

he was glad Con was getting over it. They had been everything to each other since the mother died. If the boy would only take a fancy to a nice, sensible girl, with a bit of money, if possible, but if not—well, Michael Kilrush had not done as well as he had done without being in some ways a bigger man than his fellows. And he had not liked Con to be estranged from him. Time had been when he had looked to Con to bring home a fortune with a wife. But now, since there had been the cloud between them, he had come down in his demands. If there was a girl desirable in other ways, only lacking the money, a sound, decent little girl, not like the wastrel, bankrupt Gillespies—he would not say no to the boy again.

After that day when the Creamery Girl took the stone from the mare's foot, it became quite a usual thing for Michael Kilrush to give her a lift on the way to the creamery, when it happened that their ways were the same. He soon began to look with some anticipation along the sunny road before him between high hedges white with May blossoms for the pretty figure in the cool-colored prints.

The third or fourth time they drove together he asked her name and where she lived.

'My name is Nora Gillespie,' she returned.

Old Michael gasped.

'Nora Gillespie,' he repeated. 'There was a family of that name over at Glenacappa.'

'Glenacappa's full of Gillespies,' she said; 'I've a lot of cousins over there.'

'There was a family went to America.'

'There was so.'

'They were no great loss. Idle and careless, I heard they were, and not a penny left by the time they got to America.'

'Tis true enough,' said Nora impartially. 'The mother of them died when they were young. They were but a lot of boys and girls together, and the father was a soft, easy man. He died on them, too, and the place was sold over their heads. They maybe weren't so bad all out.'

'And tell me, my little girl, where do you come from?' said Michael Kilrush, turning willingly from the consideration of the other feckless Gillespies to the shining girl the other side of the car. 'Is it far you have to come to the creamery?'

'It might be a mile or two. Do you know Cromwell's Fort, Mr. Kilrush?'

'Ay, well.'

'My brother and I have taken it for seven years. There's a bit of land with it, you know. We'll see what we can make of it. He's a very wise boy, is William, though he's young, and he's cut for a farmer.'

'My poor little girl!' said Michael Kilrush, looking at her compassionately. 'You'll never make anything out of the land. It grows more thistles than any other bit of land in the country. And 'tis the queer old place for you to be livin'.'

'We're stubbing up the thistles fine,' said the girl.

'And it is a queer old place, but we like it. If you're passing by one day—any day after next Tuesday fortnight—and look in, you'll find me at home.'

'Not at the creamery?'

'I'll be done at the creamery then. It was a three months' course of lessons I took. I wanted to learn the dairy work. The nuns didn't teach us butter-making at the school. I'll often think, Mr. Kilrush, how kind you were to me.'

'Indeed, then, I'm not going to lose sight of you,' said Michael Kilrush, feeling a sudden dismay at the thought of the long road without the little figure upon it. 'I'll come to Cromwell's Fort fast enough, though 'tis a good nine miles from my own gate.'

He did find his way to Cromwell's Fort soon after Nora Gillespie had done with the creamery. It was surprising how he missed the little figure the other side of the car, and how much longer the road seemed now that there was no Nora to give a lift to.

He had only known Cromwell's Fort as a thick round tower seen in the distance across the fields, with a low, long cottage fixed at its base. It had seemed an unchancy sort of residence for anyone to his mind, let alone that such old places bore a bad name with the peasantry. He would have said that he despised the superstition of the people, being a hard-headed, dogmatic old man, but he was not really far enough away from them to be uninfluenced by their beliefs. There were things he would not do; for instance, stub up the group of fairy thorns that grew in the middle of his best meadow, making it awkward for the machine, let alone wasting good land. It was no use going against old superstitions and customs, although he didn't believe any harm could come of it—not he.

He paid a surprise visit to Cromwell's Fort on the way back from Tullybrackey. He was agreeably surprised. The Fort was set down in the midst of a field, but a garden was in process of being made. Under the windows of the dwelling house ran two long beds filled with annuals in gorgeous flower.

He looked in over the half-door. There was the sound of churning and a smell of cream. The kitchen was bright and shining. There were scarlet geraniums in the deep window. The floor was ochred bright red. The big dishes and pewter jugs on the dresser winked in the sunlight. There was a round iron griddle with cakes baking on

the fire, and an elderly woman was ironing some of Nora's print frocks. Nora herself was at the churn, an old-fashioned churn in which one worked the dash up and down. Her arms were bare to the elbow, and her hands wet with the milk. She was as sweet and fresh in her enveloping apron of brown holland as she had been when she tripped along the road to the creamery.

