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NORA BRADY'S VOW.

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CHAPTER X.

"Pain's furnace-heat within me quivers,
God's breath upon the flames doth blow,
And all my heart in anguish stivers
And trembles at the fiery glow;
And yet I whisper, 'As God will,'
And in hottest fire hold still."

It was a long night, — that night on which Nora Brady had so unexpectedly found Mr. Halloran. She thought it would never end; and yet she feared that when it passed away another and a deeper change might fall on him, and that with the night-shadows his spirit would pass away. She watched and prayed alternately. The anguish that the absent would have felt, had they been present, or could they even have known it, was accumulated and mingled with her own grief; and, while tears flowed in silent torrents over her face, her heart could only find language in these words:—"If possible, my God, let this cup pass away from them."

When Thomas McGinnis went away, little after midnight, she had sent a message by him to the friendly publisher in Franklin Street, stating how and where Mr. Halloran was to be found. She had never forgotten the first day she called at the "Pilot" Office, or the heaviness and gloom that oppressed her then, or the kind words which had greeted her, or the sudden sunshine which had burst around her when, after making her inquiries, the good publisher had exclaimed, "John Halloran! He is my friend; he was my guest." And now she did not doubt for an instant that he would come the moment he received her message, and make every arrangement necessary for Mr. Halloran's removal to a better and more comfortable place, and for any exigency that might occur during his illness. This thought comforted her greatly; and, beseeching Thomas McGinnis to lose no time in the morning in delivering the message, she resumed her post near the bed of the sufferer. It was near day-dawn, and the doctor and clergyman stood together at the bedside, conversing in a low tone about the condition of the patient, while Nora leaned eagerly forward to hear their opinion.

"He is decidedly no worse," said Dr. Bryant; "and that is something, in an attack like this."

"And you think he may get over it?"

"Well, I hope so; yes, I think so."

"God grant it!" said Father Nugent, while he looked at his watch. "I shall have to go away in a short time: it is nearly five o'clock, and that is my hour to be at the altar. I shall return, however, as soon as I can. If any sudden change occurs, I must know it immediately."

"I have no patients very ill at present," replied Dr. Bryant, "and therefore I can remain here until about ten o'clock. Some time during the day my patient must be removed to more comfortable quarters."

"Yes; no doubt his remaining here would embarrass these poor people considerably, who have neither the time nor the means to render him such attentions as are absolutely necessary. If no better place can be found, doctor, my house and its poor accommodations are at your service. My own room shall be prepared, as soon as I get home, for Mr. Halloran's reception, if you think it will do."

"Do? Why, sir, it is the very thing; and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the suggestion. Perhaps in a day or two something may occur which will put us in communication with Mr. Halloran's friends."

"I beg your honor's pardon," said Nora, unable any longer to keep silent, and leaning eagerly forward, "but Mr. Halloran has a friend in Boston who will be broken-hearted intirely to hear of his illness; and it's Mr. Donahoe, your reverence, at the 'Pilot' Office."

"Alas!" said the priest, "how unfortunate! Mr. Donahoe left the city last evening for New York, and will be away several days; besides which, he lives at a hotel, which I fancy would not do very well for a sick person to go to.—But, my child, why is it that you are so deeply interested in this unfortunate gentleman?"

"Och, your reverence!" said Nora, while tears fell like rain-drops from her eyes, "sure I was born and bred with Mrs. Halloran; and after the great downfall of the family she was so heart-broke at being separated from Mr. Halloran, who was hunted intirely out of Ireland, that I came to America to find him and— and do what I could for them at home, God save them. But I had begun to give up all expectation of ever laying my two eyes on him again, when, sirs, the Blessed Virgin brought me to the widow Blake's this night, right to him. And it's sorrowful tidings to hear that his best friend is gone; but, your reverence, I brought over with me some of the old McCarthy More diamonds, that Mrs. Halloran sent, thinking may-be he'd be at a *deshort* for means in a strange country; and they'll pay all his expenses out-and-out."

"I am glad to hear all this, my dear child,

God will bless your fidelity. Come to my house and nurse Mr. Halloran; let a familiar home face be the first his eyes fall on when he recovers."

