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O'HOULIHAN'S JEST

A
Lament
for
the
Irish

O'
Houlihan's Jest

by Rohan O'Grady

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To
Mary Ward O'Grady
and
Mary Comstock Skinner

O'HOULIHAN'S JEST



COULD YOU HAVE SEEN O'HOULIHAN lying on his bier, as darkly handsome as a pagan king, you would have wept. My foster mother sits with tearless eyes beside the fire, dreaming of the last of her eight dead sons. We are all gathered here to say farewell to the O'Houlihan, a king, and the last of his race. By the side of my foster mother sits little Molly Bawn, she who was the blood of O'Houlihan's heart. She weeps, little Molly Bawn, her gentle, witless eyes weep tears enough for all of us. And O'Houlihan's men are gathered here by my side—no tears yet from them, but before this night is through we shall see many strange things. I, Mick Delahanty, he whom The Man called the red-

headed jackal, I do not weep. He, the most hated man in Ireland, hated so fearfully that my people will not speak his name, but call him only "The Man," he called me the jackal. Well, so I be, if a jackal dogs the footsteps of the lion, for such was my cousin O'Houlihan to me, and O'Houlihan, what did he call me?

He also called me a jackal, but he smiled and called me his Jackaleen, and so I am known to my people.

The smoke finds its way lazily past the rafters to a hole in the roof. We have no chimbleys, we mere Irish. Our homes have been burned so frequently over our heads that we bethink ourselves fortunate with what we have, never knowing when it shall strike the fancy of the soldiers to fling the torch again.

And O'Houlihan's bier, is it as gorgeously bedecked as befits a king? Is he laid out with torque and diadem of gold, jeweled sword and finely wrought battle-ax? O'Houlihan lies in a dark corner on a deal table, with a pair of wooden stools the only furniture that this miserable cabin affords.

This is O'Houlihan's wake; he lies, his mighty chest arched like a bow, and the death bandage tight about his chin. I tied that bandage before the sun set this night, and already the death beard, a dark blue shadow, creeps across O'Houlihan's jowls.

The men are restless; they look about fearfully. Be patient, I say in our own tongue; be patient, we wait for one more guest.

Brosnaghan, a violent man with the face of a murderer when anger is upon him, shakes his head and raises a bottle to his lips.

No, I say. We must wait. There are twelve men in this cabin, besides the old woman and the girl. Not counting himself, of course, who shall watch but shall not drink or speak.

Move back to the walls, sit you there upon the ground, leave the middle of the room free. They do as ordered; they

are well trained, O'Houlihan's men, used to sleeping in the rain like dogs. And the names upon them, of ancient chieftains; these men's sires spoke Latin and were clothed in the finest saffron linen five hundred years before the stranger set foot in this land.

But no matter, I shall not dwell on that. O'Houlihan would not wish it. Tonight we bury a king. But we wait for one more guest.

"Do not grieve, my mother," I say to my old foster mother. She does not even turn her eyes from the fire. I take her hand, which is as large and work-worn as a man's, and I kiss it.

Little Molly Bawn buries her face in my mother's ragged skirts, and weeps more.

"Be silent, you little innocent," I say to her. I raise her head and point to the corpse. "Do you want himself to hear you?"

She shudders and clings to my mother's knee, and my mother turns and strokes Molly Bawn's head.

"Do not frighten her more," says my mother softly. Her face is so old, so infinitely tired and gentle, that I would say it breaks my heart, if seeing her poor hands had not already done so.

There is no clock upon the wall, and the sun has set, so, timeless, we must wait patiently.

"Do you think he will come?" asks Ruarc of me.

"He is no coward," I answer. No, The Man is not a coward. An Englishman, but not a coward.

"But will he dare to attend O'Houlihan's wake alone?" asks another, "with twelve of O'Houlihan's men about him?"

"He will be here," I answer. "He will be here. He gave his word, and he is a man of his word."

Yes, The Man is a man of his word. When he came to this country to put a bloody stamp upon our revolts, that was the first thing he told my people.

"I am a man of my word," he said, "and before I am gone from this land you will wish Cromwell was back."

Indeed, oh, indeed, The Man is a man of his word.

The night he ordered the torch put to the pitch cap that covered the head of Owen Ruh, O'Houlihan's brother, what did The Man say?

He said: "So your name is Owen Ruh, Owen the Redhead. Well, Owen Ruh, your head will be redder yet, before this night is done."

This is the fashion of The Man who dares to attend O'Houlihan's wake. And yet, in his own way he is honorable. It would be the pitch cap or the garrote for every one of us in this room if he gave the word to his men, but in my heart I know he will not.

He comes to feast his eyes and his soul upon the sight of his dead enemy. But who knows? Perhaps he loved O'Houlihan, the only man in Ireland who could outwit him. Except for once, you understand. But O'Houlihan was human like the rest of us. Or was he?

In ancient days it was known that kings had lucky eyes. A king's glance was like a shower of gold. And so it was with O'Houlihan; he had the kingly eyeballs, and luck. Dear sweet Mary, mother of God, until the Welshman fired that shot, was ever a man so lucky as O'Houlihan?

The Welshman, that damned Welsh sergeant, the finest shot in Ireland, he with his harp and his songs, a mercenary in the pay of the English. Oh, how he sang of his hills and his valleys! He made my people weep with the beauty of his songs, and they loved him as though he were one of us. He spoke our language like his own, and he loved little Molly Bawn, and, God curse or bless him, when The Man said Fire! it was he who fired the shot like any other English soldier.

There is a knock upon the door, and there he stands, The Man, the most feared and hated man in Ireland.

A small man, finely built, his hands narrow and white, but as strong as steel. He stands there fearlessly and then he steps in.

For all he knows, twelve pairs of hands could tear him apart, but he glances carelessly at the men, as though he cannot credit them with being a danger to him. Disdain sits upon him like a cloak, and I feel my mouth become sour with hate. I whom he could have killed a thousand times, but he only turned laughing to the Welsh sergeant and said he did not kill jackals. I have suffered many insults, but to have my enemy refuse to kill me is an indignity too terrible to be borne. But I have given my word to O'Houlihan. Yes, Englishman, you are as safe with me as by your mother's knee. My revenge shall be, I shall not kill you. There are things worse than death.

There is a coldness about him that is like a breath of frost upon the air, but it melts as he turns his eyes to the dark corner where O'Houlihan lies.

Yes, he thaws and his eyes burn with an unholy light. How many years he has waited for this minute, long years, bloody years for this country! O'Houlihan knew this Man; he understood his heart and the long years The Man lived, breathed, for this very minute, to outwit O'Houlihan and to see him dead.

Why should The Man fear O'Houlihan's men? Did not O'Houlihan himself charge his men to give safe-conduct to The Man to attend his wake?

O'Houlihan called us together in the glen. He stood silent and reflective, as was his manner, and then he turned to me.

"Lead the priest from us."

There is a price on the priest's head, the bounty the same as that on a wolf, and O'Houlihan protected and sheltered the poor man. But priests had no part in O'Houlihan's plans; he had neither trust nor patience with them, so I took our priest by the arm and led him out of hearing.

When I returned, O'Houlihan faced his men.

"Come here," he called me, so I stood by his side, and he put his hand upon my shoulder.

"When I am dead, you shall do as my cousin Delahanty bids you. And you, Mick, my heart, I bid you see that The Man keeps his promise and attends my wake. Hear you all, lay not a hand upon The Man. He will be under my roof. He will be my guest. I charge you, if you love me, remember my words. Do not harm The Man!"

Yes, if harm befell The Man it's the people who will suffer, and O'Houlihan knew it. More crops afire, more famine, more women hanged by their own hair and swinging from the trees like terrible flowers. All these things O'Houlihan knew. Revenge, that Irishmen cry for, cannot be.

O'Houlihan's word is honored. The Man shall not be harmed. Death stalks the roads and chokes the air, but O'Houlihan's men sit like well-trained dogs, their eyes hungry, their faces haggard, and their knives sheathed.

"Grief makes me unmindful of my duties, sir," I say to The Man. I prefer my own tongue, though there's little lacking in my English, but I have prepared this little speech before, and I am proud of it.

I bow to him. "You are our guest, sir." I turn to the men. "Our guest does not speak the Irish, so we will all speak English."

Malley and Brennan, who are Dublin men, speak their own language like strangers, and any tongue is difficult for Brosnahan, but they turn and bow to The Man as though conferring an honor upon him.

"This, sir, is my foster mother, O'Houlihan's mother. She has not a word of English, sir, and you must forgive her."

The Man turns his eyes to O'Houlihan's mother, and for a moment I think I see a shadow of shame, or is it fear? But my mother turns her head and nods, her face showing a thousand generations of sorrow, and The Man bows to her.

Then his eye catches little Molly Bawn, and his mouth tightens with distaste. He is not overly fond of women, or men either, for that matter, but there is something about this gentle creature that brings out the demon in The Man. Is it because O'Houlihan loved her so?

Molly Bawn's thin little white hands go to her face like moths; she is so pale I fear she will have a faint, but my mother pulls the girl closer to her, and Molly Bawn turns her face to my mother's knee and weeps softly again.

I, as O'Houlihan's only male relative, must play my part, so I pour drinks for all of us.

Usquebaugh, the fiery water of life that burns the throat and brings tears to the eyes, yes, it does many things, strange things, to men. It has been known to drive men mad. O'Houlihan would not drink of it, but he let his men have it on occasion. There is a vast supply of whisky tonight, for O'Houlihan prepared well for his death feast.

I offer a cup to The Man, watching for the small, telltale signs that O'Houlihan forewarned me of, but there are none yet.

My mother and Molly Bawn will not drink, so we raise our glasses, I, The Man, and my men.

Fihelly, Brosnaghan, Mulcahy, Gahan, Ruarc, Hanrahan, Donaghy, Malley, Brennan, Tomalty, Celteran, men from all parts of Ireland, stand to toast O'Houlihan.

"O'Houlihan," I say, "O'Houlihan, we are all here, my heart, my soul. We are here. Do you hear me? We shall drink to you, James; we shall drink to you, we shall sing to you, we shall dance for you, and we shall weep for you."

"To the soul of James O'Houlihan, may he rest in peace," whisper the men.

I glance at The Man; he seems paler, but he raises the cup to his lips and drains it like an Irishman, and then I see his

eyes, with terrible urgency, turn to the giant in the dark corner. But, no, he must have more to drink.

"It is our custom, sir, for each man to drink and address the departed," I say, and refill his cup.

He raises his cup and drags his eyes from the dark corner.

"To James O'Houlihan," he says, and this is all.

"No doubt the customs of a wake seem strange to you," I venture. I look at him slyly; after all, we are savages, are we not? We are the mere Irish. Ah—but he has seen nothing of our strange customs yet.

"Tobacco for himself," I say sharply to Molly Bawn. The little creature is hardly able to stand in her fear of The Man and O'Houlihan together in the same room, but she totters to her feet.

The Man watches with careful interest as she places tobacco on a plate and goes to the dark corner, where, with trembling hands, she puts it on O'Houlihan's chest.

"We like to think of himself as here, enjoying the company of his dearest comrades, playing the part of host," I say to The Man. "You see, until he is buried, he is not dead to us. A remnant of some old pagan custom, no doubt. Before the days of tobacco we would have supplied him with food, but God knows there's little enough of that about now, and himself always a man for a pipe, a great comfort, I've heard him say a thousand times. But never a drop of whisky he'd take, though. Ah, well, this being the occasion it is, perhaps he'll be more liberal and take no offense if we place a cup beside him."

"I understand," says The Man coldly. He still treats me as though I were a dog, but I am determined to play my part.

I watch, fascinated, while he drinks his whisky, his eyes again like magnets drawn to his host.

"There was a time," I say to The Man, "when a hundred harpists and pipers from all parts of Ireland would gather at a king's wake, to sing his death song. Many, many years ago

it was, you see. But, of course, circumstances are different now, and we must do the best we can with what we have.”

And I add, in my own tongue, “We are not free men, but we are not slaves, my boy.”

He swings his head to me sharply; I know he hates the very timbre of this language.

“Grief makes me forgetful, sir,” I say in English. “Forgive me.” I bow.

He nods his head slightly. He can scarcely listen to me, I know; his attention, his mind, his being is centered on that mighty form.

Like O’Houlihan could, at this minute I can read his thoughts.

“Yes, mister,” I say, “is it not a pity? Is he not magnificent? So perfect. The finest and strongest man in Ireland, he has been called. Ah, God, like a lion, perfect, and not a mark on him. Except for that one little musket shot through his heart, now.”

He listens now. When I speak of O’Houlihan he listens as if he would drag the words from my brain. But I must play my part. Already the men’s faces begin to glow from the whisky.

“Music,” I say. I snap my fingers. “O’Houlihan loves music.”

Mulcahy springs to his feet and, placing his hands across his mouth, imitates the pipes, for we are too poor to own a set between the twelve of us. Brennan begins to sing, and the rest join in until they are like a tree full of blackbirds.

“Dance!” I say.

Snapping their fingers they start the intricate steps of a country dance.

The sudden confusion and noise are like a blow, and The Man looks shocked by our savage customs. O’Houlihan planned the evening well.

Since Molly Bawn and my mother are the only women present, they will not join in, and the men weave around the room with each other to the jig.

Most of them are smoking pipes; the only lights in this wretched cabin are rushlights; the air is dark, hazy, close, and the men's faces gleam with sweat as they whirl, turn, stamp, shout, and jump.

I smile to myself as I see The Man shudder. He cannot leave. He gave his word to attend O'Houlihan's wake, and he is a man of his word.

An hour passes; the frenzy increases; the men are very drunken now, and The Man stands, as graven as an idol, but I see the muscles of his jaws tighten and relax, tighten and relax.

My mother never takes her weary eyes from the fire.

"Do not grieve, Mother, it will be over by dawn," I say in English. She does not understand, but The Man does. Five more hours to wait, and his eyes go again to the corner.

Ruarc bounds over to me, his eyes shining and his cheeks like fire.

"Ah, Mick," he says, and tears come to his eyes, "himself lying there cold and dead, and us so lively. I tell you, it's enough to break a man's heart."

Brosnaghan, he with the murderer's face, steps up.

"He'd love it, could he see it. There never was a man with a kinder heart, and to see his boys drinking and dancing, ah, that would give O'Houlihan pleasure."

He stares at The Man, and they both step back startled, and I laugh, one with the face of a murderer and the other with the face of a hangman.

Four of the men, who have been dancing around the corpse, suddenly shriek like banshees; they are so drunken now that they stagger, and their shrieks are of laughter.

I turn and see the cause of it. It takes four of them to lift him, but they have O'Houlihan off the table.

"Here now, boys," I say, "no disrespect to himself."

"Ah, and isn't it himself who'd like it?" shouts Fihelly. "Lying there in a dark corner by himself, not seeing his own boys."

They carry O'Houlihan, now as stiff as a board, closer, and prop him up against the wall.

"I have not toasted you yet, James," shouts Hanrahan.

"Mind you, you fool," I cry, "you will knock him over!"

"Ah, you old woman," says Hanrahan, "the man doesn't live who could knock O'Houlihan off his feet, dead or alive. O'Houlihan, my little heart, I left my wife, I left my children, to join you. We've starved together, fought side by side, slept in ditches. O'Houlihan, we lived like dogs, but I loved you, by God, I did, O'Houlihan. I would have followed you to hell. I left my wife and my children, to starve with you as an outlaw, O'Houlihan. O'Houlihan, do you hear me? You were a man among men; you came and were of a race of kings!"

He raised his cup and drained it. I turned and looked at The Man. His face was ashen, and sweat stood on his brow.

"You people," he snarls to me, so lowly that the others cannot hear, "you are animals. If I had my way I would wipe out your whole cursed race."

"Indeed, your Honor, you are doing very well as it is," I assure him.

A fit of rage is upon him and he trembles visibly now. His voice is so low that I strain my ears to hear.

"He was the only one in your filthy country who deserved to be called a man."

I shrug. "You killed him, not I."

O'Houlihan had warned me of this Man. How clearly he had understood him!

The men dance around the corpse, singing and shouting.

“Louder,” shouts Donaghy, “sing him alive, boys!”

“O’Houlihan,” shouts Mulcahy, “enjoy yourself, man. Arrah, we’ll miss you. Enjoy yourself this last time, darlin’; here, take my duideen.”

And with this he shoved his pipe between O’Houlihan’s firm cold lips. It toppled out, but Mulcahy caught it in time, and, forcing the jaws slightly, got it between O’Houlihan’s teeth where it stayed.

Now I have seen much death here and abroad. O’Houlihan and I fought on the Continent as mercenaries for many years, and this poor country is like a charnel house, but this was too much for me.

“For the love of God, Mulcahy,” I said, “leave him alone!”

Tears flowed down Mulcahy’s cheeks, and he put his arm about my shoulder.

“It’s the last time he’ll see us,” he wept drunkenly. I pushed him away and reached for the pipe, but Brennan and Hanrahan caught my arms.

“All those years,” they shouted, “devil a roof over his head, sneaking like a cur to see his poor old mother, giving his food away and going hungry himself rather than seeing others so. And you, Mick Delahanty, his own cousin, begrudge him a bit of joy at his own wake!”

I struggled to free my arms, but they are both strong men. All O’Houlihan’s men are. They must of necessity be.

Hanrahan let go of my arm and grabbed a cup of whisky.

“Here, my little heart, have one last drink of your own good whisky.”

He tried to pour the whisky through O’Houlihan’s lips, but it spilled down the corpse’s chin.

This was too much for me. I stepped back. “By God,” I said, “beware, all of you! You have heard the old tales. Kings are not like ordinary mortals. Leave him alone before you find you have done something for which we shall all be sorry.”

I stepped back into the corner. O'Houlihan had seen no priest; he would be buried in unhallowed ground, and my heart felt cold.

It was then I noticed The Man. There was agony on his face and death in his eyes. He came to my side and took my arm. The strength of his white fingers made me wince.

He whispered something to me, but over the shouting and the dancing I could not hear. I cupped my hand behind my ear to indicate I could not hear, but he did not speak again. Instead, he pointed to the corpse.

I looked, and there was O'Houlihan as I had left him, a warrior, magnificent, huge. He was propped against the wall, his death pallor more noticeable since the men carried rushlights near him. The corpse bandage was snug about his blue jowls, and Mulcahy's pipe stuck jauntily from his mouth.

"What is it?" I shouted to The Man. He trembled so violently now that I had to support him, and again he pointed.

I stared. At first, in the flickering light, I was not sure. And then I saw it. A cloud of blue smoke puffed and rose regularly from the pipe between O'Houlihan's teeth.

My first thought was for little Molly Bawn. I pushed the Englishman away from me and ran to her side.

Drawing her up, I pulled her to the door.

"For the love of Christ, Molly Bawn, flee to your Welshman now! He loves you and I know you love him. Run, my little Roisheen Dhu, run as fast as your feet can carry you! He is waiting for you; you will be on board ship and out of this country by dawn."

Molly Bawn has a face like a little white flower, and not so long ago her black hair hung to her waist. She is what we call one of God's fair innocents, and we treat her with special tenderness because she will never be like others.

Thank God, this time she understood. She put her hands on my shoulders and kissed my cheek.

“Ah, Mick,” she says, and her voice is like a soft wind heard from a distant shore. “I do love the Welshman, but can I leave the old mother?”

“I shall look after the old mother,” I say, thrusting her out the door. “Run!”

One last kiss on the cheek, like the wing of a sparrow, it was so soft and swift, and little Molly Bawn disappeared into the night, to her lover, the Welshman who had shot O’Houlihan.



THERE IS A LAKE WHERE THE BLACK-bird sings. Deeply set as an ingot of silver in the heart of the earth is Lough Fionn. Lough Fionn, the white lake, wherein dwells Fer-fi, a gentle red-haired little spirit. Our priests, saying their forbidden prayers in lonely glens, and teaching their pitiful little flocks, caution my people to forget these pagan gods. But the people spring from an ancient race and are loath to cast aside their old heritage, and so Fer-fi lives in the hearts of the people. They pay him no homage, but when the night is silent some creep through the curfew to the side of Lough Fionn. They close their eyes, and there are some who say they have heard the songs of Fer-fi. Fer-fi knows but three

songs. He plays upon a three-stringed harp, and the songs he plays are his whispering song of sleep, his wailing song, and his laughing song.

Fer-fi has a brother, Ainë, who sings but one song, and his fairy music, ceolsidhe, he plays to comfort the dying.

I myself am not much given to seeking sprites of any sort, but in this land and in this time, the people have so little, and so much has been taken from them, that it needs a harder heart than mine to scoff.

One night, two years before O'Houlihan's wake, I was about my business by the light of the moon.

I was just to cross a boreen when I heard footfalls. I quickly hid myself behind a clump of bushes, watching and waiting, and as the moon came out I whispered, "Matthew Cooley, is it you?"

The old man started violently.

"It is O'Houlihan's Delahanty," I whispered.

"Ah, glory be." He let his breath out. "Mick, my son."

"Matthew, are you looking for the pitch cap by breaking the curfew?"

"I'm looking for my little Molly Bawn," says he. "She says to me just before dusk: 'Daidda, when the wind blows down from the valley I hear Fer-fi. It is so beautiful.' 'Oh, my foolish little one,' I said, 'it is Ainë's death song you will hear if the soldiers find you wandering about.' I took her into the cabin thinking she would stay, but when I returned a few minutes later, she was gone. Ah, Mick, she is the last of my children. What shall I do without her?"

This poor old man, he makes my heart ache, one child left, and she as witless as a sparrow.

"Go home, Matthew," I whispered. "I will find her and take her back to your cabin. You know The Man does not think the Jackaleen worth the killing of, so I am safe. Go back; I'll find her, never fear."

He wrung my hand for thanks and started his way home, while I set out to find Molly Bawn.

I was creeping toward the shore of Lough Fionn when I heard the music—so sweet, so beautiful I thought my heart would stop. Holy Mother, I thought, is it me who has been the foolish unbeliever and this is Fer-fi's gentraighe, his lovely laughter music?

And then, by God, in the light of the moon I see that damned Welsh sergeant playing upon his harp.

And is this not enough, when three feet from him is little Molly Bawn, dancing in the moonlight, she, the most timid creature alive, who faints at the mere sight of O'Houlihan who loves her, and flies like a little mouse from me who have known her all her life!

Dancing like a swan in the moonlight she is, with her laughter like little silver bells and her white arms floating like thistledown.

And then the Welshman puts down his damned harp and holds out his arms to her and like a fairy she runs to him, sits on his knee, and kisses his lips.

Well, by God, there I am, sitting watching all this as though I am Fer-fi himself. Now, I know the Welshman and he knows me, and I like him as well as I can like any man who doesn't stay in his own country. And as far as soldiers go, he follows his orders, but on the sly he has helped far more of my people than he has ever harmed, so I do not fear to speak up.

I arise and step forward.

"Molly Bawn's father has been looking for her," I say.

With Molly Bawn on his knee he does not stand up, and what has he to fear? It is not a felony to kill an Irishman.

"Ah," he sighs deeply. "You, Mick Delahanty, why for do you come here now? Indeed, go and find Molly Bawn some

time in the daylight, if you can catch her. In the moonlight she is mine."

His voice is like his harp; there is magic music in it. Small wonder Molly Bawn turns from me in fear and buries her face on his shoulder.

"Give her to me," I say. "Old Matthew Cooley has seen enough sorrow in his day; do not add to it."

Now, this Welshman is a strange fellow. He stands up suddenly, and puts Molly Bawn on her feet with a thump.

"Do not insult me, Delahanty," he says in his singsong Irish, "or we will forget I wear a uniform, and you and I will settle our dispute with our fists."

Now, though I am a small man, I have the name of having been in more fights than any man in Ireland. Perhaps it is because I am small and cannot look at my opponents with haughty disdain, which is what O'Houlihan does, he with the strength of three men. Whatever it be, there is hardly a bone in my body that has not been soundly cracked at one time, and my poor face bears witness to the number of times I have trod on the tails of other men's coats. But now I am astounded.

"How have I insulted you?" I ask in surprise.

"Why, you have insinuated that I am not to be trusted with Molly Bawn."

Now, I have said that this Welshman is a strange fellow, and so he is. In a land where chastity is held in great respect by the natives, this Welshman is as chaste as a Spanish nun. The bayonet is a great persuader of women in this country, but never has the Welshman been known to be other than gentle, leaving women alone. Oh, I have seen him sitting at a cabin door, drinking a cup of milk with the woman, but he pays her with a song from his harp and goes on his way.

He drinks at the public house with the other soldiers, but I know he does not like them, which is why he is so often

invited to our poor cabins, probably the only stranger in the country who is treated by us as one of us. And I know he is a very lonely man.

"Come, my friend," I say, "this will not do. It is not that I do not trust you, but you know full well that O'Houlihan loves this poor little creature."

This damned Welshman, he will argue.

"Sorrow for O'Houlihan," says he, "for she does not love him."

I am weary. "That is not here or there. He loves her and that is enough. Molly Bawn, get you home with me. Your poor old father was in tears for you, thinking the soldiers had got you. Are you not ashamed?"

She did not move or speak, only stood by the Welshman, gazing at him with her timid fairy eyes.

I took her wrist and pulled her away.

"Come, I am taking you home."

She followed me as quietly as a lamb, but so did that damned Welshman, talking all the while.

He tells her he will meet her by the lake again, and calls her sweet names, of which in Irish there are many, and when he runs out of Irish he continues in his Welsh, taking the trouble to tell me what they mean.

When we reach the cabin door, I put her in and turn and face him, but he laughs me aside and blows a kiss to Molly Bawn and tells her he will be waiting by the lake.

And then, damn him, he puts his hand upon my shoulder and walks back with me to where we met, singing all the while, him with his voice as rich and sweet as an echo.

When we part, I must go and face O'Houlihan, and what shall I say? Cousin, I have just left the Welshman who loves Molly Bawn also, and his songs bring tears to my eyes with their beauty. They have, cousin, a tryst by Lough Fionn, and the little people of the lake rejoice in the love of these

two fey sweethearts. What shall I say? I should hate this damned Welshman, but I do not. Instead, I like him.

And then I stop in my steps, remembering. Oh, God! It was the Welshman whom The Man ordered to put the torch to the head of Owen Ruh, O'Houlihan's brother, and the Welshman did it.

And Donlevy saw the Welshman the next day, by the side of that very Lough Fionn; drunk and weeping he was, and he says to Donlevy he will cut his own throat, and Donlevy says, Here, let me do you the honor, but when he saw the Welshman's face he backed away and left him.

And Donlevy told me later, he said, "God help the poor Welshman, he has a conscience, he has, and it's no thing for an English soldier to have in Ireland."

Well, who am I to judge? He is a mercenary, and so was I on the Continent, for long, bloody years, and though I have avoided cruelty, always preferring a nice free fight with my fists, there were times I too followed orders.

The most and the least I can say of him is that he is a good soldier.

So, when I met O'Houlihan by appointment in a midnight glen two days later, I did not mention the Welshman.

And when O'Houlihan said, in his quiet way, "How is the Roisheen Dhu?", I only said what I always say:

"Seamus, that poor girl has not the wits of a rabbit. Why cannot you love a good sound colleen, of which this country abounds? Will you marry poor Molly Bawn and breed a race of idiots rather than kings?"

But he loves his little black rose, his Roisheen Dhu, whether because or in spite of her affliction I cannot say.

"Marry?" says he, looking sadder still. "Ah, Mick, what can I offer any woman, me with blood money over my head instead of a roof? I would marry her tomorrow could I look

after her and keep her, but she is better off in her father's poor cabin, such as it is."

Thinking or speaking of Molly Bawn always makes him melancholic, and sure, it is no wonder, for our lives are slipping quietly away from us, like ice melting in the sun, and we are not wines or books and do not improve with age.

We are doomed men with hope, which is a savage thing to dwell with.



THE IRISHMAN, FOR SOME REASON PUZZLING to me, can neither fight nor write in his own country, which may be why he is so well established as a professional soldier on the Continent. Indeed, European kings, princes, and generals clamor for Irishmen, and they soon rise to commissioned ranks. Until the return of O'Houlihan to Ireland, Irishmen were allowed to emigrate freely, our English masters feeling, no doubt, that the fewer able-bodied men in Ireland, the lesser the inevitable revolts would be. However, O'Houlihan has changed all that, for too many trained and disciplined soldiers returned to Ireland to serve under him, so that now any man who has served as a soldier, except in the British army, is executed upon his return to Ireland.

But on dark nights, sturdy lads slip out of Kerry by boat, never knowing the heartache they will feel, as old campaigners, sunning themselves in Parisian parks, eternal exiles.

And many the Irishman is dreaming of his own land while he scales foreign ramparts, for the Austrians and the Russians have full brigades of Irishmen, while the Spanish have five regiments and the French six.

Strange it is, hearing foreign tongues on all sides, to read a muster roll with names like Hoidoire, who is O'Dwyer; Figueral, one of the Fitzgeralds; O'Shagnussi, Hautbrion, an O'Brien, would you believe it? or De Mahoni.

The Counts de Dillon in France are Irishmen, born and bred in France, commanding Irish regiments for two generations already. And many an English officer, leading his own men, has been staggered, when fighting in faraway lands, and seeing the enemy approach, to hear their officer call in English, "Steady, boys, hold, boys, till I give you the word!"

Fihelly estimates there have been three hundred thousand Irish lives lost on the Continent thus far; but O'Houlihan, who is most observant in these matters, says closer to four hundred and fifty thousand would be more accurate.

While in mercenary service on the Continent, it was in Brussels one day that O'Houlihan and I were walking down the street when I spied a black, stocky man leaning against a wall.

"There is an Irishman," says I, digging O'Houlihan with my elbow.

"Indeed," says O'Houlihan, "and how do you know this?"

"I can tell by the way he carries his chin," says I, "and his black hair, what with that skin whiter than any of these blonde women's here. I'll lay you a wager, Seamus, he's a Limerick man."

Well, this fellow sees me eying him, and he spits upon

the ground and says in English: "Why are you staring at me? Is it a taste of my fist in your mouth you're after?"

"Begod," says I, "a true Limerick man, mean as Englishmen, the lot of them."

Well, this fellow's eyes light up and he strikes his hand upon his thigh and says: "Glory be to God, it's two Irishmen. Where have you been fighting, boys? I'm just out of Hesse meself."

So we fell to talking and laughing, and I says, "And of what race are you, me bucko?"

"I'm an O'Brien," says he, "and my mother an O'Shehehan from Tipperary."

"Well," says I, "I took you for Limerick, but I wasn't far away. I'm blushing to tell you, O'Brien, that my name is Delahanty through no fault of my own, but my mother was an O'Houlihan, and this is my cousin, James O'Houlihan."

Then suddenly O'Brien's face clouded up and he looks at Seamus and says very soft, "Are you James O'Houlihan of the O'Houlihans?"

O'Houlihan nodded.

O'Brien said nothing for a minute, and then, "I have news for you," says he, "news from home. Two months ago, in Hesse, I met with Teague Tierney, who had been asked by Donolan O'Heffernan, cousin to the O'Heffernan, to pass the word along."

O'Houlihan and I stood holding our breaths. When news is sent thus by Irish clan leaders, it is of import.

"It is sad news it is I have for you," says O'Brien quietly. "You are the O'Houlihan."

So it was that O'Houlihan learned that the last of his brothers was dead, killed by The Man.

We sailed back to Ireland, where I became a tinker. The O'Houlihans having an aptitude for revolutions, so to speak,

Seamus soon took up the family trade. I had the freedom of the roads and himself that of the hills, for the mere sound of his name was a curse to the authorities now.

