

## VOLUME I

### CHAPTER 7

“Why should this desert silent be?  
For it is unpeopled? No;  
Tongues I’ll hang on every tree,  
That shall civil sayings show:  
Some, how brief the life of man  
Runs his erring pilgrimage,  
That the stretching of a span  
Buckles in his sum of age;  
Some, of violated bonds  
”Twixt the souls of friend and friend.”

—*As you Like It.*

ONE MONDAY MORNING, Miss Nellie Davoren might have been observed taking peculiar and unusual care with her toilette. She braided her brown hair in the very last style, a modification of Miss Malowney’s, just as Miss Malowney’s was an exaggeration of “Her Excellency’s.” She pulled two silk dresses out of her wardrobe—a blue and a grey—and spent some time deliberating which to put on. The grey finally obtained most favour in her sight, and she decided to wear it. At twelve o’clock Nellie was ready; and her brother, who had been shouting impatient summonses and threats up the stairs for half an hour previous, seized and hurried her off, vowing he would be late for lecture, and promising all sorts and kinds of misconduct in revenge if such turned out to be the case.

“Oh, there now, Dicky,” said Miss Nellie, at last, “do not go on at that rate: you will be in long before one o’clock.”

“How do you know, Miss? and what’s it to you? The idea of your talking!” returned the saucy boy in his most scornful tone.

“Since you entered college, you have become unbearable. Do you imagine that knowing Latin and Greek gives you a right to be so impertinent? You think you’re a man; but, indeed, that’s not the way men behave. Look at Mr. Orpen and Mr. Hogan, how polite they are.”

“Yah! because you’re not their sister,” retorted Dicky.

“No matter, sir; gentlemen are always polite. There now, the clock is only just ringing, and with all your hurry we are five minutes too soon.”

“So much the better. Cool down and look pleasant over it.”

Just then they came upon a tawdrily dressed nurse, carrying a baby, and followed by a number of little children. They belonged to an acquaintance of the Davorens’, and Nellie stopped to inquire for their mother from the nurse.

Dicky, who was a little in advance, turned half round with such an angry face that she hastily quickened her step to overtake him. He stood quite still until she came up, and then said, in an angry and serious tone,

“Did I possibly see you speak to that girl of the Wildings?”

“Yes; I asked for her mistress.”

“Don’t you ever dare to speak to her again: never notice her on any account. You hear me, Nellie?”

“I do. Why not speak to her? What can you mean?”

“I mean this, then, since you must have meanings and reasons,—she’s not a person fit for you to speak to. I know what she is very well.” So he did; for the “person” in question was a companion and associate of several of his college friends.

Nellie made him no rejoinder. She felt shocked and mortified, and getting into the train seated herself silently in a corner alone, for Dicky had got into the smoking compartment with a neighbour of theirs, a Mr. Saltasche. Neither she nor her father was acquainted with him, but Dicky was on friendly terms with him. Arrived at the terminus, Dicky reappeared, and sulkily informing her that he would not return to dinner, and that Dorothy must send Peter, the man-servant, home with her, hailed a cab, and putting her into it, departed speedily on his own road.

Nellie looked out of the window after his retreating form, striding along beside his companion. She had noted of late—not without much misgiving the change in the boy’s manner. A dictatorial impertinence had taken the place of his former good humour, and sulky reticence made all question as to his employment of his time and outdoor pursuits bootless and unsatisfactory. Cousin Dorothy supplied him liberally with pocket-money, which, with his own allowance, disappeared mysteriously; he was always wanting more, and always grumbling that he had never money like other fellows. A beautiful boy, he had been his mother’s darling; and from the day of his birth he had been spoiled. His sister and mother, and in accordance with their example the servants, had always given way to him. Whoever suffered inconvenience, or came short of any comfort, it was not to be Master Dicky; and the lad took it all as his birth-right. He was a fine boy naturally, and was good-natured and generous of spirit. But he had never been denied anything, and he had never learned to deny himself anything. It seemed perfectly natural, and a matter of course, that his sister should give him her allowance of pocket-money. He had the grace, to be sure, to ask her politely for it, and even to call it lending; and sometimes, when he chanced to be in a particularly good temper, vague visions of paying it back would cross his brain. But he did not feel at all bound to do so. What was she but a girl? and what did women want money for? Indeed Mr. Dicky, like a great many of his kind, held the pleasant theory that women had no business to have money except for men to take it from them. If the young gentleman thought about the matter at all, his thoughts probably took that shape.

Nellie soon arrived in Fitzgerald Place. Peter opened the door, and bade her walk into the dining-room.

“Bless us, Nell! is that you?” said Miss O’Hegarty, who was busy arranging a wintry-looking bouquet in a china basket. “You look quite nice, my dear,—a great deal too nice for my pack of old women. They’ll fall on you tooth and nail, just for the spite of it. Come here, and see if you can arrange these. I want them for the drawing-room by-and-by. Don’t splash your dress now! I want to go to the drawing-room to see if Peter has put things to rights. Peter, Peter!” she called; and Nellie was left to arrange the chrysanthemums and veronicas in the basket.

