

Stories of Connacht

Seumas O'Kelly

1919

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The home-coming

Persons :

Mrs. Ford
Donagh Ford
Hugh Deely
Agnes Deely

Scene : A farmhouse in Connacht.

Hugh : They'll make short work of the high field. It's half ploughed already.

Donagh : It was good of the people to gather as they did, giving us their labour.

Hugh : The people had always a wish for your family, Donagh. Look at the great name your father left behind him in Carrabane. It would be a fine sight for him if he had lived to stand at this door now, looking at the horses bringing the plough over the ground.

Donagh : And if he could move about this house, even in his great age. He never got accustomed to the smallness of the hut down at Cussmona.

Hugh : When I was a bit of a gosoon I remember the people talking about the eviction of Donagh Ford. It was terrible work used to be in Carrabane those times. Your father was the first man to fight, and that was why the people thought so well of him.

Donagh : He would never speak of it himself, for at home he was a silent, proud man. But my mother used to be telling me of it many a time.

Hugh : Your mother and yourself have the place back now. And you have Agnes to think of.

Donagh : Agnes is a good thought to me surely. Was she telling you we fixed the day of the wedding yesterday at your uncle's ?

Hugh : She was not. A girl like her is often shy of speaking about a thing of that kind to her brother. I'd only be making game of her. (*A cheer is heard in the distance outside. Hugh goes to look out door.*)

Hugh : Here is the car coming up the road with your mother and Agnes. They're giving her a welcome.

Donagh (*looking out of window*) : She'll be very proud of the people, they to have such a memory of my father

Hugh : I'll run out and greet her. (*In a sly undertone.*) Agnes is coming up. (*He goes out laughing. Donagh hangs up harness on some pegs. Agnes Deely, wearing a shawl over her head and carrying a basket on her arm, comes in.*)

Agnes : Donagh, your mother was greatly excited leaving the hut. I think she doesn't rightly understand what is happening.

Donagh : I was afraid of that. The memory slips on her betimes. She thinks she's back in the old days again.

Agnes (*going to dresser, taking parcels from the basket.*) : My father was saying that we should have everything here as much like what it used to be as we can. That's why he brought up the bin. When they were evicted he took it up to his own place because it was too big for the hut.

Donagh : Do you know, Agnes, when I came up here this morning with your brother, Hugh, I felt the place strange and lonesome. I think an evicted house is never the same, even when people go back to it. There seemed to be some sorrow hanging over it.

Agnes (*putting up her shawl*) : Now Donagh, that's no way for you to be speaking. If you were to see how glad all the people were ! And you ought to have the greatest joy.

Donagh : Well, then I thought of you, Agnes, and that changed everything. I went whistling about the place. (*Going to her.*) After coming down from your uncle's yesterday evening I heard the first cry of the cuckoo in the wood at Raheen.

Agnes : That was a good omen, Donagh.

Donagh : I took it that way, too, for it was the first greeting I got after parting from yourself. Did you hear it, Agnes ?

Agnes : I did not. I heard only one sound the length of the evening.

Donagh : What sound was that, Agnes?

Agnes: I heard nothing only the singing of one song, a lovely song, all about Donagh Ford !

Donagh : About me?

Agnes : Yes, indeed. It was no bird and no voice, but the singing I heard of my own heart.

Donagh : That was a good song to hear, Agnes. It is like a thought that would often stir in a man's mind and find no word to suit it. It is often that I thought that way of you and could speak no word.

Agnes : All the same I think I would have an understanding for it, Donagh.

Donagh : Ah, Agnes, that is just it. That is what gives me the great comfort in your company. We have a great understanding of each other surely.

Hugh (*speaking outside*) : This is the way, Mrs. Ford. They are waiting for you within. (*He comes in.*) Donagh, here is your mother. (*Mrs. Ford, leaning on a stick, comes to the door, standing on the threshold for a little. Hugh and Donagh take off their hats reverently.*)

Mrs. Ford : And is that you, Donagh. Well, if it is not the fine high house you got for Agnes. Eh, pet?

Agnes (*taking shawl from her*) : It is your own house Donagh has taken you back to.

Hugh : Did you not hear the people giving you a welcome, Mrs. Ford ?

Donagh : Don't you remember the house, mother?

