Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the groundfloor and helped him off with his overcoat when the wheezy halldoor bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest. It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also. But Miss Kate and Miss Julia had thought of that and had converted the bathroom upstairs into a ladies' dressingroom. Miss Kate and Miss Julia were there, gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs,

peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come.

It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members of Julia's choir, any of Kate's pupils that were grown up enough and even some of Mary Jane's pupils too. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style as long as anyone could remember, ever since Kate and Julia, after the death of their brother Pat, had left the house in Stony Batter and taken Mary Jane, their only niece, to live with them in the dark gaunt house on Usher's Island, the upper part of which they had rented from Mr Fullam, the corn factor on the groundfloor. That was a good thirty years ago if it was a day. Mary Jane, who was then a little girl in short clothes, was now the main prop of the household for she had the organ in Haddington Road. She had been through the academy and gave a pupils' concert every year in the upper room of the Antient Concert Rooms. Many of her pupils belonged to better class families on the Kingstown and Dalkey line. Old as they were, her aunts also did their share. Julia, though she was quite grey, was still the leading soprano in Adam and Eve's and Kate, being too feeble to go about much, gave music lessons to beginners on the old square piano in the back room. Lily, the caretaker's daughter, did housemaid work for them. Though their life was modest they believed in eating well, the best of everything: diamond bone sirloins, three shilling tea and the best bottled stout. But Lily seldom made a mistake in the orders so that she got on well with her three mistresses. They were fussy, that was all. But the only thing they would not stand was back answers.

Of course they had good reason to be fussy on such a night. And then it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign

17 Never--it 14P; It had never once MS--10G; Never once it had 10
20 Stony] stet MS, 10 23 Fullam,] stet MS, 10
of Gabriel and his wife. Besides they were dreadfully afraid that Freddy Malins might turn up screwed. They would not wish for worlds that any of Mary Jane’s pupils should see him under the influence: and when he was like that it was sometimes very hard to manage him. Freddy Malins always came late but they wondered what could be keeping Gabriel: and that was what brought them every two minutes to the banisters to ask Lily had Gabriel or Freddy come.

—O, Mr Conroy, said Lily to Gabriel when she opened the door for him, Miss Kate and Miss Julia thought you were never coming. Good night, Mrs Conroy.

—I’ll engage they did, said Gabriel, but they forget that my wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself.

He stood on the mat, scraping the snow from his goloshes, while Lily led his wife to the foot of the stairs and called out:

—Miss Kate, here’s Mrs Conroy.

Kate and Julia came toddling down the dark stairs at once. Both of them kissed Gabriel’s wife, said she must be perished alive and asked was Gabriel with her.

—Here I am as right as the mail, aunt Kate! Go on up. I’ll follow, called out Gabriel from the dark.

He continued scraping his feet vigorously while the three women went upstairs, laughing, to the ladies’ dressing-room. A light fringe of snow lay like a cape on the shoulders of his overcoat and like toecaps on the toes of his goloshes; and, as the buttons of his overcoat slipped with a squeaking noise through the snowstiffened frieze, a cold fragrant air from out of doors escaped from crevices and folds.

—Is it snowing again, Mr Conroy? asked Lily.

She had preceded him into the pantry to help him off with his overcoat. Gabriel smiled at the three syllables she had given his surname and glanced at her. She was a slim growing girl, pale in complexion and with baycoloured hair. The gas in the pantry made her look still paler. Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll.

—Yes, Lily, he answered, and I think we’re in for a night of it.

He looked up at the pantry ceiling which was shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above, listened for a moment to the piano and then glanced at the girl who was folding his overcoat carefully at the end of a shelf.

—Tell me, Lily, he said in a friendly tone, do you still go to school?

—O no, sir, she answered, I’m done schooling this year and more.

—O then, said Gabriel gaily, I suppose we’ll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man—eh?

The girl glanced back at him over her shoulder and said with great bitterness:

—The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you.

Gabriel coloured as if he felt he had made a mistake and, without looking at her, kicked off his goloshes and flicked actively with his muffler at his patent leather shoes.

