

prefaced it with many a 'Beg y' pardon, Sir.' Could the Major see his way to letting the Slane-M'Kenna wedding be adorned by the presence of four Battery horses to pull a hired barouche? The Major could, and so could the Battery. Excessively so. It was a gorgeous wedding.

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'Wot did I do it for?' said Corporal Slane. 'For the 'orses o' course. Jhansi ain't a beauty to look at, but I wasn't goin' to 'ave a hired turn-out. Jerry Blazes? If I 'adn't 'a' wanted something, Sim might ha' blowed Jerry Blazes' blooming 'ead into Hirish stew for aught I'd 'a' cared.'

And they hanged Private Simmons--hanged him as high as Haman in hollow square of the regiment; and the Colonel said it was Drink; and the Chaplain was sure it was the Devil; and Simmons fancied it was both, but he didn't know, and only hoped his fate would be a warning to his companions; and half a dozen 'intelligent publicists' wrote six beautiful leading articles on 'The Prevalence of Crime in the Army.'

But not a soul thought of comparing the 'bloody-minded Simmons' to the squawking, gaping schoolgirl with which this story opens.

BLACK JACK

To the wake av Tim O'Hara
Came company,
All St. Patrick's Alley
Was there to see.

Robert Buchanan.

As the Three Musketeers share their silver, tobacco, and liquor together, as they protect each other in barracks or camp, and as they rejoice together over the joy of one, so do they divide their sorrows. When Ortheris's irrepressible tongue has brought him into cells for a season, or Learoyd has run amok through his kit and accoutrements, or Mulvaney has indulged in strong waters, and under their influence reproved his Commanding Officer, you can see the trouble in the faces of the untouched two. And the rest of the regiment know that comment or jest is unsafe. Generally the three avoid Orderly Room and the Corner Shop that follows, leaving both to the young bloods who have not sown their wild oats; but there are occasions--

For instance, Ortheris was sitting on the drawbridge of the main gate of Fort Amara, with his hands in his pockets and his pipe, bowl down, in his mouth. Learoyd was lying at full length on the turf of the glacis, kicking his heels in the air, and I came round the corner and asked for Mulvaney.

Ortheris spat into the ditch and shook his head. 'No good seein' 'im now,' said Ortheris; 'e's a bloomin' camel. Listen.'

I heard on the flags of the veranda opposite to the cells, which are close to the Guard-Room, a measured step that I could have identified in the tramp of an army. There were twenty paces crescendo, a pause, and then twenty diminuendo.

'That's 'im,' said Ortheris; 'my Gawd, that's 'im! All for a bloomin' button you could see your face in an' a bit o' lip that a bloomin' Harkangel would 'a' guv back.'

Mulvaney was doing pack-drill--was compelled, that is to say, to walk up and down for certain hours in full marching order, with rifle, bayonet, ammunition, knapsack, and overcoat. And his offence was being dirty on parade! I nearly fell into the Fort Ditch with astonishment and wrath, for Mulvaney is the smartest man that ever mounted guard, and would as soon think of turning out uncleanly as of dispensing with his trousers.

'Who was the Sergeant that checked him?' I asked.

'Mullins, o' course,' said Ortheris. 'There ain't no other man would whip 'im on the peg so. But Mullins ain't a man.' E's a dirty little pigscraper, that's wot 'e is.'

'What did Mulvaney say? He's not the make of man to take that quietly.'

'Said! Bin better for 'im if 'e'd shut 'is mouth. Lord, ow we laughed!

"Sargint," 'e sez, "ye say I'm dirty. Well," sez 'e, "when your wife lets you blow your own nose for yourself, perhaps you'll know wot dirt is. You're himperfectly eddicated, Sargint," sez 'e, an' then we fell in. But after p'rade, 'e was up an' Mullins was swearin' 'imself black in the face at Ord'ly Room that Mulvaney 'ad called 'im a swine an' Lord knows wot all. You know Mullins. 'E'll 'ave 'is 'ead broke in one o' these days. 'E's too big a bloomin' liar for ord'nary consumption. "Three hours' can an' kit," sez the Colonel; "not for bein' dirty on p'rade, but for 'avin' said somethin' to Mullins, tho' I do not believe," sez 'e, "you said wot 'e said you said. "An' Mulvaney fell away sayin' nothin'. You know 'e never speaks to the Colonel for fear o' gettin' 'imself fresh copped.'

Mullins, a very young and very much married Sergeant, whose manners were partly the result of innate depravity and partly of imperfectly digested Board School, came over the bridge, and most rudely asked Ortheris what he was doing.

'Me?' said Ortheris. 'Ow! I'm waiting for my C'mission. 'Seed it comin' along yit?'

