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This odd return to pioneering might have had its drawbacks. One could have understood the builder growing annoyed at being badgered whichever way he turned. But strangely enough the builder too was from County Cork, and considered grandmother "a fine, upstanding lady, then." The house was finished to the complete satisfaction of everyone concerned—except perhaps Aunt Mary, whose opinions were never considered anyway.

NOT that Aunt Mary didn't have her opinions. And not that she didn't voice them sometimes. Her mouth and chin were just as firm as grandmother's, and strangely like them too. But grandmother's matronly blandness was worlds apart from Aunt Mary's pinched and bitter spinsterhood. And could you blame her bitterness when all the money she ever saw was the sixpence doled out to her every Sunday morning when we were setting out for Mass? Sixpence for Aunt Mary, and threepence for myself, and we owned them for half-an-hour or so till we dropped them in the collection.

Yet I was happy enough, in a way. I was young enough to feel detached. My mind was always on what was ahead, and I was sure that all my life was going to be wonderful. It was only in the evenings I felt the oppressiveness of the place.

During the daytime it wasn't so bad. Aunt Mary's pent-up feelings were relieved as she worked. And how she worked! She wreaked the disappointment of her life on every pot she scoured, each floor she scrubbed, on every poking of the fire.

In her hard clattering, no less than in her tight-lipped silence, was all the frustration of her loveless life, her lack of friends, of money, her hatred of the drab clothes grandmother bought for her. Even the wool Aunt Mary knitted was drab and colourless. She worked at it fiercely in the evenings.

But knitting needles, after all, don't click very loudly. The evenings were far too quiet. Grandmother played patience on one side of the fire. Aunt Mary knitted on the other, and I did my homework. Once, I remember, a neighbour gave Aunt Mary some paper-backed novels, and grandmother burned them all—at least she thought she did. But I knew Aunt Mary still had some in her bedroom, where she read them avidly. Sometimes in the evening she read my schoolbooks, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Travels with a Donkey*, and sometimes she would ask me to translate, which I did very clumsily, from *Tartarin de Tarascon* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*. I think she had a fellow-feeling for the unloved and unlovely Cyrano.

BUT for the most part the evenings passed in silence. I couldn't help wondering at what stage of their lives grandmother and Aunt Mary had ceased to talk to each other. They spoke, of course, when necessary, and sometimes Aunt Mary's bitterness would flare into loud anger, but in that house there were no discussions, no conversations of any kind. No minds were ever drawn out, but fed only upon themselves, and upon their own bitterness.

Nor did I ever find out whether this was merely a slow growth over the years, or the result of some major frustration by grandmother.

In the quietness of those evenings all sound was intensified. There was only

the click of Aunt Mary's needles, grandmother's faint movements as she shuffled her cards, and the ponderous ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. That clock, together with the mantel edging of painted green velvet, had come all the way from Ireland, and was one of grandmother's most treasured possessions. It seemed as though it knew of its own importance. The heavy ticking, and the calm assurance of the swinging pendulum, seen through the glass door, gave to the clock, in its ornate and fretted wooden case, a brassy independence. It seemed to have a life and motivation self-controlled and exerted. In some strange way, I felt, that clock intensified the charged and brittle atmosphere.

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Oh, it's nice to  
in the morning



WHO'd want to stay in bed when it's seven o'clock and there's a wonderful new day just outside the window? Even the longest Summer day isn't half long enough for the climbing, fishing, swimming and all those other important comings and goings that make up a small boy's life.

But first — breakfast. He's as hungry as a hunter for the breakfast that transforms him from a little boy into a bundle of energy . . . Weetbix . . . crisp, golden, malty Weetbix, with stewed fruit and milk. As he eats them up and passes his plate for more he won't know that those toasted, good-tasting whole-wheat biscuits are supplying him with energy-giving elements. All he knows is that he likes them any way — for breakfast, for tea, or spread with butter and honey or Marmite for play-lunch or picnics. Any time, any place — "Weetbix please, Mum."

# WEET-BIX

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