

changed. Big and well-lookin' ye got, an' yer eyes are bluer than ever, pet'?

Winnie brought a piece of bread and a bowl of sweet milk from the dresser. The child ate and drank eagerly.

'No wonder ye would be tired and hungry, acushla,' said Winnie compassionately. 'I suppose 'tis a long journey from where ye kem. Were ye comin' all day?'

'All day,' returned the little one, 'an' me tired and me want mother.'

'An, ye'll soon get to know mother, asthoreen, an' ye'll be a happy as the days are long.'

The child's tears were quickly dried, for between the heat of the fire and Winnie's crooning voice weariness overcame her, and soon the tired eyes were closed in heavy slumber. Then Winnie laid her gently on the bed, and sitting beside her gazed with infinite love into the fair childish face which had grown so beautiful during those weary months of absence. And as she gazed her heart overflowed with happiness, and casting herself on her knees she poured out her gratitude to God, who had after all turned her sorrow to joy.

III.

'Oh, I'm so tired! Do sit down, Kitty. But no, as we have come so far let us go to the very top, and see what lies at the other side of this terrible hill.'

It was Meg who spoke. Time—a gorgeous August afternoon nearly a year from the day we first met Emily MacMahon. Scene—a hill a little to the east of Kilfaroge. Dramatis persone—said Meg, her cousin, Kitty, viz.—the writer.

We had been so charmed with Kilfaroge during our former stay that we decided on again spending our holidays there. We even succeeded in inducing Emily to come with us. The place, instead of being abhorrent to her as the scene of her great sorrow, had for her, as is sometimes the case, a special attraction, as having witnessed the last happy days spent with her loved one.

Never in all those weary months had she received a single clue as to the child's fate. As time wore on the hopes, which, in the absence of positive proof of the little one's death, would not wholly die, gradually grew fainter, and resolved themselves into a calm and settled resignation.

She had not felt equal to the stiff climb which Meg had proposed on this day of which I write so we left her behind with Aunt Hannah.

'Heigho!' cried Meg, when we had at last reached the summit. 'Squat down on the grass, Kit, and, like Mirza, turn thy face eastwards. Well, nothing much, after all, only a wild glen shut in by hills and adorned with one stately edifice. What a wee shieling, and how lonely!'

'A primitive piece of architecture, certainly, Meg. Yet I doubt not it shelters worthy souls. Would you feel equal to visiting it when you are rested?'

'The very thing I should like. But on what plea would you enter?'

'The poorest Irish peasant requires no apology from anyone who enters his dwelling,' I answered reproachfully: 'but in this case there is no need to invent one, for I am dreadfully thirsty. I daresay I shall get a bowl of goat's milk, or at least a glass of water.'

'Well, are you ready?' All right. Who'll be down first?'

And Meg ran down the hill like a deer. I followed more leisurely.

Our laughter and chatter brought a woman and a little child to the door of the cabin.

The woman waited till we drew near, thus giving us an opportunity of noticing her appearance. She had a pale, sad-looking face, and her figure was thin and scanty; her eyes, however, were bright, but it struck me at once that they shone with a strange, unnatural light. We exchanged salutations, on which the woman invited us to enter the cottage. We did so, seating ourselves on two rickety stools, while she got me the drink I asked for. Meanwhile the child had crept up to me, and my first idea on looking at her was the striking contrast she presented to the mother. My second was a vague notion that she reminded me of someone I knew intimately—I could not remember whom.

'What a pretty child,' said Meg. 'What is your name, dear?'

'Nonie,' answered the little one with a blush and a smile.

'Nonie! and a very nice name, too. She is your daughter?' to the woman, who was presenting each of us with a measure of milk.

'Yes; whose else's should she be? Me that lives all by myself here in the hills, especially since she kem back to me.'

'Was she away for a time, then?' I inquired.

'Did I say she was away?' she asked, somewhat uneasily. 'Well, an' if I did 'tis no harm to tell ladies that know nothin' about it, she added, half to herself. 'Aye, Miss, she was away a whole year, an' she kem back that beautiful an' grandly dressed that I wouldn't know her only for the signs an' tokens.'

'The signs and tokens?' interrogatively.

'Aye, the signs an' tokens, she repeated, her eyes assuming a far away, dreamy look. 'I had them from ould Maureen. She was to come in the fall of the evenin' from the west, for the rath is westwards. I was not to meet her or lead her, but to wait till she walked in to me. An' sure enough, it all came to pass.'

I was quite mystified, and so, I could see, was Meg.

I did not understand the woman at all.

'But why should you not meet her? Where was she?' I asked.

The woman smiled as if compassionating my ignorance.

'Ah, I see you don't understand me, Miss. Where should she be but wid the good people?'

'With the good people?' we both exclaimed simultaneously, and interchanged glances.

