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JOHN MCCORMACK

THE DIRECTOR

by

L. A. G. STRONG

THIRD EDITION



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TO
FRANK O'CONNOR

This story is entirely fictitious. It does not
Fefer to any actual persons or to any actual
attempt to make any film anywhere at any
time.

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THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
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I

EACH wave that rolled into the small sunlit bay seemed a movement of light rather than water. At first an iridescent surge, then wicked, spilling green, it foamed and fell in snowy rage, rushing and bounding, until it met the weight of the wave before, reeling back from the rocks. The impact was sheer anarchy; then the incoming wave won, and rushed forward again in hissing milky tongues. And everywhere light gleamed and dazzled; the wet rocks glistened; each tress of weed was a dangling glory.

The bay was too small to contain so much light. It flung light up at the sky, flung it south and west, flung it up its own steep huddled sides, and the light rose like smoke on the peat and moss and heather, softening as it rose, till it cleared the brow of the small headland and was lost in the June sky.

Down by the waters' edge, the light was so diffused that there were no shadows. Everything one saw was removed from the normal world. Whatever its texture, it was so irradiated, so saturated with light that it took on a new character and was alive with perpetual motion.

The light gave this new life to everything that belonged to the place. On the faces of the three intruders it had another effect. Their faces, as they stared fascinated at the turmoil, were reduced to a total blankness. The ceaseless movement of light gave their skins a crawling pallor, as of imminent dissolution: all expression and character had dissolved already. But for differences of shape, the three faces were indistinguishable.

For minutes the three men stared. Then one of them, crowned with a green velour hat, moved his lips.

'Boy! If only we had technicolour.'

The second face drew back its lips in a snarl.

'Technicolour! You would make it like the top of a cake. White icing, green angelica.'

The first man gave him a sideways glance. Then, realizing

that it was unprofitable to shout above the noise of the waves, the three turned, and climbed in silence. Small though the bay was, the noise was soon muffled by the moss and tufted heather that grew down to the rocks. A couple of minutes' climb, and the three men could speak in normal voices. Away from that jubilation of light, each face took on its own identity.

The man in the velour hat was shown to have a handsome face, academic in outline, with regular features. It seemed to be still under the influence of light reflected from water, smooth, unmarked, without the lines that should accompany the almost white hair revealed as he took off his hat. It could be the face of a lawyer, but it lacked the law's austerity; the face of a successful physician, yet a little too malleable, too opportunist: the face, perhaps, of an actor, who specialized in playing lawyers and physicians, but could be swiftly adapted to other parts.

The man who had contradicted him was still scowling. Many years younger, he was sallow, with a mop of dark curly hair which came down over his forehead. This, and his high Slav cheekbones, gave his face a simian twist.

The first man turned, and once more screwed up his eyes at the bay. He shook his head, and sighed. The other, knowing what he was going to say, barked at him angrily.

'Technicolour! this is a country of line, of movement, of energy. Of values.'

The gesture which accompanied each point, and a slight preciosity of speech, proclaimed the foreigner who speaks excellent English.

'Technicolour is an instrument of great subtlety,' the first man reproved him gently.

'It softens. It blurs. It makes weak. This has got to be a strong picture. Clear cut and strong.'

'You don't have to tell me what sort of a picture it's got to be.' There was no severity in the tone. It was musical and absent-minded. 'I'm seeing to that. All the same, a spot of technicolour would do wonders. A scene like this. Or a sunset over the sea.'

'A sunset! blood and blue-bag/

The third man looked a little anxiously from one to the other. He had written the story. He had had more than one disappointment in the past, and did not want another.

'If you'll come along over this little headland,' he said, 'I'll show you the place where Sean kills himself. Mind you, it's not the right sort of day to see it. You want a gloomy, overcast day.'

'Overcast. I wouldn't believe you ever get that sort of a day here.'

'You just wait. May be tomorrow, likely as not.'

He was sturdy, stocky, freckled, in his early thirties, with an ingenuous, countryman's face. You needed to be some time with him, or to be an unusually close observer, to see that his years in the city, his apprenticeship to a craft the modern world makes no easier, had edged a worldly knowledge beneath his first simplicity. John Reilly was not dishonest. With luck, he never would be. But he had lived for years by his pen: he had admitted compromise.

The three men climbed another hundred feet, and came into the wind, from which the slope had screened them. The first man stopped, and replaced his hat. He pinched it, and gave it a slant, as carefully as if he stood before the mirror of a hotel vestibule. Then he buttoned across his smart double-breasted light overcoat. His whole appearance was townish, and wildly inappropriate to the scene. Reilly wore tweeds, and the Russian a leather jacket, a bright crimson pullover, dirty pale brown corduroys, and sandals.

The leader hummed pleasantly, and looked about him.

'See the line of that island, Votty? We'll use that behind the two heads in 270-272.'

'What's that.'

'Where Rory and Shelagh talk. Before the smuggling scene. Sun go down behind there, John?'

'Not till September.'

Pity. We can't wait that long.'

'Fake it,' Votty sneered.

'There's not going to be any faking in this film. No, children. We're going right to nature. Pity, though, about that sun.' A note in his voice suggested that it was rather

unreasonable of the sun not to come to an agreement. 'Never mind, John. You leave it to Votty. He'll get a grand effect. See his work in *The Cabin?*'

'You asked him that question five times already. And each time he said no.'

'Did I? That's too bad. I must be getting absent-minded. Fact is, my mind's so full of John's story I can't think of anything else.'

John Reilly looked uncomfortable. He led on quickly to the next place. The ground became rocky and uneven. Reilly led the way confidently, from indications which could not be called a path, but suggested that, every once in a while, feet or little hooves followed the line of least resistance. As the three dipped and climbed and twisted, the caprice of the June day was intensified. The wind hit them hard, then, as thankfully they dipped again, it became a noise above their heads, unbelievable in the heat of a moist and fragrant hollow.

'Now,' the Russian said, with the satisfaction of one who sees his warning fulfilled, 'Paul will wish he had sensible shoes on his feet.'

'Do you know,' the first man replied, nimbly skirting a pool of dark peat water, 'you've touched on a remarkable fact of psychology. Either you know how to keep your feet dry, or you don't. I do. I always did. My brother Bob didn't. Look at women, Votty. They wear flimsy shoes, little openwork things with no strength at all. Yet—ever see a smartly dressed girl get her feet muddy? Never in your life. Girls walk daintily. They've got sense.'

'Smart girls don't walk in the mud.'

'They get caught in the rain. They're liable to an Act of God, same as anybody else.'

'Leda and the Swan.'

'You know I don't mean that sort of act.'

'Nor that sort of God,' Reilly suggested.

'My business is to take pictures,' said the Russian suddenly, for no apparent reason.

'And you shall. You shall take the greatest picture of the century. Hey! Hullo. Look at that. Look—at—that!'

They 1. ad come out on a tiny plateau, that tilted suddenly and revealed a sheer drop to the sea. The height was not great—maybe three hundred and fifty feet: but they had not realised that during the last quarter of an hour they had been slowly climbing, and the sudden drop took them by surprise. Moreover, as so often on that coast, the cliff was dramatic out of all proportion to its height. Narrowing his eyes, Paul could see it as the perfect stage for one of the most violent incidents in Reilly's story.

Reilly stood aside, with an air half bashful, half proprietary, like a parent whose child has brought off its parlour trick.

'I thought,' he began, trying to keep his mouth steady: but Paul interrupted him.

'Yeah,' he said. 'Yeah, Votty?'

The Russian made an indeterminate sound. His skilled eye was choosing points of vantage, placing his camera.

Paul said it for him. 'Yeah.' He turned to Reilly. 'O.K., John. Now we'll go and see Father Whatsisname.'

'Don't you want to see the cave where Peadar kept his still? And the sand where the fight was?'

'Not now. I'm convinced. You've convinced me. This is the spot for us. I kept an open mind all the way here. In fact, I don't mind telling you now, John, I thought the odds were we'd have to go home.'

'Have to—? Why?'

Paul smiled at his look of hurt bewilderment.

'Authors don't always know everything. A picture isn't the same as a book. Is it, Votty?'

'But,' Reilly objected. 'This is where the book was written. I used this country. I set each incident in a definite place I didn't invent an inch.'

'Doesn't mean a director mightn't find better places. A director who knows his business. More than once, I've had an author tell me I'd gone one better.'

'I believe you,' interjected the Russian sardonically.

Paul raised an eyebrow, smiled amicably, and jerked his head, calling on Reilly to be amused and to admire. Reilly was reassured. He realized that these were the terms on

which the pair co-operated, Votty caustic and scornful, and Paul receiving his sarcasms with affectionate delight, but getting his own way.

As he was thinking this, Paul clapped him on the back.

'You know your stuff, John. If all authors were as sensible as you——We'll go over it all before we start shooting. Right now, I want to see the priest. Father Me——what's he called?'

'McCubberty.'

'McCubberty. That's a queer name. I never heard that name before.'

'I did. There are some in Kildare.'

'Well—we've got to see him, and see him quick. And the minister. See what a lot I'm taking from you, John. By myself, I'd have gone first to the minister. Priests are reasonable, in my experience. It's ministers that are apt to go difficult.'

Reilly shook his head. 'Cartwright's the quiet, gentle sort. He likes the book, too. McCubberty will need careful handling. Besides, there are three times as many Catholics in the place.'

'That's an argument.' Paul stopped, extracted a toothpick, and used it. He sucked his teeth, cleaned the toothpick on a tuft of moss, and returned it to its case.

'Don't prick yourself with that,' the Russian advised him. 'You'd get tetanus.'

'Poppycock. You say McCubberty doesn't like the story?'

'Not a little bit.'

'Tell you so?'

'No. But I heard from several of the people here.'

'We'll talk to him. He'll see the good of his congregation. I never met any sort of priest or minister who thought bad of a bit of money coming into the parish. You two go ahead. I'll catch you up.'

'Think he was a girl, wouldn't you,' Votty said.

'You know, I'm worried. He doesn't realize the sort of opposition we may be up against. I can't get him to take it seriously. If he goes talking money to McCubberty, we'll go out on our ears.'

Pau.'s no fool. He can handle people. I've seen him finish a picture in the middle of three strikes. When no one else could get into a studio, let alone get anyone on the floor.'

'He's so optimistic. I've learned to distrust optimists.'

Votty showed his teeth. They were brilliant and even.

'Paul talks big, but he brings it off. You've got to hand it to him. He can—'

He stopped, as Paul rejoined them, humming a phrase from *La Traviata*. The sound was so musical that Reilly remarked on it. Paul clicked his tongue, and shook his head.

'No, no. You're kidding me. I used to be a singer, way back. Toured with Alma Gluck. And Paul Reimers. Then, one fall, I had laryngitis, and the voice went.'

'Paul's been everything, for about six months.' Evidently Votty repented of his recent tribute. 'He's got the start of half a dozen talents. He can draw one face—just one. Then he tells you he had to give up study because his mother was sick. He can make one good billiards shot—just one. Then he tells you how he was amateur champion, only he broke his arm. Next thing—'

Paul aimed a playful blow at him.

'Don't believe him, John. Don't believe him. He's always picking on me. It's a hobby with him.' Abruptly, he became serious. 'I want to get to the priest and the minister. Right away, before there's any gossip. I want them to be the first to hear, straight from me. That's why I didn't let on a word in the hotel. That's why I had the rooms booked in your name, John. They mightn't know mine—all right, Votty. Save the crack. I'm taking no chances. It'd never do for these reverend gentlemen to hear of our plans at second hand. No, sir. We just wade right in, and get their support.' He put an arm round Reilly's shoulders. 'John here doesn't believe I shall get it. He doesn't trust me. Do you, John? Take it easy. Trust your Uncle Paul. You'll see.'

II

A SQUARE granite house of surpassing ugliness, the Presbytery faced the sea. At the end of the long, straggling village, it was surrounded on three sides by a tall hedge of glossy laurel, which left the front open, and, joined with its small windows, gave it the appearance of staring with bleak and short-sighted hostility from a lair. A metal gate admitted one to a drive of pink gravel, which bisected a close-cropped lawn, and led straight to the door. In some extraordinary way, the house managed to convey that it had been built expensively and from the best materials; but they had been put together with such ferocious bad taste, such active dislike of grace in line or colour, as to be a slap in the face to anyone who came upon it suddenly.

The visitors, turning a corner of the laurel hedge, received the full impact of the house. Paul's jaw dropped: he stared, and his expression changed from surprise to an incredulous amusement. The Russian gave a swift, indifferent scowl. Such a building would not figure in his film, and he therefore took no interest in it. Reilly had seen the place before. To him, it was a part of the scene.

'Boy.' Paul said. 'Boy!'

Reilly grinned nervously. He did not look forward to the interview.

'Ugly, isn't it? Most of them are, round here.'

'Ugly?' Paul viewed it with respect. 'It's epic. It's unbelievable. Who thought it up? I'd like to meet him.'

'It's a stock pattern, I think.'

'This is certainly a wonderful country. I must have a still of this place. Look—that roof: the way it comes down over the corner.'

'Don't stand pointing.' Reilly urged him. 'He won't like it, if he sees you.'

'I don't like his house. I don't like it a bit. Poor man. It's no wonder he's difficult. A bit warped. Votty—if *you* had to live in that house, wouldn't *you* be warped?'

The Russian did not think the question worth attention. Paul went on.

'Say. Look at the gravel, too. Well! Come on. Mustn't stand here all afternoon. We got work to do.'

Carefully setting his velour, he opened the gate, and walked up to the front door. Reilly followed, and the Russian, still scowling, sauntered behind him, on the extreme edge of the path as if dissociating himself from the call.

An iron bell pull hung down by the white painted door. Paul pulled it, and set up an immediate harsh clangour inside. A dog barked shrilly, ran to the door, sniffed underneath it, and went on barking, in angry paroxysms.

For a half minute or more, nothing happened but the sniffings and outcries of the dog. Then a woman's voice called reproof, and her shoes came rapping drily towards the door.

Paul turned to the others, with a smile of pure happiness.

'Lino,' he said. 'Can you beat it?'

The voice continued to scold the dog, and there was a rattle of bolts being undone. The dog gave two or three yaps of defiance, and retreated to the back of the hall, whence he continued to make isolated and staccato protests.

'Yes?'

The door opened so suddenly that they were unprepared. A woman of late middle age confronted them, thin, spectacled, with a dark moustache. Her cheeks and nose were congested with small red and purple veins.

'My name is Paul Deakin. I represent Python Films. These gentlemen are my colleagues.'

Neither smile nor tone had any softening effect. The eyes glittered suspiciously on each of the three, and came back to Paul.

'Yes?' she said again.

'We wished to see his Reverence for a few minutes. May we?'

'No.' She swallowed, and added, as if reluctant to mitigate the refusal, 'Father McCubberty is away.'

'Oh dear. Oh dear. That's too bad. I wished to see him particularly. On a very important matter.'

'He's away.'

'How soon will he be back?'

'Friday or Saturday.'

'I see. Thank you. Well——' he raised his hat again, and smiled charmingly upon her, 'we'll just have to come back on Friday or Saturday. So sorry to have troubled you. Good afternoon.'

'Good afternoon.'

They could feel her eyes on their backs as they walked to the gate. Paul turned as he opened it, and, seeing her still looking, took off his hat once more. She shut the door with a bang.

'Housekeeper?'

'Sister.'

'Fierce.' Paul shook his head. Tierce. We don't realize the saintly, ascetic lives these men lead. Living in a house like that, all bare and uncomfortable, with a sister like that to look after him. They certainly endure a lot for the spirit's sake.'

Reilly looked at him quickly, but he appeared to be quite serious. The expression on his face was one of mild wonder. Then he resumed his special preoccupations.

'That corner, with the tree, and those geese. That'd do for when they come back from church and meet Kate.'

Reilly flushed with pleasure.

'That's exactly where it did happen.'

'You don't say! Now—am I in *sympathy* with your script, or am I not. Votty—you heard that? You heard what I said to John? About this being the right place for them to meet Kate coming back from church?'

'I heard you,' the Russian said

'Well. Don't you think that a remarkable instance of sympathy with John's artistic intentions?'

'Remarkable.'

'Scram, Votty.' Paul was in excellent humour. 'I don't know what we're taking you around for, on these calls. You give a sour sort of look to the enterprise. Sort of let it down, socially and morally. I guess we'd better leave you outside, when we call on the minister. What do you say, John?'

'O.K. By me.' said the Russian.

'On the other hand, if we let him out of our sight, he'll go in the pub.'

'He will.' said Votty laconically.

'I guess we'd better keep him. Eh, John?'

Reilly murmured something, then tried to catch Votty's eye and wink at him. He was not yet attuned to Paul's note in badinage, and often felt ill at ease.

They walked through the village, attracting a great deal of covert attention. Anyone whom they passed Paul greeted cheerfully. He walked ahead of the others, hat in hand, looking about him with the liveliest interest, and calling on them in ringing tones to admire a variety of objects. A whitewashed cottage, with a tiny front garden full of stocks, drew from him loud cries of delight. The woman of the house peered, startled, from inside a window. Reilly felt his face hot.

'Paul. Be quiet. She'll hear you.'

'I want her to hear me.' He squatted down, and began to chirrup at a kitten which appeared in the doorway. It hesitated, its eyes yellow in the sunlight: then, to Reilly's surprise, it came trotting to the outstretched hand, and rubbed its head against it.

'There, sweetheart. There, sugar. Aren't you pretty? Aren't you cute? There, darling.'

He straightened up, went to the open door, and knocked.

'Anyone at home?'

There was a pause. He stood there, the kitten rubbing itself ecstatically against his leg, and knocked again.

'Is there no one in? Oh, good morning, ma'am. How do you do. You'll think it very forward of me: but I was passing with my two friends, and I just had to stop and admire your lovely little home. And the flowers. Do you tend them yourself? I think it's so good, when people who have to work hard still have time to stop and care for the beautiful things of life. I just felt I had to stop and say thank you.'

The woman stood staring at him during this speech. In the early thirties, she still had traces of good looks. A series

of thoughts were visible in her face. Scared at first, she next decided that her visitor was mad, but harmless. Then—Reilly, standing by in an agony of embarrassment, saw it happen—then some mysterious quality in the outlandishly-dressed stranger, the warmth of goodwill that came from him, reached to her, and compelled a feminine response to his praise and admiration. Paul was shaking her hand, holding it for a long time in his; his voice was filling her little doorway with resonant enthusiasm. Then, just at the right moment, before self-consciousness should come flooding back to her, he released her hand and stood away. A flush came to her face, her eyes softened: she murmured something. With a last smile and a flourish of his hat, Paul turned and joined the others.

They walked away in silence, Votty contemptuously withdrawn, Reilly in turmoil. He looked back over his shoulder, and saw the woman staring after them.

'We could use her in the sheep shearing scene.' Paul said. 'She drags her left leg a bit, but that wouldn't matter.' He hummed a phrase. 'Nothing like making a good impression.'

'Which is what you won't do, if you go barging into people's houses like that.'

'Nonsense. The Irish are a hospitable people. Especially in remote parts, like this.'

'That's right.' Votty said. 'Tell him about the Irish. He doesn't know. He's a Laplander.'

'Clever. John; don't mind him. I'll take all your knowledge of your own people, and respect it. Haven't I bought your story? Why else am I paying you to stay by me while we're shooting? Didn't I take your advice and go first to see the priest?'

'Yes, Paul. I know. And I do appreciate it. But these people—they may not understand your ways at first. Just go a bit easy to begin with, and give them time to get used to you.'

'John.' Paul stopped, and put an arm about his shoulders. 'I like you. We're great friends, and we're going to be greater. You're a mighty good judge of character. One only has to read your books to see that. But there are one

or two things you don't know about me yet. One is, I've got my own ways of handling people. That side of the business you'll have to leave to me. I've made pictures in scores of places. I've made 'em where I didn't know a word of the lingo. I've directed Arabs, Negroes, Bushmen, Fiji islanders—Votty was with me there: he'll tell you—and I never yet failed to make friends and get folks to do what I wanted. Now, you're sensitive, because you know these folk, and they know you. *You* couldn't act the way I do: they'd think you were drunk. But I don't belong here. I'm an exotic. I'm queer, anyhow. So leave me go my own way.'

It was persuasively, almost affectionately said, yet Reilly felt like a clumsy schoolboy who has been put in his place. He had, for the twentieth time, the uncomfortable feeling that Paul read his mind.

Then, abruptly, the arm left his shoulders, and Paul tripped on ahead. He opened his overcoat.

'It's not windy here,' he announced.

'Wind's behind us. That hill keeps it off.'

From a laneway ahead of them two small boys appeared, driving a donkey and foal. The foal, a graceful little creature on long spindly legs, suddenly decided to leave the party, and scampered stiffly up the road towards the three men. Laughing delightedly, Paul spread out his coat and waved his hat.

'Whoa, sweetheart. Whoa, sugar.'

With a foretaste of asinine cunning, the little beast headed straight for him, then, at the last moment, swerved expertly, and galloped past. But Reilly was not country-born for nothing. He had stepped up behind Paul, and the donkey, intent upon the flapping of coat and hat, did not see till too late the strong brown figure that darted from behind him and neatly collared it. Before it could do anything, it was lifted up bodily, and held in strong arms against a broad, tweedy chest. The little beast kicked, then realised that it was comfortable, and, with baby inconsequence, lay still and contented.

Paul was in ecstasies, caressing the donkey's cheek. It tossed its small fastidious head. He stood back, admiring it.

'Say—did you ever see such a cute little beast? We must have it in the picture. A shot of Oona with her arm around its neck, up on the headland.'

One of the small boys padded up, barefoot, grinning. Paul addressed him.

'You own the little donk? Where do you live?'

'We can get as many of these as we want,' John said. 'The place is full of them.'

'That so? Not as cute as this one, I'll bet.'

'Well,' John said, 'we'll find him again, all right.' He set the donkey down. The small boy took it by its tail and by an ear, and ran it off in the required direction. After a few steps he let it go, and gave it an affectionate slap on the behind. It kicked up its heels, and scampered to rejoin its mother.

Paul stood, shaking his head from side to side in delight. Then the three went on. John's self-respect was restored. He felt an absurd pride at having succeeded where Paul had failed. That Paul had at once taken charge of the incident merely amused him. Obviously, he would always do that. His whole technique and training would encourage him to let other people do the work for him, and then take the credit. Well, there was one thing he couldn't do. And, with this reflection, all the warmth of his liking for Paul returned.

Now they had come to the far end of the village, where the minister lived. Of later date than the Presbytery, the residence of the Reverend Mr. Cartwright had an advantage in situation and a slight, but very slight, advantage in appearance. It was an ugly house, by any standards, with a blank, staring front: but it stood on a small eminence, in the open, and its front lacked the suggestion of a malignant creature about to rush out from a thicket. It was also considerably larger, and its roominess, a nuisance in the winter, enabled Mr. Cartwright to augment his stipend in the summer months by letting a part of it to visitors.

The minister proved to be a tall, thin man of delicate appearance, so fair as to be almost an albino. His weak eyes blinked enquiringly on the trio: then they recognised Reilly, and his face was irradiated by a smile.

Before he could greet his acquaintance, however, Paul took charge.

'Mr. Cartwright? My name is Paul Deakin. I represent Python Films.'

'How do you do, Mr. Deakin.'

Tine, thank you. This is John Reilly, whom you know.'

'I know Mr. Reilly. Indeed. How are you, Mr. Reilly? It is a pleasure to see you here again.'

'And this is Paul Votitchenko, one of the best cameramen in the world. Soon he'll be *the* best, won't you, Votty? We call him Votty, because his first name and mine are the same.'

'How do you do, Mr. Votitchenko.'

There was quality in the man. His smile and handclasp had an unforced friendliness. He gave each person his full attention as he spoke to him. Then he turned again to John.

'Well, Mr. Reilly. I hope you have come to stay some time with us. Not like your last visit.'

John began 'Yes, I hope——' when Paul interrupted.

'Yes—he'll be here some time. We'll all be here some time.'

'Indeed. I am glad to hear it.'

'It's mighty nice of you to say that, Mr. Cartwright. It's a great relief to me personally. You see, the time we stay here very largely depends on you.'

'On me, Mr. Deakin?' The weak blue eyes opened wide. 'I don't quite understand.'

'You will, Mr. Cartwright, as soon as I tell you my business. Python Films, for whom I have the honour to work, is one of the largest motion picture corporations in the world. They have bought the rights in Mr. Reilly's great novel *Awaken the West*—he paused, as Cartwright turned to John with a beam of pleasure and congratulation—'and they have entrusted me with the direction of the picture. That is a very great honour, and a great privilege. I intend, if possible, to be worthy of it. Mr. Cartwright, I want to make this picture here, in the only place where it can fittingly be made: the place where it was conceived: the place that gave birth to it.' I want it to be a beautiful

picture, an honest picture, a great picture. I don't want any of the old hokum or the old ackamarackus.'

The minister blinked. His sensitive, slightly pendulous lips silently formed the syllables, and finding them too much, ended in a question.

'Ackamarackus. Slang for boloney. I don't want anything insincere or faked or meretricious about this picture. It has got to have the authentic truthful quality of John Reilly's story.'

Mr. Cartwright nodded at him and at John.

'And, in order to secure that truthfulness and that authenticity, I am going to do a very daring thing, Mr. Cartwright. I am going to make the picture with local players. Amateurs. Village people. I know, I know. You'll tell me it's been done before.'

The minister shook his head quickly.

'And here in Ireland. So, in a sense, it has. *Man of Aran*, for example. But not as I am going to do this story. No one, Mr. Cartwright—he leaned forward, and waved a finger under the minister's nose—'no one has yet filmed a dramatic story, a story that calls for comedy, tragedy, and the full gamut of human emotions, with local players—and made it box office. That is what we are going to do. That is the task we have set ourselves. We three are going to be the pioneers. We three. Writer, cameraman, director—what more do you want?'

Mr. Cartwright shook his head again.

Think of it. Think of the appeal. The real thing. Primitive story. Peasant players. Real fishermen — not Hollywood actors in jerseys and rubber boots. Think of the gain in truth, in sincerity, in authenticity. The life, as it is, shown by the people who live it. That's what we plan to do, Mr. Cartwright. And that is where you come in.'

'I?' Mr. Cartwright shot out his lips and started back. He looked, for the moment, like an alarmed camel. 'My dear Mr. Deakin—what have I to do with your project?'¹¹

'Everything, Mr. Cartwright.'

'I—but I don't——?'

"The success of the whole plan depends on whether we

can persuade the people to collaborate with us. If they refuse, we can do nothing. That is why we have come to you: to ask you to use your great influence in our behalf. If you approve, then your parishioners will follow your lead and help us.'

The minister flushed, and swallowed. He was opening his mouth to speak, when Paul went on.

'I know it is a lot to ask of you. I know too that it isn't just a personal thing which you can grant out of friendship to John here. No, sir. It is a matter of principle. You and I are men of principle. You, because of your sacred calling, and I—well, because my calling, though very, very different, entails artistic responsibilities, many sorts of responsibility; and because I happen to be made that way. I ask you to believe, that.'

Mr. Cartwright was only too happy to believe it,

'So, Mr. Cartwright, the first question I have to ask of you is—and, if your reply is negative, I shall go away at once, and not bother you any more: the first question I have to ask is, do you, as a minister of the gospel, approve the project? Wait—no—that's asking too much. Do you, as a minister of the gospel, see anything to *disapprove of* in the project I have laid before you?'

He gazed earnestly into the mild, studious face. The minister blinked, and shook his head.

'No, Mr. Deakin. No, I do not.'

Paul sat back, sighed loudly with relief, looked at the others, pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"Thank you, Mr. Cartwright. Thank you. That is a great load off my mind.'

To his surprise, Cartwright suddenly twinkled.

'Why, Mr. Deakin—did you imagine I was likely to disapprove?'

'No, no. Don't get me wrong. I examined the book honestly, from end to end, and I could not see anything to which a broadminded person could take exception. **But—**'

'But you could not be sure whether I was a broadminded person?'

Paul looked up, then heartily led the laugh against himself. 'You slipped over a fast one, there, Mr. Cartwright. *Touche*. You have the better of me. In any case, it's always a relief to get the O.K. at first hand.'

'Mr. Deakin.' The minister was serious again, and spoke with quiet authority. 'I do not wish you to receive a false impression. You must not, please, exaggerate my influence here. My congregation is small, and represents a small proportion of the people. Anything which my recommendation can do, anything I can say and do to help you, you are welcome to. But—again—do not expect too much. I think, in your generosity, you overrate the effect I may produce.'

'I don't think so, Mr. Cartwright. I don't think so. Now, having settled the spiritual side of the matter—by far the most important side—let us come to the material side. The making of this picture will bring to the village a very considerable prosperity.'

The minister nodded. 'I appreciate that.'

'You may not appreciate quite how much. The daily wages paid to the people chosen to play the parts will be generous. Accommodation will have to be found for a number of people, who will be here for two or three months.'

'Pardon me—I gathered you were going to use local actors?'

'One or two of the principals will have to be professionals. Not more. A couple of parts call for experience. But I wasn't thinking of actors. I meant the technicians. It takes a lot of apparatus to make a film, Mr. Cartwright. And the apparatus takes people to work it.'

'Yes. Yes, I see.'

'As I say, economically this will be a good thing for your parish.'

'Not only for my parish, Mr. Deakin. My flock is a minority here.'

'For the whole community, of course. I was thinking first of your parish, because I was talking to you.'

'And because you thought I would be thinking of it.' He

twinkled again. 'Well, I confess, you bring me good news. As a community, we are not too well off. A little prosperity will not do us any harm. I say, a little prosperity. You must not demoralize us, Mr. Deakin, you know.'

'Demoralize?' Paul was shocked. 'My dear Mr. Cartwright—if I had any such thought, would I be coming to you? Demoralize? Just the opposite. I am coming to you to ensure that we work through the right channels. I am coming to you to keep us on the right road: to safeguard the people.'

'You must not take me too literally, Mr. Deakin. I was having a little joke. Or, shall we say, I was only half in earnest. I am sure you have no sinister designs against my flock. If I thought you had, this conversation would have been over some time ago. No. Let me say, I very much appreciate your action in coming to see me. It is courteous and kindly.'

'And practical.' Paul said. 'Don't forget that. We need your help.'

'And practical.' The smile was wise and wholly kind. 'Well now: we understand each other.'

'Mr. Cartwright. I have talked about the material prosperity this work will bring; but I hope it will bring more than that. Have you a church hall?'

'Not of our own. We share the village hall, when anything of the kind is required. Why do you ask?'

'I believe very strongly in the cultural value of moving pictures. As an art form. As a broadener of life. As a civilizing medium. As an opener of new vistas and new horizons. I should like, subject to your approval, to bring up a screen and projector from the city, and to give free shows of worthwhile films, to be chosen and approved by you, once or twice a week.'

'That would be very good of you, Mr. Deakin. I am not sure that I would be competent to choose the films. In fact, I know I would not. I know next to nothing about them.'

'Well—I will choose the titles, and you shall approve.'

'I can with all confidence leave the matter to you. You would not, I am sure, introduce anything that could offend.'

'No.' Paul said. 'I'll play safe. I mean, I'll see that only the best and most worthwhile titles are imported.'

'Excuse me, Mr. Deakin. But have you seen Father McCubberty?'

'No. You're the first.'

'In that case, I would advise you to see him without delay. Before anyone who may have seen you come here can report the fact.'

Paul glanced swiftly at John.

'Just why do you say that, Mr. Cartwright?'

'Because, since he represents the great majority here, he will naturally feel he should have been consulted first. In fact—well—while I cannot, of course, suggest to you anything in the nature of deception, I do most earnestly suggest that you do not mention to him that you have been to see me first.'

'I won't deceive you, either, Mr. Cartwright. John here gave me the same advice. He said, see McCubberty first. I gave in, against my own inclination, and we went along: but he was away. So, you see, we can tell him we tried to see him first, and, if he doesn't like it, he's only himself to blame.'

Cartwright nodded, his eyes fixed on Paul.

'It is unfortunate that he is away. I am afraid that it will be impossible to conceal from him that you have been here: but keep it dark if you can.'

'I trust there is no enmity between you and Father McCubberty, Mr. Cartwright?'

'God forbid. Only—shall I say—the fact that I approve a project may not necessarily make an ideal recommendation for it to Father McCubberty. Remember, Mr. Deakin, my flock and I are a Protestant minority, a mere sect, in his eyes.' He smiled. 'Mr. Reilly was right. Father McCubberty should have come first. You have begun at the wrong end.'

'I don't believe it, Mr. Cartwright. The event bears me out, at any rate.'

'May I ask why you yourself would have come to me first, Mr. Deakin?'

Paul hesitated, then grinned engagingly.

'In my experience, there isn't much difficulty in getting Catholics to co-operate. It's the ministers who cut up tough.'

Cartwright laughed with sheer pleasure, and John joined in. Even Votty smiled sourly.

'You are very frank, Mr. Deakin. It does you credit. Well, well. I am glad to have proved an exception to your rule. I only hope Father McCubberty will not complete the picture by proving a second exception.'

'From all I hear about this McCubberty,' Paul said, 'he seems a tough proposition. However—don't cross your bridges before you come to them. We don't come to McCubberty till Friday. Say—isn't that sun on the water fine?' He got up, and went to the window. 'Marvellous! This is the most inspiring place I've been in, Mr. Cartwright'

'I am glad you find it so. It inspired Mr. Reilly.'

'It certainly did. You think it would be good to write a note to Father McCubberty? To say I called? And tell him about the picture? So's he won't feel left out?'

'It might be wise; yes.'

Til do it, and leave it in by hand. At once. Votty!

It came out so sharply that Cartwright jumped.

'Votty. 184. That thorn tree—the little strand back of it: the sea beyond: and the girl in the foreground. Could we get it?'

Votty slouched over to the window. His expression did not change, but Reilly saw his muscles go tense.

'We might. I can't see from here.'

'Let's go down. Mr. Cartwright—may we go through your garden? We want to look at something, Votty and me.'

'By all means, Mr. Deakin. Please.'

'Come on, Votty.'

He rushed out, Votty following, now professionally intent. Cartwright gazed after them. Then, with one accord, he and John crossed to the window. The pair were already in the garden, Paul excitedly gesticulating and pointing.

Cartwright turned to John.

'What a very remarkable man your friend is.'

'Isn't he?'¹ John made a grimace. 'I thought he was a mountebank at first.'

'So did I. But he is not. There is a real force in him. He is simple, too.'

'And complicated, I get a surprise every half hour I'm with him.'

'Yes. A very interesting character. Is he an American?'

'No. I thought he was, till I asked Votty. He's English really: but he's been all over the place, Hollywood, Canada, everywhere, and he speaks a sort of bastard mixture of everything.'

'The accent seemed to me American.'

'I think it suits him to keep to that. He says he's been there so long he's forgotten how to speak any other way. Votty says it isn't proper American at all. Only the sort you'd get out of a book, and all mixed up, at that. 'Coo, said the duke.' You know.'

Cartwright looked blank: then his face cleared.

'A confusion of idioms, you mean. I see. Well, I am too ignorant to detect that. He could impose on me at his pleasure.'

'Same here.' They watched the gesticulating figure. 'He does seem to know films, though! All his ideas—he's really got the spirit of the book better than I could have done it myself. And he's ready to listen to my ideas, too. Or Votty's. Or anyone's.'

'Yes. A formidable individual. Kind: but formidable.'

'Very simple, in some ways, mind you. Nai'f.'

'But of course. And all the more formidable for it.'

III

'NOW.' Paul said, as they approached the hotel, 'we get busy, and spill the beans.'

'How will you do it?'

'Get a crowd, and talk big.' Votty cut in, before Paul could reply.

Paul smirked.

'You boys leave that to me. John—what sort is the landlord?'

'Typical. I couldn't give you him in one sentence. Finger in every pie. Do anything for money. Board of Guardians, jiggery-pokery.'

'Just how I sized him up. But I wanted to be sure. You know these folk: I don't. Well—I guess we see him first, and get him on our side.'

'There won't be any trouble about that, once he's convinced it'll pay him.'

'Now: faces straight. Here we go on in, and demand an audience.'

Girvan's Hotel was a modern building: that is to say, it dated from about 1910. In appearance it favoured the blankness characteristic of local architecture. Square, like a large box, it had very soon proved too small for what promised to be a boom in summer holiday traffic, and by 1914 it had suffered several accretions, at one side and at the back. But, for some mysterious reason, subject of long and blasphemous speculation on the part of its proprietor and other interested persons, the decade that followed had not fulfilled this early promise, and the troublesome years at the end of it had dealt a blow from which the district never recovered. This was the harder to understand in that there had been little real trouble. Relatively few murders had occurred. Divergent loyalties had not been allowed to interfere with business. Brothers who fought on different sides had combined to fleece the visitor as naturally as to save the harvest, and there had been no serious shooting until the season was over: only an occasional token exchange, which the visitors seemed to enjoy, as it gave them something to talk about. And yet—the visitors did not come. At least, only a few. Some of the loveliest scenery in Ireland: bathing, boating, fishing: as the late Percy French had put it, what more could the quality want? No one in Dennistown could understand it.

The front door was open, but there was no sign of life. Paul strode into the hotel. The hallway had that appearance of being taken unawares, of not having recovered from the last occasion and not being ready for the next, which is characteristic of hotels in the country parts of Ireland. A

dustpan and brush lay on the floor by the hatstand, but there was no evidence that they had been used. Someone had laid down the remains of a meal on a small table at the side, and had forgotten to remove them. A door, which apparently led to the kitchen quarters, was swinging in the draught: every now and then it clapped, but not with sufficient force to shut it. The hatstand sported an old green hat and a raincoat covered with oilstains, so much a part of the scene that one could not believe they had been moved for years.

'Hey!' Paul cried. 'Anyone at home? Ring the front bell, Votty.'

'It doesn't work.'

'How d'you know?'

'John tried when we came.'

Paul pushed open the flapping door.

'Anyone in?'

There was a silence: then a red-haired girl appeared, with an air of surprise and a flush which suggested that she had been asleep. She had received them on their arrival. Inquiry had elicited that she kept the books, saw to the housekeeping, and was reputed to be the landlord's niece. This was borne out by the fact that her name was Judy Girvan: and they had already heard her reply to him in tones the asperity of which suggested a family connection.

The girl looked at them. She blinked, and rubbed an eyelid. Then, unwillingly, she smiled in answer to Paul's expansive beam.

'I'm afraid we've broken in on your rest time. I'm so sorry.'

'It's nothing. I was having a look at the paper. Were you wanting anything?'

'I want a word with Mr. Girvan.'

She hesitated. 'Is it important?'

'It is. Decidedly important. To me, and to him.'

A flash of suspicion went across her face. Her expression did not change, but at once she was on the defensive.

'I doubt if he can see you just now. Will it do a bit later?'

'I'd prefer it now, if it isn't asking too much.'

She looked at the trio from eyes that were at once expressionless and calculating.

'I'll tell him,' she said, and withdrew.

John pressed forward excitedly, and touched Paul's arm.

'Paul. For God's sake. If you talk that way, you'll get us all thrown out.'

'John. My dear John. Aren't you fancying things?'

Paul's voice was indulgent and gentle.

'Can't you see, if you go on like that, they'll think you're a policeman or some sort of government inspector? All these chaps have something to hide. With Girvan, it's probably spirits that haven't paid duty. You'll have scared him properly, and he'll hate you for it.'

For a moment Paul looked disconcerted. Then his face cleared.

'If he's had a scare, and then he finds he was wrong, he'll be so relieved he'll like us.'

'You see,' Votty said, 'he's always right. Paul Deakin: the man who never makes a mistake.'

'I make lots of mistakes,' Paul said complacently. 'And I'm always ready to admit them.'

'You mean you're willing to say it half a second before someone tells you.'

Paul smiled. There was a silence. Somewhere from the depths came a bumping sound.

'He's not in a hurry,' Paul said.

'Isn't he, though,' John said viciously. He was angry at having produced no impression when he knew he was in the right. 'He's bundling all his stuff safe away, and the girl's helping.'

Paul continued to smile. The smile said as plainly as any speech that those who thought they possessed special local knowledge must be humoured, however childish and absurd their contentions. John almost found himself wishing that the interview with Girvan might go wrong—though he would be the chief sufferer if it did.

Paul began to hum. He walked over to the one narrow window, tried to see if it would open, glanced at his fingertips, grimaced, looked around for something to wipe them on, then wiped them on his coat.

There was a shuffle, and Girvan appeared. His face was redder than usual, and he was breathing hard. John glanced at his hands, but they were dirty anyway.

If the landlord was annoyed or alarmed, he did not show it. His expression suggested neither hostility nor welcome: and, when he spoke, his voice had no colour beyond its natural huskiness.

'Well, gentlemen. What can I do for you?'

He looked from one to another, and his eyes finally came to rest on Paul.

Jeremiah Girvan was a powerful man of sixty or thereabouts, heavy, running to fat, but still a dangerous customer. His brow was low, his nose long and fleshy, his countenance purple. A straggling grey moustache partly hid his mouth; his jowl was decorated with two days' growth of whitish stubble. It was the face of a man who could be ruthless when occasion demanded, but whose life had run in grooves too petty to make many such demands. There was intelligence in the face—even though, at the moment, its owner had emptied it. The man had himself in strong control, but John realized that he was nervous.

Paul opened with a flourish.

'Mr. Girvan. I won't beat about the bush. I'll admit to you right away that we are not casual visitors. We're here on business.'

Girvan's eyes narrowed. He squinted slightly, and passed his tongue over his thick lower lip.

'I guessed that,' he said. He sent a swift glance left and right, and began to whistle. Suddenly he plunged forward. 'Here—what am I thinking of. Keeping yous all standing here in this place. Sure, I'm forgetting myself altogether. Come on in. Come in.'

He led the way into a small and evil-smelling cubby-hole. At the end of a narrow dark passage—they had to walk sideways, brushing against a row of fat coats that hung along the wall and projected half way across—the cubby-hole had a frosted glass window opposite the door, and a small window from which its occupant could watch the bar.

A large cat was sleeping on one of the chairs. Girvan

tipped her off, and removed a tin tray with a bottle and two glasses on it from a second chair. The third, a bald old horsehair contraption, was empty.

'I'll sit here.' said John, perching on a corner of the table.

'What'll you take, gentlemen?'

'Nothing, thanks. At least, not yet.' Paul said. 'Let's get to business first.'

Girvan's suspicions returned with a rush. He sat forward, on the edge of his chair, his short thighs wide apart on either side of his sagging belly

'Mr. Girvan: I'll come straight to the point. I represent Python Films. Mr. Reilly is an old friend: Mr. Votitchenko is my cameraman. We have come here to decide whether the country is suitable for the making of a picture which we have in mind. We've had a look round, and we've decided that, so far as the country goes, the place is ideal.'

Girvan nodded. He felt such immediate relief that he could hardly trust himself to speak: his agile mind, though still on its guard, was at once inspecting the new possibilities opened by what Paul had said.

'From the scenic point of view.' Paul went on, 'we have everything here that we need for making the picture. But there are other considerations. And that is where we need to consult you.'

Girvan's tongue once more crossed his lower lip.

'Would ye be wanting accommodation for a great number of persons?' he enquired.

'Not a great number. But an appreciable number: say, a dozen or so. You see, Mr. Girvan, we want to make this picture under special conditions.'

'Just so.'

'The making of a picture brings, you will appreciate, as a business man, very considerable prosperity to the district where it's made. In this case—providing all goes well—it will bring a great deal more. From that point of view, this is to be a very exceptional picture. (From other points of view too, of course.) But that's the point we're considering at the moment.'

Girvan nodded.

'The picture we are going to make is actually set here, in Dennistown. That is the scene of it. And when I tell you the story is by Mr. Reilly here, you won't need to hear much more. Now, Mr. Girvan. I want to make a real Irish picture in a real Irish setting. To do that, I'm not going to bring in a crowd of professional movie actors and actresses who've never seen Ireland in their lives. They wouldn't know how to play it: they'd make a travesty of it: the result would be false, untruthful, phoney.'

'You're right there,' Girvan said.

'I'm glad you agree. I felt sure you would. Now, Mr. Girvan, I'm going to do a very bold thing: a very bold thing indeed, but the only possible thing in the circumstances. I'm going to make this picture with local actors. With the people of this village and countryside. The story is about them, and about their lives. And I am going to let them make it.'

Girvan drew in a breath, and shook his head.

'I doubt you could do that. They wouldn't be fit. There's no great talent for actin' in these parts.'

'That's my headache, Mr. Girvan. I'll see to that. That is, if we can make the necessary arrangements. This is where you come in.'

Girvan glanced at John, then back at Paul.

'I beg your pardon. But you said the story was by Mr. Reilly. It wouldn't by any chance be the book he wrote on this place?'

'That very one. It was a best-seller here and in America. And I don't need telling you, Python Films regard it as a very important proposition. Very important indeed. They are prepared to spend a considerable sum of money upon it.'

'Do ye tell me that?'

'The moment I decided,' Paul swept on grandly, 'that this was the only place to make the picture—and, I may tell you, I was in favour at first of going to some better known place, nearer the city, with greater facilities; but Mr. Reilly persuaded me to come here and have a look, and how right he was! The moment I decided this was the place, I went immediately to visit Father McCubberty, and

Mr. Cartwright; and now I come straight to yourself. No one else has a notion of my plans, nor who I am, even. In business, it is important to go to the right man first.'

Girvan showed by a gleam that he appreciated this point; but he still looked dubious.

'If Father McCubberty gev his approval, o' course—Did ye tell him it was this book of Mr. Reilly's yez were goin' to make into a picture?'

'Unfortunately Father McCubberty was not at home. I'm leaving a letter for him, explaining very fully what I want to do, and asking for his support.'

Girvan grinned wryly. 'I'll be surprised if ye get it. Father McCubberty has no great liking for Mr. Reilly's book. He spoke against it very bitter when it came out.'

'Naturally, we shan't present the story exactly as it was in the book. For the purpose of the picture, several of the incidents have to be toned down.'

'It's a lot of tonin' down ye'll have to do, before ye'll please Father McCubberty.'

Paul raised his eyebrows. His manner was still perfectly cordial, but it was clear to the others that he was becoming irritated by the suggestion that he would not be able to get round the priest.

'I think you will find that Father McCubberty will be anxious to co-operate in a project that will bring so much prosperity to the parish. Mr. Cartwright approves, and has promised his full support. Lord Dunlucan approves. I spoke to him in Dublin only the other day. The minute he heard I was thinking of making a picture here, he said to me, 'Deakin, there's only one story for you to make there, and that's *Awaken the West*. He's offered to turn Dunlucan Castle over to us, if we want it.'

'Is that so.'

Reilly saw that Girvan was only pretending to be impressed. The landlord knew that nothing counted but the approval of the priest. But Paul, with his airy confidence, would not see it.

'So, you see, there is no reason why Father McCubberty should not co-operate. However, for the moment, we're not

concerned with him. The point is, will *you* co-operate?

Girvan eyed him cautiously.

'What is it you want me to do?'

'First of all, accommodation. There may be twelve of us. Yes. Say twelve.'

'For how long?'

'Two or three months.'

That'd cut all across the season. We have only a short season here.'

'How many can you put up?'

'Eighteen.'

'That's putting three or four to sleep outside.' Reilly said.

Girvan was not pleased. 'Aye,' he said.

'Very well. Now, what d'you reckon to take a week, in the season? What would compensate you for all your available space in the hotel?'

Girvan considered.

'In the season, with every bed full, I should take a matter **of eighty pound a week.'**

I ' i l p a y y o u a h u n d r e d , a n d g u a r a n t e e t e n w e e k s ,
option of another four weeks at the same figure. That fair? The extra is for any inconvenience you may suffer, in putting people off, and so on.'

Girvan licked his lip. 'I was thinkin' of that,' he said. 'There will be a loss of good will.'

'Loss of good will?' Paul exclaimed. 'That's a good one. Wait till you see what I'll do. Wait till you see the newsreel men down here, taking shots of the making of this picture, with Girvan's Hotel in the background. Do you realize that, as a result of this picture, Dennistown will be known all over the civilized world? Man alive—don't you see what a chance this is? Don't you see that the players we choose from here will become world famous? Are you, a shrewd business man like you, going to be left out of all this? *Loss of good will!*—Mr. Girvan, you make me laugh.'

He leaned forward, and waved a finger in the publican's face.

'If this picture goes through—if I am allowed to make it as I design to make it—Dennistown is going to be a different

place. The value of property here, the standard of living, the whole life is going to be different. A prosperity is coming to you here, a boom, beyond anything you can imagine. The photographs Mr. Votitchenko will take of your lovely scenery will make people come here, from Paris to San Francisco. Just do a simple calculation, in your own head. This picture will be shown to a million audiences. Suppose one person in each audience—no, you'll say that's too many, though I for my part don't think it's nearly enough—suppose one person in every hundred audiences decides to come here and see the place for himself—how are they to be accommodated? What openings will there be for a man of foresight to cope with that flood of visitors, to see that there is food and drink for them, and somewhere for them to sleep? And souvenirs to spend their money on? And tweeds to buy? Why, if I, as a stranger, can see it——'

Girvan was listening now with all his attention. He nodded slowly, his eyes on Paul.

'Yes,' he said. 'There's possibilities in what you say.'

'Possibilities! Certainties. Certainties, that is, if you give us your support and work with me. I believe in what I'm doing, but I'm not in this job for my health, any more than you are. You play ball with me, and I'll see you don't regret it. So. A hundred a week, then. But, mind, Mr. Girvan,' the tone had not changed, yet it was suddenly formidable, 'for that, I expect service. I require the unrestrained use of the entire hotel. I shan't interfere with your wine and spirit trade, down here. Let that go on as usual—or, as you'll find it, better than usual. Otherwise, I want first call on all service, and the full use of the house and all rooms, public and private. That right? Good. I'll write you a cheque for the first two weeks, straight away.'

He whisked out his cheque book, pulled out a gold mounted fountain pen, and began to write with a flourish. Reilly made a series of ineffective gestures.

'Do I make it out to you, or to the hotel?'

'To me, if you please. Jeremiah Girvan.' He stared with fascinated eyes. Sweat had appeared on his forehead and at the sides of his nose.

'Good. There you are, Mr. Girvan. I'd like a receipt, if you please.'

Girvan took the cheque. The whites of his eyes were showing. He stared for a few seconds, like a man in a dream. Then he pulled himself together.

'Receipt? Oh aye. I'll go and get it for you.'

The door had hardly closed behind him when Reilly burst out in an excited whisper.

'Paul—you're mad! he's cheating you hopelessly. He doesn't take anything like eighty pounds a week, I doubt if he takes forty.'

'Don't worry,' Votty told him. 'It's not his own money he's throwing away. It's only the company's.'

'Paul—for God's sake! Why didn't you ask me first? He's robbing you wholesale.'

Paul smiled tolerantly. 'Of course he's robbing me. I know that.'

'Don't you *care* ? Do you like to be robbed?'

'John—when you've been in this business as long as I have—Listen. This is the only hotel in miles, isn't it? Stay here, or stay nowhere?'

'You might get people put up in cottages, singly, here and there.'

'And lose a couple of hours every day collecting them and taking them back again. No, sir. We've got to get this landlord right on our side. But right on it. Once we start shooting, time's money. How if we had to turn out, half-way through, and lose days and days, or maybe have to start all over again some place else, because all the cottage accommodation was full up with the visitors we've been keeping out of here? No, John. In this business, penny wise is pound foolish. I'm going to let our friend here cheat, and cheat plenty. Provided he delivers the goods. No one's going to turn out a customer who not only pays good, but lets himself be cheated. No: money that goes getting everything sweet and hotsy-totsy is money well spent. Besides, if I make this picture too cheap, they'll reckon it's no good.'

'Now you're getting near the truth.' Votty said to John.

'Votty. You're a cynical heathen. If you weren't such a darned fine cameraman, I wouldn't expose John to the contamination of your society. Pff! he's coming back.'

Girvan came in. He still looked as if he was walking in his sleep.

'Here y'are.' he said, handing over a grubby paper. 'Here's the receipt. With a stamp. All in order.'

'Thank you.' Paul glanced at it, and put it in his pocket book. He beamed on Girvan. 'That's grand.'

'When will you be wanting the use o' the rooms?'

'As from to-day.'

