

Dowling Richard

Tempest-Driven: A Romance (Vol. 2 of 3)



Richard Dowling

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Romance (Vol. 2 of 3)**

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CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER TEN YEARS

Jerry O'Brien's words had been no sooner uttered than he saw how foolishly injudicious they were. In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten what ought to have been uppermost in his thoughts—the condition of his friend.

He rang the bell. In a few seconds Madge entered the room. He briefly explained what had occurred, and then set off to summon Dr. Santley.

The doctor looked grave, and hurried back to Carlingford House. Here he stayed an hour, and left with gloomy looks and words. A relapse was possible, and a great delay to convalescence certain. There was danger, serious danger of the patient's life.

Jerry O'Brien was in despair. He had the greatest affection for Alfred, and he was in love with Alfred's sister. Yes, he might as well confess the matter boldly to himself; plain-looking, gentle, cheerful Madge was worth more to him than all the rest of the girls in the world put together. And here his impetuous rashness had brought her brother to death's door. Curses on his rashness!

Santley said he was by no means to see Alfred again that day, or until he got formal leave to do so. He would give no opinion as to the ultimate course of the disease; but there was cause for anxiety—great anxiety.

Jerry took his leave of the house with a heavy heart. He was quite alone in the world, and since he lost his mother, now years ago, he had known no trouble so trying as this. He told himself over and over again that all would yet be well with Alfred. In vain! His heart would not be comforted; his mind would not abide in peace.

When he got into town, he did not know where to turn. The idea of going to the club under the unpleasant circumstances was out of the question. Walking about alone was dull work. He did not care to call on any friend, and the notion of spending the evening at a place of entertainment was simply monstrous. There seemed to be nothing else for it but to go home, and that was a stupid programme enough.

Jerry had lodgings in Cecil Street, Strand, and thither he went. He let himself in with a latchkey, and walked upstairs in the gathering gloom of a late February afternoon. His rooms were on the second floor. He entered the one looking out on the street, and lit the lamp deliberately. There were two reasons for his proceeding slowly. In the first place, it was not yet quite dark; in the second, deliberation killed time, and he had nothing to do between that hour and to-morrow morning, when he should call to know how Alfred was.

"Killing time," he thought, "is, when one is anxious, an excellent though slow way of killing one's self."

He pulled down the blinds, drew the curtains, and roused up the smouldering fire; then, with a heavy sigh, he threw himself into an easy-chair, and looked indolently, discontentedly around.

The room at best was not very cheering or elegant. The house was old, the room low, the furniture heavy, by no means fresh, and far from new. The table on which the lamp stood had a staring crimson cover. This was a recent and outrageous addition to the chromatic elements of the place. Until that afternoon the cover had been of a dim, nameless green, quite inoffensive, except for motley stains.

In his present state of mind, this cover felt like an insult, and he rose quickly, and, having lifted the lamp, flung the obnoxious cover into a corner, and was about to sit down again, when his eyes caught sight of a letter lying on the carpet at his feet.

He stooped and picked it up.

"A letter from O'Hanlon, and a fat letter, too! What can it be, now? Nothing more about those weirs and the commissioners, I hope. Well, even the weirs and the commissioners in moderation would be better than dwelling on this wretched business about poor Alfred."

He broke the cover, sat down, and began to read a long and closely-written letter in a clerks hand. It was signed in a different hand "John O'Hanlon," and from a printed chaplet in the corner it appeared John O'Hanlon was a solicitor residing at Kilbarry.

Jerry O'Brien read on resolutely. The only sign he gave of perturbation while mastering the eight pages he held in his hand was now and then crossing, uncrossing, and recrossing his legs. When he came to the end he threw the letter from him with an exclamation of annoyance and disgust. Then he sat awhile motionless, with his elbow resting on the table, his cheek on his hand, and his eyebrows drawn low down over his eyes. At last he muttered:

"It is my unfortunate weirs again-or, rather, it is the weirs of unfortunate me. They'll end by tearing up my weirs and leaving me to graze on the parish. I'll make a nice pauper-splendid! I don't think paupers have numbers like convicts; but if they have, I shall be number naught, naught, naught recurring. Confound those commissioners eternally! Obstruct the navigation of the Bawn! My salmon weirs obstruct as much the navigation of the Bawn as they do of the Euphrates or the Mississippi! If I had my will, these infernal, meddling commissioners would be drowned first in the Euphrates and then in the Mississippi, after which I'd give them a roasting alive in Vesuvius for a change. This will take eight hundred a year out of my pocket, and hand it over to-the Atlantic, and parts adjacent! That's a nice way to help a struggling country!"

He paused for a while, and began walking up and down the room hastily, angrily. Presently his thoughts took another turn.

