

A Basement Story

By Edward Eggleston

I.

It was one of those obscure days found only on the banks of Newfoundland. There was no sun, and yet no visible cloud; there was nothing, indeed, to test the vision by; there was no apparent fog, but sight was soon lost in a hazy indefiniteness. Near objects stood out with a distinctness almost startling. The swells ran high without sufficient provocation from the present wind, and attention was absorbed by the tremendous pitching of the steamer's bow, the wide arc described by the mainmast against no background at all, and by the smoky and bellying mainsail, kept spread to hold the vessel to some sort of steadiness in the waves. There was no storm, nor any dread of a storm, and the few passengers who were not seasick in stateroom bunks below, or stretched in numb passivity on the sofas in the music saloon, were watching the rough sea with a cheerful excitement. In the total absence of sky and the entire abolition of horizon the eye rejoiced, like Noah's dove, to find some place of rest; and the mainsail, smoky like the air, but cutting the smoky air with a sharp plane, was such a resting place for the vision. This sail and the reeky smokestack beyond, and the great near billows that emerged from time to time out of the gray obscurity--these seemed to save the universe from chaos. On such a day the imagination is released from bounds, individuality is lost, and space becomes absolute--the soul touches the poles of the infinite and the unconditioned.

I do not pretend that such emotions filled the breasts of all the twenty passengers on deck that day. One man was a little seasick, and after every great rushing plunge of the steamer from a billow summit into a sea valley he vented his irritation by wishing that he had there some of the poets that--here he paused and gasped as the ship balanced itself on another crest preparatory to another shoot down the flank of a swell, while the screw, thrown clean out of the water, rattled wildly in the unresisting air and made the ship quiver in every timber--some of those poets, he resumed with bitterer indignation, that sing about the loveliness of the briny deep and the deep blue--but here an errant swell hit the vessel a tremendous blow on the broadside, making her roll heavily to starboard, and bringing up through the skylights sounds of breaking

goblets thrown from the sideboards in the saloon below, while the passenger who hated marine poetry was capsized from his steamer chair and landed sprawling on the deck. A small group of young people on the forward part of the upper deck were passing the day in watching the swells and forecasting the effect of each upon the steamer, rejoicing in the rush upward followed by the sudden falling downward, much as children enjoy the flying far aloft in a swing or on a teetering see-saw, to be frightened by the descent. Some of the young ladies had books open in their laps, but the pretense that they had come on deck to read was a self-deluding hypocrisy. They had left their elderly relatives safely ensconced in staterooms below, and had worked their way up to the deck with much care and climbing and with many lurches and much grievous staggering, not for the purpose of reading, but to enjoy the society of other young women, and of such young men as could sit on deck. When did a young lady ever read on an ocean steamer, the one place where the numerical odds are reversed and there are always found two gallant young men to attend each young girl? This merry half dozen, reclining in steamer chairs and muffled in shawls, breathed the salt air and enjoyed the chaos into which the world had fallen. On this deck, where usually there was a throng, they felt themselves in some sense survivors of a world that had dropped away from them, and they enjoyed their social solitude, spiced with apparent peril that was not peril.

The enthusiastic Miss Sylvia Thorne, who was one of this party, was very much interested in the billows, and in the attentions of a student who sat opposite her. From time to time she remarked also on some of the steerage passengers on the deck below; particularly was she interested in a young girl who sat watching the threatening swells emerge from the mist. Miss Sylvia spoke to the young lady alongside of her about that interesting young girl in the steerage, but her companion said she had so much trouble with the Irish at home that she could not bear an Irish girl even at sea. Her mother, she went on to say, had hired a girl who had proved most ungrateful, she had--but here a scream from all the party told that a sea of more than usual magnitude was running up against the port side. A minute later and all were trying to keep their seats while the ship reeled away to starboard with vast momentum, and settled swiftly again into the trough of the sea.

