

as for Delia herself, she is a darling! I'm falling head over ears in love with her day by day.

This was perfectly true, and that beautiful Delia McCarthy reciprocated—in some measure at least—the inflammable young man's ardent feelings was perfectly evident as the weeks and months rolled by.

'I shall ask her to marry me!' Dan decided one afternoon in January. 'If she consents, our engagement can be kept a secret for the present—until I see my way to breaking the news to mother. I shall try to contrive some scheme of bringing my mother and this girl together without the mater suspecting who Delia really is.'

'This will secure from mother a wholly unprejudiced opinion of Delia. And I've not the slightest doubt that such an opinion will be entirely favorable in every respect. Then when mother has learned to love Delia, for her own sake, it will be time enough to break the full story to her—and then I shall have cornered her, and she cannot possibly withhold her consent to our marriage.'

It was a delightful and exciting project, and Dan proceeded to carry out the first part of it without a moment's delay.

He proceeded straight to Mrs. McCarthy's cottage, and was lucky enough to find Delia all alone in the tiny parlor, seated in the light of a glowing bog-wood fire.

In an incredibly short space of time Dan's arm was wound about the girl's slender waist, and he was pouring red-hot eloquence into her ears.

'I love you, Delia—I've loved you from the first day we met on the cliffs below Reenogriana. And I want you to marry me, dearest! I think you love me a little, don't you? You always seem glad to see me, at least.'

This speech was so ingenious—so devoid of conceit and self-assurance—that Delia's heart, already captured in part, was now wholly, unconditionally won.

A long sigh escaped the girl's lips, and it needed no words whatever to convey to Dan O'Connor that his impetuous wooing was crowned with full success.

'Darling!' Dan cried, as he took her bodily into his arms, and kissed her so rapidly and so vehemently that the girl gasped for breath. 'I'll send for the engagement ring to-morrow. Let me see! This is January. I cannot run the risks of a long delay. You must marry me in March, Delia, and in the meantime I shall at once take steps to secure my mother's consent.'

At these words a shadow darkened Delia's glowing face, and a little shiver passed over her.

'Your mother will never consent, Dan. never!' she said in a whisper.

'Leave it to me, dearest—just leave it to me,' Dan answered, with a brave show of conviction. 'I've partly arranged a plan that, I'm positive, will work out all right. The Lynams—they live in Clare street—are friends of mother's, and your mother, Delia, used to know them intimately at one time. I will ask Mrs. Lynam—who is a special favorite of mine—to invite you on a visit to Clare street, and I will go to my mother at the same time; and I shall arrange with Mrs. Lynam to ask my mother some afternoon to her house and to introduce you under some assumed name. Then the mater will judge you on your merits alone—and you'll see she will be completely bowled over!'

It seemed a simple scheme enough, and Delia's hopes rose again, and Dan returned to Droumgarra in hilarious spirits.

He was singing a merry West Cork folk song as he entered the dining-room, and old Martha Hanlon, who chanced to be placing some blocks of wood on the fire at the moment, turned quickly and directed a searching glance of her keen, yet kindly grey eyes on Dan's face.

'Wisha, glory to you, Master Dan! It's well for you, faith, to be in such high spirits.'

'All I want now is a wife, Martha, and then you'd always find me in high spirits. But with the help of God, I won't be a lonely man much longer.'

'Wisha, amen! Master Dan—if it's for your good, why?' Martha returned, after a pause, during which her eyes seemed to probe Dan to the marrow of his bones. 'And I'm sure the poor dear mistress would be only too overjoyed to hear that you were after selecting a suitable young lady—a suitable young lady, Master Dan,' the old woman added, with a significant emphasis on the word 'suitable' that at once caused Dan to have certain misgivings as to the wisdom of his impetuous words.

'Good Gracious! I hope she suspects nothing,' Dan thought, uneasily, as Martha Hanlon presently withdrew. 'The mater and she are as thick as thieves. It would never do if Martha guessed the truth. . . . But, then, of course, she doesn't. How could she? She never stirs outside the door, except on Sundays and holidays to go to Leap to Mass. And I don't believe she is intimate with any of the people here.'

However, there was a slight risk, all the same; and Dan decided to lose no time in writing to his confidential friend, Mrs. Lynam, of Clare street, and enlisting her kindly assistance in his little scheme.

By the same post that conveyed Dan's letter next day to Dublin, a letter from Martha Hanlon to Mrs. O'Connor—marked 'private and urgent' also travelled to the metropolis.

