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# The Way of a Maid With Men

BY MADGE BARLOW.

"I've brought Delia's body," announced Miss Quigley, mincing into the kitchen of John Connor's cottage and laying a brown paper parcel on the table. Delia's stepmother and stepfather received the ghastly intimation with soft, clucking sounds of joy. They placed Miss Quigley upon a chair as tenderly as if she were glass that a careless bump might break, and clasped in turn the kid-gloved hand she extended to each before raising her veil and applying a scented handkerchief to her moist, perspiring countenance. She was considered the "pink and pattern of gentility," and by her garb and deportment bore out her claim to be something above the common, although Providence had allocated to her the humble sphere of the village dress-maker.

"'Twas too much for the likes of you to carry," purred Mrs. Connor, a large, hard-featured woman, who ruled John and Delia Connor with a rod of iron. Miss Quigley simpered.

"Don't mention it, ma'am," she replied. "I'm proud to have the makin' of Delia's trowsaw, and to run over and fit her."

"You wouldn't be proud if 'twas your brother Terence she was marryin'," giggled Nancy, the second Mrs. Connor's offspring.

Her mother frowned at her from behind the visitor's chair. "Go and call Delia," she commanded sharply.

Nancy obeyed, and Miss Quigley looked vindictive.

"It must be a trial to you to have such a plain daughter, and Delia a born beauty," she said, avenging the child's blunder on the parent. Mrs. Connor flushed dully.

"Better a plain chick than none and the prospect of none," she retorted, the snap of her eye a battle signal.

Remembering that she who lives by the people is obliged to pander to the people, Miss Quigley drew in her horns. Murmuring that no offence was meant, and she hoped no offence would be taken, she opened the parcel and switched the current of Mrs. Connor's emotions on to the safer topic of clothes, feeling that she could afford to pardon Nancy's slip now that she had rescued her only brother from Delia's maker's aspiring soul yearned to see him clutches by urging the stepmother to support the claims of his rival, Bartley Tighe. Terence was clerk to Fatty Farrell, the local buyer of raw wool, and the dress-united to his master's daughter and heiress.

Between Terence and Bartley the struggle had been long and strenuous. Delia kept both on a string, unable to decide which she would accept. Bart's rugged strength and quiet masterfulness charmed her, but so did Terence's effeminate good looks and frothy chatter, not to speak of the lure of his white linen collars and fancy ties. Bart's superior position as a snug farmer ought to have biased her in his favour, for her father was merely a carter at the slate quarries of Doolish, but she had resolved to marry for love, and her chief worry was to pick her man and be sure she wouldn't regret the choice afterwards.

When she came to a fuller understanding of herself Delia would assuredly have taken the less ornamental Bartley, but Mrs. Connor interfered at the instigation of Miss Quigley, and ordered her to accept him or quit the house, and the girl pouted sullenly and said, "All right, I'll have him just to stop your tongue."

"You hear her, Jawn?" shrilled Mrs. Connor.

John muttered "Aye," and hung a submissive head. Years of subjection had accustomed him to the back seat in the family councils. Indeed, the sole occasion on which he drifted into any kind of prominence was on Delia's wedding day, when he—

"We shall come to that presently, however."

"Hark to your father layin' his commands on you," Mrs. Connor adjured. She had a habit of saddling him with the onus of those decrees of hers which threatened to engender friction. In this case she need not have apprehended friction. She should have known that no amount of bullying could compel wilful Delia to marry Bart unless she wished to. The pretty hypocrite's air of martyrdom was misleading.

"I'll do me father's biddin' if it breaks me heart," said she, the reproach of her big grey eyes scarifying simple John. In the gloom of the chimney corner his own heart wept blood because he lacked the moral courage to defy his tyrant to crush Delia, as she had crushed him, but the seeds of revolt were sown, and the second wife's daily crowing over her triumph fostered their quick growth. Mrs. Connor took the credit of the match to herself. She flew to tell Miss Quigley. Miss Quigley embraced her ally and passed the news to Terence, who sank under it. His pink cheeks yellowed, he lost flesh, and seemed ready to drop into a deadly decline. Delia passed Fatty Farrell's store oftener than she might have done, merely to note the ravages of cruel disappointment on Terence's stricken face.

