

## The Magpie Fountain.

Midwinter—and yet all that morning I had been thinking of spring. Are there not days of snow when without reason spring is one's thought? To explain this I have a theory that year-long spring is the secret spirit of all things; and that she walks masked, now as ripe summer, now as yellow autumn, and now, when the fancy seizes her, as white winter. But all the time the happiest hearts understand the jest and know that whatever she may wear—wreaths of corn or grapes or snow—yet spring is never absent from the world.

I am wont to call this secret presence the Little Spring, and all that morning, though the snow blew and piled about my casement, I had known that the Little Spring was in the air.

Then Peleas came in, and the winter sun touched his white hair as it touched mine, for we are both 70 and everybody believes that we belong to the Winter people, the people whose hair is white and whose steps are slow. But we laugh at this because we know that we harbor spring in our hearts.

"Ettare," said Peleas, "Nicola has a friend who is ill in the hospital. She has gone to see her, and she has got in her place for to-day the most pathetic little woman. She is down there in the kitchen now making a salad. Her eyes look as if they had seen nothing but the things they did not want to see."

"Then her salads will be good," I said. "Haven't you often noticed how the disappointments of life come out in appetizing dishes or exquisite needlework or beautiful dispositions?"

"Ah, yes," said Peleas, "but their eyes never look any less sad. Isn't it curious that excellent salads and kind deeds leave the eyes sad—as if they wanted something more? I wish we could cheer her up. Her name is Mary."

Presently I went down to the kitchen. It was strange to see in her place this quiet woman with the young face and the sad eyes and the gown of heliotrope gingham.

"Mary," I said, "what fresh, crisp lettuce! I am glad to know that the world smelled of spring this morning."

"Spring, ma'am," said Mary, as if she hardly knew what the word meant.

"Yes—spring," I said, "March, April, May. Surely, in spite of the snow, you have not forgotten?"

Mary smiled faintly, and sighed but the smile was a sigh after all.

I understood her silence. I protest I think that no one could properly answer that question, thinking only of spring.

"Ah," said I, "Mary—if it were spring at this moment I suppose that you and I would be with one whom we like best to be with."

"Ma'am," said Mary, "Yes'm."

I had only to look in her eyes, swiftly lifted, to know that in her heart some wish was hidden of which that swift look was the spirit.

Whom did Mary like best to be with? I wondered. I moved about the spotless kitchen about.

"For myself," said I, "spring or winter, I would wish the same thing. Mary, let us both wish that to be near some one very, very dear. And if, as I suspect, spring is somewhere about, I think we shall have our wishes."

"Oh, ma'am," said Mary. "Yes'm." But the sadness of Mary's eyes was like the outer winter itself.

"Ah, well," said I as I left her, "this I am persuaded is a very special day. And I know that spring is somewhere about listening."

I went back upstairs, smiling at the pleasant mystification in Mary's face. And I protest that as I passed through the corridor, I smelled the sweetness of flowering currants and of Forsythia.

In the upper hallway Peleas stood with a workman.

"Ettare," said Peleas, with that adorable helplessness which the most charming men always assume in the presence of the processes of domesticity, "this man says something about water-pipes."

"Ah," said I, "to be sure. The water-pipes in the attic. Have you forgotten the school play?"

"I had," Peleas confessed, "I had. So many good things have happened this last week that only a magician could remember them. This will be the man to make the fountain that Lisa wanted."

"This will be the man," I assented, "and let us go up to the attic at once."

The man—a great earnest giant in blue clothes and soft felt hat, followed Peleas and me to the attic, that place of deep windows and mysterious trunks which has never lost its fascination for me. Here Lisa and some of her butterfly friends had begged leave to come on a holiday, and pursue a most astonishing course to which Peleas and I had assented only after proper hesitation. They wished to give here a kind of play, something which seems of late years to be a necessary part of education; and they had selected our attic for the simple reason that the heroine of the piece lived in an attic chamber, all cobwebs and rafters, and fell asleep, and dreamed that she was a princess by a fountain in a garden, and met there the prince waiting for her. After which she woke and found herself in an attic, fountain and princess crown gone, but the prince was still there among the cobwebs and rafters. It was a charming little play, and a true allegory of much love, and for that reason Peleas and I had consented to have it

given in our attic, where there would be room for eighteen or twenty of Lisa's friends to watch it. This was the man who had come in that attic by which the princess should meet the prince.

At four o'clock Lisa and her friends came to rehearse for the fountain play. I saw them all safely above stairs, and then I slipped down to the kitchen, for I had a fancy to send Mary up, when they were finished, with a tray of tea and jam, and little cakes and bonbons.

