

Women have all the advantage in matters of delicacy—and in this story they use their power splendidly

O'Leary's Wig

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From *Carnhill Magazine*
London Literary Monthly

MR. PATRICK O'LEARY stood looking in through the window of Mahon's tiny shop; and cupidity flamed up in his soul. He had never seen such a wig. He raised his hat, and caressed his egg-shaped bald head.

Here he was, nearly at his seventieth birthday, and for thirty-four years his hair had been leaving him. What splendid hair it had been, too. He had never been able to afford a wig. Such things cost money, terrifying sums nowadays—Shamus at the end of the village had paid over three pounds for his. But here, here in the shop window, was a wig, and only fifteen shillings and sixpence. A bargain indeed.

It lay comfortably between a lithograph of one of the Saviors of Ireland, who posed anxiously with one hand negligent on an obviously cardboard pedestal, and a set of bronze fire-irons—Mahon's shop was like that—a tawny wig, with a meticulous parting on one side, and curls shining

alluringly when the bright morning sun caught them.

O'Leary scratched his toothless jaw with a contemplative finger. He measured the wig as well as he could in perspective with the span of his hand, and wondered if it would fit. For already, in his mind, it was his. He would have hair again. And he would look at least twenty years younger, instead of appearing quite his age, what with his rheumy eyes, and stiffness, and frequent inarticulation over sibilants.

Fifteen and sixpence. And perhaps not even as much as that. Mahon was difficult, but he was not forgetful of past obligations. There had been the matter of his hens that would not lay until he, O'Leary, had advised on the feeding of them. The hens might take maybe half-a-crown off the price.

Of course, it was a lot of money, even with that. And his wife, Maria—he knew that she would utterly forbid the purchase if she was told. Ah! If she was told. But she did not need

to be told until he came home with the shining evidence of his wisdom securely on his head.

When O'Leary opened the door of the shop, the tiny bell above the lintel tinkled, and to its summons came Mahon himself, shuffling and peering, wiping his hands on an old cloth, and bringing with him the faint sweet smell of boiling potatoes.

'Ah, 'tis my old friend Mr. O'Leary,' he began conversationally. 'It's fine you are looking today.'

'Ach,' O'Leary was non-committal. 'How are you yourself?'

'Well enough. But my cow is not doing so fine. She is needing a potion, I think. You were wishing . . .'

'Yes—a box of matches.'

A box was whipped from its snug place below the counter.

'Thank you,' and O'Leary turned to go. He hobbled to the door. 'Oh, my friend.' He stopped as though with an after thought. 'Was I seeing a wig in your window?'

'You was.' Mahon became more affable, scenting business on a grand scale.

'It will be for sale?' O'Leary's voice was careless and easy.

'It is.' The shopkeeper's eyes turned sharp under his thick brows.

'It takes my fancy—but, man, you ask too much for it. I was thinking it didn't look over fresh. And on the big side. Was it for the head of a giant, will you tell me?'

'Heh! Ah, Mr. O'Leary dear, it is a wonderful wig.' Mahon bent and thrust a hand through the strip of faded curtain that cut off his window from the shop. 'Look now. Do you see the beautiful hair on it? Why, the king himself would be glad to wear a wig like this.'

O'Leary looked. Yes, at closer view, it was all that he had imagined it to be. Its sheen beckoned with enticement; his fickle mind thought of his youth renewed. He admitted to himself that even his own hair had never been so attractive.

'Well, I would be taking it off your hands. My wife's brother, a pretty man, has long lacked hair—a sad thing for him—and the wig would be making a grand holiday present for him. But the price is too big.'

'Surely not!' Mahon was indignant. 'I tell you, the wig belong to a mad American who lost it last week while he was bathing. It's drowned he was, maybe, poor man. My Rory found it afterwards on the sand when he was out with his shrimp net. But there! I'll be easy with you. If we say . . . fourteen shillings?'

'Done with you!' exclaimed O'Leary in delight. 'But will you keep it for me? I have not all that money with me. If you'll be keeping it until tomorrow, well, my brother-in-law is a fine man, and it is a terrible thing for him to be without hair.'

'But surely, Mr. O'Leary.' And Mahon smiled and nodded.

As he hurried home down the village street, O'Leary caught his reflection now and again in dark windows; and he turned and grimaced, and wagged his finger at his long lean face. He would be a handsome man again. Maria and Maureen . . . Ach, Maureen, his daughter fancied herself too much, with her laughing and pirouetting before mirrors, and her careless ways. There was no consideration for an old man nowadays. But he would be old no longer.

O'Leary felt splendidly capable of dealing with her now. She could no

longer laugh, and ask her mother why she had married a monkey on a stick. And the next time that young Dennis, on his horse, arrived from Ballycannan to see her, things would happen.

