

# OUR LITTLE LIFE

*A NOVEL OF TO-DAY*

BY

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*Author of "Sister Woman"*



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## PROLOGUE

AT the acute angle formed by O'Neil Street and Drayton Place there was, in the eighteen-sixties, a cluster of houses that were "good." The Agent, whenever he had occasion to advertise one of these houses in Regalia's *Daily Planet* was accustomed to say, "A Desirable Residence on O'Neil Street—or Drayton Place, whichever it might happen to be—to Rent"; and forthwith came a rush of desirable citizens, each eager to get ahead of the other and occupy the house. But the eighteen-sixties are a long time ago. By the eighteen-eighties the houses were no longer in such demand. By the time the 'nineties came along they were distinctly on the down grade—and with the end of the century they came more or less to an end too. Regalia had, like the generality of cities, stepped westward. Her citizens had stepped with her. They had begun their exodus when one of the great Railway Companies of the Dominion had placed its Yards straight opposite the O'Neil Street windows. When a car-line was laid along the street, and another matched it on the parallel St. Hubert Boulevard—the main street of Regalia; when Drayton Place, the short uniting link between the thoroughfares, came to be peopled with cut-rate drug-stores, corner groceries, demi-semi-repair tailors, and "dagos" who stood at the doors of their Shoe-Shine Parlors showing their excellent teeth, it seemed time for desirable citizens to quit. They quitted. They packed up their belongings, their drawing-room suites and their leather-backed dining-room chairs, and they betook themselves to where no car-lines are. They formed a desirable cluster in Regalia West, as they named the suburb they fled to; and they left the O'Neil Street homes alone, forlorn, bereft of respectability, something that no desirable citizen would ever look at again. The houses stood empty, becoming less desirable every week.

It was early in the twentieth century that a Business Woman with a little money to invest, passed the O'Neil Street way. She was desirous of finding a good investment for her hard-earned money, something sure and safe yet bringing in a sat-

isfactory yearly return. She paused before the O'Neil Street houses. She thought she saw her investment there.

Slowly she walked into Drayton Place and considered the houses from that point of view. More slowly she returned to O'Neil Street, observing all the way. Next morning saw her at the down-town Agent's, talking the matter over with him: and the following week she was the possessor of the whole block of what had once been desirable residences, considering with how little expenditure of her hard-earned money she could convert them into an Apartment House. This was rapidly done. Three months later she was christening the finished investment after herself. So Penelope's Buildings came into existence.

The fact of the Buildings having begun life as a cluster of semi-detached dwelling-places explained certain odd constructions in the flats; also the many undesired intimacies—common taps of water on the landings, verandas that belonged to everyone and no one—that the inhabitants so reluctantly shared with one another. The Apartment House was the uncomfortable place it was because when it had been "made over" comfort had been the last thing in anyone's mind. The Business Woman was wanting a good investment for her money. The Agent wanted to be rid of his property so as to get his percentage. The Builder wanted to "make" his contract. The Penelopians found themselves in the end packed like so many herrings in a barrel, with the additional disadvantage (which herrings know nothing of) of being expected to pay as high a rent as could possibly be extracted from them, mainly for things they didn't get. Penelope's Buildings, almost as soon as it was evolved, began to become the Palace of Disagreement which such places generally are.

Before long the Penelopians took to moonlight flittings—for of such flesh were they made. Then the Business Woman began to find her job, as the Agent said, a bit too tough for her. She retired, handing over her property to a French-Canadian on the make, for a consideration of a small cash-payment down, the rest to be paid in yearly instalments. The French-Canadian punctually made his first small cash-payment; he then punctually re-sold the property for a rather larger cash-payment to a Jew—and then decamped. The Jew, having bought the property out-and-out, took possession; the Business Woman went on claiming her further cash-instalments; the French-Canadian remained prudently invisible: and the affair went

into the hands of that Great Instrument, the Law. Now the Law, as we all know, is the one thing the mind of man has as yet been able to devise that can go on moving forever without getting anywhere. It is like the earth—except that it has no sun to go round. Until the Buildings were out of the Law again no tenant might have his rent increased or decreased by so much as a dollar, no flat might be repaired by the landlord to the extent of a washer on a tap: the Law revolved, the Buildings stood still. They stood so very still that soon it became patent, even to little Mr. Bellerose, the letter-carrier who went daily up and down the Penelopian stair, that before long there would be no Buildings to stand. The cracks in the walls became bigger and bigger; the fissures in the ceilings grew wider and wider. Cassie Healy, operator on pants to trade, knew what it was up in the attic flat, to have leakage from the roof: and Mrs. Savourin, the Janitress, down in her basement dwelling, was able to calculate from the amount of the floodings in her kitchen, just how damp and depressed Miss Healy must be feeling. The balustrades “gave.” The whole tenement “settled.” By the first year of the War it was plain to anyone who thought about it that when the Law had finished with Penelope’s Buildings the Business Woman’s good investment would have gone where good investments go—to that bourne whence no money can return. Yet the Jew and the Business Woman went on claiming their respective pounds of flesh. The French-Canadian went on remaining invisible. The tenants—happy at least in the surety that no rent could be raised on them—went on growing more and more disreputable. And in the midst of the clamor of the flats falling from one another brick by brick, in the midst of the down-at-heelness and general dilapidation, the Law, in its most magniloquent and majestic manner—went on talking. Penelope’s Buildings were doomed.

The Penelopians, naturally, did not take this uncheerful view of the matter. They could not be evicted (unless the Police felt itself entitled to call upon them), they could not have their rents raised, there was no one to come and remonstrate with them on their ever-increasing dirtiness—they had, on the whole, a pleasant time. The Buildings from the outside, it is true, looked a sorry sight. But inside, where the Penelopians were deciding what they would have for the next meal, things were far less gloomy. Breakfast, dinner, tea—that is the great Empire on which the sun never sets: meals are

the true preoccupation of the lives of almost all of us, and the Penelopians were no exception to the rule. They fought with one another, sometimes with tongues and sometimes with fists. They gave black eyes and received them back again. They did wonders in the slandering and back-biting line: and when they were ill, they were angels to one another. It is queer to think that good things can spring from such a soil; yet loyalty does spring at times from the most desperate ill-usage. Courage may arise from cruelty. Cheerfulness is often born where things are hardest. The Penelopians hung up at their windows poor little ragged bits of curtains that once were white. They placed on their window-sills pots of something that looked like plants. They trusted that some day they would have time to wash the curtains; they hoped that in the spring the plants would flower . . . their curtains and their plants were the flags they flaunted in the face of Fate: and the fine things that sometimes sprang up in themselves were, in a sense, the outcome of their wretched way of life. Had you gone into any one of the flats and lived there awhile, you would have found the inhabitants of the flat planning for the future, just as people plan in grander residences. One would be planning for the time when she would live in a "real" apartment, where there would be a gramophone always playing and cut glass on the buffet. Another would have a vision of that country garden that grows in dreams—always full of flowers and vegetables and needing no one to work it. A third would run to new hats and fine furs and smart boots whenever she wanted them, and the man would see himself boss in the softest of snaps with a fifty-cent cigar in his mouth all day long. The Penelopians were much like the rest of the world. Hope sprang eternal in their human breasts. Had Pope come back in order to protest against the over-usage of his famous remark, even he could not have denied that its truth was exemplified once more in Penelope's Buildings. There seemed little enough to hope about, but the Penelopians went on hoping. It was that that kept them alive.

By 1917 the Business Woman's investment was on its last legs. It stood, but it stood totteringly, ready to fall whenever the word was given. Round about things had not improved. The Railway Yards had waxed strong and were kicking hard; beyond, there was the apparently limitless expanse of chimney-pots and roofs that proved Regalia to be taking her place as one of the world's cities. The cut-rate store at the corner of

Drayton Place was growing with the Yards. It had inaugurated a big clock over its door, and every month or so a new clerk, as dingy, as polite, as unappetizing as the rest, made his appearance: Semple's Cut-rate Drug-Store was on its way to be a thriving business concern. The rest of Drayton Place, with the exception of Dufour's grocery at the St. Hubert Boulevard corner, was still composed of small "individual" businesses, where the boss did the major part of his own work and his wife took in roomers in the house above the shop. From the front windows of the Buildings there was dinginess to look upon; from the back windows there was an uninterrupted view of other back windows across a triangular court. And from both ends of Drayton Place, unceasing, unresting, night and day, came the everlasting hum of the electric car-line. Noise, grime, squalor; by this great trinity of words did Penelope's Buildings justify its existence.

One thing, and one thing only, was beautiful to look at. From the windows of Drayton Place, and even, slantingly, from the windows overlooking O'Neil Street, the tall slender spire of St. Patrick's church was visible. There it was, whenever you looked out, shooting, as it seemed from far underneath, right into the sky. The rest of the church was invisible; houses and shops hid it from Penelope's Buildings. But the spire—constructed in an age when men had more time for their work—was there; and high up in the belfry was the bell that warned the Penelopians of the flight of hours. Night and day the bell broke in on the hum of the street-cars. Each quarter of an hour it told solemnly off what had gone before from what was yet to come. It spoke of things calm, peaceful, eternal. It told of what was to come long after Penelope's Buildings had crumbled into dust, and, in a curious way, it told of what had been long before Penelope's Buildings had been thought of. By the sight of the spire, by the sound of the bell, and by these things alone, was beauty brought to O'Neil Street and Drayton Place. St. Patrick's, even when it was least thought of, dominated the scene. It was there. You could not get rid of it. And, when you turned your eyes to it from the Yards, from the sight of the big clock over the cut-rate store, from the uncleared filth of the street; when you lent your ear for a moment to the sound of the deep-toned bell, you could not but be conscious that here was something by which mere passing life could be regulated; that here was not only peace for a moment, but peace for ever, if you chose to make it

so. There were those in Penelope's Buildings who did listen, who did find—if it were only for a moment—peace to their souls in the chiming of the bell. There was one at least who would cry to herself as she waked in the night and turned restlessly on her bed, "Glory be to God that He built St. Patrick's here close be me home. For without ut, God help me, I'd not be able to go on."

The bell of St. Patrick's did, perhaps, more than it knew.

**OUR LITTLE LIFE**



# OUR LITTLE LIFE

## CHAPTER I

IT was in the late autumn of 1917 that Robert Fulton sat writing in a small flat on the O'Neil Street side, three floors up in Penelope's Buildings. He wrote as if he were in earnest about what he was doing. Sometimes he would go straight ahead, dipping his pen old-fashionedly into the ink-pot on the deal table before him; and sometimes he would stop and lean his elbow on the table and his head on his hand and sit, gazing out of the window—out, over the Railway Yards to where he could just see a patch of sky; and then, as the word he was in search of came floating to him—down from that patch of most beautiful night-sky, perhaps—he would bend over his paper again, and get it down. As he did this a very charming smile would come to his face. His face would be irradiated by the smile, and you would see how nice a person Robert Fulton would be, if only he were happy.

But he wasn't happy. You had only to look at him to see that. There is nothing, of course, to be proud of in being unhappy—very much the reverse: yet there are circumstances in this life in which it is difficult to be happy and content, and Robert Fulton was in the very midst of such circumstances—he was completely tangled up in them. He was a creature not made at any time for the acute kind of happiness, perhaps; happiness of that kind is an effervescing draught, and Robert Fulton was accustomed to drink the still waters of life. Yet it seemed unnecessary for him to have had to come down to the dregs of life and have the bitter taste of them in his mouth. He could have been happy enough—he could have been infinitely content if contentment had come his way: as it was, he was drinking dregs. Not only was it unlikely now that he would ever taste the definite warm-blooded joys of life; it seemed equally unlikely if he would ever know contentment again.

Still, as he sat writing, he was not actively unhappy. This

evening part of his life was what he looked forward to all day long. When he put his poor key into his shabby door and passed into his more than shabby room, he always felt that he had left a great deal that was actively unpleasant behind him. Out in the world where he had to spend his days it was nearly all unpleasant. From early in the morning when he gently closed his door behind him till the time when he undid it at night, nothing agreeable of any kind—except lunch, perhaps—ever happened. All day long he was earning his living, as almost all of us have to do: and there is nothing bad in earning a living—God forbid! But to earn your bread by the sweat of your heart; to gain your pence in hour after hour of uncongenial labor; to have to be courteous whether you like it or not to discourteous and unreasonable people—is it clear why Robert Fulton disliked the day? And why, as he turned the key in his key-hole and came back into his shabby, cold, unattractive room he felt that he had come—home? All evening, all night long for that matter, he was free to do as he liked. When all is said and done, what we all like—what is to all of us the greatest treat in the world—is to do as we like. Leave us alone and we'll all come home—sometime. Robert Fulton was no exception to the rule.

He wrote, bending low over his deal table. This was a good evening, evidently. There were nights when the pen wouldn't talk and the paper remained blank; when, if the pen were forced to talk, it said the most—*banal* things. Occasionally when Robert had driven his pen where it didn't want to go, and he read over what it had written at his dictation he was amazed that he—a passably intelligent human creature—could write such abominations of nonsense. He was never one of those writers who write spontaneously, as it were; one of those who, reading later what is written, stop amazed that such things should be written by themselves at all. Robert Fulton never knew what it was to have feeling run out of him and set itself down without let or hindrance in the form of words. He had never experienced the strange sensation that phrases—even the feelings that mold those phrases into shape—have lives of their own. As he read in cold blood what he had written down he did not know what it was to feel that kind of ingenuous astonishment that a woman feels when she sees the child that a little while ago was herself—and now is there, parted from her, with a definite life of its own. What Robert Fulton wrote he had ripely considered. He thought

most of the day, while his hands did the mechanical work that was expected of them, what he would write at night. He was never *surprised*, when work went moderately well with him, at what he had written. He knew he was going to write more or less like that. He had thought it out, even, perhaps, to the very form of the words in which he would clothe his thought. The sensation of feelings of which he had never been conscious surging up (from where?) and writing themselves down, almost in spite of him; the immense joy of reading these, of knowing they were his, of realizing that he had written down in black and white a part of him that it would be impossible to reach by knife or scalpel . . . and yet to feel that these words and the emotions they represented had a life of their own independent of his: that exquisite pleasure Robert Fulton would never know as long as he lived.

Yet out of the other kind of writing, the thought-out, carefully-considered, conscientious work that he did, he got pleasure. Sometimes when he had managed to transmit to paper, in such a way that he thought it might be understood, the deep underworld of his own thought, he felt dimly as if he had perhaps touched a spot where—it is difficult to put into words—he met humanity's thought. He felt, always dimly, that if you get down deep enough into your own underworld, you come also to the underworld of other people. That there is a communal region where we all feel—and if we feel must we not in time think—much alike; and that, in having cleared the way an inch or two towards that kingdom of satisfaction—contentment—peace, that core of life where sympathy and understanding are—he had done something worth doing. Robert Fulton had towards his work, in fact, the two-fold attitude that conscientious workers feel. He considered with one part of him that his work was good (that was the part that recognized what a trouble it had been to get the work there at all); and with the other part he was deeply disdainful of it, was sure that it was no good, commercially or otherwise, wondered how he could be such a fool as to write—and the next night set to with undiminished diligence. Probably, however, the chief thing about Robert Fulton's writing was that he enjoyed himself while he was doing it. He thoroughly enjoyed himself—in his mild way. He even liked resting from his labors and poising his slender porcupine-quill pen in his hand and searching the universe for the right word. There was a deep satis-

faction in leaning an elbow on the table and looking up into the sapphire night-sky and trying to find the word he wanted there. Even a word, if you want it badly enough, may be a definite aim in life. To Robert, to whom the world was a slippery place, a missing word was a foothold where he could perch for a moment and find satisfaction.

This autumn evening he was unusually deep in his work. It was a new piece of work he was beginning, and it happened to treat of a subject that went deeper—and climbed up higher—than anything he had attempted before. He was quite definitely in the thought-region, just trying to transmute into words his very definite impressions and opinions. His subject was not an emotional one: it was Canada. And Canada is a big subject, and Robert Fulton was anxious to rise—and also to get down—to his subject. He was finding it a difficult job, and he was consequently gazing a good deal more than usual into the night-sky.

The reason he wrote of Canada was because his opinion of the Dominion had grown to be such that it must out. He had no one to talk to about what he thought; he felt an irresistible desire to say what he thought to someone or something. He was saying it to the piece of cheap paper that lay on the deal table before him. Six years before Robert Fulton had brought to Canada wares to sell. These wares had been inside his head, and without being unduly proud of them, he had felt that they ought to be saleable—for something. They hadn't been. Canada would have none of them. And no doubt this attitude of Canada to the wares he had wanted (very badly) to sell tinged Robert's attitude to Canada, and made his reflections about her not so impersonal as he thought them.

Naturally he prided himself on being impartial—we all do; and the language he used *was* impartial: it was the literary language which does not permit itself the license of a more red-blooded style. Yet, occasionally, behind the well-chosen words and the carefully-considered phrases, there was something visible that Robert Fulton did not know was there: between the lines, as well as behind them, personal sentiment made its appearance. Had Canada accepted with joy the wares Robert Fulton intended her to buy, Robert Fulton's book would never have been written. Had the Dominion taken hold of him, accepted him and what he brought, given him what he himself called "real" work to do, he would never have wanted to say anything about her. As it was, he did want to say things. Only

half consciously, perhaps, what he was doing as he sat at his deal table with the raw glare of the Penelopian gas-light streaming down on his paper was making plain his sense of injustice against the Dominion. He was oblivious of his surroundings. He was so engrossed in what he was doing that he had for the moment forgotten his feelings in trying to find words to express them. Yet for all that he was getting rid of a little bit of his spleen against a country that had not used him any too well. Robert Fulton was not so impartial as he thought he was.

Canada had not really treated him badly, of course. He had no well-founded complaint to bring against her. Yet it is hard—well-nigh impossible—to be fond of anything that has not known how to *use* you. Robert Fulton felt that he was good for something. He knew that if “they” would set him “real” work, he would work; no one harder. But he also knew—or thought he did—that the only work he had been able to wring out of Canada was not “real” work. Robert Fulton served at a cheese-and-butter counter all day long. He handed out butter and he weighed off cheese. He told the price of eggs. He expatiated on the excellence of the pots of honey that were sold at his counter. He urged buying on the customer. He counted out change into countless hands. And over and over and over again he agreed to the same comments on the same weather. “How cold it has been today.” “Yes, Madam,” “How long the winter is.” “Yes, Madam.” “Seems as if the Spring would never come!” “No, Madam.” Wasn’t that enough to drive any man mad? Could any old mythology (prolific as it was in thinking of things) invent any torture worse than that? Oh, the *boredom* of it! The unutterable ghastly unforgivable boredom! It was, to some extent at least, this boredom with his uncongenial way of work that Robert Fulton poured into his views on Canada. But he thought that he was only writing down exactly what was the fact. He thought that, right down to the bottom of the place where reasoning goes. And, down below that, he knew better.

There are all sorts of ways of looking at Canada, of course, just as there are all sorts of ways of looking at everything. Canada looks one thing to the unsuccessful immigrant and another thing—quite another thing!—to the successful one: and it looks another thing still to the son or the grandson or the daughter or the granddaughter of the successful or the unsuccessful immigrant. Observe that the emphasis must be laid on

the "successful" or the "unsuccessful" immigrant. For—and this is perhaps where the New World differs a little from the Old—the mirror in which you look at things is money. In older countries there are things still (not many) which can be had without money; but in the new countries there is nothing that can be had without money—things unbuyable and unsaleable don't exist there. Sometimes as Robert Fulton was walking home at night he would look up at that most beautiful of all Canada's beautiful possessions—her sky: and he would think bitterly to himself, "Why, it's impossible to admire even that without money!" He meant that he was either too cold (for you can't buy warm enough wear for the Canadian winters on butter and cheese) or too hot (for you can't provide for the Canadian summer comfortably on a similar basis) and that therefore he was not physically comfortable enough to . . . well, to be artistic, I suppose. It is a nice question just how comfortable we need to be for the artist in us to exert himself. Can you be artistic when the thermometer is 24 below and an icy wind is blowing and you haven't a fur coat? Can you be artistic while you have a raging tooth-ache? How did Shakespeare see the world when he had a tooth-ache? Robert Fulton saw the world very much askew when he was too poor to be comfortable; a good meal, nicely served, would have paved his way to a far keener appreciation of lovely things. When he turned into Penelope's Buildings he felt, every night afresh, as if the world was an ugly place, an unworthy place—an odious slatternly wicked place. He hated Penelope's Buildings. How he hated them! And he hadn't money enough to live anywhere else.

On the whole, these facts probably colored his monograph on Canada.

## CHAPTER II

**T**HE first thing Robert saw when he waked up the morning after his busy evening was a letter slipped under the door. He recognized at once the postal service, as it plied from one "apartment" (as the Penelopians loved to call their flats) of Penelope's Buildings to another. And, as he knew quite well from whom the letter must come, he didn't trouble at first to get up and look inside it. He merely lay where he was and lazily contemplated it as it lay on the floor with its outer edge still under the door.

We can judge from Robert Fulton's way of regarding this letter that it was not a very important document—to him. If it had been a love-letter he would have been up in an instant, pressing it to his bosom; and if it had been that long envelope from the lawyer's firm, which so many of us pass our lives hoping for (and not getting), he would also have been up, not pressing it to his bosom but undoing it and taking out what was inside with trembling, eager hands. Knowing, as he did, that it was a letter from Miss McGee, on the first-floor flat on the Drayton Place side, he merely lay in his poor bed regarding it in the dim light of the October morning. He knew what the letter contained. An invitation to something. He said to himself that Miss McGee would be asking him in to evening "tea" perhaps, or that she would be making some overture for the Sunday afternoon. He was glad to get her invitations—he didn't get so many that he could afford to throw away any: but he was also aware that these invitations of hers did not afford him any special pleasure. He was glad to go to Miss McGee's, as things were; but if things had been otherwise—and how he wished they were!—he wouldn't have been glad to go. And he knew it.

After a bit he stretched out his hand for his watch; that watch, which, like the porcupine-quill pen, had no connection at all with the twentieth century. It was a watch wound up in the good old way with a key (which went a-missing the moment you took your eye off it) and keeping excellent time so long as it was not put into the hands of a Canadian watch-maker. When Robert's hand had reached this watch of his and he had consulted it, he said "Oh!"—that expressive monosyllable by which those of us who live alone do so much conversation with ourselves. He put the watch back on the table beside his bed, and he got up. He didn't leap up. You don't leap unless you feel in a leaping mood. Robert Fulton got up slowly, one leg and one arm at a time, and when he was wholly out of bed he stretched and said "Oh!" again—and began to dress. He had no bath-room. In Penelope's Buildings there were no bath-rooms at all. Nobody thought of such things. The Penelopians went to their wash-basins as a matter of course, and, for better for worse, according to the way they were made, they washed themselves clean. Robert Fulton was made for better in that particular way. He was not one of those Englishmen, conventionalized in the Canadian mind, who on their arrival in the Dominion fall from a pinnacle of

superfine cleanliness into a bottomless pit of dirt. He had not, from sheer desperation, ceased to use a tooth-brush; nor had he ceased to brush his hair. His clothes were poor and thread-bare—he couldn't help that; but he brushed them and he brushed himself. In spite of the drawbacks of living as he did, he remained self-respecting. He looked neat. In so far as he could possibly manage it, in short, he triumphed over the wash-basin and made it seem as like a bath as he could. It was his one heroism.

It wasn't until he had got on his suit (which he would have to change for a white linen one as soon as he reached the store) that he approached the door of his room and stooped for the letter. As soon as he had got out of bed he had placed his small sauce-pan on the spirit-lamp, and now, before he read the letter, he took the tea-pot off the top of the sauce-pan (where it had been warming), placed in it the requisite teaspoonful and a half of tea, filled the tea-pot with the boiling water, extinguished the lamp: and sat down to breakfast. Breakfast is not a complicated meal when you live alone and have to get it in a hurry. Robert Fulton's breakfast consisted of a cup of tea and a piece of bread (and margarine with it) on weekdays all the year round. On Sundays he added to this anchorite repast another cup of tea and an egg—or some marmalade—or a little honey: and he eked out these delicacies with the reading of a book—which on ordinary mornings he couldn't afford to do. His Sunday morning breakfast was the pleasantest time of the whole week; and if, as the day went on, it proved rather a forlorn and desolate day (as Sundays in a strange land are apt to do), still it was Sunday, and that was a great thing. There was no mention of butter or cheese from morning till night; and he was not required to talk of the weather with anyone.

The present day was Friday and there was need for hurry. Robert Fulton had been five minutes too late in looking at his watch. He poured out his cup of tea, and between his rapid bites of bread and margarine he took up the letter. It was a small tidily-folded piece of paper. No envelope—such luxuries were not necessary in the simple postal service of Penelope's Buildings: merely a piece of paper of poor quality, torn off a "pad," folded in three, and addressed in a careful illiterate hand, "Mr. Robert Fulton."

Robert hastily unfolded it, with a knife in his hand. It contained what he had expected, an invitation to "tea."

"Well," he thought to himself, "all the better. I'll go." He went on buttering his bread while he was thinking this. "And," he said to himself suddenly, putting down his knife, "I know what I'll do. I'll take the manuscript down and read it to her."

He knew this was a desperate resolution. He was well enough aware that what he had been writing the night before (for it was of this he was thinking) was above Miss McGee's powers of comprehension. Miss McGee was intelligent, but her intelligence had never had a chance to get itself cultivated in any way. It was the native thing she had brought into the world with her; and Robert Fulton knew very well that what he had written the night before needed some cultivated as well as some native intelligence to comprehend as well as appreciate it. He knew Miss McGee would not understand a great deal of what he had written. He also knew he *must* read what he had written to somebody. The time had come to share, and he had nobody—nobody on earth—with whom he could share but Miss McGee. He had the unlucky artistic streak that demands sympathy . . . "She'll pretend to understand if she doesn't," he said to himself, definitely showing his artistic streak and glancing down at the letter before him; "she'll *pretend*—and that'll be something." He turned the poor little piece of paper round, wrote rapidly on the back of it in his legible practised hand, "I shall be delighted to come. Thank you. R. F."—and he rose up and washed the breakfast things and put them away, made up his bed (for he couldn't bear to come back at night to an untidy room), seized his hat, took a rapid glance round to see that nothing was in too-furious disorder, opened the door, went out, locked the door behind him—and made off. He ran down-stairs, stopping to slip the return letter under Miss McGee's door as he ran (he ran because he would have to pay a fine if he were late and he couldn't afford fines): and then, making his way out of the front door of Penelope's Buildings, he forged in the direction of the store. "Yes, I'll read it to her," he thought as he made his way through the clear fine transparent morning; "I'll know she doesn't understand, but it'll be nice of her to *try*." He knew she would try. He knew he would feel grateful to her for doing her best to please him. He knew he would even derive some benefit—some actual literary help—from the un-understanding warm human sympathy Miss McGee would be sure to shower out on him. "You gain things from reading aloud, anyway," he further said

to himself; and then, once more consulting the watch, he said, "Now then, get on. Don't talk. Hurry. You'll be late." The thought of the fine began to obscure all other thoughts and his pace quickened almost to a run.

There was a bite in the air as he went through it. The trees, which bordered the streets as he got further west, were hung with amber and golden leaves. The world looked lovely, and it seemed, as it so often unreasonably does, as if it should be a lovely and a happy world. Robert Fulton went along resolutely, more stoically perhaps than resignedly. He thought transitorily of the day before him, and the sensation came over him—as it often did—of hanging by his teeth and nails to life; and then his thoughts went back to Miss McGee's poor little invitation. "Mr. Fulton," she had put on the top of the paper; and a little lower down, "Will you come to tea to-night—7:30, if you can. I have a chickun." And then at the foot of the paper she had signed "Miss McGee." "Yes, I'll take the manuscript along," he said, reverting to the pleasantest thing in sight as he walked through the golden morning. "I'll take it—and read it to her." And, a moment afterwards, he added, "It'll be something to *do*."

He reached the store, passed through its fine marble portal, made his way to the cement back premises, and there changed into his professional linen suit and cap. You would hardly have recognized him when he was dressed for the day. He looked like a salesman; just like any other salesman—except for his eyes. But who casts eyes on the eyes of the man selling butter and cheese? No one. Robert Fulton took his place behind the sanitary glass-covered counter with the white tiled wall behind him and the cement floor beneath his feet. He prepared for his doom. "A beautiful morning!" "Yes, Madam." "I hope we shan't have rain, eh!" "No, Madam. Did you say one pound? We have beautiful honey—just come in." "How much is it a section?" "Forty cents, Madam." "Oh! Well, just pick me a *good* section, will you . . ."

Robert Fulton's day had begun.

### CHAPTER III

THE acquaintance between Miss McGee and Robert Fulton had formed itself in the most casual manner. One day Robert had encountered Miss McGee on the stairs. He was going, after his day's work, up to his solitary room; and Miss

McGee, who had returned a little earlier from her work, was struggling up the stairs as well as she could in front of him with a bag of coal in her arms. She looked bent and frail and unable to cope with such work; and Robert, without giving himself time for reflection, had run up the stairs that divided him from her, and lifting his hat, as Miss McGee said afterwards, "like a gen'leman," had offered to carry her burden up the rest of the way. Miss McGee had faltered and blushed (not at being spoken to by a "gen'leman" but because she was "caught" in the actual carrying-out of one of her shifts of poverty); it was a little time before she gave way, but in the end she had allowed him to carry her coal for her—even allowed him to carry it into her flat: and no one in Penelope's Buildings, except Miss Healy from her garret-room at the top of the Building and Mrs. Morphy from the other side of the court, had ever been allowed to cross Miss McGee's threshold. Miss McGee was a great believer in keeping oneself to oneself and not having truck with the neighbors. But when Robert Fulton at the door of her "apartment" had said to her in that quiet way of his that rarely awakened opposition, "Let me carry it in for you," she had not said no. He penetrated right into the very fastness of Miss McGee's kitchenette (a black hole of a cupboard which she dignified by that name), dumped the coal there, and made his way out again. After that Miss McGee and Robert Fulton "bowed" when they met on the stairs; and occasionally one of them would say "a frosty night," or "a lovely morning," as the case might be—and the subject of the weather, approached in this way, seemed to one of them less repellent than usual.

Miss McGee in a rather lonely life was not accustomed to having much done for her; and this incident of the coal, when something *had* been done, stuck in her mind. She thought about it a great deal. On her way to work it would come into her mind and she would ponder over it. When she was "doing out" her flat, either before she went out in the morning or after she came home at night, it would cross her brain and she would entreat it to stay. Sometimes when she was lying in bed unable to sleep (she was not a remarkable sleeper) she would lie and think of Mr. Fulton two flats up on the O'Neil Street side, and wonder about him and his family and how he came to be where he was. "He's the round peg in the square hole be-lieve *me*," said Miss McGee to herself—her sharp eyes had seen at once that Robert was a misfit where he was. "Sure,

I wonder where he comes from," she would further say to herself. "I wonder what his fam'ly eh'll be loike. I wonder what's brought um here." Miss McGee's wonders on the subject of Robert Fulton were great and inextinguishable, so it is not surprising, perhaps, that an acquaintance so casually begun, should have gradually ripened into something like a friendship; let a woman wonder enough about a man and the acquaintance may end anywhere. The desire to be acquainted was mainly on Miss McGee's side, it is true; but when she made overtures—quite nice and modest overtures—Robert did not rebuff them. He submitted to them—welcomed them indeed: even a Miss McGee is an oasis in the desert when you are in a large city with no one to talk to and nowhere to go.

After slight interchanges of civility on the stairs came slight invitations to "come in a minnut." The minnut lengthened itself, perhaps, into half an hour: then sundry unlooked-for meetings in the street ripened the acquaintance: and then Miss McGee took her courage into her two hands and said one day, "Would ye drink a cup o' tea with me Sunday, eh?"—and Robert had gone. The first step is, we know, the step that counts. After the first visit came a second: gradually it had become a matter of course that no week should go by without Robert Fulton paying some visit two floors down—and drinking tea there.

These tea-drinkings were resting-places in Miss McGee's busy life. She was as busy as Robert himself, and engaged in just as uncongenial work. She was "a woman who went out sewing by the day." She left her home betimes in the morning and reached her customer's house at 8:30. Then she sat down to a breakfast, sometimes nice and sometimes nasty, according to the house she happened to be working in. Sometimes she had her breakfast by herself in the dining-room (at the same table that the family had already taken breakfast at) and sometimes she had it in the kitchen with the maids. Sometimes she went straight to the work-room, and her breakfast was brought in to her there on a tray. And when that was the case the lady of the house usually accompanied the tray in order to evolve her views. There is nothing about which even the best women are less conscientious than their clothes. They all want to be well-dressed. Sooner than throw away a thing when it is worn out, seven women out of ten will hire a woman to rip it and sew it up again, and to what such women expect—both from the garment and from the woman

in by the day—there is no boundary-line. An aged petticoat will cut up well into an evening gown; an evening-gown can become a mantle: a mantle can be turned into a kimono—their husbands' old pyjamas can be "arranged" (a great word of Miss McGee's) as "dainty little house-gowns" for the morning. Miss McGee's was a difficult position. She needed the address and the balance of a ballet-dancer and the astuteness and slippery eloquence of a diplomatist to keep up with her customers' views. But she managed it. While she sat sipping her cup of tea or coffee at half past eight in the morning, she would watch the lady of the house spreading out the garment that was to become something else, and she would deliver her judgment. First she would take a corner of the material in her hand and feel it. "A foine stuff, sure," she would say. "Pre-War that, Madam." (She too said Madam.) "We must do our best with *that*. . . ." And slowly and regretfully she would let the piece of stuff slide out of her hand, and return to her tea. This put the lady (any lady) into a good temper and paved the way to telling her later what couldn't be done.

In her life Miss McGee had wrought many a transformation. Many an odd bit and scrap had she "worked up" (another of her expressions) into something elegant—or "darling" as she said. She would turn and fit, snip here, round a corner there; she would patiently sit, hour after hour, trying the effect of this—of that: she would rip—and join . . . make a little unnecessary ornament to hide the join: and then at the end she would say to the lady, "I'm ready for you now, Madam," or "Mrs. So-and-So," according to the length of time she had worked for her: and together they would go into the customer's bed-room, and there, before the long mirror, Miss McGee would "fit" her customer. She would kneel on the floor grading the hem of the skirt. She would reach up and pin and unpin and pin again, arranging and rearranging the bodice, and then, from her kneeling posture on the ground, she would look up and say with her mouth full of pins, "How's that, Madam? How does that strike you, Mrs. So-and-So?" And at an indication from Madam, a wave of the hand from Mrs. So-and-So, the whole thing would have to be undone again, and Miss McGee would be back where she was in the early morning. And the lady, conscious that her dollar and a half was running to waste, would become snappish and cross. "Can't you fix it, McGee," she would ask: and at lunch, perhaps, she would say to her

daughter, "I guess McGee's going some awf, my dear. She don't seem as if she could stick a pin straight this morning."

Lunch-time was Miss McGee's moment of deliverance. There again it depended on what house she was working in what lunch she got. Sometimes she went down and shared the servants' lunch—and that was usually comfortable. Sometimes she went in with "the family" to lunch—and that was usually constrained. Sometimes the tray was once more brought into the work-room, and Miss McGee cleared a space amidst the remnants on the table and the threads and pickings on the floor, and ate her midday meal amidst these ruins of Carthage. The worst of this arrangement was that the lady, hot on some new evolution-theory, usually came back into the room before the lunch was finished, and watched Miss McGee rapidly swallowing her little mess of pudding or hurriedly munching her cake. "Through, Miss McGee?" the lady would sweetly ask perhaps. "Oh, yes, Madam," Miss McGee would reply; and then, while the lady carried off the tray, Miss McGee would shake the crumbs off her lap and move back to her working-seat, and for the rest of the afternoon, without one minute's rest or grace, she would continue making something out of something else.

At about five a lonely tea-pot on a tray would make its appearance; at six she would rise and shake herself and take off her apron and begin to fold up her work, and then the lady would say, "Oh, Miss McGee, I wonder would you mind looking at *this*." And from some unexpected place of concealment she would produce something entirely and utterly new—or rather, not new but up to that moment unrevealed; and Miss McGee, standing on one leg and shivering with eagerness to be off, would have to stand and watch—finger the stuff, pronounce it excellent—listen to all the lady's thoughts and aspirations . . . she was lucky if she got away without the lady trying it on, or hunting out the pattern for the thing it was destined to become and laying it on the pattern to see if it would make it. . . .

If Robert Fulton had something to complain of in the world's commercialism, what about Miss McGee? Robert Fulton, if the worst came to the worst, could leave his firm and try another one; but Miss McGee couldn't leave her customers. She couldn't venture to refuse to go to one of them—she dared not offend the least of them. For if she did, that customer would make it a point of honor to go round all Miss McGee's other

customers with whom she was acquainted and say to them, "Say, you know that McGee there, eh? Well, she done the most ah-ful thing!" And the other customers would believe every word and begin to look for another woman who went sewing by the day—and Miss McGee's profession would be gone. The sword of Damocles hung over her head every minute of every working day. It was the sword that made her agreeable to her customers. She *was* agreeable. In some houses they wanted her to be quiet—there she sat and sewed. In other houses they wanted her to amuse them, talk, gossip—there she chatted. In other houses still she was required to listen while the lady streamed on all day long—and then Miss McGee sat as mum as a mouse. Sometimes people offered to "help," and Miss McGee's heart sank. Sometimes they sent the housemaid up to sew and the housemaid was saucy. Sometimes the baby had to be fitted, and the baby cried and was naughty. And in all these circumstances Miss McGee was expected to be perfection: when they had done their worst by her all she could do was to put on her hat and say, "Good evening, Madam. Thank you, Madam," and go away. Day after day she ended what other people had begun and began what other people were to end. There was nothing she hadn't done—or tried to do. In her time she had made a ball-dress out of the kitchen dusters; she had "turned" sheets, when work was slack; she had fitted out maids in aprons and alpaca dresses; she had fixed over many a "model gown" that her ladies had bought at bargain sales. Ever since she had learned her business more than thirty years before (she had been a "trotter" at twelve and now she was forty-six) she had been doing these things and a thousand things more: and all this she expected to go on doing until the day when she should be carried out of the Buildings feet first, as she said—with her heart at rest at last.

It wasn't a bright life and it wasn't an interesting life, but Miss McGee made the best of it. It had gone on such a long time that she was used to it. She had forgotten—almost—what it meant to be riotously happy. She had forgotten—almost—the fresh days of her youth and the hope that had filled her heart then. She had grown accustomed to leaving Penelope's Buildings at eight o'clock or a little sooner and to coming back there at seven o'clock or a little later. She regarded the Buildings as "home." She was glad to get back there.

On the day when she had pushed the letter under Robert

Fulton's door, Miss McGee came home a little bit later than usual. She had had a trying day. The lady she had been working for was one of her oldest customers, a Mrs. Barclay of Wellston Road. Miss McGee did not dislike her in general, in fact she liked her: there had been a time in the far-back past when Mrs. Barclay had known how to be kind and thoughtful, and a true friend. But this did not prevent her from being excessively irritating at times. She was, when the fit took her, what Miss McGee was accustomed to call "a moral blister." This had been one of the days. On Miss McGee's arrival in the morning she had found a heterogeneous mass and mess of clothes awaiting her. Mrs. Barclay seemed to have unearthed all the clothes she had ever had—she was one of the older-fashioned kind who preserved everything in case it might "come in useful sometime." Out of the mess three gowns were segregated on the couch of the work-room: and while Miss McGee was at breakfast (with the family) Mrs. Barclay had tried to recall to her memory the three gowns in succession, and how exquisite each had been. And Miss McGee had gone steadily on with her breakfast, while Mr. Barclay from the head of the table (a great favorite of Miss McGee's and "a thorough gen'leman as ever lived") had repeatedly said, "Mother, mother, get on with your breakfast, and talk of the gowns when ye've finished yer meal."

All day long Miss McGee had sat ripping the gowns. She knew that ripping was not the worst of it for, when they were ripped, she had to make them up into one "new" gown: and how she was to do it she did not know. It is work like that that makes the heart sick. She was on sufficiently good terms with Mrs. Barclay to say what she thought, and she had said what she thought, and Mrs. Barclay hadn't liked it. Lunch in consequence had not been a pleasant meal. Tea had been drunk in the state of bottled-up irritation that dislocates the soul. Miss McGee and Mrs. Barclay had parted coldly—though Miss Barclay had come running with a pot of jam at the last—and this distressed Miss McGee, for she liked Mrs. Barclay and remembered a hundred proofs of her goodness. "For the sake of Mike," she said to herself as she made her way back to Penelope's Buildings, "what do they think I'm made of, eh! Good lines! How *could* I? How could *anybody*? Why, she's *old!*" And she went along in a loitering listless fashion quite unlike her usual brisk business-like gait. She felt discouraged—tired inside and out. She hardly noticed even the

radiant gold and amber leaves that had lighted Robert Fulton's way in the morning.

As she turned into Drayton Place, however, and saw the Buildings standing before her, she brightened. The thought that Robert Fulton was coming to tea with her flashed suddenly into her mind—and she smiled. "My," she said to herself, glancing at the big clock over the cut-rate drug-store at the corner, "I'm all behind toime. I shall only do ut ef I hurry-rush." And forthwith she began to hurry-rush. She went across the street at the double, passed through the dark, dank entrance to the Buildings, hurried over the little ill-kept passage-way that led to the stairs, and set her foot on the metal inset of the first wooden step. "Sure," she said to herself, "I wouldn't for a million have um come and me not fixed." She quickened her pace till she was running up stairs, feeling as she ran in her little wrist-bag for her big door-key; when she had pushed her key into the old, worn key-hole and opened her door, it looked black and dark, and it smelled cold and close. "Oh *my!*" Miss McGee said to herself. She felt for the matches where she always left them on the table, lighted the gas, ran to the window, glanced once more at the clock, pulled down the shade. "Sure," she said, "I'll do ut. But I'll only just do ut, God help me." And then once more she said, "I'd not have um come an' catch me fer . . ." And, still in her coat and hat, she knelt down at the fireplace to make her fire. The thought of Mrs. Barclay and her three gowns in one and the pot of jam Miss Barclay had pushed into her hand as she was coming away faded out of her mind. "Sure, she thinks she'll make ut up to me with jam, eh!" was what she had said as she left Wellston Road, and it was with an effort that she had not thrown the jam into the gutter. Now she was smiling and radiant as she knelt in the cold ill-lighted room making up the fire that was to welcome Robert Fulton. "It's good to have comp'ny comin'," she said to herself, "sure, it's noice not to have to spend me evenin' alone." She looked perfectly happy as she rose from her knees, and the fire crackled and spat as if it were happy too. "I'll put um *there*," Miss McGee said to herself, surveying the table, "it's the warmest cor'ner . . ."

The thought that she had to tidy herself as well as her house made her hurry still more. "I must give me hair a wave," she thought as she set his knife and fork and laid the little paper table-napkin by the side of them. "It makes the differ-

ence in ye . . .”—and she looked ten years younger than she had done three hours before when they had been trying on the first rough sketch of the three gowns in one before the mirror and Mrs. Barclay had said, “Guess you ain’t fixed ut good, McGee. You ain’t caught the *idea*.” Miss McGee had looked an old woman then: it had taken all her good feeling of years gone by to prevent her saying, “*Take yer idea and make ut yerself.*” Now, as she went bustling about her “apartment” she looked, not young perhaps, but a good deal less than her age. She was happy. Mrs. Barclay had faded into nothingness.

#### CHAPTER IV

WHEN Robert Fulton knocked gently (he was very quiet in all his ways) at the door of Miss McGee’s apartment and Miss McGee, after opening the door, stood on her threshold welcoming him in, you could never have told that she had been in a hurry at any time of her life. She looked quite composed, and as if she had never had any other occupation than to sit waiting his arrival, in her best dress. For she had managed, not only to wave her hair, but to “slip into,” as she put it, her little summer-gown—a relic from some friendly customer’s wardrobe, and relegated to Miss McGee when the friendly customer was tired of it. Miss McGee was not good-looking. In her best days of girlhood she had never been that. But she had had, in those faraway days of youth, a certain *beauté de diable*; and she retained of that some traces still. Her hair, black in her girlhood, had turned that charming silvery-white which black hair does turn. It had remained as abundant as it had always been—and Miss McGee knew how to dress it becomingly and make the best of it. She waved it in the front (when she had time) and she always drew it droopingly from her forehead to the back where she “did it up” in thick simple coils. Yes, Miss McGee’s hair was a distinct acquisition. Her eyes were remarkable. They were eyes that you would have looked at anywhere—large, lustrous, deep blue in color (they looked black in some lights) and fringed with long dark lashes. From those eyes Miss McGee might have been a Saint—or a genius—or a devil. It all depended from what angle you saw them what opinion you might form. And here ended—if you except

a soft fine-textured sallow skin—all Miss McGee's claims to beauty. Her nose was ugly; too large and too thick-set. Her mouth was so ugly as sometimes to strike you as almost repulsive. It was thick-lipped and coarse . . . and yet, oddly enough, sometimes, when Miss McGee would smile, you could swear that it was a lovely mouth. Miss McGee's physical body was a mass of contradictions from one end of it to the other. She had a figure that always had been full and now was stoutish; in her early girlhood she had served, in the firm in which she had learned her business, as model for the small, full-busted type of gown. Now she was past all that. She had neat legs still, however, and the shape of foot that gives a springy gait to its owner. The last contradiction about Miss McGee was her hand—a beautiful hand—a charming hand, soft, small, white, dimpled. If Miss McGee was proud of anything in the world it was of her hand; and nothing gave her keener distress than to see this hand of hers in the grasp of rheumatism. She regarded each swelling of each joint as a personal insult. She mourned over the shapelessness that ensued. "I'd used to have the pretty hand," she would say pathetically, "you wouldn't think it now—but it was *pretty*." And at such times her large blue-black eyes would grow soft and mournful, and for the moment you would say that Miss McGee was beautiful. But she had never struck Robert Fulton that way. He was inexperienced for his years and not very noticing of such things as women (he hadn't had much to do with them) and to him Miss McGee was merely an elderly feminine thing who asked him into tea in a room that was pleasanter than his own.

Miss McGee's room had no business to be pleasanter than Robert Fulton's. It had no intrinsic advantages of its own. But Miss McGee had what is called "a way with her." Partly by dint of long experience, but more by native talent, she was able to make a very little go a very long way. Her room, full of nothing at all that was pretty, looked comfortable. It looked home-like. The way that Miss McGee pulled down her blind and drew her shabby curtain, the way she arranged her poor little sticks of furniture, the exquisite cleanliness that she kept (no one in Penelope's Buildings made a better use of a hand-basin than Miss McGee) shed a glow of warmth and comfort over her home-life: and it was pleasanter to come into Miss McGee's one sitting-room than to go into many halls of the great (as they used to be called) where you would

have champagne for dinner and a man in livery to pour it out for you.

"Come in," said Miss McGee. "Come right in, Mr. Fulton. I'm ready for ye—I was just wishin' ye would come."

She stood in her little black and white summer-gown with her waved silvery hair and her ugly mouth curved into a beautiful smile, and she looked—nice. Robert Fulton came in, rather awkwardly as was his way (for he was self-conscious), and put his hat and the little manuscript he had brought with him down on the window-sill, and came over to the fire.

"Sit down," said Miss McGee, "sit right down, and I'll make the tea. Did ever ye hear ut called 'maskin' the tea'?" she went on conversationally. "Ma'a—my mother, that is—used to call ut that."

And she put three generous teaspoonfuls of tea into her crockery tea-pot and poured the steaming water over the tea as if she loved doing it.

"It's—it's a Scotch expression, isn't it?" said Robert Fulton—still awkwardly. He was always awkward till he had got rid of his self-consciousness, and then, when he had got rid of that, he would open out his petals like a flower—expand, till sometimes he showed his heart.

"It wasn't Scotch *my* mother spoke," said Miss McGee. "She was Irish to the bone. Ma'a came out from Ireland," Miss McGee continued, "but she brought Ireland with her. Yes, Sir. And she brought up me and me sister Irish, and we're Irish to this day. *I'm* Irish," said Miss McGee fiercely, as if Robert Fulton were denying the fact. "*I'm* Irish. Make no mistake. . . ."

"Yes, I know," Robert Fulton said, beginning to lose his self-consciousness. "I know. Nobody could doubt it,"—and he laughed. "But," he went on, "don't you know that lots of Irish and Scotch expressions are the same. What part of Ireland did your mother come from," he asked—"the North?"

"Yes, Sir, the North," said Miss McGee. "Ma'a came out from a farm in Ballyhoochlan—near Tyrone there. There's a young man rooming at Mrs. Morphy's now," Miss McGee continued, "and what do you think *he* calls me? 'Black North!'" Miss McGee laughed. All the fighting blood seemed suddenly to have run out of her. "What do you think of that for gall, eh? He's the South himself, and, when he's out of the drink, he's a nice young man. But he's always drunk. . . ."

"And now, come to the table," Miss McGee said—and sud-

denly into her voice there had come a sort of undercurrent of pride. "Draw in your chair, Mr. Fulton. We'll have the tea now, and you'll excuse all the shortcomin's, I know, for ye're used to 'em."

Again in her voice there was that undercurrent of pride, and, in response to it, perhaps, Robert Fulton glanced at the table. Up to now he had noticed nothing. He was completely inobservant and at the same time keenly perceptive. No one could be less deceived by the atmosphere of the place he was in, and no one would be able to tell you less of the actual details that went to make up the whole. Up to this moment he had been basking in the warmth of the fire (which had burned up very creditably in its short space of life) and had been content to anticipate, as it were, the on-coming of tea. If you had asked him what Miss McGee had on or what her hair looked like, or whether the table was well-laid or ill-laid, or what was actually on the table, he could have told you almost nothing. But had you wished to know other things—things far less easy to put into words—Robert Fulton could have passed on to you all sorts of perceptions—feelings—what can one call them? He had grasped nothing of his surroundings but he had apprehended everything.

At the undercurrent of pride in Miss McGee's voice, however, he glanced at the table; and there he saw spread a feast of unprecedented splendor. There was a chicken—the "chickun" mentioned in Miss McGee's note: and there was salad, neatly arranged on two plates, one for each of them: and there was a bowl of "boiled dressing" (that transatlantic delicacy). There were two potatoes in their jackets which Miss McGee was just taking out of the pot; and there was an apple pie.

Such a feast as that was a rare thing for both of them. Miss McGee, indeed, at some of the houses she worked at fared pretty well. But in her own house she fared sparsely; and as to Robert Fulton, he never fared well at all.

When, therefore, he saw this Lord Mayor's banquet in private life spread out before him, and smelt the fragrance of the tea as Miss McGee poured it into the cups, he couldn't refrain from looking intently at her; and when Miss McGee, lifting her mysterious eyes (they looked lovely at the moment) from the pouring of the tea met his—something for the first time passed between them. So much can a chicken and salad and potatoes and an apple pie do.

"It's a present a lady-customer made me," Miss McGee said,

coloring faintly. "She's an old customer, and she's good to me. Will ye car-rve the chickun, Mr. Fulton?"

Miss McGee spoke a confusion of tongues. It was possible for her to relapse into Irish completely, and this she did in moments of great emotion, or sometimes on rather inappropriate occasions, to prove that she *was* Irish. "It's the Irish in me," she was accustomed to say when she did anything that was unusually trying to the onlooker. In a general way she spoke Canadian—a language impossible to indicate by means of print. Sometimes she would begin in Canadian and end in Irish; sometimes she would float an Irish intonation into the midst of a wholly transatlantic way of speech—it cannot be set down. Her way of speaking at any rate was one of her attractions. She had refinement—God knows where she got it!—when she liked; and she had—when she liked—an extreme coarseness of speech. But this Robert Fulton did not hear. When she spoke of the chicken she was sensibly affected, and so she had a slight relapse into her native tongue. "Will ye car-rve the chickun, Mr. Fulton," said she, and for the moment it might have been one of her ancestresses speaking—one who had never left the emerald beauties of her native isle.

Mr. Fulton carved the chicken, and he carved it well. He had neat hands, and he did things compactly. "White meat, Miss McGee?" said he.

"I'll take a mixture of the two, Mr. Fulton, if you please," said Miss McGee, "and help yerself *good*."

They supped royally. They ate the chicken and the salad and the potatoes in their jackets, and they drank the tea. And then they went on to the apple-pie, and they ate that. The bread was good—the lady samaritan had lined the bottom of the basket with some home-baked rolls: altogether Robert Fulton hadn't had such a good meal as that for a very long time past, and he enjoyed every bite. Miss McGee enjoyed her own meal, but she enjoyed yet more seeing Robert Fulton open out and become expansive and almost confidential. There is something pathetic in what a good meal will do; it was such a treat to Robert Fulton to see a table spread even as poor Miss McGee could spread it, and to sit down to a meal all ready-prepared and merely to eat it that he couldn't help rising to the occasion. He sat in the warmest corner that Miss McGee had selected for him, and he ate his "tea" and basked in the rays of the fire, and thoroughly enjoyed himself. The ugliness of Miss McGee's room (it was thoroughly ugly),

the wicked design of the wall-paper, the criminal shade of the window-curtain, the vicious coloring of the rug . . . all these things he failed to see. He only felt warm and comfortable and comforted—and grateful. And Miss McGee (who had perceptions too) knew that he was feeling like that and, in response to his feelings, became younger every minute. There seemed no reason, at the rate at which she was going, why she should not become a young girl before the evening was over—and what would have happened then!

When they had eaten all they could and before Miss McGee “cleared away” they sat a little bit and talked. “When did your mother come over, Miss McGee,” said Robert Fulton, who had never “wondered” at all about Miss McGee and therefore did not hesitate to ask a harmless question when he wanted to.

“Ma’a came over when I was a child,” said Miss McGee. “I was a babe in ar’rums when she landed here, Mr. Fulton. And me sister was six.”

“Have you ever been back?” said Robert Fulton.

Miss McGee shook her head. “I’ve never saw no country but Canada,” she said, “barrin’ the United States on a trip I made. But it’s Ireland I’d like to see,” she said, her voice growing suddenly passionate. “It’s Irish I am, and it’s Ireland is me country. Me mother used to tell me of the green grass and the kindly people and the way the McGees lived there.”

Miss McGee sat looking at the fire a minute.

“I want you to understand,” she said then, and her voice had suddenly become dark and grave, “the McGees go back so far you can’t trace them. There was a McGee in Ballyhoochlan before the time of Our Lord . . . and God knows what *he* believed,” said Miss McGee.

She stopped a minute and looked intently at the fire.

“So that’s some family, eh, to live up to in a strange land,” she said after a bit, raising her eyes to Robert’s. “Ye can’t feel, Mr. Fulton, ye have all that behind ye and not try an’ live up to ut . . .”

Robert said nothing.

“There’s times at night,” said Miss McGee, “I’ll dream of that green Irish grass me mother used to ta’alk about. ‘Katie,’ she’d say, ‘there ain’t the like of ut in Canada. The Irish grass is Irish, and I’m Irish an’ you’re Irish—and never forget ut.’ I ain’t never forgot ut,” said Miss McGee. She stopped again. “The name of the McGees is known far an’ wide at

Ballyhoochlan," she said. "Why, me mother used to tell me that for ten miles around ye had only to speak the name of McGee and they'd honor ye."

Still Robert Fulton said nothing. It wasn't that he didn't feel sympathetic, but Miss McGee's remarks made him feel awkward and he couldn't think of anything to say.

"Ma'a came over here the young widow she was," Miss McGee went on. "She came out here with me in her ar'rums, and me father dead before I got meself born, and she left the old farm behind her that had went to me father's brother and he not kind to her. "Ah!" said Miss McGee, "it was a sore heart me mother brought to Canada. She was but a young girl, and she come to join her brother here, and when she landed she found um married and his wife not wantin' her . . ."

Miss McGee gazed into the midst of the glowing fire and heaved a big sigh.

"'Tis a hard thing life," she said, "and a sad world. But there's a better one comin', Mr. Fulton."

Once more Robert Fulton said nothing. He felt this subject inspire him even less than the last. He felt by no means so sure as Miss McGee that a better world was awaiting him when he had finished with the butter-and-cheese counter. He knew that Miss McGee was a fervent Catholic and that the nearness of St. Patrick's was one secret of the attachment she felt for Penelope's Buildings.

"It's the next world ye think of as ye git on in this," Miss McGee pursued. "There's not much to this world—barrin' the beauty of ut. But the next world'll be more beautiful, and there'll be peace in ut as well."

Miss McGee stopped once more, and Robert Fulton felt it "laid upon him," as they say in Scotland, to say something.

"Yes," he said awkwardly, "I suppose so."

Robert Fulton had never believed anything very fervently. He hadn't been brought up to anything beyond the ordinary orthodox thing; and his school-days and his years at the university (for he had been three years at College in England) together with a whole-hearted addiction to books of every sort and kind, had successfully undermined anything he had been originally taught in the religious line, and left him with nothing. He didn't think much about any world at all—except this one; and when he thought of this one it was chiefly to find fault with it. Miss McGee's ardent acceptance of life on a Catholic basis was incomprehensible to him. He didn't under-

stand her feeling to the Church, the priests, the nuns (what education she had received had been in a Convent). The way she slipped into the church every morning on her way to her work seemed to him picturesque: no more than that. He was, not so much incapable of understanding, as not ripe for understanding, the passionate sense of protection this gave her; how she was able to go to her work, strengthened—armored from ill—by her little bit of broken prayer before one of the tawdry altars at St. Patrick's. He was unwilling to enter on any discussion as to religion. He didn't want to discuss at any time with Miss McGee (who would be irritating in a discussion he felt sure); and especially to-night, when he was warmed and comforted by her chicken and tea, he wouldn't for anything have hurt her feelings. He therefore said in a half-assenting kind of way, "Yes. I suppose so"—and left the conversation there.

"But you like Canada, don't you?" he said, taking up after a minute a new branch of the subject. "You're happy here?"

Miss McGee gave a little laugh.

"Oh yes, I'm happy," she said. "I'm as happy as I deserve."

And *she* left it at that.

She was quite aware of the gulf that divided them. She knew that Mr. Fulton was "a gentleman" and that she wasn't "a lady." She recognized at once the difference life had put between them. She couldn't have told you how she knew; but she did know. She also knew that there were some things that there would be no good explaining to Mr. Fulton. He wouldn't understand. Her life and how she lived her life was one of these things: and she didn't try to explain it. "Oh yes," she said, "I'm happy enough. I'm as happy as I deserve." And she rose and began to remove the tea things.

She was deft in her movements. She did things so that it was a pleasure to watch her. She gathered together the plates and the cups and saucers and the knives and forks and spoons and she put them away on the shelf in the "kitchenette"—to be washed after Mr. Fulton went away. Then she folded up the cloth and put it into the drawer of the table they were sitting at (it was a plain deal kitchen table with no pretensions to anything except economy); and as a climax to all this she re-spread the table with a cover almost more unspeakably hideous than anything else in the room. It all took her five minutes or so, and then she sat down again with her little bit of

work in her hands. "I'll leave *you* to make up the fire, Mr. Fulton," she said.

This was meant by Miss McGee as the last concession to friendliness. To no one on earth except Robert Fulton (though Robert had no idea of this) would she have said such a thing. When she said, "I leave you to make up the fire," she meant, "Anything and everything you choose to do will be accepted by me." She watched him take the poker and lean forward and make up the fire (he did it as neatly as he had carved the chicken), and in watching him she felt a deep luxurious pleasure. She didn't frame her pleasure into words, even to herself. She didn't say, even to herself, "How nice if he were here to do that always!" She merely watched him from under her long dark eye-lashes and felt the luxury of the moment. She ceased to feel alone in the world as she watched the masculine hands busy with her fire. Something consoling seemed to come into her life, and, for the moment, the next world ceased to be the aim and goal of this one. This world could be very sweet—so Miss McGee felt—so sweet that one would hesitate to leave it. One might cling to it—love it—care for it inexpressibly.

"So you're not a Canadian," Robert Fulton said, re-seating himself in his chair. "You're Irish born."

"I'm Irish born," Miss McGee answered, choking back a little sigh that her happy moment was over. "I'm Irish born—sure thing. Me sister remembers Ireland," Miss McGee went on, "or says she does. She says it's a lovely place with rivers and streams and the rain always fallin' . . ."

She paused.

"Me mother was a sweet woman, Mr. Fulton," she added inconsequently. "She had the sweetest, prettiest face. 'Where did *you* come from, ye little black divil,' she'd used to say to me. She had blue eyes and fair hair that she parted in the middle and dressed in smooth strands over her temples. Ah," said Miss McGee, shaking her head over her work, "she had a power of offers, one way and another, me mother. But she stayed faithful to me father's name, God bless her. And when she was old she died."

The fire sent out little jets of flame in response to Robert Fulton's "doing-up." It filled up any pause in the conversation with little friendly noises—hisses and spurts that it made.

"I see Ma'a now," Miss McGee said, "the way she'd used to look. She was a home-woman, bless her. When I'd come

in from me work she'd come to the door to welcome me. 'Katie,' she'd say, 'I'm glad to see ye back. Ye're late to-night.' And we'd sit down to tea together—me sister married young and left Ma'a an' me—an' I'd look at her an' think there never was such a pretty thing before . . ."

Miss McGee stopped.

"You must be lonely without her," said Robert gently. We know he was perceptive.

For a minute or two Miss McGee said nothing. And then she looked up and looked him full in the face. "We must all be lonesome at toimes, Mr. Fulton," she said. And she dropped her marvelous eyes and looked ugly again.

"She reared us strict, Ma'a done, you bet," Miss McGee resumed after a while. "She wasn't one of the intimate koinde, Mr. Fulton. She kept herself to herself an' she kep' us to ourselves. There was no boys about, be-lieve *me*. When me sister married it was Ma'a chose the boy. 'I'll have no drunkards brought in me house,' says she, 'not no libertines neither.' So she chose an honest bo'oy an' me sister Mary married um. She's borne um eight kids an' there's four of 'em dead, an' she's a happy woman, Mary Garry is—but she's never cared for her husband . . ."

Robert Fulton saw no way of commenting on these facts, and so he once more held his tongue. His thoughts, now that the chicken and tea were all cleared away, had turned to his manuscript and he wanted to be reading it. But he saw no way of opening *that* conversation.

"I wonder," he said irrelevantly, "how you would have liked it if your mother had never left Ireland."

"Not at all," said Miss McGee promptly (she divided these three words into distinct entities, not sounding the final consonant on to the following vowel). "Sure, it's good in Canada. I've took a look," she said; "our folks is not so koinde when they comes out here as what they'd used to be in Ireland, but ye *git* more here I guess."

Robert Fulton, in spite of himself—it was instinctive—glanced about the little room: and Miss McGee, whose eyes had been fixed on her work, raised them suddenly, and fixed them on his.

"Sure," she said, just as if he had spoken, "I haven't made much of ut. It's women alone have the poor toime. But," she hesitated. "Well," she said, "I'm some more re-fined, I guess, Mr. Fulton, eh, than ef I'd stopped back there in Ire-

land." She glanced down at her hand. "I'd never 've kep' a hand loike that," she said, laughing, "ef I'd stayed back where me father was."

For the first time Robert Fulton looked at Miss McGee's hand. He saw that it was a small hand, a well-shaped hand, a white hand. (She covered her hands with paper bags and slipped elastic bands round her wrists when she had house-work to do.) He saw also the nails. Miss McGee's nails wouldn't have been like that—if she had stayed in Ireland. Robert Fulton saw in a flash what she meant.

"Yes," he said. "But is it worth it?"

And Miss McGee saw what *he* meant.

"Sure ye have to loose some way," she said. "Ye know that's true, Mr. Fulton. Ye can't be koind an' git on in the wor'ld too. Here," she said, "ye have to work an' work har'rd, but ye have the *feelin'* ye're equal to the best. That's somethin', eh," she added after a minute.

"Miss McGee," said Robert Fulton suddenly, "will you let me read you something I've been—writing?" This last remark of Miss McGee's had pushed up into his mind an early remark in his Paper, 'I should say at the start that my main theme will be not so much Canada in and by itself as Canada's effect upon the European immigrants,' and he longed to be up and reading all that he had written both before and after that remark. "I've been writing," he went on hastily—his self-consciousness had fallen from him as a cloak falls when you undo the clasp—"and I took the liberty of bringing my manuscript down. Would you—if you'd let me read it to you I'd—I'd be very much . . ."

He stopped.

"Sure," said Miss McGee heartily—she had seen him bring the manuscript in and put it under his cap on the window-sill and she had wondered what it was—"sure, Mr. Fulton, I'd think ut the treat an' all. I love a bit of readin'," she said, and there was sincerity in her tone, "but it's rarely I git a chanst of ut."

"I don't know if you'll like this," said Robert hesitatingly: the sentence out of his essay, now that he had had time to turn it over in his mind, seemed hardly applicable to the occasion. His self-consciousness began to envelop him again. "I can't even tell you what it—*is*," he said.

He came to a stop.

"Whatever it is, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, "I'll take

ut as an honor ef ye'll let me hear ut. Why," she cried excitedly, suddenly bethinking herself, "I never in my loife had anyone read me anythin' they'd *wrote*. I never knew ye did wrote," she said. "I never thought ye . . ."

She was going to say "could" but she stopped herself in time. It was indeed a matter of intense surprise to her that Mr. Fulton, whom she had taken for a mere innocent man, could write anything. She stopped herself in time, but it was only just in time. "Git in roight now," she said, "an' star'rt before the noight gits older. I'll set workin' here, an' ef I don't git on to what ut is—ye'll explain. I've not had much chanst of an education," her voice fell a semi-tone. "I wisht I'd had. I worry some the way I don't know things—I did plan I'd be a school-teacher onest when I was young. But that's neither here nor there," she ended, her voice righting itself. "Go roight ahead so I kin listen. . . ."

Robert Fulton rose and went to the window-sill, took the little rolled-up manuscript and came back to his seat. He felt suddenly nervous. What if she should think him a fool. What if, when he read it out loud, it should sound thoroughly and detestably bad. He cleared his throat. "It's only a very little thing," he said, "just a beginning . . ."

And he unrolled it, twisted the pages backwards to make them flat again, and, spreading the manuscript on the table, began to read.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN Robert had finished reading there was the usual disturbed pause that occurs at the end of anyone's reading anything. Reading aloud one's own wares is fascinating, but it is also a risky business. Reading, for one thing—however well the reading may be done—is not calculated to arouse enthusiasm. Eloquence, the spoken word, the suggestion of improvisation, the touch of heart on heart, will arouse an audience, whoever it may be, so that it is able to shake off its self-consciousness and—be articulate. An audience addressed by someone with the kindling gift is set on fire—when an orator has done speaking those who listen rise, and, burned out of all consciousness of self, acclaim the man who has wrought this miracle on them: the orator feels his power, the people he has addressed do homage, all goes merrily as the

classical marriage-bell. When, however, someone sits down and in cold blood reads something, with his eyes necessarily glued to his paper, this kind of enthusiasm is *not* evoked. The end of the reading is apt to be greeted rather by the sound of the funeral-bell. The audience is mute, oppressed, very conscious of self; and with all its energies bent on trying to think of something appropriate to say, it sits very unhappy indeed—and making the reader yet unhappier than itself by its silence. Even Tennyson himself, of whose reading of “Maud” we have all heard so often, may have suffered occasionally from this recalcitrancy on the part of his audience.

Robert’s reading was no exception to the rule. When he had finished there was an intense silence. Poor Miss McGee sat at the other side of her waning fire, tied up in a knot and wondering what on earth she could say. She wanted to say something very nice indeed and, naturally, the more she wanted, the less she could attain. She sat tense, inelastic, pulled together—though outwardly calm and peaceful. As the moments went on she began to feel a sense of desperation. What was she to say? What *could* she say?

The fact was, of course, that there was a great deal of Robert Fulton’s manuscript she hadn’t understood. It was above her. What could she do with a sentence like this, ‘The two countries (Canada and England) are so alike and at the same time so very different that any power of thinking you may possess will almost inevitably be forced to the surface by the change from the one to the other; one of the drawbacks of general travel is that the lands you visit are so totally different from what you are accustomed to at home that all capacity for just comparison is taken away from you for the time being, and your power of thinking is more or less in abeyance—we need only recall the traveling letters of any ordinary mortal to convince ourselves of that truth.’ - To Miss McGee travel was the ideal way of spending some, at least, of life. She hadn’t known before that it had a drawback. And then what did ‘in abeyance’ mean? What *were* ‘traveling letters’? Miss McGee got on an average one letter in the year—a Christmas epistle from her cousin in New York, and it said to begin with “hoping you are well,” and to end with “no more at present from yours.” Was that a ‘traveling letter’? It traveled a long way—from New York to Regalia. No treat was greater to Miss McGee than a book; she had spoken truthfully enough when she had said she was fond of reading. But what kind

of reading? On Saturday night, on the way back from work, Miss McGee was accustomed to call in at one of the great Departmental Stores and make her way to the Library Section. There she would say good evening to the "young lady" in charge, and then, wandering aimlessly in front of the bookshelves she would take down a volume here and a volume there and dip casually into them; and then, ten to one, she would turn at last to the young lady and say, "What's a nice book, eh? Could ye fix me one for Sunday?" And the young lady, affable to all literature, would pull out a volume and say, "Gee, that is one cracker-jack, you bet," or words to that effect. And Miss McGee, meekly accepting the judgment of authority, would pay her deposit of two cents for the night's read of the masterpiece and go off with it under her arm. And she liked it. She considered the cracker-jack was a cracker-jack; she formed one of the public who so generously create best-sellers. She cried at the places indicated by the author and laughed at the places where wit was provided, and when on the Monday morning, on her way to work, she carried back the cracker-jack and paid the remaining two cents for the treat she had had, she said to the young lady, "Say, my dear, that's a well-wrote book, eh?" And the young lady would reply, "I believe you," or "I should worry," or "true as steel," or something of that kind: and the author had walked up one more step of the ladder of fame.

Seeing that this was the case, it will be perceived that Miss McGee was hardly up to Robert Fulton's literary standard; he had been perfectly correct in his diagnosis of her intellectual state. She had had a vague idea while the reading was going on that it was a fine thing she was listening to; Miss McGee, in common with a good many other people, whenever she didn't understand a thing concluded that on that very account it must be fine. Robert had besprinkled his literary garden too from a watering-pot of quotations (he thought, poor soul, they were patent to the sparrow on the house-top) and these, Greek as they were to Miss McGee, complicated the situation. She had never read "Little Dorrit," so what was she to make of 'life in Canada is the antithesis (and what on earth was that!) to the sort of officialized existence led in the Circumlocution Office.' The immortal Tite Barnacles were for Miss McGee as if they were not and had never been. Odd as it may seem, she hadn't even heard of "David Copperfield," and therefore Robert's sentiment that you cannot look at Canada without feeling a lit-

tle as Littimer did towards David 'though Canada has not the perception or sensitiveness of David, so neither guesses your thoughts nor would be interested in them if she did,' was lost on her. As for La Fontaine's frog, which in Robert's manuscript was made a symbol for 'that inflation of the New World which is so distinct from growth,' it was not even a name to her. How should Miss McGee have heard of La Fontaine? His Fables would have bored her, anyway. It was impossible for a man like Robert Fulton, accustomed to books from his infancy (and perhaps before it) to realize the position of a Miss McGee—who read, as the Scotchman jokes, with deeficulty, and whose literary taste was bounded on the North by "Evesham Bobby" (a synonym for the Duke of Tynmouth), on the South by "Great Love Gets There Every Time," and on the East and West I will not say by what. He simply, with the best will in the world, could not throw himself into the area of sentimentality and obviousness, false reasoning and bad grammar that Miss McGee regarded as the literature of the age, and he was unable to quote from any of the books she knew—because he had not read them.

Miss McGee was in a hole. She was tempted—in one-half of her—to wish that Robert had never come to tea. However, there was another half of her that was quite different from the first half; and that half, most irresponsibly and unreasonably, was *glad* he had come. It didn't matter that he said, 'In Canada's atmosphere there is something young; something of that awakening self-consciousness and ambition and vague sense of latent power that exercises a fascination over many of us. It is the spirit of aroused egoism walking abroad, but just as the first conscious manifestations of the ego in himself are fascinating to the individual, so Canadian life is fascinating to those who come to it in something of a kindred spirit. The liking for Canada is largely temperamental.' She hadn't the slightest idea what all that was about, but at the same time she was proud that he should have selected her to read it to. She loved sitting there listening to things she didn't understand, in the half of her that was glad he had come; and she wished—oh how she wished!—she could prove worthy of his confidence. Had Robert been able to say what his Paper said in burning personal words, the one half of Miss McGee would have risen and cast the other half from it and answered him in words as burning as his own. It was Robert's method that got between him and his listener.

It was the technicality of his writing—the literary form in which he chose to en-wrap his thought—that put Miss McGee off. She had never been taught the use of specialized tools like that—she didn't understand; how could she? And, being hit hard with the intellectuality of it all and rendered in her turn self-conscious to the last degree, she was afraid of saying anything at all in case she made a fool of herself. Possibly Miss McGee is not an isolated case of such feeling as this. Possibly she was quite as much sinned against as sinning. If Shakespeare (let us say) had written Robert Fulton's little criticism on Canada and its ways and had sat by Miss McGee's fireside reading it aloud, Miss McGee might never have been self-conscious at all.

For a while it was a drawn battle between Miss McGee's two halves: and then, after a minute or so of complete silence (which seemed like an eternity to both of them), she said in a small voice, "Oh my, Mr. Fulton, that's lovely, eh!"

It was not a very stimulating remark. It was even a rather silly remark. But Robert Fulton felt a good deal heartened and even stimulated by it. He also had been feeling a complete fool in the small (and at the same time eternal) silence that had greeted the end of his reading; he had felt so much of a fool that if the silence had lasted much longer he would have gathered up his ill-fated manuscript and with it he would have escaped to his own den, two stairs up: and there in company with his literary work he would have spent a suicidal night. However, by speaking at all Miss McGee broke the evil spell, and by saying, "Oh my, Mr. Fulton, that's lovely, eh!" she indicated at least her good-will. Good-will is something. It is a good deal. Robert Fulton felt suddenly saved—calmed—cheerful. His artistic streak went up with a bound, the "prespiration," as Miss McGee always called it, ceased rolling down him in the secret recesses of his being; he looked up with his candid blue eyes and right into the dark mysterious queer eyes of Miss McGee and he said naïvely, "Did you like it?"

He couldn't have said anything better. With that remark Miss McGee became assured once more (a thing she had doubted while he was reading his manuscript) of his humanity. The fact that he was able to write things that other people couldn't understand dropped away from her and she was able to look upon him almost, though not quite, as she had looked before. It hardly seemed possible that the same

thing that had written 'What is lacking in Canada in spite of her youthfulness, is the spirit of fertility—fertility of brain and imagination, without which the fertility of field and forest and stream are of little profit' could also have said, "Did you like it?" in that gentle humble tone of voice. "Oh, bless um, he's just an innocent young man," Miss McGee said to herself, and she felt reassured. Out loud she said, "Like it! Why, I think it's great. It's a grand thing you've wrote there, Mr. Fulton. I never thought," (and this time she said it) "you had it in ye."

As soon as she had said that she felt she shouldn't have said it, and she wished she could retract it. But Robert Fulton, responding to the tone of her voice (which was warm and human), said "Oh!" And stayed where he was, looking into her deep eyes with his lighter ones. And they sat a while like that, he perfectly unself-conscious and she almost so, looking deep, deep into one another.

It was Miss McGee who came back first. She straightened up, and moved in her chair, and colored a little, and removed her eyes: and then she said, "You must have went about the wor'ld a lot, eh, Mr. Fulton, before ye could write that."

Robert Fulton felt at a loss. His moment of complete unself-consciousness had been snatched from him. He could have sat a long time looking into Miss McGee's eyes; not because they were the eyes of a woman—not at all—but because they were something human to look into: and that, by means of them, he could get—somewhere. He felt this possibility, as I say, torn away. He felt his eyes left in mid-air, so to speak. He took possession of them again, removed them from where they were, and turned them to where Miss McGee had turned hers—to the dying fire. "Oh well," he said vaguely, "yes, I suppose I've seen things."

Now, this to Miss McGee was a facer. She had sized up Robert at their first meeting when he had carried the coal upstairs for her as "an inexperienced fella." Miss McGee knew only one kind of experience—that of actual life. She had knocked about the world for a long time, and in that knocking about she had encountered most things there are to encounter. There were few things in the commercial world and in the sex world (though Miss McGee herself was chaste) that she didn't know. She had been born into the world with an agile brain. She had used that brain on anything and every-

thing she came across; and the result was that in the two spheres that were open to her there were few things she didn't know. You couldn't have shocked Miss McGee by telling her anything about those two spheres. It would have been impossible. She knew the worst that was to be known, and in a sort of half-cynical, half-melancholy way (with a dash of humor superadded) she accepted it. "Men are men and women are women," she would have said. "God made them that way and you can't make them different." And what men did to women and women to men in the sex world, what men did to men in the commercial world and women to women in a mixture of the two worlds—she took for granted. Her being a devout believer didn't impinge somehow on her view of this world. This world is as it is—and the next world will be as it will be; different in every respect, Miss McGee would have said, and having no connection with here and now.

Being deeply experienced in this limited way she naturally sized up everybody else from the depths of her limitations. She saw Robert Fulton, neat, quiet, shy, gentle—with the occasional quick naïve artistic kindling that distinguished him—and she took for granted that he was inexperienced in every way. She saw that he was unaccustomed to women (and women size up a man almost completely from that) and she said to herself, "He's a boy. He knows nothin' . . ."

Judge then of her surprise that this "young fella" whom she had taken to be a sort of Schüler in Faust (only she had never heard of either Faust or Schüler) should evidently have not only thought and felt, but have actually gone about the world and seen it in a way she—Miss McGee—had never done. Reading, to a person of Miss McGee's experience—is a sort of by-way; if it be a highway, at all it doesn't seem to her to be leading anywhere special. But traveling, the actual seeing of other countries and mingling with the inhabitants, *that*, to a Miss McGee, means . . . well, it means "an elegant education." As she sat on the other side of the dying fire from Robert Fulton, all sorts of new ideas and apprehensions about him were flooding her mind. As she sat there indeed a sort of French Revolution was taking place inside her. This young inexperienced creature had been about the world; he had seen things and thought about them—he was able to put his ideas together so as not to be able to convey them to someone else . . . Miss McGee guillotined on the

spot all her preconceived ideas about Robert Fulton and placed him on the pedestal on which women always place men when they begin to care for them. That night, in the most unexpected way, Robert Fulton walked out of a certain place in Miss McGee's consciousness and into another part. She suddenly felt for him—and she knew she felt it—an impulse of the most tender admiration. He could write like that! He could say 'possibly money *is* fertile: it certainly does beget money, once you have the proper start . . .' He could, without rhyme or reason, define the Canadian climate as 'brilliant sunshine and a diamond quality in the air.' He could (bless um!) burst into things like this, 'Canada has not emerged from the early spoilt-child stage, the stage of noise and grab and acquisitiveness and intense appetite for the material things of life'—and God only knew what he meant by that! Still, he *could* say things like that! He could "*write*"! All that she had previously read seemed to her suddenly worthless. She felt that she never would be able to say again to anyone that she was fond of reading—she who could not understand this wonder that Robert Fulton had put before her.

"Say, that's a grand thing, Mr. Fulton," she said. "It's—sure, it's *foine*. I—I didn't know ye'd read a thing like that to *me* . . . or I'd never've asked ye to come down."

It was well that Robert Fulton was perceptive, or he might not have understood what Miss McGee was driving at. He *did* understand. And he glanced over gratefully at her.

"It's—it's only a very little thing," he said stammeringly.

"It's a *big* thing, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, and her voice was grave. "Sure, it's the great big grand everlastin' koind of thing." She stopped a minute. "Ef ye'd have the koindness," she said, "to come down Sunday noight" (in her mind she had already resurrected the remains of the chicken into creamed chicken on toast) "an' read out loud again—I . . . p'raps I'd take hold some better."

"I guess I'm stupid, Mr. Fulton," she went on. "I've not had the elegant wor'rk you've had put in ye. But I'd *loike* to git ut . . . ef ye'd explain."

She paused.

"If ye'd come Sunday," she said, "it would be a great agreement."

She meant "*agrément*." She mixed with the French-Canadians in St. Patrick's church, and she caught up their words and used them, anglified, as her own.

Robert Fulton felt something warm and soothing run into his heart.

"Thank you, Miss McGee," he said. "*Thank* you. If it doesn't bore you, I'd—I'd *like* to come on Sunday."

And then, on another impulse of self-consciousness, he took out his nineteenth-century watch and looked at it.

"My goodness," said he. "Look at the time . . . !"

He sprang to his feet and stood opposite Miss McGee.

"Good night," he said.

His self-consciousness had once more left him.

"Good night," Miss McGee said. She didn't offer to get up, nor did she stretch out her hand as usual. She merely sat where she was and looked up at Robert Fulton from under her long dark eyelashes.

"Won't you shake hands?" said he. He couldn't have told you why he said it. They always did shake hands, and he had never thought anything about it before. But now it suddenly seemed to him that he would *like* to shake hands with Miss McGee. "Won't you shake hands?" he said smilingly; and he stretched out his slender womanlike hand.

Miss McGee slowly put her plump warm soft hand into his. She let it lie there, and she allowed him to clasp it and hold it—and then shake it warmly. She felt that he only shook it as he would have shaken any other human being's hand that had praised him. It might have been a man's hand in his—or his mother's—or his aunt's . . .

When her hand dropped back into her lap she rose up and went with Robert to the door.

"You'll be in Sunday then," she said. "But come ahead of toime, eh, Mr. Fulton, an' we'll have the good evenin's read. Come in at six, eh?"

She watched him run rapidly up the stairs, and then she closed her door slowly.

"I'm old," she said to herself. "I'm old."

The thought seemed to her for the moment almost too bitter to be borne. The thought of her ardent youth that she had sacrificed to her mother came rushing over her like a torrent. She went about mechanically putting the room in order, mechanically getting out the tea-things to wash—and the hot tears coursed down her cheeks.

"I'm old," she said to herself. "I'm old . . ."

## CHAPTER VI

ON Saturday night (just twenty-four hours after the famous reading-party) Miss McGee came homewards with a lagging step. The three gowns had proved more trying than ever. All day long she had sat endeavoring to weld them into one, and all day long they wouldn't weld. "What's the matter," Mrs. Barclay had said, on her periodical visits to the work-room to see how things were getting on. "You'd used to be so clever, McGee. What's the matter, eh?" Whenever anyone said anything like that Miss McGee, who had a fearful strain in her (own sister to the superstitious strain that coursed in her veins), saw herself on the streets. She knew Mrs. Barclay wouldn't really go back on her. She always had been and always would be, in spite of everything, a true friend. Still, if she—"McGee"—failed to please, where was she? Was her right hand really losing its cunning? Was her skill departing from her? Mrs. Barclay didn't, of course, mean what she said but, for all that, disparaging remarks always seemed to Miss McGee to be casting their shadow before.

Whenever Mrs. Barclay had paid a visit to her therefore, she had redoubled her efforts on the gowns. "Darn the thing," she had said to herself, "whyever don't she buy herself somethin' *new!*" And she had seized "it" more firmly in her hands and struggled—wrestled—with it to make it look something like a tunic—which was Mrs. Barclay's desire: and it wouldn't look like one. No, it wouldn't. It seemed to have a life of its own, foreign and antagonistic to hers. Do what she would not an atom of "style" or "pep" would come into it. It remained, in her own word, "dumphy." By the afternoon the tunic that wasn't one raised despair in its creator's soul and ire in its possessor's. "Whatever's the *matter!*" Mrs. Barclay had kept saying. It had been a miserable day.

To complete the tragedy, the weather had broken. The clear golden days had suddenly gone as if they never could have been; and in their place had come a fierce black stormy day—precursor of the long months of the Canadian winter. The few leaves—amber only yesterday—turned a sickly yellow or a withered brown as you looked at them; they detached themselves from their branches one by one in a heart-sick sort of manner, and came fluttering to the ground. The bare

branches that they left looked flaccid, soaked with the down-pouring rain. The world had looked a dejected world as Miss McGee surveyed it out of the Barclay window; it had looked a world with an inky sky out of which fierce torrents of rain had come swishing and pouring, a world with soaked sidewalks, and swamped passers-by, and tired dripping horses.

Miss McGee was dependent on the weather for her cheerfulness in life. A clear sunny day, and she was "keyed up" as she said to enjoyment; a wet heavy day, and she went so out of tune that you couldn't believe she would ever ring clear again. She had sat all this day in a sort of stupor of wretchedness. The gown—the sky above and the earth beneath—the periodical visits and ejaculatory remarks of Mrs. Barclay—roused in her moments of acute misery: and when the misery was not acute it was chronic. It was most unusual for Miss McGee to feel this way at the Barclay's house. She regularly spent two weeks of her life there each year—one week in the spring and another in the fall—"fixing over" all Mrs. Barclay's and Miss Barclay's "things." And she was accustomed to look forward to these weeks. They were amongst the pleasantest things that came into her life. For the keynote of the Barclay's house was comfort—there were good meals and lots of them and a warm upholstered homey sort of atmosphere. Then Miss McGee was on a comfortable footing at the Barclays'. She shared the family nourishment in the dining-room, and Mr. Barclay, who always came home when he could "from business" for the family noonday dinner, carved with a liberal hand and always urged a second helping. There was no constraint about the Barclay weeks. Miss McGee ate as much as she could, and often at night, when she left after her day's work, she carried a basket loaded with "things." The "things" in this instance were not clothes to fix over, but bits of cold joints, odds and ends of chickens, remains of layer cakes . . . pots of jam, such as that Miss Barclay had thrust into her hand to make up the quarrel. And Miss McGee liked all this. She did not enjoy the Barclay food as she enjoyed food that she ate at her "best" customer's. *That* food—Mrs. Glassridge's food—was for the hierarchy alone. But Mrs. Barclay's dinners were good solid things, well put together and comfortably served: Jennet, in the kitchen, looked forward to *her* share of them and took care of that. Possibly Barclay dinners were better for humanity than Glassridge food every day. Mrs. Barclay's dishes had not the

“goût” that Mrs. Glassridge’s chef knew how to put into his cooking. They bore no resemblance to what the archangels must eat the one time in the year they feel hungry. But then Mrs. Glassridge’s food was on the same grade as the little gowns that were wafted over from Paris for her to wear, while Mrs. Barclay’s gowns at their best, when they were one gown and one alone, were merely good solid articles—like Jennet’s dinners. Still, Miss McGee was certainly more at home at Mrs. Barclay’s than at Mrs. Glassridge’s. In the Glassridge establishment she was conscious—resentfully conscious—of being out of place, the square peg in the round hole that Robert was in Canada: whereas at the Barclays’ she was pleasantly in her element. The days as a rule passed quickly. Miss Barclay, a thoroughly good-natured girl, often took her out shopping with her and gave her tea and hot cakes in the tea-room of some Departmental Store. And *now* look! See what had happened! Mrs. Barclay had taken a fit of economics and her three gowns had turned into an Athanasian Creed on their maker’s hands.

Not even lunch (as Miss McGee always named the noon-day meal) cheered her. The good food tasted like dust and the cup of tea like liquid ashes, if there are such things. Mr. Barclay’s husky kind voice saying, “Jes’ a *sma’*all piece more cor’rn, Miss McGee!” seemed, in some mysterious way, to add insult to injury.

“What’s the good of ut anyway,” Miss McGee said to herself, splashing her way home. “Here’s me workin’ me head awf—and what for! To please *her*.” All Mrs. Barclay’s kindnesses, past, present, and to come, ceased for the moment to exist. “Her’s not wor’rth pleasin’,” Miss McGee said furiously to herself, “that’s all about that. I wisht I was dead.”

She trudged a bit further through the sloppy slush and sometimes deliberately plunged right into the big pools, that were forming themselves on the uneven side-walks.

“Can’t she buy somethin’ *new!*” she said.

Naturally, it was not alone the three gowns in one that had wrought this transformation scene in Miss McGee. In women, when the world suddenly and quite inexplicably, as it seems, takes on mourning apparel, there is a reason. The three gowns were in Miss McGee’s mind; she hated to make a *mess*. But there was something else. And it was a something that she was unwilling to confess—to put into so many words—even to herself.

When women are on the brink of the first step towards surrender—not necessarily bodily surrender, but the surrender of mind and soul—oneself—that accompanies the feeling of love—there is always at the back of their minds a big fear. When a woman is young such a surrender seems—and perhaps is—the natural thing. The fear (always there) is swamped then by the great rush of joyous feeling. The anticipation of “something” coming; “something” that is different from and worth all that the world has had to show before. But when a woman reaches Miss McGee’s age—when she is, technically speaking, “old” . . . ah, then it is very different. The joyous anticipation is nowhere, for there is no anticipation at all except of grief and failure; and the fear of something even more disagreeable than usual coming into the life is paramount. Miss McGee had had a thoroughly disagreeable life. She had seen the world emphatically from the wrong side of the tapestry. All the odds and ends of unfinished thread had come her way, and she had spent her life in trying to fasten them off—and failing. As she looked back, especially, as now, on a dark rainy night after a day of ineffectual work, she seemed to see her life in no way except one of petty futile failure. “Oh, I’m a failure a’alright,” she said to herself, as she went splashing along. “I’m a failure. That’s all about *me*. And,” she added to herself after a minute, “I’m an old fool, too. That’s what I am. A darned old fool.”

Swearing is, after all, a confession of failure in itself. It is the expression of a weakness that fails to find adequate language for the consolation of its feelings. In Miss McGee’s defense it can only be said that her vocabulary was limited. She had not, as she told Robert Fulton, had the advantages of an elegant education, and therefore she was not able, on acute occasions, to find the exact word to fit her thought. On such occasions (they were not very frequent) Miss McGee had recourse to what is called “strong” language in which to express her feelings. “I’m a darned old fool,” she said to herself, and she felt that sort of miserable pleasure we all do when we say and do things we know we oughtn’t to say and do; and, as she splashed her way along after this outburst, she more deliberately still chose the worst of the puddles to splash through. “I wisht to God,” she said, “I could catch the cold an’ get the peumonia an’ be done with ut.” And then after a second she said, “God forgive me!”—and felt better.

As she neared home, however, she felt as if it would not

be possible for her to go back into her lonely room. "What will I do," she said to herself, "there all alone." She knew what she would do. She would take refuge in that feminine consolation—tears. Miss McGee knew very well that if she went back into her dark lonely room—if she opened the door and saw before her that vista of gloomy loneliness that she saw nightly on her return, she would (before she had time to stop herself as it were) burst into tears; and once having burst, as every woman knows, it is impossible to close up again. As well try to stop a cloud-burst before it has spent itself. Now Miss McGee had a particular objection to crying. She knew it was a relief—for the moment. She also knew, as all lonely women know, that such a cloud-burst left her with sightless eyes and a "sore head," as she herself called it, that her whole body seemed to smart and her whole soul to ache with misery; that not even a night's sleep could quite restore the balance she had upset; that it would take time to restore her, time which she had not got to give . . . and that the whole thing was silliness and not worth it. Miss McGee, in common with all other women who know what sorrow is, always tried to keep off a crying fit. Whenever she felt that such a thing was in front of her she took means to keep it off; if it were humanly possible, she prevented it. Trudging along, therefore, with the hot irrepressible tears welling up into her big blue-black eyes, she kept saying to herself, "What will I do, God help me? Where can I go to keep meself from thinkin'?" And after she had said this a sufficient number of times the idea flashed into her mind, "Sure I'll drop in on Mrs. Morphy and ta'alk with her a minnut. *She'll* distract me."

As soon as she had thought of this Miss McGee felt better. The thought of Mrs. Morphy acted like a charm on her sinking spirits so that they ran upward like the mercury in a clinical thermometer when the patient has a fever. "I'll drop roight in on the old lady," said Miss McGee, "an' see what *she's* doin'. She's cheery, bless her. An' ef she ain't, she'll keep me from thinkin'." The tears dried up like magic in Miss McGee's eyes (there is nothing like forming a plan, however small and poor, for making you feel better) and she walked on with a brisker step, now choosing deliberately the dryest spots to walk on, and evading as well as she could the splashes of mud she would have to brush off later from the hem of her skirts.

Mrs. Morphy, on the ground floor of the Buildings, across the court, had a bigger domain than most of the Penelopians. She had a fine kitchen (in which her life was spent) a good room off it which she rented to a professed cook, Maggie Chambers—Mrs. Morphy took “roomers”; Dan, “the nice young man who was always drunk,” occupied the room to the side of that; and in a tiny place with a skylight window, dignified by the name of room but not much resembling the thing, “Mac” lived and did his best to move and keep his being going. And “Mac” was the pride and joy of the Morphy establishment, and in love with a niece of Miss McGee’s.

“Come in, McGee,” cried Mrs. Morphy, “come roight in an’ set down. It’s the worst wor’ld this, an’ I’m wantin’ someone to say it to in the wor’rst way. Set down and have the cup o’ tea with me. Ye look wasted with want.”

Mrs. Morphy leant across to where the tea-pot stood on the top of the stove and shook a good pinch of tea into it out of a paper bag that stood beside it. She filled up the pot out of the ever-boiling kettle. “Sure it’s the cup o’ tea’ll do us both good,” said she. “Set down, me dear, an’ be welcome.”

Miss McGee sat down. The kitchen was none too clean, there were stacks and piles of unwashed dishes lying about, the whole place looked sordid and uncared-for and unpleasant—but Miss McGee felt comforted. She needed human contact badly, and if Mrs. Morphy’s home was on the squalid side, Mrs. Morphy herself was hearty. She sat in her rocking-chair beside the stove as if everything was in apple-pie order and she had nothing in the world to do but to rock in a leisurely manner back and forth; and her face (which had been a handsome one in its youth) looked on Miss McGee with a human smile of welcome. “Sit ye down,” said Mrs. Morphy, “and make yerself at home. Glory be to God but I’m glad to see ye.”

Miss McGee took the cup of tea that Mrs. Morphy held out to her. As she sat in her rocking-chair the hostess had merely to stretch out a hand first to one side and then to the other to reach all that was required. The milk was on the table to her right hand, in its bottle, just as it had been delivered by the milkman in the morning, except that it was only half-full now; the sugar was in a paper bag, a little to the left; and as to the cups and saucers themselves, they were on the sink-board amidst the stacks of unwashed dishes, and they just needed a rinse and a rub, God help them, to be

ready for use. Miss McGee was not in a mood to be too particular. She took the cup of tea as it was offered her, and it tasted a great deal better in her mouth than the more elegantly served cup she had tried and rejected at lunch-time.

"'Tis the foine mess of a world this," said Mrs. Morphy, reaching for the loaf and the butter (also in its own piece of paper on the table) and cutting a slice. "There's Dan in his room as sick as a dog with the drink, and Maggie just bent on marryin' um and him not wantin' her. And there's Mac in love with your niece, McGee, and her not wantin' um through um not bein' Catholic. Where's the use of anythin'?" said Mrs. Morphy cheerfully, handing Miss McGee the slice of bread-and-butter in her fingers. "Where's the use of loife! That's what I ask."

She took a big sip of tea and seemed comforted.

"Ye well *may* ask," said Miss McGee.

It was frantically and furiously hot in Mrs. Morphy's kitchen. It was not a lofty apartment, nor was it a spacious one, and Mrs. Morphy, as long as she had a cent to do it with, stoked "like hell," as Dan said in lucid intervals. The window was tight shut, and as soon as Miss McGee was seated Mrs. Morphy pushed the door to behind her with a well-directed kick, and as Miss McGee sat drinking her tea she was simply sweltering. But she was glad she had come. The physical discomfort was counterbalanced and set at naught, as it were, by the hearty friendliness of Mrs. Morphy's hospitality.

"I don't know what's come to Dan," said Mrs. Morphy. "Here's him spendin' every cent he earns on the drink an' layin' awf till he has to git up to make some more to spend. 'Why in God's name don't ye marry Maggie?' I say to um. 'She's an honest woman as they go.' 'I don't loike Maggie, Mrs. M.,' says he. 'What's that to do with ut,' I says. 'Marry her an' the loikin'll maybe come after.'"

"I'd be sorry for Maggie," said Miss McGee uninterestedly. She wasn't thinking of Maggie.

"Take me wor'rd for ut now," said Mrs. Morphy, bending forward so that she might be close to Miss McGee's ear, "Maggie's not wor'rth yer bein' sawry for. She's the—(here Mrs. Morphy used a classic word) that'll run after any man. Dan's good enough for *her*. He's a deal *too* good," Mrs. Morphy went on after a second. "Dan's the noice bo'oy when he's out of the drink."

Mrs. Morphy was expressing the opinion about Dan that Miss McGee had expressed to Robert Fulton. They both sat silent for some moments listening to the snores of the nice bo'oy who was, as Mrs. Morphy put it, "sleepin' ut awf" in the adjoining room.

"He's the drunken beast," said Miss McGee unexpectedly: her nerves were set on edge by the constantly-recurring snores.

"Och," said Mrs. Morphy heartily, reaching for the empty cup, "bo'oy's will be bo'oy's." She threw the dregs of Miss McGee's cup into the sink, filled up the cup from the teapot, added sugar and milk with a generous hand, and passed the cup back again.

"Sure, what I'm worried about is Mac," she remarked, when she had refilled her own cup. "He's all set on Rose Garry, McGee. What for will she not have um, eh? *He's* the man a'alroight."

