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MÁIRTÍN Ó CADHAIN

An Bhliain 1912



Máirtín Ó Cadhain 1906-1970

Life and Literary Status

Máirtín Ó Cadhain was born in 1906 in the Irish-speaking area of Cois Fharráige in County Galway. An extremely competent and committed native speaker of Irish, he was often openly critical of the Irish State's official language policies which he felt were often little more than lip-service. He was a recruiting officer for the Irish Republican Army in the 1930s and, during World War II, he was detained in the Curragh Camp, Co. Kildare, for his republican activities. In 1969, Ó Cadhain was appointed Professor of Irish in Trinity College, Dublin.

Ó Cadhain is widely considered the most influential prose-writer in Irish in the twentieth century. His experimental novel *Cré na Cille* (1949) has long been considered a masterpiece by Irish language readers, and has gained wider global recognition since it was published in English translation twice by Yale University Press as *The Dirty Dust* (2015), translated by Alan Titley, and *Graveyard Clay* (2016), translated by Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson. To date, the novel has been translated to over ten European languages, and Ó Cadhain is increasingly gaining recognition as a major writer comparable to James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. *Cré na Cille* is one of the chosen works included in the prestigious volume *Modern Ireland in 100 artworks* (2016). For further information on Máirtín Ó Cadhain and his literary works, see Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature: Volume II, 1890-2000*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 275-278. See also, *The Dictionary of Irish Biography* at <https://dib.cambridge.org>

For further details in Irish, see www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=413

A note on the short story 'An Bhliain 1912'

The short story 'An Bhliain 1912' (translates as 'The Year 1912') is the story of young woman, Máirín, nineteen years old, who is preparing to emigrate to America. The newly bought trunk becomes the focus of her mother's attention as she watches Máirín and her siblings open and close it,

during the final week of her daughter's life in Ireland. The story conveys the repressed emotions of a mother who realises that she will probably never see her eldest daughter again, and that she will have no place in her new life abroad. This heartbreak is compounded by the fact that she realises that this is the most likely the fate of her other daughters who, like the other young women in the community, will rely on the eldest sibling to pay for their passage to America in due course. Much of the story is set during the 'American Wake', the traditional farewell party that neighbours attended to say their final farewell to the young person departing. The word 'wake' itself indicates that this was a type of death for the community who did not expect to set eyes again on the one departing. Máirín's mixed emotions and final difficult farewell to her mother are at once personal and universal. Ó Cadhain's perceptive and emotive prose renders vividly the heart-break of physical separation, and the rupture of familial and communal ties.

Language and translation

Ó Cadhain's short-story is written in his native dialect of Irish, but the register is decidedly a literary one. The dialect along with references to a rural environment and way of life, locate the story in a very specific community and time. The literary register places the mother's thoughts and feelings in a more universal context; her story is the story of parents of emigrants throughout history, and up to the present day. The English translation here by fellow Galwegian and creative writer Eoghan Ó Tuairisc (Eugene Waters), is a skilful literal rendering of Ó Cadhain's text. Ó Tuairisc chose a register of English which is distinctively Irish, but not clichéd Hiberno-English.

The short story 'An Bhliain 1912' is from the collection of short stories *Máirtín Ó Cadhain: Rogha Scéalta* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2014) and is reprinted with the kind permission of Cló Iar-Chonnacht.

The English translation by Eoghan Ó Tuairisc is from the collection of short stories *The Road to Brightcity and other stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1981) and is reprinted with the kind permission of Rita Kelly.

An Bhliain 1912

‘An trunc.’

Ainneoin a réchúisí agus a dúirt an mháthair an focal, bhí dubh na fríde den bhundún lena aithneachtáil ar a glór. Ní ghabhfadh sí don Ghealchathair ag ceannach an trunc, seachtain go Satharn seo a chuaigh thart, in éindigh lena hiníon. Ná níor lú dar léi an sioc ná an stiúir a bhí air ar feadh na seachtaine, gróigthe mar bheadh íol adhartha ann ar dhroim chomhra na cisteanáí, agus spraoi an domhain ag na páistí á oscailt, á dhúnadh agus á dhearcadh. Ní bhfaigheadh sí ina claonta a dhul ag cur múisiaim ar an iníon an tseachtain deiridh. Murach sin bheadh sé craptha siar sa seomra agus isteach faoin leaba aici ó thús. Ach má bhí oiread eile d’fhonn ar an iníon an ball éadálach sin a bheith go feiceálach i bhfianaise na cóisreach a bhí cruinn anocht, rinne an mháthair an rud ba bhreá léi féin i dtús na hoíche, ó tharla go raibh contúirt bhriste nó liochta ar an trunc san áit a raibh sé. Ba bhall dóite, ba cholm bolgaí ar scéimh a saoil é a fheiceáil anocht go háirid, ó b’annamh léi oíche chroídhílis a bheith faoi chaolacha a tí. Ní raibh ina dheiseacht agus ina fhóint uile go léir ach ciméara draíochta le céadcheap a broinne agus fios fátha a saoil a fhuadach uaithi, go díreach agus an t-ól, an mheanma, an ceol agus an siamsa ag dul go barr bachall. Seacht seachtaine ó shin, sular tháinig an phaisinéireacht, bhí sise chomh beophianta ag fuireacht léi is a bhí Máirín. Níor chuid iontais léi a hiníon féin ag dul go Meiriceá ach an oiread leis an ochtar deirfiúr arbh é a géarchuimhne cuid acu a imeacht ann. Idir ord agus inneoin an tsaoil múineadh dise lena croí a cheansú agus a gean máthartha a chriogadh i ngreim scóige mar a bhí ag Éabha a dhéanamh le nathair na hAithne. An phaisinéireacht a chuir an chríonach trí lasadh arís. Agus mar bheadh teangacha feasa ann ó chéadfaí scoite, bhí lasracha as dóiteán a croí ag goradh chiall agus réasún a hintinne agus ag ligean feasa léi go mba mheasa an imirce ná creachadh teampaill agus ná bánú tíre... Ach ní raibh cluas bhodhar le tabhairt do stoc na cinniúna ní b’fhaide. Bhí an lá gealta. Patch Thomáis imithe faoi choinne an jaunt. Mire scréacha tar éis a theacht sa siamsa thíos sa gcisteanach bheag phlúchta, mar bheadh fuíoll air cine a raibh an díobhadh i ndán dóibh lá arna mháireach ag cur barr drabhláis driopásach dheireadh oíche ar a mbigil ollghardais. Níorbh fholáir do Mháirín a bheith ag téisclim...

Bhí coinneal leathphingine ar choimhrín le balla an tseomra agus smál uirthi de bharr an gheoladh gaoithe a bhí isteach faoi chorr an pháipéir ar phlána briste na fuinneoige. Bhí doimhneacht, draíocht agus diamhaireacht duibheagáin dhochuimsithe sa mbleánach sholais a bhí eitealadh na coinne a thál ar chnapáin phráis an trunc. Níorbh ar an toirt a d’fhéad an mháthair cuimhniú cá bhfaca sí cheana gné bhuíochta chaillte an adhmaid: snua coirp tar éis tórraimh fhada aimsir mheirbh. Agus ní ligfeadh an col di breathnú isteach sa trunc sin anois ach an oiread is a ligfeadh féachaint ar chorp i gcónra, tar éis gur thug sí obainn ar sin a dhéanamh go minic.

‘Bhfuil chuile shórt a’ d?’ a deir sí leis an iníon, gan ligean dá súile lonnú ar an solas. Bhí gach uile shórt ann: caorán móna, sceallóg den tinteán, dlaíocha gruaige, mogall seamróige, ainneoin gurbh é an fómhar a bhí ann,

stocaí glas caorach, glac dhuilisc, balcaisí éadaigh agus páipéir a bhain leis an iomlacht anonn. Thóg an iníon a bróga, a cóta, a hata agus a gúna amach as an trunc agus leag sí ar an gcoimhrín iad lena gcur uirthi. Le seachtain, ba mhinic uirthi iad sa ngeadán céanna, ach níor thaobhaigh an mháthair riamh í agus chuaigh sí go bog agus go crua uirthi i dtús oíche anocht gan a gcur uirthi go maidin.

