

江苏省高等教育自学考试教材

ENGLISH EXTENSIVE READING (2)

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THE GREEN YEARS

by Archibald Joseph Cronin

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

Holding Mama's² hand I came out of the dark railway station and into the bright streets of the strange town. I had never seen Mama until today. Her tired, troubled face did not resemble my mother's face. In spite of the chocolate she had bought me I had no warm feeling for her so far. During the journey from Winton she had sat opposite me silent, from time to time she had touched the corner of her eye with her handkerchief.

But now that we were out of the train she tried to look cheerful. She smiled and pressed my hand.

"You're a good boy not to cry any more. Do you think you can walk to the house? It's not too far."

I was anxious to please her. I answered I could walk. So we did not take the cab which stood near the station.

We went down the High Street. I was so tired that I could hardly move. Opposite a large building with columns Mama said proudly:

"Here are the Levenford Municipal Offices.³ Mr. Leckie... Papa... works there." "Papa," I thought, "That is Mama's husband. My mother's father."

Now I could hardly drag my feet. Mama looked at me with pity.

"It's too bad there are no trams today," she said.

I was much more tired than I had thought, and rather frightened. The strange town terrified me. Soon, however, we left the noise and smoke behind and entered a quiet suburb.

We stopped at last before a tall grey house with yellow curtains and the name Lomond View. It was not so nice as the other houses in the quiet street. But I liked the garden in front of it. It was full of beautiful yellow flowers.

"Here we are, then, Robert," said Mrs. Leckie. "It's a nice place, near the village. Levenford is a smoky old town, but there is lovely country around it. Wipe your eyes, there's a dear⁴, and come in."

I followed obediently. My heart was full of fear. The words of our Dublin

neighbour, Mrs. Chapman, as she kissed me good-bye, rang in my ears: "What'll happen to you next, poor boy?"

At the back door Mama paused, a young man of about nineteen was working on his knees in a flower plot. He rose as we approached. He was big, pale, darkhaired and wore large spectacles.

"You are here again," Mama said reproachfully. Then, bringing me forward: "This is Robert."

Murdoch held out to me a large hand.

"I'm glad to meet you, Robert," he said. Then he turned to Mama, "I got these flowers from the Nursery, Mama. They did not cost me anything."

"Well, anyway, dear," Mama said, "you must wash before Papa comes. You know how angry it makes him to see you out here."

We entered the kitchen. Mama told me to sit down and rest. She took off her hat and coat, hung them behind the door and began to move to and fro over the old brown floor. From time to time she gave me an encouraging look. I sat hardly breathing on the edge of a chair.

"We shall have dinner in the evening," she said, "because I was away. When Papa comes, try not to cry. It has been a great blow to him as well. Kate, my other daughter, will be in any minute, too. She is a teacher. Maybe your mother told you." She saw I was going to cry and went on hurriedly.

"Oh, I know it's confusing, even for a big boy like you, to meet all his mother's relatives for the first time. And there are more of them. There's Adam, my eldest son, he doesn't live with us. Then there's Papa's Mother. She is away now, but she spends half her time with us. And there is my father who lives here always—he is your great grandpa Gow. It's not every boy who has a great-grandpa, I can tell you. When I have his tray ready you can take it upstairs to him. Say, how do you do, and help me at the same time."

Mama laid the table for five. Then she prepared a tray: she put upon it a cup of tea, a plate of jam, cheese and three slices of bread.

I looked at her with surprise: "Does Grandpa not eat his food downstairs?"

Mama seemed confused. "No, dear, he has it in his room." She lifted the tray. "Can you manage? Be careful and don't fall."

I climbed the stairs and entered a strange, interesting, very untidy room. The bed was still unmade.

My great-grandpa was sitting in a big old armchair by the fireplace. He was writing something.

He was a tall man, perhaps about seventy, with a mane of faintly red hair. It was in fact red hair, which had lost some of its colour, but had not

yet turned white. His beard and moustache were of the same colour. His eyes were bright blue, not the faded blue of Mama's eyes. But the most remarkable thing was his nose. It was a large nose, large and red. It looked like a ripe, enormous strawberry. I had never seen such a strange nose, never.

