
AMBROSE PRATT
THE REMITTANCE MAN

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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Author of "Three Years with Thunderbolt," &c., &c.

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Chapter I.—The Meeting.

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The steamer *Tomki* was signalled "off the bar" at sunrise, but although everyone knew that she could not enter the river until flood tide at 10.30 a.m., the inhabitants of Ballina drifted towards the public wharf as soon as they had breakfasted.

A dark-haired and rather sun-burned young man, who sat upon a flying pile industriously fishing, observed the crowd grow out of the corners of his eyes. He was at first indifferent enough. Ballina invariably assembled to welcome the mail boats. The fisherman, after a time, however, became aware of some unusual, and therefore noteworthy, features in the gathering. Major Reay, the richest mill owner and sugar planter of the district was seated on a camp chair about the centre of the wharf, nursing a gouty foot upon a stool before him. A score of gaily costumed young women fluttered attentively about him, each armed with a huge bouquet of white and crimson roses. The fisherman, having grasped these phenomena, turned his head in order to consider them more narrowly. As he did so a well-dressed lad of seventeen detached himself from the crowd and came forward. The fisherman recognised the boy with a nod, then, as if ashamed to be caught indulging his curiosity, he resumed his former attitude, and stared fixedly at the float. The lad rapidly approached, but, halting half a dozen feet away, he sat down upon the edge of the wharf and dangled his feet over the water.

"What ho! Jan!" he remarked familiarly.

The fisherman said "Good morning," in cool tones, without raising his eyes.

"Any luck?" asked the boy.

"No."

"I expect you will have no breakfast, then?"

The fisherman looked at his interlocutor in a fashion that needed no words to explain his meaning.

"None of my business, eh?" laughed the boy, entirely unabashed.

"I may be wrong," replied the other gently; his voice was soft as velvet, but it did not invite discussion of the subject.

The boy shifted uneasily for a moment, then he laughed at his thoughts. "I came over to you because I felt like a fish out of water over there," he muttered suddenly.

"Is that so?"

"O' course—if you have important business with yourself, I'll move on?"

The fisherman smiled, and his strong, serious face was unexpectedly illuminated.

"I do not own the wharf," he replied.

"That's better!" laughed the boy. "I hate you solemn! It's unsociable."

The fisherman lifted his rod, and drawing his line from the water, glanced at the untouched bait.

"They don't seem to be biting this morning," said the boy. "You should give 'em some burley."

The fisherman shrugged his shoulders and allowed the line to sink again.

"The steamer will bring them about," he remarked. "Why so many ladies to-day, Jack—and your father, the Major? Are

you expecting someone by the boat?"

"My sister Marion," replied Jack Reay. "She has been in Europe for the past two years. The dad is pretty nearly off his head with excitement."

"And you?"

The boy blushed. "I've got 'em all on in honor of the occasion. How do you think I look?" he added artlessly.

The fisherman glanced up and nodded. "A credit to Bond-street," he answered, smiling.

"Jim Tunks put 'em together," said the boy. "I feel like a—like—a bloomin' home-made dude. Beastly all over! The chaps have been chiacking me all the morning. I've promised to give Hal Best a black eye to-morrow."

"He is more than your match, Jack."

"I know. That's why I put it off till to-morrow. Couldn't meet Marion with a smashed face, could I?"

"I suppose not."

"She's a good sort, Marion," observed the boy reflectively, "but peaceful like; she was always lecturing me against fighting."

"Pretty?" inquired the fisherman.

"She never struck me that way," replied the boy, with a judicial air. "She's nothing like Lena Best."

"No great misfortune," muttered the fisherman.

The boy did not hear. "Lena has a rod in pickle for her, I guess," he went on, with a grin.

"Indeed."

"Yes, sir, and the other girls as well, though Lena's the leader. She's president of the Women's League and Social Purity Brigade, you know."

"What is the motive for the rod?"

"Jealousy—I call it, Mr. Digby. They say—it's 'necessary precautions.' Martha Lang put the show away to me."

"What will they do?"

"I don't know, just. Watch her, I expect, like cats, for a chance to scratch."

"But why?"

"Well," drawled the lad, "the general feeling seems to be that Marion is pretty sure to come back superior, don't you know; 'sidey,' and all that sort of thing."

