UNA'S DEVOTION. By Eoghan MacDiarmada

"Ye who believe in affection that hopes, and endures, and is patient,
Ye who believe in the beauty and strength of woman's devotion,
List to a tale of love in Acadia, home of the happy."

CHAPTER I.

A dance in Mrs. MacManus's was an event to be remembered. 'Twas a heart-lifter to the fretful—but, thank God, few were fretful in Carrownaha. Summer day, winter day, the world went merrily in that locality.

"Ready up the house, Una, ahaisgie; run out, Kathleen, for a few sods of turf; and Seumas, my own little man, go out and ask the girls," and Mrs. MacManus had not spoken when all her orders were being fulfilled. Una was her eldest child, and a girl in a million. With glossy yellow locks, blue eyes, and cheeks of the rowanberry, she was easily the pride of Carrownaha. This evening she is a little paler than usual, occasionally absent-minded, and not without a tinge of nervousness.

"Arrah, Una, what are you doing—putting the ash-shovel on the dresser with the plates!" said Kathleen, with a loud laugh as she returned with an armful of turf, and so lovingly had the little vixen enfolded the brown peat of the mountain-side that you'd give a world to change places with the unresponsive turf. But laughter proving too much for Kathleen, she let fall the burden before reaching the fire, and shouted in merriment till the rafters rang. The object of her uproarious hilarity blushed, and smiled, and attempted to mutter some explanation. "Una, you're in love!" said Kathleen gleefully.

The house was soon "readied up." The boys crowded in, the girls came smiling, and high revel began its course. The old piper from Kilshane turned up with his pipes, and every eye glistened at the first strains of "The Night Before Larry was Stretched." Little Nora Cuinaan, bashful and timid as a child, danced with Dhooltach MacDonagh, the finest hurler in the Carrownaha team. In his way as gentle as Nora herself, robust and manly in the field, and fierce in anger, all contending in his fine black eye. Nora and Dhooltach were looked upon as lovers—everyone was everyone else's lover in Carrownaha. And who is Una MacManus's lover?—Una of the sunbeam curls, soft red mouth, and milk-white skin—

"Skin like the downy ceanavan or the snow-blossom on the blackthorn bush!" was Master M'Garry's poetical description.

"The heat is oppressive inside, Una, come out into the cool of the night," whispered Teige Dunleavy. The tone of voice was so musical and the accent so carefully modulated that even the most inexperienced would have anticipated the speaker's relationship to Una. She moved a little closer to where he stood in the doorway. Teige's arm went round her waist—whether they kissed or not cannot be truthfully recorded, perhaps they did, perhaps they didn't—and together they sauntered down the borheen to the road. The raucous song of the corncrake came up from the cornfield, the sweet odour of the newly-mown hay was heavy on the cool night air, but lovers are oblivious of mundane song and pastoral glamour. There is a song in the heart that drowns every other, and a world all their own full of fancy and ecstacy.

Loch-na-gcearc, coming up to the road-side was lapping the stones and pebbles at the feet of Una and Teige as they took a seat on the mossy ditch.

"I have thought and dreamed of you, Una, since our last meeting—you are my ideal and more than that; or is it that my mad imagination surrounds you with a glory, a beauty you do not possess! That cannot be. O, it is not the stillness and splendour of the night that arouses my enthusiasm and love! You are more than life to me, Una," and his voice was scarcely audible as he proceeded: "Can you give me a promise—will you—will you be my wife?"

"Yes," was all Una said—all she could say. The corncrake sang in his own discordant way; the little waves babbled in the sedges; the glorious moon queened it in the starry heavens, and the skirl of the pipes, and the laugh of the dancers was borne on the night.

With hearts full of ineffable joy, the lovers returned to the dance. They were both supremely happy. Teige loved Una fully and truly—but was he of a type to withstand the trial of time and separation? Studying medicine in Dublin, he had on a previous visit home met her, and they became lovers. Rather delicate of build, but handsome, he, with his polished ways and seductive, eloquent speech, might easily become a favourite with the rustic maidens. 'Twas doubtful, however, if any of them would so readily have given him a promise of marriage as Una had done, and

await indefinitely the fateful day. Teige had no provision made for a home—and could it be that he would trifle with the noble heart of gentle, confiding Una? His father owned a small estate close by Carrownaha, which brought in a very inadequate income. He had resolved to make a doctor of Teige, "for," said he, "'twill take a larger annuity than the miserable property can afford him to live respectably." Teige was the eldest son.

"You will not be over-anxious now, my dear Una," said he, as they sat down after a dance, "during my absence in the city. To be sure, we must wait a while before we can be married."

"O, I won't fret—that's if I can help it. Won't you write very, very regular? Carrownaha, I fear, henceforth will lose its joyousness—all is centred in you, Teige."

