

Further Experiences of an Irish R.M.

of circumstances to remind me of it. A new hunting-cap, pressing implacably upon my forehead, an equally new red coat, heavy as a coat of mail, a glittering horn, red hot from the makers, and so far totally unresponsive to my apoplectic wooings; these things in themselves, without the addition of a poultry bill, were sufficient to bring home to me my amazing folly in having succumbed to the wiles of Mr. Florence McCarthy Knox, and accepted the charge of his hounds, during his absence with the Irish Yeomanry at the South African war.

I had yielded in a burst of patriotic emotion to the spirit of volunteering that was in the air. It would be, Flurry had assured me, a purely nominal position,

"They'll only go out one day a week, and Jerome Hickey and Michael'll do all the work. I do secretary for myself, but that'll be no trouble to you. There's nothing at all to do but to send out the cards of the meets. It'll be a comfort to me to think you were running the show."

I suggested other names that seemed to me infinitely more comfortable, but found them blocked by intricate and insuperable objections, and when I became aware that Mr. Knox had so engineered his case as to get my wife on his side it seemed simpler to give in.

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A week afterwards I saw Flurry off at the station. His last words to me were:

"Well, good-bye, Major. Be fighting my grandmother for her subscription, and whatever you do, don't give more than half-a-crown for a donkey. There's no meat on them."

Upon this touching farewell the train steamed out, and left me standing, shelterless, a reluctant and incapable Master of Hounds.

Exhaustive as Flurry's instructions had been on the subject of the cuisine and other details of kennel management, he had not even hinted at the difficulties that are usually composed by means of a fowl fund. My first experience of these had taken place but a week ago, when from the breakfast-table I had perceived a donkey and cart rambling, unattended, in the shrubberies, among the young hydrangeas and azaleas. The owner, a most respectable looking old man, explained that he had left it there because he was "diligent" to bring it up to the house, and added that he had come for compensation for "a beautiful milking goat" that the hounds had eaten last March, "and she having two kids that died after her."

I asked why he had not long since been to Mr. Knox about it, and was favoured with an interminable history of the claimant's ill-health

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during the summer, consequent on his fretting after the goat ; of how he had been anointed four times, and of how the donkey was lame this long while where a branch bet her in the thigh one day she ran into the wood from the hounds. Fearing that the donkey was about to be included in the bill, I made haste to settle for the goat and her offspring, a matter of fifteen shillings.

Next day two women took up a position on the steps at luncheon time, a course which experience has taught me indicates affairs too exalted, and too personal to be transmitted *via* the kitchen. They were, according to their own showing, ruined proprietors of poultry yards, in proof of which they pointed to a row of decapitated hens, laid forth on the grass like the bag at a fashionable shoot. I was irritably aware of their triumph in the trophy.

"Sure he didn't make off with anny of them only three, but he snapped the heads off all that was in it, and faith, if Maáther Flurry was at home; he'd give us the blood of his arm before he'd see our little hins destroyed on us this way."

I gave them thirty-two and sixpence as an alternative compensation, not, I admit, without an uneasy sense of something unusual in Peter

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Cadogan's expression, as he assiduously raked the gravel hard by.

It was Michael Leary, Flurry's Michael, who placed the matter of a fowl fund upon a basis. Catharine O'Donovan and her list of casualties had been dismissed at a cost of ten shillings, a price so inadequate, and so cheerfully accepted, as to confirm my dawning suspicions.

"Is it what would they get from Mr. Flurry?" replied Michael when I put the matter to him; "it isn't ten shillings, no, nor thirty-two shillings that they'd get from him, but a pelt of a curse after their heels! Why wouldn't they keep their hens inside in the house with themselves at night, the same as annyone that'd have sense, and not to leave them out enticing the fox this way."