'Aye, aye, ladies. 'Tis two years ago now since they stole her, lavin' there on the bed the appearance of her corpse. But I knew

my darlin' was not dead, an' afther talkin' to Maureen, the knowledgeable woman, I began to hope. An' sure enough the ginthry sent my darlin' back to me. She was lonesome afther them, too, an' cried an' cried for weeks. 'Twas just an evenin' like this,' she added, 'but later. The 16th September it was, for I kept an account of the time Nonie was away.'

'The 16th September,' I exclaimed excitedly, and again looked at Meg, reading in her eyes the thought that flashed into my own mind. Could it be possible? An, now I remembered to whom the child bore the resemblance which had so puzzled me. In fact, I recognised the child herself, and Meg's face told me that she, too, recognised her. Motioning my cousin to keep silent I renewed my conversation with Winnie.

'How was she dressed when she returned?'

'In a soft pink dress, and the nicest underclothes at all. Sure! have them yet there in the box, as I thought 'twould plaze the ginthry to treasure them.'

'Have you, really? We should so much like to see them.'

And while her back was turned Meg and I compared notes in suppressed whispers. There was scarcely a doubt that the child was Emily MacMahon's. She had probably strayed away from Kilfaroge, wandering on till she reached this lonely spot. But we must get all the proofs we could.

Presently from the recesses of a rude deal box the woman took a neatly-folded parcel, which she opened, disclosing the very pink frock which little Tessie had worn on that fatal morning. How often had not Emily described it to me? I took it in my hand to see if it bore a mark, but it did not. The underclothing, however, was all marked T.M. We made no remark, but when handing them back I said, as if casually—

'I know a lady who would be delighted to see those pretty things. Would you show them to her if I brought her here?'

'Sure, I'll be only too proud to do it, Miss,' answered Winnie. She was evidently flattered by our admiration of the clothes.

'Did Nonie answer to her name at first?' asked Meg.

'That she did not, miss. She used to cry when I would call her Nonie, and say "Me name Tessie," but now she knows better,' smiling at the child, who was staring at us with round eyes of wonder. Catching the sound of the name, she cried suddenly:

'Yes, yes, me Tessie,' and even her very voice was the counterpart of Emily's.

'Well, we shall go back to Kilfaroge now for the lady of whom I spoke. Perhaps if you dressed her in the things it would show them off better. Has she outgrown them?'

'She has then; but they look lonely on her for all that, though 'tis but once or twice that I let her wear them. Never fear I'll have her grand and settled out whin ye come back wid the lady.'

In a state of feverish excitement we hurried from the shieling. What joy was in store for Emily! and how wonderful were the workings of Providence in leading us to this secluded spot!

I thought it better that Tessie should be dressed exactly as she had been on the morning of her disappearance, so that the mother should have no difficulty in recognising her.

We decided on telling her nothing till she was confronted with the child, but the unwanted excitement in our faces, and our mysterious way of insisting that she should come with us must have awakened strange thoughts in her breast, for during the quick walk towards the valley she was very pale and unusually silent.

Before seeking her out we had gone to the barrack and told the sergeant of the discovery we had made. He readily consented to follow us with a constable, as we feared there would be trouble with the poor, half-witted creature who was about to be so terribly disillusioned.

Emily's face expressed surprise when on doubling the hill she perceived that our destination was the miserable cabin at its foot. Still she maintained that eloquent silence, though we noticed that she trembled with sheer excitement.

But when Winnie appeared with the little one that excitement could no longer be restrained, and clutching my arm tightly she stared at the child with amazed, incredulous eyes.

Suddenly she gave vent to a wild cry, and starting forward caught the child's hand and gazed long and anxiously into her face. Then her own countenance became transfigured with joy as, all doubt dispelled, she clasped her darling to her breast, the while she tremulously called her by every endearing name.

Then a wonderful thing happened. The child, who had been rather startled at first on hearing herself called 'Tessie,' suddenly started and stared up into Emily's face with eyes that showed she was struggling with some half-awakened memory. Then she looked down at her own unusual attire, still perplexed. Raising her eyes once more, they chanced to rest on the rings which glistened on Emily's fingers. These somehow formed the missing link to the infant mind—we all know what delight children take in jewellery and all gaudy, glittering things—for, laying her chubby finger on the emeralds which shone on the guard to the wedding circlet, she lifted her pretty face, now all aglow with light, and lisped, 'That mamma's ring—you mamma and me Tessie—me not Nonie,' and to Emily's delight she nestled closer in her arms.

Winnie's face was a study during the above scene. Its expression changed from surprise to wonder, from wonder to understanding, but from that again to fear and rage, as she at length realised what was taking place. With a cry like the howl of a wild beast she darted forward, and would have snatched Tessie from the arms of her real mother had not the two policemen who had stolen up unobserved, suddenly intervened and held her between them by main force.

The poor creature's frenzy was pitiable.

The sergeant and all of us tried to reason with her and explain matters. But she would listen to no reason, and only laughed a fierce, maniacal laugh when we told her how Tessie had disappeared