Behold, it was a Dream!

Rhoda Broughton

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CHAPTER I.

YESTERDAY morning I received the following letter:

Weston House, Caulfield, shire.

"MY DEAR DINAH, You must come: I scorn all your excuses, and see through their flimsiness. I have no doubt that you are much better amused in Dublin, frolicking round ball rooms with a succession of horse−soldiers, and watching her Majesty's household troops play Polo in the Phoenix Park, but no matter you must come. We have no particular inducements to hold out. We lead an exclusively bucolic, cow−milking, pig−fattening, roast−mutton−eating and to−bed−at−ten−o'clock−going life; but no matter you must come. I want you to see how happy two dull elderly people may be, with no special brightness in their lot to make them so. My old man he is surprisingly ugly at the first glance, but grows upon one afterwards sends you his respects, and bids me say that he will meet you at any station on any day at any hour of the day or night. If you succeed in evading our persistence this time, you will be a cleverer woman than I take you for.

"Ever yours affectionately,

"August 15th.

"JANE WATSON.

"P.S. We will invite our little scarlet−headed curate to dinner to meet you, so as to soften your fall from the society of the Plungers."

This is my answer:

"MY DEAR JANE, Kill the fat calf in all haste, and put the bake meats into the oven, for I will come. Do not, however, imagine that I am moved thereunto by the prospect of the bright−headed curate. Believe me, my dear, I am as yet at a distance of ten long good years from an addiction to the minor clergy. If I survive the crossing of that seething, heaving, tumbling abomination, St. George's Channel, you may expect me on Tuesday next. I have been groping for hours in 'Bradshaw's' darkness that may be felt, and I have arrived at length at this twilight result, that I may arrive at your station at 6.55 P.M. But the ways of 'Bradshaw' are not our ways, and I may either rush violently past or never attain it. If I do, and if on my arrival I see some rustic vehicle, guided by a startlingly ugly gentleman, awaiting me, I shall know from your wifely description that it is your 'old man.' Till Tuesday, then,

"Affectionately yours,

"August 17th.

"DINAH BELLAIRS.

I am as good as my word; on Tuesday I set off. For four mortal hours and a half I am disastrously, hideously, diabolically sick. For four hours and a half I curse the day on which I was born, the day on which Jane Watson was born, the day on which her old man was born, and lastly but oh! not, not leastly the day and the dock on which and in which the Leinster's plunging, courtseying, throbbing body was born. On arriving at Holyhead, feeling convinced from my sensations that, as the French say, I touch my last hour, I indistinctly request to be allowed to stay on board and die, then and there; but as the stewardess and my maid take a different view of my situation, and insist upon forcing my cloak and bonnet on my dying body and limp head, I at length succeed in staggering on deck and off the accursed boat. I am then well shaken up for two or three hours in the Irish mail, and after crawling along a slow by−line for two or three hours more, am at length, at 6:55, landed, battered, tired, dust−blacked and qualmish, at the little roadside station of Caulfield. My maid and I are the only passengers who descend. The train snorts its slow way onwards, and I am left gazing at the calm crimson death of the August sun, and smelling the sweet peas in the station−master's garden border. I look round in search of Jane's promised tax−cart, and steel my nerves for the contemplation of her old man's unlovely features. But the only vehicle which I see is a tiny two−wheeled pony carriage, drawn by a small and tub−shaped bay pony and driven by a lady in a hat, whose face is turned expectantly towards me. I go up and recognise my friend, whom I have not seen for two years not since before she fell in with her old man and espoused him.

"I thought it safest, after all, to come myself," she says with a bright laugh. "My old man looked so handsome this morning, that I thought you would never recognise him from my description. Get in, dear, and let us trot home as quickly as we can."

I comply, and for the next half hour sit (while the cool evening wind is blowing the dust off my hot and jaded face) stealing amazed glances at my companion's cheery features. Cheery! That is the very last word that, excepting in an ironical sense, any one would have applied to my friend Jane two years ago. Two years ago Jane was thirty−five, the elderly eldest daughter of a large family, hustled into obscurity, jostled, shelved, by half a dozen younger, fresher sisters; an elderly girl addicted to lachrymose verse about the gone and the dead and the for−ever−lost. Apparently the gone has come back, the dead resuscitated, the for−ever−lost been found again. The peaky sour virgin is transformed into a gracious matron with a kindly, comely face, pleasure making and pleasure feeling. Oh, Happiness, what powder, or paste, or milk of roses, can make old cheeks young again in the cunning way that you do? If you would but bide steadily with us we might live for ever, always young and always handsome.