"It's fortunate I said nothing to Madge. She must know by this time how I feel towards her, and I don't think her people would have any objection if this infernal affair was not hanging over me. But I could not speak to her father if I had to say: 'Will you, sir, be good enough to bring your daughter over to Kilbarry, and see her married to me in the poor-house?' It would not look swell. Not a bit of it! Why, 'twould look quite squalid and ungentle. Never mind, Madge. I'll fight them, darling, to the last. I won't leave a stone unturned, and every one I turn I'll fling at these rapacious fools."

He paused in his walk at the table.

He took up the letter again and looked at the end of it.

"He says I must go over at once-that I must start to-night. That's peremptory and but short notice. Never mind; it may be all for the best. I know the people at Dulwich will not think I am running away from them after bringing this fresh trouble upon them. They are the most generous people in the world. My honour is perfectly safe with them. I have plenty of time to catch the mail. This letter must have come at noon, and fallen off the table. I'll write a letter to Carlingford House explaining matters, and then when I have packed a portmanteau I shall be all right for the road." He sang in a low voice:

"With my pistols cocked, and a kind good-night,
Then hurrah, hurrah for the road!"

Adding: "I wish to heavens the days were not gone for 'pistols cocked' and 'the road.' Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to bag these accursed commissioners on the road, or in the

water, or on the wing. Unfortunately, 'old times are changed, old manners gone,' as the poet says, and shooting even ruffianly commissioners is against the law of the land, or the sea, or the air."

He got writing materials, gave Mr. Paulton a short account of the reason for his unexpected departure from London; then he ordered his dinner, packed his portmanteau, ate his dinner, and caught the mail train for Holyhead easily.

He slept half the way from Euston to Holyhead, and nearly all the way from Holyhead to Kingstown. In Dublin, at an hotel close to the Westland Row Station, he got his breakfast, and then drove to Kingsbridge, where he booked and took train for Kilbarry, an important town in the south of Ireland.

A railway journey in the early part of the year from Dublin to the south of Ireland is far from exhilarating. Half the way may be performed at a fair, but the second half is done at a funereal pace. The country looks damp, and is ill-clad with trees. It has not yet donned its summer vesture of astonishing green. The towns are small, far apart, and generally invisible from the train. Few people are on the platforms, and the stations of even important towns are paltry and forlorn. There are occasionally lovely mountains and pastoral streams, but the whole effect is dulling, depressing, from the absence of trees and the melancholy thinness of the population. It is a country empty of its children, and desolate at the loss of them.

Jerry O'Brien was of a mercurial nature, and when he was down he was at zero, and when up, at boiling. This last stage of his journey plunged him into the profoundest gloom. Overhead there was a sick, watery sun, which gave a feeble white glare more dejecting than a pall of thunder cloud. Tobacco was powerless to ameliorate the chill influence of that changing landscape. He tried to read a newspaper, but found he could not fix his attention on one word of what he read. After ascertaining there was nothing in it about Fishery Commissioners, he gave it up as a bad job, and laid it with resignation on the rug which covered his knees.

When he arrived at Kilbarry he was in the lowest and most desponding state of mind. He was firmly persuaded that nothing could save his weirs, and was almost convinced that the first news he should hear was that his weirs had been destroyed, and that the commissioners had resolved to lynch him if they could lay hands on him before he died of hunger.

He left the station in an omnibus and drove along the mile of broad quays beside the noble river Bawn to the "Munster Hotel." Here the prospect was more cheering than on the bleak, cold journey down. The river was thick with shipping; the quays noisy with traffic; the stores, warehouses, wharfs, and shops alive with people. Sailing vessels were discharging corn and coal, and steamers taking in cattle, and cases of eggs, and bales of bacon, and firkins of butter. Here the stream of humanity was vivid and strong. Moderate prosperity asserted its presence blithely. The weather had cleared and brightened, and the sun hung in the clear western air, a pale golden shield of light.

O'Brien was well known at "The Munster," and as he went up the steps of the hotel, was greeted cordially by the cheerful landlord and a few loungers with whom he was acquainted. He did not see a trace of the hated Fishery Commissioners, and by the time he had eaten a light luncheon, he began to think they were little more than an amiable fiction of a jovial Government. No one he met seemed to think his fortunes were in peril. The manners of John, the old waiter, were respectful and joyous as though the traveller had just returned from far distant lands, after an absence of many years, to enter into possession of a princely patrimony.

There was no time to be lost if he wanted to catch his solicitor, O'Hanlon, at the office. Accordingly he set off at once in that direction, and, having gone through two or three streets, found himself in the presence of his legal adviser, agent, and friend all in one.

