

why I sign myself now. I said long ago, you get you a signature and sign everything you do and keep a copy of it. Then you'll know what you done and you can hold up the crime to the punishment and see do they match and in the end you'll have something to prove you ain't been treated right. I call myself The Misfit," he said, "because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment."

There was a piercing scream from the woods, followed closely by a pistol report. "Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain't punished at all?"

"Jesus!" the old lady cried. "You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!"

"Lady," The Misfit said, looking beyond her far into the woods, "there never was a body that give the undertaker a tip."

There were two more pistol reports and the grandmother raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water and called, "Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!" as if her heart would break.

"Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead," The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but thow away everything and follow Him, and, if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said and his voice had become almost a snarl.

"Maybe He didn't raise the dead," the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in the ditch with her legs twisted under her.

"I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't," The Misfit said. "I wisht I had of been there," he said, hitting the ground with his fist. "It ain't right I wasn't there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady," he said in a high voice, "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted

close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them.

Hiram and Bobby Lee returned from the woods and stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky.

Without his glasses, The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking. "Take her off and thow her where you thown the others," he said, picking up the cat that was rubbing itself against his leg.

"She was a talker, wasn't she?" Bobby Lee said, sliding down the ditch with a yodel.

"She would of been a good woman," The Misfit said, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

"Some fun!" Bobby Lee said.

"Shut up, Bobby Lee," The Misfit said. "It's no real pleasure in life."

## THE MAN OF THE HOUSE\*

BY FRANK O'CONNOR

WHEN I woke, I heard my mother coughing, below in the kitchen. She had been coughing for days, but I had paid no attention. We were living on the Old Youghal Road at the time, the old hilly coaching road into East Cork. The coughing sounded terrible. I dressed and went downstairs in my stocking feet, and in the clear morning light I saw her, unaware that she

\* from *The New Yorker*

was being watched, collapsed into a little wickerwork armchair, holding her side. She had made an attempt to light the fire, but it had gone against her. She looked so tired and helpless that my heart turned over with compassion. I ran to her.

"Are you all right, Mum?" I asked.

"I'll be all right in a second," she replied, trying to smile. "The old sticks were wet, and the smoke started me coughing."

"Go back to bed and I'll light the fire," I said.

"Ah, how can I, child?" she said anxiously. "Sure, I have to go to work."

"You couldn't work like that," I said. "I'll stop at home from school and look after you."

It's a funny thing about women, the way they'll take orders from anything in trousers, even if it's only ten.

"If you could make yourself a cup of tea, I might be all right later on," she said guiltily, and she rose, very shakily, and climbed back up the stairs. I knew then she must be feeling really bad.

I got more sticks out of the coalhole, under the stairs. My mother was so economical that she never used enough, and that was why the fire sometimes went against her. I used a whole bundle, and I soon had the fire roaring and the kettle on. I made her toast while I was about it. I was a great believer in hot buttered toast at all hours of the day. Then I made the tea and brought her up a cup on the tray. "Is that all right?" I asked.

"Would you have a sup of boiling water left?" she asked doubtfully.

"'Tis too strong," I agreed cheerfully, remembering the patience of the saints in their many afflictions. "I'll pour half of it out."

"I'm an old nuisance," she sighed.

"'Tis my fault," I said, taking the cup. "I can never remember about tea. Put the shawl round you while you're sitting up. Will I shut the skylight?"

"Would you be able?" she asked doubtfully.

"'Tis no trouble," I said, getting the chair to it. "I'll do the messages after."

I had my own breakfast alone by the window, and then I

went out and stood by the front door to watch the kids from the road on their way to school.

"You'd better hurry or you'll be killed, Sullivan," they shouted.

"I'm not going," I said. "My mother is sick, and I have to mind the house."

I wasn't a malicious child, by any means, but I liked to be able to take out my comforts and study them by the light of others' misfortunes. Then I heated another kettle of water and cleared up the breakfast things before I washed my face and came up to the attic with my shopping basket, a piece of paper, and a lead pencil.

"I'll do the messages now if you'll write them down," I said. "Would you like me to get the doctor?"

"Ah," said my mother impatiently, "he'd only want to send me to hospital, and how would I go to hospital? You could call in at the chemist's and ask him to give you a good, strong cough bottle."

"Write it down," I said. "If I haven't it written down, I might forget it. And put 'strong' in big letters. What will I get for the dinner? Eggs?"

As boiled eggs were the only dish I could manage, I more or less knew it would be eggs, but she told me to get sausages as well, in case she could get up.

I passed the school on my way. Opposite it was a hill, and I went up a short distance and stood there for ten minutes in quiet contemplation. The schoolhouse and yard and gate were revealed as in a painted picture, detached and peaceful except for the chorus of voices through the opened windows and the glimpse of Danny Delaney, the teacher, passing the front door with his cane behind his back, stealing a glance at the world outside. I could have stood there all day. Of all the profound and simple pleasures of those days, that was the richest.

