

CHAPTER VII.

VANISHED.

We were all astir shortly after daylight on Monday morning. Dick's foot was well enough for his walk to Knockcalltecore, and Andy came with me to Knocknacar, as had been arranged, for I wanted his help in engaging labourers and beginning the work. We got to the shebeen about nine o'clock, and Andy having put up the mare went out to get labourers. As I was morally certain that at that hour in the morning there would be no chance of seeing my unknown on the hill-top, I went at once to the bog, taking my map with me and studying the ground where we were to commence operations.

Andy joined me in about half-an-hour with five men—all he had been able to get in the time. They were fine strapping young fellows and seemed interested in the work, so I thought the contingent would be strong enough. By this time I had the ground marked out according to the plan, and so without more ado we commenced work.

We had attacked the hill some two hundred feet[Pg 127] lower down than the bog, where the land suddenly rose steeply from a wide sloping extent of wilderness of invincible barrenness. It was over this spot that Sutherland hoped ultimately to send the waters of the bog. We began at the foot and made a trench some four feet wide at the bottom, and with sloping walls, so that when we got in so far the drain would be twenty feet deep, the external aperture would measure about twice as much.

The soil was heavy and full of moderate-sized boulders, but was not unworkable, and amongst us we came to the conclusion that a week of solid work would, bar accidents and our coming across unforeseen difficulties, at any rate break the back of the job. The men worked in sections—one marking out the trench by cutting the surface to some foot-and-a-half deep, and the others following in succession. Andy sat on a stone hard by, filled his pipe, and endeavoured in his own cheery way to relieve the monotony of the labour of the others. After about an hour he grew tired and went away—perhaps it was that he became interested in a country car, loaded with persons, that came down the road and stopped a few minutes at the shebeen on its way to join the main road to Carnaclif.

Things went steadily on for some time. The men worked well, and I possessed my soul in such patience as I could, and studied the map and the ground most carefully. When dinner-time came the men went off each to his own home, and as soon as the place was[Pg 128] free from them I hurried to the top of the mountain. The prospect was the same as yesterday. There was the same stretch of wild moor and rugged coast, of clustering islands and foam-girt rocks—of blue sky laden with such masses of

luminous clouds as are only found in Ireland. But all was to me dreary and desolate, for the place was empty and *she* was not there. I sat down to wait with what patience I could. It was dreary work at best; but at any rate there was hope—and its more immediate kinsman, expectation—and I waited. Somehow the view seemed to tranquillize me in some degree. It may have been that there was some unconscious working of the mind which told me in some imperfect way that in a region quite within my range of vision, nothing could long remain hidden or unknown. Perhaps it was the stilly silence of the place. There was hardly a sound—the country people were all within doors at dinner, and even the sounds of their toil were lacking. From the west came a very faint breeze, just enough to bring the far-off, eternal roar of the surf. There was scarcely a sign of life. The cattle far below were sheltering under trees, or in the shadows of hedges, or standing still knee-deep in the pools of the shallow streams. The only moving thing which I could see, was the car which had left so long before, and was now far off, and was each moment becoming smaller and smaller as it went into the distance.

So I sat for quite an hour with my heart half sick with longing, but she never came. Then I thought I [Pg 129] heard a step coming up the path at the far side. My heart beat strangely. I sat silent, and did not pretend to hear. She was walking more slowly than usual, and with a firmer tread. She was coming. I heard the steps on the plateau, and a voice came:—

“Och! an’ isn’t it a purty view, yer ’an’r?” I leaped to my feet with a feeling that was positively murderous. The revulsion was too great, and I broke into a burst of semi-hysterical laughter. There stood Andy—with ragged red head and sun-scorched face—in his garb of eternal patches, bleached and discoloured by sun and rain into a veritable coat of many colours—gazing at the view with a rapt expression, and yet with one eye half-closed in a fixed but unmistakable wink, as though taking the whole majesty of nature into his confidence.

When he heard my burst of laughter he turned to me quizzically:—

“Musha! but it’s the merry gentleman yer ’an’r is this day. Shure the view here is the laughablest thing I ever see!” and he affected to laugh, but in such a soulless, unspontaneous way that it became a real burlesque. I waited for him to go on. I was naturally very vexed, but I was afraid to say anything lest I might cause him to interfere in *this* affair—the last thing on earth that I wished for.

He did go on; no one ever found Andy abashed or ill at ease:—

“Begor! but yer ’an’r lepped like a deer when ye heerd me shpake. Did ye think I was goin’ to shoot ye?[Pg 130] Faix! an’ I thought that ye wor about to jump from aff iv the mountain into the say, like a shtag.”

“Why, what do you know about stags, Andy? There are none in this part of the country, are there?” I thought I would drag a new subject across his path. The ruse of the red herring drawn across the scent succeeded!

“Phwhat do I know iv shtags? Faix, I know this, that there does be plinty in me Lard’s demesne beyant at Wistport. Sure wan iv thim got out last autumn an’ nigh ruined me garden. He kem in at night an’ ate up all me cabbages an’ all the vigitables I’d got. I frightened him away a lot iv times, but he kem back all the same. At last I could shtand him no longer, and I wint meself an’ complained to the Lard. He tould me he was very sorry fur the damage he done, ‘an’,’ sez he, ‘Andy, I think he’s a bankrup,’ sez he, ‘an’ we must take his body.’ ‘How is that, Me Lard?’ sez I. Sez he, ‘I give him to ye, Andy. Do what ye like wid him!’ An’ wid that I wint home an’ I med a thrap iv a clothes line wid a loop in it, an’ I put it betune two threes; and shure enough in the night I got him.”

“And what did you do with him, Andy?” said I.

“Faith, surr, I shinned him and ate him!” He said this just in the same tone in which he would speak of the most ordinary occurrence, leaving the impression on one’s mind that the skinning and eating were matters done at the moment and quite offhand.

I fondly hoped that Andy’s mind was now in quite[Pg 131] another state from his usual mental condition; but I hardly knew the man yet. He had the true humorist’s persistence, and before I was ready with another intellectual herring he was off on the original track.

“I thrust I didn’t dishturb yer ’an’r. I know some gintlemin likes to luk at views and say nothin’. I’m tould that a young gintleman like yer ’an’r might be up on top iv a mountain like this, an’ he’d luk at the view so hard day afther day that he wouldn’t even shpake to a purty girrul—if there was wan forninst him all the time!”

“Then they lied to you, Andy!” I said this quite decisively.

“Faix, yer ’an’r, an’ it’s glad I am to hear that same, for I wouldn’t like to think that a young gintleman was afraid of a girrul, however purty she might be.”

“But, tell me, Andy,” I said, “what idiot could have started such an idea? And even if it was told to you, how could you be such a fool as to believe it?”

“Me belave it! Surr, I didn’t belave a wurrd iv it—not until I met yer ’an’r.” His face was quite grave, and I was not sorry to find him in a sober mood, for I wanted to have a serious chat with him. It struck me that he, having relatives at Knocknacar, might be able to give me some information about my unknown.

“Until you met me, Andy! Surely I never gave you any ground for holding such a ridiculous idea?”

“Begor, yer ’an’r, but ye did. But p’raps I had bettther not say any more—yer ’an’r mightn’t like it.”

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This both surprised and nettled me, and I was determined now to have it out, so I said, “You quite surprise me, Andy. What have I ever done? Do not be afraid! Out with it,” for he kept looking at me in a timorous kind of way.

“Well, then, yer ’an’r, about poor Miss Norah?”

This was a surprise, but I wanted to know more.

“Well, Andy, what about her?”

“Shure, an’ didn’t you refuse to shpake iv her intirely an’ sot on me fur only mintionin’ her—an’ she wan iv the purtiest girruls in the place.”

“My dear Andy,” said I, “I thought I had explained to you, last night, all about that. I don’t suppose you quite understand; but it might do a girl in her position harm to be spoken about with a—a man like me.”

“Wid a man like you—an’ for why? Isn’t she as good a girrul as iver broke bread?”

“Oh, it’s not that, Andy; people might think harm.”

“Think harrum!—phwhat harrum—an’ who’d think it?”

“Oh, you don’t understand—a man in your position can hardly know.”

“But, yer ’an’r, I don’t git comprehindin’! What harrum could there be, an’ who’d think it? The people here is all somethin’ iv me own position—workin’ people—an’ whin they knows a girrul is a good, dacent girrul, why should they think harrum because a nice young gintleman goes out iv his way to shpake to her?—[Pg 133] Doesn’t he shpake to the quality like himself, an’ no wan thinks any harrum iv ayther iv them?”

Andy’s simple, honest argument made me feel ashamed of the finer sophistries belonging to the more artificial existence of those of my own station.

“Sure, yer ’an’r, there isn’t a bhoy in Connaught that wouldn’t like to be shpoke of wid Miss Norah. She’s that good, that even the nuns in Galway, where she was at school, loves her and thrates her like wan iv themselves, for all she’s a Protestan’.”

“My dear Andy,” said I, “don’t you think you’re a little hard on me? You’re putting me in the dock, and trying me for a series of offences that I never even thought of committing with regard to her or any one else. Miss Norah may be an angel in petticoats, and I’m quite prepared to take it for granted that she is so—your word on the subject is quite enough for me. But just please to remember that I never set eyes on her in my life. The only time I was ever in her presence was when you were by yourself, and it was so dark that I could not see her, to help her when she fainted. Why, in the name of common sense, you should keep holding her up to me, I do not understand.”

“But yer ’an’r said that it might do her harrum even to mintion her wid you.”

“Oh, well, Andy, I give it up—it’s no use trying to explain. Either you *won’t* understand, or I am unable to express myself properly.”

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“Surr, there can be only one harrum to a girrul from a gintleman,” he laid his hand on my arm, and said this impressively—whatever else he may have ever said in jest, he was in grim earnest now—“an’ that’s whin he’s a villain. Ye wouldn’t do the black thrick, and desave a girrul that thrusted ye?”

“No, Andy, no! God forbid! I would rather go to the highest rock on some island there beyond, where the surf is loudest, and throw myself into the sea, than do such a thing. No! Andy, there are lots of men that hold such matters lightly, but I don’t think I’m one of them. Whatever sins I have, or may ever have upon my soul, I hope such a one as *that* will never be there.”

All the comment Andy made was, “I thought so!” Then the habitual quizzical look stole over his face again, and he said:—

“There does be some that does fear Braches iv Promise. Mind ye, a man has to be mighty careful on the subject, for some weemin is that ’cute, there’s no bein’ up to them.”

Andy’s sudden change to this new theme was a little embarrassing, since the idea leading to it—or rather preceding it—had been one purely personal to myself; but he was off, and I thought it better that he should go on.

“Indeed!” said I.

“Yes, surr. Oh, my! but they’re ’cute. The first thing that a girrul does when a man looks twice at[Pg 135] her, is t’ ask him to write her a lettther, an’ thin she has him—tight.”

“How so, Andy?”

“Well, ye see, surr, when you’re writin’ a lettther to a girrul, ye can’t begin widout a ‘My dear’ or a ‘My darlin’—an’ thin she has the grip iv the law onto ye! An’ ye do be badgered be the councillors, an’ ye do be frowned at be the judge, an’ ye do be laughed at be the people, an’ ye do have to pay yer money—an’ there ye are!”

“I say, Andy,” said I, “I think you must have been in trouble yourself in that way—you seem to have it all off pat!”

“Oh, throth, not me, yer ’an’r. Glory be to God! but I niver was a defindant in me life—an’ more betoken, I don’t want to be—but I was wance a witness in a case iv the kind.”

“And what did you witness?”

“Faix, I was called to prove that I seen the gintleman’s arrum around the girrul’s waist. The councillors made a deal out iv that—just as if it warn’t only manners to hould up a girrul on a car!”

“What was the case, Andy? Tell me all about it.”

I did not mind his waiting, as it gave me an excuse for staying on the top of the hill. I knew I could easily get rid of him when she came—if she came—by sending him on a message.

“Well, this was a young woman what had an action agin Shquire Murphy iv Ballynashoughlin himself—[Pg 136] a woman as was no more nor a mere simple governess!”

It would be impossible to convey the depth of social unimportance conveyed by his tone and manner; and coming from a man of “shreds and patches,” it was more than comic. Andy had his good suit of frieze and homespun; but whilst he was on mountain duty, he spared these and appeared almost in the guise of a scarecrow.

“Well! what happened?”

“Faix, whin she tould her shtory the shquire’s councillor loked up at the jury, an’ he whispered a wurrd to the shquire and his ’an’r wrote out a shlip iv paper an’ handed it to him, an’ the councillor ups an’ says he: ‘Me Lard and Gintlemin iv the Jury, me client is prepared to have the honour iv the lady’s hand if she will so, for let bygones be

bygones.' An' sure enough they was married on the Sunday next four weeks; an' there she is now dhrivin' him about the counthry in her pony-shay, an' all the quality comin' to tay in the garden, an' she as affable as iver to all the farmers round. Aye, an' be the hokey, the shquire himself sez that it was a good day for him whin he sot eyes on her first, an' that he don't know why he was such a dam fool as iver to thry to say 'no' to her, or to wish it."

"Quite a tale with a moral, Andy! Bravo! Mrs. Murphy."

"A morial is it? Now may I make bould to ask yer 'an'r what morial ye take out iv it?"

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"The moral, Andy, that I see is, When you see the right woman go for her for all you're worth, and thank God for giving you the chance." Andy jumped up and gave me a great slap on the back.

"Hurro! more power to yer elbow! but it's a bhoy afther me own h'arrt y' are. I big yer pardon, surr, for the liberty; but it's mighty glad I am."

"Granted, Andy; I like a man to be hearty, and you certainly are. But why are you so glad about me?"

"Because I like yer 'an'r. Shure in all me life I niver see so much iv a young gintleman as I've done iv yer 'an'r. Surr, I'm an ould man compared wid ye—I'm the beginnin' iv wan, at any rate, an' I'd like to give ye a wurrd iv advice—git marrid while ye can! I tell ye this, surr, it's not whin the hair is beginnin' to git thin on to the top iv yer head that a nice young girrul 'ill love ye for yerself. It's the people that goes all their lives makin' money and lukin' after all kinds iv things that's iv no kind iv use to thim, that makes the mishtake. Suppose ye do git marrid when ye're ould and bald, an' yer legs is shaky, an' ye want to be let sit close to the fire in the warrum corner, an' ye've lashins iv money that ye don't know what to do wid! Do you think that it's thin that yer wives does be dhramin' iv ye all the time and worshippin' the ground ye thrid? Not a bit iv it! They do be wantin'—aye and thryin' too—to help God away wid ye!"

"Andy," said I, "you preach, on a practical text, a [Pg 138] sermon that any and every young man ought to hear!" I thought I saw an opening here for gaining some information and jumped in.

"By Jove! you set me off wishing to marry! Tell me, is there any pretty girl in this neighbourhood that would suit a young man like me?"

"Oho! begor, there's girruls enough to shute any man."

“Aye, Andy—but pretty girls!”

“Well surr, that depinds. Now what might be yer ’anr’s idea iv a purty girrul?”

“My dear Andy, there are so many different kinds of prettiness that it is hard to say.”

“Faix, an’ I’ll tell ye if there’s a girrul to shute in the counthry, for bedad I think I’ve seen thim all. But you must let me know what would shute ye best?”

“How can I well tell that, Andy, when I don’t know myself? Show me the girl, and I’ll very soon tell you.”

“Unless I was to ax yer ’an’r questions!” this was said very slily.

“Go on, Andy! there is nothing like the Socratic method.”

“Very well thin! I’ll ax two kinds iv things, an’ yer ’an’r will tell me which ye’d like the best!”

“All right, go on.”

“Long or short?”

“Tall; not short, certainly.”

“Fat or lane?”

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“Fie! fie! Andy, for shame; you talk as if they were cattle or pigs.”

“Begor, there’s only wan kind iv fat an’ lane that I knows of; but av ye like I’ll call it thick or thin; which is it?”

“Not too fat, but certainly not skinny.” Andy held up his hands in mock horror:—

“Yer ’an’r shpakes as if ye was talkin’ iv powlthry.”

“I mean Andy,” said I with a certain sense of shame, “she is not to be either too fat or too lean, as you put it.”

“Ye mane ‘shtreaky’!”

“Streaky!” said I, “what do you mean?” He answered promptly:—

“Shtreaky,—thick an’ thin—like belly bacon.” I said nothing. I felt certain it would be useless and out of place. He went on:—

“Nixt, fair or dark?”

“Dark, by all means.”

“Dark be it, surr. What kind iv eyes might she have?”

“Ah! eyes like darkness on the bosom of the azure deep!”

“Musha! but that’s a quare kind iv eye fur a girrul to have intirely! Is she to be all dark, surr, or only the hair of her?”

“I don’t mean a nigger, Andy!” I thought I would be even with him for once in a way. He laughed heartily.

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“Oh! my but that’s a good wan. Be the hokey, a girrul can be dark enough fur any man widout bein’ a naygur. Glory be to God, but I niver seen a faymale naygur meself, but I suppose there’s such things; God’s very good to all his craythurs! But, barrin’ naygurs, must she be all dark?”

“Well not of necessity, but I certainly prefer what we call a brunette.”

“A bru-net. What’s that now; I’ve heerd a when o’ quare things in me time, but I niver heerd a woman called that before.”

I tried to explain the term; he seemed to understand, but his only comment was:—

“Well, God is very good,” and then went on with his queries.

“How might she be dressed?” he looked very sly as he asked the question.

“Simply! The dress is not particular—that can easily be altered. For myself, just at present, I should like her in the dress they all wear here, some pretty kind of body and a red petticoat.”

“Thru for ye!” said Andy. Then he went over the list ticking off the items on his fingers as he went along:—

“A long, dark girrul, like belly bakin, but not a naygur, some kind iv a net, an’ wid a rid petticoat, an’ a quare kind iv an eye! Is that the kind iv a girrul that yer ’an’r wants to set yer eyes on?”