"Ah!"

"Yes—and the League has formed itself into a sort of vigilance committee. Martha says they are bound to resent being patronised—and they're sworn to give Marion a holy time if she puts on airs."

The fisherman's, lips curled. "Charity, thy name is Woman," he sneered.

"They are charitable, though," laughed the boy; "leastways, they think they are. Martha says they are going to give her every chance, and I believe Lena made a speech last meeting pluming herself and the others on their being broad-minded. I suppose it was because they decided to meet her with flowers."

Jan Digby glanced over his shoulder at the crowd. "They have flowers enough for a carnival," he remarked.

"False pretences, I call it," sneered the boy. "Marion will be that grateful to them! Never mind, I'll soon put her fly to the way they've picked her to pieces."

The fisherman stood up, and began to wind his line around his pole.

"Giving it best?" asked Jack Reay.

Digby nodded. "For the present. I don't want to lose my line. Here comes the *Tomki*."

"Where?" cried the boy, springing to his feet.

The man nodded in a certain direction, and beyond a point of mangrove swamp the boy perceived a pair of gliding masts.

He darted off, flushed and eager, to his father's side, and Jan Digby, after secreting his rod in a handy niche, climbed slowly to the wharf. Standing up, he threw out his arms and breathed deeply. He had been sitting for hours, and felt cramped. He was little short of six feet in height, and of light yet sinewy build. As he stretched his limbs he swayed slightly from side to side, and his muscles swelled and rolled under his threadbare, tightly buttoned coat with an astonishing oil-like smoothness that irresistibly suggested the movements of some animal of the cat species.

"If only one could exist without eating," he muttered in confidence to the air. "Or," he added reflectively, "fast without getting hungry—life would be worth living."

He heard a sudden clatter of feet, and turned to see the Ballina ladies coming forward in a body escorting in their midst the stumbling figure of Major Reay. Digby immediately remembered that he occupied that part of the wharf nearest the approaching steamer. His first intention was to slip away, but he subdued it on an impulse of defiance which he knew was absurd, and which left him undecided and frowning. Swinging on his heel, he stared at the *Tomki* and listened acutely to the conversation behind him.

"Can you see Marion, yet?" demanded Major Reay of all round. His voice was high pitched and tremulous.

"No, no, not yet," answered the ladles in chorus. "It is too soon yet."

"Jack, Jack. Where is Jack, confound him?" cried the Major.

The steamer whistled, and the Major groaned.

"If only I had someone to lean on," cried the old gentleman.

"Lean on me, dear Major!" said a woman's voice.

"Thank you, dear," growled the Major; "I'd break you! Jack," he shouted. "Jack!"

But Jack, who had climbed a post at the other end of the wharf, was frantically waving his kerchief at the *Tomki*, oblivious of all else.

"I can't stand any longer," said the Major, with a groan of pain. "Take me back! Oh, my foot, my foot."

Jan Digby turned about, and bowed to the old gentleman with the grace of a cavalier.

"Permit me to assist you, sir," he suggested gently.

The Major raised his grizzled eyebrows, and surveyed the tattered fisherman with a somewhat supercilious air. "You, Jan Digby!" he growled.

"At your service," replied Digby in slow, even tones, giving him look for look.

"Very well," said the Major, most ungraciously. "Help me to that ledge. I want my daughter to see me."

Digby smiled, and stepping forward lifted the ponderous old man as though he were a child, and placed him upon the coping of the wharf.

"You are strong, sir," said the Major.

Digby, still smiling, bent one knee upon the planks, and offered the other as a stool for his companion.

"If you sit down, sir, it will ease your foot," he remarked.

The Major suppressed a groan, and barely smothered an oath. "It is giving me the devil," he muttered, his lip trembling.

"Sit down," said Digby.

The Major obeyed, and Digby passed an arm around his waist.

"You are certainly strong, sir," said the Major. "But I am blocking your view, sir."

"That is of no consequence."

The voice of the boy, Jack Reay, at that moment rose high above the general babel.

"I see her, there she is!" he yelled. "Marion, Marion. Hurrah!"

The Major, uttering a cry, sprang half erect, then sank back again with an exclamation of anguish.

"Easy does it, sir," said Digby.