Mrs. Ford : I have a memory of many a thing, God help me. And I heard the people cheering. I thought maybe it was some strife was going on in Carrabane. It was always a place of one struggle or another. (*She looks helplessly about house, muttering as she hobbles to the bin. She raises the lid.*) Won't you take out a measure of oats to the mare, Donagh ? And they have mislaid the scoop again. I'm tired telling them not to be leaving it in the barn. Where is that Martin Driscoll and what way is he doing his business at all ? (*She turns to close the bin.*)

Hugh (*to Donagh*) : Who is Martin Driscoll ?

Donagh : A boy who was here long ago. I heard a story of him and a flight with a girl. He lies in a grave in Australia long years.

Mrs. Ford (*moving from bin, her eyes catching the dresser*) : Who put the dresser there ? Was it by my orders ? That is a place where it will come awkward to me.

Agnes (*going to her*) : Sit down and rest yourself. You are fatigued after making the journey.

Mrs. Ford (*as they cross to fire*) : Wait until I lay eyes on Martin Driscoll and on Delia Morrissey of the cross ! I tell you I will regulate them.

Donagh (*to Hugh*) : Delia Morrissey—that is the name of the girl I spoke of. She was lost on the voyage, a girl of great beauty.

Agnes (*to Mrs. Ford*) : Did you take no stock of the people as you came on the car ?

Mrs. Ford : In throth I did. It was prime to see them there reddening the sod and the little rain drops falling from the branches of the trees.

Hugh : They raised a great cheer for you.

Mrs. Ford : Did you say that it was to me they were giving a welcome ?

Donagh : Indeed it was, mother.

Mrs. Ford (*laughing a little*) : Mind that, Agnes. They are the lively lads to be taking stock of an old woman the like of me driving the roads.

Hugh : The people could not but feel some stir to see what they saw this day. I declare to you, Donagh, when I saw her old stooped dark figure thrown against the sky on the car it moved something in me.

Mrs. Ford : What are you saying about a stir in the country, Hugh Deely ?

Hugh : Was it not something to see the planter going from this place ? Was it not something to see you and Donagh coming from a miserable place in the bog ?

Mrs. Ford (*sharply*) : The planter, did you say? (*Clutching her stick to rise*). Blessed be God ! Is Curley the planter gone from Carrabane ? Don't make any lie to me, Hugh Deely.

Hugh : Curley is gone.

Mrs. Ford (*rising with difficulty, her agitation growing*) : And his wife ? What about his trollop of a wife?

Donagh : The whole brood and tribe of them went a month back.

Agnes : Did not Donagh tell you that you were back in your own place again ? (*Mrs. Ford moves about, a consciousness of her surroundings breaking upon her. She goes to room door, pushing it open.*)

Hugh : It is all coming back to her again.

Donagh : She was only a little upset in her mind.

Mrs. Ford (*coming from room door*) : Agnes, and you, Hugh Deely, come here until I be telling you a thing of great wonder. It was in this house Donagh there was born. And it was in that room that we laid out his little sister, Mary. I remember the March day and the yellow flowers they put around her in the bed. She had no strength for the rough world. I crossed her little white hands on the breast where the life died in her like a flame. Donagh, my son, it was nearly all going from my mind.

Agnes : This is no day for sad thoughts. Think of the great thing it is for you to be back here again.

Mrs. Ford : Ah, that's the truth, girl. Did the world ever hear of such a story as an old woman like me to be standing in this place and the planter gone from Carrabane ! And if Donagh Ford is gone to his rest his son is here to answer for him.

Donagh : The world knows I can never be the man my father was.

Mrs. Ford (*raising her stick with a little cry*) : Ah-ha, the people saw the great strength of Donagh Ford. ' They talk of a tenant at will,' he'd say, ' but who is it that can chain the purpose of a man's mind.' And they all saw it. There was no great spirit in the country when Donagh Ford took the courage of his own heart and called the people together.

Hugh : This place was a place of great strife then.

Mrs. Ford : God send, Agnes Deely, that you'll never have the memory of a bitter eviction burned into your mind.

Donagh : That's all over and done now, mother. There is a new life before you.

