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MURTHA'S MISCHIEF: OR, THE MATCH-MAKER'S BARGAIN. BY THOMAS SHERLOCK. (From the Nation.)

CHAPTER III.—(CONTINUED.) Dinny Horan's feelings being stirred, he forgot the abuse Moll Murtha had hurled at him a few minutes previously—forgot the angry derision had inflicted on him—and he stood regarding her efforts to soothe the new-made orphan with a feeling of sympathy that was quite new to him. "Where did you get the young fellow, Moll," he asked in his pleasantest squeak, when the child's peace was restored. "The Widow Driscoll's," she replied without a trace of anger. "The poor woman is gone at last, God be good to us all." "An' what on earth are you goin' to do wud him, bringin' him up to the mountain?" "To keep him an' do for the poor orphan, now that Dan Murtha is gone. I'd be lonesome without something to love," she explained. "See that now!" Dinny Horan burst forth, flourishing his hands about like a great orator in an impassioned moment; look at that now. That's the way I do be. It's lonesome I am, mornin' noon, an' I'd aight, an' not wan in the whole mortal world to care for me! Lonesome as the top o' the big mountain beyant, ever an' always! Kitty Donohoe's the only girl!" "Arrah, whisht, man alive!" Moll Murtha broke in with impatience; "don't be for ever moilderin' me about the slut. She's done more mischief to me an' mine than ever she'll be able to mend. You an' her between yez, I mane—for between yez it is." "What's the good o' goin' on that way?" Dinny Horan whined. "I'll go bail, you wouldn't think much o' the cow that would kick the bucket an' spill the milk every time she gave it. That's what you're like. You take all the good out of what you do. I'm more down-hearted than ever afther soein' you. Every time it's the waa way!" "I'm always tellin' you to be a man an' have a little sperrit," she retorted; "but sure I might as well be talkin' to that rock there. Didn't I say yisterday, Dan Murtha wouldn't stand long in your way; an' where is he now? It will become you to fly at me like that!" "There now!" he squeaked back; "that'll do! You're always ready for fight. I gave you a guinea yisterday, an' you did what you promised, sure enough; I'll give another now if you promise you'll lose no time about courtin' Kitty Donohoe for me. I'll show you I'm as much of a man as anyone in Ballycoona, at all events." The tedious process of diving for the chamois bag, slowly drawing it up to light, more slowly unwinding its guardian coils, and still more slowly depositing the coin from its fellows, having been gone through, the gold was at length laid with much deliberation in Moll Murtha's open palm. The match-maker, not being much addicted to self-examination, was probably quite unaware that her feelings underwent a great change from the time that the guinea was first mentioned until it was safe in her possession. She was for taking a more hopeful and rosy view of the position. Dan Murtha would come back, cured of his fancy for Kitty Donohoe, to find that his old mother had managed matters for him so well during his absence that he had the beginning of a fortune. All the former hopes and speculations in his regard were revived again and in vigorous action. But one thing remained to assure success, and that was to carry out that portion of her original plan which was to turn the current of Kitty Donohoe's feelings violently against the young man. "You're always tellin' me to have sperrit," piped the miser, as he refastened his purse; "amn't I showin' you I have?" "Good luck to you, Dinny," she returned in her most uncouth tones; "there isn't a great deal of you in it, but whatever the neighbors may say agin the regard o' being a naygur or the like, if I'm to the

fore I'll tell them you have a heart as big for the size o' your body as e'er a wan in the parish." Dinny Horan smiled complacently at the doubtful compliment; but reverting at once to the matter which engrossed his thoughts, he replied: "Never mind what the neighbors say, Moll; I got on without axin' much from any o' them up to this, an' I can do the same from this forward; but won't you go an' court Kitty Donohoe for me? She's the only girl!" "Av coors, Dinny, av course," Moll Murtha interrupted. "Keep your heart up, man, for a few days; never fear but I'll be sendin' you good news afore long; Now God be wud you! I must be goin'." The child here hasn't even a