

DIGNITY

A Radio Play.

by Teresa Deery

(Fade in sound of cups and saucers being put on a tray. Woman's voice "You didn't finish your breakfast. Were the rashers not done to your liking?")

Dermot Wade: (A young man) Yes, very nice.

Mrs. Hally: (Elderly woman) It's a pity you didn't finish them so. Good food like that going to waste. (more sounds of table being cleared) Is that all now?

Wade: That's all, Mrs. Hally.

Mrs. Hally: And you have all you want?

Wade: Everything.

Mrs. Hally: Well I'll go on so and leave you to settle to your work. Isn't that what you'd like?

Wade: Yes - I've a good deal of writing to get done.

Mrs. Hally: I left the books there on the table ready for you.

Wade: So I see.

Mrs. Hally: And the blotting paper ready to your hand - and I left a jar of ink up there on the shelf -

Wade: You left all I could want -

Mrs. Hally: I did so: I'm used to the way of men with books. Young men like yourself. That's the word I said to your mother when she came looking at the room. "I'm used to the ways of literature men. I'm well acquainted with their habits. Why wouldn't I be? Twenty years now I'm taking a lodger and the place ever a favourite for it's quiet -

Wade: Yes, I suppose so -

Mrs. Hally: We never had trouble to get a lodger --- being respectable people that keep to themselves - No trouble at all.

Wade: I'm sure you hadn't.

Mrs. Hally: Oh I'm pleased to have you (as conferring a favour) I had ever a great wish for young men -- Saving an odd one they have a nice way about them - Well, I'll go on, for I see you'd like that --

Wade: Yes - I'm pretty busy.

Mrs. Hally: A great wish. But never a son did God send me. Not a one. Girls only, by my first husband, and by my second. - Well, I'll go on -

Wade: I'd better begin/mywork you see -

Mrs. Hally: Indeed you'd better: men are a fright for losing time. The sooner you'd start the sooner you'd have it under way -

Wade: And I don't want to be interrupted -

Mrs. Hally: And what would interrupt you?! (indignant) May I ask you that? This was never a house for interruption. Tell me now, did you sleep last night?

Wade: Yes, very well.

Mrs. Hally: Ah that's the thing to help your work. There is nothing like the blessed sleep. You take it for granted, being young, without so much as "Thank God" for the night. Is there a draught in on you from the window?

Wade: No draught at all.

Mrs. Hally: The fire is poked up nice and cosy -

Wade: Yes, very nice.

Mrs. Hally: Ah these October mornings do be very chilly. And well I know if a gentleman has work to do he must have comfort. If it was you were going out to work the fire needn't be lighted until the evening. But sure you say you like to start writing after breakfast.

Wade: That's my best time.

Mrs. Hally: Well it's a pity on account of the coal, but there's no help for that now. Is it for a book you're writing?

Wade: Yes, a book.

Mrs. Hally: Ah - I was thinking. Well, I never before had a man wrote a book - Students only, and men who'd be writing for the paper. There was one man stopped here - he didn't stop very long - but while he was here ----

Wade: Another time you must tell me about him.

Mrs. Hally: Oh - it is/always 'another time'. There's no time like the present for them would gain wisdom.

Wade: That's why I must get on with my work.

Mrs. Hally: Get on with it so, - but maybe the longest way round would be the shortest way home. And them stops to listen might learn a lot.

Wade: I can't stop now.

Mrs. Hally: The blotter is there on the table beside you -- But likely you won't use the blotter for I see you have one of them quick-drying fountains -

Wade: I'm using a pencil at present ---

Mrs. Hally: That's better for you -- not to be wasting the ink - and may be putting a daub on the carpet - I dusted the table seeing you said the dust was thick on it yesterday.

Wade: It's all right now.

Mrs. Hally: Thick you said, and that you had to go up and wash your hands. That was never said to me before, not by anyone who ever stayed in this house. Oh, I won't bear it against you, I wouldn't bear grudge.

Wade: Mrs. Hally -

Mrs. Hally: It's a thing never happened to me before - to let the lodger's table get that dusty.

Wade: It might happen to anyone. Now please go on -

Mrs. Hally: Wait a minute. There is one thing I'd like to say.

Wade: What is it ?

Mrs. Hally: That young man that stopped here - he used to be writing for the papers. He was forever asking me questions. I told him all. I let him have it - "something thrilling" was what he wanted (contempt)

Wade: What do you mean ?

