



# IRISH HONEYMOON

by Walter Brookes

THIS story concerns one Jacko Brocklebank, of 23 The Bishop's Terrace, Little Malfroy Street, S.W.3, a much better address than S.W.1, according to John Betjeman in *The Spectator*, and there can be no arguing against that, for he is a poet of some standing, and if he said it in *The Spectator*—well . . .

Jacko, a rising young man in the wholesale grocery trade (he works in his firm's office in the City, and, as Betjeman also said that the City—in this case E.C.3—was the only business address to have, you can see that Jacko was worth listening to) told me the story himself in considerable detail when I was in London. I used to meet him at the London Chamber of Commerce where, as I said before, I used to go from South Molton Street (W.1, you remember—as good an address as any in the world according to George Schwartz in *The Sunday Times*) on overseas trade matters, just as Jacko did. As we had to wait some time for these matters to be attended to we used to go off and have a cup of coffee together and discuss business.

The story is about Jacko's adventures on his honeymoon in Ireland, for he had married a very attractive Irish girl

named Nora, and they had gone over there. And as you will see that he got a very good address in Dublin, and I have a good address in Wellington, and as for the address of *The Listener* office—well, you will realise that the story is absolutely reliable from start to finish as a description of Irish life and manners.

IT begins when Jacko and Nora stepped out of Westland Row station into the streets of Dublin.

"Will I take you to your hotel, Sir?" called a driver from the seat of his old horse cab.

"I'm afraid we haven't got a hotel yet," said Jacko.

"If you haven't got a hotel I couldn't very well take you to it, andorra a hotel you'll find in Dublin today," replied the driver.

They had come over to Nora's native Dublin because she had insisted, even though they had not been able to arrange any accommodation, for it was Hofse Show week. Jacko was beginning to think he might find things a little trying, for he was a serious and efficient young man, and his first impressions of Dublin were not of seriousness and efficiency. But he was steadily keeping

in mind his boss's commission to pick up a man or two for the packing department if he could—someone who would appreciate a job in London, for they found it hard to keep staff.

"I don't like having nowhere to go," he said.

"Something will turn up, I'm sure it will," said Nora. Jacko usually felt cheerful at the sight of her curly hair and the sound of her laugh, but just now he was uneasy.

Something unexpected did turn up, however, but it was not what he considered a pleasant surprise. Lunchtime had come and they had gone into a restaurant in O'Connell Street to eat and think.

"Why, it's Fiddler Brennan," cried Nora, looking at a waiter, evidently coming up from a basement stairway, as he rose from behind the counter like Venus from the sea, except that he was wearing a stained white coat matching the tablecloths in the room. "He's my ex-fiancé."

Well, Jacko had not heard of Nora's ex-fiancé before, and he surveyed the

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thin, dark young man, whose appearance was quite in contrast with his own: blond chubbiness.

He had to face it. Nora introduced them.

"How do you do?" he said, standing up and letting his bowler hat and umbrella, which he had temporarily placed on his knee, fall to the floor. "It's a lovely day."

"Beside yesterday it is—it would want to be," said Fiddler. "And I'm glad to see you here, Jacko, though it's a terrible place, Dublin."

How Jacko wished Nora hadn't mentioned Christian names. He had tried to shake off Jacko for years.

"What's the braised steak like?" he asked Fiddler.

"Oh, no good at all," said Fiddler. "Just old bits of meat stewed up and a bit of mush put round them. Left-overs from the whole week. You can have it if you want it, though," he added considerably.

Jacko decided to play safe with poached eggs, and Nora agreed.

"Why did you break off your engagement?" he asked her when Fiddler—well, that sounded just as ridiculous as Jacko—had gone to get their poached eggs.

"We didn't break it off," she said.

"What? You don't mean—that is, you—"

But he was interrupted by the return of Fiddler with a large pot of tea.

"You can amuse yourselves with that while the other's getting ready," he said. "Would you be

over here for a holiday? Or perhaps on your honeymoon, of course."

"Business and pleasure," said Jacko with an air of importance, thinking of his commission from his boss. After all, he was a businessman looking round for staff. He mustn't let the silly place get him down.

"You'll have somewhere to stay, of course?" Fiddler went on. "But if you haven't, which I don't suppose you have, it being Show Week, unless you arranged it three months ago, and you couldn't have done that for you weren't engaged then, let alone married, me having had a letter from Nora only two months back—yes, I'm coming. I'll be back in a minute—just be having a bit of tea, both of you."

He had been called over to the counter to get their poached eggs. He returned and went on: "I was going to say, you could stay in the house where I am, right in Merrion Square, no less. There's not many dwelling houses round there now, and this one has a lovely room vacant for the reason that the lodger left this morning and there's not another coming for a fortnight. The landlady is away, but I'd fix it all up for you myself."