

derstand? I should have been a fool not to annex property when I had merely to draft out a deed and expend a penny stamp.'

His change of manner perplexed her, but she had a latent confidence in him that would not easily take flight.

'But, as you said, every property brings its own trouble. You will have to cultivate the land and be kind to the cottagers who work for you.'

He gave a hard, short laugh, as though her simplicity began to be irritating.

'You must not be kind to those sort of people. They encroach at once and take liberties. But at least under my management they shall pay their rent; I promise you that. Give me your address, please. I may have occasion to write to see you about certain things.'

So, having disencumbered herself of those things which make for ease of body and sloth of mind, Nora Barry went back to the battle of life. She had need to fight it strenuously and so get ease for her heartache and partial forgetfulness of those happy things which might have been had a hard, unforgiving old man died a few months earlier.

From a worldly point of view she had acted disastrously, and yet, after all, she had known what was best for herself, and in fighting and overcoming difficulties the keenness and zest of youth came back to her. Through pressing forward in so eager a race, she slowly overtook the shadows and passed beyond them into the cheerful sunlight. Bernard Warburton, who always saw her when he was in town, noticed the gradual brightening of her eyes, and perhaps vanity suggested that he himself had something to do with this happy change. At any rate he was very cousinly attentive, and she frankly appreciated his society, for he was a man of parts, and art was no dead letter to him.

Sometimes—but not often—she would let him take her here and there, and those rare holidays were very pleasant to her. She wondered that a man without sisters could make himself so companionable, and on one subject only did they seem to strike a discordant note. Whenever they talked about business or of Narn he seemed to change at once into a hard, money-loving man. So striking was this that she rarely mentioned either, leaving it to him to come out occasionally with a sentiment only worthy of old Scrooge or a man who found pleasure and profit in grinding the faces of the poor.

In spite of her faith in him she would wince then, although putting it all down to the hard facts of legal training. She did not believe in his hard sayings until one bitter day when she could not help herself; he convicted himself out of his own mouth—and perhaps no other kind of evidence could have convinced her.

Her small suburban room looked very cramped that May morning, and he made mention of the primroses that he had left behind him in the country.

'The primroses! Ah! I remember how they used to grow in Ireland when I was a little girl.'

She looked dreamily beyond the bricks and mortar as she spoke, and he wondered if ever she regretted Narn. Quite suddenly he struck the discordant note.

'I suppose primroses are not had in their way, but the country is not Arcadia after all. The bailiff of that wretched little Narn—you are well quit of it—has been spreading reports that I have no real right to the place. I have not been able to bring it home to him, but I saved him seven-and-sixpence by shooting his dog.'

She came back from her primrose memories with a painful shock; the bad taste of his joke set her teeth on edge.

'You did it—by accident, of course?'

'By accident! I never aimed more carefully in my life. I do not say that I would have done it if I had liked the dog, but it was an ugly, ill-conditioned cur.'

It was impossible to doubt that he spoke the truth, and for her the light of the May day went suddenly out.

'But the dog was not yours—he may have loved it—may have thought there was no dog in the world like it. Oh! I could not have believed that.'

So keenly did disillusion sting her that words failed. He shrugged his shoulders as one who had little patience with sentimental folly.

'It is quite as well you gave up Narn; they would have fleeced you right and left. Only the other day I had to distrain upon an old widow's pig; it is not pleasant, but rent must be paid.'

This time she regarded him with real honor, and the quick Irish temper of which he had suspected the existence, on their first meeting blazed up into her face.

'Do you mean to say that you actually robbed a poor old woman of her pig?'

'Robbed; nonsense! The old humbug could not pay her rent—or would not—the one more likely than the other, so I made six-and-eightpence a score—not a bad price for a good bacon pig.'

There was a pause, and then she spoke at a white heat of sorrowful indignation: 'You shall give me back Narn. I see you are not fit to have any sort of power!'

'Give you back Narn?' he answered, scornfully.

'What! rob myself of what is legally mine? Remember the stamp across which you signed. Remember Simpson, a witness of full age and well acquainted with the nature of an oath.'

'I doubt if the stamp means anything. I have thought since that it ought to have been quite another sort of stamp.'

He had to laugh outright—he could not help himself, and to her the laugh sounded mocking and insolent.

'What about the great waxen seal with its red tape? How do you suppose to get over that?'