“O’Houlihan,” I says one night when I had met him secretly in a lonely spot, “three months in Ireland we have been and we have not seen the mother.”

“Ah,” says O’Houlihan, holding up his hand and watching the rain drip through his fingers, “this rain, Mick, this damned, cursed rain. It has killed more Irishmen than they have.”

I know O’Houlihan well, so I sit waiting patiently. “Yes,” I say, “it makes my old battle scars ache. I wish I was in Spain, Seamus.”

“Spain?” says O’Houlihan. “No, Mick, Ireland. It is nearly time. It is nearly time; I feel it is safe now. The Man, he thinks of how to trap another O’Houlihan. Day and night he thinks, for weeks, and then his brain flags, and he rests. He is resting now, Mick. We shall visit the mother tomorrow.”

Now, it is a strange thing, and one that the English would discredit were it not for the proof, but O’Houlihan has the second sight, and trusts his instinct in these matters, and his instinct is never wrong. Is it he is an O’Houlihan that makes him so? Is it the luck of kings that makes him know the mind of his enemy? Ah, my mother was an O’Houlihan, and I too have known these flashes that warn me, not like O’Houlihan, mark you, for I am not a king, only the Jackaleen.

“It will be good to see her,” I say. Yes, good for O’Houlihan who lives like an animal of the dark, hidden by day and traveling like a wolf in the night. I think he is lonely, but he does not speak of these things.

“You are lonely,” I say. “This life is not natural for a man.”

He shrugs. “Soon I shall have enough men. Then I shall not be lonely.”

"I was not thinking of men," I say. "I was thinking of women. You know, O'Houlihan, I think you will fall in love with the first woman in Ireland you set eyes upon."

He shrugs again and turns his eyes away.

And the next night we creep silently up to his mother's cabin. Five years we have not seen the old woman, and our hearts are aching for the sight of her.

O'Houlihan holds his finger across his lips, and bids me stay as he approaches, for he is cautious, which is why he is alive.

He nears the glassless square of a window, and I see the rushlight reflected on his face. He stands, his face that of a stranger to me; he stands, and the light seems to come from his face, as though not being reflected from inside the cabin, and he does not motion me to approach. He only stands, gazing.

"What is it?" I whisper in the dark.

His face is no longer war-scarred and weary; it is secret and beautiful, and he beckons me to approach.

I gaze through the window, and there by rushlight I see O'Houlihan's old mother, my foster mother, bathing the face and hair of Molly Bawn.

"Oh, God," I groan, for I know what has happened, but O'Houlihan claps his big hand across my mouth and stands gazing in awe at the beauty of Molly Bawn.

And the mother dries Molly Bawn's face and long black hair with a piece of old, soft white linen, and in the flickering rushlight Molly Bawn is a queen.

I disengage O'Houlihan's paw from my face; he lets me do it absently; he has forgotten I am there.

"Do you not know her?" I whisper. "It is little Molly Bawn."

"Ah, yes," he says, and he has not heard a word of me.

"Molly Bawn," I whisper again, "old Matthew Cooley's

daughter. God in heaven, O'Houlihan, don't you remember her and how she was?"

He turns his face to me.

"Aye?"

"Oh, Seamus," I say, "she is as innocent of wit as she is of sin, poor creature."

But his face reflects only love.

"She is as fair as sunlight," he says. "She is a queen. Mick, look at the little feet of her."

My mother has sat Molly Bawn upon a stool, and, kneeling before her with a basin, is washing Molly's feet.

"I should have known," I whisper. "Did I not say, the first woman you set eyes upon in Ireland and it had to be Molly Bawn?"

"Look at the little feet of her," whispers O'Houlihan in wonder, and I know he has not heard a word. "No longer than my hand, and as white as frost are her feet, and arched like a bird's wing.

"Ah, my mother." His expression changes, for he is a good son.

He walks to the door and pushes it open, his form in the light looking greater still.

"Mother," he says softly.

My foster mother turns; she drops the basin, and water spills over the earth floor. She tries to rise but she cannot. O'Houlihan steps into the cabin and he seems to fill it.

Little Molly Bawn, who has sat frozen with fear, lets out an elf scream now. She jumps to her feet and, with her ragged skirts floating about her, she runs past O'Houlihan and into the night.

O'Houlihan turns a puzzled, wounded face to the door, as though a small bird of night had thrust its beak into his heart and flown swiftly away, and then he bends to his mother.

The mother, she is a tall woman, close to six feet, which is

where the O'Houlihans get their great size from, and she is bowed with age and work.

But O'Houlihan lifts her to her feet as easily as I would a child. Speech does not come easily to him.

"Ah, Mother," he says again, and stands looking down at her.

"Ah, it is you," is all she says, and puts her poor old hand upon his cheek and touches it lightly.

And then she turns to me, the pawshteen fionn, her fair-haired darling, the weakling among all the strong sons.

"Ah, Mick," she says, and holds out her arms, and I clasp her, and weep.

"Arrah," she says, "your poor face, my little soul, you've been fighting again," and she brushes the tears from my cheeks.

Yes, she loves me, the foster son, as dearly as the others, perhaps more so. When I was a child I laughed and cried at her skirts for kisses, and this woman who bore eight somber sons who rarely spoke and never laughed, she would look down upon me and her eyes would sparkle. She has known little but hard work and sorrow, and the foster son brought merriment to her eyes and laughter to her lips.

I pull her to the stool by the fire, and she sits there with O'Houlihan and me at her feet. She rocks back and forth and clasps her hands and she fumbles with the edge of her apron, her eyes going from O'Houlihan's face to mine, and back and forth, as though we nourish her, and never a word she speaks.

"We are home, Mother," I say again and again. "On the run as usual, but we are home."

Then I tell her about France and Spain and Germany and all the fine things we have seen and done. When I tell her of the great churches, with gilded altars hung with finest cloths and silk, and golden crosses, she looks with wonder to O'Hou-

lihan to see if I am jesting with her, for she knows me, but O'Houlihan only smiles and nods.

"Glory be to God," she says, and then, "Mick, did you go to confession and say your prayers?"

"Whenever I could," I say, which is partly true.

"And you, my child?" she says of O'Houlihan hopefully, but this time he shakes his head, for O'Houlihan has not seen the inside of a church since he was twelve years of age and the first of his brothers was hanged by The Man.

"Ah, well," she says, and smiles, for mothers will hope.

And then a change comes over O'Houlihan, and he leans closer to her, his face strained.

"Mother, who was that lady here?"

"Lady?" says the old woman. "Why, my child, it was our poor little Molly Bawn."

"Ah," he says softly. "Does she come here often, Mother?"

"Three or four times a week," says my mother, and now she looks at him strangely. "She is like a child, Seamus. Old Matthew sends her over, and I mother her as best I can, poor creature.

"Ah, Seamus, it's a shee she is. She doesn't belong to us at all. Don't you remember, the last of old Matthew's children had been dead for twenty years when his wife bore her? And Matthew says, before Molly Bawn was born his wife went to the side of Lough Fionn, and she heard Ainë's death song. Two days later dead she was, and it's Molly Bawn who has been a fairy ever since."

Now isn't that life for you? The one man in Ireland who doesn't believe in fairies falls in love with one.

O'Houlihan stands up, fills his pipe, and hands it to his mother. While she sits quietly smoking and waiting, I see the great effort O'Houlihan makes to speak.

"Mother," he says finally, "when I and this country are free, I shall marry Molly Bawn."

The mother does not answer, for she knows it is useless to argue with James O'Houlihan.

"And you, Mick," she turns to me, "will you find yourself a wife too, my child?"

I shake my head.

"Like Seamus," I say, "when Ireland is free. I fear I have a long wait, Mother."

She sighs, and points to the rafters of the cabin. There, lashed securely, is the cradle, finely wrought from black bog oak, and at the head is carved the arms of the O'Houlihans, the battle-ax and the harp.

"It is all we have saved," she says. "That has rocked O'Houlihans for three hundred years, and I had hoped to see it used, before I hear Ainë comfort me."

"What's this talk of dying?" says O'Houlihan morosely. "You are as strong as an ox, old Mother. You will live for another thirty years, so no more of this folly of Ainë."

She smiles and her eyes sparkle. He has not changed, and then she turns to me.

"Tell me about the food and the clothes and the houses and customs and the ladies of all these fine countries."

But O'Houlihan interrupts.

"Mother, when will Molly Bawn be here again?"

"A day or two, a day or two; have patience, my son. And now, go on, Mick."

"But why did she flee from the sight of me?" he persists.

"Ah, the dear," she says, "she is the most timid creature alive, Seamus. Indeed, it is the manner of fairies. You will need patience, great patience, my son, if you will court Molly Bawn."

"That I have," says O'Houlihan, sitting down and staring into the fire, and I, with my head leaning on the old woman's knee, talk until the first lights of dawn, and then O'Houlihan and I bid her farewell.

I am sad to leave the old woman, for it's little enough I have seen of her since my youth, and she is dear to my heart, she, my foster mother, but like to my own had she lived.

This is the fashion in which I came to be fostered by the O'Houlihans. The year of my birth was one of great famine and fever in the land, and all of my race save myself perished. My mother's brother, the O'Houlihan, father of Seamus, brought me to his home, wrapped in his shirt.

It was a mewling, puny thing I was, and had it not been for the affection and care lavished upon me by my foster mother I would not have survived. Indeed, it must have seemed strange to her, who had borne eight sons who had never ailed a day of their lives, to have been the custodian of such a frail creature as myself.

Past infancy and into boyhood, I continued to be a sickly thing, and my earliest memories are of my foster brothers being hurriedly dispatched for Mr. O'Hickey. The O'Hickeys are the traditional healers of kings; indeed, the very name Hickey means healer in our tongue, and I, on my mother's side an O'Houlihan, have the right to call upon them.

And thirty miles away, poor Mr. O'Hickey would have to travel on foot to see me, and he did not relish it, but he must follow the bidding of the O'Houlihan.

Mr. O'Hickey neither liked nor trusted me, my father being a Delahanty and a newcomer, so to speak, his family having been in this country only six hundred years.

"There's no knowing what blood they had in them before they got here," he was wont to say, looking at me suspiciously, as the string was tied to his finger, for one of his cures is the giving of his own blood, but he cannot be cut, and the blood must be forced out with a tight cord.

In times of trouble, he treats all; indeed, at the time of the great fever, when my parents died, my foster mother said the poor man was bled quite pale, but he never complains except

when his blood must be used to help those he feels are strangers to his land. So, even though the Delahantys married into the old Irish families and fought side by side with the great Irish earls and princes at the time of the Elizabeth, I am still half Norman to Mr. O'Hickey.

As I have said, my foster father brought me home wrapped in his shirt, and I soon became his favorite, for I resembled him far more than any of his own sons, being short and red-haired as he himself was.

Another of Mr. O'Hickey's potions was a strong draught of whisky; and though my foster father died when I was in my sixth year, I still remember sitting on his lap, my mouth open like an obliging robin, while Mr. O'Hickey poured me a neat cup.

"Isn't he a brave man, the bold fellow?" said my foster mother.

"Ah, to be sure," said my foster father, "he shows a great affinity to it." I have persisted in this infant accomplishment to this very day, though my mother does not now remark that I am the bold fellow when she sees me tilt the bottle.

Gradually O'Houlihan became organized. Twelve key men surrounded him, and each man had twelve men, and each of the twelve had twelve, and in forty-eight hours O'Houlihan can call upon one hundred and fifty thousand men.

One hundred and fifty thousand men who have nothing but their bare hands to fight with.

O'Houlihan is known the length and breadth of the land to the English by his "Stand and deliver," as he relieves them of their gold and their watches, but what is this pittance toward one hundred and fifty thousand muskets?

When Fihelly brought news from O'Kelly of a shipment of arms landed for a garrison, O'Houlihan smiled. "It is a trap. I smell the bait. The Man is behind this. He seeks to

draw me out, and a belly full of lead from a garrison of waiting soldiers is as close as we'll get to muskets there."

He proved to be right, as always, and so we go back to the endless arguing.

"France and Spain will help us," says Mulcahy.

"I have been there," says O'Houlihan, and turns his head.

"The priest could go as our emissary," says Fihelly.

"This country will be freed only by fighting men, not priests," says O'Houlihan. "We've been betrayed before in many manner of ways. This time we'll make new mistakes. No priest will have military or political power while James O'Houlihan leads."

I saw the priest, our priest, cringe, and it made me blush, but in my heart I knew O'Houlihan was right.

Finally he agreed to two Spanish-educated Irishmen, both well spoken and intelligent, being sent to the Continent as our envoys, only because he knew that a successful uprising in Ireland was impossible without foreign arms, aid and gold.

Our poor, shabby envoys limped across Europe, waiting long and patiently in foreign anterooms, trying to beg in a dignified manner and at the same time soften the iron-clad demands O'Houlihan made. O'Houlihan swore that never again would Ireland be used as a springboard for foreign nations unless the advantages and the power were all in our hands.

He was angrily puzzled when no aid was forthcoming.

Oh, if a land bleeds, why does it not die, and leave its poor natives in hopeless peace? But this cannot be; rest of mind is not for us, though at times we would seek it. And then we stumble over the bodies of starved children in ditches, our dreams are rent with the screams of ravaged women, and the wretched cabins are fired. One poor anguished soul rebels, and the gallows is weighted again. That's the way it goes, the ashes of defeat blowing away at the breath of a patriot

to reveal the burning heart of Ireland, and then more ashes, and the fire neither goes out nor flares.

More and more I understand the dread Owen Ruh, O'Houlihan's dead brother, and I marvel at the patience of Seamus.

The day came to Owen Ruh, that fateful day in Connaught, when he heard the news that Thomas and William O'Houlihan were swinging in the wind with forty other men in a Limerick revolt. Owen Ruh tossed his spade upon the rocky soil, he spat on his hands, and a tiger was loosed upon this land.

His name still strikes dread to the hearts of his own countrymen, and what of the English? My God, English mothers in this land still caution their children, "Be good or Owen Ruh will get you!"

For all that I hated and feared him, I now understand him. For every Irish hovel fired, Owen Ruh burned five mansions. For every Irishman killed, Owen Ruh dipped his hands in the blood of ten Englishmen, and his own men called him "The Dragon." Rape by English soldiers was rare while Owen Ruh lived, for it was unprofitable to cross The Dragon in the smallest way, and when rightfully provoked he was monstrous.

In the dead of night, when Owen Ruh and his men raided, the war cry of the O'Houlihans roared from his throat and mingled with the screams of dying Englishmen. The Irish love a fighting man, and they adore James O'Houlihan, but they feared Owen Ruh. And in the end it was they, the Irish, who paid for his rage. The memory of what happened in this poor land after the death of Owen Ruh makes me shudder, and though I wonder at James O'Houlihan's patience, I cannot but see the wisdom of it.

And if O'Houlihan is patient, what of The Man? Oh, yes! His patience is like that of the spider. He lags and rests at times, but seven O'Houlihans, all leaders of revolts, are dead by his endless cunning, and he lives with his brain of fire

and ice for the day when James O'Houlihan, the last, shall trip and fall in his web.

But I, who by force have spent so great a time in nature's realm, have observed a curious sight. When the spider builds his web, he uses two contrasting lines, one which, if you touch it with your finger, sticks like honey, and is for his victims, and the other, which he himself traverses, as dry as a rope. And once I saw a foolish spider, unmindful of his ways, trapped in his own net.



I AM THE TINKER, THE JACKALEEN,
and I wander the misty roads with the moon
a circlet of sorrow impeding my way with her
vair face and clouds of floating hair. I am the
clown, the jester, but I do not despair, for at
heart I am a man of letters, seven years studied
in the ancient arts, and my destiny is not to
wander lonely roads but to record the history
of heroes. I am the schenachie, the bard, the
storyteller, the master of verse perfected forty
generations past by the fair-haired princes of
Milesius. Shrouded in dim history, they came
and fought and loved, till patient spidery
priest-scribes in the seventh century wrought
with infinite skill, in letters of scarlet and silver,
entwined with violets and roses sprinkled

with the dust of pearls and gold, their magic tales of dead kings.

Generations of death-pale minstrels have staggered and fallen, harpists have rent their plaintive strings of defeat, but one poet still limps the misty roads.

He is called the Jackaleen, or perhaps O'Houlihan's Delahanty, and I am he, I, Michael O'Houlihan Mahoney Delahanty!

I come and go as I please, for in these troubled days I am not considered worth hanging, such is the value of poets now.

In the days of the heroes, I would have been secure from attack by the authority of my rank, above that of kings, while now it is the very meagerness of my position that protects me.

"Mourn me with the dead," wept Cuchulain, fifteen hundred years ago.

I had been on the road a week, which pleased me, for the field of Mars is no place for a poet, and O'Houlihan's presence would have lent the air of a military camp to a nunnery. But even poets must eat, and it was in pursuance of my trade of tinker that I first made the acquaintance of that "gentlemen of the house," the little pig, who will figure so prominently in my narrative.

It was raining heavily by the time I reached a crude mud hut. Dusk was nearing, and I craved a seat by a fire and a pipe before continuing my journey.

I knocked on the plank door, which swung on leather hinges to reveal a gaunt dark woman.

"God save you, Mistress; I am Murphy, the tinker. Have you any pots with holes in them?"

"God save you kindly, Master Murphy. It is pots and pans I have, and for all I have to put in them they might as well have holes."

"Times are dark all over, Mistress," I says with a sigh.

“Indeed, so they are. But you are soaked to the skin. Come sit by the fire and have a potato and dry your coat.”

I bowed, and entered the smoky interior.

Six half-naked children huddled by a pile of straw near the turf fire. At the sight of me, the tinker, they arose so I could draw near the heat.

“Thank you, my dears,” says I. “And what is this?” I asked, surveying the pile of straw. “To be sure, is the gentleman of the house ill?”

“Arrah, she is,” said the eldest child. “My mother thinks it is the measles.”

I pushed aside the straw and gazed at the sick pig.

“Ah, the poor soul,” says the woman of the house. “I’m feared it’s dying she is, and her with eight little piglets.”

“Have you a pig, Mister Murphy?” asked one of the children.

I felt the pig’s hot side.

“Not me, ma bouchal, but my old mother had a fine fellow by her fire once, and the English, God curse them, stole him.”

“Hush,” said the woman, and then she recognized me. “Ah, it is yourself. Why did you not speak sooner?”

“As big as our pig, Mister Murphy?”

“Not that, chilydbawn; more of a lad, you’d say.” I turned to the woman. “Now, what this poor pig needs is a drop of whisky in hot water.”

“Ah, the dear, and we have none.”

“But I have,” I answered, going outside. From the pack on my donkey I took the black bottle and handed it to the woman.

While she prepared the drink, I sat on the earth floor by the fire. No sooner was I seated than a gust of wind came through the hole in the roof that served as a chimbley and blew a cloud of smoke around me.

“Bless us,” said the woman. “Kevin, my soul, just run up on the roof and hold those wattles a bit.”

The boy left; I stretched my limbs before the fire and lit my pipe.

The woman took a hollow reed, opened the sick pig’s mouth, and forced the reed down its throat.

Handing my pipe to one of the children, I helped her administer the medicine to the struggling beast.

“It’s weak I made it,” said the woman. “Sure, she’s not used to the drink.”

“This will cure or kill her for sure,” I says confidently.

And when the poor creature closed its eyes in despair, I says: “She’s coming around fine. Let her sleep for a bit.”

Sure now, what have I done? I says to myself, but then the poor beast was dying anyhow.

We returned to the fire, where I offered the woman the bottle, but she shook her head, saying I had been kind enough already.

“Ach, go on,” I says. “Your heart doesn’t need warming, but take a drop for your stomach.”

She swallowed and sighed with content. Reaching into the embers of the fire, she drew out a potato, and juggling it for the heat, put it beside me.

Her children averted their hungry eyes and went back to nursing the pig as I drew the blade from my sleeve and split the potato. With my mouth half full, I called to one of the children to fetch me the brown sack from my donkey’s pack.

When he did so, I emptied it before the woman. There were bread and bog butter, cheese and onions, and half a dozen boiled eggs I had been saving for Dennis Hogan’s widow.

“Eat hearty, childer dear,” I says.

The mother had tears in her eyes.

“You are a good man, Mister Murphy. ’Tis not often we

see food like this. Put some aside for Kevin on the roof, my soul.”

“Bring the boy down,” I says.

“Arrah, no. The least the head of this house can do is keep the smoke from your eyes.”

Fatherless and twelve years old, and head of his house, he stayed on the roof to keep the smoke from my eyes. The courtesy of my poor Irish breaks my heart.

The other children gazed fascinated at my knife, so I says, “Do I know a few gossoons who’d like to hear the story of my knife?”

They crowded round me, eager to hear, and I let them handle it and observe it closely, for it is known all over Ireland.

It is the most beautiful knife in the world, with its ivory handle carved in the shape of a woman’s body, and an emerald winking at the tip. The blade it is like a beam of moonlight, and so subtly tempered that it bends like a blade of grass.

Oh, my lovely Spanish lady, I held you to the light so that the children might see you better. Why did I not cast you in the fire, then, before you were buried in the heart of my country? But, instead, I began my story.

“Now, the history of my knife goes a long way back, to the days when the Spanish Armada was wrecked on our shores. Mind you, we were fighting the English then, but the Spaniards were with us that time.

“Well, it was many years ago that a gallant Spanish captain was washed up on our shores, and he was found by a little Irish maiden, Eleanor Delahanty. She took him to the stronghold of her father, who was a lord, and there her family tended his wounds and hid him from the English.

“When the time was ripe, Eleanor’s father smuggled the

handsome captain, who was called Don Roderiguez, to Portugal, and from there he returned to Spain.

“This was many generations ago, and do not be forming pretty thoughts of Eleanor and Don Roderiguez, for she was only six and he was seventy. But he was a courteous Spanish gentleman, and before he left the castle of the Delahantys he took his only possession of value, this dagger, from the silken sash about his waist, and he presented it to Eleanor. He told her it had been in his family for many hundreds of years, and had been wrested by his ancestors from the Moors.

“And then he translated the strange message on the blade, kissed Eleanor on her alabaster brow, and departed.

“Eleanor did not reach womanhood, for she died of a fever when she was twelve. This dagger was inherited by her brother, Hugh Delahanty, and from him by his son Brian, and from him to his son John, to his son Liam. Down and down it came.”

“And how did you get it, Mr. Murphy?”

“Sure, the fairies left it before my doorstep early one morning, darling.”

“And what does the message on the blade mean, Mr Murphy?”

But I lied and said, “Ah, now that’s been forgotten for many years, chilybawn.”

And sad it is, that this knife and I are all that is left of a once mighty heritage.

But one story is never enough for children, and they begged for another and I could not say no, for I love children. If I have one regret in following my cousin, it is that I cannot have a fireside of my own and a troop of bright-eyed little ones about me, lispng for a story.

These children crowded about me, two sturdy little fellows on my lap and a little maiden hanging over my shoulder and

pulling my hair and asking why it is so red, with the baby, just able to toddle, weeping and roaring at my knee because there was no room for him, so I hoisted him onto my other shoulder and says, "Now, childer dear, what story is it?"

"One of the Red Branch tales!"

"No, no! How the hero cut off his own hand in the race!"

"Pray, sir," says the little maid, "tell us of the Children of Lir."

And always being partial to maids of any age, I obliged her and told them the sad and lovely story of how the Children of Lir were changed into swans.

"Do you know, pets," says I when I was through, "that in England there was a very famous man called Shakespeare, and he took our story of the children of Lir—changed a bit, it was—and he wrote it into a fine play called *King Lear*?"

"What!" says one of these stout rascals. "So now the damned English steal our kings. I curse them!"

"Whisht," says I, "you musn't do that. And he wasn't much of a king anyway. Let the English have him. We have many better ones left."

"Mister Murphy," says the second eldest boy, "have you traveled in many lands?"

"Yes, my child."

"And are their stories like ours?"

"Like ours?"

"All our great stories are of kings who fought and died over a thousand years ago. Is it so in other lands, Mister Murphy?"

"No," says I sadly, "it is only in Ireland that dead kings reign rather than quick ones."

"O'Houlihan is a king, and he lives," says the other lad, looking at me defiantly, "and when I am a man I will join him and kill every Englishman in Ireland."

"Hush!" says his mother, looking fearfully over her shoul-

der. "Do you want this roof, such as it is, burned over our heads?"

The boy looked sullen. "I'll kill every Englishman in Ireland," he repeated.

His mother shook her head and turned to me.

"Their father was hanged a month before the babe was born. For why? Because, they said, he had a pamphlet in his pocket. There was no trial; they just hanged him like a dog, nor did I ever find what was in the pamphlet, for they told me, when I asked, to be on my way before I and my brats joined him."

I sighed and looked away. It's an old story to me. I ruffled the lad's hair, and turning again to his mother, said:

"You being on the main road, so to speak, get a fine view of life. Much traffic going past?"

"No, no," says the woman, casually. "A few sojers, now and then."

"Indeed," says I, and raised my eyes to the hole in the roof. "That's a west wind, is it not?"

"Nay, east," says the woman.

"You are a fine lad," I says to the boy. "How many does your mother wish she had like you?"

"Fifty," says his mother.

"Fifty?" says I. "That's a lot, Mother. Are you sure?"

"Sure I am," says she carefully.

"I must be on my way," I says, rising and putting on my coat; then I stooped to have another look at the sow.

I heaved a sigh of relief, for she was breathing easy now, and she was cooler.

"I hope her impression is not the measles," I says.

"God be praised," says the woman, examining the pig, "it may be that she will be spared to us yet."

"A blessing upon you all," says I, going to the door.

But the woman cried, "Wait!" and she took up a little pink

piglet. "Take this to your old mother who has none, and give her my blessing. And tell her that myself and my children pray for her son."

"God save you," says I, tucking the little pig cozily in my donkey's pack. I saluted and went again into the storm, wondering if O'Houlihan knew of the transfer of fifty soldiers to the garrison of Ballykeera.

Three hours later I arrived at a hostel by the roadside. Slapping the little donkey on his rump, I sent him to forage for himself, and entered the hostel, where an aproned man said harshly, "Well, stranger?"

"God bless you, sir," says I. "Any pots to be mended?"

The publican's eyes slid for a fraction of a second to the corner of the room, where two men sat drinking, and then he nodded. Reaching to a shelf he handed me a tankard.

I stole a glance at the two gentlemen in the corner, and, lapsing into my broadest brogue, I says, "Begod, that's a nice nate hole it is."

The publican shrugged. "One of the sojers shot it. You may have an ale on the house as your pay."

"Nay," says I, "for sawder won't fix this. It is pewter, and I must use tin, man, and it will cost you a tester."

He shrugged, and tossed me the coin.

"I'd appreciate a pint of your good brew," I says.

"No doubt ye would," he says, but drew me one nevertheless.

I swept my hat from my head and turned to the two men.

"Gintlemen," I says courteously, "would it break yer hearts on a cold night to have a poor tinker drink under the same roof as yez?"

They looked at me in surprise. "Drink and be damned, but not at my table," growled one.

"Ye'll drink out in the kitchen where you belong," says the publican. "A thousand pardons, Mr. Holden."

I, who know the name and pedigree of every landowner in Ireland, picked up my ears.

"Out with yez," said the publican, jerking his head and his thumb toward the kitchen.

"Shame on yez," I says, "and the honor ye could be doin' me. Sure, gentlemen, a drink in your company would take only a minute of your time and mean nothin' to yez, but to me would be a cherished memory for life."

I smiled to myself, for I recognized Mr. Holden's friend as a Delacroix, though he knew me not.

The two men looked at me puzzled.

"Sure I have fallen on hard times now," I says, "but 'twas not always so. A poor tinker I may be, but me name is Delacraw, and 'tis not often I can drink with gentlemen of me own station."

"Delacroix," says one, looking at the other in amazement. "Why, that's my name. What the devil are you talking about?"

"Sure and me ancaisthers could make mistakes like the next ones," says I, laughing.

"If your name is what you say it is, my good fellow, the mistake was made by one of my ancestors."

"Ye have a lively tongue in yer head," says I. "Sure ye must have Irish blood in ye."

"And so have you," says Mr. Delacroix, "and a Delacroix to boot." He laughed.

"Be off," says Mr. Holden.

But Mr. Delacroix says, "No Charles, I would speak with this fellow, for we may be cousins."

"A Delacroix no less," says I. "And you, sor, from yer accent are a foreigner?"

"Bring this man a pint," says Mr. Delacroix. "Sit down, mister, whoever you are. So I am a foreigner, am I?"

I smiled as disarmingly as my face will allow. "Some of our noblest immigrants has been foreigners, sor."

The man laughed. "Now what the devil does he mean by that?" he says, turning to his companion.

Ah, me bucko, thinks I to myself, you won't be laughing, you won't, when you meet James O'Houlihan on the road soon and he relieves you of the weight of your purse and watch.

"For your information," says my friend Delacroix, "I was born not many leagues from here."

As if I did not know, I thought to myself, you, one of our famous absentee landlords.

"Do you tell me," I says. "Ye've had a great deal of throuble learnin' the language, sor. Sure I could of sworn ye was a stranger from yer speech."

The publican moved in, but Mr. Delacroix waved him away. "You know," he says, smiling, "I begin to suspect that you are not without a certain native wit."

"Drink up and begone," says the surly Mr. Holden.

"I was born here," continued Mr. Delacroix, who was a bit worse for his port. "I was born here, left three months later, and do you know, I only returned six weeks ago."

"Indeed, sor, and I hope ye'll be with us for some time?"

"Do you?" he says laughing. "I have enough poor relations without you."

"And me without a sowl in the world," I says. "Sorrow upon me, losin' one of me own race, after just findin' him."

"Poor fellow, you must, for I'm on my way back to England this very week."

"Do yez tell," says I, looking sadder still. "And I hope it is a pleasant crossin' yer Honor will have, although the *Sea Sprite* is a leaky little tub."

"Ah, but I'm not sailing on the *Sea Sprite*."

“Why, she’s the only vessel sailing from these parts this week.”

“Ah, but I’m sailing from Dublin, my clever fellow.”

“To your voyage and your health,” I says, raising my cup and draining it.

He raised his. “To you, who ever you may be.”

“Murphy is the name,” I says.

“I suspected as much,” he says, laughing.

We were interrupted by the publican’s boy.

“Dadda, dadda,” the child cried, “the tinker’s donkey is eating our hayrick.”

“Out with yez!” says the publican, pushing me out, and following close.

I trailed the boy to where my donkey was nuzzling in the hay, with the publican at my side.

“My curse attend them,” I muttered, spitting. “Well, we know two fine gentlemen will be on the road to Dublin. Give the word to Brosnaghan in case I cannot get to O’Houlihan in time.”

Nolan, the publican, nodded and, putting an arm on my shoulder, says: “Is Dinny behavin’ like a real soldier now, Mick? Ah, his mother is that proud of him. When will he be home, Mick?”

“Ah, he’s a fine soldier,” I says to his father. “Tell Kathleen he’ll be home in the spring if O’Houlihan can spare him.”

“God be praised,” whispered Nolan. “Slip into the kitchen and have a bite before you go. Kathleen would love a word with you.”

“No time tonight, your soul,” I says. “Tell her Dinny is a credit to his country. God save you, Pat.”

“Hold, Mick, till I get you a rasher and a few eggs.”

“What’s going on at Ballykeera that they’re sending extra men?” I whispered.

“It’s them muskets they received last week. They heard O’Houlihan was in the county, and fear a raid, so they’re sending extra men to guard them.”

