

TWO SOULS

(From The Irish Rosary)

"Heart of Jaysus, have mercy on me poor boy," sobbed Mrs. Hinchin.

A pious reader may shrink at such a rendering of the greatest and sweetest of all names, but the truth must be told if the sky fall, and that is how Mrs. Hinchin said it as she sat in the guard room of Her Majesty's barracks at Cork, of which town the worthy woman was (saye in her calling) an unobtrusive citizen.

"Oh, wisha, Joe, Joe, what—
"Yerra, cheer up, mother, you'll be better before your twice married, replied Joseph, with a forced cheerfulness.

"If you only kem home last night, boy—" a fact to which Joe inwardly assented, and he could hardly stifle a groan when he saw how the rosy pictures of ease and enjoyment which the recruiting sergeant had drawn, for his tiny brain had up till then only materialized into a loss of his liberty and a splitting headache.

"An' sure if I could, make up the price of ye itself, but me little hand-ful of valja wouldn't make it in tin year!"

The "value" was Mrs. H.'s professional term for the basket of vegetables, her stock in trade, which lay outside near the barrack gate.

"Anyhow, Joe darlin', won't you promise me to mind yourself! Say Sweet Heart of Jaysus' every night before you goes to bed, won't you, Joe, alanna!"

"I will, mother," assented Joe, who was struggling between his inclination to cry and his shame of the grim smile on the face of the bronzed sergeant who was watching the scene, a little distance away.

"There, there now, mother—
"And won't you mind the drink, Joe, boy?" said the mother, beginning again with renewed courage like Abraham.

Joe hung his weary head.
"And look! take that badge of the Sacred Heart and carry it always, won't you now? Promise me! An' if you c—"

"Oh, my God, mother, lave us alone!" and with a violence that was half tenderness Joe jumped up and fairly shoved his poor mother out of the room and pulled the door to.

The handful of "valja" was just then occupying the humorous attention of one of the red-coated loungers about the barrack gate, who was exhibiting great amusement by inserting pebbles and stones into the wares of Mrs. H. and speculating, not too respectfully, on the possible owner.

"The said owner arrived drying his eyes in her apron the way poor women do to console her most tenderly, and the poor woman's grief prevented her from noticing the convulsive amusement of the other soldiers, till the solemn assurance that they would "assist him say his prayers every morning" aroused the dark suspicion in the worthy matron's mind that the fellow was only "humbugging" her.

With the gallant assistance of her husband she proceeded to "lift the heavy basket on her back, but the tremendous heave of the rascal behind landed the load nearly upon her shoulders and tumbled much of the pile over the owner's head. With a scornful compliment on his dexterity, Mrs. Hinchin was turning round when she suddenly collapsed, and to a short, sharp cry of "shun!" every man sprang up and stood like a statue. A sparsely built elderly man with white hair and in the uniform of a general was standing behind Mrs. H., noticing the plumes in his tricolor hat, bobbed as well as her head would allow her, and with a least hope for Joe rising in her mother's heart she said: "Twas the way me poor son 'list—"

"What corps does that man belong to, sergeant?" said the general (who commanded the district), not heeding the bowed head of Mrs. H., but fixing a look on her assistant which made that young man grow very serious.

"The 'O's, sir, here on escort duty," said the sergeant.

"Thank him till he leaves," was the prompt answer, and to her wonder the general man stopped, and, taking up the fallen vegetables, put them on the old woman's basket, while Private Hinchin marched into the guard-room to reflect with much profane verbal accomplishment on the unreasonableness of human life.

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yard Kipling. She felt better, however, when she had subsided heavily in her seat—"St. Attractive's Section," she was won't to tell one completely.

"The loving heart of Jesus seek In trouble and distress . . ."

sang the congregation when the Rosary was finished, and one poor heart at least welled its sorrow over into soothing fears. And all poor Mother Hinchin, though your addition to the devout chorus was not of the sweetest, nor (without being too blunt) following quite on the lines of the composer, though your hymnbook was held upside down and your pronunciation of the sacred name had the broad sound of the Munster Irish, yet your effort was not by any means the least pleasing to the Great Listener, Who knew the voice and read the heart of every one of the hundreds there. Perhaps, indeed, more of those tears that the Infinite Love in our tabernacles is thirsting for are wiped away by check aprons than by cambric handkerchiefs.

