The Marriage Of Mary Ascension

by George Egerton

A Millstreet love story

Aubane Historical Society

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INTRODUCTION

A 'New Woman' from Millstreet

In 1893 there was a collection of short stories published in London by the John Lane Company which caused a sensation and effectively launched what came to be known as the "New Woman" writers' movement. The stories were called "*Keynotes*" and were a best seller, selling several thousand copies immediately and were translated into seven languages. They were written by George Egerton (1859-1945) whose real name was Mary Chavelita Dunne and she was living in Millstreet where the stories were written. She later explained "As a matter of fact, I wrote *Keynotes* straight off, *The Little Grey Glove* (one of the stories. J.L.) on the back of an up-turned tea-tray after supper in the gauger's cottage near Millstreet, Co. Cork." (30/4/1930).

The cottage, called Ardrath, was located in the townland of Dooneen (see "A Millstreet Miscellany (6)"). She was then married to Egerton Tertius Clairmonte. He was an adventurer down on his luck and penniless. He spent his time fishing, most likely in the Blackwater and its tributaries, and pottering about in their garden and their resulting poverty was one reason for her writing the stories.

The 'New Woman' phenomenon was a feminist literary movement that dealt with the changing ideas of femininity and women's place in society. She is credited with being the first writer in English to present female sexual drives explicitly as existing independently of, and, differently from male sexuality. Her stories challenged convention not only in their frank treatment of female sexuality - they also anticipate twentieth-century modernism in their focus on their characters' inner lives. She said that only a woman could explore "the *terra incognita* of her, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her – in a word to give her away, as man had given himself in his writings."

Some extracts from her first story will give a flavour of her writings:

"She fancies herself in Arabia on the back of a swift steed. Flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her, and she can see the clouds of sand swirl, and feel the swing under her of his rushing stride; and her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, — a song to her steed of flowing mane and satin skin, an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat; a song to the untamed spirit that dwells within her. Then she fancies she is on the stage of an ancient theatre out in the open air, with hundreds of faces upturned towards her. She is gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue. Her arms are clasped by jewelled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils round her hips. Her hair floats loosely, and her feet are sandal-clad, with the delicate breath of vines and the salt freshness of an incoming sea seems to fill her nostrils. She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissome waist, and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what he craves, be it good or evil. And she can feel now, lying on the shade of Irish hills with her head resting on her scarlet shawl and her eyes closed the grand intoxicating power of swaying all these human souls to wonder and applause. She can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded

breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow, now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with a human note of passion in its strain."

And:

"They have all overlooked the eternal wildness, the untainted primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman. Deep in through ages of convention the primeval trait burns an untameable quantity that may be concealed but is never eradicated by culture – the keynotes of women's witchcraft and women's strength. But it is there, sure enough, and each woman is conscious of it in her truth-telling hours of quiet self-scrutiny – and each woman in God's wide world will deny it, and each woman will help another to conceal it- for the woman who tells the truth and is not a liar about herself is untrue to her sex and abhorrent to man, for he has fashioned a model on imaginary lines, and he has said, 'so I would have you,' and every woman is an unconscious liar, for so man loves her.

And when a Strindberg or a Nietzsche arises and peers into the recess of her nature and dissects her ruthlessly, the men shriek out louder than the women, because the truth is all times unpalatable, and the gods they set up are dear to them."

She was a Catholic and highly critical of the Church she saw in Ireland. She commented on her friends and neighbours in Millstreet:

"We are going to kill some pike in a quarry near here. I like seeing them killed. The Canon comes to see me sometimes. He is a nice harmless, Irish gentleman, neither he nor his curate take any part in politics. The farmers here don't care one fig for Ireland or any class but themselves, "Eeesha! Mushagh! I dunno about Home Rule, if we had a good land bill, that would lower the rints!" That is all they want, and land here in many cases is better and cheaper than any of the same kind in England or Scotland.

They are fearfully lazy and shiftless. Mrs. O'S. leaves the cows unfed or watered (they are beastly cruel to animals, all catholic countries I have been in are the same) to go and 'pay rounds' at a well decorated with crockery offerings. I haven't patience with them. The Canon sees it very plainly and is not too popular 'accordin.'" (6/7/1892).

She seems unaware of certain basic facts of the time and had some big blind spots as regards the socio-political situation in the Ireland of the day which prevented her having a rounded view of the society she found herself in.

The Canon would have been Canon Griffin, and contrary to what she says, he was notorious *for* his political involvement - against the Land League.

He was almost unique as a Parish Priest in the country in this regard. Earlier publications of ours have detailed this. That is why he was not popular. He could not understand why people wanted to own their own land and why they were not that enthusiastic about working land, ultimately, for their landlords' benefit. There could not be a meeting of minds on this and the Canon, and Egerton, were mixing up cause and effect in their comments on laziness, etc.

To both Egerton and the Canon the existing landlord–tenant relationship were sacrosanct, laws of nature and of God. The tenant farmers of the day would therefore be very wary, suspicious and careful in what they said to the Canon and Egerton in these circumstances and, no doubt, that could have appeared 'shiftless' to them.

As for the cruelty to animals it seems contradictory to love killing fish and bemoan ill- treatment of other animals.

However, she described herself as "intensely Irish" and her critique of the Church and Ireland was not from the usual English derogatory perspective as she disliked England just as much at that time. She explained her feelings to her father in a letter from

London:

"It is all humbug, part of the most positive British doctrine – of commit adultery, seduce any woman you can, in fact sin as you please but don't be found out. It's all right so long as you don't shock us by letting us know." (15/3/1891).

Her cultural perspective then was that of Germany and particularly that of the brutal honesty of Nietzsche. She is credited with being the first writer in English to refer to him as she had studied him earlier in Germany before he was translated into English. She does not therefore fit into the usual groove of Irish and/or English writers today and that is probably the reason she is not really acclaimed by our modern *literati*, even our feminist writers, whose world begins and ends in London.

For example, she stands in stark contrast, in every way, to the intensely English Elizabeth Bowen lauded nowadays as an Irish writer though her Irishness was essentially a literary facade and a cover that proved very useful for her espionage work here during WWII when she declared herself to be a very, very Irish writer indeed! And Bowen never delved so deeply into the psyche of women, and men, as Egerton did, and in so far as she did it, it was derivative of the ground that had been opened up by Egerton and the other 'New Woman' writers long before her.

Bowen is introverted, staid, tiresome and irremediably focussed on the mores of the English middle class in contrast to the exhilarating and adventurous Egerton whose subject matter is human nature itself – whatever that is.

For example, the latest book about Bowen from the UCC expert on her, Eibhear Walshe, says: "Bowen was close only to women of her own caste and had little or no empathy with Irish women writers from other classes or traditions." (*Elizabeth Bowen's Selected Irish Writings*, 2011, page 17)

Egerton's writing was stymied and curtailed by publishers after the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 when a reaction set in against her and others who were breaking new ground on the cultural/literary front and her writing never recovered from this setback.

Some years after her initial fame, in 1905, she wrote the following short story about a love affair in Millstreet and the fate of its heroine, Mary Ascension Moylan. The town is very thinly disguised as Millroad. I don't know of any other such story based on the area. Written from Egerton's perspective, and in her style, it gives an unvarnished, vivid, compelling, portrayal of Millstreet and its people at the time but it needs a 'health warning' as she did not have a comprehensive view of the society she wrote about and had a jaundiced, partial, view of it. She was in it but clearly not of it.

An intriguing suggestion she makes is that the town had a previous Gaelic name that meant "the little town in the lap of the hills." I don't think this has ever been suggested or recorded before. It is, however, a distinct possibility as the place would not have been nameless in Gaelic Ireland, which gloried in wonderfully descriptive names, and the description fits it perfectly.

This could mean that it might have been known as something along the lines of 'Baile i n-ucht na sléibhte,' or some shortened version of it.

Jack Lane
October 2011

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The Marriage of Mary Ascension

by George Egerton It was market-day in a little Irish town lying in the lap of the hills, where Cork slips through a shallow valley to greet wild Kerry. Millroad, they call it in the ordnance map, with that cult of the obvious and commonplace so strangely English. The old Irish name "the little town in the lap of the hills," had instinctive poetry, therefore more of truth, in its naming. Whatever beauty it may have once had vanished with its growth; it had become as uninteresting as its English name. A mile of dirty road flanked by a deep ditch, with rank, rush-patched land stretching away on each side, without hedge or tree to break its grey-green poverty, led from the ugly railway station to the keynote of the town – a mill at the side of a dilapidated bridge. A sullen brown river ran sluggishly under the crumbling arches, swirling into amber-white froth round heaps of cans, hoops, crockery shards, turf creels, and the carcase of a sheep with its bleached ribs sticking up like the frame of an old boat, - in fact all the refuse of a town unhampered by modern devilries in the shape of sanitary measures, main drainage or local dustmen.

The town itself was shaped like a dumbbell. The centre, one long, wide, atrociously paved street, was flanked by shops, eight out of ten of which were "licensed to sell wine, spirits, tea, and tobacco." Church and State had each grabbed an end knob, and, in conformity with the world's history, they flourished at the expense of the people. In this instance, being in Ireland the State was represented by the Church (that is, the Protestant place of worship), the police barracks and the court-house. The little stronghold of State religion was, of course, out of all proportion to the number of its congregation of twenty souls. The handsome stone rectory stood in the middle of neglected grounds, with unpruned arbours, ragged shrubberies, and a riot of perennial flowers. Some half dozen thoroughbreds cropped the grass between the rhododendrons and laurel bushes, and jumped the haw-haw (a type of ditch, but known as a dyke hereabouts. J.L.) which once divided paddock from lawn. In the absence of mothers' meetings, parish duties, or tea-fights, that very fine judge of a horse, the parson's wife (a daughter of Nick le Touche, the trainer) found the breeding and breaking in of hunters a lucrative and attractive occupation. The police barracks, a monster white building, was not unlike a fortress, with its barred windows, loopholes, and double sentry-boxes; indeed it had once been an important military station, and now stood sentry by the vestry wall.

