IV

"THE MAN THAT CAME TO BUY APPLES"

It had been freezing hard all the way home, and the Quaker skated perilously once or twice on the northerly stretches. As I passed the forge near my gate I issued an order for frost-nails, and while I did so the stars were kindling like diamonds over the black ridge of Shreelane Hill.

The overture to the Frost Symphony had begun, with its usual beauties and difficulties, and its leading theme was given forth in a missive from Flurry Knox, that awaited me on the hall table. Flurry's handwriting was an unattractive blend of the laundress's bill, and the rambling zigzags of the temperature chart, but he exhibited no more of it than was strictly necessary in getting to the point. Would I shoot at Aussolas the following day? There were a lot of cock in, and he had whipped up four guns in a hurry. There was a postscript, "Bernard Shute is coming. Tell Mrs. Yeates he didn't kill any one yet this season."

Since his marriage Flurry had been promoted

to the position of agent to his grandmother, old Mrs. Knox of Aussolas, and through the unfathomable mazes of their dealings and fights with each other, the fact remained that he had secured to himself the Aussolas shooting at about half its market value. So Mrs. Knox said. Her grandson, on the other hand, had often informed me that the privilege "had him beggared, what with beaters and all sorts, and his grandmother's cattle turned into the woods destroying all the covert—let alone her poaching." Into the differences of such skilled combatants the prudent did not intrude themselves, but they accepted without loss of time such invitations to shoot at Aussolas as came their way. Notwithstanding the buccaneerings of Flurry's grandmother, the woods of Aussolas, in decent weather, were usually good for fifteen to twenty couple of cock.

I sent my acceptance before mentioning to Philippa that Bernard Shute was to be of the party. It was impossible to make Philippa understand that those who shot Bernard's pheasants at Clountiss, could hardly do less than retaliate when occasion served. I had once, in a moment of regrettable expansion, entertained my wife with an account of how an entire shooting party had successively cast themselves upon

their faces, while the muzzle of Bernard's gun had followed, half way round the compass, a rabbit that had broken back. No damage had ensued, not even to the rabbit, but I had supplied Philippa with a fact that was an unfortunate combination of a thorn in her pillow and a stone in her sling.

The frost held; it did more than hold, it gripped. As I drove to Aussolas the fields lay rigid in the constraining cold; the trees were as dead as the telegraph poles, and the whistle of the train came thin and ghostly across four miles of silent country. Everything was half alive, with the single exception of the pony, which, filled with the idiotic exaltation that frost imparts to its race, danced upon its frost-nails, shied with untiring inventiveness, and made three several and well-conceived attempts to bolt. Maria, with her nose upon my gaiter, shuddered uninterruptedly throughout the drive, partly because of the pinching air, partly in honour of the sovereign presence of the gun-case.

Old Mrs. Knox was standing on the steps as I walked round to the hall door of Aussolas Castle. She held a silver bowl in her hand; on her head, presumably as a protection against the cold, was a table-napkin; round her feet a throng of hens and pigeons squabbled for the bits that she flung,

to them from the bowl, and a furtive and distrustful peacock darted a blue neck in among them from the outskirts.

"'Good-morrow, old Sir Thomas Erpingham,'" was Mrs. Knox's singular greeting, "'a good soft pillow for that good grey head were better than a churlish turf of France'!"

My friendship with Mrs. Knox was now of several years' standing, and I knew enough of her to gather that I stood rebuked for being late.

"Flurry arrived only half-an-hour ago! my first intimation of a shooting party," she continued, in the dictatorial voice that was always a shock when taken in connection with her beggar woman's costume, "a nice time of day to begin to look for beaters! And the other feather-bed sportsmen haven't arrived yet. In old times they would have had ten couple by this time, and then Mr. Flurry complains of the shooting!"

She was here interrupted by the twitching of the table-napkin from her head by her body-woman, who had advanced upon her from the rear, with the reigning member of the dynasty of purple velvet bonnets in her hand. The bonnet was substituted for the table-napkin, much as a stage property is shoved on from the wings, and two bony hands, advancing from behind, tied the

strings under Mrs. Knox's chin, while she uninterruptedly fed the hens, and denounced the effeteness of modern cock-shooters. The hands descended and fixed a large pin in the uppermost of her mistress' shawls.