He was a stout tallish young man. The high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of pale red; and on his hairless face there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes. His glossy black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve behind his ears where it curled slightly beneath the groove left by his hat.

When he had flicked lustre into his shoes he stood up and pulled his waistcoat down more tightly on his plump body. Then he took a coin rapidly from his pocket.

—O Lily, he said, thrusting it into her hand, it’s Christmas time, isn’t it? Just .... here’s a little ....

He walked rapidly towards the door.

—O no, sir! cried the girl, following him. Really, sir, I wouldn’t take it.
—Christmas time! Christmas time! said Gabriel, almost trott ing to the stairs and waving his hand to her in deprecation.

The girl, seeing that he had gained the stairs, called out after him:

—Well, thank you, sir.

He waited outside the drawingroom door until the waltz should finish, listening to the skirts that swept against it and to the shuffling of feet. He was still discomposed by the girl’s bitter and sudden retort. It had cast a gloom over him which he tried to dispel by arranging his cuffs and the bows of his tie. Then he took from his waistcoat pocket a little paper and glanced at the headings he had made for his speech. He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they could recognise from Shakespeare or from the melodies would be better. The indelicate clacking of the men’s heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure.

Just then his aunts and his wife came out of the ladies’ dressingroom. His aunts were two small plainly dressed old women. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller. Her hair, drawn low over the tops of her ears, was grey; and grey also, with darker shadows, was her large flaccid face. Though she was stout in build and stood erect her slow eyes and parted lips gave her the appearance of a woman who did not know where she was or where she was going. Aunt Kate was more vivacious. Her face, healthier than her sister’s, was all puckers and creases like a shrivelled red apple and her hair, threaded in the same oldfashioned way, had not lost its ripe nut colour.

They both kissed Gabriel frankly. He was their favourite nephew, the son of their dead elder sister Ellen who had married T J Conroy of the Port and Docks.

—Gretta tells me you’re not going to take a cab back to Monkstown tonight, Gabriel, said Aunt Kate.

—No, said Gabriel, turning to his wife, we had quite enough of that last year, hadn’t we? Don’t you remember, Aunt Kate, what a cold Gretta got out of it? Cab windows rattling all the way and the east wind blowing in after we passed Merrion. Very jolly it was. Gretta caught a dreadful cold.

Aunt Kate frowned severely and nodded her head at every word.

—Quite right, Gabriel, quite right, she said. You can’t be too careful.

—But as for Gretta there, said Gabriel, she’d walk home in the snow if she were let.

Mrs Conroy laughed.

—Don’t mind him, aunt Kate, she said. He’s really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom’s eyes at night and making him do the dumbbells and forcing Lottie to eat the stirabout. The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it! ... O, but you’ll never guess what he makes me wear now!

She broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband whose admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair. The two aunts laughed heartily too for Gabriel’s solicitude was a standing joke with them.

—Goloshes! said Mrs Conroy. That’s the latest. Whenever it’s wet underfoot I must put on my goloshes. Tonight even he wanted me to put them on but I wouldn’t. The next thing he’ll buy me will be a diving suit.

Gabriel laughed nervously and patted his tie reassuringly.
while aunt Kate nearly doubled herself so heartily did she enjoy
the joke. The smile soon faded from aunt Julia’s face and her
mirthless eyes were directed towards her nephew’s face. After a
pause she asked:
— And what are goloshes, Gabriel?
— Goloshes, Julia! exclaimed her sister. Goodness me, don’t
you know what goloshes are? You wear them over your ....
over your boots, Greta, isn’t it?
— Yes, said Mrs Conroy. Gutta percha things. We both have a
pair now, Gabriel says everyone wears them on the continent.
— O, on the continent, murmured aunt Julia, nodding her head
slowly.

Gabriel knitted his brows and said, as if he were slightly
angered:
— It’s nothing very wonderful, but Greta thinks it very funny
because she says the word reminds her of chrestian minstrels.
— But tell me, Gabriel, said aunt Kate with brisk tact. Of
course you’re seen about the room. Greta was saying ....
— O, the room is all right, replied Gabriel. I’ve taken one in the
Gresham.