The other knob looked more prosperous, consisting, as it did, of the chapel (Roman Catholic Church), the priest's house, schools and convent. It spoke volumes for the business instincts of those pious ladies that they had chosen, as is the case in every town in Ireland, the most attractive bit of ground in the place for their home. The belfry tower, with shrill-toned bell, peeped out through the only beautiful trees for miles around. Such of the solid grey building that was visible from the road above was clad with a lacework of well-trimmed white ivy. In season, lilac and laburnum and a rose of great daring would peer over the cloistered wall – startling beauty in the surrounding ugliness. A gigantic mission cross with a plaster Christ stood at the entrance to the chapel yard. Tame grey pigeons waddled with satisfied churring along the extended arms, whilst the sparrows foraged amongst the crown of thorns. Now and then a woman, with the head of her blue cloak drawn over her head (therefore a woman from the mountain district on the Kerry side), would stop and kiss the nailed, pierced feet, and tell a decade of her rosary. Mostly, they passed on; choosing rather, if they had time for devotions after their marketing was done, to "pay rounds" at one of the many holy wells in the neighbourhood.

The white Christ on the cross could look across the meadows, where the low brown river meandered by the "sally-trees" to the "well of the Saint," whither women went to "pay rounds" for ailments peculiar to their sex, or pray deliverance from the (in the peasant mind) reproach of barrenness; could see them in the grey, cool evening rocking with fervent appeal, as they went the round of the well on their knees. The little pool of ever-crystal water held millions of pins in every stage of tarnish, from silver brightness to red-brown rust, votive offerings – surely a relic of pagan times. Farther away, where the meadows rose to creep up the slope, there was a nameless well (near the top of Mushera. J.L.) at which men 'paid rounds' for sick cattle; there the propitiatory offering took the shape of trouser buttons. And, could He have turned His tortured head, and followed the winding mountain road up to where mists gather over Mushera Mor and Mushera Beg; past the lake of the 'fraughans' or 'hurts' – where the sulky trout are almost black, and the bald-headed crows flap heavily amongst the steel-grey boulders – He might have discovered the ruined church of Ballyvourney. There, held in a hole in the wall, is the wonder-stone, 'the stone of the cures.' Old folks, who have seen and felt it, say: "It is cool to the touch, and black to the sight like a darkened mirror." Crowds of pilgrims wend their way there to the yearly 'pattern' in cars, on horseback, on foot. They used to confess, and hear mass on the hill-side – it may be that they do still – and then take out the sacred stone, and piously touch their sores with it. A lesser cure might be tried, by seeking under an old moss-grown gravestone for 'a bone of the saint' – a tibia, or fibula, shiny and worn at the knuckle by frequent service. This was in the old days; for an irreverent pig-jobber stole up one night, and carried off the stone with sacrilegious hands to cure pigs down Bantry way. Sleep, the tale has it, overpowered him on the way, and the stone was restored miraculously to its former place in the wall; but the stones around it closed tightly upon it, and ever since that time the pilgrims must content themselves with putting their hand and touching it with a cloth, which they can then lay on the evil to be cured. And in all this the grave white Christ with the tortured brow would find little of Himself or His teachings. Indeed, He has as little in common with the saints of the 'pattern,' the severe church rules, and the fanatical ravings against dance and song, and all the beautiful wooing of man and maid, as the little lady Mary's son of the Apocrypha, who made clay sparrows on Sunday, had with the dour Moloch of Calvin's invention.

The tender day, silken soft, with a moist caress, like the touch of a child's fresh lips, spoke but faintly here of young or young desire, or the thrill of the senses, which responds in normal man and maid to the whispers of the spring. Fear of sin bred fearsomeness of the soul; the imperative call of nature became an evil to be fought against, as a ghoul luring to death and damnation; and, as that way madness lies, the roll-call of the country asylum could tell its tale to all who seek the truth without dismay. "Better be the sane mother of a bastard than a mad virgin!" said "the woman who would not be cheated," when the cost of the pearl of chastity in Ireland's fair crown was explained to her by "the man who wasn't afraid of the truth."

There was little greeting between the men and women who were flocking into town to buy and sell. The girls kept close to their mothers and spoke little, watching the noticeably few young men with shy eyes, or a furtive smile that peered through narrowed lids and veil of lashes. Throughout the forenoon, lines of vehicles of all kinds had been streaming in from the crossroads. There was a tendency to race on the part of every driver. The boys, and indeed many of the women, screamed in savage gutturals, "Gwan, gwan now, gwan!" to the asses, adding an imprecation now and again, in Irish. When sawing at jaws or the steady thwack of a blackthorn failed to get up a gallop, a pin, inserted deftly in the end of a

stick and thrust on the inside of a hind leg, where the hair grows thin, seldom failed in its effect. A brutal callousness to animal suffering was everywhere in evidence. Fowl and geese, tied tightly by the legs in bunches of six or seven, hung, head downwards, all through the longest market day, without water or thought of their possible torture. Many of the asses were galled or had ghouts of blood at their jaws. The most soft-eyed of the women with beautiful brows would pluck her geese alive for a bed, with a smile at remonstrance. One would have to go to Spain, or the countries of the South American republics to find a parallel to such brutal indifference to animal suffering.

A girl, so delicate looking and so daintily clad she would have passed muster anywhere out of her native country as a woman of gentle birth and breeding, came out through a gateway at the side of a narrow, three-storeyed house opposite the barracks. She picked her way fastidiously through the refuse in the roadway, and inclined her head with a stiff little smile to those who bade her the time of day as she passed. She took the road mountainwards. One farmer, the centre of a laughing group, said something as he looked after her which drew a peal of laughter from the listeners. A dry little woman with an acid smile said: "Troth, Bid Magrath'll see to that."

The lower storey of the house was a shop with a dirty plate-glass window; a crack across one corner was held together by gelatine lozenges. Battered tins of peaches, salmon, and corned beef lay higgledy-piggledy with loops of fly-blown macaroni, packets of starch, and tins of mustard. A line of freshly-painted gold lettering above the door informed strangers that James Moylan was "licensed to sell Tea, Wine, Spirits, and Tobacco."

Yet it had little of the usual public-house about it, for Moylan served as he pleased. Most of the spirit trade was done across the counter in bottles; and those who stepped into the parlour behind the shop were generally decent people of the "strong" farmer class, treating friends, concluding a bargain, or arranging a match over a bottle of wine or a noggin of whiskey. Shy young girls, with the permission of parents, declared for a glass of "the sherry wine" or "the port," as the case might be, in response to the invitations of cousins back on a visit from America – cousins who kindled their imagination and woke a desire for the freer life of the wonderful country beyond the sea. They could drink it safely, for it was, as in all small Irish towns, of a quality unknown in country places in England.

James Moylan was reputed to be a "warm" man. He was a retired police pensioner, whose religion – he was a Catholic – had not, it was said in official circles, been his only bar to promotion. He had served though troubled times; and information judiciously withheld from too zealous superiors until an Atlantic liner had cleared Queenstown, or discharged her live freight in New York; or of official movements made known in the right quarter, was good for a draft from America from more quarters than one. All this was conjecture. In any case, Moylan had enough on retiring to open a shop; for, although he had his dead wife's fortune, that was to be Mary's dowry.

The district, a disaffected one always, seemed to offer little encouragement to trade; but Moylan combined a judicious money-lending with agencies for life and fire insurance, guano, sheep-dip and patent churns. He had never suffered under the imputation of being a *gombeen* man, for his rate of interest was fair – he had not been known on occasion to take it out in produce – nor had he ever brought any man into court, held a distraint, or been a party to a garnishee. He had many American visitors, and the priests themselves knew nothing of the esoteric significance of his business.

He was standing behind a railed desk, somewhat higher than the counter, making entries into a private ledger. A farmer in an old-fashioned frieze coat, "Caroline" hat, and coarse white linen Gladstone collar, had just counted out three dirty one-pound notes, some gold, a

florin in silver, and a few coppers. Moylan shoved back the silver and coppers, and put the gold and notes into separate chamois bags with a slow smile glinting thorough his pursy eyelids.

He was a stout, flabby man, saved from slouchiness by the drill of earlier years. His face was puffy, the colour of pale beeswax, with a fleshy, porous nose. A long, firm, well-cut upper lip contrasted oddly with a loose purplish nether lip, which he had a habit of protruding and then catching in with a sudden suction, changing the whole character of his face from one of amiable slackness to shrewd hard purpose; at such moments, his eyes shifted from pale grey to deep violet. A fringe of sparse, yellow-grey hair struggled from ear to ear beneath his jaws and chin. A black linen apron showed underneath a homespun tweed coat.

As the farmer passed out a little hard-featured woman, with a pious trick of turning up her eyes like a sick hen when any one spoke to her, stepped forward with a sidelong bend of the body to the counter. She handed over a letter with an American stamp:

"Ye can read it and keep it till Saturday, an' consider what I'd best say."

He nodded, without speaking.

"And how is Mary Ascension?" She gave a quick, sidelong look at the parlour.

"She is well."

"Glory be! It's only like yesterday since we waked herself, an' Mary Ascension the very split of her. You'll be making up a fine match for her. They're all sayin' you'll give her ---"

Moylan drew his lip in suddenly, with a sound like cupping. He said with an odd smile, not without a touch of malicious humour in it:

"Bid Magrath is inside. Will ye step up?"

The sharp eyes had noticed the change in his face, but she answered equably:

"Maybe, thin, I will, later on; they're sayin ------"

Moylan turned his back on her, and rapped on the window with a stick; a big, loose-limbed, laughing man turned at the sound; and, tossing back a jest over his shoulder to a group of men and women on the pavement, came into the shop. "Musha, an' how's yourself, Ellen?" he said mockingly to the little woman; "an' how's the family?"

He ended his question with a laugh. The widow Ryan, a cousin of Moylan's late wife, accepted defeat. "You'll laugh once too often, Michael O'Connell!" she retorted to the laughing man; and then settling the small, black silk fringed shawl she wore over her shoulder, added to Moylan:

"I'm going up to Father O'Sullivan now, to talk over Kate Ellen's vocation. She has decided on the Ursulines, but I'll be back on Sunday after last mass."

The impassive face relaxed as she went out.

"What'll you take?" he shoved over two bottles, as he asked.

"She's a holy terror" said the laughing man sympathetically.

"There's another of them girls going into a convent, an' Mary Ann says it's only to get away from herself. That's three nuns and two priests she's got. Be gob, she's paving the way to heavin, anyway."

