



The Big Poor People

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Irish

Intermediate

39 min read

There was a knock at the door, and John opened it. “God save all here except the cat!” said a voice outside.

“God save you kindly!” John answered.

A young man and a young woman came in. They were neighbors—Peter Sullivan and his wife, Ellen. “Good avenin’ to you, Pether,” said John; “you’re lookin’ fine and hearty, and it’s like a rose you’re lookin’, Ellen.”

“It’s more like nettles than roses we’re feelin’,” Ellen answered, “but something with prickles anyway, wid the bother we have every day and all day.”

“Thru for you, it’s hard times,” said John; “we was speaking about them just the minute before you came in; but we all have to bear them. It’s not you ought to complain, as long as you’ve good health; now here’s Kitty—I dunno how—”

“It’s not the hard times I’m speakin’ of now,” said Ellen; “they’re bad enough, goodness knows; but it’s the bother we have all the time, and we can’t tell how or why. Half the time the cow gives no milk, and when she does, you can make no butther wid it. The pig, the crathur, won’t get fat; he ates everything he can reach, and still he looks like a basket wid a skin over it. The smoke of the fire comes down the chimney, the dishes are thrown on the floor, wid nobody near them, and such noises are goin’ on all night long that never a wink of sleep can a body get. What we’ll do at all if it goes on, I dunno.”

“By all the books that ever was opened and shut,” Peter added, “it’s all throe what she says, and more. What wid all that and what wid the troubles that’s on the whole counthry, if I only had the money saved to do it, I’d lave it all to-morrow and go to the States—I would so.”

“Leave off the things you do that make you all these troubles,” said the older Mrs. O’Brien, “and you’ll have no more need to go to the States than others.”

“What things are them that we do?” Ellen asked.

“Haven’t I told you before this,” said Mrs. O’Brien, “that it’s the Good People that trouble you? If you’d treat them well, as we do, they’d never bother you. If you’d even take good care never to harm them, it’s likely they’d never come near you.”

“It’s the fairies you’re speakin’ of,” said Peter. “Sure I don’t believe in them at all. It’s old woman’s nonsense that your head’s full of, savin’ your presence, Mrs. O’Brien. There’s no fairies at all. Don’t talk to me.”

“You’d better be more respectful to them, Peter,” Mrs. O’Brien answered. “Say less about not believing in them and don’t call them by that name, that they don’t like. Call them ‘the Good People’ or ‘the gentry.’ They don’t like the name that you called them, any more than they like those who disbelieve in them or those who try to know too much about them. Speak well about them and treat them well, as we do, and they’ll not trouble you; maybe they’ll even help you. Didn’t you see, as you came in, how we left something for them to eat and drink outside the door there? We’ve not much, but they like fresh milk and clean water, and we always give them these, and they hold nothing but friendliness for us. Look and see now if they’ve taken what we left there for them after supper.”

Peter went to the door and looked. "There's nothing in the dishes there," he said; "but how do we know it wasn't the pig that ate it, or some poor dog, maybe?"

"You don't know," said Mrs. O'Brien, "only as I tell you, and you'd better be attending to them that know more than yourself. If you did chance to give a meal to some poor dog, instead of to the Good People, there'd be no great harm done, but it's the Good People that get what we put there. We always leave it for them and they always come and take it, and it's that makes them friendly, and so they would be to you, if you did the same. But you do nothing for them, because you say you don't believe in them, and you do worse than nothing. Didn't I see Ellen the other evening throwing out some dirty water and never saying "Take care of the water?"

"And what if I did?" said Ellen. "Can't I throw out wather when I plase, widout talkin' about it?"

"You can if you like," said the old woman, "but when you throw out water without warning, it's as likely as not some of the Good People may be passing, and they don't like dirty water to be thrown on them; and so after that your cow gives no milk, your pig is thin, and your dishes are thrown around the room. Do as you like with your water, or with anything else, but if you anger the Good People, be sure they'll do you harm."

"It's superstitious you are. Mrs. O'Brien," said Peter; "I dunno what it is that's throubling us, but there's no fairies at all."

