

Mary's Wedding

BY GILBERT CANNAN

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MARY'S WEDDING was first produced at the Coronet Theatre, in May, 1912, with the following cast:

MARY *Miss Irene Rooke* TOM *Mr. Herbert Lomas* ANN *Miss Mary Goulden* MRS. AIREY *Miss Muriel Pratt* BILL AIREY *Mr. Charles Bibby* TWO MAIDS. VILLAGERS AND OTHERS.

SCENE: *The Davis's Cottage.*

NOTE: There is no attempt made in the play to reproduce exactly the Westmoreland dialect, which would be unintelligible to ears coming new to it, but only to catch the rough music of it and the slow inflection of northern voices.

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MARY'S WEDDING

A PLAY BY GILBERT CANNAN

[The scene is the living-room in the Davis's cottage in the hill country. An old room low in the ceiling. Ann Davis is at the table in the center of the room untying a parcel. The door opens to admit Tom Davis, a sturdy quarryman dressed in his best and wearing a large nosegay.]

ANN. Well, 'ast seed un?

TOM. Ay, a seed un. 'Im and 'is ugly face--

ANN [*untying her parcel*]. 'Tis 'er dress come just in time an' no more from the maker-up--

TOM. Ef she wouldna do it....

ANN. But 'tis such long years she's been a-waitin'.... 'Tis long years since she bought t' dress.

TOM. An' 'tis long years she'll be a livin' wi' what she's been waitin' for; 'tis long years she'll live to think ower it and watch the thing she's taken for her man, an' long years that she'll find 'un feedin' on 'er, an' a dreary round she'll 'ave of et....

ANN. Three times she 'ave come to a month of weddin' an' three times 'e 'ave broke loose and gone down to the Mortal Man an' the woman that keeps 'arf our men in drink.... 'Tis she is the wicked one, giving 'em score an' score again 'till they owe more than they can ever pay with a year's money.

TOM. 'Tis a fearful thing to drink....

ANN. So I telled 'er in the beginnin' of it all, knowin' what like of man 'e was. An' so I telled 'er last night only.

TOM. She be set on it?

ANN. An', an' 'ere's t' pretty dress for 'er to be wedded in....

TOM. What did she say?

ANN. Twice she 'ave broke wi' 'im, and twice she 'ave said that ef 'e never touched the drink fur six months she would go to be churched wi' 'im. She never 'ave looked at another man.

TOM. Ay, she be one o' they quiet ones that goes about their work an' never 'as no romantical notions but love only the more for et. There've been men come for 'er that are twice the man that Bill is, but she never looks up from 'er work at 'em.

ANN. I think she must 'a' growed up lovin' Bill. 'Tis a set thing surely.

TOM. An' when that woman 'ad 'im again an' 'ad 'im roaring drunk fur a week, she never said owt but turned to 'er work agin an' set aside the things she was makin' agin the weddin'....

ANN. What did 'e say to 'er?

TOM. Nowt. 'E be 'most as chary o' words as she. 'E've got the 'ouse an' everything snug, and while 'e works 'e makes good money.

ANN. 'Twill not end, surely.

TOM. There was 'is father and two brothers all broken men by it.

[She hears Mary on the stairs, and they are silent.]

ANN. 'Ere's yer pretty dress, Mary.

MARY. Ay.... Thankye, Tom.

TOM. 'Twill be lovely for ye, my dear, an' grand. 'Tis a fine day fur yer weddin', my dear....

MARY. I'll be sorry to go, Tom.

TOM. An' sorry we'll be to lose ye....

MARY. I'll put the dress on.

[She throws the frock over her arm and goes out with it.]

ANN. Another girl would 'a' wedded him years ago in the first foolishness of it. But Mary, for all she says so little, 'as long, long thoughts that never comes to the likes o' you and me.... Another girl, when the day 'ad come at last, would 'a' been wild wi' the joy an' the fear o' it.... But Mary, she's sat on the fells under the stars, an' windin' among the sheep. D' ye mind the nights she's been out like an old shepherd wi' t' sheep? D' ye mind the nights when she was but a lile 'un an' we found 'er out in the dawn sleepin' snug again the side o' a fat ewe?