"I know ut," said Miss McGee, but still indifferently. It was impossible for her to concentrate her mind on any but her own concerns just then. "But Rose is the har'rd one, believe *me*. Ef she says no she means ut. An' Rose ear'rn's her own mooney, too," Miss McGee added after a minute. "She kin say no ef she wants to, I guess."

"Och, ivery woman wants a man," said Mrs. Morphy.

She paused expecting Miss McGee to controvert this. But after a minute Miss McGee said, "That's true"—and the subject dropped.

"I've somethin' more I want to say to *you*," Mrs. Morphy said after a bit. Miss McGee had filled up the pause by gazing in between the bars of Mrs. Morphy's fire and seeing—things—in the glowing coal beyond the bars. Mrs. Morphy hitched her rocker a bit nearer to Miss McGee and once more lowered her voice—this time to a whisper. "Me leg's bad," she said.

At that Miss McGee came out of her abstraction. The love-affairs of Dan and Maggie, or Mac and Rose were not enough to rouse her from the study of her own preoccupation, but at the hint of physical trouble her heart gave a jump. "What's the matter with ut?" she said.

Mrs. Morphy with a free gesture (a gesture impossible to Miss McGee) turned up her skirts and showed a fair fat white leg. She showed her leg in a way that revealed many things—that she was a married woman—that she was a much-married woman—that she had "seen life," as it is called—

that few things in a certain area of life were unknown to her. Had Miss McGee had to show a bad place on her leg to Mrs. Morphy she would have done so in a private secret manner, lifting her skirts delicately, showing as little of the leg as possible; but Mrs. Morphy; with a fine free gesture, showed all the trouble and all the leg at once. "Look here at me leg," she said, beginning to undo some singularly unappetizing-looking bandages. "Look at ut, Miss McGee, dear. It's sore . . ."

It was "sore." The sight of it reached far down in Miss McGee and touched a very kind spot in her. "My, Mrs. Morphy," she said, "that's ah-ful." (So Miss McGee pronounced that word.) "It's a bad place. Ye should take care of that. Will ye not have a man in to see to ut?" (She meant a doctor.)

"None of your men for me," said Mrs. Morphy emphatically. "Where's the money to pay for 'em . . . ?" She was beginning to wrap the unappetizing bandages round the leg again (it had been a fine well-shaped enticing limb before Mrs. Morphy let it get so fat) when Miss McGee stayed her hand.

"Wait a minnut, Mrs. Morphy, eh" she said. "Let me bandage ut for ye. I've often bandaged Ma'a's." She looked around. "Where's some clean stuff," she said, "that I can fix ut with?"

"There's none," Mrs. Morphy said.

A minute after that Miss McGee was on her way to Semple's drug-store. As she hurried along she never noticed the dreariness of the night, nor did she think of the condition of her own heart. The state of Mrs. Morphy's leg occupied the whole of her consciousness and there was no room for anything else. "The poor *thing!*" she kept murmuring to herself.

At the drug-store she bought the lint and a cooling liniment, recommended by the drug-man, as Miss McGee called him, and, with these in her hands, she went hurrying back to Mrs. Morphy's kitchen. She knelt down on Mrs. Morphy's none-too-clean floor, unwrapped the old bandages with careful hand from the fair soft white leg that had so emphatically seen better days, washed the threatening-looking sore tenderly, and then, very gently and very skilfully too (Miss McGee had what are called "good hands"), she bandaged up the wound with the clean linen she had brought from the chemist's—all soothingly steeped in the cooling liniment.

"There," she said, as she stood off a little from Mrs. Morphy, "is that easier now a bit?"

"It's grand, God bless ye," said Mrs. Morphy. "Thanks to you, McGee dear, I'll spend a better noight, God willin', than for the long toime past. It's the bad noights I been havin' of late. . . ."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" enquired Miss McGee.

"It's not after tellin' more than I can help, I am," said Mrs. Morphy evasively.

Miss McGee stood looking at her. This evasion, this unexpected secretiveness gave her sudden new lights on Mrs. Morphy's character. "It's the way I would be meself," said Miss McGee—to herself. And out loud she said, "I'll give ye a hand with yer dishes, Mrs. Morphy." And, turning up her sleeves she set the tap in the sink running in a business-like manner, feeling the water with her finger to see how hot it was.

"Niver mind the dishes," said Mrs. Morphy heartily. "They'll do to-morrow."

But Miss McGee, paying no attention to her, began to stack the dishes for washing in a professional manner—first the little ones, then the bigger, last of all the biggest and the pots and pans. Everything in Mrs. Morphy's ménage seemed to be collected for washing at one time, but Miss McGee went at the job and did it. After she had scraped and washed and rinsed and dried the dishes and put them away in Mrs. Morphy's cupboard (and she felt like cleaning that out when she looked into it) she turned to and scoured out the sink and scrubbed the sink-board; and then she washed through the dish-towels and the dish-rag she had washed the dishes with and set those to dry before the fire. "Is there somethin' else I can do?" she said, glancing round the kitchen. "If there is, say the word. I've toime. To-morrow's Sunday."

"Bless ye, me dear," Mrs. Morphy said. "Ye been sent to help me. I'd never have had the strength meself." Suddenly her gray-green eyes that had once been translucent and glancing, filled with tears. "I'm an old woman, McGee dear," she said, "an' none so strong as I onest was." And then in the same breath she went on, "but don't you be tellin' anyone, dear. I've kep' it to meself till now. So don't be tellin' anyone about me leg. They'd be sayin' things if they knew. . . ."

As Miss McGee went up-stairs—it was an extraordinary thing—she felt far less tired than when she had come in from

her day's work and gone across the court to get some comfort from Mrs. Morphy. Since that time, when she had thought herself dead-beat, she had been out again in the rain and mud, she had done a good hour-and-a-half's work in Mrs. Morphy's kitchen, and she had done a nurse's work on Mrs. Morphy's leg.

"I feel fine now," Miss McGee said to herself, as she put the key in her door and opened it and went into her dark gloomsome room. Her tone was quite business-like—there wasn't the slightest hint of an Irish inflection in it. "I feel *fine . . .*"

There was, in no corner of her consciousness, the slightest idea of crying. Never had tears been further from her. "The poor *soul*," she said to herself. "Why don't them gir'rls of hers look better after her! She ain't fit to be there alone takin' roomers—an' drinkin' an' all." The gin bottle in the corner of the kitchen cupboard as she put the dishes away had been quite visible to Miss McGee's naked eye. "I'll step down bright an' early an' dress that leg to-morrow, eh," she thought; and all the time she was undressing she kept saying to herself meditatively, "I guess it ain't *roight* someway. That leg there ain't roight at all."

The room was cold and it felt damp and Miss McGee hurried to bed. "I'll not put me things to soak to-night," she thought. "To-morrow's Sunday, an' I kin git up a bit ahead o' toime an' wash them through."

By the time she had her things off and had said her prayers and looked at the little figure of the Madonna that she kept over her bed to "watch over her," as she said—she felt contented. She lay down and composed herself to sleep. As she thought of Mrs. Morphy a big pity filled her soul—and as she thought of Robert another kind of pity—a motherly kind—filled the place where the restless longing had been an hour or two before. "Sure, he's a bo'oy," she said, "an' a dear bo'oy." She saw him carrying up the coals and showing, by his way of doing it, that he had never done it before; and then she saw him coming in, as he would be coming in to-morrow, carrying his little roll of paper in his hand. "We'll have creamed chickun on toast," she said to herself, "an' that'll be noice." And her last waking thought was, "Thank God fer a comf'table bed. There's many's the one hasn't got that. Thank God. . . ."

She went fast asleep.

## CHAPTER VII

FOR once things turned out as they should. The Sunday evening so much looked forward to by both Robert and Miss McGee, was a success. Both enjoyed it to the top of their bent—each had a bent of his and her own—and both of them were sorry when the evening was over.

As a matter of fact, this evening was a sort of turning-point in the lives of both of them; for the friendship which it cemented between them was a big thing, both for Robert and for Katie McGee. They were lonely creatures when all is said and done; they led dull lives in which tiny events made big marks; for each of them to feel, as each did, that a friend—a real live friend—had turned up, was something to think about. Each did think the matter over and over and each came to quite opposite conclusions about it; yet this fact that drove them to opposite conclusions united them as nothing else could do.

Probably a friendship between a man and a woman never yet was a quite satisfactory thing; and probably the reason is that a friendship between a man and a woman never is a friendship—not, at least until the physical difficulties have been bridged over between them, and not often then. Yet men and women (or women and men, rather) often think they are friends; for a time. And then comes another time when they know they aren't; the friendship—on one side or the other—has lopped over into . . . something else. In the case of Robert and Miss McGee, it was on Miss McGee's side that the friendship lopped over into the something else; but, though she was conscious of this in the dim recesses where we are conscious of such things, she kept the consciousness there. Outwardly, in the part of her mind that was above-ground, so to speak, she said to herself that this friendship between her and the lonely lad (so she called him) a couple of stairs up was a good thing for both of them. "An' why not?" she asked herself indignantly (but why indignantly?). "Why wouldn't ut be a good thing, eh? He's lonesome. An' I'm lonesome. Where's the har'rm of an evenin' or so spent together at toimes. . . ." There was no one to answer these questions and so it seemed as if it *was* a good thing. Miss McGee choked the questioning part of her back into that lower consciousness where things lie in us and ripen; and she compacted her mind on to the everyday things of life. "He'll

come in Sundays, an' I'll 'have the nice meal for um," she said to herself—this was one of the plans they had formed—"an' we'll have the cozy toime together." A smile that started goodness knows where in her came slowly to the surface and irradiated her face as she thought this. "Sure it's noice not to be lonesome," she said; and on the Monday morning she went to the fashioning of the famous tunic with a new heart on her.

Robert Fulton's ideas were a good deal less subtle. He didn't feel anything at all in that deep-down consciousness where Miss McGee scented danger. There wasn't any danger for him to scent. It was a true friendship he offered Miss McGee. He thought of her as someone divided from him by a mountain of years, and to say that he never dreamed of scaling that mountain of years by the ladder of love is to put it insufficiently. Robert Fulton never dreamed of Miss McGee as an object of love—in the sense of sex-love. He was not very old himself; he was young for his years; it never occurred to him that a woman getting on for fifty (which was the way he would have sized up poor Miss McGee had he sized her up at all) would be thinking of love. Robert regarded fifty as "old" for a woman—as, in a sense, it is. He liked Miss McGee; he was even getting fond of her, but he wasn't *interested* in her. She couldn't interest him physically and she didn't happen to mentally either, and she certainly was not a target for any romantic ideas in the world. She was just a kind elderly thing of no particular sex, who had held out a hand to him when he was bitterly in need of a hand being held out. He took the hand exactly as if it had been a man's hand, and held it; and he was as unconscious that there was any sex connected with the holding of it as if it had been the hand of—a unicorn.

However (for with the subtlety of woman she had managed to conceal from him the nadir of her understanding) he regarded her as valuable as a listener. He was grateful to her. And, on the Sunday, she had appreciably improved.\* Habit accustoms us to anything, even to the unintelligible; Miss McGee had always been quick—one night of Robert's reading had been enough to create a habit in her. On the second evening she was there with the listener's first essential—interest; she *wanted* to understand what he had to say; she wasn't afraid any more; she could say things herself. Miss McGee at no time, of course, got down to the grounds of Robert's thinking anything he did; why, for example, he should re-

gard travel as not an elegant thing for everyone remained to the end a secret for her. However, all such mysteries as that she simply laid aside and concentrated herself on anything she did understand. On Robert's side too, things on the second occasion were less strained. He was no longer nervous—perhaps Miss McGee had become a habit with him. He not only read, he sometimes stopped reading and talked; and by such means he let his listener into his mind in a way mere reading never could have done. "What in thunder brought that bo'oy out here?" Miss McGee kept saying to herself during a great part of the time when he was talking to her—for the feminine intelligence reduces all abstract idea to the particular instance—"What brought um, eh, away from his home?" And she would have given anything to ask. But Robert Fulton was oddly reticent and Miss McGee was oddly considerate. She had, emphatically, the qualities of her defects; and if she was unpunctual (to her customers' despair), if she was quick-tempered, moody, prone to exultation without much reason and to depression with less, she was also quick to grasp, intuitive, careful of the feelings of others, if she liked them—tactful, in a word. If a person is tactful (tactful not on his own account but ours) we can forgive anything. Miss McGee neither by word nor hint nor gesture sought to find out anything Robert Fulton didn't choose to tell. She didn't apply her feminine ingenuity to worming out of him things he didn't wish to speak about. And though Robert Fulton certainly was not definitely conscious of this—he could not, at any rate, have put it into so many words—still he was indefinitely conscious of it. It gave him, though he hardly knew it, a feeling of safety in Miss McGee's company. He felt instinctively that he could say what he pleased and leave unsaid what he pleased, and Miss McGee would let it go at that. Such a feeling is at the bottom of every friendship (though it is not necessarily at the bottom of love) and Robert Fulton was completely conscious of his feeling of friendship for Miss McGee. It changed the aspect of the world for him—so lonely was he; and, as he went upstairs, pretty late, after the Sunday sederunt, he was conscious of a warmth in the spiritual part of him that he had not felt for many a day. "She's a good old thing," he said to himself, absolutely unaware how his words would have pierced Miss McGee like a sword. "She's a good old thing." And he thought a moment, pausing on the stairs, smiling to himself. "I'll take

her down everything I do," he further said—and, half in earnest, half in jest, he felt that he was giving as much as he got, and who shall blame him?—"I'll take it *all* down and read it to her." And the prospect of many pleasant evenings such as the one he had just spent floated before his mind.

Yes, Robert Fulton was singularly young for his age. His mind had, from his childhood up, been filled with a great many things which have nothing—or little—to do with love; or rather, since all things spring from and go towards love, Robert Fulton's preoccupations did mainly spring from love—but not his own. The circumstances of his birth and life had rather tended to turn his thoughts from love of his own—to give his mind a twist away from that central fact of life. And, half-consciously only, perhaps, he had turned his attention determinedly to study. In order to still in himself the ever-crying thing in all of us, he had definitely preferred to look at life reflected—for what are books but the mirrors of the lives of all of us?—and so escape what he instinctively felt would only be further disagreeables to face. It is good for us to bear a certain amount, but each one of us has his (or her) own definite amount that it is possible to bear; beyond that amount misfortune becomes, not a salutary lesson, but a load that bears us down—down—down . . . to ever-increasing depression and uselessness. Robert Fulton had had about as much to bear as he could bear from childhood up; what Canada had in store for him on his arrival in her was just about that last proverbial straw that over-balances the scale. His writing was a mere forlorn hope of balancing the scale—not pecuniarily (for it had never occurred to Robert to think of his writing as a commercial asset), but just as a means of—forgetting himself; the surest means of balancing the scale for all of us.

The friendship with Miss McGee had come at the right—what, if it were not so hackneyed a phrase, one might call the psychological—moment. As Robert Fulton went up the stairs to bed after his evening of creamed chicken and reading his manuscript and friendly talk, he felt—saved. "I can do it," he said to himself. "It's all right."

And, as he went to bed—without any Madonna on the wall to protect him, without any prayers either as I need hardly say—he went on feeling cheered. "She's a good old thing," he said to himself again. "A *good* soul. . . ."

*He* fell fast asleep.

## CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Miss McGee had been a young girl she had had attractions. Katie McGee had never been beautiful—"a beauty," as they had said of her fair stupid sister. She had never had Mary McGee's silky hair, nor her calm blue eyes, nor her soft pink-and-white skin, nor her slender straight figure, nor her supreme health. Katie McGee had always been what her mother called her, "the little black divil of the fam'ly"; and she had had those nervous disabilities that go with the sort of high-strung temperament she possessed. It had been no unusual thing for Katie McGee in the old days to be laid aside with a headache that seemed to go from one temple to the other, through her head, like a never-ceasing sword-thrust. She had suffered from moods—she had been full of eager excitement one day and speechless with depression the next; she had had neuralgias, fits of indigestion. Had Katie McGee been a "lady" she would have spent money taking rests at Sanitaria; she would have drunk this tonic, eaten that patent food, gone from one medicine-man to another. She would have been forever talking about her ailments. Being what she was—a working-woman—she had said very little about them. She had taken them about the world with her as a sort of inevitable possession and, as she had grown older, they had decreased in virulence and in violence. As an elderly woman Katie McGee had lost most of her headaches and neuralgias. She had become less exacting. She took life more as she found it. Her mental temperature was more often down at normal—and she suffered less.

But, after the cementing of the friendship between herself and Robert Fulton, as she went out of Penelope's Buildings to her work in the morning and as she came back to the Buildings at night, she seemed to feel conscious of something pushing up in her mind; something new, and yet something that roused the old Katie in her, that old Katie who had lain so quiet for so many years that Miss McGee had almost forgotten her. She was in a curious way unable to account for this feeling she was conscious of inside herself—pushing its way up into the world as you may see the slender spike of the hyacinth pushing its way out of the sheltering bulb. She was astonished. The more she thought the less could she compre-

hend this feeling, that, stronger each day, growing quietly within her without her help or volition, urged her to think more and more about Robert Fulton. Miss McGee recognized the outer aspect of the situation. She didn't think of herself as young or beautiful or as possessing any longer any sexual attraction whatsoever. She knew perfectly well she was forty-six; that she was old for her years; that she was uneducated and gray-haired; that such charms as she may once have had were far far behind her. She knew all this with a sad certainty; yet, notwithstanding, growing from her soul into consciousness was a desire—a great desire to help, to be of any possible service, to do away with herself altogether if need be, to push her own personality utterly aside to make room for this other personality that had suddenly become to her so much more precious than her own.

The question in Miss McGee's mind was—what was this feeling? It was unknown to her.

It was not, in her estimation, love. Love, as Miss McGee knew it, was a selfish thing. Love demanded. It took rather than gave. It stamped its egoism on everything it touched. It affirmed itself, denied any other personality but its own. Love, as Miss McGee had seen it throughout life, had been a tearing, rending, frantic sort of thing. A thing short-lived, but panting with life while it did live. A thing that wanted more and more—a thing that was insatiable, full of desire, unquenchable by anything it got, always demanding more, insisting. A furious, frightening sort of thing—and with death clear in front of it.

Such was Miss McGee's conception of love. She couldn't have put it into so many words since formulating feeling is an acquired art; we have to be taught to think, as we have to be taught to do everything else—but feel. Miss McGee had never been taught to think so she didn't think. She puzzled over things and tried to get somewhere, but, not possessing the tools that would bring her into the thought-region, nine times out of ten she was pushed back into the very place she was trying to get out of. As she went to and fro, however, and while she was sitting quiet in those houses in which she was permitted to sit quiet, she *did* try to think about this sentiment that was pushing its way up out of her heart—or was it her soul? What was it? What did it mean? Where was it taking her?

Sitting sewing this or that, at this time, Miss McGee thought a great deal about her youth; this constant close intimate feel-

ing that seemed part of herself, and was at the same time something new, growing up out of herself, was like a reminiscence of her youth—with a difference; and it brought the old days back. She remembered the letter-carrier, Tim Donough, just out from the old country, that had wanted to marry her. She remembered the other Irish boy that she had met at "Old Nancy's," her mother's friend, that had sighed over her blue-black eyes. And she remembered Tully Bardwell—that she had wanted to marry. Yes, she had wanted to marry him. She had longed to marry him. Very nearly she had thrown discretion and duty to the winds and left her mother alone and gone off with Tully. And then—she couldn't do it. It had been a choice between her mother and Tully. Tully had been given to drink and Mrs. McGee had said, "Katie, you must choose between us. . . ."

As she sat in her customers' houses Miss McGee went over this episode, over and over it, a thing she hadn't thought of for years. She had loved Tully with all the hot blood that lay back of those blue-black eyes of hers. She had wanted him with the fire of her blood and the craving of her flesh. She had longed to touch him, to be touched by him, to lie in his arms . . . she had had all those desires that go with the love of the body. His body had tempted hers and she had wanted him.

And she had given him up. She had let him go and had stayed with her mother. Had she been right? Tully had gone off to "the States" and married a widow with money. He was happy—enough it seemed . . . but once, after years, they had met again and Tully, a middle-aged bloated man, still drinking hard, had said to her, "Kate, ye were wrong. Ye should have married me. . . ."

Out of these dreams Miss McGee would wake to her customers' demands, "Yes, Mrs. Glassridge, I guess a little collar of velvet would smarten it up some, eh. Will I bring ye samples to-morrow . . . ?" And when the little velvet collar had been definitely decided on she would tumble back into her own reflections.

Then there had been Mr. Mitt. He was a later "beau," as Miss McGee called such things. He had appeared just before her mother's death, when Miss McGee had been thirty-five. Mr. Mitt was an Englishman who had come out to Canada, expecting much; and, as happens to expectant Englishmen, nothing at all had happened, except a gradual de-

clension into nothingness. Mr. Mitt had had Miss McGee's "elegant education." He bore all the marks of it. He read the papers and brought Miss McGee the magazines, and there wasn't a subject, as Miss McGee said, that you could ask him about that he didn't know. He was to all intents and purposes omniscient, and he wore a smart tie, and when you told him things, he said, "Really!" in an accent which went to Miss McGee's heart. "England an' Ireland's forever at war, God help them," said Miss McGee, "but if ye bring the *roight* Englishman an' the *roight* Irishwoman together they're the greatest friends that ever was." Mr. Mitt had been an assiduous suitor. He had come to the McGees' twice a week for a year; and at the end of the year he had asked Miss McGee to marry him. He had nothing and he did nothing, so he wasn't perhaps a great catch. But he had a beautiful way of speaking and a nice tie, and he said "Really!" as no Canadian could do it . . . and Miss McGee thought of it. However, this time, too, she stuck to her mother. "Mr. Mitt," she said, "me mother's not long for this world. I'll have to see her through. But if ye'll wait, I'll marry ye then."

Mr. Mitt had not waited. Poor old Mrs. McGee had taken a long time to die, and Mr. Mitt had tired of it. After her mother's death Miss McGee had found herself with nothing but her occupation to look forward to—and she had gone on with it. During the eleven years that had elapsed since then Miss McGee had never thought of a man. She had considered men as past her—or herself as past men, perhaps. She had thought of her work and whether she was going on getting any—of her food (increasingly); of the novel she took home from the Library on Saturday night, of her rheumatism. And that was about all. For all Miss McGee had thought of men since the departure of Mr. Mitt there mightn't have been any in the city she lived in.

And now, suddenly, without warning, the thought of a man had come into her mind again. The thought of Robert Fulton, younger than herself, far less experienced in the world's ways, the thought of his quiet blue eyes, his fair skin, his slender youthful figure, his neat feet and hands, had come into Miss McGee's mind to stay. The feeling she had for him was something quite distinct from the feeling she had had for Tully Bardwell and for Mr. Mitt. There was in her thought of Robert Fulton no trace of the fire she had felt for Tully. There was in her feeling no suggestion of the pride she had

felt in Mr. Mitt—for Robert Fulton's culture, such as it was, was so unobtrusive that unless you had possessed at least an equal amount yourself, you would never have noticed it. This feeling that was springing up in her, and growing day by day and night by night, was something new—unexpected—unimagined before. It was a comprehensive feeling. Miss McGee felt as if she would like to cover up Robert Fulton from the world, as if she wanted him not to be hurt—as if she wanted this so passionately that there was nothing she would not do to prevent it. Miss McGee felt that if Robert Fulton were in danger she would thrust her life in between him and the danger . . . and find happiness in doing it.

We all speak of love as if it were one thing that we called by that name. It never seems to occur to us that love has more strings to its bow than the most complicated instrument ever devised by man. Love *is* what Miss McGee thought it. It is a rending, tearing, furious thing, but it is also a very gentle restful all-pervading thing. It is the shortest-lived thing on earth—but it is also eternal. It is hard and cruel—and it is self-sacrificing and kind. It is selfishness itself—and it is the obliteration of self. Up to this time Miss McGee had only seen love in its manifestations of wind and fury and desire. She had thought that a woman's love for a man or a man's love for a woman must be accompanied by the passionate thought of self—or it was not love. And now she guessed the truth.

Day after day she sat in her customers' rooms and worked hard all day long; and then she walked home through the ever-increasing cold of the early winter months and as she came and went, she kept asking herself, "What is this? Is it right? Is it a temptation of the devil . . . ?" She would go into St. Patrick's church and, making her way to the pillar she always leaned against she would kneel and pray and pray—she would beseech guidance; and, as she rose from her knees, she would feel within her—growing—growing—throwing out long spear-shaped leaves—this young thing, full of life and hope and strength . . . and she would wonder. It was as if she had conceived a spiritual child and was carrying it about with her. There were days when she went about carefully, as a woman goes when she carries life. The feeling grew and grew—a soft, still, reverent, loving feeling.

And one day it came to Miss McGee that she loved Robert Fulton. And she wept.

## CHAPTER IX

AS the days grew shorter and the Canadian winter came nearer, Robert Fulton wilted. When November came and the first icy winds of the long cold months went piercing through his insufficient clothing, he seemed to shrink. Each year, by the time January came along, he was not only wilted and shrunken, he was shriveled, too. He always felt, each winter afresh, as if his flesh were getting to be a tight fit for his bones, as if his bones were crushing down on his soul: the cold had that effect on him that he could hardly breathe or think or feel. And indeed, by the time it came March and the winter was nearly at an end, each winter he had ceased to feel anything very special at all. He had ceased even to wish to complain—he never did complain much: he only wished that Canada and he had never met, or that he and Canada might part never to meet again—or that he were dead. With each short spring, afresh as everything melted, he felt a rush of returning life; with each hot parching summer he felt again that life was not worth having; Robert Fulton was built for a temperate zone, and the arctic winters and torrid summers of Canada were not for him.

He was forced, however, each November to admit anew that approaching winter is a beautiful time in Canada. Even in untidy Regalia, there was beauty on every side of him as he went to work in the morning and returned home at night. The clearest crystal spring couldn't come near the clarity of the late autumnal air. A gurgling brook with clear pebbles at the bottom of it couldn't touch it. Canada's autumn air is something all to itself—"diamond" as Robert himself had called it—special, unmatched by any other air. It is the clearest thing in all the world, and one feels at times as if one should be able to see right through it to some other world beyond: as if the world to come must be just at the other side of what one looks at—and quite near to one.

Robert Fulton, who loved beautiful things, could not wander through such clarity and not love it. He did. There were moments when he felt he did love Canada, or would if only it would treat him decently. He loved the great dome of the sky, so infinitely, incessantly blue; he loved the great trees of the University Grounds through which he passed to go to work—he loved the sharp distinctness of every tiny bough across

the sky—he loved the contour of things, and their bigness, and their suggestion of freedom and space. Sometimes he felt that if he had tried the Canadian country with its great wastes of land to be reclaimed, he might have . . . But no, Robert Fulton was not made for work of that kind, and he knew it. He was made for a quiet and orderly life. He sometimes thought—and more wisely this time—that if he had been an old monk of the fifteenth century, busy all day long over some exquisite script, he would have been happy. And, walking through the raw beginnings of life that he had chosen, he would imagine to himself an old monastery, gray and enduring and beautiful, and the cultivated lands round about it, and the cloistered peacefulness of working there; and then the toot of a motor-horn would cut across his imagery or his search for the right word, perhaps, and he would wake up and hurry on to his cheese-and-butter counter so as not to be late—and so avoid the fine.

It was not till well on in November that he took anything more down to Miss McGee's. And it happened that the evening he took his next instalment down he didn't read it. He simply sat back in the warm corner that was becoming his own by a sort of right, and he gazed into the fire. He possessed, to a surprising degree, that masculine power of doing nothing particular, and saying nothing particular, and thinking nothing particular—just sitting.

To Miss McGee such a state of things was impossible. She, like most women, didn't know how to relax. All the time she was awake she was doing something; even when she was supposed to be sitting still she was moving restlessly about in her seat, or thinking some unnecessary thought. To sit, as Robert Fulton sat, relaxed in every fiber of his being, was to Miss McGee an impossibility. But she was able to recognize that he wanted to be left alone and (rather unfemininely) she left him alone. Thus they sat together over the fire, and for a long time there was no noise in the room but the ticking of Miss McGee's dollar clock, and the occasional falling of a cinder out of the grate.

"It's noice not to be alone," Miss McGee said at last. She felt Irish and happy.

Robert Fulton waked out of his state of nothingness with a start, and came back to life.

"Is it?" he said dreamily.

"Is ut?" said Miss McGee: and she laughed. "I been sittin' alone here for ten years an' more," she said then

gravely. "Since Ma'a died." And she paused. "It's some lonely woman I been, Mr. Fulton," said she.

But Robert Fulton had relapsed again. He was sitting a little forward in his chair, gazing in between the bars of the fire. There was a far-away look in his eyes, and he didn't answer.

"It's a hard life, sure," said Miss McGee, starting again after a bit. "It's a wonder what it's for, eh."

He said nothing.

"Ye'll be thinkin' of yer folks at home, Mr. Fulton, an' you settin' lookin' in the bars of the fire?" Miss McGee said then. It was the first question she had asked him.

That roused Robert. He sat up straight in his chair, and out of his quiet blue eyes he looked directly at Miss McGee. "No," he said. "No. I'm alone in the world. I haven't any people."

And he looked away from her into the fire again.

Katie McGee felt her heart give a great jump. He hadn't any people. *She* could have him, keep him, mother him—for a bit. The time would come when he, like all men, would want something of his own, something young, pretty, charming, soft, speaking like himself (Miss McGee never stopped to think where he was to find this paragon) . . . but meantime he was with her. She could keep him with her for a bit. It was not necessary for her to face the world alone again—yet. Her spirits went up again with a bound. "Sure," said she, "we're the lonely two. But two's comp'ny, eh. We're friends."

Something in the sound of her voice roused Robert Fulton once more.

"You're very good to me, Miss McGee," he said gratefully. He couldn't have explained why he said it. He merely responded instinctively to something he heard in her voice.

Miss McGee felt exultant. She felt for the moment as if she could kick the world like a foot-ball and watch it go up in the air.

"Sure," she said, "an' who wouldn't be koind to you. It's good to have ye. I"—she hesitated—"I love to have ye, Mr. Fulton," she said. "It's the joy of"—she hesitated again—"me loife."

But Robert Fulton saw no reason for her hesitation. He merely saw before him a good old soul (so once more he phrased her to himself) who was kind to him. He smiled up

at her in his boyish way, and as she met his candid eyes she felt her heart contract. If she had done what her heart prompted her to do she would have leaned forward and taken his face in her hands and sat there long, looking at it. She felt the impulse that a man has when he sits by a young girl, to touch—to take some part of the young thing into his arms—and hold it. Miss McGee pushed back these feelings with an effort. She gave a long sigh.

"Ye're but a bo'oy, Mr. Fulton," said she.

And she returned to an unnecessary bit of work she held in her hands, and sewed.

"I think life's a mess," said Robert Fulton suddenly. He was replying, rather late in the day, to Miss McGee's remark.

Miss McGee gave a start. It was her own view, but somehow she didn't like to hear Robert say it.

"Oh my," she said, "there's lots to ut too. We has our toimes. We kin be with the folks we"—she hesitated—"we loikes. . . ."

Robert Fulton said nothing.

"Ye wouldn't *not*'ve lived, Mr. Fulton, eh?" asked Miss McGee, after what seemed to her a long time of silence.

Robert hesitated in his turn.

"I don't know," he said.

"I know then," Miss McGee said, letting her work fall. "I know." Her voice had a clear ring in it. "I wouldn't not have lived for all ye could give me, Mr. Fulton. Ain't ut worth just to've been aloive? Ain't ut worth havin' saw the wor'ld? An' ain't the sunloight grand, eh, and the whoite snow in the winter-toime—an' the flowers in the spring, . . ."

"When I was young," she said after a pause, "me feet'd used to dance under me as I'd went through the streets. I'd used to see the wor'ld laughin' as I gawn along. I wouldn't not've had that," Miss McGee said, "fer . . . everythin' there is." She paused a minute. "Ye're young, Mr. Fulton," she said then. "Ye're young, me dear"—it was the first time she had called him dear—"there's all the wor'ld in front of ye—an' all loife. . . ."

And she stopped.

"I don't feel young," Robert Fulton said.

At that minute Miss McGee would have given all she had ever had and everything she hoped to have, yes, in the world to come, to fold her arms round Robert Fulton and press him to her breast, and rock him to and fro there as one rocks a

tired child. She would have put her hopes of eternity away if she might have done that . . .

"My," she said, "ye're young. Ye're *young*."

She bent forward a little.

"'Tis a great thing to be young," she said. "'Tis the greatest thing in the wor'ld. Ye got the prize. Don't throw ut from ye."

There was a silence between them.

"An' ye got a gift," Miss McGee said, "a grand gift. Don't forget ut. There's a day comin' ye'll be famous, Mr. Fulton. Ye'll write an' the folks'll read what ye write, an' they'll be scramblin' and pushin', me bo'oy, to see ye . . ."

She stopped.

"Ye'll be *glad* ye're aloive then," she said.

And suddenly she felt as if she couldn't bear him to be unhappy.

"Ye'll be happy, me dear," she said. "Ye'll be happy. I know ut. Cheer up an' go on and keep writin' things. And hope on. I'm thinkin' an' . . ." She stopped again. She felt as if she were pushing him away from her, further and further with every word. "I'm waitin' on your success. You'll be happy," Miss McGee said, "don't fear. . . ."

Words with no sense in them come home at times when they are said out of a full heart. Robert Fulton, though he knew very well that his chances of happiness were the slenderest things, brightened up when Miss McGee promised him—what she never could perform. He felt her promises of happiness to be the next best thing to the thing itself. He felt once more actively grateful to her. He turned his eyes away from the fire and looked into hers. After a second he smiled—he had a nice smile . . .

Miss McGee felt repaid.

"Will ye not read the piece ye brought along, eh, Mr. Fulton," said she.

He hesitated a second, and then, for no reason at all, he felt that dislike to his own work that we all of us feel at times. He suddenly felt it to be, not only worthless, but definitely objectionable. He felt as if he couldn't read one word that he had written—to-night.

"Not to-night, Miss McGee," he said. And as she looked up at him enquiringly he added, "I'm not in the mood."

Miss McGee was quite satisfied.

"That's what Mr. Mitt used to say," she remarked.

"Who was he?" said Robert. He just asked for politeness. "A gen'leman friend," said Miss McGee.

She felt the desire that all women feel when they love, to tell the man—everything. All about themselves, about their inmost thoughts and feelings, and about the events of their lives down to the uttermost detail. Miss McGee felt, sitting there, as if she would like to empty herself out at Robert Fulton's feet. At the same moment, she felt a sudden instinct of reserve, a sentiment of shrinking to show even the outermost layers of herself. She longed to tell Robert all about Mr. Mitt—and she felt she would never be able to do so.

"Mr. Mitt was a gen'leman friend of mine," she said, shyly. "Oh," said Robert.

He didn't care who Mr. Mitt was or whether Miss McGee had ever had any gen'lemen friends at all. Mr. Mitt's name went in at one side of his memory and passed out at the other, and when Miss McGee, at a later date, mentioned Mr. Mitt once more Robert Fulton had no sensation of ever having heard of him.

He said "Oh"—that spacious monosyllable: and the subject dropped.

That night, as Robert Fulton went up to bed, there remained in his mind one—and only one—impression of the evening. But it was a distinct impression—so distinct that it seemed etched on his mind. It was that Miss McGee had said, "There's all the world in front of ye—and all life." And that she had added, "Don't fear." He felt as if a little courage had been poured into him; or rather, he felt as if a little seed of courage had been planted in him and that—if the gods were propitious—it might sprout. No one had ever said things to him like that before.

As a preliminary to sprouting he felt the seed go coursing through his body with his blood-stream. And that night he lay awake.

## CHAPTER X

IT was on the day of the first snow-fall of the year that Miss McGee was thoroughly upset. She had had one of her unpleasant days; and what made it more unpleasant, perhaps, was that it had been a day to which she had rather looked forward. The tunic was finished. It was an accomplished

fact at last—after many days' wrestling in the wilderness. Whether Mrs. Barclay might not have spent less money if she had gone to a shop and bought a new dress is not the question; the three dresses that Mrs. Barclay had wished to have used up were used up: one was the tunic, the second was the underskirt, the third was belt and trimmings combined. The Athanasian Creed had at last resolved itself into one.

But what must Mrs. Barclay do just on this day which should have been such a cheerful one but resolve herself into theology; as if it were not enough that she had had economics, now she must go and catch another thing. She had spent the entire day in lambasting Miss McGee (as Miss McGee herself called it) with theological crooked questions—to which there could be nothing but cross answers. Mrs. Barclay was not only a "dissenter" in her religious views, she was a frantic and furious dissenter. The Roman Church was to her much what it would have been to a Roman centurion before he was brought over to Rome. To say that Mrs. Barclay couldn't abide it is to put the case insufficiently. She loathed it, she hated it; if she could have taken the whole Roman Church, neck and crop, and thrown it once more amongst the lions, she would have done it. And then she would have sat in the dissenting chapel turning down her thumbs and calling herself a christian.

Being of this turn of mind it was naturally impossible for Mrs. Barclay to keep silence long about the subject. In season and out of season, when Miss McGee was working at Wellston Road, Mrs. Barclay would begin her diatribes on the Roman Catholic Church—"Papistry" was what *she* called it. Miss McGee had borne a lot. She was not remarkable for patience at any time; and though on the whole she had borne it well she hadn't borne it as well as she thought she had. Even when she said nothing her silence was expressive; and when she did speak she answered Mrs. Barclay in a more devastating way than she was aware. It was the very devastation she wrought, indeed, that brought Mrs. Barclay back and back to the charge. She had no hope of "converting" Miss McGee. She knew well in her heart that that was impossible. But she simply couldn't—*couldn't*—help talking against the Catholic Church and calling it names and dragging it in the mud so far as she was able to do so; and Miss McGee couldn't—she equally couldn't—help picking up the Roman Catholic Church so far as *she* was able out of the mud and

carrying it, held aloft, another bit of the way. When Mrs. Barclay and Miss McGee sat talking together on religious subjects they were exactly the Kilkenny cats who used to live in the reign of Mary Tudor. If they could have hanged, drawn, and quartered one another, they would have done so; and then, kind-hearted women as they were, both of them, once one had seen the other in separate portions, each would have run to try to cement together again the havoc she had wrought. Of so much common-sense were they made.

On this day of the first snow-fall of the season—and the completion of the Athanasian Creed—Mrs. Barclay had taken what Miss McGee was accustomed to call a “turn for the worse.” She had been more maddening than usual. Instead of taking a right-minded interest in the accomplishment of her views, trying it on, and pirouetting in so far as years and flesh would allow her before the glass, she had refused to be interested in clothes at all. She had turned, quite unexpectedly, from “personal adornment” to the consideration of “more serious things.” Miss Barclay had tried to prevent her. Mr. Barclay, at lunch, had vainly sought to wrap her mind in mutton chops. Mrs. Barclay had eaten the chops and the steamed ginger pudding to follow, and then she had returned to the work-room—and her subject. From bad things had gone to worse. Miss McGee, after a while, had permitted herself a certain flippancy in her observations; and, urged on, perhaps, by this, Mrs. Barclay had at length permitted *herself* a remark regarding the taking of the Sacrament (the swallowing of Our Lord was what Mrs. Barclay called it) which Miss McGee at least had never heard before. It had shocked her. It had wounded her. She had felt, on hearing her Lord’s name taken thus in vain, a sort of rending wound made in her that a jagged spear might have caused had it been thrust in her side. The flippancy died out of her. She felt that Mrs. Barclay in desecrating her Lord had desecrated her. She felt outraged—debased—as if she had been made unclean in having been compelled to listen to such a thing. And, on her way home, she had run into St. Patrick’s, and there, leaning against her pillar, she had tried to wash her soul in the sight of her God. “God, forgive me for hearin’ ut,” she had prayed. “Forgive her for the thought that come into her moind. Blot ut from my moind an’ heart, O God. Take the filthy thought out of me—leave me clean again. Print Thy holy name where the thought has been—let me be clean. . . .”

She had prayed in the soft silent obscurity for a long time, and, as she knelt there, a sort of comfort had stolen into her mind. She had felt as if she were in the midst of strength, as if she were being wrapped round with consolation and kindness; and when she had risen from her knees she had felt as if the insult had been wiped out. But, as she came back into the street and into the every-day world where there are Mrs. Barclays and tempters—the thought pushed up into her mind with renewed violence. She felt as if she could not forgive her old friend for having thus insulted her faith. She felt as if she could never go back to Wellston Road, that quiet broad street fringed so calmly with maples—as if she must forgo for evermore all that solid comfort and kindness, never even carry home baskets with cakes and home-baked bread and things for tea any more . . .

She turned into O'Neil Street from St. Patrick's and came along with the anger thrusting through the chastened comfort of the church, as a fire bursts out again after it seems quenched; and as she came round the corner of Penelope's Buildings that gives on Drayton Place (where the entrance door is) what should she see but Robert Fulton in the passage-way, talking to the Janitress. It needed only this.

If there was one woman on earth whom Miss McGee detested it was the Janitress. She not only detested her, she thought her a "bad woman." And she not only thought her that, she was sure she was. To live in a place with a "bad woman" set over her, as, in a sense, Mrs. Saviourin was, was to Miss McGee a thing hardly to be borne. Above all things else, perhaps, Miss McGee was respectable. She had always held her head high. Mrs. McGee had been respectability itself. She had brought up her girls to hold themselves aloof and to look upon the sin of the world—especially the female sin—with a rigid eye. Miss McGee felt that by having Mrs. Saviourin in the basement, the Penelopians were all inevitably dragged down a rung of the social ladder. She therefore made it a point to show Mrs. Saviourin what she thought of her on every occasion: and Mrs. Saviourin responded with spirit and fought the brave fight.

"Good evenin', Mr. Fulton," said Miss McGee, stopping transitorily as it were, on her way upstairs, and acknowledging Mrs. Saviourin's presence with the minutest of nods. "Are ye comin' up?"

She knew she was imprudent to say this. She realized quite

well that she was thus, in a way, setting her claim openly on Robert. She was saying in effect, "You are *my* property. What are you doing here? Come with me." And she knew that Mrs. Savourin would make use of her slip. But what woman ever yet was wise when she loved?—At the sight of Robert in close conversation with Mrs. Savourin, jealousy surged up in Miss McGee. Not the murderous sexual jealousy she would have felt years ago had she found Tully talking to the Janitress, but a quick motherly jealousy (that had its sex-element in it) that would have torn Robert Fulton from Mrs. Savourin and held him from her by force forevermore—because she was bad for him.

"Won't ye come up, Mr. Fulton," she said therefore. And she waited.

Robert was quite unconscious of doing wrong. He had wanted his double window (for with the first appearance of the snow he, with the rest of the poor, had wished to exclude all the air he could from his room and so economize the coal he would have to burn) and he had come down to the Janitress to ask for the key of the cellar where the double windows were.

"I'll come in a minute," he said cheerfully. "Just wait till I get my double window."

"Ye best go an' *git* ut," said Miss McGee: and she turned and went up the stairs.

This was the end to her day! As if it wasn't enough for Mrs. Barclay to insult her religion, now she must come home to find Robert being seduced by the Janitress. Such was the way Miss McGee put it to herself. She made no bones about it. "That—!" and here Miss McGee used the classic word made use of by Mrs. Morphy with regard to Maggie Chambers. "I could murdher her."

She went into her own flat and banged the door behind her, and with an unaccustomed noise she began to make preparations for supper.

As for Robert, he still stood talking with the Janitress. She was a fine free full young woman of thirty or so, conscious of her charms, and pleased to show them off to whoever cared to look at them. She was fair with goldined hair and large prominent blue eyes. She had a white skin that no hard work or rigor of climate seemed able to mar or roughen, full bosom, large hips, and a disposition to make the best of these things. She was said to sell the gentlemen of Penelope's Flats "privileges"—to bring home whatever they fancied at whatever

hour they pleased—and to add the surplus, thus earned, to her monthly income. She “did herself good” or “got on,” as the female members of the Buildings said, however she managed it; for to see her go out Sundays, as the same critics put it, was enough to make a tom-cat laugh. That might be, but she was a handsome woman.

She was not a careful person in her speech. She was—vivid. She said she had a husband at the War, and perhaps she had. But no Penelopian eye had beheld him; nor did he seem to write to her. “*Husband!*” said Miss McGee. “How many . . . !” She voiced the popular opinion.

Robert Fulton was ignorant of all this. Completely ignorant. He was not a stupid man. He knew, naturally, the things we all know as we grow to years of discretion. He knew that women are not all virtuous; and he knew the whys and wherefores of the loss of virtue, and what such mean in this world of ours. He was man born of woman. He had the usual ardors of such a descent. He was perfectly human. He was just one of us; and besides all this, he was well-read in more than one of the literatures of the world: and such topics as the loss of virtue together with such personalities as Mrs. Savourin’s have always formed, and always will form probably, a part of these literatures. Robert Fulton was no fool; but he had an incurable naïveté, a sort of lack of suspiciousness, a powerlessness (if one may put it so) to put two and two together so that they made four: and, therefore, it was quite possible for him to stand and talk with a woman like Mrs. Savourin and never realize, in his upper consciousness at least, what sort of woman she was and what sort of thing she was after in talking to a man. He knew—and he didn’t know. And to give the finishing touch to his unsuspectingness, Mrs. Savourin and her like recognized Robert Fulton’s position towards themselves with much greater precision than they could have given tongue to. They knew that he thought better of them than they deserved and they more or less unconsciously acted up to the character he gave them, and appeared at their best while talking to him.

Had you explained this to Miss McGee for a year, at the end of the year she would have been just as inflexible as ever. Yet it was true. Mrs. Savourin, as she stood talking to Robert at the entrance-door, was showing at her best. She had a certain fund of kindness in her; the look in the young man’s eyes brought the kindness surging up from where it often lay

perdu for months at a time. She was merely talking to him as Miss McGee came into the entrance-hall—saying no harm of anyone—not even embroidering her language with the choice morsels of blasphemy and obscenity with which she usually decorated her speech. As she stood there she was keeping a watch upon her tongue. And if, in the recesses of her heart, there was something of the feeling of Potiphar's wife for Joseph . . . does it matter? Robert Fulton was unconscious of it. It did Mrs. Savourin no more harm than usual. And assuredly there was human kindness mixed with the feeling. She wouldn't willingly have done him any harm.

Robert went down to the cellar and got the window, and Mrs. Savourin went with him. Possibly she tried the experiment of edging her shoulder up against his as she helped him to hoist the window up on his shoulder; and perhaps, as they came up the steep cellar stairs, she may have managed a collision . . .

Nothing happened. Robert Fulton came up-stairs as he had gone down, except that he carried his shutter up on his shoulder: and by the time he had got into his room and had (with some trouble) adjusted the double window on the outside of his single one, the thought of Mrs. Savourin had slipped right out of his mind. She didn't interest him. Her beauty, such as it was, was not for him. He asked something a little less obvious . . . and anyway, it so happened that the thought of woman was out of his mind for the moment. It does slip out of a man's mind at times!

After Robert had adjusted the window and after he had eaten his very simple meal he said to himself, "I think I'll go down to Miss McGee's and read her that new piece I wrote last night." And with a smile on his face and the joy of anticipation in his heart, he descended the stairs again, and knocked at Miss McGee's door.

His knock was a gentle one, as always. But this time, after he had knocked, instead of the door being thrown open instantly—hospitably—as was the way, it remained obstinately shut; and from inside there came no sound. "She can't have heard me," thought Robert—and he knocked again. Still nothing. And then he said to himself with a certain disappointment and the smile fading out of his face, "She must be out." And he was just turning away when the door opened a little way—an inch or two—and Miss McGee's face became apparent in the opening.

She said nothing. She simply stood there, looking out. And this was so daunting to Robert that he said nothing either. For a long minute they stood like that gazing at one another, Miss McGee's face set, and Robert's wondering.

"Miss McGee," he stammered out at last, "I just brought down something to—to read." He glanced involuntarily down at the little roll of papers in his hand. "I—I thought . . ."

His voice died away.

"I can't hear ut to-night, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said—and he had never heard her voice like that: so stern. "I—" and she stammered in her turn, "I'm tired. I—I'm going to bed."

Robert felt that something had happened.

"There isn't anything—*wrong*, is there?" he said.

"No," Miss McGee answered: and then she stopped. There was something so disarming about Robert's evident puzzlement, his discomfiture, his disappointment at being repulsed—and a certain timidity that had come into his bearing—that Miss McGee felt . . . different. As she stood there in the crack, looking out at Robert Fulton, some of her anger against him, against Mrs. Savourin, against Mrs. Barclay, against the world in general melted away. She suddenly felt repentant . . . but not loving.

"I'd ask ye in," she said, and her voice was more as it usually was, "but I'm"—she glanced down—"I'm in my wrapper."

She paused, and the thought flitted through her mind, "Will I ask him to go upstairs for a minnut till I slip in me gown again?"

She hesitated. And then the thought of everything that had gone cross in the day surged up into her mind again.

"No," she said. "No. I can't see ye to-night. I've the headache. I'm tired. I—I got to git to bed."

She gazed out through the crack of the doorway, and it seemed to Robert that her eyes grew misty as he looked at them.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night, Miss McGee," said Robert—and he ascended the stairs again. That night Miss McGee cried herself to sleep.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HIS all happened on the Thursday. By the following Sunday Miss McGee was still so upset that she slipped up in the early morning and pushed a note under Robert's door asking him not to come as usual on the Sunday evening. "I'm kinder tired," she wrote, "and I guess I got to git to bed. Puhhaps" (spelling was not Miss McGee's strong point) "you will come in some night this week insted. I am not sick." And she signed herself as usual "Miss McGee."

She had hesitated a good deal before doing this. She wanted to see Robert very much. She had a sort of craving to see him: but, on the other hand, she thought he might ask for explanations (which showed how little she knew *that* part of him) and she didn't want to give explanations. She didn't want to think of the Mrs. Savourin episode ever again. On the whole she decided she preferred not to see him at all, and then, the moment after she had irrevocably pushed the note under his door, she wished she hadn't.

Having done it however, there was nothing for it but to go down stairs wearily and get into bed again. It was in such very early morning that Miss McGee had slipped upstairs that the slow wintry dawn wasn't even thinking of breaking; and she had deliberately chosen this time because she didn't want any inhabitant of Penelope's Buildings to see her pushing notes under Robert's door—she knew what they would say. Sunday morning, as she well knew, was the signal for a "long lie" on the part of every Penelopian, male and female (who was not working at munitions); she got upstairs and down again without meeting a soul and crept back into bed, feeling mentally and physically, yes, and morally too, upset. Lying there with her eyes wearily shut she felt as if she were a field of grain battered by the wind and rain. If sunshine were to come along, she said to herself, perhaps she might be able to make the effort to incline herself towards the light and air and warmth—and go on growing again. As it was there was nothing for it but to lie in bed, not sleeping or thinking of sleeping, merely dully aware of her existence in the world: and regretting it.

After what seemed a long time the reluctant light of a winter morning came dimly in at the window. She lay looking at

it for a time (her bed-room window looked out, not at Drayton Place beyond which she could see St. Patrick's, but to the back where there was only the view of the dark court-yard) and then she began to get up. She dragged herself to the edge of the bed and sat there awhile, her legs dangling to the floor; and, for a bit, she put her hands before her face and kept them there. At last, with a sigh, she definitely "got up," put the kettle (she had filled it the night before at the common tap of water in the passage) on her lighted spirit-lamp—she began every day hygienically with a cup of hot water: and then, attiring herself in an ancient dust-habit of her own conspiring, she set to sifting the cinders. This was the start to every day. There was no central heating in Penelope's Buildings: each Penelopian had its own fire: and Miss McGee was unable to let any prodigal cinder escape her, for if she had let cinders go their way, she would have been unable to go hers: a dollar fifty a day is not a princely wage. With her head tied up in a cloth, and her body guarded by an armor of sackcloth, and her hands elastic-banded into paper bags, Miss McGee sifted the cinders from one end to the other. Clouds of dust rose and circled round her enswathed head. Most of it settled on the floor and furniture and some of it went out at the window she had opened for the purpose. There was an accumulation of cinders, as it happened, for Miss McGee had felt too miserable since Thursday to sift at all. Now, as she knelt in sackcloth amongst the ashes—she felt all of a sudden as if she were doing penance for her life.

When she was through she washed, drinking the hot water in sips as she did so: then, attiring herself much as the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge are said to do for a similar purpose, she went to church. St. Patrick's was not far; it is possible that God was just as pleased to see Miss McGee in her night-gown with a big coat over it as He would have been had she come to Him with an ostrich feather in her hat. She knelt, feeling very bruised and broken, her petitions, somehow, were formal; when she rose from her knees and made her way out of church she did not feel the same deep warmth of comfort as usual. She felt as if God were not friends with her—yet why? Because she had put Robert off for the evening? Because she was still furious with Mrs. Savourin? Because she still resented Mrs. Barclay's speech? Or was it because she felt at enmity with the whole world—and herself—and a little bit with God? Miss McGee had the sensation of having gone

out of tune. She felt that her pitch had quite unexpectedly run down and that, though this was perhaps in a sense her own fault, yet that it was also somebody else's fault—possibly a little bit God's. She did not enjoy the early Mass as she usually enjoyed it; and when she got back to her own apartment and took off the big coat and put her kimono on, and took the teapot from its warm shawl (she always made the tea before she ran over to church—she liked her cup of tea *strong*) she did not enjoy that either. Something was lacking. Perhaps a bad leaf had got in. She drank mechanically and gazed out of her window with an unseeing eye. She had not provided herself with any week-end novel, she had no Sunday paper—she had nothing to read and nothing to think about (except disagreeable things) all day long. It was a dismal prospect.

She knew that before very long one of her nieces would come in for her on the way to church, and that they would go along to the ten o'clock Mass together. This was a family habit. Although Miss McGee had quarreled with her sister some Christmases before over a plate of cold turkey her sister had sent her (as a make-up, since Katie, on account of sickness, had been unable to attend the Christmas festivity) the family continued to think of Miss McGee as "Auntie" and bore her no malice. Miss McGee had resented the turkey as an almsgiving ("I ain't a *beggar!*") and she had ever since steadily and strenuously refused to see her sister, and so Mrs. Garry never came. But one of the girls—there were five of them—or sometimes a couple, called in on their way to church every Sunday and bore Auntie along. Miss McGee appreciated this, though she would never have acknowledged it. She liked her nieces. She had been at the birth of each, had received each, as it came into the world, in her arms. She had taken her share in the bringing-up—had played with them, whipped them, admonished them all through infancy and girlhood; and now that the Miss Garrys were grown-up young ladies, yes, even little Mae!—smart and self-respecting and ready to be married, she liked to look at them and think they were partly of her making. She would—though she would have died rather than say so—have been bitterly disappointed had one of them failed to come for her on the Sunday morning; and now, as she sat drearily drinking the tea that had a bad leaf in it, the thought that Rose or Nellie or fat comfortable Ag, or Katie that was named for "Auntie," or little Mae—but most probably Rose—

would be here before long was the one bright spot on which Miss McGee could allow her thoughts to dwell.

Rose came. She was the one who usually did come. She was the eldest of the Garry girls, and she had a strong sense of duty. She was a good-looking girl—tall and fair-haired and calm, the spit and image of her mother, as Miss McGee said: and she was peaceful by temperament. If she leaned to the cold side, if she could be something that was not very far from being hard, still she was a “good” girl, and it was almost impossible to quarrel with her. Miss McGee did not understand Rose very well, but she had an admiration for her. Rose was so correct. At the Bank where she worked, she did her work well: quite mechanically, yet almost always without mistakes. Rose was entirely unadaptable. There was not much possibility of growth in her. Take her for what she was, and she was excellent: ask her to become something—even the smallest, tiniest—something else . . . and she couldn't. She was a kind, handsome, unable-to-put-herself-in-anyone-else's-place girl: and Mac, Mrs. Morphy's best roomer, seeing her through a cloud of illusion, loved her.

“Why won't ye have Mac, Rose?” Miss McGee said to her niece this morning, as they sat a minute before it was time to go to church. “Why won't ye have um, eh? He's the brought lad!”

“He's not a Catholic, Auntie,” Rose said.

Beyond this point it was impossible to get her to go. Mac might have all the virtues in the world, but Rose would always be unable to see them because of this flaw. Mac was not a Catholic, and he never would be a Catholic. He was a good sound staunch Presbyterian, and if he had not been dazzled by Rose's complexion, he would have gone on thinking (as he had been brought up to think) that Roman Catholicism is another name for the devil. Mac's people, far away in Scotland, agreed in the main with Mrs. Barclay, though they might not have expressed themselves with the same strength. Mac spoke with the good Scotch accent he had been born to, he looked on life with the good Scottish eye; and Miss McGee knew well that when she and Rose did go out, they would find him (casually) on the side-walk. She knew how he would come up to them—much as a big dog approaches those whom he seeks to interest, with a wag of the tail and an ingratiating deprecating look of the eye. “Good mornin', Miss McGee,” he would say with his eye on Rose. “It's a fine day, eh?” And when

Miss McGee had answered, "'Deed but it is, Mr. Fisher Macpherson" (which was Mac's name), the conversation would languish and come to an end. Rose with her Sunday hat would seem to Mac more unapproachable than ever. She would view the heavens with her calm blue eyes (but longing, Auntie guessed, to speak to Mac all the time); and Mac, after a moment or so of ineffectual struggle to find something to round the conversation with, would give up the job—and the ghost. "Well, good-by just now," he would say—how well Miss McGee knew it! "See you later, eh, Miss Rose. I—I thought I'd just *speak* . . ." And he would melt away into the adjoining landscape and into the next Presbyterian church and into despondency and loneliness as he had so often melted before, and she and Rose would go on to church—and Rose would be miserable.

Miss McGee wanted Rose to marry Mac. She wanted it in defiance of all the ideas and views and religious convictions she had been brought up in. She wanted Rose just to marry and have a home of her own and children and a man to look after her—as she wanted few other things. Rose wasn't her favorite of the Garrys. Nellie, the wee black devil like herself—Nellie the school-teacher that Auntie should have been—was that: Nellie indeed, appreciated by the Nuns, and on the way, as it seemed, to success in her career, often seemed to Miss McGee to be herself in another generation, achieving what she would have achieved, had she only had the chance. Still Rose was Rose. Rose was the first Garry she had received into her arms twenty-three years ago. Rose was the one "Grandma'a"—old Mrs. McGee—had loved. Rose was fair and kind, she never missed coming for Auntie if she could possibly help it (whereas Nellie, the monkey, was seldom to be seen)—Miss McGee wanted Rose married. A Roman Catholic would have been better, certainly; but since no Roman Catholic was forthcoming, Mac was the next-best thing.

"*Why* will ye not think of um, Rose?" Miss McGee said once more, when they had come out of Mass. "Mac's the good fella. He'd make ye happy a'alroight, I guess. He's as fond of ye as the moon's fond of the stars—*think* of um, Rose." She hesitated a minute. "Ye don't know what ut means, me dear," she said, "to be lonesome an' an old woman all alone be yerself. Think of Mac, me choild," Miss McGee said. "Don't throw um awf loike an old shoe. Good men ain't so easy come by in this loife. Be *civil* to um . . ."

It was not often Miss McGee said as much as that: but Rose remained obdurate.

"He's not a Catholic, Auntie," she only said again; and, possibly because of Miss McGee's speech, she wouldn't come in for the usual cup of tea that heartened her up for the long car-ride home to Massonville, the suburb on the outskirts of the city where the Garrys lived. She just set her lips ("the very way Mary'd used to set hers!") Miss McGee said to herself) and a hard look came into her eyes—and she set off home. "I've got to go, Auntie," she said. "Mother hates ut when we don't get in on time fer dinner Sundays."

And she went.

This was not an inspiriting episode. Miss McGee once more thought of the field of grain and felt as if another hail-storm had battered it flatter than ever.

"Rose is one good gir'rl," she said to herself, "but she's the fool a'alroight."

And the idea of Rose at the Bank for ever, getting older and older and drier and drier as she did her work in her excellent way, became definitely repugnant to Rose's aunt. "The fool-gir'rl," she thought, "*why* wouldn't she think of um!" The remembrance of Mrs. Morphy's tone as she said, "Och, ivery woman wants a man!" came across her. Mac, looking so nice in his semi-ready suit, "he bought ut a purpose you bet your sweet loife," Miss McGee said to herself; the thought of him going on to his lonely church; the feeling of his disappointment, his sense that it was all "no good," the dull useless silly Sunday he must be spending—all this was transferred to Miss McGee's own mind: and, since we all feel other people's troubles far more when we have troubles of our own to feel, the world began to look to Miss McGee entirely out of joint—dislocated at its central line—breaking all to pieces.

"Sure," said Miss McGee to herself when she had finished the misery of economy that she called her dinner, "what will I be doin' next, in the name of God!" It seemed to her that stay in her own dull flat alone with her own dull thoughts she couldn't. "I'll be goin' down to Mrs. Morphy's there," she suddenly thought, with a sense of remorse that poor Mrs. Morphy's leg had hitherto escaped her mind. "Sure I'll be goin' down there an' dressin' the leg."

She slipped on the big coat of the morning once more, went down-stairs, crossed the court, knocked at the door of Mrs. Morphy's "suite."

"Come," cried Mrs. Morphy from the inside; one of the peculiarities of Mrs. Morphy's door was that it was always on the latch, hospitably undone so that anyone could enter, day or night.

"It'll be broighter here p'raps," said Miss McGee to herself, going in at the unlatched door.

But it wasn't. Mrs. Morphy was in the dumps too. She had been dining not at all economically. The dishes were scattered all about the kitchen in the most unpoetic disorder, and Mrs. Morphy herself, seated by the fire in an unpoetic negligée and not heartened as she should have been by her glass of gin, had big tears running out of her eyes and pouring down her cheeks.

"How's all with ye?" said Miss McGee, determined to ignore as far as she could the dirty slatternly place and the depression of its mistress. "How's loife, eh?" But when Mrs. Morphy's tears continued to pour, when Mrs. Morphy herself shook her head speechlessly without even attempting to answer, Miss McGee merely thought, "Sure, here's another. How could I look for somethin' else"—and she resigned herself to her fate. The world seemed more broken than ever . . .

Mrs. Morphy's leg was very bad. It was worse. The night before it seemed, when Mrs. Morphy had regained the power of speech, Mac and Bert Baird (a friend of Mac's) had said to the "Old Lady" as they called Mrs. Morphy, "See here, Old Lady, it's a change ye need. Come on with us an' *we'll* show ye."

Mrs. Morphy had gone. She had put on her best bonnet trimmed with bugles that her "swell" daughter, Mrs. McKennay, had given her. She had put on the best gown that, since she wore it last (Mrs. Morphy lived in a wrapper), had grown too small for her. "Sure, ut wouldn't button on me," Mrs. Morphy said, cheering up somewhat at the recital of her woes, "but the pins hild together be the help of God." Mac and Bert had taken her first of all in the street-car to a Movie. Then they had taken her to supper. The supper had been of an uproarious nature, with gin and oysters, and, by the time it was over, Mrs. Morphy's leg had become so sore that a street-car as a means of getting her home again seemed out of the question. Mac had risen to the occasion ("Sure, an' he would!" from Miss McGee); he had 'phoned for a sleigh and the bo'oy's and she had come home in triumph, "singin'," as Mrs. Morphy said, "all the way." Once home, they had further celebrated

the occasion "with a glass,"—and then Mrs. Morphy had gone to bed and lain awake all night with the pain.

"It's over me days of pleasure is," said she, and the tears coursed down her cheeks more rapidly than ever. "It's the old woman I am now, McGee, it's the grave that's before me."

She turned up her skirts and began showing her leg to Miss McGee. "Sure, it's me leg's gawn back on me," she said.

Miss McGee sighed. She was past saying much, and indeed the sympathy she felt for Mrs. Morphy had in it an element of pleasure. She wasn't glad Mrs. Morphy's leg hurt her—oh no!—but she would have been disappointed had she come and found Mrs. Morphy rejoicing in the world and all its ways. Now she could feel surer than ever that the world was a broken place. It wasn't just that *she*, Katie McGee, thought so—it *was* so: it was a place for which no rational creature could be expected to have anything but the strongest abhorrence.

"For the love o' Mike!" she said, bending over the leg, "yer leg's gawn back on ye a'alroight, eh." She dressed it tenderly and well.

"Sure, an' it's the angel ye are, McGee, dear," Mrs. Morphy said gratefully, putting her hand on Miss McGee's shoulder. "What would I be doin' an' you not here!" And in a whisper that began to have some enjoyment in it she detailed into Miss McGee's ear the brave fight for independence and bachelordom that Dan was putting up against Maggie's ever-stronger onslaughts. "He says he's promussed to a widow-woman," Mrs. Morphy said in conclusion, "with feather-beds an' napery of her own." "They're all widow-women," said Miss McGee bitterly—she was thinking of Tully.

Before she went, and quite against Mrs. Morphy's desires, she once more washed the dishes. "Sure, me da'ater Finn's comin', me dear," Mrs. Morphy kept saying. "*She'll* fix 'em."

"Nonnie Finn'll *not* come an' say ye've no one to help ye," Miss McGee answered decisively: and then, as she washed and rinsed, she said, "Why will Maggie not come an' give ye a hand, in God's name? Where's she that she'll not help?"

Mrs. Morphy pointed mysteriously towards Maggie's room. "She's sleepin' ut awf," she said. "Drunken beast!" said Miss McGee. "The foine wife *she'd* make any man."

"S-s-sh!" said Mrs. Morphy, but Miss McGee didn't care.

"The better ef she does wake," she said, louder than ever.

"Sure, it'll do the punk good to hear what decent folks thinks of her."

Maggie giving no sign, however, and there being therefore no excuse for a fight—which Miss McGee felt would have done her good—there was nothing for it but to come away.

She went back to her own flat with a lagging step. As she reached her own door, it flashed through her mind how she might go up-stairs—go running lightly up—and tap with the softest of hands at Robert's door and ask him to come down to tea. She thought of his face as he would open the door; she saw those pale agate-blue eyes of his suddenly become suffused with light—as they sometimes did. She painted to herself, in the semi-darkness there of the stairway, the pleasant surprise it would be to him—the way his whole face would light up . . .

And then the remembrance of him standing there talking with Mrs. Savourin swept over her. "*He loikes her!*" she said to herself. The image of Robert at his own door faded away. She saw him merely standing talking to other women . . . Miss McGee put the key into the keyhole of her door and opened it with a violent push. "Sure," she said aloud, "it's the *poor* wor'ld. Why was we ever bor'rn into ut! That's the question."

And then, totally unconscious of the fact that she was quoting Hamlet—she prepared to go to bed. "It's the only place there is, God help me," she said, "that we kin lie *quiet*."

She undressed in the soft winter dusk, turned the key in her door, pulled down her blinds with a rattle, and got into bed. As she lay there waiting for the sleep that wouldn't come, she felt her cheeks wet.

## CHAPTER XII

**T**HE week went on—as weeks have a way of doing—as it began: very badly. Miss McGee went on sulking, and the world went on appearing broken. She had changed her environment. With the finishing of the Athanasian Creed, her work for the time at Wellston Road had finished too. There was a promise that she would be needed before long to

make a gown for Miss Barclay—when Miss Barclay would be able to pick up suitable material at some bargain sale. When this event happened Miss McGee was to be telephoned for; but until it did happen she was free from any more theological disturbances.

She was spending this week—the week of grievance—at the house of her “best” customer, Mrs. Glassridge. At this house also Miss McGee was accustomed to be engaged for a spring week and a fall week; but it was not, as at Wellston Road, as an artist she was engaged. At Wellston Road Miss McGee’s efforts were looked on with respect. She was regarded as a “good” dressmaker, one to whom material could be entrusted with no compunction or doubts as to her being able to make it up into suitable raiment. Mrs. Barclay and her daughter had not soared as yet above the happy medium, the mean average; they either bought their clothes ready-made—what Miss McGee called “little frocks”—or they had Miss McGee in and trusted to her scissors and needle for the result.

Mrs. Glassridge lived on another plane. She clothed herself in works of art, exquisite in design and charming in texture, that were, in exchange for Mr. Glassridge’s dollars, tossed to her across the Atlantic ocean. She was a work of art herself when she emerged like Aphrodite number two, clad in what it had taken the intellect of Paris to produce. Mrs. Glassridge was “smart.” She called Mr. Glassridge “Trot,” whereas Mrs. Barclay always industriously referred to *her* husband as “Mr. Barclay.” Mrs. Glassridge had what Miss McGee called a ly-mousine, and she went out in it when she felt like it; when she didn’t she stopped at home and did whatever she had a mind to—nothing, usually. She would come sauntering into the work-room when Miss McGee was there, and throw herself on to the old couch that was allowed to remain there, and negligently ask Miss McGee questions. “Say, how ye gettin’ on, McGee, eh?” she would say—not that she cared, or even waited for an answer, but just because she wanted to say something, and that was an easy thing to ask. Miss McGee never felt that Mrs. Glassridge was quite flesh and blood. She seemed made of something quite particular that had no connection with muscles and nerves and bones and commonplace things. As she reclined on the couch and asked questions to which she waited for no answers, she seemed hardly human at all. Just something lovely, exquisite, unimaginable, that Paris had taken it into its head to dress—and make. And yet Miss McGee remembered

the time when this wonderful creature was just a manicure girl earning her living. Miss McGee knew that Mrs. Glassridge had once been Queenie MacGowan of the Barber's Shop—until Mr. Glassridge one fine day caught sight of her and wrought a transformation-scene.

Miss McGee was, of course, of no very definite use in this entourage. Mrs. Glassridge would as soon have thought of giving Miss McGee a dress to make as she would have thought of—wearing such a thing. Miss McGee put on little velvet collars, or took them off, or, very carefully, ripped some tulle or lisse where a capable French hand had put it in, and replaced it with fresh tulle, or lisse—as near to what the original had been as she possibly could. Miss McGee loved working on the gowns at "Culross," as the Glassridge mansion was rather inappropriately called (Culross—he called it "Kewross" himself—was the Scotch village from which Mr. Glassridge had emanated): she loved the *feeling* of them, and she adored the totally unexpected little bits of artistry and cleverness she came across. She realized, working on them—turning up a hem, perhaps, where it was worn, or fixing a cuff where a stitch had come undone, what a different ideal exists on the French side of the Atlantic, what finish is put into the work there, what brain there is behind those elaborately simple little gowns . . .

Miss McGee would as a matter of fact never have had the chance of working on these gowns at all had she not been something in the nature of a legacy in the Glassridge establishment. Mrs. Glassridge was a second wife; and, long ago, before Andrew Glassridge had made, or dreamed of making, his millions, Miss McGee had worked for the first Mrs. Glassridge, a plain kindly, unassuming woman who had borne Mr. Glassridge a family (at the coming of which old Mrs. McGee had punctually assisted); and now she was invited for the spring week and the fall week, not because Mrs. Glassridge the second wanted her, but because Mr. Glassridge himself saw to it that she came. Mr. Glassridge was "one good man." He was not a perfect gen'leman, as Mr. Barclay was, but Miss McGee liked him, respected him, was most grateful to him for his advice (freely given) as to the investment of a tiny sum of money she had once come into from an uncle, Mrs. McGee's "American" brother. Mr. Glassridge had put the legacy in "Steel," and one pleasant thing about the War to Miss McGee was that "Steel" was constantly going up and she was as constantly

getting bonuses or a little more interest on her "mooney"—as she always pronounced that word.

Mrs. Glassridge was kind enough. She wasn't at all unkind: when she thought of it she told her maid to tell the chef to give McGee things, going home: and to this thoughtfulness on the part of Mrs. Glassridge, Miss McGee owed the nicest things she ever took home to Penelope's Buildings. Mrs. Glassridge's chef was "It." He did know how to cook. Miss McGee used to think, as she ate the little lunches and teas sent up to her (in the Glassridge establishment everything was sent up, of course), that this was really hardly food at all. It was like Mrs. Glassridge's gowns—like Mrs. Glassridge herself. It was something too delicious to be thought about much—in case you never could eat anything else again. And here came the point where Miss McGee *resented* Mrs. Glassridge.

While she was sitting ripping with the greatest care the little vests of tulle or lisse—"vestees" was what Miss McGee called them—sometimes she would think to herself (the thought seemed to come unbidden): "Why should *she* have all this! What's her that she should have everythin', an' me nothin' at all. She's only a manicure when all's said an' done . . ." Religion was vain when Miss McGee got into this mood. She resented then Mrs. Glassridge's carpets, her old Persian and Chinese rugs, her Pomenarian dog (as Miss McGee always called that animal) her maid, her husband—her ox and her ass and all that was hers. Why should *she* have a chef, in the name of all that was ridiculous? Wasn't she just a manicure, eh? What was that? Very often something it was better not to be. And yet, on this special week of grievance, Mrs. Glassridge had been more definitely kind than ever for she had taken—a thing she had never done before—Katie McGee down in her ly-mousine, yes, the real live ly-mousine, to a play, yes, a real play with music and singing and dancing and feminine legs innumerable.

Miss McGee was sitting in the work-room sewing obstinately. She was replacing a piece of embroidery that was worn, and as she did so she was thinking to herself, "*Ain't* ut the punk wor'ld!": when into this desert Mrs. Glassridge, in the most exquisite of exquisite gowns, had burst. "Come on, McGee," she had said. "Come on. You an' me's goin' to a matinee." And, before Katie McGee could believe it was true, before she had time to regret that her best hat was at home, she and Mrs. Glassridge (the Glassridges lived in patrician splendor

up on the hill that looked down on Regalia) had been rolling smoothly down towards town where the theater was.

Miss McGee never forgot that afternoon; indeed Robert Fulton, in the future, often wished she never had gone to that matinee he was told so much and so often about it. He heard of the girls' legs and the little they had on, the ladies in the boxes, the chaw'clates Mrs. Glassridge laid on the ledge of *their* box, the way the Chaw-fure sat on his seat of the ly-mousine, the way his collar sat on him, the *exquisiteness* of Mrs. Glassridge's boots, the way she took the violets out of the cut-glass vase of the ly-mousine and pinned them in Katie's coat. It had been a glorious occasion, and Katie McGee was destined never to forget it as long as she lived.

The play had been silly—but Katie had enjoyed it. "Sure, Mr. Fulton," she said, "them legs of the women was somethin' to look at." The play had been chiefly legs of women. It had been centipedal in its dancing and showing of limbs. Miss McGee was not alone in her surprise; even Mrs. Glassridge, who had seen so much—of legs and other things—condescended to say, "Oh my, ain't ut some stunt, eh, McGee!" She retained her manicure way of talking.

After the play there was tea at Regalia's smart Hotel "Il Fornaro." Miss McGee had had china tea and 'way beyond elegant cakes, and she had sat, eating and drinking and listening to the band and the monkey-house chatter all round her. Yes, it had been a great day. Mrs. Glassridge *was* kind—once she had given Katie a couple of the Parisian gowns she had tired of, and Katie had never been satisfied with any dress since. She was kind, and it was silly to go on resenting the fact that she was rich and that Katie McGee wasn't. That was the way of the world after all . . . "an' a rotten way—a bad way—a *punk* way." So Miss McGee found herself suddenly thinking as she walked quickly home through the keen air (it had not occurred to Mrs. Glassridge to send her home in the ly-mousine—that would have been too great an effort for her imagination); as she went up the well-known stair, it had all come back. The quarrel with Robert, which she had forgotten for a moment in the heated air of the theater, Mrs. Savourin, the poor leg she had to go out again to dress—Mrs. Morphy's uncared-for state—Mrs. Glassridge's undeserved riches . . . she didn't think Mrs. Glassridge kind at all; the play was fool-stuff, the ly-mousine was wicked, the Chaw-fure was only a slave in disguise. Miss McGee went up her stair

on the night that made a week from the date of poor Robert's original sin, a socialist, a syndicalist, a bolshevist—anything that wants to take from other people all that they have and grab it itself. She felt as if she hated Mrs. Glassridge with her exquisite gowns. She felt that Andrew Glassridge had had no *business* to make millions—she felt that if she had been a bull and seen the Glassridges coming along she would have gored them both. Yes; she would . . .!

Mrs. Morphy's leg once more calmed her. There is nothing that does calm us like seeing the real sores of humanity. She dressed it, and then, having heard from Mrs. Morphy that Cassie Healy, in her "attic apartment" was sick, she began to trail wearily upstairs, past her own flat, up, up to where poor Miss Healy paid nine dollars a month for a room you couldn't, as Mrs. Morphy said, swing a cat in, so help you God.

Cassie Healy was lying on her bed; not in it, just on the top of it, as Scotch people say. She had a bad cold and was breathing with difficulty; and, as Miss McGee questioned her, it seemed (reluctant as she was to admit it) that she had had no work for a week and that she was—starving.

The room Miss Healy occupied was exactly what it should have been. She and it, as she lay on her wretched bed, seemed exactly suited to one another. Cassie Healy was not bad: on the contrary she was good—a "good" girl, devoted to St. Patrick's, taking her chief joy in life out of the lights there and the smell of the incense; and consequently she was approved of by both Mrs. Morphy (who always *meant* to go to church) and by Miss McGee (who did go as often as she could).

"Sure, it looks loike the work's gawn underground," said Cassie Healy, coughing, and turning restlessly in bed. "It's the bad job for me, eh? I been round an' round an' tryin' an' tryin', an' there's nothin' to be had."

Cassie Healy worked in Jews' sweating-dens at stitching pants. She was a good worker—or "operator" as they said—she did her work capably and well; but there were too many capable workers and the Jews thought it salutary that all should know what being out of work meant, and so they changed round at times and took on relays of fresh workers: and then the old workers starved until they were taken on again.

"What does ut mane, for Gawd's sake, Miss McGee," said Miss Healy, edging herself up in bed, and supporting herself upon an elbow. "What's we here fer, eh? What d'ye s'pose is tæe *manin'* of ut all?"

To remarks such as these Miss McGee had only the answer of faith.

"Sure, Miss Healy," she said, "we must keep on b'lievin' an' goin' to the church. There's *some* meanin' in ut sure, or me name's not McGee."

Her anger against Mrs. Glassridge and a millionaire conception of life evaporated. It didn't seem real here somehow, that conception. It didn't seem worth while to be angry with it, to think about it at all, in the face of such poverty as this. This was real. Mrs. Glassridge, however you looked at her, wasn't quite that. She was wonderful and beautiful and marvellous and a sort of miracle—but like all miracles you had to believe in her more or less against the evidence of your senses.

"Sure I'll bring ye the cup o' tea," Miss McGee said: and then, forestalling Cassie Healy's objections—Miss Healy was "proud"—she added hastily, "I'll take me own tea with ye, ef ye ain't had yours. I've not had the bite, an' me head aches, an' I don't feel like eatin' at all, God help me, ef I've no comp'ny, it's the truth."

As she went downstairs to put the kettle on and make the tea and bring it all up again to Cassie Healy's attic, she said to herself, "I guess God knows a'alroight, eh. But He acts *quare*."

Miss Healy's remark, "What's the *manin'* of ut all!" kept ringing in her ears.

### CHAPTER XIII

**I**T never occurred to Miss McGee to think how Robert was feeling. If he did come into her mind during this week of grievance, she dismissed him again with a "I guess *he's* a'alroight!" In her deep unconscious self she knew better: but this was the way she chose to look at the matter, and she did look at it this way.

As a matter of fact poor Robert up in his third-floor room was faring very badly. He hadn't the slightest idea what was wrong with Miss McGee. He only knew that his one friend had suddenly, and for no reason whatever apparently, taken herself away. On the Sunday when Miss McGee's note had been slipped under his door, he had been rather specially looking forward to going down to her later in the day. He had some-

thing new to read to her, and he thought an evening together would be very cozy. Then had come the note—nothingness—no evening together—coldness—offense . . .

What *was* the matter?

He had gone for a walk (that refuge of Man) while Miss McGee had been wrestling, first with Rose and next with Mrs. Morphy's leg. The weather was dark and heavy; the first snow flurry had almost melted and no more snow had come: no one knew whether runners or wheels were most appropriate—there were both sleighs and cabs to be seen, and each looked more out of place than the other. Robert thought as he strode through the dismal landscape, that Canada, waiting for snow, was one of the most depressing sights in the world. He wished even for winter, when the broad river that runs past Regalia is frozen hard as iron: when the whole world seems full of frost and snow—when there is a curious feeling of being in a huge room with white curtains drawn . . . and black darkness outside. . . .

Had Miss McGee seen Robert Fulton walking through this desolation of nothingness she would have felt pleased—or, at least, she wouldn't have felt *displeased*. He was depressed enough even to suit her desires. "Why wouldn't they pass me for the Front," he kept asking himself. "I'm *strong*." And he thought with something like contempt of the doctor who had turned down his slender, slightly-stooped body as "unequal to the strain."

As he went walking back to Penelope's Buildings in the dusk, just when Miss McGee was getting into bed, he felt more depressed than he had ever been. He was not one to contest things with destiny. He was never one of those vital people who want to fight. But, as he turned into the dismal place he refused to call home, he knew what it means to feel a heart sink. His sank so much and so rapidly that it seemed as if it must land in his boots and go out by his toes, and as he passed the first-floor where Miss McGee's flat was (he didn't actually pass her door, for his own flat was on the other side of the Buildings), something more seemed to pass into his mind. He felt, for the second, a faint resentment against Miss McGee. "What's the *matter* with her?" he said to himself. "Is she foolish!" And he had a momentary disposition to say, "Oh, very well. As you like"—and be done with the friendship for ever.

However, when he came home from the cheese-and-butter

counter at the end of the week—thanking God at least that it was Saturday night—and found on the floor as he entered his room one of the familiar neatly-folded ill-written notes, he did not disdain to pick it up. He was, if the truth be told, not sufficiently deeply interested in Miss McGee to feel any profound resentment against her. The feeling he had had was merely a passing momentary fit of annoyance; when he saw the note, he was thoroughly glad to see it. He forgot that he had ever been provoked with Miss McGee, he stooped to pick up her note, he even opened it rather quickly for him—he was calm in all his movements—and he read, with some anticipation, what was inside. “Could you cum down to-night—*right away*,” it said—without any beginning such as “Dear Mr. Fulton” or anything of that sort. “Sumthin has happened an’ I must see you. Miss McGee.”

Robert regarded the note with surprise. It wasn’t like Miss McGee, who, until now, had always expressed herself with dignity and calm. The writing, too, was more disordered than usual, and Miss McGee’s spelling seemed to have taken to itself the wings of a dove and flown completely away. Robert stood regarding the note in his hand—he was not “quick at the uptak’,” as Scotch people say; and so it was only after regarding it for a moment or two that he came to the conclusion that Miss McGee was in trouble. That she really *wanted* him: and that he had better go down forthwith.

He went down and knocked at the door once more; and this time, instantly, if not before that, the door sprang open. It was as if Miss McGee had been behind the door waiting for his arrival, and that, on hearing his knock, she had flung open the door as wide as it would go—to welcome him.

“Oh, Mr. Fulton!” she said. “Come right in, eh. The most ah-ful thing has happened. Come on in.”

Robert came in, and Miss McGee closed the door, and then, impulsively, she seized hold of his hand.

“Mr. Fulton,” she said, holding his hand fast in both of hers. “There’s an ah-ful thing come along. I’m *diss*-graced. I don’t know how to tell ye.”

Robert felt frightened. What had happened? What could have happened to upset Miss McGee so? He said nothing, but he stood looking down at her with disquieted blue eyes, and an anxious look came into his face.

“It’s—it’s just ah-ful!” said Miss McGee, who seemed unable to get beyond this: and she began to cry.

There is something daunting for a man when a woman begins to cry. What on earth is he to do? If he is in a position to take the woman into his arms and comfort her, that is not so bad. There is a distinct pleasure for the woman in crying on the masculine shoulder, no matter how uprooting the cause of the tears may be; even the man may possibly find some consolation in such a process—if the shoulder and the woman are a pair.

But Robert Fulton was not in the position to Miss McGee that he could offer such consolation as this. He couldn't offer any physical consolation (the only adequate consolation for tears) at all except a pressure of the hand. He put his other hand on to Miss McGee's two hands which were clinging to his one hand: and they stood as if they were prepared to play that childish game of withdrawing the lower hand and placing it on the top hand—and continuing, quicker and quicker, until the game ends in a confusion of fingers.

"What is it, Miss McGee?" said Robert at last. "Can I do anything?"

Miss McGee sobbed.

"It's—it's a *diss-grace*," she said.

Robert Fulton was appalled. He thought of all the possible things that are usually described by that word, and each one of them seemed worse to him than the other. Bankruptcy—forgery—murder—rape—adultery . . . they none of them seemed probable when he looked round Miss McGee's "apartment." But what could be a disgrace, even here, if it were none of these? He stood silent and puzzled, holding on to Miss McGee's two hands in a loose and somewhat inadequate manner.

Presently Miss McGee disengaged one hand and put it into her pocket and got a handkerchief out and blew her nose and wiped her eyes.

"I'm silly, I guess," she said indistinctly, "but—but I've always lived respectable up to now."

And she began to weep again.

After a second or two, however, she pulled herself together. "Come on an' set down, Mr. Fulton," she said, "an' I'll tell ye about ut." And, without letting go of his hands (which she held on to with her one hand) she led Robert towards his usual chair.

He sat down.

"It's this," Miss McGee said after a bit, in an unsteady sort of voice—she spoke bending over him, so that she still kept

his hands in hers—"Ye'll know ut sure, there was a kind of a jig-saw puzzle, eh, about the fellas that lived there opp'site me?"

—Robert shook his head. He not only did not know there was a jig-saw puzzle, he didn't know there were fellas who lived opposite Miss McGee—or who lived there—or if anyone lived there—or anything at all about it. Robert Fulton was criminally incurious about his neighbors, and he didn't know the names of any of them at all.

"Well, there was then," said Miss McGee, replying to the shake of the head. "There's been fellas there this ever so long, an' no one sensed their names nor what they done fer a livin', nor so much as throw good mornin' at 'em ef they met 'em on the stairway. It's that slut of a Janitress," she went on fiercely—she couldn't stop herself now—"the lyin' cheatin' punk of her. She'd rent to the devil umself ef he come along offerin' her twen'y dollars in his hoof . . ."

Miss McGee pulled herself up and glanced at Robert; but he showed no signs of wishing to defend the Janitress. He simply hadn't the ghost of an idea that Mrs. Savourin was the cause of the quarrel, if quarrel it was. He went on saying nothing.

"It's come out now, I want *you* to know," Miss McGee went on after a second. "It's out now, God save us. The Pollis has went in there an' what do you s'pose they struck?"

Robert shook his head.

"They struck," Miss McGee said, bending forward and speaking in a low mysterious tone, "a dope fact'ry there. They been manufactrin opium roight opp'site where I room, Sir . . ."

Tears came into her voice again.

"Them yeller fellas," she said (Miss McGee used the color merely as a term of opprobium), "roight opp'site *me!* The shame of ut—the *diss*-grace. . . ."

She stopped.

There was a silence.

"But, Miss McGee," Robert said mildly at the end of the silence—he didn't feel very sure of his ground, so he went slow. "It doesn't matter to you . . ."

"Don't matter to *me!*" said Miss McGee. "Not when it's roight straight opp'site where I lives!"

She withdrew her hand and stood in front of Robert, looking down on him.

"Say, Mr. Fulton," she said, "where's yer wits? It'll git in

the papers. There'll be ta'alk. People'll *say* things. I might be in a bad house . . . it ain't *roight*. I've held me head up—and kep' meself respectable . . .”

The rest of the statement was drowned in tears.

Robert felt lost. And he felt relieved. If manufacturing opium in the flat opposite hers could upset Miss McGee so desperately, then what had upset her before must—in all likelihood—be something as unreasonable. The quarrel with her which never had been a real quarrel because it takes two to make such a thing began to pass out of his mind, and the chief thing that remained there was a desire to comfort her in this—to him—imaginary trouble.

“I daresay it'll never get into the papers,” he said.

“It sure will,” said Miss McGee, out of her pocket-handkerchief.

“No,” said Robert, speaking, for him, emphatically.

“Or, if it did,” he added, as a sort of safeguarding afterthought, “it would be in some odd corner where no one would think of looking for it. What would it matter anyway?” he continued. “It's nothing to do with you. *You* couldn't help it. It's just a chance that might happen to any of us who live opposite people who are . . . doing anything.”

Robert Fulton felt his consolation to be weak—he thought the whole thing so silly that he had some difficulty in consoling it with any appearance of seriousness at all: and therefore he was immensely surprised to see the effect it had.

Miss McGee brightened up. She glanced out of her handkerchief, and, though the tears were still running down her cheeks, they were no longer desolate tears. They were hopeful tears—and the smile that had begun to play round her ugly mouth gave promise of a speedy rainbow-effect . . . and a general clearing-up.

“Well,” she said for the fourth or fifth time, “I guess *you* should know, Mr. Fulton.” She gave a deep sigh. “It seemed a *diss-grace to me*,” she said. She once more blew her nose and wiped her eyes—and put her handkerchief away, and gave another deep sigh. “Ye'll stay an' take the cup o' tea with me, eh?” she said. “Ye'll think ut silly. But I'm scared to be alone.”

Robert stayed. There was no special inducement to call him up to his cold uninviting room overhead. He knew that if he went up there he would have to light his fire, boil his kettle, make his dreary little meal himself and eat it alone. It seemed

far easier to stay where he was and share Miss McGee's meal and make it up with her again. He stayed.

"See here, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said when they were sitting one on each side of the table and the tea-pot was between them, "I never been in any trouble yet. Ma'a brought me up good an' I kep' straight, so it seemed har'rd ef trouble was to come on me now."

She poured out the tea.

"Be-lieve *me*," she said with emphasis, "I ain't one of the sporty koind."

"But, Miss McGee," Robert said, chipping his egg, "why should it matter to you *what* they do next door?" The horizon seemed so bright and sunny now that he thought he could venture to talk sense, perhaps.

"Ef," said Miss McGee, bending forward and speaking mysteriously, "they'd been coiners, Mr. Fulton, I shouldn't a said one wor'rd. There's no har'rm in counterfeitin' that I see, God forgive me. It was the dope that got me goin'. . . ."

She stopped short, balancing the tea-pot in her hand. Robert sat looking at her.

"Say what ye will, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, "it's a *diss*-grace to have the drugs an' drink made at yer very door."

She sighed deeply.

"It was the drink broke my loife all up," she said—and this was the nearest approach to Tully that Miss McGee ever made with Robert Fulton—"an' it fixed me the way I am. I can't bear to think of ut. An' see here, a dope-fact'ry roight at me door . . . an' the Pollis comin' in——"

She stopped.

"But, Miss McGee," said Robert again.

He was about to explain the difference between drink and drugs. He was about to enter on explanations of ever so many things that Miss McGee seemed to have got inextricably mixed up in her head . . . when into his masculine head an idea entered. "It's no good talking to her," he said to himself. I might talk till doomsday and she wouldn't understand." Out loud he said, "Well, Miss McGee, it's over. Don't let us think about it any more": and he left it at that.

Miss McGee looked at him, with the tea-pot still in her hand. Her eyes were red and her nose was swollen, and her mouth had that tremulous look that comes with tears. She did not look her best.

"Mr. Fulton," she said, and a slow, half-childlike smile gathered at the corners of her tremulous mouth, "I'm glad ye come. It was loike ye to come. Ye're the goods a'alroight. Ye made me feel good. . . ."

"Ye've made me feel good," she said, "an' 'twas good o' ye to come. . . ."

The quarrel was ended. The armistice was signed. Peace had come. And if Robert Fulton didn't know—and never knew—either wherein he had sinned or how he had managed to comfort Miss McGee so completely—it didn't matter. The way he had sinned and comforted her, too, was by being a man. But how was he to know that?

It was a pleasant evening. Robert didn't stay long, for (unobservant of such things as he was) he saw that Miss McGee needed a rest. She was done. She had found out the horrible fact of the opium-manufactory early in the morning just after Robert had gone to his butter-and-cheese counter, and just before she herself set off for work. She had had "words" with Mrs. Savourin, she had gone to work disturbed, upset, feeling as if the world were coming to an end; she hadn't been able to eat all day, she had given thorough dissatisfaction to her customer, she had come home feeling that she couldn't bear it another minute—that she must pack—leave Penelope's Buildings—that she couldn't rest there another night. . . .

And then she had written her note to Robert Fulton.

Now, everything was right again, or almost right. Miss McGee said at intervals, "Ef they'd jes' been coiners!" and continued to feel that respectability lay that way. But the fact that Robert Fulton was a man—that he had come in response to her call—that he was sympathetic, that they had made it up . . . all these things combined to make Miss McGee happy. She was happy. She felt life worth living again.

"Mr Fulton, dear," she said—once more she called him "dear"—"ye'll come to-morrow, eh? It's Sunday . . ."

And Robert Fulton promised.

"An' bring down a piece of stuff to read," Miss McGee continued. "I'm crazy to hear what comes next." (She spoke of Robert's "Canada Book," as he was beginning to call it to himself, as if it had been "Great Love Gets There Every Time.") "Bring ut down with ye, eh, an' we'll make a noight of ut."

As Robert was undressing he thought a little about women. It seemed to him that they were curious creatures, full of sense

and completely lacking in sense, daring and cowardly, open to reason yet shut to all logic. He tried to put himself into Miss McGee's state of mind. He endeavored to think how he would have felt—had he been Miss McGee. And he failed. He failed. Robert Fulton was a man and Miss McGee was a woman, and there yawned between them the fathomless abyss of sex—which nothing but sex-passion can even temporarily bridge over. Robert Fulton could not any more understand how Miss McGee felt than he could understand how the sea feels when the moon draws the tide. He got into bed and rolled himself round in his poor coverlets and put the effort to think at all out of his mind. "It'll be a pleasant evening down there anyway," he said to himself. "I'm glad she's all right again." And the thought of "the quarrel" passed out of his mind—forevermore.

But Miss McGee downstairs went over and over the quarrel and the reconciliation, too. "Sure he's a'aloight," she kept saying to herself at the end of each review of the matter. "He's a'aloight. I don't b'lieve he meant ut one particle." (She alluded to the episode with Mrs. Saviourin.) "The . . . !" she then remarked, making use of the epithet she had applied once before to the Janitress. Then she added, "Bless um, he's only a choild." And she smiled. The effects of the tear-storm were passing off more quickly than usual. There is nothing like happiness as a restorer. And Miss McGee was happy.

As she began to go to sleep the making of the opium next door presented itself to her mind as a Decree of God. "I guess it *had* to be," she murmured sleepily to herself. "It's a'aloight."

And she, too, rolled herself in her coverlets and went to sleep. The battered field of grain was right again—straight and strong and growing. It had been restored to health by a catastrophe.

#### CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Robert knocked on the Sunday evening at Miss McGee's door and she did not immediately answer, he merely stood waiting with a perfectly satisfied heart. He thought, "Oh, she doesn't hear, or she isn't ready, or she doesn't want to open yet." And he waited where the door-mat

ought to have been, not even troubling to knock again. His friendship with Miss McGee had taken another step: the initial phase of incalculability on the part of each as to what the other might be feeling was past.

Robert was a punctual person. In spite of the artistic streak through his temperament (or perhaps because of it), he always came when he said he would come, and if he was unpunctual at all it was on what is usually alluded to as "the right side." He came too soon. On this occasion it was five minutes *to* six when he knocked at Miss McGee's door. The silence after the knock was broken by a certain rustling as of many mice getting back to their holes, or a platoon of rabbits scuttling home to their warrens. It was hardly a noise; it was a sort of ghost of a noise. It was Miss McGee, who was taken unawares, getting herself and the room and the meal under weigh before she opened the door.

Miss McGee was *not* a punctual person. Her artistic streak took her the other way, and she found it very hard indeed to be "on time" for anything. Indeed, her unpunctuality was the cause of some of the misunderstandings that not infrequently arose between her and her customers. "Can't that woman be on time!" the customers would say to themselves and one another—they strongly objected to five cents' worth of their time being thrown away on Miss McGee's inability to knock at their doors as the clock struck the hour. And Miss McGee on her side would say to herself or anyone else she could get to say it to, "Oh, why won't they wait foive minnuts, bad luck to 'em, fer a little black divil loike me!"

Robert had not time to think seriously of knocking again before the door opened, and Miss McGee looked cheerfully out. "Come in," she said, "come right in, Mr. Fulton. Sure, it's welcome ye are." He came in in his quiet hesitating way and walked across the room and laid his cap and his little roll of papers on the window-sill. He never noticed that Miss McGee had on once more her little black-and-white striped summer-frock, he never noticed that her hair was waved, he never saw that the ends of her person were carefully attended to. He just took it all for granted, as he took for granted the bright fire and the tidiness of the room—and as he had taken for granted, and never thought of again, the yesterday's disorder and tears and general dreariness. Had he had had the slightest sex-feeling for Miss McGee such things would have weighed with him—he *would* have noticed.

As it was, all Miss McGee's anxious attempts to make herself look at her best, her little wavings and crimpings, her pinnings in of artificial roses, her polishings of nails . . . they were all as thrown away as if she had pitched her efforts into the Dead Sea and watched them sink. But she didn't know this. Love is proverbially blind (just as it is the most keen-sighted thing in the world)—and this was one of the occasions of its blindness. Miss McGee on this Sunday evening was as blind as a bat in daylight, and that was what made her happy.

