

A
WOMAN'S
EQUAL SHARE

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Bridget Geegan Blanton

Desert Rose Books

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For my husband, Christopher

I recognized you the moment we met
Those first steps that brought me towards you, led me home.
The road we followed together has crossed turbulent rivers,
rainy mountain paths and the unearthly quiet of a dry, hot desert.
Refreshed and spiritually renewed, we came upon a field,
filled with tender violets;
fashioned not by man, but by the Creator
whose Love is reflected in each otherworldly hue.
United, you and I continue, onward, into the wind.
I pause on this journey to thank you, for your passion for life,
your unshakable confidence in me, the laughter
and the enduring love that flows ceaselessly between our hearts.

all my love,

Bridget

Tiny Cottage *by the Sea*

*Powerful waves batter the shoreline
thunder, energy and spray
wild wind carries a scent of salt and sea
as it blasts relentless
against me
my mind empties
my spirit soars*

The moon was still visible in the morning sky. Brilliant, white light bordered the gray, shadowy sphere as it sank slowly down into the clear blue expanse overhead. Kate O'Rourke tossed back her long, red hair and gazed up at the sight from underneath the protection of her right hand with a sense of awe. "Perhaps it's an omen," she thought to herself, squinting up at the moon through dark green eyes. Kate stood motionless with her face upturned, focusing on the unusual celestial display while gentle waves rolled in over her bare feet on a stretch of beach off Bantry Bay. Kate turned and looked away from the water and up at Gran's tiny cottage by the sea. She sighed deeply and smiled to herself at the happiness she felt, being back in Ireland.

Continuing down the coastal beach, Kate kicked at the water and allowed her gaze to stretch out over the bay and rest on the mountains in the distance. The luxuriant green of summer in full foliage created a spellbinding contrast, against the black cliff face and the azure blue water. Kate reveled in the warmth of the sun as she watched a lone cormorant dive for fish. The spell was broken by the sound of someone running behind her. Kate turned and saw Liam, her husband of five years pounding through the surf and not slowing down in the least as he drew near. Kate began to take a few steps backwards and then turned and broke into a run hoping to outdistance Liam. It was a contest for a while, but finally Liam overtook her and stood triumphantly ahead of Kate with his hands outstretched in victory. Kate bent over and heaved for air, “ye had a running start ‘ye know,” she gasped.

“What matters is winning and you did not win.” Liam gloated.

“Aye, give me a fair start boyo and we’ll see who wins,” Kate replied with hands on hips as a slight breeze danced through her long, red hair.

“It’s times like this when I realize that I’m actually a little afraid of you,” Liam said with a laugh.

“Ye wouldn’t be the first,” Kate said in jest.

“Unruly as ever,” Liam began, “nobody would ever accuse you of being a graceful loser.”

“Well, at least I enter into a footrace offering ‘me soon-to-be defeated challenger equal footing, unlike ‘yerself.” Kate added with a smile.

“Being back home in Ireland always seems to light a spark in you, my dear Kate and it’s wonderful to see it.”

“Ah, ‘tis wonderful to be home Liam, seeing Gran and all this,” Kate replied as she swept her arm towards the view in front of them.”

“Look at that moon,” Liam added as he pointed towards the sky.

“Aye, I’m thinking ‘tis an omen considering the journey we’ll be taking today.”

Liam looked at Kate and nodded thoughtfully. “Come here love,” Liam said, opening his arms to Kate.

“Agree to the fact that I wasn’t given a fair start and I’ll go anywhere with ‘ye.” Kate challenged.

“Agreed.”

Kate and Liam walked hand-in-hand along the beach in silence and reflection. The verdant beauty of God’s natural design subsumed their senses and rendered them both full of wonder. The scent and the sensation of the salty wind, the piercing cry of birds aloft on air currents and the fusion of mountain, sea and cliff all combined to humble their souls in admiration. Time dwindled down, ticking seconds off the moments stolen away from the demands of the day that lay waiting for them both.

Liam ran a hand through his black, wavy hair. “I should have gotten that haircut and there’s no time for it this morning,” he conceded as he looked at Kate.