WHEN he reached the cottage, O'Leary went to his bedroom furtively, and opened a drawer in the chest of drawers; he took out a treasured purse. He had just the money, he found, if he went without tobacco for a week, and told his wife that he had lost his pension on the road. She would not believe him, of course, but then did she ever? So that was that.

The money trickled gratefully through his tremulous fingers. Then he turned and saw his daughter watching him from the door, her hands on her hips. Maureen, he always said, was a bud that had blossomed too soon.

'Well, now!' Her voice bit into his ears. 'The old man has his hoard after all. Saving to give us all presents, surely.' The confident irony warned him of disaster. How he hated his daughter then!

'Have I not told you I will not have you bursting in on me like this when I am resting?' O'Leary spoke to gain time, his left hand sliding slowly down to gain the sanctuary of his trouser pocket. Perhaps she had not seen . . . His voice was thick and harsh with suppressed terror. 'Has your father no privacy in his own house?'

'His own house!' Maureen's words were scornful darts. 'Who feeds you? Who work like heifers to keep you in house? Me mother and meself. And this is what you are after doing behind our backs. How much have you there, old miser?'

'Only five shillings—or at most, maybe six, acushla.' O'Leary became endearing and supplicative.

There was a moment's silence. Through in the kitchen, a pot was boiling protestingly; the morning was giving way to the dinner hour. The stillness was complete, yet very fragile. The whole slender structure of the old man's dream was swaying. He bobbed despairingly on a wave of fear. Then Maureen spoke again:

'I don't believe you. The purse is as fat as a sow.'

'Well, the money is mine, is it not?' O'Leary's tone was informed with defiance and weariness. She was his daughter, the devil take her, but she would not spare him, because of the many things that came between them.

Maureen watched him, her eyes bright with thought. Then she said slowly:—

'Come now, I'll be after making a bargain with you.' Her father raised his head. 'You do not like my sweetheart Dennis, tell me?'

'Ach now, I wouldn't be saying such a thing . . . ' But she interrupted him.

'But 'tis true enough all the same. You forbid us to marry, and I am a dutiful girl to you, and will not. But—if you were to keep your money, and tell my mother that, after all, you would not be raising objections to a wedding . . . He would make a fine son for you.' And Maureen smiled slowly—as a cat must smile, O'Leary thought.

So that was it. Blackmail, corruption, and in his own house. She was clever, too. A faint sense of pride was stifled in overpowering indignation. Yet, could he do as she asked—or could he lose his wig?

But no! Maureen should not have

that rascally waster for a husband. A million times no. He would take the words out of that she-cat's mouth. He would, with a magnificent gesture, hand over the money to his wife, and tell her that it was all for her that he had saved so much. Besides, he need only give her five shillings or so.

'No!' he shouted at his daughter. 'I would rather strangle you with me own hands than you should marry that—that . . . ' and the words bubbled in his throat in his anger, and he ran through to the kitchen, past her, and out into the little garden where his wife was working at the turnips.

MRS. O'LEARY's face was etched by the sun and the wind into wrinkles that spread down to her neck. Her hair hung, tape-like, from under a golfing cap. She was a quiet woman, bred to economy, and easy-going. She still loved her husband, but she understood him, too.

'Yes, Pat?' she questioned him, leaning on her hoe. She could only suppose that he was hungry.

'Yes, Maria.' He came panting to her side. 'I have something to give you.' He stopped as a fading vision of the wig floated before him. Then: 'Here—take it all, fifteen shillings and sixpence. Quick woman.' And he thrust the purse into her hand. 'It is for your birthday.'

'It will be honest money?' she asked, at last.

She was an admirable woman, but he could have struck her in his rage and disappointment. 'Ach, to be sure, woman.'

'But it is not my birthday, nor will be for a while yet.' She was determined to get to the bottom of the miracle.

'It will be doing for your last, then.' For a moment, O'Leary felt a righteous glow in him. Maria deserved the money, after all. He tried to pull himself erect.

'Have I not been a good husband to you, Maria? It is cruel you are to think that I should be forgetting such an important event as your birthday.' And as he shuffled off, she called to him that his dinner was ready, but he never even turned his head.

The shimmering brown road creaked under his feet as he walked. He did not care where he went. He told himself that if he hadn't the wig—at least, Maureen would not have her Dennis. The affair was ended. And yet, what did it matter? How easily one got tired nowadays. Was he not just a vain old fool? New hair was of little account without new legs, without a new heart, without—so many things needed to be new in him.

