

RECONCILED;

OR,

Nan Cullen's Romance.

By Eoghan MacDiarmada.

I.

"Here's the postman," shouted little Diarmaid Kilroy, as he reached his father, standing by the door.

"'Tis he, indeed, my little man"; and catching up the sturdy youngster the proud father tossed him playfully in the air.

The postman gave Farral Kilroy an American letter.

"Now, who can this be from?" he asked himself, turning the envelope over and over, and scrutinising it closely, as he muttered the words in an almost inaudible whisper. But curiosity, beyond the fact that the letter bore the Cincinnati postmark, was not to be gratified till opening he read:—

"Your sister, Mrs. Cuinaan, is dead. God give her eternal rest! Her last request was that her only child—a girl of about four years of age—should be placed under your care, her father being dead, and she having no friend or relative here. The little one is to sail soon in charge of a lady returning to Ireland for good. This lady is a native of Breeoge, in your own county."

The letter was signed "John Tuohy, C.C., St. Patrick's, Cincinnati."

Farral Kilroy read and re-read the terse epistle. "This is strange," he murmured. "So poor Nora is dead. God rest her soul! And that I have not heard from her for years—aye, twelve years or more—and now this letter. Neither did I hear of her marriage. Well, Father Tuohy didn't make the story very long, but it's plain enough. Diarmaid, my boy," said he aloud, "you'll soon have a little sister, a real Yankee."

"Hurrah!" shouted Diarmaid, in childish glee, "won't we have sport together! And we'll go up to the top of Doocarrig for bill-berries and fairy-fingers in summertime." He went on to tell what merry days they'd spend, oblivious that his father did not hear a word of what he was saying. Old memories were awakened in the breast of Farral Kilroy at the mere mention of Breeoge contained in the letter.

"Breeoge! Dear me, it's many years since I heard even mention of the name—and many more since I saw the place itself. I wonder can it be as of old, with its repose, its kindness and heartiness. What romps we had there, to be sure, and Nan—poor Nan!" There was a filling in the throat and a tear stood ready to fall. Outside the day was bitter—big hail hopped on the threshold and rattled down the chimney. The east wind blew with a cutting and stinging energy. Beulasruffaun looked bleak and saddening that winter's day, but only in keeping with the heart and thoughts of Farral Kilroy.

Farral's story is soon told. He was the "man for the land," by which was

meant successor to the ancestral home of the Kilroys—he being the eldest son—with its twenty acres of shallow, limestone land and long stretch of mountain attached. Beulasruffaun mountain was picturesque, but not profitable, and from off Doocarrig, its summit, a view was obtained ravishing to the eye. Here all day long contemplation could sit in rapture with restful solitude.

Breeoge, some miles distant from Beulasruffaun, was noted for fun and frolic.

"The song, the dance, the softly-yielded hand." No spree could equal a Breeoge one, and the Breeoge 'pattern' brought together the most winsome colleens in the wide baronies of Corran and Tirerrill. The boys were proud of them, as well they might be. Nannie Cullen was a beautiful girl, and known poetically as the "sweet heath-blossom of Breeoge." Her soft brown eyes were pools of laughter and playful mischief, and the white delicacy of her skin would fill a meditative and sensitive boy with that divine intoxication which, we are told, is often the starting point and inspiration of genius. None in the tripping, merry dance was sprightlier, and the exquisite contour of a shapely leg and neat, tight ankle enhanced not a little the grace and lightness of her movements. Farral Kilroy loved her, and took occasion to make a full and passionate avowal. The coy and roguish glance gave way to a seriousness of expression that sat pleasantly on her brow as she listened.

"But your people will never consent to receive a penniless girl into their house—I have no dowry to bring with me," she said.

"No dowry! You have God's rich dowry in no ordinary degree, Nannie. You have beauty, health, virtue, and a heart of love, and cheerfulness."

"Oh! Farral, for shame! to fill a silly girl's head with such nonsense. But had I these rich gifts of God as you say, they cannot weigh against the beautiful, heavy, solid, glistening gold that everyone worships save dreamers, madmen and lovers."

Farral smiled at this little piece of philosophy, but Nannie was right. Her gentleness and cheerfulness, her beauty, her goodness and warmth of heart did not prevail. Age is blind to these blandishments—age, ugly, chilled and crabbed, that sits crooning by the grave and oblivious of its own past youth and glorious impulses. Farral, it is true, argued, protested, rebelled; but to no effect. He became reckless, still the old people were obdurate. He threatened to emigrate, they told him he might, that his brother in Scotland would gladly take his place—and Farral was wedded to Beulasruffaun. In this agony of spirit with aching and troubled heart he could not face Nannie for a time.

arranged for him with a "girl of the Cummiskeys." The fortune she was to bring to her husband was highly pleasing to the old couple—the parents of Farral Kilroy. This girl of the Cummiskeys came regularly on the taps every Sarait for many years, smiling and unabashed. The only impediment to the marriage was Farral's consent. The news of the arranged match, as was likely, reached the ears of Nannie Cullen—and the tale, strange to say, lost a little in the telling; there was no word that Farral had not given his consent.

