

***THE GHOST OF
THE
GALLOPING MAJOR***

by

Pat Antony

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Gallopig Major

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1. The Journey Begins
2. A Strange Find
3. The Dinner Party
4. Lady Kitty Tells Her Story
5. Lady Kitty Has A Problem
6. The Emerald Isle
7. Jason's Strange Encounter
8. Liam's Warning
9. A Puzzling Discovery
10. Justin Gets A Bad Scare
11. Cassy Tells What She Knows
12. The O'Connor Boys are Missing!
13. The O'Connor Boys Have A Story To Tell
14. Lady Kitty Takes Charge
15. An Exciting Discovery
16. Into The Unknown
17. A Voice From The Past
18. The Truth Is Told
19. The Shamrock
20. Lady Caroline Gets Involved
21. Tragedy Strikes
22. An Heir For Lady Kitty
23. The Sign Of The Shamrock
24. Jason Gets A Surprise
25. Lady Kitty Faces The Truth
26. A Link With The Past
27. The Major's Farewell

*This novel is dedicated, With Love.
To our Grandsons, Jason and Justin
VICTORIA, BC*

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Chapter 1. The Journey Begins.

Two young brothers, Jason and Justin Craig, fastened their seat belts. The 'plane was getting ready for take-off from Vancouver Airport, in British Columbia. The boys settled back in the large seats of the first class cabin. They found it hard to believe that, at last, they were on their way to Ballymore Castle, on the shores of Dundrum Bay, In Northern Ireland.

The boys had been sad when the time had come to say good-bye to their parents and friends. But now their excitement mounted as the runway slid away from under the wheels, and the huge aircraft thundered into the sky. The great adventure for the fifteen year old Jason, and his younger brother, had begun.

"Gee!" exclaimed Jason, turning from the small window, "it's hard to believe that we really *are* on our way to Ireland. And all because of a lady's purse!"

"It's awesome," agreed Justin. "Just think! It could have belonged to just any old ordinary person. If it had, we wouldn't be on this 'plane, and that's for sure! Wow! Weren't we the lucky ones?"

"Weren't we ever! Who would have guessed that we would find something belonging to a titled person from a real castle? Boy! was I ever excited when she told us about the ghost!"

"Don't even mention it!" exclaimed Justin, with a shiver. "This is one thirteen year old who wants nothing to do with any old ghost, galloping about on a white horse, or whatever!

Anyway," Justin added in a brighter tone, "I'm as happy as you are that it was Lady O'Donnell's purse we found. She's not a bit like you'd expect. I think it's awesome that she's invited us to stay in her real, live, castle, ghost or no ghost!"

The boys tilted their seats back as the great mountains of the Canadian Rockies slid beneath the wings. Each of them was going over in his mind, yet again, the chain of events leading up to this great adventure.



Chapter 2. A Strange Find

It had all begun on a rainy April afternoon. Jason and Justin Craig were walking their dog, Rusty, in Victoria; Beacon Hill Park. Little did they know, as they set out, that the whole course of their lives was about to take a new turn.

The two boys followed the path they knew so well. Their coat collars were turned up against the damp mist that drifted in from the sea. Rusty bounded along ahead of them. Soon the winding path led them to a wooden seat, facing the sea. A thick hedge gave it shelter. It was a perfect spot, on a clear day, from which to watch the boats beating up the channel to Victoria harbour. To-day, however, the sea was just a grey blur beneath scudding clouds. Rusty took off towards the hedge behind the seat. He didn't return when they called and whistled.

"I'll go!" said Justin, turning back. Jason hunched himself deeper into his warm jacket, and waited. A moment later his young brother was shouting, "Jason! Come and see what Rusty has found!"

"No thanks!" Jason called back. "I'm not the least bit interested in any dirty old bone, or dead animal, or whatever!" He stood his ground. There was great silence from the other side of the hedge. Presently Jason's curiosity got the better of him. He turned back. A strange sight met his eyes. Rusty was sitting back watching his young master rummaging through a large, brown, leather purse.

"What on earth have you got there...?!" Jason hurried forward to join his brother.

"Look! See!" Justin was breathless with excitement. "It's a lady's purse. Rusty found it."

"Here, let's have a look." Jason wanted a share in this interesting discovery. He grabbed the purse, and began turning it over in his hands. "Hmmm," he murmured after a moment. "Real leather. Very expensive. I hope Rusty hasn't ruined it. I don't see any teeth marks."

"No, I don't think so. I got it away from him in time. I've looked inside. There's a whole bunch o'money. Must be more than a thousand dollars!" Justin took the purse and withdrew a thick wad of bills. Jason gazed in awe at the sight of so much money in his brother's fist. "Hey! Kiddo! Take it easy with all that. Put it back before it blows away, or something happens to it. You know it's not ours."

"Oh, of course I know that!" replied Justin, shortly. "But we'd best set about trying to find out who it does belong to." As he was speaking he began taking each item out of the purse. He laid it carefully on the seat beside him.

Jason sat down. He examined each piece carefully. "There must be *something* here with a name, or an address, on it. We've just got to find the owner. Whoever she is, she must be frantic with worry. Fancy losing all that money, and everything. I wonder if she has gone to the police about it? I'm sure she will."

"Here's something!" Justin handed his brother a credit card holder. The edge of the card was showing. Jason pulled it free carefully. He studied it for a long moment. His face showed astonishment.

"Well? Don't keep it all to yourself. Does it say who she is?"

"You'll never believe this, Justy! This purse belongs to a Lady!"

"That figures!" blurted Justin. "I could have told you that. You don't see too many men carrying something like this around."

"Naw! You got it all wrong. It belongs to a real Lady. You know, a titled person."

"You mean 'Lady' like Lady Diane?"

"Well it's not Lady Diane's, if that's what you're thinking. Look! See for yourself." Jason handed over the card. Justin studied the small raised letters. "Awesome!" he breathed, after a moment.

"You're right. Lady Kitty O'Donnell, Ballymore Castle, County Down, N. Ireland." Justin paused before he looked up. "What does this, er, this 'N' stand for, Jay? D'you know?"

"Of course! The 'N' stands for North, Northern Ireland."

"Is there a difference?" Jason responded with a laugh.

"You'd better not say that, when we get there!"

"I gather there is, then," mumbled Justin.

Jason took the card out of his brother's hand. He stared at it for a long moment. "Wow! Just fancy. A real live Lady, in a real, live castle. And in Ireland, at that!"

"Northern Ireland!" corrected the younger boy, still smarting slightly from his brother's laugh. Jason ignored the jibe. "I wonder what she's doing here, in Victoria? I suppose she must be staying somewhere near, or she wouldn't be toddling about this neck o' the woods, leaving her things lying around for anyone to find."

"Just her purse," commented Justin. Then he added brightly, "Maybe she was mugged?"

"Don't be daft, Justy. If that was the case the purse and its contents would be long gone!"

"I guess!"

"Let's take another look and see if we've overlooked something." Jason took up the purse again. In a moment he gave a grunt of satisfaction. "Hey, we missed this zip pocket." As he spoke he withdrew a large plastic tag with a small key dangling from it. "See here! The Empress Hotel, suite 202."

"Wow! The Empress, no less." Justin's eyes widened. Gee, nothing but the best for her ladyship, eh? She's probably loaded. I wonder if she'll offer a reward, for her purse?"

"We'd better move fast!" Jason became brisk and business-like. "The police are probably on to it by this time. We'd have some explaining to do if we were stopped and questioned for having a lady's purse on our hands, especially this one." He held it up, as he spoke.

"Let's get going, then," agreed Justin. "We'd better get it back to Lady, er, Whatever before we get caught with it."

"Lady O'Donnell, Lady Kitty O'Donnell," corrected his brother. With that, Jason began stuffing the various items on the bench back into the purse.

"Here, let me have it. I'll take it." Justin thrust the purse under his arm. "Hey, Jay, will you put the leash on Rusty. We don't want him taking off on us again."

The boys took a quick look around to make sure they had everything. At a brisk pace they set off across the park, for the Empress hotel.

It was Jason who broke the silence, voicing his thoughts. "I wonder what she'll be like? Tall, and thin, I expect, and leaning on a silver-topped cane."

"With a string of real pearls round her neck, and dripping diamonds, or whatever," added Justin.

"I bet she's pacing up and down on the thick carpet in her suite, even as we speak. She'll be wondering how she's going to pay her bill!"

"What an adventure!" breathed Justin. "I wonder how it will all turn out? I've never met a real

titled person before. How do we address her? Er, 'Here's your purse, Missus?'"

"Hardly!" replied Jason, dryly.

"How about, then, something like, 'O Exalted One, may I have this great honour...'" Justin made a mock bow, from the waist. Both boys burst into peals of laughter which echoed back from the trees bordering the path.

The boys hurried forward. Presently the two Craigs reached the edge of the great park, bounded by a busy street. They darted across, when there was a lull in the traffic.

A few more paces brought them to the grounds of the hotel. There was a seat by the path. Justin quickly tied Rusty's leash to a metal support. "Stay, Rusty!" He spoke gently to the dog. "Don't worry. We won't be long."

Jason and Justin entered the great hotel by the side entrance. They made their way to the desk in the main lobby. The black-suited clerk behind the counter eyed the two boys rather coldly. They were damp and untidy after their hurried walk through the park. Justin was clutching the purse, under his arm. Jason approached the counter. "My name is Jason Craig. We are here to see Lady O'Donnell. We have important business with her. Will you kindly announce us." The clerk was taken aback by Jason's manner. Without a word he turned to the intercom and pressed a button. "Front Desk, Your Ladyship... There are two, er, young gentlemen to see you.... Right away, Milady." The man, visibly impressed, turned to Jason. "Lady O'Donnell will see you. You may go straight up. Second floor, on your left."

Scorning the elevator, the young boys bounded up the wide staircase. It was quiet in the corridor after the bustle of the lobby. There came the sound of a heavy door being opened. Lady O'Donnell appeared, framed in the open doorway. Jason and Justin were taken aback for a moment. The pretty lady who faced them was so totally unlike anything they were prepared for. She was quite short with a pleasant, motherly look about her. A comfortable sweater matched a heavy tweed skirt. She wore a pair of sensible, flat-heeled walking shoes. However, it was not the lady's clothing that had captured the attention of the two boys. Lady O'Donnell had the twinkliest blue eyes and the warmest smile that they had ever seen.

Before they had time to recover their wits, Lady O'Donnell gave a friendly wave. "Come on! Come in, come in, the pair of you." The lilt of an Irish accent added to the charm of her smile.

The boys entered the suite, still recovering from their surprise.

"Take off those wet coats, now, before we all sit down. Do tell me, for I am dying to know, what brings young gentlemen, such as yourselves, to my door?"

"L-Lady, er, Lady O' Donnell," Jason began, stumbling a little over the greeting. "I'm Jason, Jason Craig. And this is my brother, Justin." Gaining confidence, he hurried on, explaining briefly how the purse had been found under the park bench. Finally he took the purse from his brother, and thrust it, almost awkwardly, into her ladyship's lap. "And here it is, then. Everything's there!, We didn't touch anything, oh, er, well, that is, except to look inside to find out who owned it."

"Of course, my dear I'm so glad you did. How else could you have brought it back to me?" Lady

O'Donnell rose from her seat and gave each of the boys a hug and a loud kiss, much to their surprise. When she had settled back in her chair she said, "I'm sure you must be wondering how I came to do such a silly, silly thing?" The brothers didn't know quite how to reply, so they remained silent. "You see, Lady O'Donnell went on, "I thought I would get a much-needed leg stretch, this morning. I took my writing things with me. I knew I had lots of cards and letters to write, to my friends in Ireland. There's a lovely park, right opposite the hotel." She stopped for a moment, and smiled. "But of course you know it. Well, it seems I don't have to tell you about the lovely quiet spot I found, overlooking the sea?"

"Yeah, we know it well, we go there all the time." It was Justin who spoke for the first time, colouring as he did so. Lady O'Donnell nodded, as she smiled across at the young boy. "Well, thank you, I don't have to go into details then. I took all my writing things out, and shoved my purse under the seat, out of the way.

"I'd barely started writing when down came the rain. I had to run for cover. I quite forgot about my purse under the seat!"

"Oh, that's easy to understand," said Jason. "It could have happened to anyone, doing the same thing."

"Thank you, Jason," said Lady O'Donnell, simply. "Of course when I got back, and looked for my room key, I remembered what I had done. I can tell you I was almost frantic! My purse held all my travel papers, my tickets, my passport, not to mention small change spending money!" At the mention of 'small change' Justin was unable to stifle a gasp, which he quickly changed to a cough.

"Are you all right, Justin?" Lady O'Donnell asked the question with concern, but the blue eyes held a twinkle hard to conceal. "Can I get you a glass of water?"

"Oh, no thanks, Lady O'Donnell, I'm quite fine, thank you."

"Well!" the Lady continued. "I was just about to 'phone the police when the desk clerk told me there were two young men to see me. I had a good feeling that it might be news of my purse. I don't know too many young people in Victoria who would be wanting to see me. The moment I set eyes on the pair o' you standing there, in the hallway, all wet, I knew that it was my lucky day. And am I not right? I shall always be grateful to you both."

After a brief silence Lady Kitty turned to the boys. "It was Rusty, you say, who was clever enough to find it? But where is your pet right now?"

"Oh, he's all right," Jason answered. "He's tied up outside, just by the side entrance."

"Well," smiled Lady Kitty, "I should like to buy him the biggest bone in all of Victoria, for his cleverness. I'm, sure you know of a meat-market where you could get one?" As she was speaking, Lady O'Donnell was rummaging through the famous purse.

She found what she was looking for. Leaning forward she offered Jason a crisp hundred dollar bill. The young Craig was taken completely off guard for a moment. He tried not to allow his face to show his surprise. "Thank you, so very much, Lady O'Donnell. Your gift will certainly please him!" Lady O'Donnell couldn't suppress a smile at Justin's re-action. A drawn out 'Wow!' told her that her gift hadn't gone unappreciated.

There was a moment's pause in the conversation. Justin spoke up. "Talking of Rusty, if you'll excuse us, we ought to be getting back to him. We've been away a long time. He'll be cold, and hungry, I expect."

"Yes indeed," added Jason, coming to his feet. "Mum will be getting anxious, too."

"Of course, of course!" nodded Lady O'Donnell. "How very thoughtless of me. I should have suggested that you 'phoned her, to let her know where you are. Do it now, please Jason." She indicated the telephone on a small table nearby. But before Jason had had time to lift the handset, their hostess broke in, "Oh, I'm not being myself at all today. I'm even forgetting my manners, too! I should have thought of asking your mother over, for afternoon tea. I'd love to meet her. See if you can persuade her, Jason."

"I'm certain that Mum would love to meet you, too," Jason said, as he lifted the 'phone. "She was born in Northern Ireland."

Before the conversation could continue, Mrs Craig was on the line. She was really surprised by her son's rather garbled account of all that had happened, especially when she learned that her children were being entertained by a Lady, at the Empress hotel. She was even more surprised at the invitation to join them, for tea.

Judy Craig needed no persuading. She agreed to come, immediately.

Justin was making frantic signs to his brother that he wanted to say something.

"Hang on, a minute, Mum," Jason concluded. "Justy's here. He wants to talk to you."

"Hi, Mum! It's me, Justin." The young boy was almost shouting in his excitement. "It's awesome, Mum! You are coming?.....Great! Will you come to the side entrance, you know, by the park? Rusty's there. I want to put him in the ear. Then I can show you where Lady O'Donnell's suite is. Oh Mum! She's the greatest. You'll just *love* her...Sure!... See ya!... Bye Mum." Justin's face was scarlet as he turned away from the 'phone.

Covering for her young guest's embarrassment, Lady O'Donnell spoke across to Jason. "So, you were just telling me that your mother comes from the North of Ireland? Now isn't that just a grand coincidence? And tell me, what part of the country would it be?"

"I think it was near Belfast. But she's lived in Canada a long time. Justin and me, we've never been. We were born here, in British Columbia."

Justin was beginning to shift, restlessly. Taking advantage of a brief lull in the conversation, he stood up. "If you'll excuse me, Mum'll be here soon. I think I should go down."

"Oh, for pity; sake," jeered Jason. "She's not driving a turbo jet, you know!"

"Now don't you be teasing the lad," said Lady O'Donnell. "It's a grand thing to see a young boy express concern for his mother. Run along, Austin. She'll be here any minute I'm sure."

The door was hardly closed before Lady O'Donnell and Jason were chatting away like old friends. Jason felt quite at ease in the company of this charming, titled Lady. For her part, it was plain to see that Lady O'Donnell was enjoying herself immensely.

Jason bombarded his hostess with all sorts of questions about Ireland, and in particular, about her castle. Lady O'Donnell was delighted to have such an eager young audience. She was only too willing to talk about her beloved ancestral home. She spoke about it so clearly that Jason felt that he could almost see it, surrounded by an emerald green parkland, near the shores of the shimmering Irish Sea. His interest quickened, when the castle ghost was mentioned. The boy was about to press for the chilling details when there came a sudden knocking on the door. It gave Jason quite a start!

A moment later Justin was proudly making the introductions. Lady O'Donnell embraced Judy Craig, warmly. In no time at all laughter and bright conversation filled the room.

Afternoon tea arrived, served in the best tradition of the famous hotel. Justin took full advantage of an array of rich pastries. Judy commented on the delicacy of the cucumber sandwiches.

Time passed all too quickly. After the whole adventure had been recounted, yet again, Mrs Craig stood up. She thanked her hostess. "But," she explained, "we really must be going."

Lady O'Donnell forestalled their departure for a moment when she said, "Oh, I am sorry you have to leave. This has been the highlight of my trip to Canada. I really find it hard to say 'good-bye' so soon after we have met. I would so much like to see you all again before I have to return home. I wonder," she paused, "it's short notice I know. Could you all come, tomorrow evening, and have dinner with me, here, in the hotel?" She searched her young friend's face, almost anxiously. "Please say you can manage it, Mrs Craig?"

"Of course! We'd simply love to come." Mrs Craig answered without a moment's hesitation. She laughed, as she added, "But only on one condition, that you call me 'Judy', please."

"Agreed! Judy, then. how about six thirty or seven? Come up to the suite first and leave your coats. I'll order for seven thirty. Does that suit you all?"

The boys were simply delighted at this turn of events. Cheerfully they exchanged hugs with their smiling hostess. Lady Kitty O'Donnell had really won their hearts.

All the way home the two boys were bubbling with excitement over all that had taken place since they left home for their walk with Rusty, on a damp and dreary afternoon.



Chapter 3. The Dinner Party

The dinner party the next evening was a huge success. Lady Kitty O'Donnell was a charming hostess. She soon had the boys talking about themselves. Justin joined in without a trace of shyness.

Judy Craig sat and listened, and watched. She was proud of her two sons who were chatting away so cheerfully. She was thinking how grown up they had become, all of a sudden. Judy had a strange feeling that she was seeing the beginnings of a lasting friendship that would have an effect on all their lives. Little did she know how right she was!

At last the meal was over. Even Justin had to agree that enough was enough. The boys thanked Lady O'Donnell for what had been 'the best ever!'

It was Lady O'Donnell who suggested that the two young ones should find the hotel games' room. "A game of table tennis will help to shake it all down!" was how she put it. "Your mother and I will be going upstairs for a nice chat. You can join us there when you're finished."

"Good idea!" said Jason, rising from the table. "But, er, would you please have time later to tell us more about your castle? Maybe about the ghost, too?"

"My dear Jason," replied her ladyship. "Ballymore Castle is one of my favourite subjects. You can be sure there'll be plenty of time to talk about it. But run along, now, the pair of you!"

"Right!" returned Jason. "We're outa' here! C'mon kiddo! Prepare for a sound beating!"

"That'll be the day!" murmured Justin, as he joined his brother. "We won't be long." The boys were laughing, as they left the dining room together.

"Well now," said Lady O'Donnell, in the silence which followed. "Shall we go up, then? We'll be more comfortable. There's something I've been wanting to ask you."

When the two ladies had seated themselves, Judy said, "You certainly have made a great hit with those boys of mine. I've never seen them, especially Justin, take to some-one so readily. I think you must have cast a Leprechaun's spell on them!"

Lady Kitty looked pleased, but then her face clouded over. "The feeling is mutual. I am going to miss them so dreadfully. I have to leave for Belfast in a couple of days."

"So soon?" Judy looked upset.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. My business here is almost completed. I can't think of any excuse for remaining, that would satisfy Cassy, and the others. I had a letter only this morning." The elder lady reached for the purse by her chair. She withdrew a sheet of light blue paper. "It's from Cassy, my house-keeper," she explained. "It says, among other things, 'there are strange goings-on, in the district, since you've been away. The Major's been out and about again. Some folks here are expecting trouble. We'll be glad to have you back home, soon...'"

Judy waited in silence until the letter was safely away in the famous purse. "Er, who's the Major, she mentions? A leader in the Irish Republican Army, perhaps? Or, one of the soldiers from England?"

"Well, that last is perhaps nearer the truth!" Lady O'Donnell laughed. "No, my dear, the Major is more fantasy than substance. The Major, more commonly known as 'The Galloping Major' is Ballymore's resident ghost!"

"You're kidding!" Judy's eyes were wide with surprise.

"Oh no, dear. The local people are a superstitious lot. They take their ghost very seriously. They regard its comings and goings as a bad sign of trouble in the neighborhood. It's all part of the Ballymore folk lore, dating back to Cromwell's time." Lady O'Donnell paused, as she smiled briefly. "It is regarded as a friend of the devil, or a messenger from God, depending on what religion you belong to! Lately, the spirit's re-appearance is linked to Ireland's political and religious trouble. I'm sure you know what I am telling you?"

"Indeed I do!" answered Judy, with a heavy sigh. "I am greatly saddened by all the fighting, murdering, and bombing, that has been tearing my home-land apart since I left, thirty years ago. It's dreadful. There doesn't seem to be any end to it!"

"Then you can understand that Cassy is not too happy? She would like to see me safely home, where I belong."

"Your housekeeper, er, is she all alone, in that huge castle?" Judy asked. She couldn't help thinking it was no wonder Cassy wanted her mistress home. What a traumatic experience to have a ghost galloping to and fro beneath one's bedroom window!

"Oh, no! Not alone. I have Dermot, the head of the house-hold staff; then there's Liam, the grounds-keeper. He has his grandsons living with him. There's daily help, too, of course. I expect they're all in the plot to bring me home! They think I'm getting too old to be trotting about, so far from home, on my own. It looks like it, indeed it does. It seems I've come to the point of leaving my most valuable possessions lying about in a public place, for anyone to find!" Lady Kitty chuckled. "No! On second thoughts, that was the best thing I ever did!"

"I know that my lads will be heart sorry to hear that you are leaving so soon," said Judy. "I think they are half expecting it, though. I heard them talking this morning. Justin said that he didn't think that anyone could stay long. The best suite at the Empress must cost so much money!"

"Bless the boy! He has a point!" Lady O'Donnell laughed.

"Anyway," Judy went on, "I know they hope to see you again, even if it means saving up so that they can visit with you, in Ireland. I don't think they quite understand what's involved. But that's the optimism of youth for you!"

"That's just a strange co-incidence that you should bring the matter up. It's what I've been wanting to talk to you about, all evening."

"Oh? And what matter is that, Lady O'Donnell?"

"To tell you the truth, my dear, I've just been waiting for the right moment to ask you if you might consider allowing your two boys to come and stay with me, at Ballymore, for the summer holidays? All expenses paid, of course," Lady O'Donnell gave Judy no time to reply before she hurried on. "I know it's a great deal to ask. I would just love to have them. It would do us a power of good to have young people about the place. They would keep us all from feeling our age."

All the while that Lady O'Donnell was speaking Judy's face was a study. It was impossible to interrupt. Before she could form a reply, her hostess was off again. "Now don't let me rush you into your answer right away. I know you need time to think it over." The elderly lady rose from her seat. She crossed the room to her desk in the corner. Taking up some papers she tried to look busy.

Presently Judy Craig cleared her throat. Lady O'Donnell turned in her chair.

"Lady O'Donnell," Judy began, choosing her words carefully. "You took me completely by surprise. What a wonderful invitation. I could not possibly deny my sons such a treat as you have offered. I thank you, so much. Of course they may go!"

Lady O'Donnell's escape of breath could be heard across the room, as she sighed with relief, and obvious pleasure. She rejoined her young guest on the settee. In a moment they were busy making plans, and arranging the details. They had scarcely finished when there was a knock on the heavy door. Jason and Justin had returned.

Lady O'Donnell greeted the boys warmly. She was positively beaming with excitement. "Sit down, the pair of you! Your mother and I have something important to say to you both." Justin's face grew red. Jason looked anxious. Lady O'Donnell laughed out loud. "Oh, don't look so upset. It's nothing bad! At least I should hope not?" She winked, as she caught Judy's eye. Then she added, "Would you like to tell them, or shall I?"

"Tell us what?" interrupted Jason, still looking upset.

"In good time," said Judy. "It's your privilege, Lady O'Donnell. You tell them, please. I shall enjoy watching their faces!"

Her ladyship turned to the boys. "Now you two," she began, in a tone of mock severity, "your mother and I have been seriously discussing what should be done with you both, during the long summer vacation.. we were thinking...."

"Oh, No!" groaned Justin, "not summer school? Jason and me, we wanted to get jobs to er..." He looked at his mother. "You know, Mum, what, er, we talked about."

By this time, Judy and Lady O'Donnell could contain themselves no longer. "You'll have to put them out of their misery." spluttered Judy.

"Boys," said Lady O'Donnell, more kindly, "make way on the settee so that I can come and sit between the pair of you. I have a very great favour to ask of you." The brothers moved aside, and her ladyship joined them. "That's better," she sighed.

"Have we displeased you, in some way?" Jason sounded really distressed. "Honestly, I don't know...."

"Stop! Stop this very minute. How could you even think such a thing? Sure, if that were the case I would scarcely be the one to be asking you if you would both like to be spending your summer vacation with me, at Ballymore Castle?" For several seconds there was complete silence as the Craig boys' minds dealt with something almost unbelievable. Then, Chaos broke loose! With loud whoops of excitement both boys were trying to talk at the same time. It was Jason who was the first to find his tongue. "Oh, Lady O'Donnell! D'you really mean it? Are we really invited to visit with you in the summer?"

"Why of course, Jason my dear. I asked you, didn't I? That is, if you care to say 'yes' to my invitation, which, incidentally, has your mother's blessing."

"You bet we accept, don't we Justy?" Jason didn't wait for his brother to finish his long drawn out 'Awe-some!' before he went on, "Oh, thank you, Lady O'Donnell, and thank you, too, Mum, for letting us. Wow! It's fabulous. I can't believe it!"

"You can believe it, all right," smiled Judy. "That's what Lady O'Donnell and I have been talking about when you were downstairs. It's all arranged. I'm so happy for you both."

"Yes," added Lady O'Donnell, "you owe a great deal to your mother for allowing me to have you. So that's all settled then!"

"Thanks a lot, Lady O'Donnell, and you, too Mum." Justin's eyes were shining with excitement. "It's awesome, Lady O'Donnell!" There was a pause for a moment. Lady O'Donnell looked around her as she said, "Well now, I think it's time to drop this 'Lady O'Donnell' business. Why don't you all call me 'Kitty,' er, 'Lady Kitty. I would like that much better, since we're already such good friends, and I expect we always shall be."

"You bet we will, Lady O'Donnell, oh, er, Lady Kitty," Jason added, with a laugh.

The room grew quiet for a moment. Jason spoke up. "Lady Kitty, you did say that you'd tell us all about your castle. It'd be all the more exciting to hear about it, especially now! Maybe about the ghost, too?"

Justin groaned, inwardly. He was thinking, 'trust Big Brother to bring *that* up!'

"Well," answered her ladyship. "I did promise. But to tell you all about it would be quite a long story! Ballymore Castle has been through a great deal In Its four-hundred year history!"

"Wow!" breathed Justin. "That much, eh?"

"Judy," Lady Kitty turned to her guest. "Have I your permission to keep these boys up past their usual bed-time?"

"Oh, that's all right, Lady, er, Lady Kitty'," Justin broke in. "We can go to bed any time!"

"Justin, dear, I was speaking to your mother. Please don't interrupt!" Lady O'Donnell spoke firmly, but kindly. Justin turned red but held his tongue. "What d'you think, Judy? Is it getting a bit late for you and the boys?"

"Oh, not at all. In spite of what my younger son says we do have rules and regulations. But I think this is the time to bend them a little." Judy paused for a moment before she added, "But what about you? You must be exhausted?"

"Me? Exhausted? Gracious me no! I've never had so much fun in all my life. I'm in no hurry for the evening to end, I assure you. As a matter of fact I have been cooped up in this room, on my own, so much, that I was beginning to think I'd lose the use of my tongue. It'll do it the world o' good to get a bit of a wag!"

In the silence that followed, Lady Kitty settled herself more comfortably in her chair. She looked about her. "Jason, would you turn off the overhead chandelier? The switch is by the door. Maybe we could do with another log on the fire, Justin?" The boys quickly did as they were asked. When the room was quiet once more Lady O'Donnell began her story.



Chapter 4. Lady Kitty Tells Her Story

"Ballymore Castle is, in itself, just a monument to those who built it," Lady Kitty began.

"However, to my mind, it is the people who have lived in it, yes, and died in it, that has given it its character and atmosphere. You'll feel it, the moment you cross the threshold."

"If you don't mind, Jason, I'll tell you, first, about the part my earliest ancestors played, in the history of Ballymore and its castle. In particular, I think you should hear the tragic story about Earl Wilmot, and his lovely daughter, Caroline. You see, Jason," Lady Kitty paused for a moment, "I already have it in my mind to let you have her room, Lady Caroline's, that is. It's one of the oldest rooms in the castle, and by far the most interesting. There are all sorts of stories about it."

"Let me start by explaining why the castle was built on that particular site. From the earliest times, it is known that Ballymore was a seat of learning. There was a monastery on the hill, overlooking the town.

"Some time, around the fifteen thirties, the King of England, Henry the Eighth, broke away from the Catholic Church. He was looking for a way to divorce the first of his many wives! The results were felt even across the sea. Henry decided to do away with all the monasteries. The one at Ballymore was not spared."

"The Monks, however, had foreseen this. They built a tunnel so that they could escape, with their sacred treasures. It's important to know this. The tunnel played a big part in the Castle's history, in the troubled times that followed. I'm afraid that much of the story of Ballymore is written in the blood of its people!" Jason's face was flushed with excitement, as Lady O'Donnell continued her story.

"At the turn of the century, that would be in the early sixteen hundreds, Ireland was in a state of turmoil. There had arisen, across the land, a hatred of the English. England's Queen, Queen Elizabeth the First, that is, was making plans to take over most of Northern Ireland. She was giving away the best of Irish land to her friends and supporters. This is written up in history as 'The Plantation of Ulster.' It's important to know where it all began. Nothing has ever been quite the same between England and Ireland, ever since. There was worse to come, of course. I'll get to that in a minute." Her ladyship paused and looked around her. "What about another log on the fire, one of you? Are you comfortable, Judy?"

"Oh, yes, Thank you. This is fascinating, Lady Kitty. I hope you are not tiring yourself?"

"Not a bit of it! I'm really enjoying myself. I have such a wonderful audience! So, where was I? Oh, yes, I'll come to the bit about Oliver Cromwell when I've finished telling you about Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. She had a tremendous effect on the O'Donnell family. In fact, it's true to say that she had everything to do with everything!" The Lady laughed. "I'll tell you. Elizabeth's plans for Ireland gave her a close interest in Ballymore. Jeremy made an excellent landlord. The community was really well settled. Her Highness wanted to see for herself how it was done. She met, secretly, with Jeremy. Elizabeth was so impressed that she made him an

Earl! Right on the spot, you might say! Not only that but the title carried a huge sum of money!" "Wow!" escaped Justin.

"For some reason or other, the Queen made a condition. She decreed that the O'Donnell daughters should have the right to inherit the title and the fortune." Lady Kitty added, with a chuckle: "The first of Women's Lib, I shouldn't wonder?" She continued more seriously.

"Affairs at Ballymore continued to thrive and prosper. Jeremy was able to build the O'Donnell Castle. He wisely chose to use the original Manor House as part of the castle. He did this to preserve the family heritage: the secret tunnel, leading to a cove in Dundrum Bay. Jeremy saw to it that the entrance to the tunnel was kept a closely guarded secret. It was known only to the Earl, himself, and his heir."

"Jeremy was growing old. It was time to pass on the whereabouts of the secret passage to his son Wilmot. We don't hear too much more about Jeremy. Apparently this remarkable man lived to a ripe old age. On his death Wilmot took over the title along with the secret of the tunnel."

"I mentioned a man named Cromwell, a few moments ago. It was just about this time, in Wilmot's time, that startling events were taking place in England. The King, Charles was de-throned, and beheaded! A soldier, this, er, Oliver Cromwell took control. A new army was formed. It became known as 'the Model Army.' Cromwell; followers were called 'Puritans.' This was because they hated the rituals of the Catholic Church. Cromwell set himself the task of purging the land. This man was to rule in infamy for almost ten years. He came to be known as the most hated man in Ireland. In fact, most Irishmen will tell you, he still is!"

"Cromwell was a Protestant fanatic. He, and his Puritan followers, put to the sword any who would not denounce their Catholic ways. The English soldiers rampaged across the country. They plundered all before them. The reign of terror that followed descended on Ballymore, as on all the town and villages in every corner of the land."

"It was time for Wilmot to open up the long-disused tunnel. Unknown to the Cromwellians, Earl O'Donnell was engaged in secret activities. Many a luckless Catholic family was led to freedom and safety."

"Earl Wilmot O'Donnell was fully aware of the tremendous risks he was taking by engaging in these dangerous activities against the English. He knew it could cost him his life at any time. He feared that the secret of the tunnel would die with him. He decided that it was time to share his knowledge with his heir. You remember that, by Queen Elizabeth's decree, it was his lovely young daughter, Caroline, who had to be told where the passage was. He was not happy, of course, to involve the girl. He knew he had little choice in delaying matters, under the circumstance.

"Much to Wilmot's pride, and relief, Caroline accepted the information with a sense of maturity far beyond her eighteen years. Without a moment's hesitation she expressed her wish to help her father. Far from being afraid of the dangers, she welcomed the chance to help her friends and fellow countrymen to escape from the hated Cromwellians."

"The beautiful Caroline played her part well. She cleverly hid her true feelings. The young girl made friends with some of the English Officers. She made a point of eavesdropping at the social events to which she was invited. There was many an Irish head that was saved by an overheard conversation!"

"However sad to say, as was to be expected, the luck of the O'Donnell's ran out! The English were furious! They had been made fools of, by the Earl and his daughter, right under their very noses."

"Cromwell's senior officer was determined to make an example of the O'Donnell's, for all to see, and remember. He sent his most trusted soldier to make the arrest. The Earl, and his entire family was to be delivered to headquarters without delay."

"The officer chosen for this special task was a certain Major, Major William Hamilton. He was well known in the district. He was often to be seen, astride his fine grey horse, 'Lightning' as he galloped across the countryside at the head of the Puritan soldiers. William Hamilton had earned for himself the nickname, 'The Galloping Major.'

"Major Hamilton set out at once for Ballymore Castle. He took with him an armed escort. However, the arrest was never made!"

"How Come?" interrupted Jason, unable to contain himself.

"Well," continued Lady Kitty, "it's one of those unsolved mysteries that is part of the Ballymore folk lore. Legend has it that a terrible event took place, right at the Castle door!"

"The arresting soldiers were in sight of the castle on the hill. The Major was leading. Suddenly, he let out a shout! He spurred his horse. 'Stay where you are, men!' he ordered, over his shoulder, as he disappeared into the trees bordering the path. The soldiers did as they were told, and reined in their horses. They remained in their saddles. Without warning, the silence was shattered by a single musket shot. It echoed back from the castle walls."

"A moment later the Major broke through the trees. The musket was still smoking in his hand. 'Get after them!' he commanded. 'Catch the rebels! They're not far ahead. When you have them, follow me to the castle. I'll hold the Earl under arrest until you come. Go to it, men!' With that, the Major goaded his horse into a gallop. He disappeared up the pathway leading to the castle."

"The soldiers scattered as they led their horses into the forest. Silence fell."

"The sun was high. The pathway was a pattern of light and shadow, from overhanging trees. The Major and his horse were totally unprepared for what happened next. Rounding a bend at a gallop, they suddenly came up on a hastily built barrier of hewn branches. Skilled rider though he was, Major Hamilton was powerless to prevent his mount from crashing, headlong, into the trap. The soldier was pitched headlong, over the horse's head. It had all happened so suddenly that the Major was taken completely by surprise. He fell heavily on the pathway. He was stunned, and breathless. Even as the brave soldier struggled to draw his weapon, two armed men fell upon him from the trees. Raised swords glinted, and crimsoned. Major Hamilton fell back, mortally wounded. Dimly, through his failing senses he heard the dying screams of his beloved

'Lightning,' impaled on a stake in the barricade. The Major and his faithful horse lay dead. Their blood flowing, together"

"The Irish rebels melted into the forest."

The tears were streaming down Judy's face. "Oh, how awful!" she gave a stifled sob. 'Sorry! Please go on, Lady Kitty. I didn't mean to be so silly...."

"It's quite all right, Judy, dear I've always been upset by that bit about the horse! Shall I go on, then?"

"Oh, of course, please'. It's an absolutely fabulous story. You tell it so well. Please do go on."

"Well then," Lady Kitty took up the story where she had left off. "A little later, the escort was making its way to the castle. The men feared that their leader would be angry to see they had made no capture. Their anxiety turned to horror and dismay. They came across the slain body of their officer beside that of his horse. Furious, they beat their horses into a fierce gallop in an effort to catch the murderers. There was no sign of them."

"Presently the angry soldiers reached the great doors of the castle. They burst their way in, still hoping to find the ones who had killed their master. There was no one to be seen. Quickly the men spread out and made a careful search of the entire building. The castle was empty. It was completely deserted! Not a living soul was to be found."

"Sadly, and in some fear, the escort slowly made its way back to barracks. They knew that their commanding officer would have plenty to say! There was going to be a lot of explaining to do!"

"Search parties were formed immediately. The English soldiers combed the entire countryside for miles around. The Earl and his family had escaped through the tunnel to a waiting ship."

"The O'Donnells had sailed for France on the tide. The Major and his horse were dead. The castle stood silent and empty, in the moonlight. The passing clouds cast dark shadows over its turrets and battlements. The wind blew cold, as it whispered round the gables."

"It was a very strange twist of fate, that, at this very same moment, in England, a man was dying. Oliver Cromwell, himself, lay on his death-bed. Legend has it that there was a thunderstorm, the fiercest ever known in those parts. The superstitious country folk barred their windows, and huddled together, fearing that the devil himself had come, to claim his own!"

The tension in the hotel room could be felt, as Lady O'Donnell finished her story. "Well, the death of Cromwell broke the power of the Puritans. Finally, peace came to England. The Monarchy was restored. Prince Charles was crowned its rightful king."



Chapter 5. Lady Kitty Has A Problem

Silence fell in the room. Lady Kitty said, simply: "Thank you all, for being such good listeners. I hope I didn't bore you. There was such a lot of stuffy old history."

"Stuffy nothing!" exclaimed Jason, immediately. "It was great. Really it was."

"It's a wonderful story." added Judy.

Justin, not to be outdone, offered his best "Awe-some!" breathed with the utmost feeling.

"I can't get over it," it was Jason again. "So much has happened in your castle. Now we can look forward to actually seeing all the things you have been telling us about."

"Not quite *all* the things, I hope!" Justin was heard to mutter.

Lady O'Donnell appeared to be quite delighted by it all. "Well," she said, "there; a great deal more to be told, of course. It's a grand thought that we'll have all the time in the world, to tell it."

"Lady Caroline..." mused Jason. "What happened to her? Do you happen to know?"

"Sorry, Jason, I can't tell you much, I'm afraid. There is no further mention of her, in all the records we have. I think it would be safe to say that she didn't survive, God knows under what circumstances. All we do know is, that when the O'Donnell's returned to the castle, from France, Caroline was not with them. It was Wilmot's son, Stephen, who had the estate. It should rightly have gone to Caroline, had she been alive."

Jason looked upset. "What a shame! She was such a wonderful person. She shouldn't have had to die so young. It's awful to think that she may have been captured, and tortured, into telling about the tunnel!"

"Rest your mind about that, Jason, dear. The capture of Caroline would have made banner headlines! It would have been written up, somewhere. No, I don't think it happened that way."

Jason nodded slowly, in agreement. "I guess so!"

"Yes!" Judy entered the conversation. "It doesn't seem fair. She did so much to help others. The end of the Cromwell times was so near at hand." "I agree with you, Judy." Her Ladyship nodded her head. "As a matter of fact the death of Caroline had a lasting effect on our family history. You see, if she had lived she would almost certainly have married and had children. Who knows what that would have led to! It certainly would have affected my position!" Lady Kitty laughed. "I'm sure I wouldn't be where I am today!" There was an awkward pause. No one knew quite what to say.

Jason seized the opportunity to change the subject. "Lady Kitty, I hope you don't mind my asking, but, er, well, do you know if the part of the secret tunnel that's supposed to lead from the castle, is still around?"

"That's one way of putting it!" Lady Kitty was laughing as she answered. "Yes, Jason, as a matter of fact I believe it is. But, of course, no one has ever been able to find it. I think we have to say that its secret died with Earl Wilmot, and Lady Caroline, all those hundreds of years ago."

"What a shame!" Jason gave a sigh. "Wouldn't it have come in handy, now, with all the troubles and everything? People could run from danger, like they used to?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. I don't mind too much not knowing about it. It would be quite a secret to carry about! Anyway" the lady smiled grimly, "I don't have to worry about passing on the secret to my heirs. I don't have any!"

"I'd say that such things should be left well enough alone." Mrs Craig nodded towards her hostess. "I'm glad, too for your sake, as well as my own. There is no dark underground passage to worry about." Judy corrected herself: "At least, from what you've just said, no one seems to know where it is. To tell the truth I don't fancy my boys prowling about on their own in dirty old places!"

"Never fear such a thing, my dear! Your fine boys will be safe with me, tunnel or no tunnel!"

Judy, realizing what she had said was suddenly embarrassed. "Oh, er, of course I know that, I didn't mean to suggest...."

"Of course you didn't. I quite understand. I do hope you know that if I thought that there was the slightest danger, of any kind, I would never have asked..."

Judy interrupted. "And I should never have agreed! You know I have every confidence in your good judgement. My boys will be safe with you, I know that!" She paused, as she changed the subject. "But I am sorry to hear you say that you have no one left in the family to carry on the O'Donnell heritage."

"Thank you, dear." Lady Kitty sighed deeply. "Yes indeed, it's the greatest sadness of my life that, as things are, I am the last of an ancient line. It has been cruel tricks of fate that have turned things out that way. I never talk about it but I should have been married these many years. My handsome young fiancé, the love of my life, was killed in a hunting accident. Oh dear, it was all so unnecessary! Robert was thrown from his horse. He was an excellent rider. Something spooked his mare!" Lady O'Donnell stiffened in her chair. "But this is no time to dwell on such things. Nothing is going to put a damper on the sheer joy of this evening."

"My dear Lady Kitty. I had no idea! I'm so dreadfully sorry." Judy was so moved that her eyes filled with tears.

"Of course you didn't! How could you! I haven't even mentioned, er, Robert's name for twenty years. Lady Kitty's voice almost broke. "There now! Look what; happened. I'm sorry for myself. I haven't shed a tear in all these years, and here I am, getting all weepy-eyed! Ridiculous! I'm a terrible hostess!"

A chorus of protests broke the tension and brought a smile to her ladyship's face. "Well, thank you for that!"

"So, you've no immediate relatives to carry the O'Donnell name?" Judy thought it best to carry on the conversation as if nothing had happened.

"That's about it. It seems to have been a trick of the fates, as I said. They seem to have been determined to take an axe to the family tree!"

"I don't understand what you mean," Justin's face wore a frown.

"Oh, it's just an expression. All my relations met with their end before their time. It's hard to believe. My father's brother and his family were lost when the Titanic went down, in 1912. What a tragic event that was. I had an elder brother who was killed in Flanders, the first world war. My nephew, Derek, such a fine young man, he was shot down over Germany. Bomber Command, in the last war! So," Lady Kitty laughed, as she turned back to Justin. "If you know what a family

tree is, you'll understand what I meant when I said that ours was pruned to the bark!"
"Sure!" nodded the young boy, apparently satisfied.

Lady O'Donnell continued. "So you see, I have no one to succeed me. I am having a hard time finding legal means to prevent the entire estate going to the British Crown, when I'm gone. "But what a dreadful thing to happen!" Judy's eyes were wide. "Can nothing be done, then?"
"Well, my dear, that remains to be seen. That's what brings me here, to your lovely province. I am here to seek help from a lawyer who was recommended to me as the best in his field. Have you ever heard of Desmond Orr, perhaps!"
"The name is familiar, right enough. I can't say I've met him."
"Well," Lady Kitty went on, "he has agreed to take on my case. He expects to visit me in Ireland to see what can be done."
"Let's hope, then!" said Judy. "Maybe he'll find you a long lost relative.
"Like in Australia, or something, you know, making his fortune, or whatever," Justin suggested.
"Whatever!" Lady Kitty repeated, as she gave the boy a smile. "But let's change this dreary old subject. We've been having so much fun."

Jason spoke up. "Lady Kitty," he began. "May I say something?"
"Of course!" Her ladyship nodded. "Please do."
"I've been thinking. It's about the Major. It doesn't make sense. Why should he want to haunt your castle? Is it to seek revenge on the O'Donnells? I hardly think so! He was a soldier, wasn't he? Surely he must have known that he could be killed at any time." Jason broke off, as he laughed. "What would this world be like if every soldier who has ever been killed, came back as a ghost! There'd be more ghosts than people, if you ask me!" The boy stopped again to collect his thoughts. In the moment of silence Justin was heard to murmur. "Good grief!"
"No! I believe there must be another reason." Jason continued. "When I go to Ireland I'm going to see if I can meet him. I'll ask him what's bothering him. If we can find out what it is he wants then maybe he'll get down from his high horse and rest in peace."

Justin was looking glum at this turn in the conversation. The idea of his brother trying to lay a ghost by the heels played no part in his rosy dreams for a holiday in Ireland.

Clever Lady O'Donnell caught sight the young boy's long face. She hastily broke in: "Isn't it a wonderful thing your mother is doing in allowing you both to come and visit?" She looked across at Judy. "I'm so grateful to you!" she added, simply. Then, turning back to Jason, she went on, "I don't think you should concern yourself with things best left alone. Anyway, I can't see it happening. I can't recall hearing of anyone who has ever had the doubtful privilege of a conversation with him. So I wouldn't count on it, if I were you."
"In that case," sighed Judy, with obvious relief, "I'll not worry about either of my boys running into him, accidentally, or on purpose!"
"Mum! You gotta' be kidding!" Justin bristled. "Me? On purpose...?"
"Oh, you needn't worry, Mum!" Jason interrupted. "I just have the strangest feelings that if I could meet the Major. I could make friends with him. I'm sure he could mean me no harm. He has no axe to grind with Canadians!"
"You got something there, brother!" Justin brightened. "I must be sure to have a large Canadian flag with me at all times. I shall wave it frantically, at the first sign of him!"

Justin's remark was greeted with a roar of merriment. It was on this cheerful note that the party came to an end. Still laughing, Judy stood tip. The boys joined her as they moved towards the door.

With a chorus of 'Good-nights' and affectionate hugs, the Craig family took their leave of their smiling hostess.

"It has been wonderful," she said. "I'll get in touch with you before I leave to make sure that all the plans are made!"

The journey home was made in silence. The boys had so much to think about! Jason and Justin could scarcely believe their good fortune. They had always longed for a chance to visit Ireland. It was really going to happen!



Chapter 6. The Emerald Isle

"...Ladies and gentlemen...." The captain's voice over the intercom roused the two boys. "We are over the Irish coast. We expect to arrive in Belfast on time. If you wish to set your watches, the correct local time is eight thirty. The weather in Belfast is clear. The temperature is a comfortable seventeen degrees. We hope you have enjoyed your flight. Thank you for travelling with us..."

Justin leaned forward to peer out the window. It was the younger boy's turn for the window seat. "What d'you see, Justy?"

"Wow! It's awesome! There's lots of green patches. ...must be fields 'n things, I guess. I can see a river..." The young boy was speaking without turning his face from the scene below. He continued to stare in wonderment at the green landscape sliding beneath the wings. They had left the shining sea behind them. There were caps of white mist on the small mountains. Lakes shone like mirrors; narrow ribbons marked winding country roads. "Jason, you should see this! It's awesome!"

"Move over, then, little brother. Let's take a look." The boys changed places. Jason was fascinated by his first glimpse of Ireland. "It's no wonder it's called the Emerald Isle," he breathed, misting the glass for a moment. "It's unbelievable. It's so green."

Justin slipped out of his seat. He made his way to the washroom. He knew that it was almost breakfast time. There was a delicious smell of hot coffee coming from the galley.

Presently Justin returned to his seat. He nudged his brother. "Hey, Jason, You'd better get ready. Breakfast's coming. We'll be landing soon after that." With a grunt, Jason tore his gaze from the window and slipped past his brother.

Not long after the stewardess had cleared the trays, the 'plane tilted slightly. The engines took on a different note. With a lurch, and a slight bump, the tires screeched briefly on the concrete runway. It was a significant moment in the lives of the Craig brothers from British Columbia. They had landed on Irish soil!

The boys' emotions were somewhat mixed. They were excited to have arrived in Ireland, at last. Now they began to think of their meeting with Lady Kitty O'Donnell. She had promised she would be at the airport to meet them. But what if she had forgotten, or mixed up the dates, or had an accident?

The two boys edged themselves into the aisle and joined the passengers moving towards the exit door. With a smile from the stewardess they left the 'plane. There was a great bustle of activity in the reception lounge. People was gathered round the carousel which was already spewing luggage from a conveyor belt.

It didn't take the Craigs long to rescue their suitcases from the bags circling round and round. The customs officials waved them through with a friendly smile, and barely a second glance. In another moment they found themselves in the public waiting lounge. "This is where she'll be," murmured Jason, as he edged forward. "D'you think she'll come herself?" said Justin, sounding a bit anxious. "Maybe she'll just send a footman, or whatever." The two Canadian boys continued to crane their necks in all directions.

In a few minutes, to their relief, they spotted Lady Kitty, herself. She was running across the lounge, looking about her. Her shrill cries of; "Coo-ee! Coo-ee!" created quite a stir, and many a smile! Then, in a great flurry, she came upon the waiting pair. She hugged them wildly! "My dear, dear boys!" Lady Kitty bubbled. "It's right glad that I am to set eyes on you both, safe and sound.. Here at last!" Still hugging them she gave each of them a smacking kiss. It was delivered with such force that her hat, feather and all, went flying over her shoulder. Jason and Justin were left quite pink by the excitement of it all! Pausing only long enough to catch her breath, Lady Kitty stood back a pace or two. She collided with an elderly man in chauffeur's uniform. He was holding her ladyship's hat. He had quickly rescued it from being trampled upon.

"Oh, thank you, Dermot!" Lady Kitty took the hat and jammed it back on the top of her head, without a moment's thought. "Would you feast your tired old eyes on this fine pair. They've come all the way from Canada just to visit with us. Aren't we the lucky ones, Dermot?"

"Indeed, We are, at that," he agreed. The chauffeur's face brightened with a smile of welcome. "It's just grand to meet you young gentlemen. Her ladyship thought the day would never come. Am I not right, Madam?"

"Oh stop babbling, man!" Lady Kitty was laughing. "Just take the lads' baggage to the car."

Dermot picked up the cases. With a friendly nod to the boys he disappeared through the sliding glass doors.

