

'You know how weak I am, Gerald. But I will show you that I am sorry, grateful, loving. I will win your forgiveness if I can. Tell me just one thing: have you never regretted—Laura?'

'Laura? She is my sister. After mother's death she lived with an aunt in Paris, and did not know of my marriage until it had taken place and father had cast me off, as he had threatened. She is coming here to-night; so dry those eyes, love.'

But when Laura did come it was to find her brother in the delirium of fever, and Isabel in a half-distracted state. She had neither eyes nor ears nor thought for any one but him, and she answered Laura's questions at random.

'Oh, if only the doctor would come!' she cried. 'I have sent for him. Why isn't he here?'

'I will send again for him,' said Laura, soothingly; and there was another for whom she also would send.

The unhappy wife pleaded with all the fervor of her heart that this one dear life might be spared, that the possibility of reparation might still be left to her; and was so praying when a tall old gentleman entered, and, approaching the bedside, uttered an inarticulate sound of pity and dismay.

'Oh, doctor!' she cried, 'you don't think he will die? He must get better! You must save him!'

'You—you are his wife?' You must save him!'

'Yes; and his illness is all my fault. He has killed himself working for me. He has gone without necessities lest I should want. Do you know, Doctor, we had a little child—a dear little girl—and she died. Oh, I cannot lose him too! Oh, don't tell me that the only one in the world who loves me—who truly loves me—will be taken from me!'

'Hush, hush! You will be ill yourself next,' he said, answering with difficulty. And Laura, who had re-entered, and down whose cheeks the tears were running, gently laid her hand on the woman's arm.

'Come with me,' she said. But Isabel resisted.

'No; I must watch him, I must nurse him; she answered wildly.

'If you wish to help him you must be calm and composed. Come with me, and when we return the doctor will tell us what is to be done.'

She half forced the girl from the room, and then, smoothed her hair and bathed her face, and made her swallow some soup, speaking all the while hopefully and reassuringly.

'Now be brave, Isabel!' she urged. 'Perhaps his recovery may depend on your fortitude.'

The fairy gloaming crept over the hills, and a wind, soft and faint as a human sigh, rippled the waters and lost itself amid the grass and clover; a single star hung high above Cloughmore. The birds came and went without a sound. One almost seemed to hear the 'Peace be still.'

When they returned to the sick room, a dark, wiry little man with eyeglasses was talking in a low voice to the grey-haired gentleman who had come first.

'I am Doctor Power,' he observed, addressing Isabel.

'I think you had better have a trained nurse, Mrs. Boyle.'

'You are the doctor? Then who is this?' she asked.

'I am Gerald's father,' said the elder gentleman. 'I came to Killowen to meet my daughter and her husband, and from her I learned of Gerald's state.'

Isabel's head dropped in pathetic humility. Doctor Power, glancing from one to the other, withdrew.

'He has suffered much,' said Isabel, sadly. 'I am the cause of the quarrel—the coldness between you, sir. Say what you wish to me: I deserve it. I was never worthy of your son.'

'Ah, my poor girl, you have enough to bear without harsh words! I have been hard, unjust—how terribly so I did not realise until Laura told me of my boy's altered looks. May God spare him to us!'

Then began for Isabel the long anxiety that attends the sick-bed of a dear one—now hope, now fear in the ascendant; with thoughts ever rushing back to the days of old when the great Physician walked on earth, and health and healing followed His gracious footsteps.

Slowly Gerald's consciousness returned and the fever left him, but wasted to a skeleton and weak as a child. One day Isabel was sitting in her usual place beside him, when his dark eyes unclosed to recognise the grey-haired old man who had shared many of his young wife's vigils and all of her suspense.

'Father!' he faltered.

'Yes, it is I. Will you come back to me, Gerald, my son, and let the past be forgotten? Will you bring your wife to the old home?'

With an effort Gerald drew Isabel's head down to his shoulder, and then extended his hand to his father. Strong and warm was the returning clasp. They realised, at length, each heart through its own bitterness, that life is too short and death too sure and eternity too near for anything save loving kindness.—'Ave Maria'

A SAD PROBLEM

Walking home from late Mass the other Sunday, I observed a young man in front of me, well dressed but with a slight stoop, and carrying his hands in his pockets—a habit which is odious to me. Presently two young girls, also well dressed but too gaudily for an old woman of my conservative tastes, passed ahead of me. As I walked along behind them I overheard the following conversation.