My musings on Jane's metamorphosis, combined with a tired headache, make me somewhat silent, and indeed there is mostly a slackness of conversation between the two dearest allies on first meeting after absence a sort of hesitating shiver before plunging into the sea of talk that both know to lie in readiness for them.

"Have you got your harvest in yet?" I ask, more for the sake of not utterly holding my tongue than from any profound interest in the subject, as we jog briskly along between the yellow cornfields, where the dry bound sheaves are standing in golden rows in the red sunset light.

"Not yet," answers Jane; "we have only just begun to cut some of it. However, thank God, the weather looks as settled as possible; there is not a streak of watery lilac in the west."

My headache is almost gone and I am beginning to think kindly of dinner a subject from which all day until now my mind has hastily turned with a sensation of hideous inward revolt by the time that the fat pony pulls up before

the old−world dark porch of a modest little house, which has bashfully hidden its original face under a veil of crowded clematis flowers and stalwart ivy. Set as in a picture−frame by the large drooped ivy−leaves, I see a tall and moderately hard−featured gentleman of middle age, perhaps, of the two, rather inclining towards elderly, smiling at us a little shyly.

"This is my old man," cries Jane, stepping gaily out, and giving him a friendly introductory pat on the shoulder. "Old man, this is Dinah."

Having thus been made known to each other we shake hands, but neither of us can arrive at anything pretty to say. Then I follow Jane into her little house, the little house for which she has so happily exchanged her tenth part of the large and noisy paternal mansion. It is an old house, and everything about it has the moderate shabbiness of old age and long and careful wear. Little thick−walled rooms, dark and cool, with flowers and flower scents lying in wait for you everywhere a silent, fragrant, childless house. To me, who have had oily locomotives snorting and racing through my head all day, its dumb sweetness seems like heaven.

"And now that we have, secured you, we do not mean to let you go in a hurry," says Jane hospitably that night at bedtime, lighting the candles on my dressing−table.

"You are determined to make my mouth water, I see," say I, interrupting a yawn to laugh. "Lone, lorn me, who have neither old man, nor dear little house, nor any prospect of ultimately attaining either."

"But if you honestly are not bored you will stay with us a good bit?" she says, laying her hand with kind entreaty on my sleeve.

"St. George's Channel is not lightly to be faced again."

"Perhaps I shall stay until you are obliged to go away yourselves to get rid of me," return I, smiling. "Such things have happened. Yes, without joking, I will stay a month. Then, by the end of a month, if you have not found me out thoroughly, I think I may pass among men for a more amiable woman than I have ever yet had the reputation of."

A quarter of an hour later I am laying down my head among soft and snow−white pillows, and saying to myself that this delicious sensation of utter drowsy repose, of soft darkness and odorous quiet, is cheaply purchased even by the ridiculous anguish which my own sufferings and hardly less than my own sufferings the demoniac sights and sounds afforded by my fellow passengers, caused me on board the accursed Leinster,

"Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark."

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, I cannot say that you look much rested," says Jane next morning, coming in to greet me, smiling and fresh (yes, sceptic of eighteen, even a woman of thirty−seven may look fresh in a print gown on an August morning, when she has a well of lasting quiet happiness inside her,) coming in with a bunch of creamy gloire de Dijons in her hand for the breakfast table. "You look infinitely more fagged than you did when I left you last night!"

"Do I?" say I rather faintly.

"I am afraid you did not sleep much?" suggests Jane, a little crestfallen at the insult to her feather beds implied by my wakefulness. "Some people never can sleep the first night in a strange bed, and I stupidly forgot to ask

whether you liked the feather bed or mattress at the top."

"Yes, I did sleep," I answer gloomily. "I wish to heaven I had not."

"Wish to heaven you had not?" repeats Jane slowly, with a slight astonished pause between each word. "My dear child, for what other purpose did you go to bed?"

"I I had bad dreams," say I, shuddering a little and then taking her hand, roses and all, in mine. "Dear Jane, do not think me quite run mad, but but have you got a 'Bradshaw' in the house?"

"A 'Bradshaw?' What on earth do you want with 'Bradshaw?'" says my hostess, her face lengthening considerably and a slight tincture of natural coldness coming into her tone.

