

"Good evening, Miss Mary," she said cheerfully, "that's the lovely night."

"It's soft, I'm thinking. I wonder will I get up to Mrs. O'Neill's with the mourning gown?"

"Twixt hoppin' an' trottin' maybe you will, Miss Mary. But you've a right to finish my wedding gown."

"It's not so easy waiting to be buried as it is to be married," said Miss Mary grimly.

"Is it wait? Me that's called an' all an' Jimmy with the ring bought, an' he pawning his Sunday suit the way he'd pay the last half-crown."

Lizzie laughed boisterously while Miss 'Stasia walked round her with pins and yard measure. Presently she stood clothed in white serge, a stiff figure trying to see herself in a cracked little glass. "Now that's lovely; you'll be a picture, Lizzie Kilfoyle," said Anastasia.

"Ah! don't be talking, Miss 'Stasia," Lizzie exclaimed in shy pleasure.

"You will so. Raise your arms now and try can you breathe."

"I feel quare and tight. I hope I'll not be bursting an' I standing before the priest."

"I can give you a quarter of an inch more—there!"

"The skirt's a bit wide, Miss 'Stasia. They're all narrow now. They say the ladies of London do hop with their two feet together, they're that tight."

Mary rose and began folding the mourning clothes to put them into a box.

"Kilt we are making that lot," she said as she put on her bonnet.

"Why do you do it at all?" asked Lizzie cheerfully.

"Because we're not people to be begging our bread, my girl, or being beholden to anyone. Dacintly we were born and rared an' dacintly, please God, we'll die and be buried if it's no eyes we have left and our ten fingers worked to the bone."

"Well! I'd rather be married than that," said Lizzie, trying to see her round and rosy face in the glass. Mary turned and looked at the girl, a grim smile on her face.

"Would you so?" she asked, "with a baby coming home each year an' you not knowing how to put food in its mouth or clothes on its back, an' the young ones with their legs getting crooked because you can't mind them. That's a fine life for a young girl! And herself standing at the wash-tub early and late, sick or sorry, and getting that bad that she must needs go to the hospital for the great doctors to be operating on her."

"God help us!" cried 'Stasia, "will you whisht, Mary, and not be scaring the wits out of the girl?"

Mary took her parcel and went out, bidding Lizzie good-night.

Lizzie sighed heavily and there was a crack when a pin had flown.

"Miss Mary has a quick tongue," she said. "you'd know she'd never had a companion of her own, she's that crotchety. I'm thinking you were the best looking, Miss 'Stasia. I wonder now you never got married."

"What's putting that into your head. Try this waist-band now."

"You'll have me cut in two halves, Miss 'Stasia. But I'm wondering now you never had a comrade, my mother said there was a young lad used to be after you, what's this his name was?"

"Whisht! Lizzie, hold up your arm and don't talk."

"And in the heel o' the hunt he married another—that's what she said. He was not good enough, maybe?"

"In my young days it was the parents made the matches," said Miss 'Stasia severely, "and wasn't it better so? Where'd I be with a man spending his money at the public house and having me bet at home. That's no life for a decent woman."

"They're bad when they've drink taken," Lizzie admitted philosophically. "but there's some would only drink too much at a wedding. My Jimmy's one o' that lot, and when the missionaries do be preaching about Hell fire down in the chapel he gets off the drink altogether for two months or three."

"But Mary's right that a big family hacks a woman out terrible quick," said Anastasia.

"Maybe so," Lizzie answered, "but you wouldn't mind with the childher playing about you. There's great diver-

sion in them and when they grow they'll keep you out of the Workhouse itself."

"Or have you ruined—one or the other."

"Well, if it's God's will, Miss 'Stasia, it's got to be. An' I'd rather that than living alone all my mortal days. It must be lonesome here with no man in it to be telling you the news and smoking his pipe, or taking you to the Pictures or some place on a Bank Holiday."

Miss Anastasia made a sound of protest as she detached the white garment from Lizzie's person.

"Now," she said, "I've done with you."

"Tell me about that lad, Miss 'Stasia, is he old now?"

"God be good to us! What's come to the girl," said Anastasia sharply. "I never give him a thought. Will you quit talking of what's dead and gone these thirty years."

Lizzie laughed.

"You won't go back on me about the dress, Miss 'Stasia. Saturday night now."

"Maybe . . . and I sitting up all night to do it," she mumbled.

Lizzie smiled broadly while Anastasia considered her. "Them's lovely new teeth you have in your mouth," she remarked candidly.

"They are so. A power of money they were—four pounds."

"H'm, but they're a bit brittle-looking. For five pounds you'd get better value. You'd tell them at a glance."

Lizzie looked a little crest-fallen.

"You'll be gettin' yours, I suppose," she said; "it's wonderful the difference they do make."

She bade the dressmaker farewell and went out into the darkness, where a young man, who had evidently been languishing against a neighboring wall, met her and went off with her. Anastasia heard their laughter and sighed.

She went back into the little quiet dull house. When she had made a cup of tea, she sat down at the sewing machine. It was some time before she heard a faint tapping at the door. With a murmur of vexation she rose and opened it.

A young girl stood before her, a girl almost speechless with timidity. Anastasia spoke sharply.

"Who is it at all?" she asked.

"It's Delia McKenna," came the answer.

"I don't rightly know you. What McKenna is it, an' where are you from?"

"I'm Joe McKenna's daughter from Murphysstown."

Anastasia hardened for a moment.

"What is it you want with me?"

"It's a message from my father. He bid me ask for Miss 'Stasia."

There was a moment of silence. The elderly dressmaker stood there rigidly while she considered. The wind was cold and the girl coughed.

"Come in anyway," said Anastasia, "it's strange you coming this night, for your father was in my mind."

She led the way into the work-room, and bid the girl sit down. Then she looked at her keenly. Delia McKenna sat on the edge of her chair; her big hazel eyes were anxious.

Miss 'Stasia had once looked into eyes exactly like hem. She believed that she had forgotten those foolish days. She believed, too, that as a thoroughly respectable woman she had also forgotten Joe McKenna, who had been married for long, and who was a widower of a year's standing. As a matter of fact the real Joe of the present, with his straggling grey beard, his untidy clothes and his taste for drink, left Anastasia coldly indifferent. She could echo her parents' verdict that he was not good enough for her and never would be. But the old romance she still cherished. At the bottom of her heart she loved the image of a young man with hazel eyes and long black lashes: a gallant, improvident, romantic young man who once had talked fine talk to her in moments snatched as best he could when her parents were not watching.

"I'd know you for your father's daughter," she said abruptly; "you'd best have some tea."

Delia coughed again and said "thank you" shyly.

"So you've lost your mother?"

"We have, Miss 'Stasia, she died on us a year ago."

"Does your father mind himself these times?"

Delia nodded.