TOM. 'Tis not like a weddin' day for 'er.... If she'd 'ad a new dress, now--

ANN. I said to 'er would she like a new dress; but she would have only the old 'un cut an' shaped to be in the fashion.... Et 'as been a strange coortin', an' 'twill be a strange life for 'em both, I'm thinkin', for there seems no gladness in 'er, nor never was, for she never was foolish an' she never was young; but she was always like there was a great weight on 'er, so as she must be about the world alone, but always she 'ave turned to the little things an' the weak, an' always she 'ad some poor sick beast for tendin' or another woman's babe to 'old to 'er breast, an' I think sometimes that 'tis only because Bill is a poor sick beast wi' a poor sick soul that she be so set on 'im.

TOM. 'E be a sodden beast wi' never a soul to be saved or damned--

ANN. 'Cept for the drink, 'e've been a good son to 'is old mother when the others 'ud 'a' left 'er to rot i' the ditch, an' 'e was the on'y one as 'ud raise a finger again his father when the owd man, God rest him, was on to 'er like a madman. Drunk or sober 'e always was on 'is mother's side.

TOM. 'Twas a fearful 'ouse that.

ANN. 'Twas wonderful that for all they did to 'er, that wild old man wi' 'is wild young sons, she outlived 'em all, but never a one could she save from the curse that was on them, an', sober, they was the likeliest men 'n Troutbeck....

TOM. 'Tis when the rain comes and t' clouds come low an' black on the fells and the cold damp eats into a man's bones that the fearful thoughts come to 'im that must be drowned or 'im go mad--an' only the foreigners like me or them as 'as foreign blood new in 'em can 'old out again it; 'tis the curse o' livin' too long between two lines o' 'ills.

ANN. An' what that owd woman could never do, d'ye think our Mary'll do it? 'Im a Troutbeck man an' she a Troutbeck girl?

TOM. She've 'eld to 'er bargain an' brought 'im to it.

ANN. There's things that a maid can do that a wife cannot an' that's truth, an' shame it is to the men. [*Comes a knock at the door.*] 'Tisn't time for t' weddin' folk.

[*Tom goes to the window.*]

TOM. Gorm. 'Tis Mrs. Airey.

ANN. T' owd woman. She that 'as not been further than 'er garden-gate these ten years?

[*She goes to the door, opens it to admit Mrs. Airey, an old gaunt woman just beginning to be bent with age.*]

MRS. A. Good day to you, Tom Davis.

TOM. Good day to you, Mrs. Airey.

MRS. A. Good day to you, Ann Davis.

ANN. Good day to you, Mrs. Airey. Will ye sit down?

[*She dusts a chair and Mrs. Airey sits by the fireside. She sits silent for a long while. Tom and Ann look uneasily at her and at each other.*]

MRS. A. So 'tis all ready for Bill's wedding.

TOM. Ay. 'Tis a fine day, an' the folks bid, and the sharry-bang got for to drive to Coniston, all the party of us. Will ye be coming, Mrs. Airey?

MRS. A. I'll not. [*Mrs. Airey sits silent again for long.*] Is Mary in the 'ouse?

ANN. She be upstairs puttin' on 'er weddin' dress.

MRS. A. 'Tis the sad day of 'er life.... They're a rotten lot an' who should know et better than me? Bill's the best of 'em, but Bill's rotten.... Six months is not enough, nor six years nor sixty, not while

'er stays in Troutbeck rememberin' all that 'as been an' all the trouble that was in the 'ouse along o' it, and so I've come for to say it.

ANN. She growed up lovin' Bill, and 'tis a set thing. She've waited long years. 'Tis done now, an' what they make for theirselves they make, an' 'tis not for us to go speirin' for the trouble they may make for theirselves, but only to pray that it may pass them by....

MRS. A. But 'tis certain.... Six months is not enough, nor six years, nor sixty--

ANN. And are ye come for to tell Mary this...?

MRS. A. This and much more....

TOM. And what 'ave ye said to Bill?

MRS. A. Nowt. There never was a son would give 'eed to 'is mother.... 'Tisn't for 'im I'm thinkin', but for t' children that she's bear 'im. I 'oped, and went on 'opin' till there was no 'ope left in me, and I lived to curse the day that each one of my sons was born. John and Peter are dead an' left no child behind, and it were better for Bill also to leave no child behind. There's a day and 'alf a day o' peace and content for a woman with such a man, and there's long, long years of thinkin' on the peace and content that's gone. There's long, long years of watching the child that you've borne and suckled turn rotten, an' I say that t' birth-pangs are nowt to t' pangs that ye 'ave from the childer of such a man as Bill or Bill's father.... She's a strong girl an' a good girl; but there's this that is stronger than 'er.