"If your reverence and his honor there don't think I'm taking too much on myself, I'll beg you not to move Mr. Halloran away until I see the good lady I live with, and tell her, and an old gentleman there that has promised to help me if I ever was in trouble, all that has happened. The lady I am at service with, sirs, has a fine airy room, that I think Mr. Halloran might have; she takes a few lodgers, and it is a quiet, nice place; so, without drowning Mrs. Sydney out of a help, I might nurse him just as well, and have her to help."

Both gentlemen knew Mrs. Sydney, and thought Nora's plan was a sensible one; while they could not help admiring and respecting the nice sense of honor and self-respect which seemed to govern her in every particular. But Father Nugent could not remain another moment; and Nora, wishing to have matters arranged as early and speedily as possible, also hurried homeward.

Mrs. Sydney was sitting in the dining room, with a worried anxious expression on her countenance; but the moment she caught a glimpse of Nora's face the cloud passed away, and smiling, she greeted her with "La suz! child! where in the world have you been? You'll be in a perfect snarl about you. You'll be sick, sitting up so of nights, and may-be get some dreadful disease yourself."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, you had any uneasiness about me; but I could not come any earlier. Do you think Mr. Mallow is stirring yet?" said Nora, with a nervous air.

"Up! He's been up this hour, and was down here about ten minutes ago, to inquire if you had come home. He's in an awful humor. I declare, I shouldn't wonder if a mad dog had bit him some time or other," said Mrs. Sydney, sharply.

"Might I go up, ma'am, and ask him to come down here? I want to speak to you both about something that's happened," said Nora.

"Lord's sake, child, you haven't gone and got married?" exclaimed Mrs. Sydney, looking over her spectacles at Nora, with widely-rounded eyes.

"Married!" said Nora, with a low, merry laugh which she could not repress. "No, indeed, ma'am,—not married, or likely to be."

"Well,—yes; go up to Mr. Mallow's room. But it is at your own risk."

When Nora opened Mr. Mallow's door, he looked up quickly, and gave an indescribable grunt, which said, as plainly as grant could express, "it's well you've come."

"Good-morning, sir. I hope you are well?" said Nora, curtsying.

"Huumph!"

"Mrs. Sydney wishes to see you, sir, for a little while."

"I sha'n't come. I'm busy. Breakfast time will do."

"Sir, may I speak to you?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I want you, if you please, to come to Mrs. Sydney: it's ye both I'd be after speaking to."

"And what in the mischief, Nora Brady, do you want to talk about? Has Ireland gone to the bottom of the sea, and do you wish me to fish it up? All women are alike, though. Go away. I don't know whether I shall come or not."

"Sir, I'm proud enough, in my poor way, and if it was for myself I'd scorn to be troubling you; but it's for them I love better than myself; and, if you haven't forgot it, you said once if I ever was in trouble and wanted help you'd lend it, so help you God! But at the same time, sir, I want you to know beforehand that it's not money I'm after."

"So you're in trouble. What is it? I always keep my word, Nora Brady," he said pushing back the morning paper and taking off his spectacles.

"Yes, sir; I'm bothered enough, God knows; and it was about that I wanted to see you and Mrs. Sydney together; for I have found Mr. Halloran, and shall have to go away."

"Found Mr. Halloran! Go away! Be gone down with you! I'm coming instantly!"

And when the three were together, Nora told them all about it, speaking as little as possible of herself,—of her sacrifices, her trials, her anxieties, hopes, and fears, up to the present moment. As to Mrs. Sydney, she made no secret of wiping her eyes. Mr. Mallow was only affected with a sudden violent cold in his head.—He, odd in everything, had always felt the deepest interest in the history of ill-fated Ireland, and by way of obtaining the most reliable news concerning her over-agitated and gloomy affairs, and for many years been a subscriber to a leading Dublin newspaper.—He therefore knew all about John Halloran, and how like a martyr he had immolated his affections and fortunes on the sacred altar of his country; and he had learned from the same source that the nobility and worth of his character were without reproach. So it was with no ordinary emotion that this eccentric but true-hearted old man exclaimed,—

"And you are sure it is John Halloran, the

Irish patriot, who is lying ill, insensible, at the house of a poor widow who lives in an alley?"