“Well,” said I, “item by item, as you explain them,[Pg 141] Andy, the description is correct; but I must say, that never in my life did I know a man to so knock the bottom out of romance as you have done in summing-up the lady’s charms.”

“Her charrums, is it? Be the powers! I only tuk what yer ’an’r tould me. An’ so that’s the girrul that id shute yer?”

“Yes! Andy. I think she would.” I waited in expectation, but he said nothing. So I jogged his memory:—

“Well!” He looked at me in a most peculiar manner, and said slowly and impressively:—

“Thin I can sahtisfy yer ’an’r. There’s no such girrul in all Knocknacar!” I smiled a smile of triumph:—

“You’re wrong for once, Andy. I saw such a girl only yesterday, here on the top of this mountain, just where we’re sitting now.”

Andy jumped up as if he had been sitting on an ant-hill, and had suddenly been made aware of it. He looked all round in a frightened way, but I could see that he was only acting, and said:—

“Glory be to God! but maybe it’s the fairies, it was, or the pixies! Shure they do say that there’s lots an’ lots an’ lashins iv them on this hill. Don’t ye have nothin’ to say to thim, surr! There’s only sorra follys thim. Take an ould man’s advice, an’ don’t come up here any more. The shpot is dangerous to ye. If ye want to see a fine girrul go to Shleenanaher, an’ have a good luk at Miss Norah in the daylight.”

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“Oh, bother Miss Norah!” said I. “Get along with you—do! I think you’ve got Miss Norah on the brain; or perhaps you’re in love with her yourself.” Andy murmured *sotto voce*, but manifestly for me to hear:—

“Begor, I am, like the rist iv the bhoys—av course!”

Here I looked at my watch, and found it was three o’clock, so thought it was time to get rid of him.

“Here,” said I “run down to the men at the cutting and tell them that I’m coming down presently to measure up their work, as Mr. Sutherland will want to know how they’ve got on.”

Andy moved off. Before going, however, he had something to say, as usual:—

“Tell me, Misther Art”—this new name startled me, Andy had evidently taken me into his public family—“do ye think Misther Dick”—this was another surprise—“has an eye on Miss Norah?” There was a real shock this time.

“I see him lukin’ at her wance or twice as if he’d like to ate her; but, bedad, it’s no use if he has, for she wouldn’t luk at him. No wondher! an’ him helpin’ to be takin’ her father’s houldin’ away from him.”

I could not answer Andy’s question as to poor old Dick’s feelings, for such was his secret, and not mine; but I determined not to let there be any misapprehension regarding his having a hand in Murdock’s dirty work, so I spoke hotly:—

“You tell anyone that dares to say that Dick[Pg 143] Sutherland has any act or part, good or bad—large or small—in that dirty ruffian’s dishonourable conduct, that he is either a knave or a fool—at any rate he is a liar! Dick is simply a man of science engaged by Murdock, as any other man of science might be, to look after some operations in regard to his bog.”

Andy’s comment was made *sotto voce*, so I thought it better not to notice it.

“Musha! but the bogs iv all kinds is gettin’ mixed up quarely. Here’s another iv them. Misther Dick is engaged to luk afther the bogs. An’ so he does, but his eyes goes wandherin’ among thim. There does be bogs iv all kinds now all over these parts. It’s quare times we’re in, or I’m gettin’ ould!”

With this Parthian shaft Andy took himself down the hill, and presently I saw the good effects of his presence in stimulating the workmen to more ardent endeavours, for they all leaned on their spades whilst he told them a long story, which ended in a tumult of laughter.

I might have enjoyed the man’s fun, but I was in no laughing humour. I had got anxious long ago because *she* had not visited the hill-top. I looked all round, but could see no sign of her anywhere. I waited and waited, and the time truly went on leaden wings. The afternoon sun smote the hill-top with its glare, more oppressive always than even the noontide heat.

I lingered on and lingered still, and hope died within me.

When six o’clock had come I felt that there was no[Pg 144] more chance for me that day; so I went sadly down the hill, and, after a glance for Dick’s sake at the cutting, sought the sheebien where Andy had the horse ready harnessed in the car. I assumed as cheerful an aspect as I could, and flattered myself that I carried off the occasion very well. It was not at all flattering, however, to my histrionic powers to hear Andy, as we were driving off, whisper in answer to a remark deploring how sad I looked, made by the old lady who kept the sheebien:—

“Whisht! Don’t appear to notice him, or ye’ll dhrive him mad. Me opinion is that he’s been wandherin’ on the mountain too long, an’ tamperin’ wid the rings on the grass—you know—an’ that he has seen the fairies!” Then he said aloud and ostentatiously:—

“Gee up! ye ould corncrake—ye ought to be fresh enough—ye’ve niver left the fut iv the hill all the day,”—then turning to me, “An’ sure, surr, it’s goin’ to the top that takes it out iv wan—ayther a horse or a man.”

I made no answer, and in silence we drove to Carnaclif, where I found Dick impatiently waiting dinner for me.

I was glad to find that he was full of queries concerning the cutting, for it saved me from the consideration of subjects more difficult to answer satisfactorily. Fortunately I was able to give a good account of the time spent, for the work done had far exceeded my expectations. I thought that Dick was in much better spirits than he had been; but it was [Pg 145] not until the subject of the bog at Knocknacar was completely exhausted that I got any clue on the subject. I then asked Dick if he had had a good time at Shleenanaher?

“Yes!” he answered. “Thank God! the work is nearly done. We went over the whole place to-day and there was only one indication of iron. This was in the bog just beside an elbow where Joyce’s land—his present land—touches ours; no! I mean on Murdock’s, the scoundrel!” He was quite angry with himself for using the word “ours” even accidentally.

“And has anything come of it?” I asked him.

“Nothing! Now that he knows it is there, he would not let me go near it on any account. I’m in hopes he’ll quarrel with me soon in order to get rid of me, so that he may try by himself to fish it—whatever it may be—out of the bog. If he does quarrel with me! Well! I only hope he will; I have been longing for weeks past to get a chance at him. Then she’ll believe, perhaps——” He stopped.

“You saw her to-day, Dick!”

“How did you know that?”

“Because you look so happy, old man!”

“Yes! I did see her; but only for a moment. She drove up in the middle of the day, and I saw her go up to the new house. But she didn’t even see me,” and his face fell.

Presently he asked:—

“You didn’t see your girl?”

“No, Dick, I did not! But how did you know?”

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“I saw it in your face when you came in!”

We sat and smoked in silence. The interruption came in the shape of Andy:—

“I suppose, Masther Art, the same agin to-morra—unless ye’d like me to bring ye wid Masther Dick to see Shleenanaher—ye know the shpot, surr—where Miss Norah is!”

He grinned, and as we said nothing, made his exit.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT TO JOYCE.

With renewed hope I set out in the morning for Knocknacar.

It is one of the many privileges of youth that a few hours’ sleep will change the darkest aspect of the entire universe to one of the rosiest tint. Since the previous evening, sleeping and waking, my mind had been framing reasons and excuses for the absence of...!—it was a perpetual grief to me that I did not even know her name. The journey to the mountain seemed longer than usual; but, even at the time, this seemed to me only natural under the circumstances.

Andy was to-day seemingly saturated or overwhelmed with a superstitious gravity. Without laying any personal basis for his remarks, but accepting as a stand-point his own remark of the previous evening concerning my having seen a fairy, he proceeded to develop his fears on the subject. I will do him the justice to say that his knowledge of folklore was immense, and that nothing but a gigantic memory for detail, cultivated to the full, or else an equally stupendous imagination [Pg 148] working on the facts that momentarily came before his view, could have enabled him to keep up such a flow of narrative and legend. The general result to me was, that if I had been inclined to believe such matters I would have remained under the impression that, although the whole seaboard, with adjacent mountains, from Westport to Galway, was in a state of plethora as regards uncanny existences, Knocknacar, as a habitat for such, easily bore off the palm. Indeed, that remarkable mountain must have been a solid mass of gnomes, fairies, pixies, leprachauns, and all genii, species and varieties of the same. No Chicago grain-elevator in the early days of a wheat corner could have been more solidly packed. It would seem that so many inhabitants had been allured by

fairies, and consequently had mysteriously disappeared, that this method of minimisation of the census must have formed a distinct drain on the local population, which, by the way, did not seem to be excessive.

I reserved to myself the right of interrogating Andy on this subject later in the day, if, unhappily, there should be any opportunity. Now that we had drawn near the hill, my fears began to return.

Whilst Andy stabled the mare I went to the cutting and found the men already at work. During the night there had evidently been a considerable drainage from the cutting, not from the bog but entirely local. This was now Friday morning, and I thought that if equal progress were made in the two days, it would be quite [Pg 149] necessary that Dick should see the working on Sunday, and advise before proceeding further.

As I knew that gossip and the requirements of his horse would keep Andy away for a little while, I determined to take advantage of his absence to run up to the top of the hill, just to make sure that no one was there. It did not take long to get up, but when I arrived there was no reward, except in the shape of a very magnificent view. The weather was evidently changing, for great clouds seemed to gather from the west and south, and far away over the distant rim of the horizon the sky was as dark as night. Still the clouds were not hurrying as before a storm, and the gloom did not seem to have come shoreward as yet; it was rather a presage of prolonged bad weather than bad itself. I did not remain long, as I wished to escape Andy's scrutiny. Indeed, as I descended the hill I began to think that Andy had become like the "Old Man of the Sea," and that my own experience seemed likely to rival that of Sinbad.

When I arrived at the cutting I found Andy already seated, enjoying his pipe. When he saw me he looked up with a grin, and said audibly:—

"The Good People don't seem to be workin' so 'arly in the mornin'! Here he is safe an' sound amongst us."

That was a very long day. Whenever I thought I could do so, without attracting too much attention, I strolled to the top of the hill, but only to suffer a new disappointment.

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At dinner-time I went up and sat all the time. I was bitterly disappointed, and also began to be seriously alarmed. I seemed to have lost my unknown.

When the men got back to their work, and I saw Andy beginning to climb the hill in an artless, purposeless manner, I thought I would kill two birds with one stone, and,

whilst avoiding my incubus, make some inquiries. As I could easily see from the top of the hill, there were only a few houses all told in the little hamlet; and including those most isolated, there were not twenty in all. Of these I had been in the sheebeen and in old Sullivan's, so that a stroll of an hour or two, properly organized, would cover the whole ground; and so I set out on my task to try and get some sight or report of my unknown. I knew I could always get an opportunity of opening conversation by asking for a light for my cigar.

It was a profitless task. Two hours after I had started I returned to the top of the hill as ignorant as I had gone, and the richer only by some dozen or more drinks of milk, for I found that the acceptance of some form of hospitality was an easy opening to general conversation. The top was still empty, but I had not been there a quarter of an hour when I was joined by Andy. His first remark was evidently calculated to set me at ease:—

“Begor, yer 'an'r comes to the top iv this hill nigh as often as I do meself.”

I felt that my answer was inconsequential as well as ill-tempered:—

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“Well, why on earth, Andy, do you come so often? Surely there is no need to come, unless you like it.”

“Faix! I came this time lest yer 'an'r might feel lonely. I niver see a man yit be himself on top iv a hill that he didn't want a companion—iv some kind or another.”

“Andy,” I remarked, as I thought, rather cuttingly, “you judge life and men too much by your own experience. There are people and emotions which are quite out of your scope—far too high, or perhaps too low, for your psychic or intellectual grasp.”

Andy was quite unabashed. He looked at me admiringly.

“It's a pity yer 'an'r isn't a mumber iv Parlyment. Shure, wid a flow iv language like that, ye could do anythin'!”

As satire was no use I thought I would draw him out on the subject of the fairies and pixies.

“I suppose you were looking for more fairies; the supply you had this morning was hardly enough to suit you, was it?”

“Begor, it's meself is not the only wan that does be lukin' for the fairies!” and he grinned.

“Well, I must say, Andy, you seem to have a good supply on hand. Indeed, it seems to me that if there were any more fairies to be located on this hill it would have to be enlarged, for it’s pretty solid with them already, so far as I can gather.”

“Augh! there’s room for wan more! I’m tould there’s wan missin’ since ere yisterday.”

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It was no good trying to beat Andy at this game, so I gave it up and sat silent. After a while he asked me:—

“Will I be dhrivin’ yer ’an’r over to Knockcalltecreore?”

“Why do you ask me?”

“I’m thinking it’s glad yer ’an’r will be to see Miss Norah.”

“Upon my soul, Andy, you are too bad. A joke is a joke, but there are limits to it; and I don’t let any man joke with me when I prefer not. If you want to talk of your Miss Norah, go and talk to Mr. Sutherland about her. He’s there every day and can make use of your aid! Why on earth do you single me out as your father confessor? You’re unfair to the girl, after all, for if I ever do see her I’m prepared to hate her.”

“Ah! yer ’an’r wouldn’t be that hard! What harrum has the poor crathur done that ye’d hate her—a thing no mortal man iver done yit?”

“Oh, go on! don’t bother me any more; I think it’s about time we were getting home. You go down to the sheebeen and rattle up that old corncrake of yours; I’ll come down presently and see how the work goes on.”

He went off, but came back as usual; I could have thrown something at him.

“Take me advice, surr—pay a visit to Shleenanaher, an’ see Miss Norah!” and he hurried down the hill.

His going did me no good; no one came, and after a [Pg 153] lingering glance around, and noting the gathering of the rain clouds, I descended the hill.

When I got up on the car I was not at all in a talkative humour, and said but little to the group surrounding me. I heard Andy account for it to them:—

“Whisht! don’t notice his ’an’r’s silence! It’s stupid wid shmokin’ he is. He lit no less nor siventeen cigars this blissed day. Ax the neighbours av ye doubt me. Gee up!”

The evening was spent with Dick as the last had been. I knew that he had seen his girl; he knew that I had not seen mine, but neither had anything to tell. Before parting he

told me that he expected to shortly finish his work at Knockcalltecore, and asked me if I would come over.

“Do come,” he said, when I expressed a doubt. “Do come, I may want a witness,” so I promised to go.

Andy had on his best suit, and a clean wash, when he met us smiling in the early morning, “Look at him,” I said, “wouldn’t you know he was going to meet his best girl?”

“Begor,” he answered, “mayhap we’ll all do that same!”

It was only ten o’clock when we arrived at Knockcalltecore, and went up the boreen to Murdock’s new farm. The Gombeen Man was standing at the gate with his watch in his hand. When we came up, he said:—

“I feared you would be late. It’s just conthraht time now. Hadn’t ye bettther say good-bye to your frind an’ [Pg 154] git to work?” He was so transparently inclined to be rude, and possibly to pick a quarrel, that I whispered a warning to Dick. To my great satisfaction he whispered back:—

“I see he wants to quarrel; nothing in the world will make me lose temper to-day.” Then he took out his pocket-book, searched for and found a folded paper; opening this he read: “and the said Richard Sutherland shall be at liberty to make use of such assistant as he may choose or appoint whensoever he may wish during the said engagement at his own expense.’ You see, Mr. Murdock, I am quite within the four walls of the agreement, and exercise my right. I now tell you formally that Mr. Arthur Severn has kindly undertaken to assist me for to-day.” Murdock glared at him for a minute, and then opened the gate and said:—

“Come in, gintlemin.” We entered.

“Now, Mr. Murdoch!” said Dick, briskly, “what do you wish done to-day? Shall we make further examination of the bog where the iron indication is, or shall we finish the survey of the rest of the land?”

“Finish the rough survey!”

The operation was much less complicated than when we had examined the bog. We simply “quartered” the land, as the Constabulary say when they make search for hidden arms; and taking it bit by bit, passed the magnet over its surface. We had the usual finds of nails, horseshoes, and scrap iron, but no result of importance. The last place we examined was the house. [Pg 155] It was a much better built and more roomy

structure than the one he had left. It was not, however, like the other, built on a rock, but in a sheltered hollow. Dick pointed out this to me, and remarked:—

“I don’t know but that Joyce is better off, all told, in the exchange. I wouldn’t care myself to live in a house built in a place like this, and directly in the track of the bog.”

“Not even,” said I, “if Norah was living in it too?”

“Ah, that’s another thing! With Norah I’d take my chance and live in the bog itself, if I could get no other place.”

When this happened, our day’s work was nearly done, and very soon we took our leave for the evening, Murdock saying, as I thought rather offensively:—

“Now, you, sir, be sure to be here in time on Monday morning.”

“All right!” said Dick, nonchalantly; and we passed out. In the breen, he said to me:—

“Let us stroll up this way, Art,” and we walked up the hill towards Joyce’s house, Murdock coming down to his gate and looking at us. When we came to Joyce’s gate, we stopped. There was no sign of Norah; but Joyce himself stood at his door. I was opening the gate when he came forward.

“Good evening, Mr. Joyce,” said I. “How is your arm? I hope quite well by this time. Perhaps you don’t remember me—I had the pleasure of giving you [Pg 156] a seat up here in my car, from Mrs. Kelligan’s, the night of the storm.”

“I remember well,” he said; “and I was thankful to you, for I was in trouble that night—it’s all done now.” And he looked round the land with a sneer, and then he looked yearningly towards his old farm.

“Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Sutherland,” said I.

“I ask yer pardon, sir. An’ I don’t wish to be rude—but I don’t want to know him. He’s no frind to me and mine!”

Dick’s honest, manly face grew red with shame. I thought he was going to say something angrily, so cut in as quickly as I could:—

“You are sadly mistaken, Mr. Joyce; Dick Sutherland is too good a gentleman to do wrong to you or any man. How can you think such a thing?”

“A man what consorts wid me enemy can be no frind of mine!”

“But he doesn’t consort with him; he hates him. He was simply engaged to make certain investigations for him as a scientific man. Why, I don’t suppose you yourself hate Murdock more than Dick does.”

“Thin I ax yer pardon, sir,” said Joyce. “I like to wrong no man, an’ I’m glad to be set right.”

Things were going admirably, and we were all beginning to feel at ease, when we saw Andy approach. I groaned in spirit—Andy was gradually taking shape to me as an evil genius. He approached, and making his best bow, said:—

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“Fine evenin’, Misther Joyce. I hope yer arrum is betther—an’ how is Miss Norah?”