"The poor fellow!" she would sigh.

Bart found that the beginning of his engagement didn't end his troubles. The girl he had won remained the tantalising mystery that had always been. Sometimes she let him think she was marrying him for love's sweet sake, sometimes that she was doing it to escape her stepmother's nagging, not caring whether he or another were her refuge. It is man's nature to covet madly the woman whose apparent indifference piques him, therefore Bart's passion increased by leaps and bounds. He was slow to speak of it, oddly shy for a strapping young giant

standing six feet in his socks, so he hid his adoration beneath a mask of heavy stolidity very ruffling to Delia's "amour propre." Terence, she mused, would have smothered her with caresses, raved of his devotion till his voice dried in his throat. And the grand big words Terence had! The full of his mouth of them.

She was nursing her grievance when Nancy called her to have her "body" fitted. Reluctantly she trailed indoors, kicking a stone before her, and during the fitting process her behaviour raised a chill fear that the bother of disposing of her was not yet finished. She gave Miss Quigley a bad quarter of an hour, scoffing at her praises of Bart, and maintaining that the sea held as good fish as ever were caught. While the sparring was brisk Connor entered, dusty and tired from his work, and Mrs. Connor said in a tone of relief, "Here's Jawn."

Miss Quigley glanced at him as perfunctorily as though Mrs. Connor had said, "Here's the cat," and continued to talk through a clatter of pins in her teeth. "For I've said it again and again," quoth she, "and I'd stick to it if I was to be struck dead the next minute. A more polite and gentlemanlier young chap than your financy, Delia, I never did behold."

"Her what?" bleated John, his interest roused.

"Her financy," purred Mrs. Connor.

"And what's that?"

"'Tis Frinch for her intended," tittered Miss Quigley.

"God help us!" he ejaculated, his mild eyes fastened on her like a fascinated bird's.

"I'm sure Delia's a lucky girl to get him, Mr. Connor."

"Are ye, Delia?" he asked.

"You and my mother can answer that," she replied.

Then sorrow sat down by the hearth with him, and he bit his pipe-stem across in sheer impotent rage. Mrs. Connor and Miss Quigley exchanged dubious looks.

"Well, them that despises Bart may go farther and fare worse," snapped the latter, rather ruffled.

Delia smiled a honeyed smile.

"How is the courtin' of Terence and Molly Farrell progressin'?" she inquired, mimicking the dressmaker's affected accents. The bony fingers wielding the bustling needle quivered. Miss Quigley sucked a bitter lip but kept her head.

"Terrible fond they are. Me brother is delecteriously happy."

"Isn't it wonderful the way he can conceal his happiness?" cooed Delia.

"For a brass fardin I'd have run the needle into her," Miss Quigley told her favourite apprentice. "Only the Lord put hands about me I swear I would. A common chit of her sort to gibe at me!"

Unaware of anything irritating in his conduct Bartley pursued his placid course, puzzled on occasions by his prickly little love's variable moods, blaming the fuss and excitement of bridal preparations, not dreaming that his inability to play the vehement lover gnawed like a cankerworm at the root of her peace. He would have been astonished had he known she wanted him to ape Terence's extravagant method of wooing and neglect his work to dance attendance on her, sing her praises, and flatter her, talk the flowery language of the novelette hero. He couldn't have done it to save his life. Instead he toiled that the harvest of his fields might be rich for her, and he freshened his house inside and out with paint and gay paper, whitewash and clean new thatch, to give her beauty a daintier setting. Her comfort was the motive power of all his labours. He could have married a fortune, being what is termed a "warm" man, and his condensation in stooping to John Connor's daughter amazed Doolish.