By this time he had ceased to write and turned slowly to look at me. We stared at each other in silence. I forgot about his nose, and blushed to think of the miserable picture I must make. I was standing there in my black suit, one stocking falling down, my face pale and tear-stained, my hair red.

Still silent he pointed to the table. I put the tray down on it. Without taking his eyes off me he began to eat hurriedly. Then he lit a pipe.

"So you are Robert Shannon?" he said.

"Yes, Grandpa."

"Did you have a good journey?"

"I think so, Grandpa."

"Can you play draughts?"

"No, Grandpa."

"You will, boy, you stay here. I understand you are going to stay."

"Yes, Grandpa. Mrs. Chapman said there was no place for me to go." I felt very sorry for myself.

Suddenly I had a wild longing for sympathy, I wanted to tell him of my terrible position. Did he know that my father had died of tuberculosis, the dreadful family disease, which had soon carried off my mother? It had even laid a little finger on me,⁶ it was whispered.

But Grandpa looked at me attentively and changed the subject.

"You are eight, aren't you?"

"Almost, Grandpa."

I wished to make myself as young as possible but Grandpa was pitiless.

"It's an age when a boy should stand up for himself...Do you like to walk?"

"I've never tried it much, Grandpa."

"Well, we shall go for walks, you and me and see what good Scottish air does to us." He paused. "I'm glad you have my hair. The Gow hair. Your mother had it too, poor girl."

I could no longer hold back the desire to cry—I burst into tears. Since my mother's funeral a week before, each time her name was mentioned I began to cry. And my tears always brought me everybody's sympathy. Yet this time I received no sympathy. I had a painful feeling that Grandpa did not like my tears. I tried to stop, choked and began to cough. I coughed and coughed, until I had to hold my side. It was one of the strongest fits I had ever had.

I was, to be truthful, rather proud of it and when it ceased, looked at Grandpa expectantly.

But he did not say a word. Instead, he took a little box from his pocket and chose a large sweet from it. I thought he would give the sweet to me, but, to my surprise and disappointment, he did not. He put it calmly in his own mouth. Then he said severely,

"If there is one thing I do not like, it is a crying child. In my life I've had many difficulties. Do you think I would have won if I'd been weak?"

At that moment a hand-bell was heard downstairs. He stopped—disappointed, I thought—and made a sign I should go. I took the empty tray and moved, ashamed, towards the door.

Notes:

1. Archibald Joseph Cronin ['ɑ:tʃɪbɔ:ld 'dʒəu zɪf 'krəʊnɪn] 阿·约·克洛宁, 本文作者, 1896年生于苏格兰, 1919年开始行医, 后弃医, 从事文学创作。作品有《帽商的城堡》(The Hatter's Castle, 1931); 《群星俯视》(The Stars Look Down, 1935); 《堡垒》(The Citadel, 1937) 等。

2. Mama, 指罗伯特·谢农的外祖母, Papa 指他的外祖父。

3. the Levenford ['li:vənfo:d] Municipal Offices: 里温福市政府。

4. there's a dear: 真是乖孩子。

5. with a mane of faintly red hair: 长了一头马鬃似的淡红色头发。

6. It had even laid a little finger on me. 甚至我也有点染上了肺病。

Comprehension questions:

1. Why did Robert come to live in his Mama's house?

2. How many members are there in the family? Who are they?

CHAPTER II

Downstairs, Mr. Leckie, Kate and Murdoch had come in and, with Mama, were waiting for me in the kitchen. Their sudden silence showed that I had been the subject of their conversation. Like most lonely children I was very shy. In my present state I was more shy than ever. After a pause Papa took my hand, held it, then bent down and kissed me.

"I'm pleased to see you, Robert. It is a pity that we haven't met before."

I knew that a deep gulf had existed between my mother and Papa. But his voice was not angry, as I had feared, it was low and sad. I told myself that I must not cry, yet it was difficult not to, when Kate also bent down and kissed me gently.

"Let's sit down," Mama said showing me to my place and again trying to look cheerful. "It's nearly half past six. You are very hungry, I am sure."

Papa, at the head of the table, began to slice the hot meat, while Mama served the potatoes and cabbage, at the other end.

"There!" Papa said with the air of giving me a nice piece. He was a small man of forty-seven with a pale face and small eyes.

