

Patsy Mac Cann

James Stephens

It was the donkey awakened them.

For some time he had been rolling along the ground in ecstasy ; now his agitated legs were pointing at the sky while he scratched his back against little stones and clumps of tough clay ; now he was lying flat rubbing his jowl against these same clumps. He stood up suddenly, shook himself, swung up his tail and his chin, bared his teeth, fixed his eye on eternity, and roared “ hee-haw ” in a voice of such sudden mightiness, that not alone did the sleepers bound from their slumbers, but the very sun itself leaped across the horizon and stared at him with its wild eye.

Mary ran and beat the ass on the nose with her fist, but whatever Mary did to the ass was understood by him as a caress, and he willingly suffered it “ hee-haw, ” said he again triumphantly, and he planted his big head on her shoulder and stared sadly into space.

He was thinking, and thought always makes an ass look sad, but what he was thinking about not even Mary knew ; his eye was hazy with cogitation, and he looked as wise and as kindly as the eldest of the three angels ; indeed, although he had never been groomed, he looked handsome also, for he had the shape of a good donkey ; his muzzle and his paws were white, the rest of his body was black and his eyes were brown. That was the appearance of the donkey.

The angels arose and, much as the ass did they shook themselves ; there was no further toilet than that practicable ; they ran their hands through their abundant hair, and the two who had beards combed these also with their fingers then they looked around them.

Now the birds were sweeping and climbing on the shining air ; they were calling and shrieking and singing ; fifty of them, and all of the same kind, came dashing madly together, and they all sang the one song, so loud, so exultant, the heaven and earth seemed to ring and ring again of their glee.

They passed, and three antic wings came tumbling and flirting together ; these had no song or their happiness went far beyond all orderly sound ; they squealed as they chased each other ; they squealed as they dropped twenty sheer feet towards the ground, and squealed again as they recovered on a swoop, and as they climbed an hundred feet in three swift zig-zags, they still squealed without intermission, and then the three went flickering away to the west, each trying to bite the tail off the others.

There came a crow whose happiness was so intense that he was not able to move ; he stood on the hedge for a long time, and all that time he was trying hard to compose himself to a gravity befitting the father of many families, but every few seconds he lost all control and bawled with fervour.

He examined himself all over ; he peeped under his feathers to see was his complexion good ; he parted the plumage of his tail modishly ; he polished his feet with his bill, and then polished his bill on his left thigh, and then he polished his left thigh with the back of his neck. “ I ’ m a hell of a crow, ” said he, “ and everybody admits it. ”

He flew with admirable carelessness over the ass, and cleverly stole two claws and one beak full of hair ; but in mid-air he laughed incautiously so that the hair fell out of his beak, and in grabbing at that portion he dropped the bits in his claws, and he got so excited in trying to rescue these before they reached the ground that his voice covered all the other sounds of creation.

The sun was shining ; the trees waved their branches in delight ; there was no longer murk or coldness in the air ; it sparkled from every point like a vast jewel, and the brisk clouds arraying themselves in fleeces of white and blue raced happily aloft.

That was what the angels saw when they looked abroad ; a few paces distant the cart was lying with its shafts up in the air, and a tumble of miscellaneous rubbish was hanging half in and half out of it ; a little farther the ass, in a concentrated manner, was chopping grass as quickly as ever he could, and, naturally enough, eating it ; for after thinking deeply we eat, and it is true wisdom to do so.

The eldest of the angels observed the donkey. He stroked his beard.

“ One eats that kind of vegetable,” said he.

The others observed also.

“ And,” that angel continued, “ the time has come for us to eat.”

The second eldest angel rolled his coal- black chin in his hand and his gesture and attitude were precisely those of Patsy Mac Cann.

“ I am certainly hungry,” said he.

He picked a fistful of grass and thrust some of it into his mouth, but after a moment of difficulty he removed it again.

“ It is soft enough to eat,” said he musingly, “ but I do not care greatly for its taste.”

The youngest angel made a suggestion.

“ Let us talk to the girl,” said he.

And they all moved over to Mary.

“ Daughter,” said the eldest of the three, “ we are hungry,” and he beamed on her so contentedly that all fear and diffidence fled from her on the instant.

She replied :

“ My father has gone down the road looking for food ; he will be coming back in a minute or two, and he'll be bringing every kind of thing that's nourishing.”

“ While we are waiting for him,” said the angel, “ let us sit down and you can tell us all about food.”

“ It is a thing we ought to learn at once,” said the second angel.