John O'Hanlon was a man past middle life, tall, a little stooped in the shoulders, black-haired, neither fat nor lean, dark, ruddy, with whiskers just tinged with gray, loud-voiced, and aggressive in manner, and owning a pair of enormous brown hands. One of the peculiarities of O'Hanlon was

that no matter how well prepared he might be for the advent of any one who came to him he was always at that moment busy, or about to be busy, with something or somebody else.

As the young man entered the private office of the solicitor the latter rose hastily, pointed to a chair, and said rapidly:

"A minute, O'Brien-a minute. Sit down. I want to tell Gorman something."

Gorman was the head clerk-a red-haired, restless little man, who was always to be found in the front office, and who never seemed to have anything more important to do than lean against the folded window-shutter and look out into the street, but who was reputed to be more wily than any two fully sworn-in attorneys in Kilbarry.

After a short absence, O'Hanlon came back.

"My dear O'Brien, I'm delighted to see you."

He took both his client's hands, and shook them most cordially. He had the reputation of being the most insincere man you could meet on a summer's day; but no one had ever been able to point out any one act of insincerity in his conduct.

"I got your letter," said O'Brien, after replying to the greetings of the other, "and here I am. I came post-haste."

"Right, right, my boy! Those rascally commissioners will be the death of me. They'll be the death of every man in the neighbourhood who takes an interest in salmon, except the net men."

"Well, what is it this time? The same old story, as well as I could gather from your letter."

"The same old story over again. The same old three-and-fourpence-(a professional sum, which, I am sorry to see, has grown into a saying, although a colourless and unmeaning saying). The facts are these."

Here the solicitor gave a long and energetic account of the vile proceedings of these rascally commissioners, and wound up by saying that they hadn't a leg to stand on, and that "we" were sure to win in the long run, but that to insure success it was absolutely necessary for O'Brien to be in town or within very easy call for a month or two, as petitions and declarations and so-ons had to be considered, drawn up, and attended to generally and particularly.

When Jerry heard the whole state of affairs, he felt considerably relieved on the score of his salmon weirs on the lower Bawn. Upon telling this to his friend, the latter became hilarious, slapped Jerry on the back, and said that he'd prove the commissioners were the greatest fools in Ireland, and, moreover, make them confess it themselves in their own little dirty hole-and-corner court.

These and other gallant words and brave assurances served to put Jerry in good spirits, and when he rose to leave he was as buoyant as though he already held the proofs of triumph in his hand.

As he was about to quit the office, O'Hanlon took him by the hand, and mysteriously said:

"You were in London while that Davenport inquest was going on?"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about it?"

O'Brien's good spirits instantly took flight.

"Too much! I know everything about it."

"You read a good report of the inquest?"

"No; I was at the inquest."

"Ah-h!" It was a long-drawn, deep breath. The eyes of the solicitor became suddenly introspective, and he lolled his head over his right shoulder as if in deep thought. "Why did you attend that inquest?"

"Well, for two reasons. First, I, as you of course know, was acquainted with the Davenports; and second, because the dearest friend I have in London was greatly interested in Mrs. Davenport. It's a long story."

"Is it? Ah-h! I am greatly interested in that story too."

"Are you? Why? I didn't think you knew the Davenports."

The solicitor straightened his head on his shoulders. His eyes were still turned inward.

"You are right so far. I did not know the Davenports. But do you remember a client of mine named Michael Fahey-commonly called Mike Fahey!"

"Let me see. That's a good while ago?"

"Ten or eleven years ago," said the solicitor, shaking his head in accord with his private thoughts rather than with his words.

"I do. He was drowned near Kilcash, wasn't he?"

"At the Black Rock."

"An awful death. I never think of any one being drowned there without shuddering. Wasn't there something wrong with that man-that client of yours?"

"Yes. The police were after him."

"Why do you speak of him now?"

"Don't you remember that when seen by the police who were in chase he was in the neighbourhood of Davenport's house, and that he ran like a madman until he got to the Black Rock, and then threw himself in?"

"Yes; it makes my flesh creep," said O'Brien, with a shiver.

"He left some documents in my possession. They are in my possession yet. They show he had some connection with Davenport. I had forgotten all about it until-"

The solicitor paused, and suddenly the eyes, which had been so long turned inward, flashed out their light, and blazed into those of the young man standing opposite.

O'Brien started back in vague dread.

"Until when?" he asked, in a low, constrained voice.

"Until this day week."

"And then" – O'Hanlon's eyes dilated-"I saw-"

"In the name of Heaven, what?"

"His ghost."

CHAPTER XIX

SEEING NOT BELIEVING

For a moment the young man looked at the other in amazement and doubt. But it was impossible to resist for any great length of time the conviction that O'Hanlon had spoken sincerely. O'Hanlon himself looked troubled, scared, affrighted, as though scarcely able, and wholly unwilling, to believe his own words. O'Brien was the first to recover his composure.