'There's two visitors in it, yet, and one is comin' on Frida'. Only for the weekend. Will I stop him?'

'Not if it's only for the weekend. We won't fill up till Monday. But don't take in any more.'

'Whatever you say yourself.' Girvan grinned. 'You're in charge now. Will you take a drop o' something, gentlemen? To wet the bargain?'

'I always believe in conforming to local custom.'

'You're not telling me—' Girvan uncovered a ferocious jocosity—'that this is the only place where we do that.'

'No. No. I have encountered the custom on my travels.' Paul was smiling, tolerant but apart. 'A soft drink for me, please. I don't use alcohol.'

'Begod, you're wise. I wish I could say the same.'

'You don't like it?'

'I like it more than is good for me.'

It came unexpectedly from the gross, bloated publican. Paul gave his back a speculative glance, as he bent to pour the whisky.

'I'll fetch you yours, Mr. Deakin.' he said, over his shoulder. 'I don't keep that sort here.'

'Don't trouble.'

'No trouble. I'll call the gerrl.' He went to the door, and roared *Judy*. A bottle o' lemonade for Mr. Deakin. And a glass.'

He returned, and sat, fingering the base of his tumbler. It was clear that he did not know what to say next. What had happened was so far outside his calculations, so far

beyond the normal range of his avarice that it left him at a loss. He still could scarcely believe it; he feared that an unlucky word might shatter the dream.

There was a silence until the girl came in. She looked suspiciously from one to another. Reilly, watching her, saw a flicker of enquiry towards her uncle: but he would not meet her eye.

Paul rose chivalrously. She poured out the lemonade, and he took the glass from her.

'Thank you so much. I'm sorry to cause trouble.'

She smiled coldly and went out, with another glance at Girvan. The atmosphere of the room baffled her.

'Tine girl.' Paul said admiringly, as soon as she had gone.

'Aye. Will you be putting her in your picture?'

'I'll be putting nearly everyone in it, in one way or another.'

Girvan was on the track of further profit.

'There was an artis' here, last year, and he took a great fancy to the gerrl. Said she was a fine unusual type. He wanted for to make a paintin' of her.'

'If we were making the picture in colour, we couldn't miss that hair. Could we, Votty?'

Girvan knew better than to press a point.

'Well,' he said, lifting his glass, 'here's luck.' They drank, murmuring to one another. The occasion lacked cordiality. Votty sat, his shoulders hunched, looking into his glass and moodily rocking what it held. Paul sipped the lemonade, set the glass carefully aside, took out a lilac-tinted handkerchief and wiped his lips.

Girvan broke the silence. He seemed to overflow with a sinister cheerfulness.

'Well,' he said. 'And what will you be doing next?'

Paul affected to return from a distance and consider the question.

'I want to see a bit more of the country. Mr. Reilly tells me there's a harbour further down the coast.'

A gleam came into Girvan's eye.

'There is so,' he agreed.

"There's a big scene in the picture set there. We shall need a boat to come up. A steamboat."

'A steamboat?'

'Yes. Mr. Reilly tells me that it can be done at high tide.'

'Oh, Mr. Reilly knows. There isn't much about the place that Mr. Reilly doesn't know.'

That's evident. When is the next high tide? In the morning?'

'In about—aye—in about a week's time.'

'Can we hire a steamboat?'

'What size of a steamboat?'

'It's to represent the boat that used to come here before the railway.'

'Is it the *Arethusa*?'

'Yes,' John said,

'She's in it yet,' Girvan declared. 'In Kilbeggary. Didn't I see her the last time I was there.'

'Is she in use?'

'Ah, not at all. But she's floatin'.'

'Would it be possible to hire her, do you think?'

'It might. If th' engines aren't took out of her.'

'That mightn't matter.' Paul said quickly. 'We need a shot of her close to the pier, and the rest of the time she can be alongside. As long as she can float, she'll do us.'

'If you like to leave it to me, I'll see can I get her for you.'

'Splendid. Splendid. Mr. Girvan, I can see you're going to be a tower of strength. We've come to the right man. Next; automobiles. I'll want four. Two pounds a day, and ten shillings extra for the driver. Will you see to that for us? Good.'

'Some o' them might make more than that in a day, drivin' visitors.'

'Not every day. That's my figure. They can take it or leave it.'

'I'll see.' Girvan said.

Paul got up. 'Finish your drinks, boys. I want to go exploring. We've a lot to do,' he said to Girvan. 'I want to cast all the parts and start en Tuesday.'

'Begod, Mr. Deakin. Ye don't let the grass grow under your feet.'

'Not even the Irish grass.' He laughed heartily. 'Know that song—eh?'

"Not even th' Irish grass'. Oh, begod, that's a good one. I must tell them that in the bar to-night. 'Not even th' Irish grass.'"

They left to an accompaniment of hoarse chuckles, Girvan following them to the door and watching them a short way down the road. Then his expression changed, He went inside abruptly, and called in urgent tones for his niece.

Paul,' John said, 'why are you doing everything through Girvan? I told you before, he's a holy ruffian.'

'Because I want to commit him to the picture. If all the arrangements have to go through him, his friends will lynch him if he tries to back out.'

'Is that why you put him up to all that stuff about house property, and catering for tourists?'

'You're beginning to see the way I go to work, John. Once these boys begin speculating, they're with us heart and soul. They've got to be, or they come down too.'

'In other words, you don't care what you start, and what hell you raise, so long as it suits your purpose.'

'It won't be me that raises hell round here. I want to do the place good, and make a swell picture.' He was looking about him. 'Can we see that harbour?'

'It's a couple of miles away.'

'Let's hire an auto, and see one or two other things on the way.'

'Nothing else is on the way.'

'Well, let's drive for the fun of it. I want air, after that frowsy little office.'

'Paul. What do you make of Girvan?'

'I don't judge my fellow creatures, except in so far as they affect me or my work.'

'He may affect both.'

'Sure, he may. That's why I'm appealing to certain characteristics in him. If he plays ball, and does what I

want him to do, he'll deserve very well of us both, John.'

'That's not answering my question.'

The arm came round John's shoulders.

'Don't you worry about Girvan.' Just leave him to me. Now—did you ever see anything better than that?'

The wind had dropped, and the sea, still heavy, came in smooth glittering undulations towards the shore. The sun, still strong, made of the more distant water a dazzling belt of brightness: and each wave was a dark string drawn taut, that suddenly collapsed in gleaming disarray.

Paul stood on tiptoe, drawing in the air.

'I'm going to *enjoy* making this picture,' he proclaimed.

IV

HE was down early next morning, talking affably to all and sundry, rubbing his hands, sniffing the air, and exclaiming on the fineness of the day. After stupefying the kitchen with a request for a boiled egg shelled and served in a tea-cup—the cook had to be fetched in person so that this might be explained—he proceeded to eat it with a teaspoon and a finger of toast, while heads, awed at the portent, poked over and around the screen to watch him.

Votty, morose in the early morning, made no rejoinder to the pleasantries that rang around him, but solidified into a carven mask of disgust: and John, who could have sustained Paul's energy, was intimidated by Votty's patent loathing, and wondered how Paul could be so obtuse and remain unaffected. Reacting always to discord, he was in real discomfort.

Paul was a light breakfaster, and had soon finished. He jumped up, walked to the window, and after a struggle opened it. A great rush of sea air filled the room. The two guests to whom Girvan had referred, a young and spotty married couple, looked peevishly round.

'Glorious air.' Paul cried, in ringing tones. 'Now, boys—casting. We've a busy morning.'

'I don't move for half an hour after my breakfast.' Votty said. 'And I'm not done yet.'

Paul looked at him with affectionate commiseration.

'You're sluggish, Votty. Your liver doesn't work right. You know'—he came across—'you don't give yourself a chance. If you'd only treat your body right, you'd be up in the morning like a lark.'

The married couple, who not surprisingly had looked round, intercepted so vicious a scowl that they recoiled in their chairs. It had no effect on Paul.

'Look at John here. He's all bright and clear. He doesn't misuse his body.'

Votty's eye gleamed. 'You oughtn't to say that sort of thing in public.'

'Votty!' Paul flushed crimson. 'For Pete's sake——'

He glanced in horror at the visitors, and went quickly out of the room. With a sour grin, Votty poured himself out some more coffee. He tasted it, grimaced, and half-filled the cup with sugar.

'Huh.' he said to John, and jerked his head after Paul. 'He's as pious as hell.' He tried the coffee again, and stirred it gloomily.

'I told you you were rash to ask for it.' John smiled. 'Tea's much safer.'

'One hopes.' Votty said sadly. The breeze blew his napkin off the table. He winced. John picked it up.

'Shall I start out with him, while you have a rest?'

'No. For God's sake. Once you let him set the tempo, he'll wear you out. He'll need me, anyhow.'

'I'll go and keep him in check.'

'Um.' Votty piled butter and marmalade on a piece of toast, with the air of one who expects little.

John went out to the front of the hotel. As he got out, he heard the window shut, and looked through it into the red and disapproving face of the spotty husband. Of Paul there was no sign.

Though the breeze seemed strong again, the sea had gone

down. It gleamed silkily: only the slow tilt and the roar on the beach betrayed the swell that was still heaving itself shorewards—a swell that could crack a boat like a teacup and drag a hundred survivors to death with its undertow. John shivered. He knew how many hazards, natural as well as human, had to be overcome before the picture could be made. Working with Paul on the script, he had insisted on adding to each shot a precise account of the weather conditions under which it was to be taken, so that the notorious changeability of the climate should not delay the work, and they could revise their plans from day to day. The only scenes that could hang them up were those that required the old steamboat at the pier: and they would be by far the most expensive anyhow. John, who came of farming stock, and had had for years to watch every penny, felt his stomach go chill at the thought of the expense that might mount up. He could not yet accustom himself to Paul's contempt for money, any more than he could really believe in the sum that he was to pocket when the picture was completed. It was all down in the contract, in black and white. He had had his advance. But such things were too good to be true, after years of pulling the devil by the tail. His caution and his native humility forbade him to believe, and so, unable to ignore the black-and-white of the contract, he concentrated upon the difficulty of completing the picture, and told himself that he would never get the rest of the money. Paul was evidence on both sides. He inspired confidence, yet he talked big. John had not met anyone who both talked big and delivered the goods. He felt that anyone who needed to talk big must be a bluffer. Besides, some of the things Paul said were not true. Paul had described the book as a best seller. It had sold well on this side, and respectably in the States, but it certainly could not be called a best seller. But that was Paul's way. Everything to do with him had to be superlative. There were no half tones. He never said 'a friend of mine', nor, of a famous actress 'I know her.' It was always 'a very great friend of mine', or 'Daphne's an utter darling. We were in each other's pockets. In fact, the Hollywood columnists . . .'

John Reilly, my boy.' John said to himself, for the twentieth time, 'you've strayed into a very queer outfit, and you must just learn how to take it.'

'Take it' was not too strong a phrase. For John, quiet, no conversationalist except with those whom he trusted or when drink had made him cheerful, the effort to adapt himself to Paul and all Paul stood for meant a real nervous strain. He felt it in his stomach. It broke his sleep. He told himself a score of times how glad he would be when the business was over, and he could return to his own life, and lead it now, at long last, with serenity: yet he was lured by the golden insanity of this new world, with its rewards and its passports to strange acquaintance. Moralising his difficulties, he decided that he must overcome them, and that this was the latest hurdle life had set in his course.

As he stood thinking, and staring at the sea, Paul came gaily round the corner. His long hair waved in the breeze; he looked young and invincible.

'Hullo, John.' They might not have met for weeks. 'Here you are.'

John struggled with his inhibitions.

'Where've you been?' he got out.

'Round about. Sowing the good seed. Votty done yet?'

'He said half an hour.'

Paul peeped round the corner, winked at John, and beckoned to him. Votty was sitting on a seat behind the door, well out of the wind, smoking a cigarette and blinking liverishly at the paper of the day before. Paul took John's sleeve, and pulled him where Votty could hear them.

'I believe'—he spoke loudly—'we shall be able to cast Owen locally, after all. Between you and me, I'm not so struck on Terry for the part.'

John stared. 'But you said you needed at least one name——'

Paul put a finger to his lips and winked again.

'I don't see Terry fitting in with the local boys and girls. Fancies himself too much. If you and I can pick a real good masculine type——' He dug John in the ribs. 'Let's get along. We don't need to wait for Votty. He's not

so hot on casting. We'll get on faster without him. Now, if you and I can pick some real characteristic types——'

He broke off, and John, following his glance, saw Votty crunch the paper to a ball, furiously stub out his cigarette, and rise. He crossed the lounge, and bounded upstairs. Paul beamed.

'That'll fetch him.'

Paul hummed, and did a few dance steps.

Inside a minute, Votty re-appeared. He favoured Paul with a black scowl, rolled an eye seawards, and stood shivering.

Well?'

'You're never ready? I thought you were going to be half an hour yet.'

'I finished,' Votty said.

'Sure you're all set? I'd hate to hustle you.'

'Get on. It's cold.'

'Right.' Paul became brisk and businesslike. 'First, I'm going right down through the village. With an absolutely open mind. Then, we'll go and see the girl John thought of for Oona, and the man for Sean. We'll all keep an eye lifting. We'll make no promises to anyone, and settle nothing till we've had time to talk the whole thing over among ourselves. No actual casting to-day at all. Just a look around. What do you say, Votty?'

'So long as you keep to it.'

'Sure, I'll keep to it.'

'It'll be the first time.'

'Don't mind him, John. It's his temperament. He goes all broody before he makes a picture. I knew a cameraman in Hollywood—a swell cameraman: even you aren't as good yet, Votty: and before every picture, he sort of went wild and bit someone. Folks around the studio got terrible nervous till Jake had had his bite. Then he was sweet as pie, all the way along.'

'Maybe it'd be a good thing if I bit someone. Maybe then I'd make pictures as good as he did.'

'Instead of biting John's and my head off every time we

make a suggestion.' Paul laughed merrily. 'There might be something to it. Now—keep a good lookout. The character parts won't be any sort of trouble. We can get scores of old fishermen, and stacks of gnarled hands for Votty to shoot disentangling lines.'

'I want only one pair of hands, for tying the noose.'

'Well: watch out for them. You know what you want: But it's the straight parts that are going to be hard.'

'Do you call Ellen a straight part?' John asked him.

'Physically, yes. It's no harm to a picture to have a few good-looking girls around.'

'You said you didn't want pretty girls; you wanted character.'

'So I do. So I do. But a face doesn't have to be homely to have character.'

'No. But——'

'We can't leave out box-office *altogether*, John. I only wish we could.'

'You won't find anything very decorative here, by Hollywood standards.'

'If I had wanted them, I'd have gotten some. I wouldn't have hired Votty, either. He can't shoot pretty girls. He makes them look as if they'd been to Siberia or had the toothache. No, sir. I want character. If a face's got character, Votty'll find it. If it hasn't, he'll put it there.'

'They develop character sometimes, after Paul's directed them for a bit.'

'I reckon you mean that rude, Votty. But I take it as a compliment.'

'It's as near a compliment as you're likely to get.'

The exchanges had freshened Votty up. He looked sardonic, but awake. They were approaching the village now: a single street, which swerved off seawards into four or five small shops, making a cul-de-sac. The main road ran on, and the cul-de-sac ended abruptly at a small green or common, sacred to geese and donkeys, and bounded on the far side by the top of the strand.

'It beats me,' Paul observed, 'why the harbour is so far from the village.'

'You couldn't bring boats in here.'

'I get that, John. But why have the houses so far from the harbour?'

'I don't know. I expect the harbour came later. There was a lot of money spent, early in the century, putting harbours to villages. Half of them were no good. I think the idea was to employ labour and bring money into the district.'

'If that's the idea, we ought to go big here. We're bringing money into the district, and—hullo. It's working. Look.'

They were at the beginnings of the street. In the doorway of almost every cottage a girl stood, leaning self-consciously against the lintel, patting her hair, or gazing out to sea. Votty sneered. Alone of the three, he had seen a small boy catch sight of them, and scurry towards the houses, doubtless to give news of Paul's approach.

As they passed down the street, there were further manifestations. A rather pretty dark girl, her hair fluffed out and tied with a red ribbon, emerged from behind a cottage, leading a baby donkey. A scampering commotion broke out on their left, and an old man shooed two more donkeys out of a shed. A woman's head was poked round a wall, and yet another small donkey shot out, attached to two small boys, and spoiling by its wild recalcitrance the idyllic effect which had been intended.

As they went along, John felt his face get redder and redder. Most of the inhabitants seemed to be in the little street, and each one was behaving with a violent artificiality. The girls postured and moved mincingly. The older women were in their Sunday shawls, two had fetched out bonnets in an effort to appear townish and fashionable, and one wore a dolman. An old crone sat blinking by the side of a spinning wheel which John saw to be useless. A number of men were standing about sheepishly and staring at nothing, some with uncomfortable grins on their faces. There was by now a positive plague of donkeys, all advertising by their conduct that the present concentration was abnormal and distasteful to them. The nearest approach to natural behaviour came from the children. Their faces had been

scrubbed, and the feet of some of them crammed into stockings and boots, but their interest in Paul survived even these ordeals. Where everyone else was pretending to be unaware of his existence, they stared with owlish wonder.

Paul ignored it all. He kept straight along the road, not even glancing into the cul-de-sac—to the agitation of the girls from the shops. Once he loudly called Votty's attention to a weazened thorn, that leaned away at a frantic angle from the West: otherwise the entire scene and pantomime might not have existed.

As soon as they were out of earshot, John stepped close to him.

'I can't think what's come to them,' he said apologetically. 'This is all put on. They're not a bit like this, really.'

Paul gave a complacent smile. He tilted back his head and sniffed the tang of seaweed across the green.

'Folks always start to act that way when I come around.'

'I hope they won't go on.' There was dismay in John's voice.

'Don't worry, boy. I'll take care of that.' He turned, and surveyed the street as if it were empty. 'Where does the Sean live?'

'Back a bit. To the left.'

'Back we go.'

They started back, John bracing himself almost visibly. This time Paul raised his hat, and called cheery greetings right and left. The response was immediate. A chorus volleyed back, and the girls began to smile and make eyes openly.

'A lovely morning you have for us,' Paul exclaimed. 'You certainly treat your visitors well.'

Loud laughter greeted this. John writhed.

'Look at here, your honour, sir.'

It was the old man who had shooed out the donkeys. He hobbled up, holding one by its scanty mane.

'Sir, your honour. I hear tell ye're wantin' dunkeys for your picture.'

'You heard wrong.' Paul put a hand on the donkey's head. 'I only want one, and I chose it yesterday.'

The old man backed away a step. His mouth fell open, and he looked blankly at Paul as the three walked on. Paul was stopping now, and exchanging words with each of the girls. Charmed to be noticed, they smiled and sidled and answered in affected voices.

At last they were through the street. Without looking round, John could feel the eyes fixed on their backs, the crowd drawing together, the muttering, the chat, the jealousy among the girls.

'I'd never have believed Irish girls could behave that way.'

The words jumped out. He had not meant to say them aloud. Paul turned and smiled.

'You're too hard on them, John. You're not using your imagination. Those are nice girls, every one of them. Thoroughly nice, simple girls. Put yourself in their place—living here all the year round, seeing nobody, doing nothing, turning to the screen for the romance their own lives can't provide for them; and then comes this chance. The chance to get to Hollywood, act opposite the stars—that's how they see it: that's the hope at the back of their minds: romance, luxury, travel, fame; wouldn't you have a cut at it, in their place?' His tone changed. 'They've got nice voices.'

'They were putting on the most awful twang.'

'I said nice voices, not nice accents. When you've been in this business as long as I have, you'll know what's a voice and what isn't.'

'It's no good arguing with Paul. He and God fixed the whole thing up years ago.'

'That is a very blasphemous crack, Votty. You know I don't like blasphemy. I can take a joke with any man, but I bar blasphemy.'

'I was only giving God a bit of the credit. Rather I left Him out?'

Paul's answer was to step on ahead. His face had flushed. Votty grinned, and John, anxious not to be involved, avoided his eye.

Paul's equilibrium was soon restored. He began to hum, and presently dropped back level with them.

'I reckon, on a fine day, we could start shooting at eight o'clock.'

'You'll never get them to turn out at that hour.'

'When they see the money I'm paying, they'll turn out at six.'

Tor two or three days. Then they'll see you can't do without them, and they'll start to be late.'

'That so?' Paul did not believe him. 'Well, we're in no great hurry. Isn't this the place?'

'Yes. How did you know?'

'I asked, back at the hotel.'

'You see,' Votty said. 'He doesn't trust you.'

'It's not that at all. I had a reason for asking. I wanted to let them know that this——'

'Sssh. There he is.'

John Brannigan was a type to be found in many villages and small towns in Ireland and in the Highlands. Better educated than the rest of the community, or of better ability, for some reason they have not taken the plunge and sought a living elsewhere. Since no one local occupation serves to exercise their talents, they practise two or three, making a living out of their neighbours rather than with them; despising them; bearing life a grudge because they have not got away to a wider world, envying those who belong to that wider world, and labouring always to impress upon them that, but for filial virtue or for adverse fortune, they would not be where the visitor sees them. They are to be found everywhere, spoiled priests or lawyers or schoolmasters, accredited to no profession but claiming a professional prestige, agents for insurance companies, practitioners of petty rackets, consulted by people who neither like nor respect them but cannot do without them, taking the lead through push and quickness of wit, heading deputations, smelling out advantages, but never, save in the rarest cases, doing well enough to set themselves free, and often possessed of sufficient insight to realize that they had better remain cock of a small dungheap than be nobody on a big one

Of this type Brannigan was a prime example. He was

working in his garden when the three caught sight of him. Well aware of their approach, he continued to work until they were close upon him, John guessed that he had anticipated the visit, and had decided that this would be the best way to receive it.

Allowing himself to hear them, Brannigan rose at once from his squatting posture, and was revealed as of middle height, short in the neck, high shouldered—the combination made him seem almost a hunchback—and possessed of a pair of exceptionally strong legs. Paul and Votty were at once impressed. Physically, at any rate, here was the perfect villain of John's story. A long nose, an angular jaw, a low forehead, two very deepset eyes of a shifting green colour, and a pale skin decorated with huge blotch-like freckles: Votty began immediately to envisage sinister close-ups in his favourite sombre lighting.

Brannigan wiped his palm on the seat of his trousers, and advanced upon John, smiling broadly.

'You catch me in one of my moments of leisure, Mr. Reilly. Most of my time is so taken up with utilitarian pursuits, I get little for the cultivation of beauty. How are you? Are you well?'

It was a strikingly fine voice, deep, resonant, consciously produced.

'Very well, thank you. Let me introduce my friends. Mr. Deakin, of Python Films. Mr. Votitchenko. Mr. Brannigan.'

Brannigan gave each a greeting which they saw at once he had modelled on the minister's.

'Won't you come in, gentlemen? Mr. Reilly knows the way. He has been here more than once. He did me the honour to stay the night when we were putting on our last play. I am very fond of the drama, Mr. Deakin: though we don't get a great deal of scope here. Now: may I get you some refreshment?'

'No, thank you, Mr. Brannigan. We've only just done breakfast.'

Brannigan's teeth flashed. 'I've forgotten mine,' he said, with humorous pathos. 'My day starts very early.'

'Maybe it won't start quite so early, from now on. Mr.

Brannigan: we've come to talk business. As you've heard, I'm here to make a picture of Mr. Reilly's book.' Brannigan with comical quickness adjusted his face from enquiry to comprehension. 'My purpose is to get local players for all but one or two parts. Mr. Reilly thought you might be suitable for one of the chief parts. That's why we've come to see you.'

Brannigan's eyes gleamed.

'I think I can say that, as far as this district is concerned, you've come to the right man. I've had far more experience of acting than anyone else in this part of the world. I've made a considerable study of the art of elocution: and, as I expect Mr. Reilly has told you, I have produced a company of my own and entered it three times at the Feis at Dunlucan.'

'I'm sorry to hear that. It's all very unfortunate. All the same, I'm going to ask you to play for me.'

Brannigan's pupils went to pin-points. 'I don't follow, Mr. Deakin.'

'Acting in pictures isn't like acting on the stage, Mr. Brannigan. I'd far rather start with a raw beginner who'd never said a line than with somebody like yourself. However, you have the right appearance, and the voice. If you do just what I tell you, you'll be all right. We'll make a test, and, if that's satisfactory, I'll give you a contract.'

Brannigan's eyelids snapped. He did not at all like this summary handling. For a minute he thought of raising some difficulty, in order to assert himself. Then he reflected that it might lose him his chance, and decided to say nothing. It was all expressed in a flicker, and Paul missed none of it.

Brannigan managed a smile.

'I'm glad you intend to give me a trial, at any rate.'

'Sure. I don't engage anyone without.'

'There is another way in which I can be of use. I can tell you which of the people have any talent for acting.'

Paul shook his head. 'You don't know what I'm looking for. Get rid of this idea, that any experience you or anyone else here has had is any sort of use at all. I wish no one

here had ever acted or dreamed of acting. I shall have to undo everything you have learned, Mr. Brannigan.'

'I don't see how you can be so sure of that, when you have never seen any of us at work.'

Paul smiled with pure goodwill.

'I sound the most unreasonable sort of cuss, don't I? I know I do. But don't be scared. You'll find me easy to work with. All I want you to know is that this is a game in which none of you has a start of the rest. Don't come to me thinking you know anything about how to act. I don't care if you've been a star in London or New York: I don't care even if you've been in pictures. This is my picture you're going to be in, and everybody starts from scratch.' He paused, and looked at Brannigan. 'You don't believe me: but you will.'

'Of course.' Brannigan said. 'I'm willing to learn.'

'Grand. Now, let's talk business.' He looked at Votty and John. 'Will you two take a walk in the garden, or shall we?'

'We will.' John said hurriedly. Brannigan smiled, and John saw that he was nervous. Votty got up with an exaggerated unwillingness, and slouched out after John.

John turned to him. 'Well: do you think he'll do?'

'I believe you wrote the part round him.'

John grinned. 'I didn't meet him till after I'd written the book.'

'Nasty bit of work. Him, I mean. Not the book. Photogenic, though: once he begins not to make faces.'

'You think he'll do?'

'Paul will push him through, even if he can't act.'

'Look, Votty. Paul said a thing this morning that worried me. He said he was thinking of getting someone here to play Owen, and not have Terry Boyne.'

A slow smile overspread Votty's face.

'He'll have Terry all right.'

'How do you know?'

Votty's voice was soft and unpleasant. 'You know our Paul's psychological peculiarity.'

'What?'

His brows rose mockingly.

'Mean to say you hadn't realized?'

John felt as if he had suddenly stepped on a moving staircase.

'N-no. I—I can't say I had.'

'He will bring Terry Boyne to play Owen, all right.'

V

IT was tea time. Paul had picked five players for small parts, but did not seem to be in any hurry about the rest. He was in great good humour, and his air of blandness and security increased as John became nervous and impatient. John dreaded Father McCubberty's return, and was anxious to have everything fixed before the priest had a chance to check it. If the people could be induced to sign contracts, so that the forces of law were on Paul's side, the priest's work would be that much harder. The sight of the money they were going to earn, money that was as good as theirs once the contract was signed, would make them very reluctant to back out—even at Father McCubberty's bidding.

He put this to Paul. Paul listened indulgently.

'I'm every bit as anxious to make this picture as you are, John. In fact, I'm more anxious. I put the picture first. First, first, first, all the time. I'd be doing the company poor service, and I'd be doing your own fine story poor service, if I cast it in a hurry and got the wrong players. Where would we be, if I cast Oona and Maurice and Gregory to-day, and we found better players to-morrow or the next day. No, John. Leave me to go my own pace. You can't hurry the casting.'

John sighed, and left him. He got no sympathy from Votty either. The Russian had gone into a trance. He glared at everyone in technical scrutiny, and was thinking only of his camera.

Paul was sitting at the open window, stirring sugar into his tea and gazing out at the shimmering water, when he heard the sound of the door. A swift glance showed him

that Girvan's red-haired niece had come in and closed it after her. There was no one else in the room. For an instant he regretted his folly in remaining. He had seen the look in the girl's eyes, and kept out of her way. Oh well: since it had to be, he might as well get it over.

'Beautiful view you have from this window. Beautiful.'

She came and stood close by his table.

'Mr. Deakin. Do you mind if I ask you something?'

'It's a free country, sugar. Go right ahead.'

'Mr. Deakin. I've read the book. I know lots of it by heart.'

'Well! You don't say. We must tell Mr. Reilly. He'll be terribly pleased.'

'The bits I like best are all about Oona. Mr. Deakin—I know that girl. I understand just what she felt. In a sort of a way, I'm in the same position myself: cooped up here: longing to get to a bigger life.'

She was breathing quickly. He thought, she's all in this. I'm seeing the meaning of her now.

'Mr. Deakin——'

He wagged a finger at her. 'I know what you're going to say. You're going to ask me for a part in the picture. Don't worry, sugar. I've got a part for you. It's not a big part, but it's good. It's up to you to make it stand out.'

She shook her head. 'I mean the part of Oona. I know I could play it. I'd work terribly hard. I'd do everything you said.'

'Oona?' He whistled softly, and opened his eyes wide. 'No, no, sugar. You couldn't play Oona, not within fifty miles.'

'Why couldn't I?' She was fierce in her urgency. 'I know I haven't got the chocolate box sort of looks, but I heard you say you didn't want the ordinary type of pretty girl in your picture.'

He continued to shake his head.

'What's wrong with me?' she demanded.

Tor a start, your face is too hard. The lines are too strong.'

'Oona was a strong girl. She wasn't the soft sort. How would the soft sort row out that night in the storm?'

'I know, sugar. I know. But she has to start gentle. She has to be strong and look feminine. We've got to show the audience how love will give a girl strength to do a man's work if need be. They'll take that and like it. But they'd never stand for the heroine of a picture looking tough.'

'Tough !' Her face flamed. 'You say I look tough!'

'Not in the ordinary way, you don't. But you'd photograph tough—especially with Votty. He underlines the character in a face: that's what he's here for. With the older characters, he'll be a hundred per cent. Because of his style, Oona's a ticklish proposition for him. I've got to pick a really young girl for Oona. He'll make her look years older than she is.'

'Tell him to take me the way I look young,'

'He can't. He's got to work the way he's made. It's no good, sugar. You just won't do.'

'Mr. Deakin.' She leaned forward, putting her hands on the table. 'I've read several times that the way to act is to have your heart in the part and understand just how the person felt. Well—no one could understand how Oona felt better than I do. I've heard people talking about the book, here in the hotel, and saying she could never have felt able to kill a man. Well—I know how she could. I shouldn't have to act that bit, Mr. Deakin, because it would be me. Me myself.'

Paul reached out, and patted the back of her hand. She gave a quick shiver of distaste, immediately suppressed.

'You're a very intelligent girl, sugar, and it will be a pleasure to work with you.'

Hope blazed in her face.

'Then——?'

'But not in the part of Oona. What you've just said is the best argument you could put forward. But, as you said it—while you were telling me you could kill a man—you looked like Lady Macbeth and Clytem—what's-her-name rolled into one. You looked a murderess, sugar. With Votty at the camera, you'd have looked forty. How old are you? Twenty-six?'

She hesitated. 'Twenty-seven.'

'There you are.'

'It didn't say in the book Oona had to be very young.'

'A book and a picture are two very different things. Look, sugar. I'll give you a test, and you'll see then that I'm right.'

'And if you're not right, can I have the pan?'

'I want you to play Honor.'

'Honor! Why, she's—she's nothing!'

'She can be very important, if she's played as you could play her.'

She was controlling her anger with difficulty. The skin beside her nostrils had gone white.

'But you'll give me a test for Oona?'

'Just to convince you, yes.'

'You'll cheat!' she cried. 'You'll tell that fellow to take me all wrong, just out of spite.'

'Where does the spite come in? What harm have you done me?'

'To make out you were right, and do me down.'

'I don't want to do you down, sugar. There's only one thing I want, and that's to make a first class picture. I've no personal feelings when I'm working, ever. I'd push out my best girl if she wasn't right, and sign up my worst enemy if he was what I wanted.'

'Mr. Deakin. If you knew what my life is like here, you'd realize that I'd do anything to get out of it. And I'd do anything for the man that helped me.'

She had come so close that he could feel her breath on his face. His tone did not change.

'There again, you're talking personally. I can't afford to talk personally when I'm making a picture. Excuse me.' He took her wrist, moved her arm aside, and reached for the teapot. She stood back sullenly, and watched him pour himself out another cup. He spooned in the sugar, then looked up and smiled.

'Think I'm a terrible callous cuss, don't you? But you see, making pictures is a tough business. You have to be hard. At least, that's how it must seem to everyone else.' He stirred his tea, and looked at her, his head on one side.

'So you want to get out of here? Why? Don't you like it?'

'I hate it,' she said violently.

'Find it dull?'

'Dull!' Her face became vixenish. She controlled it, and forced a smile. 'I won't tell you what I think, or you'd certainly say I'm tough.'

'You speak very well. Like you'd had a good education.'

'They teach well at the convent school. I worked hard, because I wanted to get away.'

'How was it you didn't?'

'I'd no money,' she said sulkily. 'My parents died, and I was bound to come to my uncle.'

'You could get a position in the city, with your intelligence and looks.'

'My uncle paid for my schooling, on condition that I came to help him here. I don't get any money till he's paid back.'

'You can go any day you wish. You're of age.'

'You don't know how—' She swallowed, and changed to the old urgent note. 'I'll be able to go if you let me play Oona.'

'If you play the small part well, you'll attract attention, and get offers. Far better offers than if you played the big part badly.'

'I shouldn't play it badly.'

'Even seen an old actor in a young part?'

'You talk as if I was fifty,' she cried.

He finished his tea, and got up from the table.

'Sugar. I said I'd give you a test, and I'll do it'

'As Oona?'

'As Oona. Cross my heart. There. I can't say fairer than that. I respect you. You've got character and guts. You'll go far.'

'I haven't gone far yet,' she said bitterly.

Paul went to the door. She stood, looking at him.

'When will you test me?'

'To-morrow. I've half-a-dozen tests to make.'

'You'll play fair?'

'You don't want me to play fair. You want me to give

you the part, whether you're fit for it or not.' His smile took the edge from the words. 'I'll play fair, sugar. Be good.'

He went out, and at once she heard him humming. She stood for several seconds, looking after him, her head lowered. The resentment smouldering in her face changed to a baffled look that was almost admiration. Only one man, so far, had been able to overcome Judy Girvan—her uncle, whom she loathed. It looked as if and she did not loathe him yet.



VI

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PAUL did not look for the others. He was glad of a chance to go off on his own. The anxiety of John, and Votty's girding, were like the persistent buzz of a bluebottle. It would be too much to say they irritated him, for Paul did not allow himself to be irritated: but he noticed with pleasure that, for the moment, they had stopped. Of the two, John's fussing was the more vexatious. Votty had a devilish knack of getting under his skin, but Paul was used to Votty, and sure enough of himself to accept good-humouredly a certain amount of debunking. If going on in that way made Votty happy, well, it was just part of the price that had to be paid for a first class cameraman. And once they started work, Votty would have no mind for anything but his job.

But John's nervousness, the nervousness of someone who wanted things done in a hurry, was almost a disturbance. It made Paul nervous too. The tantrums of actors, the agonised shyness of beginners, he could deal with perfectly. They did not threaten to alter his *tempo*. That was what he could not stand, he reflected, as he walked briskly down towards the village, the strengthened breeze fingering the roots of his hair, any attempt to change his *tempo* when he was working. He reflected on it, because, the moment he noticed his relief at being alone, he began at once to take himself to task, and enquire whether it was not a weakness

to notice such small things. Yes, he decided, it was a weakness: but, in the matter of John, it was pardonable. John was all the time at his elbow, so to speak, nudging him to hurry up, looking round in an agony of impatience for fear this guy McCubberty should turn up and upset things. McCubberty—why, hullo! what in the wide earth——?

Before his astonished eyes, the upper window of a cottage burst suddenly into a monstrous flower of white. The efflorescence swelled, rose, thinned out, and blew towards him in a wild white cloud, like a flurry of snow. Paul stared open-mouthed, as the particles flew high into the air and blew along the road, dancing and whirling till the first of them reached him and he could see what they were.

'Feathers!' he exclaimed.

The cottage and the window, hidden at first behind the cloud, were clear again: and something white was being vigorously waved from the window. Paul waved back, and hurried towards the cottage. It stood on the outskirts of the village, a little to one side, conspicuous by its extra storey: though it looked as if this consisted of one room only, under the arch of the roof, lit by the window at which Paul was staring.

Paul put his hand to his mouth.

'All right.' he called out reassuringly. 'I'm coming.'

He could now see the head and shoulders of whoever was waving. The waving stopped: the head looked at him. With the light in his eyes, Paul had to wait till he was close to the cottage to see clearly.

The cottage was prefaced by a box hedge that came up to one's middle, broken by a small wooden gate. The upper room was not directly over the gate, but a little to one side. From it there looked down an old man of fierce and melancholy aspect, like a puzzled hawk: bald-headed, skinny, with a jutting beak of a nose, red-rimmed eyes that were at once angry and vacant, thin sunken cheeks, and an almost toothless mouth, crowned with a little grey moustache. The top part of the face was fine, a handsome head in ruins; but the mouth gaped foolishly and a dribble of saliva ran like a snail's track over the stubbly chin.

The apparition gazed dully down at him. Paul took it to task.

That's a fine mess you made, throwing out all those feathers. What's the idea?

A faint gleam came into the eyes. The chin and Adam's apple worked, and a hoarse voice came from the cavern above them.

'I done it to shame them.' it said lugubriously.

Who?

'Me wife and me daughter. Who else?'

What have they been doing?'

Energy stirred the lean form. The old man put both hands on the top of the sash, and leaned towards Paul.

'Do you know what they done? They're after lockin' me in. Lockin' a man inside his own house. That's a treacherous deed, mister. Oh, begod, it is.' He shook his head mournfully. 'A damn treacherous deed.'

'Why did they lock you in?'

'Why did they lock me in, is it? Sure, any fool knows that. They locked me in the way I couldn't get up to Girvan's.'

Paul stood, his legs apart, his head on one side. The sun gleamed on his white teeth. His eyes were screwed up.

'I get you,' he said. They want to stop you drinking.'

This was so self-evident that the old man did not bother to reply.

'Well, well,' Paul went on. 'Haven't you got self-control? Are you a soak? Do you take too much? Do you get drunk?'

'Of course I get drunk. Why wouldn't I?'

'Very well then. They have to shut you in, for your own good.'

The old man waved a hand from side to side. Interruptions broke the flow of his thought.

'Why wouldn't I get drunk, and it the one chance I have, when his Reverence is away?'

'Father McCubberty?' The head nodded. 'Why can't you get drunk when Father McCubberty's here?'

A snort of contempt came down to him.

'Have ye no sense at all? Sure, he'd have the bloody pelt offa me. Ate alive I'd be, and murdered after.'

Paul smiled. 'Very strict, Father McCubberty, eh?'

'Listen.' The head craned nearer. The one chance I get to have a booze up is any time his Reverence'd be away. Three days he's been gone, and he'll be back to-morra. It's me last chance. Will you aid me, mister? Will ye fetch me a ladder, for the love o' God?'

'What about your wife and daughter? We've got to think of them.'

'They're not in it.' The old man saw things from one angle only. 'It's safe, mister. Safe as a house.'

'Why did you throw out all those feathers? Why didn't you just wave?'

'I had to spoil somethin' on her, and sure, it was the nearest to me hand. I cut the other pilla too, but sure, 'tis only flock.' His face lit malevolently. 'Only for you seein' me, I'd have the mattress slit on her.'

'What would you sleep on then?'

A coarse expression assailed his ears. The old man was tired of backchat.

'Listen, mister. Will ye stop argufyin' and analysin' me, and fetch a ladder? There's one beyond in the shed. Cock it up to me here and I'll be down in two shakes of a duck's arse.'

'Indeed then, da, and you'll do no such a thing. You'll stay where you are.'

The music of the interruption made Paul turn sharply. A girl of about eighteen, small, neatly built, determined, had come round from the back of the cottage. His jaw dropped in pleasure, and, to his increased surprise, she transferred her attack to him.

'Shame on you, sir, to be encouraging him and helping him. You should know better.'

Her face crimsoned as she spoke. It was a round face, soft in outline. The eyes were grey, the brows and lashes dark, the hair a shade lighter. Though young and rounded, her figure was strong: the hands and the bare forearms looked capable. Paul stared in frank delight, a smile growing on his face. She stamped her foot.

"Tis no laughing matter.' she exclaimed. 'A gentleman like yourself should know it.'

'I do know it. I'd no idea of helping him down. I don't touch drink myself, and, while I wouldn't impose my ideas on other people, I've no sort of sympathy with drunkenness. No sympathy at all.'

'Holy God.' said the voice above, in accents of deep disgust. She glanced up, but Paul went on before she could be diverted.

'I was just walking down the road, when I saw a cloud of feathers coming out of the window here. As soon as it cleared away, there was someone signalling to me. So I came to see what was wrong.'

Feathers?'

'Yes. From a pillow.'

'Oh!' The rising inflection enchanted Paul. She stepped back, the better to apostrophize her father: but the window was empty. The ancient had realized that the position was past cure, and had retired.

'Me ma's best pillow!' There was a note of tears in the voice. 'What next will he do on us!'

'He'll slit the mattress.' Paul said. 'He was just going to do it, when I came along.'

'Is it the mattress!' Her eyes were round with dismay. 'Oh, sir, please—come on up with me, and hold him at bay till I get it from him. If he destroys that, me mother's heart will be broke. Will you do that for us?'

'Sure. Sure I will.'

Without hesitating, she ran into the house. Paul, smiling broadly, followed, stooping low as he pursued her up the narrow stair.

She took a key from somewhere he did not see, and attacked the door.

'Shall I stand here, in case he makes a bolt for it?'

'Ah, lord, no. It's feeble he is.'

She opened the door, The old man was sitting on the bed. He eyed Paul with a venomous contempt.

'Up out o' that, da, if you please.'

He got up, his eyes still on Paul.

'Min,' he proclaimed, as his daughter tugged at the puffed feather mattress, 'should stan' together. And aid one another. Not go leaguin' with the women. God help ye. You're no sort of a man at all.'

'Don't mind him, sir. Don't mind him.'

'Here,' Paul said. 'Let me help.'

'Ah no. Sure it's no weight.'

'That's a nice daughter, to go sayin' not to mind her own da.'

'The gentleman done well to warn me. What would ma say, if you destroyed her good mattress? Isn't it bad enough, ye cut the pillow?'

A malevolent gleam shone in the old man's eye.

'I shamed yez. I shamed yez in the sight of all.'

'Indeed then, it was yourself ye shamed.'

She ushered Paul out, hugging the mattress to her breast, her head peering around it. Flushed from her exertions, she looked extraordinarily attractive.

'Turn the key in the lock, sir, would ye mind?'

Paul did as she asked.

'Leave it there. He can't come to it.'

They went downstairs. She put the mattress on a narrow horsehair sofa. Now that the work was over, she was suddenly awkward and at a loss. Paul at once took charge.

'Sit down a minute, Miss—I don't know your name.'

'Heggarty. Katie Heggarty.'

We'll have to change that, Paul thought.

'Listen, Miss Heggarty. I've got a proposition to make to you. I expect you've heard why I'm here.'

'Are you the film gentleman?' She made 'film' a disyllable.

'I am. I've come here to make a big picture about a girl who lived here in this village.'

She stared. 'A girl lived here! what girl?'

'Not a real girl. A girl in a story. And I am hoping to find a girl here to play the part. Not an actress. A real girl who lives here in the village.'

She was watching him, wide-eyed.

'Miss Heggarty. I've found her. Do you think she'll do it for me? Yes. You. You're the girl.'

'Is it me?' Colour flooded her face, then left it pale. 'You're funning.' she said unsteadily. 'You're coddling me.'

'I was never more serious in my life. Let me tell you what it will mean. It will mean money—money enough to buy your mother a thousand feather mattresses; money to——'

"Glory! Sure what would she want with all them?"

'Money to buy anything you ever dreamed of. Money, fame, friendship. Your name in electric lights, Hollywood, contracts, success. The world will be open to you like an oyster, Katie. You'll be able to do anything you like: and get anything you like for your mother. And your dad: you'll be able to keep him out of mischief. You'll be able——'

'Will you stop!' She stamped her foot. 'What are you saying all this to me for! How would I do it? And I only a poor ignorant girl.'

'Katie. You've got sense. You know who you can trust and who you can't. You know a person's character the moment you see them. Look in my eyes. Now. Am I serious? Do I mean it?'

'You—you—you may mean it, but, sure, how——?'

He was intent and taut. Power flowed from him.

'If you will speak and look as you have spoken and looked in this last few minutes, you'll not only play this part, but I will make a great star of you.'

'A star—of me.'

Her voice was breathless, with a hint of tears. Boy, boy, he thought, if only I can get that note out of her when she's playing.

'Yes. If you do what I tell you.'

'But—but—ah, you're coddling!'

'Dead serious, Katie. I know my job. I've made a score of pictures. I've directed some very big stars. You can join them.'

'But, sir, look at me. Look at me hands, they're all rough. And I'm not beautiful and shapely, the way you'd have to be, to be on a picture.'

'You're not a society type, certainly. If you were, you'd

be no good for this picture. I'm not asking you to play that sort of a part. I'm asking you to play an Irish village girl, the sort of girl you are. You won't be a conventional type. Your hands are right for this part. They'd want care and attention before you played another sort of part. But I'm asking you to play *this* part. Time enough to talk about others when we've made this picture. The others will depend on how you make out in this one. Now—will you do it?'

'I never acted in me life.' she said faintly.

That's the best news yet.'

'Why's that?' She was smiling now: her dark eyelashes were bright with tears.

'You'll be better able to do what I tell you. You won't have anything to unlearn. Not like that Brannigan. I'll have a terrible time with him.'

'Is Brannigan in it?'

'He is. I'm going to have nearly all your people in it. Only one or two professional actors. You'll play opposite one of them.'

'Opposite?'

'To be your boy, in the picture.'

'Do I have a boy?'

'You do. And a very goodlooking boy too. Terry Boyne. Have you seen him?'

'Sure how would I see him, and I living here?'

'In pictures, I mean.'

'No. I never seen him.'

'How old are you?'

She opened her eyes at the abruptness of the question.

'Eighteen.'

'We'll need your parents' consent. There won't be any trouble about that. Your mother will settle it, I reckon.'

'We'll have to get me da's leave.'

'His leave? I didn't think he counted for much. I mean, with you locking him up. You didn't seem to have any great respect for him.'

'Oh, you're wrong there.' She clasped her hands. He saw with amazement that she was in deadly earnest. 'It's only

when he does be this way . . . Every once in a while he'll break out, like. It's a weakness. The rest of the time he's the best da a girl could have. Isn't it a terrible thing, you to see me having small respect for him. I do respect him, sir, and me ma does too. We wouldn't do a thing against him. You'll need to get his leave, or I won't stir a foot.'

Paul looked at her from quizzical, narrowed eyes.

'Well, if you aren't a funny girl.'

'I don't see anything funny in that, to respect me da.'

'And lock him up, and bawl him out. Scold him.'

'Amn't I telling you, it's only an odd time, when he'd have his weakness.'

'I believe you, Katie. And I like you for it. You're a good daughter.'

'I've a good da. And a good ma.'

'They won't stand in your way, then, when they hear of this great chance. Do you mind if I talk to your mother first. I'm in bad with your father for the minute; but he'll soon change his tune. In fact, I reckon the news will sober him up, and you'll be able to let him out.'

'Not yet.' She smiled. 'He'd be up the road, to celebrate it.'

'You'll do it, then, Katie? You've decided?'

'If me ma and me da say I may.'

'Leave that to me. I'll persuade them. Not that they'll want persuading.'

'You really think I can do it?'

'I know you can. We'll have a test to-morrow, to make **sure**. Then I'll give you your contract. When will your mother be back?'

'Half after six.'

'I'll come back then. Well, Katie. Shake hands on it. You're starting a new chapter in your life. A year from to-day, half the world will know you.'

VII

THE heavy man on the other side of the table was listening attentively to what Girvan was saying: but his manner of doing it left Girvan and his friend Kennedy in doubt. He sat with his eyes shut, and his pendulous, greasy face gave nothing away. When Girvan stopped, he made no sign, but presently allowed himself a faint, sleepy nod. He then sighed, and sucked his teeth.

Kennedy, a little keen-faced, anxious-looking man of fifty-five or thereabouts, gave Girvan a glance of comic despair, and raised his eyes to the ceiling. Girvan, no less anxious, stared doggedly at the visitor.

'Of course.' Girvan said, 'it could be that it's all a bluff. It could be he's a swindler.'

McVeagh opened one eye.

'And what good would it do him to come here? If he was a swindler, it's to Dublin he'd go, to some high class hotel, where there'd be persons that had money.'

Girvan was at once discomfited, and secretly pleased. The contempt in McVeagh's voice riled him: but it was a step on their way that the man of money should think Deakin genuine. He touched the same note gingerly again.

'It's what I've heard, there do be plenty of swindlers in the films.'

'If there are, it's not here they'd come, where there's nothing to be got.'

'Maybe,' Kennedy suggested, 'it'd be a blind, the way he'd lower the prices for himself at Roseville, or Rathniven, or some place else where he'd be wanting to make the picture.'

'Ah, not at all.' McVeagh was massive in contempt. 'The trouble with yous is, you do be always thinkin' in small little sums. You think ye done fine, if ye save five pounds a week. Sure, a big company'd throw away five hundred, and not miss it. No. Them boys doesn't trouble themselves beatin' down prices. They'd take up every hotel in Ireland, if they thought they might be wanting one only, and didn't

know which it'd be. I tell ye, money's no object to the like o' them.'

He was silent again. His two hearers waited.

'Then you think he means business?' Girvan ventured at last.

There was seven big crates of apparaatus, labelled Python Films, come over on the mailboat yesterda' morning. They'll be down here to-morra. Saloon berths was booked for eight people, to arrive Sunda'. And Neligan from Tigers-town is warned to be over here to-morra for signin' contracts.'

Girvan let out a loud breath.

'Begod, Mr. McVeagh. Ye have great information.'

'I need it, a man in my position.' There was a grim note that took away the suggestion of complacency.

'Well, Mr. McVeagh. If he's going to make the picture here—and it looks as if he is—will it have the effects, do you think, he said it would?'

McVeagh sucked his teeth for nearly a minute before he replied. Girvan contemplated him with fascinated distaste. The long, fleshy face, pitted with acne, the huge nose, the bald dome fringed with small dark curls: Girvan did not know if he detested him more for his looks, for what he was, or for the power he wielded.

'That's my risk.' McVeagh said at last.

'And ours.'

One eye opened.

'Oh yes, Mr. McVeagh. Me and Joe here.'

'And Bartley. And Flynn,' amended the contemptuous voice. 'Only they daren't face me.'

Girvan grinned. 'Local enterprise,' he said softly. 'It's only right a man that knows of a good thing should let his friends in on the ground floor.' He drew breath and dared. 'The way we're letting you in, Mr. McVeagh.'

McVeagh sucked wetly.

'Don't make a favour of it,' he advised. 'Or ye might find me a floor below yez. In the basement.'

Girvan's face lit with inward joy. He glanced at Kennedy, who licked his lips foxily, and nodded.

'I don't think so, Mr. McVeagh.'

Both eyes were half open now, sleepily regarding him.

'Get this clear, the two of ye. If I accommodate you, it's I who am doing the favour. What's to stop me going straight to the man and negotiating with him direct?'

Kennedy made a small movement, but Girvan said gently, 'Tour sense of fair dealings, Mr. McVeagh.'

'Do ye think I depend on you for my information?'

'We know you heard this first from us. Once you knew, you were able to find confirmatory details. But the first information came from us, all right.'

'And what makes you think that?'

'We may live in a small place, Mr. McVeagh, and by your gait o' thinkin' we mayn't amount to much. But we're not such fools as to think that a clever man like yourself would leave anyone else to take the options if you'd had the knowledge what was goin' on.'

'Options?'

'Aye. Options.'

'And what have you, for to take the options?'

'Them as has options to give trusts us, Mr. McVeagh. The way, maybe, they wouldn't trust others they didn't know.'