"Can you see her?" stammered the old man. "I can't! I can't!"

"There she is. There she is," chorussed the ladies behind them, and with shrill shouts they pressed to the coping's edge, fluttering their handkerchiefs and waving their bouquets.

The steamer's signal bell sounded through the din. Digby could see nothing, but he knew that the Major's self-control had broken down, for his right hand was splashed with

tears, and the old man's body was quivering like a blancmange.

A weighted rope, skilfully cast from the *Tomki's* bows clattered upon the wharf, to the accompaniment of a chorus of female shrieks. Two attendants seized the line and pulled ashore a hawser, hand over hand, whose loop they cast presently over an immense iron stanchion screwed into the wharf near Jan Digby's feet.

The steamer, forging ahead, was stopped short by the rope, and her shivering stem swung inwards. A bell rang, and her screws reversing action, dragged her astern, a manoeuvre which in less than a minute brought her smooth iron sides in gentle contact with the wharf.

"Help me up!" cried the Major. "Quick man, quick!"

Digby put the old man on his feet, and lifted him down from the coping.

"Where to, sir?" he asked, for the Major clung to him helplessly, his eyes blinded with tears.

"Take me—to her," stammered the old man. "Be quick, be quick."

Digby shouted, "Way, way for the Major!" and half carrying, half leading his charge, he forced a path through the press in the direction of the gangway.

A moment later he paused at the foot of the ladder, wondering if the Major wished to wait there for his daughter or climb aboard the steamer. But his doubt was speedily resolved. Glancing up, he saw a sweet, furbelowed vision looking down at him. A milk-white face, with big blue shining eyes, and a small crimson mouth whose lips were tremulously parted—lower, a shape of softly undulating

curves, and lower still, two tiny high-heeled shoes, peeping out of a bewildering mass of lace and silk and creamy draperies.

"Father!" cried a voice of piercing sweetness.

"Marion!" shouted Major Reay.

Jan Digby witnessed something of a miracle. As the girl ran down the steps with open arms and eyes aglow, Major Reay, a second since the weakling dependent on Digby's courtesy, started erect, and forgetting his gout, sprang up the gangway to meet his daughter with the agile vigor of a lad.

Digby immediately fell back, and threading his way through the crowd he returned to his original vantage post. The stern of the *Tomki* now lay beside the flying pile, separated by a dozen feet of space; but there was room to fish, and Digby forthwith recommenced operations with a hand line. The hook had barely sunk to its limit before he felt a tug, and with a quick series of gestures, he drew out a black bream, weighing at least a pound. Digby smacked his lips as he put the fish into his bag. "Come, come," he muttered, "we shall not starve to-day, at all events."

In ten minutes he had caught a dozen bream, and had expended all his bait. He then rolled up his line, and slinging his catch across his shoulders, got slowly to his feet.

The wharf presented now a very different picture from that which had obtained upon the arrival of the steamer. The ladles and other sight-seers had departed, and the whole place was in the charge of grimy stevedores and hairy-chested lightermen, who ran to and fro in busy streams between the store sheds and the *Tomki's* screaming

cranes. Some were trundling trucks of merchandise which the sailors had discharged from the vessel's hold, others trotted with staggering steps under bags of flour and grain cast athwart their shoulders.

"Lucky devils," said Jan Digby, with a sigh of envy, as he watched them. "They have work to do!"

Chapter II.—Marion's Friend.

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Major Reay's house, familiarly known all over the river as "The Folly," was prettily situated at the head of a little sheltered cove near the river's mouth, within the bar, about two miles from the township of Ballina. It was so called because the Major, in building it, had embarked upon a temporary career of extravagance which his acquaintances had regarded as little short of lunacy.

The house was constructed of finest white marble imported at immense expense from Italy, and though not really of prodigious size, its dimensions and beauty of design, rendered contemptible by comparison every other mansion in the district. The fact was that the Major, who had been a poor man until comparatively late in years, had cherished secretly throughout his poverty a dream of one day returning to England; and repurchasing the home of his fathers—a stately old castle lost to the family by the prodigality of his ancestors. The time arrived when he found himself able, financially speaking, to gratify his wishes, but other considerations intervened; his physicians warned him that the climate of England would infallibly cut short his life. Obliged therefore, to abandon an ambition which had become a part of his being, the old gentleman strove to repair his disappointment by erecting in the land of his adoption a house which he resolved should surpass, at least in magnificence, the beloved castle of his dreams. In that he had probably succeeded, for the "Folly" was a lovely place, and its natural surroundings were incomparably beautiful;

but the Major looked upon it as a *pis aller*, and it was long before he became reconciled to the idea of spending his last days within the marble halls.