Mullins turned purple and passed on. There was the sound of a gentle chuckle from the glaxis where Learoyd lay.

"'E expects to get 'is C'mission some day,' explained Ortheris;' Gawd 'elp the Mess that 'ave to put their 'ands into the same kiddy as 'im! Wot time d'you make it, Sir? Fower! Mulvaney'll be out in 'arf an hour.

You don't want to buy a dorg, Sir, do you? A pup you can trust--'arf Rampore by the Colonel's grey-'ound.'

'Ortheris,' I answered sternly, for I knew what was in his mind, 'do you mean to say that--'

'I didn't mean to arx money o' you, any'ow,' said Ortheris; 'I'd 'a' sold you the dorg good an' cheap, but--but--I know Mulvaney'll want somethin' after we've walked 'im orf, an' I ain't got nothin', nor 'e 'asn't neither. I'd sooner sell you the dorg, Sir. 'S trewth I would!'

A shadow fell on the drawbridge, and Ortheris began to rise into the air, lifted by a huge hand upon his collar.

'Anything but t' braass,' said Learoyd quietly, as he held the Londoner over the ditch. 'Anything but t' braass, Orth'ris, ma son! Ah've got one rupee eight annas of ma own.' He showed two coins, and replaced Ortheris on the drawbridge rail.

'Very good,' I said; 'where are you going to?'

'Goin' to walk 'im orf wen 'e comes out--two miles or three or fower,' said Ortheris.

The footsteps within ceased. I heard the dull thud of a knapsack falling on a bedstead, followed by the rattle of arms. Ten minutes later, Mulvaney, faultlessly dressed, his lips tight and his face as black

as a thunderstorm, stalked into the sunshine on the drawbridge. Learoyd and Ortheris sprang from my side and closed in upon him, both leaning towards as horses lean upon the pole. In an instant they had disappeared down the sunken road to the cantonments, and I was left alone. Mulvaney had not seen fit to recognise me; so I knew that his trouble must be heavy upon him.

I climbed one of the bastions and watched the figures of the Three Musketeers grow smaller and smaller across the plain. They were walking as fast as they could put foot to the ground, and their heads were bowed. They fetched a great compass round the parade-ground, skirted the Cavalry lines, and vanished in the belt of trees that fringes the low land by the river.

I followed slowly, and sighted them--dusty, sweating, but still keeping up their long, swinging tramp--on the river bank. They crashed through the Forest Reserve, headed towards the Bridge of Boats, and presently established themselves on the bow of one of the pontoons. I rode cautiously till I saw three puffs of white smoke rise and die out in the clear evening air, and knew that peace had come again. At the bridge-head they waved me forward with gestures of welcome.

'Tie up your 'orse,' shouted Ortheris, 'an' come on, Sir. We're all goin' 'home in this 'ere bloomin' boat.

From the bridge-head to the Forest Officer's bungalow is but a step. The mess-man was there, and would see that a man held my horse. Did

the Sahib require aught else--a peg, or beer? Ritchie Sahib had left half a dozen bottles of the latter, but since the Sahib was a friend of Ritchie Sahib, and he, the mess-man, was a poor man--

I gave my order quietly, and returned to the bridge. Mulvaney had taken off his boots, and was dabbling his toes in the water; Learoyd was lying on his back on the pontoon; and Ortheris was pretending to row with a big bamboo.

'I'm an ould fool,' said Mulvaney, reflectively, 'dhrag-gin' you two out here bekaze I was undher the Black Dog--sulkin' like a child. Me that was soldierin' when Mullins, an' be damned to him, was shquealin' on a counterpin for five shillin' a week--an' that not paid! Bhoys, I've took you five miles out av natural pevarsity. Phew!'

'Wot's the odds so long as you're 'appy?' said Ortheris, applying himself afresh to the bamboo. 'As well 'ere as anywhere else.'

Learoyd held up a rupee and an eight-anna bit, and shook his head sorrowfully. 'Five mile from t' Canteen, all along o' Mulvaney's blaasted pride.'

'I know ut,' said Mulvaney penitently. 'Why will ye come wid me? An' yet I wud be mortal sorry if ye did not--any time--though I am ould enough to know better. But I will do penance. I will take a dhrink av wather.'

Ortheris squeaked shrilly. The butler of the Forest bungalow was standing near the railings with a basket, uncertain how to clamber down to the pontoon. 'Might 'a' know'd you'd 'a' got liquor out o' bloomin' desert, Sir,' said Ortheris, gracefully, to me. Then to the mess-man: 'Easy with them there bottles. They're worth their weight in gold. Jock, ye long-armed beggar, get out o' that an' hike 'em down.'

