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## NORA BRADY'S VOW.

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### CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

Sitting a little back from the others, he had been watching Nora as she came in and out, making eyes at her, and grimacing, which liberties she resented by looks of ineffable scorn on her handsome face; and, finally, as she attempted to reach across to put the tea-urn in its place, he suddenly pinched her cheek.

"Ugh!" screamed Nora, and the next instant the tea-urn, with its boiling contents, was toppled over him. He sprang up with a fearful oath. Mrs. Halloran shrieked, and her husband, who, in a mirror opposite, had watched the whole affair, could scarcely control his features or restrain his laughter.

"Nora—why, Nora," he said, as she came in with a cloth to wipe up the floor, "that was extremely awkward."

"I know it was, sir, and if a vile bug hadn't stung me on the cheek, it wouldn't have happened at all. I wish St. Patrick himself was here to drive all such venomous creatures away from Glendariff, anyways. Did it hurt you, sir?" she asked, innocently, turning to Donald More, who, half-frantic with pain, had thrown himself on the sofa, where he lay groaning vociferously. His reply was full of profanity and fury. Nora shrugged her shoulders, and turned away to conceal the smile that flitted over her face.

"Go, Nora, quickly, and tell Mrs. Shea to prepare the south chamber for Mr. More; tell her he is badly scalded. Go, have it done as soon as possible," said Mrs. Halloran nervously.

"I am sorry this accident happened, Donald," said John Halloran.

"Accident! I am parboiled. My shoulder—my arm—my thigh! Good God, Halloran! I am almost murdered!" he screamed.

"You will feel better soon. Keep quiet. Mrs. Shea has an invaluable remedy for burns."

"Do try, John, to get him up to the south room at once, that something may be done," said Mrs. Halloran, really sorry for him.

"Yes—yes—let me get there. I shall go mad if this continues five minutes longer. Help me up, Halloran. There—*Diablo!* I can't walk." But, with the assistance of a stick, and Mr. Halloran's arm, he succeeded in climbing the stairs, where, in a little while, a remedy was applied, which relieved his pains considerably, and a composing draught administered, under the influence of which his irritated nerves were somewhat soothed. Mrs. Shea, staring in the dislike with which all regarded him, darkened the room, and made her escape as soon as she thought he was asleep. But he heard her go out, and, finding himself alone, gave vent to the revengeful feelings of his dark heart in low, bitter words. "It shall fall on them all," he said,—"all. I have not dogged John Halloran's steps, day and night, in vain. He robbed me of my first love—the love of my boyhood. She robbed me of the small inheritance, which should be mine, by her inconstancy; and now this vixen—this virago—because I touched her dainty cheek, maims me for life. But vengeance is near at hand." And he fell asleep, to dream of the ruin he would work.

It was past midnight, and a deep hush was over Glendariff. All beneath the old roof slept soundly, except John Halloran. He sat watching beside a lone couch, on which reclined his wife. She had refused to retire. A strange, sad presentiment urged her to watch through that night, lest, if she fell asleep, when she awoke she should find him gone; but at last he prevailed on her to lie down and rest, and, folding her hand in his, sat talking low, pleasant words to her, until, quite exhausted with the emotions of the day, a deep slumber stole over her. And now she lay so calm and motionless that it looked like death,—strangely beautiful and solemn. He dashed heavy tears from his eyes as he leaned over her, and his heart almost failed him. He thought, perchance, he might never look on her face again. Alas! long years would roll by ere he would see that sweet face again, except in visions of the night. A pang wrung his heart, and his face grew deadly white. He stooped and kissed her, then took up the small scissors from the work-table and cut one of the long fair curls which lay on her cheek, and placed it carefully and tenderly in his pocket-book; kissed her once more, and, with a noiseless step, left the room to seek his children. Oh, little pebbles of the brook of life and love! how sure and unerring is the aim with which, at moments like this, ye are slung into the forehead of giant nature, bringing him prostrate to a level with your own littleness! How the blow sinks down into his heart, making it heavier than the nether millstone, and as bitter as the waters of Marah! John Halloran could but weep now; there was no help for it. His tears and kisses fell together on their heads. He lifted their soft, dimpled hands to his bearded cheeks, and pressed long, loving kisses on their rosy lips. But it must end. One lingering look and fond caress, and

he tore himself from them. Perhaps something whispered that he should never see them thus again; that one of that twain would fit heavenward, and leave only the vision of a shrouded angel in his memory.