"We are so pleased to be here Lady Kitty," said Jason. "We have been looking forward to it so very much."

"yes, we certainly have," added Justin. "I hope you won't find us a nuisance now that we're really here."

"Oh you dear lamb! Of course you won't be any such thing!" Her Ladyship gave each of them a hug before she added, "Don't even think of it, Justin. I'm just thrilled to have you both." With that, she grabbed tight hold of her young charges. They all marched off at a whacking pace. Dermot was waiting, with the car.

Justin looked with awe at the shining Bentley parked at the curbside. As Dermot opened the rear door for him, he remarked, "See! I feel like Royalty!" Dermot made sure his mistress was safely settled on the front seat, before he climbed behind the wheel.

"All set, then?" he asked, over his shoulder. He put the car into gear, and edged into the moving traffic.

"Well," commented Lady Kitty, addressing Justin. "You're more than welcome to feel that way. This is your very first day in Ireland. You'll just be one of us after today!"

The young Canadians settled back on the large leather seat. It was a new experience for them to be driven, and in such style, through the Irish countryside. Dermot wheeled the car onto a concrete ramp leading to an express motorway. Jason spoke up, "It seems strange to be driving on the wrong side of the highway!"

"The wrong side, you say young master? Oh well, I think we'll be safe enough if all the other drivers choose to do the same thing!" Dermot chuckled as he spoke.

The time passed quickly. The two boys were taken by surprise when the big car slowed and slipped smoothly onto an exit ramp. Dermot told them, "Now, young gentlemen, look around you. You'll soon be coming close to the O'Donnell Estate."

The road was narrow. It twisted this way and that. It wound its way between grassy banks alive with rich and colourful wild flowers. Dermot sounded the horn. They had come upon a herd of cows, spread across the roadway. There was a small boy, with a dog at his heels. With the help of the barking dog he guided his animals to one side to make room for the car to pass. Dermot lowered his window as he drew level. "Hello there Billy!" he shouted cheerfully. "Just you be taking your time there, with them ladies. If you make 'em run it'll be butter you'll be puttin' in your pail, this night!" The boy laughed. He said something that was lost as the car gathered speed.

"Nearly home!" sang out Lady Kitty. They had rounded a corner. The car slowed to a stop before a pair of heavy iron gates, set between stone pillars. Dermot gave a short blast on the horn. Immediately, a young girl came, and swung back the gates. The car moved forward. The gates were closed behind them.

"That was very helpful of that person," Justin observed.

"Oh yes, well, that's just part of the duties for the family living in the gate house," replied Lady Kitty. "Gate-keeping is an old fashioned custom. I never sought to change it. It's perhaps just as well in these troubled times. It's good to know who is coming and going on the castle grounds."

Jason smiled to himself as he wondered if the little girl would be called from her bed in the middle of the night to admit the Galloping Major, astride his great horse. "But no!" his thoughts ran on, 'any respectable ghost, worthy of the name, would be able to ride clean through a set of gates, open or closed!'

In the meantime, the Bently was moving forward slowly on crunching tires. Her Ladyship nudged the driver. "Dermot, pull up here, a minute." She turned to the boys. "Why don't you two take a walk a little way? You'll catch a glimpse of the castle for the first time, from just round that bend, there. It's always been my favourite view of it. Take a sniff of the soft Irish air, at the same time. It'll do you good."

The Craigs jumped out of the car. They were eager to catch their first glimpse of the castle that was to be their home for the next several weeks. Side by side they hurried up the drive. They were immediately aware of the smell of fresh earth. It mingled with the heavy scent of the rhododendron blooms bordering the path. Jason drew a deep breath. "My! She's right! It's really good!" Justin nodded. "Sure is," he agreed.

Together the boys reached the slight turn in the pathway. They stopped dead in their tracks. A wonderful sight met their eyes. At the top of the rise stood the castle. It was a perfect setting. The great building filled the scene with massive walls and turrets. It was like nothing the two Canadians had ever seen before, outside story-books and television. It was Justin who broke the silence. "A real, live, castle," he breathed, in awe. Lady Kitty had slipped out of the car. She came up behind the boys. "Well, not exactly *live*, I hope," she said, with a laugh. Then, after a

pause, she added, "although lately it's hard to tell. I'm not so sure. Strange things have been happening!"

Both boys were quick to notice the sudden change in Lady Kitty. Her cheerful look had clouded over. She looked troubled.

"What d'you mean? What sort of things?" Jason asked, with concern in his voice.

"Oh, I don't know exactly. Flickering lights, strange noises." Lady O'Donnell shrugged. "It's probably nothing."

Justin forced a cheerful voice. "Never mind, Lady Kitty! Fear no more! Canadians to the rescue of a Damsel in Distress!" The young boy broke off and coloured hotly when he realized what he had said. Lady Kitty's face lit up with a broad smile. The worried look vanished. "Dear boy," she murmured, as she patted his arm. "It's a great comfort to me, indeed it is, to have such fine young men, to look after me. I'll not worry any more now that you're here."

"We'll certainly be of any help we can," added Jason. "If that old ghost bothers you *we'll* fix him, never fear!" But Justin remained silent. He was none too pleased with Jason's choice of the word, 'we!'

"Now don't you be minding to do any such thing as catching ghosts!" Her Ladyship was quite herself again. "Anyway, I don't think for one minute that you'll catch a glimpse of even so much as a hair in the tail of his horse!" She went on, to change the subject. "Well now, lads, and tell me, what do you really think of my castle, eh?"

I've never imagined anything like it. It's magnificent!" Jason's eyes were bright, as he spoke.

Dermot had left the car, rumbling softly in the background. He joined the others. Lady Kitty turned to him as he came up. "Dermot, don't you agree that all of us at the castle are in need of a bit of cheering up? Wouldn't you say now, that these young 'uns are just the ones to do it, eh?"

"It's quite certain they'll do that, Your Ladyship," replied the chauffeur, with a laugh. "Why Milady, even our ghost could do with a bit of a change. He'll enjoy young company. Sure, it's all of three hundred years since he has had any fun at all!"

"Now don't you be teasing the lads with talk of ghosts. And them barely an hour on Irish Soil!"

Dermot smiled, and winked at the boys as he turned back to the car. The others followed.

The car nosed its way up the long avenue. It came to rest, finally, at the foot of a flight of worn steps leading to a massive door. The Craigs had, in fact, arrived at last, at Ballymore Castle. Dermot gave a quick toot on the horn. It was the signal to Cassy that her mistress and her guests had arrived.

Lady Kitty sprang out of the car. She did not wait for Dermot to assist her, as was the custom. Before one could say "Jack Robinson" she was mounting the steps, calling over her shoulder.

"Come on you two. Uppy, uppy uppy! Ah, here's Cassy come to greet you."

The boys quickly followed her ladyship. They reached the doorway on the heels of their hostess. Jason and Justin were delighted to meet the pleasant looking apron-clad woman, waiting in the open doorway. She wore a warm smile of welcome. Cassy, for her part, stood gazing at the two

boys, so young, so far from home! She opened her heart to both of them from that very instant. "Are you going to stand there all day, blocking the doorway? Or are you going to stand aside and let us in? Better still," Lady Kitty pretended to scold, "be off with you! These boys are going to want something to eat."

Cassy took the hint. She hurried inside. The strings of her apron flapped behind her. Lady Kitty was obviously enjoying the moment when she could show her young guests the inside of the castle. She motioned to the boys to follow her, as she crossed the threshold.

For a long moment no one spoke. The boys' eyes were open wide. Their heads were turning this way and that.

"Well boys," Lady Kitty broke the silence. "Here you are at last, safe and sound! And tell me now, what do you think of my real, live, castle? It was easy to detect a note of pride in her ladyship's voice.

"It's just Awesome!" whispered Justin, as if he was afraid to speak out loud. There was no answer from Jason. The boy was speechless with the wonder of it all. He took in the splendor of the main hall in which they stood. He noted the high ceiling. A glass dome let in a soft light. There was a suit of armour in one corner. A wide stairway led to a gallery above. His attention was drawn to the large portraits that lined the walls. The boy's eyes roved up and down and from side to side. His keen senses were challenged on every side. The spell was broken by Justin's voice, at his elbow. "Hey, Jason! Earth calling! Come in, please! Lady Kitty wants to show us to our rooms!"

"Huugh? Oh! I'm so sorry," apologized Jason, as he pulled himself together. "It's all so fantastic!"

"Not at all, dear boy." She took his arm. "Come along upstairs. You must see your bedrooms." Lady Kitty was obviously pleased that her young guest was so impressed.

Jason and Justin eagerly followed their hostess up the wide staircase. They were really anxious to see their rooms. They reached the landing. At the end of a long corridor Lady Kitty threw open a door. "This will be your room, Jason," she announced. "I do hope you'll be comfortable." She stood aside to allow the boys to enter. Jason was almost speechless for the second time that day! He stood, just inside the doorway and looked about him. It was the most fascinating room he had ever seen. It was like stepping back in time. Jason had always loved anything to do with history. This room really had that feeling about it. At a glance the boy was able to take in a large four-poster bed, in the middle of the room. The long window was hung with heavy curtains, almost floor to ceiling. The flickering light from a fire in the grate reflected in the high polish of a very old writing desk, over by the corner. On the mantel was a large, branched candlestick. There was a cosy armchair drawn up close to the fire.

"Comfortable?" breathed Jason, echoing Lady Kitty's last words. "I've never been in such a fantastic room. Thank you so very much for going to so much trouble to choose it for me. I absolutely love it!"

Lady Kitty was beaming with pleasure. She had summed up Jason's interests very cleverly. The room had, indeed, been chosen after a great deal of thought. It was one of the oldest in the castle. She was rewarded by Jason's re-action to it.

"Well now," Lady Kitty led the way into the corridor. "Justin, this will be your room." She had paused in front of the next door, nearer the stairs. "This one is not as old as Jason's. But I'm sure that won't spoil it for you will it?"

"Certainly not! Not in the least!" Justin answered politely. "In fact, if I may say so, I would rather have it that way. I don't share Jason's love of, of old things, and whatever." The elderly lady gave the boy a warm smile. Once again, she knew she had made the right choice. "I'm glad it suits you. Now," she said, briskly, "I want you both to know that my room, and Cassy's, are just further down the corridor. We aren't too far away if you feel lonely for company." Her Ladyship was about to add, 'and scared,' but thought the better of it just in time. However, she was wise enough to understand that, when it came to the middle of the night, with a wind whistling round the battlements, the young boys might indeed be glad enough to know that there was company nearby!

Just at that moment there was a heavy tread outside in the corridor. Justin was startled for a moment. Dermot appeared with the suitcases.

"Which one's for your room, Master Jason?" Dermot was slightly breathless.

"Er, ah, er, that one, and that other small one, thanks." Lady Kitty noticed Jason's moment of confusion. She made a mental note for Dermot. He should be reminded that young Canadians are not used to being called 'Master!'

In a few moments the elderly chauffeur returned. "So these must be right, for in here, Master Justin?" Lady Kitty underlined the note she had just made.

The room inspection was over. Once again the Craig boys told their hostess how much they liked them. Lady Kitty felt very pleased as she said, "Good! Now, I'll leave you to your own devices. But don't be too long. Cassy'll have the dinner ready soon. She turned, and hurried off down the corridor. She was obviously enjoying the visit of the two boys.

Jason and Justin separated. Jason went back to his own room. He could hardly wait. He was so excited and impatient to get another closer look.

The silent corridor shook with a deep booming sound. It brought Justin running to Jason's door. "What was that?" His face was pale with fright. "It wasn't the, the ghost, was it?"

Jason burst out laughing. "Oh you are such a silly-billy brother. Ghosts don't kick up a racket like that. That was just Cassy sounding the gong for grub! C'mon, then kiddo, I'm starved!"

"Me too!" At the thought of food Justin's colour returned. Lady Kitty was waiting for them at the foot of the stairs.

"The dining room's in here." Their hostess led the way into a long room. Dark wood covered the walls. There were more family portraits. Above the oak table glittered a huge light fixture. The room was made more cheerful by the fire in a large grate.

Once seated Jason had more time to look about him. His gaze finally settled on the portrait of a beautiful young woman. Her shining black hair was piled high on her head. An unusual piece of

jewelry hung from a gold chain round her neck. It occurred to Justin that the lady's handsome features were somehow familiar.

Lady Kitty noticed the direction of her young guest's attention. She remarked, "Ah, I see you have already noticed Lady Caroline?" Jason coloured slightly. He had been unaware that his gaze had been so obvious. "Yes, Lady Kitty. If you don't mind my saying so, I see a great likeness to you, in the picture."

"No I don't mind in the least. I'm pleased, in fact. Lady Caroline is known to have been a great beauty, in her day. By the way, Jason, I'm not sure if I neglected to tell you that the room I chose for you, your bedroom it was her room!" Jason's attention was drawn to the portrait again.

"Really'? That does make it even more special. From what you've already told us in Victoria, she must have been a very interesting person?"

"Yes, dear, she certainly was. But for pity's sake, eat up. The food is getting cold. Your brother has almost finished his. There are lots of my ancestors on the walls, for you to meet later. We can take a look at them, together, on a wet afternoon perhaps."

The chat in the dining room became general. The Craig boys were beginning to feel very much at home, already. Occasionally a burst of laughter would ring out. It echoed from walls that had not heard such merriment in years!

The rustle of a starched apron behind them told them of Cassy's presence.

"Well now, and have you all had enough? There's lots more to be had for the asking. Would you be able to manage another helping, Master Justin?" Lady Kitty made another mental note.

"Er, oh, no thanks. No more for me, I'm stuffed." Justin patted his stomach. "That was a great meal, real good!"

"Now isn't that nice. There's nothing like cooking for those who know how to appreciate it!" Cassy was beaming, but the smile left her face as Her Ladyship looked up. "Meaning, Cassy? Are you suggesting that I don't know the difference?"

"Your pardon, Milady!" Cassy hurried from the room.

As the group left the dining room Jason paused at the foot of Caroline's picture. He needed to have another, closer look, at this famous lady, whose room he occupied. His eyes were drawn to the oval locket. He spoke over his shoulder to Lady Kitty, who had joined him. "That's an unusual piece of jewelry she's wearing. Do you have any idea what happened to it? I mean, was it handed down, through the family, or anything?"

"Yes, it's an interesting piece. I have no idea what happened to it, I'm afraid. It certainly never came to my hand."

"Probably stolen from the ruffians who murdered her," said Jason, sadly. His thoughts went from the locket to its owner. For some reason that didn't make sense, Major Hamilton, the Galloping Major, came into his mind. It was as if there were a connection somewhere. But that didn't seem possible. The two were sworn enemies. Jason was looking forward to getting back to his room again. It had taken on an added meaning to him since he had learned that it had once been occupied by Lady Caroline.

The Craig brothers were still struggling to get their bearings. They were both suffering from Jet-lag, and considerable loss of sleep. They explained to their hostess that, if she didn't mind, they would welcome an early bed-time.

And so, the boys' first day at Ballymore came to a close. Their heads were filled with all sorts of jumbled impressions. The cheerful fires burning in each of their rooms helped to disperse any dark shadows of loneliness. Night-time often brings said feelings to those who are away from home. But exhaustion took its hold. Sleep was not long in coming.

'I wonder if Mum is missing us. I hope she's not too sad...' Justin thought, sleepily.

'Cat will be wondering where I am' Justin was thinking. The tear that formed in the corner of his eye rolled unheeded down his cheek. Justin was fast asleep.



Chapter 7. Jason's Strange Encounter.

One day Lady Kitty suggested that her young guests should meet the last member of her household staff. She explained that he lived down by the farm yard. Liam O'Connor had his two grandsons living with him. Lady Kitty thought perhaps that the Craig boys might like to meet up with someone their own age, for a change. They might even make friends. As things turned out this was not to happen at least not at first. However, in the end, Liam's boys were to help Jason and Justin solve an age-old riddle. But the friendship that would spring up between them, as a result, would come too late!

The Craigs thanked Lady Kitty for the thought. They promised that they would indeed pay Liam O'Connor a visit, soon. As a matter of fact Jason and Justin had already seen Johnny and Jimmy lurking about behind the barn. 'Probably for a smoke,' Jason thought. Neither of the Canadians had taken a fancy to either of the O'Connor boys.

That morning, however, Justin refused to take his nose out of the book he was reading. Left to himself, Jason decided to take a walk.

His steps took him down the long, tree-lined avenue, towards the gate-house. Jason's thoughts were full of all the stories he had heard about the Galloping Major. He fell to wondering if there was any way in which he could reach out to the ghost he wanted to meet. The spectre, and his horse, had, however been absent from the scene.

Jason shuddered. A chill wind had sprung up out of no-where. The trees sighed and whispered. The boy suddenly felt very much alone, and somehow afraid. He stood where he was for a moment. He was trying to decide which would be best. Should he hurry back to the castle? The gate-house was nearer. Before he could make up his mind, it happened!

Jason suddenly felt very strange. It seemed to have grown darker. The birds had stopped singing. It was very, very still. In the silence the boy heard the strangest of sounds. It was the muffled thud of horses hooves. The jingle of harness came from the driveway hidden by the curve.

Jason, acting by instinct rather than through fear, stepped quickly off the path. He dived into the shrubbery. He could not explain why he wanted to avoid being seen. The heavy beat of the horses grew closer. Jason pushed his way deeper into the trees. He stood, hidden behind a large oak. Silence fell. The party of horsemen had reined in, nearby. There came the low murmur of voices.

Suddenly, Jason was shocked by a great crashing sound. In front of the boy's wide eyes there appeared a huge white horse. Its rider was making straight in his direction. Jason shrank behind the tree. There was no time to run.

The overhanging trees cast deep shadows. Nevertheless, Jason could see quite clearly. The man had pulled in his mount in a small clearing. It was less than twenty paces from where the boy was crouched.

Jason's pulses raced and hammered. His knees shook. The stranger was unlike any rider that the boy had ever seen before. His long legs were encased in tall boots with large fold-down tops. He wore a tunic or doublet with a wide belt from shoulder to waist. It held a sheathed sword. On the man's head was a helmet with a strangely wide brim. It glinted in the light filtering through the trees. A musket was held in one hand. The other grasped the reins of his horse.

Jason was so astonished that he forgot about being afraid! He even moved out from behind his cover, and faced the intruder. The man in the saddle did not seem in the least bit surprised to see the young boy appearing from behind a tree. Jason, and the horseman remained still, looking at each other. There was an air of calm between them. Jason picked up a sense of sadness, however. He wished he could understand it. There was a nod, and a half-smile, from the stranger. The feeling of gloom disappeared. It was almost as if some sort of message had been passed.

The next thing that happened took Jason completely by surprise. The tall rider raised the arm that held the musket. With the muzzle pointing to the tree-tops, he pulled the trigger. A single ear-shattering blast broke the silence of the forest. The horse bucked for a moment. Jason's ears sang. The soldier appeared satisfied. After a moment's pause he lowered his weapon. As he wheeled his mount he looked over his shoulder. He nodded to the boy. It was a farewell salute!

Several seconds passed before Jason could pull himself together. He was filled with a strange excitement. It was time to move. However before he had taken a step he froze with alarm. There came a great crashing sound. Into the trees cantered two, or maybe three, helmeted riders. They were urging their horses as if in pursuit of some quarry. Jason ducked for cover. A heavy silence descended once more, as the party disappeared. It became so still that there was an air of unreality about the deathly hush of the forest.

The hairs on the back of Jason's neck suddenly prickled. There came the most dreadful sound, echoing through the trees. It was the piercing scream of an animal in its death-throes. Jason remained motionless, in horror. More sounds came to his sharpened senses.

There came the clash of steel on steel. Then, a heavy thud. A moment's silence. The sound of running feet. Silence again, even more intense than before.

It was the rough cawing of crows in the nearby trees that brought Jason back to reality. He looked about him for a moment. He needed to get his bearings before starting back to the castle.

In a few minutes Jason mounted the stone steps. He made his way quietly up the stairs to his room. He was in no mood for conversation. He wanted to be alone. He needed time to think. Had all this really happened? Throwing himself across the bed the boy gave himself up to serious thought. He already had the idea in his mind that he had been a witness to the last moments in the life of Major William Hamilton. The scream of the dying horse still echoed in his mind. 'If I *did* see it., Jason argued to himself, 'then, unbelievable though it may seem, I did actually see a real, live, ghost! Furthermore, there is no doubt that it was the Galloping Major, himself, and his horse "Lightning."'

Jason's thoughts went round and round in his head. Finally, he made up his mind. Firstly, all that he had seen, and heard, had actually happened. Secondly, he wouldn't tell a soul. Not even Justin. It would only scare the daylights out of his kid brother. No one else would believe him, anyway! But, even after making these hard and fast decisions, his racing mind would give him no rest. There were too many unanswered questions. 'Why did the Major, the leader of the escort, leave his men and dash off into the trees? It hadn't looked as if he was chasing after anybody. Even more puzzling, why did he fire his gun into the air?' Jason became quite exhausted by it all. He fell fast asleep.



Chapter 8. Liam's Warning

The clatter of his brother, Justin, bursting into his room, roused Jason to instant wakefulness. Even as he opened his eyes he wondered if he had been rudely taken out of a strange dream.

"Hi, there, Jason! What have you been doing?"

"Well, actually, since you ask," Jason answered with forced politeness, "I was enjoying a lovely sleep, until you came barging in!"

"Sorry! I thought I should let you know it's almost time for lunch."

Jason roused himself. He swung his feet to the floor. "Okay, brother, thanks."

Summoned by the deep boom of the gong the boys made their way downstairs. Lady Kitty was there before them. She was standing with her back to the log fire that burned in the grate.

"Hello, boys! Did you both have a good day so far? Did either of you do anything interesting?"

"N-No, Lady Kitty," Jason lied quickly.

"What about you, Justin?"

"Oh, I was reading most of the time."

"Just go ahead and sit down, both of you. I'll join you in a minute as soon as I warm up a bit. I should have worn a jacket. I got chilly in the rose garden."

When they were all seated Cassy arrived with steaming dishes. Jason found it difficult to keep his eyes from wandering over to the portrait. The morning's adventure made him feel even more drawn to Lady Caroline. He was becoming more and more certain that she and the major knew each other more closely than legend allowed.

Jason's day-dreaming was interrupted by Lady Kitty. "Jason, you seem lost in thought? You've hardly said a word."

"Oh, I'm sorry! It's the picture, again, I'm afraid. Every time I see it I start thinking. I didn't mean to be rude."

"I understand exactly! I have sat at this table, on my own, by the hour, quite carried away by her picture. But, don't let it spoil your meal. Cassy'll be upset if you don't do it justice."

"Oh, I think we can count on Justin to keep Cassy happy," Jason laughed. Justin looked up, at the mention of his name.

"Mustn't let the god lady down," he said, with his mouth full. The tension that Jason had been feeling, fell away. He spent the remainder of the meal chatting away happily.

It was the next morning when Jason and Justin decided to go down to the farm and visit with Liam. Actually it was very much Jason's idea. He felt he wanted to talk to some-one about the Galloping Major. He was sure he could steer the conversation in that direction. Fortunately, Justin had finished his book, so he hadn't needed much persuading.

The Craig boys found Liam sitting in the sun, on his front step. It was a scene that suggested peace and charm. The old man was smoking his pipe. The blue smoke wafted upwards in the still air. The chickens were clucking and scratching on the gravel path. A large orange cat was sleeping on a low stone wall. However, to the boys' surprise, Liam didn't look at all content. A worried frown creased his forehead. He was staring straight in front of him. He seemed so troubled by his thoughts that he did not hear the boys as they drew near.

Jason forced a small cough. Liam snapped out of his mood in an instant. His face lit up with a broad smile of welcome.

"Well, hello there!" he called out cheerfully, "tis an honour you pay me, by your visit."

"We just thought we'd come down for a bit of a chat." Jason spoke up.

"And what would your fancy be this morning? Sure, I have a mind full of stories in this old head, just waiting to be told."

"Well," Jason hesitated. He was trying to decide how best to bring up the subject of the Galloping Major. He didn't want to make the reason for the visit too obvious. While he was forming words in his mind, it was Justin who jumped straight in. "We, er, that is, Jason, is trying to find out what's bugging this, er, ghost chap, that's bothering Lady Kitty and everybody. We, er, Jason, that is, was hoping that you might be able to tell us something. Lady Kitty doesn't seem to like talking about it. Maybe the ghost would be willing to talk to Canadians? I mean, we're new here. I don't suppose he's ever met anyone from so far away. Perhaps he'd like to talk. He must be very lonely. After all, everyone's scared to death of him whenever he goes out for a bit of a night's gallop. Jason wouldn't be scared." Justin finished, breathless. It had been quite a speech, for him!

Jason's eyes had grown wider and wider. He looked at his younger brother in amazement. "Way to go, Justy!" he exclaimed. He turned to Liam. "My brother's quite right. You see, if only we could find out what's really bothering the Major, maybe we, er, maybe I could help him. Then he could retire in peace, or whatever a ghost does when it's fed up haunting people!" Jason laughed at his own attempt at humour. He didn't succeed in raising even the suggestion of a smile on Liam's solemn face. After a pause, Jason added, "You don't want to tell us, do you?"

Liam waited to choose his words before he answered. "I'm just figurin' out how best to tell you something for your own good. I've a mind to give you some well-meant advice. But I fear ye'll not want to heed it!" Jason remained silent. Liam continued. He was speaking slowly. His expression was serious. "I would tell you that you young people should best not go stirring up things that are best left alone, if you get my meaning? If the Good Lord sees fit to allow a poor lost soul to come back to earth, for whatever reason, then that's His business. Then again, supposin' it's not the will of the Good Lord, at all? What if it's the work of the devil himself, sending the poor soldier? That Prince o'Darkness may have some evil plan to destroy innocent lives!" Liam's stern face relaxed. "Anyways, he went on, "we don't know of anyone who has been so bold as to speak up to this old ghost. Maybe it's just a lot of old gossip. Why make matters worse?" The elderly man gave each of the boys a searching look. "If ye'll heed my advice ye'll look out for all that is best in this beloved country of ours. Enjoy your visit. Give over dark matters that don't concern you. Don't look for trouble, or, trouble may be lookin' for you!" With that, Liam's face broke into a smile.

Jason had been listening carefully. He was impressed by Liam's sincerity, and obvious concern. It was on the tip of his tongue to contradict the old man about the ghost's existence. However, Liam's solemn warning brought back that eerie feeling of the day before. The young Canadian was weighing up the common sense in all that Liam had said.

As Jason stood up to leave, he added, "Well, Liam thanks for the advice. We'll come back another time. In the meantime you really don't need to worry too much about us, do you? That is, if there's no such thing as the ghost? But then, maybe, there are things you didn't tell us?" Liam grinned. "You're a sharp lad. Shouldn't wonder if ye grow up to be one of them lawyer

fellas that could argue the tail off a pig! Don't go, just a while yet, unless you have a mind to?" "No, that's fine, we'd like to stay." Jason replied immediately.

"Then sit the pair o' you down. You're indeed quite right, young master. Maybe there is something that should be told if only to keep you from meddlin' and getting yourselves in too deep in dangerous matters."

The two boys settled down at once. They were eager to hear what Liam had to tell them. It was indeed a gripping story that unfolded. Liam knocked out his pipe. He refilled it. When the smoke had cleared, the elderly man began.

"A short time ago, a good friend of mine, a police sergeant by the name of Billy Duffy, was found dead! Aye, his body was found lyin' in the cove not far from here. There were bits and pieces of his smashed up motor-bike strewn all around him. But there he was. He was turned on his back, with a terrible look on his face. And him with not a mark on him! Sure, everyone said that he'd run off the edge of the cliff above. There'd been a powerful fog, in from the sea. But I'll tell you, I knew different." Liam paused for a moment and tapped the side of his face with a gnarled forefinger. He gave the boys a knowing look before he went on. "Aye," he repeated solemnly, "I knew better! Sure, he wasn't the sort of madcap that would go racing about on a cliff face in a blanket o'fog. Take my word for it he wouldn't ha' done anything so daft! And him knowing every foot and cranny of the blessed pathway. He's played up and down that cliff since he was a lad in knee-britches."

"Billy Duffy, for all that he was a policeman, was well liked. Aye, well liked he was. There was a grand funeral. He left a widow woman and two wee babies. Ach, I'm tellin' you there were a lot o' tears.

"You boys might be thinkin' that's the end of it. And you might be right. But there's something I know that only he and I shared. And that was the night before he died! I'm heart-scalded to know if I should speak up and say what I know. But then again, I've got a couple o' young 'uns in my care. There's no tellin' what harm might come if I spoke out."

Jason and Justin recognized the strained look that had returned to the old man's deeply lined face. Liam heaved a sigh, before he went on. "Y'see, boys, it's like this. Billy and me were takin' a wee drop, at the pub. It wasn't the first time. But I never thought it 'ud be the last, either! Billy seemed strained. He wasn't himself. He had somethin' on his mind. When I says to him, 'Billy,' I says, 'what ails you?' It was then that he looked me straight in the eye. 'Liam, what ails me is that I know too much! I'm on to something so big that the whole town'll be talking about it.'

" 'Sure nothing' much comes and goes in Ballymore,' I said to him. 'Except yon ghost, o' course!' I laughed, but Billy was real serious.

'Liam,' he says, 'I know somethin' about that ghost that might surprise you! Butt I daren't tell you, leastwise not now. By this time tomorrow we'll be sharing it with all the town folk. It's a tricky business. If I make a wrong move I could be in big trouble, and no mistake. I'll thank you, Liam,' says he, 'not to be breathin' a word o' what I just told you. Not now, not ever. It could bring mortal danger to me, or my Betsy and the wee ones. Do I have your word?' Sure, what else could I do but agree. Him being dead and all, should I keep my word? What's to be gained? It won't bring him back to his wife and kids." Liam stopped. He looked up and searched the sky, as if looking for an answer in the clouds. He scratched the top of his grizzled white head. "It could only bring harm to his loved ones!"

Liam turned to face the boys at his side. "Now, d'you hearken to what I'm telling you? There are things goin' on in this land of ours the likes o' which you young Canadians would know nothing about, and it's better that way! Maybe now ye'll have a better understanding of my advice? Anyways, that's all I can say.

"Thank you, Liam," Jason said, as he got up to leave. "I really do understand better. We'll not repeat anything you told us. I guess we should leave things alone, like you said. Anyway, we promise to be careful. Thanks again."

Liam merely nodded. The boys left him as they had found him, deep in thought. The boys were silent as they' walked slowly back to the castle. They were greatly impressed by Liam's concern for their safety.



Chapter 9. A Puzzling Discovery

There was a chill in the great drafty hall. Jason and Justin made their way to the library. There was always a cheerful log fire burning there. It would help to dispel the mood of doom and gloom that Liam's warning had created.

Justin sank into a deep chair by the fire. His mind was made up. He was not going to allow Jason's antics to spoil his holiday. The young boy would have been relieved to know that Jason was thinking on the same lines. He knew he shouldn't be involving his kid brother in things that upset him.

Jason wandered over to the bookcase. The stacked shelves reached from floor to ceiling. He loved books. His eyes scanned the titles. He was looking for anything to do with history. The boy wasn't sure what he expected to find. He knew he would know it when he saw it. Justin looked up at Jason's grunt of satisfaction.

"You've found whatever it is that you're looking for?" he asked.

"Well, yes. I think so. I did find something. This might be interesting." Jason joined his brother by the fireplace. "Look, Justy!" He held out the book.

"What is it?" Justin took the slim book. He read the title. "Yeah, sure, 'Ireland's Famous Ghosts.' D'you think it'll mention the Major?" Justin was showing a great deal of interest in spite of his recent decision not to become involved. Ghosts were not his favourite topic!

"Hope so. This index should help." Jason studied the list. "Got it!" he exclaimed. 'The Phantom Horseman of Ballymore.' "Wow!" breathed Jason a moment later. "This is great. There's a whole lot about him here. 'The Horseman of Ballymore', referred to locally as 'The Galloping Major.' "Let's hear it, Jay. Read it aloud." Jason flattened down the page.

He began to read.

" 'A spirit on horseback is said to haunt the township of Ballymore in the county of Down. It is believed to be that of William Hamilton. His origin is uncertain. It is said that he was born in Ireland in the early sixteen hundreds. He was brought up in Scotland, following the brutal massacre of his parents. Not much is known of his childhood years. At the time William Hamilton came of age, civil war had broken out in England. Hamilton joined Cromwell's New Model Army. He rapidly rose to the rank of Major. At this time Cromwell, a bigoted Protestant, was engaged in a ruthless purge of the Catholics in Ireland. For reasons never clearly understood, Major William Hamilton volunteered for service in Ireland, the country of his birth. He obtained a posting at headquarters in County Down. Major Hamilton soon earned himself a reputation for being ruthless in the execution of his duties. He was widely known, and greatly feared. His favourite mount was a large white horse named 'Lightning.' He was a familiar sight, galloping at the head of his men.

After some time, a plot involving the Earl, and his family, at Ballymore Castle, was uncovered. They had been assisting the Irish Catholics to escape from Cromwell's soldiers. William Hamilton was given the task of arresting the Earl and his household.

Legend has it that the Major set out immediately, for the castle, at the head of an armed escort. However, as he drew near, he was ambushed. Hamilton and his horse were brutally slain.

Thereafter, his spirit is said to appear in the district, astride his great white horse. The local people regard his appearance as a sign of coming mis-fortunes. It is not known why the spirit of William Hamilton should choose to haunt Ballymore Castle. There is one widely accepted theory. The Major had failed the most important mission of his career as a soldier.

Earl O'Donnell and his family were never captured alive. The Major's escort made every attempt to carry out the orders. It found the castle empty and deserted.

There have been no reports of this apparitions activities within recent years."

"Wow! That's awesome!" Justin broke in, as Jason put down the book.

"Yes, it sure is," agreed Jason. "But it doesn't tell us too much that we didn't know already. It says there haven't been any sightings in recent years. I wonder what they meant by recent?" He took up the book and quickly thumbed through the pages. He folded back the front piece. "A-ha! just as I thought. London, England, 1908. That's hardly recent, is it?"

"Before Lady Kitty was born, I should think," mused Justin.

Jason got up to return the book to its rightful place. Justin called out, "Wait a second, Jay, there's a loose page about to fall!" Jason looked. He pulled a newspaper cutting from between the pages. He began to flatten out the newsprint, as he sat down again.

"What have you got Jay?" Justin wanted to know.

"I'll tell you, if you give me time to unfold it. It's obviously a news item of some kind."

"Is it old? I mean really old?"

"Sorry to disappoint you, brother. No, it's not. There's a date. April 13th, that's this year. Just a few months."

"How do you suppose it got in there?" Justin wrinkled his brow.

"Well," said Jason, thoughtfully, "let's see. Who uses this library? There's Lady Kitty herself, of course. Then there's Cassy, and Dermot? Maybe even Liam? Might even be the cleaning lady, or the day-help? Could be any number of people.

What about the grandsons, the O'Connors, Johnny, and Jimmy?" suggested Justin.

Jason laughed. "Not likely! I can't see either of them interested in books! I guess we'll just have to ask Lady Kitty."

"You mean tell her?"

"Oh, no, not just yet. If there's a mystery here I'd like to be the one to give her the answer, rather than add to her problems.

"Don't you think we should see what it says, first?"

"Sure!" Jason took up the flimsy paper and began to read.

" 'R.U.C. Capture Arms and Ammunition at Border Crossing.' "That's just the heading."

"What does R.U.C. stand for?"

"It's the Northern Ireland police, I think. Royal Ulster Constabulary, or something."

"Like the R.C.M.P., in Canada, I suppose? Go on, anyway."

"Yesterday, in the town of Newry, the local police acted on a tip. They stopped a funeral procession at the border crossing. The coffin was opened. It contained no corpse. It was filled with guns and ammunition. A search of all the cars in the procession, was carried out. Automatic weapons, grenades and mortars were uncovered. They were removed to the police barracks. It is believed that the Irish Republican Army is responsible for the attempted smuggling of arms into Northern Ireland. There were many arrests.

"Gee!" exclaimed Justin, "That's really something! Newry? Isn't that near here?"

"Just a few miles! Wait, there's more."

" 'Later that evening a bomb, placed in the barracks parking lot, exploded. Doors and windows were blown in. Fortunately there were no serious injuries. In the confusion which followed the blast, a party of armed, masked men, entered the building. The weapons held there were quickly removed to waiting trucks. The convoy headed North. A large scale search is in progress. No arrests have been made.' "

"That's it!" Jason finished. He laid down the paper.

"It doesn't say where all that stuff going, or what it was all for?" Justin commented.

"It's not hard to guess, Justy. It's all this shooting and bombing business that's going on between the Catholics and Protestants, or whatever. I guess it's more of what Liam was telling us about." Jason paused in thought before he went on, slowly. "If some-one was interested enough to keep this news cutting, maybe he knew something...?"

"So," added Justin, "We've should try to find out who was in the library. About the time that Lady Kitty was away, wasn't it?"

"Right, Justy. We'll have to see what we can find out, okay'?"

"You do what you like, but don't look for any help from me!"

"Whatever!" replied Jason. He remembered his decision not to involve his brother. "I'll take care of it!"

Justin got up. He stretched, and yawned. He wandered off. Jason replaced the book where he had found it. He followed Justin out of the library. He made his way up to his room. It had become his favourite 'thinking place.' When his young brother appeared, some time later, he was no further on. The bits and pieces he had been churning around in his mind, just didn't fit together.

It was afternoon tea-time. Lady Kitty was waiting for them in the library. Jason had already made up his mind to learn as much as he could, from his hostess.

The elder Craig boy quickly managed to take over the conversation. "Do you know all about all these books, Lady Kitty?" he began. His face was the picture of innocence.

"Bless you, no! It would take more than my life-time to get through all that lot!" The lady made a wide sweep of her arm, as she answered. "Some of it would make for pretty dull reading, at that!" She finished with a laugh.

"Do you like ghost stories?" Jason persisted. "Have you got any of those, in your collection?" Lady Kitty thought for a moment. "Why yes, I do believe I have one, anyway, that I remember. I've read it. It's called 'Irish Ghosts' I think. Yes, there's a piece about Ballymore in it." Jason said nothing about having seen it. Lady Kitty added, "It's a long time. I was little more than a child."

Finally after a few more unsuccessful attempts to learn what he needed to know, Jason fired a direct question. "Lady Kitty, er, may I ask you, does everyone have permission to use your library?"

"What an odd question? But, well, it depends on what you mean by 'everybody?' The door is never locked, it's true. There's never been any ruling about the household staff. I don't believe any of them would use it. Is it important, Jason?"

"Important? Er, no, of course not," the boy replied, lamely. "I was just thinking. Of course it could never be opened up to the general public, or anything like that."

"I should say not!" Her Ladyship spoke out firmly. "Some of those books are early editions. They're of considerable value. Oh no! In fact I have been thinking that there should be greater security, especially lately."

"How come?" It was Justin who asked.

"Oh, these are troubled times. I know of other houses that have been broken into, and for less reason. Money for 'The Cause' I suppose!"

"But you must have had everything locked up, while you were away?"

'Oh, good grief!' Justin was thinking. 'This is going too far!' however, to the young boy's

surprise, the elderly lady didn't seem to mind the question. She replied readily, "Oh, no, not really. I can count on Dermot. He's a good watch dog as far as my affairs are concerned. I never worry when he's in charge."

Jason knew that there was little more he could find out. He finished his tea. The conversation became more general.

When their hostess gave a small sigh of satisfaction, and placed her small china cup on the tray, the meal was over. The boys excused themselves politely, and withdrew.

"C'mon upstairs, Justy. We should talk." Once in his bedroom Jason closed the door and threw himself on the bed. "This is the best place to discuss things don't you agree, brother? After all, this was Caroline's room."

Justin didn't reply. He wasn't at all impressed that it was four hundred years old, never mind whose room it had been.

Jason didn't notice his brother's silence. "D'you suppose that Lady Caroline might come back? We sure could use her help!"

"I should jolly well hope not!" Justin exploded. "Certainly, not when I'm in the room. That does it! But you go ahead. Invite her! I'm outa' here! I've a good hook to finish." Justin was glad of an excuse to leave.

In the quiet that followed his brother's noisy departure, Jason's' thoughts began circling again, like leaves in an autumn breeze. Finally, he must have dozed off. It was the sound of the dinner gong that roused him. Quickly he tidied himself. He joined the others in the great dining hall.

It had already become the custom for Lady Kitty and her young guests to move into the library when the meal was over. 'It's so cozy in there,' she had said.

Tonight the Monopoly board was brought out. The boys were particularly pleased that Lady Kitty had invited Cassy to join them. She always livened things up!

The game was soon in full swing. Jason's mind was elsewhere. All of a sudden, however, his attention was drawn to what Cassy was saying.

"Young Cavanagh never came for the pig scraps today.

"Is he ill?" Lady Kitty asked, as she moved her token forward three spaces. It landed square on one of Cassy's red hotels!

"Your pardon, Milady, that'll be eight hundred pounds...No, not ill, Ma'am. But I did hear that he'd had a bad scare, or something."

"Eight hundred, you say? That much, eh?" Her Ladyship peeled off the orange bills from the thick wad in her hand. "A scare, you say, Gassy? What kind of a scare, d'you know?"

A look of concern crossed Cassy's face. She felt that maybe she had spoken out of line, in front of the young boys. She knew she hadn't watched her tongue, in the heat of the game. "Oh, did I say 'scare' Ma'am? Oh, I, er, I don't think it can ha' been that much." She began counting her money. "It isn't worth the telling."

Jason wasn't going to be put off that easily. "Tell us, anyway, Cassy. Let us be the judge."

The Housekeeper gave her mistress a pleading look. She got no sympathy in return. "Well, my friend, you started something by talking too much. You should have kept your mind on the game. Serves you right! Now you'll have to finish it. Tell us what you know!" Lady Kitty was

still obviously smarting from her loss.

Cassy understood quite well that Her Ladyship was getting her own back. She would not otherwise be insisting.

'However,' thought Cassy to herself, 'if that's the way she wants it I've no reason to spare her feelings.' She put the dice from her hands. She placed her money of the table. Looking directly across at the two boys, she said, "You'll pardon me, Milady, if what I have to say is not to your likin' but isn't it yourself that insists? You see, Ma'am, it has to do with the, er, the 'goings-on' that have been so bothersome."

The housekeeper's face had grown quite solemn. There was a deathly silence in the room. Justin's eyes were black. His face was pale. No one spoke.

"Well," Cassy began, "when young Kevin didn't show up, like I said, I asked one of Liam's boys if they knew anything. O' course I don't know how much you can depend on anything those lads have to say. But, if the mistress here, wants to know, who am I to say she can't? I'll tell you!" Jason sat forward in his seat. His eyes were fixed on Cassy, as she began.

"Young Cavanagh was at choir practice last evening. It went on 'til all hours. The Harvest Festival, you know. The wee lad had to set off for home all by himself. I don't know all the rights of it. I gather, from what was said, that he decided to take a short cut. It being so late, and all. The lad knew his parents would be anxious." The housekeeper was spinning out her moment, for all it was worth. She paused to collect her thoughts.

"The young lad found himself all alone," Cassy continued. "He was crossing the bottom of the field that runs close by the cove. It must ha' been just near the spot where Billy Duffy went over. God rest his soul! All of a sudden there were lights bobbin' up and down. They appeared from nowhere out of the blackness. The wee lad was scared to death, alone as he was. O'course he told all this afterwards, when he got home in a terrible state. He says that he was starin' at them lights, frozen where he was. But his fear turned to mortal terror when he heard a horse come trottin' near by. He swears to it that, right before his bulgin' eyes, was the Galloping Major! Aye, the ghost himself, astride his great white horse. It was all shimmering like, in the light from the moon.

"The poor child had difficulty tellin' what he'd seen. He was able to describe the boots, the sword, the round helmet on his head. Ach, sure, there can be no doubt about it. Wee Kevin must ha' seen something that frightened him half to death!"

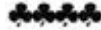
Jason's mind was racing. His pulses had quickened. He understood only too well how scared Kevin must have been.

Cassy was enjoying herself. She continued, after a moment. "When the boy reached home he was in a terrible state. He just stood on the doorstep, as white as the ghost he'd seen. His father had to go out to him and carry him in. They set him near the fire. He was that cold, and shakin' all over. Mr Cavanagh told it that he had to give his child a drop 'o whisky before he could utter a word. It's not for me to say, beggin' your pardon, Milady. I know your feelings. But, I daresay there's truth in what Kevin Cavanagh is tellin'!"

Cassy puffed out her cheeks as she sat back. She looked about her, enjoying the stir she had created.

"That sounds like a lot of foolish gossip, Cassy! I'm surprised at you!" Lady Kitty scolded. "You should never have thought it worth repeating, especially in front of our young guests, here!" Cassy bristled. "And wasn't it yourself, begging your pardon, Ma'am, that insisted I repeat it?" Her Ladyship had no answer. With a coldness that was not at all like her, she told Cassy to pick up the dice and take her turn. The game resumed. The sparkle and the merriment were gone. Justin's hand was still shaking when he played his turn. Jason could think of nothing else but Kevin's story. Cassy was still smarting from the sharp rebuke from her mistress. Lady Kitty looked drawn and tired. There was a feeling of relief when their hostess looked up at the clock on the mantel. "My, that time already? I think we should call it a night?"

After a chorus of 'Good-nights,' the subdued party broke up. The Craig boys were indeed ready for bed. Cassy's story had done little to help Jason sort out his thoughts. He certainly didn't doubt the truth of it all. However, worn out by it all he was soon fast asleep. Justin, however, was still tossing and turning, long after the castle had fallen quiet.



Chapter 10. Justin Craig Gets a Bad Scare!

It seemed to Jason that he had barely closed his eyes. Suddenly he was roused to instant wakefulness. A board had creaked, right outside his door! The startled boy sat up and listened. Yes, there it was again! It was the sound of some-one, or something, coming to his room. The dim light from the dying embers in the grate shone on the brass door-knob. It moved! The handle was being slowly turned from the outside. Jason's heart was beating like a hammer. Some-one was coming in! A hand appeared! It was followed immediately by a familiar shock of tousled hair. Justin entered the room.

"What on earth..." Jason was almost beside himself. "You just about scared the living day-lights outa' me! What d'you think you're doing, creeping about like that, in the middle of the night? What's the matter?"

"Oh, Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I was trying not to wake up the rest of the castle. I, er, I thought maybe that you mightn't be asleep either, after what Cassy told us. Maybe you'd like to talk about it...?" Justin finished lamely.

"Oh, well, you're here anyway, and I'm wide awake. You might as well stay. But let's not discuss it. I've had enough on the subject for one day, thanks very much."

Justin was relieved. He didn't want to talk about it either! He had just made up an excuse for Jason to invite him in.

The two boys curled up' side by side. It was something they hadn't done for years and years. Almost at once they were both fast asleep.

It was Justin who was first awake. He felt much better after a good night's sleep. Quietly he slipped out of bed. All his fears of the previous night were banished from his mind in the early morning sunshine streaming in through the long window. He made his way into the corridor without waking his brother.

For the second time, Jason was rudely jolted out of his sleep. The bedroom door burst open. Justin was on the threshold. His face was all colours.

Jason jumped up in an instant. "Great Heaven's! What ever is it, this time?"

The young boy was trembling. He seemed unable to speak. He just stood there.

"Come in, come in and close the door. What's the matter with you. Tell me what happened. You look like you've seen a ghost"

"You c-could s-say that!" Justin stammered through chattering teeth. Jason crossed the room and placed an arm round the frightened boy's shoulders.

The younger boy was beginning to recover his wits. He finally blurted out, "Come and see! Somethings been at my room. It's all wrecked. There's writing on the mirror. It's awful. Come, come and see!"

Jason didn't wait for dressing-gown or slippers. He followed his brother along the corridor. The door was flung open. What a sight met his eyes. Justin's room really had been trashed. Drawers had been emptied on the middle of the floor. The bedclothes had been stripped from the mattress. Jason had never seen such a mess.

"Look there!" Justin pointed to the mirror above the dressing table.

Jason read the scrawled words: '*Canadians Not Wanted Here. Go Home before you get Hurt.*'

"See!" uttered Justin in a frightened voice. "It's the ghost. I'm sure of it! Jay, I'm really scared. Just think, if I hadn't moved into your room last night I could ha' been murdered in my bed!" The young boy sank down on the mattress. He stared straight in front of him. His thoughts were filled with all the dreadful things that might have happened to him. 'Maybe I would be lying there, dead, like the policeman, without a mark on me! And a terrible look on my face!'"

As usual, it was Jason who took control. He understood that his kid brother was really scared. "I don't blame you in the least for being upset," he said, gently. "But give up the idea about the ghost. This is clearly not the work of an apparition. Whoever did this is as much flesh and blood as we are!"

"D'you really think so?" Justin's colour was returning to normal. He trusted in his brother's common sense. "What'll we do, then?" Shouldn't we go and tell Lady Kitty? She'll have to call the police. I don't want to get killed. Ghost or no ghost, it won't matter to me. I'd like to pack up and go home before we're dead. Let's do what the message says!"

"What?" exclaimed Jason. "Give in? Play right into the hands of whoever wrote that nonsense? Oh no! Don't you see, Justy, they're just using the 'The Major' as scare tactics?"

"It worked!" mumbled Justin.

"Just think for a minute. Don't you get it? Whoever is doing this is worried in case we find out something. It's great, Justy! We've got them on the defensive."

"I don't care about that!" growled Justin. "I still don't want to wind up dead, or worse!"

"You won't, little brother. I promise. Don't worry. Let's see what we have to go on. In the first place, we can say that the person or persons unknown, must know their way round the inside of the castle. They must have a way of getting in, after Dermot has locked up. They even know which rooms we have."

"I don't want them to know which rooms we have. I don't want them to know we even exist, especially if it's the ghost!"

"Now you're being silly again! You know what Lady Kitty would say?"

"What?"

"She'd say, 'Stop your nonsense man! Get this room tidied up this instant!' C'mon Justy. Let's do it!"

Justin was glad to be busy. He worked away with his brother at his side. He began to feel like himself again. Jason was always there for him, when he needed him.

"You know, Justy," Jason was saying, "I don't blame you for being upset. It's a terrible thing that someone has invaded your space, and handled all your things. It's even worse when you don't know who did it."

"D'you think we'll ever find out?"

"We'll find out! There, the room's okay now. Get yourself dressed. It's almost breakfast time. Will you be all right now?"

"Sure, I'll be fine, thanks. Thanks a lot, Jay!"

"Oh, that's what big brothers are for! Hurry now."

Lady Kitty greeted her young guests. "Good morning, you two! I hope you slept well. I was worried in case Cassy's silly nonsense upset you."

It was Jason who answered. "No, No. We're fine this morning, thank you. Isn't it a lovely day?" He never batted an eye-lid. He gave no indication of what had happened. He knew that it would

upset Lady Kitty dreadfully.

"Well, thank goodness for that! I wish I could say the same for myself. I was tossing and turning."

Jason noticed that their hostess looked tired and drawn. She was not her cheerful self at all.

"D'you want to talk about it, Lady Kitty? I mean, did something disturb you?" Jason asked the question out of genuine concern. At the same time he wondered if she might have heard someone moving about.

"You dear boy! No, it was just the usual old worry. Once it starts it's like a squirrel on a treadmill. It goes round and round, and gets nowhere! I wish I could get some kind of it hold on what's been going on around here, lately. I know there's something! As if I didn't have enough to worry about!"

Justin's fork, with its load of sausage, stopped in mid-air. His voice was strained as he asked, "You mean something bad has happened since we got here?"