"I will not," he said, "question what you say; I will go so far as to assure you I am fully convinced you saw the ghost of that unhappy man. You want me to tell you a story which, as I said, is a long one, and I want you to tell me your story at length. Dine with me at 'The Munster' this evening at seven, and we can chat the matter over."

The reference to the hotel and dinner drew the mind of the lawyer back once more into its ordinary groove. With a shrug of his shoulders and a forced laugh, he said:

"Right-you are right, O'Brien. This is not a good time or place for our little private theatricals. I'll join you with pleasure at seven. Here I have been holding you, which is an assault, and detaining you against your will, which is false imprisonment-both punishable by law. I ought to be too old a stager to be guilty of either offence. But I cry mercy, and will do my best to wash away my offences in your claret this evening. Till then, adieu."

So they parted.

O'Brien resolved to stroll about until it was time for dinner. He knew every street, almost every house in Kilbarry. He had lived in the neighbourhood the most part of his life. He had no relative alive, nor any place he could call home. When in this neighbourhood he usually stopped at "The Munster"; but of late years he had spent much of his time in London. He owned the land close to which his salmon weirs stood on the Bawn; but there was no house for him on them-only a few rude, primitive farmers' houses.

He was now thirty years of age, and had been a rover most of his life. He had always made it a point to spend a month or two of the summer at Kilcash, a sea-bathing and fishing village ten miles by road from Kilbarry. Here it was that he learned what he knew of the Davenports, for Mr. Davenport's place, Kilcash House, was only a mile inland from the village whose name it bore. He had been personally acquainted with the Davenports, and had often seen them, and knew all about them.

O'Hanlon's words, now that he was from under the influence of the manner which accompanied them, filled him with wonder more than anything else. He was only nineteen or twenty at the time that man Fahey was drowned-or, rather, committed suicide-and he could not recall all the particulars of the case. When it occurred, he had been living with his widowed mother at Kilbarry, and had not, like other young men of the city, gone out to the scene of the tragedy. He knew every nook of the coast for miles around Kilcash. It was a bold, bad, rock-bound coast save at the village, where there was a bay and a strand fatal to ships. He remembered that, from the first news of Fahey's death, there had not been the least hope of recovering the man's body. It was a tradition of the coast that the body of no one who had been drowned there was ever recovered. Who or what Fahey was he did not know, and so he resolved to banish the subject from his mind until O'Hanlon reopened it that evening.

The great feature of this day was O'Hanlon's assurance that his weirs would not be torn up. If that were true, and Alfred Paulton recovered, then he would have to think of building a house somewhere near the weirs for-Madge.

He got back to the hotel a little before seven, and wrote a letter to Mr. Paulton, announcing his safe arrival, asking for news of Alfred, and sending his kindest regards to the others in the order

of their seniority. It was a little comfort to be able to send even kind regards to Madge through her father. But if he had the commissioners by the collective throat at that moment, he could have throttled them with great comfort to himself, and an assured consciousness that he was a benefactor to mankind.

Seven o'clock brought O'Hanlon and the dinner. The latter was served in a small, snug, private room overlooking the broad white river. When at length they were alone and had lighted their cigars, the guest reverted to the Davenport affair, and asked for the full and true history of the case as far as it was known to Jerry.

Then O'Hanlon's turn came:

"Since I saw you I have hunted up and glanced over the documents left in my hands by the dead man Fahey. They are, I find, unintelligible, as far as my lights now lead me, and I think we may dismiss them from our minds for the present. I shall, however, keep them safe. I will say nothing more of them than that in whatever portions of them Mr. Davenport is mentioned, they always speak of him in terms of gratitude and respect. It is plain that at one time the relations between these two men were very close, but of the nature of these relations there is no hint. At the time of the death of Fahey he had been hovering about Kilcash for months. No one exactly knew who or what he was. He had taken a mean lodging in the village, and given out that he was poor, and had been ordered to the seaside for his health, and recommended to get as much sea air and boating as possible. He often went out with the fishermen, and at last bought a small punt, a mere cockleshell, and kept it for his own exclusive use. In this he put off at all times of the day and night, and the fishermen predicted that he would be drowned some time or other; and so he was, but not in the way anticipated by the people of the village. They made sure his boat would be swamped one day, and that would be the end of him. An additional reason for their fears was that he never swam, and said he was too old to learn.

"On the day of his death he was followed from a distance by two policemen in plain clothes. They watched him leave the cottage in which he lived at Kilcash, take to the downs, and make straight for Kilcash House. They were not able to get near him until he had just gained the house. He then became aware that he was followed, and ran straight for the cliffs. The rest I have already told you. There never was an inquest, for, as you may know, the bodies of people drowned there are never found.