And now he is out on the lawn. The full orb moon sheds an unspeakable splendor upon the scene, silencing over the antique gables and quaint chimney-stacks of the old house, and throwing tremulous shadows through the foliage on the deep set windows. When should he see it again?

### CHAPTER III.

"What? Thundering to be heard, Old Land? Ho! bravely and boldly done; Now! where are thy children gone? Ay, there, support her, she's weak; See, see how her cold limbs shake. Let her lean on that *ma'am* brand! They have treated thee ill, old dame, And thou blushest with rage and shame! Thou'rt astir,—a fearful token That the o'erstraining bow is broken!"

A gleam of sunshine, that flickered through the dense foliage which shadowed the window, fell warm and golden over Mary Halloran's face, and awoke her from her deep but uneasy slumbers. Surprised to find that she had passed the night on her couch instead of the bed, she could not, at first, remember how it was. She passed her hand over her forehead, then glanced around the room with a wild and frightened look; and, when she found it empty, she flew toward the bed and tore back the curtains. But she saw that it had been untouched, and a low cry of anguish escaped her lips. She tottered toward the bell-rope and pulled it, then fell heavily on the couch from which she had risen, her face as white as the cambric pillows on which she leaned.

"Did you ring, ma'am?" said Nora, coming in.

"Where is Mr. Halloran, Nora?" she asked, as calmly as she could.

"It's altogether uncertain, ma'am, if he is not here. Troth and I thought he was snug in his bed yet," replied Nora, endeavoring to conceal her own anxiety.

"My husband is not here, Nora; he's gone. Something dreadful has happened. I know and feel it. I have felt it on me these many days," she said, folding her long white hands together, and rocking herself to and fro, while a torrent of tears rolled over her cheeks.

"Why, surely, now, it's nothing unusual for a gentleman to be out airy at this season of the year. I've heard him say, God save him, that he'd rather be out when the dew is on the fern-leaves and the birds whistling through the morning air, than to see the grandest show in the kingdom. He'll be in presently, and have to wait for his breakfast, if I don't be stirring."

"Nora, is Mr. Halloran's horse in the stable?" she asked.

"And how should he be, surely, and Mister Halloran out on the hill-side, or foremost there at Holy Cross, on his back?" replied Nora, cheerfully.

"There is one thing will settle all this doubt. I dread the worst; and yet—my God!—it is necessary for me to know it. If they should be gone, how can I bear it? Help me, O my Father! thou whose ears are never closed to the plaint of thy suffering ones; endow me with strength and fortitude to bear the storms which are gathering about my head."

"Jesus, lover of my soul, Let me to thy refuge fly, While the nearer waters roll, While the tempest's wrath is high!"

And even then, while her troubled soul poured out its cry for aid, she felt calmer and stronger. An almighty arm was about her, would bear her up as the bitter floods rolled by now; and in the sorrowful days that were to come, He would be her solace and defense.

She went to an old oak cabinet, and, turning the key, opened the door. One glance sufficed to show her that the shelves were empty.

"Yes, they are gone," she murmured; "gone."

"And what is it, *Muir Bhann asthore*," said Nora, who had come close to her and placed her strong arm tenderly and caressingly around her slender, drooping form,—"what is it that's gone, my jewel?"

"All gone! Sword, spurs, the green uniform, epaulets, chapau, and all. Gone with my darling to the wild hills of Tipperary, where the cruel hunters will snare and cage him,—my eagle-heart, whose worst fault is that it would be to near the sun. Oh! oh!"

"And what is this, *suilish machree*?" stooping down to pick up a small twisted note which had fallen unperceived when the door was opened. "It looks like his own writing, surely."

"It is—it is!" cried Mrs. Halloran, running her eye rapidly over its contents. The blood mounted to her pale cheeks, and something like exultation lit up her features, but faded rapidly, and she leaned on Nora's faithful bosom cold and shivering. "Let me lie down, Nora dear, and read it to me. I cannot see very clearly. Perhaps I did not read it right," she said, feebly.