crust o' bread, an' it must be starved, the poor thing." She moved away. "Well, God be wud you, Moll Murtha," he replied, standing still as she walked off briskly; "but you won't forget about Kitty Donohoe?" "Is it me forget?" she screamed back, without turning her head; you don't know Moll Murtha!" "I'll give you every wan o' the twenty, nev' fear," he piped after her; "before the knot's tied—the very day she says she'll have me." As Moll Murtha still went and made no answer, Dinny Horan was reluctantly compelled to note that the interview was at an end. Such meetings with the match-maker were the sole solace of the little man since his infatuation concerning Kitty Donohoe had reached a climax. He returned slowly to his farm, pondering on Moll's oft-repeated exhortation that he should "be a man," and wondering within himself what special steps he ought to take in order to reach the development required. Not much came of his cogitations, however; and he felt but little inclination for his usual work when he got home. He stood on a knoll overlooking his farm, and gazed vacantly on the bill-tops scattered around, and on the beautiful mountain lake, dark, deep, and fishy, which partly margined his own land. His eye rested on the boat in which—acquistive even in his recreations—he had often, on Summer eves, when he could no longer work on the farm, dragged from the still waters his chief food for the morrow; and the idea struck him that, while still industrious and acquiring, he could cogitate therein over the difficulties which seemed to stand in the way of his becoming a man. He entered the boat, pushed off a little from the bank, threw out his lines, and began again to think, in his own feeble, patient manner. Half an hour had passed away unheeded, when from the steep mountain side the sound of his own name came rolling down. Looking up, he beheld Lanty Quinn. "God save you, Lanty!" he piped up. "Did you see Moll Murtha lately?" Lanty sang out. "Yis. Do you want her?" "Yis. I met Dan Murtha on the road the other side o' Knockcorrib, an' I want to tell her." "Dan Murtha! where was he goin'?" "He was makin' for Glinduff." "Is he comin' back?" "I dunno." "Does Moll want him back?" "Yis—very bad. She axed me did I know where he was goin'?" It seemed from this to Dinny Horan that the match-maker was about to play him false. "Did you tell Dan Murtha she was axin' for him?" he piped out. "Yis." "What did he say?" "He was goin' to turn back at first, then he said he'd go on." Dinny remained lost in thought for a while. The first glimpse of a plan to counteract the match-maker's suspected treachery came to him. "I saw Moll Murtha to-day mornin'," he screamed up; "she was goin' over to the Mochans o' Drumna-muck." "Then she won't be home to-night?" "I'll beve not." "Are you ketchin' much?" "No—not much." "Well, God be wud you, Dinny Horan, anyway," shouted Lanty, whose sentiments towards the miser were considerably warmer since he had the felicity of fingering "a shillin' o' the waygub's money." "God be wud you!" Dinny Horan piped back. He watched the lad's retreating figure until it was lost behind the brow of the hill; and while he watched he was busy in the framing of what he thought a notable scheme. Dan Murtha was going to Glinduff; there was a barrack in the glen; he (Dinny Horan) would row up to the end of the lake, and so be able to reach the barrack long before Dan Murtha could pass that way; one of the sergeants there was a distant relation of the miser, and it would be, Dinny thought, an easy matter to induce that functionary to entice Dan Murtha to drink deeply, and to take, while intoxicated, the fatal shilling which would make him "a queen's man" for one-and-twenty years. That would be getting rid of Dan's rivalry with effect, and at the same time justly out-fitting the match-maker, who was inclined to ply his employer false. "I'll show her," he thought, "that I can be a man. I'll fight for Kitty Donohoe me own way. I'm not big enough to handle an alpeen, but I'll fight for her me own way, so I will; an' I'll show them all in the long run that I can be a man as well as the best o' them. Here goes." Seizing the oars, he threw all the vigor he possessed into his strokes, and was soon ploughing through the placid water at a respectable speed, on his way to prove to the neighbors in general, but to Moll Murtha in particular, that he could "be a man as well as the best o' them."