It looked very cheerful. No one except a woman who has lived alone and done everything for herself can imagine what Miss McGee did for her room in that minute and a half when Robert stood where the door-mat should have been. She had transformed the room in that fraction of time as surely and as certainly and as magically as Aladdin ever could do it by means of his lamp. Women living alone are constantly taken unawares—and they grow a sense of swiftness and certainty in putting the best foot foremost. You can knock at the door when woman alone is in complete dishabille, and she can open that door to you in her best clothes, having tidied up the place in the same instant of time, and you will hardly be conscious of having been kept waiting. In the fugitive diamond of time that had for ever disappeared into the dimness of the past between Robert's knock and his entrance into Miss McGee's "apartment" his hostess had thrown an armful of miscellanies into her bedroom and shut the door on them, she had edged forward his chair to the best corner by the fire, she had given the last touches to the table, she had set her waved hair straight in the glass of her favorite picture that hung over the mantel (the Sistine Madonna and Cherubs all complete), and she had hurriedly rubbed a papier poudré over her flushed cheeks and thrown the papier poudré into the fire. When one is getting on for fifty and gets the supper, one flushes. And red cheeks and half a century of experience go not well together.

Robert, as unconscious of all this as a roosting owl, came in, and smiled and took his accustomed seat. He was unconscious of all the things Miss McGee would have liked him to be conscious of; but he was conscious of something she didn't know about. He knew of the new stage their friendship had reached; he was perfectly conscious of the mounting of another step in their relation to one another, and he felt a corresponding security in his friend's presence.

What, after all, had happened that this should be the case? Well, though Robert did not put it to himself in so many words, Miss McGee had shown herself in a new light. She had shown herself, for the first time to Robert, helpless, clinging, completely devoid of all common-sense. What did it matter to her that people (wholly unknown to her) in the flat opposite had made opium in their rooms? Why should she have minded that? And why should she have considered counterfeiters more respectable than they? It was all so absurd, and the vision of Miss McGee in tears was at the same time so ridiculous and so pathetic that Robert's view of her had—changed. If he had viewed her before merely as an old thing of no particular sex who was kind to him, he now viewed her as a thoroughly female thing who clung to him in difficulties—and whom he could help. A sort of half-absurd but wholly affectionate feeling had crept into his sentiment for her. He realized she was lonely, that she felt this world rather much for her, that he (little as it seemed to him likely that he could be a help to anyone) might take a corner of her burden on his shoulders. If he didn't put all this into words, he knew it none the less in that sure and certain part where we all know things without putting them into words. He knew it in the place that modifies our actions without our being conscious of its doing so. Robert Fulton did not know that his voice was different in speaking to Miss McGee; he did not know that his choice of words had become more intimate; he did not know that his very way of coming into the room and taking his place by the fire was more friendly than it had ever been before. But Katie McGee knew. She knew it—instantly—irrevocably; and in knowing it, something seemed to flash through her body and her soul, too. She—if Robert had only had eyes to see it—almost sported the flag of youth that evening in consequence of the difference in her visitor. Her eyes gleamed, the flush on her cheeks ceased somehow to be unbecoming; her soul, which had never taken on the six-and-forty years of her body, looked through her eyes and said to Robert's soul, "Look at me. I am young. . . ." But Robert, kind, friendly, as forgetful of the old and piteous appearance the tearful Miss McGee had presented yesterday as he was unconscious of the spruce and cared-for appearance she presented to-day, was immersed in hungry thoughts (he wanted his supper), in retrospective thoughts (he had been walking all day through the wintry coun-

try), and in anticipative thoughts (he was looking forward to reading what he had brought). He had no time for any other thoughts. And so Miss McGee's soul spoke to the empty air and no one took any notice of it at all.

"Sure, ye'll be wantin' yer supper, eh?" said Miss McGee, divining in part what was going on in Robert.

Robert smiled.

"I've had a long walk," said he.

"Did ye go far?" asked Miss McGee. She didn't care. She wasn't thinking what she was saying. She was really entirely taken up with the "dishing" of the supper. But she thought it nice to ask.

"Oh, a fair way," answered Robert. He had the English habit of vagueness.

In reality he had gone very far. In the morning, over his late breakfast with its little Sunday addition of luxury, he had happened to glance from his book out of the window, and he had seen a fine day, and that had tempted him out. There was no special inducement to stay at home. He had no one to speak to and his room was not an "enticing" one, as Miss McGee would have said, and besides he was glad of an excuse not to light his fire—he wanted, like any other Penelopian, to save his fuel: and altogether, outside seemed pleasanter than in. He had slipped the little book he was reading into one pocket and a hunk of bread into another pocket. He had locked his door behind him and he had set forth for the day. Robert Fulton was a good walker—he could keep up his light even unhurrying stride for thirty miles if need be, and once he had passed through the slovenliness and casualness that borders Regalia and had struck the open country that lies just beyond, his spirits rose. "It's not too bad," he had said to himself, quoting Miss McGee with a smile, and, through the clear sunny day (for the weather had found itself again), he had walked, sitting down for lunch under a huge maple tree that had shed every golden leaf, and under its bare branches returning to Ulysses and his visit to the underworld, that had formed one of the luxuries of his breakfast. He had spent a happy day, far from the butter-and-cheese counter, far from commerce of every sort, away back in a vanished civilization that seemed to him far more beautiful than anything we have to show to-day. "The slaves then were better off than I," he said to himself—but not bitterly. And after he had eaten his bread (which tasted good

in the middle of his walk) he had lain down under the maple tree for a while and he had looked through the wonderful tracery of the branches to the clear sky above. "That's lovely at any rate," he had said to himself. "There was nothing in Greece to beat *that*." And as he lay there he thought what the New World might be—if only it were different. And, in thinking that, he went to sleep and dreamed a little dream, perhaps—and then awakened cold and ready to walk on again. As he sat by Miss McGee's fire he was rosy with the day's exercise—tired but pleasantly tired, ready to relax and be fed and talked to and made much of. The open air was coursing through his veins, and his heart was pumping his blood round in a fine leisurely healthy way. He was disposed to look on life for the moment in a rosy manner—to lie back on the world and bless it and enjoy himself. Could there be a pleasanter guest than that?

"I'm pretty near fixed, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, following up her remark as to how far he had gone; and she gave a look into the pot on the fire and stirred the hashed potatoes she was browning in the fry-pan. "I meant it to be on tap," she said, "but it's better the way it is. It'll be good an' hot, I guess. . . ."

The meal smelt good to Robert. He had gone hungry all day but for his hunk of bread, and he was ready for his supper. It never occurred to him to ask Miss McGee if he could help. It didn't come into his mind to see to the toast or offer to make the tea. It wasn't that he wasn't willing. If Miss McGee had asked him to do anything for her he would have done it and welcome; but it somehow didn't occur to him that he, a man, would be expected to do things like that. He took it for granted that such was woman's work, and, at the bottom of his mind, perhaps, he hardly regarded it as work at all. It was odd that he should be like that, accustomed as he was to looking after himself. But his housekeeping wants were simple. He hardly cooked at all up-stairs: he was one of those men who never would cook and who would always rather do without food than cook it, and he (without specially thinking about it at all) regarded men's work as men's work and women's work as women's; and therefore he merely sat and looked on while Miss McGee made the toast, and then turned her attention to the hashed brown potatoes and the little bit of fish she was cooking in the pot and to warming the tea-pot and making the tea. She

didn't ask him to do anything. Somehow it never occurred<sup>ght-</sup> Miss McGee to ask Robert to do anything. Her brother<sup>ther</sup> law, Tim Garry, was a handy man; and if it had been he <sup>is</sup> was sitting at her fire-side she would have said to him, "Say, Tim, go ahead with them potatoes there, eh, an' fix the toast." And she would have added, "There's a good fella," and would<sup>d</sup> have considered it done. But Robert!—no. In Miss McGee's<sup>t</sup> eyes he was different. He was something to be looked after, to be taken care of, something that was precious—set aside to do better things than dish potatoes or make toast. Miss McGee exempted him—she could hardly have told you why—from all household cares. Had they been of a suitable age and married, she would willingly, all her life long, have worked for both of them with all her strength; she would have found it a suitable thing that she should earn the money and do the home work, too, while he sat expressing his elegant education in a book. Miss McGee had a great opinion of the value of the written word, even of the word of "Evesham Bobby." And besides that, she would have been *happy* slaving for him: it is the feminine way, and Miss McGee was feminine: there is no other explanation to offer.

They enjoyed their meal. It was not as sumptuous a meal as the first one they had had together. There was no roast chicken this time—but there was fish, and it was all very cozy and nice. Miss McGee was not a great cook. She didn't like cooking, her artistic streak didn't take her that way; but on this occasion she had been successful. She had taken great pains, and all her trouble seemed paid and paid a thousand times over when she saw the hungry man opposite her eat round after round of toast with his fish, and help himself again to potato, and drink cup after cup of tea. She sat opposite to him, radiant. She wondered if life held a happier moment than this. Perhaps Katie McGee had never been happier in her life than when she sat watching Robert Fulton enjoying the meal she had cooked. There is an intimate close enchanting satisfaction in feeding those we love.

"Did ye walk far?" she said again. What do actual words matter when one is happy?

"Yes," he said, more communicative this time. "I went a good way."

"An' did it look foine?" said Katie. Her Irish accent came into play at this ecstatic moment.

"Yes," he said again, "it looked lovely to-day." And then

in the  
pleaded, "I sat under a maple tree a long while and I thought  
ful Canada looked a lovely country."

Miss McGee felt pleased.

"It's that sure," she said. "It's the grand country, Canada.  
There's space in ut, eh, an' room to grow. . . ."

She stopped.

"Yes," Robert said for the third time—but this time more  
promptly than usual—"but to grow into what? That's the  
disappointing thing. There's room to grow but nothing to  
grow into."

Miss McGee did not quite understand so, woman-like, she  
hedged.

"Ye kin grow into affluence a'alroight," she suggested.  
"There's me brother-in-law now, Tim Garry. He come out  
here with nothin', you bet, an' look at um now. Me sister's  
an elegant home, Mr. Fulton, an' she wants fer nothin'. An'  
the gir'rls, me nieces, has had an education apiece that'd con-  
tent the king umself. Nellie's teachin' now," she said—and  
she sighed. "An' that's what I star'ted out to do, Mr. Ful-  
ton," she went on, "the teachin'. But Ma'a had no mooney,  
bless her, an' so I had to tur'rn to the dressmakin.' I says  
to meself at times," she pursued after a second, "it's Nellie's  
doin' what I should a-done an' carryin' the ambitions I was  
bor'rn out with. 'Tis a comfor't, too," Miss McGee said,  
"to have yer ambitions wor'rked ef it ain't be yerself. There's  
a comfor't in that."

Robert didn't answer. He felt the conversation was sagging  
away from what he had meant it to be. He wasn't interested.

"Sure ef ye was to see me sister, Mary Garry, Mr. Ful-  
ton," Miss McGee went on, "ye'd say to the manner bor'rn.  
She plays bridge an' she's friends that droives their cars.  
*She's* grew a'alroight. To look at Mary Garry ye'd never  
say her an' me come out of the same hole. . . ."

She gave a great sigh.

"Sure, Mr. Fulton," she said, "but this wor'ld's a puz-  
zle. What for are we here? To git in trouble one with another,  
an' be broke in sunders because one of us plays the bridge  
an' dresses in silks, an' the other goes out and wor'rks for a  
livin' an' comes home to a garret when her wor'rk's put  
through? 'Tis har'rd now, ain't ut?" said Miss McGee, to  
whom the cold turkey episode presented itself in this fashion.

Robert went on saying nothing. He was frankly quite un-  
interested.

"Me nieces is a'alroight," Miss McGee went on, brightening up. "They're good gir'rls a'alroight ef their mother is to the manner bor'rn. They comes every Sunday there is an' fetches me awf to the Mass. 'Come on, Auntie,' they says, 'come on with us.' They're noice gir'rls, Mr. Fulton," she said, "an' mawdest gir'rls, too. I'll say fer me sister she's brought 'em up as Ma'a'd a-wished. They're good obedient gir'rls a'alroight. . . ."

She got up to clear the table. She saw he wasn't interested.

"Don't ye be fergettin' yer piece now, Mr. Fulton," she said coaxingly. "I'm crazy, sure, to hear ut. . . ."

Robert Fulton came back to earth, and the present moment, and what Miss McGee was saying—with a rush. He didn't care a pin for Miss McGee's nieces but he did care for his book. He jumped up with the greatest alacrity and went over to the window-sill and fetched his roll of paper, and came back to the table with it.

"Certainly I'll read it," he said in the slightly literary way he so often spoke. "Thank you, Miss McGee."

And he smiled.

It didn't take Miss McGee a second to clear the table and put the dishes aside and roll up the table-cloth. And this time she didn't take even a pretense of sewing into her hands to do. She merely sat down opposite Robert and leaned her elbows on the hideous table-cloth and laid her face in her framing hands: and she sat there looking intently across at Robert—and devouring him with her blue-black eyes.

He read.

## CHAPTER XV

**R**OBERT'S ostensible reason for writing his Canada Book was to show the effect of Canada on her in-coming population—the emigrants from other lands, but principally from England, Scotland and Ireland. He also wished to show the effect of these immigrants on the land they came to. He had a notion that Canada was just the manual worker of Great Britain, and that the nouvelle noblesse of Canada was just the manual worker enriched—and exactly as he would be had he stopped in England enriched . . . plus the sunshine of Canada and the complete lack of tradition there. Robert, though habitually an almost over-modest person, thought himself capable of setting forth this thesis, for he

considered himself a manual worker, and a manual worker who was able to write grammar (more or less), grammar being one of the few accomplishments he had been able to bring away from a long school and college education. The grammar he was right about (more or less), but the manual worker part he wasn't. Robert served at a butter-and-cheese counter, of course, and earned his bread (with tears!) there. He was surrounded on all sides by manual workers; he talked to them—a little; he regarded himself as sharing their lives: when he came back to Penelope's Buildings at night there is no doubt that he was in the midst of manual workers, eating and drinking like them: but one thing he forgot—he was not making merry like them. His ideas of enjoyment and theirs were profoundly different; and when our ideas of enjoyment are profoundly different from somebody else's, we are not like that somebody.

The fact was, of course, that Robert Fulton was not a manual worker at all. Everything on earth stood between him and the salesmen who counted change into customers' hands by his side. He counted change and they counted change, but they did it differently. They were all aware of it—Robert and the salesmen, too. Why, Robert's accent alone put a gulf—a yawning chasm—between him and his fellow-workers. They knew, as soon as he opened his lips, that he wasn't one of them; and instinctively, instantly, they put a distance between them and him: and they kept it. Robert Fulton was a worker with his hands; he was democratic in his sentiments—he wanted everyone, that is, to have a *chance*; yet, for all that, one of the sentences in the section he brought down to read on the Sunday of reconciliation ran, 'The aristocratic virtues, so unostentatious as they are, are in a sense out of date in Canada and everywhere else, here and now; yet until they can be revived in a somewhat different form, Democracy will go on being what it is to-day, the rule of the unfit.' After that, no more need be said as to the *unfitness* of Robert to begin to write his Canada Book.

Now, Miss McGee was a manual worker. Her mother had been one before her—her grandfather and grandmother before that. She came straight off the land, and many generations of the land, and the few modern ideas of the city she had plastered on to herself were anachronisms and didn't count for much. Even these were the ideas of the manual worker of the city; Miss McGee, though she liked fine clothes and

well-set dinner-tables and cleanliness and other symptoms of civilization, and though she did come into contact with these things—distantly—in connection with her work, still looked on “the aristocracy” (by which she meant Mrs. Glassridge, and possibly Robert) as something with no connection with herself. For all the flavor of aristocratic virtue that she sometimes exhaled, for all the suggestion that into her composition, somewhere and somehow, there had been introduced a pinch of something that had nothing to do with the manual worker, Miss McGee was, to all intents and purposes of the earth and earthy. She had sprung from people who worked with their hands and left their heads alone; she knew how workers with their hands feel, what they want, why they want it. Her knowledge of the manual worker was one that Robert would never attain. Miss McGee knew what Robert was writing about as the anatomically unlearned owner of a thoroughly healthy stomach knows about his digestion. She *knew* all about it but she couldn't have told you how.

All this being true Miss McGee's sentiments, as she sat with her face in her hands, gazing at Robert, were mixed. They were very mixed indeed. Once more the actual words were often beyond her, but this time the general sense of what Robert was trying to say penetrated deeper than before. “It *ain't* loike that!” she found herself occasionally saying *to* herself when Robert's studied impartiality and kindness towards the workers (which she understood very well) and his evident determination to take their part at all costs, got slightly on her nerves.

As to Robert's assumption—which, too deep for mere words, ran all through his essay—that England was the only possible place you could set out from and go back to, that put Miss McGee in what she herself would have called a quandary. She was, like all older Canadians, ultra-loyal. She accepted Queen Victoria (but nothing later) as something God-given and entirely irreproachable. She admired England (in a sense); she regarded herself as a British subject; she stood up in an aggressive manner whenever she heard “God Save the Queen” (which was the way in which she continued to regard the National Anthem), and she looked upon the Union Jack as the best, if not the only, flag, in the world. At the same time Miss McGee was not sorry when she heard England had got a bruise. She didn't want anything *very* bad to happen to England; she didn't want her even to be

too much shaken up. Still, at the back of her mind, and not so very far back either, there was the distinct sensation of England having behaved extremely badly to Ireland in the past and of her not behaving any too well in the present and of herself—Katie McGee!—and all her ancestors back to the legendary gentleman before the time of Christ being Irish . . . and that she and her ancestors, too, were not going to stand any nonsense from England. She had been delighted at the time of the Boer War when England had been getting knocks from the Dutch farmers. "That'll teach 'em!" she had said. She had been equally enthusiastic when the regiment of "Irish Rovers" (bless the bo'oyes) had been recruited for the Great War. She had gone to the presenting of the colors at St. Patrick's, had seen the bo'oyes off; she had wept over their casualties and prayed for their safety to God . . . and she had been *proud* that Irish-Canada should have gone to the help of England in England's trouble. She loved England to get it hot, yet for all that was in her and for everything she possessed, she would not have had England suffer a defeat. Canada was the halting-place between England and Ireland, and Miss McGee, brought over to Canada when she was a child, had adopted Canada as her country. When thought took her back across the ocean, her blood went to Ireland, her Canadian tradition homed to England. The upshot of it all was that she really hadn't any country at all.

While Robert was reading she felt, sitting gazing at him, that *something* was wrong. She felt as if her foster-country were being set forth asquint. She was exceedingly anxious to say something that would set it straight again, but what to say and how to say it, she did not know. At the conclusion of the reading therefore there was a silence, but it was a different brand of silence from that which had greeted Robert's first section of the Canada Book, and both Miss McGee and Robert were conscious that it was a different brand of silence. Robert waited with a rather pleased sense of anticipation; he felt he had done, perhaps, not so badly. Miss McGee waited with a sense of gathering herself together, not for a fight—not that at all—but for a tussle, perhaps.

She began very much as she had begun before.

"It's a grand piece ye've wrote there," she said.

Robert lifted his meditative eyes from his manuscript and looked smilingly at her.

"Do you think so?" he said.

Miss McGee paused.

"Sure," she said slowly, after a bit. "It's a great piece a'alright. 'Tis elegant, sure. But," she went on, after a further pause, "I guess ye think England's It, eh?"

She attacked the England question first; it seemed easier than the manual worker one. She sat looking at him curiously—half-aggressively and half-affectionately—out of her blue-black eyes.

"Do I?" Robert said—and he laughed. He so took it for granted that you come out from Europe and go back to it when you can that he was hardly aware of even thinking so. He was in the position to this thought that Miss McGee was to the consideration of the manual worker. He thought it so fundamentally that he didn't know he thought it. "Do I?" he said.

"Ye do," said Miss McGee. She paused, drawing herself together so that she could express what she wanted to. "But Canada's It, too," she said, "an' don't you forgit ut. I never been in England an' I misremember Ireland, but I seen the folks ye sends us out here, Mr. Fulton (at this moment Katie McGee was Canadian out-and-out) an' they're the rough-house lot a'alright, be-lieve *me*. It sure takes Canada all her toime to tame 'em."

This was a new idea to Robert. Frankly, it was a new idea. He hadn't the slightest tendency to evangelize, to "improve" Canada. He wanted to set her out just as she was in black and white and give her her sporting chance. But that the European who came out from the other side, rich in tradition, if in nothing else, was superior to the Canadian with no tradition at all except what he had originally brought with him and forgotten, was so patent a fact—to him, that he didn't feel it needed proving. He therefore said with a smile, "Do you think Canada civilizes us, Miss McGee?" And, as he said it, it struck him as so deliciously ridiculous that the smile became a laugh. He *laughed*.

"I do," said Miss McGee, nettled by the laugh. "I sure do. I guess ut takes an Englishman a year in Canada before he gits on to knowin' how's the way to dress umself."

This, too, was a new thought to Robert. Up to this moment he had taken it as one of the facts of nature that Englishmen, without giving thought to the matter, were the best-dressed men in the world.

"Oh!" he said.

"Sure, it's not yerself I'm thinkin' of, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said politely, "You're—ye're *different* some," she said: and she hesitated a moment. "Sure, anyone kin see you're a highbrow, Mr. Fulton," she said: then, "an' a gen'lemen bor'rn."

Robert started a little. It is unexpected to be told you are a gentleman.

"Ye're the gen'leman bor'rn a'alroight," Miss McGee said positively, "an' ye can't git out from under ut." She hesitated again. "But them," she said, "ye're ta'alkin' of"—she motioned to the Paper—"they ain't gen'lemen nor high-brows neither. They got to *learn*."

She stopped again, trying to collect her thoughts.

"Sure," she said, "ye seen ut, eh? An Englishman that's been out here a year's got all dolled up from what he was when fir'rst he come. We've *learned* um to be smar'rt. He *cares* . . ."

She stopped again.

"You an' Mitt's different," she said. "Youse is gen'lemen a'alroight, I guess. Why," she went on with a touch of pride coming into her tone, "them ties Mr. Mitt got into was elegant things. They was elegant a'alroight, you bet. Canada couldn't a' touched 'em. You wouldn't foind the beat of 'em search high or low. . . ."

Once more the sacred name of Mitt fell on deaf ears. Robert wasn't thinking about Mr. Mitt or his ties either. He didn't want to hear about them, so he asked no questions; he just sat and looked at Miss McGee. This time she was interesting him. It just began to dawn upon him dimly, as she spoke, that possibly there was another side to Canada that, all-round and impartial as he had resolutely striven to be, he hadn't managed to set forth. His mind wandered into regions forever shut to his companion.

" . . . sure, it's one grand thing," Miss McGee was saying, when he began to listen once more. "It's the lovely thing a'alroight. It has ut so pat ye can't foind nothin' to say when ye know it's wrong. . . ."

With this concluding morsel of praise she gave a deep sigh—it rose up in her from the fact that she couldn't say what she wanted, and that she felt things generally too much for her; and she turned her eyes away from Robert and sat looking, rather sadly, into the fire.

"What do you think people get b'y coming out to Canada, Miss McGee?" Robert said abruptly.

"I guess," said Miss McGee, still gazing into the fire, "ye git——"

She stopped.

"Ye git the idea of yerself," she said, after some struggle with herself; "ye ain't no forrarder, p'raps, to what ye was in the Old Country there, but ye feel some different someway. I'm the beat of Mrs. Glassridge any day," she went on, after another moment's struggle. "At least, I guess I ain't, but . . ."

She stopped dead short. The person with the healthy stomach who had never studied anatomy was coping with explanations of the whys and wherefores of digestion.

"See here," she said at last. "Mrs. Glassridge *got* things, eh? But that don't make her no different to me. I guess if we was over there"—with one of her ample gestures that showed the pinch of aristocracy in her somewhere she signified that she meant across the ocean—"we'd feel *some* different. Well, we *ain't*."

She paused. She really didn't feel equal to explaining further.

"I see," said Robert.

And he did see. He saw clearly enough that Miss McGee meant that though she had not a ly-mousine or a mansion or a tiara or a Mr. Glassridge to provide these things, there was no distinction of *class* between her and Mrs. Glassridge; and there still wouldn't have been even if Mrs. Glassridge hadn't ever been Queenie MacGowan of the Barber's Shop. Money stood between them and money only. Robert Fulton, in seeing this, saw further. He saw somehow, in one of the queer flashes that came to him, that there was something in the Canada Book he wasn't getting down. He had thought sincerely that he was impartial, and that he was setting forth facts in the light they shone in; listening to Miss McGee he seemed to see another light—up above and beyond his own. He just edged off the conclusion—for it was distasteful to him—that his facts were set forth in an aristocratic atmosphere and that he was not fit to cope with the manual worker—and Canada who just was the manual worker—at all.

"You should write a book yourself," he said in a jocular tone.

And as he made this slightly irritating remark, the further

thought came to him that if Miss McGee *did* write a book about Canada and the manual worker, it would be a book worth reading—only, of course, she couldn't write that or any other book because she hadn't had an elegant education; and if she had had such a thing she could have written the book, but it wouldn't have told anything worth knowing about the manual worker.

It seemed an inextricable muddle, and though Robert made his remark to Miss McGee in a jocular tone and laughed after it—it wasn't a very mirthful laugh that he laughed. Neither was Miss McGee's answering laugh mirthful. They both felt depressed. Never had Miss McGee felt so estranged from Robert Fulton as at this moment when they sat one at each side of her fire, trying to get into line, and not succeeding. It wasn't, as on the first occasion that Miss McGee felt incompetent to understand Robert's allusions. The "big bit," as she called it in her mind, that Robert happened to give to Euripides in this section (and who *he* might be God alone knew!) was of no special moment. Miss McGee didn't care who Euripides was; she didn't want to know about him; his name was enough. But she did want to get over the nameless something that all through Robert's paper she had felt was separating them. What was it—this thing with deep roots and towering branches too—this thing that had endless glistening leaves that fluttered and rustled between them? Miss McGee felt very sad as she sat looking into the fire. She had succeeded in nothing she had tried in her life. She hadn't even been able to make clear to Robert what it was she wanted to say. And she *did* want to say something—but what? It eluded her. She couldn't get salt on its tail however much she ran after it. Robert had had an elegant education, she hadn't. There was the crux of the matter. And gradually she sank into that state of mind that says, "What for, after all? What does it matter? Why worry!" She sat gazing into the fire and for the second she wished it—the book—the reading aloud—the friendship—had never been begun.

"It's a great piece," she said, ending where she had started.

And as she said it, Robert too, felt penetrated with sadness. What was the good of it? Why had he ever begun it? Why not just come down to the Arundel Market level and stop trying about anything. . . .

"Oh—it's the merest little thing—" he said vaguely in answer to her remark; and he stuffed the pages into his pocket,

regardless of crushing them, and, after a second, got up and strolled to the window, and stood there looking out into the snowy night. The snow-flakes came against the window in soft thick monotonous flakes. They drove against the window, and then noiselessly they fell away again and banked themselves up in a great downy cushion on the window-sill. There was nothing to be seen beyond the snow. The night, Canada's glorious sky, the dull houses across the dingy street, all these were as if they had never been. There was nothing to be seen but the white regularly-falling snow-flakes, coming quickly down and covering up Regalia's untidiness and uncleanliness and general slovenliness with a great white enveloping mantle. Robert stood looking out into the snowy night.

"Bah, what a world!" he said turning away with a shiver, and dropping the blind.

"It's as God made ut," said Miss McGee.

Robert took up his cap—it was part of his Old Country formalism that made him bring a cap on his head to come down two flights of stairs from his flat to Miss McGee's—and he came over to Miss McGee and held out his hand.

"Good night," he said.

"Mr. Fulton," said Katie, without attending to the hand, "what makes ye speak that way at teachers?"

Teachers were her gods. . . . She always felt that if she had been able to realize her ambition and "teach school," as Nellie Garry did, there would have been little left to wish for. To hear Robert say, therefore, 'Cultured People have been at extreme pains to lay hold of the Higher Education, and what they really need next is to bring that education into some relation with life. Before that can be effected the majority of them have to forget a good half of what they have so laboriously acquired. They have to come back to the ordinary things of life and realize how intimately these are connected with the knowledge they have stuck on from the outside—this lesson Canada is likely to teach them' was somewhat of a shock. Miss McGee did not exactly know who or what 'Cultured People' were, but she guessed that they were just teachers dressed up in a fine way of saying it; and in so far as she grasped what Robert meant, it seemed to her that he was throwing a stone at both school-teachers and Canada, too; and that the stone had fallen short of its aim and hit Katie McGee. The fact was that teachers and teaching were

no gods to Robert Fulton. He had looked at this particular corner of the world from the inside, and things seen from that angle are apt to lose—their illusion. Had the Cultured People been attacked, it is highly probable that Robert would have taken up the cudgels for them, but, writing his little book, the reverse of the picture had been before his eyes and he had, more, perhaps, for fun than anything else, struck out. He had, as Miss McGee put it, "got his knife into" all that was not manual worker—for it was manual worker he had set out to defend, and the way the "teacher" got into his booklet at all was because he represented one of the four "classes" whom Robert Fulton allowed to emigrate to the New World.

A good deal of this was unknown, and likely to remain unknown, to Miss McGee. What she did apprehend was that "school-teachers" were in some mysterious way being belittled, and she wanted to know *why*. "What makes ye speak that way at the school-teachers, eh?" she therefore said; and she sat, with her head on one side, rather like an inquisitive bird, waiting for an answer.

Something in Miss McGee's tone, or in the turn of her head, perhaps, amused Robert. It struck him as funny, this worship of hers for the teaching profession. In his turn he said, "Why?" A sentence of his apropos of the same subject 'Canada will relieve these academicals of the Cultured Man's burden—the little more of learning than they can comfortably carry—and how heavy indeed it is!' came into his head, and this again amused him: he smiled. His slight ill-humor against Miss McGee and the world, too, began to pass away. He laughed, a pleasant hospitable laugh that had power to dissipate entirely the sadness that had fallen between them.

"Well, you see," he said, "I was a teacher myself once, so I know how it feels to be one—and what it means to other people too."

"Ye were a teacher?" said Miss McGee. You could have knocked her over with a feather.

"That's what I came out to Canada to be," Robert said. "But I didn't like it, and Canada didn't like it—and so I'm not one now."

"Well!" said Katie.

She sat in her chair beside the fire looking up at Robert, and once more she rearranged her ideas of him. He had been a teacher. He had realized those inmost ambitions she had had for herself, and he had thrown them up. She looked at him

as if she would like to look into and through him and away out at the other side.

"No," Robert said, answering her look. "I didn't like it, Miss McGee; I'm sorry, but I didn't." He stood with his cap in his hands looking down at her, and somehow he looked very boyish and young. "You wouldn't have liked it either, though you think you would," he said—and there was almost a roguish look in his blue eyes as he watched her discomfort. "Teaching isn't all it says it is." And then he laughed and said, "be-lieve *me!*"

"That's Canadian a'alroight, ain't ut?" he asked, and they both laughed heartily.

But when Robert had gone away with his cap in his hand and a bit of his crushed manuscript sticking out of his pocket, Miss McGee sat where he had left her—thinking. Had she had the bad habit of using threadbare quotations to express her thoughts she might have said, "There are more things in a Robert Fulton than are dreamed of in a Miss McGee's philosophy." Not knowing this quotation, she didn't quote it; but she did say, "Oh my, sure I never *did!*"—which possibly amounted to much the same thing: so Miss McGee was once more quoting Hamlet without being aware of it. She rose up, raked out every cinder in the grate, and stood with the poker in her hand, gazing down into the black nothingness she had made. She shook her head slowly from side to side. "Sure, my, ain't he the limutt, eh!" she remarked. She went to bed.

## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HE thing, however, in Robert's Paper about which Miss McGee had made no remark at all was the thing that had interested her most. This was characteristic and feminine.

When men talk, either in public or private, and women listen, what the women are thinking behind the kind of attention they seem to be giving is, "What sort of husband would you make? What sort of lover? Are you a father—would you like to be one?" It is possible that when a man listens to a woman holding forth, under *his* polite inattentiveness he may be thinking, "What sort of woman lies under that flow of words? Would she make a home?"—this may be so: with

the woman it is invariable, hotly as she might often protest it wasn't. What interests a woman is a man. She doesn't care what he thinks about politics or philosophy. His dreams of poetry or painting are nothing to her. His opinions, his views, even his ambitions as to his profession (though these come nearer it) are immaterial to her. What she cares about is the man.

Robert Fulton, in sizing up his third class of immigrants—clerks and stenographers who come to the Dominion—had touched on "Woman." Three-fourths of these stenographers and clerks are women; women taken in bulk is "Woman": and "Woman" is a professional entity with a career of her own and not so very different (in a mere matter of writing a book) from "Man." This abstraction was completely unknown to Miss McGee.

It may seem odd that this was so. By the year 1917 it was hardly a new thing that women should go out into the world and have "careers." But Miss McGee lived in Canada; and in Canada, up to the time of the Great War, women didn't have "careers"; they did not even go out into the world and earn their bread unless they didn't happen to get a husband; and as up to 1914, there were, roughly speaking, enough men to go round, Canadians (with a very rare exception) paired off as if they were going into the Ark, and the Woman Question, which people everywhere still have an inclination to spell with capitals, had not emerged on the horizon. By 1917 it was still too new to have reached Miss McGee.

Besides this, Miss McGee belonged to the workers, and with them the woman question is a simple thing, not worthy of any capitals at all. Girls go out to work, perhaps, but with the expectation of matrimony in their minds. They do marry more often than not, and there is the end of it. Miss McGee thought like this: she regarded a woman as a home-keeping animal; a thing that got married as soon as it could and kept a house and bore children and saw that those children got a chance in the world (to the best of her ability) when they were ready to go out into it. If the children were daughters, they did as their mothers had done before them, as quick as ever they could. If things went wrong, then women were old maids, creatures who had missed their vocation in life—failures who were only fit for the scrap-heap. Miss McGee regarded herself in this light. Her work had no romantic appearance in her eyes; it was merely a means of gaining bread,

and no more than that. It is true that she did sometimes make a show of resistance to the old maid point of view by parading the Church's teaching of the value of virginity. But this was usually when Mrs. Barclay insisted on pitying her lonely condition and was "kind." Then Katie McGee did proclaim, so that it could be heard from one end of Regalia to the other, that virginity is the highest thing; that it is not only preferable, but immensely and incontrovertibly superior, to the completest married state; and that, consequently, she—Katie McGee—in the eyes of the Church and of God, was at least one rung higher in the spiritual life than Mrs. Barclay, whose daughter bore constant witness to the loss of the desired state in her mother, could ever hope to be. Miss McGee pounded this view into Mrs. Barclay for all she was worth—on occasions; but when she left Wellston Road she always found such an elevated position difficult to maintain; and by the time she arrived at Penelope's Buildings she usually felt she was not only a virgin but an old maid too. A married woman had things very comfortable; Mr. Barclay, though he could not be in any way compared with Andrew Glassridge as a general provider, yet was eminently desirable both as to income and generosity. When there was no Mrs. Barclay on the tapis what Katie McGee really felt was that there is but one true career for women—marriage; and that, when she has not achieved that career, she is, socially speaking, bankrupt and of no account.

Imagine then how surprising to hear Robert read 'the women-workers who go out to Canada in an odd way mold the Dominion; they at least accustom Canada to the idea of women occupying themselves with something else than the domesticities: and disconcerting as that doctrine frequently proves to be, yet it has, most certainly, to be accepted before general harmony can be restored.'

He evidently looked upon women "working" as Miss McGee compendiously called it, as something not only natural but durable; a woman, apparently, in Robert's point of view, could go on being unmarried to the end and yet *be* something. Queer!

It was more puzzling still to Miss McGee because she had always sized up Robert as knowing nothing about women. He had never seemed to her to think of such things. When she had spoken of her nieces he had never said, "Is she pretty," or, "who does she meet up with?" or anything natural of that kind. He had shown no interest at all. He generally refused

to be interested even in the Mrs. Glassridge tales, though occasionally he did condescend to be entertained by these. And he never said, "Oh, how like a woman!" or, "No one but a woman would say that!" No, Robert did not seem to Miss McGee to know anything about the sex. "Bless the bo'oy," she was accustomed to say when he struck her in this light, "he has ut all to lear'rn"—she alluded to the sexual side of women. Not even his conversation with Mrs. Savourin on the doorstone had really shaken this conviction; Miss McGee knew well enough (though nothing earthly would have induced her to admit it) that Robert was only talking to the Janitress (almost) as he might have talked to a man. . . .

And now, see here, this innocent was suddenly launching theories on the very subject he had been supposed to know less than nothing about! What should he have to say about women coming to Canada? His remark was as disconcerting to Miss McGee as the coming of "Woman" was, in Robert's idea, disconcerting to the Dominion.

In Miss McGee's experience men were interested in women from the sexual point of view and from that point of view only. A short sharp and furious period was followed, in Miss McGee's experience (when things went right) by a long dull period when the man addressed the woman as "Mother" in an essentially married tone of voice. And then they died. Such, for Miss McGee, were the relations of the sexes. The woman was an appendage of man—she bore the man children and she looked after them and him in return for being married and "done for"; and if she didn't do this she was a virgin of exceedingly high repute or a poor little insignificant old maid whom everyone very naturally looked down on and patronized. There were others too, of course. But Miss McGee alluded to these as "punk," and dismissed them from her mind.

Was it possible that there was yet another way? Could women be things that had work to do much as men had? Could they make that work their life—as men mostly did? And if this was possible, were they entitled to the same amount of space in the world as men normally took up? And if so, would the world be big enough for them both?

Katie McGee not only thought about this all the time Robert was reading—it lay below the surface irritation she had felt in listening to him laying down the law about the manual worker he knew so little about—and after he had done

reading, and during the following days she went on thinking about it. It was as if an entirely new view of the world had been opened up to her. She felt suddenly as if something bigger than she had ever known about before lay all round her; and that she was free to wander in that bigness—if she only would. Her own work began to seem to her something more definitely real than it had ever been before. She was one of those women whom Robert was talking about who was occupied 'with other things than the domesticities,' as he magnificently put it. Miss McGee liked words in five syllables when she "got" them, as she said. They seemed to her worth while. She was occupied with things other than the domesticities. She went out, just as a man might, and earned money and came home again. Did she, too, 'mold the Dominion'? she wondered.

As she wondered something darted into her mind. Mitt, long ago, had had an embryonic something (only Miss McGee didn't put it that way) of what Robert had so astonishingly revealed. Mitt, too, had regarded women as things that might go on earning their livings all their lives (yes, and sometimes earn the man's living too) without the slightest sense of degradation. She remembered a discussion between Mitt and herself. "Say, listen here," she had said on that occasion, "that's *silly*." And when Mitt had said "Why?" she had had no answer to give him. As she pondered over Robert's more recent remarks, another idea flashed on her. "Be the glory of God," she said, borrowing Mrs. Morphy's phraseology, "'tis English! Sure, that's what it is." She sighed the sigh of relief. As she made the discovery she was on the way to a very pernicky customer with whom she knew she would have a bad day; but that didn't seem to matter. "Sure, 'tis English!" she said; and she stood stock still in the Canadian road and gazed triumphantly over the Canadian landscape. 'Mold the Dominion!' she said. "The poor lambkin choild." Once more Robert presented himself to her as an innocent boy that had had no experience of the essentials of life. "'Tis the quare country England, eh!" Miss McGee said to herself. "'Tis the square things they thinks there, sure." She felt, all down her backbone, that it was Canadian and not English she was; and deeper than the backbone—in the marrow itself—she felt she was Irish. The homing tradition of "back to England" seemed little better than a myth. She went scurrying through the Regalian suburb—she was five minutes late

as usual—and she laughed as she went. Women were women after all, marriageable creatures, virgins on Sundays, old maids all the rest of the week. . . .

Old things are best!

Yet the oddest part of the business was that Katie McGee's work, after this reading of Section II of the Canada Book, took on to itself another complexion. She somehow had never felt before that her work was in any way *important*; it was just a means of gaining bread to eat. But now, in spite of the kindly scornful laugh in the middle of the Regalian suburb, she began to feel that this work of hers was Work; and that she, though undoubtedly an old maid (and a virgin) was also perhaps Woman. The day with the pernicky customer was unable to put her out. Work was Work whoever did it. Next time Mrs. Barclay had anything to say about old maids—look out!

Possibly the most definite thing that Section II of Robert's Canada Book achieved was something that Robert had never even thought of. It established in Miss McGee's mind the gender of Work. She had never known before that it was neuter.

## CHAPTER XVII

**T**HERE had been so few pleasant events in Miss McGee's life that she might be excused, perhaps, for referring over and over again to the few that *had* come her way. Of these the great and principal event was the visit to New York after her mother's death; and the principal event that had occurred while she was there was the hearing of a pianist—who to Miss McGee always remained "the bo'oy with the velvet jack-ut." There were other things. Mrs. McGee had missed no free treat during her stay in New York City. There was, for example, a young lady who had posed beside a fountain in a Spring Show. She had been clad in a shimmering gown that looked loike a thing ye moight see in a dream. "An' say, *my* dear," Miss McGee was accustomed to say—when she wished to be business-like she said "*my* dear," and when she wished to be affectionate she said "me dear"—"I wisht you had saw that young lady there." She always paused and gasped a little here. "She was elegant a'alroight," said Miss McGee. "She was *i*-deal; be-lieve me."

Here Robert would grunt.

"Sure, 'twas a thing ye'd dream of," Miss McGee would go on. "Ye never did saw the beat of that in all yer loife, Mr. Fulton."

She would stop, and a hushed sort of look would come into her face.

"Do ye know, me dear," she would say, "when ye see some-  
thin' that's 'way beyond lovely the way ut makes ye shiver?  
Ye feel sad. . . ."

Miss McGee would look wistful.

"Would ye tell me why is that?" she would ask.

But Robert was never equal to explaining that mystery; and the young lady would, each time she thus entered into the conversation go, at this point, the way of all flesh.

Robert was frankly bored with Miss McGee's impressions of New York. He didn't like her friend Beta Hendricks who was Matron of a small Maternity Hospital there. He couldn't bear her cousin, Mrs. Weltman (the one from whom Miss McGee got the annual letter); nor did he like Mrs. Weltman's husband, Jo; and least of all could he put up with the daughters Maybelle and Marianne, who always figured in Miss McGee's stories as Polly and Belle. When they came determinedly into the conversation Robert always found that it was time for him to go to bed.

The bo'oy with the velvet jacket was, perhaps, the most bearable of the lot. He certainly was the one whose simple history Robert had heard most often.

"Onest I was smoochin' around," Miss McGee would say, "an' I see in a store there a tickut in the window sayin' there was a concert in the back-store an' 'twas free to come in. So I gawn in. . . ."

She would stop.

"When I gawn in," she would go on after a bit—and her voice always dropped as if she were telling a ghost story and was nearing the point, "say, what do you s'pose I struck?"

Robert always went on supposing nothing.

"'Twas a bo'oy in a velvet jackut was playin' in there, bless um," Miss McGee would say, "an' oh, Mr. Fulton, see here. . . ."

She would stop: and here the young woman posed beside the fountain in her shimmering gown faded all away into nothingness.

"Sure," Miss McGee would say, relapsing into Irish pure and

simple, "he played loike the wind an' the loight. He played the way he'd make ye think of the stars. He was loike a stream comin' roarin' down a hill—an' the green rushes be the soide of ut. He made ye la'aff—an' cry. He made ye glad ye was bor'rn an' wish ye was dead. . . ."

And then usually, words here failing Miss McGee, she would declare he was elegant and 'way beyond it, and Robert would squirm in his chair.

When the winter had well descended on Canada and Regalia was white—white, wrapped deeply in snow, Miss McGee came back one night from her work in a supreme state of excitement. New York was about to reincarnate itself in Regalia city.

"What d'ye think, Mr. Fulton, eh?" she said to Robert, whom she had summoned to a conference by note, "say, what d'ye think, eh? That young fella in the velvet jackut I heard that toime in New York city is comin' on here!"

She paused to see how the news would affect Robert. And she did feel appreciably disappointed when it didn't seem to affect him at all. He had had a bad day in the butter-and-cheese hole, the store had been cold—war-time scarcity of fuel had begun—the customers had been maddening, he was so tired and dispirited and lethargic that if you had told him the archangel Gabriel was coming to Regalia to give a recital on his horn he wouldn't have stirred a muscle.

"Ye've not forgot me tellin' ye the way the bo'oy played in New York City, eh?" said Miss McGee tentatively. She saw Robert was not interested.

"No, no, I've not forgotten," Robert said. He said it hastily, for he was afraid if he gave Miss McGee time she would start off telling him all about it again—and that he felt he could not bear. "Yes, yes," he said. "I remember."

There was a silence. Miss McGee had had a plan to unfold but this lack of energy on the part of Robert chilled her, and she felt as if perhaps it would be better to keep her plan folded up in her head. However, she was full of her subject and longing to let Robert into her plan, and so, after a second or two, she went on a little further.

"Ye'd like to hear um, eh?" she said, once more tentatively. And then she added impressively, "He's an ar-rtist, moind."

She waited.

"I'm not very fond of music, Miss McGee," Robert said.

And then, after this ungracious remark, something made him glance towards Miss McGee, and he felt perhaps rather than saw her disappointment.

"You mean you'd like to go and hear him?" he said.

Miss McGee did not need to answer. It was as if something electric had flashed through her, and she had broken out into light. She sat gazing at Robert with her blue-black eyes, and her soul seemed to be looking through those eyes, and for a minute she said nothing.

"D'ye think we could go," she said then, "Dutch treat, eh?"

"I invite you to go with me," said Robert, most unexpectedly—and he laughed a little. There was something infectious in Miss McGee's breathless joy. "Damn the expense," he said—also unexpectedly. And he laughed again.

The next day when he went "in his lunch-hour," as Miss McGee called it, along to the theater where the concert was to be and paid down a whole dollar and a half, he didn't feel quite so enthusiastic, perhaps. The worst of just not gaining enough to live on is that it cramps life everywhere. Robert would sometimes have most willingly broken into flower and expanded in the sunlight; but just so soon as he made even a bud—it was nipped in the frost of not enough cents to go round. He bought the tickets, and put them in his pocket—where the dollar fifty had been; and as he walked away from the theater, he caught himself thinking, "What a lot of money! What a lot of things I could have . . ."—and there he checked the thought. But it had been there. There had been a moment when he was out-and-out sorry that he had indulged Miss McGee; and even after he had pushed down the thought, it came pushing and pushing up again. He denied himself so much—in books, in clothes, in food, in everything, that it seemed almost criminal to be throwing away money on a concert, for which he felt he wouldn't care. It wasn't until he handed over the tickets to Miss McGee at night and watched the color come surging up into her soft worn cheeks that he felt really comforted. "She'll like it," he thought; and yet, unwillingly, behind that kindly pleasant thought—even then—the other thought kept obtruding itself "What a *lot* of money. What a lot. . . ."

There really isn't any denying that poverty is an ungracious thing.

## CHAPTER XVIII

IT is not too much to say that from the time when Robert put the tickets into her hand to the moment when they made their way together to the cheapest seats in the house and sat themselves down on them, Miss McGee thought of nothing but the concert. It was the very first time in her life that she had ever been to a paid-for seat at a real live professional concert. So it was an experience for her. She loved music. She had an inborn sense of melody and rhythm. She had thought of this concert all week and every minute of the week. She had thought of it as she was walking to her work, as she was cutting out and planning and piecing together and sewing and machining for her customers; she had thought of it coming home, while she was eating her poor supper—as she was undressing, even, yes, even then!—in her prayers. Miss McGee felt ashamed that she could not banish the bo'oy (God bless um!) out of her devotions, but she couldn't. He obtruded himself between Miss McGee and God, and the thought of the melody that he was shortly to pour into her soul intoxicated Miss McGee and sent the blood spinning through her body—even in a kneeling posture.

Robert and she arrived in good time. They looked a nice couple. Robert was neat and well-brushed as ever, and he looked, as Miss McGee said over and over to herself, a gentleman. He had indeed that unobtrusive quiet appearance that is the essence of looking like a gentleman; had you met him in a public place you couldn't have mistaken him for anything but what he was—a man of breeding and culture; in this instance Miss McGee was right.

She herself looked well. In an odd way Miss McGee always looked "all right" in the old clothes that were all she had to wear. She was ugly. She was poor. But she had something—the thing that makes a beau laid—that she had resurrected from some long-dead ancestor, perhaps. At any rate it was there. She had it, and her "something," set her apart. Even Mrs. Glassridge in the fashionable hotel had not felt in the least ashamed of her companion.

To-night she was all a-twitter. She could hardly contain herself at all when she thought that here at last she was to see the bo'oy she had seen eleven years before in the room behind the music-store. Quite irrationally she expected to see

him still in his velvet jacket, and when (eleven years later as it was) he came on the platform clad in the usual garments worn by the concert-giving male she was for the moment disappointed. —“Bless the bo’oy, he’s growed-up, eh,” she said in a disconcerted tone: but when he had sat down to the piano and run his fingers—they were long delicately-tapered ones, just what the Public demands of a musician and so seldom gets—over the keys, she was reconciled to anything.

She was reconciled to life as she listened. It seemed to Miss McGee as she watched those white hands moving on the ivory keys that they were putting a poultice on her soul. All her bitterness against life—and Miss McGee was bitter with life for not having given her what she thought it should—passed away. She forgot that the world had been more or less of a disillusionment. She forgot that she often said to herself she wished she were dead. She simply sat bent a little forward, drinking in the sweet and lovely sounds that “the bo’oy” drew from the keys. The theater and the rows of faces passed away from her, it seemed to her as if she were alone with this great magician who could draw sound from wood and metal and ivory—and enchant the soul. She felt that life is a beautiful thing—a charming and tender thing, and at the same time a thing ineffably great. . . .

Robert Fulton was not fond of music in the way Miss McGee was. He liked it. It gave him a calm pleasure to listen to music beautifully made, as this man made it, and his study of specialized art of other kinds helped him to understand in a way that Miss McGee couldn’t. They sat beside one another, their elbows touching sometimes as they leant on the arms of their chairs . . . and their spirits were leagues—worlds—away from each other. Robert’s spirit was well in hand. It was in this world, inside himself, listening, and enjoying what it heard. But Miss McGee’s spirit was in some other world, floating about in the ether, mystic, understanding mystic things—immensely happy. . . .

When “the bo’oy” stopped and the applause leapt out, there seemed nothing to say. Miss McGee’s spirit, brought back abruptly from its wanderings, felt giddy. She turned and looked at Robert, and her eyes were dazed.

“The bo’oy!” she said.

“Isn’t it a beautiful genius?” a voice said behind; and at the English sound of it Robert turned involuntarily.

Yet it was right, this English voice. It was a beautiful

genius that was opening itself out before them. "The bo'oy," as he sat at the piano, was tossing rhythmic bits of his soul amongst the audience, and they were catching them as they could, and the bits of the soul were beautiful. There are all kinds of genius. There is genius that is great and powerful and ugly, and that kind of genius we acknowledge reluctantly; and there is genius that is tender and wise—that we love to be near; and there is genius that is radiant and beautiful . . . and this player's genius was of that sort. Robert, unmusical as he was, felt the influence of it. And Miss McGee was silenced—awed—made incapable of speech. . . .

It wasn't till they were coming home together that Miss McGee found her tongue.

"Sure, Mr. Fulton," she said, "it's the grand treat ye been after givin' me." She stopped. "I'm glad ye've gave ut me," she said. "I'd sooner take a treat at your hands than at anyone else's." She stopped again. "I'll think of ye together," she said, "you an' the bo'oy."

And then she stopped a long long time.

"I knew um," she said, as they were turning in at the door of Penelope's Buildings. "I knew um for an ar-tist the time I heard um years ago." Miss McGee looked up into Robert's face and the light of the hall-lamp fell on her face.

"It must be a grand thing," she said, "to be a man, Mr. Fulton."

And she stopped again.

"I'd sooner," she said—the music was unlocking her tongue now—"you was a man an' a great man an' wrote books, Mr. Fulton, then . . . than anythin'. I'd die," Miss McGee said, and suddenly her voice was passionate, "if ye could be great. I'd—I'd do . . . anythin'."

They went up the stairs silently together. When they reached the first landing they stopped at Miss McGee's door and she held out her hand—she didn't invite him in. "Good night," she said, "an' thank ye. I'll never forget ut."

She went in and closed the door.

## CHAPTER XIX

**A**FTER the concert nothing at all happened. It was mere unadulterated dullness. The days passed for Robert, and Miss McGee too, in the rapid discordant kind of way that is characteristic of the New World, and perhaps of

the modern world all over. There was a hustle to get through the days at all, and a feeling that nothing had been accomplished when they came to an end. A most unsatisfactory way to live.

It sometimes seemed to Robert as if he could hardly bear it much longer. He stood his life of drudgery far worse than Miss McGee stood hers for the simple reason that he had begun to drudge too late. The pleasantnesses of his early life stood between him and his butter-and-cheese existence till the Arundel Market seemed frankly unbearable. He didn't complain much out loud in actual words, but his whole bearing—his indifferent expression, his slow movements, his lack of interest, his evidently lessening vitality—told the tale for him. The expression of his eyes showed that he was discontented with life, that he rebelled against life—as it is: that he was either ready to burst into a flame about life, or give it up altogether.

There is no denying that such a frame of mind as this is wicked. Robert Fulton, in feeling this, was *disgraziato*, as Samuel Butler and the Italians say. But can one blame him? It wasn't the work he had to do he complained of. It wasn't even the miserable drudgery of the work he was expected to do. It was the uselessness of it that made him despair. If he could have felt that he was accomplishing anything by standing in his white linen suit behind his hygienic glass-covered counter all day long, he would not have minded so much; he might even have been—contented: though not, perhaps, happy. But to stand there all day long, from eight in the morning till seven at night (and after that came clearing-up time) just attending to tiresome unreasonable women who nine times out of ten didn't know what they wanted to buy—that was what was so unbearable. Had Robert felt that he was selling good honest food to people who needed nourishment, he could have comforted himself by the feeling that he was at least useful—he wouldn't have grudged then the necessary drudgery of the work. But he couldn't—or didn't—feel this because of the atmosphere of the store he worked in. The Arundel Market was a big palatial sort of place, the "best" food store in the city, all white marble and glass and tiles and linen suits: and Robert and his fellow-salesmen and the young lady cashiers, perched up aloft like so many cherubs in plaid skirts and "lingerie" waists, were just pawns in the hands of financiers "playing the game" and making money out of them. Robert realized this. That was the reason for his so often feeling that he could not bear it one moment longer.

What made him bear it? Dire necessity. He had by his own foolishness—a more emphatic thing than mere folly—reduced himself to this plight, and there was no way out of it. How could he save anything to buy himself out of it on his weekly pittance? Had he time to do anything else, to make money on some side-issue? And even if he had had time what could he offer that would be accepted in the Commercial Market? He knew well enough in the *real* place that anything he could write would be unsaleable in the New World—and possibly in the Old one too. He had wares—but they were unsaleable wares. The world had taught him that. Well, then, there was nothing for it but to hang on to the cheese-and-butter counter and make a bare living wage out of it. When that did get unbearable—quite . . . there was always a way out of it. And yet Robert Fulton wasn't a person who would commit suicide.

It was a long weary day. There was nothing on earth to amuse him. His fellow-salesmen—good fellows enough—had nothing in common with him. He was civil to them all, they didn't dislike him: but there was nothing between them. They had no links to hold them together. And the young lady cashiers, with their waved hairs and their shrill voices—he had nothing in common with them. He felt sorry for them, sorrier perhaps than they deserved he should be; but when he had wrapped the customers' money in the bill and put the packet in the box, when he had set the box in the rack and touched the button and set the whole thing rolling unexpectedly up-hill to the young lady cashier, and seen her receive the box and set it on its homeward way again his connection with the plaid skirt and the wash-waist was at an end. He never spoke to these things, or really knew what was inside them.

The coming of a man into the store was a treat. A man usually knew what he wanted and was willing to pay the price for it. You wrapped the thing up and he took it away—and when he got home his wife said "My *dear*, you shouldn't have paid that ah-ful price for it!" In Robert's opinion the first thing women had to learn (to prove their equality with men) was how to shop. He held the most determined opinions on this; his faith indeed in women had first been broken down when he came into intimate shopping-relations with them. He had thought of them before he became a butter-and-cheese salesman as faintly possessing all sorts of virtues, shopping virtues amongst them: and when, as a salesman, he found that they didn't possess shopping virtues at all but quite the

reverse, his opinion of the sex, and his views on "Woman," underwent a corresponding change. "When women know how to shop," Robert might have said to anyone if he had had anyone to say it to, "I will vote for their vote. But not before." He held embittered views on this subject. All that can be said in his excuse is that he had had his trials, and that trials lead first to embitterment before they point the way to resignation.

The break in the day was lunch. It was a blessed time. All morning long Robert's eyes sought the clock that dominated the store. "Two hours from lunch now," he would say. Then "just an hour now—half an hour—twenty—ten—five—minutes." When noon came he heaved one deep sigh, doffed his linen suit and—fled.

There was no special place to fly to. He fled merely round the corner to the Great North-Eastern Lunch Counter of the Dominion. It had not many attractions, this Great North-Eastern Counter. Its chief attraction was that it was not the store. It was a big bare place, filled with endless chairs, each with its own broad wooden arm which served as a table when the lunch was brought. Robert had not money to have a nice lunch. He merely had a cup of cocoa and some toast; but it was quiet, comparatively; he could sit in the window and watch what was going on; he could read, if he felt inclined, a little bit of the book he always carried in his pocket; and above all, and chiefest treat of all, there were no lady-customers to serve. There were no ladies, or women either, in the Great North-Eastern Lunch Counter of the Dominion, except the little waitresses who hurried to and fro and carried the Quick Lunches to the Quick Customers and then carried back the empty dishes to the Quick Dish-washers. They were poor undergrown, underfed little kinds of things, with the usual waved hair and pat of powder on the cheek—"They too are pawns," Robert would say to himself bitterly, "they are slaves—just like me." And now and then he would bestow an ill-to-be-spared five cent piece on the little waitress who looked after him. *She* found it hard to live, and anyone that eased her path got her attention. She kept the chair in the window for him whenever she could.

As the winter went on Robert read less and less in the book he carried about in his pocket. He felt tired and tired as the weather grew colder, and less and less inclined to lose himself in a book; for it takes vitality to be able to lose your-

self in anything, and Robert had no vitality to spare. Instead, he merely used to sit in the window of the Lunch Room, and look out at the people passing to and fro on the sidewalk (the North-Eastern Lunch Counter was situated on St. Hubert's Boulevard, the main thoroughfare of Regalia which runs almost from one end of the city to the other), and watch the unceasing traffic in the street. There were the electric cars making their way down the middle of the street with an unending clang. There were sleighs innumerable gliding about to the festive little accompaniment of their bells. He liked to watch the sleigh-drivers, who looked like bears in their great 'coon coats; and it amused him to watch the occupants of the sleighs wrapped up in their furs, with sleigh robes—of buffalo or bear—behind them over the back of the sleigh and more robes over their knees and tucked in about their legs. It was cold—cold—cold. The winter of 1917-1918 came early and stayed late. By the middle of November Regalia was already deep in snow, with the sort of clear and frosty air that usually waits till January to come; and through the clearness there came a sort of dagger of cold that plunged to the very heart. Robert had no fur coat, he could never take a sleigh. He could only sit at the window of his cheap restaurant, eating his cheap lunch and looking at the sleighs peeling by . . . and watching the great leviathans of motor cars that came rolling through the traffic to the ground-bass of their tooting motor-horns.

It all looked very wealthy and easy and luxurious. Inside the cars—the ly-mousines, as Miss McGee called them—there were women wrapped up, protected from the cold in every possible way. As such cars went rolling by Robert could sometimes distinguish the vase of flowers that had its place opposite the occupant of the car—violets at a dollar a bunch, such as Mrs. Glassridge had taken from the cut-glass vase to pin in Katie McGee's coat, or roses at a couple of dollars each. And, at that sight, something of the anarchist would rise up in Robert Fulton; a desire would seize him to go out and break through the window of the ly-mousine and seize the flowers and throw them in the snow and trample on them, and take the occupant out and . . .

It was totally unlike Robert Fulton to feel that way. He was the most peaceful of creatures. He wished no one any harm. But to see wealth flaunted before your eyes, when you are uncomfortable all day long—it is hard. And it was only occasionally, on his better days, that Robert could permit

his sense of the ridiculous, a sort of *gaieté de malheur* to rise up through his discomfort—and comfort him. “Perhaps Mrs. Glassridge is inside that!” he would say on these better days when a car with Dollars written on it would go rolling by. And when he said that—some of Miss McGee’s tales of the magnificence of the Glassridge household would come into his mind—a sense of the ludicrousness of the world as it is would fill his soul—and he would feel better. Perhaps a sense of the ridiculous, or humor as we call it, is the best gift civilization has offered us yet: or did God send humor to compensate us for other gifts that civilization has forced on us? At any rate whenever Robert thought of Mrs. Glassridge and her absurd ménage, something seemed to break in him, and he felt amused. And then the tenseness of life seemed loosened for the moment; the whole thing seemed ridiculous.

After lunch there was nothing to do but to go for a turn. Robert would leave the restaurant and stroll up the first turning out of the Boulevard and turn his eyes to Regalia’s hill. He had not much time, just enough to see that God’s world is beautiful; perhaps, in one of the tree-bordered side-streets, he would catch sight of a big gray squirrel, down on the ground, quite at home here within hearing of the electric-cars: and he would stand to watch it as it skimmed fearlessly along the side-walk, or sat up holding some little delicacy it had found tight between its tiny fore-paws. It was a pretty thing. Robert would stand contentedly, while it nibbled and kept a bright brown eye on him. It was not frightened. It was fat and evidently well-used; yet at Robert’s slightest movement to come near, it would turn, stand suspended, as it were, on its hind legs for a second, and then before Robert could count three it would be high amongst the branches, looking down on him; and if he stood a moment longer watching, he would see it leaping from one bare branch to another—holding on by the lightest twig, springing, leaving the waving twig behind it. How sure-footed—alert—dexterous it was! What a miracle of minute strength and muscular grace . . .

It seemed a shame to leave the squirrel and go back to the Arundel Market for an afternoon that was only a morning longer-drawn out. Nothing was going to happen—nothing could happen—till seven o’clock but more serving out of butter and honey and cheese and eggs to more customers. There were interminable hours to be worn through. How Robert hated those prosperous women who came and shopped! How he

detested the clipped intonations of their Canadian voices. He loathed their shrillness and their arrogance and their clumsiness of movement (it had taken his labor in the store to show him that women are more clumsy in their movements than men). He hated them from head to foot, and he felt certain that if he could see inside them he would hate them more. "How could St. Anthony be tempted by a woman?" he would ask himself as he was wrapping up a pound of butter. "What did he see in her? Hadn't he any *sense*?" It seemed to him incredible that any of these creatures that came flouncing and rustling into the store could ever be fascinating to any man. They weren't real enough to him to enable him to realize that a woman buying butter and the same woman in the arms of the man she loves are two different women. "Bah!" he would say to himself—just as he had said it the evening when he lifted Miss McGee's blind and looked into the snowy night, "I hate women. Take them away . . ."

Going home at nights in the cold clear darkness he felt sometimes as if he must give it up. "If it *led* anywhere," he would keep on saying to himself. But the thought of going on like this for ever and ever till he passed out of it into—what! . . . seemed to him something that he couldn't possibly face. He was miserable—wretched—with everything that makes life worth living knocked right out of him. And worse even than the acuteness of these unbearable feelings—he was bored. He was horribly bored. He was bored stiff: and boredom reduces the vitality. It makes the temperature sub-normal. It checks the flow of the blood, it lowers the pulse-rate—it takes the light out of the eye and the springiness out of the foot. It inhibits desire: it is a microbe that searches through and through the system—and ravages it. Robert Fulton, in his work in the store had a physical feeling sometimes as if someone were working through his chest with a gimlet and coming out with the point at the other side of him. He suddenly realized the meaning of "being bored." The etymology came home, like a curse, to roost. Great sorrow can be borne—somehow. Despair must be faced. But boredom, tedious purposeless boredom, day after day, starting nowhere and leading to no kingdom come—who can be expected to bear such a thing as that? No possible idea underlies boredom. And ideas are what enable us to face the unhappinesses of our lives.

As Robert Fulton came back to Penelope's Buildings in the last winter days of 1917, he felt that this world is not a

fit place to live in. As he slithered along in his old rubbers, not even Miss McGee after the "matinee" with Mrs. Glass-ridge felt more revolutionary than he. He felt anarchistic and Bolshevik—which was quite foreign to his nature. Had there been anything to join he would have joined it. He envied the men at the War. The only thing that would have given him unmixed satisfaction would have been to see the Directors of the Arundel Meat, Grocery, Fruit, Vegetable and Dairy Produce Market (so it was described in the circulars punctually sent round to the Shareholders) dragged in the snow—and left there to freeze . . .

He was ashamed of this state of mind, and yet he hadn't the strength to rise above it. He went on from one wretched day to another—and struggled to the next. As he was walking to his business or home again he never raised his eyes to the beautiful skies of winter with their great snow-laden clouds that showed their silver lining to the seeing eye whenever a shaft of light struck across them. What Robert saw was blackness. He walked along, like Mr. Muckrake, with his eyes glued to the frozen ground. It is perhaps not difficult to understand that Robert Fulton, in this state of mind, was not a cheerful companion.

He went down to Miss McGee's most evenings, chiefly because he had nowhere else to go. Once there, he would take his seat by the fire and wait silently till the meal was ready, and then, turning his chair to the table, he would sit and eat his meal, replying certainly to any remark Miss McGee might offer, but originating nothing of his own. He didn't mean to be disagreeable. He assuredly didn't want to be disagreeable; but somehow, whenever he did think of something to say, he was unable to say it. Something inhibited his speech. The thing didn't seem worth saying, or he didn't feel like saying it when it came to the point of placing the words on his tongue, or although he might wish to say it—he couldn't. Such a mood as that comes back on the possessor of the mood. No one can feel a sick disgust at the world without feeling a sick disgust at himself too. No one can hate life without hating himself. No one can separate himself—we are all a part of everything else: and Robert felt all this. He did hate himself as well as everything else. He was thoroughly and blackly miserable.

Although Robert mainly went down to Miss McGee's because he had nowhere else to go, there was another and a pleasanter reason for his going. He went down night after night (the

meals had been brought to a business basis, and Robert paid for what he ate) because at Miss McGee's there was a faint flavor of home. For a long while past there has been a great deal said against home. Probably we had all had too much of it. But go away from home and stay away; be barred outside of home: have no entrance to any home at all—and see how you feel. Robert Fulton in his better moods was glad and thankful to have Miss McGee's poor little apartment to go down to in the evenings just because it had a faint flavor of home. He liked to go, not so much for the meal which Miss McGee prepared for him (though he liked that too) as because she liked him to come, because she wanted to give him her best and present him with the warmest seat by the fire; because he saw, in a semi-conscious and sub-conscious sort of way that it meant a great deal for her to have him there beside her. It is the feeling of being wanted that makes home; and it is the reverse of this feeling that makes the other thing. Robert Fulton, silent and irresponsible as he was across Miss McGee's little oblong table, was yet grateful to Miss McGee for the atmosphere which she created. It was when he walked into her poor little room that he knew—and only then did he know it—a certain pause in his wretched misfit of a life. He was not happy or even contented as he sat, half-listening to Miss McGee and half away in some melancholy reverie; but he was, for the moment, at rest. He had a feeling of respite. He could stop, sit quiet, think about nothing at all—rest.

Miss McGee was so glad to see him that she didn't mind whether he was disagreeable or not. She was past the stage of criticizing; she had got to the place where she took Robert for granted—as women do take men when they care for them: she swallowed Robert Fulton whole, regarded him lovingly with eyes that saw no faults—in a truly Christian way.

When conversation languished between them, she regarded it as her fault. "Sure," she said to herself, "I'm no companion fer such as him. He's thinkin', bless um." And with that extraordinary mixture of feelings which women shower on men when they begin to love them, Miss McGee regarded Robert at once as a totally incapable child to be led and thought for and taken care of, and as a grand great thinker in whose footprints she was not worthy to tread. She looked up to him and down at him at one and the same time. "He's thinkin'," she said to herself on the nights when Robert's disagreeable-

ness was most to the fore. "He's got the great grand book in his moind an' he's nursin' ut, God bless um." And she sat opposite him at the little oblong table, perfectly contented to be dull. If he didn't care to talk—well then, all right. If he wished to drop an observation—all the better. It was sufficient happiness for Miss McGee to have him there beside her, and while he was nursing, not any great grand book at all but his disappointment with the world and his hatred of life, she was turning over in her mind projects like this. "I wonder, would he let me fix his sta'ackens fer um, the bo'oy! Would I ast um—or would I wait till he feels happier in his moind . . ."

Years seemed to be blotted out in Miss McGee's soul as she sat watching Robert. She loved him like an aunt, like a wife, like a mother, like a sister—anyway, so that she might have him there close beside her, eating the meal she had prepared for him, and growing rested by her fireside. In the late days of 1917 Miss McGee was very happy. She had never been happier in her life than now when Robert came tossed into her fireside as a bit of wreckage comes tossed on to the mainland by the furious waves.

Miss McGee made a far better business of life than Robert did. She didn't question things. She just took what came, and except in acute moments when she wished she were dead, she didn't complain—even to herself. As to boredom, she was immune from it. She had been inoculated with the virus so early in life that she could nurse a case of the most malignant boredom and not even fear infection. Miss McGee always had had a hard time, and she reaped the benefits of it. While Robert harked back to the better days he had known—and bitterly regretted them, Miss McGee hadn't any better days to hark back to (except perhaps the Tully Bardwell days, and *they* hadn't been perfect); therefore she took life as she found it, a pretty poor thing, and made the best of it: and you couldn't contrast Robert with his divine discontents and Miss McGee unaware even of the existence of such things without feeling that there is a good deal to be said for throwing a puppy into the water and letting him see if he can swim. Miss McGee had been chucked into life at the tenderest age and she knew the worst life can do by you. And consequently the *gaieté de malheur* which only at rare intervals could rise up and make itself felt in Robert was more or less a habitual state with Miss McGee. The tiniest things pleased and amused

her. A pat of sweet butter made her happy for a day. While Robert sat inwardly bemoaning his fate, Miss McGee was busy planning how she might spend her daily dollar and a half so that Robert might get the utmost benefit out of it. Through Robert Fulton Miss McGee had finally managed to slip out of herself—into the world, which is probably the first step on the road to heaven; while Robert, who never dreamed of the possibility of slipping out of himself through Miss McGee, shut himself tight up inside himself, closed every window in his soul, drew down the blinds—and sat silent and irresponsible. He was very unhappy.

There were times, however, when Miss McGee could lift Robert for a few moments right out of his despondency into a rational view of life; and when she did this it was usually by what he considered her entire unreasonableness. One evening, for instance, she began, out of a blue sky, to praise Mrs. Savourin. Now, one thing Robert had got into his head after some preliminary difficulty, and that was that the Janitress of Penelope's Buildings was anathema to Miss McGee. He didn't know why this was, and he didn't want to know. If he had been pressed for a definition, he would probably have answered, "Some silliness." But the fact he did know; and, knowing it, he kept off the subject of Mrs. Savourin altogether, knowing that it could only lead to trouble. When therefore he heard Miss McGee begin to open up in favor of Mrs. Savourin, nay, to laud her up to heaven as a foine good big-hear'rted woman, he came out of his abstraction with a jump. He drew up the blinds and opened the windows of his soul and sat looking out.

"I thought you didn't like her," said he abruptly.

Miss McGee took no notice of the remark.

"I wish ye'd been on the stair-head today, Mr. Fulton," said she, "when that young dope-man come back here fer to fetch his things."

She paused.

"Seems," she continued after a bit, "he's too young to punish someway. So the judge told um to git back home an' behave umself."

"A first offender," said Robert.

"I s'pose," said Miss McGee.

She considered.

"Sure, listen here," she went on after a pause. "That young fella there come on here fer his things an' Mrs. Savourin come

up the stair with um to let um in the flat. An' the toime they was comin' up she *ta'alked*. I wisth you could 'a' heard her."

Miss McGee paused once more.

"'Young bo'oy,' says she, 'have ye a mother?' 'Sure thing,' says he, 'I have a mother.' 'How will ye ruin yerself then,' says Mrs. Savourin to him, 'you with a mother, gittin' shut in a prison an' losin' the loight of the day! Can ye not be thinkin' of yer mother, young bo'oy, an' she waitin' an' watchin' at home . . . ?'"

"My, she spoke elegant a'alroight," Miss McGee said after a pause to let the words of elegance soak in—during which pause Robert said nothing. "Say, 'twas great to hear her, I tell you." And after another moment she went on. "Ah, 'tis good we all have in us, Mr. Fulton, eh, an' Mrs Savourin there has the good loike the rest of us. We've no ca'all to be har'rd on one another. God save us, we're all sinners!"

She sighed.

It did not strike Robert that Mrs. Savourin (as reported) had said anything very original or very remarkable. He listened unmoved to the further recital of what she had said. It seemed to him merely a repetition of the young man having or having had a mother—which seemed self-evident: for if he hadn't had a mother, how could he have been there? But to Miss McGee the fact of the young man having a mother was enough. She had tears in her eyes as she thought of it. Mrs. Savourin (who had spoken, it appeared, to the young man at the stair-head with an ever-increasing Penelopian audience) had hit the nail plumb on the head. There was a universal revulsion of feeling in her favor. "She ain't *bad*, God bless her," said the Penelopians (female made He them) to one another. "Did ye hear the way she got ut awf on that young bo'oy, eh? Sure, 'twas great!"

Miss McGee was of the opinion of the other Penelopians. All her feelings against Mrs. Savourin were swept away—dead and buried. There was no chance of a resurrection of Miss McGee's former feelings until the next time she caught Mrs. Savourin trying to entangle Robert in a conversation. Till then she was a Saint.

Robert sat and listened. It seemed to him that women are odd, contradictory, not-to-be-laid-hold-of creatures. He felt increasingly, as Miss McGee went on, that it would be impossible for any man to say what wind of doctrine would blow them about next, or in what direction it would blow them. Having

got it into his head that Miss McGee hated Mrs. Savourin for life, it was thoroughly disconcerting to his reasoning faculty to hear her say that the Janitress had a foine motherly hear't. The young man, it appeared, had shown himself moved. He had been drawn on to talk of his mother—also, according to Miss McGee, "a great big-hear'ted woman, God bless her." The simple name of "mother" had broken down every former assurance of the dope-man's guilt and every equal certainty of the Janitress's impropriety. The unknown mother had drawn all the female Penelopians into a partnership of one. As they watched the young man going into the flat to fetch his "things" and coming out of it again with the "things" under his arm, they had felt their hearts big with emotion. He was no longer a criminal to them, he was only a son. As Miss McGee told about it, tears came into her voice. "God have mer'rcy upon us all, Mr. Fulton," said she, "how do we know how much they was needin' the mooney, the poor souls? They moight 'a' been star'rvin' there an' us not knowin', eh. It's not findin' fault we should be anyway," she went on, "it's lookin' after God's creatures." She sighed deeply. "Sure, we're all the sinners," she said once more.

Robert gave it up. He thought of Miss McGee as she had been on the night of the visit of the "Pollis," the vision of her tear-stained face came over him, he remembered her clinging to his hand, the misery, the general dampness of the atmosphere, her inconsolableness at the *diss*-grace—and here she was, almost equally overwhelmed . . . on the other side.

"The poor bo'oy," she kept saying, "an' his mother far away sorrowin' and prayin' an' him next door to the prison. . . ."

She sat shaking her head, the big tears of sympathy in her eyes.

"He had the good face too, the bo'oy," said she, "he'll have been misled, bless um."

Yes, women are queer incomprehensible creatures. They are not-to-be-laid-hold-of things. Still, as Robert looked across at Miss McGee's tearful eyes, he did not feel the hatred he felt for the equally queer and incomprehensible things who came and shopped at his store. He sat eyeing Miss McGee—and suddenly the tenseness inside him seemed to give. He felt loose—relaxed, suddenly and unexpectedly contented and amused. He burst into a fit of laughter.

"What's the matter, eh?" said Miss McGee. The tears dried up in her eyes.

She looked across the table at him and she thought to herself, "Say, my, ef men ain't the *queer* things . . .!"

And then, as Robert continued to laugh, after a minute she laughed too . . . but not the same kind of laugh as Robert's.

"Miss McGee," said Robert, getting up—his voice was quite weak from laughter, "I must go."

"Must ye?" said Miss McGee. She felt regretful, as she always did, when he had to go.

"Yes," said Robert, "I must go. With the laugh had come inexplicably the impulse to go up-stairs and write. It was as if the laugh had been a key turned in the door of something, and as if the door had flown open at the turn.

"I must go," he said. "I've got to work a bit." He stood looking down at Miss McGee, and suddenly he felt very fond of her. "It's been a nice evening this," he said. "Thank you. I feel ever so much better. Good night."

And he held out his hand.

"Do ye now?" said Miss McGee. The news that he felt better almost made up for losing him an hour earlier than she had expected. "Well, come again," she said—and she put her hand in his.

As he went upstairs that night he felt better than he had felt for a long time past. "Queer," he said to himself as he fitted his key into the key-hole of his door, "aren't they *queer!*"—and, still laughing a little, he sat down at his table to write. It was bitterly cold, but he hardly felt it. The laugh had warmed him and set his blood flowing . . . he felt interested in being alive again.

But Miss McGee, as soon as she was left alone, turned grave. "Sure now, that bo'oy's onhappy," she said to herself. "I wonder now, has *he* a mother!" Her thoughts played about him as she made ready for bed. "Sure, they're the *queer* things, men, a'alroight," she said to herself. She felt no inclination to smile.

## CHAPTER XX

CHRISTMAS was to Miss McGee *the* time of the year. She looked forward to it as a child looks forward to a toy; and she looked upward to it as a Christian looks up to a rite. She loved Christmas—many of the happiest moments of her life were connected with Christmases past and gone;

and she adored and revered Christmas as the birthday of her Lord. These two feelings made Christmas to her a sweetly sacred thing; and, all through the year, whenever the thought of the Christmas Eve midnight service, to which she always went, came into her mind—her eyes filled with tears. Miss McGee was emotional, but all her feelings did not go out in emotion. To prove her joy in Christmas she would have done any practical thing: and no hardship would have been too great to go through to reach St. Patrick's on the night before Christmas Day.

Often as she was walking to her work through too-hot sunshine or too-cold wind, the vision of the brightly-lighted church would come before her eyes. She would see the child in the manger with the kneeling figure beside it; the figure of the old priest, Father O'Rourke (whom she loved and respected) would rise before her eyes . . . and she would see the acolytes coming slowly after the old priest, down the church, scattering as they went the thick intense perfume of the incense; she would see the faint blue smoke go up out of the censers; and she would hear the voices—like the voices of angels—coming from up above. And, when this happened, all the common and unclean things of daily life were blotted out from before Miss McGee's eyes, and it seemed to her as if she were alone with God. St. Patrick's represented to Miss McGee—home. When she went in through the great portals of the church she felt as if she were coming to rest in dear arms, to be comforted, consoled for the sorrows of life, as if she were about to receive promises of something to come, so great and so glorious that all present griefs paled before it as a tiny rushlight pales before the sun. Her religion was to Miss McGee something real, something not dimly connected with life but something that was knitted into life itself. She loved her religion so well that she could sometimes jest with it. She would use the name of God, not in vain, but as if He were a beloved friend. And when she did this there was something about Miss McGee that was infinitely young. She seemed tender and fresh in spite of her whitened hair and her lined brow. Out of her large eyes there seemed to look an eternal child; and on to her ugly mouth there would come a smile that made it beautiful. "Ye little black divil," as she said of herself, "what roight have *you* to be aloive!" And then she would say, "Sure, I'm a joke of God's . . ."—and laugh as a child laughs when it makes fun of its mother.

It was as they approached Christmas Day that a difference—a new one—made itself felt between Robert and Miss McGee. It was this time, perhaps, more a difference of what we call “class” than anything else. Robert viewed Christmas as the “educated” mostly do. He thought it a bore, a tiresome thing, a thing to be passed over lightly as a birthday is passed over when its possessor is no longer young. He had always viewed Christmas that way without thinking much about it one way or the other; and now that the Arundel Market expected its salesman to stay till ten all the nights of the Christmas week (without compensation) his views on the Feast grew clearer and more acutely outlined. “Christmas,” he said to Miss McGee at her first mention of the day, “what’s Christmas to me? I have to stay at the store till ten o’clock.”

And the subject was dropped.

Miss McGee regretted this, but she didn’t see her way to alter it. Her view of Christmas was the *poor* view. Christmas is the poor man’s treat just as the Christian religion is the poor man’s (and the poor woman’s) religion. Miss McGee thought of the birthday of Christ as a comforting thing, as a breathing-space in the toil of the year, as a religious festival and also as the occasion to go and “blow” all the money you have. Her point of view was the eminently religious point of view; it was the point of view of the alabaster box: and Robert’s wasn’t. He went on looking at our Lord’s birthday as he always had done—but rather more so. He regarded his having to stay at the Arundel Meat and Dairy Produce Market until ten o’clock at night without a penny’s compensation as an outrage. If by any means he could have called down a piece of the Divine Fire and set it against the dairy counter—he would have done so; not being able to do this, he put Christmas out of his mind as far as he could and refused to say one word about it.

Miss McGee therefore found herself as lonely as she usually was at Christmas-time. Mrs. Garry each year sent an invitation to let bygones be bygones and for Katie to come and eat hot turkey as of old; but Miss McGee sturdily refused. “I ain’t a beggar,” she went on saying, “an’ I *ain’t* comin’, an’ you kin tell yer mother so, Rose Garry.” What Rose reported to Mrs. Garry is not known. The plate of cold turkey rose up before Miss McGee more distinctly at Christmas-time than at any other season of the year.

This year, as she sat sewing at her customers’ houses, her

mind was full of a plan which she wanted to carry out. "He's nowhere to go, I guess," she said to herself, "an' sure thing he'll be lonesome, the bo'oy. Why wouldn't we have a little bit of Christmas to ourselves, eh? We'll *keep* the holiday."

The difficulty was that for the past two years Miss McGee had invited Cassie Healy down from her attic to share the feast. (It was a feast, for Mrs. Barclay always came out strong at Christmas-time.) "The poor article," as Miss McGee said of Miss Healy. "She ain't got nothin' an' nobody cares. I want to have her come an' play in *my* yar'rd." Miss Healy had come every time she was asked, and now the difficulty in Miss McGee's mind was that Cassie was not quite "good enough" for Robert. She debated the point a good deal in her mind; and she finally came to the conclusion that it had to be. Robert must just put up with it. "I ain't goin' to let the article be lonesome all by her lone," Miss McGee said to herself, "not on Christmas-noight, an' that's one sure thing. Ef she does stick her knoife in her mouth an' she ain't got no par'rty manners . . . well, she ain't, an' that's all about ut."

"Ye'll not moind Miss Healy bein' there," she said to Robert by way of preparing him for his fellow-guest's deficiencies. "She's a bit awf—but ye'll not *moind*." Robert said he wouldn't, and the Christmas party being thus settled, nothing remained to be fixed but the details in the hostess's mind.

Up to Christmas Eve, and even on Christmas Eve, Miss McGee had work. This was unusual; for at the Christmas time of year Miss McGee was apt to be "laid awf," as she said, with a consequent shortage of money. But this year a customer had wanted her to "fix over a lot of stuff"; and Miss McGee had thus been able to earn her dollar and a half a day all through December, up to Christmas Eve itself. It was immediately after lunch on the 24th that Miss McGee left this lady's flat with a full day's pay in her wrist-bag purse. She had only worked for half the day; but she had put the last stitch in and had even packed the lady's trunk (she was leaving for the South that night): and the lady, in what to Miss McGee was an astonishing outburst of generosity, had insisted on paying for the whole day's work. Miss McGee had demurred—she was punctiliously and even rather foolishly honest; but the lady had insisted. "Of *course!*" she kept saying—and at last, nothing loth, Miss McGee had accepted the money.

It had been a pleasant three weeks. Miss McGee was sorry it was over. The lady was a new customer, to whom

Miss McGee had been recommended by someone, and this was the first séance of sewing Katie had ever held in her apartment. It was a "real" apartment, a place furnace-heated by a Janitor, with a big bath-room, and electric light. If the lady had been other than she actually was Miss McGee might have felt a sense of envy—a sort of "why should *she* have it all!" as she was accustomed to feel at Culross. But it was impossible to feel that way about this customer—though Miss McGee would have found it difficult to tell you why. Miss Eileen Martyn—for that was her name—was in fact more or less of a mystery to Miss McGee. She wasn't, in the strict sense, a lady at all. She worked for her bread, and therefore she was a "Business Woman." But—here was the problem—she seemed, like Robert, to have had an elegant education. The way she made her living was by means of this elegant education—she wrote. And writing, in the eyes of Miss McGee, was in itself a superior proceeding, appertaining to elegance, and making the individual who plied such a trade, not a Business Woman nor a lady, but something nameless between the two. Miss McGee sometimes wondered if here, in the Fréjus Mansions she had struck "Woman." Robert's remarks about "Woman" molding the Dominion came more than once to her mind as she listened to the lady's calm equable accent—not unlike Robert's own—holding forth on some totally unfeminine question. For, here was another odd thing, this customer talked about all sorts of things that Miss McGee's other customers never came near. She was interested in politics, in what the municipality didn't do for the town, in what it *should* do, in housing problems, in the life of the poor.

Miss McGee, in conversation with Miss Martyn, varied between respect and familiarity. Sometimes she thought of her as "Woman"—and then she was respectful; sometimes she thought of her merely as one who earns a living—and then she was familiar. But which ever way she spoke—and another odd thing was that the customer didn't seem to care—she found herself being more than usually communicative. To Miss McGee's own profound astonishment she had caught herself sometimes during these three weeks talking of all sorts of things—of Tully—of Mrs. Morphy—of Dan and Maggie Chambers. Miss Martyn was immensely interested in all Miss McGee let fall. She encouraged her to speak by being a very first-class listener; everything seemed to be grist that came to her mill. She liked hearing about Penelope's Buildings, and—unlike Robert—she

quite took to the subject of Mitt, whose name, in an unguarded moment, Miss McGee had let fall.

"It seems to me a pity you let him go," Miss Martyn had said at the conclusion of the Mitt tale; "you'd far better have been married, Miss McGee."

She spoke in a perfectly business-like manner; but still, "Woman" as she evidently must be, she seemed to hold the usual opinion that woman is but man's 'appendage.

"Well," Miss McGee had answered—and it was on this occasion that she showed the first-fruits of the seed Robert had allowed to fall upon her mind—"I *moight* be better as I am. Mitt was foine to look at sure, but he would've been an expinse a'alroight to keep."

There was about this remark none of the feverish heat that attended Miss McGee's asseverations to Mrs. Barclay on the superiority of virginity. She spoke quietly—just as one speaks when one means things.

After a pause Miss Martyn said, "Perhaps!"—also quietly, as if she, too, were assured of the truth of the observation. And it was "the Lady's" prompt agreement with this point of view that led Miss McGee to the conclusion that she had "saw the wor'rld."

"Sure thing she's no fool!" said Miss McGee to herself. Out loud she said, "There's safety in the single loife."

The subject dropped.

As Miss McGee came out of the Fréjus Mansions and walked along the sidewalk she felt distinctly sorry that the Miss Martyn episode was over. She made her way to St. Hubert's Boulevard where she had some shopping to put through, and as she went she turned things over in her mind. She guessed that the Lady's interest in Penelope's Buildings was not wholly disinterested. "Sure, she'll be a choild among us takin' notes," Miss McGee (who had Scotch friends and who sometimes picked up their remarks incorrectly) said to herself. "She's the choild a'alroight, be-lieve *me*," she further said, making her way along. She thought how sympathetic the Lady (for by this absurd name Miss McGee had already begun to represent Miss Martyn to herself) had been when she had been telling her things in her life-history. "Sure," she said, "she's welcome to all *I* kin tell her fer her books." And she laughed a somewhat mirthless laugh as she thought how impossible it would be for anyone to make any book at all out of *her* life. "A little black divil loike me," she thought, and she laughed rather mirthlessly

again as she went further. The thought that she was useless as "copy" rather depressed her—she would have liked to be a heroine of romance: yet it also rather consoled her for what she felt had been indiscretions on her part. Miss Martyn had been kindly—excessively: as they had sat sewing together, Miss McGee had expanded. "Sure, I never told anyone so much before," she had said to the Lady once. And the Lady, with a queer kind of laugh, had replied, "Oh, it's safe with me." She had dropped her bit of sewing, Miss McGee remembered, as she said that, and had gone back to her typewriter.

Now that was over—for the time. Miss McGee hoped she might go back some day to the Lady. She had liked being in the little warm apartment, so simple and yet so charming—in its unexpectedness; for it was very unexpected to Miss McGee with the relics of travel the lady had scattered all about. *She* had traveled and it had had a good effect on *her* in spite of Robert's opening to his book—'Whether travel is to be commended as a necessarily educative and enlightening influence is perhaps a debatable point.' That fazed Miss McGee, as she said. Why was travel not good for everyone—*Why?* And yet she never dared to put the question point-blank to Robert in case he should reply in words of ten syllables, and she remain more puzzled than ever. Well, anyway the time at the Fréjus Mansions was at an end; there were no more of the simple good meals the Lady had so unexpectedly cooked . . . for the present. Miss McGee had appreciated the Lady's kindness and interest, she had enjoyed the peaceful friendliness of the days, the click of the lady's typewriter in the adjoining room had been interesting—"it's the queer loife sure fer a woman!" Miss McGee had said to herself. There had been scattered scraps of paper lying about all the time, and once Miss McGee had seen the scrap-basket, as she called it, positively brimming: and that day the Lady had had tired eyes, and there had been just a suggestion of racked nerves sometimes in her short answers. However, on the whole she had been delightful. Her occasional unreasoning moments of gayety had appealed to Miss McGee; and then her knowledge of the ways of the world and her lack of interest in them, her whole attitude to Canada, half-respectful, half-patronizing—but not at all like Robert's—and the aroma she constantly gave off of being, well, different from anything Miss McGee had ever seen before—all this puzzled Miss McGee and intrigued her curiosity.

"Sure she's neither flesh nor fowl," Miss McGee would say to herself, watching this curious phenomenon leave her typewriter and make her way to the gas-stove in the tiny kitchen. "She's the Business Girl that knows how to cook, an' she's the elegantest moind, an' she don't seem to *care* . . ."

This was the peculiarity of the Lady. She didn't seem to care for any of Miss McGee's fixed criterions of life. She seemed to regulate things by some mysterious unexplained rule of her own. All Miss McGee's ways of thinking, her views of things in general and of women in particular (except that they should be married) she seemed to wave aside. Yes, she certainly must be "Woman," and no mistake about it.

As Miss McGee came wandering home from the Fréjus Mansions with the surprising unearned increment of a dollar and a half in her pocket she kept on being sorry that this odd pleasant little time with the Lady was at an end; she kept hoping that another such time might come very soon. The Lady was certainly interested in her clothes—but even that was in an odd way. She cared—and she didn't care. Altogether she was a puzzle, and the name Miss McGee had struck out, "the Lady," was a sign and symptom of the puzzlement. It meant that she wasn't the Business Girl she seemed to be, and that, although she earned money and didn't seem to be married—though her talk was often that of a much-married woman—she wasn't the complete woman of leisure that Mrs. Glassridge was. She had a nice voice and a nice way of speaking and Miss McGee was sensitive to such things. Yes, "the Lady" was a suitable name. Miss McGee repeated it to herself as she walked along—and liked it.

"Sure, I could have that ef I wanted ut," she said suddenly to herself as some smart cakes of soap marked "Three a quarter—While they Last" in a cut-rate drug-store caught her eye. "I could have 'em an' never miss the mooney!" It was an unusual thought. She fingered the dollar and a half as it lay in her wrist-bag. "I could have 'em sure," she thought to herself. It gave her a sense of power.

She didn't buy the soap, however. She looked at it for some time and decided that there were other things she would like better. She turned into St. Hubert's Boulevard and began looking at the shops there, all decked up for their Christmas sales. "The things is noice a'alroight," Miss McGee said to herself now. She began to loiter and to look in at all the shop-windows. "It must be foine to be rich, eh!" she thought:

and as she stood gazing in at the florist's just round the corner from the cut-rate druggist's, the dollar and a half suddenly seemed a pitiful thing. The sense of power decreased. "Them pale yella roses is foine!" Miss McGee thought to herself. "An' say, see them violets, eh!" She wondered what it would feel like to be Mrs. Glassridge going into that florist's with Andrew at her back and saying casually and carelessly, "Send me twelve of them pink Killarneys. An' say, make me up a bunch of mixed carnations—an' weave in two of them Beauties there." *That* would be a sense of power. Fancy being able to do things like that without a thought of the financial consequences! Miss McGee stood outside the sheet of heavy plate-glass that divided her from the flowers and tried to think she was smelling the rich perfume of the Beauty roses. There they stood, magnificently plutocratic, over-long-stemmed, too big, taking up far more than their share of the room—arrogant overbearing flowers. But Miss McGee admired them whole-heartedly. "Sure, they'd look foine on me table tomorrow!" she said to herself—and she walked on further.

After a bit—just half a block down—she went past the Great North-Eastern Lunch Counter of the Dominion, and she imagined Robert seated in the window looking out at the traffic and the eternal passers-by. All that she could know about Robert she knew. Everything that he did was interesting to her. In the evenings, so as to share his life as well as she could, she would question him as to where he went for his lunch and what he had—and who waited on him, and whether he ever spoke to her. Miss McGee had a conviction that nothing could uproot that no man can be happy for long without a *young* woman; and she often tried to trip Robert up into an admission—which if he had made it would have rendered her an unhappy woman. But so are woman made. As Robert said "Queer!"

Presently Miss McGee came to Regalia's Irish store—and there she stopped. In the window were collars of Irish crochet, and table centers worked round with Irish lace. There were fine linen handkerchiefs with initials embroidered in the corners, and there were tablecloths and sheets—and towels—bath-towels. Miss McGee gazed as intently as she had gazed at the roses a block before. "Sure," she said to herself with her eyes on the big bath-towels, "it's how many years I been wantin' a towel loike that fer meself!" It was at Mrs. Glassridge's that Miss McGee had formed this aristocratic aspiration.

"Sure," she said, "it's the grand big towel I'm wantin' to cover me over when I git out of me . . . basin!" And at that she laughed: but it wasn't a laugh with any special merriment in it—and she edged away from the shop. "Ireland's It anyway," she said to herself, recalling the lace and the embroidery, and the beautiful fine linen. "Ireland's It." She kept turning to see the last of the Irish store, "It's a grand country Ireland," her heart said to her, "it kin beat the band every toime, thank God. An' ef I don't never have a big towel to wrap me around in before I die I guess I kin live without ut." Her meditations were uprooted here by her bumping into a large gentleman who was hurrying along. "Par'rdon *me!*" she said. "He moight've said 'Ye're welcome!'" she said to herself as she crossed the road to the ten-cent store opposite. "The manners is goin' the down-hill road sinst *I* was young." With this admission that she was getting old Miss McGee turned into the ten-cent store to buy some handkerchiefs for Mrs. Morphy to give to Dan. "Bless the bo'oy," Mrs. Morphy had said. "He's on the bum an' I want to give um somethin' to cheer um up. He's been drunk these three weeks past an' he ain't got the cent fer Christmas. It's koindness he's needin', God help um." Miss McGee on the whole sympathized with these sentiments. "Well, I guess we kin stand um that," she had said: and now, as she entered the stifling, packed, noisy ten-cent store, everything faded from her mind except to get the best value she could for Mrs. Morphy's money. "Sure I'll *die* before I git near the fixin's section," she said to herself, as she pushed her way slowly along. The Lady's calm warm atmosphere, the majestic Beauty roses, the all-enveloping bath-towel, Ireland's supremacy, the rudeness of the present day and generation, all these things vanished from her mind, and there was left only one fixed determination—to cleave the human obstacle and reach her aim—the notion counter.

When Miss McGee got home it was late. She stopped to pass the time of day with Mrs. Savourin (about whom the flavor of "mother" still hung) and then she went up-stairs to light her fire and make herself her cup of tea, and wash and dress and make ready for the midnight service. Rose would be coming for her—Ag too, perhaps. Ag was on the point of getting engaged, "the first of the bunch," as Miss McGee put it to herself, and the fragrance of such an operation enveloped her. Miss McGee had never taken much interest in Ag;

but now that Ed Furlong had arisen, she felt that she was a very reputable niece and that she was going to prove herself worthy of the name of woman (but not "Woman"). Yes, on the whole she hoped Ag might come too, and then they would all go to the service together, and in the midst of the light and beauty she would not need to feel she was alone.

As she sat drinking the solitary cup of tea her thoughts wandered to Robert. "The poor *bo'oy*," she thought, "him workin' there on his tired feet an' me settin' comf'table here." The thought went through her like a knife that he must be wearied through, body and soul, that Christmas Eve was no Christmas Eve for him. "The choild!" she said—and a wave of infinite tenderness went through her. She would have given up her midnight service for him, she would have given up her joy in Christmas—her life—her God . . . she would have stood on her own tired feet until she dropped, and thought it bliss. . . .