Michael was in a bad temper, and so, for the matter of that, was I, quite irrespective of dealings in poultry. Our red coats, our horses, and the presence of the hounds, did not betoken the chase, they merely indicated that the Hunt was about to be photographed. The local photographer, backed by Mrs. Sinclair Yeates, had extorted from me the privilege of "a sitting," a figurative expression, involving a ride or five miles to a covert, selected by my wife as being typical of the country, accompanied by the four-

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teen and a-half couple of half-bred harriers who figured in Hound Lists as "Mr. Knox's Fox-hounds."

It was a blazing day in late August, following on forty-eight hours of blanketing sea-fog; a day for flannels and a languid game of croquet. Lady Jane, the grey mare lent to me by Flurry, had been demoralised by her summer at grass, and was in that peculiarly loathsome frame of mind that is a blend of laziness and bumptiousness. If I left her to her own devices she drowsed, stumbling, through the dust; if I corrected her, she pranced and pulled, and kicked up behind like a donkey. My huntsman, Doctor Jerome Hickey, who was to have been in the forefront of the photograph, was twenty miles off in an open boat, on his way to an island at the far end of his dispensary district, with fifteen cases of measles ahead of him. I envied him; measles or no, he had on a turned down collar. As a result of his absence I rode in solitary dignity at the head of the pack, or, to speak more correctly, I preceded Michael by some thirty yards of unoccupied road, while the pack, callous to flogging, and disdainful of my cajoleries, clave to the heels of Michael's horse.

In this order we arrived at the tryst, a heathery hill side, flanked by a dense and rambling wood.

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A sea-gull scream from the hill-side announced the presence of my wife, and summoned me to join her and the photographer at the spot where they were encamped. I put the mare at a suitable place in the wall by the roadside. She refused it, which was no more than I had expected. I sampled my new spurs on her fat sides, with the result that she charged the wall, slantways, at the exact spot where Philippa had placed her bicycle against it, missed the bicycle by a hair's-breadth, landed in the field with a thump, on all four feet, and ended with two most distressing bucks. It was a consolation to me, when I came in touch again with the saddle, to find that one of the new spurs had ploughed a long furrow in her shoulder.

The photographer was a young man from Belfast, a new comer to the neighbourhood; Philippa is also a photographer, a fact that did not tend as much as might have been expected to the harmony of the occasion.

"Mrs. Yeates has selected this hillock," said Mr. McOstrich, in tones of acrid resignation, indicating as he spoke a sugar-loaf shaped knoll, thickly matted with furze and heather. "She considers the background characteristic, my own suggestion would have been the grass-field yonder."

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It is an ancient contention of my wife that I, in common with all other men, in any dispute between a female relative and a tradesman, side with the tradesman, partly from fear, partly from masculine clannishness, and most of all from a desire to stand well with the tradesman. Nothing but the remembrance of this preposterous reproach kept me from accepting Mr. McOstrich's point of view, and, while I hesitated, Michael was already taking up his position on the hillock, perhaps in obedience to some signal from Philippa, perhaps because he had realised the excellent concealment afforded by the deep heather to his horse's fetlocks, whose outline was of a somewhat gouty type. It was part of Flurry Knox's demoniac gift for horseflesh that he should be able to buy screws and make them serve his exacting purposes. Michael's horse, Moses, had, at a distance, the appearance of standing upon four champagne bottles, but he none the less did the work of two sound horses and did it well.

I goaded Lady Jane through the furze, and established myself beside Michael on the sugar-loaf, the hounds disposed themselves in an interval of bracken below, and Mr. McOstrich directed his camera upon us from an opposite slope.

"Show your teeth, please," said Mr. McOstrich to Michael. Michael, already simmering with



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indignation at the senseless frivolity of the proceedings, glowered at his knuckles, evidently suspicious of an ill-timed pleasantry.

"Do you hear, Whip?" repeated Mr. McOstrich, raising his bleak northern voice, "show your teeth, please!"

"He only wants to focus us," said I, foreseeing trouble, and hurriedly displaying my own, new front row in a galvanic smile.