'My dear Mistress,—This is only a line or two to tell you something I kept from you since the first week I came here, as I did not like to trouble you, if I could help it.

'But now I cannot keep the truth from you any longer. Mrs. McCarthy—Miss Kate O'Meara that was—is staying near Glandore with her daughter, Miss Delia. Master Dan is constantly with them. I thought there was no danger in this friendship at first. Now I think different.

'The sooner you can come here yourself the better, dear mistress. Then I will tell you all about it—for my eyes were open and my ears, too, during the past three months.

'Ever your devoted old servant and faithful friend,
'MARTHA HANLON.

'Please, dear mistress, do not pretend to Master Dan that I told you about this.'

CHAPTER IV.

Dan's letter to Mrs. Lynam was answered in a way he little expected.

Frank Lynam—Mrs. Lynam's eldest son, and always a chum of Dan's—appeared at Droumgarra on the day following the receipt of Dan's letter in Dublin, greatly to Dan's delight.

Frank was a civil engineer, and had been staying for the previous months in Kerry in connection with the making of a new railway line.

'I had a note from my mother this morning, Dan, and when I read it I started here at once to see you. I'm taking holidays for a week or two, so I'll stay with you, old chap, until you turn me out.'

Then he proceeded to discuss with Dan the matter of Delia McCarthy's visit to Clare street.

'My mother told me about your letter, Dan, and she will be delighted to do what you ask. She will write to you on the subject in a day or two. There's no great hurry—because, as I suppose you know, your mother is laid up with an attack of influenza, and she will probably not be able to venture over to Clare street for a week or two at least.'

'I wonder Aunt Alice has not written to tell me,' Dan said, a shadow crossing his face. 'It is just like her, though—a selfish, unfeeling old thing! I never did like Aunt Alice. It was always a puzzle to me how mother could be so fond of her.'

That same afternoon Dan took his friend Frank to call on Mrs. McCarthy and Delia, and Frank was loud in his praises of the girl.

'I'm not one bit surprised you are so gone on her, Dan! She's a splendid girl—I'm inclined to envy you!'

And Frank sighed, and his eyes were suddenly averted from Dan's face.

'By Jove, I had forgotten, old chap!' Dan said hastily. 'You've had a romance of your own—that time you were in Scotland two years ago. How has it gone on since, is it any harm to ask?'

'Let it rest in peace, Dan,' Frank Lynam said very gravely, and his handsome face was shadowed. 'I can't bring myself to talk of it even to you—just yet!'

During the days that followed the two young men were constantly at Mrs. McCarthy's hospitable cottage.

Mrs. Lynam had answered Dan's letter, promising to assist him in his matrimonial schemes in every way she possibly could.

'I am sorry to say your mother is not yet fully recovered,' the letter went on, 'although she is certainly very much better. Next week I hope to have Delia McCarthy here in Clare street.'

Dan was in wild spirits when he read this letter; but on the following morning he was destined to receive a very unexpected shock.

When Frank Lynam entered the breakfast-room at Droumgarra he beheld Dan pacing excitedly up and down the floor, an open letter in his hand.

'Frank, I've had most unexpected news,' Dan said, suddenly pausing. 'This letter is from the mater. She's quite well again—or well enough, at least, to undertake a long journey. She's to be here this afternoon. She travelled to Cork yesterday, and she is coming on to Skibbereen by the mid-day train to-day!'

'I—I wonder why she's coming, Dan?' Frank asked, considerably surprised and curious.

'I'm almost certain that silly old Martha has been telling her tales!' Dan cried excitedly. 'I was a bit too outspoken one evening lately when talking to Martha, and I had an instantaneous misgiving, which I now believe was well founded.'

'My mother would never dream of coming here—at such a time of the year, too—unless there was some urgent reason of that kind. And she's not coming alone, either. She's bringing a girl along with her.'

'A girl! What girl, Dan?'

'She doesn't tell her name, but she declares her to be the "most charming creature in the wide world—almost an heiress, too—highly accomplished," etc., etc., etc. And she winds up by saying, with profuse underlining: "Only wait until you meet her, Dan. You will fully agree with my opinion. And here's a secret for you—she is dying to meet you. She told me so last night."

(To be concluded.)

For Children's Hacking Cough at night,
Woods' Great Peppermint Cure, 1s 6d, 2s 6d.