Dhún an mháthair an trunc arís, agus chaith sí súsa na leapa anuas air 'lena choinneáil glan'. B'fhada faitíos uirthi, ach a mbeadh an iníon in éadaí Mheiriceá, go mbeadh an coimhthíos céanna aici léi a bhí leis an trunc. Bhí Máirín ina boinn agus í nochta, cé is moite de léinteog fhada gheal a bhfuair sí tiaráil mhór uaithi á deisiú uirthi ard-tráthnóna agus nach raibh aon rún aici a baint di arís go mbeadh sí in áras duine mhuintearaigh ar an talamh thall. Lena feiceáil mar sin, ba gheall le brionglóid óna hintinn féin í: an t-aon bhrionglóid a raibh a céadsnua scéimhiúil buan fós. Brionglóid go mba chruth di goltraí bhinn Chrann na Beatha, go mba dhealramh snua meangach Úll na hAithne: céadiompar agus céadabhras máthar. Bhí an iomad rud ar bharr a goib aici le rá léi: na rudaí teanntásacha ceanúla a bhíos i dtaisce i gcroí máthar, mar bheadh bradán a beatha ann, ón uair a n-airíonn sí gin bheo faoina broinn nó go bplúchann an lóchrann síoraí smearsholas an tsaoil.

Le mí anuas, is iomaí rud a dúirt sí leis an iníon ina sceidíní i bhfad ó chéile... Nár mhiste léi dá n-imíodh a raibh sa teach ach Máirín fanacht... go n-aireodh an teach í, ach í féin go háirid... go mba í an duine ba lú a bhfuair sí anró uaidh de na páistí í... go mb'ait í in aice tí. Ach ní raibh iontu sin ach an screamhóg mhullaigh. Bhí sí mar bheadh bean choimhdeachta ann a scorfaí an bráisléad a bhí sí a chur faoi bhráid na banríona agus a mbeadh a cuid liaga lómhara scaipthe anonn agus anall, i gcontúirt a dtaltaithe agus a millte. Ba gheall le neach naimhdeach di a bheadh ag scagadh a cuid cainte agus ag cur treampán uirthi an rosc a chur di a mhaolódh docht a croí. Bhí a fhios aici nach raibh aon ghair aici go héag na rudaí a bhí ar a hintinn a rá i litir a mbeadh sí i dtuilleamaí duine eile faoina scríobh agus i dteanga a raibh a féith agus a cuisle ní ba choimhthí di ná féith agus cuisle Shíogaí na Bruíne. Drochshop críon in áit scaibe beo an bhéil agus na súl agus na gceannaithe a bhí i litir. Thraoithfeadh agus théachtfadh fuarlach na hintinne agus rabharta an chroí sa scríbhneoireacht dhoicheallach.

Agus níor mhóide di Máirín a fheiceáil go ceann fada fada. Bheadh a paisinéireacht lena íoc aici. Ansin paisinéireacht duine nó beirt den chlann, i dteannta riar a chur abhaile. B'fhéidir go mba thúisce a d'fheicfeadh an páiste a bhí faoina broinn í ná í féin. An dá mhar a chéile a bhí sa gcóta Meiriceá agus sna taiséadaí go hiondúil. Ní raibh sa 'céad slán di' a déarfaí feasta, agus daoine ag caintiú ina hainm uirthi, ach taobh bun os cionn de 'bheannacht Dé lena hanam'. Ba mhinic páistí ag déanamh cíor thuathail den dá leagan sin. Agus an tráth a gclaochlaíodh an 'céad slán' ina 'bheannacht Dé' dáiríre, ba chlaochlú gan chóiríocht gan chróchar, gan chás gan chaoineadh é. Na taiséadaí féin ní bheadh ag máthair sa mbaile lena mbaint as a bhfillleadh anois agus arís mar réidhe an achair dá brón, ná ainm agus sloinne ní bheadh ar réchláirín i gcill cois Caoláire do na glúine

a thiocfadh. Scríobfadh an t-iomlacht – an domhnaíocht seiscinne fuaire sin – an t-ainm de ghinealach an chine. Mar na géabha fiáine a bheadh a himeacht.

Ach cé go raibh na smaointe sin mar thaos nimhe in intinn na máthar, ní ligfeadh sí lena hais nach bhfeicfeadh sí go deo an iníon. Bhí a ciall agus a réasún ag inseacht di nach bhfeicfeadh agus a croí, a dóchas agus a misneach ag rá a mhalairte. Agus ba dá croí a thug sí cluas. Ach bhí a fhios aici ach a bhfeiceadh go mba bheag ab ionann í is an gearrchaile sóntach, tíriúil a bhí anois in aois a naoi déag, agus gile a dealraimh fearacht snua gréine maidine ar mhala cnoic i dTír Tairngire. Bheadh domlas ar a béal ó chaora Chrann an Mhaith agus an Oilc. Bheadh easóg dhorcha na gangaide ina croí. Nathair shleamhain na céille ceannaithe ag snámh ina hintinn. Faghairt na cruach fuaire ina ceannaghaidh. Canúint ar a cuid cainte, ar nós fuíoll díoltais leasmháthar. Mar sin a bhí na Poncáin uilig. Níor mhór di í féin a fhoilsíú di anois, mar d’fhoilsíodh máthair amhais na huachaise í féin dá clann san am go mba chúrsaí báis agus martraithe gach géabh dá dtugtaí ag sireoireacht bídh. Í féin a fhoilsíú di chúns nach mba dhíol magaidh léi fós a cuid seanórtais agus aineolais féin agus nach raibh díchreideamh ná dochreideamh na hiníne ina bhádhún idir a dhá n-intinn...

I ndar léi féin, ní raibh tionscailt ar bith ab fhearr ná an t-airgead. Tharraing sí sparán éadaigh as a brollach, bhain sí as a mbeadh de mhionairgead ag teastáil ón iníon sa nGealchathair, agus ansin shín sí chuici é. Chuir an iníon an sparán faoina muineál agus dheasaigh sí go maith ina brollach faoin scaball é. ‘Fainic anois, a leanbh, nach dtabharfá aire mhaith dó,’ a deir an mháthair. ‘Ní móide go dteastódh sé chor ar bith uait, ach mura n-éirí obair leat go tráthúil ba mhór an ní duit a bheith i gcleithiúnas aint Nóra agus an mhuirín atá uirthi féin. Coinnigh an súsa deasaithe i do thimpeall go maith ar an soitheach. Ná taobhaigh aon duine mura i ndán is go mbeidh duine aitheantais ann go díreach. Beidh leat ach a sroichfidh tú chomh fada le tigh Nóra. Má chaitheann tú pá bheag féin a thógáil, ná cuir thar d’fhulaingt thú féin ag obair... Tabharfaidh tú cuairt abhaile faoi cheann chúig bliana. Bhuel, deich mbliana ar a fhad... Ní féidir duit nó beidh pingneacha beaga agat an uair sin... Mo...’

Tháinig a cuid spleodair léi ar sheol na braiche go dtí sin. Ach ar an dá luath is ar shíl sí an screamhóg mhullaigh a bhriseadh níor fhan focal den chaint aici; ach staidhce a dhéanamh ag féachaint ar a hiníon. A lámha ag sméaracht le cruinniúcháí a naprúin. Luisne a raibh an gáire agus an gol ina lánúin léanmhar inti ina grua. Leathleiceann léi ní b’fhaide ná an leiceann eile i gcosúlacht. Roic chrotacha ag cruthú go hanróiteach ina baithis, mar bheadh eochracha ann ag coraíocht le glas. Bhí an iníon i ndáil le réitithe anois agus d’fhiafraigh sí cá raibh na pingneacha beaga a theastódh uaiti sa nGealchathair?’ Leis an ruibh chainte a bhí ar an máthair roimhe sin níor lig an dearmad di an spaigín a fháil agus a gcur ann. Ar iontú thart di anois le dhul ina choinne bhuaíl an oiread anbhá í agus nár chuimhnigh sí go raibh an t-airgead i gcúl a glaice nó gur thit sé uaiti ina sprus ar fud an urláir. Ba é an rún a bhí ag an máthair ó thús fuireacht go dtagadh déantús ceart

cainte ina teanga; ansin an mionairgead seo a sheachadadh dá hiníon mar thoirbhirt naofa, í a phógadh agus a dheornadh... Ina leaba sin coilleadh a Soitheach Naofa as a láimh...

Ag cur spaigín an airgid i bpóca a cóta di, mhothaigh an iníon clúdach litreach ann. ‘Dlaoi de do chuid gruaigese, a mhama,’ arsa sise. ‘Shíl mé gur chuir mé sa trunc í in éindigh leis an gcuid eile. Chuir sí an dlaoi dhubh idir í agus an choinneal agus thláthaigh a dhá súil ghorma nó go raibh siad mar shúile páiste. Tháinig fonn uirthi rud eicínt a rá lena máthair ach ní raibh a fhios aici go barainneach cén rud. Bhí a cuid smaointe ag sméaracht fúthu agus tharstu mar bheadh aineolaí ar eanach caochphollach oíche dhubh. Níor mhór don bheirt a bhelth ar aon leaba, an solas a bheith múchta, agus ga gealaí isteach tríd an bhfuinneogín mar bheadh maide milis ann leis an teanga a bhealú. Breathnaigh sí idir an dá shúil ar an máthair, féachaint an bhfaigheadh sí ugach ar bith uaithi, ach níorbh fheasach di go raibh a máthair mar bheadh cnoc ann a mbeadh tormach chéatach ina chrioslaigh, tar éis nach raibh an tine in ann aon scolb a chur ar a fhorscreamhóg thinn theangmháilte...