It was as she was sitting over this cup of tea on Christmas Eve that Miss McGee recognized that Robert was more to her than God. It suddenly came upon her that Robert *was* God to her. She felt as if she were a cup filled full to the brim with something infinitely precious—that her love for Robert was overflowing the edges of the cup and running down the outside of the cup and falling on quite extraneous things. She loved the world, as she sat alone at her little oblong table, life, all the people in the world—just because she loved Robert. She felt as if the world were not big enough for her love to take to itself. She felt as if her love were infinite—as if it had been from the beginning, and would go on to the end—

When Rose came in she put her arms round her and pressed her to her bosom. This was a part of her love—she embraced her with all the rest: and, as she held the young girl in her arms and felt the young warmth of her . . . a spasm of jealousy shot through her. The universal love was shattered. "I'm *glad* he ain't come tonoight," she said to herself. "I'm *glad* he's workin' an' ain't here with us—" Out loud she said "where's Ag, eh? I thought she'd maybe come with ye." And Rose's answer that Ag was gone to the midnight service with Ed's folks meant nothing to her now. She felt, as Rose's voice came to her from a long way off, that she had escaped a danger by Robert not being there. She looked into Rose's fresh young face and she felt triumphant that Robert was not seeing it . . . and at the same time she felt ashamed. They went over to the church together.

## CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Robert came out of the Arundel Meat Store on this same Christmas Eve it was eleven o'clock and almost Christmas Day. Already the bells of some of the churches had begun to chime—Christmas was in the air. It was cold, but not so bitterly cold as it had been all day long. Christmas Eve had been one of those dark gloomy waiting sort of days that come in Canada before a snow-fall. And now, as Robert put his rubbered feet on the step that led from the Arundel Market to the side-walk, he felt that it was snow-covered and soft. A thick padding of untrodden snow lay on it—Robert was the first to leave the store after cleaning-up time—and the world beyond the step was an indistinct white world, the objects in it only visible as in a dream through the fast-falling veil of snow.

Robert was past complaining. He was tired, so tired, that his one thought was bed. He had been in the store all day long from eight in the morning, busy all day long (with his lunch-time cut in half), turning, whenever his own counter did not need his services, to the meat counter on his right or to the fish and poultry counter to his left in order to give first aid to the over-driven salesmen there. All day long he had worked in uncongenial substances. The chickens and turkeys were livid to the touch; the slimy fish made him shiver; the soft luscious dampness of the beefsteak gave him a feeling of nausea—he loathed the great white slabs on which the beefsteaks lay, all running with raw red juices.

He had done his best. He had seen around him all day long over-driven and frantic salesmen who would have done as much for him; and he had turned to with a will, weighed birds, recommended beasts, earned what the Arundel Meat Market could never have repaid him if it had tried for a year.

He had been slightly mollified towards fate by hearing from a fellow-salesman that all were to receive (as every Christmas, only Robert did not know it) at the end of the week a "bonus" on their salaries. He knew quite well that this bonus was only Latin for the Arundel Directors sliding out of their Canadian debts—but all the same the thought of having twenty dollars in his pocket to put by or spend at once, to do anything he liked with, mollified him in spite of his better sense.

He felt exactly as every employee in the store felt, and as every Director knew every employee would feel. He felt, as he walked through the store on his way out of it, much as Miss McGee felt when she came walking home from the Lady's fingering the unexpected dollar and a half in her purse.

When Robert stepped on to the soft cushion-ey side-walk, a feeling of thankfulness that he had seen the last of the Arundel Market for thirty-six hours at least filled his heart. He had not gone a dozen steps on his way when he came to the very flower-shop that Miss McGee had stood in front of earlier in the day. He went past it, his head bent to prevent the softly-driving snow from blinding his eyes, but he had not gone twenty yards further, when something made him pause. He had hardly been aware of passing the flower-shop, but something inside him must have noticed, and this something now called to him "Stop!" He did stop and, after a moment's thought, he went back till he reached the shop, and then he stood before it looking earnestly in at its window.

The window had changed its appearance since Miss McGee had looked longingly into it earlier in the day. The arrogant Beauty roses were all gone, the clustering violets in their green bowl had disappeared. The Killarneys had gone their way—the pale orchids which had formed a coup d'œil in the middle of the window were nowhere to be seen. Nothing was left but some roses in the corner—small deep-colored roses, the color of red wine when it is held up to the light, short-stemmed, with a clear glossy foliage . . . and the roses were pointed in shape, as yet in bud, and the texture of the petals was velvety on one side and satiny on the other. Robert was completely ignorant of the nomenclature of the modern flower. He knew that these were roses, and that was all he knew. After a second's hesitation he entered the store and, not being accustomed to enter any store except the Arundel Market, he stood near the door, hesitatingly, waiting rather humbly (as people wait when they haven't much money in their pockets) for the "young lady" in the background to come forward and conduct a sale.

When Robert had asked how much the roses were and had heard what the amount was, he was taken aback. Not ever having bought flowers in the Dominion he was unconscious of the prices frost and snow must exact before they can produce what mere sunlight does—for nothing. He stood and looked rather wistfully at the roses, and with the hand that he had slipped out of his old worsted glove, he fingered the loose

money he had at the bottom of his trousers' pocket. He said nothing.

"See here," said the young lady; she was in a hurry, tired to death, as anxious to get rid of Robert as he could possibly be to go. "See here! If you wa'ant them roses have 'em—quick. They're the la'ast we got an' this store has to close up—right *now*. You kin have 'em fer . . ."—and she mentioned a very moderate sum.

It was a moderate sum all right, as the young lady would have said, but it wasn't moderate to Robert. However, he somehow felt that, sensible or not sensible, those roses he must have. Even had the young lady not brought down the price at all he would have had them; and now, with no further hesitation, he brought his hand out of his trousers' pocket, and, drawing off his other worsted glove, he counted the sum into the young lady's hand.

It was a new sensation to be counting money into someone else's hand—and getting the article yourself!

"Wait jes' a minnut, eh," said the young lady. "I got to bawx 'em for you."

She retired to the back of the shop where, near midnight as it was, wrapping and "bawxing" and addressing and delivering over parcels to tired errand-boys was still going on. As Robert stood in the front shop by the window, with the snow melting off him and running down and making a pool about his feet and the crusted snow on his eyebrows and lashes distilling itself into drops and bathing his cheeks, it suddenly came over him that Christmas is the enjoyment of the very few at the bitter expense of the great many.

"That's why we don't like it," he said to himself—and as he said it, the truth came home with force and certainty. "Poor souls!" he thought, as he looked at the tired faces of the young ladies bawxing the flowers, and at the black-circled eyes of the drenched and half-frozen errand-boys. "Poor souls!—they"—and as it came over him that he was one of them he changed the "they" to "we"—"*we* bear the brunt of the Christmas joy." And he was getting lost in his reflections, standing in the pool of melted snow he himself had made, when the young lady came back with the flowers wrapped in cotton batting, all tissue-papered and bawxed, in a fit condition to face frost and snow.

"Guess we'll have all the snow we want this time, eh!" the young lady said with a tired smile. "Why yes, it's late but

we kin close up now, thank Gawd! Gee, Lew, git them shades down, eh, an' hurry—rush," she cried to an invisible someone in the background—and then to Robert. "You got them roses low-priced a'alright. Good value, eh? Well, you're welcome."

She closed the doors after him, and the shades came down with a rattle over the plate glass window. She too, poor young lady, once the mess at the back of the store was cleaned up, was free for thirty-six hours.

As Robert made his way further along the heavy snow-covered streets after leaving the flower-shop his spirits were high. They seemed to have flown up in some mysterious way. "She'll like these," he said to himself more than once. "They'll make her happy, poor soul." He hugged the box to him, and almost seemed to feel the velvety softness of the deep-red petals within the box and to inhale the fragrance of the flowers—a sweet clear far-reaching fragrance that made one hold one's breath so as to possess more and more of it. "She'll like them," he said, "they'll give her a minute's pleasure . . . ."

The image of Miss McGee kept coming up again and again before him as he went hurrying along through the soft obstinately-falling snow. He thought of her as she had looked on the night of the visit of the "Pollis" (and all that had seemed ridiculous in her on that occasion seemed to fade away) and he thought of her totally unreasoning change of front just because the Janitress had spoken to the young man of his mother (and there, too, she seemed merely pathetic). He saw her as she sat listening to the reading of his Canada Book, her face framed in her hands, her eyes intent, her whole body absolutely still—every muscle listening and trying to understand. He thought of her as he had so often seen her—anxious to please—wanting to share . . . and it came on him with a swift realization of the truth that he had a *friend* in Miss McGee. He was drenched with the wet snow by the time he reached Penelope's Buildings, and, as he went up the stairs he left a little hard cake of wet snow on every step (which later would slowly melt and run as little separate rivulets, converging gradually into one stream, down the stairs to make a pool in the hall) and he felt that the snow had penetrated his ancient rubbers and reached through his old boots to his feet, and that his feet were ice-cold and stony. But, as he reached Miss McGee's flat and, stooping down at her door, laid his box of flowers across her threshold, he was happy. He was quite un-

reasonably and unreasoningly happy. He felt even high-spirited—for him.

"*She'll* like them," he said to himself once more. And he reflected that soon she would be coming across the threshold for her midnight service and that she would find the flowers there, waiting for her; through the badly-fitting door he even faintly heard the sound of her voice, talking to Rose. "*She'll* like them . . .!"

To the tune of that he went further up-stairs—and went supperless to bed.

"Never mind," he said to himself consolingly as he undressed—he had got into the lonely way of talking to, and consoling, himself. "Never mind. You can have your breakfast to-morrow—any time you like. . . ."

He turned over in his not-too-comfortable bed, and for once he felt thankful for it. He lay quietly awhile, worn-out, thinking faintly of the day that was past, thank God, for ever. Then, to the sound of the Christmas bells, he fell asleep. Down-stairs Miss McGee, with the sound of the same Christmas bells in her ears, was making her way to the midnight Mass—with Robert's red roses in her heart and her thanks to God rising out of her soul. As the two of them turned out of Penelope's Buildings and into the snowy night, she looked sideways at Rose's clear-cut face with the 'softly-falling flakes of snow between her and it. "Ef I was young," she thought. "Ef I was *young* again." And with the thought of that lying by the thought of the roses in her heart she passed through St. Patrick's big door—into the light.

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## CHAPTER XXII

IT was towards the end of January that the next thing happened. Up to that time it was merely a case of the common round and the trivial task not giving anyone anything they wanted to ask. But at the end of the month the monotony was broken up once more for Robert and for Miss McGee, by a Lecture. If this does not sound very enthralling a break to those who have things happening every day of their lives, it must be remembered that any change was to our two a welcome thing: a Lecture—even that!—may assume rainbow hues and become iridescent in the imagination of those who are starving for mental sustenance.

One day as Miss McGee came downstairs five minutes late for her work, she met the letter-man, as the Penelopians usually called him, on his rounds. She often did this, but as she expected nothing from him—except her one letter at Christmas-time—she usually passed him with a cheerful “Good mornin’, Mr. Bellerose,” or “a cold mornin’, eh,” or “a war’rm day, God save us,” as the case might be. Mr. Bellerose would reply, “Mais, sure, Missus,” or with any other *Canadien* phrase that might occur to him. And they would pass on their separate ways. This morning, however, he stopped, “Attendez, Missus, wait,” said he: and, ferreting in the bundle in his hand, he produced or rather shucked off a letter. “Pour vous,” he said, “bonne chance!” And he went further up.

Miss McGee stood with the letter in her hands. She was so astonished at receiving it she couldn’t get further. She had had Doll’s letter—this couldn’t be from Doll. Beta Hendricks sent her a card at Christmas-time: that card had come. What was this! Miss McGee never heard from anyone else. If anyone wished to communicate with her, or wished her services for any particular day, she (it was always a she) found out where her work had taken her and telephoned there. “Say, is Miss McGee there? Can I speak with her?” Miss McGee would go to the telephone, more or less apologetically (to signify that it was not *her* telephone and she knew it), and the bargain would be struck. She never got letters from anyone. For all the benefits she received at the hands of the Dominion Postal Service she might have been a native of Wa-Wa, Central Africa.

She stood still on the stair making herself later than ever, and turned the unopened letter over and over in her hands. She looked at the sides and back as earnestly as she regarded the front; she glued her eyes to it with such persistence that it seemed almost as if she sought to tear the secret from the gummed-up envelope. “For the love of God!” she kept ejaculating. She slowly descended the stair, gazing at the envelope all the time, and it was not till she reached the side-walk that she could make up her mind to open it. “*My!*” she said several times as she took a hair-pin from her hair (what do men do without them?) and neatly slit the envelope from side to side. As she did this—her hands were positively trembling with excitement—she never noticed that she was holding the envelope asquint. Two green cardboard tickets slipped out of the envelope and fell with a small thud on the frost-bound earth below.

"Well!" said Miss McGee, stooping to pick them up.

"Well," she said once more, as she was picking them up: and then, to make things square, she repeated, "For the love of God, eh . . .!"

The green cardboard tickets were two admissions to a Lecture to be given the same evening at the Hall of Regalia's "Art Circle." On each ticket was stamped "Row A"; and in the right-hand corner of each ticket was printed in smaller type "two dollars."

Miss McGee stood regarding the green pasteboard in a state of stupefaction. In all her varied experience of life such a thing had never come her way before. She looked at the envelope again. Yes, it was correct: "Miss McGee, Penelope's Buildings, Corner O'Neil Street and Drayton Place, Regalia City." She stood stock-still on the side-walk, utterly oblivious of the biting wind that swept round and through her, and she gazed, first at the envelope and then at the tickets, as if she wanted to gaze beyond them where elucidation might be.

Mr. Bellerose passed her on his way down again. "Frawsty eh," said he, once more offering a comment on the weather in his kindly French wish to be agreeable. "Fait mal au rheumateque, you bet,"—and he laughed and tapped his leg.

"I s'pose," Miss McGee said absent-mindedly. Had she been her usual self, she would have recollected that Mr. Bellerose had had sciatica, and that he liked his sciatic nerve to be asked after. As it was she merely watched him go further on his rounds with his brisk, only-slightly-halting step: and, as he turned the corner and disappeared round O'Neil Street, she roused herself.

"My God," she said, out loud—her language, when Robert was out of hearing, tended occasionally to the same vivid coloring as Mrs. Savourin's, though without Mrs. Savourin's brazen reds and screaming yellows—"My *Gawd*, Sir, I'll be all behoid toime."

And she went scuttling round to O'Neil Street after Mr. Bellerose, and jumped on to the street-car that went to Prince Leopold Avenue, where her day's work was; and, gazing absent-mindedly out of the window after she was seated, she saw Mr. Bellerose just turning the corner down the next street that lay parallel to Drayton Place.

It wasn't until she was in sight of the house she was bound for that it occurred to her to look inside the envelope once more, and then—there sure was a scrap of paper that had escaped

her eyes the first time she opened the envelope. The tickets had been wrapped inside this scrap of paper, and they, being heavy, had fallen out of the slanted envelope and left the bit of paper inside.

Miss McGee drew the paper out. It was a slip torn hastily off a pad, and on it was written in a hand that had seen much service. "Dear Miss McGee, Can you make use of these? I am called out of town on business, and I cannot use them myself. The speaker is a poet and an Irish one, so perhaps he may interest you. Good enjoyment, if you go! I shall want some work done soon, so I hope to see you before very long. E. M." The communication bore all the marks of haste, and the initials at the end were all but unreadable. They struck no light in Miss McGee's mind, and on the sidewalk of Prince Leopold Avenue after she left the car she came to another stand-still, almost as determined as the one on the stairs of Penelope's Buildings.

"Sure, my, things is *quare!*" she said to herself, ruminating. And then, with a slap of her hand on her thigh, she said out loud, "Be all the Saints, 'tis her!"

Of course it was the Lady. Who else could it be? The initials were Eileen Martyn; and who but the lady would have written that way, or written at all, or ever thought of sending the tickets! Her ways were *quare*, and she was *quare*—but Miss McGee rather liked her. "Sure 'twill be the treat," she said to herself, putting back the tickets and the note into the envelope, and the envelope into her purse. "'Twill be the treat a'alroight," she said; and then, posting along to make up for lost time as well as she could, she began to revolve matters in her head. They needed a deal of revolving.

The first thing to do was to placate the customer. Twenty-three minutes out of the legitimate day were gone, and Miss McGee did not wish (as things were) to have to stay and make them up. The first thing then was to get things off the bias, as Miss McGee herself said. She did that. It was not easy to do but she did it. Miss McGee could overthrow the box of dressmaking pins by an untoward movement of her elbow, and then, by the simple ingenuousness of the tone in which she said "Did I do that!" cheat the customer into (almost) believing that she had done it herself. When anyone can do that he, or she, or it, is capable of any diplomatic move. By midday, not only was the lateness of Miss McGee's arrival dispersed from the Prince Leopold customer's mind, but

she was willing—nay eager—that Miss McGee should go into town and get a bit of stuff that was declared to be indispensable for the furthering of the work. “I hate to go,” Miss McGee had said. “I jes’ hate to loose yer toime, Madam.” (This customer was “Madam.”) “But ef we don’t git that piece right-away I guess yer gown’s goin’ to look a koind of a has-been to the end.” She paused on this, and then she added in a soft persuasive tone, “I can’t bear you should look out of stoyle, Madam.”

“Say, that McGee is one good woman, be-lieve *me*,” said the customer to a female relative as they sat down to lunch. “She’s skipped out, gawn running awf to fetch some sample she wants. I guess she has my interests at heart all right. She’ll work her head awf to see me looking good. She’s an ar’tist.”

Meanwhile the ar’tist was speeding in the direction of the Arundel Meat Market there to hold a conference with Robert.

“Say, kin you come?” said she in an eager whisper over the glass-covered counter. “It’s goin’ to be *some* lecture I tell you. An’ *some* po-ut, be-lieve *me*.”

Robert was willing. He leaned over the counter, looking very hygienic and very unlike himself in his white suit, and he said in a low voice, “Who is it that’s going to speak?”

But that Katie did not know. It was a Po-ut and an Irish one and who could want better than that. “*She* (Miss McGee did not further particularize Miss Martyn) said it was a po-ut. An’ *she* said he was Irish. They’re po-uts that comes from Ireland a’alroight,” Miss McGee remarked. “I guess it’s a’alroight.”

Robert left it at that. He was to be at Miss McGee’s “place” at 7:45 sharp, and she would be ready for him, and they would set off together for the Art Circle.

“I’ll have the cup o’ hot milk fer ye,” Katie McGee said, in a lower whisper than ever. “An’ I’ll git a bit’ o’ supper when we gits home. Kin ye hold out that long, eh?”

Robert said he thought he could, and it was settled so. Robert watched his friend go briskly through the store and disappear through the swing glass-door. It had made a little break in his day, just seeing her friendly face. The last words, “Sure it’s the grand toime we’ll have together,” rang in his ears. His spirits went up. It would be fun to be doing anything. . . .

“Sure, that’ll kape her quiet, eh,” Miss McGee said to herself, making her way back to Prince Leopold Avenue, a

short time after, with her parcel in her hand. "Ef she says I been long I'll tell her I couldn't match the sample."

When she rang at the bell she was quite out of breath. "My," she said, "ain't ut the limutt!" She paused, waiting for the door to be opened. "Anythin'll do fer *her* I guess," she remarked. And then, out loud, she said, "God help me!" But whether this was an invocation for pardon to God, or whether Miss McGee felt her patience at waiting for the door to be opened was near an end, or whether she was merely out of breath—who shall say?

The customer was *deloighted!*

### CHAPTER XXIII

**W**HAT the Po-ut thought of Regalia, history sayeth not. He probably thought badly of its climate, for he "struck," as Miss McGee said, the very coldest night of all the year. It wasn't merely cold, it was arctic, polar, super-polar; it was the coldest night ever conceived by the imagination of God: as Miss McGee and Robert made their way to the Art Circle of Regalia (a pillared building in the classic style) they shivered and shook in their insufficient clothing.

"It would need to be someone worth hearing after this," Robert said to himself. He said nothing out loud; the cup of condensed milk which Miss McGee had had ready for him when he called for her was proving a very insufficient stay and refuge against the winds that were blowing straight down on him from the North Pole. "I wish I had stayed at home," he thought, as a blast struck him. He felt, walking along Victoria Crescent (the names of Regalia's streets tended to be loyal) as if no verse, however lovely, could possibly compensate him for what he was going through on his way to hear it.

"Listen!" said Miss McGee impressively; it was as if she were answering Robert's unspoken thought. "I have a koind of a notion this Po-ut'll be *some* man. I guess he's swell a'alroight." The wind cut her remarks short by taking her breath away.

Robert paid no attention. Miss McGee's remark struck him as being beside the point. And besides politeness, pleasant-

ness, sociability, desires to please, were rapidly coming to seem to him mere abstract ideas. He forced his way along, clutching an uneasy foothold on the frozen snow, and he bent his head low down to avoid the piercing shafts of wind. Inside his mind, and growing up like Jack's beanstalk or Jonah's gourd, was the idea that he wished he had stayed at home. "It's no *good* her talking like that," he said to himself impatiently.

When they reached the Hall it was all lighted up. It looked rather imposing; and as neither of them had ever had a chance of being at the Art Circle before, it was something of an ordeal to go up the broad stone steps and into the vestibule, and then up more stairs, and on into the Hall where the Po-out was to speak. Robert was so thankful to get anywhere out of the cold that at first he was hardly conscious where he was or where he was going; but as the steam-heat began to steal up the sleeves of his coat and the legs of his trousers, he came back to life, as it were, and glanced round. He liked the staircase with its red-carpeted steps, and the plastercasts—so familiar, most of them!—that decorated the corner niches in the staircase walls. He looked at the Venus of Milo with a smile. He had never felt so friendly towards her as now, when they met thus unexpectedly, in Regalia. He felt like going up and saying to her, "How *are* you? What ages since we met." And when, a step or two further at a turn in the stair, he caught sight of "Sleep" up on a bracket with his broken wing and his exquisite parted lips, he uttered a little exclamation, and caught his breath, and stood still, gazing.

"How lovely," he said involuntarily. He felt a little as he had felt that day he lay under the leafless maple and looked up through the branches at the winter sky; but not quite. It seemed to him now, confronted with "Sleep," almost intolerable to be so near such beauty and not to be a part of it. A desire, so strong as to make him feel shaken and sick, came over him—to be in some place where beauty was a part of life, where a thing like "Sleep" would seem possible and everyday and not too good to be true. . . .

Miss McGee stood still and looked with him. She always wanted to admire what he admired; but she was anxious and nervous, and self-consciousness amongst all these strange people, some of them in evening dress, clothed her as a garment might. "Come on," she said, gently touching Robert's arm

with her finger. "Come on, eh. We want to git *in an' git* seated good before the Po-ut gits star'ted awf."

The fact was that Miss McGee was a little shaken. She had never in all her life been the possessor of two dollar seats before; and she wanted to act the part: and she wasn't sure that she knew how. She was bound she was going to walk into those seats as if she had walked into such every evening since life began; therefore, though she stood before "Sleep," she wasn't able to look at it. The beauty of the calm face existed not for her. Perhaps at any time she might have thought it "queer": but now she really saw it not at all. When Robert did "come on" and they did walk into the seats provided by Miss Martyn, it was Robert and not Miss McGee at all who walked into them "as to the manner born" as Miss McGee was fond of saying. It wasn't the first time Robert had been in such seats as that. His head was full of the beauty of the cast he had just been looking at, he forgot all about his shabby clothes and the unfortunate rubbers he wore with a tear in the sides and the back of them; he merely reverted to type and calmly handed Miss McGee's tickets to the attendant, received back his portion, walked into the third row of seats, and sat down on the chair indicated to him. He thought nothing about it at all. Miss McGee was conscious that there was a difference between Robert's way of taking his seat and hers. She felt a little disconcerted at her own anxiety, and at the same time she felt proud of her companion. "Bless um," she thought in the midst of a rather topsy-turvy mind, "he's one gen'leman bor'rn. He knows the ways of stoyle an' he goes them ways!" She felt glad and proud to be in the company of such a "happy Willie."

"'Tain't as swell as what I thought ut would be," Miss McGee said in a whisper to Robert, when she was settled in her seat and her mind. "I guess this is a low-priced crowd a'alright." Miss McGee had expected the Art Circle to look something like the Hotel Fornaro where *dégagé* people would be sitting, not eating ice cream as on the hotel occasion but drinking in the Po-ut's utterances in the same smart way, and lo and behold, there wasn't a smart thing to be seen. Miss McGee herself looked as smart as anyone. This fact, when she had grasped it, saddened and at the same time exhilarated her. Had she known what kind of a bunch it would be to hear the Po-ut—a mixture of a few academicals and a great many ordinary Regalians—she wouldn't have thought twice about

getting into her two dollar seat. "Well, I guess they *know* things, p'raps, if they don't look good," she said to herself. Not to Robert this time—consolingly and she settled herself to enjoyment.

"Ain't ut great, eh?" she whispered in Robert's ear, after a space. In spite of the absence of "stoyle" she was feeling it an occasion, and she had to confide in someone. "I guess it's goin' to be a'alroight, eh?" She wanted to know what he thought.

Robert smiled. He was feeling comforted in the warm hall, and Miss McGee's remarks did not rub him up the wrong way as they had done coming along. He said nothing at all: merely smiled. But his smile always satisfied Miss McGee. "I guess I didn't oughter ta'alk, p'raps," she said to herself. "*He* don't ta'alk. I guess *he* knows." Robert's way of getting into his seat had assuredly not been lost on Miss McGee.

She was silent after this—and Robert was as well pleased. In spite of the red roses and his pleasure in that occasion, he had never changed his mind about Katie McGee. The roses had been a spurt of emotion due to a snowy Christmas Eve and the chime of Christmas bells and a little bit of unexpected money coming into his pocket—all joined by an impulse of friendliness. He liked Miss McGee. But she didn't *interest* him. She never would.

Also he was feeling more on his own ground than usual. It was a long time since Robert Fulton had felt on his own ground as he did this evening. "So *that's* who it is!" he said half aloud, glancing down at the program the attendant had thrust into his hand. As he read the name of the Po-ut his spirits went up. He felt nearer to cheerfulness than he had felt for a long time. In an odd way he felt at home. This, after all, was the atmosphere.

"D'ye know um, eh?" Miss McGee asked, coming close up to him so as to whisper in his ear. She felt more impressed with Robert than ever. But before there was time to answer—to do more than give the deprecatory nod and gesture of the hand that signifies "I don't know him, but I do *know* him . . ." the Po-ut walked in. And the Lecture began.

The Po-ut's lecture was very beautiful. He seemed to speak simply: but it was a simplicity that had not only grown—it had been evolved, with how much care, and with what anxious work! He threw into the Hall at Regalia on that frosty

January night words that were like gems. They seemed to glow in the air: you could almost see them as you watched him standing quietly behind his reading-desk and looking at the audience over the manuscript that lay un-glanced at on the desk before him. There were words like red rubies, and other words like deep shining emeralds, and there were words like diamonds, white, glistening, colorless. As he spoke you seemed transported to a magic world where pure prose flowed naturally, as streams flow. You seemed to be cast out of Regalia into an outer light where there was music and rhythm and harmony of words. The Po-ut seemed of another world than the New World. He seemed, to look at him and to listen to him, never to have heard of dollars and cents; he seemed to be regulating his life (like Miss McGee's Lady) by some quite other rule—and yet why was he in Regalia at all on this arctic night, speaking to the Regalians of things they had never heard of before? Was he not just touring the world seeking what he could make out of it by his gem-like words . . . ?

When he read—and he read much verse of his own—he read apparently simply, as he spoke: but, once more, it was a simplicity attained by great effort, a simplicity that was born of strain. He stood behind the reading-desk, and when he read his eyes glowed with a mystic light, his pale skin seemed to grow paler, he tossed his dark hair off his brow with a long white hand. He too, like his simplicity, seemed to have been evolved with effort and stress.

To Miss McGee the Po-ut was something like Robert's book. It was all very fine and magnificent but she understood nothing about it at all. She liked to watch. The Po-ut's voice gave her at times a taste of the joy she had had out of the playing of the bo'oy with the velvet jackut. The rhythms of the voice suggested the more complicated rhythms of the musician. But for all she *knew* the whole thing might have been Sanscrit; and as she sat gazing at the Po-ut with her large eyes, her mind was a strange conglomeration of ideas. She thought "Ireland made um!" And she thought, "Say, ef he ain't got the foine coat to his back a'alroight!" And she thought, "I guess he's swa'all!" When she glanced half-timidly at Robert to see what he was thinking she said to herself, "Sure, he's a'alroight!" And all the time she was sitting gazing surprisedly at the Po-ut she said to herself, "By gosh, he's *quare!*"

Robert sat entranced. Possibly if the Po-ut had come his way in the old ante-Regalian days he might have felt critical and picked faults in him. But now he felt as one feels when one sees food after long abstinence. He was starving, and he swallowed the Po-ut whole, without even stopping to take in his full flavor. He listened to him greedily—that soft west-country Irish, so different, oh, so *different!* from the Irish over-seas—how lovely it seemed to Robert! He felt as if he could go on listening forever to those charming cadences, sit there, hungry and tired as he was after his long day's work, just letting the cadences sink in. . . .

It seemed to Robert that he was alive again. He felt as if he had been dug up and as if he were above-ground in an air he could breathe. He had a feeling that someone was talking *sense*—at last. As he sat there a tiny bit of his mind seemed to be still at the Dairy Counter, giving change, saying, "Yes, Madam," and loathing it. But all the rest of him was repudiating that part of himself as dead, useless, putrid—the real Robert Fulton stretched out to the Po-ut, sensitive (as Miss McGee never could be) to the Po-ut's rhythms, perceptive of his meanings, happily understanding even what he didn't say. And in the back part of his mind where the Arundel Meat Market kept moving and agitating and worrying, Robert kept asking himself what became of this living Robert all the dead days of uncongenial work. . . .

"It isn't life," something in him kept saying, as he pictured himself tramping to his work and tramping back again at night. And, hauntingly, St. Paul's words came into his mind, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He sat, intensely alive for the moment, conscious of his mind being sliced into two distinct parts—back in the Arundel Market with one part of himself, and with the other drinking in the stream of the Po-ut's verse—watching the gems out of the Po-ut's mouth go shimmering through the air.

The Regalians were not of the same mind as Robert. They were a good deal more like Miss McGee, only they hadn't got a Robert to be proud of. To them the Po-ut was a crank. They didn't like him. They thoroughly disliked his hair. They thought his words affected and dull, and what he had to say silly, and at intervals they whispered to one another, "Say, when is this stuff going to stop awf? There is no meat in ut." The rhythms that entranced Robert worried them. They didn't see that they led anywhere. They didn't want to be in that

land where Robert Fulton was wandering, and what they did want was that the lecture should come to an end and they could go home to bed. The Po-ut, had he not been so enraptured in himself, would have seen that he was not carrying his audience along with him. But perhaps there is something hypnotic in the influence of rhythm—to those who are susceptible to it. Robert was unconscious of the flight of time; Miss McGee was willing it should go on as long as it liked: perhaps the Po-ut didn't know how long he was speaking, or very distinctly even where he was: or perhaps, behind that pale skin and mystic eye, he did know well enough, and just was determined to finish his five and forty minutes—and get his dollars?

Suddenly the voice stopped. Robert came down to earth with one great big bump. He would have to go to the Market to-morrow morning, and if he were late he would have to pay a fine. He was solidly tied up in this world, he was part of its machinery; if he ceased to play his part in the machinery of this world, he would be drawn *into* the machinery and ground to powder. He sat up on the two dollar seat and he heaved one big sigh. The treat was over and he was going back to Penelope's Buildings—and he didn't know how he should bear it.

When they got home Miss McGee poked up her fire and broke up the "backing" of small wet coal she had left to keep it alight; and she got a fine handsome blaze. In a short space of time she set before Robert two sausages, one cup of cocoa, and a slice of bread and butter. She set the same before herself; and though it seemed a come-down from the Po-ut, still they were both hungry (Robert was starving—the cup of condensed milk was the only thing between himself and lunch-time), and so the food tasted good. Robert ate absent-mindedly, hardly tasting what he was eating: but he was glad of the food, now that he had partially returned to earth, and he felt grateful to Miss McGee for providing it.

"What on earth would I do without you?" he asked her, catching her eye.

And Miss McGee blushed.

The color rose up from her heart and flooded her sagging cheeks. It rushed like a wave over her face and neck—her very hands seemed pink as she laid them on the table and sat looking across at Robert. She said nothing. But the

color rose up in her face—died away—rushed back in a great tide of emotion. . . .

After a moment she took up her knife and fork and went on eating her sausages.

“Sure,” she said, in that Irish that was so different—so *different!*—from the Po-ut’s, “sure, Mr. Fulton, ’tis a pleasure anyway to do things fer ye. Ye’re,” she hesitated—she hesitated painfully, “so—so dear to me,” she said. “I’d do *anythin’.*”

She stooped over the fire and reached for the frying-pan.

“Will I fry ye another sausage?” she said. “Ye’re hungry, sure. . . .”

## CHAPTER XXIV

**W**HEN the Po-ut went away from Regalia the chances are that he thought he had left nothing behind him. He had. He had left Robert Fulton an impulse to work.

It was impossible to say whence this impulse came. Robert had sat and listened to the lecture and when he had come home he had felt that he too must say something—not like that, but in his own manner and as he could. The Regalians were wrong when they said there was no meat in the Po-ut’s discourse. There was meat and bone too, and the proof was that Robert was able to make a meal of what the Po-ut had said, digest it, and thrive upon it. Man cannot thrive on style alone. There must be, if sustenance is to come, something either behind or below the style—either something behind to steady it, or, if it be the real creative thing, a root from which it can grow. The Po-ut’s discourse had *seemed* to consist of shimmering words which he flung into the air, and which shone and glittered there, like gems. But this was maya evidently, and an illusion. They weren’t gems. They were nourishing food, on which one whom such food suited, could live and grow fat. The Regalians couldn’t live on the Po-ut’s remarks because they didn’t understand them and therefore could neither digest nor assimilate them. Miss McGee could make little out of the discourse because, though the beauty of the language dimly affected her, it didn’t mean anything to her—and so the effect rapidly passed off. But Robert!—even so early as the same night, when he was toss-

ing on a sleepless bed with Miss McGee's sausages breaking the peace inside of him, was saying to himself, "I must work. Why not? Haven't *I* things to say?" He didn't think he had gems to cast on the air, or beautiful verse to draw out of himself. He made no mistake at all as to quality. And he didn't think either that there would be any special commercial advantage in his working—the commercial aspect wasn't in his mind at all. He merely felt he must *do*—something, he didn't quite know what, create a little bit of sense or beauty in the Canada Book, perhaps. Oddly enough (in the middle of the night) the desire seemed to be father to the power. Ideas that he had longed after—sweated after—pursued with momentary haste and then abandoned with disheartened leisure, came trooping into his head, and swirled about there. He was conscious of whole regiments of ideas pushing in the greatest disorder into his brain and then standing waiting about for his gray matter to lead them into action.

"Of course," he said, sitting upright on his uncomfortable bed, "of *course*. Why didn't I think of that before?" And as he turned his pillow and gave it a thump with his fist before laying his head on it again, he said to himself, thinking of the Po-ut's lecture, "Fine! It was fine—fine . . ." And then, after a second, "Canada's a *great* subject." And then he lay half waking, half dozing, not unhappily at all, with a line of the Po-ut's verse singing in his head, and balancing there as a twig balances in the wind—till the cold gray winter dawn came slowly streaking in through his eastern window.

As he got up into the ordinary everyday world, and his feet and legs felt how cold a place that is when there isn't a fire in it, the whole regiments of ideas seemed to have dwindled to one: that it is a very difficult thing to write anything at all. In the cold chill light of the January morning the old gentleman (President of the "Art Circle" of Regalia) who the night before had arisen to ask the Po-ut the best hundred books on which to nourish the imagination of Regalian youth, ceased to be so abjectly ridiculous. After all, if one lives in this world, one has to find out things; and the Po-ut, answering hesitatingly that the Bible—Shakespeare—Old Irish Legends—Blake . . . were what he recommended as sustenance seemed—absurd, if it were not blasphemy to say so. How could Regalia eat Blake? What awful fits of indigestion he would give it. And why hadn't the Po-ut thought of

that? He was unpractical, the Po-ut, no good for this particular life; the old gentleman was the really right representative of the age. Robert recalled how the aspect of the Art Circle (and perhaps rightly enough) had changed with the old gentleman's utterances. Suddenly the fairy palace that the Po-ut had erected had fallen down, and in its place was a very respectable market where the old gentleman was taking gems for sale . . . and the next object to any rightly-constituted mind was to go to the brokers' with the hard cash the gems had brought and find suitable investments for the money. . . .

Was it worth while in the world the old gentleman had created to try and *do* anything at all?

Morning is a depressing time. Still, if ideas were not so plentiful as the night before, Robert could make plans. We can all make plans; and we can all break them. Our common humanity is held together by such efforts as that. Robert, at the Arundel Market, was all day haunted by little bright-colored fragments of the Po-ut's genius. Half-lines came singing in his head. He sought vainly for words that ended lines; as he took orders, beautiful broken phrases formed themselves in his mind, and out loud he said, "Anything further, Madam?" It was all very sordid and very depressing. The only thing that held the day together was the determination that when he got home he would go up-stairs as soon as he had finished his meal with Miss McGee—and work. "I'll have a fire," he said to himself as he wrote down a long order a fat lady was giving him. "I don't care what it costs . . . Cheese, Madam? Yes, we have an imported cheese—Brie. It will certainly give satisfaction . . . I'll have a *fire*."

When he got home he ran up-stairs and set a match to this fire he had laid in his mind in the morning. He felt an unusual tingle as he thought that he was going to begin to work again. For the last weeks depression had got between him and his writing, and nothing had seemed worth while. But now: he set a match to his fire, and he stood a moment watching the little flames creep round corners and through obstacles, and emerge, many-colored and as beautiful as the Po-ut's verse, above the wood and coal. "I'll have a good evening," Robert said to himself; and he seemed to feel little flames of anticipation in his blood, creeping up and almost reaching his brain. He ran down-stairs with an unaccustomed lightness of step. "I've got to go as soon as we

have had supper," he announced. "I've got work to do to-night."

Miss McGee took the news of his leaving her in this untimely way in perfectly good part. She had been entirely sincere when, on the two occasions when she had been "raised" as she herself called it, she had said she would do "anythin'" for him. She would. There was nothing that Miss McGee would have fallen short of: and, disappointing as it was that Robert should thus want to go, apparently, there was nothing for it but to assent. She did say, "Couldn't ye wor'rk down here, eh? 'Tis the pity ye should be bur'nin' yer own coal an' eatin' mooney." But when Robert assured her that he must be alone to work, she accepted that too. She never doubted that Robert was as good as the Po-ut. Better. She had the utmost certainty in her heart that Robert had only to get a hearing and the St. Lawrence river itself would go on fire. The fact that she didn't understand what he wrote was in his favor. "Sure, 'tis the great things ye can't understand," she said to herself. She hadn't been able to understand the Po-ut either, and *he* was evidently a great grand man. Well, just give Robert his head—let *him* have a chance . . . an' we'll see where Po-uts is then! Such was more or less Miss McGee's meditation as she sat eyeing Robert after he said he must go and work alone. "Sure," she said in a pensive voice, "'tis war'm here an' I'd set as quiet as a mouse!" But this was only thinking aloud. She immediately added, "But ef ye must, then go an' bur'n yer own coal, an' may God bless yer wor'rk."

It was on this evening, and just as Miss McGee said that, that Robert became clearly conscious of being thoroughly fond of her. It wasn't so much what she said as the way she said it, that went to his heart. Her unspoken attitude to him and his work touched him. Miss McGee's words were often silly enough. Her accent was far, very far, from the Po-ut's. But affection streamed through her inappropriate utterances, and her actual words sometimes seemed only transparencies through which something better shone. Robert looked at her good-humoredly—he hadn't the faintest idea that her liking for him went beyond liking—and with a half-amused, half-deprecatory air, he said, "You want me to—to get on, don't you, Miss McGee!" And he felt more humble than amused when he saw the look that this rather casual remark brought into her face. He did realize how she overrated him. "She

is a good old soul," he thought to himself as he ran upstairs, "a *good old soul*." He had said this often before, but he said it now in a more tender, kindly way. Her appreciation of him made him feel thoroughly humble as he sat himself down at his small deal table and prepared for the fray. "She is," he kept thinking to himself, "she really *is* a . . ." and the thought of Miss McGee's goodness kept him going till he had set out his ink-pot and his sheets of cheap paper and the little piece of blotting-paper that he kept handy, and till he had got his porcupine-quill pen into his hand; and then he bent down over his table—and forgot all about her.

The hours went past just as they had on the night when he began his Canada Book. He forgot, as he sat writing and considering with his eyes on the night outside, all about even the Po-ut. He forgot the world where he was and the squalidness of the Buildings he lived in, Miss McGee's solicitude, the dullness of life: he forgot all these for the hour, while he searched for the idea—and the word to clothe it in. His fire in the grate went on quietly burning itself out. Sometimes a lightly-falling cinder ticked its way through the grate and settled peacefully to a gray feathery ash on the hearthstone below. Such minute non-human noises just suited Robert when he was working. They kept him in touch with the world he lived in, and they didn't disturb him because they made him conscious of no individuality but his own. Even the sound of the French-Canadian voices outside, rising through the still winter air, didn't get between him and his work. They too, at that distance, seemed hardly human. The men at the snow-plow called to their patient big horses, "Holà!" "Avance *donc!*" just as if they were in the France of three hundred years ago. Once or twice when these cries pushed up into Robert's consciousness, he raised his head and sat, with his head slightly to one side, listening. He saw in his mind the noiseless snow-plow brushing its way through the drifts—the great horses pulling, the snow-covered men tugging at the bridles, running by the side of the plow, shouting and encouraging their beasts. . . . "I must do something with *that* some day," he said once to himself—and he sat a moment with his slender pen balanced in his fingers. And then, with a start, he bent over the table again and got down something more in his exquisite script.

That night, very late, as he lay between sleeping and waking, the world seemed to him a beautiful one. He was fresh

from work, he hadn't had time to read over what he had written—he felt as if the whole universe were full of the glow of fire and the magic of verse. A memory of "Sleep" and his one wing slipped through his mind. He seemed to see the Po-ut's white hand tossing his dark hair from his brow. He thought drowsily of the convolutions of the human brain—of the simplicities of beauty that man brings forth from the intricacies of his own fearful and wonderful make. The room for once was warm—luxurious. He dropped asleep.

Perhaps Robert never had so happy a night in Penelope's Buildings as this one he dreamed away with the Po-ut's magic still working in his blood.

## CHAPTER XXV

ROBERT'S impulse to work lasted three nights, and then he took down what he had written to Miss McGee to read it aloud to her. It was unfortunate that just on this night he should have landed on a loquacious mood, and that, in spite of his longing desire to begin to read, Miss McGee should have gone on talking. She didn't understand. Had she known that he had come down bursting with the desire to share she would indeed have sat as mum as a mouse, as she herself said. Had she been able to look through those light blue eyes and to have seen down into the intricate workings of the mind, she would have thrown herself with energy, with passion, with all the vitality that was in her into the discussion of the chapter he had brought down with him to read. First she would have listened breathlessly, and then she would have *talked*. Not being able to see further than the flesh—how should she know what writing means to an author?—how should she realize that "a bit of stuff" is not something apart from, something above, but a thing belonging to and connected in the most intimate way with the life of its maker?—she just smiled and said, as she watched him put his manuscript down on the sill, "So ye fetched a piece down to read, eh! Say, ef that ain't great." And passed on to considerations of Ag's happiness in the married state—doubts as to Mrs. Morphy's leg (which was acutely on her mind), and facts as to the cookery of Mrs. Glassridge's chef.

"An' see here," she said as to this last item, bringing fact and fiction together in the only way that makes true conver-

sation, "I want you to understand, Mr. Fulton, we got *some* tea to-noight. I see Mrs. Glassridge's chef to-day, an' says he to me, 'I guess you *some* loike poy!' says he. 'I guess I *do*,' says I. 'Well, here's *some* poy fer you,' he says. An' say, *my* dear, it is *one* poy a'alroight."

Miss McGee laughed heartily at her own and the chef's wit, and never—no, never since Robert had known her—had her amusement seemed so out of place, so trivial, so uncalled-for, and so silly. The glory the Po-ut had left behind him was passing off. Three more or less sleepless nights were telling their tale. The miraculous wakefulness that a certain kind of sleepless night bestows on its victim was over; and it was gradually being succeeded by a lack of balance—an unnatural joyousness succeeding without reason to an almost equal tendency to depression and snappiness.

"Come on, eh, an' set down," said Miss McGee. "I'll be fixed in jes' ha'alf-no-time." She pointed hospitably to Robert's own seat, and went on making the tea.

Robert sat down. He felt as if the world, which had been so satisfactorily round for the last three days, had suddenly gone flat. Buoyed up by the manuscript he was carrying under his arm, he had been feeling cheerful and even frisky, for him—till he came into Miss McGee's room; now, suddenly, he ceased to feel cheerful and buoyant. He took the seat that Miss McGee indicated—his own!—and he sat down in it in a crumpled-up manner.

Miss McGee, if she didn't know how it felt to be a writer of prose, was alive to changes in vitality. "Ye tired, eh," she said affectionately—her tone was that of a kind nurse to a child. "Well, never moind. When ye've had a bit o' poy ye'll look at the wor'ld different, me dear."

Affection worked its way. Robert forgave Miss McGee for her lack of understanding. He thought to himself, "How should she know!"—and turned his chair to the table. He felt no trace of his former cheerfulness that had approximated to effervescence. He continued to feel much as a toy-balloon must feel after a pin has been stuck into it. But he was determinedly cheerful—a dangerous thing to be!—and he steered his thoughts on to the direction of food: and felt better.

"Sure thing that poy is great, eh!" said Miss McGee. She was unable to tear her mind from thankfulness at the gift of the pie. She cut a great slab and put it on a plate and set

the plate before Robert. "That chef is swa'all a'alroight," she went on conversationally, "an' I want you to know ut. I guess he wears a lot o' dawg," she continued confidentially, cutting her own piece of pie; "ef you was to see um wa'alikin' out Sundays, ye'd want to be the young girl he says 'Lady! to be-lieve *me!*'"

There was no doubt that Robert must have brought down the black dog (not the same kind the chef wore) with him, or he must have seen the new moon through glass, or got out of bed left foot first, or something dire and irremediable must have happened: for he didn't like the pie! It was a good pie all right, as Miss McGee had remarked. Mrs. Glass-ridge's chef knew his business. But the fact of that chef having bestowed on Miss McGee three-fourths of a pie, the other fourth having presumably been demolished by Mrs. Glass-ridge herself in company with "Andrew," rasped Robert. He wasn't unduly proud. He certainly wasn't snobbish. Yet the fact that he was sitting down to a half-eaten pie, that he was supping on the pie-crust that had fallen from the plutocrat's table, got on his nerves, as Miss McGee was fond of saying. He ate a little bit of his slab, and then he listlessly dropped his knife and fork, and sat looking more like a symbol of dejection than a reasonable human being.

"What's the matter, eh" said Miss McGee, regarding him anxiously, "don't ye loike the poy?" Her face fell about a yard.

"Oh, it's all right," said Robert. "It's very nice."

To say that Miss McGee was disappointed is to say nothing. When the chef had bestowed the pie on her (in response to some jocose wheedling) she had felt that joyful uplifting of the heart that comes when we know we have something worthy to offer those we love. "Sure, I'll have the tea fit for um this toime, bless um," she had thought: and now Robert didn't like the pie. She felt heart-stricken, and all her gladness in her own piece of pie wilted away and died a natural death.

It was at this crisis that Miss McGee showed what she had in her. "Don't ye eat ut," she said, "ef it don't make the appeal. Put ut to one soide an' I'll fry ye an egg."

Could anything be more heroic? The flavor of aristocratic virtue that Miss McGee sometimes exhaled became extraordinarily evident: it distilled itself into the furthest corners of the room.

Robert stopped looking at the fire. He glanced over at Miss McGee. The disappointment that she was quite unable to conceal looked out of her blue-black eyes at him. But behind the disappointment and promising every moment to break through it, as the sun promises to break through threatening clouds, was the genuine desire that he should be comfortable, the longing to make him as happy as she could. To this Robert responded: "I don't want an egg," he said, "and there was a more affectionate tone in his voice than had ever been there before. "I like the pie. It's *all* right." And he cut a great piece off the slab Miss McGee had given him and put it into his mouth. "Stuff and nonsense," he said to himself, "what difference would it have made if the pie had been whole? It would still have been plutocratic crumbs. What does it matter. . . .?" And he went on with his supper.

One would have thought that Miss McGee would have understood Robert's state of mind: it was not so very unlike her own towards Mrs. Garry's plate of cold turkey. But she didn't understand. And she didn't because, in spite of all protestation, she regarded Mrs. Glassridge in a totally different way from what Robert did. She *said* she and Mrs. Glassridge were equals; and she based this theory on the facts, first that Mrs. Glassridge had been Queenie MacGowan of the Barber's Shop and, second, that she, Miss McGee, *might* have married Tully and Tully *might* have made good, and in that case there would have been no difference at all between them. In actual fact there was a difference, and Katie McGee knew it. There was a difference of French gowns and toy poms and (as Queenie Glassridge said) Louis Sextorze drawing-rooms and ly-mousines of the best make; Andrew's dollars had digged between the two of them a pit big enough for all the unrighteous of this world to fall into. Mrs. Garry mightn't send a plate of turkey because she was Katie's sister and only a beggar on horseback, after all: but Mrs. Glassridge wasn't a beggar on horseback, she was a beggar on camelback—the sort of camel that can't get through a needle's eye, and *that* made the difference between them and Miss McGee knew it—she *knew* it!—whatever she might say. It was just the extra height of the camel that enabled Mrs. Glassridge to give half-worn gowns and half-eaten pies with impunity, and Katie McGee could accept such with no offense to her dignity, and eat and wear them.

But Robert was different. To him the Mrs. Glassridges

of the world were negligible things. He might be amused at them—he often did laugh at the stories of Culross that Miss McGee brought home, heartily if he were in a good mood, and a little bit on the wrong side of his mouth, ironically, if he were in a bad one. But when all was said and done he hardly considered that Mrs. Glassridge existed. Her aspirations were not his aspirations, neither were her gods his. He didn't care a snap of his fingers for her poms and her "sextorze" drawing-rooms; her ignorant wealth would have got on his nerves. He regarded her when he thought of her at all as a sort of joke—one of those bad jokes that the modern world is fond of playing upon us. He didn't take her seriously—and yet, when it comes to taking favors from the hands of something you have a contempt for! When it comes to being fed, not by ravens but by bad jokes . . . ! Katie McGee was protected, in a sense, by her very belief in the reality of the things she resented and inveighed against and envied, whereas Robert's armor was pierced by his very contempt for them. It was as much as he could do to finish his pie at all. And when he had finished it, and pushed his plate away from him as far as he could, it began at once to give a fit of indigestion . . . as bad jokes do.

It was not a good beginning to an evening of reading. Robert had come down in the mood to read, and eager to begin. But he was a person whom little puts off, and he felt, as he sat looking gloomily over his empty plate and across at Miss McGee, as if the sensible thing would be for him to go up to bed—and stay there. Miss McGee, too, was disheartened. She knew well enough that the pie had not been the success it should have been, and she felt correspondingly depressed. However, she never could bear to have so much as an eyelash between her and Robert. When things did go wrong her habit was to say to herself, "Sure, it's your fault, ye little black divil, ye!" and without going quite that length on this occasion, she did say, "Sure, it's put about the bo'oy is, eh! He's *toired*, the choild." And she therefore quite consciously and determinedly set herself to be nice and to abolish the incident.

Quite suddenly and without the slightest warning she dropped her slangy way of speech (that seemed to herself so witty and smart) and fell into that other tongue, the one to which she had been brought up by "Ma'a." When she spoke like this, as she always did when she spoke of old times, she was

far sweeter to Robert. He never could help feeling on such occasions that the world had not been kind to Miss McGee; that she had been meant to be nicer and far more charming than she actually was: and that, had she been shown early what was beautiful, she never would have been so struck with the young lady posing in the lime light with the peacock's gown stretching behind her in the New York store. The moments when Miss McGee was most charming were the moments when she was most conscious of her own deficiencies and most regretful about life.

"Regalia's changed a'alroight, Mr. Fulton," she said, when the subject of the pie had been put away between them. "When the first Mrs. Glassridge there was aloive an' Ma'a'd used to go when the babies was bor'rn an' see to the house, there was no woild extravagance then." Miss McGee paused and then added, "Be-lieve *me!*" with conviction. It was an unfortunate chance that she should have selected any member of the Glassridge household to speak of, but the pie was the bridge to that: it lay on Miss McGee's inner consciousness as heavily as it lay on Robert's stomach, and she couldn't quite escape from it.

"Ma'a brought us up good," Miss McGee resumed after a short pause, "an' she was a good friend to Mrs. Glassridge too. Andrew Glassridge there hadn't made his mooney then. He was one plain *man*, an' Ma'a was the plain good woman I tell you. There wasn't nothin' lay between them. There was no ly-mousines then."

Miss McGee gave a deep sigh, and the stream of her conversation was diverted to "Ma'a."

"Sure, I kin see her now," she said, "makin' the sign of the cross there above us as we laid in our beds, an' then settin' down after her day's wor'rk—she gawn out cleanin' Ma'a done—to do the sewin', eh, an' her bit o' washin', bless her. Nothin' was too har'rd fer Ma'a. She kep' the place good an' she kep' us good. She was one good woman," Miss McGee repeated, "an' whenever I think of her I don't grudge me lonesome loife to-day. I lawst me chanst an' that's God's trewth, stayin' to the end with her. But ef I had to do ut over again this day," Miss McGee said with energy, "I'd stawp jes' the same, God bless her. Every article of ut. An' ef Mitt wouldn't wait—well, he'd have to do the other thing, that's all—the way he done. . . ."

As always, when the name of Mitt entered the conversa-

tion, Miss McGee glanced at Robert: and, as always on such occasions, she met a dead wall of a face. It was as if there was the mischief in ut, Miss McGee said to herself. Robert couldn't and wouldn't be persuaded to take an interest in Mitt. Why was it?—after a bit Miss McGee heaved a big sigh and took up the conversation at a slightly different angle.

"Well, things is fixed a'alroight, I guess," she said, "an' God keeps His eye good on every one of us, you bet. But ef 'twasn't fer me religion I'd have a notion some days I'd get koind of overlooked."

She rose and began to clear the things away. She had put the pie incident behind her, but the pie-crust seemed to have left a bitter flavor in her mouth.

"Sure, I got uncle's mooney a'alroight," she said, moving about in her rapid way; she felt the desire common to all humanity to count up its mercies when things are going worst: "an' I want *you* to understand that was some s'prise to *me*. Me uncle, Mr. Fulton," she added explanatorily, "was Ma'a's brother, the one she come out to keep house fer, an' he acted *bad* to Ma'a. He lef' me the mooney he'd oughter give to Ma'a. So I got ut."

She paused, and then went on in a pensive voice.

"My, them trousers Uncle cut was a pattern to all! Me uncle was a tailor, Mr. Fulton, an' an ar'tist at that. I lear'ned a lot in Uncle's wor'rkroom there. I wisht you could 'a' saw them trousers he cut!" She paused and then added in a low reverent voice, "I got the overcoat Uncle Michael died in now, an' I'm going' to let ye see *that*. Believe me when I say it is the best yet. It is the *Goods*."

There was a pause. Through Miss McGee's mind the thought flashed like a fish in a sunny pool that Uncle's overcoat would be a find for Robert. "Took in under the ar'rums there," she said to herself, "an' fixed some around the hips, he'd look the Prince in ut!" She began rapidly to consider how she could best induce Robert to accept Uncle's overcoat. She reviewed in her mind several ways of opening the attack.

"Uncle was a fleshy man," she said meditatively. She was carrying on her thought out loud. "I guess he'd make the two of you."

Robert was silent because he didn't quite know what to say. Miss McGee's voice in speaking of the overcoat had been so charged with reverence that he couldn't think of any remark good enough to make. He felt as if he were in an

artist's studio, standing (with the artist) before the Exhibition Picture, and waiting for inspiration from above. He didn't feel as if Uncle's fleshiness helped the question.

"I'll let ye see ut," Miss McGee said, after a prolonged pause. She had decided to let the offer of the coat slip for the moment. "I have ut laid away a'aloight from the mawth. When Uncle gawn out"—she meant "died," of course—"he, done the straight thing an' I want you to know ut. He acted mean to Ma'a, but he lef' Mary an' me our thousand dawllars apiece. Yes, Sir, an' Andrew Glassridge there took hold an' put the mooney *away*." She took the table cloth up and went with it in her hands towards the kitchenette. "That's the way," she said, "I pass fer a lady o' prawperty here in the Buildin's. I ain't never told no one but yerself yet the way it all come about, nor yet the roights an' wrongs, nor how much the mooney was nor nothin'. But now you know's much as me—an' I'm *glad* ye do."

She went into the kitchenette and almost shut the door on Robert and the conversation generally. She *was* glad she had told Robert, and yet she felt as if she had parted with what up to that moment had been a secret: and she felt that sense of regret we all feel—momentarily at last—when we part with things we can't get back again.

"I'm—I'm glad you've got something of your own, Miss McGee," Robert said at last, rather awkwardly. He had a most unfortunate habit of being unable to rise to emergencies. He knew that what he was saying was so banal as to be semi-idiotic, but he couldn't help it. "I'm glad," he said: and he hoped that his voice might atone for the inadequacy of his words. It was a great surprise to him to learn that Miss McGee was a lady of prawperty even to the infinitesimal extent she was.

"Yes, I guess ye're glad a'aloight, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, out of the kitchenette, quite matter-of-factly. She took his good feeling so much for granted that she didn't feel the need of any proof of it. "I guess ye're glad a'aloight," she said, "or I wouldn't 'a' told you." And then, after a momentary pause, she added, "Ef I'd had me mooney sooner I guess I could have had Mitt with ut." She came to a dead stop, but Robert said nothing; the deep slumbrous indifference that seized him at the name of Mitt was once more to the fore. "I wisht ye'd had the chanst to be acquainted with Mitt, Mr. Fulton, eh," Miss McGee went on—she felt as if, at long

last, she must *force* Robert to take Mitt in. "Ye'd 'a loiked um sure. He was witty a'alroight," she pursued, her hopes growing fainter with every word. "He'd say one thing an' I'd be at um loike a flash. An' then he'd say somethin' elest—we kep' the *ba'all* rollin'. 'Twas the merry-go-round when Mitt an' me got together, be-lieve *me*."

Even Robert felt himself forced to say something. The first principles of politeness gave him a jog. He said, "I'm sure it must have been," and when he had said it he was so struck with his own idiocy that he had room to be struck with nothing more.

"You an' him'd been the friends a'alroight," said Miss McGee—heartened even by this. "Ye'd a loiked the one the other . . ."

She came back from the kitchenette and slipped the white table-cloth into the table drawer, and drew out the wonderfully hideous other cover and spread it on the table.

"Sure there's somethin' in the way ye speak, the two of ye," she said wistfully—it was the last supreme effort—"that much alike ye moight be brothers. . . ."

But Robert was suddenly struck with her deftness in changing the cloths. He had often seen her do it before, yet tonight, as he sat indolently watching her, it came over him how different her swift easy movements were from the clumsy ineptness of the wealthy women who came out of their ly-mousines to shop at his store. "Why," he said to himself with that keen intellectual pleasure we have when we discover something for ourselves, "those women have lost the use of their muscles because they never *do* anything. Of course," he said to himself, "of *course*. She's graceful because she's always busy. Why did I never think of it before!" Out loud he said, "I like to watch you, Miss McGee. You do things so—so nicely. . . ."

He began to smile. His irritation against the pie died down. This new idea pushed itself into the place where the irritation had been, and ousted it.

"You *are* neat," he said.

Once more Miss McGee blushed. Mitt faded away without any further effort into the limbo he had created for himself.

"Won't ye—won't ye read yer book?" Miss McGee asked. She felt an irresistible desire to please Robert, and instinct told her how to do it. "Say, git a move on there an' *read*,"

she said in her coaxing voice. "I'd jes' love to hear a piece to-noight."

Robert sprang up and went towards the window-sill.

"You won't be bored?" he said eagerly. "You're sure I don't bore you—do I?" Some of the effervescence of the earlier evening fluffed up in him.

"*Bored!*" said Miss McGee. "Say, what d'ye take me fer, eh? I jes' love the book. I adore ut. I think it's *i*-deal."

She watched him coming back to the table with the manuscript in his hand.

"Wait jes' a minnut," she said, "till I git me work."

She took her piece of sewing in her hands and composed herself as audience. She felt as if she could sit till the Crack of Doom listening to Robert's book and not understanding one word of it. The pie was a completely back number for both of them.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**T**HE pie was a back number, yet it had existed. And when things exist they have a way of going on existing when we think they are dead. The evil that the pie had done lived after it even when the pie itself was only a source of indigestion.

It might be that this section of Robert's book, which he had taken great pains over for the last three nights, was slightly more aristocratic even than usual because he had been listening to the Po-ut. The Po-ut was no aristocrat of the titled sort, but he was an aristocrat of the intellectual sort. He escaped being an intellectual snob—just: an intellectual aristocrat he was. Robert perhaps fell under his spell because of this. Robert's besetting sin in life was fastidiousness. He was fastidious mentally, morally, intellectually—every possible way in which it is possible to be fastidious: and his attitude to Penelope's Buildings—the impossibility he felt in accepting even the better parts of them, was owing to this.

All unknown to himself, totally unconsciously, as he was writing this third section of his book, he was more fastidious than ever. He was still under the Po-ut's spell; he was far away from the very sordid actualities of life amongst which he found himself. He was away in that Palace of Unreality which the Po-ut had built (and which the old gentleman had

knocked down) and from that vantage-ground he was considering the world. To an even greater extent than usual he was therefore distant from the world, and his view of it was—remote.

Yet he said some very good things in this third section of his. His facts were all right—he was an accurate person: what was wrong was his envisagement of these facts. He surveyed democratic facts from the aristocratic standpoint; he undertook to explain “the people” when he didn’t know how they felt. But, if you gave him the premises he set out with, he exploited them very well.

‘In Canada,’ said he, ‘you begin to comprehend what it was that Morris meant when he spoke of “leisure to grow” There is little enough of that precious commodity in England nowadays, but in the Dominion there is a good deal less. The Canadian has no time for the spiritual refinements of life and therefore he has no time to consider how you may be feeling and to adapt himself politely to your immediate desires. It is this want of leisure, I fancy, that accounts for a certain callousness that is characteristic of him.’ Very true. Undeniable. But how about Robert Fulton adapting himself to the Canadian’s hustle? That sort of criticism works two ways—probably any sort of criticism does—and Robert was most assuredly not taking time to consider how the Canadian might be feeling. Yet he said what he had to say neatly, for all that. He went on, ‘There is nothing bad in the people who are thus imperceptive. It is simply that the more imaginative attitude towards life presupposes time for growth. Friendship, good workmanship, beautiful manners, all these things require a certain deliberateness to develop properly. Leisure to grow is to the mind what good air is to the body; and mental life is deformed no less surely than the physical body when such elementary needs are denied.’

Nobody could say this wasn’t true. The only thing was it might have been said another way . . . but then it wouldn’t have been Robert Fulton.

Having cleared his mind of these remarks, Robert returned to the immigrant. In his previous sections he had shown that Canada was made up of immigrants, and he had divided these immigrants into classes—academicals (who come out to “teach” the Dominion), penniless aristocrats (who come to see if there is a good time to be made out of it), clerks and stenographers (who come frankly for what they can get), and, lastly, the actual hand

workers themselves, from whom the Dominion almost entirely springs. Miss McGee had had to stand hearing Canada "vilified" as she called it; and now she had to sit and hear how she and her like come out to Canada, what it is they come from, and why it is they make of Canada such an unsatisfactory country.

During the reading of the first two sections of the Canada Book—and perhaps even more in thinking over them afterwards—Miss McGee had been conscious of a vague distress. She had had a sense of incompleteness and longing and general emotion borne in upon her, which she could no more have explained than any of us can explain what *we* feel when we hear a distant strain of music or when the first spring-song of a bird strikes upon our ear. Sometimes as Miss McGee was on her way to work a note or two from some wheezy hand-organ would come to her, borne faintly on the wind; and then, if she was at all "peevéd" with life, as she put it, if things had gone wrong and she felt she was old and of no use in the world, these notes would make their way right into her heart, and there, in some mysterious way, they would cause trouble and sadness. The first two sections of the Canada Book had been notes from the hand-organ. They had got into Miss McGee's heart and they had caused trouble and sadness there—yes, and they had caused tumult too. In vain Miss McGee had blamed herself. "Sure an' it's not jealous an' envious ye are, ye little black divil?" she had said to herself. "'Tis not of sin an' badness altogether ye're made up of, are ye?" And she would push back the personal sadness that she felt, the tumult in her that said "it *ain't* loike that!" and try to merge these uncomfortable feelings in the pride she felt in Robert's "cleverness, bless um!" and the joy she had in her certainty that, sooner or later, this masterpiece of his would be hailed by the world and he would become a sort of hero . . . and she, by reason of her intuitive recognition of his greatness and her pride in it, would take her rightful place by his side. When she looked forward she always saw herself, in her imagination, in this place by his side. She said to herself, "We'll be the friends, us two, eh!" And, since she did not feel, either in her head or heart, the certainty she would have liked to feel that they always *would* be the friends, she said it with the greater energy.

This time, while she was listening to the third section of the book, she felt more than vague sadness or passing irrita-

tion; she felt acute distress. If, as usual, she did not entirely understand what Robert had to say—if, for instance, his remarks on leisure (she wasn't very sure what that was) passed over her head—still there was one thing she did and could understand: the *tone* of what she listened to. And that was what distressed her.

She sat with her work in her hands, rapidly moving her needle in and out. The work with her hands was purely mechanical, she didn't need to think about it; and as she listened with an almost painful anxiety to know what it was all about—for once this evening already she had felt far from her friend and she didn't want to go through this experience again . . . so soon—she seemed suddenly to detect what hurt her. It was the distance Robert put between himself and her. It wasn't only the grand words he used; it wasn't the technicality of his style—it was something else. Robert, as he read what he had been at so much pains to get down, was deliberately, as it seemed to Katie McGee, saying to her, "You are of different flesh and bone from me. Keep your distance."

Nothing perhaps in the world could have cut Robert so painfully as to be told of this. He did consider with everything that was in him that he was putting the workers' case as they never could put it for themselves . . . and of course he didn't see that just there was the trouble. In his Paper, all through it, inherent in its very conception and long before its birth, was the difference between himself and the manual worker. This had been evident enough in the last section when he had been parceling out the inhabitants of Canada into four separate packets—like seeds you plant in the ground with labels on the little wooden sticks beside them. He had written labels in his neat handwriting—labels that Miss McGee with her impetuous mind had snatched off and thrown to the winds. He had got Canada ready for the worker—and now the worker was coming on, labeled too . . . Miss McGee felt she could not bear it. And Robert, reading away in the most industrious way and feeling here and there that he had put a finger on the spot, was utterly and entirely unaware of her feelings. He hadn't believed her when she had said she "adored" his book. He knew, in a sort of way, that she was only "being nice." Yet in another way he *had* believed her. How was he to know that the more enthusiastic a woman's tone is the less she means, and the more intelligently she listens the less she has any idea what it is all about. He was an "innocent man" in

many ways. He didn't know much—outside of Greek and Latin and things like that. He hadn't the slightest idea that class wrote his essay and showed in every line of it. He would have been miserable if he had known it. He had almost everything to learn. . . .

As he read Miss McGee gradually disassociated her mind from the actual pages and allowed her thought to trail back into the past. She had been talking of "old times" before Robert had begun to read: Ag's engagement had somehow thrown her mind back into what was past and gone, and once more she saw Ag's mother engaged—fair flaxen Mary McGee engaged to big Tim Garry that she didn't care for, and Ma'a standing quietly over the two of them and approving the match. What a queer thing life was! Ma'a had been the good woman—and what had she got out of life? Miss McGee had never heard Ma'a grumble. Old Mrs. McGee had taken life as it came, done her day's darg, and expected nothing more. "She'd oughter've had more," her daughter now said rebelliously. She felt that her mother, quiet in her grave, hadn't had her chance. She thought of all the old past-and-gone festivities, when she, Katie, had been but a slip of a girl with eyes that caught men and held them fast. "Sure, 'twas sweet Ma'a'd used to look a Christmas noight!" she thought. She saw her pretty mother in the red gown she always wore for best, with the little white collar and cuffs, and she saw those capable motherly hands arranging the mistletoe on the Christmas table—and the pink candles she had always lighted then. And once more she sat through the Christmas dinner with her mother and Mary—and Tim later, and later still "the kids"; and Old Nancy too, her mother's friend, she that was mother to Danny Finn that married Mrs. Morphy's youngest daughter, *she*, too, was there till the year of her death. That Christmas dinner—half jollity, half sacramental feast! Miss McGee's eyes filled with tears as she thought of her mother's goodness—her simple attitude towards life. "My, my," she said to herself, "her was the good woman, God help me."

"The Canadian immigrant," read Robert, 'brings with him the blank dumfounding lack of interest in things artistic which he so successfully cultivated in England . . .'

"Sure," Miss McGee said to herself, waking up to what Robert was saying and disassociating herself with a wrench from the past, "ain't we *folks!*" She suddenly felt defiant.

Robert of course might have abused Canada as he would if

only he would have done it differently. Had he "hit out" with a strong accentuated transitory sort of dislike, Katie McGee would have been with him every time. She would have said, with the deepest fellow-feeling in her voice, "Sure it's roight ye are! Canada's mud, ain't ut, Mr. Fulton." She would have felt entirely, exaggeratedly, purely Irish. "Ireland's It!" And when they had both said their say and Canada had been sufficiently pelted with mud, she would have turned round—or back—and cherished Canada as her foster-country to her breast. "It's the foine toimes we has in Canada, eh," she would have said then. "It's the *chanst* we gits here." What hurt Miss McGee and what hurt her even after Robert had finished reading, was the sense he gave her that he was cut off from her by an ocean of class—that he belonged to a different world from the McGees as surely as if he had descended from the planet Mars and was shortly going home again by a special yet-to-be-discovered martiaplane. She felt with a sinking of the heart when he said 'there is of course nothing bad in the people who are thus imperceptive' that she had neither part nor lot in him, that he was different from her, root and branch, that she never would or could be the smallest part of him, that she was a fool—oh, what a fool!—even to think of him or to wish to be friends, yes, even to sit beside him as she had been sitting listening to what he had to read to her. "What roight have I," she said to herself bitterly, "to be takin' par'rt with such as him! He's as far above me as the starloight. He's not *loike* me. He's a gen'leman bor'rn." A vision of an old-time long-past party came up before her eyes with Old Nancy, her mother's good friend, dancing an Irish jig, and her old feet neatly twinkling in and out of her skirts. "'Twas the properest jig ever ye saw," Miss McGee said bitterly to herself. "Her"—she meant Old Mrs. McGee—"would never 'a' stood for anythin' unproper, bless her." And she thought how she had enjoyed the party, and how Tim Donough's eyes had followed her round the room and told her what kind of girl she was—she saw again the circle round Old Nancy applauding and crying "Brayvo!" and old Mrs. McGee clapping her hands the loudest of all. And she thought, "*He* wouldn't a cared fer ut. We're not fer him. God help um, he hates us. . . ." She choked back the hot tears she felt coming into her eyes and pushed back her thoughts—beyond the thinking-point.

"Now I'll *listen*," she said; and she sat, letting Robert's

paper go in at her ears and surge about in her head while, quite mechanically, she went on sticking her needle into her work and taking it out again. Robert said plenty of kind things about the workers too. He meant thoroughly well when he said "They have been held down for generations—when at last the feast is spread to their hands, is it not natural that they should over-eat?" But the very fact that he said "they," that he always alluded to the workers as something apart—far away—not to be seen almost without a telescope held to the human eye—it was this that grieved Miss McGee—this that kept the tears pushing upward and upward for all she could do to keep them down. "What does he *mane*," she said to herself as she listened to him saying 'being simple folks and coming from the class they do'—*what* class? Why was it such a long way away? Weren't they flesh and blood too? Wouldn't a knife cut them? But it was when Robert, at the end of all his summings-up and castings-down, said 'it is this, I think, that makes Canada or any other New Land so extremely interesting,' that Miss McGee, as she herself expressed it, went entirely off the handle. Why should Canada be treated as if it were a moth in the hands of a boy who was about to stick a pin through its thorax? She felt a sort of choking as if the boy's hands—excellent careful Student's hands—were already on Canada's thorax—and since she had suddenly become, for good and all as she thought, a piece of the Dominion, on her thorax too. "My *Gawd*," she said to herself, "ain't we *alovive!*" And for a moment, yes for a moment, Robert as it was, she felt a wave of hot indignation surge from somewhere deep down in her and come flooding up right over her affection. Canada was the land her mother had come out to so long ago; come out to from the farm that she could no longer make pay. Canada was the land that had offered the McGees refuge—Mrs. McGee had come, bringing her children . . . Miss McGee could just remember faintly the smell of the ship in her baby nostrils . . . and there, in Canada the despised, the 'interesting' place, Katie and Mary McGee and their brave good mother had found a home. Yes, a home. What fault was there in Tim Garry's working his way so Mary had her gramophone and her fur set with the best of 'em? Why shouldn't the workers work themselves up, in God's name, and have their clothes and their fine homes with the rest? With a great surge Miss McGee felt herself go to the side of the sister she hadn't spoken to for years. She was her sister—

blood of her blood—class of her class: who was this stranger here in her room, reading to her in his cultivated voice, calling her fosterland ‘interesting!’ Miss McGee felt hot and she felt a burning pain in her breast; and then, suddenly, the tide turned. This was her boy, her dear, the man whom her soul went out to—whom her withering body would fain mother and love. She forgave him. She began, before she entirely realized how angry with him she was, to make excuses. “Bless um, how should *he* know!” “He’s the gen’leman bor’rn, you bet!” “*He* don’t know how the workers feels—he thinks, the bo’oy, we’re the different make to him . . . an’ he’s roight. Yes, he’s roight,” Miss McGee said to herself. “I’m different to him. What do I know? What do I understand? I’ve no education—I don’t know roight from wrong. If Nellie was here,” she thought with a passionate desire for someone of her own who could “talk to” Robert—“show him.” “If Nellie was here,” Miss McGee thought, “*she’d* fix um.” And with the thought that her niece anyway had had the education that she herself so vainly longed to have had a smile came on her face—a sad smile—and she sat looking palely at Robert, waiting for him to be finished.

It was during Robert’s last paragraph that all these violent feelings had surged through her; it was about the middle of it—so miraculously rapid are the processes of feeling—that she had settled down to resignation. The sentence that had made her so angry had been the prelude to Robert’s summing-up. ‘It is largely this,’ he had said, ‘that makes Canada or any other New Land so extremely interesting. It is the opportunity of watching how the workers will develop, once the restraining influences of the Old Country are withdrawn. My own impression is that they will develop everywhere—even in England itself before so very long—as they develop out here, and that a period of personal ambition and self-assertion is before them. They have long since emerged, or rather been violently ejected, from the old state of contentment and submission to authority: they have taken the first step on the path to the realization of self, and that path leads inevitably through egoism and acquisitiveness and confusion. Thus, however unsatisfactory the effect of Canada upon these immigrants may appear at first sight, there is always this element of hopefulness about it, that it may prove to be only a stage on the way to something ever so much better. And even as it is, it undoubtedly has some immediately tangible compensations, as I shall now attempt to show.’

He looked up. There was a modest complacency on his face. He felt it was not altogether *too* bad.

"Sure it's a grand thing," Miss McGee said after a silence—her criticism always resolved itself into that. "It's great, an' I'm the proud woman to be hearin' ut all. Thank ye, Mr. Fulton."

And when Robert, poor soul, looked at his watch and decided reluctantly that it was too late to begin Section IV—she said she was "sawry." "I'll come down to-morrow night, Miss McGee," he said eagerly, if it's convenient—it's Sunday, you know—and read you the rest. There isn't much. It won't take long. It—it won't tire you . . . ?"

And, after he had left her, he said to himself, "It can't be *quite* bad. It roused her." And, for the very first time, the thought came to him that deliverance might lie the way the porcupine-quill pen pointed. "Could I buy myself out of the Meat Market with this?" he began to say to himself that night. And his writing began to take on a new complexion.

"She *liked* it," he said to himself again as he was getting into bed. The odd look Miss McGee had had in her eyes when he had said it was too late to begin Section IV followed him into a dream.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**T**HE whole of Sunday Miss McGee spent preparing to hear Section IV. She knew she was in for a bad time, and with the fighting blood of the McGees in her veins she was preparing to meet it. "Sure *I* don't care," she said to herself with the energy that means, "I *do* care very much." "I don't care. He kin read all he darn well pleases an' I'll set an' listen to um. 'Tis a fool-stunt anyways ye take ut, an' I'll take moine standin' *up*." With these reflections Miss McGee slipped over her nightgown several woolly spencers of varying ages, and one big coat of a respectable antiquity, and went over to St. Patrick's to interview God.

The little Low Mass calmed her. She felt better when she turned to come out of church again, and more as if she could bear to hear a small piece more of the Canada Book in the evening hours. "I'll fix the poy," she had said to herself as her beads slipped through her fingers, "the way he won't know ut fer a poy, an' then I guess he'll relush ut good."

She pondered this matter in the quiet of the church, and when she came out into the world with the pie-riddle solved in her mind, she felt soothed and comforted. "I 'guess I'll pick awf the crust," she thought to herself with the utter unscrupulousness of woman, "an' I'll fix over the meat in a kind of a little hash . . . an' I guess he'll make a meal awf of that a'alroight." On the church steps she saw going down before her her old teacher at the convent school, Mother Bridget, and that cheered her up further. "Wait, Mother," she cried, running up to her as if she was the old Kitty McGee of the school days, "sure, wait on me. Good mornin'. 'Tis the treat to see ye." And she slipped her hand under the old nun's arm and helped her down the slippery steps. "I'm a powny kickin' up its heels in the field," she said when they were safe on the side-walk, capering a little, and showing her white stockings under the nightgown. And she enjoyed the scandalized eyes of the younger nun, watching, waiting to take her turn at helping Mother Bridget home. "Sure 'tis Kitty McGee of the old school, Mother," Miss McGee said, capering a little more. And somehow the "Eh, ye *bad* gir'rl, Katie McGee!" of the old nun calmed her further. She liked the touch of Mother Bridget's wrinkled old hands, and the gentle Irish voice that said, "Good mornin', Katie, God bless ye, me dear." She went on her way across Drayton Place comforted, feeling that this world is not such a bad place after all; and on the way upstairs to her own room she had a slight brush with Mrs. Savourin (the aroma of whose words about "mother" had long since passed away) as to the conduct of some "young ladies" to whom the flat opposite Miss McGee had been let—and this revived her still further. "Them gir'rls is *punk*," said Miss McGee to Mrs. Savourin as they stood together on the landing outside Miss McGee's apartment, "an' ye're one of the same koinde yerself an' 'tis toime ye should know ut." To this Mrs. Savourin had replied with at least equal vivacity, and Miss McGee had responded with "Ye'll stawp *awf* rentin' them rooms to young ladies as has young gen'lemen comin' in to 'em at any hour of the noight an' a decent woman lyin' awake through the wall with the shame of hearin' 'em, or I'll git you *fired*." After a short time the discussion had developed into something like a free fight with tongues. No one could beat Miss McGee in agility of that unruly member. She knew the language of the slums to the very core—how should she not who had heard it about her all her life?—and when she fought

with the Mrs. Savourins of her acquaintance she used their weapons. If Mrs. Savourin had not Miss McGee's acrobatic genius of the tongue she had an even viler vocabulary: as these two stood on the landing unloading their minds, the mists of convention were dispelled. It was like hauling up truth in pailfuls from the bottom of the well—and finding it mud. . . .

"I'll git her foired, the god-damned punk of her," said Miss McGee furiously to herself as she went into her own apartment at last and banged the door behind her. And as her thoughts reverted to the "has-beens" next door she further said, "What did I *say* . . . !" (she was now harking back to the dope-men period) "an' what would Ma'a say, God help me. . . ."

She took her tea-pot out of its protecting shawl and sat down to breakfast. "Sure, my," she said to herself, pouring out her cup of tea, "what *would* Ma'a say ef she knew her little Katie was cheek-be-jowl with street-walkers an' *punk*."

The repetition of this pleasant word cheered Miss McGee. She said it over to herself once or twice with increasing emphasis, and then she settled to her cup of tea and the novel she had, rather surreptitiously (another effect of the Canada Book on Miss McGee's mind), fetched home from the "circulator" of the Departmental Store. "'Tain't what I should be readin', I guess," she said to herself with a sigh, "but it's koind of restful too." And she read about the Duke of Denbigh with a feeling of thankfulness that she could understand him and that he, at least, said nothing—hurting, as poor Robert's pages did. Now and again Miss McGee looked up from her book to pour herself another cup of tea. "Push my face in, eh," she said to herself, reverting to one of the flowers of Mrs. Savourin's speech, "I guess there's *two* to that." She felt on the whole lightened and encouraged by the Savourin fray. A word-fight now and then did her good—it worked off some of the exasperation with life that accumulated in her heart; and at the present moment, with Section III just behind her and Section IV immediately to come, she felt as if she must work off something on someone. There was a lot to work off; but the Mass and the complete peace of the church, the friendly meeting with old Mother Bridget, and, lastly, the absolute row with no pretense about it on the stair-head with Mrs. Savourin, had done her good. She was able

to enjoy her breakfast. She thoroughly liked her book. It was, for the moment, as if she had poured away her grievance—as if she were in the midst of a tiny entr'acte in the disagreeables of life.

As for "firing" Mrs. Savourin, Miss McGee knew well enough that that could not be done. The Janitress's occupancy of her flat dated back eleven years; she had come to "The Buildings" as the inhabitants always called them, immediately after Miss McGee's own return from New York, after old Mrs. McGee's death. Everything had been respectable enough then; the flats had been freshly remodeled from the block of separate houses they had originally been. Miss McGee had seen the Buildings pass out of the hands of their original owner; she had seen them in the hands of the second owner—the French-Canadian: she had seen his passing, and the coming of the third owner, the Jew: and finally, she had seen the Buildings go "in the Law"—and "in the Law" she well knew they were likely to remain. She also knew that while the Law extended its claws over the Buildings, for just so long nothing could be changed in them. Just as a door-handle could not be taken off and replaced with a new one, so Mrs. Savourin could not be ejected and replaced with a new Mrs. Savourin. And therefore, her remarks had been so much smoke . . . to point the fact that there was a fire. The really peculiar part of the whole business was that, had Mrs. Savourin been going to run away from her post and leave the Buildings without a Janitress at all, Miss McGee, informed of her intention, would have been the first to contribute to the utmost of her powers, to a testimonial of regret. Miss McGee disapproved of Mrs. Savourin in the same way that she disapproved of certain parts of the Canadian climate; and in the same way that she took twenty degrees below as a gift of God, she took Mrs. Savourin. Had there been any project afoot for giving Mrs. Savourin an imitation leather "grip-sac," or an imitation diamond pin, or a comb that looked like tortoise-shell and was something quite different, Miss McGee would have headed the vanguard and presented the gift with a speech of amenity. Miss McGee, in fact, had her own code of morality and politeness, and, so far as lay in her, she acted up to it.

After breakfast Miss McGee did the bit of washing she had put to soak after Robert left her the night before. Then she cleaned her room—the cinders had been sifted before

she went to church: and then she ran over to Mrs. Morphy's to dress her leg—and then she would come back and get ready for church again and Rose, and surely Ag this time, would come in their best Sunday clothes to fetch her. And she would feel proud of her kin.

"Mac's awf," said Mrs. Morphy, as Miss McGee was kneeling before her, dressing the leg. "He's awf, the poor bo'oy, to make good in the States. Rose won't look at um, the fool-gir'rl of her, an' I say 'tis a shame. She'd oughter be spanked, tur'rnin' um down the way she done. Why won't she have um, McGee? 'Tis the goods a'alroight he is, an' she won't git a better man to the name of her ef she waits her loife."

"I guess Rose Garry don't need to look at any fella twice ef she don't feel the ca'all," Miss McGee said haughtily. "Me niece Rose is workin', Mrs. Morphy. She kin pick an' choose the way she feels, I guess." Miss McGee did *not* feel like this. She regretted as no one else could Rose's treatment of Mac. But all the same Rose Garry was her niece and she wasn't going to give her away. "Sure we all has to live the way we feel," she went on in the same quite distant tone, and concentrating her attention on the bandage she was putting on, "ef we don't feel loike ut, we don't have to clutter us up with no man-truck at all, I guess."

She went on unrolling her bandage carefully.

"Oh, psha!" Mrs. Morphy cried. "You make me toired. Rose Garry's the same's any other gir'rl, I guess. She wants a home an' a man an' kiddies comin'. Don't be tellin' *me*, McGee. 'Tis the day'll come yet when Rose Garry there'll be cryin' out the eyes of her she sent Mac awf. An' he's *awf*, I want you to know," Mrs. Morphy continued. "He's *awf*. 'Old lady,' he says to me, 'it ain't no good. I can't git sinse out of her an' I mean to quit. She'll have her religion to comfor't her,' he says." Mrs. Morphy paused ere she sent her shaft home. "Mac ain't goin' to wait fer ever," she said after the pause, with a good deal of emphasis. "Take ut from me, McGee, Mac'll marry. He's a clean fella an' he's what the gir'rls loike. Mac ain't goin' to wait all his loife fer Rose," Mrs. Morphy went on after another short pause, sending another shaft home. "*He'll* git a gir'rl a'alroight, don't worry!"

"I *should* worry," Miss McGee returned, bending over the poor piteous leg. But for all that she *did* worry. "Ain't she the limutt, the big darn-fool," was what she said to herself.

Out loud she remarked, "I guess Rose Garry'll git all the awfers she wants. She'll marry when she feels loike ut, believe *me*. Mac kin go all he wants to fer her." And then, with a slight change of tone, she said, "I guess that leg o' yours'll feel more comf'table now it's fixed fer the day eh?" And that changed the current of Mrs. Morphy's remarks to gratitude.

When Miss McGee left Mrs. Morphy her mind kept weaving about the conversation they had just had. She fully agreed with the "old lady." Mac would marry in the States, where he was going. He would see some girl—and she would "take" him: and he would want her, and there was no other way of getting her but by marriage—he would put Rose out of his head. Miss McGee agreed absolutely with Mrs. Morphy. Mac would git a gir'rl a'alroight.

When Rose came she was resolutely silent. No mention of Mac escaped her lips, neither did she seem to wish to talk of Ag's engagement. "Yes, Ed was a good boy." That about began and ended that matter. And Ag herself was once more invisible. She had gone with Ed to Ed's church, the great church of St. Francis Xavier—and there was no fault to be found with that. Rose seemed not in the best of spirits, but she said nothing about it. She went to Mass with "Auntie," and came away again. "Oh say, my," Auntie said to herself, "that Rose is one good gir'rl a'alroight, but I guess she is one *fool!*" With the greatest joy in the world she could have acted on Mrs. Morphy's suggestion and turned to and "spanked" Rose with a will.

This time they didn't meet Mac sauntering on the sidewalk in a *dégagé* manner with the thermometer below freezing-point and a semi-ready suit on. There was no deprecating solid Scotch accent saying it had just happened to be out and had thought it would come there—"Good *mornin'*, Miss Rose."

When Robert came in the evening, Miss McGee was depressed. She felt deeply and darkly and most unbeautifully blue: and the sight of Robert's slim little roll of papers on the sill didn't make her any better. "Some more tomfoolery, eh," was what she would have said, had Robert been someone else. As it was she gave a big sigh and she said to herself, "Oh, well, it has to be, I s'pose. So we may's well stick ut the best way we know how." The thought did pass through her mind how nice it would be if Robert would just take up the

novel where she had left it off and see if the Duke of Denbigh *did* seduce that girl. . . .

"Miss McGee," said Robert as he was eating with the completest enjoyment of ignorance—he had no conception it was the offending article—the reincarnated pie, "why do you spell your name the way you do? Oughtn't it to be 'McGhee'?" He had meant for a long time back to ask Miss McGee this, but it had always slipped out of his mind at the right times and in again at the wrong. "M-c-G-h-e-e," he said, spelling it letter by letter.

"M-c-G-h-e-e," said Miss McGee, also slowly spelling it. "Why, how did ye know, Mr. Fulton, eh?"

She looked at him with brightening eyes. She liked him to be clever—and if this wasn't clever, what was!—and she was interested too, always, in any reference to the name McGee, which she loved and was proud of.

"Oh, well," Robert said, smiling at her, "that's the way they spell it in Ireland, isn't it? 'McGee' ought to be pronounced 'McGee,' you know,"—and he made the sound the driver makes when he hurries his horse.

"So 'twa'as 'McGhee' when first we come out," Miss McGee said, "but sure the folks here knows nothin'." Her voice was contemptuous—she was purely Irish now. "So they'd used to koind o' la'aff," she continued, "when Ma'a'd git after 'em an' spell ut out. 'Say, why don't ye git in the other letters of the alphabit,' they'd say, and fool-ta'alk loike that. An' so at the finish Ma'a gits koind o' mad an' says she, 'Have ut the way ye loike an' bad luck to ye,' she says. 'Fix ut wrong an' be happy.' She ca'alled ut awf roight there, Mr. Fulton, if *you'll* be-lieve *me*, an' 'tis M-c-G-e-e 't has been ever sinst."

Miss McGee paused a moment and then repeated with a slightly accentuated contempt, "My, sure 'tis nothin' at all they don't know out here, eh! 'Tis the poor place Canada when ye think of Ireland."

She felt extraordinarily comforted by this small conversation. She felt, as she would have put it, all made over by Robert's remarks. She had hardly ever before felt so intensely and exclusively Irish as she did at the moment; she felt so Irish that she was able to see even England's point of view and make excuses for it. "Bless um," she thought, "he thinks there's other places as good's Ireland—an' I guess he's *roight!*" Out loud she said, "Say, what have ye brought

to read this noight?" And then she went on, without the slightest idea that she was not stating what was exactly the fact, "I been countin' up all the day long. When I woke up in the mor'nin' says I to meself, 'Sure Katie McGee, there's one thing in the front of ye an' that's a treat!' So star'rt roight in, Mr. Fulton, eh, an' git a move on—quick. I'll git the dishes in the kitchenette an' then I'll set as dumb as a bat drinkin' in all ye brought to tell me. . . ."

She got up and bustled about, and Robert felt cheered and inspirited at the very sight of her.

When she sat down to the cleared table and looked at the outspread pages to which she was to listen, she felt as happy as if never a pin's-worth of patronage to Canada and the workers had ever come between them. She felt even more than happy; she felt hilarious. "Oh, *bless* um," she thought, "ef he ain't got the stick all good an' ready fer Canada, eh!" As she sat looking at him with her sparkling eyes, she felt not Canadian at all. She felt European, cosmopolitan, a citizeness of the world—and, above all, of Ireland. She thought of the old farm behind her that her mother had so loved to talk about and she thought, "Sure, I belong *there!*" And she thought of the big Departmental Store in New York where the young lady had posed and she thought, "An' I been *there!*" Regalia seemed indeed a poor paltry insignificant place. Canada hardly seemed worth taking into the question. "Foire away, Mr. Fulton, eh," she said, "we'll have the evenin' of ut sure."

And, in this enlivening atmosphere, Robert began to read.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**R**OBERT'S Section IV began well. It said, 'In making the change from one country to another these immigrants leap, so to say, from the first stage into the second. That is what makes them such interesting and even, in a sense, romantic figures.'

Now this was quite a different thing from summing up a great many (mostly derogatory) facts and saying at the end, 'This is what makes Canada so extremely interesting.' We would all object to hearing ourselves brought down to that; but none of us would object to being called 'romantic,' and

elevated to being, in that sense, 'interesting.' Miss McGee felt like that. When she had lamented, walking home from the Fréjus Mansions, that she was not suitable for a heroine of romance, it had been just that quality Robert was indicating that she had thought absent. The Duke of Denbigh in her novel was 'romantic.' Now it appeared she and her fellow-immigrants were romantic. She composed herself to listen.

What followed was not wholly clear to her, but still she got a better idea of what it was all about than she had ever got before from listening to Robert's reading. She had a notion, at least, what he meant when he said, 'In their old surroundings the workers have been vaguely unhappy, they have been penetrated with a sense that all is not as it should be with them—a sentiment which pervades practically the whole working-classes of Europe today. They decide at last that their lives have become unbearable in the Old Country; they take the leap; they land in Canada: there they are, in an odd fashion, just as unhappy as they were, though if they are capable workers they are at the same time more prosperous than they ever dreamed of being in their old homes. All these things together—the revolution in their lives, the unexpected prosperity, the even more unexpected unhappiness—combine to force them to self-consciousness. What they confusedly felt at home—that they are not getting their due and that the powerful classes are somehow taking an unfair advantage over them—develops into a conscious and definite thought. This becoming articulate of the dumb discontent of the worker in Europe is really the romance of the immigrant.'

Miss McGee liked this. If she did not get inside the thought of it she certainly liked walking round the walls and looking in at the slit windows. She thought it sounded "nice." She was less impressed by it than by the parts of Robert's book that she understood not at all, but at the same time she liked it. She had never enjoyed anything out of the Canada Book so much. She began to realize that dying a thousand deaths beforehand when you may not have to die at all is a silly procedure. She breathed a sigh of relief.

The next portion she understood less. When Robert began to lay down the law as to the worker "at home" being articulate publicly, in Trade Unions, and the immigrant becoming articulate privately, as an individual in his Canadian home-life she did not "get" it quite, as she said. But she liked his saying, 'In Canada the possibility of his (the worker's) be-

coming even as the millionaires are is first borne in upon him. He sees around him wherever he goes the embodied transformation of what was on its first arrival in Canada precisely what he himself is to-day. Working-men have climbed to wealth. Why may not he or his children, or anyway his children's children, be bejeweled and betitled and bedollared even as these?

She liked that. *Now* Robert was ta'alkin'! Sure! She even liked it when he said, 'The worker once landed in Canada definitely enters the individualistic stage with its commercial views and aims; by slow degrees he learns what disenchantment means. In his hope and in his disenchantment lies the romance of the situation. He has behind him centuries of being ground down to the dust to avenge; his tragedy is that he takes his revenge the wrong way for himself.'

There were no quotations in this section. Robert was warming to his subject and he found enough to do in quoting himself. That was nice. It made things more straightforward. By the time Robert—this was written on the third evening of impulse, the spell of the Po-ut was weakening—got to saying 'this determination of the workers to prove themselves equal to the best is not without its good side—it rapidly awakens in them a sense of self-respect,' Miss McGee found herself in enthusiastic accord with him. "What's got into the lad," she said to herself. "He sure is ta'alkin' *some* this noight!" And at the conclusion of the reading she was sitting at her side of the table looking intently across at him in a way she had never looked before. She was no longer merely admiring and negatively acquiescent or furiously and forlornly acquiescent: this time she was actively interested—and critical. Yes, she was critical because for the first time she understood: or, if she did not actually understand she at least grasped enough of the meaning of Robert's Paper to know that, however clumsily he might express himself, he meant well by the workers. The sense of smart and inferiority was gone. The stick that was to have been so good and ready to hit out at Canada and the workers, too, had—like Tannhäuser's—suddenly blossomed out at the top. Miss McGee felt fonder of Robert than ever. The up-looking non-understanding reverent admiration was for the moment, perhaps, gone; but in its place had come the warm desire to share with him, in so far as she was able, everything she could: to become one, indeed, if that were possible, with what she so intensely ad-

mired. Robert Fulton, all unconsciously and unwittingly, had in this section managed to do for Miss McGee what the really great authors do for all of us at times. He had lifted her up for the moment to his own intellectual level, and had thus shared with her his own wider views of life. When he had done reading and had placed his pages neatly one on top of the other, there was a tremendous pulsating silence, a silence that throbbed and vibrated with things that begged to be said. He sat with his eyes on his manuscript, placing and replacing the pages so that the edges of all were perfectly straight and plumb with one another.

"Say my!" Miss McGee said, breaking into the silence after a long quiet pause; and into her voice had come a certain appraising quality—a critical admiration. "I want you to know that stuff is great."

She sat with her arms on the table looking intently across at him, and a queer thing happened to her. It was as if she, like the stick that should have beaten Canada and the workers, had suddenly burst forth into leaf and bloom. The years seemed to have fallen from her as she leant across, looking thoughtfully at Robert. The shaded light of the coal-oil lamp (long ago now she had hunted out of a cupboard an old lamp of Ma'a's—" 'twill save the eyes of um, God bless um!") fell quietly on her. The lines that a great deal too much going out by the day had graven in her face were only very faintly visible. Nothing could change the blanched whiteness of her hair, but that, in conjunction with the eyes, so dark as almost to be black, looked well. The ugly mouth wore the smile that made you forget its ugliness; and the white unsuitably beautiful hands were folded on the edge of the table, clasped, and against them Miss McGee's full breast leaned. Somehow or other, just at that moment, you forgot that it was a woman of forty-seven (for Miss McGee had had a birthday since the autumn when Robert began to come to her) that was looking across at you with those intent eyes. One of the miracles that happen every day had happened to Miss McGee. The soul—that always stays the same age—had got the upper hand . . . for the moment. It looked out at the black eyes, eternally young, interested, alive immensely—conscious of itself—conscious of the soul that at any moment might look out at it from just across the table; and it spoke, this soul of Miss McGee—it spoke—it *spoke* . . .