"Mullins, have done!" exclaimed Mrs. Knox, suddenly tearing herself from her captor, "you're an intolerable nuisance!"

"Oh, very well, ma'am, maybe you'd sooner go out with your head naked and soak the cold!" returned Mullins, retiring with the honours of war and the table-napkin.

"Mullins and I get on famously," observed Mrs. Knox, crushing an empty egg-shell with her yellow diamonded fingers and returning it to its original donors, "we're both mad, you know!"

Comment on this might have been difficult, but I was preserved from it by the approach across the frozen gravel of a short, red-bearded man, Mrs. Knox's gardener, wood-ranger, and ruling counsellor, John Kane. He held in his hands two large apples of arsenical hue, and, taking off his hat to me with much dignity, addressed himself to the lady of the house.

"He says he'd sooner walk barefoot to Cork than to give three and fippence for the likes of them!"

"I'm sure I've no objection if he does," responded Mrs. Knox, turning the silver bowl upside down over the scrimmaging hens and pigeons, "I daresay it would be no novelty to him."

"And isn't that what I told him!" said John Kane, his voice at once ascending to the concert pitch of altercation, "I said to him if the Lord Left'nant and the Pope was follying me around the yard of Aussolas offering three and a penny for them apples they'd not get them! Sure the nuns gave us that much for windfalls that was only fit to be making cherubs with!"

I might have been struck by the fitness, as well as the ingenuity, of this industry, but in some remote byway of my brain the remembrance woke of a "black-currant cherub" prescribed by Mrs. Cadogan for sore throats, and divined by Philippa to be a syrup. I turned away and lit a cigarette in order to conceal my feelings from John Kane, round whose red beard the smoke of battle hung almost palpably.

"What's between you?" asked his mistress sharply.

"Three and a penny he's offering, ma'am!" declaimed her deputy, "for sheeps' noses that there isn't one in the country has but yourself!

"AND NOT A BROWN FARTHING MORE WOULD HE GIVE"

And not a brown farthing more would he give!
—the consecrated blagyard!"

Anything less like a sheep's nose than Mrs. Knox's hooked beak, as she received this information, could hardly be imagined.

"You're half a fool, John Kane!" she snapped, "and the other half's not sensible! Go back and tell him Major Yeates is here and wants to buy every apple I have!" She dealt me a wink that was the next thing to a dig in the ribs. As she spoke a cart drawn by a cheerful-looking grey pony, and conducted by a tall, thin man, came into view from the direction of the yard. It rattled emptily, and proclaimed, as was intended, the rupture of all business relations.

"See here, sir," said John Kane to me in one hoarse breath, "when he's over-right the door I'll ask him the three and fippence again, and when he refuses, your Honour will say we should split the difference——"

The cart advanced, it passed the hall door with a dignity but little impaired by the pony's apprehensive interest in the peacock, and the tall man took off his hat to Mrs. Knox with as gloomy a respect as if she had been a funeral.

John Kane permitted to the salutation the full time due to it, in the manner of one who

counts a semibreve rest, while the cart moved implacably onwards. The exact, the psychic instant arrived.

"HONOMAUNDHIAOUL! SULLIVAN!" he shouted, with a full-blown burst of ferocity, hurtling down the steps in pursuit, "will ye take them or lave them?"

To manifest, no doubt, her complete indifference to the issue, Mrs. Knox turned and went into the house, followed by the majority of the hens, and left me to await my cue. The play was played out with infinite credit to both artists, and at the full stretch of their lungs; at the preordained moment I intervened with the conventional impromptu, and suggested that the difference should be split. The curtain immediately fell, and somewhere in the deep of the hall a glimpse of the purple bonnet told me that Mrs. Knox was in the auditorium.

When I rejoined her I found Flurry with her, and something in the atmosphere told that here also was storm.

"Well, take them! Take them all!" Mrs. Knox was saying in high indignation. "Take Mullins and the maids if you like! I daresay they might be more use than the men!"

"They'll make more row, anyhow," said Flurry sourly. "I wonder is it them that put

down all the rabbit-traps I'm after seeing in the coach-house this minute!"