"Sweet wife" (Nora read), "I have courage to die for my country, but not enough to

bear your tears and a mutual farewell. But cheer up. Our separation will be short.—When we meet again, the old Sunburst will wave its folds of green and gold over Ireland,—the beacon of her freedom. She will lift up her bowed head and be a nation once more, and our children will be no longer helots, but freemen. Adieu, sweet wife. Kiss the dear ones, and tell Nora I recommend ye all to her loving care."

"And so she will lift up her head, alanna," cried Nora, in a transport, "if he's to be the leader, and had a few like himself to help. It will be done; and the English, with their red coat sagers, and their black-coat parsons, and their sneaking tithe-men, drivers, and the devil knows what besides, will be hunted off our Irish acres in a jiffy, and have our beautiful country to *shinfaone*, the right owners, by troth."

"Nora!" said Mrs. Halloran.

"Faith, ma'am, and I can see nothing to be crying at, at all. If I only knew where to go and how to go, I'd be off on the wildest Kerry colt I could find to help, only in respect to yourself. *suilish machree*, I couldn't have you unprotected. But there is one shall go in my place, please God, and that's Dennis Byrne; and if he's kilt, it'll be the best thing could happen in such a cause. May God and the Blessed Virgin help the right."

"Amen!" said Mrs. Halloran, in a low, fervent tone; "we are in our Father's hands.—We are under the protection of our blessed and dear Lady. We may suffer,—oh, yes, that we must expect,—but in the end, peace and rest must come. Go down, dear Nora; and the moment anything happens, let me know."

"Yes," said Nora, pausing in the old oak-panelled passage to shake her fist towards a closed door; "and if you hadn't got what you did in good time, you'd be on his track, cross-bred mule that you are; but, thanks to the scalding tay that lathered your shins, it'll be some time before you can do any mischief, black informer that you are." Then, as if relieved, she walked quietly and swiftly down to the kitchen to begin her usual day's labor,—a labor which her cheerful and faithful heart and industrious hands made so light that she not unfrequently had more time to herself than any other domestic at Glendariff.

No event of importance occurred that day. If a stranger had been passing through the country, he would have lingered on the road to gaze down on the tranquil beauty of Glendariff, and thought it must be the abode of happiness and contentment. He would have known that plenty teemed from those rolling lands, covered with a verdure and luxuriance of vegetation which indicated the fertility of the soil, and those sunny slopes, rich in waving grain, which, as the wind-tide ebbed and flowed over it, swayed and undulated with a motion as graceful and harmonious as the ocean-billow when no storm is on it. In the distance, through a natural vista, his eye would have fallen on the gray ruins of Holy Cross, their desolate grandeur and beautiful decay gilded by the sun-beam, while here and there, through the moss-grown arches, the bright-blue waters of the Suire might be seen rippling on towards the sea, uttering the same mysterious numbers that it sang of old, like Tim, hymning the wrongs, the evils, and the sins of men as it rolls on solemnly toward eternity. And then he would have turned away from the view of Glendariff—beautiful in its antique style and picturesque site—from its abundance, from its productive fields—to go past the abodes of poverty, which the natural and rich resources of the land had no blessings for, and seen men and women worn down with ineffectual labor, bowed and gloomy on the inadequate returns it would afford them, or characterized by a levity and recklessness which, with the livery of want that they wore, preached bitter homilies by its mockery.

As evening wore on, Mrs. Halloran's anxieties increased. She could think of but one thing, and that was the approaching desperate struggle. The very indefinite knowledge she possessed heightened and augmented her terror. When? where? what? were the questions that haunted her. The children shrank back, rendered timid by her silence and paleness, and Mrs. Shea retired angry and voluble from her because she did not open her lips when she went in to report to her concerning the health of Donald More.

"An' it's in purgatory I've got before my time," she complained to Nora, "with that screeching, swearing pagan up stairs, that was so crazy to get out this morning that he swears a big oath, and gives a lupo, when down he comes flat to the floor, leaving me the immortal honor, sure, of picking him up; an' troth if he does it agen, honey, I'll get the pitchfork to toss him in. It was all through your bad doings; Nora Brady, and you ought to nurse him."

"Thank you, dear Mistress Shea; I don't look up to any such grandeur as to nurse such a great gentleman as Donald Dhu," said Nora, laughing, as Mrs. Shea flounced out with bowl of chocolate for the invalid.