I found that Mary had miraculously anticipated my wish and had already spread the sandwiches and opened the jam.

"Mary," I said, as I arranged the bonbons, "it is still snowing. Have you got your wish yet?"

"O ma'am," said Mary, "No'm." She looked up at me suddenly. I hardly know how I knew, but at once I understood that her sad eyes spoke but one wish.

"Who is it, Mary?" I asked on a sudden impulse. "Is it your sweetheart?"

"No'm," said Mary soberly, "it's my husband."

"Do you care to tell me, Mary?" I asked, for one must live to be seventy before one learns that there is a sympathy that transcends all false reticence and consists simply in holding out one's hand and listening to what some one else is longing to say. And then she told me of the trivial dispute and the parting.

"Is he dead, Mary?" I asked, laying the bonbons on the dish.

"O ma'am," said Mary. "No'm. But I do not know where he is. And he won't never forgive me."

The pretty play was just over, and the little maid, in her gown of gold with her gold hair about her shoulders, had just shyly answered the prince, and sat with him on the rim of the fountain, back in her attic house, when I heard Mary coming upstairs with the tray of tea and tarts.

She looked very pretty in her print gown, her sad eyes lighted by the faint excitement of the moment. No sooner was she there than Lisa, who can coax bewitchingly, begged that we should have tea down in my room, where there are a half dozen deep window seats—for the joy of dreams and tales.

Peleas and I stayed behind—and as the cloud of Lisa's friends went in soft laughter down the attic stairs we turned and fancied that the fairy tale had come true before our eyes.

Between the dormer window and the ancient chest the fountain, was still sparkling to the sun, as it had sparkled when the little mock princess had found her lover by her side.

And where she stood, Mary stood now, and she was suddenly and unexplainably in the arms of that earnest young giant in blue clothes, whose magic had struck the fountain upward in the sun of our sombre attic.

"Mary," said the young giant brokenly; and then he saw us and tried to make us know all that the moment brought welling to his heart. And Mary met our eyes, unashamed that his arms held her, and her hand was in his hand; and high above their heads in the late sun of afternoon sprang that magic fountain which he himself had brought from some place of the winter world.

"O ma'am," said Mary, "it was him I told you about. It was him I meant. I says to him: 'It was you,' and he says to me: 'It was you'—and they didn't neither of us have the sense to see that it wasn't neither him nor me, but just the way things naturally was."

"That's right," said the young giant huskily, "that's right. We didn't see."

To Peleas and me, standing almost awestruck in the presence of this great actuality, it seemed as if the voice of the whole world were there beside us crying passionately to love: "We didn't see."

But yet the moment was so piercingly glad that the gladness, after all, was its chief significance. I looked at Mary, her sad eyes magically lighted with something that could never go out; and—

"Did I not say?" I cried, "that spring was somewhere about? And that we shall all have our wishes?"

"O ma'am," said Mary, "Yes'm."

Peleas and I, laughing happily, went down the attic stairs, and left them by the magic fountain in the sun. And the air about us smelled the sweetness of the flowering currants and of Forsythia. The Little Spring is never far away.—By Zona Gale, in Exchange.

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## The Shepherd of the Hill.

It was a wild, stormy night late in October. A heavy torrent of rain was falling. The main street of the little village of Ionia, nestled among the northern hills of New York, was deserted. The wind came in sharp, cold gusts, driving the rain in angry splashes against the lighted windows that shone here and there through the darkness. Now and again a great streak of lightning flashed across the skies, followed by a deep roar of thunder. It was not a comfortable night to be out, but rather one of those nights of storm when the moaning winds and the dripping rains outside made an armchair and a warm room all the more cosy and inviting.

At one end of the village one man sat listening to the storm. He was the young resident priest of Ionia—"Father Dan," the people called him. His mission consisted of the village and a territory of several miles of surrounding country. He had been reading, but as the storm increased in violence, he laid aside his book and began to listen. As he heard the rain dashing against his window, he hoped no call might bring him out that night, for he thought it would not be the most pleasant duty on such a night to leave the warmth and comfort of his modest study.

Father Dan had been ordained only two years. For a year he had been assistant in a large city church, where he had plenty of work and experience. Then one day a letter came from the Bishop asking him to go to Ionia. "It was a backward parish," the Bishop wrote, "and would be a good test of a young man's zeal." Father Dan liked his "backward parish," as the Bishop called it. He was happy amid such peaceful surroundings, for he loved the country with its simpler ways and kinder hearts.