Learoyd had the basket on the pontoon in an instant, and the Three Musketeers gathered round it with dry lips. They drank my health in due and ancient form, and thereafter tobacco tasted sweeter than ever. They absorbed all the beer, and disposed themselves in picturesque attitudes to admire the setting sun--no man speaking for a while.

Mulvaney's head dropped upon his chest, and we thought that he was asleep.

'What on earth did you come so far for?' I whispered to Ortheris.

'To walk 'im orf, o' course. When 'e's been checked we allus walks 'im orf. 'E ain't fit to be spoke to those times--nor 'e ain't fit to leave alone neither. So we takes 'im till 'e is.'

Mulvaney raised his head, and stared straight into the sunset. 'I had my rifle,' said he dreamily, 'an' I had my bay'nit, an' Mullins came round the corner, an' he looked in my face an' grinned dishpiteful. "You can't blow your own nose," sez he. Now, I cannot tell fwat

Mullins's expayrience may ha' been, but, Mother av God, he was nearer to his death that minut' than I have iver been to mine--and that's less than the thicknuss av a hair!

'Yes,' said Ortheris calmly, 'you'd look fine with all your buttons took orf, an' the Band in front o' you, walkin' roun' slow time. We're both front-rank men, me an' Jock, when the rig'mint's in 'ollow square. Bloomin' fine you'd look. "The Lord giveth an' the Lord taketh awai,--Heasy with that there drop!--Blessed be the naime o' the Lord,"' he gulped in a quaint and suggestive fashion.

'Mullins! Wot's Mullins?' said Learoyd slowly. 'Ah'd take a coomp'ny o' Mullinses-ma hand behind me. Sitha, Mulvaney, don't be a fool.'

'You were not checked for fwhat you did not do, an' made a mock av afther. 'Twas for less than that the Tyrone wud ha' sent O'Hara to hell, instid av lettin' him go by his own choosin', whin Rafferty shot him,' retorted Mulvaney.

'And who stopped the Tyrone from doing it?' I asked.

'That ould fool who's sorry he didn't stick the pig Mullins.' His head dropped again. When he raised it he shivered and put his hands on the shoulders of his two companions.

'Ye've walked the Divil out av me, bhoys,' said he.

Ortheris shot out the red-hot dottle of his pipe on the back of the hairy fist. 'They say 'Ell's 'otter than that,' said he, as Mulvaney swore aloud. 'You be warned so. Look yonder!'--he pointed across the river to a ruined temple--'Me an' you an' 'im'--he indicated me by a jerk of his head--'was there one day when Hi made a bloomin' show o' myself. You an' 'im stopped me doin' such--an' Hi was on'y wishful for to desert. You are makin' a bigger bloomin' show o' yourself now.'

'Don't mind him, Mulvaney,' I said; 'Dinah Shadd won't let you hang yourself yet awhile, and you don't intend to try it either. Let's hear about the Tyrone and O'Hara. Rafferty shot him for fooling with his wife. What happened before that?'

'There's no fool like an ould fool. You know you can do anythin' wid me whin I'm talkin'. Did I say I wud like to cut Mullins's liver out? I deny the imputashin, for fear that Orth'ris here wud report me--Ah! You wud tip me into the river, wud you? Sit quiet, little man. Anyways, Mullins is not worth the trouble av an extry p'rade, an' I will trate him wid outrajis contimpt. The Tyrone an' O'Hara! O'Hara an' the Tyrone, begad! Ould days are hard to bring back into the mouth, but they're always inside the head.'

Followed a long pause.

'O'Hara was a Divil. Though I saved him, for the honour av the rig'mint, from his death that time, I say it now. He was a Divil--a long, bould, black-haired Divil.'

'Which way?' asked Ortheris.

'Women.'

'Thin I know another.'

'Not more than in reason, if you mane me, ye warped walkin '-shtick. I have been young, an' for why should I not have tuk what I cud? Did I iver, whin I was Corp'ril, use the rise av my rank--wan step an' that taken away, more's the sorrow an' the fault av me!--to prosecute a nefarious intrigue, as O'Hara did? Did I, whin I was Corp'ril, lay my spite upon a man an' make his life a dog's life from day to day? Did I lie, as O'Hara lied, till the young wans in the Tyrone turned white wid the fear av the Judgment av God killin' thim all in a lump, as ut killed the woman at Devizes? I did not! I have sinned my sins an' I have made my confesshin, an' Father Victor knows the worst av me. O'Hara was tuk, before he cud spake, on Rafferty's doorstep, an' no man knows the worst av him. But this much I know!