"It may be *they*, but it certainly is not *them*," retorted Mrs. Knox, hitting flagrantly below the belt; "and if you want beaters found for you, you should give me more than five minutes' warning——" She turned with the last word, and moved towards the staircase.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said John Kane, very respectfully, from the hall door, "that Sullivan brought this down for your Honour."

He placed on the table a bottle imperfectly wrapped in newspaper.

"Tell Sullivan," said Flurry, without an instant's hesitation, "that he makes the worst potheen in the country, and I'll prosecute him for bringing it here, unless he comes out to beat with the rest of you."

Remembering my official position, I discreetly examined the barrels of my gun.

"You'll give him no such message!" screamed Mrs. Knox over the dark rail of the staircase. "Let him take himself and his apples off out of this!" Then, in the same breath, and almost the same key, "Major Yeates, which do you prefer, curry, or Irish stew?"

The *cuisine* at Aussolas was always fraught

with dark possibilities, being alternately presided over by bibulous veterans from Dublin, or aboriginal kitchenmaids off the estate. Feeling as Fair Rosamond might have felt when proffered the dagger or the bowl, I selected curry.

"Then curry it shall be," said Mrs. Knox, with a sudden and awful affability. In this gleam of stormy sunshine I thought it well to withdraw.

"Did you ever eat my grandmother's curry?" said Flurry to me, later, as we watched Bernard Shute trying to back his motor into the coach-house.

I said I thought not.

"Well, you'd take a splint off a horse with it," said Mrs. Knox's grandson.

The Aussolas woods were full of birds that day. Birds bursting out of holly bushes like corks out of soda-water bottles, skimming low under the branches of fir trees, bolting across rides at a thousand miles an hour, swinging away through prohibitive tree tops, but to me had befallen the inscrutable and invincible accident of being "off my day," and, by an equal unkindness, Fate had allotted to me the station next Flurry. Every kind of bird came my way except the easy ones, and, as a general thing, when I had

done no more than add a little pace to their flight, they went down to Flurry, who never in my experience had been off his day, and they seldom went farther afield. The beaters, sportsmen every man of them, had a royal time. They flailed the bushes and whacked the tree trunks; the discordant chorus of "Hi cock! Hi cock! Cock! Cock! Prrrr!" rioted through the peaceful woods, and every other minute a yell of "Mark!" broke like a squib through the din. The clamour, the banging of the guns, and the expectancy, kept the nerves tingling; the sky between the grey branches was as blue as Italy's; despite fingers as icy as the gun-barrels, despite the speechless reproach of Maria, slinking at my heels in unemployed dejection, I enjoyed every breath of the frosty day. After all, hit or miss, a good day with the cock comes very near a good day with the hounds, without taking into consideration the comfortable fact that in the former the risk is all on the side of the birds.

Little Bosanquet, the captain of coastguards, on my left, was doing remarkably well, so apparently, was Murray the D.I. of Police; how Bernard Shute was faring I knew not, but he was certainly burning a lot of powder. At the end of the third beat I found myself beside Murray. His face was redder than usual, even his freckles

conveyed an impression of impartially sprinkled cayenne pepper.

"Did you see Shute just now?" he demanded in a ferocious whisper. "A bird got up between us, and he blazed straight at me! Straight bang in my face, I tell you! Only that I was in a dead line with the bird he'd have got me!"

"I suppose that was about the safest place," I said. "What did you do?"

"I simply told him that if ever he puts a grain into me I shall let him have it back, both barrels."

"Every one says that to Bernard sooner or later," said I, pacifically; "he'll settle down after lunch."

"We'll all settle down into our graves," grumbled Murray; "that'll be the end of it."

After this it was scarcely composing to a husband and father to find Mr. Shute occupying the position on my right hand as we embarked upon the last beat of the Middle Wood. He was still distinctly unsettled, and most distressingly on the alert. Nothing escaped his vigilance, the impossible wood pigeon, clattering out of the wrong side of a fir tree, received its brace of cartridges as instantly as the palpable rabbit, fleeing down the ride before him, and with an equal immunity. Between my desire to keep the thickest tree trunks between me and him, and the companion

desire that he should be thoroughly aware of my whereabouts, my shooting, during that beat, went still more to pieces; a puff of feathers, wandering softly down through the radiant air, was the sum total of my achievements.