"Now," said Nan, "I know why I have not seen him for some time. Good-bye Breeoge! Good-bye."

Hurriedly she decided to go to America, and went. Light-hearted and laughing at first, at parting she gave way to bitter tears. She clung to the door-post of her parents' home, and kissed it repeatedly. No leave-taking was ever so bitter in the recollection the oldest; it omened something feeble. And, standing by the Cro Roads, where so often of a summer evening many a careless laughing hour was spent, she cast one last look back, then turned to the dark awful road, and went silyently.

When Farral heard of her departure he pretended not to be interested. A dagger shot through his heart. A few days he moped about listless and despondent. Breeoge saw him no more and the following Sarait he gave his consent to marry Bedelia Jane Cummiskey. Their union was blessed with little Diarmaid, but his mother died at his birth.

The American letter lay still open on Farral Kilroy's knee as he gazed in the fire running over in his mind the incidents of his life that have just been related. And within a week the little phan Yankee arrived in the company—Nan Cullen! But oh, what an altered Nan from the sweet, glorious girl of Breeoge! The heart of Farral bled to look upon the wild, staring, lustreless eyes, the pale, emaciated face, and high cheekbones.

"Good God! Nan, is it you?"

"I guess the same," answered the pained creature. "Waal, ole me, this is your niece, Maeve Cuinaan, Too too." Uttering this idiotic farewell, shaking her transparent, bony fingers she marched stately out of the house.

Farral was dumbfounded and transfixed to where he stood. He thought the whole thing "the idle vision of a dream." Mechanically he went to the door, and from there, topping the mountain road, could plainly discern the low weird figure of the returned American.

Meanwhile little Diarmaid was given a child-like, respectful, and somewhat bashful welcome to the Yankee. She was a port, rosy-cheeked child, with soft, wavy amber locks riveted Diarmaid's admiration, and despite his shyness and deference, went bravely over and touched a curl. The little American seemed pleased at the open-eyed admiration, and graciously gave a kiss in repayment. They were friends at once, and chattering merrily. Farral turned from the door to children, and catching up little Maeve placed her on his knee. He looked at her and sharply at the child—"can it

what"—said he in an undertone—Oh, Heaven! this is Nan's own child!"

II.

Poor Nan Cullen went fast over the old rugged mountain road that led to Breeoge. Night setting in, she was unobserved by the neighbours as once more after years of exile she set foot on her native hearth. Long grass, nettles, and dock-weeds covered the dismantled walls and grew by the hearthstone in undisturbed security. The hand of landlord tyranny had turned the home of her youth into a thing of horror. Who can look upon a ruined home without feelings of bitterness? Bright faces gone and hearts cold, youth banished or slain, merriment, song, dance, the shout and laughter of children no longer heard. An awful stillness over all. Death and the savage heart of man triumphant, and oh, what a splendid triumph!

The lone wayfarer, bereft of reason, hooded by the cold, damp chimney-nook, and lifting up her voice in piteous wail, cried aloud to the night-wind.

"Oh, God's protection to us!" said Peg Keelan, as she sat by a few embers in her little cabin with her aged father, on hearing the shrill, piercing scream borne by the southing breeze. "It is the bannee's cry, or the howl of a lost spirit. Not since poor Nan Cullen went to America has such a dreadful lamentation been heard in Breeoge. 'Tis her, 'tis her! Look! look!" and pointing towards the window with outstretched finger, Peg lay senseless on the floor. The old man for some time brought her to consciousness.

"You have had an awful start, Peg—whom did you see?"

"Nan Cullen's ghost. Let us pray God to give her soul eternal rest."

"Have I not often said her spirit could never leave Breeoge?"

The old pair prayed fervently for the repose of the soul of Nan Cullen before going to rest, little dreaming that she was close by in bodily shape.