"Oh, No, nothing like that. Nothings happened, at least that I am aware of." Justin's fork resumed its journey. Lady Kitty cleverly changed the subject "I do wish I could get some sense out of all these legal people. I've had nothing from them....except bills," she added with a smile. After a sip of coffee she went on, "It's beginning to look more and more as if everything will end up in the hands of the government." She sighed. "Last night I was thinking how much easier it would be for me to give up and let them have the lot!"

"Lady Kitty!" Jason was horrified. "You wouldn't! You couldn't! You're not a quitter. What's happened to the fighting Irish spirit?"

For a moment her Ladyship's face lit up. "Ah!" she said, "It's plain to see, Jason, that you have inherited some of that Irish spirit from your mother! You're absolutely right! I still have Desmond Orr's visit to look forward to. You remember? The lawyer from Victoria. If he's as good as people say he is, he'll come up with something. No, dear! I'll not give up. You'll see."

The Craigs were glad to see that Lady Kitty had cheered up. Her tensed look was gone. Presently she looked up, over the rim of her coffee cup. "I see you're both finished. Run along, the pair of you. I'll sit a-while over this. I'll try thinking positive thoughts. Thanks Jason!"

"You're welcome, Lady Kitty." The boy replied with obvious pleasure.

As the Craigs were leaving the dining-room, Lady Kitty's voice reached them. "Tell Cassy she can come and clear. I know she hates to be held up." The boys made their way to the kitchen.

"Saints be praised!" exclaimed the good lady. She was clearly delighted. "What brings you young 'uns here? Is it more muffins you be wantin' Justine?" She eyed the young boy with her eyes twinkling.

"N-no thanks!" stammered the young boy, taking the cook seriously. "It's just that Lady Kitty is finishing her coffee. She says you can come and clear when you want to."

"Is that a fact now? If I know Her Ladyship, and who does, better'n me, she'll be holdin' that cup in her hand until it's grown stone cold? I'm thinkin' I should wait a while before I disturb her with my gossip."

"You mean 'gossip,' like the story you told last night? That didn't go down too well, eh, Cassy?" Jason couldn't resist it!

Cassy puffed and blew. "Jason!" She exclaimed. "The teasing me you are! I did get my head blowed off, for my trouble, didn't I!" She finished with a cackle of laughter. The two boys joined

in. Cassy dabbed her eyes with the hem of her apron, she sighed. "Aye, it upset her all right, and no mistake. These are bad times." The laughter was gone from the housekeeper's face.

"Did you sleep well last night, Cassy?" Jason asked.

"And why should I not? Lyin' awake is only for those with a guilty mind!"

"Oh, I just thought I'd ask. I thought I heard strange noises during the night." Jason was at least telling half-truths.

"Strange noises, eh? Well, lad, that's something you could get used to. Sure, them boards are so old they creak and groan of their own accord! That's all it was. Anyway I know it for a fact that Dermot locked the place up tight, last night I heard them bolts and chains clanking as I went up to bed." Jason and Justin exchanged glances at this piece of news.

Jason tried again. "Have you seen Liam yet this morning, Cassy?"

"Seen him, you ask?" The cook bristled. "Seen him? Indeed I have! And him the one that knows it! It was himself that was hammerin' on the back door here, at day-break. He was that upset. He asked me if I'd seen any sign of Johnny or Jimmy. 'And me, scarcely out of my bed' I told him. I says, "Liam, what brings you up here at this hour, and with all that clatter and banging. Did you forget your keys, man?"

"They're gone, Cassy!" says he."

"'Gone?' says I. 'Where are they gone to?' The old fella' was in a real tizzy I could see. I made him a brew o' tea before he could calm down enough to tell me."

Jason was really interested. "What did he say?"

"They didn't sleep in their beds last night," says he. 'I haven't seen hide nor hair of 'em. Them keys, they're gone, too!'"

Jason's mind was working overtime. Justin's face was a study as he took in what Cassy was saying. "Liam has nothing but worry about them two boys o' his."

"Why does he have them to stay with him, then, if they're such a problem?" Jason wanted to keep up the conversation.

Cassy pulled her apron around her as she leaned back against the heavy kitchen table. "I don't know if I should risk gettin' into more trouble with the mistress."

"Oh, don't worry, we won't tell her. You don't care much for Liam's grandsons, do you, Cassy?"

Jason prompted the housekeeper.

She took the bait. "I never said any such thing. But, well, if the truth be known, just between you boys and meself, it's true. And not without good reason, mind!"

"Oh, please Cassy, do tell us. Jason and me, well, we don't really like them much, either." It was Justin who spoke.

"What I say won't be against friends, then?"

"Certainly not!" Jason replied at once.

Cassy motioned to the Craigs to settle down. In the silence of the great kitchen, she began the story of Johnny and Jimmy O'Connor.



Chapter 11. Cassy Tells What She Knows.

"The O'Connors come from a wee town called Ballinadrum. It's not too far from here."

"For all that's been said about them two boys, I'd say I blamed the town and not themselves. It's known to be full of young hooligans. The sort out to make trouble for trouble's sake. All kinds o' mischief."

"I heard that there was a lot o' stone throwin', and the like. A big window in the Protestant Church was busted. Maybe I didn't get the rights of it. I don't think that them lads, Johnny and Jimmy were too far off when it happened. Their parents were at their wits, end waitin' for the police to come knockin' on their door! Mind you, they're not bad boys, left to themselves. There's little to keep them off the streets and outa' bad company."

"So, it was Liam who got the bright idea to get them away from there, before they landed up in serious trouble. The O'Connors have family In Phihidelfy. That's in America."

"Philadelph-ia," corrected Jason. "We know where it is."

"Where-ever;" Cassy continued, unfazed by the interruption. "While the arrangements were being made he suggested his grandsons stay with him. 'To be outa' harm's way,' as he put it."

"It wasn't long before their Uncle Bill sent them a cable sayin' for them to come, and welcome. He has a grand job, and a big house, I hear. Liam's been busy with all that red tape stuff. Sure you could strangle yourself in it easier that gettin' two wee boys a passage. Among other things, Johnny and Jimmy need references. And o'course, not a smell of a police record! Liam's been that worried in case the trouble In Ballinadrum catches up with them before they're safely away. And o'course, he's really upset now. He fears they're in some kinda mischief. From what I heard the airplane seats are booked for the next day or two. Aye, and I'd say that Liam has every reason to be in a tizzy. I smell trouble, all the way from Ballinadrum."

Cassy finished up sounding like a prophet of doom.

Jason's brain was working overtime with all this new information. He didn't miss the significance of the lost keys. He hoped that it was the O'Connor boys who had them. If not, there was no telling what murdering cut-throats could be loose in the castle, to come and go as they pleased.

With a sudden gesture that showed that Jason had made a decision, he grabbed his brother's arm. "C'mon Justin! We've got to talk!" Together the young Craig's swept out of the kitchen. They left Cassy opened mouthed. "Land Sakes!" she breathed, "What was all that about'?" She slid from the table. Grabbing a large tray, she went about her business.



Chapter 12. The O'Connor Boys are Missing!

"What's going on?" Justin had been taken by surprise, also.

"I suspect that the O'Connor boys are mixed up in all this. I think we should first talk to Liam. You just keep out of it. Let me do the talking, okay?"

"Sure, suits me. I don't know what we'd be talking to Liam about anyway!" Justin was well used to playing second fiddle to his elder brother.

Together the Craigs reached the farm yard. They soon found Liam. He was busy washing vegetable down with a garden hose. The boys noticed the grim expression that creased the old man's face. There was no doubt that he looked worried.

" 'The Top o' the Mornin' to You,' Liam," Justin called out the Irish greeting as they approached.

"And to you, lads!" Liam looked up. A smile of pleasure crossed his face.

"Have you time for a wee chat, Liam?" Jason asked, as they came up to him.

Liam hesitated for a moment. "Well, now, ye'll have to give me a minute to get this lot cleaned up, or Cassy'll be at me! I'm short handed this morning."

"We'll help." Justin suggested, good natured as always. He took the hose from the gardener's gnarled hands. "Aye! Thank 'ee lad. I could do with a bit o' help. I'm all behind. I was away all day yesterday. It seems that nothin' was done. Here, Jason, will you be loading up the barrow with them clean 'veggies.' " The Canadian was pleased that Liam had dropped the 'Master' and called him by his name for the first time. He got to work at once.

In next to no time the wheelbarrow was loaded to the top. Liam gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Thanks boys! Now, if you'll just sit over yonder, I'll whisk this lot up to her high-and-mightiness' in the kitchen. I'll be back in no time at all. Sure I'm anxious to hear what it is, that brings you lads down. Though it's right glad I am," he added, as he picked up the barrow and trundled it away.

The Craigs took their place on the wooden seat by the house. Jason was soon thinking how peaceful it all was. He fell to wondering how it had come about that there was so much tension and turmoil amidst such a lovely scene. Before he could dwell further on Ireland's problems, there was a heavy tread on the path. Liam had returned. He sat down beside the boys. There was a few moment's silence until blue tobacco smoke curled into the still morning air.

It was Jason who started the conversation. He chose his words carefully. He knew he had to approach a tricky subject with some care. "Did I hear you say you were away all day, yesterday?" he asked, casually.

"Aye, I was indeed. I was in the big city. I've no love for it either. It was business about these boys o' mine. Liam paused. He gave a deep sigh before he continued, heavily. "They should rightly be leavin' for Americky tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Jason echoed, in surprise. "But, but Liam, Cassy told us that the boys weren't home last night? That's one of the reasons we wanted to talk to you about."

"Aye," said Liam, slowly. "I had a mind that it might be!" He waited a moment before he went on, "I'm at my wits' end, and that's no lie! If them lads crossed up with the law, they'll not be using them airyplane seats tomorrow. And that's even supposin' that nothin' worse has happened

to em! Sure I don't even know where to find them!" The Old man's voice broke.

"Listen, Liam," Jason spoke gently. "Did I hear that you've mislaid your keys? Do you think that, er, perhaps, the boys might have, er, 'borrowed' them?"

"What makes you ask such a question's" Liam gave Jason a sharp look from beneath shaggy white eye-brows. "Is there something you should be tellin' me?"

"Well," said Jason, carefully, "maybe there is. We didn't want to tell Lady Kitty. It would only have upset her."

"We didn't tell Cassy, either," added Justin.

"Out with it man!" Liam's voice had an edge to it. He felt sure he was going to hear something bad about his boys.

"Hang on a minute, Liam. We don't know anything for sure. It was last night. My brother was a bit spooked by the story about the Canvanagh boy..."

"Aye, I heard about it," interrupted Liam. "So what about Johnny and Jimmy? Tell me now, what have they been up to?" his voice rose.

"Wait, Liam, there's nothing for sure. Anyway, listen. Justy couldn't sleep so he came in to me, in my room, you know, for company. In the morning, this morning, that is, he woke early. When he went back to his room he found it completely trashed! There was a message on the mirror, 'Canadians Not Wanted here,' or some such thing."

Liam broke in, "And you're tellin' me it was my lads that done it?" His voice was full of anger.

"And what makes you dare to say such a thing!"

"No, Liam, I didn't say that. I'm only telling you what happened. I daresay it must have been someone who could get into the castle during the night. We know that Dermot locked up. Your boys weren't in their beds..."

"You make a point," said Liam, more calmly. "I understand what you're tellin' me. If them lads took the keys they could ha' done it, right enough. But for the life of me I can't think what would make them do such a daft thing. I never did hear a bad word spoke about you boys. There's no call for them to mess up your place. That is," he added, "if it was them that did it."

Jason didn't blame Liam one bit for not wanting to put the blame on his grandsons. He didn't want to upset the old man further so he changed the subject. "I can see now why you were so anxious to keep us out of things. You were afraid we'd uncover something that your grandsons might have been mixed up in?"

"Yes lad, that's about the truth of it. My one concern has been to keep those two o'mine out of mischief until they were safely on their way to Philadelphia. It's so close! And now, my worst fears have come about. I'll not draw an easy breath until I find out what those two got up to while I was arranging their flight."

"I'm glad to hear you say that Johnny and Jimmy meant us no harm. Maybe there's a reason we don't know about?" Jason guided the conversation back to the problem at hand.

"What you say makes sense enough, Jason. Who better than them, with a fine set o' keys to every part. Sure it wouldn't be once that they've seen me open up that back door to the kitchen."

Justin spoke for the first time in a while. "I'm sorry for even thinking it was them, Liam. Even if it was I wouldn't want you to get mad at them..."

"Now aren't you the real gentleman! As to gettin' mad at them, well, we'll see. All I want now is to see them comin' down the path! I don't think there'd be much anger left in me!" Liam was really moved, as he spoke.

Justin was pleased at Liam's compliment. He could see that the old man was really upset. After waiting a few moments he said, "Liam I do wish I understood why there is all this trouble. I don't just mean here, at the castle, but everywhere. Are things worse in Bally, er. Bally-whatever, you know, where your grandsons come from?"

"Ballinadrum," corrected Liam, gently. The strained look on his face vanished for a moment as he looked at Justin. 'Nay, lad, neither better nor worse I'm thinkin'. It's the same all over this beloved land. I'll tell you, Justin, it's hard for a young lad from foreign parts, to figure out what's goin' on, and why. Sure it's such a mix up of polities and Protestants, Catholics, and Nationalists, you wouldn't know where to begin to fathom it all! You're asking questions that a lot a' people would like answers for. There's no end to it, as I can see." Liam paused to pull at his pipe.

"Aye," he went on, "tis terrible times we are in, and no mistake. However, some o' them higher-ups are beginnin' to use a bit of common sense. There's a big meetin' in Stormont, that's the government building outside Belfast. I do hear that her highness the Prime Minister of London'll be at it, along with his Lordship from Dublin. To-gether with all the Northern Ireland big-wigs, you'd think that they'd have somethin' to say to each other? We'll see what comes of it, in a day or so."

"The meeting is soon then?" Jason asked. "D'you think it'll all be over then? Gee! Lady Kitty'll be glad. She worries about it a lot."

"Well, I wouldn't go countin' on it! If there's any talk about givin' too much to the Catholics, the Protestants will be all stirred up by that fella' in the pulpit with the big voice. 'Not an inch! He'll be shoutin'! The the Prods will be out making trouble on the Falls Road, shootin' and bombing, all over again."

"The Falls Road?" Jason asked. "Why the Falls Road?"

"It's just the name of the road where a lot o' Catholics live. And when they're done there'll be more o' the same in the Shankill, from the Catholics. That's the Protestant part of the city."

"So," observed Jason, "the whole thing is just because the two religions can't get along together?"

"Aye, lad. That's a big part of it. But there's more to it than the hatred between Catholics and Protestants. Sure, we're living, if you can call it that, in a country divided in politics and well as by religion. The South of this blessed land is mostly Catholics. They run their own government, in Dublin. In the North of Ireland, here, we're nearly all Protestants. We have loyalty to England. That doesn't sit too well with a lot o' fire-brands in the South. They want to have Ireland for Ireland, all of it, that is."

You can't blame them for that!" commented Jason.

"There are plenty that do! Ach, there's blame enough to go around on both sides. But that's enough about all that!" Liam clearly wanted to change the subject.

"Thanks a lot, Liam, I understand much better now. Justin wasn't sure that he did, but he was too polite to say so.

Jason decided to start on a new tack. "So, Liam, The Galloping Major, really has very little to do with all the fighting between the North and the South? That's something else, again?"

"Ah, for sure! There's more talk than substance about that fella' on his fine horse. Irish folk just love a bit of a gossip over their pint o' Guinness. Aren't there stories of Leprachauns and wee folk, told the world over?"

"Sure!" Justin joined in. "We've heard of them in Canada."

Jason had to bite his tongue when Liam scoffed about the ghost. He knew that to say anything

further on that subject would accomplish nothing. He decided to get back to more pressing matters. "Well, Liam, I'm sorry if we've blamed Johnny and Jimmy in the wrong, for trashing Justy's room."

"Oh don't fret about it. You had reason. All I want to do now is find them, whatever they may have done. Get the pair o' them up to Belfast, real quick, and onto that 'plane. It's only then that I'll be able to take a breath without it hurtin'!"

Jason nodded, sympathetically. "I know what you mean. I wish we could help. Tell you what, Justy, why don't we go back and check your room and see if we can find any clues?"

"Good idea," said Justin, getting up. "Let's do it! Thanks again, Liam for the chat. See ya!"

"If we find anything we'll let you know. Try not to worry, Liam. I'm sure they'll turn up safe and sound," added Jason.

"I hope to God you're right, lad!"

Jason and Justin walked quickly up the path to the castle.

"We'll go over everything in your room very carefully," Jason was saying. The two boys mounted the wide staircase. "Maybe we'll find a shoe-print, or something they may have dropped."

Justin was first across the threshold. He stopped dead in his tracks so suddenly that Jason ran into him, in the doorway.

"What's up, brother?"

"Look!" exclaimed Justin. His face was pink with surprise. "They've been at it again!"

Jason followed his brother's eyes to the mirror. On it was written the single word: *'help'* in much the same hand as before.

"What d'you make of it, Jason?" The younger boy's voice was low. He looked frightened.

"Beats me, for the moment. I need time to think. Who needs help, d'you suppose, Justy?"

"The ghost?"

"Don't be silly! Ghosts don't need any help! At least I don't think they do. They certainly don't make a habit of writing on mirrors with wet soap." Jason crossed the room. "Here, see!" he licked the tip of his finger and rubbed it across the letters. "Soap! That's all it is. That's what they used."

"In the movies it would have been lipstick, but I don't have any." Justin was feeling better. Jason was being brisk and businesslike. "Now, let's go on with our search for clues. Check everything. Look everywhere. It's even more important now we know they've been back. Fancy them coming back a second time. It makes you think, doesn't it? They must be pretty desperate. I dunno!"

Jason paused, and looked around him.

"M-Maybe they didn't have to come back? Maybe they were here all the time!" Justin grew pale at the thought. "They must have been here, all the time, in the room, when we were cleaning up! I bet they were waiting to pounce on us and murder us, or worse!"

"Fat chance! We went over this room pretty good when we were tidying up. There was no place they could have been hiding. Anyway, I'm glad to hear you say that!"

"Glad? How come?"

"You've obviously forgotten the notion that it was a ghost. No! Whoever's at this is flesh and blood all right!"

The boys spent the next several minutes having a good look around. They moved the furniture;

they looked under the bed. Jason got down and pulled out a pair of socks. He held them to his nose. "Yuck! Yours, I presume!" He tossed them to his brother.

Finally, after another quick look all around, Jason suggested that they both return to his room, for a quiet think. Justin closed the door behind him.

"I bet the O'Connors are mixed up in all this. I wish we could get to the bottom of it," Jason was saying, as they reached his room. He opened the door and went in, followed closely by his brother. Without looking round, Jason made a dive for the bed, and stretched out. It was, as he had called it, his 'favourite thinking position.'

Justin never entered the room with any great show of enthusiasm. Today was no exception. He found the room particularly stuffy. The air was heavy. The long drapes were partly pulled across the window. He started across, to pull them back, to let in more light. He had seen something totally unexpected. There were two pairs of muddy shoes, sticking out from under the drapes! For a moment blind panic seized him, until common sense quickly took over. Ghosts don't have muddy feet. They don't lurk behind curtains! Justin was a sturdy boy for his age. He could be relied upon to give a good account of himself in a skirmish with beings of flesh and blood. His pulses were racing as he sought to attract Jason's attention. However, it was the elder boy who had noticed his brother's sudden halt, in mid-stride, in the middle of the room. Jason had his mouth open to call out. Quickly, Justin put a finger to his lips. With his free hand he pointed to the base of the curtains. Jason sat up. His eyes followed the signal. A look of amazement crossed his face. Slowly, he slid from the bed. He moved closer to his brother, talking casually. "I do miss our Rugby football games in Victoria...That was a great coach we had. 'Always go low,' he used to say. You know what I mean, Justy?"

Justin's face was alive with excitement, as he nodded. Jason grinned, as he silently mouthed, 'One....Two....Three!' On the count of three both boys launched themselves in a flying leap at the legs of the intruders!

All hell broke loose! Bodies landed in the middle of the floor. With a loud *crash* the curtain pole descended, bringing down with it fold after fold of heavy material. Muffled curses could be heard from beneath the firm weight of the two Craigs. Wriggling and squirming and gasping for air, two heads appeared.

"It's Johnny and Jimmy!" exclaimed Justin. "We've found them!" Jason heaved a sigh of relief. There had been no hesitation in his attack on the four feet behind the curtain. However, it was nice to know that their enemy had not been a great four-legged Irish giant, armed with a club! Dealing with their own kind had been less of a hazard to life and limb! Jason was also quick to take satisfaction in the fact that it was, indeed, the two missing boys.

"What d'ye think you guys are doin'?" A red faced Johnny O'Connor blustered. "Are ya tryin' to kill the pair of us altogether? Sure we were minding our own business and doin' no harm to anyone!" The Canadian boys found it hard at first, to understand the strong Northern Ireland accent, delivered with such breathlessness.

"Well, Justin," said Jason, in a business-like voice. "What shall we do with these two miserable worms?"

"Do?" replied Justin, with a wink, "Why, I think a night or two in the local jail might teach them a lesson. You hold them while I call the police!" Both Canadians knew fine well that involving the police was the last thing they should do, under the circumstances. However, the threat hit home.

Jimmy, the younger brother, started blubbing. "Oh, Oh, please, for the love o' God, man, not the police! P-please don't call the cops!"

Johnny was trying hard to pull himself together. "Please, please listen," he begged. "We're already in trouble enough. It'll be the end of us if the cops get to us. We'll do anything, anything you say!"

"Well," said Jason slowly. He put his hand to his chin, as if giving the matter close consideration. "We might not get the police. At least not in the meantime. It would have to be on one condition."

"Anything!" repeated Johnny, earnestly.

"Very good, then. No police for the moment. But you've got to tell Justin and me everything, and I do mean everything! What have you two guys been up to, for the last couple of days? You might as well know that your grandfather has been half out of his mind with worry."

"Aye, we thought as much. More's the shame on us. Grandad bein' so good to us, and all." Jimmy lowered his chin to his chest, as he spoke. He looked up, at his brother. "We'll have to tell em, won't we? I mean, they'll have to know?"

"Yes, Jimmy, it all has to come out. It's lives that are at cost, now, no matter what happens to us! You'd better let me do it?"

Jimmy nodded silently.

Jason and Justin exchanged looks. They knew that they had the upper hand, and that the truth would come out.

"Right, then!" Jason wanted to make it clear that he was still in control. "No tricks mind! You've obviously got something to say. We'll talk in a civilized manner. Not here, in the middle of all this mess."

The group shook themselves free of the folds of heavy material, and stood clear. Jason was silent for a few moments. He was considering what should be done next. Taking a look at the wretched intruders looking so sorry for themselves, He said:

"Now you two, you're both a sorry sight. You look as if you've been dragged through a ditch!"

"Close enough!" mumbled Jimmy.

"So, get yourselves washed and cleaned up. When you're more presentable we'll talk. Understood?"

"Sure, we want to tell you. You'll all have to know!" Johnny seemed eager, even anxious, to tell his story. Justin spoke up as the O'Connors got up to do as they were told. "Hey, you guys must be hungry? I bet you've had no breakfast?"

"Nor supper, neither," sighed Johnny.

"Okay then. I'll slip down to the kitchen and see what Cassy has ready for our morning snack. You'd better behave yourselves when I'm gone!"

"Us? Make more trouble? We're not daft altogether!" replied Johnny, over his shoulder, as he and his brother made their way to the bathroom.

When Justin returned, not many minutes later, he found the O'Connors sitting on the bed, as meek as lambs. They looked much more presentable. All traces of anger and hostility had long since disappeared. At the sight of a tray-load of scones, milk and cookies, their faces lit up. Silence fell as the two hungry lads wolfed down the food. Justin wore a pained expression as he recovered the tray without so much as a crumb left on it!

"Thanks!" said Johnny, wiping his chin with his sleeve. "That was nice." He seemed grateful for the treatment that he and his brother were being shown.

"And now, let's get down to it," said Jason. "You owe us an explanation. You promised to tell us everything."

"Yes," added Justin. "You sure trashed my room good. And I want to know why!"

"We'll tell you. We said we would! You guys have it all wrong. We have to talk, and you have to listen, or there'll be hundreds, maybe thousands killed! Am I not right Jimmy?" His brother nodded. Johnny went on, "Didn't ya see that we want help? We wrote it plain."

"Yes," said Jason, "but now we expect you to tell us why! I must say, from what you've already said, it sounds real serious."

"You can say that again. If you guys are ready, I'll tell you the whole thing, from the start. Right, Jimmy?"

"Tell 'em Johnny."



Chapter 13. The O'Connors Have a Story to Tell

"Blackmail!" said Johnny, softly, between his teeth. "We had to do it. We were threatened. It would ha' been all over for us if we hadn't done what we were bid!"

"You'd better start at the very beginning. Tell us everything. Justin and I won't say a word until you're finished. You know, of course, that there's no way you can keep a thing like this from your grandad? But we'll come to that, later. When you've told us what you know, and we understand the rights of it better, me and Justin could go with you. Maybe it'd make things easier if we were able to speak up for you. There's one thing for sure. He won't 'skin you,' as you put it, if we're there!"

"You'd do that for us?" Jimmy sounded awed.

"No promises in the meantime. Let's hear the story first. Then we can decide what to do, and maybe help you, if we can."

"Gee, thanks! I'm awful glad we came to the likes o' you with our troubles." Johnny straightened his shoulders. "You want to hear about the awful things that are happening, right under our noses! Then I'll be the one to tell you, the whole thing!"

The only sound that broke the silence in that old room was Johnny's voice. In a strong Northern Irish accent he told the following story.

"Jimmy and me, when we came to live with Grandad, we hoped that things would be better for us, being away from Ballinadrum, and all that. But it hasn't worked out like that!

"Our miseries began one day, many weeks ago. Her Ladyship was away at the time. We, that is, Jimmy and me, were setting out to walk into town. An expensive car pulls up alongside. The driver pokes his head out and asks us, no less, if we knew where the O'Connor boys could be found? Course we told him. He asked us if we would hop in and he'd give us a ride into town. 'I have something of a favour to ask of you two lads.' So Jimmy and me, we hopped in, like he said. We didn't see the harm, being two of us."

"When he got the car going he asked us if we would like to make some money. Me and Jimmy froze at that one, I can tell you! But when the man saw that he had taken him up wrong he laughed, 'Oh no, it's nothing like that, nothing bad or anything!' So we listened when he told us that he was a free lance journalist, or something, I think he said. A writer, anyway, with a deadline to meet. He was looking for background material. He'd been told about Ballymore and its legend about the Galloping Major. He'd come a very long way, to follow it up."

"We asked him how he thought that we might be able to help him, even if we wanted to. The strange man then offered us money if we'd let him into the castle, so that he could get the atmosphere and the material he needed. He knew about the library. He said he wanted to spend some time there, doin' his research, or whatever."

"I just laughed and told him that there was no way we could give him any such permission. The castle belonged to lady O'Donnell. He'd have to ask her."

"We know it now! The man must ha' done his home-work. Sure, didn't he know that Her Ladyship was away in America. There was no way he could get in touch with her or wait for her return, so he said."

"There was nothing more said until we reached the town. Polite he was, for he opened the car

door to let us out. But then he said, real nasty like, 'You boys had better re-consider. You'll let me into the castle tomorrow evening, or else!' "

"Or else what?" Justin forgot his promise not to interrupt.

"Aye, that's what we wanted to know!" Johnny took up the story again.

" 'Well,' replied the stranger, 'I think I'll get out of the car here, too. The police station is just around the corner.' "

"I caught sight of Jimmy's face. I'm sure me own must ha' looked jus' as bad, as the man went on, 'Did you know boys, that there's still a warrant out for the culprits that smashed a valuable stained-glass window in the Protestant Church in Ballinadrum? I'm thinking it's my duty to give the police a lead, now.' "

"Oh, Jimmy and me, we were real scared, and no mistake. Sure we knew all about that window. But it wasn't either of us, I swear to you, that threw them rocks. We know who did, though. The big guy in the gang said he'd swear to it that is was us that did it, if we ever opened our mouths! We've been worryin' about it ever since. We was hopin' to be in America before it all came out."

Johnny paused for a moment. Jason prompted him to continue. "So you had to go along with it? You had to agree?"

"What choice did we have?" Johnny sounded indignant, "What else could we have done? Don't you know that a breath o' trouble with the law means the trip is off, to America, or anywhere else, for that matter, except perhaps the Ballymore Jail!"

Yes, of course you had to do what he wanted," Jason conceded. "Go on, anyway, and tell us what happened after that."

"Well, at first you know, I said that we had no way in which we would be able to get him, or anyone else, into the castle. Sure what about Liam, and Cassy? And Grandad close by? 'Don't you worry,' he said, 'they'll be taken care of!' That put Jimmy and me in a real sweat. We didn't know for sure what he meant, at the time. Anyway, he got back in his car. As he was movin' off he said, 'Just you he ready to let me in, around seven-thirty, to-morrow evening, no slip-ups!' "

"Did he turn up? Did you have to let him in, in the end?" Justin was impatient to know.

"You'll find this hard to believe. I know we did," Johnny continued. "Whoever he was, he certainly knew how to pull a few strings in high places. Jimmy and me were that astonished the next morning. A whole lot of things seemed to happen, real quick. Cassy came puffin' down to Grandad in a terrible tizzy. She'd had a telegram read to her over the 'phone. Her brother, in Dublin, had been taken ill. She had to go at once. 'Dermot,' she said, 'has offered to drive me down, it being the quickest way to get there. I'll be back by noon, to-morrow, all being well!' Then she asked Grandad if he would lock up, and keep an eye out, until she returned. Of course he promised he'd look after everything."

"Well, that took care of Cassy and Dermot. But what about your grandfather?" Jason asked.

"Aye, I'm comin' to that, 'though I expect you'll never believe it! In the mail box, that very morning, was an official looking letter from the government. Jimmy and I were there when he opened it. 'Pon my word,' says Grandad, 'Will you look at this! I've been called to Belfast for Jury duty, for eight o'clock to-morrow morning. I'll have to be on the afternoon bus.'

Justin's eyes opened wide with amazement. "You must have guessed, by this time, that whoever was doing all this must have been a very important guy with the IRA, or the militant Protestant group, whichever, to pull that off, at such short notice?"

"Indeed we knew it! It scared us all the more, I can tell you. If you cross up any o' them lot you dig your own grave!"

"There's no doubt he made it easier for you to do what he asked," Jason commented, drily.

"That's the way of it. It was almost embarrassing when Grandad took me aside. He handed me the bunch o' keys and asked me to take over, in his absence. He said I was to be sure not to let anyone in, and lock up tight, before dark. And we had to promise. Ach! That was hard, like."

"I can imagine," said Justin, sympathetically. "But, by this time you were in so deep you just had to go through with it. You must have had a good idea what he would do to you, if you let him down! I suppose he showed up, all right?"

"Och! He did indeed, and right on time, too. He had very little to say to me. He just followed me, like, when I opened the front door. He asked, straight away, for the library."

"What about Jimmy? Was Jimmy with you?" Jason asked.

"No. Well, I thought that being the older that I should take the responsibility. I told my brother to stay out of it altogether. You know, just in case something went wrong and there was trouble later. Mind you, and I still say it, we didn't think that too much harm could come of what we were doin'. We had made it clear that we wanted no part of him, or his dirty money."

The Craig brothers were sitting forward, tense with interest and excitement, as the gripping story unfolded. Johnny went on.

"I led the way to the library. Then the man said, 'If you don't mind, I'd like to be left alone here, for a while.' And I says, 'If you don't mind, I do mind. I'm stayin'.' He looked a bit annoyed at that one!" Johnny raised a smile on his pale face. "It was hard for me to figure out what he was looking for. Up and down the shelves, he was. Then, presently, he cocks his head to one side. 'Did you hear that? It sounded like some-one at the front door.' I thought it might be Jimmy, wanting something. So I hurries to let him in. O' course, when I looked out, high and low, and saw no-one, Jimmy nor anyone else, I knew that I'd been easily fooled, by his lordship! There was little I could do about it. I hurried back to the library. I was just in time to see this fella' puttin' something he'd been holding, back on the shelves, furtive, and quick, like. His body was blocking my view of the books so I couldn't see what it was, or where he put it. He acted normal. He made no comment when I told him that there had been no-one outside. I was mad, inside me, but I too was scared to let fly. He could ha' murdered me where I stood, for all I knew! A fella' the likes o' him wouldn't be walkin' around without a weapon of some kind. I didn't want to find out just what kind!"

Jason had been thinking, all the while. "Justy!" he exclaimed suddenly, with a note of excitement in his voice. "The book, the book on Irish Ghosts!"

"And the newspaper cutting!" added Justin, looking pleased with himself.

"And what's all that about?" queried Johnny, looking from one to the other. "Is there something you guys know?"

"Oh, no, it's nothing of any great importance in the meantime. We'll fill you in, later. Please go on, sorry about the interruption."

"Well, your man acted real strange, from then on. He made me take him into every room. He spent a few minutes in each one, just looking around him. It was almost as if he didn't know what he was looking for, or what he hoped to find. But wait till I tell you. When I brought him to this

room, Jason, I told him that it had once belonged to Lady Caroline O'Donnell, herself. The man came over all peculiar! He got all excited, like."

"How d'you mean? What did he do?" Jason's interest quickened. "He seemed to forget about me, altogether! That suited me. He went round tap-tapping on the walls. He'd put his ear to the wood paneling. I thought he'd gone nuts. I don't know what it was he was expecting to hear!"

"He was listening to see if it sounded hollow," said Jason. "He was obviously looking for a secret passage, or something."

"That must ha' been it, right enough," agreed Johnny. "He tried all over. He took down the pictures. He even looked behind the drapes. There was nothing he didn't look at. Finally, and I thought I'd be there for ever, he gives a sort of grunt of disappointment."

'I'm all through,' he says. I was relieved to see the back of him, and that glad, to see go, I can tell you. I'd been real scared the whole time that he was only waitin' 'til he had finished whatever it was, before he would do me in! When he was going out the door he threatened me again with all sorts, if I breathed a word. But sure I had no trouble giving him all the promises he wanted, to be rid of him!"

"And you never did find out who he was, or where he came from? More especially you didn't discover what he was after?" Jason didn't want it forgotten that he was still in control.

"As a matter of fact I did have a pretty good idea, from the clothes he was wearing. It was that obvious."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that the man was wearing a belted raincoat, and a dark soft hat. The people who belong to the South, the Catholics, they choose to wear them sort of clothes. It's their kind o' trade mark."

"It strikes me as odd," said Jason, slowly, "He must have known, then, that you would recognize him as a member of the IRA?"

"He would ha' known, all right, known that it would put the fear o' God into me! Which it did!" Johnny raised a wan smile. "My knees were still knockin' until the moment I watched him drive away, and I heaved a sigh of relief! Jimmy and me have said nothing to anyone. Not a word, to this day. We were heart scalded that Grandad would get wind of it. It'd be enough to end our plans of gettin' away."

"No, I can see you could never have told your grandfather. What happened the next day, when he returned from Belfast?"

"Oh, he never questioned us or asked us anything. He was full of his own concerns. He was that perplexed, like. When he got there the clerk couldn't find the right name, on his list. He explained that it was just a mix-up, O'Connor being such a common name, and all. Grandad was rightly angry. He told them, that as far as he was concerned there was only on Liam O'Connor, and he'd thank them to remember it!"

"I bet Cassy had something to say, too' when she got back?" Justin had a respect for the length of that good lady's tongue and never wanted to be the one that took a lashing from it.

"Och, indeed she had. She was fit to be tied. Her face was bright red down to her shoulders. No one seemed to know how the telegram had got sent. It didn't come from any of the family. And, according to what Cassy said, they were all rightly shocked when she burst in, all flustered. 'Is Harry still breathin'? Dear God! Am I in time?' It was her sister who answered the door. Before she could speak, Harry poked his head round the door to see what all the hub-hub was about. Can you imagine Cassy's shock!"

"I'll bet!" said Jason. He couldn't help smiling at the thought of Cassy's confusion. "But, tell me,

Johnny, was that the end of your dealings with Mister Raincoat? Have you ever seen him since?"

"We thought we were well away with it. We heard nothin'. The weeks went by. Then, we were shocked out of our minds. He appeared again, suddenly, and right on our doorstep, no less!"

Justin interrupted, "What did he want? What did he say? Did your grandfather see him?"

"I'll tell you, I'm scared o' that servant of the devil. Didn't he know to come when Grandad was away? He knows all that's goin' on, that's for sure!"

"And what did he want from you, this time?" asked Jason.

"I'll tell you, and I mean no offense. I can only give you the truth of it." Johnny paused, to be sure of his ground before he went on. Neither of the Craigs made any answer. Jason merely nodded his head. Johnny said, "The man told us that he had heard that there were two meddlesome young visitors, staying at the castle. We couldn't deny it. He went on to tell us that his people wanted to be rid of the pair o' you. The best way would be a swift flight back to Canada. 'Of course,' the man says, 'That's the best way, but not the only way!' "

"And what d'you suppose Jimmy and me are able to do about it?" I asked him.

" 'You can get to the younger one, the one they call, Justin. He'll be easy to impress if you mention the word 'ghost'."

"That fellow should be in a tent telling fortunes," muttered Justin. "He knows all the answers."

"Well," continued Johnny, "We had to do as we were told. I mean he threatened you guys, as well. We knew we'd better go along with it when he said to wreck up the place, and pretend it was the Galloping Major."

"You did a great job" Justin couldn't resist the good-natured gibe. "You scared the day-lights out of me. It would have worked, too, if it hadn't been for Jason. I was all of a heave-ho for the first available Atlantic flight!" He looked admiringly at his brother, as he went on, "Jason talked common-sense to me and saved my sanity! I'm glad he did!"

"Jimmy and me, well, we feel real bad, you being such nice guys, and all, but we had to do it."

"That's all right now, we understand." Jason sounded sorry for the two Irish boys, and the plight they had found themselves in, through no fault of their own. "Justin and I would have done exactly the same thing if we'd been in your shoes."

"Speak for yourself, brother, dear," Justin muttered.

Jason asked, "But where were you all night? You came out from under those drapes with mud and dirt all over you. You looked as if the pair of you had been pulled through a hedge backwards!"

"Aye, you might say that!" put in Jimmy, drily.

Johnny thought for a moment before he answered Jason's question. "Well," he began, "Part of it was spent in the castle, but that's only the half of it."

"You mean there's more?" Jason's eyes opened in surprise. "Tell us the whole thing, but start with the castle bit, first."

Johnny picked up the story. "We were hiding in the spare bedroom opposite, when you guys came up. We didn't quite know how we were supposed to muss everything up in your room, Justin, with you tucked up in the bed!"

"But not for long," interrupted Justin, briefly.

"Jimmy and me had already made up our minds to wait until morning. We could do the job when you were at breakfast."

"Good thinking!" Justin interrupted, for the second time. His brother caught his eye and warned him to be silent.

"But you made it easy for us, Justin. We watched you creeping up the corridor and into Jason's room. So we were quick to take the chance, when it came. We did the job as we'd been told. We left the message on the mirror, and all."

"But you just said that there was more?" "Aye, I did say that. And indeed there is. In fact, if we're gettin' to the truth, it's what happened next that's really botherin' us the most. That's why we came to you guys for help. We feel that something has to be done."

There was a build up of tension and excitement at Johnny's words. The Craigs waited.

"Jimmy and me felt we'd done the job as well as we knew how. We used Grandad's keys and sneaked out the kitchen door as quiet as a couple of field mice. All we wanted, at that moment, was a good sleep in a nice warm bed, until Grandad got home."

"But you didn't get to bed, did you? What stopped you?"

"You'll be surprised when I tell you. It's a long story, and a good one. You'll pardon me if I ask you to let me tell it, as best I can without interruption. There'll be lots you'll want to ask me, at the end."

"Fair enough," said Jason, speaking also for his brother, who was nodding his head.

"We were heading for home, down the path. Jimmy whispers to me, all of a sudden. 'Look there! Johnny.' I looked, and I got the shock of me life. There, down by the cove, there were lights bobbing and weavin'. Jimmy and me, we stood and watched. Says I, real quiet like, 'Jimmy, it's three o'clock in the morning, and those lights have no business to be there!' We made up our minds, then and there, that there was some funny business goin' on. I had it in my mind that our 'raincoat' friend might be mixed up in it. Goodness knows we had it in for him! 'C'mon, Jimmy,' I said. 'We'll take a closer look.' "

Jason's eyes were shining with excitement. He remained true to his promise and kept quiet.

"As we got a bit nearer, down through the field, we could see that there was a lot of people movin' around near the old ruined house. No-one's lived there for years 'n' years. It's all fallen in, except for the outer walls and a bit o' the roof. You can still see it from some of the castle windows. I tell you, it's close by where poor Bill Duffy met his maker. Well anyway, we were getting close enough to make out a line o' men with torches, and the like, strugglin' along the path by the top o' the cliff."

"But, weren't you scared?" prompted Justin.

"Scared? Nah! Not really. We were in behind the trees. We knew we was well enough hid."

"So, what did you do then? Did you just sneak away and go home?" Jason was afraid there was going to be an ante-climax to the exciting story. His fears were unfounded.

"Is that what you think we did?" replied Johnny, bristling with indignation. "I suppose that's what you two might ha' done," he added, scornfully.

Jason replied, hotly, "No! That's not at all what we would have done. We'd have stayed to learn more. Wouldn't we, Justy?"

There was no reply from Justin.

"Well then, that's what Jimmy and me did. We stayed to find out what was goin' on. If you care

to listen, I'll tell you what we learned."

The room grew quiet. Johnny waited. Then he began again.

"After we'd watched from there, for maybe ten minutes, or so, we began to work our way closer, still in the cover of the trees. We were able to get right up to the overgrown hedge round the house. Me and Jimmy crawled along beside it until we were close enough to hear the voices of the men, talkin'!"

"You were taking a terrible risk of being caught!" Jason's voice was full of genuine concern.

"D'you think we didn't know it? My heart was beatin' so hard I could scarcely draw a breath. But Jimmy and me we just wanted to be able to tell what these men were sayin'. There must ha' been a dozen or more of 'em, in, and around the old house. We had to keep down real low, like, and not show our heads. It was hard to know for sure, what was happenin' there, about fifty paces from where we was hid. Isn't that right, Jimmy?"

"Aye, fifty yards, close enough."

"We stayed put for a while. We were thinking that the time might come when we'd have to make a run for it. Then, all of a sudden, like, there came the whinny of a horse, followed by the thump o' hooves. I was that astonished I had to take a chance. I lifted my head clear of the hedge just long enough to have a peek. Man! I nearly fell backwards in my fright! There, not even a stone's throw from me gawkin' eyes was the biggest grey horse I ever did see. But it wasn't the horse that had seared the wits out o'me. It was the rider on its back. It was the Galloping Major, hisself!"

"The Galloping Major?" echoed Jason, in utter disbelief.

"Aye, The Galloping Major;" repeated Johnny. That's what I thought I was lookin' at. The clothes he was wearin' the costume, that is, was like a soldier. But it was all covered over in white kind o' shimmering stuff. At that first sight I was certain that it was the ghost. I was half-turned to bolt for me life, when the apparition spoke, real loud and clear!"

Justin's face was a study. In a voice, barely above a whisper, he asked, "W-what did he say?"

"Says-he, from the back of his great horse, 'Now men, it'll be daylight in less than an hour. We've time for one more load, if we move it quick. Come on, then. Let's go!' With that, he wheels his horse about and set off down the path towards the cove. The men were grumblin' and swearin', like, as they followed. It didn't seem to faze them one bit to be takin' orders from a ghost! But then again, o'course they really weren't!"

Justin had recovered somewhat. "So it really wasn't the ghost of the Galloping Major, after all?"

"Not at all!" said Johnny, with a chuckle. "He looked the spittin' image of him, that's for sure. He had me fooled, and me not twenty paces from him! But let me tell you the rest. This is the best part."

"In a few minutes the place was deserted. Quiet as a grave. The lights had disappeared down the path. Jimmy and I held a quick conference, still hidin' behind the hedge by the old house. We agreed, at once, that this was too good a trick to be missed. We crawled out from under the hedge and snuck up to the broken down doorway. We peered inside."

Justin's head was hammering with excitement. Johnny knew that he held an audience in suspense. He made the most of it, continuing very slowly. "It was dark, in there, except for the patches of moonlight streamin' in from where the windows had been. Jimmy and me stood for a

minute, straining our eyes, aye, and our ears, too! Then me eyes got used to the dark and I began to see better. I caught sight of a chink of light. It was comin' up through all the bits and pieces strewn about the floor. I nudged Jimmy. He nodded his head. He'd noticed it, too. We went ever so careful, like. We tried each step so as not to turn a foot on a loose board. Sure enough! Up close we could see the outline of a trap-door. It was well hidden. We never would ha' found it in daylight. It was the light, underneath, that gave it away."

"Did you, er, were you able to get it open?" Jason whispered. The atmosphere in Jason's room had become electrically charged. The tension was almost tangible!

"We did! Very careful, like. As quietly as you wouldn't believe. But I'm thinking, now, that the job was made that much easier by a set of well greased locks and hinges, that had been put in. There was a wooden ladder leadin' down. I felt it was all, or nothin', so I led the way down. I went first, being the elder." Johnny couldn't help sounding self-important. "What a sight met our eyes. Row upon row of great wooden boxes, like coffins, stacked neatly against the walls. I'd say there'd ha' been about fifty of 'em. Would I be right, Jimmy?"

"Aye, could be," replied Jimmy.

"One of them crates had been put aside from the rest. It was lyin' in a corner. I noticed it was kind o' battered looking. I think they must ha' dropped it. Maybe they were going to fix it later. Anyway, Jimmy and me went over to it. It took only a minute to shift the lid. We looked inside. You'll never guess!"

"Gold, jewels, pieces of eight?" suggested Justin quickly.

"Guns!" countered Johnny. "Guns," he repeated. "And lots of 'em. They looked like all the latest kind, you know, like you see in the movies. They were all brand new, by the look of 'em. Jimmy and me put the lid back on as best we could, like we'd found it. Then we took a quick look around. There were strange letters and numbers, written in chalk, on most of the boxes. We couldn't fathom what they meant."

Jason interrupted, "They were different kinds of ammunition for the weapons. I expect that there may have been grenades, and other explosives, too. You know, what, Johnny, I can tell you what you found." He didn't wait for an answer; but went on, "You discovered the whereabouts of all the guns, and stuff, that was stolen from the Police Station, in Newry, last April!"

Johnny's eye-brows shot up. "How, how in the world do you know all about that? And you guys from Canada, and all!"

"Let's not get into that, right now. The fact is, Johnny, and you too, Jimmy, that you are both in the most terrible danger. You've stumbled into something really big!"

"Aye, we know it!" Johnny admitted. "And you'll know just how big, when I tell you the rest o' the story."

"Do please go on, then, and tell us," pleaded Justin.

Johnny cleared his throat, and took up where he had left off.

"While we were still lookin' around, like, tryin' to figure it all out, sudden like, in the dead quiet of the night, I heard the clink of a stone under a horse's hoof!"

"They're comin'!" I whispered to Jimmy. "I tell you, we were up that ladder quicker than a pair of scalded monkeys. We weren't too long gettin' the trap shut, either. We reached the open doorway. The sound o' the men trampin' down the path was clear, now. The lights were back, like before. They weren't more 'n two hundred paces from where we stood, petrified, in the

doorway. The safety of the hedge was like a mile away! 'We'll never make it!' I whispered to Jimmy, who was shiverin' like. I grabbed his arm. 'C'mon,' I says, 'Round the back o' the house, quick!' In a few seconds we were round the corner, and safely hid from the pathway, and the front of the house. All we could do now, was to hope, and pray, that none of the guys would take to wanderin' round the back. But it seemed to us that they were all too busy gettin' them loads off their backs, and safely stowed below. They had time for little else.

"The big man had climbed down from his horse. He was giving orders, left, right, and centre. He had a loud voice, he had. We couldn't see what was goin' on, but we could hear every word, especially the leader. It didn't take them that long to stack all the boxes. Soon, everything was neatly stowed, apparently. The man who was dressed up like the Major had thrown a raincoat over his costume. The men were gathering around. I heard the leader say, 'Now, men, our job here is done. There'll be a truck here, to-morrow, after dark. It'll pick up this lot and fetch it up to Belfast. The party members will soon have it in their hands.'

" 'Now, We'll have to lie low, for a while. We can't use this place again until the heat cools off. There'll be all hell breaking loose after to-morrow. You men, scatter, and keep to yourselves, say nothing. Keep out of harm's way until we need you again.' "

"A muffled voice said something we couldn't catch. It must have been a question. Big-fella' said, '..by private plane from London. The president, from the South will be in about the same time. No! We can't use the airport. They'll not be to-gether. We choose our time and place and we'll get them all....all the meddlin' politicians who want to destroy what's rightfully ours. It was won for us by King Billy, on his white horse. Well, when we're done with what we have to do, there'll be fewer weak-kneed traitors. Men, I tell you, three o'clock the day after to-morrow will see great changes in God's country! Let us bow our heads in prayer.' "

"There was a moment of silence. I think the men were gatherin' round, removin' their caps, and the like. Then, mister Big-voice began prayin'. It went on so long I can't remember the half of it. He called down the wrath o' God upon the Pope. He asked the Lord to bless their endeavours to be rid of all them in Northern Ireland that followed Rome! Ach! It near made me sick, to hear him. And the men sayin' 'Amen', and all."

"Then they all trooped out, puttin' on their caps and shakin' hands with his nibs."

"So that was it? They all dispersed?"

"Aye, and it was very nearly the end of us! We didn't know that they had a mini-van, back there, hidden near where we were crouched. It was covered in branches, and stuff. When the branches were pulled away we felt sure we'd be seen. But the men were busy hitching up a horse-box. They climbed in and started up.

If they'd put their headlights on it would have shone right in our faces. I was in a bad sweat for a few seconds before I realized that they daren't use the lights of the van for fear of drawin' attention to themselves. I said to Jimmy, 'Run for it, it's our only chance!' We scampered like rabbits round to the front of the house. We took a chance on the house being empty, and dived through the doorway. Just in time! The van came slowly round the house and passed us by within a few feet. It came so close it was easy to see the plates on the back."

"You mean you actually got their number? Wow! That was really something else!" Jason obviously regarded his former captives as young heroes.

"Oh, we have their number all right, and maybe in more ways than one!" Johnny gave a short laugh. "I'll not easily forget it, like everything else that happened. The trouble is, though,"

Johnny went on, looking serious, "What do we do with all this information, now that we have it? You know we can't go to the police. Not with things the way they are. Sure, small chance we'd have of settin' foot on the shores of the promised land!"

"Let's just wait and see about that." Jason was being practical. "So long as, like in this case, you've done absolutely nothing wrong, the law should be on your side. Indeed it should! When everything's cleared up you'll be able to book a later flight. You'll never be stopped from going. Not after what you've done!"

"Thanks Jason. That makes me feel a bit easier. I'm sure you're right. If we have played a part in landin' them bigots in jail, where they belong, the law will hardly want to harm us. Maybe this terrible thing that they're planning could be stopped from happenin'? From what we heard, it's plain there's goin' to be a blood-bath in the city, in a couple o' days. I wouldn't be surprised if them boyos are planning to blow up Stormont! Just think! All those important people at their meetin', talkin' peace, no less!"

"There's no doubt in my mind." said Jason. "It's all up to us to prevent it, at all costs. We don't have much time. But, listen, Johnny. There's something bothering me about this whole thing. There's something here that doesn't fit with what you told us!"

"What could that be?" Johnny looked puzzled. "I hope you don't think..."

"Oh, no, sorry, I know it all happened like you said. It's just that I don't know who is on which side? Tell me, again, about the stranger at the bottom of all this, Mister Raincoat."

"What about him?"

