

From Morn Till Night

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One stone may change the course of a stream;
One word may break a nation's strife;
One day, with its sum of work and dream,
May make or unmake a human life.



THE Runt wriggled himself farther into the A. D. T. bench and blew on his fingers. For days he had battled with the cold wind, with loneliness, and with fear; and now they had turned upon him like a triple-headed monster, before which his fighting spirit was as chaff.

The wind took him first. It shriveled his already small body into such smallness that he was obliged to search for it, with many wriggles, inside his blue uniform. His fingers and toes ached. He stopped dressing, drew his fingers inside the sleeves of his coat, and closed his eyes. There was cold in Ireland—aye, plenty of it, but there was always the glow of a peat fire, somewhere, to soften it.

Odorous whiffs of coffee and fried cakes from the Boston Lunch, next door, unkindly reminded him that his stomach was empty. Then loneliness took him—a loneliness which seemed to tear at the very heart of him.

There was hunger in Ireland, too—bitter hunger—but it always had company. Those that had stragglers shared with those that had none; and there were puddleheads and tea to be had, somewhere, for the asking. Loneliness, sometimes, set on your doorkill, or your neighbors', but it never reached the hearthside; and there was always room at some hearthside, even for a stranger.

But in this promised land it was different. There seemed to be no room for strangers, save in bad company, and one was denied the touch of a creature one could call one's own. Why, in Ireland, even the sorriest vagabond had a dog to share his dose of food and heap of sacks! There was a strangely alien quality about this country that still troubled the Runt after two years of residence. He wondered if the Blessed Virgin ever saw beyond the altar railing of the churches here. In Ireland, he knew, she walked upon the hills, guarding the cabins all about.

The Runt shuddered, for fear had taken him, laying cold, tight fingers on his heart. How could a lad keep from the friendliness of bad company in a land where the respectable and the law-abiding saw in him something undersized and ill conditioned, to be distrusted or ignored? Only that Father O'Donnelly had known his people in the home land, and stood sponsor for him, he never would have been taken into the rigid arms of "the service."

Evil had first housed him and fed him. He slept under her roof-tree now; and he knew that it would be but a matter of weeks of days, perhaps—before she would claim him and drag him on, on to that bottomless gulf which he had been told awaited all sinners. He could see the gulf already, stretching black and yawning before him. He could feel his feet slipping over the crumbling edge of it; while Evil, with her wheedling voice, drove him relentlessly forward.

Aye, he could feel her towering above him—her face like some horrible ghoul. Her hands were on his shoulders now, pushing him down, down—

"No, no, do you hear? Wake up! Wake up!"

The office clerk was bending over him and shaking him back to consciousness with no gentle hand.

"What do ye want?" he demanded sleepily.

"What do I want?" roared the clerk. "Take this call, and beat it!"

The Runt pulled himself out of the A. D. T. bench and shuffled toward the door.

"Look here!" called the clerk after him. "You make good time on that call, understand? You haven't been Johnny-on-the-job lately, and it won't take much to fire you. Now hustle!"

The Runt saw nothing. He was too busy dreading the wind outside. As he pulled the door open it rushed in between the buttons of his coat, up his sleeves and down his collar and set him shivering and shivering anew. He beat his chest with both fists, as if he were fighting a live thing.

"Even the wind is crueler hereabout!" he muttered.

Then he set his steps toward the call. His whole being rebelled against the dullness of those calls. If only something besides letters and packages, curt admissions and curter dismissals, ever greeted him! He was tired of being told to hustle; no one ever hustled in Ireland. But in this promised land you ran here and you ran there all day long, and somebody always said "Faster!"

For the last fortnight the Runt had wished that each call had been his last. Now suppose this call was the last; suppose he went back, threw his uniform into the face of "the service" and told them all to go to thunder! Afterward he would go and join the gang.

There was much good in the gang. Their ways might be evil, but their hearts were kind; and they had spoken truth—there was no chance for the small and the vagabond in this country. Didn't he—the Runt—know?