So they sat in a half-circle opposite the girl, and requested her to give them a lecture on food.

She thought it natural they should require information about earthly matters, but she found, as all unpractised speakers do, that she did not know at what point to begin on her subject. Still, something had to be said, for two of them were stroking their beards, and one was hugging his knees, and all three were gazing at her.

“ Everything,” said she, “ that a body can eat is good to eat, but some things do taste nicer than others ; potatoes and cabbage are very good to eat, and so is bacon ; my father likes bacon when it's very salt, but I don't like it that way myself ; bread is a good thing to eat, and so is cheese.”

“ What do you call this vegetable that the animal is eating ?” said the angel pointing to the ass.

“ That isn't a vegetable at all, sir, that's only grass ; every kind of animal eats it, but Christians don't.”

“ Is it not good to eat ?”

“ Sure, I don't know. Dogs eat it when they are sick, so it ought to be wholesome, but I never heard tell of any person that ate grass except they were dying of the hunger and couldn't help themselves,

poor creatures ! And there was a Jew once who was a king, and they do say that he used to go out with the cattle and eat the grass like themselves, and nobody says that he didn't get fat.

“ But here's my father coming across the fields (which is a queer way for him to come, because he went away by the road), and I'm thinking that he has a basket under his arm and there will be food in it.”

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It was true enough. Mac Cann was coming to them from a point at right angles to where he was expected.

Now and again he turned to look over his shoulder, and as he was taking advantage of dips in the ground, bushes, and such-like to shield his advance his daughter divined that something had occurred in addition to the purchase of food. She had often before observed her father moving with these precautionary tactics, and had many times herself shared and even directed a retreat which was full of interest.

When her father drew nigh he nodded meaningly at her, set down a basket and a bundle, and stood for a moment looking at these while he thumbed his chin.

“ Faith !” said he, “ the world is full of trouble, and that's a fact.”

He turned to the strangers.

“ And I'm telling you this, that if the world wasn't full of trouble there'd be no life at all for the poor. It's the only chance we get is when people are full of woe, God help them ! and isn't that a queer thing ?

“ Mary,” he turned, and his voice was full of careless pride, “ try if there isn't some small thing or other in the basket, and let your honours sit down on the grass while the young girl is getting your breakfast.”

So the angels and Patsy sat down peacefully on the grass, and Mary opened the basket.

There were two loaves of bread in it, a fine square of butter, a piece of cheese as big as a man's hand and four times as thick ; there was a leg of mutton in the basket, and only a little bit had been taken off it, a big paper bag full of tea, a package of soft sugar, a bottle full of milk, a bottle half full of whisky, two tobacco pipes having silver bands on their middles, and a big bar of plug tobacco. Those were the things in the basket.

Mary's eyes and her mouth opened when she saw them, and she blessed herself, but she made no sound ; and when she turned her face towards the company there was no expression on it except that of hospitality.

She cut slices from each of these things and piled them on a large piece of paper in the centre of the men ; then she sat herself down and they all prepared to eat.

The second angel turned courteously to Mac Cann.

“ Will you kindly begin to eat,” said he, “ and by watching you we will know what to do.”

“ There can be nothing more uncomely,” said the first angel, “ than to see people acting in discord with custom ; we will try to do exactly as you do, and although you may be troubled by our awkwardness you will not be shocked by a lapse from sacred tradition.”

“ Well !” said Patsy thoughtfully.

He stretched a hand towards the food.

“ I’ll stand in nobody’s light, and teaching people is God’s own work ; this is the way I do it, your worships, and any one that likes can follow me up.”

He seized two pieces of bread, placed a slice of cheese between them, and bit deeply into that trinity.

The strangers followed his actions with fidelity, and in a moment their mouths were as full as his was and as content.

Patsy paused between bites :

“ When I’ve this one finished,” said he, “ I’ll take two more bits of bread and I’ll put a lump of meat between them, and I’ll eat that.”

“ Ah !” said that one of the angels whose mouth chanced to be free.

Patsy’s eye roved over the rest of the food.

“ And after that,” he continued, “ we will take a bit of whatever is handy.”

In a short time there was nothing left on the newspaper but soft sugar, butter, tea, and tobacco. Patsy was abashed.

“ I did think that there was more than that,” said he.

“ I’ve had enough myself,” he continued, “ but maybe your honours could eat more.”

Two of the angels assured him that they were quite satisfied, but the youngest angel said nothing.