Marion, however, who had paid a lengthy visit to Castle Reay during her sojourn in England, returned to Ballina with shuddersome memories of her ancestral home, whose air of gloom and interminable wilderness of rat-infested rooms and corridors had made the "Folly" seem doubly bright and sweet by virtue of comparison.

As she sat with her father and brother upon one of the lower balustraded balconies that faced the sea, after dinner of the evening of her arrival, she again contrasted the places in her mind, and her verdict was wholly in favor of the "Folly."

"Ah! but it is good to be home again," she declared, with a deep sigh of contentment.

"Home is where the heart is, my dear," grumbled the Major; "mine is in the old country, the dear old country, which I shall never see again."

Marion shook her head. "It is better here," she murmured. "I love England—but I love this more—the land where I was born."

"I was born in England," said the Major sadly.

"Yes, at Castle Reay, dad; but oh, dad, it is not good to dream, loved places grow superlatively fine in dreams. If you could see the castle once more you would never wish to live there—it is sombre and old, and full of mystery and mould and melancholy; one could not be happy there, it weighed me down—more than I can tell you. I was glad to leave it—and oh, I am a thousand times more glad to be

here again, where all is bright and sunshining and sweet smelling."

"I guess 'you're just skiting, aren't you, to cheer us up," said Jack. "Give me England and Castle Reay every time—eh, dad?"

Marion laughed. "You have never seen either, that is why you think so, you silly boy," she cried. "Now I have been all over the world, and have never seen a place that I like one half so well as this."

"Honestly, darling?" asked the Major.

"Honestly, dad," she answered earnestly.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, "I am glad to know it, dear; it makes one easier in mind, for to tell you the truth, I was half fearing that you would come back to us dissatisfied."

"Dad!" cried the girl indignantly, "how dared you think such a thing?"

"It would have been natural, most natural, for you to dislike the idea of resuming the old life here. Don't think I would have blamed you, my pet."

Marion stood up, her eyes bright with tears. "I shall never leave you again, dad," she said quickly, and there was much passion in her voice; "I was never really happy away from you, and now I can see that you have been miserable, too—you must have been—to have thought such things of me."

"It seems that I have been an old fool," said the Major gruffly. "Sit down, dear, and let us talk of something else."

"Lena Best was responsible," observed Jack. "Cat! Every time she came here, it was to give you a dig."

"Lena Best!" exclaimed Marion. "Why, she used to be my best friend."

"She didn't mean badly, it's just her way," said the Major hastily.

"Talk of the Dickens," muttered Jack, *sotto voce*, "here she comes, with Joyce Templeton; I'm off, by-bye, dad."

"A good riddance, you young imp!" growled the Major, but he followed the lad's retreating figure with indulgent eyes. "He's a good boy, Marion!" he said, smiling, "a good boy is Jack, and I'm proud of him!"

"So am I," said Marion, standing up as she spoke to receive her visitors, who were already half way up the steps.

"We had to come," cried Lena, "we simply could not keep away, we were just dying to see you, weren't we, Joyce?"

"Just dying," echoed Joyce.

Lena was a tall and slim, rather thin-featured blonde, some twenty-four years of age, whom most people considered very pretty. She had eyes of the palest blue imaginable, and elegant taper-fingered hands, of which she was unaffectedly vain. Her father was a local bank manager, a widower, and Major Reay's most intimate friend. Joyce Templeton was a stout and rather stumpy brunette, the eldest of a brood of sixteen daughters of a sugar planter, who resided at a neighboring village. She was at that time spending a holiday with Lena Best, who dominated her in all things, and whose echo and jackal she was.

"It is just sweet of you both," said Marion, and she kissed them heartily in turn.

The Major stood up and shook hands. "Did you walk?" he inquired.

"Yes, Major," answered Lena. "But father will call for us and drive us home, he wants to see you about some matter of business."

