

# *Grant's Big Advent Calendar*

THANKS FOR PARTICIPATING!

*Merry  
Christmas  
one and all*



Here's your  
Master Author Showcase story  
from the pages of the  
Inner Circle Writers' Magazine



**William Butler Yeats** (1865 – 1939) was one of the foremost figures of 20th-century literature. As part of the Irish literary establishment, he helped to found the Abbey Theatre, and later served two terms as a Senator of the Irish Free State. He spent childhood holidays in County Sligo where he became fascinated by Irish legends and the occult. From 1900 his poetry grew more realistic and he largely renounced the transcendental beliefs of his youth. In 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. 'The Pot of Broth', Yeats's first comedic drama, was published in *The Gael* in September 1903. It has been adapted by the editor.

# *The Pot Of Broth*

*Adapted from a play by W. B. Yeats*



Somewhere in the middle of Ireland in the middle of the 19th century, there was a cottage kitchen with a fire on the hearth, and a table with cabbage, onions, a plate of meal, and other basic foodstuffs upon it. Through the half-open door, a tramp entered and looked about.

‘What sort are the people of this house, I wonder?’ he said to himself. ‘Was it a good place for me to come to look for my dinner, I wonder? What’s in that big pot?’ He lifted the lid from a big pot on the hearth. ‘Nothing at all! What’s in the little pot?’ He lifted the lid from a smaller pot on the hearth. ‘Nothing at all! What’s in that bottle, I wonder?’ The tramp took up the bottle excitedly and tasted its contents. ‘Milk! Milk in a bottle! I wonder they wouldn’t afford a tin can to milk the cow into! Not much chance for a poor man to make a living here. What’s in that chest?’

Kneeling over, the tramp tried to lift the lid on a large wooden chest.

‘Locked!’

He sniffed at the keyhole.

‘There’s a good smell there — there must be a still not far off.’

Getting up to his feet, the tramp sat on a stool and listened to some noises outside: shouting and footsteps and a loud, frightened cackling.

‘What in the earthly world is going on outside?’ he said to himself. ‘Any one would think it was the Fiannta-h-Eireann at their hunting!’

A woman’s voice came in through the door.

‘Stop the gap, let you stop the gap, John! Stop that old schemer of a hen flying up on the thatch like as if she was an eagle.’





.A man's voice followed.

'What can I do, Sibby? I all to had my hand on her when she flew away!' 'She's out into the garden!' shouted the woman's voice. 'Follow after her! She has the wide world before her now.'

'Sibby he called her,' mused the tramp. 'I wonder is it Sibby Coneely's house I am in! If that's so it's a bad chance I have of going out heavier than I came in. I often heard of her, a regular old slave-driver that would starve the rats. An old niggard with her eyes on kippeens, that would skin a flea for its hide! It was the bad luck of the world brought me here, and not a house or a village between this and Tubber. And it isn't much I have left to bring me on there.' He emptied his pockets as he spoke. 'There's my pipe, and not a grain to

fill it with! There's my handkerchief that I got at the coronation dinner! There's my knife, and nothing left of it but the handle.' Turning out the pocket, he added, 'And there's the crumb of the last dinner I got, and the last I'm likely to get till tomorrow. That's all I have in the world, unless the stone I picked up to peg at that yelping dog awhile ago.' He took a smooth stone out of his other pocket and tossed it up and caught it. 'In the time long ago I usedn't to have much trouble to find a dinner, getting over the old women and getting round the young ones! I remember the time I met the old minister on the path and sold him his own flock of turkeys. My wits used to fill my stomach then, but I'm afraid they're going from me now with all the hardship I went through.'



A cackling came in from outside, followed by Sibby's voice.

'Catch her, she's round the bush! Put your hands in the nettles, don't be daunted!' A choked cackle and prolonged screech was heard.

'There's a dinner for somebody, any way!' said the tramp. 'That it may be for myself. How will I come round her, I wonder? There is no more pity in her heart than there's a soul in a dog. If all the saints were standing there barefoot she'd bid them to call another day. It's myself I have to trust to now, and my share of talk.' He looked down at the stone. 'I know what I'll do, I know what Charlie Ward did one time with a stone, and I'm as good a man as he is any way.' He jumped up and waved the stone over his head. 'Now, Sibby! If I don't do it one way I'll do it another. My wits against the world!' And he began to sing,

'There's broth in the pot for you, old man,  
There's broth in the pot for you, old man,  
There's cabbage for me,  
And broth for you,  
And beef for Jack the journeyman.

