TERENCE'S REWARD.

I.

"LED BY ILLUSIONS ROMANTIC AND SUBTLE DECEPTIONS OF FANCY."

THE whole thing happened in an instant. Terence Horan—not easily excited or perturbed at any time or under almost any circumstances—admitted it was lightning-like. The hand of God was in it, he thought. That he of all men should have become a sort of hero in a moment, that he should have been the means of saving a life, that he should have imminently risked his own in so doing, and that—ah, in this lay the secret of the smile that lighted up his broad, homely face—that he should have been thanked by such a lovely mouth in such sweet accents, and that his reward should have been a smile and look of the beautiful eyes as they parted, was almost too much to believe. And yet it was all simple enough. Terence had snatched a tiny child from almost under the wheels of a motor-car which came unexpectedly flying round a corner of the street. He had no time to think; he did not stop to think, but bounded, as it would seem, right in front of the car. He stretched out his arms and saved the child just by a hair's breadth. The recklessly-driven motor touched the child's clothes as he held it tightly to his breast.

"Oh, thank you, sir," said a quavering musical voice in his ear; "what should I ever do if little Finny was killed. Oh, how shall I ever recompense you. And you risked your own life too."

"Not at all," said Terence. "But there should be some strictures put on these drivers of motor cars. "She is a pretty little one, God bless her!" added he, as he patted the tiny head of curls. "Her name you said——?"

"Fionuala. We call her Finny, and sometimes Nooley, for short."

"Ah!" and then he hesitated. "I am pleased to have been of service to Fionuala and—and—her mother." He raised his hat, and then on turning to go received a grateful smile and look that was worth a king's ransom.

Terence Horan was one of those gentle, quiet, deep natures that are for ever in the background, and that are looked upon by the vain and superficial with disdain. He never minded that. He was past thirty, and, strange enough, had reached that age without having formed any attachment for any of the gentler sex. He studied much, and prided himself a little on his philosophy. He was an estimable friend, had an easy manner, a good, robust appearance, and a comfortable way of living. Such briefly was Terence Horan.

He sauntered along after parting with the pretty young woman and her little girl, revolving in his mind the incident in which he had played so conspicuous a part. He wondered if she were the child's mother, after all. He had said so, and she had not corrected him. Yet he thought there was an amused smile in her eyes as they parted which was an encouragement to him to put his question more directly. As to her name and where she lived, he had not the slightest knowledge. The little one's Christian name he knew, to be sure, but no more. "There are probably ten thousand Fionualas in Ireland in these days," he reasoned, "since the people have reverted to their own beautiful nomenclature, discarding the harsh-sounding monstrosities of an alien civilisation." He remembered, too, that it struck him at the time that the lady of his thoughts did not belong to the city; that she and her charge belonged to the country, and were in the city merely sight-seeing.

It was passing strange that this unknown lady and her little child should occupy such a large place in his thoughts. How was it, he asked himself, that he had lived so long without being troubled by woman's smile, and that now he was almost in love with an acquaintance of a moment, and whom he might never again see? It was amusing. It was one of those little pranks that Fate or Cupid is for ever playing on unhappy mortals. And were it likely that he should ever again meet the bewitching girl how rude an awakening it would be to find that she had already a husband! He imagined himself a nice fellow indeed to be in love with another man's wife! What would his chums say if they only knew—how they would laugh! And somehow it did become known amongst them that Terence Horan was in love; but who the enchantress could be was a mystery.

In a little time Terence banished the vision—tried to banish it, rather. He essayed to convince himself that the idea of his rescuing anyone at the peril of his own life was ridiculous, and that it was only in the disordered fancy of his brain that the whole thing originated. The girl was simply an ideal—a spirit woman—a thing of the imagination—a poetical extravaganza. She was in accord with the dream-woman he had often pictured to his mind in an ecstatic moment. There he left it. Yet the incident would thrust itself upon him whenever he saw a madly-driven motor car or a pretty, curly-headed child, or heard the kindly Connacht accent.

Terence was right in his impression that the young woman was country-bred, and merely in the city on a holiday. When she stepped on the station at Portduff, two days after the motor-car affair, she was met by her stalwart young lover, Conn Cassidy.

TERENCE'S REWARD.

"You're welcome back, Una a stor; my eyes have been hungering for the sight of you again," said he in open-eyed delight.

