

## NORA BRADY'S VOW.

BY MRS. ANNA H. DORSEY.

## CHAPTER VIII. CONTINUED.

Nora followed her with a timid step into the small, dingy room. On a bed in the corner the sick man lay; but she could not see his face, or even his person, because there were two or three women grouped around him, attracted by that strange fascination which the appearance of death always presents to the living. The atmosphere of the room was stifling from the heat of the stove and the number of breaths in it, and Nora, quietly opening the door and raised the window a little way, then resumed her seat. A dip candle burned in a tin candlestick, on a table which stood in a recess beside the chimney, and the flickering shadows it cast on the wall, with the quick, gasping sobs of the unconscious man, filled Nora's heart with a nameless terror; a weakness and trembling came over her, and a strong desire, which is common under such circumstances, took possession of her, to look on the sufferer's face. She approached the bed and quietly waited until one of the women moved away, then looked down on the white, convulsed features before her. Was she dreaming? Was she bereft of her senses and subject to an illusion, that John Halloran's name was blended with the low, sharp cry that burst from her lips? She flew across the room, snatched up the candlestick and brought it to the bedside, and, holding it close to the face of the dying man, scanned his features, and gently lifted the dark, clustering masses of hair back from his temples and forehead. "It is his blessed self, thanks be to God!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears: "it is my poor master, Mr. Halloran!"

At that moment McGinnis returned with Dr. Bryant, who was soon followed by a clergyman; and words cannot paint the amazement of the whole party when they learned that the unconscious man before them was the noble, the brave, the beloved John Halloran, whom they had all loved without having ever seen. The physician ordered the clergyman and Thomas McGinnis to remain and assist him. As to Nora, she knelt quietly in a corner of the next room, pouring out her soul to God, and pleading earnestly for the restoration of the stricken man, who was one of that band about whom the tenacious fibers of her heart's warm love had been clinging for years.

And she felt that her Father in heaven would succor him.

She would now claim help from Mr. Mallow.

And she thanked God, and felt comforted that in the publisher who had so kindly assisted her Mr. Halloran had a friend.

## CHAPTER IX.

"Oh, blessed be that warning, my child, thy sleep adorning."

For I know that the angels are whispering to thee:

And while they are keeping bright watch o'er thy sleeping,

Oh, pray to them sweetly, my baby, with me.

And say thou wouldst rather they watch o'er thy faith—

For I know that the angels are whispering to thee."

The rich autumnal glories, the burnished shadows of golden sunlight, were over.

The thrush had sung the last song on the moss-covered turret of the ruined abbey of Fada Brae, and a wild, cold wind had swept down from the Galties, like an "Army with banners," and torn away the few withered leaves which had been left clinging, like human hopes to earthly promises, to the bare and gnarled branches overhead.

For two months no letter had come from Nora Brady, and heart-sick with anxiety, Mrs. Halloran had almost ceased hoping to hear from her husband. Innumerable fears assailed her, and her imagination was filled with anticipations of some terrible disaster having befallen him,—of loneliness, illness, and perhaps death, in the land of the stranger. It is true that the roads had been almost impassable for weeks, and there was no way of sending to Buttevant unless Dennis Byrne walked there; and that was impossible, on account of the frequent storms, the swollen streams, and the piled-up snow drifts. Many of her old friends and neighbors around Glendarriff, Protestants and Catholics, had made a day's journey to see her during the fine autumnal weather, and had cheered her somewhat by their hearty sympathy and the onsets of amusing or interesting news which they imparted. They all knew Mary Halloran's poverty; but not daring to offer pecuniary assistance which they were well assured her pride would reject, their generous Celtic hearts suggested many modes of aiding her without offending her sensitive delicacy; and many a hamper of game, wine and delicacies of various kinds, found their way mysteriously into her larder, which caused Dennis the full exercise of his ingenuity and imagination to account for, by telling her plausible tales of wonderful purchases when he went to Buttevant with butter and eggs; and it was edifying to observe his patience when she gently reproved him for his extravagance.