"Superstitious, is it?" said the old woman. "And so you're not superstitious at all, and you don't believe in the Good People! Now tell me, Peter Sullivan, when you came to that door just now and said 'God save all here,' like a decent man, why did you add 'except the cat?' What did you mean by those words 'except the cat?' Tell me that now."

"Why, sure, Mrs. O'Brien," Peter answered, just a bit confused, "sure, we're told that cats is avil spirits, so we mustn't put blessings on them, and when we say 'God save all here,' we add onto it 'except the cat,' so as not to be calling down a blessing on an avil spirit."

"Ah!" said Mrs. O'Brien, "it's not the likes of you that's superstitious. You can't put a blessing on the poor cat, when you're blessing everybody and everything else in the house, for fear you'd be putting it on an evil spirit; but you're not superstitions, and so you throw dirty water on the Good People as they're passing, and you call them by names that they don't like, and then you wonder what it is that's troubling you."

“No, Mrs. O’Brien,” said Peter, again, “I dunno what it is at all. It may be the avil spirits themselves, for what I know, and whatever it is. I’d go away and leave it and leave the country, if I had the money to get to the States. I heard once of a man that was druv out of the counthry by a monsther that I suppose was maybe something like the fairies—like them in making trouble for the man, anyway. It was a great conger that lived in a hole in the Sligo River, and I suppose he was ten yards long, and the man was a diver. He was gettin’ stones out of the bottom of the river, and the conger says to him, ‘What are you afther there?’ says he. ‘Stones, sor,’ says the diver. ‘Hadn’t you betther be goin’?’ says the conger. ‘I think so, sor,’ says the diver, and afther that he never stopped goin’ till he got to the States.”

“That’s you, Peter,” said the old woman; “you don’t believe in the Good People or strange monsters or anything of the sort, but you want to run away from them.”

If Peter had been quite honest about it, he could scarcely have said, even to himself, whether he believed that there were any fairies or not; but he was really afraid of them, though he put on such a bold front and said that he did not believe in them, to make people think that he was uncommonly knowing. “Mrs. O’Brien,” he said, “do you think it’s true, what they say, that in the States you can pick up goold everywhere in the streets?”

“What good would it do you if it was true?” she asked.

“What good would it do me? Are ye askin’ what good would goold do me? Sure, then, wouldn’t I pick up all of it I could carry, and wouldn’t I take land wid it and pay rent and buy stock for a big farm and grow as rich as Damer? What good would goold be? Ha! Ha! What couldn’t you do in a country where ye could be pickin’ up goold in the street?”

“There’s no gold to be picked up in the streets there, any more than here,” said the old woman, “and if there was, it would be no use to you. Only suppose, now, that you had picked up all the gold you could carry, and that you wanted to buy a loaf of bread with it. And suppose you went into a baker’s shop and chose even the smallest loaf of bread you could find, and threw down a whole gold sovereign for it—aye, or a hundred gold sovereigns. Would the baker sell you the bread for your gold, do you think? Wouldn’t he say to you: ‘Go on out of this, for the silly Irishman that you are! What for would I be giving you good bread for that gold of yours, when I can pick up as much and as good as that any minute here before my own door and keep my bread as well?’ If you could find gold in the street, it would be worth no more than the stones that you find there.”

"I don't know how that is, Mrs. O'Brien," said Peter, "but I can't see why goold wouldn't be goold, wherever you could find it."

"It's not sensible," said John, "to be talkin' of findin' gold in the streets, but there's a deal in what Peter says, for all that, and it's often I've thought, too, that I'd go to the States and be away from all these throubles, if only we could save up the money to take us all there. It's not any gold or any riches I'm thinkin' about, but what I want to know, mother, is this: Could a man in the States, if he was strong and if he worked hard—and if he didn't drink a great deal—could he make enough to keep himself and his wife both, so that she needn't work too hard—not so that she would sit idle, I don't mean, but so that she needn't be doin' hard work and doin' it all the time—could he do that?"

"That's the sensible and the honest talk," said his mother; "he could do that. Those that do nothing get nothing, in the States the same as anywhere else. But I've talked with them that know, and they tell me that in the States those that will work are paid for their work, and those that are strong and industrious and honest can keep their families from want, and that's more than some can do here, God help them!"

