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THE WEAVER

The cottage lay close by the narrow roadway, on the other side of which a mountain torrent, forced its way over boulders in a mad race to the sea. On its shelving banks Tom Garvey's blue-eyed children played all day and every day, and people used to wonder how Tom and his wife Biddy saved them from a watery grave, for the brook abounded in treacherous pools.

Tom was tall and fair, with genial blue eyes and a face that might be considered handsome were it not for the weak, receding chin. He was never busy, never in a hurry. He tilled his acre of land and grazed his cow along the road dykes in summer time when her usual pasture land was stopped for the growth of hay. Sometimes he did a day's work for a neighbor for hire or kindness—generally the latter. He had always the kind word for young and old, always the spare time to stop for a chat, always the willing heart to do a neighborly act, and, in consequence, was much liked, if not too much respected.

Biddy, his wife, had been a beauty in her youth, and, as the mother of six youngsters, was still comely. She had chosen Tom out of many admirers, although he possessed nothing he could legally call his own, for the cottage and three acres of land belong to his elder brother. They were married by the parish priest one Sunday and the pound-of-fering made by Tom was borrowed from a neighbor. They returned to Tom's brother and made their home with him without ever asking his leave. Paddy Garvey did not welcome them, neither did he resent the intrusion; the only evidence of feeling showed was a little pallor of the face and a tightening of the lips, as of one who did not quarrel with fate and bowed to the inevitable. Biddy noticed these things as she sat by the kitchen door and watched Paddy as he went on with the preparation of their modest evening meal, for he and Tom had lived alone in the cottage since their mother's death—the former doing the housework.

"I've brought home a housekeeper," said Tom at last, looking at his brother sheepishly.

"Aye!" ejaculated Paddy without ceasing his work.

"She'll be handy," went on Tom.

"You'll need some one handy when I'm gone," answered his brother.

"An' some one more than that, I'm thinking," he went on in a tone slightly suggestive of bitterness.

Biddy flushed, but she took off her bonnet and mantle and sat down to the meal without an invitation. The three ate in silence and the monotonous tenor of their lives began.

The marriage was more than a nine days' wonder. People were never tired of praising Biddy—never wearied setting her up as a brilliant example. Nobody ever saw her at work, yet the cottage was always as neat as new pins, the children tidily and cleanly, if poorly clad. She devoted a goodly part of each day, when weather permitted, pacing the roadway with fingers busy building up, stitch by stitch, abnormally long stockings. The inquisitive puzzled their brains as to the probable destination of these, since Tom could not possibly wear out as many as she knitted and so far as any one knew, she had no relations, near or otherwise.

Tom and Biddy were popularly supposed to be an ideal pair, and should have been ideally happy were it not for the gloomy presence of Paddy, and much pity was bestowed upon the young pair for this dark cloud in their bright household, for Paddy Garvey was dark, and sullen and silent. No one ever saw him since Biddy crossed his threshold, and he

worked so hard that he never had any time for kindness. He was by trade a weaver, and the bright, sunny cottage had one gloomy chamber set apart for his entire use, where bales of wool hung suspended from every beam over a big, ugly loom, in the midst of which Paddy sat, unwashed, unkempt, playing his shuttle as if impelled by an unseen power.

Sometimes the children peeped shyly in, but ran away again as they might at the cry of a bogie-man, and, at such times, an observer, had there been any, might have seen a swift spasm of pain pass over the man's tired face. Occasionally Biddy came into his den with a cup of tea, a few potatoes, a bowl of milk, or some such scanty portion of their meal when he delayed joining them over-long, and laid them silently on a small table at his back. Often the neighbors called in with work for him and the will to tarry for a little mild gossip, but he usually cut them short, and they went away more content than ever that Tom and Biddy were much-enduring mortals. When their concern evinced itself in words, Biddy had a peculiar trick of sucking in her lips and looking at her husband with an expression that was not kind to love, and he had an adroit way of quickly changing the conversation, or rising suddenly with an ejaculation about some important business left undone through forgetfulness, which set more than one thinking. But curiosity remained unsatisfied. Biddy could close her lips to some purpose. She never spoke ill of Paddy, of her husband, of anybody. When she had no good to narrate she held her peace. Tom laughed good naturedly at everything or joked facts away when they came persistently before him. Paddy remained grim, silent, unapproachable. It was only once a year, when the parish priest hunted him out to perform his Easter duties, that the neighbors caught a glimpse of a clean, uncomfortable man attired in best clothes of a very ancient pattern.