Miss O’Hegarty’s Mondays were the event of her week. She did not go into society; at least, since her father’s death she had given up entertainments, but she had by no means given up her circle, and had hit on

the popular and cheap device of weekly afternoon teas to assemble her coterie. She had a large number of relatives and connections; and as since the Church Act was passed a great many county families had thronged up to live in Dublin, her Monday afternoons were as punctually attended as the Drawing-room itself. Gentlemen seldom came. Now and again some old country acquaintance would drop in with his wife or daughters, and, appalled at the gathering of women, drop out again just as quickly as politeness would allow. Married ladies and spinsters of her own standing, and young ladies who had reached the age when the appetite for scandal may be indulged without any of the *jeune personne* squeamishness, composed the majority of her *habitués*. It was not without some misgiving that she gave Nellie Davoren an invitation to one of these festivities.

Nellie very soon finished arranging the flowers, and hastened upstairs to aid her cousin and Peter in the drawing-room. This was a large room, with a fine bay window. The furniture was for the most part old, and some of it had come from Castle O'Hegarty. Queer old girandoles, with mirrors that reflected you upside-down, or broader than you were long, as a spoon does, hung here and there among the pictures on the walls. Dorothy had not adopted the modern custom of hanging her walls with china until they resembled a kitchen dresser; but had she liked she could have made a fine display of old Worcester and Wedgewood ware—a goodly stock of both being stowed in a great glass-fronted chiffonier. She liked solidity and massiveness in her surroundings: the chairs and sofas were enormous of frame; but for all that there were plenty of pretty things scattered about—little lounging chairs, velvet covered, and with gilt legs and backs a pretty little table held Miss O'Hegarty's work materials; and here and there were artistic mementoes of her foreign travels in the shape of pretty statuettes and ornaments of various kinds.

Peter was carrying in flower pots out of the little greenhouse on the leads, and under Miss O'Hegarty's directions distributing them through the room. On a sofa-table stood the tea equipage, and the top of the grand piano was utilized to hold spare cups and plates of cakes.

“You will do the honours, Nellie. And, Peter, mind what you're about to-day, and if you must spill coffee and tea the way you did last week, don't do it upon the only lady of title in the room.”

Some inarticulate growlings, as Peter descended the stair in quest of another pot of myrtle, was the only notice vouchsafed to this recommendation.

“He’s getting old,” continued Miss O’Hegarty, turning to Nellie,—“getting old, my dear, and past his work.”

A frightful crash on the staircase followed this asseveration, and seemed to have occurred precisely to bear out the mistress’s opinion,—the fact being that Peter had overheard her remark, and took the means of smashing the flower-pot as a double-barrelled expedient of revenging himself and venting his temper.

The lady divined the state of affairs, and with a discretion the fruit, no doubt, of long experience, judged better to take no notice. So she pretended not to have heard anything, and left the old gentleman to gather up the mess at his leisure.

“He’s done it on purpose, me dear.” Whenever Miss O’Hegarty was vexed her native Kerry brogue asserted itself in all its purity. “Just wants to aggravate me; but he shan’t. He’s been at it all morning. Old devil!” she added wrathfully; “who on earth would put up with him but meself?”

Peter, a shrivelled little old man, with apple and red cheeks and sly blue eyes, was one of those ancient retainers whose impudence and good-for-nothingness people feel themselves bound to endure simply because they have been in the habit of doing so for a greater or less number of years. The race is fast becoming extinct, with no great loss to the community at large. Between Peter and his mistress there was a perpetual feud going on. They were always at cross-purposes about something or another; and Dicky Davoren declared that a considerable portion of the time of both was spent devising schemes to vex each other.

“Everything’s done, I do believe,” said the lady of the house, giving a final glance around. “Come up to my room, Nellie, while I dress myself.”

They passed up the stairs without seeming to see the irate Peter busy with brush and pan, and reached a large airy bedroom over the drawing-room floor.

Nellie sat down, and Miss O’Hegarty proceeded to divest herself of a dark morning dress, and having arranged her ringlets, put on a heavy black silk dress, with lace to match her rich headdress.

“I hope I’ll do, Cousin Dorothy,” said Nellie, looking dubiously at her simple costume.

“Pooh! do, child? indeed you will. I never have a mortal but a pack of women about me—horrid lot! I hope you won’t repent coming among them. See if I left the hand-glass over there.”

“They are not all old, are they, cousin?” asked Nellie, handing her the article in question.

“Old: humph! If they heard you say so! There will be Mrs. Bursford. Now she knew your mother long ago; but she’s older—oh yes, much older; and her daughter, Miss Diana, is a belle. She’s over thirty. Her cousins the Bragintons say she’s thirty-five. But that’s cousins’ talk all the world over. You’ll see them here and an amiable collection they are. They’re nieces of Lord and Lady Brayhead, and are on a visit to them,—nieces on her side, you know. And the eldest, Miss Blanche, is going to be married; at least, so she’s given out. We’ll see what her aunt, Mrs. Bursford, says of it. Nellie, see if you can find the eye of that hook.”

