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PÁDRAIC Ó CONAIRE

# Nóra Mharcuis Bhig



## **Pádraic Ó Conaire** **1882-1928**

### *Life and Literary Status*

Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882-1928) was the most eminent author and journalist of the Irish language literary revival in the early twentieth century. He was born in Galway city to middle-class Catholic publicans. However, after their untimely death, Pádraic was sent out west to Connemara, to Ros Muc, to live with extended family in an Irish-speaking community. While he died in abject poverty in a Dublin hospital in 1928, he is commemorated today as the first modern writer of Irish, who attempted to make a living fully through his literary work.

From 1910 onwards, he lived in London, working first as a low-ranked civil servant, and later both as a teacher with Conradh na Gaeilge (Irish-language revival association) and as an Irish language writer of stories, articles, and novels. The novel *Deoraíocht*, published in 1910, is the first novel about emigration in the Irish language, and is regarded by many as the first modern novel in Irish. His writings veer strongly away from the romantic and sanitized portrayals of Irish speakers often found in literature of the period. Instead his works are realistic, gritty, and focus, in many cases, on the social ills of exile and emigration, and on the effects that this has on the mind and body of the characters he brought to life.

More information can be found on Pádraic Ó Conaire and his work in, Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature: Volume II, 1890-2000*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 242-243.

See also: [www.galwaycitymuseum.ie/padraic-o-conaire](http://www.galwaycitymuseum.ie/padraic-o-conaire) and *The Dictionary of Irish Biography* at <https://dib.cambridge.org>

For information in Irish, see [www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=186](http://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=186)

### **A note on this short story**

The short story 'Nóra Mharcuis Bhig' (literally, 'Nora the daughter of small Marcus'), is the story of a young woman who emigrates to London despite the express wishes of her father, who

wishes to marry her off to an older wealthy farmer, and to bequeath the farm to them. It is hinted at in the text, that Nora is pregnant but unwed, and that she feels that emigration is her only choice.

Informed no doubt by Ó Conaire's experience of disenfranchised Irish immigrants in London, the story portrays the harsh life that Nora faces in London, finally becoming a sex worker to stay alive. Alcoholism is her escape from reality. Ó Conaire also thematicises the pressure felt by young emigrants to prove themselves to the community they left behind. Ultimately, Nora's father disowns her once he realises what she has become. The sympathetic portrayal of a female sex worker who has been betrayed by men she trusted was a radical gesture by one writing in 1906. Sadly, Nora's story has parallels with immigrant sex workers in Europe and across the globe in our times.

### **Language and translation**

Ó Conaire's short story is written in the vernacular of Galway's Connemara Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking district). Ó Conaire's register is very close to the spoken word of the time; he was after all writing for readers who were predominantly language learners or native speakers of Irish who were literate in English and learning to read in Irish.

Thomas McCarthy's English translation is a very literal one, translating as directly as possible from the original Irish text, as can be seen in the sentence: 'when they were east at the crossroads the showers of tears were on the cheeks'. A more thoroughly 'anglicised' translation of the text might have read 'by the time they reached the crossroads the tears were streaming down her cheeks.' These conversational turns of phrase that he chooses may seem a little antiquated to a modern-day reader but they remind us that the characters in the story were native speakers of Irish and not of English.

'Nóra Mharcuis Bhig' is taken from the collection *Gearrscéalta an Chéid* (2000) and is reprinted with the kind permission of Cló Iar-Chonnacht. 'Nora, daughter of Marcus Beag' was published in *The Finest Stories of Pádraic Ó Conaire* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1986) and is reprinted with the kind permission of Thomas McCarthy.

## Nóra Mharcuis Bhig

Ní fhaca tú riamh ach an t-ionadh a bhí ar mhuintir Ros Dhá Loch nuair a chualadar go raibh Nóra Mharcuis Bhig le dul anonn go Sasana. Bhí deirfiúr léi thall cheana, agus í ag obair ann, ach bhí gá le Nóra sa mbaile. Ní bheadh ina diaidh sin ach an tseanlánúin. An bheirt dheartháir a bhí aici ní dhearnadar aon rath - dóibh féin ná d'aon duine a bhain leo. Cuireadh Mártan, an duine ba shine acu, go baile mór na Gaillimhe ina bhuachaill siopa (bhí an éirí in airde i Sean-Mharcas i gcónaí), ach níorbh fhada dó ansin gur chaill sé a phost i ngeall ar an ól, agus ansin chuaigh sé san arm Gallda. Maidir le Stiofán, an dara duine acu, ní raibh aon tsúil ag an seanfhear go bhféadfadh sé “duine uasal” a dhéanamh de go deo. Ach nuair nach bhfuair an t-ógfhear ceannndána seo cead a chinn óna athair, ghlan sé leis agus luach dhá bhullán a dhíol sé ar aonach Uachtair Aird ina phóca aige.

“Ní fearr ann ná as é,” arsa an seanfhear ar chloisint dó go raibh sé imithe. Ach ní raibh sé ach ag ligint air féin nár ghoill an scéal air. Is minic san oíche a bhí sé gan néal a chodladh ach ag cuimhneamh ar a bheirt mhac a bhí imithe uaidh ar a n-aimhleas. Duine ar bith de na comharsana a cheapadh an seanfhear dorcha a shásamh an aimsir sin, nó a théadh ag déanamh trua leis i ngeall ar an donas a d'éirigh dá chlann mhac, ní deireadh sé leo ach, “Cén mhaith do dhaoine a bheith ag caint? Ba bheag é a mbuíochas ormsa nuair a shléas a gcoinneáil sa tsean-nead. Ghlac an bheirt acu sciathán agus d'fhágadar mise liom féin. Is beag an imní a chuirfeas siad ormsa feasta.”

Ach chuir. Agus go dtí go ndúirt Nóra leis go raibh socraithe aici gan fanacht sa mbaile níos faide, ní raibh aon ní ag déanamh buartha dó ach an tslí ar imigh a bheirt mhac uaidh. Bhí sé náirithe acu. Bhí an pobal ag déanamh magaidh faoi. Bhí sé ina staicín áiféise ag an mbaile – é féin agus a chlann. Agus an chaoi ar cheap sé slí mhaith bheatha a thabhairt dóibh! An chaoi ar bhain sé allas as a chnámha ag obair moch deireanach, fuar fliuch agus tirim lena gcoinneáil ar scoil go rabhadar chomh foghlamtha leis an máistir féin, mórán!

Ach ní hamhlaidh a bheadh an scéal ag Nóra, dar leis. Choinneadh sé ise sa mbaile. Dhéanfadh sé cleamhnas di. D'fhágfadh sé an gabháltas aici féin agus ag a fear tar éis a bháis. Nuair a dúirt sí leis go n-imeodh sí, cheap sé gur ag magadh a bhí sí ar dtús. Ach ba ghearr go mba léir dó nárbh ea. Ansin rinne sé a dhícheall dubh is dath a coinneáil sa mbaile. Ní raibh aon mhaith ann. Ní raibh aon mhaith don tseanbhean a bheith ag caint ach oiread. Feadh míosa bhí sé ina chogadh dhearg eatarthu. An seanfhear ag bagairt gach donais uirthi dá n-imeodh sí; ise ag iarraidh a shárú. Ach bhí sé socraithe aici dul anonn, agus anonn a ghabhfadh sí pé ar bith céard a déarfadís.