— To be sure, said aunt Kate, by far the best thing to do. And
the children, Greta, you’re not anxious about them?
— O, for one night, said Mrs Conroy. Besides, Bessie will look
after them.
— To be sure, said aunt Kate again. What a comfort it is to
have a girl like that, one you can depend on! There’s that Lily,
I’m sure I don’t know what has come over her lately. She’s not
the girl she was at all.

Gabriel was about to ask his aunt some questions on this
point but she broke off suddenly to gaze after her sister who
had wandered down the stairs and was craning her neck over
the banisters.
— Now, I ask you, she said almost testily, where is Julia going.
Julia! Julia! Where are you going?

Julia who had gone half way down one flight came back and
announced blantly:
— Here’s Freddy!

At the same moment a clapping of hands and a final flourish
of the pianist told that the waltz had ended. The drawingroom
door was opened from within and some couples came out.
Aunt Kate drew Gabriel aside hurriedly and whispered into his
ear:
— Slip down, Gabriel, like a good fellow and see if he’s all right
and don’t let him up if he’s screwed. I’m sure he’s screwed. I’m
sure he is.

Gabriel went to the stairs and listened over the banisters. He
could hear two persons talking in the pantry. Then he recog-
nised Freddy Malins’ laugh. He went down the stairs noisily.
— It’s such a relief, said aunt Kate to Mrs Conroy, that Gabriel
is here. I always feel easier in my mind when he’s here ....
Julia, there’s Miss Daly and Miss Power will take some refresh-
ment. Thanks for your beautiful waltz, Miss Daly. It made
lovely time.

A tall wizened faced man with a stiff grizzled moustache and
swarthy skin who was passing out with his partner said:
— And may we have some refreshment too, Miss Morkan?
— Julia, said aunt Kate summarily, and here’s Mr Browne and
Miss Furlong. Take them in, Julia, with Miss Daly and Miss
Power.
— I’m the man for the ladies, said Mr Browne, pursing his lips
until his moustache bristled and smiling in all his wrinkles. You
know, Miss Morkan, the reason they are so fond of me is ....

He did not finish his sentence but, seeing that aunt Kate was
out of earshot, at once led the three young ladies into the back
room. The middle of the room was occupied by two square
tables placed end to end and on these aunt Julia and the
caretaker were straightening and smoothing a large cloth. On
the sideboard were arrayed dishes and plates and glasses and

234 swarthy] 10; dark yellow MS-10G
bundles of knives and forks and spoons. The top of the closed square piano served also as a sideboard for viands and sweets. At a smaller sideboard in one corner two young men were standing, drinking hop bitters.

Mr Browne led his charges thither and invited them all, in jest, to some ladies' punch, hot, strong and sweet. As they said they never took anything strong he opened three bottles of lemonade for them. Then he asked one of the young men to move aside and, taking hold of the decanter, filled out for himself a goodly measure of whisky. The young men eyed him respectfully while he took a trial sip.

—God help me, he said smiling, it's the doctor's orders.

His wizened face broke into a broader smile and the three young ladies laughed in musical echo to his pleasantry, swaying their bodies to and fro, with nervous jerks of their shoulders. The boldest said:

—O, now, Mr Browne, I'm sure the doctor never ordered anything of the kind.

Mr Browne took another sip of his whisky and said, with sidling mimicry:

—Well, you see, I'm like the famous Mrs Cassidy who is reported to have said: Now, Mary Grimes, if I don't take it make me take it for I feel I want it.

His hot face had leaned forward a little too confidentially and he had assumed a very low Dublin accent so that the young ladies, with one instinct, received his speech in silence. Miss Furlong, who was one of Mary Jane's pupils, asked Miss Daly what was the name of the pretty waltz she had played; and Mr Browne, seeing that he was ignored, turned promptly to the two young men who were more appreciative.

A redfaced young woman, dressed in pansy, came into the room, excitedly clapping her hands and crying:

—Quadrilles! Quadrilles!

Close on her heels came aunt Kate, crying:

—Two gentlemen and three ladies, Mary Jane!