Nan made the old ruin her home again—the kindest offers were unavailing to remove her. She took to the road a beggar, barefooted and bareheaded. Thoughtless school children scorched her hands and feet with nettles, and called her "mad Nan." Her moods were any—reason being unseated, the mind came the sport of every impulse. Along the road she came, singing gaily stanzas of rude song, and again, shouting, cursing, and swearing. Sometimes she would execute a fantastic dance—reeling, kicking, and jumping like one possessed. She had her moments of sanity and restored reason like all "temples," in the same degree that sane people have their spells of madness. In blessed intervals of rationality she would speak well and coherently, telling of America, and Cincinnati in particular. And then, turning her thoughts to old happy days she would say:

"Don't ye remember the old days in Breeoge when Farral Kilroy and myself were wooed and courted, and flung care to the winds; and didn't Mickaleen, the poet, compose that song to me in which he called 'the sweet heather-blossom Breeoge,' and 'the Singing Spray?'—that was an evil hour, for those who sing the songs composed in their honour always come to ill. The accursed song, as

ye all know, was this—didn't I hear it sung at the wedding of Katie Tansy only last week, and I standing outside by the window in the pelting rain:

"Sweet Nannie Cullen in cot or hall,
Beside fair damsels is queen of all;
Her snow-white breast and lily hand
Might grace the proudest in Ireland.

"I've seen her dance with young Cormac
Bawn
To the rousing music of Tigheen Seaghain:
How the rafters rang with the wild applause
Of young and old at the final pause!

"Oh, she's as gladsome as lark at dawn,
And nimble-footed as frightened fawn;
Her laugh rings out like a silver bell
O'er the mountain heather adown the dell.

"The sun shines on her at break o' day:
In the golden tresses the sunbeams play,
And linger fondly like lover pale
Who fain would tell o'er the old, old tale.

"She's the singing spray by the mountain
brook,
The wild, sweet rose of the scented rook,
The Branch of Fragrance is Nellie oge,
And the Heather Blossom of old Breeoge."

God had allotted the poor vagrant these happy periods of understanding—or, rather were they not the unhappy and agonising occasions of retrospection? It may have been a divine dispensation that clouded the past—the past so full of proud memories, growing only the more ideal and beautiful the farther it receded.

Years went by bringing in their train affliction and trial to poor Nan. Still the rude, sharp winds and harsh winters nipped not the heather-blossom, though withered and decrepit, it hung its head.

Maeve grew up the attached playfellow of Diarmaid Kilroy. A glorious girl; and as Farral, her guardian and protector—or, as she styled him, her uncle, for he kept his own thoughts on the question of her parentage—looked at her, he saw the mother's eye of liquid brown that looked into his in the morning of life. The only shade of difference he could find was that Maeve had less of the buoyancy of spirits that characterised poor Nan. She moved about quietly and gracefully, doing all the household duties. From the day she entered Farral Kilroy's house she grew into his heart.

"How shall I ever tell her that poor Nan is her mother?" he asked himself. "Diarmaid is unaware of her relationship to the simple woman who speeds across the countryside, footsore and weary. He looks upon Maeve as his own first cousin—too close a relation to think of asking her in marriage. I have seen the debate in his

mind as plainly as if it were written on a slate. Often has he said to himself: 'Would to God she were not so near a blood-relation!' But then there is the matter of her legitimacy, even were the other impediment removed."

The end at last came to the poor beggar and wanderer of the roads. Snow lay over the earth heavily for days, and Farral Kilroy and a neighbour, one day returning from a neighbouring town, found Nan huddled by a withered bush. Reverently Farral raised her up, and held her closely in his strong arms again; oh, after so many years of sorrow and change; He carried her to his own house, and Maeve became her nurse, for life was not wholly extinct. Warmth and assiduous attention restored animation and consciousness, and, stranger still, brought back the full active, healthy functions of the mind. Opening her eyes, Nan encountered those of Maeve. The girl was awe-stricken at the intensity of the gaze.

"My child, my daughter!" she cried, and stretching forth her lean arms, caught the bewildered girl to her heart. "O my little one," she sighed, "do you not know me?"

"Yes, yes; you are poor Nan. Hush, hush! you must not become excited."

"Poor Nan, girl! I am your mother!" Maeve turned ghastly pallid, but, recovering herself, added in breathless questioning.

"You my mother? Tell me, tell me! And why have you for so long deceived my kind guardian—whom I have looked upon as my uncle—and myself?"

Farral came to the door of the sick-room, and asked if he might enter.

"Yes yes; come Farral, come whilst my mind, by God's great mercy, is capable of directing what I have to say."

Farral entered, and the poor invalid raising herself slightly and pointing to the girl said:

"She is my daughter. Look upon her standing there and look upon me."

He looked and thought what a strange resemblance there was between the two women, now that Nan was again composed in sanity. The shiftiness and vacuity of the madwoman's eye had given away to a calm light. The face was pale, but reason illumined it.

"Oh, thank God for this moment!" he internally prayed; and, speaking aloud, answered the questioning gaze of the wayfarer. "I knew Maeve was not my sister's daughter from my first laying eyes on her. She is, now that I look upon her, just as you were 26 years ago. The same soft lustre of the eye, the same white forehead—"

"And in the dance, Farral? interrupted Nan.