Her Joe, her only boy, was gone for a "sojer," and only God knew what would become of him.

Joseph's reflections on the situation were interrupted by the sudden entrance of linesman Finch, who, connecting the dejected Corkonian with his own unexpected confinement, proceeded to give him and all his relatives a distinguished place in the mud-geyser of adjectives with which he was overwhelming all representatives of law and order. Another time this would have led to the destruction of the guard-room furniture, but the scion of the house of Hinchin, after his first astonishment confined himself to a few terse objections to his assailant.

Little did either of the two men think to what results the inauspicious meeting was to lead.

So blindly do we move through our part in the world, we never know how the piece will end or when it will be comedy or tragedy? The clown we laugh at in the first act, while we strut as the hero, may show he bears a noble heart beneath the motley, and we may find our armor only paper tinsel ere the curtain has rung down. Only One knoweth the end.

II.

Six months' drill and a regimental tailor made a considerable improvement in the appearance of the new chum of the X's, and he was by no means below the average when he joined E Company of that distinguished body of warriors at Templemore. But ah! there are things to be learned in the army besides the intricacies of the latest form of drill, and that, too, by a young fellow who had passed no inconsiderable portion of his twenty-four years at the street corners of his beloved city. In truth, the statement in his mother's petition for his release which represented him as the "sole support of his mother" was a slight straining of the facts of the case, though its prompt (and, of course, regretful) rejection (in a long blue envelope) caused tearful indignation in the Hinchin household. Joe had unwittingly enlisted in an English regiment, which contained but a small number of Catholics, and these—English-born all of them—he found, from the extent of their religious knowledge, might be classed just as truly as Mohammedans. His hopes had risen when he heard of an O'Connor and a Leahy, but he fairly stood aghast when he found some time afterwards that both of them, who were "bred, born and reared" in the Seven Dials, didn't know in the least what Mass was about and had never even heard of the Blessed Virgin. However, as he hurriedly answered the faint remonstrances of his conscience, "when you're with pigs, you must grunt"—a new version of an old adage about Rome. He learned that, though the moral atmosphere of his native haunts was not always pellucid, it was a restraint to live amidst a Catholic population, he learned what a check on the broad down-grade had been the example and prayers of his poor, pious mother, and that as no one, apparently expected any good from a soldier, he might as well let his character go as easily as his few shillings weekly pay.

"Elo, Corkey," was the first salutation he got in the barrack quarters, and the speaker sat up on the bed where he had been stretched.

"Know 'im," he added to inquirers, "me and 'im's old chums, ain't we, Corkey?"

Joseph was christened on the spot. "Hinchin was me father's name," said Joe, slowly, as he stared at the speaker, who had risen and came over, offering his hand, "and they christened me Joe, so if you don't mind—"

The two men were a contrast as they stood facing each other in the strong light from the window. The smile had left the Irishman's blue eyes for once, and the deep line down between the eyebrows made the usually good-humored tanned face look a little formidable. When an Irishman of that kind grows quiet under pro-

location, you had better handle him gingerly. The other soldier looked older, and his dark eyes lit a face of sallow paleness—a keen dare-devil face, the strong bull-dog mouth that showed a broad line of white teeth in a hard smile amply atoning for any softness in the eyes.

"Don't you remember me, then?" And it was only when a mimicry of Joe's mother at the gate of Cork barracks had been given, so droll that the son had to smile, that he recognized his assailant of the first morning of his military life.

"Oh, is that you?"

"Yass, Private Albert Finch, of Her Majesty's X's."

Mr. Finch seemed to be in a very different mood that day. He was very affable, so cleverly affable that the new chum did not suspect anything as they subsequently, with two others proceeded on Joe's invitation to that Mecca of the thirsty Atkins—the canteen. To be "dacent" is bred in the bone of every Hibernian—a man one is sure to be a hybrid Joe soon came to see the position Bertie Finch had in the battalion. With intelligence to make him a "non-com," in a word, he remained a full private because he was too often full in an entirely different sense. He was known as the Warbler because he really was so in more than his name. He was one of the singers of the regiment. But few ventured on that familiarity unless the addressee were in a very sunny mood. There were times when a kind of savage moodiness came on the man, and we betide whoever put the spark in his volcanic temper. His tongue was a biting scourge. Had his victims any peculiarity, bodily or mental a savage caricature was painted of him, and if the subject were too stupid to be affected by withering ridicule, the fabled mind of the man like a quick-firing gun poured a hail of epithets that the fiend could hardly improve.

