

# The Storyteller.

## AN UNEXPECTED ENDING.

'AN' if ye can't be aisy be as aisy as ye can' Maureen turned away with a laugh, but her eyes were full of tears.

'I don't know what you mean,' her sister said impatiently. 'Or how that absurd saying applies to the subject we are discussing.'

'Oh! yes it does. You see we—you and I and auntie—can never be "aisy" in the sense of being quite comfortable, on the small income that remains to us. But if I go away and work for myself, you and she will get along better, and she will have the things that are necessary for her in her present delicate health. So, though none of us can be exactly "aisy," we'll be as "aisy" as we can.'

'I cannot think how you can joke on such a subject. I don't believe you care that'—cracking her fingers—'about leaving auntie and me, and—and the dear old home.'

'Sure, then, I do, Kitty. But I think it's right to go. And the post offered me is a good one.'

Kitty tossed her head and walked across the room with an impatient, restless step.

'The post of a saleswoman in a shop, a mere living peg on which to hang mantles—a good one for an O'Connor! Oh, Maureen, I can't bear to think of it. Think what poor father would have said had he had an idea that a daughter of his would have ever stooped so low.'

'Had father lived the necessity would not have perhaps arisen. Things might have been different.'

'You will lose caste. Pretty, bright, winsome as you are, you will sink socially. No one in your own class will care to marry a girl out of a Dublin shop.'

Maureen flushed.

'I don't want to marry and I do want to earn my bread.'

'Then go as a governess—or a companion.'

'I am not well enough educated to be a governess. I would as soon—almost—go into penal servitude for life as be a companion. Murphy's, in Grafton street, offer me £90 a year to walk up and down their show-room in a black silk dress and exhibit their mantles to customers. I see nothing unladylike in doing so.'

'Of course, you don't.' Kitty's tears fell down like rain.

'But oh, Maureen, I can't bear to see you go. Let us cling together. We can manage to live, and—'

'In a miserable way—denying ourselves everything, and not being able to get proper nourishment for poor auntie. Such a life is impossible. I must work, and it would be madness, for the sake of our pride and a false idea about losing caste, to refuse this post.'

'Don't decide at once. Ask Father Tom's advice,' cried Kitty eagerly. 'He knows all about us. And if he says you ought to go, I'll oppose you no longer.'

Maureen smiled and kissed her sister's hot cheek.

'Very well, dear. But I feel sure Father Tom will take my part. He is too sensible not to do so.'

'He has a high opinion of our family. He is deeply grieved that beautiful Glencree, the O'Connors' home for so many centuries, has been sold to a man whose father made his money in trade.'

Maureen laughed gaily.

'And I am glad that the young man has got such good value for his money. To give up the dear old place was indeed a grief, but since it had to go I'm glad it went to someone well enough off to keep it up properly. So long as money is honestly come by what matter how it is made. A trade is as honorable as a profession. Money earned is better, to my mind, than money that comes to a man without any efforts of his own. I'd rather make a fortune than inherit it any day, and Maureen's eyes grew bright and her color rose. 'The satisfaction in having done so would be immense.'

Kitty looked at her sister reproachfully and sighed.

'Your advanced ideas are extraordinary. I cannot think where or how you got them.'

'Say, rather, that you are a dear little old-fashioned damsel, full of the pride of your race, and a thorough conservative to the tips of your fingers.'

'I hate new things and new places, and strange faces,' cried Kitty. 'I'd rather starve within sight of Glencree than feast a hundred miles away.'

'Then you'll do neither,' said Maureen. 'You'll live here, near the old home, quietly and peacefully, with just enough of the goods of this world to keep you and dear auntie in a fairly respectable way, in the part of the country you love so well. Whilst I, with my love of adventure and anxiety to earn a little money, will go forth to this post in a Grafton street shop—'

'If Father Tom approves. You must ask him at once.'

'Without a moment's delay. I was going out. I'll step down to his house now, and I'll bring my little camera and take a few views of dear Glencree as I go past. It will be looking charming in the sunlight this brightest of May mornings.'

Kitty shook her head, seemed about to speak, then turned away in silence.

'There's no use arguing with Maureen,' she thought, as she went up to her aunt's room.

'Once she gets an idea into her head that it is right to do a thing, nothing will move her, and she just goes her way, cheerful and determined. I do believe she'd go to the block with a smile on her face. But I cannot reconcile myself to this new freak of hers, and I do not like to think what the end of it may be.'

A minute later Maureen stepped out of the little cottage in which she, her sister, and aunt had been living since the death of

Mr. O'Connor, and the unexpected discovery that reductions in rents and the sudden failure of a big company in which he had invested a considerable sum of money had so impoverished them that to remain at Glencree was impossible.

