

Serial Story.

"KITTY."

From "HOME LIFE."

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

As if mentioning the name had acted as a sort of spell, George Raymond was at that moment entering at the hall-door. He sent a message to ask if Miss O'Grady could see him for a few moments.

"Go and see him, child," said the old man, and Kitty went downstairs. "Has your brother come home?" That was Mr Raymond's first question. "No," said Kitty. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it may be important to him and to you to know where he is, and what he was doing yesterday. Look here," he said gently, "the fact is there has been a bad accident—a man has been found dead, and there were questions asked about your brother. I came here as soon as I could, to warn you and him. Don't faint now, for pity's sake," he said, with all a man's horror of such an event. "You'll want all your senses about you."

"I never fainted in my life," said Kitty. "What am I to do? What is this you mean?"

"Listen now, and don't be too much alarmed. A man called James Sullivan was found dead last evening. That he died from a gunshot wound is certain; also there are bruises on his body. No gun has been found with him, and therefore suicide is out of the question," and then he stopped.

Kitty nodded, speak she could not.

"Of the three men who found and carried him home, none know exactly, or can quite remember now, the spot where he was lying. You know what a bog is," continued he, impatiently, stirred greatly by sympathy and pity for her—one part the same as another—water, mud, little tufts of grass. Of course, they ought to have left him there, and sent for somebody who would have recognised the exact spot; but they carried the body home, and when the police came they had to wait till daylight to try and discover some trace of the accident. Now your brother's name has been mentioned; the coroner will hold an inquest to-day. Where is your brother? It is most important that we should know."

Kitty was able to whisper, "Do they suspect him?"

"I am afraid they do; there has been ill-will between them. Even the police know that. Then there is the fact of your brother threatening the other; and now Sullivan is found dead from loss of blood from a gunshot wound, and your brother was out shooting yesterday. We must look at the matter in this light."

Desmond O'Grady had been out shooting—a score of people were ready to prove that. His gun stood now in its accustomed place; but when it had been placed there, or by whom, nobody could tell. He must have come very quietly home, laid by the gun, and then gone out again— that much, and no more, was certain.

"He will come back," said Kitty, looking into George Raymond's face for the hope and confidence she did not feel.

"He will be mad unless he does. Now, you are a brave girl—be prepared for what may be said and done. Take care that your father does not hear it—too soon." For Mr Raymond knew better than she did that sooner or later Mr O'Grady must know all.

"You are very good and kind," she said; and Mr Raymond felt that he could ask no better reward.

"I am going now to the inquest," he said, "and shall see you again. Depend on me. If you hear anything of your brother, let me know. You must be very cautious and very silent," and then he went away, leaving poor Kitty very desolate and almost stunned with this new, strange blow.

The inquest was at an end. It was with difficulty that Mr Raymond found this out when he arrived, so

loud and hot was the debate. What was the verdict? "Found dead, evidently from gunshot and other wounds: how received, there was not evidence to show."

The Coroner took George Raymond into a corner. "It's over," he said, "and a good thing too. Lucky that the jury were all of the O'Grady faction—all friends to Mister Desmond."

"I think their verdict a very just one," said Mr Raymond, coldly.

"Yes, yes, sir. Of course, it was according to their oath; but the Sullivans have been talking, and they have put it about that Mister Desmond has had a finger in the matter. They can do no harm, I suppose—a verdict is a verdict, and nobody saw Mister Desmond next or near the place, that's one thing. Sorry I'd be to have a hair of his head suffer. Sure, was not it the old gentleman got me into the place I have?"

"He may have shot himself." "That's the thing! He may; and I told this to them. But you see, sir, where is the gun? I ask ye that. Them unlucky men took him up, and nobody can swear to the exact place he was found. I've had the peepers and a dozen men trapesing all over the bog, but not a sign of the gun."

"Somebody must have seen him leave his house with it—his servant; was he examined?"

"Faith, he just was," responded the Coroner, with a melancholy sigh; "and he told us nothing at all. He has been drinking hard ever since, and nothing can get it out of his head but that is was young O'Grady who did it."

"But what about the gun? It hasn't been found, you say—is it in his house? Has that been searched?"