Under all these eyes it was difficult for me to manage the knife and fork; they were long and heavy. Also, I did not like cabbage, and my small slice of meat was terribly salty and tough. I was used to good food, to tell the truth, I was a spoiled child. My mother had often given me a sixpence and a kiss to make me eat a slice of chicken. Yet I could not displease Papa; I choked down the watery cabbage.¹

Papa saw that I was busy with my food. He looked down the table at Mama, and continued their interrupted conversation.

"Did you have to take a cab?"

"No... there was nothing much to bring."

I could see that Papa was very much displeased.

"No wonder there was nothing left. They had little common sense.² Why didn't they insure?" He turned to me as I was trying to clear my plate. "That's a good boy, Robert. We waste nothing in this house."

Kate, who sat across the table, gave me an encouraging smile. Though she was twenty-one, only three years younger than my mother, I was surprised how little she resembled her. My mother had been pretty, but Kate was plain, with pale eyes and a dry, red skin. Her hair was colourless.

"You've been to school, I suppose?" Kate asked.

"Yes." I blushed and spoke with great difficulty. "To Miss Barty's."

"Was it nice?"

"Oh! very nice. If you answered well, Miss Barty gave you a sweet."

"We have a fine school in Levenford. I think you will like it."

Papa cleared his throat. "I thought the elementary school in John Street... would be very suitable."

Kate looked directly at Papa. I could see that she was angry. "You know the school in John Street is a bad school. He must go to the Academy where we all went."

Papa's eyes fell. "Well, maybe. But not till next term. Give him some questions and see what class he is fit for."

"Now he is very tired and must go to bed. With whom is he sleeping?"

Mama said thoughtfully, "He is too big to sleep with you, Kate...and

your bed is very narrow, Murdoch... besides you often go to bed late because of your studies. Why not put him in Grandma's room, Papa, while she is away?"

But Papa shook his head.

"She pays good money for her room. We can't do it without her permission."

So far Murdoch had been silent, eating quietly. Now he looked up with a practical air.³

"He must sleep with Grandpa," he said.

Papa nodded, though his face became dark when Grandpa's name was mentioned. The question was settled. My heart sank. I was afraid of the strange man upstairs. But I was also afraid to say that I did not want to go.

Kate washed me in the small bathroom. She dried me and again put on my day shirt. We went upstairs. And there on the landing, holding out his hand, to take me, was Grandpa.

Notes:

1. I choked down the watery cabbage. 我勉强咽下这淡而无味的白菜。
2. They had little common sense. 他们没有什么常识。
3. with a practical air. 带着一副讲求实际的神情。

Comprehension questions:

1. What did Mama's family talk about before Robert went downstairs?
2. What did they talk about during the dinner?
3. What problems did Robert have in the new place?

CHAPTER III

It was difficult to sleep with Grandpa. He snored loudly and squeezed me flat against the wall. In spite of this I slept well.

When I opened my eyes, I saw the morning sun streaming into the room. Grandpa was standing at the window, almost dressed.

"Did I wake you?" he turned. "It's high time you were up."

As I rose and began to put on my clothes, he explained that Kate had already left for her school and Murdoch was on his way to College where he was preparing for a position in the Civil Service.¹ As soon as Papa left we should go downstairs.

At last we heard the slam of the door. Mama greeted us with a faint smile, as if we were schoolboys, ready for all sorts of tricks.

"How did you two get on?" she asked us.

"Nicely, Hannah, thank you," Grandpa answered politely, sitting down in

Papa's chair at the head of the table. This was the only meal that he took outside his room, as I soon learned. And he enjoyed it very much.

"Will you take Robert with you this morning, Father?" Mama asked.

"Certainly, Hannah," Grandpa answered.

"I know that you will help," she said. She continued to look at him with that sad faint smile, which showed her affection for him. As we finished our breakfast she brought his stick and hat the documents which I had seen him copying the day before. Grandpa took my hand in his and walked out.

Soon we reached the High Street. Grandpa entered a low building with a big brass plate: Duncan McKellar, Solicitor.

As we entered the office a woman at the desk told us coldly that Mr. McKellar was busy with Mayor Blair and that we must wait.

After five minutes the door opened and a dark-bearded man came through the waiting-room. He looked at me attentively and stopped before us.

