

Picture of a Shepherdess

The cottage beside the sea was in ruinous condition. The wind had stripped off the slates winter after winter, and no one had thought of repairing the damage.

The Cottage was like a museum. Old furniture of the best Sheraton and Chippendale period, French mirrors, high old brass fenders, Waterford glass, old colored engravings, old pictures, old plate, old jewelry, old silver.

A mere glance round the room made Hilary L'Estrange's bright eyes brighter, his glance more eager, for he was a born collector.

He had a letter of introduction to Miss Marcella from the rector, Mr. Vandeleur, whose pupil he had been once upon a time.

"My dear fellow, she won't sell," Mr. Vandeleur had assured him, "so you will only be able to look and long. The worst of it is that the things are going to rack and ruin. Between the damp and the rats, everything that can spoil will spoil. There won't be much left for Cecilia when the time comes."

Miss O'Sullivan Beare was gracious to the rector's friend. He drank his tea—oddly fragrant tea—from Chinese cups and saucers worth a small fortune.

Miss O'Sullivan Beare's niece, Cecilia, poured out the tea. She was a tall, pale girl, with serious brown eyes, and would have been pretty if she had a little more color and animation.

Under her sleeves of Limerick lace, moved with a certain grace among the teacups. It was a wild, windy day, and the sea lashed against the panes. The room was full of portentous shadows, amid which Cecilia, in her gray gown, glided like a ghost.

L'Estrange spared her a thought of pity, remembering what the rector had said:

"There is no young society within ten miles, and the last thing that would occur to Marcella would be the possibility of Cecilia's requiring young society. She is too much alone."

Hearing that Mr. L'Estrange was interested in the old things, Miss Marcella was graciously pleased to display them. For a couple of hours L'Estrange sat, his head bent toward the lamp which Cecilia had brought, inspecting lace, silver, china, portfolios. Why, there was a fortune in the place at the mercy of the damp and the rats and clumsy peasant girls, such as the one barefoot who had opened the door to him.

He talked about the things calmly, with expert knowledge, even while his heart was beating furiously. Once he spoke in a different, small voice of the things of the things, of what they would fetch in a London sales-room. Miss Marcella immediately became cold, and said, loftily, that the O'Sullivan Beares had not come to selling their possessions.

"For the matter of that," she said "they go after the manner of mortal things lost and broken and destroyed by rats in my time."

"They should be kept more carefully, in glass cases under lock and key," L'Estrange protested, but without effect.

Presently there was something Miss Marcella desired to show him, a picture which hung on a bedroom wall, and was too big to be carried down. Asking L'Estrange to take the lamp, she preceded him up the few steps from the hall, which led to a long corridor, with rooms going off it at one side. She forgot in which room the picture was, and went from one to another. Everywhere there was a damp and mouldering smell. Everywhere beautiful things revealed themselves out of the shadows, rotting to their end.

After all, when the picture was found, L'Estrange was not much impressed. He had noticed downstairs that Miss Marcella did not seem to discriminate between the treasures and lesser things.

"My grandfather, Sir Hercules O'Sullivan," she said, "an Colonel O'Flaherty through the right arm because the colonel said that this was not a genuine Rembrandt, but a copy."

L'Estrange had wiped the dust and damp off the picture with his big silk handkerchief—which, truth to say, was in a desperate condition, having dusted many things this afternoon—and inspected it closely.

"Nevertheless," he said, "Colonel O'Flaherty was right. It is but a copy, and not a good one at that."

He replaced the picture, not noticing the old lady's offended air, and, taking the lamp in his hand, he looked about the room. In a corner there was a pile of books. He could see the tooled edges of some catching the lamplight like a jewel, and his heart bled at the murder of beautiful things.

"What is this?" he asked, picking up a small canvas out of its frame which leant against the discolored wall. Again he had recourse to his handkerchief, bringing it out of his pocket, and inspected it closely.