"Hum," said the Major, "I guess I'll leave you," and he stumbled off into the house.

"Sit down, dears," said Marion; "how pretty you have grown, Lena. Do you love me just the same as ever?"

Lena cast down her eyes and blushed. "Everyone says that," she simpered. "Of course I love you just the same," she added as an afterthought.

"You are no slouch yourself in looks, Marion," observed Joyce. "Is she, Lena?"

Miss Best eyed Marion doubtfully. "Distinctly stylish," she commented, smoothing out her own dress in order to display her hands. "Did you bring home many frocks like that, Marion?"

"I brought out a lot of gowns," returned Marion smiling; "but this is only a wrapper—a tea gown."

Lena looked shocked. "Is that real lace?" she demanded, pointing to the fringe of under-skirt peeping from under Marion's flounces.

"Only Maltese," said Marion apologetically.

"Only Maltese," repeated Lena severely. "My dear Marion, you'll have all the girls down on you in no time, if you sport your money like that. The most we can run to here is Torchon or imitation Valenciennes, and only then on our summer Sunday-go-to-meeting's. Only Maltese, indeed! why"—(she bent forward suddenly in order to more closely examine the offending apparel). "Good heavens!" she cried, "it's silk! silk!"

"Silk!" echoed Joyce. "Good heavens, and on an underskirt!"

"The whole underskirt is silk, too," exclaimed Lena, sitting back and gasping.

"Are you expecting company to-night?" demanded Joyce, with a suspicious sniff.

Marion was bewildered, and she felt too surprised to conceal her feelings. "Surely I may wear what pleases me," she said, not without indignation.

"Oh, certainly," said Lena stiffly.

"Certainly," echoed Joyce.

"I hope that you will excuse my remark," went on Lena. "If I have presumed, it was only in consideration of our old friendship. Of course, if you do not wish to resume that relationship—I——"

Marion frowned, then smiled.

"Don't be a goose, Lena," she interjected brightly. "I am not a changeable girl—as you ought to know besides, but—but after what you have said—perhaps——" she paused dramatically.

"Perhaps what?" demanded Lena.

Marion's eyes twinkled. "Apropos of lace," she answered. "You seem to think that it is wrong to wear it—and—you see, when I was leaving England, I wanted to make you a present, and I—I—was silly enough to think you'd like some lace. I brought you out a lot—whole rolls."

Lena started up in her chair, like one galvanised. "You darling!" she cried. "What sort?"

"Two cards of Maltese—deep, and, let me see——"

"Yes? Yes?"

"Valenciennes—and——"

"Real?"

Marion nodded. "Some Minorca—scarves, two sets of Brussels collars and gauntlets, and some old Irish fichus."

Miss Best gasped for breath, and, for a moment seemed unable to speak.

"All that for me!" she muttered at last.

"Some Bruges insertion, too," said Marion.

"How utterly lovely!" sighed Joyce.

"Is—is it—have you got it unpacked?" stammered Lena.

"No," answered Marion. "My boxes are not all up from the wharf yet."

"It's too good to be true," cried Lena.

"I feel so disappointed about it," murmured Marion. "I acted for the best, really, Lena. I made sure you would like it."

"But, Marion, I do." Lena was trembling between excitement and apprehension.

"But the girls would be down on you in no time, if you wore it—wouldn't they?" asked Marion innocently.

"Let them try," said Lena. "Do you think I care a fig for them, now I know you love me. You darling," she cried, "to think of me when you were so far away. I just adore you for it. My word! won't the other girls be jealous!"

Marion submitted to the embrace without remark, then turned to Joyce. "I have a silver purse for you, Joyce," she said quietly. "I brought out something for every one of my old friends."

"You angel!" cried Joyce. "A silver purse—hurrah! Oh, you darling, I must kiss you, Marion."

Lena looked on with a discontented frown.

"I'm offended," she declared after Joyce sat down again. "I thought it was only me, I hate being one of a crowd."

"I brought you the most," said Marion sweetly; "for I never made any secret that I loved you better than the others; but I could not neglect the others entirely—could I?"

"You angel," cried Joyce again.

Lena permitted herself to be mollified. "Of course, if you put it in that way, I forgive you," she said magnanimously.