"Well, you described him with his coat, and his soft hat. You said that you were convinced that he was a member of the IRA? But down in the old house they were all prayin' damnation to the Catholics?"

"Well, y'see, like meself, you got it all wrong! The man was wearin' them clothes to make me think he was one of the Catholics. It worked! I was fooled into believin' like you said, that this was all the handiwork of the IRA. But you see now, man, that those fella's down there were all a bunch o' them militant Protestants, led by the biggest and the worst of the lot! I have it fixed in my mind that, when them guns are handed out, in Belfast, those that put them to their shoulder will be wearin' raincoats and soft hats! The trade-mark of the Catholics. 'Tis the greatest confusion there will be, when the shootin' starts. In the uproar that follows, most o' the people, the Protestants, will be callin' down the wrath o' God on the IRA, and all its followers, for the massacre. But them militant Prods responsible will be laughin' up the sleeves of their raincoats!"

"We've just got to stop them!" Jason was emphatic.

"We will that!" exclaimed the younger O'Connor boy.

"Leave it to me then!" Jason was enjoying the role he was taking. "I'll go and tell your grandfather that you two are both all right. No problem. In the meantime, I suggest that you curl up here, for a bit of a shut-eye. You both look exhausted."

"You couldn't be more right." murmured Johnny. All the life, and fire, seemed to be drained out of him, now that he had got his story off his chest. "There's nothing that would suit me better than to close me eyes for just a wee while."

"Me, too!" yawned Jimmy, visibly relaxing.

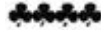
"Very well then. Justin and I will take care of everything. You guys stay right here. We promise to come and get you if anything develops, or when you are needed."

Jason and his brother stood up to leave. Johnny also stood, as he said, "You two are really nice guys. We want to thank you. I wish we had come to know you better before this."

"Me too," replied Jason. "And we're sorry we had to be so rough on you both when we pulled you out from behind the drapes. I think that you two are just great to have had the guts to go through with what you did!"

"Thanks, and it's all right about the tumble you gave us. You were more than a match for us. We got off lightly, considerin'."

"Okay, then, that's great. We're friends?" Jason extended his hand. The four boys exchanged hand-shakes, some-what self-consciously. Jason turned quickly, and left the room. He was followed closely, by his brother.



Chapter 14. Lady Kitty Takes Charge

"What'll we do first?" Justin asked, as they descended the great stairs into the hall.

"First, and most important, we'll find Lady Kitty. She has to be brought into this, before anything else. We'll have to get to Liam, though, as soon as we can. He'll be frantic."

Quickly, the boys went through the downstairs rooms in the castle. They were hoping to find their hostess. Usually at this time she was in her den, writing letter, or making her phone-calls. Sometimes she was to be found by the fire, in the library, with a Beverly Nichols, or an Agatha Christie, on her lap. More rarely, Lady Kitty could be found in the kitchen.

"Let's try the kitchen," suggested Justin, breaking into Jason's train of thought. "She may be talking to Cassy."

The boys went through the baize door, and entered the big kitchen. A warm smell of freshly made bread met their nostrils. Cassy was bending over her oven. Her round face was red, from the heat. The scrubbed wooden table behind her was laden with fresh buns and scones, still warm.

"Have you seen Lady Kitty?" Jason asked. "We've been looking all over for her. We must find her. We've got to talk to her!"

A look of curiosity came over Cassy. Although she was on very close terms with her mistress, she knew her place. It was none of her business what she was wanted for, by the two boys, so urgently. She held her tongue for a moment before she replied, "Well she ain't here. You can see that for yourselves. I have a notion that you might find her in the rose-garden, out back."

The boys immediately turned for the door. "Thanks Cassy," said Jason, over his shoulder. "We'll catch you later!" He had used the Canadian expression without thinking. As Justin moved across the kitchen he could not resist the temptation to grab a couple of scones from the table.

"Land sakes!" exploded Cassy, in feigned aggravation. "Is it still hungry you are? And you, havin' had a tray-load of food up in your room, not half an hour since!"

Justin blushed in momentary confusion. Cassy's boisterous cackle set him at his ease. He smiled, as he left the kitchen, with his mouth already stuffed!

Quickly, the two boys followed the pebbled pathway to the walled-in-garden. There, to their pleasure, they saw Lady Kitty. Her arms were full of cut flowers. She looked very pretty. It was a lovely setting.

"Hello, there, boys," Lady Kitty called out, in obvious delight. "What brings you into my garden? Isn't it lovely?" She made an expansive sweep, with her free hand.

"Yes, Lady Kitty, it is indeed lovely. We wanted to talk to you, if you have some time?"

"Of course, Jason, you know I have," she laughed. "As much time as you want, and more. But, is this something serious?" Her Ladyship quizzed the boys' faces, in search of her answer.

"Yes, Lady Kitty, it is serious, and it's very, very important that we talk to you," replied Jason.

"Something has come up that you have to know about!"

"My, my, but you sound very earnest, this morning. You've got my curiosity going. D'you want to tell me about it, right this minute? Can it wait until I get these flowers in water before they wither in my arms?"

"I think it would be best, Lady Kitty, if you came inside. It's a long and involved story. I think you should be sitting down!" Jason looked serious. Lady Kitty dropped her light-hearted attitude and became entirely business-like.

"Good enough! Meet me in the library in five minutes. Cassy can look after these." So saying, she marched off to-wards the kitchen entrance, with a firm step that belied her years. The Craigs took a shorter route and arrived in the library a minute or two before their hostess.

"Do you mind, Justy, if I do most of the talking? We don't want to be interrupting each other; or talking at cross-purposes. If I say something that you disagree with, you should say so. Otherwise, let me do it, okay?"

"Absolutely! That's fine with me. You're so much better than me, at this sort of thing, anyway. Sure I don't mind. You just go right ahead. I'll listen." Justin smiled. Jason was glad that he had such an agreeable young brother.

At that moment Lady Kitty arrived. She carefully closed the door, behind her. The boys stood up, respectfully.

"Sit down boys, thank you." Her Ladyship seated herself comfortably, between them. "Now, since you tell me, Jason, that there is something important that I should know, I'll try not to interrupt. There is something obviously bothering the pair of you. Get it off your chest, whatever it is."

"Thanks, Lady Kitty. It's hard to know where to begin."

"That's easy," smiled their hostess. "Begin at the beginning, like In Alice in Wonderland." It was a vain attempt to ease the tension that seemed to exist.

Jason gave a polite laugh. "Very well then, from the beginning. It's about the O'Connor boys, Johnny and, er, Jimmy." Lady Kitty took a deep breath, as if she was about to speak. She remembered she had promised not to interrupt. She remained silent. Jason was able to continue. "You see. Johnny and Jimmy O'Connor have really got themselves into very deep and very dangerous water. They've become witness to what appears to be a hideous plot." At Jason's words, uttered in such a serious tone, Lady Kitty stiffened in her chair.

Jason began by explaining how Justin's room had been found ransacked, with the ominous writing, on the mirror. He described how they had come upon the O'Connors, hiding behind the drapes. At the graphic account of how the intruders were dealt with, Lady Kitty allowed her stern expression to relax behind a hidden smile.

The only sound in the library, to break the silence, was Jason's voice, and the ticking of the ornate gilt clock on the mantel. The story was told from beginning to end with intelligence and maturity. Jason tried to remember everything. Occasionally he would catch his brother's eye, as if for confirmation on one point, or another. Justin would merely nod in assent, or in approval. Lady Kitty was as good as her word. She never moved, until at last, Jason finished up by saying, "We told Jimmy and Johnny to take it easy until we could find you, and tell you all about it. We thought that you should be the first to hear all this, and that you would know what was the best thing to do."

"Thank you, Jason. You did exactly right, and I appreciate it. I am glad that you came to me first. I am sorely concerned for the anguish that Liam must be enduring, for every moment that passes.

Lady Kitty furrowed her brow in thought, for a moment. She looked up and spoke decisively. "Go now, boys, this minute, straight down to Liam's place. Be sure to tell him first that his grandsons are perfectly all right. Explain to him that I want to see him, here and now, in the library. Don't try to tell him anything, or get involved in explanations. Please leave all that to me. While you're doing that I shall round up Cassy and Dermot. We shall have a conference, with all of us present."

"What about Johnny, and Jimmy?" Justin asked, as the boys stood up to leave.

"No, don't disturb them. They're best where they are. They need all the rest they can get. Goodness knows, they'll have to go over the whole thing again, for the police, when they get here."

"So you are going to call in the police?" Jason asked, politely.

"Of course, Jason. This is a situation 'way out of our league. We have no other choice. We cannot possibly handle this ourselves. It's quite plain that there are lives at stake here!"

"Of course you're absolutely right, Lady Kitty. My only concern is for the O'Connor boys. They'll never catch their flight to America."

"Oh, I see your point all right, Jason. We'll do what we can. It may well be, that all the police will need is a signed statement. They may not have to stay, after that. Anyway, we'll worry about that later. Run along, now. Fetch Liam up here before he has a nervous breakdown!"

The Craig brothers hastened down to the yard. They were quite shocked to see how old, and worn, Liam looked. His expression brightened considerably when he saw his young friends coming.

"Have you any news?" Liam called out, anxiously, as the boys approached.

"The very best of news, Liam," answered Jason, with a broad smile. "Your two lads are safe and sound. They're having a good sleep at this very minute."

"Sleepin', is it?" Liam tried to sound angry, but the relief flowed all over his face. He wiped his eyes, with the back of his hand. "Come in, come in, the pair o' you. Tell me, why is it that my boys are sleepin' while you two are doin' all the walkin' and the talkin'?"

"It's really okay, Liam. We don't mind. Everything is just fine, really it is. There's nothing for you to worry about. Lady Kitty will tell you everything, herself. She wants you to come up to the library, right away."

"But, but what in the world is goin' on with them lads...?" Liam began, before Jason interrupted him. "No questions, now, Liam. There'll be plenty of answers, presently. Hold your patience. Can I tell Lady Kitty that you'll be there?"

"Aye. You tell her that I'll be up as quick as these old legs o' mine will take me. But first I have to put down a bite to eat, for His Nibs, here."

A few minutes later, Jason and Justin re-entered the library. They found Cassy, and Dermot, already there. The group was strangely silent. The boys guessed, immediately, that Lady O'Donnell had warned them that something very serious was a-foot. The Craigs took the chairs that had been set out for them. Lady Kitty looked up. "Did you see Liam? Is he coming?"

"Yes, Lady Kitty," answered Justin. "We saw him. He's on his way. He'll be here, well, er, he said he'd come as quick as his legs would carry him."

Justin's reference to Liam's rheumatic gait brought a fleeting smile to Cassy's face. Silence fell. Heavier than before. It was broken, presently, by Lady Kitty.

"I have 'phoned the police. They'll be here in fifteen minutes, or so. I want to wait for Liam

before we start. This certainly concerns him as much as it does the rest of us, and, indeed, maybe more. However, we do have this private moment on our own, before the police arrive. I want to say how proud I am of our young Canadian guests, here. Jason and Justin have handled an extraordinary and unusual situation extremely well. I want them to know how much I appreciate it. Thank you, boys, both of you!"

Justin blushed furiously.

"Thank you, very much, Lady Kitty." Jason acknowledged the compliment. He looked pleased. He might have said more, but before he could do so there was an interruption. Liam had arrived.

"Come on in, Liam. Sit over here. Make yourself comfortable." Her Ladyship waved to a chair between Dermot and Cassy. Liam looked quickly round the room before he replied. "Thank you, Milady. I was hopin' that my two boys would be here?"

Jason spoke out quickly without thinking. "They're up in my room. Still sleeping, I should think. I'll go and fetch them down!" Before he could put the action to his words, Lady Kitty said abruptly, "You'll do no such thing, Jason. Stay where you are. Leave well enough done. Time enough when the police got here. Let's wait and see how they want matters handled."

Jason realized that he had spoken out of turn. He reddened slightly, but said nothing.

Liam was looking concerned, as he shifted uneasily, in his chair. Finally he spoke up. "Excuse me, Milady. Did these old ears deceive me when I heard you say that the police were comin'?"

"You heard right, Liam. I'm sorry. I'm afraid I had to call them in. Something very serious has come up. Too big for us to handle on our own."

The old man sagged in his chair. "I knew it! I knew it. I've been dreadin' this minute ever since them lads darkened my doorstep. More shame to them for bringing trouble on the likes o' you, Milady."

"Hold on there, a minute, old friend," smiled Lady Kitty. "Tis proud you'll be, not ashamed, when you hear what your brave lads have been up to."

"Is that a fact, Your Ladyship'?" Liam raised his bushy white eye-brows, in surprise. "Well no doubt you'll be tellin' me, all in your own good time. But, if it was anyone but your good self, who was tellin' me that, I'd have a mind not to believe 'em. Beggin' your pardon, Milady."

Justin smiled at Liam, as he whispered, "You can believe it. They were great. Wait and see!"

"Tis very impatient I am, to know what's goin' on that I don't know about. Will no-one put an old man out of his torment?" Liam peered round the room.

"Patience, Liam!" said Lady Kitty gently. "The whole story will have to come out when the police arrive. It's a very long and difficult business to unravel. I can tell you that I don't want to have to go through it all again, more than once. You'll just have to possess yourself in patience. In the meantime you should be happy to know that Jimmy and Johnny are both safe and sound. They did very well by you, and that's a fact!"

"Thank you, Ma'am, for tellin, me." Liam settled back in his chair, looking more relaxed.

"Sure, aren't we all, here, in the same boat? Sittin' on the edge of our seats waitin' to hear the rights of all this?" Cassy paused. She looked across the room. "By the way, Justin, if you're still hungry I'll fix you up good and proper, like, as soon as all this is done." She gave the embarrassed boy a sly wink.

"W-What makes you think that I should be hungry, Cassy?"

"Ah, well now, it occurs to me that maybe it was the likes of Johnny and Jimmy O'Connor, that

scoffed up all them goodies on the tray that went up to your room?"

The Craig brothers broke out laughing. "You're a smart one, Cassy," said Jason. "You'd make a good detective!"

Conversation ended abruptly, with the arrival of two uniformed police officers. It was Dermot who went to let them in. He showed them into the library. "Your Ladyship, Sergeant Michael O'Rourke, and Constable William Kearney," he announced.

"Thank you, Dermot. I'm glad to see you again, Sergeant. And you, too, Bill." Lady Kitty was obviously on familiar terms with many of the people of Ballymore.

The police officers doffed their caps, and sat down on the edge of the hard chairs, looking a bit uncomfortable.

Lady Kitty was in her element, however. She enjoyed taking charge of the situation. She knew not to waste words. After the preliminary introductions had been effected, all round, she addressed the sergeant.

"Mr O'Rourke, it has come to my certain knowledge that, a party of men, understood to be Protestants, have a large cache of arms and ammunition, stored near the boundaries of my property. To be precise, in the cellar of the old stone house, down by the cove." Lady Kitty paused to allow this statement to sink in. The constable took out a folded note-book. Licking his pencil he began to write furiously, as Lady Kitty continued.

"We further believe that these arms are to be transported by truck to Belfast before dawn, to-morrow morning. They are to be used in an uprising against the British Parliamentary party from London, and the President of Southern Ireland. They are holding a meeting, in Stormont, the day after to-morrow, at three o'clock. It seems that we have become privy to a planned massacre of those who seek for peace in our beloved land!"

The breathless hush continued, moments after Lady Kitty had finished speaking. Sergeant O'Rourke coughed politely. He cleared his throat. 'Excuse me, Lady O'Donnell. This is a very serious allegation that you are making. I might add, at this point in time, what you say is unsubstantiated, and uncorroborated. May I make so bold as to ask by what means you ascertained this pertinent and relevant information?"

"By all means, officer. I take it that you want to know where I heard all this?" Lady Kitty found it difficult to suppress a smile.

"Thank you, Milady. Would you be explicit, please, Your Ladyship?"

"Of course, sergeant. The facts I have related to you were given to me by my good friends from Canada. You have met Jason and Justin Craig?" Lady Kitty indicated the two boys sitting opposite.

"I heard that you were entertaining two fine young visitors, Milady." The policeman smiled, and nodded.

"You boys at the station don't miss much, do you, now?" Lady Kitty laughed. "However, Mr O'Rourke, you should know that the entire information came originally from Liam's grandsons, that's Johnny and Jimmy O'Connor. They gave an accurate account of what they had seen, and heard, to their friends, the Craigs. From what I gathered, so far, I understand that Jimmy and Johnny were witness to the stashing of the arms and ammunition in the old house, by a party of

ten, or so, unidentified men. As for the planned use of the weapons, the boys overheard the arrangements for the attack on Stormont, and the chief targets in the massacre. That's about as much as I can tell you, sergeant."

"Thank you, Milady. You have been more than clear. And now I must ask, where would those two grand O'Connor boys be found, at this point in time?" Sergeant O'Rourke asked the questions. It was the constable's pencil that was busy. The pages were flying.

Jason was dying to interrupt and answer the policeman, 'At this point in time, they're probably snoring their beads off, on my bed!' But he had learned his lesson. He held his tongue. It was Lady Kitty's privilege to do all the talking. She was saying, "Both the O'Connor boys are upstairs, in one of my bedrooms. They are sleeping!"

"With your permission, Milady, I should like to have a statement from them." Sergeant O'Rourke addressed Jason. "If Her Ladyship will allow, perhaps you would fetch these boys down to the library?"

Jason looked across at Lady Kitty, for confirmation.

"Yes, please, Jason. Do run upstairs and rouse the two sleeping beauties. Tell them to come down, will you?"

Jason rose at once. He slipped quietly out of the library. An awkward silence fell. It was broken by Lady Kitty. "Officer, if you are going to talk with Johnny, and Jimmy, to get a statement from them, wouldn't you like us to leave? You may want to talk to them in private?"

"That won't be necessary, thank you, Lady O'Donnell. I daresay that what the lads have to tell us may be of some interest to the assembly, here. Am I right, Liam?"

"That's the fair truth of it, Michael. Thank you. I am indeed more than anxious to know what my lads have been up to. At this moment I have no idea, savin' what her Ladyship has told me that they have done well by me. I'll be glad to find that out for meself!"

"Amen, to that!" Dermot added, nodding his head.

The heavy tramp of three pairs of feet across the hall, heralded the arrival of the boys. Johnny and Jimmy entered, somewhat nervously. Jason brought up the rear. The O'Connors cast an apprehensive glance at their grandparent, before turning to Lady Kitty. It was Johnny, who spoke. "I'm sorry, Milady, if we have brought trouble upon you."

"Stuff and nonsense, the pair of you. Just pull up those two chairs beside the sergeant here.

You'll have to say exactly what happened. I'm counting on you both to be truthful in everything you say.

"Of course, yes, Milady," chorused the two boys, as they sat down.

Sergeant O'Rourke spoke gently. "Now, you two, Johnny, and Jimmy, is it? You have nothing to be afraid of. You must do as Lady O'Donnell says, and tell only the truth, all of it. Keep nothing hid, or it'll only trip you later. Which of you lads wants to begin?"

"I'll do it," volunteered Johnny, at once. "I'm the one that's done most of the talkin', when we were tellin' Jason, upstairs. Will you help me out, Jimmy, if I forget somethin'?"

Jimmy merely nodded. He was studiously trying to avoid catching Liam's eye. He kept his gaze fixed on the floor at his feet.

"Well, then, Johnny, I'll just ask you to go nice and slow, like. Y'see, Constable Kearney, here, is taking notes of what you say. Take your time over it. Afterwards you may have to come down to the station. It'll all be typed up. You'll both be asked to read it over careful, like, and sign it.

That's all there is to it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir, I understand. I'll do me best."

"Good! Now, if you don't mind, your Ladyship, I must ask all of you, gathered here, to remain silent. There must be no interruptions while Johnny is making his statement. If any of you have questions they'll be dealt with, at the end."

The sergeant looked all round. No one moved. Nobody spoke. "Go ahead, then, Johnny.

The clock ticked. The fire stirred occasionally.

Johnny told how he, and his brother, Jimmy, had been accosted on the roadway, the previous April. It was then, the trouble began, he explained. He went on to talk about the raincoated stranger and how he threatened to expose them to the police if they didn't do as they were told. Lady Kitty pursed her lips, but she said nothing, when Johnny admitted that he had let the stranger into her castle. Cassy, on the other hand, could barely contain herself!

At this point Johnny's eyes flickered nervously towards his grandfather. Liam's eyes were closed. His chin was resting on his chest.

Johnny continued to tell how the stranger had re-appeared on their doorstep recently. Once again Johnny had to admit he, and Jimmy, had to do as they were told. Justin had to have his room wrecked and be given a good scare. "He even told us what to write on the mirror!" Johnny stopped for a minute. He looked over, to catch Justin Craig's eye. "You know we're sorry for what we did? We had to do it!"

The policeman's warning about remaining silent was in Justin's mind. He didn't dare open his mouth, in reply. He merely nodded his head, and smiled back, at Johnny. The sergeant coughed, politely, to bring attention back to the matter in hand.

"Sorry," said Johnny, at once. "Er, where were we?" The sergeant looked over to the constable beside him. "Will you be good enough to oblige us, Mr. Kearney?"

After a moment's hesitation, the young policeman read, rather self-consciously, '...Jimmy and me, well, actually it was me who did the writin' and stuff, like we'd been told. When Jimmy and me had finished up, we snuck out of the castle by the kitchen door...' Constable Kearney stopped and looked at Johnny.

"Oh, yes. It was on our way home we saw them lights, down by the cliff. Jimmy and me thought we should see who was down there, at three o'clock in the morning!" The constable had resumed his writing. Johnny had the undivided attention of everyone present. He continued his story. He admitted to the terrible scare he got when he poked his head up and beheld what he thought was an apparition on horseback!

The scene in the old house was described clearly, and accurately. Johnny told how he, and Jimmy, had to make a bolt for it when they heard the men returning.

Sergeant O'Rourke nodded his approval when Johnny was able to recount, word for word, what he had heard said, by the leader of the gang. The policeman's expression was a study in admiration when Johnny quoted the figures and numbers on the plates of the van, without hesitation.

There was a general stir of sympathy when Johnny explained that he, and Jimmy, felt the need for help. The sympathy gave way to barely concealed amusement as Johnny described how he, and his brother, had been downed, by the two Craig boys.

Johnny looked all round him as he said, "That's all I can tell you, honest, it is. Jimmy and me have been sleepin' since, on Jason's bed. He just woke us up and told us to come down here." The atmosphere in the library underwent a dramatic change. The tension had disappeared. Everyone

present seemed to want to talk at once. There was a general hub-hub of conversation. Johnny looked over at his grandfather. He blushed with pleasure when he saw the expression on his face. Liam was sitting bolt upright in his seat. The old man's eyes were bright. A broad smile crossed his face when he caught the young boy's eye. Johnny noticed that all the adults were looking pleased, and nodding their heads, in approval. All except Constable Kearney. He was too busy fiddling with his pencil and note-book.

Sergeant O'Rourke lifted his hand as he raised his voice. "Lady's and gentlemen, one moment, if you please. We're almost done. May I please have quiet for a few moments longer?" The big room grew hushed in an instant. The police officer turned to the boy beside him. "Now Johnny, I want you to think, real careful, like. Is there anything further you wish to add, to what you have told us'?"

Johnny wrinkled his nose. "No sir! I have told you all that happened as best I could remember it" The sergeant looked across at Jimmy. "Jimmy," he said, "Would you be agreeing with everything that your brother has told us? Is there anything he left out that you can remember? Maybe you'd like to add something?"

Jimmy was extremely self-conscious when all eyes focussed on him. "N-no, sir. It was all like he said, every word. There's nothin' more."

"Thank you, thank you boys, very much. You have done us all a great service. This community, at Ballymore, will not quickly forgot it. Am I not right, Your Ladyship?"

"I think it's quite wonderful, what you two boys have done." Lady Kitty beamed at the two O'Connors. "You see, boys, I have heard a great deal about the strange happenings down there. It'll be the greatest relief to us all, and indeed to me, to know that such things will no longer be botherin' us. Flashing lights and strange noises, round my property, will be a thing of the past, from now on. I shall always remember your courage, and be grateful for it." Lady Kitty paused before she turned to the sergeant. "May I take it that there is no intention, on your part, to pursue the matter of the broken church window? It would be poor reward for the service these boys have rendered us all. In any case," she added briskly, "I don't believe they did it!"

The police sergeant smiled warmly at Johnny and his brother, as he said, "And what window might that be, Your Ladyship?"

Lady Kitty gave the sergeant a look which conveyed her gratitude. "Did you know, Sergeant, that Johnny and Jimmy have had plans to leave for the United States? In fact, I believe their flight is booked for tomorrow. Will all this prevent them from getting away?"

"No, Milady, I can't see that there'll be any problems at all. What we have to do can all be done this afternoon, at the station. It only means that what Johnny has said will all have to be transcribed. Then it needs their signatures, once they've read it over. It shouldn't take all that long. They'll be free to go, when, and where, they please, taking with them, I might add, the blessing o'the saints of Ireland, on their young shoulders."

"Amen, to that," muttered Dermot.

Sergeant O'Rourke scratched his forehead, as he thought for a moment. Then he turned to Liam. "In fact, Liam, if I were you, I would make double sure that your two lads are put, safe and sound, on that 'plane to-morrow. You know that we'll take every precaution to see that Jimmy and Johnny are not implicated, when we make the arrests. However, you can't be too careful with the kind o' people we're dealing with. They seem to know everything that goes on! They have their sources of information everywhere. If it were me, Liam, I'd be happier to see the lads out of

harm's way, no matter what else!"

Liam nodded his shaggy head, in complete agreement. He had perked up no end. He looked ten years younger. Johnny and Jimmy were all smiles at this good news.

"That sounds all very satisfactory, then, sergeant. Thank you," said Lady Kitty. "And now, maybe you'd like to partake in some refreshments? Cassy, I've no doubt you can provide these kind police officers, with something?"

"That won't be necessary, thank you, Ma'am. With your permission we'll be on our way. Soonest started, soonest done. We have a fair bit o' work to do. First thing is to look after these boys so that they can get away. Then we have to spread the net. I'm thinkin' we may land a few big ones, before this night is out!"

Constable Kearney had finally stopped writing. He folded his note-book and put his pencil away before buttoning up his uniform. The heavy-booted policemen dumped across the parquet floor. The sergeant turned, as he reached the library door. "I thank you, Milady, for your co-operation. And I thank all you here present for your kind attention in this matter." He paused as he looked round the room. Then he addressed the O'Connor brothers. "If I might see you both down at the station, later this afternoon? And, oh yes, Your Ladyship, there is just one more thing." The sergeant paused before he went on, "Beggin' your pardon, Milady, but I need to have the solemn undertakin' of all your house-hold, and guests, here present, that what we have heard and witnessed here, this morning, remains tight, safe and sound within these castle walls. If there was to be a word of this spread abroad, there would be no tellin' what the consequences might be!"

"Rest assured, Sergeant You have our unqualified word for it that nothing will be heard outside these walls." Lady Kitty spoke with dignity. She added, "What time do you want Dermot to bring the boys down to the station?"

"Four o'clock, would be good, Milady, if it's suitable to you?"

"Of course. Thank you, again, for looking after everything for us. May God smile on your endeavours, this night!"

Sergeant O'Rourke returned Lady Kitty's blessing with a nod. Dermot followed the two policemen into the hall. A moment later the great door of the castle thudded shut Dermot returned and sat down.

Now that all the formalities had been attended to, with the departure of the police, everyone relaxed. Liam stood up. "Milady," he began, simply, "You were right! My boys have done well by me. It's proud indeed, that I am. And now, if you'll be kind enough to excuse us, we'll be on our way. I am so glad to be able to say that we have things to attend to that I feared might never have to be done! Come along, you two bright boys. Say your piece to Her Ladyship before you leave."

Johnny and Jimmy approached Lady O'Donnell, shyly. She put them at their ease at once. She rose and embraced each one, in turn. "I expect to see you before you leave for America? Dermot will be down for you this afternoon at half-past three."

Liam left, followed by his two grandsons. "Come and see us to-morrow morning," whispered Johnny, as he passed close to where Jason was sitting.

"Bless those dear boys," said Cassy, dabbing her eyes with the hem of her apron. "And to think that they might ha' been killed by them vermin down there. Praise be the police will catch them in a trap, this night, like the rats they are!"

"I never would have believe the Prods would go that length," murmured Dermot.

"Now don't you be gettin' all hot and bothered about all Protestants. Just because there are a few hot-headed auld bigots," Cassy retorted, bristling. "What upsets me the most is the fact that for the first time in years, some-one in government shows a bit o' common sense. Wasn't it a brave step, now, to arrange for a meetin' with heads of all three governments."

Jason looked up. "Three governments, you say, Cassy?"

"Aye, sure isn't it three, I said? There's the Prime Minister of Britain, comin' over. Haven't we got our own government people, in Belfast? Then there's the President of the Irish Republic, from Dublin. It strikes me that somethin' could ha' been worked out between the three of 'em. Of course we might ha' guessed the uproar the Protestants would get into when they heard that the man from Dublin was puttin' his hand in the pot." Cassy heaved a sigh, as she said, "When I think of what they did get up to, my blood runs cold. What d'you suppose would have happened if Jimmy and Johnny hadn't come along when they did? I'll say this, and say no more. When I kneel beside me bed this night to say me prayers, I'll be hard put to have Christian feelings in my heart, for those responsible. May the Lord forgive me!"

"I'm sure He will, Cassy," Lady Kitty smiled. "In the meantime I think it must be nearly lunch-time."

Cassy threw up her hands. "Will you be lookin' at the time it is'? And me bletherin' here. Your pardon, Milady. I'll have food on the table in no time at all!" She disappeared in a flurry of skirts and starched linen.

"I think that you boys deserve great credit for the way you have both handled yourselves, throughout all that has happened." Her Ladyship had turned to Justin, and Jason. "I can't tell you how thankful I am at the great news. The Galloping Major and his horse won't be botherin' us again. Jason, didn't I try to tell you that there was no such thing!"

Jason swallowed hard when he felt obliged, out of politeness, to agree with Lady Kitty. Only he, knew the real truth, but he couldn't bring himself to share it with his hostess. Dear Lady Kitty wasn't finished with Major Hamilton and his steed. Not by a long shot! "Yes, Lady Kitty, it's simply great that you'll have no more strange sounds, and mysterious lights, to worry you." He turned to Justin. "I know of some-one else who'll be glad to know that the ghost has substance, and is nothing more scary than a man dressed up to look like one. the whole idea was to keep people away."

"Who's that?"

"That young kid from the village, Kevin whatever. You remember, when he was walking home near the cliff path?"

"Oh, yes. That's right. We should go right now and tell him it's okay and not to be frightened anymore."

"You'll do no such thing!" Lady Kitty intervened, speaking sharply. "Have you forgotten, already, that Sergeant O'Rourke made us promise not to say a word, to anybody? You could ruin everything and bring terrible danger to all of us."

"Oh, Gee! Golly, I wasn't thinking straight. I'm very sorry, Lady Kitty!" Justin's face was bright red. He was obviously really embarrassed.

"That's all right, this time, then, so long as it doesn't happen again and you have another lapse of

memory!" Lady Kitty was almost sorry for the way she had spoken. She relaxed her stern expression. She smiled as she went on, Now, I must be off. I am going to have a wash up and get ready for lunch. It won't be long. I suggest that the pair of you do the same." She rose from her chair and left the room.

"Well, little brother, that's you told off!"

Justin's crestfallen expression reminded him how sensitive his young brother was. "I'm only kidding," he explained. "C'mon, let's go upstairs and get ready for lunch."

"I'm for that. I'm starved!" Justin's good nature re-asserted itself.

The boys went quickly upstairs. When Jason flung open the door of his room he let out a groan of dismay, which startled Justin.

"What's up?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, nothing much! I clean forgot about the mess in here!"

Justin peered over his brother's shoulder, as they stood in the doorway. "Gosh ! Me too! It's awful. What'll we do?" The two boys came slowly into the room and looked around them. The huge bed was all tossed, as the O'Connors had left it. Across the floor, in the centre of the room, lay folds and folds of heavy material. The long curtain fitting was sticking up in the air like a broken limb. The window frames looked as bare as a tree, in winter.

"Do you want me to help you fix it?" Justin asked.

"Nah! We can't do it right now, it would take too long. It's lunch time. Anyway, it'll take a ladder to get that pole back up there!" Jason pointed to the top of the window, high above their heads.

"We'll borrow a ladder from Liam, after lunch. " suggested Justin.

"I don't think so, Justy. Not this afternoon, anyway. Liam has more than enough to think about right now! We don't need to go bothering him. We can leave all this mess until tomorrow, I suppose. Tell you what, let's just straighten things up a little bit, in the meantime. It would just be too awful if Lady Kitty happened to look in, the way it is!"

"Thank goodness Grandma isn't here to see it! She'd throw a fit! Can't you hear her say, 'Jason, don't you dare leave this room in such a state. Tidy it, at once!' "

"That's about the truth of it," laughed Jason. "Here, take an end of this. We'll get these drapes folded, at least, before we go down for lunch." The boys soon had the curtains neatly stacked in a pile beside the window frame. It only took a moment to straighten the bedclothes. When the pole was placed upright, alongside the wall, Jason grunted with satisfaction. "There! That's much better! Thanks a lot Justy. Y'know we should go into business as room tidiers! We certainly are getting enough practice. I hope the Galloping Major won't be back to create more confusion around here."

"You know perfectly well there's no such thing! You heard what Lady Kitty said. So don't you start in on all that nonsense again! As far as I'm concerned that subject is closed, 'Dead and Buried' along with the Major's bones!" Justin was pink with irritation. He marched out of the room without waiting for his brother to reply.

Jason was glad he was spared the necessity for further deception. A few moments later they were all assembled in the dining room, for lunch. Justin had quickly recovered, at the sight of the food on the table.

Everyone at the castle was very tense and restless, all that close, summer day. The impending ambush of the gun-runners was uppermost in everyone's mind. After a while, even talking about

it, didn't help. Everything that could be said, had been said, many times over. Further speculation only added to the general feeling of impatience, and frustration.

Dermot left, with the car, to pick up the O'Connors. Jason lay on his bed, that long, sultry afternoon. He wasn't sleeping. He was thinking about the Galloping Major. He knew that he would get little help or support if he pursued the subject openly. He was more convinced than ever, of the Major's existence. But what to do about it was entirely another matter. Finally, mentally exhausted, he made up his mind that he would. 'let the chips fall where they may!' Little did he know that they would fall into his lap, before he was much older!

The crunching of car-wheels on the drive-way roused Jason immediately. Dermot had returned. He threw himself off the bed. On his way past Justin's room he knocked briefly and called out, Dermot's back!" His brother joined him, immediately. By the time the Craig's reached the bottom of the stairs, Dermot was already in the hallway.

"Did everything go off all right?" called out Jason.

"Oh, sure. Everything went well. It was nothing more than a long wait while them pages were made up, and then read over, by the lads. Once they'd put their signatures to it, they were done. The sergeant shook hands with them, and wished them well, and a safe journey. It was all very easy, like. No problems at all."

"So they'll be able to catch their plane, then?" asked Justin.

"Shouldn't be any doubt about it at all, that I can see. I've planned to drive them, at one o'clock to-morrow, like her Ladyship told me to do." Dermot was making for the green baize door to the kitchen quarters when he stopped short, and turned.

"By the way, young gentlemen, I have a message for you. Well, it; for all for us, really. The sergeant asked me to deliver it. Will you be kind enough to take heed of it, then?"

"Of course," replied Jason. Justin nodded.

"Everyone in the castle is to remain indoors for the rest of the day and until this business is done with."

Jason re-acted immediately. "That's no big deal, Dermot. No problem. We had no plans to go anywhere, anyway! I guess we'll probably be able to see whatever there is to see, from my window upstairs. Thanks for the message Dermot. We'll talk to you later!"

The boys found the time dragging very slowly as they waited for the day to end, and for darkness to fall. In the meantime, however, the formalities were observed. The meal was served on time, as usual. Lady Kitty tactfully indicated that she didn't feel like playing monopoly. She knew, only too well, that the boys' minds would be elsewhere.

Finally, the sun went down, and darkness fell.

Jason and Justin had already decided that they would watch, together, from Caroline's room. After they had said 'Good-night,' to Lady Kitty, they came upstairs and settled themselves beside the great window. Justin had already remarked how convenient it was that they such a clear view, unobstructed by the curtains. They knew that they were in for a long wait. During an earlier conversation with Dermot they had learned that the police didn't expect action before three, or four o'clock in the morning. 'That being the time,' Dermot had said, 'that everyone sleeps the soundest.'

To keep themselves awake, the brothers decided to talk about the interesting things that they

remembered about other summers, other places.

Jason recounted some of the adventures he had enjoyed, with his grandparents, at their summer place, on Prince Edward Island. Justin had heard most of it, before. He enjoyed hearing about those happy days. When Justin, himself, was old enough to travel, he joined his brother on these holidays, away from home. He was able to contribute to the memories of sun-filled days, on silver beaches. Talking about them helped to pass an hour or two.

Time began to drag. All the lights in the town began to disappear, one by one. Law-abiding folk were taking to their beds, unaware of the drama that was to be played out, on their very doorstep. Then, without warning, all the street lights went out in one giant blink. It was after midnight. Occasionally, a lone car would wink its way along the narrow road. Presently there was nothing to break the darkness that stretched across the fields and copses, to the sea. Now and then a sliver of moon peeped out from behind a white-edged cloud. It shed a narrow band of light on the ink-black seas.

Justin yawned loudly. Jason eased his cramped limbs. Another hour passed. Justin yawned again. "Sorry, Jason. I can't keep my eyes open for one more minute." He rose, as he spoke, and stretched his arms over his head. "You.. .can. . tell.. .me.." he yawned widely, ... 'all about it in the morning. Good night!' He disappeared. Jason heard the click of the door as it closed. Left on his own it didn't seem like so much fun. However, Jason re-adjusted his position, with the aid of a couple of pillows from his bed. Ten minutes later, Jason Craig was fast asleep!

It was the sun, streaming in through the uncurtained window, that startled the boy into instant wakefulness. For a moment he blinked fiercely in the light. He wondered why he was sitting on the floor, with his head against the window frame. Then he remembered. "Darn it! I missed it all," he muttered. He gathered up his pillows and climbed into bed. In the next room, Justin, too, was soundly sleeping.

The echoes of the breakfast gong had scarcely died away when the tousle-headed Justin burst into his brother's room. "What happened? What did you see? Did they get caught?"

"How should I know," replied Jason, sleepily, putting his feet to the floor.

"But you were watching weren't you, after I left? Tell us, what did you see?" Justin was all excitement.

"I didn't see anything," mumbled Jason. "I went to sleep! Sorry, little brother."

Justin, good-natured as always, said cheerfully. "It doesn't matter. Who cares? It'll probably all be on TV, anyway. Hurry up, I'm off to get dressed." He vanished, as quickly as he had appeared.

Jason had a question for Lady Kitty, even before they had exchanged their morning greetings.

"Did they get them, Lady Kitty? Have you heard anything?"

Lady Kitty shook her head, and smiled, as she replied. "No, my dear, I haven't heard a thing. I'm not long up. I don't usually turn on the radio, or TV, before breakfast."

"Do you mind if we turn it on, now?" Justin asked, abruptly.

"Not until you have finished your breakfast. The news, good, or bad, will keep that much longer. Now, eat your bacon, and possess your soul in patience."

There was little conversation round the breakfast table, that morning. The boys were too excited. They could hardly wait to get to a radio. Justin pushed back his plate. Lady Kitty raised her eyebrows. "Finished already, Justin? Why, you left a full piece of toast."

Justin wasn't sure whether he was being made fun of, or not, but with a good grace he managed a smile, as he replied, "Thank you, Lady Kitty, but I've had enough." He looked across at Jason.

"May we please be excused?"

Just as that very moment, the telephone rang, in the hallway. Lady Kitty paused, in a listening attitude. Cassy's hurrying feet were heard. A few muffled words were said, followed by the click of a replaced receiver. Cassy came into the dining room. "Your pardon, Milady."

"Yes, Cassy. Who was on the 'phone?"

"It was the police station, your Ladyship. It was Sergeant O'Rourke, calling. He wanted to know if it would be convenient for him to call on you, in fifteen minutes, or so? He also asked, respectful, like, if you would be so kind as to have the O'Connors at the castle. What he has to say concerns them also. I took the liberty, Ma'am, of saying 'yes' to the gentleman, you being at your breakfast, and all."

"You did right, Cassy. Thank you." The house-keeper stood her ground. "Was there something else, Cassy?"

"Beggin' your pardon, Milady, but will you, by any chance, be needin' meself, and Dermot, maybe, to be present, also?"

Lady O'Donnell didn't miss the anxious expression on Cassy's round face. "Of course. At least I have no objections. You can tell Dermot the same. It's up to the sergeant. If he doesn't mind, I certainly don't. Aren't we all anxious to hear what the good man has to tell us?"

"Thank you, Milady. We are that!" Cassy beamed. She looked at the table. "If it's finished that you are, may I start clearin' the table?" She caught sight of the piece of toast. "Oh, your pardon, Justin, I see you're not finished eatin' yet?"

Justin felt that there had been a great deal of fuss over a single piece of toast. He grabbed it, plastered it with butter, and popped it, almost whole, into his mouth. "I am, now," he spluttered. Cassy and Her Ladyship exchanged glances of amusement. The cook began collecting the dishes.

"Jason," began Lady Kitty, "Would you be an angel? Run down to Liam's. Tell him what's happened. Ask him will he please get up here, with the boys, as soon as he can manage it. In the meantime, Justin, you and I shall adjourn to the library. Cassy, when you've finished up, here, fetch Dermot, and join us."

Jason had already left before Lady Kitty had finished speaking.

The house-hold, and its guests, to-gether with Johnny and Jimmy, were soon assembled. It was a relaxed group that awaited the arrival of the police.

Johnny and his brother moved their chairs closer to the Craigs.

"Hi, Johnny," said Jason. "Are you all packed, ready to leave?"

"Aye, as ready as we'll ever be." There was a moment's pause before Johnny added, "I'm sorry now that we're going' so soon after we just got to know each other. I'm thinkin' it'll be hard, like, to say good-bye to you guys. It's a shame we couldn't ha' made friends, sooner."

"That's right," replied Jason. "We feel the same way. But it was going to happen anyway. We'll be leaving for home, ourselves, in a little while. We could always keep in touch. I mean we could write? I'll tell you something else, Pennsylvania is not all that far from British Columbia. Well,"

Jason laughed, "At least it's on the same side of the Atlantic Ocean! You never know, maybe we could get to see each other again. I'm sure my mum would love to have you both to stay with us, in Victoria."

"She would?" Johnny sounded surprised. "Man, would we ever like that!"

The conversation between the boys had to end there. The two policemen were shown into the library. Sergeant Michael O'Rourke, cap in hand, was closely followed by Constable Kearney. Lady O'Donnell waved to the vacant seats. "It's good of you to come, Sergeant. Please, sit down. We've all been waiting anxiously to hear whatever you may be able to tell us."

The sergeant began, a trifle pompously, "Well, Milady, and all present." he looked around, "It's the best of good news, that I bring."

There was a general stir of excitement which settled into a breathless stillness when Mr O'Rourke continued.

"At precisely four twenty-three, this morning, a closed van was observed in the neighborhood. Running on side-lights only, it turned off the Ballymore Road onto the track leading to the old stone house. We had a squad car, neatly parked, behind some trees nearby. There was also a back-up vehicle standing by, well concealed." The sergeant paused, and looked round the room, again. He knew that he held his audience hanging on his every word.

"I am not at liberty to disclose the names of the gallant officers involved in this top-secret operation, for reasons of tight security measures in effect still. There were five of us, all told. One officer was left with the concealed back-up car. The remaining four of us took the squad car; very slow and gentle like, into the lane, behind the suspect vehicle. No lights, o'course. The police ear effectively blocked off any unauthorized departure of the suspect vehicle."

Jason noticed that Lady Kitty's eyes were twinkling at the policeman's legal jargon. Her face remained serious, however; as the sergeant continued.

"Leaving the police ear, the four of us approached the old building with the utmost caution. We were not observed by the suspects. They were already involved in their task of lifting them heavy crates. The back o' the van was parked near the doorway. We quickly approached the group of men who were committing this misdemeanor. On my quiet command we shone our flash-lights full in the faces of the suspects. I cried out, in a loud voice, "Police! Hands up! You're surrounded!" The element of surprise worked to our advantage."

"You mean they gave up, easy?" Johnny interrupted.

The policeman mustered his dignity. "Apprehending four desperate and dangerous criminals is never easy! But we had them down, with the cuffs on, in no time!"

"I'm sure you were very brave, Mr O'Rourke!" Her Ladyship's eyes were still twinkling but her sincere tone left no cause for misinterpretation.

"Thank you, Milady. With these felons under our control, face down on the ground, the back-up car was called in, by radio. The four prisoners were taken into custody and driven to the station. One of our officers stayed behind to make an assessment of the situation. The suspect vehicle was confiscated and impounded."

"Did you recognize any of 'em?" It was Johnny again. He was reliving his experience, and unable to contain himself. "Did you get Mr Loud-mouth, with 'em?"

"No, son. Just small fry," replied the sergeant. "But, don't worry it takes a spratt to catch a mackerel. We'll get some big ones when the talking starts. The interrogation has been going on for several hours now. There's a great deal we've learned already. Enough, in fact, to put a spoke

in their wheel, thank God!"

"Amen, to that," nodded Dermot.

"Aye," continued the sergeant. "We're all agreed, down at the station, that it was a fair night's work. It'll set them lads back a while, with their plans. Leastwise there'll be no threat to our important visitors. If their meeting goes well, who knows, maybe we'll take a step closer to havin' peace, in our beloved land." Sergeant O'Rourke looked around.

"Amen," said Dermot, again.

"We musn't forgot how much of this we owe to you, and your men, sergeant. I would also like to recognize the courage shown by Johnny, and Jimmy. Come over here, you two." As she was speaking, Lady O'Donnell was rummaging in the capacious purse that the Craigs recognized so well. She withdrew a slender slip of paper. It was in her outstretched hand, as the O'Connors approached. "It's a cheque," she explained, smiling broadly, her eyes shining.

Johnny took the proffered cheque, timidly. He cast an anxious look at his grandfather, as he did so. Liam smiled and nodded his head, in approval.

"Thank you very much, Milady. May I look at it, please, Your Ladyship?"

"Of course you may look at it! It's yours, yours and Jimmy's." Lady Kitty was laughing as she spoke. She was obviously delighted at the impression her gift was creating.

Johnny unfolded the slip of paper. His eyes widened. His mouth dropped open. "Look, Jimmy! It's one thousand pounds!"

There was a quick stir of astonishment. In the silence which followed, Jimmy's awestruck voice echoed, "A thousand pounds, for us?" He looked over at Lady Kitty.

"Five hundred, for you, Jimmy, and five hundred for your brother. It'll come in useful when you get to your new home. Spend it wisely, mind." Lady Kitty looked over at Liam. "It is all right for me to do this, isn't it, Liam?"

"Milady, how can I find the right words to thank you!" The old man was unusually eloquent. His eyes were brimming.

"Well then," Lady Kitty said, briskly, "That's just a show of our thanks to you two boys. It's a going away gift, from all of us."

Jason held his breath as he waited for Dermot to say 'Amen to that!' But the man was smiling and nodding his head. He was looking as pleased as if he had done it all, himself!

Presently, after some general small talk, the policemen got up to leave. They promised to keep her ladyship informed of any new developments. On the way out, the officers solemnly shook hands with each of the O'Connor boys, wishing them a safe journey.

"Well, Liam," said Lady Kitty, "I think you'd best get these two lads of yours back home in time to gather up all their bits and pieces. It'll soon be time for them to leave." She turned, "Dermot, are you all set then, to pick them up?"

"Tis set I am, Your Ladyship. Ready to go."

In a scene that was charged with emotion, Johnny and Jimmy took their leave of the assembled company.

Cassy was quite overcome, as she hugged each one of them, in turn. She was wiping her eyes as they turned away.

Lady Kitty shook hands with them, formally. Then, she couldn't resist it, she threw out her arms, giving each of them a warm hug.

When the O'Connors had finally made the rounds they reached Justin, and Jason. Suddenly, they were shy. "I'm glad we're partin' such good friends," said Johnny.
"We'll be in touch," replied Jason, smiling. "I'll get your new address from your grandfather."
"Good-bye, and the very best of luck," Justin offered his hand.

The O'Connors left. The gathering in the library broke up, each going a separate way. Dermot drove off, for the airport. Cassy busied herself in the kitchen. Lady Kitty disappeared into her den, with the intent of writing letters.
Silence fell in the great castle, brooding there, as it had done, for centuries past, on a warm, sunlit afternoon.



Chapter 15. An Exciting Discovery.

The Craig boys made their way upstairs together. As they reached the corridor Jason turned to his brother, "Well, that's the end of that, I guess? Those O'Connors are nice guys, after all. We sure didn't think so when we first met them. Funny how things work out."

The boys reached Jason's room before Justin had time to reply. By common consent, he followed his brother inside. Jason said, looking over his shoulder, "I suppose we'll have to do something about the state of this room? Will you stay and give me a hand, Justy?"

"Sure, let's get to it. I've nothing else planned for now, except lunch.

"Well, brother, we mustn't let anything interfere with that!" There was a note of good-natured sarcasm in his voice. It was wasted on Justin, who asked, cheerfully, "Where do we start?"

"Well," said Jason, looking around him, ruefully, "I think we'd best start with the worst part. We'll have to get those drapes back up. I can't see how we're going to get them right up there, all the same." Jason waved a hand to-wards the top of the tall window frame. He viewed the huge, thick pole, propped against the wall, with some misgivings. "We're not tall enough to manage to get 'way up there without a ladder."

"It's awesome," agreed Austin. "It'll probably all come crashing down on our heads!"

"Probably! Let's make a start anyway, by getting the drapes back on the pole. That shouldn't be out of our league?"

The boys worked in silence, except for an occasional grunt of exertion from Justin, who was supporting the heavy end of the pole. It already held one curtain. They began threading the second one, on the other end. At last the two drapes were in position, suspended on the pole by the great brass rings. It was time to hoist the pole to the metal brackets, above the window. "Now for the hard part," muttered Jason. "We'll just have to find something to stand on. Then we can try one side at a time."

A quick look around the room was all it took to find a heavy wooden log-box. Jason brought it over to the side of the window and placed an upright chair on top of it.

"Oh, do be careful, Jason," warned Justin, nervously. He watched his brother clambering up, a bit unsteadily. In a moment Jason straightened up.

"Can you reach the bracket?" called Justin. "I can hand up end of the pole to you. I'll hang on to this end."

Jason stretched his hand up as far as it would go. He found it was just touching the metal bracket above his head. "Right, Justy. Let's do it! I can just reach it. Hand me up the pole, then." Jason lowered his arm to receive the heavy wooden bar, without looking down. "Ouch! Darn it! These stupid carvings!"

"What happened?"

"Oh, not much, except I just grazed my knuckles on one of these darned carved things sticking out. Can't for the life of me think why anyone would be so stupid as to carve anything behind a set of drapes. What a waste! Who'd see them? We certainly didn't, until now!" Jason examined his bruised knuckle as he wits speaking. "Oh, well, nothing too serious. I'll survive!"

"I should certainly hope so," murmured Justin.

"C'mon, down there. Where's the end of that pole? Hand it up here before I lose my balance and fall on your head!"

Justin struggled valiantly to raise the heavy curtain pole to wards his brother's outstretched hand. As he did so, the thick drapes slid down the bar, to-wards him. The added weight threw him off balance. He tripped, and fell forward, thrusting the pole to one side to prevent it from crashing

through the plate glass window.