Michael murmured to Moses' withers something that sounded like a promise to hocus Mr. McOstrich when occasion should serve, and I reflected on the hardship of having to feel apologetic towards both Michael and the photographer.

Only those who have participated in "Hunt Groups" can realise the combined tediousness and tension of the moments that followed. To keep thirty hounds headed for the camera, to ensure that your horse has not closed its eyes and hung its head in a doze of boredom, to preserve for yourself that alert and workmanlike aspect that becomes a sportsman, and then, when these things have been achieved and maintained for what feels like a month, to see the tripod move in spider strides to a fresh position and know that all has to be begun over again. After several of these tentative selections of a site, the

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moment came when Mr. McOstrich swung his black velvet pall in the air and buried his head under its portentous folds. The hounds, though uneasy, had hitherto been comparatively calm, but at this manifestation their nerve broke, and they unanimously charged the glaring monster in the black hood with loud and hysterical cries.

Had not Michael perceived their intention while there was time awful things might have happened. As it was, the leaders were flogged off with ignominy, and the ruffled artist returned from the rock to which he had fled. Michael and I arranged ourselves afresh upon the hillock; I squared my shoulders, and felt my wonted photographic expression of hang-dog desperation settle down upon me.

"The dogs are not in the picture, Whip!" said Mr. McOstrich in the chill tone of outraged dignity.

I perceived that the hounds, much demoralised, had melted away from the slope in front of us, and were huddling in a wisp in the intervening hollow. Blandishments were of no avail; they wagged and beamed apologetically, but remained in the hollow. Michael, in whose sensitive bosom the term "Whip" evidently rankled, became scarlet in the face and avalanched from the hill top upon his flock with a fury that was instantly

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recognised by them. They broke in panic, and the astute and elderly Venus, followed by two of the young entry, bolted for the road. They were there met by Mr. McOstrich's carman, who most creditably headed the puppies with yells and his driving-whip, but was out-played by Venus, who, dodging like a football professional, doubled under the car horse, and fled irrevocably. Philippa, who had been flitting from rock to rock with her kodak, and unnerving me with injunctions as to the angle of my cap, here entered the lists with a packet of sandwiches, with which, in spite of the mustard, she restored a certain confidence to the agitated pack; a proceeding observed from afar with trembling indignation by Minx, her fox-terrier. By reckless expenditure of sandwich the hounds were tempted to their proper position below the horses, but, unfortunately, with their sterns to the camera, and their eyes fastened on Philippa.

"Retire, Madam!" said Mr. McOstrich, very severely, "*I will attract the dogs!*"

Thus rebuked, Madam scrambled hastily over the crest of the hillock and sank in unseeing laughter into the deep heather behind it.

"Now, very quiet, please," continued Mr. McOstrich, and then unexpectedly uttered the words: "*Pop! Pop! Pop!*" in a high soprano.

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Michael clapped his hand over his mouth, the superseded siren in the heather behind me wallowed in fresh convulsions; the hounds' remained unattracted.

Then, arose, almost at the same moment, a voice from the wood behind us, the voice of yet a third siren, more potent than that of either of her predecessors, the voice of Venus hunting a line. For the space of a breath the hounds hung on the eager hacking yelps, in the next breath they were gone.

Matters now began to move on a serious scale, and with a speed that could not have been foreseen. The wood was but fifty yards from our sugar-loaf. Before Michael had got out his horn, the hounds were over the wall, before the last stern had disappeared the leaders had broken into full cry.

"Please God it might be a rabbit!" exclaimed Michael, putting spurs to his horse and bucketing down through the furze towards the wood, with blasts of the horn that were fraught with indignation and rebuke.

An instant later, from my point of vantage on the sugar-loaf, I saw a big and very yellow fox cross an open space of heather high up on the hill above the covert. He passed and vanished; in half-a-dozen seconds Venus, plunging through

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the heather, came shrieking across the open space and also vanished. Another all too brief an interval, and the remainder of the pack had stormed through the wood and were away in the open after Venus, and Michael, who had pulled up short on the hither side of the covert wall, had started up the open hill side to catch them.