Miss Thorne now wondered that the sail, which did not flap as she had observed sails generally do, in poems, did not tear into shreds as she had always known sails to do in novels when there was a rough sea. But the

blue-eyed student, having come from a fresh-water college, and being now on a homeward voyage, knew all about it, and tried to explain the difference between a sea like this and a storm or a squall. He would have become hopelessly confused in a few minutes more had not a lucky wave threatened to capsize his chair and so divert the conversation from the sail to himself. And just as Sylvia was about to change back to the sail again for the sake of relieving his embarrassment, her hat strings, not having been so well secured as the sail, gave way, and her hat went skimming down to the main deck below, lodged a minute, and then took another flight forward. It would soon have been riding the great waves on its own account, a mark for curious sea gulls and hungry sharks to inspect, had not the Irish girl that Sylvia had so much admired sprung to her feet and seized it as it swept past, making a handsome "catch on the fly." A sudden revulsion of the vessel caused her to stagger and almost to fall, but she held on to the hat as though life depended on it. The party on the upper deck cheered her, but their voices could hardly have reached her in the midst of the confused sounds of the sea and the wind.

The student, Mr. Walter Kirk, a large, bright, blond fellow, jumped to his feet and was about to throw himself over the rail. It was a chance to do something for Miss Thorne; he felt impelled to recover her seventy-five-cent hat with all the abandon of a lover flinging himself into the sea to rescue his lady-love. But a sudden sense of the ludicrousness of wasting so much eagerness on a hat and a sudden lurch of the ship checked him. He made a gesture to the girl who held the hat, and then ran aft to descend for it. The Irish girl, with the curly hair blown back from her fair face, started to meet Mr. Kirk, but paused abruptly before a little inscription which said that steerage passengers were not allowed aft. Then turning suddenly, she mounted a coil of rope, and held the hat up to Miss Thorne.

"There's your hat, miss," she said.

"Thank you," said Sylvia.

"Sure you're welcome, miss," she said, not with a broad accent, but with a subdued trace of Irish in the inflection and idiom.

When the gallant Walter Kirk came round to where the girl, just dismounted from the cordage, stood, he was puzzled to see her without the hat.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"The young lady's got it her own self," she replied.

Kirk felt foolish. Had his chum come down over the rail for it? He would do something to distinguish himself. He fumbled in his pockets for a coin to give the girl, but found nothing smaller than a half sovereign, and with that he could ill afford to part. The girl had meanwhile turned away, and Kirk had nothing left but to go back to the upper deck.

The enthusiastic Sylvia spoke in praise of the Irish girl for her agility and politeness, but the young lady alongside, who did not like the Irish, told her that what the girl wanted was a shilling or two. Servants in Europe were always beggars, and the Irish people especially. But she wouldn't give the girl a quarter if it were her hat. What was the use of making people so mean-spirited?

"I'd like to give her something, if I thought it wouldn't hurt her feelings," said Sylvia, at which the other laughed immoderately.

"Hurt her feelings! Did you ever see an Irish girl whose feelings were hurt by a present of money? I never did, though I don't often try the experiment, that's so."

"I was going to offer her something myself, but she walked away while I was trying to find some change," said Kirk.

The matter of a gratuity to the girl weighed on Sylvia Thorne's mind. She had a sense of a debt in owing her a gratuity, if one may so speak. The next day being calm and fine, and finding her company not very attractive, for young Kirk was engaged with some gentlemen in a stupid game of shuffleboard, she went forward to the part of the deck on which the steerage passengers were allowed to sun themselves, and found the Irish girl holding a baby. "You saved my hat yesterday," she said with embarrassment.

"Sure that's not much now, miss. I'd like to do somethin' for you every day if I could. It isn't every lady that's such a lady," said the girl, with genuine admiration of the delicate features and kindly manner of young Sylvia Thorne.

"Does that baby belong to some friend of yours?" asked the young lady.

"No, miss; I've not got any friends aboard. Its mother's seasick, and I'm givin' her a little rest an' holdin' the baby out here. The air of that steerage isn't fit for a baby, now, you may say."

Should she give her any money? What was it about the girl that made her afraid to offer a customary trifle?

"Where did you live in Ireland?" inquired Sylvia.

"At Drogheda, miss, till I went to work in the linen mills."

"Oh! you worked in the linen mills."

"Yes, miss. My father died, and my mother was poor, and girls must work for their living. But my father wanted me to get a good bit of readin' and writin' so as I might do better; but he died, miss, and I couldn't leave my mother without help."

"You were the only child?"

"I've got a sister, but somehow she didn't care to go out to work, and so I had to go out to service; and I heard that more was paid in Ameriky, where I've got an aunt, an' I had enough to take me out, an' I thought maybe I'd get my mother out there some day, or I'd get money enough to make her comfortable, anyways."