"A week ago I was in the neighbourhood of Kilcash House. I had left my horse and car at Kilcash, and was walking over the downs to the village, when on the cliffs, just over the Black Rock, I cast my eyes down, and there, on that large shelf of rock, as plain as I see you now, I saw him. The same coat, the same Scotch bonnet, the same trousers-not a thing altered since the first day he stood in my office, going on eleven years ago."

"What time of the day was it?"

"Broad day. About three o'clock in the afternoon."

"It must have been some one of about his stature dressed identically."

"Must it?" cried the lawyer, scornfully. "You have not heard all yet. I made up my mind to be sure. I ran-I *ran* to the top of the path, and went down to the rocks below. There was nobody there. You know the place. Tell me how a living man could get away alive, except up the path that I went down? It was Michael Fahey's ghost, as sure as I am a living man."

"I confess," said Jerry, in perplexity, "I cannot explain away what you say, except upon the supposition that you were suffering from delusion. How do you account for the appearance yourself?"

"This is my way of reasoning it out. I either saw the ghost of Michael Fahey or I did not. If I did, I account for it by the fact that Davenport and he were associated together in something while they were alive, and now that both are dead, one of them has to come back and see that something left undone-a wrong unrighted, a debt unpaid, an explanation unmade-is put straight."

"But why should the one be Fahey? And why should it be at the Black Rock? And why should he appear to you?"

"The first, because I had nothing to do with Mr. Davenport; the second, because seeing Fahey's ghost there would recall to my mind most vividly the circumstance of his death; and the third, because I hold the documents to which I have referred."

"But don't you think the fact of Davenport's name having been brought before the public so lately, and that you recollected the documents you held belonging to Fahey, and that you looked over the cliff at the very spot where he lost his life, may all have helped to impose upon your imagination?"

"Sir, an attorney of my years does not know the meaning of the word imagination. You may say I am mad if you like, but don't attribute imagination to me, or I shall break down altogether. O'Brien, do you mean to say seriously that you take me for a crazy young poet? Great heavens, sir, it can't have come to that with me in my declining years!"

"But, then, what did you see?"

"A ghost-Fahey's ghost."

"You don't mean to tell me seriously you believe in ghosts!"

"I mean to tell you most emphatically I do not."

"Then what is your contention?"

"That I, being one who does not believe in ghosts, saw the ghost of Michael Fahey this day week at the Black Rock."

"I can make nothing of your position."

"I can make nothing of my position either. I am beginning to think I shall lose my reason. You are the first person I spoke to on the subject. Don't say anything about it to a soul. I have no wife to blab to, and I look on you as a friend. I had hoped you would have brought me news from London—some facts not published in the papers, and bearing on this branch of the case. But you haven't. If you let this get abroad, some of my *kind* friends will get me locked up. I got old Coolahan locked up because he kept on saying that farthings were as valuable as sovereigns because they had the Queen's head on them."

O'Brien was sorely puzzled. It did not now look like a matter which ought to be laughed at. Either O'Hanlon had seen the ghost of this man, or he was losing his reason. There was one other possibility. He said: "I am not going to make light of what you have told me, or communicate it to a soul. There is one other question—a wild one, I own. I wonder have you thought of it?"

"What is it? If you have thought of anything which has escaped me, you are a very Daniel come to judgment."

"Could it be that man was not really drowned ten or eleven years ago? Either the police may have been mistaken in their man, and the wrong man may have leaped into the hole, or Fahey may have leaped in and by some miracle escaped."

"Yes, I have thought of both possibilities. The only answer will dispose of both. The clothes seen ten or eleven, years ago, and those seen this day week, were identical."

"What! You identify them?"

"Yes, if" — with a shudder—"those of last week could be produced and handled. O'Brien, I'm not afraid of ghosts, but I begin to be afraid of myself, now that I have begun to see them."

"But after such a lapse of time, and at a long distance, as from the top of the cliff to the plain of rock below. It must be a hundred feet."

"It is a hundred and twenty feet from the brow of the cliff to where the cliff meets the sloping rock, and the figure was about one hundred and seventy or eighty feet from the base. I measured both roughly. That gives between seventy and eighty yards from my eye. Now, ten years ago, and this day week, the colour, cut, and material of the coat and trousers were identical, and both times there was a circular green patch on the right elbow of the coat, about the size of my palm; and both

times the right leg of the trousers had evidently been torn up as high as the knee-joint behind, and rudely stitched by an unskilful hand. I'm not," he said, looking timidly around, "afraid of ghosts, but I am of men. Keep my secret, O'Brien, if you care for me."