Robert didn't hear. His soul was quiescent, lying where

souls do lie when we let them be. But as he looked over to Miss McGee, with the renewed sensation of friendliness that her warm disinterested sympathy was bringing out in him, for the first time he became directly conscious, odd as it may sound, that she had a body. Her living soul, looking through her eyes, made her so intensely alive that even Robert, wrapped up as he was in his own little literary concerns, couldn't help becoming conscious of the vitality that throbbed beside him in the little room. "Why," he thought to himself, "she'd make a model for a painter!" And, in his mind, he saw the warm pulsing rough sketch—the *ébauche*—that Miss McGee would be in the hands of a master. Her very uglinesses would be an added note of life.

All this passed between them without the need of any words. Words, indeed, would only have made things shallower between them. In that instant of time, as Miss McGee leant forward in the rays of the poor little ugly coal-oil lamp with its hideous green paper shade and Robert leaning back in his chair at the other side of the table sat looking at her, something passed between them that could not be put into words; one of those things that we may have known in some other sphere and may know again—somewhere: but which here and now we can only know through the medium of a glance—or a touch—or that longing pang of memory . . . of what?—that shoots through us at the impact of some unexpected scent or sound. It was, in that instant of time, as if Robert and Miss McGee had remembered some dim united past or had forestalled some far-off closely-knit-together future; it was as if the symbol we call time had been blotted out for a flash, and as if that present moment in Penelope's Buildings was at the same time what had already passed in some far-back, far-different surroundings and also what was yet to come in some sphere of unimaginable beauty. And when the moment was past, they neither of them could have told you anything tangible or accurate about it.

"I guess ye know somethin' a'alroight," Miss McGee said slowly, when the time for words had come again. "Say, ye're the Bawss that has the language, Mr. Fulton, eh?"

Her mode of expressing herself didn't seem to matter. What was behind the words, what had filled the room a moment ago, was still so potent that her intensely ugly way of speech didn't jar on Robert one bit. He smiled at her.

"Why," she went on slowly, "you got the thing down on

a foine point that toime. I guess you ain't fooled none. Ye got eyes, eh. . . ."

Could anyone, even though they put it into blank verse or alexandrines, say more than this? Can anyone tell any artist more than that he has got eyes—and ears: those rare, rare adjuncts to humanity? Robert felt the full force of Miss McGee's compliments. He sat drinking in all she could give him; he felt that if only she would go on, he could sit all night listening to what she had to say. On the previous occasions he had known well enough that he was not sharing any essential part of his work with his auditor—though, to comfort the loneliness in him he had once in a way pretended that he was. His had been the condition that pretends with one-half that something is, while the other half knows quite well all the time that it isn't. Now such compromises with life were unnecessary. Miss McGee liked it. He could see she liked it. He said nothing in reply to her remarks, but only smiled a little more.

"Ye never should 'a' been here, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, after a long pause. "Be-lieve *me* ye're not roight placed. Ye should be somewhere where it's—beautiful an' . . . an' *foine*—"

The thought passed through her how she would like to give him all Mrs. Glassridge's advantages—Culross, and the softness and elegance in which she lived there; the famous lymousine; the power to go away from Regalia—all the infinity of power that Andrew Glassridge's millions gave. Miss McGee felt that if such money had been hers, she would have handed it in packets into Robert's hands, scattered it all round him in a brisk crackling shower of dollar bills. She longed to see him rich and famous, she felt that she would sell all that she possessed—her soul too—and give it to Robert if it would benefit him and make him happy and do good to his work.

"Oh, ye should have the mooney, she burst out, ye should be *rich*. My, ain't ut all a—a blasted shame . . . !"

Even the unexpectedness of the word—for Miss McGee always kept her tongue in order when Robert was in sight—couldn't make any difference. Once more Robert seemed to see through words to where feeling sprang in Miss McGee: and he saw that the feeling was pure as water where it springs at the source of a river.

"Oh," he said a little awkwardly—he was unused to this

sort of thing—"it's—it's all right. I'm all right as I am. I—I'm afraid I make a fuss."

And for the moment it seemed to him—as to all of us when we receive true sympathy—that he did make a fuss. "Poor soul," he thought, "look at her. *She* has the hard time—and she doesn't grumble." He forgot that she was inured to her hardships. He forgot all the excuses he was in the habit of making for himself. For the moment he was swung right out of himself into some freer air—where he could breathe and live: and he was swung there and held there by the mere force of Miss McGee's sympathy and love. Love is the strongest thing in the world. There are no miracles it cannot work—if it is love. And is that extraordinary? Is not Love God?

There seemed nothing more to say. Miss McGee remained as she was, leaning against her clasped hands, and gazing at Robert. And gradually a smile began to form round her mouth and creep into her eyes till presently her face was lighted up with a look of pure amusement. What was amusing her was a sketch that Robert, in the course of Section IV, had given of women's dress. He had wanted to show the effect of residence on the Western side of the Atlantic on the woman-worker—on "Woman" in fact: and he had dwelt on the self-respect that improved conditions of life awaken in her 'Never,' had he said, 'do you see a woman the worse for drink in Canada. The craving she may have brought with her from Europe, and she may satisfy it surreptitiously; but the sights you see in Scotch and English cities—women drunk and staggering with a child in their arms—are spared you in Canada.' And from this he had gone on gravely to the consideration of what women on the two sides of the Atlantic wear. 'The attire of the English and Scottish factory-worker,' he had said, 'vanish with the drink. And' (here was the delicious part) a growl as one may at the apings of the fashion by all and sundry in Canada, protest as one may at the waste of the little earnings, still one must admit that the coveted "spring suit," constantly pressed out and therefore always uncreased, the jealously washed waist, the hideous hat and the high-heeled unhygienic boots are more likely to cover a cleanly human creature than the much less anxiously evolved and much less extravagant clothing of the similarly situated woman at home.'

"Bless um," thought Miss McGee, with that intense and delighted amusement with which women always greet the purely

unsartorial man when he wanders on the sacred precincts of Dress. "Bless the choild, he'll see what the women wears, will he! My, ain't he the Bo'oy!" And her smile seemed to emanate from the very soul that had been speaking such a different language a moment or two before, and irradiate her entire person.

"What are you laughing at?" said Robert.

"Nothin'," said Miss McGee.

What could she have said? She certainly couldn't say, "I'm laughing at your divagations on the sacred Tom Tiddler's ground of *Our* clothes." And equally she couldn't have explained, because she could never have found words to explain it in, how deliciously funny she found what he had to say on that sublime subject. What *was* so funny? It was quite evident from the wording of his observations that he had paid more attention than he had sometimes appeared to be paying to Miss McGee's professional remarks. Usually when she had insisted on describing one of Doll Weltman's Bargain Sale treasures—"Say, Mr. Fulton, that wa'as one coat, I tell you! Be-lieve *me* when I say it had braidin' a'all down the back an' round on the soides. And, say, listen here a minnut. It had poipin's of silk around the ar'rum-holes . . ."—when Miss McGee had gone on like that to world without end, Robert had *seemed* to baffle her by retiring into that one fastness which was exclusively his own: himself. He had appeared not to be listening at all. Nothing had been capable of rousing him. Beta Hendricks' radiant appearance in her white uniform as Head of the Maternity Hospital in New York, Belle's bit of dawg that she had put on whenever she was goin' to meet up with Fred Perry; Mrs. Barclay's solid acquisitions in fur coats and taffetas silks; Katie Barclay's unexpected appearance in the foulard gown; Mrs. Glassridge fresh from the hands of Europe—Miss Healy's new waist and Mrs. Morphy's swa'all daughter's fall suit . . . all these things had seemed alike to go sailing over Robert's absent head or to be trampled under his ungrateful feet. He had, whenever Miss McGee had set out on a professional tour, put on such a bored, worn, piteous expression that Miss McGee, for very pity's sake, had not gone the lengths she had always originally intended to go. She had decided that Robert was *not* interested in women's dress, and that he never would be; and here now, just see, the unexpected had again happened. He *had* been listening—a bit: or else he never would have known enough

even to call by their right names the "spring suit" and the "waist" that the emigrating lady was said so jealously to wash.

But the way he mentioned these things!—that was the joy of it. Would any woman, alive or dead, ever have thought of saying, 'growl as one may at the aping of the fashion by all and sundry.' Wasn't that nice! Wasn't it delicious! And 'the hideous hat and the high-heeled unhygienic boots that are more likely to cover, etc. . . .'—Could anything beat that? Could you possibly go beyond it? As Miss McGee sat looking at Robert in the light of the old-fashioned little coal-oil lamp with the smile that seemed to come from the soul beaming out from her face, another thread—but different from any thread before—began to unwind itself from her heart and travel towards Robert to en-mesh him. If only she had had words and grammar and things like that, how differently *she* would have written! It suddenly dawned on her that, on one subject at least, Katie McGee had the superiority over Robert Fulton, Genius. He never could or would write as she could and would write on Clothes . . . if only she had his and Nellie's elegant educations. "My, my," she said to herself, "*he* don't know. The sweethear't!—he's as innocent as the da'awn." And both Robert's ignorance and the pains he had evidently taken to remove this ignorance filled Miss McGee with a great big motherly delight in him as she sat contemplating him in the light of the coal-oil lamp.

"What are you laughing at?" said Robert.

"Nothin'," said Miss McGee.

Possibly if it had been turned the other way and Miss McGee had had her elegant education and had written on Clothes, Robert Fulton would have felt that keenest of keen joys—the pleasure in someone else's being able to do what one cannot do oneself: the obverse of what Miss McGee was feeling at the moment. "I never could have written like that," Robert Fulton would have said to himself, listening to Katie McGee's thesis, "and if I could have done it, I wouldn't."—And he would have felt a corresponding delight. The sense of one's own personality is enhanced by the evidence of another personality entirely different; the realization that one can do what someone else cannot, and equally that that someone else can do what one cannot do oneself whets the grindstone of life and keeps it sharp. When Robert Fulton came to go, he took Miss McGee's absurdly pretty hand in his and kept it there. "I've enjoyed my evening," he said. "I've en-

joyed it." And when he had gone Miss McGee said to *herself*, "Gee, I'll never git all fussed up again as sure's me name's McGee." She began to tidy up for the night, raking out the fire in the grate, putting back a chair here, straightening an antimacassar there. "Sure ef it ain't the dam-fool thing I been," she said to herself. "The bo'oy of um! *He* don't know." The sentence about woman's clothes came sailing into her mind again. "Oh, bless um, bless um," she thought, "God bless um!"—and she began to laugh. "Sure Mike, he's got the wor'ld to lear'rn."

For good and all the terrors of the Canada Book were removed. Miss McGee felt that, were she able to understand all that portion that did not relate to Clothes, she would enjoy it. It was the ignorance of the Canada Book that had broken down the barriers between itself and Miss McGee and at last made her its friend.

## CHAPTER XXIX

ONE would have thought that when, for the first time too, Robert had got Katie McGee's sympathy and (provisional) understanding, he would have prosecuted the making of the Canada Book with ardor, and tried to set it on its way. Not at all. After Section IV he lapsed entirely from the point of the porcupine-quill pen, and wrote, for a time, no more. Perhaps his impulse to write had ridden him too hard. Perhaps the microbe with which the Po-ut had inoculated him had been a swift microbe with a short and an impulsive life. Perhaps also Robert's vitality was not quite equal to the rate of writing to which the microbe had pushed him—two whole sections of carefully thought-out stuff in three short nights. He was underfed too. His breakfast was little and his lunch was less; and his evening meal—a sausage, a sardine, an egg (strictly old-laid), sometimes a chop (pretty tough and greasy), followed by what Miss McGee called "dessert," apple sa'ace or a canned plum of something of that kind—was hardly enough, in and of itself, to build up a very fierce fire in a man. Then, too, Robert was his own housemaid. He had his room to "keep," his fire-place, when he used it, to clean. This of itself was enough to keep him from writing

if the impulse wasn't very strong. He didn't like housemaid's work. And it isn't easy either to do such work when you have outside duties and are away all day.

After Section IV too, Robert had a bad accession of boredom. He felt that nothing at all—let alone Canada Books—was worth doing; and so he did as little as he could. The acute anguished ante-Christmas boredom had passed away. He was merely stolidly bored now. He went on with his routine, did his work at the store: and even there he didn't suffer as he had suffered before Christmas. He just felt increasingly that nothing mattered, that life is a bad job, that he wished he were well out of it. It all seemed purposeless—useless. It hardly seemed worth while to take the trouble to go on living. Robert Fulton didn't definitely or passionately wish to die as he plodded home night after night in February—the month of snow-falls in the Canadian year: he certainly wished that he was not alive and sometimes that he had never been born. But it takes vitality passionately to wish yourself dead; more vitality still to take the further step—and *be* dead. Robert's red blood-corpuscles were not equal to any such definite fact as that.

The world with the coming of the new year had turned into a soft fluffy eider-downy world, with great drifts and walls of snow everywhere. Sometimes as Robert was walking home he saw how beautiful it was; a world soft, sheeny, and whitely shimmering; or else a world blotted out altogether by falling snow—snow between him and the ground, snow between him and the sky, snow between him and the houses, and the trees—snow, as it sometimes seemed to him, between him and reality. Robert often felt when he came home in such a night as this that the snow clinging to his hair and feet, to his eyebrows and eyelashes, couldn't be real. He felt as if he had wandered far, and had come at last into some enchanted land where everything was quiet and muffled; where only now and again sleigh-bells came ringing through, and a dim horse went by, close for an instant, and then passed into unreal snow again.

The beauty of such nights as he saw them, hurrying to get to Miss McGee's warm fire, never came near to him. He saw them from afar, as it were, intellectually. They couldn't touch him, move him, urge him to production of his own, as other beauty could do. Sometimes when his eyes would catch a snow-laden branch, bending beautifully under its pile of soft cushion-ey snow, he would indeed stop, and look at it a

moment. But the idea that it principally suggested to him was, "Will winter *ever* be done!" And when he had looked a moment he would push on again with a shiver and with a renewed wish that he was out of it—for ever.

He did sometimes feel the need for that other kind of beauty—not nature's but the beauty that man makes for himself with effort and urge. He felt this so keenly on some nights that he would slip away from Miss McGee's after the insufficient supper, and walk along once more through the snowy night to the Art Circle; and once there, mount the staircase, stand at the turn, and gaze at "Sleep." This seemed to comfort him. As he stood before it he would think, "Some man somewhere once saw that face in life, and he felt that he must make it his own—by re-creating it." He would stand and look at the fine oval of the face, at the chin, so round, so living even in the stucco cast, at the mouth that when it was alive must surely have spoken living words. Robert Fulton, gazing at "Sleep," would sometimes feel that this life of his was not life at all. He would feel as if he were already among the dead—or amongst those shades who neither live nor die: and the sense of longing that had shaken him sick on the way in to the Lecture would take him once more—worry him, toss him, as a terrier shakes a rat—and drop him back in Miss McGee's room tired, weary, heart-sick, hopeless.

"Sure, why do ye step out into the noight?" Miss McGee would often say to him when he got back. "Them pictures'll not run away sure. Ye should stay home, me dear. Wait till the foine weather comes an' then go look at 'em." She often spoke to him as a kindly nurse speaks to a child. "Will ye not go on with yer great grand wroitin' eh?" she would say. And when he would merely shake his head, too listless to explain, she would bend over the fire and stir up the coal to a brighter blaze, oblivious of the war-shortage of fuel and the difficulty and expense of getting any more coal at all, and think how possibly she could "better" his life. "Was ut the free evenin' to-noight at the Art Circle there," she would ask, "or did ye have to pay out mooney?"

Probably there were two things definitely wrong with Robert Fulton—and neither of these two things would be put into definite words, even to himself. The first was of course the War. In 1918 the thoughts of everyone were concentrated on that great fact, and on that great fact alone. What was happening overseas, the battles, the slaughter, who would come

out top in the desperate struggle—what would become of the world when the struggle was done: these things occupied the minds of men—and women took newspapers tremblingly in their hands and scanned the columns with the endless lists of names. . . .

War was alien to Robert Fulton's every idea of life. By right of the make of both his body and mind, he was a pacifist—though no coward. He had been willing to give himself and his life and his conceptions of life and what life ought to be and let the War do with it what it would. He had offered himself. He had been "turned down." As he had come away from that rejection he had brought with him a mind torn in two: he had felt relief . . . and he had felt a miserable sense that he was being forcibly turned back from the only real duty that lay before him. This double attitude of his persisted. Had he been at the War, had he waited in the terrible trenches and rushed over No Man's Land into the German trenches opposite—he would undoubtedly have been miserable. But he could not have been *more* miserable than he was in the Arundel Store, feeling day after day that he was degradingly safe. He was safe there. It added a poisoned pin's point to his daily misery that in the place he loathed he was safe. This mental discord was at the root of his acute dejection during the winter of 1917-18. He very rarely spoke of the War; merely exchanging briefly with Miss McGee the news of the day, whatever it might be, and then dismissing the subject. And the fact of Miss McGee being on no side at all—for to hope the English will win and yet be delighted whenever they get a slap in the face is not being on the side of the Allies (and yet Miss McGee loyally hated the Germans)—made it easier for him to keep silent about the battles as they came and passed away. He thought about the War, God knows. But his thoughts weren't satisfactory thoughts, and he tried to get away from them when he could. It was like some accursed riddle—the further he got away from them the nearer he was. "My God," he used to say to himself sometimes as he walked home through the snow, "why wasn't I made in some *decent* kind of a way?" There were moments when he envied the possessors of the cheap jingo patriotism that he heard resounding on every side of him; and by the side of a returned man in the store—with his little mark of service on his white linen lapel—Robert would sometimes feel a sort of pang of envy. "He's been through it anyway," he would think. "He's been

some good." His detestation of war mingled inextricably with his desire to be in the midst of it.

This confused feeling crept into the Canada Book. He didn't speak there of the War, of course: in fact the Canada Book seemed to be an odd little book to be writing at all when the whole world was a seething mass of fury and fight. It was queer to be sitting down considering what Canada did for immigrants and what immigrants did for Canada just at a time when the immigrants were streaming "home" with no thought of Canada in their minds. It was rather a time to be writing a book to show that everyone stayed exactly what he was wherever he emigrated to—and Robert was conscious himself that his was a queer little book to be writing in the midst of a war-ridden world. "What's the good of my sitting down," he would ask himself, "to set down platitudes on humanity when humanity's gone mad?" And it was probably this thought that, more than anything else, forced him from the pen's point after his three nights of work: and it was also this thought that set another thought, close to this one in his mind, jangling.

He felt the Canada Book wasn't real. He had not felt this—at all—when he began to write it. He had taken care to have his facts accurate, his desire was to set them down as he knew them and as they would be most intelligible to other people. As he sat up in his little lonely room, bent over his deal table, the Canada Book seemed to him entirely real—often surprisingly real: he did feel occasionally, setting down the facts that had collected themselves in his mind, that he was approaching the veritable thing—humanity itself. But when he came into contact with humanity (to give Miss McGee that grand name!), when he went down just two flights of stairs and came into the first-floor looking out on Drayton Place, and Miss McGee sat at the other side of her ugly oblong table—then things seemed different. From the very first time that he had read his book to Miss McGee he had been conscious of something in himself—a slight, a very slight dissatisfaction that it was difficult for him to put into exact words. He felt, even that first time, that *something* was wrong with the Canada Book; and as the Sections had gone on, he had felt this increasingly. It was of no use his saying to himself, as he did, that Miss McGee liked it, enjoyed it, that it roused and made an appeal to her. He did say these things to himself as he went up-stairs to bed; but at the back of these encouraging remarks there was a constant consciousness that Miss McGee

*didn't* altogether enjoy the Canada Book; that it didn't appeal to her, though it certainly did rouse her, and, above all, that she didn't understand it.

Of course it was easy to dwell on the fact of Miss McGee's educationless state. It was easy to say to himself, "Oh, she doesn't *understand*." But the fact remains that authors *like* people to understand their things, education or no education; Molière himself surely must have been daunted if his house-keeper, when he had read to her one of his best scenes, only stared back at him with expressionless, lack-luster eyes. Miss McGee never did this; but Robert, whose keen perceptions just as often were a hindrance as a help to him, was conscious often of a certain reserve in her. He knew that, if she would, she could say more. And she only didn't, partly because she didn't command the words to say what she wanted, and partly because she didn't want to hurt her guest's feelings.

Section IV had been the success of the lot; and yet, Robert as he left Miss McGee after reading it, and still more during the days that immediately followed, kept saying to himself, "It isn't right. Something's wrong somewhere." The vision of the puzzled—and sometimes the directly antagonistic—look that he saw in Miss McGee's eyes came up before him. "If it was *right*," he said to himself, "she wouldn't look like that. I'm not getting the right point of view. . . ." With this uncertainty in his Canada Book, his desire for it floated away—for the time—and he felt not the slightest desire to write down anything more. Even the Po-ut's beauty which remained with him as an almost constant guest, sometimes, but only sometimes, seemed to him to be lacking in something. "What?" he would ask himself. He could never answer that. The Po-ut was beautiful and aristocratic, what he said and wrote was finished and exquisite—isolated lines and necklets and rings of words still seemed to Robert to be set with priceless gems—but . . . well what? Robert felt that, far away from and ever so far behind the Po-ut, he was on the same road; and it was a road he didn't want to be on. He put away the four finished sections of the Canada Book neatly in the packing-case he had arranged as a cupboard, and he shut the door on them. "It isn't real," he said to himself, "and things that aren't real are no good." "Sleep" was real enough—it, in some mysterious way, united beauty and reality, as Robert and the Po-ut did not. By February Robert's life consisted, just as it had done before the Canada Book began to exist at

all, in going to the Arundel Market and coming home again . . . and being with Miss McGee.

Deep down discontent with himself and his life smoldered within him: and Miss McGee, sitting looking at him from the other side of her fire—worried.

## CHAPTER XXX

**M**AC'S "goin'-away par'rty," as Miss McGee called it, descended into the midst of all this and didn't mend matters. Mac was determined to go. He didn't want ever to see Rose again. Rose had wounded him by insisting on having nothing to do with him: and he wanted to be away from her, to go somewhere where it would be impossible to meet her round any corner. He wanted to wipe Rose Garry out of his life, forget her, forget all the miseries and joys she had kindled in his heart. While he stayed in Regalia things that had been kept coming up in that heart of his however hard and resolutely he pushed them down; and he wanted to be somewhere where these things would not keep coming up into his heart—somewhere where he would never be reminded of Rose Garry again.

He remembered—very often and always in spite of himself—one day when he had been out at "Garryton," as the Garry's residence at Massonville was called, for an afternoon call. A married cousin had been there, and the married cousin's little girl had also been there, a pretty little saucy thing of six or seven, all smiles and white starched petticoats. Mac, who was unfeignedly fond of children, had begun to play with Daise. He had taken her into his arms, told her stories of bonny Scotland across the seas, and then, when this amusement had shown signs of palling, he had turned to romping—running after Miss Daise, catching her, tossing her up in his arms, catching her again and kissing her, to the accompaniment of shrieks of joy. This had gone on for some time when Rose had come on the scene. Mac remembered—how he wished he could forget it!—how the rare pink—she hardly ever blushed—had come into Rose's cheeks and gradually flooded her face and neck. "Put her down, Mac," she had said. "Put her *down*." And she had come forward and taken the child out of his arms, and smoothed down the starched white petticoats

over the plump legs. "Go and play quietly, Daise," she had said, "like a little lady. Cousin Mae will play with you." And, with the pink still in her cheeks, she had turned to Mac. "Don't do that again, Mac," she had said. "It isn't—nice."

It had been that day that Rose Garry had definitely entered Fisher Macpherson's heart. Her modesty, her sense of what was fitting for womanhood even at the age of six, had touched his good Scotch sense of decency. "The *douceness* of her," he had found himself saying to himself over and over again that day when he had left Garryton; and the image of Rose, pink and determined, taking the child out of his arms and then bending down to smooth the little starched garments into their proper places had never left him since. There he had seen the wife—and the mother—he wanted. He had done all he could. He had attacked the citadel of her faith at every point he knew. But—here was the definite break between them—Mac never would consent to have children of his brought up in the Catholic faith; and Rose Garry, serene and compact in her beliefs, could as little have borne that any child of her body could be brought up in any other than the Holy Roman church. On this rock the love of the two had split. Theirs was not the love that clears all obstacles before it. The love of both of them was tinged with this-worldliness, though they thought it other-worldliness: their churches stood between them. "I'll go," Mac said to himself after the third time he had stormed Rose Garry's citadel and been repulsed. "I'll go and leave her—and forget her." His good Scotch pride was wounded. His vanity was touched. Yet as he said the word "forget" the little picture, vignettted on his heart for this life for all he might do to rub it out—Rose in her white frock with her neat hair and her flushed cheeks taking the child out of his arms—came pushing up through his desired forgetfulness. He *knew* he never would forget Rose Garry. And at the same time his dour Scotch determination forced him away from her. "Mac's tickled all to death with Rose, eh," Mrs. Morphy, to whom Mac had related the starched petticoat incident, had said once to Miss McGee. "'Tis mawdesty takes the fellas, eh, McGee! They'll play up to the sporty ones a'alroight, but Glory be to Gawd, 'tis the mawdest gir'rls they'll marry."

"I guess me sister brings her gir'rls up a'alroight," had been all Miss McGee's reply.

And now Mac was definitely going. He was leaving his

good job with its chance of a rise; he was parting from Regalia where he had made friends and where he had hoped to found a home of his own. He was going away from his "Old Lady" out into the vague and forlorn: and the reason, the cause of it all was Rose Garry, white, unspeaking, resolute, going to the Bank and doing her daily work there, quietly, methodically; and then coming home again and taking her share of what was to do in the Garry household. Rose always had taken her share—and more than her share—of everything disagreeable that had come her way. She did unpleasant things as by a sort of right. She accepted whatever came, making no fuss. She was self-respecting, narrow, unswerving in the path of duty. There was never so much as a pin-awry about her—she had always been the nuns' pet at her Convent School. While Nellie spent her life losing everything and never knowing where to find it again, Rose spent hers with everything calculated and exact. She was neatness and economy itself.

"I guess Mac there'd be tickled a'alroight with a par'rty, eh, McGee," Mrs. Morphy said another night when Miss McGee was dressing her leg—an office no longer to be conceived of but as the work of a true sister of charity—"How's that, eh? Let's give um a send-awf so he knows he has friends."

"One sure thing, Fisher Macpherson has friends roight here in Regalia, Mrs. Morphy," Miss McGee had answered. "An' I guess he'd know ut sure ef they was to give um a par'rty." Having thus delivered her opinion Miss McGee kept a silence as resolute as Rose's own to all succeeding remarks of Mrs. Morphy's as to some friends that were no friends and her own unchanging desire to "spank Rose Garry good." But there and then, at any rate, the question of Mac's par'rty itself was settled.

Since Mrs. Morphy was no longer able herself to cook the supper on which it was felt the success of the evening mainly depended (she could hardly get round the kitchen now, and Miss McGee often found her in tears of misery and pain) her second daughter was approached on the subject, and she promised to come round "good an' early" the day of the party and do what she could. Mrs. Finn (wife of Danny, son of Old Nancy of the Irish jig) was what her mother called "no great shakes at a supper." Poor Nonnie Finn was no great shakes at anything at all. She was a kindly good-natured thing that had once been pretty and now was slatternly. She had a husband who was a rake and who kept

her short of everything, happiness included. She was a devoted mother and spent her life caring for the children who were already there, and having more of them year by year. Miss McGee's remarks on Danny Finn and his ever-increasing family were instructive. "Sure he's the busy man," she would remark whenever she heard there was another baby coming. But Nonnie Finn resisted nothing. She was like a spaniel with her humble manner and her soft brown eyes. Her hair that had once been golden was fading. Her eyes had lost the brightness they had once had. Moll McKennay, her sister who had married "good" and who had by now re-christened herself "Margu rite" had not been a thousandth part so pretty as little Norah Morphy. But now . . .!—Mrs. McKennay was It. You would hardly believe to look at the two of them—Margu rite all trim and corseted and not doing anything whatsoever for herself any more, and Nonny down-at-heel, dirty, no longer thinking about herself much at all—that there ever could have been any comparison of any kind between the sisters. Mrs. Margu rite McKennay was as surely climbing up the hill as Mrs. Nonnie Finn was rolling down it. Pat McKennay was "landed" in a good business and making the best of it; and Danny Finn was landed in nothing at all but betting and drinking and coming home drunk and beating his wife, and generally galloping to ruin as fast as he could. There was no doubt, however, which daughter Mrs. Morphy liked best. Nonnie was like herself. Even in her early girlhood she had been a slender edition of her mother. "Nonnie's the goods a'alroight, be-lieve *me*," she always said: and when Nonnie promised to get someone in her place to look after the kids so she could come around to her mother's and see to the cooking of the par'ty supper, Mrs. Morphy said to Miss McGee in a very self-satisfied tone, "Nonnie'll come. *She'll* take hold." To which Miss McGee only replied, "She'll take hold, I guess, as good as she knows how"—and since it was felt that Miss McGee thus expressed only the general sentiment as to Nonnie's powers, it was decided to approach Maggie Chambers, and ask her if, in her capacity as professed cook, she would be good enough to "take hold" behind Nonnie, and pull the supper through. Miss Chambers accepted the approaching graciously. "We'll have petty poys   la parfait," said she instantly, speaking in her professional capacity, "an' Potiphar's grass."

"'Deed then an' we won't," said Mrs. Morphy to that.

"We'll have peas in their can an' sparrowgrass out of ut."

"'Tain't sparrowgrass I'm speakin' of," said Miss Chambers with a touch of scorn, "'tis goose's livers, Mrs. Morphy."

"'Tis the goose'll be on the table, Miss," was Mrs. Morphy's rejoinder, "an' his liver insoide of um."

"The gall of her," Mrs. Morphy confided later on to Miss McGee. "'Tis her'll fix me supper, eh! Me supper's moine, Ma'am. 'Tis me'll fix ut." The "Ma'am" was no sign of offense with Miss McGee. It was merely Mrs. Morphy pointing her moral. There were times when Miss McGee felt that Mac's par'rty supper was a sort of volcano that, before it was finished and done with, might blow up and scatter boiling lava around. She felt a certain relief that she was "out of ut."

Her part was to set the table. Either by some personal attribute or by virtue of her profession, or by the mystic influence of "Uncle's mooney," Miss McGee was acknowledged by the Buildings to be a person of taste. Penelopians came to consult her, not only as to details of their attire but also as to the pattern of Mr. Somebody's new trousers, or how they should "fix" the furniture in their rooms. And Miss McGee took their consultations as a matter of course. She felt in herself the presence of something that gave her a right to be thus consulted. Possibly it was the thing that made her wear her old clothes the way she did; probably if Uncle's mooney had never existed her neighbors would still have consulted her. Anyway, as soon as it was a question of who should set the par'rty table, the job was instantly voted to Katie McGee as a matter of course. She accepted the appointment also as a matter of course, as a sort of divine right; and she began to make plans (by ill-luck it was the pernicky customer she was engaged to for the day) to get home a bit earlier so she could cawncentrate her moind on table decoration. "I mean ut shall look jes' so," she said to herself a good many times over, balancing this decoration against that in her mind. "*He* (she meant Robert) shan't have nothin' to tur'rn um against ut (she meant the par'rty) ef *my* name's McGee."

The meal itself was to be it. Mrs. Morphy provided a pair of ducks and one fowl and a goose—the last so as to be upsoides with Maggie. Dan (he happened to be what Mrs. Morphy called "flush") came down, on his invitation, with a tur'rkey, Gawd bless um, and a bottle of Scotch. Mrs. Morphy herself saw to the gin. Pat McKennay (as an apology

for Marguérite, who refused to be present at all) sent in a couple of bottles of Irish and a couple more bottles of Manhattan cocktails and three big bricks of ice-cream from the "swa'all" confectioner of the city. Nonnie Finn undertook to make layer-cakes "with a chaw'clate icin' on top" for dessert and Maggie Chambers promised to "kape the eye over a'all." Dubois, the grocery on the corner of Drayton Place and St. Hubert's Boulevard went on sending in canned stuff and cauliflowers and apples and oranges and dates and figs and nuts until he got tired of it: and then *his* contribution to the feast was to say that he wouldn't send any more. "Him want to see ze couleur de ses dollar," remarked the French errand-lad. "You tell that Dubois there he ain't got the spur't of a mouse," was Mrs. Morphy's reply. But even this did not bring any more groceries. The mouse went on strike.

"God save us," was Miss McGee's remark to herself as she arrived, breathless from the pernicky customer on the par'ty night. "This sure is the filthiest dur'rtiest place!" Mrs. Morphy's kitchen seemed to her, looking through Robert's eyes as she was doing, far dirtier than she had ever seen it before. She hoped that Robert would not notice the unwashedness of the floor—nor the unwashedness of Mrs. Morphy and of Mrs. Finn. "Sure, gen'leman doesn't notuss," she said consolingly to herself, as she scuttled round striving to create order out of the chaos poor Nonnie had been busy evolving all day long. Mrs. Morphy's hair was waved. Miss McGee trusted that Robert's eyes would be taken with his hostess's comeliness, that his eyes would travel no lower than Mrs. Morphy's face which, though oddly dragged and aged of late, still bore the traces of a comely youth. "She's been the pretty woman, don't forgit ut," Miss McGee had said to Robert on the one occasion of his having seen Mrs. Morphy. He had been brought down to be introduced to her. "She's been the beauty in her toime, Mr. Fulton, eh," Miss McGee had said to him rather wistfully on their way up-stairs. But all Robert's reply had been "Has she?"

He hadn't fancied Mrs. Morphy. He had detested her slatternliness and her easy tolerance of everything she shouldn't have tolerated and her fat all-embracing laugh. He had felt that he never would know what Mrs. Morphy would be saying next—except that it would be sure to be something he would rather not hear. No, Robert hadn't liked her.

And he hadn't wanted to come to the par'ty either. He

had done his best to get out of it. But Miss McGee had been so earnest that he should come. She had felt so acutely that he needed a change and that this would be better than nothing perhaps—she had so pressed and begged, that, at last, reluctantly, Robert had accepted Mrs. Morphy's invitation. "Sure, fetch yer young bo'oy along, eh, McGee," Mrs. Morphy had said, half in good-nature, half in curiosity. The news had spread long ago round Penelope's Buildings that Miss McGee had a bo'oy; and it was only the something that Miss McGee had about her—the same thing that made them ask her to set the table as a matter of course—that prevented the Penelopians from joking her openly about it. They didn't joke Miss McGee, however. They knew better.

Miss McGee "fixed" the table as well as ever she could. She had brought down a basketful of things of her own—amongst other things, the candlesticks that her mother had always decorated the Christmas table with—and, with all the taste that was in her, she set these things out at her best. Her contribution had been pink candles to put in the candlesticks, and little candle-shades that she had manufactured up-stairs in the evenings out of bits and scraps she got out of her "scrap-bag." The shades were very neatly made. They fitted well over the pink candles, and in everyone's opinion they formed the chef-d'œuvre of the table. "I guess they'll look noice loighted, a'alroight," Miss McGee said reflectively, surveying her handiwork. "Them paper napkins is a nice match, ain't they, Mrs. Morphy, eh?" The paper napkins were pink to go with the shades, and, in a small "vayse" in the center of the table there were three pink roses surrounded with "baby's breath." It was the purely decorative part of the feast that had been Miss McGee's contribution to its festivity.

When the table was finished she hurried upstairs and slipped into her best frock, and gave her hair a hurried wave, and dabbed a hurried layer of powder on her nose. As she worked at herself before the glass she hardly saw herself. She was completely absent-minded, thinking of the table set downstairs and the party that were coming to sit round it, and of the way the table and the people sitting round it would strike Robert. "I guess he won't notuss the way the kitchen's fixed," she said to the image in the glass. "*He* won't notuss the dir'rt on the floor none, bless um! I guess. Gen'lemen don't." She rapidly reviewed the guests and felt they were certainly not up to Robert's level: and then Mac came into her mind with

a refreshing sense of his, at any rate, being "a'alroight." "Sure, Mac'll fix um," she thought. "I guess they'll be the way two peas lies in the pod." And she thought, with an even greater regret than usual, that Mac was going away and that Robert would not be able to see any more of him. "They'd be the friends," she had often thought: and she had often wanted to bring them together—only she hadn't known how.

But as soon as Robert came into the room down-stairs she knew she had made a mistake. She had had him come alone, without her, because she knew what people would "say," and she wanted to save him from what that would be: and, as she sat by Mrs. Morphy's fire—she had come early on purpose—and heard Robert's tap on the door—she recognized it at once—and watched him come hesitatingly in and stand as close by the door as he could, she realized instantly that she would have done better to leave him alone as he had wanted to be left alone, and never have dragged him there at all.

Robert, without the slightest desire to do so, looked entirely different from the company into which Miss McGee had almost forcibly brought him. He didn't necessarily look better—it all depended on the way you looked at it. He looked different; and it only required the most superficial glance to see that, however much he might wish to do so, it wouldn't be possible for him to amalgamate with what he was amongst: he quite evidently hadn't a grain of sympathy with anything present—and it is sympathy that is the amalgamating force. He didn't care even for Mac (Miss McGee had been wrong), clean, spruce, tidy, business-like as Mac looked. Mac was to Robert antipathetic—just as Robert himself was antipathetic to Mac. Mac disliked Robert's quiet unobtrusive way of speech quite as much as Robert could possibly dislike Mac's own broad vowels and super-accented consonants. And Bert Baird, Mac's "best" friend, who arrived almost simultaneously with Robert, bearing a three-pound box of "chaw'clates" in his hand, Robert didn't like *him* any better than Mac. They were well-doing young men, both of them. They were far better off than Robert. They knew how to take Canada, and Canada knew how to take them. After a bit each of these young men would hold a bit of Canada in the hollow of his hand, and that bit of Canada would like to be held, and would give proof of liking it by giving up its dollar bills. You had only to look at Bert Baird and Mac to see that they would be well-off some day. "'Deed an' it's Rose is the

fool-gir'rl of her"—Mrs. Morphy was right. Mac's wife would be the only one. He would be a good father, bringing up his sons in the way they should go, steering their path close by the Mammon of Unrighteousness, yet never into it, he would bring his daughters home presents, furs and jewels . . . and yet there was something in Mac's cold clear blue eyes that Robert didn't like; there was even something in it as it rested on himself that Robert resented. It seemed to say, "What for do ye give yerself airs, Man? I see nothin' in ye that's preferable to the rest of us." Robert didn't want to give himself airs. No one could have been more genuinely modest than he. But his modesty ran in a peculiar channel—the English Channel; the one that divides England from the rest of the world. There was something in the way Robert wore his clothes, in the way he brushed his hair and put on his shoes, in the way that he said "how do you do," or "I beg your pardon," that irritated everyone . . . who was not an Englishman too. He had only to walk into a room—or the Arundel Market—or go quietly along the street—to raise hostile feelings in those about him. And the only thing to be said in defense of Canada is that it would have been the same had Robert been in France—or in Italy—or Spain—or Belgium—or Holland—or the United States of America—or anywhere else. He was English.

Mac did not suffer from this disability. He was Scotch, like Bert Baird (who had been Robbie Baird in Scotland), and when either of these two opened their mouths and the broad Scotch accent dropped out, they irritated no one—except the English. Mac and Bert could walk along Regalia's Wellston Road or Argyll Crescent after Church on Sunday just as if it were Union Street, Aberdeen, or Princes Street, Edinburgh. They were quite at home. No one noticed them specially, except to say in tones of approbation now and then, "See them young fellas there? Swa'all, eh?" They had adapted themselves. Canada had received them as her own.

Miss McGee had not been about the world enough to realize these fine shades of nationalities. She liked Mac as everyone else did. She thought him a perfect gen'leman, as indeed he was. She admired the cut of his clothes and the way he spoke and his clean-cut determined jaw. And she liked Bert Baird too, with his dapper appearance and his jokes and nonsense (for Bert was the jocose Scot); she had said to herself a good many times during the week preceding the

par'rty, "Them's two young gen'lemen a'alroight you bet, an' ef they kin do with Mrs. Morphy, I guess *he* kin." Now she saw she was wrong.

Robert came inside the kitchen, just inside, and quite passively allowed himself to be jostled aside by Bert Baird and the box of chaw'clates, and did nothing at all—just stood. Bert elbowed his way right up to Mrs. Morphy herself, seated close by Miss McGee at the kitchen fire with her leg on a stool, and said to her, "Madam, the day has come, bedad, fer which I been layin' awake all noight!" And with this adaptation of Mrs. Morphy's brogue, he laid the box of candies in her lap.

"Git away widg ye," said Mrs. Morphy, instantly becoming more Irish than ever. "Did iver anyone see sech a kid!"

She laughed and they all laughed, and she was turning to Miss McGee to make some further observation when Katie gave her elbow a jog.

"Sure, Mrs. Morphy," she said, "ye know Mr. Fulton, eh."

"Be sure!" returned Mrs. Morphy: and she beckoned to Robert. "Come roight here an' set down be me foire," said she: and then, instantly beginning the introductions, "Here's me da'ater Nonnie, an' here's Danny Finn, her man. An' here's Gen'leman Dan," indicating her lodger. "An' here's Maggie that's Miss Chambers—Mr. Fulton, meet Miss Chambers, eh. An' there's Pat McKennay (come on, Pat, here an' be inthrojuiced), an' me da'ater, Moll McKennay that wouldn't come. An' here's Bert Baird, Mr. Fulton, that's as good as a play. Every toime. You wait till ye hear um. La'aff!—ye'll die la'affin'. Git a move on there, Nonnie, fer Gawd's sake, an' put the supper on. Git busy. 'Tis murdher here with us the way we're wantin' a drink."

"What's the matter with puttin' them cocktails on roight now," cried Pat McKennay. "I didn't send 'em in to look at. Git 'em out, old lady. Don't be holdin' 'em fer to drink after we're gawn away. . . ."

They all laughed.

"If cocktails be the drink of love," said Bert (he had been a member of a Shakespearean Society in Greenock before he came out to Canada) "mix on."

They all laughed again.

"Say, my, ain't he the giddy goat, eh?" said Mrs. Morphy admiringly; and then to Robert, warmly, "Listen, now! Don't you git all awf. He *is* as funny as *he* kin be!"

Robert was now introduced to the whole company—except Mac. He had bowed this way and that, always from his station just inside the door, and his bows had irritated them all. He felt nervous and he looked supercilious. Dan growled something that was best unheard. Maggie set him down for a “No Englishman Need Apply.” Danny Finn didn’t fancy um. Pat McKennay ditto. Mac and Bert thought alike. Nonnie, as she spilled a trickle of gravy all along the floor, looking at him, was of the opinion that he had a lovely smoile, God bless um. And Mrs. Morphy, whose mind was solidly on the gin-bottle, didn’t think anything at all. “*Git* a move on, Nonnie,” she kept saying. “(Give her a hand now in Gawd’s name, Maggie.) Dra’aw in yer chairs, ladies an’ gentlemen. Make yerselves at home. Yer healths!”

While they were all taking their seats at the table, Miss McGee got up from her place and moved over to Mac and took him by the hand (she didn’t mind taking *him* by the hand) and drew him over to Robert.

“Say,” she said, “I guess Mrs. Morphy got all awf, eh. She didn’t present ye.” And then, with just a grain of formality, she said, “See here, Mr. Fisher Macpherson, meet up with Mr. Robert Fulton.”

Robert and Mac looked at one another. Possibly the fact that Mac limped so that he was unable to go back to the front, while Robert had never got even so far as the drill-ground in the Campus may have had something to do with it. Possibly a certain half-bakedness together with the most complete certainty in himself that Mac had may have exasperated Robert unduly: undoubtedly the question that leaped to Mac’s mind the instant he set eyes on Robert, “What’s he doing here? What’s *he* done for his country?” complicated the situation. They certainly didn’t like one another. They disliked each other very much. Miss McGee with a tremendous sinking of the heart felt that her only hope for the success of the evening had been removed—it was as if you neatly drew out the linch-pin from a cart, and watched it collapse.

“Come on,” she said, “I guess we’d best set down.”

She didn’t give the slightest hint of defeat. She took hers, as she said, standing *up*.

The first excuse for a toast was the announcement of Dan’s engagement to the widow. Dan, it appeared, had taken heart of grace that morning and confided this secret to Mrs. Morphy, and begged her to announce the fact at the supper-table

as a means of "breaking the news to Maggie." Mrs. Morphy was quite content to do this. She didn't like Maggie, and neither did Miss McGee; and when Mrs. Morphy had confided the secret to Miss McGee before supper, they had agreed that it was a very good way of breaking the news. "Sure, Maggie Chambers should have had more *dacency* to her," had been Mrs. Morphy's remark: and Miss McGee had only rejoined to this, "Them as sows, reaps!" and had gone on laying the table.

Now, when Mrs. Morphy upset this piece of news amongst the company, Mac "saved the pieces," as Miss McGee said afterwards, by springing to his feet and toasting the bride and groom in a neat speech. He and Dan, he said, were about to leave Mrs. Morphy's ever-hospitable roof-tree. He alluded to his hostess as the "Old Lady," mentioned the good times they had had together, drew Bert, his best chum, into the story, lightly touched on all the various members of the company . . . and before the table had realized where he was bound for, was in Bonny Scotland, extolling it up to the skies and saying nothing had ever been like it yet. This was the way Mac's patriotism took him. The further away he got from Scotland, the more he loved it. Bert Baird likewise. Robert's patriotism took him quite the other way—another source of antagonism between him and Mac. Robert made no demonstration whatever on St. George's Day (whereas Mac went to dinners on St. Andrew's Night and toasted his country and listened to the pipes and sang "Scots wha ha'e" with tears in his eyes); and, instead of dragging England into every conversation and vowing there never was such a land before, Robert Fulton was rather in the habit of disparaging his native land—passing over as negligible all its virtues and making its mistakes very plain indeed . . . than which nothing is more unpopular: and therefore, during Mac's speech, Robert's expression, though undesignedly, was eloquent. "He sure is one gen'leman bor'rn," Miss McGee said to herself, watching him: she admired his scornful look. "Mac ain't fer *him*."

Mac sat down. And Maggie, whose nerves had been somewhat set on edge by the news that had been broken to them, immediately and without any preamble let loose a remark about the widow and her feather-beds that—even in that company!—caused a blush to circulate slowly round the table. Pat McKennay, the seasoned cask, grew as red as any of them.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Maggie Chambers," Mrs. Morphy said. "Are ye tellin' us!"

She meant "us married women." With that curious sensitiveness of even the roughest man about his own wedding, Dan's blush was pinker than anyone else's.

There was a pause.

"Sure it's the health of the broide an' groom we'll drink again, God bless 'em," said Miss McGee, rising with her glass in her hand and saving the situation, "an' then we'll drink to Mac umself, good luck to um, an' may God bring um back to us in the ind."

The table drank. It's blush passed away. Harmony was restored.

"Good luck to ye, Black Nor'rth," Dan said, waving his glass in the direction of Miss McGee. "'Tis more sinse ye have than ye moight, considherin' where 'tis ye come from." Dan was from County "Ca'ar'rk."

They drank again—and yet again—and then Bert Baird got up with a few well-chosen jests in Scotch. And they all (with the exception of Maggie—and possibly Katie McGee—and certainly Robert—began to think what a nice thing life is. Toasts had been begun thus early in the evening in order that they might think this. They attacked the turkey and the goose and the two ducks and the fowl and Pat McKenney's ice-cream with the zest and vigor that a preliminary cocktail, and three drinks will give.

Robert sat completely silent in the midst of the merry-making. It wasn't that he didn't want to talk, but he couldn't think of anything to say. It was as if the whole world had suddenly shrunk to the size of Mrs. Morphy's kitchen, and as if all the things he had previously thought of as existing outside of these four walls, didn't exist any more. If Robert was perceptive, he had all the faults that attend perceptiveness. He took on the tone of the company in which he found himself to such an extent that for the time being he was unable to see beyond the limitations of whatever company that might be. At the same time he couldn't, for the life of him, ever adapt himself or his conversation to those limitations, and so make himself agreeable.

He sat completely silent, eating and drinking as little as he possibly could. He disliked Mrs. Morphy, sitting at the top of her own table drinking gin. He disliked poor Nonnie with a wisp of the hair that had once been golden hanging

down her back; he disliked even more her husband, Danny, with his rakish air and his big laugh and his doggish jokes taken second-hand from last night's *Evening News*. He detested Dan. It is one thing to try to write sympathetically of the manual worker and quite another to sit beside him at supper. Robert loathed the *smell* of Dan, the smell of manual labor imperfectly washed off, mingled with the smell of drink, ancient and modern, which he constantly exhaled: he also loathed the way he ate and drank—it made him sick to see Dan draw his hand across his mouth and wipe his knife off with his tongue. As for Maggie, *she* was frankly impossible and Robert's only idea concerning her was to keep as far away as he could. Pat McKennay was like a beer-barrel. We know how Mac struck Robert. Bert seemed to him simply silly . . . he was thoroughly put out with Miss McGee for bringing him there at all: and he was not less put out with himself for having consented to come. Never before had it been borne in upon him with the same pitiless clarity what a slatternly, down-at-heel, shabby, degraded place he lived in. Penelope's Buildings suddenly seemed to him an impossible place. The food he was eating, touched as it had been by Nonnie Finn's hands, seemed to him impossible food. A feeling of nausea crept over him. A horror of this kind of life, dirty, unkempt, with nothing to relieve its squalor but one or two half-bred, would-be-successful people like Mac and Bert Baird, gripped him.

"Take another sloice, Mr. Fulton, eh," said Mrs. Morphy.

"No, thank you," Robert said: it sounded to himself pernickity in the company he was and he wished he could think of some other way of saying it. "No, thank you," he said. "No more. . . ."

And then—feeling himself silly—in the wrong for the moment—he smiled.

"Faith, the bo'oy has the good smoile," said Mrs. Morphy to herself: she was warmed with gin. "Fill up yer gla'ass then," she went on, trying the universal language on him when she saw he helped himself to nothing. "Sure, ye've nothin' to drink."

But Robert, unfortunately, didn't drink. He had, in response to the toasts, put his lips to his glass: but he really *didn't* drink—and thus was the last link cut between him and the company.

"Sure, 'tis the mother's dar'rlin' ye are then," said Mrs.

Morphy. And she laughed. She meant no harm. It just came to her lips. But no sooner had she said it than the whole table laughed. *They* meant no harm. They had been enjoying their drinks, and enjoyment of drinks means easy laughter . . . and Robert had not taken their fancies.

It was the end.

"Idiot!" Robert said—furiously for once—to himself. "Why didn't I stay upstairs and be miserable alone? I'm not fit company—even for this. . . ."

"I was wrong to bring um, God help me," Miss McGee said to herself—*she* hadn't laughed—as she watched him. "Faith, what should he have to do with the loikes of us. I must git um away," she thought.

She was as good as her thought. As soon as supper was ended—and that was not before midnight—she pretended she had to go. Mac and Bert were lighting cigarettes and Pat McKennay's cigar had been sending up curls of bluish smoke to the ceiling for quite a long while when she invented her clever excuse that took no one in, and got up in her place. "Will ye come with me, eh," she said, turning casually to Robert. "Ye've ear'rly hours in the mor'rnin'."

And, perfectly alive to and as entirely ignoring, all the innuendoes that would accompany their thus departing together, she went across the court with Robert—and they went slowly up-stairs.

"Ye're weary-toired," she said, "an' ye've not had the toime, an' how should ye! I was wrong to take ye, Mr. Fulton. I'd oughter've known we're not loike you. I been used with that koinde of a loife all me days pretty near an' it seems a'alroight to me. But you're used with some different koinde of loife . . . I never oughter've brought ye in ut. I'm sawry . . ."

She stopped.

To say that Robert was conscience-stricken is to say nothing. He had had no idea of how his behavior had struck Miss McGee, and now he felt as if nothing in the world would be too much for him to do to reassure her and comfort her. As she stood opposite him with the dim gas-jet on her landing shining down on her, she looked haggard somehow and, not exactly old, but with a premonition of what she would look like when she would be old. It might have been the effect of the light—but it seemed to Robert as if there were a tragic look in her eyes.

"I'm sawry," she repeated. "I'd oughter've knowed better'n that."

"Oh, Miss McGee," Robert said, "Miss McGee . . ."

He stopped. For the life of him he couldn't think of anything to say.

"'Tis the tough loife I been used with sinst Ma'a was took," Miss McGee said. She stopped a moment and then went on. "I was brought up good I want you to understand, Mr. Fulton, an' I've kep' meself good an' straight sinst, be-lieve *me*. But it's a tough lot I been amongst, an' it's gittin' worse. I'm sloidin' down-hill, Mr. Fulton, God help me, an' I can't help meself."

She stopped.

"Don't ye think I'm gittin' after Mrs. Morphy there," she said. "I'm not. She's as straight as they make 'em. An' Nonnie Finn is one other good soul. I want you to understand that. But," she said, "them others . . ."

She stopped.

"Mac's a'alroight, I guess," she said, looking wistfully at Robert. "I guess Mac's a'alroight, eh? He ain't the gen'lemen loike, what ye've been used with, p'raps. He's the same's us, I guess, only he means to lift umself up out of us, the way Tim Garry an' Andrew Glassridge done. An' Bert Baird's another," she said; "but you . . . *you* . . ."

She stopped again.

"Miss McGee," Robert said, "don't talk like that. I'm no one. I'm nothing at all. If you knew," he said—and he stopped.

There was a pause.

"I'm just one of you," Robert went on after the pause. "You don't know how I want to be one of you," he said. "And I am. I am. If you knew everything—" he stopped again—"perhaps you wouldn't even . . ."

There was another pause. A long one this time.

"Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said, "ye may want to be one of us. An' ef ye say ye do, I guess ye do. But," she said, "ye can't be. Ye never will be. Ye're made on the one plan," Miss McGee said, "an' we're made on the other. Mac ain't the same's you. I see ut. No more's Bert there. They're on the bias, every one of 'em—goin' cheap—seconds . . . when it comes to you."

She stopped.

"You're——" she said.

And after a minute she went on in quite a different tone, "I guess God there knows His job. He made ye the way He felt loike, an' ye're made that way. We have to stick ut."

She stood looking up at him for a moment and—there was no doubt of it now—the look in her eyes was tragic.

"I'm sawry," she said. "Good night."

And she was gone.

## CHAPTER XXXI

**M**AC'S goin'-away par'rty (and, as it turned out, Dan's, too) was the last drop in Miss McGee's cup of discontent with life. This cup had been filling up for a long time, mostly without Miss McGee's knowledge. She had always tried to keep a brave face towards life, she had done her best to joke about misfortune and say it was a gift of God and therefore must be all right; but, for eleven years—since old Mrs. McGee died—Katie McGee had found life an up-hill piece of work. At Mrs. McGee's death she had what, if she had been in another stratum of life, would have been called "a nervous break-down." And it was because of this, and because of her brother-in-law, Tim Garry's persistence on her having a holiday, that she had gone to Doll Weltman's in New York and spent the winter and spring months of 1906 with her. Doll had been kind; very kind. Mrs. McGee had been good to her when she had come, Dolly McSwayne, an orphan girl, from Ireland: she had actually lived with the McGee's some years, and had a sort of sisterly feeling therefore to Mary and Katie McGee; and she had seen her way to pay back her debts. She had cosseted Miss McGee, and fed her on innumerable glasses of milk and raw eggs, and, later on, on as many beefsteaks as she could assimilate. Mrs. Weltman had taken Katie's breakfast up to her in bed herself, she had taken extra cream on her account, she had insisted on doctors and tonics and electrical treatment for the neuritis in the arm . . . no expense had been spared in the Weltman household to make Katie McGee fit for her job again: and Miss McGee, in recognition of this (not mentioned to the Weltman household, however), had "remembered" Belle and Polly in her will. "Uncle's mooney" was to be divided between them—with a little legacy subtracted for Nel-

lie. "I'm not one to take without payin'," Miss McGee had said to herself many times. "I'll pay me way after I'm dead ef I can't do ut whoile I'm aloive." It had been a great satisfaction to Miss McGee to say this to herself; and it had been with an even greater satisfaction—amounting to joy—that she had visited a lawyer's office in order to indicate her wishes as to the apportioning of her money. "Uncle was good to me," she said, "an' I'm goin' to be good to somebody else." And she rejected with scorn Mrs. Barclay's suggestion (the Barclays by the right of the age of their friendly patronage were let into the secrets of the family McGee) that she should put Uncle's mooney in one entire lump into an annuity and so make the best of it for herself. "I loike to think," she had said in response to this, "that me Dutch cousins an' me own sister's choild is goin' to have somethin' left 'em be Katie McGee." And the fact of this definite substantial remembrance of herself that she would have to leave behind her was a comfort to her in many a trudge to a thankless day's work and home again.

This nervous break-down in Miss McGee was the sign evidently of some definite weakness in her nervous system. People whose nervous systems are what they should be don't have nervous break-downs. Miss McGee, however, had ample excuse for such a thing—if excuses are needed. She had been almost sole nurse to Mrs. McGee through a long and terrible illness—cancer. All through the illness there had been wearing anxiety about money. Where was the money to come from to keep her mother alive, with every possible alleviation for her agony? Tim Garry was willing to contribute; but Tim hadn't been as well off in 1906 as he was in 1916; he had had a growing family to keep and educate—it was impossible for him to give as much as Mrs. McGee needed to have. The McGee savings were nothing at all; where were savings to come from with one woman going out cleaning and the other going out sewing by the day? They could afford no Nurse: and even could a hospital have been found to take in such a case as Mrs. McGee's, both she and her daughter passionately set their hearts against any hospital at all. Mrs. Garry came and stayed for days at a time, and loyally took her share in the nursing of her mother: and Rose—then just a "halfling" as old Mrs. McGee used to call her, kept things running in the Garry home. Rose had been as unselfish and as self-reliant at thirteen as she was at twenty-four: and Mrs. Garry, in the

tiny shack where Mrs. McGee and Katie lived on the confines of Regalia, had no anxiety about Garryton (not the big important Garryton in which the Garrys lived now, but a precursor of the same) when she was away from it. Things went on flourishingly with Rose at their head. The children were being cared for, Father was being fed, the house was being kept clean—and if Rose was missing her Convent schooling, she could make up for it when the time of stress and strain was over. Mrs. Garry came and stayed, sometimes for weeks at a time, and whenever she did this, Katie went to work and gained a little extra money. Her customers were good to her—she only went at that time to the old tried ones—they let her come late and go early; and Mrs. Barclay especially, in those days of sorrow (and this was the link that bound Miss McGee so irrevocably to her) had been goodness itself. She had sent constant supplies of good nourishing food suitable for the invalid; soups, strong and kindly, jellies cool and soothing, light sponge-cakes to tempt the sick woman—together with magazines that could be read aloud to her, a down pillow to tuck in at the back of her neck (which Katie used to this day) a light quilt that would keep her warm without burdening her. Mrs. Barclay at that time had been what Miss McGee could never forget; and, even now, in the midst of one of Mrs. Barclay's most infuriating diatribes, when a sharp retort was on the tip of Katie McGee's tongue, she would pull herself up short. "Sure, she was good to Ma'a," she would think to herself. "Let her ta'alk."

It had been a long siege of pain and misery, that last illness of Mrs. McGee. Katie, even yet, could never come to certain turns in certain roads, without the old sick feeling of apprehension coming over her that she had had eleven years before at the end of some of her working days. "What if somethin' had happened to Ma'a while she was out! What if Ma'a was—dead—when she got home?" At those turns in the road, when she came to them now, eleven years later, she remembered as if it were yesterday how she had suddenly broken into a run—and run—and run—and come at last to the poor little cottage, out of breath, exhausted; and then waited at the door, silent, too frightened to turn the handle and walk in. Those had been terrible days—prolonged up to the breaking point: and when poor old Mrs. McGee had breathed her last and was at peace under the soil of her adopted land, Miss McGee had gone, as she expressed it, "all to pieces": and in

the breaking-up of her nervous system, she had exposed the flaw in her make. She hadn't been ill exactly—unless neuritis in the arm be illness: but she had ceased to care for life. What was there to look forward to now that Ma'a was gone! How could she bear to come home all the rest of her life to an empty room somewhere, where Ma'a was not—and where no one else was either. What kind of life was it that she had to look forward to, at thirty-five, with nothing and no one of her own to care for her, and for her to love and cherish in return? Miss McGee had for her mother the peculiar love that unmarried women sometimes have for their mothers. She retained for her the child's veneration, mingled with the later feeling that the mother had grown helpless and old and needed protection and shelter from the very one she used to cherish and shelter herself. "Ma'a was the good woman, sure," Miss McGee was never tired of repeating to herself. She gave Ma'a some of the love she ought to have given to a child of her own. She thought of Mrs. McGee in a sort of way as if she *had* been a child of her own and in those last dreadful days, the old woman in her helplessness and pain, had clung to Katie as a sort of protector and mother. When this clinging was over and Miss McGee was all alone, she had felt, as I say, as if life were over for her, as if she could face no more of it: and if it hadn't been for Tim Garry and his good-nature and his money, Katie McGee might very likely have "gone under" with so many of the rest. She had pulled through, however, by the help of the kind offices of Doll Weltman and her nourishing food, and by the help, too, of the brightness and youth of Belle and Polly. Joe, too, had been a factor. Miss McGee had liked Joe Weltman and his jokes (as much as Robert disliked them when they were retailed to him) and she had liked—loved—the big strange bewildering beauty—and ugliness—of New York. It had been a sort of revelation to her, this gigantic city, full of noise and rush and color, with buildings such as she had never seen before, some of them towering up into New York's clear unsmoked sky, and some large and broad as if the land they were built on cost nothing, and decorated on the outside as if they were meant to be palaces for the gods. Miss McGee used to walk up and down Fifth Avenue (when the glasses of milk and the raw eggs had done their work) as if she never could be tired of it. She had gazed at the palatial residences (so she termed them to herself) "Great, eh!" and at the wonderful shops, full of every luxury

and beauty that woman's desire could covet for itself. Yes, Miss McGee had loved New York. Ever after she had towards that city the sort of feeling we have for any place where we have regained strength—and renewed ourselves. New York had brought back to Miss McGee with its strangeness and its novelty and its fierce rush of life, the desire to live; and always it was associated in her mind *with* this desire to live. She felt as if the very stones of the streets of New York were permeated with life; as if it had cried to her as she was walking on it, "Live, Katie McGee!" She was correspondingly grateful to it.

It hadn't been only Mrs. McGee's death that had wrought havoc on her. The departure of Mr. Mitt had had its share in the break-down. With the death of her mother Miss McGee had seen herself for the first time as a woman out in the world without a parent, and with the departure of Mr. Mitt she had also seen herself as an elderly woman out in the world without the chance of a man. She had slipped between the two homes—the parent's home and the husband's home—and she saw herself henceforth for ever and ever without any home at all: for what kind of home is the one a single woman makes for herself and comes back to sadly in the evening! Miss McGee, at that time, eleven years ago, had faced the facts of her future life; and, before New York and Doll Weltman's steaks lent their artificial stimuli, Miss McGee felt that it would be impossible for her to tread any further this mockery of a life that lay before her. She wanted a home of her own—a husband—not to go out working by the day any more . . . she just wanted the old eternal thing that the woman always has wanted and always will want: and she couldn't get it.

She recovered. She surmounted her nervous crisis, and she came back to Regalia in due time, ready to take up her work again. She took it up, made some kind of a shelter for herself in Penelope's Buildings, regained her old customers, made new ones, set her life on its new basis as firmly as she could—and wiped the past off her mind.

She wiped it off—but not quite. She did her best not to think, but she couldn't help thinking, sometimes. There was one thing too that, try as she might to wipe it off, wouldn't go. It stayed, written apparently in indelible ink. She tried not to see this writing on her soul, but the more she tried not to see it the clearer it got. Had the Garrys done what

they should, she—Katie McGee—might have married Mr. Mitt. Here was the crux of the whole business. The plate of cold turkey was a pretext and a pretense—the real reason for Katie McGee's anger, the thing she couldn't—and never would—forgive the Garrys was that they hadn't come to her help in the Mitt business, and made it possible and even profitable, for Mr. Mitt to wait. Had Tim Garry come forward, this was what Miss McGee said to herself, and *talked* with Mitt, had Mary Garry wanted Katie McGee to be married, as she should have wanted it—Mitt never would have gone away. But the Garrys hadn't cared for Mitt, they hadn't thought he would be a "good" match for Katie—he had no money—no profession—he wasn't a Catholic—they had done nothing at all. They had let Mitt go without a word. Kind as they had been about Mrs. McGee, nobly as Mrs. Garry had taken her part in the long illness and the terrible death, brotherly as Tim Garry had been after the death and generously as he had come to his sister-in-law's assistance—Katie couldn't forgive them. If they had helped her it was a married woman she would have been this day. She couldn't forget it. She couldn't forgive it. And, after her return from New York, though she had gone for some years regularly enough to the Garry's house, she had eagerly seized on the first possible occasion for taking offense—a plate of cold turkey did as well as anything else—and she had quarreled furiously, irrevocably (as she thought) and for ever. She never wanted to see Mary again, or Tim either. They had deserted her when and where she had most needed them. And now see what had come of it.

Mac's goin'-away par'ty seemed a little thing to set her cup of discontent with life brimming. But it did. The cup was full before the par'ty, and it needed only a drop to make it overflow. The par'ty was the drop. After the evening at Mrs. Morphy's, had you searched the earth you couldn't have found a more wretched creature than Katie McGee.

She did nothing by halves. If she loved—she loved. If she hated—she hated. If she felt she couldn't do her work—she couldn't do it. After the unlucky par'ty that had been productive of so much dismay to so many people, Miss McGee felt it would be impossible for her to go on dressmaking any more. She suddenly felt a disgust at her profession, she felt (what she often felt at moments and for moments before) as if she had spent an utterly wasted life in making over other people's gowns, and as if that part of her life must come

to an end. She just felt that she never could make over a gown again—as if a needle and she must henceforth be strangers.

It was all very well to feel that—but what to do? Miss McGee, as she walked to her work and home again, thought and thought. She went over in her mind all she could—and couldn't—do. She racked her brain to find some talent she might turn to and make money with. "Sure ye're not the fool, Kitty," she would say to herself. "There's *somethin'* ye kin do. Get busy."

Such admonitions sounded well and did her good perhaps in keeping up her spirit. But they didn't take her very far. What could she do? She could do just one thing and that was, go out sewing by the day. It was too late for her to try and set up in business of her own—and besides, that needs capital. She couldn't get a place in anyone else's business because her personality would have made it impossible for her to keep the job; the artistic streak that made her able to do what she did do would also have got between her and any "bawss" and cloven them in sunders. There was nothing for it but to go on as she was doing—nothing between her and her last day on earth but to plod wearily to a customer in the morning and to plod more wearily home at night with a dollar and a half in her pocket. She couldn't raise her prices because the customers wouldn't "stand for it": she might think herself lucky if she went on getting customers and dollars and a half till the end.

By nature Miss McGee didn't care for dressmaking. She was interested in it. She had the true artist's feeling towards it; possibly, if she had had a better technical training, she might even have liked it. For she had a flair for clothes. Quite extraordinarily she could tell what the fashion was going to be and where any given thing was good "stoyle" or bad. So marked was this sense and so clear her eye for "line" that Mrs. Glassridge herself often condescended to take her to the tailor's or to the smart Importer's where she bought her Paris clothes "so she could have McGee *tell* the folks." The folks didn't like it—how should they? But the dollar-and-a-half Katie McGee "put it over them," as Mrs. Glassridge also said, "every time." She didn't know how she knew: she just knew. Something in her said "Fix that so it cur'v'es around," or "Ease there a particle"—and, lo, the effect was attained. Had Katie McGee had her chance—had she emerged from a

Paris atelier instead of out of a twopenny-halfpenny dress-making stunt in Regalia city—she would have been an artist in clothes: and then she would have liked dressmaking. As it was, this talent of hers was more a sorrow than a pleasure. It told her what ought to be without giving her the power to do the thing herself. For, though she could point out where a given finished article should be altered so that a desired effect might be produced, she was unable, with the imperfect training which was all she had received, to evolve out of a clear sky of stuff an original creation. She made a try for it, and sometimes it came off . . . but more often it didn't, and then that was a black day for Katie McGee. She had the feeling of an artist to the thing she wished to create. If it came off she loved it. If it didn't come off she hated it to such an extent that she could have murdered it on the spot. "It *don't* do," she would cry in despairing tones, "it *ain't* comin' out." "Don't fuss yourself all up, McGee," the customer would reply, "don't worry. It's a'alright, I guess." And so to the customer's imperfect eye, perhaps it was. This kind of consolation never had any effect on Miss McGee. It only made her feel that this world is a world of mostly fools. "I'll never cut in a bit of good stuff again, so I won't, God help me," she would say, walking home after one of these failures to attain the ideal. "'Tis a croime gittin' after what ye can't do." And before Robert had given her something else to think of she had spent whole evenings wondering what she should have done to get some effect she hadn't been able to get, and worrying herself sick over something her customer had considered "perfectly sweet."

It was her repeated failure in embodying her ideal that had gradually undermined her interest in her profession. She wanted to produce "on her own," as she said, the beautiful simple lines of the best French frocks, she wanted to get by her own spear and bow their perfection of cut and their aroma of style—and she couldn't. Whenever she saw at Mrs. Glassridge's or at the houses of any other of her "good" customers, those lovely little outgrowths of some complex French intelligence, some of the feeling that haunted Robert as he stood before "Sleep" crept into her mind. She wanted to put *herself* into the frocks she made; and when she couldn't—for to put ourselves into anything is the last proof of our skill and the last evidence of our maturity—she felt a sort of sick disgust with her whole profession. As the years went on she felt

less and less interest in what she did, because she couldn't nohow do ut, as she said. When she first began to "go out" she had detested the everlasting "making over" with hardly ever a chance to cut into a new piece of stuff; but as time went on and it was gradually borne in on her that she would never be able to "create," she began to feel an actual relief when her customers turned over to her some last year's gown to be "remodeled." "I guess I kin fix that so ut looks good a'alroight," she would say to herself, and that feeling that is the reverse of the ecstasy of creation—the solid satisfaction in decent work done—would take hold of her as she cut and snipped. "Guess *that's* goin' to look foine," she would say to herself, basting away, "ef ut is old stoyle made over."

It is all very well to adapt oneself, but an indefinitely prolonged adaptation down-hill all the way is apt to lower vitality in the end. Interest, after all, is what keeps us alive. Miss McGee, not expecting much from life, especially after the termination of the Mitt episode, had resolutely set out to make the best of a bad job; and what gaieté de malheur she possessed had evolved out of that. But—at every feminine core you find a man, *cherchez-le!*—Robert's advent had broken down this gaieté de malheur . . . and the malheur itself, behind, that Miss McGee had been pushing back for eleven years, had broken through. It had broken through and forced itself on Miss McGee's attention; she suddenly realized that she was very unhappy: and when we realize that we *are* unhappy.

Had Robert Fulton kept out of her life Miss McGee might have gone on to the end as she had gone on for the eleven years since her mother's death. She might, not discontentedly and certainly not despairingly, have gone on altering and repairing the wardrobes of her ladies; taking, except perhaps for an occasional pang of quite human envy, the beautiful gowns of Glassridge and Co. as God-sent things in which she had no part, and accepting the substantial kindness of Mrs. Barclay as a pleasant change in the monotony of life. But with Robert something new had come into Miss McGee's life. A hope. Of what?—it is impossible to say. She had felt for Robert, almost as soon as she had set eyes on him, a new sort of feeling that was compounded of a sister's affection, and a mother's devotion, and a comrade's loyalty, and a woman's love. He had slipped into her purposeless life like something—that opened up vistas of Miss McGee hardly knew what. She had felt for him and his accent and the things he said and the

way he said them, for his appearance, his smile, the look in his eyes, his very way of holding out his hand, something that she had never felt before. She realized in Robert something she had never had the opportunity to meet—but something that she had always dimly wished to meet. He was connected in some inscrutable way with her desire to make beautiful gowns. He was caught up and all entangled with her desire for beauty—for the lovely in life. With her intimacy with Robert all that she had put behind her, as she thought so successfully—her longing for happiness, and beauty, and life as it is not but as it ought to be—blazed up in her heart: and with this blazing up of things that she had thought were dead ashes, all the old unhappy longings that she thought she had done with blazed up too. She felt—and all winter long she had been feeling and thrusting the feeling down—as she had felt eleven years before when she had lost her mother and Mitt, and with them her chance of a home, her last hope of any position in life; she felt in 1917 as she had felt in 1906, that she had not been fairly treated, that the beauty she longed for was beyond her reach; that perhaps it didn't exist at all, that anyway she was useless, no good at her work, no good as a woman. What was she—a poor little barren old maid (virginity be darned!) a bit of wreckage in the world, only fit for the scrap-heap—to be made over again somewhere and made over quite different.

All these things Miss McGee had felt during the winter of 1917. They had surged up in her on the night of the concert. Her ecstasy as the bo'oy in the velvet jacket played was shot through with the sense that the harmonies he threw on the air were painful—unbearable in their beauty. And they were unbearable because their beauty was transitory and it was what her soul was yearning for—to keep. In a minor degree she had felt the same at the Po-ut's lecture. She had felt it sometimes even as Robert read his Papers to her in his pleasant voice. What would not Miss McGee have given to have a voice like that, to read like that, to have an education like that to make use of! Had Robert looked up oftener than he did while he was reading he would have seen tears in Miss McGee's eyes—hot scalding tears of misery and a sort of envy that had no harm in it. He might have seen in her face a yearning for life as it ought to be. He didn't look up. Miss McGee pushed back her tears. But at each repetition of the longing "it" grew stronger, more unbearable, more difficult to push

down. . . . After Mac's goin'-away par'rty her cup of life brimmed over into open discontent.

"I'll not go on the way I'm doin'," Miss McGee said to herself the morning after the fiasco the par'rty had been. "God save us, ain't I slaved enough for them women there? Can't I git out?" As she said "git out" it seemed to her that she was an animal caught in a trap. She had to get out. She must get out. She could no longer go to Wellston Road and Graceburgh Mansions and The Queen Mary Apartments and Tompkins' Avenue and sit and rip and think and sew up again and try on and take off and wear out her brain trying to make one thing out of another. "I'll not do ut," she cried, "'tis murder." And then a little later on she cried again, "God in Heaven, Katie McGee, ain't ye got *nothin'* in ye? Brace up, for the love o' Mike, an' git a move on. . . ."

She thought and thought what she could do. All the time she was awake she turned and twisted her brain and tried to make it over into another brain as if it was a customer's gown. "What could she do!" "How was she to get out of the trap—*quit!*" These were the questions that perplexed her. It was not till the night she went to see Mac off at the "depot" that she found, as she thought, the answer to her question. "Gawd," she said then to herself, gazing at a man she hadn't seen for years and years. "Kitty McGee, ain't ye the fool! Mickey Ryan'll foind ye the job." She felt the answer come sailing into her mind as a swan turns the curve of an inlet and comes swimming down the lake. "Ef I ain't forgot Mickey!" she said over and over to herself. "Mickey Ryan," she said aloud, going up to her friend and twitching him by the sleeve, "ye ain't forgot Kitty McGee, eh?" And she was not surprised, she just took it for granted when the big man turned to her and said in his big hearty voice, "Forgot ye! D'ye think I've forgot me everla'astin' hopes 'o' hell!" They laughed together, and then Katie, in an eager unsteady kind of voice asked Mickey if she might come and see him—at his office: she had—had something to ask him. "Sure, come," Mickey said. "Come *on*, Kitty McGee, whenever ye feel loike ut."

Katie McGee felt that her fortune was made in that big fat voice. "I'll 'phone ye up, Mickey Ryan," she said: and then she said in herself, "An' sure now I'll be hurryin' home an' tell Mr. Fulton." Robert was mixed up in her every plan of life. As she went almost running home to Penelope's Buildings her blood seemed to bound in her. The bleak wind that she

had minded so much on her way to the depot hardly seemed to be blowing at all. "I guess it's tur'ned war'rmer some," she said to herself, with her foot on her stairway. And then, bounding through her, went the thought, "Mickey'll fix me. Mickey Ryan'll foind me the job." The spotless handkerchief that Mac had so very properly waved from his departing train seemed now to Katie McGee not of the slightest importance as compared with her reincarnated Mickey Ryan. "Sure, *ain't* ye been the fool-woman . . .!" she said to herself once more, feeling round and round her wrist-bag for her latch-key on the threshold of her door. She made up her mind that she would tell it *all* to Robert.

## CHAPTER XXXII

IT was daunting to open her door and find Robert peacefully sitting by the fire reading a book. It was nice to find him there at all of course, but Miss McGee could have dispensed with the book.

"Mac's awf," she said, coming in and shutting the door.

"Is he?" said Robert.

He only very reluctantly raised his eyes from his book. It happened to be Samuel Butler's Note-books, and he was enjoying it, and it was a considerable come-down to descend to Mac.

"Sure he's awf, the poor bo'oy," Miss McGee said. "He's gawn in the wor'ld, God bless um, an' Gawd knows ef ever we'll see um again."

She removed her hat and stood with it in her hand, while with the other hand she felt carefully all over her hair to make sure, as women do, that it was fit for the public eye.

Robert said nothing further. Manners obliged him to put his book down on his knee, but he kept a finger inserted in the place where he had been reading in the hope that he might be able to return there; and now and again he cast his eyes downwards in a longing sort of way.

"There was me seein' um awf," said Miss McGee unnecessarily, "an' Nonnie Finn was there, the good soul that she is. An' Danny Finn come with Pat McKennay that he's seekin' the job with. (Danny's on the bum, an' he'll take the job where he kin git ut, bad luck to um!) An' Bert was there with his joke, you be sure. An'," Miss McGee continued in a significant

tone, approaching the inner soul of her subject, "there was one there I ain't saw this long toime pa'ast." She paused, and then in her usual tone she went on, "An' there was one or two gen'lemen out of Mac's awfus, I guess. *He's* the whoite-haired bo'oy, Mac is, sure. An' me brother-in-law was there too. I guess *he* thinks Mac's the bawss . . .

She paused.

"Oh," said Robert. "Oh, indeed." It wasn't stimulating, but he wanted to get back to Butler.

"Sure I ain't saw Tim Garry in years," Miss McGee remarked.

"Haven't you?" said Robert.

"I ain't saw Tim," Miss McGee said impressively—as if Robert cared!—"not sinst me sister an' me scrapped over that bir'rd there." Miss McGee stopped short as if something had shot her. "I want them Garrys to understand I ain't a *beggar*," she said in a war-like tone.

Robert did fervently hope that it was not written in the note-books of the gods that he was once more to hear the cold turkey episode. Of all Miss McGee's rigmaroles this was the one, perhaps, that he could least bear. He had heard it so often. He was sick of it, and anyway, even at the first time of hearing, he had never seen anything in it. Why shouldn't Mrs. Garry send her sister a plate of turkey if it was convenient so to do? (His own sensations at the advent of the Glassridge pie occupied another plane in his sensations.) He now sat entirely silent. He thought this might be his best chance of escape. And, apparently, it was written in the divine note-books that he was *not* to hear, for in a moment or so Miss McGee said in her usual tone, "Tim Garry's gained weight some sinst I seen um."

And then, after a second, she turned and went into her bed-room, and Robert could hear her moving about and putting away her out-door things, taking off her rubbers and changing her boots. He once more opened his book and cast himself therein.

"'Twas Mickey Ryan was the friend I ain't saw this long toime pa'ast," Miss McGee observed, when she had put away her out-door gear and had come into the living-room once more.

"Oh," said Robert again. This time he didn't even raise his eyes from his book. He realized it was rude, but he didn't care. He wanted to read.

"An' Mickey's no loighter than *he'd* used to be," Miss McGee remarked, siting down at the other side of the fire, and spreading her feet on the fender to warm. She twitched her nose with an odd little movement she sometimes had. "Sure, I guess Mickey Ryan'll git away with his two hundred pound a'alroight," she said.

Robert closed his book. It was no good, and he saw it was no good. With the air of a saint gone slightly sour he placed the book on the table, crossed his feet on the fender beside Miss McGee's feet, leant back in his chair and resigned himself to fate.

"I kin see Mickey now," pursued Miss McGee, "I kin see um now, the red-headed glory of a bo'oy that he was. Scrappin', God help um, from mornin' to noight an' his Da'a gittin' after um with a stick. . . ."

She gazed retrospectively into the fire.

"Them Ryans is hot stuff, you bet," she said. And then, with a touch of pride, she added, "'Tis the divils comes out of Ireland, Mr. Fulton, ye kin bet yer sweet loife."

Robert just went on saying nothing. He felt no drawing to the Ryans. And, to tell the truth, he wasn't wanting to hear about Ireland—a country he had no great sympathy with. Robert hadn't really half as big a mind as Miss McGee—whose desires embraced the world. Robert's mind accepted certain things and definitely shut out others. But Katie McGee's mind was made of some elastic material, and the more you had given her to put into it, the more it would have stretched.

"I guess they done themselves good, them Ryans there," Miss McGee went on after a period of silence. "Ole Pa'a, God save us, couldn't put the letter to's name when fir'rst he come out. An' look at Mickey to-day, the gall of um." Miss McGee stopped, but this time for emphasis. "With his woife," she went on, "an' the ly-mousine she got, an' the dawg there in the front seat, an' the Chaw-fure to droive an' all. My," Miss McGee went on, lowering her voice a trifle, "ye couldn't git yer moind around what Bidy Ryan there ain't got." She paused again and then remarked, "Ef 'tain't her husband's love. An' sure pop, Mr. Fulton, she ain't got that."

Robert felt himself forced to say something. He said, "Hasn't she?" And then, feeling that to be inadequate, he added, "It seems a pity, doesn't it?" He cared no more about Bidy and Mickey Ryan than if they had been troglodytes—and neither

archæology nor anthropology was one of Robert Fulton's "things."

For quite a long time Miss McGee remained wrapped up in her own reflections. She stayed silent so long indeed that Robert was just considering the possibility of putting out a stealthy hand and drawing his book nearer—when she spoke again.

"Mickey Ryan's made his, I guess," was all she said when she did speak: she was paving the way to mentioning to Robert that she hoped Mickey would also make *hers*.

Robert sighed.

"What does this Mr. Ryan do?" he asked. "I mean, what is his work?" He saw that he would have to hear and he thought the shorter way might be to ask the definite question.

"G-r-a-f-t spells gra'aft," said Miss McGee calmly. "Michael Ryan, take ut from me, Mr. Fulton, eh, is one boodler bor'rn." She gazed into the fire. "Them Ryans knows the way to git in one on the ground-floor, be-lieve *me*," she said.

Robert felt less and less drawn to Mickey.

"Are they old friends of yours?" he said.

"I ain't *saw* Mickey in years," Miss McGee replied, "not till this noight. But him and me was the kids together a'al-roight. Ole Pa'a Ryan had the lean-to there in Ma'a's back-yar'rd."

She was silent. For a frail moment Robert thought the Ryans had gone the way of everything—to oblivion: and then Miss McGee burst out worse than ever.

"Say, my, ef you'd laid eyes on Ma'a, Mr. Fulton," she said, "ye wouldn't want me to tell you why 'twas Pa'a Ryan kep' the stair swep' fer *her*."

She stopped short and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh my, them was the good toimes," she said: "ef ye'd saw Ma'a, ye wouldn't wonder at me keepin' ta'alkin'. She was *good* . . ."

"I'm sure she was," said Robert, much more pleasantly than he had yet spoken. He could bear with old Mrs. McGee far better than he could bear with these new importations, the Ryans.

"Whin ye see a good woman, Mickey Ryan," Pa'a'd used to say, "kape yer eye on her. Niver take ut awf till ye see the next good woman comin' round the cor'rner. 'Tis the one way to kape safe."

Robert glanced downwards towards his book.

"An' good 'twould 'a' been *fer* Mickey Ryan there," Miss McGee proceeded darkly, "ef he had hearkened to Pa'a. *He* gawn the way his Pa'a never done, Mr. Fulton, an' that's the way of the bad women, God help um."

Miss McGee considered a moment. She didn't want to prejudice Robert too desperately against Mickey if she could help it.

"But he's a'alroight, I guess," she said, "ef he is sport-y. He knows the way to the bad women's house, but he ain't the only one."

This was so incontestable a remark that Robert saw no way to answer it. He didn't want to anyway. He was only listening with one ear. He wasn't interested.

"An' ef Biddy Ryan don't know enough to stay home when ut rains an' she don't know the way to fix herself so her husband stawps home too, why, I guess she kin take a'all that's comin' to *her*," Miss McGee said, after a considerable pause.

Robert continued to make no remark.

There was another long pause.

"She has her ly-mousine," Miss McGee proceeded, "an' the dawg on the front seat, an' the Chaw-fure at the helm. I guess *she's* a'alroight."

Robert did hope that the Ryans were now done with for ever and ever. He felt growing up inside himself the same dislike against Mickey and Mrs. Mickey and Pa'a, too, that he had felt the other night against Dan and Pat McKennay and the Finns and all the rest of them. He sat quite tense—so anxious was he to hear the last of Miss McGee's friends; and when she burst out again after about five minutes' silence he felt all his muscles jump.

"When Pa'a gawn out," Miss McGee said, gazing intently into the sinking fire (she meant out of the world and not out into the street as Robert at first understood), "he had Ma'a up at the house there *fer* to bid um good-by. Says he, 'Yer the good woman, Mary McGee, an' ef ye ain't had ut in this loife, be-lieve *me* it's comin' in the next. 'Tis the Ryans,' he says, 'will be gittin' ut hot there,' he says, 'so good-by to ye now.' He stritched out his hand—Ma'a'd used to say 'twas cold then—an' he fell back on his pillas. 'Pray *fer* me, Mary McGee,' says he. He died that noight."

Miss McGee bent down and took up the poker and neatly trimmed off the fire. She was speaking now as if Robert were not there at all.

"My, my," she said, "men's made all sor'ts o' quare ways. But most of 'em is made the one way, I guess, an' whin ye foind one that's made t'other, most toimes he ain't much of a man."

She put down the poker and reached for her work-bag, and she seemed to become conscious of Robert's existence again.

"One sure thing," she remarked in her usual voice, "I seen many better men than Mickey Ryan with the bowels o' mer'cy lef' out. So I guess he's Pa'a's bo'oy after all."

She began to sew.

Miss McGee had not enlightened Robert as to her schemes for Mickey. Even after she came in to the room and saw him reading his book, she had fully intended to tell him everything—how she meant this old friend of hers to get her out of her dressmaking life and land her somewhere else; and then, perhaps, when it was all fairly settled—she had intended to tell Robert this too—Mickey might be approached on the even more important subject of Robert himself.

She had meant to make a clean breast of it all. But when she got into her story—in rather a roundabout way as her manner was—she saw that it somehow wouldn't do. Mickey was "a'alroight," he was "Pa'a's bo'oy," he was "sport-y" and all the rest of it. But he wasn't for Robert, any more than Mac was. Miss McGee saw this almost as soon as she began to speak; and, once having grasped the fact, she said to herself, "I'll wait till Mickey's fixed me good an' *then* I'll tell um, bless um." She didn't feel in the least provoked with Robert for his lack of interest. She merely felt that it would be a false step to enlighten him at this stage of the proceedings—that she had had hers, as she phrased it to herself, the other night at Mrs. Morphy's, and she wasn't taking any more. She therefore sat at her side of the fire after she reached for her work-bag, not at all unhappy for the time being—thoughts of what Mickey would do for her slipping through her head as her needle went slipping through her piece of cloth. She had infinite faith in Mickey—was he not Pa'a's bo'oy, and had not Pa'a been good to Ma'a? She reviewed in her mind what other topics of conversation she might introduce, the Mickey one being laid away on the shelf for the moment.

"Mac's gawn," she said, after a long interval of silence. She noticed Robert give a slight movement of impatience in his chair, but she thought she might indulge herself with one

minute of Mac—considering he was gone for good and all. “He’s gawn an’, take ut from me, more’s the pity.”

She sewed for a bit in silence and in an extremely business-like manner. It was always a pleasure to watch her needle-hand moving along.

“Sure, I guess *he’ll* make the grade a’alroight,” she said after a bit—she was also saying to herself that, after this, she would stop. “That young fella is one smart-y, take ut from me.” She now began to get so fascinated in her subject that Robert’s boredom ceased to be a motive power for her at all. “Sure,” she said, “Mac’s great. An’ he’ll fix up matrimonially too where he’s goin’, or me name’s not McGee. Why, that young fella there,” she said, warming to her subject and crossing her legs and gazing once more intently into the fire, “has ‘wed’ wrote roight all over um.” She settled herself now for a thorough good “ta’alk.” “You take my wor’rd,” she said—and she sighed: she was thinking of Rose—

But Robert had had enough.

“Miss McGee,” he said, rising and reaching for his book and giving it a tap as he put it under his arm, “do you know what this book says? It says, ‘I can generally bear the separation, but I don’t like the leave-taking.’” Then, after just a second’s pause to allow the quotation to sink in, “You’ll find,” Robert said, “that’s *your* condition as to Mac. You’ll get over his departure.”

He knew this wasn’t nice of him. He knew he hadn’t behaved well this evening—but he couldn’t help the dig. He did so dislike Mac. He went towards the door with the offending book under his arm. “Good night,” he said.

Miss McGee sat by the fire, pondering. She didn’t even seem to notice that Robert was going away. “My wor’rd,” she said, in a meditative voice, “but tha’at’s *good*.”

This remark of Butler’s had struck her far more than the whole Canada Book. She didn’t see the slightest joke in it. She didn’t consider it in the least degree funny—but she liked it. She accepted it as solid fact.

“It’s true, be God,” she said, slowly raising her meditative eyes to Robert’s. “’Tis the Goods a’alroight. I jes’ hated to say ‘so long’ to Mac—but now he’s gawn I don’t seem to care one par’ticle.”

She kept her meditative eyes fixed on Robert’s face. Mac floated away into what used to be called the ether.

“I guess ye’re glad we got yer name fixed on them Free Libery

lists there," she said. (Through Miss McGee's intervention and Mr. Barclay's signature, Robert had been promoted to Membership at the Free Library of Regalia, and the Note-Books were the first-fruits of his Membership.) "Ye kin git yer own books now." She went on rather wistfully, "an' please yerself, eh. An' I guess ye won't be wroitin' so much on yer own now, eh," she continued, that odd penetrative power of seeing into others coming once more to the fore now that her own concerns no longer occupied her exclusively. "'Tis easier enjoyin' what t'other folks wroites, eh, than be wroitin' on yer own?"

Robert looked down on her with a smile. She always managed to catch him in the end.

"You're right," he said, "but," his smile grew more pronounced, "how did *you* know?"

"Must ye go?" Miss McGee answered—she was down on the ground once more with Robert, and the fact that was principally clear to her was that she didn't want him to go away.

"I must," said Robert. "Good night." And as he ran upstairs, he said to himself, "Those *awful* friends of hers! Ghastly creatures . . ."

Miss McGee, left alone, reviewed the evening. It had not been a conspicuous success, yet neither had it been a complete failure. The subject she had wished to reach after Mickey had been blown away had certainly been "Uncle's coat." The bleak March wind that had blown through her on her way to the station had renewed the wish in her that Robert should wear that cherished article and be warm in it. And yet she had never got—never *could* somehow get—the length of mentioning it.

"Seems too bad," she said to herself, left sitting by her fire alone, "seems loike there was bad luck in ut. An' yet 'twould fit um loike a mericle . . . onest 'twas took in under the ar'rums there."

She sat pondering and gazing into the fire with earnest eyes.

"Sure ef I was to put the brand-new velvut collar on ut 'tis King George umself'd look the bawss in ut," she thought.

She got stiffly down on her knees to rake out the fire, and knelt with the poker in her hand, gazing a moment longer into the glowing redness.

"'Twas eight year come June me uncle Mike Cassidy died on me," she said meditatively to herself. She paused. "Sure!" she went on in a pensive way of thought, "but when a coat's

cut swa'all it is cut swa'all, I guess;" and the rest of her meditations after that were one huge interrogation mark—till the fact of her never being able to propound the coat-question to Robert at all came over her once more, and once more she sighed deeply. "Oh my," she thought, "where's the use of a wor'ld I want to know where nothin' don't never come *awf*." She raked out the glowing cinders on to the hearth and battered them black with the fire-shovel with an almost unnecessary violence.

"Mickey's goin' to be my little tin god on wheels this toime, anyway," she was saying to herself cheerfully five minutes later as she tied up her head in the woollen shawl that wrapped the tea-pot round when she went to morning church. Her spirits flew up at the thought. "Mickey's my little beau that brings the goods home," she said, setting her window carefully a little bit ajar so that no draught might fall on her directly in the night.

She clambered into bed.

"It's stiff I'm gettin'," she remarked, clutching the bed-post, "'tis toime to be goin' to Mickey. Kitty McGee, ye're an old woman. . . ."

She got down into the bed and turned, like a cat settling itself for a nap. She hunched the clothes contentedly over her shoulders—and she went to sleep.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

AS soon as Miss McGee had definitely taken this resolution to go to Mickey Ryan the world changed its color. Instead of being a drabbish-gray, mole-colored sort of world it suddenly became shot through with prismatic lights. As Katie McGee looked about her, going to her work in the early morning or coming back in the late afternoon, she didn't see the soft dusk she was walking through, she saw rosy tints and hints of the most heavenly blue, she saw her future—she calculated it at twenty years more perhaps—spreading out before her in a charming delicate luminous tint: she saw her future, in fact, in color; not inky-black as we see our futures when things are going wrong with us.

Presently she 'phoned Mickey. And it was when a strange voice answered from the other end asking her name and

whether she could state her business that it began to dawn upon Miss McGee that Mickey had indeed sailed into the business empyrean. He had reached that height when he was protected by hello girls sitting at the switch in the entrance-hall, and by stenographers of his own; it had become a matter of some difficulty even to get speech with him. It was during the conversation with the telephone girl—short, sharp, and to the point—that Miss McGee felt her first qualm of uncertainty as to her mission to Mickey. However, she persevered. And, when she had insisted on sending her name in to Mickey and persisted in refusing to state any business at all, a message was at length brought back from the Bawss himself that he would see her the next day at noon. The young lady at the other end delivered the message as if she were shooting something out of a fire-arm of modern manufacture, and when she had finished shooting she cut the telephonic communication off.

This appointment of Mickey's implied, according to Miss McGee's first calculation, a day off. And then it occurred to her that, as it was the Lady (so she continued always to call Miss Eileen Martyn in her mind) for whom she happened to be working, and as the Lady was unlike any other lady on the face of Miss McGee's earth, she would explain the matter to her and see whether an hour off might be granted—and considered, of course, in the day's pay: Miss McGee was nothing if not honest, and, as she said, always asked nothin' from no one for nothin'. The Lady proved, not only a willing, but an eager ally. "But of course," she said with great emphasis, "of *course* you must go. Take as long as you like. What does it matter how long you're away? I have to go out myself," she continued after a second, "but I'll leave the key under the door-mat and you can take it out and let yourself in whenever you want to."

It was interesting to see that so intelligent a creature as the Lady still lent herself to the fiction of the unfindableness of a door-key under a door-mat.

"Be sure you tell me all about it, now," said the Lady, the last thing before Miss McGee set off. "And make yourself *nice* to him, mind. Tell him I'll give you a reference, and try and get him to promise something. Be sure . . ."

Her voice sounded really interested.

As Miss McGee made her way to Mickey's Office she found herself thinking about the Lady. She found her mind dwell-

ing indeed on the Lady rather than on the all-important talk she was about to have with Mickey. What was the Lady? How did she come to be where she was, elegant, educated, with no servant, working, evidently, as Miss McGee could see, rather harder than her strength could overtake? Miss McGee, walking rapidly along in the down-town direction, reflected that she knew absolutely nothing about this customer of hers. Much as she had told the Lady—and she had, first and last, told her a lot!—the Lady had told her nothing in return. She was receptive exceedingly, but communicative not at all. Miss McGee did not even know for certain whether the Lady was married or not. She seemed to be unmarried at the moment, but there were things she had said that seemed impossible to emanate from anything but a very-much married woman. And yet she seemed “good.” She was beyond Miss McGee’s ken. She was a mystery.

When Miss McGee got down-town the question of the Lady faded from her mind before the more instant question of how she was to “manage” Mickey. Miss McGee had a great idea (in common with most of her sex) of “managing” Man. She said to herself as she came near Mickey’s Office, “Ef I was young I could twist um round me finger, you bet. But I’m old, God help me, I’m old, an’ it’s goin’ to be har’rd to git around um p’raps.” And involuntarily, with the woman’s instinctive turn of the head, she viewed herself in the window she was passing. Old—old—old. Work-worn—work-worn—work-worn. Her heart sank. “How am I to ask Mickey to help me quit an’ me lookin’ like that?” she said to herself. And, as she passed through the big outside revolving door of the great building where Mickey’s Office was and made her way to the elevator, she drew herself up and together in a pitiful desire to impress herself even on the elevator man. “Ryan, Sullivan and McCurdy,” she said—and went swinging upward.