McVeagh put his fat hands together, and leaned forward.

'What options have you, and for how long?'

'Just a minute, Mr. McVeagh. By your leave. With what we have, we could have gone to any big man in the city of Dublin. Instead, we come to you, because you're a warm man, and a local man, and it's only right to keep good money in our own county. Isn't that so, Joe?'

'Aye. Aye. That was what we thought.'

Girvan sat back. 'We'd like you to appreciate that, Mr. McVeagh.'

'Well,' McVeagh said easily, 'we're none of us here for our health. What's worryin' yez?'

Girvan and Kennedy once more exchanged glances. Girvan spoke.

'The priest.'

'McCubberty?'

Girvan nodded. 'He's dead agin the book.'

McVeagh's eyes opened wide for the first time.

The book?'

The book the film is to be med out o'. He preached against it.'

'When? How did he know?'

'He hasn't heard yet. He's away till to-morra. It was when the book came out first. A matter o' two years ago.'

'Well.'

'Well. We thought maybe you would be able to persuade him.'

There was a silence. McVeagh looked at him with a cold, dead stare.

'And why would I be able to persuade him?'

Girvan shrugged. 'I was only wonderin'. There's some says he borried money off of ye for the church roof. And for the room.'

McVeagh's eyes were small and forbidding.

There's some as'd do well to mind their business.' His voice deepened. 'Ye bloody fools, ye. Do ye think any-thing'd make that man keep his mouth shut, once he was started?'

'You might have influence with him, where another wouldn't. Damn it, Mr. McVeagh: the way you keep pickin' at us and faultin' us, anyone would think it was an injury we done you, invitin' ye in on this.'

McVeagh permitted himself a slow smile. Then, without warning, he sat forward, elbows on the table.

'Come to business,' he said. 'Now. What have ye, and what do ye propose?'

VIII

OLD Heggarty stared at Paul. The lower part of his face hung loose. He swallowed, his Adam's apple shooting up and down.

'Will ye say that agen, mister?'

With a smile that was all friendliness, Paul repeated his offer. The old man could hardly frame the figure after him.

'Twenty-five pounds each week!'

'That's it, Mr. Heggarty.'

It was beyond him. His eyes rolled helplessly round at his wife and daughter, then came back to Paul.

'Not each month?'

'No. Each and every week. First week down in advance, on signing the contract.'

'Holy God.'

'Da!' the girl remonstrated, flushing.

The old man continued to stare at Paul.

'Is there all that money in the world.' he muttered, half to himself.

'That will be only the start, Mr. Heggarty, if all goes well. I'm an experienced man in these things, and I honestly believe that your daughter has what it takes to make a star. If that happens, twenty-five pounds a week will be sparrows' feed to what she'll earn.'

The old brow corrugated at him. The eyes narrowed.

.'Ye wouldn't be making game of us, mister?'

Paul smiled, and shook his head.

'Dead serious, Mr. Heggarty. I'll bring you the contract to-morrow. The lawyer will be here with them then. I'll give it to you. in writing now, if you'd prefer, until the lawyer comes?'

'No, no. To-morra will do.' He looked at the others, and gave a nervous snigger. 'Til be in dread to wake up and find it's all a dream.'

Katie stepped forward impulsively, and squeezed his arm. He looked at her, and his face softened.

'Erra, girleen——'

A thought struck him, and dimmed his eyes. His face dropped again, and his mouth opened. Slowly, like an old lizard's, the head turned on the skinny neck, and looked at Paul with probing wonder.

'Look at here, mister. Ye won't be offended, now, at what I'm goin' to say to ye.'

Katie caught her breath. A ripple of anxiety passed over

the faces of the two women. With painful attention, they listened for what came from him.

'I only a poor man, and no sort o' scholar. This has come on me terrible sudden, and I've nothin' to guide me,' only what I might be thinkin,' the same as any other poor man that had great riches held in front of him. So, it's what I'm thinkin'—ye won't be vexed with me, for sayin' what'd rise up in me heart?'

Til welcome any question you like, to ask, Mr. Heggarty. You're entitled to the fullest information I can give you.'

'Nor you won't be vexed with me, Mary? Nor you, girleen?'

They looked eloquently at him; he interpreted the look, and smiled.

'I'm not in drink,' he said to them, as a naughty child might reassure its parents. He turned again to Paul.

'Well, mister, meaning no harm, but saying out to you the innate thought in me mind: you're in a terrible hurry to get my leave for the girleen here. And that's terrible big money yez are holding out to us. Now, mister, I'm a poor man, but I'm her da: and if it was for anything wrong you wanted her, sure, I'd drop dead before I'd consent to it. I—ye won't be vexed——?'

He broke off in astonishment, as Paul sprang up and shook his hand.

'Mr. Heggarty: there's nothing you could have said that would make me like and respect you better. I've been guided to the right place. I felt it at once, but now I know. Offended? Why, I'd have thought less of you if you hadn't asked me that question.'

He let go of the old man's hand, and sat down again.

'Now, Mrs. Heggarty—this concerns you even more, as a mother. I don't ask you to accept my word for it that no possible sort of harm is intended to Katie—nothing but her good and prosperity. You don't know me—yet—and therefore my word means nothing to you. Instead, I'll tell you this. First of all, there'll always be a couple of girls around, all the time, while your daughter is working for us. You mightn't trust them, perhaps. You might reckon I'd bought them too. In that case, you must remember that some of

your own people will be around, all the time, the other people from your own village, who are going to play in this picture. Better than that, if either of you has the least doubt or fear at all, Mrs. Heggarty shall be there the whole time, all day and every day, as long as Katie is working for me. Now—how about that?’

Relief beamed in the women's faces, but old Heggarty shook his head.

‘That'd never do at all, at all. Sure, who would cook me meals for me?’

Paul threw back his head, and led the laugh.

‘In that case, I'm afraid you'll have to trust me. And trust Katie.’

‘Sure, I'd trust her any place.’ The old man was suddenly fierce. ‘Any place at all. All the world knows that. It was only—’ he sagged again—‘when a big thing the like of this would come upon a person that's no ways used to it, faith, he'd want to be sure in himself . . . There's great wickedness in the world, mister, God help us all, and I've no sort of guile in me, nor wisdom, to know how would I be able for it. Every day there does be news in the papers of the cunning schemers there are in it, and the big swindlers, and them as makes traps for young girls.’

They were making little gestures, and trying to stop him, but he went on, his eyes fixed earnestly on Paul.

‘I'm only a simple man, mister, and never met with any great and bad wickedness of that sort: so, maybe, it'd come on me unawares like, before I'd know where I was, and I wouldn't be able to repel it away from me. I trust to others, and they trust to me. That's the way I've lived me life, mister, and it's well enough here in Dennistown. But pictures and fillims and great riches, them things all comes from the big world, and so—well, if you're not vexed with me, mister, sure, there's no harm done. Katie's welfare is the great thing—isn't that so, Mary? So I'll trust you, mister, and I'll put me hand to the bargain.’

The simple dignity of it had touched Paul's quick emotions, and there were tears in his eyes as they ceremonially shook hands.

'Ye must have a dram to wet the bargain. Mary—Katie—get a drink for the gentleman.'

'No, thanks.' Paul forestalled their distress. 'I won't, if you'll forgive me. I'd rather not.'

'Ye wouldn't be too proud to drink with me?'

'I'd think it an honour. But I only take soft drinks. Temperance. You know—coca-cola, lemonade, that sort of thing.'

Old Heggarty's face wrinkled in irrepressible disgust. Paul laughed outright, rose, and clapped him on the shoulder.

'We'll be along to-morrow with the contract. Good-bye, Mrs. Heggarty. Good-bye, Katie. It's grand we have it all fixed up.' He dug Heggarty in the ribs. 'I was afraid I might get a rather warm reception.'

'Ah!' Heggarty was delighted. 'That's no thing to be throwin' up at a man.'

The women smiled dutifully: the little room was full of good will.

'Suffer me to see ye to the gate, mister,' Heggarty said. Katie looked at her mother.

'No farther, da,' she warned him.

Paul marvelled at the co-existence of the two attitudes in her—respect and deference to her father's word, and the tone of a nurse to a child.

'I won't let him come any farther,' he laughed. 'Good-bye.'

They went slowly to the gate. The wind had dropped: there was every promise of a marvellous sunset.

Old Heggarty shut his eyes and shook his head.

'This is a great wonder,' he said. 'I don't feel the equal of it.' He stared vacantly at Paul, then grinned. 'Faith, you're a cute man altogether. I see now why ye were makin' up to the pair of them.'

'No,' Paul said. 'I didn't know about your daughter till she came and spoke to us. No: it's true what I told you. I don't take liquor. My religion doesn't allow it.'

Heggarty looked at him in dismay.

'Begod,' he ejaculated with feeling, 'that must be a bloody awful sort of a religion.'

IX

VOTTY was in the hotel lounge when Paul walked in. He lay back in a chair, at such an angle that his behind projected far past the seat of the chair, which instead was supporting the small of his back. His elbows were stuck up on each arm of the chair, his head was thrust forward by the back of it, and he scowled at an out-of-date magazine which he was holding up between himself and the light.

'Marvellous evening, Votty.' Paul's voice rang rich and cheerful. 'You ought to be out enjoying the beauty of it, not frowsting in here.'

The scowl deepened. Paul sat on the arm of the second chair, and swung a dapper foot.

I've got her. It's all fine and dandy. The father came round all right. I knew I could fix it.'

Getting no reply, he glanced at Votty.

'Test to-morrow. The lawyer will be over with the contracts.'

'Cameras aren't here.' Votty grunted.

'They're on the train.'

'What do you want the contracts for, before we've seen the tests?'

'I want to get the most important signed up before the priest comes.'

'I thought you didn't give any importance to the priest.'

'I want to be prepared against anything that may happen. We needn't give out the contracts till we've seen the tests. Except for this girl, and maybe one other. You'll rave when you see her, Votty. She's perfect for you.'

'How many tests do you think I can make in half a day?'

'A whole day, Votty.'

'It will take all morning to get the cameras.'

'We'll start early.' Paul's tone remained easy and cheerful.

'You don't have to worry about the priest,' Votty said, after a pause.

'What do you mean, I don't have to worry about him?'

'He doesn't come back till Monday evening.'

'How do you know?'

'I heard them saying it. He sent for some deputy to do the work for him on Sunday.'

That's good. That's very good. We'll be all signed up and started before he's back. We'll start with the sequence down by the lobster pots.'

'Got any?'

Toots'll be here to-morrow.'

Those girls'll want a rest, after a hell of a long journey like that. You can't start fagging them around the second they get here.'

Paul hadn't thought of this. He said, with dignity, There's all Sunday.'

People here don't work on Sunday. You'll put them all against us.'

Paul got up. 'You don't have to tell me those things. All I meant was, Toots can go round and see where they are, so as to be able to collect them first thing Monday morning. She and Gladys will want to explore, anyway.' He paused in the doorway. 'Where's John?'

'With the poet chap.'

Poet chap?'

The one that's just come. You know. The one Girvan talked about, that was coming for the weekend, and you said it was O.K.'

'Oh yes. It'll be a pleasure to see him. Maybe he'll be able to give us a hand. What's he like?'

'Like a horse in a bad temper.'

'Say! that doesn't sound too good. What was he in a temper about?'

'I never said he was in a temper. I said he looked like it. You could cast him for the man they kill. He'd roll his eyes just right.'

'Like a terrified horse, I see that scene, Votty. You said bad tempered.'

'For God's sake, Paul. You ought to have been an old spinster in a boarding house.'

That's interesting. Why?'

Votty sat up. 'He looks like a horse. When he came in here, he looked like a bad tempered horse. If you go in and

behave nice to him, I daresay he'll look like a terrified horse. As soon as you leave him alone, he'll look like a happy horse.'

Paul considered him, then smiled patiently. x

'You'll feel better once we start shooting.'

'Sure. Meantime, it'd be a help if you stopped talking about horses.'

'I didn't introduce the subject at all. It was you said he looked like a horse.'

Votty sank back with a sigh, and raised his magazine again.

'Go and see for yourself what sort of a horse he's like.' he said from behind it.

Paul hesitated: then he went out, humming his favourite air from *La Traviata*. Votty twisted his mouth, sniffed loudly, and went on with his reading.

'Pa-arigi, o-o cara——' Paul broke off, hearing voices: a new voice, high pitched, cracking every now and then in excitement, punctuated by John's pacific mumble. They came from a partly-open doorway on the left. Paul looked round him, and, quick as a cat, ran on tiptoe to the door. Reaching it, he checked, and drew back into the darkness of the passage. A long mirror over the sideboard just inside the door, tarnished and flyblown though it was, gave him a view" of John sitting at a table with the newcomer. The view was partial and distorted, and there was a blue haze of smoke: but he discerned a lean gesticulating figure, in a bright blue open-necked shirt and rough tweed jacket, whose large head jerked as he talked, and who seemed to be in a state of excited indignation.

Paul surveyed him for perhaps ten seconds, then softly withdrew, and went upstairs to his bedroom. He glanced at the somnolent flies on the window, sighed once more over the inadequacy of the fittings, and drew comfort from the array of toilet pots and bottles set out on the washstand and the chest of drawers that served him for a dressing table. He cleaned his teeth, supplementing the brush with a tooth-pick: used an orange stick upon his nails: brushed his hair with a handsome pair of ivory-backed brushes, carefully

pinching the waves to their normal exuberance; and finally subjected his face to a minute scrutiny, bending so close to the mirror that he had to hold his breath in order not to blur the surface. The light was bad; he glanced pettishly at the window, and for a moment contemplated lifting the crazy tilted mirror and carrying it to the light; but it looked and felt as if it might fall to pieces, so he left it where it was.

The mournful metallic noise that served for a gong beat thinly below. John came bounding up the stairs to wash. It was a foible of his always to be caught unprepared by gongs and bells. Paul stepped out on the landing, and emitted a sound as sharp as an escape of steam.

'Ssst!'

John stopped, and looked about him in bewilderment.

'Here.' Paul said, and beckoned John into his room. This poet guy: put me wise to him.'

John raised an eyebrow. He was breathing fast.

'Name, Quentin Flanagan. Country born. Scholarships, politics, bit of shooting. Short spell in prison. All forgiven and forgotten. Academy award for first book of poems. One novel. Critics liked it, public scared. Uncompromising, idealist, Ireland-for-the-Irish. Hates any sort of popular success.'

'His own, or other people's?'

'Other people's. He hasn't had any, yet.'

Paul smiled. 'You don't like him, do you?'

'That's the devil of it.' John said with a grimace. 'I do. And I respect him enormously. It'd be easier if I didn't.'

'You've let him get under your skin. That biography didn't pop out on the spur of the moment.'

'He makes me feel inferior.'

'You've got on better than he has.'

'That's just why. He implies that I've sold my soul to the devil.'

'M'm.' Paul lost interest in these niceties. 'What's he doing here?'

'Writing a guide book.'

'That doesn't sound his cup of tea.'

'It isn't. He hates it. But he has to live.'

Paul smiled, and raised a hand. He looked like a mediaeval bishop about to give the blessing.

'We've all got to live, John. Live and let live. Well—thanks for the information. I didn't want to step off on the wrong foot.'

He went down, all primed for the meeting, but was disappointed. Flanagan had gone out. Paul looked a little blank. He stood in the open doorway, humming to himself, and went in to dinner.

'The food is fierce,' he said presently to John. 'I'll get Toots and Gladys to do the catering.'

'How?'

'Get the food sent from town.'

'Better talk to Girvan first, hadn't you?'

'What's the good? He doesn't think anything's wrong.'

'Better let the local people have a chance to do the supplying.'

'They don't know what to supply.'

'You might try telling them.'

Paul said nothing for a while. Then his face cleared.

'You're right, John. Perfectly right. No use hurting people's feelings. This chop made me forget myself.'

'I'm used to it, you see,' John said apologetically.

'I certainly envy you.'

'The trouble with Paul,' Votty said, 'is he never enters into the atmosphere of a place. He always wants to take Hollywood and Bond Street around with him.'

Paul smiled gently.

'That's just calumny,' he said, in the tone of one reasoning with a child. 'If there is one thing I've got as a director, it's just that I *do* enter into the atmosphere of a place. I soak myself in it.'

'Attaboy. So you want Fortnum and Mason's to feed you.'

'When you find anything wrong with my work, Votty, you tell me of it. Till you do, I prefer good cooking.'

'I'm not the slave of my stomach, thank God.'

'I'm not the slave of any of my bodily appetites. At least, I try not to be.'

'Mortify your flesh, then, and eat your chop.'
'Mortify my flesh.' Paul eyed his plate. 'You've said it.'

X

THE meeting with Flanagan did not take place that evening. Paul retired early, and the poet did not come in till close on midnight. Votty liked to sit up till all hours, becoming more and more animated as night gave way to morning, and reaching great fluency round about two o'clock, an hour which seemed to have for him some magical property, sending him back into the recesses of his quite incredible past. Nobody knew whether the incidents he narrated had ever taken place, and suspicion increased as Votty's companions perceived that the storehouse seemed inexhaustible and included scenes from almost every capital in Europe. On the other hand, it was agreed that Votty must have lived somewhere; that his proficiency in the argot of seven or eight languages must have been acquired in the appropriate countries; that it was of so deplorable and intimate a character that he must have frequented the places where such persons and adventures could be found; that anyone capable of inventing such adventures would be unable to tell the truth about anything, whereas Votty could and often did; and, finally, that no one could invent them. Furthermore, the adventures which Votty managed to have in such unpromising places as Haslemere, Nuneaton, Paisley, and Lytham St. Anne's—to mention four towns where it had been possible to apply some check to his records—were so far beyond the reach of normal humanity as to strengthen his claim to even more *outré* happenings abroad.

To-night, however, Votty had not reached the autobiographical stage. What he had drunk only deepened his moroseness. John gave up all attempt to talk to him, and read a book: but the silent, sprawling figure began to obsess him, and keep his attention from the page. He resisted, but had every couple of minutes to look up and see Votty, glass

in hand, staring with intent sightlessness at an emigration poster on the wall. What was he thinking of, John wondered. What preposterous scenes were enacting themselves before those brooding deep-set eyes?

'You don't have to stay here.'

Votty had not stirred or shifted his gaze. It was hard to be sure whether the words had come from him. In the still room, they seemed an auditory hallucination.

'I'm going up when I've finished my chapter.'

John felt slightly hurt, and at once was angry with himself. How ridiculous to take any notice of what Votty said. Look how Paul managed never to get ruffled. All the same, Votty shouldn't act this way. John and he were allies, combining to offset Paul's domination.

'That's all right, then.'

There had been a long interval before Votty replied. This was getting uncanny. The sooner John went to bed, the better. Only obstinacy kept him in his chair. He couldn't let himself be dictated to.

As the minutes passed, he became physically oppressed. His back itched, then his nose. The chair pressed inhospitably against his buttocks. His legs were stiff. The page of the book receded. Then it leaped forward, and the print ran together, then sorted itself out and stared at him, clear and meaningless.

He had just decided for the third time that this was unbearable, when there was a shuffle in the passage, followed by Flanagan's high voice saying good night to someone. A moment later, the long head craned round the door, and the poet came in.

John was glad to see him. He moved: his tension left him.

'Where've you been all the evening?'

'Getting a place to sleep.'

'I thought you were staying here?'

'With all you film actors infesting the house? Not likely.' He bared his long horse's teeth. 'I know my place.'

'Deakin was hoping you'd have dinner with us. He wants to meet you.'

'Royal command.'

'That's it.'

'I've no wish to meet him.'

'You'll have to. He's set on it.'

'Hah.' Flanagan snorted fiercely. 'If I do, I'll tell him what I think of him.'

'We all do that.'

'I'll tell him all the poison his rotten films are letting loose in the world: debauching our standards, debasing our values with their filth and their nonsense.'

Votty spoke, without raising his eyes from the poster on the wall. The words came in a dead monotone.

'When you say the world, do you mean the world? Or Ireland?'

'The world; and Ireland as part of the world.'

'It's nice to know.'

Flanagan stared at him belligerently, then restored his attention to John.

'If I meet this man, it's to be understood I'm at liberty to speak freely.'

'I'll put that to him. I'm sure it'll be all right.'

'Be careful,' Votty warned Flanagan. 'He's got too many guns for you.'

'What do you mean?'

'You Irishmen are very fond of demanding free speech, but you're not so good at taking it from other people.' Votty was still looking at the poster. 'All right. I'm not English. I'm a Russian.'

Flanagan sneered. 'An admirer of Dostoevski?'

Votty did not heed the bait. 'You were happier in the days of action than you are now. Yes, yes: I understand. You and I know things those two don't have any idea about. One can always tell the difference between a man who has faced death, and one who has only imagined it. So it is a pity for you to talk nonsense. I have met many Irishmen like you, in Spain, in Vienna, in Budapesth. You had action too young and for too short a time. Therefore the memory of it has the bad effects of a drug. But do not despise Paul. He has never faced death nor held a rifle, but he is too

many for you. And do not despise me, because I am going to bed, and it will not be any use.'

Flanagan stared after him in astonishment. 'Is he drunk?'

'I think he must be.' John was even more surprised. 'I never heard him talk that way before.'

'That's it.' Relieved, Flanagan dismissed the problem. 'Who is he, anyway?'

'The cameraman. By name Votitchenko. Said to be brilliant at his job.'

Flanagan looked towards the door again.

'I've heard that cameramen are the pick of the bunch. The most intelligent. They do any good work that is done. One can believe that. The technicians. Workers. Employees.'

'Where have you arranged to stay?' John hurried to escape a lecture on economics.

'With some people in the village. Name of Heggarty.'

'Heggarty? That's the name of the girl Paul's chosen to play Oona.'

'Oona?'

'In my book. They're making a picture of it.' You know that perfectly well, John thought: why not have the decency to admit it.

'Oh yes. I'd forgotten the name. Old Peadar was talking to me about it.'

'I'm surprised you're to be there. With what she'll be earning, they won't need to let rooms.'

Flanagan's nostrils curled.

'You couldn't misunderstand more completely. Old Peadar said to me that, thanks to the money they would be getting, they could now feed me and look after me properly. You don't know everything about these people.'

'It's handsome of you to admit I know something.'

'Oh.' Flanagan shrugged expressively. 'You've got some aspets of them. That's what beats me—how an artist can sell himself to a vicious crew like this.'

'They're not vicious. If you heard Paul—that's the director—if you heard him talk about the film, and plan the shots, you'd see he was an artist too.'

'What sort of hash have they made of it? How will they do the girl's death, for instance?'

John set his teeth. Flanagan's devilish intuition had gone straight to the weak spot.

'They won't.'

'What?'

'She doesn't die, in the film.'

'My God! And then you say you haven't sold yourself. You let them cut the" guts out of your story—make it utterly meaningless—God!'

John worked to keep his temper.

'If one lets one's work be translated into another medium——'

'Don't let it.'

'—if one does, one has to respect the limitations of the medium.'

'Mean to say a camera won't photograph a girl being strangled?'

'No. But an audience won't sit still to see it. Not when she's the heroine.'

'To hell with the audience.'

'Heroic, but not practical.'

'It's what I say, you've sold yourself. You've forfeited all right to be called an artist. My God. Are there no honest men in this bloody country.'

'You ought to know.'

'Well—I hope your paw is being well greased. It'll need to be, for you'll suffer. Yes. Even you must suffer, seeing your book made into cheap nonsense, to please housemaids—who won't like it anyway.'

'You're forgetting I've done the script myself.'

'More shame to you. I might excuse you, conniving at the mutilation, if you were well away from it. But to' wield the knife yourself—I'm gladder still I'm not sleeping here.'

'Dine with us to-morrow, anyway. If only to widen'your anthropological knowledge.'

'I'll say what I think.'

'That's the one reason we're asking you. We want to widen our studies, too.'

Well, on your head be it. Good night.'

'Don't forget what Votty said. Paul will be too many for you.'

'I'll risk that. Good night again. I hope you won't get nightmares, thinking what you've done.'

'I thought you weren't staying here.'

'I'm not. I'm going up to get my things. No sense dragging them around till I found a place to go.'

XI

THE next day ate its way into John's memory. His deepest impression was the devastating energy of Paul. He could not sit still at breakfast, and, though assured several times that the mail train was not due till a quarter to twelve, he was down at the station soon after nine, arranging for the unloading of the equipment. It was the amiable practice of the railway officials to clear off the passenger traffic first, detaching any goods waggons or heavy stuff and pushing them into a siding, to be dealt with at leisure after the departure of the train at two. Informed of this by John, Paul declared he would have none of it.

The stationmaster was reluctant and unhelpful. He had received advice of the crates, and he told Paul sorrowfully that they were of a great and weighty nature, that they would need a team of men itself to move them, but that maybe, if God was good, these could be procured in the evening, the way all would be nice and ready for an early start on Monday morning.

Paul's reception of this proposal hurt him deeply. He called in the two porters, who took their cue and gloomily doubted that the crates could be unloaded that day at all. Paul asked how many men would be required. They hazarded a dozen. Splendid: Paul would go at once and secure them. The stationmaster shook his head. This, he said, would be highly irregular. The railway company had its lawful procedure, from which no departure might be made.

Paul looked at him with an air of dreamy speculation.

'Let's get this straight. The train arrives at a quarter to twelve?'

That's when she's due. She might not fetch up for another half hour.'

'Mebbe it'd be more,' said the elder porter.

'All right. Say, an hour. And you can't deliver my goods till evening?'

Their faces cleared. The man was taking the point at last.

'That's so.'

'I see. May I use your telephone?'

The stationmaster blinked. What would ye be wanting the telephone for?' he asked uneasily.

To ring up the manager of the line in Dublin, tell him what you've just told me, and ask him if it's in order.'

Glances of consternation were exchanged. The stationmaster licked his lips.

'I wouldn't do that, mister. Sure, you wouldn't want to go bother him with a little matter the like o' that, a busy man like him.'

'I'm busy too. You don't understand my position. I work to a time schedule. I'm accountable to the company that employs me for every hour and for every penny. If I start on Monday, I've got to have everything ready, and get my camera tests done to-day.'

'Well, maybe, if it's so terrible urgent——'

'See here. I can do with one crate right away. The rest can follow during the afternoon. Now—there's a pound for each of you, and five bob for anyone else who lends a hand, if I can have the crate marked B2 unloaded and ready by two o'clock.'

They managed to keep their faces straight.

'Well,' said the stationmaster mournfully. 'We'll do our best for ye. Won't we, boys?'

'I leave it in your hands. That's fine.'

He beamed on them, and rushed off. All the morning he was fizzing about the village, interviewing people, looking for a building that could be used as a studio for interior

shots, finding a place to make the tests, and so on and so forth. Warned by Votty, John kept out of his way, and did not see him till he ran into him on the stairs. Paul was carrying in each hand a plain glass tumbler with a posy of wild flowers.

'Just been out picking these for the girls' bedrooms. Cute, aren't they? I asked Judy for a couple of vawses, and she had only fierce little china horrors; so I took these.'

He went on, solicitous, happy, carefully watching his burdens lest he spill a drop of water: and left John staring.

'Professional stuff.' Votty said, when John told him. 'He loves people to say how thoughtful he is.'

John was not satisfied. He had seen in Paul's face the eagerness of a child who is genuinely anxious to give pleasure.

Paul ran downstairs, his neatly shod feet twinkling rapidly.

'Time to go to the station, boys. Coming?'

'I'll come,' John said, and they went out together. Votty ostentatiously let them start, then rose and slouched after them. He had to be there, to give an eye to his cameras.

The village, as usual, had turned out to meet the train, and a small army of youths and men, congregated expectantly at the further end of the platform, grinned and touched their caps to Paul.

'This is going to cost you something.' John said to him.

'Money well spent. I get what I want, and so do they, and it makes them eager for more.'

The train came in a bare ten minutes late. Paul, excited as a schoolboy, stood on tiptoe to catch sight of the girls, then caused a sensation among the onlookers by rushing up and kissing them both effusively.

'How are you, darlings. This is grand. What sort of a journey was it. You must be dead. John. This is Toots. This is Gladys. This is John Reilly, but for whom we shouldn't be here.'

'Do we want to be here? I'm not sure yet.' The girl addressed as Gladys looked at John with a crooked, friendly smile. Tall and blonde, she had bold features, good eyes,

and a deep voice. It was not fair to judge her looks at the moment, since she had obviously been trying to repair the ravages of a long journey with too much powder.

Toots was small, dark, sharp nosed, spectacled, and insignificant. The insignificance she at once corrected with a voice of strong individuality.

'This place smells of fish,' she said to Paul, accusingly.

'Does it, sugar? Perhaps you're right. See here—John will look after you and take you back to the hotel. There's an auto—so-called. I must go and see to the stuff.'

It's in the van half-way down.'

'Not your stuff, darling. The cameras. John will get yours.'

'Paul doesn't change.' Gladys said, looking after him as he darted in and out of the crowd.

'Darling. He's only been gone six days.'

'Is that all. It seemed a year of blessed peace. Don't they have porters in this bloody place?'

John grinned. 'Paul has hired the entire populace to unload the cameras. I shouldn't be surprised if they pull the van up to the hotel by hand.'

'Meanwhile, we stand around. Hulloo, Terry. Feeling better?'

A tall, strikingly handsome young man had just lounged out of a first class carriage. He wore a long camel coat and a cap of white and brown checks at an angle. There were pouches under his eyes: he looked sour and liverish.

'lo.' he said, and gave John an uninterested glance. 'Any porters in this foul hole?'

'Tact, Terry, tact. The natives can hear you. Paul's bought 'em all.'

Then where the hell are they.'

'Unloading the stuff, ducks. The b-loody apparatus. We fend for ourselves.'

'They *are* unloading the luggage van.' John said. He had stepped back to look.

'Are they. Good. Oh, Terry—this is Mr. Reilly, who wrote the story. Mr. Reilly—Terry Boyne, who's playing lead.'

'How do you do.'

Boyne flashed John a professional smile. He had a fine voice. John had reluctantly to admit that he could see him as Owen.

Suddenly shy, he turned to the girls. 'Have you any hand-luggage in the compartment? Let me get it for you.'

The next few minutes, spent in lugging cases about, securing and instructing a porter, and bustling about generally, helped him to feel at ease. Soon he had the girls tucked into the car. They took with them Terry's expensive pig-skin grips, he saying that he preferred to walk.

'Look.' John said to him, 'you get in. You're tired. I'll walk. It's no distance.'

'Thanks a lot.' Terry had opened his coat, and taken off his cap. His dark curls gleamed in the sunlight. 'I'd like a walk, to stretch my legs.'

'Oh well, if you're sure.'

'I'd rather; thanks so very much.'

John, suddenly aware of the admiring glances which the village girls were showering upon his companion, ducked into the car. There was a queer third seat, that pulled out sideways. He sat in it, in front of the girls.

'Terry'll feel better now.' Gladys looked frankly at John. 'Is he your idea for the part? Really?'

'As much as any professional actor. I've seen him in a part not unlike it.'

'You mean in *Driftwood*?'

'Yes.'

'He was grand in that. Agree, Toots?'

'Must we talk of Master Terry? I've had enough of him.'

'Not nearly as much as you're going to get for the next six weeks.'

'More, won't it be?' John asked. 'Paul said to me eight or ten.'

'Terry's contract's for six.'

'Oh.'

'Dear, dear,' Perhaps we oughtn't to have said that.'

'You said it, dear,' Toots reminded her.

'Oh well. It'll all come out in the wash.'

They were friendly, but John felt out of things and still not quite at ease. He liked Gladys better than Toots, he decided. Toots didn't take much notice of him. She seemed preoccupied with her own immediate sensations.

'This car smells of mice.' she declared.

'Darling. You're always smelling things.'

'Well, doesn't it?'

Gladys turned to John. 'What are the bedrooms like?'

'Not bad, for this part of the world.'

'Don't depress me. I'm a bad sleeper. Are there lumps?'

'Not in mine.'

'Is that an invitation. Never mind, I'm too tired to cope. Are we there?'

'Almost.' Furious with himself, John felt a blush flame in his face. To hide it, he turned and pretended to look ahead. 'Just round this corner.'

He kept his head averted till they reached the door, and he could jump out and help them in'

'Lunch isn't till about half-past one. I ordered some tea.' He had a sudden misgiving lest they reject it scornfully, and demand alcohol.

'Tea. You are an angel.'

'I'm just dying for a nice cuppa.'

Judy appeared, full of resentful curiosity. She gave each girl a devouring glance, then relaxed a little. These were not what she had expected. Silent, not actively discourteous, she led them to their rooms. John followed, carrying their cases.

'Is the tea ready?' he asked Judy.

'I'll wet it now.'

She withdrew, and he went down, hearing the girls exclaiming and calling to each other with forced lightness. Judy brought in the tea, and there was an interval of ten minutes. John was just wondering whether to call them down, or ask her to take it out and keep it hot, when he heard them coming.

They fell on the tea at once, and he returned to the window-seat, looking out while they ate and drank and exchanged fragmentary chatter. In a surprisingly short time, Paul rushed in.

'Well, darlings. Feeling rested?'

'Rested!' Toots cried. 'We are *not* rested. A little revived, that's all. No, Paul, it's no good. I'm not going to listen to a word. Nor's Gladys: we're both going right away to lie down, and not a stir out of either of us till tea time.'

Paul's face changed ever so little. 'Sure, sure,' he said heartily. 'You want a real good rest after your journey.'

'You've said it.'

'Only—I was thinking—just before you go and lay down—just to get a little of the lovely fresh air into you, and blow away the cobwebs of the train——'

'Cobwebs!' Gladys exclaimed. 'That's just what there were, on that train. And earwigs.'

'I can't stand earwigs,' Paul said, all conciliation. 'From a child. They make me shudder. You know, some folks can't stand spiders, and some can't stand cats. Well, I'm that way about earwigs.'

'I'll make a note of it,' Toots said, yawning. She got up. 'Goodbye all.'

'Toots. Just before you go. It's no distance. There's a little donk I want for the first test. It's for Oona. Say, wait till you see the girl I've got for Oona. Is she a peach!'

'I wouldn't know. Good night.'

'Toots. This little donk——'

'My God. Is all this about a donkey?'¹

'I want it for Oona. I figure that if she has it in the test—looking at it and petting it—we'll get the expression we want.'

'Oona (on the right) and friend'. Wake me at four, and tell me all about it. Come on, Glad.'

'I'm coming. But don't call me Glad.'

Paul looked sorrowful.

'I thought you two girls would like a nice stroll before you turned in. Just to see the place.'

'*And* get fresh air into our lungs. *And* stretch our legs. Get Terry. He's stretching his legs, and all the girls in the village are looking on. I'm sure he'd adore to stretch them some more. Bye.' She smiled at John. 'Thanks for the tea.'

'They look all in.' Paul said solicitously, as the two disappeared. 'They need a rest. It certainly is a long journey.' He pondered a moment. 'Oh, Toots!' He bounded up the stairs. 'Toots! One moment, sugar. Just one thing——'

John could not hear what he said, but apparently it yielded him no great satisfaction, for he came down in a couple of minutes, the faint shadow of injury once more on his face. He looked at the plates on the table.

'Ham.' he said. 'They'll spoil their lunch.'

'They said they weren't coming down till tea.'

Paul shook his head, as one who knows better.

Toots'll never forgive me if she's not there for the first test. She's a demon for work, that girl. When you've known her as long as I have—Hullo. Hullo.' He rushed out to the doorway. 'If it isn't Terry! How're you feeling? You look fine. It's grand to see you.'

'I was on the train.' Terry said, a little coldly.

'Were you. I didn't see you. I saw the girls.'

'And the gear?'

'And the gear.'

'Well—I was between the girls and the gear.'

Remembering Votty's insinuation, John was giving the closest attention to these exchanges.

'That's how I must have missed you,' Paul exclaimed.

'Well, well. Have a good journey?'

'Bloody.'

'Never mind. This air will fresh you up in no time. Terry—I'm testing the Oona at two o'clock. I'd like you to be there. Wait till you see her, boy! She's a find. A natural. It'll be a joy to play opposite her.'

'I'll be seeing plenty of her in the next few weeks.'

'No, but, Terry, I'd like to have you there when she makes her test. It'll make it easier for her. I want to get her expression just right when she looks at you.'

The appeal to vanity nearly succeeded, but not quite.

'Nothing doing.' Terry said. 'I'm going to have a good meal and a nice, long sleep. Let her make faces at Reilly.' He rose and stretched. 'When do we eat?'

'Round about half-past one,' John answered him.

'Christ. I'm hungry.'

'Don't blaspheme here.' Paul said sharply. 'I won't stand for it.'

'Sorry, Saint Paul.'

'I don't like blasphemy, which doesn't matter so much. But the people here like it even less. We've got to work with them and amongst them. So cut it out, as from now.'

Terry made a mock salute. He was not pleased.

'Have I your apostolic sanction to go upstairs and wash?'

'You don't need any sanction for that, Terry.'

'I didn't think so. But, as we seem to have turned into a Sunday School or a nursery, I thought I'd better ask.'

'All right. Go and wash. Wash your mouth out, too.'

'Thanks, Nana.' He went out.

'A good boy,' Paul said, 'but he's got swelled head. You have to bounce him. Well—see you soon.'

He hurried out, leaving John deeply disturbed. The look on Votty's face rose in his mind's eye, making him squirm. Could that be the explanation? Must it be? In a panic of distaste, he took refuge in the thought that the girls had shown an equal disregard for Paul's expressed wishes. Yet that was disturbing in a different way. If Paul was to have no more authority than that over them and the rest of the cast, it was a very poor augury for the picture.

At that moment Votty came in. It was unthinkable to speak to him about Terry: a repetition of the slander was the last thing John wanted. Yet he could not keep quiet; and, after a few moments of acute uneasiness, he approached the subject obliquely.

'Those girls don't seem afraid of Paul. They sauced him and tell him where he gets off.'

Votty grunted.

'Don't worry. It's the last kick they'll give. Once we're started, they toe the line.'

'Do you?' John asked him.

Votty made a motion as if he were chewing something and preparing to spit it out. For the moment John was afraid he had displeased him.

'We work together.' Votty said finally. 'I argue only if it

is for the good of the picture. If Paul doubts, he can come and have a look. Then he sees I am right. Paul is a good director: only, if you did not watch, he would direct your life too.'

XII

THE camera was not ready by two, despite Paul's largesse and cajoleries, but it was ready soon after three, at a total cost of nine pounds odd. Still, the company got value for its money, for Paul gleamed in and out among the army of helpers like quicksilver, and, before they knew where they were, they found themselves unloading the entire consignment. None of them was able afterwards to say how this minor miracle came about. They discussed it as they liquidated their earnings in Girvan's bar, and, if Paul's ears had burned, it would have been for tributes of reluctant admiration. He who could bamboozle the able-bodied men of Dennistown into doing a job they had never meant to do, in excess of their contract, was a man indeed.

The camera for the tests had been set up by some rocks and a tree at the top of a small field. The villagers swarmed to look on, but Paul shooed them away. The field was private property, he explained, and he had hired it from its owner. The said owner, a scrawny toothless old man, stood grinning by his door. He viewed the whole thing as an insane but..profitable joke: and the idea that the others should be warned off his field, with which they made free at all times, and were welcome, seemed to him the funniest part of it. The villagers thought so too, but they did not want to offend Paul, so they retired as far as the low stone wall, whence they kept up a babble of talk and laughter.

Votty glowered at them. Katie, white but smiling bravely, sat on a rock and waited for her ordeal.

'They'll put her off,' Votty complained to Paul. 'She's all tense. You should have done it indoors.'

'You saw for yourself, the place isn't ready. I've hired

three old guys to clean it. Anyway, ninety per cent of the shots are out of doors. I want an out of doors test.'

'The light's wrong.'

'It's good enough.' Paul came close, and spoke out of the side of his mouth. 'I told you, this test doesn't matter. It's only for the say-so.'

'Then we could just as well do it indoors.'

Paul raised his brows whimsically, and went to speak to the boy who held the baby donkey. Before he reached him, he was intercepted by Judy Girvan.

'It's not fair.' Her eyes burned at him. 'You promised you'd give me a test, and you're starting with her.'

'Listen, sugar. In the studios we sometimes test twenty girls for a part. Well, we've got to do them in some order, haven't we? We can't do them all at once. Now—does it matter who comes first?'

'You've made up your mind already.'

'If I had, I wouldn't be bothering with a test. You'll have your turn soon: so stand by. Now, son. Bring her on.'

The small boy obediently came forward, leading the little donkey by a halter. This was too much for some of the brighter spirits in the audience. They whistled and let catcalls, sending the little nervous beast spindling off in dismay. The little boy tugged and shouted, the donkey became wild with fright, and the crowd, enchanted, laughed loudly and redoubled their noises. Paul made as if to appeal to them: then he admitted defeat.

'All right, son. Another time. Here you are.'

He gave the boy half a crown, with a wink and a smile that made them both part of the whole conspiracy. One would think Paul himself had engineered the uproar.

He went up to Katie. Her smile trembled: she was more than halfway to tears. Paul sat down beside her.

'Listen, darling. Don't pay any attention to these people. Pretend they aren't there. Just look at me. I'm going to talk to you. It's a pity we have to do this out of doors here, but the place we're fitting up as a studio isn't ready—they were driving hens out of it when I saw it last—there, that's better: that's a real smile!—and, anyway, nearly all the

shots have to be taken out of doors. So there we are. Now—' he gave a glance at Votty, who was manipulating and squinting through his lens—'yes: take a look at the camera. It's not so terrible, is it? Weil, all that's going to happen this afternoon is that you and I will have a little conversation here. All you have to do is to watch me and listen to what I say. You'll hear a sort of purring sound from the camera. Well, just don't take any notice. Are you comfortable there? Just get up a minute. My. That's terrible hard to sit on. Here, let me roll up this coat for you. No? You prefer it as it is? Right.' The camera purred, and stopped. 'Well, everyone to his taste, as the old man said when he kissed his cow. Is that funny? I didn't think so. Look here—if you laugh like that, they'll all want to know what the joke is. Don't they look fools, all gaping! Look at those old women down there. Where do they come from? What village? Where is it? Can we see it from here? What—over there past the point? .' don't see any houses. Oh yes. I can just make them out. My, you must have fine sight. Why shouldn't you, with those fine eyes? Mustn't I say that kind of thing? Like to slap me? It's no good trying to look angry. You don't know how. You simply don't know how. Even when you were scolding your father yesterday, you couldn't quite manage it. You weren't serious.'

'I was serious.' she said, nodding to affirm it. He had hypnotised her into forgetting the camera.

'Then it's true what I said. You can't look angry, even if you want to. You'll have to, you know, in the picture. How do you feel now? Would you like to do a bit of acting?'

'I'll try, if you like.'

'You needn't, sugar. Yes. Your test's over. Votty's been photographing you all the time we were talking. There! I told you it was nothing to be frightened of. It'll all be as easy as that. Just leave it to me, and you'll be all right. I'll even manage to make you look angry. How was it, Votty?'

'Oke.'

'Get enough?'

'Yes.'

'Right. That was fine, Katie. No, I mean it. You'll be grand. Just relax, and do as I say, and it'll be as easy as pie. Now—next one. Judy! Here you are.'

An excited murmur went up from the onlookers as Judy appeared. One or two called out to Katie, asking her where was her fine young man, and why wasn't he there to begin kissing her. They persisted in this to such an extent that John's attention was distracted from Judy, and he saw that they were doing it not so much at Katie as at a dark young man of the farming type, who stood by himself, glaring angrily. As Katie walked away, he made a couple of irresolute steps towards her. One of the women gave a screech of laughter.

'Och, it's not you we're talkin' about. It's the fine young actor fella, has come all the way from London to make love to her.'

'Will ye look at him. He thinks it's himself we're meanin'.'

The young man's face grew dark with rage. He seemed about to make some retort, then he remembered Katie, and looked for her, but she had walked out of the gate and was well away.

Then, abruptly, the crowd forgot them both and was watching Judy.

Votty, his face expressionless, adjusted the machine. Paul was conferring with the girl. She was tense and set, she spoke in jerks.

'Would you like to do the scene you spoke of, or the same as Katie?' Paul asked her.

'She didn't do a scene.'

'Not a whole one. Bits of several.'

'I'll do the one I spoke of. *She* couldn't do it.'

'Right, sugar. Take your choice. Stand right here.'

'I want him, to act with.'

'I'll have to do instead. Come on. Act like you hate my guts. Act the way you spoke to me yesterday.'

She set herself to begin, then motioned him away.

'I can't do it with you.'

The crowd saw the gesture, and laughed. She frowned at them furiously.

That's it.' Though he wished her to fail—as indeed she must—Paul helped her to give a good performance. He could not misdirect to save his life. She broke off from her natural scowl at the crowd, and stiffened her features into a rigid grimace that suggested nothing so much as an effort not to betray some violent physical discomfort. Then she demanded to be photographed sideways, and from below. Votty made the necessary adjustments, and took her in another rigid pose which showed her brow and hair to advantage, but accentuated the hard line of her jaw and made her nose into a beak.

Well content, Paul let Votty give her a full sixty seconds.

'Like another, sugar?'

She glared at him, uncertain, feeling that he was mocking her.

'Do you want any more?'

'No. As far as Votty and I are concerned, that'll do. But we want you to be satisfied.'

Sullenly she stepped down from the stone. Her place was taken by Brannigan, who proceeded to act with violent theatricality, gesticulating, contorting his face, and mouth-ing ferocious sentiments. Paul watched him tolerantly.

'Brannigan.'

The performance stopped abruptly. 'Yes?'

'Take it easy. Relax.' He spoke quietly on purpose, and Brannigan stepped towards him, a puzzled expression on his face. 'Let's see something a little milder. How do you look if your egg isn't cooked right? Or perhaps it always is? Yes; I guess you'd give anyone a hard time that didn't cook your egg right. That's grand. Quite fierce enough. How would you look if you heard you had to get up at three in the morning? Do you like pickles? Just how do you react to frogs? Linoleum? Saucepan lids? Splendid. Thank you, Mr. Brannigan. That'll do. No. You needn't hold it any longer.'

Brannigan was staring at him blankly.

'You see,' Paul said, 'I was making you act my way. We'll

show it on the screen beside your way, and see which comes out best. Next, please.'

Three other villagers, two grinning, one determined, were put through their paces. Then Paul called the crowd, and, to Votty's disgust, made them parade in groups before the camera. He cracked jokes with the men, flirted with the girls, made love to the older women, and was finally taken himself between two grannies, an arm around each waist, and ended up by giving each a resounding kiss. Then he picked up his hat, and shooed the onlookers away as if they were geese.

'That's all for now, folks. Come and see yourselves at the Church Room on Monday evening. All seats free. Come and see your own picture. As many showings as you like. All welcome. See you all then. Now—scram. Run away home.'

He came back to John.

'Very valuable publicity. They'll come and see themselves. Give them an interest in their work. Well, Votty. How soon can we have the rushes?'

'Ted's not here yet.'

'Ted? Not here? Where is he, then?'

'In Dublin. Doing what you said. He'll be here on the night train. So will Gerry and Fish.'

'Oh yes—I forgot. Well. I suppose you couldn't develop?'

'Ted's got all the stuff.'

The men approached who had helped set up the camera. They looked at it in silent awe. Votty smiled at them, and John noticed that he already knew and used their Christian names. He treated them as if they had always been studio hands, his matter-of-fact manner contrasting with Paul's effusive friendliness: and it was obvious that the men liked and respected him.

Paul clapped his hands together, making them all jump.

'Contracts!' he exclaimed. 'Where's that lawyer?'

He started off. John ran after him, and caught his arm.

'Look: forgive my butting in. But, if you give Katie her

contract before the tests are shown, won't you have trouble with Judy?'

'I've got a part for Judy. She's impossible for Oona, anyway. I told her so, straight out.'

'You said you'd test her for Oona. Won't she have a grievance if you give Katie the contract right away?'

'We'll tell Katie not to say a word.'

'My dear Paul. In a village! how do you imagine you would keep it quiet?'

Paul grimaced pettishly. 'If only Ted were here, we could get the thing done right away. I know. I'll give Katie the contract, and leave out the name of the part. No: that won't do.' His face cleared: he rolled up his eyes. 'What *am I* thinking of! I'll get an option on both girls, to be taken up on Monday, when we've seen the tests. Brannigan I'll take anyway. He's got sense. He'll eat out of my hand, once he sees what a fool he's made of himself.'

'You managed to make them all look natural, once you began on them.'

'Sure. Give me inexperienced players, every time. They've no ideas of their own. You've only got to talk to them. I remember my uncle teaching me to play billiards. I was an absolute novice. He said 'Hit your own ball this way, and aim to hit the other one just there,' and I did, and brought off the shot. I did it again and again. I did fine, until I began to ask what the object of the stroke was. As soon as I began to think about that, instead of concentrating on uncle's orders, I couldn't do a thing. Well: it's like that with the camera. All you have to do is get to know each player, and then find the words that will fetch up the expression you want.'

'What about the sound? You won't be able to talk to them, once you get that fixed up.'

'No. But I'll have talked to them before each shot, and worked out a pantomime to remind them.'

'Isn't it a risk, not to test them for sound?'

'Leave it all to me, John. Leave it all to Paul, the little orphan boy.'

'Are you an orphan?'

'I never saw my father. He passed over when I was five weeks old. And my dear mother passed over six years ago. Where's this lawyer got to?'

XIII

JOHN had been afraid that Flanagan would not turn up for dinner, but he appeared, asserting his individuality by coming in half an hour late.

Paul met him with extraordinary skill: if skill was the word for a warmth of friendliness that seemed wholly unaffected. His manner was attentive, with just a hint of deference; he laughed and chatted and told story after story, all amusing and none malicious, and above all appeared to be experiencing an irrepressible pleasure in the presence of his guest. From being stiff and guarded, Flanagan by degrees relaxed, and presently contributed a story or two of his own. They were uncomfortable stories, grotesque, savagely funny, but he told them well, his high voice screaming like a gull's in imitation of an old country woman's, or giggling goatishly as an old man's. Paul laughed in delight. After one story he seemed unable to stop, shaking his head, drying his eyes, and affirming that it was too much for him altogether. All his resource and charm were in play, and John, looking on, felt an admiring victim and could not but believe they were spontaneous.

It was not till they had returned to the lounge that Flanagan recollected his principles. John watched it happen: saw him sit up in his chair and stiffen: saw the muscles in his neck grow taut, and his eyes begin to stare fixedly at his host.

His chance came as a silence fell. Paul had offered cigars, which Flanagan refused, ostentatiously producing an old foul clay pipe. He lit it, and puffed belligerently, while Paul cut the tip of his cigar and deliberately inserted it between his teeth.

'Well,' Flanagan brought out, 'So you've come all the way from Hollywood to patronise us poor Irish.'

Paul smiled and shook his head.

'I've come here to learn. For instance, I shall sit at the feet of the priest to-morrow morning, and the minister in the evening.'

Flanagan uttered a snort, but John got in before him.

'I've told him he can't possibly do that, but he won't believe me.'

'Of course he can't do it,' Flanagan exclaimed shrilly. 'In this country, Mr. Deakin, you have to be on one side or the other.'

'But why?' Paul spread out his hands. 'I'm on no side. I'm impartial. I'm equally well disposed to both.'

'We have an ugly name for that sort of person,' Flanagan said. 'I won't tell you what it is. You wouldn't like it.'

'I don't get this,' Paul protested. 'I'm here to work with all sections of the community. To get on with all alike.'

'Which means getting on with none. The only result of your going to both churches will be to make both suspect you and despise you.'

'But I can't slight one by going only to the other.'

'Then don't go to either.'

Paul looked at John, quite unconvinced. Flanagan gave a sudden wicked grin.

'Apart from that, Irish people have an old-fashioned notion that one goes to church, not for business purposes, but to worship God. Forgive my mentioning it.'

'Forgive *my* mentioning that I said nothing whatever about business purposes; and that it is possible to worship God in more than one type of church.'

'Or in the green fields,' Flanagan sneered. 'Or on the sea-shore. I know.'

Paul's eyes were steady. 'God is a Spirit, and therefore everywhere.'

'Even in a film studio.'

'Certainly. Why not?'

'Well,' Flanagan said, 'that brand of weak-kneed liberalism won't go down over here. We take our religion seriously.'