"Well she'll have no trouble with them, there's that in it."

The laughing man stopped, with his glass raised to his mouth, and a wonderfully shrewd look displaced the smile in his eyes.

"Is Bid troublesome?"

At a silent nod of assent, he scratched his ear thoughtfully.

"Well, it's too late to go agin her now. Get the girleen married, and out of it! Father

O'Sullivan'll help you to a match, if it was only for the marriage money. Begob, he's a terror for the dues! Five percent, not a penny less. Well, here's luck to it!"

"I guess it's luck ye'll be wanting, Michael O'Connell, if you lift that elbow of yours so often!"

The man changed colour at the soft Irish voice, with the old Eve mockery underlying the new American note in it. A close observer would have seen the effort needed before he could turn a devil-may-care face to meet the searching, wistful, angry look in a pair of unmistakable Irish eyes. The turned-up hat and the long feather gave a theatrical look to the dark, handsome face of the girl who has just entered the shop, attended by a crowd of girls and boys who watched her admiringly. Her tweed dress, tan gloves, and long gold chain, holding watch and bag, made her stand out among her companions.

"Faith, it's not luck I'll be wantin', when its' all the way from America ye come to have a look at me!"

An intenser colour splashed the girl's vivid face as the laughter rippled round her.

"I'd be heart-scalded for a reason to come back, if I couldn't find a better one than that. I guess time hasn't altered the conceit ye have of yerself."

"Troth, then, it hasn't taken the edge off your tongue, nayther, though it's left ye handsomer than ever. It's a pity....."

"How's yerself, Mr. Moylan?" She put out her hand, with a twist of shoulder that shut off the big man, whose eyes never left her face.

"About the same. Ye won't find many changes here. We heard yer uncle died out there. Are ye home for good? It's buying a property ye'll be with all the money he left."

With the easy diplomacy which is so inherent a factor of the peasant blood, she paid no heed to his question, but inquired about his daughter and her health. Then she turned to a long-faced, delicate-looking woman with a shawl over her bonnet.

"What'll you have, Delia, the port or sherry?"

"I'll have a glass of the sherry wine, thank ye."

"An' you? An' you?"

There was a feverish eagerness in her questions. The laughing answers ranged from a glass of the port or sherry wine to ginger "corjel" and lemonade. Laughing with shyness and gaiety, they pushed one another into the parlour behind the shop – a dingy room with a round table, covered with Italian cloth, cut to fit it and then bound with braid. Moylan busied himself setting bottles and glasses, and two saucers with sweet biscuits and ginger nuts on a tray. One slip of a girl, with the brow of a saint and freckles powdering her white skin until it looked like a turkey egg, had stayed behind, and was watching the man in suspense.

The girl turned; her eyes challenging, irate, were almost on a level with his, and there was a catch in her throat as she asked, with a supreme effort to steady her voice:

"Will you join us, Michael O'Connell?"

A sudden fire leaped to his eyes and set her lids fluttering as she watched him; then the eagerness gave way to a comical look of distress, and his voice sounded indifferent as he replied:

"I'm sorry I can't, and that's the truth;
I ---- "

The fire flamed up in her eyes again, as flame to flax, and her look swept from him to the counter, where the two bottles stood by the empty glass. She tore at her gloves and seemed ready to rush out of the shop in her anger. The girl at his side – now that a like distress played over their features, a delicate family likeness could be traced between them – caught

his arm, crying in distress:

"A-a-h! Wait, will you Honora? Ah, then, wait! Shure, perhaps Michael has had his allowance! Have you?"

The man had stretched out his hand with a muttered oath, for the bottle. He nodded as he turned, and, with a patient tenderness in his voice, which belied the roughness of his words said hoarsely:

"Keep your tongue in your gob, Eily. Honora was always ready to believe the worst of me!"

The girl seized his hand in spite of him, and shoved the bottle away, with a terrified appeal in her child-eyes.

"Don't, for the love o' God, Michael agrah, don't break yer pledge! He's been a three-glass man for four years, Honora! A-a-h don't go make him break it!"

He put down the glass, thrust his hands in his pockets, and went our through the door. The girl called Honora whispered, in awed realisation of what the words were going to mean for her, "Four years, Eily!" then followed him quickly . She called sharply --

"Michael!"

He flinched, as if shot in the back, but didn't turn.

"Oh, Michael!" She put her hand on his sleeve. He looked round into her penitent eyes.

"Michael, avic, I'm sorry. I didn't know. Can't ye understand it makes me mad to find ye drinkin' when I came back, it made me think of all that happened before I went. I was fit to be tied. I ---"

"What brought ye back?"

"What sent me away?"

The Irish way of answering a question with a query seemed to be entirely satisfactory, for his eyes filled with light, and his lips curled into love-laughter, as he held out his hand and said simply:

"Ye'll trust me now, Honora, an', with the help o' God, I'll deserve it!"

Then with the sudden change from solemnity to mirth which makes it so difficult for the English to understand the Celt, he added:

"Bad scran to old Moylan! Only for him asking me to have a drink, I'd have one to spare for ye."

His laugh rang out jovially, and hers chimed in with it. A priest crossing over from the courthouse turned his head as he heard it. His puzzled gaze was displaced by one of keen interest as he recognised the girl. His was a typical, Irish, peasant head. The blue-black shadow on his long upper lip and strong jaw, and the hair growing right down under his round collar told of animal vigour. His brown eyes were shrewd, hard, and inexpressive of his own feelings. The broad, strong-bridged nose and narrow forehead gave an impression of obstinate power. Francis Xavier O'Sullivan was senior curate, but, as Canon Cleary was delicate in health, and disinclined, as a student, to meddle with politics and parochial quarrels, he had it all his own way. His methods were autocratic and retrogressive. He ruled the parish with an iron hand. Dancing, cards, cup-tossing (divination by tea-leaves), the keeping company of man and maid, were all alike "occasions of sin," the subjects of violent denunciation from the pulpit. Woe betide the luckless boy or girl caught walking out together. They ran the risk, if they persisted after due cautioning, of being "called" from the altar after High Mass. He exacted all dues, at a scale fixed by himself – five per cent. on a marriage portion in all cases.

He turned back, and halted near the door of the shop. The sweet laughter of the women mingled with the jesting voices of the men. He looked in; the dusty glass window in the

partition prevented him from recognising any of them. He drew his brows sharply together, and walked on, with his hands crossed behind his back – and the tender Spring whispered insistently through every bawn and ploughland, and stirred the hearts of youth, and sent the thought of man to maid, and maid to man; and up above, a tiny cloud, gathering as it went, grew darker as it sailed on the silken breeze across the delicate sky - Father O'Sullivan was thinking.

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Corporal McNaughton, of the R.I. Constabulary was leaning over a little stone bridge watching an old trout feed under an overhanging whitethorn bush. The stream, a mountain emigrant from some over-flowing tarn, (small mountain lake, J,L.) purled and plashed in feverish haste to reach the valley waterway which would help it in its destiny, the sea. Some such thought flitted through the mind of the man standing so quietly there. His trim, dark-green uniform set off the red-gold of his hair – so thick and so curly that no close-cropping could affect the ripple in it. The sun transmuted the fine hairs at neck and temple to silver, and struck a glint of gold off of the end of his up-curling lashes. The red hazel eyes, looking so steadily through the heavily fringed lids, were frank as a child's, with a touch of melancholy almost painful in its appeal. A finer man never wore the uniform of, perhaps, the finest body of men in Britain.

Miss Mary Ascension Moylan thought so, as she came along the *borheen* leading to the main road near the bridge, lifting her long black skirt daintily to avoid the straggling bramble shoots; thought so, with a fluttering stress of heart and scarcely defined resentment. She was a tall wand of a girl of twenty. In profile her nose was long but finely cut; a full face, it had a slight twist to one side, as had her fine red mouth. This detracted from her positive beauty, but lent an oddly arrestive expression to her narrow, delicately pale face. Her blue-grey eyes were set wide apart under sharply pencilled high eyebrows, and her hair, of a like colour, was carefully dressed in waves and curls under her big black hat. The feather drooping behind her delicately lobed ear threw up the chalky whiteness of her throat. The cut of her gown was fashionable, her jacket sat closely to her slight frame; a piece of Spanish lace was twisted round her throat, and fell in folds, relieving the uniformed flatness of her bosom. She swayed forward a little as she walked, and Corporal McNaughton felt something stir in him, a male protective instinct, as he noticed the quaint, helpless trick she had of turning in one long slender foot as she went. She had a way, too, of dropping her skirt a little, and then clutching nervously for it with her delicate hand, whenever she met him. Strange how these foolish ways called to the man in him – he wanted to spring forward and put his arm around her – otherwise, he thought she was so perfect, so aloofly ladylike, so daintily nun-reared, so finely clad; not one of the country gentry a patch on her. She came nearer, shrinking to the other side of the bridge, and bowed, with a whitening of face to her very lips that sent the colour leaping to the big man's face. He loosened the strap of his smart cap with a jerk of chin, and raised it in greeting:

"Good-day Miss Moylan, I hope you're well!" There was a lilt of the north in his tongue.

"Good-day!" Her voice seemed to shiver a little as she crossed over to him. A clatter of falling stones and a man's voice cursing in Irish cut through the quiet of her words. She felt herself half lifted, half carried through a gap in the stone wall running from the bridge, as a young steer, chased by a panting drover, tore down the road. Her lips trembled piteously and she got her foot twisted in her skirt.

"You're all right, you've no call to be afraid!" he cried passionately. "D'ye think I'd let anything harm ye!"

"I'm a great coward, I'm afraid of cows and things!" she lisped a little, clutching for her skirt. "I ---"

She stopped, arrested by the look in the man's eyes as they dwelt on her face, for the echo of his question lay in them. It seemed suddenly to her as if he and she were alone in a place of silence – a silence so extraordinary, that the trickle of the stream, the larks' exultant threnodies above, and the lowing of the cattle in the town below, were distinct, outside sounds coming from a long way off, to cease abruptly when near them – so that they too stood apart from all the world, in a zone of absolute silence. She could hear, and she felt that with him (this man with whom she had never exchanged more than the courtesy of a greeting when they met) it was the same; could hear with some sense different from her ordinary hearing, the throb of her heart, the tingle of her blood racing in jerks through her veins and thrilling through every fibre, until it was like the thrumming of the telegraph wires in certain phases of weather. His eyes held her, and she answered simply:

"No, you wouldn't!"

