

Of course Mr. Crawford could not refuse a gift so kindly offered. As she bustled about, rolling the eggs in paper cases and packing them and the griddle-cake into a little basket, he stood looking on the pictures on the walls about him. These pictures had often arrested his attention before, because many of them were old, and some of considerable value, as far as he could judge. 'The Village Festival,' 'The Fighting Horses,' 'The Jew's Harp'; these were the names of some of the engravings. On the wall opposite the fireplace hung an old time-obscured oil-painting, a portrait of a man.

Mr. Crawford stood looking fixedly at this, as he had often done before.

'I wish, Thady,' he said at length, 'you would lend me this picture. I feel greatly interested in it, and can't help thinking it is very valuable. Would you have any objection to parting with it? I am going to London next week, and I will visit a picture dealer there, who will be able to tell me what it's worth. At the worst, if I do not sell it, I can at least have it cleaned and restored for you. Will you let me take a loan of it?'

'Certainly, sir,' Thady answered readily. 'Sure the picture's of no value to me, except for old time's sake, since it was here, like the trees outside, with my grandfather and great-grandfather before me. Take it, to be sure, and may you have good luck with it, sir.'

Mr. Crawford took down the picture from its place. After Mrs. Donnellan had brushed off the dust with a clean cloth, he proceeded to carefully remove the canvas from its frame. He thought it would be the safer way to carry it rolled up cylinder-wise, but Thady and his wife said to themselves that whatever little value it may have possessed before, it was only a poor-looking rag enough now it was removed from its frame. But they didn't express this opinion to their visitor.

As Mr. Crawford was about to roll the canvas up he took it to the window to have a better look at it in the now fading light; he thought he discerned a name half-illegibly inscribed in the left-hand corner where the frame had hitherto hidden it. As he peered through his glasses he gave a start of surprise, then looked more carefully once again. At last he rolled it up, and turned to Mrs. Donnellan with a smile.

'Well, I'll take it with me and see what I can do. These are the eggs; a thousand thanks. Herbert and his mother will be grateful to you. Good-bye now, and don't be disheartened. Pull yourself together, Donnellan, and get well; but don't go out in wet weather. I'll be back before Christmas and will tell you all about this,' tapping the roll of canvas he held carefully in his hand.

A moment later he had mounted the dog-cart and was gone. As he drove home over the mountain he whistled a tune and felt happy, hoping that at least the Donnellans were safe from eviction this year. The name he thought he discerned on the canvas was 'Holbein.'

'God bless him, anyway! 'Tis he is the kindly-spoken gentleman,' Mrs. Donnellan ejaculated, as she watched the dog-cart vanish out of sight. 'Though he brought the trouble with him, I feel as if he had taken it away with him again too.' She turned and busied herself about the house, mending the fire and tidying up the noggin and plates after the boys' simple repast.

Hopeless as things seemed, Mollie would not grumble even now. She had come there ten or twelve years before, a happy, laughing girl, and at heart she was a happy, laughing girl still. The tidy dowry of £200 which had come to her on her wedding day had been given shortly after, as was the custom, to 'fortune off' Thady's elder sister Kate, who got married soon after they did. Molly did not grudge it to her. Thady was good and kind, and made her very happy, and the little boys, and now the precious baby girl, coming one by one, made her even happier still. Thady's cottage with its homely interests and pleasures, its pretty, well-tended garden stretching down to the shady road, and the orchard of fruit trees securely sheltered behind the house, made a simple earthly paradise to her, rendered more heavenly by her own happy, cheerful nature. She would not be downhearted now, she told herself determinedly. Thady must get well first; she would have to take great care of him. The potatoes and the hay and straw could be looked to afterwards. Surely the landlord would wait.

But Thady did not get well. The weather continued to be damp and unwholesome, and kept him greatly indoors. Whenever he ventured out, even for a little while, he paid for it afterwards with days and nights of racking pain. Finally he had to remain indoors altogether. The doctor said it might be fatal to him to attempt to do any farming in the state of health he was in. So Mollie hired a few men to dig out and trench the potatoes for them. This was easily enough done, but the men's wages made a big hole in the slender profits of the crop. And the hay and straw lay still untouched and unmarketed in the haggard under the winter's rain and snow. Mollie was in great trouble.

Christmas was now almost upon them, and it promised to be a sorrowful Christmas enough. All the little pleasures and surprises she had planned long ago for Thady and the children must be given up. Even the trifling little delicacies which were necessary for Thady in his illness seemed each to put them one step further from any chance they had of remaining on at the farm. So the smiles and dimples one by one died out in Mollie's face and her cheeks grew pale and wan.

Meanwhile the Crawfords had gone away, taking their crippled boy to see the great London doctor who, it was hoped, might be able to restore the child to health and strength again.

