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IT SEEMED AS if she had been running for hours; there was a stitch in her side that was almost unbearable but she knew that if she stopped, if she fell to the ground and sobbed as every fibre of her small being implored her to do, she would never find the strength to get up and so she kept going. She had to keep going or Mam would die, it was as simple as that.

You haven't run so far, she told herself. It's not even a mile to the doctor's and not a mile from his house to the pit.

'Doctor's at the accident,' had said Dr Hyslop's very superior housekeeper, 'and certainly will have no time for the likes of you tonight, Kate.' Her sniff implied that he would never have time for the likes of Kate Kennedy, but Kate knew better. Doctor Hyslop always had a smile or a word even though she sometimes found it hard to understand what he was saying.

'Speaks wi' Marbles in his mouth', was how the mining fraternity described the cultured tones of the village

doctor, and then, of course, there was the terrible speech impediment that – so rumour had it – had prevented him from becoming a rich and famous surgeon in a place called Harley Street.

Kate ran on, her breath coming in laboured gasps. She could not go on but she did, proving, not for the first time in her short life, that the will is stronger than mere bone and muscle. One leg followed the other, her breath was ripped painfully from her throat and tears, of which she was completely unaware, ran down her cheeks. They were tears of frustration and impotence and naked fear. *Why was the doctor not at home when she got there? Why did there have to be an accident down the pit, that loathsome open jaw that gaped open farther and farther under the ground; for months it stayed quiet, almost acquiescing in the rape and plunder of its precious fruit and then, when they were lulled into a false sense of security – it roared, demanding sacrifice – but why tonight of all nights?*

At last she was at the pithead. There were makeshift lights swinging from hastily erected structures and men running around as if they had no idea at all about what they were supposed to be doing. Women were standing huddled together for warmth or comfort more likely, and she recognized one of them. ‘Mrs Brown, it’s me mam; she needs the doctor.’



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The woman looked at the girl and the effort to wrench her mind away from the horror of the coalface to the exhausted child was clearly written on her face. For a moment she seemed not to know her; she had a man and two lads down there. ‘Yer mam?’ she managed at last. ‘Och Kate, the bairn’s no comin,” she said impatiently. ‘Look round ye, lassie. We’re dealin’ in death here. Away home, yer father’ll have to manage himself. He got her pregnant easy enough, let him be in at the end o’ it.’ She turned back to her vigil and then, conscious of the child still at her side, she relented. ‘Away and chap up Mrs Breen. She’ll not be here and she’s birthed more bairns than our braw doctor.’

Kate stood for a moment looking at the woman’s back. She felt tears welling up again and desired nothing more than to submit to the luxury of being thirteen years old and to cry for her mammy, to be held in soft, warm arms, certainly not to have to face that three miles of dark fields and woods between the pit and her tumbledown home. Mam, she sobbed quietly and started once more to run – to run like a frightened hare back across the ground she had just covered so painfully. Her mother was in labour for the sixth time in thirteen years – not counting the miscarriages – and something was wrong. Kate was used to childbirth, the newspapers collected furtively for weeks and then spread on the old stained mattress, the



neighbour women crowding in, glad that they were not lying in agony in that uncomfortable bed, ready to do what little they could to bring this new life into the world as easily as possible. They never sent for the doctor. His fee was minimal; but there was usually no way that Liam Kennedy could pay it – and why should he pay for something so natural as a woman's Godgiven function; this act of giving birth. Kate remembered huddling in the big box bed with her brothers and sisters, trying to block out the sounds of her mother's screams, soothing the frightened babies, telling them stories, crooning little songs. Tonight they were alone, well, Da was there, but he would be of little use what with Mam so bad and all the little ones there. When Kate had left, Da had been walking the floor with little Colm sobbing himself to sleep in his arms.

Mrs Breen. Mrs Breen. Kate turned and ran, her pains and fatigue forgotten. Behind her the desperate rescue work went on but she was already divorced from that tragedy and would never in the years to come be able to remember clearly anything at all about it.

Kate stumbled down the hill that led from the mine, reached what passed for a main street and turned left towards the miners' rows. The road ran along the river and usually she stood stock still and let the sound of running water seduce her but tonight she hardly noticed it at all; past the doctor's fancy big house with its beautiful



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garden – so much time, I’ve wasted so much time – and on to the foot of the village. Number six, that was Mrs Breen’s house and it looked deserted, drawn in on itself like a tortoise. Everywhere else there were open doors and light spilling out. Of course, Mrs Breen had lost all her family long ago, no need to alert her to the trouble at the pit. Kate leaned on the door for a moment to get her breath; she had been running for ever and only the door stopped her legs from going on and on. Don’t sleep, she admonished herself and battered on the door as hard as she was able. What a puny battering the door received; there was no strength left in the tired little body.