“Now, child,” said Miss O’Hegarty, turning round, let’s have a look at you. Smooth your hair; and there’s hot water; and let me see—yes, I’ve got a bit of a lace collar and cuffs, which will look better than that.”

While Nellie did as she was told, the elder lady rummaged in drawers and boxes, and at last brought forth a collar and wristbands of fine Brussels point, and a queer oblong gold brooch, with double rows of pearls, blackened with age, set in it.

“I’ll give you this brooch, Nellie,” she said, pinning it in the girl’s collar as she spoke; “it was given to me long ago by a man whom I daresay your mother recollects—Laurence Lentaigne. He’s dead ages ago,” she added quickly, seeing a look of curiosity in the young face so close to hers.

They went downstairs now, and had scarcely reached the drawing-room when the company began to arrive. It was already a quarter-past three.

“Mrs. Fitzharmon Dillon, Mrs. Hepenstall, Mrs. Biggs,” roared Peter in his broadest Limerick brogue. Another of Peter’s tricks when in bad humour was to speak in the coarsest country fashion he could manage. His mistress darted a—

“How are you, me dear Mrs. Biggs? The children all well? My *dear* Mrs. Hepenstall! Back from London? We’ll have tea in one instant, Nellie love. Oh! Miss Davoren, my cousin: Mrs. Hepenstall, Mrs. Biggs.”

Nellie made a circular reverence, and hastened downstairs to see that Peter was bringing a really boiling urn. She found, as she had anticipated, that he was doing nothing of the kind; so, as he was called away by a succession of knocks at the door, she took advantage of his absence to enlist the cook’s services in the interests of the tea-drinking, and have a properly munitioned tray carried up.

When she returned to the drawing-room she found the “kettle-drum” in full swing. She was presented to all the ladies, who received her graciously enough; and she sat down by Mrs. Hepenstall, a young married woman, with a good-natured handsome face.

“Dinner at the Chief Secretary’s last night.” A very dressy woman was talking in an abrupt, disjointed way. “Their Excellencies not there—couldn’t come. No. What d’you think we heard? Corrie Vickars, the *aide-de-camp*, got it from London by telegraph—brother in War Office. Lord Newmarket—h’m—Lady Oaks! It’s been expected at the clubs this while back.”

“Nellie dear, go and make our tea,” interrupted Miss O’Hegarty, nodding in the direction of the sofa-table.

“Lord Oaks went after by the next ——”

“No, Blanche,” interrupted another lady; “Lord Oaks missed the *next* train, so he could not overtake them that night,—he had to wait till next morning.”

The Misses Braginton had commenced this anecdote together, but gradually the younger and weaker had dropped out of the running, and now seized the opportunity of her elder sister pausing for breath to cut in again for the finish.

“They say,” went on Blanche—Miss Braginton—“that he missed it *purposely*.”

Miss O’Hegarty took off her spectacles and wiped them. Mrs. Fitzharmon Dillon, who knew nothing whatever of either party, but who wanted it to appear that she was conversant with the aristocratic doings on the other side of the Channel, threw out the following little random shot:—

“Lady Oaks was—ahem—very fast, you know.”

“That’s evident,” snapped Miss Braginton; “but Corrie Vickars says the betting in London is even that Lord Oaks will take her back again.”

“Especially as Newmarket is so poor, you know”: the other Miss Braginton brought this out with an insinuating giggle.

A tall old lady, with a prominent hooked nose and cold blue eyes, who was seated on a sofa opposite, turned and looked reprovingly at her.

“Really, Blanche, you do go rather beyond your text. Mr. Vickars, I am certain, has not heard that; oh! come now.”

“There are three children,” continued Miss Braginton, speaking rapidly, in order to divert the stream of public attention from the channel opened by the snubbing remark of the lady on the sofa.

“Dear! dear me!” said Miss O’Hegarty. “But it’s in the blood: look at her mother. You remember the Marquis of Cheltenham scandal? That was her mother, my dear.”

Miss O’Hegarty did not know one of these titled people whose names she now bandied so freely. Neither did she know anybody who did know them. Nevertheless, she could talk of them quite cleverly—even familiarly; and she was as thoroughly versed in all the bearings of her subject as a Court Chamberlain.

“I got my German governess at last,” put in Mrs. Hepenstall, impatient of the ill-natured Bragintons; “and brought her home with me from London.”

“Ah! did you now? Where did you get her?”

“The Brighams recommended her to me strongly.”

“Ah! there now, Mrs. Hepenstall,” cut in some one else, “and what is there new in style this time in London? It’s ludicrous the way we’re behind here.”

“Yes; positively we are two years behind Paris!” This from a pretty little lady, who had just come in.

“Paris! Bless us,” said the hostess, “we don’t think of Paris. London is good enough for us. And I declare, only for *Punch* and *Fun*, we’d never know even what clothes they were wearing over there.”