"Oh, Conn, how can you be such a flatterer. Up in Dublin there they couldn't hold a candle to you. It's you have the glib tongue, surely."

"Ugh! I feared they'd keep you, Una. They say there are fine boys in Dublin, and to be sure you'd look a thousand times prettier on a splendid carpet in a Dublin drawingroom than on a daub floor in a kitchen in poor ould Derreenatragh."

The random shot hit the mark, for the same thought persistently held its place in Una's mind all the way on the train journey home. She found it impossible to put away the image of that handsome city stranger who had saved little Fionuala. He was, she thought, so manly and unpretentious. His eyes were brave, and she liked that firm, well-cut countenance. He had not attempted to enlarge on their accidental meeting. This, she argued, was good breeding and proper reserve; yet he might have said a little more. "And why," she laughed, "did he take me to be Fionuala's mother. Oh, the silly boy!"

"Ugh, heigh-ho! Conn," said she, "doesn't Foilduff look dreary and quiet after one has been to the city?"

"'Deed, an' I couldn't say," said Conn quietly. "Sure, you know I have never been to the city. So you like it, Una?"

"I do. The people are the kindliest in the world; you'd never think of home whilst there."

"I'm glad you like it. Did you see anyone you liked better than—than—yourself?" He was going to say, "Did you see anyone you liked better than Conn?"

Una blushed and said, "Conn, I think you're getting jealous; but what if I did?"

"What if you did, Una!" retorted Conn fiercely. "Do you know what I'd do with anyone that took my place in your love?"

"Indeed!" pouted Una, a little nettled.

"I'd kill him!" said Conn, coolly, with tightened lips and flashing eyes.

Una was frightened and not in a humour to encourage this strain of talk. She and little Fionuala mounted the outside car in waiting, and Conn, having carefully secured their luggage, took the reins and drove off. Very little save commonplaces were exchanged on the way home to Derreenatragh. Conn was angry and jealous. He resented the high-and-mighty attitude of Miss Una, who, for her short stay of a few weeks in the city with a friend, had become a grand, hoity-toity lady, and looked down with contempt on Foilduff and Derreenatragh. Una in turn was miserably unhappy. She was sorry she had said anything to annoy Conn; and, again, she regretted bitterly she had ever looked into the face of that handsome Dublin stranger. She almost wished that Fionuala had been run over—no, no! that was a savage thought; and, overcome with remorse, she hugged the little one tightly to her side.

At a comfortable-looking house in Derreenatragh a halt was made. It was the house of Una's sister, Mrs. Cryan. A pleasant woman came out to meet them, and taking little Fionnala lovingly in her arms, kissed her, as she whispered:

"A phaistin mochroidhe! an' have you come." The little daughter nestled her head in her mother's breast. "An', Una, you're heartily welcome—come in, Conn, come in," added Mrs. Cryan.

"No, no," protested Conn. "I've a sick cow at home, and I must make haste back." He would not leave his seat on the car, but drove off.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Cryan to Una, as they sat gossiping beside the fire before going to bed, "I don't think Conn has a cow sick at all. Wasn't it strange of him not to come in for a few minutes? Nothing would do him but that he should go himself to fetch you and Finny from the station. He's been very lonesome for you, Una."

"Ugh!" said Una reflectively, and with a slight curl of her lip, "I don't know if I'll ever marry him."

"What!" said her sister, "not marry Conn Cassidy!"

"No," said Una, emphatically, as she tapped a neat, small foot on the hearth and displayed a daintily-rounded ankle. She looked a glorious figure of womanhood as she sat there with the firelight in her face, her beautifully-rounded wet red lips parted, her dress a little open at the neck, revealing a snow-white skin, and over her shoulders in disarray the heavy masses of nut-brown hair.

Mrs. Cryan looked at her beautiful sister critically.

"You have met someone in the city who has turned your head, Una child," said she.

Una looked fixedly into the fire as she answered, "I have." There was a heave of the breast and a slight distention of the nostrils of the prettily-tilted nose. There was the suspicion of a sigh. "I will tell you it all," said she, still looking into the fire. And then she related the rescue of Fionuala and simply added that the rescuer was her lover.

"That is all nonsense!" said Mrs. Cryan. "You do not even know his name. He did not speak beyond a few words to you. He did not say he loved you. In fact, he thought you were Fionuala's mother!" And Mrs. Cryan laughed very heartily. "Oh, Una," she added, "did I ever dream you were so childish!"