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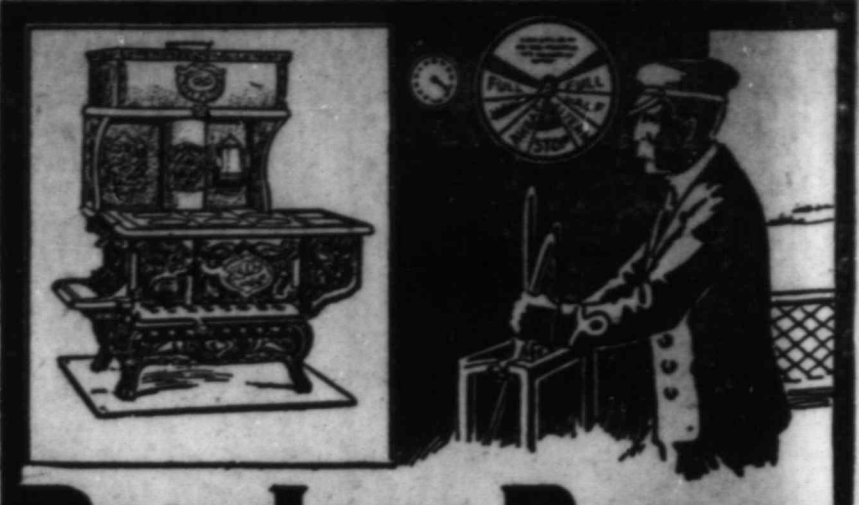
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"Excuse me, sir. I will fetch a light," Miss Marcella said, and went out, leaving him in the dark.

There was a green glimmer in the room; the moon was breaking through the stormy clouds and was reflected on the crests of the waves. Miss Marcella was gone a few minutes. When she returned she found L'Estrange standing as she had left him.

He had hardly seemed to notice that his opinion against the genuineness of the Rembrandt had offended her. Indeed, when they had reached the hall again, and she would have led the way to the sitting room, empty now, since Cecilia was washing up the precious china cups in the housemaid's pantry—she cared for the things, at all events—he bowed himself out instead.

"I was deceived in the young man, Cecilia," Miss Marcella said, afterward. "The young man of the present day have no modesty."

So she put L'Estrange out of her head. Not so Cecilia, who had hardly ever met a gentleman of her own age. Poring over romances and her poetry through the wild winter, the clean shaven, wholesome face, with its bright eyes and eager air, looked at her from between the pages of her book. She became more absent minded than ever, and Miss Marcella was more snappish with her than ever.

Miss Marcella had her cronies, who came and played cards with her on a Chippendale card table, with candles in silver candlesticks, flanked by silver snufflers on their trays, at each corner.

Cecilia, watching the lined, greedy old faces, and the shaking hands drawing in the small stakes or putting them out, or picking up the cards, wondered if she would grow to be like the old ladies. It seemed a poor idea of pleasure to her.

Once or twice she had met Mr. Vandeleur, and her mouth had parted to ask him a question, and closed again. He noticed and wondered about it. The last thing he would have thought of would be that Cecilia wanted to know about L'Estrange. He had almost forgotten about L'Estrange's visit to the Cottage.

L'Estrange had found bad news awaiting him in a telegram at the rectory. His little half-sister, Effie, the one creature he loved greatly, was suddenly ill—had to undergo an operation immediately.

He was at her side as fast as express trains could carry him. For days the chances inclined rather to death than life. Then there was the faintest hope, which grew so imperceptibly that one doubted if it grew at all. Even when the operation was long left behind there was terrible weakness.

The days of late winter and early spring passed, and L'Estrange thought of nothing but Effie. What would life be worth to him without Effie? She was half his age, fifteen years to his thirty; and she had been his for ten years, years during which she was his little star of home, to which he always returned with happy speed.

He took Effie away to Madeira before May had time to show her treacherous side. As the seasons changed he took her hither and thither, following now the coolness and again the warmth, till he was rewarded by seeing a robust Effie once again.

Then, after nearly a year of absence, they returned home, and L'Estrange, with an arm around Effie's shoulder, as they visited their gardens, now all one riot of leaf and blossom, shouted, "Oh, to be in England now that Auril's there!" and was reminded by Effie, who was a matter-of-fact little person, that it wasn't England, but Ireland.

He left Effie in the care of the old servants, enjoying herself hugely because she was not to go back to school, but was to have a governess as soon as Hilary could find the perfect lady. He had business in London. After that he was going down to see Mr. Vandeleur.

He had hardly arrived at the rectory when he asked Mr. Vandeleur about Miss O'Sullivan Beare.

"Ah!" said the rector. "Are you still hankering after the collection? It's no good, my boy. All the things are gone to Davy's locker. The old lady and her niece very nearly went with them. An uncommonly narrow escape they had."

"What do you mean?" "Only that in the big February storm the house came down, collapsed like a house of cards. Went to fire, too, when it collapsed. You'd have thought it was too damp to burn, but it burned all the same. The girl, Cecilia, had heard a chimney-stack fall in one of the unoccupied rooms and had dragged the old lady out of the house, much against her will and only just in time. They found a refuge in the stable, which was hewn out of the solid rock. None of us knew till morning. We were too busy saving our own lives and

property. When we knew it was too late. "Where are they—Miss Marcella and her niece?" "They have left here. Gone to Dublin to live. They are as poor as church mice. Was it really true that the things were so valuable?" "They were very valuable," said L'Estrange.