I wish you were dead, my gay old man,  
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,  
I wish you were dead  
And a stone at your head,  
So as I'd marry poor Jack the journeyman.'

John's voice came in from beyond the door.

'Bring it in, bring it in, Sibby. You'll be late with the priest's dinner.'

'Can't you wait a minute till I draw it?' replied Sibby.

John walked in and saw the tramp. 'I didn't know there was any one in the house.'

'It's only this minute I came in, tired with the length of the road I am, and fasting since morning,' said the tramp.

John began groping among the pots and pans.

'I'll see can I find anything here for you... I don't see much... maybe there's something in the chest.' He took a key from a hiding-place at the back of the hearth, opened the chest, took out a bottle and a ham bone and was cutting a bit from it when Sibby entered, carrying a chicken by the neck. John dropped the ham bone on a bench.



'Hurry now, John, after all the time you have wasted,' she said. 'Why didn't you steal up on the old hen that time she was scratching in the dust?'

'Sure, I thought one of the chickens would be the tenderest, Sibby,' he said.

'Cock you up with tenderness, indeed!' answered Sibby. 'All the expense I'm put to! My grand hen I've been feeding these five years! Wouldn't that have been enough to part with! Indeed, I wouldn't have thought of parting with her itself but she had got tired of laying since Easter.'

'Well, I thought we ought to give his reverence something that would have a little good in it, Sibby.'

'What does the age of it matter? A hen's a hen when it's on the table,' Sibby said, sitting down to pluck the chicken. 'Why couldn't the Kernans have given the priest his dinner the way they always do? What did it matter their mother's brother to have died? It is an excuse they had made up to put the expense of the dinner on me.'

'Well, I hope you have a good bit of bacon to put in the pot along with the chicken,' John said.

'Let me alone,' Sibby answered. 'The taste of meat on the knife is all that high-up people like the

clergy care for, nice genteel people, no way greedy like potato-diggers or harvest men.'

'Well, I never saw the man, gentle or simple, wouldn't be glad of his fill of bacon, and he hungry,' said John.

'Let me alone, I'll show the Kernans what I can do. I have what's better than bacon, a nice bit of a ham I am keeping in the chest this good while, thinking we might want it for company.'

Suddenly Sibby saw the tramp and cried out.

'Who is there? A beggar man is it? Then you may quit this house if you please, we have nothing for you.' She got up and opened the door.