“*Punch* does always give the fashionable hats, and the hair too, very correctly,” said Mrs. Dillon, who was a county lady; “but *Fun* and *Judy* are not good style.”

“No; nothing like *Punch*,” went on Mrs. Hepenstall, speaking a little louder, and settling herself back on her chair. “I left sooner than we’d intended. Couldn’t trust my chest in London these months.” And she coughed in a most interesting manner.

“Tell us, what did you notice in the way of dressing hair?” This from Miss Braginton, to whom nature had been rather grudging in this respect, provoked a quickly stifled smile from the other ladies.

“Well, there were several styles, but the favourite and best seemed to be that of the Princess of ——. We saw her last Saturday. The hair all carried up at the back, quite high under the bonnet, plain and smooth in front, and generally quite off the face.”

“Now,” said Miss O’Hegarty, putting on her spectacles, and deliberately surveying her visitor through them, “how about bonnets?”

“Oh! really most unsatisfactory. One good thing, you can wear hats almost anywhere. The bonnets are getting smaller, and prices larger—in inverse ratio—now. This is one of Rebons’s last from Paris: what do you think of it?” and Mrs. Hepenstall inclined her head forwards. After a general inspection and admiration of the lady’s very becoming head-piece, Mrs. Fitzharmon Dillon changed the subject.

“When did anybody hear of the George Lamberts?”

“Oh!” cried the two Bragintons simultaneously, “she’s off to Nice. *He* is going on so badly. She says it’s for her health she’s going. Don’t believe it. You know they went from this to Leamington. Dee Tee, my dear; and treats her—oh! frightfully; she never has a penny in her pocket. Never—for any purpose.”

“Poor creature! She has a small settlement, has she not?” asked Mrs. Hepenstall, in a compassionating tone.

“I don’t believe it. I assure you it’s quite her own doings—quite.” And the amiable Miss Braginton raised her voice insistingly. “George Lambert’s father, and the family generally, are quite furious about her: say she neglected him, running after all sorts of excitement. We all know when the Buffs were here she never missed a thing that was going. She quite neglected the man, and he has taken to drink in consequence.”

“It’s rather hard on her to say that, now—don’t you think so, Blanche?” put in the frisky matron, who owned a scampish husband too. A vicious toss of the head was the only notice vouchsafed by Miss Braginton.

“You were a great friend of hers. I thought, Blanche?”

This question came from a tall blonde woman, dressed, as blondes will dress, with a quantity of pale blue about her head and throat; her round cold blue eyes, with lashes and eyebrows of the same whitey yellow as her hair, were turned full on the corner honoured by Miss Braginton’s presence.

But she got no answer; for that lady, whose versatility equalled her ill-nature, had gone down to the tea table to see who the little girl was who was busy pouring out tea alone, and engaged speedily in conversation with her.

“Mrs. De Lancier, won’t you have a cup? Do—just one! Nellie!” called the hostess, taking the cup from the lady in the low chair.

She was a Frenchified, stylish looking little dame, with a head of dyed hair.

“Were you at the Castle on Tuesday evening?”

“Oh yes; I can’t say I enjoyed myself, though. I was paired off with that dreadful old Tubbs, the Q.C. Stupid creature! I do hate Buzfuzes. I never spoke to him all dinner-time. Really, only we are obliged to go there, I’d prefer staying away. They do manage things so badly.”

“I have heard,” began Miss O’Hegarty in a very grave tone, “that they have given great offence there latterly, being so careless about their arrangements. I’m sure in Lord ——’s time—(he went in, you know, for being popular, and all that sort of thing, lugging up all description of rubbish to the Castle, and being that polite and affable to them)—people were greatly annoyed by his going on that way. Just as if everybody was alike and equal in Ireland! At one of the private dinners, sending Solfa, that musician man, you know, down with Miss Sheedy of Castle Sheedy! And it wasn’t that he did not know, either. There never was a dinner in his time that there wasn’t a rumpus after it on account of the precedence. All just to make himself popular.”

“They have no business,” began Mrs. Bursford, turning the Castle into a scramble of that kind. It’s most insulting to the Conservative aristocracy here.”

“I assure you,” rejoined the hostess, “the drawing-rooms are the very same, if not worse. The Chamberlains must be perfect nonentities; they allow tradespeople of all sorts in; no distinction is observed at all. Really, in London you are safe not to meet that sort of mud. But here, I am told, when the people themselves don’t go—these traders and shopkeepers, I mean—they send their daughters, chaperoned by some city celebrity, nobody inquires about them at all, and so the place becomes the insufferable ‘omnium gatherum’ it is.”

A general murmur of indignant assent filled the room, now pretty well stocked with Dorothy’s *habitués*. Nellie was busy at the tea-table, but not so busy that she could not catch the substance of what was being said. She was more amused than edified at the airs of the ladies. There was something unreal and artificial about them, polished and refined of manner and appearance as they all were. And knowing as she did the relationship between the Bursfords and Bragintons, she could not help noting and being shocked at their ill-concealed hostility to each other.

“Ah!” said Mrs. Bursford, “in London it really is different. By-the-bye, Mrs. Hepenstall, did you see anything of Lady Dacres in London?”