When I got home, I rushed upstairs and found Minnie Ryan sitting with my mother. She was a middle-aged woman, very knowledgeable, gossipy, and pious.

"How are you, Mum?" I asked.

"Grand," said my mother, with a smile.

"You can't get up today, though," said Minnie Ryan.

"I'll put the kettle on and make a cup of tea for you," I said.

"Sure, I'll do that," said Minnie.

"Ah, don't worry, Miss Ryan," I said lightly. "I can manage it all right."

"Wisha, isn't he very good?" I heard her say in a low voice to my mother.

"As good as gold," said my mother.

"There's not many like that, then," said Minnie. "The most of them that's going now are more like savages than Christians."

In the afternoon, my mother wanted me to run out and play, but I didn't go far. I knew if once I went a certain distance from the house, I was liable to stray into temptation. Below our house, there was a glen, the drill field of the barracks perched high above it on a chalky cliff, and below, in a deep hollow, the millpond and millstream running between wooded hills—the Rockies, the Himalayas, or the Highlands, according to your mood. Once down there, I tended to forget the real world, so I sat on a wall outside the house, running in every half hour to see how the mother was and if there was anything she wanted.

Evening fell; the street lamps were lit, and the paper boy went crying up the road. I bought a paper, lit the lamp in the kitchen and the candle in my mother's attic, and tried to read to her, not very successfully, because I was only at words of one syllable, but I had a great wish to please, and she to be pleased, so we got on quite well, considering.

Later, Minnie Ryan came again, and as she was going, I saw her to the door.

"If she's not better in the morning, I think I'd get the doctor, Flurry," she said, over her shoulder.

"Why?" I asked, in alarm. "Do you think is she worse, Miss Ryan?"

"Ah, I wouldn't say so," she replied with affected nonchalance, "but I'd be frightened she might get pneumonia."

"But wouldn't he send her to hospital, Miss Ryan?"

"Wisha, he mightn't," she said with a shrug, pulling her old shawl about her. "But even if he did, wouldn't it be better than neglecting it? Ye wouldn't have a drop of whiskey in the house?"

"I'll get it," I said at once. I knew what might happen to peo-

ple who got pneumonia, and what was bound to happen afterward to their children.

"If you could give it to her hot, with a squeeze of lemon in it, it might help her to shake it off," said Minnie.

My mother said she didn't want the whiskey, dreading the expense, but I had got such a fright that I wouldn't be put off. When I went to the public house, it was full of men, who drew aside to let me reach the bar. I had never been in a public house before, and I was frightened.

"Hullo, my old flower," said one man, grinning diabolically at me. "It must be ten years since I seen you last. What are you having?"

My pal, Bob Connell, had told me how he once asked a drunk man for a half crown and the man gave it to him. I always wished I could bring myself to do the same, but I didn't feel like it just then.

"I want a half glass of whiskey for my mother," I said.

"Oh, the thundering ruffian!" said the man. "Pretending 'tis for his mother, and the last time I seen him he had to be carried home."

"I had not," I shouted indignantly. "And 'tis for my mother. She's sick."

"Ah, let the child alone, Johnnie," said the barmaid. She gave me the whiskey, and then, still frightened of the men in the public house, I went off to a shop for a lemon.

When my mother had drunk the hot whiskey, she fell asleep, and I quenched the lights and went to bed, but I couldn't sleep very well. I was regretting I hadn't asked the man in the pub for a half crown. I was wakened several times by the coughing, and when I went into my mother's room her head felt very hot, and she was rambling in her talk. It frightened me more than anything else when she didn't know me, and I lay awake, thinking of what would happen to me if it were really pneumonia.

The depression was terrible when, next morning, my mother seemed not to be any better. I had done all I could do, and I felt helpless. I lit the fire and got her breakfast, but this time I didn't stand at the front door to see the other fellows on their way to school. I should have been too inclined to envy them. Instead, I went over to Minnie Ryan and reported.

"I'd go for the doctor," she said firmly. "Better be sure than sorry."

I had first to go to the house of a Poor Law Guardian, for a ticket to show we couldn't pay. Then I went down to the dispensary, which was in a deep hollow beyond the school. After that I had to go back to ready the house for the doctor. I had to have a basin of water and soap and a clean towel laid out for him, and I had to get the dinner, too.

It was after dinner when he called. He was a fat, loud-voiced man and, like all the drunks of the medical profession, supposed to be "the cleverest doctor in Cork, if only he'd mind himself." He hadn't been minding himself much that morning, it seemed.