"What kind of work will you do in New York? I don't believe we've got any linen mills. I think we get Irish linen table-cloths, and so on."

"Oh, I'm going out to service. I can't do heavy work, but I can do chambermaid's work."

All this time Sylvia was turning a quarter over in her pocket. It was the only American coin she had carried with her through Europe, and she now took it out slowly, and said:

"You'll accept a little something for your kindness in saving my hat."

"I'm much obliged, miss, but I'd rather not I'd rather have your kind words than any money. It's very lonesome I've been since I left Drogheda."

She put the quarter back into her pocket with something like shame; then she fumbled her rings in a strange embarrassment. She had made a mess of it, she thought. At the same time she was glad the girl had so much pride.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Margaret Byrne."

"You must let me help you in some way," said Miss Thorne at last.

"I wonder what kind of people they are in New York, now," said Margaret, looking at Sylvia wistfully. "It seems dreadful to go so far away and not know in whose house you'll be livin'."

Sylvia looked steadily at the girl, and then went away, promising to see her again. She smiled at Walter Kirk, who had finished his game of shuffleboard and was looking all up and down the deck for Miss Thorne. She did not stop to talk with him, however, but pushed on to where her mother and father were sitting not far from the taffrail.

"Mamma, I've been out in the steerage."

"You'll be in the maintop next, I don't doubt," said her father, laughing.

"I've been talking to the Irish girl that caught my hat yesterday."

"You shouldn't talk to steerage people," said Mrs. Thorne. "They might have the smallpox, or they might not be proper people."

"I suppose cabin passengers might have the smallpox too," said Mr. Thorne, who liked to tease either wife or daughter.

"I offered the Irish girl a quarter, and she wouldn't have it."

"You're too free with your money," said her mother in a tone of complaint that was habitual.

"The girl wouldn't impose on you, Sylvia," said Mr. Thorne. "She's honest. She knew that your hat wasn't worth so much. Now, if you had said fifteen cents-----"

"O papa, be still," and she put her hand over his mouth. "I want to propose something."

"Going to adopt the Irish-----" But here Sylvia's hand again arrested Mr. Thorne's speech.

"No, I'm not going to adopt her, but I want mamma to take her for upstairs girl when we get home."

Mr. Thorne made another effort to push away Sylvia's hand so as to say something, but the romping girl smothered his speech into a gurgle.

"I couldn't think of it. She's got no references and no character."

"Maybe she has got her character in her pocket, you don't know," broke out the father. "That's where some girls carry their character till it's worn out."

"I'll give her a character," said Sylvia. "She is a lady, if she is a servant."

"That's just what I don't want, Sylvia," said Mrs. Thorne, with a plaintive inflection, "a ladylike servant."

"Oh, well, we must try her. How's the girl to get a character if nobody tries her? And she's real splendid, I think, going off to get money to help her mother. And I'm sure she's had some great sorrow or disappointment, you know. She's got such a wistful look in her face, and when I spoke about Drogheda she said-----"

"There you are again!" exclaimed the father. "You'll have a heroine to make your bed every morning. But you'd better keep your drawers locked for all that."

"Now, I think that's mean!" and the young girl tried to look stern. But the severity vanished when Mr. Kirk, of the senior class in Highland College, came up to inform Miss Thorne that the young people were about getting

up a conundrum party. Miss Sylvia accepted the invitation to join in that diluted recreation, saying, as she departed, "Let's try her anyway."

"If she wants her I suppose I shall have to take her, but I wish she had more sense than to go to the steerage for a servant."

"She could hardly find one in the cabin," ventured Mr. Thorne.

So it happened that, on arrival in New York, Margaret Byrne was installed as second girl at the Thornes'. For in an American home the authority is often equitably divided--the mother has the name of ruling the household which the daughter actually governs.

II.

How much has the setting to do with a romance? The old tales had castles environed with savage forests and supplied with caves and underground galleries leading to where it was necessary to go in the novelist's emergency. In our realistic times we like to lay our scenes on a ground of Axminster with environments of lace curtains, pianos, and oil paintings. How, then, shall I make you understand the real human loves and sorrows that often have play in a girl's heart, where there are no better stage fittings than stationary washtubs and kitchen ranges?