The end of the beat brought us to the end of the wood, and out upon an open space of sedgy grass and bog that stretched away on the right to the shore of Aussolas Lake; opposite to us, a couple of hundred yards away, was another and smaller wood, clothing one side of a high promontory near the head of the lake. Flurry and I were first out of the covert.

"We'll have time to run through the Rhododendron Wood before lunch," he said, looking at his watch. "Here! John Kane!" He put two fingers in his mouth and projected a whistle that cleft my head like a scimitar.

John Kane emerged, nymph-like, from a laurel bush in our immediate vicinity.

"'Tis only lost time to be beating them rosydandhrums, Master Flurry," he said volubly, "there wasn't a bird in that bit o' wood this winter. Not a week passes but I'm in it, making up the bounds fence against the cattle, and I never seen a one!"

"You might be more apt to be looking out for a rabbit than a cock, John," said Flurry expres-

sionlessly, " but isn't it down in the lower paddocks you have the cattle and the young horses this hard weather?"

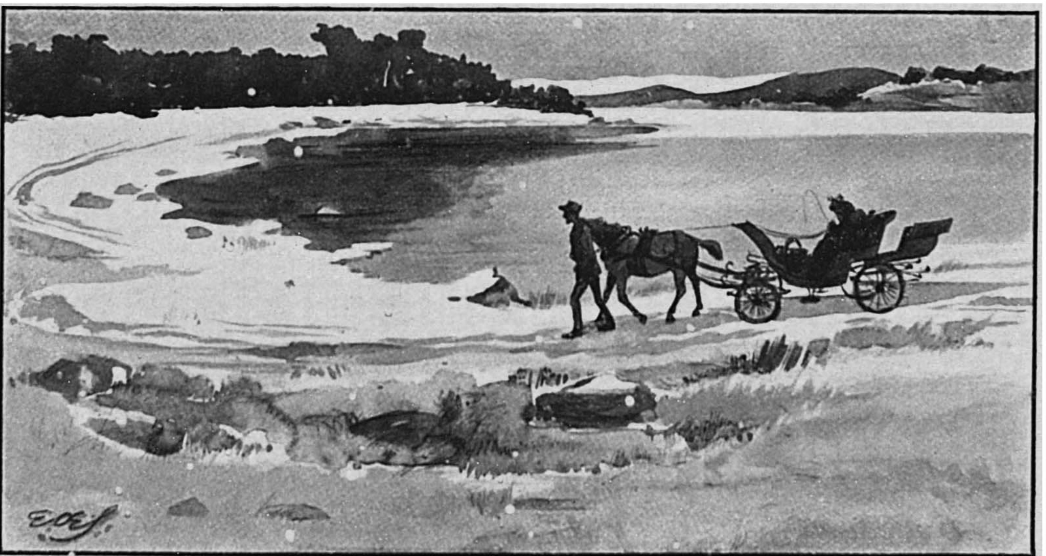
"Oh it is, sir, it is, of course, but indeed it's hard for me to know where they are, with the Misthress telling this one and that one to put them in their choice place. Sure she dhrives me to and fro in my mind till I do have a headache from her!"

A dull rumble came to us across the marsh, and, as if Mrs. Knox had been summoned by her henchman's accusation, there laboured into view on the road that skirted the marsh a long and dilapidated equipage, silhouetted, with its solitary occupant, against the dull shine of the frozen lake.

"Tally-ho! Here comes the curry for you, Major! You'll have to eat it I tell you!" He paused, "I'm dashed if she hasn't got Sullivan's pony! Well, she'd steal the horns off a cow!"

It was indeed the grey pony that paced demurely in the shafts of Mrs. Knox's phaeton, and at its head marched Sullivan; fragments of loud and apparently agreeable conversation reached us, as the procession moved onwards to the usual luncheon tryst at the head of the lake.

"Come now, John Kane," said Flurry, eyeing the cortège, "you're half your day sitting in front



"I'M DASHED IF SHE HASN'T GOT SULLIVAN'S PONY"

of the kitchen fire. How many of my rabbits went into that curry?"