But his efforts to please her seldom succeeded. Her world had gone awry. Since her engagement she had ceased to be the centre of attraction where men congregated, she missed her flirtations, felt the chafing of her chains. Even gawky, freckled Nancy was more in request than she, for Nancy was free and unpromised. Spoiled Delia nursed a sense of injury, and Bart bore the brunt of her spleen, his patient endurance worthy of a Christian martyr. She had her reasonable periods, of course, or it would have been unbearable. He forgot the clouds when the sun shone.

The marriage morn arrived. The bride awoke in a captious frame of mind and had a word to say to anybody. Her cold silence and her peevish response to questions wrung John's withers. He saw her as a lamb dragged to the sacrifice through his cowardly yielding to the rule of the second Mrs. Connor.

Miss Quigley dressed Delia, relishing the task and purring over it like a complacent tabby. Some women in their suavely nasty humours do remind one of a purring cat. She brought Bartley to see her handiwork, pushing him playfully towards an entrancing vision wreathed and veiled, snowy white from top to toe. He stared and twisted his hat, turned pale and stammered. The sight of her snatched his breath.

"Am I nice?" asked Delia, spinning round on her heel. He choked replying.

"Mavourneen, you're fair as the buds of May, and the red mouth of you would tempt a saint."

"Is it you payin' a compliment?" she laughed. "Wisha, who'd think you had it in you, Bart?"

But to herself she thought, curiously resentful:

"He didn't say that yesterday, and I in my cotton frock."

It was a walking wedding, a string of couples marching along the middle of the road, the bride and best man leading the procession chapelward, the groom and maid behind them. A crowd of kinsfolk and almost the whole village gathered to witness the ceremony. Hot July sunshine flooded the chapel. It dazzled Delia's eyes. Bart's radiant face was bathed in its glory. She couldn't look at him without blinking. Shifting her gaze, she fixed it on the Quigley's standing at his back below the altar rail, occupying the solitary patch of shadow the interior afforded. The different expressions of brother and sister fascinated her.

Miss Quigley's was aggravatingly triumphant. She did not deny herself the gratification of a mocking smirk and a flaunt of the head. Her derisive actions goaded Delia.

The voices of Father Dan and Bartley seemed to come from an immeasurable distance. She heard nothing distinctly but the gross breathing of her stepmother at her elbow, noticed nothing but the behaviour of Miss Quigley. The priest had to ask twice, "Delia, wilt thou have this man, etc., etc."

The girl's brain swam. Her eyes glazed. Urged by a crazy impulse, an unaccountable impulse, she replied:

"Please, your reverence, I'd rather have Terence."

The next instant, realising what she had done, horror paralysed her and deprived her of speech.

An awful hush was broken by John Connor.

"And be the powers, darlin', ye'll have him, or I'll know the reason why," he cried.

Brooding upon Delia's fancied wrongs had temporarily deranged Mr. Connor. His conduct proved it. Plunging to the front he sized Terence and strove to pull him to the altar rails, Miss Quigley strove to prevent him, and the kinsfolk endeavoured to tear the three apart and nearly rent them asunder. Aghast at the profanation of the sacred place, old Father Dan sternly bade them desist on pain of his severe displeasure.

"But in spite of him me lace sleeves were tore to fitters," sobbed the dressmaker, describing the scene to the favourite apprentice. "And I split me nails on Jawn Connor's jaw. Bartley was the colour of ashes, and Delia fainted, and the wind-up of it was that we were all thrun out of the chapel like a lot of dirt."

"Gracious heaven!" gasped the apprentice. "'Twas terrible. And you the lady that you are, miss."

"I've sunk low," Miss Quigley wailed; "and Terence is lower. He broke from me clutches and flew to the brazen huzzy."

A ban of dire disgrace lay on the village and the luckless author of the scandal.