—O, here's Mr Bergin and Mr Kerrigan, said Mary Jane. Mr Kerrigan, will you take Miss Power. Miss Furlong, may I get you a partner, Mr Bergin. O, that'll just do now.

—Three ladies, Mary Jane, said aunt Kate.

The two young gentlemen asked the ladies if they might have the pleasure and Mary Jane turned to Miss Daly.

—O, Miss Daly, you're really awfully good after playing for the last two dances but really we're so short of ladies tonight.

—I don't mind in the least, Miss Morkan.

—But I've a nice partner for you, Mr Bartell D'Arcy, the tenor. I'll get him to sing later on. All Dublin is raving about him.

—Lovely voice, lovely voice! said aunt Kate.

As the piano had twice begun the prelude to the first figure Mary Jane led her recruits quickly from the room. They had hardly gone when aunt Julia wandered slowly into the room, looking behind her at something.

—What is the matter, Julia? asked aunt Kate anxiously. Who is it?

Julia, who was carrying in a column of table-napkins, turned to her sister and said simply, as if the question had surprised her:

—It's only Freddy, Kate, and Gabriel with him.

In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel's size and build with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, timid and protruded lips. His heavylidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy. He was laughing heartily in a high key at a story which he had been telling Gabriel on the stairs and at the same time rubbing the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye.

—Good evening, Freddy, said aunt Julia.

Freddy Malins bade the Misses Morkan good evening in what seemed an offhand fashion by reason of the habitual
catch in his voice and then, seeing that Mr Browne was
grinning at him from the sideboard, crossed the room on rather
shaky legs and began to repeat in an undertone the story he had
just told to Gabriel.
—He’s not so bad, is he? said aunt Kate to Gabriel.

Gabriel’s brows were dark but he raised them quickly and
answered:
—No, hardly noticeable.
—Now, isn’t he a terrible fellow! she said. And his poor
mother made him take the pledge on New Year’s Eve. But come
on, Gabriel, into the drawing-room.

Before leaving the room with Gabriel she signalled to Mr
Browne by frowning and shaking her forefinger in warning to
and fro. Mr Browne nodded in answer and, when she had
gone, said to Freddy Malins:
—Now then, Teddy, I’m going to fill you out a good glass of
lemonade just to buck you up.

Freddy Malins, who was nearing the climax of his story,
waved the offer aside impatiently but Mr Browne, having first
called Freddy Malins’ attention to a disarray in his dress, filled
out and handed him a full glass of lemonade. Freddy Malins’
left hand accepted the glass mechanically, his right hand being
engaged in the mechanical readjustment of his dress. Mr
Browne, whose face was once more wrinkling with mirth,
poured out for himself a glass of whisky while Freddy Malins
exploded, before he had well reached the climax of his story, in
a kink of highpitched bronchitic laughter and, setting down his
untasted and overflowing glass, began to rub the knuckles of
his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye, repeating
words of his last phrase as well as his fit of laughter would
allow him.

* * *

Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her
academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages, to the hushed
drawingroom. He liked music but the piece she was playing
had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any

melody for the other listeners though they had begged Mary
Jane to play something. Four young men, who had come from
the refreshment room to stand in the doorway at the sound of
the piano, had gone away quietly in couples after a few
minutes. The only persons who seemed to follow the music
were Mary Jane herself, her hands racing along the keyboard
or lifted from it at the pauses like those of a priestess in
momentary imprecation, and aunt Kate standing at her elbow
to turn the page.

Gabriel’s eyes, irritated by the floor which glittered with
beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall
above the piano. A picture of the balcony scene in Romeo and
Juliet hung there and beside it was a picture of the two
murdered princes in the tower which aunt Julia had worked in
red, blue and brown wools when she was a girl. Probably in the
school they had gone to as girls that kind of work had been
taught, for one year his mother had worked for him as a
birthday present a waistcoat of purple satin with little foxes’
heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round
mulberry buttons. It was strange that his mother had had no
musical talent though aunt Kate used to call her the brains-
carrier of the Morkan family. Both she and Julia had always
seemed a little proud of their serious and matronly sister. Her
photograph stood before the pierglass. She held an open book
on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constan-
tine who, dressed in a man-o’-war suit, lay at her feet. It was
she who had chosen the names for her sons for she was very
sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constant-
tine was now senior curate in Balbriggan and, thanks to her,
Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the royal university. A
shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen
opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used
still rankled in his memory. She had once spoken of Greta as
being country cute and that was not true of Greta at all. It was
Greta who had nursed her all during her last long illness in
their house at Monkstown.