CHAPTER IV. The conclusion of her interview with Dinny Horan left Moll Murtha's spirits at their natural level. Not only was she in a more cheerful mood than when she met the little miser, but her mind had regained its usual activity; and while she was returning to the lonely cabin on the hill side she decided that early in the coming night her plan against Kitty Donohoe's peace should be carried out. Having swallowed a hasty and frugal meal, and given some suitable food to the orphan boy—whom she treated as if petted with a tenderness truly maternal—she set out again for Kilbrandon. The bearing about of the child she found to be so serious a

hindrance to her movements that she resolved on ridding herself of him for the night at least. She therefore sought out Biddy Heerlaly and asked that good-natured matron to take charge of the boy for awhile. "He's lonesome wud me, the poor little creature," she said; "but if you'd let him thro' about among the childer for a day or two he might come round to himself agen." Mrs. Heerlaly readily consented to this arrangement, and Moll Murtha, freed from her burthen, started at a good steady pace for the "big house," which she reached by sundown. She deemed herself lucky when on entering the kitchen she found Kitty Donohoe alone. "Ah, then, Kitty allanna, is that yourself?" was her salutation. The rustic beauty arose blushing as she found herself in the presence of her lover's mother. "To be sure it is, Mrs. Murtha," the girl replied pleasantly, shaking hands; "who else would it be?" "An' how is every inch of you? Are you well an' hearty?" Moll continued. "Arrah, what would all the likes o' me?" Kitty returned. "But won't you take off your shawl an' sit down. Mrs. Murtha?" "Deed an' I will, Kitty, for me old bones is not as young as they used to be. Ochoone I age changes us greatly." "Arrah, what's the good o' frettin'?" said Kitty, as she dusted a chair to hand to the visitor, "sure it was car killed the cat, you know. Here, Mrs. Murtha, sit down, an' I'll make you a cup o' tay that'll warm the cockles o' your heart." The match-maker was always "Mrs. Murtha" to Kitty ever since Dan and herself "began pullin' a cord." Moll Murtha came down on the seat with a thop, as if she had lost all power over her limbs. "Musha, Kitty Donohoe avourneen, I envy you your sperrits," she almost wailed. "Sorra wan I see as hearty as yourself." "Why shouldn't I? What's to hinder me?" the girl rejoined, bustling about in preparations for the decoction which was to affect Moll Murtha's heart in the way rather vaguely described by Kitty. "If I hadn't sperrits now, when would I have them?" "Thrice for you, Kitty Donohoe," Moll returned in tones that spoke of a broken heart; "thrice for you." It was part of the match-maker's tactics on the present occasion to appear in a melancholy mood. "Thrice for you," she continued; "you're young an' hearty, an' nothin' in the world to trouble you, not all as wan as an old woman like me; and she swayed her body gently backwards and forwards, while her hands, one laid over the other, pressed her bosom as if they would keep confined the overflowing cares of griefs within. Kitty Donohoe paused in her occupations to survey her guest with earnestness. "Arrah, don't be goin' on wud your cockamus, Mrs. Murtha," she said at length in her liveliest manner; "sure every man knows you're the youngest woman of your age in the five parishes. It's heartier than meself you always war." "Och, girl, don't be comparin' wud an old woman—you that has a'most every boy in the barony lookin' afther you!" "What in the world would make them be lookin' afther me?" Kitty returned, flinging her arched glance at the match-maker. Moll Murtha shook her head deprecatingly, and with a faint smile said: "It's no lie for them to say you have an eye that could stalk cowl'd prafies off a dresser." "Musha, Mrs. Murtha can't you talk sense? Sure I hear enough o' that kind o' blarney from mostly every epidgee that scrapes his chin with a razor." And the girl, who, notwithstanding her disclaimer, was mightily pleased at hearing such words fall from the lips of Dan Murtha's mother, stuck her arms a-kimbo, began hitting a popular hornpipe tune, and kept time to the music of her own sweet voice with as neat a pair of feet as ever wakened the echoes from a kitchen floor. "Och, that's yourself!" said Moll Murtha, admiringly, charmed into forgetfulness of the air of gloom she had meant to wear; "that's yourself, Kitty Donohoe!" The old woman could not