Sylvia Thorne was sure that the pretty maid from Drogheda, whose melancholy showed itself through the veil of her perfect health, had suffered a disappointment. She watched her as she went silently about her work of sweeping and bedmaking, and she knew by a sort of divination that here was a real heroine, a sufferer or a doer of something.

Mrs. Thorne pronounced the new maid good, but "awfully solemn." But when Maggie Byrne met the eyes of Sylvia looking curiously and kindly at her sad face, there broke through her seriousness a smile so bright and sunny that Sylvia was sure she had been mistaken, and that there had been no disappointment in the girl's life.

Maggie shocked Mrs. Thorne by buying a shrine from an image vender and hanging it against the wall in the kitchen. The mistress of the house, being very scrupulous of other people's superstitions, and being one of the stanchest of Protestants, doubted whether she ought to allow an idolatrous image to remain on the wall. She had read the Old Testament a

good deal, and she meditated whether she ought not, like Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to break the image in pieces. But Mr. Thorne, when the matter was referred to him, said that a faithful Catholic ought to do better than an unfaithful one, and that so long as Margaret did not steal the jewelry she oughtn't to be disturbed at her prayers, which it was known she was accustomed to say every night, with her head bowed on the ironing table, before the image of Mary and her son.

"How can the Catholics pray to images and say the second commandment, I'd like to know?" said Mrs. Thorne, one morning, with some asperity.

"By a process like that by which we Protestants read the Sermon on the Mount, and then go on reviling our enemies and laying up treasures on earth," said her husband.

"My dear, you never will listen to reason; you know that the Sermon on the Mount is not to be taken literally."

"And how about the second commandment?"

"You'd defend the scribes and Pharisees, I do believe, just for the sake of an argument."

"Oh, no! there are plenty of them alive yet; let them defend themselves, if they want to," said the ungallant husband, with a wicked twinkle in his eye.

As for Sylvia, she was all the more convinced, as time went on, that the girl "had had a disappointment." On the evenings when the cook was out Sylvia would find her way into the kitchen for a talk with Maggie. The quaint old stories of Ireland and the enthusiastic description of Irish scenes that found their way into Margaret Byrne's talk delighted Sylvia's fancy. But the conversations always ended by some allusion to the ship and the hat, and to the large-shouldered blond young man that came down after the hat; and Sylvia confided to Maggie that he had asked permission to call to see her the next summer, when he should come East after his graduation. Margaret had no other company, and she regularly looked for Sylvia on the evenings when she was alone, brightening the kitchen for the occasion so much as to convince the "down-stairs girl" that sly Maggie was accustomed to receive a beau in her absence.

One evening Miss Thorne found Maggie in tears.

"I've a mind to tell you all about it," said the girl, in answer to the inquiries of Sylvia, at the same time pushing her hair back off her face and leaning her head on her hands while she rested her elbows on the table.

"Maybe it will do you good to tell me," answered Sylvia, concealing her eager curiosity behind her desire to serve Margaret.

"Well, you see, miss, my sister Dora is purty."

"So are you, Maggie."

"No, but Dora is a young thing, and kind of helpless, like a baby. I was the oldest, and that Dora was my baby, like. Well, Andy Doyle and me were always friends. I wish I hadn't never seen him. But he seemed to be the nicest fellow in the world. There was never anything said between him an' me, only--well--but I can't tell ye--you're so young--you don't know about such things."

"Yes, I do. You loved him, didn't you?"

"You see, miss, he was always so good. Dora, she hadn't no end of b'ys that liked her. But anything that I had she always wanted, you may say, and I always 'umored her in a way. She was young and a kind of a baby, an' she is that purty, Miss Sylvy. Well, one of us had to go out to work in the mill, an' my mother, she said that Dora must go, because Dora wasn't any good about the house to speak of. She never knew how to do anything right. But Dora cried, and said she couldn't work in the mill, and so I went down to Larne to work in the mill, and Dora promised to look after the house. Now, at the time I went away Dora was all took up with Billy Caughey, and we thought sure as could be it was a match. But what does that girl do but desave Billy, and catch Andy. I don't think, miss, that he ever half loved her, but then I don't know what she made him believe; and then, ye know, nobody ever could refuse Dora anything, with her little beggin', winnin' ways. She just dazed him and got him engaged to her; and I don't believe he was ever entirely happy with her. But what could I do, miss? I couldn't try to coax him back--now could I? She was such a baby of a thing that she would cry if Andy only talked to me a