The strange trio had thus lived their lives about a dozen years, with little or no break in the monotony save the periodical arrival of a fair, blue-eyed child, when Biddy, entering the dark chamber one morning with the customary cup of tea, found the loom still and the dark figure absent. It took her several seconds to take in these facts, and her breath came a little quickly as she climbed the ladder stairway to peep into the attic bedroom. Not that she expected to see him there, for Paddy rarely lay abed about the sun; since he seldom went abroad it was useless seeking him in the fields. The summer sun was fighting his way in at the small attic window, and lingered on the lowly bed and a still figure with pallid face which lay there. The eyes were wide open and sad, the mouth drooped, and the hands lay limp and inert on the quilt. Biddy's breath came quickly. "Paddy!" she said in an awed whisper.

"I couldn't help it, Biddy," answered a weak voice. "I set the kitchen in order, lighted the fire, fed the fowls, and then I turned in again. Biddy, do you know I am dyin'?"

The sad, patient eyes searched her face, lingering on its rounded curves and pointing red lips.

"Paddy!" she reiterated as she blood crept away from her cheeks and a mist swam before her eyes.

"'Tis true," he said, "Mortal man couldn't stand it, an' I've been givin' this year or two."

Biddy came close to the bedside, and kneeling down, looked into the sick man's face, saying: "I'll send for the doctor. Pat Donovan will get us a ticket, an' bein' a kind neighbor, he might call for him on his way to-morrow."

The sick man smiled, answering: "Never mind the doctor, Biddy; as there; I'm thinkin' I won't be in his need to-morrow."

"Paddy," she said brokenly, "we didn't heed you much, but we'll be different when you are better again. The children—"

"Ah, yes; I was only an old crank, Biddy, an' you were a fair young colleen. Who could expect that you'd take me an' leave Tom?"

"I couldn't help likin' Tom best then, but if I had the time over again—"

"If you had, you'd have married Tom just the same, an' ye'd have let poor old neglected Paddy work to fill the children's mouths."

"Don't," she moaned.

"Tisn't that I mind, 'for when a man goes around with a heart of lead, day in an' day out, 'tis bound to weigh him down at last; but I pity the children with a lazy father like Tom, although they always kept me far away from their little hearts an' I pity the girl I gave my life for—"

Biddy's sobs broke into his speech, and he raised himself on one elbow with a painful effort, while, with the other hand he gently stroked her head.

"I was the queer old man, to be sure," he went on half unheeding, "but the first day I ever saw you, when the boys gathered down in the kitchen for a dance an' you stood beside Tom, I thought the old kitchen wasn't the same while you were in it—so bright like, as if the sun had come out suddenly after a dark morning. 'Twas rainin' hard, I remember, as ye ran in, but I did not notice the rain or the darkness for the brightness that was all around you. I was the queer old man for sure, to be askin' you to stop with me, when I knew from the first you had eyes only for Tom. Sure I carried him on my back when he was a little lad, an' when he fought with the other youngsters, as boys will, I beat them till they were black an' blue for darin' to lay hands on him. I was always more like his father than his brother, an' I never wanted a thing from him but the girl he wasn't man enough to work for, an'—"

"Don't say anything against Tom," Biddy interrupted, starting up. "He can't help being made as he is."