If everything prospered, as Red Dave had sworn it would, he would make his pile and go back to Ireland. He would buy a bit of land on the side of Binn Ban and build the grandest thatched cottage in the whole countryside. He would have geese and ganders a plenty, sheep in the pastures and pigs in the byre. And for company—there would be a dog.

He ran up the steps of the house whence the call had come and rang the bell.

Aye, it would be a dog like the one Peter, the tailor, had—a terrier.

The door opened. In the hall stood a man, evidently waiting for the messenger; and in a near corner shivered a small, wire-haired Irish terrier. The man picked the terrier up.

"You are to take him to the address on his collar. He's a valuable dog, so look after him. The doctor who has bought him pays the charges at the other end. Now hustle!"

III

AS ONE in a dream, who sees what his heart most desires at last within reach, and fears he may awaken before he gets it, the Runt jumped over the doormat and gathered the terrier hungrily in his arms. The man misunderstood; and the inevitable distrust that followed the Runt like his very shadow fell again across his path.

"Look here!" The man eyed him with the kindling suspicion. "Don't you try stealin' that dog! I am going to call up the doctor the minute you leave, and if you don't get that dog down to him in half an hour he will have the whole New York police force after you!"

"I'm no thief—yet!" retorted the Runt angrily; and he ran down the steps.

At the corner of the street he stopped to read the address on the collar. The dog still shivered.

"Ye poor wee wan, ye've got the feelin', too! An' ye look about as thin in your coat and pants as I'm feelin' in mine!" A sudden idea brought a laugh to his lips. "Faith, ye'll fit in where I've shrank—an' 'twill keep ye warmer!"

The Runt unbuttoned his blue coat and tucked the dog inside. It might have been the touch of the warm little body against his own, or it might have been the friendly lick that the dog gave his fingers; but something wrought the bond of comradeship on the spot and welded it, strong, between these two.

The next moment the Runt was clasping his arms closely about the buttoned-up terrier, while his eyes were shining with the first joy he had known since his feet had trod the ways of the stranger.

"He'd be a friend worth havin'," he muttered. "Say, would ye like to be a pal o' mine?"

The terrier reached out from between the buttons and gave the lad's hand another lick.

"Sure, I'm gettin' me dave afore I've built me cabin! Ye'd like Ireland first

rate, wee wan," he assured the terrier. The terrier blinked his approval, and the two hurried on. Cold, loneliness and fear crossed the street and passed from sight, while boldness and villainy took their places. On the street where the doctor lived they mastered the Runt; and, showing how strong was the bond between these two, he let the terrier know of it at once.

"Ye are not goin' to where ye are sent, at all," he whispered breathlessly. "I'm keepin' ye for the day."

To confirm it he turned about and started for the East Side wharves. The Runt had forgotten the yawning gulf and the ghoulish face of Evil as well. Instead, he looked down into the friendly eyes of a small Irish terrier.

Suddenly the day grew warmer; the sun shone brightly overhead, and the Runt, looking up, spied a welcome strip of blue in the sky.

"Do ye see that?" he asked, lifting the terrier's head up. "Well, if ye think that's blue, what will ye say to the sky back o' Binn Ban?"

It was too much for the terrier. He gave it up and snuggled his nose into the Runt's hand.

"Ye wee bit of a creature! I'll be lettin' ye chase the ganders over yonder if ye'll not get at them too hearty. Now, would ye be buyin' the land that's south o' the slope, or the bit furthest the beiland, lyin' toward the sea?"

The two years of strangeness had slipped from him; he was back in his home land, tramping the hills again. The freshness of the memories surprised even himself.

"I mind it all—do ye hear, wee wan? I mind it all as if it were yesterday.

Faith, if I close me eyes I could put me hand down this minute on the patch of cotton-grass where Dan Hegarty an' me used for to be studyin' our books of an afternoon, after school!"