"But what of me, Una?—will I not be longing as ardently as you for that day of days, when I can call you my own!"

The memory of the merry dance and the moonlight walk by the lakeside; the sacredness of the promise she had given, and the ever-haunting soft accents of the honeyed speech of Teige were not to be banished. Deep down in her heart she felt the joy and pain of a too great love. "Why will he not write!" she had almost cried aloud in anguish. "Is he dead?—does he forget?—can he have repented?" and a thousand other such unanswerable questions she put herself. Teige had written but once after his leaving. Two of Una's letters were unacknowledged, and a third returned through the Post Office.

'Twas a cold February evening as Mrs. MacManus sat on one side of a good fire, Phil Tiernan, her neighbour and crony opposite.

"Well, Phil," said she, "I may as well get Una off my hands at once. I'm getting a bit old, and I'd like to have them all settled before I die."

"Wisha, not a sign of you dying that soon, ma'am, and Una is only a girleen yet."

"That's very well, Phil, but 'tisn't often such a good chance comes our way. Tom Tighe is a nice respectable boy, and has a snug place."

"Tom Tighe! he's too ould for Una—bad scramps to the one of me id take Tom, were I a girl, if he had the parish of Bealdrehid rent free!"

"Phil, I'm ashamed of a man of your years and wisdom talking like that. My man (God rest his soul!) was a good bit older than Tom Tighe when I married him, and I was younger than Una at the time."

"An' be all accounts, if I may say it, ma'am, beggin' your pardon, an with all respect to the dead—(may God grant him the light o' Heaven!) you didn't take very kindly to the match at all. Before Donal MacManus came on the scene it's often at the stile of the milkin' field in Gorteensallagh you listened to Terence O'Rorke. Terry was a strappin' boy, and broken-hearted enough he went to America afterwards. I heard he was killed on the railway—probably threw himself under a train, ma'am, for, as he said when goin' away, he had nothing to live for."

The railway accident, or suicide, as Phil in an afterthought would have it, was purely a vagary of the imagination, for Terence O'Rorke was an eminent politician and well-respected and wealthy citizen at that hour in Chicago.

"There's something in what you say, Phil," said Mrs. MacManus, with a sigh, after a slight pause, during which time she was probably reviewing the events of the past. "But maybe 'twas all for the better," she added in resignation.

"Ugh! here's herself," said Phil, as he heard a step on the threshold, and the lifting of the latch, "an' I'll leave ye to talk the matter out."

When Kathleen and little Seumas were cosily in bed, Mrs. MacManus, addressing Una began:

"Your uncle Mick was speaking to me the other day when I was down in Drumdoney concerning Tom Tighe. I think you know Tom. He's a quiet, respectable boy, with only his mother and sister in the house. The land is good and well-stocked. Of course, it's a little bit out of the way, and I'll admit they might trim up the borheen. Now, Tom is thinking of settling down, and he sent a friend to your uncle to ask him to speak to me for you. I see no objection to the match—you ought to be a proud girl—provided he doesn't want too much money. Your uncle and myself have agreed upon a hundred and thirty, and we think Tighe will be inclined to take it. Anyhow we'll hear his answer a little later on."

Mrs. M'Manus looked fully at her daughter, hoping to encounter some show of opposition. She was not a little surprised to observe the thoughtful, placid face.

"Of course," she continued, "Tom isn't too young, and, from what I hear, a staid, sober boy. You don't find him on Sundays running to hurling and football, or dancing on the cross-roads like that bucko of the Tivelahans that got married only a few months ago. He minds about the house and place instead and looks after the cattle. Faith, I believe he brings in water and turf for the house. He's an example of what a good husband should be. Neither will be spend his time going to political meetings. And what could be madder than to see young men and old men—Farral Gurhy and his crutch amongst them—and women, too (God forgive them!) peggin' ~~dirbe~~ it like the very deuce after the hunt on Saturday last, and leaving their work there—the horses standing in the middle of the field. Troth, Una, Tom Tighe wasn't to be found among these light-headed fools!"

"There is," said Una timidly and cautiously, "surely no harm in gaiety. Out of the mere ebullition of spirit and desire of gladness they followed the hunt not far, I believe—only to the top of Knockalassa, from where a good view is obtained. If the joy of life—the dance and merrymaking, the shout and laugh, the song and foolishness (as it is called)—is taken from us, were we not better dead?" But Una, checking herself, fearing a revelation of her hidden thoughts concerning the proposition just made, reached for the tongs and stirred the fire.

"You have spoken very poetically—that is, I think, how Master M'Garry would term it—very poetically indeed; but it won't put down the crops; it won't pay the landlord and keep the pot a-boiling. Take care now that foolish and foppish student we

had here last summer didn't put these notions in your head. He and his people too, you must remember, are much above our station. I hold this bit of land from his father."