“Bhí beirt mhac agat,” ar sise leis oíche, “agus d'imigh siad uait. Náirigh an bheirt acu thú. Níl a fhios agat nach ndéanfainnse an cleas céanna, mura ligfidh tú dom imeacht go toilteanach.”

“Is í an duine deireanach acu í, a Mharcais,” arsa a bhean, “agus i nDomhnach féin is dona liom scarúint léi i ndeireadh mo shaoil, ach,” ar sise agus í beagnach ag caoineadh, “b’fhéidir gurb é lár a leasa é.”

Cheap a hathair nárbh é. Bhí sé dearfa de. Bhí sé lánchinnte go mb’fhearr di go mór fada fanacht san áit a raibh sí agus cleamhnas a dhéanamh ann. Bheadh dhá fhichead acra talún ag a fear nuair a gheobhadh sé féin bás. Bean óg lách gheanúil a bhí inti. Ní raibh feilméara ná ceannaí siopa sna seacht bparóistí ba ghaire dóibh nach mbeadh lánsásta í a phósadh.

“Agus tuige nach mbeadh freisin?” arsa seisean, “bean chomh breá léi agus dhá fhichead acra de thogha na talún aici?”

Ach b’éigean dó géilleadh i ndeireadh na dála.

Is acu a bhí an obair ansin. An buaireamh mór agus an imní mhíchuiósach a bhí ag gabháil do Nóra le tamall, scaipeadh iad, de réir dealraimh. Ní raibh a rian le feiceáil. Bhí sí chomh haerach scléipeach agus a bhí an lá ab fhearr a bhí sí, nó ceapadh é. Bhí an oiread sin le déanamh aici! Hataí agus gúnaí le déanamh agus le gléasadh aici. Éadach agus ribíní de gach cineál le ceannach agus le dathú aici. Ní raibh sos léi feadh na seachtaine sular imigh sí. Ag tabhairt cuairte abhus lá, agus thall lá arna mhárach.

Deoir níor shil sí go dtí gur cuireadh a dhá bosca mhóra taistil a cheannaigh sí i nGaillimh ar an gcarr a bhí lena tabhairt go port na traenach i mBaile na hInse. Ansin thosaigh sí ag gol go faíoch. Nuair a bhíodar thoir ag an gcrosbhóthar bhí na frasa deor lena leiceann.

“Go bhfóire Dia uirthi,” arsa duine de na buachaillí a bhí caite le claí ar phlasóg mhín chaonaigh le hais an bhóthair.

“Áiméan,” arsa duine eile acu, “agus gach uile dhuine dá sórt.”

“Ach meas tú cén ealaín atá uirthi go bhfuil sí ag imeacht?”

“Ní dhéanfainn iontas ar bith de dá mba rud é nach mbeadh slí mhaith aici sa mbaile.”

“Tháinig triúr á hiarraidh anuraidh – triúr a raibh cáil mhór orthu ar airgead freisin.”

“Deirtear gur chuir sí spéis mhór i mac Sheáin Mhaitiú, an fear siopa,” arsa seanfhear a bhí ina measc.

“É siúd a bhí sa gcoláiste mór i nGaillimh?”

“An duine céanna.”

“Ná creid é. Drochbhuachaill bhí ann.”

“Abair é.”

Bhí an carr ag imeacht ó thuaidh thar an gcriathrach mór leathan atá idir an Ros agus Baile na hInse. Bhí a teach le feiceáil fós ag Nóra síos uaithi sa ngleann. Ach ní air a bhí sí ag cuimhneamh, ach ar an lá mí-ámharach a casadh mac Sheáin Mhaitiú uirthi ar dtús ag crosbhóthar Ros Dhá Loch, agus é ag caitheamh a laetha saoire tigh dheartháir a athar ar an mbaile thoir. Níor stad sí den mhachnamh sin go rabhadar i mBaile na hInse. Lig an traein fead ghéar mhífhoghdeach aisti mar a bheadh sí á rá leis na daoine deifir a dhéanamh agus gan moill a chur ar rud a bhí chomh mór agus chomh beoga agus chomh cumasach léise. Chuaigh Nóra isteach. Bhog an traein ruainne beag. Thosaigh sí ag imeacht go mall míthapa ar dtús. Bhí Marcas Beag ag siúl lena hais. Chuir sé a bheannacht lena iníon agus d'fhill sé abhaile go brónach dólásach leis féin.

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B'fhíor don seanfhear críonna úd a bhí ar an bplásóg chaonaigh ag féachaint ar an saol agus á ligint thairis, gur chuir sí spéis mhóir i mac Sheáin Mhaitiú uair dá saol. Ach bhí an uair sin caite. Agus ní bréag a rá gur fuath agus dearg-ghráin a bhí aici ar an bhfear óg galánta a bhí thall i nGlaschú sa gcoláiste le bheith ina dhochtúir. Toisc an cion a bhí aici air b'éigean di imeacht as Ros Dhá Loch agus óna cairde gaoil, agus an domhan mór a thabhairt uirthi féin. Ba ghile léi, uair, an fear óg aerach a thugadh a laetha saoire i Ros Dhá Loch ná duine ar bith eile dár casadh léi riamh roimhe. Agus nárbh iontach iad na scéalta a bhí le n-aithris aige faoin saol a bhíodh acu sna bailte móra thar lear! Agus nach breá a thaitníodh na scéalta úd léi! Agus nuair a deireadh sé leis an gcailín díchéillí mínósach nár casadh leis in aon bhall dá raibh sé duine ba mheasa leis ná í, nach uirthi a bhíodh an t-aiteas agus an t-aobhneas croí! Agus an teach breá a bheadh acu i mbaile mór éigin nuair a bheadh sé ina dhochtúir!

Agus chreid sí gach a ndúirt an fear óg léi. Chreid seisean é freisin – nuair a dúirt sé é. Ní mórán imní a dhéanadh an chaint úd dó, ámh, nuair a bhí sé imithe. Ní mar sin do Nóra. B'fhada léi go dtagadh sé arís. B'fhada léi uaithi an shamhradh. B'fhada léi uaithi nuair a bheadh sé ina shamhradh i gcónaí aici.

Bhí ardmhuinín aici as ach mealladh í. Na litreacha a chuir sí chuige, seoladh ar ais chuici iad. Bhí sé i mball éigin eile. Ní raibh a thásc ná a thuairisc ag aon duine. Bhí an saol ina cheo uirthi. Bhí a hintinn ina luaidhe leáite ina ceann nuair a thuig sí an scéal i gceart. Bhíodh sí ag déanamh machnaimh air agus á chur trína chéile de lá agus d'óiche. Ní raibh le déanamh aici ach imeacht as an áit ar fad. Bhí sí féin agus gach duine dár bhain léi náirithe aici os comhair an phobail uile. Bhí bean óg a bhíodh ar aimsir acu thiar i Ros Dhá Loch ag obair thall i Londain. Bhéarfadh sí aghaidh ar an gcathair mhór sin. Is ar an gcathair sin a bhí a triall anois, agus ní ar an mbaile mór eile a raibh a deirfiúr ann.