"It was a month to-day you came back?"

"Yes."

"I saw you in the window, and I listened to you playing that night, and every night; and I have watched you going to mass and all you done since; and I've seen you wakin' and sleepin' every hour since then.....an' you?"

"I have watched you too."

They turned without intention and walked, side by side, up the winding lane. Every swish of her skirt stirred him; and she could see him from head to foot, although her eyes never loitered a second as they flew past him. He stooped now and then to pick a dog-violet – in Irish flower lore, "world's delight." Once, when rising, as his sleeve brushed her knee, the lace on her bosom rose and fell quickly, a delicate flame leaped in her eyes, and a flush stained her cheeks, making her wondrously lovely. He drew his breath sharply, and half stopped, then, mastering the catch in his throat, asked, with seeming irrelevance:

"Do you like reading poetry?"

"Not much; I got Longfellow as a prize for Italian."

"I read a good deal of it; I have twenty volumes. My mother was a fine scholar; she used to read to us all the winter evenings, for we lived in a lovely place. Bits of lines do be always singing in my head when I'm out in the open. Ah, God, if one could just only walk over the mountains, and leave trouble behind us, an' have one's heart's desires!"

She looked round at him with dilated eyes. He was gazing ahead to the heights mystically clouded in a mantle of purple mist; a tarn glistened in the sunlight, like a diamond in a setting of dark green enamel.

"Last night I was on patrol duty, an' I looked down to the town in the moonlight, an' I could see your window - an' there wasn't a breath anywhere – and I thought I could see you sleepin,' an' I wished I could take you in front of the saddle an' quit all the bother, an' ride somewhere where the law could bind us, an' a man and a woman live to their likin,' without priest or person sayin', 'Ye must be my way of thinkin' if ye want to be together'; that's what I keep sayin' to meself every minute of the day. An' you?"

The note of revolt in his voice set her heart beating, as a martial air and the tramp of marching feet will send women to the windows with a tender, instinct, mother-feel for every soldier-man.

But her eyes darkened as a terrified child's, and her nether lip quivered, and the schooling of years fell away, and she went back to the simple phraseology of early childhood:

"Me da would be angry."

The big policeman grew grave, and said as simply:

"He would that. An' the priests would. An' yer fortune! God help us, if it wasn't for the fortune, I'd defy them all. Would ye let it go, and come away along with me? I've a brother in America doing well!"

"They'd never let me!" The thin red mouth was pitifully crooked, and the delicate brows kissed in troubled strain.

"Would ye, if ye could? Ye're fine, an' delicate, an' convent reared; but I'd see ye come to no hurt, love. Would ye?"

The creaking of wheels and the lagging trot of a tired horse broke the silence, and brought her back to the realities of her position, and a sharp consciousness of what she was doing. Her chin trembled piteously. Her hand fluttered in his as he held it closer, and, although his face blanched and a note of resentful pain roughened his voice, he said soothingly:

"Ye couldn't? Ah, shure ye couldn't!"

The hurt in it appealed to all the dormant tenderness in her; she dropped her skirt, and closed her other hand fervently over his:

"Ah, then, I could! I would!"

"Ye would? Ye care enough? My God, ye care enough!"

Their looks met, and the triumphant joy in his broke down the trained restraint of her eyes and lips, so that the real woman, a thing of responsive sex and natural instincts, revealed herself in a sudden glory of emotion. He caught her hands up to his breast and bent his head, pushing back her sleeve until his lips could kiss the wrist above the glove.

They were unconscious of everything; of the peering, hen-like head of the widow Ryan, who dropped the beads she was telling with somnolent piety, in a horrified realisation of the damning fact that Mary Ascension Moylan – who had hundreds "lost to her" education, with eight hundred more to go with her when a match was found – was standing in immediate nearness to a common policeman, and he a black Protestant into the bargain.

The look in the girl's face told its own tale. The matter was grave to warrant the widow Ryan's active interference; and when the inside car came to the turn in the road a quarter of a mile farther up, the yellow horse was turned back, with many imprecations from the boy driving, to the town road.

"T'will go hard with us, darlin', an' you only a slip of a girl to withstand them."

A troop of frightened bullocks and shaggy assess, with panniers slung across their straw saddles, drove them apart in opposite sides of the road. The drover called a good-day to them; he was a customer of her father's. She clutched for her skirt, and noted with surprise that she held the pale blossoms of "world's delight" he had plucked in her hand. An outside car, driven by a blue-eyed man in the uniform of a D. I., with a policeman in plain clothes on the off-side, was dashing down the road at racing pace. She could hear him talking to his mare, as was his way, with a strong mayo accent:

"Steal away, steal away! There's a girl! Skim along, skim along, good jade! That's a lady."

Every one knew the inspector and his mare. He pulled up sharply with a "Wo, beauty!" as he saw McNaughton, crying:

"The very man I want! Jump up!"

The corporal saluted him, and got up on the other side of the car. As he crossed over, he sent her a tender encouraging smile. She noticed how the sun showed off the gold in his

hair as he leant across to speak with the inspector.

She stood a moment; then picked up her gown carefully. Her watch, an old-fashioned German repeater with much chasing, had slipped under her belt; the bunch of charms she wore was caught in her lace. She loosened them – a tiny silver fish, a filigree basket, a brass medal of St. Anthony, that gentle patron of all things lost who talked with fishes and conversed with the birds and the beasts. Her silver *Enfant de Marie* medal gave her a tang of reproach. What had she been doing? How had she come to forget herself so sorely?

The quick blood, that Spring and love had sent to her cheeks with an exquisite glow, receded as violently, leaving her waxen pale. All the glory of her womanhood died away, and the prim restrained air habitual to her sharpened her face again. New born lucid reasonings and old childish memories, the past with the present, danced a carmagnole in her brain as she went down the road. She recalled how proud she had been to have her mother's watch, a schoolfellow, now a nun, had given her the little fish.

He, the very thought made her feel disturbed, was a heretic, outside the Church militant, suffering, or triumphant. To think of that alone was torture. The theory of possible salvation, through the loophole of "invincible ignorance," was too nice a piece of casuistry to bring the girl any comfort. Her lips formed a prayer to the Virgin Mother, a prayer for intercession to obtain his conversion.

The lark above her head, the gushing rills of seeking water on every side, the pale flowers in her hand, all thrilled her virgin senses with a new meaning and a terrible fear – fear of sin in thought, in word, in deed. She had meant to confess that evening. Years of training in a daily examination of conscience, which precluded very natural thought on sex or its workings as occasions of sin, rose up like warning gnomes in her soul - making every thought on the natural processes of human nature an immodesty – aye, even the contemplation of her own fair body a thing to be ashamed of. Did not one bathe, even in the solitude of one's room, in a little petticoat?

Her temples throbbed with the strain, and the yells of the boys driving, and the gossiping of the women, hurt her like the stab of tiny invisible fairy darts.

When she reached the town, she went through the big bare chapel, and out though a side door into the convent grounds. Double rows of purple and orange crocus-blooms bordered the beds royally. Some nuns were cluttered like bees about a rose-bush near the south wall. They called to her with the eager, pleased voices of happy children.

"Just think, there are five buds nearly out! They will be in time for Our Lady's Feast."

The mother superior, a shrewd-eyed woman with a genial smile lurking around her small tight mouth and double chin, noted the strain on the young face. She put her hand gently on the girl's shoulder. The sisters drew discreetly away. She took a flat basket, filled with exquisite hyacinths and delicate fern-fronds, from a seat near, and gave it to the girl saying:

"There's some trouble, child; I can see it! Go into our chapel, and, whilst you arrange these, tell all you sorrows to our Blessed Mother."

The convent chapel was darkly beautiful, with the silver sanctuary lamp gleaming, and the smell of flowers and incense in every cranny. She found her task a soothing one. She flitted from the altar of Our Lady to that of the Sacred Heart, trying the effect of each vase as she arranged it; and, when the last fragrant spike and waving fern had been settled to her liking, she knelt at the foot of the tiny altar with less stress of soul. The spirit of peace inherent in this place of devotion stole in, assuaging her excited nerves, filled her breast with calm, and raised a hope that, some way, her heart's desire might yet be vouchsafed to her.

As the spring day waned, the mother superior peeped in, studying the face of the girl. It gleamed like a waxen medallion under the glow of the lamp. Then she stood in, with a

loving genuflection as she crossed in front of the high altar, and touched the girl's shoulder. She said cheerily, as they went through the vestry:

"Sister Bonaventura has prepared you a little repast. She will be wounded in her one vanity if you don't do justice to her cakes."

The girl enjoyed her daintily laid tea. The food in her own home, under the sway of her father's housekeeper, revolted her acquired sense of refinement. How good the reverend mother was to her, - and she had always thought her severe.

"You must come every day, and help to arrange the flowers and make the wreaths for the children. Good-night, my child. You will wait for Benediction and then go home."

She knelt in the flower-scented gloom and listened to the soaring voices of the nuns in choir, and tears of emotion welled up in her young heart.

She went out into the deserted street; a short shower had fallen; tiny silver pools glistened in the gaslight, as if some tricksy weather-sprite had danced the spangles off her wings in passing. She scarcely felt her feet beneath her; she was buoyed up with exultant gladness and ardour of feeing. Life was good, after all, when one met with such tender care. There must be hope, if one only trusted enough. Happily, she knew nothing of the hurried visit that the widow Ryan had paid on her way to Moylan's. The wise-hearted lady superior had listened gravely. She had seen, when the girl entered the garden that some new influence was at work. Virtuous gentlewoman to the uttermost fibre of her being, a great pity for this girl, whom she had known from her childhood, stirred in her at the thought of Bid Magrath, and the means Moylan might be likely to adopt in his anger.

"I must hope and pray," whispered the girl as she neared home – and she vowed a novena to St. Joseph; he was very slow, so many sought him; but did he not know, best of all the saints, the joy and poetry of home and hearth?