Chuir an iníon an cóta scagach scanraithe agus an hata caisealmhór uirthi. Ba chuid de na cóirithe catha, dar léi, seal fada a chaitheamh ag deisiú agus ag athdheisiú an hata, ainneoin nach raibh goic áirid ar bith ba mhian léi a chur air. Níor chuimhnigh sí riamh nár bharr slaicht uirthi a mhéad agus a chrotaí is a bhí a chaiseal, ná go raibh buí a bróg, dubh a hata agus rua a cóta fearacht tríonóide mallaithe datha a bheadh ar thí scéimhe a ceannaghaidh ghil snuaúil. Ach bhí sí faoi réir: hata agus cóta agus bróga ísle agus láimhainní lady uirthi - le fanacht uirthi níos mó. Bhuail an oiread coimhthís agus iontais í is a bhuailfeadh féileacán ar mhothachtáil dó an chéad uair go raibh sé tar éis géaga craiplithe an spigneanta a sceitheadh agus go raibh fairsinge dhochoimsithe dho-bhacainneach an aeir inseolta aige lena chuid sciathán scolbánta. Mhothaigh sí ina cheann sin páirt d’aeraíl agus duabhar an fhéileacáin...

Nó go raibh an glas ar an trunc níor chuimhnigh an mháthair nár chuir sí aon cheo de mhaith na circe ann, ná i mbalcaisí na hiníne ach an oiread. Ach ní iarrfadh sí a dhul ag baint an ghlais de anois ar bhás an domhain. Dá dtosaíodh a hiníon ag séideadh fúithi nó ag samhailt pisreog léi an mhaidin sin, ba bheag é a hacmhainn thar is riamh. Chroith sí scaird uisce choisricthe uirthi agus an fhad agus a bhí sí ag cur an chleite sa mbuidéal arís bhí an iníon imithe síos go lúcháireach ar lom an urláir lena culaith Mheiriceá a thabhairt le taispeánadh.

Ní raibh an jaunt ar fáil fós. Bhí gleadhradh damhsa ann agus Tom Neile de ghuth phóitiúil ag gabháil 'An Triúr Mac' sa doras dúnta, ainneoin go raibh sé ag plúchadh an cheoil:

‘Is iomaí forrá-á-nach breá-á-á lúfar láidir

A théanns thar sá-á-á-á-á-ile a’s nach bhfilleann choí-í-chin.’

‘Déan go réidh leat féin,’ arsa an mháthair le Tom. Ach thabharfadh sí cuid mhaith ar an ala sin da mbeadh fonn aici mar a bhí ag Tom, leis an ualach a bhí ar a croí a chur amach de ina shile cheoil. Bhí na gearrchailí

cruinnithe timpeall ar an iníon arís, ag fáil caidéise dá feisteas, ainneoin go bhfaca siad é go minic le seachtain. Ní raibh gair ag an máthair í a thaobhachtáil acu. Dar léi, ba bheag acu ding a chur sa nádúr, nárbh éagóraí de mhórán ná é an ding a bhí an tseiscinn mhór fhuar a chur ann. Ag ceiliúr faoi Mheiriceá a bhí na mná óga. Ag ceiliúr faoin saol a bheadh acu abail a chéile ar fad i South Boston go gairid, mar ba dhual do chine arbh é trunc Mheiriceá a n-ingeal coimhdeachta, arbh í an long imirce a réalt eolais agus arbh í an Fharráige Mhór a Muir Rua. Mheabhraigh Bidín Johnny di iarraidh ar a col ceathrar dlús a chur lena paisinéireacht. Dúirt Judeen Sheáin, ar a bhfaca sí riamh, a inseacht do Liam Pheige faoin spraoi a bhí ar thórramh shean-Cháit Thaidhg. 'Seachain nach n-inseá do Sheán se' a'inne go bhfuil Garraí an tSléibhe faoi fhataí arís i mbliana a'inn,' a deir Sorcha Pháidín. 'Dúirt sé ag imeacht dó nach dtiocfadh aon duine ar an gcine arís go deo ó d'imeodh sé féin a bhuaileadh faoina chur, bhé sé chomh deacair sin.'

'Abair le mo bhuachaillse, a Mháirín, gur gearr go mbí mé anonn chuige,' a deir Nóra Phádraig Mhurcha de chogar a chuala na gearrchailí ar fad.

'Dar príocaí, ní bheidh sé i bhfad go mbaine mise aithinneacha as leacacha South Boston,' a deir scorach fionnrua ar chuir an t-ól ruibh na cainte air.

'Go bhfóire Dia ar an dream a chaithfeas fanacht sa mbaile,' a deir sean-Séamas Ó Curráin.

Bhí an fuisce ag dul timpeall arís. 'Ara seo, b'fhearr duit blaiseadh dó,' a deir an fear roinnte – Peaitsín Shiubháine – agus bhí sé ag tónadh na gloine ar Mháirín, nó gur dhóirt sé steall de ar a cóta leis an gcreathadh a bhí ina láimh. 'Ní dhéanfaidh lán do bhéil lá dochair duit. Maidin chrua í ar jaunt. Dheamhan is móide deoir phoitín a d'fheicfeá le do lá arís.'

Bhí meacan ina ghlór, arae bhí sé ag cuimhniú ar sheisear iníon leis féin a bhí 'thall' – duine acu le cúig bliana déag agus fiche – agus gan aon súil aige a bhfeiceáil go brách... 'Ólfaidh mé féin mar sin í. Do shláinte agus go dtuga Dia slán go ceann cúrsa thú, a Mháirín.'

Ba bheag an lua ag Peaitsín – ná sa gcás sin ag aon duine dá raibh ar an gcóisir – cuimhniú ar 'Go seola Dia abhaile arís í' a chur d'agús sa méid sin. Faoi cheal an oiread sin d'fhios a labhartha a bheith orthu spréach an docht tine a bhí sa máthair.

'Ní fheicfidh tú cúig bliana ó inniu go mbí sí abhaile arís,' arsa sise go mosánach.

'Go dtuga Dia di,' a deir Peaitsín agus Seáinín Thomáis Choilm as béal a chéile.

'Agus pósfaidh sí fear airgid agus fanfaidh sí inár mbail ar fad,' a deir Citín, deirfiúr do mháthair Mháirín, go geal-gháireach.

'Dheamhan mórán den rath a bheas agam in imeacht chúig bliana,' a deir Máirín, 'ach b'fhéidir go bpósfá féin mé, a Sheáinín, gan pingin gan bonn.'

Ach bhí Seáinín faoi seo craptha leis siar go doras dúnta agus é ag stolladh cainte d'fhonn magadh na ngearrchailí a ligean thairis.

'...Ná bíodh aon chanúint ort ar chuma ar bith,' a deir buachaill óg de chol ceathrar léi, 'agus ná bí ag guessáil fút agus tharat mar bhí Mícheáilín Éamainn nár chaith ann ach dhá mhí agus a tháinig abhaile trasna na ngarranta agus leathghine agus veist nua aige de bharr a aistir.'

'Ná ag fiafraí "What's that, mammy?" nuair a fheicfeas tú an mhuc.'

'Cuirfidh tú mo phaisinéireacht chugamsa ar chuma ar bith,' a deir Mairéad, an iníon ba ghaire do Mháirín agus splanc ag rince i mac eilmistín a súl.

'Agus chugamsa,' arsa Nóirín, an deirfiúr eile arís.

Ba deich mbliana de ghiorrúchan saoil ar an máthair dilleoireacht na beirte sin. Bhí na blianta moille dá gcarnú ar chuairt a hiníne, mar charnaítear na sluaisteoga créafóige ar chónra. Agus bhí lá cairde na cuairte sin ag féithiú uaithi siar – siar go Lá an Bhreithiúnais. Toradh a broinne féin ba naimhdí leis an máthair ar an ala sin.