'Have you any right to assume I don't take mine seriously?'

'Only your own words. I tell you, in this country you have to be on one side or the other.'

'Meaning there are only two sides?'

'Sorry. I should have said one side or another.¹

'God being only on one?'

'Naturally,' John put in. 'We're a race of partisans, so you couldn't expect us to worship any but a partisan God.'

Flanagan frowned. The sentiment was his, but he did not care for the way John put it. Paul leaned forward.

'I did not realize you were so much interested in religious matters, Mr. Flanagan. The little I know of your writings suggested you were anti-clerical.'

'You don't understand, Paul,' John said. With Flanagan to take the main shock of opposition, he was enjoying himself. 'We're all interested in religion in this country, anti-clericals more than anybody. No one can get away from it. That's why we don't like to see anyone carrying it around in his pocket like a toothbrush.'

Paul shuddered. 'I don't carry my toothbrush in my pocket. But I certainly do carry my religion around with me, in the sense that I don't need any particular place to realize it.'

'An accommodating religion,' Flanagan observed.

'It is not attached to man-made forms and ceremonies, certainly.'

'So it blossoms even in the film studio.'

'As that is where I do a great part of my work,' Paul said with a smile, 'it's just as well.'

'Has this adaptable faith a name?'

'It has. But the name wouldn't convey much to you. It's what you'd call a sect.'

'Oh, come. We like you better at once. Don't we, John?'

'I like him very well anyhow.'

To his surprise, John had lost all awe of Paul. What a coward you are, he told himself. You can't speak your mind till someone else is here to pave the way for you.

Paul turned to him. 'That's fine of you, John. That's

real friendship. Take a man as he is. Accept even what you don't care for in him, as well as what you do.'

John gave an uncomfortable smile, and Flanagan's eyes gleamed ironically.

'So, in this atmosphere of brotherly love, and under the presidency of a God without prejudices, you are united to debauch all Dennistown. Splendid.'

'Pardon. But did you say debauch?'

'That's the word. Debauch. Or, if you prefer it, debase. Prostitute. Ruin. Corrupt.'

'My!' Paul said mildly. 'Did you know anything about this, John?'

'Mr. Deakin.' Flanagan gripped the arms of his chair. His ironic manner vanished. 'Is it possible you don't realize what you are going to do to this place? Don't you see that you are going to overturn all its quiet, decent standards, upset its ideas, and trample its quality in the gutter? Don't you see that your values simply won't graft on to those of an Irish village?'

Paul looked at him for a couple of seconds without speaking. He took out his cigar, and sat back in his chair.

'Just before I start in to answer that, would you mind defining my values?'

'Inflated ego, spotlights, drivel, and cash.'

'Thank you. I'm not entitled, I suppose, to demur at that definition? I have to accept it?'

'It is (he definition commonly applied to Hollywood values.'

'By whom?'

'By persons of taste and culture. If you are honest, you'll be obliged to accept ninety per cent of it.'

'And you, as an honest man—you see, I don't make a supposition of it—you must be ready to listen to my side of it.'

Flanagan puffed at his pipe. 'That's ohly fair.'

'Thank you. And to admit that, even supposing your definition were generally true—which I don't for an instant allow—there might be exceptions to it. There might be individual films and directors who didn't subscribe to the worship of the golden calf.'

'It's an academic possibility.'

Paul smiled broadly. 'I won't waste your time with an academic discussion. I'll give you the creed of one director of motion pictures, by name Paul Deakin. I believe in the motion picture as the greatest instrument of culture and liberation in the world. Greater even than radio, for it has no limits of language. It appeals to the sense of beauty that is in the eye of every human being. It is the world's greatest teacher—yes, by far the greatest: and I'll tell you why.'

'I wish you would.'

'It is the greatest, because it teaches without seeking to teach, and those who see it learn without seeking to learn. They go to be amused and to satisfy their emotions, and they are amused and their emotions are satisfied, and at the same time they have learned—without knowing it. They have been given new standards in culture, in the furnishing of their houses, in hygiene, in conduct——'

'They have indeed,' Flanagan interjected sardonically. 'I'm with you there.'

Til go part of the way to meet you. I'll admit that there have been pictures that weren't a very good example, that didn't show worthwhile standards of conduct or of life lived the way it should be lived. But they're not typical. You don't judge a civilization by its crooks. If a man came to a new country, and saw nothing but its prisons, he wouldn't form a very fair impression of it.'

It would depend on how many prisons there were. And what proportion of crooks.'

'Very good. If——'

'A country or a civilization that produced a great preponderance of crooks could be fairly indicted as a whole. You admit that?'

'Certainly. But——'

'Well. The film industry can be indicted as a whole.'

'—I maintain that undesirable pictures are in a very small minority.'

'And I maintain that ninety-nine per cent are not only undesirable but damnable. It is evident that we have widely different standards.'

'All right.' Paul said. 'We can't agree on general lines. Let's cut out generalisations, and get down to something concrete and particular.'

'Willingly.'

'You're objecting, in the first place, to the fact that I am coming to this particular village to make this particular picture. You assume right away that it will be an undesirable picture.'

'Having no reason to assume that it will be otherwise.'

'Have you seen any of my pictures? Pictures that I've directed?'

'Not that I know of. I've seen very few pictures.'

'Like most of the people who object to them. Doesn't it, in passing, strike you as odd that, whereas a scientific judgment would not be accepted unless it was based on a very great number of instances, people are content to base a moral or aesthetic judgment on a very few?'

'A passable debating society point.' Flanagan said, with a sneer. 'One doesn't have to stick one's nose over a hundred cesspools to know that cesspools stink.'

'Not even a passable debating society point.' Paul smiled, 'but a totally false analogy. Have you read John's book?'

'I have.'

'What do you think of it? Is it a good book?'

'I am bound to admit that it is.'

'That is a handsome admission. I am sure John appreciates it.' He spoke apparently without sarcasm, 'All the same, it has a somewhat unwilling ring. It sounds as if you had expected the book not to be good. As if you were surprised that it was.'

'I was surprised.' Flanagan said bluntly. 'I still am. I would not have expected that a man brought up in a fat, pastoral part of the country, as different from here as possible, and then after living so long in England, would get so near to these people.'

'He has got near to them?'

Flanagan hesitated. 'I would know that he did not belong to them. There are small differences. But—yes.' He looked across at John. 'He has got them well.'

'Thank you. That was my own feeling.' Paul said, 'though of course I had nothing but my intuition to go on. Now—you know that John has written the script for this picture?'

'So he tells me.'

'Then, my dear Mr. Flanagan, if you still think the picture is going to be undesirable, that can only mean that you think I am a perfectly terrible director.'

'I don't know that you aren't. The one thing I do know about you—the one contribution you have made—doesn't incline me to think well of you.'

'And that is——?'

'You have so bribed, bought, bullied, or otherwise overborne this poor gutless fellow as to make him commit a supreme outrage and violation on his own book.'

'Oh dear. Oh my.' Paul grinned at John. 'Just what is this terrible thing?'

'You've persuaded him to keep the girl alive. To destroy utterly the whole logic and meaning of the story. To blaspheme against the fundamentals of his art. It must be you who made him do it. He could never have done such a thing of himself.'

'But, my dear Mr. Flanagan, every art medium has its limitations.'

'Yes, you taught him that catch-phrase, too.' Flanagan suddenly sat up straight and hit the table a furious blow. 'It's a lie I' he shouted. 'A camera will photograph anything. A microphone will record anything. Limitation be damned!'

'Sure. Sure. The camera will photograph a hanging or an obscene action or a celebration of the black mass. But you can't show such things on a public screen. Therefore they are outside the medium.'

'There's no analogy. Such things are illegal.'

'Sure. An audience wouldn't stand for them. Anything an audience won't stand for, for whatever reason, moral or aesthetic, lies outside the medium of the screen.'

'Don't you see,' Flanagan shouted, 'that's exactly my objection to the whole damned thing? If what you say about audiences is true—it may be, but I suspect audiences have a hell of a sight more sense and better taste than the

crew of pimps who grow fat on catering for their lowest instincts—then it means that the film can only present characterless and spineless rubbish. It can contain nothing that might offend the most half-witted slut that has sense enough to find her way into a seat. It must contain only the views of life that she will find acceptable.'

'Don't forget I said the great mission of pictures was to teach and to improve.'

Which they do by prostituting and devitalising every story they lay hands on.'

'Well.' Paul said, 'Oona can't die (if you don't mind my returning to the particular book we're speaking of). That's a screen axiom. No audience would stand for it. That leaves us two alternatives. One is not to film the book at all.'

'The only honorable decision.'

'The other is so to adjust the balance of the picture story that a happy ending becomes the logical fulfilment of it, just as an unhappy ending is essential to the book.'

'Which is utterly impossible.'

'Ah. That's where I disagree with you.' Paul said sweetly. 'Just why is an unhappy ending more artistic than a happy one, Mr. Flanagan? I know you literary men hold it to be so. But why?'

Flanagan sweated with rage. 'No 'literary man', as you call him, would say that every unhappy ending *per se* was more 'artistic', as you call it, than a happy one. The whole point is the context from which it arises. What is inartistic is to take a story so constructed that a tragedy is its only logical outcome, and then twist it cock-eyed because a crew of silly louts and bitches haven't the guts to face reality, and so yelp for the tale to end in a way that will suit their own cowardly desires. Bah!'

'Audiences pay to be entertained, not harrowed.'

'So you give them any garbage that will entertain them.' Flanagan jumped up. 'It's a waste of time going on with this conversation, Mr. Deakin. We have no single point of agreement.'

'Wait a minute. Sit down again. We have. And you yourself mentioned it a minute ago. Please.'

Flanagan sat down. He had gone pale with rage: he breathed fast, and his nostrils twitched like a rabbit's.

'Now,' Paul went on. 'You said a minute ago that it was inartistic to have a story end happily when all the preliminaries pointed in the direction of tragedy. There I'm with you. Yes. Completely. To tack an ending on to a picture that doesn't belong to it is bad picture-making—though it's no worse than to insist on an unhappy ending, just for the sake of it, when the preliminaries point the other way. You'll agree there?'

Flanagan's voice still shook. 'The end must arise naturally and inevitably from the beginning. The story must develop logically.'

'Good. Good.' Paul's eyes twinkled. 'In a parenthesis, that comes oddly from an Irish writer. So many of you excel in fantasy.'

'Fantasy is a thing apart. Don't confuse the issue.'

'Not on your life. It's too important. Now—the essence of a good story or picture is that it shall develop logically—inevitably, I think your word was—from beginning to end, and that the end shall be homogeneous with the beginning; am I right?'

Flanagan nodded.

'Then, on your own showing, all we have to do to make a good picture of *Awaken the West* is to arrange the beginning so that it leads up naturally to Oona living on happily, instead of dying.'

Paul sat back triumphantly, and beamed on his opponent. Flanagan stared at him, the whites of his eyes seeming to widen. Then he leaped to his feet. Saliva gleamed on his lips. His voice cracked almost to a scream.

'But, God above us, man! don't you realize that's impossible? Don't you realize that would utterly destroy the story?' He clutched his head. 'Is this a lunatic asylum! am I really listening to this nonsense? Or have I gone mad? John! can't you tell him—explain to him—make him see?'

He started to pace up and down the room. So genuine was his agitation that the others watched him without

speaking: John in a cold depression, for Flanagan's attack had destroyed the defence he had gradually and laboriously built up against this very feeling that he had sold and prostituted, not only his story, but the life it portrayed: and Paul in tolerant surprise. Catching John's eye, Paul slowly and amusedly shook his head. These Irishmen, the gesture said: well, well.

Flanagan stopped his pacing, and stood in front of John.

'If this wasn't a good book, and you weren't a good artist, I'd wash my hands of the whole thing and leave you to wallow in your own filth. But the reputation of the whole country is at stake. You, God help us all, are internationally known as an Irish writer. Somehow, despite the corrupting influences to which you have been subjected, you have managed to write truly of your country and produce a work of art. Your book has been justly admired. For once, a good book has had a popular success. The herd who bought it, even if they read it, didn't know how good it was, but no matter. It was good. Now, with the eyes of the world upon you, you sell your book to this accursed muck-factory: you hand it over to this—this tickler of shopgirls——'

'Hey!' Paul protested. 'I never tickled a shopgirl.'

Flanagan shot round on him. 'Physically, I dare say not. I'd think better of you if you had.' He returned to John. 'What you are doing is to blaspheme not only against your book—that would be bad enough—but against your art and your country and your countrymen, in the face of the whole world. For every one that has read your book, ten thousand will see the film this man makes out of it. What they will know of the country and its life will be the travesty, the prostitution, the sugared mess, the abomination he makes of it. I appeal to you in the name of your manhood and your art and your country either to stop the whole thing, or to insist on the book being followed in every detail.'

That, as I've explained,' Paul said, 'is not possible.'

'Then scrap the thing. You may miss the weight from your pocket, but you won't have it on your conscience.'

'I can't do that,' John answered, 'I've signed the contract, and written the script.'

Flanagan spread his hands helplessly. 'In that case——'
Suddenly John found himself shaking with anger.

'I must say, Quentin, you take a damned arrogant attitude. Are you the keeper of my conscience? By what right do you assume that the script I've written is a violation of what I believe? You haven't even seen it.'

'I don't want to see it.'

'Naturally. It might upset your theory.'

'You told me yourself——'

'I've noticed before now that you have a healthy distaste for facts. Your sort of thinking gets on better without them.'

'You told me yourself that you had changed the book to a so-called happy ending. I don't need to hear any more than that.'

'Will you read the script?'

'No.'

'There you are!' They glared at each other.

'Why won't you read it?' Paul interposed mildly.

'Because my stomach's easily turned. And because there's another reason why this infernal project should be given up.' Flanagan faced Paul. 'If you must do this thing, at least take it away to Hollywood, where it belongs, and do it with your hirelings. Don't come here destroying our life. God! by the time you've made this film, the picture you give of us will almost have come true.'

'John, John.' Paul shook his head. 'You and I are terribly dangerous people, and no one knows it.'

'Don't jeer, man. Can't you see how serious this is? Don't you realize how you are going to overturn this place and the lives of everyone in it?'

'I see that I am going to be the means of bringing prosperity to poor and decent people.'

'Don't you see that, by suddenly flooding the place with money, you will ruin it? What will these people be fit for, after you have done with them?'

'A better and fuller life than they lead now. From a little God-forsaken village, with primitive and insanitary arrangements, this will become a prosperous and healthy resort. Do you realize that half these cottages have no plumbing?'

'I do.' Flanagan replied fiercely. 'I was reared in one.'

Then you'll be the first to appreciate the change that will come.'

'God in heaven! are lavatories your idea of the millennium?'

'It certainly includes them.'

Flanagan sat down. 'Let me tell you, you will meet with opposition.'

'From the priest?'

'And others. The owner of the local estate will have something to say.'

'He's with us.' Paul said. 'He recommended me to do the book, before he knew what picture I had in mind.'

'An innocent. A fool. Well. Even so, you won't find it easy.'

'Python Films is a wealthy corporation. It can deal with any opposition that is likely to arise.'

Flanagan stared at him. 'You speak as if you think everyone can be bought,' he said.

Paul looked at the end of his cigar for a moment before replying.

'Sure,' he said at last, 'I think everyone can be bought. Not necessarily with money. Though money will fix most people.'

'Indeed.' Flanagan said, breathing through his nose.

Paul leaned back and spoke dreamily. 'The whole secret of buying a man is to pay him enough. Say a man earns five pounds a week, they offer him ten. That's no use. That doesn't tempt him. Offer him fifty, and you'll start him thinking. Find out his way of living, and offer him something he won't dare refuse.'

'Are you thinking of attempting to bribe Father McCubberty?' Flanagan asked quietly.

'I would never offer a minister of religion money for himself. That would insult him. But most of them can be brought to consider a project in a different light, once they realize that it is going to be of great benefit to their church or congregation. A new organ; new vestments; a new altar cloth; a few thousand pounds for their pet hospital or

charity; practical, God-fearing men who put their faith and the welfare of their flock first are not going to deprive that flock of a blessing, or lose a means to glorify their God, for the sake of a mere personal prejudice. They are taught that men do not gather grapes of thistles; and they draw the logical inference that what bears such thumping good grapes cannot be a thistle.'

Flanagan stared, fascinated. 'It's like listening to Satan, himself,' he whispered. 'Go on. Please.'

Paul waved his cigar. There's nothing else to say.'

Still staring at him, Flanagan began to nod. The nods grew longer and more violent.

'So you believe that every man can be bought?'

'I'd rather say that every man is liable to change his viewpoint if a different viewpoint is urged persuasively enough.'

'Do you think I can be bought?'

There was a moment of silence. Abruptly Paul laid down his cigar.

'Mr. Flanagan.' The words cracked out, hard and incisive. 'All this time you have been whaling into us. The time has now come to carry the war into your country. You've accused John here of playing fast and loose and betraying his art. Do you care for your art? Do you take it seriously?'

'What do you mean!' Flanagan stared at him haughtily. 'Of course I take it seriously.'

'But are you prepared to do anything for it? Would you make sacrifices for it? You talk a lot about the reputation of your country. Are you prepared to back up your words? Or is it all just talk?'

'I think my career has shown that I am ready to serve both my art and my country.'

'Very well. A further opportunity is now offered you. You say this picture is going to be bad for art and bad for Ireland. I'm going to give you a chance to look after both, and to do your own art a good turn at the same time. Come in with us on this job, Mr. Flanagan. Work with me as assistant director. See that we do it right. See that we keep the spirit of the place and the people. I'll give you three

hundred pounds a month for a minimum of two months. That will mean that, when the picture's finished, you will be able to take time *off* to finish your long poem. And you won't have to trot around writing any more guide books—and I don't imagine that guide books are too good for your art, anyway. Now—what do you say?

Flanagan sat up, gripping the arms of his chair. His face had gone white. For a few seconds his mouth worked silently.

'You devil!' he breathed at last.

Paul turned to John. 'You see? He's ready to talk about his country and his art, but he won't do anything for them. He's a bluffer, like most of his sort. He'd far rather sell himself for a pittance to write guide books which anyone could do, than do a job which he's spent half an hour telling us is necessary. Art and country can go fish, for all he'll do to help them. Meantime, he can be a martyr. Yes—it's all of a piece.'

'Taul!' John put out a hand in alarm: he feared Flanagan would have a seizure.

'Rats!' Paul cried. 'He's been bawling us out all evening. Now it's his turn. Flanagan, you're a windbag,' he continued, pointing a finger at the shaking poet. 'You talk big, and when I give you a chance to live up to your words, you're scared stiff.' He leaned across, gripping the table. 'Think, man. Can you afford to turn my offer down? Do you want to write that poem, or don't you? John here is worth ten of you. He's an honest man. He sells me his book, and comes in with me to help make a good job of it. I know your sort. You'd sell your book all right—oh yes, you would, and ask a thumping big price for it: and then, instead of helping, you'd shrug your shoulders and stand aside and say you weren't to blame for what we did with it. But you'd pocket the dough all right. Another thing about this man, John. He's jealous. He won't work on this story, because it's yours.'

'It's a lie.' The words sounded little above a whisper, but such was the convulsion with which they came that they had the effect of a scream.

'He's getting his breath back now,' Paul said, 'and he'll

tell us what a noble idealist he is, and how he's refusing to help safeguard his art and country from the highest motives. Really, of course, he's only doing it to raise the price on me.'

Flanagan jumped up. Foam stood on his lower lip.

'God damn your soul!' he cried, in a shrill, broken voice; and rushed from the room.

John turned a shocked face on his companion.

'Paul! Of all the unscrupulous attacks——'

'Nuts! he had it coming to him. There's only one thing to do with a guy like that. Sail right in, and call his bluff. He goes stalking up and down the world shooting off his mouth and making a long spiel about how he's honest and you can like it or lump it: but as soon as anyone starts on him, he yells the place down.'

'You were horribly unfair to him.'

'John: let me tell you something. The whole art of quarrelling is, keep out as long as you can, but once you're in, hit your hardest with every stick you can find. I'm peaceable. I don't lose my temper, and I'll go all ways round sooner than have a fight. But, if I have to fight, if there's got to be a showdown, then I go into it one hundred per cent, cold as ice water, and keep it up till the opposition has had enough.'

'You do indeed. But what's the point?'

'What's which point?'

'The point of baiting Flanagan like that? Revenge? A passion for abstract justice?'

'Certainly not revenge. It could be the other thing: I don't like to see this sort of a guy get away with it. No. My aim was strictly practical. It would be good for the picture to have his name among the credits.'

'My dear Paul! you don't imagine he'll work for you now, do you?'

'Like to hear my bet?' As John stared, he went on. 'He'll be back to-morrow or the next day, to tell us how wrong we are. We've given him something to think about, anyway. Cheer up, John! you mustn't take this seriously. You're too modest, too gentle. You shouldn't let these four-flushers come it over you. Say! what's all this?'

An astounding burst of noise assailed their ears. It seemed to come from the bar. With a glance at John, Paul went down the passage. The door of the bar was open, and inside it, centre of a cheering throng, old Heggarty stood, leaning on a friend's shoulder, and swaying like a tree in a gale. Porter foamed and dribbled from a mug in his hand, which he waved in time to the rhythmic chant that was rising from his lips.

'Every fertile thing there will be in the garden, every root in the earth, and every fruit on the tree. Fine provision will be in the house, butcher's meat, tinned fruits from America, cakes with sugar, and butter for a hundred. Good company will be in it, and tobacco for pastime, and rivers o' drink. The good man that's givin' me credit this night, the way yez all can drink with me—sure, he'll live in splendour with the orders will be lavished on him. And all because of me daughter, me little Katie, her that from this out will be minglin' with the e-leety o' the earth. Kings and queens and lords and dukes and bishops and millionaires; sure every class of high-up person will be throopin' to kiss the two little hands of her. She'll wed a baron itself, or a prince maybe——'

A man pushed past them from the lavatory, walking unsteadily, and went into the bar, shutting the door.

'My,' Paul said, with a comical grimace. 'That's too bad. He gave them the slip after all.'

XIV

WHETHER because John's and Flanagan's remonstrance had carried weight with him, or for reasons of his own, Paul did not visit both churches on the Sunday. The morning he spent with Toots and Gladys, planning, dictating, and making those detailed schedules and arrangements which, unthought of in most studios, had caused him to be one of the speediest and most economical directors in the business.

The remaining members of the outfit had arrived overnight, and Paul had time to go over with them all his plans and arrangements. By four o'clock he was finished. He took John with him for a walk along the shore, keeping as near the edge as he could, and having to skip nimbly to avoid the seething inrush from a wave: but he was quick on his feet as a cat, and did not get so much as a speck on the pipeclay of his co-respondent shoes.

'I didn't know you could dance like that, Paul.' John laughed, after a particularly agile gambol.

'I was a dancer once. Didn't you know?'

'I might have guessed. I always assume, now, that you've been everything.'

Paul smirked. 'I had a song and dance in the second act of *Here She Goes*. I'd never danced professionally before. They offered me the part at short notice when Jack Eastcott walked out. I had just eighteen hours to learn the whole routine.'

'You brought it off, though.'

'I played the part for seven months. Jack was sore. You see, they figured I did it better than he did. He didn't speak to me again in years. We're the greatest friends now, though. Hoop!'

He sped sideways again, on his toes, keeping just a few inches from the shooting tongue of foam.

In the evening he visited Cartwright's chapel, and disorganised the entire service by his presence. He sang one verse of one hymn, but then stopped.

'Darn it all,' he explained to John afterwards, 'the whole congregation were looking at me. I'm apt to forget myself, and join in. It doesn't do.'

As John was not with him, and had no speech with anyone who was, he could not tell whether it was the beauty or the oddity of his voice which had made the congregation stare. At any rate, Paul was in fine form at dinner and afterwards, telling stories, chaffing the girls, baiting Votty—a sport which Votty seemed in his farouche way to enjoy—and attempting to scare Ted, the Sound man, by imitating in outrageous fantasy the voices he would have to record

on the morrow. The fantasy was leavened with extraordinarily accurate imitations of Katie and of Brannigan. Altogether, it was an hilarious evening, and everyone went to bed cheerful.

Of Flanagan there was no sign.

XV

THE weather was still fine in the morning, and Girvan's was astir at an hour unprecedented in its history. Paul had asked to be called at half past six. At twenty to seven, nothing at all having happened, he roused the entire household, including Girvan and the staff. The only one who was awake was Judy. Paul found her in the kitchen making herself some tea.

'I don't know what's come to this place,' he said. 'I distinctly gave orders for a call at half past six.'

'When will you have the tests ready, Mr. Deakin?'

'Two o'clock. And when I say two o'clock, I mean two o'clock. Same as I meant half past six. Why did no one call me?'

'You'd be lucky if you got called at half past seven, in this place.'

She poured out a cup of tea, and offered it to him. Paul sat on the edge of the table, swinging a silk-clad leg. His brocade dressing-gown of pale lilac was carefully draped around him, and his hair was in perfect order.

'That's one of the things that'll have to change about this place. I work to schedule.'

'I wish you luck,' she said. 'What are you going to do this morning?'

'Test the' make-up. Maybe shoot a scene or two for practice.'

'How can you test the make-up when you haven't given out the parts?'

'Test those I have given. Don't worry, sugar. Your make-up will be the same, whichever part you play. You have to look your best for both.'

She eyed him. 'I don't believe you're playing fair with me. You've already made up your mind to give it to her.'

'I watched the tests being shot, and they made me think even more strongly that my first opinion was right. But I promise you no decision will be made till we've all seen the tests on the screen.'

'We had no make-up on Saturday. She's younger than me, so it will favour her.'

He shook his head. 'We can tell, sugar, believe me. Look: you talk as if this was a matter of personal favour, a thing I can settle for myself on my own whim. Don't you realize that back of this there are thousands and thousands of pounds, and that if I make a wrong choice all that money goes down the drain, and I'm accountable? Would I risk losing my job and branding myself as an incompetent jackass by choosing the wrong girl for the most important part in the picture?'

'I *can* play the part,' she said sullenly. 'I understand it. She's only a child.'

Paul finished his tea, and got off the table.

'Well, sugar, if the test says so, the part is yours. Now—hurry those lazy skrimshankers up, will you? We've got to get moving.'

Breakfast, ordered for seven, was served by resentful and sulky domestics at ten to eight, the porridge lumpy, the bacon charred, and the tea, made from water that had not boiled, a pale fluid in which the tea-leaves floated gaily. Paul, after ascertaining that everyone's was in the same state, sent for Girvan. There was a delay of some ten minutes: then the landlord appeared, in his shirtsleeves, scowling and unshaven.

Quietly, Paul showed him the food and the tea. Girvan stuck out his lower lip.

'It's the way they're not used to startin' at such an outlandish hour.'

'I'll give them exactly twenty-four hours to get used to it,' Paul said. 'Our agreement is that this establishment and staff are entirely at my disposal. What do you suppose I've doubled their wages for?'

Girvan shrugged.

They can take their choice.' Paul said, raising his voice so that the little gathering in the passage could hear. 'Either they play ball and earn their money, or I bring a full staff from Dublin and run the place myself.'

'Ye couldn't do that.' Girvan said thickly.

'I can and will.'

Girvan lost his temper. 'If this place isn't to your likin', ye can find some place else to go.'

'A fortnight from now. Till then, you are under contract to give me the service I have paid you for.'

'There's no place else for miles around.'

Paul smiled sweetly. 'I have a fleet of caravans on call in Dublin, and I've hired a field to stand them in. It looks as if I'd better wire for them. Meanwhile, I've hired this hotel. I've paid for service, and I'm going to have it.'

Girvan eyed him under his pouched lids. 'If ye want to turn the place upside down, and get everyone up at the crack o' dawn, ye must pay according. Breakfast is at nine o'clock in this house, exceptin' someone would have to get the early train to the junction.'

'We all have to make an early start in this business.' Paul was urbane again. 'I gave you warning the other day, and again last night, so there's no excuse. That will do, now. I'll see you later.'

He turned his back, and Girvan, after standing for a couple of seconds, went out, his face working evilly.

Paul looked at his watch. 'Katie should be here. I told her eight o'clock sharp.'

'It's no good.' John said. 'I told you before, these people have no notion of time' They sit up till all hours, and get up when they feel like it. They're up till three in the morning one day, and go to bed at eight on another. They eat when they're hungry. Half the time they don't know what hour it is at all.'

'They'll have to learn. We can't make a picture that way.'

'You'll have fun, teaching them.'

'I'll teach them all right. I made South Sea Islanders keep to schedule, and I'm not going to be beaten here.'

Besides.' Paul's sense of the proprieties came to the surface again, 'this is a *hotel*.'

'In Ireland.' Votty put in. Paul spun on his heel.

'I've kept your countrymen to schedule too, and in Paris.'

'Yes.' Votty said. 'You amused them.'

'Well.' Paul said amicably, 'I'm going to raise hell around here. I can't have the company's money wasted.' He winked at John, and lowered his voice. 'Don't look so worried, John. I took your word for this. We've got nothing serious to do to-day, and all day to do it in.'

'Then what are you making all the fuss about?'

'To get 'em hopping. So that they'll be in time to-morrow.' He grinned delightedly. 'Can't start shooting after a row all round. I shall have to bawl out everyone in the cast, and scare hell out of Girvan as well. We'll get all that over to-day.'

John looked at him. He was not yet used to Paul's peculiar mixture of candour and guile, of authority and childishness. He rebelled professionally against saying that Paul was incalculable, and blamed himself for being taken by surprise. The main characteristics being known, one should be able to predict their emergence. But Paul didn't fit into any normal scheme. With most people, one could anticipate the way in which a given circumstance would cause them to behave; but Paul's behaviour was more like that of a roulette machine. One might know how many numbers there were, but one did not know which number would turn up. For the twentieth time, John told himself that he must consciously study Paul: and realized, once more, that he did not know even the fundamental things about him. Was he a complex character, or extremely simple? Simple himself, John inclined to the latter belief. He felt that the force which radiated from Paul, though exercised so far only in petty details of management and contrivance, was too strong not to be based on some inner authority, some quality of the spirit. Yet what spiritual impulse could set in motion these small gleeful stratagems? Paul's handling of the villagers during the camera tests had been mad, from the orthodox standpoint—John had seen

enough of the studio to know that. Yet it was utterly sure: and John, who all the time had wondered whether he was in the hands of a confident and clever bluffer, was coming to believe that Paul would direct the film as well as he said he would.

Just before they set off for Dennistown, John had lunched with Gerry Crothers, a director for whom he had done small jobs at Richmond. Gerry had not a good word to say for Paul. To cover up his own dismay, John had told him of the sensitiveness and the intelligence Paul had shown in discussing the book, of his exact and often poetic visualization of the scenes. Gerry sneered.

'He talks a good picture,' he said. 'There are plenty like that in the business.'

The two or three successful pictures of Paul's which had crossed the Atlantic he dismissed by saying that he was a notorious picker of other people's brains, and that the assistant and the cameraman and the stars directed the picture, and Paul took the credit.

Well—Paul had picked no one's brains yesterday. It remained to be seen if he could persuade the village people to act: but he had certainly made them be themselves, and in their own despite, if only for a few seconds. Of course, the tests hadn't yet been screened. They might look very different then. But they'd been convincing as an example of personal ascendancy; very convincing. Yes, Paul was—what? Not an enigma, since he kept nothing hidden: his cards were all on the table. The question was, which card would he pick up, and why? What word was there to describe such a personality? And *were* all the cards on the table? John had an uneasy feeling that there might be an ace or two up the immaculate, Savile Row sleeve. What, too, of the accusation which Votty had made against Paul. He recalled the spiteful flicker in Votty's eye as he had made it, and his evil smile. What lay at the back of that allegation?

Switching his mind from the unpleasant subject, John focussed on the clash between Paul and Dennistown in the matter of time. Here his mind was divided. He longed to

see Paul's confidence defeated: he hated, as do most Irishmen who have left their country and learned to live to another time signature, that envenomed apathy, that brutish inertia which the Irish can oppose to any effort to make them bestir themselves. The refusal to live by the clock could come, as in some parts of Ireland and of the Scottish Highlands, from a noble indifference to the material rewards of hustle, from a realisation of the importance of leisure and of time to meditate and to let the soul expand in social intercourse: but, coupled as it often was with a grasping eagerness for the said material rewards, and revealed in its nakedness as a desire to grab the cash and do as little as might be in return, it was an ugly thing, and needed smashing. Good luck to Paul if he could smash it: yet John felt a secret pride in the power of the national resistance. It was good to see Paul stub his toes against it.

Meanwhile, the subject of these speculations had followed Girvan to his lair, and was cheerfully smiling into the mottled, reluctant face.

'I'm sorry if I was a little short with you, Mr. Girvan. But, at all costs, I have to get my work done on time. Now—I don't want to put your people out unduly. Suppose I can get the cast here, and have them made up before breakfast, at what hour can you guarantee that the meal will be ready? It's no good saying nine o'clock. Put that right out of your head. Can you make it eight?'

'We might,' Girvan said grudgingly. 'Eight to a quarter past.'

'Eight is the latest. Come now. You don't want us to leave here, any more than we want to go. This business is going to suit us both very well. There's a lot of money coming into this place, more than you can guess. You don't want it to go elsewhere. I don't want the trouble of moving, and I'm settled here. We're both experienced men of business, and two men of business don't generally find it hard to agree on anything that is profitable to both alike. Suppose we say breakfast at eight, and a bonus of a pound each to the staff for every seven mornings when it's on time? What do you say to that?'

Girvan's wits had been moving quickly during this speech. He rubbed his stubble with a forefinger horny enough to suffer no abrasion; then he grinned.

'It may suit the staff. But what do I get out of it?'

Paul laughed delightedly, and clapped Girvan on the back.

'Good man! good man! You and I are going to be friends. Inside two or three weeks' time, I don't think you'll be complaining.' He looked about him, and leaned over confidentially. 'Once we get started, costs are going to be in the region of two hundred a day. You can see for yourself, as a business man, I can't afford to start the day an hour or so behind time. I've got to use the daylight and the fine weather. Some mornings we'll be out shooting before breakfast.'

'Shootin'?

'Taking pictures. Well—that's settled then. Grand. Splendid.'

He patted Girvan's shoulder once more, and went out. One or two members of the cast had turned up, and stood, sheepish and unconvinced, while he gave them a rating. Only when he spoke of getting others in their place did a look of faint, rather injured anxiety appear on their faces.

Brannigan appeared at a quarter to nine, rubbing his hands.

'It's grand to be up so early. You realize what you miss.'

'You don't realize what you'll miss, if you turn up at this hour again. When I say eight, I mean eight.'

Brannigan's face fell. A look of consternation came into it.

'Why, Mr. Deakin—what hour is it?'

Paul took him by the ear, and led him to the clock. He gave a grasp of feigned horror.

'Mr Deakin! will you believe it! If my old clock hasn't played traitor on me again. And I paying four and sixpence in the town to have it regulated. Oh, isn't it a caution, the way people will take money off you for nothing.'

'It is,' Paul said. 'But they're not going to do it here. If I hire anyone to start wort at eight, he doesn't take money for turning up at nine.'

'I'm terribly sorry—it was the clock let me down—naturally—of course I——'

'All right, son. As long as you understand.'

'Obviously, Mr. Deakin. Obviously. Now.' he assumed an attitude of deep meditation. 'What I am thinking is, how will I be able to circumvent that clock? How will I rely on it?'

'That's your headache. You'll get your call, each evening, for the hour I want you next day. If the weather changes, and we have to shoot a different scene to suit it, I'll send for you specially in the mornings. But here you must be, and on time. Failure is regarded as a breach of contract. Clear? Off you go, then.' Paul gave him a push and a friendly nod.

Brannigan's chagrin at being thus dealt with was comic to witness. Speciousness vanished: he was like a schoolboy in front of his headmaster. His mouth opened and shut: then he tightened his lips, flushed angrily, and was silent.

Katie appeared, smiling, at twenty minutes past nine. Paul tackled her at once.

'See here, sugar. This won't do. Remember what time I said? Yes? Well—come here and look at the clock. Now. What have you got to say for yourself?'

She opened wide, china-blue eyes of innocent distress.

'I came as quick as I could, Mr. Deakin. I had to get my Da's breakfast for him, and do the cleaning for my Ma. I came the moment it was done.'

'Right, Katie. From now on, you sleep here in the hotel. You shall have a room in the wing with the two girls. I've got to have you here when I want you. Your Da and Ma will just have to do their own cleaning and get their own breakfast.'

She looked at him like a bewildered child. Her lips trembled. She had given offence, and could not understand how. That a fixed hour in the day mattered, was a reality even, did not enter her scheme of life. She had been bidden come early, and she had come as early as she could. What more could anyone do? And here now was Mr. Deakin, vexed with her. Her eyes opened wider still, and became bright with tears.

Paul suddenly put an arm about her shoulders and gave her a squeeze.

There, sugar. It's not your fault. That's why I'm going to have you live here in the hotel. Toots and Gladys have to be up early. They'll call you, and see that you're all right. Here—take my hanky. Now—blow. No?'

She snatched the handkerchief from him, laughing through her tears: but she used it.

There. That's better. Finished? 'Ta.' Paul folded the handkerchief, and put it away.

'I don't know will me Da suffer me to sleep away from the house,' she said unsteadily.

'You leave him to me. What hour did you get him back last night, the old sinner?'

She blushed and lowered her eyes. 'Latish.'

'And how is he this morning? Sorry for himself?'

'Roaring for his diet.'

Paul shook his head humorously. 'A wonderful man. Remarkable. He made a fine speech here last night. Real eloquent.'

'Oh, indeed, he's a great warrant to make speeches.'

'That's lovely. I must get that into the script. John. John. Where's John? Oh, John. Look. I want to make a note, for the script. Katie here has just said the loveliest thing. Look. Isn't she grand when she blushes? If we only had technicolour. We'll have to keep you by, John, to say sweet nothings to her, and make her blush.'

'Ah, go on.' Katie was still shy, but feeling surer of her ground. She could understand this line of talk.

John waited to hear what it was she had said, but Paul had forgotten about it. He proceeded to call for Toots, introduce Katie to her, and give her instructions about getting the girl's room ready. Toots smiled with real friendliness, and led Katie off.

'Do you want me, Paul?'

'Sure I want you, John. I'll be with you in half a minute. There are just one or two things I have to see to.'

John stood irresolute. No one seemed to know what was to happen next. He thought of appealing to Votty, but a

glance at that resolute mask killed the idea. He walked over to the window, and leaned out, drawing in the mild, sweet air. The sun was surprisingly hot; John raised his head, and realized that the air was thin. Maybe a change was coming. He anxiously considered the weather arrangements which he had recorded on the script. Would Paul be ready for them? Would he have warned the necessary actors? Had he cast them yet? John tightened his lips, and told himself severely that he was a fool. These things were Paul's concern: they had nothing to do with him. The habit of worrying, of anxious, defensive reaching out towards the future, to push away a possible disaster: this was a legacy from his early days, when he did not know where his next penny was coming from. It was no longer necessary; for that matter, it had never been necessary: it was a weakness, and a hindrance. He told himself that for the thousandth time. But the habit died hard. Even now, if he were tired or uneasy, he felt the old disintegrating contraction of the diaphragm, as his own tentacles reached out in terror to enlase with the chill illusory tentacles of the bogey, and he drew into his entrails a Thing which had no reality. You idiot; you absolute fool: what are you fussing about? What does it matter if everything is in a muddle? Or if the weather changes? Or if the priest kicks up hell? *You're all right. You've no responsibility. It can't hurt you.* Sit tight, man. Here you are, on what is virtually a holiday, and getting paid for it. You've money in the bank, lots of it, and more to come. You don't need to do a tap of work for months. Keep calm. He sighed the deep sigh of physical depression.

Votty slouched out, hands in pockets, wearing an even filthier green jersey with a polo collar. He was on his way to the cameras. Ted, the sound man, was bustling about in the yard, with an unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth. Toots came through, carrying a sheaf of papers. She had a resolute, preoccupied air. Now that work was actually starting, each of them revealed some unexpected professional characteristic. They were back at the familiar job. Each knew what to do: and John felt more out of things.

than ever. As always, his sensitiveness rushed to arms, and he felt that they despised him. As long as they were not working, he was tolerated. Now that the real business had begun, they had no use for him. He was irrelevant, a nuisance, the author. Yes, Reading had been right.

'Keep out of it, old boy.' Reading advised, pouring out a third glass of hock. Take their money, all you can snaffle, then get out and leave 'em to it.'

Reading should know. He'd sold five of his books, and done damned well out of them. But no, John said to himself, you let them tickle that wretched vanity of yours. You let Paul talk you into it—or so you thought. Actually, it's clear, he was only indulging you. He spotted that absurd vanity, and played up to it. He never for a moment dreamed! that you'd be such a fool as to accept. If you'd had any tact, any sense, you'd have refused. Now they're saddled with you, an encumbrance, an embarrassment. No wonder they don't even trouble to speak to you.

He started violently, as Paul's voice rang in the yard.

'John. John. Where's John? Go and tell John I want him, will you, sugar? We're going to try 127, and I need him to show just how the old man fixes the rope.'

John's heart gave a sudden and absurd leap of joy. Fool, he said, and had hard work to prevent himself from rushing out with a schoolboy's eagerness.

The morning went very quickly. Katie looked tired, but the anxiety on her face had given place to relief. The novelty of being made up—her skin was sensitive, and she hated to have anything touch her eyelids, or anywhere near her eyes: the stiff feeling, the weight of the paint upon her face: a deeper uneasiness, born of the idea that to paint her face was sinful, welling up into consciousness because of her general anxiety and sense of helpless inexperience: these anxieties had all been allayed by Paul's tact and skill and kindness, and by his assurance that, whatever she felt like, she had done very well. There was not the crowd of villagers to worry her this time. A certain number turned out, but the majority were working. Paul kept the few there were at a distance, and they soon became bored.

Terry Boyne appeared for a quarter of an hour or so, with a marvellous check cap on the side of his head, then sauntered off. Katie was glad when he had gone. She felt terrified of what he must think of her.

And then, just as she felt she could not bear any longer the repetition of half a dozen lines and actions, Paul had suddenly stood her down, and made Judy Girvan go through the same scene. Judy, who had watched furiously while her rival was at work, was taken at a disadvantage. She spoke the lines with an ill grace, her voice was low and harsh, and Ted made all sorts of difficulties. Paul had been as gentle as ever, but he managed to convey to Judy and to everyone else that he was being exceptionally patient in exceptionally difficult circumstances. Inside twenty minutes they had succeeded in making Judy lose her temper.

'How's that one, Ted? Too loud?'

'Terrible.'

Paul smiled at her. Too loud, sugar.'

She scowled round at him. 'You said it was too low last time.'

'So it was, sugar. But I didn't ask you to shout. Just try something between the two.'

Gritting her teeth, she tried again, only to have Votty raise an objection. By the time Paul gave the order to knock off for lunch, she was sweating with anger and humiliation. To make matters worse, she saw Ted give Votty a quick, expressionless wink.

She stood still, then ran after Paul.

'You're doing it on purpose.' she said, her voice quivering.

He stopped, smiled, and patted her arm.

'It's never easy, at first, sugar. You'll get used to it. It'll come easy soon.'

'You made a fool of me in front of all those people.'

'Hard to please, sugar, aren't you? I gave you both a trial, same as I promised I would. How would you have liked it if I'd given it only to Katie, and left you out? You'd have bitten my head off.'

'You've made up your mind already. You know you have.'

She turned off abruptly, and hurried down the slope.

'We're screening the tests at two.' he called after her. 'Don't be late.'

They were late, all of them. Even the most resolute chasing and shepherding failed to get them into the shed till twenty past: and then the films weren't ready. Paul laughed and talked and wisecracked, expecting that they might show resentment at being hustled for nothing. He need not have bothered. Unpunctual themselves, they expected unpunctuality in others—so far as they were conscious of time at all.

Katie's test was screened first, and John could see, from the start, that her face and expressions were right for the screen. Even her first look of dismayed uncertainty was natural and appealing: and then, as her eyes followed Paul's direction, as she looked over to the village he had pointed out, and pointed herself, as she smiled and looked up in his face, every movement was unforced and right.

Judy, on the other hand, looked awkward and ferocious. Her movements were jerky and ill-timed: she looked ten years older. Only at the end, when Paul had intervened, did she reveal a power of natural movement and a sort of primitive beauty. Her first appearance had been greeted with suppressed giggles by the small audience, but they stopped before the end.

Brannigan, on the other hand, caused loud laughter. His gestures, theatrical in life, were impossibly exaggerated on the screen, and hid whole performance a badly overdone parody. The villagers stamped and howled with joy. Then, just at the end, they saw him turn, and look enquiringly at the unseen Paul. A scowl of perplexity appeared on his face. He ceased to be a mouthing grotesque, and became a real person.

'See, Brannigan?' Paul called across the chairs. That's how I want you to be. See how much better that is than what you did first?'

Brannigan saw. He couldn't help it. Angry and abashed, he mumbled something.

'That's a thing to remember, all of you,' Paul said to the room. The camera magnifies everything. Leave it to

me. I'll tell you just what to do, and you'll be fine.' The other tests were shown, and Paul broke up the party. To John's surprise, he did not at once give the part of Oona to Katie.

'We'll screen this morning's test after dinner,' he said. 'I want to be dead sure.'

Haggard, Judy looked at him in sudden incredulous hope. No fool, she knew that her test was a failure: but her belief that she could play the part was unshaken. It wasn't a good test: they had cheated: they had taken her wrong on purpose. She had braced herself into a cold blaze of hatred, and this sudden change broke her resolution. There was something desperate in her eyes, as she looked at the man who controlled her fate. John felt genuinely sorry for her. It distressed him always to see the naked ambition of a human soul, especially when it must be disappointed. Votty, Ted and Co. were entirely unmoved. It was axiomatic to them that everybody wanted to get on the screen, and they looked on it as a duty to keep rather more than ninety-nine per cent of them off.

Brannigan walked beside Paul. All the stuffing had been knocked out of him by the test, but he had had time to readjust himself. His new line was that, now he realized what Paul wanted, he would easily be able to supply it. His manner became jaunty. Some people could not profit by a lesson, or learn from their mistakes. He, on the other hand, had always been adaptable. He could fit in: he could do what was required. These assurances he mingled with flattery of Paul, who said 'swell' and 'fine and dandy,' and did not listen.

'John.' Paul turned, interrupting the harangue.

'Yes?'

'Come here a minute. I want to consult you.'

He waited for John to come up, took his arm, and led him off, leaving Brannigan standing. Brannigan licked his lip, and looked quickly about him, to make sure that no one had seen. He met Votty's eye, and smiled nervously. Cold and fishlike, it looked through and past him. Brannigan fell into step beside him.

'There's a lot to learn in this business. A lot to learn. I see that. But I'll soon be equal to it. I feel I've learned a lot already.'

Votty grunted.

'There must be a great deal of skill in working the camera. I've done quite a bit of photography myself, so I can appreciate that it calls for skill. Judging the light, now, for instance. That calls for great experience.'

Another grunt.

'Have you been long with Mr. Deakin?'

'Excuse me.'

Votty swung off abruptly, and went towards Toots. Brannigan licked his lip again. Two or three of the villagers were looking at him. He scanned the sky, screwing up his eyes against the light, and appeared to be making investigation into the weather.

The villagers exchanged glances. They were not deceived.

'Mister bloody Brannigan.' murmured one to the other.

XVI

FATHER Francis Aloysius McCubberty *sat* at the table, turning over the small pile of letters that had accumulated in his absence.

'I didn't send them on,' his sister explained. 'I expected you back on Friday, or Saturday at the latest.'

She stood near his chair. Her voice had the slightly accusing note it always took on when she felt that her own conduct might be called in question.

'Yes.' The priest was frowning over an unstamped envelope. 'Who left this?'

She craned her thin neck. 'Oh yes. I want to speak to you about that. The man called here.'

'What man?'

'The theatrical fellow that has taken over Girvan's. A great disgrace. He has brought a whole troupe of persons here.'

He looked up. Theatrical? 'A troupe? Here in the village?'

'Yes. To make a film for the cinema, they say.'

She said it as one might say 'a bed for the brothel'.

The priest frowned, and looked down again at Paul's envelope.

'You say the man came here?'

'Yes. As bold as brass. Asking to see you. He said he was sorry you were away.' She paused. 'Then he went away up to Cartwright.'

Father McCubberty stiffened to an immediate alertness. His lean, ascetic frame jerked upright in the chair. He tore the envelope with his thumb, and spread out the sheet.

Taken separately, his features were good. The face was long and thin, the brows dark, the cheeks hollow, the jaw and chin angular, blue, smooth-shaven, the black hair flecked with grey above the ears. In repose, the face would have been handsome, but it twitched continually, the thin lips contracting, the eyelids snapping, the nostrils quivering. Deep lines were scored around nose and mouth, and the brow had furrows that were almost scars. A perpetual nervous energy burned the man from within. As he read, one foot swung, the other tapped in contrary time upon the floor. Small irregular jerks galvanised the shoulders, and the fingers of the free hand picked at the coarse serge trousers.

For perhaps a minute and a half the priest scanned Paul's letter. His mouth tightened to a line. He looked up.

'When did the man come?'

'On Tuesday. He said a whole lot to me.'

'What did he say to you?'

'About how he was very anxious for your help, and that he came to you before anyone else, as the most important person.'

'He did right to come here first,' the priest admitted severely. 'But he was losing his time.' He folded up the letter. 'I will send him packing.'

'He has taken the hotel for the whole summer. They started to make the film this morning. Katie Heggarty and

Judy Girvan he had, with paint all over their faces, posturing and making eyes. And that Brannigan!' She watched his face. There is talk that he will hire as many as come, at a pound a day.'

'Will he.'

He did not reveal to his sister the inner start of anger which her words had caused him, but a patch of white at the side of each nostril told her that she had made the impression she desired. And her best card was still to play.

The priest got up.

'I cannot have the parish overturned in this way. I will write to him at once.'

Miss McCubberty watched. She withheld her card till the last moment. Not till he glanced impatiently for her to leave him did she speak.

'They are saying the picture is to be of a book about the village.'

He stopped dead. There was not even a twitch.

'A book about the village! What book?'

She licked her lips. '*Awaken the West*' she whispered.

Father McCubberty made a movement, quick as the withdrawal of a finger from the flame. His eyes splintered and flashed.

'Yes,' she gloated, sucking in her breath in horror and relish. 'And he came here for your help.'

For a moment she was afraid she had gone too far. He stood, staring past her. Then he drew in his breath in a sound that was the male counterpart of hers.

'I'll settle this,' he said.

XVII

THE tests that were screened in the evening made the choice of Katie to play Oona obvious to everyone. Paul and Votty had cheated flagrantly. They had gone over the rushes beforehand, in the tiny theatre they had rigged up in the ground floor writing room of the hotel, picked out the best

of Katie's, and fitted them happily together, leaving Judy's harsh ineptitudes to speak for themselves. The addition of sound told all in Katie's favour. Her voice came over smoothly, if a trifle lacking in colour. To Judy the microphone was unkind; and John, listening, suspected that Ted had been in the plot to discredit her.

Judy herself listened appalled to the sounds that purported to have come from her, now strident and cracked, now gusty and deep-chested—'Wouldn't ye swear it was a man speakin'!' someone said audibly behind her. It took her some time to get back to her old defence that they had distorted her *on purpose*, and that it was all a trick.

She sat, glowing with anger, her handsome face set in murderous resentment. The lights went up. Faces were turned towards her. She glared through a blur of tears.

Paul's voice came to her, affectionate, persuasive, silvery. He was standing at her side.

'Tough luck, sugar. You see how it is. Never mind. I have a contract for you to play the other girl: and very well you'll do it.'

Aware of the faces turned in surprise, and the growth of respect in them, she heard her voice answer, shaking with fury.

'I don't want any other part.'

Paul was undisturbed.

'You'll feel different in the morning, sugar. It's a fine chance, and good money.' He pressed her shoulder, and added, in a voice which only she could hear, 'and the way out of this place.'

She started to fling off his hand, but something checked her. Humiliated, choking, she lowered her head, and heard as if through a red mist Paul's voice repeating to her uncle that he had a good part for her.