'Madeline, do you see that young fellow in front of us?'

'Yes; do you know him?'

'No. I don't care to know him either. But he fooled me nicely last Sunday.'

'How was that? Did you mistake him for some one else?'

'No; I mistook him for a gentleman.'

'And isn't he one?'

'Why, certainly not. Can't you tell it by the way he shuffles along with his hands in his pockets?'

'Well, his walk is really not very graceful, Bertha.'

'He looks well sitting down, though. It makes the greatest difference.'

'Does it? Where did you see him sitting down?'

'In church last Sunday. I came late, and thought I would go to the side aisle. You know those two funny little pews against the wall? I suppose you would call them at right angles to each other.'

'Yes, well?'

'I slipped into one of them, knelt a moment, and then, as the sermon had begun, I sat down. When I got settled in my place I saw that young man almost facing me in the other pew. I was struck by the beautiful shape of his head and the short crisp curls. I like that kind of hair, there is something so romantic about it. And he had such a fine complexion, and such a lovely tie—blue, with white polka dots; just like the one I gave Arthur for Christmas. Mean thing! I wish I had it back! I'll never spend another 50 cents on him, I can tell you. He's such a flirt!'

'Well, he's got his match now in Kitty Hayden. I believe he likes her real well. He gave her a bangle.'

'How do you know?'

'I saw it—she showed it to me.'

'Well, I'm not jealous of her. I wish them joy of each other. But to go on with my story.'

'Yes, go on.'

'My friend was all right till he stood up. Then I noticed that he kept his hands in his pockets. I despise that habit? But afterwards I didn't wonder in the least.'

'Why?'

'At the last Gospel he made the Sign of the Cross—at the blessing. I mean—and—well, I can't describe those hands!'

'Weren't they clean?'

'Yes, they were clean; but so big and coarse and rough! They were simply disgusting. I know he's a drayman or maybe a blacksmith.'

'A blacksmith wouldn't slouch along like that.'

'Probably he works at some trade, though.'

'Tradesmen make good money.'

'But they're so common!'

'Yes, that's so.'

'I don't see how any young fellow with a bit of pride would want to work at a trade, do you?'

'Some one has got to do things, you know,' rejoined Madeline, who seemed to be less silly than her companion.

The girls began to walk briskly, and that was all I heard. At some distance farther on they were stopped by an old woman, poor-looking but neatly clad in black. After exchanging a few words with her they passed on. She walked very slowly, and when I reached her she bade me a kindly 'Good morning.'

'I saw you in church, ma'am,' she said, 'and took you to be a stranger.'

'Those are very pretty girls to whom you have just been speaking,' I remarked.

'Yes, they're pretty enough,' she replied. 'But they're just as empty-headed as they're good-looking. They're neighboring girls of mine—cousins—but they have foolish parents. Instead of putting them to good trades they let them take places in one of those big cheap stores. I declare, ma'am, the way they do be chewing gum all the day long in those places, and then standing talking to customers with their mouths full of it, is sickening—just sickening. And, then, the foolish airs they put on! Mary and Bridget they were christened, but it's Madeline and Bertha they call themselves now.'

'Probably they will end by being ashamed of their parents,' said I.

'They're ashamed of them already, ma'am, in a way. Do you think those girls ever take their whippersnapper company to the house? Never!'

'Where do they take them, then?'

'They meet them in the parks and at the corners. It's a wonder that more of them don't come to grief.'

'Perhaps they have no place where they can entertain their friends.'

'Maybe some of them haven't, but these have a neat little sitting-room, where they needn't be ashamed to take any young man. But they wouldn't have him hear the Irish "brogue," as they call it, from the lips of their poor old father and mother.'

'I wonder they go to Mass.'

'And so do I, ma'am. It's habit with them; and they meet people and show their fine clothes. What the children of Irish Catholic parents are coming to in this country I don't know—that is, some of them. They're not all like that. And yet those two would be very sweet and good girls, if they'd had training. Glory to God, but it's a sad thing!'

'And so it is—'Ave Maria.'

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