

he, 'that you knew what they wor going' to do.' 'What do you mane, Tom?' says I—speakin' as civil as I could to him, because Norah here begged uv me not to be severe on him, since the way he began thremblin' when I spoke about risin' his rent from thirty-eight to forty-eight shillin's an acre. So I asked him civilly what did he mane. 'Well, my rint is riz,' says he, 'just as you said it would.' I thought 'twas humbuggin' me he was, till I remembered I see Darby Ruadh turnin' into his gate a start before. 'Tom,' says I, 'are you in airnest, or is id jokin' you are?' 'He is in airnest, Phil,' the wife makes answer. 'Darby is afther given us notice of another rise.' I looked at him," continued Phil, turning round in his chair and resting his elbow on the back of it, so as that he could look up into Billy Heffernan's face, of which, however, there was not light enough to afford more than a dim outline—"I looked at him; and there he was, breakin' his heart laughin'; 'Tis on'y two shillin's an acre, Phil," says he, 'to make id even money. A couple uv pounds a year won't make much difference. But whin Darby walked in an' spoke uv another rise, begor, I thought of what you wor sayin' to me last night. An' wasn't id dhroll,' he says, laughin', that your words come to pass all at wance?' 'Tom,' says I, 'I have nothin' to say to you.' 'Darby tould me,' says the wife, 'that Mr. Pender was sorry, but that he couldn't help id whin the order came down from the landlord.' But 'tisn't Tom Hogan that's throublin' me," continued Phil, after a pause; "but I fear we're goin' to have some bad work in the country."

"What bad work, Phil?" his wife asked in alarm.

"Well, that blessed bird," he returned, "that came in to light the lamp t'other night—honest Darby—and Wat Corcoran wor overheard makin' some remarks to-day about bein' near stirrin' times about here. An' we all know what that manes. Mat Donovan is likely to lose his little garden, too. An' that's a bad sign. An' there's poor Mick Brien that they beggared. Kept him hangin' on expectin' they'd give him a little spot somewhere, if 'twas on'y a skirt uv the bog, till every penny he had was gone uv whatever thrife he was able to make by sellin' the few things he had left afther bein' turned out uv the nice little farm that his people lived in for hundreds uv years. Well, Maurice Kearney gave him a couple uv bundles uv straw to cover the roof over his wife an' childher. An' just when he had id finished, the guardian angels come to tell him he must go out; that the cabin is to be pulled down, as such cabine can't be allowed on the property any longer. I'm tould he's out uv his mind. The wife is thought to be in a decline, an' two uv the childer have the faver. An' the thought uv the poorhouse sets him mad."

At these last words the tears began to fall silently from Norah's eyes; and Billy Heffernan, on seeing them dropping down one by one, began to be angry with some one or other, and felt a strong desire to relieve his feelings by beating Darby Ruadh and Wat Corcoran black and blue. Indeed at that moment Billy would have faced a whole legion of "guardian angels," and done heaven knows what desperate things, if he had the chance.

"So you see, Billy," said Phil Lahy, "that thinkin' of such things is enough to make any man violent."

"'Tis true!" replied Billy Heffernan, almost fiercely.

"I of'en think uv Mick Brien's wife," Honor observed, as if she were thinking aloud, while, with her chin on her hand and her elbow resting on the shop-board, she gazed at the moon through the branches of the beech-tree. "She was sich a good, charitable woman. 'Tis too good she was. Of'en Father McMahan said 'twas a pity she wasn't as rich as Damer."

"'Tis many a piggin uv milk she made me dhrink," said Billy Heffernan, "when I'd be passin' comin' from Clo'mel. An' Mick brought home my ould coat that I put about him the last night I was passin'. I'd rather he'd keep id," added Billy, "for the divil a much harm a wettin' ever done me. But Mick wouldn't be satisfied. An' whin he was comin' for the straw to Mither Kearney's, he brought home the coat. Ould Phil Morris gave him the lend uv his ass to brin' the straw. An' sure if he kem to me for the mule I'd give her to him an' welcome. But he says he thought I might be on the road. An he knew Phil Morris's ass was idle."