On Finch could afford this, for though not the most powerful man in the battalion, his skill when he put his hands, and the devil behind his hitting, had forced a toleration of his eccentric ways on the hottest tempers in the regiment. Give him a minstrel corps to coach for a song, and he had officers and men (to be at his whimsical absurdities. Next day probably he would walk alone, with the gloom of the damned shadowed in his dark eyes. Such fits had invariably one ending—drink. And then until the guard-room held him there was nothing he was not liable to do. Joe was generally exempt from attack, but one evening there was an exception, and the result was the appearance of both men next morning before the colonel.

Finch with a plastered gash where the heel of a heavy regimental boot had struck him. The cause of war had been the Cork man's sensitiveness about his country, and the result was his removal to the district military prison for a period of ninety days. It was an event in his life which it was not in human nature to appreciate, but it was in truth a check on the downward road and gave him in the loneliness of his cheerless cell time to look ahead and see the clear ending of the way. A few words from the prison chaplain—and he recovered the mood he used to know before his faith had been dimmed and his heart hardened by the goddess surroundings of his military life. Some months later when the Assistance landed her living cargo at Jubbeppore, amongst the draft going up to Jubbeppore to join the second battalion of the X's was Joe Hinchin. Finch was also there.

Far away an old mother's head was bowed, and toil-wrinkled hands clasped. "Heart of Jaysus have mercy on me poor Joe!"

Who answered her never a word.

III

"One of that new draft wants to see you, sir," said a hospital attendant at Jubbeppore, and the Jesuit Father K— came to a cot where two wildly staring eyes looked up at him, and he heard from the parched lips of a soldier muttering over and over again deliriously, "Heart of Jaysus, have mercy on me!"

IV

"Now, Joe, do you not honestly feel better and more a manly man?" said the same good Jesuit two months later as he met Joe, with the fever-pallor bronzed away, stepping across the barrack square.

"I do that, father, there's a ton load of me heart, and with the help of God I won't miss one till I have 'em finished," said Joe, and he looked away lest the steady eyes bent upon him should see the moisture that had rushed to his own.

"God bless you, Joe lad, and now let me see a stripe on that arm, soon, let me see a stripe on that arm, soon," and with a hearty slap on the shoulder the priest walked away. And it came to pass the steadiness of No. 1734 was the more marked by contrast with his previous conduct, and one day as he stepped along by the quarters of his company the appearance of a number of grinning faces in response to an excited cry of "God's sake, lads, look at Corkey," made him blush scarlet. Later in the day Bert Finch made his voice heard in an address of congratulation to a circle of shouting Atkins, but "Is Roy's 'ighness' back of Blackpool, Commander-in-Chief of the old bloom-in' British army," said nothing, and in a day or two the soldier boys grew accustomed to the new power of Lance-Corporal Hinchin. The canteen

knew him no more, but the struggle he often had to make to keep from it came less from the animal desire for drink than it did for the craving for something to "rise the cockles of the heart" when the daily fight with his temper made him despondent. The mock gravity his chief tormentor assumed whenever the new stripe showed itself amongst the leisure trivialities of the men always brought the thunder flush upon poor Joe's face, and the strained jaw muscle and quivering hands showed what was passing within. Still it would pass, and the pallor that followed wrought such an effect on the men that all gave a few of the older and more hardened spirits treated Corkey with no small deference when the second stripe came soon, and the lieutenant mentally marked Corporal Hinchin as the best soldier in his company. He was still a good fellow with the privates, and as the Warbler marked the decreasing popularity that his gibing enjoyed, his bitterness only increased and the gap between the two former sportsmen became wider.

"What sort of a fellow is that new corporal, Vereker?" said Captain B. to Joe's lieutenant, crossing to their quarters together from mess one evening.

"Why?" queried the other, though he could have given a straight answer.

"Why, I came on 'im yesterday back there by the east gate; affiding up and-down and swearing to himself like a—"

"Swearing, was he?" said Lieutenant Vereker.