* * * * *

The bolt was slipped on the door between parlour and shop, and she had to lift the flap of the counter and pass behind to enter it. She noticed how rankly the coarse, moist brown sugar and the port droppings in the battered pewter bowl under the tap smelt. She used to dip her forefinger in and suck it, when a very little girl. The picture of a Dutch interior she had seen at a loan exhibition in Cork came back to her, as she paused timorously in the opening. The hanging gas-jet was lighted, but the globe was dirty; it was the steady glow of the turf fire which threw the figure of the man and the woman into relief.

Moylan was huddled in the armchair near the fire. He did not look up, but the *Freeman's Journal* he held in his hand rustled. A soiled glass sugar-basin, two tumblers, and a bottle of whiskey stood on the table; a black kettle crooned in the hob. Bid Magrath was leaning against the table with her arms crossed in front of her, the short, thick forefinger of her pulpy hand traced imaginary figures on the oil-cloth. Her full, squarely-built figure was tightly cased in an old black silk bodice trimmed with jet. The silk had frayed horizontally under the arms, betraying the stout grey linen of its lining. Abundant thick black hair waved off her broad, intelligent forehead, with a coronal of plaits above it. Two deep vertical lines showed between the level eyebrows. A short nose with inflexible nostrils, sensuous mouth, and firm chin with a cleft in it, finished a head attractive or repellent as might be, with its suggestion of latent force. Her sloe-black eyes, quick to sparkle like jet at a salacious tale, or to narrow to a red glint in anger, darted with a challenge to the man's face as the girl entered. He stirred uneasily under the magnetism of her gaze, and said, dropping his head to peer over his spectacles at her:

"Ye walk in and out of this house, me fine madam, as if it was kep' for your convenience. Your tay was kep' up an hour for ye. Ye'll get none here," thumping the table with his fist.

"D'ye hear me now, traipesin' the streets till this hour. I won't have it, mind that now!"

His voice grew less rough as he looked at her: he was proud of her delicate ladylikeness – perhaps, at heart, wished to approach her, but he was reaping the aftermath of an indiscretion.

"The reverend mother gave me some tea, and I waited for Benediction."

"She'd give you tay, if she knew what games ye were up to. Ha, ha!"

The girl drew herself up, like a lance, at the sneering voice.

"What I do is no concern of yours, that is for my father to say. I'll take no impudence from you!"

"What! What!" Temper and the look of contempt on the girl's face lashed her voce to a shriek. "I'm not good enough, I suppose? Let me tell ye ----"

A weak, bent figure, with a face like one of Goya's *brujas,* peered in from the kitchen. The man dropped his paper, and seized the woman fiercely by the shoulder:

"Ye'll tell her nothin'. D'ye hear me now? Ye'll damn well keep yer tongue in yer jaw. I'll have no rows here!" Turning to the girl, "G'up stairs this minute, and don't go out of this house agen, without I tell you!"

The crone withdrew, and the girl rushed out through the big kitchen, with its mingled smell of rancid bacon, stored potatoes, and turf smoke, and opened the door to the stairs.

The woman said something with a malicious laugh. Moylan answered stingingly. The lurking, savage passion which is in every Celt broke out – their imagination supplies them with a picturesqueness of invective and nakedness of imagery only to be paralleled in the East. The sullen resentment of years, of bond slavery to his own passion on the part of every man, of thwarted ambition and savage jealousy of the girl's cleanness on the part of the woman, found vent in recriminations and taunts, and the awful revelation of a pent-up knowledge of each other's frailties, secret sores and evil propensities, which makes a scene of this kind so potential.

Upstairs, in the bedroom, the girl took off her hat but kept her jacket on, for it was cold. A cascade of shavings, with a pink paper rose and tangle of tarnished silver cuttings, in the grate, smelt of damp soot. She opened the window a little. Oleographs of Pius IX and of W. E. Gladstone, and a coarse coloured print of Raphael's "*Madonna della Sedia"* hung on the walls. A cheap suite of furniture, glaring Brussels carpet, and many antimacassars made a hideously ugly room. A cottage piano, with a statue of St. Joseph under a glass shade, stood in a corner by the window.

She sat on the music-stool and listened to the voices downstairs. Naturally timid, violence of any kind affected her painfully. She looked across to the barracks and wondered if he was there, reading, or listening for her music. She had played every single night since the one when he had taken up her melody and followed it on the violin. A smile flickered in her eyes and stole to her lips as she thought of his word – the first word of love she had ever heard from any man. She forgot the quarrel downstairs, forgot everything, in listening to the magic melody in her own heart. She turned mechanically, and, opening the piano, put down the soft pedal and began to play. She had a good touch and considerable brilliancy of execution. Girls of her class in Ireland receive strangely unfitting education- of housekeeping they know nothing, but they nearly all play well, have an expurgated knowledge of the French classics, a smattering of Italian, a little painting, and are exquisite needleworkers. She forgot her caution. If he were over there, he would listen to her; she would commune with him that way, if in no other. She wandered from one thing to

another, from Schubert to Grieg as the motives seemed to accord with the message she wished to convey.

The door of the room was flung open, and Moylan came in unsteadily. Bid Magrath lurked in the shadows in the lobby. A purple flush mottled his cheeks.

"Drop that – d'ye hear, drop it! D'ye think I paid my money to have ye educated and brought up like a lady for ye to demean yerself with a common policeman, to make yerself the talk of the parish?"

"I'm not doing anything I am ashamed of!"

"What d'ye think of that for a brazen piece?" cried the woman at the door exultantly.

Her voice roused whatever there was of spirits in the girl; she sprang to her feet and faced them defiantly. Some touch of scorn in her look stung the man; he cursed her hoarsely for bringing disgrace on him. She shivered under his words; the malicious chuckle of the woman adding poignancy to her hurt. A passer-by paused underneath the window.

"There's no disgrace worse than that you put upon me yourself," she cried with desperate courage. "Don't think I haven't known what's said ever since I was home last. The poorest place in the town would be decenter for me than my own home."

Moylan staggered, and gasped as if he had received a blow. A shriek of ingenious invective, couple with threats to expose him if he left this insult unavenged, assailed him from the lobby.

"Will ye hould yer tongue?" he cried menacingly. The girl smiled crookedly from sheer nervous strain. He lifted his hand and struck her on the side of the face with his open palm. He drew it back for another blow, when he was seized from behind and flung, rather than pushed, across the room. He fell on to the sofa, and turned with a snarl towards his assailant. Father O'Sullivan stood with his silk hat on and his stick uplifted threateningly. His peasant face was glorified into a symbol of stern justice and the majesty of undisputed authority. The stick he held might have been the Cross, held aloft as the sceptre of ecclesiastical power over some recalcitrant sinner. Moylan stared helplessly.

"How dare you, James Moylan, raise your hand to this child – this child, whom it is your duty to protect. Let me never hear of it again."

He turned like a flash to the woman, waiting sullenly in the doorway, and he voice cut like the crack of a whip.

"And you – you disgraceful woman, what are you doing up here? Your place is downstairs, doing your work, not striving to make bad blood between father and daughter."

There was a choking sound in the woman's throat, as she checked the rush of words in her lips; it was almost like the uncouth sounds a deaf mute makes in moments of intense excitement. He raised his hand warningly.

"That'll do, or it'll be the worse for you. Let me not have to exercise my authority and force you to leave my parish. Go down now and let me hear no more. I'll have no scandal here."

He kept his eyes fixed on her until she went downstairs; then closed the door. Laid his hat on the table, and turned to Moylan, who had risen and was leaning heavily on the back of a chair.

"It isn't the first time I've had to interfere in this house, James Moylan; but what I have to say to you will keep. There's a retreat for young ladies at the moment in Kenmare. It begins the day after tomorrow. Kate Ellen Ryan is joining it, and Mary Ascension had best go with her. After that, my sister in Queenstown will be glad to have her on a visit, and she can go with her to Kilkee later on – sit down! Say good-night to your father, my child, and remember that he has his cross to bear, too; and it's none to easier for being of his own

making. You have had the best his money could procure for you. Forget everything but that. Go now, and Kate Ellen will come in to-morrow, and you can be getting ready."

Her cheek was stinging from the blow, and yet, as she looked at the man huddled heavily on the sofa, watching her with sullen shamed eyes, a sudden rush of pity thawed her. A wild desire to take him by the hand and lead him away from both of them, to some place where he and she could be together to themselves – as father and daughter. It was a vague sense of revolt against the tyranny of priest and woman alike, as coming between her and this man whose blood ran in her veins; and who, whatever his faults, was her own mother's husband. In one of those strange flashes of vision which makes us all clairvoyant in moments of unusual stress, she recognised that the priest standing like a judge over him and her, arbiter of their fate, came between them no whit less than the creature downstairs who held him thrall to her sex.

She bent and said, "Good night, dada!" as she kissed him on the cheek.

Dropping a half curtsy to the priest, as she was used to do in the convent when passing the lady superior or the visitor of note, she went up to her room.

* * * * *

The tedious weeks of a long wet summer had dragged sulkily through their course with occasional outbursts of temper, in the guise of thunderstorms which cleared the atmosphere temporarily, as a shower of tears will assuage the wrath of an ill-tempered woman. Autumn had followed imperceptibly, a sickly sister of like temperament – sullen days, with still warm air that clung about one with a smothering, cloying palpability, making sensitive creatures nervous, as when a moribund fly will buzz feebly in one's hair or crawl over one' neck in vicious dread of the coming cold.

Mary Ascension was sitting in the upstairs room, dressed to go out. Her gloved hands lay supinely in her lap. Her eyes were closed, the lids looked reddish blue and jerked and quivered continually. The thinness of her face accentuated the crookedness of her nose, and the sharp pale line of her lips ran up in unison.

She had returned to Millroad a fortnight ago, to find the one glimmer of hope, which had kept her heart from becoming petrified, quenched once and for ever. A stupid rhyme kept buzzing in her head; she could hear the old boatman's voice as he expatiated (with the pride of a man born and bred on the side of this lake with the "gloomy shores") on the wonderful properties of its waters:

Lough Neagh hones
Put in shticks
Come out shtones!

He had pointed out the pumice-like change wrought in wood or plant if sunk for a time in its depths. Aye, there were things in life which acted thus on the human heart, drying all love and tenderness in it. She had plunged in a sea of deadening quality; they had held her under for her soul's good, quenched the bright flame in her ardent young heart.