Next came the formal business of signing the contracts. The lawyer had been kept in attendance. Seldom had so much business passed through his hands in a week, let alone in a day. He fussed and sniggered, pointing over the villagers' shoulders at the place where they must sign, and sucking his teeth as the unaccustomed pens staggered carefully on or about the lines he had pencilled for their

guidance. As Katie was under age, her father had to sign his consent: a performance accomplished at last with many an oath from him and many an apprehensive small explosion from the lawyer.

Judy hung back. She did not intend to sign, but something held her in the room against her will. When Katie's possession of the coveted part was confirmed by law, such swirling passion shook her that she could hardly see. Then she realized that her turn had come.

'I won't.' she swore, and tried to run from the room. But the sound was inaudible, and the effort did not reach her taut muscles. Girvan's voice sounded in her ears.

'Eh! Judy. C'm on here. Here y'are.'

She got to the table. Suddenly, to her own surprise, she was in command of herself.

'Let me read it first.'

'Ah, sure, what sense will you make of it. Hurry up, girl, and sign your name.'

Girvan was afraid the chance might vanish. He still could not believe, after her showing, that anyone would give her a part. She felt this, and hardened in resentment.

'Read it by all means, sugar.' Paul was persuasive as ever. 'Take your time.'

Her face burning, she read it, and realized a fact that was entirely new: that for playing the part of Honor she was to receive a salary of fifteen pounds a week for a minimum of six weeks. As she took in what this fantastic sum could mean to her and to her prospects, all rage left her. Her body went still and cold: she felt the chill of her wet armpits.

The room was silent. They were looking at her. She raised her eyes, green and calculating, and looked at Paul.

'Right.' she said. 'I'll sign it.'

Her signature concluded the business, and Paul decreed an early bed. They grinned at him. They still could not believe that he would really keep them to this preposterous hour in the morning. In any case, it was a long way off. Why go to bed before one was sleepy? But Paul was peremptory. He shooed them away, and gave Katie into the

hands of Toots and Gladys, as if she were a child. She went off, docile and smiling. She had begun by being afraid and shy of these two girls, but their unaffected friendliness reassured her. She liked them, and wanted to please them, and resemble them, and learn all she could from them. She was tired after her day, and she gave herself up to the new life with a trustful wonder.

When time came for shutting up the bar, Judy was left alone with her uncle.

'Begod,' he said coarsely, 'ye were bloody lucky to fluke a job. I thought ye'd done for yourself altogether. What ailed ye, to go roarin' and croakin' that way? Why couldn't ye talk quiet, the same as Katie Heggarty?'

Judy went on putting away the glasses, and did not speak a word. She was waiting for her uncle to say something about the money she was to get. That he would try to lay hands on it she was perfectly sure. Rigid in her resolve that he should not touch a penny, she bore his reproaches with expressionless face.

'Cock yez up!' Girvan exclaimed. 'Don't be thinkin' that because the man puts ye in his fillum just for my sake, ye can be puttin' on airs. Yis. For my sake. Why else would he put ye in, and you croakin' like a crow? He done it to please me, and for no cause else.'

Her eyes flashed murder, but she remembered her contract, and kept quiet. Girvan remembered it too.

'Hand over that contract. I'll put it in the safe.'

'I prefer to keep it myself.'

'Hand it over, girl!'

'It's mine.'

Girvan eyed her. He knew the danger signals. When she got this way, there was nothing for it but to give her a clout: and it would not do to mark her at this juncture. He shrugged.

'Ye don't want to go losin' that. Suppose he didn't pay, and ye hadn't it. Then where'd ye be?'

'He'll pay all right.'

'I wouldn't believe these fellas till I seen the colour o' their money.'

'You're trusting him all right. You and the rest.'

'Sssh!' He came close to her, his face ugly. 'Keep your mouth shut, do you hear me now! If that got about in the village, there's them as might make trouble.'

Who would I talk to?

'If ye do, there'll be no fillum for ye, nor anything only the hospital.'

'You wouldn't dare lay a hand on me.'

'There's more than myself would lay a hand on ye.'

Judy shivered. McVeagh would not be gentle with anyone who crossed his path. She thought of the gang of them, with their greasy faces and their calloused paws. Her uncle had often threatened to marry her off to one or another of his friends. She had not believed his threat, because she was too useful to him in the hotel: but years of dependence had implanted fear in her heart, and her insolence and defiance were often precarious.

About half an hour after he had gone up, Paul was surprised by a soft tapping at his door.

'Come right in,' he sang.

There was a pause, then more tapping. He went to the door, and found Judy, wearing an old coat over a flannel nightgown. The thought leaped into his mind that she was about to attempt one of the oldest ways of persuading him to give her the part she wanted: but it was at once driven out.

The girl pressed a paper into his hand. It was her contract.

'Mr. Deakin. Please keep this safe for me. My uncle is trying to get hold of it.'

'Certainly, sugar. But it wouldn't do him any good if he did. It's made out to you, and only you can draw the money.'

'Yes, but,'—she looked round apprehensively, as a door sounded. Paul caught her wrist, drew her into the room, and closed the door.

'See here, sugar. I'll take care of you. Your uncle isn't going to touch a penny of this. You're of age. You're earning it. It's yours.'

'He's always saying I owe him for my board and my keep, but, Mr. Deakin, it's not true. I work hard, running this place for him, and he gives me only pocket money, and I have to fight him for it.'

He looked at her, his head on one side.

'You shouldn't have stood for that. Why didn't you walk out on him?'

'I have nothing. I've been here since I was a young girl. I got one chance to go away, but——' she coloured.

'Like that, sugar?' He patted her arm. 'Good job you stayed.'

'He was a commerical traveller. I heard afterwards he was married. Another girl went off with him. It was in the papers.'

'Aren't you glad it wasn't you? Well—I'll keep this safe for you.'

'You'll pay the money to me? You won't let him get it?'

'Not a red cent of it. Cross my heart.'

She thought for a moment, frowning.

'It might be better if you paid it into the bank for me. Not here—I wouldn't trust that dirty old Hanaghan. He'd say he thought it was for my uncle's account, and he'd made a mistake. No. It'd be best in Kilmulgan. And then to give the last lot to me in cash.'

'Any way you say, sugar. I think the bank is a very good idea.'

She looked into his eyes. 'I'm trusting you,' she said.

For a moment Paul saw past the drawn brows and the heavily handsome lines to the young girl that still stood within, and he realized her inner defencelessness.

'You may, sugar, I'll play ball.'

Quickly, before she realized, he stepped to her, took her by the elbows, and lightly kissed her lips. Then he turned her round, and gave her a small slap on the behind.

'And now you must go to bed, or you'll be getting me a bad name, like the commercial traveller. Half a second.' He opened the door, and put his head out. 'All clear. Off you go. Punctual in the morning, mind. Night night.'

The door closed, and Judy went down the passage, in

deep amazement. She had never imagined anyone like this man before. He treated her as if she were a small child: and the odd thing was, she did not resent it.

XVIII

THEY were in quite good time the next morning, breakfast being only ten minutes after the appointed hour, and work started soon after nine. The weather had offered a number of threats, but the sun still shone, and Paul decided to have a preliminary shot at one of the easier scenes between Katie and Terry Boyne.

The actor was full of elaborate gallantry and consideration, thereby flustering Katie and throwing her into agonies of embarrassment. She forgot her words, or, if she kept them, failed to time them. Terry maintained his air of patience and kindness, but as the morning wore on he permitted himself a sigh or two. Soon after twelve Paul called a halt for twenty minutes, during which they all sat around and laughed and chatted. Then, before Katie had time to stiffen up, he ran through the scene again, and it went almost perfectly. Paul exclaimed with pleasure, Terry added his praise, Katie looked as if she were going to cry with relief, and they broke off for lunch. Clouds had appeared above the mountains, and were fast settling down on them in grey and woolly softness. A breeze sprang up from nowhere, and blew in chill from the sea.

'Looks like we just got that done in time, Votty. Best get the stuff under cover.'

'You don't say.'

Paul winked at Katie. Votty took fanatical care of his apparatus, and it amused Paul to pull his leg about it.

The nearest mountain was hidden by the time they reached the hotel, and they had no sooner sat down than a sharp rattle of drops sounded on the panes: large drops, that spread and dribbled down, then were blurred and merged in the rush of drops that followed them.

A letter lay in Paul's place. It bore no stamp, and had obviously been delivered by hand. He opened it, read it without expression, and put it in his pocket. He did not say much for a few minutes, then burst into animated talk, as if to make up for his silence.

'What's it to be now?' Votty asked him, indicating the downpour.

'We'll try one of the cottage scenes. 17A.'

'Nothing's ready.'

'Sure, I know. You go on down with Ted, and see if you can fix it.' He turned to John. 'We may have to do all the interiors in the studio. When we get back.'

John's face fell. 'Why? Won't that cottage do?'

'I doubt it. It's so small. We can't get the lighting. However—Votty'll fix it, if it's fixable. Come in next door. Yes, all right: we'll take our coffee in there. I didn't think it was possible to make coffee worse than they make it in England, but I have to hand it to these people. They can do it. Now. Run your eye over that.'

He gave John the letter he had received. John opened it, and read.

The Presbytery,
Dennistown,
Monday.

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter. I am sorry I was not at home when you called, as I would have told you that your project is impossible.

The book is a disgraceful production. It is a foul slander upon this place and its people. It should never have been printed.

You can look for no sympathy or assistance here, and will do well to return whence you came.

Yours truly,
Francis Aloysius McCubberty.'

John finished it with a sinking heart. He was still near enough to it all to feel a chill at the threat of ecclesiastical enmity. Away in London, he could laugh at it. But back

here, where everything reminded him of his early days, he felt the power strong.

'Just how much does that mean?' Paul's tone was light and casual.

'It's pretty bad, I'm afraid. He'll go all out against us.'

'But why? What's he got to object to?'

John sighed. 'My dear Paul, it's no good our going all over this again. I know that all the weight of sense and civilization is on our side. I know the whole of the rest of the world is with us. But this is Holy Ireland, and a very out of the way corner of it at that. Every film that's shown in this country has to be mutilated first.'

'What—doesn't even the Hays Office satisfy them?'

'Nothing satisfies them.'

'I can't see what he's got to object to. I'll go and see him.'

'You'll get a flea in your ear, if you do.'

'I've got round an archbishop before now. I guess I'm not going to be scared of a parish priest.'

'You'd have a better chance with an archbishop. He'd have some sense. He'd have to, to be an archbishop.'

'I'll go and see McCubberty, and ask him in detail what it is he objects to.'

'He objects to the whole damn thing.'

'Did they ban the book over here?'

'No. For some inexplicable reason, they didn't. They banned my next one, though. And now they'll ban anything I write, automatically.'

'Still, they didn't ban this one. I'll point that out to him.'

'It won't make the slightest difference. I know these chaps. You heard Flanagan, too. He told you what would happen.'

'How much notice will these people take of McCubberty?'

'A lot. If he forbids them to work for us——'

'He can't upset a legal contract, surely.'

'I don't think so. That would be putting his strength to an extreme trial, and I don't think he'd care to risk it, unless he felt it was absolutely essential. No; I think what he

will do is to forbid anyone else to help. Extras, and labour, and so on.'

'I ought to have signed them all on. Maybe there's still time.'

John shook his head. 'He'll have been round already, if he left this here himself.'

'Well.' Paul got up, and squared his shoulders. 'If he want's a fight, he shall have it. Where's the bishop live?'

'Liscraig. Why—you're not thinking of appealing to him, are you?'

'I certainly am.'

'If he forbids it, you'll be worse off than ever. It's a huge diocese. You won't be able to make the picture anywhere over here.'

'Then we'll go back home, and make it there.'

'It won't be the same thing.'

'Sure it won't. That's why I'm going to move heaven and earth to make it right here.'

He went out of the room to the cubby-hole he had adopted for his study, and sent for Toots.

'I've got some jobs for you, sugar.'

She pulled out her pad, and nodded. With her round glasses, she looked comically like an owl.

'Find how I get to Liscraig, and fix for me to see the Bishop there.'

'What bishop?'

'Bishop of this diocese.'

'When do you want to go?'

'Right away. To-morrow.'

She nodded.

'Find out if Girvan owns this joint, and, if he doesn't, who does. If it's a tied house, find out to what brewery.'

Another nod.

'There's talk that some government department is going to advance money to this place to develop the harbour. Find out what department, and where it functions, and who I ought to see. Find out everything you can about Girvan's pals who will be in on the local development stunt. Oh yes, and find out if the presbytery or the church is in debt.'

She looked at him over the tops of her glasses.

'Some of this information may not be easy to get.'

That's why I rely on you to get it, sugar. Another thing. Garages, labour, and so on. Girvan will have given us a list of his Catholic pals. Find out any there are belonging to the Protestants, or Presbyterians, or whatever they are.'

She watched him attentively. 'Show-down?'

'Not if I can help it. But it's as well to be ready.'

'Do you want tickets taken?'

'Only for Lisraig. Dublin can wait a day or so. I can't be away too long at the start. Unless the weather stays bad. Find out how quickly I can get up to Dublin and back again. It won't be hard to find out about the government department. Girvan knows, and Cartwright. Cartwright. He's the one to ask.'

'Will he tell me?'

'Good idea, sugar. I'll go and get that one myself.'

'What do you want done, if you go to see the Bishop to-morrow?'

'Gladys will check costumes. Ted will record Brannigan, and get him straight. Votty will do the long shot of the shore before the storm scene, if it's that way, and take 117 and 54 and 323 if it's fine, in that order. There's no directing wanted there. Katie has to walk along the street.'

'Paul. That kid. She's sweet.'

'Yes.'

'No, but I mean, she really is sweet. She's good through and through.'

'I know. And you're looking after her.'

Toots stood still for a minute. She pressed her lips together, and shut her notebook.

'That all?'

Yes. Get busy.'

She gave him a little absent-minded smile, and went out.

'Oh—Toots?'

Her head came round the door.

'Give me your advice a minute. A point of tactics. You know the priest here doesn't like the idea of the picture. Well: shall I go and see him about it first? Which will give him a chance to veto it flat, as far as he's concerned. Or

shall I see the Bishop first, and smash the priest with what he says?"

She considered a moment, her head on one side. Now she looked more like a sparrow, or a linnet.

'If you think there's any hope at all of persuading the priest, then you'd better go and see him first. If his goodwill is of any value. His goodwill to you personally, I mean. He'll hate you like hell if you go to the Bishop, over his head, before you've seen him. That is, supposing you can persuade the Bishop; which doesn't sound very certain, to me.'

'Yeah, sugar, I know. But, so far, all the priest has said is that I can't expect encouragement. He hasn't said flat out that no one is to work for us.'

'Can he say that? I mean, will they take any notice?'

'The natives all say yes. John, and that Flanagan.'

Toots inclined her head. 'Won't the Bishop be worse, then?'

'I fancy myself with Bishops.' Paul smiled. 'This McCubberty sounds a prickly, sore-headed sort. But I think you're right, Toots. I'd best give him the chance to be sweet. I'll go down, and put it to him all very respectful and reasonable. And keep an ace or two up my sleeve, for safety's sake. Then I can say I've tried. The only thing is, I don't want to have the Bishop ask me does McCubberty forbid the banns, and be obliged to say yes. So far, you see, he doesn't. Not in so many words.'

Toots suddenly gave a wide and most engaging grin.

'Come clean, Paul. What exactly does he say?'

Paul wagged his head reprovingly, and pulled out Father McCubberty's letter.

'Here you are. See for yourself.'

She read it, raised her brows, and handed it back.

'He doesn't sound what you might call enthusiastic.'

'No. But he hasn't actually said——'

'You are a kid, Paul. How could he tell you plainer—short of kicking you in the pants? 'You will do well to return whence you came.' If that isn't the Irish for scram, I'm a Manx cat.'

'Say, do you think so?' Paul looked like a hurt child. 'I didn't take it quite as drastic. You think he means that?'

She nodded, her eyes twinkling. Paul was too much concerned to notice the twinkle.

'I figured he meant it wouldn't be any good our looking for help, if we were going to do what he thought.' His face brightened. That's how it is, Toots. You see, he's got a quite mistaken idea of the whole business. But when I've been to him, as you say, and explained just how we're going to make the picture, and how there won't be anything in it he can object to, then, you'll see, it'll all be fine and dandy. You'll see it will.'

'All right, Paul. I'll see it will.'

He looked at her, chuckled, and aimed a swipe at her with a folded newspaper.

'Yes, but you don't believe it. Never mind. You wait. I'll show you.'

He pinched her cheek, and ran out of the room. She hesitated, then followed, a warm light in her eyes.

XIX

'YOU may come in if you wish.' The priest stood stiffly aside, allowing just enough room to pass, and averting his face as Paul brushed by. 'I do not conceal from you that it will be a waste of time.'

'Surely—thank you—surely a friendly discussion between men of goodwill can never be a waste of time.'

'If their points of view are irreconcilable, Mr. Deakin.'

'You are assuming that, if I may venture to say so, with all respect: you are assuming that before you have heard what I have to put before you.'

'I assume nothing. The facts are more than enough.'

'May I have leave to relate the facts as I see them? Thank you.'

Paul put down his hat and yellow gloves, pulled up his trousers, and crossed his legs. The priest glanced con-

temptuously at the immaculate lavender silk socks, held in place by suspenders.

'Father McCubberty. I intend to be absolutely frank. I do not deny that your reception of my letter has given me great concern—not so much for what you have it in your power to do, to help or to hinder, as because it reveals a total, and to me very painful misunderstanding of my whole purpose. In my way, Father McCubberty, I have always been an idealist: I have always been actuated by Christian principles. I don't say that my interpretation is the same as yours: but it is sincere. I try to live according to the principles laid down in the Sermon on the Mount.'

The distaste on Father McCubberty's face became a thin revulsion.

'I find it impossible to accept your statement, Mr. Deakin. Your whole manner of life is a violation of Christian principles.'

'But, Father McCubberty—pardon me—what do you know of my manner of life?'

'I am not speaking of your private life.' The tone implied that it would be unspeakable. 'I refer to the trade you practise.'

'There are many good Catholics in the film business, Father McCubberty. I could give you a long list. Some of them stand high in the esteem of the church. For that matter, an archbishop is a very good friend of mine. I don't say he has given his blessing to every picture I have made: but he admits me to his house and his table.'

Where is this?'

'In Los Angeles.'

'I cannot answer for what may be done in America. I am concerned only with my own parish.'

'I perfectly appreciate that. My only purpose in mentioning this is to suggest that the film business is not sinful, *per se*.'

'You did not write to me about the film business *per se*. You wrote to me about a particular film you proposed to make here in my parish: a film to which I take the strongest

possible exception. That is, if the information given me is correct.'

Paul leaned forward. His eyes were fixed earnestly on the priest's.

'Will you tell me on what grounds you object?'

'I am told you wish to make a representation of a book entitled *Awaken the West*.'

'I propose to make a picture adapted from that book, yes. Very freely adapted, and without certain incidents which would be unsuitable for a picture. But based on the book, yes, certainly.'

'That book is a foul slander on this village, its life, and on every man, woman, and child that lives here.' His face had gone white: he breathed loudly. 'It is a disgraceful book, lewd, unprincipled, malicious. It sets morality at naught, it violates the sanctity of family life, it belittles the influence of the clergy. It should never have been written: and, having been written, I would not have believed that any publisher would stoop to print it.'

'Yet it was the choice of a 'Best Books' club, that has a very wide family circulation. It was praised by every newspaper, both here and in America.'

'The degradation of the English press is inconceivable.'

'Your own board of censors did not ban it.'

'It was the grossest dereliction of duty. An incredible oversight. I wrote five times to protest.'

The dark eyes blazed. The thin lips were drawn into an implacable line.

'You take, then, a different view of the book from that of the vast majority of readers, including the official guardians of the country's morality. You will admit that?'

'I said, I cannot imagine how such a filthy and blasphemous production came to be overlooked.'

'It wasn't overlooked, Father McCubberty. You have made that quite clear. You wrote drawing attention to it. No. The censors did not share your view of the book.'

The priest glared at him angrily.

'Now,' Paul said, 'I put this tentatively, and with great respect: is it not possible that your zeal for your own con-

gregation, and your anxiety to protect their good name, has led you to read into this book a meaning which it does not have for the outside world?'

'I am not concerned with the outside world. My concern is with my parish. It is my duty to protect it from all harmful influences.'

'But, Father McCubberty, great numbers of people, including the official censorship of the country, do not consider the book a harmful influence.'

'I am unwilling to believe that, Mr. Deakin: although, on the evidence, it might appear to be so. However, that does not in any way affect my own view.'

'Very well, Father McCubberty. I accept that. I accept that you feel constrained by your conscience to disapprove of Mr. Reilly's book.'

'I reprobate it most strongly.'

'If we were about to film the book in its entirety, you would feel bound to oppose us.'

The priest inclined his head a fraction of an inch. Paul rubbed his hands.

'In that case, Father McCubberty, how happy I am to be able to relieve your mind. To relieve it entirely.'

'You mean that you will abandon your project?'

'I mean that I never had any such project. To make a picture, the story will have to be radically changed. Have you heard of the Hays Office, Father McCubberty? Its function is to see that nothing undessirable goes on the screen: to preserve the decencies of family life. I believe I am right in saying that it has the full support of your church. Well: there are in John Reilly's book certain episodes and characters which would be quite unsuitable for the screen. Quite unsuitable for a picture that was to be shown to family audiences all over the world. That's a point where, if I may say so, I don't think you have given me full credit. I believe in the cultural and ethical mission of the picture industry. It is a central faith with me. I aim always at the betterment of my fellow creatures. I would not run the smallest risk of offending them—in the Biblical sense.'

'I am glad to hear these sentiments from you, Mr. Deakin.' The twist of the lips gave the effect of a sneer.

Tor that reason, even in view of the endorsement of this book by so many eminent judges, I should never for an instant have dreamed of putting certain parts of-it on the screen. The commercial appeal of the picture might be greater if I did, but that is never my first consideration. I think always of the picture industry's mission: a mission which can only be discharged by adhering to the highest standards.'

'I will tell you how to implement your good intentions, Mr. Deakin.'

'That will be really kind of you, Father McCubberty.'

'Give up all idea of making this picture, here or anywhere else.'

Paul's face did not change. He sat still for a second; then sprang to his feet.

'Father McCubberty: we are at cross-purposes. You are thinking all the time of the story you have read. I am thinking of something quite different. Before we go any further, I will bring you an outline of the new story: and you will be convinced that there is nothing to object to.'

'Mr. Deakin, I beg that you will not palter with me any longer. I——'

'I'm not paltering, my dear Father McCubberty. I mean every word of it.' Paul's manner grew louder and more enthusiastic with each sentence. 'I'll go right away now.'

'Disabuse yourself of any idea that I could ever possibly sanction a performance of this book, no matter——'

'That's right. That's the exact point. You couldn't approve the book. I realize that. So——'

'No matter what alterations——'

'I'll get it to you in a day or two. Good-bye, Father McCubberty. It's most kind of you to have let me come and see you, and I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. Don't bother to see me out. I can find my way. Thank you so much.'

He shook the priest's hand warmly, and rushed out, giving him no chance to repeat his warning. Father

McCubberty shrugged his shoulders, went to his desk, pulled out a sheet of paper, and began to write.

Paul walked quickly back to Girvan's. He greeted two or three villagers, his voice ringing so clearly that others, working in the fields near the road, turned to look. As soon as he reached the hotel, he hurried into the little office. Toots looked up from her typewriter.

'Well,' she said. 'How did it go?'

'Lousy. He's a fanatic. Nothing on this earth will shift him.'

'Did he forbid the banns?'

'I didn't give him the chance. As soon as I saw how it was, I wrung his hand in brotherly love, and skipped it.'¹

'We're no worse off, then.'

'Maybe a bit better. I stalled a bit; said I'd pop him over a new synopsis in a couple of days' time. All right, keep your hair on, sugar. I know it won't do any good: but it may make him think there's no hurry. Meantime, we can be doing plenty.'

'What's his real objection, Paul?'

'He's just got a bee in his bonnet about the book. I shouldn't have let on we were going to do it. It would have been better to make out it was something new altogether. Only, I didn't figure on this.'

'It wasn't for want of telling, Paul. John warned you several times.'

He sat down. She leaned over, and smoothed back one of the neat grey curls. The movement was so impersonal, so absent-minded, it seemed no more than the gesture of a perfect secretary tidying a desk. Paul caught her hand, and gave it a squeeze.

'I know, sugar, I know. I guess I was so set on this thing, I didn't properly listen. Besides, you know what John is.'

'John was right about this.'

'Sure he was. But he was plum wrong about a lot of other things. How was I to know which was which?'

'You're very good at not knowing what you don't want to know.'

'Me?' He grinned. 'A hard-boiled realist.'

'Half the time.'

'All the time, from this minute.' He sat upright. 'Any news for me?'

'You've no right to expect it do soon. But, as a matter of fact, I have.' She made a pretence of consulting her note-book. 'The bishop will see you to-mprrow at two-thirty. You could, if you wanted, get the three-forty on to Dublin.'

'When's it get there?'

'In time for dinner. I've booked you a room at the Shelbourne. You could do the rest of your business next morning, and be back here by the last train.'

'Who've I got to see?'

She handed him a typed sheet. He studied it, folded it carefully, and put it in a crocodile skin wallet. She looked at him, and went on.

'The hotel is owned by a syndicate, with headquarters in Dublin and Limerick. I'm hoping for some particulars shortly.'

'The red-head? Good work.'

'It occurred to me that she might know,' Toots said, looking down her nose.

'Honey: you're a wonder. How could I live without you? You'll get the details, for sure?'

'I think so.'

'Good. Two days. I'll use 'em.'

'Suppose the bishop is the same sort as this man?'

'Time enough to worry about that when I see him. No, beautiful. It's going to be all right. I feel it in my bones. Now—for what's to be done while I'm away. What I told you just now won't be enough. Get me Votty and Ted, will you? And John?'

As she moved to the door, he rose, and put an arm around her shoulders.

'Good for Toots. Don't think I don't appreciate it, because I do. Now. Run quick.'

He stood at the window, plying a toothpick, his face quite without expression. After a couple of minutes, she came back.

'They're not here.'

'Not here! Why not? Where are they?'

'Down at the studio. You told them to go down.'

Paul's face contracted in vexation. It always irked him if everyone was not ready at hand the instant a new idea had come into his mind. Then, as usual, at the bidding of the inner moderator, his face cleared.

'That's all right. I'll go down. By the way, this is the evening we show the natives themselves in the village hall. Is it all ready?'

'The hall's ready. Votty is going down afterwards to put the finishing touches.'

'Good. I'll go on down to the studio.'

'Shall I pack for you?'

'Would you? That'd be swell.'

He blew her a kiss, and hurried out.

XX

THEY were sitting over dinner. Coffee had just been served. Paul gave his a glance and a sniff, and pushed the cup away. Always he hoped that a miracle might happen, and the brew be drinkable.

'Got the recipe yet, do you think?' John grinned.

'Acorns, pencil sharpenings, and a dash of cabbage water.' He looked out of the window, then jerked back to them. 'I hate all this contrivance and all these tactics. I'm an artist; I don't care about anything except making a good picture. I don't want to waste time dickering about, trying to out-manoeuvre these locals.'

'You love it. It's meat and drink to you.'

'I do *not* love it, Votty. It's a waste of time. Here have I got to spend two whole days in the train, instead of getting on with the job.'

'You see,' Votty said to John. 'He thinks nothing can be done if he's not here. That's a poor compliment to

John when you've just asked him to direct a sequence."

'Well,' Paul said happily, 'with all respect to John and to you, Votty, and to all concerned, I think more work gets done if I'm here than if I'm away. Otherwise, what would I be here for at all? I couldn't conscientiously claim my salary if I didn't think I made a difference to the picture.'

- 'No,' Votty said, to John's surprise, 'Til give you that.'

'Thank you, Votty. That's very handsome of you.' He pushed back his chair. 'As soon as you're ready, we'll go on down.'

'We're not ready.' Votty growled: but John, even with that derisive eye upon him, responded to Paul's electric impatience, and swallowed the last of his coffee.

The rain had lifted, but low clouds with dangling ragged tufts were drifting in series from the west, and a sea of pale slate came uneasily in at an angle to the shore, the waves spilling edgeways and awry. A shaft of wan sunlight fell through a gap in the clouds, but the sea hardly responded. A flat, cold glitter was spread out for a few seconds across a width of some four hundred yards. Then it narrowed quickly, faltered, and was gone. The air was thin, so thin that the wind, though it was blowing strongly, to judge by the swift clouds, seemed to have little force, and did not hamper the trio as they walked along. Toots and Gladys were ahead. Toots' skirts blew up as she turned a corner, revealing a pair of uncommonly neat and slender legs. That was the odd thing about Toots. Her general appearance was so insignificant that one tended not to notice how good many of her individual features were. Gladys, on the contrary, had a large handsomeness which diverted attention from the fact that, feature by feature, she was nothing remarkable. She radiated good nature; her voice was warm, and somehow managed to be both loud and restful. Toots, who gave away nothing, made her impression by a quiet integrity.

'They're a good couple.' John said, putting his thought into words.

'You don't know how good they are. This outfit would

be nowhere, without those two girls. I'd as soon try to do without Votty.'

'You have done without him.' Votty observed laconically. 'Many times.'

'Yes. That's how I know I don't like it.' Paul was pleased with himself. 'I've got an ideal team, and an ideal story, and an ideal setting. There's only one fly in the ointment, and I mean to swat him, and swat him hard. Mind you, I respect that McCubberty. He stands up for his principles, just as I stand up for mine. But I rather fancy I'm going to stand up a bit harder and a bit longer than he is.'

'You don't imagine he'll give way, do you?'

'He'll have to. Or it won't matter if he does or not. He'll be fixed, anyway.'

'How long are you staying away?' Votty asked.

'Only two days.'

'Bad time to choose, just when we start shooting.'

'My dear Votty—*did* I choose? I wouldn't be away five minutes, if the choice was mine. You know that.'

'Well. Don't be away longer.'

Paul winked at John. 'I'm very much touched by this solicitude.'

'You needn't be. I'm only thinking about Terry.'

'What about Terry?'

'He'll get upstage. He's bad enough already.'

'Bounce him. It doesn't do to be afraid of Terry.'

'I'm not afraid of him. But I haven't got authority to bounce him.'

'Yes, you have. You're in charge. You and John.'

'Don't be away long, anyhow.'

'Why—' once more Paul winked at John—'I thought you and Terry were the most tremendous pals.'

'The sooner you come back, the longer we shall stay pals. He won't take direction from me. You know that as well as I do. We don't want any bad blood in this outfit.'

'You're right.' Paul was instantly serious. 'If he gives any trouble, starts hogging the camera, or anything like that, let him get on with it, and I'll bawl him out when I see the rushes.'

Then he'll say it's my fault, and he wasn't directed right.'

'No matter what he says. I'll fix him. Hullo, hullo, hullo. The world and his wife. And children.'

They had come in sight of the so-called village hall. Early though it was, a large crowd had gathered outside, and figures were converging from both directions. The sun, which had made another abrupt reappearance, shot a low slanting beam of pale gold which picked the figures out unnaturally against the murk beyond, and threw enormous shadows. Those who stood clear of the buildings were silhouetted on the narrow spit of land above the shore: and in the wild forlorn light they looked savage and magical, larger than human, charged with an extraordinary life. Then, as abruptly, the shaft of light swung off and vanished, and the figures shrank to drab and petty uniformity.

Paul bore down on them triumphantly, hat in hand. He exclaimed how glad he was to see them, how good of them it was to come. They grinned, but a communal shyness seemed to have fallen on them. They stood in knots, and no one would go in. They made way respectfully for Paul, but would not follow him through the door.

Paul dealt with the situation characteristically. He made sure that all was ready, and that the projector was working properly. Then he came back to the door.

'Come on, folks. Don't you want to see yourselves? The show's going to start in two minutes from now. You're not going to let me watch it all by myself, are you?'

They came in then—hesitating for a few seconds, then advancing in a rush, and storming the chairs. In two minutes they were all wedged solid, leaving only a couple of rows at the back.

'Don't start yet,' John said aside to Paul. 'Lots of them won't be here yet.'

'I gave out the hour, and I'm going to start. They must learn punctuality.'

'It all depends whether you're doing this to give them a lesson, or to please them.'

'There are plenty here. We can have a second house

later, if it's necessary. I don't see why we should give in to them all the way.'

The show was a rapturous success. From being quiet and respectful, the audience soon became uproarious. They shrilly recognised themselves and their neighbours, they screamed with laughter, they uttered yells and catcalls. Meanwhile a steady stream of new arrivals crowded in at the door, till the hall was packed to a steaming heat. Paul jumped up by the screen, and appealed to those in the front rows to go out and make room for the latecomers to see the show: but they would not budge. The latecomers protested that they could see perfectly well from where they were, and so the whole thing was done again, to the riotous satisfaction of all. At the end, Paul rose again.

'Well—now you've seen yourselves on the screen. Now you know what it's like to be film actors. How do you like it? How do you think you do it? Pretty good? .' think so. Now listen. In a few days' time I shall be wanting you—all of you—to take part in scenes in the picture I'm making. Just as you are. Just to be yourselves. Just as you have seen yourselves to-night. Think you can do it? Of course you can. And—what's more—listen to this. I'm not going to ask you to do it for nothing, as you did this. You would, of course, I know, just for the fun of it. But I represent a very big and powerful and wealthy company, and they always like to recognise fully all that is done to help them. So you will be paid for any work you do at the full rate which is given to players in scenes of this kind. I will pay every man, woman, and child one pound a day for any work you may do for the company.'

A gasp went up. They had heard rumours, but here was the fact.

'I shall not want you before Friday: but I may want you at any time after that. I will give you as long notice as possible; but we have to depend on the weather.'

They understood that. Everything they did themselves had to depend on the weather.

'Well: that's all for now. Good night. And thank you all for coming.'

There was a tumult of good nights, and then they were suddenly shy again. Paul pushed his way out, and John overtook him some distance up the road, fanning himself with his hat, although the breeze was strong.

'Terrible smell in there. I can't stand crowds of people.'

He pulled out a scented handkerchief.

'I wish I could have a bath, right now. Terrible facilities, at the hotel. Water wasn't hot last night. It's an extraordinary country. Do you know, I don't believe they're trying to stint service. They just don't seem to understand.'

He recovered himself, and began to hum.

'This would be a grand night for the storm scene. Votty could get it. He's a marvel. One of the best shots he ever got was in a real rainstorm, round about twilight. Everyone said it was impossible, but Votty got it.'

A wild spatter of raindrops greeted them as they reached the hotel. A piece of newspaper rose high in the air, twirled queerly, and sailed away inland.

Paul stopped at the foot of the stairs.

'Wait for me. I'm just going to clean off a little. Then we'll go in the bar.'

'In the bar?'

'Yes. I want to spread a bit more talk.'

John raised his brows. He looked round for Votty, but could not see him. Evidently he had remained in the hall, to help look after the apparatus. What would Paul say next? Though he had to admit that so far he had been more than efficient, John was always afraid that by some violent miscalculation, some total indiscretion, Paul would ruin everything.

Paul was not long. He reappeared smelling of lavender water and talcum powder.

'That's better. I felt demoralized. Now for Girvan and his merry men all.'

The bar was full, and the haze of smoke already so thick that one could barely see across. A sudden silence fell the moment they came in. Paul, sensitive as a cat, realized at once that something had happened. He smiled.

'Well, gentlemen. Nice to see you all. May I ask you all

to have a drink—on the company? Oh, don't thank me. Thank the company. They don't know what you're thanking them for—it'll be entered as expenses—but thank them all the same.'

They roared appreciatively: and for three or four minutes Girvan and Judy were busy. Then a small scuffle arose. A young man was being pressed to have the free drink, and was refusing. Men looked at him, and then at Paul. The incident became obvious, and Paul saw it.

'Well, well. What's this.'

The young man muttered angrily to his friends, 'Leave me be, I tell you. Leave me be.' John saw he was the same that had attempted to speak to Katie aiter she had done her test.

Paul pushed on, oblivious of danger.

'What's wrong? Haven't they given you what you want?'

The young man shook himself free, and stood panting and glaring at Paul.

'He's out with ye, sir.' a tall, unslaven man explained, smiling.

'Out with me?'

'Vexed with ye. Annoyed, like.'

'Why? What have I done?'

'He's lookin' after Katie Heggarty. He's wishful to marry her.'

Paul's eyes narrowed in comprehension. He looked back at the young man, who turned very white.

'Leave her be! D'ye hear me?' he cried thickly, and could not articulate anything more.

Paul began to nod.

'Oh yes. I hear you. And I understand. It's that way, is it?' The nodding became sinister. The crowd watched, fascinated. 'I know your sort. You claim you love the girl, do you? You've a mighty queer notion of love, my friend. Look at him, gentlemen. A chance comes to her to be rich and famous and make a great success, and what does this man do, who says he loves her? Does he clap his hands and rejoice in her good fortune? Does he rush round telling everyone the good news, and laughing all over his

face, as he would do if he really loved her? Not on your life. He's angry. He hates her good luck. He doesn't want her to have it. He'd take it from her, and keep her back, and stop her ever getting any higher in the world than he could put her.'

He stepped right up to the young man, so that in spite of himself he shrank back against the bar.

'I know your sort. Mighty well I know them. You don't want that girl ever to have a thing that you don't give her. You want her in your power. You want to be the source of all that comes to her. You haven't the grace or the generosity to share in her good fortune. You won't take anything from her. You've got to be the giver. You want to keep her tied down tight in your own narrow little world. And, now that she's going to get right out of it, and go up in life, you're sore and grudge it to her. And then you have the neck to say you love her.'

He stepped back, and looked round the room.

'If that's love, give me honest hate, any day of the week.' He turned to Girvan. 'Got a lemonade for me?'

The spell was broken. Girvan hastened to get the drink, and a low murmur arose in the room. Paul's attack on the helpless young man had browbeaten rather than carried them with him. They were pleased about Katie, and did not care for the young man, but their sympathies were partly with him.

Girvan handed Paul his glass. Paul sipped it, then challenged him directly.

'Til be wanting a lot of labour towards the end of the week,' he said, loudly enough to be heard by them all. 'As much as you can get me.'

There was a dead silence. Girvan's mottled countenance became evasive.

'I don't know will that be easy, Mr. Deakin. Men will be apt to be busy just now.'

The hay.'

The crops.'

The fishin."

Paul laughed aloud. 'What's this? A game to raise the

price on uie? Nothing doing, friends. The price is high—a pound a day, same as for the acting—and it doesn't go any higher.'

'That's not it at all, sir. Sure, we're well content with that. Only——'

'Only what? Hay, crops, fishing! You know as well as I do that's all boloney. What do you take me for? Think I can't see when the harvest's due? Now, tell me, straight out. Why are you making difficulties? Why don't you want to work for me?'

'It's not us is makin' difficulties.'

'We're willin' enough.'

'Well then: what's wrong?' He looked around. 'Nobody tell me? I'll have to guess. Would the difficulty come from down the road, by any chance? From the Presbytery?'

There was a loud, concerted sigh. Paul laughed.

'That's what you're thinking of, is it? Well, you can take it from me, that's absolutely all right. I've been down to see Father McCubberty myself, this afternoon. There was a slight misunderstanding, I'll admit that. You see, Father McCubberty thought, not knowing a great deal about the picture business, that we were going to screen the story exactly as it was in the book. Of course, I explained to him that we were going to do nothing of the kind. That we are going to make an entirely new story, based on Mr. Reilly's book——'—he turned to John——'but leaving out certain incidents which, as Mr. Reilly is the first to admit—it's he who has made the new story—as Mr. Reilly is the first to admit, would not be at all suitable in a screen play. So, you see, that was all a misunderstanding. Father McCubberty's feelings were based on a mistake. Now what's going to happen—I arranged it with him this afternoon—is that we're to show Father McCubberty the new story for his approval: and then it will be all right.'

They looked at one another, and pretended to feel relief.

'Of course.' Girvan said guardedly, 'if Father McCubberty gives his approval, sure, that will be a different matter altogether. What time did you see him, Mr. Deakin, gir?'

I didn't check it exactly. Between tea and dinner.'

'And you say you left him all right about it?'

'I explained the whole misunderstanding to him, and arranged to show him the new story in a day or two's time.'

Girvan stuck out his lower lip with a comic gesture. He fished in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a folded piece of paper, soiled already with the pressure of many thumbs.

'Whatever way it was, this come in just an hour ago.'

He handed it over. In a tense silence Paul read it. It consisted of three lines.

'You will understand that no help whatever is to be given to the man Deakin or any of his associates, and that no work of any kind is to be undertaken for him.

Francis A. McCubberty.'

Paul beamed, and handed it back.

'That's perfectly right. That's quite in order. None of you are to do a thing until Father McCubberty has approved the new story. That will be in a couple of days' time. Well—I don't want any of you before Friday at the earliest. So that's absolutely all right. I'm only telling you now, so that you'll be ready at short notice.'

Girvan put away the note. John could see he was quite unconvinced, as were the others, despite the polite murmurs with which they greeted Paul's reply.

'A man of great principle, Father McCubberty,' Paul said. 'I respect him greatly. Many a man in his position would be only too glad to see so much money coming into his parish. But he puts his principles above everything. Even above the prosperity of his congregation.'

A queer muttering went round the room.

'Yes,' Paul went on. 'I am convinced that Father McCubberty will be influenced by nothing but his principles. Whatever he decides, it will be from the highest motives. Now there are some priests who might not be too well pleased to have a lot of money come into the pockets of their congregation. They might be afraid it would make the congregation too independent. They might be afraid it

would weaken their power over their congregation: set the congregation free of their hold. I've known one or two like that.'

This time the murmur was almost soundless, but ugly.

'However, Father McCubberty is not that sort. He won't let the money side of it influence him for a second. He won't care whether you are rich or poor. He'll decide only on principle.'

'Begod, ye said a true word then, mister.'

The voice liberated other voices. There were exclamations, oaths, and laughter with an edge on it.

'Yes,' Paul went on dreamily, 'I have the highest respect for your parish priest. That is why I am so anxious for him to be convinced and satisfied. That is why I'm taking the story to show him. I wouldn't do it for another man. I would just carry on, knowing that I had the most powerful picture corporation in the world behind me, a corporation that thinks nothing of money and can command the support of governments, if need be. No: I've taken a fancy to this place: I want to make the picture here—I'm going to do that anyhow—I want you people to have the money that it will bring, and I want Father McCubberty to be absolutely easy in his mind. That's why I'm taking this most unusual step of letting him approve the story before we go ahead. Even though it's only a matter of form: because the new story has nothing that anyone could possibly object to.' He took a drink from his glass. 'It will be a very great relief to Father McCubberty to be able to sanction so much money coming into the parish. He will be delighted. You can understand how painful it must be for him to feel he can't approve.'

'I don't think,' said a voice at the back of the room.

Paul finished his lemonade.

'Well, boys. Don't worry. This picture is going through all right, I assure you of that. In a couple of days, you'll have your parish priest's approval, and you'll be able to go ahead and fill your pockets with a good conscience. Remember now—be ready for a big call at the week-end. Good night to you all.'

'Good night, Mr. Deakin, sir.'

'God.blessye.'

'Good night to ye now.'

Paul and John went out to the doorstep, to get rid of the fumes of the bar.

Isay, Paul. Isn't it risky to bluff them like that? McCubberty'll never give way.'

If he doesn't, there'll be a certain amount of disaffection in the old home town. I guess I started a doubt or two.'

'I never heard anything more blatant.'

'It worked.'

'It won't do any good.'

'We'll see. I'll fix McCubberty. 'The man Deakin'. Ill show him.'

'You were a bit rough on that poor young chap that wants to marry Katie.'

'I've no use for his sort. A mean brute. Trying to keep her caged.'

'Hang it all, Paul, it's only natural.'

'Yeah. Natural as murder and every other form of meanness. No, John. That's not love as I understand it.'

XXI

PAUL smiled ruefully into the twinkling kindly eyes that regarded him.

'I'm afraid I'm very largely to blame.'

His manner was frank, impulsive, almost boyish. He might have been confessing a peccadillo to a sympathetic headmaster. 'You see, I committed a grave error in tact. When I called upon Father McCubberty to explain my project, and to solicit his approval for it, he was away from home. Of course I should have waited till he came back. I see that clearly now. But, like the silly impatient guy I am, I was all eagerness to get started, so I thought that, to save time, I would go and see the Protestant clergyman, Mr. Cartwright. He gave his immediate approval; and—well——'

The bishop's smile broadened. Paul spread out his hands.

That's how it was. I wish I didn't always act this head-long sort of way. I was warned, too. I'm not making excuses for myself: but there was the company's money to consider. Every day costs so much.'

'Perfectly, Mr. Deakin. I quite appreciate that point.'

The face was old and smooth, creased round the eyes into a maze of small wrinkles. It was a gentle, saintly face, but Paul perceived the shrewdness at the back of the mild blue eyes, and knew that his only chance was to open his heart and respond without reserve. He knew this with relief: it was the course which the warmth of his nature urged upon him. Paul was never so happy as when he could be the part he had to play.

So, as the bishop waited for him to go on, he plunged.

'Of course, I wouldn't for a moment insult Father McCubberty by suggesting that he would allow a personal matter to influence his decision. What is bothering him is that he feels the book to be an attack on the neighbourhood, and on his parish in particular. Therefore he was the one to be consulted first. I gather, by the way, that there is rather a tendency in this country to judge works of art and literature on—shall we say—a rather—well—'

'A rather parochial basis? Let me say it for you, and spare you any possible embarrassment.' They laughed together. 'You are right, Mr. Deakin. There is. I won't defend it, though I could easily excuse it. Small countries and small communities are always more inclined to be touchy than larger bodies.'

'Thank you.' Paul bowed. 'Father McCubberty sees this story, not against a world background—it isn't too much to call it that, for the picture will be shown on the screen all over the civilized world—but against the background of his own village. That was clear when I pleaded to him that the book had been chosen by the famous 'Best Books' club, with Sir James Durston in the chair.'

'Sir James Durston? Indeed. He and I are very old friends. We went through college together.'

'Well 1 That is most interesting.'

'Yes. He has done very well for himself. I see him occasionally, when I go to London.'

'In that case,' Paul said, 'you will realize that the book can't be so very terrible. Also, it is on sale in this country. The government censorship found nothing to object to: naturally enough, if I may say so, since the 'Best Books' club is aimed at family reading.' Paul ventured a smile. 'Father McCubberty was very much worried about that. He wrote to the censors himself. Five times, he told me.'

The bishop returned the smile.

'Ah, he is a good fellow, is McCubberty. A splendid fellow. A little strict, perhaps, and over zealous.'

'Yes.' Paul leaned forward. 'That is why it worries me so to be at odds with him. I have conceived a very real respect for Father McCubberty. Many a man—I hope I may say this without offence—many a man would be dazzled by the thought of so much money coming into his parish, and so would seize on every excuse for approving of a project like this. He would say to himself 'Well, the 'Best Books' club says it's all right, and the Censorship Board says it's all right, so I can go ahead and allow it in all good conscience.' But Father McCubberty puts his principles first. I had to admit that, to the villagers themselves, even though I suppose it wasn't very good policy from my own point of view.' He gave his rueful smile again. 'I always think of these things afterwards. Never at the time.'

The bishop had listened, with the tips of his plump pink fingers pressed together.

'What is the exact position, Mr. Deakin? Has Father McCubberty denounced your plan?'

'Oh, no!' Paul's eyebrows rose in shocked surprise. 'At least, certainly not to me. He wrote in reply to my letter, saying I could expect no encouragement. I went straight to see him, when he told me of his objection to the story. I then found that he was labouring under the mistaken idea that the picture was to correspond with the book, incident for incident. I'm afraid I was a little lacking in tact, then, too. It hadn't occurred to me that anyone could know so little about pictures as to think that it would be possible to

do that, even if we wanted to. I'm afraid that it's hard for us in the picture industry to realize that there are people who don't know anything about the way we work. That's *our* parochial outlook.'

The bishop's eyes twinkled.

'I explained to Father McCubberty,' Paul went on, 'that of course we had no intention of adhering closely to the book, but had prepared an entirely new story based upon it. There were, I told him, certain episodes in the book which, even though they had been passed for family reading, would not be suitable for the screen. It isn't always right to animate, and present publicly, to people who may have no educational background, things that may be read without harm in the pages of a book. We in the picture industry—' Paul pressed home his point, encouraged by an approving nod—'are always conscious of that fact, and, if I may say so, we feel our responsibility very deeply. I explained this to Father McCubberty, and promised to submit to him a synopsis of the actual story we are going to film. That is how the position stands at the moment. A sort of armistice.'

The rosy bald head nodded benignly.

'If you will let me say so, Mr. Deakin, I think that, apart from your first venial slip—' he beamed at Paul—'you have acted with great propriety.'

'I hope you don't think it presumptuous of me to come direct to you like this,' Paul exclaimed. 'But I am terribly anxious to have the work go forward under the right auspices, and to remove any possible shadow of misunderstanding.'

'Quite so. Quite so. And now, Mr. Deakin: what can I do for you?'

'Well—' Paul was more like a schoolboy than ever. 'I hope it isn't asking too much. But I thought, if you could give the project your blessing—at least, if you could give me a written line of approval, however short—then the people would be relieved, and Father McCubberty would be easy in his mind.'

The bishop chuckled. 'I won't promise you it will have

that effect.' he said. 'But I'll be very happy to do what you ask. Sir James is a very good friend of mine, and I have every confidence that he would not set his imprimatur upon a book that was in any way scandalous or improper.'

He got up and ambled over to his desk.

'I think.' he said, turning his head to look at Paul, 'that it will be better if I give you something general, rather than a note to McCubberty himself. That might make it appear that you had been complaining of him.'

'Exactly what I would have asked.' Paul said eagerly. 'Just what I thought myself.'

He gazed at the bulky back and shoulders and the smooth pink neck. For half a minute there was no sound but the smooth scratching of a pen, and the whistle of the old man's breathing.

'There, Mr. Deakin. Will that do?'

Paul looked joyfully at the three lines written on the sheet of episcopal notepaper.

'That's splendid.' he exclaimed. 'I can't say how grateful I am. You will have the satisfaction of knowing, too, that the parish and the whole neighbourhood will benefit very greatly.'

'That gives no grounds for objection, certainly.' said the bishop drily.

Paul folded the paper and put it in his wallet.

'It's pleasant.' he said, as if one cardinal were speaking to another, 'when the right course is also the materially profitable course.'

'How right you are, Mr. Deakin.'

Paul gave him a swift glance. Then he laughed.

'Now you're laughing at me.' he said. 'You make me feel about ten years old.'

'Am I as ancient as all that?'

'No, no. That's not what I was thinking at all. You know—I should just hate to come and try to pull the wool over your eyes.'

The bishop blinked amiably.

'I'm afraid I might be no match for a practical man of affairs.'

'Business men are not hard to read. You don't need me to tell you that.'

'Well, Mr. Deakin, I won't contradict you. I have not found the deepest human riddles in that class, certainly.'

They laughed, and made their farewells. Safely outside, Paul pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his brow. Saw through me, he told himself. Saw through me, and out the other side. A great old guy. Had me scared. But he's given me the paper. That's all that matters. He's given me the paper.

XXII

'I WAS a fool to come into this.'

Terry gloomily broke the crust off his sandwich, and threw a piece to a gull that, bolder than the rest, had come close to the picnic party. Toots and Gladys had found a ledge for lunch, overlooking the sea. Grass and heather, grown on a shallow bed of earth which centuries had brought to the rock, made a comfortable and secluded nest. To their regret, the leading man had noted it and joined them.

'It's all damned fine,' he grumbled on. 'It looks damned good on paper, but it doesn't work out. A chap warned me, in the club, when he heard what I was going to do. Brian Nixon: he's had a lot of experience. 'Play opposite amateurs?' he said. 'Don't you do it, old boy. It simply isn't worth it. Never mind what they offer you. Don't you do do it.' That's what he said: and he ought to know.'

'Why didn't you take his tip?' Toots asked shortly.

'Wish I had now. Wanted the money.'

'Why,' Gladys enquired largely. 'What's wrong?'

He turned to her, flourishing his sandwich in an arc.

