

The Catholic Journal

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Nellie Bryant's Secret

Twilight was deepening; there was a clear green glow in the sky, toward which, shorn fields stretched smooth and brown. At the gate of a white cottage, surrounded by a glory of phloxes, a woman was standing gazing anxiously up the lane which led to the village. Now a covered cart went by, its driver nodding drowsily over the reins, now a group of youthful anglers, displaying their catch in a pickle bottle; now a pair of alehouse cronies, "disputatious and altogether," at length watched for one came in sight, tall and shapely, and the woman opened the gate with a sigh of relief.

"How late you are, Jim!" she said.

"You will never have to complain of that again," he returned, curtly, and went into the house without other response or salutation.

"Well, I was not complaining," she said, ignoring his unusual and perplexing ill-humor. "You see you are always home in such good time that I couldn't help wondering what was keeping you."

He looked at her in a hard stern way, and for the first time she noticed the anger in his eyes, the flame of wrathful color in his cheeks.

"You'll not have to complain of my being late or early," he said, "because the same walls won't hold you and me after tonight."

"Jim, whatever has come over you?"

"I have found you out—found your treachery at last!" he muttered through his teeth.

"What can you mean?" she demanded.

"Oh, of course you don't know, don't understand! Not you! Perhaps you will, though, when I tell you I saw Mrs. Brighthouse-to-day."

Mary Massey that was. She has come home from America, and we had a long talk together over old times."

Nelly's color had faded; her eyes grew anxious, troubled, expectant; her lips trembled.

"I don't need to remind you," he said, his voice shaken by the very intensity of scorn and wrath, "that Mary and I used to be sweethearts, boy and girl together. We had a silly quarrel, and it was never made up, and she went away to service in Liverpool. The next I heard was that she had married another man, and gone to America with him. Well, today I met her for the first time after all these years, and we began to talk about the past. And it came out that before her marriage she wrote to me, asking if I still cared for her; because she liked me best, and would not have any one else, if I wanted her. She never got an answer to that letter, of course; so she married the other man, and I married you. Thanks to you, Mary's letter never reached me!"

"Are you trying to say that I kept back that letter?"

"I'm not trying; I'm saying straight out that you did. You were in our house, nursing my mother, and I was away from home at the time the letter must have come. No one but yourself had any motive for keeping it from me."

She did not reply for a few minutes; when she did so, the words were slow and dragging.

"You believe I did a mean, dishonest action to get you, Jim. You—"

"Do you deny that you kept back that letter?"

She looked at him steadily and even more clearly what she quietly, but she did not deny the accusation. He turned his back on her, and she walked slowly out of the room. A dead silence fell upon the little dwelling; her patient were isolated, so that thought of what might have been he could not see her, else he had if that letter had reached him, told her that indeed he loved her; that because of that very love he had felt so keenly her fall from her high estate.

One afternoon's neighbor met him as he trudged home, her eyes red with weeping. Nelly had contracted the dread disease, and the doctor did not think she would recover.

pulses. He crept quietly up stairs; within the bedroom he saw Nelly kneeling, her arms flung across the snowy counterpane, her head bowed on them, and a sobbing sigh shook her from head to foot. He went away as noiselessly as he had come, a softer feeling, a kinder judgment growing on him. After all, it was evident that if he suffered, so did she. The wrong she had done had been for love of him, and she had been a good wife, making his home a home indeed.

He was awakened from a troubled sleep by the chirping and twittering of birds. Early though it was, he heard her stir too, and found her going about her customary household duties as if nothing unusual had occurred. But her face had fallen into hollows, the light of her eyes was quenched as by many tears.

"Nelly," he said, awkwardly, "I was very harsh to you last night. But I will try to forgive you, and to let bygones be bygones."

"It is not a question of your forgiveness, but of mine," she answered very quietly. "Some day you may be glad to know that I forgive you, though it has cost me a struggle to do so."

"I'd like to know what you have to forgive me for—I'm sure I don't understand you," he declared impatiently.

"Don't you? You have proved that you have no faith in me. We have lived together, man and wife, many a day; yet you think slightly of me that you believe the first charge you hear against me. I thought you loved me as I loved you. But you have as good as told me that you married me only out of anger with Mary, not because you cared for me and wanted me for your wife. You can't understand, I'll admit, the shame of that—the wrong of it to a woman."

He stared in amazement, she was talking as if she was the injured person. The situation was relieved and a diversion effected by a hasty knocking at the door. Nelly admitted a woman whose face was blanched with distress, whose voice trembled in a passion of appeal.