"I know it seems rude insultingly rude," say I, still holding her hand and speaking almost lachrymosely; "but do you know, my dear, I really am afraid that that I shall have to leave you to−day?"

"To leave us?" repeats she, withdrawing her hand and growing angrily red. "What! when not twenty−four hours ago you settled to stay a month with us? What have we done between then and now to disgust you with us?"

"Nothing nothing," cry I eagerly; "how can you suggest such a thing? I never had a kinder welcome nor ever saw a place that charmed me more; but but"

"But what?" asks June, her colour subsiding and looking a little mollified.

"It is best to tell the truth, I suppose," say I sighing, "even though I know that you will laugh at me will call me vapourish sottishly superstitious; but I had an awful and hideous dream last night."

"Is that all?" she says, looking relieved, and beginning to arrange her roses in an old china bowl. "And do you think that all dreams are confined to this house? I never heard before of their affecting any one special place more than another. Perhaps no sooner are you back in Dublin, in your own room and your own bed, than you will have a still worse and uglier one."

I shake my head. "But it was about this house about you."

"About me?" she says, with an accent of a little aroused interest.

"About you and your husband," I answer earnestly. "Shall I tell it you? Whether you say 'Yes' or 'No' I must. Perhaps it came as a warning; such things have happened. Yes, say what you will, I cannot believe that any vision so consistent so tangibly real and utterly free from the jumbled incongruities and unlikelinesses of ordinary dreams could have meant nothing. Shall I begin?"

"By all means," answers Mrs. Watson, sitting down in an arm−chair and smiling easily. "I am quite prepared to listen and disbelieve."

"You know," say I, narratively, coming and standing close before her, "how utterly tired out I was when you left me last night. I could hardly answer your questions for yawning. I do not think that I was ten minutes in getting into bed, and it seemed like heaven when I laid my head down on the pillow. I felt as if I should sleep till the Day of Judgment. Well, you know, when one is asleep one has of course no measure of time, and I have no idea what hour it was really; but at some time, in the blackest and darkest of the night, I seemed to wake. It appeared as if a noise had woke me a noise which at first neither frightened nor surprised me in the least, but which seemed quite natural, and which I accounted for in the muddled drowsy way in which one does account for things when half

asleep. But as I gradually grew to fuller consciousness I found out, with a cold shudder, that the noise I heard was not one that belonged to the night; nothing that one could lay on wind in the chimney, or mice behind the wainscot, or ill−fitting boards. It was a sound of muffled struggling, and once I heard a sort of choked strangled cry. I sat up in bed, perfectly numbed with fright, and for a moment could hear nothing for the singing of the blood in my head and the loud battering of my heart against my side. Then I thought that if it were anything bad if I were going to be murdered I had at least rather be in the light than the dark, and see in what sort of shape my fate was coming, so I slid out of bed and threw my dressing−gown over my shoulders. I had stupidly forgotten, in my weariness over night, to put the matches by the bedside, and could not for the life of me recollect where they were. Also, my knowledge of the geography of the room was so small that in the utter blackness, without even the palest, greyest ray from the window to help me, I was by no means sure in which direction the door lay. I can feel now the pain of the blow I gave this right side against the sharp corner of the table in passing; I was quite surprised this morning not to find the mark of a bruise there. At last, in my groping I came upon the handle and turned the key in the lock. It gave a little squeak, and again I stopped for a moment, overcome by ungovernable fear. Then I silently opened the door and looked out. You know that your door is exactly opposite mine. By the line of red light underneath it, I could see that at all events some one was awake and astir within, for the light was brighter than that given by a night−light. By the broader band of red light on the right side of it I could also perceive that the door was ajar. I stood stock still and listened. The two sounds of struggling and chokedly crying had both ceased. All the noise that remained was that as of some person quietly moving about on unbooted feet. 'Perhaps Jane's dog Smut is ill and she is sitting up with it; she was saying last night, I remember, that she was afraid it was beginning with the distemper. Perhaps either she or her old man have been taken with some trifling temporary sickness. Perhaps the noise of crying out that I certainly heard was one of them fighting with a nightmare.' Trying, by such like suggestions, to hearten myself up, I stole across the passage and peeped in"

I pause in my narrative.

"Well?" says Jane, a little impatiently.