"'Tis Miss Quigley's fault," moaned Delia, stretched prone on the ground beside the domestic hencoop, drinking the cup of remorse to the dregs. "She drove me to it, the scorpion, and I've humbled Bartley, and he won't forgive me. Oh, oh! Amn't I the misfortunate girl to lose the best man that ever lived on her account! I'll die of grief and shame, so I will, and sorrow one need pity me."

Our heroine had come to her senses, you perceive.

An unexpected shock awaited her. After her declaration in the chapel everybody was bent on marrying her to Terence, her dotting father among the rest. Deaf to her hints that she loved him too well to leave him, John arranged an early date to circumvent a possible rehatching of plots between Mrs. Connor and her crouy. Terence haunted the cottage and was offensively familiar; at least, Delia pronounced his sentimental attentions an offence, though once they were her admiration and her pride. His visits caused Miss Quigley and Mrs. Connor to quarrel on the public street. According to Doolish gossips Miss Quigley "called Mrs. Connor out of her name somethin' crool," and Mrs. Connor "hailed Miss Quigley's false fringe off of her brow and hit her in the teeth with it."

Pandemonium reigned. Heedless of the pother, Bart stayed on his farm, spurning sympathy, toiling till he humped his broad shoulders in the futile effort to kill his pain. A rumour of Delia's approaching marriage reached his ears and utterly crushed him. He didn't notice in blue gloomings a little figure off the hill above the house, peering through the whins to see him pass. It was recreant Delia tearfully snatching stolen glimpses of her lost Eden and her estranged Adam, scheming (or she wouldn't have been Delia) how she might recover it and him, and still avert the flaming sword of an insulted man's wrath. A ticklish problem, but women's wits are nimble.

Bart laid his busy fork down and sat on a pile of fragrant hay to mop his steaming face. The dew had scarcely dried on the sun-swept uplands. He had been astir since dawn, blunting heartache with hard, physical labour, for it was the day of his rival's crowning. In a few hours Delia would wear Terence's ring.

"I dunno why she treated me so," he thought aloud, vacantly following the meanderings of a grass-bug through the stubble. "'Tisn't natural for a dove-eyed wisp of a colleen to act the way she did. I can't make her out at all. I'm clane bewildered."

Perched on top of the high green ditch to the rear of him Delia studied him intently. He dropped his unlit pipe amid the hay, took his head 'twixt his calloused palms, and sighed deeply. She tucked her pink cotton skirt around her limbs and slithered down the side of the ditch, bumping into him.

He glanced across his shoulder, darkness gathering on his astonished countenance. Delia did not quail. She seated herself in the hay opposite him, folded her arms, and seemed to challenge scrutiny.

"What brings you here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Is it you asks that, Bartley Tighe?" Her indignation staggered him. "You who helped my own father to ruin me."

"I? Are you sane? Didn't you jilt me at the altar? Didn't you say, 'Please your reverence, I'd rather have Terence?'" Bart flung up hands of appeal to the listening heavens.

"If you and the others had let me finish there'd have been no ructions, but you didn't, tryin' to be smart the lot of you."

Her nostrils curled with scorn.

"I say I wasn't let finish," she went on. "John Connor started raisin' ructions before a body could as much as draw a breath, and I fainted. A fine gang of men you were, frightenin' a timid creature into a faint and deseratin' a place of worship. Be proud of yourselves. If Terence Quigley hadn't carried me to a tombstone and

sprinkled water over me p'raps I wouldn't be alive to-day. I'd be dead and better off."

"Aw, no," he protested unsteadily.

"Better off," she repeated. "They're compellin' me to marry Terence. They said you rushed home in a black temper. Faith, your temper's easy kindled!"

"'Twas you jilting me," he declared.

"You didn't hear it right?" she quavered.

He gasped slack-jawed, and Delia wiped a dry eye.

"You saw the Quigleys standin' starin' at me, Bart?"

"I couldn't, but I felt them back of me. They weren't there for aught good, the same pair."

"I had that very notion, Bart dear. And only I was interrupted I was goin' to say, 'Please, your reverence, I'd rather have Terence put where the sight of him wouldn't sicken me.'"