"So this is the boy?"

"It is, Mayor," Grandpa answered.

Mayor Blair stared at me like a man who knew my history better than I did myself. I felt my legs shaking with shame.

"You have no friends among boys of your age?" he said kindly.

"No, sir."

"My boy, Gavin, is not much older than you. Come over to the house to play with him. It's quite near."

I hung my head. I could not tell him that I did not want to play with this unknown Gavin. He stood for a moment silent, then he nodded and went out.

Mr. McKellar was now free to give us his attention. His office, though old-fashioned, was very rich and beautiful. He was a red-faced man of about fifty with clever eyes. He took the papers which Grandpa had brought and looked at them.

"Indeed, Dandie, you are a good writer. I wish you could do everything as well as you copied this."

"I'm grateful for the work you give me," said Grandpa.

"I see you have a new member of the family," said McKellar, looking at me perhaps more attentively than the Mayor. Then he added as if with surprise. "It's a nice boy. You will have no trouble with him or I'm much mistaken." Slowly he took a shilling out of the pocket. He gave it to Grandpa and said:

"Buy the boy a glass of lemonade, Dandie. You may go now. Miss Glennie will give you some more papers to copy."

Grandpa left the office in an excellent mood. But I was very much depressed. I felt myself more of a mystery than ever. Why was I such a curiosity to all these people? What made them shake their heads over me?

The truth, though I didn't know it, was very simple. In this small Scots town everybody knew that my mother, a pretty and popular girl, had disgraced herself; she married my father, Owen Shannon, a stranger from Dublin who had nothing but high spirits and good looks. Nobody thought of the happy years that they had spent together. But my father's death, followed so soon by my mother's, was regarded as a just retribution.²

Grandpa took the way near the pond and at the end of half an hour we entered Drumbuck village. It was a pretty place with a little river, surrounded by woods, Grandpa seemed to know everyone. As we walked down the village street he greeted all the people we met, and they also greeted him in a friendly way. I felt him to be a really great person.

On the step of the "Drumbuck Arms"³ stood a stout red-faced man. He was especially friendly. Grandpa stopped and said:

"We mustn't forget your lemonade, boy." 柠檬水

I sat on the warm step and Grandpa brought me a glass of lemonade. I liked it very much. Grandpa returned to the "Arms" and I saw him empty a small thick glass with a quick movement and then drink slowly from a big glass.

At this moment my attention was attracted by the cries of two little girls who were playing on the lawn not far from the inn. As I was lonely, I rose and approached the lawn. I did not like strange boys but most of Miss Barty's pupils had been girls and I did not feel shy with them.

The younger of the girls stopped running and sat down on a bench. She was of my age, wore a short skirt and was singing, singing to herself. While she sang, I placed myself quietly on the other end of the bench and began to examine a scratch on my knee. When she finished singing, there was a silence, then she asked me in a friendly way,

"Can you sing any songs?"

I shook my head sadly. I could not sing a note. Still I liked this little girl with brown eyes and curly dark hair. I was anxious to continue the conversation. I looked at her companion and asked,

"Is that your sister?"

She smiled, but quietly and kindly.

"No," she said, "Louisa is my cousin. She has come to visit me. My name is Alison Eeith. I live over there." She pointed to a beautiful house, surrounded

by trees, at the end of the village.

I felt confused because I had made a mistake, and because she lived in such a beautiful house. Louisa ran up to us.

"Hello! Where did you spring from?"

She was about twelve, with long fair hair, which she pushed back with an air of importance.⁴

"I came from Dublin yesterday."

"Dublin? Dublin is the capital of Ireland." She paused. "Were you born there?"

I nodded.

"Then you must be Irish?"

"I am Irish and Scottish," I answered boastfully.

Louisa was not impressed.

"You can't be two things, that's quite impossible. It all sounds very strange." Suddenly she looked at me with the suspicion of an inquisitor.

"What church do you go to?"

I wanted to answer "To St Dominic's"⁵ but suddenly the burning in her eyes awoke my instinct of self-defence.⁶

"Just an ordinary church, it was near our house."

I did not want to continue the conversation. So I jumped up and turned head over heels⁷ three times, the only trick I knew.

When I got up, red-faced, Louisa's stare remained upon me. Then she said kindly.