'The Tyrone was recruited any fashion in the ould days. A draf from Connemara--a draf from Portsmouth--a draf from Kerry, an' that was a blazin' bad draf--here, there and iverywhere--but the large av thim was Oirish--Black Oirish. Now there are Oirish an' Oirish. The good are good as the best, but the bad are wurrst than the wurrst. 'Tis this way. They clog together in pieces as fast as thieves, an' no wan knows fwhat they will do till wan turns informer an' the gang is bruk.

But ut begins again, a day later, meetin' in holes an' corners an' swearin' bloody oaths an' shtickin' a man in the back an' runnin' away, an' thin waitin' for the blood-money on the reward papers--to see if ut's worth enough. Those are the Black Oirish, an' 'tis they that bring dishgrace upon the name av Oireland, an' thim I wud kill--as I nearly killed wan wanst.

'But to reshume. My room--'twas before I was married--was wid twelve av the scum av the earth--the pickin's av the gutter--mane men that wud neither laugh nor talk nor yet get dhrunk as a man shud. They thried some av their dog's thricks on me, but I dhrew a line round my cot, an' the man that thransgressed ut wint into hospital for three days good.

'O'Hara had put his spite on the room--he was my Colour Sargint--an' nothin' cud we do to plaze him. I was younger than I am now, an' I tuk what I got in the way av dressing down and punishment-dhrill wid my tongue in my cheek. But it was diff'rint wid the others, an' why I cannot say, excipt that some men are borrun mane an' go to dhirty murdher where a fist is more than enough. Afther a whoile, they changed their chune to me an' was desp'rit frien'ly--all twelve av thim cursin' O'Hara in chorus.

"'Eyah," sez I, "O'Hara's a divil an' I'm not for denyin' ut, but is he the only man in the wurruld? Let him go. He'll get tired av findin' our kit foul an' our 'coutrements onproperly kep'."

"We will not let him go," sez they.

"Thin take him," sez I, "an' a dashed poor yield you will get for your throuble."

"Is he not misconductin' himself wid Slimmy's wife?" sez another.

"She's common to the rig'mint," sez I. "Fwhat has made ye this partic'lar on a suddint?"

"Has he not put his spite on the roomful av us? Can we do anythin' that he will not check us for?" sez another.

"That's thrue," sez I.

"Will ye not help us to do aught," sez another--"a big bould man like you."

"I will break his head upon his shoulthers av he puts hand on me," sez I. "I will give him the lie av he says that I'm dhirty, an' I wud not mind duckin' him in the Artillery troughs if ut was not that I'm thryin' for my shtripes."

"Is that all ye will do?" sez another. "Have ye no more spunk than that, ye blood-dhrawn calf?"

"Blood-dhrawn I may be," sez I, gettin' back to my cot an' makin' my

line round ut; "but ye know that the man who comes acrost this mark will be more blood-dhrawn than me. No man gives me the name in my mouth," I sez. "Ondersthand, I will have no part wid you in anythin' ye do, nor will I raise my fist to my shuperior. Is any wan comin' on?" sez I.

'They made no move, tho' I gave them full time, but stud growlin' an' snarlin' together at wan ind av the room. I tuk up my cap and wint out to Canteen, thinkin' no little av mesilf, and there I grew most ondacintly dhrunk in my legs. My head was all reasonable.

"Houligan," I sez to a man in E Comp'ny that was by way av bein' a frind av mine; "I'm overtuk from the belt down. Do you give me the touch av your shoulther to presarve my formation an' march me acrost the ground into the high grass. I'll sleep ut off there," sez I; an' Houligan--he's dead now, but good he was while he lasted--walked wid me, givin' me the touch whin I wint wide, ontill we came to the high grass, an', my faith, the sky an' the earth was fair rowlin' undher me. I made for where the grass was thickest, an' there I slep' off my liquor wid an easy conscience. I did not desire to come on books too frequent; my character havin' been shpotless for the good half av a year.

'Whin I roused, the dhrink was dyin' out in me, an' I felt as though a she-cat had littered in my mouth. I had not learned to hould my liquor wid comfort in thim days. 'Tis little betther I am now. "I will get Houligan to pour a bucket over my head," thinks I, an' I wud ha'

risen, but I heard some wan say: "Mulvaney can take the blame av ut for the backslidin' hound he is."

"Oho!" sez I, an' my head rang like a guard-room gong: "fwhat is the blame that this young man must take to oblige Tim Vulmea?" For 'twas Tim Vulmea that shpoke.

I turned on my belly an' crawled through the grass, a bit at a time, to where the spache came from. There was the twelve av my room sittin' down in a little patch, the dhry grass wavin' above their heads an' the sin av black murdher in their hearts. I put the stuff aside to get a clear view.

