

said Kitty, kneeling by her father's side.

The old man put out his hand. It rested on the girl's head with a gesture of blessing.

"Speak to me—speak to your own Kitty!" she cried, and she looked into his face and saw—

What? That awful change that comes but once upon the face of mortals—that strange and solemn stillness and pallor which have no likeness to life. She put her lips close to his ear for some word that might convey a farewell; for though Kitty had never seen a dying person, she knew—she knew! There is something within us that tells us when the end has come.

Listen as she might, it was but a half-sigh, and a broken whisper that met her ear; and she fancied—was it fancy?—that the pale lips said her brother's name. Perhaps; she never could be quite sure, for then the head fell gently back on the pillow, the hand dropped from Kitty's clasp, and she knew that she was fatherless. She knelt by his side still, as if movement might bring on the surer knowledge that she yet did not need, for she knew that he was gone from her.

Presently the door opened; it was Peggy, hastily summoned by George Raymond, who had been the agent by whose action Mr Mick Ryan had been forcibly expelled. One glance showed the old woman the truth.

"Miss Kitty," she said, "get up, child. The poor master's gone. The heavens be his bed! Get up, miss; you can't help him anyways now."

Kitty stood up and looked at the still, white face, and then Peggy's words, so sternly true—for her poor old father was far removed now from her little cares and fondnesses—struck the girl's heart. That's what we feel most, just at the very first moment when our dear lie before us. They have done with us. We may weep and lament them; our tears fall unheeded by them, our cries are spent in vain. Afterwards may come hope and comfort, but not at that first moment which breaks the closely-tied bonds, and puts an awful gulf between the one who has just gone from us and we who linger here.

"Cry your fill, alanna," said Peggy, and his own tears were flowing fast; and it was in Peggy's arms that the poor thing shed the first tears, which seemed to come with actual bodily pain.

George Raymond waited downstairs as patiently as best he might. As for Mr Mick Ryan, short work had been made of that hero. Mr Raymond, though not a young man, was strong and active, more than a match, you may be sure, for the feeble, unsteady creature whose daily potations of bad whiskey had several times brought him within the grasp of the demon delirium tremens. Get the strong man hold him gently, and took care not to hurt him, thinking, "Poor wretch! this is what drink brings a man to; and after all, there is love and regret for a dead master and friend at the bottom of all this impudent presumption." Yes, he held him as gently as he could, though those strong arms of his could have made Mick Ryan a helpless cripple for life, and he took him to the hall-door and set him free.

Then he went back to the drawing-room and waited—almost in darkness, save for the small light that the hall lamp threw in at the open door. How very still everything was! How distinctly one heard the ticking of the great old clock! Sometimes the wind shook the window frame, and once George Raymond almost fancied he heard a step on the gravel without.

Then he heard a door somewhere upstairs shut, and then steps. He knew very well that those steps were not those of Kitty; rather of trembling age, that comes softly, and as if there was nothing worth much haste, as if caution and care burdened the heavy feet and bowed down the weary limbs. Peggy it was—Peggy, with very red eyes and a melancholy looking candle in her trembling hand.

"Is that you, sir?" she said. "The poor master's gone, sir. It's a sad and sorrowful night for us all."

"And your young mistress?"

"I've just come from her, sir. She's half dead with cryin' and mournin', an' I think she's asleep. 'Tis the sore wakin' she'll have."

"Then I cannot see her to-night?"

"No, sir, no. Let her sleep, if she can; she has the youth in her, an'

'tis aisy to wear them out. The likes of them can't bear much sorrow. If we only knew where Mister Desmond was," said the poor old woman sadly. "Shure he ought to be here, now that his father is dead an' his poor sister all alone in the world."

But nobody in or about Ballybrophy knew where Desmond O'Grady was, or why he had disappeared so strangely. Mr Raymond could give her no comfort on this point.

"I shall come early in the morning," he said. "Tell your young mistress I must see her—I have something to say to her that she will be glad to hear."

All night long in the still chamber where the dead man lay lights were burning, and watchers sat in patient attendance, after the kindly Irish fashion that has surely something to recommend it.

Madame Bourke had sent a special messenger, who came straight as the crow flies, over miles of bog and country roads, with a kindly little note to Kitty, and all sorts of messages, which would be followed by herself as speedily as possible.

"Mr Raymond wants to see you, Miss Kitty," said Peggy. "The long night was over, and the tardy day stole in at the shrouded windows."

"I can't see him," she said. "But he says he won't keep you a moment," said Peggy. "It's about Master Desmond, I think, miss."