"It would be a great thing," said John, speaking slowly, as if he were trying to make himself believe this dream of a land where a man's work could make his wife and his children sure of a home and food—"a great thing. And do you think, mother—but no, no—I suppose not—do you think, if we was once there—do you think that I could work enough to make it so that it would be easier for you and for Kitty both? Could one do enough for three?"

"It would be easier than here, maybe," was all that the old woman said in answer to this. She had heard this talk of America many times before, and she did not like it. She would rather believe, and make others believe, that better times were coming for Ireland. She was not so young as the others and not so ready to leave her old home, yet lately she had seen how it was growing harder and harder to stay, and there seemed to be little left of the good luck of which she boasted.

She was thinking of all this now, and John knew her thoughts, though she did not speak them, and he said: "You always tell us that there's betther times comin', mother, and I've learned to know that all you say is true. She was sayin' it just before you came in, Pether. But how can we believe in the betther times? They don't come. They get worse and worse. How do we know they'll ever come?"

Again Mrs. O'Brien seemed lost in deep thought, or in a dream, just as when, a little while before, she had told them of O'Donoghue. What she told them now was a sort of answer to John's question, but perhaps she told it quite as much to draw their thoughts away from America. She was silent for a little while, and they all waited for her to speak.

"Good times for Ireland there will be again," she said, "when Earl Gerald comes back. It was hundreds of years ago that Earl Gerald lived in his great castle of Mullaghmast. He was a strong warrior and he fought many a good fight for his people against their foes. More than that, he was powerful in magic. He could work mighty charms and he could change himself into any form he liked.

"His wife knew that he could do this, but he had never shown himself to her in any form but his own. She often begged him to let her see what his magic could do, and to change himself to some other form for her. But he knew there was danger in it, and he put her off with one reason and another. But at last, she asked him so many times, he told her that if she took any fright at all while he was in any form but his own he could never live in the world again in his own form till all the people of the country had passed away many times. 'I'd not be a fit wife for you,' she said, 'if I'd be easily frightened.'

"'You might not be easily frightened,' he said, 'but you might have great cause, and if you were only a little frightened you would never see me like myself again.'

"Then one day, as they were sitting together, the Earl turned away his head and muttered some words which his wife could not understand, and that instant he was gone, and instead of him sitting beside her she saw a little goldfinch flying around the room. The goldfinch flew out at the window into the garden; then it flew back and sat on the lady's shoulder and on her hand and on her head, and it sang to her, and so they played together for a time. Then it flew out into the open air once more, but in a second it darted back through the window and straight into the lady's bosom. The next instant she saw a wild hawk, that was chasing the little bird and was coming straight through the window after it. She put both her hands over her bosom, to save her husband's life, but she was frightened and she gave one scream as the hawk darted into the room, dashed itself against a table, and was killed. Then she looked where the little bird had been, and it was gone. She never saw Earl Gerald again.

"But Earl Gerald was not dead, and he is not dead, though all this was hundreds of years ago. He is sleeping, down under the ground, just beneath where his old castle used to stand. His warriors are there with him. They

are in a great hall. The Earl sits at the head of a long table and the men sit down the sides. All rest their heads upon the table and all are asleep. Against the wall there are rows of stalls, and behind each man, in one of the stalls, is his horse.

“Once in every seven years Earl Gerald wakes at night. He rises and mounts his horse. A door of the hall opens. He rides out into the free air. He rides around the Curragh of Kildare and then back into the cave, to sleep again for seven years.

“While he is out the door is open. Once, long ago, a horse-dealer was going home late, and he had been drinking a little. He saw the door in the hill open and he walked in. And there he found himself in a hall, dim and high. A row of dim lamps hung along the hall, and he saw the smoke of them rise up to the roof, where many old banners, faded and torn, stirred a little in the light breeze that came in by the open door. And the light of the lamps shone down and glistened on the bright armor of rows of men who sat with their steel helmets bowed upon the table, and behind them were rows of horses, with their saddles and their bridles on, ready for their riders.