"Oh, Mrs. Bryant," she said, "I'd wish you'd come down and see our Sarah! I've been up the whole night with her, and she's no better yet. Come and tell us what to do."

Amongst her humble neighbors Nelly was something of an authority on childish and other diseases. Often they consulted her in preference to a doctor. It was cheaper, and sometimes more satisfactory.

"Of course I'll come," Mrs. Bryant answered promptly. "Will you get your breakfast yourself, Jim? It's ready."

He offered no opposition to his wife's departure; indeed it was not unwelcome, for the current of her thoughts would be changed and her unreasonable wrath cooled by attending on a sick child.

Before going to his work, he thought he would like to see her, he scarcely knew why; and so he made his way to the neighboring cottage. She had observed his approach, and spoke to him from the window.

"Stay where you are Jim, it is diphtheria, very bad. I've promised to do the nursing. Tell Granny Hill to keep house for you in the meantime. She'll be glad to do it."

"Very well," he acquiesced. "Don't run any foolish risks, Nelly."

As the days went on he realized even more clearly what she had been in the house; how she had studied him, interposed between him and petty domestic worries; how peaceful and benign fell upon the little dwelling; her patient were isolated, so that thought of what might have been he could not see her, else he had if that letter had reached him, told her that indeed he loved her; that because of that very love he had felt so keenly her fall from her high estate.

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"You can't see her Mr. Bryant. That's hard, I know. None's left to go near her but them that must. Father Ryan was there and gave her the Last Sacraments, so everything's been done."

The woman left him with homely words of comfort and promises of prayer; and, half stupefied, he entered his house, from which indeed the light had gone. He started round the little parlor, with its picture of the Sacred Heart, its statue of Our Lady, which it had been Nelly's delight to keep surrounded with flowers. There were her books, presents, and school prizes; her workbasket, with an unfinished bit of knitting, a ray of sunshine glistening along the needles, her desk, her favorite chair. Each thing revived some memory of her; her innocent pride in her little library, her busy hands sewing raiment for God's poor, or binding white and blue flowers together for her humble altar.

He touched the books tenderly, as though they were already relics of the dead; he moved the chair and set the workbasket beside it, as things apart from all else of his possessions; his eyes dim, his fingers trembling.

Somehow, the handling of her things gave him consolation and hope; she must come back to them. He lifted the desk and softly blew the dust from its shining surface; the lid slipped from the unsteady grasp, and in falling heavily dislodged a letter which had been fastened to the inner surface. It was sealed and addressed "To my dear son James."

How was it that he had never seen this before? Why had Nelly kept it concealed in her desk all these years? Good heavens, had she suppressed even a letter from the mother he idolized? He tore it open and read the lines, dated a week prior to the writer's death, five years before.

"My Dear Son:—I know that I am on my deathbed, and before I die I must clear my conscience, and ask your pardon if you think I wronged you by what I did. You have been so happy with Nelly, and she has proved so devoted a wife, that I feel that what I did has, after all, turned out for the best. Mary Massey was never good enough for you, and I was glad when something came between you, and she went away. I knew Ellen liked you, but you might never have asked her to marry you if I had not suggested it. One day a letter came for you from Mary, and I opened it and read it. She wanted to be friends with you again. No one but my self knew about the letter, and I burned it. I meant you no wrong knowing that Nelly was the best wife for you; but I can't die with this on my conscience. I am giving this letter to Nelly to give to you if she sees fit. She knows what I did, but she does not know that it was I who advised you to marry her, and that you cared for Mary."

His mother's signature followed. The feeble scrawl fluttered to the ground. He understood too well. Nelly would not shame his mother in his eyes; she would not clear herself at another's cost. His reproaches, his harsh judgment came back upon him like a bitter sea that over-whelmed him. How long he sat stupefied by the double blow that day had dealt him he never knew. But at length he started up in desperation, impelled to action by very agony. He must see Nelly, he must speak to her; no human power should keep him from her. He could not bear another minute of his life without her pardon. He rushed out, determined if need be to force his way to her presence; but, fortunately for both, he was met at the gate of the cottage where she lay by Father Ryan, who laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"Jim! You can not go in, my dear boy!"

"But I must, Father! Don't try to stop me."

"For your wife's sake, Jim, control yourself. I have good news for you. Since Extreme Unction was administered this morning, there has been a slight change for the better; and, please God, Nelly will be spared to you for many a day. Go to the chapel, Jim, and pray for her. I shall see her again tonight, and I will bring you word how she is."