"Rabbits, Master Flurry?" echoed John Kane almost pityingly, "there's no call for them trash in Aussolas kitchen! And if we wanted them itself, we'd not get them. I declare to me conscience there's not a rabbit in Aussolas demesne this minute, with the way your Honour has them ferreted—let alone the foxes!——"

"I suppose it's scarcely worth your while to put the traps down," said Flurry benignly; "that's why they were in the coach-house this morning."

There was an undissembled titter from a group of beaters in the background; Flurry tucked his gun under his arm and walked on.

"It'd be no more than a charity if ye'd eat the lunch now, sir," urged John Kane at his elbow, in fluent remonstrance, "and leave Sullivan go home. Sure it'll be black night on him before the Misthress will be done with him. And as for that wood, it's hardly we can go through it with the threes that's down since the night of the Big Wind, and briars, and all sorts. Sure the last time I was through it me pants was in shreds, and I was that tired when I got home I couldn't stoop to pick a herrin' off a tongs, and as for the floods and the holes in the western end—" John Kane drew a full breath, and with a trawling

glance gathered Bernard and me into his audience. "I declare to ye, gintlemen, me boots when I took them off was more than boots! They re-simbled the mouth of a hake!"

"Ah, shut your own mouth," said Flurry.

The big rhododendron was one of the glories of Aussolas. Its original progenitor had been planted by Flurry's great-grandmother, and now, after a century of unchecked license, it and its descendants ran riot among the pine stems on the hillside above the lake, and, in June, clothed a precipitous half acre with infinite varieties of pale mysterious mauve. The farm road by which Mrs. Knox had traversed the marsh, here followed obediently the spurs of the wood and creeks of the shore, in their alternate give and take. From the exalted station that had been given me on the brow of the hill, I looked down on it between the trunks of the pine trees, and saw, instead of mysterious mauve blossoms, the defiant purple of Mrs. Knox's bonnet, glowing, motionless, in a sheltered and sunny angle of the road just where it met the wood. She was drawn up in her phaeton with her back to a tumble-down erection of stones and branches, that was supposed to bar the way into the wood, beside her was the great flat boulder that had for generations been the table for shooting lunches. How, in any area of

HE CROWNED THE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE BOTTLE OF POTHEEN

less than a quarter of a mile, Sullivan had contrived to turn the phaeton, was known only to himself, but he had accomplished it, and was now adding to the varied and unforeseen occupations of his day the task of unpacking the luncheon basket. As I waited for the whistle that was the signal for the beat to begin, I viewed the proceedings up to the point where Sullivan, now warming artistically to his work, crowned the arrangement with the bottle of potheen.

It was at that moment that I espied John Kane break from a rhododendron bush beside the phaeton, with a sack over his shoulder. This, as far as I could see through the branches, he placed upon Mrs. Knox's lap, the invaluable Sullivan hurrying to his aid. The next instant I saw Murray arrive and take up his allotted station upon the road; John Kane retired into the evergreen thicket as abruptly as he had emerged from it, Flurry's whistle sounded, and the yells of "Hi cock" began again.

We moved forward very slowly, in order to keep station with Murray, who had to follow on the road the outer curve of the wood, while we struck straight across it. It was a wood of old and starveling trees, strangled by ivy, broken by combat with each other in the storms that rushed upon them up the lake; it was two years since I

had last been through it, and I remembered well the jungle of ferns and the undergrowth of briars that had shredded the pants of John Kane, and had held in their thorny depths what Flurry had described as "a dose of cock." To-day the wood seemed strangely bare, and remarkably out of keeping with John Kane's impassioned indictment; the ferns, even the bracken, had almost disappeared, the briar brakes were broken down, and laced with black paths, and in the frozen paste of dead leaves and peat mould the hoof-marks of cattle and horses bore witness against them, like the thumb-prints of a criminal. In the first ten minutes not a gun had been let off; I anticipated pleasantly, if inadequately, the remarks that Flurry would address to John Kane at the conclusion of the beat. To foreshadow John Kane's reply to Flurry was a matter less simple. Bernard Shute was again the next gun on my left, and kept, as was his wont, something ahead of his due place in the line; of this I did not complain, it made it all the easier to keep my eye on him. The idle cartridges in his gun were obviously intolerable to him; as he crossed a little glade he discharged both barrels into the firmament, where far above, in tense flight and steady as a constellation, moved a wedge of wild geese. The wedge continued its course unshaken, but,