She has dropped her flowers. They lie in odorous dewy confusion in her lap. She is listening rather eagerly. I cover my face with my hands. "Oh! My dear," I cry, "I do not think I can go on. It was too dreadful! Now that I am telling it I seem to be doing and hearing it over again"

"I do not call it very kind to keep me on the rack," she says, with a rather forced laugh. "Probably I am imagining something much worse than the reality. For heaven's sake speak up! What did you see?"

I take hold of her hand and continue "You know that in your room the bed exactly faces the door. Well, when I looked in, looked in with eyes blinking at first, and dazzled by the long darkness they had been in, it seemed to me as if that bed were only one horrible sheet of crimson; but as my sight grew clearer I saw what it was that caused that frightful impression of universal red" again I pause with a gasp and feeling of oppressed breathing.

"Go on! go on!" cries my companion, leaning forward, and speaking with some petulance. "Are you never going to get to the point?"

"Jane," say I solemnly, "do not laugh at me, nor poohpooh me, for it is God's truth as clearly and vividly as I see you now, strong, flourishing, and alive, so clearly, so vividly, with no more of dream haziness nor of contradiction in details than there is in the view I now have of this room and of you I saw you both you and your husband, lying dead murdered drowned in your own blood!"

"What, both of us?" she says, trying to laugh, but her healthy cheek has rather paled.

"Both of you," I answer, with growing excitement. "You, Jane, had evidently been the one first attacked taken off in your sleep for you were lying just as you would have lain in slumber, only that across your throat from there to there" (touching first one ear and then the other), "there was a huge and yawning gash."

"Pleasant," replies she, with a slight shiver.

"I never saw any one dead," continue I earnestly, "never until last night. I had not the faintest idea how dead people looked, even people who died quietly, nor has any picture ever given me at all a clear conception of death's dread look. How then could I have imagined the hideous contraction and distortion of feature, the staring starting open eyes glazed yet agonised the tightly clenched teeth that go to make up the picture, that is now, this very minute standing out in ugly vividness before my mind's eye?" I stop, but she does not avail herself of the pause to make any remark, neither does she look any longer at all laughingly inclined. "And yet," continue I, with a voice shaken by emotion, "it was you, very you, not partly you and partly some one else, as is mostly the case in dreams, but as much you, as the you I am touching now" laying my finger on her arm as I speak).

"And my old man, Robin," says poor Jane, rather tearfully, after a moment's silence, "what about him? Did you see him? Was he dead too?"

"It was evidently he whom I had heard struggling and crying," I answer with a strong shudder, which I cannot keep down, "for it was clear that he had fought for his life. He was lying half on the bed and half on the floor, and one clenched hand was grasping a great piece of the sheet; he was lying head downwards, as if, after his last struggle, he had fallen forwards. All his grey hair was reddened and stained, and I could see that the rift in his throat was as deep as that in yours."

"I wish you would stop," cries Jane, pale as ashes, and speaking with an accent of unwilling, terror; "you are making me quite sick!"

"I must finish," I answer earnestly, "since it has come in time I am sure it has come for some purpose. Listen to me till the end; it is very near." She does not speak, and I take her silence for assent. "I was staring at you both in a stony way," I go on, "feeling if I felt at all that I was turning idiotic with horror standing in exactly the same spot, with my neck craned to look round the door, and my eyes unable to stir from that hideous scarlet bed, when a slight noise, as of some one cautiously stepping on the carpet, turned my stony terror into a living quivering agony. I looked and saw a man with his back towards me walking across the room from the bed to the dressing−table. He was dressed in the dirty fustian of an ordinary workman, and in his hand he held a red wet sickle. When he reached the dressing−table he laid it down on the floor beside him, and began to collect all the rings, open the cases of the bracelets, and hurry the trinkets of all sorts into his pockets. While he was thus busy I caught a full view of the reflection of the face in the glass" I stop for breath, my heart is panting almost as hardly as it seemed to pant during the awful moments I am describing.

"What was he like what was he like?" cries Jane, greatly excited. "Did you see him distinctly enough to recollect his features again? Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"Should I know my own face if I saw it in the glass?" I ask scornfully. "I see every line of it now more clearly than I do yours, though that is before my eyes, and the other only before my memory"

"Well, what was he like? be quick, for heaven's sake."