"Desmond!" cried Kitty, starting up, "has he heard from him?"

"No, miss, not that; but he has something to tell you about him, Shure you'd better come and see the gentleman. Just smooth your hair, alanna, an' don't keep him waiting."

George Raymond knew the step very well, you may be sure, though it was very slow, and unlike the rapid, lightsome spring with which Kitty generally descended the stairs. Then the door opened and she came in and shook hands with him; and, looking into his face, she read two things—one, that he was very sorry for her loss; but the other—could it be possible that he had any good news for her?

"You have something to tell me," she said. "What is it?"

"I have heard nothing about your brother," said he, at once replying to her eager and anxious look. That was one thing about George Raymond—straight to the point he always went.

Her face fell, and she withdrew the hand that she had allowed him to retain for a moment.

"But I have something to tell you that you will like to hear. You know about the accident—how people spoke, and what suspicions attached to your brother? Well, I was determined to try myself, and search for the gun that must have been used by the man if he shot himself. Everybody seemed to think that that question was set at rest by the assertion made by Ryan as to the man having gone out without his gun; but the gun has been found."

"Where? Who found it?"

"Not far from the spot where he fell—perhaps, indeed, on the spot, for the man who took him home could not clearly fix on the place. One said it was close to the bog; another, that it was in the bog; and it is not easy to distinguish one part of it from another," added Mr Raymond, who remembered that bog and its mountainous tufts of grass and heather, and its unvaried surface of brown turf.

"You found it?" she said.

Then he told her the story of its discovery; how he had determined to make an effort to search the ground more thoroughly, in spite of the wisecracks of the village, who were ready to swear that "all was done that men could do," and, like the hopeless work of the Jacobite Cavalier, "all had been done in vain." Why, they said, the man was dead—would soon be buried; the "crown" had sat on him; and though they were "certain sure" that Desmond O'Grady had killed him, yet the said Desmond had fled; and, with the easy going nature of the Irish, they asked what an earth was the good of making more fuss about the matter?

George Raymond listened impatiently to about half these speeches; then he went to the little police station, and there he got what he wanted, viz., two men who would accompany him in his search; not strictly legal, perhaps, but one must stretch the line sometimes, and head constable Malligan was a friend of Desmond O'Grady,

and quite willing to lend his aid to anything that might help to raise the veil which shrouded both the death of Jimmy Sullivan and the fate of young O'Grady.

Had the men who came across James Sullivan's body been careful to note the exact spot where it lay before they moved it, it would have been easy to make a close search; but in the fright and wonder of the moment one was ready to swear to one place, another equally willing to declare that they had found him in quite another. One thing they had agreed upon, at least without much dissension, and that was that the body had been found some yards from a little stream or ditch where the black bog water slowly crept along; and all along the bank they had scouted for the possible gun that might have been lying there, but nothing was to be found save the brown turf and dry heather. George Raymond who had share of northern perseverance, was not to be foiled by disappointment. Steadily refusing to think of its being a case of murder, there remained but one possibility—he must have shot himself. To be sure, there were some odd looking bruises on the poor dead body, in addition to the more deadly wound from which—as the doctors swore—he must have bled to death within a very short period after the gun had been fired; and though a man might, in a fit of madness shoot himself, he would hardly bruise himself also.

It was George Raymond who was to find the missing gun. He found it, half buried in a great tuft of heather and moss cotton, just where the palsied hand of the wounded man must have let it fall. The first impulse was to stoop and pick it up, the second was of a more calculating and prudent nature. He stood still and called the others.

"Bedad, he's got something," said one of them, and they ran to the spot. It was plain enough then how the accident had happened; for the old, much worn, and often-mended gun had at last finished its career—it had burst, the contents going through its owner's body, and part of the stock hitting him severely.

"Oh, holy Biddy!" said one of the men, piously. "It's the world's wonder of a gun now, so it is." Neither gunsmith nor any other smith could make it a gun again.

"I always told him he'd get his death by the same gun," said the other official.

They took it up carefully, and then they saw a brace of dead snipe close by, marked with blood not their own. It was plain enough now, James Sullivan had died from the bursting of his own gun. The dead birds must have fallen with the gun, at the same moment, from his agonised hand; and then he must have exerted his last energy in crossing the little stream, for there were the marks of a man's feet in the thick black mould. This was certain, for it was at the other side of the stream that the body had been found, and nobody had ever thought of what was the truth—that the injured man had desperately sought the nearest way home, and had sunk exhausted from loss of blood, after staggering some yards. There could be no reasonable doubt now about the affair. The wounds were precisely those that would be caused by such an accident; and Desmond O'Grady was quite cleared from all suspicion.