Mrs. Hally: He wanted it for the paper. "Oh, Mrs. Hally, you've lived through exciting times in this little village. Let me write an account of that" - a raid, you know, on the house - when the Black and Tans were here in Ireland - And next day he'd want all about the secret tunnel we had out at the back, for the men, to escape from the Free State soldiers--- I told him whatever I could remember. And let anyone read that for a penny. But -- (Eager now - very serious) - what you're writing will be in a book. I had ever a great respect for books If you'd wish now I'll tell you my life story --

Wade: Your life story - Oh, not now, Mrs. Hally --

Mrs. Hally: I thought you might put it in a book.

Wade: I don't think so.

Mrs. Hally: I could tell it. It wouldn't take but five minutes. (Longing)

Wade: Five minutes - your life story in five minutes !

Mrs. Hally: Not very much longer. It is clear before me. I think of it often when I look out of the window. (Restrained) Would I sit down there now and tell it to you ?

Wade: No - No - You see I haven't the time - it isn't worth your while to sit down.

Mrs. Hally: It is well worth while - for five minutes - if you were on your feet all day -

Wade: Well, I can't give more than five minutes.

Mrs. Hally: Let you stop me so when the time is up - if I'm not finished. (She sits down) Will you come and sit down by the fire while I tell it to you -

Wade: No - I'll stay here.

Mrs. Hally: Very well so - with the pen in your hand, - or it's a pencil you tell me.

Wade: A whole life story is apt to be wearisome.

Mrs. Hally: Now one minute - listen to me. Leave your mind free to follow my words . . . It was out there at the corner it all happened --- you can't see the corner from this window. Carey's barn is in the way. But just out there. . . He was a very ordinary fakk looking fellow. He wasn't much above middle hight. But I was only turned seventeen at that time, and I thought he was the sun and the moon. Well, the day I'm telling of - it was about mid-day or past it of an October day. Tim, - that was his name - and I were at the corner. Often we'd meet out there at the corner: he'd be on his way to dinner, and I had it a custom to slip out for a message at the right time. - There was a stir in the street about us, more of a stir than you'd get now. (Faintly heard sounds of village street) We were having a laugh over something - maybe the man he worked for, or ourselves. Then of a sudden Tim fell silent: it was a way he had. Often he'd go off in a brown-study. "Tim" I'd say, "what is on you?" Then he'd wake up. But this day when I said it he turned to me "We don't know at all, Mary, what it is is going on in the world." I turned from him. I didn't like he'd see the fright he gave me. I looked away, up the street. Two fellows were coming down towards us: They were like travellers - they weren't of the town at all: I didn't like the look of them. I turned to Tim, I answered him proud: "What do we care about the world?" And in a minute we were laughing just the same. (Sounds of street again: cart jolting over stones, bicycle bell, etc) But on that minute the door of the infant school was opened, - the childer came pouring out (Sound of children running) The two fellows were close to us now: they stood up on the path,

by the way to let the childer pass. -

1st Man: There's a grand girl. Did you see her, Willie?

2nd Man: Did you see how she laughed, and looked at him.
(Spaking rather loudly: to be overheard by the couple)

1st Man: I'd like she looked at me that way.

Mary: (Young girl) Tim, do you hear them?

Tim: (Young man) Don't mind them at all.

2nd Man: What harm if he was worth her while. (Louder than before)

1st Man; A girl like that thrown away on such a fellow.

Mary: Come on, Tim, let us be moving.

Tim: We will not. Let them move on. We'll stop where we are.

Mary: Ah, come on, do. Come down with me as far as Whelan's.

Tim: I won't move from this, I tell you that.

Mary: Well, you needn't take the head off me.

Tim: If you're not able to stand a few remarks.

Mary: Yes I am, it is for you I minded.

Tim: I can mind myself. You needn't do it.

Mary: Tim, what is on you at all to-day? You were never one to get like this.

Tim: Can't you stop shouting. He's close behind you.

Mary: I don't care where he is -

Tim: Trying by the way to light his cigarette -

2nd Man: Damn that match. Excuse me, mister, could you give us a light.

Tim: I haven't one with me. (Short)

1st Man: Ah, he hasn't one, Willie. (Mocking)

2nd Man: The lady might have a match.

1st Man: Miss, - could you oblige us?

Mary: No, - I'm sorry. (Quick, nervous)

1st Man: Ah, - she's sorry !

2nd Man: We might have known she is quite matchless. (Laugh)

1st Man; Take care now; we're disturbing their little tete-a-tete.

Mary: Tim, I'm going. (Street sounds heard faintly all the time)

Tim: Do not.

Mary: But it's beginning to rain.

Tim: It's nothing - only a few drops.

1st Man: There's going to be the hell of a shower. Stand in here, Willie, until it's over.

2nd Man: Miss, - would you like to stand in the doorway - out of the rain ?

Tim: If she likes she'll do it without your invitation.

