

'Aunt Matilda is a crusted Tory,' laughed Anthony La Touche to Mrs. Langford, who met him with responsive laughter.

'I should think I was, my dear,' the old lady replied. 'It's the only thing for a gentlewoman to be.'

Miss La Touche had forgotten that she had been told that the new people at Ardmore—who had been there thirty years—had taken up with the new-fangled notions and called themselves Nationalists. If she had remembered it, perhaps she might have tried to steel her heart against Mrs. Langford's soft, compelling claim, so it was just as well.

In the end Miss La Touche and her nephew had stayed to dinner, their scruples about dining in their ordinary attire having been satisfied. Pamela had sat by Captain La Touche at dinner, and had almost forgotten her shyness of him. Something he had said about her mother had won her heart.

'You feel it,' she had said, lifting large, luminous eyes to his; in the intensity of her feeling and pleasure she had forgotten to be shy—'you feel it, who have only seen her this one afternoon. Can you imagine how we feel it?'

For the moment her expression had a passion which made his thoughts go to Juliet on her balcony.

Before the dinner-hour Miss La Touche had explored the house from garret to basement, peopling every corner with old memories and old ghosts. Pamela had gone silently up and down stairs with her. She had often thought about those La Touches who had lived so many years at Ardmore, so many generations, so many centuries, even for part of Ardmore was very old. As she listened to the old lady she felt that the house did not really belong to them. They were interlopers. The La Touches had set their seal on every inch of it. She had had some shadowy sense of it, hardly realised, while she had listened to the peasants' talk of the La Touches. The house had just tolerated them. They were in no real sense its owners.

'You would not be inclined to sell?' the old lady said to Mr. Langford later. 'The one thing that might induce us to come back to live in Ireland would be if you would sell. To be sure, it matters less while Anthony is in the Service; but by-and-bye he will marry and settle down. Perhaps by that time you might be tired of Ardmore.'

'I hope to live and die at Ardmore,' Mr. Langford said, in a startled way, passing his hand over his lined, intellectual forehead.

It was a thousand pities that it was the La Touches' last evening in the country, that they were not likely to meet again. Even with Miss La Touche Mrs. Langford had made strides towards friendship.

'I can think of you in Ardmore with less pain than I could have imagined,' the old lady said, with an air of great generosity. 'In fact, I could give it up to no one as I feel now I can give it up to you. It is not like strangers being in the place. Still, we should have liked to have bought it back. I should have liked Anthony's children to be born in Ardmore. It is a little hard, now that Peter La Touche has left his fortune to Anthony, that Ardmore must be yet beyond us.'

'I felt like sympathising with her over our own usurpation,' laughed Mrs. Langford afterwards.

'I paid thirty thousand for the place,' Maurice Langford said. 'As I listened to the old lady I felt as though it had been given to me as a gift.'

Seven years. A good many things may happen in seven years. To Pamela Langford it happened to lose everything, everything, in seven years—father and mother, sisters and brothers, home and fortune, were all lost to her between that day when she met with Anthony La Touche and the day she turned her back on Ardmore in its summer glory to take a governess's place in the city.

Mrs. Clifford, the wife of the hard lawyer who had managed John Langford's affairs down to the payment of the last creditor, had found the place for Pamela. The girl had accepted it in a dazed way. Now that everything was gone, what did it matter how she fared during the years of her pilgrimage till she should find her mother's arms about her again? She listened, not understanding them, to Mrs. Clifford's explanations about the place she was to undertake. The salary was small, and there were six children. But Mrs. Clifford considered it quite providential that the chance had turned up. So much was expected of governesses nowadays. Girls with University degrees were a drug in the market. It was a pity Pamela's education had not been more complete. But then, of course, no one could have anticipated that she would ever need to earn her bread. And so on, and so on.

Pamela only caught a word here and there. Her mind was too dazed by suffering to be receptive; and she was passive in Mrs. Clifford's hands.