Nothing could possibly have been nicer than Mickey. He had developed from the red-headed glory of a bo’oy into a big heavy expensive man. You could see, to look at him, that he ate big dinners that cost a lot of money, and that even his lunches were not things to sneeze at. His watch-chain, that hung across his ample stomach, was the best quality. His clothes were a comfort to his tailor. His socks and shirts and ties were everything they shouldn’t be perhaps, but for all that they hadn’t come in with the milk, as Miss McGee said to herself. They had cost money. Mickey, and Mickey’s

Office, and doubtless Mickey's home, and the flat where he kept his other home, were all things that were expensive and, from the point of view of dollars and cents, of the first grade only. He was one of the successful ones of the earth—good-natured on occasion, self-indulgent always, quick to see profit, stupid intellectually, hard as nails, and yet responsive to any adroit touch on his weaknesses of the flesh; Mickey Ryan was born to be a modern money-maker, and he was a money-maker, and it was hard to fancy even his disembodied spirit in any other manifestation than as a money-maker still. His presence breathed money. As he sat with his fat legs crossed into the aperture of his hideous costly desk, with the dictaphone to one side of him, and human machines just on the other side of the wall hired at so much apiece to be ready to run at the least touch on his bell, you felt that he and money were partners: and that, running in harness as they did, they were a power—the power of the present world. It seemed, looking at Mickey, as if love itself could not wage war against this supreme power that Mickey and his dollars embodied. As if the best thing love could do would be to draw itself apart and assume a waiting posture. "Some time my turn will come. But Mickey now . . ."

The moment Miss McGee was shown into Mickey's private sanctum, her errand seemed to her a sort of lost dog wandering where it had no business to be. If she had followed her impulse she would have turned and gone back into the snowy street and followed her dressmaking trade forevermore. However, she couldn't very well turn and go out of Ryan, Sullivan and McCurdy's office without explaining her presence there. By the very momentum of her own efforts, she was obliged to shake hands with Mickey, to assume a composure she was far from feeling, and to sit down in the chair he indicated—the client's chair on the other side of the table from his own.

"Well, Kitty McGee," said Mickey kindly, "'tis the big day since you and me was the youngsters together, eh? How's the world with you, me dear?"

His voice was friendliness itself, and, except that it was slightly hoarser, it was the voice of the old Mickey Ryan that had run riot in Ma'a's yard and got Da'a's stick at night. It reassured Miss McGee.

"I'm slick," she said. "How's yerself, Mickey, eh?"

Mickey sighed, and a look of gloom—odd on his broad rubicund good-nature—over-spread his face.

"None too good, Kitty," he said. "Things goes back on me, God damn 'em, most days."

And then Miss McGee thought she saw the way to "manage" him.

It was only after she had asked him every possible question that sympathy could suggest, only after she had taken his side against Bidy, urged him on to further revolt against her and her mother, steadied him in his determination to take his kids away from his wife and send them to any boarding-school he had a fancy for: it was after she had led him into reminiscences of the old life and his Da'a and her Ma'a, and only after that that Miss McGee began to venture to set forth her own proposition. She told Mickey how she had fared in the world. She made it clear to him how hard she had worked and how little she had got. She told him in unmistakable Irish how she felt towards her profession. "Mickey," she said, "for the love of God, git some sawft snap quick; ye know the way to slip me in. I'd fix things. I'd bring home the goods, you bet, every toime. Sure as I'm aloive, I can't go the way I'm goin'. I'm sick an' toired of the dress-makin'"—and through her mind dashed the possibility of some soft snap in his very office itself, perhaps—"I'm quick, Mick Ryan," she said, "I'd *wor'rk*. Don't ye know the way I was always quick, Mickey dear," she said, changing her tone for the coaxing one. "Ef I was slipped in a trust-job be a friend, I'd keep ut, be sure. Ef—ef there was any Bawss'd trust me——"

Her voice slipped away into nothingness.

Mickey looked at her. He hesitated.

"Kitty," he said, "ye were best to stawp where ye are." And then, noting the desperate fall in her face, he went on, as if he had always meant so to go on, "but sure, me dear, I'll look around. I'll see what there is . . ." And he wandered off into vague talk and vaguer promises of Street Car Companies and Telephone jobs and men he knew that he would speak to. It sounded grand and it signified nothing at all. But Miss McGee's knowledge of the world didn't lie that way—and she thought he meant it.

When she left the office she found not the slightest difficulty in impressing herself on the elevator-man or anyone else. She trusted Mickey. She felt that certainty of emerging out of her present life and into some other much more prosperous one that arose naturally out of her trust. Mickey would do the

straight thing. Mickey would fix loife. With his hopeful words going round and round in her head Katie McGee saw not the slightest difficulty in her being "slipped into" some comfortable job, in earning a fair living wage there, in being able to live decently, in being able to help Robert. "Onest Mickey's through with me," Miss McGee said to herself, "I'll set um on to Mr. Fulton. *He'll* fix um." And she saw Robert in some secure little job with little to do (so that he could have lots of time for writing) and much to get, and all round about herself and Robert she saw a beneficent universe quite different from the world they had hitherto inhabited. She walked uptown again with a swift springy step. She felt warmed and comforted. It never occurred to her (quick and worldly-wise as she was, too, in some things) that Mickey's easiest way had been to promise what he had not the faintest intention of ever attempting to perform. She took the Lady's key from its inscrutable hiding-place under the doormat, fitted it into the door, opened the door, and came into the pleasant safe cozy flat that was so redolent somehow of the Lady's presence even when she was not there. "He'd be happy, bless um, in an apartment fitted out the way this one is," Miss McGee thought, glancing about her. "It'd fit um the way the pod fits the pea . . . it looks loike um *now*." And when she had taken off her things and hung them up in the Lady's cupboard and sat down at the table again, her work simply ran through her hands, and everything succeeded with her, she was so happy. She sewed, and turned and twisted the stuff in her quick nimble fingers, and when the Lady got back a little later with the eager word on her lips, "Well, Miss McGee, what did he say?" she found her gown in an extraordinary state of finish. Miss McGee had positively romped through the difficulties. "Guess you're goin' to look loike the Queen of England (she meant Victoria) in this," she cried gayly, holding up the gown: and then, coming on to the real thing, "Me friend says he kin fix me a'alroight. Sure, Ryan, Sullivan and McCurdy's It. Ef I'd've knew before I'd went to-day what a swa'all place they got there an' the way Mickey Ryan's got umself all fixed up, I guess I'd never have went. But it's a'alroight," Miss McGee said. "It's *a'alroight*, I guess." Her voice gave a queer little crack. "Mickey Ryan spoke to-day the way he moight 'a' been me brother. He says he knows guys that's *wantin'* ladies the loike of me, and he says he'll speak to the 'phone folks. . . ." Once more her voice gave a queer little crack—"so I guess

I kin quit," she said. "I guess I kin say so long to the dressmakin' job. An' I'm glad. I'm *glad*. I've bore up . . . but I been crazy to quit ever sinst Ma'a died on me an' I gawn to New York . . ."

Miss McGee was silent a minute.

"I guess I'll fix your clothes up slick," she said, "before I quit. You been *good* to me."

She paused.

"Take ut from me," she said, "dressmakin' ain't fer a loife-toime. There ain't nothin' *to* ut. Ye git sick an' toired——"

She paused again.

"But what's the use o' ta'alkin'," she said, "when I'm pretty near out of ut now."

"I'm glad, Miss McGee," the Lady said: and it was after a second that she added, "if . . ." She stopped there. "Well, I'm glad," she said, after another second, "that you think you've got what you want."

She went out of the room to take off her coat and hat. And it was only after she had gone away that it came over Miss McGee that her voice had been very grave. She wondered why.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was on his birthday that Robert read the next section of his book to Miss McGee. His birthday happened to be on the date of the reputed birthday of Shakespeare, and this little fact gave Robert each year an absurd little throb of satisfaction. Possibly it was ridiculous that Robert Fulton liked his birthday at all. It has become the fashion to be superior over birthdays and anniversaries generally, and to say, "What is the New Year? Every day is a New Year": and in the same way, "What does it matter what day you were born? Any day is good enough to bring forth anyone."

Robert Fulton did not share this excessively democratic feeling to dates. He did like his birthday. He would have thoroughly enjoyed it if someone had made a great big pleasant fuss, and shown affection by welcoming the day that had brought him into existence. No one made any fuss at all. No one in fact knew anything about it. And so, in a sort of self-defense, Robert had fallen into the way of doing some small thing on his own account to mark the event . . . of his

having reached such-and-such an age. He said to himself apologetically that it was Shakespeare's birthday he was celebrating, and then, as an afterthought, he glided himself under Shakespeare's wing and felt glad that Nature had arranged that they should slip into the world on the same day—never mind how many centuries apart. If this was a child-like, or even perhaps, a childish trait in Robert Fulton's character, it was nevertheless there, mixing inextricably with the rest of it.

For some days before Shakespeare's birthday, therefore, Robert was busy. He ate his supper in Miss McGee's apartment, and then he hurried to his own room and reveled in the pleasant unaccustomed warmth of it—looked into the glow of his fire and felt happy. He felt a sort of dare-devil luxurious pleasure in the sight. When he sat down to write with his table jammed into the warmest corner and his chair placed so that he could feel on his body the full force of the flame and the red after-coming glow, he felt as if for the moment he had managed to shut the world outside and that he was in some safe secure inside spot—where he could live. A fire for Robert was an event. From this trifle he could extract a meal for his senses. The one drop of honey in extreme poverty is this ability it gives to extract pleasures from the merest trifles. As Robert Fulton watched the reflection of the dancing flames of his fire on the wall it seemed to him—very temporarily and transitorily of course—that his Canada Book was perhaps worth something; he felt sure for that moment, anyway, that the creation of it was bounded both behind and before with happiness.

It just happened that this section of his booklet gave Robert special pleasure to write. He felt—rightly or wrongly—that in it he was drawing nearer to the worker than he had ever been able to draw before. He had passed that first worst step of recognizing that he was on the wrong road. He had taken time to think; and sometimes as he busied himself about this Section V, he felt as if the Canada Book might—perhaps—blossom into something after all. Quite a little blossom, of course—a daisy among flowers: but yet that it might be worth that much from the very fact that its author was sincere. Robert Fulton had reached a midway state. His desire was to be heart and soul with the worker and yet he was uneasily conscious of being driven away from him both by the fastidiousness of his senses and by the convolutions of his brain. Also—possibly his convolutions were too convoluted—Robert had a capacity of seeing things both ways at once . . . like a fly: and what

usually goes with this power was thrust upon him too: the incapacity to accept passionately any given side. Without definitely knowing it indeed—he wasn't introspective—Robert was perhaps the least bit cold. He never could bubble over at any rate, as Miss McGee did when things enchanted her. On the other hand, he could do what she never could—he could see what was good even in those things that were most antagonistic to him . . . provided the things, such as Dan at Mrs. Morphy's supper-par'ty, were physically absent so that his senses did not get in the way. He saw, for example, exactly what the immigrant to Canada wanted: and he sympathized (intellectually) with that want. At the same time he saw with equal clearness what was lacking in that desire—and all that was right and praiseworthy in what the immigrant *didn't* want. It was no wonder that he and Canada didn't agree. The very fact that he liked his birthday to be on the same date as Shakespeare's is enough to show that Canada and he never could have agreed. He did like this, however, very much: and his intention to finish the section he was working at and take it down to Miss McGee's on April 23rd and read it aloud on that night (as a tiny offering on Shakespeare's shrine) nerved him to special efforts and sent him to bed each night with the pleasant glow of something actually done.

The last month had been a pleasanter one than usual, and that fact alone made it easier to work. Miss McGee had been in a mysterious state of good spirits (mysterious because she had not yet divulged to Robert her hopes of Mickey Ryan) and he had basked, as it were, in the rays of her hopefulness. The month had passed for Miss McGee, it is true, without anything definite happening. One day, a couple of weeks or so after her trip downtown, she had ventured to ring Mickey's office up and had, after some preliminary skirmishing with the young lady on the 'phone, "got him"; and then he had merely reiterated what he had said before. "Nothin' doin', Kitty, yet. You wait. Keep cool. *I'll* fix ye." Miss McGee had hung up the receiver with the same feeling of joyous anticipation that she had had when she left Mickey's office. He was going to place her. He was choosing amongst various delightful jobs the most delightful for her. Her dressmaking days were near an end. Soon she need no longer be preoccupying herself with customers' dresses. She would be "fixed" in some new work, necessarily better than any she had ever had before, she would be mixing with more interesting "folks," she would

be getting on better, making more money. It was odd that a woman, knocked-about as Miss McGee had been, should have had such visions. One would have thought that any nose that had been kept at the grindstone all its life would have had more sensible ideas of the world. But then Miss McGee had seen so little of the world. She had seen Regalia and a sort of thin surface film (what a visitor does see of a city) of New York: and she had heard about Ireland. That was all. Of the small space she knew she had acute conceptions: of the enormous space that lay all around that small space she knew—the great big outside real world—she knew nothing at all.

On the night of the 23rd Robert came back from the Arundel Market with a quick step. He longed to get home and begin reading the Canada Book. He ran upstairs, washed his hands, brushed his hair, took hold of his manuscript and his cap, and ran down-stairs again to Miss McGee's room. When he got there, to his unbounded astonishment (for such a thing had never happened before) he found Miss McGee on the threshold of her apartment with her arm round the neck of a big fair outspreading sort of woman who made Miss McGee look beside her florescence like a little dark-skinned white-haired gnome.

"Well, good noight to ye, Mary dear," Miss McGee was saying. "Come again, eh. An' good noight, Ag," she went on, releasing the big woman and turning to a younger fatter thing that hovered in the background. "Goo'-by, dear, an' fetch on yer fy-ance to see me, eh." And without being aware of Robert (he had shrunk back into the shadow of the staircase wall) she went over to the banister and hung over it as her visitors descended, calling after them as they picked their way downstairs, "Good noight to ye. Come again, eh." It was not till she was going back into her own room that she saw Robert was there at all.

"Me dear!" she said then in a warm happy tone—it was as if her affection for the whole world was just brimming over—"come on in. That was me sister, Mary Garry. She come on here an' made ut up with me. . . ."

Robert glanced at Miss McGee—it was something in her voice that made his glance—and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"We had the same Ma'a," she said, after a minute, "Mary an' me. Ye can't go back on yer own, eh."

She stopped short and a tear ran down her cheek.

"I'm the darn-fool," she said, "sure. I don't *want* to make ut up with Mary. But she come an' we got ta'alkin'. An' sisters scrappin' is silly. . . ."

She stopped again and another tear rolled down her cheek.

"Oh, go *on*," she said, "there ain't nothin' to cry about."

And she hesitated.

"What's pa'ast is pa'ast," she said, after a bit, "an' I'll git yer supper."

And, as she went bustling about, she said, "Sure 'tis all behoid I am, but ye won't be moindin', Mr. Fulton, dear. 'Twas me sister comin'. . . ."

She was unable to get beyond the reconciliation. She prattled about it all the time she fetched the dishes and set the table and boiled the water and made the toast. Robert sat with his eyes on the fire, thinking. It was Shakespeare's birthday—but he felt lonely. Shakespeare, whatever else he was, wasn't a family tree. Robert felt acutely on this anniversary of his birth-night that he would like a sister—or a cousin—or even an aunt . . . if she were nice. He wanted something of his own: and he hadn't anything. Decidedly there is a great deal of sense in not keeping anniversaries at all.

## CHAPTER XXXV

YOU remember where we were?" Robert said when the things were all cleared away, and the inner man was (so far) comforted, and the hearth was tidied up. "It's a long time since we read anything together."

Miss McGee looked up brightly. She wasn't thinking of Robert's manuscript at all. Scenes of old times were floating before her eyes: and together with these old scenes were mingled the reconciliation with her sister and possible new scenes to be set by Mickey the Great. Miss McGee was feeling that the Kitty McGee of long ago might yet resurrect into a Miss McGee who was worthy of consideration and respect: if she had not felt like this, Mrs. Garry might have come to visit her in vain. "Never moind," Katie McGee had said to herself when the poverty of her surroundings had struck her full in the face as she was talking to her prosperous sister. "Don't worry. I'll be out of this. I'll be in me own yet."

It was this power of imagination of hers that had enabled her to face the situation with dignity and keep pace with Mary Garry's overtures. "Sure I'll be even with 'em yet," she had kept saying to herself all through the interview. "Mickey's fixin' ut. *I'll* show 'em."

These ideas were still floating about in Miss McGee's consciousness: it was these ideas indeed that enabled her to look at Robert with such bright intelligent eyes.

"Sure," she said, "I remimber." (She remembered nothing.) "I'm there a'alroight, you bet. Foire ahead, Mr. Fulton, dear. I'm with ye."

"We were talking about the clerks and stenographers and how they became Canada—how they *are* Canada after a time," Robert said, rather as if he were beginning a Lecture. And then he stopped himself and glanced at his friend with a smile.

"You're Canada, aren't you," he said, "and your sister that made friends with you. And her husband . . . and those other friends of yours, Ryan, if that's their name. And Mrs. Morphy too—and Dan, and all the rest of them. They're all Canada, aren't they?" He paused just imperceptibly. "And your mother, I suppose," he added, as a sort of afterthought.

Just for the second, oddly enough, he was traversed by a pang of jealousy for these people who could merge into the vast becoming-ness of Canada, grow into her, become rib of her ribs and loin of her loins. Canada even, in that case, might be something of your own. "I'm not Canada," he said, "am I, Miss McGee? I won't ever be . . ."

He stopped short and looked away from his manuscript and down into the fire.

"Ye're yerself," Miss McGee said in a matter-of-fact tone. "God made ye the way ye are." And then, after just a momentary halt, she went on, "Ma'a'd used to say she was happier in Ireland."

"Did she?" Robert said. He felt not so lonely.

Miss McGee pursed up her mouth and nodded several times.

"Sure," she said, "she'd used to say, 'Katie, ef I had to do ut over again, 'tis in Ireland I'd stay.' An' yet," Miss McGee said, right on the top of this remark of Ma'a's, "will ye look at Mary there!"

The vision of the big fair prosperous well-dressed woman on the stairway rose before the eyes of Robert.

"H'm!" he said.

One of their pauses fell between them.

"Ain't ye goin' to read yer piece," Miss McGee said, breaking it after a minute or so, "I'm a'all fixed up to listen."

And she laid her chin in her hands in the old way and sat gazing steadfastly at him with her large eyes.

Robert had thick short hair—fair hair, the kind that would have been soft and dense and cloudy in texture if it had been a woman's and long. His eyes were clear light eyes; and when they looked full at you, you saw in them a queer ingenuousness. They were eyes that knew a good deal and suspected that there was a great deal more to know, and yet they were eyes to which a great deal of life would always remain sealed. The mouth was a pleasant one. Had the world treated it well it would have smiled easily; and even as things were it did smile fairly often—a shy, slightly deprecating, very friendly smile, the "good smile," of which Mrs. Morphy had spoken at the unlucky supper: there was something akin between the look in the eyes and this smile that drew you to Robert Fulton. You couldn't be in his company a minute without feeling that you were in the presence of a genuine human being. He was not a pretense thing, masquerading as a man; he was, so far as he went, the real thing: and if he didn't go all the way, he went, at least, the length of his tether.

As Miss McGee sat opposite him with her chin in her hands and gazed at him, she was conscious of a deep pleasure in his looks. He wasn't good-looking, in the ordinary sense; but he had what Miss McGee admired. He had "style"—distinction, in a small way. She looked at him, and felt very proud that she knew him. She felt very proud that she was thus admitted, as it were, to the inside of his mind. She did not exactly listen, perhaps, but she sat hearing what he had to say. What he had so striven over in his little room upstairs came home, on this night of Shakespeare's birthday, in an odd way to Miss McGee. She seemed to feel what she had felt the first shadow of on the last occasion of his reading—his sympathy with what he wrote of: and this time, curiously, not in words but more through the medium of what he did *not* say, he conveyed to her something else: that her experience of the world was of value—that an "elegant education," however elegant it may be, does not go all the way. "God save us," she thought, leaning forward and regarding him very affectionately, "we two makes the whole. He's one ha'alf, bless um,

with all he knows, an' I'm t'other ha'alf with all I *don't* know." She felt, sitting hearing what he had to say, that she could supply just what he lacked; that the knowledge—the squalid sordid knowledge of life that she had attained with so much sorrow and woe—was what was wanted to set the Canada Book on its legs. "Sure 'tis red blood I'd pour into ut," she thought, leaning forward, gazing at him. "Sure 'tis *loife* I could give . . ." And then, smiling at the thought that she could give anything at all, she leaned nearer to him and caressed him with her eyes. "The dear choild," she thought, "will he write the book!" And Robert's efforts seemed suddenly to her like the playing of a child with a ball. Delightful, of no importance, and yet in another sense all-important and the one thing life has to give.

The old envious thought that she too could have written had she had Robert's advantages seemed a foolish thought now. She just felt happy sitting there beside him, motherly, kindly-disposed to all the world, fond of Robert—so *fond* of him that it seemed as if all the world was centered in him, and as if, in being fond of him, she loved all the world. There was, this time, no pang of jealousy to break up this feeling of joy and delight. "Sure," she said to herself, "he's moine—in a sinse. He's moine—jes' now. I'll not worry."

Robert read steadily, and without looking up. His clear eyes were down on his paper, traveling from line to line. The light of the lamp gleamed on his fair hair, and made bright lights in it. It was all very quiet, just the falling of an occasional ash through the grate, and now and again, a hurried blast of wind outside the window. The drawbacks of Miss McGee's room were hidden by the imperfect light. It all looked cozy, domestic, there was a flavor of home all around. And through this flavor came Robert's quiet even voice, reading—reading . . . making views clear—speaking to the world outside . . . through Katie McGee. . . .

'Except on the very rare cases where a specialized artist of quite unusual ability and strength of character is in question, it must be granted that the Newer Worlds do mostly crush out the artist in the man. It is not probable that the artist will succeed in them in the ordinary sense of the word. He will have to take his pleasure in feeling that he has attained the power of looking things straight in the face and so has got into truer relation with essentials—has become, to some degree at least, the greatest artist of all, the artist in life.

Now as there is no chasm between the specialized artist and the humblest craftsman, the same thing applies to the manual worker who emigrates. The first, naïve kind of artist he will rapidly cease to be: any remnants of spontaneity and child-like intent pleasure in his work will go in Canada. But there is no reason why the same processes of reality should not go on in his case as in that of his specialized brother. The little bit of a virtuoso that he was in his own special department at home he will cease to be: but other and more important things he will learn—if he has sense enough. . . .

The wind came dashing from O'Neil Street and went scurrying past the Drayton Place windows. It was not the fierce winter wind that had so often pierced Robert through and through; it was not even the biting wind through which Miss McGee had walked on the night of Mac's departure: this was a spring wind—the precursor of new springing life. It came tearing round the corner as a boy plays—hasty—merry—preoccupied in its own game. . . .

'For the really vital and significant thing in the whole situation is that, all the while this elimination of the artist from the workmen is taking place, there is something else going on in him which is very difficult to grasp and almost impossible to put into words. When he gets over to Canada he does cast away a great many of his preconceived ideas; he loses his bearings; he becomes casual and inefficient and in many ways less pleasant than he was, but he becomes a more definite personality. He ceases to be one of a class and becomes instead more of a distinctive human being. He sets foot on that long road which passes through egoism and acquisitiveness and leads slowly to knowledge and mastery—what wonder if he travels eagerly?'

Robert's voice, as he read on this night of April 23rd, was not so absolutely even and equable as usual. Part of Miss McGee's inability to understand had on preceding nights arisen from this perfect evenness of voice of his. Had he accented here, glanced up to translate a word there, she would have understood long before that his sympathy was where she thought it ought to be. It was as much the manner of his way of delivering the exterior as it was the technical matter of the interior that had kept him and her apart. This evening, moved as he was sometimes by what he had written—moved because of the sincerity with which he felt the words he himself had put down—his voice took on light and color, it became trans-

parent at times so that you seemed to see through it, at other times it became human and kind. Miss McGee sat gazing fondly at him, and she wished this evening might never finish—that it might go on for ever and ever and ever—world without end. . . .

'A curious transformation sets in. What is happening' is that the worker is defiantly proving his own personality not only to the world but to himself. He is getting born again—out of a class and as an individual. At that stage of the human being's history (and it happens sooner or later to everyone) what we call "art" is bound to suffer. If it persists at all—if the human being is so essentially of the artistic type that he cannot shake it off—it persists unhappily; but it is mainly in the intellectual type of artist that this is observable. In the case of the craftsman, whose interest in his work is transferred to interest in himself, the love of the work will die. There is no room for both: a man cannot serve two masters. In the birth of self-consciousness, art must go for a time. . . .'

Robert knew that he was carrying Miss McGee along with him. He realized, and more distinctly than if she had tried to give voice to it, the confused understanding of his paper that was going on in her mind. He knew that she was liking what he had to read to her. He was even conscious that he was saying something to her that she had long been wanting to hear. As he turned over to the last page of his manuscript, he glanced up at her and met full with his own light clear candid eyes her dark shining caressing glance. He smiled, and when he turned back to his page, he carried back that look with him—eager yet pensive too, happy, immensely anxious to understand.

'The worker is not likely to be happy in Canada, but then would he be happy anywhere, once he has entered the stage of self-consciousness? Can you be acutely self-conscious and happy at one and the same time—if your self-consciousness is being used by you only in order to further your own interests and assert your rights? But if he is no happier, he will at any rate be more satisfied. He gains a sense of freedom in the New World, and in the escape from tradition and the routine of a narrow groove he also acquires a resourcefulness and a certain rough-and-ready adaptability that are of value. Perhaps that is the next step back to the old loyalty: perhaps this spirit of assertion is the necessary bridge to that other consciousness of self that makes you only the more valuable

servant of others. But it is a long step and a strong step over the chasm, and it cannot be taken—while you stand and look.’

Robert folded up his manuscript in his own neat way and laid it aside. For the first time he had the complete joy that comes of sharing. He had written his little scrap, he had shared the fruits of it with another human being. He felt—it was absurd of course—as if Shakespeare were not so far away: not the genius Shakespeare who is entombed in so many scholarly works, but the personality, gentle, friendly, encouraging, infinitely satisfying and kind.

They sat quiet a long time and neither of them was conscious that any time had passed.

“I loike that,” Miss McGee said at last. She had been aroused by some infinitesimal noise, and she shook herself as she spoke as if she had just been awaked from a nap. “I loike ut. ’Tis true.”

Robert turned slowly round from the fire and looked at her.

“Do you?” he said—he meant “like it.”

“I do,” Miss McGee returned. Her voice was grave. “’Tis true. I seen ut with me own eyes scores an’ scores o’ toimes. They comes out here loight-hear’rted an’ koind-hear’rted, bless ’em, an’ they’ll do things fer the love of the things. But when they been out here a whole . . .”

She paused.

“’Tain’t good,” she said, “fer Mary there to be that much took up with clothes.”

As every woman does she had carried the general over to the particular: and then the reconciliation was still simmering in her mind.

“Sure it’s different fer me,” she said. “I loves clothes meself . . .”

She paused.

“Whin I see them things Mrs. Glassridge there gits over from the other soide——” she stopped “sure, it takes me breath away,” she said. “I feels happy. Jes’ to look. Them loines! The cut of ut all! Ef I could tur’rn out things the way them things is fixed,” Miss McGee said, “I—I never would want to roise up from doin’ ’em.”

She stopped again, gathering her ideas together as well as she could.

“But Mary Garry ain’t made that way,” she said, “believe me. She never was. She wants clothes so she kin git over the folks the way she wears ’em. ’Tain’t loike me. . . .”

She stopped again.

"Mary didn't oughter have 'em the way I should. She don't *know*."

She looked at Robert with that curiously intent look her eyes had at times: she meant of course—what she was striving to say was that the artist in herself that made her love beauty for itself gave her a right to possess beauty that Mary Garry should never have.

"Ain't ut Gawd's trewth I been ta'alkin', eh, Mr. Fulton?" she said.

"Yes," said Robert, "it is."

He felt this was a complete sequence to his paper. He was entirely satisfied.

"It's my birthday to-night," he said suddenly. He didn't know why he said it. He certainly hadn't meant to say it, and no one was more surprised than he when he heard the words.

"Is ut?" said Miss McGee. She too was surprised. She hadn't been thinking of birthdays. "Why in thunder didn't ye tell me?" she went on reproachfully. "I'd 'a' had a birthday koind of a meal fer ye. An' I was late," she went on remorsefully, "an' Mary there an' all . . ."

She took her chin out of her hands and leaned back in her chair.

"Oh my, say, ef that ain't too *bad!*" she said.

"It's all right," Robert said—he was smiling again. "I liked having things as they were. I didn't mean to tell you at all, only——" he hesitated, "well," he said, with his delightful smile, "I don't believe I've ever had such a nice birthday before."

He was surprised to hear himself saying that. He hadn't realized he felt that way, and yet, now that he had said it, he knew that it was true.

"I haven't had very many happy birthdays, you know," he said. He hesitated again. "In fact my birthday——" he stopped. "My birthday," he went on with a slight effort, "is one of the things perhaps that shouldn't ever have been there. . . ."

There was a pause.

"But it *is* there," he said after the pause, and quite naturally once more, "and so we must make the best of it."

In the second that followed Miss McGee's mind made some lightning journeys. Whatever record of speed new inventions attain to, they never attain the speed of that oldest of inven-

tions, the human mind. In the almost infinitesimal fraction of a second that passed after Robert had finished speaking, Miss McGee's mind went clear round the world. She realized in a flash something that Robert hardly meant her to realize—then, at least. She understood in a way she had never understood even the paper she had just listened to and admired so much, all that he hadn't said. In some inscrutable way her mind had lit, in the course of its voyage round the world, on just that fact that Robert himself most tried to ignore. It lit on it, seized it, made it its own—and in making it its own, the love for Robert that in Miss McGee had smoldered so long, sprang into a blaze. Pity is akin to love. When the two meet there is a mighty conflagration.

"Sure, ef yer bir'rthday's nothin' to yerself," she said very gravely, "'tis somethin' to me it is, Mr. Fulton. Ye've——" she stopped. "Ye come into me loife," she went on hurriedly, "the way the drink o' water comes whin ye're thir'rsty. I was thir'rsty, Mr. Fulton, when ye come on here an' ye gave me the drink. I—I'm not thir'rsty now," she said stooping to the fire and beginning to make it up. "I—I'm contint. Ef I kin git my wor'rk fixed an' fix yours someway—so ut goes . . . I ast nothin' more."

She raked out the fire from the lowest rib of the grate and prepared to put more coal on.

"Don't put that on, Miss McGee," Robert said, and he laid a restraining hand on her wrist—it was the first time he had touched her except to shake hands. "Don't put it on. I must go." He kept his hand on her wrist. "You've been good to me," he said, "and it's you who have made my birthday a good day." His fingers, only half-consciously, slid round her wrist and held it tight. "I've had a happy evening, Miss McGee, and I didn't expect it."

He gently let her wrist go.

"Thank you," he said.

Their eyes met.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

**T**HIS thoroughly pleasant evening was the beginning of unpleasantness. Hardly was it over when all sorts of objectionable things began to happen. Not to Robert. His life continued to be merely the thing of unpleasantness it was;

he just kept on going to Market and coming home again and wishing all the way there and back that he wasn't where he was. A dismal prospect, but in the day's work.

The definite unpleasantnesses that began to rain down from heaven fell on Miss McGee: she it was who began to make the eternal human discovery that bad things don't come alone. First Beta Hendricks died. Beta Hendricks—from whom the annual Christmas card came—was the very old customer who had turned into a friend and who had “gone on to” New York and there become transmogrified into the Head of the Maternity Hospital Katie McGee visited on her hegira in the States. Beta had belonged to a family of four daughters—Robert had often heard about it all! And when old Pa'a Hendricks had gone the way of Pa'as, the daughters had had to “turn to” and make their livings. Beta had trained for a Nurse; and when her time of training was up, she had gone further and fared better, and Katie McGee it was who had made her first white linen “Sister's” clothes. Miss Hendricks occupied in Miss McGee's mind the place next the Weltmans. She hadn't seen much of Beta for many years. Indeed the only positive meeting between them had been that one visit Miss McGee had paid to the Maternity Hospital when Beta as Matron had presented her friend with the bawxes of talcum and the sample bottles of stuff—that Polly and Belle Weltman had afterwards seen good to use up. Robert could do with Beta as little as with Polly and Belle: he detested all three. If he disliked Belle and Polly's hats and their factory chatter (they were workers in a pickle factory, in New York City), Beta Hendricks' first letter back to “the bunch,” as Miss McGee and Beta's three sisters had appeared to be called, he absolutely loathed. “Girls,” the letter had said, “I want you to know what I done. I washed a nigger-man last night, and cut his toe-nails.” This was Beta's first effort apparently in the direction of gaining her bread; and heartily did Robert wish that her efforts had been in any other direction. He abhorred the nigger. His toe-nails made him creep. Yet Miss McGee, never tired of this condensed example of wit and humor combined, went on telling him about this letter and reciting it aloud—till Robert sometimes felt as if he could bear it no longer. When he heard therefore that Beta Hendricks was dead, he was unable to prevent himself from feeling that sentiment of relief that does come over us when we hear that the earth is rid of some one we don't like. However, it was

also impossible to watch Katie McGee's grief at the loss of her early friend without sympathizing with it. Katie did nothing by halves. She *mourned* Beta. "My, she was the truest lady," she kept saying. "She was one good thing, Mr. Fulton, believe me, Beta wa'as. She was the best friend, the truest gir'rl . . . an' now she's gawn. I shan't see her never again. Ef I could 'a' watched by her one noight . . ." That was the saddest bit of the situation. Beta had died away in New York and Miss McGee couldn't sit by her dead body one night. It seemed as if her friend had been torn from her. She went back to the old days when she had gone to the Hendricks—whose main occupation before the death of Pa'a seemed to have been to cut up clothes and make them over again. "My," Miss McGee said, "I remember when Pa'a had his awperation on his eyes. D'ye think Pa'a'd go to the haws-pital there? No, *Sir*. Old Man Hendricks had the dawctor come to him. An' when he did come an' he swore a oath, Pa'a says he shouldn't have the awperation done at all." Miss McGee sat shaking her head, a very monument of woe. "Sure, Mr. Fulton," she said, "them was the good ole toimes. Pa'a there was one good man. He'd sooner've been bloind all the days of his loife than he'd been awperated on by a man that spoke a oath." She sat shaking her head slowly and sadly and gazing deep into the fire. "We persuaded um in the end," she said, "but 'twas a close ca'all. The dawctor, he says, 'Twas the oath slipped out of me mouth, Mr. Hendricks, an' me not ussin'.' He awperated at the finush. But them Hendricks there . . ." Miss McGee sat contemplating the past of the Hendricks in the red ashes of the fire. She said no more, but Robert inferred that it was a fine Past, a grand Past, a Past that could not be repeated in the present day. He was glad Beta Hendricks was dead, he didn't feel as if he should have cared to know Pa'a, he didn't want to resurrect that particular Past—he wished Miss McGee would talk of something else. And when she did it was only to quote once more the nigger's toe-nails and the cutting of them. . . .

Hardly had Beta's death passed into the circle of things accomplished and done, when poor Mrs. Morphy's fate came upon her. She had been getting worse and worse since the preceding fall. She had become more and more unbearable, poor soul, to those around her; and when at last—because she could no longer help herself—she permitted investigation by a doctor, her disease turned out to be the disease of which poor

humanity is most afraid. It was a cancer from which poor old Mrs. Morphy was suffering. She had allowed it to go too far for operation. Death lay straight before her.

She didn't look on death as a great adventure. She didn't have any high-flown notions about it one way or the other. She simply, odd as it may seem that Mrs. Morphy should have clung to life, didn't want to die. She had lived in filth and poverty and a great deal of ignorance and discomfort and desperate pain for a long time past: and yet she clung to life. She clung desperately to it. She didn't want to die.

She was taken away to her daughter Nonnie Finn's. Marguérite McKennay would have none of her. "Can't Ma'a go to hawsptial, eh?" she enquired. "We can't do with no nursin' here." And she returned to her contemplation of bridge and the teas that accompanied it.

So Nonnie Finn took her mother home to her own slatternly kindly place, chock-full of children as it was: and, without a thought of any other way, she added the nursing of a desperate malady to all the rest of the things she had to do. Danny came home drunk and knocked her about as usual. The last baby wept and the babe to come made her sick in the morning and weary at night. Mrs. Morphy died slowly to the tune of children coming and children come: and all the time she was dying, she *wanted* to live.

Miss McGee couldn't get over it. She could criticize Mrs. Morphy when she was there, but as soon as her old friend was removed, hopelessly suffering, to the Finns' house, she became almost as perfect as Beta. "I got crawssways with her, God forgive me," Miss McGee kept saying, "the very la'ast toime I dressed her leg. She had one on me, the poor thing, an' I answered her shar'rp. I fixed her with moine. I shouldn't. I should 'a' bitten out me tongue. She's gawn now an' the very la'ast toime we got on the scrap . . ."

Over this little squabble, too, Miss McGee was inconsolable. All her patient dressing of the leg, twice every day, all winter long; all her runnings here and there when she was tired, to and fro from Semple's drug-store and Dubois' grocery; her coaxings of little Monsieur Dubois to let her have bottles of beer, yes, and glasses of gin, too, on tick; the little sums expended by herself that poor Mrs. Morphy had never had funds to repay—all these things were dropped out of Miss McGee's consciousness as if they had never been. "We got on the scrap," she kept reiterating, "an' she tha'ht the wor'ld of me, Mrs.

Morphy done. 'Sure 'tis cliver,' she'd say, 'the way ye shake them bottles o' milk to mix up the cream with the skim ere ye popple 'ut out.' The poor *soul*," Miss McGee would conclude, "'tis cliver she'd think ut ef I hild up me finger an' thumb 'tis that much she tha'aht of me!"

By the time Beta's body had been brought back to Montreal to be buried and Mrs. Morphy's ground-floor across the court was empty and bare, it was May. The winter was over and gone. In the extraordinarily hard winter of 1917-18 the cold was so intense and lasted so long that even in the beginning of May there were still lumps of hardened snow on the streets of Regalia; and the ruts were all filled up with ice. But round these relics of winter spring was beginning to show itself. The sap had long risen in the trees; the delicate and exquisitely beautiful early spring skies of Canada—opalescent and most diaphanously lovely—were things of the past. The sun had already got power. The branches of the trees against the miraculously blue sky were beginning to be faintly tinged with green. As yet, it was only an indication—a haze through which prisoners, shut up inside the northern winter for long months looked, wondering if it could be true. But as each day went by the green grew more perceptible; the branches lost their statuesque nakedness and became clothed with richness and color: by the time Victoria Day came round Regalia was in 'her spring dress. The slushing thaw was behind—summer, short and burning, 'was ahead.

In the last week of May the whole world looked as if it had put on its best dress for a party. Everything animate and inanimate seemed to be rejoicing, except Miss McGee's heart—and that was clad in black. No knocking about that life could give it could make that heart less tender. Miss McGee loved her friends in exactly the same proportion that she hated her enemies, and she had now reached that rather melancholy period of life when it is impossible not to realize that no new friends, however charming these may be, can ever take the place of the old friends who are gone. At forty-seven the loss of a friend is like the loss of a tooth. No new tooth will grow and no new friend will grow, and artificial replacements of teeth and friends are—artificial replacements. They cannot be the real original youthful thing.

Besides these two calamities all sorts of minor afflictions were also laid on Katie McGee. It seemed at last as if she must be the younger sister of Job. Mrs. Savourin was laid low in her

basement by an attack of sciatica, the result of the spring floodings of her kitchen. Forthwith all *her* sins were forgotten, and she grew a pair of wings. "The poor *thing*," said Miss McGee, "lyin' there in that hell of a place. Them Buildin's," she continued fiercely, "didn't oughter *be* here. They ain't places fer hogs. 'Tis a dar'ned shame us perishin' with the cold an' damp an' the rich not knowin' what truck to chuck their mooney on." Miss McGee was excited. Once more she went Bolshevik. Had there been anything to shoot at in this moment of revolt, she would have shot. Robert hardly recognized her in this character of revenge.

"What could I do?" he said, quite practical for once. "Does Mrs. Savourin need money? I can give her some."

"Ye'll do jes' nothin' of the koin'd," Miss McGee said, returning from Bolshevism at the slightest suggestion of an understanding between Robert and Mrs. Savourin. "You leave ut be, Mr. Fulton. I'll fix her. That Mrs. Savourin here I want you to know," she went on impressively, "ain't fer no gen'lemen to have no truck with. She don't know the way to behave. *I'm* lookin' after *her*. She'll be a'alroight, don't worry."

It is all very well to be sorry for people but one has to keep one's sorrow in moderation. Miss McGee felt that the subject of Mrs. Savourin's illness had better not be mentioned to Robert again.

Then Cassie Healy was carried off from her attic to the hospital. She had been in and out (principally out) of work for a long time, and with her queer Irish pride she hadn't said anything about it to anyone. She had just quietly starved. She had never had more than one eye (that was one of the things for which Miss McGee had been most apologetic on the occasion of the Christmas festivity—she had felt that a woman really ought not to *be* without an eye, and that when the time came for showing her to Robert in some mysterious way, it was Cassie's own fault) and of late the other eye, strained by its over-use, had shown signs of giving out. In the end someone had gone into her room and found her sick of a fever—and she had been taken to the hospital for infectious diseases, away down by the river-side.

"An' jes' see Miss Healy now," Miss McGee said to this in a sort of desperation. "Look at her, the poor soul. What's *she* did I want to know? She never done no har'rm to no one an' now see, she has to go down in that haws-pital there. . . ."

Miss McGee, in common with all other Penelopians, regarded hospitals with a deep suspicion. When anyone was carried away in an ambulance, as poor Cassie was, there was much lifting of hands and shakings of heads. The Penelopians gathered at the street-door or hung out of their windows not to miss the treat: and it was with a ghastly pleasure that they saw with their mental vision Cassie, dead, and being immediately cut into by a band of ravenous surgeons. They loathed these vultures who satisfied an obscene curiosity by prying into the privacies of Cassie's interior—and they got the liveliest delight in imagining the scene.

"That gir'rl, eh," they said to one another. "Say, that poor *thing!*" They had never taken the slightest interest in Cassie before. "Say, my, I guess she's fixed a'alright. *She ain't comin' back to Penelope's Buildin's.*"

It was after Cassie's departure that the state of the Buildings themselves began to prey on Katie McGee's nerves. There was no doubt about it that the long law-suit was not improving the status of the place. The class of inhabitants was "going down," as Miss McGee put it. Well-doing workmen with their lawful wives were beginning to avoid Penelope's Buildings as a habitation for their families; there were—a bad sign in a poor part of any city—hardly any "kids" to be seen playing about on the steps or in the passages. More and more were the Buildings falling into the hands of night-hawks, male and female, and single in the eye of the Law. Things even so respectable as dope-men could have been welcomed now by Miss McGee. Men and women went out from the Buildings at night—not always to work on night-shifts either—and came back in the small hours: and well-dressed men were seen on the stairs at unseemly times, damning the Buildings by the cut of their clothes and the way they wore their hats. The Buildings were on the down-grade. Soon, Miss McGee felt, they would reach the abyss when money would be paid in bribes where no bribes should be taken that there might be no question of midnight raids.

"My, to think what Ma'a'd say, the poor soul, ef she could saw her little Katie now," Miss McGee began to say to herself: she didn't very often confide just these matters to Robert Fulton. "Them things there opp'site. A bunch o' tar'rts!"

It was not long before the things opp'site began to take such a hold on Miss McGee's nerves that she simply had to speak to Robert about them. "My wor'rd, ef I didn't git all tied

up with them dope-men bein' here, Mr. Fulton, eh," she said, "ye remember? My," she went on, hesitating a little, "I could do with that bunch back now. I wisht they *wa'as* back. They ain't the wor'rst yet though I tha'aht they wa'as."

Robert, who was eating an egg, looked up. They were at supper together.

"What's the matter now?" he said. It was well on in May when Miss McGee said this and he had been hearing nothing but woes and sorrows for some weeks past, and he was tired of it. "What's the matter?" he said. He did not like complaints.

"Them gir'rls back there," Miss McGee said, nodding in the direction of the dope-men's old flat. She paused. "Ever saw 'em, Mr. Fulton, eh?" she asked.

Robert shook his head.

"Ye'll know the koind they is, eh?" Miss McGee said further.

Robert hadn't known. But when people stop and shake their heads and change their voices and don't say things . . . Robert recognized the kind of girls they were.

"Oh," was all he said, however.

"Ain't ut ah-ful, eh," Miss McGee went on, her eyes filling with tears. "Here's you an' me that's a gen'leman an' a lady, an' you with yer elegant education an' all, fixed so we have to live nex' door to bad women an' thugs. For I bet you," Miss McGee proceeded with emphasis, "that man that's come an' fixed umself roight there in poor Mrs. Morphy's home is one thug. He has all the look of ut. Be sure he ain't what he should be. . . ."

Robert feared Miss McGee was going to cry, so he tried to think of something to say. He liked crying as little as most men do. He therefore bestirred himself to offer comfort.

"If there's a law-suit on about these Buildings," he said after a moment's consideration, "and we can't any of us have any repairs or anything done till the case is settled—can the flats be re-let at all?"

He stopped for a moment's more consideration.

"I don't believe they can," he said, "and I fancy you could have those people turned out if you wanted to. Who lets the flats?"

Miss McGee's tears dried up as if by some hidden mechanical process. She sat regarding him with that pleasure she always showed when he was "smart."

"Say, my, don't ut take you, eh, Mr. Fulton, to think of things," she said in a pleased voice. "Sure, I never would think o' things meself." She stopped a moment considering. "'Twill be Mrs. Savourin lets them apar'tments there," she said, "an' fills her pa'ackut with the mooney."

She continued to regard Robert with her beaming smile. She hadn't looked so happy since Beta Hendricks died.

"Sure," she remarked, "I never did saw sech an elegant moind as yours, Mr. Fulton. 'Tis the treat to be beside ut."

She paused, and heaved a deep sigh.

"An' to think," she said, "there's you as smar't as a penny-piece an' ye can't ear'rn enough to live decent. Fer ut ain't decent here in Penelope's Buildings," she went on, after a minute, "an' yet I don't know where ye'll foind the same accommodation fer the mooney."

She paused again, and then she began to laugh.

"Oh my, ain't that Savourin there the clever Jane, eh!" she said. "It's her'll be ownin' the Buildin's soon an' us paying her the rentals. Say, ain't ut great!" she said.

There was no shadow of irritation against Mrs. Savourin in Miss McGee's voice. The very vexation of having to live in a place like Penelope's Buildings seemed to have momentarily passed away. Everything was swallowed up in the admiration for Robert's smartness and the Janitress's cleverness. "Ain't you the smart-y, eh!" And "Ain't she the Jane!" she kept saying over and over as she moved about, clearing away the dishes. The bunch of tarts had disappeared into the place where things go when they are no longer thought of. They too, apparently, were only part of Mrs. Savourin's abounding "wit."

Robert sat regarding Miss McGee's delighted face over the top of his egg-shell. Once more it came over him that women were queer things. He wondered if God had wholly foreseen what He was doing in creating them female as He had done. There were moments when Robert felt doubtful if God had altogether foreseen what would happen. This was one of the moments.

"I guess that woman knows the nigger in the fence when she sees um, eh," said Miss McGee. And then in a cozy happy tone she added, "Say, let you an' me have the *good evenin'*? I feel *foine*."

She stood, with the butter-dish in her hand, looking at Robert.

"There ain't nothin' loike the s'rpoise, eh, for makin' ye feel smar't," she said. "I tell you, you braced me a'all up."

She went about with a brisk light step. She hummed a little tune as she put the dishes in the kitchenette. Robert sat watching her for a bit, and then he pulled a book out of his pocket. He felt more doubtful than ever about God's absolutely omniscient foresight. He began to read.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

IT was in the last delicious days of May and in the lovely early days of June when the Canadian spring came with such a burst and a rush that it seemed to her she could almost hear the trees coming into leaf, that Miss McGee realized that Mickey Ryan had failed her. It was her nature to be cheerful, and during the days of the sunny windy April when she had hoped, she had gone about with a brisk springy step, saying to herself, "Never moind. 'Tis comin'. 'Twill come. Mickey Ryan'll see to ut." Not even Beta Hendricks' death, not even Mrs. Morphy's mortal illness had been able quite to take out of her the hope she had for her coming life. She had had the utmost trust in Mickey. She hadn't even made excuses for him when he hadn't rung her up, when he had made no sign. She had simply thought, "Bless um, he's waitin' on the roight job to come along," and she had gone about her work as usual, quite willing and happy to wait.

Now she knew she had been wrong. She knew he wasn't going to do anything at all. One day it "came over her," as she said: and she was stricken old. It was impossible not to notice the change in her. Now she went to her work with a listless, don't-care step: and though, when she got to her customers, she did her best, it wasn't the old best. It was a sort of try-and-do-what-you-can kind of work that she turned out, and the customers (who were sharp enough in some things) soon saw the difference in the gowns and even in the re-modeled garments into which she didn't try to put bits of herself any more.

Her joy in dressmaking was absolutely gone. It was gone, never to be re-captured. She detested the sight of a gown, she wasn't interested in what her customers wished her to do with it. She sat listening to their copious explanations with no

suggestions of her own: and when they had finished she set to with a sort of desperate industry, and tried to work out the impossibilities they had suggested. The result was what that kind of work always is.

The whole point about Miss McGee's earlier work had been that though she had not been able to turn out "creations" she had been able, just by her interest in the work and her early love for it, to turn out something that "had style to it." She had made a bold try for success; and as happens with the people who care for their work enough to do that, *something* had happened. Her gowns had not been the gowns of Paris assuredly, but they had had something about them that distinguished them from other gowns. They had been *nice*. It was Miss McGee's own eyes that discerned the faults in them. To the general, more-easily-satisfied eye, they had looked well, and the customers who wore them had been satisfied.

Now it was different. With her going to Mickey Ryan Miss McGee had put once for all the whole idea of gowns behind her. When Mickey had seemed kindly and helpful and had made her believe in his desire and his power to "do something" for her, she had thrown the idea of dressmaking so far behind her that, now the time came to pick it up again—she simply couldn't find it. She didn't care for clothes any more. The sight of a lovely model gown, all fresh from the great work-rooms of the world, would still, of course, stir something in her. She would smile involuntarily as it was shown to her. But she didn't want to try and copy it. She didn't want to re-model something so that it looked like it. She wanted to be clear of the whole dressmaking art, and never try her hand at it again. ~~And the fact that during~~ the whole of the rest of her life she must be content to cut and snip and sew up and rip again and struggle after effects she never would attain to, was a horrible prospect.

She faced it. She made no outward difference in her life. She went out from Penelope's Buildings at her usual time, and came back again as she had done for so many years. The difference was inside. All the way out in the morning and all the way back at night was now filled up with melancholy meditation. Miss McGee did not feel, as she had felt nearly twelve years earlier, actively rebellious. She did not feel, as she had felt then, that it was wicked—on the part of something or somebody—that she was being used as she was. She felt no desire to *do* anything special in the line of revenge

on the world that had treated her, as she thought, unjustly. She merely felt a sort of dull ache that was like a toothache of the mind, and a determination to bear that ache and to say nothing about it. She was nearly twelve years older than when she had had her first nervous break-down, and her vitality was just twelve years less vital.

What wounded her was that Mickey had failed her. Miss McGee had, in a good many ways, rather a cynical outlook on the world. She distrusted a great many men and women; of customers she expected less than nothing at all: she was not easily taken in by protestations. But there was one weak spot in her. She trusted her early friends—she thought well of them, she would have done all in her power to help them: and she believed that they were made on the same mold as herself and would have gone far in their efforts to help her in any trouble. It was in this spirit she had gone to Mickey Ryan. "Sure, he's a swa'all fella now," she had said to herself, "but he'll not have forgotten Kitty McGee." She had gone in that surety of being welcomed, in that certainty of being helped, that admits of no doubt at all. And she had been received by Mickey Ryan, as she thought, in that spirit of kindness that she had expected. Possibly her belief in Mickey was a sort of relic of the early time when she and he had been the youngsters together and both he and she had believed in everything and everyone: it is youth's prerogative. Later years had shown Miss McGee with great clearness that you *can't* believe in all things or all men, and perhaps even less in all women: and so she had grown at least a sort of surface layer of cynicism. But underneath that layer, as water flows swiftly beneath a thin topping of ice, Miss McGee's beliefs had lived and moved and had their being. She had believed deeply in the back of her mind that, should the time ever come when she might have to go to Mickey and ask his help—he would help. She had never imagined that he wouldn't help. If anyone had said it to her she would have been, not so much indignant as amused. She built on Mickey Ryan's honor as she built on her own. And now, when Mickey Ryan's honor fell down in ruins before her—what was she to believe in at all?

Her religion was left to her, of course. And it was both a comfort to her—and it wasn't. Miss McGee was religious and she was ecclesiastical too. She loved both God and her church: but since neither God nor her church were true secure

refuges to her in time of trouble, probably she did not love either so much as she thought she did. People who truly trust in God don't have nervous break-downs. And people whose bent of mind is ecclesiastical keep on going to church and finding comfort there whatever may happen to be happening to them. Miss McGee's trust in God had already failed her once at the time of her mother's death and the flight of Mr. Mitt. And her ecclesiastical sense could never have been so deep as she thought it was or she would never have been able to contemplate, as she had done, marrying Mr. Mitt, a heretic, rank and not-to-be-hoped for. Miss McGee had been brought up by her mother to be a "good Catholic." She had, from her babyhood, been trained to follow out rigidly all the forms of her church. But she wasn't originally cast in an ecclesiastical mold—nor, perhaps, in a very religious one either: and, though she went on as she had been taught to do, and though the artistic bit of her found comfort and joy in the celebrations of her church, it didn't go as deep in her as she thought. At every crisis in Miss McGee's life the church fell away from her. She went to its services as usual, but in any deep sorrow she didn't find the consolation there she expected to find. Rose's attitude to Mac and his religion was simply inexplicable to Miss McGee. That anyone should put the love of man *after* respect for the church . . . frankly, that to Miss McGee was incomprehensible. She herself would have chosen, every time and always, the man first—and let the church go. And away, too deep down for her to be able accurately to get at the thought, was the vague sentiment that God would not be against this choice. That He would understand. Make allowances. That, if it were to come to a tussle, God would take the woman's side here against the church. . . .

But these things Miss McGee not only did not put into words; she would have repudiated them as sinful, devilish thoughts had anyone put them before her. Yet she believed them all the same, and at any time of her life she would have shown that she believed them by acting upon them—had she had the chance.

After Mickey's failure to respond she just went on. Since that first successful telephoning she had telephoned twice again, with discreet intervals between each time of "ringing up." She had had short sharp interviews with the "young lady at the 'phone." And the upshot of the interview in each case was that "Mr. Ryan was *busy*. Could you ring again?" And the

second time—Miss McGee had understood. She had, moreover, seen Mickey Ryan one day on the street; and then she had understood even better. He had been going along, jaunty, expensively dressed, with an expensive cigar in his mouth, and an expensive smile on his lips; and he had been chatting to another man, quite equally expensive, and they had evidently come from lunching expensively together. Mickey Ryan, to Miss McGee's eyes, had exhaled money. She had been doing some shopping for a customer, and she was in her working clothes, not dressed up carefully in the best she had to make an impression on the young ladies who waited on her in the shops. She hadn't expected to do shopping and had therefore not dressed herself accordingly. Now, when she caught sight of Mickey she felt suddenly unutterably shabby. A tear in her right rubber obtruded itself on her consciousness. The thought had flown through her mind, "I shall have to git meself a new pair": and simultaneously, inextricably mingled somehow, there had shot through her brain a picture of her old worn disreputable rubbers as they would appear to Mickey: and then she thought of the money she would have to put out to get the new pair—and rubbers so *dear* since the War. And then she looked at the expensive rubbers of Mickey, and guessed at the fine high-grade boots he wore underneath his expensive rubbers . . .

It was that day she had realized—for the first time perhaps in its entirety—the gulf, the unbridgeable chasm—that money and the lack of it makes between two human creatures. She had realized that, however much Mickey and she had been the youngsters together, they were no longer that. Mickey of the yar'd had expanded into Mickey of the Smart Restaurant and the Ly-mousine. He was a wealthy man, an important citizen of Regalia, a man who could travel to New York City (Miss McGee's Mecca) and back again and never think of the expense. And she was the poor little dressmaker who went out sewing by the day, thankful if she had a dollar in her pocket, able to travel nowhere and to see no one, doomed to live in Penelope's Buildings amongst harlots and thieves. . . .

When Mickey had gone past, Miss McGee came out of the doorway into which she had slunk involuntarily when she first saw him approaching. His round, slightly hoarse, jolly voice rolled still on her ear-drums. She could see his fat prosperous back as she looked along the street. And then in a slit of looking-glass down the edge of the tailor's window by which

she had taken refuge, she saw her own face. Old, faded, pinched, lined. And the thought passed through her mind that if it had been a man's face in the mirror it wouldn't have mattered so bitterly. The point was that it was a woman's. She was a woman. You can't change your position and leap into new fortune if you are a woman and forty-seven. Miss McGee stood still a minute and regarded herself in the slit of mirror. She noted remorselessly each dint that time had made in her face, and each scar that worry had left. "Ye're ugly," she said to the reflection in the mirror. "Ye're ugly, God help ye. It's no wonder Mickey'll have nothin' to do with ye. . . ."

She accepted at that moment all that the world held for her. She just took things as they were, once for all, and made the best of them. She glanced down at her torn rubber, and accepted that with no feeling of animosity. She glanced again at Mickey's disappearing back, and she accepted that. How had she ever thought he would help her? What possible earthly right had she had to intrude upon his prosperity with her unpardonable adversity? How had she ever imagined that such a little unimportant subject as Kitty McGee's unfitness for her work at the age of forty-seven could interest him? Quite suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, Miss McGee caught sight of the world at a new angle. She saw it as a hard round thing against which, if you were outside, you might cast yourself in vain and find no entrance—unless you came with your entrance-money in your hand. She had no money to bring. She never would have any. And Mickey had money. He brought his entrance-money in his hand, and the door of the hard round world flew open—and he entered in. When Miss McGee stepped down from the doorway in which she had hidden herself, when she stopped looking at herself in the tailor's mirror and prepared to go back to her customer's with her shopping-wares in her hand, she felt—it had taken only a moment—twenty years older. She felt no longer a middle-aged woman, she felt an old woman. She saw life differently from what she had ever seen it before. She felt quiet—docile—acceptant. Conscious that nothing she could feel or say or do could alter the hard round way the world was made. She knew that she was outside—for good. She felt *old*.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

WE are all of us twenty and many of us are five hundred, human beings in a single skin, and therefore no one of us can go on feeling exactly in the same way for very long at a time. Each member of the blessed company wants his turn.

Miss McGee did not go on uninterruptedly feeling quiet and docile and acceptant after the, to her, terrible moment when Mickey Ryan passed joking by. She had flashes of resentment against that hard shut round world—as in the Ante-Mickey-Ryan days. But on the whole, after that momentary sojourn in the doorway beside the tailor's shop (one of the hundred beings shut up inside Miss McGee's skin had noticed with approbation what lovely socks there were in the window—good socks—socks such as Mickey would wear—costly socks), she felt ready for the worst. For the first time in her life she felt patient; in other words, the shock of finding Mickey to be what he evidently was—the ordinary unhelpful man whom she had taken to be one of the helpful angels!—knocked (to use her own phraseology) her out. Nothing specially seemed to matter any more.

Patience—that overrated virtue—is not much more than a failure in vitality. Youth goes full-tilt against the windmills of life without a thought of the consequences. It is only when youth—never really a matter of years—departs and age stands hesitating before life's windmills that patience makes its appearance. You decide to bear—not to attack: you are old. Miss McGee had reached this unenviable state. She was, as years go, middle-aged. Up to the day when Mickey passed by—yes, notwithstanding the nervous break-down—she had been young. Now she was old. The vision of her hard round world obsessed her. It circled obstinately before her mental eyes and she, as obstinately, remained outside it, watching. She knew what the outer darkness meant now. She was in that outer darkness—with a good many million more. Inside that revolving world were the lucky people who had lots of dollars and cents, who were able to chuck money about and get what they wanted with it; who were able, for instance, to buy those socks in the tailor's window—wear them—throw them aside when they needed mending: the Mickey Ryans and Mrs.

Glassridges of the universe, in fact, who went about the world laughing expensively, and scattering what ought to have been other people's entrance-money as they went along.

Miss McGee accepted it. She had moments, as I say, of revolt, and flashes of her old desire to "belong," but in a general way she took things as they were—and, not so much made the best of them, as endured them. Under these circumstances it hardly seemed to matter that Mac, in a letter to his "Old Lady," sympathizing, and sending, in the shape of a check, a tangible proof of his sympathy—"and there's plenty more where that comes from, 'Old Lady!'"—had announced his engagement to a young lady of Pittsburgh (where Mac had found a resting-place for the sole of his foot), Insola Wenberg by name: an angel, though not yet disembodied, in disposition, it appeared. Mac was happy. He announced his engagement as most young men announce their engagements. He evidently, and quite rightly, felt that nothing of the kind had ever happened to anyone before; and he was, also quite evidently and rightly, bent on making Insola happy—and in making himself happy in "possessing" her: for that was the way the idea of marriage presented itself to Mac. Miss McGee accepted this with the rest. She had expected it. Had she not foretold that Mac would marry? And though he was marrying a little bit sooner than she had anticipated, still, that was what men like Mac did. He had taken the love-fever badly with Rose as his microbe. He had been ready to give Rose all, and now he was going to give Insola Wenberg—not perhaps quite all, but all that was over from his love for Rose. Mac had cared for Rose. There was no question about it. He had had that—that *shyness* about her that genuine love brings with it. But now—Rose had sunk to that place in his consciousness where first loves do sink when the man meets the second love and marries her. Miss McGee did not believe that Mac had forgotten Rose; but he had shoved Rose to the back of his mind—as an impossibility. Mac was nothing if not practical. And the romantic streak that runs through the most practical Scot he had transferred to Insola. He was ready to bestow on her all the handsome gifts that Rose might have had. He would devote himself to Insola just as he would have devoted himself to Rose. He would give this new wife of his (so Miss McGee phrased it to herself) the fur coats and "good" jewelry that Rose might have had: and, as the years accumulated, Rose would be

shoved further and further back in his mind until he would never think of her at all. There would be no room for Rose Garry amidst the preoccupations Insola would create with her own nature and her troubles and worries and the sons and daughters she would doubtless bring forth. Domesticity is nice, but it is the most smothering thing in existence; and the romantic streak is the first of all the streaks to get covered up and buried and put out of the way.

It was poor consolation to Miss McGee to think that possibly on his death-bed (when things have a way of changing values) the Rose Garry episode might rise up untarnished and just as it had been when it happened. Miss McGee knew very well that it was Rose that Mac cared for . . . but what is the *good* of thinking of things on your death-bed when it is too late to do anything . . .? Miss McGee tried to dismiss the subject from her with an impatient sigh.

As for Rose, she said nothing at all. A Sunday or two passed without her coming to see Auntie (that did not matter so much now when Mrs. Garry and Ag dropped in each week on their way to church), and when she did come she looked much as usual, except that she was perhaps a trifle thinner, and that there were darker lines than usual under her eyes. And her lips, always thin, seemed thinner somehow, and more closely pressed together.

"Hulloa, Auntie," Rose had said, exactly as usual, on entering the room. "You all right, eh?"

"Foine," Miss McGee had answered, without looking at her niece, "how's yerself? Heard ye been sick, eh? Stopped away from the Bank?"

"For a day," Rose said, with an extreme nonchalance. "Got chilled some, I guess. It was nothin' at a'all. *I'm* alright. *I'm fine.*"

There was nothing more to be said.

Miss McGee went to see Mrs. Morphy once. She took with her a rose (which she could ill afford to buy) and a cake and a pint bottle of gin. It was the first time in her life that Miss McGee had, on her own initiative—she had once or twice put it to Mrs. Morphy's account or begged for it on Mrs. Morphy's credit at Little Dubois' grocery store—bought such a thing. She felt a certain hesitation even in asking for it; she almost felt like adding, "'Tis for Mrs. Morphy, eh, the poor soul, Mr. Dubois," but she thought that would be mean, so she didn't. "I don't *care*," she said to herself instead,

defiantly, coming out of the shop with the wrapped-up bottle under her arm. "Sure why should I care? She's goin' to have ut. I guess it'll fix her some."

It had fixed Mrs. Morphy some. When Miss McGee (she had taken a day when she was "laid off" as she called it to go and see Mrs. Morphy) reached Nonnie Finn's she found a scene of confusion and dirt indescribable. The house—it was hardly better than a shack—was situated on the outermost borders of the city. It was not unlike the shack in which poor old Mrs. McGee had died of the same malady twelve years before. The street-car railway reached to within a few hundred yards of the small irregular street, of which the Finns' house was the very last: and beyond the tiny plot of green in front of the parlor window, there stretched an expanse of rough un-tilled, uncared-for ground that looked as if it might stretch thus uninterruptedly to the North Pole itself, and one fancied the winds that would come sweeping over that ground in the dark bleak months of the year. When Miss McGee knocked on the door of Nonnie's house, first with her knuckles and then with a metal ball that formed the apex of the handle of her wrist-bag—the electric bell which she had tried first of all was out of order and wouldn't ring—all that happened was a confused sound of romping inside the house and someone crying, a boy shouting, Nonnie's ineffectual voice rising now and then in feeble gusts above the uproar of her babes.

"My," Miss McGee said to herself with a good deal of emphasis. She went on knocking. "Sure, save us," she said to herself, standing out there on the wooden step, "'tis outside *them* passengers is!" The vision of the inexorable world going round and round and just stopping now and then to let a monied passenger in and then circling on again, assailed her with renewed force. Nonnie Finn, when she did come to the door, looked dragged and wearied and almost inexpressibly dirty. Mrs. Morphy was dying by yards rather than inches, in a state of almost equally indescribable dirt, and equally indescribable other things inside. But they both welcomed Miss McGee, and Nonnie made tea, and they drank it, and poor Mrs. Morphy put spoonfuls of gin into her cup—and cheered up even as she did it. And Miss McGee heard Mac's letter all through—she had previously heard only an abstract of the contents over the telephone: and she was shown a photograph of the great Insola that Mac had sent, immediately, evidently, after posting his letter. Insola was a fine rounded young

woman with an experienced mouth. She stood in a posture eminently suitable for the photographer's camera to grapple with. She wore an unembarrassed smile—which showed her excellent teeth. She was immensely self-possessed: unlike Bidly Ryan, she evidently did know enough to come in at the first drop of rain, and she was acquainted with the art of “fixing herself;” she was perceptibly one of those passengers for whom the revolving world would in due time stop revolving for a second in order to allow her to pass in. She was entirely suitable to be Mrs. Mac. If he had “wed” written on him, she had “success” written all over her.

“Sure, ef Rose Garry ain't been the fool-gir'rl,” Mrs. Morphy remarked once again, this time with a change of tense to mark the progress of events. “She moight 'a' had um, McGee fer the takin'. An', take my word for ut, Mac was the man. He was *a* man,” Mrs. Morphy went on. “I guess that Mac there was the cleanest, straightest koind of a bo'oy ye'd foind in the wor-rld.”

“Rose'll live to be sawry, I guess,” even poor humble Nonnie put in with an unaccustomed emphasis of utterance.

Once more there was nothing to be said. It was self-evident. What was Rose Garry ever going to get out of her church to compensate her for Mac? Miss McGee came away after tea so profoundly miserable that she hardly knew how to bear it. She was sorry—oh, how sorry! for Mrs. Morphy (whose farewell, compounded of affection and gin had been truly grateful and warm-hearted and eternal), she was sorry for Nonnie, and for Rose and for herself, even for Mac, little as he seemed to need it—Mac, who was shoving his love for Rose to the back of his mind. And she felt sorry for Cassie Healy and for Mrs. Savourin and for the bunch of tarts opposite, yes, even for them—could they help themselves, the *bad* gir-rls! And little Bellerose, the letter-man, who was tied by the heels with rheumatism, who had nothing laid by to keep a wife and five children on, and a sixth child coming. She was sorry for them all. She felt as if she had taken them all into her heart and as if there weren't room for them there, and they were crowding and *hurting* her. And Robert! Was she sorry for *him* . . .!

Robert was to Miss McGee the one unbearable thing in the whole abominable mess. She had thought within herself, and with how much joy, that when Mickey had found something for her and she was “placed good” and doing justice to

Mickey's recommendation, she would once more apply to the Ryan office and find something for Robert. At the bottom of her mind, this idea that she would "place Robert good" as a sort of consequence of placing herself, had been a factor in pushing her on to Mickey and his influence. Had Miss McGee never met Robert she probably would have gone on dress-making with a gently fading interest in her work—till the end. The meeting with Robert had changed everything. It had opened up somehow new outlooks on life. She had begun with Robert's advent on the scene, to want life to be "worth while," as she said. With the vision of Robert in the flesh had come another vision of Robert; still in the flesh, but different—because life was different. And to Miss McGee, as to all loving women, the vision of perfect happiness had come along with this idea of being able to help the man she loved. She had gone to Mickey on her own account first, because policy lay that way; but she had said to herself all along, "Soon's I'm fixed good, I'll fix *him*." She meant Robert. And, in her mind's eye, she saw Robert big, famous, inside that revolving world and setting it afire with the flame of his genius. She saw him rich, respected, looked-up-to, happy: and she saw herself—how?—well, perhaps as a beloved companion of this genius; something that not so much shared in his happiness as a harmless yet quite necessary trifle that basked in the rays of it. She had seen herself in these past few weeks of hope connected with Robert, linked to him by ties of the deepest friendship that merged insensibly on her side into untieable bands of love. And now it was finished. Robert, so far as she could see, was doomed to sit outside the world, watching with herself the circular revolving mass with all the good things inside it, and never even hoping to possess the necessary dollars and cents to make it stop for a second—in order to enter. It was frankly unbearable. The thought of Robert Fulton sharing her abstinences, and for life, broke up Miss McGee's dispirited patience; whenever she thought of it—she tried hard not to think of it at all, for what was the good!—she felt, surging up inside her, the old youthful impatience and the old desire to tilt at the windmills that stood between her and happiness; she wanted once more to assert her refusal to accept, and the old fighting spirit, the desire to be up and at the enemies who stood between her and life struggled for mastery. And then the hopeless feeling would descend on her again. What was the good? What was the *good*? That

kind of patience that is only another name for the realization of disability to contend with the dragons of life descended on her, and she accepted. She was old.

There was one thing left that Miss McGee could do for Robert Fulton. She could take him to Fréjus Mansions and introduce him to "the Lady" there. This idea had often occurred to Miss McGee before, but for some reason best known to herself, she had always put it behind her. Miss Eileen Martyn was evidently a successful worker in the medium in which poor Robert was, as yet anyway, only a totally unpaid amateur. Miss McGee had seen, lying about the little living-room which served also as the Lady's study (Miss McGee sewed in the bed-room when she was there) masses of typed stuff—rapid work, illegible with written-in corrections, very different from Robert's clean, clear, legible script!—and she had said to herself, "*She* knows the ropes, I guess!" She had a shrewd guess that the Lady not only "did herself good," but that she also had influential friends who might "help." She had very often said to herself that if she were to take Robert along to the Fréjus Mansions his fortune would be made. Thinking this, as she assuredly did, why had she not taken Robert, along? She never answered that question, very accurately or succinctly when it presented itself to her. She knew that, of all her customers and friends, Miss Martyn was the only one with whom Robert would have anything in common. She recognized that they spoke alike, thought alike very likely, were interested certainly in the same things. Miss Martyn would be a "grand" friend for Robert. They would sit talking by the hour: and Eileen Martyn, for all her inaccessibility on certain subjects—she was entirely reserved, she never let fall any fact, however unimportant, about her life—was most accessible in certain other ways. She didn't seem to have any notions of "class"—not even so many as Robert. Miss McGee could perfectly fancy Miss Martyn seated beside Dan at a Mrs. Morphy supper-party and making herself quite agreeable. She had a sort of dim fancy that, not only would Robert like her, but Dan too. She said to herself, "*She'd* fix 'em." She was pretty sure that if it had been the Lady that she had taken down with her to Mac's goin'-away festivity, she would have been a raging success. . . . And yet, she had never mentioned her—to anyone. She had kept the Lady and her mode of life, her oddness, her quick sympathy, her mysterious unlikeness to anything she—Miss McGee—had ever

seen before entirely to herself. She had never gone so far even as to mention the Fréjus Mansions. Robert was entirely unaware that such a place as the Fréjus Mansions existed, and Miss Eileen Martyn was perhaps the only one of all Miss McGee's customers of whom he had never even heard.

Now, it seemed as if the Lady were the only resource. It seemed to Miss McGee that, did she truly wish to help Robert out of his hole, it was the Lady's assistance that she must beg. She could take Robert along and "present" him. Then the Lady would, in her turn, go on "presenting" Robert to other people. And—so Miss McGee put it together in her mind—no sooner would these influential friends of Miss Martyn's have Robert "presented" to them than they would see what a jewel of great price had been cast at their feet. They would bend down, pick Robert up, and not only ask him to come up a seat higher, but lead him with their own hands to the very top of the table. That was the way it presented itself to Katie McGee: and then, when Robert was at the top of the table . . . she wouldn't see him any more. Miss McGee was of course accustomed to the ways of a New World, where it is a question of getting on or getting out. If you get on you sail into another horizon where your old friends see you no longer; and if you get out, you similarly sink into an atmosphere where, for your friends, you no longer exist. Miss McGee herself was about the only person she knew that had neither got on nor got out. She had stayed where she was, and it seemed now, that she was going to stay where she was till the end. Well! Let Robert have his chance. Why should she stand in his way, bless um. At this point—she thought it over and over and over again—there always came a full stop in her meditations. It seemed to her as if she could not go on. It was as she was coming back from visiting Mrs. Morphy that, at long last, she did go on. She forced herself a little bit further along this road that led—to what!

"I guess it's the roight thing to do," she said to herself, coming to a dead stop in the lonely lane that called itself The Regency Avenue where the Finns' house was. "I guess there ain't no other way. I guess that's what I'd *oughter* do." She walked down the Regency Avenue, seeing nothing of the long bare stretch of dismal nothingness that alone separated Danny and Nonnie Finn and Mrs. Morphy from the North Pole. "Look at um," she thought, seeing in her mind's eye the trim

boy Danny Finn was once in the old days when Old Nancy, his mother, had taken such a pride in him. "Look at Danny there," she thought, "that's what comes ef ye go the *wrong* way." And, in her mind's eye—that clear, clear place!—she saw Robert also, in some time to come, down at heel, his neat trimness gone, unkempt and unshaven, perhaps even his kind smile dimmed. She felt she could not bear it. She felt as if that would be the one *unbearable* thing in this life. Rather than that she would . . . take Robert to the Fréjus Mansions. She would take him there, and, of her own free will, she would give what she had of him away. This time she did not cry. She looked at the bleak desolation round about her, her eye glanced over the piles of bricks, the long planks of wood, the girders of iron, that at some future time were to make and complete the Regency Avenue, and she thought, "I'll do ut, God help me. I'll do ut." She walked on to where the car-line was—it was the very end of the long straight line the Regalia car-line took—and she stood, waiting for the car that went once in every twenty minutes. After she had waited ten minutes or so, the car came in sight. She knew it would draw up at this termination of the line—it would turn—the man at the wheel would descend from his perch and do something mysterious with the electric switch . . . and the car would be turned for its journey back into Regalia city. She watched the car coming speeding along with the graceful rapid gliding movement of the electric car; and as she stood there she suddenly drew off her glove and brushed the back of her hand across her eyes. It seemed to her for a second as if she couldn't bear to look on this world any more. "Oh, *my*," she said, and a great throb of her old youthful impatience shook the very heart in her body, "*Dar'rn*. What's the good of ut?"

She got into the car and took her place, and sat with her face turned to the window, looking out.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

IT was on one of those wonderful evenings in June that make the interminable bleakness of the Canadian winter seem like a bad dream that Robert and Miss McGee went to see the ~~Lady~~. They had come home from work and they

had had their usual simple, on this occasion rather hasty, evening meal: and then, not "dressing up" at all, but simply putting on their every-day working hats, they had taken the road for the Fréjus Mansions. Robert had made no objection to being taken there. He didn't expect much from it, not even anything specially pleasant. He liked Miss McGee thoroughly, but he put no confidence in her judgment—as to the "niceness" of persons. What she thought a Lady, he probably would think—anything but that. He had formulated no distinct idea of "the Lady" in his thoughts; Miss McGee had remained rather obstinately silent about her and he had nothing on which to mold his ideas; but he more or less expected something in the nature of another Mrs. Morphy (rather better than that, perhaps, but on the same make) and for Mrs. Morphy, even in her dire adversity, he had no more than pity: a pity quite untinged by, and wholly unrelated to, love. He *didn't* like Mrs. Morphy or Nonnie Finn or any other of Miss McGee's friends whom he had come across, and he didn't expect to like "the Lady." He simply acquiesced in Miss McGee's desire to take him there (he had not been let into the secret that the visit was purposed for his own good) because it would have been more trouble to do anything else; and, rather in the disposition of the lamb that is being led to the slaughter, he walked along by her side.

It was very lovely. Few things can be more lovely than a June day or the sky of a June evening in Regalia. As the two went through the grounds of the Regalia University there was a sort of translucence—the "diamond quality" of Robert's Canada Book—in the air. The trees stood out, faintly green, magically silent, as if they were cut out against the unbelievably blue sky. The air was full of the clear stillness that precedes the short twilight of the spring Canadian days.

"Ain't ut great?" Miss McGee said, as they entered the Campus grounds.

The big elms and maples towered above them, the grass was as yet the tenderest green; and just at the entrance of the grounds a wonderful birch-tree—tall and slim and graceful excessively—swayed lightly on the evening air and seemed to look down on them with a protecting kind of innocence.

"It's great, ain't ut?" Miss McGee said again. She stopped a second to hearken to a robin (the big prosperous Canadian robin, cousin to the English thrush) insistently singing "Love—love—love" to his mate.

"Lovely," Robert said.

He too stood still and looked about him: and the note of the robin, so sweet and so clear and insistent, knocked at something in his heart and said "Open!"

"It almost makes you love Canada, a night like this," he said, with a sigh.

Miss McGee did not answer. When Robert said things like that, emphasizing the fact that he was not a Canadian and did not wish to be one, her heart always sank. The robin's note ceased to be so transcendently beautiful for Miss McGee. She drew herself together and walked on. Robert caught up with her in a big stride.

"Yes," he said, "it's lovely, and I'm glad I've seen it." He stopped a second. "I *am* glad I came out, you know," he said, "in spite of everything. I wouldn't have *missed* Canada . . ."

He paused a moment.

"But, for that matter, I suppose we're always glad we did the things we did," he said. "It's so unbelievable we *could* have done anything else."

He stopped again.

"Anyway," he finished up with his nice smile, "I'm glad I met you. It's only those *winters* . . ."

This was about all the conversation they had, going to the Fréjus Mansions. Their conversation was never very much worth recording—few conversations are. It is only in books that people set to with long dissertations on this and that, flattening each other out with pages of eloquence . . .

They reached Fréjus Mansions and went up the broad stone steps that were topped with two great "vayses"—as Miss McGee said "Elegant!"—full of geraniums and heliotrope and lobelia, with long streamers of greenery trailing over the pots and hiding the blank hideousness of them; and they passed in at the big front door, and made their way up the stairs. Fréjus Mansions was just not quite grand enough to have a Janitor in livery sitting in a chair by the door or an elevator boy waiting day and night in a cage; so they trudged up-stairs flight after flight; and when they reached the top of the house and stood for a minute regaining breath, directly under the cupola in the roof, Miss McGee said, "I guess ye'll loike her a'alroight." It was the first direct remark she had made about the Lady: and before Robert had had time to collect himself and ask a question, she had pressed the electric bell, and immediately

the click of the typewriter that had been audible for the last flight of stairs or so ceased inside; they heard a rustle of feminine clothes along the passage, and a light tread of someone coming to open the door.

Robert never forgot that first appearance of the Lady. She stood on the threshold of her flat, dressed in the loose blue Russian blouse she always wore when she was at home and at work—Miss McGee had run up half a dozen of them for her: and as she stood there, there was something tremendously friendly in the expression of her eyes. Robert could not have told the color of her hair, nor whether she was tall or short, not even whether she was young or old. He didn't know whether her eyes were blue or brown. He never noticed how they were set in her head. He just saw their expression. It seemed to him an all-embracing expression—friendliness itself. And, as he stood outside the threshold of the flat, looking into those eyes, nothing else in the whole world seemed to matter.

"Come in," the Lady said, breaking the spell: her speech was quite like other people's, once she spoke. "I'm glad to see you. Come in."

They stepped inside the little hall.

"I'm going to ask you to come along to my dining-room," the Lady said. "It's dreadfully untidy, but you won't mind. You see, I always work there."

She was leading the way as she spoke down the long corridor of a hall to the other end of her flat: and when she pushed a door a little more widely open and hospitably motioned her visitors inside the room, Robert saw that it was an end room looking straight into a tree: and that, beyond the tree, visible in a charming sort of way between its branches, the hill of Regalia rose up and formed a sort of background to the whole. The sun was just going down behind the hill and a flood of evening light poured into the room, making it radiant and beautiful—making even the typewriter that stood on the table by the window a beautiful object—and lighting up the piles of manuscript that were scattered in an untidy yet workwoman-like confusion about the room.

"Yes, it's nice, isn't it," the Lady said, catching the look in Robert's eye. "It's this room and this view of the sky that keeps me in this flat. I can't make up my mind to leave it, though it's too big for me and there are ever so many disadvantages."

She moved two chairs a little bit forward.

"Can you find room," she said very pleasantly, "amongst all my mess?"

They sat down.

Then it was that it burst upon Robert that he had been brought there as a kind of pensioner for whom work had to be found. Miss McGee had kept, as I have said, discreetly silent on this subject, knowing intuitively that if she were to tell Robert the whole facts of the case he wouldn't come at all. She had therefore represented the visit—as a visit and nothing more. Now that it exploded on Robert as a business proposition, the shock was great.

"You want to find some literary work, Miss McGee tells me," the Lady began with her business-like sense that there was no time to lose. She had not been in Canada nine years for nothing! "What kind of work do you want?"

Robert was aghast. The flood of evening light ceased to give him pleasure. He ceased to see the little room as a haven of rest and delight: the commercial atmosphere of the New World seemed to rise up around him with a steamy unpleasant odor to it. He felt that he had been brought here on false pretences—cheated into coming. For just a second he felt quite unreasonably angry. . . .

And then—what did it matter! That lack of vitality which was perhaps inherent in him, which certainly the diet of buns and tea on which he subsisted fostered and made more evident every day, asserted itself. What did it matter after all, if Miss McGee took things into her own hands—and interfered. He would much rather she had *not* interfered, but since she had!

"I didn't know I was coming in search of work," he said: he couldn't help that little repudiation of the business proposition. "I didn't even know I was in search of literary work at all."

He glanced up at the Lady smiling a little. His eyes shyly met the friendly look in her eyes. His anger evaporated—and, like every other woman, the Lady said to herself, "What a *nice* smile!" Miss McGee, sitting by in some trepidation—she hadn't reckoned on the Lady being so instantly business-like—calmed down. "It's a'aloight," she said to herself. And, with a curious drawing at her heart, she noticed the eyes of the two of them as they met. "I guess it'll be a'aloight for um," she said. She felt her under-lip "go," as she expressed it, and she set her teeth on it for a second. "Ye dam-fool," she said to herself. "Play up. What did ye *bring* um for . . ."

"Well," the Lady said, "suppose, before we discuss it any further, we have some coffee." She saw there was something amiss. "Wait just a second." She got up, "I'm my own maid-of-all-work, you know. I'll fetch it. I shan't be a minute."

She went out of the room.

"If you still want to talk," she called out from the kitchen just on the other side of the wall, "I can hear. I'm not very far off."

And they could hear her moving about, and the clang of a metal tray as she set it down on a deal table next door.

They didn't talk. They sat in the little room saying nothing at all; and the sun went down behind the hill and left the sky full of glory, and the glory shone into the little room and changed it into one of our Father's mansions—a mansion of rest in this case: and Robert sat back in the comfortable chair the Lady had given him to sit in, and just for the moment he put aside all thought, all worry, all regret—in that moment he just lived . . . more completely, perhaps, than he had ever lived before. The little home-like noises from the kitchen next door were pleasing to him. They seemed to drift into some cleft of his being, and fill it up. For the second—just the merest passing second as it was—he felt at home. He felt that he had come home, quite unexpectedly, utterly surprisingly. But he felt that he was home—at last: and he sat silently enjoying it.

When the Lady came in, carrying her big copper tray before her in a practical matter-of-course way that suggested she brought her own meals in that way three times a day, it still seemed just as it should be. There was nothing surprising to Robert—and yet, at the same time it was the most surprising thing that had ever happened to him—to be there in the Lady's little flat. He felt with one part of him as if he had always been there; as if he and the Lady were old old friends, their friendship dating from—where? Some unknown, and yet immensely intimate place. He felt in a dreamy sort of way as if he had seen her countless times before come into the room carrying that copper tray in that practical businesslike way, as if he had watched her—how many times—put it down on the table, and take the plates of biscuit and cake off it and place them near her guests, and then sit down and pour the hot steaming coffee into the blue and white cups. He felt as if the coffee had an aroma of its own that only he had smelt before—as if he knew by heart the little twisted spoons in the saucers

of the cups, as if the movement of the Lady's hand, high above the cups as she poured the coffee into them, were something inexpressibly familiar—and *known*.

It was one of those mirages known to us all. We have all felt that sensation of having lived through something before: as if, from where or from how far back who can say, we remembered, as if, without being able to put it into words, we yet know infallibly what will happen next. Robert felt certain that the Lady would rise in a certain way, hand the cup to him in a certain way, that she would smile as their eyes met—that, as she smiled, the air would become charged, as it had done when she opened the door, with a great all-embracing friendliness.

It all happened as he knew it would. The loose Russian blouse, looking so intensely blue beside the copper tray, seemed inexpressibly familiar to him. And the background of the gray wall of the room with the radiance of the evening sky turning it to pinks and yellows—how familiar that was! And the loose mass of papers . . .

In the same instant that all this passed through his mind—or was it his soul?—Robert felt that his own life, that life down there in the Arundel Market, was unbearable. He felt to it, not the steady dislike and the heavy resistance he had felt at the Po-ut's lecture, not the nausea he had felt at Mrs. Morphy's supper; in this instant of remembrance and of charm and of delight, he felt to it the sort of physical repugnance that a woman feels towards a man to whom she owes a physical debt that she feels she cannot pay. To Robert it seemed as the Lady handed him his coffee—"Tell me if it isn't right," she said in her pleasant voice—as if he were degraded by leading the life he led. Penelope's Buildings rose up, as if had risen up on the night of Mrs. Morphy's party, as a sinful place to be in. He felt, for the second, as if he had no business to be in this little study, so clean, so self-respecting, so charming in its very bareness and look of transitoriness—as if the Lady were the merest traveler on life's high road and were shortly moving further on—he felt that, rather than go on in this poverty-stricken squalid life into which he had fallen, it were better to be dead. The old forgotten time—where was it?—that surged up through his sub-conscious self into consciousness and poignant feeling at the mere movement and sway of the Lady's hand, seized hold of him. It said, "Come back. Come back." And, even while

he was saying, "Where? Where?"—it passed. He was simply in the Lady's study, a pleasant little room looking out on Regalia's hill, and the Lady herself was sitting at her table looking across her coffee-tray at him with her friendly eyes.

She was saying, "I wonder what we could do. Have you ever done any journalism, Mr. Fulton?"

He pulled himself together with an effort.

"No," he said. "I haven't."

And, as always when he spoke to a stranger, his speech seemed to him inadequate, hopelessly inefficient, lacking in sense—silly.

"I don't know what I could do," he said, after a second. And then, with a sort of impulse to show himself as he felt himself at the moment to be, "I'm no *good*, you know," he said. "I really am not . . ."

And when he met the Lady's friendly eyes he thought to himself, "But if all the world had eyes like that, I *would* be some good. . . ."

They drank their coffee—and it was good coffee. Robert hadn't tasted coffee like that since he came to Canada. The stuff at the Great North-Eastern Lunch Counter of the Dominion was only coffee in name and Miss McGee's coffee wasn't much better. This had the aroma of the true thing. It was strong and warm and beautiful in color. It seemed to pour something into Robert's veins, so that they ran with life.

"You should never have come to Canada, you know," the Lady said when they were all warmed and alive with the coffee.

"Shouldn't I?" said Robert.

The Lady shook her head.

"Oh, *I'd* have told you not to," she said. "Canada isn't a country—it's a temperament. And your temperament isn't Canada and Canada isn't your temperament."

It sounded oddly familiar. And then Robert remembered that he had said something like that himself in the Canada Book—but not quite so tersely. He smiled at the Lady. "Yes, I know," he said.

"And besides," the Lady went on, "you like ideas. Oh, it's plain you do," she said, shaking her head at him, "just to look at you. And Canada hasn't any ideas," she went on, "except about gasoline tanks from one end of it to the other."

She looked steadily at him and her face was both merry and sympathetic.

"Canada's mind is a gasoline tank," she said. "You shouldn't have come."

"I expect you're right," Robert said. He felt half-pleased and half-annoyed—Miss Martyn's obvious sympathy half-soothed and half-chagrined him.

"Oh, I *know* I'm right," Eileen Martyn said: but the way she said this didn't sound either so downright or so egotistical as it looks written down.

"Well," she said, after a bit, "we must see what we can do. You're here—and you certainly mustn't stay as you are." (Miss McGee had evidently been frank then, on the subject of the Market! Robert was once more, or rather this time perhaps, one-quarter pleased and three-quarters annoyed.) "Let me see," the Lady was saying meditatively. "I'm sorry I just have to go away—I've got a job to write up that everlasting West—and I'm just back from the South where I was writing up the rice-fields of Arkansas. . . . I'll be away most of the summer. When I get back in the fall," she said, turning directly to Robert—it sounded odd to hear her use that transatlantic expression with her conspicuously un-transatlantic voice—"will you come and see me again?"

She stopped and regarded Robert.

"I would like you to come often then, if you will," she said. "We'll have lots to talk about, you and I. And that Market must come to an end. Oh, that's quite absurd," she said, her eyes still on Robert, "we can do better than *that*."

And with that she seemed to put the purely business part of the interview behind her.

"Don't hurry away," she said. "I've nothing to do. . . ."

Miss McGee had made a movement to go as soon as she perceived that the commercial aspect of the visit had been thoroughly looked at and put aside for the time: it was in response to this movement that the Lady asked them to stay.

"I'm not busy," she said; "really," she added, as she saw Miss McGee still preparing to go: and Katie settled back in her chair. She didn't want to stay. She felt a sort of sick distress at being there at all. She saw Robert as she had never seen him before; and she preferred him as she was accustomed to see him in his own corner at her fireside in Penelope's Buildings. "I guessed they'd meet up a'alroight," she kept saying to herself. "Seem's them's bir'rds of a feather ef ever bir-rds was. Well," Miss McGee paused—she looked out of the window and fixed her eyes on the hill outside in an endeavor not

to see what lay so straight before her—"I guess it has to be. It's fixed that way, I imagine." She sat on in a kind of passive fatalism that didn't think it worth while even to make the effort to take Robert away again now she had brought him into the magic circle.

Robert, of course, was totally unconscious of Miss McGee's feelings. He felt, now that his momentary anger against her for bringing him there at all had subsided, quite quiescent. He was perfectly happy where he was. He hadn't been so happy for a long while—never since he had been in Canada, and rarely quite so happy as he was at the moment anywhere at all. He felt a sense of life stroking him the right way, of which he had never been so actively conscious before. He felt that he was in his atmosphere, that the little room with its littered papers was home, that the evening sky outside, that was gradually becoming pearly and faintly diaphanously blue in tint, was the right thing for him to look out at. He loved the shape of the hill against the evening sky. He liked to look at it through the branches of the maple tree outside the Lady's window. The momentary feeling he had had of Miss Martyn's flat being more familiar than anything else he had ever come across had vanished. It was as if a memory had just touched him in passing and then gone further—out of his reach. Now, as he sat back in his chair, quite relaxed, warmed and comforted by the coffee and cake, cheered by the dainty way in which it had been served, soothed by the sight of the Lady sitting picturesquely, not so very unlike a French working-man, in her long blue blouse, he felt merely mortal, quite ordinary, conscious neither of anything behind this life or of anything to come after it—just living deliciously in the Everlasting Now, and wishing it might last for ever.

The Lady talked intermittently, and her way of speaking pleased his ear. It was not that she was specially wise or specially brilliant. She said nothing that had not been said hundreds of thousands of times before. But there was a pleasant intimacy in her address, a sort of taking for granted that the person she spoke to was a friend that made it pleasant to talk to her. She and Robert naturally spoke of Canada—it is the eternal subject between the immigrants. And the Lady—who had seen far more of Canada than Robert—spoke in Canada's favor . . . in a sort of way.

"Yes," she said, "it's big, and growing, and all that. When we come here first we all have, I suppose, that illusion that

it is going to grow into something bigger than has ever been before. But it isn't, you know," she said, after a second's pause. "Canada's just going to be like everything else—and not half so good as our old country for a long, long time . . ."

Miss McGee, sitting silent, wondered what made all these people, so she already classed the Lady and Robert, speak of Canada as they did. To Miss McGee Canada was It. If it wasn't Ireland itself, it was even better than Ireland—except when you wanted to "ta'alk." Miss McGee resented, not so much what the Lady said, perhaps, as the tone she said it in: just what had been objectionable in the earlier sections of the Canada Book. It was the *tone* these people took when they spoke of Canada!—"Sure," Miss McGee said to herself, "I'm not bound to set an' hear me country vilified." She was Canadian through and through as she sat in Miss Martyn's flat. For the moment Ireland was merely a myth behind to which she felt no inclination to reach back. She sat wondering when she could go.

"Oh, well, of course," the Lady was saying when Miss McGee came out of her own rather resentful meditations again, "there is *something* in it." She paused. "But what?"—she laughed—"I don't know. It's provincial," she went on musingly, "Canada's horribly provincial. Its gasoline mind is all *inside* the tank—it never comes out to see there's a big world *outside*. But all the same," Miss Martyn ended up, with a slight change of tone, "there's *something* there. And what's more, no one has ever caught that something yet . . . not to put salt on its tail." And once more her direct glance met Robert's much more hesitating one.

"Why don't *you* write something about Canada?" she said. "You've had lots of experience—of a kind. And just the kind of experience that ought to be useful to write about. Why don't *you*"—her voice had taken on the tone of having at last something definitely practical to suggest—"spend the summer writing up Canada from the point of view you've seen it from? And bring it me when I get back. You might make something awfully interesting of that," she said. "It might be worth all the Arundel Market's done to you." She, too, like Robert, said "Arundel" (and not "Arundel") in her conspicuously English accent; and this innocent and quite authentic pronunciation was to Miss McGee but another thrust at Canada.

"Canada's a man's subject," Eileen Martyn went on after a moment, with her direct eyes still on Robert Fulton. "There's noth-

ing feminine about the Dominion," she said. "A woman can't tackle it anyhow. I can't. I've tried. You see what you can do."

And Robert, as he allowed the Lady to fix his eyes with hers, saw himself looking into those eyes with ever-increasing friendliness—perhaps: and reading them what he had written . . . about Canada.

"He's wrote somethin' now," Miss McGee remarked in a slightly defiant tone of voice. She felt as if Miss Martyn were wrenching the Canada Book, at this very first interview too, out of her—Katie McGee's—hands. "An' it's good a'alright, I want you to know," she continued, with the defiant note becoming slightly more in evidence. "It's a Book."

She rose.

"I guess we got to be gittin' home, eh, Mr. Fulton," she said. "'Tis late."

They walked home silently. As they went through the Campus grounds the robin had gone to bed. It was very still. The moon came sailing over the tree-tops and it looked down on them in between the young leaves. But Robert was conscious of nothing with his physical eyes; his vision was turned inward—to the evening he had spent. He thought of the other evenings he would spend, like this one—perhaps: and he thought of the long summer without any evening like this one, just a long interminable summer of the Arundel Market and heat and dust and weary boredom. He felt sick with a longing for a decent life—for something different. The book that he was to have ready for Eileen Martyn on her return from the West seemed different now that it was not being conceived under the glance of those direct bright eyes. Perhaps he would never write it at all. . . .

"'Tis goin' to be the way I tha'aht ut would," Miss McGee was saying to herself, as she walked speechless at his side. "Well, sure thing ut can't be no worse than the way 'tis an' I'll stick ut, God help me, whatever comes." Her meditations paused for a moment, and to her mental vision also the bright direct glance of the Lady was visible. "There's one thing sure," Miss McGee remarked to herself, meeting this direct bright glance that she saw in her mind with her own much deeper and more passionate look, "'tis one dam-fool mess of a loife."

When they reached the Buildings they parted, with a mere good-night, at the door of Miss McGee's flat. They had not exchanged one word on the subjects of Miss Eileen Martyn or their evening visit.

## CHAPTER XL

ROBERT did not continue this reserve of his about the Lady. (He adopted somehow, utterly unsuitable as it was, the absurd name that Miss McGee had for her customer.) He felt, when the first impressions of the evening at the Fréjus Mansions had passed off, an impulse to share them; to talk of the flat, of the outlook from the flat, of the arrangements of things inside the flat—of the Lady herself, her appearance, her talk, her blouse, the way she carried the tray into the room. He wanted to talk about everything connected with her: and though he would much have preferred talking about these things to the Lady herself, in Miss Martyn's absence he consented to talk to Katie McGee.

