That evening my aunt visited the house of mourning and took me with her. It was an oppressive summer evening of fading gold. Nannie received us in the hall, and, as it was no use saying anything to her, my aunt shook hands with her for all. We followed the old woman upstairs and into the dead-room. The room, through the lace end of the blind, was suffused with flaky golden light, amid which the candles looked like pain, thin flames. He had been coffined. Nannie gave the lead, and we three knelt down at the foot of the bed. There was no sound in the room for some minutes except the sound of Nannie’s murrinings—for she prays not at all. The fancy came to me that the old priest was smiling as he lay there in his coffin.

But, no. When we rose and went up to the head of the bed I saw that he was not smiling. There he lay solemn and expressionless in his brown habit, his large hands loosely retaining his rosary. His face was very grey and massive, with distended nostrils and circled with sebaceous white fur. There was a heavy odour in the room—the flowers.

We sat downstairs in the little room behind the shop, my aunt and I and the two sisters. Nannie sat in a corner and said nothing, but her lips moved from speaker to speaker with a painfully intelligent motion. I said nothing either, being too young, but my aunt spoke a good deal, for she is a bit of a gossip—harmless.

“Ah, well! he’s gone!”

“To enjoy his eternal reward, Miss Flynn, I’m sure. He was a good and holy man.”

“Yes, he was a good man, but, you see ... he was a disappointed man. . . You see, his life was, you might say, ruined.”

“Ah, yes! I know what you mean.”

“Not that he was anyway mad, as you know yourself, but he was, always a little queer. Even when we were all growing up together he was queer. One time he didn’t speak hardly for a month. You know, he was that kind always.”

“Perhaps he read too much, Miss Flynn?”

“O, he read a good deal, but not latterly. But it was his scrupulosity, I think, affected his mind. The duties of the priesthood were too much for him.”

“Did he . . . peacefully?”

“O, quite peacefully, ma’am. You couldn’t tell when the breath went out of him. He had a beautiful death, God be praised.”

“And everything . . .?”

“Father O’Rourke was in with him yesterday and gave him the Last Sacrament.”

“He knew then?”

“Yes; he was quite resigned.”

“Poor Nannie,” said her sister, “she’s worn out. All the work we had, getting in a woman, and laying him out; and then the coffin and arranging about the funeral. God knows we did all we could, as poor as we are. We wouldn’t see him wanting anything at the last.”

“Indeed you were both very kind to him while he lived.”

“Ah, poor James; he was no great trouble to us. Yes, wouldn’t hear him in the house no more than now. Still I know he’s gone and all that... I won’t be bringing him in his soup any more, nor Nannie reading him the paper, nor you, ma’am, bringing him his snuff. How he liked that stuff! Poor James!”

“O, yes, you’ll miss him in a day or two more than you do now.”

Silence invaded the room until memory awakened it, Ellis speaking slowly—

“It was that chance he broke. . . Of course, it was all right. I mean it contained nothing. But still . . . They say it was the boy’s fault. But poor James was so nervous, God be merciful to him.”

“Yes, Miss Flynn, I heard that . . . about the chance. He . . . his mind was a bit affected by that.”

“He began to mope by himself, talking to no one, and wandering about. Often he couldn’t be found. One night he was not heard, and they looked high and low all over and couldn’t find him. Then the clerk suggested the chapel. So they opened the chapel (it was late at night), and brought in a light to look for him. . . And there, sure enough, he was, sitting in his confession-box in the dark, wide awake, and laughing like crazy himself. Then they knew something was wrong.”

“God rest his soul!”