“Thank ye kindly, Andy; both me arm and the girl’s well.”

“Is she widin?”

“No! she wint this mornin’ to stay over Monday in the convent. Poor girl! she’s broken-hearted, lavin’ her home and gettin’ settled here. I med the changin’ as light for her as I could—but weemin takes things to heart more nor min does, an’ that’s bad enough, God knows!”

“Thru for ye,” said Andy. “This gintleman here, Masther Art, says he hasn’t seen her since the night she met us below in the dark.”

“I hope,” said Joyce, “you’ll look in and see us, if you’re in these parts, sir, whin she comes back. I know she thought a dale of your kindness to me that night.”

“I’ll be here for some days, and I’ll certainly come, if I may.”

“And I hope I may come, too, Mr. Joyce,” said Dick, “now that you know me.”

“Ye’ll be welkim, sir.”

We all shook hands, coming away; but as we turned to go home, at the gate we had a surprise. There, in the boreen, stood Murdock—livid with fury. He attacked Dick with a tirade of the utmost virulence. He called him every name he could lay his tongue to—traitor, liar, thief, and indeed exhausted the whole terminology of abuse, and accused him of stealing his secrets [Pg 158] and of betraying his trust. Dick bore the ordeal splendidly; he never turned a hair, but calmly went on smoking his cigar. When Murdock had somewhat exhausted himself and stopped, he said calmly:—

“My good fellow, now that your ill-manners are exhausted, perhaps you will tell me what it is all about?”

Whereupon Murdock opened again the vials of his wrath. This time he dragged us all into it—I had been brought in as a spy, to help in betraying him, and Joyce had suborned him to the act of treachery. For myself I fired up at once, and would have struck him, only that Dick laid his hand on me, and in a whisper cautioned me to desist.

“Easy, old man—easy! Don’t spoil a good position. What does it matter what a man like that can say? Give him rope enough! we’ll have our turn in time, don’t fear!”

I held back, but unfortunately Joyce pressed forwards. He had his say pretty plainly.

“What do ye mane, ye ill-tongued scoundhrel, comin’ here to make a quarrel? Why don’t ye shtay on the land you have robbed from me, and lave us alone? I am not like these gintlemen here, that can afford to hould their tongues and despise ye—I’m a man like yerself, though I hope I’m not the wolf that ye are—fattenin’ on the blood of the poor! How dare you say I suborned any one—me that never told a lie, or done a dirty thing in me life? I tell you, Murtagh Murdock, I put my mark upon ye once—I see it now[Pg 159] comin’ up white through the red of yer passion! Don’t provoke me further, or I’ll put another mark on ye that ye’ll carry to yer grave!”

No one said a word more. Murdock moved off and entered his own house; Dick and I said “good night” to Joyce again, and went down the boreen.

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CHAPTER IX.

MY NEW PROPERTY.

The following week was a time to me of absolute bitterness. I went each day to Knocknacar, where the cutting was proceeding at a rapid rate. I haunted the hill-top, but without the slightest result. Dick had walked over with me on Sunday, and had been rejoiced at the progress made; he said that if all went well we could about Friday next actually cut into the bog. Already there was a distinct infiltration through the cutting, and we discussed the best means to achieve the last few feet of the work so as not in any way to endanger the safety of the men working.

All this time Dick was in good spirits. His meeting with Norah’s father had taken a great and harrowing weight off his mind, and to him all things were now possible in the

future. He tried his best to console me for my disappointment. He was full of hope—indeed he refused to see anything but a delay, and I could see that in his secret heart he was not altogether sorry that my love affair had received a temporary check. This belief was emphasized by the tendency of certain of [Pg 161] his remarks to the effect that marriages between persons of unequal social status were inadvisable—he, dear old fellow, seemingly in his transparent honesty unaware that he was laying himself out with all his power to violate his own principles.

But all the time I was simply heartbroken. To say that I was consumed with a burning anxiety would be to understate the matter; I was simply in a fever. I could neither eat nor sleep satisfactorily, and—sleeping or waking—my brain was in a whirl of doubts, conjectures, fears and hopes. The most difficult part to bear was my utter inability to do anything. I could not proclaim my love or my loss on the hill-top; I did not know where to make inquiries, and I had no idea who to inquire for. I did not even like to tell Dick the full extent of my woes.

Love has a modesty of its own, whose lines are boldly drawn, and whose rules are stern.

On more than one occasion I left the hotel secretly—after having ostensibly retired for the night—and wended my way to Knocknacar. As I passed through the sleeping country I heard the dogs bark in the cottages as I went by, but little other sound I ever heard except the booming of the distant sea. On more than one of these occasions I was drenched with rain—for the weather had now become thoroughly unsettled. But I heeded it not; indeed the physical discomfort—when I felt it—was in some measure an anodyne to the torture of my restless soul.

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I always managed to get back before daylight, so as to avoid any questioning. After three or four days, however, the “boots” of the hotel began evidently to notice the state of my clothes and boots, and ventured to speak to me. He cautioned me against going out too much alone at night, as there were two dangers—one from the moonlighters who now and again raided the district, and who, being composed of the scum of the country-side—“corner-boys” and loafers of all kinds—would be only too glad to find an unexpected victim to rob; and the other, lest in wandering about I should get into trouble with the police under suspicion of being one of these very ruffians.

The latter difficulty seemed to me to be even more obnoxious than the former; and to avoid any suspicion I thought it best to make my night wanderings known to all.

Accordingly, I asked Mrs. Keating to have some milk and bread and butter left in my room each night, as I would probably require something after my late walk. When she expressed surprise as to my movements, I told her that I was making a study of the beauty of the country by night, and was much interested in moonlight effects. This last was an unhappy setting forth of my desires, for it went round in a whisper amongst the servants and others outside the hotel, until at last it reached the ears of an astute Ulster-born policeman, from whom I was much surprised to receive a visit one morning. I asked him to what the honour was due. His answer spoke for itself:—

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“From information received A come to talk till ye regardin’ the interest ye profess to take in moon-lichtin’.”

“What on earth do you mean?” I asked.

“A hear ye’re a stranger in these parts—an’ as ye might take away a wrong impression weth ye—A think it ma duty to tell ye that the people round here are nothin’ more nor less than leears—an’ that ye mustn’t believe a sengle word they say.”

“Really,” said I, “I am quite in the dark. Do try and explain. Tell me what it is all about.”

“Why, A larn that ye’re always out at night all over the country, and that ye’ve openly told people here that ye’re interested in moon-lichtin’.”

“My dear sir, some one is quite mad! I never said such a thing—indeed, I don’t know anything about moon-lighting.”

“Then why do ye go out at night?”

“Simply to see the country at night—to look at the views—to enjoy effects of moonlight.”

“There ye are, ye see—ye enjoy the moonlicht effect.”

“Good lord! I mean the view—the purely æsthetic effect—the chiaroscuro—the pretty pictures!”

“Oh, aye! A see now—A ken weel! Then A needn’t trouble ye further. But let ma tell ye that it’s a dangerous practice to walk out be night. There’s many a man in these parts watched and laid for. Why in Knockcalltecore there’s one man that’s in danger all the time. An’ as for ye—why ye’d better be careful[Pg 164] that yer night wanderins doesn’t bring ye ento trouble,” and he went away.

At last I got so miserable about my own love affair that I thought I might do a good turn to Dick; and so I determined to try to buy from Murdock his holding on Knockcalltecore, and then to give it to my friend, as I felt that the possession of the place, with power to re-exchange with Joyce, would in no way militate against his interests with Norah.

With this object in view I went out one afternoon to Knockcalltecore, when I knew that Dick had arranged to visit the cutting at Knocknacar. I did not tell anyone where I was going, and took good care that Andy went with Dick. I had acquired a dread of that astute gentleman's inferences.

It was well in the afternoon when I got to Knockcalltecore. Murdock was out at the edge of the bog making some investigations on his own account with the aid of the magnets. He flew into a great rage when he saw me, and roundly accused me of coming to spy upon him. I disclaimed any such meanness, and told him that he should be ashamed of such a suspicion. It was not my cue to quarrel with him, so I restrained myself as well as I could, and quietly told him that I had come on a matter of business.

He was anxious to get me away from the bog, and took me into the house; here I broached my subject to him, for I knew he was too astute a man for my going round the question to be of any use.

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At first my offer was a confirmation of his suspicion of me as a spy; and, indeed, he did not burke this aspect of the question in expressing his opinion.

"Oh, aye!" he sneered. "Isn't it likely I'm goin' to give up me land to ye, so that ye may hand it over to Mr. Sutherland—an' him havin' saycrets from me all the time—maybe knowin' where what I want to find is hid. Didn't I know it's a thraitor he is, an' ye a shpy."

"Dick Sutherland is no traitor and I am no spy. I wouldn't hear such words from anyone else; but, unfortunately, I know already that your ideas regarding us both are so hopelessly wrong that it's no use trying to alter them. I simply came here to make you an offer to buy this piece of land. The place is a pretty one, and I, or some friend of mine, may like some day to put up a house here. Of course if you don't want to sell there's an end to the matter; but do try to keep a decent tongue in your head—if you can."

My speech had evidently some effect on him, for he said:—

“I didn’t mane any offinse—an’ as for sellin’, I’d sell anything in the wurld av I got me price fur it!”

“Well! why not enter on this matter? You’re a man of the world, and so am I. I want to buy; I have money and can afford to give a good price, as it is a fancy with me. What objection have you to sell?”

“Ye know well enough I’ll not sell—not yit, at all evints. I wouldn’t part wid a perch iv this land fur[Pg 166] all ye cud offer—not till I’m done wid me sarch. I mane to get what I’m lukin’ fur—if it’s there!”

“I quite understand! Well! I am prepared to meet you in the matter. I am willing to purchase the land—it to be given over to me at whatever time you may choose to name. Would a year suit you to make your investigations?”

He thought for a moment—then took out an old letter, and on the back of it made some calculations. Then he said:—

“I suppose ye’d pay the money down at wanst?”

“Certainly,” said I, “the very day I get possession.” I had intended paying the money down, and waiting for possession as a sort of inducement to him to close with me; but there was so much greed in his manner that I saw I would do better by holding off payment until I got possession. My judgment was correct, for his answer surprised me:—

“A month ’ll do what I wanted; or, to be certain, say five weeks from to-day. But the money would have to be payed to the minit.”

“Certainly!” said I. “Suit yourself as to time, and let me know the terms, so that I can see if we agree. I suppose you will want to see your attorney, so name any day to suit you.”

“I’m me own attorney! Do ye think I’d thrust any iv them wid me affairs? Whin I have a law suit I’ll have thim, but not before. If ye want to know me price I’ll tell it to ye now.”

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“Go on,” said I, concealing my delight as well as I could.

He accordingly named a sum which, to me, accustomed only as I had hitherto been to the price of land in a good English county, seemed very small indeed.

“He evidently thought he was driving a hard bargain, for he said with a cunning look:—

“I suppose ye’ll want to see lawyers and the like. So you may; but only to see that ye get ye bargain hard and fast. I’ll not discuss the terrums wid anyone else; an’ if y’ accept, ye must sign me a writin’ now, that ye buy me land right here, an’ that ye’ll pay the money widin a month before ye take possession on the day we fix.”

“All right,” said I. “That will suit me quite well. Make out your paper in duplicate, and we will both sign. Of course, you must put in a clause guaranteeing title, and allowing the deed to be made with the approval of my solicitor, not as to value, but as to form and completeness.

“That’s fair!” he said, and sat down to draw up his papers. He was evidently a bit of a lawyer—a gombeen man must be—and he knew the practical matters of law affecting things in which he was himself interested. His Memorandum of Agreement was, so far as I could judge, quite complete and as concise as possible. He designated the land sold, and named the price which was to be paid into the account in his name in the Galway Bank before twelve o’clock noon on the 27th September, or which [Pg 168] might be paid in at an earlier date, with the deduction of two per cent. per annum as discount—in which case the receipt was to be given in full and an undertaking to give possession at the appointed time, namely Wednesday, 27 Oct., at 12 noon.

We both signed the memorandum, he having sent the old woman who came up from the village to cook for him for the old schoolmaster to witness the signatures. I arranged that when I should have seen my solicitor and have had the deed proper drafted, I would see him again. I then came away, and got back at the hotel a little while before Dick arrived.

Dick was in great spirits; his experiment with the bog had been quite successful. The cutting had advanced so far that the clay wall hemming in the bog was actually weakened, and with a mining cartridge, prepared for the purpose, he had blown up the last bit of bank remaining. The bog had straightway begun to pour into the opening, not merely from the top, but simultaneously to the whole depth of the cutting.

“The experience of that first half-hour of the rush,” went on Dick, “was simply invaluable. I do wish you had been there, old fellow. It was in itself a lesson on bogs and their reclamation.”

It just suited my purpose that he should do all the talking at present, so I asked him to explain all that happened. He went on:—

“The moment the cartridge exploded the whole of the small clay bank remaining was knocked to bits and was [Pg 169] carried away by the first rush. There had evidently been a considerable accumulation of water just behind the bank; and at the first rush

this swept through the cutting and washed it clean. Then the bog at the top, and the water in the middle, and the ooze below all struggled for the opening. I could see that the soft part of the bog actually floated. Naturally the water got away first. The bog proper, which was floating, jammed in the opening, and the ooze began to drain out below it. Of course, this was only the first rush; it will be running for days before things begin to settle; and then we shall be able to make some openings in the bog and see if my theories are tenable, in so far as the solidification is concerned. I am only disappointed in one thing.”

“What is that?”

“That it will not enlighten us much regarding the bog at Shleenanaher, for I cannot find any indication here of a shelf of rock such as I imagine to be at the basis of the shifting bog. If I had had time I would like to have made a cutting into some of the waste where the bog had originally been. I daresay that Joyce would let me try now if I asked him.”

I had my own fun out of my answer:—

“Oh! I’m sure he will; but even if he won’t let you now, he may be inclined to in a month or two when things have settled down a bit.”

His answer startled me.

“Do you know, Art, I fear it’s quite on the cards[Pg 170] that in a month or two there may be some settling down up there that may be serious for some one.”

“How do you mean?”

“Simply this—that I am not at all satisfied about Murdock’s house. There is every indication of it being right in the track of the bog in case it should shift again; and I would not be surprised if that hollow where it stands was right over the deepest part of the natural reservoir, where the rock slopes into the ascending stratum. This wet weather looks bad; and already the bog has risen somewhat. If the rain lasts I wouldn’t like to live in that house after five or six weeks.”

A thought struck me:—

“Did you tell this to Murdock?”

“Certainly! the moment the conviction was in my mind.”

“When was that now? just for curiosity!”

“Last night, before I came away.” A light began to dawn on me, as to Murdock’s readiness to sell the land. I did not want to have to explain anything, so I did not mention the subject of my purchase, but simply asked Dick:—

“And what did our upright friend say?”

“He said, in his own sweet manner, that it would last as long as he wanted it, and that after that it might go to hell—and me too, he added, with a thoughtfulness that was all his own.”

When I went to my room that night I thought over the matter. For good or ill I had bought the property,[Pg 171] and there was no going back now; indeed I did not wish to go back, for I thought that it would be a fine opportunity for Dick to investigate the subject. If we could succeed in draining the bog and reclaiming it, it would be a valuable addition to the property.

That night I arranged to go over on the following day to Galway, my private purpose being to consult a solicitor; and I wrote to my bankers in London, directing that an amount something over the sum required to effect my purchase should be lodged forthwith to an account to be opened for me at the Galway Bank.

Next day I drove to Galway, and there, after a little inquiry, found a solicitor, Mr. Caicy, of whom every one spoke well. I consulted him regarding the purchase. He arranged to do all that was requisite, and to have the deed of purchase drawn. I told him that I wished the matter kept a profound secret. He agreed to meet my wishes in this respect, even to the extent that when he should come to Carnaclif to make the final completion with Murdock, he would not pretend to know me. We parted on the best of terms, after I had dined with him, and had consumed my share of a couple of bottles of as fine old port as is to be had in all the world.

Next day I returned to Carnaclif in the evening and met Dick.

Everything had gone right during the two days. Dick was in great spirits; he had seen his Norah during the day, and had exchanged salutations with her. Then[Pg 172] he had gone to Knocknacar, and had seen a great change in the bog, which was already settling down into a more solid form. I simply told him I had been to Galway to do some banking and other business. It was some consolation to me in the midst of my own unhappiness to know that I was furthering the happiness of my friend.

On the third day from this Mr. Caicy was to be over with the deed, and the following day the sale was to be completed, I having arranged with the bank to transfer on that day the purchase money for the sale to the account of Mr. Murdock. The two first days

I spent mainly on Knocknacar, going over each day ostensibly to look at the progress made in draining the bog, but in reality in the vain hope of seeing my unknown. Each time I went, my feet turned naturally to the hill-top; but on each visit I felt only a renewal of my sorrow and disappointment. I walked on each occasion to and from the hill, and on the second day—which was Sunday—went in the morning and sat on the top many hours, in the hope that some time during the day, it being a holiday, she might be able to find her way there once again!

When I got to the top, the chapel bells were ringing in all the parishes below me to the west, and very sweetly and peacefully the sounds came through the bright crisp September air. And in some degree the sound brought peace to my soul, for there is so large a power in even the aspirations and the efforts of men [Pg 173] towards good, that it radiates to unmeasurable distance. The wave theory that rules our knowledge of the distribution of light and sound, may well be taken to typify, if it does not control the light of divine love, and the beating in unison of human hearts.

I think that during these days I must have looked, as well as felt, miserable; for even Andy did not make any effort to either irritate or draw me. On the Sunday evening, when I was on the strand behind the hotel, he lounged along, in his own mysterious fashion, and after looking at me keenly for a few moments, came up close, and said to me in a grave, pitying half-whisper:—

“Don’t be afther breakin’ yer harrt, yer ’an’r. Divil mend the fairy girrul. Sure isn’t she vanished intirely? Mark me now! there’s no sahtisfaction at all, at all, in them fairy girruls. Faix! but I wouldn’t like to see a fine young gintleman like yer ’an’r, become like Yeoha, the Sigher, as they called him in the ould times.”