"Now let's have a nice chat," said Marion. "I want you to tell me all the news of Ballina, everything about everybody. Dad says nothing whatever has happened since I went away, but of course there has."

Lena and Joyce at ones drew up their chairs, and sat as close as possible to their hostess.

"Dad is an old silly," said Lena. "Lots has happened, hasn't it, Joyce?"

"Lots!" echoed Joyce—"lots and lots."

"Then tell me."

"Such fun," began Lena—with a conscious smile and demurely downcast eyes; "you remember Jack Mappin?"

"Yes, the teller in your father's bank."

"No, the accountant—you know, the one with the brown moustache. You must remember him?"

"Sandy," corrected Joyce.

"Brown," retorted Lena; "you are color blind, Joyce."

"I'm not," said Joyce rebelliously.

"What of him?" asked Marion quickly.

"I refused him," said Lena, "and he married May Streeton a fortnight afterwards out of revenge."

"And she had twins last month," cried Joyce, bursting into a laugh.

"Isn't it perfectly awful," said Lena. "But doesn't it serve him right?"

"He was rather a nice boy," said Marion; "I hope that he is happy."

"Happy!" sneered Lena. "I guess not, he never looks at me now—he is ashamed, I expect."

"But what has he done to be ashamed of, Lena?" asked Marion.

"Twins!"

Joyce laughed loudly, but Marion did not smile.

"Does Mr. Keeling still live at Ballina?" she asked.

"Horace Keeling. Oh, yes," Lena's face changed expression suddenly. It seemed to stiffen.

"And he is still single?"

Lena was silent, but Joyce guffawed. "He and Lena were engaged for a bit," she explained, "but he caught her flirting with Will Taylor, and they haven't spoken since."

"Ah!" said Marion, "and Will Taylor, how is he?"

"He is doing splendidly. He is sub-manager at the big mill now."

"Fat fool!" muttered Lena.

"He is courting Mamie Sinclair," murmured Joyce, giving Marion a meaning glance.

Marion suppressed a smile.

"Are there any new people?" she asked.

"Was George Griffen here before you left?" demanded Lena.

"No."

"Then he is new," Lena brightened up at once, and preened her ruffled feathers like a bird in the sunshine.

"What is he, and what is he like?" inquired Marion.

"He is second analyst at the mill, with a real good screw—salary, I mean. I could have him by raising my little finger."

"Is he nice?"

"Not bad. Awfully good-looking, and very dark, with a perfect duck of a moustache. He makes love beautifully."

"You ought to know," said Joyce; "what about the Masonic ball?"

Lena giggled and scrouged up her shoulders. "Don't be silly, Joyce," she simpered.

"Alan Laing is new," said Joyce suddenly.

"A nice name," commented Marion.

"All the girls are after him," said Joyce; "but he is not taking any."

"Not all the girls," corrected Lena, with a frown. "I never could stand him, a proud, elderly, stuck-up toad—that's my opinion of him."

"Oh, Lena!" cried Joyce—"he is not a day over forty, and I can't allow you to call him a toad."

"Just because he rowed you home from Shell Island in the rain, and paid you a duty call afterwards," she turned to Marion with curling lip; "Joyce's head is very easily turned," she sneered.

"He saved my life," protested Joyce; "I was caught by the tide, and in another half hour I should have been washed away and drowned."

"A romance!" cried Marion, her eyes sparkling, "a real romance! how lovely! tell me all about it, Joyce."

"There is nothing to tell," answered Joyce.

"But it will not end there!"

"It will; we are good friends, but that is all."

"Is he—nice?"

"Yes—and whatever Lena may say, he is a gentleman; his manners are princely."

Lena sniffed. "I quite agree with you about his manners," she sneered; "by all accounts, most princes are condescending prigs, that just describes him; he thinks no end of himself, I can tell you; why, would you believe it, Marion, he has never attended one of our dances; he considers us beneath him, I suppose, the snob!"

"What does he do for a living?" asked Marion.

"I think he writes," said Joyce in awe-stricken tones, "they say he is an author; he is living here for his health's sake, he is consumptive, I think; but he must be well off, for he has the 'Bungalow,' and he keeps three servants."

"A bachelor?"

"I dare swear not," said Lena, spitefully. "He is bald, and he looks as if his hair had been pulled out by the roots."