“ I’m doubting that you had enough,” said Patsy dubiously to him.

“ I could eat more if I had it,” returned that one with a smile.

Mary went to the cart and returned bearing two cold potatoes and a piece of bread, and she placed these before the young angel. He thanked her and ate these, and then he ate the package of soft sugar, and then he ate a little piece of the butter, but he didn’t care for it. He pointed to the plug of tobacco :

“ Does this be eaten ?” he enquired.

“ It does not,” said Patsy. “ If you ate a bit of that you’d get a pain inside of your belly that would last you for a month. There’s some people do smoke it, and there’s others do chew it ; but I smoke it and chew it myself, and that’s the best way. There’s two pipes there on the paper, and I’ve a pipe in my own pocket, so whichever of you would like a smoke can do exactly as I do.”

With a big jack-knife he shredded pieces from the plug, and rolled these between his palms, then he carefully stuffed his pipe, pulled at it to see was it drawing well, lit the tobacco, and heaved a sigh of contentment. He smiled around the circle.

“ That’s real good,” said he.

The strangers examined the pipes and tobacco with curiosity, but they did not venture to smoke, and they watched Patsy’s beatific face with kindly attention.

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Now at this moment Mary was devoured with curiosity. She wanted to know how her father had become possessed of the basketful of provisions. She knew that three shillings would not have purchased a tithe of these goods, and, as she had now no fear of the strangers, she questioned her parent.

“ Father,” said she, “ where did you get all the good food ?”

The angels had eaten of his bounty, so Mac Cann considered that he had nothing to fear from their side. He regarded them while he pulled thoughtfully at his pipe.

“ Do you know,” said he, “ that the hardest thing in the world is to get the food, and a body is never done looking for it. We are after eating all that we got this morning, so now we’ll have to search for what we’ll eat to-night, and in the morning we’ll have to look again for more of it, and the day after that, and every day until we are dead we’ll have to go on searching for the food.”

“ I would have thought,” said the eldest angel, “ that of all problems food would be the simplest in an organised society.”

This halted Mac Cann for a moment.

“ Maybe you’re right, sir,” said he kindly, and he dismissed the interruption.

“ I heard a man once, he was a stranger to these parts, and he had a great deal of the talk, he said that the folk at the top do grab all the food in the world, and that then they make every person work for them, and that when you’ve done a certain amount of work they give you just enough money to buy just enough food to let you keep on working for them. That’s what the man said : a big, angry man he was, with whiskers on him like the whirlwind, and he swore he wouldn’t work for any one. I’m thinking myself that he didn’t work either. We were great friends, that man and me, for I don’t do any work if I can help it ; it’s that I haven’t got the knack for work, and, God help me ! I’ve a big appetite. Besides that, the work I’d be able to do in a day mightn’t give me enough to eat, and wouldn’t I be cheated then ?”

“ Father,” said Mary, “ where did you get all the good food this morning ?”

“ I’ll tell you that. I went down to the bend of the road where the house is, and I had the three shillings in my hand. When I came to the house the door was standing wide open. I hit it a thump of my fist, but nobody answered me. ‘ God be with all here,’ said I, and in I marched. There was a woman lying on the floor in one room, and her head had been cracked with a stick ; and in the next room there was a man lying on the floor, and his head had been cracked with a stick. It was in that room I saw the food packed nice and tight in the basket that you see before you. I looked around another little bit, and then I came away, for, as they say, a wise man never found a dead man, and I’m wise enough no matter what I look like.”

“ Were the people all dead ?” said Mary, horrified.

“ They were not they only got a couple of clouts. I’m thinking they are all right by this, and they looking for the basket, but, please God, they won’t find it. But what I’d like to know is this, who was it hit the people with a stick, and then walked away without the food and the drink and the tobacco, for that’s a queer thing.”

He turned to his daughter.

“ Mary, a cree, let you burn up that basket in the brazier, for I don’t like the look of it at all, and it empty.”

So Mary burned the basket with great care while her father piled their goods on the cart and yoked up the ass.

Meanwhile the angels were talking together, and after a short time they approached Mac Cann.

“ If it is not inconvenient,” said their spokesman, “ we would like to remain with you for a time. We think that in your company we may learn more than we might otherwise do, for you seem to be a man of ability, and at present we are rather lost in this strange world.”