“I told ‘ye Liam that ‘ye have the look of a barbarian about ‘ye and here ‘ye are about to take a meeting with the local solicitor,” Kate said as she shook her head. “Ah, but when isn’t your hair a bit too long,” Kate continued. “I’d hardly recognize ‘ye any other way. ‘Ye have the look of a wild man, but fortunately ‘ye possess the gift of gab and before one knows it, they’re throwing their door wide open to ‘ye; and those beguiling blue eyes of ‘yers don’t hurt ‘ye none. Tell me again, what exactly is it that ‘ye hope to accomplish this morning?”

“I want legal certainty that Gran owns the land that she’s living on. We don’t want to be back in Chicago and hear that she’s been thrown off of it for some reason.” Liam replied.

“So ‘ye fear that’s she’s squatting in cottage with no legal hold to reside there?”

“I want the land title and if I need to, I’ll buy it right there and then.”

Kate turned to Liam and pushed a lock of his hair to the side. “It’s moments like these when I fall in love with ‘ye all over again.”

Gran unlatched the upper part of the half door and pulled it open to allow free passage of the refreshing breeze off Bantry Bay. She peered down the beach looking for Kate and Liam and saw them off in the distance heading back towards the cottage. Gran pushed a stray length of white hair away from her face as her attention was caught by the sight of the moon still visible in the morning sky. “How unusual,” she

thought to herself as she continued to gaze at the curious sight. “Lovely in its own way,” she murmured as she opened the door and stepped outside, looking for a sign that would announce the arrival of her friend, Neal Donnelly. She smiled as she thought of him. Neal had brought companionship into her sometimes lonely life as a widow. Neal was a widower as well, and while they both enjoyed being together, neither thought seriously about another marriage. Their relationship was fine just as it was. While they had always known each other, these days their relationship was much closer. Soon after Gran had made the move to the tiny cottage by the sea, a financial arrangement was made by her eldest son James with the Donnelly Dairy Farm to provide for Gran’s needs as far as butter, milk and cheese was concerned. In the end, James never received a single invoice. Although Neal had grudgingly agreed to the arrangement at James’ insistence, he had never intended to bill the son of the woman who had done so much in her youth to promote the issue of land rights. Katherine O’Reilly was well known for her passionate speeches as a young woman regarding land ownership for Ireland’s tenant farmers. Alongside her husband Ronan, Katherine worked tirelessly to rally for land rights, quite often placing their own personal security at risk. It would be tantamount to a sin to demand payment for the scant amount of butter, cheese and milk delivered to her each week. He would be unwelcome to tip a pint at the Public House, that’s for certain. It was for this reason and for the relationship that had innocently sprung up between them in the

years since her arrival. Gran had heard all of this from Neal himself over the many, many meals they had shared. They had become permanent and necessary parts of each other's lives. Gran accompanied Neal to Donnelly family functions and Neal escorted Gran whenever and wherever the O'Reillys came together. James' wife Grania considered Gran's relationship with Neal to be an embarrassing scandal of sorts. In time, Grania had given up trying to convince her to marry Neal. Gran thought the idea of marriage as comical for two old people who simply enjoyed each other's company. Indeed, affection had grown over the years between them, but why complicate life?

Hearing the rumble of a horse drawn cart, Gran looked down the road that led up to her cottage and waved to her friend, Neal Donnelly and his son John.

"Katherine, would 'ye look at that sky," Neal called out as he brought the team of horses to a halt. "Doesn't it look like the moon is melting back into it?"

"Why that's a fair description of this wondrous sight, Neal. Good morning John, so kind of 'ye to take time out of 'yer day to bring us 'round the station house."

"'Tis nothing Katherine, I'm happy to do it," John responded.

"Do 'ye think it's an omen?" Neal asked, nodding towards the sky.

"Could be."

"So where's the fair Kate and her Liam?" Neal ventured.

Gran pointed towards the beach, “heading back this way. Come inside, they’ll be up the hill shortly.”

“Here’s ‘yer tea gents, fierce and strong as ‘ye Donnelly men seem to like it.” Gran said as she handed each man a steaming mug.

John accepted the tea and squinted through gray blue eyes as he took a small sip. “Good and hot, thanks Katherine,” he said with a nod.