as if lifted by the bang, the first woodcock of the beat got up in front of me, and swung away into the rhododendrons. "Mark!" I shouted, loosing an ineffectual cartridge after him. Mr. Shute was equal to the occasion, and let fly his usual postman's knock with both barrels. In instant response there arose from behind the rhododendrons the bray of a donkey, fraught with outrage and terror, followed by crashing of branches and the thunderous galloping of many hoofs, and I had a glimpse of a flying party of cattle and horses, bursting from the rhododendron bushes and charging down a grassy slope in the direction of the road. Every tail was in the air, the cattle bellowed, and the donkey, heading the flight, did not cease to proclaim his injuries.

"How many of them have you hit?" I shouted.

"I believe I got 'em all, bar the cock!" returned Mr. Shute, with ecstasy scarcely tempered by horror.

I hastened to the brow of the hill, and thence beheld Mrs. Knox's live stock precipitate themselves on to the road, and turn as one man in the direction of home. With a promptitude for which I have never been given sufficient credit, I shoved my gun into the branches of a tree and ran back through the wood at my best pace. In that

glimpse of the rout I had recognised the streaming chestnut mane and white legs of the venerable Trinket, the most indomitable old rogue that had ever reared up generations of foals in the way they should not go, and I knew by repute that once she was set going it would take more to stop her than the half-demolished barricade at the entrance to the wood.

As I ran I seemed to see Trinket and her disciples hurling themselves upon Mrs. Knox's phaeton and Sullivan's pony, with what results no man could tell. They had, however, first to circumnavigate the promontory; my chance was by crossing it at the neck to get to the phaeton before them. The going was bad, and the time was short; I went for all I was worth, and Maria, mystified, but burning with zeal, preceded me with kangaroo leaps and loud and hysterical barks. A mossy wall ringed the verge of the hill; I followed Maria over it, and the wall, or a good part of it, followed me down the hill. I plunged onward amid the coiling stems and branches of the big rhododendrons, an illuminative flash of the purple bonnet giving me my bearings. A sort of track revealed itself, doubling and dodging and dropping down rocky slides, as if in flight before me. It was near the foot of the hill that a dead branch extended a claw, and with human malignity

plucked the eye-glass from my eye and snapped the cord: the eye-glass, entering into the spirit of the thing, aimed for the nearest stone and hit it. It is the commonest of disasters for the short-sighted, yet custom cannot stale it; I made the usual comment, with the usual fervour and futility, and continued to blunder forward in all the discomfort of half-sight. The trumpeting of the donkey heralded the oncoming of the stampede; I broke my way through the last of the rhododendrons and tumbled out on to the road twenty yards ahead of the phaeton.

Sullivan's pony was on its hind legs, and Sullivan was hanging on to its head. Mrs. Knox was sitting erect in the phaeton with the reins in her hand.

"Get out, ma'am! Get out!" Sullivan was howling, as I scrambled to my feet.

"Don't be a fool!" replied Mrs. Knox, without moving.

The stampede was by this time confronted by the barrier. There was not, however, a moment of hesitation; Trinket came rocketing out over it as if her years were four, instead of four-and-twenty; she landed with her white nose nearly in the back seat of the phaeton, got past with a swerve and a slip up, and went away for her stable with her tail over her back, followed with stag-

like agility by her last foal, her last foal but one, and the donkey, with the young cattle hard on their flying heels. Bernard, it was very evident, had peppered them impartially all round. Sullivan's pony was alternately ramping heraldically, and wriggling like an eel in the clutches of Sullivan, and I found myself snatching blindly at whatever came to my hand of his headstall. What I caught was a mingled handful of forelock and browband; the pony twitched back his head with the cunning that is innate in ponies, and the headstall, which was a good two sizes too large, slid over its ears as though they had been buttered, and remained, bit and all, in my hand. There was a moment of struggle, in which Sullivan made a creditable effort to get the pony's head into chancery under his arm; foreseeing the issue, I made for the old lady, with the intention of dragging her from the carriage. She was at the side furthest from me, and I got one foot into the phaeton and grasped at her.