Una bit her lip at this home-trust, aimed at random. She feared a catastrophe, for the blood was stinging in her cheek.

"I am sure there is—or ought to be—more in life than eating and drinking, buying and selling, and going to Mass," she ventured, a little nettled, but her mother had closed the conversation, and was not to be drawn.

Mrs. MacManus for some time had been growing anxious regarding the management of the farm. Seumas was only a child. She was thus left to rely on Una and Kathleen, and an occasional labourer to do the work. Things were not going forward to her liking. She resolved to have Una married, "off her hands," as she put it, and then look out for a "quiet, steady boy" for Kathleen. Old age pensions were not then in vogue, or she would, like many similarly and even better circumstanced in our own day, have resigned after long and honourable service. When Una lay down by her sister Kathleen—not, indeed, till she had prayed fervently and with a full heart to God to help her—sleep would not visit her eyes. She knew only too well of her mother's worldly and stubborn disposition, and that her word was law. If she refused to marry Tom Tighe, "the sober, steady boy," she might pack up and leave Carrownaha—Carrownaha, that had become endeared to her by a thousand ties. She heard the low murmuring of the waves of Loch-na-gcearc on the shingle; recollections of summer evening dances crowded upon the imagination, and memories of days upon the lake, and rambles in the wood were poignant to an over-burdened heart. She wept at the thought of the bitter alternative to the thwarting of her mother's wish. "O, if he had only written—written to say, he remembered me!" she cried. Her eyes were red when morning broke. She felt the heavy, dark, impending agony of separation as she looked abroad o'er the well-loved scenes.

CHAPTER II.

London was murky and appalling. The previous days were cold, with a drizzing rain, and now a heavy fog—out of mere charity or disgust—had enveloped all in its folds. 'Twas a thick black dirty fog—you felt it in your nose and in your throat. It made you sick and sullen. The publichouses were closed at the half hour past midnight, and drunken figures were dimly seen aimlessly meandering—God only knows where. Outcasts dodged into doorways or gazed fixedly down at the river as they leaned over the bridge parapets. Theatre-goers were scurrying homewards: cars, cabs, and carriages were dashing recklessly, regardless of the fog and chance pedestrians.

"He must have been knocked down by cab," said the policeman in the most nonchalant way to a passer-by who, more from curiosity than pity, halted to inquire what was the matter. "He is stunned, and has lost a deal of blood—I fear he wasn't too sober," and the policeman had the wounded man conveyed to hospital.

There need be no mystery about it: here was Teige Dunleavy! Unsteady, without application to study, fond of conviviality, and cursed with a too active and original genius that led him in any direction but the way of medicine, he failed to pass his examinations. He left Dublin in shame, resolved to begin a new and better life in London. Alas for all such resolutions! Still God had given him a grand though wayward soul. Despite his too great freedom with the jolly and vine-crowned god, despite his reckless abandon, despite his forgetfulness of poor Una, he had the all-saving love of country that only became intensified with exile, sorrow, and shame. In his cups—aye, too, in his sober and inspired moments—he would whimsically and not without considerable poetic feeling liken himself to his idolised country. An insatiable hunger burned in his heart and mind—genius in some degree had made him mad. He could play music, sing songs of haunting sweetness—some of which were supposed to be his own; tell stories—the high, brave stories of the Gael; declaim, dance, whistle, and laugh. Dunleavy was a character—in him you found as

"In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way."

When Teige Dunleavy reached the hospital and was examined by the doctor in attendance he was found to have suffered terrible injuries. So serious were they that 'twas feared they would prove fatal.

"Poor fellow!" said the doctor, "another unfortunate son of Erin," and as he glanced at the frayed coat and torn boots his heart was stung. There was such delicacy and greatness in the face and such poverty in the apparel that the contrast was chilling.

"Here, nurse," said the doctor, "is another unhappy compatriot of yours. You are surely the good angel of these lone wayfarers, and one of these days I anticipate the beginning of a romance. Well, in that event—should the romance end up, you know, with merry peal of bells—we'll sorely miss you. Father Brady himself hasn't brought more smiles to wan faces with his kindly Connaught brogue and ghostly ministrations than Sister Una," and the doctor, with a good-natured smile at his own flattery, withdrew. The nurse so highly eulogised, need it be said, was Una MacManus. Assuredly the ways of God are inscrutable. That Una should after all these years—after so much aching and weariness of heart find herself a nurse at the bedside of the one dearest to her on earth, was more than a mere coincidence. God may have our little lives and destinies closely in His keeping when we are least conscious of His guardianship. Una had preferred to become a nurse in London. She chose this profession and exile rather than marry Tom Tighe. Dublin she avoided lest Teige Dunleavy should chance across her way, and she shuddered at the meeting of his cold, indifferent glance! And could she look upon him paying court to a haughty city damsel, who smiled loftily on her own rusticity! No, there was a touchy and proud temper ever in a MacManus.