“ Sure,” said Patsy heartily, “ I haven’t the least objection in the world, only, if you don’t want to be getting into trouble, and if you’ll take my advice, I’d say that ye ought to take off them kinds of clothes you’re wearing and get into duds something like my own, and let you put your wings aside and your fine high crowns, the way folk won’t be staring at you every foot of the road, for I’m telling you that it’s a bad thing to have people looking after you when you go through a little village or a town, because you can never know who’ll remember you afterwards, and you maybe not wanting to be remembered at all.”

“ If our attire,” said the angel, “ is such as would make us remarkable.”

“ It is,” said Patsy. “ People would think you belonged to a circus, and the crowds of the world would be after you in every place.”

“ Then,” replied the angel, “ we will do as you say.”

“ I have clothes enough in this bundle,” said Patsy, with a vague air. “ I found them up there in the house, and I was thinking of yourselves when I took them. Let you put them on, and we will tie up your own things in a sack and bury them here so that when you want them again you’ll be able to get them, and then we can travel wherever we please and no person will say a word to us.”

So the strangers retired a little way with the bundle, and there they shed their finery.

When they appeared again they were clad in stout, ordinary clothing. They did not look a bit different from Patsy Mac Cann except that they were all taller men than he, but between his dilapidation and theirs there was very little to choose.

Mac Cann dug a hole beside a tree and carefully buried their property, then with a thoughtful air he bade Mary move ahead with the ass, while he and the angels stepped forward at the tailboard.

They walked then through the morning sunlight, and for a time they had little to say to each other.

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IN truth Patsy Mac Cann was a very able person.

For forty-two years he had existed on the edges of a society which did not recognise him in any way, and, as he might himself have put it, he had not done so very badly at all.

He lived as a bird lives, or a fish, or a wolf. Laws were for other people, but they were not for him ; he crawled under or vaulted across these ethical barriers, and they troubled him no more than as he had to bend or climb a little to avoid them he discerned laws as something to be avoided, and it was thus he saw most things.

Religion and morality, although he paid these an extraordinary reverence, were not for him either ; he beheld them from afar, and, however they might seem beautiful or foolish, he left them behind as readily as he did his debts, if so weighty a description may be given to his volatile engagements. He did not discharge these engagements ; he elongated himself from them ; between himself and a query he interposed distance, and at once that became foreign to him, for half a mile about himself was his frontier, and beyond that, wherever he was, the enemy lay.

He stood outside of every social relation, and within an organised humanity he might almost have been reckoned as a different species. He was very mobile, but all his freedom lay in one direction, and outside of that pasturage he could never go. For the average man there are two dimensions of space wherein he moves with a certain limited freedom ; it is for him a horizontal and a perpendicular world ; he goes up the social scale and down it, and in both these atmospheres there is a level wherein he can exercise himself to and fro, his journeyings being strictly limited by his business and his family. Between the place where he works and the place where he lives lies all the freedom he can hope for ; within that range he must seek such adventures as he craves, and the sole expansion to which he can attain is upwards towards another social life if he be ambitious, or downward to the

underworlds if he is bored. For Mac Cann there was no upward and no downward movements, he had plumbed to the very rocks of life, but his horizontal movements were bounded only by the oceans around his country, and in this gigantic underworld he moved with almost absolute freedom, and a knowledge which might properly be termed scientific.

In despite of his apparent outlawry he was singularly secure ; ambition waved no littlest lamp at him ; the one ill which could over- take him was death, which catches on every man ; no enmity could pursue him to any wall, for he was sunken a whole sphere beneath malice as beneath benevolence. Physical ill-treatment might come upon him, but in that case it was his manhood and his muscle against another manhood and another muscle the simplest best would win, but there was no glory for the conqueror nor any loot to be carried from the battle.

Casual warfares, such as these, had been frequent enough in his career, for he had fought stubbornly with every kind of man, and had afterwards medicined his wounds with the only unguents cheap enough for his usage the healing balsams of time and patience. He had but one occupation, and it was an engrossing one he hunted for food, and for it he hunted with the skill and pertinacity of a wolf or a vulture.

With what skill he did hunt ! He would pick crumbs from the lank chaps of famine ; he gathered nourishment from the empty air ; he lifted it from wells and watercourses ; he picked it off clothes lines and hedges ; he stole so cleverly from the bees that they never felt his hand in their pocket ; he would lift the eggs from beneath a bird, and she would think that his finger was a chicken ; he would clutch a hen from the roost, and the housewife would think he was the yard dog, and the yard dog would think he was its brother.