For once he did not find an attentive auditor. Miss McGee was willing to sit and listen for a certain time: but the moment that time was over (it was fixed by rule and regulation in her own mind) she turned snappish and wouldn't hear any more. There was no use trying to penetrate this snappishness and see what was further inside; it was apparently guarded by something impregnable, and no effort of Robert's could get past that impregnability: and yet he continued to talk.

It was odd that Robert Fulton should talk. He was really one of the silent brotherhood, and not meant to talk at all. It sometimes seemed as if the visit to the Lady had unlocked something inside him—a box, perhaps—and as if, this box being unlocked, nothing could ever shut it up again. Starting to talk about Miss Martyn, he ended by talking about himself; and though this was exceedingly unlike him, yet he did it more than once, indeed, he rather got into the habit of doing it: he felt confidential, and he had to tell someone, and he told Miss McGee. I don't fancy he even told himself that he would rather have told Miss Eileen Martyn things—but if it had been she that he had been talking to, probably they would have discussed ideas. Robert was driven back on personalities in talking to Miss McGee—his only possible confidante—because talk about ideas means a preliminary training—the “elegant education”—which Miss McGee had never received.

“When I came to Canada,” Robert said one night, quite suddenly and apropos of nothing at all, “I had some money.”

“*Had ye?*” said Miss McGee. And then, after a pause, she said, “Gee!”

It was a great surprise to her that Robert had ever had money. She somehow had never exactly thought of him like that. She had rather taken him as an aristocrat, a thing with whom money rarely has much connection—as aristocracy shows itself on coming out to Canada. “Had ye mooney,” she therefore said eagerly in reply to this remark of Robert’s. “Where is ut, Mr. Fulton?”

Her tone was the tone of one who expects her auditor to say, “It’s in my stocking up-stairs,” or something of that kind.

“Ah, that’s just it,” Robert said. “I lost it.” He was extremely surprised to hear himself mentioning his moneyed episode at all.

“*Lawst* ut!” said Miss McGee. The image now rose in her mind of a fat pocket-book dropping out of Robert’s pocket on to the side-walk. “Didn’t ye know enough to put an ad in the paper, eh?” she said.

“Oh, not that way,” Robert said, laughing a little. And then, with that slight hesitation we have in confessing our stupidities, “I lost it in speculation,” he said. “In mines.” There was a dead silence. “It was stupid,” he continued in an entirely casual tone, “but I did lose it and that’s all there is about it.”

He regretted ever having begun to speak of it.

Miss McGee sat speechless. The loss of money affected her as it affects women generally—as something irreparable and an affair too tragic almost to be spoken of.

“Can’t ye git ut back?” she said after a bit, in a low voice.

Robert shook his head.

“It’s gone, Miss McGee,” said he. “Last winter’s snow isn’t more gone than it is. The scrip isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on.” He laughed again—but this time without mirth, “especially at the war-price of paper,” he said. He now wished to goodness he never had said anything at all.

Miss McGee continued grave.

“Ye gotten the—the *stuff* yet?” she said. “Them papers, eh?”

“Yes.” Robert did answer, but it was the sort of answer that says, “Don’t ask any more questions—*please*.” He made a long pause. “The money’s gone,” he said once more, “and that’s all about it.”

For a while he sat looking out at the window—they sat by Miss McGee’s window and not by her fireplace now—across Drayton Place to where workmen were tearing down Semple’s

drug-store on the other side of the way. Semple's lease had run out; he had not been able to renew it: another Penelope's Buildings was about to be raised up in its place. "I was a fool," Robert said, after a long silence, "when I landed here. I was a greenhorn. I hadn't had any sensible experience of the world—just School and College . . . and what did they teach me there! I never had any real training in anything—practical, till I came to Canada. And then of course I never had any home. . . ."

He stopped dead short and sat looking out through the open window at the bleak prospect on the other side of the way. "You know," he said, rather slowly, "I've had a lonely sort of life." He stopped again, for a long time this time. They both considered the fallen bricks of the drug-store and the house above it, once built up by hands and now lying in loose untidy heaps on the other side of the roadway.

"The fact is," he went on, rather quickly, at last. "I've always meant to tell you—just because you've been so good to me. I—I never knew my parents. I don't know who my father was, or my mother." He stopped, and then went on more quickly. "I suppose," he said, "though I don't actually know, that I'm one of those people who haven't any right to be in the world at all . . . as people think. But I don't know. I spent my childhood with a woman who didn't know anything either. She was a kind woman—good to me. She got money, of course—I mean, she was paid. . . ."

He stopped.

"There always seemed to be money," he said, "that's the odd part of it. *They* must have had it between them. I was sent as quite a little chap to school. And there I stayed—practically—till it was time for me to go to College."

He surveyed the dispiriting prospect outside the window very attentively.

"I tried to find out, of course," he said, "lots of times. But I couldn't. It was all kept very tight. You *can* keep things tight if you want to. The reason things leak out is that generally people don't *want* to keep them tight, and they evidently didn't want me to know. My College bills were paid through lawyers. I went to their Firm but *they* didn't know anything—or they said they didn't. And Mrs. Always didn't know anything. I think she really didn't know. Yes, I think she *didn't* know. . . ."

"You see why I came out to Canada," he said. "I wanted

to get right away. *Begin.* I never had any beginning at home. . . ."

He drew a deep breath.

"Not a real sort of beginning," he said: and then he went on in a quite normal voice. "And, being a young fool that knew nothing about the world," said he, "the very first thing I had to do was lose the lump sum of money—*they'd* settled on me . . . for good. So it's gone," Robert Fulton said, "and there isn't any more where that came from. Or, anyway, I won't ask for it. And the next thing I did was to throw up the teaching post I had come out to take: and then—oh, well, then, things went from bad to worse. I didn't like applying to any of the College people, and I went on just getting shabbier and shabbier, and nobody would have anything to do with me . . . and I don't blame them. And of course I didn't *know* anyone here. And how could I write to the lawyers at home and beg! I wouldn't . . . just because I'd been a—a fool."

He broke off short.

"I didn't anyway," he said after a bit. "I just drifted down into the Arundel Market, and I suppose I shouldn't have done that if I'd been any good. But I did."

He broke off short again, and when he spoke it was with a note of determination in his voice that Katie McGee had never heard there before.

"Now," he said, "I've got to get out of that. I've got to get out. Got to."

Miss McGee said nothing. She surveyed the dispiriting prospect on the other side of the road.

"I don't know why it is," Robert went on, "but since the other night, when you took me—*there*, I've just felt, whatever comes, I have to get out. I simply must," he said. "I *have* to. I can't stay there."

Oddly enough, and quite unconsciously evidently, he was emphasizing his words the very way the Lady did.

"It's a silly miserable little story, isn't it," he went on, after a pause, "and I didn't mean to bore you with it, at this length anyway. I always meant to tell you. And I want you to know, Miss McGee, that I've never told it to anyone else—as it happens. I've let them think what they liked—always: but somehow it's come natural to tell you. And you see, don't you," he went on, "that I can't keep on as I am? I have to get out." There was a note of desperation in his voice. "I've got to," he kept repeating.

Miss McGee sat looking straight in front of her. The immediate world she was looking into was a dismal one, but the mental world that she was looking into was more dismal still. She knew well enough why Robert had been moved to tell her what he had told. She knew well enough that it wasn't really to her at all that he was talking: that what he was saying, he was in truth saying to the Lady. "When *she* comes home," Miss McGee said to herself, "he'll git there." She didn't imagine that Robert was in love with the Lady—yet. But she saw that they were, as she had said, birds of a feather, that they would naturally foregather—talk together in their voices, that were not so unlike, of the things inside themselves that were so very like. She saw herself, not so much an outsider, as a poor lost thing. She saw herself with the one thing she cared about, not taken from her, but leaving her of its own free-will. It was a bitter moment for Miss McGee, this moment when Robert poured out of the unlocked box inside him all the things she had been for so long eager to know. She had wanted to know, not for curiosity's sake but for sympathy's sake, who Robert was, what his early life had been, why he was so lonely, why he seemed so utterly poor and so entirely bereft of influence and friends. And now she knew.

She knew, and this thing she had wanted so much to know came in the shape of a sort of blow. She wished she didn't know. She wished Robert had never felt that impulse to confide in her. Miss McGee saw the finish, as she called it, of their intimacy and of their happy times together. "What'll I do," she said to herself, "when he's gawn over to her! What'll I *do*?" Life seemed unbearable.

"Ye had the har-rd toime," she said out loud. "An' it's been har-rd on ye, Mr. Fulton, eh. Ye've not been the fool, me dear," she further said after a minute. "It's that ye been sent out in the wor-rld without the lesson of how to take ut. An' it's a bad wor-rld, be-lieve *me*," Miss McGee said. "It's not the place for innocent young bo'oy's the loike of you to be wanderin' around alone."

She turned her eyes from the unconsidered ruins outside the window to Robert, sitting opposite to her in the best poor chair she had to give him; she looked at him sitting there, so neat, so well-brushed. . . .

And suddenly the feeling in her changed. She felt not only old, but *old* to him. She felt as if she might be the mother he had never known. With the sensation of something

breaking in her she stretched across to him and took his hands in hers and held them. She had never done this before; she had always held back from touching him. "Me dear, me dear," she said, "'tis the har-rd toime ye've had. Ef I could help ye to bear ut an' mend ut, I—I'd . . ."

She stopped, and her hands tightened their clasp on his.

"I'd die," she said. "Ye know that." And then, loosening her clasp on his hands and letting them go and straightening herself up in her old chair again, she added in quite a commonplace tone, "Ye must never forgit, Mr. Fulton, eh, ye've the old friend in Katie McGee. The old friend," she said. "Tur'rn to her, me dear, in any trouble. She's the *friend*. She's the friend a'alroight."

She got up and began to fidget about the room. She felt tired, drooping, as if the something that had broken in her were essential to hold her up.

"An' cheer up," she said. "I guess the worst's pa'ast an' gawn. When the Lady comes back she'll help ye the way I can't. She'll foind ye work, depend. Take ut from me, she'll not forgit."

Miss McGee paused in her fidgeting about the room.

"I'll not *let* her," she said fiercely.

And as Robert sat looking out of the window at the dead heaps of brick on the other side of the way, a little glimmer of hope stole into his heart. It stole there because of the certainties in Miss McGee's voice. She infected him with hope. He thought perhaps that the Lady *might* help him. Just help him to help himself—with a hand, how he would clamber up—now! How he would work!

He turned to Miss McGee with a happy smile.

"You're good to me," he said, as he had said it before, but with emphasis and energy this time. "You're good to me. I don't know what I should have done without you here." For the first time, perhaps, he felt truly affectionate. Miss McGee noted his tense.

## CHAPTER XLI

**D**URING this communicative mood of Robert's—which was interspersed with evenings when he would absolutely retire into the fastnesses of his former silence—he hadn't the smallest inclination to work at the Canada Book. Robert

Fulton wasn't one of the workers of the world. If he had been left alone and life had dealt peaceably with him, he would have waded gently through life, not idle exactly, but indolently meditative. He did not feel any impulse to *do* things. He had not a trace of that restlessness that spurs the born workers into work—whether they wish it or not; he had never, before coming to Canada, felt the, often unhappy, itch that stimulates men, and sometimes but far less often women, to produce. Robert Fulton would have been well content to have been, as he often had wished he might have been, a quiet monk of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, happily settled in his monastery, a digger in the earth there, a peaceful cultivator of herbs or fruits or flowers; possibly the illuminator of a script; never a St. Augustine, a great sinner and a great repentor, one of those who, for the relief of his own mind and body, must be *doing*—either right or wrong. Robert was one of those calmer souls who are content to be. Willingly would he have passed his days noting, but only mentally—that is sufficient for the contemplative souls—the things of this world as they went by him: for his active pursuits he might have made a small accurate drawing, of a tree-branch, perhaps, or he might have made a study of a flower. Or he might merely have stayed observing the world with the receptive mind that was contented to be where God had placed it.

He had no chance of developing this type of being. Robert Fulton was one of the many people of our day who are being hurried more rapidly than was good for him—as he himself in his *Canada Book* declared the immigrants to have been—into a further stage of evolution. The experiment the modern world (in conjunction with his own folly) was trying on Robert Fulton was undue poverty and a long grind of uncongenial toil. These chemical agents were naturally producing on him some reaction; and the reaction they were producing was the driving of him to express in some way or other the definite discontent he felt.

It was the *Arundel Market* really that was responsible for the *Canada Book*. Had Robert not served at his Dairy Counter and suffered the misery he did there, it would have been long before he would have put pen to paper, to try to make articulate what he felt. For that was what the *Canada Book* was doing—really. It set out to be a book about the manual workers, but what it really was was a book about Robert Fulton, salesman at the Dairy Counter. He had been made so su-

premely miserable by being planted in ground where he could not possibly grow—or he had made himself so supremely miserable by allowing himself to be planted there—that the itch to express himself had been artificially developed. He had begun to feel that desire to work, that desire to explain himself to himself and the world to everyone else that is so characteristic of our time. He felt unhappy. His unhappiness urged him to an introspection which was foreign to his nature. The peaceful monk of the fifteenth century retired one day further back into an impossible past as the Robert Fulton of the twentieth century each day unwillingly made his way to Stempel Street—where the Arundel Market was. If fate had kept Robert Fulton indefinitely at the Arundel Market the monk of the wholly impossible past would in time have become utterly impossible to find in a wholly discontented Robert Fulton of an actual present. The peaceful cultivator of herb or flower would slowly but relentlessly be turned into the restless writer of unhappy books.

Robert could not have put these things to himself in so many words. He was not definitely conscious that the Canada Book was his indictment of the modern world. But, had he had the chance of one or two intimate conversations with Eileen Martyn, it would not have taken him very long to have reached the point of consciousness. He half-knew that his little booklet was his apologia for life. He semi-recognized that his thesis was not nearly so much a treatise on Canada and her immigrants as a questioning of himself. And possibly it was the semi-consciousness of this that kept him back from writing more of it. What Miss Martyn had suggested was not this. She had suggested that he might write "something about Canada": that he might "present" an impersonal Canada to the world at large. He knew well enough he was not doing that. More: he had a very shrewd suspicion that he never would be able to do that. Miss Martyn had said Canada was a virile subject. Well, was he competent to handle virile subjects?

He slid along through the July days that were not so hot as he had feared they would be. Robert, like Miss McGee—far more than Miss McGee—was in the habit of dying a thousand deaths before there was any talk of dying one. The July of 1918 was pleasant. He could go on living in it, and even more bearably than usual; for the smart clientèle of the Arundel Market was out of the city on its summer holi-

day, so that the Arundel salesmen could stop and linger and chat to one another, count the hours till lunch-time out loud, calculate (with very light-weight bets, perhaps) who would get out of the store first when the time should come to close down for the night. At six or a little after it (for the Directors of the Market had decided to close an hour earlier during the months of July and August) and on Saturdays at five, Robert was free to go back to Penelope's Buildings and have the evening to himself. Penelope's Buildings was close and dingy and smelly, more unbearable in the summer than in the winter months; and, very often, after their meal, Robert and Miss McGee would leave the Buildings and go on the hill above Regalia, and, amongst its great shadowy trees, and along its thick bushy paths, they would wander and wander, and imagine themselves far from the city. There were lovely views to be had. From one spot, above an old disused quarry, it was possible to look far across the mighty St. Lawrence flowing calmly past Regalia's fussy busy-ness, and to look over to the Green Mountains rising majestically beyond the opposite bank. Sitting there looking out into the calm distance, Miss McGee would sometimes begin and tell of the mountains in Ireland that Mrs. McGee had loved to talk about: "Mountains, the loike of which isn't here, sure thing, blue and quiet an' misty, an' full of the loveliness that's not of this wor-ld. D'ye know the feelin', eh, a mountain gives ye?" Miss McGee would go on. "I've seen me with me hear-rt in me throat for the great beauty of ut. The way the hill would look would take me acrost the eternal river and roight in the eternal city there. D'ye think, Mr. Fulton, eh," she said once, "it's us two'll be meetin'? Is there one place fer you and another fer me that thinks different on these things, or will we be meetin', an' no more misunderstandin's nor nothin' no more . . . ?"

After a second she would add to this sort of remark, "There's no misunderstandin's here betwixt you an' me, God help us, but there'll be *less* there. We'll be understandin' everythin' there p'raps."

Miss McGee would take their supper up sometimes with them in a little basket. Robert would find her on his return from the Market with her hat on and the basket in her hand. "Sure," she would say, "it's the grand foine noight. I was thinkin' in meself we moight lie up there on the gra-ass, eh, an' eat our suppers. I've a sup of tea in me bottle here an' I

got sangwitches made, an' we can git a peach at the corner fruit-store there the toime we're passin' ut."

Those little meals were a pleasure to Robert. He liked things out in the open air; to get away from Penelope's Buildings was in itself a treat. He would lie on the burned-up grass and gaze up into the soft evening sky with lazy, non-seeing eyes. And Miss McGee, seated by his side, with her feet tucked under her, would hand him out sangwitches and a piece of cake perhaps, a mug of tea: and she would love to peel the peaches he was so fond of and carefully hand him the peeled fruit on the end of the knife. "Here," she would say. "Hurry there. Git busy, eh. Be sure ye let no drip fall on yer clothes the way ye're lyin'. The fruit's juicy, be-lieve *me*." And then, with that playful way women have of finding fault with the men they care for, she would add, "The way to be lyin' there an' you eatin'! Why will ye not be settin' up an' eatin' yer meal the way I'm eatin' moine. Ye'll dir-rty yerself lyin' there on the ground, an' the sun gittin' in yer eyes. . . ."

"Don't bother me, Miss McGee," Robert would answer. "I'm happy."

"Are ye now?" Miss McGee would say. "Are ye now, me dear? That's good hearin'. Take my word, if it's happy ye are, it's happy I am meself. *Take* yer rest the way ye feel loike ut, an' I'll pare yer fruit fer ye."

Those evenings up on Regalia hill were happier things than Miss McGee ever expected to enjoy again. She, too, was quite happy—at moments. Sitting up on the hill with the sun going down, as it were in a special grand spectacular stunt for Robert and herself (Regalia's hill was big enough to give you the feeling of utter loneliness upon it), she was happy. She loved to watch Robert stretched at her feet. She loved it when he was moved to say something—the communicative mood still went on taking him by fits and starts. "*Did* ye!" she would say: and then, with an ever undiminished enthusiasm and interest, "Sure, tell us some more, eh, Mr. Fulton, dear."

Apart from these evenings Miss McGee was not having any too good a time of it. Her customers were all away for their summer holiday, and she was therefore "laid off" from her work. Usually in past summers, she had taken some odd job for the two or three midsummer months. She had put an "ad" in the papers, and she had gone to the Office of the *Daily Planet* and seen what the "ad" had brought

forth. There had been a distinct pleasure in opening those notes addressed to "10432A" or something of that kind; as she took out the note from its envelope she had always had a feeling that here perhaps was the really unexpected something. It never had been. Still, one summer she had got the job of upholstress at a small hotel—running up fresh curtains on the machine and renewing the covers on the hotel chairs: and that had been rather fun. The meals had been "foine." Several times she had gone to the country to redd up country family wardrobes too—and sometimes that had been rather nice. There had always been the greediness of the country families to combat; they, different as they might be in other things, had all been alike in wanting the utmost cent's worth out of their money. But Miss McGee was a doughty warrior. No family, country or town, could get out of her what she didn't want to give. She had wheedled, blandhandhered, stood up for her rights, flatly said she wouldn't as had seemed most suitable to her: and by the end of the time, glad as she had usually been to come away, she had at least had country air, a difference in meals, a difference in the humanity she looked at. Miss McGee liked her fellow-mortals. It would have been difficult to her to do without them. She would indeed have chosen disagreeable mortals rather than none at all—an incomprehensible point of view to Robert: and she was so rootedly city-bred too that her heart always gave a bound in her when she saw the unkempt side-walks and the flashing electric lights of Regalia city once more. She didn't really like country life. It was "noice" but it was dull. After a bit the cows got on her nerves and she began to wish the trees would talk. It was on the whole a comfort to get back to the Buildings and have a row with Mrs. Savourin. This summer she made no effort to get a job. One reason perhaps was that the summer before she had had charge of a child—an only one—and that had been a punk job and she had sworn she never would have such another. Miss McGee was not the essentially motherly type. She liked "kids," provided they were always good and were generally little girls and wore nice starched clothing which they never crushed. She certainly didn't like children in the way her own mother had liked them. However, she did her duty by children; this spoiled child she had taken in hand—she had lectured it and made it say its prayers, and sometimes, when it was in its nightgown and sleepy and quiet, she had taken it in her arms and crooned to it and felt very fond of it. But

she had also been glad to say good-by to it. "Regalia fer moine!" she had remarked in putting her foot down on the platform as she got off the train after that holiday. And, this year, there was another reason to "stay put" as she said; she didn't wish to leave Robert. Who knew! This might be her last, as it was her first, summer alone with him. Perhaps in a year from now . . .! Miss McGee always closed up her reflections at this point. She made occupations for herself. She strolled along St. Hubert's Boulevard and looked into the windows of the big stores there, and whenever she saw a "mawdel" that took her fancy she strolled into the shop and asked the young lady in the "Suit Department" if she could "try that there mawdel in the window on." It never did, of course. And the young lady had a shrewd idea it wouldn't be likely to do before she ever got it out of the window. But it was her business to please customers—she got it out; and Katie McGee posed with it on in front of the triple-mirrors, turned and twisted, walked a step here and a step there—took off the pattern of it in her mind (this was the way she got her patterns mostly) and then said she guessed it was too long—or too short—or the waist didn't "set," or she didn't fancy the "loines." It always ended in her taking the "mawdel" off and in the young lady putting it back in the window. Miss McGee enjoyed herself thus, it passed the time: she would spend hours in this way, strolling along the hot side-walks with her head turned sideways towards the things inside the stores.

She did keep her eyes on the "ads" too. She borrowed the *Evening News* from Mrs. Savourin who inherited it from "the thug" who occupied Mrs. Morphy's old home: and she pored over the "ads" in its columns hour after hour. Once she saw that at the Fornaro Hotel they wanted a "linen-girl," and she went to apply for the post. She didn't want a "sleep-in job," and this linen-girl's job was not a sleep-in one. The pay was good. She felt anxious to get it. However, when she had been interviewed by various people, getting less and less smart in the ratio of distance they showed to the front door, she found she "wouldn't do." "Guess you have to wear gla'asses, eh?" the housekeeper on the top floor said meaningly. Miss McGee came down the stairs of the Fornaro Hotel feeling ten years' older than when she went up. Nothing makes us so old as others branding us with age.

Another time she saw that at the big Women's College of

Regalia they wanted an "odd girl." She thought she might pass as a "girl,"—a "business" one, and she went to the big gray building and rang at the bell there. She thought as she stood on the broad door-step outside the college door that she would like to get some employment inside. She would then *see* what an education was like if she could not actually share in it. However, there too her age was the barrier. "I want a *girl*," the housekeeper said with emphasis. Not even in the business sense did Miss McGee answer to that description any longer, evidently. "Guess Mickey was roight," Miss McGee said to herself descending the ample stairway of the College. "Guess *he* knew the toime o' day, eh!" Her bitterness against Mickey began to subside. After all, he had been quite right. He had known.

It seemed to her cruel that the dire age of forty-seven should so effectually bar her out from usefulness. "I ain't *old*," she would say to herself occasionally, with a faint flicker of resentment against unmerited misfortune. "I *ain't* old. I'd fix 'em—ef they'd take me." Yet the fact remained—and she knew it—that needles wouldn't thread as they used to do. And sometimes, too, she was conscious that her stitches seemed coarser, that her finishing was less immaculate. Also, as she trailed about the streets gazing at "mawdels" and preparing her mind thus for its winter's work, it struck her that life seemed more of a responsibility than it had once done. She was losing her youthful sense that "things'll come a'alroight, God help me. . . ." She was beginning to feel the load.

Apart from these two trials Miss McGee made no effort to find work. She felt that, rather than face more employers of labor—more housekeepers of hotels and colleges—she would rather go short of "mooney." Robert, when he saw that she was not occupied, wanted her to come and lunch with him every day at the Great North-Eastern. "Do come," he said, quite eagerly for him. "It will be such fun to find a friend." But, except for one special occasion when Miss McGee consented to meet him at the Lunch Counter (it was in order to see the little waitress he had sometimes told her about) she never would go. "No," she said, 'no, Mr. Fulton, dear. I ain't never begged yet, nor I ain't cadged. I got Uncle's mooney. I'll fix meself a'alroight, don't worry."

And Robert had to take it so.

Once or twice she got a stray day's work. One of her

regular customers would be "passing through," and she would write a post-card to "McGee" to come. And then Katie, only too glad, would go and spend a couple of days perhaps, pressing out the customer's suits, sewing buttons on where they had come off, renewing soiled "vestees," putting the wardrobe in order for its further travels. That made an extra three dollars or so; and Mrs. Barclay, down at some "summer hotel" with her Katie, would send up a parcel now and then with country produce in it—eggs, butter, a fowl, home-made candies that some enterprising lady was making in the village. Whenever one of these parcels came Katie McGee and Robert would have a special pic-nic up on Regalia hill. They would sit on the grass with their eyes on the beautiful world as they ate and drank, sharing the crumbs of their feast with some friendly chipmunk, who, chipping and chattering, would come sidling off his native bough and up to them for charity and kindness. "The sweethear't," Miss McGee would say, holding out her hand with something tasty in it. "Come, sweethear't, come." She loved animals in a sort of passionate way. "Did ever ye saw the beat of that!" she would cry, when the chipmunk, daring and yet frightened, would slip up to her and consent to take the tit-bit out of her fingers. "My, ain't he the cute little article, eh? Ain't he the kid, Mr. Fulton?" If it had been a chipmunk that she had had to spend her previous summer with, she would have been happy enough. She loved animals far more than children. It was at such moments as these—but only at such moments now—that her oldness fell away from her. With the chipmunk's advent her preoccupations would quite suddenly be as if they were not. When it came time to go home together after such an episode, she would walk at Robert's side with a light springy step, her head held high, her eyes shining in the soft summer night. "Ain't the sky great?" she would say. "Ain't the loines of ut grand? I guess," she said once, turning mischievously to Robert, "ye ain't got the sky loike that in England, eh?" she laughed. "Takes Ireland to be the beat of that. Canada's It, ain't ut, Mr. Fulton . . . ?"

And at that speech the memory of the Lady would slip across both of them, and the deep night-blue of the sky would cease to be beautiful for Katie McGee. "Don't forgit yer book, eh," she would go on in a much graver voice with that casual linking on of one subject with another that is so essentially feminine. "Ye got to have that wrote the toime *she* comes back,

don't ye forgit ut. Ye'd best git in an' fix yerself some, I guess."

And, after such a reminder, they would go the rest of the way with hardly a word between them, and they would part at the door of Miss McGee's flat, as they had parted now so many times, and Robert would go up-stairs thinking to himself, "I'm no good. Why don't I work? *Do something?*" And he would lie half the night through meeting the Lady's direct glance with his wide-open sleepless eyes. "I wonder where she is now!" he would say to himself. She seemed infinitely distant—from Penelope's Buildings. There were times when that visit to her seemed little better than a dream.

## CHAPTER XLII

WHEN the first real heat of the summer came in the late days of August it burst upon what remained of Robert's philosophy and broke it to pieces. Robert Fulton certainly was an unsatisfactory creature. He could stand no intensities of any kind—neither heat nor cold, nor extremes of poverty—nor would he have stood extremes of riches any better. He didn't like passionate feelings; he wasn't an extremist in any way. When the sun shone down on Regalia with a fierceness and intensity it hadn't shown for years, Robert merely said to himself, "Of course," and went his way as usual. It wasn't a matter to grumble about: he simply bore it.

Also, something helped him to bear the intensity of the sunshine and all other things too. After he had said "Of course," something else passed through his mind. It's nearly autumn now, was what he said, "and autumn is cool, and besides, in autumn . . ."—and there his meditations ended. But, as he said these things to himself, his eyes seemed to meet something they met very readily. Again the direct glance of Eileen Martyn seemed to be before his eyes, and he met it timidly, with his own much less direct one. "She'll be back," he sometimes got the length of saying, "soon." And the Arundel Market seemed less—what it was.

It was Miss McGee who really stood the heat-wave badly. She had no electric fans in Penelope's Buildings as Robert had at his Dairy Counter. He stood in the full blast of a fan; and now, instead of his eyes being glued to the clock (as in

the absence of customers, they were in the winter) they were turned to the streamers of many-colored ribbon that were tied to the metal spokes of the revolving fan: thus he would stand, watching, until the varied colors of the ribbons would become blended in his consciousness into one rainbow shade—and the shreds of his consciousness too, would, like the many-colored streamers, seem to be merged into one. There, behind his counter, his blue eyes fixed, he would fall at last into an almost hypnotic state: and the voice of some stray woman asking for “a ha’alf a pound of sweet butter, eh,” would startle him as if it were the last trump. He would tear his eyes from the fan with the sort of effort it takes to rouse oneself from a deep dream; his consciousness would detach itself into shreds once more, each shred catching on to some separate effect of this world, and he would leap into action. “Yes, Madam. Anything more?” He would wrap the butter up into a neat parcel, take the money from the customer’s hand, wrap it up with the bill, stuff the wrapped-up parcel into the little metal box, set it on its rail, touch the button—and with a swish of motion up-hill it would go running to the young lady in her cage. It was always the same old story. “Your change, Madam.” There was lots of time to be polite now. He would count the change into the hands of the customer—molto andante—“Good morning, Madam.” And once more he would fix his eyes on the streamers of ribbon, once more melt into the hypnotic state, and become as unconscious of the world around him as if he were an Indian gnani.

This passed the time for Robert. At the Lunch Counter there was another electric fan; and, in the draught of it he could sit, either gazing dreamily into St. Hubert’s Boulevard—very hot, very dry, very deserted now: or he could draw the inevitable book from his pocket and desultorily read a sentence here and there. There were mitigations for Robert in the heat-wave of August.

But Katie McGee stayed home, as she said. During the intense heat she felt as if she couldn’t face the trying-on of mawdels, or the glare of the Boulevard at all. She stayed in Penelope’s Buildings, and sewed. First she renewed the collar on Uncle’s coat: and in this there was pleasure. She got it out from where she had it carefully put away “from the mawth,” and she shook it and let it air in the sun. Then she brushed it, and, having reverently unpicked Uncle’s collar, she cut a new one from a piece of velvet she had brought home a long

while before from Mrs. Glassridge's (Miss McGee often brought home "pickings" as she called them from her customers') and very carefully sewed it on. The re-collared coat was the one pleasant fact she had to allow her mind to dwell on. "I'll put ut away from the mawth again now," she said to herself, stitching away, "an' in the winter, God bless um, I'll give ut um, an' it'll keep the cold awf of um sure." The coat, held up at arm's length, fulfilled itself entirely. The eight years since Uncle Mike Cassidy's death seemed but a day in the eyes of Miss McGee as she surveyed this wonderful garment. "I guess," she said to herself, making the same remark she had made to herself on a previous occasion, "when a coat *is* cut swa'all, it *is*." And in her mind's eye she saw Robert setting off from Penelope's Buildings looking like the gen'leman bor'rn he was with the coat on his back—and she felt happy.

Otherwise she sat and stitched at Ag's trousseau. After Mrs. Garry and Ag had come a good many times, this possibility had been hinted at; and after it had been hinted at a good many times, the hint passed into a supplication, and the supplication into a demand. Miss McGee was willing enough. She said to herself, "I moighter knowed, eh, Mary had su'then up her sleeve!" Mary Garry always had had that "having" instinct that wanted everything in sight: and she had that stupidity—or rather, perhaps, that obtuseness that often goes with such a disposition. "I moighter knowed ut, eh," Katie said to herself. "A'alroight," was what she said out loud, "I'll fix Ag ef you want ut so them Furlongs don't need to feel badly they married a McGee." Miss McGee regarded her sister's family as McGees. One of her abiding regrets was that Mary had had no boy whom she could have named McGee Garry, and 'so, in a sense, carried on the family. "Sure, gir'rls is a'alroight," she had remarked in the old years when Mary insistently brought forth only the female sex, "but, God save us, ain't there enough!" She would have liked a boy. She would have felt a great pride in a McGee, even though his last name had been Garry. It was not to be, and she was resigned to doing the best she could for the girl of her family who was going into a strange family, there to bring forth in a year or so something that still had the McGee blood in its veins—the McGee blood that was slowly drying up into nothingness.

"Sure, ain't ut the pity Ag ain't got some stoyle," Ag's Aunt thought, stitching and cutting and fitting Ag every day or so.

"My wor'rd, she ain't got the *look* her grandma'a had!" And she thought with sadness of Tim Garry and Tim Garry's sister, Auntie Nellie (whom Nellie the school-teacher had been named for). "My Gawd," she thought, "'tis some hog's hole back in Ireland there *they'll* be comin' from." She had always liked Tim Garry—in a way: but she always disapproved of him too. *He* had no ancestor back before the time of our Lord. Tim was a modern proposition, and it showed in him, and in his sister Nellie too. They looked as if God had got tired of making human beings and hadn't had energy to finish these properly. The Garrys had thick hands and short finger-nails, stumpy feet, they were thick in the body—their faces were large. Ag was a Garry through and through: and as her Aunt "fixed" underwear and crêpe-de-chine kimonos and little dressing jackets and dainty blouses and stylish underskirts, she often thought to herself, "Sure 'tis the clothes Ed Furlong'll be marryin', eh. 'Tis them that's wor'rth whoile." She slightly resented the fact that Ed Furlong had never been brought to be introduced to her, but that made no difference in her desire that Ag should enter the Furlong family "good." "Ye'll git yer tailored suit the place *I'll* show ye," she said to Ag (she had Mrs. Glassridge's tailor in her mind). "I'll not make yer tailored suit fer ye—no fear. Ye'll go where *I* say, an' Auntie's comin' with ye too to choose an' see ye fitted." "She'll not save her mooney *that* way," she said to herself. "She'll look *good* in her suit the way a *man* kin make ut." And she carried her point and took Ag and Mrs. Garry to the tailor's (they were rather surprised to see the esteem in which the tailor evidently held Auntie Katie) and chose a dark, plain, well-cut suit for Ag—the reverse of what Ag and her mother would have chosen for themselves: and Ag looked "dacent," as her Aunt said. "Be God," she however also said to herself, "'tis the dickuns to be fat an' all, eh. 'Kape thin!' was what Uncle Mike'd used to say—*he* knowed the toime o' day!"

These things passed the time. Without Ag's wedding-clothes this August Auntie sometimes felt she would have gone under. They interested her. Though she would have liked it much better if they had been Rose's wedding-clothes—or Nellie's—that would have been worth while!—still Ag's were better than nothing. She did her best. As she sat sewing, however, things seemed to "come over her," as she said. It hadn't been a good year. This year of 1918 had brought it home to her that she was an old woman and that nobody and nothing

cared for her any more. As she sewed Ag's clothes, she quite consciously chose out the needles with the large eyes to sew with. The world would have none of a woman who did that: the world wanted brisk young active creatures with good sight and good hearing so that they could do its behests quickly and well. She also cared very much for a young man she had quite voluntarily handed over to a young woman. Friends were no good—Mickey Ryan had chucked her over. She felt, stitching away, as if the world had rather ruthlessly chucked *her* about, and that in the chucking process she had got rather badly dinted. "Oh my," she said over and over again to herself, "don't matter any. I ain't neither better nor worse than the rest. I'm jes' wore out. But say," she would add to herself after a minute, "ain't ut *some* wor'ld, eh?" She felt—*tired*.

She could of course have gone to stay at Garryton. It would have been far more convenient for the Garrys to have had her sewing there, instead of Ag having to trail constantly in and out to Penelope's Buildings to be fitted. But Miss McGee would not go to Garryton. Possibly she felt in herself a sort of suspicion that they wanted her so badly to come because it would be more convenient to have her there. Perhaps the cold turkey was not quite digested even yet. Certainly Aunt Nellie Garry's being in the Garry home as a permanency had something to do with it. And besides . . . Katie McGee saw herself now quite clearly for what she was—not for what she had thought she was on the night of Mary Garry coming to "make it up." She was just a poor little old soul with no chance of bettering herself as long as she might live. She had rolled to pretty near the bottom of the hill—and she would stay there. No, she would not go to Garryton to be patronized and petted, and for Aunt Nellie to point out kindly to her how old she had grown and what beautiful hair she had once had in the days long long ago. She wouldn't. It was no *use* for Mary to keep saying, "Come on, Kate. The gir'rls is just woild to have Auntie come an' stay. . . ." It was no *use*. She wouldn't go. She could still bestow something on the Garry family—her taste. She would make Ag's clothes. She would slave all summer through. She would give all that was left to her to give with both hands—generously: but she would not receive.

How well she remembered Auntie Nellie casting sheeps' eyes at Mitt. Auntie Nellie!—that thing that God had evidently made in a desperate hurry and thrown into the world. Miss

McGee, in the oldest days of all, had never been able to bear her: and she had wanted Mitt. And after Mitt had thrown Katie McGee over, she had wanted to be "kind." Miss McGee was quite polite in the way she rejected Mary Garry's invitations. She merely said she guessed she loiked stayin' home best. She was gittin' old—she loiked her own bed. She guessed she'd come some other toime when she felt more loike ut. She could sew better at home. . . .

But it was dull, and she was bored. There was nothing to *do*—but sew. It was all very well to adjust her glasses carefully on her nose so that she might make no false stitch and so imperil the honor of the McGees in the Furlong family: but—it was dull. There was no one now she could run in and pass the time of day with. Poor Mrs. Morphy's leg was no longer there to dress. She couldn't even run up to Miss Healy's and insist on her coming down to drink the cup of tea. Things had come to a bad pass when she was missing Cassie Healy, God help her! And them gir'rls opp'site. 'She heard things in the night she should not have heard. She turned and twisted and tried *not* to hear. But she heard. It began to seem not worth while even to prepare "lunches" that she and Robert might eat up on the hill. "Guess ut's too hot, eh," she would say in a languid voice to Robert when he came home: and he and she would pass the evenings by her open window, surveying the dispiriting prospect across the street, and sometimes even listening to the clang of the workmen's hammers on the metal girders when they were working overtime at "The Trefusian Mansions" as the big Apartment House opposite was to be called. "We'll have to quit, eh," Miss McGee would say, gazing out of the window. "Guess you an' me'd do some better in them Trefusian Mansions there, eh." And through her mind would flit the query, "What for?" It seemed to size up life.

Under these depressing conditions it seemed nothing less than a heaven-sent inspiration that dispatched Robert home one night with an energy quite unusual in him. "Come along, Miss McGee," he said. "Let's go down to Summer Park. It's cooler down there—I heard two customers talking about it. Get your hat on and come." With that queer quick change of front that was first nature to Miss McGee, she suddenly felt this world was worth living in—that it was a good place—that people were kind—that Robert was fond of her. . . .

It didn't take a second for her to say, "I'll come, Mr.

Fulton—be sure!”—with the languor all gone out of her voice: and not ten minutes more for her to slip into her best little black-and-white summer frock and her “good” hat—her “good” smile was there anyway. It seemed a bad dream that she had been spending the summer sewing clothes for Ag and thinking the world a nightmare: by the time they were seated side by side in the car, on the wicker crossway seat that only held two, Robert close by her, and the kind world just outside the window, Katie McGee was out of this life altogether and into a dream-life of her own. “Oh my,” she thought, with all her old vitality, “say, ain’t ut good, eh, to git out! ’Tain’t *roight* to be settin’ there all the toime alone. ’Tis foine ut is out here.” And she put all bad things far away behind her and set out to enjoy herself.

### CHAPTER XLIII

ON the long ride down to Summer Park they didn’t say much. They were tired, both of them, and Robert was faint for want of food. It had been so hot in the middle of the day that he had eaten nothing at his North-Eastern Counter; he had simply drunk down a cup of coffee, hoping it would pour some stimulant into him: and then he had sat, until inexorable time, galloping along, had sent him back to his Market. He was glad Miss McGee didn’t seem to want to talk. In fact, he felt so weary and done that he was almost sorry at moments he had ever heard the two customers at his Dairy Counter exchanging their impressions of the place he was bound for.

“Fine, eh?”

“I should say!”

“That music down there at the Summer Park is one fine thing, you bet.”

“I guess ’tis, eh!”

“An’ say, *my* dear, take ut from me, that What’s-us-name, Facciatore there, beats the band. . . .”

“Oh, Gee . . . !”

So the two had passed out of hearing, continuing to exchange what they took for their impressions of Summer Park. It had all been very banal and silly and Robert was in no smiling mood; and yet, without rhyme or reason, just because he hadn’t

been able to help listening to this idiotic conversation, there had dashed into his mind the idea, "Why shouldn't we go down there to-night? It would be cooler, anyway!"

—He had felt what Miss McGee called all braced up by the idea. He had come home with a most unusual speed, and he had knocked at Miss McGee's door with an extraordinarily eager hand. "Come along," he had said with quite an irresistible impetus, "get your hat on. We'll go down to Summer Park and have an evening there. I'll just run up-stairs—I shan't be a minute. . . ." He had felt eager to have any sort of a treat—a change from the daily darg—a breath of the river air. And now, as he leaned back on his wicker seat, it struck him that he would have done quite as well—better perhaps—to stay at home and contemplate the prospects of the Trefusian Mansions on the ruins of Semple's drug-store out of Miss McGee's Drayton Place window.

Miss McGee, on her side, was silent principally because she was so happy. She felt the touch of Robert's coat-sleeve on her thin summer gown. She loved the feeling of his personality, there, so close as almost to be a part of her own. She was unwilling to break in on this happiness of hers with speech—in case she should shatter it. So she sat, close-pressed to Robert's side, unaware of the reluctance to be where he was that was slowly taking shape in him: entirely and absolutely happy.

The car sped very rapidly through the evening air. The intense burning heat of the day was letting up. The windows of the car were down to their uttermost so that a rush of air went through and through the car, bringing with it a sense of refreshment and renewing life. Men took their hats off and let the breeze play on their close-cropped heads; women leaned back, their ungloved hands in their laps, careless of the way the draught might disorder their carefully-waved hair. It was cool and delicious, and the folks sat, as Miss McGee said to herself, "drinkin' ut in." She herself sat close to the open window and looked out at it. Their way to the Summer Park lay East, through the French-Canadian part of Regalia, that looked, for all the world, as if it were a Parisian suburb. There were the French names above the stores—Bourgeau, St. Aubin, Darettes; there were pleasant capable stout women going home with half yards of bread sticking out of their baskets: there was the look, the air, above all, the smell of the French suburb or the small provincial French town. Further

on, there were Jewish names above the doors, and Miss McGee glanced with an unfamiliar feeling at the dark bearded men and stout olive-skinned women with their greasy abundant hair, talking to one another in unknown tongues and gesticulating with almost as unexpected gestures. Robert too, looked out of the window across Miss McGee, and it came over him, as he looked, what a cosmopolitan city, after all, he and Miss McGee lived in. Inside Penelope's Buildings with the Irish and Scotch tongues round about them, Regalia seemed a small parochial sort of place, formed of just as parochial places brought across the sea: but here, in the Eastern part of Regalia there was nothing parochial at any rate. There was a good deal of dirt and a good deal of unexpectedness, but there was something that was far bigger than just little Great Britain across the sea to watch. As the car went speeding through St. Hubert's Boulevard that went in one long straight line right down to the waterway, a long procession formed before the eyes of Robert and Katie McGee. There were the Jews of Eastern Europe upset pell-mell across the Atlantic Ocean. There were French, dark Sicilians, Chinese carrying the weekly laundries home with care. There were Syrians with soft yet passionate eyes. Now and again a big fair Bulgar—a rare one who had not gone back to fight for his land—crossed before them. Yiddish sounded everywhere—German, Russian, Polish, Montenegrin—a jargon of half-familiar words rose up on Robert's ear and flooded down for the moment other and more familiar sounds.

Over on the other side of the aisle from where Robert and Miss McGee were sitting, were a couple of Japanese, also, evidently on their way to Summer Park. They sat as silent as Miss McGee and Robert, but far more impassive than Miss McGee or even Robert could ever be. The "japs" or "chinks" as Katie indifferently called them, gazed too out of the open window by their side, noting silently every detail that passed before their eyes. They sat there (one of them wore the glasses of the West over his small slanting eyes) with their golden skins and their straight dark hair and their scrupulous European dress and their immensely intelligent expression. "Say, will you look at them dagoes there," Miss McGee whispered to Robert—it was the first remark she had made. "Cute, eh? Ain't the wrist-watches they got the article!"

She paused a moment and then she added, "I guess them chinks does themselves good out here."

Japs were dagoes to Miss McGee. They were "chinks." They were anything. To Robert, as he glanced over at the calm faces, full of a latent cleverness that might at any moment, he felt, spring full-fledged from their brains, they brought a waft of cherry-blossom—a vision of fields of chrysanthemums, and of small exquisitely-garbed people making laughing pilgrimages to watch the beauty of the world. He saw a land, charming, joyous—a land that was only now beginning to be daubed over with the "civilization" of our West. He wondered what was going on behind that impassive golden exterior—behind those faces that looked like old ivory with the sun on it. He thought of saying to Katie McGee by his side how much more beautiful those little men would have looked in their own finely-embroidered mole-colored robes. And then it struck him as silly to say such a thing as that to Miss McGee. To her those small beautifully-turned men were "chinks." Had it been someone else—someone with a clear comprehensive glance . . .

Summer Park was all alight and alive with noise and tramping of people. Everything seemed to have had the same idea as Robert—to get down by the water's edge and get rest from the burning heat. Robert paid the entrance-money, they passed in at the swing gate, the young lady in the pay-box said to a friend at her side, "Gawd, ef tha'at ain't the twenty-fir'st million an' one tha'at's pa'assed in to-night!"—and then, slipping a hand underneath Miss McGee's black-and-white-striped arm, Robert headed for the river, where he guessed the restaurant must be. His first thought was—food.

He was right. He had the instinct for direction that is the right of most men and the wrong of most women. The restaurant was where he had guessed it would be. The two went up the wooden rough steps that led to the railed-off platform where what to Katie McGee in her lady's French without the accents was "the cafe"; and after some searching they found a table round the corner—a little table for two, out of the noise and bustle (also out of the way, as they presently found, of much hope of rapid service) looking straight on the water which flowed calmly past the Park: and placed so that they might drink in every shining ripple of the great St. Lawrence as it shone in the light of the rising moon.

"Say!" said Miss McGee, "my, ef this ain't the limmutt!"—she meant of delight.

If she had felt happy in the car she felt happier now. All

the immediate miseries of the past weeks fell away from her. With her mercurial temperament she not only felt at the moment as if she had been silly to grieve over them, she felt as if they had never existed at all. "Ain't I the fool-woman," she said to herself, "to worry meself sick. What about! What's it's a'all about, I want to know?" And with that, she laid her elbows on the table and clasped her pretty white hands in front of her chin that she leant lightly against them, and watched Robert earnestly consulting the menu—and smiled right down into the depths of her soul, and felt happy. The whole thing enchanted her. The situation of their table, the prospect of the river with the moon on it right before her, the noise and careless gayety all round her, the young ladies with their young gen'lemen friends meeting up on every side of her: the fact that she was there with Robert out to enjoy herself, the surprise of it all, the delight of being suddenly nipped up, as it were, from Penelope's Buildings and swept over to this place of delight . . . Miss McGee was so happy she didn't know what to do. She felt lifted right out of herself. She felt carried up to some great height, and poised there—and able to look down on the whole joy of the evening and yet, in some mysterious way, to take part in it. "I don't care," she said to herself, as Robert still studied the bill of fare, "ef I don't never enjoy anythin' again—I'm happy now. I'm happy now," she repeated to herself, "an' ef I was to die to-morrow—it's been worth ut." With this declaration of independence in the face of everything bad, she looked across at Robert with an increase in her smile: and, quite unknown to herself—she was not thinking of her appearance—she looked charming. Her big eyes were shining; they looked bigger for the black half-circles that the heat draws round the eyes of those who have to bear it. Her ugly mouth was changed into its most charming look by its happy smile. Her hands were very white—as hands often are intensely white in the great heat: and her whole body was swinging with life. She looked alive, as she sat there. Age was far from her. It seemed impossible that she could ever have felt old. She was the youngest thing in sight. . . .

"What will you have?" said Robert, looking up. "There's cold meat of various kinds, and spaghetti, and we can have chops if we wait for them . . . or there's chicken."

He looked over at Miss McGee. His face had that intensely serious expression that comes over the face of a man

when he is consulting a bill of fare. It seemed charming to Miss McGee that he should look like that.

"I'd jes' *love* chickun," she said, after a moment's pause, during which she was calculating in her mind which was the cheapest thing he had mentioned—and then choosing the most expensive on an unconsidered impulse. "I jes' love ut . . ."

"All right," Robert said. "Waiter!"

But it was one thing to say "Waiter" and another to have him. Waiters passed hurriedly to and fro; they went here, there, and everywhere, but the one place they didn't seem to go was the little table where Robert and Miss McGee sat. At last Robert was obliged to go and take a waiter by the sleeve and personally conduct him where he wanted him to be; even then the waiter's memory seemed somewhere else. *He* was there, but the rest of him had stayed behind.

"Yessir," he kept saying. "Yessir. Anything else, Sir." He was English, and perhaps his soul was in England. But wherever it was it wasn't in Summer Park that summer night when Robert and Miss McGee were down there. "Anything more, Sir?" said the waiter going away and bringing back everything they hadn't ordered and nothing they had. . . .

"I *said*—" said Robert: and Miss McGee was amazed to hear the Englishism of his voice and the mastery of it.

"Yessir," said the waiter once more. He had crumbled together at the sound of Robert's voice. He had responded to Robert's accent as the circus horse responds to the flick of the whip.

"Yessir," said the waiter. "I'll bring it, Sir." And when he came back again he said in a persuasive humble tone. "Very busy to-night, Sir. Hard to keep all the orders in your mind. . . ."

They enjoyed their supper as they hadn't enjoyed anything to eat for a long time. The chicken wasn't bad and Miss McGee's salad (Robert didn't like salads) was entirely to her mind. The bread was given to them in little crusty rolls that tasted good. And the green peas, if they were out of a tin, had been put into that tin in France, and therefore had a "goût." They ate and drank plentifully, and they enjoyed every mouthful. Miss McGee was glad, and said she was glad (which was noble in her) that Robert had discarded a transitory offer of hers to "bring *some* baskut, eh, an' eat a lunch down by the river there." "Isn't it pleasanter," Robert said, in that unexpectedly masculine way he had suddenly de-

veloped, "to be eating our food in a civilized way, than be grabbing things out of a basket . . .?"

Miss McGee agreed that it was. She took the ice-cream that Robert ordered for her as a sort of extra gift from the gods, and ate that slowly, enjoying every mouthful. And when the English waiter had been persuaded to take the things away and bring them a little potful of coffee, they sat drinking that slowly, and watching the moonlight rising flush on the water, and making it more and more silvery white each minute.

"It'll be a silver pathway across," said Robert, "before it's done." He laughed. "Shall we go across on it," he said, "and see what's at the other side . . .?"

And a pause fell between them.

It was the one time in that whole evening that the shadow of the Lady fell across Miss McGee.

When they had finished their coffee Robert paid for their meal ("thank you, Sir," from the waiter—it felt like old times to be doing things decently like that), they got down from the platform that formed the "cafe," and slowly, comfortably, as one walks when one is fed, they began to walk about the grounds. "One sure thing, it'll come rain before long," Miss McGee said, looking up into the Heavens. And when Robert said, "How do you know?" she replied, "Feel ut in me bones, I guess. That moon can't faze me any. Mark me wor'rd, 'twill come thunder before the noight is out."

This did not interfere with their enjoyment. They wandered about, watched the water-toboggan with its boat-loads of shrieking girls, coming tumbling down the water-shoot and landing, with a splash and a crash, in the pool below. "See them young ladies!" Miss McGee said, pressing Robert's arm, as the girls came out of the boats, shaking themselves and the drops of water from them, laughing, calling to one another, "Oh my, say, didn't ye feel the way ye might *die*!"—and then, clinging fast to the arms of their beaus, either went back to feel like dying once more, or went further and tried some other kind of extinction—at ten cents the show.

"Want to get on?" enquired Robert.

Miss McGee shook her head.

Then they watched the circular railroad, plunging in and out of the most impossible curves—like a symbolist poem. They watched the railroad passengers getting greener and greener as the railroad became more and more circular . . .

and then they strolled over to the "Atheletic Arena" as the man who stood shouting himself hoarse on the platform before it called it, and watched that. "Come on, Ladies an' Gen'lemen. Come on, right in *here*. This is the Atheletic Arena. These are the Atheletes of the Wor'ld. Don't loose yer opportunity, Gen'lemen an' Ladies. Come on *in*. The Pay-Bawx is on yer *right*. The Atheletes of the Wor'ld is jes' the other side the door. . . ."

He was hoarse but determined. He was faint but pursuing. The strongest gen'leman (who was fat) came out on the little platform in front of the door when the ladies and gen'lemen outside seemed shy of going in. By and by the strongest lady (thin, and smiling with a conciliatory smile) also made her appearance outside. They stood bowing and waving their hands for a bit; and then, to give a simulacrum of the performance beginning, they disappeared inside the door again, and the hoarse man recommenced his remarks. "Don't you miss yer chanst an' be sawry after. Come *in*. The Pay-Bawx is to the *right*. The Show of the Age is about to commence . . ."

When it was time for the music to start—the orchestra, the supreme inducement Summer Park had to offer—it was Miss McGee who led the way to the square of chairs that was set out within a cordon in the center of the grounds. Robert paid down another twenty cents, and they both passed within the cordon, and took their places amongst the elect. Robert chose seats farther back than Miss McGee could have wished, because he wanted to watch the moon on the river—and he could only do that if he sat behind the restaurant platform which would otherwise have obstructed his view. He wasn't expecting anything very much from the music under the conductorship of Facciatore, the "What's-us-name" of his two customers' conversation; but he thought it would make a nice accompaniment to his thoughts if he could watch the silvery streak dancing on the water—and have visions of what he most wanted to see. In fact, immediately they had taken their seats, he did feel his indolent meditations begin to flow and lap in his brain much as the water went flowing past the Summer Park, lapping up against the banks as it went: But Miss McGee burst in upon these meditations and stopped them lapping by twitching his sleeve, "See there, eh, Mr. Fulton," she whispered excitedly, "no, that way—there—to yer roight, eh! Listen! That's Mickey. Mickey Ryan there. Ye ain't forgot."

She twitched Robert's sleeve violently again. "Them Ryans. The gen'leman I told ye I met up with the noight Mac gawn awf. . . ." The circumstance came trickling back to Robert's memory. He wasn't interested now as he hadn't been interested then. What was Mickey Ryan to him—or he to Mickey Ryan? The same feeling of faint dislike to the entire Ryan connection now came gently flowing over his consciousness at Miss McGee's renewed mention of the name, as had flowed over it that bleak March night when she had come home from the depot so full of the Ryan Past. He glanced most indifferently in the direction in which Miss McGee was continuing violently to urge him to look.

"Oh," he said. "Where?"

And, out of the merest convention of politeness, he turned in the direction where Miss McGee's twitching inspired him to look, and he saw Mickey.

Mickey was in his element. He was there, fat as life, with lots of money in his pocket, and a good deal of "Scotch" in his stomach. He was, when Robert glanced that way, hanging over a small bit of painted wreckage that was clinging to his arm. The girl was prettiness on its last legs. She bore, to any eye instructed to see it, the marks of disease on her still pretty face. She had large blue eyes with nothing behind them. She had blackened eyebrows above the eyes and blackened circles below them. She had cheeks whitened as if she were the clown just going before the foot-lights. Her mouth was a vermilion streak cut across the whitened surface of her face. Yet, behind the make-up, Nature had done well. She had been pretty, this poor piece of wreckage that life's storm was just casting up amongst the rocks. . . .

Mickey was bending over his companion, laughing, saying, evidently, something "smart." He was wholly engrossed with the work in hand. He had no eye for any possible acquaintance that might be at hand to observe him. He passed up the aisle to the dollar seats in the front: and as he went past Robert saw that he held his companion's thin arm tightly gripped in his fat fingers. They almost closed round it, now and again lightly pressing the flesh they held. His face was red, his great lips looked unpleasantly moist—there was an expression in his eyes that made one think of an animal . . . when it is most animal and least intelligent.

Robert felt within him the clinching of all the vague distaste he seemed hitherto to have so unreasonably felt for the

Ryan clan. He merely glanced at Mickey and his companion in the most casual way, and then he immediately glanced away again, conspicuously quite in the other direction, as if he wanted to have no more to do with them either in this world or any other world that might be to come. He said nothing. But his silence was more expressive than any words. And that fastidiousness of his—that troublesome accompaniment of his life—rose up in him, swamping everything but a merely animal dislike; he felt that he detested the Mickeys of this world and all their ways: for the second, sexual passion seemed to him a purely horrible thing, a wholly detestable thing, an unclean beastly thing. He leaned back with an expression Miss McGee had never seen before on his face. "Oh, my," she said, loosening her grip on Robert's sleeve, "ain't he the busy ape, eh?" Through her mind passed the question "Tain't *her*, I guess, as he keeps the flat fer!" And then the thought of Biddy Ryan alone at home somehow slipped through her mind: and, almost at the same second she thought, "I shouldn't 'a' pointed um out. He's the clean bo'oy, bless um." It struck her as all right that she should see Mickey in this Don Juan phase, but Robert was something different, something removed—she shouldn't have pointed out such sights to him. She felt as a man might feel in the presence of a young, very sexually ignorant girl. An awkward pause fell between them.

"See them kiddies over there, eh," Katie McGee said after a minute or two's silence, to distract Robert's attention. She felt that this sudden access of fastidiousness on Robert's part had made a cleavage between them, and she wanted to bridge it over. "See them kiddies," she said. "Ain't they cute, eh?" Robert, looking beyond her outstretched finger, saw a see-saw erected behind the restaurant between where they sat and the river: and beside the see-saw were two Nurses in white uniforms; and on to the see-saw these Nurses put little ones left there in their charge by mothers come to the Summer Park for a "gorgeous time" and anxious for the attainment of this gorgeous time to be rid of their offspring for an hour or two. The Nurses had careful capable hands. They regulated the "turns." They held the tiniest of the little people on: and, with shrieks of joy, the tinies felt the secure hands at the back of them as they sailed into the air and came down again with a bump. Bands of kiddies stood waiting their turns. "Time fer *me*, now. *Me* turn again . . ." The little vehement

high-pitched protests came ringing over to where Robert and Miss McGee sat: in the moonlight they could see the babies tossing high in the air—they could hear the happy cries of delight at the rocking motion. The Nurses stood one at each end of the see-saw like immaculate white Policewomen.

"Pretty, ain't ut?" Miss McGee said.

She glanced at Robert.

"Yes," he said, smiling, "it is nice." He paused a second. "It's the nicest thing here by far," he said.

Perhaps he wouldn't have said that if Mickey hadn't gone by just before; and Miss McGee didn't like his saying it—for a great many very complicated reasons which to any woman wouldn't be complicated at all. She was hesitating what reply to make when Facciatore made his appearance: and as soon as she heard him tap the wood of the desk before him with his baton, all idea of making replies to anything faded from her. She straightened up in her seat and became all eyes and ears. Mickey, the kiddies tossing in the moonlight, the sound of the river lapping by, the huge attentive audience, the restless walkers in the grounds round about the corded-in portion where they were sitting: all these things, and Robert himself—yes, Robert himself!—became non-existent for Miss McGee as Facciatore called the attention of the orchestra before him by the strokes on the stand. Miss McGee sat gazing. She had never heard a band before—except the military bands that accompanied Canada's regiments to the war. She remembered the Irish Rovers' band—God bless ut! But this was different from that. She anticipated she hardly knew what. She sat up extraordinarily straight. Something grew tense in her.

Facciatore's correct evening-clothed back was towards them. They faced the big orchestra of white-faced men; faintly outlined in the electric lights that hung above the orchestra were the "queer things" the men played. "What's that, eh?" Miss McGee whispered excitedly to Robert: the Mickey episode was so much green cheese to her now. "What's that great *quare-lookin'* bunch o' sticks there?" She meant the bassoon, but Robert could not tell her what it was. And, anyway, before he had time to answer, Facciatore, standing still and brilliantly outlined in the electric bulb immediately above his head, raised the baton he had tapped with, stood a moment motionless—strained: and then, with the merest turn of his wrist, led his men into a triumphant wave of sound—and Katie McGee into the Eternal City.

It seemed to Katie, listening, as if the Heavens themselves had opened and were allowing her to see the eternal throne with God upon it. She felt, as the orchestra poured forth its waves of sound, as if this were life. She felt that, if this were indeed to come when our bodies are dust, the sooner this life were over the better. She ceased, after a while, to think at all. She merely sat there in the half-light betwixt the electric bulbs and the moon, with the tears quite unconsciously springing forth out of her eyes and coursing down her cheeks. She sat, slightly bent forward, gazing at Facciatore's back—blissful as she had never been blissful before.

When that first piece came to an end the moon was shining on the water much as it had shone when Facciatore began. It seemed marvelous to Miss McGee that the world was as it had been before that music played. "He seemed to do ut with his hands, eh," she said to Robert in a low subdued voice. "Seems as ef he drawed ut out of 'em. Seems as ef he waved them hands an' the music *come*. . . ." And when Facciatore struck the music-stand with his baton once more, Miss McGee fell once more into the trance of delight, and stayed ecstatically in it till the last notes of the second piece had died out on the evening air.

She didn't know what they were playing. She hadn't the slightest idea of the names of the pieces or the names of the composers; and if she had had, they would have meant nothing to her. She simply knew that she was happy. That she was happy as she had never been before. That the waves of sound were pouring out and flooding her, but that she was buoyed up by them at the same time, and floating amongst them—floating where? She felt, while Facciatore played, that she was truly on her way to the eternal kingdom where things are as they should be—not as they are in this imperfect world but as they are in our minds and souls in our happiest sweetest moods. . . .

When the music ceased Miss McGee put her hand on Robert's arm, and they made their way, close together, to the revolving gate by which they had come in. "'Twas grand," Miss McGee said in a low tone, as they stood waiting for the car that was to take them home again. "'Twas grand, eh. I shan't never forgit ut." And then she said, "Them hands, eh. Them hands . . .!"

The ride home was a very silent one. They returned as they had come, close together on one of the little front seats of

the car. There were crowds all round them, pressing them close together, hemming them in; but they hardly felt the crowds. The music had done its work on Robert too. He hadn't listened to it, but the waves of sound had broken on him, as it were, and made their way into his mind by crevices and chinks. They had had an odd effect on him. They had set his thoughts working in a most practical way. He had thought to himself when Facciatore had been leading his men into one of his most triumphal bursts of sound, "I *must* save some money. How am I ever to get out of that place if I don't. I'll work. I *will* work. I'll finish the Canada Book first. Perhaps that might be some good if—if I were to turn it round some-way—bring more life into it." And then he had thought, "When I read it to her, she'll know. . . ." And the practical thoughts had merged into remembrance of a sunny evening room and the Lady in her vivid blue blouse with the copper tray shining at her elbow. What friendliness in those eyes! How they might light up—change—speak . . . if things were to come different—sometime. . . .

He went on allowing these things to pass before his mental eyes while Miss McGee sat close pressed to him in the car. She was thinking nothing. She was lost in the clouds of sound that still hung about her. "Eh, 'twas grand!" she murmured at intervals. "Say, ef that wasn't great! I shan't never forgit ut." They had had three treats together—this was the third: but this treat outdid the others as the sun outshines the stars. The vision of Facciatore's hands—those hands that had drawn melody out of a living instrument of sixty souls—came before the eyes of Katie McGee again and again. Was anything more wonderful than that? Could anything more miraculous await her even in her Father's house? "Them hands," she whispered once more to Robert, after they got out of the car: she kept the hand he had taken to help her out of the car pressed close to his side. "Wasn't them hands, great, eh, Mr. Fulton? Wasn't they *foine*!" A little quiver of joy kept running through her all the way, from the car to Drayton Place; the sense of ecstasy had not entirely left her as she turned in by the disreputable door of Penelope's Buildings. "Oh my," she said, as she parted from Robert at her own door, "that's loife, ain't ut, Mr. Fulton? Ain't ut loife?" She felt that at last she had lived: she felt wide awake as she hardly ever had felt before. Bed seemed waste of time.

## CHAPTER XLIV

I N her weather prophecy Miss McGee was right enough. She hadn't lived in Canada with an observant eye on the winds and rains for close on half a century for nothing. The thunderstorm broke out almost immediately after she and Robert got back to Penelope's Buildings; indeed there were occasional big drops and a deep threatening growl or two from the massed clouds while they were walking from the car to their own street-door: and hardly were they safe under the roofs of their respective flats when the rain broke and the thunder and lightning cast itself loose from yoke—and the world was deluged with storm and fury and sound.

A thunderstorm is a grand thing. But it is a thing that is pleasanter to share than to enjoy alone. Miss McGee, sitting at her window watching the downpouring sheets of rain—through which even the inky sky was completely blotted from sight—was conscious that she would have felt more secure with Robert at her side. However she was no coward, whatever else she was; and, in a sort of way, the storm seemed to suit her mood. The peals of thunder, the flash after flash of brilliant malignant light, seemed to come near something within her and soothe it. She had a dim sort of feeling somewhere that if there could be a great storm—a really *great* one, and the world might be destroyed by it as it was by the old storm of the sacred history—it would be a good thing. "We could build ourselves up somethin' better, p'raps," she said to herself. And when the storm was over and she crept to bed, it was a soothed, unecstatic Miss McGee that crept there. She lay for a long while thinking over the evening, seeing the Park in her mind's eye, catching sight of a confused phantasmagoria of pictures—the Conductor with his white hands that drew the music out of his human instrument, the big fat man at the "Atheletic" Arena, the "atheletic" lady, poor thing, in her insufficient tights and conciliatory smile, the mass of children, throwing themselves pell-mell on the see-saw and laughing and shrieking with delight, the calm *legal* appearance of the Nurses—and the excited *illegal* look of Mickey as he bent over the poor little painted thing on his arm with that hot look in his eye. "It was a grand evenin', bless um," was Miss McGee's last waking thought. She relaxed herself completely with that thought, and lay before these pictures of her remembrance as a cat lies

before the fire—and slept. She slept like a child, and she woke up to cheerfulness and a cool world. There was no need for the moment of even a *gaieté de malheur*: she still felt, as she had felt at the Summer Park, happy. She felt soothed, as if her nerves had stopped sticking up on end and were all lying the right way again, as they had not lain for a long time. The thunderstorm proved to be a definite break in the weather. It inaugurated a rainy season such as Regalia, so the newspapers said, had not known for half a century, which always seems the journalistic limit of time before remarkable events repeat themselves, and it rained, as if the deluge Miss McGee had been wishing for on the night of the thunderstorm was indeed at hand. The whole of September was a dripping month. Day after day dawned in the same dull manner, with the rain either coming down in scant sparing drops—something indefinably moist like a Scotch mist—or shooting past the window in a slanting stream. Umbrellas that had hardly been in use for years were looked out, and people went about in their wet clothes (mackintoshes were scarce amongst the Regalians) and cursed their luck. In Britain, or in Western Canada rain is a normal experience and people prepare for it. But in Eastern Canada a rainy day is a rare thing, to be commented on; umbrellas and mackintoshes are the exception and not the rule: and when rain overtakes a community not prepared for it—it strikes hard and strong. Colds became prevalent. Regalia went about sneezing and coughing; polite old country persons said “Bless you!” to other persons. And the afflicted one said “Well, say, ef I ain’t got the *worst* cold . . . !”

Robert was amongst the sufferers. He had been addicted to catching colds in the old days in England, and now he began to resurrect this talent. He caught a frightful cold and went about sneezing first, and then, later, coughing a deep hollow resounding formidable sort of cough that found its echo in Miss McGee’s heart. “It’s nothing,” he said—he was not a fuss-maker. “Don’t you know that the coughs that sound the worst are the best ones?” And then he laughed and said, “It’s a workhouse cough.” But that was no enlightenment for Miss McGee. She didn’t know what a workhouse was. There are no workhouses in Canada.

Whether it was due to the collapse of the weather or not, Miss McGee, as September went on, collapsed once more into the deepest depression. She felt so miserable indeed that it was hard work not to show it to Robert—not to talk about it con-

tinually. Constantly there came to her lips complaints about life, bitter wretched things that she wanted to say. For the most part she pushed them back and didn't say them. Once or twice she spoke crossly, snappishly, almost rudely to Robert, and then was overwhelmed with remorse. He never answered these outbursts of Miss McGee's. If he was inobservant of the common outward things of life, he was perceptive enough—though sometimes quite unconsciously perceptive—of the inner things. He was like an extremely sensitive instrument that registers impressions without knowing why it does so—instinctively he knew when the world went out of tune about him. And when things went out of tune he felt sorry for them.

One night in September after a long day's work—daily occupation had begun to come in again regularly with September—Miss McGee had returned home what she herself called "done." It was the first day of her annual fall week with Mrs. Barclay. They had spent the day in interminable discussions as to what was to be done with last year's clothes so as to make them look like this year's, and Miss McGee had come in so worn out with the struggle that, wonderful to relate, she had sent even Robert away so that she might get to bed immediately after the evening meal. She had one of her rare bad headaches; one of those headaches that, coming on in quite an ordinary manner over the brow, creep backward over the skull until the whole head is wrapped in a cowl of pain. Miss McGee had had these headaches at intervals all her life long—she was what doctors call of a rheumatic or gouty diathesis. Of late years the headaches had come further and further apart, and when they had come the pain had not been so great, and she flattered herself that she was "growin' out of 'em." But this was what she called "a real old teaser." It was an exquisite headache. A fearfully, wickedly painful one. She had borne up with it as well as she could during the day, and when she had come home she had thrown something together for the supper as well as she could; and then, after the supper that she hadn't been able to taste, she had been obliged to ask Robert to go—and, feeling more dead than alive, she had crawled to bed. It wasn't her mind that was bothering her this time. Pain like that blots out all possibility of thought. It was simply that, for the time being, her body had got "one too many for her," and there was nothing to do but to give it its way and let it rest. With the supper dishes still on the table she had gone into her bed-room,

cast off her clothes anyhow—anywhere—and, with a feeling of sick relief crept into bed. Once between the sheets, with her aching, bursting, pain-drawn head on the pillow, she had experienced the first morsel of comfort that had come her way that day: and, oddly enough—or perhaps not so oddly, it does happen sometimes with that species of pain—she had almost instantly dropped off to sleep. Her last waking thought was, “With God’s help I’ll wake without ut.”

She was no sooner asleep—or it seemed so to her—than she dreamed. She dreamed that she was missing. That people in Penelope’s Buildings, not having seen her come out of her flat for some days, were in a hullabaloo about her. She dreamed that Mrs. Savourin had suggested that her door should be broken in, and that Robert had said, “No. Let me first climb up on a ladder and look through the window. Perhaps she’s there. We haven’t any *right* to break her door in.” She dreamed that Robert had climbed up, on a high ladder set against the wall (and that, absurdly, she had watched him climbing with her heart in her mouth—Sure the bo’oy’ll fall!) and that he had stood on the ladder and looked through the window of the room they had so often sat in together: and that (she was there in some mysterious way looking *down* on it all) she saw Robert looking at her own body lying face downward near the door—lying there as if she had made for the door in a blind effort to get out, and had failed to reach it. She saw—through Robert’s eyes always—her body, stretched out, with its arms in front of it, palms down to the ground (as if her hands had tried to reach the lock) and her body had a helpless crumpled-up look as if something had gone out of it; as if it were uninformed with life. She felt that the thing that had informed it with life was here—up above where *she* was, watching Robert’s face as he stood at the window on the ladder, looking in. . . .

She waked up with the pain in her head lessened, but with a cold stream of perspiration trickling down her body. “God in Heaven,” she said to herself, “what’s the matter with me dreamin’ that, eh? It’ll not be the end—yet. Mercy!” She sat up in bed and composed herself with her hands, stroking her hair into position, and putting her night-clothes straight. “*Mercy!*” she said several times. “What made me think of that.” And she crossed herself again and again, praying to God that He would take away evil visions from her and protect her through the night. The picture of her mother, so gentle and

calm and composed, as she had been when Katie was a little girl and she had come to the bedside to see that all was safe and well came over her. "Ma'a," she said. "Ma'a, dear, you come, eh, to see that little Katie's safe." She felt that God had sent the vision of her mother to stay and comfort her. And then, waking up a little more, it came over her that she was only half-awake. She lay down again and composed herself to sleep; and once more as soon as she was asleep—or it seemed this way to her—she dreamed: but this time she dreamed differently.

She dreamed that it was the old time in Regalia when there were no electric cars and the antiquated horse-cars that she remembered so well—had she not taken them time after time in the days of her mother's illness?—were running. She dreamed that she—Katie McGee—was running after the old omnibus as she had so often had to do, and that the 'bus was full and that there was no room for her in it, and that she *had* to get into it; in her dream it was urgent that she should reach it, somehow or other clamber inside and get a ride home. She ran in the slushy mud—it was, in her dream, the time of the thaw—and vainly she tried to cry to the passengers who were hanging outside like a swarm of bees, that she wanted help. *Help.* She would have implored a helping hand but, as so often it happens in dreams, power of speech was taken away from her. At last she managed to catch hold of the rail that bordered the entrance steps to the 'bus. She hoisted herself up by the strength of her arm on to the bottom step of the 'bus—and there she clung. It was a perilous situation. She could not always keep hold of the rail. It slipped out of her ice-cold fingers, the step was slippery with mud, the swarm of passengers descended on her and pushed her off. Sometimes she was running once more in the wet slush, sometimes she was able once more to catch hold of the rail and hoist herself up on the step; always, all through the dream, there was a sense of misfortune impending, a sense that if she were to lose the 'bus altogether she would be lost. She tried to call to the passengers—she implored them mutely with her eyes. They stood on the steps—there was such a crowd of them that she could never catch so much as a glimpse of the inside of the 'bus . . . and then, just as she was waking up with the 'bus disappearing into a sort of dim mist of nothingness, it seemed to her dimly that a hand was stretched out from somewhere; the hand lifted her securely on to the wet slippery

step—it took hold of her—upheld her—guided her past the passengers and into the inside of the 'bus—

She waked up. Gray morning light was struggling in at the window. The pain in her head was gone. There was only the stiffness left and the bruised feeling that follows such an attack of pain. "Glory be to God!" was her first thought: and then, as she turned instinctively to the dollar clock that stood on her bureau, "Oh *my!*" she said—and she leapt from her bed. She had overslept herself, dreaming like that! She was late.

It was only when she was drinking her hurried cup of tea that her dreams came back to her. They were extraordinarily clear in her mind. They seemed realler than real—etched in her memory by some occult process. She laughed a little at the second dream—pushing the memory of the first as far away from her as she could. "Oh my, Glory be to God," she said to herself, "'tis the way loife treats me, eh!" And with the thought of her clutching to the rail, slipping off the slippery step, at the vision of herself wading in her dream through the slush of the world as she ran after the too-rapidly-moving 'bus, she laughed again: not a too-mirthful laugh, but a laugh. "'Tis meself sure a'alroight," she said to herself. "'Tis me after the 'bus o' loife an' never catchin' ut." And then, after a second, she added, "Sure, ain't ut the limmutt, eh!" And as she went hurrying along the Wellston Road—for she was due at the Barclay's—she realized that this dream-'bus was only another manifestation of her hard round world which she could not enter for want of entrance-money. She stood on the entrance step at 23 Wellston Road panting a little after she had rung the electric bell, and just fifteen minutes later than she should legitimately have done so ("Sure, 'tis not Mrs. Barclay'll moind!"—this was a moment when the Barclay star shone) and, unexpectedly, the end of the dream came back. The running along in the slush had been so vivid in her mind that the being lifted out of the slush—hurried and dimmer than the rest as this had been—had slipped clean out of her memory. Now as she stood on the well-whitened door-step waiting for Jennet to open the door, the hand that had taken her, steadied her, helped her where she had wanted to go seemed once more to take hold of her. The conclusion of her dream was so clear in her mind now that it seemed to her to blot all the rest of the dream out. Here, in the sunlight, about to begin her prosaic day's work, far from the region of dreams, yes, even

here on the door-step at No. 23 Wellston Road, she still seemed to feel the comforting pressure of that large protecting hand. It seemed to touch her as hand never had touched her before. It almost seemed to her to . . . Jennet stood with the door open in her hand.

"Good mor'nin', Miss McGee," Jennet said in her down-right Scotch voice, dispersing with its very accent any kind of illusionary vision, "it's a fine day for once."

"It is that, Jennet, a'alroight," Miss McGee said, stepping in to Jennet's clean hall, and scraping her boots on Jennet's well-shaken mat. "'Tis the foine day, thanks be to God. An' 'tis not too many of 'em He's been givin' us of late."

And she went on scraping and brushing and getting the mud off the soles and sides of her boots while Jennet, standing by, considered whether she altogether approved of her Presbyterian God being dragged so familiarly into the conversation. She liked Miss McGee in spite of many differences. She decided to say nothing.

"Will ye be steppin' up-stairs when ye're ready," she said. "I've a fine hot muffin I'll be bringin' for yer breakfast. . . ." And, with that agreeable indication of what was to come, Jennet disappeared down the stairs to the old-fashioned kitchen—the house in Wellston Road had been built by the Barclays thirty years before—to reconnoiter the muffins and tea.

Oddly enough, Miss McGee did not speak of her dreams to Robert—she could not have told you why. She was accustomed to tell Robert everything—even such trivial things as dreams: in their dull lives, even dreams were things to talk about—but this time she said nothing about either of her dreams to her friend. She did tell them to Father O'Rourke in the confessional: and she got rid of them that way. She felt, if she didn't tell them, that she might be haunted by them. They were so very real. She thought she had better get rid of them by confessing them. So she did confess them, with other things . . . and they faded into their place. After a week or so she hardly thought of them again.

## CHAPTER XLV

ON the last day of September poor old Mrs. Morphy died. She was not old in years, she was a woman of but fifty-three, but somehow, during her illness, people had got to think of her as old. She seemed old. She had, during the last

unbearable weeks, taken on all the ways of an old woman; she had got to look like an old woman—someone who had been born far far back in the world's history; someone who had had time to gather to herself a load of humanity's suffering, and who was wearing away under the weight of the suffering and the years. She was dead: and everyone was at heart relieved. They wore long faces, but to themselves they said "Thank God!" And even out loud they said (only they didn't say it out loud but in low voices to one another), "Say, ain't it the mercy she's been took! You couldn't want her to go on suff'rin', eh." So they excused themselves for being thankful to be rid of her and her unbearable pain.

Nonnie cried her eyes out. She was perhaps the one creature (and she had had the worst end to carry) who deeply regretted Mrs. Morphy. Moll McKennay sent round a bunch of lilies at a dollar apiece with a card tied to them "Marguerite's and Patrick's last love." She "said it with flowers." The lilies were laid with the poor old woman, and Nonnie hovered round the "casket" in her down-at-heel black clothes and thought them lovely and thought her mother lovely and shed tear after tear of fatigue and wretchedness.

Mrs. Morphy did look—not lovely perhaps, but majestic and handsome. When Miss McGee arrived at the poor outlying shack to take her turn at the watching—she had claimed that privilege as soon as the news of her old friend's death had reached her—she stood beside the coffin, looking down into it, and she said to herself, "*He* couldn't help seein' she'd been a pretty woman in her day now." She meant Robert. So was he intertwined with her every thought.

The undertakers' men had done their direst by Mrs. Morphy—Pat McKennay was paying for the funeral, and he had directed that it should be "in stoyle," like Miss McGee's customers' gowns. The professionals had taken the sparse locks that in Mrs. Morphy's life-time had been in all the places they shouldn't be and they had waved them with hot tongs. The hair that had once been golden like Nonnie's and now was a faded white, was banded in regular waves on Mrs. Morphy's forehead. The face had been "treated" in some way so that it had almost a bloom of youth. The teeth which had never been in poor Mrs. Morphy's mouth during her illness had been shoved once more into place. Her knotted hands had been whitened and laid crosswise on her bosom. The unwieldy porpoise-like corpulence of her, that had taken away all idea of

beauty to the unseeing bystander for so many years, didn't show now that she was "at rest," as Miss McGee called it. She lay in her coffin straight and calm, and into her face—in spite of all the decorative efforts of those who had "handled stiff"—had come the inevitable look of death's majesty. Her quiet unresponsive face seemed to say "I am gone. I have escaped. I have left my shell behind and I stamped on it, before I left it, my own ineffable majesty. I have left engraved my farewell. But, though I am still here, speaking to you—I am gone. Farewell! You can do me no more harm now." Marguérite's lilies gave forth a thick sensuous odor. The room was full of it. And it was full too of that great calmness and dignity that made the people who came and stood beside Mrs. Morphy in her last bed, lower their voices. "Say, ain't she the thing, eh," they whispered to one another. "Swa'all!" And the facile tears rolled down their faces and then they turned to poor washed-out Nonnie—big with her near-approaching motherhood—and asked her in the same whisper what her mother said before she died and who she said it to, and who the Firm had been who laid her out, and what flower-man Moll's lilies come from an' my, ain't they swa'all!

To Miss McGee's superstition her dream of Robert looking through the window at her own dead body meant the foretelling of the death of this old friend. "Sure," she said, "that's what 'tis. I had to dream of death an' I got ut all tangled up. 'Twas Mrs. Morphy me moind was after." And as she stood beside the coffin she offered up prayer after prayer for the old woman. She had not felt so deeply and so ecclesiastically moved for a long while. With the departure of the old friend, old times surged up into her mind, her mother's teaching, the old devotion to the strict rites of the church. She prayed, and she laid the little bunch of violets she had brought (hot-house forced violets, almost scentless and quite out of season, but royally purple and exquisite to look at) close up to the neck of the old woman. She tucked them in where they would hardly be seen. "No, Nonnie," she said, "let 'em be. They're a trust-word betwixt yer mother an' me. They're not fer the other folks to git ta'alkin' about."

It was in the evening that all this happened. Miss McGee had come on straight after the hasty little evening meal she had prepared for Robert, and after a long day at Mrs. Barclay's. Mrs. Barclay had tried to be nice; she knew Mrs. Morphy well

by name: in her long association with Katie McGee she knew all Katie's cronies, and had even seen and spoken with some of them. She had sympathized from the bottom of a truly kind heart at the taking away of one of Katie's old props, as it were, of friendship. Mrs. Barclay had reached the age when she knew what it felt like to have these old props removed, one by one, and to feel life becoming one-sided, tottering, unsafe, without the old trusted helps and stays. She had *meant* to be thoroughly kind, but unfortunately, the talk had turned on the War: talk could hardly fail to turn on the War during the autumn months of 1918 when the vitality of the world was so nearly exhausted and the end of the War was so near at hand. Mrs. Barclay was patriotic in that infuriating way that can not only see no wrong in what one's country does but also is necessarily obliged to see no right in what any other country may possibly do. To Mrs. Barclay, England (preferably under Queen Victoria, reluctantly, under George V) was the one country of the world. What England—the old oligarchic England that seems with the passing of the War to be passing too—did was right. England could do no wrong. Anyone or anything that ventured to differ from what Mrs. Barclay called England (she meant the bit of England that has no sympathy with any new aims but always wants to go on exactly as it used to do) was a heretic and a fanatic and a madman and a bolshevist. Mrs. Barclay had no words—or rather, perhaps, it would have been better had she not had them—to express what she thought of labor troubles, Ireland, Russia, everything that was not Allied, agitation in general including all women's demands about anything; she wanted the world to be arranged in an all-over state of everyone being entirely contented in that station to which it had pleased somebody else to call them . . . and the Union Jack sailing triumphantly over the whole. Miss McGee had passed the day feeling as if she were listening uninterruptedly to the strains of "God Save the King," and, fine anthem as that is, she had felt inclined at moments to raise a counter-strain of "The Wearin' o' the Green." To stand all day with your hat off (metaphorically speaking) and to have your Irish eye obsessed at dinner by the Union Jack unspreading itself in a golden vayse (as it did on Mrs. Barclay's dinner-table on this occasion) is rather too much—even if the original thing is good. Miss McGee had come away from the Barclay establishment not at all as she had stood on its step a morning or so before. The Barclay star had set as rapidly as it had

ascended. "The divil take her, the fool old woman that she is." Miss McGee had said to herself, not furiously this time but with a kind of cold contained rage, as she was descending Jennet's well-kept door-step, "she's ta'alks the way there ain't no Ireland at a'all." Miss McGee tightened her mind, her brain, her determination, her will-power, everything she possessed, inside and out, as she was coming down the Wellston Road on the way to the car. "But there is," she remarked to the circumambient air. "There *is*, you bet. An' England'll foind ut out. There's a *Church*, too," Miss McGee had further remarked to the air a little bit further on—she did not mean the Methodist Establishment to which Mrs. Barclay so punctually paid her respects each Sunday, "There's a Church, mark me wor'rd, an' I guess Mrs. Barclay's goin' to foind *that* out for a'all she don't know ut." Miss McGee had felt furiously ecclesiastical. There was nothing in the world that could make her so ecclesiastical as Mrs. Barclay. Whenever Katie had been to Wellston Road she always wanted to run to confession immediately afterwards and confess all Mrs. Barclay's sins—just to prove that she—Kitty McGee!—was a Member of the One True Church . . . never mind whether she had been willing to accept Mitt or not!

After all this turmoil it was a relief to come and sit by poor Mrs. Morphy's coffin, Mrs. Morphy, who, for all her failings, had been a true daughter of the church. "Can't git to Mass today, McGee, dear," she had said when her leg got bad—and before it too, if the truth be told, "but ye'll say a prayer fer me, eh?" Mrs. Morphy had always added. She had *meant* to get to church even though she had very rarely got there.

Miss McGee thought of all Mrs. Morphy had been. How generous she had been with what money she had had! One of Robert's remarks in an early section of his Canada Book, 'The Canadians will let you have food or give you money, but these forms of benevolence do not call for much imagination, nor does one need to pause in one's race with hustle in order to bestow them,' had always been a puzzle to Miss McGee. *Why* wasn't it a fine thing to be ready with your money? *Why* wasn't it good to share your food an' drink? She had never had the courage to ask Robert to explain, and now as she thought of Mrs. Morphy's generosity, interthreaded with her thought was a remembrance of this saying of Robert's. Well, anyway, Mrs. Morphy had been *good*. That was one sure thing. She had welcomed you at all times to her house and home, she

had been truly hospitable, never grudging the bite of food or the swallow of drink (especially the latter), happy to share to the last bone with you, never mind if the drink was out of the bottle or the bone served wholesale out of the pot. She had been a kind woman, true to the Church, a fond mother—with the big heart that was willing to take into it Mac or Bert Baird or any strange boy or girl that came her way and was just passably good to her. “Sure, he’s the foine bo’oy when he’s not in drink!” she had said of unsavory Dan. “Mac’ll miss his Old Lady,” Miss McGee said to herself: and a vision of the Old Lady going out with the “bo’oys” for that last treat, the picture of Mrs. Morphy in her out-door things with the black-beaded bonnet she always wore—“Sure, who am I to be dressin’ meself up, fer the love of God!”—and the old comfortable boots that Mrs. Morphy hadn’t scrupled to wear on all occasions came before her eyes. And then Miss McGee had a picture of the two bo’oys, not in the least ashamed of the old sweetheart they had in tow; taking her to the Movie Show and to supper afterwards . . . and Miss McGee remembered how *done* she had been after it. “Sure, there’s good in Mac,” Miss McGee said to herself. And there was a painful twist somewhere about her heart to think that Robert didn’t *like* these people, couldn’t see any good in them: that their kindness was non-existent for him just because their way of speech was not his, and their manner of eating was alien. “There’s good in Mac, be-lieve *me*,” Miss McGee said over and over again to herself, sitting beside the old woman’s body. “He’s a good fella and that gir’rl’s doin’ well fer herself whoever she may be that’s gittin’ um.” And then her thoughts wove themselves about Rose. “She’s the fool-gir-rl, eh!”—and her heart went atwist again as she thought of Rose’s face with its marks of suffering, all resolutely held together, her tight lips and the blue circles under her eyes. “It’s a mess of a wor’rld,” Miss McGee said, “it’s a mess of a wor’rld. There’s no good to be had of ut—it’s just a *mess*. . . .”

And she put her hand against the side of the coffin and held it there. She felt nearer that way to her old friend.

She wasn’t alone in her watching. Mrs. Morphy, the Old Lady, had had many friends, and they had come to do honor to her kind heart by watching beside it now that it was stilled forever. Mrs. Garry herself had been there, it appeared, in the afternoon—whatever else ye moight have to say against her Mary was a great one for rememberin’ old toimes—and she was coming back to spend the next night by the corpse of her old

friend. Meanwhile she had sent two of the girls "to be useful if they could." Nellie and Kathryn—Auntie's "name-gir'rl"—were there, and, in the midst of her downcastness and sadness, Miss McGee felt interested to see these two nieces of hers. Nellie—although she never came for Auntie on her way to church—still remained Auntie's favorite amongst Mary's children; and Kathryn, another of the nieces who never came for Auntie, she also liked to see, because curiosity sometimes seized her as to the way her namesake was turnin' out. Nellie was a dark, clever-looking girl. She was perfectly ready to talk to the Auntie she looked so like. Yes, she was getting on fine with her teaching. Sure. The Nuns were pleased. She was to get a larger class next year and a rise. Perhaps she'd end by going to the States and seeing what she could make of it there. "Yer Pa'a won't loike that, Nellie," Miss McGee said. She had every sympathy with Nellie. She would have felt just like that herself in her own youth—had she had Nellie's chances. "I guess Dad'll get over ut," Nellie had said to that with a perfectly good-humored laugh—she alluded to Tim Garry as "Dad" not "Pa'a" any more—"I have me career to think of, Auntie, eh." Nellie seemed to have not the slightest thought of marriage as a career. There was no look of a "bo'oy" in her eyes. She had that entirely straight unsexual glance that has become so common now in the eyes of girls. Her mind was taken up with getting on, with making money and carving out "a career" for herself. She simply had no time to think of matrimony, or love, or "tearin' around with the fellas." Auntie Katie was destined to meet "Woman" for the first time—really, for the Lady did not quite embody the part—in the person of her own little niece, Nellie Garry. How *queer!*

Katie—Kathryn—Aunt Katie's name-gir-rl—was, alas, just a nonentity. She didn't interest Miss McGee at all. "Sure," she said to herself, "ain't ut me luck a'alroight she should 'a' been named fer me. A little lame-headed duck that can't spell quack!" She turned away from Katie Garry's smiling face. It irritated her. "Why couldn't ut have been Nellie they named fer me," she said to herself. It seemed to her that Nellie was the one who would realize the ambitious side of herself. The thought passed through her mind, "Why shouldn't I cut Polly an' Belle out of me will and give ut all to Nellie, eh!"—and she felt a thrill of pride that she had something to give that would help in the carving out of this career that should have been her own.

And Willie Bardwell was there, the blind brother of Tully. His presence, so intimately connected with the long-dead past, seemed to clutch at something in her heart. "Sure an' it's never Kitty McGee," Willie Bardwell said. "Why, Kitty, me dear, 'tis years an' years since I've saw ye." He spoke of seeing as if he hadn't gone blind. Miss McGee had often seen him at church, being led in by his eldest girl, who had devoted herself to Pa'a: but she had never spoken to him since the years long ago when she and Tully had been lovers together. She could feel, as she fixed her own blue-black eyes on Willie's sightless ones, the pressure of Tully's lips on her own. He was the one man she had kissed like that—back again—passionately. It seemed to have left something in her—as if a seed had been planted that had never had strength to grow up but had remained, just alive, somewhere in the depths of her.

"Willie," she said. She felt herself once more the old Kitty McGee. Not the staid elderly Aunt to the two big girls beside her—not the old woman Auntie must appear in their eyes—but the young light-footed thing that Tully had wanted—wanted with all the force of his passionate body. Miss McGee felt at the moment all the fires of youth rush through her own body—all the old insistent longing, the desire for contact, to *touch* Tully. She went forward to Willie: and she was conscious, just for the second, of a feeling of thankfulness, a feeling of gratitude, profound and terrible, that he was blind, that he could not see the wreck of the old Kitty McGee that his brother had desired.

Willie Bardwell passed his hands lightly over her features and down gently over her shoulders to her waist. There was some inexplicable mysterious family touch that he had in common with his brother's far more ardent fingers: Miss McGee felt as if Tully's hands were on her once more. She felt once again that furious rebellion that had risen up in her at her mother's prohibition against her marriage. She shut her eyes to heighten the illusion. It was Tully touching her. At that moment Robert was blotted out as if he had never existed. Katie McGee was back in the past.

"It's the same old Kitty McGee," Willie said, with his soft smile. Blindness had produced in him the taming effect it usually produces. He was kindly and gentle and soft and quite cheerful. He sat down by Katie, and began to tell her about his work—he was a tuner of pianos and went about

Regalia as if it were the quiet Regalia of the old days—standing now and again at a crossing till some kindly passer-by would give him an arm to the other side. And then he began to ask Katie about her own work. And their talk drifted back to the old times, to Mrs. McGee and Old Nancy of the jig, to Mrs. Weltman that had been Dolly McSwayne in the days when Willie knew her; to poor Mrs. Morphy as she had been then, “a fine clear-footed gir’rl she was,” Willie said; and lastly to Tully.

Tully was in the States. He wrote rarely. He had no children—the widow he had married was far older than himself. He was a widower now. The woman had died—not long ago . . .

Miss McGee’s heart gave a bound. It was not that she *expected* anything of Tully. “That,” as she called it, was dead, as dead as Mrs. Morphy in her coffin; and deader. She expected nothing of Tully. She didn’t even want to see him again. But as these things lie waiting in a woman’s heart all a life long, so they spring up at attention when news comes. Tully was a widower, free again. “He’ll be marryin’ someone that’s nearer his own,” Miss McGee said out loud. She could say it quite quietly. “Sure, Kitty, ’tis you should ’a’ been marryin’ um yerself long ago,” Willie said affectionately.

The old love turned again in Miss McGee’s heart. Love, after all, is the life of a woman. How often had Tully thought of her all these long, for the most part barren, years? He had had his work. And his drink. He had his wife’s money now. There isn’t room for more than that in a man’s heart. But women always keep room for love. How was Nellie going to manage about that with her downright conceptions of life? Her decisive energy with which she was going to attack life—like a man—carve out a career for herself “whether Dad liked ut or not”—how would it serve her in the place of love? A pang for Nellie shot across Miss McGee. How would *she*—this favorite niece—fare in this mess of a life . . . ?

When Miss McGee left the Finns’ house in the morning, she felt somehow soothed. She felt not only as if she had passed the night with all that was left of Mrs. Morphy, but as if, by her talk with Willie, she had resurrected into flickering momentary life, all the ghosts of the past. She felt as if her mother had been there, spending the night with her beside the coffin; as if Danny Finn’s mother, Old Nancy of the light foot, had

tripped across the room. Miss McGee felt as if Willie Bardwell's good wife and his steady well-doing family were non-existent; as if he were once more the young, good, rather stupid, steady boy he had been years ago—"the pussy-cat"—the "Sissy"—of a man that she had half-liked and half-despised in the days long ago. She felt as if Tim O'Donough, the letter-carrier, had resurrected and had come to sit beside the coffin for a space; as if Tim O'Donough's landlady, old Mrs. Molloy, with her capable face and her spacious body, had been there too; as if Mary Garry with her old sweet madonna girl-face had been sitting close by her—and as if Tully had been there loading down the air with his passionate protestations.

As Miss McGee took the road for home, just to have a hurried wash and another cup of tea (Nonnie had been insistent with her hospitable offers and had supplied several already) before she set off for another day at Wellston Road, she felt that, even if Mrs. Barclay were as patriotic—as mad-English, was how Miss McGee put it—as she had been yesterday, she wouldn't mind it. She felt as if she were protected by numberless kind ghosts of the past, against everything evil. (Mrs. Barclay's patriotism was evil to Miss McGee.) "Sure thing," she said to herself, "they're waitin' fer me somewhere." She was thinking of those dead to her in the flesh—not of Tully, dead in the spirit, yet warm and living somewhere in the States. "They're there, I guess," she said, "waitin' fer Kitty." And she felt a sense of protection awaiting her in the other world; she felt a certainty that all those who had gone before were waiting for her there. "'Tis the grand thing a'alroight," she said to herself, "to be sure they'll be welcomin' me home. Home," she kept saying to herself. "Home. Home." And as she passed into Penelope's Buildings the mess that this world is seemed less bitter than it had seemed to her before she spent the night beside her old friend. The soft calm sight of the coffin with the dead Mrs. Morphy majestically asleep inside it rose before her. She saw the calm lips, the quiet eyelids, the look of aloofness—and repose that had come over the face.

"Sure, she's waitin' too now," Miss McGee said. And it seemed to her that it would not be hard when the time came to give up her hold on this world, to slacken gently, feel herself being lowered bit by bit—or carried up, perhaps, to be floating at last in some unknown empyrean. . . .

But once she had passed the doorway of the Buildings she came back with a start to the present. Penelope's Buildings, Mrs. Savourin, the bad man in Mrs. Morphy's old flat across the court, the bunch of tarts just across the passage-way from her, Robert—all these things tightened round her once more and asserted their presence in the very beats of her pulse. "I'm not through with ut yet," she said to herself with a sigh. "I'm in the thick of ut, God help me." The friendly ghosts seemed to part from her, gently let go their hold on her, float away silently and imperceptibly into those unseen places where we can no longer commune with them. Miss McGee, as she climbed the dirty gray stairs of the Buildings, felt once more alone. She felt very much alone. Her soul turned to Robert—and clung to him.