"How are you going to get this now?" he grumbled, sitting on the bed with the prescription pad on his knee. "The only place open is the North Dispensary."

"I'll go, Doctor," I said at once, relieved that he had said nothing about hospital.

"'Tis a long way," he said, doubtfully. "Do you know where it is?"

"I'll find it," I said.

"Isn't he a great little fellow?" he said to my mother.

"Oh, the best in the world, Doctor!" she said. "A daughter couldn't be better to me."

"That's right," said the doctor. "Look after your mother; she'll be the best for you in the long run. We don't mind them when we have them," he added, to my mother, "and then we spend the rest of our lives regretting it."

I wished he hadn't said that; it tuned in altogether too well with my mood. To make it worse, he didn't even use the soap and water I had laid ready for him.

My mother gave me directions how to reach the dispensary, and I set off with a bottle wrapped in brown paper under my arm. The road led uphill, through a thickly populated poor locality, as far as the barracks, which was perched on the very top of the hill, over the city, and then descended, between high walls, till it suddenly almost disappeared in a stony path, with red brick corporation houses to one side of it, that dropped steeply, steeply, to the valley of the little river, where a brewery

stood, and the opposite hillside, a murmuring honeycomb of houses, rose to the gently rounded top, on which stood the purple sandstone tower of the cathedral and the limestone spire of Shandon church, on a level with your eye.

It was so wide a view that it was never all lit up together, and the sunlight wandered across it as across a prairie, picking out first a line of roofs with a brightness like snow, and then delving into the depth of some dark street and outlining in shadow figures of climbing carts and straining horses. I leaned on the low wall and thought how happy a fellow could be, looking at that, if he had nothing to trouble him. I tore myself from it with a sigh, slithered without stopping to the bottom of the hill, and climbed up a series of shadowy and stepped lanes around the back of the cathedral, which now seemed enormous. I had a penny, which my mother had given me by way of encouragement, and I made up my mind that when I had done my business, I should go into the cathedral and spend it on a candle to the Blessed Virgin, to make my mother better quick. I felt sure it would be more effective in a really big church like that, so very close to Heaven.

The dispensary was a sordid little hallway with a bench to one side and a window like the one in a railway ticket office at the far end. There was a little girl with a green plaid shawl about her shoulders sitting on the bench. I knocked at the window, and a seedy, angry-looking man opened it. Without waiting for me to finish what I was saying, he grabbed bottle and prescription from me and banged the shutter down again without a word. I waited for a moment and then lifted my hand to knock again.

"You'll have to wait, little boy," said the girl quickly.

"What will I have to wait for?" I asked.

"He have to make it up," she explained. "You might as well sit down."

I did, glad of anyone to keep me company.

"Where are you from?" she asked. "I live in Blarney Lane," she added when I had told her. "Who's the bottle for?"

"My mother," I said.

"What's wrong with her?"

"She have a bad cough."

"She might have consumption," she said thoughtfully. "That's what my sister that died last year had. This is a tonic for my other sister. She have to have tonics all the time. Is it nice where you live?"

I told her about the glen, and then she told me about the river near their place. It seemed to be a nicer place than ours, as she described it. She was a pleasant, talkative little girl, and I didn't notice the time until the window opened again and a red bottle was thrust out.

"Dooley!" shouted the seedy man, and closed the window again.

"That's me," said the little girl. "Yours won't be ready for a good while yet. I'll wait for you."

"I have a penny," I said boastfully.

She waited until my bottle was thrust out, and then she accompanied me as far as the steps leading down to the brewery. On the way, I bought a pennyworth of sweets, and we sat on the other steps, beside the infirmary, to eat them. It was nice there, with the spire of Shandon in shadow behind us, the young trees overhanging the high walls, and the sun, when it came out in great golden blasts, throwing our linked shadows onto the road.

"Give us a taste of your bottle, little boy," she said.

"Why?" I asked. "Can't you taste your own?"

"Mine is awful," she said. "Tonics is awful to taste. You can try it if you like."

I took a taste of it and hastily spat out. She was right; it was awful. After that, I couldn't do less than let her taste mine.

"That's grand," she said enthusiastically, after taking a swig from it. "Cough bottles are nearly always grand. Try it, can't you?"

I did, and saw she was right about that, too. It was very sweet and sticky.

"Give us another," she said excitedly, grabbing at it.

"'Twill be all gone," I said.

"Erra, 'twon't," she replied with a laugh. "You have gallons of it."

Somehow, I couldn't refuse her. I was swept from my anchor-age into an unfamiliar world of spires and towers, trees, steps, shadowy laneways, and little girls with red hair and green eyes.

I took a drink myself and gave her another. Then I began to panic. "'Tis nearly gone," I said. "What am I going to do now?"