“There was no sound in the cave but the shuffle of his own foot, and the stillness and the sight that he saw made him afraid. His hand trembled, and a bridle that he had fell upon the floor. The noise echoed and echoed through the cave, and the warrior who sat nearest to the poor man raised his head. ‘Is it time?’ the warrior said.

“‘Not yet, but soon will be,’ the man answered, and the warrior’s head sank again upon the table. The man went out of the cave as quickly as he could, and he never could find the door of it again.

“They say that Earl Gerald’s horse has silver shoes. They were half an inch thick when the Earl’s sleep began. When they are worn as thin as a cat’s ear it will be time. Then a miller’s son, who will have six fingers on each hand, will blow a trumpet, and Earl Gerald and all his warriors will come out of the cave. They will fight a great battle and will conquer the enemies of Ireland. Then the country will be peaceful and prosperous and happy, and Gerald will be its King for forty years.”

Peter's mind could not be set at rest by any such stories as this to-night. "What's the good of all thim old tales to us?" he asked, "Can we pay our rint wid the knowledge that Earl Gerald will be King of Ireland for forty years? They do be all the time fortellin' and prophesyin' and predictin' this thing and that thing and the other thing in thim old tales, and nothin' ever comes o' thim. Did you ever know, now, Mrs. O'Brien—I ask you—will you tell me this—did ye ever know of any of the prophecies in any of thim old woman's tales comin' thru?"

"It's surprised I am," said the old woman, "to hear you, Peter Sullivan, talking that way—you, that had a decent man for your father, and that's a decent man yourself, all but knowing nothing—you, that have heard the stories of your people. Tell me now, did you ever hear what was foretold of the children of Lir, and did you ever hear if it came true or not?"

Perhaps Peter had never heard about the children of Lir, or perhaps he had heard and did not like to say so, because the story would be proof that a prophecy had come true. At any rate, he said nothing. But the old woman seemed resolved that if he had never heard about the children of Lir he should hear about them now.

"Lir was a powerful man in the old days of Ireland," she said, "He had three sons and one daughter, and their mother was dead. The names of the sons were Hugh, Fiachra, and Conn, and the name of the daughter was Fair-shoulder, and beautiful and good children were they all. Lir was visiting once at the castle of Bogha Derg, the King of Conacht, and he saw the daughter of the King, and he fell in love with her and married her.

"For a time they were happy, and then the new wife began to be jealous of the love of her husband for his four children. It troubled her so much that she began to lose her beauty and her health, and at last she took to her bed and did not leave it for a year. And after that time there came a great Druid to visit her. You know who and what the Druids were, I think. They were the priests of the old religion of Ireland, before St. Patrick came and made the people Christians. They were powerful in magic; they could bring storms and could drive them away; they could foretell the future; they could work powerful enchantments on people and beasts, and trees and stones, and they could do many other marvellous things.

"This Druid talked with the wife of Lir for a long time alone. He made her tell him all that troubled her, and then he told her what she could do to be rid of her husband's children. He gave her a magic wand and went on his way.

"Then she rose from her bed and took the four children with her in her chariot and set out for her father's

castle. On the way she ordered the driver of the chariot to kill the children, but he refused. Then they passed near a lake, and the step-mother told the children to go into the water and bathe. But Fair-shoulder believed that she meant them some harm, and she refused to go, and begged her brothers not to go. So the step-mother called her men, and she and they forced the children out of the chariot and pushed them into the water. Then she touched each of them on the head with the Druid's wand, and they were changed into four beautiful white swans.

“After she had done that, she went on to her father's castle. When her father had welcomed her, he said, ‘Where are your husband's children?’

“‘They are at home,’ she answered, ‘in their father's castle.’

“‘And are they well?’

“‘They are well.’

“Now the King himself was a Druid, and more powerful than the one who had given his daughter the wand. More than that, he was a good man, and the other was a wicked one. He did not believe what his daughter told him about the children, and so he put her into a magic sleep. When she was asleep he said to her, ‘Where are your husband's children?’

“And she answered, ‘They are in the lake which we passed by the way as we came here.’

“‘And what did you do to them?’

“‘I changed them into white swans.’

“‘Why did you do that?’