"Yes, sir; and the creature's been as kind as if he was her own kith and kin. But she's very poor; and the doctor says it's not a fit place for Mr. Halloran to be in because it's close and smoky; and I thought of the nice front room up stairs that's been empty these two months, and, says I, 'Maybe Mrs. Sydney will let Mr. Halloran be moved into it; then there'll be no need for me to go away to nurse him; and there's no fear of losing anything, ma'am, for he has enough and to spare for all his expenses.'"

"Don't speak, ma'am!" said Mr. Mallow, blowing his nose vociferously. "Don't, madam; for I must have my say out. Nora Brady, it's my solemn opinion that you only want a pair of wings—to be a perfect wild goose. You are a heroine; and that's next door to being a lunatic. You are a miserable, shiftless body, taking care of everybody but yourself; and now, to crown all, you want to give yourself and us some horrible disease—ship-fever, may-be—by bringing a sick man into the house. But—"

"An' then, sir, I hope God and Mr. Mallow will pardon me for demanding myself to ask a favor for the like of him," said Nora, with an indignation she could not control. "I may be a wild goose, but I've only done what I thought was right by them I was beholden to for whatever good fortune I ever had since I was born; and I hope when I'm judged it won't turn the scales of God's mercy against me. And surely there's no need of going on my two knees to get a place for such a one as John Halloran of Glendariff; for Father Nugent himself is having a room prepared in his own house for him, where I shall go to nurse him. Ma'am, you've been very kind to me, a poor stranger in your house, and I'm sorry to take you so short; but it's my duty, and I can't help it. And it's no ship-fever that's on him at all, only a sug that took him in the head last night, and dazed his brain like; and, if it was, it couldn't be caught from a better person; for he's a gentleman and a Christian out-and-out."

"Nora Brady, you are like a torpedo. Your tongue goes like a coffee-mill; and, now that you've ground me to powder, I will go on and finish what I was saying when you were rude enough to interrupt me. I was going to observe, when you broke out, that, no matter what ailed Mr. Halloran, he should come. I, every boarder left the house on account of his being here, he should stay, and I would make good all losses to Mrs. Sydney,—partly for his sake, partly for yours. Go away!" exclaimed Mr. Mallow.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was too hasty," said Nora, ashamed.

"Oh, never mind. A young lady who has money in bank, and who has independence enough to earn her own living, may be allowed a few airs."

"What do you mean, sir? I haven't a cent to call my own on this earth, and never wanted it worse," said Nora, with a sigh.

"You are not telling the truth, Nora. You have at this moment, in the Trenton Bank, five hundred dollars."

"And where in the name of my old shoes, did it come from, sir? Faith, an' I think you might find something else to joke about," said Nora, puzzled and worried.

"Ah! I lost ten thousand dollars one fine night, and it was returned to me every cent.—Did you think I should forget it? No, child. I went that very day and deposited five hundred dollars in the Trenton Bank for you; and there you'll find it, subject to your order. You can get any or all of it at any moment, or let it remain where it is. It is yours, to give away, send away, or throw away—the latter of which I expect you will do. Madam, give the silly child an answer about the room. If the boarders should object to a sick person's coming, let there be an exodus forthwith, and I will make up all deficiencies."

"Go, Nora, child, and get the room ready as quick as you can. Mind now and slick everything up nice. I'll attend to breakfast," said Mrs. Sydney, who had listened with no little interest to what had been passing.

"After breakfast, Nora Brady, I'll charter an omnibus and call here for a small bed, pillows, and other things, yourself included, to bring Mr. Halloran home at once. Begone now. I want no thanks,—not yet, at least."

Then Nora began to see unlight breaking through the clouds. Mr. Halloran had been removed to Mrs. Sydney's without any ill effects; he was surrounded by every comfort, and no attention was wanting that his situation required. His symptoms gradually assumed a more favorable type, and, although he had not yet recovered his faculties, there was very little doubt but that the disease would finally yield to remedial agents. But two of Mrs. Sydney's boarders went away,—two young gentlemen who were so devoted to the violin and clarinet that they could not endure the interdict which Dr. Bryant laid on the indulgence of their musical propensities. While Nora attended to her work, Mrs. Sydney watched in the sick-room, and from the time it was finished—generally about noon—Nora