"You know, Dennis, that we are poor, quite poor, now, and we must live according to our means," said Mrs. Halloran, on one occasion. "It is no disgrace to be poor, since our Lord Himself chose a life of poverty while He was on earth; but it is disgraceful to go beyond our means and get others into difficulties to support our pride."

"Bad scan, then, ma'am, to all the difficulties I'll ever bring anybody into by my extravagance. It's all paid for, sure, and it'll be a mortal shame for a lady born and raised like yourself to suffer for delicacies and the like, that you've been used to from your cradle. My things fetch a good price at Buttevant and other places. Faith! and there's no butter sells like the Brae butter, after all."

"Thank you kindly, Dennis, for thinking of me; but we can do with less and more common food. Do not purchase any more game or wine; we have enough to last a year already," she said, with a half smile on her sad countenance.

"She'll have to know it afore long," said poor Dennis, as Mrs. Halloran went away, while a pained expression settled on his countenance. "The blight is on the potatoes; they're rotted black in the ground everywhere, and there's but little of my own left; and as to selling off the old McCarthy More siller and jewels, the few that's left, why agra! it's not to be done at all; for, as sure as God rules, they'll come to their rights again." And between him and Ellen there was as much state kept up around the wreck of Mary Halloran's fallen fortunes as if she had been a captive queen. She was tended with a watchfulness and care, and all her wishes anticipated with a fidelity, which can find no parallel under the sun, out of Ireland. Dennis generally circled around the table at meal time with an antique silver salver in his hand, and Ellen was as scrupulous about the courses at dinner as if there had been a banquet, instead of the too frequently poor meal of bread, cheese and tea. The children were drilled into the importance of using their silver forks and table napkins properly, and were in a fair way to believe that it was a much better thing to be poor gentry than rich parvenus. They were never allowed to do anything for themselves when either of their faithful guardians were present.

"It's not becoming, sir, or miss," Dennis would say, "for one of the ould stock like yourself to be lettin' yoursel' down to do such a thing when there's servants to the fore. Ye come home at Glendarriff. But the next day the 'little lady' drooped, and often, leaning against her mother, complained of being very tired; then day by day the bloom faded out of her cheeks, and her footsteps became faltering and uncertain, and at last she reclined on the lounge near the fire all the time, or sat in her cushioned chair beside her mother, silently caressing her white dove or whispering to her doll.

One morning Mrs. Halloran observed her leaning back on the lounge, very pale. Alarmed, she caught her up to her bosom, and folding her arms about her, said to all my darling? Tell me what hurts you."

"Only my head—a little; and I feel so tired," she said, faintly.

"Only her head! Oh, Heaven," said Mrs. Halloran, wildly. "Dennis! Ellen! Desmond! come, some of you, instantly."

Dennis happened to be in the dining-room at the moment, and ran in.

"Gracie is very ill, Dennis; I fear the child is very ill; and I must have a physician immediately," said Mrs. Halloran.

"I'll go right off at once, ma'am, for Dr. Ward. It's only a step from here to his house; and if he's not there I'll go over to a doctor as any in the country."

"There's nothing like the *seoghrath* after all for the sick," exclaimed Dennis, hurrying away on his sad errand, heedless of the three miles of broken and unfrequented road between Fada Brae and Dr. Ward's place. The snow drifts and the steep slippery paths were nothing to him; war was in his heart; he had loved the child from her babyhood, and was scarcely less distressed than the mother at the idea of her being in danger.

The doctor came toward evening; he examined the child's pulse, and looked at her tongue; he talked cheerfully and in pleasant tones to her; but she was languid and silent, making no complaint, except that her "head hurt like a little too much."

"Fear," said the medical man, "that slow fever is taking on; but in this early stage there are many efficacious remedies for it. There's not much the matter now, but I will leave some medicine, Mrs. Halloran, and call again to-morrow. We'll have you well pretty one, by the time the cuckoo sings." Gracie smiled one of her quiet smiles, and held out her beautiful hand to the doctor, who said good-by.