"Fwhat's that?" sez wan man, jumpin' up.

"A dog," says Vulmea. "You're a nice hand to this job! As I said, Mulvaney will take the blame--av ut comes to a pinch."

""Tis harrd to swear a man's life away," sez a young wan.

"Thank ye for that," thinks I. "Now, fwhat the divil are you paragins conthrivin' against me?"

""Tis as easy as dhrinkin' your quart," sez Vulmea. "At seven or thereon, O'Hara will come acrost to the Married Quarters, goin' to call on Slimmy's wife, the swine! Wan av us'll pass the wurrd to the room an' we shtart the divil an' all av a shine--laughin' an' crackin' "

on an' t'rowin' our boots about. Thin O'Hara will come to give us the ordher to be quiet, the more by token bekaze the room-lamp will be knocked over in the larkin'. He will take the straight road to the ind door where there's the lamp in the veranda, an' that'll bring him clear against the light as he shtands. He will not be able to look into the dhark. Wan av us will loose off, an' a close shot ut will be, an' shame to the man that misses. 'Twill be Mulvaney's rifle, she that is at the head av the rack--there's no mistakin' that long-shtocked, cross-eyed bitch even in the dhark."

'The thief misnamed my ould firin'-piece out av jealousy--I was pershuaded av that--an' ut made me more angry than all.

'But Vulmea goes on: "O'Hara will dhrop, an' by the time the light's lit again, there'll be some six av us on the chest av Mulvaney, cryin' murdher an' rape. Mulvaney's cot is near the ind door, an' the shmokin' rifle will be lyin' undher him whin we've knocked him over. We know, an' all the rig'mint knows, that Mulvaney has given O'Hara more lip than any man av us. Will there be any doubt at the Coort-Martial? Wud twelve honust sodger-bhoys swear away the life av a dear, quiet, swate-timpered man such as is Mulvaney--wid his line av pipe-clay roun' his cot, threatenin' us wid murdher av we overshteped ut, as we can truthful testify?"

"Mary, Mother av Mercy!" thinks I to mesilf; "it is this to have an unruly mimber an' fistes fit to use! Oh the sneakin' hounds!"

'The big dhrops ran down my face, for I was wake wid the liquor an' had not the full av my wits about me. I laid shtill an' heard thim workin' themselves up to swear my life by tellin' tales av ivry time I had put my mark on wan or another; an' my faith, they was few that was not so dishtinguished. 'Twas all in the way av fair fight, though, for niver did I raise my hand excipt whin they had provoked me to ut.

""Tis all well," sez wan av thim, "but who's to do this shootin'?"

"Fwhat matther?" sez Vulmea. "'Tis Mulvaney will do that--at the Coort-Martial."

"He will so," sez the man, "but whose hand is put to the trigger--in the room?"

""Who'll do ut?" sez Vulmea, lookin' round, but divil a man answeared. They began to dishpute till Kiss, that was always playin' Shpoil Five, sez: "Thry the kyards!" Wid that he opined his tunic an' tuk out the greasy palammers, an' they all fell in wid the notion.

"Deal on!" sez Vulmea, wid a big rattlin' oath, "an' the Black Curse av Shielygh come to the man that will not do his duty as the kyards say. Amin!"

""Black Jack is the masther," sez Kiss, dealin'. Black Jack, Sorr, I shud expaytiate to you, is the Ace av Shpades which from time immimorial has been intimately connect wid battle, murdher an' suddin death.

'Wanst Kiss dealt an' there was no sign, but the men was whoite wid the workin's av their sows. Twice Kiss dealt an' there was a gray shine on their cheeks like the mess av an egg. Three times Kiss dealt an' they was blue. "Have ye not lost him?" sez Vulmea, wipin' the sweat on him; "Let's ha' done quick!" "Quick ut is," sez Kiss, t'rowin' him the kyard; an' ut fell face up on his knee--Black Jack!

'Thin they all cackled wid laughin'. "Duty thrippence," sez wan av thim, "an' damned cheap at that price!" But I cud see they all dhrew a little away from Vulmea an' lef' him sittin' playin' wid the kyard. Vulmea sez no word for a whoile but licked his lips--cat-ways. Thin he threw up his head an' made the men swear by ivry oath known to stand by him not alone in the room but at the Coort-Martial that was to set on me! He tould off five av the biggest to stretch me on my cot whin the shot was fired, an' another man he tould off to put out the light, an' yet another to load my rifle. He wud not do that himself; an' that was quare, for 'twas but a little thing considerin'.