"Every blessed corner of it; and Ryan swore that, to the best of his belief—not that I think much of that same, Mr Raymond—his master had sent the gun to be mended. He wouldn't, or he couldn't tell us to whom it was sent; but anyways, I wish from my heart we could find it; and another thing, sir—I wish we could find out where Mister Desmond was about that time. Not that I think he had any act or part in it, but just to stop their tongues. That Ryan, when he has the sip taken, says at nothing; and he has been saying that the verdict is a false one, and that we all know Mister Desmond did it."

Indeed, the voice of the said Ryan was just at that moment being uplifted in very drunken declarations that his master was a murdered man.

"Killed—don't ye be talkin', boys! It's meself knows who did it. Arran, don't tell me. Oh, them O'Grady's are onlucky! Is it a verdict? Who cares for it! I say, an' I'll swear, too, that Mr Desmond killed him! Where was the gun? Who else did it? I ax you if it was his own gun that did it. Shure, it would be found!" and so forth.

But the jurymen stoutly held to their opinion, and maintained that there was really no evidence at all to show how those wounds had been inflicted.

George Raymond went out of the smoky room into the purer air to try and "think out" this problem. So far, Desmond O'Grady was safe enough. If he were really innocent, why should he so far play the part of a guilty man by flight? and, guilty or not, where was he? In vain George Raymond asked himself that question.

The questions that pressed so heavily on George Raymond's mind were more easily solved by the popular prejudice or feeling. Almost everybody thought that Desmond O'Grady had a hand in the murder. Not that they blamed him greatly. Those whose lives have been spent in Ireland know how high party feeling runs, and how little is thought of human life when disputes arise. So the matter rested; and far and near

went the report, as palpable as air, and as impossible to catch and imprison, that it was young O'Grady who had killed James Sullivan, and was "hiding in consequence." There was not a bit of use in talking of want of evidence to connect one name with the other. Evidence, indeed! That was by no means necessary. Every man, woman, and child felt that "Mister Desmond" was to be pitied, not blamed. All except the smaller faction of the Sullivans, who, to be sure, were loud in their denunciations of the murderer and quite ready to hang him without judge or jury.

And it was this news that George Raymond had to bring back and break (as if any such news can be broken!) to Desmond O'Grady's father and sister. Kitty's eyes rather than her lips asked the question that he replied to by saying:

"The verdict is that there is no evidence to show how he came by his death."

Then she said, "They say Desmond did it."

"For heaven's sake, who told you that?" he asked with an ignorance of Irish matters which would have made Kitty laugh at another time. Had not Peggy heard it from the donkey boy, who in his turn had heard it from the dairy woman? Why, the news had spread like wildfire. Was the poor old father still ignorant of the death of James Sullivan and of Desmond's disappearance? George Raymond asked that question.

"He suspects something," said Kitty. "He is so quick. He guesses things. What are we to say to him?"

He could have blessed her for using that little word "we," yet was ready to blame himself for selfishness. "Sooner or later he will know that your brother is not at home," he said.

"That's certain. Perhaps he may come back to-day. What folly or weakness was it that took him away just now?"

"You don't believe that he did this thing?" said the girl, flushing an angry red on cheek and temple. "You don't speak," she went on. "I know what that means. Go away, Mr Raymond—go, sir. If you believe Desmond killed this man, why do you want here? I am his sister and I know he is innocent, and you dare to tell me you think it possible that he is not."

"It is not much matter what I think," he said, calmly. "You know very well I would not harm a hair of his head."

"I know nothing about it," said the girl willfully and hotly, then the passion broke, as a wave breaks against a cliff and spends itself, and she began to cry. The world seemed a bitter and a cold place. There was nothing but trouble in it, and Kitty's heart was full to overflowing—too full to allow her to be capable of just reasoning, or even common fairness.

"You are angry with me," said Mr Raymond, "but if you would consider—I am very anxious to see the best way out of this trouble. Now, I won't discuss the question of your brother's share in the matter, but supposing that he is quite free from it, and of course you know him best, he has acted foolishly in staying away. Those who dislike him say he has good reason for doing so. There is another thing—if we could trace the missing gun. They say that a gun there must have been."

"I see. And if it isn't found?"