He had a culture too, and if it was not wide it was profound ; he knew wind and weather as few astronomers know it ; he knew the habit of the trees and the earth ; how the seasons moved, not as seasons, but as days and hours ; he had gathered all the sweets of summer, and the last rigour of winter was no secret to him ; he had fought with the winter every year of his life as one fights with a mad beast, he had held off that grizzliest of muzzles and escaped scatheless.

He knew men and women, and he knew them from an angle at which they seldom caught themselves or each other ; he knew them as prey to be bitten and escaped from quickly. At them, charged with a thousand preoccupations, he looked with an eye in which there was a single surmise, and he divined them in a flash. In this quick vision he saw man, one expression, one attitude for all ; never did he see a man or woman in their fullness, his microscopic vision caught only what it looked for, but he saw that with the instant clarity of the microscope. There were no complexities for him in humanity ; there were those who gave and those who did not give ; there were those who might be cajoled, and those who might be frightened. If there was goodness in a man he glimpsed it from afar as a hawk sees a mouse in the clover, and he swooped on that virtue and was away with booty. If there was evil in a man he passed it serenely as a sheep passes by a butcher, for evil did not affect him. Evil could never put a hand on him, and he was not evil himself.

If the denominations of virtue or vice must be affixed to his innocent existence, then these terms would have to be re-defined, for they had no meaning in his case ; he stood outside these as he did outside of the social structure. But, indeed, he was not outside of the social structure at all ; he was so far inside of it that he could never get out ; he was at the very heart of it ; he was held in it like a deer in an ornamental park, or a cork that bobs peacefully in a bucket, and in the immense, neglected pastures of civilisation he found his own quietude and his own wisdom.

All of the things he knew and all of the things that he had done were most competently understood by his daughter.

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It is to be remarked that the angels were strangely like Patsy Mac Cann. Their ideas of right and wrong almost entirely coincided with his. They had no property and so they had no prejudices, for the person who has nothing may look upon the world as his inheritance, while the person who has something has seldom anything but that.

Civilisation, having built itself at hazard upon the Rights of Property, has sought on many occasions to unbuild itself again in sheer desperation of any advance, but from the great Ethic of Possession there never has been any escape, and there never will be until the solidarity of man has been really created, and until each man ceases to see the wolf in his neighbour.

Is there actually a wolf in our neighbour ? We see that which we are, and our eyes project on every side an image of ourselves ; if we look with fear that which we behold is frightful; if we look with love then the colours of heaven are repeated to us from the ditch and the dungeon. We invent eternally upon one another ; we scatter our sins broadcast and call them our neighbours ; let us scatter our virtues abroad and build us a city to live in.

For Mac Cann and his daughter there was no longer any strangeness in their companions. As day and night succeeded, as conversation and action supplemented each other on their journeys, so each of them began to unfold from the fleshy disguise, and in a short time they could each have spoken of the others to an inquiring stranger, giving, within bounds, reasonably exact information as to habit and mentality.

What conversations they had engaged in ! Sitting now by a hedge close to a tiny chaotic village, compact of ugliness and stupidity, now at twilight as they camped in a disused quarry, leaning their shoulders against great splintered rocks, and hearing no sound but the magnified, slow trickle of water and the breeze that sung or screamed against a razor edge of rock ; or lying on the sheltered side of a pit of potatoes, they stared at the moon as she sailed on her lonely voyages, or watched the stars that glanced and shone from the drifting clouds ; and as they lifted their eyes to these sacred voyagers in whose charge is the destiny of man they lifted their minds also and adored mutely that mind of which these are the thoughts made visible.

Sometimes they discussed the problems of man in a thousand superficial relationships. The angels were wise, but in the vocabulary which they had to use wisdom had no terms. Their wisdom referred only to ultimates, and was the unhandiest of tools when dug into some immediate, curious problem. Before wisdom can be audible a new language must be invented, and they also had to unshape their definitions and re-translate these secular findings into terms wherein they could see the subject broadly, and they found that what they gained in breadth they lost in outline, and that the last generalisation, however logically it was framed, was seldom more than an intensely interesting lie when it was dissected again. No truth in regard to space and time can retain virtue for longer than the beating of an artery; it too has its succession, its sidereal tide, and while you look upon it, round and hardy as a pebble, behold, it is split and fissured and transformed.

Sometimes when it rained, and it rained often, they would seek refuge in a haystack, if one was handy ; or they would creep into a barn and hide behind hills of cabbages or piles of farming tools ; or they slid into the sheds among the cattle where they warmed and fed themselves against those peaceful flanks ; or, if they were nigh a town and had been lucky that day, they would pay a few coppers to sleep on the well-trodden, earthen floor of a house.