Now, fully aroused to a sense of the child's danger, and her maternal instincts ever on the watch for the slightest change, other sorrows were forgotten. The doctor came again and again; he changed the medicines, he alternated the nourishment; but she languid and drooped, she wasted and grew paler every day. With her mother's hand in hers, she would lie quiet for hours together. Sometimes she would start with a happy smile from her fitful slumbers, saying, "I thought papa was here." "I thought I had wings like Birdie's," Desmond, anxious and sorrowful, crept in and out, and with her blue eyes cast down in reverie her dove flew down and nestled in her arms. She kissed the gentle creature's head, and smoothed the snowy wings with her hands, which were scarcely less white and said—

"Birdie, where do the flowers go to when winter comes? Tell me, Birdie. But, ah me! what a pity you cannot talk, beautiful white Birdie! I shall have to ask my mamma."

"What is it, little daughter?" said Mrs. Halloran.

"Mamma, can you tell me where the flowers hide themselves when the frost and snows come? They don't die, for they come back in the very same places in the spring, that they were before; so they must creep away and hide—the cunning little things!—in the earth."

And she laughed at her own conceits.

"No; only the leaves die, dear one. The root, which holds the true life of the flower, remains in the earth; and when the warm sunshine and the soft spring rains come, it opens its bosom and sends forth the leaf and the flower again," said Mrs. Halloran, caressing the beautiful head which leaned on her bosom.

"And, mamma, would the flowers come out if the roots were not buried in the earth? It seems cruel to leave the poor roots out in the frozen earth all the winter."

"They must be buried in the earth, to bring forth flowers," said Mrs. Halloran.

"If that the reason," she asked, suddenly, "they laid Mary Flynn's little child in the churchyard, mamma?"

"Little children who are laid in the earth, Gracie darling, are like the

roots: only their souls, which is the flower, bloom in heaven. They could not see God without passing through death and the grave. Heaven is their spring and eternal summer; God is their sunshine; and the earth holds their bodies until the great day comes for all the world to be judged; then, little darling, those dear innocent ones who sleep in the dust will arise, filled with new life and brightness, never to know death again."

"And will they have wings like Birdie, mamma?"

"Yes—soft, white wings, like Birdie."

"I wish I might be planted in the earth, mamma—that I might wake in heaven—that I might have wings like my dear dove."

"My child!"

"Mamma, I would ask my heavenly Father to let me fly back again and watch around my dear, dear papa, who is so far away. Oh, I know I shall never, never see him again!" she said, while she threw herself on her mother's breast, weeping.

"Oh, yes; we shall surely see him again. You must not think so; for it would grieve him, because you are the dearest little birdie of his heart; so come, let us sing something he used to love," said Mrs. Halloran, with a feeling of indecise dread in her heart as she uncovered her harp and ran her fingers over the strings. The child leaned against her, and the entrancing music lured her away from her strange mood, and lifting up her sweet, tiny voice, she sang smilingly the strains that she learned from the happy home at Glendarriff. But the next day the "little lady" drooped, and often, leaning against her mother, complained of being very tired; then day by day the bloom faded out of her cheeks, and her footsteps became faltering and uncertain, and at last she reclined on the lounge near the fire all the time, or sat in her cushioned chair beside her mother, silently caressing her white dove or whispering to her doll.

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other one should nurse her, so jealous was she of every moment that she lingered. But amidst it all there was an unacknowledged hope that her ceaseless care and tender nursing would bring her through; for the doctor still assured her there was not much the matter.

"Open the window, mamma, by my bed," she asked, one evening.

The window was opened, and in flowed a gold and crimson flood of sunset. The sky, like a "sea of fire," glowed behind the ragged and wild cliffs of the Galties, and above, in the blue, silent depths, a few splendid cloud spots floated. The child looked out long and thoughtfully; then, turning her full, beautiful eyes on her mother's face, she said—

"When I die, and go away up there, and have wings like Birdie's, can I see you every day through these windows?"

