

'Let us pray that Mr. Burke may live for many long years, and then, perhaps, it will not matter so much—in fact, not at all—to you.'

'I cannot see what difference the years could make to me.'

'You may—excuse me saying so—but you may marry.'

'That,' she answered quietly, and stooping to gather some golden daffodils as he spoke, 'is not probable.'

'Are you so hard to please, then?'

She laughed lightly.

'Oh, no. But this is not what one would call a marrying country. Men are few and far between about here, Mr. Lyons; and my mother and I do not mix much in the gay world.'

So I heard from Father Tom, 'You are fond of the country?'

'Yes. It suits my mother.'

'You are a devoted daughter, Miss Burke.'

'I love my mother,' she said simply, then passed on through the garden and out into the stable-yard.

'These stalls were once filled with horses,' she said, a little sadly. 'This small pony represents the whole of our stud now.'

'A sturdy fellow,' he said, an expression half shame, half annoyance, creeping over his face, 'but not worthy to be the only occupant of these stables. Your uncle and—and his heir neglect you, Miss Burke.'

'You must not say that,' she replied quickly. 'Uncle has been away for years and years, and forgets the place. His heir is a stranger. By-the-bye, what is his name? It may seem odd to you, but we never heard it.'

'It does not seem odd to me, because I knew before I came here that you had never heard it. His name is the same as mine—George Lyons.'

'Indeed! Is he a relative?'

'Yes. A very near relative.'

'Come; that's pleasant news,' cried Sheila gaily. 'I don't feel as if he were altogether a stranger now.'

'Thank you,' he said, well pleased at the gracefully-implied compliment. 'I am much obliged.'

The tea-party that afternoon was an immense success, and the fun and merriment were delightful to behold.

This happy intercourse went on for some months, and then suddenly George Lyons was called away.

'The illness of one dear to me obliges me to go,' he wrote to Mrs. Burke. 'But I trust you and Miss Sheila will not forget me, but think of me kindly and often during my absence.'

'That we are sure to do,' sighed Mrs. Burke, 'for we shall miss him terribly. Sha'n't we, dear?'

'Terribly,' Sheila answered. And turning away she hurried out of the room. In the hall she paused, and a sob escaped her.

'Gone? Is it possible? Without a word. And last night I fancied— But, flushing to the roots of her hair, 'I was mistaken—horribly, bitterly mistaken.'

The days and weeks that followed were brilliantly fine and warm. Such a summer had rarely been known; but Sheila was absorbed and preoccupied. She took no heed of the flowers; scarcely noticed the golden plums or dainty apricots. Her heart was sad, her spirits depressed, and when away from her mother she was frequently in tears.

Still she did not neglect her work among the poor, nor her visits to the church.

'Miss Sheila will surely be a nun,' the people would say when they saw her kneeling wrapt in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. 'God bless us, but she'll be the cruel loss to us entirely. But sure His holy will be done.'

However, pious as Sheila was, the convent was not what God intended for her, and so the people learned to their joy before very long.

When George Lyons had been gone some five or six months, Mrs. Burke one day received a telegram from London announcing the death of her brother-in-law.

'Poor fellow! God be merciful to him. May he rest in peace!' she cried. 'But, oh, Sheila, his death will make a great difference to us.'

'Great, indeed,' Sheila was very pale. 'We must leave this at once, mother. From what I have heard this George Lyons is not too nice.'

'Very unlike his namesake,' Mrs. Burke sighed. 'It is certainly strange that their names should be the same. I often wondered Sheila—'

But Sheila was gone. And when she returned to the drawing-room a few hours later her mother saw with pain that she had been weeping bitterly.

That she and her mother should get away from Leamont before Mr. Burke's heir appeared upon the scene was now Sheila's most earnest wish, and without delay she rented a cottage about a mile from Coote-hill.

A fortnight elapsed, and nothing was heard from either the heir or his solicitors.

'Once to-morrow is over we'll pack up and go,' decided Sheila on Christmas Eve, as she walked briskly home through the wood. 'He may come suddenly and expect to find us gone. Dear old home! 'Tis sad to think it is our last Christmas here. And, oh! how strange it is that another George Lyons should have come into my life, my thoughts. Will he—the first—ever return? Yes, as a friend, perhaps, of this man's. And I—oh! how shall I meet him? How greet him as an acquaintance? God help me; it will be hard, but it must be done.'

Overhead the sky was blue and cloudless. There was a slight touch of frost in the air, but the sun shone brightly, and one might have fancied it was a day in early spring, instead of Christmas Eve. Here and there a robin or a thrush piped merrily on branch or twig. Little brown rabbits crept out from the under-

wood and came up close to her feet, apparently unconscious of her presence.