I can’t wake her. Mammy will die for I’m useless. She picked up a stone that lay on the path and thumped it – with the strength of a dying moth – against the door, screaming and crying ‘*Mrs Breen, Mrs Breen*,’ and not hearing a sound except the silence from inside the house. And then the door opened and the old woman stood there like a witch, her black shawl pulled round her voluminous flannel nightgown.

‘Lassie, lassie, ye’ll have the house down about ma ears. What’s wrang?’

She hustled the slight, undernourished little girl into the kitchen assuring her that she could easily listen while she pulled on her drawers and her shoes. Kate poured out her story, grudging every second that the old woman



took; it was years before she fully appreciated how fast Mrs Breen had actually been.

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‘Where is the doctor, lass? Did I not send you for the doctor?’ Liam Kennedy’s natural courtesy surfaced. ‘Sorry, Mrs Breen, but I’ve had to send for the doctor, Mary Kate’s been took terrible bad.’

Mary Kate was in labour – this looked to be the hardest yet – and he was almost out of his mind with worry but he would struggle to be polite to this neighbour, but Mrs Breen seemed not to hear him. Already she was over at the box bed where the slight figure with its huge distended stomach was struggling desperately to bring her child into the world.

Mary Kate gripped the old woman’s hand with desperate strength. ‘My Katie, Mrs Breen,’ she whispered through cracked, bleeding lips, ‘send her to bed; ’tis not a place for a wee lass.’

Mrs Breen smiled at her reassuringly but said nothing. She threw her shawls over the dilapidated old armchair and began issuing orders. ‘Liam, boil water’ – useless occupation but would keep him busy – ‘Kate, hen, ye’ll need to help me wi’ Mammy. Where have you put the cloths, Mary Kate?’ For weeks, Mary Kate would have been boiling and cutting up old sheets. ‘Kate, get the cloths from the wardrobe, that’s a good lass.’

The labour went on for hours. The echoes of her mother’s screams never left Kate although on that awful night



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she was so numbed by fear and fatigue that she paid little attention to them. After a while she was completely anaesthetized, and although, for most of the night, her body did as it was bid, when her mother died she had dropped asleep by the bed. They left her there while Liam ran, at the old woman's bidding, for the priest. Mary Kate would have wanted a priest.

Liam didn't. All his life he had lived by the dictates of the Roman Catholic Church; he ate fish on a Friday when he could afford fish, he fasted before receiving Holy Communion on Sundays and holy days, he gave up everything he could think of – including the comforts of a sexual relationship – during Lent; in every way possible he tried to be a good Catholic. He had accepted every misfortune fate handed him, believing that his 'reward would be great in heaven', but this . . . this . . . Mary Kate lying there dead at the age of thirty-three . . .

'Get away from her,' he yelled at the boy, for that was really all the young priest was; 'don't prate about eternal life with me Mary Kate lying there in her own blood and me left with these babbies and Kate only thirteen . . .' he choked on his tears and visibly tried to control himself, his hands clenched and shaking.

'Now, now, my son,' began the young priest, desperately trying to say and do the right thing; he could not allow this child of the church to lose his immortal soul, 'you





should have fetched me earlier but I have given her the last sacrament, Extreme Unction; Mary Kate is sleeping with the Lord.'

Liam, distraught, turned on him in a rage. 'Get out of my house and take your extremes and your unctions with you. Eternal life; damn you and your kind for ever – it's now she wants life. Now.' His voice broke and he turned away from the priest, brushing aside the younger man's arm as if he scarcely noticed it.

The old woman soothed the priest. 'Away home with you, Father, and say your prayers. He'll get over it, sure he will and be back to beg your pardon in a day or two.' Gently but relentlessly she pushed the young man, who spent what was left of the night prostrate on the concrete floor of his little chapel begging for help, out of the door. Then she returned to work that she had had to do far too often in her life. Forgetting her seventy-five years, she issued orders and instructions to the young man who stood bowed and helplessly weeping beside the bed and when he was incapable of responding she carried them out herself.

