

By JANE BARLOW

COPYRIGHT STORY. THERESA'S TWO FORTUNES

Author of "England Studies," Etc.

MARTIN BYRNE wished to goodness that the young rapscallion had kept out of Clonowen; he might have gone anywhere else at all, so long as he had done that; and in this wish several of Martin's neighbours shared. The object of it was Tom Clancy, who had lately come to stay with his great-aunt, old Mrs. Finny, up at Knockree. If you said that Tom was good-looking and pleasant-mannered, you mentioned all his best qualities; but the worst of them was that they were of a sort which will often dispose people to credit their possessor with a variety of other merits, wherein he may be entirely deficient. And amongst those who entertained such a delusion about Tom Clancy was Martin Byrne's only sister Theresa. This, for every reason, was a great annoyance to Martin. Ever since their parents' death he had been managing Theresa's affairs, which had prospered so well under his six year's guardianship that the few head of cattle originally left to her for her portion, were now quite a goodly herd, worth near a couple of hundred pounds on any market day. Moreover, he had every penny of the profits which had accrued from the milk and butter and sold-off calves put up for her in the Ballyraheen Bank. So that Theresa was a really considerable heiress, fully entitled to have a brilliant match made for her among the well-to-do bachelors of the neighbourhood.

Now, to such an alliance, Martin had long looked forward with satisfaction and confidence, the other party to it being his friend Fergus Moore, of Mangansdown. Fergus was a thriving farmer, and a very decent man. The latter consideration weighed heavily with Martin, for he did not at all approve the plan of appraising a husband's merits solely by the amount of his worldly gear. "Much good," he used to reflect, "a girl'll get out of a bit of land, and a bit of stock, if there was to be some ill-conditioned, drunken young reprobate, or some cross-tempered old nuygur, walkin' in and out of her house all the days of her life. She'd be better stopping where she is."

Nor was he indifferent to the fact that his sister and his friend were well inclined towards one another. "For," as he reflected again, "there's some good enough things I never could abide the thoughts of myself. Parsnips, now, is no harm for anybody that likes them, but I wouldn't be aitin' them for sixpence a bite. And it might aye be happenin' that way wid them two, only it didn't be good luck. Sure Fergus thinks there isn't the like of her in the Kingdom of Connaught; and Theresa was friendly wid him ever since she could run on her feet." As affairs were in this propitious state at a time when Theresa was going on for nineteen, and when Martin Byrne had begun to think about those McGowan in a way which made it appear all the more desirable that his sister should be provided with a house of her own, everything tended towards the speedy making up of one batch at least.

Therefore no cow's horn certainly can ever have been crookeder than was the chance that must needs bring Tom Clancy just then into the parish of Clonowen. Recently and quickly did Martin rue it, for he noticed, or fancied that he noticed, from the very first appearance of the new comer at Maas, a tendency on Theresa's part to look down on Fergus Moore, to flout him to his face, and behind his back to speak of him disparagingly. And the cause of this untoward change soon became evident. It was

Christmas time, when a round of festivities among the neighbours gave the young folk opportunities for making the acquaintance of old Mrs. Finny's great-nephew; and on these occasions Theresa clearly showed her readiness to accept the attentions of the handsome stranger, who offered them with more than equal readiness to the most handsomely dowered girl in his company.

Of these things Martin Byrne was a profoundly dissatisfied spectator, for they seemed to threaten him with a most undesirable brother-in-law. Tom Clancy was not only poor but a n'er-do-weel, and a loafer, if not something more reprehensible. Kilkearns, where he had been living in an uncle's household, was not so far from Clonowen, but that certain rumours had travelled thither. There could be no doubt that he had quitted Kilkearns under a cloud, which involved his character for honesty. The fact was that the coming to light of some underhand transactions with respect to the sale of hay at Moyne's fair had been the immediate cause of his departure. "So now," Martin said to himself, "me fine gentleman's landed here to get what he can out of his unlucky old aunt, that has little enough. But if he thinks to be gettin' a hold of Theresa, and her fortune as well, let me tell the young scamp he's mistook, for as long as I have control of them anyway, and that'll be till she comes of age—better than two year off yet. Again that time, please the pigs, she might get a thrille more wit than to be takin' up wid a fellow who hasn't a penny to his name, unless by reason of some schemin' tricks."

After a while Martin did take leave to hint at this determination to Theresa, and also to a third person, who would, he considered, probably pass it on to young Clancy. The result was, he thought, satisfactory, for he observed that Tom and Theresa became thenceforth less demonstrative in their manner to one another. Yet notwithstanding his favourable inferences, a more acute spectator might have doubted whether his communication had in reality proved as efficacious as he supposed in averting the peril of an imprudent marriage from his sister, and of a disappointment from his friend.

One bright, soft-aired April afternoon, Theresa Byrne was standing in the cow-lane, and looking over the wooden gate into a very green, long-shaped field, where cattle were grazing. With her was a girl of about her own age, smaller, slimmer, and prettier, as she might rather easily be, for Theresa's broad, fresh-coloured face had in truth no pretensions to any special beauty. Likewise the other wore her dark hair elaborately puffed and waved, and was clad in much frilled and fur-bowed pink; while Theresa's light-brown locks were twisted up in any way, except a becoming one, and a coarse linen bib covered her plain bluish calico. This companion of hers was Fanny Fitzgibbon, the eldest of the village schoolmaster's many children, and an old acquaintance of Theresa's.