The characteristic background chosen by Philippa, however admirable in a photograph, afforded one of the most diabolic rides of my experience. Uphill, over courses of rock masked in furze bushes, round the head of a boggy lake, uphill again through deep and purple heather, over a horrid wall of long slabs half buried in it; past a ruined cabin, with thorn bushes crowding low over the only feasible place in the bank, and at last, the top of the hill, and Michael pulling up to take observations.

The best pack in the kingdom, schoolmastered by a regiment of whips, could not have precipitated themselves out of covert with more academic precision than had been shown by Flurry Knox's irregulars. They had already crossed the valley below us, and were running up a long hill as if under the conventional tablecloth; their cry, floating up to us, held all the immemorial romance of the chase.

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Michael regarded me with a wild eye; he looked as hot as I felt, which was saying good deal, and both horses were puffing.

“He’s all the ways for Temple Braney!” he said. “Sure I know him well—that’s the pug-nosed fox that’s in it these last three seasons, and it’s what I wish——”

(I regret that I cannot transcribe Michael’s wish in its own terms, but I may baldly summarise it as a desire minutely and anatomically specified that the hounds were eating Mr. McOstrich.)

Here the spurs were once more applied to Moses’ reeking sides, and we started again, battering down the twists of a rocky lane into the steaming, stuffy valley. I felt as guilty and as responsible for the whole affair as Michael intended that I should feel; I knew that he even laid to my charge the disastrous appearance of the pug-nosed Temple Braney fox. (Whether this remarkable feature was a freak of nature, or of Michael’s lurid fancy, I have never been able to ascertain.)

The valley was boggy, as well as hot, and the deep and sinuous ditch that by courtesy was supposed to drain it, was blind with rushes and tail fronds of *Osmunda Regalis* fern. Where the landing was tolerable, the take-off was a

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swamp, where the take-off was sound the landing was feasible only for a frog: we lost five panting minutes, closely attended by horse-flies, before we somehow floundered across and began the ascent of the second hill. To face tall banks, uphill, is at no time agreeable, especially when they are enveloped in a jungle of briars, bracken, and waving grass, but a merciful dispensation of cow-gaps revealed itself; it was one of the few streaks of luck in a day not conspicuous for such.

At the top of the hill we took another pull. This afforded to us a fine view of the Atlantic, also of the surrounding country and all that was therein, with, however, the single unfortunate exception of the hounds. There was nothing to be heard save the summery rattle of a reaping-machine, the strong and steady rasp of a corn-crake, and the growl of a big steamer from a band of fog that was advancing, ghostlike, along the blue floor of the sea. Two fields away a man in a straw hat was slowly combing down the flanks of a haycock with a wooden rake, while a black and white cur slept in the young after-grass beside him. We broke into their sylvan tranquillity with a heated demand whether the hounds had passed that way. Shrill clamour from the dog was at first the only reply; its

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ingly hot as the weather. I wildly thought of removing my coat and leaving it in charge of the man with neuralgia, but was restrained by the reflection that he might look upon it as a gift, flung to him in a burst of compassion, a misunderstanding that, in view of his affliction, it would be impossible to rectify.

I picked up my lathered reins and followed Michael at a gloomy trot in the direction of the galloping cattle. After a few fields a road presented itself, and was eagerly accepted by the grey mare, on whom the unbridled gluttonies of a summer's grass were beginning to tell.

"She's bet up, sir," said Michael, dragging down a rickety gate with the handle of his whip. "Folly on the road, there's a near way to the wood from the cross."

Moses here walked cautiously over the prostrate gate.

"I'm afraid you'll kill Moses," said I, by no means pleased at the prospect of being separated from my Intelligence Department.

"Is it him?" replied Michael, scanning the country ahead of him with hawk eyes. "Sure he's as hardy as a trout!"

The last I saw of the trout was his bottle fetlocks disappearing nimbly in bracken as he dropped down the far side of a bank.

