

FATHER BANNON'S UMBRELLA

Things might have arranged themselves better if Sabina Murphy's father had been less anxious for his daughter's union with Cornelius O'Donovan, if Cornelius' mother had been less wistful whenever she saw the young couple together. Sabina's father joined Corney's. Both farms were much of a size and in the pink of condition. They were unimportant taken separately, joined together they would look for a prettier farm, and people were as fond of the land in the '30's in Ireland as they are today.

But the resolute intention of relatives and friends to force the young people together only succeeded in defeating its own ends. Sibbie, as all the world called her, was something of a spoiled child—a beauty, an heiress, her father's darling. She had only to send a glance from under her long black eyelashes at any swain of them all to bring him to her side. Corney, on the other hand, was, from his own point of view, nothing at all of a match for her. He had the soft, rugged, melancholy looks which often belong to the Celt and are as appealing to the sensitive as the sadness of animals. An artist would have found Corney beautiful. To his own class he made no appeal at all. He was heavy, clumsy, dark, his features shapeless, his limbs cast in a great mould that he carried ungraciously. Whereas Sibbie—Sibbie had a Japanese daintiness of aspect, though they knew nothing of Japan in Corrieglen. Her smooth hair was like black satin, her black eyebrows were exquisitely arched over long eyes, she was milk-white of skin and had delicate, disdainful red lips.

No one person in the world suspected that Sibbie had some secret to herself, in the seclusion of her own pretty room. "Why is he such an 'madhaun'?" stamping her foot angrily at the same time; nor if they had, would they have suspected any connection between the speech and Corney O'Donovan. When Terence Murphy in his last illness spoke of the wish of his heart to Sibbie, she leaned over him and smoothed his pillow tenderly. "He's a great old omadhaun," she said, "and he will never ask me." "That how it is!" answered Sibbie, nodding her head emphatically. "This surprising, the foolishness of people and things," said Terence. And that night he died in his sleep, so that Sibbie's secret died with him. The next to go was Peggy O'Donovan, a kind, hard-working woman for whom the neighbors had nothing but good words, when she went. "I wish I could have seen you settled, Corney," she said, wistfully. "Sure, I never had eyes but for the one girl," Corney answered, "and she won't look at me." "Are you sure, Corney?" "Sure! It's too sure I am." "Whether she doesn't know what's good. A better son never walked the world, and a good son makes a good husband. 'Tis her loss, Corney." "Maybe, I know it's mine." "I've longed this many a day for your children on my knee. I'll never see their faces now." "I wouldn't want children unless they were hers and mine," he said. "And if she holds out against me to the end, I think 'tis an old bachelor I'll be dying, like my Uncle Peter." "She bids fair to be an old maid herself, the way she's letting all the boys go by her," said the mother, with a little bitterness. Corney looked at her in amazement. "Is it she the old maid," he asked. "That could have any boy in the country, from old James Fogarty, that's worth ten thousand pounds if he's worth a penny, down to Lanty Whelan, that hasn't got two pennies to call his own nor the first hair on his chin? Sure, why would she be an old maid?" His eyes kindled in sudden violence, but he curbed himself. He wasn't going to distress the said young mother with a revelation of the depths of his hopeless love and the fury of jealousy that shook him when he thought of another man winning Sibbie. But the mother had comfort. Old Father Bannon, of Newtowncross, who had a great and deserved reputation for sanctity which extended as far as Dublin itself, knew her desires and assured her at the last that he believed they would be satisfied. Perhaps he knew something, perhaps he did not. Anyhow, she died easy in her mind about her son's future. When the two were left alone they seemed more contrary to each other than ever. They bore their griefs in a lonely isolation, Sibbie prouder than ever now that her cheek was pale and her eyes ringed with purple, while Corney walked with a stoop of the shoulders, as though a burden pressed them down, and a face that had more than ever the dumb sadness of an animal's.

