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A Nice Little Plot.

THE Major on a sunshiny day in the main street of Ballykillrowdy was pleasant to behold. He was not strictly a handsome man perhaps, but he had the air of being a handsome man—an air of so much nonchalance and good-humored triumph that it imposed upon most people and sent them away with the notion that the Major was an Adonis. He had one of the grandest figures I remember to have seen. Strength sat by his side with grace on his broad shoulders, and the carriage of his head was in itself a sort of wonder of high temper and vivacity.

Ballykillrowdy was mainly owned by Miss Vivian Blake, a young lady of charming exterior, who rode to hounds under the escort of an ugly male second cousin, whom the Major loathed. But such part of Ballykillrowdy as was not owned by the beautiful Miss Blake was owned by her ugly male second cousin, and the popular impression was that Miss Blake and the cousin would make a match of it. Against this popular belief the Major chafed, as Socrates might have riled up against a decrepit syllogism. It may be said of the Major that he had an air of prosperity, which was greatly more deceptive than his air of physical beauty. Had his creditors met in conclave, they might possibly have decided amongst them a problem of some interest; how did the Major live? He owned neither lands nor messages. Like his look of beauty and his air of prosperity, his very title was misleading to the stranger. He had never held a commission anywhere, in anything; but a man with such a figure ought to have been a Major—if the rank had been created especially that he might ornament it, the thing had seemed most fitting and admirable, and, in short, the title was a popular tribute, unsought by him, conferred upon him by nature, so it seemed, and adopted without one dissenting voice by the public of Ballykillrowdy, and indorsed by the members of the Ulster in lordly Belfast.

Novelists and other social moralists have often been cynical, at small cost, with respect to the affection entertained by an un-acred gentleman for a well-acred lady. But, as Beccaccio and a Mr. Tennyson will tell you, a real attachment is not altogether impossible under such conditions. The Major was madly in love—not with Miss Blake's landed possessions, but with Miss Blake. Time had made his first inroads on the poor gentleman's close-clustering hair. He was but two and thirty; but some men age early, and I have never heard that a partial or even a complete baldness gives safety against the assaults of the grand passion. The ugly second cousin, his own poverty, the rapidly increasing width of his central parting, and Vivian's bounty and Vivian's kindness, combined together to fret the Major's heart. Yet the Irish elasticity of his temperament constantly pulled him out of the depths of his despondency, though it as constantly suffered him to fall again.

It was an honest passion. The poor fellow was fairly hacked. All manner of ambitions began to bestir themselves; for there was more in him, or at least he thought so, than the helpless power to dream of good luck over a bottle of the club Pomard or a glass of hot Irish, as the state of the funds might order. Perhaps the title conferred on him was not without its influence upon his dreams.

"I'd hang me harp on a willow tree,

an' off to the wars again," said the Major; "but I haven't a harp, or the funds to buy one; and there's no willow tree handy, and no wars convenient, the Lord be good to me."

Whether Phil Durgan, the ugly second cousin, had or had not in his own person exhausted the family stock of physical unhappiness, I cannot tell; but I know for a fact, that his sister was as pretty as Vivian herself. If I knew of anything prettier, I would compare her to it, but I do not; and in these declining days I am not likely to find it. Whose is the hand which shall, by the aid of movable types, describe a pretty girl? If I say that each of these young ladies was ravishing, nineteen, and Irish, I have done my best. Like Rosalind and Celia, they learned, played, ate together, and whereso'er they went, like Juno's swans, still they went coupled and inseparable. It followed that if Phil Durgan had known as much as was known to his sister Julia, he would have known more of Vivian's likings than he knew. In that case the ineffable satisfaction which commonly illumined his foggy features might have dimmed a little. Yet, why should I triumph over ugly Phil? Your storyteller is rarely contented unless he flogs his rascals. Dickens, for example, gloated over the buffets dealt by his popular to his unpopular people. With what a gusto he flogs Squeers; how rejoicingly he throws Wegg into the scavenger's cart; with what pleasure he tells the story of Pecksniff's thrashing! It is in my power to administer to Mr. Philip Durgan such a horsewhipping as never yet mortal man received; but as I am strong, I will be merciful. Phil, as the late Lord Lytton said of somebody, was uglier than he had a right to be. There is a certain Irish type of face which trenches perilously on the aspect of the gorilla; and Phil, who was naturally gifted in this direction, improved his chances by the disposition of his hair and whiskers. He had all the graces of a lady-killer, as an imitative ape might have them. He had a brogue a man might have hung his hat on, and believed that he spoke with the purest of all possible English accents.