He knew that Mary Jane must be near the end of her piece
for she was playing again the opening melody with runs of scales after every bar and while he waited for the end the resentment died down in his heart. The piece ended with a trill of octaves in the treble and a final deep octave in the bass. Great applause greeted Mary Jane as, blushing and rolling up her music nervously, she escaped from the room. The most vigorous clapping came from the four young men in the doorway who had gone away to the refreshment room at the beginning of the piece but had come back when the piano had stopped.

Lancers were arranged. Gabriel found himself partnered with Miss Ivors. She was a frankmannered talkative young lady with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a lowcut bodice and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bore on it an Irish device.

When they had taken their places she said abruptly:
— I have a crow to pluck with you.
— With me? said Gabriel.

She nodded her head gravely.
— What is it? asked Gabriel, smiling at her solemn manner.
— Who is G. C.? answered Miss Ivors turning her eyes upon him.

Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows as if he did not understand when she said bluntly:
— O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for the Daily Express. Now aren't you ashamed of yourself?
— Why should I be ashamed of myself? asked Gabriel blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

— Well, I'm ashamed of you, said Miss Ivors frankly. To say you'd write for a rag like that. I didn't think you were a west Briton.

A look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel's face. It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in the Daily Express for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a west Briton surely. The books he received for review were almost more welcome than the paltry cheque. He loved to feel the covers and turn over the pages of newly printed books. Nearly every day when his teaching in the college was ended he used to wander down the quays to the secondhand booksellers, to Hickey's on Bachelor's Walk, to Webb's or Massey's on Aston's Quay or to Clohissey's in the bystreet. He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the university and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books.

When their turn to cross had come he was still perplexed and inattentive. Miss Ivors promptly took his hand in a warm grasp and said in a soft friendly tone:
— Of course, I was only joking. Come, we cross now.

When they were together again she spoke of the university question and Gabriel felt more at ease. A friend of hers had shown her his review of Browning's poems. That was how she had found out the secret: but she liked the review immensely. Then she said suddenly:
— O, Mr Conroy, will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles this summer? We're going to stay there a whole month. It will be splendid out in the Atlantic. You ought to come. Mr Clancy is coming and Mr Kilkelly and Kathleen Kearney. It would be splendid for Greta too if she'd come. She's from Connacht, isn't she?
— Her people are, said Gabriel shortly.
— But you will come, won't you? said Miss Ivors, laying her warm hand eagerly on his arm.
The fact is, said Gabriel, I have already arranged to go ...

—Go where? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, you know, every year I go for a cycling tour with some fellows and so ...

—But where? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany, said Gabriel awkwardly.

—And why do you go to France and Belgium, said Miss Ivors, instead of visiting your own land?

—Well, said Gabriel, it’s partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.

—And haven’t you your own language to keep in touch with, Irish? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.

Their neighbours had turned to listen to the crossexamination. Gabriel glanced right and left nervously and tried to keep his good humour under the ordeal which was making a blush invade his forehead.

—And haven’t you your own land to visit, continued Miss Ivors, that you know nothing of, your own people and your own country?

—O, to tell you the truth, retorted Gabriel suddenly, I’m sick of my own country, sick of it!

—Why? asked Miss Ivors.

Gabriel did not answer for his retort had heated him.

—Why? repeated Miss Ivors.

They had to go visiting together and, as he had not answered her, Miss Ivors said warmly:

—Of course, you’ve no answer.

Gabriel tried to cover his agitation by taking part in the dance with great energy. He avoided her eyes for he had seen a sour expression on her face. But when they met in the long chain he was surprised to feel his hand firmly pressed. She looked at him from under her brows for a moment quizzically until he smiled. Then, just as the chain was about to start again, she stood on tiptoe and whispered into his ear:

—West Briton!

