

'God help any poor girl that has to spend her days at work in those smoky, unwholesome places! To be sure, a week or two in the country would do the poor child a power of good,' she reflected, in motherly tones, with a grateful glance at the rosy cheeks and clear eyes of her own fair-headed darling. 'Do you write, Maggie, by the early post, and ask Bridie to come down for a while. She'll be a bit of company, too, for yourself, alanna.'

A day or two later, with commendable promptness, Miss Bridie duly arrived. She was a slight, dark-haired, pasty-faced girl, her excessive pallor no doubt being partly due to her recent illness. Mrs. Shanahan's motherly bosom glowed with benevolence at the thought of all the good and pleasure this girl, newly come from the hot and dusty city, must derive from a stay in such pleasant surroundings, amid all the beautiful sighs and sounds of the country.

With pardonable pride, on the first day of her arrival, Maggie conducted the visitor round her domain, showing her all the beauty-spots of the garden before displaying her multifarious other interests. But her cousin regarded all her treasured belongings with lack-lustre eyes.

'Them roses and geraniums are very nice to look at,' she admitted, 'but my! they must take a terrible lot of time and care! And then in the winter I suppose they all die on you?'

Maggie's lamb, her chickens, and rabbits evoked even less enthusiasm. 'Messy things,' the other declared with a sniff. 'I don't know how you can bother your head with them, feeding and minding them all so regularly.'

Then when evening came, the excessive stillness and quiet annoyed her.

'Is it always as lonely as this?' she asked with an exaggerated shiver. 'The country is all very well for a day's pleasuring, but when night comes give me the city and the gas-lamps, the life and brightness of the streets. My! it must be terribly dreary here in winter time!'

'I don't think so. We never find it lonely or dull,' Maggie answered, feeling rather hurt.

'Don't you really, now? Being buried alive, that's what I call it,' the other said with a shrug of her thin shoulders.

Nothing escaped the town-bred damsel's unfriendly criticism, least of all poor Watt Kennedy when he came into tea with John Shanahan on the following evening.

'A regular country bumpkin, with his rough clothes and coarse, horny hands,' Miss Dempsey pronounced him. 'But he seems quite smitten with you, Maggie. Surely you're never thinking of marrying a great rough creature like that!'

'He didn't ask me to marry him,' Maggie answered stiffly.

'But he means to, evidently, by the way he looks at you with those great, sheepish eyes of his,' and Miss Dempsey burst into a loud jeering laugh.

Maggie blushed hotly. She was very indignant at her cousin's rudeness; and yet, were Bridie's sneers already putting her out of conceit with her lover—if she could call him that? Was he really so rough and uncouth as Bridie pictured him? for it seemed to Maggie once or twice that Miss Dempsey was herself throwing eyes in Watt's direction. The thought made her angry; most of all, and unreasonably, with the innocent Watt himself. And yet, it might be only a jealous fancy of hers—for in her frequent confidential moments Bridie was fond of dilating on the many charms of her own young man in town, who held the position of assistant in a provision grocer's shop. Maggie, indeed, had already heard so much of her cousin's 'young man' that she could easily bring up his picture before her—his curly hair and 'lovely dark eyes,' even down to such details as his gold watch and chain, and the gloves and the brown boots which he wore on Sundays.

'A good-looking girl like you, Maggie, could get a good match any day in Dublin, a nice young man with plenty of money, to.' Bridie had said with unwonted generosity, on the eve of her departure for home. 'If I were you, I'm sure I'd never be content to end my days here in this dead-and-alive spot. You could easily get a situation in town if you wanted one. Look at me, now. I could go into domestic service if I liked, but I'd rather be in the factory, earning six or eight shillings a week, and have my every evening off, and no one to ask any questions as to where I spend my time. I tell you, Magie, if you once had a week in Dublin, and saw the grand shops, and the theatres, and all the life and fun, you'd think very little of this sleepy, hole-and-corner place down here.'