went in and remained; for Phillis, with an air of condescension, had offered to get tea every evening "while the poor gal had such constant nursing to do." Thus relieved, Nora would sit watching every symptom and almost every breath of the sick man. To the moment, she gave him his medicine, and regulated the temperature and light of the apartment with instinctive judgment. When there was nothing else for her hands to do, she would sit beside the fire, going down into the embers, while her imagination, like a prophet, foretold many beautiful and happy things. She saw under grand old trees a stately home, where were once united all that she loved on earth. She heard the sound of Mary Halloran's harp, and the clear, wild cadences of her sweet voice, ringing down through the magnificent woods as she sang strains of the land of their birth. She saw John Halloran, his fine face, thoughtful and noble, walking with a stately step through those handsome halls and lofty rooms, and heard his kind voice speaking gently and cheerily to all. Then floating up through the vision came sweet, flute-like tones. Little children were at play, and Gracie's gentle tones mingled softly with Desmond's merry laughter. Dream-tones indeed of the one who was gone, which would never more be heard on earth, for far away, beside the shining water which flows from the throne of God, her voice was blending sweetly with the angel melodies that make glad the celestial City. Then came a softer spell,—the twilight hour, the day's toil over, and a quiet stroll with Dennis Byrne through the old woods; and many a heart-felt word and bright anticipation seemed to be whispered in her ears, while ever and anon their thoughts fled back to "Holy Ireland" and lingered lovingly amid the scenes and beside the graves they loved. The entrance of Dr. Bryant or Mr. Mallow, or perhaps the crumbling of a coal, or a low moan from the invalid, dispersed the rainbows of her fancy, leaving only to her aching heart the stern and sad reality.

One evening Nora was standing by the bedside, looking down with a sorrowful heart on the pale, motionless features of Mr. Halloran. He seemed to be sleeping, and sighed heavily, then, opening his eyes, looked around him.—Almost breathless, Nora sank quietly down on her knees; and, turning his head, he said, faintly, "Come, Nora." Then a soft slumber stole over him, his breathing became regular, and a gentle moisture appeared on his skin.—When Dr. Bryant came, he pronounced him out of danger. Little by little, when his consciousness was fully restored, they told him all. The first wish he expressed was to see a clergyman and receive the sacraments; after which he was more calm and composed, and talked with Nora, whose presence he could scarcely realize. He looked at her, and followed her with his eyes about the room, as if he were not quite convinced that she was not a figment of the dream-land he had been sojourning in so many days, and might melt away as that had done. But ere long he heard how it was; and, when he was strong enough to bear it, she told him all that had befallen his family since he left home. It was almost too much for him to bear. The treachery of Donald More roused within him a stern, bitter feeling of wrath, which yielded only to a softer emotion when he heard of his shorn lambs seeking refuge among the forsaken ruins of Fada Brae.

"But I will be still, Nora. I will, by the help of God, bear it in patience, leaving the wretch who has robbed my children to His avenging justice. I have them all left to me,—I shall ere long have them with me,—my Mary, Desmond, and my gentle little darling Gracie. Why, then, should I repine? Such treasures are of inestimable price, and, possessing them, I am not poor. Do you know that the only thing I can remember during my illness was Gracie? Arrayed in white, and looking like an angel, the child was ever around me; she seemed to guide me, and to brighten the gloom of the terrible darkness into which I was plunged. Sometimes a white dove would flutter down on my breast; then it would not be a dove, but her. Truly it is a strange, deep love I have for the little, quiet one, to brighten up such dark hours when all else was forgotten."

"It was strange, sir; but you always thought of the little lady more, by reason of her always hanging about you and following you about wherever you went, surely," said Nora.

They did not know that the fair little daisy of Glendariff had been beaten down by the death-storm to the silent dust. God help thee, John Halloran, when thou hearest the tale! No letters had come yet; and he could not conceal his uneasiness. Nora, hiding her own anxiety, said all that was cheering, and used every argument she could think of to convince him that it was not time for the letters to come, and that without fail a budget would arrive by the next ship. He tried to hope for the best, although not convinced.

One morning Mr. Mallow came in as usual, and, in his own peculiar and abrupt way, inquired if Mr. Halloran had made any business arrangements, or had anything in view, either professionally

mercantile way, for the

future. Mr. Halloran replied in the negative. His next inquiry was,—

"Do you know anything about book-keeping and commercial life?"