He was off the next morning, although he had come for a week, on an insufficient excuse which did not deceive his old master.

"The boy seems rather distracted," Mr. Vandeleur said to himself. "I wonder if he's in love. Yes, I suppose that must be it. Unless, indeed, he's heard of something he must acquire somewhere. Cold-blooded creatures, these collectors. Friends don't count against a precious find."

Dublin was not so big, Hilary L'Estrange was saying to himself next day, as he walked down Dawson street to the Educational and Scholastic Agency of Mrs. Drummond Dunlop, who had promised to find him the governess for Effie, one who should have tact as well as knowledge; who would not disturb the relationship between him and Effie; who would not assert herself too much, nor mistake the order of things in which Effie reigned as mistress of the house, with Mrs. O'Keefe, the housekeeper, as her prime minister. Dublin was not so big that people could disappear in it. Not like London at all. Thank Heaven, not at all like London.

As he went up the steps he met a young lady coming down at whom he glanced casually. Then he stood still and stared in his surprise.

"I was just thinking of you, Miss O'Sullivan," he said, holding out his hand. "Do you suppose my thinking of you brought me just here, where I should meet you? I have come from the South; Mr. Vandeleur told me of your misfortunes."

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governess to that extent that L'Estrange complained with secret delight that Miss O'Sullivan had disposed of him with Effie.

Late in the summer Miss O'Sullivan Beare came to visit Clooney, and found a new Cecilia. Delicate wild roses in Cecilia's cheeks, a shy light in Cecilia's eyes, a straight carriage, a springing step, a ready laughter that had never been Cecilia's before.

With her opinion of the O'Sullivan Beares, the old lady was not unduly elated when she discovered the state of affairs between her niece and L'Estrange. In fact, she made a secret inquiry among her cronies into the history of the L'Estrange family before she consented to be satisfied.

Then, when all was happily settled, L'Estrange led her one day into the picture gallery and toward a picture which stood upon an easel. He was oddly pale for a happy lover. Miss O'Sullivan Beare was an oddity; one could not be sure of her point of view.

"I want you to look at this," he said, and his voice shook.

"She had to get out her forgotten before she could see the picture. "That!" she cried. "The old Shepherdess picture! How did you come by it? It is not a copy, surely?"

He became paler than before. "Not to put too fine a point upon it," he said, "I stole it. I told Cecilia I would confess everything. I said to myself at the time that I was only taking it away to verify my own suspicions about it. I should have sent you the full value of it. How could I leave it to the rats and the damp? You know you would not believe me."

"Dear me!" said Miss Marcella, rather in wonder at his agitation. "I've always heard a collector would do anything. In fact, my reverend grandfather, Sir Hercules, always justified it. You know he stole the Grand Duke's snuffbox. Alas! it perished in the flames. But why did you not take the Rembrandt rather than this?"

"The Rembrandt? The Rembrandt was only a copy. 'The Old Shepherdess,' as you call it, is by Anthony Watteau. You know you wouldn't let me make sure that day. My dear aunt, if you'll let me add it to my collection, I'll give you six thousand pounds for it."

"Why, it would have come to you in the natural order of things. But six thousand pounds! You are very generous, nephew. I can live in Dublin, I can see my friends, and have my little card parties, as I was accustomed to. To be sure, life at Clooney is a little monotonous."

"And come to Clooney whenever you are tired of town," L'Estrange said, "and bring your friends with you, aunt. There is plenty of room at Clooney."

"I won't say it wasn't providential," said the old lady; "your picking and stealing, I mean. Still, I can't help thinking that Providence meant you to take the Rembrandt."

—Katharine Tynan in The Sketch.

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Mr. Gladstone's Suggestion

The unveiling of the Gladstone statue in Liverpool has recalled to one of the Liverpool papers the following "Fragments of suggestion," written by Mr. Gladstone in 1875, on a postcard, in reply to a Liverpool gentleman who had asked for hints on public speaking:

1. Study plainness of language, always preferring the simpler word. 2. Shortness of sentences. 3. Distinctness of articulation. 4. Test and question your own arguments beforehand, not waiting for critic or opponent. 5. Seek a thorough digestion of and familiarity with your subject, and rely mainly on these to prompt the proper words. 6. Remember that if you are to sway an audience, you must, besides thinking out your matter, watch them all along. This is all, we may be sure, most excellent advice. But point 2 is certainly amusing, for no public man spoke longer sentences than Mr. Gladstone. Sometimes they were, indeed, so long, with parentheses and the rest, that the listener frequently imagined he had lost his way. But that never occurred. The waiting noun always found its verb at last, no matter how long it had to keep its patience.

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