She was morbidly occupied with her own sensations. It had become a habit with her to go over each event since her last meeting with him – the terrible scene which heralded her departure, the month in Cork, the weeks in Kilkee; interminable hours in interminable weeks, made up of days of strained tension and nights of hopeless prayer; mornings when she woke up with a flush of courage, determined to brave all and send to him; then dull depression, as she realised how vigilantly she was watched. There were crowds of friends and acquaintances amongst the many priests taking their annual holiday, and she was

surrounded by cousins to the fourteenth degree. They were all watchful. Once she had loitered behind and seated herself near some rocks. Just where she could be alone and listen to the waves' unceasing voice. A rhythmical accompaniment to her own yearnings. A ragged "gossoon," she had noticed him hovering about for two days, slipped a soiled piece of paper into her hand. She had never seen his writing, but there was only one in the world who could have written to her thus:

"I have given up hope of an answer to my letters, and I have been trying for two days to see you. Am leaving by six train. If you still care, come to the back of the churchyard. Shall wait all the afternoon."

She gave the boy sixpence, all she had in her pocket. Kate Ellen's thin voice (they had missed her) came up with the breeze. She whispered feverishly:

"Run, say yes, if I can, yes!"

"A-a-h, then, where did you get to? Father Daly of Macroom an' his sister, an' a young lady from Dublin are coming to see ye on the strand."

She watched the ragged urchin until he crossed a stile in safety' then she turned, and said decidedly:

"I have a headache; the sun's hot; I'm going to lie down."

Kate Ellen watched her suspiciously. She was having her last worldly holiday, as she was to enter as a postulate in September. There was the making of a fine mistress of novices in Kate Ellen. She had got a glimpse of the boy, and noted the tension of the girl's look.

"I'll go back with you!"

"You needn't, I don't want you. You must excuse me to Father Daly ---"

"Honora can do that." She waved to a girl in the background, and gave her the message.

There was nothing to be done. Once, near the church, she thought she saw a tall man in grey tweed slip quickly through a gap in the wall; she turned almost hysterically:

"I can go the rest of the way alone. Oh, why should you come with me?"

If she had a hope of escape, it was cut off by the sudden appearance of her hostess. Mrs. Bernard Byrne was a genial edition of her brother. Something had disturbed her. Her face was flushed; she had not even taken time to tie her bonnet-strings, and carried her gloves in her hands. She hailed then pantingly, with a gasp of intense relief.

"Mary Ascension is killed with a headache. Father Daly was asking for her, but she wants to lie down."

"A-a-h, for goodness' sake don't be making such a fuss. Any one would think I was a child."

"A quick nod of intelligence passed between the others and Mrs. Byrne seized the moment of turning to nod her head vigorously to Kate Ellen, pointing to the pavement with her forefinger, whilst her lips formed, "Here!"

The girl's senses, all sharpened by the strain she was undergoing, caught the shadow of the action, and, with a flash of telepathic communication, she realised his presence in the town was known.

She submitted to having strips of brown paper dipped in vinegar laid on her forehead, drank a cup of deadly strong tea, and lay still whilst the hot white sun stole mockingly in through a slit in the drawn blinds.

How the minutes dragged! She waited half an hour and then got up stealthily, put on her things, and stole to the door. She wanted to see if the coast was clear. She turned the handle softly and pulled the door. Locked! The blood ebbed from her face. Five o'clock was striking; he was to leave at six – and they knew, they knew! Perhaps they had gone out – Mrs. Byrne was not fond of her own society. The servant might let her out; she rang the

bell gently – listened. A shuffling step in the hall below, some one was coming up. A whisper in Kate Ellen's voice:

"What? Miss Moylan's bell! No, you're mistaken; she's asleep, and hasn't stirred. I'm sittin' here, with my door open, to see no one disturbs her."

She tossed her hat behind the bed and lay down, drawing up the quilt and closing her eyes. The key turned softly; she could feel a cooler breath of air as the door opened; a pause – it closed softly again. The eyelids fluttered, and the gloved hands clenched and unclenched in her lap, for the thought of her hopeless vigil was an ever-present torture to her.

And now he is in America; not even the America where very Irish soul has acquaintances or friends, but away in the Argentine. Yes, so Bid Magrath had told her – with a malicious joy in describing what a fine figure of a man he made in plain clothes, when he came back to see the inspector and fetch his things on his way to Queenstown.

An outside car rolled out of the yard, and stopped before the door. Bid's voice yelled up the stairs:

"Will ye come down at onst? The car's at the door!"

Half-way through the town they swerved aside, to let another car pass; a girl, with dancing eyes under the brim of her feathered hat, was leaning across, showing her white teeth as she laughed. Michael O'Connell in a new blue suit was on the other side. Their gladness brought a smile into the face of Danny Beg, Moylan's driver. He gave a flourishing salute with his whip, and they called a good-day to the Moylans.

"They're sailing next week," remarked Danny, "an they're taking Eily with them. Father O'Sullivan's leppin' mad. Begob, I wouldn't go to confession to him till they're out of the parish for a fortune!"

"He met his match for once," laughed Moylan, grimly.

"Why, Danny?" asked Mary Ascension.

"For why, Miss Mary?" He laughed until his old face looked like a shrivelled walnut.

"Shure, wasn't he dead set agin the match from the furst; an' thin, whin' they kep' company and walked out forninst every one, didn't he say they wor a scandal to the barony an' he wouldn't marry thim unless she behaved herself."

"Yes?"

"Begob, she up and tould him he had no choice' that she'd wrote to the bishop; an', come to that she'd go to the registry – or wait til they got to America; an' she wasn't goin' to pay a piny more marriage money than was laygal."

"Yes?" eagerly.

"Well, he preached at thim one Sunday, an' there was the devil's own talk. No wan knows the rights of it. Some say she wrote, some say she wint, an' in any case, the order come to marry thim. Father Clery offishiated, an' such a wedding hasn't bin seen for thirty years. All the mountainy boys rode down to escort Michael, and there was two bands playin' 'Haste to the weddin',' and lashins ov drinkin' an' eatin' an' three fiddles an' a mile of cars tearin' up to the crossroads."

"I wonder he let them dance. Who was there?"

"Begorrah, he had no choice. Shure, both she and Michael have cousins in every ploughland between this and Macroom. He went round, an' tried to persuade some of the ould people to keep the girls at home; but faix, they slipped out of the windows whin the doors were shut. An' whin he rode up, to see if he couldn't create a scandal about somethin', wasn't the Canon there sittin' in state; an' big Father Cregan an' little Father Doyle. So he came home the way he wint. She's a fine speritted clever-cut figure of a girl."

A sudden shower cut him short. He put on an old cape and sat huddled under it, whistling

a tender tune with little thrills of wistful passion in it – some courting lay, perhaps, never set to music. She held the umbrella against the rain – it blew from the mountain, - and listened in patient misery. The tale had only accentuated her own fate. The jog-trot of the old mare's feet, the squelching roll of the wheels, the glimpses of sodden grass and drenched tansy leaves, seemed a fit setting for the shameful quest she was bent on. Wasn't she going again, to be offered with her money as a match to some man she'd never seen? Danny's music hurt, for it whispered of a might-have-been. Never now would she look into any man's eyes as that girl was looking when they met her. She'd sacrificed love when it came to her, cast it aside for the fiction of duty – she was a poor weak thing. She shut her eyes, and prayed despairingly to be freed from the spell of her heart's desire.

Some hours later Danny lashed the mare into the semblance of a gallop. They were entering a town; dirty hovels, with ragged children playing in the doorways, lined the street on each side. Then better-class houses, until they pulled up in the market-square at the door of the second-best hotel. She followed her father in; he took her past the bar, upstairs to a dingy sitting-room, with the usual oleograph of Pius IX over the chimney-piece. There he left her. She sat looking out into the square. Two dogs rolled over one another near the pump; a man in knickerbockers came out of the National Bank; otherwise, it was deserted.

A slatternly girl came and put a pail of lighted sods into the grate, then banked it up with hard pieces newly brought in from the clamp in the yard. They were wet, and smoked, without giving out either heat or flame. She was too numb to reason much; a vague feeling of being badly treated, of being shamed in some finer instinct of her womanhood, made her writhe when she thought of it, so she tried to put it away.

Once, since her return, she had been driven to another town. Father O'Sullivan had taken her himself; but they had driven direct to the house. Nothing had come of it except a pleasant tea and a glimpse of happy people. There was a party of tourists there – two girls from Glasgow, doing Killarney with a brother and a fiancé. They'd broken their journey to see the doctor, a brother of the young man in the Father's mind. They had met in England, and were full of reminiscence:

"Do you remember that Sunday up the river? the night we went to Daly's? the fun we had at Lords?"

She had felt so out of it all. The old doctor was really only a "vet" and a horse-dealer, and his wife, a strong farmer's daughter, a connection of her own. But the sons all had professions, and the daughters had married well into a better class. They rode well, danced well, were brilliant musicians; these accomplishments, with pretty faces and witty tongues, brought them into contact with the smaller Protestant gentry and such military men as were stationed at the depot. It had cost a good bit to make two doctors and an attorney, and dress three girls – to help then to find their husbands, and give them a good send-off when they did. The youngest and last was going to marry an Englishman. Father O'Sullivan knew that Aloysius had just finished his term to a solicitor in Dublin, and wanted to set up for himself – Mary Ascension's money would do nicely.

They welcomed her warmly, as they welcomed everyone who came to the house, and the girls carried her off to a cosy drawing-room, where a coal fire blazed cheerily in the ample grate. A girl in spattered safety-habit was laughing near the fire with a young doctor. Father O'Sullivan eyed her with tightened lips and the eye of an inquisitor. Privately, Mary Ascension wondered how she could reveal her legs in that way.

The big, untidy, room with the daintily laid tea-table, three-tiered cake stand, and the side-table, laden with whiskey, wine, and siphons, struck her as being English. Indeed, the voices all seemed to have an English tone in them. How they chaffed and laughed! Several

young men came and went. One of them hammered out a new waltz on the piano. It was very gay and very worldly.