That night Nora sat silent and sad by the fireside, her fingers busy shifting from one

needle to the other the stitches of a stocking, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the glowing turf, her lips silent. No sound was heard but the chirping of a cricket in some warm corner.—Ere long the silence was broken by the echo of heavy, slow footsteps. She thought it might be Dennis Byrne, and tripped out on the lawn to meet him; but it was Father McCarthy.

"God save us, your reverence," she said, kneeling for his blessing, which he gave.

"And how is Mrs. Halloran, my child?" he asked.

"She's poorly enough, sir."

"And Mr. Halloran,—where is he?"

"We do not know exactly, father; he left home in the night, and its much comfort she needs, poor thing."

"Heaven help the poor child!" said the priest, in a compassionate tone. "Where is she, Nora?"

"She's in the room, sir, Mr. Halloran's books and things is in, where he used to read and write, your reverence. Shall I go and tell her?"

"No, no; it is not necessary," he replied, hurrying in with a heavy heart, for Mary Halloran was the child of his only sister, and he loved her well.

Nora could not sit still or rest; so, throwing the stocking aside, she walked with a quick pace down to the lodge, once inhabited by a porter who kept the gate. But it was dismantled and almost ruined now, with its low stone walls covered with ivy and creepers, and which John Halloran had allowed to stand, because it was a picturesque feature at Glendariff. She went to the broken casement which looked out on the road, and, leaning her arms on the low sill, stood watching for the blacksmith of Kildare. She had not waited long before he came.

"Nora *asthore*," he said, starting at the sound of her voice, "is it waiting for me that you are here? It's no safe place for one like you, dear."

"And why isn't it a safe place, Dennis Byrne?"

"Because the times is bad."

"What is the matter with the times, sure? It seems to me the times is good enough; and if men was as good as the times, we shouldn't have English sagers poking their noses into everybody's business, and kith and kin hounding each other, selling their own flesh and blood like nigger slaves."

"Whist, Nora dear! it isn't safe to talk out," he replied, looking furtively about him, and speaking in a whisper. "Is Mr. Halloran up yonder?"

"No; and that's what I wanted to spake to you about. Have you heard any news to-day?—but come in; it'll be safe altogether there," she said.

"May-be not," he replied; "may-be not. There's sagers lurking about Glendariff.—They're watching for Mister Halloran."

"They'll have their watching for their trouble, then. He's not here, nor won't be again in a hurry, accordin' to my judgment.—But I've got something to say, Dennis, and I might as well say it first as last. It's a dark day when it comes to my heart, and a sorrowful one when it comes out. But it's no use; may-be it'll blow over and may-be it won't; anyway, God's will be done. We was to be married in the spring coming. I have fifty pounds and a cow to begin with. You have enough for a poor boy to settle with; and I won't say I looked to the time with sorrow. I loved to think of being in my own cot, and keeping it cheery and thrifty for you, *maur-naun*, and, troth, I had my own dreams of happiness. But they're over now. I cannot be—"

"What's that you're saying, Nora Brady, after promising me these three years?" exclaimed Dennis Byrne, aghast. "Don't be trifling with a fellow in that way, Nora; joke with anything but that, and I'll laugh with you."

"You had every word I said, and I'm just as much in earnest, Dennis, as if it was my dying day. And you may give me up intirely if you like. I can very quick give you back your love-tokens. But my mind's made up, and, what's more, I've taken a vow."

"In the name of the Blessed Virgin, woman, what are you talking about?" he asked, half beside himself.

"It's nisy enough explaining what I say," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder.—"You know, Dennis, as well as I do, what's in the wind, and Mister Halloran's in it, where every true Irishman ought to be; and if he's helped by them that have rayson enough to fight, it'll be a glorious day for Ould Ireland. I know that, and want it, too, if I am only a poor girl. But mind, Dennis, may-be the rebellion will fall,—God help them that's risked all they have on the chance,—and, if it does, I've made a vow before Heaven, on the cross, never to wed you if you don't help them that's willing to spill their blood for you, and if sorrow and distress and penury come to Glendariff, never to marry until all is right again with them I love. If they suffer, I suffer; if they wander, I wander. And now be off with you; for that is Nora Brady's Vow."