Ina suí sa traein di ghabh iontas mór í faoi rá is go raibh abhainn agus inbhear, loch, sliabh agus machaire ag sciarradh thairsti agus gan aon ní á dhéanamh aici féin. Cá rabhadar uile go léir ag dul uaithi? Cén saol a bhí i ndán di sa tír choimhthíoch údán ina bhfágfadh an gléas iontach iompair seo í? Ghlac uamhan agus critheagla

í. Bhí an doircheacht ag titim ar mhachaire agus ar chnoc. Coisceadh ar na smaointe uirthi, ach b'fhacthas di go raibh sí ag marcaíocht ar ainmhí éigin allta; go gcuail sí a chroí ag preabadh agus ag léimnigh fúithi le teann feirge; go raibh sé ina dhragún tine, agus lasair ag teacht óna shúil; go raibh sé á tabhairt go fásach éigin uafásach – áit nach raibh taitneamh gréine ná titim uisce; go raibh uirthi dul ann in aghaidh a tola; go raibh sí á díbirt go dtí an fásach seo i ngeall ar aon pheaca amháin.

Shroich an traein Baile Átha Cliath. Cheap sí go raibh an áit fré chéile in aon gheoin amháin torainn. Fir ag screadaíl agus ag béiciúch. Traenacha ag teacht agus ag imeacht agus ag feadaíl. Torann na bhfear, na dtraenacha agus na gcarr. Chuir gach ní dá bhfaca sí ionadh uirthi. Na báid agus na loingis ar an Life. Na droichid. Na sráideanna a bhí soilseach sa meán oíche. Na daoine. An chathair féin a bhí chomh breá, chomh beoga, chomh geal sin in uair mharbh na hoíche. Is beag nár dhearmad sí feadh scaithimh bhig an mí-ádh a dhíbir as a baile dúchais í.

Ach nuair a bhí sí ar an traein thall bhí a mhalairt de scéal aici. Thosaigh na smaointe dubha duaiseacha ag brú isteach uirthi arís. Ní raibh aon chosc leo. Níor fhéad sí a ndíbirt. Cad chuige ar fhág sí an baile chor ar bith? Nárbh fhearr di fanacht ann pé ar bith céard a d'éireodh di? Céard a bhí le déanamh aici anois? Céard a bhí i ndán di san áit a raibh sí ag dul?

Agus mar sin de. Má bhí daoine ann fadó a chaith na céadta bliain agus iad ag ceapadh nach raibh ann ach lá, mar a deir na seanchaithe linn, rinne sise rud níos iontaí fós. Rinne sí céad bliain d'aon lá amháin. D'éirigh sí aosta críonna in aon lá amháin. Gach dólás agus céasadh croí agus buairt mhór aigne a thagas ar dhuine feadh a shaoil thángadar uirthise in aon lá amháin ó d'fhág sí Ros Dhá Loch go raibh sí istigh i lár Londain mhór Shasana – go bhfaca sí Cáit Ní Roighin, an cailín aimsire a bhí ag baile, ag fanacht léi ag doras na traenach le fáilte a chur roimpi. Níor thuig sí an saol go dtí an lá sin.

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Bhí an bheirt bhan óg ina gcónaí i gcúlstráid shuarach ghránna ar an taobh ó dheas den chathair. I dteach mór millteach ina raibh na daoine in aon charn amháin ar mhullach a chéile sea bhíodar ina gcónaí an tráth sin. Ní fhaca tú riamh ach an t-ionadh a bhí ar Nóra nuair a chonaic sí a raibh ann díobh. Bhéarfadh sí an leabhar go raibh céad ann ar a laghad idir fhir agus mhná agus pháistí. Bhíodh sí léi féin feadh an lae fhada, mar bhí ar Cháit a bheith amuigh ag obair ó mhaidin go faoithin. Shuíodh sí ag an bhfuinneog ag féachaint amach sa tsráid ar na daoine ag dul thart agus ag déanamh iontais cá rabhadar uile go léir ag dul. Ní bhíodh sí i bhfad mar sin go dtosaíodh sí ag ceapadh nach ndearna sí a leas agus teacht chor ar bith. Tuige ar fhág sí an sráidbhaile uaigneach úd a bhí thiar i measc na gcnoc ar bhruach na farraige móire? Céard a déarfadh a hathair dá mbeadh a fhios aige cén fáth? Ar ndóigh, bheadh sé ar mire. “Cén tubaiste a bhí orm seachas duine ar bith eile?” a deireadh sí. Ach b'aimhréiteach an cheist í sin, agus nuair nach n'éiríodh léi a freagairt bhuaileadh sí

amach ar an tsráid; ach ní bhíodh sí i bhfad ar eagla go dtéadh sí amú. Ach bhíodh na smaointe céanna ag brú isteach uirthi amuigh ar an tsráid i measc na ndaoine díreach mar a bhí istigh.

Oíche dá dtáinig Cáit abhaile ó bheith ag obair, bhí Nóra os cionn na tine agus í ag gol.

“Seo anois, a Nóra, a chroí,” ar sise, “triomaigh do shúile agus ól cupán tae liomsa. Dúradh liom a rá leat go bhfuil cailín aimsire ó dhuine muinteartha le mo mháistreás-sa, agus dá dtéiteá ann...”

“Rachad ann freisin,” arsa Nóra, ag éirí de phreib.

Ar maidin lá arna mhárach ghluais léi go teach na mná uaisle seo. Chuaigh sí ag obair ann. Bhí an oiread sin le déanamh aici ann, agus bhí an oiread sin smaointe nua ag teacht isteach ina haighe nár chuimhnigh sí ar aon ní eile feadh scaithimh bhig. Na litreacha a chuireadh sí abhaile bhíodh intiús beag iontu i gcónaí, cé go raibh a fhios aici nach mórán a bhí ag teastáil uathu, mar bhí bealach maith leo cheana. Agus na litreacha a chuireadh a hathair chuici léadh sí agus d’athléadh sí iad gach oíche sula dtéadh sí a chodladh. Bhíodh nuaíocht an bhaile iontu. Go raibh an-lear scadán á fháil ag na hiascairí. Gur cheannaigh Tomás Pheaits Mhóir bád nua. Go raibh Neil Ní Ghríofa imithe go Meiriceá.

D’imigh cúpla mí mar sin, ach sa deireadh dúirt an bhean uasal léi nach raibh sí sásta léi agus go gcaithfeadh sí an áit a fhágáil. B’éigean di sin a dhéanamh. D’fhág sí a raibh aici ina diaidh, agus d’imigh léi. Dídean ná foscadh ní raibh aici don oíche sin ach an bháisteach ag titim anuas uirthi agus na sráideanna crua faoina cosa...