Marion laughed outright. "Poor fellow," she cried, "he is to be pitied since he is bald, and has Lena for an enemy. But let us drop him for the present. Who else new is there, Joyce?"

"No one that I remember, except married ones, and they're not worth mentioning."

"No one—surely you are mistaken—think!"

"There's no one else," sighed Lena, shaking her head, "I wish there was."

Marion looked thoughtful. "'That's strange," she murmured, "I saw a gentleman standing beside father on the wharf this morning, when the boat came in, and his face was strange to me; can I have been mistaken?"

"You must have been dreaming," said Lena. "We were with your father, and there was certainly no gentleman with us except Jack."

"It was not Jack."

Lena shook her head. "I saw no one—did you, Joyce?"

"Not a soul," said Joyce.

"I saw him distinctly," said Marion, "and I intended to ask dad who he is, but I forgot."

"That's curious," said Lena, frowning. "But if you saw him so distinctly, you should be able to describe him. What was he like?"

Marion half closed her eyes. "Tall, thin, strong-looking, very manly," she answered musingly.

"You must have second sight!" cried Lena.

"Oh, my!" gasped Joyce, "not that, it's bad luck."

"Nonsense!" said Marion abruptly. "I don't believe in such absurdities at all. Besides, I assure you that I saw him quite distinctly, and he was not a bit unreal."

"Lena!" cried Joyce of a sudden. "I know," she began to giggle furiously, as though she was being tickled.

"What?" demanded Lena, much vexed. "Don't giggle, you —ninny—tell us—if you know."

But Joyce could not stop herself. "Oh,—my!" she gasped, "gentleman!—oh, my!"

"You—you," said Lena, her pale eyes flashing fire. "I hate the giggler."

"G-g-gentleman," stuttered Joyce, laughing like mad. "She m-m-means Jan!"

It took Lena some seconds to grasp the idea conveyed, but when she did, she also dissolved in mirth.

"Jan Digby!" she cried—then "never," and her laughter rippled seaward in a sudden silver peal.

Marion felt a little irritated. "I should be glad to have amused you," she said coldly.

Lena stopped at once. "Forgive me, dear, it was very rude of me. I know," she said contritely, "but when you know you will laugh, too."

"Indeed," said Marion.

"It's about the—er, the gentleman you saw," explained Lena, tittering as she spoke. "Was he clean-shaved—and rather dark?"

"Yes."

"And were his clothes shabby?"

"I did not examine his clothes," answered Marion.

"It was Jan Digby!" said Lena. "You confused us by calling him a gentleman. If you had not said that, we'd have known at once whom you meant."

"What, then, is Mr. Jan Digby?"

"A remittance man. He hasn't sixpence in the world, beyond a pittance he receives quarterly, through my father's bank from England—about £10, I think. His relatives allow him that to keep him away from home."

"Oh!" said Marion.

"He is a rank loafer," pursued Lena. "He keeps body and soul together by fishing, and he lives in that awful little shanty on the beach—that which old mad Karl built out of kerosene tins years ago; you remember it, don't you?"

"Yes, I remember the place; but where does the joke come in, Lena?"

"You can't have much of a sense of humor, my dear," replied Lena, with a patronising smile. "The joke is that you took him for a gentleman."

"Are you sure that he is not?" asked Marion quietly.

Lena pursed up her lips. "Not any of the nice people in Ballina speak to him," she declared, her manner imparting to the words an air of absolute finality.

Joyce, however, protested against the implied decree. "Oh, come, Lena," she said quickly, "you know we saw him walking with Mr. Laing yesterday."

"Birds of a feather," retorted Lena. "I said not any of the nice people, with an accent on the nice."

Joyce turned scarlet, but Marion hastened to avert the storm.

"Is he a drunkard?" she inquired.

"No, indeed!" cried Joyce, looking defiantly at Lena, stung at last into open revolt by the slur cast upon her. "He is nothing of the kind, and I'm sure he is a gentleman by birth."

"He looks it," said Marion. "Has be been here long?"

"About two months," replied Joyce. "And as for no one speaking to him," she went on with increased warmth, "that may be nearly true now, but when he first came all the fellows were glad enough to win his money at cards, and eat