"Yes, in a mad, excited kind of way, sounded like swearing anyway, and groaning to himself I don't think the fellow is all right and should advise you to see what is wrong with him."

"I think Father K— knows," was the answer. "Good-night, Bronson."

X

Jubbeppore barrack was in a bustle. Stormy cheering was in the air. The latest loafer in the battalion took a new interest in life, for news had come suddenly that there was big trouble on the frontier and the X's were ordered north.

"You don't seem very elated, Joe," said Father K— at the railway station, noticing the contrast between the subdued demeanor of the young Irish corporal and the rollicking high spirits of the men about him.

"What's the matter with you, lad?" "Well, you know, father," said the young soldier, and troubled eyes looked far away westward, "I had eight of the nine done, and I had my heart set on finishing 'em I see the good they done me, father, and God knows I done me best to keep 'em up in spite of the div—the temptations—and now I dunno what to do."

"Oh, I see—I remember," said the priest, and a softened look came into the eyes fastened on the reddening face of the young man. "Well, Joe, my lad, God is good, and even yet there may be a chance."

"I hope so, father."

They parted, to meet again under curious circumstances. A wild rumor ran from corps to corps that an Irish regiment at the front were being ordered back in disgrace for mutinous cowardice, and the wrath and bitter scorn that found vent in broad Scotch and jerky Cockney made martyrdom for every Hibernian who had to hear it. But a corporal in the X's had done something as a countervail to cheer him. Father K— had come to the camp that morning, and now, after his confession, God seemed to have lifted the cloud, and the Nine Fridays would be completed. Joe Hinchin had a lightened heart. He felt sure that the infamous report about the Irish regiment was not true and that the talk, however hard to bear, would pass in a few days.

"Yass," he heard a voice saying that same evening as he passed a group of men off duty, "I'd shoot the 'ole damned sons of cabbage-women! The earth and sky swain around the Irishman. He was conscious only of a wild, mad leap that hurled the nearest men out of his way, of a savage fury that screamed through clenched teeth; a roaring like thunder was in the ears and fire in his brain. Blows fell on his face, but he felt them only as a rock feels the pattering of rain. To grip the throat of the man heaving against him and dash his head against the ground, to choke and strangle with a bulldog hold till the foul tongue would blacken in the lying mouth was the one desire. Shouting and panting, they tore the two wild animals asunder and clung to them while the priest sergeant and his men came running up.

"What in all this!" shouted Lieutenant Vereker, hurrying down from the officers' quarters.

"Private Finch and Corporal Hinchin, sir, have had a fight."

"I am very sorry for this, Hinchin," said the officer later, as Joe sat handcuffed in a tent. "Very sorry! What made you touch yourself?"

"Oh, my good God, have mercy on me," said the sobs within the tent. "Oh, Christ, my Christ! after all me strivin', and God so good to me, and poor ould mother—"

Next day, haggard and white, with livid bruises and swollen lips, Corporal Hinchin heard his degradation from the colonel in silence. His hard-won stripes were gone. He was a private again and a black mark to his name. Day followed day in leader routine of duty when once again he was at work. The rude sympathy extended to him he avoided, because he dreaded any more unmanly exhibition of weakness, and his dull heart was only mastered by a rigid silence. Comfort came in a visit from the same good Jesuit who had cheered him before—strong, earnest words of cheer that made the gloomy eyes brighten a little. "You're late, Father, for the wan thing I'm on 'sintry go to-night at twelve, an' we'll advance at daybreak. However, I'm aisy in me mind now."

"Stay—the priest was thinking, evidently, and Joe wondered a little what was coming. Then the Jesuit whispered something to him that made the soldier stare full-eyed in astonishment.

"Is it in almost you are, father?" "Yes, Joe. The love of God takes Him to strange places, and you don't know what may happen."

The soldier's breath came quickly, and he could only whisper hoarsely, "All right, sir," but the clasp of his rough hand told what he felt.

"I shall be able to come up from the Field Hospital in an hour; after I'm done there, and, remember, don't shoot me, Joe," he added, lightly, over his shoulder as he strode off.