An éigean a chur síos ar gach ar tharla di ina dhiaidh sin? Ar an bhfear “uasal galánta” a thug ithe agus ól agus airgead di agus í i ndeireadh na déithe le call agus le heaspa. Ar an gcaoi ar thosaigh sí féin ar an ól. Ar an mbealach a shíl sí a hintinn agus a haighe a chaochadh agus a dhalladh leis. Ar na daoine éagsúla a bhuail léi i dtithe, ólta agus eile. Ar a gcaint agus a gcomhrá. Ar an gcaoi ar laghdaíodh ar an meas a bhí aici uirthi féin go dtí go mba chuma léi tar éis tamaill céard a d’éireadh di. Ar an gcaoi a raibh sí ag dul i ndonas ó ló go ló, go dtí nach raibh a clú ná a meas aici sa deireadh, ach í ag siúl na sráide.

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Naoi mbliana mar sin di. Ag ól agus ag ragairneacht d’oíche. Á gléasadh agus á réiteach féin sa ló i gcomhair na chéad oíche eile. Smaoineamh ar bith a thigeadh isteach ina ceann faoin saol a bhí aici nó an saol a bhíodh aici ag baile, dhíbríodh sí é chomh luath in Éirinn agus a d’fhéadfadh sí. Smaointe mar sin a chuireadh an míshuaimhneas is mó uirthi. Agus – más fíor é nach mbeadh dúil mhaireachtála ag duine chor ar bith mura sílfeadh sé, ar bhealach éigin, go mba mhó an mhaith a bhí á dhéanamh aige ná an t-olc – ní fhéadfadh sí a mhalairt a dhéanamh. Ach thigeadh na smaointe údán chuici gan bhuíochas di ina gcéadta agus ina gcéadta i gcaitheamh an lae – mórmhór nuair a bheadh sí tar éis litir a sheoladh abhaile, rud a níodh sí go minic. Agus nuair a bhíodh siad ag teacht chuici go tiubh mar sin, théadh sí amach ag ól.

Bhí sí amuigh oíche ag siúl na sráide, tar éis litir a raibh roinnt bheag airgid inti a sheoladh abhaile. Bhí sé a haon déag a chlog. Bhí na daoine ag teacht amach as na hamharclanna ina mílte agus ina mílte, agus ise ag féachaint orthu. Bhí cuid acu ann agus d'fhéachaidís uirthise agus ar mhná dá saghas. An fhéachaint úd a thaispeánas an dúil agus an tsaint a níos scrios ar dhaoine, a chuireas tíortha in éadan a chéile, agus a thug ábhar cainte d'fhilí agus do scéalaithe an domhain ó aimsir na Traoi go dtí an lá atá inniu ann.

Níorbh fhada ansin di go bhfaca sí fear os a comhair amach, a bhean lena thaobh. Dhearc an bheirt ar chéile, gan a fhios aicise cén fáth. D'aithníodar a chéile. Mac Sheáin Mhaitiú (a bhí ina dhochtúir i Londain anois) a bhí ann. Chas sise ar a cois go tobann. Chuala sí é á rá lena bhean dul isteach i dteach ithe a bhí i ngar dóibh agus go mbeadh sé féin chuici ar an bpointe.

Bhog Nóra amach ar a chloisint sin di. Bhí seisean ina diaidh. Ghéaraigh sise ar an siúl. Rinne seisean an rud céanna. Ní raibh uaithi ach imeacht uaidh. Bhí sí ina sodar, eisean ina shodar ina diaidh. Tosach maith aici air. Í ina cos in airde suas sráid agus anuas ceann eile. Í ag ceapadh go raibh sé ag a sála. Faitíos an domhain uirthi go mbéarfadh sé uirthi. Go mbeadh a fhios acu ag baile an bealach a bhí léi. Go mbeadh a fhios ag an uile dhuine é.

Bhí séipéal ar a haghaidh amach – séipéal beag a bhí ar oscailt feadh na hoíche i ngeall ar fhéile éigin. Bhí dídean ón bhfear a bhí ina diaidh uaithi – ón bhfear dá dtug sí searc a croí uair agus a mheall í. Ní raibh aon chuimhneamh aici ar dhul isteach, ach isteach ann a chuaigh. B'aisteach léi ar dtús gach a bhfaca sí, bhí sé chomh fada sin ó bhí sí istigh i séipéal roimhe sin. Tháinig a hóige ar ais chuici. Bhí sí i séipéal Ros Dhá Loch arís. Bhí dealbh na Maighdine Beannaithe istigh i gcúinne agus solas dearg os a comhair. Rinne sí ar an gcúinne sin. Chaith sí a lámha timpeall uirthi. Bhí sí á suathadh agus á luascadh anonn is anall le buairt aigne. A hata breá péacach ar chúl a cinn. A cuid ribíní breátha dearga fliuch salach smeartha le clábar na sráide. Bhí sí ag guí Dé agus na Maighdine os ard, paidir i ndiaidh paidre, go ndúirt sí i nguth mór dúthrachtach:

“A Naomh Mhuire – a mháthair Dé – guigh orainn, na peacaigh – anois agus uair ár mbáis – Áiméan!”

Bhí seansagart a chuala ag guí í ar a cúl. Labhair sé léi go lách cineálta. Shásaigh sé í. Thug leis í. Cheistnigh í. D'inis sí a scéal dó gan aon ní a cheilt air. Na litreacha a fuair sí óna hathair, thaispeáin sí dó iad.

Chuir sé tuilleadh ceisteanna uirthi.

Sea – bhí sí sásta dul abhaile. Is í a chuir an t-airgead abhaile lenar cheannaigh an seanfhear an bád iascaireachta. Go deimhin féin ní raibh – ní raibh aon cheapadh acu cén saol a bhí aici i Londain.

“Agus an raibh d'athair á fhiafraí díot cén fáth nach ndeachaigh tú chuig do dheirfiúr ar dtús?”

“Bhí. Dúirt mé leis go raibh an obair níos fearr i Londain.”



D’fhanadar tamall maith mar sin – eisean á ceistniú agus ise á fhreagairt. Fuair sé lóistín maith di i gcomhair na hoíche. Dúirt sé léi litir a chur abhaile á rá go raibh sí ag brath ar filleadh, agus go dtabharfadh sé féin cuairt uirthi lá arna mhárach agus go bhféadfadh sí faoistin a dhéanamh.

An oíche sin, sula ndeachaigh sé a chodladh, chuir sé litir fhada ag triall ar shagart paróiste Ros Dhá Loch ag insint an scéil dó agus á iarraidh air súil a choinneáil i ndiaidh na mná óige nuair a shroichfeadh sí an áit.

D’fhan sí mí eile thall. Cheap an seansagart go mb’fharr di sin a dhéanamh. Nuair a bhí an mhí caite thug sí an traein abhaile uirthi féin.

Bhí súil acu léi sa mbaile. Bhí gach uile dhuine á rá nár imigh duine ar bith as Ros Dhá Loch a rinne chomh maith léi. Nach raibh duine ar bith acu a chuir an oiread sin airgid abhaile léi.