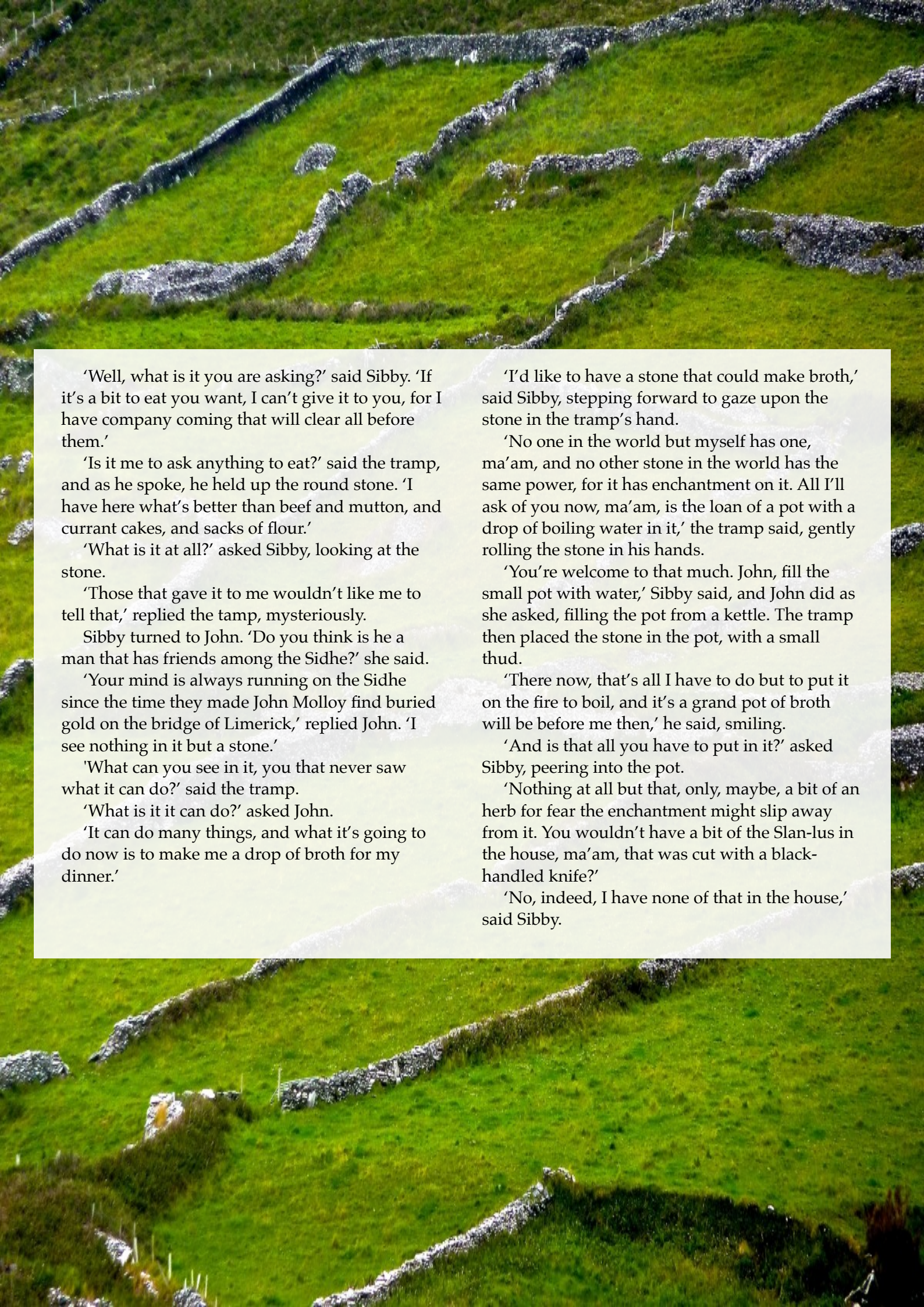
'It is a mistake you are making, ma'am, it is not asking anything, I am,' said the tramp, stepping forward. 'It is giving I am more used to. I was never in a house yet but there would be a welcome for me in it again.'

'Well, you have the appearance of a beggar, and if it isn't begging you are, what way do you make your living?' Sibby replied.

'If I was a beggar, ma'am, it is to common people I would be going, and not to a nice grand woman like yourself, that is only used to be talking with high-up noble people,' the tramp responded.





An aerial photograph of a lush green landscape, likely a rural area in Ireland. The terrain is divided into irregular fields by low, grey stone walls. The grass is vibrant green, and the stone walls are made of rough, stacked stones. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down on the fields.

‘Well, what is it you are asking?’ said Sibby. ‘If it’s a bit to eat you want, I can’t give it to you, for I have company coming that will clear all before them.’

‘Is it me to ask anything to eat?’ said the tramp, and as he spoke, he held up the round stone. ‘I have here what’s better than beef and mutton, and currant cakes, and sacks of flour.’

‘What is it at all?’ asked Sibby, looking at the stone.

‘Those that gave it to me wouldn’t like me to tell that,’ replied the tramp, mysteriously.

Sibby turned to John. ‘Do you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe?’ she said.

‘Your mind is always running on the Sidhe since the time they made John Molloy find buried gold on the bridge of Limerick,’ replied John. ‘I see nothing in it but a stone.’

‘What can you see in it, you that never saw what it can do?’ said the tramp.

‘What is it it can do?’ asked John.

‘It can do many things, and what it’s going to do now is to make me a drop of broth for my dinner.’

‘I’d like to have a stone that could make broth,’ said Sibby, stepping forward to gaze upon the stone in the tramp’s hand.

‘No one in the world but myself has one, ma’am, and no other stone in the world has the same power, for it has enchantment on it. All I’ll ask of you now, ma’am, is the loan of a pot with a drop of boiling water in it,’ the tramp said, gently rolling the stone in his hands.

‘You’re welcome to that much. John, fill the small pot with water,’ Sibby said, and John did as she asked, filling the pot from a kettle. The tramp then placed the stone in the pot, with a small thud.

‘There now, that’s all I have to do but to put it on the fire to boil, and it’s a grand pot of broth will be before me then,’ he said, smiling.

‘And is that all you have to put in it?’ asked Sibby, peering into the pot.

‘Nothing at all but that, only, maybe, a bit of an herb for fear the enchantment might slip away from it. You wouldn’t have a bit of the Slan-lus in the house, ma’am, that was cut with a black-handled knife?’