"Die! Oh, my child, why talk of dying? Do you wish to die?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And not afraid, my own?"

"No, ma'am—not afraid."

Then, as if an angel had whispered it, Mary Halloran knew that her child was surely passing away from her; and, leaving her head down on the pillow, she wept in silence. She already felt the glow from the fiery furnace into which her bereaved heart was to be cast; she already tasted the bitterness of the cup she was to drink.

The next day she sat watching and weeping. The child lay still, but breathing quick and low. A footstep shared on the threshold. She started, looked up, and her kinsman, Donald More, stood before her—the destroyer of her peace, the spoiler of her home.

"I could not find the servants; so you must pardon me, cousin Mary, for announcing myself so unceremoniously," he said, with an easy air.

"Way come you here at all this?" said Mrs. Halloran, rising and standing between the sick child and the unwelcome intruder.

"I came to inquire after my kinswoman's health," he said, with an air of effrontery. "I hope I find you well."

"Insolent!" she murmured, while the blood rushing from her face, left it very white; but she thought of the dying child, and the storm was calmed.

"This is no place for you, Donald More," she said, calmly. "I pray you go away. Your being here disturbs me."

"I am sorry to hear that, Mary. I came with far other intentions. I wish to be your friend and your children's friend."

"Friend!" she said, with bitter scorn depicted in every feature. "You do not understand the meaning of the word. We do not need your friendship, even if you did; nor could I accept it for myself or them. All I ask is that you go away."

"I come on an errand which deserves a better reception, Mary. I know you despise me and regard me as the enemy of your household; but I only did my duty, and government chose to reward me with a grant of the Glendarriff estate. I had reasons for not refusing. It is far better for it to be in my possession than in strangers' hands; and now I promise, before God, that, on certain conditions, it shall return to your branch of the family again."

"And what may be those conditions? But speak softly: my child is ill."

"Well, listen. I have made up my mind never to marry—why, *ma belle*—because I have come to the determination, with your consent, to adopt Desmond, provided I can prevail on him to give up the superstitions and follies of the Romish Church and adopt the Protestant creed."

Donald More had lost all caste. Protestants spoke coldly to him, and avoided him; the Catholic gentry abhorred him; and every mark of distinction, while the lower classes regarded him with distrust and hatred, for all alike in Ireland detest the informer; and for the sake of recovering a position he had fallen on this plan, knowing well that an act of justice to John Halloran's family would be the best recommendation he could offer. He was so full of it, and so sanguine of success, that he was scarcely prepared for what followed.

"You have said your say, Donald More; now listen to mine," said Mrs. Halloran, while her fragile form dilated with indignation. "Child of mine shall never be your heir. Their lies one, dying. Father would I consign them both to the grave, than agree to your base proposal. Let them be beggarly, my G-d! or return to Thee, if thou wilt; but through all preserve to them the gift of Faith. No, Mr. More: it is out of your power to serve me or mine."

"You will think better of it, Mary?"

"I am contentless, sir. I refuse your proposal decidedly. I have told you that your presence is painful and unwelcome. Shall I have to tell you more emphatically that you are an intruder?" she replied.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mary. It is the way of women to get into the heroics. I shall go away presently, but will return in a few weeks to know the result of your considerations on the subject. One thing I cannot refuse me: I must kiss that child. She is one of the few things I have ever loved, Mary—little, dainty lady." He said, while the nearest approach to tenderness he had in his nature gathered on his features.

"Do not touch her, I beseech you, sir," said Mrs. Halloran, leaning over the child. "Do not touch her. You might awaken and terrify her."

But the whispering had awakened her; she looked around with a bright, eager expression, then lifted her eyes to her mother's, saying, "I thought he was here."

"Who, darling?"