Mrs. Ford : Well, they had their way and put us across the threshold. But if they did it was on this hearth was kindled a blaze that swept the townland and wrapped the country. It went from one place to another and no wave that rose upon the Shannon could hold it back. It was a thing that no power could check, for it ran in the blood and only wasted in the vein of the

father to leap fresh in the heart of the son. Ah, I will go on my knees and kiss the threshold of this house for the things it calls to mind. (*She goes to door, kneeling down and kissing the threshold.*)

Hugh : It is a great hold she has on the old days and a great spirit. (*A low murmur of voices is heard in the distance outside.*)

Donagh : They are turning the ploughs into the second field.

Mrs. Ford : What's that you say about the ploughs ?

Donagh (*going to her*) : The boys are breaking up the land for us. (*He and Hugh help her to rise. They are all grouped at the door.*)

Agnes : It was they who cheered you on the road.

Mrs. Ford : The sight is failing me Donagh. I can only make out little dark spots against the green of the fields.

Donagh : Those are the people, mother.

Mrs. Ford (*crossing to fireplace*) : The people are beginning to gather behind the ploughs again. Tell me, Donagh, what way is the wind coming ?

Donagh : It is coming up from the South.

Mrs. Ford (*speaking more to herself*) : Well, I can ask no more now. The wind is from the South and it will bear that cheer past where HE is lying in Gurteen-na-Marbh. It is a kind wind and it carries good music. Take my word for it every sound that goes on the wind is not lost to the dead.

Hugh : You ought to take her out of these thoughts.

Agnes : Leave her with me for a little while. (*Hugh and Donagh move to door.*)

Mrs. Ford : Where are you going, Donagh?

Donagh : Down to the people breaking the ground. They will be waiting for word of your home-coming.

Mrs. Ford : Ah, sure you ought to have the people up here, *a mhic*. I'd like to see all the old neighbours about me and hear the music of their voices.

Hugh : Very well. I'll step down and bid them up. (*He goes.*)

Mrs. Ford : You'll have the anxiety of the farm on your mind from this out, Donagh.

Donagh : Well, it is not the hut, with the hunger of the bog about it, that I will be bringing Agnes into now.

Mrs. Ford: Agnes, come here, love, until I look upon the sweetness of your face. (*Agnes goes to her, kneeling by her side.*) You'll be in this place with Donagh. It is a great inheritance you will have in the name of Donagh Ford. It is no idle name that will be in this house but the name of one who knew a great strength. It will be a long line of generations

that the name of the Fords will reach out to, generations reaching to the time that Ireland herself will rise by the power of her own will.

Agnes (*rising*) : You will only sadden yourself by these thoughts. Think of what there is in store for you.

Mrs. Ford : I'm an old woman now, child. There can be no fresh life before me. But I can tell you that I was young and full of courage once. I was the woman who stood by the side of Donagh Ford, that gave him support in the day of trial, that was always the strong branch in the storm and in the calm. Am I saying any word only what is a true word, Donagh ?

Donagh : The truth of that is well known to the people. (*He goes to door.*)

Mrs. Ford : Very well. Gather up all the people now, son. Let them come in about this place for many of them have a memory of it. Let me hear the welcome of their voices. They will have good words to say, speaking on the greatness of Donagh Ford who is dead.

Donagh : They are coming out from the fields with Hugh, mother. I see the young fellows falling into line. They are wearing their caps and sashes and they have the band. I can see them carrying the banner to the front of the crowd. Here they are marching up the road. (*The strains of a fife and drum band playing a spirited march are heard in the distance. Mrs. Ford rises slowly, "humouring" the march with her stick, her face expressing her delight. The band stops.*)

Mrs. Ford : That's the spirit of Carrabane. Let the people now look upon me in this place and let them take pride in my son.

Donagh : I see Stephen Mac Donagh.

Mrs. Ford : Let him be the first across the threshold, for he went to jail with Donagh Ford. Have beside him Murt Cooney that lost his sight at the struggle of Ballyadams. Let him lift up his poor blind face till I see the rapture of it.

Donagh : Murt Cooney is coming, and Francis Kilroy and Brian Mulkearn.

Mrs. Ford : It was they who put a seal of silence on their lips and bore their punishment to save a friend of the people. Have a place beside me for the widow of Con Rafferty who hid the smoking revolver the day the tyrant fell at the cross of Killbrack.

Donagh : All the old neighbours are coming surely.