“‘Because my husband loved them more than he loved me.’

“He woke her out of the magic sleep and called all his people together. Before them all he told her that she should be punished for her wickedness, and then he changed her, by his Druidic power, into a gray vulture. Then he said to the people: ‘This creature that was my daughter has laid a wicked enchantment on her husband's children. She has changed them into swans. They must keep that shape for many hundreds of years; they must swim in the lakes and the seas and fly over the land, and they must travel far and must suffer much.’

But there is a hope for them. Many, many hundred years will pass away—so many that even the Druid's eye can scarcely see what is at the end of them. But at last there shall come strange men across the sea to Erin—men with shaven heads. They shall build houses and shall set up tables in the east ends of their houses, and they shall ring bells. And when the swans that were the children of Lir shall hear the first sound of these bells, they shall have their human shape again, and then they shall be happy forever. But she—the gray vulture—she shall fly in the sky, where it is stormy and cold. Where there are thick clouds and where the rain is made, there shall be her home. She shall not fly where the heaven is blue and where the sun shines warm. The bells of the good men from over the sea shall bring her no peace. Her way shall be with the wind and the hail. If she has any rest it shall be on the peak of some wet crag, where the snow whirls around her, or the fog drives past her, or the sleet cuts against her, or the cold spray of the sea dashes over her. And it shall be so with her till the Day of Doom.'

“When the King had finished speaking the gray vulture flew away, and she was never seen again. But the King and all the court rode in chariots to the lake where the white swans were, and Lir and all his people came there, too, when they heard what had been done. And there they all stood and listened to the singing of the four swans. So beautiful was the song that those who listened could think of nothing else while they heard it. They left their horses and their chariots and stood on the shore of the lake and listened to the enchanting music, and never thought of food, or of drink, or of sleep. Even the horses listened to the song as the people did. Day and night they stood there, and many days and nights, and no hunger came upon them, and they felt no cold and no heat, and no wind and no wet.

“But the time came when the enchantment that was upon them compelled the four white swans to leave the place. They rose up into the air and flew away and out of sight into the sky. Then the King and his people, and Lir and his people, went back to their castles, and they never saw the four white swans again.

“The four white swans flew to Loch Derg, and there for many years they swam on the lake, and fed and slept among the rushes along the shores. In the summer the lake was pleasant and cool, the air was clear and mild, the sky was blue, and the sun was bright and beautiful. Then Fair-shoulder and her brothers forgot that they were unhappy. They sang songs to one another and scarcely remembered that they had ever been anything but swans, swimming on this peaceful water. But when the winter came and the ice was all around, and the wind from the north blew the snow against them, so that it froze among their feathers and they could scarcely move, they were so stiff and so cold—then they remembered how happy they had been in their father's castle. They

could not sing now—not even sad songs. They only longed to have their human shape again and to be back in their old home.

“But after many, many years more had passed they ceased to wish for home. They had been swans so long now that it did not seem to them that they had ever been anything else. When the winter came again and again and again, and the days of chilling storm and the nights of freezing darkness were upon them, the poor brothers longed for nothing but the end of it all. The thought of the old castle hall, with its bright fires and its feasts and its music of minstrels and its dances and its games, was only another pain to them, and they wished only to die and to leave their sorrows.

“Then they crowded close together, to be as warm as they could, and Fair-shoulder tried to spread her wings over her brothers, to keep the storm from them. She tried to comfort them, and she told them again and again the story that she had heard from the people who stood by the lake to hear them sing, the story that the King had told, that, after many hundreds of years, strange men should come across the sea to Erin—men with shaven heads; that they should build houses and set up tables in the east ends of their houses, and that they should ring bells; and when the swans should hear the first sound of those bells they should have their human shape again, and then they should be happy forever.

“For three hundred years they were at Loch Derg, and then, by the power of their enchantment, they were compelled to leave it. They flew to the sea of Moyle, and there they stayed, through the summer’s heat and the winter’s cold, for three hundred years more. Still the sister told her brothers of the strange men who were to come to Erin and of the bells that were to free them. But they could not be comforted. The strange men were too long in coming.