"My papa! Cousin Donald, how do you do?" she said, reaching out her dainty and beautiful little hand.

"Bring my papa back, Cousin Donald, and take my mamma to Glendarriff."

"Why Gracie, little lady, what alls you?"

"Nothing much; only I am so tired waiting for papa to come, it makes my head hurt me. I'm afraid I shall go

away before he comes, for you know I'm going far, far away; but do you find him, Cousin Donald, and bring him to mamma and Desmond."

"I'll try Gracie; but make haste over her," she whispered, leaning over her. "When I come again, I shall bring some beautiful French toys and pictures."

"Bring papa, and give my best love to him," she said, leaning back exhausted on the pillow. "Good-by, Cousin Donald; I am so tired."

And then again a portentous slumber stole over her senses.

"Do not come again, Donald More," said the agonized mother, going to the door with him. "There can be nothing in common between us. A wide gulf separates us. I will receive no favors from you; nor should John Halloran's children accept the slightest gift."

"Time, I hope, will soften your feelings," he said. "Farewell."

Inexpressibly relieved by the absence of Mrs. Halloran returned to the bedside of the little one, who from that hour seemed to sink, or, rather, like some fair thing cradled on a wave, to float gently away, without pain or suffering, toward eternity.

The next day Dennis brought a letter from Buttevant, which Mrs. Halloran tore open with eager expectation; but her face flushed up, and, throwing the letter from her, she sat for a few moments bewildered, trembling, and undecided. The letter was from her kinsman, begging her acceptance of a £50 bill on the Bank of Ireland, which he enclosed. In a little while her determination was formed. She inclosed letter and bill together in an envelope, and, directing it to Donald More, Esq., of Glendarriff, handed it to Dennis Byrne, who had been waiting in hopes that the letter contained news from America.

"Dennis," she said, "if you wish to do me a service, go instantly with this to Buttevant and return it to the post-office. My cousin Donald has had the audacity to write to me. Yesterday he was here. I wish to return his letter without loss of time."

"Here, my lady? Why, then, it's a gort sin I wasn't to the fore to welcome him," said Dennis. "For I declare to my soul it would have been the greatest pleasure I ever had, to put him at a briske pace from Fada Brae than he came to it."

"Be on the watch, then, Dennis; for he threatens to come again. But go on."

"Lethim," said stout Dennis: "I declare to my sins I wouldn't desire better fun. But I'm going, my lady, after I hear how Miss Gracie is."

"She is very weak—oh, very weak, Dennis."

"Thanks be to God, she'll go to heaven without much pain; and I pray His holy name that the angels will welcome her with their sweetest songs."

"But it'll be a hard blow on Mister Halloran," murmured Dennis, while he lingered a moment to look at the child, dashing off, as he did so, the tears that fell from his eyes.

That evening, Mrs. Gray, the Protestant rectory's wife, who lived in the neighborhood, and who had been very kind in her attention to Mrs. Halloran, drove up to Fada Brae, and brought some beautiful clusters of grapes and flowers from her hothouse to the invalid. She was a gentle, kindly woman, and Mrs. Halloran was always glad to see her. Gracie was awake, and smiled and when she saw the beautiful present, and holding out her little wasted hand, touched the fruit and flowers with the tips of her fingers in the same dainty way she had always done when she saw anything beautiful which pleased her.

"Taste one, my darling," said her mother.

"No, dear—just yes—to please you, mamma."

They pressed a grape between her lips; but it seemed to sicken her; and she said, "I would rather look at them." Then they laid them where she could see them, and her innate love for the beautiful found a quiet joy in the sight.

Father Halton came in and brought her a picture of our Lord blessing little children. She looked at it long and earnestly, then gazed into his face with one of her earnest expressions, and held out her hand.

"You see, my dear, how Jesus loved little children. Their angels see the face of His Father in heaven; and He is always glad when they are gathered into His bosom."