"The first moment that I caught sight of him," continue I, speaking quickly, "I felt certain that he was Irish; to no other nationality could such a type of face have belonged. His wild rough hair fell down over his forehead, reaching his shagged and overhanging brows. He had the wide grinning slit of a mouth the long nose, the cunningly twinkling eyes that one so often sees, in combination with a shambling gait and ragged tail−coat, at the

railway stations or in the harvest fields at this time of year." A pause. "I do not know how it came to me," I go on presently; "but I felt as convinced as if I had been told as if I had known it for a positive fact that he was one of your own labourers one of your own harvest men. Have you any Irishmen working for you?"

"Of course we have," answers Jane, rather sharply, "but that proves nothing. Do not they, as you observed just now, come over in droves at this time of year for the harvest?"

"I am sorry," say I, sighing. "I wish you had not. Well, let me finish; I have just done I had been holding the door−handle mechanically in my hand; I suppose I pulled it unconsciously towards me, for the door hinge creaked a little, but quite audibly. To my unspeakable horror the man turned round and saw me. Good God! he would cut my throat too with that red, red reaping hook! I tried to get into the passage and lock the door, but the key was on the inside. I tried to scream, I tried to run; but voice and legs disobeyed me. The bed and room and man began to dance before me; a black earthquake seemed to swallow me up, and I suppose I fell down in a swoon. When I awoke really the blessed morning had come, and a robin was singing outside my window on an apple bough. There you have it all, and now let me look for a 'Bradshaw,' for I am so frightened and unhinged that go I must."

CHAPTER III.

"I MUST own that it has taken away appetite," I say, with rather a sickly smile, as we sit round the breakfast table. "I assure you that I mean no insult to your fresh eggs and bread−and−butter, but I simply cannot eat."

"It certainly was an exceptionally dreadful dream," says Jane, whose colour has returned, and who is a good deal fortified and reassured by the influences of breakfast and of her husband's scepticism; for a condensed and shortened version of my dream has been told to him, and he has easily laughed it to scorn. "Exceptionally dreadful, chiefly from its extreme consistency and precision of detail. But still, you know, dear, one has had hideous dreams oneself times out of mind and they never came, to anything. I remember once I dreamt that all my teeth came out in my mouth at once double ones and all; but that was ten years ago, and they still keep their situations, nor did I about that time lose any friend, which they say such a dream is a sign of."

"You say that some unaccountable instinct told you that the hero of your dream was one of my own men," says Robin, turning towards me with a covert smile of benevolent contempt for my superstitiousness; "did not I understand you to say so?"

"Yes," reply I, not in the least shaken by his hardly−veiled disbelief.

"I do not know how it came to me, but I was as much persuaded of that, and am so still, as I am of my own identity."

"I will tell you of a plan then to prove the truth of your vision," returns he, smiling. "I will take you through the fields this morning and you shall see all my men at work, both the ordinary staff and the harvest casuals, Irish and all. If amongst them you find the counterpart of Jane's and my murderer (a smile) I will promise then no, not even then can I promise to believe you, for there is such a family likeness between all Irishmen, at all events between all the Irishmen that one sees out of Ireland."

"Take me," I say eagerly, jumping up; "now, this minute! You cannot be more anxious nor half so anxious to prove me a false prophet as I am to be proved one."

"I am quite at your service," he answers, "as soon as you please. Jenny, get your hat and come too."

"And if we do not find him," says Jane, smiling playfully " I think I am growing pretty easy on that head you

will promise to eat a great deal of luncheon and never mention 'Bradshaw' again?"

"I promise," reply I gravely. "And if, on the other hand, we do find him, you will promise to put no more obstacles in the way of my going, but will let me depart in peace without taking any offence thereat?"

"It is a bargain," she says gaily. "Witness, Robin."

So we set off in the bright dewiness of the morning; on our walk over Robin's farm. It is a grand harvest day, and the whitened sheaves are everywhere, drying, drying in the genial sun. We have been walking for an hour and both Jane and I are rather tired. The sun beats with all his late−summer strength on our heads and takes the force and spring out of our hot limbs.

"The hour of triumph is approaching," says Robin, with a quiet smile, as we draw near an open gate through which a loaded wain, shedding, ripe wheat ears from its abundance as it crawls along, is passing. "And time for it too; it is a quarter past twelve and you have been on your legs for fully an hour. Miss Bellairs, you must make haste and find the murderer, for there is only one more field to do it in."

"Is not there?" I cry eagerly. "Oh, I am glad! Thank God, I begin to breathe again."