They tried to draw her out; they left the priest to their mother. She took him off to the dining-room. She was a shrewd, vulgar little woman, inordinately proud of her girls. One of them had married a naval engineer, who had made a fortune out of some invention connected with torpedoes. She was full of the "grand" people Agnes Mary met at Portsmouth, "high naval and military gentlemen – indeed, she was at a ball recently with Royalty." *Modern Society*" was her *Almanach de Gotha,* insofar as she found names in it mentioned by Agnes Mary in her letters. She thought Mary Ascension genteel, but lacking in "stoile and animation," and she lowered her voice as she inquired if it was true that he would marry Bid Magrath if he had the daughter off his hands. Ignoring the question, Father O'Sullivan asked after Aloysius and his prospects, saying:

"There's more than room for a Catholic attorney here: I hear Nolan's giving up."

"There is so. An' he'd get a lot of the Protestan' practice too."

"Take care he marries a good Catholic wife, a pious steady girl."

"Oh, Aloysius is in no hurry. He wouldn't like a country stuke. He met a young lady when he was over with Agnes Mary. An' his father an' I will let him please himself. We've never made up a match yet (proudly) – and they've all done well."

"Is he engaged, then."

"Well there's nothin' settled."

"Is she a Catholic?"

"No, but she may be; they're comin' over every day in England. Agnes Mary says it's quite the fashion among the aristocracy. Will ye have a taste of this brown sherry? Major Vandeloor says – he often comes in – that it's better than any he got when he was at Windsor. I think it's ajukong he was."

The temper of Father O'Sullivan was beginning to get the better of him. He refused the sherry curtly.

"Have a glass of port; Denis is very fond of this port."

"If he was as fond of going to his duty, an' setting a good example, an' seeing his children do theirs, it would be better than filling his house with Protestants, siding with the Government, an' entertaining and wasting money like water, while Father Conroy can't get a subscription to repair the chapel roof!"

Mrs. Devine pursed her lips tightly, and a spot of crimson patched each cheek.

"Denis does his duty by his wife and children, an' I'm thinkin' it would be better for Ireland if there were more like him. Ye won't keep the brains nor the money in the country by tongue-thrashin' an' dullness. An' ye'll have no country, if ye drive then all out of it. Look at Fr. Ryan's 'month's mind,' the whole chapel swimmin' in priest. It'll do a lot of good to have twenty priests to serve each mass, an' scores o' nuns in the choir, if ye haven't a congregation. If ye won't be takin' the wine, we'll join Miss Moylan. I hear that woman's to marry him when ye find a match for the poor girl. It would be a good thing if it could be managed."

There was a malicious tone of patronage in her voice, which caused the priest to answer sharply:

"She'll have eight hundred pounds down, an' she's very accomplished. Her mother was a cousin of your own."

"She'll want all that to make James Moylan go down, - at least, if she's to marry into one of the professions."

The visit terminated abruptly. And the contrast of her home tea – a soiled coarse cloth

thrown over the end of the table, with a dish of cold bacon and a slab of butter in a saucer on the stained oilcloth of the other half, the dingy spoons and coarse crockery-ware on the japanned tray – jarred painfully on her strained nerves. She tried to swallow a mouthful of tea, burst into tears, and rushed up to her room. Neither of them had spoken a word to her. It was an ugly little room with magenta paper gone green in places. It had the damp mildewy smell so common in Irish houses. She flung herself on the bed, and sobbed like a worn-out child.

The door was opened cautiously and a bent old woman crept in. Her palsied chin waggled and her hands shook; they were covered with blotches and the veins crossed with purple knots. The life in her eyes glimmered through a film, like horn, and the white cloth tied over her head, crossed under her chin and back again, suggested a cerement. She took off the girl's boots, coaxed her to turn and have her clothes off with an almost unintelligible flow of Irish love-words. Not all love-words, for, when she saw the stained face, she broke into fierce imprecations against the woman below, untranslatable and awesome – lending her youth and vigour, steadying voice and chin whilst the wrath blazed in her. She crept out, and came back with a hot jar wrapped in flannel, warmed the bed, and put it to the girl's feet. Then she crouched on a chair by the girl's pillow, and brushed and braided the fine hair into a plait, gave her a rosary beads, and stole out again.

Before the first five decades had dropped through the girl's fingers the crone was back again - a spirit of Eld, (old age. J.L.) loathsome in decline; an awe-inspiring object-lesson on human finality, with a subtle, charnel-house odour of decay clinging to her breath; yet with divine spark of unselfish love, burning with an undying flame, in the wreck of her womanhood.

"Sup it, asthore; sup it, accorra macree!" she muttered, as she placed the bowl of gruel, made with stolen cream and a liberal glass of port to "give it soul," in the girl's hand. She lit the night-light in the basin – the girl was always frightened of the dark; and, when she dropped to sleep with her hand under her cheek and her beads twisted round her wrist, the crone bolted the door cautiously, and, dragging out a feather-bed and a couple of scattered blankets from the recess, she curled herself with many groans, like a half-blind, fiercely faithful old hound, near the child of her nurse-child's bed.

Downstairs, some fearless realist of the modern school would have found a subject to delight in.

Bid Magrath had opened her bodice and taken off her coarse grey stays. Released from its iron pressure, her breasts dropped on her arms as she sat in her favourite posture by the table. Her still white neck creased in folds, her eyes gleamed, and her lips grew loose to match her tongue.

The man in the chair looked like a great white toad, held under the spell of some evil melody-maker. It was on that night that Bid Magrath suggested a fresh match.

A cousin of hers had been in during the day, and told her, amongst other things, of a man in want of a girl with money to further his ends.

This journey was the outcome of that night's talk.

Moylan found his way to the back of a shop at the end of the town. It was quite a small shop, with many bins of corn, whole maize, and yellow meal, sacks of flour and samples of oats. A few bowls of eggs, and some rolls of butter wrapped in muslin stood on the counter. A bell jingled as he entered. A boy reading a number of the *Irish Fireside* looked up as he asked:

"Is herself in?"

"She is. Is it Mr. Moylan?"

"Yes."

"Ye're to go to the private door, please."

He went, and, stepping into the street, rang the brass bell and left Mr. Moylan standing in the mizzling rain.

An old woman with a plaid ribbon round her clean white cap opened the door, and dropping him a half-curtsey as she held it back, said, as he passed in:

"Will ye be plazed to walk up?"

Moylan followed her upstairs to the door of the back room. She opened it, saying:

"Some one to see ye, ma'am."

A small coal fire burned in the grate, and a woman, busy regulating the wick of a lamp, turned quickly. Moylan stood blinking as the sudden light confused him. The woman's eyes darted past him, as if in search of some one. The man, strung out of his habitual lethargy, with all his wits sharpened, intercepted her glance.

The fact that she was eager gave him courage. He threw back his shoulders, and some of the bearing of former days returned to him.

She put out her hand and held his for a second in a steady, cool grip, saying with a singularly deep, harsh voice:

"It's James Moylan, isn't it?"

"It is. Good-day, ma'am,"

She closed the door carefully, adding:

"It's many years since I met you last. Are ye alone? Take a seat."

"My daughter is with me but I left her at the 'Imperial,' I wasn't clear in my mind about some matters."

He put his hat under his chair and waited. She seated herself in a corner of the horsehair sofa, and took up a man's stocking she was knitting. The needles flew under her short, square fingers. She had plump, exceedingly white hands. Her crinkly red hair, streaked with grey, was dressed in a crown of plaits; her pale eyes peered through her full lids, as those of a tortoise, her light lashes helping to hide them. A well-cut tailor-made gown, handsomely braided, showed her still fine figure; her feet, crossed in front of her, were cased in neat shoes with ribbon bows. She had the air of a woman of some importance in her sphere. Well she might, too, for she had made few mistakes in life, and had conquered almost insuperable difficulties.

The younger daughter of a rich butcher and jobber, whose ambition it was to give all his son professions and marry his daughters well, she had been expensively educated. Two brothers became priests; a sister, crossed in love, took her portion into one of the severest orders known for women; and another died of consumption. The youngest forged his father's name and fled to America, having drained the parental resources to the detriment of her dowry.

Sister of two parish priests, niece of a bishop and first cousin to a coming cardinal, it was a bitter pill to see less well-favoured girls carry off the best matches. The price of cattle fell with a period of agricultural depression and, in the end, she accepted a man years her senior – a corn-chandler in a fairly good way of business. He died within the year, leaving her a prospective mother.

All the thwarted ambitions of a woman of strong capabilities centre themselves in her boy Jeremiah. Weakly, fretful, selfish, precocious beyond his years, he went through his schooling with honours in all examinations and no friends – feared, although too frail to defend himself with his fists. Even the Jesuit Fathers, those subtle judges of character, could not boast of any intimate knowledge of their most brilliant pupil. He belonged to that

strange small race of people in Ireland which seem to be absolutely alien in soul and body to the rest of the people: an insoluble quantity in the fusing of the races; materialists in a nation of dreamers, deaf to the sound of the fairy fiddlers; sceptical in a country where the faith as of a little child governs the hot, wild hearts of the irrepressible people.

He had entered as a student at Guy's Hospital, taken a brilliant degree, and then spent a year in Paris and Vienna. He had contributed several papers to a science journal of note on the toxic action of a rare serum on the nerve-centre of certain animals – and its possible effect on the human system, were experiment permitted, in case of lunatics afflicted with paraplegia. It attracted considerable attention amongst students interested in physiological experiment.

Old Dr. White was giving up his practice. The "ould doctor," with his low phaeton and grey cob, was known in every ploughland in the district. But time and gout bring every man nearer to the "stones of forgetfulness" which dotted the old churchyard on the hillside where his fathers were gathered. He had lived in a big, grey stone house outside the town; some three acres of neglected garden were enclosed by a high granite wall, with massive iron entrance gates. The doctor was going to live in Cork, where he might enjoy a rubber of whist and a glass of punch with old friends. Never a bargainer, he was prepared to take a fair sum for the goodwill of the practice and run of the lease.

Jeremiah Clery knew the house well, knew the unused side-wing, which would be admirably adapted to the needs of the two paying patients whom he could get as soon as he had a place to receive them. One, a harmless imbecile, was becoming a nuisance to a friend of his, who had married a sensitive wife, and the other was an interesting case. Between them, it would mean four hundred a year with one attendant. He was certain to get one or two of the doctor's appointments, for the only other candidate had an "unlucky" hand with the births.