"Was I sayin' anything against him? I'm the queer old man, an' the sooner I lay my bones to rest beside my poor old mother, the better for all."

But Biddy was of an active mind, and did not believe in sympathetic words where deeds would serve better, so without more ado, she retreated to the kitchen and bustled about the wants of the sick man, Tom was sent at once for the priest and doctor, while little Patsy, the eldest boy, was despatched to the village for such dainties as could be procured there.

"'Tis the way we didn't heed him enough," she said to the doctor, and the doctor laughed. The idea of any deeper meaning in her words did not filter through his mundane mind. Accustomed to his thought, a sufficiency of food and drink was enough to satisfy any man's needs; and if the sick man had not had a sufficiency in that way, it was surely his own fault, since trade was brisk and wages good in his line of life.

Yet for all the care and ministrations of physicians for body and soul, Paddy lay inert, slowly but surely bound for the land of shadows. The heart of the big, ugly loom in the dark chamber ceased to throb, and the bales of wool made uncanny shadows when the moonlight filtered through the uncurtained window. The children peeped in, and seeing the figure absent, whose will moved the uncanny thing to weave great bundles of flannel and frieze, they took to playing hide and seek between the beams and joists.

Paddy heard them as he lay still in his attic bed. Sometimes a shout of delight warmed his heart a little, but such manifestations of joy were quickly quelled by the mother, lest they might disturb him. It troubled him, for he had loved them in his slow, silent way for her sake, and he bade her leave them free, since childhood was a time of joy. He wished they would come up and share a little of their youthful gaiety with him, but they never came further than half way up the ladder stairway, when he would suddenly see two big round eyes and a fair, curly head peeping over, only to disappear again as soon as his eyes turned in that direction. Why did they fear him? They had always held aloof from him. It was time he was going home.

"You are tired, Biddy," he said one day. "I never thought I would live to give you so much trouble."

The tears came up and stood in her eyes. She knew now it was no use striving against the Reaper.

Paddy had entered the valley of shadows, and the neighbors, although they had been kind and sympathetic during his illness, could not but feel that Biddy and Tom would be happier when time had softened the sorrow that usually follows in the train of death. They did not know that want came and sat an unwelcome visitor in Paddy's place at their board, for Biddy was ever one to keep her own counsel, and when they still came with bales of spun wool to be woven, thinking surely Tom worked the loom in his brother's place, she never let them know that, early in the morning and late at night, her own hands threw the shuttle that transformed their wool into good, sound flannel for rough wear.

"God rest his soul," she would say to herself as she arose early for her day's toil, and the same again as, wearied and over-burdened, she lay down for a brief rest.—N. F. DeGion, in the Catholic World.

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ANY even numbered section of Dominion lands in Manitoba or the Northwest Provinces, excepting 8 and 26, not reserved, may be homesteaded upon by any person who is the sole head of a family, or is male over 18 years of age, to the extent of one-quarter section, of 160 acres, more or less.

Entry may be made personally at the local land office for the district in which the land to be taken is situated, or if the homesteader desires, he may, on application to the Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, the Commissioner of Immigration, Winnipeg, or the local agent for the district in which the land is situated, receive authority for some one to make entry for him.

HOMESTEAD DUTIES: A settler who has been granted an entry for a homestead is required to perform the conditions connected therewith under one of the following plans:

(1) At least six months' residence upon the land in each year during the term of three years.

(2) If the father (or mother, if the father is deceased) of any person who is eligible to make a homestead entry under the provisions of this act resides upon a farm in the vicinity of the land entered for by such person as a homestead, the requirements of this act as to residence may be satisfied by residence upon the said land.

(3) If the settler has his permanent residence upon farming land owned by him in the vicinity of his homestead, the requirements of this act as to residence may be satisfied by residence upon the said land.

APPLICATION FOR PATENT should be made at the end of three years, before the Local Agent, Sub-Agent or the Homestead Inspector.

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