As he sat, and listened to the storm imagination led him back through the two years of his priestly life. He remembered the morning when he stood with his companions in the sanctuary before the Bishop. It was the fearful moment of decision, when in his heart he had feared the self-sacrificing life of the priesthood, and he deemed himself unworthy of the call. True, he was well on in years when he decided to take the step. He had given up a lucrative position and all that is sweetest in life, and cheerfully underwent the long, severe studies and rigid discipline of the seminary, which in itself is no small test of a true call to the priesthood. Those years of preparation had cost him many a hidden conflict, that none knew save himself. But he had never wavered until the morning of ordination. While he knelt before the Bishop in prayerful anxiety, he thought of the words the Bishop had spoken to himself and his companions—that "their lives were to be the lives of shepherds caring for and guarding their flocks." Then with these words in his ears, he remembered a picture that passed before his mind that morning. It was a green hill, upon whose pasture rested a flock of sheep and lambs. The Shepherd who was watching them was tall and kindly and across His shoulders His hair fell in long, waving curls. His eyes seemed infinitely beautiful and gentle. Then he imagined the Shepherd speaking: "These are the ninety-and-nine that are safe in the fold, but one has strayed and even now may be perishing." It was this picture of the Good Shepherd that gave Father Dan courage and decision for his future life-work.

The storm was still raging when the priest, awakening from his reveries, arose and placed the volume in his hand in the bookcase. The clock slowly chimed the hour of ten. Suddenly a knock came upon the front door! The priest, wondering who his late visitor could be, went and opened the door. A man stood before him drenched with the rain. "Is this Dr. Harrison's?" "No," replied Father Dan; "the Doctor's house is the next one farther down. What is the matter?" "Joe Miller's child up at the Creek is very sick. Joe himself thinks it's diphtheria. It's his only child and Joe is feeling very bad about it."

"Well," replied the priest, "the Doctor went away this afternoon on a case ten miles north of here, and I'm doubtful if he will come back on a night like this. Better leave a message at his house anyhow, in case he should return."

Father Dan, closing the door, thought of the sick child. He recalled the first time he met the little fellow. He called him "Curly-head" because he had long golden curls. The priest had won instant favor with "Curly-head" by giving him a ride upon his shoulders, for which Father Dan was to be repaid with two long golden curls. After the messenger had gone away he asked himself whether he should go and see the sick child. It was two miles out to Joe Miller's, and on such a night without a horse it was far from being a pleasant tramp. There was no obligation for him to go, as the child was only five years old and baptized. But the child's father was a stray sheep of the flock, "and perhaps," the priest thought, "if I went up to Joe Miller's to-night in the hour of his anxious grief, I might bring him back to the fold." He stood listening for a moment to the storm and the rain without, then putting on his storm boots, raincoat and hat, he went out in the darkness and rain.

Joe Miller was surprised when the priest stood before him on the doorstep. Father Dan explained the circumstances of the messenger's mistake, and the Doctor's absence, but that word had been left for the Doctor to hasten up as soon as he returned. Joe brought the priest to the sick child's cot, beside which the mother sat in deep anxiety. He saw

from the little flushed face that the fever was running high. Then he noticed that the child was breathing with very great difficulty, and it dawned upon him that unless respiration could be kept up until the Doctor arrived, the child would die. Kneeling at the bedside of his little friend, the priest prayed God to spare the boy to his sorrowing parents. Then with full knowledge of the risk he ran, Father Dan placed his lips to those of the suffering child, now almost choked with the terrible disease. For a long time it seemed like hours—he kept it up, hoping all the time that the Doctor would come. Joe Miller watched in silence the heroic efforts of the priest to save his child. He knelt down in a corner of the room, and only God saw what passed through that man's heart. The Doctor at last arrived, and quickly operated upon the child's throat. Turning to the parents, he said: "This good priest has performed a very brave act of heroism, at imminent danger to himself. He has undoubtedly been the means of saving your child's life." The Doctor then warned Father Dan "to be careful for a few days and watch out for the slightest symptom" of the dread disease.

In a few days little "Curly-head" was well on the road to recovery. Once or twice he asked "Where is Father Dan?" I want to give him my curls. Will he come and give me a ride again on his shoulders?" But the days passed and Father Dan never came up the road again. "Curly-head" missed him and asked his mother: "Mamma, why doesn't Father Dan come for my curls?" He said he would come. The mother told the child to her heart's content: "Father Dan has gone to the nurse-maid of heaven to gather golden curls from the angels; he will come again some day; he will come again for yours." "Then I will keep my curls for him," Curly-head said.

It was only a few days after Father Dan had knelt at the sick child's bedside that the toilers on the fields heard the slow, sad tolling of a church bell, and every head became bowed, for they knew Father Dan had answered his last call. He had gone out through the hills in search of the missing sheep, and he, the shepherd, had given his life for his flock.—Victor T. Noonan, in the New World.

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