

'How you love your country,' he said looking at her, his eyes full of admiration. 'Why Ireland, according to you, is a Heaven on earth.'

'So it is—to my thinking,' she answered dreamingly. 'The grass there is the greenest—the sky the bluest—the trees the finest—and the flowers—the sweetest in the whole world. Oh! Mr. Gilliman, my heart aches for a sight of it—here amongst all the bricks and mortar and high walls.'

He bent towards her.

'I wonder you ever left it.'

Bridget moved away a little.

'We were poor, and it was hard to make money there.'

'Was there no one who would have worked for you? Are the men all fools or good-for-nothings in that Paradise?'

'No, no!' Bridget crimsoned. 'There are many good fellows. But Morna and I wished to work for ourselves. You see we had no brother. Not like the O'Beirnes, who have the best of men, their brother Larry, to toil and work for them. I told you before how good and clever and—'

'Oh, I know all about him!' he growled. 'He is head-strong and obstinate, and won't leave his native bogs for love or money. I don't want to hear his praises. And now tell me—are there any nice, handsome places to be sold in the part of the world you love so well?'

'Yes,' Bridget's head drooped, and there was but little interest in her voice. 'Two or three.'

'Then I'll buy one, the finest and best, if you, my beautiful Biddy,—leaning forward and catching her hand—' will love me and marry me and live there with me in—'

Bridget wrenched her hand from his and sprang to her feet with a cry of horror.

'Oh! You—I thank you!' came at last from her quivering lips. 'I—I could never love you—never marry you.'

'But I am rich! I can give you jewels—fine clothes—make you a lady.'

'I could never marry you. I—I don't want jewels—or fine clothes. Oh! I am sorry things have come to this—very sorry! And, bursting into tears, the girl rushed out of the room.

'Morna, Morna, you were right!' she cried, running up to her sister and flinging herself into her arms. 'I have gone too far. My experiment is a failure and I am a fool. I have brought trouble on myself and have done Larry no good—perhaps harm. So there, throwing her cap and apron on the floor, 'I have done with parlour-maiding. Mr. Gilliman may attend to himself. He may sweep and dust, make his own bed, black his own grate, for all I care. I, clenching her fists, 'will go near him no more.'

Morna looked at her in consternation.

'My dear Bridget, what is wrong?'

'Wrong? The world is upside down, and I feel mad. Fancy, he—Larry's uncle—asked me to marry him!'

'The highest compliment a man could pay a woman.'

'Compliment! Bridget cried scornfully as she flung herself into a chair. 'I did not want any such compliment. I wanted him to help Larry. And,' wringing her hands convulsively, 'that's all over now.'

The drawing-room bell pealed loudly through the house.

'You may ring,' Bridget exclaimed, springing up and stamping her foot, 'till you can ring no more. I shan't—I won't answer your bell. So there! And she sank back with a groan upon her chair.

A quick foot was heard upon the stair, and Mrs. Murdock came running in, white and breathless.

'Miss Bridget,' she cried, 'have you forgotten? Are you ill?'

'I have not forgotten, and,' suddenly, 'I'm not ill. But unpleasant things have happened. I cannot,' firmly, 'enter Mr. Gilliman's room again.'

'That is extremely awkward, Miss—'

'I am sorry for your disappointment, but it can't be helped. The girl you saw yesterday will come to you at once. Tell Mr. Gilliman that I have left your service. There is his bell again. Please go.' And she walked over to the window.'

'Good manners and good looks are well enough,' muttered Mrs. Murdock as she hurried downstairs. 'But ladies as servants are more bother than they're worth. My patience! The bell again. The man must be off his head. He'll be out of this when a new girl appears. He'll never stand her after Miss Bridget.'

Mr. Gilliman was pacing up and down, his face the colour of beetroot, his overhanging brows knit together in a frown, his burley frame quivering with excitement.

'Well,' he cried, as the door opened. 'So you have come at last. Then seeing Mrs. Murdock he glared angrily and bit his lip.

'You rang, sir?'

'Rang! I should say I did. Where is Biddy?'

'She's left my service, sir.'

'Left? He staggered to his chair. 'Where has she gone?'

'This is a serious attack,' thought Mrs. Murdock, alarmed at his agitation. 'No wonder the poor dear was frightened. She cleared her throat. 'Not far, sir. I've a girl coming to-morrow, and—'

'I leave your house to-morrow evening. Go.

'There's nothing I can do for you, sir.'

'Nothing. But stay. Find out where Biddy is, and tell me. I'm a rich man—and, if you do this I shall not be ungrateful. You understand?'

'Yes, sir, and I'll tell you—if I can.'