So many things happened, so quickly, that it was difficult to sort them out, in sequence, later. Jason, from his unsafe perch, saw what had happened when the curtains slid down and enveloped his brother. He made a wild grab at the pole. He missed it. He lost his balance, and sailed backwards through the air, with a cry of alarm. Justin was down on the floor; with his face scarlet, and the drapes all round him. Jason's cry was still ringing in his ears. He was too shocked to move. He greatly feared for his brother! However, a moment later, a breathless 'Wow!' from the direction of the bed indicated that Jason wasn't seriously hurt.

"Are you all right, Jason?" Justin was scrambling to his feet.

"Sure! No problem. Just a bit scared, that's all! I thought I was a gonner."

"Me too! Lucky for you that you landed on your back, on the bed. Thank goodness you're all right. It was all my fault. I'm sorry, Jason."

"No need. I'm okay. No harm done." Jason had quickly recovered. He slid his feet to the floor and stood up. He surveyed the situation with his hands on his hips. "Well," he mused, "Not *much* harm done, except perhaps to the silly carvings on the side of the window. I think the pole has damaged them, a bit. So, little brother, would you like to give up, or shall we have another go?"

"So long as you're sure you're not hurt, or anything? I can see how it happened. The best thing is to start off with both curtains at my end. It won't happen again, I promise you!" Justin began sorting out the folds of material. He reached for the bar.

"Wait, Justy! Problem here." Jason was working to free the pole from the side of the window. It was firmly wedged between a couple of carvings. "Don't touch your end for a minute. You may cause these things to break off, or something." He tugged gently.

Without warning something most unexpected happened. The pole moved slightly. There came a distinct 'click'. Right in front of Jason's astonished eyes, a square section of the wood paneling swung outward, propelled by a hidden spring. "Justin, Justin, look what's happened! There's a secret opening, here!"

"It must have been activated when one of those knobs, was moved?" breathed Justin, in awed wonder. He joined his brother by the side of the window.

"Let's have a look inside," said Jason. "is there a flash-light handy? We need a light. I think there's one in the drawer by the bed. It's completely dark in there. Can't see a thing."

Justin had found the flashlight. He handed it to his brother. He crowded in close. He was anxious to learn what was inside the twelve inch square opening that had appeared before them.

Jason shone the light into the opening and strained his neck forward, "Hmmm!" he murmured.

"Tell us, what's in there?" Justin could not contain his impatience.

"Absolutely nothing, except a kind of metal bar, right at the back, attached to the wall. Wait till I get my hand, and my arm in there and feel around. I'll see if I can touch something."

"Hope it won't be anything dead, or nasty." whispered Justin.

"Nope, nothing there, except the bar, at the back. I'll grab it, and try to pull it free so that we can take a look at it."

Justin could feel the muscles in Jason's shoulder tense. He waited, with his heart pounding.

"It's - it's moving," grunted Jason. His face was red from the strain. "It doesn't seem to want to come free, though. Here, brother; pull back on my shoulder. Give me a bit of extra weight."

Justin put his arm under his brother's arm-pit, and leaned back, adding his weight to Jason's straining arm.

"Good! That's great!" Jason shouted in his excitement. A prolonged groaning and creaking sound came from within the panel. What happened next came as a complete surprise to both boys.

Jason let go his hold on the bar. Justin's pull nearly threw them both off balance. When they recovered their footing, their attention was suddenly drawn to a most astonishing sight! The wall behind the head of Jason's bed had disappeared! In its place was a yawning dark cavern. For a long moment the Craigs just stared, with disbelief in their eyes. It was Jason who broke the silence.

"Justin," he declared solemnly, "We have uncovered the secret of the castle. We have found the entrance to the tunnel!"

"Awesome!" breathed Justin.

The two brothers kicked their feet clear of the drapes which covered the floor. They took a few careful steps in the direction of the newly opened doorway in the wall. A rush of foul air offended their nostrils.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Justin, wrinkling his nose, in disgust. "Don't go near there, Jason. There may be dead bodies in there, or worse!"

For a moment it didn't occur to Jason to consider what might be worse, than dead bodies! He was busy making up his mind to take a closer look, quite heedless of his brother's warning. "Justy, I need you to give me a hand at moving this great bed. We'll not be able to get near that entrance until we get the bed away from the wall."

The boys were strong. The excitement of the situation gave them an extra shot of energy. In next to no time they had the bed moved back a couple of feet. The gap in the wall was now more fully exposed. It looked quite fearful, black, and mysterious. The way into the secret passage lay open, before them. It was far from inviting. The brothers stood close, side by side, somehow afraid to approach the yawning hole.

"What'll we do!" whispered Justin, sounding really scared.

"Do?" echoed Jason, swallowing hard, "Why, we're going to take a look inside, of course. What else?"

"N-not me!" stammered the younger boy. He knew he was risking his brother's scorn. "Be my guest. You go ahead. It's your tunnel, and you're welcome to it!"

"Oh don't be so silly! There's nothing to be afraid of. How could there be? No one has been in there for hundreds of years!"

"What about the Galloping Major, and things?" Justin's face paled, at the thought. "There's probably bodies of dead monks, and skeletons, chained to the walls. Oh no! You won't get me in there!"

"You've watched too many scary movies. Just think for a minute. This was Caroline's room, remember? Nothing nasty can have happened where she was concerned. I mean, she didn't go round chaining bodies to the walls, or anything. And I should think she would have raised serious objections about anyone else having such nasty habits near her room. Seriously, Justy, Lady Caroline was probably the very last person to have set foot across that threshold, on her way out, for the last time. No, Justy, you can set your mind at rest. There'll be no bodies hanging to the walls, dead, or alive. Will you come?"

A definite shake of the head, and a stubborn look, advised Jason that he was wasting his time.

"Very well then, if you're such a cowardly custard I shall have to go in there all on my own!"

Jason advanced to-wards the opening before turning to his brother. "Promise me you'll stay right here, in case I need you. You won't go away, will you?"

Justin wasn't prepared to guarantee anything. He had a feeling that if Jason had any needs they might not be met! All the same he admired his brother's courage. He knew that Jason wasn't feeling as brave as he tried to make out. He felt honour bound to go through the motions of

offering support, when he said, "If you see anything scary, just sing out!" It wasn't much of a commitment but it was the best he could muster. Apparently Jason didn't think much of it, either. He muttered, "A lot of good that'll do!" Turning on the flash-light Jason Craig stepped firmly over the threshold and into the unknown!

It took a moment for Jason's eyes to adjust to the darkness. The flashlight did little to dispel the inky blackness that enveloped him. He kept the narrow beam directed to the floor so that he could mind his step. It was as well that he did so. He had taken less than a dozen small steps when the light picked up a well of blackness reaching almost to his feet.

"Hey, Justy!" Jason called out. "There's a stairwell in here, leading down." As he spoke he inched cautiously forward until he was able to direct the light straight down. "There are stone steps cut into the wall. I can't see how far they go. It looks pretty deep down there. It smells horrible!

Justin's voice reached him through the darkness. "Are you going to go down?"

"Naw, better not!" Jason shouted back.

"We'll need more light." He turned back the way he had come. "Anyway, I think we had better not do anything more in here until we have told Lady Kitty."

"Come on out then, before you fall down and hurt yourself. I feel scared about you being in there, all on your own. Anything could happen."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, Justy." Jason had reached the pool of light leading into the bedroom. Justin was standing there, peering in but not daring to set a foot forward. In a moment Jason was safely at his side.

Jason stepped clear of the hidden chamber. He brushed himself down, with his hands, to remove cobwebs and dust, which had settled on his sleeves. "We'll definitely have to have more light, in there. An extension cord, or a big bunch o' candles would help us to see what's in there, if anything.

There was a moment's pause, as if the boys were undecided what they should do next. In the silence they heard the crunch of tires on the gravel sweep. "Good! That's Dermot, back from the airport," exclaimed Jason, as he moved to the window.

"I think it's time to break this wonderful news to Lady Kitty," suggested Justin, as his brother turned back from the window. "She's sure to be thrilled, don't you think? She's been wondering about the entrance to the passage, all her life. Just think of it, Jason. It was up to little old us, to find it for her!"

"Yes, indeed, she will be excited," agreed Jason. "We'll go and tell her about it, right now!"

Having made up his mind, Jason wasted no more time. He started for the door. "C'mon, Justy," he called, over his shoulder. "Lady Kitty is sure to be in the library right this minute. Let's go find her!"

"But, er, Jason, what about all this mess? Are we going to leave this room the way it is?" Justin made a feeble gesture with his arm.

"Not important! Bet you she won't even notice the mess, she'll be too busy gazing at the hole we opened in her wall!"

"Good job it isn't Grandma we're dealing with. She'd have a fit, on both counts!" Justin muttered.

"Oh, what are you burbling about?" said Jason, as they reached the head of the stairs.

"Nothing important, never mind," replied Justin, meekly.

Side by side the two boys reached the heavy library door. With a polite tap, they entered. Lady Kitty was sitting at a writing desk, by the window. She looked up, in surprise. A smile of pleasure lit her face. "Hello, boys. What brings you here, looking so fussed and bothered, about something? Were you looking for me?" She laid down her pen, as she spoke.

"Yes, Lady Kitty. As a matter of fact we were." Jason tried to sound 'cool, calm, and collected.'

"We, er, Justin and I, that is, well, we have something of the utmost importance to tell you."

Lady Kitty's blue eyes twinkled. She hid a smile that hovered round her lips. She could see how hard Jason was trying to be serious. "Why don't we all sit down, over here. She motioned to a settee, and an easy chair, near the fire-place. "We might as well be comfortable. Then you can tell me what it is that has you in such a state." She held up her hand. "Oh you needn't deny it. It's written all over your faces. You both look hot and bothered and quite untidy - looking, if I may say so!"

Jason and Justin looked at each other in the sudden realization that they certainly were, indeed, untidy-looking, after all that had happened upstairs. Lady Kitty was saying, "Jason, dear, I do hope that you're not going to tell me that you've been talking to the Galloping Major, or something? You know that subject is closed, finally." Then she added, softly, "Thank Goodness!"

"No, No, Lady Kitty!" Jason hastened to re-assure his hostess. "It's not that, at all. It's much more important. Really it is!"

"My goodness, Jason, you can't be serious! More important to you than a conversation with the deceased Major Hamilton? Gracious me, what are we going to hear, this time?" Lady Kitty was teasing. She regretted it, however, when the boys continued to look solemn. She sat forward. 'I'm sorry,' she said, simply. "Please tell me what it is, that is so important to you both."

"Where do we begin?" whispered Justin.

"Leave it to me. Let me do the talking."

"Lady Kitty," Jason began, "If you don't mind, I'd like to start from the very beginning. I have to tell you, though, that it's the end part that really matters. I feel we should explain to you how it all happened."

Lady Kitty merely nodded her head, in silent assent. Jason continued.

"It all started when we discovered Johnny and Jimmy in my room, hiding behind the drapes. We should have told you this, before, but the right moment didn't come up, until now.

"When we tackled the O'Connors, we pulled the drapes down from the window, by mistake. The curtain pole, and everything, just fell down on top of us, when we were struggling."

Lady Kitty permitted the ghost of a smile to cross her face. She said nothing. She waited, knowing that there was more to come. Jason was too involved in his tale, to notice the smile.

"We should have tidied it all up at the time. Everything happened too fast, from there on. We just didn't get the chance. We were going to fix everything this afternoon. We did try, but something unexpected, happened. This is what we came to tell you about. You see, Lady Kitty, when we were trying to lift the heavy pole into its position above the window, well, I guess it kind of slipped out of Justin's hand. It, er, well, it hit the wooden paneling round the window frame."

Lady Kitty relaxed, visibly. She was thinking how much she loved these two young boys. They were trying to explain to her that they had damaged a silly piece of wood carving. As if it mattered! She opened her mouth to tell the boys it was quite all right, not to worry. She hoped to spare her friends further embarrassment. Much to her surprise, however, Jason was hurrying

along with his story.

"Here's the part that'll startle you, Lady Kitty," Jason was saying, as the lady re-focused her attention on her guest opposite her. "You'll find it hard to believe this. As I said, the pole got kind of stuck in between two pieces of carved scroll-work. I had to try to free it. As I eased it gently from the wood there was a quite a loud click' from inside the wall. Guess what? A small trap-door flew open, beside the window, right before our eyes!"

Lady Kitty stiffened in her seat. Her eyes were suddenly alive with interest. Is there more?" she asked in a muffled whisper. She was almost afraid to ask in case she wasn't hearing the truth that had evaded her, and her ancestors before her. Jason needed no encouragement from Her Ladyship.

"It wasn't a big opening, or anything. It was just wide enough for my hand and my arm to go through. I tried to grab something I felt inside the hole. It was a kind of bar, or lever. Justin helped me pull. It moved! It began to creak and groan inside. Lady Kitty, this is the exciting part. "D'you know what it did?"

"I hope I can guess," said Lady Kitty, in a voice breathless with excitement.

"It slid back a large panel in the wall, behind my bed. Lady Kitty! We have found the secret entrance It was there, all the time, right in the middle of the wall, in Caroline's room!"

Lady Kitty sprang to her feet. Her face was flushed with excitement. "C'mon the pair of you! This is something that I shall have to see, for myself. Have you been inside yet, either of you?" The boys were following Lady Kitty, as she made for the door. Justin answered, "Well, Jason took just a peek inside, with a small flash-light. He didn't see anything except some steps and things..."

"We must go prepared!" They reached the hallway. Lady Kitty raised her voice to a shrill call, "Cassy?...Dermot?" The echo had barely died away when hurrying feet sounded. The cook, and the chauffeur came quickly, to Her Ladyship's call.

"Is anything the matter, Milady?" Dermot's expression was full of concern.

"Far from it, my friend! Something quite wonderful has happened."

Before Dermot could open his mouth to form the question, his mistress had swung round to Cassy. "Cassy, have we got candles in the store-room?"

"Any amount, Madam. May I make so bold as to ask what you'll be needin' candles for, on this bright sunny day?"

"Don't bletcher, woman. Go fetch us half a dozen, or so. Bring them upstairs, to Lady Caroline's room." Her Ladyship started for the stairs. "Dermot, Boys, Come with me!" With surprising agility for one of her years, she skipped up the stairs. In a moment they arrived at the door of Jason's room. It was open, as the boys had left it. Lady Kitty entered first. It was Dermot who was taken by surprise. "My God, Madam! What have we here?"

A shriek from behind them indicated the startled Cassy's arrival on the scene. "Land sake's! I must be dreamin'!"

"Pull yourself to-gether, Cassy. Let me have those candles. Justin, hand me down that holder, from the mantel shelf. Dermot, I need a match?" Lady Kitty was brief and business-like. She had taken control of the situation. Her breeding, and birthright gave her a natural authority that none would question.

Lady Kitty took the candle, one by one, and inserted them in the candlesticks' six empty sockets. She accepted the light from Dermot, and touched each wick, in turn. Soon there was a warm

golden light from the spluttering flames. It lit up Lady Kitty's face and highlighted the brightness of her eyes and the flush of her cheeks. She looked around her. "Well now, who's going first?" She paused, and chuckled. "oh yes, I know, 'Ladies first'. I'll yield that courtesy just for this once. Dermot! Age before Beauty! Here, take this. Lead the way!" She handed the lighted candles to Dermot.

The elderly chauffeur stepped forward, without hesitation, to do the bidding of his mistress. The loyal servant would have led the way into the jaws of hell, itself, at Her Ladyship's command.



Chapter 16. Into the Unknown

The gallant group crowded in, behind Dermot. The candelabra was held high, to light the way. Justin brought up the rear, his courage bolstered by the presence of Lady Kitty, and the others. It was a very solemn moment.

The room or ante-chamber, smelt dank and musty. The tuckering candles shed the first light to illuminate it in three hundred years. In breathless silence they took in the scene before them. It was a small, windowless room. The only exit, apart from the sliding panel, lay in the dark and forbidding stairwell. The room itself was sparsely furnished with roughly hewn pieces. A small, square table stood just inside the entrance-way. Jason noticed a small ornament, made of some metal or other. It was badly tarnished. He moved to touch it. Lady Kitty's voice broke the stillness. "Don't touch anything, Jason! Whatever artifacts we find will be very fragile. Let's take care not to disturb anything until we have had a good chance to look around." Jason withdrew his hand quickly at the gentle rebuff. Lady Kitty put her hand on his shoulder. "It's all right, Jason. There'll be plenty of time later, to examine what we find."

"Good Glory, Ma'am. The saints preserve us!" Cassy's sibilant whisper reached Lady Kitty. "Can you believe it? It's been here, all these years. And me, in and out of the room a thousand times! How in the world did you find it, Milady?"

Lady Kitty spoke over her shoulder. "Oh, it's too involved to explain it all now, Cassy. It was the boys who discovered the secret for us. We'll tell you after."

Silence fell again, on the intruders. Each was busy trying to take in the significance of the discovery. Jason's mind was in a fever. He realized that he was standing in the very place where Lady Caroline had stood, so long ago. He knew he was seeing what she saw, maybe for the last time. Perhaps she was fleeing for her life? On the other hand she may have been anticipating a lover's embrace. Jason dearly wished he could tell what happened before the oak panel slid shut for the last time, and for all the years that followed.

Jason's fantasizing was shattered by Dermot's raised voice. "Look, Milady! There's something in the corner, there. It's covered in dust." He moved to-wards it, as he spoke. "Shall I take a look, Ma'am?"

"Well, Dermot, you'll have to go very carefully. I don't suppose for one minute that it will harm you, in any way. It may easily be destroyed, however, whatever it is, if you're rough with it."

"Not me, Ma'am. Don't worry! I can be as gentle as a summer breeze." Dermot handed the candles to Cassy, nearby. He bent forward, slowly, as the others held their breath in anticipation. Careful as he was, a mist of grey dust swirled upwards in the still air. 'It's a box, Milady, of metal, I think. It seems solid enough. I should be able to lift it.' Using both his hands Dermot eased the object from the floor amidst a great cloud of dust that made him cough. "W-what will I d-do with it, M-Milady?" he spluttered.

"Put it in the bedroom, Dermot, thank you. We'll examine it later."

Dermot returned in a moment and took the light from Cassy's hand. "I don't think there's much else, for the moment, Madam. He looked around him. "Have you a mind to try them stairs, Your Ladyship?"

The group waited for Lady Kitty's decision.

"What d'you think yourself, Dermot. Are they safe, do you suppose?"

"Can't say that, for sure, Ma'am. With your permission I'll go first and try each one. If they hold

me, it should be safe for the rest of you, me being the heaviest, eh, Cassy?"

"Get on with you," chortled Cassy. The laugh sounded unlikely, in such strange surroundings.

"Just a moment, Dermot!" Lady Kitty deftly lifted a couple of candles from their sockets in the candelabra. 'Please, be careful! We'll wait at the top of the stairs, here, until you're safely down. If you think it's safe enough then, we can follow you."

Dermot, candles held aloft, edged close to the wall. He began his descent. Cautiously he tested each step before he put his full weight on it. There were eerie shadows thrown up on the grey stone wall.

"Are you all right, Dermot?" called Lady O'Donnell. Her voice echoed strangely.

"Just fine, just fine, thank you, Milady. Whoever put this lot in knew what they were doing. Good as the day they were built, I would say. I'm almost down, Madam. If you care to follow me I can see that it's quite safe." Dermot's voice rang out in the cavern that had known nothing but the deepest silence for hundreds of years.

Lady Kitty and her young companions could see Dermot's head and shoulders bathed in the light of the candles he was carrying. It looked a long way down. In reality, however, it was not much more than thirty feet below where they were standing.

Dermot's voice echoed up the stairwell again. "I'm safely down on the bottom step, Madam. I'll hold these candles high, to light your way, Milady. Mind your step, now!"

"Right, Dermot! I'm on my way." Lady Kitty turned to the boys. "Now, we'll just take our time. I'll go first, and when I'm down, Jason, will you come next?"

"Excuse me, Lady Kitty," said Jason, politely. "Do you mind if Cassy goes down after you? Justin and I can then come down together because we're light."

"Quick thinking, brother," said Justin quietly. "If Cassy had gone after you I should have been left up here all on my own. I could not have endured that unthinkable situation!"

Jason gave his brother a swift smile. "It's okay. We're in this together!"

"Suit yourselves," agreed Lady Kitty, as she set foot on the top step. "Here, you can have one of these candles. I can manage with one until I can see from Dermot's." Jason took the light from her hand. An eerie gloom fell, as the shadows deepened. The flickering light from the solitary candle shed a small pool of light around the small group, at the top of the stairs. Jason felt his brother's warm breath on the back of his neck. Justin had edged forward, for comfort and protection.

It was Cassy who broke the silence. "I, er, I'm thinkin' that it's a nice hot cup o' tea we'll all been needin' presently. I'd best run down to the kitchen, and put the kettle on. Would you be kind enough to show me a light over as far as the doorway there. I'll be on my way!" Moving together they turned for the oblong of light in the wall behind them. Once Cassy had set her foot over the threshold, and into the bedroom her sigh of relief was plainly audible.

The boys returned quickly as Lady Kitty's voice rang out in the darkness, "I'm down. Who's next? Cassy, are you ready?"

"Cassy won't be coming," Jason called down. "She's gone to make some tea!" Lady Kitty's laugh reached the boys, clearly, up the stairwell. "That figures! She has no stomach for this sort of thing."

"Join the club," murmured Justin.

"Come along then you two. Take it slow. There's nothing to worry about. We'll shed some light for you, as you come down."

Without further ado the Craig brothers set out, side by side. The stairs were wide enough to accommodate the two, shoulder to shoulder. Down they went. Step by step. In no time they reached the warm glow of the candles held by Dermot and Lady Kitty, as they waited for them. In less than a minute they were all together, at the foot of the stone steps. The light was better. All the candles were shining with a steady flame. The air was heavy. It was close, and unpleasant. Jason took a quick look around him. He let out a cry of excitement. His eyes had taken in a great heavy wooden door, set in a roughly hewn archway. The massive door was hound with wide metal hands. They had long since rusted. The door looked solid, 'Made of oak' Jason thought, knowing that oak was the most commonly used material of that time. The attention of the group was drawn to another archway. It led directly into a long rectangular room. By common consent, it seemed, the party all moved from the foot of the steps and into the newly discovered chamber. It seemed to be very different from the small ante-room, upstairs. This room appeared to have been more in use.

Lady Kitty broke the silence. "This is quite the most fantastic thing I could ever have imagined." She spoke quietly as if she was afraid to rend the cloak of mystery that lay heavily in the atmosphere.

Jason was taking it all in. His eyes were darting hither and thither, as if afraid they would miss something.

A long sturdy table occupied the centre of the long room. On it there were some earthenware pieces of no great significance. There were, however, some pewter artifacts of considerable value.

Along both walls metal sconces were fixed, to hold flaming torches. Bench-like seats were set down both sides of the table.

'It looks like a typical medieval baronial hall,' thought Jason.

There was little conversation. Each member of the group was busy with thoughts and speculations. Presently, it was Lady Kitty who voiced an opinion, shared by the others. "This must have been the gathering place for the Irish patriots, in peril of their lives. They must have waited here, to be taken through the tunnel, in small groups. I expect they ate, here, too, at this table. No doubt Lady Caroline played a large part in ferrying food down, from the castle kitchen!"

At the mention of Lady Caroline, Jason's interest in his surroundings, quickened. He imagined the beautiful lady hurrying down the room, laden with baskets of freshly baked bread. How the people must have loved her. Jason gave a mental sigh. His train of thought was interrupted when Lady Kitty suggested that perhaps it was time to take a closer look at the door into the tunnel! "Dermot," said Lady Kitty, "Do you think you'll be able to get it open for us?" The rest of the party gathered round.

"We can always try, Your Ladyship."

An iron ring was set into the wood. Dermot placed his fingers through it, and gave a tug. Nothing happened. He tried again. This time, He pulled harder, giving the ring a twist, as he did so. Still nothing. "The ring is firm, Milady. Shall I give it my best try?"

"Do your best, Dermot. Jason, Justin, lend a hand there. Hold on to Dermot. If the wood crumbles and metal gives way, Dermot may take a toss."

The boys did as they had been asked. Jason adopted the tactics employed by his brother, a few hours ago, upstairs. He put his arms round Dermot's chest, and leaned back. Justin stood in the

rear with both his hands pressed against Jason's shoulders. If the intent hadn't been so momentous, the scene might have been comical. No one was smiling.

"Ready?" said Dermot, over his shoulder.

"Ready!" echoed Jason.

Dermot tensed and exerted all his strength. The wood held. Their united efforts were rewarded with a low groaning sound. The metal hinges were protesting their unaccustomed use! The great door opened an inch, and then another inch. Finally it swung open as Dermot released his hold, keeping his balance.

The opening revealed a stone-hewn tunnel, leading straight in. It disappeared into total blackness, well out of the narrow area of light from the candles which were flickering wildly from the sudden draught of air.

"My Golly Gee!" exclaimed Jason. "The secret tunnel!"

"More or less what I expected," put in Lady Kitty.

"It's awesome," breathed Justin, from a safe distance.

"Shall I lead the way, Milady?" By this time Dermot had accepted the role he was playing.

"Does it look safe to enter, Dermot?"

The elderly man took a short pace into the entrance. He put out a hand to touch the roof, and the walls, on either side. "Solid rock, Madam. Like them stairs. It'll be all right, Milady. Watch your step, now. I'm afraid I can't hold these candles high, to light your way." It was true, the roof was barely clear of Dermot's head. "One moment, Your Ladyship, I think these candles could be divided up between us." Without waiting for an answer he handed each member of the party, a flickering flame of light. Carrying the remaining two candles as high as he could, Dermot began to move forward. He tested each step, as he shuffled his way into the tunnel.

The passage-way had a noticeable downward incline. The procession edged its way deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth underneath the great castle.

Jason had time to note the rough stone walls, and the arched roof, just clear of his head. He was right behind Dermot. Lady Kitty, for reasons of her own, was bringing up the rear. She was sensitive to Justin's natural nervousness. She had allowed the young boy to take a middle place in the line. They inched their way forward with cautious steps.

Suddenly the heavy silence was shattered by Jason's excited cry. The boy had pushed his way past Dermot. "Look! There's a shawl, or a scarf of some kind, on the ground!" Rushing forward he reached down and grabbed the piece of material, where it lay.

"Jason," Lady Kitty called out. It was too late. A great grey cloud spiralled into the candlelight. The article disintegrated into a million pieces.

Jason's wail of utter horror and dismay softened Lady Kitty's heart as she opened her mouth to scold the reckless boy. She checked herself, and said, "Jason, I did warn you not to touch anything, now, didn't I? Now, please, be a good boy and don't touch anything else unless I give my permission. Retrieving these things is a job for trained experts, and not for the likes of us, a bunch of bungling amateurs.

"I'm terribly sorry, Lady Kitty!" The boy was near to tears. "It's gone, for ever, and it probably belonged to Lady Caroline!"

"Very likely," agreed Lady Kitty, sympathetically. "But gone it certainly is. There's no use worrying any more about it. Cheer up. There's no knowing what else we may find down here." Jason was far from cheered up, as he resumed his rightful place in the line. He was miserably aware that he had thoughtlessly destroyed a tangible link between himself and Lady Caroline. It

was almost sacrilegious, he felt. All thoughts of self-pity were driven from his mind by Dermot's shout. "Hold up, behind, there!"

"What is it, Dermot?" Lady O'Donnell called, from the rear.

"It's a bad cave in, a blockage, Milady. We'll get no further today!" The party closed up, looking over the man's shoulder.

Sure enough! Before them lay a mass of fallen rocks, stones and earth. It reached from wall to wall, and from floor to ceiling.

Dermot characteristically scratched his head with his free hand, as he surveyed the mound before him. "It'll take a bulldozer to move that lot, Madam. Aye, and that's even supposin' you could get one down here!"

They all stood and stared at the mountain of debris that confronted them. It was a frustrating and disappointing turn of events.

"Don't let's get ourselves into a tizzy about this!" Her Ladyship spoke in a business-like tone.

"We'll have time to give it some careful consideration. If it's the right thing to do we'll clear it. We may need a small army of workers to do it. However, at this moment I am not at all sure what would be best. We'll see. In the meantime," she looked around her, and gave a slight shiver, "Let's get out of here! I've suddenly become uneasy. I have no wish to be trapped down here by another cave-in!"

Lady Kitty's words lent speed to their steps as they retraced them. They finally emerged at the bottom of the steps, with sighs of relief.

"I think I've seen enough, for one day," said Lady Kitty, as she mounted the stone stairway.

"More than enough!" Justin was heard to add, as he followed his hostess.

Without incident the party entered Jason's room. They blinked in the strength of the sunlight that streamed in through the uncurtained window.

Jason's eye fell on the metal box. It lay where Dermot had placed it. "Lady Kitty" he asked, "Are we going to have a look to see what's inside the box?"

"Dear boy, presently. Cassy was the wise one. After a nice cup of tea we'll examine it. I'm all for a good wash. Goodness knows what nasty germs we could have picked up in there. I suggest that you two boys get thoroughly cleaned up. You could do with it!" Lady Kitty added with a good-natured laugh. "You will join us, Dermot, won't you? There's the box to look at, and much to talk about."

"Gladly, Milady, thank you. But first, the advice you gave the boys is good enough for me. I'll be off, to have a wash. We all need it! No disrespect, Ma'am."

"Very well then. Let's assemble in the library in ten or fifteen minutes." The party broke up, each going to the nearest bathroom to be rid of the dirt and grime of the ages.

"May I stay with you?" whispered Justin.

"Of course you may. But there's nothing to be scared of, now."

"I've got my thoughts to live with. They scare me half to death."

"Oh, you'll be all right, Justy. Don't think about it." Jason looked about the room as he spoke. He grimaced. "Now it's really in a mess! Tell you what, Justy, let's ask Lady Kitty if you and I could share your room, at least in the meantime. I don't think that even I, could sleep in here, the way it is." He jerked his head in the direction of the gaping hole in the wall, by his bed.

Justin tried hard to conceal his relict "Sure, that'd be great, for the time being."

The boys took turns in the shower. "I'll just slip into my room for some fresh clothes." Justin wrapped a towel round his middle as he spoke. "Back in a jiffy, if the spooks don't get me!" The gong sounded. The group re-assembled once more, looking fresh and relaxed. Her Ladyship was presiding over the large silver tea-pot.

Cassy had excelled herself. The scones and tea-cakes were particularly delicious. Whatever Justin's thoughts may have been, he certainly put them aside in the enjoyment of the moment. Lady Kitty motioned to Cassy to draw up a chair, and join them. "For goodness sake, stay, Cassy! Are you not one of the family? You have every right to know what's going on, and be part of it."

"Thank you Milady. 'Tis indeed interested that I am. Provided of course, you'll not be expecting me to go back into that dirty old hole, or down them steps!"

"No, Cassy. That won't be at all necessary," Her Ladyship smiled. "It's always good to have some-one waiting on the outside with a nice cup of hot tea to take the chill out of these old bones."

"I take it, Ma'am, that it's your own bones ye'll be warming. Not some of those skeletons you'll be finding, and that without too much lookin'!"

Everyone broke out laughing at Cassy's observation.

"What do you think of all this, Dermot?" asked Lady Kitty, as soon as the tea things had been cleared.

"My goodness, Your Ladyship, 'tis hard to believe what has happened. If I hadn't been down there myself I never would have imagined it. I would have thought that it was something that Jason dreamed up. Him being so interested in it. I mean, the ghost, and all. Sure, Milady, isn't it just grand that it was himself, and the other wee lad, that found it, for us."

Jason tried to look modest. "It was only luck, Dermot We had a bit of an accident with the curtain pole."

Justin shifted uncomfortably at the recollection. "Don't remind me," he said quietly.

"Isn't it strange, Milady," Dermot continued, "to be finding the entrance to an underground tunnel in an upstairs room? I've a mind to smile at the thought of them soldiers rootin' in the cellars, lookin' for it!"

Jason took up the conversation. "I can't get over how clever it was to have had the hidden spring behind the drapes that covered the window. And I was only saying to Justin how silly it was to have carvings where they wouldn't be seen." At the memory of it Jason lifted his hand and examined his knuckle. "It was all a perfect camouflage. I mean, Justin and I would never have discovered the secret..."

"I'm so glad, Jason, that it was you, and your brother; who did find it." Lady Kitty was smiling at the two boys. "It's a strange coincidence really, or is it? You've spent such a lot of time thinking about it all, and the history attached to it. You've formed a great attachment to the Lady Caroline, too, unless I'm mistaken?"

"No, Lady Kitty, you're right, I guess I have!" Jason coloured slightly. "It's because of my having her room, and everything."

"I'm so glad I chose that particular room for you, Jason. I had the strongest feeling about it, from the very beginning. I knew that you would appreciate being there. There's so much of the castle's history absorbed into its walls and furnishings. I am quite delighted with myself for going along with my instincts."

"Thank you, again, Lady Kitty, for letting me have that room. I had a feeling for it the moment I saw it. You were absolutely right about everything. I'm terribly sorry that it is quite a mess, at the moment. You know we were trying to tidy everything up when..."

Lady Kitty interrupted, "Don't worry about a little thing like a mess! Considering the outcome I think it's well worth it! I never thought I'd see the day when I would tell a lad like yourself that the untidiness of his room was a blessing in disguise!"

"I think that 'untidy' is a bit of an understatement, Lady Kitty, what with the great hole in the wall, and everything! I'd say it's looking pretty bad, at the moment." Everyone laughed. "I was going to ask, Lady Kitty, if, under the circumstances, I might move in with my brother, Justin, in his room. In the meantime? I have already discussed it with him. I think there might be a bit of a draught over my head, where I am!"

"That's an understatement," laughed Lady Kitty. "Of course, you may do as you please. As a matter of fact I'm inclined to leave that room the way it is, in the meantime, drapes and all."

Everyone was finishing up their tea. Justin had just swallowed the last tea-cake.

Jason brought up the subject that had been uppermost in his mind, all afternoon. "Lady Kitty, are we going to be able to take a look inside that metal box we found?"

"Of course, dear. I've known you've been dying to get at it. We'll go up, presently, and take a look at it. I have a feeling it will be locked. I looked like a strong-box, of some kind."

"May I go and fetch it, and bring it down here?" Jason suggested. "It might be the best place to examine the contents, and things?" His colour was rising with excitement.

"Relax, Jason," said Lady Kitty, kindly. "You musn't set too much store by what you hope to find. You know it may well be empty. Of course we won't be able to tell until we have it open. You're quite right. This is a much better place to examine any treasures we may hope to find. Run upstairs and fetch it down here, by all means."

Before the elderly lady had finished speaking, Jason was on his way. He mounted the stairs, two at a time. With a feeling in his chest akin to reverence, he gathered up the precious burden and hurried back down the stairs.

"That was quick!" commented Her Ladyship. She took the heavy box into her lap. "Now, draw up your chairs, everyone. Let's see what we have here." Jason and Justin moved behind Lady Kitty's chair as the others drew in close. All waited, with bated breath.

Lady Kitty's knuckles showed white. A hiss of breath escaped her. "Just as I thought It won't budge. Locked, no doubt. Tight as a drum!"

There was a general sigh of disappointment from the onlookers. Lady Kitty looked up, and smiled cheerfully. "That's great! It's a good sign. There wouldn't be much point to locking up an empty box, now would there? I'm now firmly convinced that there's something of value inside. Dermot," she looked over her shoulder, "this is your department! Here, take it and see what you can do with it. Break it open, Dermot, if you have to. You'll not be finding a key to it, I'll be bound!"

Dermot rose from his chair and took the box from Her Ladyship. He sat down again before examining it carefully. He turned it over and over, with probing fingers. Finally he looked up. "If you'll excuse me, Milady, I'll run out to the car and get the tool box. I have something there that'll do the trick." Without waiting for an answer he got up and left the room.

Silence fell in the library.

"May I, please, Lady Kitty?" asked Jason, as he went to retrieve the box from Dermot's chair. He shook it gently, holding it to his ear as he did so. "There's nothing solid in there, I mean like jewels and things, I don't think. Could there be papers inside, Lady Kitty? I mean, did they even *have* paper, in those days?"

"Oh yes, Jason. Indeed they did. Paper was being made in England as much as a hundred years before Caroline's time. Of course it was scarce. It was mostly only used by the privileged classes, and the rich. There's no doubt that Caroline used it for her love-notes, and the like. Documents, however, were hand written on parchment, at that time. If there is anything in the box it's more likely to be on parchment. I don't know if paper would have survived that long. Anyway, we'll see. As far as I could tell the box does seem to be air-tight. If Dermot does his job well we'll find out, soon enough!"

"Don't you worry, Ma'am," chuckled Cassy. "That fella' could break his way out o' Mountjoy Jail!"

"Oh, I do hope you're right, Lady Kitty," said Jason. "It would be wonderful to see and touch something so old, and maybe something personal, I mean, like belonging to Lady Caroline. But maybe it'll all go to pieces like..." The boy stopped and flushed at the recollection of what he had done.

"Well, you'd have to be mighty careful," smiled Lady Kitty. "If the box is well made the papers inside may have survived well enough. That is," she reminded the boy, "if there are any papers or documents inside."

"Oh, I can hardly wait," breathed the boy.

Dermot returned. His step was uneven due to the heavy tool-box he was carrying. "Thought I'd better bring the whole thing," He commented breathlessly. He set the box down with a thud. "Is it opening the vaults o' the Bank of Ireland, you're at?" remarked Cassy. "If it's just a lock that needs pickin' I could ha' lent you one of me hairpins. It 'ud do the job as quick as all them hammers and things!"

"All right, Cassy!" interrupted Lady Kitty. "Dermot knows what he's doing. Let's not waste another minute. See what you can do, Dermot."

Silence fell on the small group. Four pairs of eyes followed Dermot's every move. The chauffeur was turning the tarnished box over and examining each side very carefully. He produced a hammer and a chisel from his tool-kit. "Sorry, Milady. There's no way into this box without usin' these." He brandished the light hammer and the chisel, as he spoke.

"That's perfectly all right, Dermot. Just do what you have to, to get it open for us. I'm sure you'll be as careful as you can. We're not at all sure what it contains, so don't shake it about more than you have to."

"You can depend on that, Ma'am."

The atmosphere in the old oak library grew electric, with the excitement of the onlookers. Dermot began. He prodded and tapped and grunted as he applied pressure with the chisel. His sinewed hands were straining. His brow was furrowed in concentration. Then, "It's yielding, Ma'am. I think it's... got it!" The man exclaimed triumphantly. The lid flew back, exposing the interior of the box to the light, and the air, for the first time in three centuries. It was an awesome moment. A wave of excitement broke loose. Lady Kitty raised her voice, to take charge of the situation. "Well done, Dermot! Cassy, throw a tray-cloth on the table. We'll put the box on the

table, there, before we even dare to take a look at what we've got!" The good lady's face was flushed, and her eyes were bright. "Come on, all of you! Gather round!"

Jason, and the others, needed no second bidding. In a moment the table was surrounded by eager faces. The mysterious box stood in the centre. The lid was closed over. Dermot had done his job well. It was scarcely strained.

Everyone waited for Lady O'Donnell to make the first move. She looked quickly round the assembled group. She noted Jason's parted lips, his charged colour, and the look of eager anticipation in his eyes.

"Jason," she said, "you may have the privilege of being the first. I give you this right as your due, for the part you have played in the finding of this box!" The boy shot her a look of amazement, so filled with gratitude that Lady Kitty was moved almost to tears. "Here you are, Jason," she said, in a husky whisper, as she slid the box over in his direction. "Mind how you go! Anything you find just lift it out, as gently as you can, and lay it on the table. No-body is to touch anything until I say so!"

With as much reverence as a priest at the Communion table, Jason slowly pushed back the metal lid. He leaned forward and peered inside. He was almost afraid to look! His heart was pounding in his ears. Silence, then, the excited cry, "Lady Kitty! There's a whole bunch of stuff, in here!" Jason's voice was shrill.

"Take each item out separately, and slowly," cautioned Lady Kitty. "If there are papers, rolled or folded, don't attempt to open them up, in the meantime."

"Don't worry! I learned my lesson."

"I believe you. Now then, what do we have, in there?"

"There are a couple of rolled sheets that might be documents of some kind. Wait! The main thing appears to be a big bunch of parchment sheets, all tied round." Jason's voice rose as he added, "I think there's some kind of writing on them!" The young boy took the items, one by one, and laid them down carefully. It took both his hands to extricate the parchments. The look of concentration on Jason's face, the lower lip clenched under his teeth, portrayed clearly the responsibility he felt in removing the last, and most significant item from its resting place.

"That's the lot," he said, at last. "Phew! I was so seared that it would all fall apart on me!"

"So, that's everything?" asked Lady Kitty, as Jason gently pulled over the lid of the strong-box.

"Yes, that's the lot. Just what's on the table, in front of you. But it looks like a great find, don't you think? Better'n we expected?"

"It's great, Jason There's a lot of fascinating material there, I'll be bound. Perhaps even something of Caroline's?" Lady Kitty stretched forward and pulled the large package of parchments towards her. She paused for a moment to produce her spectacles and adjust them on her nose. She examined the top sheet in the bundle, carefully. Finally she pushed it aside. Well, Jason. This doesn't look like anything that Lady Caroline would have written. It's a scholarly work, of some kind, I think." Lady Kitty fell into a moment's silence as she pondered over the ancient documents on the table before her, as if undecided on the best course of action. She straightened up. She had come to a decision. Jason," she said, "This is something I would like you to handle." She paused. The boy waited with an expectant expression on his face. "I am greatly impressed with the intelligent manner with which you have dealt with everything, so far. I know you have deep feelings about the castle, and its history. It's easy to tell you have also formed an affinity with Lady Caroline. That's understandable, since I went out of my way to encourage it by giving

you her room." Lady Kitty adjusted her spectacles and, looking straight at Jason, she declared, "I want you to accept the responsibility of going through all these papers and parchments. Perhaps I'm hoping that you'll be the first to establish a form of contact with that long lost lady. After all you've done I think it's the least you deserve!"

Jason's mouth fell open and his eyes grew rounder and wider by the moment, as Lady Kitty was speaking. He poured out a torrent of gratitude, mingled with pleasure and excitement. "Oh, thank you, Lady Kitty. I do so much appreciate it, if you're sure? It really is your privilege to be the one to find out about your ancestors, and things."

"Yes, I suppose it is! however, I have the right to put aside protocol in favour of one I have come to regard, and love as a grandson. Yes, my dear, I am certain that I want you to do the honours here. Don't you agree with me, Dermot?"

"It's a very nice gesture, Milady, very perceptive, if I may say so. It's a kind act befitting a gracious lady, such as your good self!"

"Thank you, Dermot." Lady O'Donnell was more than a little pleased by the compliment.

"Well, Ma'am," put in Cassy. "I have the vegetables to prepare and the roast to attend to, that is, if you be wantin' your dinner this side of midnight! I'll be off, now. Thank you, Milady, for allowing me to be a part of all this. It's been great excitement that these two fine young 'uns have brought to us, and no mistake."

"That's true, Cassy. And you'll always be a part of anything that happens in this castle. I'm glad we were able to share these goings on. Of course you missed out on the best part!"

"And what might that have been, Your Ladyship?" Gassy looked genuinely puzzled. Lady Kitty could hardly refrain from laughing as she replied, "Why Cassy, you missed a nice walk in the old tunnel!"

"Get on with you, Milady!" chortled Cassy, as she bustled out of the room.

"I'll be going, too, Your Ladyship. Unless of course there is anything more that I can do?"

"No, Dermot, thank you. You have done well by us this day. I appreciated your support. It was clever of you to get that box open with so little damage."

"It was a pleasure, Milady," Dermot replied. He stooped to retrieve his tool-box from beside the chair. "Good-evening, then, Ma'am."

Lady Kitty O'Donnell, and the two boys were alone in the library.

"Justin," Lady Kitty smiled, 'you've been uncommonly quiet all afternoon. Tell me, what do you think of all this, now? I do hope you didn't mind my giving your brother this favour?"

"Me? Mind? Why of course not! He's the one who has been the leader and everything. I'm the one who just went along for the ride. And sometimes against my better judgment, at that! I couldn't be happier for my brother. He deserves it, like you said."

"Bless you, dear boy! What a nice thing to say. Please don't think I love one more than the other. I think the two of you are just a wonderful pair. I envy your mother!" There was a moment's pause before Lady Kitty said, briskly, "Come along now, let's you and I take a turn in the rose garden, you can give me a helping hand. We can give Jason a bit of space! I think he'd like some peace and quiet to sort out all these papers and things." She smiled at Jason. "We'll be outside. You know where to find us if you want anything. Good luck with your task. I hope you find what you're hoping for!"

The next moment Jason was totally alone in a silence which almost unnerved him. He suddenly felt the full weight of the responsibility that had been given him. He sat for quite a while,

irresolute. He was almost afraid to begin, in case the task proved more than he could handle. He sat up and stiffened his shoulders as he reached out to the heavy bulky package of parchments. "I'd better start with these." he muttered to himself. "The papers look more fragile, I'll try these first, and see what happens.

Jason examined the parchments carefully. They remained firm in his grasp. 'Good,' he thought, 'at least they didn't fall to pieces like the scarf.' He quickly put that thought aside and concentrated on what he was doing. 'Well, here we go!' He pulled gently at the thong that bound the parchments. It yielded and then suddenly broke into several pieces. The stiff sheets spilled out but remained intact. The boy knew that the biggest hurdle was over. The secrets of the past lay before him! Jason was stimulated into action. His nervousness had left him. His eyes were to be the first to scan these pages since they were tied and sealed in the box, so long ago.



Chapter 17. A Voice From the Past

Jason laid the top page flat on the table, before him. The sheet was thicker than He had expected. He felt a sudden surge of disappointment well up, inside him, "Golly!" He gasped. "I'll never be able to make anything of all this!" His eyes had taken in some very strange writing. It was very neat, but it was covered in scrawls and loops. There were letter 'F's, all over the place!

Jason sat back in his chair, for a moment, to think. He was trying to remember what little he knew about ancient lettering and script. It occurred to him that this was the way that monks used to write. That was before printing was invented, and everything had to be carefully copied, by hand. He had heard of the beautiful work that the monks had done, in creating the Book of Kells, now a museum piece, in Dublin. He forced himself to calm down so that he could think more clearly. He remembered something else. "Yes!" he said to himself. "All the 'S's were made like an 'F'. That explains something."

With renewed determination he once more bent over the page before him. His interest quickened. He realized that if he took it slowly, and examined each letter carefully, he could make sense of what he was seeing. He knew it would be a task demanding the utmost patience. However, the realization that he could probably read, and understand, the written work in front of him, lifted his spirits so that he could have shouted for joy.

The young boy settled himself to the task in hand with energy and enthusiasm. He quickly gained confidence as his eyes grew accustomed to the quaint style. Soon he was able to deal with all the loops and curls, and other ancient styles.

Jason read aloud, his voice echoing strangely in the deserted library.

"I, Brother John Sebastian, being a member of the Holy Order of Saint Francis, to hereby make an accounting of the tragic happenings that have befallen our beloved country. This being the year of our Lord One Thousand Six Hundred and Fifty-eight. The sixth year of Ireland's persecution under Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate.

Set down, also here-in, is a recounting of the misfortunes of the family of the O'Donnells of Ballymore. As the Lord's humble servant I was saved from death by His Holy Grace. The Franciscan Abbey being sacked and plundered during the siege of Drogheda, by the English soldiers. All were put to the sword with the inhabitants of that town. May the name of Cromwell live in infamy, written in the blood of the Irish martyrs.

Given Sanctuary by His Grace the Earl of Ballymore, I, Brother John do pledge allegiance to him, and his family, for as long as the Lord wills that I shall live.

Untimely events and misfortune have fallen upon this place. May the Good Lord guide my hand in the telling, and be a witness to the truth of all that is set down here-in."

Jason paused for a moment. He knew it was important to understand and remember what he was reading. Presently, no doubt, he would be asked to give a detailed recounting of what he had learned from the parchments.

"So," the boy said to himself, "I was right. It was indeed written by a monk, as I suspected. He gives the year as 1658. Won't Lady Kitty be fascinated. It's all about what happened to the O'Donnells! Gee! This is really interesting." Jason took up the manuscript, and continued reading aloud, where he had left off.

"...If it is God's will these words will be made known to those who have reason or cause to be concerned with the lineage of the O'Donnell clan. It is with heaviness on my soul that I fear at this time for the continued survival of the ancient lineage of O'Donnell. It is mindful of my pledge of loyalty to those whom I have served that I hereby declare, as God is my witness, that I was witness to the birth of a man-child in this place. The fact has been attested to elsewhere in this accounting. The child survived. I had involvement in preserving the life of this child. God was a witness to the solemn pledge to his dear mother, as she breathed her last, that I would save her infant from the hands of the Cromwellians. This being done may her soul rest in eternal peace, Amen."

Jason put down the page he had finished. He guessed correctly, that this was end of the monk's introduction to the greater work, to follow.

The young Craig's excitement and curiosity knew no bounds. His pulses were racing as thoughts crowded his mind. Could it be that Caroline was the mother that the priest had mentioned? The baby had obviously survived, at first, anyway. But, even supposing that Caroline was the mother, who then, was the father of this baby? It grew more complicated. If Caroline had a child it figured that she was married. There had been no mention of a husband, in all that Lady Kitty had told him. Then again, did the child grow up? Maybe he married and had children. This would mean a whole new line of succession in the O'Donnell family. The possibilities seemed endless. Further speculation only made Jason's head swim. He shook himself free with the realization that the papers on the table before him might well contain some of the answers he needed.

Jason took the monk's opening testament and carefully placed it to one side. He tackled the work that Brother John Sebastian had dedicated to those who had reason to be interested in the history of the O'Donnell family. Jason couldn't have felt more keenly involved if Brother John had addressed the package to him, personally!

The young Craig's eyes had become well accustomed to the language and style used by the writer. The different spelling no longer bothered him. It was only a matter of moments before he was thoroughly absorbed and completely engrossed in the priest's story. Jason read on, unaware of his surroundings. The words and letters danced before his eyes. He became part of what he was reading. Without realizing it, he slipped easily into the past! Jason found himself on a grassy sward in front of a stone building. In his subconscious mind he knew that he recognized the place. He was standing in front of the old building down by the cove. It was undoubtedly the one that the O'Connor brothers had mentioned in their story. The boy had little time to dwell on the significance of his surroundings. The thump of horses' hooves warned him that a horseman was approaching. The sound of the horse and the jingle of harness roused the attention of someone in the house. The door flew open. A young woman, clad in a flowing cloak, stood on the threshold, shielding her eyes from the setting sun. She was looking eagerly in the direction of the approaching rider. In a moment the young woman gave a small cry of pleasure. Lifting her skirt, she ran lightly to the man, now dismounting a large grey horse. Jason's mouth went dry. It was the horse he had seen in the woods by the driveway. No doubt the rider was one and the same, the Galloping Major!

Before Jason's astonished gaze, the Major moved quickly forward to gather the young woman in his arms. There was a loving and tender embrace. As they met, the lady's hood became dislodged and fell back on her shoulders. A mass of dark, shining hair fell in loose coils about her head.

Jason trembled! His legs felt weak. The young woman who was standing, not twenty paces from him, was none other than the Lady Caroline!

With arms entwined the lovers strolled up the stone-flagged path leading to the house. Their happy laughter carried dearly on the cool breeze from the sea. The front door closed gently behind them. Everything grew still.

In the silence Jason could hear the grey horse cropping the fresh grasses. Suddenly, there was a sound, close beside him. It was a large log, settling in the great fireplace, in the library. Jason Craig was jolted back to reality. It was a moment before he could pull himself together and focus his thoughts on the present. He stood up and stirred the dying embers of the fire. Reaching into the log-basket he placed a couple of heavy pieces of wood at the back of the grate. The common task gave him a chance to sort out his thoughts. There was no doubt in the boy's mind that he had been a witness to a secret meeting between Lady Caroline O'Donnell, and the Galloping Horseman of Ballymore. What could it mean? Caroline cavorting with the sworn enemy of her people? 'Indeed,' thought Jason, 'cavorting' is scarcely the word for it. They were undoubtedly lovers!