Una Lavin soon after retired to bed, but only to dream of the steady, brave eyes that looked into hers; and when morning broke she arose more tired than she lay down. Her slumbers were wakeful and troublous

TERENCE'S REWARD.

with dreams. Conn's terrible threat was in her ears. She knew how passionate he was, and that he would stop at nothing. She walked out into the cool of the summer's morning just as the lark shot heavenwards thrilling his splendid song. The country was gladdening and healthful again, and as she strolled through the dewy-wet grass towards the seashore she felt her spirits revive. The musical big waves broke thunderously on the beach; the seabirds shook themselves from the ledges of rock and screamed as they circled in air. Una loved the sea, for as a tiny child she had made its first acquaintance. And it seemed only like a few days since she paddled in its cool waters and gathered beautiful shells on its sanded beach. She was thoughtful this morning, and, seating herself on a large stone, fell into a reverie. The outcome of her cogitations was that in giving way to an infatuation for a visionary and unknown lover she was very foolish. She felt her cheeks grow crimson as she realised how ludicrous the whole affair seemed to her sister's eyes. It was too preposterously romantic. No wonder her sister laughed heartily. She was amazed at herself for having ever harboured a thought of a stranger who did not desire to cultivate her acquaintance. He could have found her out in Dublin, she felt sure, if he wished; and his excuse for calling might be to inquire if Fionuala was anything the worse of the fright she had had. He might have found a thousand excuses or none. She had walked next day with little Fionuala at the same hour through the same street in hopes of meeting him.

Una was gratified that her commonsense and sanity were returned to her.

Some little distance off she heard a whistling she well knew. It was Conn's.

"O, Conn," said she, rising and going towards him, "I was very rude and unthankful to you last evening. Can you forgive me "

Conn could, and did, and taking her in his arms he kissed her.

"Now," said he, "it is all forgotten. I was bitterly unhappy with the manner of our meeting after your absence for so long. I came abroad to ease my heated and agonised brain, and was simply 'whistling grief' when you spoke to me."

"And I came along here, too," said she, "because I could not sleep. The song of the sea is soothing."

"It is," assented Conn; "and it must be very sweet to those who live in big cities like Dublin and have the harsh noises for ever in their ears."

"Ah, I wish I had never seen Dublin, Conn," said Una incautiously.

Conn was silent a moment, and his brow darkened; but Una, being too much engaged with her own thoughts, did not observe the ugly frown. It was soon gone, however, and pleasantly he rejoined:

"Ugh! You'll soon forget it, alanna. Mrs. Cryan and myself yesterday, before I set out for Foilduff, agreed that our marriage should come off soon. O, Una, say it shall be in a month or two from now!"

Una gave a slight start, but otherwise retained her composure, as she answered:

"You are rather impatient, Conn, I fear. Let us put it off till this time next year. however."

"Una, agradh, I am impatient—impatient to have you as my own. Oh, you do not know how dearly I love you: how much I could bear and dare for your sake!"

"I do, Conn," said she absent-mindedly, scarcely knowing what answer she gave.

CHAPTER II.

"'Tis sweet with you beside me in a world of harvest gold."

DERREENATRAGH lay picturesquely on an inlet of the sea. It had of late begun to stir itself—to make itself known as a summer watering place. Visitors at first came shyly, as well they might, for Derreenatragh was practically unheard of; had no hotel, no appearance of modernity, and lay away from the beaten track of the pleasure-seekers. A few quiet, somnolent people came, however; next season these were augmented by a group of skittish damsels from a neighbouring large town, who formed a laughing, merry party by themselves. They were joined by their boy friends—their lovers probably—before their departure. Thus little by little, year by year, Derreenatragh became known as a pleasant, quiet summer resort for those in search of health and relaxation. It obtained, in time, its hotels and attractive boarding-houses, and its regular system of car service during the sea-bathing season between it and Foilduff, the nearest railway station.