“Well, this day has been worth its walkin’,” I says, as Nolan slipped a parcel of food into my hand. “Bless you,” I says, leaving, and thankful for the parcel, for I hated to pass the door of the widow Hogan, her with her many little ones, and me empty-handed.

I and my little donkey faded into the night and the mountains, unmindful of the curfew, for what have I to fear?



I NEVER KNOW WHERE O'HOULIHAN IS, and he always knows where I am. When he wants me, he summons me. Perhaps by a fresh-cheeked farmer, or maybe a rough-bearded sailor, or a chance acquaintance in a tavern. A man sidles up to me, whispers, turns and leaves, and I know where to find himself. I walked all night and part of the next day, and as I was not summoned, I decided to visit my mother. The information I had to relay to O'Houlihan would be received by him when he was ready. "Dheelish," says my mother to me, "you have returned." I kissed her cheek. "I have a present for you," I says. "For me?" "For none other. Come outside." From my donkey's pack I took the little pink pig. "Ah,

the dear," says my mother, taking the little creature in her arms. "He is so small, Mick. And is he really for me?"

I nodded.

"Poor little soul," says my mother. "His skin is so fair, it is, and not a hair on him. It's a little jacket he needs, Mick, to protect him from the cold."

Crooning to the piglet, she carried him into the cabin, with me following.

"Fatten him up," says I, laughing. "By Christmastide he'll feed an army, he will."

"What are you saying?" says my mother, in horror, wrapping an old shawl about him.

"Well, sure now, Mother, and what good is a pig but to eat?"

"Ach!" She was angry. "And me beside myself all day and none to speak to, and you give me a gift, a pig, the most sagacious of God's creatures, and it's company for an old woman. Do you want to eat your gift? What are you, a butcher or a son, and did you not give me this pig not three minutes ago? Is it not my pig?"

"Whisht now, Mother."

"It is my pig. Hush now, my little dear. You won't be eaten, you won't."

Teasing the old woman I slipped the knife from my sleeve and says: "Now, Mother, it's greedy you are, wanting to keep him all for yourself. And why wait till Christmastide, for what is nicer than a little roasted pig?"

"Shame upon you, Mick Delahanty! Shame upon you, I say. Begone from here before I take my broom to you."

I put my knife back, and says: "I'm done with my teasing, Mother dear, and I must be on my way. Himself will be needing me, and have you any message for him? Here, I nearly forgot; I brought you a bit of tobacco."

"Tell Seamus I pray for him daily, as I do for you. Are you

wearing your wool undershirt? Ah, I thought not; you'll be down with the quinsy again before you know it, and none to thank but Mick Delahanty."

I kissed her cheek while she blessed me, the little pig still in her arms.

"And as for you, me bucko," I says, patting his little bald head, "look lively by Christmastide!"

"What news?" says O'Houlihan when we met in a midnight glen.

I told him of the garrison and the soldiers.

"I know, I know," he grunted, and I might have saved myself the trouble, for indeed he always seems to know. "What else, you Jackaleen?"

Nor did he seem overinterested in the two fine gentlemen, for he looks upon his trade of highwayman as poor substitute for that of a soldier.

He saddled his horse and called out Brosnaghan and Fihelly for cover.

"Will you join us for the sport of seeing one of the fine Delacroix relieved of his watch by a cousin of the Delahantys?" he says, with what, if I didn't know him I might have taken for a touch of humor. He cannot abide the great Norman-Irish families who have bred into the English until they are more English than the English.

"Hah," says I surveying their horses, the best that could be stolen in Ireland, "I'm afraid I'd outrun you on my noble mount," and I patted the gray head of my little donkey.

"Jump up behind me," he says. "I haven't seen you for a week and I want all the talk about my mother and Molly Bawn."

Now, isn't it a fact that most silent men like O'Houlihan are insatiably curious? They drink up the speech of talkers like me like a sponge soaks water. Never a word from them,

but draw you out they will, leaving you as dry as a bone and wondering why you chatter.

O'Houlihan has robbed so much it's like breathing to him, so when I was tired of speaking, he only yawned and whispered, "Well, there they are."

I jumped from the horse and slipped into the shadow, where I waited.

The moon came out from behind a cloud, and the road was lit as clear as daylight.

It was the work of minutes till the carriage was surrounded and the occupants and the driver with their hands in the air standing on the road.

To my surprise there was, besides the two gentlemen, a fine lady. She must have been upstairs at the public house when I saw the men.

"I'll see you hanged for this, by God!" says my cheery friend Mr. Holden as O'Houlihan took his watch, his purse, his fob and his rings.

O'Houlihan turned to the other and proceeded to relieve that gentleman of his valuables. Delacroix went white to the lips with rage, but the breadth of O'Houlihan's shoulders was enough to make him prudent.

O'Houlihan was about to leave them to be guarded by his men when I whistled softly.

He rode over to the shadows.

"What about the woman?" says I, for I had seen the moonlight sparkle on the diamonds in her ears. But before I could say more, he rode back to the group and sat staring down at the woman, looking puzzled.

"Ah," he says finally, "Madam, do not think me ungallant if I take your fur cape."

And with that he leans down and lifts the cape from her shoulders. The woman put her hands to her throat and looked at her two companions as if in disdain that they stood so idly by.

"You swine!" says Delacroix. "Robbing unarmed men and a lone woman. You are very bold, are you not?"

I admired his spirit, although O'Houlihan sent him spinning in the dust with the back of his hand.

"I am not bold; I am wary, and you, sir, will be silent."

The lady suddenly laughed, a pretty, womanly laugh which was not lost upon O'Houlihan.

"Madam," he says by way of apology, "I am sure you can well spare this garment."

He was about to turn his horse away when he spoke again. As I say, robbing is not his trade, and he has always treated women with a great natural dignity and courtesy.

"Thank you, Madam," he says, bowing.

He rode into the shadows and tossed me the cape.

"The diamonds in her ears, you natural!" I whispered.

But robbing a woman twice was too much for O'Houlihan.

"Take those jewels from her ears," he called to Brosnaghan in Irish.

A piercing and unrehearsed scream of pain came from the lady.

"Dear man, what are you doing?" says O'Houlihan in perplexion, riding to Brosnaghan.

"Well, begod, they're fixed in her ears like the ring in a pig's nose," says Brosnaghan, "and ye told me to get them."

"Well, I didn't tell you to pull her ears off, you fool!" says O'Houlihan, and, leaning down, he gently lifted the earrings from the lady.

"My sincere apologies, Madam," he says, saluting, and with that he rode into the shadow, tossed me up behind him, and galloped into the night.

I tell you, where O'Houlihan and women are concerned, there is not a more courteous fool in Ireland.

Dawn, at our camp, found O'Houlihan softly stroking the cape. It was of finest marten skins, and lined with heavy shot silk, with a great clasp of gold at the neck.

“Mick,” says he, and I turned. There was a great silence, and I waited patiently. Still more silence.

“For the love of God, Seamus, maybe you do not need sleep, but I have been on the road for two days.”

“Mick,” says he, making a great effort, “do you think it would be amiss if I gave this to Molly Bawn instead of my mother?”

“Not at all,” says I. “If the poor witless creature dances through the town wearing that, she’ll very likely only be hanged for theft.”

“Ah,” says he softly, “she wouldn’t have to wear it to be seen; but you see, Mick, when the nights are cold, she could put it about her shoulders in her father’s cabin, and who’d be wiser for it?”

“Well,” says I, “when my mother goes out to hoe her potatoes in the rain, she puts an old sack over her shoulders. It’s the best she’s ever had.”

“That’s just what I was thinking, Mick,” says he. “Sure now, I says to myself, what would my mother want with a fine thing like this?”

I shrugged and turned over to sleep.

“You’ll give it to her, won’t you, Mick?”

“Mm,” I grunted.

“And be sure to tell old Matthew to let her wear it only in the cabin.”

“Yes,” says I wearily.

“Oh, Mick,” he says softly, once I was thoroughly asleep.

“Yes,” says I.

“Tell Matthew if there’s ever rumor of the soldiers to come sniffing about, to burn it, immediately, you understand?”

“Yes, Seamus,” I says.

Once more he waited until I was asleep.

“Mick,” he says very softly.

I arose, walked over to him, and kicked him soundly in the ribs.

"I'm nearly through talking," says he, looking offended.

"Ach," says I, rubbing my forehead, for I was weary and my eyes were aching.

"I have been thinking, Mick. It has a gold clasp. Now, that wouldn't burn, and the soldiers might find the clasp. Tell Matthew to bury it if soldiers come prowling about his cabin. Tell him to dig a little hole in the corner of the cabin, and to fill it with reeds. And if he hears soldiers, he just scrapes the earth off the top, puts the cape in, and covers it over again."

I nodded.

He made a great effort to hurry his speech.

"Mick," says he.

"Yes, Seamus?"

"Don't forget to tell him not to forget to burn the reeds."

"Is there anything else before I am dead from fatigue?"

"Well," says he, after a pause, "Mick, do you think it would be amiss if maybe I gave her the earrings as well?"

"I do that!" I sat up suddenly. "Have you lost your wits as well as your heart? Those jewels are worth the price of ten muskets."

"Ah, man, you're right." He sat with the diamonds glittering on the palm of his big hand.

"One more thing," he says in a gentle, humble voice, not at all like himself. "Tell her"—he paused and sighed—"tell her that someday I shall make her Queen of Ireland." He turned his face away, "Tell her, Mick, that O'Houlihan will give her fine jewels to put on her brow."

Poor Seamus, my blood and my heart. It is not easy for him to speak.

"I shall tell her," I says softly. "Go to sleep now, Seamus."

It was eight days before I saw him again.

"Did you see her?" he asked anxiously.

I nodded.

"And did you give her the cloak, Mick?"

I nodded.

“And did you tell her someday I would make her a queen and give her fine jewels to put on her brow?”

I nodded.

“And what did she say, my soul?”

I took a deep breath.

“She said,” says I, “that she would rather have a little brown cow. ‘A little brown cow with a white face.’” Which is exactly what poor Molly Bawn had said.

“Ah, the darling,” whispered O’Houlihan. “Asthoreen, my little treasure, you shall have a hundred brown cows.”

So, when next I visited my mother with supplies, what was the first thing that assailed my eyes, as I entered the cabin?

It was the gentleman of the house, it was. Soundly sleeping on his bed of rushes in the corner was the little pig, warmly wrapped in the fine fur cape.

“Mother! What’s this?”

“Ah,” she says, “is it not beautiful, Mick? Molly Bawn brought it to me yesterday. Himself sent it to her.”

“A crow’s pudding of Molly Bawn!” says I in a rage. “Why the hell doesn’t Molly Bawn wear it? Seamus and I could be dancing a jig in the air for the sake of that robbery, and here the damned pig is wearing it!”

“Mick dear,” says my mother gently, “do not curse, you foolish boy. Seven years a curse will hang over you and then on your own head it will fall.”

“And she gives it to you! Why is that damned pig wearing it? Why are you not wearing it?”

My mother threw her apron over her face in horror at the thought.

“Oh, Mick,” she says, “it’s much too fine for me!”

Still in a rage, back I went to her son.

“Ah, cushla machree, pulse of my heart. It’s a saint she is, Mick.”

“It’s a foolish old woman she is!”

"No, no, not my mother. The Roisheen Dhu, my little black rose. Her so gentle and kind, she is, giving the fine cape to my mother."

"So the damned pig can wear it," says I bitterly. "Small wonder this country is in chains, inhabited as it is by a race of fools."

"Sure ye must have English blood in ye," says O'Houlihan gently. "Ye don't understand at all, ye don't. It was the mother's, to do what she would with it. I gave it to Molly Bawn, and it was hers, and she chose to give it to my mother, who gives it to the pig. Now, isn't that the grand gesture, Mick? Sure the Irish have a certain nobility of character that's not to be observed in any other race. An Englishman would bid his wife wear the cape to impress his neighbors; a Scotsman would sell it and set his sons up in trade; a Welshman would barter it for six sheep or a harp; but only an Irishman would have the grace to let his pig wear it. We're a race of kings, me bucko."

However, he did concede that it might cause comment, even among the Irish, for a pig to go about clad in furs, and perhaps it would be best for him to trot around in something less fine, perhaps a nice little wool shirt, he suggested.

"Sure," say I, "we wouldn't want him mistaken for an English pig."

Thus slowly began the tragedy of the little pig, who was to change the destiny of a country and lead O'Houlihan down a dark path to his wake.



LIFE, TO JAMES O'HOULIHAN, IS NOT something to be enjoyed, but to be endured, and to be endured with stoicism. Though he has little patience with the cloth, he is in himself of an ascetic nature, not with the disposition of a saint, but so constructed that he can conceive of no earthly happening that is not a trial to greater sufferings and glory. I have seen the old mother entranced by the finding of an early flower, and I receive pleasure from poetry, song, the bottle and good fellowship. Brosnaghan prays, and Fihelly reads ancient Gaelic and Greek. We each have our ways, our moments of gentle weakness. But O'Houlihan has none save Molly Bawn. When he recognizes that he begins to soften and enjoy a

simple pleasure, it is a sin to him, and no inquisitor was ever harsher than James O'Houlihan is with himself.

There is no humor in him, no laughter, no playfulness, no gossip, no dishonesty. There is justness, strength, and an austere, impersonal kindness.

He rises in the morning, awaiting with joyless vigor the trials of the day. That there should be none has never occurred to him, and if he finds none, he makes them. He bathes daily in icy water. He eats as sparingly as a priest in Lent. He exercises and drives his body to an excess that would kill a Titan, and he waxes strong on it. He does not drink, and smokes only to be sociable, for he deems it a duty to be sociable to a point, but at heart he detests smoke and smokers. If he enjoys a particular food, he will do without it. If he dislikes a particular pastime, you may be sure he will drive himself until he excels in it.

I irritate him to the point of fury at times, but apart from seeing his jaws tighten with silent anger, he gives me no sign except to reprove me with restraint.

I have seen him, under the stress of good emotions, reduced to a furtive tear; but evil leaves him unmoved, for he has trained himself to be wary of it in any form, and is impassive under pain or violence.

If I had not always seen him display the patience of Job, the justice of Solomon, the strength of Goliath, and the occasional gentleness of a St. Francis, I would say he had a most contrary nature.

It was me the old woman always wanted to make a priest of, but I know I would have been as indifferent a priest as I was a soldier, good-hearted but inefficient. Not so her son James: he would have reached the top in either capacity.

And had he been a priest, the souls he saved would march straight to heaven, four abreast and none of them out of step, or, by God, they would find themselves reduced to the

petty ranks of hell with dispatch. But they would not be free of him, for he would start them from the bottom again, most cognizant of their errors, and fearfully anxious to reach the echelon where James O'Houlihan strode with no doubt on his part as to where he was going.

It had been months since he had seen Molly Bawn, and after she gave the cloak to his mother I knew he pined for the sight of her.

He saw me staring at him one day, and says, half smiling: "How ill it becomes a soldier to be concerned with love! Yes, Mick, I am thinking of the Roisheen Dhu." He sighed. "The Man will begin to think I lack metal in my soul if I continue to sit here. Call the boys together."

I did so, and we gathered round him.

"Things have been too quiet, boys. It is time we had a bit of trouble. They have builded a fine new barracks at Kildun."

He paused.

"We raid it tonight, but no bloodshed. Just keep them busy for an hour at midnight, for there's nothing like disturbing the sleep of soldiers to scatter their morale. And we'll fire the kitchens, so maybe they'll be having their dinners late for a day or two."

I was not in favor of this or any other sally without a definite purpose, but I know that O'Houlihan believes it is dangerous for a well-trained group of men, such as his are, to have too much time on their hands. And who knows? Perhaps he is right.

He called me aside.

"You will not come with us, Mick."

I shrugged, happy to be out of it, and began to move off, but he called me back.

Glancing covertly over his shoulder, he says softly, "Mick, me boy, there is something I must say to you."

“Well?”

“Have a bit more heart, lad. Be more of a man before the boys. Remember, you are my cousin. Don’t shame me before my own men.”

I turned on him in astonishment and bitterness.

“Attend you this well, Seamus Beg! Blood is thicker than water; and remember this, if all the world betrayed you, I would go willingly to hell, to hell, I say, rather than betray you also. And find me another man in Ireland that you know in your heart you could trust so. Do not chide me for weakness, James. If I am not much of a soldier, neither am I a coward!”

He looked hurt, and coming to my side, put his hand on my shoulder.

“You speak the truth, I know, but my burden is not a light one, and it is easy to criticize a leader. I can make no mistakes, and I chided you for my own welfare, my own safety, on which depends the safety of my people.”

“I don’t like this business of a raid for the sake of a raid,” I says. “There may be reprisals. What if he harms the mother?”

“Ach,” he says, “he won’t do that. He is a soldier, not a killer of old women. What good would it do him to kill her?”

“He might just do it to draw you out.”

“No. It is not his way. Besides, he is a dead man if he lays a hand on her or Molly Bawn, and he knows it. He would perish by my hand though every Irishman and his spawn to the ends of the earth were destroyed. But do not fear; this Man, he is very fond of living.”

Though every Irishman and his spawn to the ends of the earth were destroyed!

“Why don’t you kill him now and have done with the lot of us?”

“Despair, despair,” he says, “you with your queasy stomach. To be sure, a battle always put you off your food for days.

And do you know why, Mick? It's numbers. You don't understand them. Well, I do, and I'll tell you the first thing I learned about soldiering. When you've seen one soldier die, you've seen all mankind perish. It's a mistake wise men make to think that quantity changes the magnitude of a deed. The death of one man is the same as the death of a million, and it's a logic that scholars cannot see. If you can bear one, you can bear all.

"It's like me and The Man, and why I fight him. You don't understand him, Mick, but I do, and if I didn't I would be as dead as my brothers, but I am not. It's this way: there are millions of other Irishmen and Englishmen, but there's only one me, and one him. And I'm the only king in this land, and don't you know it. The rest of you couldn't lead your country off the king's highway in broad daylight without falling in a bog. There's only me who can lead Ireland, and there's only one soldier who is fit to fight me, and that's himself. The quantity doesn't affect the magnitude of the struggle. The rest of you don't count.

"And when I've freed this land, do you think I will be a statesman, a politick? Not me. I'm a soldier, and my destiny will be to see that strong statesmen govern Ireland truly and wisely. And if they don't, begod, I'll crush them, as I will crush The Man."

The terrible heart of the matter is that O'Houlihan has no vanity. For all I know, what he says must be God's truth, for apart from his belief in his destiny, he is a humble man.

The one occasion that he might be called a talkative man is when he relives old wars. This he does, not from any feeling of sentimentality, but to point out to his men military logic and strategy, most of which is lost, I fear, on them. He discusses his own personal experiences, and often dwells on ancient battles. There is not a battle that has been fought in Europe for a thousand years that he is not familiar with. He

knows each commander by name, the arms, ammunition, supply, political affiliations, insofar as they affected the outcome of the battles, and the routes and strength and spirit of each army.

The lectures are strange, for he assumes our reasoning is similar to his, and he speaks rapidly and firmly.

“The element of surprise. The element of surprise is of the essence in a small force such as ours. If I am compelled to make a direct frontal attack, I will use intense fire with the heaviest firing at the point where the attack will be made. Of course. Then, when that attack is made, it will be made on a very small front. Of course. As soon as the breach is made, firing from the flanks. And to hell with the boys in the rear. Press on. They’ll look after themselves. Once the breach is made, the flank firing carried out, the battle is won, despite difference of numbers, as long as the rear carries through.

“Now then, if you have a small force and you cannot put the enemy in a position to use this method, remember the wolf. He works with greatest devotion to his pack, and he runs his enemy to death. It is a relay, and each wolf plays his part with cunning, for he knows if he harries a herd long enough, and wearies them, they will break rank, and then it’s a field day, for he cuts up the herd, and he’s a fine butcher once they panic.

“But the greatest thing for a good soldier to remember is to think. I have never felt sympathy for a dead soldier, for I know there is a man who did not think, or who had a poor commander, and it is up to himself to supersede and rise to be commander himself. All in due military fashion. Of course.

“A few are bound to be killed. Of course. But that’s the fortunes of war, so to speak, and not important enough to be given much thought.”

Not important to you, Seamus O’Houlihan, but an item of passing interest to Mick Delahanty. And how does one

supersede one's commander on the field? The thought of superseding O'Houlihan makes me shake.

"It is the readiness to take a risk, and the ability to carry out an order, with no confusion, that makes a good soldier. Exploit a position. If you are the officer in charge, be able to make a decision instantly. There are no chances in battle to sit and mull over a situation. You must be ready to exercise a change of strategy in a split second, and you must learn to use that split second to confound your enemy. Never, at any time, give an order without a purpose, for you may be sure that if the man you are fighting is worth rolling up your sleeves for, he will not."

I sat looking at him, and thinking. I have seen him go for five days without food or sleep, and after one meal and a quick nap, awake refreshed and ready for the fray for another five days if necessary.

He is neither brave nor heroic, and frowns upon a man who is. He is cool, cunning, and the men who have followed him in battles on the Continent were not men to him while a campaign was on. They were war machines, to be carefully fed, led and supplied. And if they died under his command, he grieved and sought out all the details of their deaths later, carefully reviewing each step of the battle to see how their deaths could have been avoided, for he hated the loss of a good soldier.

For all of his lectures, his men follow him blindly. I remember many an old soldier in battle saying: "Let O'Houlihan do the thinking. I'll just follow and do the fighting." For the safest place in a battle, despite the hazards of leadership, was by O'Houlihan's side. And as the soldiers said, it was of a certainty safer to be with him than against him.

How his men loved him! In that ominous minute of quiet before the charge, he would glance over his shoulder at them, giving them a look of almost tender concern, like a mother

gazing at a beloved brood, and his voice, calm and gentle with, "Steady, boys, steady, till I give the word."

His men gazed back at him with the trust and love of children. It was moments like that, of the greatest stress, that one felt most the magic quality of his character, and it was why he was called a king by his own people.

I remember a bad thigh wound I received once, and the surgeon standing there with his saw, his assistant with the tar, and O'Houlihan kneeling with tears in his eyes beside me.

"Must the leg come off, Doctor?" he said.

"I fear so, Captain, for it already looks infected, and he will die."

My cousin bravely brushed his tears away.

"Ah, well, leave it on then, Doctor. The poor boy. What good is a soldier with one leg? Poor, poor little Mick, you're better off dead, darlin'."

Thanks to his careful nursing, I did recover, but I never felt properly grateful when I reviewed the circumstances.

When his lecture was over, he stood up and said, "Are there any questions?"

"Well," says Fihelly timidly, "who, in your opinion, Seamus Beg, is the best fighting man?"

"All men, properly trained and led, and fighting for a just cause, are good fighting men." He paused. "But I have found the Germans and the English to be excellently trained and led, although the English foot soldier lacks the physique of, say, the Irish or the Scots. He's long of stamina, though, which puts them at par. And I have seen whole regiments of Germans destroyed because their officers and they fought bravely, but without imagination."

"What of the Irish?" I asked.

"Modern or ancient?"

"Well, start with the ancient."

"The ancient Irish had too much individuality of fighting

style, and were poorly led. Discipline was the answer. Why, I'd sooner see The Man kill off twenty Irish sept leaders if he'd leave one of the caliber of himself or, say, Cromwell."

"Cromwell!" I says in horror, and the others were too shocked to speak at all.

"An excellent soldier."

"I'll be damned if he'll be praised in my presence!"

O'Houlihan sighed. "This is unworthy of you, Mick. Why, only a man of craven spirit would deny that Cromwell was a good soldier."

Gazing into space, he says to himself, rather than to us, "What a pity he wasn't on our side!"

Then, straightening his splendid body, he stretched.

"And now, boys, on your toes, for we want this raid on the barracks to be a success."



NOT BEING INCLUDED IN O'HOULIHAN'S raid on the barracks did not quite excuse me from military duty, for instead Brosnaghan and I were sent to the port, to check on news from the Continent. There is a nice little cove with a cozy public inn where Brosnaghan and I retired for a cup of cheer and to exchange news. A secluded place, where men know how to keep their mouths shut, and always a good hour's warning if the authorities are about to raid, since they do without their brandy if they are too sharp, for The Man confiscates all contraband. Paddy and I sat nursing our drinks, he looking over his shoulder before speaking. "Do you know a man called McPherson?" he asked. I thought for a minute.

“Yes,” I says, “there’s a saddle maker in Wexford, William McPherson.”

“No, no,” says Brosnaghan, sinking back, his brow furrowed.

Now, here I’ll tell you about Brosnaghan, and it’s a sad story it is, for his father was an English soldier. This is a common enough thing in Ireland, but the shame of it was, Paddy’s mother went with him through choice.

This soldier abandoned her, and with her infant she returned to her people, the Brosnaghans. She had named the babe Phelim, after her father.

Now the Brosnaghans are a proud race, and old Phelim Brosnaghan was laid low with shame at this daughter of his, and he would not allow his grandson to be named Phelim, so the child was known as Paddy.

Paddy’s mother’s spirit soon broke under the treatment her kinsmen afforded her, and when her spirit broke, so did her mind, and the poor creature cut her throat one day, thereby adding further to the shame of the Brosnaghans.

Proud people they are, the Brosnaghans, and a handsome race, as big, fair-haired and ruddy-faced as the sons of Milesius.

The lot of this dark and ugly changeling, Paddy, was not a happy one among them, for they detested the sight of him. By the time he was eight, he took to the roads, poor little man. At ten years he was a bugler on the Continent, at twelve a drummer, and at fourteen a soldier, fighting by the side of full-grown men, him who never remembered a kind word or a caress.

It was on the Continent he served under O’Houlihan, and it attests to the nobleness of O’Houlihan’s heart that for the first time in his life Brosnaghan was treated like one of his own race.

Paddy Brosnaghan is not a man to forget the few kindnesses

that have been accorded to him, and he swore to O'Houlihan that if O'Houlihan returned to Ireland, he, Brosnaghan, would be his right hand.

Now an additional right hand is an awkward thing to manipulate, but Brosnaghan has been by O'Houlihan's side like a dog since that day.

Two things mark Brosnaghan's character. His hatred of the English and his attachment to the memory of his mother, whom he does not even remember.

She is buried in unholy ground on the bleak side of a mountain, and many the time he has come to me when we were in that district and asked me to say a few prayers by her grave.

He's a great man for praying, is Phelim Brosnaghan, much to O'Houlihan's disgust. And in his own way, raging as his temper is, Paddy's a good man, for I've yet to hear him speak disrespectfully of a woman, and the sight of a child or a kitten can bring tears to his eyes.

To see him, kneeling in the rain by the side of that forsaken grave, he, the living cause of the poor woman's damnation, his hands knotted in prayer, and his face, which nature in a cruel moment fashioned like that of a murderer, twisted with grief and remorse and shame, the sight of this Paddy Brosnaghan is not easily forgotten.

Paddy downed his drink, came out of his deep thoughts at last, and says again, "Are you sure, Mick, that you don't know any other McPhersons?"

I have a good memory for genealogy and names, and I am often consulted to settle arguments.

"Well, there may be more up north, Paddy, but I'm not familiar with them."

"It's a Roderick McPherson I'm inquiren' after."

"Roderick," says I, musing, "Rory McPherson. No, I don't know him, Paddy."

Brosnaghan looked over his shoulder again, carefully, and leaned forward.

“He was buyin’ arms for a revolt,” he whispered.

I straightened up with a jerk.

“What’s this you are saying?” I whispered.

“God’s truth, Mick, I know it for sure. It’s this way. I met a man, captain of a small vessel, Collinge is his name. Smugglin’ muskets and small arms from France, he was, for this Roderick McPherson. Well, Collinge tells me the English have hanged this McPherson, and now Collinge is left with a consignment of arms, handmade by master gunsmiths in France, and he wants to unload them.”

I shook my head.

“No, Paddy, that’s an old trick. Now, you wouldn’t be taken in by that.”

Paddy looked uneasily over his shoulder again.

“I’m not crazy, Mick. This Collinge is a hard man, and not one to play foolishly with. He’s stuck with these guns; he can’t collect for ’em and he’ll hang if he’s caught with them. The Frenchies won’t take them back, and he’s only paid them for half of them. They’ll close up all his contacts on the French side if he doesn’t come through. He’ll sell them cheap, Mick.”

I shook my head again.

“I tell you it’s so,” he whispered. “I’ve seen the guns, and they’re beauties.”

And then it struck me like a bolt of lightning.

“Sure,” I says, “Roderick MacPherson!”

“Ye know him, Mick?”

“Sh,” I whispered, switching to Irish. “Of course, Paddy. Why didn’t I recognize the name? Why, it’s not three months since they hanged him.”

Now Paddy was suspicious.

“I never heard of him,” he says begrudgingly.

“He’s a Scotsman, not an Irishman, Paddy. They’re up to having a lovely bit of trouble of their own over there, all the

boys in the north of their country. Sure now, why didn't I think of it when you said Roderick McPherson?"

"Do you think O'Houlihan will make a bargain with this Collinge?"

"He will of a certainty be very interested," I says. "I'm seeing himself tomorrow. Tell your friend Collinge to stand by. I'll meet you here in two days. Agreed?"

Paddy nodded and we parted, and that was how Conn Collinge came into our lives. A little pig, and a smuggler named Collinge, and the destiny of a nation was changed.

O'Houlihan met Collinge, questioned him closely, but would make no decision.

Collinge's terms for the arms were fair, but then, what else could he do with them? He couldn't sell them to the English.

O'Houlihan's funds from robbery were small and our needs were many, so he hesitated for fear Collinge might possibly default.

"I'll talk it over with my men," he says, "and get in touch with you within the week. If at that time we decide to buy, I'll have the money."

He paused, looked Collinge up and down, and added significantly, "And you will have the guns."

"Now then, what sort of a name is Collinge?" says O'Houlihan after Collinge departed. "Is he not one of the Collins and you with a mouth full of spit, Paddy?"

"No," says Brosnaghan, "he says his name's Collinge, so Collinge it is, a Cork man."

"Are you sure he isn't an Englishman?" says O'Houlihan.

"He's as Irish as I am," says Brosnaghan.

"Why, Paddy," says Fihelly, laughing, "you with—" but the words died in his throat as Brosnaghan turned his murderer's face, and Fihelly prudently refrained from finishing his remark about Paddy's blood lines.

But Brosnaghan stood up, fingering the knife at his belt.

"You were saying," he says.

"No offense, me charming boy," says Fihelly.

Brosnaghan took a step toward Fihelly.

"You, Liam Fihelly, will ye never learn to keep your foolish gob shut?" says O'Houlihan, standing up. "Sit down, both of you."

Fihelly sat down, but Brosnaghan still stood.

"I said 'Sit down,' " says O'Houlihan quietly.

Brosnaghan sat down, but cast us such a look of reproach that I was genuinely contrite for Fihelly's remark.

I don't know why Fihelly should have made such a cruel jest, except that he has a brilliant mind and no opportunity to exercise it, and Paddy, poor soul, is a natural butt when men are bored.

"Sure, Paddy, I'm not myself today," says Fihelly. "I meant you no harm, and if it wasn't you it would have been Mick or Brennan with the humor that's on me today." Fihelly gave me a good-natured shove and called me the Jackaleen. "See, Paddy, Mick takes no offense."

Brosnaghan glowered with rage.

"And Collinge is an Irish name," say I, trying to help matters.

There was no response from Brosnaghan, so Fihelly offered his hand. Brosnaghan ignored it.

"Shake his hand," said O'Houlihan quietly.