Mrs. Ford (*crossing slowly to door, Agnes going before her*) : Let me look into their eyes for the things I will see stirring there. I will reach them out the friendship of my hands and speak to them the words that lie upon my heart. The rafters of this house will ring again with the voices that Donagh Ford welcomed and that I loved. Aye, the very fire on the hearth will leap in memory of the hands that tended it.

Donagh : This will be such a day as will be made a boast of for ever in Carrabane. (*Agnes goes out door to meet the people.*)

Mrs. Ford : Let there be music and the sound of rejoicing and shouts from the hills. Let those who put their feet in anger upon us and who are themselves reduced to-day look back upon the strength they held and the power they lost.

Donagh : I will bid the music play up. (*He goes out.*)

Mrs. Ford (*standing alone at the door*) : People of Carrabane, gather about the old house of Donagh Ford. Let the fight for the land in this place end where it began. Let the courage and the strength that Donagh Ford knew be in your blood from this day out. Let the spirit be good and the hand be strong for the work that the heart directs. Raise up your voices with my voice this day and let us make a great praise on the name of Ireland. (*She raises her stick, straightening her old figure. The band strikes up and the people cheer outside as the curtain falls.*)

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Both sides of the pond.

I

Mrs. Donohoe marked the clearness of the sky, the number and brightness of the stars.

“ There will be a share of frost to-night, Denis,” she said.

Denis Donohoe, her son, adjusted a primitive bolt on the stable door, then sniffed at the air, his broad nostrils quivering sensitively as he raised his head.

“ There is ice in the wind,” he said.

“ Make a start with the turf to the market to-morrow,” his mother advised. “ People in town will be wanting fires now.”

Denis Donohoe walked over to the dim stack of brown turf piled at the back of the stable. It was there since the early fall, the dry earth cut from the bog, the turf that would make bright and pleasant fires in the open grates of Connacht for the winter months. Away from it spread the level bogland, a sweep of country that had, they said, in the infancy of the earth been a great oak forest, across which in later times had roved packs of hungry wolves, and which could at this day claim the most primitive form of industry in Western Europe. Out into this bogland in the summer had come from their cabins the peasantry, men and women, Denis Donohoe among them ; they had dug up slices of the spongy, wet sod, cut it into pieces rather larger than bricks, licked it into shape by stamping upon it with their bare feet, stacked it about in little rows to dry in the sun, one sod leaning against the other, looking in the moonlight like a great host of wee brown fairies grouped in couples for a midnight dance on the carpet of purple heather. Now the time had come to convert it into such money as it would fetch.

Denis Donohoe whistled merrily that night as he piled the donkey cart, or “ creel,” with the sods of turf. Long before daybreak next morning he was about, his movements quick like one who had great business on hands. The kitchen of the cabin was illuminated by a rush-light, the rays of which did not go much beyond a small deal table, scrubbed white, where he sat at his breakfast, an unusually good repast, for he had tea, home-made bread and a boiled egg. His mother moved about the dim kitchen, waiting on him, her bare feet almost noiseless on the black earthen floor. He ate heartily and silently, making the Sign of the Cross when he had finished. His mother followed him out on the dark road to bid him good luck, standing beside the creel of turf.

“ There should be a brisk demand now that the winter is upon us,” she said hopefully. “ God be with you.”

“ God and Mary be with you, mother,” Denis Donohoe made answer as he took the donkey by the head and led him along the dark road. The little animal drew his burden very slowly, the cart creaking and rocking noisily over the uneven road. Now and then Denis Donohoe spoke to him encouragingly, softly, his gaze at the same time going to the east, searching the blank sky for a hint of the dawn to come.

But they had gone rocking and swaying along the winding road for a long time before the day dawned. Denis Donohoe marked the spread of the light, the slow looming up of a range of hills, the sweep of brown patches of bog, then grey and green fields, broken by the glimmer of blue fakes, slopes of brown furze making for them a dull frame.

“ Now that we have the blessed light we won’t feel the journey at all,” Denis Donohoe said to the donkey.

The ass drew the creel of turf more briskly, shook his winkers and swished his tail. When they struck very sharp hills Denis Donohoe got to the back of the cart, put his hands to the shafts, and, lowering his head, helped to push up the load, the muscles springing taut at the back of his thick limbs as he pressed hard against the bright frosty ground.