'We must leave our home and sell it, Maureen,' the elder of the two girls decided at once. 'The purchase money will give us an income, upon which we shall be able to live comfortably in Sea View.'

But Glencree was heavily mortgaged, and although it was sold for a big price, little of the purchase money came to the orphans, and they were almost as poor as before the sale had been effected. Their income, therefore, was such a small one that they found it a difficult task to live and feed three people even in tiny Sea View. Then Mrs. O'Brien fell into delicate health. She was quite dependent on her nieces, and, loving her very dearly, they longed to give her everything she required.

'If I were gone,' Maureen reflected one day, 'Kitty and Aunt Bedelia would get on better. I am strong and young, and don't mind strange places or people. So I'll go—go—somewhere—a sob choked her—and earn my own bread.'

Looking about anxiously to see what she could do, a friend told her of this post in Murphy's shop in Grafton street. She went to Dublin, saw the manager, and was at once engaged. Her tall, slender figure was just what he required. Her attractive, lady like manner would, he knew, be a valuable acquisition in his show-room.

Maureen went home elated by her success. But her news was coldly received. Kitty's pride was hurt. The idea of an O'Connor of Glencree stooping to earn her bread in any way was a grief to her, but that she should earn it as a show-woman, in a Dublin shop, seemed so disgraceful, that she set her face against it from the first. But she could not, say what she would, shake Maureen's resolution, and, at last, she implored her not to decide till she had consulted Father Tom Fagan who, in all their troubles, was their guide, philosopher, and friend. To this request Maureen gladly and willingly acceded, knowing well that the good priest would fully approve of the step she was going to take.

'Poor little Kitty would rather die of starvation than lower one bit of her family pride,' she said, laughing, as she went up the hillside. 'But, I'm made of tougher stuff. If I can help those I love I will—in spite of themselves.'

She paused and looked round her, in delight. A little below stood Glencree, its gardens and orchards full of spring flowers and pink apple blossom; beyond it the deep waters of the bay, gleaming brightly in the sunshine.

'To live and die here would be an unspeakable joy!' broke from the girl's lips. 'Oh, would we had never been obliged to leave our home—to give it up to strangers! But God's will be done. He knows what's best for us. We can only do what we think right. 'Tis a struggle harder than Kitty or anyone else imagines to go, but I feel I must. "To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life," we are told in the Apocalypse. I believe in Our Lord's promise and will go, cost me what it may. Now for my last photograph of the dear old home.'

She fixed up her camera, and had taken a couple of views of beautiful Glencree, when a young man with a dark, intelligent, but rather sad face came slowly over the grass towards her.

He took off his hat and bowed.

'You are taking a photograph of Glencree,' he said. 'It ought to make a pretty picture.'

'It does. I have taken it several times already,' Maureen answered, with an utter forgetfulness of the conventionalities. 'But I was anxious to take a last one—as a souvenir.'

'You are going away, then? And are sorry to go?'

'Yes, I have lived here all my life. Is it wonderful I should regret having to go?'

He gave an impatient sigh.

'I suppose not—if you love it. I am only a newcomer and have not yet felt the fascination of the place.'

'You have no friends—no old associations with the neighbourhood.'

'None. I feel myself a stranger and am bored to death. I think I must get away again as soon as I can.'

'If you feel that way, it might be just as well, though I cannot imagine anyone being either dull or bored at Glencree.' She bowed distantly, and taking up her camera moved away.

It had suddenly flashed across her who the young man was, and her heart beat quickly as she felt a pang of fear lest he should identify her.

'The purchaser of our dear old home,' she exclaimed, hurrying along towards Father Fagan's cottage. 'The heir to the rich tradesman's money. He doesn't look too happy, poor fellow, in spite of his wealth. But I do hope he has not recognised me.'

Maureen found Father Tom at home and very glad to see her. Frankly she spoke out and told him the difficulties that beset her path.

'I hate to give them pain, or add in the smallest way to all that they have been obliged to suffer,' she said, 'since my father's death. But it can't be helped. It would be folly, I think, to struggle on as we have been doing, and the post offered is a good one.'

'You are acting unselfishly and doing what is right,' replied the priest. 'And Kitty will soon find that instead of losing caste you will gain the good opinion of every right-thinking person. God bless you.'

Greatly comforted, Maureen went home. As she tripped quickly down the hill she came suddenly face to face with the dark-eyed stranger once more.

The young man's face flushed, and the look of gloom passed from his eyes as they met hers.

Maureen's color deepened a little, but merely bowing her head she passed on without speaking.