'How the hell am I to fit in? You heard Ted at me in that last scene. What with toning my voice down to that kid's mewling, and then trying to balance that hamming bloody idiot—what the hell does Paul think he's at, signing on a fool like that? How am I to work out a level between

those two? Whispering in one shot and bawling in the next?"

'Isn't that what they call technique?' Toots asked innocently.

'Technique!' He swallowed a mouthful, and glared at her. 'I'll play with decent actors anywhere, and give a show. But with these yokels!'

'I should have thought it was dangerous to act with these people, certainly.'

'Dangerous! it's the end. It's death.'

'But not for the same reason. I'd be afraid they'd show the professional actors up.'

'Show them UP!'

'Yes. Make them look as if they were acting.'

'If you have a lot of people being natural,' Gladys joined in, 'and one acting——'

'Being *natural*! My God! Have you watched that Brannigan oaf? D'you call that being natural?'

'He's only trying to copy the professionals.'

'Trying to——!' He had flushed an angry mauve. 'Here—— have you gone mad, or have I?'

'I *think* we're all right. Aren't we, Gladys?'

'Mm. Definitely.'

They awaited an outburst, but it did not come. Terry got up, and viciously flung the remains of his sandwich at the gull. The bird squawked in affright, rose vertically, flew a little way, checked, then darted back, snatched at the morsel, squawked again wildly, dropped it, and fled.

A malicious grin suddenly overspread Terry's features.

'Here comes the apostle of nature,' he said. 'I'll leave you to enjoy his company.'

He jumped down, and sloped off. The girls looked round, and saw Brannigan, a look at once determined and ingratiating upon his face. He smiled at Terry, and was ignored. Then he came on.

'May I join you ladies for a while?'

With resigned glances at one another, they made room for him. Brannigan settled himself down, delighted, and began to talk. Within a minute it seemed to Toots that she

had never done anything but sit still and be harangued by that rounded, unceasing voice.

Over Brannigan's shoulder she watched the gull, attended now by a second, come back to get the piece of sandwich. It lit on a rock, and stood swaying uncertainly. It hopped nearer, sidled away at an angle, rose and flew in an anguished curve, came over the bread, and made to swoop, rose at once in panic, and came to rest upon a rock a little farther away. Then, just as Toots decided it had given up all attempt on the titbit, it flew low down at desperate speed, snatched up the bread, and flew off with a loud and rapid beating of its wings.

Brannigan, overjoyed at a silent audience, plunged deeper into his autobiography.

XXIII

PAUL'S eyes were everywhere as he drove about Dublin, noting backgrounds for scenes, composing shots, taking in a score of gestures and eccentricities of character and colour. I must make a picture here, he decided, surveying the bank of the Liffey and the rows of masts and funnels that swung off in a curve to meet the sea. These trams are cute ... A *Quai des Brumes* in modern Ireland . . . His mind rushed along, exploring a possible scenario. Then the front of Trinity set him off on a different track, and the first project was forgotten, until, reaching a dead stop with the second, which included Goldsmith, Emmet, and Tom Moore—Paul was vague about dates—he recalled the Liffey, abandoned history, and decided on a modern modification which should somehow link the two.

His first interview was brief and wholly satisfactory. The firm who owned Girvan's were exceeding well pleased to hear of his plans. They bristled angrily at the idea that there could be any shadow of a question about accommodation for the party, and undertook to let Girvan know that, if he valued his position, he must place himself and all he had entirely at Paul's disposal.

The head of the firm went so far as to hint, with an acid smile, that there were reasons why Girvan should be more than willing to do anything that was asked of him. Paul's further suggestion, that the celebrity of the film might bring more tourist traffic to the place than could at present be catered for, and that it would be well to have alternative accommodation under skilled management, brought understanding nods and an exchange of glances among the gentlemen he was interviewing. Local endeavour, Paul hinted, was all very well: but the introduction of a little more capital, operated with a larger vision and with greater enterprise . . .

'In fact,' he smiled, 'I've more than once suggested to the corporation that they would do well to buy up all the local hotels on such occasions as this, and take on the catering themselves. It would show a good profit. But there, they have large ideas. They won't listen to anything that only promises a few thousands.' He laughed. 'I've a very good mind to do it myself, one of these days. Put in a good man to run it, on commission; I shouldn't have the time myself; and pocket the proceeds.'

He got up.

'Well, good day, gentlemen. And thank you very much. You will contact Girvan direct?'

'At once, Mr. Deakin.'

And he left, well pleased by the speculative and slightly anxious look that had come into the eyes of his listeners as he sketched his final flight of fancy.

And why not, he said to himself, as he walked down Nassau Street. It was a good idea; he might do far worse. What fools there were in the world. Here was he, Paul Deakin, walking along the street of this picturesque and wholly foreign city, this street full of people who knew it and all its ways, who lived in cut-throat competition against one another for meagre rewards. And yet, if at this very moment it should please the Lord to strip from him every penny he possessed, to cut him off utterly from his past and from every association that bound him to the life in which the name Paul Deakin had meaning, and rechristen him

with the silliest and most unpublicizable name that even a divine ingenuity could devise, yet, such was the fecundity and resource of his mind, that, in spite of all this, within twenty-four hours he would be firmly set upon a fresh and profitable career. Ideas for making money were active in Paul's mind. He never had any difficulty in coming to terms with the world, and he knew that he never would. The thought enriched him, it made him feel large and generous. He beamed upon the shabby and seedy persons who shuffled past, pitying them from his heart, because the good *Lord* in His wisdom had not seen fit to endow them with the versatility and address of mind He had bestowed upon Paul Deakin, His most grateful servant. The size of this blessing affected Paul so powerfully that he stood still and took off his hat, uttering a prayer of genuine thanksgiving, and registering his humility, his essential and permanent humility—it was important that this should be fully realized, here and in heaven—before he went on to his next appointment.

This interview, conducted over the lunch table at Jam-mets, needed finesse. One may not trifle with a Government department, nor approach it with undue directness. Civil servants, Paul well knew, do not talk turkey till avenues have been explored and stones turned, proportionate in number to the seriousness of the matter within view; and it is always well, particularly in the smaller countries, to regard the matter as most serious.

By the coffee and liqueurs stage, Paul knew that his general information was correct. His manner until now had been in the best oblique tradition. Now he decided on a man-to-man approach. He looked around, pulled his chair closer, and leaned across the table.

'Look here. This is all very irregular, I know, but the picture industry is all pretty irregular, from an official point of view, so that what I have to put before you will only be in keeping with it. This is the most marvellous natural country for making motion pictures. Only one thing is against it, and that's the climate. Dennistown is by far the best natural spot that I have come across. On the strength

of what I have seen there, I am making certain recommendations to the corporation. If they are accepted, and I am inclined to think they will be, this will develop into a very big thing indeed. It won't be an affair of one picture, but of scores. We will make Dennistown a regular centre of the industry. I need not point out to you what that will mean, in the way of permanent employment, prosperity, land values, tourist traffic, and development generally.'

The official nodded guardedly.

'I don't want to exaggerate to you.' Paul went on. 'Dennistown will never be a Hollywood, because of the climate. But it can be, and if these plans go forward, it will be, a permanent centre for the making of pictures with an Irish background. Such pictures are always in demand, primarily for the U.S.A. market, but also for Britain, the whole of Europe, and even for Ireland. It will mean an outlay, not of hundreds of thousands, but of millions. Such a site, and such an industry, with all its incidentals, would be a national asset. It would have an appreciable effect on national revenue.'

The official nodded. It sounded so good, he groped for the snag.

'What do you want us to do?' he enquired, nervously. 'If you are looking for any sort of financial guarantee, I must tell you at once that it is out of the question.'

Paul looked at him steadily.

'I think I can say, without being offensive, that Python Films Incorporated are not in need of financial help from any business, from any corporation, or from any country. No. I'm not asking the Government of Eire for money. On the contrary, I'm proposing to save it some.'

He leaned closer.

'I don't know if I'm being indiscreet. If I am, forgive me. But I gather that there is some question of a grant to the local district board, or whatever you call it, at Dennistown, for improving the roads, or the harbour facilities, or some such purpose.'

'The matter has been under discussion, yes.'

'Well, Mr. Hennessey, Python Films are prepared to take

a part at least of this work off your hands. As I said, the Corporation is not looking at one picture only, but at the possibility of a great number. That being so, we are not calculating expenses on the lines of a single picture. We are looking right ahead. If we are going to be able to do this work, we need much better facilities than we have got at present. We want to get on with the work at once. A Government department, with the best will in the world, cannot always move very rapidly.'

'That is so.'

'Very well. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the sum immediately needed is ten thousand pounds. I say immediately, because of course a far greater sum will be needed later on. Don't look alarmed. We will see to all that. But, for the immediate need, the Corporation is prepared to donate half of whatever sum your office has contemplated laying out; on two conditions.'

The official leaned back, on the defensive. This was what he had been waiting for.

'One.' Paul said, 'that the work starts at once. Two, that we get, from you, an all-clear signal. That you communicate with all the appropriate local authorities, saying that our work has your approval, and instructing them to afford us all the help in their power.'

'I don't think that will be very easy.' Mr. Hennessey said slowly. 'You see, such a procedure would be highly irregular. The ordinary——'

Paul settled himself down to hear a talk on the accustomed lines. The session was protracted. In the course of the afternoon he was taken to see three more officials, each higher than the last.

It was a hard afternoon's work, and he missed the train home: but, by six o'clock, he had got what he wanted. Letters had gone off, drafted and written while he sat in the office—Paul knew something about official promises: and he had in his pocket a document which, while highly irregular—as all concerned protested to him—would open any door that might try to stay closed.

XXIV

'ON the contrary, it was as easy as falling off a log.'

Paul leaned back in his chair, and contemplated John affectionately. With John he was only half surprised to find Flanagan. For the time being, Flanagan had slipped his mind. Now, seeing him again, Paul remembered that he had expected him to come back. It was just a question of how long the poet felt it necessary to stand on his dignity.

Paul greeted Flanagan as if nothing had happened. The greeting was coldly acknowledged, and Flanagan made as if to go. At once Paul began an account of his travels and negotiations. The bait was too strong, and Flanagan stayed. Now, bristling with hostility, he listened to a narrative which Paul, watching him from the corner of his eye, was careful to make airy and, by implication, contemptuous.

'I told you.' Paul said to John, 'that the mere name of Python Films would be enough.'

Typhon Films.' Flanagan jeered at him. 'They'd never have heard of that. You might as well say Boa Constrictor Films, or Viper Films, or Earwig Films. It'd be all the same to them.'

'In that case, how do you account for the results of my trip?'

'Results!' Flanagan's thick lips curled. 'Promises, you mean. They're cheap, in Dublin.'

'I think the term results is justified, for what I have.' Paul said mildly.

'What have you?'

'I have, one, a letter from the bishop, enjoining the faithful in his diocese to give me all assistance. Two, an order to Girvan to give me all I want, or go out on the back of his neck. Three, an order from the Government Department concerned, to all local officials to do the same, under penalty of losing the development grant promised for the harbour and other amenities. Yes.' Paul sat up, and addressed Flanagan with sudden sharpness. 'That is what it amounts to. Did you really imagine that a corporation like Python Films, which could buy up half this country

and forget it, was going to let its work be hindered by a parish priest? I don't mind playing ball with local hicks for a day or so, just to flatter their self importance. But there's a limit.'

Flanagan struggled to control himself.

'I do not believe,' he said, 'that any government department in any country would make so infamous a bargain. Why, if it was known, they would be turned out of office in five minutes.'

'It won't be worded that way.' Paul grinned at him. 'But that's the way it works. Figure it out for yourself. The Government is going to give Dennistown ten thousand pounds. I come along, representing Python Films, and offer to pay half that sum at once and twenty times as much afterwards, in pursuance of a scheme which will open up the entire countryside, develop it at no cost to the treasury, and bring in millions of money, a large part of which will find its way into the coffers of the said treasury—provided that I can have certain facilities right away, which won't cost the government a cent. There are mighty few governments that would resist that. Anyway, yours didn't. I've got the authority in my pocket.'

Flanagan glared at him. John bent forward.

'What is this scheme, Paul? To bring in millions?'

'To develop the locality as a permanent setting for Irish pictures. A whole series. Fifty, or a hundred.'

John stared. 'I never heard a word of anything like that. You never told me.'

'I never heard of it myself, till I got talking to that chap across the table.'

'What! You mean to say you made it all up on the spur of the moment!'

Paul bowed. 'All the same, it's a very good idea. Or it might be. I don't see why we shouldn't do it. I shall recommend it to the corporation. They'll listen, too, if this picture's a success. Yes. I thought it was a good idea, the instant it came into my mind.'

'And—and it's on the strength of this chimera, this fantasy, that——' Flanagan could not go on.

'It's not a—whatever you said. All my best ideas come to me suddenly. You make a great mistake, a very great mistake, if you think I'm not serious. If these people do what I expect of them, I have every intention of putting the scheme into operation.'

'Man!' Flanagan's voice was a croak. 'Have you no ethics? No principles?'

Paul sat up and slapped his knee with a sound sharp and startling as the bursting of a paper bag.

'I have. And I'll tell you what they are. I am an employee of Python Films, and I conceive it my duty under God to further their interests by every means in my power.'

'You might have the decency to leave God out of it.'

'I don't leave God out of anything. You're too arrogant, Flanagan. Too arrogant, and too intolerant. You think there is only one way of worshipping God. I try always to act ethically: my ethics being to be a good and faithful servant of Python Films.'

'But, Paul,' John said, 'surely you don't suggest that that is the same thing as being a servant of God?'

'If Python Films asked me to do anything I considered wrong, of course I would not do it. But they don't ask me to do anything wrong. They ask me to make a picture of your story. If I could do that by sitting here and saying my prayers, no one would be happier than I. But, unfortunately, we have to work in a world that does not always accept Christian values. We have to contend with people who use cunning and trickery, whose motives rise from self-interest and greed. I have also to deal with honest but misguided coots like McCubberty. Therefore I am obliged to meet these people, I won't say with their own weapons, but with weapons that will defeat them. In the words of the Bible, I have to be wise as a serpent but harmless as a dove. To attain my good and perfectly ethical end as a servant of the corporation, I have to get up a bit earlier in the morning than any guy who wants to stop me. I have to scratch my head a bit. I have to set things working. But that I am doing any harm, or acting in an unethical or unchristian way, I most strongly deny.'

Flanagan let out an explosive breath.

'I can't make out if you're a hypocrite, or just an imbecile.'

'I deliver the goods, anyway. And now, if you'll excuse me, I must get busy. Unless you've anything to say to me specially, John? No. Well—so long. See you soon.'

There was a short silence after he had gone.

'Look here,' Flanagan said urgently. 'There'll be hell to pay, if all this is true. If he's really got these people to back him, there'll be the most unholy row.'

'I don't see,' John said, 'what they can do. The people here, I mean. They'll have to give way.'

'McCubberty'll never give way. He'd be cut to pieces first.'

'But what can he *do*, if the bishop has approved?'

'The bishop won't override him in his own parish.'

John shrugged. 'There'll be a good deal of bad feeling, if he forbids the people to work after they know the bishop says they may.'

'That's what I'm afraid of. John—don't you see what this will mean? The whole place will be thrown into an uproar. There'll be bitterness, bloodshed even. And, if he's really serious about that horrible notion—to make the place a studio—God! can you stand for that? I know you're an apostate; but can you bear to think of this lovely country trampled and defiled by those brutes?'

'I don't like the idea of it.' John had reddened at the word apostate, but his voice was steady. 'However, I don't imagine there's the least likelihood of its ever happening. He made it up on the spur of the moment, to serve his immediate purpose, and likely as not he'll have forgotten all about it by to-morrow.'

'He's just as likely to bring it all to pass, in order to justify himself for having mentioned it to us. I'm beginning to be afraid of that man. He has the logic of the maniac. He's wholly irresponsible. He's capable at any moment of living his fantasy. It's—it's terrifying. We're in the presence of evil.'

Flanagan was sweating. His face was white.

'Nonsense.' John said. 'If you'd been with him as much as I have, you'd realize he was harmless and kindly and in-offensive. A bit ruthless in business, perhaps: but there's nothing evil about him.'

'He can masquerade as harmless and inoffensive. But he is evil. That's what evil is, that casual irresponsibility that can even follow an apparent good without any regard for the consequences. I'm ready to accept that he honestly believes what he says. That he honestly thinks he's doing the right thing.'

'I'm sure he does. He's really rather naif. He pretends to be cunning and sophisticated: but it's only a pretence.'

'Can't you see that makes him all the more dangerous? All the more insidious?'

John shook his head. For him, the centre of interest had shifted from Paul to the fact that he, John, was no longer dominated by Flanagan and bullied by him. Instead, he was standing out and calming the poet's agitation.

Meanwhile, Paul had gone into his office, and had sent for Toots to get a report on what had been done while he was away.

She gave him her account in her usual crisp, business-like tones, but he perceived at once that she had something on her mind. She would come out with it soon.

'Got them all done but 216 and 3,' Paul said. 'Not bad. Not bad at all. What are they like? Seen any rushes?'

'No. We kept them for you.'

'Nice. But why? I bet John was all on fire to see the first shots he ever directed.'

She smiled faintly. 'He was rather eager. But Votty told him he wouldn't know, anyway, and that if they were bad he'd have the double bloodiness of waiting to hear you say so as well: so better wait.'

'Anything else?'

'How did you get on?' At last she raised her eyes to his.

'Fine. All set. Chit from bishop. Chit from syndicate to Girvan—help, or get out. Chit from government department. By the way, in case anyone asks you—' he showed all his teeth in a smile—'we're going to make Dennistown a

permanent base for Irish pictures. Scores of 'em. If this one's a hit. Perhaps.'

Her manner changed altogether. 'Oh, Paul! What have you been saying now?'

'No more than I can make come true, sugar.'

'Yes.' She spoke half to herself, looking at him with a sort of wondering appraisal.

He half rose, reached across, and took her hand. 'Everything else all right?'

'No.' She looked down, frowning painfully.

'What's wrong?'

'Terry.'

'The big slob! What's he been up to? Throwing his weight about?'

'No. Making passes at Katie.'

'So.' Paul let his breath out slowly. 'All right, honey. Thanks a lot. He's for it.'

'Paul.' She looked up, urgently, and caught his sleeve. 'Paul. That kid. Nothing must happen to her, do you hear. She's good, Paul. She's sweet.'

'Sure, I know. She——'

'No, but you *don't* know. She's good all through. They don't grow that way any more. At least, I didn't think they did. She's just like a kid, only she's got a lot of real sense, clear, good sense. She knows things. And then that empty, swollen-headed, hulking great bastard——'

'Honey!' Paul was shocked. 'You know I don't like that sort of talk. Least of all from you.'

'I'm sorry, Paul. But he is. There's no other name for him.'

'I've heard a few.'

'Oh, be serious, Paul. Just for a minute. Please. I'm not laughing. I've never felt less like it.'

'Well, well. Sugar's all steamed up. Mustn't get this way at the start of a picture: or what will you be at the end?'

'If there is an end.'

'What?'

'Nothing. I was talking to myself. Paul—that kid. I lost

my fountain pen the other day. Left it down somewhere, and it was gone when I came back.'

'That's tough, sugar. Anyone pinch it, d'you think? Never mind. I'll get you a new one. What kind d'you fancy?'

Thanks very much, I found it. Only Katie—this is why I'm telling you: Katie came up to me, and said, all shy, like a little girl, 'I'm after burning a candle for your pen, Miss.' (We can't stop her calling us Miss.) 'I'm after burning a candle for your pen.'

'Sakes alive ! In the church?'

'Yes. To St. Anthony, so that he'd find it for me.'

'Well. Isn't that sweet. There's something lovely about that, sugar.'

She looked at him gratefully.

'I told the others, and they laughed.'

'John didn't laugh.'

'No. John explained to me about St. Anthony. I didn't like to ask Katie, for fear I'd hurt her feelings. You know, Paul—it—it made me want to cry.'

He took her chin in his hand, and held her face steady. Her eyes were very bright behind the owlsh glasses, and her thin lips trembled.

'You *are* steamed up, honey. What is it. Climate getting you down? Food not good?'

She pressed against his chest, averting her face. He held her in his arms, a puzzled look in his eyes.

'It's that kid, Paul. I've a horrible feeling something's going to happen to her. She's going to suffer, to be made unhappy, or something. I can't explain it. It's been hanging over me.'

He pushed her gently away.

'We all have to suffer, honey. I don't expect she's different. I can promise you one thing, though. It won't be on account of Terry. Run along now, and send him in here to me.'

She stood for a second, then ducked her head and ran out of the room. Paul raised his brows, and whistled silently to himself. He stood quite still, staring abstractedly

at nothing, till the door bumped open, and Terry lounged in.

'Hullo, boss. Want me?'

'Yes.' Paul looked at him without expression. 'Listening? Fine. Get this. One more pass at that kid, and you're out. On your neck.'

Terry winced. Then an angry flush spread over his face.

'What is this outfit?' he asked. 'A Sunday School?'

'Never mind what it is. Just you say one word to that kid: just wink at her, that's all: and this picture has a new lead. Make up your mind.'

'Make up my mind what!'

'Make up your mind to lay off her, and behave yourself.'

'Look here, Paul. If you think I'm going to be ordered about as if I were at school——'

'That's just what I do think. Be your age, Terry. Here we are, working under difficulties——'

'You're telling me! All these bloody hicks and yokels.'

'—Under difficulties, with the priest against us, and saying we're the devil's children: and you start to play into his hands.'

'Good God. Anyone'd think I'd tried to rape the girl.'

'If you had, you'd never get any more work for Python Films. I'd see to that. Nor will you, if you don't do what I say. Can't you see the girl's just a kid? The ordinary run of girls can look after themselves. If they're fools enough to listen to your line of talk, so much the worse for them. But this is a sweet, good kid, and I won't have her bothered. Get me?'

Terry's face set in an evil mould.

'O.K. When do family prayers start? Let me know.'

He slammed the door. Paul looked round for a bell, remembered where he was, and went into the passage. Judy was in the little office. She had not been wanted in the shots he had delegated to Votty and John.

He crooked a finger at her, and asked to see Girvan.

'He's inside in his room. Will you go in.'

'Thanks, sugar.'

He gave her a brilliant smile, and she was forced to smile in return.

Girvin looked up quickly as Paul entered. His manner suggested uneasiness.

'I was hopin' you would look in, Mr. Deakin. There's matters I'm wishful to speak to ye about.'

'Anything gone wrong?'

Girvan rose, shuffled over, and closed the door.

'I'm after having the divil's own time with Father McCubberty. Insisting I should turn yez all out, he was. I told him I hadn't the right, and I'd be apt to lose my licence.'

'What did he say to that?'

'Ah, ye know, it's very hard to reason with Father McCubberty. Once he has a thing set in his mind, there's nothin' in the wide earth will get it out' Girvan was sweating. 'He cross-examined me very hard about the arrangement between us. I told him ye'd paid for a fortnight.'

Paul tapped his breast pocket.

'Don't worry. I've just been to Dublin.'

'Yis?'

'There I interviewed, among other people, the owners of this hotel. I let them know my plans here, and the much larger and more ambitious plans of Python Films after this picture is made. They assured me that the hotel would be at my disposal for as long as I wanted.'

During this speech, emotions had chased each other across Girvan's face like shadows on a mountain. He emitted a long sigh.

'I was hopin' ye might do somethin' of the sort. I had it in mind, meself, to tell ye the way things stood: only——'

Paul studied him. 'You hoped it, did you? I thought you might not be altogether pleased that I'd gone above your head, so to speak.'

'Oh, begod, I'd ask no better. Sure, I don't want to put yez out. It's against me profit to do it. The longer yez all stay here, the better.'

'Fine and dandy. That's the way I saw it. So as you wouldn't be able to help yourself. Good alibi for you, with Father McCubberty.'

True for ye. *I'm glad ye done that* If I'd had more

sense, I'd have told ye sooner that I wasn't me own master.'

'Not at all. It's not a thing a man gives away unless he's obliged. You're a large-minded man, Mr. Girvan. Congratulations. And now, since you've been so open with me, I'll be open with you. I'll be open with you on two counts. First, the bishop has approved the making of the picture, and has given me a letter to that effect.'

'The —! You been to see the bishop?'

'I did.'

'And he gev ye the O.K.?''

'He gave me the good old O.K., with his blessing.'

'Over McCubberty's head! Holy God.' Girvan coupled the invocation with an unholy chuckle. 'Doesn't that beat all ! McCubberty'll be leppin' mad. Mr. Deakin—you're a great man. I give it ye. You're a great man.'

'I appreciate that compliment very highly, Mr. Girvan. Very highly indeed. But wait. I've a second piece of news for you. More important.'

'Begod, I don't see how it can be more important than that. Old McCubberty put down by the bishop. Oh, that's rich. That's too rich altogether.'

All Girvaq's spleen against the priest rose to his face, like a boiling scum. He rubbed his hands together.

'All the same, if you're the man of business I take you for—'

Suddenly the face changed back to a look of narrow cunning it had worn a couple of minutes earlier.

'Begod, Mr. Deakin, I think I have it. Ye say ye told the owners what's in your mind to do here?'

'I did.'

'Do you think, did they appreciate what it would mean to the neighbourhood?'

'I guess they formed a pretty good idea.'

'Do ye tell me that, now.' Girvan sucked his lower lip.

'What is more, I also visited the government department that is concerned in the devolopment grant for the harbour. I don't know, of course, to what degree they are interested in rateable values, and so on. But they have offered me every facility for getting to work quickly: and I think, if

by any chance the scheme should not go forward—if, for instance, I felt I was not getting the local support I needed, and decided on that account to move further along the coast: well, the grant would follow me. To put it at the lowest, Dennistown would get very much less than it stands to get if all goes well.'

'I appreciate that.' Girvan said: but Paul saw with satisfaction that his mind was clinging to the earlier point. He rose to go.

'Being a business man, you'll see the importance of what I've been telling you.' He paused in the doorway. 'As a matter of fact, I told the owners that I thought the Corporation might very well do property deals in any place they mean to develop as a centre for making pictures.' He laughed. 'I'd do it myself, if I'd a little more time.'

Girvan's eyes went to slits.

'Ye wouldn't care to come in? With a little capital, you and me could——'

He stopped, for Paul was shaking his head amusedly.

'No, thank you, Mr. Girvan. It's real good of you. But I've too much to do right now.'

'It'd cost ye no trouble. I'd do the negotiatin!'

Girvan spoke yearningly. The idea of doing down some of his associates floated sweetly before him.

'No. I just thought you'd like the tip. So long.'

The door closed. Girvan stared at it, once again sucking in his lower lip. Then, with shaking hand, he lifted the receiver of his telephone and asked for the number of Mr. McVeagh.

XXV

IN the doorway of the hotel, Paul ran into Flanagan. An impulse of sheer mischief bade him beckon the poet aside.

'Like a flutter?'

Flanagan looked at him suspiciously.

'Land. Houses. Barns. Pigsties. Anything. I predict a three hundred per cent rise. In this immediate locality.'

Half Dublin will be down here to-morrow, bidding against each other.'

'Your wit is childish.' Flanagan said at last.

'I wasn't trying to be witty. Here's John. And Votty. And Toots. And Gladys. Katie too. And Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all. Quite a family party. Where you all going, children?'

'We're going to take a walk.'

'Katie's going to show us the cave.'

What cave?' Paul asked.

Where there was a massacre.'

'They killed a lot of women and children.'

Who did?'

'Chaps from another island. Coming, Paul?'

'In a minute. I want to go and sow the good seed in the bar. I'll catch you up.'

'Don't be long.'

John stepped after him. 'If you've been talking to Girvan, hadn't you better let him spread the news?'

'I mean to. I'm only going to make sure that he does.'

'How do you mean?'

'I told him one or two things he will want to keep to himself. He might turn cautious and say nothing. Leave it to me. I'm only going to say enough to make them question him.'

He went into the bar, and John pursued the others. Votty's voice was upraised.

'Only the English would be such fools.'

'Such fools as what, Votty?'

'To make an end of what is only a regrettably needful means. A sometimes needful means.'

'What *are* you talking about, Votty?' John asked him.

'Walking. A sane person endures to walk if he must get somewhere, for a purpose. It takes the English to glorify this necessity into a pastime and do it for no reason at all.'

'But we are doing it for a reason, Votty. We're going to see the cave.'

'The cave. They are going to see the cave. As if one cave was not like another cave.'

This one has a history. Didn't you hear what Katie was saying?'

'All caves are the same. They are dark and wet, and they smell badly.'

Katie's eyes opened wide. She was half serious, half laughing.

'Doesn't the gentleman want to come?' she asked Gladys. Her voice was low, but Votty heard it. He spun round.

'I am not a gentleman. I am a poor bloody cameraman.' The others jeered.

'Hark at him.'

'Coo!'

'Since when have you been so modest, Votty?'

'Modest, hell. He's being dramatic. Don't spoil his act.'

Votty tried to keep his face straight. Toots looked at him over the tops of her glasses, and, unwillingly, he grinned.

'Do not mind them, young Miss,' he said to Katie. 'I take pride in not being a gentleman, and in being a poor bloody cameraman. That is what the English call me. They mean it for an insult. I take it as a high word of praise.'

A chorus of catcalls greeted this announcement. Gladys opened her bag, and gave him a piece of chocolate.

'Here. Stick that in your face, and shut up.'

Votty did so.

'I came for your walk,' he mumbled through it amiably. 'I have to say something.'

'Nice, gracious nature. Hasn't he, Katie?'

Votty winked at her, his face distorted with chocolate, and Katie giggled. It was a beautiful evening. Light, pouring down from behind a long ridge of dark cloud, seemed to have flattened the sea. The surface, wide on left and right, looked immobile and compact, as if from direct pressure. Only near the shore was any motion allowed, and then but as if a few waves, reluctantly detaching themselves from the motionless mass, rolled shorewards in weary fulfilment of a duty. The distant islands had come startlingly close: their shapes were dark, and, in place of the uniform blue they usually presented to the eyes, small dark mottlings appeared, fields, woods, irregularities of surface.

Flat washes of colour hitherto, they took on a new dimension. They seemed also to rise in height, and stalk towards the mainland, as if the rim of the horizon were shoving them across the shining metal band between. So strong did the illusion become as minute after minute favoured the light, that the little group on the shore could have believed that the edge of the world was rising, the waters were being pulled up like a sheet, and the islands would at any moment topple down upon them in confusion.

'There's Paul.'

They turned, and saw a small unmistakable figure coming purposefully along a quarter of a mile behind. Even at that distance, he looked preposterously neat and out of place. He was carrying a macintosh over one arm.

'He wasn't there long.'

'He doesn't like the smoke. He was complaining to me the other day that it got into his underwear.'

'Oh. So you're on those terms with him, are you?'

Toots frowned, indicating Katie with a jerk of her head.

'Let's wait for him.'

'Yes, for God's sake.' Votty curled his legs under him, and subsided on the sand. Almost before he had reached the ground, he had begun to roll himself a cigarette.

'Lazy brute.'

'You're all flabby, Votty.'

'Need exercise.'

'I hear this nonsense so often, I don't respond.'

'Nice course of physical jerks in the morning.'

Votty looked at Katie. 'You don't do these barbarisms.' He shot his arms out in pantomime. 'When you get up?'

Tor mercy's sake.' Katie's laugh rang merrily. 'I wouldn't have the time.'

'Nor the foolishness. It is foolishness. You and I know this.'

He gazed up at her, his head on one side. A beam of sunlight, escaped from the cloud, fell on him, and threw his shadow on the sand behind him. Squatting cross-legged, he looked like an Eastern image come to life. Katie considered him, the corners of her mouth trembling into a

smile. She had begun by being afraid of him, but he had been so easy with her that morning, during the filming of a scene, that she was fast losing her fear and coming to like him.

'I daresay it's very well for them as likes it.' she said.

'But we don't like it, you and I. For us it is foolishness.'

They stood, looking at him, smiling. He returned their gaze without seeming aware of it. By degrees, an expression of concern came over his face, deepening into injury.

'The sand is cold.' he complained, and rose with a single movement, as abruptly and unexpectedly as he had sat down. 'There.' he turned to Gladys and Toots. 'You could not do that, with all your silly exercises.'

'Well I never. Votty—you're a blooming acrobat'

'I was an acrobat.'

'No—honest injun. Were you really?'

'Dark horse, our Votty.' Ted said. 'Been all sorts in his time, I bet.'

'My friend, you don't know how you are right.'

'How right you are. Your English is very bad all of a sudden, Votty.'

"Thank you. I am in despair. Therefore I go back to the days of my younger life, when I did not speak so well.'

'What are you in despair about, Votty?'

'Where's the girl?'

'It is no girl. I am always in despair.'

'D'you always grin like that?'

'That the way it takes you?'

'Hullo, folks.' Paul's voice rang across the sands. 'I didn't mean you to wait.'

'We didn't. Votty squatted down to pray to the setting sun.'

'He wouldn't go on without you.'

'That so?' Paul came up with them. 'Now, Katie. Where's this cave of yours?'

'Not very far now. Over by them rocks.'

'Lead the way, then. Is it big? Could we use it in the picture?'

'Hark at him.' Gladys said.

'We want a cave, for the smuggling scene. Would this do?'

'I've got a perfectly good cave for that.' John said.

'This is only a small little cave.' Katie said anxiously. 'You have to go in one at a time, creeping like.'

'That wouldn't do.' Paul said. 'Never mind. What is it you say happened there, Katie?'

Katie was confused to find herself the centre of attention. She flushed, and told him in halting phrases the ancient savage story of murder and reprisal.

'They gave them the choice, to come out, or to be burned in there. Those that came out they misused and killed with their swords. A lot stayed in, when they heard the others crying and screaming. Then the men cut wood and gorse and filled the mouth of the cave and set fire to it and pushed the fire in with long sticks and logs, and they were burned.'

Paul shook his head.

'That was fierce. Women and children, too. Terrible.'

'Yes.' Katie said quietly. 'But I'm thinking them that stayed in the cave had the best of it.'

'Aha.'

A silence fell on the group. In the light that now flooded the beach and gleamed in long irregular bands upon the water, such ferocities were incredible: yet something in Katie's words, and in the atmosphere of the place, brought that distant hour close, and charged the air with it.

'How long ago would this be, Katie?' Paul asked her.

'I don't know. A long time. Maybe a hundred years.'

'Much longer.' John said involuntarily. 'Sorry, Katie. I didn't mean to contradict. But it was somewhere about the middle of the sixteenth century.'

Katie looked confused. 'My father said it would be about a hundred years ago.'

'It's no matter, Katie.' Paul said. 'We've got to be thankful people don't act that way nowadays.'

'They do, in many places.' Votty said.

'Not here, anyway.'

'A hundred years is the stock answer here, for anything

in the past.' John whispered to the girls. 'They don't reckon any further back than that. I've been told about the Danes' landing, before now, as a hundred years ago. And a Spanish ship of the Armada getting wrecked on the Mayo coast.'

'How long ago was it?'

Which? The Danes, or the Armada?'

'Oh, don't let's go all historical,' Gladys exclaimed. 'It gives me the willies. Save it for the pictures. Hullo: is this the place?'

Katie had halted at a small, dark opening in a steep bank, beneath a rock. It was about three feet high, and a trickle of water oozed from it, turning tufts of sparse moss to a shrill green.

It's bigger inside,' Katie explained. 'You can stand up, in one place.'

'Fine. Now then, boys and girls.' Paul stood at the entrance like a showman. 'Who's going in?'

'Not me.'

Til take it as read, thanks.'

'Td like to,' Toots said, after a glance at Katie.

'Who'll go with her? You won't let a lady go in alone.'

'Why?'

'Well. I mean to say.'

Til go in, then,' Gladys said, 'if no one else will.'

'You mean, if anyone else will.'

Til go,' John said. He feared that it might seem ungallant to refuse. A loud laugh disconcerted him.

'Go on, Gladys. Quick, before he changes his mind.'

'Now we know.'

'A kiss in the dark is worth two in the gaslight.'

'Children, children,' Paul repressed them. 'Katie will think we're all terrible people.'

But Katie was for the first time quite happy with them. This was a line of talk she well understood. If she had gone in herself, and been kissed by one of the men, she would have been quite at her ease. Indeed, it would be a want of manners on any man's part not to kiss a girl, when such a chance was offered him.

But there was no need for John to be gallant. The temper of the group had changed, the original horror was forgotten, and Ted and the other men were scrapping for the privilege of going in first. Paul exhorted them cheerfully, then went off by himself: and after a minute or two John and Votty joined him. Thoughtfully and in silence, they climbed a little way up the slope. Coming to a level place, Paul spread his macintosh on the ground, and invited John to sit on it beside him. Votty went a few yards away, and leaned against a rock. He hunched his shoulders, rolled himself a cigarette, and subsided into meditation.

Paul and John stared at the sea. The late sunlight poured past them in a flood, seawards, streaming to the East, laying everything flat before it till it reached the horizon, where a dark line, firmly drawn, stayed its progress. They were gazing almost due South, John reckoned. On their left, the mainland fell away sharply at the start of a long bay. The whole coastline turned and twisted so variously that it was a recurrent surprise to find the sunlight coming from one improbable place after another. Often there was no other way of deciding which way one was facing.

The sun sank, the sea gleamed wide, its edges spread, and the peace of the evening deepened into majesty.

Suddenly Paul muttered something under his breath. John did not catch it, and turned towards him in enquiry. Then, without warning, Paul began to sing.

Tell us, Momma,
O tell us, Momma, O tell us,
Momma, is Massa gwine sell us,
Gwine sell us
To-morrow ?

The words of the old slave song, charged with helpless sorrow, floated out into the streams of light, linking their pain with the beauty of the hour. Paul's voice was soft but full and perfectly controlled. He sang the plaintive words so simply and with such purity of feeling that there was a perfect harmony between his singing and the splendour of the light. John felt a stab of pain at his heart: for the moment, all the world had of beauty and sorrow was fused

in one unbearable, triumphant pang. When the last note faded and fled, his eyes were full of tears, and he could not speak.

Paul was moved too. For once he had had no thought of an effect. He sat, his profile relaxed and vulnerable.

The silence held for as much as a minute. Votty stirred, and clapped a hand to his neck.

'Midges.' he said. 'Let's go down.'

'Yes.'

The others rose. A scramble, a slither, and they were on the sand again. The rest of the party were visible in the distance. They had evidently exhausted the attractions of the cave. Their voices and laughter came clearly in the interval between the soft fall of two waves upon the shore.

'I never knew you could sing like that, Paul.' John said, as soon as he could trust himself to speak.

Paul turned dreamy eyes on him.

'That story got me. About the women and children. They get the worst of things, always.' His voice changed. 'I was a singer, once. Didn't I tell you?'

'Yes, but—You've been so many things, Paul. I didn't somehow expect you would sing that way.'

'Thought I was bluffing, eh?'

'Well, no. Not exactly. But——'

'I'd have been a decent singer, only I didn't have a voice. Too small. You don't get anywhere, not with a little voice like mine.'

'If you got up and sang like that——'

'The front rows'd think I was fine, and the rest of the house wouldn't hear me.'

'What about radio?'

'Got to have a reputation before you can sing on the air. Besides, I don't care for crooner stuff. No. I'll tell you the real truth. My voice doesn't last. I can't sing more than three or four songs. Then I get hoarse.'

'But why? It's beautifully produced. At least, it sounds so to me.'

'If you could tell me why, you'd be a very wise man. Half a dozen specialists couldn't tell me why. They couldn't

see anything wrong with my cords, nor my throat, nor the way I used them. But it happened. So I quit. I've always known when I'm beaten.'

'I thought there was a law of nature against that.' Votty said.

XXVI

FATHER McCubberty looked up sharply from his manuscript. He hated to be interrupted while preparing his sermon.

'I'm sorry, Francis,' his sister said. 'But I thought I ought to tell you.'

To tell me what?'

'What the people are saying this morning in the village.'

'What are they saying?'

'They say that the Bishop has given this film man a letter saying that everyone is to help him.'

'What!'

Father McCubberty started upright, every nerve and fibre rigid.

'Yes. He has been to Lisraig. I heard the day before yesterday in M'Gurks' that one of his women had taken a ticket there. It seems he went on to Dublin, too.'

'To Lisraig! You should have told me.'

'I didn't—it never occurred to me. I only recalled it to-day, when I heard. I didn't think it important.'

'I have told you before, it is not for you to judge the importance of what happens in the parish. It was your duty to tell me.'

'You told me before that I was not to bring you gossip,' said his sister, with a flash of spirit.

'Use your judgment, woman. If you cannot tell the difference between mere chat and a thing like this . . .' He struck his fist into his palm. 'I should have foreseen it. I knew he was scheming something, with all that talk of sending me an outline of the story.' His eyes blazed. 'The effrontery! Insolent, treacherous scoundrel!'

Miss McCtjbberty watched him. While his anger made her quail, something gloated in her eyes.

The Bishop does not appear to have thought him a scoundrel. That is, if the story is true.'

'The Bishop is old and kind-hearted. Anyone could impose on him. A plausible ruffian like this would have no sort of difficulty at all.'

Tatiier Conmee said he thought the Bishop was very shrewd and hard to deceive.'

'Father Conmee has his own reasons for wishing to think that.' He picked up his pen, as if to dismiss her, then threw it on the table. 'I must go and look into this. I wish you had told me before.'

'I only just heard it, when I went to do the shopping.'

'I mean, about the ticket.'

'I don't expect you would have made any more of it than I did. A person can go to Lisraig besides to see the Bishop.'

He did not answer, but strode out into the little hall, seized his hat, and went out, slamming the door. Outside the gate he hesitated. Then, his lips in an angry line, he made direct for the hotel. As he walked along, the fingers of his right hand snapped and clenched themselves, and tremors ran along the muscles above his jaw. His eyes glowed, under the dark brim of his hat. A little girl, greeting him, received no answer, and drew aside in alarm from the white unseeing face.

Paul was sitting in the hotel doorway, reading a paper. Continual showers had hindered the shooting of the scene on which they were working, and he had called a halt finally till lunch, giving time for an alternative scene to be got ready, one of those marked in the script as suitable for just such weather.

Observing the priest's mien, he saw at once what was coming, and decided to land his punch first. He waved a cheery hand.

'Good morning, Father McCubberty. They're just bringing me out some coffee. Can I persuade you to join

me in a cup? It's not good yet, but I'm teaching them. They're improving by degrees.'

'I have not come to take coffee.'

'Maybe you're right. I'll ask you again in about a week's tinje. It should be drinkable by then.'

'I have come to ask you a question.'

'I know. I know. It's about that synopsis I promised you. I ought to have sent it, but, you see, things have moved since then. The Bishop has heard of our rians here, and has given his approval: so that you will no longer need to see the synopsis. That being so, I didn't see any sense in bothering you with it.'

'The synopsis was a trick, and you know it.' He held up a furious hand, to stop Paul from interrupting. 'I am told that you have flouted my authority and gone to the Bishop.'

His voice rose. Paul glanced up at the windows.

'Come inside, unless you want everyone to hear us.'

'It is good that everyone should hear.'

'Very well.' Paul gave up all pretence at blandness. 'You have given yourself away, Father McCubberty. I realized all along——'

'Answer me, man!' The priest stamped his foot. 'Is this true?'

'You have no right to speak to me in this manner. I am not answerable to you for any of my actions. As to flouting your authority—you have none.'

'You will find otherwise.' Father McCubberty was suddenly quiet. 'Meanwhile, I will thank you to answer my question. Did you go over my head to the Bishop?'

'Yes,' Paul said. 'I went to the bishop. I went to your superior officer. He, being a wise and an enlightened man, gave me at once the support which you have grudged. I do not usually deal with subordinates. I made an exception in your case, although I was warned by more than one person what sort of man you were. Still, frankly I did not believe that in the twentieth century I should find such reactionary and bigoted ignorance. My interview with the Bishop confirmed my view that your attitude was exceptional; and you have now let the cat out of the bag, and shown that it

is not principle that is making you behave like a mule in a turnstile—that would be crazy, but I could respect it: it is just your petty local sense of authority. You oppose me because I did not approach you first, and because you prefer to keep your parishioners poor, so that they shall stay under your thumb. That's your measure, Francis Aloysius McCubberty, man of God.'

This address produced no effect upon the priest. He might not have heard it.

'The Bishop is old, and suspects no evil,' he said. 'He has not so much as heard that there are men like you. You went to him with your lies and your knavery, and imposed upon his goodness. I shall go myself and undeceive him.'

'You're taking on big odds, McCubberty. Your bishop, a government department——'

'I shall denounce your iniquities from the pulpit. No man shall raise a hand to help you.'

With a quick jerky movement, he pulled out a handkerchief, and wiped the saliva from the corner of his mouth. Paul again looked up at the windows. By some lucky chance, there seemed to be no one about. He tapped his breast pocket.

'I have the bishop's letter, calling on the faithful to give me all the help in their power. Your people have seen it.'

'You shall do nothing here,' breathed the priest, his eyes glittering in the shadow of his hat, 'even if you are Anti-Christ.'

'I don't know what you are. Canute, telling the waves to go back.'

Father McCubberty sneered. 'Your history is false, like everything else about you. Canute did not tell the waves to go back.' He pulled himself together with a jerk. 'I will waste no more time with you. I am glad that you have come out in your true colours, and shown yourself for the foul-tongued ruffian that you are. The personal insults that you have uttered against me I disregard. You misread me entirely, but how could such a man do otherwise. I shall not attempt to defend myself against your misrepresentations.'

He turned stiffly on his heel, and stalked away. He did not walk quite straight, but leaned a little to one side, and presently corrected his deviation by tacking. Paul felt a schoolboy impulse to shout something rude after him. He repressed it, and gave a slight shudder.

'Gee!' he said to himself, with a last glance up at the windows. 'I'm glad no one heard that. Hello, John! Where've you been?'

'With Votty, round at the back. Why, what's up? You look upset.'

'I've been behaving very badly, John. Slanging McCubberty. Look.'

He drew John to the road, and pointed at the black receding figure.

'He came here, and started on me, and I let him have it back.'

'That's all to the good.'

'No, John, it isn't. I said things I never ought.'

'So did he, I expect.'

'That doesn't make it any better for me. I was a bit wild. He gets under my skin, somehow. There's no satisfaction in hitting back at him. He's as unreasonable as—

as——

'As hell.'

'I don't swear, John. I daresay you noticed. He's unreasonable, and he hates my guts, and he has these poor folk here under his thumb. He's the enemy of Python Films, and I ought to enjoy crushing him flat. And I don't enjoy it at all. I feel like I'm hitting a woman, or a child.'

'I don't think you need waste any pity on him. Nothing you can say will touch him.'

'Maybe not. But I've injured myself saying it. You can do a bad thing without hurting anyone but yourself. I spoke to hurt him: and that's a sin.'

John looked at him in astonishment. He was visibly distressed. His eye had a look of unmistakable appeal.

'I can't make you out, Paul. You've surprised me more than once these last few days. What do you believe?'

'I've surprised myself, John. Come a little walk. I don't

want to be heard. It's not a thing I talk about much: but you're my good friend, you've put a straight question to me there, and I'll give you a straight answer. I believe it's wrong to lose control of our bodily passions. I don't drink, or smoke, or use bad language, or lose my temper, and so forth: leastways, I try not to lose my temper. I didn't really lose it with that guy just now, but I'd have liked to. I let myself be pulled into a vulgar scene with him; and now I feel ashamed for us both. That's partly why I was sore with him. A man of God has no business scrapping in the doorway of a public house. It's not right. And he is a man of God, however misjudged.'

'I see that, Paul. But that's a matter of conduct. You haven't told me what you believe.'

'I belong to a body you won't ever have heard of. We are an offshoot of the Scientists. Our founder couldn't go with them all the way, with Mrs. Eddy, and so we split off,'

A hail interrupted them. Votty was waving from the hotel. Paul turned.

Til tell you all about it one day. If you're interested, that is. Hullo, Votty!'

He had changed in a second. Confidence once more radiated from him. His step became brisk and purposeful.

Tine, boy. Fine. Let's get to it.'

He turned to John. 'Votty has the latest rushes. Come and see them.'

They went along to the small room where Paul had his own private projector, so that he could see the rushes before they were shown to the others.

'I found that redhead in here,' Votty told him.

Paul stopped short.

'How'dsheget in?'

'Key, I suppose. Said she was cleaning it up.'

Paul smiled. 'She's kind of morbid interested in the rushes, poor kid. Nothing for her to see. But we can't have her messing around. Get a second lock on the door. I'm sorry for that girl. If she'd only take things easy, I could get good work out of her. Rushes good. Votty?'

Uh.'

XXVII

A HEAVY, loaded silence hung over the bar-room. The occupants looked at Paul, then turned to Girvan, silently calling on him to be their spokesman.

Paul ran his forefinger along the grooved edge of the bar, checking it where a trickle of spilt porter had made it sticky. He appeared to be absorbed in studying the grain of the wood.

'Yes,' he repeated. 'It's all plain sailing now. I told you to be ready for this week-end. The weather has held us up. I'm sorry.' He raised his eyes. 'Til want every man jack of you on Tuesday, for a big scene at the harbour.'¹

A single indrawn breath, from a man by the window, sounded harshly. Feet shifted on the floor. No eye met Paul's.

'We'll rehearse in the morning, get the moves all mapped out, and shoot in the afternoon. I've got the old steamer that used to bring the mails, before the railway came. She'll be putting in on Monday night, and probably there'll be help wanted then. Say, twenty men. Ten shillings a man.'

The tension had so increased that the room seemed to groan with it. Desperately they looked at Girvan. The landlord cleared his throat, and spat. He looked at Paul in exasperation.

'You say it's plain sailin'. Well,—he spat again—'it's not plain sailin'. It's not plain sailin' at all.'

Paul's eyes were guileless, full of innocent surprise.

'No? Why—what's in the way?'

Girvan sucked in his lip.

'The priest,' he said: and, on the word, every breath in the room exploded. 'Father McCubberty. He's after comin' in to see me.'

'But'—Paul was like a puzzled child—'that's all square now. The bishop has overruled Father SMcCubberty's objection, so there's nothing left to worry about.'

'Father McCubberty doesn't think so.'

'Father McCubberty,' Paul said, 'is far too good and obedient a churchman to go against his bishop. No good

could come of that. Besides, why should he? The responsibility is off his shoulders. He was opposing the Corporation because he thought—why I don't know—that we wanted to do something wrong. The bishop has lifted that load from him, and said it's all right. So Father McCubberty doesn't have to worry.'

'Maybe he doesn't. But he is worryin'. He's worryin' us, too.'

Paul spread out his hands. 'But you're all in the clear. The bishop says—here, I'll show you what he says.'

He took out his wallet, but Girvan motioned him not to open it.

'I'm not doubtin' you. No man here is doubtin' you. Only——'

'Only what?'

'Well, you see—the bishop is away in Lisraig, and Father McCubberty is here in the middle of us. And we have to do what he says.'

Paul sat very still. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

'I asked the bishop to write direct to Father McCubberty. He did not think it would be necessary.' He got down from the stool. It was the only one in the bar. No one had used it, in living memory, until he had come. 'I must just get on the 'phone to the bishop, and get him to ring Father McCubberty.'

'Father McCubberty's not on the 'phone.'

'Write him, then. Wire him. Anything.'

It'll need to be a wire, if we're to work for ye on Tuesday.'

The tone was unmistakable. Paul accepted its challenge.

'Why? What's that to do with it?'

'He's after forbidin' us to aid ye. To do any sort of work for ye. He wanted me to put yez out from the hotel. Only for the messages I got from Dublin. I'd have had to do it.'

Paul looked round on them.

'And you stand for it? In a free country, in the twentieth century, you let one man order you all about like a pack of children?'

It was the wrong note. He felt it before his words were finished. Anger darkened their faces.

'The hell of a free country.'

'That's our business, mister. Let you mind yours.'

'It is my business.' Paul shot back. 'What do you think I'm here for—a holiday? I'm here under orders; and I'm going to carry those orders out. Don't imagine this is going to stop me. I wanted you people to have the first pick and the best chance. If you won't, even when your bishop tells you to help me: if you're going to disobey your bishop—yes, that's what you'll be doing: I have his word here: well, I must go to the other end of the village, that's all.'

A murmur ran round the room. They looked at each other.

'What do you mean?' Girvan asked.