‘No, indeed, I have none of that in the house,’ said Sibby.



‘Or a bit of the Fearavan that was picked when the wind was from the north?’

‘No, indeed, I’m sorry there’s none.’

‘Or a sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs?’

‘There’s plenty of it by the hedge,’ said John. ‘I’ll go out and get it for you.’

‘O, don’t mind taking so much trouble; those leaves beside me will do well enough,’ replied the tramp, and he took a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and put them in.

‘But where did you get the stone, at all?’ asked Sibby.

‘Well, this is how it happened,’ he said. ‘I was out one time, and a grand greyhound with me, and it followed a hare, and I went after it. And I came up at last to the edge of a gravel pit, where there were a few withered furze bushes, and there was my fine hound sitting up, and it shivering, and a little old man sitting before him, and he taking off a hare-skin coat.’ The tramp looked around and noticed the ham bone next to the steaming pot. ‘Give me the loan of a kippeen to stir the pot with,’ he said,

and took up the ham bone and put it into the pot.

‘Oh! the ham bone!’ said John.

‘I didn’t say a ham bone, I said a hare-skin coat,’ the tramp said.

‘Hold your tongue, John, if it’s deaf you’re getting,’ Sibby said.

The tramp gently stirred the pot with the ham bone as he went on. ‘Well, as I was telling you, he was sitting up, and one time I thought he was as small as a nut, and the next minute I thought his head to be in the stars. Frightened I was.’

‘No wonder, no wonder at all in that,’ Sibby said, as she pulled feathers from the chicken in her lap.

‘He took the little stone then — that stone I have with me—out of the side pocket of his coat, and he showed it to me. “Call off your dog,” says he, “and I’ll give you that stone, and if ever you want a good drop of broth, or a bit of stirabout, or a drop of poteen itself, all you have to do is to put it down in a pot with a drop of water and stir it awhile, and you’ll have the thing you were wanting ready before you.”’

'Poteen! Would it make that?' Sibby asked.

'It would, ma'am; and wine, the same as the Clare Militia uses.'

'Let me see what does it look like now,' said Sibby, bending forward to look in the pot, plucking the chicken all the while.

'Don't look at it for your life. ma'am,' said the tramp, stepping in front of her. 'It might bring bad luck on any one that would look at it, and it boiling. I must put a cover on the pot, or I must colour the water some way. Give me a handful of that meal.'

Sibby held out a plate of meal and he put in a handful or two.

'Well, he's a gifted man!' said John, coming to stand beside Sibby.

'It would be a great comfort to have a stone like that,' said Sibby, as she finished plucking the chicken which lay in her lap.

'And there's another thing it does, ma'am, since it came into Catholic hands. If you put it into a pot of a Friday with a bit of the whitest meat in Ireland in it, it would turn it as black as black.'

'That is no less than a miracle,' said Sibby. 'I must tell Father John about that.'

'But to put a bit of meat with it any other day of the week, it would do it no harm at all, but good. Look here now, ma'am, I'll put that nice little hen you have in your lap in the pot for a minute till you see.' The tramp took the chicken from Sibby's hands and put it in the pot.