Chuir sí Máirín ag ól tae an athuir, ainneoin nach raibh sí ach tar éis éirí uaidh go gairid roimhe sin. Ach theastaigh uaithi ligean a fháil uirthi arís. Níor mhór di arán a bhearnú, comaoineach sláin a dhéanamh agus caidreamh agus comhar teanntásach an tsuipéir dhéanaigh a shnaidhmeadh lena hiníon. Déarfadh sí léi gan frapa gan taca nár chreid sí go mba é an lón imeachta seo lón a báis chomh fada is a bhain sé leis an mbaile: go dtiocfadh Cáisc roimh an mbreithiúnas. Ach níor fágadh eatarthu féin é. Bhrúigh a deirfiúr Citín, a clann iníon agus cuid de na gearrchailí isteach chuig an mbord a bhí leis an mballa nó go raibh Máirín faoina mullóg féin acu gan mórán achair.

Ní raibh aon dúil i mbeatha ag an iníon. Bhí luisne na splaince ina ceannaghaidh: tnúthán, anbhá, iontas agus beophianadh a hintinne á n-ionchollú féin ina grua. An Ghealchathair an t-achar ab fhaide ó bhaile a bhí Máirín riamh. Ach ba sheanchas faoi Mheiriceá an chéad bhia sa sliogán di. Ba ghaire go fada do chomhlaí a tuisceana agus a samhlaíochta South Boston, Norwood, Butte Montana, Minnesota, nó California ná ná Baile Átha Cliath, Belfast, Wexford, ná go fiú is áiteacha nach raibh thar chupla míle ar thaobh an Achréidh den Ghealchathair. Fuineadh agus fáisceadh a saol agus a smaointe as cáil Mheiriceá, as saibhreas Mheiriceá, as siamsa Mheiriceá, as fonn cráite a dhul Meiriceá . . . Agus ainneoin go raibh cumha uirthi an baile a fhágáil anois, níor chumha é gan an gliondar, an dóchas agus an t-iontas a bheith ina orlaí tríd. Faoi dheireadh thiar bhí sí ar thairseach na Brúine Draíochta . . . Farraigí uafásacha, slata seoil, soilse greadhnacha, sráideanna ar dhath an airgid, daoine cróna a raibh loinnir an daoil ina gcneas, ag cur in éagruth cheana féin uirthi gort, sliabh, carraig agus caoláire.

Ní raibh ina hintinn ar feadh na hoíche ach cleitheog thaisce a dtuillfeadh uairleacháin chuileáilte a cuimhne inti, nó go bhfaigheadh sí ionú ar a dteilgean amach sa mbruth faoi thír feadh is í ag seoladh. De bharr chomh neamhairdiúil is a bhí sí anois thug sí cead í féin a chinnireacht amach ar lom an urláir ag damhsa, ainneoin go raibh sí i bhfeistias Mheiriceá agus eile. Ach ní bhfaigheadh sí óna claonta Pádraigín Pháidín a eiteach ar aon chor. Chuir sí scrúdaí uirthi féin anois faoi gur fhág sí an fhad sin é gan é a thaobhachtáil. Bhí sí buille támáilte as tosach an damhsa, ach chuaigh fíor an cheoil – an ceol sin ar cuireadh comaoin air sa mbruíon féin – faoina cuisle; agus gan mórán achair ní raibh de shamhail aici ina gléas breac ballach ach os fuiliúil cuideáin a mbeadh miolghairí an tréada ag macnas ina timpeall le cur faoi deara di a gaisce agus a tréathra a thaispeáint, chúns a bheadh na fundúirí ina suí faoi gcuairt ag cur a gcomhairle i dteannta a chéile. Ag smaoineamh a bhí an mháthair ach a bhfeiceadh sí arís í go mbeadh eolas doscúch an tsaoil ina bhró mhuilinn ar an meanma dhamhsa sin. I leaba an reacht fola boirbe a thug do ligean a géag a bheith ar spéiriúlacht réalta, bheadh sceidín liathuisce na haoise agus céille ag greamú a cnámh ceansaithe don chréafóg.

Ach ina dhiaidh sin agus uile níor dá hiníon ba mhó a thug an mháthair suntas ach do Phádraigín Pháidín a bhí ag damhsa léi. Bhain sí abhras as an scéal ar an toirt. B'fhurasta a aithint é. Níor mhóide don bheirt focal a rá riamh le chéile faoi ghrá. Níor mhóide gur dhúirt siad focal anocht. Agus ní móide go n-abróidís focal go brách. Ach thuig sí go bpósfá i South Boston iad, má ba faoi cheann bliana, cúig bliana nó deich mbliana ó inniu é... Bhí sí splanctha. Sin é an cuthach damhsa a bhí ar Phádraigín. An rud a bhí cinnte uirthi féin a rá lena teanga bhí seisean a rá as damhsa. Bhí a chosa agus a cholainn ag cumadh rídháin a raibh snafach agus síneadh, cumas agus cáilíocht ag teacht faoi i leaba a chéile, nó gur bhain lasc dá bhróg thairní aithinne ghreannta as leac an teallaigh ar aon bhuille le nóta deiridh an cheoil. Déarfadh daoine go mba shúgáil óil é, ach bhí a fhios ag an máthair nárbh ea. Ba bhailchríoch dáiríre an aithinne sin: buille scoir dé ar chaithréim iomlán. Agus ar an dá luath is a ndearnadh a shamhlú leis thosaigh sé ag gabháil fhoinn gan a dhath mairge, ainneoin go raibh saothar an damhsa fós ann. Níor fhan aon aird ag an máthair ar an iníon ach ag éisteacht leis:

‘Tá’n gairdín seo in’ fhásach, a mhíle grá, agus mise liom féin,
Níl toradh ‘bith ‘fás ann, bláth na n-airní ná duilliúr na gcraobh,
Ní chluintear ar an tsráid seo guth cláirsí ná ceiliúr na n-éan
Ó d’éalaigh mo ghrá uaim, craobh álainn, go Caisleán Uí Neill.’

Gearrcach dé óig ag iarraidh scolb a chur ar chrotal cruinne a bheadh á chuibhriú: b’in é a dhíocas foinn. Bhí an ghráin shíoraí ag an máthair faoi seo air. Neach mallaithe i gcionn a ciste chirt féin a bhí ann...

Airíodh úmacha capaill agus clascairt ‘jaunt’ ar an mbóithrín amuigh. Scoir an ceol agus an siamsa d’aon iarraidh, cé is moite de ‘Óra, mhóra mhóra’ Sheáinín Mhic Thuathaláin a bhí sínte óltach ag an doras iata: ‘Ar an taobh ó dheas de chéibh New York sea landáilfeas mé thall.’ Níor thóg Seáinín d’amhrán riamh ach an ‘lúibín’ sin.

‘Ba féirín do Mheiriceá thú, muis. Múchadh agus bá ort nach ar chéibh eicint atá tú thar is a bheith i do scramaire anseo,’ a deir scorach a raibh sé ag cinnt air aon fhoighid a chur ann.

‘Tugaigí amach é sin agus ceanglaigí ar an jaunt é,’ a deir an mháthair, ach ar tógadh an trunc anuas as an seomra agus ar gróigeadh mar bheadh lao óir ann ar an mbord é.

‘B’fhéidir go mbrisfí é. Ná bacaigí leis,’ a deir Máirín, ‘go mbí mé féin faoi réir le dhul amach freisin.’ Ba é an trunc sin a cuid dindiúirí agus grámh le hata galánta a bheith ar a ceann, le cóta gáifeach a bheith ar a droim i leaba seáil. Dá uireasa sin ba dhiamhlasa é an feisteas lady. Dá ligeadh sí as a hamharc é ar feadh ala an chloig níor dhóide cleas do na baill fheiceálach sin ná seargadh ina ngioblacha luaithe thuas ar a craiceann.