“Is mór an sásamh aigne duitse é, a Mharcais,” a bhí Seán Gabha ag rá agus é ag cur crú ar chapall Mharcais thíos ag an gceárta an lá a raibh sí le teacht, “go bhfuil sí ag teacht abhaile sa deireadh, mar duine ná deoraí níl agat leis an talamh a fhágáil aige.”

“Abair é,” ar seisean, “agus tá aois mhaith agam anois freisin.”

Bhí an capall agus an carr gléasta aige le dul go port na traenach ina coinne.

“Bhídís á rá,” ar seisean go mórálach agus é ag cur an chapail faoin gcarr, “nach ndearna an bheirt eile aon rath, rud ab fhíor dóibh, b’fhéidir, ach ní chreidfeá ach an cúnamh a thug sise dom. Féach ar an mbád mór iasacaireachta sin atá ag dul amach ar lorg na ronnach anocht – ní fhéadfainn í sin a cheannach murach í.”

“Níl tú ag rá ach na fírinne anois, a Mharcais,” arsa seanfhear a bhí ag tabhairt cúnamh dó, “ach cogair anseo mé,” ar seisean go himníoch, “ar dhúirt sí leat gur casadh Séamas s’agamsa léi in aon bhall thall?”

“Chuir mé a thuairisc léi ach ní fhaca sí é.”

“Féach é sin anois ... Agus ní bhfuair mé aon litir uaidh le leathbhliain.”

D’imigh Marcas. Ní raibh sé chomh croí-éadrom le fada an lá agus a bhí sé ag dul amach go port na traenach dó. Má bhí a chlann mhac go dona, bhí a iníon thar cionn. Bhí sí ina sampla ag an bparóiste uile. Anois, ní bheadh acu le rá go gcaithfeadh sé an talamh a dhíol sa deireadh thiar. Choinneodh sé Nóra sa mbaile. Dhéanfadh sé cleamhnas di. Gheobhadh sé fear stuama staidéarach di ...

Ní raibh deireadh leis na smaointe sin go dtáinig an traein isteach faoi ghradam. Bhuail Nóra amach chuige. Agus nach aige a bhí an fháilte roimpi. Agus ba mhó ná sin, dá mb’fhéidir é, an fháilte a bhí ag a máthair roimpi sa mbaile.

Ach nach í a bhí tanaí traochta! Céard a rinneadh uirthi chor ar bith? An amhlaidh a bhí an iomarca oibre le déanamh aici? Ach ní fada a bheadh sí sa mbaile go mbeadh cuma na maitheasa uirthi arís. Is gearr go mbeadh na leicne bána imithe, dá bhfanadh sí acu agus a gcomhairle a dhéanamh.

“Agus is é an chéad chomhairle a bhéarfainn duit an mhias mhaith seo feola agus cabáiste a ghlanadh, mar is dócha nach raibh uain agat tada a ithe thall sa mbaile mór,” arsa an tseanbhean agus í ag gáire.

Ach ní fhéadfadh Nóra a ithe. Ní raibh ocras ar bith uirthi. Bhí sí trína chéile de bharr an aistir fhada a dúirt sí. Rachadh sí siar sa seomra agus bhainfeadh sí di. Ligfeadh sí a scíth ann. Agus ar ball b’fhéidir go bhféadfadh sí ruainne a ithe.

“Nó b’fhéidir go mb’fhearr leat cupán tae ar dtús,” arsa an mháthair nuair a bhí sí thiar.

“B’fhearr,” ar sise, “b’fhéidir go ndéanfadh sé maith dom.”

An oíche sin, nuair a bhuail muintir an bhaile isteach le fáilte a chur roimpi, ní fhacadar í. Dúradh leo go raibh sí chomh tugtha traochta sin de bharr an aistir go mb’éigean di dul a chodladh, ach d’fheicfidís go léir í lá arna mhárach. Chuala Nóra a gcaint agus a gcomhrá agus í thiar sa seomra ag guí Dé agus na Maighdine í a chur ar bhealach a leasa feasta agus cumhacht a thabhairt di go bhfanadh sí amhlaidh go deo.

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B’iontach a shaothraigh Nóra tar éis teacht abhaile di. Sa duine úd ar ar tugadh Nóra Mharcais Bhig i Ros Dhá Loch bhí beirt bhan dáiríre, an ógbhean lách a chaith tréimhse thall i Sasana ag saothrú airgid agus á chur abhaile, agus bean eile nár cuireadh in aithne do dhuine ar bith ar an mbaile, ach a d’fhulaing géarbhroid an tsaoil i gcathair choimhthíoch. Agus díreach mar a bhí beirt inti, mar a déarfá, bhí dhá intinn agus dhá mhodh smaointe aici freisin. Bhí modh smaointe na mná úd a bhí ar a haimhleas i Londain Shasana aici chomh maith leis an modh smaointe a bhí aici sular fhág sí a baile dúchais chor ar bith.

Agus bhí sé ina shíorchomhrac eatarthu. An bhean úd a bhí ar fán an tsaoil uair ag cur in aghaidh na mná eile nár fhág an baile riamh agus nach raibh ag iarraidh ach fanacht ann go socair suaimhneach. Ba dhian an comhrac é. Ba threise ar an olc ar uaire, shílfeadh sí, agus ansin d’fheictí í ag déanamh ar theach an phobail. Agus na daoine fré chéile á rá nach bhfacadar riamh bean óg a bhí chomh cráifeach diaganta dea-bhéasach léi.

Le linn an ama seo bhí pátrún acu ar an tsráidbhaile ba ghaire dóibh. Chuaigh lear mór daoine as an Ros ann. Cuid acu ag siúl, cuid ag marcaíocht agus cuid eile fós thar an gcuan ina mbáid. Chuaigh cuid acu ann le stoc a dhíol. Cuid eile fós gan gnó áirithe ar bith acu ann.

Bhí Nóra ar an dream seo. Bhí sí ag siúl timpeall an aonaigh ag féachaint ar an eallach a bhí ar díol ann. Ag cur aithne ar dhuine anseo agus ag cur tuairisc duine éigin eile a bhí imithe as an limistéar ó chuaigh sí go Londain ar dtús. Í go breá gléasta stuacach. Gúna den chadás bán ab fhearr agus ba dhaoire a bhí le fáil uirthi. Gúna a

thug sí abhaile as Sasana léi. Ribíní breátha dubha sróil ar sileadh léi. Cleiteacha péacacha in airde as a hata. Ní raibh sí chomh meidhreach aerach le fada an lá.

Lá meirbh brothallach a bhí ann. Bhí an ghrian ag spalpadh anuas go millteach. Mura mbeadh an séideán beag gaoithe a thagadh isteach ón gcuan anois agus arís ní fhéadfaí an teas a sheasamh. Bhí Nóra tuirseach traochta de bharr an lae. D'airigh sí ceol veidhil i ngar di. Ceol bog binn aoibhinn. Bhí an veidhleadóir ina shuí ag doras cábáin. A cheann á luascadh anonn is anall aige. A shúile druidte aige. Féachaint chomh suairc chomh sonasach sin ar a éadan agus ina ghnúis is go gceapfa nár bhuail imní ná buairt an tsaol ina threo riamh agus nach mbuailfeadh choíche.