'Ye'll need to shift the bairn, Liam. I cannae manage her.' For a moment she could not interpret the loathing on his face and then she understood. 'Naw, it's wee Kate. The undertaker'll need tae get in, that's if he finds time with an accident at the pit. Ye'll have to get him and the doctor; ye cannot bury her without ye've seen the doctor.'



Liam eventually got the doctor and the equally over-worked village undertaker. One hundred and nine men and boys had died in the pit, many others had been hideously injured and so, on the day that Mary Kate Kennedy was buried, mourners got mixed up and merely went from one grave to the next. What did it matter whether it was a boy born and bred in Dumfriesshire and his father and his father before him – fodder for the mines – or the wife of one of those Irish Catholics. Her man was a miner and miners all gave their wives far too many bairns, especially the Catholic ones. With any luck there would be some sister or auntie or grannie to come and help with the bairns for the women of the village who would normally have pitched in were all too busy mourning or nursing boys who would never walk again or husbands who would lie in the big box beds coughing their lives away.

Most of the vilage changed in the next few months for the miners' rows needed working miners and if the workers were dead, well then their widows would have to throw themselves on the mercy of relatives for the but n' bens were needed for ablebodied men. More Irish flooded in but Liam did not hold out the hand of fellowship. His spirit had died with Mary Kate and he rose and went to work and he returned and sat in his chair staring into the fire until he fell asleep.

There were no relatives and so at thirteen Kate became the mother of the family. On the day her mother died she had been at school and the teacher had mentioned a writer called Charles Dickens and a book called *A Tale of Two Cities*. Oh, how Kate hungered to read that book. Reading was for school children or the leisured classes and Kate belonged to neither. She could have asked Pat to borrow the book for her but when could she have read it? Without a qualm she forgot all about Sydney Carton, until years later she was introduced to the wonders of motion pictures and fell in love with a young actor called Dirk Bogarde.

For now, Kate set herself to rising every morning at half past three. She would rinse the sleep from her eyes with the ice-cold water she had left out the night before, pull on some clothes and then, while everyone was still asleep, she would rake the coals in the grate and throw on some kindling, hoping desperately that the fire would catch and that she would not have to start it all over again. Next the kettle would be set on the hotplate, and the pan of porridge that she had also prepared before going to bed. Only then would she wake Da from the exhausted sleep that never seemed to refresh him. Almost as soon as he pulled on his moleskin trousers she would hand a mug of hot sweet tea into his hand which was still grimy from yesterday's coal dust, and then set before him a heaping bowl of porridge. Liam would wolf it down without a word while she



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spread dripping over four thick slices of her own crusty bread and put them into the tin box carried down the pit every day. Falls of coal and rock were quite common, if not always dangerous, and it was the miners' tins that bore the brunt of them. Liam Kennedy's tin was bashed, as were his fingers, fingers that had once, long ago, teased such sweet music from his granda's fiddle. It was doubtful that he had any idea of that same fiddle's whereabouts and even more doubtful that he would have cared. Music belonged to his childhood in Limerick.

Did he ever look at Kate's childhood? Could he have borne it if he had? He would smile when he took his dented tin from her small hands – the smile for which a stronger woman than Mary Kate Kennedy would have left her home in Limerick.

'Thank you, Allanah,' he would whisper softly and she would watch him on his long walk to the pithead until his thin figure disappeared from view. Then, at the beginning of the day, she would have her moment of peace and quiet. She would set water on to boil for the washing – Mary Kate had been fanatical about cleanliness, mouthing all the old platitudes as if she had invented them; 'Sure isn't cleanliness nearest to Godliness' – and while Kate waited she would pour herself a mug of the thick, black tea, add three lumps of sugar, and sit down in Da's chair to enjoy both the tea and the solitude. If she was very lucky she



might sit long enough to enjoy the morning song of the birds, but she would never ever waste time. There were always the baby's nappies to wash, and the other bairns' clothes, once a week the pit clothes that never got clean no matter how hard she scrubbed them on the scrubbing board. Then there were her own underclothes. She had made herself two pairs of knickers, one to wear and one to wash. As soon as she could manage, she would make a third pair for emergencies. She remembered her mother talking about a young woman who had died suddenly in the Main Street. 'Her underclothes was as clean as if she had just come out of a shop; you be sure, Kate Kennedy, that if you're ever hit by a cart, God forbid, you need never be ashamed of your knickers.'