As Jason made his way back to the table, he glanced at the clock. He was surprised to discover that it was less than an hour since the afternoon tea had been cleared. Such a lot had happened since he had begun his monumental task. He had learned so much, and yet so little. The young Craig had a strong impulse to run to the secluded rose-garden and blurt out his finding to the astonished Lady Kitty. Jason could picture her amazement at his extraordinary discoveries. What excitement there would be, and how many questions! Jason knew that, as yet, he didn't have any answers. He immediately made up his mind that he must read on. Perhaps he would learn more about the strange relationship which puzzled him so much.

Jason sat down. He pulled the papers towards him and sorted through them quickly. He needed to be sure he would begin reading again where he had left off. Satisfied, he once more gave his entire attention to the monk's script. As he became immersed in what he was reading, the walls of the library seemed to recede as they resolved into stone, lit by flaming torches. Jason became aware that he was standing in the long narrow chamber beneath the castle. It was not as he had seen it, earlier that day. The smell of resin filled his nostrils. The sconces along both walls were filled with burning light. The furniture had been re-arranged. The Baronial Hall had been converted into a chapel.

The wooden table was placed sideways, at the far end. It served as a makeshift altar. On it had been placed two gleaming brass candlesticks and a silver chalice. The centerpiece was a rough wooden cross. Its very simplicity created an aura of dignity, impossible to ignore. The wooden benches had been placed in rows, with an aisle down the centre.

Jason recognized, at once, that a religious ceremony was in progress. A robed figure stood, with his back to the altar, facing a young couple. The boy guessed, correctly, that a wedding was taking place in this underground secret chapel.

Jason had time to register the fact that the chapel was noticeably empty, save for the three participants. It occurred to him that it was, to say the least, a quiet wedding.

'More like a secret wedding' thought the boy.

Jason had already guessed that the robed figure, officiating, was Brother John. The bride and groom had their backs to him and their identity escaped him for the moment. It came as a considerable shock when the priest intoned the familiar words, "Wilt thou, William Hamilton, take thee, Caroline O'Donnell...."

Jason lost track of the proceedings as his mind raced wildly. Caroline and the Major becoming man, and wife? Impossible! The Major, a feared and hated Cromwellian Officer; Lady Caroline a staunch loyalist to the Irish cause. It didn't make sense. What could it mean?

Jason forced his attention back to the scene being enacted in front of him. The marriage service was concluding. Brother John's prayers, in Latin, were strange to him. In another moment, however, the priest made the sign of the cross above the kneeling couple. They rose, embraced, and kissed. The monk was smiling kindly. The wedding ceremony was over. Caroline and William Hamilton were united as man and wife.

The couple linked arms and walked slowly down the centre aisle. Caroline looked radiantly happy beside her handsome husband. Jason clearly remembered that the hall led directly to the foot of the stone steps leading to the castle. He decided to follow, if only long enough to get some clue as to why this marriage had been conducted in such secrecy. He still could not comprehend how such a politically ill-sorted couple could be joined in a marriage, apparently made in heaven.

Jason's confused thoughts came to a dramatic and abrupt halt. Something totally unforeseen occurred. Instead of tripping lightly up the steps to the castle above, the Major grasped the ring and heaved open the great oak door leading into the dark and cavernous tunnel. Reaching up he grabbed a flaming brand, from the wall. Bending low, he handed his wife through the entrance, following closely on her heels. They disappeared into the darkness lighted only by a flickering flame which cast strange shadows.

Without hesitation, Jason followed, keeping some distance behind, but with the light well in view. The downward slope increased. The air became fetid, and heavy. No time for speculation. Jason resolutely followed the flame, blinking in the distance. Apart from the occasional clink of a foot against stone, the silence was heavy.

The floor began to level out, somewhat. Jason hoped that the long trek through the tunnel must be nearly at an end. He was right. The Major, and Caroline, appeared to have stopped. A grating sound reached back, clearly, to Jason. A square of light illuminated the couple. In another moment the Major and his wife disappeared from view.

Jason did not hesitate. He quickly followed the newly-weds. He found a few wooden steps set into the wall. The trap-door above had been left open. In another moment Jason's head reached floor-level. His eyes took in his surroundings. It appeared to be the cellar of the house above. A number of sacks leaned against the dark stone walls. There was a smell of apples mixed with the spicy tang of onions' hanging in strings, from the rafters. The loving couple had made their way up into the house by a wooden staircase over against the wall. Even as Jason was about to follow he heard the thud of their footsteps in an upstairs room. The tinkle of laughter and the low rumble of the Major's voice reached him through the floor.

Jason was about to mount the stairs when he came up short. He stopped. He sniffed the air. There was no doubt about it' something was burning! He coughed. The scene about him receded and dissolved. Jason found himself once more seated at the table in the library. His eyes smarting. A log had fallen from the fire in the hearth. The blue smoke was spiralling upwards and filling the

room. In an instant the boy grabbed the tongs and heaved the burning wood back onto the fire. The air in the library was heavy with the fumes. Jason opened the door into the hall, and a window opposite. The through draft caressed his face. It felt cool and refreshing.

For a long time Jason remained at the window, looking out on the terraced lawn. Thoughts were racing through his head. What he had been reading was so real. The boy felt as though he were in limbo. He had the eeriest feeling that he belonged to the world of Lady Caroline and Major Hamilton, and that he would awaken at any moment from the dream of the library in Lady Kitty's castle.

It was the breath of fresh air and the scent of new-mown grass that brought Jason back to reality. He was more than ever conscious of all that he had seen, and heard.

The grandfather clock in the hall whirred, and struck five.

'Good!' said Jason to himself. 'There's enough time to get a fair bit more done. I should be able to do another hour or so before the evening meal. Lady Kitty, and Justin, have been very tactful and considerate in giving me the library to myself like this. I should make the most of it.'

Jason Craig sat down and pulled the parchments towards him. He had not been reading for more than a few minutes when his pulses quickened. He knew he was onto something really significant. The boy's eyes were burning in his head as the startling facts emerged from the page before him.



Chapter 18. Major Hamilton: The Truth is Told

I, BROTHER JOHN SEBASTIAN, do hereby bear witness to the marriage between WILLIAM HAMILTON and CAROLINE O'DONNELL, in the year of our Lord 1,666. The deed of marriage is so recorded.

It was Lady Caroline's wish that the marriage, and the true identity of her husband, Major William Hamilton, remain a closely guarded secret, for as long as there was a threat from the Cromwellian soldiers at Ballymore. If it became known to the English forces that Major Hamilton was a secret agent, his arrest and execution would follow immediately. Lady Caroline, also, would be taken, as his accomplice. After the wedding ceremony I was sworn to silence, on my oath.

Time has passed. There can now be no threat to the lives of this brave couple. I am, therefore, relieved of the burden of hiding the secret. It may now be revealed. May God be my witness and my right hand, as the truth about Major William Hamilton is hereby recorded. It has been believed that William Hamilton was an English Officer loyal to the service of Cromwell. He has been held responsible for many acts against the Irish patriots. He is said to have been greatly feared. This is a wrong, which must be righted, in the sight of God and man. No man, such as he, should have to wear the dread cloak, that the Irish wove for him. Let it be known, henceforth: Major William Hamilton was, at heart, no Godforsaken Cromwellian soldier. It has been for the love of God, and Ireland, that he took on this identity. I swear to it that William Hamilton is as brave an Irish Patriot that ever graced this fair land. There are scores of our noble countrymen who are living, free, in a far country, thanks to the secret work of this man. Let not it be written in history that the hands of William Hamilton are stained with Irish blood. I set down, here-in, the true facts concerning the birth, life, and tragic death, of one of Ireland's truest, bravest, and most noble sons.

Jason let out a deep breath. So much had suddenly become clear to him. He felt as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He knew, now, that his belief in the Galloping Major had not been mis-placed. The Major was no traitor to the Irish cause. Jason felt comforted and at peace with himself. However, there were still many unanswered questions that plagued the boy. He was confident, however, that the good priest would provide him with the knowledge he needed. Jason had no hesitation in burying himself in his task, once more. A quick glance showed that Brother John had taken it upon himself to explain the political situation in Ireland as it related to William Hamilton and his true Irish parentage. Jason's eyes skimmed rapidly over the manuscript seeking out the material covering his interest in the Major, and Lady Caroline. He learned, first about the troubled times in Ireland during the sixteen hundreds.

"William Hamilton was the only child of a wealthy Catholic landowner. He was born on the family estate in the northern part of Ireland about 1633, as near as may be determined. It was not long after the crowning of King Charles, the First, to the throne of England. These were troubled times across the land. The king made many promises of good faith to the Catholic landowners in Ireland, in exchange for large sums of money. King Charles sorely needed to re-fill the nigh empty coffers, in London. The Irish landlords were only too pleased to offer loyalty to the new king. They had fared very poorly under his ancestors, the Tudors.

Charles did not keep his promises, once he had their money. The Irish were furiously angry at their betrayal. Fierce rebellions broke out across the land. This disturbed King Charles. He was greatly put out at this turn of events. He selected one of his trusted noblemen, Thomas Wentworth, The Earl of Stafford, to go to Ireland. His task was to quell the riots and re-establish law and order. Thomas Wentworth set sail for Ireland in 1632.

King Charles had made an unfortunate choice. Thomas Wentworth hated the Catholics. He took advantage of his mission to make them suffer as much as possible. To Sir Thomas, all Catholics

were branded as traitors and rebels, without question. He believed that there could be no peace until they were all destroyed.

'Now it happened at this time, that one of the most bitter and most active of the Irish Rebels, was the father of the infant William. Sean O'Brian, and his wife, Mary were not happy that the child was born to them in such stormy times. They were very much aware of the danger that surrounded them. It was no place to rear a child. The hostility of the Earl of Stafford towards the O'Brians, was a well established fact.

It was under these circumstances the baby William first saw the 'light of day.'

'In addition to the threat posed by the hostility of Sir Thomas Wentworth, the O'Brians faced danger of attack from the Protestant English settlers. They called themselves 'Puritans'. The Catholics suffered many a bloody deed under them, in the name of religion.'

'Sean O'Brian knew, full well, that It was only a matter of time before he, and his family, fell victim to one or other of these bloody-thirsty groups. He begged his wife to take the infant and flee to Scotland, and safety. Mary, however, had other ideas. She was as staunch and loyal to her husband as she was to her beloved country. She swore she would never leave, preferring to die with him, if necessary, with a sword in her hand. All Sean's pleadings were in vain. Mary stayed! However, her loyalty to her husband did not rule out her concern for the safety of her infant son. She made secret plans for William. He was sent, forthwith, to her Uncle, in Scotland.'

'And so it was, that the baby William was smuggled out of the country on a small fishing smack, in the dead of night. The infant left his land wrapped only in a blanket. He carried no form of identification. English spies were everywhere. Mary had taken great care to protect the child's identity. Her uncle was asked that he should keep William's background a secret at least until he came of age. It was understood that, in the event of the untimely death of his parents, the child should be raised in Scotland, unaware of the Irish heritage. So it was done.

Hardly was William safely out of the country when the dreaded deed befell them. Sean O'Brian and his beloved wife, Mary, were taken by surprise, and brutally slain. The entire household was massacred and the building torched. William O'Brian, son of Sean, and Mary O'Brian became the adopted son of Robert and Ellen Hamilton.

During his formative years young William Hamilton knew nothing of his Irish ancestry. He knew no parents other than Robert, and Ellen. They loved him and nurtured him, as their own.'

'William grew into a handsome lad. He became aware of the troubles in England, at an early age. He was greatly disturbed by the execution of King Charles.

Sometimes William would stand on the cliffs and look across the sea to a blue smudge on the horizon. It was Ireland, Robert Hamilton had told him. At the very mention of Ireland the young boy would feel the blood surge through his veins. There came a wildness to his thoughts that he could not understand.

As William grew to manhood he would spend more and more time gazing across the waters to that far off land. It seemed to draw him, like a magnet. Sometimes, round the fire, in the evenings, he would ask questions about the land across the sea. But somehow, the answers were always unsatisfactory, or excuses. Robert and Ellen would manage to turn the subject round to

the troubles in England.

It was on just such a night that William heard the name, 'Oliver Cromwell, for the very first time. He little knew that, before he was much older, he would become closely acquainted with that famous soldier.'

'William became more and more eager to hear all he could about the New Model Army's exploits. He became particularly interested when he learned that Cromwell had become involved in the land across the sea.

Stories of terrible massacres reached his ears. He was greatly saddened, he knew not why.'

'One day, William's father took his aside and said to him, "Tomorrow, my son, you will be twenty-one. It is time for you to plan for your future. We shall have a long discussion. There is much that you do not know that you should learn.

William was anxious to pursue the conversation further, then and there. His father said, mysteriously: "Tomorrow, my son!"

'The following morning, after breakfast, Robert summoned his adopted son to the library. William sensed tension in the air, as he followed his mother into the oak-panelled room. As soon as they were comfortably seated, Robert cleared his throat. He turned to face the handsome young man who had been a son to him for almost twenty-one, years. A lump rose in the elderly man's throat at the realization of what he had to do. He greatly feared that William would rise up in anger at the deception that had been played upon him. He dreaded the thought that the affection and deep trust that existed between them might be lost to him, for ever. Ellen's face was pale. Robert knew she was sharing his anxiety.

After an awkward silence, Robert began. "Please, William, be kind enough to hear me out. There is something of the utmost significance that you must learn. This is going to be very difficult for me. I must ask you to let me finish what I am about to tell you, before you say anything. The time for that will come later."

"Go ahead, Father, I promise not to interrupt." William's face wore an expression of concern and curiosity, as he waited, in silence.

Robert Hamilton began hesitantly, at first, but gaining in confidence as the story of William's birth, and true parentage emerged.

William sat, as one transfixed. The look of curiosity left his face. It quickly changed to one of amazement and disbelief. His healthy complexion went from crimson to a muddy palor. True to his word he never uttered a sound. Ellen, too, remained silent. She was studying her son's face. She tried to read into it the emotions which were engulfing him'.

'Robert spared nothing. He went on to describe the terrible death of his true parents. At this information William's colour returned. His face darkened with anger. The muscles of his jaw tightened. Still he did not speak. His eyes grew black. His whole bearing had changed.

Ellen grew concerned. Her son had all the appearance of a panther, coiled to spring, in unleashed fury!'

'Presently, Robert coughed gently. He forced a wan smile as he said, "Well lad, that's the whole story. I give you credit, and I thank you, for not interrupting."

'Robert and his wife studied William's face as they sought to learn his re-action to such startling news.

William took a deep breath, as if to loose the tension that had seized his entire body. For a long moment he could not trust himself to speak. Then he said, "My very dear Mother, and Father, may I please continue to call you that? What you have told me in no way lessens the deep affection I have, and always will have, for you both." Impulsively, he rose, somewhat stiffly. He crossed the room and embraced his mother. He kissed her, gently, on the tearstained cheek. Then he went to his father. He laid a warm and affectionate hand on the old man's shoulder. "I love you, too, Father!" '

'The strain was gone. The atmosphere lightened. Tears of joy flowed freely down Ellen's face. Robert's voice was husky, as he clasped William's hand. "Thank you, son!" He said, simply.'

'William returned to his chair. He sat down heavily. "Isn't it strange," he mused, "how I have always had a feeling for the Irish people and their cause. I've always been an admirer of Cromwell's, but I have never been able to applaud, or accept his exploits over the water. So much, that has puzzled me for years, now becomes abundantly clear to me. I thank you, Father; for telling me all this. It can't have been easy for you. You should have known that I would never have renounced you both as my parents. If I may have the privilege of calling myself a Hamilton, for always, I shall be proud, and happy!'"

'Robert and Ellen made no reply, but their smiles of pleasure were meaningful.'

' "Of course, you do understand, that the news of my Irish background gives me an entirely new outlook on my future? For a long time it has been my intention to enlist, and serve in the New Model Army, under Cromwell. I have been an admirer of his skills and daring, as a soldier. But, even less, now, can I condone his actions!" William gave a hollow laugh. "I must have time to re-think. I should tell you, right at this moment I should like to seize a mighty sword. I would dash to Ireland and lop the head off every English soldier in sight!"

Robert and his wife registered concern.

"Oh, don't worry, dear ones. I know it would not be too long before it was my own head that rolled. I should accomplish little by an untimely death. It would be an ill-fitting return for my Irish parents' concern for saving my life, to say nothing of the loving care I have received, from you both. I do not intend to throw away my life, recklessly." William paused, and added slowly, "I shall have to be a great deal more subtle than that!"

"Do you still intend, then, to join Cromwell's forces?" Robert asked.

William didn't answer immediately. "Only if it serves my purpose," he said quietly, as if his thoughts were elsewhere. "Tell you what, though," he brightened up, "I'm going to enjoy my birthday. I'm not going to rush into anything. We'll talk again, tomorrow. I'll give you my decision then."

The Hamilton family linked arms. Laughter echoed round the hallway as the happy group left the library.'

'It was later that the full import of William's decision became known, to a very select few. From the very moment that he had learned of his Irish heritage, he had been determined to join the Irish cause. He had no doubt where his loyalties lay. He spent much of his time in planning how

he could do the most good. He intended to help as many of his people as possible, whilst minimizing the risk of his own death. Not that William entertained fear of death, itself, but he considered that Ireland already had too many dead heroes.'

'Some days after his fateful twenty-first birthday, William broke the news to his parents. He had made up his mind that the first step in his plan, was to enlist in Cromwell's army. By deception he hoped to gain the reputation of being a staunch Catholic hater. He would present himself as an enthusiastic supporter of all Cromwell's deeds of cruelty in his suppression of the Irish. William anticipated that, in this way, he would gain the attention of his superiors. His ultimate goal being a commission, and a posting overseas. He would return to the land of his birth in the cover of a Cromwellian soldier.'

'Once William's mind was made up, he wasted no more time. He took a long and loving farewell of his foster parents. He renewed his pledge of loyalty, and his everlasting gratitude for all that they had done for him.'

'William Hamilton was soon inducted in the army. He lost no time. He began by making extravagant remarks about the 'dreadful Irish' when carousing in the taverns, with his army comrades. He went on to brag about he would like to join the forces in Ireland. He would show little mercy to its inhabitants.

It wasn't long before William's efforts were successful. Word soon reached the ears of his superiors, in London. They believed that they had found an ideal candidate for their campaign in Ireland. It was shortly after his twenty-second birthday that William received his commission. A posting to the garrison town of Ballymore, quickly followed.'



Chapter 19. The Shamrock

'Major Hamilton was already believed to be a fierce enemy of the Irish even before his arrival in that small town. This suited William's plan only too well. He knew he would have to earn the trust and respect of the garrison's commanding officer. His task was going to be difficult enough to offer aid to his Irish friends, as a secret agent, under the very noses of the English soldiers. It was essential to the success of his mission that he be accepted at headquarters as a dedicated cavalry officer.'

'The Major was always the first to volunteer for duty when action against the rebels was being planned. In this way he was always the first to learn what was afoot. On his swift grey horse he managed, many times, to be a step ahead of the English soldiers. He gave warning of impending danger to many an Irish family. To confound the English, and to cheer the patriots, William Hamilton would scrawl on a written message, or scrape in the dirt, with his riding crop. The emblem he left was a three leafed plant. It was the shamrock.'

Jason dragged himself back from the world of Major Hamilton and the troubles that beset the Irish. He rose, and stretched. It took him a few moments to readjust to his surroundings. A glance at the clock on the massive mantel revealed that it had taken him only a matter of minutes to span nearly a quarter of a century. Looking down at the parchments on the table Jason estimated that he was more than half-way through his assignment. He spoke aloud, to himself.

"Well, I guess I should make the effort to finish up this lot. Just think of all the news I have for Lady Kitty. It's incredible. But it all fits. The Galloping Major was really a spy for the Irish. Everyone believed he hated the Catholics, and was out to destroy them. All the time he was doing the exact opposite. It's just like the 'Scarlet Pimpernel' story."

Jason sat down and shuffled the parchment sheets. Before he settled down to read, he was thinking, 'We know that the Major was murdered, and by Irish rebels. How unfair! It's no wonder he haunts the place.' Jason's eyes rested for a moment on the top sheet before him. It was the priest's recounting of his first meeting with Major Hamilton, under somewhat dramatic circumstances.

"The years had passed and the tragedy of the O'Brians had become another blood-stained page in history.'

'One fine day, Brother John was making his way on foot into the town of Ballymore. He came upon a pitifully thin donkey, heavily overloaded. The poor animal's legs were almost buckled. The suffering beast came to a quivering halt. Its rough, red-faced owner raised a stout stick and attacked it with heavy blows. It brought great screeches from the creature's foam-flecked jaws. Without hesitation Brother John accosted the man. He grabbed hold of the upraised arm that was wielding the cudgel. "Hold!" he cried. "Enough!"

"Mind your own business!" retorted the man. "This animal is a lazy good-for-nothing. It has a lesson to learn, and I'm the one that'll teach it." The man shook the priest free. Once more he rained blow after blow on the poor donkey. Its front legs had folded. It was kneeling on the roadway. Its flanks were heaving.

"Stop it, I said!" Once again the robed figure laid a hand on the angry farmer. "Stop it, for the love of God, man!"

The man turned a pair of blood-shot eyes on the priest. "Cease your interference in matters of no concern to you, or you'll get this staff about your shoulders!" As he spoke he raised the weapon and brandished it, menacingly, above the priest's unprotected head. Suddenly a great clatter of hooves sounded, close by. In the same instant a grey horse reared up. A commanding voice rang out. "What goes here? Would you have the blood of a priest on your hands?"

The farmer slowly lowered his arm and looked sullen and shame-faced. In that same instant the donkey sank to the ground and lay still. The horseman was out of the saddle in an instant. He knelt by the head of the outstretched animal. "Well, my man, you'll trouble this wretched creature no more. This animal is dead! By the look of things I'd say its better off than being a beast of burden to the likes of you. Now, you go along about your business. I may decide to despatch you, here and now, beside the animal you murdered!" The soldier drew his sword to lend weight to his threat. The man needed no further persuasion. He made off, down the road, muttering curses, as he disappeared.

The monk eyed the soldier as he spoke. "Far be it for me to admit that I could be beholden to one whose sword is already stained with Irish blood, but 'tis thankful I am that you came along. I fear I might have ridden to meet my maker on the back of that poor donkey." The priest indicated the motionless carcass.

The soldier smiled. He lifted his helmet from his shoulders to wipe his brow with his free hand. The bright blue eyes bored keenly into Brother John's face, as he said, "Well now, you wouldn't be the first to ride to glory on the back of a donkey, now would you?"

Brother John stood as if spellbound. The years seemed to fall away. He found himself standing beside just such another as the soldier before him. This time, however, he was gazing into the face of his beloved friend, Sean O'Brian. At length he pulled himself together. As soon as he could find his voice he said, "I thank you, Sir, who-ever you may be, for you do not have the looks or the ill-manners of your countrymen in arms." A moment's silence fell between them. The priest dared to continue. "Good Sir, would you take offense if I told you that you have the face of an Irishman, true, and brave, that I knew once. God rest his soul."

A strange look crossed the handsome features of the soldier, as he asked, quietly, "And who might that have been, my good friend? Be not afraid to speak out."

"Many years ago, nigh on a quarter of a century has passed since I stood before a noble Irishman by the name of Sean O'Brian. He was later brutally slain, not far from these parts. 'Tis to him, Sir, you bear an uncanny likeness, begging your pardon for the liberty."

"There is no liberty taken here, my friend. The man you speak of was my father. I am the natural son of Sean, and Mary O'Brian."

"Then you must know the true circumstances surrounding your birth, and your exile to Scotland?" said Brother John, recovering from his astonishment. "It was your humble servant here who placed you aboard the vessel."

"Aye, I know of it!" The handsome soldier's face darkened as he went on, "I have come back to Ireland only to avenge their deaths!"

"B-But," faltered the priest, "You are well known in these parts as a dedicated officer in the English army. How can it be that...."

"Look you here, at this, my friend," interrupted the soldier. He traced a pattern in the dust with the tip of his sword.

The priest's eyes opened wide, and his mouth dropped open. He recognized the emblem at his feet. It was the shamrock!

"You, the Shamrock?" he managed, at last.

"I am, and there's few that know it, and that's too many! Your very life depends on your keeping this secret. Mine, too." added the Major, with a laugh. "I need scarcely demand an oath of silence from you. I do insist, however, that you share this knowledge with no-one. You will not inform the Earl, or any member of his family. They may be told, but all in good time, and only when I say so. You do accept this pledge, do you not?"

"I accept it, with my life, Sir. You have my word on it!" Brother John hesitated a moment before he added, "I would have you meet my master, the Earl, though. He is loyal to the Irish cause. He has helped many to avoid capture. You would find in him a brave and honourable ally.

"You are not telling me something that I do not already know," smiled the Major. "I have been biding my time to share confidences with him. It but needed the right opportunity for me to visit him without arousing comment in the district." Major Hamilton added slowly, as if in thought, "Methinks the time has come. This meeting of ours may give me just the excuse I've been waiting for. Yes! Brother John, tomorrow I shall be calling at the castle."

"Sir; under what cover, may I be so bold as to ask?"

"You may ask, indeed, but I shall not tell you. You cannot repeat what you do not know. All things must be kept secret." The soldier cocked his head as he quickly sheathed his sword.

"Listen! There are horses approaching. We must not be seen together. Quick, make for the trees. I'll distract them until you're safely away. God go with you, Brother John!" The elderly priest disappeared into the thick undergrowth. The Major turned, as if intent on examining the carcass on the roadway. The wicker panniers had split open. The contents were scattered about the road. He made an interesting discovery just as a posse of soldiers reined up alongside.

"That brings you here?" demanded the Major.

"An informant, Major. We were advised that there was smuggling taking place in this area. We are here to investigate, Sir!"

"The information is correct, Sergeant. Ask your men to dismount. There is work to be done here."

Soon the six men had dragged the lifeless donkey to the side. They started to gather up the debris. "Sir," said one, "these kegs contain brandy if I'm not mistaken?"

"Quite right, Corporal. You are not mistaken. Finest brandy it is. My nose tells me true. It's plain that the kegs were well concealed beneath those vegetables." The Major indicated the pile of potatoes, onions, cabbages, and other produce, at the side of the road by the body of the donkey.

"Very good, then. gather up the containers. Report in immediately to the quartermaster. Be sure to get a tally. I shall hold each of you responsible. Send back a cart and have this unfortunate animal removed from here." The Major did not wait to see his orders carried out. With a curt nod to the sergeant he mounted his horse and rode off without looking back.'



Chapter 20. Lady Caroline Gets Involved

Heavy knocking on the great oak door of the castle echoed through the hallway. Lady Caroline heard it. She left her room and made her way to the head of the stairs, the better to see who the caller might be. An elderly footman crossed the hall, in answer to the summons.

As the door swung open there stood, on the threshold, an officer of the Cromwellian army, in full uniform. The footman bowed. The soldier stepped into the hall.

"I am here to see the priest, Brother John. Please be good enough to advise him that Major William Hamilton wishes to speak with him." The voice rang through the castle in a tone accustomed to command. The servant bowed, and retreated.

"And may I ask, Sir, what your business is with our chaplain, Brother John? If it is spies you seek here you'll not find them in our chapel, I assure you!" Caroline's voice was as cold as an icy wind. Her eyes flashed.

"It is no business that need concern Your Ladyship." The Major spoke politely but the rebuke was evident.

"Then, whatever business that may be, about which I need not concern myself, I pray you conduct it briefly, and be gone from here. I do not have it in my mind to make you, or your kind, welcome here!" Caroline turned, in a flurry of skirts. She was about to make a dramatic retreat when the calm voice reached her.

"And, Milady, may I presume to ask, what kind that might be?"

Caroline's colour rose. She quickly turned with a sharp answer already to her lips. She was prevented from uttering by the abrupt arrival of Brother John. To her discomfort the Major bowed to her. A smile hovered round his mouth. "Your Servant, Ma'am!" Then he turned quickly to meet the priest, hurrying towards him.

"Major Hamilton, you asked to see me?" Brother John pretended surprise.

"Yes, Father. Regarding the incident of a donkey, dead at the hands of its owner I believe? You were a witness?"

"That I was, Sir, to my distress. What is it that you need from me?"

"I am here to gather further information on this matter. The man was a smuggler, we believe." Brother John's look of surprise was genuine. Major Hamilton continued. He was speaking slowly and clearly. Lady Caroline was making no attempt to conceal the fact that she was eavesdropping, on the conversation. "Is there anywhere I can get a detailed statement from you. I intend to take notes."

"Come this way, Sir, if you please." Brother John led the way. The soldier followed him, with boots smacking on the tiled floor.

It was not many days later that a courier arrived at the castle. He was the bearer of a beautifully engraved invitation. It was addressed to the Earl, the Countess, and the Lady Caroline. Caroline was with her father when it was presented to him, on a silver salver by a footman.

The Earl opened it at once. His colour darkened. "The sheer audacity of the rogue! How dare he attempt to introduce himself into this family by assuming we would even consider accepting such an invitation!"

"An invitation? What are you talking about, Father? who is this rogue you speak of?"

"It's the English soldier, Major Hamilton, you know the one. The people call him 'The Galloping Major.' He's always chasing after our unfortunate countrymen, on that white horse of his! And he

has the nerve to presume we would accept his invitation to the Ballymore Garrison Ball, next week. Such impudence!" The Earl puffed angrily, as he threw down the card. Caroline quietly retrieved it.

Lady Caroline was silent for a moment. She was confused by her feelings. The name 'William Hamilton' had sent her pulses racing, she knew not why. She laid a hand on her father's arm.

"Father; dear, do not upset yourself. I understand that it would be against all your principles to agree to such a hold request. Please consider; for a moment... "

"Consider; you say? What's to consider?"

"I pray you, let me finish. I was about to suggest that we should, perhaps, pretend friendship with these people. If we could win their trust we would be placing ourselves in a much better position to help our oppressed countrymen. There's no knowing what useful bits of information we might pick up, in casual conversation."

"Daughter, dear, there's truth in what you say." The Earl spoke carefully, after thinking for a moment. "Yes, maybe it could work to our advantage. But see here, Caroline, such a caper is not for you! I shall accept this invitation on behalf of my wife and myself." He looked about him.

"Now, where did I put that card?" Caroline said nothing. Her heart was heavy with disappointment. She rallied. "Dear Father. This is my idea." She smiled at him. "Do you really think that you, or Mother; would be successful in winning the confidence of these dashing young cavalymen? And besides," she smiled artfully, "am I not pretty enough to capture the attention of the handsome young officers?"

"I can't deny it," her father admitted. He had also recognized the courage and the determination of a true O'Donnell. "I know it's useless to argue with you, once your mind is made up!" '

'The day of the hall finally arrived. Caroline was in a flutter of nerves, all day. "I hate him! I despise him!" She kept muttering to herself, over and over.

As she descended the stairs, her parents were already waiting in the hall. Their exclamations of delight at her beauty and poise, made her feel good.'

'The livened footman announced the O'Donnells as they entered the ballroom. Caroline tried to keep calm and composed, with her eyes steady. She had difficulty in controlling them. In spite of her efforts, they darted, hither and thither, seeking out the broad shoulders of the man she was trying to persuade herself that she hated, and despised. Suddenly, a voice at her elbow almost brought her to confusion. Turning quickly she found herself staring' straight into the clear blue eyes that had mocked her, at their first encounter.

"Lady Caroline," the Major was saying. "I am glad you decided to come. I didn't think you would. I felt sure you would not want to dance with the likes of us?" Once again, the eyes were mocking but the warm smile gave the lie to malicious intent. The Major continued, "But since you did decide to come, would you give some consideration to dancing' with the likes of me?" Caroline didn't dare trust herself to speak for a moment, whilst she gathered her scattered wits about her. She merely nodded, in assent, and followed her escort onto the ballroom floor.'

'Caroline's practicality and common sense came to her rescue. She realized that she was dancing with an arch enemy of her people. The thought calmed her. The Major's manners, and his dancing, were faultless. Under any other circumstances Caroline was already aware that she would be completely under the spell of this handsome, charming man. She kept the conversation aloof. She avoided meeting his eyes, as much as possible. But she had all the instincts of an

intelligent young woman. She felt it, strongly, that Major Hamilton was deeply attracted to her. The thought frightened her. Caroline felt that she must hurt, and embarrass this man. She must not allow him to impose on her vulnerability. She said, quite suddenly, "Major, does it not bother you at all to be dancing with me when you have the blood of my countrymen on your sword?"

"I am a soldier; My Lady. Would I be any the less to blame if the blood of my sword, as you put it, were that of an Englishman, or a Frenchman? And is it not possible, to say the least, that some day it will be my blood, on the sword of an Irish rebel?"

"I wish you would not call them that!" Caroline countered, hotly. "To us, and this is our land, they are true patriots. They deserve the dignity of the term."

"I shall endeavor to remember; in future, since the word offends you."

"Tell me, Major; why did you come to Ireland, in the first place? You say you are a soldier. Surely there is fighting elsewhere which is not motivated by religion. Some other place might have profited by the weight of your sword?"

"A soldier takes his orders without question. It's a simple matter of fact that I was ordered here. I do no more than my duty."

"From all accounts that is not so. You are more than merely conscientious. You have a reputation that does you no credit. You are greatly feared in these parts."

"Oppressors are always feared and hated by the oppressed. This is a fact of life, of death, and of war!"

Caroline could think of no suitable reply so she remained silent. A mischievous smile hovered round the corners of her lips as she formed the question, "Major, you have been chasing after a man who calls himself The Shamrock, is that not so? You haven't been able to catch him? What a wonderful fellow he must be. How brave, and how clever, to be able to outwit a soldier like yourself, sworn to do his duty." She laughed outright. Then she added, "Now that's what I call a man, the kind I was referring to, earlier. So you see, Major; I cannot accept the attention of murderers, such as yourself, acting as soldiers, using duty, as an excuse for the shedding of Irish blood. As for the Shamrock, I defy you to ever catch him!"

As Caroline finished speaking she grabbed her skirts. She made a move to leave. She was a little embarrassed by her outburst. She knew that she had allowed her tongue to run away with her. She only wished, now, to make a quick retreat, to salvage her dignity. To her surprise, however; she felt a restraining hand on her arm. It was gentle, but none-the-less firm. Caroline looked at the gloved hand and then into the face of the Major. "Sir?" she said coldly.

"Forgive me, My Lady. Please do not leave. There is something that you should know." He removed his hand from her arm. Caroline merely nodded. "Very well, Major. If you have something to tell me, that, as you say, I should know, I confess I am curious. I shall remain long enough to learn what it is. I shall not take kindly, however; to hearing about your exploits in dealing with my countrymen.

"Would you be willing to listen if I am to mention the exploits of the Shamrock, then?" The Major's eyes had a curious twinkle in them as he faced his companion. His remark met with a short laugh.

"You, talk about the Shamrock? That indeed would be interesting! Pray admit that you are driven into a frenzy of frustration by the man. I would certainly like to have you explain how it is that he slips through your net, time after time. The daring, and the audacity of the Shamrock never falls to intrigue me. I am willing to listen to anything you may have to say about him."

"What would you say, Milady, if I was to tell you that I have certain knowledge of the Shamrock's whereabouts, at this very moment? Furthermore, I know him to be in grave danger,

very grave danger, indeed!"

Caroline's face grew pale. "Sir; if, as you say, the Shamrock is in real danger, danger from whom? It is yourself that he has to fear? You say you know his whereabouts. I don't understand...."

The Major interrupted, "No, Milady, the Shamrock has nothing to fear from me." He paused and looked into Caroline's eyes as he said, slowly, "Lady Caroline, the grave danger the Shamrock faces, is from you!"

Caroline flushed, in confusion. "Sir, you speak in riddles. What possible harm can come to him at my hands? I don't even know the man!"

The Major's face broke into a smile. Still looking into her dark eyes, he said, "It's his heart, Milady! He's in grave peril of losing it!"

Caroline's flush deepened at the intimacy of the Major's gaze. It sent her nerves tingling. "Good Sir, you toy with me! You play with words I do not understand! You speak in riddles! Pray have done. Be good enough to speak plainly or this conversation is ended this minute!"

The Major broke his steadfast gaze. The smile left his face. He grew serious. "Forgive me, My Lady. I am guilty of an unpardonable jest. I will speak plainly. Please be careful not to make a sign of any kind that what I tell you has disturbed you. There are spies everywhere, even here!"

"Spies? Here? What have we to fear?"

"My Lady, please offer me your assurance that you will remain calm. May I entrust my very life to you? I place it, with my heart, in your fair hands."

"I still do not understand. However, you have my assurance that I shall not cry out. Sir, pray continue. You will come to no harm through any action of mine."

"You said, a moment ago that you did not know the man they call the Shamrock?"

"I did, and I spoke the truth. I do not know this man."

"You are mistaken, Lady Caroline! You have been at his side all evening!" The Major paused.

"My dear, I, I am the Shamrock!"

Caroline's face flamed crimson then paled. "Sir, you jest again. How dare you! Tis ill-timed and in poor taste..."

"Do you love and trust your Father Confessor, Brother John?"

The question came as a surprise. Caroline's anger cooled. "Of course! I have known him all my life. Why do you ask?"

"He alone, knows the secret of my identity. Ask him. He will gladly confirm what I say. He will tell you how he plucked me from the carnage that destroyed my parents and my home. He sent me, safely, to Scotland. I was reared as William Hamilton. My true name is William O'Brian. I am the son of a noble Irish family, Sean O'Brian, and his wife, Mary. They were brutally murdered for their belief. I have come home to avenge their deaths. Lady Caroline, I am the Shamrock!"

'Caroline's eyes were wide. Her mouth fell open, but she made no sound. Quickly regaining her composure she said, "I have little need to seek confirmation of your disclosure, Major. I have had the strongest feeling all evening that you were not what you would have everyone believe. I am honoured that you have shared your secret with me and taken me into your confidence. You have my word, should my life depend upon it, I shall never reveal your identity."

The Major gently took Lady Caroline's hand, as he said, "Your reputation as a brave and courageous woman is only exceeded by your beauty! I should not have revealed myself to you if

I did not know that I could trust you with my life." He waited for a moment before he said, "Milady, there is something I must ask you. I have known for some time that you, and your father, have been actively engaged in helping the, er, patriots. May I presume that you will help me with my endeavors to the same end?"

"Of course we shall help you. In any way we can." Caroline's eyes were bright with excitement. "I was hoping it would be so. Brother John has told me that there is a secret passage-way leading from the castle to a house, down by the cove. There is also a branch tunnel to the caves, by the shore, I understand. This being so, it would certainly help me, in my plans. However, it is with some reluctance that I accept your offer of help. I do not wish to bring you, or your family, into any kind of danger."

"My dear Major, we have been using the tunnel as an escape route for the 'rebels', as you once called them." The young girl smiled. "With your help no doubt we can free a great many more."

"Thank you, Lady Caroline. We shall meet and talk again, soon. In the meantime it is best if we cut short our present conversation. It has already been prolonged, and may cause comment. Please do not tell your father what has happened, or any member of the household. The secret of my long life, thus far," he laughed, "is in the fact that my identity is known to so few. It keeps the noose from my neck. I prefer to have it that way!" With that, Major Hamilton and Lady Caroline took a polite farewell of each other. The look which passed between them denied the formality of the exchange, however.

The remainder of the evening passed uneventfully, to all outward appearances. The Earl and his wife did not fail to notice that Caroline wore an air of suppressed excitement. It shone from her eyes. It heightened her colour. They forbore to ask questions. Caroline was glad. She would not want to have admitted that she had fallen in love!



Chapter 21. Tragedy Strikes

'William and Caroline had many secret meetings in the old stone house. It was not long before they pledged their everlasting love for each other. Brother John arranged for their secret marriage. The wedding ceremony took place in the chapel beneath the castle. Caroline knew that no-one, not even her parents, must learn of her marriage.'

'In the days that followed, the Major and his wife spent as much time as they could, together in the old stone house. Their marriage remained a closely guarded secret. Many daring escapes were planned for the patriots. Their success threw the entire Ballymore garrison into turmoil, time after time.'

'Major William Hamilton became increasingly aware that using the castle so often was greatly increasing the danger to the Earl, and his family, and of course, to his wife, Caroline. He felt that, since luck had favoured them on so many occasions, there might come a time when their fortunes would turn against them.

Against this happening, William arranged a plan, with Caroline. In the event of charges being brought against the Earl, before an arrest could be made, he, the Major, would make sure that he was the one chosen to lead the arresting squad. He would devise an excuse to fire a single musket-shot. It would serve as a warning of the immediate danger.

The Earl, and his family, must flee at once. The tunnel would lead them to a ship, ready to sail. Major Hamilton went over the plan in detail, making sure that Caroline understood. He was obliged to change the arrangement somewhat, when his wife objected, refusing to leave without him. William finally agreed. He would break away from his escort, and join her. They would flee the country together.

The Major was a wise soldier. He knew that once the O'Donnells were arrested his own life would not be worth a moment's purchase! His days of usefulness to the cause would be at an end. The legendary Shamrock would ride no more.

Caroline appeared satisfied with the plan. She promised that she would live in constant readiness, from that moment on.'

'It was well that Caroline was prepared. Not long after she had agreed on her husband's plan, disaster struck!

There came a swift horse to the castle. It was the footman of a neighboring squire, who, by chance, was romancing a helping maid in the O'Donnell household. His motives not being held in question, the footman related a tale of jealousy and base treachery, overheard that very day. His master had betrayed the Earl to the English authorities.'

'There was little time to be lost. Caroline immediately informed her father of the Major's plan. Everything had already been put quietly in readiness, for their flight. She knew that her mother and father would expect her to accompany them in their escape. It was time to explain why she could not go with them.

As briefly as possible, Caroline told her astonished parents of her marriage with William. Her mother embraced her, with tears flowing freely. She knew it was no use trying to persuade her daughter to come with them. An emotional farewell took place between them.'

' "Go you now, quickly," Caroline told her parents. "I must wait for my husband. He has promised to join me. Do not worry. If all goes well I shall follow, shortly." '

'The Earl led his wife, and their young son, into the tunnel. When the last member of the household had disappeared down the dark steps into the blackness below, Caroline closed over the secret panel.'

'Deathly silence fell on the deserted castle. Caroline sat by the open window of her room. An hour went by, and then another. The day was drawing on. Suddenly, all her senses were aloft. Every nerve tingled. A shot had sounded, from the nearby woods. The sound echoed off the stone walls of the castle.'

'Caroline entered the secret chamber, and closed the door. She was taking no chances that her husband might not have successfully left his escort.

The silence was deadly. Caroline waited, expecting momentarily to be in the embrace of her beloved husband. Still he did not come. No sound broke the stillness. Time passed slowly. Caroline grew more and more anxious. What could have happened? She grew cold, and took to pacing up and down in the narrow ante-chamber.'

'A footfall sounded at the foot of the stone steps. Caroline uttered a cry of relief. She moved to the top of the stairs. The cowed figure of Brother John, emerged from the gloom. An icy hand clutched Caroline's heart. "Brother John? W-Where is my husband? Is he not with you?" '

'The old monk pushed back the hood of his robe. Caroline saw at once that his face was drawn, and grey. It was filled with unutterable pain.'

' "My dear," the priest spoke softly, "I pray you, prepare yourself. I have the worst possible news to impart. May God give you strength at this time. Your husband, Milady," his voice faltered, "Your husband, he is dead!" '

The terrible scene dissolved as Jason's eyes blurred with tears. A lump filled his throat. Anger seized him. The unfairness! The injustice! The Galloping Major's final assignment, to end so tragically! And at the very hands of the very people he had served so courageously. It just wasn't fair. Poor Caroline! Jason was indeed greatly moved. It was several moments before his vision cleared and he felt ready to continue.

'Caroline had collapsed into a chair. She was sobbing her heart out. The good priest was standing close by, looking on, helplessly. He knew that her tears must be shed, brave and strong though she was. Such grief had to find release.

Presently, Caroline lifted a tear-stained face. "Father, pray tell me what happened. I must know." Brother John hesitated before he began. Steadying his voice as best he could, he recounted the last moments of the brave soldier as he was slain, beside his horse, by Earl O'Donnell's men.

They truly believed that they were dispatching the hated and feared Cromwellian officer, on his way to arrest their master. Abundant tears flowed as Caroline listened in silence. "Thank you for telling me, Brother John. It was not easy. You loved him too, did you not?" She choked back a sob. "But what news of my parents? Did they succeed in getting away safely?"

"Yes, Milady. After waiting as long as they dared they were forced to leave with the tide. The neighborhood was in a turmoil. Soldiers were everywhere. They had to go."

Caroline nodded dully. "Of course they did. They were brave to stay so long."

"Your father, the Earl, Milady, he bid me give you a message. I was to find you, under whatever circumstances had befallen you, and tell you to remain safely in hiding, if possible. The troubled times will soon be over. He will return for you at the earliest opportunity." '

'Caroline had ceased crying. When Brother John had delivered his message she said, softly, "Let it be so! I am better to remain in the castle, at least until I come to full term. You see, Brother, I am with child!" '

The startling news brought Jason back to reality with a sudden jolt. Caroline was going to have a baby! The Major's baby. He could hardly believe all he was reading. The priest's manuscript was certainly full of surprises.

'What a tale I have to tell Lady Kitty and the others. They'll never believe it! But it's all here, and in writing,' Jason was thinking to himself. Poor Lady Caroline. Having a baby and all alone except for Brother John.'

Jason sat, for a long moment, lost in thought. His mind wandered back over all he had learned from the parchments before him.

Suddenly, and on impulse, Jason rose from his chair. He made his way into the dining-room. It was empty and silent. The silverware glistened, in the light from the hall. The crystal glittered and sparkled.

Jason's attention was focussed elsewhere. He stood beneath the portrait. He stared up into the familiar face with a new feeling and a new understanding. "Poor Caroline," he said aloud. How dreadful for you!" The boy was so engrossed in his thoughts that he didn't hear the light footfall. He jumped with a start when Lady Kitty spoke. "Oh it's you, Jason? I thought I heard voices as I passed the door. But are you alone?"

"Oh, my goodness, Lady Kitty, you surprised me. I didn't hear you come in. The boy looked embarrassed. "No, there's no-one here. I'm afraid I was talking to myself."

"I think you mean you were talking to Lady Caroline?" Lady Kitty said this so gently, and with such understanding, that Jason relaxed immediately. He replied without a trace of shyness. "Yes, as a matter of fact I was. I was wishing I could find some way of letting her know how sorry I am for her."

"Sorry for her? Have you learned something about her from the scrolls? Have you finished, then?"

"Well, not quite, Lady Kitty. Nearly through, and I was just taking a bit of a break, to stretch my legs. Would you mind if I didn't get into what I have learned, until later? I am hoping to be finished soon. I can then tell you the whole story, from beginning to end."

"Of course I don't mind, dear. I understand. 'Fools and children should never hear things half-finished,' or whatever the saying is. I can hardly wait. I gather you have found it interesting?"

"It's better than that, Lady Kitty. It's incredible! You'll really get some surprises, I promise you."

"In that case Jason, don't let me keep you. You'd best get back to work lest my impatience becomes unbearable. By the way, I have left word that you are not to be disturbed in the library. Your brother is perfectly happy. He has retired to his room with a good book. He is looking forward to finding out how you have got on."

"Well we mustn't keep everyone hanging in suspense. I'll try and get finished within the hour. I'm off. See you later." Jason re-entered the library. Soon his eyes were once more focused on Brother John's carefully scripted story. He became a silent witness to events of long, long age.

'Caroline was heavy with child. She looked pale, and tired. She was determined, however, to keep as cheerful and as healthy as possible for the sake of the baby within her. The infant stirred occasionally, to remind her of his presence and his impatience to be born. It was this child that had brought Caroline through those dark and lonely days, following the death of her beloved William. 'William will live on,' she vowed. 'In my son I shall always have a part of my husband.' 'And so it was, that Caroline survived, as the time came near for her to deliver. She had long since discussed the forthcoming event with Brother John. She had been surprised to learn that he had been witness to childbirth on more than one occasion. He had even assisted, once or twice. The mother-to-be reckoned that it would be less than a month before she would put her priest's skills to question. Dear Brother John. What in the world would she ever have done without him? Caroline's world had been bounded by four close walls, and a deep sense of isolation. It was only the frequent visits of Brother John that preserved her sanity, and kept her in touch with reality. Caroline heard the news of the death of Cromwell with no great sense of relief. Her only focus in life was her unborn child.'

'The priest's comings and goings to the castle were always secretive, and by way of the tunnel. Caroline's presence there had never reached the ears of the military. There was still a warrant out, for the arrest of the Earl and his family. However, the strength of the garrison in the town had been reduced considerably since Cromwell's death. Indeed, there was talk of the crowning of the monarchy. A king, for the throne of England! Caroline was aware of these trends, through the daily visits of the good priest.'

'One day, at about this time, Brother John arrived, as usual. He was carrying food, for his mistress. Caroline sensed something was amiss, immediately, from the gravity of his expression. "Why, Brother John, whatever ails you this day? Are you not well? Tell me, I pray you, what troubles you so greatly?"

I would that I did not have to impart bad news, Milady. It seems I cannot disguise my grief from your sharp eyes and sweet nature. There is indeed a burden on my soul, and I must tell you..."

"Tell me? Tell me what, Father? You cannot bring me worse news than you imparted six months ago?"

"Alas, Milady, I fear that what I have to tell you will distress you greatly. I bid you be calm. There is little I can do to soften the blow that I am about to deliver."

Caroline's eyes were black and her face was pale. She remained motionless.

"My Lady. It's your parents. Your dear father, and your mother." The priest's voice broke but he struggled to continue. "Both are dead! Killed in an accident!"

"Both, you say? Both, dead?" Caroline's voice was scarcely more than a whisper. "Tell me, I beg you, tell me the circumstances, if you have them."

"Aye, Milady, I do have them, and if it is your wish that I should....?"

"It is my wish, Father. Do not spare me. I have to know!"

"When your father learned that the English forces were in disarray, he deemed it safe to return to secure your escape. It seems that the carriage in which he, and your mother, were travelling, overturned. Both were killed, instantly." The priest finished speaking. He watched Caroline anxiously. He was fearful that his second shock might cause her a physical, or mental, breakdown.

The unfortunate girl seemed to collapse inwardly. She slumped in her chair. Her eyes glazed over. She said nothing. There was a silence between them. Brother John had no words of

comfort. In any case he knew that they would not reach through her state of shock. He reached forward and laid a gnarled hand on her shoulder. Suddenly, Caroline started to shake. She trembled so violently that Brother John could hear the teeth rattling in her head. A great cry escaped through her clenched lips. The girl pitched forward, in a dead faint! It was fortunate that the priest had moved forward. He was able to catch her, as she fell from her chair.'

'Caroline was moaning softly as the old priest managed to carry her to her bed. She opened her eyes. "Bro-Brother John," she managed to gasp, "please, please don't leave me!"

"My child, of course I won't leave you. Rest now. I shall keep watch by your side until you awaken."

Caroline gave a cry of pain. "Father! It's the baby. It's coming. Oh God help me! My baby is being born!"

'And thus it was. It was a long and difficult birth. Many hours later Brother John delivered a fine, healthy boy! The infant greeted life with a thin wail. It reached Caroline's ears. She smiled. She was too weak to speak.'

'Brother John busied himself about the chamber. He wrapped the baby and placed him in the cradle which had awaited its arrival. When he returned, at last, to Caroline's side, he grew gravely concerned. Her breathing was shallow. Her lips had a bluish tinge. Her eyelids fluttered as she became aware of the priest's presence. "Is my baby all right?" she breathed in a small voice.