“Tis the least I can do John,” Gran added. “Please, take a seat and enjoy ‘yer tea,” Gran continued, as she gestured towards the worn oak table that filled the kitchen area of her small cottage.

Neal joined his son at the table, both men removing their soft and faded tweed caps as if on cue. John smoothed a hand over his gray-flecked, black hair and relaxed back into the chair.

“Tis a gorgeous day for a journey,” Neal announced, while placing his mug down on the table. Peering over a pair of spectacles, he locked his gray blue eyes with Katherine’s and smiled. “I can tell when ‘yer Kate is about,” Neal began. “There’s a happy glow about ‘ye, Katherine.”

“The girl has ‘me heart full of joy, ‘tis certain and I can’t seem to take ‘me eyes off of her ‘fer more than a moment.” Gran continued. “Oh, how I miss her when she’s gone,” she added with a soft, sad note. “Well, she’s here today and we’ve got an adventure ahead of us, don’t we?” Gran said, summoning a cheerful note.

“Aye Katherine, in fact why don’t we go over the plans ‘fer the day,” Neal replied.

“Well then Neal, here it is, Liam and I have an appointment with Michael O’Sullivan regarding the title ‘fer this land. As ‘ye know, Liam is wanting to make certain that’s it all legal and that nobody will come along and toss me out of the cottage. We’ll be stopping by Michael’s office ever so briefly, for a quick update on the situation. Tell me Neal, did ‘ye ever get a hold of a train schedule? Do ‘ye have our route to Knock all plotted out”? Gran inquired.

“Aye, Katherine. We’ll be traveling nearly the length of this fair Isle, mind ‘ye, with quite a ways to go. We’ll board a later train this morning in Bantry and travel from there to Killarney. The Killarney to Limerick leg of the journey arrives quite late at night, but I understand that there are a number of Inns close to the station in the market square. In the morning, the very early morning that is, we’ll continue our journey by traveling from Limerick to Ballyhaunis. I’m told we can hire a horse drawn cab to take us the rest of the way to Knock, where we’ll spend the night after a day at the shrine.”

“All that needs to be done now is to load the cart with a few things ‘fer the journey,” Gran added, “and Liam can take care of that just as soon as they return from their walk.”

A few days earlier while Liam was busy working through a list of repairs Gran needed done around the cottage, Kate and her Grandmother were busy inside tidying up. The extended family had been by the cottage for a visit the night before and now the clean-

up that follows entertaining needed to be addressed. Dishware was washed and put away along with Gran's finest table linens. This round of work was rewarded with a cup of strong tea before Gran set to work putting together a soup for lunch of leftover roast lamb, carrots, leeks, wild garlic and potatoes. The soup simmered in a large blackened pot suspended over the hearth, as Kate nestled a pan of soda bread within the outer embers to bake alongside while the soup came together. Finally, the two women settled in rocking chairs before the hearth each with a bit of sewing in hand. Not one given to waste, Gran had a small pile of worn tea towels each with a small rip requiring a few, well placed stitches.

"I wouldn't dare use these while Grania is about," Gran confided, referring to her daughter-in-law. "While she's not quite so irritating these days, this is just the sort of thing that would set her off. These old tea towels may be worn, but they're still serviceable and just fine 'fer one old woman."

"It reminds me of the time when 'ye explained to me that we're meant to be good stewards of whatever the Lord blesses us with and that He doesn't take to waste and excess," Kate replied.

"Well, it's all part of this attachment to worldly goods that so many people suffer from at the expense of their reliance upon God. It's just a distraction from what really matters in life," Gran added as she put her sewing down in her lap. "That reminds me," Gran began, "Kate, we need to have a bit of a chat. I saw the quick appearance of pain in 'yer face yesterday when

‘yer cousin Maureen passed around her new, young son. Let’s talk about that.”

“Oh Gran, didn’t I already know ‘ye probably read ‘me heart yesterday and don’t I also know that you’re not one ‘fer avoiding painful topics.” Kate replied as she sighed deeply.