We pass through the open gate and begin to tread across the stubble for almost the last load has gone."

"We must get nearer the hedge," says Robin, "or you will not see their faces; they are all at dinner."

We do as he suggests. In the shadow of the hedge we walk close in front of the row of heated labourers, who, sitting or lying on the hedge bank, are eating unattractive looking dinners. I scan one face after another honest bovine English faces. I have seen a hundred thousand faces like each one of the faces now before me very like but the exact counterpart of none. We are getting to the end of the row, I beginning to feel rather ashamed, though infinitely relieved, and to smile at my own expense. I look again, and my heart suddenly stands still and turns to stone within me. He is there! not a handsbreadth from me! Great God! how well I have remembered his face, even to the unsightly smallpox seams, the shagged locks, the grinning slit mouth, the little sly base eyes. He is employed in no murderous occupation now; he is harmlessly cutting hunks of coarse bread and fat cold bacon with a clasp knife; but yet I have no more doubt that it is he he whom I saw with the crimsoned sickle in his stained hand than I have that it is I who am stonily, shiveringly, staring at him.

"Well, Miss Bellairs, who was right?" asks Robin's cheery voice at my elbow. "Perish Bradshaw and all his labyrinths! Are you satisfied now? Good heavens!" (catching a sudden sight of my face) "How white you are! Do you mean to say that you have found him at last? Impossible!"

"Yes, I have found him," I answer in a low and unsteady tone. "I knew I should. Look, there he is! close to us, the third from the end."

I turn away my head, unable to bear the hideous recollections and associations that the sight of the man calls up, and I suppose that they both look.

"Are you sure that you are not letting your imagination carry you away?" asks he presently, in a tone of gentle kindly remonstrance. "As I said before, these fellows are all so much alike, they have all the same look of debased squalid cunning. Oblige me by looking once again, so as to be quite sure."

I obey. Reluctantly I look at him once again. Apparently becoming aware that he is the object of our notice, he lifts his small dull eyes and looks back at me. It is the same face they are the same eyes that turned from the plundered dressing−table to catch sight of me last night. "There is no mistake," I answer, shuddering from head to

foot. "Take me away, please as quick as you can out of the field home!"

They comply, and over the hot fields and through the hot noon air we step silently homewards. As we reach the cool and ivied porch of the house I speak for the first time. "You believe me now?"

He hesitates. "I was staggered for a moment, I will own," he answers, with candid gravity; "but I have been thinking it over and on reflection I have come to the conclusion that the highly excited state of your imagination is answerable for the heightening of the resemblance which exists between all the Irish of that class into an identity with the particular Irishman you dreamed of, and whose face (by your own showing) you only saw dimly reflected in the glass."

"Not dimly," repeat I, emphatically, "unless I now see that Sun dimly" (pointing to him as he gloriously, blindingly, blazes from the sky). You will not be warned by me, then?" I continue passionately, after an interval. "You will run the risk of my dream coming true you will stay on here in spite of it? Oh, if I could persuade you to go from home anywhere anywhere for a time, until the danger was past!"

"And leave the harvest to itself?" answers he, with a smile of quiet sarcasm; "be a loser of two hundred or three hundred pounds, probably, and a laughing−stock to my acquaintance into the bargain, and all for what? A dream a fancy a nightmare!"

"But do you know anything of the man? of his antecedents? of his character?" I persist eagerly.

He shrugs he shoulders.

"Nothing whatever; nothing to his disadvantage, certainly. He came over with a lot of others a fortnight ago, and I engaged him for the harvesting. For anything I have heard to the contrary, he is a simple inoffensive fellow enough."

I am silenced, but not convinced. I turn to Jane. "You remember your promise: you will now put no more hindrances in the way of my going?"

"You do not mean to say that you are going, really?" says Jane, who is looking rather awed by what she calls the surprising coincidence but is still a good deal heartened up by her husband's want of faith.

"I do," reply I, emphatically. "I should go stark staring mad if I were to sleep another night in that room. I shall go to Chester to−night, and cross to−morrow from Holyhead."

I do as I say. I make my maid, to her extreme surprise, repack my just unpacked wardrobe and take an afternoon train to Chester. As I drive away with bag and baggage down the leafy lane, I look back and see my two friends standing at their gate. Jane is leaning her head on her old man's shoulder, and looking rather wistfully after me: an expression of mingled regret for my departure and vexation at my folly clouding their kind and happy faces. At least my last living recollection of them is a pleasant one.