"I was beginning to be afraid you were a Catholic." She smiled.

Redder than ever I said, "What put the idea in your head?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's lucky you're not,"

Quite confused, I looked at my shoes, Alison's eyes showed something of my own suffering.

"Are you going to stay here?" Louisa asked,

"Yes, I am." My lips were stiff, I could hardly speak. "I'm going to the Academy."

"The Academy! That's your school, Alison. Oh, it's lucky you're not what I thought. I don't think there is a single one in the whole Academy. Is there, Alison?"

Alison shook her head, with her eyes on the ground. I wanted to cry. Then Louisa laughed gaily and said,

"We must go for lunch now." She rose and added with an encouraging smile, "Don't look so miserable. You will be quite all right if what you've

said is true. Come along, Alison.

As they were leaving, Alison turned to me and gave me a look full of sorrowful sympathy. But it did not make me happier. I was crushed by the terrible and unforeseen catastrophe.

Stiff with shame, I stood looking at their figures in the distance, when Grandpa called me from the other side of the street.

He was smiling and looked very pleased. We set out in the direction of Lombard View.

"You seem very successful with the ladies, Robie. Was that the little Keith girl?"

"Yes, Grandpa," I mumbled.

"Nice people," said Grandpa. "Her father was captain of a ship ... before he died. The mother is a fine woman. She plays the piano beautifully ... and the little girl sings like a bird! What's matter with you?"

"Nothing, Grandpa. Nothing at all."

He shook his head and began to whistle.

As we approached the house, he said in a low voice:

"You mustn't tell Mama that we had a drink. She doesn't like it."

Notes:

1. He was preparing for a position in the Civil Service. 他正在做准备以取得一个文职人员的职位。
2. a just retribution; 一种应得的报应。
3. Drumbuck Arms ['drʌmbʊ:k] 旅馆名。
4. with an air of importance; 带着自命不凡的神情。
5. St. Dominic's [sən 'dɒmɪnɪks]: (天主教) 圣多米尼克教堂。
6. the burning in her eyes awoke my instinct self-defence; 她那逼人的目光唤起了我自卫的本能。
7. to turn head over heels; 翻筋斗。

Comprehension questions:

1. Where did Robert go with Grandpa after breakfast? *Duncan Macpherson's house*
2. Was he happy? Why (or why not)? *He felt he was a*
3. What do you think of Robert's conversation with Alison's cousin? *to all the*

CHAPTER IV

At that early period of my life in Levenford I saw little of the other members of the family. Very often Papa was away till the evening. He

worked very much. Murdoch was also away most of the day at College. When he came home he spent as much time as possible on his supper. Then he spread his books all over the table and placed himself with a heavy sigh before them.

Kate came home after school. But she talked very little. She seldom spent the evenings with the family. If she did not go out to visit her friend, Bessie, she went to her room, where she corrected exercise books or read.

It was not surprising that while waiting for my beginning at the Academy I spent most of my time with Grandpa. In the afternoon when it was fine, he took me out.

Sunday brought a different programme. On that day Mama rose earlier than usual and brought Papa a cup of tea in bed. Then they all began to dress in order to go to church. Kate ran up and down the stairs. Murdoch cried: "Mama, where did you put my clean socks?" Papa stood in the lobby, looking at his watch and repeating, "The bells will start in a minute."

During these preparations I always stayed in Grandpa's room. Grandpa never went to church. He didn't want to go; besides his clothes were not good enough. When the family had left for the church, he gave me a sign to accompany him while he visited his friend Mrs. Bosomley.

Mrs. Bosomley was the widow of a merchant and had once been an actress she was about fifty, quite stout, with a broad face and small kind eyes, which disappeared when she laughed. Mrs. Bosomley's hospitality was a sharp contrast to the Spartan economy in our house.¹ She gave me milk and sandwiches, while Grandpa and she drank coffee.

On Sunday afternoon, while Papa slept on the sofa in the parlour and Murdoch left with Kate to teach in Sunday school,² Grandpa again gave me a sign and we set out in the direction of the village. After Sunday dinner all the villagers were asleep. Grandpa turned into a small lane and stopped near a beautiful garden with the sign "A. Dalrymple, Nurseryman"³ near the gates. Grandpa looked carefully down the deserted lane, and over the hedge. Then he said, "What a pity the dear man is not here."