This Dennis, now. He had a farm, and three cows—if Maureen was to be believed. He could be useful for tobacco, and for a few shillings now and again, and such things—as a son-in-law.

Ah, well. He was hungry all of a sudden. Perhaps it would be sweetbreads for supper. . . .

He came back late, and entered the kitchen slowly, like a blind man in a strange street. He was resigned to an existence which he had thought for a moment that morning he was going to leave behind.

His wife was at the hearth, turning pancakes. She was a worker, that woman.

He felt grateful for his chair, for soft slippers; for the promise of food.

Maureen sat at the spread table,

spinning her knife idly round and round on her plate. O'Leary said that it might rain later. It was his offering to peace.

His wife glanced round, smiling at him.

'Patrick,' she said softly. 'I am grateful to you. You haven't remembered me for a long time.'

'Ach, woman.' The old man was suddenly uncomfortable. Neither had he, come to think of it. She was a sweet woman, too, his wife. He moved heavily in his chair. How tired he was—and how useless, and helpless.

He looked at his daughter. She smiled at him. Always laughing, that girl. But handsome, like himself used to be. Oh, well; she could have her Dennis.

'Patrick,' began Maria, as she dished the pancakes. 'Maureen was just telling me what you were saying to her this morning. It was clever of you to be keeping the secret so well. I got the finest surprise a woman ever had.'

O'Leary raised his head, shining with pathetic baldness. He looked again at Maureen, and she laughed outright, and nodded to him ever so slightly.

'Now! Will you have the gracious goodness to tell me what . . . ' he began.

'Maureen is saying that you told her how long you had been saving the money for me—ch, Maureen?'

'Aye. Father, you remember?' Maureen spoke to him as she had never spoken before. 'You were wishful to buy a perfume, but I said that our mother would be wanting the money to spend as she wanted herself.'

Then O'Leary understood.

'Maria,' he said, 'twas nothing but what you deserved, and Maureen will be saying the same. Ah, girl?' And he smiled and winked largely—the first smile since he had stood at Mahon's window that morning.

'But hurry with your supper, acushla. That young Dennis must be in a great state about seeing you.' And he winked again, the father of all winks. O'Leary and his daughter looked at each other. Then she rose, and came round the table to him, and when he looked up at her, she kissed him.

'Me lord, I am greatly obliged to you,' and she curtsied, and was off with a twinkle of heels.

'Patrick,' Maria sat down opposite him. 'He is not a bad young man, what with his farm and all. She might do a lot worse for herself. But I am thankful to you, for I have always liked him.'

Then Maria put her hand into the capacious pocket of her apron. 'I'll not wish you to be angry with me for being a spendthrift,' she continued. He looked at her in dismay. What a day this had been.

'I can't be angry any more,' he murmured.

'Well . . . ' his wife hesitated, and she smiled to herself. 'I was in Mahon's shop this afternoon after matching a piece of ribbon. He said that if I cared to take away the wig you had been talking to him about . . . So I just said yes, and paid him the money . . . Here!'

She laid a white box on the table. He opened it slowly, and the wig shone and smiled at him.

And O'Leary rose, to bend and kiss his wife, a thing he had not done for a long time.

South America seeks remedy for her economic ills through industrialization

Pan-America Faces World War Problems

By P. GONZALEZ ALBERDI

Translated from *Orientación*, Buenos Aires Liberal Weekly

IF THE program outlined at the recent Pan-American Conference in Panama could be carried out in practice, it might prevent serious repercussions of the European war in Latin America, and particularly in the Argentine. Among other important clauses, this program includes certain measures which would loosen the hold of foreign imperialism on South American economy.

Generally speaking, the Conference arrived at certain agreements intended to maintain American neutrality and to assure the belligerents' respect for the South American continent. By creating a vast safety zone forbidden to belligerent vessels, by exempting food from the category of war contraband, and by condemning the practice of 'blacklists,' the Panama Conference took the first steps to safeguard the continuance of South American trade. But this is not enough. The European countries, and particularly England and Germany, have played a large part in the commerce of Latin

America. Great Britain has been the Argentine's principal market, both for exports and imports, and Germany has frequently occupied second place. Today, trade with some European nations is rendered impossible, and with others it is suffering under extraordinary limitations. This situation means economic paralysis and misery for countries whose entire economy and foreign trade have been orientated in the direction of Europe.

At Panama, the sincere desire for coöperation among the South American Republics has been recognized, and it was urged that all of them enlarge their industries, intensify agriculture and develop commerce. An advisory committee of financial experts has been formed to solve monetary problems, foreign relations, etc., with a view toward promoting commerce among them.

Increased continental exchange of trade to compensate for the decline of trade with Europe is one step toward solution of the problem. In order to