“Er—no. In London it is so hard to see people. They were at their place in Leicestershire. It is really so difficult to see people in London!” Mrs. Hepenstall clearly did not like the question.

“Ah! yes; I should think so,” put in Mrs. Dillon. “What an income one requires to live there! Now, when Mr. Dillon was in Parliament——”

“When Mr. Dillon was in Parliament” seemed to be the signal for a general rally of the listeners’ forces in opposition to the reminiscences connected with that halcyon time. Miss Braginton threw herself into the fray.

“But it certainly is cheaper to live there than here,” cried she with a sudden burst.

“The necessaries of life may be a little cheaper,” said Miss O’Hegarty dogmatically; “but house-rent alone is quite an income. My friend Lady Brooker: her house in—ah, what was the name of it? some terrace in Hyde Park—was over six hundred a year.”

The little yellow-haired lady looked up from her tea and the Carlsbad wafer she was nibbling.

“My dear Miss O’Hegarty, we are not all Lady Brookers. There are cheaper parts of London than Hyde Park. It is only the nobility or very rich people who live in the Kensington or Hyde Park quarters.”

“Mercy, yes, Mrs. De Lancier! I know you can get houses cheaper in London than you can in any part of Dublin; but in places you couldn’t live in. You would be out of society, quite.”

“You lived in Belsize Park, now, Mrs. De Lancier.”

This was from the second Braginton; but the hostess adroitly shelved the question of topography by turning to Nellie and ordering her to play for the assemblage.

Miss Davoren began a brilliant drawing-room piece, and conversation went on with renewed vigour.

“In London there are twice as many sets and ranks of society as in Dublin.” Miss Braginton was determined to keep to the subject.

“But, excuse me, dear Miss Braginton, we make distinctions here that they do not in London. Rich tradesfolk cannot get into society here, as there, on the mere strength of their money. We value position and family far more on this side of the water. Doctors hold a better position here—how it came to be so I cannot tell—than in England.”

“And then professionals are the aristocracy of Dublin,” said Miss Bursford. “On the whole, I think they are in a better set here too.”

“I don’t think so,” said the little Mrs. De Lancier, with something of a huffy air. “We went into an excellent set in England, and we met professionals in every house.” And she went away with quite a savage look at the Bragintons.

“I hope Mrs. De Lancier isn’t put out, now,” said Miss O’Hegarty, a little anxiously, looking at Mrs. Bursford as she spoke.

“Her father was an eminent doctor in England,” hastily replied Miss Braginton; “and the mother married a second time—Lieutenant-General Anstruther.”

“Oh, ho! If I’d thought that, I’d never have said a word. What a stylish person she is—and so young! Well, since she’s English, I’m not altogether sorry she got a knock. I never could endure English people.”

“Can’t you, now, Miss O’Hegarty?” rejoined Miss Braginton. “So many of our relations are pure English. I assure you we are quite fond of them.”

Miss O’Hegarty had one invaluable talent. No matter how grave a conversational *contretemps* might be, whether she had caused it or not, her imperturbability was unequalled. In truth, she seemed rather to court them than otherwise, and dearly loved to administer a good snub or “taking down” when a fair chance offered. On this occasion she looked coolly at the speaker, and noting the glitter of her beady black eyes and the somewhat defiant pose of her head, answered in the same tone—

“I am glad to hear you say so. You have a reason, to be sure, for feeling well disposed towards them; but, for myself, my prejudices are of too old standing.”

Nellie, now freed from her duties, covered up her teapots in huge cosies, and coming up to the circle gathered near the fire, seated herself in the velvet chair left vacant by the little Englishwoman.

“I never cared for English people either,” said Diana Bursford; “and I am sure on the Continent they are so hated. You see them there to perfection.”

“I have known them upset a whole hotel in the middle of the night to look for a bag or umbrella. There wasn’t a row at the Kater Saisons last year but what they made.” Miss O’Hegarty laid her knitting on her lap. “Don’t you recollect, Emma,” she continued, turning to Mrs. Bursford, “at Ghent, when poor Maria Gordon was lying so ill at the hotel there,—dying, positively—and at eleven o’clock one night there arrived in an English family? They were told there was a lady upstairs very dangerously ill; and the first inquiry was, of course, as to its being infectious. No; the landlord assured them, it wasn’t infectious; but would they please not to make a noise? Upstairs they stormed, calling and shouting and tumbling boxes about. They woke me at the far end of the corridor, and up I jumped and gave them such a talking to. They quieted down when I got the landlady to threaten to turn them out of the house: even that would not keep them quiet. Next morning, at five o’clock, we heard a voice roaring down the corridor—‘My bawth. I want a large bawth of cold wataw. I could not exist without a cold bawth ewevy morning.’ John Gordon ran past the wretch, and called into Maria’s room, ‘My dear, I hope you’re not disturbed. It’s only one of these Cook’s tourists

trying to get up a row on his own account.' We heard no more of the bath, I assure you."