When the lancers were over Gabriel went away to a remote corner of the room where Freddy Malins’ mother was sitting. She was a stout feeble old woman with white hair. Her voice had a catch in it like her son’s and she stuttered slightly. She had been told that Freddy had come and that he was nearly all right. Gabriel asked her whether she had had a good crossing. She lived with her married daughter in Glasgow and came to Dublin on a visit once a year. She answered placidly that she had had a beautiful crossing and that the captain had been most attentive to her. She spoke also of the beautiful house her daughter kept in Glasgow and of the nice friends they had there. While her tongue rambled on Gabriel tried to banish from his mind all memory of the unpleasant incident with Miss Ivors. Of course the girl or woman or whatever she was was an enthusiast but there was a time for all things. Perhaps he ought not to have answered her like that. But she had no right to call him a west Briton before people, even in joke. She had tried to make him ridiculous before people, heckling him and staring at him with her rabbit’s eyes.

He saw his wife making her way towards him through the waltzing couples. When she reached him she said into his ear:

—Gabriel, aunt Kate wants to know won’t you carve the goose as usual. Miss Daly will carve the ham and I’ll do the pudding.

—All right, said Gabriel.

—She’s sending in the younger ones first as soon as this waltz is over so that we’ll have the table to ourselves.

—Were you dancing? asked Gabriel.

—Of course I was. Didn’t you see me? What words had you with Molly Ivors?

—No words. Why! Did she say so?
—Something like that. I'm trying to get that Mr D'Arcy to sing. He's full of conceit, I think.
—There were no words, said Gabriel moodily, only she wanted me to go for a trip to the west of Ireland and I said I wouldn't.

His wife clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump.
—O, do go, Gabriel, she cried. I'd love to see Galway again.
—You can go if you like, said Gabriel coldly.

She looked at him for a moment, then turned to Mrs Malins and said:
—There's a nice husband for you, Mrs Malins.

While she was threading her way back across the room Mrs Malins, without adverting to the interruption, went on to tell Gabriel what beautiful places there were in Scotland and beautiful scenery. Her son-in-law brought them every year to the lakes and they used to go fishing. Her son-in-law was a splendid fisher. One day he caught a fish, a beautiful big fish; and the man in the hotel boiled it for their dinner.

Gabriel hardly heard what she said. Now that supper was coming near he began to think again about his speech and about the quotation. When he saw Freddy Malins coming across the room to visit his mother Gabriel left the chair free for him and retired into the embrasure of the window. The room had already cleared and from the back room came the clatter of plates and knives. Those who still remained in the drawing-room seemed tired of dancing and were conversing quietly in little groups. Gabriel's warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper table!

He ran over the headings of his speech: Irish hospitality, sad memories, the Three Graces, Paris, the quotation from Browning. He repeated to himself a phrase he had written in his review: One feels that one is listening to a thoughttormented music. Miss Ivors had praised the review. Was she sincere? Had she really any life of her own behind all her propaganda? There had never been any ill feeling between them until that night. It unnerved him to think that she would be at the supper table, looking up at him while he spoke with her critical quizzing eyes. Perhaps she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech. An idea came into his mind and gave him courage. He would say, alluding to aunt Kate and aunt Julia: Ladies and gentlemen, the generation which is now on the wane among us may have had its faults but for my part I think it had certain qualities of hospitality, of humour, of humanity, which the new and very serious and hypereducated generation that is growing up around us seems to me to lack. Very good: that was one for Miss Ivors. What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?