Bart swallowed with difficulty. It was no wonder.

Her eyes clung to his, limpid and innocent, rebulking his incredulity, and he wanted to believe. He wanted to dreadfully.

"You are speakin' the truth?" he queried.

"Would you doubt me?" she murmured, her voice liquid and soft.

"I'd as lief doubt the blessed saints," he said.

For a moment Delia languished under conviction of sin, but her spirits were buoyant. Did not the end justify the means?

"Bart," she whispered, snuggling into his arms, "Father Dan is in the chapel beyond."

A mutual comprehension of the possibilities of the situation illumined their faces. The hour, they felt, was big with fate.

"He'll likely be in it a good while, Bart," fingering his waistcoat buttons. Bart lifted her to her feet, pale and resolute.

"Would Father Dan marry us?"

Delia did her best to appear quite scared, and failed.

"He'd be glad to," she blushed. "I was talkin' to him ten minutes ago—talkin' of yourself and me. He vowed he'd have a nervous illness if I wasn't kept from plaguin' him, and 'twould be a charity for some strong, determined fellow to come to his rescue."

"That's me," chuckled Bart. "He got me to the life. Lord love you, alanna, what else did his reverence say?"

"He said maybe . . . if we were quick . . . and I was truly penitent . . ."

Bart grabbed his coat and took a firm grip of Delia.

"Now's our chance," he said, heading for the short cut across the fields.

## WIT AND HUMOUR

Elsie: "Tom says I am a riddle to him."

Maudie: "I know. He wants to give you up."

"Very, very sad, sir," said the doctor. "I greatly regret to tell you your wife's mind is completely gone." "I'm not surprised, Doc," returned the husband, "she's been giving me a piece of it every day for the last fifteen years."

"Sandy," said the minister, "did you not hear me calling to you when you were going in that public-house yesterday?" "Ay, meenister," replied Sandy. "I heard ye, but I had the price o' only yin drink!"

Lawyer: "It's absolutely essential that your correct age is entered." Spinster (faintly): "Well—er—fifty-three! But please write it as illegibly as possible."

The languid lady drifted into the dog-dealer's and looked round. "I want a dog," she said vaguely. "I don't quite know the sort of dog I want, at least I don't know what they're called. A head rather like a bulldog, you know, and the rest like a fox-terrier, only rather shaggy hair and black markings. Do you keep any dogs like that?" "No, mum," said the shopkeeper, emphatically. "We drowns 'em."

A woman who had received an interesting bit of news said to her little daughter: "Marjorie, dear, auntie has a new baby, and now mummy is the baby's aunt, daddy is the baby's uncle, and you are her little cousin." "Well," said Marjorie, wonderingly, "wasn't that arranged quick?"

Gipsy: "You want to know about your future husband, beautiful lady?" Visitor: "No. I want to know something about the past of my present husband for future use!"

"So this baby is a girl?" beamed the rector, as he walked round the baby show. The proud father assented. "And this other one—is it of the contrary sex?" The mother's eye was on her husband, but with no thought of the wrath to come he replied, blithely, "Yes, she's a girl, too."

First Bright Lad: "I had a funny dream last night." Second Ditto: "What was it?" "I dreamed that I was eating shredded wheat, and when I woke up half the mattress was gone."

Jack: "I shall marry for beauty." Jessie: "And I for brain." An Onlooker: "Well, everybody for what he needs most!"

A young German matron in whom the shopping instinct was strong asked a butcher the price of Hamburger steak. "One shilling a pound," he replied. "But," she said, "the price at the corner store is only sixpence." "Vel," said Otto, "vy don't you pay down there?" "They haven't any," she explained. "Oh, I see," replied the butcher. "Ven I don't have it I sell it for fivepence."

Mistress: "I wouldn't hold the baby so near the tiger's cage, Nora." Nora (the nurse): "There's no risk, mum. The tiger is a 'man-eater,' and the child is a girl."