minute after I come home. And I didn't want to take him away from her. That was when the mill at Larne had shut up. And so I hadn't no heart to do anything more there; it seemed like I was dead; and I knowed that if I stayed there would be trouble, for I could see that Andy looked at me strange, like there was somethin' he didn't quite understand, ye may say; but I was mad, and I didn't want to take away Dora's beau, nor to have anything to do with a lad that could change his mind so easy. And so I come away, thinkin' maybe I'd get some heart again on this side of the sea, and that I could soon send for me old mother to come."

Here she leaned her head on the table and cried.

"Now, there," she said after a while, "to-day I got a letter from Dora; there it is!" and she pushed it to the middle of the table as though it stung her. "She says that Andy is comin' over here to make money enough to bring her over after a while, sure. It kind o' makes my heart jump up, miss, to think of seein' anybody from Drogheda, and more'n all to see Andy again, that always played with me, and---- But I despise him too, miss, fer bein' so changeable. But then, Dora she makes fools out of all of them with her purty face and her coaxin' ways, miss. She can't help it, maybe."

"Well, you needn't see Andy if you don't want to," said Sylvia.

"Oh! but I do want to," and Margaret laughed through her tears at her own inconsistency. "Besides, Dora wants me to help him get a place, and I must do that; and then, sure, miss, do you think I'd let him know that I cared a farthin' fer him? Not a bit of it!" and Maggie pushed back her hair and held herself up proudly.

The next morning, as Margaret laid the morning paper on Mr. Thorne's table in the library, she ventured to ask if he knew of a place for a friend of hers that was coming from Ireland the next week. That gentleman had caught the infection of Sylvia's enthusiasm for the Irish girl, and by the blush on her cheek when she made the request he was sure that his penetration had divined the girl's secret. So he made some inquiries about Andy, and, finding that he was "handy with tools," the merchant thought he could give him a place in his packing department.

It happened, therefore, that Sylvia rarely spent any more evenings in the kitchen. Instead of that, her little sister used to frequent it, for Andy was

very ingenious in making chairs, tables, and other furniture for doll houses, and little Sophy thought him the nicest man in the world. Maggie was very cool and repellent to him, with little spells of relenting. Sometimes Andy felt himself so much snubbed that he would leave after a five minutes' call, in which event Maggie Byrne was sure to relax a little at the door, and Sylvia or Sophy was almost certain to find her in tears afterward.

Andy could not, perhaps, have defined his feelings toward Margaret. He could not resist the attraction of the kitchen, for was not Maggie his old playmate and the sister of Dora? Sure, there was no harm at all in a fellow's goin' to see, just once a week, the sister of his swateheart, when the ocean kept him from seein' his swateheart herself. But if Andy had been a man accustomed to analyze his feelings he might have inquired how it came that he liked his swateheart's sister better even than his swateheart herself.

One evening he had a letter from Dora, and he thought to cheer Margaret with good news from home. But she would not be cheered.

"Now what's the matter, Mag?" Andy said coaxingly. "Don't that fellow in Larne write to ye?"

"What fellow in Larne?" demanded Margaret with asperity.

"Why, him that used to be so swate when ye was a-workin' in the mill."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, now, you needn't try to kape it from me! Don't you think I knew all about it? Do you think Dora wouldn't tell me, honey? Don't I know you was engaged to him before you left the mill at Larne? Has he gone an' desaved you now, Maggie? If he has, I don't wonder you're cross."

"Andy, that isn't true. I never had any b'y at Larne, at all."

"Now, what's the use denying it? That's always the way with you girls about such things."

"Andy Doyle, do you go out of this kitchen, and don't you never come back. I never desaved you in my life, and I won't have nobody say that I did."

