

The Luck of the Nugents

Written for W.H.M. by W. R. Gilbert.

It had been a parching summer, quite unlike anything within the memory of the oldest man or woman. For Ireland, it had been very hot indeed, and the people had gone about wiping their faces and sighing for the good old days when it rained from Lady Day in spring to Lady Day in harvest, when the potatoes were washed out of the ground, and the oats beaten flat to the earth, grew musty and never filled, and the green grass lay in long swathes and refused to ripen.

It was something so unexpected as to seem unnatural and uncanny. "We'll be havin' the terrible winter for this" they said, and shook their heads over the golden abundance of the harvest and the great ricks of hay and the potatoes that were as dry as flour,—when other years they had been green and spotted. "Sure, a good harvest for every man," they said, "is as bad as a bad harvest. There'll be no prices goin' for anything at all, at all, sure, there won't."

Eily Carew was as unreasonable as any of them. She thought it the loneliest summer she had ever known. She missed the sound of the waterfall in the glen below the Eagle's Nest.

The silence seemed grave-like to Eily Carew, in the Eagle's Nest, where everyone was old, except herself and Norah Molloy, who had been her foster sister and was now her maid. And since Norah spoke habitually in a soft little whisper, and glided about like a mouse, she did not add much to the liveliness, to say nothing of the fact that Norah's eyes had a way of filling with tears whenever they met her foster-sister's, and then each would sigh and turn away from the other.

The beautiful summer had succeeded the saddest winter, for the Captain, as he was known to all the countryside, otherwise Captain Terrence Nugent, of the Royal Irish, had gone out to the war, and the wedding was indefinitely postponed. Eily had longed to be married before Terrence went. She had thought that no one, not even Terrence himself, could know what a comfort it would have been to her if only she could have borne his name. But Sir Jocelyn, Eily's grandfather, would not have listened to such a thing. He had been against the engagement, not that he was not fond of Terrence Nugent at the time, but that he thought Eily ought not to be bound so young to a man, whose only fortune was his sword, and who had to let his whole mansion, Castle Clody, to rich Americans for an indefinite period.

The rich Americans, a Mr. and Mrs. Wells, their son, Hiram, and their daughter Phoebe, had called at the Eagle's Nest. It was an attention Sir Jocelyn had supposed as much from the way he had come out of his dreams to receive the visitors in his most charming fashion.

The American young woman was very pretty and exquisitely dressed. She talked a good deal of Captain Nugent, and his perfectly immortal old house. While she chattered, restless as a moth, the old man's unworried eyes watched her with thoughtful expression.

Why shouldn't Terrence marry her and let Eily alone? Why should they all go on being miserably poor? Eily was only a baby. She needn't think of marriage this many a year.

Despite his odd, unexpected prudence, and his grandfatherly jealousy, Sir Jocelyn had to acknowledge that Captain Terrence was a bonny lad. Golden-haired, grey-eyed, six-foot-two in his stockings, gallant, daring, a splendid horseman, a kind neighbor, it was no wonder he was the people's hero. When he rode at the races even the women clubbed their pennies together "to put a bit on the Captain's horse," and when Finn-ma-Coul fell at the double ditch at Punchestown, breaking his knees and nearly his owner's heart, there were a good many humble pennies lost as well as the Captain's last chance of retrieving his fortunes.

Captain Terrence had had no eye apparently for Miss Phoebe Wells. If Sir Jocelyn could have entertained such an idea he might have noticed that the heir of the Wells's millions, a well-groomed young man with somewhat Indian features and the young American's air of having

always been grown up and old, lost something of his blase air when his eyes fell on Eily.

But Sir Jocelyn would never have thought of such a thing. While Castle Clody was occupied Eily kept to her own grounds. The Wells family would have been very glad to be friendly with the old baronet and his grandchild, but Eily, although a friendly creature by nature, shrank from the incessant rush and hurry in which the Americans lived; although she liked Miss Wells ever since the day when the American girl had surprised her in the hazel glen where she and Terrence had parted, and coming upon her suddenly, had given her a warm hug, exclaiming: "You poor little thing. I think it's downright too sad for this world."

Eily was often in the hazel glen. Sometimes when she had sat there quite a long time, Norah, her maid, would come to look for her. She would know of Norah's coming by the softly-breathed sigh which seemed just the echo of her own. For Norah's lover, too, was at the war. He was the Captain's soldier servant, Patrick, and he was own foster-brother to the Captain, and as devoted to him as Norah to her foster-sister.

Time hung heavy on Eily Carew's hands that dry summer. There was a restlessness upon her.

She would snatch a hasty look at the war news before taking the papers to her grandfather, always dreading to look, always with the same passionate relief when the beloved name was not in the list of casualties. And then the vigil of the hours began again, with the hope and the terror till another morning gave her short respite.

She envied now the thin stream that trickled over the stones and went down to Castle Clody. She often longed for the comfort of going there among Terrence's familiar things. She remembered his den, with the litter about it of pipes and hunting crops and spurs and silver cups and letters, and the pervading smell of tobacco over it all. When she had last seen it in company a pair of dogskin gloves had lain upon the table. She remembered the pictures of the racehorses on the walls, between the swords and pistols. It would have been almost like seeing him to have gone into the dear, untidy room once more.

She smiled to herself, remembering the St. Patrick in tent-stitch which had hung above the chimney piece. The beaded eyes had alarmed Mrs. Wells when she paid her first visit to Castle Clody, and she had assented eagerly to the suggestion that Captain Nugent's own modest suite of two rooms should be locked up while the house was let. "I shall feel safer," she said in her usual drawl, "if that very weird old gentleman is kept under lock and key. He might take to straying round the house after dark."