Jeremiah had been to a dance at the Devines' and had heard of Father O'Sullivan's visit. He had broached the subject to his mother, and left her to arrange it. He had no luck with women; they shrank from his odd, serpent-like eyes, his high pale forehead with the thin red hair worn off the temples, the flat head, and strong jaw with the big white teeth that showed through the thin cheeks. The intellect, power, and cruelty combined in the arrestive head might have fascinated the eyes of a sculptor; but no woman ever cared to look at him twice. He had none of the little, dear things that can make an ugly man dear to a woman, lure the tenderness out of her finger-tips, and wile a caress from her lips. Yet his mother would have sacrificed every man, woman, and child in Ireland to give him his heart' desire. She now said to Moylan:

"Well, perhaps it was as well; you can fetch her a little later. I hear she is accomplished, and very genteel-looking. That is necessary – Jeremiah has so many professional friends. He could have his pick out of the Cooley girls, with a thousand apiece; but they're a vulgar set. How old is she now?"

"She's twenty,"

"I'm told she's delicate?"

"Faith, she isn't: she's just fine in her ways. She never had a hard word said to her."

A description of Jeremiah's capabilities followed, and his intention of buying the practice; but not a word of the patients in prospective. Moylan discussed the advantages, and then added:

"I'll give her eight hundred pounds, but the marriage money will have to come out of it. Father O'Sullivan will not let me off that."

"Well, it ought not to come out of the eight hundred: you have only one girl, and you

could settle with him any time. You'll get her 'troosow' in Dublin, I suppose?"

Moylan thrust his hands deep in his trousers pockets, drew in his lower lip, and answered her questions by others equally to the point. He had found a worthy antagonist. They entered unto details, asked pertinent questions, fought every issue bit by bit, and contested every inch of debatable ground. The woman's respect for him increased. She had heard of him only as a soaker of liquor, a man under the thumb of a designing woman; she found him possessed of brains and finesse. Had she known that he had inspected Jeremiah from behind the wire screen of the Imperial Hotel bar, and that he had almost wavered in his resolution to arrange this match once and for all, her opinion might have been modified.

Twice in the twenty-four hours had the soul of father and child touched, on the wave of a common feeling of revolt and desire for escape. Had Moylan followed his impulse, he would have gone up to the waiting girl, kissed her, and driven her back. Sensitive to impressions, as is every Celt, he shrank from giving her to the man he saw on the pavement outside.

The voice of a drunken slattern, raised in maudlin abuse, turned the scales. The moral cowardice, also inherent in most Celts, asserted itself. He could hear the voice of the woman, who sat at his hearthstone, raised in upbraiding, and his soul shivered at the idea of facing it.

It was too late; he felt old, and the worst of it was he needed her, needed the physical warmth of her; there was comfort in the possession of this one human being who had, when all was said and done, given herself to him body and soul – he could not do without her. The girl was too fine, too nun-reared, to find a shelter under his roof.

The drunken woman was dancing in the gutter, to a ribald air of her own composing; she had stuck a paper rose in her hair. She was the one blot on the town, a derelict dating from the days when an English garrison occupied it. It spoke well for the rigidity of its morality that Phryne (prostitution. J.L.) was forced to hide in so unattractive a guise. Yet, so strange are the workings of fate, she determined that of Mary Ascension. He had gone out, and thrown her a penny as he passed on his way to see Jeremiah's mother.

One thing he resolved: that was, to settle some of the girl's money on herself, to promise a further sum on his death, subject to her married happiness and entirely under her own control, or the control of such trustees a she might think fit to appoint in case of its failure. This point came under discussion.

The widow Clery had not anticipated any opposition - nor, indeed, had she thought of any money beyond the marriage portion. Moylan had not mentioned to any one a legacy from a brother in New York, late a shining light in Tammany circles. The worth of the girl rose when the sum to come was mentioned between them.

"You will settle the matter of the legacy before the marriage comes off?" queried the widow, stopping her knitting to watch the man's face, and see if the thought at the back of her mind in asking was clear to him.

"It is to my daughter's interest to do that," was the steady reply. "If" – with emphasis – "she has children, it will go to them; if not, it will go back at her death to the children of a sister of mine in Liverpool. She will be worth taking heed of." And, answering her sub-thought, "The business goes to the woman who has kept house for me."

He rose to his feet heavily, and the woman to hers. She realised something of the dual nature of the man facing her. Respect for his latent powers, shrewd brain, and finesse mingled with pity for the fetters which the needs of his lower nature had laid upon him. With such a man what might she not have done? One thing was clear, she must make Jeremiah understand that his father-in-law was a force to be reckoned with. When Moylan

had left to fetch the girl, she went upstairs to the room which was known as "Master Jerry's." He covered up a frog under experiment as he heard her step.

"Well?"

"It is settled; he has gone for her."

"How much?"

"Eight hundred down."

A dull gleam showed for a second in his eyes.

"I must close with old White to-night. I hear there is another man after it, and I'll send a wire saying I can take Doyle's patient."

"You're not asking about Mary Ascension, Jerry," with a loyal attempt to arouse his interest in the girl to be his wife.

"We'll drop the Ascension, mother; it is ridiculous. She's sure to be a typical girl, such as the good nuns turn out in batches – eaten up with anaemia or chlorosis bodily, with a smatter of accomplishments and an infernal conscience. I want the money, I haven't thought of her; but I hear she's nice-looking enough."

"I can tell you, Jeremiah, it will be to your interest to consider her, then – mind you that now."

She spoke sharply; the woman got the better of the mother in her – a flash of resentment against his selfishness, and of loyalty to the woman who might give her grand-children to be a fresh interest in life. He stared, surprised. Spoiled as he had been from childhood, he had learned to know, that when his mother spoke in that voice there was reason behind it.

"May I ask why?"

The widow Clery would have made a good lawyer. She held a brief for Mary Ascension, and she dissected it cogently, succinctly, and with invincible logic for her son's benefit. He listened intently; his face flushed slowly.

"Something must have prejudiced him, to make him want to tie up the money in that way. I always thought he was a drunken sot, with a wom----"

"He's a match for any sober man in the country," she broke in, "an' may be if it wasn't for her, there'd be no match made this day."

She hurried down to the rarely used front room, opened the piano, and poked the fire into a blaze; whilst the old servant brought in wine decanters, seed cake, and the massive silver tea-service, a gift from "me uncle the bishop" on the wedding of his favourite niece. The direct effect of the mother's communication on Dr. Jeremiah Clery, was to make him change from riding breeches into the professional frockcoat and dark grey trousers of his ceremonious visiting-days in London

Moylan found the girl sitting on the old sofa with her hands clasped round her knees. She had been watching the turf burn into a glowing hollow – lost in quite, dear, thoughts listening to the call of her own heart, wondering what the man who held the core of it was doing, where he was, and if he still thought of her. The sudden opening of the door recalled her roughly to realities; the draught shattered the burning fane, and sent it flying into grey-white ashes on the hearth. She paled, as she settled the lace round her throat, and followed him into the quiet streets on the way to meet the bridegroom.

The lamps were lit, the gutters ran with trickling water, the pavement glistened with silver pools; and, as they passed a small public house, a river of light streamed out from it into the roadway, and a blind man, led by a shivering dog, stood playing an ancient melody on the flute. The old fingers touched it so featly that there was love and longing, and lust of life, and a luring to dance and a wish to sing in the silver notes.

The spirit prisoned in that sightless frame must have known all human gladness in its

dream; known a mirth to set laughter ringing and lips smiling; known how to forget the things of sorrow, and make haste to the love-glad; for that, and much more, was in the old Irish melody, piercing so sweetly the quiet town. It caught the girl's numb heart, as when the hand of eager Spring wakes the sluggard pulse to life, and she stopped involuntarily. Where was she going, and what was she about to do?

"Would ye if ye could? Ye're fine, and delicate, and convent-reared, but I'll see ye come to no hurt, love. Would ye?"

Why did these words come back to her now in time to the music, the very tone of his voice in the notes?

Clang! Clang! Clang! From the bells of two different belfries – the first peal of the Angelus. The three hard clashes dominated the melody. Moylan looked back; she stepped nervously forward to join him:

"Ye would? Ye care enough? My God, ye care enough!"

God! Again! How his voice must have lain in her heart, till the blind man brought it to life with his witch-music.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Mechanically, she said the words: -

Behold the handmaid of the Lord,
May it be done to me according to His
word.

Clang, Clang! Clang!

Moylan raised his hat, and bent his head. She muttered the salutation in homage to the mystery of Christ-made man, without though of its significance, out of habit – for was she not hearing the despairing throb in a mortal man's throat as he cried:

"Ye couldn't! Ah, shure, ye couldn't!"

Cling clang! Cling clang! Cling clan! A riot of sound as all the bells pealed harshly, not in threes this time, but with an insistent hard clash. The blind man had put his flute in his pocket, and was filling his pipe in the public-house.

All was silent again in the girl's heart – it was numb and cold in there; and she followed passively to the sound of the triumphant church bells, dominating all sound in the Irish town – even those that love makes in the heart of man and maid.

(From *Flies in Amber*, 1905)

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* **An affair with the Bishop of Cork**, *various authors*
* **An Argument Defending the Rights of the Kingdom of Ireland** (1645) by Conor O'Mahony, first publication in English translated *by John Minahane*

jacklaneaubane@hotmail.com**In 1893 there was a literary sensation created in London when a collection of short stories called *Keynotes* by George Egerton was published. It immediately became the acknowledged trail blazer of the 'New Woman' movement and had a phenomenal success.**

It attracted acclamation and denunciation in equal measure because of its subject matter – the exploration of women's sexuality by a woman. It scandalised contemporary opinion.

The author was really a woman who was living in poverty in a cottage in Millstreet at the time called Mary Chavelita Dunne. She was born in Australia to Irish and Welsh parents, had been much travelled, learned several languages, and was married for the second time when in Millstreet.

She wrote other collections of short stories after *Keynotes* and one included *The Marriage of Mary Ascension*. It is probably unique in being a love story set in Millstreet. It presents a panorama of Millstreet life as it appeared to her when living here. It is unsparing in its description of Millstreet and its people.

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