Her face lighted up with pleasure when she saw him. She nodded and smiled her welcome, while the elderly woman came forward and set him a chair.

'The butter's just coming,' said Nora. 'I daren't leave it.'

He came and took the dash from her for luck, 'lest the butter should fly away.' She gave a few whispered orders to the elderly woman, who laid her iron aside and moved the griddle a little off the fire.

Michael Kilrush, having relinquished the dash, sat down in his chair by the sunny half-door, and filled his pipe. He was mentally approving. If she had left the churn now she wouldn't have been the girl for his money.

He sat and talked while the churn dash gradually eased off. He looked on while Nora took the butter off the churn, carrying it away into an inner room, which he took to be the dairy. He was mentally contrasting it all with his own uncared for establishment, left to the tender mercies of a slatternly hussy. The scents struck even his uncritical nostrils—the sweet sharp smell of the clove gillyflowers outside, mingled with the smell of the cream and the fresh buttermilk, the browning cakes on the griddle, the warm smell of ironing. At home the hen would be about the kitchen, and the pigs wandering unpleasantly near the door.

The elderly woman came in with a freshly-killed chicken, and proceeded to take the feathers off by the simple process of passing the bird over the red cinders. He escaped from the smell of the burning feathers into the little parlor beyond the kitchen, where Nora, having worked the butter, was now free to entertain him. She had pulled down her sleeves, and wore the peculiarly clean, shining look which was so characteristic of her. While she talked to him she spread a cloth on the table, and set out knives and forks and glasses with a civilisation that Michael Kilrush had known little of at home.

While she talked he gazed about the room. It was very old-fashioned, but very pleasant. The spotted mirror above the mantel, the few engravings, the corner cupboard for china and glass, the big horsehair sofa, the carpet with its sprawling bunches of cabbage roses, were such as might be seen in many best parlors of Irish farmhouses. But there was something added here—perhaps it was the flowers within and without, perhaps it was the window in its deep frame, perhaps the perfect cleanliness. Or—Nora herself.

Michael Kilrush sat to such a meal, daintily served, as he had not eaten for many a day—perhaps never before. It was not the chicken was perfect eating, as only a chicken cooked before it has time to get cold is; it was not the stewed gooseberries and cream, nor the whiskey and water which Nora prepared for him with a miraculous understanding of his liking. No, it was just the colleen herself. As he sat smoking his pipe afterward he acknowledged to himself that she had put the 'comether' entirely upon him. He wanted to see her sitting 'foreinst' him as she was doing to-day all his days—as his daughter, Con's wife.

It might be an unchancy old place, but Nora had banished all the ghosts out of it. She showed him how the door opened just inside the tower, and following her up the winding staircase he looked into her room—a dainty girl's room, such as he had never seen before. He had always wanted a daughter.

Later on he was introduced to Nora's brother, a wise youth, although in years he was only a boy. He discussed the farming with old Michael Kilrush on more than equal terms. Old Michael smiled grimly as the freckled, red-headed boy derided the old ways of farming, and wondered how it was at all they weren't all broke out of it. Ah, well, thought old Michael, he'd learn, he'd learn; and yet the boy had his head screwed on the right way. He showed some of the results of his farming, and Michael Kilrush saw that they were good.

He drove home thoughtfully, so thoughtfully that he passed by more than one old friend and neighbor, who wondered if the age was coming on Michael at last, or what at all he was up to.

He said very little to Con when he got home. They ate the comfortless evening meal, and though he had never thought of such a thing before, he could not help contrasting the dirty, slovenly table with the one at Cromwell's Fort.

Afterward, when Judy Kelly had put her shawl over her head and departed, they sat together by the light of a dirty lamp, which smelled of sheep oil. The last light was dying off the sky. It would soon be time for them to be going to bed.

Con brought out a paper from his pocket.

'Would you like me to read to you, father?'

'Not to-night, Con. Let us step outside for a breath of air. Turn out the lamp—what at all good is it except to show you the misery of this old kitchen?'

Con stared, as well he might, at this new fastidiousness of his father. He turned down the lamp obediently, and followed the old man out into the breen,