"I'll have to hurry, I guess," she said to herself, once more, glancing at her dollar clock. "I'll be all behoid toime at Mrs. Barclay's this toime too, eh? *My*, I'll have to hurry-rush a'alroight. I guess I'd best take the car-r. . . ."

And she bustled about, stiff a little after her sleepless night, and set things in train for the coming unavoidable day.

## CHAPTER XLVI

**T**HERE was little time for anyone to mourn Mrs. Morphy; for in October the Spanish Influenza took hold of Regalia, so that no one could think of anything else. The influenza took hold—with a strangling sort of hold that squeezed the life out of the city. Regalia was not worse than other cities, of course: it was not so bad as some. But it was bad enough. The colds—the coughing and sneezing of September—turned by microscopic degrees into the influenza of October and then the plague went round invisibly, like a thief in the night, and laid its microbe on its victim; and if it laid it on *hard*—that victim died. It was little Bellerose, the letterman, who brought the phantom of the new disease home as an effective truth to Penelope's Buildings. One day he was there delivering letters as usual: and two days later he was dead, leaving behind him a widow and five children and a sixth child to come. A new letterman began to climb the stairs of the Buildings; and I don't know that anything could have so driven the fact of dire change into the Penelopians. Bellerose had been there amongst them for sixteen years. Day after

day his friendly face had come up their stairs and gone down again: and his friendly French-Canadian voice, with its fullness of English-Canadian slang, had greeted them. "Say, ain't this the day fer you?" he would say, handing out a letter to some Penelopian who was not in the habit of getting letters. "I feel *glad*. Ain't you the bienheureux, le smart-y, eh!" And he would go further on his rounds, turning his head over his shoulder and smiling in his friendly way. When he spoke French, he was transformed. Something old and refined and courteous seemed to come into his voice and bearing. He had two selves—one self for each language that he spoke; to the Penelopians it had mostly been the slangy English Bellerose that had spoken: but in either language he was a friendly soul, doing his duty in a not-too-exquisite world, and getting small thanks for it from anyone. And now he was dead.

"Say will you tell *me*," said one Penelopian to another. "You heard, eh, that young Bellerose there is dead. Well, say, ef that ain't the limmutt, eh. This flu is goin' to be some devul, I guess. An' Bellerose's girl there with five kids an' another kiddie comin'. Ain't ut too *bad* . . .?" The Penelopians felt in their letter-man the proprietary interest we all feel in our letter-men, and they mourned Bellerose—for a few hours—with strength and sincerity. There was even a dim suggestion and a good deal of talk of a "collection" being taken up, five cents apiece all around—"See here! what ut'd do fer Bellerose's gir'rl there!"—but like many another philanthropic scheme it ended with the gush of sentiment that induced it. Nothing was done for Bellerose or for Bellerose's widow, or for the five kids, or for the sixth kiddie that was coming. They just did as they could—and very badly it was—without any help: and in a couple of days the new letter-man was accepted by all. "You comin' on, eh, 'stead of that Bellerose there?" "Yes, Madam." "I guess you miss um a'alroight down at the station there, eh?" "Yes, Madam. He was a funny fella. He kep' us all goin', I tell you, with his la'afin' an' fun." Such was Bellerose's epitaph. And he was forgotten.

After his death—instantly after it—the influenza seemed to dash over Penelope's Buildings like an ever-advancing wave of misfortune. The bad man in Mrs. Morphy's old flat across the court was stricken, and forthwith his name became blessed. Mrs. Savourin went in to him with stray glasses of wine, Miss McGee went down and made his bed and cleaned his room:

there wasn't a woman in Penelope's Buildings that wouldn't have given her right hand for him . . . while he was ill. When he got better (as bad people do) he relapsed into his pristine condition of neglect and not one of the Penelopians would so much as look at him if they met him on the stair. Then two chorus-girls—wreckage from an opera company that had come to Regalia and been hurriedly dispersed—took the plague. They took it in an empty flat, "rented" from Mrs. Savourin, where they were camping out. To them Miss McGee went down with an extra mattress that she had, and some blankets she could ill spare, with little messes of farina and sago and glasses of malted milk that she oughtn't to have afforded them out of her money-less condition. "I guess them gir'rls there is punk a'alroight," she observed to Robert, "but ye can't let 'em die." Robert—he had begun scrimping and saving out of his scanty earnings so that, in time, he might buy himself out of the Market—provided money wherewith they might live a little longer if Fate would allow them to do so: and Miss McGee went out to Semple's cut-rate drug-store—she had to go a long way down O'Neil Street now that "The Trefusian" had displaced Semple's old place of business—and she laid out the money to the very best of her ability and came back into the empty flat and tended the girls as if she had been their mother. Then Mrs. Savourin collapsed—and Miss McGee tended her. Katie was a good nurse. She had kindly and capable hands, she had had experience in nursing her own mother and the little Garrys in their childish illnesses: and, beyond any mere experience, she had what, above all other things, constitutes the Nurse. She had the kindly and sympathetic heart that, quite instinctively and without taking thought, cannot see another in pain without beating faster. By the time October started Miss McGee was going the rounds of her patients before she set off in the morning and after she came home at night: when she went to bed she only half undressed: and over the end of her bed she hung her warm old flannel kimono, and beside that she put that other relic of the past, the big coat in which she slipped over to her morning masses in the church.

Thus clad, thrice in the night-time she made her rounds. She gave the medicine, she heated little messes over the spirit-lamp she carried with her, she turned the pillows under the patients' heads, she raised the poor sick stricken creatures in her arms and comforted them. During these night-rounds it hardly seemed to be Miss McGee who was going from one flat to an-

other, noiselessly, in the soft felt slippers she wore in the house. It seemed to be something made of kindness and mercy, something that, highly-strung and sensitive as it was, seemed for the moment only to be sensitive and highly-strung for others. Something compact of sympathy, something made of kindness, the one seed of perfection in our poor humanity that some day may blossom into the beauty of great unself-conscious love. . . .

It was impossible to move any of the sufferers into hospitals: the hospitals in Regalia filled up, during the wave of the influenza, as if by magic, and soon there was room for no fresh case. Doctors and nurses were struck down, and amateurs, unconnected with the hospital staffs, had to fill their places. Where the plague struck, there the victim had to lie. In some houses, where Miss McGees were not, the victims were found dead—quite casually. In the lumber-camps far out in the Canadian country, whole batches of men were found lying dead . . . as if they had been struck, as in the old fairy tales, with some evil enchantment. Only here there was no cure.

It began to seem to Miss McGee, as October went on, that everyone she knew was going; that her world, as she had known it, was coming to an end. The wave each day seemed to sweep further in, and sweep out of being another of her landmarks: even the spray of the wave, if one may put it so, seemed to wash out distant things that had indeed not touched her life but that she had always comfortingly known were there. Willie Bardwell's faithful daughter went, and he was left without an arm to lead him into his place at church. "Ed's" brother went—in a couple of days like Bellerose; and then Ed himself was taken ill, and for a spell it seemed as if Ag's wedding-clothes might not be necessary at all. But Ed pulled through. His microbe was not one of those that turn you livid and purple from the first and sweep you off the face of the earth as the broom sweeps the particle of dust off the floor. After a week Ed rallied. Ag's wedding-clothes were safe—and Miss McGee breathed again. There was no doubt of it. Laugh as she might at the Garry's pretensions; decry her sister as she would; the Garry interests were her interests. When she was young, long ago, she had been able to push the Garrys and Garryton aside, immerse herself in her own interests, bury herself in herself, as it were, independent of family: but as life went on, the same thing happened to Miss McGee that happens to the rest of the world. Family asserted itself. The people who were dead

asserted their share in her. She could throw off her family preoccupations as little as any of us can—and therefore the sickness of “Ed” became the sickness of one of her own. She *worried* over his danger, and when he “had his crisis” and turned the corner that leads back to life, she felt as great a throb of thankfulness as if he had been her own sister’s son: and yet all the time she knew that Ag’s marriage meant nothing to her. Ag would “better herself” by marrying Ed. It was even within the bounds of possibility that she might keep a ly-mousine in the distant future. Ed was a “go-er.” “Auntie” would become less than nothing to the Ag Furlong that would be. Miss McGee knew all this. It made no difference. Ag—she didn’t care for her personally—was bone of the McGee bone and blood of the McGee blood, and as such she was a part of Katie McGee. Miss McGee prayed for Ed’s recovery passionately, imploringly, constantly. His illness was her last thought at night all the time it lasted, and her first thought in the morning. She carried it round with her in her night-watches by the sick. She sickened at heart herself as she thought of his death. And when he was pronounced “on the turn” it was Miss McGee’s heart that gave one great bound of thankfulness. Ag was on the way to her ly-mousine once more.

It was just then that Nonnie Finn went with her unborn babe in her womb; and Danny was left with the little crowd of souls that he and Nonnie had summoned to this earth, to battle as he could. Nonnie’s troubles were over—and the troubles of the child she bore within her were never to begin. Miss McGee felt that with this death of Nonnie, another link with life was snapped. Nonnie meant the continuation of old Mrs. Morphy to Miss McGee—she meant that the past was not blotted wholly out in Miss McGee’s prospect of the world. “Sure,” Katie McGee said to herself when the news came to her at Mrs. Barclay’s over the telephone wires, “when will They be takin’ me? I’m willin’ to go. . . .”

When the theaters and the movies and the schools and the churches were all “shut down” by order of the Municipality, then Mrs. Glassridge saw fit to “git out.” She gathered together her clothes and her maid and everything that was compact of Mr. Glassridge’s money and she took to herself the wings of a dove and fled to a place where she hoped the influenza was not. With her she took the nine dollars and car-fares that should have been Miss McGee’s for the annual

week of "fall work." "She'll save her skin aloive will she," said Miss McGee to Robert, apropos of this Flight to the South. "*She ain't no good.*" "*No good,*" Miss McGee went on after a pause, with the pleasure we all feel in making similar observations, "an' what did I always *say*? Punk. That's what *she* is. She'd best've stayed roight there in the Barber's Shop an' fixed up nails. 'Tis a'all she's good fer." Miss McGee here made a long speaking pause. "I guess the fir'st Mrs. Glassridge there wouldn't have acted so," she remarked. "I'd loike to have saw her." There was another speaking pause. "Skippin' out! Sendin' awf S. O. S. ca'all!" Miss McGee then remarked, "Pah!"

The subject was complete—for Miss McGee. Through the hole at the bottom of the completed subject Mrs. Glassridge the second dropped. Katie McGee mentioned her no more.

Then Mr. Barclay went. Not to the South, poor man, to escape the plague, but to a much further land which is invisible to our mortal eyes. He went West. One day he had come home from what the Barclay household called his "awfus" with that dim heliotrope tint on his face that spells death. He had taken to his bed quite uncomplainingly—old Mr. Barclay had never been one of the complaining kind—and there, tended by Mrs. Barclay and Katie, his daughter, and Jennet, his maid, he had stayed uncomplainingly until he died. He had been delirious awhile and talked of his boyhood and of a fight he had had then—a hot bloody fight it seemed to have been, poor peaceable old man—and again his thoughts would turn to the Office, and he would think he was dictating to his stenographer, Miss Atkins, that came sometimes to the Barclays for Sunday dinner: and he would classify things in a queer ordered kind of delirium, send off letters to this Firm and that Firm, address the stenographer by name. "Have them letters fixed so they go out by the mail, Miss Atkins, eh." And sometimes he would make a move to get up from his bed and go down to that Office where the reality of his life had been: and he would expostulate a little with his wife and daughter and Jennet—a Nurse they could get for neither love nor money—when they made him lie down again. "Lie down, master," Jennet would say—she kept the good old Scotch ways, "lie down, master. Jennet Caulfield'll be goin' for ye"—and he would lie down. Mr. Barclay always had done what Mrs. Barclay and Katie and, in a minor degree, what Jennet had asked him to do. After five days of this death-in-life, he had

died. He hadn't died any more romantically or adventurously or excitingly than Mrs. Morphy had died. He had just died. And Mrs. Barclay, with her thoughts turned to crape and "weepers," was a widow.

There were difficulties about the funeral. Ceremonies were at a discount. People—and highly respectable people—were going down into the grave with their hair uncurled and their nails unmanicured, they were dropping into the grave anyway—carried there on a dray, in one of a pile of hastily-made coffins. Lights burned in the undertakers' offices all night long, and the hearses and the fill-in wagons went in and out in a continuous stream from day-break to dark. . . .

Mr. Barclay was put away into the grave and Wellston Road and the Awfus down-town knew him no more. It seemed queer somehow that Mr. Barclay was dead. It seemed unsuitable in a way that anything so romantic as death should have descended on him and taken him away. Mr. Barclay's place seemed inevitably to be in the Wellston Road, at the top of his mahogany dinner table with its Union Jack flying in the golden vays, and the chair at the top of the table seemed desolate without Mr. Barclay's heavy seat on it, and even the Union Jack looked out-of-place, now that his trimmed white beard was gone. Miss McGee felt, the first time she came to Wellston Road after Mr. Barclay had gone out of it, that the world was altered. It was emptier—for her—without Mr. Barclay's two hundred pounds of flesh; and she couldn't sit down to table without the echo in her ears of his old kind voice, "Take a bit *more*, Miss McGee!" It was impossible to think of Mr. Barclay except as the possessor of that kind, slightly-hoarse voice with its hospitable invitation. How would he be—how *could* he be—as a disembodied spirit, he for whom the world had been a dinner-table and a business office and a comfortable bed . . . ?

"He was a good husband to me," Mrs. Barclay kept saying. "We never had words betwixt us the forty-three years we was man and wife. The night Mr. Barclay died, Miss McGee, he felt about me the same way he done" (Mrs. Barclay's grammar was subject to lapses) "the day he got me." It was true. It was perfectly true. There had been no question of passion between the Barclays. They had been married people from the first—good married people, never a word between them (they were not even near enough for desperate quarrels) and everything, yes, down to the most intimate act, done in a right-minded, decorous, hidden manner. Katie Barclay had come

into the world without the slightest undue exposure of anything at all: and now it was over, and Mrs. Barclay had to be respectable alone.

Once Mr. Barclay had been put away, as Miss McGee said, Mrs. Barclay's thoughts turned definitely to crape, and Miss McGee's days of work were assured. She came in the morning, after tending each one of her patients to the best of her ability, to Wellston Road, and there she sat all day long "making mourning" for the Head of the House who was gone. Where was he gone? Had he departed into some far country where it was impossible to reach him any more? Or was he, released in some mysterious way of his two hundred pounds of flesh, amongst them as they sat sewing "mourning" for him, and presiding over them as they sat at meat? Miss McGee, sewing crape on every possible garment, wondered about these things, as she had wondered about Mrs. Morphy, and as she wondered about Nonnie's unborn child. Where do the unborn children go? Do they form eternally a part of the mother who conceived them? Do they never have an entity of their own . . . does everything join, form at last a great indissoluble union? Do individuals cease to exist when they leave this earth, or do they exist as heightened individualities, watching eagerly over us who are left, sorrowing in our sorrow, happy in our joy, stretching forth invisible helpful hands that we might touch if we only would . . . ?

As Miss McGee sat sewing, these were the things she thought about. These, and the influenza. She was not afraid for herself. Not in the least. Things had come to that pass with her that she would have been glad to go. But, as she sat at the Wellston Road window and watched the funerals go by in one long unending procession (Wellston Road was on the way to Regalia's cemetery; it was, in Mrs. Barclay's estimation, an added item of respectability), sometimes a fear for Robert snatched at her heart. What if Robert should go? What if the influenza should set its microbe on him, drive it in, poison his being, kill it—make of him the unknown mysterious thing that Nonnie and Mr. Barclay had become? Miss McGee felt that she couldn't lose Robert. Unknown to herself, by imperceptible degrees, Robert had become life of her life; she held him enshrined in her inmost heart. She was now not so much in love with him—she had been that at one time—as something that deeply loved him. With the recognition of her age had come a different kind of love for him, a love in

which passion had no share. Miss McGee, sitting sewing, hour after hour, at the black crape garments that were to mark Mr. Barclay's secession from the world, loved Robert as a sister loves a brother, as a mother loves a son, as an old wife loves the passionate lover of her youth. To Miss McGee, Robert was the epitome of her life. He represented to her all the things she had always longed for and had never been able to attain. He was the elegant education to which her intellect had always vainly reached forth, walking incarnate. He was her ideal of refinement. His speech, his accent, his choice of words, went to her pride straight—and satisfied it. And over and above these things, over and above the fact too that his appearance and his flesh satisfied her, there was that mysterious thing that we can none of us explain. To Miss McGee, Robert's presence was a happiness. He had only to come into the room, she had only to think that two stories above her he was ensconced in his own little flat, to feel that the world was worth while, and that life was beautiful. Who has succeeded in defining love? No one. Miss McGee loved Robert Fulton, and the thought that this death that was round about Regalia, enveloping it, emptying it, might one day lay its finger on Robert and say, "You are mine," terrified her. A shiver ran through her as she thought that Robert might be taken from her. Snatched from her—lifted up by this mighty unseen power and taken clean out of her sight, as Mr. Barclay had been taken away from his awfus and out of his chair at the mahogany dinner-table. One bit of consolation alone remained to Miss McGee—and it was a small illogical unsatisfying bit of consolation. Yet she clung to it. She had read in one of those gems of scientific instruction that are flung at us by the evening papers of all our various nationalities, that the influenza microbe is the smallest microbe ever known. "Sure," said Miss McGee to herself, and she said it to herself over and over and over again, "ef it's that sma'all, ut'll wear utself out. Ut'll be wore all up, I guess, before it gits along to um." (She meant Robert Fulton.) And, one day, taking heart of grace, she confided to Miss Barclay, who was sitting beside her, "helping on the mourning," this small piece of scientific consolation. "I guess 'twas big 'nough to kill Pappa a'alroight," Miss Barclay remarked. And this was all she remarked. The scientific piece of comfort fell on barren soil and did not sprout at all. It had never struck Miss McGee this way somehow, and she was a good deal taken aback. "Sure an' ut *did* kill Mr.

Barclay, eh," she said to herself. And Nonnie and Ed's brother and one of the chorus-girls (who had died in her arms) and little Bellerose, and all the lists of dead that Mrs. Barclay read aloud each day in the obituary notices of the newspapers came into her mind. It was at that moment that it struck Miss McGee that there is a great gulf fixed between pieces of information and the application of those pieces of information to actual fact. "I guess 'twas big 'nough to kill Pappa" was all that Miss Barclay, a good-natured girl of pretty nearly forty years old now, said. But it was enough. Miss McGee's scientific consolation dropped through the bottom with Mrs. Glassridge the Second and a lot of other things, and from that day forth Miss McGee worried uninterruptedly about Robert. She learned day by day that fear that is the greatest fear of all—greater to a woman than the fear of the Lord: the fear for those one loves better than oneself. A gray look came gradually over her face. When she got home in the evenings she would watch Robert's face as if she wished to see *through* it to where the smallest microbe in the world was perhaps just taking its seat in his brain. She would look intently at him, and look, and look; and however long she looked she would never feel satisfied.

"You a'alroight, eh?" she would say, in that intensely matter-of-fact tone by which we mask our secret terrors and our bit-terest anxieties.

"Yes, of course," Robert would reply in a slightly irritated tone. "Why shouldn't I be all right?"

And he would go on eating the supper Miss McGee had somehow found time to prepare. As long as he was in her sight Miss McGee could bear it. It was as soon as he went out of her sight that it was unbearable. It became frankly unendurable to her, as the influenza epidemic went on, to sit through the interminable days at the Barclays, sewing crape on to every Mrs. Barclay garment . . . even to chemises, if it were permissible to think of Mrs. Barclay and a chemise. It was almost impossible, and yet she did it. "It'll be *a'alroight*," she kept assuring herself. "He'll git through. They'll never touch um—one sure thing they won't." Yet there was suspicion at the back of her mind. This world is such a deceitful disappointing kind of a place and such terrible inexplicable things happen in it! Miss McGee longed to throw down Mrs. Barclay's murky garments and fly out at the respectable front door just as she was—hatless and coatless—fly to the Arundel

Market, and see with her own eyes that Robert was still safe. It seemed to her cruel that she was shut away from him—that nothing was free to roam about as it would but the fateful microbe that might set its claws on him and kill him—and take him from her. "What'll I *do*," she kept saying to herself, "if . . .?" She never finished the sentence. But when she said that, the air all round her seemed pressed down with terror. There were times when the old fighting McGee spirit went utterly out of her—and she felt afraid.

## CHAPTER XLVII

IT is impossible to say what made Robert Fulton decide to write the final section of the Canada Book in the last depressing weeks of October; but he did so decide: and, having decided, he sat down and did it. No one can say exactly, I suppose, what the impulse is that sets the literary spring loose. A writer will pass week after week thinking he is going to write, hoping he is going to write, deploring the fact that he can't write; and then one morning, without rhyme or reason, he gets up out of bed—and he *does* write. Robert Fulton got up out of bed one day in the rapidly-darkening mornings of very late October, and he said to himself, "I'll finish that Canada Book." He felt the ideas for it, that had been all summer long hazily floating about in his brain as separate particles, cohere inside of him. Quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly, he knew what he was going to say. Whole sentences shaped themselves in his mind as he dressed. He only wished that such a place as the Arundel Market did not exist, and that he could sit down forthwith and, with his slender porcupine-quill pen balanced at just the right angle, transfer—lift carefully out of his brain, as it were—those delicately-poised sentences, those pleasantly-balanced paragraphs. He said to himself as he ran down-stairs, "*Why* can't I just sit down and finish it off? This evening I shall have forgotten all I meant to say . . ."

But he hadn't forgotten. When the evening came he found himself as keen as ever; and, seated at his little deal table, he found the sentences that had shaped themselves in his brain reeling off it and on to the paper without the slightest trouble to himself in making them do it. The ease perhaps with which he wrote down what he had to say was owing to the long

rest he had given his gray matter. He had, except for one or two of the slightest little things he had jotted down from time to time since seeing Eileen Martyn, shifted his mind completely off the Canada Book. He hadn't consciously considered it at all. And yet how could his brain present him, as it was doing in the late October days, with just what he wanted to say? He sat, smiling a little now and again—as he had done on that evening that now seemed so long ago, when he had sat writing the first pages of his book!—and between-whiles very intent, getting down sentence after sentence. And as he wrote he saw that it was good. He had never written so naturally before. He had never seemed so near to life. Some things that he had to say moved him. Some diverted him a little. As he wrote, Canada shaped itself before him as it might have been—such a fine big new ingenuous country, giving lessons to the older, more seasoned, tired countries how to grow. The deformed Canada that he saw daily before him vanished from his eyes. He saw, so clearly, what it might have been—as he wrote: and when he raised his eyes for a second from what he was writing he saw what actually was the Canada he knew—the paper and the plaster peeling off the squalid walls of his poor room, and rain coming dripping in at the broken pane that he had never had money to mend.

Miss McGee approved of his writing once more. "Sure," she said to herself, "ut'll do um good, the bo'oy." And the worry, the tense tight strings of worry that were strung through her head, slacked a little and let her rest a moment. She set the writing-fit, as she called it, down to the fact that it was almost time for the Lady to be back. (Miss McGee had telephoned and found Miss Martyn back at her flat in September, but it was only to hear from her that she was "off" again immediately on another business trip. And since then there had been silence in response to all telephone calls to Fréjus Mansions from Wellston Road.) But Miss McGee was wrong. Though the Lady's coming-back was possibly an incentive to Robert to finish what he was about, it wasn't *all* the reason for his setting to work. There was also alert in him that half-conscious desire we have in times of trouble, to be active; to be *doing* something, to take off our minds, as we say, from the sorrow round about us. Regalia in the time of the Spanish Influenza was a melancholy town. It was full of emptiness and dreariness and fearful people, going about here and there in the emptiness, watching themselves closely to see if the

microbe had got hold of them yet. At the Arundel Market the salesmen fell off one by one, and the remaining salesmen did the work of the absentees as best they could. Some of the salesmen came back, white and thin and weak; and some went the way of Nonnie Finn and Mr. Barclay. The returned man, with the badge of service on his white linen lapel, went the way of all flesh. He who had escaped shell and bomb and bayonet and gas succumbed to the smallest microbe in the world. It was big enough to kill him as well as Pappa Barclay. Robert felt a pang as he thought of the faint jealousy that the badge used to stir in him. . . .

It was not that Robert was afraid of catching the trouble, as Miss McGee put it. He wasn't in the slightest degree afraid, and anyhow, he was still too young to mind dying much. He simply wanted to shelter himself from the disagreeables round him; and then Regalia at the best bored him: and to seek an outlet from his boredom and from the surrounding influenza talk—he wrote. There was another thing that may have helped to let loose the spring; a beautiful artistic thing that happened in Regalia and turned in a flash of a moment a bustling twentieth-century commercial city into an orderly fifteenth-century picture town—a town that seemed in the midst of the electric cars and the overhead telephone wires, almost too dignified to be real. The last thing that had been closed in Regalia by municipal order was the stronghold of the Catholic Churches. And it was on the first Sunday when the Catholic Regalians were shut out from these securest refuges of theirs that Robert, standing by the side of a kneeling Miss McGee, stood on the side-walk of Drayton Place, watching a motor-car come slowly along with, inside it, a priest who held high the monstrance that bore the Blessed Sacrament. As Robert smelled the heavy hypnotic odor of the incense that the acolyte behind the priest swung out into the dank October air—for the long wet days were lasting out; as he watched the kneeling figures of the Regalians; as he turned his eyes to the Nuns of the Sacred Heart prostrate in a dark row in front of the gray convent on the upper side of O'Neil Street; as he stood there, on the concrete side-walk, acutely conscious of Stempel Street and the Market there, the North-Eastern Lunch Counter round the corner—and these side-walks as far as he could see them lined with bent-headed, kneeling figures—he wondered if he were dreaming. This was Canada. It was Regalia, Canada's port. Here came the waifs and strays of the older

lands to seek a new, a practical, a money-making life. That was a motor-car coming along, sure enough: but what kind of a motor-car? It was draped with white. Supplicatory prayers were fastened to its sides. Standing in the body of the car was a priest that might have come straight out of the time where Robert Fulton often had longed to be—he held his arms high, behind him a boy swung out fragrance. Instinctively Robert turned his eyes, past the Convent of the Sacred Heart to see if Savonarola were not hurrying to the spot—and what he saw was the tangled line of the telephone wire zig-zagging across the net-work of the electric car-line service. He looked along the bowed heads, at the majesty of the priest, holding up in his mortal hands the symbol of the faith of ages. He watched the scattering leaves of the trees in the Convent garden come floating down: and it seemed to him, at that moment at least, as if the Church would endure till those trees had scattered their leaves for the last time and the trees to come after them were worn and dead—and the trees after that, in an infinite procession. He felt the beauty of the scene go to his heart and lodge there. He looked up through the twined branches of the almost leafless trees and past the tangled mass of the wires to the sky—and the shape of the dark dome made him think of God. . . .

It was this circulatory Mass that the Mother Church sent round for the consolation of her sons and daughters that finally let loose the spring of Robert's desire to write. He felt, in a queer way, as if he had—even if only for a moment—drawn near to those human creatures who had come together, drawn by belief in something in which he had no belief: but, deeper than mere belief, Robert Fulton felt that something there—a blind faith—a supreme hope—had drawn him, for once, close to these other human creatures—united in their fear of death. He had come back to Penelope's Buildings, with a quiet chastened gentle Katie McGee by his side, and he had hurried up into his little own room, and there he had sat—for once at the door of that underworld where humanity meets—writing down . . . what he believed to be the truth.

He sat at his table night after night in the last days of the month, fashioning his work with his own carefulness, coaxing it to take the pattern he wished it to have. He felt for this last little section of his Canada Book—for this was to end his little thesis—some of the affection the monk Robert would have felt for the missal he decorated with leaves and

flowers. He dallied over it. He played with it a little. He felt as if he couldn't let it go—he wondered if, when he took it and read it to those clear unobstructed eyes, they too would see in it what he saw. Would they see that in this last section of his booklet Robert Fulton was giving a piece of himself to the world? Or was it to the world he was giving it? Was it not—to someone who might not wish to take it . . . ?

When the time came for him to take what he had written down-stairs and read it to Miss McGee, he felt a sort of shyness. It was himself that he was carrying down in his hands in those few slips of paper: and—and, it was not to Katie that he was giving it. He hesitated—in his old way—even about knocking at her door. He felt self-conscious again. Had he put too much of himself into those sheets of his? Was it too obvious—what he hoped and did not say, even to himself? Would she . . . guess?

He knocked at the door, and when he came past the door it was into the same old room with its good feeling of friendliness. Miss McGee was cooking the supper, and soon they would be facing one another across the little oblong table—how often they had done it now! In the back of his mind—unspoken—unconfessed—there was the feeling that here was the end, not only of the book, but of something more than that. It was the fall. The Lady would be back. He would go to *her*, read to *her*—with *her* help he would be able to free himself from Penelope's Buildings, from the Trefusian Mansions that, now, already, could be seen through Miss McGee's uncurtained window, full-blown, hideous, larger even than life. He would go to the Lady; he would be free of this squalor—perhaps: and, with that feeling we all have when we say good-by to a thing, yes, even a hated thing, he found himself softening even to Penelope's Buildings. "Haven't you been a good friend to me, Miss McGee," he said, quite suddenly and apropos of nothing at all when they were seated at supper together. "What should I have done without you in this hole of a place?"

And once more Miss McGee noted the tense. "What should I have done without you?" "Have done." It was over. He was going away. She felt a clutch at her heart. "Sure," she said, "ye're welcome, Mr. Fulton." She stopped, and then—she couldn't say more on that subject—she went on hurriedly, "So ye bra'aht down yer wroitin', eh? That's good. It'll be loike the old toimes hearin' ye read again," she went on, after

a second: and it seemed to her at that moment as if a century must have passed since that first time when he came shyly down, bringing his papers with him and hiding them secretively, as he had done, under his cap on the window-sill yonder. When their eyes met now she looked steadily into his. She looked into and past the light-blue eyes and read behind them what Robert himself hardly knew was there.

"Star'rt awf with yer readin', eh," she said, the minute supper was done. "Git roight at ut," she said; "ye're eager to be at ut, yer hear'rt's in ut." And inside herself she thought, "An' why not? Sure, she's comin' home, the bo'oy." And then, unreasoningly, instinctively, self-protectingly, her mind flashed back to Tully—yes, even to Mitt—to those men for whom she herself had been an entity and desirable. It was just for a moment. "Read on," she said, "git down to ut, Mr. Fulton, dear. I'm listenin', sure." And she folded her hands.

"Now for it!" said Robert lightly. He felt—for him—quite brisk.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

**Y**ET in spite of all the apparent prerogatives which they persuade themselves they have secured in the New World, these immigrants, or at any rate the elder generation of them, do miss something; and that is the tradition they have left behind them. What they miss, after the first taste of undisciplined liberty has become bitter in the mouth, is the flavor of the old aristocratic elements of life. They are of course only dimly conscious of what they lack, but they feel that something that used to make life a happier thing has gone. They get more out of Canada; but the old principle, mostly unconscious, perhaps, in Europe, that just because you were the more favored in life's lottery you owed the less fortunate brother all that you could freely give to sweeten his lot, is almost non-existent in the Newer Worlds. The workers miss that, and they miss too, many of them, the courtesy, the reticence, the refinement which many generations of practice has bestowed on the luckier ones in England.'

"I suppose," said Robert, looking up and speaking in a tentative voice, "we never do see the good in things until they have ceased to be—for us?"

Unconsciously he was addressing Miss McGee as if she had been another auditor; the thought of Eileen Martyn was

so uppermost in his consciousness as he read, that he had almost forgotten he was not reading to her.

Miss McGee was in her old attitude. She was seated in her ugly Windsor chair, leaning forward a little. The elbows that had once been dimpled and round and now were hard and angular were steadied on the hideous tablecloth before her. Into the cup of her still beautiful hands she had laid her face, and the fingers were clasped and crossed so that the lower part of her face was hidden; the ugly mouth, the too-insistent chin were invisible: it seemed in an odd way as if, for the moment, the whole of her had migrated into her eyes. She looked out at Robert—at his book—at the world—at life—with a steady gaze: as Robert glanced at her after making his tentative remark, it seemed to him—for a flash—as if he were looking Experience in the face. The Miss McGee he was acquainted with, the kindly, impulsive, ungrammatical, illogical woman who was so quick to feel an injury or taste a kindness, seemed, for the moment, non-existent; in her place was something that represented things done; something that had faced the world and been beaten back by it; something that had fought the forces of life and been defeated—yet something that in facing and fighting and being beaten back had learned what only is to be learned that way. Robert looked into the blue-black eyes and he felt a lad—a stripling—a nonentity. His booklet shrank and shrank until it seemed hardly fit to roll along as a pea before the forces of life that Katie McGee had faced. . . .

It was but a second. As soon as Miss McGee spoke the spell was broken. Perhaps it was her lack of grammar—her accent—that broke the spell: it is hard to hold spells with uneducated speech. Just as soon, anyway, as she said, "Ye'll not be thinkin' Penelope's Buildin's beautiful, I guess, onest ye've broke with 'em," the thing was gone. She only spoke the truth: it would take a deal of good-fortune to hang a halo round the unsightly stacks of the Penelopian chimney-pots. Yet just as soon Miss McGee had uttered that truth in the way she did—she was no longer a Sibyl, a creature saying fateful things with unfathomable eyes. She was once more plain Miss McGee, worth a dollar and a half a day, a seamstress with no special charm or power or influence at all. Robert gave himself a little shake.

"You're right," he said, answering the Miss McGee he knew—or possibly just speaking aloud to himself, "it would

take a lot to make me love the memory of these Buildings. Aren't they wicked," he said, glancing round and without the slightest intention of saying anything hurting. "Aren't they mean and despicable and sordid beyond all words!"

Miss McGee knew well he never would have said that had he not had the hope of leaving them.

"We've had the good toimes in 'em too," she remarked, after a minute.

But Robert only sat looking vaguely at her. His thoughts had flown once more—to where they were more at home. He sat gazing across the little table vaguely yet fixedly until, with a start, he gathered himself together and turned back to the matter in hand. "Yes," he said, but still vaguely, "it's been all right. Owing to you," he glanced up at Katie with a smile, before beginning to read. "All owing to you."

He concentrated himself once more on the pages before him.

'The native-born do not miss these things, nor is it to be wished they should. Canada's greatness lies to a very large extent in her absolute ignorance of what she lacks; that is the romantic side of her. She lacks nearly all the things that make life beautiful, and she is magnificently unaware of the fact. The immigrants see that she lacks them—see it dimly, feel it, cannot get it into words. They have come from the old lands, hoping to be able to lay hold of just those things which they have looked at from afar all through their European lives. It is the vague longing for something that is not in Canada at all—a longing that often translates itself into mere grab and hold-fast and loud talk—and the disappointment that underlies this life of theirs overseas, that gives the oddly romantic flavor which one is conscious of in so many of them. They miss the aristocratic view of life. They have never been sharers in it—only onlookers; they have grown, quite rightly, to resent it; yet, all the same, once away from it, they miss it, and no amount of mere material prosperity can quite make up for it. . . .'

Robert looked up. As there was something in his face that asked for sympathy, Miss McGee slowly nodded. She nodded three times, looking steadily at him. If she had not wholly understood what he said, she had comprehended what he wished to convey: and, with the stirrings of her ancestry deep down in her, she knew that he was right. Dim memories of old Mrs. McGee's talk surged up in her, songs, Irish lullabies with which she would croon Katie and Mary to sleep; strains of

the airs Willie Bardwell used to play came back to her; the passionate dashes of melody that Tully used to draw from his fiddle rushed, as it seemed, through her blood: the old old memories of days when Ireland was still close behind them all, when they had still had bits of Ireland in their minds and hearts—did they not sew Ireland into the very lace they made in Canada?—came floating softly into Katie McGee's mind. She recalled the tones of Ma'a's voice when she spoke of the hills of the country she had left. She thought of the tones of the voice itself—so soft, so smooth, so winning. She thought of Ma'a's quiet courtesy, her dignity, her reverence for age . . . Katie McGee sat looking deep into Robert's eyes, and she nodded slowly. She didn't speak. She just nodded to him three times: and once more the feeling of Fate passed over Robert Fulton. He felt as if the woman, sitting opposite him at the other side of the little table, had dipped deep down into something he would be forever forbidden to dip down into; as if she knew things that he, for all of his school and university training had never been able to acquire. As if, when the time would come for their bodies to be left behind, he would find that woman his superior, his elder, in the things that count. What are the things that count? Are they grammar? Diction? Style? The mere weighing of words, so many to the pound?—the placing of thoughts in an ordered mosaic of letters? Or is it the dipping down into life that counts? Is it the deep feelings, the vague longings after one hardly knows what, that one lifts out of the stream of life as it goes flowing past—and in which one may immerse oneself . . . if one will. Robert sat silent with his Canada Book in his hand, watching Katie McGee.

"You're not—hurt when I abuse Canada, are you?" he said.

It was one of his flashes of perception.

Miss McGee continued to look at him, quite quietly. As she looked, slowly, very slowly, her eyes filled with tears. She shook her head.

Once more he had that feeling of Fate. . . .

And then she spoke.

"Sure, me dear," she said, "ye couldn't hur'rt me ef ye tried." It was a lie. "I'm proud to hear ye read," she said, "'tis proud I am ye've chose me the fir-rst——"

Once more her voice had broken the spell. Grammar *does* count—accent—diction. Robert looked across at her and smiled. "Oh, I can say anything to you," he said.

He turned back to his manuscript.

The window was a little open. The weather, though damp, was as yet not cold: and Katie McGee had balanced the luxury of a fire with a slightly-open window. Through this window came the shouts of children at play. The "kids" of the Trefusian Mansions—full already of well-to-do working families—were "playing themselves," as Miss McGee said, in the street. Drayton Place reëchoed with their shouts. Sometimes there was the sound of a blow—a cry. Sometimes one could hear the vanquished on its way to its natural consoler, saying it would "tell Ma'a, it would." And sometimes the laughter of the young generation came floating through the slightly opened window—laughter that was loud, raucous, uncultured, and yet merry . . .

'This is only true, however, of the immigrants who are fairly mature by the time they set out to seek their fortunes in the New World. The younger members, who come to Canada in childhood, take naturally to Canada and become Canadians pure and simple. Soon there will be a distinction between them and their parents and one that will grow wider as the years go by. Take the artisan—son of an artisan and grandson of another—who comes to Canada: he is capable with his hands, he knows his work, yet he is sufficiently adaptable to be able to accustom himself to the inferior grade of workmanship that Canada demands. He rises. In the end he buys a lot, he builds on it, he employs instead of being employed himself, he dresses "like the best." Yet, in the zenith of his success put on this workman evening clothes of the most superior cut, dress him in English tweeds the best that money can buy . . . and his grandfather, the artisan, will stand before you: his father the artisan will wear those clothes, plain for all to see. He has come to Canada too late to change his make. But take the son. He comes to Canada at the malleable age and, let him but be both industrious and intelligent, and he will prosper. As he grows up he will be clean, smart as to socks and ties, he will wear evening clothes as if he were born to them, he will be clear-cut in the matter of shaving, he will be fastidious as to cigarettes. If he has brains and "knows enough" he will be "in with" his Boss, he will be asked to lunch at the Boss's club, he will learn to unfold what he will learn to call his "serviette"—and later he will marry. Then he will have "serviettes" of his own, and children: and between his children and Canada's newest

noblesse, what is there but a title? And cannot this be bought? . . . ?

It was very quiet in the room. The silence was merely broken—as of old!—by the tiny flickerings of burned-out coal falling to the hearth. From outside came those insistent voices. It was a new sound in Drayton Place. The Trefusian Mansions were on the up-grade as Penelope's Buildings were on the down. Children swarmed over-the-way. The Trefusian door-step and entrance-hall was cluttered up with them. There was in the Trefusian mind an indistinct desire to complain of the Penelopian atmosphere: "Say, 't'ain't *right* over there!" There was talk of getting the "Pollis," of writing to "the city." Meanwhile, into Miss McGee's little room came the voices of the coming citizens of Canada. Robert sat reading—pouring forth his ideas, his theories of the New World in which he was such an unwilling citizen: and there, outside, where one could almost reach it with an outstretched hand, was the real thing. The citizen who was going to mold Canada. The thing that was going to make the country—what it was and is and shall be. The children laughed and shouted and sometimes wept . . . but whatever they did, they did what a thousand Canada Books and a hundred thousand Roberts could never do: they created life. They founded the country of which Robert Fulton had so much to say. And he was so engrossed in what he had to say, he was so absorbed in the pages in his hand, that he never even heard the noise they made. He was so intensely occupied in gazing into the tiny mirror he was busy holding up to Nature that he never noticed their reflections in the mirror as they passed.

' . . . and this is really all, I think, it comes to. Viewed materially, the workers do improve their position. They develop will-power and ambition, and if they are clever enough they can satisfy, or rather appease, the demands these dispositions make upon them. "Satisfy" their ambition they naturally never can—who ever could?—because ambition in that sense is a purely egotistical sentiment and as such can never be contented. But at least they can welcome with a clear heart the change to greater comfort after the long experience of being down-trodden and poverty-stricken at home; and it is even possible that they may accept Canada enthusiastically and say there is no place to compare with it—while, at the same time, deep down in them will go on the more or less

unconscious conflict of the spirit of the New World against the tradition of the old. . . .'

Robert Fulton paused a minute. The idea that his book was not so bad—that there was a little something—a seed—in it, that the seed might sprout and grow, that he might sometime—with someone's help—write *something* . . . came back to him. He sat, looking over the pages he held in his hand into the fire. It was red, glowing, the kind of fire in which one sees pictures: he sat gazing down into the deep glowing mass. . . .

It was when the whole fire collapsed, broke into itself as it were, with a little clatter and rush, that Robert once more woke to the present. He once more gave that little start, shook himself together again into life: and, as he did so, the thought raced through him, "No, I'm no good. No good. I shan't ever do anything." He felt as he had felt when he had said this, or something like this, to the Lady.

'It is, I fancy, the combination of these divergent strains that makes Canada such a confusing place. The immigrants want on the one hand the old monarchical form of government, with leaders to look up to and obey, and on the other hand they want absolute freedom of action and speech, the most pronounced individualism imaginable, and the lack of manners that goes with such an ideal. Canada is pulled two ways at once. Bringing over with her from Europe the reverence for an aristocracy, she worships the plutocracy rather than nothing at all. Titles and ribbons to stick in her coat still exercise the old fascination over her—at the same time she scorns the notion of anyone being above her: and the impossibility of fusing two such incompatible elements produces the discordant result. . . .'

It was as Robert read these words that it came home definitely and once for all to Katie McGee that he was not inimical to the worker. With a great joy she comprehended that he wanted even to be friends with him—if he might. With her queer perception which was so absolutely different from Robert's, she took hold of the fact—for the first time—that what Robert deplored was not the ignorance of the worker—not the lack of elegant education which this worker never had had—but his desires, his hot lust, after—what Mrs. Glassridge the Second represented. Miss McGee understood that her resentment at Queenie Glassridge's way of life was really the same as Robert's dislike of it: both feelings had their root in the sentiment that Queenie had no *right* to such a life as that. Perhaps no one

has a right to it, thought Katie, sitting gazing absent-mindedly at Robert. Perhaps it is not allowed that we poor mortals are to enjoy luxury like that—and not suffer for it someway. But this at least was plain. Queenie MacGowan of the Barber's Shop had no right to her Louis Sextorze drawing-room—because she could not appreciate it, and therefore could not really possess it. It was as if someone should stretch forth an ignorant hand and take hold of some precious exquisite bird and squeeze the song out of its throat—just in order to possess . . . what is impossible to possess. It began to dawn dimly on Miss McGee that in order to possess things you must also be possessed of them; you must know enough to be able to enjoy what they can give you—otherwise you hold a dead songster in your hand. She gazed at Robert reading, and she not listening at all, and she saw the first Mrs. Glassridge, good honest woman that she had been, in her self-respecting print gown, over the wash-tub, making clean clothes for the Glassridge brood—that brood that to-day had left Andrew Glassridge's house in a body because they disapproved so of Queenie MacGowan. "What would *she* do but run away," Katie McGee said to herself with contempt. "What would she be doin' but git where it's safe. . . ." Once more Mrs. Glassridge Number Two, Aphrodite the Second arisen from the ateliers of Paris, Queenie MacGowan canonized and crowned, sank back to that hollow where she had dropped when she went South with her maid. She had had a brief resurrection in Katie McGee's mind—and now she dropped back. "I'll not wor'rk fer her again, God help me," Katie said to herself, "her's punk." And the listening part of her awoke again.

'If Canada had had the courage to say to England,' Robert read—"Titles are not for such as we. Decorations sit ill on the stone-breaker, and ribbons in the buttonholes are out of place on the tradesman. Leave us alone. We want neither your titles nor your ribbons. Leave us with the wealth we can dig out of our land and let us spend it simply, our own way. Our manners will then have their proper fitness; our attitude to life will be self-respecting,"—think how she would have been respected—what an example she would have shown the world! It is unreasonable to blame her. It is unreasonable to expect that the workers of England who suddenly, after long years of drudgery and toil, find themselves with a little superfluous wealth at their disposal, should develop that self-respect which must precede any true originality. They have been kept

under for too many generations to be able to recover their poise all at once, and no doubt we ought to have the same sympathy with them in their prosperous hour as in their days of adversity. But it is harder to sympathize naturally and humanly with the working-man when he is titled and palatial and busy pretending not to be a working-man at all than when, in his workaday dress, he is making his way homewards after a long spell of labor. If they would leave aristocracy alone, if they would not attempt to found a noblesse of silver plate and pinchbeck; if they would acknowledge themselves for what they are—the descendants of the Workers of the World, those very workers upon whom the world has been dependent for so many centuries and by whose aid the great power over nature, which the world is so busy wasting to-day, has been obtained—who would be found to criticize or slight them? Who would not rather join the company of emigrants and make with all speed for such a land of Promise and Performance. . . . ?

Robert's voice sank.

'We must wait yet awhile,' he read, 'before such a scheme of things as that can find acceptance: the time of chaos is upon us and will stay with us many a weary day. Yet so many things—bad as well as good—are being shattered to bits around us now that it is not unreasonable to hope perhaps, that some time they will be remolded nearer the heart's desire.'

He was silent. The Canada Book was done. The two sat for a long time, not looking at one another but each gazing straight downwards, into the fire . . . that was losing its red glow and rapidly going out.

"'Tis the great book, Mr. Fulton," Miss McGee said at last in a low tone, "an' 'tis the poor one I been to read ut to." She swallowed something before she went on. "'Tis little good I am. I know ut. But—ye put me wise this toime. Ye made ut clear. . . ."

She paused for a long time—or so it seemed to both of them.

"An' Ma'a'd 'a' loiked ut too," she said, as if there had been no pause, "an' 'twas the good woman she wa'as, be-lieve me."

Robert raised his eyes and looked at Miss McGee.

"She was a sensible woman, I know, Miss McGee," he said, "and a wise woman too." He stopped a moment. "I fancy she was a *fine* woman, your mother," he said. "If Canada was made up of Mrs. McGees with men to match—it would be the country of the world."

They said no more than this. The end of the Canada Book

came as the ends of things do come—just naturally and, in a way, unexpectedly. Miss McGee had somehow always pictured to herself something—something dramatic happening at the end. She had thought there would be a climax—that she would be able to say something worth while and Robert something miraculously wonderful: and now it was at an end. The reading was over. What had meant so much to Katie McGee was a thing of the past—like so many other things.

“You’ve—you’ve *enjoyed* it, haven’t you?” Robert said, gathering up the pages of his manuscript to take them away.

“I have that,” Miss McGee said—it had been a phrase of her mother’s: and then a flash of her every-day fear came over her and put the reading to the back of her mind.

“Ye’re a’*alroight*, eh, ain’t ye?” she asked.

“I’m perfectly *all* right,” Robert replied. And this time it was with a smile and no trace of irritation. He went upstairs.

## CHAPTER XLIX

IT had been a satisfactory close to a satisfactory evening; Miss McGee—measuring enjoyment by rather a different standard from what she had ever been accustomed to use before—felt that perhaps she had never enjoyed herself so much: it all depended on whether you were measuring enjoyment with the passionate or the contented yard-stick. But, just as soon as Robert had gone, she put the evening and all its beautiful facts away to the back of her mind: she undressed rapidly, slipped into her felt foot-wear and her old wrapper and big coat, and went her rounds. The second chorus-girl was yet very ill; one of the bunch of tarts was dead and another was dying. Mrs. Savourin, very pale and weak and thin and unlike herself, was up struggling to get herself what she called “some gruel.” In Miss McGee’s vocabulary this was spelled differently; but she coaxed her back to bed again with the promise of bringing her “the gruel”: and then she went on to the bad man across the court in the old so-familiar flat, and found him fulfilling the promise of the psalmist with the green bay-tree in the distance.

“’Tis the way,” Miss McGee said to herself, as she went back to her own room to collect spirit-lamp and matches, the remains of her morning’s bottle of milk and Mrs. Savourin’s glass

of gin (out of one of poor old Mrs. Morphy's bottles that she still kept "against the need of ut"). "'Tis the way," she said, as she went down-stairs once more. "'Tis them bad 'uns gits there, bless 'em." She felt no rancor against the bad man, none against the psalmist who also, it seemed, simply accepted such: she just took his recovery as part of the scheme of things. Part of the mess of life and therefore incontestably to be accepted.

And a few minutes after that the bad man—yes, and even Robert's final section—had disappeared into the very back of her mind, as she assisted the dying tart to raise herself in bed, and held her while she panted and suffocated for breath. "She's gawn," she said to the sole remaining tart, a big-eyed, thin, worn girl. "'Tis gawn she *is*, my dear. She'll not la'ast out the noight." "Would ye want me come set be ye here, "Miss McGee added after a moment—as her eyes met the frightened eye of the third of the bunch of prostitutes that she had so bitterly decried. "Will I come spend the noight with ye, eh?" Miss McGee said: and, in response to what she read in the frightened eyes that looked into hers, she added, "Wait jes' a minnut. I'll git me sha'ahl fer me head an' another sha'ahl an' some pillas. Don't ye git a'all fussed up now," she said in a low voice to the girl as she parted from her at the door. "I'll see ye through. I'll be back. I shan't be a minnut."

She crossed the little landing and disappeared into her own flat, leaving the door wide open behind her. The departing spirit is a disquieting thing. It arouses a sort of fear in us poor mortals when it is cleaving its way through the perishing body.

"Wait jes' a minnut, eh," Miss McGee said over her shoulder to the girl.

"Gee, I'll wait," the third tart said, taking her station by her own wide-open door. She followed Miss McGee as far as she could into the depths of the unknown flat with her anxious eyes.

"Mat's dead," she kept saying to herself. "Mattie's dead. An' now Florrie's goin'. What in hell am *I* goin' to do . . .?"

And then Miss McGee came back through her doorway and across the landing and stood a second at the threshold she had so little expected ever to cross. Her arms were full of things.

"Now, Miss," she said, looking at the girl. "*You'll* sleep."

They went into the flat together and Miss McGee softly closed the door behind them.

## CHAPTER L

THIS all happened on the night of November the 2nd—just towards the close of the Great War. On the morning of the third—very early, as the first straggling gray shreds of dawn were finding their way through the night sky—the second of the bunch of tarts died. She died, not peacefully as Mr. Barclay had died: she died painfully and harrowingly, as she had lived. Miss McGee saw her through it, as she said: and when the spirit had at last cleaved its way through the reluctant flesh, she closed the eyes of the girl who had lived by selling her flesh, and she laid the hands on the bosom that had so often bared itself for money. She said a prayer over the poor body that was saved so much by dying while it was still young: and she took the sole remaining tart into her own flat and gave her breakfast there, soothed her hysterical sobbing, talked to her, distracted her, made her eat, and then, when she herself had to go out, put her on the spare mattress on which the chorus-girl down-stairs had died—and left her to sleep in her flat. “She’s a bad gir’rl a’alright,” Miss McGee said to herself as she took her way to Wellston Road. “I guess her name is mud. But,” she said to herself, exactly as she had said it to Robert, “ye can’t let ’em *die*.” And the remembrance of the dead girl came across her, and it struck her that on that worn young face there was the same look of majesty and repose that there had been on Mrs. Morphy’s face as she had lain in her casket in the shack on the confines of the city. Miss McGee stopped short in her lagging walk as this thought struck her—she was on her way to the car; she was too tired, after her night of watching to walk all the way to Wellston Road. And, as she stood considering this matter on the sidewalk, it came to her that on the face of the chorus-girl, once she was dead, there had come the same look of quiet dignity. She too had looked at rest, and as if something, on leaving the frail tenement of the body, had stamped on it the hall-mark of residence. “I have inhabited this tenement,” seemed to be written on all these faces. “And in going I leave my mark. I am that which is and always has been and always will be. I am the divine that rests in every human body—and in leaving the body I write my signature across it.”

“The poor *soul*,” Miss McGee said to herself. And then she said “the poor *souls*,” lumping together the chorus-girl and

Mrs. Morphy and the poor prostitute and respectable Mr. Barclay and Nonnie and her unborn child in one heap in her thoughts. It went through her mind in an unseizable kind of way that we are all emanations from the divine; that we may deface our bodies, but that which our bodies contain we cannot deface. . . .

And then, seeing her car in the distance, she began to run: and having boarded the car she was too breathless to think. She peered over the shoulder of the "young lady" next her who was reading the morning's news (the car was empty but for herself and this "young lady"—the business men were all going the other way) and she looked at the head-lines. "Glory be to God," she thought to herself, "it looks loike winnin' now." And into her mind came the picture of the Irish Rovers—her own bo'ys, as she called them to herself—swinging through Regalia with their fine free step . . . a *fine* lot of men, with the best band in the ar-rmy, God bless 'em, marching at their head.

When she got to Mrs. Barclay's, and in the fullness of her heart began to tell the things that were happening to Penelope's Buildings, Mrs. Barclay and Katie—the good-natured Miss Barclay—began to get a big basket ready, full of comforts and kindnesses to the flesh, so that Miss McGee might have plenty to distribute on her return at night. Miss McGee kept to herself the profession of the girl who had died in the night. It was all very well for herself to overlook such things in the fullness of a time of sorrow, but she knew that Mrs. Barclay would be inflexible on the subject. As well make confidences of a sexual kind to a piece of whalebone. Miss McGee held her tongue—and with gratitude she accepted the basket.

She listened very kindly that day to Mrs. Barclay's aspirations in widowhood. She did her best with the crape . . .

It was on the fourth of the month that the blow fell. Miss McGee went homewards that day as quickly as she could, her basket in hand (Mrs. Barclay had insisted on a daily basket once Miss McGee had opened her heart) and her thoughts intent on the sufferers she was going home to. Since the first of November Penelope's Buildings had gone under altogether. Probably the smallest microbe in the world had passed from one Penelopian to another: but, at any rate, the whole place was down with the influenza. It seemed as if the peeling plaster of the walls must be charged with the deadly microbe; and as the plaster peeled a little more—and more, as if

showers of microbes fell and overwhelmed the inhabitants of the rooms . . . with death.

Miss McGee had done a lot of telephoning at Mrs. Barclay's in the day-time, and she hoped to find, as a result of her telephoning, at least one District Visiting Nurse in charge of the Buildings. She had also got hold of a doctor who had promised to come: and she had made arrangements with Mrs. Barclay that, should she not appear on the morning of the fifth, they would understand that she could not be spared. "I'll 'phone ye up in the course of the day, eh, ef I'm not comin'," Miss McGee said, "but I don't know what toime it'll be. I'll have to git out to 'phone, and ut may be I'll have to stay home roight where I am an' see to 'em." To Mrs. Barclay's suggestion that she should stay where she was, sleep at Wellston Road and abandon Penelope's Buildings to its fate, she had hardly deigned a negative. "What do ye take me fer?" she said. "One of 'em that'll skip out?" Her tone had been definite and unanswerable, and neither Mrs. nor Miss Barclay had attempted to answer it. They had merely pressed on her a bundle of "old clean rags" for poultices and fomentations; they had guaranteed daily baskets of food by "Express." And, on parting, Mrs. Barclay had pressed into Miss McGee's hand a ten dollar bill. "Take it," she said, "it'll be a tribute to—*him*." She meant Mr. Barclay. "He's looking down on us," Mrs. Barclay said, "you may be sure, McGee. An' he'll be glad to know I'm doing my bit, Mr. Barclay will, the way I always done."

It was impossible for Mrs. Barclay to do anything quite *right*; but the ten dollars were invaluable, and Miss McGee took them. Not, be it well understood, as a present to herself, but as a charity towards the poor. "It'll be made up to her a'alroight, I guess," she said to herself casually in the car going home. (Miss Barclay had provided a "bunch" of car-tickets.) Miss McGee meant of course that, once Mrs. Barclay was translated upwards she would find this ten-dollar bill waiting to be paid back to her—with due interest added thereto. We all, I suppose, tend unconsciously to adjust Heaven to the measure of our various friends. That was the sort of Heaven that Miss McGee foresaw for Mrs. Barclay: and she saw nothing inappropriate about the vision.

She had been too busy all day long sewing and telephoning and thinking about the various sufferers she had on her mind to consider Robert at all. Somehow, since everyone else in her

environment had fallen sick, the terror about Robert had to a great extent passed out of her mind. It wasn't so much that she hadn't had time to think about him perhaps—we always have time to feel terror for those we love—as that she had accepted a more or less fatalistic view of the world. She had come to say to herself after viewing the deaths of the influenza sufferers round about her, "It had to be, I guess. They're dyin' loike flies, God help 'em, but ut has to be." As is the case in times of acute sorrow and terrible suffering and desolation, the sense of God had become apparent. Moving, as she was becoming accustomed to do, in an atmosphere of death, Miss McGee had come to feel the presence of God. She had come to be sensible of God's immediate nearness to us—all the days of our life, though in joy we have less immediate need of His presence and so are less conscious of Him. She said to herself, viewing the swift irrevocable course of the disease, "It's in God's hands, eh. It's in His hands." And she felt that she *trusted* Robert to God. That He would take care of him. That—yes, for the past day or two, quite irrationally, she had felt it—Robert was safe.

When she got home on the evening of the fourth—a Monday night—she went hurriedly into her own flat and threw some kind of a meal together. There was little to be done to get it, for she had Mrs. Barclay's basket to fall back upon. She had only to dip in and take Jennet's good well-cooked food out. It passed through her mind as she picked out the choicest things and placed them on the table that it must be a grand thing to *live* like that; to be able always to just take things out from somewhere ready-made and sit down and eat them. There was no envy mixed on this occasion with her thought. It just slipped through her mind that it must be a great thing to live like that.

And then, just as many times before, she said to herself, "He'll enjoy that, bless um!" And an involuntary smile lighted up, just for a second, her tired anxious face.

She was very tired. She had been working out every day, and nursing all night, going from one patient to another, taking the merest shortest naps between the rounds, and as her patients could spare her services. She was tired out. She felt "on edge." And yet, past the being on edge, away behind it, she felt, as we all feel in those times of desperate stress and strain, a sense of security and grave calm. There were moments when she felt as if she must go under from

sheer physical faitgue; and then some mysterious force seemed to enter into her and stay her; it gave her something to lean against, as it were. It was as if she heard a voice saying to her, "I will uphold you. Have no fear."

The moment Robert came in to his supper she knew that the blow had fallen. As she looked at him out of her tired eyes she saw in his—absolutely clearly and irrevocably—the signs she knew by now so well. He didn't complain at all. He sat down to his meal as usual. His movements were languid, but he didn't say anything about being tired: he was even more talkative, more communicative, than usual. He vouchsafed various little bits of news about the Arundel Market. He told her how the man who had stood next to him all the three years he had been in the Market himself, had fallen with so many others by the way. He was dead. "I liked him," Robert said—though in the fellow's life-time he had hardly spoken to him. "I always liked him. He did his duty." He paused a second, and then added, smiling faintly, "It isn't altogether easy to do your duty, you know, in the Arundel Market. And the cashier's ill, poor girl," he concluded, and then he lay back in his chair, putting down his knife and fork and covering up apologetically what he hadn't been able to eat.

"I'm sorry, Miss McGee," he said—Robert belonged by this time to the people who finish what they have on their plates and feel they haven't done their duty to God and Man if they don't. "I'm sorry. It's very nice—but I'm not hungry."

He didn't say any more, and this time Miss McGee did not say, "Are ye a'aloight?" She said nothing. She merely sat and looked at him. For a second she felt a sense of God having failed to do His part . . . and then the fatalistic sense returned on her with redoubled force and, rising from the table, she said to herself, "It has to be. It *has* to be. There ain't no more to be said about ut."

On the 7th of November Robert Fulton died. He died in the little flat out of which he had so wished to go. He died, quietly, with no fuss, as he had lived. He slipped out of life with infinitely less trouble than poor Mrs. Morphy had had in getting rid of her troublesome flesh; he died more quietly even than Mr. Barclay, more calmly than the poor prostitute who had lived two stairs below him.

He had become delirious practically at once. Not a painful delirium that it was torture to be beside; but a quiet delirium that changed sometimes for a moment to a recognition of life

as it is—and then, quietly, and in a sort of inexplicable manner slipped off the rails into a disordered view of the past and the present and the future all in one: a sort of previsagement of that time which we are told will come, when there will be no past and no present and no future: when the three are one and we ourselves are quite otherwise than what we are to-day.

He saw himself as a child, kindly treated enough, nothing to complain about—but without love. He saw himself growing up without that love that is to the human creature what air and moisture and sunlight are to the plant. He saw himself at school—apt at learning, with a retentive memory and a perceptive mind. He saw himself slipping out of the sheath of boyhood into manhood at College, still alone, always alone—timid a little for want of that air and moisture and sunlight that he had never had. And he saw himself in Canada; in Regalia—savoring the life of the New World, at first hopefully, and then less hopefully, and then, definitely and only as a mistake he had made, but a mistake that he must stand by. He talked a lot of Miss McGee—recognized her sometimes as she leaned over his bed, spoke to her, gave her a hot hand, spoke sometimes sense, sometimes nonsense; but always affectionate words. He recognized in Miss McGee, now when he was “out of himself,” what he had not recognized when he was “in himself.” He recognized in her the air and the sunlight and the moisture he had required and had never had in his childhood and youth. He saw it in the expression of her eyes as she leaned over him, he heard it in the tones of her voice as she spoke to him.

“Miss McGee . . .”

He still called her that. No more intimate name than Mr. Fulton and Miss McGee had ever passed between them.

Once, when he was quite delirious, he had babbled of the Lady. Once. Just once. Nothing that mattered. A remembrance of the copper tray that her blue blouse had shown so blue against. A memory of her room with the evening sunlight streaming into it—a thought of the hill outside her window that one could look at through the interlacing branches of the tree that grew in her courtyard. He spoke once of her eyes—translucent—shining: and once he said, “I am coming. Wait . . .”

And on the day of the False Peace, as it is called in Canada, he died. He died to the sound of the trumpets and the rattles,

the clashing together of metal and the shouts of the people that the false rumor of peace called out. As he lay in his bed with the sounds coming through the slightly-open window, he turned a little to Miss McGee, and he whispered, "How young!" He meant Canada. He was quite himself then—he died quite himself. He told Miss McGee in broken whispers to take his money—it was forty-two dollars all told—to bury him with it (his savings that he had put away with such trouble and strain) and to keep the rest for herself. "A little gift from me," he said with a smile. And then, for seconds, he would wander. He thought himself once at the concert down at the Summer Park—for he said, "Those hands!" And once he thought himself back at Cambridge with its river and its trees and its quiet English grace—for he spoke of it by name. But he died knowing himself to be where he was—in Regalia. Insistently the shouts came pouring in at his window. The Peace whistles blew—the men shouted and the women shrieked—and, underneath the shouts and the shrieks, there was a sort of ground-bass all the time of a trampling of feet and a steady hum of talk. "How young!" It seemed to Robert Fulton, dying, that Canada was something so young—so *young*—that it had hardly begun to live at all; that it had hardly even managed to get successfully born. The crude sounds of the celebration of Peace—the False Peace of November 7th—floated in to him, and he thought of Canada as a child—a babe—as a sort of Hercules slipping through the womb of Time and holding in its arms the twin-powers of infinite size and infinite wealth. . . .

It was the last thought in his mind as he died. "How young!"

Miss McGee composed his body as she had composed the other bodies of the dead. She washed him as a mother washes her son: and in her ministrations to the dead she sought the help of the girl over the way—the one remaining girl of the three whose presence beside her she had so bitterly resented. Together those two women laid Robert Fulton's body to rest. The girl spoke not at all. She said absolutely nothing. She helped Miss McGee, and when she had finished helping her she vanished again into her flat. They washed him and clothed him for the grave as best they could. Miss McGee fetched the best she had and put it on him—and while they prepared him for his last rest, she hid of him what she could from the gaze of the stranger. It seemed to Miss McGee that she was working with a sacred thing that must not be shown to the

eyes of the multitude: and the girl helped silently, and vanished back into her flat.

When it was over and Robert lay quietly in his room, Miss McGee went down-stairs and fetched two candlesticks and put into them two long candles that she had had a long time ready for her own dead body; she brought these candles up-stairs and placed them beside Robert, so that at night his face should be lighted up by them. And then she prepared for the watch. Cassie Healy (back from the Hospital but the night before, thin and pale as one is thin and pale after typhoid fever) had done "the business." To her, willingly and trustfully, Miss McGee had committed all the business part of Robert's death. "Don't matter what ut cawsts," she had said to Cassie more than once. "Order ut good. Have ut roight. An' see ut is roight." She had added once, "There's loads of mooney." It was the first time in her life that she had uttered such a phrase. And with that she had shut the door on the world outside and she had sat down to watch beside her dead.

## CHAPTER LI

WHEN Robert Fulton was laid to rest on the hill he had seen from Eileen Martyn's window, Miss McGee turned and went down-hill again. She had felt, as she came up from the town, as if she were mounting the hill for a thing apart: as if this were the supreme moment of her life. As if she were carrying up a jewel in its casket, and as if she were laying this jewel aside—to be safe there. When it was laid away she turned and came down-hill again. And as she came she felt that she was coming down-hill into life, and she felt that she would not be able to bear life any more. And then she felt that she *must* bear life, that life was there to be lived, and she must live it to the end. And she did not see how that was possible.

She was perfectly calm. The tears that she had shed over the deaths of Nonnie and Mr. Barclay she had not shed over Robert. The sorrow that she had felt and shown over the death of Mrs. Morphy she had not felt at all over the death of Robert. Since he had died, indeed, she had felt almost nothing at all. She had sat beside his dead body, not deeply unhappy, not torn by sorrow, as she would have expected herself

to be, but calm, quite calm, upheld, as it were, always by that mysterious power that had upheld her throughout his illness. From the moment when he had come into her room on the night of the fourth of the month, from the instant when she had turned her eyes to him then and had recognized on him the marks of death—the violet hue of his face, the lassitude, the fever—she had felt almost nothing at all. Immediately on noticing his condition she had become intensely, immensely, severely practical. She had been so full of plans to relieve his pain and distress, she had been so wide-eyed to watch for the first symptoms of anything she had had in her power to help, that there had been time for nothing else in her. She had had no moment that she could set aside to *feel*. All that short time of his sickness she had been intent on him. Her self, her own feelings, her desolation, her despair, had been non-existent for her: or possibly she had felt them behind somewhere, far behind, but she had been able to push them even farther back so that they might not interfere for an instant with her care of her beloved sick. From the first moment when Robert came to her, ill, to the moment when his dear body was laid in the grave, Miss McGee had ceased to exist. She had been as one without a body. She had been merely something that had lived in order to be to Robert Fulton what he needed to have. She had felt, even as he lay quite quiet and reposeful and gently aloof on his bed in his poor room with the candles at his head, that he still needed her. She had sat beside him all the time that he “needed” her; and all that time she had felt quite calm, perfectly reposeful, conscious neither of pain nor ache nor tiredness—nor of unhappiness, any more than she had been conscious of hunger or thirst. It was as if the essential part of her was somewhere else, communing with the essential part of him, and communing with an intimacy and an understanding that Robert Fulton and Miss McGee had never achieved on this earth. She had felt completely reposeful with her dead: and even the rounds that she had not neglected to make amongst the sick of the Buildings had not interfered in the least with this sense of—of all being right. She had attended to the wants of the sufferers quite mechanically and perfectly kindly and correctly. She had soothed them and fed those of them who could take what nourishment she had to give, and then she had gone back to the room where Robert lay quiet and reposeful, and she had sat once more beside him and drunk in, as it were, the majestic calm that he exhaled. Once it had

flashed across her with a sense of surprise that she was feeling nothing. "Am I gawn crazy, p'raps?" she had said to herself: and then, in the calmness of the darkened room, the surprise had slipped away from her, and she had sat, leaning back, careless of the slipping past of time, thinking not at all, merely conscious that she was beside the body of the man she loved—almost happy.

And now, with the laying away of this man, and the coming down-hill after the laying of him away—alone—the vultures of desolation and misery laid hold of her and tore and rended her heart. It seemed to her as if she could no longer live. She stood on Regalia's hill and looked down on the beautiful river flowing majestically past; she looked at the blue sky above—for miraculously, at last, it was a lovely day; she looked at the beauty of the trees that Robert had always so admired; she looked at the other part of the hill where he and she had picnicked together in the hot summer evenings: and it seemed to her as if it were impossible to be borne. She felt that God had failed her. She felt that life, as she had lived it before the coming of Robert, was unbearable. She felt that more life—*more* life—was impossible to be borne. And at last, at last, the hot scalding tears of despair welled up into her eyes and burned her eyelids as they gushed their way through, and scalded her cheeks as they coursed down them. And the taste of the tears was salt in her mouth. . . .

"I can't bear ut," she said out loud to the sky and the trees and the great stretching landscape below. "How can I bear ut? I've lawst everythin' there is. They're gawn—they're all gawn." She meant Tully and Mitt and her mother and her mother's friends. "An' now *he's* gawn." She meant Robert. "It's not fair," she cried out passionately between her dry shaking sobs. "It's not *fair*. It ain't. It ain't. It *ain't!*" The beauty of the day seemed an insult to her as she stood on the hill with the salt tears running down into her mouth. The blue sky seemed a mockery, the course of the river seemed a wickedness to look at. For one horrible moment, as she stood there, all the cathedral of her faith fell round her—she seemed to hear the rending of things, the falling of deep essential beliefs. And then through her ignorant mind there rushed the thought—could God have been angry with her that there had been no celebrations at the death-beds she had assisted at? "But how could I?" she cried to God, "they didn't believe, God help 'em." And, with the saying aloud

of the name of God, this fear departed from her. She knew that God would accept their souls—He who had sent their souls into the world—as they went back to Him, without the blessing of a priest. Half of her mind clung to the faith in which she had been brought up—the ignorant half; and the other half, the half that, with God's help, had wrought itself free, knew that God is God, and that He is all-merciful, and that He welcomes all alike—the chorus-girl, Nonnie's unborn child, Mr. Barclay, the prostitute, Robert. As she recognized this the extremity of her despair seemed to pass away from her. The desolation of loneliness remained; but God was with her in the loneliness—and she could bear it. She gathered herself together as best she could, and with the tears still running down her cheeks, she went further down-hill towards the city. As she went the practical common-sense that had enabled her of late to minister to those in trouble all round about her returned to her: and it upheld her—with God. Possibly it was God manifesting Himself in that shape.

She went back to Penelope's Buildings and up into Robert's flat. She had closed the door behind them this morning and taken the key in her pocket. She went through his flat now, putting it in order. She took the money that he had passed on to her as a "little gift," and she collected together carefully the pages of the Canada Book, and took them downstairs with her to tie them into a parcel. When she had tidied all of Robert's room, placed everything in order, taken out of the room all that he would wish to have taken out of it, she came away out of it herself. On the threshold, before closing the door, she stood looking round it a moment. It was bare and very quiet. The plaster that had so annoyed Robert was still peeling off the wall. Now that its inmate was gone out of it the room showed, as rooms do in some mysterious way, a change. It looked more squalid than it had done when Robert lived in it. It looked poorer than it had done then. There was something terribly desolate about it now that Robert's smile was taken out of it. The thought passed through her mind that he ought not to have lived there—that it was a wickedness that he should have been thrown away in such a room: and then, to banish the thought, she held very tight on to the thought of God. She went down-stairs to her own flat and quietly shut the door behind her.

There she did the Canada Book up into a neat parcel. Then, still quietly, she undressed and washed herself very

thoroughly, she dressed herself again, putting on all clean things: and on the top of her clean underwear she put on the old black dress and the old black hat that she kept in the old-fashioned way "for deaths": she had worn them to Robert's funeral, and now she put them on once more. She tidied up her flat as she had tidied up Robert's: and, always with perfect composure, she went out of her flat and down the stairs and took her way to the Lady's.

"She'll be home p'raps," she said to herself. She felt she couldn't telephone somehow, she felt she must go and see. And when she knocked at the Lady's door, the Lady herself opened it.

"You!" she said. "Come in. I'm only just back last night——" And then, looking into Miss McGee's face she said, "What's the matter?"

Miss McGee stayed a long time at the Lady's. She spent all the afternoon there, and when she came away it was getting dark. She told her in those hours everything there was to tell. She told her Robert's history, her own feeling for Robert, all that Robert had ever said to her, all that she had not said to him—what she had thought—what she had wished—his death—what she felt now. . . .

She told the Lady everything, and when it was all told she took the parcel she had made of the Canada Book and she held it out to the Lady. "Take ut," she said, "he'd've wanted ye to have ut,"—and in letting go of the book she felt as if she were parting from the child of her own body.

Miss Martyn took it, and held it in her hands a minute as if she did not know quite what to do with it. And then, with the almost mechanical movement of the person accustomed to deal with books all her life long, she opened the parcel and took the manuscript out and began to glance over its pages.

For a bit she read in silence. Now and then she shook her head, as if dissenting from what she read, or disapproving of it, or thinking, as Miss McGee said to herself, it would not "do." Once or twice her lips moved as if she were repeating something over to herself—and then she turned a page, still shaking her head.

"'Tis the grand book I'd have ye know," Miss McGee said. She could not have said just why she said it: but she felt a passionate desire in her to *protect* Robert's book—if the Lady did not like, could not appreciate, did not know the

value of what had been entrusted to her, she wanted to snatch it from her, clasp it to her own bosom, keep it warm there. "'Tis the great book. . . ."

Eileen Martyn made no answer. She merely sat turning pages, at first rapidly, as she glanced down the clear legible lines; then more slowly: as she went on further, always more and more slowly.

"There are good things here," she said once, without looking up: it was almost as if she were speaking to herself. And she read half aloud, as if she were alone and were trying the words to see what they tasted like, 'A human being, like a bulb, ought to pass a certain period in the cool darkness and give his roots time to get strength and penetrate downwards. After he is rooted let him spread by all means; but until he has the power of growth in him let him be kept comfortably in his cellar and watered punctually and tended with all due care; and let those premature leaves which will prevent the healthy formation of the later blossom be judiciously repressed.'

"That's quite good," the Lady said, musingly. "It's—nicely put."

Miss McGee sat listening. The time when Robert had read that to her in his gentle cultivated voice came before her: she felt as if she could not—could not—bear it: tears, less scalding than those tears that had forced themselves from her on the hill, came into her eyes, overflowed them, ran down her cheeks.

"And this is nice," the Lady cried in her impetuous way, still without looking up, 'Of all the immigrants the penniless aristocrat is the only one without the aggressive quality: knowing himself to be as good as you, if not somewhat better, he refrains, in the true aristocratic spirit, from even hinting at such a thing . . .'—and a moment later, she laughed outright. 'In Canada there is the real Middle Class English attitude towards art of every kind; you pay your money to see and hear it and thank God when you can come away again.' "Yes," she said to herself, "there are nice *things* in here. . . ."

It was soon after this that Eileen Martyn began to turn the pages differently. Miss McGee, attentive, jealously attentive, beside her, saw the difference. She turned more slowly, reading far more carefully what was on every page: and occasionally she turned back as if she had missed something and wished to catch it up.

In Katie McGee's mind there was pain. She had put the book into those strange hands because she knew that for Robert those hands would be the book's home. But it was not less pain to her to see the hands "meddlin' ut," turning it over, looking at it, glancing at it, "pickin' the brains of ut," as Miss McGee said to herself. She had resented the Lady's first light view of the treasure, her flipping the leaves over as if there were nothing in them worth waiting for: but now that she seemed to be getting engrossed in the book, now that her eyes had taken on a quite different look, now that she held the book attentively in her hands—she didn't know but that she minded that even more. Who was this woman to be coming in between her and . . .

She stopped herself. There was no Robert of *that* kind any more. The Robert whom she might have had—would have had—to hand over to this woman didn't exist any more. The Robert who was now wasn't for marriage or love—of that kind. She rose and stood looking down on Miss Martyn with grave eyes.

"Ye'll know, I guess," she said, "what to do with ut. I've give ut ye"—she stopped. "He spoke of ye onest," she said with a final impulse of confession. "He said, 'Wait fer me. I'll come . . .'"

There was a long pause.

The book had fallen into Eileen Martyn's lap. There was no laugh now about her as she faced Katie McGee: and when she spoke, her voice was almost as grave as Miss McGee's own. "Miss McGee," she said, "leave this"—she tapped the pages in her lap—"with me. I'll"—she paused. "I'll do my best with it," she said. And then, after a moment she added, "Trust me." And she looked Katie McGee full in the face with her understanding eyes.

Once outside again Miss McGee paused in the road. She felt it would be impossible for her to go back to her tidied flat, with the tidied flat up above that contained only emptiness. She said to herself as she stood there, "Some things can be and some can't. This one can't—now anyway." And, quite without her reason having anything to do with it, her thoughts turned to her sister and Garryton; and her feet, again without her own volition, as it seemed, turned instinctively to the carline that led to Garryton.

All the time in the car she sat passive. She had drunk at the Lady's part of a cup of tea—with the greatest difficulty.

It was almost impossible for her to swallow. In her throat there seemed to be something that prevented her from swallowing, something that jerked upward whenever she wished to put anything down. But, at the Lady's earnest request, she had managed to drink a little of the cup of tea. She had refused all solid eatables, as an impossibility. The mouthfuls of tea stayed her now that she was in the car. She sat, leaned back against the wicker seat (as she had leaned that time they went together to the Summer Park!) and she felt once more not so unhappy. The old feeling of being stayed by something had come back. She thought at that moment of her despair on the hill with a sort of wonder—was it she who had felt with that intensity? Was it possible for anyone to feel like that? She felt merely tired now, tired excessively, and as if she had done a great piece of business—the only piece of business that mattered—in having given the Lady the Canada Book to have and hold, and in having told her everything. Miss McGee did not ask herself *why* it was so important that she should have done these things. She merely felt it *was* important. She felt that, now that was done, she could legitimately rest: and she leaned back against the wicker seat, resting. She trusted the Lady.

When the stopping-place for Garryton came, she got off the car. And, as the car sped on its swift electric way, she stood on the side-walk a moment, gazing about her into the darkness. It was perfectly dark now. The short November day had drawn into night, and it seemed impossible that, only a few hours before, there had been a brilliant blue sky overhead, and a blazing sun burning down on the hill—where Robert was laid. Miss McGee remembered, standing in the darkness of Massonville, that there had been a tiny bird on a bough not far off from Robert's—grave (how queer that sounded!) which had sung him to rest. She had not consciously noticed it at the time, but now it came over her that it had been so; and she was glad to think that there had been music at the graveside, and sunlight. She thought she would not have liked *him*—she no longer called him Mr. Fulton in her thoughts—to be laid away with the rain driving over him and the rough wind blowing. She had the feeling that he was her child. And she wanted him to have all the beauty she could get for him—even at the last. Sunlight, and the waving of the trees, and the sweetness of a bird's song. Once more the thought of God swept over her, and this time with such

force that it seemed to sway her from side to side as she stood in the road.

"It'll be the weakness of me," she thought, catching at nothingness. And then the feeling of God and His imminence passed away from her again. And, as she walked in the direction of Garryton, she thought, "I'll see Father O'Rourke tomorrow, God bless um, an' I'll tell um everythin'." The face of Father O'Rourke, not jolly and round as it was in the street, but exalted and apart as it had been in the motor-car when he drove through the city holding high the Blessed Sacrament, came over her. She felt for a moment like kneeling in the dark road . . . and then that other thought of God came back again. Not the God one kneels to but the God one receives with open arms into one's heart.

She went slowly along the road.

It never occurred to her that they would be surprised to see her at Garryton. The thought of the years when she had refused to go there was wiped away from her. The idea that she wouldn't go to Garryton because Mary had been luckier than she and was higher up in the world and that therefore she—Katie McGee—would be seen at a disadvantage in Mary's environment seemed an idea that was impossible to conceive. Miss McGee couldn't believe, walking along the Massonville road, that she had ever cherished such an idea. It seemed an infinitely small idea—as small as the smallest microbe in the world and an idea that was as destructive as that microbe if you were so foolish as to cherish it. But to Miss McGee it seemed as if she never could have cherished it. It seemed to her that she hadn't come to Garryton all these years—why? Oh, because Mary and she had fallen out of the way of seeing life the same. Mary had seen life one way, and she, Katie, had seen it another. But that was long ago—all past. And now to-night—they would see all that was essential of life the same way. Exactly.

Katie McGee pressed the electric bell at the Garryton door; and when Kathryn, her namesake, answered it, she stood silently looking in at the hall. The hall was improved since she saw it years ago. Money had come into it. It was clothed and furnished as it had not been the last time she came to it. There was a big expensive gramophone in the corner by the stairs, and there was a portière hanging that, quite instinctively, Miss McGee reckoned up as "havin' cawsted mooney."

"Mother in, Katie, eh?" she said.

She was surprised to find her voice quite normal.

And when Mrs. Garry came out of the living-room—the front room by the door—and called to her, “Katie! Why, Katie, come *in!*”—she came in, and submitted to Mrs. Garry’s kisses and welcome. Mary McGee had always been fonder of demonstrations of affection than Katie had.

“I tha’ah’t I’d come along,” she said—and disengaged herself gently from Mrs. Garry’s arms. “I tha’ah’t I’d jes’ come along.”

“Why didn’t ye ’phone up, eh, an’ say ye was comin’?” Mrs. Garry said. “There’s Dad” (she too said “Dad”) “jes’ gawn along to’s meetin’.” (Tim Garry was a Member of every right-minded Committee, and never missed a Meeting of any of them.) “He’ll be *sawry*, Kitty. My dear, ef ye’d jes’ ’phoned *up* . . .”

Mrs. Garry led Katie into the living-room she had just come out of. Nellie was there, and little Mae. Ag was out at Ed’s. She had “run around,” it seemed, to see “ef her fy-ance was gittin’ along a’alroight.” And Rose was up-stairs with the flu. “So we’re a hen-party, Auntie, eh,” Nellie said. “Rose ain’t too bad. I’ll go put the kettle on.” And before Miss McGee could say no, she was gone to the kitchen to put the ever-hospitable kettle on. The Garrys, for all their getting up in the world, did not keep “a girl” yet. There was no hired help in the house. The girls, assisting Mother, “did the work.”

As Miss McGee was sitting in the front room with the light on her face, Katie Garry said suddenly, “Say, Auntie, what’s the matter, eh?” And then, this remark having brought every eye on her, everyone said, “Auntie” or “Katie” as the case might be, “what’s the *matter!*”

There was a mirror in a chiffonier just opposite where Katie McGee had seated herself and, as they asked her this question, she, quite unexpectedly and casually, caught sight of herself reflected in this mirror. She saw a face that at first she did not recognize. A face, pale as death, with large meaningless eyes looking out of it. The mouth was pinched and white. And there was a curious expression on the face that she did not recognize as her own. It was an expression, half of exaltation and half of indifference. She recognized after a second, with an effort, as if the thinking processes were not going on quite normally inside of her—as if they were *blocked*—that the expression was exactly as she felt. This

feeling of the imminence of God, that came to her at moments, was the exalted look that was in her face; and this feeling of surprise that she could feel nothing, that came to her at all the other times, was the feeling of indifference in her face. ~~That moment of despair on the hill had made her deathly pale—had sunken her eyes and pinched her lips—but otherwise~~ it wasn't there in her face. There had only been that one moment of despair. She felt as if she should never have it again—as if it would kill her if it were to come to her again . . . like that.

"I've had the bad toime," she said—quite calmly: "in the house there. Them Buildin's is runnin' with the flu. I been up noights nursin' em and seein' to 'em." She paused a second. "That's why I come," she said. "I felt loike I wanted to see ye all an' see ye was well. An' have a rest."

"Kitty," Mrs. Garry said impulsively—it was the old Mary speaking this time. "Stawp roight here fer a bit, eh? Come on. We'd jes' love to have ye. The gir-rls is woild to have Auntie come. An' you kin take care of Rose. She thinks the wor-rld of ye, Kitty, Rose does . . ."

Nellie and little Mae chimed in. They all wanted her to stay. There was an air of affection and warmth about them, and the affection and warmth seemed to go a little way in through the coldness Miss McGee felt all round her—and raise the temperature, for a moment, as it were. And then, though she saw the reflection in the mirror smile quite kindly, she shook her head.

"I can't stawp to-night, Mary," she said. "They need me there . . ."

And suddenly the thought flashed across her that she had to go back to Penelope's Buildings—and *live* there.

When "Auntie"—the other Auntie, the sister of Tim, Auntie Nellie Garry—came in, once more it seemed an impossibility to Miss McGee that she could ever have felt any rancor towards her. Such a feeling seemed a sort of impossibility in the world at all. It seemed to Miss McGee that jealousy—and envy—and malice—are such tiny things that they have no right to exist. When Auntie Nellie said, "Ye're changed, Katie McGee," it seemed to Miss McGee as if someone were saying that a great way off. As if the speech came from too great a way off to be capable of hurting her. She answered Auntie Nellie with the same composure that she had answered the others. She looked at her carefully waved hair,

at the "set" of her clothes, with a sort of surprise. "She'll be tryin' to look young, eh"—the thought flitted through her mind. "Sure, she was always a silly woman," Katie McGee said to herself: and Auntie Nellie fell out of her mind as Mrs. Glassridge had fallen out when she fled from danger. Both these women seemed to Miss McGee too small to worry about. She just let them fall through—and become non-existent for her . . .

Rose brought her to earth again—for a moment. When she went up to see Rose, she saw that Rose was ill: and into her mind, just for a passing second, there swept that maternal feeling she had for those who were sick. "Ye're feelin' bad, eh, me dear," she said, sitting down beside the bed. "Ye're not feelin' good, eh." And she laid her cold hand on Rose's brow and smoothed the hair away from her face, and then quietly let her hand slip into Rose's and let the two lie clasped on the counterpane.

They said nothing for a long time. They were alone together in the room. And then, suddenly, quite without any preparation, Rose said, "Auntie, is he married yet?"

And Miss McGee answered, "I don't know, me dear."

And then there was a long long silence between them.

It seemed æons before Rose spoke again. She said, "He sent his picture." And then after a long time more she said, "There was her picture with ut."

It passed through Miss McGee's mind that this was a cruel thing of Mac: and, as if Rose had read this thought in her, she said hurriedly, "He wrote me."

They were quiet again.

And then—it seemed another of the impossibilities of the world—Rose was weeping, and sobbing in her bed. "I loved um," she said. "Oh, Auntie, I loved um. How shall I bear ut . . .?"

When Miss McGee went down-stairs again she refused to sit down. She said she must go. She had tried to drink the cup of tea Nellie had made for her—and she had failed. That thing in her throat was insistent and would not let her swallow. She had tried so evidently hard that Mrs. Garry had let her be; but an anxious look had come into Mrs. Garry's face as she had said, "*Won't* ye stawp, eh, Kitty? We'll make the bed up in a minnut, an' we've no one to send to the car with ye, Tim bein' out an' all. . . ."

Miss McGee had laughed a little at this. It seemed odd that

she could laugh, but she had laughed. "Mary," she said, reaching up to kiss her—Mrs. Garry was a fine tall stout woman—"I've had to be about all my loife long alone, me dear. I'll git home a'alroight. Don't worry." And, with a curious impulse she didn't try to explain to herself, she had put her arms round Mrs. Garry's neck and kissed her with a long kiss. "We're sisters, Mary," she said, "the same mother bore us." And Mrs. Garry, with that queer capacity she had for always saying the wrong thing at the critical time, had answered, "Kitty, we'll never quarrel again." And then she had added, "Will we?" And, just for the fraction of a second, the plate of cold turkey rose up before Miss McGee's vision as it had risen up for six long years.

It all fell away from her as she went out on to the doorstep. She had said good-by to Nellie—with once more that pleasure in having something to give her that would help her in her career: and to Katie—indifferently to Katie: and to Mae, little Mae, who had been called after "Grandma'a" who had been "Mary": and then, distantly, to Auntie Nellie. And, with them all congregated under the big electric light outside the Garryton hall door—one of the new elegancies that had come into fashion since the days of Katie McGee there—she had made her way towards the car. It was a little way she had to go, all in the dark. There was something wrong with the big light at the end of the road, and it was not burning. It was very dark, but Katie McGee knew the way. She had made that road—how many many times in the years gone by! She turned, as she reached the limits of the arc of light thrown by the hall-lamp of Garryton, and she had waved her hand to the group at the door. It had passed through her mind that they looked grouped for a "picture," Auntie Nellie in the front place, of course, and Mrs. Garry so tall and fair and handsome behind, and Nellie, dark and interesting-looking bending forward to see the last of Auntie, and little Mae (who, it appeared, was on the brink of matrimony too, "goin' with a fella"—even little Mae!) waving a hand in the front row beside Auntie Nellie Garry. "They're a foine fam'ly, God bless 'em," Miss McGee said. "Glory be to God, the McGees'll not go out yet." And through the back of her mind there passed the old regret that Mary had had no living son to carry on the name of McGee.

Miss McGee walked on towards the car. She walked in the middle of the road since it seemed to her better walking there.

She resolutely set her mind against thinking of what was at the other end of that car-drive. She thrust Penelope's Buildings out of her mind. For, if she had thought of them, it would have seemed to her—she knew it—impossible to enter there, whence Robert's dead body had been carried only that morning. Was it only that morning! Was it possible that Robert had only left Penelope's Buildings those few hours ago! It seemed a century since she had stood on the hill in the morning sunshine with the hot tears of despair running down her face and trickling saltly into her mouth. It seemed another life since she and Robert had sat one at each side of that little table—he intent on the pages before him, she sitting, taking in each particle of his flesh with her loving eyes . . .

And now she was alone.

It was at the moment that the word "alone" fell, as it were, into her mind that she heard a great rushing sound behind her. Absolutely without her will working, from the most primitive instinct, she must have leaped aside, for when her intelligence told her that danger was behind her, when she realized again what was happening, she was lying in the rut between the side-walk and the road. A great car—it might have been Biddy Ryan's ly-mousine—had gone flashing past her: when Miss McGee picked herself up, shaken but unhurt, she stood a moment gazing after it, collecting her scattered wits. "Why didn't I stawp an' let ut run roight over me," was the first collected thought she was conscious of thinking. Had she wanted to die as she thought she did, had she missed Robert as she thought she missed him—would she have leapt for life—would she not have stood where she was and let this great leviathan crush her? Then one of the other Miss McGees pushed up inside of her. The sense of her wickedness came over her. "Sure, God forgive me," she said to herself, "is ut after killin' yerself ye are, ye little black divil!" And with the old familiar phrase her mother's gentle smiling face came up before her. "Ma'a, Ma'a," she said, with a sort of sob: she stood a moment longer, collecting her thoughts and wondering, would she go back to Garryton and stay the night as Mary wished her to.

She walked slowly on. They were too happy there. She didn't grudge them their happiness, God forbid, but she felt as if she couldn't be with them. And as little could she be with Rose, the poor girl, weeping after an utterly lost Mac.

What a world.

She went to where the car-stop was, and waited there. Her mind was a sort of blank. She knew that she was on her way back to Penelope's Buildings, but her mind refused to envisage the fact. She was in one of those merciful stupors that come between bursts of excessive sorrow. The thought of God was gone. She was unable to summon up any thought of God at all. He was far away—in some inaccessible spot: perhaps Robert was with Him. Perhaps not . . .

When the car came up she climbed stiffly in. She was surprised to find that she was trembling all over. She hadn't been touched by the motor-car, she hadn't been hurt by her fall in the gutter, only bruised a little, but it had been a close shave. The motor had almost touched her—it had been by a sort of miracle that she had been drawn out of its fatal orbit. Her nerves—as her muscles had borne her out of danger quite without her volition or consent—now took the matter into their own hands. She trembled so that she could hardly mount the step.

"Ye're tired, sure," a big bent man said to her as she came inside the car. He had the seat nearest the door, and he got out of it, and gently forced Miss McGee down into his place.

"Sure, no, I'm not tired," he said. "I'll stand an' welcome." He joined the long row of men and woman hanging each to its own strap the length of the car. The car was packed. Massonville was full of munition factories, erected since the War, and even now, when the false peace had been celebrated and Canada knew that a true peace was at hand, the workers were at work producing things with which to kill their fellow-men.

The car was packed with men and women. Rough dirty specimens of humanity they were, tired with a day's work, talkative some of them, giggling some, others sunk either in the evening paper which it was hard to read by the insufficient light, or else deep in a sort of lethargy of dim reflection. What were they thinking about, these people? Of the past day's work, of the next day's work, of the meal they would have, getting home, of the pipe, the rest, the night's sleep . . .

Yes, they were a rough lot. Miss McGee, from her seat nearest the door, looked down the car. She was sunk in herself, sunk in her sorrow and her sense of the futility of all things, and yet, with a wandering upper part of herself—and partly, perhaps, to relieve the sense of futility and sorrow—she was able to look round about her, see what was passing, make her comments on it.

"They're the bum lot," was what passed through her mind. She wondered what Robert would have thought of them—he that had hardly been able to sit next Dan at Mrs. Morphy's supper-table. And then—where did it come from?—there sailed through her mind a phrase from Robert's Canada Book. 'The immigrant does lose something when he crosses the ocean, but he loses I suppose, as we all do, in order that he may gain.'

"Bless um, bless um," she thought. A great lump came up into her throat. She felt choked—her eyes were veiled by a mist of tears. But they were not the hot scalding despairing tears of the morning, not the jealous tears of the afternoon—they were the *good* tears—that help . . .

"Bless um," she thought again, "he'll come back, the bo'oy, to help me . . ."

'Gain.'

She glanced round the car again. She saw the rough faces, she smelt the unwashedness all round about her. But behind the dirt, deep below the unwashedness—this time she was conscious of the humanity that united them and her. They were all striving—all pushing on. To what? To that underworld, at the door of which Robert Fulton had knocked so often—the underworld where humanity feels alike, and recognizes that it has a common root. Miss McGee felt that her hand was on the very handle of a door leading—where? Her unhappiness ceased to be an agony.

"He'll be givin' me the seat an' him toired," she thought, her mind shaping itself to a practical end: and she glanced up into the face of the man that had stood up at her entrance.

He smiled down on her.

"Feelin' better some?" he enquired.

She nodded.

"'Tis a cold night, sure," the man went on. "The winter's comin', Ma'am."

The same old things. The same old human things that we say to one another, generation in and generation out. As Miss McGee replied to this neighbor of hers who had wished to help her, who had shown her good-will, she felt—it was inexplicable—as if her feeling to life changed. It *wasn't* a mess. The world was a mess, but not life. God was ordering life. How had she ever thought that *He* could make a mess . . . ?

The future she had before her in Penelope's Buildings stretched not quite unbearable after all—because it was a part

of life. She had her own little room where her dear had so often sat and read to her. She had those round about her, less fortunate even than herself sometimes, to tend and help. There were her nieces at Garryton—*young . . . they had life before them.* Could she not help them too? All the bitterness she had drawn out of life seemed suddenly precious to her . . . because she felt that—changed—she could give it away again: and she loved giving. The thought of God came back. And this time she did not feel giddy and dazed as she had felt in the road at Massonville. Was not God human—and kind?

“Good noight to ye,” she said to the man, getting up out of the seat he had given her, “an’ thank ye.”

“Ye’re welcome, Ma’am,” he replied.

As she got off the car and turned into Drayton Place, the chime of St. Patrick’s went three-quarters of eleven. “’Tis late I am,” she thought to herself mechanically. And then, as the thought of those sick and waiting for her—and she neglecting them all day!—came into her mind, she began to hurry. She hurried as she had hurried on that day so long ago when she had been coming home to get Robert’s supper—that day when she had hardly known him at all. He was not there. He was gone out of Penelope’s Buildings, and she had to make those Buildings her home all the rest of her lonely life. As she turned into the battered door and went across the little passage, she seemed to see Mrs. Morphy, dead, with Nonnie bending over her. She saw the tart helping her to lay out the body of the man she loved—just three stairs up. She saw the man she loved—clear before her—smiling with that smile that had first drawn him into her heart. And with this thought of him, another—an absurd and useless thought—went through her like a knife. Uncle’s coat with the new velvet collar that she had put on it was lying upstairs—and there was no Robert to wear it. Robert would never feel the winter’s cold again . . . and then, through that thought, swamping it and all her egoism like a tidal wave, came the other bigger, greater thought—God was near: she could help and tend Him. She went up the worn and slanting steps.