"But little, practically," said Mr. Halloran, half amused. "My father in his early life was an eminent merchant of Dublin, and became a gentleman farmer at the old place in Munster when he retired from business. As you may imagine, he was a great utilitarian, and, among my other acquisitions, insisted on my going through a course of commercial studies with his old book-keeper, who was then head of the house he had retired from."

"Have you forgotten it all?"

"No, no; I think not, sir. I have the unfortunate faculty of retaining with singular tenacity all disagreeable experiences," replied Mr. Halloran. "But may I be allowed to ask you why you are so particularly interested in this matter?"

"Yes, of course. My chief book-keeper has resigned; he is going to California; and if you will have the places you are welcome to it, that is, provided you think yourself fully capable of keeping my accounts in order."

"This is a providence, Mr. Mallow,—one of God's merciful providences; and, after thanking Him from the depths of my soul, I thank you, sir, who have been His willing instrument. I was only this day wondering what I should do to support my family. It will suit me in every particular."

"But the salary,—the salary. That's the thing. It's only eighteen hundred dollars; and I won't give a cent more," said Mr. Mallow.

"That sounds princely, sir, to a man without a dollar. It is quite enough."

"It is settled, then? Well, rest a few days longer. I will attend to the books myself until you are stronger. Now, there's another thing. A year or so ago I bought a very pretty piece of property near the city, with good, substantial improvements on it; but, sir, it is going to wreck for want of some one to take care of it. The cottage looks dilapidated, and everything is tangled and wild around it. Now, if you choose, you can have it at a mere nominal rent, just for the sake of having it kept in order, because by-and-by they'll be running a railroad through it, or building a town there, and won't give half as much for it if it goes to wreck as if it was in good repair."

"It is the very thing I should have chosen,—a residence somewhere in a rural district. I have been accustomed to the country nearly all my life. Sir, you are loading me with favors."

"Not at all. Don't thank me. A book-keeper is indispensable to me; so is a good tenant. Good morning." And, pulling his hat down over his eyes, Mr. Mallow went out.

A few days afterward Mrs. Sydney came to the laundry, where Nora was busy, and told her that Mr. Mallow wished to speak to her. Wiping her hands, tying on a clean apron, and smoothing her hair, she followed Mrs. Sydney up into her own private sitting-room, looking blooming and handsome, but modest and unconscious of her beauty.

"Did you want me, sir?"

"Yes. Sit down there."

"No; I thank you, sir. I'm very busy, and I'd rather stand."

"Stand, then. Do you ever think of marrying, Nora?"

"Troth, sir, an' I think it's a quare thing for you to be asking me," said Nora, reddening.

"How would you like to be a rich man's wife, Nora,—to become a fine lady and drive in your own carriage?"

"Troth, sir, an' it would depend intirely on who the rich man was, whether I'd have him or not. As to being a fine lady, I think I'm content to be jest what God made me,—an honest girl; and as He's give me good broad feet of me own, an' health to make good use of 'em, I'm well satisfied to be without a carriage."

"And may-be a rich widow one of these days," went on Mr. Mallow.

"Indeed, sir, I've no time to be foolin' here in such nonsense as this. Is it all you want, Mr. Mallow, to be makin' fun of me?"

"No; not at all. I want a wife, Nora Brady, and should like to marry you, if you'll consent, because you are a good, noble, virtuous girl, who deserves all the comfort and happiness that money can buy. If you will marry me, become my companion and nurse, I will leave you the whole fortune which I have grown old in scraping together. I am old, I am ill favored, I am cross; but you would not be plagued with me many years, child; and I know you will be all that God requires to me while I live. Say, will you become the wife of the old millionaire, Steadfast Mallow?"

"Sir, I'm only a poor girl," stammered Nora; "but I wouldn't marry you if you had a hundred million pounds sterling. You're old enough for my great-grandfather; an'—an'—well, I'm as good as married already to Dennis Byrne in Ireland, an' wouldn't break my troth to him to save my own life. But, sir, I beg your pardon for my plain spaking; I—"

And Nora burst into tears, and turned to leave the room.