Friends of her father and mother would have done better for the poor stricken girl if but she had given them

the opportunity. As it was, she saw no one, wrote to no one. She had lost everything. The world could show her nothing but a cold face, no matter where she turned. It was kind of Mrs. Clifford to take the trouble. If she could have any wish about herself it would be to creep away into a corner and be alone with her trouble. But since that might not be, since she had to earn her bread, it was kind of Mrs. Clifford to find her that place of six children and thirty-five pounds a year to keep her from starvation.

She was never going to see Ardmore again. 'Well, what matter for that, since all that had made Ardmore a heaven was gone? Yet the last night before her journey to Dublin, when she slept at the Cliffords' house, Ardmore, empty and desolate, cried to her like a lonely ghost. What was going to become of it?

While she waited on the platform for her train next day—at the last moment Mr. Clifford himself had decided to see her off, although he had intended to depute the duty to one of his clerks—she spoke about Ardmore.

'I wish the La Touches would take it,' she said. 'You know, they came to see us seven years ago—Captain La Touche and his aunt. Miss La Touche wanted papa to sell it to her nephew.'

'Seven years ago. A good many things have happened in seven years. It is unlikely they would want the house now. They may be dead for all we know.'

'Captain La Touche was quite young.' Why should her heart have given that sudden throb of pain at Mr. Clifford's words? What could it matter to her who lived and died, seeing the things that had happened to her? 'He was quite young,' she repeated. 'Perhaps he would take Ardmore now, if he knew.'

'It will be widely advertised. Of course, you know that nothing will come to you out of the sale—not one penny. The bank takes all. You need not trouble about the house.'

No, of course she need not trouble from his point of view, yet she troubled. That night, and many a night, the house cried to her, haunted her, called her like those new graves in Ardmore churchyard that held all her joy on earth.

Her new abode was in a tall, dark house in a city square. The houses had been great houses at one time. Now decay lay upon them as upon all the neighborhood. For the present their size and commodiousness and the little of their former glory which clung to them kept them from the doom of the tenement-house, which had overtaken many like them. They were still rented and owned by people of a moderate wealth and some social pretensions. Still the name meant something on a visiting-card as an address.

But the houses were ill-kept. While the summer months remained Pamela and her charges were kept in the country, in a lonely house among fields, with a background of hills, and the sea lying beyond a stretch of boglands. It was so lonely that servants could not be induced to stay there. People had a way of developing nerves. When Mrs. Quinlan, the children's mother, came for a few days, she declared that the loneliness affected her; that the sudden song of a blackbird or a lark rising from the long grass were enough to make her shriek. Her visits were never very long. A couple of times a day, while she stayed, she used to go out in the overgrown front lawn to listen for the shriek of an engine, to watch for the column of light smoke of the Dublin train. It was always a joy to her when she could turn her back on Cruddockstown and take the train.

To Pamela the quiet of the place, when Mrs. Quinlan was not there, was grateful enough. Her charges found nothing amiss in the space and loneliness. They were out of doors for the greater part of the day. They amused themselves with occasional squabbles. There was no danger in the wide fields, and they were dull, unadventurous children. Pamela could be with them and think her own sad thoughts almost undisturbed.

It was worse when they went back to town at the beginning of October. The dark street, the gloom of the high house, deepened the girl's depression. She went through her duties with the sense of a dead weight clogging her heart and her brain. She did her best to do them well, but it was with an aching sense of effort. The children were fond of her and tractable enough, but slow-witted. The mother complained. Miss Langford must really make an effort. She had had trouble, of course, but we had all trouble, and there was no use giving way to it. The children were making little progress. Mrs. Quinlan went on to a reminiscence of a governess she once had who had managed the children wonderfully, and had made their clothes, as well as Mrs. Quinlan's blouses.

Pamela knew she was dull and inefficient. She supposed it would not be easy, if Mrs. Quinlan were dissatisfied with her, to find anyone else willing to give her a home and thirty-five pounds a year. The prospect of being