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I "follied on the road" for two stifling miles. The heavy air was pent between high heaves fringed with wisps of hay from passing carts; (hay-carrying in the south-west of Ireland conforms to the leisure of the farmer rather than to the accident of season;) phalanxes of flies arose as if at the approach of royalty, and accompanied my progress at a hunting jog, which, as interpreted by Lady Jane, was an effective blend of a Turkish bath and a churn.

The "near way" from the cross-roads opened seductively with a lane leading to a farmhouse, and presently degenerated into an unfenced but plausible cart track through the fields. Breaches had been made in the banks for its accommodation, and I advanced successfully towards the long woods of Temple Braney, endeavouring, less successfully, to repel the attentions of two young horses, who galloped, squealed, and bucked round me and Lady Jane with the imbecile pleasantries of their kind. The moment when I at length slammed in their faces the gate of the wood, was one of sorely needed solace.

Then came the sudden bath of coolness and shade, and the gradual realisation that I did not in the least know what to do next. The air was full of the deeply preoccupied hum of insects, and the interminable monologue of a wood pigeon;

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I felt as if I ought to apologise for my intrusion. None the less I pursued a ride that crossed the wood, making persevering efforts to blow my horn, and producing nothing but gramaphonic whispers, fragmentary groans, and a headache. I was near the farther side of the wood when I saw fresh hoof-tracks on a path that joined the ride; they preceded me to a singularly untempting bank, with a branch hanging over it and a potato-field beyond it. A clod had been newly kicked out of the top of it; I could not evade the conviction that Michael had gone that way. The grey mare knew it too, and bundled on to and over the bank with surprising celerity, and dropped skilfully just short of where the potato beds began. An old woman, was digging at the other side of the field, and I steered for her, making a long tack down a deep furrow between the "lazy-beds."

"Did you see the hounds, ma'am?" I called out across the intervening jungle of potato stalks.

"Sir!"

She at all events was not deaf. I amended my inquiry.

"Did you see any dogs, or a man in a red coat?"

"Musha, bad cess to them, then I did!" bawled the old woman, "look at the thrack o'

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their legs down thro' me little pratie garden! 'Twasn't but a whileen ago that they com' leppin' out o' the wood to me and didn't I think twas the Divil and all his young ones, an' I thrun me-self down in the thrinch the way they wouldn't see me, the Lord save us!"

My heart warmed to her; I also would gladly have laid down among the umbrageous stalks of the potatoes, and concealed myself for ever from Michael and the hounds.

"What way did they go?" I asked, regretfully dismissing the vision, and feeling in my pocket for a shilling.

"They went wesht the road, your Honour, an' they screeching always; they crossed out the field below over-right the white pony, and faith ye couldn't hardly see Michael Leary for the shweat! God help ye asthore, yourself is getting hardship from them as well as another!"

The shilling here sank into her earthy palm, on which she prayed passionately that the saints might be surprised at my success. I felt that as far as I was concerned the surprise would be mutual; I had had nothing but misfortune since ten o'clock that morning, and there seemed no reason to believe that the tide had turned.

The pony proved to be a white mule, a spectral creature, standing in malign meditation

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trace-high in bracken ; I proceeded in its direction at a trot, through clumps of bracken and coarse grass, and as I drew near it uttered a strangled and heart-broken cry of greeting. At the same moment Lady Jane fell headlong on to her nose and the point of her right shoulder. It is almost superfluous to observe that I did the same thing. As I rolled on my face in the bracken, something like a snake uncoiled itself beneath me and became taut ; I clutched at it, believing it to be the reins, and found I was being hung up, like clothes on a line, upon the mule's tethering rope. Lady Jane had got it well round her legs, and had already fallen twice in her efforts to get up, while the mule, round whose neck the tether rope had been knotted, was backing hard, like a dog trying to pull its head through its collar.