Chuaigh Nóra isteach. Shuigh sí ar stól in aice an dorais ag éisteacht leis an gceol. Bhí sí tugtha. Dá mbeadh deoch aici! Sin é a shíl sí. Bhí an comhrac ag siúl arís. Bhí sí ar tí imeacht, nuair a tháinig fear óg as an Ros chuici ag iarraidh uirthi gloine a ól leis.

“Tá an lá chomh meirbh sin agus ní dhéanfaidh sé dochar ar bith duit. Rud ar bith is maith leat,” a dúirt seisean.

Ghlac sí gloine uaidh.

Duine ar bith a bhí tugtha don ól uair dá shaol agus a d'fhan tamall dá uireasa, má ólann an té sin gloine, is cinnte go n-ólfaidh sé an dara ceann agus an tríú ceann agus b'fhéidir an naoú ceann, dá ndéarfá é, mar athbheofar an dúil a bhí aige ann cheana.

B'amhlaidh a bhí an scéal ag Nóra. D'ól sí an dara ceann. Agus an tríú ceann. D'éirigh sé ina ceann gan mhoill. D'éirigh sí scléipeach. Chuaigh amach ag damhsa. Ach b'éigean di éirí as sul i bhfad. Bhí meadhrán ina ceann. Bhí a cosa ar fuaidreamh. Chuaigh sí amach ar éigean ach ní dheachaigh sí i bhfad gur thit sí le claí a bhí le taobh an bhóthair ...

Bhí cúpla uair den oíche caite nuair a fuair a hathair ann í. D'ardaigh sé isteach sa gcairt í agus thiomáin leis abhaile.

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Maidin lá arna mhárach bhí an chairt chéanna faoi réir aige taobh amuigh den doras.

“Más iad sin na béasa a d'fhoghlaim tú i Sasana,” ar seisean agus seirfean ina ghlór, “is ann a chaithfeas tú a gcleachtadh.”

D'imigh leo beirt go port na traenach.

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An oíche úd ar imigh Nóra d'fheicfeá seanfhear istigh i mbád iascaireachta dá mbeifeá ar chéibh Ros Dhá Loch. Bhí soitheach tarra lena thaobh agus é ag milleadh an ainm a bhí ar an mbád. Má mhill féin, níor éirigh leis an t-ainm úd a scriosadh amach óna chroí. Ainm a iníne a bhí aige ar a bhád.

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THOMAS MCCARTHY

# Nora, daughter of Marcus Beag



Translated from  
**Nóra Mharcuis Bhig**  
by Pádraic Ó Conaire

## **Nora, daughter of Marcus Beag**

### I

You never saw such surprise as that of the people of Ros Dha Loch when they heard that Nora, daughter of Marcus Beag, was to go to England. A sister of hers was already over there, working, but Nora was needed at home. There would be nobody left after her except the old couple. The two brothers she had never did any good – for themselves or for anyone belonging to them. Martin, the eldest one, was sent to Galway to be a shop-boy, (old Marcus always had notions), but he wasn't long there when he lost his job because of the drink and after that he joined the British Army. As for Stephen, the second one, there was no stopping the old fellow from thinking that he would make a "gentleman" of him, but when the headstrong lad didn't get his own way from the father he stole off with the price of two bullocks sold at Uachtarard fair in his pocket.

"He's no better here than out of here," the old man said on hearing that he was gone. But he was only pretending that the story didn't hurt him. Often at night he was unable to sleep a wink thinking about the two sons who had left him and gone astray. With any one of the neighbours who would try to brighten the dark old man then, as to sympathise with him over the misfortune of his sons, he would say nothing except – "What's the good in talking? Very little thanks I got for trying to keep them in the old nest. The two of them took flight and left me by myself. They'll give me little cause for worry from now on."

But they did. And up until Nora said that she had decided not to stay at home any longer nothing troubled him but the way the two sons had left him. He had been shamed by them. People were making fun of him. He was the laughing stock of the village – himself and his family. And the way that he'd thought that he'd give them a decent livelihood. The way he worked himself to the bone, labouring morning to dusk in all weathers to keep them at school until they might be as erudite as the master himself, indeed!

But it would be a different story with Nora, according to himself. He would keep her at home. He would find a match for her. He would leave the small-holding to herself and her husband after death. When she told him that she would leave he thought that she was just joking. But it was soon clear to him that she wasn't. Then he did his level best to keep her at home. It was useless. It was no use his wife talking to her either. For a month there was great antagonism between them: the old man threatening every evil on her head if she left, herself trying to better him. But her mind was set on going, and across she'd go no matter what was said.

"You had two sons," she said to him one night, "and they left you. The two of them showed you. You don't know that I wouldn't do the same, if you don't leave me go willingly."

"Since she's the last, of them, Marcus," said the wife, "and by God I hate to part with her at the end of my life, but," she continued and she nearly weeping, "maybe 'tis for her own good."

The father didn't think so. He was adamant. He was certain that it was far far better for her to stay where she was and make a match there. Her husband would have forty acres of land when her old father died. She was a pleasant and affectionate girl. There wasn't a farmer or a shop-keeper in the seven parishes which were nearest to them who wouldn't be very happy to marry her.

"And why wouldn't they be," he said, "such a lovely girl and with forty acres of land."

But he had to give in in the end.

It's then they saw the work! The great vexation and anxiety that had come over Nora for a while was all gone, apparently. There wasn't a trace to be seen. She was as light and festive as the best days of her life, or so it seemed. They had so many things to do. Hats and dresses to make and decorate. Cloth and ribbons of every kind to be bought and dyed. She hadn't one break in the weeks before she went. Visiting here today and elsewhere tomorrow.

She didn't shed one tear until the two big travelling boxes that she had bought in Galway were put on the cart that was to take them to the railway station at Ballinahinch. Then she wept profusely. When they were east at the crossroads the showers of tears were on the cheeks.

"May God have mercy on them," said one of the boys who was thrown on a ditch that was on a smooth mossy patch by the roadside.

"Amen," said another one of them, "and everyone like them."

"But do you know what's the matter with her that she's going away?"

"It wouldn't surprise me in the least if she could do well at home."

"Three fellows came asking for her last year – the three of them well known for their money."

"It's said that she had great time for the son of Sean Matthew, the shop-keeper," said the old man in their midst.

"The one who was at the big college in Galway?"

"The very one."

"I don't believe it. He was a bad lad."

"You don't say."

The cart was moving northwards through the great flat bogland between Ross and Ballinahinch. Nora could still see her own house below in the glen. It wasn't about that she was thinking, but on the misfortunate day that the son of Sean Matthew met her at the Ros Dha Loch crossroads, and he spending his holidays at his

uncle's house in the village eastwards. She didn't stop thinking about that until she reached Ballinahinch. The train let off a sharp impatient whistle as if it was telling people to hurry up and not delay something so huge and lively and powerful. Nora went in. The train gave a little jolt. It started to move slowly. Marcus Beag walked by its side. He took leave of his daughter and returned home sad and sorrowful.