Kitty heard what George Raymond had to tell her. "Oh, you good, kind man!" she said, and the light came into her eyes and the colour to her cheeks—only for a moment. Then the sadness of the present came back to her and clouded her face. Her father lay dead upstairs, and Desmond—where was he? They might ask that question, but no answer came to it. He was gone, never again to come back to the old house where he had spent his careless, thoughtless life; never again to hear the voice of the old man who had gone away from them all to the far off land of shadows.

George Raymond had something else to say to Kitty, but not then when the first sharpness of sorrow made her sacred in his eyes. Afterwards, perhaps, when a little time had passed, and her sorrow should be softer, and this mystery about Desmond should be cleared up, then, perhaps, she might know that he cared for her, and she might be willing to come to him and be his love. His wife—the only woman in the world for him.

Poor man! One can't help pitying

him, for his youth was past, and yet there he was as love-sick as any school boy, ready to lay himself, his money, and his goods at the feet of a simple girl who wore shabby dresses and untidy hair, and who hadn't the accomplishments that once upon a time he thought every woman ought to have.

CHAPTER VI.
NEWS OF DESMOND.

Winter and spring were things of the past. Here was lusty summer, like a god, crowned with blood-red roses, making the earth beautiful with leaves and blossoms, filling the air with sweet essences, and painting the skies all of a sapphire blue. Summer—not less beautiful in the quiet Irish home where Kitty had found a comfortable if not happy refuge than in dear old Ballybrophy.

The latter place was empty now and bare, save for a caretaker who had been installed by Mr Raymond. Everybody—that means the little world around him—wondered at his lethargy in not at once altering, pulling down, building up, making a grand new lamp, in short, out of the old dim one. He did nothing of the kind. He seemed to be quite taken up with his work upon the other property he had bought, where indeed he was making improvements that opened the eyes of the country folk.

"Dig wid a four-pronged fork is it?" one Paddy says with horror. "Shure, such a thing was never seen. Anyone can dig wid a spade." But Mr Raymond and his Scotch overster meant those new steel forks for use, not for ornament, and it soon became known that those who took Mr Raymond's money did as he, Mr Raymond, pleased, and exactly as he pleased.

Then he planted judiciously, and then were carefully fenced, little groups of young larch and fir, placed just where they would be most effective, and where no other sort of vegetable life would do much good. Not that he neglected Ballybrophy. The gardens were set to rights and carefully tended, and sundry very necessary repairs were made. Leaks were stopped, broken walls repaired, and the house put in fair order; but beyond that Mr Raymond did not go. No, though Lord Enniskean pointed out to him how it would "pay" to have a conservatory thrown out here, and new offices there, and, in fact, how a "few thousands" would make the old home of the O'Grady's a place worth inhabiting by such a man as Mr Raymond.

Even Madame Bourke, under whose ample wing the orphaned girl found shelter, wondered at his abstinence.

"For," said she, "when those new men come to an old place they like to play pitch and toss with it. New fashions everywhere. I declare now, Mr. Raymond is a nice man, that he is, Kitty." And she wondered why the girl should blush so deeply.

Madame was quick-witted, she could "put two and two together"; she remembered that Mr. Raymond had almost given up calling at the Castle Bourke ever since one fine day when he and Kitty had taken a walk together, and when Kitty had complained of headache in the evening. "Kitty," said Madame, solemnly, "you never told me that Mr. Raymond asked you to marry him."

Kitty grew redder and tossed her little head defiantly; the girl's spirits were coming back to her with the blessed elasticity of youth. Not that she forgot "daddy" don't think it! nor Desmond either—poor lost Desmond, of whose fate nothing was known. Guesses, indeed, had been made as to his having come to his end by some mischance. Rash and headstrong, there were rivers to drown him, bog-holes to smother him. He was gone, his place knew him no more. But time softens, though it may not remove, grief; so Kitty had regained something of her old pretty ways, and would even mimic kind, managing little "Madame," and laugh at and with her too.

But Madame had been too sharp for Miss Kitty this time. "How did you find it out?" asked the latter, looking very guilty indeed.

"Oh, I'm no fool," said Madame. "I see it all now, that you are the fool, child. What could you make such a mistake for? To refuse the man who could have given you a home of your own! Oh, Kitty! Kitty!"

"And that's the very reason," said the girl. "Because everybody would just say I wanted a home, not the man, there! and because he'd think so. Now when I do marry I'll do it