As for the ass, he slept wherever he could.

When there was rain he would stand with his tail against the wind sunken in a reverie so profound that he no longer seemed to feel the rain or the wind. From these abysses of thought he would emerge to the realisation that there was a sheltered side to a wall or a clump of heather, and he also would take his timely rest under the stars of God.

What did they say to him ? Down the glittering slopes they peer and nod ; before his eyes the mighty pageant is unrolled in quiet splendour ; for him too the signs are set. Does the Waterman care nothing for his thirst? Does the Ram not bless his increase ? Against his enemies also the Archer will bend his azure bow and loose his arrows of burning gold.

On their journeyings they met with many people; not the folk who lived in the houses dotted here and there at great distances from each other on the curving roads, for with these people they had nothing to do, they had scarcely anything to say, and the housefolk looked on the strollers with a

suspicion which was almost a fear. The language of these was seldom gracious, and often, on their approach, the man of the house was sent for and the dog was unchained.

But for the vagabonds these people did not count; Mac Cann and his daughter scarcely looked on them as human beings, and if he had generalised about them at all, he would have said that there was no difference between these folk and the trees that shaded their dwellings in leafy spray, that they were rooted in their houses, and that they had no idea of life other than the trees might have which snuff for ever the same atmosphere and look on the same horizon until they droop again to the clay they lifted from.

It was with quite other people they communed.

The wandering ballad singer with his wallet of songs slung at his ragged haunch ; the travelling musician whose blotchy fiddle could sneeze out the ten strange tunes he had learned from his father and from his father's generations before him; the little band travelling the world carrying saplings and rushes from the stream which they wove cunningly into tables and chairs warranted not to last too long ; the folk who sold rootless ferns to people from whose window-ledges they had previously stolen the pots to plant them in ; the men who went roaring along the roads driving the cattle before them from fair to market and back again ; the hairy tinkers with their clattering metals, who marched in the angriest of battalions and who spoke a language composed entirely of curses.

These, and an hundred varieties of these, they met and camped with and were friendly with, and to the angels these people were humanity, and the others were, they did not know what.

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It might be asked why Patsy Mac Cann permitted the strangers to remain with him.

Now that they were dressed like himself he had quite forgotten, or he never thought of their celestial character, and they were undoubtedly a burden upon his ingenuity. They ate as vigorously as he did, and the food which they ate he had to supply.

There were two reasons for this kindness He had always wished to be the leader of a troop. In his soul the Ancient Patriarch was alive and ambitious of leadership. Had his wife given him more children he would have formed them and their wives and children into a band, and the affairs of this little world would have been directed by him with pride and pleasure. He would have observed their goings-out and their comings-in ; he would have apportioned praise and reproach to his little clann ; he would have instructed them upon a multitude of things, and passed on to them the culture which he had gathered so hardily, and, when they arrived at the age of ingenuity, it would have still been his ambition to dash their arguments with his superior knowledge, or put the happy finish to any plan which they submitted for his approval ; he would have taken the road, like a prince of old, with his tail, and he would have undertaken such raids and forays that his name and fame would ring through the underworld like the note of a trumpet.

He could not do this because he only had one child (the others had died wintry deaths) and she was a girl. But now heaven itself had blessed him with a following and he led it with skill and enjoyment. Furthermore, his daughter, of whom he stood in considerable awe, had refused flatly to desert the strangers whom Providence had directed to them.

She had constituted herself in some strange way the mother of the four men. She cooked for them, she washed and mended for them, and, when the necessity arose, she scolded them with the heartiest good-will.

Her childhood had known nothing of dolls, and so her youth made dolls of these men whom she dressed and fed. Sometimes her existence with them was peaceful and happy ; at other times she almost went mad with jealous rage. Little by little she began to demand a domestic obedience which they very willingly gave her ; so they were her men and no one else's, and the exercise of this power gave her a delight such as she had never known.

She was wise also, for it was only in domestic affairs that she claimed their fealty ; with their masculine movements she did not interfere, nor did she interfere with the task and apportioning of the day, although her counsel was willingly listened to in these matters ; but when night came, when the camp was selected, the little cart unloaded, and the brazier lit, then she stepped briskly to her kingdom and ruled like a chieftainess.