## II

It was true for the wise old man who was thrown on the mossy green looking at life and letting it go by that she once gave her heart to the son of Sean Matthew at one point in her life. But that time was gone. And it wouldn't be a lie to say that it was an angry and intense hatred that she had for the fine young man who was over in Glasgow in a college studying to be a doctor. Because of that love that she had had for him she now had to leave Ros Dha Loch and her closest friends and bring the burden of the world on herself. He had been her most beloved once, that bright young man who spent his holidays in Ros Dha Loch, more so than any other person she'd ever met. And weren't those wonderful stories that he told her about the life they'd have in the great towns out foreign! And how his tales pleased her! And when he said to the foolish naïve girl that he'd never met anyone he loved more than her, how pleased and heart-warmed she'd been! And the wonderful house that they'd have when he'd be a doctor!

And she believed everything that the young fellow told her. He believed it himself – while he was saying it. Indeed, such foolish talk didn't worry him too much when he went away. But it was different with Nora. It would be a long time before he'd come back again. Summertime was a long way away! 'Twould be a long time before it would be summer always.

She had had great trust but she was deceived. The letters she sent him were returned to her. He was in another place. Nobody had any information on him. Her life was confused. Her mind was in a turmoil when she understood the story correctly. She was thinking about him and turning it all over in her mind by day and by night. She could do nothing but leave the place entirely. She, herself, and everyone associated with her were ashamed in front of people. A young girl who used to be a servant in Ros Dha Loch was working over in London. She would head for that city. She would make for that city now and not for the big town where her sister was.

Sitting in the train she was filled with wonder at the way rivers and harbours, lake, mountain and plain flew past while she herself did nothing. Why were they all moving away from her? What kind of life would be there for her in the foreign faraway land where this wonderful vehicle would leave her? Dread and trembling came over her. Darkness was falling on the flatland and the mountains. A halt was put to her thoughts but it was clear to her that she was borne away on some strange animal; until she felt her heart starting and jumping with the force of anger; until she was a fire-dragon, and flames leaping from her eyes; that she was being taken to



some terrible wasteland – a place where there was neither sunshine nor rainfall; that she had to go there against her will; that she was being banished to this wasteland because of one sin.

The train reached Dublin. She felt that the whole place was disturbed by a great single drone of sound. Men screaming and shouting. Trains coming and going and blowing whistles. The noise of men, of trains, of carriages. Everything she saw filled her with wonder. The boats and shipping on the Liffey. The bridges, the streets that were lit up at midnight. The people, the city itself that was so beautiful, so full of life, so bright in those dead hours of the night. For a little while she nearly forgot the misfortune that drove her from her own hometown.

But when she was on the train over, the reverse was true. The terrible dark thoughts pressed down on her again. There was no stopping them. Why did she leave her home anyway? Wouldn't it have been better to stay, no matter what happened to her? What would she do now? What was going to happen to her in the place where she was going?

Things like that. If there were people long ago who spent a hundred years to discover that life was but a day, as the old storytellers tell us, she herself did something more marvellous. She made a hundred years out of one single day. She became old and withered in just one day. Every sorrow and heartbreak, and every great trouble of the mind that comes upon a person over a lifetime came to her in one single day from the time she left Ros Dha Loch to the moment she was at the centre of London, England – the moment she saw Kate Ryan, the servant girl they had had at home, waiting for her at the side of the train to give welcome. She never understood life until that very day.

### III

The two young women were living in a miserable ugly back street on the southside of the city. In a large sprawling house where the people were on top of each other in one great heap was where they lived at the time. You never saw the likes of Nora's amazement when she saw the number of them that were there. She could have sworn that there was at least one hundred people, between men, women and children. She used to be left alone there for the whole day, because Kate had to go out to work from morning until dusk. She would sit at the window looking at all the people going by, wondering where they could all be going. She wasn't long like that until she began to wonder if she'd made a mistake in coming at all. She wondered why she had left the lonely village in the west among the hills on the edge of the great ocean. What would her father say if he knew why? He'd be furious of course.

"Why had I the misfortune more than anyone else?" she would say. But that was too insoluble a question, and when she couldn't find an answer she'd go out onto the street; but she wouldn't go far for fear of getting lost. But the same thoughts pressed down on her in the street among people, just like in the house.

One night when Kate came home from work, Nora was sitting by the fire crying.

"Now, now, Nora love," she said, "dry your eyes and drink a cup of tea with me. I was told to tell you that a girl is needed by relatives of my mistress, and if you would go there ..."

"I'll go there," Nora said, rising quickly.

On the following morning she journeyed to the house of the lady. She started work there. She had so much to do there, so many new thoughts entered her mind, that she couldn't think of anything else for a little while. In the letters she sent home she included a little money even though she knew that they didn't lack much because they were already well set up. And the letters her father sent to her she used to read and reread every night before going to bed. They used to have news of the village. That the fishermen had had a great catch of herring. That Tomas Pats Mor had bought a new boat. That Nell Griffin had emigrated to America.

A few months went like that but in the end the lady told her that she wasn't satisfied with her and that she'd have to leave. She had to do that. She left what she had behind her and went. She had no shelter or protection that night but the rain falling on her and the hard streets under her feet.

Is it necessary to talk about everything that happened to her after that? About the "young nobleman" who gave her food and drink and money and she at the end of her tether with want and need. About the way that she started on the drink. About the way she tried to deceive herself, and daze and blind her mind. About the different people who met her in houses of drink and otherwise. About their talk and their conversation. About the way her self-esteem was narrowed until after a while she didn't care what might become of her. About the way she was going to the bad day by day, until in the end she had no care or honour, but walked the streets.

#### IV

Nine years she had like that. Drinking and carousing at night. Dressing up and getting herself ready during the day for the next night. Any thought that used to come into her head about the life she lived now and the one she lived at home she banished as quickly as she could. It was thoughts like that that caused her most unease. And – even if it's true that a person would have no interest whatsoever in living unless he thought that somehow he was doing more good than bad – she couldn't do any differently. But those thoughts came mercilessly against her will in their hundreds and hundreds during the day – especially after she had just sent a letter home, a thing she often did. And when they came upon her thickly like that she would go out drinking. She was out one night walking the streets after she had just sent a letter home that contained some money. It was eleven o'clock. The people were coming out of the theatres in their thousands and thousands and she looking at them. There were some among them who stared at her and at women of her kind. The kind of look

that shows the desire and greed which brings destruction on people, that drives countries against each other and which gave material to poets and storytellers of the world from the time of Troy to the present day.

She wasn't long like that when she saw a man in front of her, his woman by his side. They stared at each other, without knowing why. They recognised each other. It was the son of Sean Matthew who was a doctor in London. She turned on her heels quickly. She heard him say it to his wife on going into a restaurant that was near them, and that he would join her shortly. Nora moved off on hearing that. He was after her. She quickened her walk. He did the same. She was trotting, he trotting after her. She had a head start on him. She ran up one street and down another. She feeling that he was at her heels. She worried to death that he might catch her. That everyone would find out about her predicament at home. That everyone would know.