Under the St. Patrick had stood a tiny cup of crystal, a little gem of workmanship somewhat out of keeping with the plain contentment of the room. Captain Nugent liked to tell his visitors about it. It was a model of the Cup of Clody, which had been lost some time in the Elizabethan wars. With the cup the luck of the Nugents had disappeared. Ever since then they had been poor. Many people thought that they had had the greatest of luck in not going under like many another great family in those days. They had managed to keep Castle Clody during the centuries, even when the last Nugent fought among the mercenaries of France, and no one supposed he would come back to marry a wife and rear a son.

Sitting on the seat above the waterfall with her eyes closed, Eily Carew could see the dear familiar room as though she were in it. She remembered lifting the little cup, and looking into its depths with a kind of awe. The original Cup of Clody was supposed to have been an ancient communion cup, which had belonged to one of the old Irish Monasteries. It had been given to a Nugent who had saved the Monastery from pillage and the monks from death at the hands of Norsemen. It was made of pure gold, and a piece of unflawed crystal, which had been shaped to form the cup. The little model remained to show what the cup had been, the cup which legend said St. Patrick had drank from.

Eily must have fallen asleep in the sultry day. She awoke with a start, and realised that she has been dreaming of St. Patrick, and the Cup of Clody. And there was Norah coming towards her, holding a letter between her fingers—a letter from Terrence.

It was a long one and Eily ran through it eagerly. Presently she would read and re-read it. It would keep her alive till the next letter came. Something for her heart to feed on. He had been in one or two brushes with the enemy, but had escaped with only a scratch or two.

"I think I must still have some of the luck," he wrote, "and apropos of the luck, I had a mad dream the other night, I dreamt that St. Patrick stood in my tent door, the white moonlight in his face. It did not surprise me at all that he should be exactly as in the old picture, stitches, beads and all. He said to me: 'Search in the Clody under the middle arch of the bridge.' 'It is very deep, St. Patrick,' said I, 'and full of nasty deep places.' 'Search!' he said, looking tremendously stern. 'But for what?' I asked, while I quaked. 'For the Luck, to be sure,' he said. And then I woke. But so vivid had the dream been that I could hardly believe the old fellow with his mitre and crozier had not stood there."

"It would be a queer thing," said Eily to herself, "if the Luck had really disappeared in the river. And yet, why not? Wasn't it the most likely place to fling anything they did not want people to take from them? It would be safe enough in those deep waters. No one would have thought of going treasure hunting in the deep water under the Castle bridge."

She thought for a long time, with her chin in her hand. Yet, who knew but what the dry summer might have included in its gifts to this ungrateful corner of the world the restoration of the Luck of the Nugents? To be sure there was only one Nugent at present; but—the rose crept into Eily's pale cheek—There might be others; herself and—God was good. Who could say what beautiful gifts he might be sending—He and St. Patrick. St. Patrick had always been held in special honor by the Nugents.

"I daresay it's all nonsense, Norah," she said. "You see it was only a dream of the Captain's. It isn't likely anything could lie there all these years without being discovered."

"Whist, Miss Eily," said Norah, with a shocked air, "Sure it isn't doubting the blessed St. Patrick you'd be?"

The two girls stole out of the Eagle's Nest at dawn the next morning, without disturbing the old people.

When they reached the Castle bridge the meadows were under a rosy and golden mist. The windows of the Castle shone like so many windows into heaven. Eily glanced up at them fearfully, as she stood with her skirts above her knees by the few feet of water that still flowed under the middle archway of the bridge. But the windows were all empty, except of light. The lazy servants would not be about for hours yet.

All round them the water weeds that had hidden the trout in their deep holes lay rotting in the mud. The holes revealed themselves, very little formidable that they were empty of deep water. To make sure Eily had a rope fastened about her waist. Her foster sister held the end of it on dry land. But she was not very much afraid, except of slippery and crawling things in the oozy slime.

After all, the precaution of the rope justified itself, for Eily, paddling about in the shallow water, stumbled on a hole and went down with a terrifying suddenness. Norah hauled at the rope and pulled her back to dry land, the green water and weeds drowning her face and hair.

She would have been a sight for the pampered retainers of the Wells family to see. Choking, gasping, gurgling, while Norah tried vainly to wring the wet out of her hair and her garments.

"But I've got it; I've got it," Eily cried. She had been clutching something tightly to her breast. It was so wrapped about with mud and water weeds that Norah had not distinguished it from the stuff with which her mistress was plastered from head to foot.

"Look at it, Norah; it's the Luck," she said, holding it for inspection.

It was indeed the Luck—very little the worse for its centuries of immersion. And where the Luck had lain there lay other things. Sir Jocelyn came out of his dreams in amazing fashion after his



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granddaughter had surprised him, coming in on him at his early morning studies, a shocking sight to see, but with the Luck clasped to her bosom. She had ran uphill all the way from Castle Clody; but Norah stood in the background, looking as radiant as though Patrick Mullaly were safe at home. And behind them pressed the old servants, their faces full of delighted wonder.

Sir Jocelyn himself supervised the digging out of the river bed. [Where the Luck had lain, far below the accumulation of sand and weeds, the river had gathered during three hundred years, there were cups and dishes of silver and gold, jewels, gold pieces—enough to clear Castle Clody of its mortgages and set the Nugents on their feet again; perhaps not quite so much as might have fallen to Captain Nugent's share if he had the good sense to marry Miss Phoebe Wells; but enough.

And to be sure, he said, when safe and sound from the war he clasped his sweetheart in his arms, they had the Luck. The Luck became proverbial in later years. There was hardly anything Terrence Nugent put his hand to or set his heart on in which he did not succeed. He had the Luck which had been lost to his forefathers.

"And it's all due to St. Patrick," he said.