

Mrs. Halloran entered her daughter's modern flat and was immediately hailed by an onrush of children. 'Gran'ma! gran'ma!' piped the chorus of shrill voices, while sticky fingers clutched her dress and bread-and-buttery mouths were raised to be kissed. She greeted the infant Flynns rather absently, and went straight to the mantelpiece, where a few postal cards and 'ads.' proclaimed that the postman had made his morning visit. She turned these over with a feverish eagerness, and then, the light gone from her face, sat down at the window and gazed out unseeingly.

Young Mrs. Flynn, brisk and rosy, and wiping her hands upon her apron, entered from the kitchen and made a raid upon her offspring.

'Rosie, go straight into the kitchen and wash your hands, and wash Tom's, too, and the baby's. Shame on ye, teasin' gran'ma like that! Mother, why don't ye jist give them a good clout when they come botherin' around? Where were ye this long time? Sure, I thought ye were run over or something, I was that anxious!' She was vigorously untying the black bonnet and taking off the shabby gloves as she talked.

'Mary,' said Mrs. Halloran, looking up at her daughter, 'don't ye think I've stayed long enough with you and Tom? I ought—'

'Now, listen to her!' cried Mrs. Flynn, apostrophising the furniture. 'Will ye listen to the wicked old woman! Do ye want to break my heart entirely?'

'I jist thought,' went on the soft voice but more faintly, 'that I ought to be movin' on an' lookin'—' the voice broke, and then continued bravely—'lookin' for—for—him.'

There was a peculiar expression of mingled indignation and tenderness on young Mrs. Flynn's face. 'How often have I told ye, mother, that it's no use! Pat knows where to find ye—at least he knows where Tom and I live. And to think that he never has written a word to us in ten years an' that you're still eatin' your heart out for him—it jist makes me boil—it does indeed!'

She busied herself with her work, but her eyes were misty with the thought of her brother, the little playmate she had called 'my Pat' in baby days—the 'black sheep,' but such a dear black sheep—ah, how they do get themselves mixed up in one's heart strings, these troublesome ones! She thought of the day, twelve years before, when she and Pat had said good-bye to Ireland and to their parents, brothers and sisters, and with youthful faces aglow had 'come out' to America together. Pat had given his solemn promise to 'look after' the colleen, and to be careful about Mass and the Sacraments. He had found a good 'place' for his sister and had visited her frequently. It was he who had introduced Tom Flynn to Mary, and after a few years Tom married Pat's pretty sister. But during these years the friends became estranged. Flynn was a rising young mechanic, and willing to do all in his power to help his brother-in-law. But Pat got in with bad company and began to drink. His letters home, with their enclosures of money, became less and less frequent, and finally ceased. When Mary received word from one of her sisters that her father had died, she did not know where to find Pat to tell him. In answer to many pleading letters she was obliged to admit to her mother that the boy had disappeared. The widow suffered and prayed, despaired, and hoped, for years, and at last, in spite of the entreaties of her married son and daughter, took her meagre savings and 'came out' to look for her boy—her youngest and best-beloved.

'It's his soul I'm bothered about,' she confided to Mary. 'If I knew he had died, even, and had the Sacraments at the end, it's contented, I'd be. But with the life he was leadin'—Mary, oh, Mary dear, pray God to spare me until I know Pat's soul is not lost. And He will, I know He will—some way he'll fix it so that I can be sure!'

That evening, when Mary sat sewing, and Tom read the newspaper in the light of the dining-room lamp, she began to talk. Tom lowered his paper and regarded her curiously. Her eyes had a feverish brightness, and her voice held a quality strange to it.

'Pat was always a good lad,' she began, leaning forward and looking into the dusky space beyond the lamplight. 'He was a bit wild, but always good to his mother.'

'"Mother, alauna," says he, when he was no higher than that table, I'm going to buy you a silk dress some day,' says he.

'And Mary, do ye mind the time some lad in the school teased ye, an' how Pat knocked him down, an' how the master separated the two of them? Pat could hardly speak with the blood from his nose and the tears from his eyes, but do ye mind how he told the master nobody was going to bully his sister?'

Mary remembered. The memory of that engaging scamp, Pat Halloran, seemed to pervade the room. Even Tom Flynn was living over again his brief acquaintance with Pat.

'An' do ye mind,' continued the mother, dreamily, 'how he used to wait at night, in his little night-shirt, for his father to punish him if he'd been bad? One time—she turned conversationally to Tom—'one time when he was no more than four years of age, his father went to whip him for some little thing, and that bit of a gossoon stood there and smiled at him, an' the father couldn't raise a hand to him. The eyes of him! An' do ye mind the curls, Mary? Faith, by the time he was eighteen, every colleen in the town was wild about him.'

The voice trailed off into silence. After a while she rose, and bidding Mary and Tom good-night, went off to bed. Her daughter looked anxiously at her husband.

'Tom,' she answered nervously, 'I never knew her to talk so much about him before.'

Flynn lowered his voice, glancing toward the bedroom Mrs. Halloran had entered.

'I didn't want to excite her,' he said, 'but I found a trace of Pat to-day.'

The color ebbed out of Mrs. Flynn's cheeks. 'Tom!' she murmured.

'I wouldn't speak of it for fear it wasn't true and it would be a shame to raise her hopes. Besides, it isn't such good news. I met a fellow I used to know at the time Pat and I went around together—Jim Kennedy, his name is,—and he said that he heard Pat is a brakeman or something on a railroad. He met a chap that saw him in Philadelphia. But there's something queer about it. It seems he's been livin' crooked, Mary. I'm going to see what I can do about it.'

The next day was Sunday, and Mrs. Halloran appeared dressed and ready for Mass before 7 o'clock. She would not take even coffee, explaining that she was going to receive Holy Communion.

Mary watched her anxiously from the window. It was a cold morning, and the old lady had looked even more frail and white than usual.

Michael, the sexton, generally attended early Mass in the capacity of usher. He greeted Mrs. Halloran and led her to a pew. During Mass he frequently glanced at her, noticing the pallor of her face, and the peculiar look of expectancy in her eyes. He kept his eye on her when she went up to the rail, for she walked slowly and feebly, and pressed her hand to her heart. When she returned to her seat, he saw her suddenly start up, gazing up the aisle towards the altar. Michael looked to see what had caused the expression of radiant joy on her face. He saw the communicants, mostly old women and young girls, returning from the rail, the priest closing the door of the tabernacle; a ray of winter sunlight gleaming through the stained-glass window and pointing, like a parti-colored rod, to the crucifix above the altar. That was all. And yet, the old woman, with her arms outstretched, tottered up the aisle with a glad cry, and, before Michael could reach her, suddenly collapsed in a pitifully small, black heap on the altar steps.

When they had brought her back to consciousness she tried to raise herself on her elbow.

'Where—where is he?' she asked faintly.

'Where is who, ma-am?' inquired Michael, who had in the meantime sent for a doctor. The priest,

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