

skies and standing in the light of the doorway, might well have been mistaken for a Christmas angel.

The poor old creature came in gladly mingling Irish and English in prayers for her benefactress. Blanche closed the door against the cold and snow, lighted a candle, and gave her guest a chair; provided her with supper, and put milk to warm; waiting on her with a sweetness that for one poor human heart made that country-house kitchen luxurious as a palace.

"Arrah, my jewel, 'tis I that am glad to be with you this night," said the wanderer. "God love your face, and that you may have an angel about you for every hair of your head wherever you go. Is it cooking for me, ye are. The Lord love you, my darling; and I knew yer mother when she was just the size o'you. Sure I knew you'd ever forget your poor Kitty Keenan. Yes I'm Kitty Keenan, my precious. Come and kiss me now, for you were a long time away and the house was dark without the light o' yer eyes."

Blanche did not quite understand. The old woman was ghastly pale. Sitting there by the turf fire she looked gaunt and tall, and the child shrank from the welcome of her skinny hands.

There is a beautiful story of Queen Bertha's charity that tells how one day in distributing alms, the lovely queen had no more left for the last of the poor, and having nothing else to give, out of the sympathy of her heart she gave a kiss. Perhaps Blanche had never heard the legend; but the same spirit was in her. How could she hurt the beggar woman's heart by a refusal. She did shrink, but she overcame the shrinking, and laid her fresh, soft cheek for a moment against the withered face.

To her dismay the strange visitor grasped her hair.

"My jewel, give me a lock of it to carry next me heart. Sure I've been wishing I had it; and Miss Sarah's hair too, and Master Jack's; all these years and years I've been wishing for it. Give me now! I'll cut it off as nate as thrimming a handful o' flax."

Blanche screamed aloud. It was all very well to try to make supper for an old woman, and to do her best to give her a kiss; but when this very strange person held her by the hair and brandished a pair of scissors it was time to call out, and Blanche screamed with such effect that her voice rang through the house.

The old woman let her go, but already a lock had been snipped off.

"Whist! Miss Nelly, mavourneen. Sure I wouldn't hurt a hair o' yer head for all the diamonds that are under the say."

For all that, old Kitty Keenan was taking a bunch of the fair hair out of the scissors.

"Oh! I don't mind you having a lock of my hair," answered the child; "but my name is not Nelly, and—and—I think I'll go and tell mother you are here." And she went timidly towards the door.

"Your mother's in the grave, an' her sowl in heaven, Miss Nelly asthore," began the old woman.

The child fixed on her a terrified, bewildered gaze. What could this strange old woman mean?

"Forty years ago—forty years," said the poor creature with a shake of her withered face and frilled cap. "Forty years, my precious, your mother is in the grave; the heavens be her bed this night!"

Quick as a flash the child realised that the old woman's memory was mingling present and past in a half-witted way. Blanche was rushing out of the kitchen, when her father met her in the doorway. At the sound of the scream he had gone to the nursery and then came down to search for his missing daughter.

"Father, she is such a queer old woman," whispered the child; "I let her in out of the snow."

There before him quite at home in the kitchen of his house—in fact catching up the saucepan in a human and practical manner lest the milk might boil over—there was the tall and gaunt stranger, whom he and his household had mistaken for "Nan Haggarty's ghost."

The "ghost" made a deep curtsy, saucepan in hand.

"God bless all here this night, sir. It's only me, poor Kitty Keenan! Ah! Misther Colligan, you're greatly changed. I didn't know you, sir, when you came into the bedroom a while ago. I went down and out the back door, for I couldn't believe it was you, sir. An' when I come home from the midnight Mass, 'twas all shut up. May your shadow never grow less, sir; you're looking quite young for your age."

Robert May saw the solution of the mystery; it had been explained by the charity of his child.

The "ghost" was evidently another of those wandering beggar-women, sometimes half-witted, sometimes over-shrewd, who are not yet an extinct race in Ireland. He gently took Blanche away, and called one of the maid-servants, and ordered food and shelter to be given to the homeless stranger.

