

that the half circle before her wavered and gave back a little. But it recovered in an instant and surged in upon her.

Mary Ellen stood her ground bravely, clenching her hard little fists and striking out viciously at the faces about her. But the numbers were too much for her and she must have gone down to ignominious defeat had not fate so willed it that Danny Doolan—laughing Danny, the scapegrace and pet of the village—at that moment sauntered round the corner and into Mary Ellen's life.

His bold, blue eyes took in the situation in a moment and he pushed himself forward into the mass of struggling forms.

"Katie Hagarty, be off with you," he laughed, catching a black-haired girl of eleven by the shoulders. "What do you mean by setting such an example to Benny there? Jimmy Doyle your mother was lookin' for you down the road five minutes since, and she with a gad in her hand. Polly, I don't know what your da'll be sayin' when he sees that dress."

So he elbowed his way forward, thrusting aside first one and then another, until he reached the heart of the group and stood looking down upon Mary Ellen, dishevelled and panting but still unconquered, with laughter in his eyes.

"An' what is it all about now, will you be tellin' me?" he asked her coolly.

The group about him melted unobtrusively away and left the two facing one another. Mary Ellen's breast was heaving, her hands shook a little, but her head was still erect and her eyes met his fearlessly.

"It was callin' me 'Redhead' they were, an' 'Dublin sthree!'" she explained haughtily. "An' then James Doyle did be tuggin' at my hair, the way I gave him me hand across his face. Then they all set upon me, the Kerry cowards!"

She flung the taunt full in his face and stood waiting with some trepidation to see how her challenge would

be received. Was not this also a Kerry man and so one of the enemy?

Danny looked down at her with interest and admiration. Mary Ellen, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes and the red-gold mass of hair tumbling about her shoulders, was indeed a delectable vision.

"Is it so now?" he said. "Then red is the most beautiful colour in the world. An'—an' it's beatin' the face off Jimmy Doyle I'll be, when I'm seein' him next."

Womanlike, Mary Ellen's heart softened at the admiration in his eyes, but outwardly she gave no sign.

"I'd best be gettin' along now," she said, "or me da'll be wonderin' what'll be keepin' me. An' it's thankful to you I am for your help," she added graciously, holding out a brown little hand to Danny, who took it in his own sturdy palm with a queer feeling of bewilderment and pleasure such as he had never before known.

"I'd best be going along with you," he said, "the way some of them might be waitin' for you around the corner. But if any of the young pistrogues dares be layin' a finger on you in future, he'll have to reckon with Danny Doolan, an' so I'm tellin' him."

Mary Ellen let her hand lie confidently for a moment in his.

"Oh, it's not afraid of them I am," she replied proudly. "Would you have a Dublin Conerty *afraid* of the scum of Kerry?"

"I'm a Kerry man meself," remarked Danny briefly. For the first time in his life he had fallen under the spell of one of the opposite sex, but even for her own sake he would not deny his native county.

Mary Ellen flushed a little. "Are ye so? Well, there's maybe good and bad in all counties," she conceded. And she made no further opposition to Danny's walking by her side, even condescending to converse with him in a very friendly manner as they strolled along.

At last they reached her abode, a tiny sweetie shop, standing on a corner of the long, straggling main street