Brosnaghan hesitated for a minute, and then accepted Fihelly's hand.

"Now listen, the lot of you," says O'Houlihan. "I want to go over the details of that raid on the barracks. It was not a success. You were clompin' your big spogs like heifers in a quarry. Surprise is the only value to an attack of that nature. Sure, we did burn the barracks, but we were lucky to get out with whole skins.

"Ye need whippin' into shape, so I'll give the lot of you another chance to prove yourselves soldiers. McMurrugh

has brought me information that they are repairing the barracks, with twenty muskets going along to protect the work party. I want them muskets."

He would, just when the humor of the poet was upon me. He dismissed the lot except me.

"I don't like this Collinge," he says. "He talks too much."

I shrugged. When an Irishman gets to heaven and has a few drinks and keeps his mouth shut, even the angels become suspicious, and they'll be most cautious about accepting O'Houlihan as an Irishman, but there's no doubt about Collinge.

"I trust no man who runs arms into his own country for a price," says O'Houlihan.

I shrugged. Collinge has to live, as do the rest of us.

"My eye will be upon him," says O'Houlihan, "and God help him if he has an extra card up his sleeve."

O'Houlihan is a good judge of men, and though his dislike of Collinge appeared to be instinctive and unfounded, I knew him well enough to respect it.

However, Collinge proved to be as good as his word, and the bargain was concluded, the first of many dealings between O'Houlihan and Collinge, for Collinge was an exceptional man.

Fearless, as astute as a fox, and as slippery as an eel, he was in the right trade, and an invaluable man for one in O'Houlihan's position. His brain was as quick as O'Houlihan's when it came to strategy. Once told a plan, he never forgot a detail or asked a question, but seemed, forthwith, like O'Houlihan, to see the full picture.

He was a man as big and as powerfully built as O'Houlihan, and when he slipped into O'Houlihan's fireside lectures on military tactics, I knew he followed every word, his intelligent, handsome face a mirror of interest.



WE ALL BUSIED OURSELVES, PREPARING to go out for the muskets. I say "all," but in reality Collinge and myself had a nice little game of cards going behind a bush. Collinge was not going on the raid, and O'Houlihan, who had long despaired of ever making me very useful in a military sense, allowed me a certain liberty and license in camp. And wasn't it O'Houlihan who said, "God help him if he has another card up his sleeve"? Well, O'Houlihan has the gift of second sight, and I'm the one who knows it, for Collinge cheated at cards. I could hardly believe it, but I, who in the past have not been averse to a little legerdemain, was the first to notice. I've made it a habit to cheat only Englishmen, for, though

the English wouldn't believe it, there's honor among Irishmen.

Well, as that may be, it riled me to lose to him, so, after watching him carefully, I decided to play the game his way. He did not care for that at all, and, like a maiden outraged, he threw the cards in my face, saying, "By God, Delahanty, you are a cheat!"

The outcome of this was a fight, which we took care not to let O'Houlihan know of, for he would countenance no brawling among his men.

As I have said, Collinge was a big man, and though I fought in my usual gallant manner, I was, as usual, defeated.

Brosnaghan bound up my ribs which were cracked in a most novel fashion of fisticuffs, which Collinge has perfected by the simple exchange of using his large brogues.

"Hell, Mick, why don't you fight little men for a change?"

"It was a question of honor," says I, wincing at my own humor.

"Begod, it sits ill upon me to see you used so, Mick. Next time, lad, give me a wink and I'll finish any fights with Collinge for you."

"Alas, Padraic," I says, "I fear he is, like O'Houlihan, born of a race of kings. He hit me once across the chops, and I recall little else, nor are you any match for him."

Tears came to Brosnaghan's eyes as he tightened a girth about my ribs and saw me paling with pain.

"Ye'r' that innocent, yer soul." His black eyebrows drew together. "Did you never hear of a knife?"

"Ach, Paddy, it was a fight, and not the first I have lost, and I learned a good lesson from it."

"As what?"

"Not to fight Collinge. Say no more about it, for I do not want it reaching O'Houlihan's ears, or there will be no more cards in camp, and we have few enough pleasures already."

"Ye'r' a fool," says Brosnaghan.

"Hush," I whispered. "Here's himself."

"Well!" says O'Houlihan, approaching. "You are looking somewhat pale and peaked, Mick."

"Am I now?" says I innocently.

"Not enough exercise," says he. "This raid will put the breath of life in you, me bucko. You know, I'll say one thing for the church, it keeps a man as much in line as the army. And you, poor little Mick, show what a man who is out of touch with both comes to. What a wheyface you are! You should be either on your knees praying, or marching on a parade ground."

Sure, all I need now is a nice brisk trot over the bogs, says I to myself, and to him:

"James, you have put your finger on it again as usual."

"Seven sharp," says he, beaming. "They are starting early, but we will start even earlier. Twenty muskets!"

Rubbing his hands together, he left us.

Punctuality being the obligation of kings, O'Houlihan was on time, but the soldiers and muskets were not.

Thirty of us waited in ambush. We waited and waited, and still no soldiers appeared.

One of the difficulties that plagued O'Houlihan was that, thanks to his own diligence, if more than four Irishmen were found congregated it constituted an uprising, and all were liable for execution. Because of this, O'Houlihan was most cautious, and hesitated to summon a large number of his men on the roads. The thought of those muskets had made him greedy, but there were too many of us together for him to sit at ease.

The soldiers should have passed us and arrived at their destination early in the afternoon; however, our lookout assured us they were nowhere near.

"What," says O'Houlihan, "have I been misled by false information?"

He prowled about restlessly. "No," he says finally, "no,

but why are they not here? They should have arrived two hours ago.”

“Perhaps it is a trap,” says Fihelly, “though I can hardly credit McMurrough, my informant, with being a traitor.”

“No, no,” says O’Houlihan, “something is wrong. I feel it to my fingertips.”

He was never wrong.

He continued his pacing, and after a few minutes turned to us.

“I think I will look into this.”

He beckoned six of us, including me, to join him.

“We’ll go to meet those gentlemen, and see what is delaying them. The rest of you will stay under cover until I return.”

We, the six, split into pairs and began carefully to work our way in the direction the soldiers should be approaching. An hour later O’Houlihan whistled us together and we crouched in a clump of brush.

“One hundred yards ahead,” says he, his face looking grim. “Sitting in the shade they are, enjoying themselves and playing cards and drinking!”

“Shall I send for the rest of the men?” asked Fihelly when a long, long pause followed O’Houlihan’s statement.

“There is no need for more of us,” said O’Houlihan with disdain. “You will separate and surround them, keeping yourselves thirty paces apart.”

We knelt, awaiting our further orders, and his expression was so unpleasant that we even breathed quietly.

“I shall go into the midst of them and order them to surrender. When I give a signal by raising my right hand, you will all fire one round, taking care to hit no one.

“If I raise my left hand after this, you, Fihelly, will fire to wound a sentry who is sitting on a stone asleep.”

It didn’t seem much of a battle plan to me, but then I’m not much of a soldier.

"Two hours late," I heard O'Houlihan murmur, as I rose. "Two hours, and me cooling my heels like an English flunky waiting attendance on them!" His face was hard.

From my vantage point I saw him stride into the group of lounging soldiers, to their lieutenant who lay idly on his back dozing.

The soldiers looked curious but unsurprised as he approached their officer.

O'Houlihan touched the fellow with the toe of his boot.

"Get up."

Puzzled, the lieutenant, a lanky young man, rose to his feet.

"You are surrounded," says O'Houlihan without further ado. "Surrender your arms, all of you, there!" He pointed to a patch of earth. "And form ranks, there!" He pointed beneath a tree.

"What?" says the lieutenant.

"Do as I say. I am O'Houlihan."

The young officer paled, turned to give an order—I suppose to tell his men to resist—when O'Houlihan raised his right hand.

The salvo of shots sounding simultaneously made it impossible to judge their number.

We, O'Houlihan's men, crouched waiting for his next move.

"You are surrounded," said O'Houlihan. "The next shot will find this man as a target."

He nodded to the sentry, who was now very much awake.

The young officer looked about him like a child awakened from sleep.

"Surrender arms!" roared O'Houlihan, and pointed to the spot he had indicated before.

Their officer still said nothing, and with the look of sleep-walkers they obeyed O'Houlihan's orders.

"You, there!" called O'Houlihan. "Hand me your musket!"

Looking fearfully to his officer, the man did.

O'Houlihan examined it and threw it down in disgust. "As I might have expected. Filthy! Clean them, each and every one of you, and do a thorough job or you shall have a musket hole through each and every head among you!"

The men obediently fell to this task while O'Houlihan turned to their hapless commander.

"Your name, sir?"

"Lieutenant Melville, sir."

"Why are you dawdling here, sir? You are two hours late and have kept me waiting!"

The young man, who looked like a reed beside O'Houlihan, did not answer.

"Your gear is filthy, your men unshaven and as dirty as your guns!"

The young lieutenant blushed painfully.

O'Houlihan looked him straight in the eye.

"The Man shall be informed of this, and make no mistake about it. I myself shall send him a report!"

Holy Mary, says I to myself, crouching in the underbrush, whose side is he on?

When O'Houlihan said this to the young officer, the lad went deathly pale, and spoke up. He stood very straight, and says, "I do not crave indulgence for myself, sir; but for my men that is tantamount to a death sentence."

O'Houlihan looked at him with contempt, and did not answer.

"I beg you to reconsider the report, sir," says the young man. "Shoot me now, if you will, but spare my men."

I admired him, for he spoke up bravely, and I knew he was willing to give his life for his men.

"Your concern for your men is somewhat tardy," was the grim retort. "Form ranks!" He pointed in the direction from which they had come. "March!"

We watched them going dispiritedly off. O'Houlihan whis-

bled to us; we gathered up the muskets, and half an hour later, winded and feeling none too happy, we joined our other comrades.

"Don't you see?" whispered Fihelly, looking at O'Houlihan with a sort of fearful admiration. "The Man will execute every man Jack of them, and spare us the trouble."

"For God's sake shut your gob!" says Brennan in horror.

O'Houlihan raised himself. "You, Mick, get paper and pen and take down this report."

O'Houlihan could read easily, but writing was a slow chore to him, so accordingly, I had been his scribe for fifteen years.

"Put this down:

"Sir, on the afternoon of August 18th, I waited in ambush on the boreen of Cargill, on the road to Lisheen, for a detachment of soldiers led by Lt. Melville. After two hours of waiting, I investigated the delay. I found but one sentry on duty and he asleep, Lt. Melville lying on his back, enjoying our pleasant air, the men drinking and playing cards. Their gear, including their muskets, was filthy.

"Your obedient servant,

"James O'Houlihan."

He sat gazing at the earth, and then says, "I think it wise not to tell him that I and six men took over. The less he knows of my strategy, the better."

I had been silent long enough.

"Seamus," I says, "he was a likely-looking lad, and not yet twenty, I'll wager. Ah, now, doesn't it seem a pity to kill off a bit of a boy, to say nothing of the rest of them? Sure, they obeyed your orders and you have the muskets, which is what you wanted."

A murmur went round the men, and they watched O'Houlihan expectantly. He said nothing.

Celteran spoke up. "To be sure, Seamus, there's enough black Englishmen in Ireland for us to have our revenge on, without us stooping, so you might say, to kill off a boy and a bunch of larrikins who have done us no harm."

There was not a man among us who, for a king's ransom, would have changed places and been one of those unfortunate soldiers.

Mulcahy stood up. "Seamus, you know how The Man killed Owen Ruh. He'd think no more of doing that to all forty of them soldiers, if you send that report."

O'Houlihan turned to me. "Add a postscript to that report. This: 'Sir, I trust you will afford me a similar courtesy, should the occasion arise.'"

His own tactful way of keeping us on our toes, or, as he would say, making good soldiers of us.

It was useless to argue with him. He's a thought-provoking man, a born soldier, accustomed to iron discipline, incapable of false excuse, and equally incapable of understanding why all mankind is not fashioned in the same manner as James O'Houlihan.

As he is eight years older than I, I do not remember him as a child. Had he never played? I asked the old mother.

"To be sure," the old woman said, "to be sure he played, Mick. Why, I never saw a child play at being a soldier so much. I remember him not yet six, with a fishhook stuck in his thumb, and when the O'Hickey cut it out, not a whimper out of him. 'Child,' I says, 'Mr. O'Hickey has seen many a patient cry, so do not be ashamed to weep, for we will not think less of you.' And what does he say but that it is not a fishhook but a pistol ball, wounded he was, he says, laying siege to Dublin Castle. When I smiled he says, 'Not really, Mother, but I am practicing, you see.'"

A playful boy was O'Houlihan, and thinking of him brought to my mind dim memories from my childhood, of Owen Ruh.

Nearly seven feet tall he was, and reputed to be the strongest man in Ireland. He paid scant attention to me, but I still remember his silent nature and the coldness of his eyes. No, James is not such a bad fellow, when I recall his brother.

Owen Ruh was a madman, in the same fashion that The Man is, while James, James is just. Just in the strange way the English are just: they burn out a town and all its inhabitants for one malcontent. But there is a reason, harsh as it is, as there is with James.



A SOFT MORNING IT WAS, THE KIND that is remembered for a lifetime: not a cloud in the sky, the air sweet with the scents of nature, and every little bird up early, piping merrily and saucily wherever I turned. And in the course of that morning, eight people told me the Welshman was looking for me. A shepherd leaped across a stone fence, swept his tattered hat from his head, and says: "God save you, your soul. The Englishman who speaks like us has been inquiring after you." A mile later, a little colleen came jumping along, waving a blackthorn stick she had been herding geese with. "Ah, Mister Delahanty, the one with the harp, the one we like, is seeking you." When I reached the town, old Matthew Cooley came hobbling up.

“Mick darlin’, the Welshman has been looking everywhere for you.”

This continued until two fine-looking soldiers, every button shining like the noonday sun, saluted me smartly, and one said, “Our sergeant requests a word with you, sir.”

The Welshman looked far from happy as we sat down to drink together.

“I have a message for your chief from The Man.”

It was a grand, rare day, and I made up my mind nothing should spoil it.

“The Man bids me thank himself for reporting the sloth of the barracks detail last week. The matter has been attended to. You will please to convey to your chief The Man’s gratitude, and also give him this small gift, which has afforded him many hours of pleasure and he trusts it will do likewise to your chief.”

He handed me a book.

“What folly is this,” says I, shoving it back at him, “gifts between sworn enemies?”

“For the love of Jesus, take it!” says the Welshman, shoving it back to me. “I am on orders to deliver the message and the book.”

He paused, and shuddered. “And I remember what happened to those poor boys last week, and you would do well to dwell on it yourself, Mick Delahanty, for your master is no softer than mine in some ways.”

I accepted the book and finished my drink.

“One more message before I go. They are still sworn enemies, bach, for The Man bids you to tell O’Houlihan that, before the coming of another frost, he will attend O’Houlihan’s wake. He says to tell your chief that he has spoken so, and he is a man of his word.”

We parted, and like a martial Dan Cupid I reported back to O’Houlihan.

“So he will attend my wake. Ah, yes, and he’s a man of his word. I shall hold him to it, if it should come to pass. But it shall not. He shall attend my wake when I betray my country, and a thousand frosts shall freeze this land before that evil day. I’ll burn in hell before The Man attends my wake! You will tell the Welshman every word I have spoken!”

So it came into being, the pact between O’Houlihan and The Man. If O’Houlihan betrayed his country, The Man would attend his wake.

How easily the Prince of Darkness is invoked! How anxiously he dances attendance upon us, waiting so patiently to do our bidding! No task we set him is too arduous, if only we will turn to him, and his Satanic Majesty is most diligent in the performance of his duties to his earth-bound cohorts. The perfect slave when we call upon him, him knowing who will soon be the master when we find too late that his coin is counterfeit and will not repurchase our freedom.

“Sh-sh! Seamus!” I says fearfully. “Mind what you say, and do not, I pray you, speak lightly of curses and The Man in the same breath, nor don’t allow yourself to be enmeshed in the snares of that demon. God help me, it makes my flesh creep, this rapport between you two!”

“Ach! You are as shee-ridden as the old mother, filled to overflowing with superstition!”

His jaws tightened with anger.

“Mick! Will you cease behaving like an old woman, and conduct yourself like an O’Houlihan, for your blood is half mine, and I can tell you, if it were not, I would be tempted to spill some of it. Indeed, I’d still give you bloody teeth for this softness, if I thought it would remedy it!”

“Would you now!” says I, still stiff from my encounter with Collinge. “Well, let me say this to you, my teeth have been bloodied many times, and not backing away from fights.”

He sighed, his temper conquered.

“Arrah, what are we doing, Mickaleen? Quarreling among ourselves, and you the last of me own blood. I spoke hastily, and you know that is not my way. Pardon, I beg you, here, shake my hand, Mick.”

Mollified, I shook his big paw and said: “The Man has sent you a gift as well. Now, wasn’t that kind of him? Thinking of your welfare day and night, so to speak, the darlin’ that he is.”

Opening the book, I read,

“‘*Commentarii de Bello Gallico.*’”

“What is that, Mick?”

“Commentaries from the Gallic Wars, by your mutual friend Julius Caesar.”

O’Houlihan took the book from me eagerly, but his face fell in disappointment. “Ah, Mick, it’s in Latin, and me without a word of it.” His face brightened. “You shall read it to me.”

I shook my head, “Three years as a hedge scholar did not prepare me for this.”

“True, my boy. True. And my mother always wanted for you to be a priest and to be an educated man. What’s this, though! Our priest! Bring me the father; he shall read and translate it to me.”

“Ah, sure now, Seamus,” I says, feeling awkward, “you don’t mean that. He’s off on his knees praying, which is what he ought to be doing. You can’t ask a man of God to be reading some blasphemous heathen work on war.”

“I’m not a man to interfere with another man’s praying,” says O’Houlihan. “When he’s done with his praying, send him here; he shall earn his bread.”

So I went to the priest and told him that O’Houlihan would like him to do a bit of translating from the Latin.

“God be praised,” says the poor man, crossing himself, “my prayers are answered. Oh, my son, how I have prayed he would send for me! Is it the responses he is wanting to learn?”

Blushing, I said I could not say, and departed hurriedly.

Our poor priest, I pity him with all my heart, hunted down and hiding like a hare, and no more able to care for himself than Molly Bawn could.

And for all our life is hard, it is what we have chosen, and there's always the thought of a bit of whisky in the jar, or a good piece of red meat and dancing and singing and light-footed maidens. And maybe a good fight to clear the air when our thoughts and sinews and nerves are stretched like a fiddler's bow.

Not so this poor priest—devil a bit of meat he'll eat, though we offer him his share when we have it. I've seen a lot of priests in my time: thin priests, fat priests, holy priests and bad priests; priests who read and priests who fought; priests who gave council and priests who were silent. I've seen priests who could drink with the best of men and laugh and dance if they were so minded, and our people love them for it. But not this poor fellow; it's cold water is all he drinks, and never a song or a drink or a tight belt over a full stomach.

Indeed no, alas, we have got ourselves a saintly priest. I tell you he hasn't a joy in the world. He's the saddest man I know, and it's enough to take the laughter off my lips just thinking about him.

Why, if it weren't for priests like ours, I wouldn't be able to write my own name, for it was a priest who taught me, and lent me books, which are worth their weight in gold in Ireland.

The men are shy with this priest, as he is with them; we all respect him, even O'Houlihan, but we are all uncomfortable in his presence.

He's not like the priest who taught me as a boy. I can see us yet all clustered around that good man, behind a hedge we were, and him whispering for fear of being heard, for we all knew what was in store for him if he was caught.

Latin and Greek he taught us, mathematics and history.

Moriarty he was, with fists on him like clubs, and he used them over our ears with great dexterity.

I remember him putting his hand on my head. "Mick, it's a fine mind you have. Oh, what a priest you would make! You pick up learning as quickly as a dog does fleas. The future of our land is in the hands of boys like yourself, and yet, in a year or two, it will be off to the Continent to fight and spill your blood for foreigners, like the rest of our wild geese. And will you forget all poor old Father Moriarty tried to teach you?"

No, I did not forget, nor will I ever.

"Yes," he says, smiling, "remember you are learning for two. Your cousin Seamus O'Houlihan stayed in the hedge schools long enough to write his name, and his poor mother has to do all his praying for him, she with her many sorrows as it is. Well, her son is a lad all Ireland will hear of someday. Stay close to him, Mick."

I stared at my old Father Moriarty so intently that he said a curious thing to a thirteen-year-old boy.

"Stay close to him, Mick," he whispered. "He's a king. I tell you already I can smell the difference between him and ordinary mortals. They're born hundreds of years apart now, my boy. Not like the old days, when we were a race of kings."



“MANY THEY LIE, THE HEROES OF IRE-
land,
They that reveled in vasty halls to the sound of
conch shells.
Pale, silent, low on bloody beds are my war-
riors.
Oh, spirits of the lately dead, hear Cuchulain
in his anguish,
Speak to him on fierce winds, bend his bushy
locks with voices.
Gods of my ancestors, I am alone;
No bard shall hear of me, nor gray stone rise
to my renown!”

Our king was as gloomy as his mighty ancestor, but whereas Cuchulain mourned for the warriors he had lost in battle, O'Houlihan pined for the dark Rosaleen.

Like the court jester, I sought to divert him, telling him some strange things about The Man, which the Welshman had related to me the week past, at our meeting.

"Do you know, Seamus, that the Welshman says The Man has neither cloven hoof nor horns, nor yet even a forked tail. Indeed, I gather you could walk past him in a crowd and never see him."

Nothing is sadder than a sad king. O'Houlihan only nodded.

"But the Welshman told me a strange thing about The Man. Mark you this well, James, and give me your opinion. The Welshman says that The Man cannot abide, for even an hour, in a small room. And if he is in a small room, he must have the door open."

"Ah," says O'Houlihan, with interest now.

"And he'll permit no more than two others in a small room with him."

"Ah," says O'Houlihan again, and no more, but I knew from past experience of him that the information was carefully tucked away in his brain, for future use. He was hardly a man to dismiss a weakness in his enemy.

And then he was back, his eyes dreaming of Molly Bawn.

"Seamus, my soul, you are eating your heart out, and it is for the sight of Molly Bawn, is it not?"

He nodded. "Every man has a weakness. Mine is the loveliest in the world, the Roisheen Dhu." He turned his head away listlessly.

"Well," I sighed, "I tell you what. You are not much use to anyone this way. Give me the word and I'll bring her to you. Here, to our camp, or wherever you will. You can see her and talk with her and then I'll take her home."

"Oh, Mick! Would you?" And then his face fell. "No. Ah,

it's no use, Mick. She wouldn't come. She's that timid, the mere sight of me frightens her, and I could never use force with her."

"There is no need to," I says. "Leave it all to me. I shall seek her now, Seamus, and send word to you when she will come."

Indeed, I am artful in pleading another man's cause, and isn't it a pity I can't do the same for myself?

On the way to Molly's cabin, I met her father, walking with the Welshman.

Not wishing to speak of my mission before the Welshman, I says only, "God save you, Matthew, and you too, mister."

"God save yourself, Mick; and here's this man," Matthew indicated the Welshman, "he's been in Ireland for fifteen years, and never seen the inside of the fort of Maelsechlainn."

We stood before the ancient, ruined abbey-fortress.

"Beware," says I, laughing, "Maelsechlainn, though dead these eight hundred years, still does not like Englishmen."

"I am a Welshman," says our soldier quickly.

"Come, my son," says old Matthew, smiling indulgently, for as all of us did, he liked the Welshman, "come, I shall show you Maelsechlainn's fort, and who knows? perhaps we shall even see Maelsechlainn. Will you join us, Mick?"

Nodding, I followed them in.

Legend has it that the fortress was once the abode of Maelsechlainn, Prince of Colmáin and Houlihan, last of the Hy Niall, descended in a direct and unbroken line from Eber, son of Ir, son of Miled, first of the royal house of the Kings of Milesius, before the birth of Christ. Here Maelsechlainn dwelt in the tenth century, but old Matthew says that, first, Christian monks had founded an abbey on this spot early in the sixth century.

There is little doubt that Maelsechlainn was here, for he is

still remembered by his unholy lust for the hearts of the Danes, who perished in thousands trying to invade his kingdom, and the people to this day sing of how he defeated Ragnall, King of the Norsemen, in the battle of Tara in the year 980.

This pile, like all the handiwork of the O'Houlihans, is monumental even in its decay. The very blocks of it mock time; the base stones have been toppled, but the strength is there, awry, perhaps, but mighty, tangible, and as fearsome as a freshly slaughtered corpse.

When I was a child, the place frightened me, for one does not raze the citadel of an O'Houlihan with impunity, and I felt that armed warriors still lurked in the shadows of the huge blocks; blood-lipped and waiting for merciless vengeance, I imagined them. And with my heart sinking, I would whisper to the shadows, by way of precaution:

"I am one of you. Not like Owen Ruh or Seamus, perhaps, but my mother was of your race, so spare me, for I had no part in the destruction of your castle."

If these grim shades heard me, they answered me not, but they did spare me. The place is still shunned by most of the native Irish, and even Matthew Cooley, a wise old man, looked ill at ease.

The Welshman, who, like most of his people, is closely akin to the Irish, had a cautious look on his hawk face, and unknowingly cast glances over his shoulder, for a lifetime of soldiering, coupled with the ancient Celtic instinct, made him aware of unseen menace.

"In Wales," he says, "there are places of antiquity my people fear to visit. This place is like them. When I was young, my mother said they were where the dead walked heavily."

I looked uneasily over my shoulder and handed old Matthew a bottle.

Matthew took a drink, and his face assumed a look of serenity as he placed his gnarled hand on the Welshman's shoulder.

“The spirits of the dead are not always evil, my son. Ireland is so very old, and so am I, and with age comes peace. If there are spirits here, they too are old, and have long since lost their malignancy. Perhaps they guard us, hold their phantom swords before us to ward off danger. And although my nape rises, I do not condemn nor flee these spirits; instead, I come here. My ancestors once defended this place, and if my heart is good I feel a certain peace when I sit with the ghosts of my ancestors.

“Indeed,” he added, smiling, “it is a fine place for courting; one is seldom disturbed. I met many a pretty maiden here, and your uncle, Sean O’Houlihan, Mick, courted Bidy McMeaghan here, she who is now Seamus’ mother.”

Yes, like the old mother, Matthew must be near eighty, and, like her, still hale.

“Did you know her then?” I asked.

“Ah, yes. A fine-looking girl was Bidy McMeaghan. Big she was. It’s from her the boys got their size. Sean was a small man. Why, you, his nephew, look more like the old man than any of his own boys. Ah, well—eight of them there were, and now how many? Just the little O’Houlihan. Only one left; they’ve been shot and hanged and burned, two of them, as like as blackbirds, killed in a revolt in Limerick. Well, she’s seen many a sad day, has Bidy O’Houlihan.”

“Were they important people in these parts, the O’Houlihan?” asked the Welshman.

“Indeed they were,” said old Matthew, “but Cromwell broke their backs. That was in the time of my own grandfather, and it was under Cromwell that they lost the last of their lands, after the fall of Drogheda, and there wasn’t a full-grown O’Houlihan man left alive. And then Cromwell marched here, rounded up the women and children, forty-two there were, hanged the women by their own hair, and massacred the children. The great Irish families still practiced fostering then, and a good thing it was; for although four little O’Shaughnessy

children died with the little O'Houlihans, the O'Shaughnessys had two O'Houlihan boys, Hugh and Patrick, whom they managed to protect and raise, and Patrick was your great-great-grandfather, Mick."

"It's a fearsome history the O'Houlihans have," I says, and the Welshman nodded, and shuddered.

Old Matthew smiled gently. "All Irishmen have fearful histories, Mick, and if it hadn't been for Neill Cooley having been transported, and later returning, there would be no Cooleys here, for they too were slaughtered to the last infant.

"It's a sad history it is, boys, especially for the O'Houlihans. Kings they had been here, for close to fifteen hundred years; it's all in the old manuscripts which the priests have hidden against the English finding them. Kings were the O'Houlihans, long, long before the Normans ever set foot in this land."

He sighed and lit his pipe, then went on:

"Look at them now, only Seamus Beg left, and him hard put to keep potatoes in the old woman's mouth. Them that wore collars of gold, and linen fine as silk, and had five thousand cattle and their own bards and harpists. They spoke Latin and Irish, but never a word of English; none in these parts did, even fifty years ago, and I'll wager that fifty from now they'll speak naught but English. Kings the O'Houlihans were, and they sent their sons to Spain and France to be educated, like gentlemen, with always a son for the church. Ah, and look at O'Houlihan now. God alone knows how many years it is since he has seen the inside of a church, and him hardly able to write his name.

"And it is because the people remember the old glory of the O'Houlihans that O'Houlihan need never fear any Irishman claiming the blood money on his head, for we are still proud of our own history, and it is himself who is like one of the old heroes, and him a descendant of kings. How can we help but love him? Yes, God forgive me for holding with

pagan myths, but when one such as O'Houlihan is born among us, the people know, for kings are born with the mark of luck upon them. Even to be looked upon by O'Houlihan is considered good fortune, and it is not idle coincidence that no trap has ever been laid that can catch Seamus. He is lucky in the manner of kings."

The Welshman's eyes twinkled, "What if I betrayed him? I am a stranger among you, and no Irishman, and I could use his blood money."

"Does the hare catch the fox?" says old Matthew. He smiled and turned to me. "Mick, do you think the Welshman here will claim the price on O'Houlihan's head?"

I handed the bottle to the Welshman.

"Well, now you see," I says, "I don't think he will, for he carries a harp and sings like a lark and weeps when he drinks."

"And why should that stop me from claiming O'Houlihan's blood money?"

I burst out laughing.

"Why, mister? Did you ever see an Englishman who carries a harp, sings like a lark, speaks our language, and weeps when he drinks? Why, man, you are one of us, and isn't it yourself that knows it? Why, if we had more mountains and sheep here, you'd never go home, surely you wouldn't; you'd stay here the rest of your life."

The Welshman's face became serious.

"What you say is true, Mick. But, oh, for the sight of a rainstorm, gray and cold against my own mountains, instead of your little hills. And I am a soldier. I have lived in your country for fifteen years, and now I'm a stranger here and in my own land. I am a soldier, and if tomorrow O'Houlihan were captured, and I were ordered to shoot him, I would shoot him. This does not make me happy."

"Save your tears," says I, "for you won't. And O'Houlihan knows you are a soldier and follow orders, just as I know, and

old Matthew here. How long do you think you would have lived, having put the torch to Owen Ruh's head, if it were not so? Indeed, next to a brave man, there's nothing O'Houlihan likes better than a soldier. And as for Matthew and me, what do we like better than a poet and harpist?"

"Will you favor us with one of your own songs?" asked old Matthew.

The Welshman shook his head.

"I must report back on duty. Ah, you Irish, with your compliments and fine speech. Do you know, the English say the Welsh are the most treacherous race on earth because of those very traits? But much as the Saxon hates the Irish, even he is swayed by your tongues. And what of me, your poor cousin from over the sea? Indeed, I shall go, for your tales have depressed me. Tonight I shall play my harp, and weep; perhaps I shall drink."

He bowed courteously to the old man,

"My compliments to you and your daughter, sir."

When he was gone, I turned to Matthew.

"Ah, Matthew," I says, sighing, "I come at the bidding of O'Houlihan. It has been long since he has seen Molly Bawn, Matthew. Could she come to the camp? You know well no harm shall come to her."

Matthew pursed his lips silently.