“And who might that gentleman be, Andy?” I asked, with what appearance of cheerful interest I could muster up.

“Begor! it’s a prince he was that married onto a fairy girrul, what wint an’ was tuk off be a fairy man what lived in the same mountain as she done herself. Sure thim fairy girruls has mostly a fairy man iv their own somewheres, that they love betther nor they does mortials. Jist you take me advice, Master Art, fur ye might do worser! Go an take a luk at Miss [Pg 174] Norah, an ye’ll soon forgit the fairies. There’s a rale girrul av ye like!”

I was too sad to make any angry reply, and before I could think of any other kind, Andy lounged away whistling softly—for he had, like many of his class, a very sweet whistle—the air of *Savourneen Deelish*.

The following day Mr. Caicy turned up at the hotel according to his promise. He openly told Mrs. Keating, of whom he had often before been a customer, that he had business with Mr. Murdock. He was, as usual with him, affable to all, "passing the time of day" with the various inhabitants of all degrees, and, as if a stranger, entering into conversation with me as we sat at lunch in the coffee-room. When we were alone he whispered to me that all was ready; that he had made an examination of the title, for which Murdock had sent him all the necessary papers, and that the deed was complete and ready to be signed. He told me he was going over that day to Knockcalltecore, and would arrange that he would be there the next day, and that he would take care to have some one to witness the signatures.

On the following morning, when Dick went off with Andy to Knocknacar, and Mr. Caicy drove over to Knockcalltecore, where I also shortly took my way on another car.

We met at Murdock's house. The deed was duly completed, and Mr. Caicy handed over to Murdock the letter from the bank that the lodgment had been made.

The land was now mine; and I was to have possession[Pg 175] on the 27th of October. Mr. Caicy took the deed with him; and with it took also instructions to draw out a deed making the property over to Richard Sutherland. He went straight away to Galway; whilst I, in listless despair, wandered out on the hillside to look at the view.

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CHAPTER X. IN THE CLIFF FIELDS.

I went along the mountain-side until I came to the great ridge of rocks which, as Dick had explained to me, protected the lower end of Murdock's farm from the westerly wind. I climbed to the top to get a view, and then found that the ridge was continuous, running as far as the Snake's Pass where I had first mounted it. Here, however, I was not as then above the sea, for I was opposite what they had called the Cliff Fields, and a very strange and beautiful sight it was.

Some hundred and fifty feet below me was a plateau of seven or eight acres in extent, and some two hundred and fifty feet above the sea. It was sheltered on the north by a high wall of rock like that I stood on, serrated in the same way, as the strata ran in similar layers. In the centre there rose a great rock with a flat top some quarter of an acre in extent. The whole plateau, save this one bare rock, was a mass of verdure. It was watered by a small stream which fell through a deep narrow cleft in the rocks,

where the bog drained itself from Murdock's present land. The [Pg 177] after-grass was deep, and there were many clumps of trees and shrubs—none of them of considerable height except a few great stone-pines which towered aloft and dared the fury of the western breeze. But not all the beauty of the scene could hold my eyes—for seated on the rocky table in the centre, just as I had seen her on the hill-top at Knocknacar, sat a girl to all intents the ditto of my unknown.

My heart gave a great bound, and in the tumult of hope that awoke within my breast the whole world seemed filled with sunshine. For an instant I almost lost my senses; my knees shook, and my eyes grew dim. Then came a horrible suspense and doubt. It was impossible to believe that I should see my unknown here when I least expected to see her. And then came the man's desire of action.

I do not know how I began. To this day I cannot make out whether I took a bee-line for that isolated table of rock, and from where I was, slid or crawled down the face of the rock, or whether I made a detour to the same end. All I can recollect is that I found myself scrambling over some large boulders, and then passing through the deep heavy grass at the foot of the rock.

Here I halted to collect my thoughts—a moment sufficed. I was too much in earnest to need any deliberation, and there was no choice of ways. I only waited to be sure that I would not create any alarm by unnecessary violence.

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Then I ascended the rock. I did not make more noise than I could help; but I did not try to come silently. She had evidently heard steps, for she spoke without turning round:—

“Am I wanted?” Then, as I was passing across the plateau, my step seemed to arouse her attention; for at a bound she leaped to her feet, and turned with a glad look that went through the shadow on my soul, as the sunshine strikes through the mist.

“Arthur!” She almost rushed to meet me; but stopped suddenly—for an instant grew pale—and then a red flush crimsoned her face and neck. She put up her hands before her face, and I could see the tears drop through her fingers.

As for myself, I was half-dazed. When I saw that it was indeed my unknown, a wild joy leaped to my heart; and then came the revulsion from my long pent-up sorrow and anxiety; and as I faltered out—“At last! at last!”—the tears sprang unbidden to my eyes. There is, indeed, a dry-eyed grief, but its corresponding joy is as often smit with sudden tears.

In an instant I was by her side, and had her hand in mine. It was only for a moment, for she withdrew it with a low cry of maidenly fear—but in that moment of gentle, mutual pressure, a whole world had passed, and we knew that we loved.

We were silent for a time, and then we sat together on a boulder—she edging away from me shyly.

What matters it of what we talked? There was not [Pg 179] much to say—nothing that was new—the old, old story that has been told since the days when Adam, waking, found that a new joy had entered into his life. For those whose feet have wandered in Eden, there is no need to speak; for those who are yet to tread the hallowed ground, there is no need either—for in the fulness of time their knowledge will come.

It was not till we had sat some time that we exchanged any sweet words—they were sweet, although to any one but ourselves they would have seemed the most absurd and soulless commonplaces.

We spoke, and that was all. It is of the nature of love that it can from airy nothings win its own celestial food!

Presently I said—and I pledge my word that this was the first speech that either of us had made, beyond the weather and the view, and such lighter topics:—

“Won’t you tell me your name? I have so longed to know it, all these weary days.”

“Norah—Norah Joyce! I thought you knew.”

This was said with a shy lifting of the eyelashes, which were as suddenly and as shyly dropped again.

“Norah!” As I spoke the word—and my whole soul was in its speaking—the happy blush overspread her face again. “Norah! What a sweet name! Norah! No, I did not know it; if I had known it, when I missed you from the hill-top at Knocknacar, I should have sought you here.”

Somehow her next remark seemed to chill me:—

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“I thought you remembered me, from that night when father came home with you?”

There seemed some disappointment that I had so forgotten.

“That night,” I said, “I did not see you at all. It was so dark, that I felt like a blind man—I only heard your voice.”

“I thought you remembered my voice.”

The disappointment was still manifest. Fool that I was!—that voice, once heard, should have sunk into my memory for ever.

“I thought your voice was familiar when I heard you on the hill-top; but when I saw you, I loved you from that moment—and then every other woman’s voice in the world went, for me, out of existence!” She half arose, but sat down again, and the happy blush once more mantled her cheek—I felt that my peace was made. “My name is Arthur.” Here a thought struck me—struck me for the first time, and sent through me a thrill of unutterable delight. The moment she had seen me she had mentioned my name—all unconsciously, it is true—but she had mentioned it. I feared, however, to alarm her by attracting her attention to it as yet, and went on:—“Arthur Severn—but I think you know it.”

“Yes; I heard it mentioned up at Knocknacar.”

“Who by?”

“Andy the driver. He spoke to my aunt and me when we were driving down, the day after we—after we met on the hill-top the last time.”

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Andy! And so my jocose friend knew all along! Well, wait! I must be even with him!

“Your aunt?”

“Yes; my aunt Kate. Father sent me up to her, for he knew it would distress me to see all our things moved from our dear old home—all my mother’s things. And father would have been distressed to see me grieved, and I to see him. It was kind of him; he is always so good to me.”

“He is a good man, Norah—I know that; I only hope he won’t hate me.”

“Why?”—This was said very faintly.

“For wanting to carry off his daughter. Don’t go, Norah. For God’s sake, don’t go! I shall not say anything you do not wish; but if you only knew the agony I have been in since I saw you last—when I thought I had lost you—you would pity me—indeed you would! Norah, I love you! No! you must listen to me—you must! I want you to be my wife—I shall love and honour you all my life! Don’t refuse me, dear; don’t draw back—for I love you!—I love you!”

There, it was all out. The pent-up waters find their own course.

For a minute, at least, Norah sat still. Then she turned to me very gravely, and there were tears in her eyes:—

“Oh, why did you speak like that, sir?—why did you speak like that? Let me go!—let me go! You must not try to detain me!”—I stood back, for we had[Pg 182] both risen—“I am conscious of your good intention—of the honour you do me—but I must have time to think. Good-bye!”

She held out her hand. I pressed it gently—I dared not do more—true love is very timid at times!—She bowed to me, and moved off.

A sudden flood of despair rushed over me—the pain of the days when I thought I had lost her could not be soon forgotten, and I feared that I might lose her again.

“Stay, Norah!—stay one moment!” She stopped and turned round. “I may see you again, may I not? Do not be cruel!—may I not see you again?”

A sweet smile lit up the perplexed sadness of her face:—

“You may meet me here to-morrow evening, if you will,” and she was gone.

To-morrow evening! Then there was hope; and with gladdened heart I watched her pass across the pasture and ascend a path over the rocks. Her movements were incarnate grace; her beauty and her sweet presence filled the earth and air. When she passed from my sight, the sunlight seemed to pale and the warm air to grow chill.

For a long while I sat on that table-rock, and my thoughts were of heavenly sweetness—all, save one which was of earth—one brooding fear that all might not be well—some danger I did not understand.

And then I too arose, and took my way across the[Pg 183] plateau, and climbed the rock, and walked down the breen on my way for Carnaclif.

And then, and for the first time, did a thought strike me—one which for a moment made my blood run cold—Dick!

Aye—Dick! What about him? It came to me with a shudder, that my happiness—if it should be my happiness—must be based on the pain of my friend. Here, then, there was perhaps a clue to Norah’s strange gravity! Could Dick have made a proposal to her? He admitted having spoken to her—why should he, too, not have been impulsive? Why should it not be that he, being the first to declare himself, had got a favourable answer, and that now Norah was not free to choose?

How I cursed the delay in finding her—how I cursed and found fault with everyone and everything! Andy especially came in for my ill-will. He, at any rate, knew that my unknown of the hill-top at Knocknacar was none other than Norah!

And yet, stay! who but Andy persisted in turning my thoughts to Norah, and more than once suggested my paying a visit to Shleenanaher to see her? No! Andy must be acquitted at all points: common justice demanded that. Who, then, was I to blame? Not Andy—not Dick, who was too noble and too loyal a friend to give any cause for such a thought. Had he not asked me at the first if the woman of my fancy was not, this very woman; and had he not confessed[Pg 184] his own love only when I answered him that it was not? No! Dick must be acquitted from blame!

Acquitted from blame! Was that justice? At present he was in the position of a wronged man, and it was I who had wronged him—in ignorance certainly, but still the wrong was mine. And now what could I do? Should I tell Dick? I shrank from such a thing; and as yet there was little to tell. Not till to-morrow evening should I know my fate; and might not that fate be such that it would be wiser not to tell Dick of it? Norah had asked for time to consider my offer. If it should be that she had already promised Dick, and yet should have taken time to consider another offer, would it be fair to tell Dick of such hesitation, even though the result was a loyal adherence to her promise to him? Would such be fair either to him or to her? No! he must not be told—as yet, at all events.

How, then, should I avoid telling him, in case the subject should crop up in the course of conversation? I had not told him of any of my late visits to Knockcalltecore, although, God knows! they were taken not in my own interest, but entirely in his; and now an explanation seemed impossible.

Thus revolving the situation in my mind as I walked along, I came to the conclusion that the wisest thing I could do was to walk to some other place and stay there for the night. Thus I might avoid questioning altogether. On the morrow I could return to Carnaclif, and go over to Shleenanaher at such a time that I might[Pg 185] cross Dick on the way, so that I might see Norah and get her answer without anyone knowing of my visit. Having so made up my mind, I turned my steps towards Roundwood, and when I arrived there in the evening sent a wire to Dick:—

“Walked here, very tired; sleep here to-night; probably return to-morrow.”

The long walk did me good, for it made me thoroughly tired, and that night, despite my anxiety of mind, I slept well—I went to sleep with Norah’s name on my lips.

The next day I arrived at Carnaclif about mid-day. I found that Dick had taken Andy to Knockcalltecore. I waited until it was time to leave, and then started off. About half a mile from the foot of the breen I went and sat in a clump of trees, where I could not be seen, but from which I could watch the road; and presently saw Dick passing along on Andy's car. When they had quite gone out of sight, I went on my way to the Cliff Fields.

I went with mingled feelings. There was hope, there was joy at the remembrance of yesterday, there was expectation that I would see her again—even though the result might be unhappiness, there was doubt, and there was a horrible, haunting dread. My knees shook, and I felt weak as I climbed the rocks. I passed across the field and sat on the table-rock.

Presently she came to join me. With a queenly bearing she passed over the ground, seeming to glide rather[Pg 186] than to walk. She was very pale, but as she drew near I could see in her eyes a sweet calm.

I went forward to meet her, and in silence we shook hands. She motioned to the boulder, and we sat down. She was less shy than yesterday, and seemed in many subtle ways to be, though not less girlish, more of a woman.

When we sat down I laid my hand on hers and said—and I felt that my voice was hoarse:—

“Well!”

She looked at me tenderly, and said in a sweet, grave voice:—

“My father has a claim on me that I must not overlook. He is all alone; he has lost my mother, and my brother is away, and is going into a different sphere of life from us. He has lost his land that he prized and valued, and that has been ours for a long, long time; and now that he is sad and lonely, and feels that he is growing old, how could I leave him? He that has always been so good and kind to me all my life!” Here the sweet eyes filled with tears. I had not taken away my hand, and she had not removed hers; this negative of action gave me hope and courage.

“Norah! answer me one thing. Is there any other man between your heart and me?”

“Oh no! no!” Her speech was impulsive; she stopped as suddenly as she began. A great weight seemed lifted from my heart; and yet there came a qualm of pity for my friend. Poor Dick! poor Dick!

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Again we were silent for a minute. I was gathering courage for another question.

“Norah!”—I stopped; she looked at me.

“Norah! if your father had other objects in life, which would leave you free, what would be your answer to me?”

“Oh, do not ask me! Do not ask me!” Her tone was imploring; but there are times when manhood must assert itself, even though the heart be torn with pity for woman’s weakness. I went on:—

“I must, Norah! I must! I am in torture till you tell me. Be pitiful to me! Be merciful to me! Tell me, do you love me? You know I love you, Norah. Oh God! how I love you! The world has but one being in it for me; and you are that one! With every fibre of my being—with all my heart and soul, I love you! Won’t you tell me, then, if you love me?”

A flush as rosy as dawn came over her face, and timidly she asked me, “Must I answer? Must I?”

“You must, Norah!”

“Then, I do love you! God help us both! but I love you! I love you!” and tearing away her hand from mine, she put both hands before her face and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

There could be but one ending to such a scene. In an instant she was in my arms. Her will and mine went down before the sudden flood of passion that burst upon us both. She hid her face upon my breast, but I raised it tenderly, and our lips met in one long, loving, passionate kiss.

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We sat on the boulder, hand in hand, and whispering confessed to each other, in the triumph of our love, all those little secrets of the growth of our affection that lovers hold dear. That final separation, which had been spoken of but a while ago, was kept out of sight by mutual consent; the dead would claim its dead soon enough. Love lives in the present and in the sunshine finds its joy.

Well, the men of old knew the human heart, when they fixed upon the butterfly as the symbol of the soul; for the rainbow is but sunshine through a cloud, and love, like the butterfly, takes the colours of the rainbow on its aery wings!

Long we sat in that beautiful spot. High above us towered the everlasting rocks; the green of nature's planting lay beneath our feet; and far off the reflection of the sunset lightened the dimness of the soft twilight over the wrinkled sea.

We said little, as we sat hand in hand; but the silence was a poem, and the sound of the sea, and the beating of our hearts were hymns of praise to nature and to nature's God.

We spoke no more of the future; for now that we knew that we were each beloved, the future had but little terror for us. We were content!

When we had taken our last kiss, and parted beneath the shadow of the rock, I watched her depart through the gloaming to her own home; and then I too took my way. At the foot of the Boreen I met Murdock, who [Pg 189] looked at me in a strange manner, and merely growled some reply to my salutation.

I felt that I could never meet Dick to-night. Indeed, I wished to see no human being, and so I sat for long on the crags above the sounding sea; and then wandered down to the distant beach. To and fro I went all the night long, but ever in sight of the hill, and ever and anon coming near to watch the cottage where Norah slept.

In the early morning, I took my way to Roundwood, and going to bed, slept until late in the day.

When I woke, I began to think of how I could break my news to Dick. I felt that the sooner it was done the better. At first I had a vague idea of writing to him from where I was, and explaining all to him; but this, I concluded, would not do—it seemed too cowardly a way to deal with so true and loyal a friend—I would go now and await his arrival at Carnaclif, and tell him all, at the earliest moment when I could find an opportunity.

I drove to Carnaclif, and waited his coming impatiently, for I intended, if it were not too late, to afterwards drive over to Shleenanaher, and see Norah—or at least the house she was in.

Dick arrived a little earlier than usual, and I could see from the window that he was grave and troubled. When he got down from the car, he asked if I were in, and being answered in the affirmative, ordered dinner to be put on the table as soon as possible, and went up to his room.

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I did not come down until the waiter came to tell me that dinner was ready. Dick had evidently waited also, and followed me down. When he came into the room, he said heartily:—

“Hallo! Art, old fellow, welcome back, I thought you were lost,” and shook hands with me warmly.

