

The young man did not answer.

'Father—is it to be your version or mine?'

The old man's lips curled once more.

'I have never had the pleasure of hearing yours, Helen. Let me have it now.'

'It will give you no pleasure.'

'Oh, go on, go on! What does it matter?'

The Delaneys settled here, as I have said, about five years ago,' began Helen abruptly. 'I had just come back from college. Perhaps it was in my honor'—she shrugged her shoulders—'that father thought of enlarging Clifton and making it more modern. Modern! To please me!' She laughed, and there was a note of unbelief in that laugh. 'The Delaneys lived this side of the bridge, and father's first idea had to do with the bridge. He wanted to enlarge it, and make a grand pavilion or garden of some kind just about the spot where Delaney's pretty little cottage stood. He gave Delaney notice to quit. Delaney protested. Father insisted. Delaney came to see him, told him that the wife—a delicate, sickly, fragile little thing she was—had taken an overpowering love to the place because it and the surroundings reminded her of her home in Ireland. He begged and begged, day after day. He asked to stay until the baby was born—a matter of three or four months. Three or four months was an eternity; father refused. Then the man, who had taken a lease, made up his mind to fight. Father found a way to break the lease, and was on the point of turning them out altogether when they went quietly—through the wife's influence and the influence of a missionary Catholic priest whom they call Father Maurice. He says Mass, I believe, when he visits here—which he does every Christmas eve—in the Delaney cabin. They built the small hut you were in to-day, and there the baby was born, and there it died. Died on Christmas eve. The wife lingered for a year. On the anniversary of the little thing's death, she asked her husband to carry her up the mountain path to the place which reminded her of her home.'

Helen paused, and sat back suddenly. Her voice sank a few notes lower.

'Oh, it was a grand spot then—father's money had transformed it. It is very beautiful still. You must go to see it, Michael—but I—I can not stand there without a shudder. In his strong and loving arms he carried her, and no one dared bar his path, not even father. To that spot he carried her. She lifted her head from his shoulder to look out upon the mountains and the valleys. She heaved a little sigh of content, breathed a prayer, they told me; whispered her husband's name, her child's—and died.'

'Died!' murmured Michael Jordan, carried out of himself by this recital.

Not another word broke the silence, not another sound. It was a clear-cut summary of unkindness and harshness. No note of emotion crept into her splendid voice—and it was a splendid voice for the telling of such a tale. Old Mr. Michael's pipe rested immovably between his lips; he stared into the fire, listening, seeing visions—unable to connect himself in any way with this statement of bare facts in the sweet tones of the daughter he loved well, and loved better for her frankness.

The moments slipped by. The big clock in the hall sounded the hour of ten. A log fell, the sparks flying up in a great shower. The brother turned his head. The silence had become distressing.

'Was there no other reason—none? Was it because of the grand pavilion only that father wanted Barney Delaney's home?'

Helen Jordan smiled.

'Yes, oh, yes, indeed there was another reason. Father did not like to have a Catholic priest and his heathenish practices so very close to him, even if he only comes four times a year! Father, you know, is of the ancient stock, and still raves of Papistry and the Scarlet Woman.'

She laughed softly, looking at the old man with affectionate raillery in her eyes.

'As if we had not outgrown such superstition in these enlightened days! As if we are not willing to acknowledge the divine right of all religions! Even you or I, father, or Michael here, can set up a little religion. Why not? Who is to prevent it?'

She was mocking now—not at her father. Indeed, even when telling Barney Delaney's story there was that in her voice which precluded all notion of disrespect. She seemed to stand aloof, to view mankind from a perfectly impartial point of view, and one that made sarcasm easy. Yet she was not cynical. Her brother felt that she was entitled to the laurels she had won abroad—her very manner convinced him of this. There was power and strength and judgment here, and mentally he acknowledged them.

'Helen!' said old Mr. Michael, 'I do not know what your schools have taught you, but I do not like to hear sneering words on a woman's lips. It lowers her sex, her

dignity. I am what my fathers were before me. I know what I believe. The Catholic Church is an abomination in my sight! I would rather meet a crawling viper than a Catholic priest!'

He thundered out the last words. Her story had thrilled him; he had been filled with pity for the man she pictured, and he realised that he was condemning himself, that she had made him out a tyrant. Perhaps he was not a tyrant, but he was a bigot.

His son spoke again, his voice coming evenly upon the angry atmosphere.

And there is no other reason now why the mountain-people should hate us?

'The enmity starts from that day. It has not abated since. Give a dog a bad name—you know the rest; and they have certainly made it uncomfortable for father, who has not yet learned meekness.'

It culminated to-night, then. Do you think they meant to kill me?

'No,' said Helen, a shadow on her face; 'to hurt you, perhaps—but, oh, not to kill—'

Her brother shrugged his shoulders.

'How do you know? Can any one foresee the outcome of such an attack? I, in defence of my life, would have killed. That is a man's right—to defend his life. Barney Delaney added to father's debt by his words of warning.'

'Debt!' cried the old man hotly.

'Oh, sir, is it no debt to be the author of such a memory in a fellow-being's mind? Is not sorrow hard enough without making it cruel and bitter and unkind to recollect? And is it no debt that I sit here whole and sound of body—through this poor fellow's warning? Father, as you are a just and honorable man, is that no debt?'

The old man said no word. He rose, without a single glance at either of them, and walked out of the room. A noble figure, proud and stately, and one to be looked at with pleasure. But Helen and her brother sat quiet, in empty chair between them, staring into the fire on the hearth.

'Helen,' said Michael Jordan, his face working a little, 'I have something to tell you that I think you will understand—something beautiful and lovely and holy.'

She inclined her head toward him. Between these two, so often separated, so long apart, existed a perfect communion, as rare as it was entire.

'I love a woman, and to-night, as you told that story of Barney Delaney's, I seemed to put myself into his place. She, too, is fragile, delicate, lovable, gentle. She is part of my life, of my heart—and she, too, is a Catholic.'

Helen did not speak, but her face and her eyes began to shine suddenly. Not from the firelight, but because of some strange and wonderful joy that seemed to well up from her very soul and break through the outer covering of flesh. He did not see this light as he leaned forward across their father's empty chair and took her hand. It was cold, although the fingers clung to his tightly.

'Dreamer of beautiful dreams, they call you in your world; seer of strange visions. I did not know why, until now, when you made that prosaic mountaineer a heroic figure. Tell me what you see for me.'

'Michael,' she said slowly, 'forgive me if, as on every other Christmas eve since it happened, I can only see that one being—that sad, heart-broken, brave fellow, carrying a woman in his arms to the mountain-top. And I see—saddest of sorrowful things!—that same man with a face like a mask of stone, bearing all that is left of her eyes—and it hurts my heart.'

(To be concluded.)

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