1st Man: There now, didn't I tell you: you shouldn't ever disturb a pair of lov-yers.

Mary: Hear them now ? I think we're foolish.

Tim: Turn up the collar of your coat.

Mary: I think we're like a couple of fools standing here in the rain.

Tim: You've stood in the rain with me before now, and not minded it, Mary.

Mary: I wouldn't mind now only for them. I hate to look foolish. I hate to have people laughing at me.

Tim: Well, draw in here so, under this gateway.

Mary: (Relieved) Ah, that's better.

Tim: The rain is nothing.

Mary: It wasn't the rain I minded, Tim, but those two fellows staring at me, and jeering at the two of us.

Tim: I wouldn't give them to say that I minded.

Mary: They were nasty: the way they looked at me.

Tim: You needn't mind when I'd be with you.

Mary: And besides, I was thinking - I didn't put on my good shoes coming out - and these are down at the heel.

Tim: Aren't you a little fool? (Affectionate) What does your heel matter, - what way it is? Just because there are two fellows down from Dublin you must go thinking of how you look.

Mary: Nobody likes to be seen looking shabby. (Prim)

Tim: You couldn't look shabby, - no matter what you'd have on you. Mary, you're all the world to me. (Sudden tenderness)

Mary: Mind, keep back.

Tim: There's no one looking. (Passionate now) You're my whole world. Do you hear me, Mary? -

Mary: Oh, Tim, keep back. (half frightened, half joyous) I never knew you like this before.

Tim: There, I'm not touching you now, but I tell you I love you. I'd give my life for you. Do you .. do you -

Mary: You'll make me cry.

Tim: Why would you cry?

Mary: I'm that happy. I love you.

(Sounds in the street: people's footsteps;
a woman's voice "It passed off: I thought it
was going to pour)

Tim: This is the best day I ever lived. (People's
footsteps) And isn't this a queer thing surely -
you and I that were often alone together, - and it
is here in the gateway with people passing we'd
tell one another.

Mary: (Low) I was often wishing you'd tell me -

Tim: The first day I saw you I knew it was you I wanted.

Mary: I could never want anyone else but you.

(Voices of people passing - A girl's voice -
"Hurry on, we'll be late." - A clock chimes)

Mary: I must get back: my mother'll be wondering.

Tim: I'll go with you as far as Whelan's. (They
come out into the street)

Mary: So the rain didn't come on at all. (They walk
along)

1st Man: Willie, - what are we sheltering for? Come on,
man. The sun has come out.

Tim: As soon as I can get a rise, we'd have enough
then to make a beginning.

Mary: How soon would that be?

Tim: It might be in less than six months.

Mary: And could we -- then -- ?

Tim: Get married. Why not?

Mary: Tim, (A happy laugh) you're sudden.

Tim: What's to prevent us ?

Mary: My father, - he'd never agree: he wouldn't let me
get married so soon.

Tim: We'll tell them anyway we mean to get married.

Mary: I can't believe it.

Tim: Now, I'd better not go any farther. (They stop)

2nd Man: (Close on top of them) Mind now, Jimmy, don't knock the lady.

1st Man: They nearly tripped me.

2nd Man: They stopped very sudden.

1st Man: When people stop on a sudden they can't complain if you knock against them.

2nd Man: Say, tell us the way to the Post Office.

1st Man: They can't hear you ! (A laugh) They're wrapt in one another.

Mary: Answer him, Tim.

2nd Man: Could anyone answer a plain question.

Tim: If you want the Post Office it's there, on your left.

2nd Man: I'm interrupting your conversation -

Tim: What else do you want?

Mary: (Low) Tim, don't get angry.

1st Man: We'll ask someone else; we wouldn't disturb you.

Tim: If you want nothing clear off out of this.

1st Man: Clear out of this ! Is it private property?

2nd Man: Is this path reserved for lovers' meetings ?

Mary: Take care, don't mind them.

2nd Man: Ah we must make allowance -- it's plain to see she turned him down.

1st Man: Clear out of this ! the impudent fellow.

2nd Man: Don't blame the fellow! He wanted a kiss.

Mary: Tim ! Oh ! (Frightened: woman's voice "Oh, Lord save us!" boy's voice calling "A fight! hurry you'll miss it!" Sound of running - hurried steps,

crowd gathering)

1st Man: Look out ! that's enough ! Has he hurt you, Willie?

Mary: Oh, why did you?

Woman: He has the man killed.

Man: He's not killed - it is only a fall.

Boy: The Guard is coming.

A Man: It was that he slipped on the path.

Mary: Come away, Tim.

1st Man: Is it your arm, Willie? Let me help you up.