In sunstroke heat I got out my knife, and having cut the rope in two places, an operation accomplished in the depths of a swarm of flies and midges, I pulled the mare on to her legs. She was lame on the off fore, and the rope had skinned her shins in several places ; my own shoulder and arm were bruised, and I had broken a stirrup leather. Philippa and the photographer had certainly provided me with a day of varied entertainment, and I could not be sure that I

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had even yet drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs.

I led Lady Jane out into the road, and considered the position. We were about nine miles from home, and at least five from any place where I could hire a car. To walk, and lead the mare, was an alternative that, powerless as events had proved me to be in the hands of misfortune, I still refused to consider. It was then given me to remember old McRory.

My acquaintance with old McRory was of the slightest. He was, it was understood, a retired Dublin coal merchant, with an enormous family, and a reputation for great riches. He had, within the last year or so, taken the derelict house of Temple Braney, and having by strenuous efforts attained that dubious honour, the Commission of the Peace, it had happened to me to sit on the Bench with him on one or two occasions. Of his family I knew little, save that whenever I saw an unknown young man buying cigarettes at Mr. Dannaher's in Skebawn, I was informed that it was one of the young McRorys, a medical student, and "a bit of a lad, but nothing at all to the next youngest." The Misses McRory were only occasionally viewed, whirling in large companies on glittering bicycles, and the legend respectfully ran that they had

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forty blouses apiece. Perhaps the most definite information about them was supplied by our cook, Mrs. Cadogan, who assured Philippa that Wild Pigs in America wouldn't be treated worse than what Mrs. McRory treated her servants. All these things together made an unpromising aggregate, but the fact remained that Temple Braney House was within a quarter of a mile of me, and its charity my only hope.

The lodge gates of Temple Braney were wide open, so was the door of the lodge; the weedy drive was scored with fresh wheel-tracks, as also, for the matter of that, was the grass on either side. I followed it for a short distance, in the roomy shade of splendid beech-trees, servants of the old régime, preserving their dignity through the vicissitudes of the new. Near the house was a second open gate, and on a species of arch over it I was amazingly greeted by the word "Welcomé" in white letters on a blazing strip of Turkey-red. This was an attention that I had not anticipated; did it mean a school-feast?

I made a cautious survey, but saw nobody, and nerved by the increasing lameness of Lady Jane, I went on to the house and rang the bell. There was no response; the hall-door was wide open, and from an inner hall two lanky red sette-

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puppies advanced with their tails between their legs, barking uncertainly, and acutely conscious of the fact that upon the collar of each was fastened a flaunting though much chewed bow of white satin ribbon. Full of foreboding I rang again. The bell tinkled vigorously in some fastness of the house, but nothing else happened. I decided to try the stable-yard, and, attended by the decorated puppies, set forth to find it.

It was a large quadrangle, of which one side was formed by a wing of the house; had there been a few more panes of glass in the windows and slates in the roof it might have been imposing. A cavernous coachhouse stood open, empty save for the wheelless body of an outside car that was seated on the floor, with wings outspread like a hatching hen. Every stable-door gaped wide. Odds and ends of harness lay about, but neither horse nor human being was visible. A turkey-cock, in transports of wrath, stormed to and fro in front of his household, and to some extent dispelled the sentiment of desertion and stampede that pervaded the place. I led the limping mare into a stable wherein were two loose-boxes. A sickly smell greeted me, and I perceived that in one of the boxes was a long low cage, alive with the red-currant-jelly eyes

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and pink noses of a colony of ferrets, and in the other was a pile of empty wine-boxes and several bicycles. Lady Jane snorted heavily, and I sought elsewhere for a refuge for her. I found it at length in a long stable with six empty stalls, and proceeded to tie her up in one of them.

It was while I was thus engaged that a strange succession of sounds began overhead, heavy, shapeless sounds in which were blended the suggestions of shove and thump. There was a brief interval of silence, during which Lady Jane and I listened with equal intentness; then followed a hoarse bellow, which resolved itself into the enquiry,

“Is there any one there?”