Neither of us seemed to have much appetite, but we pretended to eat, and sent away platesfull of food, cut up into the smallest proportions. When the apology for dinner was over, Dick offered me a cigar, lit his own, and said:—

“Come out for a stroll on the sand, Art; I want to have a chat with you.” I could feel that he was making a great effort to appear hearty, but there was a hollowness about his voice, which was not usual. As we went through the hall, Mrs. Keating handed me my letters, which had just arrived.

We walked out on the wide stretch of fine hard sand, which lies westwards from Carnaclif when the tide is out, and were a considerable distance from the town before a word was spoken. Dick turned to me, and said:—

“Art! what does it all mean?”

I hesitated for a moment, for I hardly knew where to begin—the question, so comprehensive and so sudden, took me aback. Dick went on:—

“Art! two things I have always believed; and I won’t give them up without a struggle. One is that there are very few things that, no matter how strange or [Pg 191] wrong they look, won’t bear explanation of some kind; and the other is that an honourable man does not grow crooked in a moment. Is there anything, Art, that you would like to tell me?”

“There is, Dick! I have a lot to tell; but won’t you tell me what you wish me to speak about?” I was just going to tell him all, but it suddenly occurred to me that it would be wise to know something of what was amiss with him first.

“Then I shall ask you a few questions! Did you not tell me that the girl you were in love with was not Norah Joyce?”

“I did; but I was wrong. I did not know it at the time—I only found it out, Dick, since I saw you last!”

“Since you saw me last! Did you not then know that I loved Norah Joyce, and that I was only waiting a chance to ask her to marry me?”

“I did!” I had nothing to add here; it came back to me that I had spoken and acted all along without a thought of my friend.

“Have you not of late payed many visits to Shleenanaher; and have you not kept such visits quite dark from me?”

“I have, Dick.”

“Did you keep me ignorant on purpose?”

“I did! But those visits were made entirely on your account.”—I stopped, for a look of wonder and disgust spread over my companion’s face.

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“On my account! on my account! And was it, Arthur Severn, on my account that you asked, as I presume you did, Norah Joyce to marry you—I take it for granted that your conduct was honourable, to her at any rate—the woman whom I had told you I loved, and that I wished to marry, and that you assured me that you did not love, your heart being fixed on another woman? I hate to speak so, Art! but I have had black thoughts, and am not quite myself—was this all on my account?” It was a terrible question to answer, and I paused; Dick went on:—

“Was it on my account that you, a rich man, purchased the home that she loved; whilst I, a poor one, had to stand by and see her father despoiled day by day, and, because of my poverty, had to go on with a hateful engagement, which placed me in a false position in her eyes?”

Here I saw daylight. I could answer this scathing question:—

“It was, Dick—entirely on your account!” He drew away from me, and stood still, facing me in the twilight as he spoke:—

“I should like you to explain, Mr. Severn—for your own sake—a statement like that.”

Then I told him, with simple earnestness, all the truth. How I had hoped to further his love, since my own seemed so hopeless—how I had bought the land intending to make it over to him, so that his hands might be strong to woo the woman he loved—how this and [Pg 193] nothing else had taken me to Shleenanaher; and that whilst there I had learned that my own unknown love and Norah were one and the same—of my proposal to her; and here I told him humbly how in the tumult of my own passion I had forgotten his—whereat he shrugged his shoulders—and of my long anxiety till her answer was given. I told him that I had stayed away the first night at Roundwood, lest I should be betrayed into any speech which would lack in loyalty to him as well as to

her. And then I told him of her decision not to leave her father—touching but lightly on the confession of her love, lest I should give him needless pain; I did not dare to avoid it lest I should mislead him to his further harm. When I had finished he said softly:—

“Art, I have been in much doubt!”

I thought a moment, and then remembered that I had in my pocket the letters which had been handed to me at the hotel, and that amongst them there was one from Mr. Caicy at Galway. This letter I took out and handed to Dick.

“There is a letter unopened. Open it and it may tell you something. I know my word will suffice you; but this is in justice to us both.”

Dick took the letter and broke the seal. He read the letter from Caicy, and then holding up the deed so that the dying light of the west should fall on it, read it. The deed was not very long. When he finished it he stood for a moment with his hands down by his sides; then [Pg 194] he came over to me, and laying his hands, one of which grasped the deed, on my shoulders, said:—

“Thank God, Art, there need be no bitterness between me and thee—all is as you say, but oh! old fellow!”—and here he laid his head on my shoulder and sobbed—“my heart is broken! All the light has gone out of my life!”

His despair was only for a moment. Recovering himself as quickly as he had been overcome, he said:—

“Never mind, old fellow, only one of us must suffer; and, thank God! my secret is with you alone—no one else in the wide world even suspects. She must never know! Now tell me all about it; don’t fear that it will hurt me. It will be something to know that you are both happy. By the way, this had better be torn up; there is no need for it now!” Having torn the paper across, he put his arm over my shoulder as he used to do when we were boys; and so we passed into the gathering darkness.

Thank God for loyal and royal manhood! Thank God for the heart of a friend that can suffer and remain true! And thanks, above all, that the lessons of tolerance and forgiveness, taught of old by the Son of God, are now and then remembered by the sons of men.

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CHAPTER XI.

UN MAUVAIS QUART D’HEURE.

When we were strolling back to the hotel Dick said to me:—

“Cheer up, old fellow! You needn’t be the least bit downhearted. Go soon and see Joyce. He will not stand in the girl’s way, you may be sure. He is a good fellow, and loves Norah dearly—who could help it!” He stopped for a moment here, and choked a great sob, but went on bravely:—

“It is only like her to be willing to sacrifice her own happiness; but she must not be let do that. Settle the matter soon! Go to-morrow to see Joyce. I shall go up to Knocknacar instead of working with Murdock; it will leave the coast clear for you.” Then we went into the hotel; and I felt as if a great weight had been removed.

When I was undressing I heard a knock. “Come in,” I called, and Dick entered. Dear old fellow! I could see that he had been wrestling with himself, and had won. His eyes were red, but there was a noble manliness about him which was beyond description.

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“Art,” said he, “I wanted to tell you something, and I thought it ought to be told now. I wouldn’t like the night to close on any wrong impression between you and me. I hope you feel that my suspicion about fair-play and the rest of it is all gone.”

“I do! old fellow! quite.”

“Well, you are not to get thinking of me as in any way wronged in the matter, either by accident or design. I have been going over the whole matter to try and get the heart of the mystery; and I think it only fair to say that no wrong could be done to me. I never spoke a single word to Norah in my life. Nor did she to me. Indeed, I have seen her but seldom, though the first time was enough to finish me. Thank God! we have found out the true state of affairs before it was too late. It might have been worse, old lad! it might have been worse! I don’t think there’s any record—even in the novels—of a man’s life being wrecked over a girl he didn’t know. We don’t get hit to death at sight, old boy! It’s only skin deep this time, and though skin deep hurts the most, it doesn’t kill! I thought I would tell you what I had worked out, for I knew we were such old friends that it would worry you and mar your happiness to think I was wretched. I hope—and I honestly expect—that by to-morrow I shall be all right, and able to enjoy the sight of both your happiness—as, please God! I hope such is to be.”

We wrung each other’s hands; and I believe that from that moment we were closer friends than ever.[Pg 197] As he was going out Dick turned to me, and said:—

“It is odd about the legend, isn’t it! The Snake is in the Hill still, if I am not mistaken. He told me all about your visits and the sale of the land to you, in order to make mischief. But his time is coming; St. Patrick will lift that crozier of his before long!”

“But the Hill holds us all!” said I; and as I spoke there was an ominous feeling over me. “We’re not through yet; but it will be all right now.”

The last thing I saw was a smile on his face as he closed the door.

The next morning Dick started for Knocknacar. It had been arranged the night before that he should go on Andy’s car, as I preferred walking to Shleenanaher. I had more than one reason for so doing, but that which I kept in the foreground of my own mind—and which I almost persuaded myself was the chief—if not the only reason—was that I did not wish to be troubled with Andy’s curiosity and impertinent badinage. My real and secret reason, however, was that I wished to be alone so that I might collect my thoughts, and acquire courage for what the French call *un mauvais quart d’heure*.

In all classes of life, and under all conditions, this is an ordeal eminently to be dreaded by young men. No amount of reason is of the least avail to them—there is some horrible, lurking, unknown possibility which may defeat all their hopes, and may, in addition, add the flaming aggravation of making them appear ridiculous! I summed up my own merits, and, not being a fool, found considerable ground for hope. I was young, not bad looking—Norah loved me; I had no great bogey of a past secret or misdeed to make me feel sufficiently guilty to fear a just punishment falling upon me; and, considering all things, I was in a social position and of wealth beyond the dreams of a peasant—howsoever ambitious for his daughter he might be.

And yet I walked along those miles of road that day with my heart perpetually sinking into my boots, and harassed with a vague dread which made me feel at times an almost irresistible inclination to run away. I can only compare my feelings, when I drew in sight of the hill-top, with those which animate the mind of a young child when coming in sight of the sea in order to be dipped for the first time.

There is, however, in man some wholesome fear of running away, which at times either takes the place of resolution, or else initiates the mechanical action of guiding his feet in the right direction—of prompting his speech and regulating his movement. Otherwise no young man, or very few at least, would ever face the ordeal of asking the consent of the parents of his *inamorata*. Such a fear stood to me now; and with a seeming boldness I approached Joyce’s house. When I came to the gate I saw him in the field not far off, and went up to speak to him.

Even at that moment, when the dread of my soul[Pg 199] was greatest, I could not but recall an interview which I had had with Andy that morning, and which was not of my seeking, but of his.

After breakfast I had been in my room, making myself as smart as I could, for of course I hoped to see Norah—when I heard a knock at the door, timid but hurried. When I called to “come in,” Andy’s head appeared; and then his whole body was by some mysterious wriggle conveyed through the partial opening of the door. When within, he closed it, and, putting a finger to his lip, said in a mysterious whisper:—

“Masther Art!”

“Well Andy! what is it?”

“Whisper me now! Shure I don’t want to see yer ’an’r so onasy in yer mind.”

I guessed what was coming, so interrupted him, for I was determined to get even with him.

“Now, Andy! if you have any nonsense about your ‘Miss Norah,’ I don’t want to hear it.”

“Whisht! surr; let me shpake. I mustn’t kape Misther Dick waitin’. Now take me advice! an’ take a luk out to Shleenanaher. Ye may see some wan there what ye don’t ixpect!”—this was said with a sly mysteriousness, impossible to describe.

“No! no! Andy,” said I, looking as sad as I could, “I can see no one there that I don’t expect.”

“They do say, surr, that the fairies does take quare shapes; and your fairy girrul may have gone to[Pg 200] Shleenanaher. Fairies may want to take the wather like mortials.”

“Take the water, Andy! what do ye mean?”

“What do I mane! why what the quality does call say-bathin’. An’ maybe, the fairy girrul has gone too!”

“Ah! no, Andy,” said I, in as melancholy a way as I could, “my fairy girl is gone. I shall never see her again!”

Andy looked at me very keenly; and then a twinkle came in his eye and he said, slapping his thigh:—

“Begor! but I believe yer ’an’r is cured! Ye used to be that melancholy that bedad it’s meself what was gettin’ sarious about ye; an’ now it’s only narvous ye are! Well! if the

fairy is gone, why not see Miss Norah? Sure wan sight iv her 'd cure all the fairy spells what iver was cast. Go now, yer 'an'r, an' see her this day!"

I said with decision, "No, Andy, I will not go to-day to see Miss Norah. I have something else to do!"

"Oh, very well!" said he with simulated despondency. "If yer 'an'r won't, of course ye won't! but ye're wrong. At any rate, if ye're in the direction iv Shleenanaher, will ye go an' see th' ould man? Musha! but I'm thinkin' it's glad he'd be to see yer 'an'r."

Despite all I could do, I felt blushing up to the roots of my hair. Andy looked at me quizzically; and said oracularly, and with sudden seriousness:—

"Begor! if yer fairy gurrul is turned into a fairy com[[Pg 201](#)]plately, an' has flew away from ye, maybe ould Joyce too 'd become a leprachaun! Hould him tight whin ye catch him! Remimber, wid leprachauns, if ye wance let thim go ye may niver git thim agin. But if ye hould thim tight, they must do whatsumiver ye wish! So they do say—but maybe I'm wrong—I'm itherfarin' wid a gintleman as was bit be a fairy, and knows more nor mortials does about thim! There's the masther callin'. Good bye, surr, an' good luck!" and with a grin at me over his shoulder, Andy hurried away. I muttered to myself:—

"If anyone is a fairy, my bold Andy, I think I can name him. You seem to know everything!"

This scene came back to me with renewed freshness. I could not but feel that Andy was giving me some advice. He evidently knew more than he pretended; indeed, he must have known all along of the identity of my unknown of Knocknacar with Norah. He now also evidently knew of my knowledge on the subject; and he either knew or guessed that I was off to see Joyce on the subject of his daughter.

In my present state of embarrassment, his advice was a distinct light. He knew the people, and Joyce especially; he also saw some danger to my hopes, and showed me a way to gain my object. I knew already that Joyce was a proud man, and I could quite conceive that he was an obstinate one; and I knew from general experience of life that there is no obstacle so difficult to surmount as the pride of an obstinate man.[[Pg 202](#)] With all the fervour of my heart I prayed that, on this occasion, his pride might not in any way be touched, or arrayed against me.

When I saw him I went straight towards him, and held out my hand. He seemed a little surprised, but took it. Like Bob Acres, I felt my courage oozing out of the tips of my fingers, but with the remnant of it threw myself into the battle:—

“Mr. Joyce, I have come to speak to you on a very serious subject.”

“A sarious subject! Is it concarnin’ me?”

“It is.”

“Go on! More throuble, I suppose?”

“I hope not, most sincerely. Mr. Joyce, I want to have your permission to marry your daughter!” If I had suddenly turned into a bird and flown away, I do not think I could have astonished him more. For a second or two he was speechless, and then said, in an unconscious sort of way:—

“Want to marry me daughter!”

“Yes, Mr. Joyce! I love her very dearly! She is a pearl amongst women; and if you will give your permission, I shall be the happiest man on earth. I can quite satisfy you as to my means. I am well to do; indeed, as men go, I am a rich man.”

“Aye! sir, I don’t doubt. I’m contint that you are what you say. But you never saw me daughter—except that dark night when you took me home.”

“Oh yes, I have seen her several times, and spoken[Pg 203] with her; but, indeed, I only wanted to see her once to love her!”

“Ye have seen her—and she never tould me! Come wid me!” He beckoned me to come with him, and strode at a rapid pace to his cottage, opened the door, and motioned me to go in. I entered the room—which was both kitchen and living room—to which he pointed. He followed.

As I entered, Norah, who was sewing, saw me and stood up. A rosy blush ran over her face; then she grew as white as snow as she saw the stern face of her father close behind me. I stepped forward, and took her hand; when I let it go, her arm fell by her side.

“Daughter!”—Joyce spoke very sternly, but not unkindly. “Do you know this gentleman?”

“Yes, father!”

“He tells me that you and he have met several times. Is it throe?”

“Yes, father; but—”

“Ye never tould me! How was that?”

“It was by accident we met.”

“Always be accident?” Here I spoke:—

“Always by accident—on her part.” He interrupted me:—

“Yer pardon, young gentleman! I wish me daughter to answer me! Shpeak, Norah!”

“Always, father!—except once, and then I came to give a message—yes! it was a message, although from myself.”

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“What missage?”

“Oh father! don’t make me speak! We are not alone! Let me tell you, alone! I am only a girl—and it is hard to speak.”

His voice had a tear in it, for all its sternness, as he answered:—

“It is on a subject that this gentleman has spoke to me about—as mayhap he has spoke to you.”

“Oh father!”—she took his hand, which he did not withdraw, and, bending over, kissed it and hugged it to her breast. “Oh father! what have I done that you should seem to mistrust me? You have always trusted me; trust me now, and don’t make me speak till we are alone!”

I could not be silent any longer. My blood began to boil, that she I loved should be so distressed—whatsoever the cause, and at the hands of whomsoever, even her father.

“Mr. Joyce, you must let me speak! You would speak yourself to save pain to a woman you loved.” He turned to tell me to be silent, but suddenly stopped; I went on:—

“Norah,” he winced as I spoke her name, “is entirely blameless. I met her quite by chance at the top of Knocknacar when I went to see the view. I did not know who she was—I had not the faintest suspicion; but from that moment I loved her. I went next day, and waited all day in the chance of seeing her; I did see her, but again came away in ignorance even of her name. I sought her again, day after day, day after [Pg 205] day, but could get no word of her; for I did not know who she was, or where she came from. Then, by chance, and after many weary days, again I saw her in the Cliff Fields below, three days ago. I could no longer be silent, but told her that I loved her, and asked her to be my wife. She asked a while to think, and left me, promising to give me an answer on the next evening. I came again; and I got my answer.” Here Norah, who was sobbing, with her face turned away, looked round, and said:—

“Hush! hush! You must not let father know. All the harm will be done!” Her father answered in a low voice:—

“All that could be done is done already, daughter. Ye never tould me!”

“Sir! Norah is worthy of all esteem. Her answer to me was that she could not leave her father, who was all alone in the world!” Norah turned away again, but her father’s arm went round her shoulder. “She told me I must think no more of her; but, sir, you and I, who are men, must not let a woman, who is dear to us both make such a sacrifice.” Joyce’s face was somewhat bitter as he answered me:—

“Ye think pretty well of yerself, young sir, whin ye consider it a sacrifice for me daughter to shtay wid the father, who loves her, and who she loves. There was never a shadda on her life till ye came!” This was hard to hear, but harder to answer, and I stammered as I replied:—

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“I hope I am man enough to do what is best for her, even if it were to break my heart. But she must marry some time; it is the lot of the young and beautiful!” Joyce paused a while, and his look grew very tender as he made answer softly:—

“Aye! throe! throe! the young birds lave the nist in due sayson—that’s only natural.” This seemed sufficient concession for the present; but Andy’s warning rose before me, and I spoke:—

“Mr. Joyce, God knows! I don’t want to add one drop of bitterness to either of your lives! only tell me that I may have hope, and I am content to wait and to try to win your esteem and Norah’s love.”