VI

To and fro in the faint starlight paced the sentinel, now leaning on his rifle and peering about him in the black, shadowy masses of the hills, now letting his eyes go up from their gloomy sky line to the jeweled depths of the heavens, all carpeted with stars. Back his mind traveled over the great wild spaces where the waves were marching in their rough, heaving lines. Familiar faces rose up before him, he saw the excited crowd following the bowling match and heard the old, familiar sound of the solemn Shandon bells. And then he remembered what he was expecting, and he began to pray with a long-drawn sigh he turned again upon his beat, when a slight noise, apparently a short distance away, made him spring around with his rifle at the ready.

"Who goes there?" he said, in a strong undertone, and he listened with beating heart. The answer would surely have puzzled any other sentinel in the whole British army.

"Sacred Heart," he heard out of the darkness, and he stood at ease while a dark figure advanced towards him.

"Now, Joe, kneel down quickly," whispered the visitor, "and tell the good God, our Lord and Master, that for His sake you forgive all men as you hope to be forgiven." Silent and trembling the sentry knelt, still holding the rifle erect, with its steel blade showing in the faint light. A few hurried, solemn words and the great gift was given. The soldier was erect again, but tears were raining down his face.

"God bless and guard you now, boy! Challenge me aloud, Joe, for I must get on to rest." Challenge and answer broke the silence loudly, and Father K— passed, leaving the tonsentry pacing to and fro with bowed head and with beating heart that strove to keep its tumult of feelings quiet. Joe's Nine Fridays were finished. The ear of Infinite Love was listening again to a soldier's words, "Lord, I am not worthy," and the simple litany of his untutored heart, "Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me."

VII

Quickly the first glimmer of light had spread across the sky. Quickly the stars had faded out, and out on the front Lieutenant Vereker with some twenty men of Company E were marching cautiously. Behind them the mountain pass through which they had come showed a deep dip of blue sky between the frowning hills and a long, widening valley opened in front. On a rough hillock strewn with great boulders from the heights above and covered with a growth of scattered

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scrub they halted to survey the ground beyond.

"We shall take to the hillside, men, where it slopes more easily there, half a mile ahead," said the officer, with his glasses fixed on the hills, and move carefully, I don't like the quietness of that pass behind." Onward they moved again in wide open order, watching their sky line with hand-shaded eyes.

"It's like the kingdom of heaven," chuckled one of the men to his nearest mate. "There ain't a damned soul in the pl—"

The gibe was unfinished. A sheet of flame burst from a small water course running slant-wise down the slope above them, and a babel of wild yells rent the air as a horde of Afghans seemed to rise out of the rough hillside hissing through the long grass came the leaden shower.

"Back men! back as you can! and rally on the rise behind," shouted the lieutenant, but the men were already flying stumbling falling and crouching as they ran. They saw the quiet hillside alive with the wild leaping tribesmen and the air rent with yells and the sharp crack of rifles. Panting, they flung themselves under the shelter of the great stones upon too little ridge and began a steady fire which quickly checked the ardor of the tribesmen. Their outcry ceased as suddenly as it had arisen, and when the white trailing clouds of smoke had blown away there was a little in the valley to indicate that man was thirsting for the blood of his brother there. One by one the men lying under the shelter of the rocks answered to their names, but no answer came to the name of Finch.

"Did any one see Finch fall?" whispered the lieutenant, whose own brown khaki uniform showed ugly dark stains.

There were several men rather badly wounded, and one of them declared that he had been near the unlucky Warbler at the time of the surprise and had seen him go down, but had thought that he was only seeking cover, "the kind of sunk on 'is knees, sir."

"Too bad," muttered the officer. "The poor fellow is lying out there somewhere, crippled most likely." He swept the hill with his glasses again.

"Would any of you men volunteer to have a look for him?" he asked, hesitatingly, and flushing red. "I'd go willingly, but you know, men, my post is here."

"I'll do it, sir," said a hoarse, strained voice from the outermost boulder.

"Who is that?" sharply asked Mr. Vereker.

"Me, sir—Private Hinchin," and he crawled down to where the officer knelt. Joe's face was as white as the snow that rose on the distant blue horizon, and his jaws were firmly set.

"You!" The officer looked a frowning inquiry into the glittering eyes of the Irish boy. "You!" he said, with a meaning emphasis on the word while the scattered group forgot to scan the hillside and stared their wonder at the ex-corporal.