For some moments all was still, and then there was a scouring and a scampering, and the little creatures beat a hasty retreat as footsteps were heard in the distance.

Sheila smiled, then glanced round to see who was coming. But no one was visible, and she sank back with a sigh, and covered her face with her hands.

But presently footsteps were heard again, this time close by; and before Sheila had time to move or to realise what had happened she found herself face to face with George Lyons, felt her hand in his, heard his voice, as in a dream.

Miss Burke, Sheila, you are in trouble,' he cried.

'Yes. My uncle, I dare say you have heard, is dead. We, her voice trembled, 'must leave Leamont.'

'Yes; I know—that is—Sheila, I have come to-day to ask you a question and to make a confession.'

The girl started and her color deepened. Without daring to raise her eyes she said:—

'A question? A confession? What can they be?'

'Can't you guess? Don't you know that I love you? Sheila, can you—will you be my wife?'

For a moment the girl made no reply. Her heart beat quickly, and her lips quivered. Then, looking up with a shy glance, she laid her hand in his.

'Yes,' she said simply, 'I will be your wife. I do love you dearly.'

'God bless you.' He caught her hand and carried it to his lips. 'And now for my confession. Sheila, I have won your love on false pretences. I—'

She looked up, startled.

'I led you to suppose that there were two men called George Lyons. There is only one—'

'Then you—'

'I am that one—your uncle's adopted son. Can you forgive my deception and love me still?'

'But why did you deceive us?'

'I can hardly tell. I came here at your uncle's wish to make your acquaintance; met you accidentally, and loved you.'

'But Father Tom, did he, too—'

'No. I met him in Switzerland, and he knew me only as George Lyons—never guessed that I had any connection with your Leamont.'

'Leamont! Why, it is yours, George!'

'Yes, and yours. My darling, neither you nor your mother need ever leave your home now. Your uncle knew that I loved you and hoped that you might perhaps love me in return. I told him everything at the beginning of that last illness that kept me so long away from you. He was delighted, and his great desire was to see us happy at Leamont together. God willed otherwise, and took him to himself. But, Sheila, you are weeping. Are you not happy, sweetheart?'

'Happy?' she cried, smiling through her tears. 'Glory be to God on high. I thought—I believed this would be the saddest Christmas of my life; and now—oh, George!' with a bright blush, 'you have made it the happiest.'

Thus were Sheila's prayers answered, her vows fulfilled. Adhering firmly and unselfishly to the path of duty, she attained a happiness greater than anything she had ever imagined possible—life with her husband and mother in her own beautiful home, in the country that she loved—CLARA MULHOLLAND, in the *Catholic Home Annual*.

The Catholic World.

AUSTRIA.—The Proposed Catholic University.—The newly-elected Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, Mgr. Katschthaler, announces the results of the recent Conference of the Episcopal Committee in Vienna regarding the projected Catholic University for Austria. The Bishops have formed a sub-committee, consisting of the Prince-Archbishop of Prague, the Prince-Archbishop-elect of Salzburg, and the Bishop of St. Pölten, to take immediate practical steps towards the opening of the free Catholic University at Salzburg. The various Bishops are invited to select one or two representatives of their respective dioceses to help forward the undertaking locally and to collect funds.

ENGLAND.—Decorations in Connection with the Holy Year.—Mr. John Millar, of Slough, Bucks, has received from Rome a special decoration in recognition of his services in connection with the Pilgrimage of the Holy Year. There has been conferred upon him the Order of the Cross of Merit, and a similar honor has been transmitted to the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Denbigh, Mr. V. M. Dunford, K.S.G., Father Bannin, of the Italian Church, Hatton Garden, and Father Clemente, the representatives in England of the International Committee of Pilgrimages. The badge, silver cross, and certificate have been transmitted to each of the recipients through Count Acquederni, president of the International Committee, Bologna. Mr. Millar is a native of Cushendall, County Antrim, and is attached to the Inland Revenue Service, in which capacity he resided for some years in Belfast.

Profession of a Nun.—At the Convent of the Cross, Boscombe Park, Bournemouth, recently, Miss Mary Kelly, eldest daughter of Mr. Terence Kelly, J.P., Palmerston road, Dublin, made her profession. This young lady took her vows as a religious of the Holy Cross at the hands of the Right Rev. Dr. Cahill, Bishop of Portsmouth. The parents, brothers, and sisters of the young nun, together with a number of friends, were present at the ceremony.