As they came down from the hills he already felt very hungry, his fingers tenderly fondling the slices of oaten bread he had put away in the pocket of his grey homespun coat. But he checked the impulse to eat, the long jaw of his swarthy face set, his strong teeth tight together awaiting the right hour to play their eager part. If he ate all the oaten bread now—splendid, dry, hard stuff, made of oat meal and water, baked on a gridiron—it would leave too long a fast afterwards. Denis Donohoe had been brought up to practise caution in these matters, to subject his stomach to a rigorous discipline, for life on the verge of a bog is an exacting business. Instead of obeying the impulse to eat Denis Donohoe blew warm breaths into his purple hands, beat his arms about his body to deaden the bitter cold, whistled, took some steps of an odd dance along the road, and went on talking to the donkey as if he were making pleasant conversation to a companion. The only sign of life to be seen on earth or air was a thin line of wild duck high up in the sky, one group making wide circles over a vivid mountain lake.

Half way on his journey to the country town Denis Donohoe pulled up his little establishment. It was outside a lonely cottage exactly like his own home. There was the same brown thatch on the roof, a garland of verdant wild creepers drooping from a spot at the gable, the same two small windows without any sashes in the front wall, the same narrow rutty pathway from the road, the same sort of yellow hen cackling heatedly, her legs quivering as she clutched the drab half door, the same scent of decayed cabbage leaves in the air. Denis Donohoe took a sack of hay from the top of the creel of turf, and spread some of it on the side of the road for the donkey. While he did so a woman who wore a white cap, a grey bodice, a thick woollen red petticoat, under which her bare lean legs showed, came to the door, waving the yellow hen off her perch.

“ Good day to you, Mrs. Deely,” Denis Donohoe said, showing his strong teeth.

“ Welcome, Denis. Won’t you step in and warm yourself at the fire, for the day is sharp, and you are early on the road ?”

Denis Donohoe sat with the woman by the fire for some time, their exchange of family gossip quiet and agreeable. The young man was, however, uneasy, glancing about the house now and then like one who missed something. The woman, dropping her calm eyes on him, divined his thoughts.

“ Agnes is not about,” she said. “ She started off for the Cappa Post Office an hour gone, for we had tidings that a letter is there for us from Sydney.”

“ A letter from her sister ?”

“ Yes, Mary is married there and doing well.”

Denis Donohoe resumed his journey.

At the appointed spot he ravenously devoured the oaten bread, then stretched himself on his stomach on the ground and took some draughts of water from a roadside stream, drawing it up with a slow sucking noise, his teeth chattering, his eyes on the bright pebbles that glittered between some green cress at the bottom. When he had finished the donkey also laved his thirst at the spot.

He reached the market town while it was yet morning. He led the creel of turf through the straggling streets, where some people with the sleep in their eyes were moving about. The only sound he made was a low word of encouragement to the donkey.

“ How much for the creel ?” a man asked, standing at his shop door.

“ Six shilling,” Denis Donohoe replied, and waited, for it was above the business of a decent turf-seller to praise his wares or press for a sale.

“ Good luck to you, son,” said the merchant, “ I hope you’ll get it.” He smiled, folded his hands one over the other, and retired to his shop.

Denis Donohoe moved on, saying in an undertone to the donkey, “ Gee-up, Patsy. That old fellow is no good.”

There were other inquiries, but nobody purchased. They said that money was very scarce. Denis Donohoe said nothing ; money was too remote a thing for him to imagine how it could be ever anything else except scarce. He grew tired of going up and down past shops where there was no sign of business, so he drew the side streets and laneways, places where children screamed about the road, where there was a scent of soapy water, where women came to their doors and looked at him with eyes that expressed a slow resentment, their arms bare above the elbows, their hair hanging dankly about their ears, their voices, when they spoke, monotonous, and always sounding a note of tired complaint.

On the rise of a little bridge Denis Donohoe met a red-haired woman, a family of children skirmishing about her; there was a battle light in her wolfish eyes, her idle hands were folded over her stomach.

“ How much, gossoon ?” she asked.

“ Six shilling.”

