

"To be shure I did! wasn't it meself that nursed her from the day she saw the light of life, and a bitter life it was to her, the poor darlint. Loved her! as the core of my heart I did; aye, better than all the rest of them!" she continued, with mournful tenderness. "But what's come over you, Miss Hilda, to ask me such a question, now?"

"Ah, nurse! I want you to love me for her sake—and to help me too!" Hilda added, impressively.

"Help you, avourneen! shure I'll do that same, never fear. But what's throubling you, darlint?"

"Eveleen, you remember mamma's unhappy marriage; but you do not know all she suffered."

"Och, then, it was the woful marriage, shure enough! To think of her, a rale lady marrying a play-actor! Many a tear I shed after she was gone, and if I knew what part of the wide world she was in, I would have followed her to share the hard fortune she brought upon herself. But the masher would never tell me, and many a time I begged him on my knees to forgive her, but 'twas no use. It was the pride that hardened him agin his own flesh and blood,—for the pride of ould Nick himself isn't greater than the pride of the Godfreys."

"But, Eveleen, you never did know the sufferings poor mamma endured—the misery, the want that shortened her days."

"Och, don't talk of it, avourneen; it's all over now and your dear mamma is in glory, for shure the life she led here was purgatory enough for her, the crathur," and the old woman wiped the tears of sympathy from her shrivelled face.

"I must speak of it, Eveleen, that you may understand what I am going to tell you. I have a secret I am going to confide in you. I am in great trouble, and you must help me."

"A saycret is it, agra?" and an undefined fear was expressed in the dark sunken eye.

"Yes, nurse, a secret, you will not betray me, I know."

There was a touching sadness in Hilda's voice, and the chiselled features worked convulsively.

"Betray you! not if I was to gain a King's ransom!"

There was a sudden lighting up of those dark eyes which were fixed with an anxious expression on the agonized face of her young lady.

"I trust implicitly in your fidelity, and as a proof of it I will tell you the painful secret which has almost broken my heart. Eveleen, I am married!"

The words came unwillingly from the pale, trembling lips. It cost the wretched wife an effort to acknowledge it even to the faithful old nurse.

"The saints forbid! Holy Biddy be good to me! Och, Miss Hilda! is it the thruth ye're telling?"

"The sad truth, Eveleen. To save mamma from want I married a man I did not love, whose money made the last few months of her life comfortable."

"And the man himself, who was he, alanna?" There was a gloomy suspicion fastening itself upon the nurse's mind, the painful truth was dawning upon her.

"The captain of the wrecked vessel. The man who lies in the opposite room."

These words were spoken calmly as some persons can enunciate what costs them a death-pang to utter.

Bowing her head upon her hands to shut out the intense anguish of that colourless face, the old woman rocked to and fro with that oscillating motion peculiar to the Irish peasant when in sorrow.

"Och, my grief! What'll be the end of this?" she wailed forth. "Shure if the masher himself should come to know it, it will be the death of him!"

"But he must never know it, Eveleen!" exclaimed Hilda, vehemently. "The secret is known only to you."

"But the man himself, acushla! did not he see you? Shure I met you coming out of the room. Why did you venture into it at all?"

"It was very foolish, I know, but I wanted to find out if it was he. I was wild with the agony of suspense; the terrible dread that all would be discovered."

"And you did the very thing to bring it about! Shure he would never set his eyes on you if you kept out of his way, ochone! You just put your foot in it. It's little sense is in your young head. Why didn't you come and tell me all about it at onct?"

"I am sorry I did not, but I was not quite sure the man was Dudley. It was so unlooked for his coming here. I never thought this would happen."

"Sthrange things do happen shure enough," observed the nurse in tones of deep dejection. "Just to think of the storm driving that ship dead on shore, at the very door, as if it might not as well be lost off some other part of the coast! And then, too, his life must be spared, while others is drowned! His life saved!" she repeated angrily, "when it would be a mercy if the wild waves swallowed him up! Och, my grief, if he only was lying cowlid and stiff like them other sailors they are waking this blessed night! Wouldn't it be the weight off your heart, alanna? But he must be

spared—spared to be the torment of your life, bad luck to him!"

There was fierceness in Eveleen's tones now, she was angry with the Providence that had spared the life of Dudley.

"Did he see you, Miss Hilda?" she resumed after a short silence. "I left him sleeping when I went to get his supper. Maybe he was asleep and never noticed you going into the room."

There was a sudden hope in the old woman's eyes as she turned them on her young lady.

"He awoke when I was standing beside his bed, but he only saw me for a moment, I extinguished the light instantly. He will mention this to you. Try to persuade him he was dreaming. You will know best what to say to him, nurse."

"Lave that to me! I'll bamboozle him, I'll engage!"

"Give him no information about the family—about mamma, I mean. He will, undoubtedly make many inquiries, but you must be on your guard, Eveleen."

"He'll get no news out of me that can hurt you, avourneen. And now it's time for you to go back to the company. The gentlemen have left the dinner-table, and Sir Gervase will be axing for you, for it is the core of his heart you are, ochone! To think of what might be if it only pleased the Lord to let that man be drowned this blessed day. Faix it's my lady you might be to-morrow! If I have not a mind to give him a dose and put an end to him!" Eveleen continued with sudden vehemence. "By all that's bad, I'll do it," she added with that wild impetuosity, that recklessness of crime which is so characteristic of the Irish peasant who boasts a Spanish descent.

"Oh nurse, you will not do it! You dare not!" exclaimed Hilda in accents of horror.

"Dare not!" repeated Eveleen, with a scornful curl of her thin lip. "I would dare do anything to serve a Godfrey, and by this cross, I'll never let that man leave this house alive to bring disgrace on your young head, alanna!"

"Nurse, I will denounce you as his murderer if anything happens to Dudley!" exclaimed Hilda with solemn earnestness, her eyes dilating with horror as she regarded the old woman.

"Will, then, I wont do it, as it is so displeasing to you, darlint. Shure it was the Devil tempting me that made me think of such a thing. Badcess to him, he is always at one's elbow egging them on to mischief!"

"But it is no use talking," she muttered, as she took up the tray of refreshments and proceeded to Dudley's room, "it is the very best thing could happen to him if I did give the misfortunate man a drink that would make him sleep the dremeless sleep of death. That would be the way to keep his tongue quiet, for dead men tell no tales. And who would be the wiser for it? Even if they did bring the crime home to me, who cares? My life is nearly spent, and what matter if the last few years was cut off before the time? Would not it be to serve a Godfrey—to save the young innocent craythur from disgrace who sacrificed herself to keep her mother from starving? And to think that she, a Godfrey born, should ever be brought to that! Shure it's full and plenty was always in her father's house, and she almost dying of hunger! Och, my grief, how some are born to suffer in this world!"

"Oh, here you are at last!" was the exclamation with which Dudley greeted Eveleen, as she made her appearance, "I was afraid you were not coming back to-night."

He was sitting up in bed looking much excited.

"Is it the hunger that's throubling you?" asked the nurse with affected simplicity. "I ax your pardon for keeping you so long without your supper. But you were sleeping so comfortable when I left, I was in no hurry back, bekase, ye see, the sleep is the best thing for you. Is it long awake you are?"

To be continued.

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