"And you will tell her, Father, that I am on my knees at her feet, beseeching her pardon, praying God to give her back to me that I may make up to her for all I've made her suffer; that I may show her there's nothing in this world so dear to me as she is—"

His voice broke and died away in tears. The old priest pressed his hand with murmured sympathy and hope and blessing; and the other hastened to the little chapel, and there sought at Our Lady's mantle in a very passion of supplication. And the Queen of Sorrows looked on him in compassion, and again told her Divine Son: "They have no wine."

As from the very jaws of death, Nelly was given back to him, to a love and tenderness of which she had not deemed him capable. Gently and sweetly she responded to his appeal for pardon, and the cloud passed away forever from their lives. To him she was the answer to a prayer. Our Lady had restored her to him, and he must prove himself not all unworthy of Our Lady's trust.—Mary Cross in the Ave Maria.

Cardinal Andreux, Bishop of Marseille, has now received the bull appointing him to the Archiepiscopal See of Bordeaux.

The English Catholic press chronicles the critical illness of Right Rev. Dr. Wilkinson, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, who resides at Ushaw College, of which he is president.

NEW HOME FOR DOLLAR HATS

Will Reopen in Two Weeks at 111 Main Street East.

The fire Friday night was a disastrous one, in that it practically wiped out of existence the entire spring stock of the Dollar Hat store. The owners, however, are wide-awake merchants, and at once set about to secure new quarters and stock.

In talking with Mr. Held of the firm of Messrs. Shaffer & Held, who own the Dollar Hat store, the writer learned that the wires cut of Rochester were kept busy for several hours yesterday until orders were placed for new spring goods. Another of the firm stated that the spacious store, 111 Main street east, had been secured and would be open for business on April 2d with a complete line of dollar hats.

Speaking further, Messrs. Messrs. Shaffer and Held collectively desire to express and extend thanks to the men of Rochester who have favored them in the past with their patronage, also to say that on and after April 2d they will again be in a position to serve all with the same great dollar values in headwear at the new stand, 111 Main street east.

About Hair Combing

If you have some hair combings or cut hair, bring them to our store and we will make them up into switches, puffs or pompadours for your own use at a small cost. We understand the proper construction of combings, therefore, we can give you the best results from them. We also have the largest stock of cut hair goods and ornaments in Western New York. Guggenheims' Hair Stores, 17 Clinton avenue south, opposite Hotel Seneca.

People Take Notice When Doors Close

Visit our new store. We have the largest and finest assortment of post cards in the city. Easter cards, 1c each; new line of Rochester view cards, 1c each. See our silk, plush, hand-painted birthday and wedding cards. Full line of novelties. E. J. Zimber, Post Card Dept., 49 South avenue, corner Ely street.

Beck Beer in an Auto

To insure prompt delivery of all orders. Flower City Brewing Company.

Flower City's Triumph

A real German style Beck beer on draft and in bottles. Phone 271.

News From Ireland

Married

February 2, at St. Matthew's, Belfast, by the Rev. G. C. O'Connell, M.A., M.C., M.P., a bachelor, a merchant, Mayflower street, Belfast, to Bridget, third daughter of James O'Connell, M.P., M.C., M.P., Clontarf, Carrickmacross.

Accident

A serious accident occurred at Griffin Mine, near Dalkey, on Feb. 16. James Kerrigan, a miner, was working in the mine, when a large block of stone, about 4 tons weight, fell from the roof and crashed beside Kerrigan, breaking his leg. The injured miner was soon removed to the hospital, where he was attended to by Dr. James Molloy.

Cavan

A number of lace classes recently opened by Miss Cavan in the Hibberdeen Lane, Cavan, are at present in a flourishing condition and find remunerative employment for a large number of girls. There are two lace classes in the Mandabawn parish conducted by Miss Fay; three classes in the parish of Kili conducted by Miss McCabe; and four classes in the parish of Kili conducted by Miss Moffet. About 500 girls are engaged in these classes and are constantly employed at lace making.

Enjoyable

A very enjoyable ball and supper was given at the Cavan Hotel on Feb. 12. The evening was held in the large hall, and was a most enjoyable gathering of the people of the town and district. The entertainment was most enjoyable and was a success in every respect.

John J. Conboy

John J. Conboy, President of the Cavan branch of the Peace and Democracy League, has been elected to the office of President of the League for the year 1948. The following is a list of the members of the board of directors of the League for the year 1948: John J. Conboy, President; William C. Harvey, Vice-President; John F. Conboy, Secretary; and John J. Conboy, Treasurer.

The British Council

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