The next morning a letter from Larry O'Beirne filled Bridget with joy.

'Morna,' she cried with dancing eyes. 'Larry is coming to-day on some business—a secret till we meet.'

'Does he know his uncle's here?'

'I think not. But, oh! dear, I could not meet that man for worlds. I promised to go out for the day, and Mrs. Murdock is to tell him I'm gone. But now I must stay in—wait till Larry comes.'

'You need not let Mrs. Murdock know that you have changed your plans. Shut yourself up here, and she and he will think you have gone.'

'True. And to-night he will depart. When Larry comes we can go out together. I hope he won't be late.'

But the morning passed and Larry did not appear till afternoon.

'Our cupboard, like Mother Hubbard's, is bare,' cried Bridget as the clock struck two. 'I am starving and I must slip down to the kitchen and get something to eat. I trust old Mr. Gilliman may not bar me pass the drawing-room door. It would be terrible to meet him.'

Quickly and noiselessly she sped down and up the stairs, and having reached her room was congratulating herself upon her success when footsteps on the landing startled her and she sprang forward to shut the door. But she was too late. On the threshold stood Mr. Gilliman, trembling with delight.

'Bridget—I—must speak to you. Listen, dearest. I love you. I am not young or handsome. But be my wife.'

'Hush!' Bridget grew pale. 'I could never love—never marry you.'

'You love another?' His voice shook with emotion. 'Oh, Bridget! is there no hope?'

'None,' with decision. 'I love another. My heart belongs to one who, though poor, is a noble fellow. A man to be proud of.'

'Bravo, Brid! What a splendid speech! Are you preparing for private theatricals?' asked a voice that filled the girl's soul with joy and brought a soft blush to her lovely, radiant face. And turning quickly she saw Lawrence O'Beirne in the doorway.

'Sir!' Mr. Gilliman leaped round, purple with indignation. 'You—'

'May I introduce you?' asked Bridget in her sweetest tones, her eyes full of mischief. 'Mr. Lawrence O'Beirne—Mr.—'

'My—confound it, sir, my rooms are downstairs,' cried Mr. Gilliman in a fury. 'You must know that.'

'To be sure I do, uncle,' answered Larry with his rich, rolling brogue. 'But sure me business is with this lady first. I meant to see you on me way out.'

'You—' Mr. Gilliman paused, a look of anguish in his broad, red face. 'Heavens!' he gasped, 'I see it all. What a fool I am. And with a moan of despair he staggered from the room.

'I see it all,' echoed Larry, slipping his arm round Bridget's slim waist. 'Poor old chap.'

'I could not help it, Larry,' she sobbed. 'I only wanted to make him think well of you.'

'And sure so you have, asthore,' Larry whispered caressingly. 'Listen,' and taking a letter from his pocket he read aloud:

MY DEAR NEPHEW,—Someone I respect and admire has been saying fine things about you, and I feel that I ought to let you marry the girl you love. So come over and we'll talk it out. If five hundred down and two hundred a year would hasten your wedding-day, they are yours. I am hoping to follow your good example very soon.—Your affectionate uncle,

THEOBALD GILLIMAN.

'And I have spoiled everything,' Bridget moaned. 'He'll do nothing now.'

'Don't fret. Sure we're no worse than we were. And after all, if it hadn't been for you, he'd never have written, and if he hadn't, I'd be tramping round the fields at Ballydoon this blessed minute, instead of sitting by your side me during your little hand in mine.'

The door opened and Mrs. Murdock put in her head.

'Mr. Gilliman wishes to speak to Mr. O'Beirne.'

'Now for it,' Larry looked into Bridget's eyes and laughed. 'I'll have a real bad time. But keep up your heart.'

In half-an-hour Larry came up the stairs again, two steps at a time.

'Bridget,' he cried, taking the girl in his arms, 'the old man's a brick. "I'm willing," said he, straight out, "to do all I promised in that letter." And when I stammered my thanks, he answered, "Make Bridget happy—that's all the thank-I want." And I think, me darling, pressing his lips to hers, that there's no doubt in the world but that I'll gratify him there.'

'Indeed, there's not,' Bridget blushed to the eyes. 'And oh, Larry, my experiment was not such a bad one after all.'

'The best ever known. And sure when things settle down a bit the poor uncle will get over his trouble and we'll coax him over to Ballydoon and make him happy there for the rest of his days.'

'Indeed we will. But there's Morna, Larry. It will be just lovely to see her face when we tell how things have turned out.'

And Bridget danced forward to meet her sister at the door.—  
CLARA MULLHOLLAND, in the *Catholic Times*.

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