"O! was never taken for Oirishman but wonce in me loife," Phil had been known to say, "an' that was a Polish Jew of met in Hongary; an' after we'd been talkin' for'n hour or tew, 'Mr. Durgan,' says he, 'ye'll be an Oirishman.' 'An' what makes ye think that?' says O! 'Your speech,' says he. An' O! lafted at the man."

It was before the days of the disestablishment and disendowment of the Irish Church, and the Bishop of Ballykillrowdy was a prosperous and a happy prelate. The Bishopess was a fruitful vine, and the quiver of the Bishop was somewhat tightly packed. His lordship's youngest son, Jack, was a terror to the hearts of his parents. His lordship was an Englishman, and Jack, to his horror, had acquired a brogue which rivalled Phil's. The lad was always in mischief of one kind or another, and his mother's anxious heart daily foreboded that he would be brought home upon a shutter. Yet there was no harm in young Jack, and he had as staunch pluck as a bulldog's. And, be it known, he knew and loved the Major.

And now, the *dramatis personae* being introduced, let the tale go smoothly on. The good Bishop was rarely without guests; for if his own hospitable instincts slumbered for a day or two, his sons or daughters brought their own chums or companions to dwell within his gates. Kate and Mary were rapturously in love with Vivian and Julia, and were continually paying and receiving visits to and from them. Miss Blake and Miss Durgan were beneath the Bishop's roofs, and Mr. Phil Durgan, who was intimate with the Bishop's second son, had no difficulty in securing quarters there. The Major, knowing his rival's chances, and recognizing the hopelessness of his own passion, was torn by vain desires. He walked and rode about Ballykill, encountering the Bishop often, but avoiding the ladies so persistently, and anybody who was a fool might have thought that the meetings with the Bishop were the special object of his journeys. Master Jack, who was acute and discerning, knew better.

Jack was also a great friend to Vivian, and I am not sure but what she had

suggested an idea to the boy which he put into operation. Subsequent events at least make it look a little that way, as when a woman wants to give a man a chance she is sure to find him a way.

At any rate Jack meeting the Major one day said:

"Gay, me boy, why don't ye come up an' have a shoy at her?"

The Major's name was Geoghaghan, and "Gay" was the friendly contraction.

"Well, ye see," said the Major dubiously, "your 'other's not too found of me."

"O, don't mind her ledyship," said Jack; "of'll pull ye through ut."

"I'm not liked, Jack," the Major answered sadly; "and it's not of any use to go. I would be coldly treated."

"Well, look here, Major," cried Jack with a look of triumph; "if oi give ye a welcome from the governor an' the ould ledy, will ye come?"

"Faith," said the Major with a doubtful smile, "I will."

"Roight!" shrieked the young gentleman, and threw a pair of skates into the Major's dogcart. He was in after them at a bound. "Drove to the Black Root Pool, Gay," he said.

The Major shook the reins and away they went.

"What is it, all?" asked the Major.

"Pull up at Murphy's shebeen," said Jack, and returned no other answer. But there was a world of hidden meaning in the wink with which this order was accompanied.

The shebeen arrived at, Jack leaped down, and swaggered in with a "Save all here!"

"It's yew for breakun' the boys' hearts, Mrs. Morphy," said Jack. "Me own is sore with you."

The plump and pretty Mrs. Murphy laughed.

"Sixteen takes foine leps these times," says she in allusion to Jack's age.

Jack beckoned her on one side, and spoke to her for a moment in a serious whisper.

"Shamus," said she with a twinkle in her eye, "be fetchin' the clothes-line."

Shamus, like a well-trained husband, obeyed.

"Ye won't tell," said Jack.

"Not a synnabe, be thim five craseses," said Mrs. Murphy.

Jack, handing up a bottle of whiskey and a clothes-line to the Major, re-ascended into the dog-cart, nodded in friendly fashion to Shamus and his wife, and requested his companion to drive on. The mystified Major obeyed. In the course of a mile's drive they came upon the Black Root Pool, and Jack began to screw on his skates.