"Finish it and say the cork fell out," she replied, and again, as she said it, it sounded plausible enough. We finished the bottle between us, and then, slowly, as I looked at it in my hand, empty as I had brought it, and remembered that I had not kept my word to the Blessed Virgin and had spent her penny on sweets, a terrible despondency swept over me. I had sacrificed everything for the little girl and she didn't even care for me. It was my cough bottle she had coveted all the time. I saw her guile too late. I put my head in my hands and began to cry.

"What are you crying for?" the little girl asked in astonishment.

"My mother is sick, and we're after drinking her medicine," I said.

"Ah, don't be an old crybaby!" she said contemptuously. "You have only to say the cork fell out. Sure, that's a thing could happen to anybody."

"And I promised the Blessed Virgin a candle, and I spent the money on you!" I screamed, and, suddenly grabbing the empty bottle, I ran up the road from her, wailing. Now I had only one refuge and one hope—a miracle. I went back to the cathedral, and, kneeling before the shrine of the Blessed Virgin, I begged her pardon for having spent her penny, and promised her a candle from the next penny I got, if only she would work a miracle and make my mother better before I got back. After that, I crawled miserably homeward, back up the great hill, but now all the light had gone out of the day, and the murmuring hillside had become a vast, alien, cruel world. Besides, I felt very sick. I thought I might be going to die. In one way it would be better.

When I got back into the house, the silence of the kitchen and then the sight of the fire gone out in the grate smote me with the cruel realization that the Blessed Virgin had let me down. There was no miracle, and my mother was still in bed. At once, I began to howl.

"What is it at all, child?" she call in alarm from upstairs.

"I lost the medicine," I bellowed, and rushed up the stairs to throw myself on the bed and bury my face in the clothes.

"Oh, wisha, if that's all that's a trouble to you!" she exclaimed with relief, running her hand through my hair. "Is anything the matter?" she added, after a moment. "You're very hot."

"I drank the medicine," I bawled.

"Ah, what harm?" she murmured soothingly. "You poor, unfortunate child! 'Twas my own fault for letting you go all that way by yourself. And then to have your journey for nothing. Undress yourself now, and you can lie down here."

She got up, put on her slippers and coat, and unlaced my boots while I sat on the bed. But even before she had finished I was fast asleep. I didn't see her dress herself or hear her go out, but some time later I felt a hand on my forehead and saw Minnie Ryan peering down at me, laughing.

"Ah, 'twill be nothing," she said, giving her shawl a pull about her. "He'll sleep it off by morning. The dear knows, Mrs. Sullivan, 'tis you should be in bed."

I knew that was a judgment on me, but I could do nothing about it. Later I saw my mother come in with the candle and her paper, and I smiled up at her. She smiled back. Minnie Ryan might despise me as much as she liked, but there were others who didn't. The miracle had happened, after all.

## THE MAN WHO SHOT SNAPPING TURTLES\*

BY EDMUND WILSON

**I**N THE days when I lived in Hecate County, I had an uncomfortable neighbor, a man named Asa M. Stryker. He had at one time, he told me, taught chemistry in some sorry-sounding

\* from *Memoirs of Hecate County*

college in Pennsylvania, but he now lived on a little money which he had been "lucky enough to inherit." I had the feeling about him that somewhere in the background was defeat or frustration or disgrace. He was a bachelor and kept house with two servants—a cook and a man around the placē. I never knew anyone to visit him, though he would occasionally go away for short periods—when, he would tell me, he was visiting his relatives.

Mr. Stryker had a small pond on his place, and from the very first time I met him, his chief topic of conversation was the wild ducks that used to come to this pond. In his insensitive-sounding way he admired them, minutely observing their markings, and he cherished and protected them like pets. Several pairs, in fact, which he fed all the year round, settled permanently on the pond. He would call my attention in his hard accent to the richness of their chestnut browns; the ruddiness of their backs or breasts; their sharp contrasts of light with dark, and their white neck-rings and purple wing-bars, like the decorative liveries and insignia of some exalted order; the cupreous greens and blues that gave them the look of being expensively dressed.

Mr. Stryker was particularly struck by the idea that there was something princely about them—something which, as he used to say, Frick or Charlie Schwab couldn't buy; and he would point out to me their majesty as they swam, cocking their heads with such dignity and nonchalantly wagging their tails. He was much troubled by the depredations of snapping turtles, which made terrible ravages on the ducklings. He would sit on his porch, he said, and see the little ducks disappear, as the turtles grabbed their feet and dragged them under, and feel sore at his helplessness to prevent it.

As he lost brood after brood in this way, the subject came, in fact, to obsess him. He had apparently hoped that his pond might be made a sort of paradise for ducks, in which they could breed without danger: he never shot them even in season and did not approve of their being shot at all. But sometimes not one survived the age when it was little enough to fall victim to the turtles.