help feeling for an instant that it would be a pity to force so buoyant a nature into companionship for life with the miser; and she thought with a sigh how much more natural a mate Dan Murtha would make, if Kitty had money. But the obvious fact that poverty and hardship must be the consequence of a union between them, as matters stood, recurred to her, and she compelled herself once more to believe that she was doing the best in the end for her son and Kitty Donohoe by the course she was pursuing. Hard material facts have most weight with elderly people. They seem to forget all the happiness they have known in their own lives that came directly from the intangible thing called sentiment, which could not be eaten or drunk or worn as raiment, could not be placed to one's credit in bank, or held as an equivalent for scrip or stock, or be subjected to any arithmetical process whatever. The girl, abandoning herself to the impulse of the moment caught up a corner of her smart apron between finger and thumb, extended and raised her right arm until it lay in a graceful curve, bent her head slightly towards it, and with the left hand resting on her hip, glided with light-limbed freedom sideways across the floor, when, having been brought up by the wall, she reversed her movements, and sailed back with the same easy, wave-like motion; then placing both hands once more on her hips she dashed into two or three intricate "steps" the sight of which would in all likelihood, have been a warrant for sudden death to any French dancing-master; and, abandoning the illit, she pattered out words to the tune, thus:—"Mother, when I die, sure you won't sell the grid-dle oh! Mother, when I die, sure you won't sell the grid-dle oh!" And Moll Murtha, catching in spite of herself the gay inspiration of the moment, was soon in front of Kitty Donohoe, double-shuffling with a vigor and agility that were utterly at variance with any theory of loss of muscular power in her limbs or stiffness in her joints. Kitty Donohoe, who went pausing in the dance, interrupted the tune for a moment to exclaim: "There! Didn't I tell you it would make your joints soople?" The remark brought back to Moll Murtha the part she had yet to play; whereupon she ran to her chair, flung herself upon it, and said, affecting loss of breath: "Musha, Kitty Donohoe, you're the wild girl! Bad cess to you, but you have me kilt, so you have!" She concluded by imitating a fit of coughing with wonderful truth to nature. "Sure it riz your heart, an' will do you good so," said Kitty, who by this time was panting a little. "But I'm forgettin' the tay. It ought to be ready now. Sit over to the table." Kitty Donohoe piled every delicacy her larder afforded before Moll Murtha, and pressed her repeatedly to partake thereof. "You're not ainin' anything, Mrs. Murtha," she would say; "here, try them cakes." And Moll as repeatedly protested that she had no appetite, and that she was doing her best; which in truth she was, as the rapid diminution of the eatables testified abundantly. But, notwithstanding her consumption of unwonted and tempting viands, the match-maker's spirits seemed to sink, and Kitty's prediction as to the effects her tea would produce remained unverified. The guest grew more and more lugubrious, and replied to the hostess's remarks with a settled air of melancholy abstraction. "All the other servants is out at a dance over at Tampusluddy, Mrs. Murtha. They'll be back shortly, I expect," Kitty said. "Ay, ay! It's well for them that can enjoy themselves," Moll rejoined. In some such strain she had returned all her replies from the moment she had sat at the table; and the manner was so widely different from her usual one that Kitty Donohoe could not fail to notice it. "Musha, Mrs. Murtha," she said at length, "what ails you to-night? You're not yourself at all." Here was exactly the starting-point Moll Murtha had been looking for. She promptly replied: "Deed it's little wonder if I'm not. Kitty allanna; an' you won't wonder yourself when I tell you that Dan Murtha is gone away and left me in me old age." "Dan Murtha gone?" Kitty exclaimed, growing suddenly pale. "Aye, in troth." "Where to?" "I wish I knew that meself." Kitty Donohoe remained silent for a minute, endeavoring to recover from the confusion into which the intelligence had thrown her. She felt the need of saying something, if only to hide her agitation. "What could tempt him to go away an' leave you, Mrs. Murtha?" she asked; "he was always a good son." "No