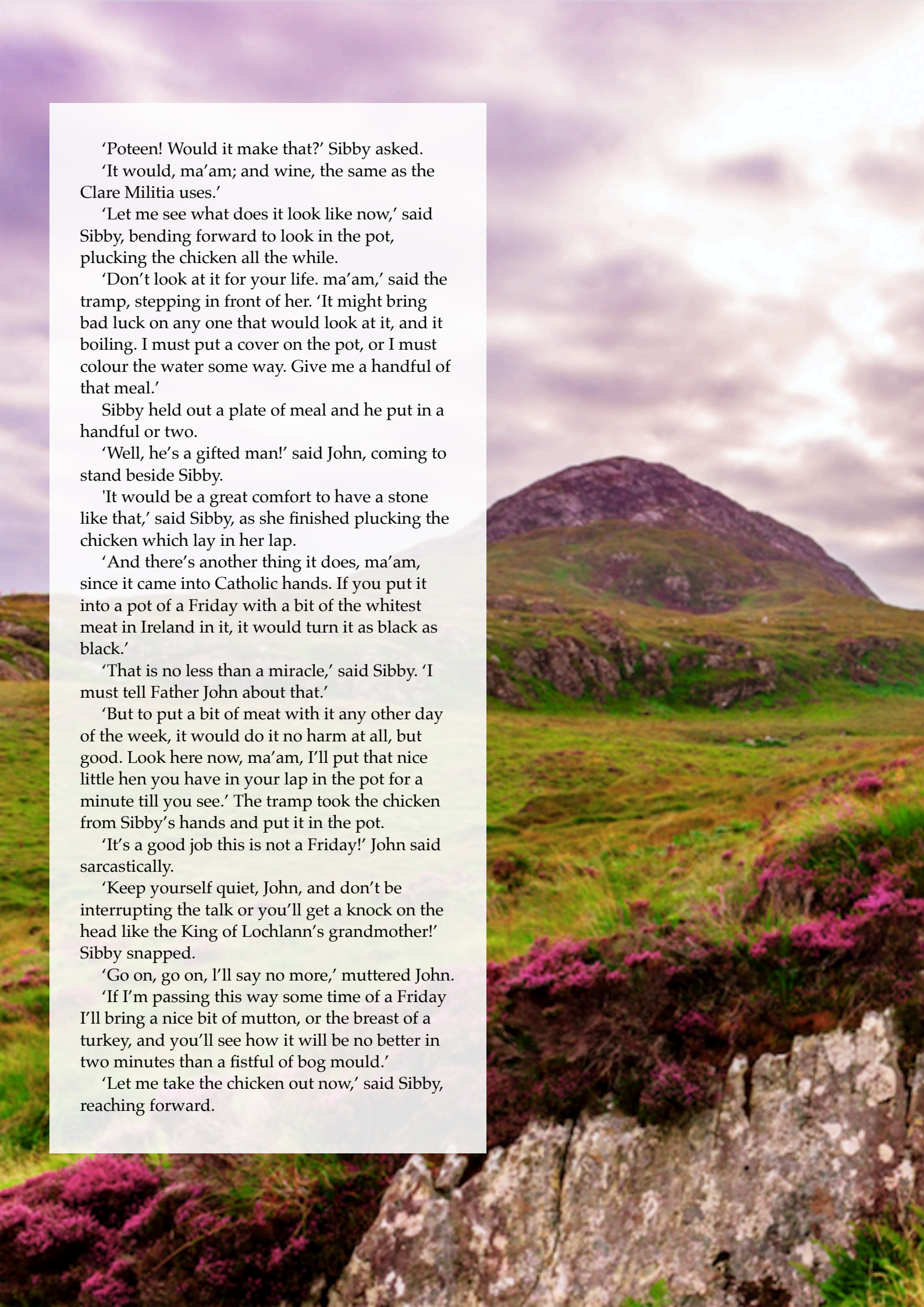
'It's a good job this is not a Friday!' John said sarcastically.

'Keep yourself quiet, John, and don't be interrupting the talk or you'll get a knock on the head like the King of Lochlann's grandmother!' Sibby snapped.

'Go on, go on, I'll say no more,' muttered John.

'If I'm passing this way some time of a Friday I'll bring a nice bit of mutton, or the breast of a turkey, and you'll see how it will be no better in two minutes than a fistful of bog mould.'

'Let me take the chicken out now,' said Sibby, reaching forward.





'Stop till I help you, ma'am, you might scald your hand,' said the tramp. 'I'll show it to you in a minute as white as your own skin, where the lily and the rose are fighting for mastery. Did you ever hear what the boys in your own parish were singing after you being married from them—such of them that had any voice at all and not choked with crying, or senseless with the drop of drink they took to comfort them and to keep their wits from going, with the loss of you?'

Sibby sat down. 'Did they do that indeed?'

'They did, ma'am,' the tramp said, 'this is what they used to be singing:

The spouse of Naoise,  
Erin's woe,  
Helen and Venus long ago  
Their charms would fade, their fame would flee,

Beside mo gradh, mo stor, mo chree,  
My Sibby, O!

Sibby took a fork and rose to take out the chicken, but the tramp put his hand to stop her, and went on singing.

'Her eyes are gray like morning dew,  
Her curling hair falls to her shoe,  
The swan is blacker than—' he looked round for a simile, and saw his hand, 'my nail,  
Beside my queen, my Granuaile,  
My Sibby, O!

Sibby got up again, but the tramp put up his hand.

'Wait till you hear to the end.

The King of France would give his throne  
To share her pillow (what's the rhyme at all?)  
So would I myself...'

Sibby began to keep time with the fork.

'The Spanish fleet is on the sea  
To carry away mo gradh, mo stor!  
My Sibby, O!