"You may swear by me. By-the-way, I have more time than you. Let me see those documents you have, and I'll try if I can puzzle anything out of them."

"With the greatest pleasure and thankfulness."

And so the two parted.

CHAPTER XX

TOLD BY GORMAN

The documents Jerry O'Brien found in his hand were four in number. He read them all hastily first, and then went over them carefully word by word. When he examined them next day, they proved in substance or text to be as follows:

No. 1. A will dated about eleven years back, by which he left all property of any kind of which he might die possessed to Mrs. Davenport, wife of his good friend Louis Davenport. He explained that he would have left his property to Mr. Davenport himself, but that so well did he know the depth of affection between Mr. Davenport and his wife, that the surest way to make a bequest acceptable to the former, was to leave it to the latter. The bequest was accompanied by no conditions, and the will wound up with a hope that Mr. and Mrs. Davenport might live long and happy lives.

To the will was affixed a piece of paper, on which appeared in the handwriting of O'Hanlon, the solicitor, this comment:

Note. – There being no trace of property or relatives of deceased, nothing could be done. I sent my clerk to Mr. Davenport to make some inquiries, but could learn nothing except that deceased was an eccentric friend of Mr. Davenport, and that as far as he (Davenport) knew, deceased had neither relatives nor property.

This was signed "John O'Hanlon."

No. II. This was half a sheet of note-paper partly covered by writing not nearly so regular or well-formed as the will. To judge by the handwriting of No. III., it was the manuscript of Michael Fahey. It ran thus:

Memorandum. – Rise 15·6 lowest. At lowest minute of lowest forward with all might undaunted. The foregoing refers to *skulls*. With only one *skull* any lowest or any last quarter; but great forward pluck required for this. In both cases (of course!) left.

No. III. was a letter of instructions from Fahey to O'Hanlon in the handwriting of Fahey. It was as follows:

"Dear Sir,

"I leave with you my will and three other papers. In case of anything happening to me, please read the will and put it in force. But if between this and then you hear nothing more from me, it will not be worth while taking any trouble in the matter. The 'Memorandum' is to be kept by you for me. In case I should absent myself from the neighbourhood for any length of time do not be uneasy, as I am much abroad. If I am away fifteen years, you may hand all these to my friend, Mr. Davenport, but not till fifteen years have passed without my return to the neighbourhood.

"Yours truly,

"Michael Fahey."

No. IV. was merely a long, narrow, slip of paper, bearing the following:

"Dear Mr. Davenport,

"Time has swallowed me, and everything connected with me. I hope when you receive this you will have forgotten I ever existed. I leave all the documents I own with Mr. O'Hanlon for you.

"Always most faithfully yours,

"Michael Fahey."

These did not throw a great flood of light on the subject. In fact, they did not help him to see an inch further than he had seen before. It was plain on the face of it that there must have been some kind of connection between this Fahey and the Davenports; but what the nature of that connection

was there was no clue to. He had no particular interest in the mystery, if it could be said to reach the dignity of a mystery. He was a kind of indifferent centre in the events. He had known the Davenports and O'Hanlon for years, and now by a strange coincidence, or rather a series of coincidences, the Davenports, O'Hanlon, the Paultons, Fahey, and himself had all been drawn together.

He shook himself and tried to argue himself into indifference, but failed. He told himself the whole matter was nothing in the world to him, and that, in fact, there was nothing particular in it to engage attention.

What were the facts?

Mr. Davenport had, under acute mental excitement, committed suicide after an interview with Tom Blake. He had left two documents respecting that act. Both of these documents were written in pencil, and on leaves of his pocket-book. One of these memoranda said he, Davenport, had committed suicide. The other accused Blake of poisoning, murdering him. Every one except Edward Davenport credited the former statement. Blake had formerly been Mrs. Davenport's lover, and might love her even still. Blake had got a thousand pounds years ago from the deceased for giving up his pretensions to that lady's hand. Blake had long been abroad; turned up unexpectedly at Davenport's house in London the first night the latter was in London, and the night of his death. Blake gets a hundred pounds from Davenport, and a promise of a further hundred in a few days.

What was this money given for? Not, of course, with the old object. It did not come out at the inquest or elsewhere that the dead man had been in the least jealous of his wife. She had not seen Blake for a good while before her husband's death. Blake had been some years on the Continent, without visiting the United Kingdom. It was discreditable, but intelligible, that when the dead man was an elderly and unfavoured lover he should buy off his rival; but it would be absurd to suppose that ten or eleven years after marriage any man would continue to pay considerable sums of money to a former rival for absolutely nothing. Such an act would be that of a coward and a fool, and the dead man had been neither.

