

to me,' said Michael. 'I was too busy making money to feel the years running over me.'

'An' y' made the money?' said the driver admiringly. 'See that now!'

'I made it too dear,' said Michael, 'too hard, if I find any of my friends in the poorhouse. And dearer still if none of them are living to meet me even there.'

'Hearten up, sir!' said the driver. 'There's always friends for them that has the money!'

'My curse on it for money,' said Michael bitterly. 'You're a young man, my boy, and don't put your heart in it, however hard you may have to earn it!'

He gave the man a handsome fare when parting with him at the door of a hotel in Queenstown, and the next day he set out alone on foot in the direction of the poorhouse indicated by the people of the hotel, who thought it a queer place for a gentleman to be off to the first thing after coming off an American steamship. But he had kept his own counsel, and asked no more questions about the O'Hallorans.

Michael stood in awe before the iron gates of the cold refuge for the aged and miserable in a country which ought to give generous food and shelter in honorable independence to the children of her love. Oh, the iron bars and the grey stone walls, so high and bare to the imagination that was filled with a picture of green-hung gables, and low chimneys, and a mellow thatch! Oh, the clanking gates and doors, and the steep stone stairs, instead of the open doorway with the hens pecking round it, and the dog sunning himself on the threshold as guardian and member of the family. What a dreary prison to those who have known the sweetness and comfort of never so humble a little homestead!

Yet it was through his own selfish neglect that his mother had sought a harbor here, through his easy belief that she was cared for in the old home by the brothers and sisters he had left behind him there. Was he to find her here in her sorrow and desolation; or was she dead?

When he entered a number of old women were sitting on a bench in the poorhouse yard, a square flanked by high grey walls from which the rows of windows of the pauper wards looked down, and threw their cold shadow in turns on the stone pavement of the enclosure as the sun moved across it.

As the sun travelled the pauper women moved with it, leaving the bench that had got under the shadow for the bench on the opposite side on which the light and warmth were now falling. About a dozen aged women were there, some of them trying to keep themselves awake with snuff, a treasure occasionally bestowed on them by visitors. Some gabbled and chattered together; others were silent and looked only half alive. One sat aloof from all the rest, younger than most of the band, with a grave, patient face, and a look of strong intelligence on the brows under the whitening hair and pauper cap.

'That,' said the official, pointing her out to the visitor, 'is Mrs. Mary O'Halloran, the woman you are looking for.'

'Thank you,' said Michael, 'I will trouble you no further. I am going to speak to her.'

He walked across the yard, with feet as if weighted with lead. Was that his mother? He saw her in memory, buxom and handsome, a genial smile on her face and a look of general well-being all over her, as she stood in the doorway of the old home, calling the children in to dinner. White and bent, now, her face furrowed with sorrow, alone and deserted by those children, holding herself aloof in her tragedy even from her fellows in misfortune, as she sat a little apart from them on the end of the bench.

As Michael walked slowly up to the row of pauper women all held out their hands to him for snuff, or anything else that the visitor might chance to have brought—all but that one who kept her head turned away as if ashamed of the importunity of the others. Michael had brought no snuff, but he had coppers that would buy it; and having moved up the row, satisfying all demands, he came to the last figure on the bench and stood before her.

'I think you are Mary O'Halloran, ma'am,' he said, trying to speak steadily.

'That is my name. I thought every one in the world had forgotten it.'

'No, then,' said Michael. 'You had children that went to America, and myself is come from it. I met some one that used to know your family, and I thought I would come here to see how you are, ma'am.'

'Children that went to America? Aye, had I. Ten children I reared about my knees. One went from me and another went from me. The ship took them all and left me as I am.'

'What became of them, ma'am? Will you let me sit down beside you for a little talk, for I'm tired with walking.'

'I'm proud of your kindness, sir,' she said, moving a little to leave him plenty of room on the bench. 'There was a time when I would have given you a comfortable seat in my own chimney-corner. But that time's past and gone. And you're welcome comin' out of America, for it's the big cruel mouth that swallowed up all my children; not a one left to hold out the hand of stren'gh to me and say, "I've come back to you, mother!"'

'How did it happen that they all went from you and died?'

'Well, it did. Pat was killed on a railway in Australia, and Jem got a fever in Africa. John was blowed up in a mine in New Zealand. Peter died in South America of the yellow fever. Norah got a bad husband in New York and broke her heart. Kate was killed in a factory in Chicago, and Mary died in a hospital in California. Nan caught the small-pox from her and followed her. And I buried a little one at home myself—that's the only one lyin' with my dear good man in Kilshirkin graveyard.'

'You've counted up nine,' said the stranger. 'Wasn't there another one?'

'Oh, an' there was. Sure, Michael went away from me the first, an' no call at all, only he was fond of rovin' the world. He was the soft, fair boy, with the laughy ways; an' "let me go off with myself, mother," he says, "an' some day I'll come back an' make a queen of you." But he forgot me. He wrote a couple of times the first few years, and then no more about him.'

'But you don't know he's dead,' said Michael. 'Sure, maybe he's the friend of mine I told you about.'

The old woman started and looked up keenly. 'There couldn't be a maybe in it,' she said. 'If Michael sent you to me he'd say it was to his mother you were going.'

'Do you think you would know him if you were to see him?'

'Is it know him? My soft, fair boy of sixteen with the twinkle of fun in the blue of his eyes always? But I'll never see him in this world again. Died, he did, in some hole or corner out foreign, an' me not with him to say "Michael, avilish, may God receive you merciful!" My little Michael, for he was young. My big Michael, for he was tall, though he hadn't got to be a man yet. My son Michael, the light of heaven to you! You never would ha' forgot your mother if you had been over ground!'

'He didn't. He hasn't forgot you. Mother! Look up at me and see if you know Michael.'

She cried out and raised her eyes, and fixed them with a dazed look on the face of the man beside her.

'Oh, why would y' make a fool of me?' she wailed. 'I never did y' harm, for a stranger to come mockin' me!'

'Look at me again, mother.'

She stared, fascinated, but incredulous.

'A fair, soft boy,' she muttered, 'an' no more than sixteen years. An' a settled, strong man with a dark face to be comin' to me callin' himself Michael.'

'Mother,' said Michael, 'you're making me cry, as if it was a baby had come back to you. Do you forget the years that turn a boy's fair hair dark, and knit him up into a man of strength? It's bad and wrong I was to be so long without writing to you, but the heart-hunger took me at the last, and I'm here now,