Sibby stood up with the fork in her hand and sang to herself: 'The Spanish fleet is on the sea,' then turned to John and said, 'I always knew I was too good for you!' She went on humming.

'Well, he has the old woman bewitched,' muttered John.

'Did you take the chicken out yet?' said Sibby, recovering herself.



Taking it out and giving it a good squeeze into the pot, the tramp replied, 'I did, ma'am, look at it there.'

Sibby took it and laid it on table.

'How is the broth getting on?' asked John.

The tramp tasted it with a spoon.

'It's grand; it's always grand.'

'Give me a taste of it,' said Sibby.

The tramp took the lid from the pot and slipped the hambone behind him.

'Give me some vessel till I give this sky-woman a taste of it,' he said grandly, and John gave him an egg-cup, which he filled and gave to Sibby. John then gave him a mug and he filled this for himself pouring it back and forward from the mug to a bowl on the table, and drinking gulps now and again. Sibby blew at hers and smelled it.

'There's a good smell on it anyway,' she said, and sipped it. 'It's lovely! Oh, I'd give the world and all to have the stone that made that!

'The riches of the world wouldn't buy it, ma'am,' replied the tramp. 'If I was inclined to sell it, the Lord Lieutenant would have given me Dublin Castle and all that's in it long ago.'

'Oh! couldn't we coax it out of you any way at all?' Sibby said, sipping some of the broth again.

The tramp had another mugful and answered, 'The whole world wouldn't coax it out of me, except maybe for one thing.' He looked suddenly sad. 'Now I think of it, there's only one reason I might think of parting with it at all.'

'What reason is that?' Sibby asked eagerly.

'It's a misfortune that overtakes me, ma'am, every time I make an attempt to keep a pot of my own to boil it in, and I don't like to be always under a compliment to the neighbours, asking the loan of one. But whatever way it is, I never can keep a pot with me. I had a right to ask one of the little man that gave me the stone. The last one I bought got the bottom burned out of it one night I was giving a hand to a friend that keeps a still, and the one before that I hid under a bush one time I was going into Ennis for the night, and some boys of the town dreamed about it and went looking for treasure in it, and they found nothing but eggshells, but they brought it away for all that. And another one...'



'Give the loan of the stone itself, and I'll engage I'll keep a pot for it... Wait now till I make some offer to you.'

The tramp muttered to himself, 'I'd best not be stopping to bargain, the priest might be coming on me.' He got up. 'Well, ma'am, I'm sorry I can't oblige you.' He went to the door, shaded his eyes and looked out, then turned suddenly 'I have no time to lose, ma'am, I'm off.' He stepped to the table and took up his hat. 'Well, ma'am, what offer will you make?'

'You might as well leave it for a day on trial first,' said John.

'I think it likely I'll not be passing this way again,' he replied, and turned to Sibby. 'Well now, ma'am, as you were so kind, and for the sake of the good treatment you gave me, I'll ask nothing for it at all. Here it is for you and welcome, and that you may live long to use it. But I'll just take a little bit in my bag that'll do for my supper, for fear I mightn't be in Tubber before night.' He picked up the chicken. 'And you won't begrudge me a drop of whisky when you can make plenty

for yourself from this on out.' He put the bottle of whisky in his pocket.

'You deserve it, you deserve it, indeed. You are a very gifted man. Don't forget the kippeen!' John said, smiling.

'It's here!' the tramp said, slapping his pocket, and off he went. John stepped out with him.

Sibby fished out the stone from the pot with a spoon, and looked down at it.

'Broth of the best, stirabout, poteen, wine itself, he said! and the people that will be coming to see the miracle! I'll be as rich as Bidy Early before I die!'

John walked back in.

'Where were you, John?'

'I just went out to shake him by the hand. He's a very gifted man,' John said, shaking his head in wonder.

'He is so, indeed,' said Sibby.

'And the priest's at the top of the boren coming for his dinner. Maybe you'd best put the stone in the pot again,' John said.

**Subscribe now to the Inner Circle Writers' Magazine so that you don't miss out on a monthly Master Author Showcase! And stay tuned to the 2024 Advent Extravaganza to download your next story for FREE!**

# CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

© 2024 by Grant P. Hudson.  
Clarendon House Publications,  
76 Coal Pit Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire,  
United Kingdom S36 1AW  
[www.clarendonhousebooks.com](http://www.clarendonhousebooks.com)  
Email: [grant@clarendonhousebooks.com](mailto:grant@clarendonhousebooks.com)