When the children woke in the morning the experience of the night to one of them seemed like a dream. While all three were emptying their stockings of the gifts of Santa Claus, Blanche told how a strange woman had come in the snow, and called her Miss Nelly, and spoken of Sarah and Jack, and cut off a lock of her hair.

The parish priest added the necessary link to the explanation of the haunting of the house. He had always heard that Mrs Colligan gave money to two servants, and wished them to look to the place, dusting it and lighting fires in winter during her husband's absence—for he had told her he would not be able to look on the rooms again for many a year. After he had taken the two girls and the little boy away, Nan Haggarty went round the country, sleeping in any out-house or barn, and mending to pay for her meals. The other woman—poor Kitty Keenan—was half-crazed and became a beggar-woman with her money sewn somewhere in her dress, while Nan Haggarty's had been buried as a hoard, and no one could ever find it now. These two, separately and at long intervals, had gone through the deserted houses during all the years of its desolation; and as they were both tall, straight, and thin, the new generation in the village mostly believed them to be but one, and called them both "Nan Haggarty." Perhaps in that particular spot no one knew of the beggar's dual existence except the family at one country house near, where food and shelter were given for a night, and where one beggar mended when she came, and the other only talked crazily of the Colligans and the return of the children some day—always children to her unreasoning mind.

Nan Haggarty's ghost spent Christmas Day at "The Colligans," but became restless on the morrow and insisted on going the next stage of her journey.

At the next farmhouse where she usually stayed, she talked triumphantly about the children, told how they had all come to see her in the kitchen and given her a feast, and showed her their toys on Christmas morning. She was immensely proud of this little attention from the unknown young trio, whom she believed she had known forty years ago.

"I hear our poor old visitor died suddenly at the farmhouse yonder," said Robert May a few days after.

"Poor woman," said Blanche with awe, while Pinkie's eyes were round with wonder, and even the boy stopped in his song of "Good King Arthur." "I am glad I let her in. She might have died outside in the snow. I am glad I gave her a kiss, too; she asked me, and she got a lock of my hair. She was quite happy; and next day she wouldn't stay any more. Is everyone young in Heaven, papa?"

"It would take an awful lot to make her young," said the thoughtless Pinkie.

"Mother, may we go to her fewnizzle? George and I like fewnizzles."

"Blanche might be timid afterwards," the mother suggested.

"Oh, no, mother; I promise I won't. She would like us three to go to her grave; and we shall put flowers on it in the spring."

"We shan't be here in the spring," argued Pinkie. "Mother says it's not a healthy house; and we are not going to sleep in our room any more."

"I have changed my mind about all that," said their mother. "I like the house now; I like it since I have heard how my little girl let that poor stranger in on Christmas Eve."

Blanche was beginning already to outgrow her childish fears; nor was there anything sad in the churchyard scene, when another mound was made beside Nan Haggarty's.

The children covered it with evergreen leaves, red berries, and winter flowers. The birds were chirping in frosty sunshine.

Crowds all around, were talking, prayerfully of the departed soul. "She knows we are not children forty years old, now," said Blanche. "I am so glad she is young again."

"How young are people in heaven?" the matter-of-fact Pinkie asked. "If they stop growing they can't have any birthdays."

"The small boy interrupted: "Come along, do, Pinkie. Corny was going round to the stable; I want to see Ginger being got up."

As they passed Mike and the sexton, old Pat was saying: "There's the two graves now, side by side, as comfortable as could be."

Mike added the startling words: "Nan Haggarty in wan, and the ghost in the other."

"Sure," said the sexton, fervently, "'tis to be hoped they won't both walk now!"

A strange thing happened recently at the site of the old Foekler Brewery in West Dubuque, Iowa. A sound like an earthquake was heard in the night and the following morning it was discovered that an acre of ground had dropped into a subterranean lake.

Some excited Parisians are proposing Lynch law as a cure for anarchy. The remedy is as sure and as heroic as that recommended by Horace Greeley to the correspondent who pestered him for a catarrh cure: "Cut your head off, you blamed fool!" replied the sage.—*Pilot*.

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