'Thin they swore over again that they wud not bethray wan another, an' crep' out av the grass in diffrint ways, two by two. A mercy ut was that they did not come on me. I was sick wid fear in the pit av my stummick--sick, sick, sick! Afther they was all gone, I wint back to Canteen an' called for a quart to put a thought in me. Vulmea was there, dhrinkin' heavy, an' politeful to me beyond reason. "Fwhat will I do--fwhat will I do?" thinks I to mesilf whin Vulmea wint away.

'Presintly the Arm'rer Sargint comes in stiffin' an' crackin' on, not pleased wid any wan, bekaze the Martini Henri bein' new to the rig'mint in those days we used to play the mischief wid her arrangements. 'Twas a long time before I cud get out av the way av thryin' to pull back the back-sight an' turnin' her over afther firin'--as if she was a Snider.

"'Fwhat tailor-men do they give me to work wid?" sez the Arm'rer Sargint. "Here's Hogan, his nose flat as a table, laid by for a week, an' ivry Comp'ny sendin' their arrums in knocked to small shivreens."

"'Fwhat's wrong wid Hogan, Sargint?" sez I.

"'Wrong!" sez the Arm'rer Sargint; "I showed him, as though I had been his mother, the way av shtrippin' a 'Tini, an' he shtrup her clane an' easy. I tould him to put her to again an' fire a blank into the blow-pit to show how the dirt hung on the groovin'. He did that, but he did not put in the pin av the fallin'-block, an' av coorse whin he fired he was strook by the block jumpin' clear. Well for him 'twas but a blank--a full charge wud ha' cut his oi out."

'I looked a thrifle wiser than a boiled sheep's head. "How's that, Sargint?" sez I.

"'This way, ye blundherin' man, an' don't you be doin' ut," sez he. Wid that he shows me a Waster action--the breech av her all cut away to show the inside--an' so plazed he was to grumble that he dimonstrated

fwhat Hogan had done twice over. "An' that comes av not knowin' the wepping you're purvided wid," sez he.

"Thank ye, Sargint," sez I; "I will come to you again for further information."

"Ye will not," sez he. "Kape your clanin'-rod away from the breech-pin or you will get into throuble."

'I wint outside an' I could ha' danced wid delight for the grandeur av ut. "They will load my rifle, good luck to thim, whoile I'm away," thinks I, and back I wint to the Canteen to give them their clear chanst.

'The Canteen was fillin' wid men at the ind av the day. I made feign to be far gone in dhrink, an', wan by wan, all my roomful came in wid Vulmea. I wint away, walkin' thick an' heavy, but not so thick an' heavy that any wan cud ha' tuk me. Sure and thrue, there was a kyartridge gone from my pouch an' lyin' snug in my rifle. I was hot wid rage against thim all, an' I worried the bullet out wid my teeth as fast as I cud, the room bein' empty. Then I tuk my boot an' the clanin'-rod and knocked out the pin av the fallin'-block. Oh, 'twas music when that pin rowled on the flure! I put ut into my pouch an' stuck a dab av dirt on the holes in the plate, puttin' the fallin'-block back. "That'll do your business, Vulmea," sez I, lyin' easy on the cot. "Come an' sit on my chest the whole room av you, an' I will take you to my bosom for the biggest divils that iver cheated halter." I

wud have no mercy on Vulmea. His oi or his life--little I cared!

'At dusk they came back, the twelve av thim, an' they had all been dhrinkin'. I was shammin' sleep on the cot. Wan man wint outside in the veranda. Whin he whishtled they began to rage roun' the room an' carry on tremenjus. But I niver want to hear men laugh as they did--skylarkin' too! 'Twas like mad jackals.

"Shtop that blasted noise!" sez O'Hara in the dark, an' pop goes the room-lamp. I cud hear O'Hara runnin' up an' the rattlin' av my rifle in the rack an' the men breathin' heavy as they stud roun' my cot. I cud see O'Hara in the light av the veranda lamp, an' thin I heard the crack av my rifle. She cried loud, poor darlint, bein' mishandled. Next minut' five men were houldin' me down. "Go easy," I sez; "fwhat's ut all about?"

'Thin Vulmea, on the flure, raised a howl you cud hear from wan ind av cantonmints to the other. "I'm dead, I'm butchered, I'm blind!" sez he. "Saints have mercy on my sinful sowl! Sind for Father Constant! Oh sind for Father Constant an' let me go clean!" By that I knew he was not so dead as I cud ha' wished.