Relieve those Inflamed Eyes! Pond's Extract

She missed her old father greatly; indeed it was the ache of missing him that had driven her to take his place in the fields, instead of leaving things to Nick Brophy who had been her father's right-hand man in his latter days. She grew sharp with those about her, which was due partly, no doubt, to that gnawing tooth of grief which made a perpetual discomfort in her life. And she was sharper of all to the suitors who came thicker than ever now that she was alone. When she had succeeded in getting rid of the most eligible of them, she smiled grimly to herself. "You're shaping well for an old maid, Sibbie Murphy," she said, and then added: "And upon my word, things being as they are, I don't know but what you're right. You're very comfortable as you are. And they are too sure there are other, and too keen after the money except one, and he's nothing but an omadhaun." Her grief and dissatisfaction had their effect on her looks, as her friends and neighbors weren't slow about telling her. Even Father Bannon, the least observant of men, noticed it. "You're not looking well, Sibbie," he said, with the kind, anxious, far off look of one who saw the world and its troubles from a great distance. "It'll be that I'm getting old, father," said Sibbie, with a frown at herself. "I pulled out a gray hair this morning." "It seems like yesterday since I christened you, and it can't be more than twenty-three years ago. Twenty-four, is it? Well, we can't call you old yet, child. I've been visiting that poor neighbor of yours, Corney O'Donovan. His house is in a miserable state, enough to make the kind woman his mother troubled even where she is. I gave him good advice, where she is. I gave him good advice, a clean, honest girl in her place." "To get a wife, he'll never be comfortable till he does." "The kind, old, far off eyes looked away from Sibbie, over whose face the color had rushed in a flood. "I hear you've a great contrivance for keeping off the rain," she said, in a confused effort to get away from what was apparently an awkward subject. "I was sent a present to me from Dublin," Father Bannon answered, brightening. Indeed, I'm afraid to go with it, for all the children in the place will be following me and the dogs barking at my heels. You wouldn't believe how it holds the rain off. For all the world like a little roof it is." "So I heard," said Sibbie, not greatly interested in Father Bannon's acquisition, but pretending to be so. "What at all do they call it?" "It has a queer name—it's called an umbrella. I have a good many people dropping in to see what it's like. It suits up very handy, too." "Indeed?" said Sibbie, politely interested. "I would like to see it, so I would." "Tis a long time, Sibbie, child, since you came to see me. Supposing you come over to tea on Sunday? I know tea's a treat to you—it is to all the women." Sibbie looked eager, finally confessed that tea was her temptation—it was nearly as scarce a thing in the parish of Newtowncross at that date as the umbrella which Father Bannon had just acquired. She dressed herself in her best to do honor to the occasion. Her best was a scarlet petticoat, a loosely-fitting jacket of some flowered stuff, white and scarlet, caught in with a scarlet ribbon at the waist, blue knitted stockings and stout, pretty little shoes. It was a fashion of dress that never went out in Newtowncross, and when she took off her blue hooded cloak and revealed her finery, the old priest took snuff and paid her a compliment. He was reading his breviary when Sibbie arrived by the window that overlooked the valley of the Daugh River, with rampart of the mountains behind it. "You're fine enough for a wedding, Sibbie," he said. "Sit down, child, while I make the tea. I'm expecting another visitor. Ah, here he is! How are you, Corney?" He looked away from Sibbie's red cheek and wore a half guilty air. When he looked back again it seemed as though a hedge of briars and thorns had grown up about the girl during the little interval. Instead of the sweet naturalness of the Sibbie of a few moments ago, this Sibbie sat on the edge of her chair in an uneasy attitude; her mouth was prim; she looked so chilly, so unfriendly that it was no wonder poor Corney, in his bottle-green coat with brass buttons, his knee breeches and frilled shirt and gray worsted stockings, felt all of a sudden chilled and depressed. He had taken his best clothes from the chest of drawers, where his mother's hand had last smoothed them out, to do credit to the great occasion of drinking tea with the priest. They had become him remarkably well, too. He had not known Sibbie was to be there. But there she was, looking more beautiful than he had ever seen her. But so cold, so angry almost. Why, he had done nothing to bring that look to her face.