"Ach," I says, "that damned Welshman. He loves her too. That is why we are forever tripping over him. Well, he had best beware."

Old Matthew only shrugged.

"Matthew, you are her father. What will happen? What is best for her?"

This wise old man puffed on his pipe and looked at me shrewdly.

"I am an old man and I have not much time left to me. When I am gone, who will look after my poor little Molleen? Why

should I not give my blessing to the Welshman to court and marry Molly Bawn? He is a good man, and a kind one. I would see Molly settled with him, and, God willing, in his own or any other country rather than this one."

"And what of O'Houlihan? My God, I fear to even think of it. And her to leave Ireland, why, she's like the spirit of the land itself."

Old Matthew gave me a slow look.

"If she were your daughter, would you have her marry O'Houlihan or the Welshman?"

I was forced to admit I chose the Welshman, my traitorous heart torn with despair.

"Well," says the old man, "you may take her to O'Houlihan's camp, but that is neither here nor there." He leaned heavily on my shoulder as we left the fortress. "For Molly Bawn is a fairy, and will marry whom she chooses."



THE DAYS PASSED SLOWLY FOR THE doomed warriors, especially for O'Houlihan, anxiously awaiting the visit of little Molly Bawn. We spent much time in telling stories. Huddled around a small fire in the lee of a mountain crag, nursing mugs of hot tea to warm our hands, we listened to Fihelly, a master in relating the old tales.

The sad and lovely story of Corban-Carglas, daughter of Torcul, king of the Loughlinns, of Scandinavia. She was imprisoned in a cave by Starno, her father's enemy, and rescued by the Irish Finn. She did not long survive her rescue, and gathering her hair from the winds, she was swept to the airy halls of Loda, the pagan afterworld. Misty Loda, whose cloudy

halls were ruled by Cruthloda. His form is dimly seen, but his right hand is on his shield, and in the left the sounding shell which calls the fallen to him. His shield rises to protect the feeble, a darkened orb to hide the weak in arms, and the roof of his dreadful hall is marked with nightly fires.

O'Houlihan pays scant attention to the tales of his ancestors. Having heard them since childhood, he sees little point in repeating them. Also, it is long, long since he has seen his Roisheen Dhu, and melancholy sits upon him.

When Fihelly's tale was done, we, the men, fell to trying to remember as many of the battle cries as we could.

Much as war is against my nature, I can tell you it is something to see an Irish regiment in the field, pipes skirling, the men as eager as hounds, waiting for the war slogans of their leaders.

Small wonder that trained European troops have broken ranks and fled before them, for there is an awesome paganism to these men when they fight shoulder to shoulder.

Ah, and to see a giant O'Halloran, lord of Clann Ferghail, leading his men, and shouting like a Fenian warrior: "Lotaim agus! Marbhaim!" "I wound and I kill!"

Or the O'Connells, once kings of Connaught, roused to blood lust with, "O Dhia! Gach an Cathair!" "O God! To each of us a castle!"

Some war cries, like that of the O'Molloys, hereditary standard bearers to the high kings of Ireland, make my blood run cold: "Gearr Aige Agus Doghadh Buaidh!" "Short in Action and Mischievous in Victory!"

After recalling as many as we could, we fell silent, until O'Houlihan gave us a short lecture on the transporting of supplies, and I noticed that Conn Collinge, who was among us awaiting orders, hung upon his every word.

I recognized this man as a natural leader; he is popular with

the men, easy and affectionate, but with an air of command about him. He has a quality about him that I detest, that of ingratiating himself with a man so that one is scarcely aware of his craftiness.

"Give us a story, Conn.," says Fihelly.

Collinge sat, his handsome face lost in thought for a few seconds, and then, casting an appraising look to O'Houlihan, he says:

"I knew your brother, Owen Ruh, Seamus Beg. And with your permission, I'll tell you all the story of the killing of Squire Delany's bull. It was myself who saw it, saw Owen Ruh kill the bull with his bare hands."

This is a story famous in the land, but if he sought to ingratiate himself with O'Houlihan through it, I could have told him he was wasting his time.

O'Houlihan looked at him without enthusiasm, for no man could talk himself into James O'Houlihan's good graces by praise of Owen Ruh. Seamus regarded Owen Ruh as a poor soldier and as a man who had squandered his destiny in a useless death.

Brosnaghan's eyes lit up when Collinge mentioned the bull. "Ah, I've heard that story, but never met a man that saw it happen. Tell us about it."

"Well," says Collinge, "we was digging in a field for Squire Delany, in Connaught it was. Now, I don't know if you've ever tried to put a spade in the earth of Connaught, but with maybe the exception of hell, there's no land with more rocks. But this squire—ah, he was a natural if ever I saw one—gold we was digging for. Not in lumps, mind you, but all nicely smithed and wrought by the ancient Irish. Hidden when the Danes came, the squire said, and I could have told him even they didn't want Connaught. Looking for the leprechauns' hoards, we might as well have been, and who wants to rob them?"

“Well, the ancient Irish, or the leprechauns, either way, they had hidden it well, for we found none; but the squire had a bull he was leading down south for sale, a prize bull. And the bull slips his nose ring and pole, and into the fields he goes, after Owen Ruh and me, who was working quietly, with no intention of distressing the little people.

“I tossed down my spade and fled, for this bull outweighed me by a ton or two. Not Owen Ruh; he wouldn’t give ground, but up he picks a pitchfork, and faces the bull, with himself, the squire, shouting, ‘By God, if you use those tines on my bull, Owen Ruh, I’ll use my fowling piece on you!’”

Collinge now looked designingly at O’Houlihan.

“Many of your brothers were still alive then. Indeed, one might say that O’Houlihans were more plentiful than prize bulls, so Owen Ruh throws down the pitchfork and says, ‘Sure, Squire darlin’, I’ll do just as you say.’

“So he grabs the bull by the horns and throws him, and twisted his neck until he broke it. Ah, he was the strongest man I’ve ever seen, was Owen Ruh. Then Owen Ruh smiles that wicked, crooked smile of his and he says:

“‘Ye see, Squireen, I did just as you said, and if you aim your fowling piece on me, it’s your neck I’ll break, for I followed your orders, and you’re a gentleman, aren’t you now, and must abide by your own words.’

“Well, the squire he sat on a rock and looked at his dead bull. “‘Sure,’ he says with tears in his eyes, ‘you have me fair and square, O’Houlihan, and I’d hate to lose a man of your strength, but why could my dear bull not have had that miserable bastard of a Collinge!’

“And Owen Ruh looks at me with them cold eyes of his and he says: ‘Squire darlin’, you’re entirely right. I’ve killed better men that Collinge with me bare hands, but bejaisus, that’s the finest bull I ever tackled.’

“I approached Owen Ruh and the squire, saying, ‘Can I

cut a quarter off him, your bull, your Honor? For he won't need no legs to walk to market now, and fresh beef is very scarce in these parts.'

"But Owen Ruh says, 'Never! He faced me with no fowling piece, charged empty-handed like a warrior, he did; and I don't know about you, Conn Collinge, but I do not eat my fallen enemies.'

"'Died like a hero, he did,' says the squire, blowing his nose. 'And he'll be buried like one.'

"'Squire,' says Owen Ruh, 'ye speak like a gentleman, and I didn't know ye had it in yez. My hand, sir.'

"And do you know, they shook hands, and devil a bit of meat did we get, for they buried the bull, it which would have fed twenty people for a month."

As I said, Collinge has a sly way with him and few are the men he cannot charm when he puts his mind to it, and he was determined to win O'Houlihan's favor.

The men laughed at his story and looked admiringly at him, for it's not many men who will repeat such a tale about themselves and take it with good humor, as well he knew.

Later, when Collinge was gone, and O'Houlihan and me sitting alone, he says to me:

"And isn't it a pity Owen Ruh killed that fine bull instead of Collinge, him who wants wages to serve his own country? Ten shillings for himself for each musket he delivers me, him who'd sell them to the English for five if they'd buy them!"

Well, it doesn't need the wisdom of a seer or a scholar to see that the likes of Collinge is not going to sit easy with that sinister saint James O'Houlihan.

That afternoon, awaiting Molly Bawn, O'Houlihan tended his appearance as carefully as a court dandy, shaving so closely that his fair skin shone through his blue-black beard. His thick hair gleamed from brushing, and his peasant hands, of which he has always been curiously proud, were as usual spotless and his nails in every detail perfect.

With his clean shirt, polished brogues and fine soldierly bearing, he was indeed a handsome man. Molly Bawn was probably the only woman in Ireland who could have looked upon him with fear instead of love.

His spell of melancholy being broken, he was as merry as his nature allows. Had it been any other man in Ireland, his preparations and change of mien might have been humorous, but this man who gives of pity so sparingly is strangely capable of inspiring it in others. His men, instead of laughing secretly, regarded the coming tryst with delicacy and silence.

And little Molly Bawn, setting out with me to meet her terrible lover, came as trustingly as a child. Like an obedient child being led by a beloved parent to its doom.

Tremblingly she clung to my arm, and her eyes, like black fringed violets, looked beseechingly at me.

"Arrah," I says, soothingly, "himself has never hurt a woman in his life. My little soul, do you think he would harm you whom he cherishes above all others?"

They were empty words, for well as I had done in my arrangements, I had forgotten one thing.

Conn Collinge had never seen Molly Bawn, and was the only man not to know of her visit to our camp.

As we neared the group of O'Houlihan's men, Molly Bawn let her breath out in a gasp, and her white hand tightened on my arm.

O'Houlihan was too shy to approach her, and stood a few yards behind his men, gazing anxiously over their shoulders.

The men stood, shuffling their feet, and began to move awkwardly away.

And then, who should come striding up but Collinge. There he was, as big as O'Houlihan, broad-chested and confident, and, from the mere swagger of him, a man with a way with women.

He knew no more of her than he knew of my donkey; all he saw was a fair woman in a group of men, and with the

assurance of a courtier he shouldered the other men aside and made straight for Molly Bawn.

“And who is this pretty blackbird?” he says, taking her white face between his thumb and forefinger.

That was all he said, all he had time to say, for Molly Bawn cast upon me such a look of utter terror that I thought she would die in my arms, and, giving a piercing scream, she ran.

As luck would have it, she ran square into O’Houlihan, bouncing against him like a pebble against a mountain, and then, when she saw it was he, she fainted at his feet.

God preserve me from the anger of a silent man.

O’Houlihan looked from her to Collinge, and I knew then what was meant by the black blood of the O’Houlihan.

Collinge stepped back in consternation, realizing now the situation.

“I meant no harm,” says he, “dear God, I’m not used to women fleeing at the sight of me. I did not know it was the fairy woman, just a pretty lass, I thought, and no harm done.”

He’s a bold fellow, and no coward. He looked about him. “You saw, you all saw, I did no more than chuck her under the chin. To be sure, does that harm a pretty girl?”

Ah, but this girl of O’Houlihan’s is no ordinary girl.

I looked at Brosnaghan, and nodded over my shoulder. He took Collinge by the arm and led him away, while the rest of the men thoughtfully melted into the landscape.

Only O’Houlihan and I and poor fainting little Molly Bawn were left.

O’Houlihan gathered her in his arms and sat down.

“Do you think she’s dead, Mick?”

“Not at all,” I says. “A drop of cold water will bring her round.”

“Mind the water.”

So off I ran, leaving him with Molly Bawn across his lap.

When I returned, I found him kissing the unconscious girl, his cheeks burning and his eyes glittering.

He stayed my hand as I was about to sprinkle water on her brow.

“Not yet,” he whispered, and handed her to me. “Not yet. Ah, if she could but sleep in my arms for a long, long night. Oh, Mick, it is a cruel and dark star that shines over my head, that the only time I may kiss my love is when she faints. Here, take her. I’ll go now before she recovers her senses, for it would frighten her even more to see me now. Take her back to my mother and guard her well.”

He backed away hastily.

I’ll go, I said to myself, I’ll go before she recovers her senses. And will the poor creature ever do that?

She opened her eyes and gave a great sigh when she saw that only I was there, but she trembled as though stricken with the ague.

I have seen horses like Molly Bawn. Gently they must be handled, and with a soft voice and a light hand. So I treated her as I would the racer who balks and sweats and shivers at the sight of a leaf blowing before him, and when I had her calmed I led her back to my mother’s cabin.

My own heart ached as I handed her over to my mother; ah, but it is sad for me too. Enough, for this is the chronicle of the kingly O’Houlihan, and not that of the Jackaleen, and I shall say no more of my hopeless love for her, except to state that no matter what dark path O’Houlihan was to lead me down, her safety was always foremost in my mind, and I have loved her as I have loved no other woman. She was my country, my poor beautiful country, my dark Rosaleen, my Roisheen Dhu, my little black rose.



“I WILL MEET YOU IN THE RUIN OF THE fort of Maelsechlainn.” So spoke O’Houlihan, for he wished to be with me when I visited the mother with food. But at the last minute, with no warning, Hanrahan sidled up to me as I watered my donkey in the town. “Himself has changed his mind. He will see his mother later, and you will go now with her food.” On the road to the mother’s, I saw little Molly Bawn. Little Molly Bawn, dancing on her white feet, pointy as a fawn’s they are, and she tripped lightly toward my mother’s cabin. “God save you, Molly Bawn, you are out early.” She printed her fairy lips upon my cheek. “See what I have here, Mick,” she says, but instead of showing me, she held her hands behind her back.

“You are a shee, Molly Bawn, so they say, but I cannot see through you. What have you behind your back, my pretty girl?”

“Ah,” she says, bringing her hands before her, “it is lettuce, Mick, and in the lettuce is honey, and I have brought it for the old mother. I have walked since dawn from my father’s cabin so that she might have it fresh and cool, Mickaleen.”

I looked at the clear, guileless face before me, and down to the sodden lettuce leaves, with the golden honey oozing to her white fingers.

“And where did you get the honey, Molly Bawn?” I says, wondering at this gentle creature with her child’s mind and fairy form.

“Indeed, I cannot tell you,” she says.

The old mother was standing in the doorway of the cabin, as clean and calm as a cat, the sun glinting on the snow-white linen of her ragged cap and apron.

“Indeed she cannot,” says my mother, putting her arm around Molly Bawn’s shoulder, “for the fairies showed her and she is kin to them, and we bear no tales on our kin, mind you, Mick Delahanty.”

She brushed Molly Bawn’s wild dark hair from her brow. “Come in, my child. Mick here has brought me some butter-milk, and you shall have a cup.”

They went inside and I followed.

“It is for you,” said Molly Bawn, holding out her hands. My mother put the sodden mass on a saucer.

“It is kind you are, Molleen, to think of an old woman. Why, I have not tasted honey for twenty years.”

She wrung out a clean cloth in water.

“Pour the milk, Mick.”

As I did so, she washed the girl’s hands, and then her face, and as Molly sipped the milk my mother brushed her hair.

Suddenly Molly turned to her in alarm. "Where is your little pig, Mother?"

"Why, he is sleeping in the corner, in his own dear little bed," says my mother gently.

"Ah, Mother," says Molly Bawn, letting out a deep sigh, "last night I dreamed he was dead, Mother, dead, and such a sweet little creature he is."

"Give him until Christmas," I says, laughing, but my mother turned a stern and warning eye upon me.

"He is safe, my child. Mick here, he's a great one for teasing, he is."

"Ah, but it was a terrible dream it was, Mother. And when he died, he spoke to me, Mother, so clearly did he, and all the sorrows of the world were in his speech."

"And what did he say?" I asked.

"Ah, I wish I could tell you, for his words were as clear as yours, but, you see, I could not understand them."

"Hush, child, it was only a dream."

Molly Bawn's eyes widened with dread. "Is he here?" she asked suddenly, trembling from head to foot.

"Who, my child?"

"He." She spoke significantly.

"My son, Seamus?"

Molly Bawn nodded, and began to weep.

"No, my child, and you have no cause to fear him. Hush, now, hush, and do not weep."

But Molly Bawn tore herself from my mother's gentle embrace. "I must go." She was panting with fear. "I must go!"

She fled our detaining fingers, and out from the cabin.

And it is strange this soul is, for she had only time to disappear into the morning mists, when the ominous, regular tramp of feet was heard by my mother and me. The sound of marching men.

Two days before, O'Houlihan had been sleeping in a ditch, and I waiting by his side. He twitched and moaned like an animal, so that I lay down and placed my ear against the ground.

"Wake up," I says, jumping to my feet and kicking him in the ribs. "There's a platoon of soldiers coming this way; I can hear them marching."

O'Houlihan opened his eyes, looked at me calmly, and laid his ear upon the ground.

"They are going away, not toward us. You are as skittish as a colt. Calm yourself."

With this he lay down and resumed his slumber, while I sat fearfully listening, afraid he might be wrong.

But how foolish of me! This descendant of kings, who sleeps in ditches, slept soundly, hearing but the beat of the ceaseless feet of the hordes of Finn MacCool.

Now, looking about the cabin, I turned and said, "Mother, you would be best to leave, and take your little pig with you."

My mother looked startled, ran and clutched her little pig to her breast.

"Ah, Mick," she says, "they wouldn't be hurting the likes of my little pig, and an old woman?"

"Begone!" I says sharply, and thrust her toward the door, but a knock shook the cabin, and it was not a knock, but the sound of a musket butt pounding, and it was too late.

An English soldier burst in, followed by The Man, and a troop behind him.

My mother stood, holding her little pig, and then she put him on the floor and stood straight.

It was the first time I had seen The Man face to face, and my blood turned to ice.

Outwardly The Man was not unattractive, finely but com-

pactly built, with a look of subtle, easy strength about him. His features were regular, his head well shaped, though narrow, giving him the smooth, somewhat repellent look of a serpent.

It was his voice that betrayed him, that set him apart from all humanity, as though he were a member of a sub-race, lost for eons. My very flesh creeps at the timbre of it, deep, hoarse, and rusty, as if the art of speech were but recently acquired by his species.

He was like a tiger deprived of its kill. O'Houlihan had planned to come here, and somehow The Man knew. Then, with his unerring instinct, O'Houlihan changed his mind, and now there was only the Jackaleen.

The Man's eyes swept the cabin coldly, impersonally, and then rested on my mother.

She stood, fumbling with the edge of her apron, and her old face flushed.

"What brings you here, sir?" she said in Irish, which is the only language she speaks.

He turned, and with a flick of his forefinger, motioned the Welshman forward to translate.

"Where is your son?" says the Welshman, looking straight ahead.

"Indeed, sir," says my mother. "I do not know."

The Welshman translated, and The Man stared hard at me.

My mother's face became transfigured with terror, and she gazed imploringly at The Man. "He does not know," she said, pointing to me. "He is my foster son, and he harms no one. I beg you, sir, let my youngest child, my foster child, be, for his heart is as sinless as a child's."

The Man gazed at her coldly as the Welshman translated.

"I have no truck with your jackal foster son," he replied when the Welshman was through. "Where is your son?"

"I do not know." My mother's hands began their familiar

rosary on the edge of her apron. "I do not know, sir, and I speak the truth. Do no harm here; we are simple people who obey your orders."

The Man's eyes were restless, and they settled on the little pig, who immediately sensed his attention.

The little pig ran to my mother, and with his sharp little trotters he put his forefeet against her skirts and hid his face like a shy child.

Suddenly The Man lost interest in us. He shrugged, and left the cabin, the Welshman following him.

We were left alone for a second, until six soldiers who had been standing outside surged through the cabin. There was not much to wreck, but they turned the place upside down with the wanton destructiveness of the conqueror.

Soldiers always travel in pairs; two of these were bored professionals, two a pair of lads who would have looked more at home behind a plow in some quiet English village, and two, God help me, of the kind that makes an Irishman's blood run cold. Recruited probably from prisons, one had a face of loutish viciousness, and the other the look of a stoat, merciless and mischievous.

The eye of ferret-face fell upon the piglet, and my mother instinctively swept the pig up from the floor to her arms.

"Give it to me," he said.

Although she did not understand his words, the old woman knew what he meant.

"Please," she says in Irish, "please, he is a baby, not worth the killing of, sir, he's that small, and of no use to anyone. He is a dear little creature, and so wise. I beg you, do not take him."

For answer, he smashed her across the side of the head with the butt of his rifle. She fell to the ground; the little pig ran squealing in terror to his corner, where, his little eyes bright with fear, he watched, and I was suddenly engaged in fighting six men.

I unfooted two, but I was soon overpowered, the two professionals holding my arms behind my back.

“Do you want a charge in your guts?” says one of the professionals, in what was an honest attempt at kindness. “Stop struggling and we’ll clear out of here before there’s more trouble. Stand still, by God!”

I did, only in time to see ferret-face blast the brains from the little pig in the corner.

“Now, why the hell did you do that?” says one of the farm boys. He sighed and shrugged, and the lot marched from the cabin.

I lifted my mother up, but she pushed me aside and ran to the corner. She fell on her knees, weeping, and dabbed at the little pig’s brains with her apron and clutched its little pink body to her.

“Give it to me,” I says harshly, wiping my own blood from my face, “give it to me and I’ll bury it for you.”

But she stayed on her knees, keening so that I could have struck her myself, until I saw the blood creeping through the silver hair at her temple, and then I wept and knelt beside her, putting my arm about her shoulder.

“Don’t weep, Aroon; I’ll get you another pig.”

“Ah, Mick,” she says, as she wrapped the little pig in her apron, “ah, Mick, why did he kill my little pig? I do not understand. They were not hungry, Mick. Why did they kill my little pig? I have so little to give and so little to lose, and I loved my little pig. Mick, he was wiser than a dog, and he would run when I called him. I do not understand, Mick. What man chokes the robin’s song?”

Before I could answer, the door swung open again, and there was The Man. He had heard the shot.

He was white to the lips, and shaking with rage. Over his shoulder, beyond the door, I could see his men holding the soldier who had struck my mother and killed the pig.

The Man clenched his teeth in agony as he bowed before my mother.

"A thousand apologies, Madam," he said, and the words were wrenched with truth and suffering from his twisted soul.

He took a lace kerchief from his sleeve and wiped the blood from her face, this Man who had destroyed seven of her sons.

He turned to me, as cold and impersonal as before.

"Translate."

I nodded.

"Your son is a gallant enemy, and I am ashamed that he was attacked through an old woman. This is not my way of fighting him, and I apologize for the blow you received. Be assured that that soldier will receive a hundred blows for the one he gave you. Indeed, he will wish the dawn had never risen on this day. Convey to your son that *my* hand was never raised against you."

The old woman had placed the pig's body on the floor, and stood gazing simply at The Man as he spoke.

"Be assured, Madam, that the soldier responsible for this will die with no more ceremony than—" He paused, turned the little pig's body over with the toe of his boot, "—than this."

He bowed low and turned to go.

"Wait," said my mother, looking to me to translate. "Do not punish that soldier on my behalf. My pig is dead. That is the end of it."

The Man looked puzzled, but bowed low again.

"As you wish; he shall not be punished."

He paused in the doorway, looked at the old woman searchingly, and then departed.

When he had gone, I thought I would suffocate with rage and shame. I paced back and forth, and then began to leave the cabin.

"Where are you going?" asked the mother in alarm.

"To Seamus."

"Stay, Mick, stay!"

"No."

I had no way of getting in touch with O'Houlihan, this being unforeseen to me; however, I did find Fihelly, and told him everything.

"Ah, Mick," he says, "the poor old soul, and her nearly eighty. As if she has not seen enough grief in her day. What will you do?"

"I must see O'Houlihan immediately."

He nodded. "Here," he says, "give the old woman this with my blessing. It is all I have to offer her. Tell her it has been blessed by the Pope."

He handed me a scapular medal, which I pocketed.

"Wait here, Mick. I'll be back as soon as I can."

It was fourteen hours before he returned.

"I'm sorry I was so long, Mick, but you know how cautious himself is. He'll meet you in the old fort at midnight."

"Did you tell him?"

He nodded.

"How did he take it?"

"Well, he's not a man to be much concerned over a pig, and when he heard that the soldier had not acted on The Man's orders and that The Man had apologized to your mother, he did not seem angry."

This enraged me, and when I did meet O'Houlihan there was very little I could say, as Fihelly had already told him the details.

He sat calmly, looking at me as if I were a peevish child.

"Well," he says, finally, "a dead pig is a dead pig. It is yourself who has always been a comfort to the old mother. Perhaps you understand her. I do not. But she is my mother and I love her, so return to her and give her what solace you may."

No more than this from Seamus O'Houlihan.

"Arrah!" I spat on the ground in disgust with myself and him and the world. "I understand neither her nor her son."

But I returned, and my mother was praying when I entered the cabin.

"Ah, Mother," says I as she arose, "it's sorry I am about your pig. When I think how I used to tease him, I could weep. It's sorry I am, Mother, and could I bring him back, I would."

"Ah, whisht! It is not for the likes of us to say such things. He was taken when his time came. I have been praying for him."

"Mother!"

"Ah, well, him and the boys. And if I don't pray for my little pig, who will? You're always praying for Ireland, and Seamus not praying at all."

"Mother, you can not pray for the soul of a pig. That is blasphemy!"

She sat wearily on the stool by the fire.

"Ma vick, it is anger which causes all this trouble. If people would only do as Jesus asked, there would be none of this. But always, there is anger and hatred in men. Seven of my sons are dead of it, Mick, killed by their own anger and hate. There is only Seamus Beg left, and I pray to God that he shall never lose his temper. And as for praying for my little pig, he was one of God's creatures, and so simple that he was easy for me to understand, and therefore to pray for. To be sure, there are times when I must pray that I can pray for men. Pray, my child. Pray for The Man too."

"He who killed seven of your sons? I'll die before I do."

"For shame, Mick. Pray for forgiveness."

I sighed hopelessly. "Pray," I says bitterly, "aye, and my mother praying for The Man and the soul of a pig."

"Mick," she says timidly, twisting her apron in her hands, "do you suppose that he is in heaven?"

"The pig?" says I in horror.

"None other."

I sighed again. "Ah, well, Mother, if pigs have a heaven, no doubt he is in it."

"You must ask the good father, the next time you see him, Mick."

"Ask your little Jesus," I says, laying my head upon her knee and not knowing whether to laugh or cry. "Ask your little Jesus; he will know."

"Ah, Mick, my lovely boy, you are so clever. Oh, I wish you could have gone for to be a priest. To be sure you are right. I have only to ask."

I nodded.

"I buried my little pig by the potatoes, Mick, wrapped in his fine fur cape. You don't suppose the good father would say a few words over him, do you, as he was taken so suddenly?"

"Mother!" I sat up, aghast. "Have you no fear for your soul?"

"None," she says. "But one thing, Mick. I want you to tell Seamus that the soldier is not to be harmed. I know The Man will keep his word, but I fear that Seamus may be angry and do the soldier some harm."

Little did she have to worry for, I thought.

"I shall tell him, Mother. He will not harm the soldier if that is your wish."

"Be sure, now. I, his mother, charge him that no harm, no harm shall come to the soldier, and he shall honor my word, even as The Man honors it."

Like a shuttlecock, I returned to Seamus.



BY THE TIME I RETURNED TO O'HOULIHAN, half Ireland knew that the soldiers had entered the cabin of the O'Houlihan, that his mother had been struck across the head with a musket, and her sinless little pig brutally shot. People looked at me pityingly, and shook their heads. Old women wiped their eyes in sorrow as I passed; children ran up to me, clutched my arm, and asked me to give the old mother their blessings; strong men turned their heads in shame and young mothers held their babes up to see the man who had fought six soldiers to protect his old mother. And I, I gave O'Houlihan his mother's message. "The old woman is cleverer than she appears," he says. "She is right. That soldier must not be touched,

and that is an order. We will have no premature uprisings while I lead. Where is the Welshman now?"

The Welshman was being followed twenty-four hours a day since the attack, with Geoghegan in charge of the detail.

"Seamus, the last report I had, he was having tea in your mother's cabin."

"Pray, why?"

"Well," says Geoghegan, blushing, "he came to offer her his condolence on the death of her pig; also, Molly Bawn goes to your mother's cabin often, and the Welshman fears she might come to some harm from the soldiers, so he escorts her there and back."

O'Houlihan closed his eyes, and his jaw muscles tightened.

"Is anything the matter, Seamus Beg?"

"Yes," says O'Houlihan, "I ought to be fighting the Irish, and the Welshman should be leading them." He took a deep breath, and continued. "Get a message to him. Tell him I received The Man's apology and I accept it. Tell him that, since I accept his apology, that soldier will not be harmed by me or my men."

Brosnaghan looked as if he would burst into tears.

"O'Houlihan," he says, "how can you see your old mother so cruelly used? Struck, she was, and her an old woman, and her little pig killed, a good little pig, and she loved it dearly."

"Be silent," says O'Houlihan.

A murmur went round the men, and Fihelly stood up. "If it had happened to the mother of any other man in Ireland, it would be different. The people will think you are afraid."

"The people can not think," says O'Houlihan. "That is why I am here, doing their thinking for them."

"If she were my mother, I would kill that soldier," says Brosnaghan.

"By a stroke of good fortune, Phelim Brosnaghan, she is my mother."

Hanrahan spoke up. "Even Brosnaghan speaks wisely sometimes, Seamus, and I am in accordance with him this time. If she were my mother, that soldier would be a dead man."

"Neither is she your mother."

"James—" I says, but he interrupted me.

"Say it, say it. She is your mother."

"There is truth in what Fihelly says. It would seem a sign of weakness on your part to ignore the whole incident. What the people think is important." I still burned with shame at having witnessed the attack on the old woman, and being unable to prevent it.

"Be silent, all of you, and listen to what I have to say, for I will not repeat it.

"First. How do I know that this is not a trap? How do I know The Man did not secretly order that soldier to attack my mother in order to anger me and draw me out? How do I know he is not testing me, to see how much more patient I am than Owen Ruh?

"You may be fools, but there is one thing, and only one thing, that I can be certain of in this instance, and that is that The Man is not a fool!

"He fears me; he knows that the longer I wait, the stronger I am. The minute I show signs of weakening, he will be waiting to strike. Do you think he does not know that both Ireland and Scotland are simmering on the edge of a revolt and that some European power is sure to step forth to take advantage of it?

"His strength lies in trying to draw me out, before I have arms and ammunition to support me. Make no mistake, he knows that if, in six months' time, I get support from the Continent, nothing on God's earth can stop me from leading a successful revolt.

"That is the first thing we must realize about this incident. Now, there is another side to the question. The attack may

not have been ordered, in which case we must consider this fact. The Man is a soldier, and this is the most important thing to remember. Suppose that soldier did not act under orders from The Man. Very well, listen to this carefully. If The Man ever had a mother, and she yet lived, and one of you took it upon yourself to harm her, contrary to my orders, I am very sure The Man would give me quarter. Do not question me; I know it.

“Neither of us can afford insubordination, and we both know it. It is the most important factor in leading a group of men. He would have me believe he offered to have the soldier executed because of insubordination. He had to or his own men would think him weak, and the next step to that is desertion. My mother has said the soldier must be spared, and I must have the strength to guarantee that he is. It is to our mutual advantage to honor each other in this case.

“If you had harmed his mother, would you, for one moment of madness on your part, expect me, as a leader, to betray Ireland, to forget my profession as a soldier for one unbridled act? No. You would expect me to exercise control. To you, to The Man, to myself, even as The Man does.”

I scratched my head. I was going around in circles, and I understood no more than I did before. Sometimes I wished I was back on the Continent. There, unsoldierly as I was, I marched when someone said March, and I fought when someone said Fight. That, at least, I understood.

“Either that soldier disobeyed an order, in which case I cannot touch him, or else he acted on an order, calculated to arouse me, which makes it doubly important that I do nothing.”

