

The old man had much to reflect on in this bit of news. The Moores were a fine old stock, as fine as there was in this county or the next one to it. Dan Moore and he had been old friends, and the girl's mother, sweet Kate O'Hara, the belle of Ballinablowne, had been dearer to him than any friend, when they were growing up boy and girl in neighboring farms. But all the wealth she had was in her heart and in the golden head of her, so, sensible man that he was, he married a woman of many cows, leaving the girl he loved with whatever love was in him to his friend Dan Moore. His wife, the mother of Shameen, had been a good wife to him. Yet in his heart of hearts he often felt a pang of pain and remorse at his own sickly cowardice that let poverty stand between him and the woman of his love—such as it was. He never knew whether, if he had spoken, she would have taken him, there were memories of looks and words that lay warm at his heart, but it is hard to know what a girl means.

There it lay, anyhow, a poor little half-formed romance at the back of his calculating old head, for Tade was a hard man at a bargain.

The gossip's mention of Kate Moore's name sent back his memory to his early days; at the same time he did not forget the hint that she had plenty of money. Between the farm and the fishing, old Dineen was prosperous enough to be particular as to whom his son should marry. 'His son's wife should bring a tidy sum of money indeed. She should pay well for the fine position she would have as Shameen's wife, the best match in Ballinablowne, indeed, and the handsomest young fellow in Kerry to be her husband, though 'tisn't praising our own we ought to be'—this was the trend of his thoughts.

No colleen in the place was well enough endowed to be Shameen's equal, so the father's thoughts turned on the girls returned from America with their savings. Now, he heard with particular joy of Kate Moore's arrival. The girl ought to be everything that was desirable if she took after her parents in aught—again his fancy winged back to the faded little romance of his youth. And finally he felt quite a glow of self-complacency in the idea that in bringing about a marriage between Kate Moore and Shameen he should be concluding a kind of truce between sentiment and what he called 'doing well and suitably by his son.' That reminded him he had heard rumors that Shameen was very friendly with pretty Molly Brady up beyond the bog. Well, that was only the usual boy and girl affair, he told himself comfortably; and, in any case, his son was a good lad, and would do what, in his elders' and betters' opinion, was best for him.

He himself had done the sensible thing long ago—and again his thoughts strayed far away from Shameen and his affairs to his own boyhood's years, when he stretched before him, an endless vista of sunlight days through which he and sweet Kate O'Hara were to walk hand in hand, lovers for ever. Aye, but all too soon the chunk of money had wakened him out of his dream, for the ring of the coins was sweeter to him than her low sweet voice, and the gleam of the metal stirred him more than the sunlight on her hair. Still, one must regret one's dreams! That brought him back to his point again, that if Kate Moore were anything like her mother, his son should find no difficulty in liking her well enough to ask her in marriage. Kate's acquiescence he took for granted. And he happened to be right. Shameen had no difficulty in securing Kate's love, only he never so much as guessed at the immeasurable height and depth of what he won so easily. Tall and straight was he as a young pine, with a head of clustering yellow curls; eyes blue-green like the sea, with a smile ever hovering in their depths; and a ringing laugh ever ready on his lips. Shameen of the sunny head and heart and the silver throat—whose voice charmed the ears of those who listened as he sent it ringing in some fine old Gaelic song over the quiet fields at eventide, when he returned home after his day's work, or over the hushed sea as the boats went out at twilight for the labors of the night—small wonder that Kate's hungry heart went out to him as her idol, her all. First in every game, best at the song and dance, and withal so carelessly simple and generous, he was the favorite and the pride of Ballinablowne.

To Kate he was the spirit incarnate of her dream of home. Strong and restful was he, accepting life gaily with a song and a laugh for every emergency; joyously careless; so altogether unlike the striving and feverish unrest she had known in the men who had offered her love before.

She was, as it were, floating along on a river of dreams, with Shameen's bright face ever before her, and his clear voice in her ears, lulling her to rest securely on his strong true love.

But, she knew not, that away up on the hill, beyond the bog, a girl sobbed herself to sleep every night and woke at the grey dawn with great black circles under the winsome blue eyes—all because of her.

For Shameen and Molly had been close friends ever since their ways lay together to the white-washed school, when the big boy brought the tiny colleen safe home to her mother every evening. And when both were grown up, and Shameen would be cutting turf at the bog, a rope of snow would bring him across the purple path to the little cabin where Molly was mother and all to the five that were younger. A short mid-call or a snatch of song would bring the busy little housekeeper out, and for a brief space she would forget all the petty cares and worries of her daily life; and it seemed to her that even the old bog-road, so dully brown during every other hour of the twenty-four, led straight into the glory of the sun—when Shameen trod it beside her, whispering words into her ear that no woman could ever forget.

They suited each other in every way, those two. Even at the dance their steps coincided exactly; and none danced like her so gracefully and so lightly, nor could any other keep up as she did with the agile Shameen.

Full as her heart was with the care of her father and the five children, she had room and to spare for Shameen.

She knew the inexorable law of marriage as understood in the country places of Ireland—money, must marry money, though hearts might break. She was far too shrewd to think that hard old Tade Dineen would ever let his son marry any colleen so poor as herself, but the bitterness that thought entailed was too much for her, so deliberately she put it aside.

Before Shameen himself came to tell her the news reached the little house beyond the bog that he was to be married to Kate Moore, a 'returned Yank' with heaps of money. They speculated rldly down in the Glen how Molly Barry would take the news. But she thanked God that her little home was isolated, and that no curious eyes could pry upon her wan white face and shadowed eyes, until at least she should have learnt better to hide her stricken heart.

One evening, though she tried to avoid him, knowing that he was haunting the house, she met Shameen at the old trysting place. He told her in a flood of words that he did love her, and her alone, but did she not understand how he had to do this thing? She listened to him in a frozen silence, and there was a chilly contempt in her face as she told him she understood quite well, that there was no need for him to come explaining what she knew already, and that she had really too much to do to stay out any longer. Then she ran quickly away, leaving him standing angry and disappointed in the middle of the old bog road. At last he strode away, feeling very contemptible, but trying to persuade himself that he was aggrieved. While in the tiny cabin poor Molly flung herself down beside her bed, burying her face in the tangled curls of her baby brother, but soon the tight clasp of his chubby arms round her neck checked the choking sobs, and his soft breathing brought a measure of peace into her aching heart. Ah! yes. She understood only too well. But it seemed to her, lying wide-eyed through the night, that if she were a man she would exercise a man's right to choose where he loved and marry whom he would, not weighing a life's happiness by pounds, shillings, and pence. She hoped, and expected, that Kate was plam-looking and middle-aged anyhow. She thought she really would not care so much as long as Shameen loved her best—her alone he had said.

(To be concluded next week.)

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