better," Moll replied. "But some wan told him somethin' about somebody that he didn't like to hear, an' without as much as hiddin' me goodbye he takes his bundle on his shoulder, an' makes off wud himself." There was enough in the artfully framed sentence to fan Kitty Donohoe's curiosity to white heat. "Did he tell you what he heard, or who it was about?" she asked, striving in vain to speak steadily. "Oh! I wouldn't tell that to anywan," the match-maker answered; and then added, "I wouldn't tell you above all." The girl felt a strong inclination to cry, for she guessed that she was the somebody about whom some one had told Dan Murtha something he did not like to hear; but, struggling bravely to suppress the hysterical impulse, she contrived to say with tolerable firmness: "If it's anything about me, I wish you'd tell me, Mrs. Murtha." "I couldn't, Kitty allanna; is would on'y hurt your feelin's, and do no good afther all." "You must tell me, Mrs. Murtha," the girl said with decision. "I'm not goin' to let any one spake bad o' me behind me back without knowin' what it is." "Now don't axe me, Kitty Donohoe," the match-maker said. "I will ax you," the girl rejoined sturdily, "an' you must tell me. It'll do me more harm if I don't know." "Well, if I must, I must," Moll Murtha returned with an air of resignation. "But deed and deed I'd rather not." "Go on," said Kitty Donohoe, whose features were rigid as those of a statue. "Tell me what was said o' me." "Some wan told Dan Murtha—whisper, acushla," and the old woman bent over the table, and put her lips beside the girl's face, and whispered into her ear, as if she was fearful of being overheard. The hot blood mounted to Kitty Donohoe's brow. She sprang to her feet, indignation flaming over her whole countenance, as she asked, in tones of suppressed vehemence: "Did Dan Murtha believe that o' me?" "He was a dirty mane dog to believe it, no matter who told him," Moll replied, "an' it's his mother that says that same." Kitty Donohoe sat down, leant on the table, and sobbed bitterly for a full minute. Gradually, however, indignation mastered the momentary weakness, and when she raised her head, though her cheeks were wet with tears, her eyes sparkled with angry light. Turning her gaze full on Moll Murtha, she said in tones of intense bitterness: "If Dan Murtha was lyin' on his dyin' bed this mornin', I wouldn't forgive him for thinkin' so meanly of me—no, not if the bishop himself was beggin' me on his knees to do it." "Deed I don't blame you," Moll Murtha put in timidously. She had been far from expecting such an outbreak.

(CONCLUDED ON SEVENTH PAGE.)

"Good night, Mrs. Murtha," the girl said, rising suddenly, and retiring from the apartment without another word. "Dear, dear!" Moll soliloquised more than once on her homeward way, "they were mortal fond o' wan another, to be sure! It was a pity to have to part them, I wish I hadn't to do it." The moon was up by the time she had passed the huts of Kilbrandon, and its light enabled her to press on more quickly up the mountain road that led to her humble dwelling. Near the spot where Lanty Quinn had told her of her son's intention to exile himself, she caught sight of a sharpless something that lay quite a mile on the road, and her heart gave a great bound, she knew not why. A creeping horror came over her as, approaching nearer, the thing grew gradually more defined, and seemed about to assume the outlines of a human form. A woman of the ordinary type would, under such circumstances, have fled back to the village at the top of her speed, and gathered the inhabitants together in her fright. But Moll Murtha was not an ordinary woman; and though her heart beat as if trying to escape from its prison, she pressed on firmly. Nearer still. There was no mistaking now. The thing had grown into the shape of a man lying on his back. Nearer yet. One arm of the man lay by his side; the other veiled his forehead. Nearer still. A little dark pool stained the dusty road close to his head. The form, even in its peculiar position, seemed familiar to Moll Murtha's eye. She ran forward quickly. One glance at the face, and then, as, wringing her hands, she fell on her knees beside the body, her piercing screams echoing across the glen and along the hillsides, waked the birds from their nests within a circuit of several miles. It was Dan Murtha that lay there, with a gaping wound on his temple, whence had flowed the blood that made the little dark pool that stained the dusty road.