CHAPTER IV.

THE joy with which my family welcome my return is largely mingled with surprise, but still more largely with curiosity, as to the cause of my so sudden reappearance. But I keep my own counsel. I have a reluctance to give the real reason, and possess no inventive faculty in the way of lying, so I give none. I say, "I am back: is not that enough for you? Set your minds at rest, for that is as much as you will ever know about the matter."

For one thing, I am occasionally rather ashamed of my conduct. It is not that the impression produced by my dream is effaced, but that absence and distance from the scene and the persons of it have produced their natural weakening effect. Once or twice during the voyage, when writhing in laughable torments in the ladies' cabin of the steam~boat, I said to myself, "Most likely you are a fool!" I therefore continually ward off the cross−questionings of my family with what defensive armour of silence and evasion I may.

"I feel convinced it was the husband," says one of my sisters, after a long catechism, which, as usual, has resulted in nothing. "You are too loyal to your friend to own it, but I always felt sure that any man who could take compassion on that poor peevish old Jane must be some wonderful freak of nature. Come, confess. Is not he a cross between an orang−outang and a Methodist parson?"

"He is nothing of the kind," reply I, in some heat, recalling the libelled Robin's clean fresh−coloured human face. "You will be very lucky if you ever secure any one half so kind, pleasant, and gentleman−like."

Three days after my return, I receive a letter from Jane:

Weston House, Caulfield.

"MY DEAR DINAH, I hope you are safe home again, and that you have made up your mind that two crossings of St. George's Channel within forty−eight hours are almost as bad as having your throat cut, according to the programme you laid out for us. I have good news for you. Our murderer elect is gone. After hearing of the connection that there was to lie between us, Robin naturally was rather interested in him, and found out his name, which is the melodious one of Watty Doolan After asking his name he asked other things about him, and finding that he never did a stroke of work and was inclined to be tipsy and quarrelsome he paid and packed him off at once. He is now on hi way back to his native shores, and if he murder anybody it will be you my dear. Good−bye, Dinah. Hardly yet have I forgiven you for the way in which you frightened me with your graphic description of poor Robin and me, with our heads loose and waggling.

"Ever yours affectionately,

"JANE WATSON."

I fold up this note with a feeling of exceeding relief, and a thorough faith that I have been a superstitious hysterical fool. More resolved than ever am I to keep the reason for my return profoundly secret from my family. The next morning but one we are all in the breakfast−room after breakfast, hanging about, and looking at the papers. My sister has just thrown down the Times, with a pettish exclamation that there is nothing in it and that it really is not worthwhile paying threepence a day to see nothing but advertisements and police reports. I pick it up as she throws it down, and look listlessly over its tall columns from top to bottom. Suddenly my listlessness vanishes. What is this that I am reading? this in staring capitals?

"SHOCKING TRAGEDY AT CAULFIELD. DOUBLE MURDER."

I am in the middle of the paragraph before I realise what it is.

"From an early hour of the morning this village has been the scene of deep and painful excitement in consequence of the discovery of the atrocious murder of Mr. and Mrs. watson, of Weston House, two of its most respected inhabitants. It appears that the deceased had retired to rest on Tuesday night at their usual hour, and in their usual health and spirits. The housemaid, on going to call them at the accustomed hour on Wednesday morning, received no answer, in spite of repeated knocking. She therefore at length opened the door and entered. The rest of the servants, attracted by her cries, rushed to the spot, and found the unfortunate gentleman and lady lying on the bed with their throats cut from ear to ear. Life must have been extinct for some hours, as they were both perfectly

cold. The room presented a hideous spectacle, being literally swimming in blood. A reaping hook, evidently the instrument with which the crime was perpetrated, was picked up near the door. An Irish labourer of the name of Watty Doolan, discharged by the lamented gentleman a few days ago on account of misconduct, has already been arrested on strong suspicion, as at an early hour on Wednesday morning he was seen by a farm labourer, who was going to his work, washing his waistcoat at a retired spot in the stream which flows through the meadows below the scene of the murder. On being apprehended and searched, several small articles of jewelry, identified as having belonged to Mr. Watson, were discovered in his possession."

I drop the paper and sink into a chair, feeling deadly sick.

So you see that my dream came true, after all.

The facts narrated in the above story occurred in Ireland. The only liberty I have taken with them is in transplanting them to England.