'O'Hara picks up the lamp in the veranda wid a hand as stiddy as a rest. "Fwhat damned dog's thrick is this av yours?" sez he, an turns the light on Tim Vulmea that was shwimmin' in blood from top to toe. The fallin'-block had sprung free behin' a full charge av powther-- good care I tuk to bite down the brass af ther takin' out the bullet

that there might be somethin' to give ut full worth--an' had cut Tim from the lip to the corner av the right eye, lavin' the eyelid in tatters, an' so up an' along by the forehead to the hair. 'Twas more av a rakin' plough, if you will onderstand, than a clean cut; an' niver did I see a man bleed as Vulmea did. The dhrink an' the stew that he was in pumped the blood strong. The minut' the men sittin' on my chest heard O'Hara spakin' they scattered each wan to his cot, an' cried out very politeful: "Fwhat is ut, Sargint?"

"Fwhat is ut!" sez O'Hara, shakin' Tim. "Well an' good do you know fwhat ut is, ye skulkin' ditch-lurkin' dogs! Get a doolie, an' take this whimperin' scutt away. There will be more heard av ut than any av you will care for."

'Vulmea sat up rockin' his head in his hand an' moanin' for Father Constant.

"Be done!" sez O'Hara, dhraggin' him up by the hair. "You're none so dead that you cannot go fifteen years for thryin' to shoot me."

"I did not," sez Vulmea; "I was shootin' mesilf."

"That's quare," sez O'Hara, "for the front av my jackut is black wid your powther." He tuk up the rifle that was still warm an' began to laugh. "I'll make your life Hell to you," sez he, "for attempted murder an' kapin' your rifle onproperly. You'll be hanged first an' thin put undher stoppages for four fifteen. The rifle's done for," sez he.

"Why, 'tis my rifle!" sez I, comin' up to look; "Vulmea, ye divil, fwhat were you doin' wid her--answer me that?"

"Lave me alone," sez Vulmea; "I'm dyin'!"

"I'll wait till you're betther," sez I, "an' thin we two will talk ut out umbrageous."

O'Hara pitched Tim into the doolie, none too tinder, but all the bhoys kep' by their cots, which was not the sign av innocint men. I was huntin' ivrywhere for my fallin'-block, but not findin' ut at all. I niver found ut.

"Now fwhat will I do?" sez O'Hara, swinging the veranda light in his hand an' lookin' down the room. I had hate and contimpt av O'Hara an' I have now, dead tho' he is, but, for all that, will I say he was a brave man. He is baskin' in Purgathory this tide, but I wish he cud hear that, whin he stud lookin' down the room an' the bhoys shivered before the oi av him, I knew him for a brave man an' I liked him so.

"Fwhat will I do?" sez O'Hara agin, an' we heard the voice av a woman low an' sof' in the veranda. 'Twas Slimmy's wife, come over at the shot, sittin' on wan av the benches an' scarce able to walk.

"O Denny!--Denny, dear," sez she, "have they kilt you?"

'O'Hara looked down the room again an' showed his teeth to the gum. Then he spat on the flure.

"'You're not worth ut," sez he. "Light that lamp, ye dogs," an' wid that he turned away, an' I saw him walkin' off wid Slimmy's wife; she thryin' to wipe off the powther-black on the front av his jackut wid her handkerchief. "A brave man you are," thinks I--"a brave man an' a bad woman."

'No wan said a word for a time. They was all ashamed, past spache.

"'Fwhat d'you think he will do?" sez wan av thim at last. "He knows we're all in ut."

"'Are we so?" sez I from my cot. "The man that sez that to me will be hurt. I do not know," sez I, "fwhat onderhand divilmint you have conthived, but by what I've seen I know that you cannot commit murdher wid another man's rifle--such shakin' cowards you are. I'm goin' to slape," I sez, "an' you can blow my head off whoile I lay." I did not slape, though, for a long time. Can ye wonder?

'Next morn the news was through all the rig'mint, an' there was nothin' that the men did not tell. O'Hara reports, fair an' easy, that Vulmea was come to grief through tamperin' wid his rifle in barricks, all for to show the mechanism. An' by my sowl, he had the impart'nince to say that he was on the shpot at the time an' cud certify that ut was an accidint! You might ha' knocked my roomful down wid a straw whin they

heard that. 'Twas lucky for thim that the bhoys were always thryin' to find out how the new rifle was made, an' a lot av thim had come up for easin' the pull by shtickin' bits av grass an' such in the part av the lock that showed near the thrigger. The first issues of the 'Tinis was not covered in, an' I mesilf have eased the pull av mine time an' agin. A light pull is ten points on the range to me.

"I will not have this foolishness!" sez the Colonel. "I will twist the tail off Vulmea!" sez he; but whin he saw him, all tied up an' groanin' in hospital, he changed his will. "Make him an early convalescint," sez he to the Doctor, an' Vulmea was made so for a warnin'. His big bloody bandages an' face puckered up to wan side did more to kape the bhoys from messin' wid the insides av their rifles than any punishmint.