He turned, took off his hat and handed it to me with a pleasant smile. "Creep through the hedge, Robert. Take the big yellow pears, they are best. And keep your head down."

I crept through and filled the hat with beautiful yellow pears, while he stood in the middle of the lane, carefully looking around and whistling.

When I returned to him and we began to eat, he said:

"Dalrymple is ready to give me his last apple. He is devoted to me, the dear man."

Although I was a shy child, I found great pleasure in Grandpa's society.

Yet there was one strange thing that surprised and upset me. Everybody greeted Grandpa warmly, but there was a certain part of the young generation that mocked at him in the streets.

Our enemies were not the Academy boys, like Gavin Blair, whom Grandpa showed to me across the street, but the small village boys. As we went by they shouted:

"Cadger Gow! There he goes!"

"Where did he get that terrible nose?"

I turned pale with shame. Grandpa walked on, his head in the air. At last my curiosity became so strong that I asked him,

"Where did you get that nose, Grandpa?"

A silence. He looked at me with dignity.

"Boy, I got it in the Zulu War."

"Oh, Grandpa!" My shame melted in a flood of pride, of anger against these foolish little boys. "Tell me about it, Grandpa, please."

I scarcely breathed as Grandpa told me how the Scottish White Horse on board a great ship had landed on a deserted shore,⁵ how the White Horse were cut off, how he carried dispatches through the enemy lines, a revolver in each hand, a knife between his teeth. How the Zulus were after him. They shot at him. But at last, weak and bleeding, he reached his men.

My heart was full of pride and admiration.

"Were you badly wounded, Grandpa?"

"Yes, boy, I was."

"Was it then that you got... your nose, Grandpa?"

He nodded. "It was, boy... an arrow... a poisoned arrow." Then he added, "The Queen herself decorated me with an order."

I looked at him with a new respect, a new affection. Wonderful heroic Grandpa! I held his hand tightly as we returned to Lomond View.

When we entered the house, Mama was in the lobby, reading a letter which had just come in.

She turned to me. "Grandma is coming back tomorrow. She wants to see you, Robert."

Grandpa did not say a word. But he made a grimace, as if he had swallowed something sour, and began to climb the stairs.

Mama said kindly: "Would you like an egg to your tea, Father?"

"No, Hannah, no," the fearless fighter of Zulus said sadly. "After that I can't eat anything."

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On the following day—it was Saturday—I heard the sound of a cab and ran to the window.

With excitement I watched Grandma climb carefully from the cab. The driver looked displeased when Grandma paid him, but at last agreed to carry in the bags. Grandpa had gone for a walk, silently, at an unusual hour. But Kate and Murdoch came out respectfully to greet her. In the lobby Mama was calling: "Robie! Where are you? Come and help your Great-Grandma."

I ran out and began to carry the lighter things upstairs. I looked with shy interest at Grandma. She was a big woman, bigger than my Grandpa, with a long, yellow, wrinkled face. Her hair, still dark, was parted in the middle. As she talked to Mama, she showed strong yellow teeth, which made little clicking noises.

Upstairs the secret door was open, and while Grandma had a cup of tea downstairs, I sat on a bag in the doorway full of curiosity. It was a clean and tidy room, with a big bed. In the corner stood a sewing-machine.

Grandma came up slowly and suspected the room to see if everything was in order.

At last she shook her head to show she was not quite pleased and opened her bag. She took out her spectacles, the Bible and some bottles of medicine, which she placed on a little table beside her bed.

Then she addressed me.

"Have you been a good boy while I was away?"

"Yes, Grandma."

"I'm glad to hear it. You may help me to unpack."

I helped her to unpack. Grandma was pleased. She looked at me smiling and said: "You are a good boy, in spite of all. Your Grandma has something nice for you." She took out some peppermint sweets, chose one for herself and gave the rest to me.

"Suck," she advised. "They last longer that way."

Grandma kept me with her most of the day. She even told me something about herself. Her husband had been timekeeper at the Levenford Boiler Works. One day, as he crossed the yard, a ton of steel had fallen from a crane to his head. Poor Samuel Leckie! But he had gone to the Lord, and she received a pension from the Works. She was independent, thank God, and could pay for her food and room.