A year had passed—a year of conflicting emotions for Una Lavin. She had her mind made up to marry Conn Cassidy. Their marriage-day was scarce a month away. There was still a vague, disquieting unrest in her breast. She loved Conn, she thought; he was warm-hearted. passably handsome, and in every way estimable. Yet there it was—this shadowy, ominous something that gave her uneasiness. She wished she could define it—allay it. She prayed for guidance and clearness of understanding. What was to be done! She could not put off Conn now, nor could she ask for a prolongation of their engagement. What would the people of Derreenatragh say? There was, too, the heavy question of honourable conduct involved. But against that, if her love for Conn was not whole-hearted, joyous, glowing, exuberant, was she doing right in marrying him? Poor Una was in a fix, and to whom could she appeal for assistance and direction, save to Him who holds our little lives in the hollow of His Hand. She prayed unceasingly—it would be as He willed it.

TERENCE'S REWARD

"ALLOW ME TO ASSIST YOU OVER."

Her perturbation may be imagined when one day about this time—it was harvest-time,—and in this state of doubt and questioning she beheld one whom she took to be the adored stranger pass down the street of Derreenatragh. Her heart beat wildly—fluttered like a newly-caged bird against her side. The stranger passed on; but again that day she did not see him. Her heart was dancing with joy. Only to speak to him; only to thank him for his heroic act; only to meet his eyes again with her's! If that was all she wished, her wish was soon to be gratified.

"Oh, I believe ——," said a voice beside her next morning, as she was going across a field that led towards the shore. She looked up, and there was the calm, smiling face and strong, brave eyes of Terence Horan!

"Well, well," said he pleasantly. "This is providential. And how is little Fionnala? Do you know I have kept singing that sweet name to myself ever since that day I was so happy as to—to have been the means of saving her."

"Her mother will ever remember you in her prayers," said Una archly, with a pretty emphasis on the word "mother."

Terence looked into the smiling face and asked very seriously:

"You are her mother—are you not?"

"I am her aunt," said Una.

A great glad light shone in Terence's eyes. He walked silently by Una's side till they reached a rather awkward stile over a fence that intercepted their path towards the sea.

"This," said he, as he jumped lightly over the fence, "is a rather troublesome stile. Allow me to assist you over."

He caught her hand in his; but on reaching terra firma Una slipped and would have fallen were it not that he, still retaining her hand, caught her boldly in his arms. It was a longer hold than the occasion warranted. Una didn't think so. Both blushed. Terence said something haltingly about the slippery grass, and together they proceeded side by side till the strand was reached.

It was a glorious day. The sun shone brilliantly, and a cool, salty breeze fanned their faces. Una seated herself on a grassy mound. Terence sat there too.

"I have," said he, "often thought of you, and have wondered if we should ever meet again."

Oh, how her heart bounded with delight! So, after all, he had thought of her. That was all she wished to hear.

"I have thought of you, too," said she, lowering her eyes and nervously plucking at a wild flower; "but why—oh, why——"

He looked quickly at her. "But why what?" said he.

"Why did we not meet before my promise was irrevocably given to another?"

"Promise given!" he repeated after her like a man in a dream. "Promise given irrevocably to another!"

"Yes, yes—oh, my heart will break. Why have you come now—why have you come!" She broke down and sobbed aloud. He made no effort to soothe her; there was one between him and her—that other. She dried her tears and looked at him piteously. He stood up, and courteously raising his hat, just as he had done on that memorable occasion in Dublin, said simply, as if it were a matter of mere etiquette:

"Good morning—good morning!" Then turning about he walked away, and was soon lost to sight. Was ever a more consummate blunderer, it may be asked, than Terence Horan? That he should on their first meeting have called her Fionuala's mother, and that on their next coming face to face, brought together by some divine or demoniacal agency—which?—he should have been so scrupulously punctilious on a point of honour. Where was his much self-lauded philosophy now? Could it not come to his aid with some plausible sophism, such as "Love is more than honour" or "All's fair in love"? Something like that would do. She loved him—she admitted it. That she did not love "the other" followed. She had promised to marry that other, however, and he would not be the means of breaking a solemn vow. It was a stern attitude to adopt, but Terence Horan was a stern and rigidly honourable man.

When he disappeared from view, poor broken-hearted Una threw herself in bitterness and agony of spirit on the ground and cried like a child. "He has left me to my fate," she sobbed; "he does not love me!"

For many days Una was low-spirited, but she gradually rallied. Her love for Conn was now dead; but how was she to break it to him? She would, she determined, live singly all her life unless ——; but what was the use of adding the proviso? The romance had ended. Let it end!