D’ionsaigh Máirín anois ag fágáil sláin ag an dream nach raibh sé de láthar iontu í a thionlacan chomh fada le bóthar an rí. Seanfhundúirí craiplithe a d’fhéad sméaracht trasna na sráide ar éigin, agus nár dhóide dá bhformhór a dhul ar aon chóisir arís go brách óna dteach féin amach. Ba é seo an chéad sine den slabhra á roiseadh: an chéad rud dáiríre a chuir i gcion uirthi a dhalba agus a dhoilí is a bhí an scarúint. Pé ar bith céard a dhéanfadh dream ar bith eile, bhí sí réidh le iad sin a fheiceáil go brách. Ainneoin a raibh d’anbhá agus de dheabha uirthi, thug sí amharc tollta ar gach duine acu i riocht is go mba lón dá cuimhne go héag a gceannaghaidh agus a gcruth. Níor thit an drioll ar an dreall ceart críochnaithe uirthi nó gur tháinig sí chomh fada lena seanmháthair ar an tinteán. Bhí an oiread ceana aici ar an tseanmháthair is a bhí ar a máthair, agus farasbarr teanntáis. Agus ní raibh aici ach malairt. Gach uile sheachtain dá n-éiríodh uirthi choinníodh an tseanbhean brabach eicint den phinsean le tabhairt di, pé ar bith céard eile a bheadh ar deireadh. Smid ná smeaid ní raibh ag an tseanbhean ach an oiread is dá mba mheall créafóige í cheana féin. Agus go deimhin ba bheag nárbh ea, mar bhí dhá dtrian di ag ‘fear na coise caoile cruaidhe’, agus an trian eile ag fuireacht go mbeadh a háras faoi réir ag an anachain chruógach. Bhí a béal chomh seasc le hadhmad cónra úrdhúnta agus, murach sméideadh na bhfabhraí ar éigin a thug dá cianfhéachaint cruinniú ná ba ghaire do láthair, shílfeadh Máirín nach raibh a fhios aici beirthe ná beo céard a bhí ar siúl.

‘Ní fheicfidh mé go brách arís thú, a mhamó,’ arsa Máirín, agus meacan goil ag cur a cuid cainte as a riocht faoi dheireadh agus faoi dheoidh. ‘Tá Dia láidir,’ arsa an mháthair, buille stuacach. Ba theas agus téagar samhraidh do Mháirín, tar éis sceirdiúlacht agus dúluachair an gheimhridh, na páistí laga agus an naionán a bhí sa gcliabhán a phógadh ansin. Coisreacan céadfaí a bhí ann ar chol na dtaiséadaí.

D’ardaigh an mháthair siar don seomra an athuair í. Ach ba ghearr thiar iad san am a dtáinig Citín agus Mairéad aníos ina mullach, go bhfaighidís a gcuid seál lena dhul don Ghealchathair fré Mháirín. Leáfadh an mháthair iad. Mura mbeadh a gcuid cunórtais b’fhacthas di nach gcalcfadh an neascóid bhróin a bhí i mbéal a cléibh arís. Níor fhéad sí a rá le Mairín ach go mba mhaith a shaothródh sí é; go raibh súil aice go bhfaighidís aimsir bhreá ar an bhfarraige; agus ar a bhfaca sí riamh a pictiúr a thógáil thall agus é a chur abhaile.

‘Mo leanbh ‘s mo lao thú,’ arsa sise, agus scioc sí cuileoigín chlúmhaí de shlinneán an chóta agus bhain sí liocadh driopásach as bileog an hata, ach gur chuir an iníon a cóir féin air arís ar an toirt. Agus i ndiaidh smearamharc a thabhairt ar fud an tí bhí sí faoi réir lena imeacht.

Thosaigh an jaunt ag tornáil leis go corrach ar bhóithrín aistreánach an bhaile agus an mathshlua, idir fhir, mhná agus pháistí, ina dhiaidh aniar. Ní raibh de shamhail acu ach cóisir íobairte: an jaunt ar tosach mar charn losctha, púireanna tobac na bhfear ag cónaí in aer soineanta na maidine fómhair ar nós túisthoite, agus Máirín lena feisteas cuideáin agus lena ceannaghaidh lasúnta mar bheadh draoi na toirbhearta ann.

Shiúil an mháthair bonn ar aon leis an iníon agus thairg an súsa a iompar di, ach sciob Bríd Shéamais é agus d’iompair sí féin é. Bhí rún ag an máthair an iníon a bheith faoina mullóg féin aici den gheábh deiridh seo, ach chuaigh Citín agus Mairéad seo aici féin ina barr uirthi arís. Ansin bhrúigh na gearrchailí uile go léir ina timpeall, cuid acu ag sioscadh go gealgháireach, cuid acu a raibh an oiread cumha acu ina diaidh is nach bhfaighidís óna gclaonta mórán a rá, agus tuilleadh a raibh buaireamh orthu nach ina bróga nó ag dul ina bail a bhí siad féin. Ba láidir má d’fhan cumha ar bith ar an máthair anois, leis an bhfaltanas a tháinig aici don bhrotainn seo ar mhian leo a hiníon a scuabadh uaithi sula raibh sí oiread is as a hamharc. Bhí sí i bhfaltanas leis an jaunt freisin. Bhí an oiread siúil faoi is dá mba ‘fuadach géar na cille’ a bheadh sé a thabhairt do chorp. Dar léi féin ba é an trunc a bhí gróigthe ar an gcrannóg agus finne déise ina chuid adhmaid faoi ghaetha na gréine óighe a bhí ag cur broide an bhuaná sa gcapall. Níor fhan focal den chaint aici...

Bhí luisne mhoiglé ón ngrian nach raibh ach ina suí. Drandail gháire ar na críocha agus ar na clochair. An coinleach taltaithe sna póicíní fánánacha stalcánta, cosúil le mullach Shamson eicint a mbeadh deimheas Delilah tar éis a dhul air. Gleoiteog a bhí i ndiaidh an chalaídh a fhágáil ag treabhadh scríbe gile le cóir siar an Caoláire. D’fhéach Máirín ar ais ar an teach ó Ard Aille an Chuilinn, arae bheadh sé féin agus caidhlín tithe an bhaile faoi gcuairt ó léargas uirthi ní ba mhó.

Ba gheall le fáithim ghreamúis na hAimsire Caite agus na hAimsire Fáistíní an stráca dromannach, san áit a raibh díon úr na bliana anuraidh ag breith ar an seandíon dubh dreoite. Agus bhí gotha an tsuain ar an mbaile arís, ar nós is dá mbeadh sé gan a dhéanamh ach dúiseacht ar feadh ala an chloig le smugairle a theilgean sa bhfarraige mhór, go bhféadfadh an ghleoiteog cis ar easair a dhéanamh dó fúithi...

Sheas an jaunt ag ceann an bhóithrín. Rinne na daoine brusacán cruinn i mbéal bhóthar an rí, i riocht is go mba ar éigin a bhí ligean ar bith ag an máthair ar an iníon. Bhí sí báite sna daoine. Ní raibh inti féin ach cloch éidreorach sa leacht. Ba é an cás céanna di é gan gaol ná páirt a bheith aici léi. Thar is riamh, ba mhór léi anois é do Chitín agus do Mhairéad a bhí le dhul don Ghealchathair le Máirín. Ar thionscailt don phógadh ba gheall iad na mná le dioscán sclamhairí ar thí creiche. Bhrúdar suas chuig a hiníon go míchéatach, d’fháisceadar a lámh, agus sciobadar póga uaithi i mbéal a chéile ar nós plód druideacha ar chosamar. Chroith na fir lámha léi

go giorraisc cúthail, mar a bheidís ag rá gurbh é an t-aon chás amháin é; agus má ba rud é a bhí rompu go raibh ar eire acu é a chur díobh ar an dá luath is a d'fhéadfaidís. An cleas céanna a rinne Pádraigín Pháidín; ach, níorbh é fearacht na bhfear eile é, d'ardaigh sé a cheann oiread na fríde, nó gur bhraith an mháthair súile na díse i nglas ina chéile in imeacht ala an chloig...

Ba é uain na máthar é ar deireadh thiar. Níor phóg sí a hiníon ó a bhí sí ina páiste cheana. Ach chinn uirthi mórán de chumha ná de chrá a croí a chur sa bpóg, ainneoin go raibh a béal spalptha dá huireasa. Nár thug sí póg do gach uile dhuine? Nach bhfuair gach uile dhuine tús pógtha agus deornta uirthi uaithi féin. Póg fhuar leamh a bhí i bpóg na hiníne, ar nós is dá mbeadh an chlimirt bainte di ag gach is a raibh ag blaismínteacht cheana léi. Bhí a colainn fuar, freisin – fuar míthéagrach mar a bheadh síogaí ón mbruíon. Is éard a chuir an phóg ó rath ar fad uirthi nár fhéad sí súil a thógáil den trunc a bhí geall le ag cur cogair ina cluais: 'Ní fhuasclóidh aon bhéal saolta geasa póige an neach sí arb í a chluain an só, an fhánaíocht agus an dearmad; agus arb í a bhruíon an gréasán óir a fhíos mianta na hóige as na gaetha gréine ar na cnoic ghlasa i bhfad ó láthair...'

Bhí Máirín thuas ar an jaunt anois. Mairéad ina suí lena hais, Citín ar an leathchaoín eile i dteannta an tiománaí, agus Pádraigín Pháidín ag daingniú an trunc eatarthu ar an gcrannóg. Don mháthair is éard a mheabhraigh siad – an trunc mallaithe, Mairéad a bhí ag tnúthán lena paisinéireacht ar luas, agus Pádraigín Pháidín a bhí ar bís a dhul go Meiriceá agus a hiníon a phósadh – tríonóid áibhirseoirí ag cur pioraíocha ar a céadghin agus ar a cuid den saol...

