

fear, timidity even in group

“the door was rapped again, & this time the biggest boy hearing the shuffle of feet in the hallway, edged away from the door. The door was slowly opened, & before they could see her they chorused out; “could you please give us something for the bonfire?” she smiled at them & the smile drew their confidence, & they all crowded closer, each pleading with her to give them something.

⊙ reassurance
benign
nature

begging
bereft of
right

“all right,” she said. “go round to the back-door & I’ll give you something.”

They moved round dubiously. “maybe it’s a bucket of water she’ll throw round us!” the biggest said; & they all laughed..a laugh that was strange & low-pitched.

uncertainty &
fear
question mark
petrists

rarely used
all use
front door
parity of
esteem

They heard the stiff bolt of the back-door scringing as she levered it back.

“there..would that be of any use for your bonfire?” she said, pointing to a black sofa that was mottled with mildew & propped up with bricks to support a missing leg.

They buzzed round it where it lay under a sideless shelter, & in a few minutes had it hauled through the door & out to the gable end where they turned it over to examine it. Two coils of spring were bursting through the rust-stained sacking & a boy ripped them out, tied them to his feet with string & began to walk round, shouting; “the latest in stilts boys! A walking jack-in-the-box!”

“aw, give us a pair,” the young ones whined as the stuffing & springs were torn out of the sofa by the bigger boys. It was then that a half-crown jingled on the ground & one boy pounced on it. “finders keepers!” he said & tried to put it into his pocket.

“no you won’t”

“it’s mine. I found it. I seen it first.”

self interest melts into
authenticity/honesty

a “we”
response:
communal

“it’s the owl woman’s,” they shouted, balked into honesty.

“come on & we’ll give it back to her,” the leader shouted.

“that’s right! that’s fair! Give it back to her!” they all chanted except the one who held the coin in his fist.

honesty
meets
honesty

“O, all right,” he agreed dolefully, & they threw their caps in the air & went back with him to the old woman. They told her they found a half-crown in the lining of the sofa.

the dissenter won over: a joyful “we.”

“are you sure it’s not your own?” she said.

evidence of its
uniqueness
“special”
lost coin/lost son

“naw, where’d we get a half-crown?”

thoughtful
going back
15 years

She took the silver coin in her hand, turned it over, & stared at a small hole near the rim. She went out with them to the old sofa & they pointed to the exact place where the coin had fallen. For a moment she stood without speaking and the boy who had the springs tied to his feet, disengaged them shyly, fearful that he had done something that had annoyed her.

a remorseful respectful caring gesture .. reverent almost

“keep the half-crown & buy sweets for yourselves,” she said quietly. They gave a cheer of delight, hoisted the sofa on their shoulders like a coffin & marched off singing “the boys of Wexford”.

abode of a lost son?

deep
within &
now released

As she stared after them a long sigh broke from her. She was trembling & she went into the house & sat near the fire in the kitchen. She gripped the arms of the rocking chair to steady herself, & over & over again she said aloud; “calm yourself! calm yourself!”

emotion emerging
from captive
longing
⊙ like a rosary of
Hail Marys

every year
every moment
counted

for her mind was leaping back to a night, fifteen years ago, when her only son went to that door, never to come back. Where he went to she didn’t know, & whether he was alive or dead she might never know. She had grown tired of watching for the postman, and though letters came regularly from her two married daughters, the letter she prayed for never came.

probably
no phone
only letter/telegram

revisiting the place of loss

our Lady when her son left home
an “empty nester”

watched for..every day every delivery
as father of prodigal watched road daily for son’s return

"good" underscores it

the phrase of story?

for what she did & how of what it could have been a mystery & sorrow for all four

a revelation

Her tears flowed freely..tears of remorse & of baffled pity. One thing she now knew; she knew it now, her son had not lied when he swore he didn't steal his sister's half-crown. It was good to know that, though her home was broken on account of it & she

②

was alone & had nobody to tell it to. ③ ① three effects then & now.. & ongoing

lostness at a response .. pokes fire inflames a presence

She shrugged her shoulders & poked up the fire. She could believe him now; believe him with all her heart & without forcing herself to believe. And if only he'd step into a prayer the kitchen this very moment, she'd go down on her knees & ask his forgiveness. prodigal mother

She sighed, put a hand to her forehead, & spoke aloud to herself; "ah, son, wherever you are this day, be you alive or dead, I believe you. You didn't steal the half-crown. It was lying in the sofa all these years. That's where it was..in the old sofa!" she swayed to & fro, & the rocking chair creaked under her weight. } profession of faith voiced to him

God in Heaven, she never could forget that night he quarrelled with her & left the house. More than anything else she thought about it. And not a morning past and not an evening passed but she prayed with all her might that he'd come back.

essence of christian spirituality "believe"

brings God into it as arbiter to bring "closure" of happy ending

a rebalancing after 15 yrs.. a "levelling-up"

very catholic effort / gritted teeth to earn the answer : his return