Despite his explanation, there was but one thing we all understood: The only reason O’Houlihan was alive was that, always, he could follow The Man’s reasoning, anticipate his next move, and outwit him.

O'Houlihan lowered his eyes and his voice now.

"One last thing. Both my mother and Molly Bawn must be smuggled out of the country until I receive assurance from the Continent. Until then, they are pawns to The Man."

The men all nodded assent.

"But where will they go?" asked Fihelly.

O'Houlihan shook his head, and it was the one and only time I ever saw him look despairing.

"I do not know, Liam. We have neither funds nor friends abroad, nor does my mother speak a word of anything but Irish. And none of you have ever tried to explain to her what war is. She will never understand why she is being uprooted from the land of her ancestors. And as for little Molly Bawn, how could she understand war, or dwelling in a land where there are no fairies?"

Hanrahan stood up.

"If I may make a suggestion, Seamus, some of the Hennessys have settled in southern France, where they are raising grapes for liquors. They are patriots, and I know they would shelter your mother and Molly Bawn for any length of time you desire."

"That is so," says Geoghegan, "I was there three years ago, and they treated me like a king."

"I can send a message on my next trip," says Collinge, who had been listening intently.

It was agreed upon, but, as Collinge pointed out, it would be a matter of maybe months before it could be settled.

"Why so long?"

"Well, you see, O'Houlihan, I can only enter a port; I dare not set foot in France. These Hennessys are not on the coast, so I must send a messenger to them, but I cannot remain in port until he returns. On my following trip the messenger will bear me news from the Hennessys, and then I shall return to you."

“And why cannot you set foot in France?”

Collinge stood up and stared at O’Houlihan.

“That is my affair, not yours.”

I had never heard one of O’Houlihan’s men dare challenge him before.

Not a muscle of O’Houlihan’s face moved as he stared coldly back at Collinge.

“As you will,” he says.

With the safety of his mother and Molly Bawn at stake, he could not argue.

He turned to Geoghegan. “And one last message to the Welshman. He is to tell The Man that should any further misfortune befall my family, he is a dead man. I too am a man of my word, as he has no doubt observed.”

He dismissed us, but I did not go.

“Well?” he says. “What do you want?”

I shook my head wearily. “Nothing. It is only that I am confused. My head aches with confusion. The old woman confuses me, Fihelly confuses me, Brosnaghan confuses me. You confuse me. Indeed, even the little pig confuses me, for I mourn his passing.”

He put his hand across my shoulder in a kindly fashion.

“Yes, Mick. Three hundred years of your kind have mourned. But when I mourn, it will not be for the death of a pig.”



THE STARS BEGAN TO SHINE FOR A change, and I lay on my back, looking long at them, and wondering, as I always do. Sleep began to fall upon me, and soon I was wrapped in that gray world where one is and one is not. I felt myself being lifted gently, so gently, and I dreamed I was a child again, with the old mother bending over my bed. Something awoke me, and when I opened my eyes Bro-snaghan was kneeling beside me. "What is it, Paddy?" "Ye were havin' a bad dream, Mick; I was just to wake you. Go back to sleep." When morning dawned, if I may use such a word for rain and sun both struggling for supremacy, I opened my eyes and looked about me. "God save you," says Fihelly, who was al-

ready about. I arose and was going to return his greeting, when I stopped with my mouth open.

"What is it?" he says.

"I don't know. I don't feel right."

"Ah, poor boy, and it's taken you thirty years to find that out."

"Don't laugh," I says, and stood there as awkward as a robin with one wing. "Indeed, Liam, something ails me."

I walked a few paces before I knew. I was not balanced.

"O'Houlihan!" I roared.

He arose from his cold bed like an eagle.

"Seamus, where is Brosnaghan?"

He looked around him puzzled. "I do not know. Why?"

I said nothing and backed away.

"Stop!" he says. "What is the matter?"

I did not stop. I ran until I was weary, and flung myself down in the heather, to think, before tracking Brosnaghan farther.

No, I was not balanced; my left sleeve was lighter. My dagger was gone, my Spanish dagger; my lovely knife with its carved handle in the shape of a woman's body, it was gone, with the emerald winking at the tip, and the blade, like a beam of moonlight, on which were engraved the fateful words "Trust me before a stranger."

I knew Brosnaghan had stolen it while I slept, and I knew Brosnaghan had a knife of his own. And I knew Brosnaghan had faults, but he was not a thief, and I knew that my knife was famous throughout Ireland.

I followed his tracks to the town, but I did not find him. Instead, I found a group of soldiers, so I sauntered casually up to them.

"God save you, gentlemen. Is there any mending of pots you have, or wicker chairs? for I plait like a gypsy."

The Welshman was in charge, and he pushed me roughly

aside, whispering, "Begone from here, you fool! Is it the pitch cap you are wanting?"

"Ah, my cousin from beyond the sea," I says, "I mean you no harm. A poor innocent tinker, sir, is all I am."

His hawk's eyes were fierce, and he jerked his thumb to a bunch of bracken, saying again, "Go, for God's sake!"

Then I saw what he pointed at.

The body of an English soldier, lying very dead and face down, his arms spread-eagled. In his back, a knife, my knife, my pretty Spanish lady, famous throughout the land, buried she was, to the hilt, between his shoulder blades.

The Welshman leaned down and pulled out the knife which pinned a note to the dead soldier's back, and on it I read the crude legend:

"THIS MAN KILLED THE O'HOULIHAN'S PIG,
AND HE IS DEAD FOR IT."

"God have mercy on us," I whispered. "This is an ill day for Ireland."

For all that The Man is himself callous of the lives of his soldiers, he is very particular about not letting Irishmen kill them. Indeed, since he holds human destinies to be of small importance, he is most severe when it comes to Irishmen assisting him in his butchery. And as if it wasn't enough dealing with him, there was O'Houlihan.

Between the thought of the two of them, I shuddered.

Ten days after The Man receiving O'Houlihan's personal assurance that the soldier would not be harmed, he was found dead with my knife, like an engraved card, in his back.

While the Welshman's men were engaged in lifting the dead man, the Welshman turned and whispered to me to run for it. I needed no second invitation.

It was nearly dusk when I caught up with Brosnaghan.

He was seated beside a stream, footsore and weary, and bathing his feet.

Before he had a chance to rise, I laid him low with one blow of my fist. Already, in my mind's eye, I saw the haze of burning cabins and smelt the odor of carnage.

"You dog, you son of a bitch of an Englishman! You have betrayed us. You stole my knife; and had I O'Houlihan's leave I'd retrieve it and plant it straight through your treacherous English heart!"

Calling Brosnaghan an Englishman was ordinarily the same as committing suicide, but this day he was changed. He did not attempt to defend himself, but turned over on his stomach, with his hands over his face, and I saw he was weeping.

"Ah, Mick," he says. "Ah, Mick, kill me if you will. I didn't understand, Mick; I didn't understand, and it is too late now. Mick, I did it for Seamus, for the old woman. Mick, Mick, what have I done?"

"What have you done?" I says with such rage that I could have killed him. "God knows, fully, but this I know, you have put a noose around my neck by using my knife."

"I did it for Seamus, and the old woman. Collinge, he kept saying it was a shame upon O'Houlihan not to revenge the blow to his mother. He said O'Houlihan was a coward. He said he could not hold up his head as an Irishman while that soldier lived. I knew O'Houlihan had some reason for not doing it himself, so I sought to spare him the task. I thought it was the right thing to do, Mick, but now I see I was a fool."

"Collinge," says I, "what has Collinge got to do with it?"

"It's like I said. It was his idea. Day and night he kept talkin' to me, feedin' me whisky and talkin' till I thought I'd go crazy with his talk of the Irish loving the English. And then he started giving me cognac from his ship, and always he was talkin', and I, fool that I was, I let him beguile me into disobeying O'Houlihan, and I stole your knife because Collinge

says it must be known that the act was from O'Houlihan, if his honor was to be saved."

Yes, how true. The Man knew that I would never disobey O'Houlihan, and if my knife was found in the soldier's back it would seem to be a direct order from O'Houlihan.

"But I didn't kill the soldier, Mick, nor did I make the note. As you know, I cannot write. It was Collinge did both, saying it would be to his credit later."

I stood thinking, and looking down at him. Paddy's wits may be addled, but Collinge's are not.

"Ah," says I softly, "things are beginning to fall into place."

"What do you mean, Mick?"

"Do you know what I think, Paddy?"

He looked at me humbly. "No."

"I think Master Collinge aspires to wear Master O'Houlihan's brogues. He has deliberately challenged him."

"You mean he didn't do it for to save the old woman's honor?"

"No, and me wanting to kill the wrong man. It is Collinge, not you, who should die."

"I'll attend to it this very minute," says Paddy, jumping to his feet.

"Wait!" I says. "You are in enough trouble already. This is a matter for O'Houlihan to settle."

"What shall we do, Mick?"

"We? We shall go to O'Houlihan, and you will tell him what you have just told me."

Brosnaghan shrank back. "But I'm afraid to face him!"

"Well," I says, "I am not going to tell him, and he is bound to learn of it. He is a just man, Paddy. Go to him and tell him the truth; it may be that he will spare you for your lack of wits."

"Do you think so, Mick?"

"I'll tell you one thing. If you do not tell him, and he thinks you betrayed him, he'll kill you with no more thought than I would step on an ant."

I never kill ants. Indeed, I have spent many happy hours observing their strange social customs.

"I'll tell him, I'll tell him," says Brosnaghan hastily. "Will ye come with me, Mick?"

I nodded, and off we went together.

When O'Houlihan was through hearing him, he looked long at Paddy.

Finally he says: "When my mother and Molly Bawn go to the Continent, you will go with them. They will need someone to watch over them, and it will be you. Now be off."

When we were alone he says: "It was the only thing I could do. I can no longer trust him, and I haven't the heart to kill him. Now leave me alone. I must think."

For one day, twenty-four hours, he sat, neither speaking nor eating, his face drawn with fatigue and concentration. I tried to urge him to eat, but he pushed the food aside.

Finally he bade me sit beside him. "Ah, Mick," he says, "there is a great fear upon me."

"What is it, James?"

"Oh, how can I speak of it?" He looked cautiously over his shoulder to see none could hear; then, clasping his head in his hands, he says, "Ah, it is a terrible thing."

"What is it?"

"Well," he sighed, "I fear I will live to be a great age and die in me bed like an old woman."

"So?" says I, puzzled.

"Do you not understand?" he says, irritably. "Did you ever hear of an Irish king who died in his bed from old age?" Thinking on it, I had to confess I had not.

"It is not for myself," says he, and I believed him. "It is not for myself I grieve; it is for my poor country."

His love for Ireland is like his love for Molly Bawn, the little black rose, the dear dark head, and his love cannot be judged by the standards of other men.

He dug his hands into the soil and sat looking at the earth.

"The soul of Ireland," he says, "and always it is wet. Small wonder it grows the greenest grass in the world; it has been nurtured with blood."

He shook his head, and turned to me.

"I have only one reason to live: to free my country. If I could live a thousand years, it would be to live as I live now, to fight every day, until Ireland is free. I have no heart for books or priests or softness. I am alone."

"God keep you so," says I, "for you are the hope of Ireland."

The rain dripped through his hair, and rolled down his forehead. It struck his swart eyebrows and dripped slowly onto his cheekbones, which are as broad as the blades of battle-axes. Then, like tears, it coursed past his nose, which, like that of so many of his countrymen, is curiously delicate in proportion to the rest of his bone structure. He sat, staring straight ahead.

"No," he says, finally. "Kings die young in Ireland. Pray that I die young."

How can I pray for his untimely death?

I, who had wished to know the future, I who had pined for the second sight of the O'Houlihans, I was given to know, for one brief and awful moment.

O'Houlihan sat staring fearfully at my face.

"What is it?" he says, but I could not answer.

He paled as he watched me. "Mick," he says hoarsely. "You know something. I know you do. What is it?"

Still I did not answer.

"Mick, it is not me. I could not betray my country. It is not this you know?"

I looked at him, and shuddered.

“Mick”—his voice was low—“tell me I can never betray Ireland.”

Still I could not answer him.

“Dear God! My soul, if this is so, kill me while I am still blameless! If you think me capable of betrayal, kill me now, while I am still free.”

Ah, God is wise to let us carry only one day’s burden on one day’s march. Not for me is the gift of second sight.

“Seamus, I can say no more than this, for it is all I understand: You will triumph over The Man. Heed our mother’s words. Anger killed your seven brothers. Do not be angered, Seamus Beg.”

“Fear not,” he says. “For me there is only vigilance and war, and I shall be vigilant, never fear. The Man shall not anger me.”

He stood up and stretched his mighty form.

“Now, Mick, I must deal with our poor friend Collinge.”

I shuddered again, and you can see what sort of a soldier I am, for I pitied Collinge now with all my heart.



**"I AM BLACK CUCHULAIN OF THE BLUE
eyes.**

Heroes stagger and perish in my presence.

Strike my shield with my spear!

**Hear its voice, which is not of peace, but of
war.**

I yield to no mortal,

For I shall be dead or great!"

Fihelly had been dispatched to bring Collinge to O'Houlihan, and Geoghegan had been sent with a message to the Welshman, a message stating that one of O'Houlihan's men had disobeyed him, and killed the soldier against the order of O'Houlihan. What it cost O'Houlihan to admit to this, his men will never know.

We were sitting around camp waiting for the return of

Fihelly and Collinge, the nerves of all except O'Houlihan so visibly agitated that I was reciting the old stories to take our minds off the terrible thing we knew must happen.

Collinge, with Fihelly like a shadow behind him, strode into camp.

O'Houlihan raised his eyes, and said briefly: "I shall deal with you in one half-hour; in the meanwhile, you are free to do as you wish, as long as you do not leave here."

O'Houlihan rose and left.

With a shaking hand, Fihelly offered Collinge a drink. Collinge tossed it off, and gazed calmly around him.

"Lad," says Fihelly, "God help me for saying this, but you've got your boat in the harbor. Get on it; sail out of this country and don't come back!"

Collinge looked at him with contempt, and did not answer him.

I stepped up. "Listen, Conn, do what Fihelly says. There's not a man here wants to see you dead. Liam is right. Get in your boat and sail away."

He stared at me with sullen and raging eyes. "Sail on her yourself, you Jackaleen!"

Hanrahan came up and took my arm. "Come, Mick. You are wasting your time, and it will be the devil to pay for all of us if O'Houlihan gets wind of this. Leave him be. Let him settle it in his own way, if he can. You stay out of it."

He drew me back into the circle of the men, while Collinge stood fearless and alone.

Not a man spoke as we waited for the return of O'Houlihan, and the minutes seemed like days.

Finally O'Houlihan approached us, and Collinge, his big shoulders squared, swaggered up to him, his face showing only pleasant anticipation of what we all knew must, of a necessity, be a bloody encounter.

“Conn Collinge, I have been told that you disobeyed my order, which was that the soldier must not be harmed. Is this true?”

Collinge eyed him coolly.

“You will not court-martial me like I was an English soldier, Seamus O’Houlihan. I am an Irishman and I will live and die like one. If you will try me, you will first fight me!”

A look of the most heart-rending sadness passed momentarily over O’Houlihan’s face, like a shadow, a hand in front of the sun, and then it was gone.

Collinge had forgotten O’Houlihan’s basic lessons on war. To act instantly, to exercise a change of strategy in a split second, and to use that split second to confound one’s enemy.

O’Houlihan struck without warning, and slammed Collinge to the ground.

Winded, Collinge tried to regain his feet, but the fight was already over.

Before he could rise, O’Houlihan, with his massive, merciless strength, leaned down and picked him up. Over his head he lifted him, and brought him down heavily with the small of Collinge’s back over his knee.

Again he lifted him up, and again he threw Collinge flat on his back on the ground. Collinge did not move.

O’Houlihan lifted him for the last time, and in this throw it was Collinge’s neck he slammed across his knee.

Collinge lay across O’Houlihan’s knee like an unstrung puppet, his eyes open and his face to the sky. He was dead. We had heard both his spine and his neck crack.

With a grave face, O’Houlihan laid him on the ground.

“Bury him,” he said. “Get the priest if you wish. Learn a lesson from Collinge, and remember him.”

He stood up, looked around, and pointed his finger at Collinge.

“This man, he thought I would ponder on fighting him,

discuss the rights and wrongs of his case, and argue that I give the orders and I cannot be disobeyed.

"Well, you saw what happened to him. He is dead because he could not think as quickly as I.

"Attend you this fact well. Collinge is dead neither because he killed an English soldier nor disobeyed my orders. He is dead because I read his mind and acted instantly, with purpose and without panic. If this were not so, I would be dead and Collinge alive."

Not a man moved or spoke.

"You, Mick, and you, Paddy, see he is buried before sundown."

Paddy and I dug the grave, and when we had it deep enough I went to get the priest for the office of the dead.

I found the poor weary fellow patiently translating *The Man's* book to O'Houlihan.

"Father," says O'Houlihan, perusing the book, "I do not understand your translation of this word *jacere*. Three pages ago you said "throw," and now you say "push." It can not be both, and these things are important to me."

I interrupted.

"You said we might have the priest."

James nodded and arose. Suddenly he clapped his hand to his brow, and there was a bewildered look on his face.

"My God! What have I done? Mick, I killed him!"

"You have that, Seamus."

"Ach, what a fool I am! How shall I get my mother and Molly Bawn out of the country? Arrah! I should have waited. But no. It is best this way. He was a danger every second he lived, and I could not have trusted him in any matter. There are other boats and other smugglers."

Thus was Conn Collinge dismissed by Seamus O'Houlihan.

I turned on my heel and left, with the priest following me.

Brosnaghan and I knelt and crossed ourselves as the priest prayed, and when he was done we buried Collinge.

“Begod,” whispered Paddy, as we piled the last stone on the grave and raised a makeshift cross, “Begod, Mick, for all he was a liar and a thief and a cheat, that is a hard way for a man to go, with no warnin’, like, and his sins sittin’ fresh upon him.”

The gentle voice of the priest droned steadily on, and Paddy and I knelt again.

“Mick,” whispered Brosnaghan after a time, “did you hate Collinge?”

I shook my head.

“Did you like him?”

Again I shook my head.

“Poor Mick,” says Brosnaghan comfortingly. “We’ll go out and get drunk soon, we will. You’re that pale, Mick, I’ve never seen you so. Sure there’s nothin’ like a good strong drink to put a bit of color in your face, me boy.”

I could have wept on his shoulder, but instead I prayed.



WE BURIED COLLINGE IN THE AFTER-noon, and by evening a melancholia such as I had experienced only after a terrible battle settled upon me. I could not sleep, and prowled around the camp until the rest of the men cursed me for disturbing their rest. I tripped over Brosnaghan and in turn cursed him for getting in my way. O'Houlihan heard me and came to my side. He has seen me in this state before, and his voice was quiet. "You can not continue in this fashion. I suppose it is time for you to go off and get drunk for a few days as always. Well, if it calms you down, do so. Take Paddy with you, if you wish." I walked away without a word, and lay down. Finally, hours later, I fell asleep, and wished I had not, for

I dreamed of Collinge. I dreamed of him standing up to fight O'Houlihan, and he held out his hand and said, "Touch me, Mick." There was a look of great sorrow on his face, and I shrank back from him in terror, for I knew he was already dead. Wasn't it me and Brosnaghan who had buried him that very afternoon?

He kept standing there, in my dream, holding out his hand to me and begging me to touch him, but I could not. Instead, I shrieked: "Go away, go away! You are dead! For the love of Christ, leave me!"

Someone shook me awake, and looking up, I saw it was O'Houlihan.

"You be out of here tomorrow," he says. "I mean that, Mick. Four days away will straighten you out."

I sighed as I saw him leave me, but I could not go back to sleep, fearing as I did that I might dream of Collinge again. Sweat poured from me, and I shook from head to foot.

Finally dawn broke, and I knew I could not continue as I was. I went looking for the priest. I found himself, the poor gentle lonely one, praying on his knees in a little glen, with the sunlight filtering through the green leaves like being in a cathedral.

I waited until he was through his praying, and then I knelt before him and told him I was afraid, afraid as I had never been before.

"Pray with me," he says quietly. I did, and when we were done I knelt still, while he rose and gazed sadly at me.

To be sure, with hardly an exception, we are a godless lot, and, I believe, most incomprehensible to him.

I felt more rested, just being in his presence. Little did I know that the slight respite I had now was only a momentary lull in the terrible chain of events of the little pig.

"Father," I says wearily, "why is it easy for you to be so good?"

He has a smile of singular sweetness, and with it he says: "Perhaps I have had more practice than you, my son. Prayer is the most important thing in this world."

"How shall I begin, Father? Truly, to pray?"

He is of a meditative order, and not given to much speech.

"You must learn to resist evil, my son. Learn to say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'"

Indeed, I thought, how simple all things are for the good people of this world! But as for me, I have fallen into the devil's snares readily enough when he was before me, and a change in his position is not enough to save me.

Though I knew what the priest meant, his words were empty to me. I still knelt, looking up at him.

He brushed a leaf from his tattered robe, and then he held his hand up to bless me. The glare of the sun shone like fire behind him and through his hand, so thin and worn I could see the bones standing out, with the rays of the sun seeming to shine through it. His face was weary, the face of a man who eats little and prays much, and never a word of complaint. He is as patient as my donkey, he is, and a saint, no doubt, but he could not help me.

"God bless you and thank you, Father," I says, and kissed the edge of his robe.

"God bless you, my son," he replied, and I saw there were tears in his eyes.

I arose hastily and left. To be sure, it is a strange world, what with me pitying him and him pitying me. Well, I can do with his prayers.

I sought out Paddy, and I found that battle-hardened soldier strangely upset. He jumped when I spoke to him and, although I did not inquire as to the source of his troubles, I knew he was deeply hurt that O'Houlihan was sending him away.

“Four days’ leave, to go and get drunk, as you suggested, Paddy. Sure, we’ll drink the town dry.”

We started drinking in the ruins of the old fort of Maelsechlainn, thinking to move on, but inertia settled upon me after the first few drinks and I could not bring myself to leave that ominous ruin.

Never trust a man who does not drink, for you will never know his true character.

The first day we drank like gods. Then the shadows began to lengthen, and Maelsechlainn stalked restlessly about his ruined castle, a fearless, unvanquished, mighty king whose descendants shamed him by living in huts and slinking in the night like animals.

Yes, the spirits of the dead walked heavily here, and the feel of the old place rose slowly about my heart. I knew, as I had known in that terrible flash of the future, that it was not for nothing that I had the blood of the O’Houlihans in my veins. The very stones of the place shrieked for honor and vengeance.

The second day, I was so plagued with my melancholia that I feared it would destroy my reason, and Brosnaghan was roaring and cheerfully drunk.

On the third day, Brosnaghan was still drunk, as was I, but his temper was of such morose savagery that I told him to be gone and let me hang myself in peace.

“What have you to be unhappy about?” he shouted beligerently.

I shrugged hopelessly.

“A hell of a lot! Look at me! His right arm, I told him I would be, and he is sending me away from him!”

“You are lucky to be alive. It could have been you instead of Collinge I helped to bury.”

A black look came across Brosnaghan’s face. If I had not been in such a mindless state myself, I might have been able

to reason with him, but instead I served only to aggravate him.

“Sending me away,” he roared, “me what did it for him! Me what would die for him.”

“And so you will if he hears the likes of this.”

He wheeled on me like a maddened bull. “No doubt that is what himself had in mind! Get rid of the two of us!”

“Have done with it!” I says in disgust. “Either let us stop arguing or go back to camp. Sure, we’ll end up killing each other if this goes on.”

“That’s what he had in mind!” he repeated. “He can’t get rid of me like this. For ten years I have been by his side. I will not have it! It’s not right!” He pounded his fist against the palm of his hand. “I’ll show him!”

I turned over, closed my eyes, and went to sleep. This was how I helped Paddy Brosnaghan in his hour of need, and it is to my undying discredit that in doing so I helped complete the tragedy of the little pig, though I did not then know it.

When I awoke, nearly a full day had passed. My head ached intolerably, and the thought of food sickened me.

“‘Oh, if all the young maidens was blackbirds and thrushes,
Oh, if all the young maidens was blackbirds and thrushes,
It’s then the young men would be batin’ the bushes.’”

Brosnaghan had finally returned, singing at the top of his lungs. He was not alone. Two drunken men and a slatternly jade of a woman were with him.

“Where have you been?” I asked him nervously.

“‘If the maidens was all trout and salmon so lively,
If the maidens was all trout and salmon so lively,
Sure divil a man would ate mate on a Friday!’”

"Paddy," I says, "where have you been? Who are these people?"

"They're me friends," he roared expansively. "I been drinkin' with them. Did you think I was going to sit and listen to you snore? I been drinkin' with them, and I feel much better!"

He dragged his companions up to me.

"This is me good friend Pat Regan, and this is Sean Moore."

He thrust them under my nose, and I shook their hands.

"And this is me lovely darlin' Kitty." He sat down and dragged her upon his knee. This surprised me, for though Brosnaghan is a rough fellow he is unusually gentle and subdued before women and children.

Lovely darlin' Kitty looked about her fearfully. "I don't like this place," she says in a voice like a cat at midnight.

Brosnaghan stood up and tossed her in the air.

"It's haunted, me lovely darlin' Kitty. This is me good friend . . . ah, now what's his name? Well, his ancestors haunt this place. Get us all a drink, Mick; I'm dyin' of thirst."

"There is no more," I says, looking at him uneasily, for it was not like him to take up with strangers.

Regan, who looked like a small, drunken and very sad leprechaun, pulled me aside and whispered: "Faith, if you're his friend, take him away. He's been rantin' his gob off about the O'Houlihan, as if the likes of him would know himself. Sure, he'll bring The Man down on us, and I don't want to be hanged at the drumhead for a rebel!"

The other, Moore, took a step toward me and stared at me intently.

"Begod, it's the Jackaleen!"

They both stepped hastily back.

"Are you?" asked Regan.

"Sure it is him," says Moore; "there's The Man's mark on his cheek."

I put my hand to my scarred cheek.

Shortly after O'Houlihan and I returned to Ireland, The Man had me picked up, for questioning, his officers said. They asked me no questions, and did me little ill, apart from hanging me in chains for a day.

Having done away with seven O'Houlihans, The Man thought it would be an easy matter to rid himself of the last, and his contempt was such that I became a living message of what he thought of James O'Houlihan.

I never set eyes on The Man while I was in custody, but just before I was released I was branded on the cheek, not with the felon's mark, but, by some perverse whim of The Man, with the Celtic cross.

When his men were through with me, they tied me across my donkey face up, pinned a placard across my chest, slapped my donkey across his rump, and, laughing derisively, bade both of us to find our leader.

For hours my little donkey stumbled with his load, with not a soul in the countryside daring to cut me free.

Finally the poor beast sank to its knees, rolled on its side, and there we remained until, under cover of dark, O'Houlihan's men rescued us.

Having been immobile for so long, I could not walk, and pairs of the men took turns carrying me, with Brosnaghan pulling and half carrying my donkey.

In camp, O'Houlihan rubbed the blood back to my numb limbs, and when he put a cold cloth on my cheek he turned his head so I could not see his tears. Then, with his knife, he cut loose the placard from my chest. It bore the one word, "Jackal."

He stood up and faced his few followers.

"It has pleased The Man to rename Mick here the Jackal. Very well, so he shall be known, and it will be a name of honor. He is my Jackaleen."

He shook his fist to his men.

“And that brand, it is the first medal struck in the honor of Ireland. It is a mark of valor, and Mick is a lucky man to wear it. Wherever he goes he shall be known and honored by his people!”

Fihelly took me to the mother’s cabin to rest and regain my strength.

When the old woman saw me, she gave a piercing cry. And then she became angry. It was the first time I had seen her truly angered.

She wept as she looked at me and cried: “Oh, my lovely boy, my pretty boy, as if your poor face wasn’t ugly enough from all the fighting you’ve done!”

When Fihelly told her Seamus said it was like a medal of honor, struck for Ireland, she was terrible as she stood before him and cried, “I want no more disfigured or dead sons brought to me for the glory of Ireland!”

Brosnaghan clapped me across the shoulder, and says: “Yes, he’s the Jackaleen. And that isn’t all. I got a wee little secret, Mick Delahanty!”

“Well?”

“Ah, and wouldn’t you like to know?” He would say no more, but suggested slyly that I would be proud of him if I knew.

Regan, Moore, and the woman stood a few paces off, looking fearfully at me.

“Tell them to go,” I whispered to Brosnaghan.

He walked up to his former drinking companions.

“Go!” he roared.

“Sure,” says Regan, as they backed away, “we’ll do that, yer soul. It’s not that we aren’t with himself and all you boys heart and soul, but after the killin’ of that soldier there’s bad times ahead, and it’s not lucky to be around even you, Mister Delahanty.”

Off they went, leaving me with a now strangely elated and good-tempered Brosnaghan.

"Pour us a drink, Mick."

"It's gone, and a good thing too. It's time we stopped if we are to see Hanrahan to find out where to meet O'Houlihan."

That sobered Brosnaghan considerably. He hated to be absent from O'Houlihan and to feel he was not part of the group.

"I'll have a little sleep, Mick. Maybe an hour. It will clear my head."

I nodded, and watched him fall almost immediately into a drunken slumber.

On the way back to camp, Paddy's conduct became more and more puzzling to me. He was sober now, and his elation had passed. Each time I looked at him, he went red and white by turns, so that if I hadn't known him so well I could have sworn he was frightened.

"Paddy, what is this secret of yours?"

He looked away.

"Come on, Paddy. I'm your friend."

He shook his head.

I took a stab in the dark. "Paddy, it wasn't by chance lovely darlin' Kitty?"

Although Paddy looks like a man of forty, he is not yet twenty-three. He glanced at me sharply, puzzled, and then a look of guilty relief came over his face. He seemed pleased that I had guessed his secret.

"Was it the first time, me bucko?"

He nodded, shamefaced.

I burst out laughing. "Sure, Paddy, it's nature, and you mustn't reproach yourself."

The closer we got to camp, the more nervous he appeared, so that he jumped every time a bee flew past.

“Here, lad,” I says, “go to the good Father and confess, and then forgive yourself.”

He didn’t appear to understand, and looked at me puzzled. Then, taking a deep breath, he pulled himself together. “Sure, you’re right, Mick.”

I looked at him suspiciously. “Paddy, there’s something more to this. I haven’t known you since you were twelve years old for nothing. What is it?”

He thought deeply for a minute, and then his face brightened. “I’ll go to the Father, Mick. Sure, but I don’t know if it will help me. When I think of me youth, stainless it was, why, I could have been snatched up to heaven at the drop of a hat. And now, all wasted.”

“Not all wasted,” I says. “Faith, when you get to heaven God will remember your virtues as well as your sins. It’s not all wasted.”

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye, and suddenly roared with laughter.

“Not all wasted that way, ye fool! What I’m sayin is me poor youth, the finest years of me life, and never a minute misspent!”

I laughed also, relieved to see him like himself again, and thinking I knew his secret.



AFTER THE DEATH OF THE ENGLISH soldier, an ominous quiet had descended over the land. We heard rumors that The Man's temper was savage; his own soldiers walked in deathly fear of him, and this boded ill for Irishmen. Our nerves, in camp, were taut, but O'Houlihan sat with his terrible patience, waiting. The evening Brosnaghan and I arrived, Fihelly came into the camp with a great lump of beef, which we boiled. "Where did you get it?" I asked. "From one of our darlin' squireens, where else?" he replied, and tasting a mouthful, he spat it out. "God sends us meat, and the devil sends us cooks," he grumbled. "It's not the cookin' that's at fault," says Hanrahan, in charge of our kitchen. "But that steer this was

off was older than me grandmother. Next time you're out stealin' for meat, use your eyes, man."