### CHAPTER IV.

"But alas for his country—her pride is gone by, And that spirit is broken which never would bend; O'er the ruin her children in secret must sigh, For it's treason to love her, and death to defend. I prized as her sons, till they've learned to betray; Undistinguished they live if they shame not their sires; And the torch that would light them through dignity's way Must be caught from the pile where their country expires."

MOORE.

"Nora Brady, you have done me a great wrong this day," said Dennis Byrne, grasping her arm, as she turned to leave him, while his heart swelled with indignation and grief. He had loved Nora long and faithfully; early and late had he toiled, that he might surround her with homely domestic comforts when she entered his house as his mistress; and now, when just on the eve of the realization of his bright hopes, to be told that "it could not be," to have all those beautiful dreams so rudely dashed out,—it was almost more than he could endure.

"Now, be a man, Dennis darling," said Nora, wiping the tears away from her face. "If I can bear it, you can, surely. I didn't say at all that I didn't love you, or that I was going to play a false game with you, *maur-naun*. I only want you to be patient, and wait may-be a year, may-be longer, in respect to the great trouble that's come on the two we love, and who has been the best friends we ever had, and that needs our help as much as we ever needed theirs; that is, if things go wrong with them, that would lay down their lives to make 'em right."

"I see no rayson yet why we shouldn't marry. I love John Halloran,—ay, the very soil his feet presses,—an' for his sake I'd give up everything but you, Nora; but why we can't serve him an' his as well when we're man an' wife, as now, bates me out intirely."

"That's because you're a *pilliquer*, Dennis Byrne," said Nora, indignantly. "How do I know what's coming to pass? If poverty comes to Glendariff, I, for one, shouldn't like to hoard up the gold that I stirred in their service; an' who knows but that I shall have to cross the sea? There'll be enough for Nora Brady's hand to do, without having a master to the fore, to bid me here and order me there. And let this be the last of it intirely; if you choose to wait for me, wait; if you don't—be off as fast as your two legs can carry you."

Dennis, the stout blacksmith of Kildare, was silent for some time. He knew by Nora's manner that her resolution was taken and not to be moved, and, although he felt angry enough at what he considered her unreasonableness, the thought of giving her up was like death. Next to her he loved John Halloran. They had been playmates together; indeed, the same breasts had suckled both in their infancy, for Byrne's mother had the nursing of the young heir of Glendariff until he was weaned, and the boys had grown up together, every year strengthening the tie, which in Ireland is as strong as that of kindred, until manhood separated them; and each in his sphere retained the old love and the old interest, and found many opportunities of serving the other. The friendship of John Halloran had cheered and brightened the humble life of his foster-brother; it had saved him from many an extortion and much injustice; and the consciousness of it gave confidence and energy to his manhood, for he knew that he was his earthly providence and would never let harm, that money or influence could avert, blight his life. He thought of all this now, and the merry sports of "long ago,"—of the days' fishing in the Suire, their wild adventures and long excursions to the Kerry Mountains, and the delicious loitering among the old ruins of Holy Cross. He could not but serve John Halloran, now that dark days threatened him. He felt ashamed of his momentary selfishness, and at last said,—

"Nora, *mo seael n-anam astig tu* are you; but let it be as you say. You have told me what you will do, but what I'm to do is what I doesn't know. I don't even know where Mister Halloran is, God save him. I have heard rumors of a rebellion, but where it's to break out it's more than I can tell, an' I wish I did, for bedad! I'd like to be in the thick of it. But there's one thing, a *suilish machree*," he said, brightening up: "he often told me, if he got into trouble with the government, as he said from a boy he always intended, and was hunted by the Saxon hounds, that I must seek him beyond the clouds—that is, in a den so high up on Ballyhowry Mountain that the wild craythurs have never made their lair in it. And so good-by, Nora: the moon's up, and I'll run down to Larry Ragan's cabin an' hire the suit and wallet of the old *buccan* man that's been sick in it these two months, and be off before day. One kiss, Nora darling."

"The Blessed Mother of God have you in her keeping my *con-buy deelish*," said Nora, as she allowed him to take the farewell kiss he

\* Seven times dearer than my soul.  
† Light of my eyes and heart.