"Well, I don't dislike them, indeed," said Mrs. Hepenstall; "but it is quite true that they are very rude to foreigners at the hotels. I sat next a nice Prussian family at the table d'hôte at Gratz; and the lady told me she would sit beside an English family for twenty years, and never address them, for they either do insult, or have the reputation of insulting, every stranger who addresses them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bursford; "and after all it may be some English cheesemongers who are giving themselves all these airs, and they are never done talking of themselves and their belongings. First what I eat, what I do, *my stick, my dog.*"

"I have noticed that," said Mrs. Dillon. "I went over to Paris to bring home Katharine from school, and a lady picked up with me on the boat. All the way up to Paris she talked of nothing but herself, her family and affairs; and at the end she gave me her card, and asked me to call upon her. 'Wednesday was her at-home day: wouldn't I come?' I just said, 'Thanks exceedingly; but—ah—you forget I have not even told you my name.'"

Miss Braginton and her sister took their leave now, and the remainder of the visitors drew up their chairs in order to fill up the gap.

The hostess looked around her. "I really think, Miss Diana, you might give us a song it is such a time since I have heard you. Come along now, do!"

She led Miss Bursford over to the piano. As that lady was untying her strings, she whispered to Dorothy, "Who is that pretty, quiet little thing sitting over there?"

"A cousin of mine, my dear."

"Very pretty indeed—very," returned Diana, glancing approvingly at Nellie. "How old might she be, now?"

"Oh, nineteen or so: scarcely nineteen."

"Is that all? Really, now, I'd have said she was twenty-two or twenty-three."

"Humph!" returned Dorothy drily, "I fancy she looks her own age exactly; just like everybody else."

Then she returned to her guests at the fireplace, leaving Miss Bursford to sing that patriotic ballad, "The Wearing of the Green."

"Just like her!" thought Dorothy, rather amused, as she resumed her seat. "She'd make everybody out to look older than they really are; I suppose in the hope to get credit for the same herself. Augh!"

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Dillon: "'The Wearing of the Green.' Why, we are becoming Fenians altogether!"

"It's quite the rage just now," said Mrs. Bursford. "Everybody has got it."

"Tell me now, Mrs. Bursford," began Miss O'Hegarty, leaning forward and speaking in a low confidential tone, "what's this I hear about Miss Blanche and the O'Gorman Mulcahy? She was saying Hanaper and Diesele—eh?"

Miss Braginton was a young lady who, owing to a variety of reasons, had been rather long on hand; longer a good deal than her cousin the blonde, Diana Bursford; and between the two there had always been rivalry and jealousy. Blanche Braginton had played a trick or two in days gone by on Diana, which would never be forgiven her, the chief of which was in this wise.

Diana's fortune was only three thousand pounds, and this sum had been magnified into five by judicious puffing, after the usual custom in Ireland—a veritable land of promise, as far as figures go. There had been seven or eight years ago an Honourable Captain Vesey, who had paid marked attention to Miss Bursford, and who, it was thought, but for some mischief maker, would have married her. Who this mischief maker was had never been openly declared; but the mother of the young lady, after seeing Vesey and Blanche for some time *tete-a-tete* in an ice-room at a Chief Secretary's ball, made up her mind as to the delinquent. Nothing could be proved. Vesey was an embarrassed man, and went to Abyssinia. All his friends declared there never had been anything in it; Diana's complexion quite went off, and she and her mother left for Italy. It was no use attempting open hostilities—the cousins were in the same set; but all the same the offence was never forgotten; and Mrs. Bursford found many opportunities of revenge.

One peculiarity of the amiable Miss Braginton was that she always fancied herself to be the recipient of matrimonial overtures from one or more eligible parties. According to the lady herself, settlements were

eternally in process of being drawn up; but at the last moment the papa or sister interposed, and "the thing was off."

On all these histories Aunt Bursford cast scornful incredulity. Nothing was more amusing to their respective friends than to hear Miss Blanche's accounts, and then to witness the methodical way in which her aunt would sit down and flatly contradict and ridicule every one of her statements. Certainly, for the few months the Brayheads patronized Dublin, Blanche's "engagements," thanks to her aunt Bursford, were the stock diversion of her set.

Mrs. Bursford's eyes kindled, and she shook herself together in her chair. "The O'Gorman Mulcahy! Trash and nonsense! Miss O'Hegarty, how can you imagine for an instant there is anything in it? A man with grandchildren, and mortgaged to the chin. I have no patience with the Bragintons——"

"Mamma," interposed Mrs. Bursford's daughter, who had finished her song and had returned to her chair; "we don't know,—there may be something in it."

"Now, Diana, don't be absurd; were we not at Hanaper and Diesele's this very morning? and do you suppose for an instant they would know anything of this and not tell us? O'Gorman Mulcahy indeed!—as if he had not enough encumbrances without taking home a penniless old woman! Blanche is nothing else." Mrs. Bursford emphasized this statement with a glance at Mrs. Dillon, who she guessed would carry the intelligence to the Mulcahy family, as she was on visiting terms with them.