Seamus came up.

"Did you steal that meat, Fihelly?"

Liam looked at the ground, and nodded.

"I know you are all hungry," Seamus said, "but we can not have this. There must be no trouble. You'll tighten yer belts and whistle next time, do you hear me? It would take little to start the bloodiest slaughter this country has yet seen, and we are not ready for it. Do you all understand?"

We nodded, and looked away.

Ah, to be like O'Houlihan. The Man could not break his granite will. It was like a stalemate in a chess game, each of these strange men waiting for what we knew not, each with his savage patience, pondering on the other's next move.

But, for once, O'Houlihan's extra instinct deserted him, and he sat puzzled, waiting. Waiting with his frightening calm.

And then it happened. The Man broke.

White and trembling, Mulcahy came into camp, and stood before O'Houlihan.

"Speak up," says O'Houlihan. "What is it?"

"I fear to speak," says Mulcahy.

"Speak or I'll learn you a few tricks of conversation," says O'Houlihan grimly.

"Ah, Seamus Beg, it is Geoghegan."

Geoghegan had been sent with O'Houlihan's apology to The Man.

"What of him?"

"He is dead. The Man has killed him. We found him on the outskirts of the town, dead for a day at least, with a knife thrust through his heart."

The men shrank back from O'Houlihan's face.

"So, he has killed the man I sent with my apology," says

O'Houlihan. "Manniken, do you know what you have done?"

Ruarc and Gahan staggered up, bearing the corpse, which they laid upon the ground, and they looked beseechingly from Fihelly to me. Neither of us spoke.

"What shall we do with him, Fihelly?" one whispered.

"Seamus Beg," says Fihelly, "what shall we do with him?"

"Bury him, you fool!" roared O'Houlihan, but then he regained his composure.

"Listen, boys, we are in for a deal of trouble, the worst we've ever been in. Listen carefully; we may have news from the Continent at any time. Hark what I say, for I want the word spread all over Ireland.

"The time is not ready for a revolt. We will not play into The Man's hand now. We will endure any hardship, but we will not break ranks. Not a hand is to be raised in all Ireland. Not a hand. When the time is ripe, and we have guns and food and money behind us, then we will strike, and God help The Man and any English soldier then. But until I give the word, not a hand will be raised in all Ireland."

He paused and stared straight ahead.

"And God help any man who goes contrary to my orders now. He'll wish The Man had him."

He turned his back and left us.

Fihelly dug a shallow grave and knelt beside the body.

Gazing thoughtfully at it, he says, "That's a nice neat little wound for English soldiers to make."

"Ah, for God's sake," says Hanrahan, "bury the poor soul and be silent."

"Well," says Fihelly, "I mean only that it isn't like The Man."

"You're wrong," I says, and shuddered. "Even The Man is capable of a clean killing when in haste."

It was so. The Man was like a tiger. When he was in one of his savage, playful moods, his prey died terribly, but when he

killed in hunger he struck quickly and cleanly, and he was hungry now. He feared that aid was forthcoming to O'Houlihan. He could wait no longer; his soul hungered for O'Houlihan.

The Man had said that, before he was done with us, we would wish Cromwell was back, and he was a man of his word.

He whipped us to our knees, and then when we could no longer kneel he placed the conqueror's iron foot upon our necks.

Nothing was beyond his endeavors to bring O'Houlihan into the open.

Droves of men, women and children were transported, to rot in slavery in every hot, stinking port of the world. Moslems in faraway Turkey had Irishmen working in their tobacco fields; white-skinned, blue-eyed maidens languished behind the seraglios, dreaming of the plains of Meath, and red-haired children wept on the slave blocks by the Bosphorus.

Half the population of a county was driven like cattle to the most arid, stony and inhospitable spot in Ireland, there left to die slowly on a diet of roots and weeds.

Cordons of soldiers were thrown around towns, and the inhabitants systematically starved to death.

The land was filled with the smoke of fired huts, for The Man saw to it that the people did not live in villages now, but by any scattered lee that would keep the force of the wind from them. He was determined that the Irish should be reduced, not to beggary, but to savagery. Wherever the eye turned, one saw the sign of that mailed demon fist, sweeping across the land and leveling all signs of husbandry.

No, The Man was no novice in dealing with recalcitrant patriots. He was angered. He wanted O'Houlihan, and he wanted him now.

I, the Jackaleen, I wandered the roads, and the people low-

ered their eyes, for wherever one turned were The Man's placards saying, "Hand over O'Houlihan!"

They averted their hungry eyes; they were silent; but they did not hand over their leader. They were as patient as saints in their desire to resist The Man and to protect O'Houlihan.

The infamy of the conqueror in Ireland is unparalleled in history. In the days of the Tudors, a historian said, "Had they done in hell what they have in Ireland, the Kingdom of Beelzebub would long since have fallen."

And our conqueror has not improved with time.

Long-standing harsh treatment has not made the Irishman immune to suffering; he still feels pain and hunger and cold like other human beings, and all during this organized campaign of death he starved but remained silent.

I saw them, my poor Irish souls, their mouths stained green like cattle, from the eating of grass, and them dying in their weakness, holding out their hands and whispering for me to tell himself that they would never betray him.

My spirit flagged until I would gladly have changed form with the most pitiful bloated corpse I saw in a ditch, if I might know its soul's peace in heaven; but I knew, as I had known since that day I saw into the future, that as I shared O'Houlihan's destiny I was safe, even as he was.

If The Man was angered, O'Houlihan was not. His old sense of the future, his extra gift, was upon him now, as it had never been before, and The Man had no more chance of capturing O'Houlihan than he had of putting a leprechaun in chains. O'Houlihan eluded the most cunning traps and snares with ease. By his side was the safest place in Ireland.

He wept at the devastation of his country, but he said, "It is the last time in this country's terrible history that this will happen."

He knotted his fists.

“I feel it, Mick. It is very close now. Tell the people. I have never felt it so strongly. Aid is on our way. Arms, Mick, money, ammunition and food. Oh, God! Give me patience for the day. I am never wrong, and it is soon, soon, soon!”



TIMES BEING WHAT THEY WERE, BROSNAGHAN and myself were slithering in the furze like a couple of hedge eels, looking for hares we were, when Brosnaghan gripped my arm. "Phelim!" I says, for he scared the heart out of me so that I used his true given name. "What is it?" "Is it a banshee it is?" says he, and I could see sweat start on his brow. Brosnaghan has ears like a dog; indeed, there's not a sharper man in Ireland. "Surely to God it is that," he says. "Close your blathering mouth," says I, and turning my ear to the wind, I listened. Not a sound but that of the little creatures of the night assailed my ear. "What do you hear?" says I. "It is like a sound of death!" "From whence?" "From the town." "God, no," says

I. "It cannot be. Indeed, Phelim, incline your ear to the bogs; it is a fox, caught in a snare, is it not?"

"It is from the town," says he. "It is a woman, and I think she is dying."

And then faintly and thinly it wafted to me, the wind throwing it here and there. It was a broken, high sound; it was the keening of no earth woman.

"God have mercy on us!" cried Brosnaghan, crossing himself. "It is the fairy woman."

He bolted, leaving me crouching alone with my heart pounding so I could no longer hear the terrible screams.

Suddenly a figure loomed out of the darkness, and from the great size of it I recognized O'Houlihan.

"Seamus!" I whispered.

He stopped and knelt beside me. "It is her," he whispered, his voice breaking, "my little Molly Bawn. Oh, God! Mick! I knew, but too late! The soldiers have got her!"

He rose.

"Where are you going?"

"To her." He took a step, and stopped. "Mick," he says, puzzled, "she is coming this way. She is coming closer. She is nearing me."

There was not a sound to be heard, so he must have felt her approaching.

"It is a trap," I says. "Go to the shore of the lake, and wait there. Be she dead or alive, I will bring her to you, I vow it."

He nodded, and obeyed me without question.

A half-hour later, while making my way stealthily toward the town, I came upon the Welshman. He carried Molly Bawn slung across his shoulder like an empty sack.

"Give her to me," I whispered, rising from the shadows.

He recognized my voice, but did not turn. He shook his head, and in the moonlight I saw the tears upon his face.

“I am taking her to O’Houlihan,” he said with no emotion. “Where is he?”

It was an hour of doom for all of us, and I knew I could trust him.

“Follow me,” I said.

Out in the bogs, when the night winds rise, we are hardened to chills, but O’Houlihan, myself and the Welshman trembled violently, for it is not laid upon all men to hear the knell of a fairy.

O’Houlihan and I lifted the poor creature to the heather, while the Welshman stood with tears still coursing down his face, and we all saw with amazement that she yet lived.

Her hair, which had hung to her knees, and which my mother had been wont to brush until it gleamed like black moonlight, was roughly shorn. And though her body was naked and bloody, it was her poor face that horrified us most, and broke our hearts.

Her poor innocent, guileless, witless face, the face of a timid sprite, cast by some off-chance of fate to live among men, parted forever from her own elf kin.

O’Houlihan wrapped her in his frieze coat and, kneeling, took her in his arms, his tears mingling freely with her blood. Gently his hands brushed back her shorn locks, and he held her head against his breast, rocking back and forth, crooning to her one minute and moaning the next. He wiped the blood from her face with his lips, and kissed her mouth tenderly.

“Oh, my soul,” he whispered, “how shall I comfort thee, thou beat of my heart? How can I solace you, you breath of my body? Could I give you my strength and take your form, I would. I would dwell with your terror here in this world, or with those gentle people in your own. Oh, my soul, I cannot be parted from you! Bid me do what you would have me do!”

But this poor creature only turned her silent, anguished eyes to the Welshman, and then it was he who spoke.

"They whipped her through the streets, Seamus O'Houlihan. The Man tossed her to them like a wren among falcons, and they tore her apart, the soldiers did. And The Man did it because he knows it will draw you into the open to fight. He bade me take her to you, so that you would see her, and be angered!"

The Welshman turned his face away in shame.

"I could not stop the soldiers, Seamus O'Houlihan."

O'Houlihan raised his eyes and looked long at the Welshman. "Had I been in your shoes, Mister," says he in English, "my mother would be burying me the morrow."

"Be that so," says the Welshman, and then, in his singsong Irish: "Your men say you are a king. Well, I shall not argue, but I have this to say, Seamus Beg. I have served The Man for fifteen long years, and I am a soldier, but I am his no longer. He turned her over to them, and I love her. I saw them whip her through the streets! I will cut my tongue from my head in shame if I speak more!"

"I am your man, O'Houlihan, from this minute on."

O'Houlihan sat looking at Molly Bawn for a long time.

"I trust you," he says finally. "Go back to The Man. I shall call you when I need you. Be ready to do as I order. Now go."

The Welshman turned and disappeared into the night, and I was left alone with O'Houlihan and Molly Bawn.

I wished I were anywhere but on the shore of that haunted lake with those two, for the spirits of the dead have close affinity for some, and though Fer-fi and Ainë, if they be, are gentle spirits, who knows what else may dwell therein?

"What did I say to the Welshman, Mick?"

I started violently.

"I do not understand you, Seamus."

"I said, 'Had I been in your shoes, my mother would be burying me the morrow.'" "

He was silent, and I feared his silence.

"Mick," he says, "not the morrow. Too soon the morrow, my soul, too soon. But soon, Mick."

He sat, still gazing at Molly Bawn, and she closed her eyes, and slept.

As the moon shone fully upon them, his face became paler and paler, until he looked like an idol of white granite.

Finally he says quietly, "I am angered, and I call upon my ancestors."

He stood up and faced the lake.

"Do you hear me?" he whispered. "Do you hear me, you shades of myself? For seventeen hundred years we have been kings in this land.

"I call upon you now, back to the days of the heroes, back to the pagans! Back to the old and wicked gods!"

His voice rose.

"You barbarian princes who spawned me and who ruled for twenty-three generations before the name of Christ was heard in this land, come to my side now! Give me your strength! Give me your cunning!

"I am your lawful leader! I am Seamus O'Houlihan, descendant of Maelsechlainn of the Hy Nialls, of the line of Eber, son of Ir, of the house of Milesius!

"Look upon me now! My mother dwells in a hovel not fit for an animal. My love has been defiled, and I, your prince, am ignoble!

"Have you no pride in your blood? For I have, and I call upon you and I curse you as cowards if you fear to answer me now! Are you afraid of Seamus O'Houlihan?"

He shook his fist, and his voice roared over the silent lake.

"I am Seamus O'Houlihan, the last of my race. You warriors of old, you know whereof I speak! I would be as strong as

the strongest! As cruel as the cruelest! As cunning as the most cunning!”

His voice was like the roarings of a thousand bulls.

“I pledge my soul and I command you to hear me! Hear me, you dread kings! Answer me, you monstrous, sinister gods of my ancestors! I invoke you!”

Slowly his face altered, and moonlight flickered in his be-deviled eyes. Death and madness and evil filled the valley until I felt I could have laid my hand upon them as I could upon a rock or a tree.

And then it happened. He threw back his head, and for the first time in my life I heard O’Houlihan laugh; it was unholy.

The little animals of the night became silent and stopped their chirruping, as his laugh, not like thunder, but as high-pitched as a woman’s, struck the rocks of the glen like lightning, and echoed. And as he turned his lucky, kingly eyeballs to the moon, my soul fainted within me, for I saw him for what he had become, one of the dread ancients.

When I again opened my eyes, I lay beside the lake, with Molly Bawn next to me, while O’Houlihan sat gazing at ghostless shadows. When I struggled weakly to rise, he turned and lifted me to my feet.

He pointed to Molly Bawn. “Take her to my mother, and call the O’Hickey.”

“What will you do, Seamus?” I whispered.

“What will I do? I will destroy The Man. I will destroy him utterly.”

My curse attend you, Man, but my pity also, for if O’Houlihan speaks thus, then so it will be, and what of me? For while the battle is on, the victor is never distant from the vanquished.

Ah, I pity myself, me, without training, to be the custodian of this dread secret, the custodian of the secret of this Seamus O’Houlihan, who is now as sinless and as sinister as an idol.

This nameless, awful being, thrown so untimely in our midst, for from this moment on, he will stretch his mighty arms and clutch the darkest stars, to bring down upon us the wrath of our pagan ancestors, and what can I do? And when the heavens crash and fall about us, we will turn our eyes upward and beg to be spared; but *they* shall be invoked, and merciless, even as he is, with his face the death mask of a stone king, carved sternly for ever, every gesture measured and cunning, and as past and triste as a pyramid or a dead bird.



MOURN ME WITH THE DEAD AND mighty Cuchulain, for I have cast my lot with heroes, and I who am of his race have sworn never to betray him. Again I went to the priest, and knelt at his feet, but I could not speak, and when I raised my bloodless face to him he shuddered. He shuddered and stepped back from me, and he raised his hand between us, tears starting in his eyes, and he said: "My child, my child, what is this dreadful thing that sits so secretly upon your soul?" "Oh, Father, God help me, God help me!" I tried to speak more, but my words choked me, for how can I serve God and O'Houlihan at the same time? Me, who thought I wasn't a soldier, well, I have been a soldier too long, and I have

been trained in obedience too long. O'Houlihan is my captain, and I vowed to follow him to hell.

So, with leaden feet, I too backed away from the priest. As he made the sign of the cross between us, so did I, both of us seeking to nullify evil and set a barrier of goodness between us. But is goodness a barrier? We must either be together or apart.

And as I make the sign of the cross, I know that from this moment, when I have chosen allegiance to O'Houlihan, I am a man apart. I have made my decision, and I must live with it. Never again for me is the lightheartedness of innocence, and me only thirty years old.

The truths of my old teacher, Father Moriarty, are still with me, to torture me, for I see them distorted in shape now, but in color as true as the spectrum.

Make me a grave where the sun never shines, for my soul is in bondage!

I have sworn allegiance to O'Houlihan. Though I know now that he is as a dread sacrificial idol, hewn of the hardest stone. His sinews, his muscles, his bones, his will, his soul are of stone, and those who try to thwart his will, they will find themselves dashed, by their own efforts and velocity, like swallows against windows, broken at his feet.

There is no alteration to his law, as The Man will discover. It is the destiny of his race, of whom he is the monster figure-head, like a form on the prow of a ship which rides the storm to port, where the bewildered fishermen, rushing to the docks to welcome the weary but brave warriors, find only corpses aboard. Seventeen hundred years of kings, and to end thus!

Outwardly, at least, O'Houlihan appeared unchanged. Only I noticed the strange and unaccustomed little smile that played about the corners of his mouth.

The outrages by The Man continued, to such an extent

that Fihelly remarked sadly that if aid did not soon arrive there would be no more Irishmen left to revolt.

O'Houlihan sat staring intently at Fihelly for a while, and then ordered him to call the twelve together.

When we gathered around him, he appeared to be his distressingly rational self, and bade us sit about him and listen.

"I have been thinking," he began in his deliberate manner, "that there is only one way out of this."

He paused and stared at us.

"You all know what it is."

Not one of us had an idea.

"The Man must kill me."

"No, no," they shouted in concert.

He held up his hand.

"Wait, wait. In my absence you are like sheep without a shepherd, and on this I am relying. So listen. The man must be made to think I am dead. You know I will not desert you. I will live to lead you, never fear; but, as Fihelly has said, there will be no Irishmen left to revolt, if The Man continues as he is doing now. There is only one thing that will make him ease his grip, and that is to think he has me dead and buried. There is no other way. Only when he sees all six and a half feet of me stretched out on my mother's table, with a bullet through my heart, only then will he slacken and his terrors abate."

While he had always been cunning, he had always been implacably just, but now a savage craftiness was upon him.

"This is my plan. There is ample food in Ireland, but ill-fortune has placed it in the wrong hands. The English land-owners and squireens have plenty of cattle. Now, what is more natural for a starving people to do than to steal food?"

"We shall organize the greatest raid of cattle since the Táin Bó. I shall lead this expedition.

"Now then, here is the ticklish part. The Man must be in-

formed of this, and I must be caught in ambush. The timing will be of prime importance.

“Now, one among you must play the part of informer, and he must be a good actor, for this drama, or maybe farce would be an apter word, will furnish a demanding role.

“The informer will tell The Man that when I heard of the treatment accorded to Molly Bawn, a madness came upon me. My wits are gone, boys, and when I saw her I stamped and raged, and said I was a king. He *must* believe you are led by a madman, a demented raver of stories first mouthed by frenzied warriors two thousand years ago. I am bereft of my wits, boys, and have planned a cattle raid as in the days of the old kings. And on this raid I shall have about me only a dozen of my men, chosen like the warriors of Finn MacCool.

“My informer, being unwilling to serve under a madman, will give all the details of the raid to The Man. Now, I understand The Man only too well. When he hears that I will have a small force of twelve with me, he will, of course, choose a small force himself. He will fear to bring more, for he knows that the noise and confusion of moving a troop at night might forewarn me, and I must not elude him this time.

“He cannot afford to have me live, for he knows, as I know, that succor is on the way. I cannot escape! Now listen carefully. It is most important that he kill—do you understand? *kill*—me during the ambush, for a wounded O’Houlihan escaping and at bay is something he fears more than the devil.

“Now, who is the finest shot in Ireland? The Welshman. So The Man will have the Welshman by his side, to fire that fatal shot. And who has the Welshman pledged loyalty to? To none but myself! He shall charge his musket so as to give me a flesh wound. He and I have not been soldiers for twenty years without learning a few tricks!”

“But how do you know the Welshman can be trusted?” asked Hanrahan.

O'Houlihan roared with laughter.

"Because he is a Welshman, and they are like the Irish in anger. You may not be able to trust an Irishman in all situations, but once he has sworn on his oath that he is your enemy, then you can be sure he will never betray you in that capacity. You are his enemy until your death."

His men laughed, little knowing how soon he would prove the wisdom of his words.

"The Welshman will fire, but he will not kill me; I shall see to that. At this moment, you boys will stampede the cattle between me and the soldiers. We will be at such close range that The Man will be satisfied that the Welshman's shot could not but kill me. When the cattle are stampeded, you boys will rush down, in the confusion, and carry your dead leader away."

As he outlined his satanic plan, he roared with louder laughter.

"Do you remember, boys, how The Man vowed to attend my wake before another frost? So he shall. He gave his word, and I know he will attend it. Ah, that'll be sport, boys, a jest that will long be remembered in this land. Two thousand years from now your descendants will sing about how the O'Houlihan had The Man to his wake; I promise you they will, and you know I am also a man of my word.

"But you must, at my wake, be between me and him, so he shall think I am truly dead. And then, when we have him believing me safely dead, we'll all sit tight, waiting word from the Continent, and The Man shall not bother us."

The men trusted him implicitly, and an excited and admiring murmur rose from them at the cunning of his plan.

"Now, two things remain to be dealt with. The informer must be appointed, and I must have the Welshman brought here secretly to instruct him carefully.

“As to the informer, you, Fihelly, will fill the role admirably.”

“Me?” says Fihelly in horror. “You know, Seamus Beg that I would never betray you!”

“That is exactly why you are being chosen. Also, you are a man of unusual intelligence, as I have not failed to notice in the past. Fihelly, *you would not serve under a madman*, and you would desert me this instant, and rightly so, if you thought I jeopardized the cause of Ireland! And you are subtle enough to adapt yourself easily to the role. After all, we couldn’t very well send poor Hanrahan, him who would go scowling up to The Man, declaring defiantly that he was a traitor to me. The Man is no fool.

“All that remains is for you to bring the Welshman here, Mick. You will know best the ways and means, and you alone are free to come and go as you please.”

He stood up before his men, smiling.

“We will go over the plan in much greater detail before we execute it.”

There he was with the easy confidence of a king, and the men paid him silent tribute of trust and love, when, to climax this strange scene, we had an omen, which made the men a thousand times more devout in their loyalty.

The omen was Brosnaghan. He was suddenly took with a fit, which, for all his English blood, had never happened before. He stiffened and thrashed, and it required four men to hold him down. When it had passed, he looked about him and then at O’Houlihan, and he says in wonder:

“What came upon me, Seamus Beg? I suddenly saw you as a king, all dressed in the way Fihelly tells us in the old tales, with a breastplate of gold, and golden arm bands, and a strange gold helmet fitting over your head tight like a cap, and all covered with gems it was, and not as Fihelly has told us at all. What does it mean?”

"It means," says O'Houlihan gently, "that you have the gift of prophecy, Phelim Brosnaghan, as in the old days when the pagan priests foretold the future. You are as loyal to me as a dog, and you are the first to understand."

"But I don't understand," says Paddy.

"The old gods are speaking through you, Phelim Brosnaghan," whispered O'Houlihan.

Several of the men shuddered and crossed themselves, among them me. The rest were so accustomed to thinking of him as a king, with his strange powers, that they stood impassive, as O'Houlihan had trained them to do.

"And now, Mick, get the Welshman."

A spellbinder, a king indeed, and not one of them questioned him; but I did, for next to O'Houlihan, The Man was the finest soldier in Ireland. O'Houlihan could dupe his own men with ease with his spellbinding, but The Man was far too astute to be taken in so readily. And I knew, as O'Houlihan did, that The Man would never attend his wake until he had personally determined O'Houlihan's death, and he would be deluded by no mere flesh wound.

O'Houlihan, still the master soldier, had a plan, a deeper, diabolical plan, for, by oath and by pledging his soul, he had cried for vengeance, and he had been answered, and I, who had witnessed the invocation of pagan kings, instinctively knew his secret.

For this I have spent years studying in every dusty library on the Continent. For this I have learned to speak English, German, French and Spanish. For this I have read my eyes out in dim barracks, so that I might educate myself and return to help my people. All these years I have spent preparing myself, only to learn, and share, O'Houlihan's terrible jest.

O'Houlihan spoke long with the Welshman, and when he dismissed him the Welshman's face was startlingly pale.

"Begod, you look like you'd seen a ghost, and you not even invited to the wake," laughed Hanrahan. "Here, have a drink to steady yourself."

"No," says the Welshman, staring at the ground. "I'll need the steadiest hand in Ireland for this task."

I took him by the arm and led him a few paces away.

"Is it as I feared?" I whispered.

There was horror in his eyes as he looked at me, and he says: "I have sworn enmity to The Man, and I shall die before I break my oath. But there is not enough gold or glory or revenge in the world to make me do *this* willingly. I do it only for little Molly Bawn, whom I love. O'Houlihan says I am to smuggle her out of the country as soon as it is done. Oh, Mick, Mick! Does he know, *know* what he is doing?"

I nodded sadly. "He knows only too well."

"But he knows I never miss! Do the rest of the men know?"

I shook my head.

"But—but—is he really to die?"

"Listen," I whispered, "he is in league with demons, and no man can understand or alter his actions. You are a soldier and will follow your orders. Whether he lives or dies is of no concern to you. You will fire that shot, then flee the country with little Molly Bawn. Would God I were going with you!"

The Welshman gave me his hand. "It is betrayal," he says. "But you are right. It does no good to speak of it. I am a soldier, and I should know better than to question an order."

He shuddered. "My God, he is a monster! Goodbye, my friend, Mick Delahanty."

We shook hands, and parted.



THE TERRIBLE MOMENT ARRIVED.

With the arrogance of kings, O'Houlihan stood in the glen, fearless, so that Hanrahan whispered nervously: "Sure now, Seamus, I know you are after getting yourself shot, but not so early. We haven't got the signal from the boys with the cattle yet." "I am safe," says O'Houlihan. "Seventeen hundred years of kings are my host, and they are all about me." Hanrahan looked about him, but a scout, whistling like a soft bird, warned us of every approaching step of The Man and the English soldiers, and from the message he sent we could count the paces they were away now. And then we heard the signal from our men with the cattle. O'Houlihan climbed toward the

brow of the hill and waited as the soldiers approached.

"There is the Welshman," I whispered.

O'Houlihan nodded calmly, while, before our very eyes, the soldiers stopped, and the Welshman raised his musket.

I could see the Welshman's hawk eyes, as he raised his musket, and with steady deliberation took aim.

O'Houlihan gave a slight signal to the men with the cattle, and I realized now he was designingly tardy.

Just before the shot rang out, O'Houlihan charged, as I have seen him do a hundred times in battle.

"Faire! O'Houlihan a buidh!"

Beware, O'Houlihan to victory! The battle cry of the O'Houlihans.

On the brow of the hill, O'Houlihan leaped, and then stiffened suddenly. The war slogan failed on his lips. He threw back his arms in the form of a cross, and on his chest was emblazoned a crest of blood, while through the silent valley the sound of the Welshman's shot thundered in echo.

Something was wrong with the timing. Instead of the cattle being already stampeded forward to separate us from the soldiers, both cattle and soldiers surged at the same time.

O'Houlihan had not given his men enough time to get the cattle between us and The Man.

It was all over so quickly, and, I knew, just as O'Houlihan had planned it! I found myself kneeling over O'Houlihan's body, staring straight into the eyes of The Man, on the other side.

He ripped open O'Houlihan's shirt, placing his hand on the gaping, bloody wound. His eyes rolled madly as he laid his ear upon O'Houlihan's chest, and shrieked with wild laughter.

But his laughter was drowned out by the sound of stampeding cattle, and the soldiers, scattering like pigeons, dragged The Man with them as they fled from the thundering hoofs.

Meanwhile, Fihelly, Celteran, Brosnaghan and Ruarc swept tardily down, rescuing me and O'Houlihan seconds before the cattle raised dust that hid the death scene, and in the confusion we escaped.

Though it took four men to carry O'Houlihan, we got him to his mother's cabin, where I dismissed his men, as he had instructed me to do.

He had bled so copiously that I could not ascertain the extent of the wound, which was directly over his heart, but the purple fingers of death lay already across his eyelids.

When I put my head on his breast, all I could hear was the pounding of my own wretched, broken heart.

Ah, it's a merry death jig the Irish dance, with their dearest corpse laid out and their pitiful bounties offered to it. A bit of tobacco, or milk or potatoes or whisky, or whatever their poverty now affords.

And himself, the dearest, for the newest dead is always the dearest, laid out on the table. The Irish have a custom I have not seen observed elsewhere, and that is the table. The table of an Irish home is just long enough to stretch out a big Irishman, and if he is bigger than his kinsmen, his feet are propped up, and if he is smaller, all is well.

The O'Houlihan men are big, so we have no problem with Seamus. Big as he is, Owen Ruh was bigger, and what was my eldest cousin's name? Was it him who was Thomas or William? Ah, well, he was as big as Owen Ruh, maybe bigger, for the mother scarcely came to his shoulder, and she is six feet tall.

So we do not worry unduly about this when laying out my cousin James.

There is no one there but my mother, Molly Bawn and myself. We took Seamus and we prepared him as one prepares the dead.

A musket wound at close range is an ugly sight, and I bound it in haste with lavendered linen, to spare my mother and Molly Bawn further anguish.

We stripped him and then we bathed him with water and herbs, the sweetest herbs, mint and rosemary and thyme. We bathed him from head to foot and then we dressed him.

We dressed him in linen small-clothes, and doeskin britches and a saffron shirt, which is the color his ancestors wore. And we tended him most tenderly and gently.

We put cloves under his tongue; his feet were scented with rosewater, as were his hands, and his hair was combed and rubbed with beeswax.

My mother, who has handled the newborn and the dead for sixty years, treats them alike. They are precious to her, and her gentleness must be seen to be understood, for they are holy to her.

Seamus might have been her first-born grandchild, instead of her last-born son, as she laid him out, for she touched him as though God had just given life to him.

He was infinitely precious to her, and she tended him as though he felt her every touch. The gentleness, the care, the unbelievable tenderness were evident in every movement of her work-worn old hands, and I could almost see her bathing a newborn infant, as if the slightest jar or rough action might disturb the slender spirit.

But here, whether she realized it or not, was no slender spirit. Here was O'Houlihan, descendant of kings, and dead.

Or was he? What did we know of this cohort of the dark angel?

As we worked over his great body, the women were silent and untearful, and I too was silent, doing the heavy work, for it took a man's strength to lift O'Houlihan.

I was silent and I was sick to my soul. I was sick to my soul

with fear and horror, and I could not allow one muscle of my face to betray me.

"Ma vick," says the old mother, as she wrung out an icy cloth in lavender water, "you are so pale, my little heart. Go and pray. Rest your soul."

"I am well, Mother."

"Leave us," she says. "I have buried my other sons; I can lay out the last."

"I shall stay, Mother."

"Go, my little heart, my dearest child. Your sorrow is more than I can bear, and take my little Molly Bawn with you."

Molly Bawn clung to my arm in supplication, but I pushed her away.

"We will both stay."

If Seamus O'Houlihan was formidable in life, he was magnificent when he donned the mantle of death. He was perfect, and no power seemed able to decrease the beauty of his form, only to shock the observer that such a man was capable of dying. He was so plainly, even in that wretched cabin, a man among men, a king among men, that nothing could dim his terrible destiny.

Not even my prayers.

Molly Bawn, the old woman and myself sat in the cheerless cabin, waiting.

Molly sat at the mother's feet, her head against the old woman's knee, and she wept softly, but my mother did not.

"Ah, Mother," I says, "how can you bear it?"

She did not answer me, but fumbling with the torn edge of her apron, began her rosary.

"Mother! Don't you care! You have lost eight children!"

She raised her head.

"It is seventeen children I bore, Mick."