“When the three hundred years were past they had to fly away again to another sea. As they flew, they passed over the spot where their father’s castle had stood and where they had been happy children together. Not a stone of the beautiful castle could they see. It had all crumbled down, and the grass had grown over it for many a year. They saw the fox that had its hole where their father’s bright hearth fire had been, and they saw the ditch of dirty water where their father used to welcome kings and bards and wise men at his gate. They kept their way through the air and saw no more; yet they had seen all that there was to see. It gave the poor swans only a little ache at the heart, for they were past hope now. They had suffered too much to believe anything or to think of anything but the suffering that was past and the more suffering that was to come.

“The end of their journey came and they swam in a new sea. Again the sister tried to cheer her brothers, but they could not be cheered. The strange men with the shaven heads would never come, they thought. They had waited for them too long.

“But the hundreds of years that had passed had done more than to bring sorrow to the poor swans. In lands far away a new faith had grown up, not like the Druids’ faith. And at last across the sea to Erin came the holy St. Patrick. He brought monks with him, and they had shaven heads. They went about the island and preached, and built chapels. In the east end of each chapel they set up an altar, and they said masses and rang bells. And they built a chapel on the island that has since been called the Isle of Glory.

“And so, one bright morning, Fair-shoulder and her brothers were swimming near the Isle of Glory, when, of a sudden, there came to them from the shore the sweet sound of a bell. Then Fair-shoulder called to her brothers, and they all swam to the shore. And as soon as they were on shore their form of swans was gone. Fair-shoulder was a beautiful young girl again, and the brothers were strong, beautiful boys. They walked up to the little chapel together, and there a monk baptized them.

“And as soon as they were baptized they were young and strong no longer. Fair-shoulder was an old, old woman, and her brothers were old, old men. They were so weak with the age of a thousand years that they fell upon the floor of the chapel. The monks took them up and cared for them for a few days, and then they died. And so the word of the Druid came to pass, that when the strange men should ring their bells the children of Lir should be swans no longer, and should be happy forever.”

They all waited for a few minutes, to be sure that there was no more of the story, and then John said: “Mother, it’s easy for you to be tellin’ us them tales, and they may be all throe enough, and I’m not sayin’ they’re not. But what good are they to us? The word of the Druid came throe, but how long was it in comin’ throe? A thousand years?”

“A thousand years or more,” said his mother; “but the stories can teach us to be patient, if they can do nothing else.”

“They may do that,” said John; “the blessed Lord He knows you’ve been patient, and He knows the rest of us have tried to be. But what does it all come to? We can’t wait a thousand years for the better times. Pether, here, is right. The States would be a better place for all of us. If we had the money I’d say that we ought to go

there.”

“It’s not the bad times alone that’s in it,” said Peter. “As I told you before, I could stand them. It’s the bother that we’re put to all the time. It’s that would make us go to the States this minute, if we had the chance. But I suppose your mother could never be leavin’ Ireland now, John; she’s gettin’ so old now, maybe she couldn’t stand the journey.”

“Have no fear about that,” John answered; “mother’s not so old as you’d make out, and she’s likely to live longer now than some others that’s here this minute.”

As he said this John felt Kitty’s hand suddenly holding his closer, and he knew that he ought not to have said it. “Don’t mind what I’m sayin’,” he said to her in a whisper; “I dunno what I’m talkin’ about, but I didn’t mean you at all, darlin’, nor anybody particular. It’ll all come right somehow, and we’ll soon see the roses back in your cheek, and the smile on your lips, and the light in your eyes. Don’t mind what I said.”

“But what’s the use talkin’ of it at all?” said Peter. “You’ve no money and we’ve less. We might as well be talkin’ of goin’ to the moon as to the States.”