UNA'S DEVOTION

She looked at the pallid face—emaciated and calm. She thought how much he must have suffered; and then the great womanly heart bounded as it had never done—not even in the morning of love's young dream! She reproached herself for having ever coupled his name with that of another.

For days he lingered on the brink of death, but gradually rallied—who can tell whether from medical aid, the assiduous and unceasing care of Nurse Una, or from the prayers she offered on his behalf! But, strangely enough, no sooner was the patient on the way of recovery than Una asked to be sent to another ward. Her wish was acceded to, and she did not again see Teige till the day of his leaving, when from a window she saw him pass out of sight.

"O," she cried, "will I ever meet him again! I could not have him know that I saw him in so pitiable a state. And if he were to marry me now it would be out of sheer gratitude or penitence. O, he might even come to hate me! My God, what am I to do!" Like one distracted, she ran down the stairs, angry with herself for what she feared to be only a false delicacy, and saw him turn the corner of the street. Hurrying she still kept him in sight. Along the Walworth road she went in his wake, and following down a bye street saw him knock at a wretched-looking house. Una waited till he had entered, and then took a careful note in her mind of its position—it having no number. It looked, she imagined, the most forbidding house in that forbidding street.

And again that night the ever-recurring conflict between heart and head! "I'm torn with conflicting emotions—I do not know whether I did right in leaving him on his recovery and before he returned to consciousness and coherency. You must help me, Amy," said she aloud to a companion—a fair Saxon, rubicund and roguish-eyed. Una, with many pretty hesitations and blushes, narrated the whole story up to the strange meeting after so many years of unrequited love.

Amy was wholly sympathetic, for had she not a little affair of the heart herself? "Seek him out," said she decisively, "and and ask him for an explanation;" but noticing the look of reproof in Una's face to these prosaic words, she apologised as prettily as any pretty little woman ever did, and to make ample amends kissed Una playfully full on the mouth.

"You love him still," said Amy archly, and fearsome that again she had blundered in asking such a question.

"O, yes—O, yes! And in the silence of the night, as he lay unconscious and raving—as he lay broken, crushed, world-weary, have I not"—a deep blush suffused the troubled face—"have I not taken him to my breast and kissed the wasted cheek! Little did he dream that his 'snow-blossom of the blackthorn bush' caught him up as a mother would her child—and oh, the supreme ecstacy of it all: the delirium, the bitterness, and the triumph! Love, Amy, had triumphed over neglect, time, separation, sorrow, worldliness, and disgrace!"

"And he used to call you a snow-blossom? Now, surely your hair is—is——"

"Well, Amy," said Una, laughing in spite of herself at the artless little lady, "you are a most lovable little hussy. You take me down from the Parnassian heights. Your advice now? Who knows but we'd end up this romance—that's the wrong word, but let it stand—as the novelists do."

"My advice plainly, dear Una, is—go to-morrow morning early to that dingy place off the Walworth road, present yourself, and—and—well, we'll talk it all over to-morrow night."

Una took the advice, called next morning, but Teige Dunleavy was gone! The surly, fierce old hag who opened the door and snappishly answered her inquiries knew not whither.

The glory of summertime was again resplendent in Carrownaha. Teige Dunleavy sought it after all his wanderings, carousals, efforts and vain longings for the unattainable. That wild, insatiable hunger of the enthusiast and visionary had given way to a saner philosophy. The fall from the stars was humiliating to remember; still, he argued, 'twas good to be there if only for one short moment with the immortals. But if the divine, exalted longing had ceased to gnaw—if the love of immaterial and visionary things remained but as a dream, Heaven itself reopened the floodgates of human love. With his descent from the stars, or ascent if you wish it, from the pothouse—he had rediscovered an earlier, and, perhaps, grander passion. The resurgence of the old love was sweet as scented summer showers on the parched woodlands. The birds sang, Loch-na-gcearc was smiling and cool, and the old faces and kindly salutations brought a thrill of pleasure. "Had I but Una!" was the expression that overflowed from his heart. That wish was gratified. His father's death left him heir to the estate—small, indeed, but ample withal. Amy kissed Una a thousand "good-byes," and not long afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Teige Dunleavy had a visit from her husband and herself. Tom Tighe is still a bachelor, and likely to remain so. "He wants too much money," the old people say; the younger generation hold another opinion: "that divil a girl within the four seas of Ireland would take him, for an ould crank and gallarahawn that he is."

EOGHAN MacDIARMADA.