The father drew his daughter closer to him, and with his other hand stroked her hair, and said, whilst his eyes filled with tears:—

“Ye didn’t wait for me esteem to win her love!” Norah threw herself into his arms and hid her face on his breast. He went on:—

“We can’t undo what is done. If Norah loves ye—and it seems to me that she does—do I shpeak throe, daughter?” The girl raised her face bravely, and looked in her father’s eyes:—

“Yes! father.” A thrill of wild delight rushed through me. As she dropped her head again, I could see that her neck had

“The colour of the budding rose’s crest.”

“Well! well!” Joyce went on, “Ye are both [Pg 207] young yit. God knows what may happen in a year! Lave the girl free a bit to choose. She has not met many gentlemen in her time; and she may desave herself. Me darlin’! whatever is for your good shall be done, plase God!”

“And am I to have her in time?” The instant I had spoken I felt that I had made a mistake; the man’s face grew hard as he turned to me:—

“I think for me daughter, sir, not for you! As it is, her happiness seems to be mixed up with yours—lucky for ye. I suppose ye must meet now and thin; but ye must both promise me that ye’ll not meet widout me lave, or, at laste, me knowin’ it. We’re not gentlefolk, sir, and we don’t undherstand their ways. If ye were of Norah’s and me own kind, I mightn’t have to say the same; but ye’re not.”

Things were now so definite that I determined to make one more effort to fix a time when my happiness might be certain, so I asked:—

“Then if all be well, and you agree—as please God you shall when you know me better—when may I claim her?”

When he was face to face with a definite answer Joyce again grew stern. He looked down at his daughter and then up at me, and said, stroking her hair:—

“Whin the threasure of Knockcalltecore is found, thin ye may claim her if ye will, an’ I’ll freely let her go!” As he spoke, there came before my mind the strong idea that we were all in the power of the Hill—[Pg 208] that it held us; however, as lightly as I could I spoke:—

“Then I would claim her now!”

“What do ye mane?”—this was said half anxiously, half fiercely.

“The treasure of Knockcalltecore is here; you hold her in your arms!” He bent over her:—

“Aye! the threasure sure enough—the threasure ye would rob me of!” Then he turned to me, and said sternly, but not unkindly:—

“Go, now! I can’t bear more at prisent; and even me daughter may wish to be for a while alone wid me!” I bowed my head and turned to leave the room; but as I was going out, he called me back:—

“Shtay! Afther all, the young is only young. Ye seem to have done but little harm—if any.” He held out his hand; I grasped it closely, and from that instant it seemed that

our hearts warmed to each other. Then I felt bolder, and stepping to Norah took her hand—she made no resistance—and pressed it to my lips, and went out silently. I had hardly left the door when Joyce came after me.

“Come agin in an hour,” he said, and went in and shut the door.

Then I wandered to the rocks and climbed down the rugged path into the Cliff Fields. I strode through the tall grass and the weeds, rank with the continuous rain, and gained the table rock. I climbed it, and sat where I first had met my love, after[Pg 209] I had lost her; and, bending, I kissed the ground where her feet had rested. And then I prayed as fervent a prayer as the heart of a lover can yield, for every blessing on the future of my beloved; and made high resolves that whatsoever might befall, I would so devote myself that, if a man’s efforts could accomplish it, her feet should never fall on thorny places.

I sat there in a tumult of happiness. The air was full of hope, and love, and light; and I felt that in all the wild glory and fulness of nature the one unworthy object was myself.

When the hour was nearly up I went back to the cottage; the door was open, but I knocked on it with my hand. A tender voice called to me to come in, and I entered.

Norah was standing up in the centre of the room. Her face was radiant, although her sweet eyes were bright with recent tears; and I could see that in the hour which I had passed on the rock, the hearts of the father and the child had freely spoken. The old love between them had taken a newer and fuller and more conscious life—based, as God has willed it with the hearts of men, on the parent’s sacrifice of self for the happiness of the child.

Without a word I took her in my arms. She came without bashfulness and without fear; only love and trust spoke in every look, and every moment. The cup of our happiness was full to the brim; and it seemed as though God saw, and, as of old with His completed[Pg 210] plan of the world, was satisfied that all was good.

We sat, hand in hand, and told again and again the simple truths that lovers tell; and we built bright mansions of future hope. There was no shadow on us, except the shadow that slowly wrapped the earth in the wake of the sinking sun. The long, level rays of sunset spread through the diamond panes of the lattice, grew across the floor, and rose on the opposite wall; but we did not heed them until we heard Joyce’s voice behind us:—

“I have been thinkin’ all the day, and I have come to believe that it is a happy day for us all, sir. I say, though she is my daughter, that the man that won her heart should be a

proud man, for it is a heart of gold. I must give her to ye. I was sorry at the first, but I do it freely now. Ye must guard and kape, and hould her as the apple of your eye. If ye should ever fail or falter, remimber that ye took a great thrust in takin' her from me that loved her much, and in whose heart she had a place—not merely for her own sake, but for the sake of the dead that loved her.” He faltered a moment, but then coming over, put his hand in mine, and while he held it there, Norah put her arm around his neck, and laying her sweet head on his broad, manly breast, said softly:—

“Father, you are very good, and I am very, very happy!” Then she took my hand and her father’s together, and said to me:—

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“Remember, he is to be as your father, too; and that you owe him all the love and honour that I do!”

“Amen,” I said, solemnly; and we three wrung each others’ hands.

Before I went away, I said to Joyce:—

“You told me I might claim her when the treasure of the Hill was found. Well! give me a month, and perhaps, if I don’t have the one you mean, I may have another.” I wanted to keep, for the present, the secret of my purchase of the old farm, so as to make a happy surprise when I should have actual possession.

“What do ye mane?” he said.

“I shall tell you when the month is up,” I answered; “or if the treasure is found sooner—but you must trust me till then.”

Joyce’s face looked happy as he strolled out, evidently leaving me a chance of saying good-bye alone to Norah; she saw it too, and followed him.

“Don’t go father!” she said. At the door she turned her sweet face to me, and with a shy look at her father, kissed me, and blushed rosy red.

“That’s right, me girl,” said Joyce, “honest love is without shame! Ye need never fear to kiss your lover before me.”

Again we stayed talking for a little while. I wanted to say good-bye again; but this last time I had to give the kiss myself. As I looked back from the gate, I saw father and daughter standing close together; he had his arm round her shoulder, and the dear head[Pg 212] that I loved lay close on his breast, as they both waved me farewell.

I went back to Carnaclif, feeling as though I walked on air; and my thoughts were in the heaven that lay behind my footsteps as I went—though before me on the path of life.

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CHAPTER XII.

BOG-FISHING AND SCHOOLING.

When I got near home, I met Dick, who had strolled out to meet me. He was looking much happier than when I had left him in the morning. I really believe that now that the shock of his own disappointment had passed, he was all the happier that my affair had progressed satisfactorily. I told him all that had passed, and he agreed with the advice given by Joyce, that for a little while, nothing should be said about the matter. We walked together to the hotel, I hurrying the pace somewhat, for it had begun to dawn upon me that I had eaten but little in the last twenty-four hours. It was prosaic, but true; I was exceedingly hungry. Joy seldom interferes with the appetite; it is sorrow or anxiety which puts it in deadly peril.

When we got to the hotel, we found Andy waiting outside the door. He immediately addressed me:—

“Och musha! but it’s the sad man I am this day! Here’s Masther Art giv over intirely to the fairies. An’ its leprachaun catchin’, he has been onto this blissed day. Luk at him! isn’t it full iv sorra he is. Give[Pg 214] up the fairies, Masther Art!—Do thry an make him, Misther Dick!—an’ take to fallin’ head over ears in love wid some nice young girrul. Sure, Miss Norah herself, bad as she is, ’d be betther nor none at all, though she doesn’t come up to Masther Art’s rulin’!”

This latter remark was made to Dick, who immediately asked him:—

“What is that, Andy?”

“Begor! yer ’an’r, Masther Art has a quare kind iv a girrul in his eye intirely, wan he used to be lukin’ for on the top iv Knocknacar—the fairy girrul yer ’an’r,” he added to me in an explanatory manner.

“I suppose, yer ’an’r,” turning to me, “ye haven’t saw her this day?”

“I saw nobody to answer your description, Andy; and I fear I wouldn’t know a fairy girl if I saw one,” said I, as I passed into the house followed by Dick, whilst Andy, laughing loudly, went round to the back of the house, where the bar was.

That was, for me at any rate, a very happy evening. Dick and I sat up late and smoked, and went over the ground that we had passed, and the ground that we were, please God, to pass in time. I felt grateful to the dear old fellow, and spoke much of his undertakings both at Knocknacar and at Knockalltecore. He told me that he was watching carefully the experiment at the former place as a guide to the latter. After some explanations, he said:—

“There is one thing there which rather disturbs me.[Pg 215] Even with the unusual amount of rain which we have had lately, the flow or drain of water from the bog is not constant; it does not follow the rains as I expected. There seems to be some process of silting, or choking, or damming up the walls of what I imagine to be the different sections or reservoirs of the bog. I cannot make it out, and it disturbs me; for if the same process goes on at Knockalltecore, there might be any kind of unforeseen disaster in case of the shifting of the bog. I am not at all easy about the way Murdock is going on there. Ever since we found the indication of iron in the bog itself, he has taken every occasion when I am not there to dig away at one of the clay banks that jut into it. I have warned him that he is doing a very dangerous thing, but he will not listen. To-morrow, when I go up, I shall speak to him seriously. He went into Galway with a cart the night before last, and was to return by to-morrow morning. Perhaps he has some game on. I must see what it is.”

Before we parted for the night we had arranged to go together in the morning to Knockalltecore, for of course I had made up my mind that each day should see me there.

In the morning, early, we drove over. We left Andy, as usual, in the breen at the foot of the hill, and walked up together. I left Dick at Murdock’s gate, and then hurried as fast as my legs could carry me to Joyce’s.

Norah must have had wonderful ears. She heard[Pg 216] my footsteps in the lane, and when I arrived at the gate she was there to meet me. She said, “Good morning,” shyly, as we shook hands. For an instant she evidently feared that I was going to kiss her, there in the open where someone might see; but almost as quickly she realized that she was safe so far, and we went up to the cottage together. Then came my reward; for, when the door was closed, she put her arms round my neck as I took her in my arms, and our lips met in a sweet, long kiss. Our happiness was complete. Anyone who has met the girl he loved the day after his engagement to her, can explain why or how—if any explanation be required.

Joyce was away in the fields. We sat hand in hand, and talked for a good while; but I took no note of time.

Suddenly Norah looked up. "Hush!" she said. "There is a step in the boren; it is your friend, Mr. Sutherland." We sat just a little further apart and let go hands. Then the gate clicked, and even I heard Dick's steps as he quickly approached. He knocked at the door; we both called out "Come in" simultaneously, and then looked at each other and blushed. The door opened and Dick entered. He was very pale, but in a couple of seconds his pallor passed away. He greeted Norah cordially, and she sweetly bade him welcome; then he turned to me:—

"I am very sorry to disturb you, old fellow, but would you mind coming down to Murdock's for a bit? There[Pg 217] is some work which I wish you to give me a hand with."

I started up and took my hat, whispered good-bye to Norah, and went with him. She did not come to the door; but from the gate I looked back and saw her sweet face peeping through the diamond pane of the lattice.

"What is it, Dick?" I asked, as we went down the lane.

"A new start to-day. Murdock evidently thinks we have got on the track of something. He went into Galway for a big grapnel; and now we are making an effort to lift it—whatever 'it' is—out of the bog."

"By Jove!" said I, "things are getting close."

"Yes," said Dick. "And I am inclined to think he is right. There is most probably a considerable mass of iron in the bog. We have located the spot, and are only waiting for you, so as to be strong enough to make a cast."

When we got to the edge of the bog we found Murdock standing beside a temporary jetty, arranged out of a long plank, with one end pinned to the ground and the centre supported on a large stone, placed on the very edge of the solid ground, where a rock cropped up. Beside him was a very large grappling-iron, some four feet wide, attached to a coil of strong rope. When we came up, he saluted me in a half surly manner, and we set to work, Dick saying, as we began:—

"Mr. Severn, Mr. Murdock has asked us to help in[Pg 218] raising something from the bog. He prefers to trust us, whom he knows to be gentlemen, than to let his secret be shared in with anyone else."

Dick got out on the end of the plank, holding the grapnel and a coil of the rope in his hand, whilst the end of the coil was held by Murdock.

I could see from the appearance of the bog that someone had been lately working at it, for it was all broken about as though to make a hole in it, and a long pole that lay beside where I stood was covered with wet and slime.

Dick poised the grapnel carefully, and then threw it out. It sank into the bog, slowly at first, but then more quickly; an amount of rope ran out which astonished me, for I knew that the bog must be at least so deep.

Suddenly the run of the rope ceased, and we knew that the grapnel had gone as far as it could. Murdock and I then held the rope, and Dick took the pole and poked and beat a passage for it through the bog up to the rock where we stood. Then he, too, joined us, and we all began to pull.

For a few feet we pulled in the slack of the rope. Then there was a little more resistance for some three or four feet, and we knew that the grapnel was dragging on the bottom. Suddenly there was a check, and Murdock gave a suppressed shout:—

“We have got it! I feel it! Pull away for your lives!”

We kept a steady pull on the rope. At first there [Pg 219] was simply a dead weight, and in my own mind I was convinced that we had caught a piece of projecting rock.

Murdock would have got unlimited assistance and torn out of the bog whatever it was that we had got hold of, even if he had to tear up the rocks by the roots; but Dick kept his head, and directed a long steady pull.

There was a sudden yielding, and then again resistance. We continued to pull, and then the rope began to come, but very slowly, and there was a heavy weight attached to it. Even Dick was excited now. Murdock shut his teeth, and scowled like a demon; it would have gone hard with anyone who came then between him and his prize. As for myself, I was in a tumult. In addition to the natural excitement of the time, there rose to my memory Joyce's words:—“When the treasure is found you may claim her if you will;”—and, although the need for such an occasion passed away with his more free consent, the effect that they had at the time produced on me remained in my mind.

Here, then, was the treasure at last; its hiding for a century in the bog had come to an end.

We pulled and pulled. Heavens! how we tugged at that rope. Foot after foot it came up through our hands, wet and slimy, and almost impossible to hold. Now and again it slipped from each of us in turns a few inches, and a muttered “steady! steady!” was all the sound heard. It took all three of us to hold the weight, and so no one could be spared to [Pg 220] make an effort to further aid us by any mechanical appliance. The

rope lay beside us in seemingly an endless coil. I began to wonder if it would ever end. Our breath began to come quickly, our hands were cramped. There came a new and more obstinate resistance. I could not account for it. Dick cried out:—

“It is under the roots of the bog; we must now take it up straight. Can you two hold on for a moment? and I shall get on the plank.” We nodded, breath was too precious for unnecessary speech.

Dick slacked out after we had got our feet planted for a steady resistance. He then took a handful of earth, and went out on the plank a little beyond the centre and caught the rope. When he held it firmly with his clay-covered hands, he said:—

“Come now, Art. Murdock, you stay and pull.” I ran to him, and, taking my hands full of earth, caught the rope also.

The next few minutes saw a terrible struggle. Our faces were almost black with the rush of blood in stooping and lifting so long and so hard, our hands and backs ached to torture, and we were almost in despair, when we saw the bog move just under us. This gave us new courage and new strength, and with redoubled effort we pulled at the rope.

Then up through the bog came a large mass. We could not see what it was, for the slime and the bog covered it solidly; but with a final effort we lifted it. Each[Pg 221] instant it grew less weighty as the resistance of the bog was overcome, and the foul slimy surface fell back into its place and became tranquil. When we lifted and pulled the mass on the rock bank, Murdock rushed forward in a frenzied manner, and shouted to us:—

“Kape back! Hands off! It’s mine, I say, all mine! Don’t dar even to touch it, or I’ll do ye a harrum! Here, clear off! this is my land! Go!” and he turned on us with the energy of a madman and the look of a murderer.

I was so overcome with my physical exertions that I had not a word to say, but simply in utter weariness threw myself upon the ground; but Dick, with what voice he could command, said:—

“You’re a nice grateful fellow to men who have helped you! Keep your find to yourself, man alive; we don’t want to share. You must know that as well as I do, unless your luck has driven you mad. Handle the thing yourself, by all means. Faugh! how filthy it is!” and he too sat down beside me.

It certainly was most filthy. It was a shapeless irregular mass, but made solid with rust and ooze and the bog surface through which it had been dragged. The slime ran from it

in a stream; but its filth had no deterring power for Murdock, who threw himself down beside it and actually kissed the nauseous mass as he murmured:—

“At last! at last! me threasure! All me own!”

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Dick stood up with a look of disgust on his handsome face:—

“Come away, Art; it’s too terrible to see a man degraded to this pitch. Leave the wretch alone with his god!” Murdock turned to us, and said with savage glee:—

“No! shtay! Sthay an’ see me threasure! It’ll make ye happy to think of afther! An’ ye can tell Phelim Joyce what I found in me own land—the land what I tuk from him.” We stayed.

Murdock took his spade and began to remove the filth and rubbish from the mass. And in a very few moments his discovery proclaimed itself.

There lay before us a rusty iron gun-carriage! This was what we had dragged with so much effort from the bottom of the bog; and beside it Murdock sat down with a scowl of black disappointment.

“Come away!” said Dick. “Poor devil, I pity him! It is hard to find even a god of that kind worthless!” And so we turned and left Murdock sitting beside the gun-carriage and the slime, with a look of baffled greed which I hope never to see on any face again.