At four o'clock in the afternoon she told me to wash my face and hands. Half an hour later we set out for the village of Drumbuck.

"Remember, dear," she instructed me as we approached a little sweetshop,

"you must behave nicely. Miss Minns is my best friend. Don't make a noise when you drink your tea and speak when you are spoken to."

I had often stopped in front of Miss Minns' sweetshop. But I had never dreamed that I would soon have the honour to be her guest. The door opened as Grandma pushed and I entered the delightful little house that smelled of peppermints. Miss Minns was a small woman in black. She gave a cry of joy and surprise when we entered. Then she took us to the back shop, where she laid the table very quickly. She poured the tea and began to tell Grandma everything that had happened while she was away. But soon they became silent and looked at me with a strange expression.

"He's a nice boy," Miss Minns said. "Take another piece of cake, my big man."

I was pleased with this sign of attention. Miss Minns had already given me a plate of biscuits and a second cushion for my chair, to raise me to the table.

"Now, dear," she said kindly. "Tell your Grandma and me how you have been getting on. You have spent much time with your Grandfather?"

"Oh, yes. I was with him all the time."

A sad glance between the two ladies.

"And what did you do all the time?"

"Oh, lots of things," I said with an air of importance. "Visited the 'Drumbuck Arms'. Hunted the Zulus. Gathered fruit in Mr. Dalrymple's Nursery...Grandpa had permission, of course, to send me through the hedge."

I forgot nothing!

A pause followed. Grandma looked at me with silent pity. Then she began to question me about my life in Dublin. She did it so cleverly that I soon told her everything she wanted to know. When I finished the women looked at each other.

"Robert, dear," Grandma said, "run and play a minute by the door. Miss Minns and I have something to discuss."

I said good-bye to Minns and waited for Grandma at the door. She did not speak during our return. Immediately she took me to her room, and asked me to say a prayer with her. She begged God to forgive a sinner. When she finished she got up, smiled cheerfully, and lit the gas.

"That suit you are wearing, Robert...it's a disgrace. What they will think of you at the Academy, I don't know." She showed to me how old the material was. "Tomorrow I'll begin making you a new suit on my machine. Then she opened the cupboard, speaking to herself;

"I have a good petticoat somewhere. Just the thing!"

Suddenly we heard a knock on the door.

"Robie." It was my Grandpa's voice. "It's time for bed."

Grandma turned from the cupboard.

"I will put Robert to bed."

"But he sleeps with me."

"No, he is sleeping with me."

There was a pause. Grandpa's voice came through the door.

"His nightshirt is in my room."

"I will give him a nightshirt."

Again silence, the silence of defeat. And in a moment I heard Grandpa return to his room. I was alarmed. Grandma saw it in my pale face. She became calmer and kinder. She undressed me, made me wash, wrapped me in a flannel skirt and helped me to climb into the high bed. She sat down beside me and sighed.

"My poor boy, I want you to prepare yourself. Your Grandpa never fought in the war. He has never been away from these places."

What was she saying? I was shocked. I didn't believe her.

"It's my duty to tell you the truth," she continued. I tried not to hear what she was saying, yet some of her words reached me from time to time. "A failure in all he did...It was the end of his poor wife. And then he drinks ... see it in his face...his nose. Now not a penny...dependent on my son."

"No, no," I cried. I covered my ears with my hands.

"You must know the truth, Robert. He is not the right company for a boy. Don't cry, my dear. I'll take care of you."

She waited till I became quiet and then rose and said that she, too, was tired. She added: "Early to bed, early to rise, makes us all healthy, wealthy and wise," and began to take off her clothes. I watched her with interest. She took off her cap and unpinned her gold watch. Next came off the white shawl, her skirt and then five or six petticoats; then she paused to remove her teeth with a quick, almost magical movement of her left hand. She placed them in a glass of water by the bed.

"Robert! Turn to the wall."

When I obeyed I heard more rustling sounds; then the gas went out and Grandma was in bed beside me. She was a quiet sleeper, but her feet were very cold. Lying on my side I fearfully studied her teeth on the table. Grandpa had no such teeth. But I longed—oh, in spite of his sins, I longed suddenly with all my heart to be back beside him.