Terence Horan was anxious to leave Derreenatragh immediately, but from day to day he kept putting off the poignant farewell. He avoided Una: only once did he see her some distance away. She walked about aimlessly, taking pleasure in nothing. She had told Conn that their marriage was impossible: it was a terrible ordeal. He suspected something. Oh, what if he should recognise Terence as his rival! She shuddered to think of it. She was, however, sure that Terence was gone back to Dublin.

It was with thankfulness she accepted the invitation one day soon afterwards of Thomas M'Donagh, a wealthy Irish-American, to go with him for a sail in his yacht as far as Boola (a neighbouring seaport) and back. She had permission to take a girl friend with her, and joyfully all three set sail. The morning was calm as they sped through the still waters: just sufficient breeze blowing to carry them pleasantly out to sea. Still old people, who had spent their four and four and a-half score years by the water's edge, declared they did not like the look of the day and the occasional angry curl of the waves. Towards midday the sky became overcast and the wind rose. The sea churned; and many expressed their anxiety for the safety of the little yacht on its return journey. The rain burst suddenly in

TERENCE'S REWARD.

a drenching downpour. Day was merged into night in an instant. A little knot of people gathered on the shore, peering into the darkness and through the falling rain. They were wet to the skin, but seemingly unconscious of their saturated clothing. And how strange that there, close beside Conn Cassidy, stood Terence Horan! Terence did not know Conn—did not know that he was "that other," but Conn knew him (by what means only himself could tell), and hated him with all the power of his being.

"I see her!" shouted a voice. There was a wild cheer from those standing around.

"She'll never reach land without help," said an old man of some eighty summers; "young hearts to the rescue!" The cry was re-echoed, and quick and eager hands were soon hauling a boat to the water's edge. Terence Horan was the first to step into the boat, but no sooner was he there than a strong hand was laid roughly on his shoulder, and he found himself pulled head foremost out again and flung into the boiling surf.

"What's the meaning of this?" said he, in a towering rage.

"Meaning be blowed" hissed his assailant, and the blazing, angry eyes of Conn Cassidy were riveted in his face. "You won't go!"

The onlookers were amazed. Terence Horan stepped into the boat again, ignoring the attack for the time being, and crying to the others who were about to accompany him to make haste, that every moment was a matter of death or life.

Again he was grasped by Conn Cassidy, but this time Terence hit out a smashing blow that sent the infuriated Conn toppling backwards, his head coming against a stone in the fall. By the time he had recovered consciousness the boat had pushed away. Young, brave hearts sent her fearlessly against the oncoming waves, only to be lost in a shower of spray. Encouraging shouts were given from the shore, but soon these were smothered in the tumult of the sea. Slowly but surely the rescuers were nearing the distressed vessel. Terence, when within hailing distance, gave a loud shout. There was a joyous answer. He never felt so proud and strong in his life; the elements were reduced to nothing in the immensity of his pre-eminence. His comrades gave a heartening cheer. But next moment a mountain-wave hit the ill-fated vessel. She disappeared; there were screams, and then a momentary silence. The supreme instant of daring had come. Terence thought he saw t white foam on the edge of a wave. He leaped towards it and, stretching out a hand, caught what seemed a human form. By almost superhuman efforts he managed to keep the person he had saved above water till he reached the boat, where he discovered that already one of the crew of the wrecked yacht lay unconscious. A move was made for shore. The lives of the two persons rescued depended on expedition, and there seemed no hope of rescuing the remainder of the crew. The saved were Thomas M'Donagh, the owner of the yacht Maureen, and Una Lavin. So 'twas Una after all that Terence had saved!

Una after a few days was abroad again—a little paler, perhaps. She was told who her rescuer was, and felt ineffably happy. She was told. too, of the altercation between Terence Horan and Conn. "But how," said her informant, "poor Conn came to be drowned is not exactly known. It is thought he attempted to overtake the boat before she reached deep water, but was unsuccessful in doing so and was drowned." It was so, indeed, Conn met his death. He raced into the tumultuous sea after the departing rescue party—with what intent it is hard to say. In charity it may be allowed that, overcome with shame and remorse, he desired to atone for his churlish conduct towards Terence Horan and to be counted amongst the brave.

Terence prolonged his stay in Derreenatragh. There was little to be said by way of love-making between himself and Una; but it took them many a long, long day and mellow autumnal evening to say it.