The two girls stood for a while silently watching the beasts at their leisurely and perpetual rest. Several glossy black Kerries, a couple of pretty strawberry cows, and of sedate shorthorns, with one delicate fawn-coloured Airedale heifer, and sundry promising calves made up a herd which no farmer need have scorned to put on his land.

"Sure, it's well to be you, Theresa," Fanny said at last. "Grand they are. But if it was me that owned them, or

the worth of them, it's not much longer I'd be stoppin' in this little doleful place, 'deed I wouldn't."

"Well now, Fanny," said Theresa, "it's just the other way round with me; for if it wasn't only for them, I'm thinkin' I'd have a better chance of gettin' out of this."

"And what might be the raison of that at all?" said Fanny.

"They're the plague of me life," Theresa declared. "Many's the time I hate the sight of them, when Martin does be blatherin' about the short step down this road that's the farthest way he'll need to drive them one of these days. It's my belief he thinks all he has to do is to be drivin' them, and myself off after them, wherever he and the other folk take the notion into their heads. But if it wasn't be reason of them, I might go where I liked for aught he'd care, and along wid—" She broke off abruptly, looking somehow not reluctant to be urged to continue.

"If I was you," said Fanny, "I'd be very apt just to sell the whole of them eliver, and clane out of that, and get the bit of money when you want it, instead of to have them streelin' about in the field there, and no manner of good to you, only harm."

"But they don't rightly belong to me till I'm over one-and-twenty, another couple of years yet, and that's the worst of it," said Theresa.

"Sure, what matter?" said Fanny. "Once you'd got the price of them in your pocket, there you'd be, and off you might go as soon as you pleased. Couldn't you find some respectable, knowledgeable man who'd undertake the job of sellin' them for you at one of the cattle fairs? Unbeknownst to your brother, of course. That's what I'd do."

Though Theresa only replied disconsolately: "It's aye talkin'," she was evidently struck by the suggestion, and seemed, Fanny thought, to be meditating deeply about something, when they soon afterwards parted at the end of the cow-lane. On her homeward way whom should Fanny meet but Tom Clancy, and what should they stop to discuss but the sale of Fanny Byrne's cattle? No doubt they both had her interests much at heart.

By this time Tom had become very thoroughly tired of his residence at Clonowen. There was little, he found, beyond merely board and lodging to be had in his old great-aunt's poverty-stricken establishment, and lack of opportunity alone kept him from seeking more comfortable and profitable quarters. As he considered the question of ways and means, two things impressed themselves strongly and clearly upon his mind. The first was the easiness of winning Theresa Byrne; the second, the


difficulty of coming by her cattle; and they were what he wanted. In point of fact, though he would rather have had both conjointly than neither, he would vastly have preferred to acquire the latter separately. This, however, seemed at the outset altogether impossible, and would perhaps have remained so, had he not made the acquaintance of Fanny Fitzgibbon, whose pretty face set his tolerably keen wits working busily, while her own were nimble and full of resource.

Not many days after Fanny's visit Theresa had a long interview with Tom Clancy in his great-aunt's kitchen. Dear Mrs. Finny could be hardly more than a spectator, and when her guest took leave said:

"Ah, my dear, if talkin' could cure the crathur, ye should have it well mended between you; but 'tis past prayin' for I'm afraid entirely." For she had gathered from fragments of sentences which had reached her that their discourse was about the serious indisposition of one of her calves. The subject under discussion was, however, far more important, and Theresa returned home pledged to a large and daring enterprise. Tom had pointed out to her that as there was absolutely no prospect of obtaining her brother's consent to their wishes, and as he could by law keep her fortune in his hands for the next two years, through a stratagem only could she hope to gain immediate possession of what was by rights her own property. Theresa having assented to this, Tom proceeded to unfold, partially at least, a carefully thought out plan, and as she listened while he glibly explained his various arrangements, she felt both pleased and proud at the notion that he should have taken so much trouble to devise such ingenious expedients, all just for the sake of herself. It was in a flutter of gratified vanity and admiration for his cleverness that she had agreed without demur to the carrying out of his design.

Next week brought Easter, when, according to his custom, Martin Byrne set off on a few days' excursion. He was very anxious that Theresa should accompany him, but she, in pursuance of her plans, declared herself engaged to spend the holidays with her cousins at neighbouring Rathkelly, and on the Sunday afternoon, not without some remorseful misgivings, she saw him start half-disappointed. For she knew that she was bidding him a farewell much longer than he supposed, and that she intended a journey immensely further than to Rathkelly.

Very early on the Monday morning Theresa packed as much as she could carry in a hand-bag and a bundle, and set out, ostensibly to meet the long-car for Rathkelly at the cross-roads. The dew still lay dim and white as she went down the cow-lane, for the sun was only



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