As well as keeping her underwear clean, Kate had a hip-bath every Saturday night and it was then that she washed her long, blue-black hair with carbolic soap. Her hair was truly a crowning glory but no one ever said so, and Kate had neither the time nor the inclination to admire it herself. Perhaps if she had, she would have stolen a few more moments for herself, to brush and curl it. As it was, she washed it every Saturday and, for the rest of the week, was content to drag a comb through it every morning.

Kate sat with her feet on the fender and enjoyed her tea. As soon as her cup was empty she straightened her back

in a gesture she had learned from Liam – like many miners of the time he spent his working day doubled over and so constantly had trouble straightening his aching spine – then Kate put all thoughts of leisure out of her mind until the next morning. By the time her brothers and sisters were awake she had the kitchen and tiny back kitchen as clean as scrubbing could make them. She had ‘redded up’ the back bedroom where her father now slept alone in the sagging double bed – no one thinking it at all peculiar that Liam should have so much space while Kate and all her brothers and sisters slept huddled together in the box bed in the kitchen – and she had booty ready for Patrick, Kevin, Deirdre and Colm. Little Bridie was usually the first to wake. She would crawl over to the edge of the bed and call, ‘Katie, Bridie’s up, come get Bridie, Katie.’

For a long time Bridie was to be Kate’s most beloved child and only one person supplanted her in Kate’s heart.

Kate liked it when little Bridie woke early, for then she had time to wash and dress her before tying her into a chair to eat her morning porridge. Bridie was a good child and seemed to know instinctively just how much of her surrogate mother’s time she could claim. Not like Colm, almost five years old and about to start in Miss Timpson’s infant class.

‘And she’ll soon sort you, you great big baby,’ Kate would tell him as she administered a hearty smack to his

wet behind. No one in 1910 was interested in the psychological reasons for constant bed wetting in a five year old. No one theorized that since Colm had been deposed as the baby of the house before his first birthday and had been bereft of his mother just after his third, he might just be in need of a little attention and reassurance. Colm's response was to rail heartily against overburdened Kate as she spanked him in the morning and to fight just as hard against his exhausted father who whacked him again when he found urine-soaked sheets drying on the clothes horse when he returned from work. It never occurred to Kate to wash the sheets every day. She made time for washing them once a week, merely drying them out in between, and in this she was a great deal cleaner than many of her neighbours. Who, after all, had time to draw water, boil it over a fire that one had to keep stoked, and then rub with raw knuckles on a washboard until the paper-thin dirty sheets were clean? Washing day was Monday; everyone knew that.

When the older children had gone running off to school, Kate untied Bridie and put her down on the floor with her 'toys' – a handleless cup and a tin spoon. Later on, if she had time to sit down, Kate would make the little girl a baby doll out of an old piece of clean cloth, but for now she was much too busy. She sent Colm out to play, with a warning not to wander. They both knew



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he would disobey but the mining village was small and Kate knew his favourite places. Like his big brothers and his sister, he carried his 'piece' and would be gone until either hunger or a skinned knee would bring him crying home.

'Ach, sure, won't it be grand to get him into school,' said Kate to solemn little Bridie, sounding for all the world like her own mother. Before her death Mary Kate had often teased her oldest child about her Scottish accent, but lately Kate had begun to sound more and more like Liam. Perhaps it was because his was the voice she heard most. Kate did not gossip on the back green as she hung out her washing and her neighbours no longer came to the door as they had done in the first weeks after Mary Kate's death. If they spoke of the Kennedys at all it was to say, 'Grand job wee Kate's doing wi' all the weans,' for all the world as if she was no longer a wean herself.

Physically she stopped being a 'wean' two months after the death of her mother. It was a terrific shock to her and also to her father who had no idea at all of how to cope with the onset of menstruation. One afternoon when Bridie was down for a nap and Colm was God knows where, Kate suddenly doubled up with the most appalling pain in her stomach. It was excruciating, low down on her right side, and so intense that she felt cold sweat



break out all over her body. She doubled over, moaning until the pain receded a few minutes later.

