

on my shoulders and two strong arms attached to my body, thank God! I can earn enough money, I hope, to keep myself and my wife out of the workhouse!"

"Oh, Walter, Walter, darling!" old Mrs. O'Grady was just beginning, her voice broken with agitation, when a hard-featured, keen-eyed spinster, of forty winters, suddenly appeared at the door.

The squire turned strenuously to the newcomer.

"Will you be good enough, Miss Bateman, to lead my mother back to her own room at once!"

"I went downstairs for a minute to get a newspaper to read aloud to Mrs. O'Grady, sir," Miss Bateman shilly explained, as she grasped her charge by the arm. "And when I returned to Mrs. O'Grady's room she was not there."

"I'm going now, Miss Bateman," the old lady meekly said.

Then she glanced appealingly at her son.

"John dear, be merciful! The boy is sensitive—he can be led with a silken thread, but not driven with a horse-whip, remember!"

Then the old lady made her exit, in the charge of her most unlovable "companion."

"There's no fear, I'm going to adopt the 'silken thread' method!" Squire O'Grady fiercely said to his erring son. "I feel far more inclined this instant, you headstrong young fool, to apply the argument of the 'horse-whip!'"

"I'll spare you that trouble, sir!" Walter at once said. He spoke respectfully, but proudly and with complete determination. "I shall leave Rathderry within an hour. Nothing can alter my decision!"

## II.

Walter O'Grady left his old home that fateful afternoon, and some months went by before the Squire heard any tidings of his son.

Then the news reached Squire O'Grady—in a letter to his mother, from an old crony of hers—that Walter had gone out to Australia to a cousin, one George O'Grady, who was running a big sheep ranch within twenty miles of Melbourne.

"Poor Walter came to see me the very day before he left Ireland," this letter went on. "He declared his intention of settling down in Australia if he liked the country and got on well at his work. Of course, I had heard about his engagement to that actress girl, so I asked him about her; and he told me that he hoped to be in a position to send for her within a year at furthest."

Old Mrs. O'Grady read this portion of the letter with tears in her eyes, and even the Squire was compelled to turn away his face from his mother's earnest gaze, as he perused the paragraph in question.

"Well, 'twas no fault of ours, mother," he said at last. Walter made his own bed for himself, with his own hands—and now he evidently doesn't mean to ask our assistance to help him to lie on it!"

Old Mrs. O'Grady burst into uncontrollable tears.

"My poor dear boy! I always loved him, since he was an infant," she sobbed brokenly, "I cannot face the thought that I'm never to see him again!"

The Squire—who like most men, hated "a scene"—hurriedly left the room; but a gentle hand was placed on old Mrs. O'Grady's bowed shoulder, and a soft, sympathetic girl's voice murmured words of consolation.

"Now, now, now, dear Mrs. O'Grady! Pray don't give way like this. Your grandson will surely write to you, when he has good news to tell you—and, please goodness, you and he will meet again sooner than you think!"

The speaker was Mrs. O'Grady's new companion—Grace Ronayne—who had replaced the terrible Miss Bateman in the previous month.

Since Miss Ronayne's arrival at Rathderry Squire O'Grady's mother seemed to have acquired a new lease of life. The days had passed away peacefully and happily. Never until to-day had Grace Ronayne seen her gentle charge give way to her hidden sorrow like this.

The Squire himself also had surrendered to Miss Ronayne's personal magnetism, and he sometimes sat with his mother listening to her new companion as she read aloud, of a night over the cosy fire in old Mrs. O'Grady's little sitting room adjoining her bedroom.

Grace Ronayne was a very lovely girl—of medium

height, with a strikingly graceful figure and a winsome, sympathetic face. She had large blue-grey eyes, full of sweetness and expression, small, delicately formed features, and beautiful, burnished brown hair rippling in sunny waves about her shapely little head.

Day by day, week by week, the Squire found himself drawn more and more hopelessly within this girl's web of fascination; until at last the day came—ten months after Miss Ronayne's arrival at Rathderry—when the extraordinary truth burst like a bombshell on Squire O'Grady.

He had lost his heart to Grace Ronayne—he, a man of five-and-fifty, a settled-down, elderly widower, had actually and literally become the slave of this beautiful girl, some thirty years younger than himself!

Watching, day by day, Grace Ronayne's unfailing kindness to his mother, the Squire's affectionate interest in the girl had at first been enlisted; then, little by little, his own heart had been drawn to her, irrespective of her goodness to his mother—drawn to her because of her own personal attraction.

And thenceforward the Squire surrendered to a wild, almost incredibly blissful dream. Could he—could he ever hope to win this girl for his very own—to be the companion and the joy of the years that were still before him?

And under the influence of this wild dream and radiant hope the Squire's heart softened towards his exiled son, and, through the wondrous force of sympathy and fellow-feeling, he now at last fully understood Walter's emotions, and, swayed by his own all-engrossing happiness of heart, he cabled an urgent message to his son:

"You are fully forgiven. Come home to Rathderry at once."

But for five weeks after this message was despatched to the other end of the world, the Squire did not succeed in summoning up his moral courage to put his fate to the touch at last.

Then came a mellow afternoon of September, when Squire O'Grady, still immersed in his love-dream, entered the old orchard of Rathderry and beheld beautiful Grace Ronayne seated on a rustic bench beneath an apple-tree, an open book in her hand.

"Now, or never," the Squire said to himself as he quickly advanced to his charmer.

## CHAPTER III.

Grace Ronayne glanced up from her book, as John O'Grady approached her; then she was about to rise quickly from the rustic bench, but the Squire's hand fell lightly on her shoulder and prevented her impulsive movement.

"Mrs. O'Grady was writing a letter, sir—so I told her I would run out here to the orchard for half an hour," the girl hurriedly explained.

"You spend far too much of your time with my mother, Grace," the Squire said. During the previous months he had dropped the formal "Miss Ronayne." "And you really must give up calling me 'sir!' The fact of it is, Grace, my dear"—and now the Squire had somewhat excitedly seated himself beside her, and the hot color had swept over his face—"the fact of it is, I—I've decided to break the whole truth to you at last—at last! . . . You've won me, in spite of me, my dear. I love you with all my heart, Grace Ronayne, and the one dream of my life now is that you may consent to become my wife and the young mistress of Rathderry!"

Then followed a passionate outburst from the lips of John O'Grady—almost a frantic appeal to this startled, trembling girl to overlook all the disparities between them and to consent to think "things over" his proposal—at least.

While these words were still rushing from his lips Grace Ronayne had risen in considerable agitation from the bench.

"Oh, sir!—oh, Mr. O'Grady," she literally gasped, and her face scarlet with shocked amazement at first, now grew paler and paler. "You cannot mean what you are saying! Oh, I hope—I hope you do not really mean it! . . . I—I've been so happy here—I am so attached to your mother—and I always looked upon you as a loved, true friend. Oh, tell me that you don't actually mean it, Mr. O'Grady!" she went on wildly, as she placed her hand appealingly on his arm. "Because, if you really are in

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