'O'Hara gave no reason for fwhat he'd said, an' all my roomful were too glad to inquire, tho' he put his spite upon thim more wearin' than before. Wan day, howiver, he tuk me apart very polite, for he cud be that at the choosin'.

"You're a good sodger, tho' you're a damned insolint man," sez he.

"Fair words, Sargint," sez I, "or I may be insolint again."

"'Tis not like you," sez he, "to lave your rifle in the rack widout the breech-pin, for widout the breech-pin she was whin Vulmea fired. I should ha' found the break av ut in the eyes av the holes, else,"

he sez.

"Sargint," sez I, "fwhat wud your life ha' been worth av the breech-pin had been in place, for, on my sowl, my life wud be worth just as much to me av I tould you whether ut was or was not. Be thankful the bullet was not there," I sez.

"That's thru," sez he, pulling his moustache; "but I do not believe that you, for all your lip, was in that business."

"Sargint," I sez, "I cud hammer the life out av a man in ten minuts wid my fistes if that man dishpleased me; for I am a good sodger, an' I will be threated as such, an' whoile my fistes are my own they're strong enough for all work I have to do. They do not fly back towards me!" sez I, lookin' him betune the eyes.

"You're a good man," sez he, lookin' me betune the eyes--an' oh he was a gran'-built man to see!--"you're a good man," he sez, "an' I cud wish, for the pure frolic av ut, that I was not a Sargint, or that you were not a Privit; an' you will think me no coward whin I say this thing."

"I do not," sez I. "I saw you whin Vulmea mishandled the rifle. But, Sargint," I sez, "take the wurrd from me now, spakin' as man to man wid the shtripes off, tho' 'tis little right I have to talk, me being fwhat I am by natur'. This time ye tuk no harm, an' next time ye may not, but, in the ind, so sure as Slimmy's wife came into the veranda,

so sure will ye take harm--an' bad harm. Have thought, Sargint," sez I. "Is ut worth ut?"

"Ye're a bould man," sez he, breathin' harrd. "A very bould man. But I am a bould man tu. Do you go your way, Privit Mulvaney, an' I will go mine."

'We had no further spache thin or afther, but, wan by another, he drafted the twelve av my room out into other rooms an' got thim spread among the Comp'nies, for they was not a good breed to live together, an' the Comp 'ny orf'cers saw ut. They wud ha' shot me in the night av they had known fwhat I knew; but that they did not.

'An', in the ind, as I said, O'Hara met his death from Rafferty for foolin' wid his wife. He wint his own way too well--Eyah, too well! Shtraight to that affair, widout turnin' to the right or to the lef', he wint, an' may the Lord have mercy on his sowl. Amin!'

"Ear! 'Ear!" said Ortheris, pointing the moral with a wave of his pipe. 'An' this is 'im 'oo would be a bloomin' Vulmea all for the sake of Mullins an' a bloomin' button! Mullins never went after a woman in his life. Mrs. Mullins, she saw 'im one day--'

'Ortheris,' I said, hastily, for the romances of Private Ortheris are all too daring for publication, 'look at the sun. It's a quarter past six!'

'O Lord! Three quarters of an hour for five an' a 'arf miles! We'll
'ave to run like Jimmy O.'

The Three Musketeers clambered on to the bridge, and departed hastily
in the direction of the cantonment road. When I overtook them I offered
them two stirrups and a tail, which they accepted enthusiastically.
Ortheris held the tail, and in this manner we trotted steadily through
the shadows by an unfrequented road.

At the turn into the cantonments we heard carriage wheels. It was the
Colonel's barouche, and in it sat the Colonel's wife and daughter. I
caught a suppressed chuckle, and my beast sprang forward with a lighter
step.

The Three Musketeers had vanished into the night.

L'ENVOI

And they were stronger hands than mine
That digged the Ruby from the earth--
More cunning brains that made it worth
The large desire of a King;
And bolder hearts that through the brine
Went down the Perfect Pearl to bring.

Lo, I have made in common clay
Rude figures of a rough-hewn race;
For Pearls strew not the market-place
In this my town of banishment,
Where with the shifting dust I play
And eat the bread of Discontent.

Yet is there life in that I make,--
Oh Thou who knowest, turn and see,
As Thou hast power over me,
So I have power over these,
Because I wrought them for Thy sake,
And breathed in them mine agonies.

Small mirth was in the making. Now
I lift the cloth that clokes the clay,
And, wearied, at Thy feet I lay
My wares ere I go forth to sell.
The long bazar will praise--but Thou--
Heart of my heart, have I done well?

POOR DEAR MAMMA