With her father she often had trouble : he would capitulate at the end, but not until he had set forth at length his distaste for her suggestions and his assurance that she was a strap. She seldom treated him as a father, for she seldom remembered that relationship ; she loved him as one loves a younger brother, and she was angry with him as one can only be angry with a younger brother. Usually she treated him as an infant ; she adored him, and, if he had permitted it, she would have beaten him soundly on many an occasion.

For she was a strong girl. She was big in build and bone, and she was beautiful and fearless. Framed in a rusty shawl her face leaped out instant and catching as a torch in darkness ; under her clumsy garments one divined a body to be adored as a revelation ; she walked carelessly as the wind walks, proudly as a young queen trained in grandeur. She could leap from where she stood, as a wild-cat that springs terribly from quietude ; she could run as a deer runs, and pause at full flight like a carven statue. Each movement of hers was complete and lovely in itself ; when she lifted a hand to her hair the free attitude was a marvel of composure ; it might never have begun, and might never cease, it was solitary and perfect; when she bent to the brazier she folded to such an economy of content that one might have thought her half her size and yet perfect ; she had that beauty which raises the mind of man to an ecstasy which is murderous if it be not artistic; and she was so conscious of her loveliness that she could afford to forget it, and so careless that she had never yet used it as a weapon or a plea.

She could not but be aware of her beauty, for her mirrors had tongues ; they were the eyes of those she met and paused with. No man had yet said anything to her, saving in rough jest as to a child, but no woman could speak of anything else in her presence, and these exclamations drummed through all their talk.

She had been worshipped by many women, for to physical loveliness in their own sex women are the veriest slaves. They will love a man for his beauty, but a woman they will adore as a singularity, as something almost too good to be true, as something which may vanish even while they gaze at it. Prettiness they understand and like or antagonise, but they have credited beauty as a masculine trait ; and as a race long sunken in slavery, and who look almost despairingly for a saviour, so the female consciousness prostrates itself before female beauty as before a messiah who will lead them to the unconscious horrible ambitions which are the goal of femininity. But, and it is humanity's guard against a solitary development, while women worship a beautiful woman the beauty does not care for them ; she accepts their homage and flies them as one flies from the deadliest boredom; she is the widest swing of their pendulum, and must hurry again from the circumference to the centre with the violent speed of an outcast who sees from afar the smoke of his father's house and the sacred roof - tree.

There is a steady influence ; an irreconcilable desire and ambition ; the desire of every woman to be the wife of a fool, her ambition to be the mother of a genius ; but they postulate genius, it is their outlet and their justification for that leap at a tangent which they have already taken.

Out there they have discovered the Neuter. Is the Genius always to be born from an unfertilised womb, or rather a self-fertilised one ? Singular Messiahs ! scorners of paternity! claiming no less than the Cosmos for a father ; taking from the solitary mother capacity for infinite suffering and infinite love, whence did ye gather the rough masculine intellect, the single eye, all that hardness of courage and sensibility of self that made of your souls a battlefield, and of your memory a terror to drown love under torrents of horrid red ! Deluded so far and mocked ! No genius has yet sprung from ye but the Genius of War and Destruction, those frowning captains that have ravaged our vineyards and blackened our generations with the torches of their egotism.

To woman beauty is energy, and they would gladly take from their own sex that which they have so long accepted from man. They are economical ; the ants and the bees are not more amazingly par-

simonious than they, and, like the ants and the bees, their subsequent extravagance is a thing to marvel at. Food and children they will hoard, and when these are safeguarded their attitude to the life about them is ruinous. They will adorn themselves at the expense of all creation, and in a few years they crush from teeming life a species which nature has toiled through laborious ages to perfect. They adorn themselves, and too often adornment is the chief manifestation of boredom. They are world-weary, sex-weary, and they do not know what they want ; but they want power, so that they may rule evolution once more as long ago they ruled it ; their blood remembers an ancient greatness; they crave to be the queens again, to hold the sceptre of life in their cruel hands, to break up the mould which has grown too rigid for freedom, to form anew the chaos which is a womb, and which they conceive is their womb, and to create therein beauty and freedom and power. But the king whom they have placed on the throne has grown wise in watching them; he is their bone terribly separated, terribly endowed ; he uses their cruelty, their fierceness, as his armies against them and so the battle is set, and wild deeds may flare from the stars of rebellion and prophecy.