"Yes, sir, me—in God's name."

The look on the face of the officer changed, and silently he reached out his slender hand to the waiting fingers of the private.

"Take this, Hinchin, and leave your rifle, 'twill be tander," giving Joe his revolver. But the men held their breath and looked their doubts into each other's eyes as Joe crawled down the slope and disappeared into the scrub brush. Closing in together the little band, by cautiously rolling some of the smaller stones in between three or four of the larger boulders, formed a rough but effective breastwork, and lying flat under the shelter, with rifle barrels between the crannies, they waited with strained ears for some sound of the coming math column.

From bush to bush crawled Joe, creeping in the long sun-dried grass. Here and there fresh red drops caught his eye, and as he stopped again to peer at the rough mountain side to his left he could feel the heavy workings of his heart against the ground. Every nerve was tense, every sense strained to quivering as he marked the ravine from which the ambushed fusillade had come close ahead, and he knew he must be somewhere close to the object of his search.

"Finch," he whispered, as loudly as he dared. But no answer came. Flat on his face he crawled a little more and ventured to whistle softly one of the regimental calls. An interval of desponding silence, and then he started as a little ahead he heard a low moan as of some one in pain. A few yards of hurried wriggling brought him in sight of the prostrate Warbler—not dead, but evidently badly wounded. Half supported by a large stone beneath his shoulders, the upturned palms and the rifle fallen uselessly by his side, told of the man's

helplessness.

"Finch, old man!" as he lifted the fallen head on his arm, "listen—"

"The lads dragged slowly up and the dark eyes looked feeble inquiry for a breath. Then intelligence flashed them open distended, and while the face quivered with pain, the hard mouth clenched and the hand the hand at the off side groped for the fallen rifle.

"No, no, Bert, pull yourself together or let me get you back to the lads." The fierce defiant face relaxed and the weary head sunk on Joe's arm.

"Did you c—come b—back to save me?" gasped the wounded man.

"Yes, yes, now where are you hurt? Can you stand?" The Warbler shook his head.

"Legs—dead—Joe, bleedin'—some where."

Joe could see no bullet mark, but the oozing blood showed that he was wounded in the back, and the legs lay limp and nerveless.

"No use—a'm gone. Listen! I want to die a Catholic, Joe—should a been Catholic always."

"Cheer up, Bert, cheer up, you're not half kilt. Wait till we gets back."

"Now, Joe listen I want—"

Perplexity ridged the forehead of the Irishman, what was he to do in such a case? How could he help the poor fellow to "turn" out there in the wilds? A brilliant idea struck him.

"Do ye really want to 'turn,' Bert?" he asked, vaguely. The heavy head moved assent. "Say, 'Heart of Jaysus, have mercy on me.' Say it!" said Joe, breathing fast with excitement. The other repeated the aspiration in his English accent. What else was he to do? Joe racked his brain in desperation, and turning his grimy face up skyward he repeated the ejaculation himself fervently.

"Listen, Bert," and he laid the wounded man's head against the rock and, kneeling beside him, took the hand that had battered his face a little while back. "Listen, listen! Say, 'I believe in God and the Blessed Virgin, an'—an'—'" Joe groaned with trouble and anxiety. Scarcely above his breath the other followed, but his quicker intelligence supplied what Joe wanted.

"I believe all you believe, Joe."

"Yes, yes, that's it," eagerly broke in Joe.

"I believe all that Catholics believe, and the eyelids dropped down and from the white lips for a while the hard breathing of pain was the only sound. Then the poor fellow tried to say after Joe. "My God, I am sorry for all my sins. Jesus, have mercy on me."

The dropping fire on the ridge behind had ceased. With a blood-stained hand Finch reached out for something.

"Joe," he whispered again, "gimme what you wear round your neck."

"Is it me scaffers?" He pulled open his tunic, hastily. It was a great idea—why didn't he think of that himself? Around the neck of the strange convert went the scapulars, and taking out the Sacred Heart badge from where it was pinned to his shirt he kissed it reverently and put it inside the breast of his comrade's coat.

The hand jerked hastily away, and for a moment all was quiet.

"Joe, Joe," moaned the prostrate man, "get off—my—legs, you're 'urtin' me, Joe!"

VIII