"In the dance, for I've seen her full often, as lightsome and nimble-footed as—as—Nan Cullen."

"Aye," rejoined Nan, with a wan smile, "you had ever the ready word, Farral; but I have my story to tell, and my stay with ye is short. I have to explain and offer palliation of my deception. What will not love do—'twas love led me to this imposition. Even when my reason was gone it directed my footsteps. And, oh, my humble prayers to God for these last moments."

There was a pause, the poor woman was silently praying, and the hearts of Maeve and Farral were beating in thankfulness to Him who "giveth and taketh away."

"Even as I said," Nan resumed, "when reason was gone, love kept hold of the heart. When I trod the rough roads I was unaware of my cut and bruised feet. I have hovered about this house when you were ignorant of my being in the vicinity. I have overheard the hot, fervent words of lovers when they thought no one was near."

She quietly turned her gaze to Maeve. A slight crimson mantled in the beautiful face, and tinged the snowy neck. Then poor Nan resumed her narrative.

"Farral, when I went to America my heart was broken, but that fatal beauty of mine hung to me like a lovely garment thrown over a corpse. I married an elderly man, by name Michael Cuinaan—I had no heart or affections to give him. We

were happy enough—ah, what wretched happiness without love! Happy did I say? I am mad. But I will draw a sponge over the slate of affliction. I hungered for Breege. I had that insatiable hunger, gnawing, agony of heart of the sensitive exile. Words will not express that bitterness. My mind weakened under the strain, and soon after Maeve's birth gave way altogether. The rest is oblivion. Death called my poor husband suddenly, I lingered on the verge of the Great Unknown for a long time. I was acquainted with your sister in Cincinnati, who tended me in my affliction with a sister's devotion for your sake. When she died I wrote you in the name of Father Tuohy, saying you were to rear up her child. How foolish of me to think that you would be deceived! but at the time my poor wits were beginning to go. You will forgive me all—for I had hoped in my clearer moments to heal the rankling wounds of both our hearts by the union of our children?"

"It is for me to ask forgiveness," said Farral Kilroy, kneeling by the bedside and kissing the wasted hands. "You have given me joy this day—greater joy than I ever thought possible. In the high noon-day of life I should have taken you to myself manfully, since our love was mutual, and laughed in the face of a huxtering, sneering world. But, oh! wisdom—false, worldly wisdom—often overcomes great impulse, manliness, and the divine effulgence of love!"

"Kiss me, Farral," she said. He gave her the kiss of peace and reconciliation, and stepping towards the window, looked out over the white, glistening fields and heather hills; he looked intently afar—up—up the rough, stony, irregular mountain road—the mind seeing when the eye had reached its limit. Breege was gladsome again. There were festivities rife in the happy little hamlet. The piper was merry, though sightless, for laughter and good cheer were rampant once more. And Farral himself led off the dance with Nan to the strains of the "Heathery Breeze."

Farral lived in his dream, and thought it reality.

Nan had fallen into a slumber. Maeve crept quietly out of the room. She met Diarmaid in the kitchen, told him of her parentage, and said she was resolved to depart the house for ever before her mother awakened. "I have kissed her good-bye," she added, as the tears tumbled down her cheek.

"And you and I are to re-enact the awful tragedy of the lives of my father and your mother?"

"I cannot stay—I cannot stay. Diarmaid, forget me—no, no! remember me as a sister—as a cousin."

"Then if you leave so shall I. I'll follow you over the world. Beulasruffaun would be black as night without you. Beulasruffaun so dear to the hearts of both of us. A desert—the dreariest, solitude and wilderness—were a lighted, splendid Paradise if you were near."

"Oh, that is folly," said Maeve, unconscious of uttering a sentiment voiced by her poor mother when Farral Kilroy, like his son, spoke in the language of rhapsody in the glorious morning of youth.

A call came from the sick room. Maeve hesitated. The call was repeated; she obeyed, and shortly afterwards Diarmaid was summoned. Mrs. Cuinaan was taking her leave of mortality, sorrow, and pain. Farral knelt by the bedside. On Diarmaid's entering she evinced a desire to see him. He approached. Maeve's hand was closely held by the dying mother, but she released it and gave it to Diarmaid. A smile shone on the lips of poor Nan, and the "sweet heather blossom" was blown into the Garden of God.

Farral Kilroy is still living in Beulasruffaun—the happiest grandfather that ever nursed chubby, shouting, curly-headed children, and 'twould seem his occupation is no sinecure, and that it may continue, with God's blessing, for a long time yet.

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