Here was the princess of the enchanted palace waking up with a vengeance. More and angrier bellows followed; I went stealthily out into the yard, and took stock of the windows above the stable. One of them was open, and it was from it that the voice issued, loudly demanding release. It roared a string of Christian names, which I supposed to be those of the McRory family, it used most unchristian language, and it finally settled down into shouts for help, and asseverations that it was smothering. I admit that my first and almost overwhelming impulse was to

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steal a bicycle and wing my way to my far-away and peaceful home, leaving Michael, the hounds, and the smothering gentleman to work out their own salvation. Unfortunately for me, the voice of conscience prevailed. There was a ladder near at hand leaning against the wall, and I put it to the window, and went up it as fast as my top boots would allow me, with a vision before me of old McRory in apoplexy as the probable reward of my labours. I thrust my head in, blocking the light in so doing; the shouting ceased abruptly, and after the glare of sunshine outside I could at first see nothing. Then was revealed to me a long and darksome room, once, probably, a loft, filled with broken chairs and varieties of primeval lumber. In the middle of the floor lay an immense feather bed, and my bewildered eyes discovered, at one end of it, a crimson face, the face, not of old McRory, but that of a young gentleman of my acquaintance, one Mr. Tomsy Flood of Curranhilty. The mysteries were deepening. I straddled the window-sash, and arrived in the room with a three-cornered tear in the shoulder of my coat, inflicted by a nail in the frame, and one spur draped with ancestral cobweb.

“Take me out of this!” howled Mr. Flood hysterically, accepting my pantomime entrance



“TAKE ME OUT OF THIS!”

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without question. "Can't you see I'm smothering in this damned thing?"

Fluff hung from his black moustache and clung to his eyebrows, his hair was full of feathers; earthquake throes convulsed the feather-bed, and the fact was suddenly revealed to me that Mr. Flood was not under it, as I had at first imagined, but in it, stitched in, up to the chin. The weaned child, or any other conventional innocent, could not have failed for an instant to recognise the handiwork of practical humorists of a high order. I asked no questions, but got out my knife once more, and beginning with due precaution somewhere near Mr. Flood's jugular vein, proceeded to slit open the end of the "tick." The stitches were long and strong, and as each one yielded, the feathers burst forth in stifling puffs, and Tomsy Flood's allusions to the young McRorys were mercifully merged in sputtering. I did not laugh, not at least till I found that I had to drag him out like a mummy, accompanied by half the contents of the bed, and perceived that he was in full evening clothes, and that he was incapable of helping himself because the legs of his trousers were sewn together and his coat-sleeves sewn to his sides; even then, I only gave way in painful secrecy behind the mighty calves of his legs as I cut the stitches out. Tomsy Flood walked

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about fifteen stone and was not in a mood to be trifled with, still less to see the humour of the position. The medical students had done their work with a surgical finish, and by the time that I had restored to Tomsy the use of his legs and arms, the feathers had permeated to every recess of my being, and I was sneezing as if I had hay fever.

Having at length, and with considerable difficulty, got Mr. Flood on to his legs, I ventured, with the tact demanded by the situation, a question as to whether he had been dining at Temple Braney.

"Dining?" queried Mr. Flood, with an obvious effort of memory. "Yes, I was, to be sure! Amn't I staying in the house?" Then, with an equally obvious shock of recollection, "Sure I'm Best Man at the wedding to-day!"

The scattered elements of the situation began to fall symmetrically into line, from the open gates to the white bows on the puppies' collars. My chief concern, however, bearing in mind Tomsy Flood's recent potations and provocations, was to let him down as easily as possible, and, reserving my conclusions to myself, to escape, swiftly and silently, while yet there was time. There was always that stall-full of bicycles; I could borrow clothes from Tomsy, and leave this

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accursed tom-foolery of hunting kit to be fetched with the mare, I could write a beautifully explanatory note when I got home——

“Hadn’t you better get out of your evening things as quickly as you can?” I suggested.