"How late you are, dear Mrs. O'Hara!" and the hostess welcomed a lady accompanied by two blooming girls—Galway beauties, in town for the season. Nellie dear, take these young ladies down there, and see if you have a cup of tea for them."

"You are up for a good while this time, I hope, Mrs. O'Hara," said handsome Mrs. Hepenstall. "You must excuse me: we dine at the Chief Justice's to-night." Some of the others followed; and the Bursfords and the last arrivals were almost the only ones left. Peter lighted the chandelier, and drawing the curtains, shut out the cheerless grey evening. The room looked all the brighter and better, and the fine red cheeks of the O'Hara girls glowed in the clear light of the wax candles.

“What kept you so late, Mrs. O’Hara? and where were you this long time?”

“Shopping, my dear Miss O’Hegarty, for the Cattle Show; buying no end of things.”

“Getting everything into campaigning order, hey, Peggy?” cried Miss O’Hegarty, with a meaning nod. “Look out for the Brazilian: he is to be there. How uncommonly well they look, to be sure!” she added, turning to the mother.

“Well, I’m sure it’s something to hear of a catch like that,” said Mrs. Bursford; “it’s not every day Dublin can boast of such *partis*.”

“Quite true,” assented the Galway matron, with a sigh; “and Dublin is that overdone with girls now, I’m sure if they would only make up their minds to it, they would do far better in the country. *I* never saw Dublin till I was married.”

“I never saw it either,” said Mrs. Bursford. “And tell me, Mrs. O’Hara, is this South American really substantial, now? For myself, I prefer something on the spot—it is much more satisfactory, you know.”

“I agree with you there,” said the hostess; “but indeed times are changed; young ladies can’t be picking and choosing now, as they did when I was a girl.” And the veteran gave a twitch to her cap-strings.

“Indeed they are, Miss O’Hegarty,” assented her compeers.

“She must have picked and chosen with a vengeance,” murmured the second O’Hara girl, a saucy, black-eyed thing, not quite eighteen.

“Well, I declare!” said Mrs. Bursford, “there are no *partis* now. This new arrival, they say, has a——” (dropping her voice discreetly) “well, a tale—fact—not safe at all. Mrs. Soames had a letter from her son, warning her not to allow the Soames’ girls to have anything to say to him. He wouldn’t say why. Men never do tell on each other, you know.”

“Dear, dear!” said Miss O’Hegarty; “there’s not a good match in the market, I do declare. There’s that Saltasche man, to be sure; I’m sure the conceit of him is wonderful.”

“Oh, he’s not to be caught!” cried Mrs. O’Hara; “that fellow won’t marry, take my word for it. His game is playing up to high society. He can’t marry there; and if he marries in his own set, he will have to give up his aristocratic tastes. But he’ll never be caught.”

“I daresay not. I can fancy his sort from what I’ve heard of him; and most likely the wretch is married to his cook on the sly.”

“I fancied,” said Mrs. O’Hara, “that last year he was paying great attention to one of those Fitzharmons of Coolmagrah—cousins of your friend Mrs. Dillon.”

“Oh yes, mamma,” said Miss Bursford. “Don’t you recollect our seeing them all together at Ostend? They had lost a boat, or missed a train, and there they were sitting on top of their trunks.”

“Don’t I remember it? There were a whole crowd of people; and the Fitzharmons had drawn up their trunks, and were perched on top of them, eating biscuits and talking of the ‘Cawstle’ at the pitch of their voices. They had Mr. Saltasche with them—most devoted, to all appearance. The boasting and bragging of those Fitzharmons, it was really sickening!”

“Now, really,” said Mrs. O’Hara, not without a touch of dry humour in her voice, “I thought it was only the English who went on like that abroad, Mrs. Bursford.”

“Indeed, then, I assure you,” rejoined Miss O’Hegarty, “wherever you hear loud boasting and bragging on the Continent, be sure our countrymen are not far off.”

“Even so, now,” maintained Mrs. Bursford, “they never are in the upsetting, dogmatic style of the English: besides, Miss O’Hegarty, the Irish you mean are those would-be English that are always talking of their Norman blood, and would not be Irish *in* Ireland for any consideration. I know them. When they go to England they change their tone, then it’s *Ipsis Hibernis Hiberniores*, more Irish than the Irish, with them.”

“They want to be Irish aristocracy over there, you may be sure; and so well they may, for it’s the only feather in their cap, once they’re across the water.” And Miss O’Hegarty gave her head an emphatic shake. “And this Mr. Saltasche was doing the civil to the Fitzharmons, you say, Mrs. Bursford?”

“Well, I don’t see,” said Diana Bursford, “why Mr. Saltasche should be attentive to those Coolmagrah people, since he has the *entrée* of the houses of people of rank—as we know he has.”

“Ah! my dear,” said Dorothy, “they have business relations together; that’s the reason of the intimacy—if intimacy there be—between him and Lord Brayhead.”