"Seventeen? I did not know!" I sat back. "But the others, where—"

"Dead."

"But how, Mother?"

"Only the strong survive in this land, my child. Seventeen I bore, and nine died in infancy."

"Arrah, Mother, aroon, how can you bear it?"

The old woman sighed. "Ah, Mick, there was one who lived to be two years old. A little maid. I was fifty when I bore her, and I knew she was the last."

The old eyes were dim. "Fill me your pipe, dheelish."

I did, and she puffed quietly.

"Two she was, with red hair like yours, like the O'Houlihan's. The rest, but for Owen Ruh, were all dark like me. Ah, Mick, I thought surely God would spare me my little one. When I worked in the fields and cutting turf, she was by my side. I made her a little doll, with a green skirt and white linen apron and cap like my own."

She sat smoking quietly.

"What happened to her, Mother? What was her name?"

"Her name was Mary. She died of the fever. The same one that killed off your race. First there was famine, and somehow I brought her through that, but when the fever struck she was too weakened to live."

The old woman sat gazing into the glowing embers.

"Strange it is, Mick, I still dream of her. Ah, I know she's in heaven, but it has been a sore trial to me never setting eyes on her these last twenty-eight years. Ah, I say to myself, it's you I don't have to pray for, my asthoreen bawn, for you died sinless, but it is no comfort to me."

I shook my head in misery, while she sighed and stroked Molly Bawn's head.

“Ah, well, Mick, I wanted her, but God willed it not to be so, and in His wisdom he gave me you, for it was not three weeks after I buried her, that himself, the O’Houlihan, came home with you wrapped in his shirt.”

I groaned. “Oh, God! Mother, how can you bear it? God in His wisdom gave you me. Oh, God! Mother! How can you bear it!”

She did not appear to hear me, and was back at her praying, the pipe in one twisted old hand and the other at her rosary, the tattered edge of her apron.

I looked about the mean, beggarly hut, which is the lot called home of the native Irish, the mere Irish, designed with relish by our conquerors to demonstrate that we shall never flourish while they are here. If we plant crops on arid, stony common lands, they burn them. To thatch a roof is to invite arson from a drunken soldier. Build a chimbley and they mine it to teach their sappers the use of gunpowder. Raise stunted cattle on weeds and they are slaughtered and eaten by the enemy. And the Irishman has no redress through retaliation. The conqueror may do as he wishes; it is no felony to kill an Irishman; indeed, in most cases it is the basis for reward.

The Irishman is forbidden by law to own land, speak his native tongue, learn to read or write, or to attend his own church.

This miserable hovel, piteous in its bareness. Not a lamp or a book or a picture. Not an ornament; four bare wattled walls, a blackened hole in the roof, and an earth floor. It is enough to shrivel the flesh and destroy the spirit. And the mystery is not the manner in which the Irish survive, but the fact that they have. Yet somehow, despite all that is done to them, the Irish are still capable of breeding Seamus O’Houlihans.

But for what purpose? The pitch cap? The gallows? Slavery in the Bahamas?

I could not bear it, and sat with my clenched fists against my eyes. I know that if I am to retain my reason and carry through with this night, I must dwell on these things.

“God curse this land,” I sobbed.

“What are you saying, Mick Delahanty?”

The brutish savagery of men has lessened Molly Bawn to the likeness of mortals. No more do enchanted eyes gleam softly from a fairy face. A docile, simple colleen she is now. Yes, even the fairies are fleeing the land.

“God curse this land!” I said with rage. “If He wanted us to suffer the fate of beasts, why did He not endow us with their intellect? Why must we feel the sorrows of men? I say, God curse this land!”

“Poor boy. He has,” said Molly Bawn, turning her face to the old woman’s knee again, and weeping softly.



THIS IS O'HOULIHAN'S WAKE. THE mother sits with her magnificent old head bowed in grief beside the fire. As each of O'Houlihan's men arrives, she stands, bows, and greets them with an innate dignity that poverty cannot veil. Finally, when all the men were assembled, I stood and spoke. "Remember O'Houlihan's orders. Stay between him and The Man unless you get a signal." "What is the signal you will give, Mick?" "I do not know, nor do I know if it will be I who gives it." Do not fear, poor boy, you will know. Silently they filed past O'Houlihan's humble bier. And as each man did, each man started and shuddered in ghastly surprise when he saw the single piece of straw lying at O'Houlihan's

feet. They had all heard Fihelly tell and retell the old tales, and each one knew the significance of it. A pagan king, with magic upon him, could destroy the reason of his enemy and make him forever insane by waving that slight and awful wand.

Puzzled, the men look to me for an explanation, but I only shake my head, and, placing my finger across my lips, sit quietly waiting for The Man.

Yes, boys, I think, you are soldiers all of you, and you have seen many terrible things. You have buried your wives and children; you have seen death and starvation, and cruelty so ferocious that the soul retreats, but tonight a new horror awaits you.

Tonight, warriors of the Fianna, you will see a spirit, evil, but still human, destroyed by terror.

Beware, followers of Finn MacCool, the well of hatred is shallow, and when it overflows, beware of O'Houlihan's jest.

I glance at himself, who is not laid out with torque of gold or jeweled sword. No, he lies in the darkened corner on a deal table, his mighty chest arched like a bow and the death bandage tight about his chin.

The men sit patiently, their backs against the wall, and little Molly Bawn weeps still.

"Be silent, you little innocent," I say to her, as I raise her head and point to the corpse. "Do you want himself to hear you?"

"Sh-sh," says my mother gently, "do not frighten her more."

There is a knock upon the door, and there he stands, the most feared and hated man in Ireland. He comes to feast his eyes and his soul upon the sight of his dead enemy, the only man in Ireland who could outwit him. Except for once, you understand.

The Man stands fearlessly at the door, and then he steps in.

For all he knows, twelve pairs of hands could tear him apart, but he glances carelessly at the men, as though he cannot credit them with being a danger to him. Disdain sits upon him like a cloak, and I feel my mouth become sour with hate. I whom he could have killed a thousand times, but he only laughed and said he did not kill jackals. I have suffered many insults, but this is the worst. Yet I have given my word to O'Houlihan, so you are safe with me as by your mother's knee, Englishman. I shall not touch you. My revenge shall be that I shall not kill you. You are O'Houlihan's enemy, and he shall deal with you.

There is a coldness about The Man that is like a breath of frost upon the air, but it melts as he turns his eyes to the dark corner where O'Houlihan lies.

Yes, he thaws and his eyes burn with an unholy light. How many years he has waited for this minute, long years, bloody years for this country! The Man has lived and breathed for this minute, to outwit O'Houlihan and to see him dead, and he has naught to fear from O'Houlihan's men at O'Houlihan's wake, for did not himself charge us to see that no harm should come to The Man?

The Man's tiger eyes sweep icily across the room, and rest for a minute on Molly Bawn. God, what a hard face he has! And the poor little creature's hands go to her face like white moths when she sees his eye upon her.

I offer him a drink, and we toast our departed leader.

"O'Houlihan, we are all here, my soul; we are here. Do you hear me? We shall drink to you, James; we shall drink to you, we shall sing to you, we shall dance for you and we shall weep for you."

"To the soul of James O'Houlihan," whisper the men.

I glance at The Man. He seems paler, but he raises the cup to his lips and drains it like an Irishman, and then I see his eyes, with terrible urgency, turn to the giant in the dark corner.

I refill his cup.

"It is our custom, sir, for each man to drink and address the departed. Will you toast James O'Houlihan?"

He raises his cup and drags his eyes from the dark corner.

"To James O'Houlihan," he says, and no more.

"No doubt the customs of a wake seem strange to you," I venture. "Ah, but then, we Irish are a savage race. Us mere Irish, that is."

He nods his head slightly. He can scarcely listen to me, I know; his attention, his mind, his being is centered on that mighty form. Finally, he has won out.

Like O'Houlihan, at this minute I can read his thoughts.

"Yes, mister," I say, "is it not a pity? Is he not magnificent? So perfect. The finest and strongest man in Ireland, he has been called. Ah, God, like a lion, perfect, and not a mark on him. Except for a musket hole the size of me fist through his heart."

When I speak of O'Houlihan, he listens. He listens as if he would drag the words from my brain. The faces of the men begin to glow from the whisky, and it is time for the next step.

"A bit of music, boys," I say. "O'Houlihan loves music."

Mulcahy springs to his feet and begins to imitate the pipes, while the rest, snapping their fingers, begin the intricate steps of a country dance.

The sudden confusion and noise are like a blow, and The Man looks shocked by our savage customs. O'Houlihan planned the evening well.

The only lights in this wretched cabin are rushlights; the air is dark, hazy, close, and the men's faces gleam with sweat as they whirl, turn, stamp, shout, and jump.

I smile to myself as I see The Man shudder. He cannot leave. He gave his word to attend O'Houlihan's wake, and, like O'Houlihan, he is a man of his word.

An hour passes; the frenzy increases; the men are very

drunken now, and The Man stands, grimly erect, but the cords of his neck are rigid with tension.

Ruarc bounds over to me, his eyes shining and his cheeks like fire.

"Ah, Mick," he says, "himself lying there cold and dead and us so lively. I tell you it's enough to break a man's heart." He roared with laughter, and The Man stood back, shocked.

Brosnaghan, with his murderer's face, steps up, and both he and The Man look startled, and this time I laugh. One with the face of a hangman and the other with the face of a murderer. We are in good company tonight.

Four of the men, who have been dancing around the corpse, suddenly shriek like banshees. They are so drunken now that they stagger, and I see they have O'Houlihan off the table.

Now it is beginning. A terrible coldness creeps over me, but I know I must continue.

They carry O'Houlihan, as stiff as a board, and prop him up against the wall.

"I have not toasted you yet, James," shouts Hanrahan.

"Mind you, you fool," I cry, "you will knock him over!"

"The man doesn't live who could knock O'Houlihan off his feet, dead or alive," says Hanrahan, and raising his cup: "Ah, Seamus, my heart. I left my wife, I left my children, to join you. We've starved together, fought side by side, slept in ditches. O'Houlihan, we lived like dogs, but I loved you, by God, I did, O'Houlihan. I would have followed you to hell. I left my wife and my children, to starve with you as an outlaw, O'Houlihan. O'Houlihan, do you hear me? You were a man among men; you came and were of a race of kings!"

He raised his cup and drained it. I turned and looked at The Man. His face was ashen, and sweat stood on his brow.

The men danced around the corpse, singing and shouting.

"Louder!" shouts Donaghy, "sing him alive, boys!"

"O'Houlihan," shouts Mulcahy, "enjoy yourself, man.

Arrah, we'll miss you. Enjoy yourself this last time, darlin'; here, take my duideen!"

And with this he shoved his pipe between O'Houlihan's firm cold lips. It toppled out, but Mulcahy caught it in time, and forcing the jaws slightly, got it between O'Houlihan's teeth where it stayed.

Can I go through with this? It is too much to ask of any man.

"For the love of God, Mulcahy, leave him alone!" I said. "I beg you, leave him alone."

Mulcahy flung his arm drunkenly over my shoulder.

"All those years, devil a roof over his head, sneaking like a cur to see his poor old mother, giving his food away and going hungry himself rather than see others so. And you, Mick Delahanty, his own cousin, begrudge him a bit of joy at his own wake!"

Hanrahan grabbed a cup of whisky.

"Here, my little heart, have one last drink of your own good whisky."

He tried to pour the whisky through O'Houlihan's lips, but it spilled down the corpse's chin.

I stepped back and shouted: "By God, beware, all of you! You have heard the old tales. For the love of Christ leave him alone!"

It was then I noticed The Man. There was agony on his face and death in his eyes. He came to my side and took my arm. The strength of his white fingers made me wince.

He whispered something to me, but over the shouting and the dancing I could not hear. I cupped my hand behind my ear to indicate I could not hear, but he did not speak again. Instead, he pointed to the corpse.

I looked, and there was O'Houlihan, a huge and magnificent dead warrior. He was propped against the wall, the death pallor more noticeable since the men carried rushlights near

him. The corpse bandage was snug about his blue jowls, and Mulcahy's pipe stuck jauntily from his mouth.

The Man trembled so violently now that I had to support him. He pointed.

I stared. At first, in the flickering light, I was not sure. And then I saw it. A cloud of blue smoke puffed and rose regularly from the pipe between O'Houlihan's teeth.

I ran to Molly and thrust her out the door. The Welshman was waiting for her, and she would be out of the country by dawn.

And now, with her out of the way safely, the play could begin in earnest.



LITTLE MOLLY BAWN FLED INTO THE night, and I was left with my English guest and O'Houlihan's men. The air of the cabin was like wool, and each man was panting to sustain breath and life, but not so himself. Calm and cool he was, with the smoke rising from his pipe, as he leaned stiffly against the wall. The men danced and sang about him, oblivious to all except drink and song, but my English guest had the look of the damned upon him, and his eyes sought mine in a savage desperation, for me to assure him that this could not be, that we were both mad. I turned my face away, and then The Man staggered to my mother. He spoke to her in English, which of course she could not understand, and she shook her head wearily.

In a frenzy, he twisted her head toward her son, pointing and screaming above the roaring of the men.

My mother crossed herself, bowed her head, and turned again to the fire.

Ruarc and Brennan, the strongest of the men, rushed to O'Houlihan's side, and each taking a stiff arm, dragged him to the center of the cabin.

While the others whistled, shouted, stamped and clapped their hands, they tried to dance with the corpse, while tears of laughter ran down their faces when they saw the fear of The Man.

He shrank back against the wall and cast my mother and me a look of horror, but my mother still gazed at the fire, and I steeled myself to look at my cousin.

He was enjoying his wake very much. Not a muscle of his face moved, but his sly, insolent eyes slid to the men in silent frolic.

His men roared with laughter. O'Houlihan had coached them beforehand, and they liked this little game.

"Dance with him, Seamus, me boy," called Fihelly.

But instead, this grisly creature clutched Fihelly to his bosom and whirled about the room, to the delight of the men.

He tossed Fihelly aside as suddenly as he had picked him up, and staggered back to the wall, where he stood, his wicked eyes darting and sparkling with vast amusement.

The men clapped and stamped louder than before, but Fihelly was strangely white and crept to my side.

"Mick," he whispered, "he's as cold as a corpse!"

"You fool!" I snapped. "This is O'Houlihan's jest, which is to be remembered for a thousand years. Do you recall now, Liam?"

He backed away from me, his face whiter yet. "Mick," he whispered, "what is he doing? I don't understand. He told us

we were to trust him this time and The Man would never bother us again. He said his jest would ensure it."

"And you believed him."

"He is my chief!" Fihelly looked like a puzzled child. "Do you mean The Man will bother us again?"

"No," I said softly. "O'Houlihan spoke the truth. After to-night The Man will never harm another Irishman."

"Mick—Mick—he was so cold!"

I stared full at Fihelly. Suddenly his knees buckled, and he fainted. Brennan, thinking it was the drink upon him, dragged him outside, shouting: "A fine soldier you are! A pint of whisky, and Molly Bawn could throw you in a fight."

"Ah, now," says Hanrahan, "go easy on him. He never was one for drinking, and it's been a hard day all round."

"To be sure it has been," says Celteran, "and this is the strangest wake I've attended; and it's no wonder he's off his whisky, for I'm feeling peaked myself, me with a stomach like a crocodile."

"You will not leave this room," I says.

"Not that I have any intention of doing so, me boy," says Celteran, and rushed up to O'Houlihan.

He bowed like a Hessian colonel and says mockingly, "May I have the honor?"

O'Houlihan stepped forward and picked him up like a doll. O'Houlihan's face was now falsely, hideously benign, as obscene as a painted harlot in the guise of a nun.

The noise was maddening, and I put my hands over my ears, but in truth I wanted to put them over my eyes.

And then the corpse stepped back.

Celteran was as white as death, and turned to me. "Holy Mary, mother of God," he whispered, "that is not O'Houlihan! Jesus, Mick, what is happening?"

"The Welshman never misses," I says.

"The Welshman betrayed us?"

“No. O’Houlihan did.”

Celteran stood, uncomprehending and staring at me. Suddenly his eyes started from their sockets, and he rushed from the cabin. I heard him retching as the door closed behind him.

And that demon propped against the wall laughed.

Though still dressed in the poor trappings we had laid him out in, there was about him now a rich and barbaric splendor which left me, even in my fear, puzzled. And then it came to me. It was the wealth of his coloring: his shirt of saffron linen, and his homemade brogues polished to the hue of pigeon’s blood, his doeskin britches worn to the color of old copper, his skin like snow and his hair like jet. His eyes, Jesus Mary, his eyes, insolent princely eyes, lazy and laughing, confident and cruel, and of the softest blue, the prettiest blue, and the bluest blue. The blue of the poisonous bog gas.

The shabby corpse had truly risen from its bier and moved casually among its guests with a pagan and terrible magnificence.

His men took him for to be jesting, and, clapping him across his mighty shoulders, they praised him for his craftiness and roared with cruel laughter at that wretched, demented creature that stood flattened against the wall, The Man, his arms outstretched at his sides and his fingernails vainly seeking support and comfort and sanity from the solidity of mud and wood.

Only Brosnaghan, one of the few sober enough to reason, whispered timidly, “Seamus, yer soul, I thought this wake was to prove to The Man ye was dead, not alive.”

When this thing rolled its eyes wildly in mock humor, and then winked broadly at Brosnaghan, I could bear it no longer.

“You fools!” I screamed. “You fools! Do you not know what he has done? Can you not see he is not jesting?”

The drunken roar of their laughter and song beat on my ears like drums.

“Hear me!” I cried, but they did not, and so I who could bear it no longer, did what I thought I could not.

Pushing them aside, I stood before the corpse and refused to let it pass.

The men stared, silent and puzzled, as that huge and mighty form stood before me and slowly raised its hands.

But with a prayer on my lips, I caught my mother’s eye, and she gave me the strength for what I knew I must do.

With one motion I ripped the shirt and bandage from it and, turning to the men, I pointed and screamed: “A dozen muskets could not stop him before the sun rises! He is possessed!”

They flinched at the sight of the ugly wound and my words.

“He’s dead!” I roared. “To us he is dead! Do you understand now? He betrayed and deceived us all! He sold his soul for revenge! *This is O’Houlihan’s wake!*”

Their silence was more dreadful than their reveling, and they shrank back against the walls.

The corpse swept its arm over the lot of them and pointed to the door. They rushed into the night, the quiet, holy night, where I longed to be.

I fell to my knees before my mother, and wept.

Only my mother’s prayers, which continued as ceaselessly as the wind outside, allowed me to retain my sanity, but for The Man there was no surcease.

That thing, with leaden feet, pursued him relentlessly about the cabin.

Pitiless, it followed The Man, and blocked his every move for the door or the windows, its great arms outstretched and the demon laughter shaking the rafters.

Pity and horror forbid description of The Man. He tried again and again to escape, to no avail.

It began to dance, and its wound bled afresh as it followed The Man, gesturing for him to join it.

Then, with fiendish sprightliness, it tiptoed merrily to the table and picked up the single straw.

Overwhelmed with its diabolical majesty, it straightened up soberly, saluted, and then, without warning, pounced like a cat toward The Man.

It raised the single straw slowly, very slowly, and then brought it down.

Courage had no place in that bedeviled cabin, and The Man screamed for mercy, but it gave none.

It swept him to it and jiggged merrily, its glassy, dreadful eyes bluer than life.

The Man fought it with the strength of a madman, but Molly Bawn could as soon have fought me, for he was picked up and carried into the grisly step.

It lifted him high up, and The Man's chest was stained with its blood.

And then it tossed him at our feet.

"Mercy! Mercy!" screamed The Man, and clutched the old woman's ankles. "Mercy!"

My mother brushed me aside and stood between The Man and her dead son.

She said nothing as she stood before her son, but her face was terrible with anger.

Suddenly the corpse staggered. It fell back against the wall, and the whole cabin shook with the weight of its body.

It held its hands out supplicatingly to my mother. "Mercy, mercy!" it croaked.

My mother looked at it coldly, and turning, dragged The Man from its path as it stumbled forward again.

"Mother! Mother! Mother!" I cried. "Can't you kill it? Dear Mother, oh, God help us, Mother! Kill it!"

It stopped, and staggered again.

My mother crossed herself, and then pointed to the table.

"Get back on that," was all she said.

O'Houlihan tried to. He took a faltering step, and fell to his knees.

"Mother," he whispered, "mercy."

"Get back," she said.

"Mercy, Mother. Pray for me."

"Get back."

On his knees, he began to crawl to the table, and blood coursed from his chest like a spring freshet.

My mother stood and watched him without pity or fear.

He pointed to the table, shook his head, and collapsed on the floor.

My mother motioned me to help her, and somehow we got him onto the table.

He was going quickly, thank God, and the bleeding suddenly stopped.

My mother stood dry-eyed, looking down at him. He was strangely beautiful now. The flickering lights threw a luminescence on his features, which stood out as fine as cameo, and his brow was as white as a maiden's. His fringed eyelashes cast jagged jet shadows over his cheekbones, to the death beard on his jowls.

There he lay, the last of the O'Houlihans, descended in a direct and unbroken line from Malsechlainn, the last of the Hy Nialls, hereditary high kings of Ireland.

Tears stole down my mother's cheeks as she looked at him. Slowly and softly she touched his lips with her fingers. Then, drawing herself up to her full height, she took a deep breath.

With the strength of a hand that had dug potatoes and turf for fifty years, she struck him full across the face.

"Ah, Mother darling," he whispered, "I knew you'd forgive me."

She kissed his cheek and made the sign of the cross over him.

She turned to me, "Take that poor creature to the town." She pointed to The Man.

I shook my head, for a terrible instinct warned me it was not over for me; the bitterest heartbreak was yet to come.

She nodded and went to The Man and, with her surprising strength, got the poor witless thing to his feet, and left the cabin supporting him.

I stood leaning over my cousin, my tears falling on his face, for the last hope of Ireland lay on that table.

“Is it the priest?” he whispered. “Peccavi, Father. Forgive me.”

Wearily I went over to the fire and sat down, and I put my hands across my face.



IT WAS NOT ENDED, I KNEW. MY VIGIL was not over. What would happen I did not know, nor did I care. There was no fear left in me, only a great emptiness; nor felt I sorrow. Indeed, I had grieved more over my mother's pig than I did now, and the fount of my tears was hopelessness. I sat alone, trying to understand, but my brain was numb. The emptiness left, and in its stead came a feeling of oppression. Slowly my senses began to return. I was physically weary, and after a time I was hungry. I arose and ate a cold potato and poured myself a drink of whisky. My strength surged, and the cold that had coursed through my veins was gradually dissipated. I could feel the warm blood tingling to my hands and feet.

I glanced carelessly at the corpse, and saw, without emotion or surprise, that O'Houlihan was breathing easily now.

I heard someone entering the cabin, and raising myself slightly from my torpor, I saw Phelim Brosnaghan. He was weeping.

"Go," I whispered, still too weak to talk.

"Ah, Mick, I must speak. It's like this; it is sorry we all are, but it is me who is the sorriest."

I lifted my weary eyes.

"I know now he's truly dead and it's entirely my fault himself lies there, Mick."

"What are you saying, Phelim Brosnaghan?"

"It's like this, Mick. The Man never got no message from himself."

I tried to stand, but staggered and sat down again.

Brosnaghan put his hands across his face as he spoke.

"I killed Geoghegan. I didn't want to kill him, Mick. I begged him not to deliver that message, but he would not heed me. I begged, for the sake of the pride of O'Houlihan, for him not to deliver that message, for I could not bear to have O'Houlihan demean himself by apologizing to The Man. 'Look at all of us The Man has killed,' I said to him, 'and you must bear our leader's apology for the killing of one paltry English soldier.' Oh, he would not heed me, Mick. 'Stand back,' he says, 'or you are dead, Brosnaghan.' But I would not, and when I sought to detain him he drew his knife, and I knew I could not stop him unless I killed him, and for the pride of my country, I did."

He wept more, and his weeping made me savage.

"Ah, Mick, what have I done?"

"You have put my soul in bondage; you have left your country in chains for another thousand years," I whispered.

I was still too weak to rise, but I slammed my fist on the table till tears came to my eyes.

“You Englishman! You God-damned Englishman.” And then I began to laugh.

“O’Houlihan,” I called to the silent form, “do you hear this now? You see, we have lost to an Englishman. Isn’t that a fine jest for you, O’Houlihan? All our plans thwarted by this Englishman! And in ages to come, when our grandchildren ask why Ireland is still not free, we have only to say we betrayed ourselves, and the English were waiting, as they have always been!

“Do you hear me, O’Houlihan? We are beaten again, by this misbegotten monster, by one of them, James, who slipped into our midst and our trust as they have always done.

“Shall I kill him for you, cousin? Shall I cut his heart out and nail it to our portal? Aye? Answer me, O’Houlihan! You give the orders here!”

The great form never moved.

“Do you hear me, cousin? Seamus Beg, King of the Irish, are you laughing now? We are still defeated by the English!”

“Mick, Mick,” says Brosnaghan, falling to his knees, “kill me if you will, but forgive me, Mick. For the love of Christ, say you forgive me!”

I got to my feet, and I pointed my finger at Brosnaghan.

“I curse you, Englishman. I curse you and I will not speak your name, for it is yours no longer. You are an Englishman. Wherever I go, I will say to my people, ‘You know of whom I speak; do not speak his name.’ And your name will die on my lips and on theirs, never to be spoken again!”

He wrung his hands. “Mick, I never knew my father’s name, and it’s long and bitterly I’ve fought to bear my mother’s. Will you rob me of it? It is all I have, or have ever had, for my name is my life and my life is my name. God save my soul and yours, Mick. Forgive me in the name of Christ and charity!”

But the rage and despair of a lifetime descended on this unfortunate man's head, and I cried:

"Traitor, Englishman! You have robbed my people of their birthright. I curse you! I am speaking your name for the last time! May you freeze in the lowest pit of hell, Phelim Brosnaghan. May you never know a kiss that is not bought! May you never have a daughter to make you a cup of tea when you are old, and never a son to weep at your wake and close your eyes. May grass grow eternally before your doorstep!"

Waving his arms in a futile gesture to fend off my curses, he stumbled from the cabin.

But he was no sooner gone than my conscience shrieked for voice, and I cried out, "Come back, Paddy, come back!"

It was a nightmare, and only the whisper of my voice and conscience could be heard as I vainly called.

He was gone. He could not hear me. Phelim Brosnaghan has left us. He wanders the earth with my curses fluttering about his head like silent ravens, while I wept weakly afresh.

O'Houlihan stirred drowsily.

I arose and stood looking down at him. Had he sold his soul and then regained it? Had he arranged with the Welshman to prime his musket so that the power of the discharge only wounded him, with a flesh wound giving the appearance of a death wound? Had he passed into a trance mistaken by even his mother for death? Did he really step across that fearful boundary? Had he been truly possessed? All these things I shall never know.

O'Houlihan stretched and blinked and looked about him puzzled.

"Ah, Mickaleen. What time is it, your soul?"

"Past dawn, Seamus."

"Where is the mother, Mick?"

"Gone to the town."

“A strange hour, indeed. Is it the market day it is? Ah, Mick, such a head I have. It aches intolerably, and me a man who never touches a drop. It must be a brush of the old fever back on me.”

I stood looking at him. Finally I says, “She is gone, Seamus.”

“My mother? Ah, to market you said, but she will be back soon, and then we must bid her adieu, Mick, and it’s off to the Continent again.”

“What?”

“Ah, my little heart. Don’t you remember? We only came to say goodbye to her, Mick, for she’s an old woman, and a mercenary’s life is not the safest. When she returns, we must kiss her goodbye and go back to our soldiering.”

“I meant Molly Bawn when I said she had gone.”

“Molly Bawn?” He looked at me, puzzled. “Molly Bawn is it? Ah, yes, she was old Matthew Cooley’s daughter. Was she not . . .”

He paused and touched his forehead significantly. “She was a bit . . . ah . . . what shall I say, Mick? A strange little creature, as I remember, indeed, poor soul. And where did she go, Mick?”

Before I could answer, my mother came in the cabin door. She said nothing, but stood looking at him.

“Machree,” he said gently, kissing her cheek, “it’s off to the Continent I am. God guard you well and bless you each day.”

Yes, it was true, he remembered not a thing. So this was the answer, the final bitterness. More than bartered or lost souls. Deeper than the death of a thousand O’Houlihans. Straight to the heart of Ireland was the wound he had suffered. How many long generations would we wait before another king would be born among us?

O’Houlihan had destroyed The Man and The Man had

destroyed O'Houlihan. So this was the true measure a man reaps when he trifles with the unknown.

James O'Houlihan was now and forever unmindful of his destiny.

"Butter my brogues, Mother, and fold up my clean shirt, for by moonrise I'll be on a ship for Europe. Get you ready, Mick."

"I am not going."

He turned to me. "Not going, Mick? What ails you? You have tears in your eyes; it is sick you are! Ah, but the sea winds will brighten you up, my bucko. We'll do famous together, Mick, for remember I hold a commission under the Duke of Alba for the spring campaign."

"I'm through with wars and I'm through with fighting," I says slowly.

"Ah, Mick, I'll miss you, I will. The last of me own blood, I liked to have you by my side when I was fighting, though, by God, I must admit you were never much of a soldier. I know it has always turned your stomach. Well . . . stay here then, my soul, and look after my mother; guard her well, Mick."

"Stay you, O'Houlihan," I says hopelessly.

"Stay? I? Here? Ah, Mick, it's a fighting man I am; soldiering's me trade, and what is there for me to do here? Sure, I am by nature and inclination one of the wild geese, Mick. There's nothing left in this country for a man of spirit."

He put his arm about his mother.

"I'll be in the Low Countries until spring, Mother, if you wish to get word to me. Send word by one of the O'Heffernan boys; there's always half a dozen of them fighting over there."

My mother looked at him sadly. "Goodbye, my son."

"Ah, sure, it's not goodbye, Mother. I'll drop around next summer, after the spring campaign, I will. I left it too long

last time, but I'll be back for a day or two next year, I will, for sure, Machree."

The old woman sighed deeply. "I will not be here, my child."

"Not here?" He kissed her cheek and put his hand on her shoulder. "Now, now, Mother, what's all this foolish talk about dying? Did you hear that, Mick? You will live to be a hundred, you will. Bury the lot of us, won't she, Mick, my boy?"

And so he too left us.

We watched the great figure go, shoulders unbowed and ready for a hundred battles, and none of them ours, while she, with her face like a thousand lost battles, sank to the stool by the fire and began her familiar rosary on the tattered edge of her apron.

Now, as before, it is death for an Irishman to be found with holy beads in his cabin.

"Come here, my child."

I went to her side.

"Kneel and pray. You and Seamus are in need of much prayer."

"What shall I pray for?"

The strong old hand touched my hair lightly.

"One does not pray *for* anything, my son. One prays."

And this is the end of my story.

The story of a man who laughed but once in his life, the story of O'Houlihan's jest, and of a strange slip of a girl, who wanted a little brown cow with a white face.

And if you tell this tale to your grandchildren, remember Molly Bawn wanted no jewels to put on her brow, nor queenly silken raiments. It was only a little brown cow with a white face she wanted.

And she has flown far away with the Welshman, who will buy her the little brown cow.

No more the midnight valley of Fer-fi will resound with her laughter, which is like little silver bells. Never again will we steal to the strand of that white lake to hear the fairy music; the whispering song, the wailing song and the laughing song; for she and O'Houlihan are lost to us.

And now the little birds of the night are indeed silent, and all the dread heroes are gone.