A conflict of feeling had made Margaret irritable, and Andy was the most convenient object of wrath in the absence of Dora. Andy started slowly out through the hall; there he turned about, and said:

"Hold a bit, my poor Mag. Let me git me thoughts together. It's me's been desaved. If it hadn't 'a' been fer that fellow down at Larne there wouldn't never 'a' been anything betwixt me and Dora. And now----"

"Don't you say no more, Andy. Dora's a child, and she wanted you. Don't ye give her up. If you give her up, and she, poor child, on the other sides of the water, I'll never respect ye--d'ye hear that, now, Andy? Only the last letter she wrote she said she'd break her heart if I let you fall in love with anybody else. The men's all fools now, anyhow, Andy, and some of them is bad, but don't you go and desave that child, that's a-breakin' her heart afther you. And don't ye believe as I ever keered a straw for ye, for I don't keer fer you, nor no other man a-livin'."

Andy stood still for some moments, trying in a dumb way to think what to do or say; then he helplessly opened the door and went out.

III.

The next Thursday evening Andy did not come, and Margaret felt sorry, she could not tell why. But Sylvia came down into the lower hall, peered through the glass of the kitchen door, and, finding the maid sitting alone by the range, entered as of old. And to her Maggie Byrne, sore pressed for sympathy, told of her last talk with the comely young man.

"You see, miss, it would be too mean for me to take Dora's b'y away from her, fer he's the finest-lookin' and altogether the nicest young man anywhere about Drogheda; and Dora, she's always used to havin' the best of everything, and she always took anything that was mine, thinkin' she'd a right to it, and, bein' a weak and purty young thing, I s'pose she had, now, miss."

"I think she's mean, Maggie, and you're foolish if you don't take your own lover back again."

"And she on the other sides of the say, miss? And my own little sister that I packed around in me arms? She's full of tricks, but then she's purty, and she's always been used to havin' my things. At any rate, 'tain't meself as'll be takin' away what's hers, and she's trusted him to me, and she's away on the other sides of the water. At least not if I can help it, miss. And I pray fer help all the time. Besides, do you think I'd have Andy Doyle afther what's happened, even if Dora was out of the way?"

"I know you would," said Sylvia.

"I believe I would, miss, I'm such a fool. But then sometimes I despise him. If it wasn't fer me dear old mother, that maybe I'll never see again," and Maggie wiped her eyes with her apron, "I'd join the Sisters. I think maybe I have got a vocation, as they call it."

It was the very next evening after this interview that Bridget Monahan, the downstairs girl, gave Margaret a little advice.

"He's a foine young feller, now, Mag, but don't you be in no hurry to git married. You're afther havin' a nice face--a kind o' saint's face, on'y it's a thrifle too solemn to win the men. But if Andy should lave, ye might be afther doin' better, and ye might be afther doin' worruss now, Mag. But don't ye git married till ye've got enough to buy a brocade shawl. Ef ye don't git a brocade shawl afore you're married, niver a bit of a one'll ye be afther gittin' aftherwards. Girls like us don't git no money afther they are married, and it's best to lay by enough to git a shawl beforehand now, Mag. That's me own plan."

A few weeks later Maggie was thrown into grief by hearing of the death of her mother. Of course she received sympathy from Sylvia. Andy, also having received a letter from Dora, ventured to call on Maggie to express in his sincerely simple way his sympathy for her grief, and to discuss with her what was now to be done for the homeless girl in the old country.

"We must bring her over, Andy."

"I know that," said the young man. "I'll draw all my money out of the Shamrock Savings Bank to-morry and send her a ticket. But I'll tell you what, Mag, after I went away from here the last time I felt sure I'd never

marry Dora Byrne. But maybe I was wrong. Poor thing! I'm sorry fer her, all alone."

"Sure, now, Andy, you must 'a' made a mistake," said Maggie. "It's myself as may've given Dora rason to think I'd got a young man down at Larne. I don't know as she meant to desave you. She needn't, fer you know I don't keer fer men, neither you nor anybody. I'm goin' into the Sisters, now my mother's dead. I've spoken to Sister Agnes about it."

But whether it was from her lonely feeling at the death of her mother, or from her exultation at her victory over her feelings, or whether it was that her heart, trodden down by her conscience, sought revenge, she showed more affection for Andy this evening than ever before, following him to the area gate, detaining him in conversation, and bidding him goodnight with real emotion.

The next evening Andy came again with a long face. He had a paper in which he showed Maggie an account of the suspension of the Shamrock Savings Bank, in which the money of so many Irishmen was locked up, and in which were all of Andy Doyle's savings, except ten dollars he had in his pocket.