A murmur in the room attracted his attention. Mr Browne was advancing from the door, gallantly escorting aunt Julia who leaned upon his arm, smiling and handing her head. An irregular musketry of applause escorted her also as far as the piano and then, as Mary Jane seated herself on the stool and aunt Julia, no longer smiling, half turned so as to pitch her voice fairly into the room, gradually ceased. Gabriel recognised the prelude. It was that of an old song of aunt Julia's, Arrayed for the Bridal. Her voice strong and clear in tone attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish the air and, though she sang very rapidly, she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes. To follow the voice, without looking at the singer's face, was to feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight. Gabriel applauded loudly with all the others at the close on the stool, 14; at the piano TS, 10; at the piano, 10G, 14P; on the stool, 14
of the song and loud applause was borne in from the invisible supper table. It sounded so genuine that a little colour struggled into aunt Julia's face as she bent to replace in the music stand the old leatherbound songbook that had her initials on the cover. Freddy Malins, who had listened with his head perched sideways to hear the better, was still applauding when everyone else had ceased and talking animatedly to his mother who nodded her head gravely and slowly in acquiescence. At last, when he could clap no more, he stood up suddenly and hurried across the room to aunt Julia, whose hand he seized and held in both his hands, shaking it when words failed him or the catch in his voice proved too much for him.

—I was just telling my mother, he said, I never heard you sing so well, never. No, I never heard your voice so good as it is tonight. Now! Would you believe that now? That's the truth. Upon my word and honour that's the truth. I never heard your voice sound so fresh and so... so clear and fresh, never.

Aunt Julia smiled broadly and murmured something about compliments as she released her hand from his grasp. Mr Browne extended his open hand towards her and said to those who were near him in the manner of a showman introducing a prodigy to an audience:

—Miss Julia Morkan, my latest discovery!

He was laughing very heartily at this himself when Freddy Malins turned to him and said:

—Well, Browne, if you're serious you might make a worse discovery. All I can say is I never heard her sing half so well as long as I am coming here. And that's the honest truth.

—Neither did I, said Mr Browne. I think her voice has greatly improved.

Aunt Julia shrugged her shoulders and said with meek pride:

—Thirty years ago I hadn't a bad voice as voices go.

—I often told Julia, said aunt Kate emphatically, that she was simply thrown away in that choir. But she never would be said by me.

She turned as if to appeal to the good sense of the others against a refractory child while aunt Julia gazed in front of her, a vague smile of reminiscence playing on her face.

—No, continued aunt Kate, she wouldn't be said or led by anyone, slaving there in that choir night and day, night and day. Six o'clock on Christmas morning! And all for what?

—Well, isn't it for the honour of God, aunt Kate? asked Mary Jane twisting round on the piano stool and smiling.

Aunt Kate turned fiercely on her niece and said:

—I know all about the honour of God, Mary Jane, but I think it's not at all honourable for the pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives and put little whippersnappers of boys over their heads. I suppose it is for the good of the church if the pope does it. But it's not just, Mary Jane, and it's not right.

She had worked herself into a passion and would have continued in defence of her sister for it was a sore subject with her but Mary Jane, seeing that all the dancers had come back, intervened pacifically:

—Now, aunt Kate, you're giving scandal to Mr Browne who is of the other persuasion.

Aunt Kate turned to Mr Browne, who was grinning at this allusion to his religion, and said hastily:

—O, I don't question the pope's being right. I'm only a stupid old woman and I wouldn't presume to do such a thing. But there's such a thing as common everyday politeness and gratitude. And if I were in Julia's place I'd tell that Father Healy straight up to his face...

—And besides, aunt Kate, said Mary Jane, we really are all hungry and when we are hungry we are all very quarrelsome.

—And when we are thirsty we are also quarrelsome, added Mr Browne.

—So that we had better go to supper, said Mary Jane, and finish the discussion afterwards.

On the landing outside the drawing-room Gabriel found his wife and Mary Jane trying to persuade Miss Ivors to stay for
supper. But Miss Ivors, who had put on her hat and was buttoning her cloak, would not stay. She did not feel in the least hungry and she had already overstayed her time.

—But only for ten minutes, Molly, said Mrs Conroy. That won't delay you.

—To take a pick itself, said Mary Jane, after all your dancing.

—I really couldn't, said Miss Ivors.

—I am afraid you didn't enjoy yourself at all, said Mary Jane hopelessly.

—Ever so much, I assure you, said Miss Ivors, but you really must let me run off now.

—But how can you get home? asked Mrs Conroy.