We went to a brook at the foot of the hill, Andy being by this time in the sheebeen about half a mile off. There we cleansed ourselves as well as we could from the hideous slime and filth of the bog, and then walked to the top of the hill to let the breeze freshen us up a bit if possible. After we had been there for a while, Dick said:—

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“Now, Art, you had better run back to the cottage. Miss Joyce will be wondering what has become of you all this time, and may be frightened.” It was so strange to hear her—Norah, my Norah—called “Miss Joyce,” that I could not help smiling—and blushing whilst I smiled. Dick noticed and guessed the cause. He laid his hand on my shoulder, and said:—

“You will hear it often, old lad. I am the only one of all your friends privileged to hear of her by the name you knew her by at first. She goes now into your class and amongst your own circle; and, by George! she will grace it too—it or any circle—and they will

naturally give to her folk the same measure of courtesy that they mete to each other. She is Miss Joyce—until she shall be Mrs. Arthur Severn!”

What a delicious thrill the very thought sent through me!

I went up to the cottage, and on entering found Norah still alone. She knew that I was under promise not to tell anything of Murdock’s proceedings, but noticing that I was not so tidy as before—for my cleansing at the brook-side was a very imperfect one—went quietly and got a basin with hot water, soap, and a towel, and clothes brush, and said I must come and be made very tidy.

That toilet was to me a sweet experience, and is a sweet remembrance now. It was so wifely in its purpose and its method, that I went through it in a languorous manner—like one in a delicious dream. When, with a blush, she brought me her own brush and comb and began [Pg 224] to smooth my hair, I was as happy as it is given to a man to be. There is a peculiar sensitiveness in their hair to some men, and to have it touched by hands that they love is a delicious sensation. When my toilet was complete Norah took me by the hand and made me sit down beside her. After a pause, she said to me with a gathering blush:—

“I want to ask you something.”

“And I want to ask you something,” said I. “Norah, dear! there is one thing I want much to ask you.”

She seemed to suspect or guess what I was driving at, for she said:—

“You must let me ask mine first.”

“No, no!” I replied. “You must answer me; and then, you know, you will have the right to ask what you like.”

“But I do not want any right.”

“Then it will be all the more pleasure to me to give a favour—if there can be any such from me to you.”

Masculine persistence triumphed—men are always more selfish than women—and I asked my question:—

“Norah, darling—tell me when will you be mine—my very own? When shall we be married?”

The love-light was sweet in her eyes as she answered me with a blush that made perfect the smile on her lips:—

“Nay! You should have let me ask my question first.”

[Pg 225]

“Why so, dearest?”

“Because, dear, I am thinking of the future. You know, Arthur, that I love you, and that whatever you wish, I would and shall gladly do; but you must think for me too. I am only a peasant girl—”

“Peasant!” I laughed. “Norah, you are the best lady I have ever seen! Why, you are like a queen—what a queen ought to be!”

“I am proud and happy, Arthur, that you think so; but still I am only a peasant! Look at me—at my dress. Yes! I know you like it, and I shall always prize it because it found favour in your eyes!” She smiled happily, but went on:—

“Dear, I am speaking very truly. My life and surroundings are not yours. You are lifting me to a higher grade in life, Arthur, and I want to be worthy of it and of you. I do not want any of your family or your friends to pity you and say, ‘Poor fellow, he has made a sad mistake. Look at her manners—she is not of us.’ I could not bear to hear or to know that such was said—that anyone should have to pity the man I love, and to have that pity because of me. Arthur, it would break my heart!”

As she spoke the tears welled up in the deep dark eyes and rolled unchecked down her cheeks. I caught her to my breast with the sudden instinct of protection, and cried out:—

“Norah! no one on earth could say such a thing of you—you who would lift a man, not lower him. You [Pg 226] could not be ungraceful if you tried; and as for my family and friends, if there is one who will not hold out both hands to you and love you, he or she is no kin or friend of mine.”

“But, Arthur, they might be right! I have learned enough to know that there is so much more to learn—that the great world you live in is so different from our quiet, narrow life here. Indeed, I do not mean to be nervous as to the future, or to make any difficulties; but, dear, I should like to be able to do all that is right and necessary as your wife. Remember, that when I leave here I shall not have one of my own kin or friends to tell me anything—from whom I could ask advice. They do not themselves even know what I might want—not one of them all! Your world and mine, dear, are so different—as yet.”

“But, Norah, shall I not be always by your side to ask?”—I felt very superior and very strong as well as very loving as I spoke.

“Yes, yes; but oh! Arthur—can you not understand—I love you so that I would like to be, even in the eyes of others, all that you could wish. But, dear, you must understand and help me here. I cannot reason with you. Even now I feel my lack of knowledge, and it makes me fearful. Even now”—her voice died away in a sob, and she hid her beautiful eyes with her hand.

“My darling! my darling!” I said to her passionately—all the true lover in me awake—“Tell me what [Pg 227] it is that you wish, so that I may try to judge with all my heart.”

“Arthur! I want you to let me go to school—to a good school for a while—a year or two before we are married. Oh! I should work so hard! I should try so earnestly to improve—for I should feel that every hour of honest work brought me higher and nearer to your level!”

My heart was more touched than even my passion gave me words to tell—and I tried, and tried hard, to tell her what I felt—and in my secret heart a remorseful thought went up: “What have I done in my life to be worthy of so much love!”

Then, as we sat hand in hand, we discussed how it was to be done—for that it was to be done we were both agreed. I had told her that we should so arrange it that she should go for awhile to Paris, and then to Dresden, and finish up with an English school. That she could learn languages, and that amongst them would be Italian; but that she would not go to Italy until we went together—on our honeymoon. She bent her head and listened in silent happiness; and when I spoke of our journey together to Italy, and how we would revel in old-world beauty—in the softness and light and colour of that magic land—the delicate porcelain of her shell-like ear became tinged with pink, and I bent over and kissed it. And then she turned and threw herself on my breast, and hid her face.

As I looked I saw the pink spread downward and [Pg 228] grow deeper and deeper, till her neck and all became flushed with crimson. And then she put me aside, rose up, and with big brave eyes looked me full in the face through all her deep embarrassment, and said to me:—

“Arthur, of course I don’t know much of the great world, but I suppose it is not usual for a man to pay for the schooling of a lady before she is his wife—whatever might be arranged between them afterwards. You know that my dear father has no money for such a purpose as we have spoken of, and so if you think it is wiser, and would be less hardly spoken of in your family, I would marry you before I went—if—if you wished it. But we would wait till after I came from school to—to—to go to Italy,” and whilst the

flush deepened almost to a painful degree, she put her hands before her face and turned away.

Such a noble sacrifice of her own feelings and her own wishes—and although I felt it in my heart of hearts I am sure none but a woman could fully understand it—put me upon my mettle, and it was with truth I spoke:—

“Norah, if anything could have added to my love and esteem for you, your attitude to me in this matter has done it. My darling, I shall try hard all my life to be worthy of you, and that you may never, through any act of mine, decline for a moment from the standard you have fixed. God knows I could have no greater pride or joy than that this very moment I should call you my wife. My dear! my dear! I shall count [Pg 229] the very hours until that happy time shall come. But all shall be as you wish. You will go to the schools we spoke of, and your father shall pay for them. He will not refuse, I know, and what is needed he shall have. If there be any way that he would prefer—that suits your wishes—it shall be done. More than this! if he thinks it right, we can be married before you go, and you can keep your own name until my time comes to claim you.”

“No! no! Arthur. When once I shall bear your name I shall be too proud of it to be willing to have any other. But I want, when I do bear it, to bear it worthily—I want to come to you as I think your wife should come.”

“My dear, dear Norah—my wife to be—all shall be as you wish.”

Here we heard the footsteps of Joyce approaching.

“I had better tell him,” she said.

When he came in she had his dinner ready. He greeted me warmly.

“Won’t ye stay?” he said. “Don’t go unless ye wish to!”

“I think, sir, Norah wants to have a chat with you when you have had your dinner.”

Norah smiled a kiss at me as I went out. At the door I turned and said to her:—

“I shall be in the Cliff Field in case I am wanted.”

I went there straightway, and sat on the table rock in the centre of the fields, and thought and thought. [Pg 230] In all my thought there was no cloud. Each day—each hour seemed to reveal new beauties in the girl I loved, and I felt as if all the world were full of sunshine, and all the future of hope; and I built new resolves to be worthy of the good fortune which had come upon me.

It was not long before Norah came to me, and said that she had told her father, and that he wished to speak with me. She said that he quite agreed about the school, and that there would be no difficulty made by him on account of any false pride about my helping in the task. We had but one sweet minute together on the rock, and one kiss; and then, hand in hand, we hurried back to the cottage, and found Joyce waiting for us, smoking his pipe.

Norah took me inside, and, after kissing her father, came shyly and kissed me also, and went out. Joyce began:—

“Me daughter has been tellin’ me about the plan of her goin’ to school, an’ her an’ me’s agreed that it’s the right thing to do. Of coorse, we’re not of your class, an’ if ye wish for her it is only right an’ fair that she should be brought up to the level of the people that she’s goin’ into. It’s not in me own power to do all this for her, an’ although I didn’t give her the schoolin’ that the quality has, I’ve done already more nor min like me mostly does. Norah knows more nor any girl about here—an’ as ye’re to have the benefit of yer wife’s schoolin’, I don’t see no rayson why ye shouldn’t[Pg 231] help in it. Mind ye this—if I could see me way to do it meself, I’d work me arms off before I’d let you or any one else come between her an’ me in such a thing. But it’d be only a poor kind of pride that’d hurt the poor child’s feelins, an’ mar her future—an’ so it’ll be as ye both wish. Ye must find out the schools an’ write me about them when ye go back to London.” I jumped up and shook his hand.

“Mr. Joyce, I am more delighted than I can tell you; and I promise, on my honour, that you shall never in your life regret what you have done.”

“I’m sure of that—Mr.—Mr.—”

“Call me Arthur!”

“Well! I must do it some day—Arthur—an’ as to the matther that Norah told me ye shpoke of—that, if I’d wish it, ye’d be married first. Well! me own mind an’ Norah’s is the same—I’d rather that she come to you as a lady at wance—though God knows! it’s a lady she is in all ways I iver see one in me life—barrin’ the clothes!”

“That’s true, Mr. Joyce! there is no better lady in all the land.”

“Well, that’s all settled. Ye’ll let me know in good time about the schools, won’t ye? an’ now I must get back to me work,” and he passed out of the house, and went up the hillside.

Then Norah came back, and with joy I told her that all had been settled; and somehow, we seemed to have taken another step up the ascent that leads [Pg 232] from earth to heaven—and that all feet may tread, which are winged with hope.

Presently Norah sent me away for a while, saying that she had some work to do, as she expected both Dick and myself to come back to tea with them; and I went off to look for Dick.

I found him with Murdock. The latter had got over his disappointment, and had evidently made up his mind to trust to Dick's superior knowledge and intelligence. He was feverishly anxious to continue his search, and when I came up we held a long discussion as to the next measure to be taken. The afternoon faded away in this manner before Murdock summed up the matter thus:—

“The chist was carried on the gun-carriage, and where wan is th' other is not far off. The min couldn't have carried the chist far, from what ould Moynahan sez. His father saw the min carryin' the chist only a wee bit.” Dick said:—

“There is one thing, Murdock, that I must warn you about. You have been digging in the clay bank by the edge of the bog. I told you before how dangerous this is; now, more than ever, I see the danger of it. It was only to-day that we got an idea of the depth of the bog, and it rather frightens me to think that with all this rain falling you should be tampering with what is more important to you than even the foundations of your house. The bog has risen far too much already, and you have only to dig perhaps [Pg 233] one spadeful too much in the right place and you'll have a torrent that will sweep away all you have. I have told you that I don't like the locality of your house down in the hollow. If the bog ever moves again, God help you! You seem also to have been tampering with the stream that runs into the Cliff Fields. It is all very well for you to try to injure poor Joyce more than you have done—and that's quite enough, God knows!—but here you are actually imperilling your own safety. That stream is the safety valve of the bog, and if you continue to dam up that cleft in the rock you will have a terrible disaster. Mind now! I warn you seriously against what you are doing. And besides, you do not even know for certain that the treasure is here. Why, it may be anywhere on the mountain, from the brook below the boreen to the Cliff Fields; is the off chance worth the risk you run?” Murdock started when he mentioned the Cliff Fields, and then said suddenly:—

“If ye're afraid ye can go. I'm not.”

“Man alive!” said Dick, “why not be afraid if you see cause for fear? I don't suppose I'm a coward any more than you are, but I can see a danger, and a very distinct one, from

what you are doing. Your house is directly in the track in which the bog has shifted at any time this hundred years; and if there should be another movement, I would not like to be in the house when the time comes.”

“All right!” he returned doggedly, “I’ll take me [Pg 234] chance; and I’ll find the treasure, too, before many days is over!”

“Well; but be reasonable also, or you may find your death!”

“Well, if I do that’s me own luk out. Ye may find yer death first!”

“Of course I may, but I see it my duty to warn you. The weather these last few weeks back has been unusually wet. The bog is rising as it is. As a matter of fact, it is nearly a foot higher now than it was when I came here first; and yet you are doing what must help to rise it higher still, and are weakening its walls at the same time.” He scowled at me as he sullenly answered:—

“Well, all I say is I’ll do as I like wid me own. I wouldn’t give up me chance iv findin’ the treasure now—no, not for God himself!”

“Hush! man; hush!” said Dick sternly, as we turned away. “Do not tempt Him, but be warned in time!”

“Let Him look out for Himself, an’ I’ll look out for meself,” he answered with a sneer. “I’ll find the treasure—an’ if need be in spite iv God an’ iv the Divil too!”

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CHAPTER XIII.

MURDOCK’S WOOING.

I think it was a real pleasure to Dick to get Norah’s message that he was expected to tea that evening. Like the rest of his sex, he was not quite free from vanity; for when I told him, his first act was to look down at himself ruefully, and his first words were:—

“But I say, old lad! look at the mess I’m in; and these clothes are not much, anyhow.”

“Never mind, Dick, you are as good as I am.”

“Oh, well!” he laughed, “if you’ll do, I suppose I needn’t mind. We’re both pretty untidy. No, begad,” he added, looking me all over, “you’re not out of the perpendicular with regard to cleanliness, anyhow. I say, Art! who’s been tidying you up? Oh! I see!

Forgive me, old lad; and quite natural, too! Miss Joyce should see you blush, Art! Why, you are as rosy as a girl!”

“Call her ‘Norah,’ Dick! it is more natural, and I am sure she will like it better. She is to look on you as a brother, you know!”

“All right, Art,” he answered heartily, “but you[Pg 236] must manage it for me, for I think I should be alarmed to do so unless I got a lead; but it will come easy enough after the first go off. Remember, we both always thought of her as ‘Norah!’”

We went down towards the brook and met with Andy, who had the car all ready for us.

“Begor yer ‘an’rs,” said he, “I thought yez was lost intirely, or that the fairies had carried yez off; both iv yez this time.”—This with a sly look at me, followed by a portentous wink to Dick. “An’ I’m thinkin’ it’s about time fur somethin’ to ate. Begor! but me stummick is cryin’ out that me throat is cut!”

“You’re quite right, Andy, as to the fact,” said Dick, “but you are a little antecedent.”

“An’ now what’s that, surr? Begor! I niver was called that name afore. Shure, an’ I always thry to be dacent—divvle a man but can tell ye that! Antidacent indeed! Well now! what nixt?”

“It means, Andy, that we are going to be carried off by the fairies, and to have some supper with them too; and that you are to take this half-crown, and go over to Mother Kelligan’s, and get her to try to dissipate that unnatural suspicion of capital offence wreaked on your thoracic region. Here, catch! and see how soon you can be off!”

“Hurroo! Begor, yer ‘an’r, it’s the larned gintleman y’ are! Musha! but ye ought to be a councillor intirely! Gee-up! ye ould corncrake!” and Andy was off at full speed.

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When we had got rid of him, Dick and I went down to the brook, and made ourselves look as tidy as we could. At least Dick did; for, as to myself, I purposely disarranged my hair—unknown to Dick—in the hope that Norah would take me in hand again, and that I might once more experience the delicious sensation of a toilet aided by her sweet fingers.

Young men’s ideas, however, are very crude; no one who knew either the Sex or the World would have fallen into such an absurd hope. When I came in with Dick, Norah—in spite of some marked hints, privately and secretly given to her—did not make either the slightest remark on my appearance, or the faintest suggestion as to improving it.

She had not been idle in the afternoon. The room, which was always tidy, was as prettily arranged as the materials would allow. There were some flowers, and flag-leaves, and grasses tastefully placed about; and on the table, in a tumbler, was a bunch of scarlet poppies. The tablecloth, although of coarse material, was as white as snow, and the plates and cups, of common white and blue, were all that was required.

When Joyce came in from his bedroom, where he had been tidying himself, he looked so manly and handsome in his dark frieze coat with horn buttons, his wide unstarched shirt-collar, striped waistcoat, and cord breeches, with grey stockings, that I felt quite proud of him. There was a natural grace and dignity about him which suited him so well, that I had no wish to see him other[Pg 238] than a peasant. He became the station, and there was no pretence. He made a rough kind of apology to us both:—

“I fear ye’ll find things a bit rough, compared with what you’re accustomed to, but I know ye’ll not mind. We have hardly got settled down here yit; and me sisther, who always lives with us, is away with me other sisther that is sick, so Norah has to fare by herself; but gentlemen both—you, Mr. Sutherland; and you, Arthur—you’re welcome!

We sat down to table, and Norah insisted on doing all the attendance herself. I wanted to help her, and, when she was taking up a plate of cakes from the hearth, stooped beside her and said:—

“May not I help, Norah? Do let me!”

“No—no, dear,” she whispered. “Don’t ask me now—I’m a little strange yet—another time. You’ll be very good, won’t you, and help me not to feel awkward?”

Needless to say I sat at table for the rest of the meal, and feasted my eyes on my darling, whilst in common with the others I enjoyed the good things placed before us. But when she saw that I looked too long and too lovingly, she gave me such an imploring glance from her eloquent eyes, that for the remainder of the time I restrained both the ardour of my glance and its quantity within modest bounds.