"The ice is not safe here," said the Major.

"Maybe I know that," Jack replied.

"Don't be fooling with me, Jack," said poor Geoghaghan, who was scarcely ever known to be angry with anybody.

"The crookedest road is sometimes the straightest," responded Jack sententiously. By this time his skates were firmly bound. "She'll stand, won't she?" said Jack, with a sideways nod at the mare.

"Like a stone," said the Major.

"Then," said Jack, taking off his overcoat, and cumbrously descending from the dog-cart, "follow me, an' fetch the clothes-line with you."

The first faint idea of Jack's plot dawned upon the Major's mind.

"You'll be catching cold," he said.

"The overcoat'll be dry," said Jack; "an' there's whiskey in the bottle, an' it's only half a mile home."

"That's true, too," said the Major, descending with alacrity.

Master Jack, having secured one end of the clothes-line about his chest, gave the other into the Major's hands, and went upon the ice. It cracked beneath him, and before he had gone twenty yards it gave way with a crash and a splash. The Major hauled, and Jack came in splittin' the thin ice before him, and puffing and blowing like a grampus. He seized his rescuer's hand and scrambled to the bank.

"In ye go!" he shouted. "Don't keep me here to catch me death!"

"What?" cried the Major.

"Now, how do ye think ye could save me loife from drownin' without a wet thread on ye?" inquired the youngster.

The Major grasped the situation, but stood awhile regarding Jack ruefully.

"In ye go!" the young gentleman cried again.

"Begorra," said the Major, slowly stripping off his coat and standing in his shirt sleeves, "there's nothing else for it."

And with that, once more taking up the end of the rope, he jumped in, and emerged breathless. Jack was already in the dog-cart, and was struggling into his overcoat. Luckily for the harmless fulfillment of this truly Irish enterprise, heavy outer garments were the fashion. Each buttoned himself to the chin, and each took a great gulp of whiskey. Then the Major, with a sense of humor to keep him warm, touched up the mare, and away they rattled.

"What's to become of the clothes-line?" asked the Major.

"Shamus is to come down to the pool and bring it home with him," said Jack with his teeth chattering.

"Jack," said the Major affectionately, "I've an English note for five pounds on me somewhere, and it's yours, my boy, for this day's work."

"Me teeth are like castanets," Jack responded. "Drive on for the love of Heaven! But I'm game to take the paper, Major, an' I think I deserve it."

"I think you do," replied the Major.

Jack's description of the rescue was a real work of art.

"No, no," cried the Major, blushing to the roots of his hair. "Indeed 'twas nothing. He'd have got out easily without me."

"Indeed, then," said Jack, "I'd never have got out at all without you. Because," he added, *sotto voce*, "without you I'd never have got in."

"Mr. Geoghaghan," said the Bishop, with tears of emotion on his cheeks, "you must not stand a moment in your wet clothes. Come with me."

The Major followed obediently. Vivian and Julia had heard the tale in common with the rest of the household. By some instinct peculiar to the sex they retired together. Vivian flew to Julia's arms and kissed her cheek.

"Indeed," said Julia, "he is a noble fellow!"

"He is as brave as he is handsome," said the beautiful Vivian, and a sympathetic tear coursed towards one corner of her charming mouth.

Ugly Phil Durgan knew not of this moving scene, and was too stupid to divine it. But there had never been any love lost between himself and the major.

"What roight has the blagyard here," queried Phil to himself, "pokin' his nose where he's not wanted? Why couldn't he let the little puppy drown himself, an' save the country the price of a rope? He'll have to have one some day. O!d have let him drown," mused ugly Phil; and indeed I am not indisposed to think that Mr. Durgan construed himself aright.

It so befell that there was nobody in the palace whose clothes were likely to fit the Major, with the exception of Phil himself. The Bishop's request for a complete rig-out for the rival was not to be denied, but Phil granted it grudgingly. A little silver kettle was hissing above the spirit-lamp in the breakfast room when the Major descended. I fancy that his lordship had caught something of the manners of the country, and had a use for that little kettle on most days after dinner. The Bishopess, with her own fair hands (plump and hospitable they were) made grog for the rescuer of her child, and they pressed it upon him lest he should take cold. It was a signal honor, and the Major felt it.