Bhí Pádraigín críochnaithe anois agus na daoine ag teannadh i leataobh le réiteach a thabhairt don chapall. D'ionsaigh na mná orthu ag snogaíl agus d'ardaigh an tsnogaíl ina huaill ghártha nach raibh de chumha inti ach an glór agus na deora, dar leis an máthair. Fiú is só an chaointe ina haonraic ní fhágfaidís aici féin féin. Agus níor ghoil sí deoir . . .

'Feicfidh mé thú roimh chúig bliana,' arsa sise, de ghlór neamhdhiongbhála, agus ní bheadh aon ghair aici a súile a ardú ar shúile a hiníne ar bhás an domhain.

'Feicfidh,' a deir an iníon trína meacan goil den charr a bhí anois ag gluaiseacht. Ach dúirt croí na máthar chomh maith lena ciall anois nach bhfeicfeadh. Ba thúisce a d'fheicfeadh Pádraigín Pháidín í agus gearrchailí an bhaile agus a clann féin, go dtí fiú agus an leanbh a bhí faoina broinn... B'fheasach don mháthair nach raibh inti ach céadghearrcach an áil a bhí ar imirce go Críocha an tSamhraidh agus an tSó: an Ghé Fhiáin nach bhfillfeadh ar an bhfara ducháis go deo deo...

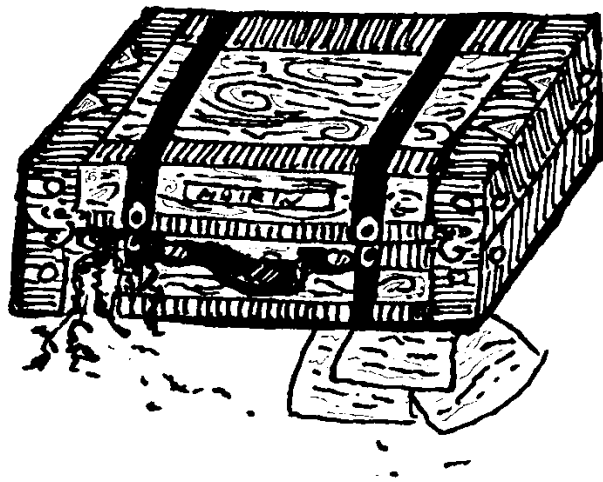
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EOGHAN Ó TUAIRISC

The Year 1912



Translated from
An Bhliain 1912
by Máirtín Ó Cadhain

The Year 1912

—The trunk.

She said the word offhand yet there was a touch of stubbornness in her tone. She hadn't agreed to go to Brightcity with her daughter a week ago last Saturday to buy the trunk, and it irked her like a white frost the way it had been perched up on the ledge of the kitchen dresser, adored like an idol. The children having great play with it, opening it, closing it, looking it all over. She hadn't the heart to vex her daughter this final week, otherwise she would have cleared it off into the room under the bed. But tonight, though the daughter might be of a different mind and anxious to show off that expensive article to the company that had gathered, the mother had followed her own inclination at nightfall and moved the trunk into the room – it might, she said, get damaged or scratched where it was.

It was like a burnt spot or a smallpox scar on the face of life, tonight especially since she seldom had a hearty gathering under her roof. It was useful and wellmade, but that was only a chimaera, a ghost from the Otherworld come to snatch away the first conception of her womb and the spring of her daily life, just when the drinking, the high spirits, the music and merrymaking were in full spate. Seven weeks ago, before the passage-money came, she had been as much on edge awaiting it as Mairin was. That her daughter should be off to America was no surprise to her, no more than the eight sisters of her own whose going was a bitter memory still. She had been schooled by the iron necessities of life to keep a grip on her feelings and throttle her motherlove – as Eve ought to have throttled the serpent of Knowledge. It was the passage-money that had set the heather ablaze again. Flickers of affection, flashes of insight from shut-away feelings, were setting her sense and reason aglow with the knowledge that this going into exile was...

But it was destiny, must be attended to. The day was agreed. Patch Thomais was gone for the sidecar. Back in the crowded kitchen the merriment had risen to a frenzy; remnants of the wreck of a people, doomed to extinction at daybreak, bringing their ritual vigil to a hurried night's-end climax of wild debauch...

A halfpenny candle stood on a small press by the wall in the bedroom, smeared by a breeze coming by the edge of the paper on a broken windowpane. Depth, magic, mystery of unfathomable seas, reflected by the guttering candleflame in the trunk's brass knobs. It was of pale yellow timber, the mother couldn't at once remember where she had seen that colour before – the face of a corpse after a long wake in sultry weather. And a certain distaste kept her from looking into the trunk, that same tabu which had kept her, though she had often tried, from looking at a corpse in a coffin.

—Have you everything? she asked the daughter keeping her eyes off the dimlit thing. There were all kinds of things in it – a sod of turf, a chip off the hearthstone, tresses of hair, a bunch of shamrock though it was autumn, stockings of homespun, a handful of dulse, items of clothing, papers connected with the voyage

across. The daughter took her shoes, coat, hat and dress out of the trunk and laid them on the little press to put on her. During the week she had often laid them out like that but the mother had never encouraged her, and early in the night she had implored her not to put them on till morning.

The mother shut the trunk, threw the bedquilt over it.

—To keep it clean. She had long feared that the daughter once she was in the American clothes would be estranged from her, alien as the trunk. Mairin was in her stocking feet and naked except for a long white shift which she had been at great pains to fix about herself that evening and which she had no intention of taking off until she had reached the house of a relative on the other side. Seeing her like that was to see a vision, the only one which had remained clearskinned and beautiful in her memory. A vision that gave bodily shape to the dear lost Tree of Life, while it made real the delicate and deceitful skin of the Knowledge-Apple – a mother's first conception, first fruit. She had so many things on the tip of her tongue to say to her, the intimacies, the affectionate things saved up in motherlove, her life-stuff, from the moment she feels the quick seed in her womb until the flush of eternity puts out the twilight of the world.

For a month now she had said many things to the daughter, scraps scattered at long intervals... that she couldn't care if all in the house were to go so long as Mairin stayed... that the whole house would miss her, herself especially... that of all her children she was the one who had given her the least trouble... that she was fine about a house. But none of all that said what she wanted to say. She felt like a servingwoman, the necklace she was putting about the young queen's neck had broken, its precious stones scattered here and there in danger of being crushed and broken. She felt as if some hostile force were filtering her speech, hindering her from letting loose the flow of talk that would ease the tight grip on her heart. She was aware she could never hope to express the things in her mind in a letter which she would have to depend on someone else to write, and in a language whose make and meaning were as unhomely to her as the make and meaning of the Ghost from the Fairymound. And a letter was a poor substitute for the living contact of speech, eyes, features. Her flowing imagination, floodtide of her love, would run thin and freeze in a niggardly writing.

She was hardly likely to see her daughter again for a very long time. Mairin would have to repay her passage, then earn the passage of one or two more of the family, as well as send a share home. It could happen that the child in her womb would set eyes on her before she did. That American coat, the graveclothes – how tell one from the other? The 'God speed her' that would be said from now on had for its undermeaning 'God have mercy on her soul'. Children often got those two expressions mixed up. And when the time came that in actual fact would change the 'God speed' into 'God have mercy', it would come without a decent laying-out and a bier to be carried, and with no passionate keen. Even the graveclothes, no mother would have them awhile to shake out the folds of them from time to time as a relief to her anguish, and there would be neither name nor surname on a rough bit of board in the churchyard by the Fiord for generations to come. The voyage – that

immensity, cold and sterile – would erase the name from the genealogy of the race. She would go as the wildgeese go.

But while such ideas were as a sour curd in the mother's mind, she wouldn't give in to the thought that she would never see the daughter again. Her sense and reason said no, her love, hope, determination, said yes. And it was these she listened to. Yet even if she were to see her again she knew she'd be utterly unlike the simple country girl, now nineteen years old, with a look pure as morningsun on a hillside in the Promised Land. Her lips would have been embittered by the berries from the Tree of Good and Evil. That dark weasel envy in her heart. Experience, that slimy serpent, writhing in her mind. Temper of cold steel in her countenance. The tone of her voice transformed by the spell of a harsh stepmother. Such were all returned Americans. She must reveal herself to her now, as the mother of the warriors in the cave used to reveal herself to her children when every sallying out in search of food was a matter of life and death. Reveal herself to her while her age and ignorance were still unmocked at, while there was yet no wall of disbelief between her daughter's mind and hers..