For what, then, had Davenport given this money to Blake? The latter said the interview between the two had been of a pleasant character. Why? Blake was disreputable, and Davenport eminently respectable. It was absurd to suppose Davenport could have had a liking for Blake. Taking that thousand pounds years ago must have destroyed any good opinion Davenport had of Blake. Why, then, had the latter been received well and been given money? He had not only been received well and given money, but invited to dinner on a later date! It was simply incredible that out of gratitude for that service rendered long ago in Florence, Davenport was going to forget that this man had been his rival, and invite him to his house and a necessary meeting with his beautiful wife.

O'Brien did not for a moment suspect the widow and her former admirer of perjury, of concocting their stories. These stories were not at all calculated to exculpate either of the two. In fact, these stories, uncorroborated by the evidence obtained at the *post-mortem* examination, would have heightened suspicion rather than allayed it. At first these stories seemed prodigal in daring, but this very excess of apparent improbability made them seem most probable when read by the light of Davenport's written confession. No, there was no reason to suspect perjury.

He could make nothing of it so far. But did those documents of Fahey's aid one towards a solution? He could not see how they bore on the case one way or the other, and yet the coincidences were remarkable. He had seen Blake in London the day of the night on which Davenport died. When Alfred Paulton told him what had happened at Crescent House, he came to the conclusion Blake was in some way or other mixed up in the matter. This conclusion turned out right, although not exactly in the way he had expected. Now upon his coming back to Kilbarry he is met by a still more remarkable story. A man whom O'Hanlon knew ten or eleven years ago, and was then drowned at the hideous Black Rock, appears to O'Hanlon in the same spot and same clothes as he had been last seen alive in. It seemed as if he, O'Brien, were destined to be connected with

the Davenport affair whether he would or not. Alfred Paulton was the greatest friend he had in London, and John O'Hanlon was the best friend he had in Kilbarry. He knew Blake by appearance and report, and he was acquainted with the Davenports; and here were all mixed up in the same matter in more or less degree, and all in a disagreeable way. It was the smallest of small worlds. He had no particular reason for being interested in the complication; and, indeed, except for the extraordinary statement made by O'Hanlon, the incident might be said to be closed, were it not that he was not quite sure whether Alfred Paulton-whom he hoped one day to have for a brother-in-law-had got over the fascination exercised on him by that beautiful woman. Any way, he had nothing particular to do now but fight those rascally commissioners; so he'd just glance over these documents again, and see if he could make anything out of them.

With a sigh, he put them away a second time. He might as well look for help to the stars. He would call at O'Hanlon's to-day and ask was there any news.

He found Mr. Gorman, head clerk to O'Hanlon, leaning against his favourite shutter with his hands in his trousers' pockets, placidly regarding through the window a tattered, battered, and wholly miserable-looking man of between sixty and seventy, who was playing "The Young May Moon," atrociously out of tune and out of time, on a penny tin whistle.

"Well," said O'Brien, briskly to Gorman, "any news?"

"Not a blessed word," answered the clerk, resting his back against the shutter instead of his shoulder, and so facing the visitor. "I suppose you came over about your weirs? Deuced bother, Mr. O'Brien!"

"It is an infernal nuisance. Do you know, Mr. Gorman, I think half the people who ought to be hanged are never even brought to trial."

"These Fishery Commissioners don't murder any one but fisheries and the proprietors of fisheries, and there is no precedent for hanging a man merely because he killed a fishery or the proprietor of a fishery. However, Mr. O'Brien, you need not be afraid. Your weirs are as safe as the Rock of Cashel. I often wonder why they call a rock a rock. It's about the last thing that would think of rocking, and the sea, which is the best rocker out, can't stir a rock that's in good wind and form. It would take the Atlantic a month of Sundays to rock the Black Rock, for instance, at Kilcash."

The mention of the Black Rock made O'Brien start slightly, for it was in the rock that famous and treacherous Hole yawned and breathed dismay and destruction. It was odd Gorman should mention the rock which had occupied such a prominent place in his thoughts that forenoon.

"It's strange," said O'Brien, walking over to the window, and placing himself against the shutter opposite Gorman, "that I should have been thinking of the Black Rock a little while ago! What put it into your head now?"

"Well, I tell you, nothing could be simpler or more natural. I knew you arrived from London yesterday. I knew you were acquainted with the Davenports of Kilcash, and a man who once had some connection with the Davenports was last seen on the Black Rock, and drowned himself, to escape the police, in the Hole. You may remember the circumstance?"

"Yes," said O'Brien, instantly interested; "I have a faint recollection of that man's death. Were you with Mr. O'Hanlon then?"