At that precise moment the pony broke away, with a jerk that pitched me on to my knees on the mat at her feet. Simultaneously I was aware of Sullivan, at the opposite side, catching Mrs. Knox to his bosom as the phaeton whirled past him, while I, as sole occupant, wallowed prone upon a heap of rugs. That ancient vehicle banged in

and out of the ruts with an agility that ill befitted its years, while, with extreme caution, and the aid of the side rail, I gained the seat vacated by Mrs. Knox, and holding on there as best I could, was aware that I was being seriously run away with by the apple-man's pony, on whom my own disastrous hand had bestowed his freedom.

The flying gang in front, enlivened no doubt by the noise in their rear, maintained a stimulating lead. We were now clear of the wood, and the frozen ditches of the causeway awaited me on either side in steely parallel lines; out in the open the frost had turned the ruts to iron, and it was here that the phaeton, entering into the spirit of the thing, began to throw out ballast. The cushions of the front seat were the first to go, followed, with a bomb-like crash, by a stone hot-water jar, that had lurked in the deeps of the rugs. It was in negotiating a stiffish outcrop of rock in the track that the back seat broke loose and fell to earth with a hollow thump; with a corresponding thump I returned to my seat from a considerable altitude, and found that in the interval the cushion had removed itself from beneath me, and followed its fellows overboard. Near the end of the causeway we were into Trinket's rear-guard, one of whom, a bouncing young heifer, slammed a kick into the pony's ribs as he drew

level with her, partly as a witticism, partly as a token of contempt. With that the end came. The pony wrenched to the left, the off front wheel jammed in a rut, came off, and the phaeton rose like a live thing beneath me and bucked me out on to the road.

A succession of crashes told that the pony was making short work of the dash-board; for my part, I lay something stunned, and with a twisted ankle, on the crisp whitened grass of the causeway, and wondered dully why I was surrounded by dead rabbits.

By the time I had pulled myself together Sullivan's pony was continuing his career, accompanied by a fair proportion of the phaeton, and on the road lay an inexplicable sack, with a rabbit, like Benjamin's cup, in its mouth.

Not less inexplicable was the appearance of Minx, my wife's fox-terrier, whom I had last seen in an arm-chair by the drawing-room fire at Shreelane, and now, in the rôle of the faithful St. Bernard, was licking my face lavishly and disgustingly. Her attentions had the traditional reviving effect. I sat up and dashed her from me, and in so doing beheld my wife in the act of taking refuge in the frozen ditch, as the cavalcade swept past, the phaeton and pony bringing up the rear like artillery.

"What has happened? Are you hurt?" she panted, speeding to me.

"I am; very much hurt," I said, with what was, I think, justifiable ill-temper, as I got gingerly on to my feet, almost annoyed to find that my leg was not broken.

"But, dearest Sinclair, *has* he shot you? I got so frightened about you that I bicycled over to— Ugh! Good gracious!"—as she trod on and into a mound of rabbits—"what are you doing with all these horrible things?"

I looked back in the direction from which I had come, and saw Mrs. Knox advancing along the causeway arm-in-arm with the now inevitable Sullivan (who, it may not be out of place to remind the reader, had come to Aussolas early in the morning, with the pure and single intention of buying apples). In Mrs. Knox's disengaged arm was something that I discerned to be the bottle of potheen, and I instantly resolved to minimise the extent of my injuries. Flurry, and various items of the shooting party, were converging upon us from the wood by as many and various short cuts. "I don't quite know what I am doing with the rabbits," I replied, "but I rather think I'm giving them away."

As I spoke something darted past Mrs. Knox, something that looked like a bundle of rags in

a cyclone, but was, as a matter of fact, my faithful water-spaniel, Maria. She came on in zig-zag bounds, in short maniac rushes. Twice she flung herself by the roadside and rolled, driving her snout into the ground like the coulter of a plough. Her eyes were starting from her head, her tail was tucked between her legs. She bit, and tore frantically with her claws at the solid ice of a puddle.

"She's mad! She's gone mad!" exclaimed Philippa, snatching up as a weapon something that looked like a frying-pan, but was, I believe, the step of the phaeton.

Maria was by this time near enough for me to discern a canary-coloured substance masking her muzzle.

"Yes, she's quite mad," I replied, possessed by a spirit of divination. "She's been eating the rabbit curry."