Sure, I must have ate something bad, she decided to herself as she straightened up, and then the pain hit her again so that she cried out again and fell to the floor. Her mother's prayers came back to her. Oh God, am I dying? Here on the floor with the child alone in the house? Mercifully the pain receded and after a few days of waiting for it to strike like a cobra, Kate forgot about it. Then she found blood in her knickers. She sat in the smelly outside privy and wondered what to do. It wasn't a scraped knee that she could show Da. The blood had obviously come out of the unmentionable place between her legs for she had looked everywhere for a cut or boil and had found nothing. How was she to tell someone else that the blood had come from *there*? Did Kate really believe that she was dying or did some instinct tell her that what was happening to her was a natural part of her development? She was thirteen years old; her father was due in from the pit and his tea had better be ready whether she was dying or not. She struggled up from the cold, wet floor and went into the kitchen to cut bread and make tea.

She was still alive at bedtime and Da had noticed nothing wrong. Perhaps she had merely strained something hauling the tub of boiling water from the fire to the



back kitchen. She fell asleep and woke up feeling warm liquid on the insides of her thighs. Her first hope that it was wee Colm come in for warmth disappeared; only Deirdre and wee Bridie were in the bed with her. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, she prayed in anguish. *I don't want to die. Oh, Mam, why did you ever leave me?* Even in the midst of her distress, Kate was aware of the other children; she did not want to wake them with her sobbing, nor did she want them to wake and find her dead in the bed. Her innate modesty made her shrink from approaching her father but it had to be done.

‘Da,’ she pulled at the blankets round him. ‘Da, it’s me, Kate.’

He did not wake immediately and from the smell of him she could tell the reason. It would not be the first time since his wife’s death that Liam Kennedy had had to drink himself to sleep. ‘Da, you have to wake up. I’m terrible ill, Da.’

That roused him – either the words themselves or the childish despair with which they were uttered. Blushingly, hesitantly, with downcast eyes Kate told him her problem. In dawning realization Liam listened to his daughter. What in God’s name was he to do, to say? In the long, lonely nights since the death of his wife, he thought that he had visualized every problem the years ahead were to bring – but not this. Like his child in her despair, he too





returned to the prayers of his childhood. 'Holy Mother of God,' he whispered and at the sound of his voice the child looked up. What did she see in his face? Was it horror, disgust? It was, in fact, embarrassment not unmixed with fear but Kate misread it and what she saw as his reaction coloured her own perception of a perfectly normal physical function for the rest of her life. Liam found his voice but the quandary in which he found himself made him gruffer than he meant to be.

'Ach, away with you, you silly wee bitch. It happens to every girl. 'Tis normal, sure. Away with you and put a clean cloth atween your legs till it stops. 'Twill be a day or two, no more.'

So ended Kate Kennedy's one and only lesson on the facts of life. Menstruation and everything connected with it disgusted her. She felt unclean, she hated the blood-soaked cloths that she secretly and furtively washed and dried. She hated having her body do this obscene thing for not one or two days but for four or five every single month, and perhaps because of her resentment her body inflicted her with cramps and nausea, two burdens that she bore in stoic silence. Who could she tell? Bridie, Deirdre? They were too wee. Liam had already shown his disgust with the whole business. Kate longed for someone, anyone who would listen to her questions, who would explain and put everything into





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perspective. There was no one. Mam would have told her, would have cuddled her and laughed and everything would have been all right. I'll pretend I'm talking to you, Mam. Maybe you can hear me up in Heaven.

If her neighbours were too burdened themselves to really consider Kate's plight, two people in the village did manage to spare more than a passing thought for her. One was the local doctor, a brilliant man, prevented from becoming the surgeon he had dreamed of being by a terrible speech impediment. Being a man of courage himself, he recognized the courage in the young girl and racked his brains to find a way to help her. Kate's brothers and sisters were as well cared for after the death of their mother as they had ever been. As he made his rounds in the miners' rows, Dr Hyslop saw the lines of washing bravely blowing, he saw the strips of carpet being thrown across the ropes to be beaten, and quite often he saw Kate herself tending the vegetable garden and he would stop to chat to her.

'Superb cabbages you have there, Kate,' he said with his usual difficulty and Kate, knowing how torturous speech was for him and what terrors casual conversation held for him, smiled warmly.

'Wee Pat does the digging, doctor. Will you have one? Sure, there's plenty.'

'Indeed I will. If you will have some flowers in return.'