The old woman did not seem to be paying any attention to what the others were saying, and now nobody at all said anything for a little while. Then Mrs. O’Brien began: “John and Kitty, I think sometimes it’s true I’m getting old and foolish. I don’t know what has made me talk the way I have to-night I’ve seen it coming—oh, I’ve seen it coming all along—yes, longer than any one of you has seen it—and I knew I couldn’t stand in the way. And yet to be leaving the old places—the old fields and hills and paths—the old streams and trees and rocks—the old places where your father and I walked and sat and talked so often together, where you were born and where he lies—I couldn’t bear to think of it. It’s old and weak and foolish I’m getting, and I couldn’t bear to think of it. And so I’ve tried to make you think of other things and to make you think that it would be better somehow, some time. Maybe I’ve said too much, and maybe I’ve kept you from going when you ought to have gone, but you’ll know that it was because I couldn’t bear to think of leaving all the dear places, and you’ll forgive me; John and Kitty, you’ll forgive me. I can say no more. If I couldn’t think of it, yet I must do it. It is right that we should go, and we will go.”

“And why should you be talkin’ that way, mother?” said John. “Was it what you said that kept us from goin’ to the States long ago? Sure, if you had said nothing at all, we hadn’t the money to go, and so what difference was it what you said?”

“Listen to me, John,” said his mother; “it was all through me that you didn’t leave this land of sorrow long ago. It was because it had been a land of joy as well to me that we all stayed here; and now, since you’re sure that it’s right and best for you to go, it’s not the want of money that shall stand in your way. It’s yourself knows, John, that your father—Heaven be his bed!—was always the careful and the saving man, and I always tried to help him the best I could. The times got a little better with us, as you know, after those worst ones in ’47 and ’48, and we saved a little again—it was not much, but it was something. Your father left it with me before he died, and he said: ‘Keep it always by you till you need it most. Don’t use it till the time comes when you can say, “I shall never need this money more than I need it now.”’ So I have always kept it, and I have it now. That was why I told you not to fear about the winter. It would have paid our rent if all else had failed, and it would have taken us all through the winter. But it’s better that it should take us to the States. If we stayed here and used the money, we’d be as bad off in another year. Kitty will be getting strong again there, and it’ll be better for all of us. The time that your father said has come; I’m sure we’ll never be needing the money that he left more than we’re needing it now. There’s no more to be said; we’ll go.”

For a little while no more was said. John and Kitty gazed at the old woman in wonder. The thing that they had thought about for so long, and wished for as a happiness that could never be, was come to them. And now it scarcely seemed a happiness; it was half a sorrow. Then Ellen spoke: “Oh, Mrs. O’Brien, it was always you was the good neighbor to us! It was always you was with us in joy and in sorrow! What’ll we ever do at all when you’re gone and we’re left here alone, with none to be so kind to us as you’ve always been?”

And Peter said: “I was thinkin’ that same. The Lord go wid you and keep you, wherever you go, but it’ll be the sad day for us when you go away.”

“Peter and Ellen,” said the old woman “how could you think that we’d do a thing like that? You may be a fool sometimes, Peter, but you’re your father’s son. Do you know what your father did for us, Peter? When my John was dying with the fever, he sat and watched with him, and brought him the water and the whey all night, and night after night, when I was so worn out that I could watch no longer. He might have taken the fever himself, and he might have died with it, and he did take it, but the Lord spared his life for a while after that, Heaven rest

his soul! And another thing that John said to me before he died was this: 'As long as you have a bit to eat or a drop to drink or a penny to buy, never let Tom Sullivan or any of his want more than you want yourself.'

"And so, Peter and Ellen, when we go to the States, you'll both go too. There's enough of the money to take us all there. If you're ever able to pay it back, you can do it, if you like; but if not, we'll never ask you for it. If we went away from here without you, my husband would look down from Heaven and see me doing what he told me, with his dying breath, never to do. He would come to me at night and he would say: 'Mary, you are deserting in their sorrow the children of them that never deserted us in our sorrow.' Do you think that I could bear that? Do you think that I would do that?"

Now I have told you all the talk that went on in the O'Briens' house that night. Perhaps you think that I have been a good while in doing it. If you will forgive me, I will try to get on with the story a little faster after this. Only one word more about this talk: you must not think that this was the first time that these five people had ever gone over and over this subject of America, or "the States," as they called it. They had talked of it many times, but Mrs. O'Brien had never given the word that they should go. The rest of them talked on and on of what they wished. But when she spoke, they all knew that she spoke of what was to be. They knew now that they should never talk of going again, but they should go.

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