The terrier believed him; but the policeman on the last street bounding the wharves evidently did not, for he jerked the Runt back from the patch of cotton-grass with a heavy hand.

"What are you doing with that dog?" For a second the Runt was frightened; then he laughed.

"Say, ye needn't get hot on your job till ye catch me with a dawg that's got a pedigree furnist. Anyway, to look at him would know that he had t any better blood in him than I've got meself. Him an' me is pals, that's what!"

"You're not much on looks, either of you, that's sure," agreed the policeman; and the Runt passed safely from under the eye of the law.

"I might have lost ye," he whispered into the terrier's one visible ear. "I'm thinkin' we'd be safer undther cover."

It was while the two were climbing the rickety stairs to the garret where the Runt had one of five bundles of sacks under an uncertain roof that the realization came to him with bewildering force of whither his boldness was leading him. The shock fastened his feet to the landing and left him clutching at the banisters.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" he gasped, over and over again. "The gang has got a hold of me now, I'm thinkin', for the service'll fire me, sure!"

It might not be too late to go back. He might somehow explain the delay and ward off the doctor's complaint and the wrath of "the service." But the dull monotony of it all came rushing in on him, along with the loneliness, and it only made him hug the terrier closer and say fiercely:

"No, no, I'll not be givin' ye up for the service nor nothin' else—not till the day's gone!"

Once in the garret, he tossed his hat to a corner, unbuttoned his coat for the terrier's exit, and together they curled up on the Runt's particular heap of sacks. They drew an old quilt over them. It was biting cold; the one beary-eyed window was thick with frost, and the Runt's breath showed visibly against the light that straggled through.

Everything was very quiet. This particular roof-tree sheltered souls with questionable occupations, whose business it was to be quiet; and, though people came and went continuously, not a footfall was heard on the rickety stairs. The gang that rented the garret was away or

of his hands together with great unction and chucked:

"Vell, you shall see—leettle flings vill vary away ze tickest bar; und he vas bendin'!"

It was a marvel to them that the breaking had not come sooner; but they only liked him the better for it.

Perhaps they would have marveled more had they known that the strength of his resistance lay in a string of old brown beads hid in one of the myriad creases of the sacking bed. After the gang was especially successful, or more than usually kind, and the Runt felt his feet turning from the lonely straight road to the broad and pleasant way of the sinner, then would his fingers steal into the creases until they found the beads. Stealthily, under cover of the quilt, he would tell the rosary over and over, until he fell asleep to dream himself back on the hills of Ireland, where the Virgin walked.

The terrier pawed his coat for attention, and the Runt reached over with a cold finger and scratched his ear.

"I'd never have dared bring ye here if the gang had been layin' off. No knowin' what they might take the notion to do—seein' ye are a valuable dawg." A look of sharp regret swept into his face. "If ye could only have been a vagabond dawg, now, I might have kept ye; but keepin's stealin', an' I couldn't be—"

The Runt broke off abruptly. Aye, he could—that was just what he was going to do. He was going to take the road that held no loneliness and steal as much and as fast as he could, to bring the day nearer when the land could be bought and the cabin built, with ganders and pigs to furnish it.

For a single moment the Runt's mind balanced the morals of it; and then, with a masterly hand, as one who is fully capable of molding his own fate against all odds, he swept morals aside and buried himself in his dream. He drew the wrig-

glee! We's sorry, but we needs your shakedown for de kid, and youse got ter squeal now. Is it stay or quit?"

The Runt swallowed hard, once—twice—three times. It seemed as if straws and stones stuck in his throat.

"Ye couldn't wait till the pain left me, could ye? A lad thinks muddylake when he's sick: I'll squeal the night."

Another upheaval shook the quilt. "Took bad, ain'tcher?" Red Dave was sympathetic. The Runt turned over and groaned.

then, in the rapture of comradeship, he had forgotten.