A chapel was just in front of her – a small chapel that stayed open all night because of some feast day. She needed the shelter there from the man who was after her – that man to whom she gave the love in her heart and who'd deceived her. She had no recollection of getting inside, but in she went. What she saw made her feel strange, it had been so long since she was inside a church. Her youth came back to her. She was in Ros Dha Loch Church again. A statue of the Blessed Virgin was in a corner and a red light in front of it. She made for that corner. She threw her hands around it. She was shaking and rocking back and forth with heaviness of mind. Her bright peaked hat almost falling off her head. Her bright red ribbons drenched and soiled by the mud of the street. She was praying to God and the Virgin out loud, prayer after prayer, until she exclaimed in a strong fervent voice: "Holy Mary – Mother of God – pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death – Amen!"

An old priest behind her heard her pray. He spoke to her in a kind gentle manner. He calmed her. He took her with him. He questioned her. She told him her story without holding anything back. She showed him the letters she had received from her father.

He put further questions to her.

Yes – she was satisfied going home. 'Twas she who sent the money home with which the old man bought the fishing boat. She was certain that they didn't – they didn't know anything about the life she led in London.

"And did your father ask you why you didn't go to your sister in the first place?"

"He did. But I told him that the work was better in London."

They spent a good while like that – himself questioning and she giving the answers. He found decent lodging for her for the night. He told her to send a letter home to say that she was thinking of returning, and that he would visit her the following day and that she would be able to make a confession. That night before he went

to sleep he wrote a long letter to the Parish Priest of Ros Dha Loch telling him the story and asking him to keep an eye on the young woman when she arrived home.

They were expecting her at home. Everybody was saying that no person ever left Ros Dha Loch who did as well as her. There was no one among them who had sent that kind of money home.

“It must give you great satisfaction, Marcus,” Sean the Blacksmith was saying and he putting a shoe on Marcus’ horse down in the forge on the day she was coming home, “that in the end she’s coming home, because you haven’t got anybody to leave the land to.”

“Well you may say it,” he replied, “and I’m a fair old age an’ all.”

The horse and cart was fitted out for his journey to the railway station for her.

“They used to say,” he said boastfully and he fixing the horse to the cart, “that the other two did nothing, which was true I suppose, but you wouldn’t believe the help she gave me. Look at the big fishing boat that’ll be chasing mackerel tonight – I couldn’t have bought it but her.”

“You’re saying nothing but the truth now, Marcus,” said the old man who was giving him a hand, “but tell me this,” he said nervously: “Did she ever tell you that my Seamus met her in some place?”

“I did ask her that, but she never saw him.”

“Well, look at that now... and I haven’t had a letter from him in six months.”

Marcus left. He hadn’t been so light-hearted for many a long day as he went off to the railway station. If his sons had gone to the bad his daughter had surpassed all. She was an example for the whole parish. Now they wouldn’t be able to say that he’d have to sell the land in the end. He would keep Nora at home. He would make a match for her. He would find her a solid, prudent man...

These thoughts hadn’t ended when the train came in majestically. Nora came off it. And he had some welcome for her! And even greater than his, if that was possible, was the welcome that her mother gave her at home.

But didn’t she look spent and tired! What did they do to her at all? Was it the way she’d been doing too much work? But she wouldn’t be at home long before she would have a good appearance again. The wan cheeks would be gone; if she stayed at home at took their advice.

“And the first bit of advice I’ll give you is to have this lovely bit of meat and cabbage, because I suppose you never had time to have a not to eat in that city,” said the old woman and she laughing.

But Nora couldn't eat. She wasn't a bit hungry. She was too upset from the long journey, she said. She would go straight to the room and undress. She would rest there. And after a while maybe she'd be able to eat something.

"Or maybe you'd like a cup of tea to begin with," her mother said when she was going back in the room.

"I'd prefer that," she said, "maybe it would do me some good."

That night when the people of the town came in to welcome her they couldn't see her. They were told that she was so exhausted from the journey that she had to go asleep, but that they would see her tomorrow. Nora heard their talk and conversation as she was across in her room praying to God and The Virgin to put her on the right road from now on and to give her the power to stay that way forever.

## V

It was amazing the way Nora worked after her homecoming. Within the person who was called Nora Marcus Beag in Ros Dha Loch there were two actual women: the young gentle one who had spent some time in England earning money and another woman who remained unknown to the people of the village, but who had suffered the hardships of life in a foreign city. And just as there were two persons, you might say, there were two minds and two modes of thought there as well. She had the outlook of the woman who had been led astray in London as well as the viewpoint she had before she ever left her native place at all.

And she bore the constant conflict between them. The woman who had once led a wild life fighting with the other woman who never left and who wanted nothing except to stay at home, settled and secure. It was a hard struggle. Sometimes the evil was stronger, she'd think, and then she could be seen making for the Chapel. And all the people saying that they'd never seen a young woman so devout and pious and polite as herself.

During this time the village nearest to them had a pattern-day. A large number of people from Ros went there. Some of them walking, some riding, and some others across the harbour in their boats. Some of them went there to sell stock. Yet others had no particular business there.

Nora was one of this crowd. She was walking around the fair looking at the cattle that were being sold. Getting to know people here and enquiring after some person who had left the district since she first left for London. She was cheery, all dressed-up and upright. A dress of the best white cotton, the most expensive, was what she wore. A dress that she'd brought back from London. Fine satin ribbons trailing after her. Peacock feathers standing up in her hat. She hadn't been so breezy and happy for a long time. It was a terribly hot day. The sun was glaring down ferociously. If it wasn't for the little breeze that came in off the harbour now and again, one couldn't take the heat. Nora was exhausted by the day. She heard violin music close by. Soft, sweet, pleasant music. The fiddler was sitting by the door of the cabin. His head swaying back and forth. Such a satisfied and

contented expression on his face and in his manner that you'd think he'd never had any worry or trouble in his life before and never would.

Nora went in. She sat on a stool by the door to listen to the music. She was exhausted. If she could only have a drink! That's what she thought. That conflict was started again. She was just about to leave when a young man from Ros came over to her to ask if she'd have a glass with him.

"The day itself is so hot that it wouldn't do a bit of harm to you. Have anything you like."

She took a glass from him.

Any person who's been fond of the drink at a point in their life and who's stayed off it for a while, and who again touches a drop, 'tis certain that he'll drink a second glass, and a third one, and maybe a ninth one, because the old desire is reawakened.

That was the way it was with Nora. She drank the second one. And the third one. It soon went to her head. She began to make a show. She went out and danced. But she had to give up before long. Dizziness was in her head. Her legs had gone from under her. She was barely able to go out but she hadn't got far when she fell on a bank by the side of the road.

A few hours of night had gone by when her father found her like that.

He lifted her into the cart and drove her home.

The following morning the same cart was being prepared outside the door.

"If those are the kind of tricks you learned in England," he said and bitterness in his voice, "it's there you can be practising them."

The two of them went to the railway station.

## VI

The very night that Nora left you could see an old man inside a fishing boat if you were by Ros Dha Loch shore. A container was drawn up by his side and he trying to obliterate the name that was written on the boat. Even if he did, he didn't succeed in rubbing the name from his heart. 'Twas the name of his daughter that was on the boat.