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"Now to shut it up," said he. But that was easier said than done. They pushed and pulled and squeezed and felt for hinges in the ribs, all to no purpose. They remembered too late that Father Bannon had not taught them how to close the umbrella. "Let us get home before the wind rises," said Sibbie. "I can see the light in the kitchen window where Bessie is waiting up for me. There isn't a house we could get into, but there's a great shelter inside the four walls of the garden." On the instant there was a great flash of lightning, and then, as though it had let loose the wind, the storm broke over them with incredible violence. The umbrella was whirled away from them and went flying over the gray fields. Whether they followed it of their own will or whether they were simply blown before the storm, as everything in its path was that night, Sibbie never knew. She only knew that she was carried off her feet for some distance and then flung with great force to the ground. As she fell some one caught her and averted the worst part of her fall. "You're not hurt, Sibbie, darling," said Corney's voice, through the roar of the tempest. "Lie still a minute and get your breath. No, don't try to stand up. The wind 'ud throw you down again. Creep, acushla, creep. The old dun in the corner of the field there is safe. If we once get to that, the storm won't hurt us." The dun was a square hut with an open lower story in which the cattle took refuge from wind and rain. It was of iron strength and so old that the antiquaries had grown tired of discussing the purposes for which it was built. Sibbie always said that she could never have reached the dun if it had not been for Corney. As they wriggled along the ground they were lashed with all sorts of debris the wind carried with it. Every second the storm increased in force. Fortunately they were in an open field with no trees under them, for the trees that night came down in their thousands. At last she felt herself, beaten, blind and exhausted, dragged within the dun, the mouth of which was fortunately away from the storm. "You're terrified, darling, and no wonder," said Corney's voice at her ear. "But now we're quite safe. There's a few cattle in here. We needn't turn them out, the creatures." "No, indeed!" "And here's a manger full of hay. I'll spread my coat on the hay and you can sit down, or lie down if you like better. Why, is it shivering you are, Sibbie?" She found herself caught to Corney's breast and held there. She felt kisses upon her hair. The cattle had come closer to them for protection. She felt the warmth of their breath and heard the deep sound of it. They were in a little space of peace and quietness, while the world seemed given over to destruction outside. "Will it ever be over?" she sighed against his ear. "Is it the storm? Sure, I don't care. To-morrow you'll be freezin' to me again." Her uplifted arms held him about the neck. He could see her eyes shining in the obscurity, always lovely to him, she said. "Why were you such an omadhaun as never to ask me?" "Never to ask you, light of my eyes! Sure, I thought you wouldn't look at me." "I never looked at any one else, not in that way." "Sure, how am I to go to Father Bannon?" he asked, happily. "Isn't his umbrella gone off to the North Pole somewhere?" "We'll get him another. I don't believe in them contrivances. Sure, if God sends rain, it must be good." "I'm obliged to the umbrella," said Corney. "Only for it you'd have gone on freezin' me." "And you breakin' my heart." "If it wasn't for that, I'd have got you home before the storm, though the brunt of it would have fallen on me." "What'll the neighbors say?" she asked, clinging to him in sudden terror. "It isn't because of that you've asked me, Corney?" The look and tender caress with which he answered her was all-satisfying. After all, there was great mercy in their night in the dun, for as they came over the fields in the gray morning, when the storm had lulled, they found that the chimney of Sibbie's room was down on the bed where she would have slept. In their passionate thanksgiving the ravages of the storm vexed them but little. A report came from somewhere about Tory Island of a strange apparition in the sky the night of the storm, like a queer, uncanny sort of boat sailing and a bare mast struck up out of it. That was the last ever heard of Father Bannon's umbrella.—The Sketch.

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Consider from time to time what passions are most predominant in your soul, and having discovered them, adopt such a method of thinking, speaking and acting as may counteract them. God delights in joy; it is one of the most certain means to secure His favors. But in order to rejoice in the Lord the soul must be purified, for the joy which pleases God must be that of a good conscience. When hearing something not intended for our ears, you refuse to listen, and then proceed to forget the chance words which have reached you through mistake, you only do as you would be done by—surely the first of all duties to our fellows. You need not cough all night and disturb your friends; there is no occasion for you running the risk of contracting inflammation of the lungs or consumption, while you can get Bickle's Anti-Consumptive Syrup. This medicine cures coughs, colds, inflammation of the lungs and all throat and chest troubles. It promotes a free and easy expectoration, which immediately relieves the throat and lungs from viscid phlegm.

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