"Matters remain where they are."

"Listen, Mr Raymond." She was very pale now, and her hands were quite cold and damp, and her voice had lost its old sweet ring and sounded like that of some old, old woman.

"Could they—now, you know—could they do anything to Desmond now—I mean if they thought there was any reason to think him guilty?"

"If there was any new evidence to connect him with it," said George Raymond. Then he started forward, putting out his hands. He thought she was about to faint. She didn't lose consciousness, but there was a mo-

mentary deathly feeling, as if her senses were leaving her. For a moment only it lasted—one brief, blessed moment, during which she supported her upon his arm. Then she looked up, with a sort of sobbing sigh.

"I see how it is," she said. "Well, Mr Raymond, it is good of you to tell me, and you have been very kind. You will forgive me if I've been rude and cross—"

"He caught her small hands in his. "Some time or other," he said. "I may be able to bring you some comfort. Believe me when I say it would cost me little to give you my life. You little know how much it pains me to cause you a moment's sorrow. Now, good bye—good bye; let me know the very moment you hear anything of your brother."

"And will you come and tell me if you hear anything more?" she said. She spoke with a direct simplicity that went to his heart; and he promised to come, and then said good bye again, and went away.

CHAPTER V.

"WITH SORROW TO THE GRAVE."

Kitty went sorrowfully back to her father's room. The poor old man knew nothing of what had been going on, and his questions pierced poor Kitty's heart. Desmond, where was he? The lad would come to mischief, said Mr O'Grady. Was there no news? Why was Kitty so dull and silent? The poor thing kept back her tears, and put on a sort of a smile.

As the twilight was fast changing into the more sombre hues of night, a visitor walked slowly along the avenue, and after some hesitation, as if not quite sure of a welcome, made his way to the front door. After the good old fashion of the days gone by, when the "open door" and hospitality of the O'Grady's of Ballybrophy were things often spoken of, that door was not locked. The visitor pushed it open with an unsteady hand, and looked into the hall on which the door opened. A lamp was dimly burning within. Then he entered and walked upstairs, holding by the banisters, and stopping once or twice, as if either ill or giddy. He had a heavy, red face, ruddy now from drink, and he was just drunk enough to be very pot-valiant.

Peggy (little thinking that such a visitor would dare to intrude) had gone to the kitchen, and poor Kitty was sitting by her father's chair, a newspaper in her hand, from which she had been reading, though the letters had danced before her eyes.

A step outside the door, then the door pushed open. "Who the deuce is that?" cried the old man, with surprise and anger.

Kitty started up. She put out her hands as if to shield her father from some unknown or but faintly contemplated danger.

"Who am I, is it?" said a harsh voice, with a sort of defiance in it. "I'll soon tell ye, sir. It's meself that is not a bit ashamed nor afraid nayther of me name nor me nation. I'm Mick Ryan, wan of the Ryans of Drumsbane, nayther more nor less; an' it's what I'm come to tell ye all is this—that it was yer fine bould son that shot me mather beyant; and for all the coroners and juries in Ireland, I hope to live to see him hanged for it!"

"Stop!" shouted the old man, in a voice at once so strange and terrible that Kitty shook from terror. "What's that you're saying? You lie, and you know it's a lie."

"A lie, is it? Faith, sorra a lie, Yer fine son, it was he shot me mather; an' he's hidin' now. Shot him dead! an' then they got twelve honest men, by the way, to say nobody knew how it kem about. But for all that, maybe Mister Desmond 'll find it isn't so easy to hide; an' maybe it's meself won't be glad to see him hangin'. Why not?"

"But these last words fell on unheeding ears. "Is this true, Kitty?" said Mr O'Grady. A deathly pallor had fallen on his fine face.

"No, no, father!" she said. "It's not true—not what this man says. Don't you listen to him—don't believe him."

Kitty clung to her father, and put her hands to his ears, as if to keep him from hearing those bitter words.

"Leave the room—leave the house!" he said distinctly, but faintly.

"When I please, and as I please," said the man; but the next moment a strong hand was laid on his arm, and before he could recover either his breath or his impudent assurance, he was whirled out of the room.

"He's gone—e's gone, daddy!"