The money, she thought, was the best way to begin. She took a cloth purse from her bosom, took out what small change the daughter might need in Brightcity, and gave her the purse with the rest. The daughter hung it about her neck and settled it carefully in her breast under her holy scapular.

—Look now child you take good care of it. It's likely you won't need it at all, but if you fail to find work soon it would be too much to be depending on Aunt Nora who has her own children to look after. Keep the rug tucked well round you on the vessel. Make free with no one unless it happens to be someone you know. You'll be safe as soon as you reach Nora's house. Even if you have to take small pay, don't overstrain yourself working... You will make a visit home after five years. Well, at least after ten years... It can't be but you'll have a few pence put by by then. My...

She had kept her spirits nicely up to that. But as soon as she thought to break the crust of speech she couldn't find a word to say but stood stockstill staring at her daughter. Hands fiddling with the folds of her apron. Blushing, tears and smiles painfully together in her cheek. Humps and wrinkles of distress coming in her forehead like keys struggling with a lock. The daughter was almost dressed by now and asked where was the small change she'd need in Brightcity? The mother had been so eager to talk that she had forgotten to get a little purse to put it in. Turning to get it she fell into such confusion she forgot the money in her fist until it fell and scattered about the floor. Her idea had been to wait till her tongue could contrive a proper speech, then to hand over the small change to the daughter as a sacred offering, embrace and kiss her... Instead, the sacrifice had been ripped from her hand.

Putting away the little purse the daughter felt an envelope in her pocket. —A tress of your hair, mama, she said. I thought I had put it in the trunk alongwith – the rest. She held the black tress between her and the candle, her blue eyes softened, became childlike. She felt an urge to say something to her mother, she didn't quite know what. Her thoughts went fumbling here and there as a stranger might among the blind holes of a bog on a dark night. The pair of them would have to be in one bed, the light out, and a wand of moonlight through the small window to charm and set free the tongue. She looked her mother in the eyes to see if she might find encouragement there, but she remained unconscious of her mother's seething emotions, locked within, quite unable to crack the fixed and rigid mask of her features.

She put on the light and gaudy coat, then the wide-brimmed hat. Part of the preparations for her attack on life, she supposed, was to spend a long time fixing and refixing the set of the hat, though she had no idea which particular slant she wanted. She didn't realise that the size and the undulations of the hatbrim added nothing to her good looks, nor that the yellow shoes, black hat and red coat made a devil's own trinity in conflict with her fresh and delicate features. But she was ready: hat, coat, low shoes on and lady-gloves – not to be taken off again. She felt strange, surprised as a butterfly that feels for the first time that it has shed its cramped caterpillar limbs and has the endless airy spaces unimpeded to sail through on easy wings. She felt too some of the lightheaded pride of the butterfly ...

The mother forgot until the trunk had been locked that she had forgotten to put a bit of hendir in it, or somewhere among the daughter's clothing. But she wouldn't for the world unlock it again. She couldn't bear the daughter to make fun of her, this morning especially, accuse her of pishrogues and superstition. She shook a tint of holy water on her, and while she was putting the feather back in the bottle the daughter was off out to the kitchen floor to show off her American ensemble.

The sidecar hadn't come yet. There was a swirl of dancing. Tom Neile with his back to the closed door was singing The Three Sons in a drunken voice drowning the music –

There's many a fine spa-a-rk young and hea-a-rtly
Went over the wa-a-ter and ne-e-e-r return'd.

—Tone yourself down, said the mother to Tom, but she'd have given a deal just then to have a tune like he had in order to release the load of her love in a spilling song. The girls had gathered again about the daughter, scrutinising her rigout, although they had been a week looking at it. They gave the mother no chance of keeping her company. They thought nothing, it seemed to her, of driving a wedge into nature, one almost as inhuman as that driven in by the immense cold sterile sea. The young women were chirruping of America. Chirruping of the life they'd have together soon in South Boston. Typical of a race whose guardian angel was the American trunk, whose guiding star was the exile ship, whose Red Sea was the Atlantic. Bidin Johnny

reminded her to ask her cousin to hurry with the passage-money. Judeen Sheain told her on her life not to forget to tell Liam Pheige about the fun there was at the wake of old Cait Thaidhg.

—Take care you don't forget to tell our Sean that we have the Mountain Garth under potatoes again this year, said Sorcha Phaidin. He said when he was going that after him no one would ever again be born to the race that would attempt to sow it, it was such a hardship.

—Tell my boy, Mairin, that it won't be long till I'll be over to him, Nora Phadraig Mhurcha said in a whisper that all the girls heard.

—By cripes it won't be long till I'm knocking sparks out of the paving stones of South Boston myself, said a redhead youth whose tongue had been loosed by the drink.

—God help those that have to stay at home, said old Seamas O Currain.

The whiskey was circling again. —Here now, you ought to take a taste of it, said Peaitsin Shiubhaine who was measuring it out, heeling the glass towards Mairin with a trembling hand. He splashed some of it on her coat.

—A mouthful of it will do you no harm. Devil the drop of poteen you're likely to see for the rest of your life. There was an undertone to his voice, he was remembering the five daughters of his own who were 'beyond' — one of them thirty five years gone — and he had no hope of ever seeing them again... —I'll drink it myself then. Your health, Mairin, and God bring you safe to journey's end.

Neither Peaitsin nor anyone else in the gathering thought to add —God send you safe home again. Such ignorance of the proper thing to say sparked off the mother's repressed anger. —Five years from today you'll see her back home again, she said tartly.

—God grant it, said Peaitsin and Seainin Thomais Choilm together.

—And she'll marry a monied man and stay here with us for good, laughed Citin, Mairin's aunt.

—I'll have little or nothing to show after five years, said Mairin. But maybe you'd marry me yourself, Seainin, without a sixpence?

But by this time Seainin had huddled himself back against the door and was talking like a tornado to let the mockery of the young girls pass over him.

—At all costs don't pick up an accent, said a young lad, one of her cousins, —and don't be 'guessing' all round you like Micilin Eamoinn who spent only two months beyond and came home across the fields with nothing to show for his voyage but half a guinea and a new waistcoat.

—Nor asking 'what's that, mamma?' when you see the pig.

—Anyhow, you'll send me my passage, said Mairead the next daughter to Mairin, eyes sparkling.

—And mine too, said Norin the next sister.

The mother felt a bleak touch of her own death hearing the greedy begging voices of the pair. Years of delay were being heaped on her daughter's return, as shovelfuls of earth are heaped on a coffin. And the grace of that homecoming was receding from her – as far as Judgement Day. At that moment the children she had given birth to were her greatest enemies.

She set Mairin to drink tea again though she had just stood up from it. But she wanted to come close to her again. She must break bread, make a farewell communion, weave the intimate bond of a farewell supper with her daughter. She would tell her plain and straight that she didn't believe this parting meal to be a funeral meal as far as home was concerned: there would be an Easter to come before the Judgement. But they weren't left to themselves! Her sister Citin with her family of daughters and some of the other girls pushed up to the table by the wall and in no time had Mairin engulfed among them.

The daughter had no wish for food. Her face burned: desire, panic, wonder, an anguish of mind, all showed in her cheek. Brightcity was the farthest from home she had ever been, but she had been nurtured on American lore from infancy. South Boston, Norwood, Butte, Montana, Minnesota, California, plucked chords in her imagination more distinctly than did Dublin, Belfast, Wexford, or even places only a few miles out on the Plain beyond Brightcity. Life and her ideas of it had been shaped and defined by the fame of America, the wealth of America, the amusements of America, the agonised longing to go to America... And though she was lonesome now at leaving home it was a lonesomeness shot through and through with hope, delight, wonder. At last she was on the threshold of the Fairy Palace... Tremendous seas, masts and yardarms, blazing lights, silvertoned streets, dark people whose skin gleamed like beetles, distorting for her already the outlines of garth, mountain, rock, fiord. Her mind tonight was nothing but a ragbag to keep the castoff shreds of memory in until she might shed them as flotsam as she sailed. She was so unguarded now that she let herself be led out to dance on the stone floor, dressed as she was for America, in any case she couldn't have found it in her heart to refuse Pdraigin Phaidin.