'I don't know now—it is all so cruelly sudden; but that deed shall be annulled if there is law in England.'

'There is, and I am one of its most able expounders. I warn you that no judge in the kingdom would venture to negative the binding powers of seal and stamp. Then, again, if you recovered Narn you would have to assume the hated name.'

'I would do anything,' she returned, passionately, 'to prevent your merciless hand from oppressing the weak. And to think that it is I who have delivered them over to you.'

He flushed uneasily, and then went on in the same mocking way:

'There is one action you could take that might pave the way to annulling the deed—mind you, I do not promise that it would—but to do this you would have to swear that black was white before a clergyman.'

'You are trading on my ignorance; if you mean anything you mean a magistrate. People do not swear before clergymen.'

'I happen to know what I am speaking about, and I mean a clergyman. See! it is done like this—having your hand I repeat this oath: 'I, Bernard, take thee, Nora,' and you answer—'

With burning indignation she wrenched her hand from his.

'I answer. Do you think anything on this earth would make me promise to love and honor—a wolf. And to think I believed in you so utterly as a good man.'

'And so you will again when you are a better woman of business and understand that you must either bite or get bitten. I suppose under tragic circumstances you will come and inspect Narn?'

'I am going there to-morrow, and then I shall consult the ablest lawyers in England.'

He bowed sarcastically.

'You do me too much honor; then I shall expect you. But remember, a dog—a wolf if you prefer it—does not readily give up a bone that has been once given him.'

He met her at the station, and although she shrank painfully and visibly from the companionship of this sordid man, there seemed no other means of travelling the necessary miles save by his side; for Narn, peaceful little Narn, nestled away amongst its hills, knew nothing of such restless things as trains. At first they had to follow the silver thread of the river as it babbled and prattled its laughing way through its primrose banks. Cuckoos singing against each other grew hysterical in emulation as to which should have the last liquid word; the wood pigeons, too, had plenty to say, but in a lower, more wooing key, so that the harmony of the woods remained perfect.

The earth, new born, so fresh and tender and exquisite had an influence hard to resist, but Nora, mindful of her sad errand, could only look on wistfully as one who had no part in these delights. He was just as silent as she, feeling perhaps, at last, the ungraciousness of his position. Once or twice she looked at him, as though trying to accustom herself to his new character, and the last time he noticed it.

'I am sorry, Miss Barry; but you know the fate of the foolish Red Riding Hoods?'

She winced back from his hardness and nothing more was said until they had left the valley below them and were almost on the brow of the hill.

Then he turned his horse into a gateway, and the quiet beauty of the place made her forget her silence.

'Whose house is this?'

'Mine,' he answered, curtly. 'If you will come in for a moment we will do the rest on foot. As we are to visit the injured Widow Morris, I may as well take her the receipt for her rent.'

She did not cross his threshold willingly, but, having done so, she would have been no artist if an interior so rich in oak carvings—so quaintly fashioned and adorned with the grace of a day that is fled—had not appealed to her strongly. The place was neither stately nor grand, but just homely in the best and most delicious sense of the world, and no ideal of her could have improved upon it.

But she forgot art on approaching the window, from which the ground fell softly away into the smiling valley. The west wind greeting her was as though it had been wafted across violet beds, and the white lilac showed delicately against the vividness of crimson May. But the humming, happy bees had richer spoil than either, knowing just where the sweet peas could peep over the sheltering wall, and they were many colored as Joseph's coat.

So for a few merciful moments she forgot everything save the beauty with which she was surrounded, and in those moments Narn—peaceful, happy little Narn—stole into her heart forever and nestled there just as it nestled into the warm protecting hills. At his brusque summons she turned heavily away.

'Is it possible that you can live here—here, where everything seems to preach the love of God—and yet have so hard a heart towards His poor? I wonder how many gentle, kindly souls have moved about this house; I should think there must be many footprints of angels.'

She looked for no answer. What could he know about such gentle visitants? And together they passed into the fields that were fields of flowers.

In among the mowing grass—almost ready for the reapers—the great white daisies stood thickly, and over the higher ground, where the young corn was springing vigorously up, hovered larks singing gloriously.

To the grazing meadows, where the grass was fed down industriously by deeply contented cattle, great dazzling patches of bluebells reflected the cloudless sky. The whole scene was pure poetry; but they discovered prose at the very heart of the idyl in the shape of a bluff yeo-