Mary, who could make women do anything for her, was entirely interested in making men bow to her will, and because, almost against her expectation they did bow, she loved them, and could not sacrifice herself too much for their comfort or even their caprice. It was the mother-spirit in her which, observing the obedience of her children, is forced in very gratitude to become their slave ; for, beyond all things, a woman desires power, and, beyond all things, she is unable to use it when she gets it. If this power be given to her grudgingly she will exercise it mercilessly; if it is given kindly then she is bound by her nature to renounce authority, and to live happy ever after, but it must be given to her.

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It may be surprising to learn that the names of the angels were Irish names, but more than eight hundred years ago a famous Saint informed the world that the language spoken in heaven was Gaelic, and, presumably, he had information on the point. He was not an Irishman, and he had no reason to exalt Fodhla above the other nations of the earth, and, therefore, his statement may be accepted on its merits, the more particularly as no other saint has denied it, and every Irish person is prepared to credit it.

It was also believed in ancient times, and the belief was world-wide, that the entrance to heaven, hell, and purgatory yawned in the Isle of the Saints, and this belief also, although it has never been proved, has never been disproved, and it does assist the theory that Irish is the celestial language. Furthermore, Gaelic is the most beautiful and expressive fashion of speech in the whole world, and, thus, an artistic and utilitarian reinforcement can be hurried to the support of that theory should it ever be in danger from philologists with foreign axes to grind.

The names of the angels were Finaun and Caeltia and Art.

Finaun was the eldest angel ; Caeltia was that one who had a small coal-black beard on his chin, and Art was the youngest of the three, and he was as beautiful as the dawn, than which there is nothing more beautiful.

Finaun was an Archangel when he was in his own place ; Caeltia was a Seraph, and Art was a Cherub. An Archangel is a Councillor and a Guardian ; a Seraph is one who accumulates knowledge ; a Cherub is one who accumulates love. In heaven these were their denominations.

Finaun was wise, childish, and kind, and between him and the little ass which drew their cart there was a singular and very pleasant resemblance.

Caeltia was dark and determined, and if he had cropped his beard with a scissors, the way Patsy Mac Cann did, he would have resembled Patsy Mac Cann as closely as one man can resemble another.

Art was dark also, and young and swift and beautiful. Looking carelessly at him one would have said that, barring the colour, he was the brother of Mary Mac Cann, and that the two of them were born at a birth, and a good birth.

Mary extended to Finaun part of the affection which she already had for the ass, and while they were marching the roads these three always went together; the archangel would be on one side of the donkey and Mary would be on the other side, and (one may say so) the three of them never ceased talking for an instant.

The ass, it will be admitted, did not speak, but he listened with such evident intention that no one could say he was out of the conversation ; his right-hand ear hearkened agilely to Mary ; his left-hand ear sprang to attention when Finaun spoke, and when, by a chance, they happened to be silent at the one moment then both his ears drooped forward towards his nose, and so he was silent also. A hand from either side continually touched his muzzle caressingly, and at moments entirely unexpected he would bray affectionately at them in a voice that would have tormented the ears of any but a true friend.

Patsy Mac Cann and the seraph Caeltia used to march exactly at the tail of the cart, and they, also, talked a lot.

At first Patsy talked the most, for he had much information to impart, and the seraph listened with intent humility, but, after a while, Caeltia, having captured knowledge, would dispute and argue with great vivacity. They spoke of many things, but a person who listened closely and recorded these things would have found that they talked oftener about strong drinks than about anything else. Mac Cann used to speak longingly about strange waters which he had heard were brewed in foreign lands, potent brewings which had been described to him by emphatic sailormen with tarry thumbs ; but at this stage Caeltia only spoke about porter and whisky, and was well contented to talk of these.

The cherub Art was used to promenade alone behind them all, but sometimes he would go in front and listen to the conversation with the ass ; sometimes he would join the two behind and force them to consider matters in which they were not interested, and sometimes again he would range the fields on either side, or he would climb a tree, or he would go alone by him-self shouting a loud song that he had learned at the fair which they had last journeyed to, or he would prance silently along the road as though his body was full of jumps and he did not know what to do with them, or he would trudge forlornly in a boredom so profound that one expected him to drop dead of it in his tracks.

So life fell into a sort of routine.

When they were camped for the night Caeltia and Art would always sit on one side of the brazier with Patsy Mac Cann sitting between them ; on the other side of the brazier the archangel and Mary would sit ; Finaun always sat very close to her when they had finished eating and were all talking together ; he used to take her long plait of hair into his lap, and for a long time he would unplait and plait again the end of that lovely rope.

Mary liked him to do this, and nobody else minded it.

The demi-gods (1921, c1914)

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