"My dear, your son is strong, and healthy, and very handsome. You must rest now..Save your strength. Presently I shall bring you some broth."

"No, no! please, don't go!" Caroline's voice rallied as she summoned all her remaining strength. "Promise me, Father, promise me you will see that no harm comes to my child." She fell back, exhausted.

"Rest assured, be at peace, My Lady. I shall place his life above my own!" Caroline's face took on a look of calm. It seemed that she was sleeping. A deep silence descended as the priest stood, with prayers on his lips.'

'Without warning Caroline's eyes opened wide. They were filled with wonder. An expression of joy filled her face. "William, my darling!" She was smiling.'

'The tears rolled down the priest's cheeks. He shed them unashamedly. There was none to witness his grief. It was many moments before he heaved a deep sigh, and turned to the infant, mewling fitfully, in its crib. "We shall name you 'William' said Brother John. "Little William!" The priest turned back to the bedside. He knelt beside the still form of his beloved mistress as he pronounced the last rites, with prayers for her soul.'



Chapter 22. An Heir For Lady Kitty

Jason found himself unable to continue. His eyes were blurred. There was an ache in his chest. He needed a breath of fresh air. He left his seat and stood by the open window. The cool breeze made him feel better.

The boy felt a keen sense of loss. He was deeply moved by the tragic death of his heroine, Caroline. It was several minutes before he could bring himself to continue his task. He knew it had to be done. It was so nearly finished. Jason squared his shoulders and returned to the table.

The priest was finishing his prayers. He turned from the lifeless body, with a heavy heart. Straightening up, he took serious stock of the situation. A secret burial would not be difficult to arrange. The Earl had many local tenants who had loved Caroline. Brother John's greater concern was for the new-born child, little William. Raising the infant was no task for an elderly priest. He knew that. However, Caroline's last words to him were fixed deeply into his mind.

The boy's needs were immediate: food, warmth, and a safe haven. Brother John uttered a silent prayer for guidance. Suddenly it came to him what he must do, and do quickly.

The priest took his final leave of his mistress. He covered her face over, gently, with a sheet.

Then, wrapping the infant in a warm blanket he hurried down the stone steps with the sleeping child in his arms.

The Sisters of Mercy were startled to find the priest on their doorstep, hammering on the door, in the dead of night.

"Good Sister," explained the priest, somewhat breathlessly. "I pray that I may count on your ears being open, but your tongue being still. I must entrust a new life into your hands!" So saying, he thrust the bundled baby into the arms of the startled woman. "If I may come in I would willingly tell you as much as you need to know."

" 'Tis an awesome responsibility that you place upon me, Father. But, if' as you say, a young life is at stake, then you know I cannot refuse. Pray come in." Brother John was quick to notice that the good sister was cuddling the child close to her breast. Maternal instinct cannot be denied.'

' "Sister, the priest began, "there is no need for you to know the identity of the infant you hold. Suffice it to say that the boy is newly delivered, not more than an hour since. His mother, alas, is dead. The birth was difficult. She died of exhaustion. The father, also, is dead, these past several months. This child is an orphan. He is greatly in need of love, care, and nourishment."

"He shall have them," murmured the sister, smiling into the wrinkled face peeping from the blanket.

"Good Sister, I do thank you. I must tell you, however, that I am about to set the wheels in motion that may lead to his adoption. The arrangements may take some days. It is with the immediate time that I am concerned."

"Be that as it may. He is safe with us in the meantime. May God go with you in your efforts."

Brother John stood for a moment, hesitating before he said, "Sister, it is only right that I tell you that there has been a search abroad for the arrest of the boy's mother, rest her soul. In consequence this innocent child is a fugitive, also. I must ask you to keep my visit secret, and, above all, the presence of the baby in your midst. If you cannot find it within you to abide by this, then I must be on my way, taking the baby with me." The monk searched the woman's face, for his answer.

"Be it as I promised, Father. His secret, is safe with us. We shall pray for your speedy return with good news for the boy's future." '

'Brother John lost no time. He returned to the silent castle, and burned midnight oil. He penned a letter to Robert Hamilton, in Scotland. He explained to the boy's grandfather the full extent of the tragic circumstances. He begged that the baby boy might be adopted, as his father had been, twenty-six years previously.'

'Not many days later word reached the priest, from Scotland. Robert Hamilton expressed great sorrow at the death of his adopted son. The news of the tragedy had not reached him. Robert was also distressed to learn of Caroline's passing, in childbirth. As far as the baby was concerned, Robert Hamilton readily agreed to take him into his family.

This time, however, The Scottish Squire promised that, at no time, even in the future, should the young baby, William, learn of his birthright. Perhaps, in remembering, Robert's decision was understandable. It was the disclosure to his adopted son that finally led to his untimely death.

The Scottish landlord was not taking any chance of history repeating itself.

So, it was decided that young William should be brought up as a member of the Robert Hamilton clan, and remain so, all the length of his days.'

'Brother John quickly completed the arrangements. He returned to the Nunnery, to gather up his charge. Once more, he placed a baby boy on a fishing smack, bound for Scotland, on the next tide.

As the priest was handing the baby over to the sea-captain he looked in the face of the infant.

"God go with you all your days, Little William. It is unlikely that you and I shall ever meet again. You will remain in my heart, and in my prayers. As your father, before you, I deliver you to your destiny. You take nothing of this land with you except the robe in which you are wrapped." As he was speaking he made the sign of the cross above the tiny forehead. He looked up. "Take the child. Deliver him safely!" The priest turned away sadly.'

'Brother John continued to give of himself in helping the unfortunate. Times were a little easier, however, and less physically demanding on the aging priest. He was able to devote much of his lime to his manuscript. Many hours he spent, hunched over the parchments in the flickering light of a tallow candle. Gradually, the true story of the life and death of an unsung hero emerged.'

Jason's intense concentration lapsed momentarily. He found that he had reached the last page of the priest's narrative. A feeling of satisfaction welled up, within him. With renewed energy he tackled the final words before him. Startling news met his eyes as he read.

'Disaster threatens. All may be lost. My safety, aye, and my life itself may be forfeit. The secret of the castle has been uncovered. The English soldiers have found the tunnel.

I am thankful that I have made this discovery in time to finish my work and secrete it in a strong-box for safe keeping.

It was through God's Grace and Mercy that I spotted the soldiers from the battlements. I make my devotion there each morning to greet the sun as it rises from the Irish Sea. This day I caught the glint of armour. The old stone house had been raided. It is my belief that the small group there is awaiting re-inforcements before the tunnel is entered, and the castle attacked.

I shall flee for my life, these papers being saved. I shall blow up the tunnel. Perhaps it will check the intruders if I be in time.'

'I, Brother John Sebastian, state, on oath, that the contents here-in are set down in truth, as God is my witness.

Into His Holy Hands I do place my life. And May God have mercy on my soul. AMEN!'

Jason took in the scrawled signature at the foot of the page. He heaved a heavy sigh at the significance of the priest's final act. Jason had little doubt that the selfless monk had brought the tunnel down about his own head.

For a long time Jason just sat, staring in front of him with unseeing eyes. His mind was still in the past.

With a conscious effort the boy pulled himself together. He began tidying up the pages which were strewn across the table. Soon he had a neat pile in front of him. There were still two rolls, tied with a leather thong. Jason decided it was time to unlock their secret, also.

Taking the nearest one to him he fumbled with the knot that secured it. A sudden pressure from his fingers and the perished leather fell apart. It was a document, written in the same hand as the priest's manuscript. A quick glance was sufficient for him to realize that it was a formal declaration of the marriage between William Hamilton and Caroline O'Donnell. Jason understood immediately that, in present day terms, it was a marriage certificate.

Putting it carefully to one side, Jason tackled the last remaining item from the metal box. It opened as easily as the previous roll. To Jason's immense satisfaction it proved to be the priest's record of the birth of Caroline's baby.

Even as the boy put the birth certificate from his hand he was aware of its significance. His mind was racing so fast his thoughts would not settle. He knew that Lady Kitty would be able to put it all together correctly. She might be able to come to the conclusion that there was, after all, another branch of the O'Donnell family, the same blood line, albeit under the name 'Hamilton'.

Jason knew that the time had come at last when he could share all this news with Lady Kitty, and the others. He felt that he had the full story sufficiently sorted out in his mind to recall it all, accurately. He went in search of the good lady. She was in the morning room.

Lady Kitty looked up, as Jason knocked, and entered. "Oh, Jason. It's you? I gather you must have finished? Isn't that great? My dear, I am so excited I can hardly wait to hear all about it. Let's go back to the library. It's so much more comfortable. First, run upstairs and fetch your brother. He'll want to be in on this, from the beginning, and no mistake!"

When the party of three had drawn up their chairs to the fire, Lady Kitty said, "Now, Jason, Justin and I want to hear all about everything you've read. Take your time but don't leave anything out."

"I'll do my best, Lady Kitty. There is so much to tell. You are going to be so surprised." He paused for a moment as he thought. "I think that I would like to begin by giving you the two most astonishing facts, first. When I have that off my chest I can go into details as to how it all came about."

"Do get on with it, brother. Start where-ever you want, but for pity's sake, do start!"

"Right! Lady Kitty, the most important thing you have to know, first, is the fact that the chap we

call the Galloping Major, William Hamilton, that is, was secretly married to none other than Lady Caroline!" Jason paused, for dramatic effect and to wait for the explosive expressions of surprise, to settle.

"Married, you say? Caroline O'Donnell, married? You're sure?"

"It's true, Lady Kitty. There's even a marriage certificate, to prove it. But wait! There's more. This is even more important, at least I think you will find it so." Jason was playing this moment he had been looking forward to. "Lady Kitty, Major Hamilton's wife, our Lady Caroline, she gave birth to a fine, healthy baby boy! Caroline had a son!"

"A boy, you say? Lady Caroline had a son?" Lady Kitty spoke as if she was a thousand miles away. Her voice trailed off into astonished silence.

For a long moment no one spoke. Justin looked from one to the other. Finally he asked, "Lady Kitty, you look upset...this news of Caroline's baby, why does it disturb you so greatly?"

"Dear boy, if I seem upset it is not because I am dismayed at the news, it is a fact that I am overjoyed beyond expression. It has already occurred to me, Justin, that if Caroline had a son, then there is, or at least was, another blood line in the O'Donnell family. D'you realize, I may even have an heir, after all!" Lady Kitty was almost overcome with emotion as she dabbed her eyes with a small lace handkerchief. "Forgive me for being so silly, the pair of you. It's just that..." her voice trailed off. With a visible effort Lady O'Donnell straightened up. "I'm sorry! I'm perfectly all right now. Jason will you be good enough to continue. We want to know all the details!"

"Well, you see, Lady Kitty," Jason resumed, "this whole story was recorded on the parchments by a monk named John Sebastian. He was the O'Donnell family's Father Confessor. It was written so clearly that at times I felt that I was drawn into the past and saw all that happened."

As Lady Kitty, and Justin, sat spellbound, Jason described the Major's romance with Caroline, and their secret marriage. He told how the Major had devised a plan to warn the castle of impending danger. Jason's voice faltered as he related the terrible circumstances of the Major's death, and Caroline's devastation at the news. Lady Kitty never moved as the story evolved. Jason told it well.

'Caroline's shock at the death of both her parents was so severe that it brought on the birth of her child. Poor Caroline!! Jason found it difficult to speak as he recounted the circumstances of her death.

Jason gave an accurate accounting of the priest's actions, following the death of the baby's mother. He explained how Baby William was smuggled to Scotland, and his subsequent adoption by Robert Hamilton.

Finally, Jason cited the bravery of the good priest, in his last moments, by sacrificing his life to save the castle.'

There was a long moment of silence as Jason finished speaking. Lady Kitty was obviously lost in thought. It was Justin who spoke first. "Lady Kitty," he began. "there's something I don't understand about this last part, the priest's death, and everything."

"There's a great deal of all this that I don't understand, either, my dear. But what is it, in particular, that bothers you?"

"Well it's about the castle really, I suppose. Brother John is just a part of it."

"Go on."

"If the English soldiers wanted the castle so badly why didn't they just march up the driveway, break down the door; and move in, or whatever? From what I gathered there was no one to stop them? They could have had the castle any time they fancied it, surely?"

"Good question, Justin. I've been thinking along those same lines, myself. I'm not sure that I have the answer, Justin, but I do have a theory."

"You do?" Jason joined in. "Would you tell us what it is?"

"Well, mind you, it's only a theory with a bit of an old legend to back it up." Jason's interest quickened as Lady Kitty continued. "After the Galloping Major was killed, and the Earl and his family had gone, the castle was, as you say, Justin, free for the taking. However, at that same time there were great changes taking place. Cromwell was dead. The Ballymore garrison was reduced. Things were much quieter, generally. Now, it's only my opinion, mind you, but I think there may have been all sorts of conflicting orders, and a breakdown in the chain of command. No doubt there was confusion in the ranks. I think the soldiers were too busy worrying about their future, and the possibility of getting home, to England. What on earth good would the O'Donnell castle have been to them at that stage, except, perhaps, to be ransacked? But you may be sure that the English guessed that the Earl would have left very little of any real value, behind him when he fled, with his family."

"But," interrupted Justin, "the monk, Brother, er, whatever, said that he expected that the soldiers were coming to attack the castle?"

"Well, that's maybe what he believed. But I'll tell you what I think. It's my opinion that the soldiers that Brother John saw, was a group of bored infantrymen, acting on their own. I'm sure there was little discipline in the ranks." Lady Kitty paused in thought for a moment. "There is an old legend, not widely known."

"A legend, Lady Kitty, to do with the castle?"

"Yes, Jason, at least indirectly. You know that the tunnel was in use long before the castle was built?"

"Oh, yes, you did tell us. There was a monastery there. The priest used it?"

"That's right. When the monastery was destroyed, by the decree of King Henry, the monks fled through it, taking their treasures with them."

"Treasures?" echoed Justin.

"Yes, that's part of the legend. Some of the valuables, like the gold plate, and silver, were too heavy and too awkward to run with. Some say that much of it was hidden away, somewhere between the castle and the waiting ships."

"In the tunnel!" exclaimed Jason, his eyes shining.

"Exactly, dear. In the tunnel!"

"Oh, now I get it," said Justin slowly. "You think, Lady Kitty, that the soldiers may have found the entrance to the tunnel when they were planning to search for the treasure? They weren't even interested in the priest, or the castle? Wow! Awesome!"

"Well, Justin, I don't know it for sure. It's only my theory, remember. These soldiers, some of them might have heard the legend. Yes, I think they were on a treasure hunt, behind the backs of their officers."

"But why was Brother John in such a panic Didn't he know all this?"

"Not necessarily, Jason. He must have assumed the soldiers were after him and were taking the opportunity to raid the castle. Maybe Brother John knew something we don't. If so, I'm afraid we

never will!"

Jason looked downcast. "So the brave priest sacrificed his life for nothing?"

"Oh no! It was a true act of heroism. It undoubtedly put an end to all further discussion about the use of the tunnel, and its contents, if any!" Lady Kitty gave a laugh. "We've all been able to enjoy a bit of peace, ever since!"

Justin nodded slowly. He appeared satisfied.

Lady Kitty straightened up in her chair. She became business-like. "Let's go over some of it, again, Jason. Now, correct me if I'm wrong. We know, first of all, that there was indeed a marriage between the mother and father of this baby. That makes him legitimate, for a start."

"That's right, Lady Kitty. The priest recorded the marriage between Lady Caroline, and the Major. He also made up a birth certificate for their child. The two scrolls are on the table, shall I fetch them over, for you?"

"No, no, not right now, thank you, Jason. I'm in no fit state to concentrate on fusty old documents, at this moment, no matter how important. There'll be plenty of time to verify all this, later. So," Lady Kitty went on, "the baby, they called it William? It was sent over to Scotland, soon after it was born?"

"Yes. The baby was adopted by this Scottish landowner, Robert Hamilton. His wife was called Ellen, I think. They're the ones that raised the Galloping Major."

"Yes, I follow all that. So that's as much as we have to go on?" mused Lady Kitty.

"I'm afraid so. It wasn't long after that that Brother John was killed when he blew up the tunnel. It's so sad. He was a wonderful person."

"I think it is really awesome." Justin was shaking his head from side to side, as if in a state of disbelief. "I've got to hand it to you, brother. You never gave up. It seems you were on the right track all the time, I mean about your feeling for the Galloping Major. He's not a bad, spooky guy, after all! It doesn't surprise me in the least that he should want to come back and clear his name, and tell about the baby, and everything."

"That's right, Justin. I must say I was never scared of him. It was the strangest feeling. I had an idea, all along, that he was trying to get some sort of a message across. As a matter of fact it very nearly happened, in a sort of a way."

"What nearly happened?" Justin asked.

"Well, actually," Jason hesitated, "there is something that I never told either of you, before. I was afraid you'd laugh at me. I knew you wouldn't believe me, Justin."

"You know that I could never make fun of you, Jason, no matter what. You should have known that." Lady Kitty spoke sincerely.

"Me neither," put in Justin. "But what was it that you thought we wouldn't believe? You are going to tell us, aren't you? I promise I won't laugh. I might even believe you, just this one time!" Jason took a deep breath. "Okay, then, this is the truth. I saw the ghost, the ghost of the Galloping Major. I guess you might even say, I met him."

"Really Jason? And you never said anything?" Lady Kitty was smiling. It wasn't in mockery. It was a warm smile, full of understanding. "Tell us how it happened, Jason."

"It was quite some time ago. It was not long after we got here. I was walking down the driveway one morning I guess I was kind of still exploring. Down near the end I heard horses coming. I hid behind the bushes by the side of the avenue. There were voices. I backed further in and got behind a tree. Suddenly I heard the crashing of a horse and its rider coming into the clearing, close by where I was hiding."

Justin and Lady Kitty sat motionless, intrigued by Jason's story.

"The horseman stopped and looked about him. He was riding a beautiful grey horse. The man sat tall and straight, in the saddle. He was wearing a uniform that it took me a moment to recognize. It was that of a soldier in olden days."

"Go on, then what happened?" Justin was breathless.

"Well, I suppose I wasn't too well concealed behind the tree." Jason gave a short laugh. "If I had had more time I should have chosen a bigger one. Anyway there's no doubt that the soldier saw me. Strange, it was as if he'd known all along that I was there. He didn't seem in the least surprised when I lost my fear and stepped out into the open. We faced each other. Time seemed to stand still. I noticed that his expression was very solemn. In fact I felt a great wave of sadness. It reached me as he looked into my eyes. I've never been one for telepathy, or anything, but I'll swear to it he was sending me a message of some kind. I knew that this man, this stranger before me, was in great distress. For a long time I stood there, willing my thoughts to him that I understood and that I wanted to help. It was a most extraordinary experience. Actually, it was wonderful. His look of sadness suddenly left his face. I think he got my message. The man smiled, straight at me. It was as if to say, 'There is trouble ahead but everything'll work out, in the end.'"

"He never actually spoke? You just felt this wave of communication between you?" Lady Kitty gave no trace of disbelief in her voice. "And how did it end, Jason, did he just disappear?"

"What happened next was very strange, Lady Kitty. No, he didn't disappear. He lifted his carbine from its saddle holster. He pointed it at the top of the trees and fired a single shot, into the air. My ears rang. I remember the horse bucking. It was all very real.

Without looking back the soldier wheeled his horse around and made off in the direction of the driveway. I heard the horses' hooves as they hit the gravel a moment later. It was awfully still and very quiet. I had a terribly uneasy feeling inside me I couldn't explain. The look of sadness on the horseman's face lingered in my mind. I couldn't shake it. Then, and I'll never forget it, I heard the terrible scream of a horse followed by the clash of steel. It was awful. I remember feeling cold, so cold." The recollection of it made Jason shiver, instinctively. He paused.

"Is there more?" whispered Justin, as if afraid to break the spell.

"Not really. Everything seemed to come right again after a few moments. It suddenly felt warmer. The birds were singing. It was almost as if I had just awoken from a dream."

"Are you sure you didn't?" scoffed Justin, good-naturedly.

"Well I thought about that, too. But, honestly, I prefer to believe that it happened the way it did. I really do want to believe that I met the Galloping Major. Besides," Jason added, "when I saw him again in the chapel, marrying Caroline, I recognized him."

"That's a bit much, brother, meeting the same stranger again in another dream!"

"Are you trying to tell me that I was dreaming all the way through the priest's manuscript?"

Jason spoke abruptly. "Look, I admit it's all very hard to believe. You'll just have to accept it, or not, as you please. I'm only telling you!"

Lady Kitty spoke for the first time in several minutes. "I do believe you, Jason. Every word. It all fits too well to be a made up story. Besides, I know you. I'm convinced it all happened, like you said. Justin," she looked straight at the boy, "Let's you and I agree that Jason has told us nothing that wasn't the truth. We'll be able to discuss it all without further side remarks from you!"

It was the closest thing to a scolding that Justin had ever experienced from Lady Kitty. He was devastated. "I'm very sorry, Lady Kitty, really I am. It won't happen again. Jason, you know I didn't mean anything by it. I am sorry, and, if you want the truth, I never really doubted you. I

was only teasing."

Jason gave his brother a friendly smile. "Thanks, Justy! That was quite an apology! I quite understand your warped sense of humour by this time!" Both boys burst out laughing.

"All right, settle down now, you two. I think we should get back to matters in hand. I want to go over some of all this again. Jason, I've changed my mind. I'd like to take a look at those parchments, the last ones."

Jason rose immediately. He retrieved the two rolls and placed them in Lady Kitty's lap. Silence fell, except for the rattle of the stiff parchments. The good lady studied each of them carefully before she spoke. "There's no doubt in my mind. These papers are genuine. I am convinced that I have an heir!"

After dinner they gathered round the library fire, as usual. There was no talk of a Monopoly game on this occasion. The boys had never seen their hostess so animated. The news from the past had given her a new lease on life, it seemed. It was obvious that Her Ladyship wanted nothing better than to talk, and plan.

It was Jason who gave Lady Kitty the opening she needed. "What next, then, Lady Kitty?"

"I guess, as you Canadians say, I guess that we'll have to think of the best way of tracing the Hamilton family back to the mid sixteen hundreds. It is going to be a monumental task. We shall have to employ the best people available. You remember about my friend, in Victoria, for one?"

"Oh yes, I do," put in Justin. "The chap you went to see?"

"Yes dear. That's what brought me to British Columbia. I do bless the day. His name is Desmond Orr. He's a retired lawyer. He specialized in wills, family trees, and things like that."

"But you just said he was retired?"

"Yes I did. Well, I meant that he has retired from practising with the law firm he was with. He just works now on special assignments which interest him."

"Lucky fellow," Jason entered the conversation. "What makes you think that this case will interest him?" The boy suddenly blushed when he realized what he had said. "I mean, er..."

"That's a good question, Jason, it's perfectly all right. You see, I believe he has roots in Ireland. We talked, you know. He has been planning to visit Ireland, for some time. In the course of our conversation I let it drop that my assignment, if he accepted it, would bring him an expenses-paid trip. Oh yes, I saw the look of interest on his face. On the downside, of course, I couldn't offer him much of a case to go on." Lady Kitty's face brightened. "But now I can! Thanks to you two darling boys."

"Then you do think he'll come?"

"Mmm! I'm pretty sure. I'll have to write to him at once, and tell him the latest developments. We have a very different picture to paint now. The one that I drew for him, in Victoria, was depressing, to say the least. Thank you, again, Jason. And you, too, Justin."

"I didn't do much," murmured Justin.

"Nonsense! You've been in this together. You have both been great." Lady Kitty was smiling all over her face when she added, "And just you remember this, Justin, my fine young friend, it was you who caused the pole to slip. Look what happened as a result of that! It was your doing that uncovered the secret of the sliding door in the wall!"

"That's right, Justin. It was all your doing!" Jason leaned across and patted his young brother on the shoulder.

Justin smiled, a little sheepishly. "It was more by luck than good management! However, I'm glad that it worked out the way it did. My Golly, when it happened I thought I'd wrecked the

joint!" He reddened when he realized what he had said. "Sorry, Lady Kitty!...I meant to say I was afraid I had damaged a valuable piece of wood-carving!"

Lady Kitty burst into laughter before she could reply. "You were right the first time, Justy. I liked it better! Anyway, it's perfectly all right. Never worry about it!"

After a short pause in the conversation Lady Kitty looked up. "Well now, it's getting late. I think that I would like to sit up for a while yet. My poor head is in a turmoil. I would like to have some quiet time to sort it all out. Jason, dear; would you be so kind as to fetch me over the rest of the documents. I will have a look over them before I go to bed. This has been an exciting day for all of us. I'm sure you boys must be tired?"

"Yes indeed!" Jason took the polite hint. Justin and I are ready for bed." He rose as he was speaking and gave Justin the eye to do the same. When he had gathered up the papers he handed them, gently, to Lady Kitty. "There you are. That's the lot. They're not hard to follow, once you get used to it."

"Thank you, Jason. I'll do my best." Lady Kitty put on her spectacles and took up the papers. "I'll say good-night to you both, then. Thank you, my dears, for the most eventful day of my life."

"Mine, too." Jason replied.

The boys chorused their good-nights once more, as they made for the door.

"Just a minute. One more thing, before you go."

"Yes, Lady Kitty?"

"Jason, you did mention moving in with your brother? Have you made your arrangements? I really don't want you sleeping in that room with your head in a draft.. not to mention unwanted visitors!" she added with a laugh.

"Oh, I would welcome company," Jason replied, returning the laugh. "Especially the Major. We're old friends by now! But, yes, joking apart, it would be drafty. I have already moved some of my things. You haven't changed your mind, I hope, Justy?"

"Of course I haven't! Just so long as your friends don't decide to come looking for you, in my room!"

Justin's answer obviously amused Lady Kitty. She was smiling broadly as the boys left the room. Presently she adjusted her spectacles and began to read.

"I don't suppose," Jason was saying, as the pair mounted the stairs, "that I shall be able to move back in for some time. I hope you don't mind?"

"Of course not!"

"It's a pity, though, I have become too attached to that room. I did all my best thinking about the past, in there. I can still use it, I guess." The boys reached Justin's room. Once inside they lost no time in getting ready for bed.

"You sleep on the side nearest the door!" Justin suggested, as they climbed in. "In that case you'll be first to greet your friends!"

"Fat chance, brother!" laughed Jason. "Good-night!"

"Good-night," mumbled his brother, already half-asleep.



Chapter 23. The Sign of the Shamrock

An hour passed. "Justy, are you awake?"

"I am now," grumbled Justin, with a groan.

"I'm sorry. I can't sleep. My mind is going round and round like crazy. I'm going to have to sneak down to the kitchen and fix myself some hot chocolate, and a piece of cake, or something. Would you like me to bring you up some?" Jason was already out of bed and on his dressing-gown. His brother's answer surprised him.

"Naw, nothing for me thanks. I'm too sleepy. It'd only wake me up. Don't bang the door, or anything...Good-night." Even before Jason had left the room, heavy breathing from the bed told him that his brother had already returned to the land of dreams. Silent as a wraith, he stole downstairs.

Jason had a tray fixed in no time. He had his favourite hot chocolate, with lots of sugar, and a large slice of cake. He was ready to take it upstairs. A thought occurred to him. It would certainly be difficult to avoid disturbing his brother, when he climbed back into bed, complete with a tray full of goodies. Before he had reached the foot of the stairs Jason had decided to go to his own room.

"If I can't sleep at least I won't keep Justin awake." Jason had a habit of talking to himself. "The fire'll be out but there's always kindling in the bottom of the log box"

Thus resolved, Jason was soon comfortably settled in his own room. The beginnings of a cheerful fire was crackling and spitting in the grate.

Jason was enjoying his late-night snack as the room grew warm. He felt relaxed and content. His thoughts turned ever again to the spectacular moments of the previous day. In his mind was Lady Kitty's wondrous excitement when she learned about Caroline's baby. Jason felt so good about delivering such momentous news to the lady he had come to love so much. 'If only it works out,' the boy's thoughts continued. 'If Lady Kitty does discover she has a long lost heir it'll make such a difference to her happiness. I do hope that it happens!' He sat for a while, staring into the fire. Jason's thought began to ramble on again. 'I know there must be an heir, somewhere. It was that kind of a message I felt, from the Major. He more or less told me that everything would work out, in the end. How else could it happen that way? If Lady Kitty was to lose everything to the government I'm jolly sure the Major would be dreadfully upset. He'd renew his haunting, with a vengeance, I'll bet. But I don't get that feeling. I'm almost positive that eventually some-one will be found, to take over.'

Once again, Jason relaxed, enjoying the warmth of the fire. He was soon off again, on the same old treadmill. 'If only there was some clue, where to begin, or something. 'To find a Hamilton, of all names, after all these years, is expecting a bit much. We need help.' The thought gave him an idea. Raising his voice he spoke quite deliberately at the empty space behind his head.

"Major Hamilton, if you are in there, and can hear me, please help Lady Kitty to find your long lost heir, and the heir to the O'Donnell estate!"

Suddenly Jason realized his rashness in invoking the spirit of the Major. He looked about him, apprehensively, half expecting to see the apparition. No deep voice boomed out of the cavernous opening in the wall. No sound broke the silence. Nothing happened. Jason didn't know whether he was relieved, or sorry! Perhaps his sense of the dramatic had run away with his imagination. He had expected it to happen like in the movie of the 'Ten Commandment's'. God spoke to Moses in deep-sounding tones.

Some time passed. Jason sat on. He stared into the flickering embers. As the logs settled a stream of sparks scurried skyward, 'like prayers ascending to heaven,' he thought. Somewhat reassured by the fact that nothing fearful had occurred when he had called on the Major, Jason decided to have another try.

"Oh Major Hamilton, if only we could know that the baby you had, grew up to get married, and have children? Your ancestors would still be living. Isn't there anything you can do, I mean, to give us a sign, or something? I promise not to be scared, really I won't. I have had the feeling that you want to help. Please do, if you can." Once more Jason waited for something to happen. Nothing did. The boy felt a sense of disappointment. He had been so sure, this time, that he would get an answer of some kind.

A thought flashed into Jason's mind. 'I wonder did we miss anything in that room? We didn't look very hard, we were too busy exploring down below.' He stood up and retrieved the candelabra from the mantel. In a moment he had the candles alight, from a burning twig. Without hesitation Jason stepped through the aperture. Once more he was in Caroline's secret room. Feeling no fear whatsoever, he looked about him. Almost the first thing that caught his eye was a flickering gleam of reflected light. It was the metal vase that stood on the table near the door. He remembered noticing it before. He had wanted to touch it then, but Lady Kitty had stopped him. Jason moved to take a closer look. The light must be playing tricks! Jason could have sworn the little bowl had been empty. Empty, yes, for three hundred years. What plant, or flower could have survived the centuries? Yet, there, before the boy's astonished eyes, a bloom of bright green leaves, fresh as the morning dew, filled the silver ornament! Jason put out a hand to touch the little petals. They felt moist, and cool.

The significance of the scene suddenly burst upon Jason. He recognized the plant. It was the shamrock! True Irish shamrock! He felt his knees shaking. He developed a sudden urge to return to the warmth and comfort of his bedroom. Grasping the bowl of shamrock the boy retreated. In a moment he was back in his chair, by the fire. He was still clutching his miraculous find.

"Thank you, Thank you, Major!" Jason uttered fervently. "Thank you for this sign of your presence and your wish to help. Yes, I know now, for certain, that Lady Kitty has an heir that will be found." Jason rose from his chair. He blew out the candles and set the little vase on the mantel.

Jason was soon warmed by the fire. The chill had left his bones. His sudden rush of adrenaline had subsided. Thoughts were wandering free once more. As he gazed into the red hot embers his fantasies took on strange shapes and sizes. Every time he imagined that he saw a man's face, it would change with a shift of logs and take on the countenance of a girl. It suddenly dawned on Jason that perhaps the heir to the O'Donnell estate might be a girl, an heiress. Not a boy, at all! Before long, the idea took hold. Jason became convinced that a young lady, probably in some likeness to the portrait of Caroline, would turn out to be the one they hoped to find.

Jason realized he was really tired. The fire had died down. He could feel the chill creeping through the opening in the wall. He shivered as he rose stiffly from his chair. "Enough is enough," he muttered. "I'm for bed. I'll sleep now, for sure." He crept quietly into the next room. He found his brother lying, just as he had left him, still fast asleep. Gently he eased himself between the sheets. That was the last thing he remembered.

It was Justin who woke first. The sun was well up in a pale blue sky. "Hey, Jason, it's time to wake up. The gong for breakfast will be going any minute. C'mon! He nudged his sleeping brother. "Wake up, Jason!"

"Huh? What time is it?" Jason raised his head from the pillow.

"Time for breakfast. Time you were out of bed. It's a lovely day. Did you finally get some sleep? I didn't hear you coming to bed with your snack."

"That's because I didn't!"

"Didn't what? You mean you didn't go down for something after all?"

"I didn't come to bed, with or without my grub. In fact I didn't get back to bed until about three o'clock in the morning." Jason sounded as tired as he felt.

"What on earth were you doing?" Justin was really curious.

"If you must know, I went in next door, to my room. I wanted to see if I could talk to the Major."

"And you weren't scared, in there all by yourself?"

"No, of course not. Why should I have been? The major is a friendly guy. You said so, yourself. Anyway, I was hoping to get through to him, a message, or something. I wanted to know about his family, and what became of his ancestors, you know, for Lady Kitty."

"Well, did you?"

"Did I what, Justy?"

"Did you, or didn't you, get a message from the Major?" Jason was out of bed, by this time, preparing for a quick wash.

"Yes, Justin. As a matter of fact, I did, believe it or not!"

"You did?" Justin's eyes opened wide. What did he say?"

"Oh, it wasn't so much what he said. He just left me something, as a sign." Justin followed his brother into the bathroom. "C'mon Jason, tell me everything, what sign?"

Jason's voice was muffled as he pulled a sweater over his head. "I'll do better than tell you, Justy, I'll show you, just as soon as I finish dressing. It's next door, in my room." Justin said nothing more, for the moment. He didn't want to delay his brother. Finally, Jason said, "Wait here, Justy!" He slipped out of the room.

In no time he was back. There was a look of surprise on his face. He was carrying a small silver jar.

"What have you got there?" Justin was pointing to the ornament in his brother's hand. For a moment Jason didn't answer. He just stood there, looking puzzled.

"I could have sworn..." he broke off, looking at the empty vase. "Last night, Justin, last night," he repeated, "this jar was full of freshly picked shamrock!"

"Freshly picked sham...." Justin pulled up short as his eyes widened. "The Galloping Major's emblem?"

"That's right, Justy. The Major's sign. What I don't understand is, what happened to it?" Without waiting for his brother to reply, Jason made for the door. "I must have dropped it when I lifted it down. It must be on the floor by the fireplace. I'm going to take a look."

"I'll help you," said Justin, following his brother. "If it's there we'll find it!"

"It'd better be," muttered Jason, in frustration.

The boys searched fruitlessly for ten minutes. The sound of the gong echoed through the building. "We'll have to give it up," said Jason, looking discouraged. "It's not here." He was mumbling to himself, all the way downstairs. "I know it was there. I did see it. No one will ever believe me!"

Lady Kitty was already in the dining room. "Good morning boys!" she greeted them cheerfully. "And how did you two sleep last night?" Her brightness dimmed a little when she caught sight of Jason's long face. "What's happened to you, dear? You look as if you'd lost your best friend." It was Justin who answered her. "Well it wasn't exactly his best friend, or anything, exactly. He says he's lost a bunch of freshly picked shamrock, or something."

"A bunch of shamrock, Jason? Is that right? Where on earth did you find shamrock? I don't ever remember seeing any growing near the castle." Jason looked a trifle embarrassed. He knew it was going to be difficult to explain. He didn't feel like getting into it right at that moment "It's a long story, Lady Kitty. Do you mind if we have breakfast first? I'll tell you all about it later. If that's all right?" he added.

"Of course, Jason. A good story is worth keeping for the right moment. Let's eat, then."

Cassy came bustling in. She went to the side-board and started lifting lids. "Have you all got what you want then?" she said, over her shoulder. Without waiting for an answer she turned to Jason. "Isn't it grand news that we have?"

"News?" Jason's mouth was full as he replied.

"Yes I'm that excited. Fancy, a wee baby in the family!"

Lady Kitty's eye-brows shot up. "What are you burbling about, Cassy? Who said anything about it being a baby, or, for that matter, being in the family, at all? Just contain yourself, woman. Curb those maternal instincts until we know more about it! More likely to be an elderly Scottish Laird, one Highland Fling from a wheelchair!" She paused. "The breakfast is fine, thank you. We've all got what we want."

Cassy took the hint and turned abruptly.

Between mouthfuls Justin looked up. "It doesn't have to be a man, does it? I mean 'old' and everything?"

Lady Kitty laughed. "Well, old, certainly not. To tell you the truth I hadn't given it much thought. The ladies in the O'Donnell family have carried special rights, given by the Queen, herself. It could just as easily be one, as much as the other. I have no idea, Justin. It's something we don't need to concern ourselves with in the meantime,"

"I suppose not!" mumbled Justin, who had resumed eating.

"By the way, boys, I have some interesting news to tell you." Jason and Justin stopped, and politely looked up. "Yes," Lady Kitty continued. "I have been in touch with Desmond Orr, You remember."

"Of course," Jason replied at once. "The chap from Victoria, the lawyer you went to see."

"That's the one. Well, he's already on his way to Scotland."

"That was quick!"

"He was so excited at the news I gave him that he said he'd catch a late flight. He should be there by now."

"You told him everything?"

"Well, yes, Jason. At least as much as we know. It seemed enough to get him motivated! He's going to phone when he has had time to make some plans."

"So, things are really moving! That's great. In the meantime we'll just have to wait."

"Yes, there's nothing more we can do until we hear from him, maybe later today, or perhaps tomorrow." Lady Kitty was finishing her coffee. "Have you got any plans made, either of you? Oh, go ahead, and finish your breakfast, Justin."

Jason thought for a minute. "Has anyone thought of telling Liam what's going on? Could Justin and me do that? I'd like to see him, anyway, to ask him if he has had any word from Johnny and Jimmy. I supposed they arrived safely?"

"Oh, I'm sure they did. We'd have heard, otherwise. Yes, Jason, I would be only too pleased if you would give Liam all the good news. You boys are the best ones to do it."

"How come?" asked Justin.

"Because you have both been mixed up in it from the very beginning. You certainly know as much about it all as I do!"

"We'll do that, then. Is that okay with you, Justy?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Well, if we're all finished, you may be excused!"

The Craigs left the table. Lady Kitty was still sitting with her cup in her hands as they left the dining room.



Chapter 24. Jason gets a Surprise

Cassy was busy preparing a tray for her Ladyship. The telephone was ringing. The cook ignored it. She knew her mistress was in the morning room. She would want to take the call herself.

"Land sakes," muttered Cassy. "Now here's the coffee made. It'll be stone cold before Herself puts down that 'phone." With a shrug, the good lady tipped the fresh hot coffee down the sink.

"I'll make a fresh in a few minutes, when she's ready to enjoy it." She cocked an eye to the wall clock. Her Ladyship was always a one for punctual meals, even a snack had to be on time! Cassy busied herself preparing the vegetables.

Twenty minutes later Cassy jumped at the sound of the morning room bell. "Oh my Lord!" she exclaimed, as she wiped her hands in her apron. She hurried out of the kitchen.

"Come in!" Lady Kitty called, in answer to the knock. Cassy poked her head round the door, before entering slowly.

"You rang, Milady?"

"Yes, Cassy. I have some interesting news. I wanted you to be the first to hear it. Anyway there'll be a change in plans."

"News? A change in plans, Ma'am?" Cassy was obviously relieved. She had been expecting a scolding.

"That was my Lawyer, Mr Orr; calling from Scotland..."

"They've found the wee baby?" Cassy interrupted.

"No, Cassy, there's no wee baby, as yet. Give the man a chance! He's planning to start the search. He wants me to join him, as soon as possible!"

"You'll be flyin' to Scotland tomorrow, then?"

"No, Cassy. I'll be sailing on the ferry, this evening. He's going to be at the dock to meet us, in the morning."

"Did I hear you right Ma'am? You did say 'us'? I'll never be ready, with all I have to do in the kitchen. Begging your pardon."

Lady Kitty had to hold back a smile. "Not on this trip, Cassy. I'm taking the boys."

"An excellent choice, Milady!" Cassy quickly recovered herself. "Will you be wanting' your dinner before you leave, Ma'am?"

"No, No thanks, Cassy. We'll get a decent meal on the boat!"

The housekeeper's face grew red. "I'm sorry that my cookin' doesn't meet up with..."

"Oh, for heaven's sakes relax Cassy! I was only teasing!"

"Well then, will there be anything else?" Cassy was still smarting.

"Yes, there is. Please get hold of Dermot. I need to tell him of our plans. Do you happen to know where the boys are?"

"They're about, some place. Master Justin was in for his snack a while back."

"Now isn't he the lucky one! See if you can find them and ask them to come. And bring me my coffee!"

"Yes, Your Ladyship. Right this minute!"

A few minutes later the Craigs joined Lady Kitty in the morning room.

"You were looking for us, Lady Kitty?" said Jason.

"Yes, I have something interesting to tell you. I hope you'll be pleased. I have arranged to take you over to Scotland with me, tonight, on the ferry."

"Wow! escaped Justin. How come, Lady Kitty?"

"I've been talking to Desmond. He needs me to bring over all the documents and papers. I thought the pair of you might like to come along?"

"Would we ever! Thanks, Lady Kitty. We'd love to come. Does Mr. Orr have any leads, or anything?"

"Not as yet. He'll meet us at the terminal. We'll be starting the search tomorrow morning!"

Early the next morning the boys were on deck. Presently the dark shoreline resolved into buildings. A harbour light winked. The ferry boat rumbled slightly as it approached the wharf. From the rail the Craigs scanned the small crowd on the dock.

"I wonder if Mr. Orr is there," mused Justin, almost to himself.

"C'mon, Kiddo, we're docking. We'd better get below. Lady Kitty will be looking for us."

The boys followed Lady Kitty down the gang plank. Half way down she stopped suddenly and waved. She gave a shrill cry. A dark haired man in the crowd waved back. In another moment Jason and Justin were being introduced.

"Mr. Orr, it's so good of you to meet us, especially at such an ungodly hour! I want you to meet the two boys I have told you about Jason, and this is Justin."

"Mr. Orr," said Jason, politely, as they shook hands. Justin followed his brother's lead.

"Desmond, please. It's good to meet you both. I've heard how helpful you've been. Lady O'Donnell has told me all about it."

"Well, here we all are!" Lady Kitty took charge, as usual. "Lead on, please Desmond."

The sun was still low in the sky as Desmond drove from the Stranraer dockside. Almost immediately the town fell away and the narrow road lead through pleasant countryside.

"Gee," commented Justin, "It's very like Ireland. Just as green. Are we in Scotland now? I've always heard that it was all mists and mountains."

"Oh yes." Lady Kitty answered. "That's the real Scotland. The Highlands, further north. By the way, Desmond, tell me, you managed to get us all booked into the, er, Orchard Hotel?"

"The Orchard Inn, yes. No problem. I've reserved a suite for you, and three rooms. I said we'd be staying a few days."

"Quite right. Have you made any plans, Desmond?"

"No, not really. I was waiting for you to arrive so that we could discuss things. I've met the proprietor, a nice chap, Angus McLeod."

Jason spoke up, from the back seat. "Excuse me, but do you mind my asking why you chose to start here. There doesn't seem to be much...."

"Good question, Jason." Desmond didn't take his eyes off the road as he answered. "It was just a hunch, after hearing about the baby William, and later, Little William. They were sent just across the water, from Ballymore. And then again, when William was growing up apparently he used to look across to Ireland. It stands to reason that he must have been reared close to these parts, by his foster parents, the Hamiltons. We have to start somewhere, and this area is as likely as any, to have large ancestral homes. As a matter of fact, the Orchard Inn has quite a history. Parts of it are very old."

"The owner's name is McLeod, I think you said?" mused Lady Kitty. "Obviously not a Hamilton!"

Desmond Orr gave a short laugh. "We should be that lucky? But I don't doubt that there's many a Hamilton to be found. It's quite the most common name in the book!"

There was no further conversation. The car was wheeling up the driveway to the Inn. It was a sprawling building. A strange but well blended mixture of very old, and quite modern. As the boys left the car Jason was the first to notice the sparkling line of the sea. The Inn was built on a rise. In the distance, low on the horizon was a blue smudge. Ireland!

"C'mon, boys." Lady Kitty called out. We'll all meet in my suite as soon as we have checked in, and seen our rooms. We have plans to make."

The Craigs entered Lady Kitty's suite. Desmond was already there. He was seated at a small side table with the familiar parchments and papers spread before him.

"Come in, and sit down," Lady Kitty greeted the boys.

"Desmond is just having a look at the documents. Tell me, are your rooms all right? I must say I like this place. What d'you think of it?"

Jason smiled. "Yes, thank you, Lady Kitty. The rooms are just fine. I'm glad you're comfortable. Justin and me like it here, at lot, as much as we've seen, so far."

"Sure, it's great. We've our own bathrooms and colour TV. I think it's awesome. I wonder what the grub is like. Will we be having lunch in the dining-room downstairs? Maybe there's a vending machine in the lobby? I'm kinda starved!"

Jason gave his kid brother a look. "That's nothing new!"

"Why don't you order up something from the kitchen, Justin? And you, too, Jason. Tell you what, I'll do it. I'd like some coffee. Lady Kitty turned to Desmond. "What about you, would you like something?"

"Huh? Oh, yes, coffee's fine."

Lady Kitty made the call, ordering for all of them. "Well, now, you two. Desmond and I were thinking of getting started. We'll just grab a cup of coffee first. We can get in a couple of hours or so before lunch."

"Do you have any particular plan in mind?" Jason asked.

"Well, yes, in a way. We've decided to explore the local village. It has a few small shops. I believe there's a post office, and a garage. Desmond and I thought we would just ask around and try and pick up any local gossip about the people living in the neighborhood. We might drive around nearby and see if there are any old, or large houses. Is that about it, Desmond?"

"Er, old houses? Yes, good idea!"

"I suppose you've thought of checking the local phone book?" suggested Jason.

"No, but we'll certainly do that, maybe this afternoon. Do you boys want to come along with us, this morning?"

"Er, no thanks. Not this time. Justin and me were hoping to explore the hotel. I believe there are stables. You don't mind?"

"No, of course not. I'd rather you didn't go on the horses in the meantime. But you should take a look at the stables, and make some enquires."

Desmond put down the papers. Well, that was a great find, boys. The birth certificate will hold up in any court of law. The marriage certificate is certainly valid. If we ever get that far we shall have no difficulty in proving our case."

The arrival of the girl with a tray put an end to further discussion. Justin was soon completely involved.

Presently the coffee cups were put aside. "Are we just going to check out the village, now, Desmond?"

"Yes, well we'll start there. It's quite a quiet place though. I expect we might wander a bit further afield."

"Then I'd better put on a stout pair of walking shoes, in case I have to take the term literally!" Lady Kitty busied herself. The boys stood up. "Will you excuse us, then? We'll be off to have a look around. You'll be back for lunch?"

"Oh yes." Desmond answered. "Back in a couple of hours, I should think."

"Right-o boys. Look after yourselves. Don't get into mischief."

"We won't, Lady Kitty. See you later!" The boys left. Lady Kitty and Desmond were behind them on the stairs, as they reached the lobby.

"What'll we do first?" Jason mused, when the hallway was quiet. He looked around him. "Look, Justy, there's a poster about the horses. Let's ask at the desk."

They approached the counter. A dark-suited clerk was on duty. "Excuse me. Will you tell us, please how we can find our way to the stables?" Jason asked politely.

"Of course, Sir. You take that corridor on your left, straight through to the rear door. There's a concrete path leading to the greenhouses and the orchard. Turn to your right just past the greenhouses. You'll see the stables quite easily." The clerk smiled. "Enjoy your stay, Sir." Jason nodded and returned the smile as he joined his brother. Together they moved across the hall to the corridor.

"Have a nice day, Sir!" Justin mocked, laughing. Jason returned the gibe with a friendly push. Jason was leading the way when they reached the door. He was looking over his shoulder and returning Justin's laugh. With a hefty thrust the door swung outwards. In that moment there was instant confusion. As Jason set foot on the concrete path he collided head on with a girl who was entering. The impact stopped Justin up short against his brother. The young girl dropped the basket of apples she had been carrying. As she reeled backwards she gave a loud gasp of fright and dismay. Apples were rolling all over the place. For a second no one spoke. Instinctively Jason bent down to retrieve the apples. The girl did the same. Jason found himself entangled in long black hair. Justin was also down on his knees by this time.

Jason straightened up. He was so taken aback by the sudden collision, that he found it hard to find his voice. "Really...it was all my fault I am so sorry. I wasn't looking where..." The boy's apologies suddenly faltered. His words were replaced by a look of absolute astonishment. The young girl opposite him had also risen. With an impatient gesture she flung back the mass of dark shiny hair that had concealed her face. Jason found himself staring into the face of Lady Caroline O'Donnell! For several seconds their eyes met. Jason's throat was dry. "Oh, my gosh, I'm, or, I'm..."

By this time the girl had recovered from the shock. "I'm all right I'm not hurt, or anything! Just scared out of my wits. It's not *that* bad!"

Jason's mouth was just opening and shutting. His face went from red to pale and back to red again. "Justy!" he spluttered as he half turned. "Tell me I'm not crazy. It is, isn't it?"

Justin was still chasing apples. He stopped and looked over his brother's shoulder. An exclamation of amazement escaped him. "Wow! Awesome!"

The girl raised her eye-brows. "You certainly gave me a nasty fright, barging out on top of me like that. However, it was an accident. You were making a nice apology before you freaked out. What's got into you? And your friend, behind you?"

"He's not my friend," Jason found his voice. "That's my brother, Oh, er, I'm Jason, Jason Craig. He's Justin. I, er, we were, er...."

"So, Jason, do you always make a habit of racing through a door without looking where you're going?"

"N-No! er, not really. But I certainly did, didn't I?" Justin handed over the basket.

"Thanks," said the girl. "Well, just a few bruised apples, and a mild case of heart failure. But you guys.... you seem to be in a state of shock, or something. What made you think you were seeing crazy, Jason? And what's so awesome, er, Justin? I think the least you owe me is an explanation? Perhaps you've never met a girl before?"

"Oh, er, it's not that. It's, well, you're exactly like, er.."

"Like the picture, the portrait." Justin finished.

"Oh, is that all. You both looked as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I thought I had," muttered Jason.

"Perhaps we'd better hear the rest of it. Now you think I'm not of this world. I've never had that said about me before! I want to hear more. There's a seat by the path. Let's not stand here at the scene of the crime. Let's sit down and talk calmly and sensibly. You can tell me all about the picture."

The group moved to the seat. The girl sat down and the boys joined her. Jason started. "I know we owe you an explanation. I'm not sure how much we can tell you, though. It's not just us, that's involved in all this!"

"Involved in all what? I'm just asking for a simple answer to a simple question. I want to know who the person in the portrait is, for starters. Which one of you two bright boys is going to tell me?"

"You'd better leave it to me, to tell her what we can, Justy."

"No problem! I wouldn't know what to say, anyway!"

"What is it that you wouldn't know what to say, Justin?" By this time the dark-haired girl was obviously losing patience. "Really, Jason, if you're going to be the one, then do so! Why all this mystery....?"

"You'll have to tell her, Jay, or she'll get mad at us!"

"Don't talk about me as if I weren't here! It's very rude. The 'her' and the 'she' have a name, you know! But we haven't even yet been introduced. I'm Raven!"

"And I'm Justin..."