'Mr. Cartwright has no objection to our work. I asked him, before I saw the bishop, whether he could supply me with enough help. He said he couldn't himself, but the minister of the next village would help, and between them they could get me all I wanted. I'd rather you people had the job,' he went on, as angry exclamations broke out, 'so much so that I lost two days' work going to see the bishop, and going up to Dublin. I call you to witness that. If, after all that, you won't help me—well, I must call in those that will.'

Girvan scowled like an orang-outang.

'Yell do well not to call in them fellas,' he said.

'Aye, indeed.'

'Be said by Mr. Girvan, mister. Leave them out of it.'

'We want none of that Ballyheron lot here.'

'Don't be stirrin' up strife, sir. That's all will come of it.'

'But,' Paul exclaimed, 'it's in your hands whether I call them in or not. Be reasonable, gentlemen. I have to get this work done. If you won't do it, they shall.'

'They won't be let.'

'True for ye, Mike.'

'It's what I told you, sir. Ye'll only be stirrin' up strife.'

'How else am I to get the work done?' Paul demanded.

The men looked helplessly at Girvan.

'Maybe,' he said, 'if the bishop would write to Father McCubberty——'

'Every day that boat's here will cost Python Films three hundred pounds.'

'Ah, sure, mister, they won't feel it, a big wealthy company the like of them.'

'You said they were rich, mister.'

'Why should they lose money, just because a priest won't do what his bishop tells him? What will they say to me, when I have to give account for the delay? They'll say at once, 'Why didn't you hire other people? Why didn't you get them down from the city?' No, gentlemen. I leave the choice with you. Either you help me on Tuesday, or I send for those who *do* realize that they live in a free country.'

He crossed the bar, and turned round in the doorway.

'Let me tell you one thing more. I went in Dublin to see the Department that is going to give you a grant for the harbour. I entered into certain negotiations with them.' He looked at them from narrowed eyes. 'Gentlemen, the government of Ireland want this film to go forward. If you want a grant, you'd better play ball.'

He shut the door, and grinned to himself as he heard the babel that at once burst out behind him.

XXVIII

'MR. NELIGAN. A long distance call.'

'Holy God. Another.' The lawyer picked up the receiver. 'Hullo. Hullo.'

'Neligan?'

'Yes. Yes. Neligan speaking.'

'Shane here. Neligan—what the devil is going on down your way?'¹

'Coin' on, Mr. Shane?'

'Yes. What's all this sudden interest in property? We've

had three offers for Coleman's land since one o'clock, two of them from London. As you know, it's been in the market for two and a half years, and only one nibble the whole time. What's on?'

'Well, bedad, Mr. Shane, you puzzle me. I don't know.'

Those aren't the only offers, either. We've had an enquiry for any properties on our books within twenty miles' radius of you. What's it all about?'

'I couldn't rightly say, Mr. Shane. Sure, we're the same down here. There's one bit o' land has been sold four times over, and it worth nothing at all. I think the country is gone mad. Inundated I am. I'm havin' to get help. Even po, it'll be days before I'm up with it all.'

'But, man, there must be a reason.'

'It's what I heard tell, the Department would be putting a bit of money into the place.'

'Nonsense. That wouldn't account for all this speculation. Have any strangers been down lately?'

'There's a fillum company is here, to make a picture.'

'Film company?'

'Yis. Python Films Incorporated. Takin' on local talent, they are. I had to draw the contracts for the people. Very liberal with their money.'

'I don't see what that could have to do with it. Who is buying the land down your way?'

'I don't think I ought to say, not on the 'phone. There's the man we had that little trouble with.'

'Oh.'

'Yis. He's in it over his neck. And there are a few others. Only——'

'Yes?'

'Well—I got the idea that maybe they were acting cover for others.'

'Large sums involved?'

'Very large.'

'Out of proportion to market values?'

'Out of all proportion, Mr. Shane. I don't know am I on pie head or me heels. The 'phone's been ringin' all the day.'

'Well. There must be some reason for it.'

'Oh, begod, you're right'

'Well, use your wits, man. What can it be?'

'I can't think of anything, sir. It has me fluthefed. Without it'd be the fillum company.'

'Right Thanks, Neligan. We must look into this. 'Bye.'

'Good-bye, Mr. Shane.'¹ He put the receiver back. 'Ye may look into it till you're black in the face.' he said softly. 'You're too late for once, Mr. Bloody Shane. Neligan this and Neligan that. For oncest in his life, Neligan's in before ye.'

The bell rang again. He picked it up, looking at it meditatively before he put it to his ear.

'Hello. Hello. Neligan here. Oh, good afternoon, Mr. McVeagh. Oh. Aha. Hah hah hah! Yis. Very good news, Mr. McVeagh. Very good news indeed. May I venture to congratulate — oh, surely. Walls has ears. Hah hahl Right. I will.'

XXIX

THAT night, as the thin streamers of prayer rose threadlike from the roofs of Dennistown into the sky, two gleamed bright; one flaming, tossing and throbbing with intensity of petition, the other an untroubled candid flow.

His knees on the hard cold mat, Francis Aloysius McCubberty passionately prayed.

' . . . Oh Father of infinite mercy, look down, I beseech Thee, on this afflicted place, and on Thine unworthy servant. Help and strengthen me, O Father, that I may cleanse it of the abomination wherewith it is threatened, and drive out those who would defile and lay it waste. Protect Thy poor ignorant children from him who would ensnare them with the lure of phantoms and the bait of gold. Give unto Thy servant persuasion and a right insight, that I may open the eyes of him who is set over me, and loose him from the webs of fraud wherein this accursed man has taken him. Speak clearly through my lips, that

Thy truth may shine and prevail. Taught by Thee and Thy Son, I have seen the evil, and corruption, and the suffering which this visitation must bring upon my poor people. Strengthen me that I may bear the pain of their displeasure, and the bitterness of their hate. In their blindness they will turn upon me, who stand between them and the tempter's promise, the fame in far cities, the seducing gold. Cleanse my heart, and make me fit to suffer. Endue my ways with Thy justice. Bless my eyes with Thy truth. If in pride and anger I have sinned, if in anything I have exceeded Thy commandment, as Moses did: if I have dealt immoderately even with this evildoer—for I discern a dreadful faith, a steadfastness in evil, wherewith he serves those devilish powers that hire him: if in anger I have hindered him from Thy light, where a worthier and a better than I might have revealed it to him and converted him: then, O Father, have pity on me and forgive me, for the sake of Thy sweet Son who bled upon the Cross, yet took a scourge of cords and drove out the evildoers from Thy holy temple, even as I shall scourge these wicked men from Thy green acres here, and drive out corruption from the hearts of the people whom Thou hast entrusted to my care .. .'

And, kneeling by her bed at Girvan's, clad in a long nightgown that showed only the soles of her small feet and her toes, trying to shut out the sound of Gladys' humming and noisy slapdash movements as she undressed next door, Katie Heggarty added a petition to the ritual of her prayers.

'Blessed Saint Brigid, intercede for me. Help me to do my work well, and please Mr. Deakin, the way I will be a great success and earn good money. Then I will be able to take care of Mammy and Da, and Mammy will not have to work so hard and Da will have control and give over the drink, and I will be able to help my Auntie Bessie and the children, and have plenty for the poor people of this place, and let me not be led away and puffed up with pride, but keep me a good girl and modest always, for the sake of our Dear Lord ...'

XXX

THE enforced inactivity of Sunday irked Paul, the more so as it was a brilliant day, with magnificent lights and shadows and a clear, rain-washed air.

After many peevish glances out of the window, and objurgations against local prejudice, he sat down to a script conference with Votty, John, and Toots. Toots sat, as always, with pad and pencil, to record the decisions for the following week's work.

'I don't see—' Paul looked once more out on the gleaming sea and the triumphant islands—'Just a small shot or two, on our own: while they're in church——'

'Don't be silly, Paul.' John would not have dared speak that way a week ago. 'You know quite well it would be absolutely fatal. It would lose you the bishop, straight away.'

'John's right.' Toots said. 'This is the worst moment of all to try any tricks. You'd be playing into the priest's hands.'

'And lose Cartwright, too. They're even stronger on keeping the Sabbath than the Catholics.'

'All right,' Paul said resignedly. 'Let's get ahead. Votty—that street scene won't do. There's that fool gawking and grinning round the corner at the camera. And I don't like that shadow on the left. It falls too far across the road.'

'Yes,' Votty said. 'Til have to get it earlier in the day.'

'Right. Now 74. That idiot Brannigan. Nothing in the world will stop him making faces.'

'He calls it "registering surprise," Votty said.

'Yeah, I know. We'll have to shoot from behind. Just his back. Like the shot of Jannings in *Vaudeville*, finding the drawing on the table. Then he can make all the faces he likes, and it won't show.'

'You'll see his ears working.'

'Put his hat over 'em. Next: the bathing scene.' Toots looked up quickly. 'Votty—I want you to get a shot of that bay we picked on.'

'I'll get it this evening,' Votty said. 'It doesn't figure

anywhere else, so evening light will do as well as morning, for the shadows.'

'But——' John and Toots burst out together; then each made way for the other. Toots flushed and sat back. John spoke.

'I thought we'd agreed to cut that out. It isn't practicable.'

'I've been thinking it over.' Paul said. 'I believe we can do it. It will be a beautiful idyllic shot, if it's handled right.'

Toots leaned forward.

'You're never going to ask that child—you couldn't do it!'

'Of course I'm not going to ask her to do anything of the sort.' Paul was offended. 'I wouldn't dream of it. I hope I know my duty better. Besides, she'd never consent.'

'Well then——?'

'There's more ways of killing a dog than telling him to jump off the pier. I've sent to town for a shot of a girl walking away from the camera. A girl with the same sort of figure, and hair. It's perfectly decent: the shot starts at fifty feet or more. You can just see she's got nothing on, that's all. Votty will put that into his shot of the little bay—shot with a white sandy foreshore—and there we are.'

'But, Paul.' Toots objected. 'What will the poor kid say when she sees it? She'll die of shame.'

'It won't be her.'

'Of course it won't. But everyone will think it is. They'll think she did it.'

'Nonsense. Anyway, don't let's meet trouble halfway. This is only an experiment. I want to see what the thing looks like. It may not come off. We're not committed to it. No one will see it, only ourselves.'

'What's the point of doing it at all, if you're not going to use it? You'd far better leave it alone.'

'Excuse me if I remind you that you come to these conferences to record what is decided, not to give an opinion on policy.'

Toots flushed deeply, and bit her lip.

'I'm sorry,' she said: and bent over her pad.

'Right. Now: the next point.'

'Wait a minute,' John said. 'I agree with Miss Fare-

brother. I'd rather you cut the shot out. We decided to suggest the scene only.'

Paul changed his line. 'Oh, let's make the shot for our own private amusement.' he pleaded. 'As I said, we're not committed to it. If, after it's made, you decide against it, we'll cut it out. Have the courage of your own script, John. My policy is always to shoot anything we might possibly need, and cut afterwards. Better be safe than sorry. Come on: it's only a little technical experiment. Now, Votty: were you satisfied with 217?'

'You know damn well I wasn't,' Votty replied. 'No more were you.'

'I think it could be improved on. But I want your reaction. You directed it.'

'This is tact, in case you don't know.' Votty told John. 'He means, what a bloody bad job you make when I am away; but he says it this way so as to be kind to my feelings. He'll start on the one you directed in a minute.'

'Now, Votty, that's a very mean way to speak. John made a very good show of directing that shot. There's only just one or two little points where, if he'll let me say so, in virtue of my experience, I think I could suggest something to strengthen the effect.'

'Don't waste time.' Votty stretched himself and yawned. 'Tut them all down to be shot again to-morrow. We will take our inefficiency for granted. Yes, John? Very good.'

'Well, as a matter of fact——' Paul began.

Votty waved to Toots. 'Put 'em down. Then we can get on.'

They bickered on for another twenty minutes, at the end of which Paul, restless though he was, could find nothing else to do. Toots rose, and flicked back the elastic on her pad. The gesture was a sure sign with her, and Paul, glancing at her face, saw it buttoned up and set. Perversely, it recalled to him the dispute they had been having.

'Where's Katie?' he enquired. 'Send her in to me.'

'She's at Mass.'

'Send her in as soon as she comes back, then.'

'Very well.'

Her face gave nothing away as she went out. Votty got up and lounged over to the window. i

'Votty.'

'Uh.'

'I doubt if the evening light will do. It's a bit of a risk.'

'Meaning you want me to get up at dawn, I suppose.'

'Well—figure it out for yourself. Suppose someone spots the shadows don't fall right.'

'He'd be one in five million. And he'd reckon he must of made a mistake.'

'Still, I don't like it. I don't want any fake in this picture.'

They stared at him. His face was serious.

'Sure,' Votty said at last. He looked out of the window.

'They're coming back from Mass.'

Paul jumped back into his active self.

'Grand. Send Katie in. John, you stay.'

'Votty, you get out.' Votty mocked him. 'You will spoil the pretty scene.'

Paul smiled. 'You have a rather sneering way with you sometimes, Votty, that don't go too well with a sweet sincere kid like Katie.'

'That don't go too well with kidding a sweet sincere kid like Katie.'

'Get out, Votty.' Paul made a playful gesture of hitting him. 'You're a disgusting cynic. Isn't he, John?'

'Til fetch Katie,' John said, and followed Votty out. The Russian grinned at him.

'He gets to feel quite awkward, telling lies in front of me.'

'I expect I don't know which is which.' John answered, as lightly as he could manage.

'It's not easy.' Votty agreed. 'I took quite a time to get wise to him. He surprises me even now.'

He bounded up the stairs, leaving John to go out and find Katie.

The girl seemed to be worried. Her face was flushed, and there was a new expression in her eyes, half scared, half sullen, that made her look more of a child than ever.

As he came to her, John felt the eyes of the neighbours upon him. Quite perceptibly, they drew away.

He gave her Paul's message. Katie hesitated. She looked at the ground, and for a moment he thought she was going to make an excuse. Then her chin came up, and there was a defiant flash in her eyes.

'I'll come,' she said: and he walked in with her, feeling the eyes concentrated, like the beams of so many hostile searchlights, between his shoulderblades.

'Hello, sugar.' Paul was at his most exuberant. 'Have some candy. Go on—it won't spoil your dinner.'

She smiled, and took a piece, watching him, guarded, suspicious.

'Go on. Take more than that. You ought to have a good appetite, this lovely morning.'

'Indeed, I have not.'

'Why, what's happened, sweetheart? Anything wrong at home?'

'No. They're all right.'

'Some of the neighbours been pulling your leg? Don't mind them, beautiful. They're jealous.'

'They'd be all right, if——' She looked as if she were going to cry.

'If they were let alone?' he finished for her. 'Why—who's been at them? Father McCubberty?'

She nodded miserably. Paul bent forward.

'What happened? He never dared to preach against us?'

'Not in open words. But it was plain enough what he meant.'

'What did he say?'

'He told about the golden calf, and how some was led away by the lure of great riches. I felt everyone was staring at me. And . . . and . . .'

'Yes. Go on. Tell me.'

'And . . .' She gulped, and the words came With a rush, '. . . how some was inspired by the devil and was that cunnin' and plaasible, they'd be apt to deceive even the Lord's Anointed.'

Paul looked at John. 'Meaning me and the bishop. This

guy will get himself into trouble, if he isn't careful.' Seeing Katie's round shocked eyes, he took out his wallet. 'I showed you the bishop's letter, Katie, didn't I?'

He put it into her hand.

'That's clear enough, isn't it? I was afraid Father McCubberty wouldn't take it, except the bishop wrote to him direct. I asked the bishop to do so, but he didn't think it would be necessary. However, I'll get on the 'phone to him to-night, and ask him to write to Father McCubberty. That will put an end to all this.'

He laughed so loudly that both Katie and John stared at him.

'Excuse me, sweetheart. But it's real funny. If Father McCubberty could hear what I was going to say to you when you came into this room, he'd be surer than ever that I was sent here by the devil. D'you know what I was going to ask you?'

He went off into another peal so unaffected that they both began to laugh without knowing what was amusing him. Paul pulled out a silk handkerchief, and wiped his eyes.

There's a scene in the story where Oona is very hot and bothered and wants to get away from all the people who are crowding and fussing after her. So she goes away to a little bay with white sand, and the water looks deliciously cool and green and pure, and the thought comes to her that if she goes into it, it will wash away all her cares and worries and the soiled feeling she has on account of Sean keeps after her. She looks about her: there's no one anywhere near, she's quite alone; and she pulls her clothes off and goes in.'

Katie had been following with close attention. 'She must have been terrible hardy,' she said.

Paul's face gave an instantaneous flicker.

'Now,' he said. That's a thing we have to go at very carefully in the picture. I mean—he smiled, as if a little embarrassed—'we're not expecting you to go into the water for us.'

Katie shuddered. 'I'd freeze. It'd be the death of me.'

'Me, too.' Paul agreed. 'All the same, we have to suggest that it did happen' So, what John here and I were thinking: the best way would be to have you come to the bay; look all round, to make sure there was no one: look at the water longingly: then just make the one first movement to pull your frock over your head, or whatever the first movement would be. Just enough to show the audience what you're going to do. We have to be terribly careful not to shock them, you know. Audiences are very very easy shocked. Easier than you'd believe. But I don't think that will shock them, do you?'

'How would it?'

'And I think that's the best way to handle the scene. Do you? Or can you think of a better?'

'No.'

'Right. We'll do it that way then. I'm afraid I'll have to get you up very early in the morning.' He put his head on one side. 'We wanted to do it in the evening light, to save trouble; but Votty is afraid it will show, and we don't want anything faked or untrue about this picture. Tomorrow morning? Can you bear that? Toots will call you, and bring you a cup of tea. It won't take long. Then we'll have breakfast when we get back, and you shall have the rest of the morning off.'

'Faith,' Katie protested. 'I'm not so delicate as all that.'

'You're a grand girl.' Paul exclaimed, 'and it's a real pleasure to work with you. Off with you now, or they'll claim we're making you work on the Sabbath. Here—have another candy. Oh, yes, you will.' He came round the table and picked out a big lump with his fingers. 'Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and see what the king will give you. There.' He popped the sweet in. 'He'd have given you a kiss too, if this wretched fellow hadn't been here to spoil sport. Off you go.'

She twinkled happily and went out. Paul pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

'Gee, that's a great kid. John: take note. It's a useful point, when you have to handle folks. Some men would

have been afraid to tackle the kid just then, when she was full of doubts after that priest had been at her. On the contrary, that was of all times the best time to tackle her, and get her on the rebound, and go with her. If I've learned one thing on this job, it's the way to tackle folks. See how she came? See how loyal she was? A *great* kid. She's going to make a stir in the world, or my name's not Paul Deakin.'

He walked up and down, rubbing his hands. John felt a sharp need to get out into the open air. As he reached the doorway, Paul stopped him.

'Where's Flanagan?'

'I don't know. He went off without saying where he was going.'

'That guy better make up his mind if he's coming in or not. I'm not keeping the offer open indefinitely. He's like the rest: waiting to see which way the cat will jump.'

'I don't think so. He's always been very independent and uncompromising.'

'Yeah. Wants to make money and to be in with the priest.'

'He's not in with the priest. He's a relapsed Catholic.'

'Wants to crawl back again, then.'

'You're unjust to him, Paul.'

'Sure. And to Girvan. And to the whole lot. You wait and see.'

'I will.' John said, and went out.

XXXI

'I REPEAT, the book is scandalous and immoral. It is a foul libel on my parish.'

The bishop regarded him mildly.

'I cannot think,' he said, 'that my old friend Sir James Durston would recommend to his reading circle a book that was scandalous and immoral.'

The fact remains that he did.'

'In your opinion, Father McCubberty. There are other opinions.'

'In the opinion of any right-minded and decent man.'

'You are condemning a number of your fellow Catholics.' the bishop said gently, 'besides my old friend, for whose judgment, as I said, I have a high regard.'

'It would be only charitable to suppose that he had not read the book.'

'On the contrary. It would impute to him the sin of dishonesty.'

The priest's expression suggested that he did not care what sin he attributed to the chairman of the book circle.

'The book is a libel on my parish and on my parishioners. It holds them up to scorn and contempt.'

'What exactly does it say about them, Father McCubberty?'

'It flaunts the seduction of a girl and the birth of a child out of wedlock.'

'Has such a thing never happened in your parish? If So, I congratulate you. It must be unique in my diocese.'

The priest's thin cheek was darkened with a flush.

'Such things may occur, in spite of all one can do to prevent them. That is no excuse for blazoning them to the world, and making them the centre of a web of lewd imaginings.'

'You persist in so describing the book, Father McCubberty. Others, including the official censors, find no fault with it.'

'Have you read it?'¹ the priest asked bluntly.

'No. But I have made enquiries about it of a colleague, and can find no support for your view. Come, Father McCubberty. I honour and respect you for your zeal and your good care of your people. But, as I have once before suggested to you, you are a little over-sensitive about their good name. I wish there were more like you: it is a fault on the right side. But, in this instance.' die old eyes were full of kindness, 'I think you exaggerate.'

Father McCubberty jumped up.

'You do not realize.' he cried harshly, 'what this man is

doing in the place. He is causing strife and disharmony everywhere.'

'How is he doing this?'

'Since I have denied him assistance, he has suborned the Protestant clergyman, and is offering lavish bribes to his people. My parishioners do not like this. They are uttering threats against the Protestants.'

'I must point out,' the bishop said, after a pause, 'that that is the result of your action, rather than of Mr. Deakin's.'

'What!' the priest cried.

'You admit that you have denied him assistance. He therefore must turn elsewhere. What else can he do? If, as you suggest may happen, trouble occurs, you will have to bear the responsibility for it.'

Father McCubberty leaned his head stiffly back and gazed at nothing. His pale face blazed with fanatical light.

'I am prepared for misunderstandings from my people. I can look for no support from them. In my folly, I did look for support here.'

'I think for the moment that you forget to whom you are speaking.' The old man's voice was very gentle.

'I cannot forget. It is a tragedy.'

'I could overrule you, and order you on your obedience to cease your opposition to this man. I will not do that. I would never wish to force a man's conscience. I do not agree with you. I think what you are doing will cause unnecessary difficulty and trouble to your parishioners. But I will not interfere. At the same time, I must warn you that you will have to bear the full responsibility for any consequence that may follow your action: an action which goes against my advice and against my wishes.'

The priest was rigid as if, on the rack.

'No power of earth will divert me from the cause I believe to be right.'

The bishop looked at him, and sighed.

'We must pray that all will fall out well.'

'How can it, when you are authorising evil to range unchecked !'

'I think this interview had better end, Father McCubberty, before something is said which we will both regret. Good-bye. Think deeply, I charge you, before you plunge your people into strife and bitterness.'

It is not I who will be plunging them into strife and bitterness.' He stood up, and began to shout. 'The book is immoral, lewd, criminal. It is an outrage, a scandal. This man seeks to plaster it everywhere, to hold up my people to contempt to the farthest Antipodes, and you give him leave and bid me to aid him. Never, never, never, while I have breath in my body!'

XXXII

NEXT day, as a result of a telephone conversation with the bishop, Paul determined to seek out Mr. Cartwright.

Things were not going well, and Paul was as near as tie allowed himself to a bad temper. The weather was fine and sunny, but there was a wind, and a swell had set in from the West, with the result that the old steam-boat which was needed for the big scene at the harbour would not adventure itself. Paul, indignant, rang up and pointed out that the conditions were ideal from his point of view. He needed a wind, as, in the film, a rowboat was to be wrecked on its way home from meeting the boat, and this could not be plausibly introduced unless there were signs in the harbour of a rough sea outside. The reply was that the boat had been condemned as unseaworthy years ago, and a prolonged period of lying up in a secluded spot on the river was not likely to have improved her.

'It'll be the mercy o' God,' the candid voice pronounced, 'if we get her round the point at all. A sea the like o' this'd roll her over.'

'That so?' Paul's voice was tart. 'The owner advised me that she was perfectly safe.'

'She'll be safe enough in the shalla water. Once we get her there.'

'How soon *can* you come, then? I've some seventy people hired, here, waiting.'

'We'll be round the instant the sea's fit, sir.'

'Well. Do your best.'

Moodily he hung up, and left the hallway. Catching sight of himself in the glass, he went to it, carefully scrutinised his face, pulled down his left eyelid, smoothed his brows, and finally adjusted his tie. Then, after popping in his head and leaving a message with Toots, he took a gold-topped malacca cane and set out for Mr. Cartwright.

Eyes were on him in the village. His direction was noted as soon as he passed the small street. Well aware, he went along, whistling to himself, and waving his cane. Any villager whom he met he greeted as affably as ever, and got a guarded greeting in return.

The minister received him gravely. Paul made no bones about what had happened.

'The bishop declines to overrule him,' he concluded, 'and on the strength of that he has denounced the whole project. I must say I am disappointed. I imagined that the discipline would have been a little stronger. It seems to me anomalous, to say the least, that a parish priest should disregard his bishop's ruling. However, there is no use in worrying about that. We have to deal with the facts.'

Mr. Cartwright nodded. His eyes were all the time fixed steadily on Paul.

'I ought perhaps to tell you, Mr. Deakin, that Father McCubberty has been to see me, in an endeavour to persuade me to use such authority as I have to support him.'

'Say!' Paul exclaimed. 'Can you beat that!'

'His argument was that, whether or not I agreed with him that the book was immoral, there could be no doubt whatever that for my parishioners to receive high wages, which would otherwise have gone to his, must create ill-feeling, influence religious prejudice, and perhaps even lead to acts of violence.'

'If it did, there'd be no one to blame but himself.'

'That was what I tried, as tactfully as I could, to suggest

to him.' Mr. Cartwright sighed, and looked out of the window. 'He could not see it. He could not see it at all. He is inspired by a strong sense of right, and can see nothing else.' He gazed at Paul. 'I told him that I possessed no authority over my parishioners, of the absolute kind he claims over his: and that, even if I had, I could not interfere.'

'Bully for you.' Paul said heartily: and added, as a look of extreme perplexity rose to the minister's face, 'I think that is just fine and broadminded. A great contrast to his **way of looking at things.**'

way of looking at things.' Mr. Cartwright appeared to take no pleasure in the tribute.

'I could wish,' he said wistfully, 'that Father McCubberty and I could work together for the good of all our people. I hate all quarrels in the name of religion. Differences there must be, but I can see no reason for bitterness. I had greatly hoped that we could work together; but it does not seem to be possible, and this, I fear, will only make things worse.'

'For him and for his people. Not for yours.'

'I see our community as a whole, Mr. Deakin. It is not practicable for one section to benefit at the expense of another.'

'It isn't a whole. Father McCubberty takes good care of that.'

'In a sense, you cannot blame him. He believes that he is right and I am wrong.'

'In ordinary life, Mr. Cartwright, that's what we call a narrow-minded attitude.'

'I suppose so. I suppose so.'

'Well.' Paul rose briskly. 'Then you will go ahead, and get me the men. I mean, you will authorize me to go ahead. Grand.'

XXXIII

THE five days that followed would be tiresome if chronicled in detail. Apart from one incident, they were all but blotted from the memories of the film colony by what happened at the end of them.

Paul had no difficulty at all about signing up the non-Catholic villagers. They seemed eager to help, but hardly able to believe their good luck. He was chagrined to find that almost all of them had kept clear of him hitherto, and that, had he known of their existence, he could have had much larger crowds, and a wider range of actors to choose from. To his question why they had not presented themselves with the others, they explained, with uneasy smiles and much shifting of their feet, that previous recruiting had been in the hands of Girvan, who showed a vigorous partiality for his co-religionists; a partiality which had gone to the length of promising to cut the gizzard out of a Protestant who too strongly asserted his right to volunteer for a part. Many, even now, admitted that their joy at the chance to earn good money was qualified by a fear that 'they might not be let'.

Paul laughed, and reassured them. He told them of all the powers on his side. They listened, smiling, their eyes unconvinced. What signified the blessing of a bishop in Lisraig, and the benevolence of officials in Dublin, against the immediate powers they had known all their lives?

'There's no *spirit* in these people,' Paul complained. 'It's bad enough to have the Catholics knuckle under to McCubberty, but when you get Cartwright's people as well... However, we've got 'ern, and we can go right ahead.'

It was the last time he said this. Setback number one was the resignation, delayed till the morning they were needed, of the firms who had undertaken to do the motor transport and the haulage. Paul replaced them with Protestants, but their defection meant the loss of a day's work. Then the sea calmed down, and he sent at once for the steamboat, only to be told that some sort of a strike had broken out among the men who were to bring her along.

The men were changed, and a new crew fixed up, after long and vexatious telephoning, plus an angry visit of Paul himself to the boat's headquarters, all of which meant the loss of another day: and Paul, getting back tired but triumphant, was rung up at eleven o'clock on the same evening and told that there would be no boat the next morning: the engines were burst on her, and there was no launch capable of towing her. Paul asked for more details. The speaker was cautious over the telephone, but he made it as clear as he could without saying so that the damage was deliberate, and must have been done by the former crew.

'How long before you can get her right?'

'She might be ready in a week or ten days.'

'A week! I must have her sooner than that. I've got all the crowd here hired by the day.'

'She won't be in it sooner.' He went into technical descriptions of the repairs and new parts necessary, and added, 'I wouldn't count on her too much, mister, if I was you.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well. Them as hindered her this time would be apt to hinder her again.'

'Nonsense. What are you men thinking of? Can't you look after her?'

'While we're workin' on her, we can. But there's the night time.'

'Til have a police guard put on her. Or the military.'

'If you could do that, o' course,' said the unbelieving voice, 'it might be all right.'

And he rang off, leaving Paul to inveigh against the fatalism of the Irish and their subservience to clerical pressure.

Next morning, the lorry which had been hired to carry the cameras and sound outfit to a place three miles off did not turn up. Paul, rushing round to find out why, found the owner disconsolately regarding it. All four tyres had been slashed.

There followed an extraordinary series of breakdowns in every form of transport Paul had arranged for. Car after

car would not work. Bewildered drivers reported water in the petrol, and every other form of mishap. A hay waggon, requisitioned the night before, collapsed with a broken axle, which was seen on examination to have been three parts sawn through. In twenty-four hours, there was hardly a sound piece of equipment left to Paul's newly recruited helpers.

The next day brought uglier news. The owner of a farm cart, normally used for carrying turnips, had sat up at night with his son to guard it. In the morning, the son crawled in on all fours, dazed and bleeding, to report that they had been set upon in the small hours and badly beaten.

'I believe me da is killed,' the young man concluded, with a sob.

Happily, this was not so: but the man had a deep cut on his head, and was taken off unconscious to the nearest hospital, twenty-seven miles away. That evening, there were a number of fights between the two factions; and seven of Cartwright's parishioners were unable to report for work in the morning.

Paul's reaction was characteristic. He got on the 'phone to Dublin, and told his friend Hennessey, in the Department, that a gang of criminals and hooligans were obstructing his work, and that, if he were not at once given adequate protection, the whole scheme would have to be abandoned. Hennessey was polite and sympathetic. He said it was too bad, too bad altogether: and in the next breath suggested that it could not be as bad as Paul made out. Pressed, he admitted that 'certain representations' had been made from ecclesiastical quarters, protesting against the scheme—adding at once that the Department would not allow itself to be deflected from the course decided upon. At the same time, he hinted, it would be wise to go slowly: to avoid, as far as possible, antagonizing local feeling.

'Antagonize I' Paul could contain himself no longer. 'If it's not antagonized when they try to murder the men who are helping me, and threaten their wives and daughters——'

'My dear man.' The official voice sounded instant relief.

'That shows it's all bluff. No one in Ireland would ever harm a woman.'

'Yeah?' Paul said. 'I'm certainly delighted to hear that. Meantime, I suppose it's bluff that has five of my men in hospital, and three others out of action? It's bluff that has sabotaged my steamboat and every blessed lorry, car, cart and wheelbarrow in a radius of fifteen miles? No.' He took advantage of a short, embarrassed pause. 'Either you give me proper protection for this job, or the whole deal ta off.'

'I was not aware of anything so definite as what you term a 'deal'.' The voice was cold.

'In our business,' Paul rejoined, 'when we agree to take money, we reckon ourselves bound to do what we've agreed to do in exchange. Oh, sure, I know that's not the diplomatic way to put it. Sure, I know you gave me a nice letter just because you liked my pretty blue eyes: and everyone will understand when I say so. Hasn't your office (*iny* dignity? Do you stand for letting yourselves be pushed around by one tinpot parish priest who takes the fancy to cock a snook at his bishop with one hand and the government with the other?'

The official remonstrated nervously that this was no way to talk. The Department naturally had not the least intention of departing from its plans, and would scrupulously carry out any obligations which the said plans might involve. It would at once see that Python Films had proper protection for their work. Paul could go ahead with every confidence. At the same time, for the moment—only for the moment—it would urge a certain moderation. If nothing precipitate were done, and local feelings were given a chance to subside, then it was not too much to hope that soon the work might be proceeding smoothly once more, and the wider plans which they had discussed together might be realized.

Paul hung up, and made an inelegant noise.

'We're not going to get much help from them.' he said to John. 'I guess I've got to wait till someone's murdered, before those boys will move.'

Coining down to breakfast next morning, he thought for a moment that it had happened. Toots met him, white, her mouth so tight the lips had disappeared.

'What's wrong, sugar?'

'Come and see.' Her voice was strained and shaking.

She led him a short way down the road, to a field at the back of a pair of cottages. A horse was lying on its side on the grass. By its head kneeled Gladys. As they came, she rose, her breast heaving. Her face was blurred with tears.

'My God!' she cried to Paul. 'I could kill the brute that did this.'

The horse's fetlock had been savagely slashed. Even Paul could see that it would never stand again. It raised its head, and rolled its eyes imploringly at Gladys. With a cry, she sank down again, and took the great head in her arms.

'They've gone for a gun,' Toots said.

Paul stood, helpless, gazing at the horse. There was nothing to be said. The horse sighed deeply, and swished its tail. Gladys was murmuring endearments to it. She had forgotten the onlookers.

The gate of the field opened. They looked round, and saw the horse's owner, and another man carrying a gun. The owner's face was green. He still could not believe what had happened.

Paul stooped, and took Gladys by the arm. She shook him off fiercely. He looked at Toots, who knelt down and whispered in her ear. Paul went to the horse's owner, and pressed his hand.

'I'm terribly sorry. I never dreamed of anything like this.'

The man shook his head from side to side. There were tears in his eyes.

'Hold hard, till I get the girls out of earshot.'

The man nodded. Paul looked round, and saw Toots leading Gladys towards the gate. The big girl was walking stiffly, with her head held back.

'You'll be compensated, of course,' said Paul to the owner. He opened the gate, and walked up the road beside the two girls. As they reached the hotel, Gladys stopped and spoke.

'The man who would maim a dumb animal.' she said, 'deserves no mercy, in this world or the nsxt.'

They did not answer her. Paul sighed, shook his head sadly, and went in to breakfast.

XXXIV

'Iv E got that fake for you.'

Paul looked up.

'What say, Votty?'

'That fake. That bathing scene. Oona going into the bay.'

'Fine.' Paul brightened up at once. 'Let's go into the room, and see how «t looks.'

It had been a wearing day. The maiming of the horse had cast a gloom over everybody. Votty had taken advantage of it to mock at what he called English sentimentality, which could remain unmoved by violence to human beings, but was outraged by cruelty to an animal. He did not meet a friendly response. Toots rounded on him fiercely, and told him to shut up. Terry told him he wanted kicking, and was invited to try, Paul intervened sharply at this point, and Terry went away: but the atmosphere remained tense and uneasy.

The actors also felt the strain. All this time they had been in a very strange position, and with each day they were more clearly aware of it. As they had signed a legal contract, the forces of righteousness made no attempt to interfere with them: but they had no chance to forget their position, and their work suffered. Katie was obviously unhappy. There were dark rings round her eyes. Her gaiety was gone: she was silent. Even the girls could get nothing out of her. John, consulted by Paul, advanced the theory that, since the actors were bound, they were intended to spoil the Egyptian, and make as much money out of the company as they could.

'It's plumb illogical.' Paul complained. 'If they're allowed to make money out of us, why not the others?'

'They wouldn't be allowed to, if you hadn't signed them up legally.'

'McCubberty's faith can't be so strong as it's cracked up to be, if he'll sacrifice a principle like that.'

'He's sacrificing nothing. He's determined the film shan't be made.'

'Is he. Well—he'd better think again.'

Then, after lunch, the rain came down in sheets: so that there wasn't even work to do. Paul welcomed any diversion, and went along eagerly to the small private projection room.

'Lock the door,' he enjoined John. 'See that shutter is drawn. We don't want anyone snooping in on this. Where's Toots?'

'It's no use sending for her,' Votty said. 'She's on strike.'

'On strike?'

'She doesn't approve of this shot. You may remember.'

'That so? I'll make the notes myself. All ready?'

'Give me a minute or two.'

'We get this sort of thing every now and then with the girls,' Paul confided to John. 'Part of my policy, to give them their heads. Get better service from them. Good girl, Toots. I take a lot of notice of her opinion, as a rule. Just every once in a while, she takes a notion; and then there's no reasoning with her.'

'I agree with her on this point,' John said.

'It's too soon to agree or disagree. We've got the picture to think of. The picture's got to come first.'

'Overriding all human considerations?'

'John, pardon me. That's a silly, exaggerated way to talk. What about the considerations of the millions of humans who are going to see the picture, and be moved and inspired by it? Don't they come before one little single local consideration? Lives have been lost, before now, to make a picture, good, young, promising lives, sacrificed willingly on the altar of art. Haven't you lost your sense of proportion, just a little bit?'

'Very often there isn't a logical answer to what you say——'

'It's fine of you to admit that, John.'

—'and yet you're talking nonsense.'

'Well.' Paul smiled. 'We'll agree to differ. Ready, Votty? O.K.'

The sequence began with a shot of Katie coming slowly along a narrow path above the bay in which they had first watched the sunlight and the fury of the waves. Dejection was in every gesture, the aimless swing of the arm, the droop of the head. She stopped, and looked down at the water. The movement was awkward, but infinitely forlorn and appealing: she looked like a bird with a broken wing. Then the lens tilted, with a jerk that miraculously copied her movement, and steadied on the clear tide leading into the bay.

Paul caught his breath. 'Attaboy, Votty,' he said. 'Lovely work.'

'Wait,' Votty grunted.

They saw Katie on a ledge, in shadow, darkly silhouetted against the grace and languid motion of the bay. The bay was in sunlight, and the curve of the waves, drawn in a skein of light across the sand behind the girl's dark figure, told perfectly of the contrast between their cool peace and her hot and troubled griefs. Their invitation was an ache: the onlookers longed to pull off their clothes in sympathy.

Then, differently seen, with more light on her, Katie looked quickly left and right, hesitated, and made to pull her frock over her head.

'Perfect, Votty. Perfect.'

'Wait, I tell you.'

He had come to the faked shot. The naked figure of a girl, her back to the camera, walked down the beach to the sea. As she reached it, her legs began to disappear under the water, first to the knee, then higher. It was credible, most cleverly done: but after the harsh, vivid truth of the preceding shots, conventional, with more than a hint of the studio.

'You see.' Votty said. 'No good.'

'If only the other shots weren't so marvellous, it might stand. But you've gone and put it right out of court. They're too good by half. Agree, John?'

'Yes. It looks unreal after them. You can't do better than just to have her start to pull off her frock. The suggestion is perfect. Why do you want the statement after? It's a come-down. Especially when it's a lie into the bargain. Katie did the other shots. She didn't do this.'

'I'm afraid you're right. What's that noise?'

John could hear nothing but the faint whirring as the film was rewound.

'What noise?'

'I heard something scrabbling about by the window.'

'Rats, I expect,' Votty said.

'Let's have just one more run through, before we make up our minds. I must see those first shots again.'

Votty said nothing, but finished rewinding, and showed the film again. This time the impression was even stronger. Paul sighed.

'That's the best you can do with that last shot?'

'I had enough trouble to do that much.'

'Yeah, I know. It's real clever. But it won't do.' He turned up the light. 'Well now, boys; isn't that a relief? We don't have to risk offending anyone. Toots will be happy, and the little girl will be happy, and there just won't be a thing to trouble about. And no fake, Votty—eh?'

'And no fake. Sure. Fine. Only a few hours' work wasted.'

'Got to break eggs to make an omelette.'

'Don't give me that line of talk. I make good omelettes. And don't act like an old woman.'

'How?'

'Speaking proverbs.'

'Well, I guess there's a proverb to suit this business. 'All's well that ends well.' He laughed happily. 'I guess I'll run up and tell Toots the shot's off.'

'Tell Toots.' Votty mocked, after he had gone. 'He's scared of that girl. She's got him.' He made a gesture with his thumb. 'If he wasn't a—' he broke off. 'Perhaps it's as well he is.'

John hesitated: then turned on him squarely. He would come to grips with this, once and for all.

'If he wasn't a what, Votty?'
Film director.' The heavy eyelids mocked him. 'What did you think I meant?'

XXXV

AS Paul, Votty and John disappeared into their private dark room, Judy Girvan crept quickly round the corner of a passage and fled into the yard. Moving feverishly but surely, she placed a mineral water box against the wall of a small shed, jumped on it, and with a violent and inelegant jerk that showed a strong white thigh, she slung one leg to the roof and pulled herself up.

Lying on her stomach, she wriggled along till her head was level with the bottom of a shuttered window. The shutter, a crazy affair with blistered paint, hung like a Venetian blind, but was in three hinged pieces. Cautiously, hunching her head and shoulders in order not to let in a crack of light, she pulled at a corner of the shutter. A small semi-circular gap in the wood allowed her to see in, without the risk of being seen by letting in too much light: and she had an uncomfortable but clear view of the tiny screen on which Votty was starting to show the others the shots of Katie preparing for her bathe.

This was the fourth time Judy had spied on the private showings. The little gap in the edge of the shutter was newly splintered where she had enlarged it. Convinced that Paul doctored the pictures to her disadvantage, she had taken this means of satisfying herself. So far she had discovered nothing, except that a few shots shown here were not shown when the rushes were screened officially for the cast.

What she now saw, however, made up fully for the labour and discomfort of lying on the hard roof and scraping her knees as she clambered down again. As Katie, on the screen, made to pull off her frock, Judy drew in her breath sharply. The next shot took her wholly unawares.

She stared in incredulity: a furious flush stained her cheeks. So violently was she scandalized that for the moment the shock overwhelmed her jealousy. Then, as the swift flush ebbed, leaving her pale, she saw what a weapon had been put into her hand. She could not believe that Katie could do such a thing, until her jealous hatred compelled her to believe it. It was necessary, for Katie's destruction.

The film ended. Judy heard them talking, but made no attempt to catch the words. The hard roof was hurting her knee. She shifted to her side, and considered, her mind running with desperate agility over this new perilous ground. No one would believe her. They knew she was jealous of Katie. They would think it a lie, made up to do Katie harm. The man would never show *that* picture to the others. He had only to hide it. Then it would be her word against the world, and no one would believe her.

Biting her lip, she lay down flat again, and peered through the opening. Powers above! they were going to show the thing again. She sat up, with a sob of anger—and found herself looking down into the face of Brannigan. It wore a furtive expression, half leering, half apologetic: as he met her eye, his tongue passed nervously over his lip, and she understood in a flash that he had been spying on her; her skirt was above her knees. At any other time she would have flayed him with reproaches, for she had the fierce chastity of her type. In any case, she loathed and despised Brannigan, her instinct telling her that he was not even a good, direct animal—the only kind to whom her strong but deeply guarded passions could respond. But her discovery had so transformed her that she saw him only as a witness, and welcomed him, even to the extent of managing a smile.

Taken aback, he tried to say something, but she signalled him to be silent, and beckoned him to join her. Brannigan smiled foolishly. Then, seeing that she meant it, he began to climb.

'Sssh!'

She seized his arm, and lugged him up beside her. He

looked warily about, then made a half-hearted attempt to kiss her. Impatiently, she pushed him to the window.

'Look in there.' she hissed. 'Quiet, for the love of God.'

He gave her a startled glance, and did as she told him. Evidently the first shots were showing, for after a few seconds he looked at her again.

'Sure what——?'

'Keep your eye fixed!'

Brannigan grinned uneasily, and applied his eye once more to the aperture. Crouching beside him, her hand on his shoulder to keep him there, she felt him suddenly stiffen. Good: he was seeing it.

She waited, aware now of the pounding of her heart, and of the sweat running from her armpits. Brannigan breathed in irregular jerks. The effect of the picture on him was far greater than Judy could have known.

The seconds passed. He gave a long exhausted sigh. His tension relaxed. Then he raised to her a face so naked, so undone that, even through her urgent thoughts, she felt repulsion.

'You saw it?'¹ she whispered.

He passed his tongue again over his lips, and nodded.

'Come on down.' she said.

He made a move to get down first, but she forestalled him. He should get no more sight of her legs, or maybe catch hold of them on pretence of helping her. Quickly she reached down a foot, found the box, and swung herself to the ground. There was a thud beside her: Brannigan had jumped down. Before she could do a thing, he had caught her in his arms and was pressing her against the wall.

In all her anger and loathing of him Judy kept her head. He was babbling hotly, and trying to kiss her. She knew that his inflammation came from the picture, and despised him more relentlessly than before.

'I love ye, oh Miss Girvan, Judy. I'm mad about ye. Ah, let me, only the once. Just one kiss.'

He had lost all his specious assurance and his long words. He was a hungry schoolboy.

Coolly averting her face, she spoke to him.

'Will you bear witness what you seen?'

'What I seen—? The picture. Oh yes. Ah, give me one, just the one.'

'Promise) She had an arm loose now, and was holding him off. 'Give me your word you'll back me up, that you seen it.'

'I will. On my oath I will.'

Reluctantly, she went limp, and let his eager mouth find hers. The kiss was long and clumsy. When she could hold her breath no longer, she twisted her head to one side, and forced him away. He clung to her, stammering in his eagerness.

'Judy,, let me love you a little, just a little. I'll stand by you. I'll do anything you say.'

'It's your duty,' she said. 'To think a girl would lower herself to do a terrible thing, the like of that.'

'Terrible indeed. He must have paid her a great sum.'

Once again Judy thought contemptuously what a fool he was. Motives, however, were not her concern. As she stood, thinking how best to use her discovery, Brannigan caught her by the arms.

'Judy, Miss Girvan. Sure you'll let me love you just a little. I'm mad about you, this long time.'

'Well.' She forced a sort of a smile. 'If you behave, and do as I tell you.'

'Til do anything. Anything.'

'I don't want you to do anything, only to bear me witness what Katie done.'

'I'll do it a hundred times over.'

She made up her mind. 'Come with me, so.'

Seeing the look in his eyes, she held her breath, and for policy's sake, let him kiss her once more.

XXXVI

AFTER a minute, .Paul came downstairs again. His face wore an uneasy expression, like that of a child with something on its conscience.

'Toots isn't there.' he said, as if he thought John could produce her. 'Gladys says she's gone out by herself. On the shore.'

Votty gave his ape's grin.

'She paddles.' he said. 'You'll have to take your boots off, Paul.'

Paul gave a rueful glance at his feet.

'Shoes,' he corrected, mildly. He looked up at John, his eyes full of appeal. 'She won't be in for ages, now she's that way.'

'Now she's that way.' Votty mocked him.

John felt a sudden pity for Paul. It was not decent to see such childlike feeling in the face of his leader—let alone the plenipotentiary of Python Films Inc.

'I'll go and look for her.' he said, 'and tell her the sequence is off.'

'The one shot.' Paul said quickly, 'not the sequence.'

'That's what I meant.'

'Thanks, John. You're a real friend. The fact is, I—well—' he smiled—I get scared to face Toots, when she's that way.'

'We all know that.' Votty agreed. 'Never mind. It's about all you are scared of.'

'I'm glad he's scared of something.' John hurried off.

How odd they were! he understood perfectly, after his first flash of surprise, Votty's last remark. There was a limit to his mockery of his chief: the point came at which the two colleagues drew together against the newcomer. And John saw, with a wry smile, that behind his own reply had lurked a refusal to be thrust out, an anxiety to affirm himself a loyal follower, one of the gang.

The bay was wide and deserted. A tiny figure, far away, on the edge of the turning tide, must be Toots. He set his course towards her.

Yes: as well face it. His was the reversed arrogance of the sensitive and self-distrustful. While they attempted to conciliate, to propitiate, they were not acting in pure humility. They were really claiming a privilege they had not earned, the privilege of being one of the tribe. The

small boy who offered himself as a recruit to the local gang leader, with gifts or mere submission; the girl who tried desperately to be accepted as one of a set, and eagerly adopted its catchwords; the elderly woman seeking to ingratiate herself with the young on a holiday; the tourist nervously attempting to find common language with the yokels in the bar of a village pub; all these were claiming something to which they were not entitled. Even though, in self-depreciation, they were willing to throw away all that separated them from those they wished to join; even though they became less than half of their true selves, yet they were arrogant; arrogant and impatient. Worse, they were dishonest. If the gang would not accept them as they were, why should it accept them under false colours? Why should they claim a shelter which they had not earned?

So, though he could tell himself that his first anxiety had been to bolster Paul's shaken *amour propre*, John saw that he had been protecting himself. He had sought to counter Votty's exclusion of him, he had been concerned to minimise, but for his own sake, any sign of weakness in the man who had his allegiance. If I've got to follow a man's lead, then, for my own self-respect, I mustn't admit there's anything weak about him. God, what devious wretches we are! how thoroughly we earn our own contempt!

Something in the scene, its peace and majesty, its wide indifference, took away the sting of John's thoughts. Instead of writhing in shame or rebellion, he was able to accept his weakness, and even to grin at it. That's what you are, he said to himself: and what about it? What do you expect of yourself? Why should you demand all at once to be better than other people? Who the hell are you, to resent the discovery in yourself of ordinary human baseness? You've got it, and with the help of the better things in life you'll learn to discount it and keep it under. And, in a further leap of his mind, he saw that his intolerance of his own shortcomings was but a further manifestation of the same weakness, a demand to be admitted to yet another gang, to the fellowship of Cod's annointed, before any achievement had made them look across and pick him **for**

their team. His grin widened: without warning, he felt aa inrush of peace. For a few moments, he was at accord with the deepest purpose of his being. He ceased to be only John Reilly, author, led by his peculiar gift into a series of complications which had nothing to do with it, but which belonged to the man-made labyrinths of circumstance: he was John, an immortal spirit, walking the beach, open to the inrush of light and air, holding without effort the balance between time and eternity. And the moment brought, not exaltation, but comfort and peace. For the first time in his life, John felt at home.

The sand and sea and sky flowed together, joined by a belt of fury where the breakers crashed. The sky rose to towering clouds and an infinite width of space beyond. Its immensities were mirrored in the wet sand, but softened, blurred, made gentle: the battlemented cloud lay vague and diffident, the noble terraced light was an innocent sheen, broken only where the sand was rippled by the wind or tide. Between, parting the two spaces, the breakers leaped and foamed. They seemed to John to be far above the level where he walked, and must rush flooding on him, instead of dissipating into the widespread frilly fan of water that came simpering towards his feet, losing the sky's reflection. The breakers were of an unearthly, transparent green, yet seemed solid, like something seen in a stereoscope: their creaming foam, though moving and leaping without cease, had the weight and momentary solidity of metal. He still could not understand why the vast weight of water piled at the sand's edge did not topple over and wash him all the way back to the dark line of refuse where the grass met the sand. It did not, however: and Toots was even nearer than he.

Barelegged, she walked very slowly at the sea's edge, where the rippling fans pressed inward. As they came, they rose above her ankles; then went out, pulling resentfully at her, swirling around her toes. John stopped, took off his shoes, put his socks in them, and tucked both shoes under his left arm. She saw him coming, smiled absently, and continued to look away past the breakers.

'From further in, it looks as if they were going to fall on top of one.'

She showed that she heard him, and John realized that he must justify the intrusion on her privacy.

'The shot's out. You needn't worry.'

'The shot——?' She was far away.

The fake. The bathing shot. Paul's decided against it'

'Oh.'

'He was looking for you to tell you. I said I would. He didn't want to get his feet wet.'

'Paul never wants to get his feet wet.'

She looked at him, taking in for the first time the shoes under his arm.

'Did he send you all the way here to tell me?'

'I said I'd come.'

'We all say we'll come.' Her voice was meditative, toneless. 'He gets us all that way.'