A little flushed by his bath, and the triumph of the situation, the Major looked more like a handsome man than ever. Mr. Durgan's tweeds fitted him as though they had been made for him.

"Phil!" said Vivian, "I always despised your tailor until now."

"Yes," said Phil innocently, "I've changed me man. These wor made in London. And he sprawled into an attitude which seemed likely to be fatal.

The Bishop begged the Major to stay. His wife commanded to the same effect, with imperious hospitality. The Major had nothing to do but to accept the situation. He spent the evening in the same house with Vivian—that was worth something to him.

"Make the running," whispered Jack, "it's all in your own hand."

Now the Major, although an Irishman was bashful. It was an Irishman who wrote, "She Stoops to Conquer," and he drew the hero on an Irish pattern.—Had Vivian been a pretty chambermaid, poor Geoghaghan had approached her with conquering airs forboding victory; but he was half ashamed before a lady, though never shamefaced enough to be clumsy.

"It was a noble deed, Mr. Geoghaghan," said Vivian, letting her splendid eyes shine full upon him for a moment.

"Faith it was not," he answered in a tone of some distress.

"What a *rara avis* is a really modest man!" thought the young lady; and when she thought it long enough she said it aloud.

"Miss Blake," said the Major in a half-whisper, "I cannot endure that you should think of me above my deserts, and especially when I have done a thing of which I am more than half ashamed. I can not endure that you should think I have done anything brave or praiseworthy." Vivian looked at him inquiringly. I think she fancied that the Major's dip had given him a little touch of fever, and that he was wandering. The Major's eyes met Vivian's and he knew his hour had come. A child's hand can launch a ship, but a woman's eye can do even more marvelous things. That look from Vivian launched the Major; nothing could hold him back. "There is wun beneath this roof," he said "who is dearer to me than me life. I was barred by cruel Fate from her presence; circumstances over which I had no control shut me out from her society. I am going abroad—" The Major had only formed this resolve upon the instant. "But I am content to have looked upon her before I go; and believe me I shall carry her image to me grave; but me conscience and honor will not permit me to go without explaining the subterfuge by which I came here. The rescue was a mere device—"

And in broken accents he told the story of Jack's rescue.

Vivian turned away her head whilst the Major told his love-sick tale; but when he reached his confession she turned away more pronouncedly, and the Major saw that she trembled violently. Was it with anger or disgust.

"Farewell, Miss Blake!" he murmured. Farewell, Vivian! Forgive my baseness if you can." There came no answer but a strange gasping sob.

At least forget me if you cannot forgive me," he urged, broken by her silence.—I shall cross your path no more. Farewell."

Still she gave him no answer, but the sob was repeated. He reiterated his farewell, and crossing the room looked blindly over a portfolio of sketches, seeing nothing. Suddenly there arose a piercing shriek, and everybody in the room rushed towards Vivian. She had cast herself almost full length upon a couch, and was shaken by a wild hysteria. Peal after peal of mad involuntary laughter broke from her lips.

"Leave the room, gentlemen!" said the Bishop's wife.

The guilty Major took his way with the rest. "Tears will relieve her," were the last words he heard. They fell from the lips of his hostess.

"Observe, John," said the Bishop, "how your inconsiderate desire for dangerous adventure operates upon your fellow beings. Mr. Geoghaghan rescues you at the risk of his life, and the excitement of the story has brought a most terrible attack of hysteria upon Miss Blake. Let this be a warning to you."

Jack shot a glance across at the Major who replied by a rueful lifting of the eyebrows. The glance meant "Did you tell?" and the lifting of the eyebrows, "I told, bad luck to me!" To the utter amazement of the Bishop, the Major, Phil Durgan, and the Bishop's eldest and second son, Jack had precisely such an attack as that form which Miss Blake was suffering.

"Unhappy boy," exclaimed the Bishop, tugging wildly at the bell-rope; "the excitement has been too much for him."

The Major stood like one dazed. The world was hollow. There was no more hope in it or joy in it. But, for all that, the fierce throes of unconquerable laughter were upon him. He was an Irishman after all, and the situation had an