

A GLASS OF WHISKEY

“I mind the man that gave me my first glass of whiskey,” said Johnny Mullen, the tailor. “I hadn’t a red nose then, or eleven half-starved children. I was a cub down at Omagh, doing my first tailoring; and it was my own uncle, God forgive him! I wish I was a cub again. I’d never get married. I’m not a man to have a houseful of children. I’m too much of a scoundrel.”

“Hold up off the counter, Johnny, dear,” said Mrs. Mulvany, “if you don’t want to break every tumbler I have in the house.”

“Come over here, Johnny, and sit down on the form between me and Williamson,” said pensioner Higgins against the wall, “and tell us about the night you and Peter Hogan drank the half-gallon.”

“I’m a bad villain of a man,” said Johnny, sitting down. “I might have come to something, and I turned out bad. There was a good man lost in me, and I turned out bad.”

“Ah, no, you did not, Johnny,” said Mrs. Williamson’s husband. “You’re a brave enough man as it is.”

“I tell you I’m not, Williamson, and I ought to know better than you. I tell you I’m not.”

“I tell you you are, Johnny. There’s worse people than you.”

“Williamson, Williamson, you know nothing about it. Damn all you know about it. I turned out a bad man.”

“That’ll do now, Johnny, that’ll do. I was always your friend, and there wasn’t often high words between us, and you can afford to talk me down. But it is not everyone would do it. It is not everyone would venture. All right now, Johnny, all right.”

“Ay, but it’s me has been the bad scoundrel of a man entirely. This uncle of mine wasn’t a drop’s blood to me. He was my uncle by marriage, and he didn’t know anything better. ‘Here, Johnny, my son,’ says he,

'you're a smart, cliver cub, and the makings of a good tailor. Drink it up,' says he, 'for it'll make a man of you.' Ay, boys dear, and so it did. It did make the quare man of me, the quare bad baste of a man."

Williamson was holding his tongue, but he was listening, and this provocation was nearly too much for him.

"I seen the time, Johnny," he said, "people wouldn't crow me down. I seen the time"—and he went on with his eyes shut, and as if talking to himself—"Ay, that was the fist could break noses"; and he held it up. "That was once upon a time. There was the fist could break noses. Even yet, maybe, Johnny, even yet. Ay, there's the fist could break noses. There's the fist could break noses."

"It made the quare man of me," says Johnny; "the quare bad baste of a man."

"Whist, Johnny, whist!" put in Higgins, who was always for peace. "Don't go on like that, man. Don't provoke him, for you're not his match, anyway."

"I never seen the day I was afeard of a boy like Williamson," said Johnny.

"Was I ever threacherous to you yet, Johnny?" said Williamson. "No, Johnny, never. Never, Johnny, never. But I never was afeard of you, either, and I amn't now. But was I ever threacherous to you yet?"

"Oh! look at this for rascality!" said Mrs. Mulvany. "They'll murder one another yet, the villains, that could not have the decency to go and fight outside. They'll ruin my house. Archy Higgins, put up them tumblers at once, unless you want every vessel in my house to be broken into bits and the place disgraced for ever with such blackguardly conduct, for you're worse than them. It's a shame for you, a man of your time of life."

"Oh! Mrs. Mulvany, dear, sure it's not my fault. Sure I'm doing nothing but trying to sinder them, and they won't let go one another's necks."

"Come here, child, and run for the police," said Mrs. Mulvany, "to get this drunken crew out of my house. However they managed to crowd in, all three of them, at once. It's bad enough, goodness knows, to have

one or two of them in the same house at the same time, but three rascals of the drunkenest feather in all the country, to think they'd come in and walk on a body like this. A party, besides, that has hardly ever a penny in their own pocket, and is always wanting to have credit or to drink on other people. Poor Mrs. Williamson! indeed I pity her, but I don't blame her. A nice thing, indeed, if she had to give away her substance; though the man is not the undecentest of them if he had it, and is quiet enough if he wasn't provoked."

Higgins had got them to let each other go.

"Did ever I act threacherous to you, Johnny?"

"No matter now, Williamson; no matter," says Johnny.

"Och! Johnny, dear, whist, will you," says Higgins, "and go no further with it. Sure, Williamson's able-bodied, and you're only a light man, anyway, and always was."

Johnny reached for Williamson again.

"You ought to have been a Catholic, Williamson," he said; "you ought to have been a Catholic. The grandfather before you was a papish, and a good one too, and a decent man."

"I was born and reared a Protestant, Johnny, and a decent one. Your uncle, Johnny Mullen, was in jail."

"He was in jail decently, Williamson. If my uncle was in jail he was in it decently. He was in it for poteen-making."

"They're clawing one another again!" cried Mrs. Mulvany. "Lord have mercy on us! or what is the world coming to. I'll go away and shut the door and leave you to yourselves, you good-for-nothing pack. Higgins, you'll pay for this blackguard work some day or other. Couldn't you go and call some of the Mullen's ones to come and take home their father? Mrs. Williamson, but I pity you! for you have a bad pill to deal with—though he's a quiet enough man in drink if he was let alone."

"I never was threacherous with you, Johnny, yet; and I never yet saw them I'd listen to saying a bad word against you," said Williamson.

“Williamson, it was me that stood up for you at the election times, the evening that they wanted your blood for breaking in and spoiling the meeting. And they'd have had it, too, only your woman came and fetched you away. But I stood up for you, Williamson, and I'd stand up for you the morrow.”

“Now they're going to hug one another,” said Mrs. Mulvany; “and they'll be crying in a minute, and it'll go on like this all evening. And there's nothing on earth I hate so much to see in two men. I'd far easier stand them fighting and killing one another. Archy Higgins, if you don't take them pair away out of that, you'll never enter my door again. Here, Johnny Mullen, your Jennie is on the street looking for you. Go on out home with her like a good man. You and Williamson may stay there, Higgins, as long as you like, for you're peaceable enough if let alone, and poor Mrs. Williamson has other things to think of than keeping a good-for-nothing man out of her way. But that Johnny Mullen!—I don't like the sight of him. He'd sit in your house from morning to night to provoke you looking at him, and him never has a halfpenny to spend after Monday morning is over.”

“Ay, I wish I was a cub again,” Johnny said, going home, “I'd never get married, anyway.” The little daughter Jennie was accustomed to the fool talk of him. “I wish I was a cub again, I'd never have got—ay, maybe I would; ay, likely I would; but things wouldn't, maybe, be like this.”

HUMPHREY JAMES.