Week after week went by, and no message came from them. For a time, it is to be feared, Mr. Crawford had

completely forgotten the picture, as was only natural, perhaps, considering his great anxiety about his boy during this critical time.

Happily the operation was at last over. It had been supremely successfully, and the great doctor was very jubilant and quite sanguine as to its good and lasting results.

Herbert was now nearly convalescent; the peaked, pale little face was growing plump and almost rosy; the expression of constant pain had almost disappeared; it was almost two months since the operation had been performed. He was now permitted to move about a little, and the doctor even said he might allow him to travel home for Christmas. His mother's eyes shone with tears of joy and gratitude to God as they saw her dear little son at last able to use his limbs. Mr. Crawford, too, began to lose his look of care and sadness, and became almost boyishly light-hearted and cheery.

One bright morning in the first days of December, when the winter's sunshine had pierced through even the fogs and smoke of London, and shone warmly in through the window where Herbert and his mother sat watching the passing crowds, Mr. Crawford suddenly came across the forgotten picture whilst going through his papers. He reproached himself severely for his forgetfulness. Wrapping it carefully up, he took it off at once to Christie's, to have it submitted for inspection by an expert in the value of such things.

'It may be genuine, or it may not,' was the great man's first verdict. 'It is a little hard to judge in its present dirty state, but one can speak more definitely when it is cleaned and restored. One thing we must remember: Holbein seldom put his name to his works, though he did occasionally. This may be a forgery; but, even if it is, it is of considerable value, for both technique and coloring are wonderful. Do you wish to put it up for sale, sir?'

'Well, yes; if you think it would bring anything worth while. I shouldn't mind giving a matter of £20 or so myself for it, as I am acquainted with the owner. So anything above that—'

The auctioneer interrupted him. 'I think we'd be very safe in putting a reserve price of a hundred guineas on it,' he said quietly.

Mr. Crawford's face showed his surprise. 'Yes, I have no doubt at all that it's worth that,' the auctioneer repeated. 'It may be worth a great deal more.'

Mr. Crawford felt quite elated as he went home. He was thoroughly glad for the Donnellans' sake; now at least there was no fear of eviction for them this year, and if Thady would only get well and strong!

Three weeks later, the Crawfords were at home again in Coolnagrena (Coolnagrena, the 'Sunny Corner'), which now, please God, would be to them a sunny, happy spot indeed.

Almost his first duty was to drive over to see the Donnellans and acquaint them with their good fortune, the extent of which they as yet knew nothing about, and which even he could hardly bring himself to believe in.

He received, as usual, a kindly Irish welcome when he entered the little farmhouse, now looking ghastly and bewitched-like under its thick covering of snow. It was Christmas Eve, and the whole country side lay white and cold. The faces of the farmer and his wife were pale and troubled, in contrast with the bright eyes and merry-buddy faces of the children, glowing in the firelight. Mollie sat nursing the sleeping baby on her knee.

'Well, thank God! Mr. Crawford said to them, 'I have good news for you at last. I did not like to tell you till I was quite sure.'

'Yes,' they answered, 'we were glad to hear the good news about Master Herbert, God bless the child! To think, Mrs. Donnellan went on, 'of that poor lamb getting the use of himself after all these years. To be sure the ways of God are wonderful, blessed be His Holy Name! I'm told now he's able to walk about a little, and is getting stronger every day. We are so pleased, sir, for his own sake and the poor lady, his mother, not forgetting yourself either, Mr. Crawford.' The speaker's eyes and those of her husband shone now in glad sympathy. Their own sorrows were forgotten in this great joy that had come to others.

'Yes! yes!' Mr. Crawford assured them with a happy smile. 'My boy is better now than we ever dared hope he would be. With rest and care he will soon be almost as strong as other boys of his age, the doctor tells us. Why, you may soon expect to see him walk over to see you all!' with a happy laugh. 'But that is not what I came about. You remember the picture I took off with me?'

'Aye, sir,' Thady answered; 'the old wall seemed lonesome life after it went away, but we had nearly forgotten it lately.'

'Well,' Mr. Crawford went on, 'having your permission to dispose of it if necessary, I put it into the hands of a man in London who understands such things. It was sold last week, and I have a cheque here for the amount it fetched. Could you guess the figure, Thady?'

Thady answered that he could not.

'Well, what would you say to eight hundred guineas?'

Mollie, forgetting the baby, almost jumped off the seat in her astonishment, but Thady remained impassive.

'You're joking us, Mr. Crawford, sir,' he said, with a reproving shake of his head.

'I'm not, Thady. I assure you. Here's your cheque for you, drawn on the Bank of England. Pay to Thaddeus Donnellan, Esquire, the sum of eight hundred and forty pounds sterling.' Look at it now, and don't doubt me. It comes exactly ten times the amount