They smiled at one another, their bargain agreed upon. Like most of the men in the mining community, the doctor spent most of his time in his garden, but while the miners grew vegetables to eke out their income, Dr Hyslop indulged in his passion for flowers. At all seasons of the year his garden was a delight to himself and all who passed. Kate stopped at the gate each time she was in the village and she and the elderly man had become good friends. He saw a wealth of potential in the girl; he saw the intelligence in her eyes and the beauty and strength of character in her face and he mourned at the waste. Unless some miracle happened, Kate Kennedy was already doing the work that she would do for the rest of her life. There was nothing else for her. Unless her father married again, Kate was doomed to spend her days washing, cleaning and cooking. She might marry, but if she did wed, her life would not change, except that she would be looking after her own husband and the children she would no doubt bear, year after year. That life script was all well and good, but only after she had been given a chance.

‘This garden is quite an amateur affair, Kate,’ he told her one evening as she stopped to admire his roses. ‘Just fifteen miles away there’s a castle with magnificent gardens. Once . . .’ He stopped for ‘once’ belonged to the past, to the days of dreaming of worldly success. ‘Kate, have you thought of going into service, of leaving the village?’



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‘No,’ she said simply, ‘who would look after me da and wee Bridie and the others?’

Who indeed? She left him then and he watched her straight narrow back as she walked towards the miners’ rows. He wondered why her fate affected him. Service or matrimony or motherhood without ‘benefit of clergy’ was the lot of most of the village girls. One or two left every year to go into service; no girl to his knowledge had ever left to pursue further education. Kate Kennedy surely should have been the first.

The teacher of the village school knew that as well as the doctor. Miss Timpson was not particularly well qualified but she was conscientious and aware of her own limitations. In her classes Kate had learned to read, write and do basic arithmetic. She had absorbed a colourful, if not strictly accurate, history of her native land and had committed to memory most of the rivers and all the capital cities of western Europe. More importantly, Miss Timpson had passed on to Kate a love of poetry and for this the girl would be eternally grateful.

Once Colm had been enrolled in the infant class, Miss Timpson saw Kate as she fetched her small brother from school. Sometimes she had Bridie by the hand and at other times, usually when the weather was bad, Kate had the child swaddled tightly against her with an old shawl wound tightly around her own body.



‘I thought you could trust Patrick to bring the wee one home, Kate,’ she said.

Kate flew to her brother’s defence. ‘Pat’s grand, miss. I was enjoying a wee walk.’

How anyone could enjoy a walk carrying a young child was more than Miss Timpson could understand. She guessed rightly that Kate was being brave and she shuddered for the girl. ‘Can I do anything, Kate? Do you need anything?’

Here Kate lost the first of many opportunities. She wanted to ask for the loan of books, any kind of book, even *A Tale of Two Cities*, but false pride got in her way. She drew herself up haughtily to her almost five feet, hitched Bridie up on her hip, and said politely, ‘No thank you, Miss Timpson. Our da provides everything we need.’

She was angry with herself as she half dragged, half herded the three younger ones home. Like all the *big* boys, Patrick would never walk home with his little brothers and his sister.

You have a big mouth on you, Kathleen Kennedy. You could have asked her for the loan of a collection of poems and copied some of them out, or even a story book, Walter Scott or Charles Dickens. You never got halfway through her shelf. Never mind, she brightened up, our Pat can bring them home when he’s in the top class and no one the wiser.

Kate was preoccupied that night as she went about her never-ending chores but, as usual, no one noticed. Would they have noticed if she had neglected to do them? Probably. When there was no clean underwear or no porridge on the fire. Kate did not often feel sorry for herself; this was the way things were. She would have liked some time to herself, but she had a strong streak of practicality. Reading a book would be wonderful tonight but in the morning she could never catch up, and life was easier if chores were done regularly. When the others are older, she would tell herself, they'll give me a hand. For now Liam sat in the big chair before the fire dreamily watching the wee ones as they played about his feet. Eventually he sent them to bed and soon took himself off. In truth Kate hardly noticed him go for her mind was full of the doctor and the school teacher. What made them different from herself? The doctor spoke 'funny', not just because of his impediment but because his was a 'toff's' voice. He did not belong to the mining community. Vague rumours about his background circulated in the village from time to time, especially when some of his relatives visited him in their grand carriages. Dr Hyslop was a *gentleman*. But what about Miss Timpson or Mrs Campbell, the minister's wife or the minister himself? He didn't have 'marbles in his mouth' as the village said when describing the doctor's cultured tones.

EILEEN RAMSAY

Why hadn't she accepted Miss Timpson's offer of help?
I'll ask her for books the next time I see her, she decided.
For it's education as makes them different from the likes of
us, declared thirteen-year-old Kate and, one way or another,
I've lost my chance of getting educated.