Oh! but she was fair and sweet to look upon! Her dark hair was plainly combed back, and coiled modestly[Pg 239] round her lovely head. She had on her red petticoat and chintz body, that she knew I admired so much; and on her breast she wore a great scarlet poppy, whose splendid colour suited well her dark and noble beauty. At the earliest opportunity, when tea was over, I whispered to her:—

“My darling, how well the poppy suits you. How beautiful you are. You are like the Goddess of Sleep!” She put her finger to her lips with a happy smile, as though to forbid me to pay compliments—before others. I suppose the woman has never yet

been born—and never shall be—who would not like to hear her praises from the man she loves.

I had eaten potato-cakes before, but never such as Norah had made for us; possibly they seemed so good to me because I knew that her hands had made them. The honey, too, was the nicest I had tasted—for it was made by Norah's bees. The butter was perfect—for it was the work of her hands!

I do not think that a happier party ever assembled round a tea-table. Joyce was now quite reconciled to the loss of his daughter, and was beaming all over; and Dick's loyal nature had its own reward, for he too was happy in the happiness of those he loved—or else I was, and am, the most obtuse fool, and he the most consummate actor, that has been. As for Norah and myself, I know we were happy—as happy as it is given to mortals to be.

When tea was over, and Norah fetched her father's [Pg 240] pipe and lighted it for him, she said to me with a sweet blush, as she called me by my name for the first time before a stranger:—

“I suppose, Arthur, you and Mr. Sutherland would like your own cigars best; but if you care for a pipe there are some new ones here,” and she pointed them out. We lit our cigars, and sat round the fire; for in this damp weather the nights were getting a little chilly. Joyce sat on one side of the fire and Dick on the other. I sat next to Dick, and Norah took her place between her father and me, sitting on a little stool beside her father and leaning, her head against his knees, whilst she took the hand that was fondly laid over her shoulder and held it in her own. Presently, as the grey autumn twilight died away, and as the light from the turf fire rose and fell, throwing protecting shadows, her other hand stole towards my own—which was waiting to receive it; and we sat silent for a spell, Norah and I in an ecstasy of quiet happiness.

By-and-by we heard a click at the latch of the gate, and firm, heavy footsteps coming up the path. Norah jumped up, and peeped out of the window.

“Who is it, daughter?” said Joyce.

“Oh father! it is Murdock! What can he want?”

There was a knock at the door. Joyce rose up, motioning to us to sit still, laid aside his pipe, and went to the door and opened it. Every word that was spoken was perfectly plain to us all.

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“Good evenin’, Phelim Joyce!”

“Good evenin’! You want me?”

“I do.” Murdock’s voice was fixed and firm, as of one who has made up his mind.

“What is it?”

“May I come in? I want to shpake to ye particular.”

“No, Murtagh Murdock! Whin a man comes undher me roof by me own consint, I’m not free wid him to spake me mind the same as whin he’s outside. Ye haven’t thrated me well, Murdock. Ye’ve been hard wid me; and there’s much that I can’t forgive!”

“Well! if I did, ye gev me what no other man has ever gave me yit widout repintin’ it sore. Ye sthruck me a blow before all the people, an’ I didn’t strike ye back.”

“I did, Murtagh; an’ I’m sorry for it. That blow has been hangin’ on me conscience iver since. I would take it back if I could; God knows that is throe. Much as ye wronged me, I don’t want such a thing as that to remimber when me eyes is closin’. Murtagh Murdock, I take it back, an’ gladly. Will ye let me?”

“I will—on wan condition.”

“What is it?”

“That’s what I’ve kem here to shpake about; but I’d like to go in.”

“No! ye can’t do that—not yit, at any rate, till I know what ye want. Ye must remimber, Murtagh, that I’ve but small rayson to thrust ye!”

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“Well, Phelim, I’ll tell ye; tho’ it’s mortal hard to name it shtandin’ widout the door like a thramp! I’m a warrum man; I’ve a power iv money put by, an’ it brings me in much.”

“I know! I know!” said the other bitterly. “God help me! but I know too well how it was gother up.”

“Well! niver mind that now; we all know that. Anyhow, it *is* gother up. An’ them as finds most fault wid the manes, mayhap ’d be the first to get hould iv it av they could. Well, anyhow, I’m warrum enough to ask any girrul in these parts to share it wid me. There’s many min and weemin between this and Galway, that’d like to talk over the fortin iv their daughter wid Murtagh Murdock—for all he’s a gombeen man.”

As he spoke, the clasp of Norah's hand and mine grew closer. I could feel in her clasp both a clinging, as for protection, and a restraining power on myself. Murdock went on:—

“But there's none of thim girls what I've set me harrt on—except wan!” He paused. Joyce said quietly:—

“An' who, now, might that be?”

“Yer own daughther, Norah Joyce!” Norah's hand restrained me as I was instinctively rising.

“Go on!” said Joyce, and I could notice that there was a suppressed passion in his voice:—

“Well, I've set me harrt on her; and I'm willin' to settle a fortin on her, on wan condition.”

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“And what, now, might that be?”—the tone was of veiled sarcasm.

“She'll have all the money that I settle on her to dale wid as she likes—that is, the intherest iv it—as long as she lives; an' I'm to have the Cliff Fields that is hers, as me own to do what I like wid, an' that them an' all in them belongs to me.” Joyce paused a moment before answering:—

“Is that all ye have to say?” Murdock seemed nonplussed, but after a slight pause he answered:—

“Yis!”

“An' ye want me answer?”

“Iv coorse!”

“Thin, Murtagh Murdock, I'd like to ask ye for why me daughter would marry you or the like of you? Is it because that yer beauty 'd take a young girl's fancy—you that's known as the likest thing to a divil in these parts! Or is it because of yer kind nature? You that tried to ruin her own father, and that drove both her and him out of the home she was born in, and where her poor mother died! Is it because yer character is respected in the counthry wheriver yer name is known?—” Here Murdock interrupted him:—

“I tould ye it’s a warrum man I am”—he spoke decisively, as if his words were final—
“an’ I can, an’ will, settle a fortin on her.” Joyce answered slowly and with infinite
scorn:—

“Thank ye, Mr. Murtagh Murdock, but me daughter is not for sale!”

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There was a long pause. Then Murdock spoke again, and both suppressed hate and
anger were in his voice:—

“Ye had bettther have a care wid me. I’ve crushed ye wance, an’ I’ll crush ye agin! Ye
can shpake scornful yerself, but mayhap the girrul would give a different answer.”

“Then, ye had bettther hear her answer from herself. Norah! Come here, daughter!
Come here!”

Norah rose, making an imperative sign to me to keep my seat, and with the bearing of
an empress passed across to the door and stood beside her father. She took no notice
whatever of her wooer.

“What is it, father?”

“Now, Murdock, spake away! Say what ye have to say; an’ take yer answer from her
own lips.” Murdock spoke with manifest embarrassment:—

“I’ve been tellin’ yer father that I’d like ye for me wife!”

“I’ve heard all you said!”

“An’ yer answer?”

“My father has answered for me!”

“But I want me answer from yer own lips. My! but it’s the handsome girrul ye are this
night!”

“My answer is ‘No!’” and she turned to come back.

“Shtay!” Murdock’s voice was nasty, so nasty that instinctively I stood up. No person
should speak like that to the woman I loved. Norah stopped. “I sup[Pg 245]pose ye
won’t luk at me because ye have a young shpark on yer hands. I’m no fool! an’ I know
why ye’ve been down in the Fields. I seen yez both more nor wance; an’ I’m makin’ me
offer knowin’ what I know. I don’t want to be too hard on ye, an’ I’ll say nothin’ if ye
don’t dhrive me to. But remimber ye’re in me power; an’ ye’ve got to plase me in wan
way or another. I knew what I was doin’ whin I watched ye wid yer young shpark! Ye

didn't want yer father to see him nigh the house! Ye'd bettther be careful, the both of ye. If ye don't intind to marry me, well, ye won't; but mind how ye thrate me or shpake to me, here or where there's others by; or be th' Almighty! I'll send the ugly whisper round the counthry about ye——”

Flesh and blood could not stand this. In an instant I was out in the porch, and ready to fly at his throat; but Norah put her arm between us.

“Mr. Severn!” she said in a voice which there was no gainsaying, “my father is here. It is for him to protect me here, if any protection is required from a thing like that!” The scorn of her voice made even Murdock wince, and seemed to cool both Joyce and myself, and also Dick, who now stood beside us.

Murdock looked from one to another of us for a moment in amazement, and then with a savage scowl, as though he were looking who and where to strike with venom, he fixed on Norah—God forgive him!

“An' so ye have him at home already, have ye! An' yer father prisent too, an' a witness. It's the sharp[Pg 246] girrul ye are, Norah Joyce, but I suppose this wan is not the first!” I restrained myself simply because Norah's hand was laid on my mouth; Murdock went on:—

“An' so ye thought I wanted ye for yerself! Oh no! It's no bankrup's daughther for me; but I may as well tell ye why I wanted ye. It was because I've had in me hands, wan time or another, ivery inch iv this mountain, bit be bit, all except the Cliff Fields; and thim I wanted for purposes iv me own—thim as knows why, has swore not to tell”—this with a scowl at Dick and me—“But I'll have thim yit; an' have thim too widout thinkin' that me wife likes sthrollin' there wid sthrange min!”

Here I could restrain myself no longer; and to my joy on the instant—and since then whenever I have thought of it—Norah withdrew her hand as if to set me free. I stepped forward, and with one blow fair in the lips knocked the foul-mouthed ruffian head over heels. He rose in an instant, his face covered with blood, and rushed at me. This time I stepped out, and with an old football trick, taking him on the breast-bone with my open hand, again tumbled him over. He arose livid—but this time his passion was cold—and standing some yards off, said, whilst he wiped the blood from his face:—

“Wait! Ye'll be sorry yit ye shtruck that blow! Aye! ye'll both be sorry—sad an' sorry—an' for shame that ye don't reckon on! Wait!”—I spoke out:—

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“Wait! yes, I shall wait, but only till the time comes to punish you. And let me warn you to be careful how you speak of this lady! I have shown you already how I can deal with you personally; next time—if there be a next time——” Here Murdock interrupted *sotto voce*—

“There ’ll be a next time; don’t fear! Be God but there will!” I went on:—

“I shall not dirty my hands with you but I shall have you in gaol for slander.”

“Gaol me, is it?” he sneered. “We’ll see. An’ so ye think ye’re going to marry a lady, whin ye make an honest woman iv Norah Joyce, do ye? Luk at her! an’ it’s a lady ye’re goin’ to make iv her, is it? An’ thim hands iv hers, wid the marks iv the milkin’ an’ the shpade on to them. My! but they’ll luk well among the quality! won’t they?” I was going to strike him again, but Norah laid her hand on my arm; so smothering my anger as well as I could, I said:—

“Don’t dare to speak ill of people whose shoes you are not worthy to black; and be quick about your finishing your work at Shleenanaher, for you’ve got to go when the time is up. I won’t have the place polluted by your presence a day longer than I can help.”

Norah looked wonderingly at me and at him, for he had given a manifest start. I went on:—

“And as for these hands”—I took Norah’s hands in mine—“perhaps the time may come when you will pray for the help of their honest strength—pray with all the[Pg 248] energy of your dastard soul! But whether this may be or not, take you care how you cross her path or mine again, or you shall rue it to the last hour of your life. Come, Norah, it is not fit that you should contaminate your eyes or your ears with the presence of this wretch!” and I led her in. As we went I heard Joyce say:—

“An’ listen to me! Niver you dare to put one foot across me mearin’ again; or I’ll take the law into me own hands!”

Then Dick spoke:—

“An’ hark ye, Mr. Murdock! remember that you have to deal with me also in any evil that you attempt!” Murdock turned on him savagely:—

“As for you, I dismiss ye from me imploymint. Ye’ll niver set foot on me land agin! Away wid ye!”

“Hurrah!” shouted Dick. “Mr. Joyce, you’re my witness that he has discharged me, and I am free.” Then he stepped down from the porch, and said to Murdock, in an exasperating a way as he could:—

“And, dear Mr. Murdock, wouldn’t it be a pleasure to you to have it out with me here, now? Just a simple round or two—to see which is the best man? I am sure it would do you good—and me too! I can see you are simply spoiling for a fight. I promise you that there will be no legal consequences if you beat me, and if I beat you I shall take my chance. Do let me persuade you! Just one round;” and he began to take off his coat. Joyce, however, stopped him, speaking gravely:—

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“No! Mr. Sutherland, not here! and let me warn ye, for ye’re a younger man nor me, agin such anger. I sthruke that man wance, an’ it’s sorry I am for that same! No! not that I’m afeered of him”—answering the query in Dick’s face—“but because, for a full-grown man to sthrike in anger is a sarious thing. Arthur there sthruke not for himself, but for an affront to his wife that’s promised, an’ he’s not to be blamed.” Norah here took my arm and held it tight; “but I say, wid that one blow that I’ve sthruke since I was a lad on me mind, ‘Never sthrike a blow in anger all yer life long, unless it be to purtect one ye love!’” Dick turned to him, and said heartily:—

“You’re quite right, Mr. Joyce, and I’m afraid I acted like a cad. Here! you clear off! Your very presence seems to infect better men than yourself, and brings them something nearer to your level. Mr. Joyce, forgive me! I promise I’ll take your good lesson to heart.”

They both came into the room; and Norah and I looking out of the window—my arm being around her—saw Murdock pass down the path and out at the gate.

We all took our places once again around the fire. When we sat down Norah instinctively put her hands behind her, as if to hide them—that ruffian’s words had stung her a little; and as I looked, without, however, pretending to take any notice, I ground my teeth. But with Norah such an ignoble thought could be but a passing one; with a quick blush she laid her hand open on my knee, so that, as the firelight fell [Pg 250] on it, it was shown in all its sterling beauty. I thought the opportunity was a fair one, and I lifted it to my lips and said:—

“Norah! I think I may say a word before your father and my friend. This hand—this beautiful hand,” and I kissed it again, “is dearer to me a thousand times, because it can do, and has done, honest work; and I only hope that in all my life I may be worthy of it.” I was about to kiss it yet again, but Norah drew it gently away. Then she shifted

her stool a little, and came closer to me. Her father saw the movement, and said simply:—

“Go to him, daughter. He is worth it!—he sthruck a good blow for ye this night.” And so we changed places, and she leaned her head against my knee; her other hand—the one not held in mine—rested on her father’s knee.

There we sat and smoked and talked for an hour or more. Then Dick looked at me and I at him, and we rose. Norah looked at me lovingly as we got our hats. Her father saw the look, and said:—

“Come, daughter! if you’re not tired, suppose we see them down the boreen.”

A bright smile and a blush came in her face; she threw a shawl over her head, and we went all together. She held her father’s arm and mine; but by-and-by the lane narrowed, and her father went in front with Dick, and we two followed.

Was it to be wondered at, if we did lag a little behind[Pg 251] them?—and if we spoke in whispers?—or, if now and again, when the lane curved and kindly bushes projecting threw dark shadows, our lips met?

When we came to the open space before the gate, we found Andy. He pretended to see only Dick and Joyce, and saluted them:—

“Begor! but it’s the fine night, it is, Mither Dick, though more betoken the rain is comin’ on agin soon. A fine night, Mither Joyce! and how’s Miss Norah?—God bless her! Musha! but it’s sorry I am that she didn’t walk down wid ye this fine night! An’ poor Masther Art—I suppose the fairies has got him agin?” Here he pretended to just catch sight of me. “Yer ’an’r, but it’s the sorraful man I was—shure, an’ I thought ye was tuk aff be the fairies—or, mayhap, it was houldin’ a leprachaun that ye wor. An’ my! but there’s Miss Norah, too, comin’ to take care iv her father! God bless ye, Miss Norah, Acushla!—but it’s glad I am to see ye!”

“And I’m always glad to see you, Andy,” she said, and shook hands with him.

Andy took her aside, and said, in a staccato whisper intended for us all:—

“Musha! Miss Norah, dear, may I ax ye somethin’?”

“Indeed you may, Andy. What is it?”

“Well, now, it’s throubled in me mind I am about Masther Art—that young gintleman beyant ye, talkin’ t’ yer father!” the hypocritical villain pointed me out,[Pg 252] as

though she did not know me. I could see in the moonlight the happy smile on her face as she turned towards me.

“Yes, I see him!” she answered.

“Well, Miss Norah, the fairies got him on the top iv Knocknacar, and ivir since he’s been wandherin’ round lukin’ fur wan iv thim. I thried to timpt him away be tellin’ him iv nice girruls iv these parts—real girruls, not fairies. But he’s that obstinate he wouldn’t luk at wan iv thim—no, nor listen to me, ayther.”

“Indeed!” she said, her eyes dancing with fun.

“An’, Miss Norah, dear, what kind iv a girrul d’ye think he wanted to find?”

“I don’t know, Andy—what kind?”

“Oh, begor! but it’s meself can tell ye! Shure, it’s a long, yalla, dark girrul, shtreaky—like—like he knows what—not quite a faymale nagur, wid a rid petticoat, an’ a quare kind iv an eye!”

“Oh, Andy!” was all she said, as she turned to me smiling.

“Get along, you villain!” said I, and I shook my fist at him in fun; and then I took Norah aside, and told her what the “quare kind iv an eye” was that I had sought—and found.

Then we two said “Good-night” in peace, whilst the others in front went through the gate. We took—afterwards—a formal and perfectly decorous farewell, only shaking hands all round, before Dick and I mounted the car. Andy started off at a gallop, and his “Git[Pg 253] up, ye ould corncrake!” was lost in our shouts of “Good-bye!” as we waved our hats. Looking back, we saw Norah’s hands waving as she stood with her father’s arm around her, and her head laid back against his shoulder, whilst the yellow moonlight bathed them from head to foot in a sea of celestial light.

And then we sped on through the moonlight and the darkness alike, for the clouds of the coming rain rolled thick and fast across the sky.

But for me the air was all aglow with rosy light, and the car was a chariot flying swiftly to the dawn!