"Oh, yes. I remember all about it. He was a client of ours. We didn't do much for him; in fact, we didn't do anything for him. He left some papers with the governor, and then got into trouble about passing flash notes. The police had their hands just on him, when he leapt into the Hole. You know what that means. The body was never found; but that does not count as anything, for the bodies of persons drowned near that spot are never found."

"And nothing was known of the connection between this unfortunate Fahey and the Davenports?"

"I don't know anything about it, and I don't think the governor does. It was supposed he was an old hanger-on of old Davenport's, since the time Davenport was abroad. Davenport himself, as

far as I could find out, never volunteered information about Fahey; and, you know, he wasn't the kind of man you'd care to ask unnecessary questions. He was about the closest man in the county. I never had any business to do with him, but I've kept my ears open."

"He died very rich, I suppose?" – with a laugh. "A friend of mine is already greatly interested in the widow."

"Ah, no wonder! She's a fine woman-the finest woman in these parts. I often saw her. You might do worse than try your luck there yourself, Mr. O'Brien. If he left her the bulk of his fortune she will be very well off. He had no one else in the world but his brother, who is crack-brained, I believe; and the dead man was very rich-made a whole fortune abroad, in various kinds of speculations, both in Europe and America."

"What did he speculate in chiefly?"

"I don't know. All kinds of stocks and shares. They say he had some plan never before adopted, and out of which he made money as fast as he liked, and this plan he never would tell any one. At all events, for more than ten years before he settled down here he had been wandering pretty well over the whole civilized world. Every one who knew of his great business cleverness wondered why he retired before fifty, but he said he had enough for a lifetime, and that his asthma was too bad for him to go on any longer. But somehow it leaked out that he got a great fright about some bank on the Continent in which he had a large sum of money-I think ten thousand pounds-lodged to his credit."

"Do you remember the story, Gorman?"

"I do."

"Well, tell it to me. But, for heaven's sake, first send out the boy and order that man with the tin whistle to go away. Here's sixpence for him."

"Not fond of music! I thought you were." He took the coin, and despatched the boy. "The Bank of England had its own reasons for keeping the thing quiet at the time, and it never came fully before the public, as the criminal was never discovered. Mr. Davenport gave notice to the foreign bank that on a certain day he would require the ten thousand he had lodged there, and that the more Bank of England notes he found in the packet, the better he should be pleased.

"On the day he had named he called and got the money, and that very evening started for London with the cash. This was an unusual mode of proceeding, but most of his ways were unusual, if not odd. On his arrival the Bank declared several of the one hundred pound notes in his packet to be forgeries, and a few tens were also spurious.

"This discovery started an inquiry, and in a little while it was found that one of the largest and most skilful forgeries ever made on the Bank of England had just been committed, and that upwards of two hundred thousand pounds worth of valueless notes had been palmed off on foreign banks of the highest class.

"The forgeries did not stop at the notes. The signatures of some of the greatest banking firms had been imitated and used as introductions to the Continental houses of eminence, and an elaborate scheme of fraud had been based on these bogus introductions. The scheme had been in preparation for a long time. At first a small private account was opened in the regular way in London, the referees-two customers of the bank-being a retired military man and a shopkeeper, I think. I forget what name the account was opened in-false one, of course, say Jenkins.

"Jenkins's account was gradually augmented, and a balance of a couple or three thousand was always kept. Moneys were now and then paid in and drawn out. The account was highly respectable. In the end Jenkins said he was going to live in Paris, and would feel obliged if his banker would give him an introduction to a Paris house. This was done as a matter of course.

"In Paris the balance was still further increased, until it was kept above five thousand pounds. Then Jenkins asked if he might deposit a box containing valuable documents for safety in the bank. He got permission and lodged the box.

"Then he drew out all his balance very gradually, and when it was exhausted, called, asked for his box, opened it in the presence of the manager, and taking from it fifty Bank of England one hundred pound notes, asked that they might be placed to his credit, as he was expecting heavy calls momentarily. He had been speculating and had lost, he said. In a couple of weeks he drew out the five thousand in one cheque payable to himself.

"Shortly after this he took from the box, and handed the manager ten thousand pounds, saying he was still losing heavily, and should want the money that day, subject, of course, to a fair charge on the part of the bank. The bank accommodated him. He said there was a great deal more than ten thousands in the box, and showed the notes to the manager. Next day he came in a great state of excitement. He had a vast fortune within his grasp if he could only get money that day. He took from his pocket one hundred thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, and from his box all that was in it-one hundred and ten thousand more. Would they oblige him? It was neck or nothing with him. If he hadn't the money within three hours, he would be a ruined man; if he got the money, he could make a stupendous fortune. He would leave the odd ten thousand in the hands of the bank against expenses, interest, etc. Would they let him have two hundred thousand in French notes on the security of the Bank of England notes?

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