—O, it's only two steps up the quay.

Gabriel hesitated a moment and said:

—if you will allow me, Miss Ivors, I'll see you home if you really are obliged to go.

But Miss Ivors broke away from them.

—I won't hear of it, she cried. For goodness' sake go in to your suppers and don't mind me. I'm quite well able to take care of myself.

—Well, you're the comical girl, Molly, said Mrs Conroy frankly.

—Beanacht libh, cried Miss Ivors with a laugh as she ran down the staircase.

Mary Jane gazed after her, a moody puzzled expression on her face, while Mrs Conroy leaned over the banisters to listen for the haildoor. Gabriel asked himself was he the cause of her abrupt departure. But she did not seem to be in ill humour: she had gone away laughing. He stared blankly down the staircase.

At that moment aunt Kate came toddling out of the supper room, almost wringing her hands in despair.

—Where is Gabriel? she cried. Where on earth is Gabriel?

There's everyone waiting in there, stage to let, and nobody to carve the goose!
— Miss Higgins, what for you?
— O, anything at all, Mr Conroy.

While Gabriel and Miss Daly exchanged plates of goose and plates of ham and spiced beef Lily went from guest to guest with a dish of hot floury potatoes wrapped in a white napkin. This was Mary Jane's idea and she had also suggested apple sauce for the goose but aunt Kate had said that plain roast goose without any apple sauce had always been good enough for her and she hoped she might never eat worse. Mary Jane waited on her pupils and saw that they got the best slices and aunt Kate and aunt Julia opened and carried across from the piano bottles of stout and ale for the gentlemen and bottles of minerals for the ladies. There was a great deal of confusion and laughter and noise, the noise of orders and counter orders, of knives and forks, of corks and glass stoppers. Gabriel began to carve second helpings as soon as he had finished the first round without serving himself. Everyone protested loudly so that he compromised by taking a long draught of stout for he had found the carving hot work. Mary Jane settled down quietly to her supper but aunt Kate and aunt Julia were still toddling round the table, walking on each other's heels, getting in each other's way and giving each other unheeded orders. Mr Browne begged of them to sit down and eat their supper and so did Gabriel but they said they were time enough so that, at last, Freddy Malins stood up and, capturing aunt Kate, plumped her down on her chair amid general laughter.

When everyone had been well served Gabriel said smiling:
— Now if anyone wants a little more of what vulgar people call stuffing let him or her speak.

A chorus of voices invited him to begin his own supper and Lily came forward with three potatoes which she had reserved for him.

— Very well, said Gabriell amiably as he took another preparatory draught, kindly forget my existence, ladies and gentlemen, for a few minutes.

He set to his supper and took no part in the conversation with which the table covered Lily's removal of the plates. The subject of talk was the opera company which was then at the Theatre Royal. Mr Bartell D'Arcy, the tenor, a dark-complexioned young man with a smart moustache, praised very highly the leading contralto of the company but Miss Furlong thought she had a rather vulgar style of production. Freddy Malins said there was a negro chieftain singing in the second part of the Gaiety pantomime who had one of the finest tenor voices he had ever heard.

— Have you heard him? he asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy across the table.

— No, answered Mr Bartell D'Arcy carelessly.

— Because, Freddy Malins explained, now I'd be curious to hear your opinion of him. I think he has a grand voice.

— It takes Teddy to find out the really good things, said Mr Browne familiarly to the table.

— And why couldn't he have a voice too? asked Freddy Malins sharply. Is it because he's only a black?

Nobody answered this question and Mary Jane led the table back to the legitimate opera. One of her pupils had given her a pass for Mignon. Of course, it was very fine, she said, but it made her think of poor Georgina Burns. Mr Browne could go back farther still to the old Italian companies that used to come to Dublin, Tietjens, Trebells, Lima de Murzka, Campanini, the great Giuglina, Ravelli, Aramburo. Those were the days, he said, when there was something like singing to be heard in Dublin. He told too of how the top gallery of the old Royal used to be packed night after night, of how one night an Italian tenor had sung five encores to Let Me Like a Soldier Fall,