

AN ALTERED CIRCUMSTANCE

By THE BARONESS VON HUTTEN

POLICEMAN GRADY sighed with satisfaction as he left the roar of the great thoroughfare and turned into the sleepy stillness of the shabby street. Outside a little bird-shop a goldfinch whistled in his cage. Just beyond, a small servant girl with a brilliant green can was sprinkling the dusty sidewalk in an elaborate pattern.

A coster passed with a barrow of purple and yellow flowers. The voice of the coster was not sweet, but the old woman sitting knitting in the striped shadow of the bird cages looked up and smiled at him.

It was spring.

Policeman Grady bought a nosegay, and the little girl watched enviously, swinging the empty water-can on her thin arm.

Beyond, in the sleepy old square the trees were breaking out into a soft, foam-coloured mist.

A butcher's boy passed, basket on head, whistling shrilly.

A horse chestnut tree gleamed redly in the straw-coloured sunlight. The sky was blue, flecked with ragged little scraps of cloud.

Policeman Grady whistled under his breath, and rubbed his nose softly with the bunch of violets.

He left the street, and came into the square. Some nurse-maids and children were lounging in the sun, an old man wrapped in a grey shawl sat reading a newspaper in a wheelchair, while his servant talked to the nurse-maids.

Grady sighed contentedly, and relaxed his military carriage into a comfortable slouch.

"This is nice, this is," he thought, "and by jabbers, if that isn't a robin!"

A shabbily dressed woman was coming towards him from the other side of the square. He noticed that she had a bunch of flowers in her hand.

She was the only person in sight, barring the old gentleman and the nurses and children.

Suddenly there was a sharp cry, the shabby woman fell to the ground, and was instantly surrounded by a crowd. The never missing street crowd.

"Good heavens, John, it is a fit," cried the old gentleman. The servant left his master, and rushed to the close circle of people.

"Give 'er some air!" "Lor, she's foaming at the mouth!" "See 'er eyes!" "Oh, Lor!" "Look out, 'ere's the p'l'ceman!"

Grady pushed his way through the crowd. The woman was rolling on the ground, gasping horribly; drops of froth hung from her chin.

Her bonnet was pushed far back on her blazing red hair, her hands jerked convulsively at her collar.

"Keep back, keep back!" ordered the policeman gruffly. It was all he could do.

In a few seconds the paroxysm was over. The woman struggled to a sitting posture. "I—excuse me," she said, painfully. "I can't tell when they're a-comin' on. Oh, Lord, I'm so sleepy."

"If she's sleepy, John," cried the old man, who had wheeled himself near with the great strength of curiosity, "it's epilepsy."

The people near him turned round. "Can't sleep here, old cove," suggested a small boy with a black eye.

"Better go 'ome and sleep it off." Grady stared impatiently at the sky.

This was no case for him.

The woman struggled to her feet, buttoning her collar with trembling fingers. "Ain't got no 'ome," she said. "Don't I look like I lived in Grosvenor Square?" She wiped the foam from her lips with the back of her hand, and laughed unevenly.

The old gentleman took a coin from his pocket. "Here, John, give her this, poor soul."

The woman took the money gratefully, and moved slowly away.

"It's a shame, it is," exclaimed a woman with a baby in her arms. "I'll give her a sixpence myself." A telegraph boy took off his cap and handed it around.

Grady watched as the woman crept off down the street. "Thank Heaven it wasn't a drunk and disorderly," he thought.

AFTER a few minutes Grady left the deserted square; the crowd had disappeared as quickly as it had come. On the corner a hurdy-gurdy was grinding out the waltz from La Boheme, while a small monkey danced solemnly, a heart broken grin on its grotesque little countenance.

"Dalla, Balla, Vittoria!" said the Italian, jerking the string. The policeman nodded to the man as he passed. A girl was singing scales high up in a house in the middle of the next block. A bridal party passed next, the bride leaning well forward that she might be seen.

Grady was thinking of a woman he had known years ago—in Ireland.

The red hair of the woman in the square had brought her back to him vividly.

"She'd be about her age now," he said to himself. "Poor little Katie." Then he thought of his wife and his two grown children with a sort of dreary satisfaction. The spring feeling is like the sap in a tree, it is irrepressible. And the man was half sad, and half happy. Autumn is the time for a perfect content with creature comfort. The air and the smells of spring are at best bitter-sweet. He had in his hand two little knots of flowers; the violets he had bought, and the yellow spring things the poor woman had carried. When she had gone he had found them crushed in the gravel and picked them up.

A clock banged. Grady looked at his watch. Half-past eleven. At noon he was due at his "headquarters."

He turned into a busy street with a sigh.

Suddenly he noticed a little crowd across the way.

"Here, Cop! Woman 'avin' a fit!"

Grady shoved his way through the cluster of people, nearly falling in the slippery mud.

"See 'er tongue!" "Ain't it horrid?" "Tis too hepilepsy! My mother-in-law has 'em, an' I ought to know."

Grady pushed the speakers away roughly.

"Come, come, give her some air, cawn't you? Mother o'God, it's the same woman!"

This ejaculation had a strange effect on the sufferer. She stopped rolling her eyes, and looked up anxiously for a second.

"Come, you get up and come along with me," went on Grady, sternly. "It's a fake," he added to the audience. "She was at it an hour ago in X-square."

"Lor!" "Clever, wasn't it?" "But the foam?"

"Soap!" answered the patient with a sudden laugh. She ran out her tongue. On it rested a bit of yellowish white stuff.

"Give me a sixpence, some of yer! The game was worth it, wasn't it?" She rose and began to rub the mud off her clothes. "There ain't another soul in town that can do it. I'm Epilepsy Kitty!"

"Well, Epilepsy Kitty, you come along with me," put in Grady. "The British Government will have a little account to settle with you!"

The woman followed him willingly enough, and when they were at a little distance from the scene of the comedy, she looked up at him, a smile in her frosty blue eyes. "Well, Danny Grady," she said, "it's many a long day since we parted!"

"Then it's Katie Rourke, you are?"

"No other."

He laughed. "It's unpleasant work arresting old friends, Katie—could you just cut away now?"

She laughed too. She had a pleasant, gurgling laugh. "Deed and I could, Danny dear. But first—I'd like to see you sometime, and talk over old times with you—"

"Healy's Hotel at six," he said, then suddenly and sternly, "Move on there now! Be off!"

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