CHAPTER V. Lonely as the scene was wherein Moll Murtha came so suddenly on the prostrate form of her son, her piercing shrieks, again and again repeated with all the reckless vehemence of despair, soon brought several of the male inhabitants of Kilbrandon to the spot. These, more cool than she, insisted that in the case before them life was not gone beyond recall; but, on the contrary, that reasonable grounds for hope remained. So, at least, they assured the distracted mother; although among themselves but little confidence was felt. Being men of practical habits, and some of them not altogether unused to emergencies of the kind, they resolved quickly to transport the body to the nearest house, and secure the aid of a surgeon at the earliest moment. A door was soon hurried up from the village, the inanimate form laid thereon, four stout fellows each upheld a corner, getting occasional relief, and in less than half an hour from the moment of their coming to the rescue, their senseless burthen was lying on a pallet in the first hut they came to in the village. Meanwhile a smart youth, who had been detailed to dash off for skilled assistance, was speeding breathlessly to the residence of the medical man, some two miles off, to bring him with the utmost haste to where his presence was so eagerly awaited. The mother crouched at the foot of the pallet, her eyes riveted in a stony gaze on the blank face before her. Though her attitude was so quiet—though not a muscle moved, not a feature changed position, not an eyelid stirred, a tempest of thought was raging in her mind. Who had done this deed? Who had felled her manly son by a foul blow—for very certain she was that no fair stroke had brought him thus low? Who could have had a wish to harm him? Who could have had a motive? With unerring instinct she leaped to a right conclusion. To all her self-asked questions she could find but one reply—Dinny Horan. But she could not stop at that point. Other questions must be put—aye, and must be answered. What share had she herself in bringing about the deed? Could she hold herself guiltless? Had she not urged the miser on in his infatuation—tempted him to go forward in a well-nigh hopeless quest—lured him onward with promises of her skillful aid—accepted his bribe and acted in his interests, sinfully, as she now admitted to herself—nay, had she not sneered at his weakness, and striven to goad him into acting with vigor? And here was the end of all her schemes. There was no palliation in the thought that she had never dreamt of such a result as this—never even in fancy supposed that Dinny Horan would have gone to the length of wielding a treacherous weapon against the life of his rival. Neither was there comfort in the thought that all her plans were framed for the express benefit of her son—that it was for him she had engaged in them, and that but in the hope of doing him life-long service she would never have entered into her unholy league with the miser. She could lay no flattering unctious of that nature to her tortured soul. The time was gone by when she could have so deceived herself. Her son lay there before her, stretched in a trace that might be the everlasting sleep of death; and she, his mother, had helped to put him there—ay, as truly as if she had handed to the assassin the weapon with which the blow was struck. At the thought the conscience-stricken woman covered her face with her hands, while hot tears of remorse and regret without avail trickled down her cheeks. Some two hours elapsed before the doctor came to the door. He knelt by the side of the pallet, and examined the case before him with professional coolness and care. "Jupiter!" he muttered, when he had probed the wound on the temple, "what skulls your Irish peasants have! The blow that did this ought infallibly to have killed the fellow—would have slaughtered a bull, in fact; yet here animation seems nearly suspended from contusion and loss of blood.—Humph! Brain badly contused, I fancy. He'll be a brainless idiot, I fear, for the remainder of his days, poor fellow! Bad contusion—very bad. No fracture, though—the only hopeful element in the case." Having completed his diagnosis, he announced that Dan Murtha was still alive, and gave directions as to the treatment most likely to restore animation. The mother leaped to her feet with a delicious thrill of joy, and set to work changing her son's body with an undimmed vigor which surpassed that of the