“Well, to begin with, I’ve about cried ‘meself out over it,” Kate continued. “What’s left is that I feel ‘meself tensing up whenever the topic is raised regarding when Liam and I intend to start a family. ‘Tis not as though we’re not trying, it’s just that nothing has happened yet.”

“Yer own mother had trouble as well, but didn’t ‘ye eventually show up on the scene,” Gran said softly. “‘Tis one of those matters that we turn over to God in faith and trust in His Divine Will, and in the meantime go about living our lives,” she added.

“Sometimes, that’s easier said than done, ‘ye know.” Kate confided. “I keep ‘meself busy with the typing jobs and caring ‘fer the house, but there are low moments especially after I spend time with the wives of the other men who attend law school with Liam. They’ve all got wee ones running about. Liam, of course is just wonderful and says not to worry, it will happen. I just don’t share his confidence.”

“I have an idea,” Gran said looking directly at Kate. “There’s a bit of a story to tell first, would ‘ye like to hear it?”

“‘Tis nothin’ I’d rather do right now, than hear ‘ye tell a story.” Kate confessed.

“Mind ‘ye Kate, what I’m about to tell ‘ye, is entirely true,” Gran started. “It all started one evening in August in the year of our Lord 1879 in the village of Knock, here in Ireland. Father Cavanagh, Parish Priest of St. John the Baptist Church has just concluded offering the 100th Mass for the peaceful repose of all those souls who had died during An Gorta Mor, The Great Hunger. God rest their tormented souls. The rain was coming down in a torrential deluge. Most of the villagers, but not all, were home and out of the weather. All except for Mary McLoughlin and Margaret Beirne who were out walking by the church; and if ‘ye asked me, I’d tell ‘ye it was by God’s Providential Design that these two women were out on a night such as this. Mary and Margaret were witnesses to a miracle. Against the very wall of the Church where the 100th Mass for the souls taken in An Gorta Mor had just been offered, these women saw an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist. That wasn’t all that they saw. Mary and Margaret also saw an altar with a Lamb and Cross on it and entire choir of angels hovering overhead. In the center of a brilliant light streaming directly from Heaven stood Our Lady. She was dressed in a pure white gown with a crown of gold. She held her hands out towards them yet, gestured up towards Heaven. Mary and Margaret could hardly believe their eyes. They rushed from the spot to alert their families and friends. All told, 15 people stood out in the pouring rain for going on two hours entranced by this miraculous apparition. Other people from Knock who weren’t part of the 15 out in the rain,

said that they saw a bright, illuminating light emanating from the area near the church. More than one witness to this miracle said that the area where the apparition was occurring was completely dry. Not a single raindrop fell anywhere near this heavenly vision. In the year that followed, some 300 healings had taken place at Knock. Think what ‘ye will ‘me dear Kate, but I believe Our Lady visited Knock that evening in August, and when ‘ye consider the part of the apparition regarding the altar, doesn’t it tell ‘ye how important it is to set aside time to go to Mass? It’s going on about 10 years now, since all this took place. In fact, I was just reading in the newspaper, that they’ve erected an ‘Our Lady of Knock’ statue and now, the pilgrimages to Knock are never-ending. Why don’t we pay Our Lady of Knock a visit, Kate? I’ve been wanting to go ‘meself, these last 10 years and while we’re there we can send up a few prayers asking to have a baby join Liam and ‘yerself. What do ‘ye think”? Gran asked Kate.

“I believe ‘ye Gran, Kate confided earnestly. “What a beautiful, hopeful story from a place that has known so much pain. I heard something in ‘yer voice that I don’t hear when ‘yer telling a story to entertain or to educate, and I felt that truth in ‘me heart. Even if I didn’t believe that this is genuine, the fact that you’ve been wanting to go these last 10 years Gran, is reason enough ‘fer me.”

“I’ve always wanted to ask ‘ye Katherine,” Michael O’Sullivan began as he opened a file and pulled

out a sheath of documents, “whatever possessed ‘ye to take up living in that old, broken down fisherman’s cottage by the bay in the first place?”

“To be close to the sea of course, Michael.” Gran replied in a matter of fact tone as she took a seat in the tiny office. “While ‘me oldest son James was concerned with the decision,” Gran continued, “Francis, who as ‘ye well know was Kate’s ‘Da, God rest his soul, was not a bit surprised, but he did share his brother’s worry as to the soundness of the dwelling and so the two of them brought the cottage up to date with repairs to the roof and the interior.”

