

He had been away from the farm for a week or more. Had he received a warning from some other quarter? and had he wisely sought refuge in flight? The amazement in the housekeeper's face, when she heard these questions, pleaded for a word of explanation. Iris acknowledged without reserve the motives which had suggested her journey, and asked eagerly if she had been mistaken in assuming that Arthur was in danger of assassination.

Mrs Lewson shook her head. Beyond all doubt the young master was in danger. But Miss Iris ought to have known his nature better than to suppose that he would bear a retreat, if all the land-leaguers in Ireland threatened him together. No! It was his bold way to laugh at danger. He had left his farm to visit a friend in the next county; and it was shrewdly guessed that a young lady who was staying in the house was the attraction which had kept him so long away. 'Anyhow, he means to come back to-morrow,' Mrs Lewson said. 'I wish he would think better of it, and make his escape to England while he has the chance. If the savages in these parts must shoot somebody, I'm here—an old woman that can't last much longer. Let them shoot me.'

Iris asked if Arthur's safety was assured in the next county, and in the house of his friend.

'I can't say, Miss; I have never been to the house. He is in danger if he persists in coming back to the farm. There are chances of shooting him all along his road home. Oh,

yes; he knows it, poor dear, as well as I do. But, there—men like him are such perverse creatures. He takes his rides just as usual. No; he won't listen to an old woman like me; and, as for friends to advise him, the only one of them that has darkened our doors is a scamp who had better have kept away. You may have heard tell of him. The old Earl, his wicked father, used to be called by a bad name. And the wild young lord is his father's true son.'

'Not Lord Harry?' Iris exclaimed.

The outbreak of agitation in her tone and manner was silently noticed by her maid. The housekeeper did not attempt to conceal the impression that had been produced upon her. 'I hope you don't know such a vagabond as that?' she said very seriously. 'Perhaps you are thinking of his brother—the eldest son—a respectable man as I have been told.'

Miss Henley passed over these questions without notice. Urged by the interest in her lover, which was now more than ever an interest beyond her control, she said: 'Is Lord Harry in danger, on account of his friend?'

'He has nothing to fear from the wretches who infest our part of the country,' Mrs Lewson replied. 'Report says he's one of themselves. The police—there's what his young lordship has to be afraid of, if all's true that is said about him. Anyhow, when he paid his visit to my master, he came secretly like a thief in the night. And I heard Mr Arthur, while they were together here, in the parlour, loud in blam-

ing him for something that he had done. No more, Miss, of Lord Harry! I have something particular to say to you. Suppose I promise to make you comfortable—will you please wait here till to-morrow, and see Mr Arthur and speak to him? If there's a person living who can persuade him to take better care of himself, I do believe it will be you.'

Iris readily consented to wait for Arthur Mountjoy's return.

Left together, while Mrs Lewson was attending to her domestic duties, the mistress noticed an appearance of pre-occupation in the maid's face.

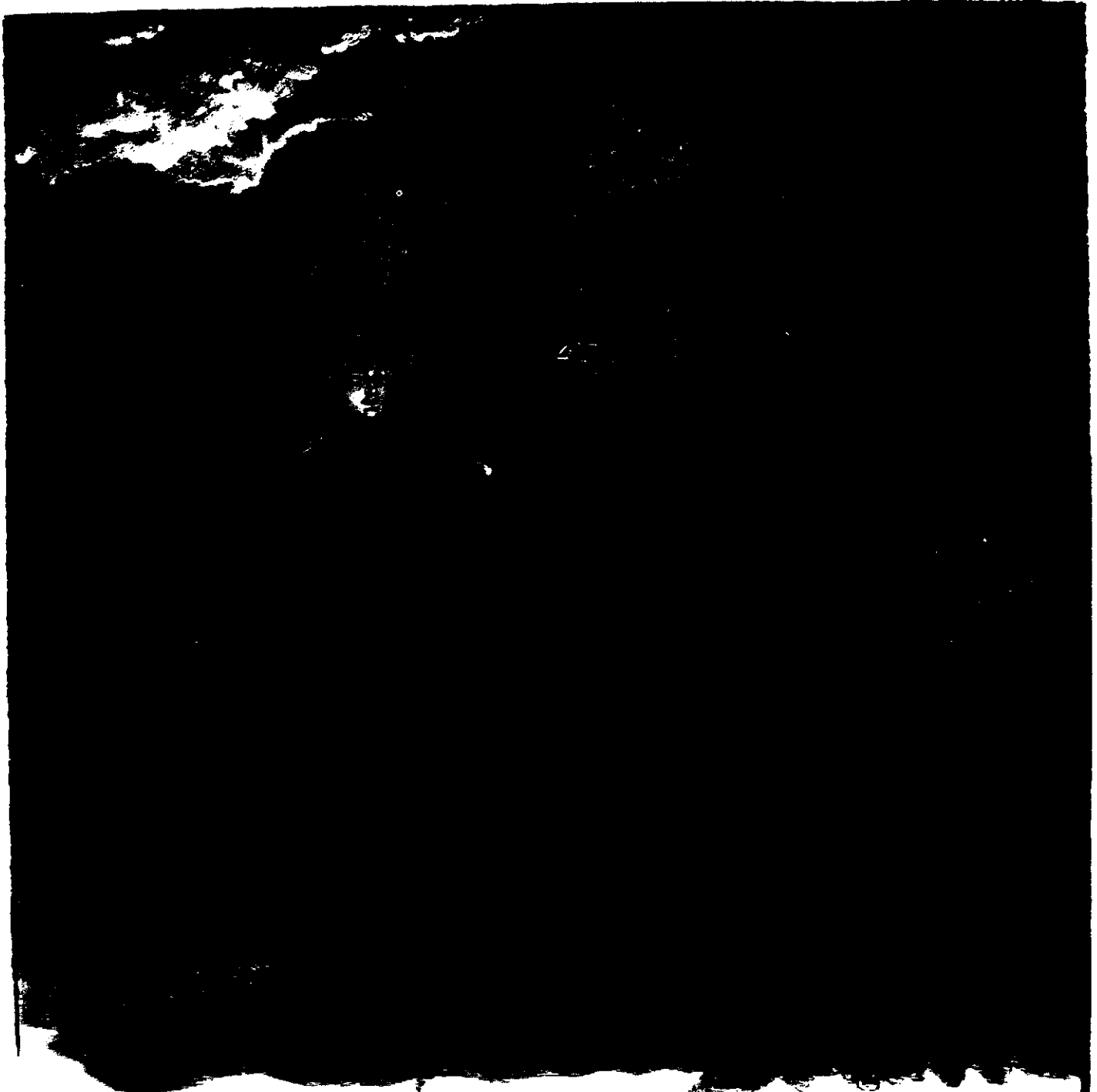
'Are you beginning to wish, Rhoda,' she said, 'that I had not brought you to this strange place, among these wild people?'

The maid was a quiet amiable girl, evidently in delicate health. She smiled faintly. 'I was thinking, Miss, of another nobleman besides the one Mrs Lewson mentioned just now, who seems to have led a reckless life. It was printed in a newspaper that I read before we left London.'

'Was his name mentioned?' Iris asked.

'No, Miss; I suppose they were afraid of giving offence. He tried so many strange ways of getting a living—it was almost like reading a story-book.'

The suppression of the name suggested a suspicion from which Iris recoiled. Was it possible that her maid could be ignorantly alluding to Lord Harry.



The shade was slipped aside from a lantern: the light fell full on the prisoner's face.