"Were you talking to Bessy Morris since she came home?" Norah asked, after an interval of silence. "She ran in to see me, but she had no time to delay."

"She was at the weddin'," returned Billy; "an' I called—. An' I met her above the Bush"—he broke off "this mornin', as she was comin' to Mither Kearney's to make a dhress for Miss Mary."

Norah raised her eyes quickly when Billy hesitated and seemed embarrassed after saying he "called in." And when he turned the "calling in" to meeting Bessy on the road, she did not know what to think. She admired Bessy Morris very much, and liked her pretty well; though she never did warm to her so much as to Nelly Donovan and one or two more of her schoolfellows.

She saw how much superior to them all Bessy was in many respects; but, in spite of her cleverness and winning ways, Norah could not help thinking that Bessy Morris wanted heart. She often accused herself of being unjust, but she could not reason herself out of this impression. Many little instances of selfishness on Bessy's part would occur to her; but it was Bessy's love of conquest and admiration that tended most to prejudice Norah Lahy against her.

And now, on observing Billy Heffernan's embarrassment, she thought Bessy might have been trying the power of her fascination upon him, too. It was but the thought of a moment, dismissed almost as soon as formed. But Norah did say to herself, after a moment's reflection, that she "would not like it."

Billy Heffernan's embarrassment, however, was simply caused by remembering his resolution to say nothing about the dragoon.

"I think," Phil Lahy observed, "I ought to take a walk up to see Mat."

"Give him time to be done his supper, at any rate," returned his wife.

"Very well," he rejoined. "But what I'm afraid uv is that this fall may come against him in throwing the sledge with the captain. I'll advise Mat not to venture. 'Tis too serious a matter. And—and," added Phil Lahy, in a dignified way, "a man should not forget his duty to the public. That's Mat's weak point. He can't be got to see that he's a public character. The people at large are concerned. The credit of Knocknagow is at stake. So I must explain this to Mat. The captain, too, though a good fellow, is an aristocrat. That fact cannot be lost sight of. So I must explain matters to Mat. An', if he is not in condition, he's bound to decline throwing the sledge with Captain French on the present occasion."

"Do you think there's any danger he might be bet?" Billy Heffernan asked, with a blending of terror and incredulity in his look.

"There's no knowin', Billy," returned Phil. "A man 'd want to be careful upon important occasions; particularly when the public are—are—the fact is," said Phil, at a loss for a word, "I must have a talk with Mat."

"Begor," returned Billy Heffernan, "you're afther makin' me someway uneasy. Good evenin' to ye."

"Good evenin', Billy," returned Phil Lahy, benevolently. "Don't let anything I'm afther sayin' prey on your mind. Let us hope for the best."

"I'll never b'lieve," returned Billy Heffernan, stopping before he reached the shop door, "I'll never b'lieve the man was ever born that's able to bate Mat Donovan at the sledge."

"You are right, Billy—unless he does himself injustice—an' what I want to prevent is that. You know yourse'f Mat is a soft soart of a fellow; and requires a friend to advise him. Are you goin' up that way yourse'f?"

"No," Billy replied. "I have to mend the mule's breechin', an' to fill the load, as I'm to be on the road to-night."

"Billy," said Mrs. Lahy, "maybe you'd take a walk down again, as I want a box of caudles an' a few other things that I'm nearly out uv."

"Very well," he replied. "I'll take a walk down before I go to bed." And as Billy, after lighting one of his antediluvian tapers, sat down upon his antediluvian block, to repair Kit's harness, he felt so oppressed and nervous, thinking of the strange change he had noticed in Norah Lahy, and of the possibility of Captain French beating Mat Donovan at the sledge, he heartily wished for the long summer days, when he could stretch upon a bank in the lonesome bog and listen to the whistle of the plover.

(To be continued.)

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