“Indeed, God rest the soul of ‘yer son Francis,” Michael solemnly replied. “To be close to the sea, ‘ye say Katherine, is it the fishing or what?” Michael continued.

“No Michael, it’s her moods. A stormy sea, a calm sea, a sea completely ensconced by mist or dazzling with dancing waves under a blue sky day. I’m simply drawn to it and it brings me peace,” Gran replied.

“Thank ‘ye Katherine, ‘fer enlightening me as to the reason ‘fer ‘yer presence on that wild bit of land or should I say sea? Now that ‘me curiosity has been quenched,” Michael continued, “allow me to share the results of the land title search that inspired Mr. O’Rourke here, to secure ‘me services. This land and the cottage belong to the family of Donnell O’Donovan, who secured it as part of a salmon fishing license obtained years ago. I spoke with their solicitor who responded with an offer to sell the cottage and the land upon which it stands, not to exceed a single acre.

To be honest, I believe the O'Donovan clan wanted nothing to do with turning down a perfectly sound offer from a woman notorious 'fer moving the tenant rights issue forward back in the day. With that opinion aired, let me list the specifics of their offer. The property boundaries will need to be set prior to further negotiations and this offer does not include commercial fishing rights. However, you're free to catch fish 'fer 'yer own personal consumption. Do 'ye do any fishing Katherine."

"Here and there," Gran replied.

"Here and there, 'ye say?"

"Aye, Michael, on occasion I fish and I also collect cockles in the appropriate season."

"Duly noted," Michael responded. "Any questions at this point"?

"How soon can a surveyor get out there to measure the lot?" Liam queried.

"I can make arrangements this afternoon to send someone out later in the week." Michael replied.

"What about the water or mineral rights," Liam continued, "there's a well on the property and as part of the negotiations we would like ownership."

"Mineral rights," mused Michael, "sounds American, anything to do with that gold rush underway?"

"Actually, yes," Liam began. "The potential for minerals including precious ones such as gold or silver is the impetus behind this ownership claim request, but it's more of a general term to provide future protection for the landowner. I would be happy to write that up

for you as I'm familiar with the legal language." Liam replied.

"I will annex a specific inclusion regarding the well and in extension, the water rights, in the title document as a non-negotiable, along with an attachment of additional language that you will provide, Mr. O'Rourke, regarding mineral rights and we'll see if that doesn't just go by them uncontested." Michael added.

"I plan to buy the land outright on Katherine's behalf," Liam added, "and so, there is no lease agreement necessary."

"Excuse me," Gran interrupted, "I have 'me own request gentlemen. I would like the land title to be put into Kate's name, so that she always has a place to come home to, as well as to avoid any family confusion over ownership after 'me death."

"Certainly Katherine," Michael responded.

Liam looked with surprise at Gran who reached over and patted his hand. "After all, you're buying it 'me boyo, but even if the land was acquired in a different way, I've known for a while now that it will go to Kate."

Ballyhaunis

Neal stepped down onto the platform at the Ballyhaunis train station in County Mayo. He turned around and immediately offered his arm to Gran whose gaze was focused out in the distance. She brought her attention back in an instant, smiling into Neal's eyes as he assisted her down the steps and onto firm ground. Gran walked away from the train and returned her gaze to the emerald green landscape that lay just beyond the stationhouse, as Neal waited for Kate to appear. Dressed for the occasion, Kate came into view donning a simple blue skirt with slim lines and a hem just above her ankle. The sleeves of her soft, yellow linen blouse were rolled up above her wrist and she held onto a plain, narrow-brimmed straw hat. Kate gratefully took Neal's hand as she stepped down onto the platform. Tossing a tightly plaited braid over one shoulder, Kate donned her hat and went over to join Gran. Liam entered the exit way on Kate's heels, loaded down with bags. He took the steps two at a time and landed alongside Neal, setting the bags down as he looked around the busy station house.

"I'll go inside and inquire about hiring a horse cab," Liam suggested to Neal.