With whatever intention or object in view, her cousin succeeded at last in planting the seeds of discontent pretty deeply in Maggie Shanahan's heart. In dreaming and pondering on fairyland scenes and joys of the city, as Bridie had so eloquently

depicted them, she quickly lost interest in all the daily small duties she had hitherto found so pleasant; with her father, her mother, and with Watt most of all, she grew strangely distant and dull. The latter, poor fellow, seeing how coldly she now treated him, soon ceased to visit the lodge at all, which made Maggie still more discontented and restless.

'The child is fretting; maybe 'tis lonely she is for her cousin,' good Mrs. Shanahan thought, as she watched her daughter narrowly. 'After all, 'tis lonesome here for a young thing like her, without any of her own age to keep her company. I was hoping that Watt and herself—but perhaps a little change to the city would do her good—and it would brighten her to be with Bridie for a while.'

Before Maggie had time to know what was afoot, it was already arranged between her mother and Mrs. Dempsey that the girl should go up to Dublin to stay for a week or maybe longer with her relatives there. The brightening face with which Maggie received the suggestion made her mother feel sure she had hit on the right cure for 'her little girl's' unwonted 'fit of the blues.' Maggie was certainly looking forward eagerly to a joyous time in the city, but that she could ever contemplate remaining and possibly taking a situation there was a thing as unsuspected by, as it would have been incomprehensible to, the loving mother.

Maggie, however, got her first set-back as soon as she arrived at the Broadstone Terminus. Instead of finding her aunt and cousins there to meet her, as Bridie had been met by them at Dunallen, with open arms of welcome, she was launched helplessly into a bewildering sea of strange faces, of hurrying porters, and noisy cardrivers, one of whom, after looking in vain for her friends, she was glad to engage at length, though at a very exorbitant fare, to drive her to her aunt's abode.

In one of her infrequent fits of boastfulness, Bridie Dempsey had informed Maggie that the house they lived in was a fine one which had at one time been the residence of an Irish lord. This was possibly true; nevertheless Maggie felt sadly disappointed when she caught sight of this mansion, which was one of a long row of tall, forbidding-looking houses in a narrow back street. To her further dismay, her cousins, she found, only occupied the back rooms, moreover, approached by a dark and ill-smelling staircase, the common property of all the other occupants of the tenement.

Bridie was still engaged at the factory, and Maggie was met by Mrs. Dempsey, a red-faced, and rather coarse-looking woman, whom she had never met before, and who laughed loudly and long at the country girl's ingenuous admission that she had supposed her cousins to own the whole of the house.

'Badad, you must think us very rich people entirely,' she said. 'It takes me all my time to pay for the few rooms we have, goodness knows,' and she named a sum four times as great as the rent of decent laborers' cottages near Maggie's home.

The girl looked about her curiously, with a surprise and even disgust, which she found it hard to conceal. Grime and smuts lay on everything, walls, ceiling, floor, and furniture. Even the chair which Mrs. Dempsey brought forward was covered thickly with dust, till the good woman, noticing how quickly Maggie lifted her pretty new navy-blue skirt, suddenly thought of sweeping the offending particles away with a dirty dishcloth.

'Botheration to it for dirt, its everywhere. I used to be like you when I first came from the country, but sure now we've grown used to it and never notice it,' she said.

The windows, guiltless of curtains and covered only by a stained and ragged blind, could hardly be seen through for the smoke and dirt that lay heavily encrusted inside and outside the glass. That seemed of less matter, however, since the background on which they looked was surely of the unloveliest. Huge factories with ever-belching chimneys, and the unkempt backs of tall, but poverty-stricken, houses crowding closely in together, was all that might be seen, while from several of the open windows long poles stretched out bespread with ill-washed, badly-colored rags and tatters of clothes. Not a tree, nor a tendrill of ivy, not even a single blade of grass was there to redeem all that broad expanse of one iota of its ugliness.

'Have you no piece of garden, no trees or flowers at all?' Maggie asked in dismay.

'Not a bit, acushla,' Mrs. Dempsey answered, with a glance at a broken window-box filled with slimy and unwholesome-looking clay in which a few withered stalks of flowers still remained. 'We tried to grow some, time and again, but sure nothing would thrive for us here without either air or sunshine.'

'Without air or sunshine.' The words sank deeply into Maggie's mind. She had been feeling ravenously hungry coming up in the train, but row with three or four younger Demp-