“ Six devils !” She walked over to the creel, handling some of the sods of turf Denis Donohoe knew she was searching a constitutionally abusive mind for some word contemptuous of his wares. She found it at last, for she smacked her lips. It was in the Gaelic. “ *Spairteach* !” she cried—a word that was eloquent of bad turf, stuff dug from the first layer of the bog, a mere covering for the correct vein beneath it.

“ It’s good stone turf,” Denis Donohoe protested, a little nettled.

The woman was joined by some people who were hanging about, anxious to take part in bargaining which involved no personal liability. They argued, made jokes, shouted, and finally began to bully Denis Donohoe, the woman leading, her voice half a scream, her stomach heaving, her eyes dancing with excitement, a yellow froth gathering at the corners of her angry mouth, her hand gripping a sod of the turf, for the only dissipation life now offered her was this haggling with and shouting down of turf sellers. Denis Donohoe stood immovable beside his cart, patient as his donkey, his swarthy face stolid under the shadow of his broad-brimmed black hat, his intelligent eyes quietly measuring his noisy antagonists. When the woman's anger had quite spent itself the turf was purchased for five shillings.

Denis Donohoe carried the sods in his arms to the kitchen of the purchaser's house. It entailed a great many journeys in and out, the sods being piled up on his hooked left arm with a certain skill. His route lay through a small shop, down a semi-dark hallway, across a kitchen, the sods being stowed under a stairway where cockroaches scampered from the thudding of the falling sods.

Women were moving about the kitchen, talking incessantly, fumbling about tables, always appearing to search for something that had been lost, one crooning over a cradle that she rocked before the fire. The smell of cooking, the sound of something fatty hissing on a pan, brought a sense of faintness to Denis Donohoe, for he was ravenously hungry again.

He stumbled awkwardly in and out of the place with his armfuls of brown sods. The women moved with reluctance out of his way. Once a servant girl raised the most melancholy pair of wide brown eyes he had ever seen, saying to him, "It always goes through me to hear the turf falling in the stair-hole. It reminds me of the day I heard the clay falling on me father's coffin, God be with him and forgive him, for he died in the horrors."

By the time Denis Donohoe had delivered the cartload of turf the little donkey had eaten all the hay in the sack. In the small shop Denis purchased some bacon, flour and tea, so that he had only some coppers to bring home with him. After some hesitation he handed back one penny for some biscuits, and these he ate as soon as he set out on the return journey.

The little donkey went over the road through the hills on the way back with spirit, for donkeys are good homers. Denis Donohoe sat up on the front of the cart, his legs dangling down beside the shaft. The donkey trotted down the slopes gayly, the harness rattling, the cart swaying, jolting, making an amazing noise.

The donkey cocked his ears, flicked his tail, even indulged in one or two buck-jumps, as he rattled down the hilly roads. Denis Donohoe once or twice leaned out over the shaft, and brought his open hand down on the haunch of the donkey, but it was more a caress than a whack.

The light began to fade, the landscape to grow more obscure. Suddenly Denis Donohoe broke into song. They were going over a level stretch of ground. The donkey walked quietly. The quivering voice rang out over the darkening landscape, gaining in quality and in steadiness, a clear light voice, the notes coming with the instinctive intonation, the perfect order of the born folk singer. It was some old Gaelic song, a refrain that had been preserved like the trunks of the primeval oaks in the bogs, such a refrain as might claim kinship with the Dresden *Amen*, sung by generations of German peasants until at last it reached the ears of Richard Wagner, giving birth to a classic. As he sang Denis Donohoe raised his swarthy face, his profile sharp against the pale sky, his eyes, half in rapture like all folk singers, ranging over the hills, his long throat palpitating, swelling and slackening like the throat of a

bird quivering in song. Then a light from the sash-less windows of Mrs. Deely's cabin shone faintly and silence again brooded over the place. When he reached the cabin Denis Donohoe dismounted and walked into the kitchen, his eyes bright, his steps so eager that he became conscious of it and pulled up at once.

Mrs. Deely was sitting by the fire, her knitting needles busy. Denis Donohoe sat down beside her. While they were speaking a young girl came from the only room in the house, and, crossing the kitchen, stood beside the open fireplace.

"Agnes had great news from Australia from Mary," Mrs. Deely said. "She enclosed the price of the passage from this place to Sydney."

"I will be making the voyage the end of this month," the girl herself added.

