

and she has learned more in one week than most children would do in a year."

At this point down came the little girl again in her Saturday evening attire, a clean print wrapper reaching half-way down over her crimson petticoat, grey stockings, and well-blackened shoes. Her thick hair was brushed smoothly into a darkling mass upon her shoulders, leaving a short curly undergrowth to cluster about her temples; her brunette cheeks were glowing after a scrubbing, and the grey eyes which were the charm of her young face shone with the consciousness that she was a good girl at last. She brought in her arms a coarse white cloth, which she spread on the table, and on which she arranged the cups and plates, buttered her bannocks with fresh sweet (but well-smoked) butter, and finally filled the teacups, with a little assistance from Kevin.

"She'll do yet," murmured the mother, sitting up in state and allowing herself to be helped like a visitor. "Maury needn't ha' been so uneasy about her, nor Connor neither."

When tea was over Fan brought her stool to the good housewife's knee and produced the beginning of a stocking, over which she bent her brows, glancing up now and again to see the effect of her good conduct upon Kevin, who sat watching her with all the interest her heart could desire. At last she sighed—

"Oh, Kevin! I wish your foot wasn't so big. I'll never get down to the heel."

"Put it away and sing us the *Ave Maria*," said the mother; and the child gladly obeyed, folding her hands and fixing her eyes dreamily on a large bright star that was shining through the doorway. The sweet, clear refrain rose and fell as the twilight deepened, and the soft Gaelic words seemed to grow holier every time they were uttered, intoned in notes of such power and fulness as made the listeners gaze in astonishment at the little creature who gave them forth.

Kevin walked to the door before it was done and drew the back of his brown hand across his eyes.

"Fan," said he, after a silence of some minutes, "there will be a holiday next week, and I will take you to the island."

Fan's eyes suddenly burned with delight, and, flinging her knitting into the corner, she threw up her arms and danced across the floor.

"Well, well, well," said the mother; "but she's as wild as a hare yet."

"I'll knit six rows every day until then," sang Fan, "and when I get to the island I may do what I like. I'll earn my wildness, and then nobody must scold me!"

An hour later, when Fanchea was fast asleep, with her small hands crossed on her breast, as Maury had taught her to place them, and when the mother had taken her knitting into the next cottage for a chat with a neighbor, Kevin followed a winding path uphill and knocked at Father Ulick's door. The old priest looked surprised to see him.

"No one ill at home, Kevin, I hope?" he said.

"No," said the youth; "no, thank God." And then, after a struggle to shake off his shyness, he made his business known.

"I've come to ask you to help me, sir. You know I was always stupid at my books at school, and now I keep wishing that I had learned more than I did. I can't go to school, for the people would laugh. I have got such a name upon me. You know it yourself, sir."

"Ay, Kevin, they say you are dull."

"Yes, sir, I read very badly. Long ago I did not care. The little bits I got to read were all about nothing, and I liked better to be looking at the stars and the sea. But lately I've been longing to read fast and well. There are things I want to know about that I can only find in books."

The old man took off his spectacles and shifted the turf sods on his primitive hearth; and then he looked up at the youth's kindling face, all flushed and excited with the effort he had made to give forth so much of his confidence.

"You are a good fellow, Kevin," he said, "to come and talk to me like this. But why are you so anxious to know the things that are in books?"

"I do not know, sir. I think I should be happier."

Father Ulick looked at him again and mused. Strange that this lad, who was looked on as the duller on the mountain, should have suddenly been seized with a thirst for knowledge. Was it a freak that would pass away? Had the desire been roused in him by wounded pride? or was this the tardy awakening of some natural gift? The priest was puzzled and interested.

"Let us see, Kevin," he said. "There is the night school, of course."

"I could not, sir; indeed, I could not bear it."

"Well, we must think of what we can do. Suppose you come to read to me here of an evening."

Kevin's face blazed with pleasure.

"Oh, sir, you are so good. There is nothing I would like so well."

"Come to-morrow night, then. But before you go, my boy, let me talk to you a little. How is it that you speak so much better English, have a better accent, and are altogether more refined than most of the young men about the place, even than those who consider themselves better scholars?"

Kevin blushed up to the roots of his hair at the compliment, which took him completely by surprise.

"I do not know, sir; unless it may be talking to Fan, sir," he said simply.

"Talking to little Fan!"

"She's different from all the rest, sir; her voice is so like an angel's, and her words are so soft and fine. I don't know how to describe it, but nobody could be very rough, sir, who is always with her."

Father Ulick smiled an indulgent smile as he thought of little Fanchea.

"Ah!" he said; "I forgot about that wonderful friendship. She is, indeed, an uncommon little creature. And so she already repays you for your protection of her?"

"Sir, it is I——"

"Ah, well, cherish that holy and beautiful affection. The love of a child is a message from God."

Then Kevin went away, and as he walked down the hill again he thought of how he had been nearly led into trying to tell Father Ulick of all his thoughts about Fanchea. And it was better he had not attempted it. Probably the good old man would have told him they were wild, exaggerated, and even superstitious. Such as they might be, they were to him as his life, and it was better he should share them with no one. Looking back over his shoulder he saw Father Ulick still standing in his doorway, his white hair gleaming in the starlight. The old man was looking after the youth with some wonder and much interest in his heart.

"What a frank, handsome face the lad has," he thought, "and what a thrill in his voice when he speaks of that little creature. They are a very unusual pair, and I cannot but think that Providence has some purpose in their friendship. If the Lord should spare me I will be curious to see what comes of it."

The holiday found Kevin and Fan on their way to the island. Fan danced over the hills, and sang her wild songs, and chased the sea-birds till she was tired; and then she was very glad to light a fire and roast the potatoes which they had brought in the boat for their refreshment. No feast was ever sweeter than this "dinner of herbs," which the happy creatures shared between them.

"Kevin, you must tell me a story," said Fan.

"Then you must sing first, and I will listen; and I will tell you whatever story your song tells me."

"I am going to sing the song of the sea," said Fan, joyously, when they had perched themselves on a rock from which they could behold the sun beginning to set royally towards the rim of the wide, lone Atlantic, and the long line of mountains on the coast catching the fire of heaven upon their faces.

She began a winding, fitful, picturesque song without words, in which her clear, ringing voice