It irked her conscience that she had so long neglected him. She began to dance in a lackadaisical way, but the pulse of the music – that music to which they were beholden even in the fairyplace – excited an impulse in herself, and soon in her dappled outfit she was like a young alien deer, fullblooded, with the common young animals of the herd prancing about her, inciting her to show what she was made of, what she could do, while the elders sat around in sage contemplation. The mother was thinking that if she was ever to see her again the hard experience of life would then be a dead weight on that lust for dancing. In place of that passion of young and eager blood that wedded her limbs to the graceful movement of the stars, the thin and watery stuff of greying age would be keeping her tired bones fixed on earth.

Nevertheless the mother was closely watching, not the daughter, but Pádraigin Phaidín who was dancing with her. There and then she guessed the whole story. Easy to see. Very likely the pair had never said a word of love to each other. Very likely they hadn't said a word tonight. And they were likely never to say a word in their lives. But she realised they would be married in South Boston in a year's time, in five years, ten years even... She was vexed. That's what lay behind Pádraigin's wild dancing fit. What she had failed to say in words he was saying in dance. Body and limbs he was enacting a perfect poem, with growing zest, abandon, vigour and precision, until a lash of his nailed boot caned a spark out of the hearthstone in time with the final beat of the music. Some might put it down to intoxication, but the mother knew better. That spark was in fact a finishing touch, a final fling of the spirit in full victory. Then hardly waiting to be asked while still breathless from the dance he began with easy power to sing. And the mother forgot the daughter listening to him:

The garden's a desert, dear heart, and lonesome I be.
No fruit on the bough, no flower on the thorn, no leaf,
No harping is heard and no bird sings in the tree
Since the love of my heart, white branch, went to Cashel O'Neill.

A young spirit trying to crack the shell of a universe that shut it in, so fierce was his song. By now the mother had come to hate him. An evil being, fingering her own proper treasure...

Horse's hooves and the clatter of a sidecar were heard from the cart-track outside. Music and merriment ceased suddenly. Only Seainín Tolan stretched drunk against the shut door still moaning –

Ora, wora, wora,
It's on the southern side of New York quay
That I myself will land –

the only snatch of a song Seainín ever raised.

—Indeed you'd be a nice gift to America! Devil drown and extinguish you, it's a pity it isn't on some quay you are, a useless hulk, instead of here, cried a youth who could stand him no longer.

The trunk was taken from the room and set like a golden calf on the table.

—Take out that and tie it up on the sidecar, said the mother.

—It might get broken, said Mairín. Leave it alone until I'm ready to go out along with it. That trunk was her licence and authority to wear an elegant hat on her head and an ostentatious coat on her back instead of a shawl. Without the trunk her lady-outfit would be an insult to God. If she let it out of her sight for as much as a second as like as not those tricksome and showy garments would wither into rags and ashes about her body.

She turned now to say goodbye to those who hadn't the strength to accompany her as far as the king's highway. Crippled oldtimers who could barely manage to shuffle across the street; for most of them this was likely the last time they'd leave their own firesides for a social occasion. This was the first link of the chain to be jerked apart, it made her feel for the first time how hard the parting was, how merciless. Whatever about the rest of the people, she would never set eyes on these again. In spite of her distress and hurry she looked closely at each one of them so as to store up in her memory their shape and features. She kept a grip on her emotion and broke down only when she came to her grandmother at the hearth. She had as much affection for her grandmother as she had for her mother, and made more free with her. And was loved in return. Never a week went by but the old woman had laid aside a bit of her pension to give her, whatever else might be behindhand. The old creature was as speechless as if already turned to clay. In fact she almost was, for the best part of her was in the grip of 'the One with the thin hard foot', and the rest waiting on busy death to prepare her dwelling-place. Her mouth was as dry as the timber of a new-shut coffin, and except for a faint blinking of the eyelids that brought her far-off look a little closer to the here and now, Mairin would have thought that she hadn't the least notion what was going on.

—I'll never see you again, mammo, she said, her voice breaking at last in tears.

—God is good, said the mother, a shade stubborn.

Then to kiss the small children and the infant in the cradle. She felt it as a warm substantial summer after the midwinter chill. Charming her senses against the threat of the graveclothes.

The mother brought her off to the room once more. But they weren't long there till Citin and Mairead came in on them to get their shawls so as to accompany Mairin to Brightcity. The mother could have melted them. How officious they were – without them, she thought, the lump of sorrow in her throat wouldn't have hardened again. All she could say to Mairin was that she'd have good earnings; that she hoped they'd have good weather at sea; and for the life of her not to forget to have her picture taken beyond and send it home.

—My own darling girl, she said picking a speck of fluff from the shoulder of the coat and giving a hurried quirk to the hatbrim, though the daughter at once reset it her own way. And having glanced quickly round the house she was ready to go.

The sidecar went lurching down the rugged village track followed by a dense crowd, men, women and children. They had all the appearance of a sacrificial procession: the sidecar like a funeral pyre ahead, puffs of the men's tobacco-smoke hanging in the early morning air, and Mairin walking in her barbaric costume as the officiating druid.

The mother walked alongside the daughter and offered to carry her rug but Brid Sheamais snatched it and carried it herself. She had determined to have Mairin under her own wing on this last walk, but Citin and her

own Mairead thwarted her once more. Then all the young girls closed round her, some chattering and laughing, some so lonesome at her going that they hadn't the heart to say much and others sorry that they weren't in her place or going along with her. By this time the mother had hardly any feelings of regret left so angry was she with the rabble that wished to deprive her of her daughter before she was even out of sight. She took a spleen against the sidecar too. It was moving as fast as if it was giving a corpse 'the quick trot to the graveyard'. It seemed to her that it was the trunk perked up on the box of the car, its timber blond as an ear of corn in the rays of the virgin sun – that was pricking the horse to death's own scything speed. She hadn't a word left to say...

There was a mild red light from the sun just up. Field walls and piles of stone grinned bleakly. In the little pokes of fields slanting and rugged the tramped stubble was like the head of some Samson having suffered the shears of Delilah. A small sailingboat just out from harbour with a fair wind scratched a bright wake down the Fiord. Mairin looked back from the rise at Hollycliff, from then on her own house and the village houses strung around would be out of sight. Last year's new thatch joined the old black and withered roof at the ridge-strip – line of contact between the past and the time to come. And the village seemed asleep again after its brief second of action, slight as a spit in the ocean that the sailingboat might obliterate.

The sidecar halted at the end of the track. The people formed a close group in the mouth of the highway so that the mother was cut off from the daughter. Just another stray stone in the cairn, that's all she was. The same as if she was neither kith nor kin. More than ever she begrudged Citin and Mairead their going to Brightcity with Mairin. When the kissing began the women were like a gaggle of scavengers about a prey. They pushed their way rudely up to her daughter, squeezed her hand, snatched kisses one after the other like a flock of starlings on a trash-heap. The men shook hands with her, shy, laconic, seeming to say it was all one, and if it had to be done then it were best done as quickly as might be. Pdraigin Phaidin did likewise, but unlike the rest of the men he gave the slightest lift to his head and the mother caught the eyes of the couple interlocked for the nick of a second.

At last it was her turn. She hadn't kissed her daughter since she was a child. But she failed to put much yearning and anguish into the kiss, though her lips hungered for her. Hadn't she kissed all and everyone? Hadn't all and everyone got ahead of herself in the kissing and hugging? The daughter's kiss was cold and insipid, the good skimmed from it by all that had been pecking at her. Her body was cold too, cold and insubstantial as a changeling from the Liss.

But what quite spoiled the kiss for her was the sight of the trunk, she was unable to keep her eyes off it and it was all but whispering in her ear –

No mortal kiss will break the spell of the changeling, seduced by pleasure to wander and forget, whose dwelling is the golden web which young desires weave from the sunlight on green hills far off from the here and now.

Mairin was now on the sidecar. Mairead sitting beside her, Citin next to the driver on the other side, Padraigin Phaidin fixing the trunk firmly between them up on the box. Damned spirits, they appeared to the mother – the accursed trunk, Mairead greedy to get her passage-money, and Padraigin Phaidin on edge to get to America and marry her daughter – three damned spirits torturing her first-born and best-beloved.

Padraigin had finished and the people were moving aside to make way for the horse. The women started in to sob, and the sobbing lifted into a loud wail of words, expressing no real anguish the mother thought, beyond voice and tears. They wouldn't leave her even the comfort of keening alone. And she shed no tear...

She stammered uncertainly, —I'll see you before five years are out. And couldn't raise her eyes to meet the eyes of her daughter, not if the sky fell.

The car was now moving. Sobbing the daughter whimpered, —You will. But now the mother's heart as well as her commonsense knew that she would not. Padraigin Phaidin would see her sooner and the girls of the village and her own children, even the infant then in her womb. The mother realised she was but the first of the nestlings in flight to the land of summer and joy: the wildgoose that would never again come back to its native ledge.