'You got him all right,' John blurted out. 'He admitted he was scared of you, when you disapproved of something he was doing.'

'Scared of me?'¹ She put a hand on her breast, then relaxed and let it drop. 'Yes. I believe he is, in a way.' She looked wonderingly at John. 'He's a strange creature.'

'One of the strangest I've seen.'

He had fallen into step with her. Very slowly, they went along together. The sideways rush of shallow bubbling water, its pause and slower return, had a gentle hypnotising effect on John.

'I'm afraid of him sometimes,' the girl said. 'Not personally, but of what he may do. He lets loose forces which are beyond his control. Sometimes I think he could be a very great man.'

'He's like a child.'

'Yes, but a child that——' She stopped short.

John knew perfectly what was in her mind. 'A child that gets under your skin,' he paraphrased for her,

She accepted the phrase with a small twist of her mouth. He thought she was going to say something more. She

made a sound, the first syllable of a word, but did not finish.

'Anyway,' he said, to help her, 'there's no need to worry this time.'

She turned to face him. 'I've never known him to do a cruel or a questionable thing for his own sake. He won't do anything for himself at all. But, for the picture, he'd trample on any of us. There's nothing he won't do, once that's got hold of him.'

'I understand that perfectly.'

'Do you?' She stared at him.

'In a much smaller way—and with far less opportunity, thank God—I'm like that myself. Lots of men are. We've a whole lot of unscrupulousness inside us, which our conscience won't allow us to use on our own behalf. But, once we're on a side, once someone else's welfare is at stake, *then* we can use it. Then it's released. Then it's our duty. That's why many men are good advocates in a court of law, or good partisans, good patriots. It isn't strange to you,' he went on. 'Look what a woman will do for her child's sake, or for the man she loves. She'll do anything at all, rather than see him go under.'

'Yes, but that's different. She doesn't do the thing because she wanted to do it all the time. She does it because she can't help it. Not because she's unscrupulous, but because she's a woman.'

'But——'

'You said yourself that, for men, it was a kind of release. It isn't a bit like that for a woman. She doesn't want to do it at all. She may not even realize what it is she's doing. All she knows is that her child or her man is in danger.'

'Paul is in some ways a feminine character.'

Then he wanted to swallow his tongue, remembering Votty's leering insinuation, and afraid that she would think he meant that. But she seemed to see nothing sinister in the remark.

'Yes, he is.'

She stopped to pick up a shell left gleaming by the withdrawn wave, just before the next inrush hid it. The water

ran over her wrist. Together, without speaking, they admired the shell. One half of a small mussel, it was of brilliant yet delicate azure.

Toots sighed.

'It's all so hard.' she said.

They did not speak any more, but struck inshore together. Toots sat on a tuft of grass to put on her shoes, and John did the same. He had all but forgotten they were off. It was easy, in these surroundings, to forget, and be back in the early years when he only wore them on a Sunday. A shaft of sun, pale, softly beautiful, broke from behind a cloud and wanly lit the shore. Toots pointed upwards to the left. On a ledge, hugging his knees, motionless as an image in the eerie light, Votty sat staring out to sea.

XXXVII

'I NEVER done it, I tell you! It's a wicked lie. I never, I never, I never!'

Tears streamed down Katie's cheeks. She stamped her foot, and faced the circle of her accusers.

'Ye little whoor!'

'Ye shameless little divil, ye, to bring disgrace on us all.'

'Ye never done it, so? Then how could the two of them have seen it on the photygraph?'

'It's Judy Girvan,' Katie stormed, pointing to where Judy stood in the background. Judy's face was pale; her eyes burned darkly. It's she made it up on me. She's jealous, because I got the good part. She wanted it herself, and now she's made up this to spite me.'

'Hold your noise,' an older man said harshly. 'Sure, no one would make up a story that could be give the lie in five minyits. If the photo was took, the photo's there, for all to see.'

'Ah, Lord forbid!'

'That's a queer thing to say, Peter M'Cann. Do ye want us all to share in the sin of it?'

The older man swung round angrily.

'I do not,' he snapped. 'Don't be takin' me up wrong and puttin' a dirty word in me mouth. I mean that the thing can be proved on her. Father McCubberty or some Chosen man can go to see is there such a photo.'

'What need o' that? Didn't Brannigan here see it too? What more proof de ye want?'

'Aye,' M'Cann said, turning again to Katie. 'What have ye to say to that?'

'Did *he* make it up? Is *he* jealous of the part ye have?'

They were all at her, hostile, jeering. Katie, who had never known anything but kindness from them, stared in horror. The world had suddenly gone mad, and turned against her. What, what could have happened?

'Brannigan,' M'Cann commanded. 'Step forward here, and tell us what you seen.'

Brannigan would normally have objected to so peremptory an address. In the stress of the moment he obeyed without thought. His eyes with their sandy lashes blinked rapidly.

'I saw what she—what Miss Girvan said. Katie came along to the water, and looked into it, and began to strip. Then, the next thing, there she was walking down the sand.'

'In her pelt?'

'She had no clothes on her.'

'It's lie!' Katie cried. 'How can you stand there and say such things!' She turned to M'Cann. 'It's true I went along to the shore——'

'Ah!'

'Do ye hear that?'

'Will ye listen to her!'¹

She shook her head passionately, trying to still their outcries.

—'And Mr. Deakin said for me to pretend I was going in, and to make the first move, like, to take my things off——'

They burst out again, men and women, with derisive cries. Her eyes on M'Cann's grim face, she waited for silence.

That was all I done. I didn't do a thing else. He never asked me to. ;

'Do ye hear that? She would if he had!'

'Have ye no shame, gerrl!'

The little red——'

M'Cann held up his hand for silence.

'Leave me speak to her. That was all ye done, do ye say?'

'Wasn't it enough?' cried one of the women shrilly. Rebuked by M'Cann's eye, she turned to a friend. 'She says she pretended to strip. Isn't that near as bad as strippin' altogether? Puttin' ideas in their heads.'

'That's all,' Katie answered M'Cann. 'I done nothing more, nor was asked to do it.'

Then how did them two see what they say? Would any two persons lay a load on their souls, to tell such a lie against one of their own people? What gain would it bring them? You're askin' us to believe too much, me gerrl.'

'What were they doing, the two of them,' Katie cried out shrilly, 'when they seen it?'

'Aye, begod!'

'What were the' doing?';

'Oh no,' M'Cann said grimly. 'Ye don't twist out of it that way. It's no matter to you or me or any other person how they seen what they seen.'

'I can tell you that, then.' Judy pushed forward. Her voice was cracked and harsh. 'I was round at the back, where they have a little room to show the films as soon as they take them, the way they can fake them up and change them, before they show them to the rest of us. I looked in the window and saw what I told you. Then I heard them gloating over it, and saying "That's grand. Show it again."'

'Do ye hear that?'

'What did I tell ye, now?' the woman asked her friend. 'Didn't I say they were a dirty lot?'

'Whisht. Listen.'

'I looked around me,' Judy said, 'to see could I find a witness to the wickedness, for I knew no one would believe me by myself. Then I saw Mr. Brannigan passing across at

the back of the yard. I beckoned to him to come, and he was just in time.'

'Is that true?' M'Cann said to Brannigan.

'It is. I'm sorry to have to say it,'

'Lies, lies, lies!' Katie's cheeks were blubbered with tears. She saw that they would never believe her: worse still, that they did not want to believe her. Their hearts were turned against her, venomous and cold.

With a sudden movement, like a young heifer, she put her head down and rushed through the knot of them, As she fled down the road towards her father's cottage, sobbing wildly, volleys of angry jeering followed her, and a stone or two bounded past her along the road.

XXXVIII

THE morning was bright, and the sea beaten flat with sunshine. Despite warnings from John that the weather was too bright to last, P'ul was full of plans for shots that needed a strong light.

The maid came in and handed him a green envelope. He slit it open. His eyes gleamed.

'Confirmatory copy. Got it over the 'phone last night. From Dublin. Those smooth boys are talking turkey good and proper. None of your hot-and-cold stuff now.'

'What's worked the miracle?' John asked him.

'Hollywood. I cabled the day before yesterday. Arthur L. Wimble cabled right back to the department. Now nothing's too good for us.' He crushed the message in his hand. 'Power, John! power! a government department eating out of my hand.'

'It's not your power.' John objected. 'It's the Corporation's.'

'I use it. I wield it. I make it serve me. I tell you, there was nothing in all this, till I thought it up the other afternoon in Dublin. Now I've got the whole lot of 'em running. If that isn't power, what is? And let me tell you a thing,

and you too, Votty, so you can take that monkey's grin off your face. A true thing. It hasn't got anything to do with me—it's——'

'No, it's true.' Votty murmured.

'I mean, it's a general truth, not only in the particular instance we're talking about. The really big men, the men at the top, don't have power. They use other people's. They use what's there already. They don't exert themselves to *do* things: they don't have to. They see the big wave rolling in, and, at just the right moment, they go with it, and use all its power and momentum as their own. Like surf-riding. In finance, in industry, in healing sick people—they don't push out power, they see and use what's there.'

'Well.' Votty said, 'now that you've got half Hollywood against a little one-eyed office in Dublin, what then?'

'What then? Why, we sail right ahead. The opposition is crushed. We have the law on our side, and no one dare do anything against us. Now—to-day's work. As I said, we'll make a start with 278. Terry—where's that big slob?'

'Not up yet.'

'Get him up. Then we'll do 39. That's a ticklish one. I must have a bit of a talk with Katie first. Where's Katie? She should be down. Ask Gladys. I'll want Judy, too.'

John got up, and went in search of Gladys.

'Judy.' Votty said, 'has got one hell of a black eye.'

'Bert can paint it out.'

'And a swollen lip.'

'Swollen lip! what in thunder has she been at, getting a swollen lip?'

'I asked her.'

'Well?'

'She spat at me. Like a ginger cat.'

'Well, she better not spit at me. I'll have something to say to her. We can't have players going and getting disfigured in the middle of a picture. Hullo, Gladys! Sleep well? Fine. Say—what's Judy been doing, to get a black eye?'

'Has she one? I don't know anything about that. Paul, I can't find Katie anywhere. Her bed hasn't been slept in.'

'Say—what's come to you all! Wasn't she in last night?'¹

'I went up late,' Gladys said. 'Toots was restless, so we took a walk.'

'Another walk? Toots seems to have spent the whole evening taking walks.'

'It was late when we came back. Katie's door was shut, and we went to bed quietly, so as not to wake her.'

'Well, sugar.' Paul's tone was gently reproachful. 'You're in charge of her, and all those things. I think you might look after her a bit.'

'I'm sorry,' Gladys said huffily. 'D'you mean I ought to have barged in and woke the kid up, just to make sure she was there?'

'You wouldn't have waked her up. You'd have discovered she wasn't there, and reported the fact at once, so as we could get her back in time to start work this morning, and not hold up the picture.'

Gladys tossed her head.

'Can I go now?'

'Sure. Go and find her and bring her along. It's your responsibility to warn the cast when they're wanted, and see they're there on the dot. You know that as well as I do.'

'Then why bother to tell me.'

'I don't have to, only when something goes wrong; Paul's tone was smooth as milk. 'It's particularly important that we get a good start this morning; John says the weather may not hold.'

'I saw Katie,' Votty said, so casually that Gladys turned in the doorway, her tantrum half forgotten.

'When?'

'Last night.'

'Where did you see her?'

'On the shore. She went by close to where I was sitting.'

'By herself?'

'Yes. She was crying out loud. That's how I noticed her.'

'Did you speak to her?'

'I gave her a bit of toffee.'

'Toffee? Didn't you ask her what was wrong?'

Votty looked at him pityingly.

'When a woman is crying, you don't ask what is wrong. You kiss her, or pat her.' He shrugged. 'I didn't wish to kiss Katie, and anyway she is more a child than a woman, so I patted her and gave her toffee.'

Paul looked at the other listeners. 'What happened then?'

'She took it. She said thank you in a very small voice, in between hiccuping, and then she went on.'

'On where?'

'I don't know. Along the rocks.'

Paul turned to Gladys. 'She'll have gone home, I guess. Run down and fetch her. And send Judy in to me as you go.' He clicked his tongue. 'Isn't that fierce, on a fine morning like this. If the kid's still upset, she'll never be fit for 39. She'll need to be in top form for that. And have me talk to her for half an hour first. John—never direct pictures. It's a dog's life.'

'No,' John said. 'Til just sit back, and watch you use all the power that's there.'

, Paul laughed delightedly. '*Touchel*' he cried. 'You had me that time. Yes?'

Gladys put her head round the door. 'Judy won't come. She doesn't want to be seen.'

Paul got up. 'Where is she?'

'In the little room at the back.'

'Right. Run on down now and fetch Katie.'

He went in to see Judy, but, despite a judicious mingling of blandishment with authority, he could get nothing out of her. This was not surprising, for the marks were souvenirs of a short and violent interview with her uncle the night before. Girvan, hearing the story, had seen the immediate danger to the picture and to all the projects in which he and his associates were now plunged up to the neck. He sent for Judy, and abused her savagely, pointing out that she was ruining her own prospects into the bargain. In the satisfaction of her jealous hatred against Katie, this obvious fact had never struck her. Inwardly appalled, she turned her rage against Girvan, who knocked her down, and, when she sprang up and flew at him, knocked her down again, and began to unbuckle his belt. Before he could ply it, she

got up, flung a chair at his legs, ran up to her room, and barricaded the door.

This last precaution was not needed: Girvan had more sense than to rouse the house. He went instead to the bar, and vigorously cursed those who were spreading the tale. Did they want to lose everything, and bring ruin on the place? Did they want the Government money to be kept back from them? His concentrated rage first daunted, then impressed them, till at closing time it was a cowed and sulky assemblage that went muttering away and broke up into twos and threes, with half-hearted good nights, to seek their homes and ponder uneasily on these disturbing thoughts.

Paul returned to the breakfast room, shaking his head.

'I can't make out what happened. She acted like she didn't know herself. Oh, she's holding out on me all right, I know that. After a long time, she claimed she fell on the stairs. We'll have to take that, I guess. The point is, she'll be no good for work till that lip goes down. The eye can be fixed all right, but not that lip.'

He turned, as Terry Boyne slouched into the room. The big torso was shown off finely in a polo jumper of canary, which was far less kind to the face above it.

Terry stretched and yawned. 'Morning, chaps. Fine day. When do we start work?'

'You can go back to bed,' Paul said to him. 'Our whole schedule's upset.'¹

'Too bad. I'm hungry. Mind if I go and find some food. No good ringing the bell,' he added, to John. 'I've tried that before.'

'Judy's got a black eye and a split lip.' Paul informed him. 'Katie's gone home.'

'Don't break my heart.'

He shambled out, his bare heels sticking out of crimson Turkish slippers, and they heard his professional, charming voice as he put his head into the kitchen to ask for his breakfast.

'You must have been proud of yourself.' Votty observed, 'when you picked that up.'

'It can act. Remember *Heartbreak Tidel*'

'Yes. And *Call the Doctor*.'

That wasn't so good, certainly. But then, he didn't have direction.'

'You mean, he didn't have Paul Deakin.'

Paul smiled. 'I guess I get as good work out of Terry Boyne as anyone. Better, in fact.'

'That's not saying much.'

'Oh, I don't know. When you think——'

'Sssh.' John exclaimed. 'He's coming.'

'Do him good.' Votty said, 'to hear a few house truths.'

'Home truths, Votty. You mean home truths.'

'Do I?' Votty asked, as Terry came in. In the vivid jumper, he seemed to fill the room. He sat down, and John saw him give Votty a very unaimable glance from under his curling lashes.

'Pretty inappropriate,' he drawled. 'He's not at home, he's a foreigner: and he doesn't bother much with the truth.'

'So?' Votty said, without expression.

'So.' Terry mocked him. 'At least, judging by all the yarns you tell. About all the places you haven't been in, and all the things that never happened there, to you or anyone else.'

How Votty would have replied to this did not emerge, for Gladys burst into the room.

'She's not there,' she exclaimed. 'She did go there, but left, quite early, to come back here. Do you know what they're saying?' She began to glare at Paul, her eyes flashing, her generous bosom heaving. 'Oh, it's a damned shame!'

'Please, sugar. Who is saying what?'

'The village people. Everybody. They're saying she let you take a shot of her with nothing on.'

There was a stiff pause. Paul's face went pale.

'Where'd they get that from?'

'Thought reading,' said Votty bitterly.

'Don't say cynical things, Votty. It doesn't help. This is serious.' He turned to Gladys. 'Did Katie know they're saying this?'

'Know! What do you think, when the brutes all mobbed her last night, and accused her of it. Know I'

'Steady, sugar. You hadn't told us that.'

'Well, they did. They booed and hissed her and threw stones after her. That's your precious fake, you two. I hope you're proud of yourselves.'

'No,' Votty drawled. 'It wasn't a good fake.'

'My God!' For a moment it looked as if she was going to pick up the coffee pot and fling it at him.

'But no one saw that shot,' Paul cried. 'No one. Votty and John and I saw it privately, and turned it down.'

'I told you,' Votty shrugged. 'Thought reading.'

'No one saw !' Gladys exclaimed. 'I suppose that's why two of them swore to it.'

'Swore to what? Try to keep things clear, sugar, will you?'

Her eyes flashed contempt.

'Swore they'd seen it. Seen the shot. The shot of Katie with nothing on. Now do you get it?'

'No need to shout, sugar. We can hear you. Who swore they'd seen it?'

'Brannigan and that red-haired bitch.'

'Gladys. Please manage your language. They couldn't have seen it. Only us three saw it.'

'They did. They peeped in through a crack. You and your precious secrets! If you want to show filthy pictures, can't you at least have the decency to show them in private.'

Paul looked at John. 'I thought, once, I heard a noise. It might—where did they look in?'

'I don't know. What I do know is that you've done a beastly thing to one of the nicest kids that ever breathed. And turned the whole place upside down into the bargain. Who do you think will work for you now?'

'You don't have to worry about that, honey. Leave that to me. John—we must see where they could have peeked in.'

'What the hell does it matter where they peeked in?' Votty asked him.

'Maybe it's all a yarn. Maybe they didn't see a thing.'

'They must be mighty good thought-readers.'

Without replying, Paul went along to the dark room, John following. A single glance proved that nobody could see through the door. There was no crack or peephole, and, even if there had been, the door lay at right angles to the little screen.

'The window's the only place.' Paul muttered. He opened the bottom of it, and pushed at the shutter. It yielded, letting in light and a thin rush of air. With an exclamation, John pointed to the semi-circular gap.

'Newly cut, too.' Paul said. 'Look, it gives on a roof.'

'Can't be a high one.'

They went round to the back, conscious of hostile eyes from the scullery window.

'Aren't we rather giving ourselves away, doing this?' John murmured.

Paul did not answer. He came to the outhouse. The mineral boxes were not against the wall, but a glance showed how easy it would be to get on the roof.

'Yep.' Paul said, shutting his lips with a snap. 'That's how it was done. Well. Those two have got themselves fired, all right.'

'Will that do any good?'

'Think I'm going to work with people who'd spy on me that way, and then spread wicked slanders about that poor kid? No, sir. Not on your life.'

John gasped.

'Paul.'

'Yes?'

'If that shot had been a success, you'd have wanted to keep it in the picture, wouldn't you?'

'I never said so. You'll recall, I left the whole thing open.'

'Yes, but suppose we had kept it—what would it have been then but a slander on the poor kid—repeated several times a day all over the world?'

'John. When you're as old as I am, you'll learn not to base arguments on mere supposition. That's a purely academic point you're raising. Be a realist. Face the facts. Don't go after all sorts of airy, might-have-beens, suppose-

this, and suppose-that. It's a failing with you writers. You live too much in the world of imagination.' He smiled kindly. There's a time for that: and there's a time for hard facts. And it's hard facts we've got to face now.'

John stood and looked at him.

There are times when you take my breath away.'

'I don't, John. It's the facts. Now—what are the facts? Those two between them have pretty near stopped production for us. They've upset our star player, and raised prejudice against us, by spreading a lie. No, John—you must face the fact. It is a lie. They've put it about that Katie took off her clothes and let us make a picture of her. That is a lie. She did no such thing, and I should never, never have dreamed of asking her. Nor would Votty. Nor would you. Very well. They are spreading a lie and a slander, and only a rank sentimentalist would maintain otherwise.'

John made a helpless gesture. 'I'm not going to argue with you.'

'Once again, let me point out that it's not me you'd be arguing with, but the facts. You can't argue against the facts.'

They were standing close to the scullery window, visible and audible to those within. John nudged Paul.

I've nothing to say that the world can't hear.' Paul proclaimed. Those that have started this wicked story shall answer to the law for it.'

They walked through to the front. Votty sat where they had left him, hunched, stirring a half cup of coffee. Terry had disappeared.

'No one knows how to make coffee in this country.' Votty said, as they came in. 'Well. Did you find the spyhole?'

'We did. In the shutter over the window. It pulls back a bit; and they'd bored a hole.'

'Lot of trouble.'

'Well. I guess the first thing is to find Katie. We can't get on until we do.' Paul made for the door, then stopped. 'Aha. That's how the redhead got her black eye.'

'How? Peeking through a hole?'

'No, clever. 'Some friend of Katie's socked her one.'

'More likely him.¹ Votty pointed towards Girvan's sanctum. 'Afraid she mig{it hold up the show.'

'Say, I wish I'd heard this before I saw her just now.'

'You'll see her again.'

'Sure, I'll see her again. Meantime—where's Brannigan?'

'Around.'

'Send him in.'

Votty drank his coffee, made a grimace, and got up.

'I run ejrrands on the days when there's no shooting.' he said to John. 'Otherwise, I get in trouble with the errand boys' union.'

He shuffled into the passage.

'B-rrr-rannigan!' they heard him call, in a high nasal voice. 'Br-rrrannigan!'

Paul spoke earnestly to John. 'You mustn't let this get you down, John. I assure you, it's nothing to what sometimes happens on location. I've been through far worse upsets than this. Where are you going?'

'I thought I'd like to be elsewhere when you interview Brannigan.'

'Stay right here. I want you. You're a material witness. No, I want you to stay, please. Ah. Here you are.'

Brannigan came in. His face was pale. His eyes flickered uneasily from one to the other.

'Good morning, Mr. Deakin. Good morning, Mr. Reilly.'

'Say.' Paul's voice was cold and metallic. 'What's this lie you've been spreading about Miss Heggarty and Mr. Votitchenko and myself?'

'Lie about you, Mr. Deakin? I—I don't understand.'

'You understand perfectly well. You and Miss Girvan, for some reason best left to your conscience, have been spreading a story that I, as director, authorized, and Mr. Votitchenko, as cameraman, photographed, a picture of Miss Heggarty bathing without her clothes. Is that correct?'

'I—Miss Girvan asked me to bear witness——'

His uneasiness was horrible. John turned his eyes away, as from something suddenly seen in a hospital.

'To bear witness to what?'

'To the picture. That is—' Suddenly he changed front 'I know this must be very awkward and embarrassing for you, Mr. Deakin, and I'm very sorry to cause you inconvenience. But you can't deny that you were showing the picture on your private screen. Miss Girvan saw it, and so did I. Quite clearly. There was no mistake.'

'So. There was no mistake. Isn't that fine. And when Mr. Reilly here, and Mr. Votitchenko, and I, and Miss Heggarty all testify on oath that no such picture was taken—there will still be no mistake.'

Brannigan's eyes flickered. 'As to what you and Mr. Reilly and any number of people might swear, of course I can't say. I can only swear to what I saw.'

'Explaining at the same time how you saw it. After boring a chink in a shutter. Getting a nice, clear, reliable view.'

'Clear enough, Mr. Deakin.' He was almost at his ease. They could see the cunning mind working behind the eyes.

'If I may say so, Brannigan, I don't think you've played your cards well,' Paul told him. 'You shouldn't have blurted it all out yesterday like that. You should have held it in, till you saw who'd pay you best.'

'Pay me, Mr. Deakin? I don't——'

'You haven't the nerve to make a good blackmailer, Brannigan.'

'Mr. Deakin. You insult me.'

'Beat it, Brannigan. Get out. Just a bit of advice, before you go. Get hold of Miss Girvan, and work your story up well. Make sure it fits together. You'll need it, in the witness box.'

'The witness box!'

'There are legal penalties for slander, as maybe you know. And I can bring a couple of score witnesses to what you said.'

'I said what I saw, Mr. Deakin. I only told the truth.'

'Tell them that in court, and see how they like it.'

'You can't bluff me, Mr. Deakin. If I may say so, I don't think you have gone about this business very well either.'

'We'll see.' Paul dismissed him. Brannigan stood, his Adam's apple working up and down. He gave John a glance of mingled venom and apprehension, then went out.

'Nasty bit of work.' Paul said.

'Hell make trouble, Paul.'

'He'd like to.'

'But——'

'Don't you fret. I've got him where I want him. See here——'

He stopped, as heavy steps sounded outside. The door was flung open, and Terry lumbered in, his face pale and ugly.

'Good God, Paul. That kid. Katie.'

'Yeah?' Paul cried sharply. 'What about her?'

'She's dead.' He was gulping and breathing heavily. 'Drowned. They've just found her body. Washed up among the rocks. In the next bay.'

XXXIX

PAUL sat in the chair beside the bed, his shoulders bowed. He moved stiffly, like an old man with rheumatism. His face was seamed with scores of tiny lines, like the first wrinkles in the skin of an apple before it decays. His voice creaked plaintively.

'I know, honey. I know. You don't have to say it again.'

He reached out a hand, and patted her shoulder. She shook the hand off. She was lying with her face to the wall, away from him.

'Toots. Listen, beautiful.'

'Oh, be quiet. Leave me alone.'

Paul sighed heavily. He put his hand back on his knee.

'No one thinks of me in all this,' he said to the wooden washstand.

'Oh yes they do.' Toots rejoined bitterly, her mouth against the bedclothes. 'Your name is on everyone's lips.'

'I mean.' he gave her shoulders a reproachful glance, 'no one thinks for me. No one sympathizes with me.'

'They might be pardoned for thinking that someone else deserved their sympathy more.' Abruptly, she rolled over. Why the hell should anyone sympathize with you? If it hadn't been for you, that poor child would be alive and happy. I told you not to try that damned fake. I told you it was a rotten, dirty trick, and no good would come of it. Sympathize with you! You deserve lynching.'

'Nobody deserves that.' Paul said quietly. 'Nobody, whatever they did. I saw a lynching, once.'

'Want me to sympathize with you because you saw-a lynching. Keeps you awake, I suppose.'

'It used to. I try not to think of it.'

'How typical! that's what you do about anything inconvenient. Try not to think of it. Try not to think of the consequences of the rotten things you do. Try not to think that, if you fake a picture, a kid may drown herself.'

'We don't know she drowned herself.'

'Of course she drowned herself.' She sat up, and beat her fists on her knees hysterically. 'Oh, for Christ's sake, Paul, be honest with yourself, if it's only for one moment. Don't try and wriggle out of this, as you've wriggled out of everything else. She drowned herself because of what you did. You killed her. Yes—you killed her, as surely as if you'd pushed her into the water and held her down—and a damn sight more dirtily.'

Paul got up.

'If all you can do is swear and blaspheme——' ,,

'There he goes.' She hugged her knees, and rocked to and fro. 'There he goes,' she cried to the chest of drawers, 'wriggling already. Trying to change the subject. Trying to put the blame on someone else. Oh, Paul, for God's sake! Sometimes I hate you.'

He sat down again on the bed.

'Honey. I feel terrible about this. Believe me, I do. Terrible.'

'Yes, but only because it's gone wrong. You didn't feel terrible about telling Votty to fake that shot.'

'I thought it was my duty to the picture.' Paul said simply.

'That's the first true thing you've said. Oh yes—you feel badly. I daresay you do. So you damned well ought to.' She flung herself down again, and turned her back on him. 'You'd better get out. I think I'll go mad if you stay here any longer.'

'All right.' He got up stiffly. 'I'll go.'

'Oh, *damn* you! Will you stop being pathetic.'

'Honey.' He kneeled by the bed, and put an arm round her shaking shoulders. 'You can't go back on me now, when I'm in such terrible trouble. You can't leave me. Who've I got, if you turn me down? I haven't got a soul. It wouldn't be like you, to desert me when I'm in a jam.'

She stiffened and drew away from him. Then, with a sudden twist, she was in his arms, her head buried in his waistcoat.

'Oh, hell, hell, hell!' she sobbed.

XL

IT was evening. Paul sat conferring with Votty and John. He still looked older, but the stoop had gone, and much of his jauntiness had returned.

'Well, boys. I had a long session on the 'phone. It's all fixed up. The best lawyer in Dublin is coming down for the inquest, to represent the Corporation. The room where it'll be held is small. We can pack it out, so's there won't be too many locals. It'll go all right. You'll see.'

'The snag is going to be Brannigan's and Judy's story,' John said slowly. 'I don't see how we're going to get round that.'

'Don't you? I do. With a clever lawyer, Judy won't stand up to cross-examination. He's only got to make her angry. Nor will Brannigan. Besides, there's my testimony. And Votty's. And yours.'

'We can only say what happened. And I don't see how that's going to help.'

'If that was all we had to worry about, we'd be fine.'

'I warn you, Paul, I'm not going to say anything that isn't true.'

'It's evident you haven't learned very much about me, John, all this time we've been working together.' The tone was gentle, as that of a man so sorely tried that nothing could hurt him any more. 'When have I ever asked you to say anything that wasn't true?'

It rather sounded as if you were doing so just now.'

'I shall take the oath, when I go into the witness box, and I shall keep it, as I hope for salvation. My religious beliefs would not for one instant allow me to tell a lie.'

'Not even for the Corporation?'

That's a cheap line, John, if I may say so, and unworthy of you. In business, one does occasionally have to keep one or two things up one's sleeve. It doesn't always do to blurt out everything. But that is very different from swearing to tell the truth, and then telling a lie. I shall answer fully every question that is put to me.'

'And rig the questions, per the cleverest lawyer in Dublin,' Votty put in. 'I'm sick of this inquest. What are you going to do about the picture?'

'I haven't quite made up my mind. I——'

'You can't go on with it here.'

'The atmosphere might not be altogether favourable, no, you're right. All the same, we mustn't decide prematurely. We'll give this poor kid a swell funeral. I cabled Arthur L. Wimble this afternoon, for a special message to read at the graveside.'

John stared. 'You don't mean to say you're going to the funeral?'

'I certainly am. I certainly will do everything in my power to show my respect for that poor misguided kid. She did wrong, terribly wrong. But it's not for us to judge her.'

'Paul. You don't know what you're talking about. Don't you realize how these people feel to you?'

'What do you mean, John?'

'If you show your face the day she's buried, you'll be lynched.'

Paul got up. 'I wish you'd quit this talk of lynching. It has a bad association for me.'

Votty sniggered. 'I don't reckon it has very good association for anybody.'¹

'What is all this, John? What are you talking about? Why should the people be sore at me? What have I done?'

Looking at him, John felt the last of his awe and diffidence go.

'Paul. I'll give you a little lesson in elementary psychology. First of all, why do you think these people last night turned on Katie, and were ready to believe ill of her? Why did they believe Judy and Brannigan, and not her?'¹

'That's dead easy,' Paul said promptly. 'They were jealous because she'd made the grade. She was beyond them. She was going places. She was going to earn a lot of dough. They thought they liked that to happen, but really, inside of them, they didn't like it a little bit. So when a chance came to do her down, they jumped at it.'

'I might have known you'd be clear on the seamier side of human nature. All right. Now go one further, and tell me why they hate you. Or does your insight fail as soon as you come into the picture?'

'No,' Paul said. 'Not as a rule. But go on. Tell me how *you* see it.'

'Well—you have, very properly, given it out to all and sundry that Katie never did what she was accused of. That means you've shoved off on to them the guilt of accusing her wrongfully and hounding her to her death. Naturally, they're not going to take that: so they cast about for someone to unload it on. Well—who's the cause of all the trouble? Who came here in the first place, and set the whole countryside by the ears? Who promised the Catholics money which the priest wouldn't allow them to earn? Whom did the priest denounce? Who, in fact, is the devil's own spawn, as the priest said all along—and events now prove that he was right?'

Paul nodded thoughtfully. 'There's something in that.' His face brightened. 'But, when we've had the inquest, and I'm cleared, it'll be all right again.'

John shook his head. 'It'll never be all right again.'

'Don't forget the backing we've got.'

'No backing in the world will get you over this. You've lost the bishop. This bathing naked stuff is going to stick, whatever happens at the inquest. I know these people. Man, it'll be all over the country!'

'It certainly is very unfortunate. Poor kid! She was shaping so well. I guess she would have gone right up to the top. What do you say, Votty?'

'She photographed well. And she could take direction, I'd have got her to do anything in this script.'

'Except bathe with nothing on,' Votty said brutally.

'Votty. Do you have to be like that, this day of all days?'

'She was a good kid,' Votty said.

'Why didn't you stop her last night? Why didn't you bring her back?'

'You asked me that before.'

'Well. Why didn't you?'

Votty eyed him. 'If she preferred to drown herself rather than play under your direction, she had a perfect right.'

'If John and I didn't know you, Votty, we should get a mighty bad impression, the way you talk sometimes.'

'Oh, go to hell,' Votty said. 'She was a good kid, I tell you.'

He got up, and stood looking out of the window. There was a long silence.

'Well,' Paul said. 'We can't do any more shooting till the inquest's over.'

John turned to stare at him.

'I thought you said——' he began, when there was a sharp knock on the door, and Toots put her head in. Even behind her glasses, he could see that her eyes were swollen.

'Paul. Judy's disappeared.'

'So. Can't face the inquest. Well——'

'Oh, don't be so blind! Those men are quite capable of doing something to her, so that she can't give evidence and stop the picture being made.'

'Good for you!' Paul jumped up. 'We can't risk another

girl gone. That would about finish us. Send me Girvan. No—I'll find him myself.'

He hurried out of the room, and knocked on the door of Girvan's sanctum. A forbidding growl he took as invitation, and tried the door. It was locked.

'Girvan. Open at once, please. It's me—Paul Deakin.'

There was a murmur, the sound of quick movements, and the shutting of a drawer. Then Girvan's voice.

'I'm not free. I'm in the middle of a business interview.'

'I can't help it if you're in the middle of six interviews. I have to speak to you, right now.' After a pause, he added, 'I guess you'd prefer me not to shout what I have to say through the door.'

There was a moment of silence; then a chair was pushed back, and Girvan unlocked the door. His face was sullen and hostile.

'Thanks a lot.'

Paul's glance went past him to the massive and unappetising form of Mr. McVeagh, whom he recognized at once for the formidable ruffian that he was. He smiled into the dead expressionless face.

'I haven't the pleasure?'

'This is Mr. McVeagh, who is here to see me on a matter o' business.'

'Delighted to meet you, Mr. McVeagh. My name is Paul Deakin. It's as well you're here, for I guess what I have to say will interest you just as much as your friend here. Girvan. Where is your niece?'

There was a long silence. Girvan looked at him, his eyes narrowing. Then he looked at McVeagh, as if for guidance. At last he licked his thick underlip, and spoke.

'I couldn't rightly say where she'd be, at the minute.' He looked again at McVeagh, whose face did not move. 'Were you wanting to speak with her?'

'No.' Paul answered him. 'No. I was just wondering where she was, that's all.'

'If ye were wanting to speak with her'—another glance at McVeagh—'it might be well to have—to let someone

else, maybe—Mr. McVeagh here would have a great influence.'

McVeagh leaned a little to one side, and spat into the fender.

'Talk plain.' he said contemptuously. 'It's no matter what we say; there's two of us to deny it after.'¹ He turned a veiled eye on Paul. 'This gerrl of Girvan's here has done enough harm. You don't want her talkin' tomorra. Nor do we. There's too much hangin' on it.'

Paul looked at him. 'She must be there, Mr. McVeagh.'

There was a silence that lasted perhaps ten seconds, a fencing match of wits. Then McVeagh, adjusted, let out a loud breath.

'That's what I'm tellin' this fool here. It's bad enough, one girl gone. Make your mind easy. She'll talk the right way. Leave her to us.'

'I think there's a slight misunderstanding, Mr. McVeagh. I haven't come here to fix the girl's evidence. I've come here to say that, if you don't produce her unharmed within the next ten minutes, so that she can be put in the care of Father McCubberty or some other responsible person with no interest in the evidence she may give, I shall put the matter in the hands of the police here and in Dublin; and you two will be held responsible for anything that happens to her.'

There was a longer silence, disturbed only by the sound of heavy, uneven breathing. Paul opened the door.

'Two young ladies will be waiting outside, to take charge of her and conduct her to the presbytery.'

McVeagh's face moved.

'Tamperin' with witnesses is dangerous work, mister.'

'If you are in any way anxious, Mr. McVeagh, you can accompany Miss Girvan and the girls on the journey. Thank you. Good evening.'

He left them, erect with triumph, and came to report to John: but it did not last long. As they turned to go upstairs together, they ran straight into old Heggarty coming out of the bar doorway. The old man was supported on each side by a neighbour. Grief and drink had made a pitiable wreck

of him. His hawk's face hung loose and bleared, his mouth drooled open, his eyes were glazed and bloodshot. The neighbours, a hand under each arm, were exhorting him in comforting tones. At sight of Paul, they stopped. Some tension from their grasp, some sense of their sudden embarrassment, must have reached the old man's drowning mind. He raised his head, and stared at Paul. 'M-m-m,' his lower lip mumbled, as if trying ineffectually to hold the spittle that coursed in trickles upon his chin.

Then, suddenly, recognition flared in his half dead eyes. His limp body stiffened. He drew himself up, glaring with an extraordinary intensity.

'God blast ye!' he said: began to shake all over, as in a palsy: and collapsed forward, his head drooping on his breast.

Paul put up his hands as if to ward off the curse, and his lips opened in soundless protest. Then a look of compassion softened his face. It was so obvious, so genuine, then even the old man's bearers felt it and lowered their eyes.

Paul shook his head, and went slowly upstairs, with a dignity John had never seen in him.

XLI

WHILE John's analysis of the villagers' state of mind was substantially correct, he failed to guess the line their resentment took against Paul. Quite simply, they decided that Paul and Votty had murdered Katie between them. On this they were all agreed. The only differences were as to motive.

Some said it was because the decent poor child had held firm against their infamous proposal that she should be 'took in her pelt'—or worse. She had thus died, in true Irish fashion, a martyr to chastity. Others said that she was made away with because she knew too much: a popular line, which entailed much shaking of the head and pursing of the lips in suggestion of unnameable things. A variant,

that she was killed for fear of what she might say at the inquest, had some vogue until a realist pointed out that there would have been no inquest but for her death. The propounders of the theory took this correction badly, retiring unconvinced to a corner of the bar, where they muttered and cast suspicious glances at the man who had put them right. All were agreed, however, that Katie was a martyr, and that Paul had killed her or had her killed, and that the sooner these evil-doers were chased out of the neighbourhood the better.

Girvan was openly derisive, and earned black looks. Only the fact that they all owed him money kept them quiet under his tongue.

'A nice lot of fools you'll look, with the man's good money druv off some other place—back t'England, maybe—and no grant from the government.'

'No grant from the government! What are ye sayin'? What's the government to do with the likes o' him?'

'Oh, nothinM Nothin' at all! Only that I've orders from high-up persons in Dublin to help him, and he has the government papers in his pocket, backin' him and sayin' all were to aid him. Mark me words, now.'

'Money's not everything' a daunted voice said at last.

'Well may ye say that, and you owin' seven pounds ten and eightpence on my books.'

'Yez can't go agen the church.' another man said, hastily changing a subject that must be unwelcome to all.

'Which is the church?' the publican replied. 'The priest or the bishop?'

'Erra,' cried an old man, 'I wish to God they'd none o' them set foot in the place. Sure we were better off as we were.'

They agreed, heartily: but Girvan's threat about the grant had shaken them, and they were worse shaken next day by the small crowd of officials and police that came for the inquest. There was room in court for very few of the villagers. The rest had to wait outside, in hungry speculation.

The inquest was a triumph for Paul. Seldom can he

have appeared to better advantage. Evidence was given of the finding of Katie's body. Votty, the last to have seen her alive, told his story of giving her toffee. A murmur at once ran round the back of the court, but Paul had foreseen the possible suggestion of poison, and medical evidence disposed of this almost before it could be made. Then Judy and Brannigan gave their story of seeing the picture that was the cause of all the trouble. Judy's disfigured face earned her sympathy at first, and she told her story well, but the Dublin lawyer, with a couple of well-aimed questions, obliged her to admit, first, that she had not seen the face of the naked figure in the film, and second, that she had earnestly desired Katie's part for herself. It was so well done that, when she sat down, feeling was once more hard against her.

Brannigan was severely handled. The lawyer showed an uncomfortable curiosity as to what he was doing, hanging about in the rear of premises where he had no right to be. Having pressed the point just far enough, the lawyer turned to the film, and once more elicited the fact that the witness had not seen the face of the naked figure.

'In that case, Mr. Brannigan, will you kindly inform the court why you at once assumed this unclad figure to be that of a girl whom you had known from her childhood to be above suspicion?'

Brannigan blinked and stammered. 'Sure, it was the natural thing to think. Who else could it be? Miss Girvan thought the same.'

'Yes. Yes, Mr. Brannigan. So she has told us. Does it not strike you as remarkable that two people should independently come to a conclusion which went dead against the previous reputation, against all in fact that was known of this unhappy child?'

'It was her in the pictures before. We seen her face then, all right.'

'So you at once concluded this distant figure to be the same. You have a charitable mind, Mr. Brannigan.'

A little more of this, and the lawyer sat down. The coroner, who was obviously overawed, put a futile question

or two of his own, and Brannigan, sweating, was allowed to leave the box.

Then Paul's turn came. To the surprise of the court, the lawyer seemed hostile to Paul. He questioned him very closely, and Paul, with gentle patience, stood up perfectly to a severe harrying.

'Now, Mr. Deakin: this question, this very distasteful, unsavoury question of the alleged film. Did you show, on your private screen, any picture of the kind alleged?'

The court held its breath. Paul faced him squarely.

'Yes. We did.'

'Ah-h-h.' A small gale of sound came from them.

'A picture of a nude girl bathing?'

'A picture of a nude girl walking down the beach into the water, with her back turned to the camera, at a minimum distance of fifty yards, increasing to a hundred as she reached the water's edge.'

'I see. Mr. Deakin: where was this picture taken?'

'At a studio in London.'

'In *London!*'

'Yes.'

'It was not, then, a picture of the deceased girl?'

'It most certainly was not.'

'You did not ask her to pose for any such photograph?'

'Neither I nor any member of my outfit would for one moment have dreamed of asking her to do such a thing.'

'In that case, Mr. Deakin, why did you import this picture from London? I will make my meaning clearer. If you were not going to show it to her, and ask her to pose for a similar picture, what was the point of bringing it here?'

'It was brought for contrast.'

'For contrast?'

'Yes. Mr. Votitchenko and I wished to do the scene by means of suggestion. We caused Miss Heggarty to walk along the shore, look longingly at the sea, and then begin the gesture of taking off her frock. The sequence is perfectly decent. We have the film here in court: it can be shown to the jury, if they wish to see it. Now it will be

obvious to everyone that there are two ways of representing every episode in a picture. One is to show it happening: the other is to suggest it, and leave the audience to imagine it happening. We were convinced that our way of handling this episode was the correct one, and that it was *not* necessary to show the actual figure of a girl entering the water. But, in order to convince some of the distributors in London, we had a film prepared of the actual bathing, in London, with a professional model, and we screened it here, privately—the three of us, Mr. Reilly, the author of the script, Mr. Votistchenko, and myself—in order to convince ourselves that it was not necessary. In fact, that it was definitely inferior to the way in which we had already photographed the episode. It has always been my firm belief that nothing should be shown on the screen which can offend even the most sensitive members of an audience. Further, I maintain that it is more artistic not to show any such episode.'

The lawyer looked round the court.

That is a very full and very candid explanation, Mr. Deakin. There is one point, however, which you have not made clear. Why did both Miss Girvan and Mr. Brannigan take this studio-made picture of a professional model for Miss Heggarty? (I am assuming, for the moment, that they did "so take it.") What led them to connect it with the sequence of pictures in which Miss Heggarty admittedly appeared?'

Paul spread out his hands. 'Don't ask me how their minds worked.' He appeared to be seeking excuses for them. 'We did show the studio picture *after* the others.'

Immediately after?'

'Surely. To get the full force of the contrast. While the first sequence was still fresh in our minds. We screened the two sets of pictures twice, to make sure: and we were all three convinced that our way of doing it was the right way.'

A few more questions were asked, fully establishing these points. Then the lawyer asked if Brannigan might be recalled.

'In view of the testimony we have just heard, Mr.

Brannigan, have you anything to add to what you have already told the jury?'

Brannigan shook his head.

'Something to take away, perhaps? To retract? To withdraw?'

'No. Nothing. The film ran straight on.' he added.

'So Mr. Deakin has told us. Mr. Brannigan: you have not yet told the jury exactly how you came to see the film.'

The suave voice hardened now; the questions were pitiless. Lying full length on a roof? Oh, you pulled back the shutter? Not far: it could not have been far, or a crack of light would have showed, and attracted the attention of those within. Oh—there was a hole made? How large? Oh no, Mr...Brannigan. It was not as large as that. The jury might be interested to see a scale drawing of the hole. Better, they could go and lie on the roof and determine for themselves how much, and how accurately, they could see what went on inside the room.

'And it is on the strength of this paltry eavesdropping, this peeping through a space smaller than a keyhole, that a beautiful and innocent girl has been driven to her death.'

The tempo of the questions quickened. Brannigan was hardly given time to answer. How did he come to be there? He had not told the jury that. He was just passing by. Nonsense. Try again, Mr. Brannigan. Why so hesitant? Why so coy?

'I put it to you that you were hanging around in the hope of a word with Miss Girvan.'

Brannigan stammered and blinked. Before he could get his breath, he stood accused of falsely conspiring with Judy, swearing he had seen what he had not, in order to help her in her jealous hatred of Katie, her successful rival for the chief part in the picture. The expert tongue lashed him without mercy. Why else had he jumped to so heinous a conclusion—a conclusion against all knowledge, all evidence, all sense? Who but 'the woman Girvan' could have put such a thought into his head? Who but an infatuated and vicious craven could have received it, and sworn it was true?

The villagers at the back of the room were growling like dogs. No one of any sensitiveness could bear to look at Brannigan, pale, shaking, sweating, blustering, and writhing. But respite came for him at last. Judy suddenly sprang up, cried out something inarticulate, and pitched forward in a faint.

The lawyer from Dublin did not fail to use this fortunate finish to his big scene. Everything after that was anticlimax. The coroner summed up carefully, going out of his way to exonerate Paul: and the jury surprised everyone but John by bringing in a verdict of found drowned.

The news was made known instantly to the crowd outside, and the film party, as they emerged, were booed and hissed. There were even a few stones thrown, but they hit no one. Paul took off his hat, and walked with uplifted face, a martyr, forgiving them.

XLII

PAUL came into the dining-room, a sheaf of telegrams in his hand. John looked up expectantly.

Tack up, boys. Off we go. First thing to-morrow.'

John felt, a curious mingling of relief and disappointment.

'Picture washed out?'

'Not on your life.' Paul clapped him on the shoulder. 'We're going to do it in North Cornwall. Peach of a location. Isn't that dandy? Just wash out this unfortunate false start, and get down to the job properly. Say, I can hardly wait. What say, Votty?'

'It's all the same to me. I'm just the bloody cameraman, hired to go where I'm wanted.'

Paul made a playful swipe at him.

'Wait till you see some of those Cornish cliffs. You'll go right off your head. This place isn't a patch on it. And they have weather, too. Not rain and mist every five minutes. And decent hotels. And good food. And plumbing.'

John looked at him. 'It's going to knock some of these

local people pretty hard, isn't it? What about all that speculating? What about your centre for Irish pictures?'

That may well come, in time, when they've learned a bit of sense. When all this has blown over. Pm going to compensate Girvan, of course, for the loss of his summer bookings, and a bit extra. But I shan't lose any sleep over those gentry. As tough a gang of crooks as you'd want to see.'

He laughed suddenly, like a schoolboy.

'I was down at the post office, sending some wires and cables, and as I came out I saw McCubberty. I was going across to tell him how terribly sorry we all were about poor Katie's death, when all of a sudden he starts to dance and wave his stick at me, and say a lot of very mistaken things.'

What did you do?'

'I—well—I know it was wrong of me, but I couldn't help it. I just blew him a kiss, and went by.'

'Did anyone see?'

'We're quitting to-morrow, and I don't care if anyone saw or not. That gink—I guess he was the real cause of 'all the trouble here.' He shook his head. 'I've ordered a lovely tribute for poor Katie. An Irish harp, all in lilies and maidenhair fern. Seven foot by four. From us all. We'll settle the wording after dinner. Gladys will do the lettering. She's swell at it. Meet your wishes, John? Oh—one thing. We've got to take Judy along with us.'

Take *Judy*?'

'Sure. She came to me, right after the inquest, and said she couldn't stop here, or they'd kill her.'

'We don't have to worry about that,' Votty suggested.

'Votty. That's a heartless way to talk. I know she did a very wicked thing. But, being jealous as she was, there's perhaps just the smallest little bit of an excuse for her making that terrible mistake.'

'Got her on your conscience, have you? Do we take Brannigan too?'

'I guess Brannigan can look after himself.'

'Glad to hear that, anyway.'

'We'll find a use for Judy, somewhere.'

'Sure. Upsetting our pictures for us.'

'Now, Votty. A little Christian spirit, if you please.' He went out again. John followed, to ask him a question, and they all but bumped into Flanagan.

'Well, well.' Paul cried. 'Look who's here.' He shook his head. 'It's no good, buddy. You've left it too late.'

The poet eyed him haughtily. 'What do you mean?' he demanded.

'Where've you been, that you haven't heard the news?'

'What news?'

'What news'. That's good.' Paul's eyes narrowed. 'You *have* heard, and you're coming in on the heel of the hunt. Too late, Flanagan. It won't do.'

Flanagan turned to John. 'What is he raving about?'

'Bad tactics, Flanagan,' Paul went on. 'You ought to have come sooner. You've heard. Of course you heard, living at the Heggartys'. Very bad tactics.'

'I haven't an idea what you're talking about,' Flanagan said. 'But, if it's any satisfaction to you, I haven't been near the Heggartys'. I've been on Inishbrendan for the last four days. A fisherman has just brought me across.'

'Too late, Flanagan.' Paul wagged a finger at him. 'You should have signed on at once. We're off to Cornwall now, and we shan't need you.'

'Do you imagine—' Flanagan began: then his face flushed dark under its growth of beard. 'You mean to say that you're clearing out, after raising all these people's expectations, and involving them in God knows what commitments——'

'Can't help ourselves,' Paul shrugged. 'These people here don't know what's good for them. If they'd only of played ball——'

A light came into Flanagan's eye. 'The priest was too much for you,' he sneered. 'I told you he would be.'

'McCubberty?' Paul snapped his fingers. 'It wasn't McCubberty.'

John found himself furiously angry.

'No,' he said, in a tone Paul had never heard from him before. 'It wasn't.'

Paul looked at him in quick surprise.

'I haven't time to stop and explain it in words of one syllable,' he said. 'You tell him, John.' Suddenly he danced up to Flanagan on his toes, like a boxer. 'You missed the chance of a lifetime, Flanagan. All along of being snooty. If you'd signed up with me, when I offered you first, you'd have gotten six hundred pounds for doing nothing. For doing nothing at all. See what you missed. I hope it'll be a lesson to you.'

He pirouetted on his toes, and started to walk off. Flanagan stared after him, then woke to the sense of his words.

'Here!' His high voice cracked in a scream. 'Do you think I came here—do you think——'

He stopped, choking. Paul turned, laughed, blew him a kiss, and danced off down the road to the post office. With an instinctive movement, the two Irishmen drew together and stood watching him. When he had gone about a hundred yards, a small boy jumped up from behind a wall, flung a stone, and ducked down out of sight. Paul stopped, and stared around. Even at that distance, they could see his hurt, reproachful look.

Flanagan turned to John.

'What's all this about?' he said. 'Why are you going?'

With a heavy heart and a slow tongue John began to tell him.

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