

below presented the appearance of a burning eye set in the forehead of a monster, Quish preserved what more pretentious people would call his home; and it was here that at this moment, while the priest's pony was picking its way through the black morasses and rocky water-courses towards the light, the bailiff lay moaning in dull inarticulate agony, like a dumb animal. Bright as the light looked, as seen against the black mountain heights, it was only a miserable smoking paraffin lamp, the upper portion of whose chimney was a mass of stinking soot. The bloodshot-looking rays that issued from the unblackened glass bulb did not do much more than the uncanny flicker of a wet turf fire to throw light into the hideous corners of the cabin, where all sorts of weird things—peering fowls' eyes among the rafters, filthy-looking stone bed-recesses, horse-collars that had a strangling look, the ugly little cow's fixed staring eyeballs—loomed and winked in horrid mystery out of the all-pervading wreaths of turf-smoke. The elfin light, foraging under the deep canopy of a bedstead, apparently built upon a stone shelf, from time to time picked out another luminous pair of eyes:—if one may describe as a pair two so irreconcilably opposed orbs as those of the dwarf, which in his present agony squinted and leered more horribly than ever in a demoniac grin. Sometimes his eyes would close, and the purple weal across his cheek would disappear in a corpse-like pallor; then, with a groan as of a volcano in labor, the dead mass would stir again, the long hairy paws would be flung out in fever, the purple gash would fill again as if a great dab of blood had been dropped upon the face, and those hideous unearthly eyes would go tumbling and flashing in all directions, like ogres searching for their victims. If there was a finishing touch wanting to the horror of the scene, it was supplied by the awful creature wringing her hands by the bedside. Quish's mother was the type of an old woman who would have been burned as a witch three or four centuries ago—bony, crooked, filthy-looking, with protruding yellow tusks, hawk's eyes buried under cavernous grizzly eyebrows, naked bony arms that seemed to reach to her feet, the whole floating against an eerie mist of wild grey hairs that suggested thoughts of their being blown about by the midnight air at some Witches' Sabbath. Who Quish was, none but the old creature could tell; and an ancient sepulchre would have been more communicative. It never occurred to Quish himself that his parentage could be a matter of any greater interest than the parentage of his moorhens, seals, or salmon; it did not strike him even that he required any more than these any second descriptive name. Whether Quish was intended to be a Christian name or surname was to him as meaningless a point of controversy as that of the Procession of the Holy Ghost; he had probably sprung up as one of the fungi that sprout from the refuse of great houses; and the old woman had been so long without anything either to hope or dread from human interest, except the companionship of her misshapen child, that she had possibly lost faith in the real facts of the story herself, so buried had they become amidst the rotting memories of her sepulchral life.

So deadened had she grown to human experiences, that when, an hour ago, the door of the cabin was roughly kicked in, and she found her son's body laid across the threshold, it took her a considerable time to realise that there was anything more than a fit of drunkenness in question. This was the less surprising that there was no trace of external bleeding. Owen might have spared himself his anxiety about the dark blotches on his flannel vest. They were only the soft mud with which the body got enamelled when it fell upon the roadway. Drunkenness, however, seemed no more terrible to the old woman in her son than his ill-mated eyes or disfigured cheek. She gathered up the body with that superhuman strength which mothers have upon emergency, and trundled it into the bedstead, and listened patiently for the snore that would tell her her boy was enjoying himself after his own peculiar way (God bless him!). Instead of the comfortable snore she heard sounds in the throat that appalled her; and when, holding the smutty lamp over the bed, she saw that the red blotches on the cheek and lips had grown a ghastly grey, and that the forehead was glistening with beads of cold sweat, and when, bending down, she found that the deep growlings that came through the teeth were groans of agony, the lamp almost fell out of her hands in terror.

"Mo stoir, mo stoir! what have they done to my boy, my darling boy?" she cried, her brain suddenly taking fire with intelligence. She knew enough of the risks and penalties of his calling to be prepared for anything. Instinctively she tore open his clothes and searched for blood. The clothes were not bloody. She snatched at the shirt. Her hawk's eye pounced upon a small round hole burnt through it, the edges slightly singed. She knew now what she would find inside. Over the left lung there was a small blue discoloration that would scarcely have suggested a wound at all only for a tiny smear of blood that had escaped from the blue lips of the bullet-hole. With a wail of lamentation that seemed to pierce the mountain she threw herself on the body. "Murder!" she screamed, with the wild instinct of one who knew she was miles away from the habitations of men, but was determined that her cry should be heard as plainly as she knew thunderclaps in the Baucherlin Mountains were heard in valleys far away. All at once she found her arm clutched, and a hoarse voice liker thunder than her own mumbled:

"Howld yer whisht, woman; will you howld yer whisht?"

It was Quish who had recovered consciousness, and whose voice was now sinking back into a tortured bellowing rumble after his spring at the arm of the frantic woman. "Drink!" was all he could articulate, his parched tongue lolling out horribly, "drink!" She put a black bottle to his lips. He sucked the neck of the bottle into his throat, as if he were going to bite it off; then sank back again without further sound or movement. The old woman set up her howl anew. "Whisht, I tell you again!—whisht!" roared the dwarf, his eyes flaring wildly as if in a desperate attempt to unite in withering her.

"Whisht? an' my boy murdered before my face!—whisht! an' his corpse left on the thrashil' of his owld mother's doore!" wailed the old creature, her skinny arms and grey hairs waving as in some eerie midnight storm.

This time the wounded man darted up, and pulled her down to him in the grasp of a demon. "If you shout again I'll—I'll kill you!" he whispered, in a voice that made her blood freeze with terror. "What business is it o' yours?" Then he relaxed his grip of the poor old trembling hag, and in a lower creaking whisper, and with the most diabolical gambolling expression of deep cunning in his eyes, he muttered: "Whisper, mother! I suppose 'twas the boys done it," and lay back, as if the observation were some plaster to the red-hot wound that was boring his heart.

The old woman was silent. She bent her old stupid head with both hands, as though the intelligence so long slumbering within would only act upon the direst compulsion. She looked earnestly into his rolling eyes to read the secret that seemed to be starting out of them. At last she understood. "I won't cry 'murder!' any more!" she whispered. The trembling eyes closed with satisfaction. "Drink!" was all that the blackening lips uttered forth.

"Oh, but to die without the priest, the docthor! Wirra, wirra, an' am I to lave him here alone?" cried the old woman, and wandering from side to side of the cabin like a she-wolf in a cage, the while the wounded man groaned like one whose pain was past expressing, and the lonesome winds sang their horrible *caoine* around the cabin, and the ugly brindled cow from her own corner contributed an occasional forlorn bellow to the unearthly noises of the night. At last the mother could stand the helpless agony no longer. "I won't say 'murder!' acushla," she whispered softly over the bed, "but if I was to be kilt an' was to burn for ever for it, I'll shout, an' if there's a God in heaven he'll hear me!" And flinging open the door of the cabin, she faced the black night, and raised a yell of "Help, help!" with such superhuman force that from that height it seemed to shoot through the troubled darkness like the cry of a damned soul, and to echo from mountain to mountain.

"All right, Judy—all right!—I am coming! It is I—Father Phil!" answered the priest out of the gloom.

"Thank God, an' the Holy Virgin! My cry is heard! My boy is saved!" exclaimed the old creature, sinking on her knees at the doorstep, and bending wildly down till she seemed to kiss the muddy ground the heaven-sent visitor trod upon.

Father Phil was sufficiently familiar with bodily as well as spiritual ailments to see at a glance that the ab-