Guard: What's all this now?

1st Man: That fellow there assaulted my friend. He knocked him down. He has his arm broken.

Tim: You go away, Mary. Keep out of this. Hurry on home. (Low, urgent)

Mary: Oh, Tim, what have you done? I don't like to leave you -

Tim: Go on, now - don't get mixed up with it -

Guard: Give me your name.

Tim: Tim Mulrooney.

Guard: What are you all doing here? Clear off now.

(Sound of crowd dispersing. Woman's voice "It is some words they had -- likely about the girl."
Man - "Who was the fellow that got hurt?" Boy's voice - "It's over. Ah you missed it". Mary's hurried steps. She knocks at hall door - it is opened at once)

Mary's Mother: You're very late. (They are in the hall)

Mary: I'll be down in a minute. (Low, shaky)

Mother: Your dinner is on the table.

Mary: I'll run up with my things.

Mother: Do not. Come in and sit down and take your dinner.
(They go into the room. Child's voice "I want more bread.")

Father: What made you go out and the dinner just ready?

Mother: She goes every day.

Brother: Mary, what's up ? (Alarmed)

Mother: She's as white as a sheet !

Mary: I .. don't want my dinner ..

Child: Mary is crying ... what's making her cry?

Mother : What is on you ? Did you get a fright ?

Father: Let her alone. Let her take her dinner I'll talk to her after. It is ~~is~~ no good thing has her so fond of being on the street.

Mrs. Hally's voice: So that was the end of Tim and me ---

Wade: The end - but what happened ?

Mrs. Hally: That fellow was badly hurt. They jailed Tim for it.

Wade: Sent him to jail - ?

Mrs. Hally: The fellow was related to someone important.

Wade: But then - I mean afterwards -- didn't you and Tim come together?

Mrs. Hally: How could I go near him and he after serving a sentence in prison?

Wade: But surely --

Mrs. Hally: What would people say ? A man out of prison.

Wade: But if you were fond of him -- you must have felt --

Mrs. Hally: No matter what I felt. A nice thing it would be.

Wade: And you mean to tell me you never saw him?

Mrs. Hally: I did once. It was on a Sunday: he was about a week out of prison. My mother and I were coming out of the chapel, after late Mass. In the crowd I knew someone pushed up beside me - :

Tim: Mary, (low, eager) Mary, - how are you?

Mary: I'm well, thank you. (Prim, frightened)

Tim: I want a word with you. -

Mary: I'm with my mother.

Tim: I must see you. Where'll we meet?

Mary: I .. don't know.

Tim: What do you mean?

Mother: Mary, come on, - what's delaying you?

Mrs. Hally: And that was the last I saw of Tim ever. He came to the house, but it was my father opened the door.

Tim: (Expostulating) I know she's here. I want to see her.

Father: Yes, she's here, but she won't see you.

Tim: Did she say that?

Father: You can't see her.

Tim: Did Mary say she wouldn't see me?

Father: I say it. You and she have done with seeing one another.

Tim: I tell you I won't give her up: and she won't either.

Father: She has given you up. She has put it all out of her head. I had no thought of what was between you - I wouldn't have it --- even if nothing had happened. Better forget it, you.

Tim: I will not !

Father: That's all I have to say to you now -----

Mrs. Hally: He went away. He went on a boat. 'Twas the best thing for him. It was five years before he was here again -

Wade: But he did come back ?

Mrs. Hally: He did; they said it was to see me he came but when he heard I was married he wouldn't come near me -

Wade: You were married - !

Mrs. Hally: He left without as much as coming to see me: that was the kind of chap Tim was: I felt it a slight on me, -- we that had been so friendly --

Wade: When he heard you were married -

Mrs. Hally: It was time for me. I was going on twenty two by then. What was before me if I didn't get married ?

Wade: And you had no regret ? .. I mean you were -- quite happy - with - Mr. Hally ?

Mrs. Hally: Mr. Hally ! I was a widow ^{six} ~~six~~ years before James Hally came near me. At this time I was Pat Cronin's wife. He died (A grievance) and left me with four young children. They were near grown up when I married for the second time ----

Wade: Did you never see, or hear, any more of Tim ?

Mrs. Hally: I heard of him, once, from a man that saw him in Buenos Aires, and said he looked worn. (Pause) Well, that is my story. I'll go on. I must get slack to put on that fire, it is burning out too sudden.
(She gets up, walks across the room, opens the door) He was only an ordinary looking fellow - except for his eyes; he had good eyes.....
I'll get slack for the fire.

(Goes out, shutting the door - sound of her footsteps fades out.)

END

Teresa DEEvy
Landscape.
Waterford.