"Oh I know, Jason, and his brother, Justin. I suppose you are staying at the Inn? The way you came through that door you'd think you *owned* the place, and all before you!"

"Yes, we're here for a few days," Jason replied.

"With your parents, I suppose?"

"Not exactly..."

"Is that a 'yes' or a 'no' or are you quite unable to give a straight answer? The pair of you are just about the dumbest..."

Jason reddened slightly. "It's not our parents. We're here with a very good friend, and her lawyer."

"Her *Lawyer*?" Raven's voice was shrill. "What ever kind of a set up is *that*?"

"Oh it's not a set-up," Justin broke in. "He's here to help her with, er..."

"Jus-tin!" interrupted his brother. "We agreed I would do the talking."

"Well, you certainly haven't said much yet, that makes sense! Every time you open your mouths you make matters worse....whatever it is you're hiding."

"Look," Jason spoke seriously. "If you will please wait, and let me arrange for you to meet with Lady Kitty, it can all be explained quite easily, I promise!"

"Lady Kitty, eh? Wow! Oh, now I get it...the picture, the portrait, in the old ancestral home. I'm supposed to look like her, is that it? Why didn't you say so, in the first place instead of falling all over your tongues!"

"You've got part of it right," replied Jason. "But it's just a little bit complicated."

"You're the one who's just more than a little bit complicated and silly, too, if you ask me. The same goes for your kid brother. I've heard enough. I've better things to do!" Raven flicked back her hair as she got up. "Don't rush to manage that meeting. I'm not the least bit interested. By the way, please knock, and wait, at any door you come to. I've no wish to run into you again, one way or another!" Without so much as a backward glance the girl strode away.

The Craigs sat in silence for a moment, until Raven was out of ear-shot. "Wow!" broke in Justin. "That's us put in our places!"

"Well, I don't think we can blame her, exactly. First, we knock her nearly silly, then we give her a whole lot of double talk. If only we could have told her!"

"Not likely! We don't know anything, for sure! She certainly looks like the picture, right enough."

"That's right, Justy. That makes sense. We could never have gone off half-cocked. It's up to Desmond, or Lady Kitty, to sort it out, first...Oh, my gosh!" Jason exclaimed suddenly, "What if she's not staying at the hotel? Maybe we'll never find her again!"

"Wouldn't be my loss!" muttered Justin.

"Don't be silly, brother. It's Lady Kitty I'm thinking about. I'm absolutely certain that Raven is the one we're looking for!"

"Let's find out at the desk, if she's a guest here. They must know who she is. Maybe she even works here? She was collecting apples, remember!" Justin got up, and Jason followed. When the pair reached the entrance Jason slowed down and opened the door very carefully.



Chapter 25. Lady Kitty Comes Face to Face with the Truth!

The boys learned from the desk that, not only was Raven *staying* at the Inn, she *lived* there. Even more interesting, her name was McLeod, the daughter of the Inn Keeper!

Filled with encouragement at this good news Jason and Justin decided to wait on the front porch for the return of Lady Kitty and her escort.

"Have we ever got news that'll blow Lady Kitty away!" Jason was saying, as they made themselves comfortable on easy chairs. "I can't wait to see her face when we tell her we've found her long lost relation. I mean, it must be, mustn't it?"

"Mmm, you'd think so, by the look of her. Trouble is, she's not a Hamilton, she's McLeod."

"Yeah, I know. That's what's bothering me! But, the likeness...it's incredible! I nearly died!"

"So did she," murmured Justin. "She could've cracked her head on that concrete path, as easy as not!"

"She wasn't hurt, Thank God! Just mad at me. What a way to start a relationship!"

"Are you thinking of it?"

"Thinking of what?" "Starting a relationship, or whatever....?"

"Hardly, she'd kill me as soon as look at me! She already said she hoped she'd never bump into me again!" Both boys laughed loudly, at Jason's choice of words! At that moment the rented car wheeled into the driveway. Desmond and Lady Kitty were back.

"Let me tell her," said Jason quietly, as they watched the adults getting out of the car.

"Hello boys!" her Ladyship called out cheerfully, as she approached. "What have you been up to?"

Jason didn't answer the question directly. "How did you guys get on?" The Craig boys stood up as Lady Kitty and Desmond joined them. Justin moved a chair over. Desmond found one nearby. When they were all seated Jason repeated, "How did you make out? Did you find out anything interesting?"

Desmond replied. "Oh, nothing, directly!"

"Oh, I disagree, Desmond. I think it really is important. We did come across the name Hamilton. The funny thing is, it's come right to our doorstep."

"Oh!" Jason sat forward.

Lady Kitty chuckled, as she added, "There's a Hamilton, or at least mention of a Hamilton, right here, at the Inn!"

"How is that possible? Is it one of the staff, here? The owner's name is McLeod, isn't it?"

"Yes, Jason. But get this....his late wife...he was married to a Hamilton. There's even a daughter, I heard!"

"There sure is! You heard right!" Justin murmured softly.

Jason slapped his knee in gesture of excitement. "That's it! That's the connection. Wow! Great! It all fits. I knew it! What d'you think, now, Justy?" Justy didn't answer. He was busy studying Lady Kitty's re-action to his brother's wild outburst.

"What's all that about, Jason? You know something we don't? What have the pair of you been up to while we were out?"

Jason calmed down at once. "Well, Justin and me, well, me, really, we had a sort of an accident.

Nothing serious. But there is something. Lady Kitty...if I asked you to handle it my way would you listen?"

"I'll always listen to anything you have to say. You know that, Jason? Tell me...what's going on? Judging from your excitement I think it must be important."

"It's the most important thing that's ever happened!" Jason eyes were shining. His cheeks were flushed.

"I trust you're going to share it with us?" Desmond spoke for the first time.

"Of course, Of course. I just would like to put my theory to the test, before I start shooting off my mouth. Will you allow me to do that, please, Lady Kitty? I promise you it'll be a very, very interesting experiment."

"I'm not at all sure what you're talking about, Jason. But I'll go along with it. You seem very worked up about something. I have to know, so we'll do it your way. Do you have a plan?"

"Well, kind of. Can we all go up to your suite, right away, before lunch? This is more important."

"It *is*?" questioned Justin, quietly.

"Go on," encouraged Lady Kitty. "You've got my curiosity going. You want to talk, in private, is that it?"

"Talk, yes, that's for sure. But, really, I just want you to meet someone.

"Oh?"

"Will you please phone the office and invite the Manager, er, Mr McLeod, to come up to your suite, right away? And, ask him, please, to bring his daughter, er, Raven, with him?"

"His daughter?" Lady Kitty's voice rose, in surprise.

"Please. It's very important!"

"What am I getting into? Are you sure you're not in some kind of trouble?" As she was speaking she got up. The others did the same.

"No, Lady Kitty. No trouble, I promise you. It's just something that only you, and then maybe Desmond, can take care of."

Her Ladyship led the way up the stairs. When they were all comfortably settled in her suite, Lady Kitty turned to Jason. "You want me to 'phone, now? This minute?"

"Please. You won't regret it!"

"All right then. Here goes. Goodness what!" Lady Kitty' lifted the receiver. After a moment there was a click. "May I speak with the Manager, Mr. McLeod, please?...Oh, Mr McLeod, Kitty O'Donnell here. I have a favour to ask of you....thank you, er, would it be possible for you to come up to my suite....well, right away if it's convenient?...Oh Good. Thank you." Jason was making faces trying to catch Her Ladyship's eye, as he mouthed the word 'Raven.'

"Just one more thing, Mr. McLeod. We would like you to bring your daughter, er, Raven, with you...Yes....Oh, er, I'll explain it when I see you both. Thank you." The Lady replaced the handset with a heavy sigh! "This had better be good, Jason!"

"You can count on it!" replied Jason.

"You've got to give me some answers, Jason." Lady Kitty spoke firmly. "They'll be here in a minute. Mr. McLeod was curious to know why we wanted him to bring his daughter. Quite frankly, so am I!"

"Trust me, Lady Kitty. There'll be no problem."

"Easy for you to say, Jason. I'm the one that has to do the explaining."

"Would you like me to do it?" Desmond offered. "Not that I know what's going on, any more

than you do, but..."

"Oh please, Desmond," Jason broke in, "it has to be Lady Kitty. It's a kinda' surprise. You wouldn't understand it!"

"You can say that again!" Desmond said, quietly.

At that moment there was a firm knock on the door. Lady Kitty stiffened in her chair. "Oh my glory, they're here! Desmond, will you get the door, please?" She gave Jason a look which clearly expressed her feelings

"Oh, Mr. McLeod, please, do come in, Raven?" The lawyer was standing between the visitors and Lady Kitty, as he ushered them into the room. He stood aside to make the introductions.

Lady Kitty put on a smile of welcome as she held out her hand to the Inn Keeper. "How do you do, Mr. McLeod. Thank you so much for coming...And this is your daughter, Raven, I...?" As Her Ladyship transferred her attention to the young girl, who had emerged from behind her father, her eyes opened. The smile on her face froze!

In the dead silence which followed, Raven muttered, under her breath, "Good grief! Not *again!*"

Lady Kitty quickly recovered her wits. "I'm so sorry, er, Raven." She turned. "You should have warned me, Jason. Come and sit down beside me, my dear. Mr. McLeod, please join us."

"Thank you, Lady O'Donnell. It's a pleasure to meet you. I must confess, though, I am, somewhat mystified..."

It was Jason who interrupted. "Mr. McLeod, I'm afraid it's mostly my fault. As Lady Kitty said, I should have warned her.

"Warned her?" ...McLeod's voice remained polite.

"Well, you see, Raven and me, we, er kind of, er 'met' earlier this morning..."

"Oh so I heard!" The man's smile was friendly.

"Is this the Lady I'm supposed to be like?" Raven whispered to Jason, beside her.

"SSssh! Just a sec."

Lady Kitty was saying, "I'm afraid I was not informed that your daughter has an exceptional likeness to one of my ancestors. It's so remarkable that I was taken by surprise." She turned to Raven. "I'm sorry to have been so rude, my dear!"

"That's okay! Jason told me that I'm supposed to be like a portrait, or something. He was kinda surprised, too!" Raven gave Jason a grin. "Sorry I was so horrid to you and your brother!"

"We forgive you, I think," muttered Justin.

"So that's why you arranged to have Raven here. You wanted Lady O'Donnell to see the likeness for herself?" McLeod spoke across to Jason.

"Yes, sir, That's part it."

"You mean there's *more?*" Raven asked, softly.

Justin leaned across, as he said. "You bet! You're the one they've been looking for!" The outspoken remark caused a stir. Lady Kitty gave a short laugh to cover her embarrassment.

Desmond Orr gave the young boy a warning look! Raven sat up in her chair. A puzzled expression crossed her face. Justin realized he had spoken out of turn, and went bright red!

It was Desmond who took control of the situation. "With Lady O'Donnell's permission I would like to explain..."

"By all means! I think it's time to tell Raven why all the fuss! My dear, I can see you're quite confused. Yes, I think you should be the one to do the talking here, Mr Orr."

All eyes turned to the lawyer. Desmond cleared his throat, taking the time to choose his words. "Thank you, Kitty," he began. "I have to take it at face value that there is a resemblance between Lady Caroline and the young lady here. I haven't seen the portrait myself. If nothing else, I am convinced by Lady O'Donnell's re-action. Jason certainly went out of his way to prove his point! That being the case, as Lady O'Donnell's legal advisor I feel that I am at liberty to explain the significance of Raven's role in all this." The young girl's face was a study in interest and curiosity. She was sitting on the edge of her chair, taking in every word.

The lawyer continued. "Yes, our friend, Justin, here, was telling nothing less than the truth, even if he did speak without thinking. We are, indeed, looking for a descendant of a seventeenth century soldier by the name of William Hamilton..."

"That's my mother's maiden name, Hamilton!" Raven couldn't contain herself.

Lady O'Donnell smiled. "Yes, dear. We learned that, only this morning. It was that fact, with your likeness to Caroline Hamilton, that convinced us that you are, indeed, the relative we've been seeking."

"B-But I don't understand. How come you guys have been looking for me, er, for someone...?"

Lady Kitty turned back to Desmond. "Sorry to interrupt you, please go on. I think she should hear it all, better coming from you."

"It's like this, Raven, Mr. McLeod. Lady O'Donnell's estate is forfeit to the British Government if there are no heirs. It has been my task to research the O'Donnell family tree, so to speak. I must say," Desmond added with a laugh, "that my job has been made considerably less difficult, thanks to the help I have had from the Craigs, here!" Lady Kitty nodded, smiling broadly.

"However, that's another story, which I needn't get into here. The thing is, that our search led us to this part of Scotland. William Hamilton was reared in this neighborhood." Desmond paused and looked around him. "Perhaps in the original part of this house? Could I be right, Mr. McLeod?"

"Oh it has quite a history. It wouldn't surprise me!"

"The bottom line is, then," the lawyer looked straight at Raven, "I accept the fact, conditionally, that you are a bloodline descendant of Caroline O'Donnell. We know she had a boy child by her husband, Major William Hamilton."

"What does this mean?" Raven spoke in a low voice, full of bewilderment.

Lady Kitty gave the girl a warm smile. "It means, my dear, that we are related... among other things."

"A-among, er; other things?"

"Go ahead, Desmond. Tell her the good news...at least I think it's good news?"

"Yes, Raven. Essentially, as Her Ladyship's sole beneficiary, you have entitlement to her entire estate, on her demise."

"Jason, I don't understand any of this," Raven whispered. What's ben, benif-whatever. And what's 'demise?"

"Tell her, Jason!" Lady Kitty was laughing. "I never can understand lawyer double-talk, either!"

"It's pretty cool, Raven. When Lady Kitty dies you'll get everything. Her castle...her fortune. Everything!"

"I don't think it's 'cool' Jason. Sure, I know what you mean, but I don't like to hear you talking about this, er, lovely person, having to die first!"

Lady Kitty's expression showed emotion. "What a sweet thing to say, my dear. But don't worry. Death is a fact of life. We all have to face it. It'll be a while yet! These boys, and now, you, Raven, have given me a reason to enjoy the many years ahead."

"Oh, thank you. I do hope so!" impulsively Raven rose from her place and embraced the elderly lady, planting a kiss on her cheek. Starting back, she exclaimed, "Oh, It is all right, isn't it? I mean, we are related?"

Lady Kitty was really moved. "Of course it was all right, it was just lovely. Thank you!" She looked about her with a decisive air. "Well, that's given us all something to think about, eh, Mr. McLeod?"

"It's Angus, please. Yes indeed. It's hard to believe." Angus McLeod smiled across at his daughter. "I am so happy for you, Raven, my dear. Well worth a few bumps and bruises?" Everyone laughed.

"Have you forgiven me for being so nasty, then?" Raven turned to Jason. "I'm really sorry."

"I never blamed you for being mad at us. You can understand, now, why we couldn't level with you?"

"Of course! We're friends, then?" Jason blushed.

"Yes, friends!"

Angus McLeod stood up. "Well, it has been an eventful morning. I am so very pleased at the exciting news."

"You will understand, Angus, and you, too, Raven," the lawyer looked across to Raven, "there are certain formalities to be attended to, so that we can get everything signed and sealed."

"Of course. What is it that you need?"

"It would be helpful if you have your marriage certificate, and perhaps Raven's birth certificate, that sort of thing."

"No problem at all. I can let you have all you want this afternoon. As a matter of fact, I hadn't thought about it for years, there's a very old trunk up in the attic. It's full of all sorts of papers. I've never had the time or the patience to go through them. You're very welcome indeed, if you think they would be of interest to Lady O'Donnell."

"Thank you, Angus," replied the lawyer. "That's a splendid offer. I'll take you up on it."

"Good! Well, may I invite you all to be my guest at the Inn for as long as it takes you, or for as long as you may wish to stay?"

"What a generous gesture, Angus." Lady Kitty smiled. "I can't speak for Mr. Orr, er Desmond, as I'm sure he'll be delighted to have a few days to take care of all the legal side of everything. He will want to go through the papers and documents you spoke of. But the boys and I must get along back. I have a house-keeper who gets upset when I'm away from home. But I do thank you for your offer."

"Not at all, Lady O'Donnell. I understand."

At that point Her Ladyship caught sight of Jason's face. It was as long as a fiddle! She turned to the Inn Keeper. "Angus, er, I wonder if you, and Raven, could return with us to Ballymore, or it might suit you better to wait a day or two. You could come over with Desmond, when he's finished up, here? I would very much like you to be our guests. I do think," she added with a laugh, "that Raven should have the chance to see what she's into!"

"My dear Lady O'Donnell, I appreciate the invitation. I greatly regret that I must, shall we say, take a 'rain check. This is the height of the tourist season, and a busy time for me. However, as you say, I do think Raven should go. Mr. Orr, you'd do that, wouldn't you?"

"It would be a great pleasure, Angus. I certainly will."

"Well, that's settled then. We'll look forward to having Raven with us, won't we boys?" Lady Kitty beamed.

No answer from Justin. Jason's face had returned to its normal length, in fact it was creased with

a broad smile. Raven had turned to him as she whispered, "I'm glad we don't have to say good-bye after all."

"Me too!"

At that point, Angus McLeod was edging towards the door. With a backward glance at Jason, Raven joined her father. Everyone was smiling as the McLeods took their leave.

"Well, Jason!" Lady Kitty was herself again. "I don't know whether I should scold you, or hug you! But all I can say is, Bless you my dear! It seems you've done it again!"

"Oh, no problem, Lady Kitty. It just happened, I guess. It wasn't exactly the way I would have chosen to introduce myself. But it seems to have worked out all right in the end. But you do see that I couldn't tell you beforehand? There had to be instant recognition without any prompting from me."

"Oh, my land!" Lady Kitty couldn't keep from laughing. "Did I ever get a surprise, shock, more like it."

"Then I'm not going to get a scolding?"

"Come over here, Jason. I want to give the biggest and best hug from a grateful old woman to the one she loves!"

"Less of the 'old' Lady Kitty, and it's a deal!"

"Well!" exclaimed Her Ladyship, breathless from the deed, "now I think it's time to go down for lunch. We've worked up quite an appetite after all that excitement."

"Me too!" Justin was already on his feet.

"I don't suppose it'll take all that long, to go through all that stuff?" Jason and Desmond were side by side as they went down the stairs.

"I'll hurry it!" Desmond smiled. "I understand your impatience! A couple of days, at most, I promise!" With that, Jason had to be content.



Chapter 26. A Link with the Past

The morning dragged by. Jason found it difficult to tear himself away from the window. He watched and waited. The driveway had never looked more deserted. A noise behind him disturbed him, momentarily. He turned. It was Justin.

"Still waiting, eh?"

"Obviously!" Jason's reply was none too friendly. His mind was elsewhere.

"D'you want some company?"

"If you mean yours, No thanks!"

"I'll be in the library, reading, then, if you're looking for me."

"Whatever!" Justin turned. The door closed. Silence fell. Jason resumed his vigil. Suddenly he came to life! A glint of chrome in the sunlight. "They're here!" he shouted aloud, as he raced for the door.

The short blast on the car horn brought everyone running. Cassy emerged from the kitchen; Lady Kitty came out of the morning room, taking off her spectacles. Justin appeared, with his book still in his hand. "Was that the car?" he asked. No one took the trouble to answer him. Jason was first at the top of the steps. The next moment he was face to face with Raven. They greeted each other shyly. "Hi!" said Jason. At that moment Lady Kitty took over. "Oh, here you are! Raven, my dear!... Desmond welcome. Do come in. Dermot'll take care of the bags." Her Ladyship was a bundle of energy. "Meet Cassy, my friend, and housekeeper." As Cassy moved forward she saw Raven and let out a shrill cry. "Lord Save us!"

"Meet Raven, and pull yourself together," Her Ladyship said sharply. "And Mr. Desmond Orr" Cassy gave a nod. She turned and scurried off, talking under her breath!

The visitors entered the hallway. Raven's dark eyes wore as round as saucers. "Oh my golly!" she muttered to Jason, at her side.

"Well, Raven, what d'you think of your ancestral home?"

"Oh, not *my* home, Lady Kitty! It's fabulous. I can't believe it!"

"Oh you can believe it, my dear...Well, I think I'll let Jason do the honours here. He'll look after you and show you round. Your room is on the first floor. Right opposite Jason's."

For some reason Jason couldn't explain, he felt pleased, and self-important. Fortunately, no one seemed to notice.

"Desmond, you and I have a lot to talk about." Lady Kitty was guiding her lawyer towards the library. Justin had disappeared up the stairs. All of a sudden it seemed, Jason and Raven were alone in the great hall. A moment of embarrassment was averted by the arrival of Dermot, puffing and blowing, laden with suitcases.

"The room opposite mine, for Raven's, please, Dermot." Jason was obviously taking charge.

"C'mon Raven," he said. "Let me show you." The young pair took the stairs together.

Throwing open the door, Jason motioned for Raven to enter. He followed her across the threshold. "Do you like it?"

"What's not to like? Of course I do. I love it!" Raven turned. "Jason, I'm so glad that your room is just across the corridor..." she broke off. "I mean, er, I'm glad that my room is not away on its own in some spooky garret!" She ended with a laugh.

"Spooky's right!" The voice behind them gave them a start. It was Justin who had just come out of his room. "This place is full of Ghosts, and things!"

"Justin! What are you trying to do? Scare our new guest?"

"Oh, you know me, just kidding!"

"Not funny!"

"Sorry! Hi, Raven. It's not that bad. The spooks are friendly! At least with brother, here. I'm not all that keen!"

"Get outa here, kiddo!" Jason pretended to be angry. He turned back to Raven. "I'd like to show you my room, when you're ready?"

"Sure! Right now's fine." Together they moved across the corridor. Jason didn't invite Raven in. He just opened the door wide and stood with her, as she peeked inside.

"Wow!" the girl exclaimed. "It's so...er old fashioned!" Raven had taken in the antique furniture, and the huge bed.

Jason made a sweep with his arm, as he said, "That wall, there, at the head of the bed. It all slides back. That's the entrance to the secret passage. No one knew where it was until we found it!"

"Wow!" repeated Raven. "Can we go there?"

"Not without Lady Kitty's permission, especially not until your dad is here, another time." Raven appeared satisfied. "Tell you what I'm dying to do!" Jason was saying as he pulled over the door of his room.

"I'm dying to show you the picture in the dining-room. You know, the portrait of Caroline?"

"The famous portrait, eh?" Raven laughed. "Of course! I'm dying to see it, too!"

"C'mon then! Let's see it. Now's a good time." In a few moments they reached the dining-room.

Jason opened the door and led the way. Raven remained motionless for a long moment. She gazed in awe, recognizing the likeness immediately. "How strange," she murmured at last. "It's like looking in a mirror, almost." The girl turned, as she said, "Jason, I don't blame you one little bit for nearly having a fit when you bumped into me!"

"And I don't blame you for getting mad at us when we couldn't tell you!" Jason's heart beat faster when Raven put her hand on his arm. "I'm so glad it all happened the way it did!"

The girl turned back to the portrait. "That's an unusual piece of jewelry she's wearing. D'you know what happened to it?"

"No, I don't think anybody does. It's never been found."

"She looks serene, in the picture. Did she have a happy life, do you suppose?"

"Absolutely not, at least not the last part of it. She died, mostly from a broken heart. Actually she had just given birth to a baby boy. That was about 1663, I think. She was only twenty five."

"That's really sad!" Raven sighed. "But how come you know all that? You're not just making it up?"

"Of course not. Why would I want to do that?"

Raven smiled mischievously. "Why indeed? But I do think it's very clever of you. Is there more you can tell me about her? Do you know anything about her husband?"

"Yes, I know about him, too. I know all about him."

"Oh, do tell me about him." Raven pleaded.

"Sure. But it's a pretty long story. If you don't mind I would rather wait until a better time. I promise I'll tell you everything. Right now, though, I think we should be joining the others in the library. They'll be wondering what we're tip to." Jason blushed, but covered up by talking quickly. "You haven't seen the library. There are so many books. Some of them are very valuable. There's one about Irish Ghosts. I've read the bit about the Galloping Major..."

After dinner Raven asked permission to have an early bedtime. She pleaded exhaustion after the journey and all the excitement. Lady Kitty was at once understanding and sympathetic. "That's an excellent idea, my dear. Indeed, I think we should all follow your example. Are you boys

ready to turn in? Desmond, do you mind? If you want to sit up and take a night cap in the library, please do so?"

Jason lingered over his goodnight to Raven. However, once in bed he soon drifted off to sleep on cloud nine.

It rained heavily during the night. Peals of thunder echoed off the battlements. It didn't disturb the Craig boys. Raven, was restless, however, in a strange setting. Caroline, the Galloping Major, Jason, and a host of new experiences and impressions jostled for a place in her mind. Finally, she fell asleep.

It seemed she had barely closed her eyes when she was awakened by a tapping on her door. It was Jason. "Are you awake?"

"I am, now."

"Breakfast'll be ready soon."

The deep boom of the gong filled the corridor. The young people were ready, and went downstairs together. Presently they were all assembled round the table. Greeting were exchanged. After everyone had been served the conversation ebbed and flowed, easily.

"I hope you slept well, Raven?" smiled Lady Kitty. "You had such a long day yesterday. You must have been out like a log, I should think?"

"Yes, I was really tired. I hardly remember getting into bed." Raven paused. She wrinkled her nose. "I had the strangest dream, though. It was so real that I am not sure that I wasn't awake. It couldn't have been real. It was one of the strangest dreams ever..." Her voice trailed off in a tone of uncertainty.

"I'm not at all surprised to hear that you had bad dreams, my dear. Your head was full of so many new and exciting things." Her Ladyship gave the young girl a warm and sympathetic look.

"Oh, no, Lady Kitty. Please don't misunderstand me." protested Raven quickly. "It wasn't a bad dream, at all. I wasn't in the least bit frightened. In fact," she added with a puzzled look, "there was a feeling of warmth, and love, all round me. It was a beautiful experience. I still don't know if any of it could have been real, or not. That's what bothers me! But, no, I'm being silly. Of course I was dreaming the whole thing." The girl gave a short laugh. "It was nothing."

"It sounds fascinating'." said Desmond, across the table. "Are you going to tell us about it?" Lady Kitty asked, with a smile. "It must have been most vivid to have left such an impression on your mind. I always forget my dreams before I have my feet on the floor! Do tell us yours, if you want to." She put down her coffee cup.

Raven thought for a moment. Everyone waited. "Well," she began slowly, "It seemed to be somewhere in these grounds. There were lots of pink and red flowers all over the place..."

"Rhododendron's," interrupted Lady Kitty. "The place is festooned with them, all summer long. Please go on, dear."

"There was the sound of a horse somewhere. Like some-one approaching me, on horse-back. I couldn't see who it was, but I sensed the warmth, I was telling you about. I wasn't afraid. I was curious. I distinctly remember the rattle of the harness and the soft thump of hooves, like on grass, or a soft surface of some kind. It grew so loud, and so close that I thought for a moment that I was going to be run down. I tried to run. My legs felt like rubber." She gave a short laugh.

"That was when I think I woke myself up. The sound of the horse and harness was still in my ears...I think I got up and went over to the window and looked out. It was such a dark night. I couldn't see a thing. I just got back into bed, I guess. I must have gone straight back to sleep."

Raven concluded her story. She looked round the table apologetically. She was embarrassed at having monopolized the attention of the other guests.

"Yes, dear, I expect you did dream the whole thing. I wouldn't give it another thought." Lady Kitty poured herself another cup of coffee. The whole matter of Raven's dream would have been forgotten except for an unexpected intervention. It was Cassy. Quite unwittingly she cast a whole new light on Raven's experience.

"Excuse me, Milady." Cassy had just come bustling in. "I just wanted to make sure there was enough of everything. So many hungry mouths to feed, Bless em." She busied herself lifting covers and peering under lids. The cook sidled over to the dining table. "Have you all got enough?" Is there anything else that would take your fancy? What about you, Master Justin?" "No, I'm doing fine thanks, Cassy."

"Oh, excuse me, Milady," Cassy's face bore a pained expression. "Liam was up with the vegetables. He's that upset this morning. My, I've never seen him so put out."

"And what was it, Cassy, that put Liam so out of sorts this morning?" Her Ladyship smiled. "Caterpillars in the cabbage?"

"On, no, Ma'am. Nothing of that sort. Just horses, Milady, one, or maybe more." The effect was immediate. Complete silence fell.

"A horse, you say, Cassy? Explain yourself." Lady Kitty's voice sounded tight, and strained. It was unnaturally loud in the stillness of the room.

"Oh, it's not me, Milady! It's what Liam was telling me. He was ready for murder, Ma'am!"

"Yes, yes, Cassy! So you say. Now, what is it?"

"When he came up to the house this morning, early, he was that upset to see the whole place dug into by some great horses hooves. The grass he takes such pride in, all churned over. He says it's worse round the back, Ma'am, especially by the castle wall. 'It's all ruined!' says he."

During this account Raven had been growing more and more excited. Finally, she blurted out, "So, I wasn't dreaming, after all? I really did hear a horse, right below my window! It must have been one from your stable, got loose, Lady Kitty? What a shame to have it ruin your lovely lawns. Thank goodness to have my silly' old dream all cleared up!"

Cassy's face was solemn as she exclaimed, "Nay, child! It weren't any horse belonging to Her Ladyship, I'm thinking!" She paused to draw a breath before delivering a message of doom. Lady Kitty caught her eye and gave her a look that froze her housekeeper's tongue in her head. Cassy dropped her eyes. She grabbed her apron round her and hurried out of the dining-room without so much as a backward glance.

Lady Kitty started the conversation flowing again before Raven had time to ask questions.

"Well, children," she began. "If you've finished eating I have an important announcement to make." Justin popped the remaining piece of toast into his mouth as Lady Kitty continued, turning to Desmond. "I think we should tell them, don't you?"

"Oh by all means. I think it'll make their day!"

"Well, then. Desmond has told me that getting my new will organized and notarized, together with a whole host of legal documents, is going to take several weeks." There wasn't a sound in the room. The young people were following Her Ladyship's every word, wondering what was coming next.

"That being the case," Lady Kitty went on, "it'll be coming up near Christmas before everything is signed and sealed. The occasion is an important one...the most important of my life, I should think!" The lady's face broke into a wide smile as she looked round the eager faces at her table.

"It calls for a party, don't you think?"

"A party', Lady Kitty...?"

"Yes, Jason, a party! The biggest and best party that this old place has seen in years! And you're all invited!"

Justin swallowed his toast. "We are? How come?"

"You, and your brother, and of course your dear mother. You're all invited. Raven, especially you. I'm sure your father, too, could get off for a few days, don't you think?"

There was a buzz of excitement. Lady Kitty held up her hand. "It's all arranged. All expenses paid for everyone present to be here for the happiest, jolliest and most wonderful Christmas ever!" Suddenly Lady Kitty became serious, as she looked round the room. "You must have known how difficult it was for me to think of having to say good-bye to you young people in a few days. Quite frankly I couldn't bear the thought of it!" She brightened up. "But now, it's not so bad. It's not going to be time for sad 'good-byes' next week. Just 'au revoirs!'"

Everyone started talking at once. There was great excitement. In the midst of all the hub-bub, Raven turned to Jason. "Oh, I'm so glad I'll be seeing you again, after next week. I thought... I was afraid that...Well you know...?"

"I've been worrying about that, too, myself. I didn't want to talk about it, though, to spoil the time we had..."

Finally, when everyone present had had a chance to thank Lady Kitty for such a wonderful invitation, the meal was declared over. "Get along with you all now, and enjoy yourselves. Give the old lady a chance to enjoy her coffee in peace!"

"Thanks again, Lady Kitty." Jason paused. "Raven and I will be upstairs. I promised to tell her all about everything. I think Desmond's using the Library."

Lady Kitty smiled as she answered. "Yes dear! That's an excellent plan. Thank you for telling me. I suppose Justin'll have his head in a book, as usual?"

"I expect so. He'll be fine. Catch you later!" Jason spoke over his shoulder as he and Raven left the dining-room together.

"Well," Jason began, as they crossed the hall. "Are you ready to come up to my room, then?"

"Sure! Why not?"

They reached the stairs. Raven grew suddenly serious. "Tell me, Jason, what was all that when I was telling my dream? Cassy seemed very strange. What did she mean when she said it wasn't one of our horses?"

"I'll have a chance to explain it all to you when we get settled. I noticed that Lady Kitty was pretty quick to change the subject!"

"Yes, I noticed that, too. You'll tell me, then?"

"Sure! We've lots to talk about...or rather, I have!" Jason gave a laugh.

Jason opened the door of his room. He stood back for Raven to enter. "Please, come in, and make yourself comfortable."

"This sure is a fabulous room, Jason. It's like I said, it's so old-fashioned, and everything." The young girl's eyes roved round the room. "It's kinda cosy, too," she added, as she took in the bright fire and the easy chairs. "You're so lucky that Lady Kitty chose this room for you, don't you think?"

"It was very clever, and very thoughtful of her. She must have read my mind!" Raven was still standing in the doorway, looking around her. "It doesn't bother you, I mean about ghosts, and

things?"

"Of course not! why should it? I've told you, they're friendly!"

Jason was taken by surprise when he turned to his friend to lead her to a chair by the fire. He held out his hand as he moved towards her. She ignored it. Raven's face was very pale. Her eyes had assumed a faraway look. She was standing quite motionless.

"Raven, come on, over here. Come and sit by the fire. You look chilled." To Jason's consternation, the girl made no move. It seemed she hadn't heard him.

"Raven?" Jason tried again. "Wait! There's something I must do." The girl's voice sounded as if it was coming from a long way off. Jason stopped in his tracks with the sudden realization that something very strange was going on. He remained still, and waited.

Moving somewhat stiffly, but nonetheless purposefully, Raven crossed the room. She went to the ancient writing desk, in the corner by the window. With precise movements she pulled open on the drawers. She inserted her hand, almost to the wrist. As Jason watched, it seemed to him that Raven was reaching for something at the very back of the shallow drawer. The whole scene had a strange air of unreality about it. 'Like a movie, in slow motion,' was how Jason described it, later. Raven's hand disappeared. There was complete silence in the room. Then, a clearly audible click reached the boy's ears. He remained frozen. Raven seemed to have expected the sound. She did not hesitate, but inserted her hand still further into the old desk. After a moment's pause she slowly withdrew her arm. Dangling from Raven's hand was a small round object, attached to a gold chain. Jason released a gasp of pent-up breath. In a split second he had recognized Lady Caroline's locket. Just as suddenly, the spell was broken. Raven heaved a great sigh. She shivered slightly. "Where am I? W-What happened?" she faltered. Then she caught sight of the locket and chain hanging through her fingers. She held up her hand. "Where did this come from?" Her eyes were wide, with surprise. Suddenly the colour drained from Raven's face. She was ashen when she turned to Jason. "This is the locket in the picture, isn't it? It belonged to Lady Caroline?"

Jason went swiftly to his friend's side. He took her by her free hand and led her, gently, to a chair by the fire.

"Don't worry!" Yes, it's Caroline's. Come on over by the fire. You look frozen. We'll talk. It's all right. Everything'll be all right I promise you. There's absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Neither Caroline, or the Major wish you anything but good. You felt it yourself, in your dream. Please don't be frightened anymore."

As Jason was talking he led the girl to an easy chair, by the fireside. Gratefully she sank into it and appeared to relax. Her colour returned. "What on earth was all that about?" Raven asked. Her face wore a puzzled expression.

"You really mean you don't know?"

"All I remember is just coming in the door. A funny feeling came over me. I felt I wasn't there any more!"

"Then what happened?"

Raven paused. She put her hand to her head, as if to concentrate. "I'm not sure. I think I just felt that I was sleep-walking, or something. I knew that I had to cross over to that desk." Raven waved a hand. "Some peculiar force took over. I knew exactly what to do. I couldn't help myself. I just had to put my hand in that drawer and retrieve this locket of Caroline's." She held it up as she spoke.

Jason smiled across at his friend. "It's obvious that there's a very strong bond, or link, between

you, and Caroline, even including her likeness. It probably exists between you, and the Major; also I shouldn't wonder. Especially judging by what happened last night."

"What about last night?" You mean my dream?"

"Yes, Raven," replied Jason. "I intended to tell you the whole story, and break it to you gently. I didn't want you to be upset when you learned the truth." Jason spoke gently. He was wondering how he could explain to his friend that she had been visited by a ghost. It might scare her still more. But it was taken out of Jason's hands when Raven broke in on his thoughts.

"The truth?" her voice rose. "Will you please tell me what is going on, around here?" I have a right to know!"

"Of course, you have, Raven. It's just that..."

"Oh, I know," the girl cut in, "you're afraid to tell me anything scary in case you find yourself with a hysterical, screaming female, on your hands."

"That's not it, at all. I have far too much respect for you to even think such a thing!"

"You have? Honestly? Even after all those horrid things I said to you, that first time?"

"Look, Raven, that's all forgotten. I told you before that I thought you were quite right. You were fully justified in being mad at a couple of bumbling idiots!"

"Oh, please," said Raven, looking upset, "don't call yourself that, even in jest. It's not funny, any more!"

"Well, it was, at the time, I suppose," said Jason with a laugh.

"Okay then. Let's never mention our first meeting again. It never happened."

"What never happened?" asked Raven, with mock seriousness. Both young people broke into peals of laughter.

"Boy, that was good. Just what I needed," said Raven, a moment later. It was true. Raven was now comfortable and relaxed. Jason felt ready to tell her everything he knew.

"Thanks," said Raven.

"Thanks? For what?"

"You've been so nice. You're so gentle, and thoughtful. You are so mature. I should never have called you a silly little boy."

"When was that, Raven?" They both laughed again. Jason felt wonderful. On top of the world.

"Well," he said. "It's time to stop kiddin' around here. You wanted me to tell you why I mentioned your dream, last night?" Raven nodded, and smiled.

"What surprises me," Jason began, "is the fact that you obviously know nothing about the history of Ballymore, and the O'Donnell family? You never heard the legend that surrounds the township, and the castle?"

"No, no one has told me anything very much, I'm afraid."

"Very well then. There is a great deal that I can tell you that will help you to understand everything, your background, and the O'Donnell family. I fully intended to tell you the whole thing this morning, anyway. We seem to have been sidetracked a bit though. You know that I have been waiting for the right moment to explain everything. Honestly, though, I wasn't quite sure how you would re-act. I was afraid you might think I was making it all up, just to impress you...or something." Jason finished lamely.

"You don't have to worry about that, Jason. I hoped that we knew each other well enough for you to trust me." Raven was swinging the locket to and fro, in front of her, as she was speaking. It caught her attention, as it glinted in the fire-light. The link chain was still entwined round her wrist. "Listen, Jason," she said. "We should decide what we are going to do about this locket,

before we get into anything else." She held it up for a closer look.

"Yes, we should. You're right. It's fabulous, isn't it? To think that it was actually worn last, by Caroline, all those years ago. Do you mind if I see it?" The girl carefully unwound the chain from her wrist, and handed it over. Jason took it as if it was as fragile as a cobweb! Raven laughed. "Relax, Jason. It's quite solid. It won't evaporate, or anything." Jason turned the locket over in his fingers. He held it up to examine it closely. "Does it open, d'you suppose?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought of trying. I was so interested in what you were saying I wasn't thinking about it. Here, let's have it back, for just a jiffy. My nails are longer than yours. Let me try." She reached over. After a moment she gave a squeal of pleasure. The ornament flew open, in her hand.

"Wow!" breathed Jason. "What's inside? Anything?" He got up and crossed over to his companion, to look over her shoulder.

"Can you believe this?" Raven's voice was shrill with excitement. "There's a picture of a man on one side. The other side's empty." She held it up for Jason to see.

"That figures," mused Jason, after a moment. "The man looks like her husband. The other side must have been left for a miniature of her baby that she was about to have, the last time she wore this."

"You never told me much about Caroline's husband?" said Raven.

"No I haven't. But I will, when we get settled down. There's so much I haven't told you. Just be patient a little while longer. I'll tell you everything. But, first, I want to take a better look at this guy in here..." He took the locket from Raven and brought it over to the window. "This is fabulous," he said after a moment. "Did you notice the long hair and high lace collar? It's the Major, all right. He looks different, out of his uniform."

"What d'you mean, different out of uniform?" Raven had joined her friend, at the window. "I don't understand how you would know that?"

"I'm sure you don't. Anyway, for what it's worth, this is quite definitely a likeness of William Hamilton, Caroline's husband."

"How on earth can you tell that? You're just guessing!"

"But I already told you, Raven," said Jason, patiently, "I told you that I know all about the Major!"

"The Galloping Major..." Caroline's husband? William Hamilton?" Raven's face was a study in excitement and confusion. "Oh this is all too much for me, Jason!" In mock exasperation she returned to her chair and sank down into it. "It's not that I don't believe you, Jason, but this is all too much."

"Be patient, Raven. I do have all the answers. Trouble is, that, at this rate I'll never get telling you everything. But what I'd like to get off my mind is this locket I suggest that we take it, now, and give it to Lady Kitty, right this minute. It's rightfully hers. Don't you agree? Then we can settle down without any more distractions."

"Of course. It's hers. Will you let me give it to her, please? I'd like that."

"There's no problem with that. Sure, you can. You're the one who found it, anyway."

"That's something I shall never understand, either!" said Raven, with a frown clouding her face.

"Oh, well, let's go and find Lady Kitty." She brightened up.

"Why, Hello, you two," said lady Kitty, as the pair entered the morning room. "What brings you both down so soon? You can't have finished, Jason?"

Raven stepped forward. She held one hand behind her back. She approached her hostess. "Lady

Kitty," she began, "I, er, we have something for you. It's something that we'd like to give you. It's a kind of surprise, really." As she finished speaking, Raven held out the locket, swinging on its chain.

"How very kind of you. It's lovely. What a pretty piece." Lady Kitty adjusted her spectacles. "It's a locket of some kind, isn't it? I have never seen..." The astonished lady never completed the sentence. She broke off with a gasp. She sat straight up in her chair. "Here, Raven, child, put that in my hand, at once. I want to be sure I'm not mistaken. I could swear that it's....," Once more, words failed her. She held the locket in her hand. Raven stood, looking pleased, and shy, at the same time. Jason kept back. He said nothing.

"This really is Caroline's, isn't it, Raven?" lady Kitty looked up at the girl. "Great Scott! After all these years! Where on earth did you find it, my dear?"

"There was a secret drawer in the desk." Jason spoke up. "Raven seemed to sense where it was. She found it. We hope you're pleased. Lady Kitty? Please open it. There's more. There's a miniature of William Hamilton, inside." Lady Kitty obediently fumbled with it for a moment. It opened. She gave a cry of excitement "Why, 'pon my soul, so there is! Raven, this locket is a rare and valuable treasure, and a real family heirloom. Bless you, my dear! I am overjoyed at your find. Thank you for bringing it to me. Once again, it seems, I am to be forever beholden to my young friends. My, my! Life is so full of surprises these days. This is the best yet! How wonderful of you, Raven to have been able to do such a clever thing on your first day in the castle! I'm so very, very grateful. Please come a little closer, my dear, and allow me to give you a big hug for your cleverness!" Raven complied, smiling. Her shyness forgotten.

"We'll go back upstairs, then, lady Kitty." Jason took Raven by the elbow as he edged towards the door. "We've still got a great deal of talking to get through before lunch."

In a few minutes the two young people were once more seated comfortably by the fire.

"Now, listen, Raven," Jason began. "This'll never get told unless there are no interruptions. Promise me you won't say a word?"

"I promise!" The girl smiled. "I'm ready!"

In the silence that followed, Jason first told his friend how the Galloping Major met his end, at the hands of O'Donnell's men. "It's probably why he has come back, on his horse, because of it. He must be pretty upset at being killed by the very ones he was trying to save!"

Raven's face suddenly lost its colour. "Y-you mean that what I heard outside last night was the ghost?"

"Well, because I believe in him, yes! But don't be scared about it. He certainly means you no harm, you, above all people!"

"How come?"

"Because, well it's obvious, you related!"

"Wow! That's right! No wonder I didn't feel afraid, just kinda, er, loved, or something! Wow! the girl repeated, as it all sank in.

"Okay! I said I'd clear up your dream. Now that's out of the way, remember you promised not to say a word?"

"Sorry! It won't happen again!"

"Oh don't worry about it.. it's just that there's so much more to tell. I'd best start at the beginning. You see, Raven, it all started in Victoria. Justin and me, we found Lady Kitty's purse...."

Raven was as good as her word. Jason was able to describe the details leading to the arrival at Ballymore Castle. He went on to admit that he had every intention of doing everything he could to unravel the mystery of the ghost.

Raven was unable to suppress a giggle at Jason's description of the tussle with the O'Connor boys. Her eyes widened when she heard the story that Johnny had to tell. Jason wasn't sure if Raven would believe him when he tried to explain how he had been drawn into the past. He described Caroline's marriage to William Hamilton. The boy knew, at once, that Raven didn't doubt the truth of what he was telling her. She remained motionless, and completely involved.

It was with renewed confidence that Jason explained to Raven how the priest's papers had led them to her. Neither of them could keep a straight face when Jason finished up by saying, "I burst through the door, and there you were, right before my eyes!"

"You got that right!" Raven laughed outright.

"The rest, as they say, is History!" Jason concluded.

"That was terrific, Jason! Oh, thank you so, so much, er, for everything! None of all this could have happened if you hadn't been so clever, and everything."

Jason couldn't think of a reply so he got up and poked at the embers of the fire and put on a couple of logs.

At that moment Justin appeared in the doorway. "Hey, you guys. It's almost lunch time. Are you finished?"

"Yeah, sure. Just this minute. Thanks brother, for giving us some space. I was able to tell Raven the whole thing!"

"What did you think of it all, eh? Did he tell you how I managed to bash the wall in?"

"I think you were great, Justy!"

"Wow! Thanks!"

The young people went down to lunch together in high spirits. Lady Kitty was anxious to hear what Raven had learned. The young girl was delighted to talk about it all.

After the meal was over Jason suggested that he and Raven should take a walk. "I would love to show you the old stone house, and everything."

"That's a great idea," the girl replied. "I'd like that."



Chapter 27. THE MAJOR'S FAREWELL

A few minutes later the young pair let themselves out of the front door. They set off at a brisk pace towards the house by the cove.

Presently they reached the road. From the gate they could just make out the overgrown lane-way leading to the old house. Jason became impatient. He quickened his pace, as the end wall of the old stone house came into view. It looked lonely and neglected as the young couple approached.

"Do you mind if we go round the outside, first?" Jason asked. I'd like to see it again from the front, over there, by those trees." He indicated a row of tall oaks at the edge of a clearing.

"You said 'again' Jason. Does that mean something?"

"It's where I was when I saw it first. I was back in time then." The boy gave a short laugh. "I don't expect you to believe that!"

"Oh, but I do!" Raven surprised him. "I've believed everything you've told me."

"You're not scared, or anything, are you?" Jason asked.

"No, of course not. Not when I'm here with you."

"There's nothing to be scared of' anyway. The Major's a nice guy, remember?"

"Sure! I remember the nice warm feeling I had. But there's a funny feeling. It's so quiet here. It's like as if the house is waiting, waiting for someone, or something, to bring it back to life again! It's sad. It's just been sleeping here all these years." The girl gave a sigh. It must have been so romantic." She took Jason's arm.

Whilst they had been talking the friends had picked their way through weeds and brambles towards the line of old gnarled trees.

Suddenly, and without warning, a chill wind sprang up from nowhere. It rattled the old branches. It buffeted the children so that their coats flapped wildly against their legs. Jason held on to Raven, tightly. They had to fight to keep their balance. Just as quickly as it had started, the whirlwind ceased. A strange silence descended on the glade.

Jason's mouth was dry. "Raven," he managed to utter, "this is the same spot I was telling you about." Together, the young pair turned to face the house. Raven gave a sharp cry of surprise. Jason's pulses quickened. It was the sight of the old house that startled them both. It was just as Jason had seen it, back in time, three hundred years! From Raven's startled exclamation, Jason knew that she had joined him, in the past!

There was a sound. Raven heard it too. She tensed. The front door of the house was opening. Onto the path stepped Major Hamilton. He was leading a lady by the hand. It was Caroline! Jason could feel Raven's hand quivering' with excitement. His own heart was beating fast.

Jason was able to take in the whole scene. It was almost exactly as it had happened the previous time. Now, however; the Major and his wife were leaving the house. Caroline looked radiantly happy. The sound of Lightning's whinny of pleasure, reached the boy. The horse had recognized his master's approach.

To Jason's surprise the loving couple stopped short, on the path. William Hamilton and his wife turned straight towards where the intruders were standing, frozen in time.

Once again, Jason and the soldier were able to exchange thoughts and feelings. The boy understood perfectly that the Major was expressing' extreme pleasure at Raven's presence beside him. A feeling' of warmth flowed freely. The Major was saying, 'thank you for all you've done,

for me, and for my wife. We may leave you but we will never forget you!" Gathering Caroline into his arms, William lifted her, easily, onto his horse. He mounted swiftly, in front of her. As the Major reached for the reins he turned in the saddle. He slowly, and deliberately, raised an arm towards where Jason was standing, breathless. It was unmistakable. "Farewell, my young friend. I'll not be seeing you again. All is well at Ballymore. Caroline and I are free at last. Thank you!" The words reached Jason across the space between them, and across the centuries. It was as if they had been spoken aloud!

The rider lowered his arm. He shook the reins. Major William Hamilton, and his wife, Caroline, galloped into the distance, never to be seen again.

Throughout this encounter, which, in reality, had taken place within the space of just a few minutes no word had been exchanged between the young friends. Each had remained aware of the presence of the other. They each knew that they had shared an unforgettable experience.

It happened again! A sharp gale of wind caught hold of the pair, as if in a giant hand. It twisted them, and twirled them, before leaving them breathless and bewildered in the middle of the clearing. Jason and Raven turned together. A house, roofless and empty, returned their stare. "Oh!" exclaimed Raven, when she could catch her breath. "It doesn't feel sad, any more!" It was true. The air of desolation about the place had disappeared. There was a feeling of peace, and contentment, in the glade.

"Don't let's wait!" Raven tugged Jason's arm. "I want to leave here remembering this nice feeling!"

As the two friends made their way back the way they had come, it was Raven who broke into Jason's thoughts. "Jason, did all this really happen? It wasn't a dream, was it?"

"No, not if we both felt it the way it happened! It was real, all right. Never doubt it!"

"Caroline was trying to tell me how happy she was that I was there!" Raven went on. "I know she was really pleased. And she kept putting her hand to her throat, and pointing." "She must have known you found her locket!" "Of course! Did you get any vibes, Jason?"

"The Major and I had a long conversation!" Jason laughed, as he added, "if you can call it that!"

"What did he say?"

"He was telling me how delighted he was that I had met you, and that you were here, at Ballymore. He also seemed to be very pleased the way everything has worked out. Mostly, he wanted to thank me for everything that I had done."

"That doesn't surprise me!"

"Well, whatever. Anyway the last part was, kind of sad, yet happy. The Major turned to me as he was leaving and told me that he was free at last. He and Caroline were leaving, to be together for ever. I know he'll not be back."

By this time the young couple had reached the gates of the castle. "Are you going to tell anybody about what happened?" Jason asked, as he closed the gates behind them.

Raven gave the boy's arm a light squeeze. "I'd much rather not, Jason, if you feel the same. What happened with Caroline and her husband was kind of personal, just between us. It's not something I feel like sharing with anyone, except you. It'll be our secret!"

"I feel exactly the same, Raven. It'll be all the more important because no one else will share it. It'll be just you, and me, for always!" The two friends huddled together in silence for a moment. A strong bond had formed between them. A cloud scudded across the sky. It grew chilly. "Let's go home, Jason!"

Still linking arms Jason and Raven walked slowly up the avenue towards the castle.

♣♣ THE END ♣♣