"I love Him," she said, folding her attenuated hands together on her bosom, with a holy expression. Just then, Birdie, her dove, flew into the room, and perched on the cornice of her bedstead, where he sat, arching his white, graceful neck, and, while he looked down with his soft gray eyes on her, began a low cooing. She lifted her eyes, and a bright smile fitted over her face; and at, while they gazed with looks of love at each other, a deep slumber stole over her.

Mrs. Gray offered to sit up and relieve Mrs. Halloran; but she thanked her, saying she would be glad of her company, but she could not leave the child. Father Halton sprinkled the dying one with holy water and benediction together, and laying his hand on Mrs. Halloran's head, lifted his eyes to heaven and besought God to strengthen and comfort her when the dark hour came—that hour so dark and bitter to a loving mother's heart—and went away to visit a poor woman of the neighborhood who was dying.

The child's dreams, or visions, were pleasant and peaceful; angel arms pillowed her sinking head, and ever and anon far-off music stole around her; but she alone, led by bright-winged ones through the shadowy vale, heard it. They thought—those who watched her—that it was so, from the radiant smiles that flitted at times over her countenance and the few whispered words that fell from her lips. Her hand, folded in her mother's, began to grow cold. Mrs. Gray brought the candle to the bedside, and it was clear that death was creeping apace through her frame; but her breath was still low and soft.

"Is this death?" asked Mrs. Halloran, with trembling lips.

"I fear so," was the reply.

"Then, my merciful God," she exclaimed, throwing herself on her knees, "spare her wild agony and bitter struggle. O angels! bear her gently away and shield her from wild fright. Oh, my child! I would that I might see thee through the dark waters on my bosom, and place thee in the hands of Him Who gave thee!"

The dove, startled perhaps by the light, fluttered down and nestled close to the bosom of the child, within her arms, while faint and more low came up her breast. Dennis and Ellen, hearing the slight stir, came in, and knelt sobbing near the bed.

"She is passing away very sweetly, my friend," said Mrs. Gray. "Let us not disturb her. It would be sinful to break in on such rest."

At that moment the child stretched out her arms; a slight smile passed over her face; then truly she slept; and that sleep which shall know no waking until the Resurrection morn dawns on the weary earth.

For long weeks Mrs. Halloran lay unconscious and hovering on the verge of the grave. She knew not when the little coffin lid was closed down on that clear face which was fairer than Parian marble, or when the white shrouded form was borne away and laid beneath the mould. Nor did she know of those long, loving letters which had come—all of them at once—from her husband and Nora, telling her of his safety and prosperity and of her happiness; nor of how the boy Desmond, grown to a sturdy girl, had watched her day after day, and how Ellen's tender care and Dennis Byrne's indefatigable efforts and unceasing attentions left nothing undone. Of all this, with the kind attentions of her friends around the neighborhood, she heard when, after long and weary months, she had been restored to life and increasing strength, and when, amidst fast-falling tears, she used to talk unceasingly of the one that was gone, and loved to hear of the slightest thing connected or associated with her. She grieved much that the dove had flown away. Ellen told her that the last time she saw it was nestled on the little white bird's bosom; and since then no one had seen it; and when at last, shrinking and with feeble steps, she visited the little grave, she found that some friendly heart had caused to be erected over it a costly and exquisitely-carved marble tomb, on which hung a garland of half-withered daisies. Over the tomb was a sculptured cross; and yet, while a dove was rising toward heaven, but no one could tell who had paid this last touching tribute to the sorrows of the Halloran family.

## CHAPTER X.

"Pain's furnace heat within quivers  
Grief's breath upon the flames doth blow  
And all my heart in anguish shivers  
And trembles at the thought of you  
And yet I whisper, 'As God will,'  
And in his hottest fire hold still."

It was a long night—that night on which Nora Brady had so unexpectedly found Mr. Halloran. She thought of the publisher who had so kindly assisted her 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 cups—"If possible, my God, let this cup pass away from them."

When Thomas McGinnis went away, a 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,