"Now, Mag, what am I goin' to do? It takes thirty-five dollars for a ticket. If I put my week's wages that I'll git to-morry on to this, I'm short half of it."

"Sure, Andy, I'll let you have it all if you want it. You keep what you've got. She's me own sister. On'y I'll have to wait a while, for I don't want to fetch into the Sisters any less money than I've spoke to Sister Agnes about."

"I'm a-goin' to pay ye back every cint of it, Mag, and God bless ye! But it 'most makes me hate Dora to see you so good. And I tell you, Maggie, the first thing when she gits here she's got to explain about that fellow down at Larne that she told me about."

"Andy," said Maggie, "d'ye mind now what I say. I've suffered enough on account of Dora's takin' you away from me, but I'd rather die with a broken heart than to have anything to do with you if you are afther breakin' that poor child's heart when she comes here."

"Oh, then you did keer for me a little, Maggie darlint?" exclaimed Andy. "I thought you said you never did keer!"

Maggie was surprised. "I don't keer for you, nor any other man, and I never----" But here she paused. "You ought to be ashamed to be talkin' that way to me, and you engaged to Dora. There, now, take the money, Andy, and git Dora's ticket, and don't let's hear no more foolish talkin' that it would break the poor dear orphan's heart to hear. The poor baby's got nobody but you and me to look afther her, now her mother's gone, and it's a shame and a sin if we don't do it."

IV.

Margaret Byrne hurried her work through. The steamer that brought Dora had come in that day. Dora was met at Castle Garden by her aunt, and Margaret had got permission to go to see her in the evening. As Andy Doyle had to go the same way, he stopped for Maggie. All the way over to the aunt's house in Brooklyn he was moody and silent, the very opposite of a man going to meet his betrothed. Margaret was quiet, with the peace of one who has gained a victory. Her struggle was over. There was no more any danger that she should be betrayed into bearing off the affections of her sister's affianced lover.

Maggie greeted Dora affectionately, but Dora was like one distraught. She held herself aloof from her sister, and still more from Andy, who, on his part, made a very poor show of affection.

"Well," said Dora after a while, "I s'pose you two people have been afther makin' love to one another for six months."

"You hain't got any right to say that, Dora," broke out Andy. "Maggie's stood up fer you in a way you didn't more'n half deserve, and it's partly Maggie's money that brought you here. You know well enough what a--a--lie, if I must say it, you told me about Mag's havin' a beau at Larne, and she says she didn't. You're the one that took away your sister's----" But here he paused.

"Hush up, Andy!" broke in Margaret. "You know I never keered fer you, or any other man. Don't you and Dora begin to quarrel now."

Andy looked sullen, and Dora scared. At length Dora took speech timidly.

"Billy will be here in a minute."

"Billy who?" asked Andy.

"Billy Caughey," she answered. "He came over in the same ship with me."

"Oh, I s'pose you've been sparkin' with him ag'in! You pitched him over to take me----"

"No, I haven't been sparkin' with him, Andy; at least, not lately. He's my husband. We got married three months ago."

"And didn't tell me?" said Andy, between pleasure and anger.

"No, we wanted to come over here, and we couldn't have come if it hadn't been for the money you sent."

"Why, Dora, how mean you treated Andy!" broke out Margaret.

"I knew you'd take up for him," said Dora pitifully, "but what could I do, sure? You won't hurt Billy, now, will you, Andy? He's afeard of you."

"Well," said Andy, straightening up his fine form with a smile of relief, "tell Billy that I wish him much j'y, and that I'll be afther thankin' him with all my heart the very first time I see him for the kindness he's afther doin' me. Good-night, Mrs. Billy Caughey, good luck to ye! As Mag says she don't keer fer me, I'll be after going home alone." This last was said bitterly as he opened the door.

"O Andy! wait fer me--do!" said Margaret.

"Ain't you stayin' to see Billy?" asked Dora.

"Not me. It's with Andy Doyle I'm afther goin'," cried Margaret, with a lightness she had not known for a year.

And the two went out together.

The next evening Margaret told Sylvia about it, and the little romance-maker was in ecstasy.

"So you won't enter the sisterhood, then?" she said, when Margaret had finished.

"No, miss, I don't think I've got any vocation."