Mr. Flood regarded me with heavy and blood-shot eyes of imperfect intelligence.

“Oh! I’ve time enough. Ye wouldn’t get a pick of breakfast here before ten o’clock in the day. Now that I come to look into you,” he continued, “you’re as big a show as myself! Is it for the wedding that you have the red coat on you?”

I do not now remember with what lies I composed Tomsy Flood, but I got him out of the room at last by a door into a passage of seemingly interminable length; he took my arm, he treated me as his only friend, he expressed his full confidence that I would see fair play when he got a hold of Stanley McRory. He also gave it as his private opinion that his cousin, Harry Flood, was making a hare of himself marrying that impudent little Pinkie McRory, that was as vulgar as a bag of straddles, in spite of the money. Indeed, the whole family had too many airs about them for his fancy. “They take the English *Times*, if you please, and they all dress for dinner—every night I tell ye! I call that rot, y’know!”

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We were all this time traversing the house by labyrinthine passages, flights of stairs, and strange empty lobbies; we progressed conversationally and with maddening slowness, followed by a fleecy train of feathers that floated from us as we went. And all the time I was trying to remember how long it took to get married. In my own case it seemed as if I had been in the church for two hours at least.

A swing-door suddenly admitted us to the hall, and Tomsy stood still to collect his faculties.

"My room's up there," he began, pointing vaguely up the staircase.

At this identical moment there was a loud and composite crash from behind a closed door on our right, followed by minor crashes, and noises as of chairs falling about.

"That's the boys!" said Tomsy, a sudden spark kindling in his eye; "they're breakfasting early, I suppose."

He dropped my arm unexpectedly, and flung the door open with a yell.

The first object that met my eyes was the original sinner, Venus, mounted on a long and highly-adorned luncheon table, cranching and gulping cold chicken as fast as she could get it down; on the floor half-a-dozen of her brethren tore at a round of beef amid the débris of crockery

The Pug-nosed Fox

and glass that had been involved in its overthrow. A cataract of cream was pouring down the table-cloth, and making a lake on the carpet for the benefit of some others; and President, the patriarch of the pack, was apparently seated on the wedding-cake, while he demolished a cold salmon. I had left my whip in the stable, but even had this paralysing sight left me the force to use it, its services would not have been needed. The leaders of the revel leaped from the table, mowing down colonies of wine-glasses in the act, and fled through the open window, followed by the rest of the party, with a precipitancy that showed their full consciousness of sin—the last scramblers over the sill yelping in agonised foretaste of the thong that they believed was overtaking them.

At such a moment of catastrophe the craving for human sympathy is paramount.

I turned even to the fuddled and feathered Tomsy Flood as to a man and a brother, and was confronted in the doorway by the Bride and Bridegroom.

Behind them, the hall was filling, with the swiftness of an evil dream, with glowing faces and wedding bonnets; there was a turmoil of wheels and hoofs at the door, and through it all, like "horns of Elfland faintly blowing,"

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Michael's blasts of summons to his pirates. Finally, the towering mauve bonnet and equally towering wrath of Mrs. McRory, as she advanced upon me and Tomsy Flood. I thought of the Wild Pigs in America, and wished I were with them.

Lest I should find myself the object of a sympathy more acute than I deserve, it may be well to transcribe portion of a paragraph from the *Curranhilly Herald* of the following week:—

“ . . . After the ceremony a reception was held at Temple Braney House, where a sumptuous collation had been provided by the hospitable Mr. and Mrs. McRory. The health of the Happy Pair having been drunk, that of the Bridesmaids was proposed, and Mr. T. Flood, who had been prevented by a slight indisposition from filling the office of Best Man, was happily sufficiently recovered to return thanks for them in his usual sprightly vein. Major Sinclair Yeates, R.M., M.F.H., who, in honour of the festive occasion had donned sporting attire, proposed the health of the Bride's Mother in felicitous terms. . . .”