There was an awkward silence, during which Mrs. Deely carefully piloted one of her needles through an intricate turn in the heel of the sock.

"Well, I wish you luck, Agnes," Denis Donohoe said at last, and then gave a queer odd little laugh, a little laugh that made Mrs. Deely regard him quickly and seriously. She noticed that he had his eyes fixed on the ground.

"It will be a great change from this place," the girl said, fingering something on the mantelpiece. "Mary says Sydney is a wonderful big city."

Denis Donohoe slowly lifted his eyes, taking in the shape of the girl from the bare feet to the bright ribbon that was tied in her hair. What he saw was a slim girl, her limbs showing faintly in the folds of a cheap, thin skirt, a loose, small shawl resting on the shoulders, her bosom heaving gently where the shawl did not meet, her profile delicate and faint in the light of the fire, her eyes, suddenly turned upon him, being the eyes of a girl conscious of his eyes, her low breath the sweet breath of a girl stepping into her womanhood.

"Well, God prosper you, Agnes Deely," Denis Donohoe said after some time, and rose from his seat.

The two women came out on the road to see him off. He did not dally, jumped on to the front of the cart and rattled away.

Overhead the sky was winter clear, the stars merry, eternal, the whole heaven brilliant in its silent, stupendous song, its perpetual *Magnificat*; but Denis Donohoe made the rest of the journey in a black silence, gloom in the rigid figure, the stooping shoulders, the dangling legs; and the hills seemed to draw their grim shadows around his tragic ride to the lonely light in his mother's cabin on the verge of the dead brown bog.

II

There was a continuous clatter of conversation that rose and fell and broke like the waves on the beach, there was the dull shuffling of uneasy feet on the ground, the tinkling of glasses, the rattle of bottles, and over it all the half hysterical laugh of a tipsy woman. Above the racket a penetrating, quivering voice was raised in song.

Now and again bleary eyes were raised to, the stage, shadowy in a fog of tobacco smoke. The figure on the boards strutted about, made some fantastic steps, the face pallid in the streaky light, the mouth scarlet as a tulip for a moment as it opened wide, the muscles about the lips wiry and distinct from much practice, the words of the song coming in a vehement

nasal falsetto and in a brogue acquired in the Bowery. The white face of the man who accompanied the singer on the piano was raised for a moment in a tired gesture that was also a protest ; in the eyes of the singer as they met those of the accompanist was an expression of cynical Celtic humour ; in the smouldering gaze of the pianist was the patient, stubborn soul of the Slav. The look between these entertainers, one from Connacht the other from Poland, was a little act of mutual commiseration and a mutual expression of contempt for the noisy descendants of the Lost Tribes who made merry in the place.

A Cockney who had exchanged Houndsditch for the Bowery leered up broadly at the Celt prancing about the stage. He turned to the companion who sat drinking with him, a tall, bony half-caste, her black eyes dancing in a head that quivered from an ague acquired in Illinois.

“ ’E’s all ryght, is Paddy,” said the voice from Houndsditch. He pointed a thumb that was a certificate of villainy in the direction of the stage.

“ Sure,” said the coloured lady, whose ancestry rambled back away Alabama. She looked up at the stage with her bold eyes.

“ I know him,” she said, thoughtfully. “ And I like him,” she added grinning. “ We all like him. He’s one of the boys.”

“ Wot price me ?” said the Houndsditch man.

“ Oh, you’re good, too,” said the coloured lady. “ Blow in another cocktail, honey.” She struck her breast where the uneasy bone showed through the dusky skin. “ I’ve a fearful thirst right there.”

Little puckers gathered about the small, humorous eyes of the Cockney as he looked at her. “ My,” he said, “ you ’ave got a thirst and a capacity, Ole Sahara !”

The coloured lady raised the cocktail to her fat lips, and as she did so there was a sudden racket, men shouting, women clapping their hands, the voice of the tipsy woman dominant in its hysteria over the uproar. The singer was bowing profuse acknowledgments from the stage, his eyes, sly in their cynical humour, upon the face of the Slav at the piano, his head thrown back, the pallor of his face ghastly.

The lady from Alabama joined in the tribute to the singer.

“ ’Core, ’core,” cried Ole Sahara, raising her glass in the dim vapour.

“ Here’s to Denis Donohoe !”

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