"I'll have a sup now," he said; and then he remembered the terrier. "The civil take me for keepin' ye by me all day an' feedin' ye on nothin' but blarney!" He dug deep into his trousers-pocket and brought up a dime and three coppers. "A nickel for fare—that leaves 8 cents for scraps for ye, wee wan. They'll keep yer stomach from tumblin' in entirely afore ye get there—"

In they went, bought the scraps, and brought them away in a greasy paper bag—hot and savory.

"I could eat them meself," said the Runt hungrily.

Halfway up the street an alley caught his eye. It was dark, sheltered from the wind, and passers-by would not disturb them. The Runt made for it, finding an empty ash can, he turned it over and sat down. It was their last hour together; the Runt realized it and fed the scraps slowly to the terrier—that the time might be lengthened.

"Have manners, and don't ye be grabbin'! Faith, they'll think ye've been keepin' had company this day!"

A great lump rose in his throat; his eyes smarted. Was it always so? Did one look into heaven only by glimpses, and then from afar off? For want of something better to say, he repeated the old cry:

"If I could only be keepin' ye?"

An hour later a shriveled messenger boy, with a small Irish terrier, stood on the hearth rug of the doctor's office, while the doctor, large and angry, glowered down on them both.

"You have been exactly nine hours and thirty-eight minutes deliverin' that dog! What do you mean by it?"

What he did mean was uncertain in the Runt's own mind, so he held his tongue and watched with hungry eyes the burning coals in the grate.

"You probably meant to steal that dog, but your grit failed you at the last—by Jove!" The doctor reached over quickly for the terrier, and taking him to the light looked him carefully over. "H—m—that's the dog, all right; and he dropped him upon the rug. Well, what are you waitin' for? I settid these charges with the company direct. You don't suppose they would trust you now, do you?"

The Runt did not stir; somehow he could not.

"Why don't you go?" The doctor was impatient. "Of course you know you will be fired for this!"

"Aye, I know." The Runt spoke dully. He tried to go, but the warmth and the glow of the fire held him. He smiled foolishly at the doctor. "It's warm," he tried to explain. "It's the first I've seen o' burnin' peat since I come over."

Something about the Runt called out to the doctor and stopped him from giving the lad a forcible dismissal.

"Irish?" he queried, instead.

"Aye—Donegal."

"People?"

"Dead."

"Who are ye living with?"

"Meself, sure." Was the doctor trying to find out about the gang, the Runt wondered?

"How did you get into this country alone? Who signed the papers for you when you went into the service?"

"Father O'Donnelly—him that died last year."

"Got any friends?"

The Runt did not hear; the terrier was scratching at him with an urgent, insistent call. He must go—the doctor had told him twice.

"Ye stay here an' mind the hearth," he said, patting the dog by way of consolation. "Maybe maybe he'll be givin' ye praties and strabour for dinner. I—I'm leavin' ye, just."

He turned on his heel, but the doctor's hand stopped him.

"Got any friends?"

In spite of his resolution the Runt turned back and his eyes sought the terrier's black ones. The foolish smile came again.

"Aye—wan."

"Irish, too?" The doctor was known by his friends as one of the best diagnosticians in the country.

"Ye bet!" The Runt looked up and chuckled.

"Want another?"

This time the Runt did not understand, and the doctor came closer.

"See here, lad, I was born in Ireland myself. Pretty lonely when you first came over?"

"Mortal!" agreed the Runt. "Makes you think long for the moorland, sometimes—and the free winds sweepin' the hills, doesn't it?"

"Aye, the green hills—an' the rose-bushes climbin' the cabin—I've been tellin' him about it." And forgetful of everything else, the Runt stooped and gathered the terrier in his arms again.

"Do you know," said the doctor, "I need a lad to look after me and the dog. Irish doctor—Irish dog—it ought to be an Irish lad! Will you come?"



"Irish doctor—Irish dog—it ought to be an Irish lad! Will you come?"