“Intimacy! Miss O’Hegarty. Why, he is a great personal friend of the family. We are to meet him at Brayhead House this day fortnight, and their Excellencies are to be there.” And Miss Diana Bursford looked all round her with an air of superiority.

“Ah!—a dinner. Anybody in the evening?” asked Miss O’Hegarty.

“No,” hastily interpolated Mrs. Dillon—who, though ostensibly engaged in confidential conversation with an old lady on the sofa, lost not a syllable of what was being said, and seized the opportunity to show off to her country neighbour, Mrs. O’Hara, that she was in such a good set—“nobody in the evening. We’re—er—(this was drawled out with an air of affected indifference)—“thinking of going.” She would have died sooner than have missed the dinner, and was only asked by the Brayheads because of a coming election in their county.

“We met Lord Brayhead to-day, he was talking in the office with Mr. Saltasche and that young barrister, his friend Mr.—ah—ah—O’Rooney—Hogan,” said Diana Bursford.

A teacup crashed into its saucer at the other end of the room, where the young girls were together.

“It is not broken, Cousin Dorothy,” said Nellie, with a perceptible tremor in her voice.

Impelled by some sudden and irresistible impulse, the girl rose from her place and advanced to the group at the fire. She passed round the back of Miss O’Hegarty’s chair under pretext of ringing the bell.

“O’Rooney Hogan,” repeated her cousin, trying to remember where she had heard the name before. “R. C., I imagine?”

“Yes,” said Miss Bursford; “his uncle is a Bishop, I believe.”

“Bishop—hey? R. C. Bishops don’t count for much. They’re useful relatives, though,” returned the old lady, flashing a keen look over her spectacles at Diana.

Mrs. Bursford took out her watch. “Positively six, my dear Diana. Good-bye, Miss O’Hegarty.” In a minute or two the room was emptied of the visitors. Miss O’Hegarty took off her spectacles and wiped them, then rose from her chair and yawned.

“Well, Nellie, how did you like them? Tired, eh?” Nellie was pale, and she was looking thoughtfully into the fire. “Do you like your own people best?”

Nellie only smiled in answer; her thoughts were busy with the tall Diana Bursford and Mr. Saltasche. To think of Mr. Hogan knowing these two people!

“Miss Bursford is handsome; and so stylish!” she said.

“Hum—she was better looking. Those blondes fade so. She’s a long time on hand now, and would take any one, I do believe. She is quite tired of trapesing about. Bless me—! Harrogate, Brighton, Scarborough,—what hasn’t Emily Bursford tried for that girl? Poor Di.!” And the elderly lady smiled half maliciously. “It’s very hard for girls to get married in our set,” continued she, after a pause. “You can see what they are for yourself. Only for her cousins, Di. Bursford would have been married long before. One man to every hundred girls—I do believe that’s the proportion—and all the women devouring each other for the sake of him. It’s a frightful state of things. Look at those Bragintons: actually their own blood relations are not safe from them. There’s no such thing as friendship; even relations are not friends nowadays; one has only acquaintances. The struggle for existence has become too keen for it. Really,” said she, stooping down to caress a huge black cat which had just taken his place on the rug, “only it’s not my nature, I’d turn against society just as Toby does: he’s a misanthrope now, is Toby. Sweet old monster! I wonder did Peter give him any dinner?”

“Toby doesn’t care for any one,” returned Nellie absently.

“He’s a misanthrope, my dear,” said his owner, “he disappears from my afternoon teas, and never comes back till the last of the visitors is gone.”

Nellie now announced her intention of going home. Dorothy’s talk jarred upon her nerves, and made her feel fidgety; and she wanted to be alone to think over what she had heard. So she set off, escorted by Peter, and in about an hour’s time reached Church House. She crept up noiselessly to her mother, whom she found awake and uncomplaining. Mrs. Davoren was anxious to hear all the details of Dorothy’s entertainment. So Nellie related everything. The invalid heard her—listlessly enough. When she mentioned the Bursfords’ names, her face kindled a little, and her eyes dilated with a fixed bright look. She raised her head a little.

“The Bursfords? Yes. Ah! Emily hasn’t married her girl yet. Let me see, Diana is older than Jervis. Yes. She must be thirty-two or thirty-three at least. Was it seventeen or—or——?” But the light faded from the invalid’s eyes, the delicate flush paled on her thin cheeks, the memory had lapsed again, and she turned her face away with a petulant and drowsy expression. After a moment or two her eyes fell on Nellie’s brooch.

“Where did you get that, dear?” she asked, with a sudden return of interest.

“Oh, mamma,” cried Nellie, eagerly, “Dorothy gave it to me: and, mamma, she said you knew who gave it to her: Laurence Lentaigne. And she unpinned the little brooch, and put it in her mother’s hand.”

A bright flush passed quickly over Mrs. Davoren’s face, and as quickly faded again. She laid down the little oblong bit of gold with the rows of blackened pearls on its edges.

“Laurie Lentaigne!” she repeated. “I hope it won’t prove an unlucky gift, Nellie. Laurence Lentaigne was the name of the man who broke Dorothy’s heart nearly thirty years ago.”