[Mary comes again, very pretty in her blue dress. She is at once sensible of the strangeness in Tom and Ann. She stands looking from one to the other. Mrs. Airey sits gazing into the fire.]

MARY. Why, mother ... 'tis kind of you to come on this morning.

MRS. A. Ay, 'tis kind of me. *[Ann steals away upstairs and Tom, taking the lead from her, goes out into the road.]* Come 'ere, my pretty.

[Mary goes and stands by her.]

MARY. The sun is shining and the bees all out and busy to gather in the honey.

MRS. A. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people to work away in t' dark when t' sun is hidden, and to work away in t' sun when 'tis bright and light. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people that takes their men an' kills 'em for the 'arm that they may do, and it's us that's the foolish ones to make soft the way of our men an' let them strut before us and lie; and 'tis us that's the foolish ones ever to give a thought to their needs that give never a one to ours.

MARY. 'Tis us that's t' glorious ones to 'elp them that is so weak, and 'tis us that's the brave and the kind ones to let them 'ave the 'ole world to play with when they will give never a thought to us that gives it t' 'em.

MRS. A. My pretty, my pretty, there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that thinks 'isself a man an' strong, poor fool, an' there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that's got a curse on 'im and is rotten through to t' bone, an' not one day can you be a 'elp to such a man as this....

MARY. There's not one day that I will not try, and not one day that I will not fight to win 'im back....

MRS. A. The life of a woman is a sorrowful thing....

MARY. For all its sorrow, 'tis a greater thing than t' life of a man ... an' so I'll live it....

MRS. A. Now you're strong and you're young.--'Ope's with ye still and life all before ye--and so I thought when my day came, and so I did. There was a day and 'alf a day of peace and content, and there was long, long years of thinking on the peace and content that are gone.... Four men all gone the same road, and me left looking down the way that they are gone and seeing it all black as the pit.... I be a poor old woman now with never a creature to come near me in kindness, an' I was such a poor old woman before ever the 'alf of life

was gone, an' so you'll be if you take my son for your man. He's the best of my sons, but I curse the day that ever he was born....

MARY. There was never a man the like of Bill. If ye see 'un striding the 'ill, ye know 'tis a man by 'is strong, long stride; and if ye see 'un leapin' an' screenin' down th' 'ill, ye know 'tis a man; and if we see 'un in t' quarry, ye know 'tis a strong man....

MRS. A. An' if ye see 'un lyin' drunk i' the ditch, not roarin' drunk, but rotten drunk, wi' 'is face fouled an' 'is clothes mucked, ye know 'tis the lowest creature of the world.

[Mary stands staring straight in front of her.]

MARY. Is it for this that ye come to me to-day?

MRS. A. Ay, for this: that ye may send 'un back to 'is rottenness, for back to it 'e'll surely go when 'tis too late, an' you a poor old woman like me, with never a creature to come near ye in kindness, before ever the bloom 'as gone from your bonny cheeks, an' maybe childer that'll grow up bonny an' then be blighted for all the tenderness ye give to them; an' those days will be the worst of all--far worse than the day when ye turn for good an' all into yourself from t' man that will give ye nowt.... 'Tis truly the bees as is the wise people....

MARY. It's a weary waitin' that I've had, and better the day and 'alf a day of peace and content with all the long years of thinking on it than all the long, long years of my life to go on waitin' and waitin' for what has passed me by, for if he be the rottenest, meanest man in t' world that ever was made, there is no other that I can see or ever will. It is no wild foolishness that I am doing: I never was like that; but it's a thing that's growed wi' me an' is a part o' me--an' though every day o' my life were set before me now so I could see to the very end, an' every day sadder and blacker than the last, I'd not turn back. I gave 'im the bargain, years back now, and three times e' 'as failed me; but 'e sets store by me enough to do this for me a fourth time--'Twas kind of ye to come....

MRS. A. You're strong an' you're young, but there's this that's stronger than yourself--

MARY. Maybe, but 'twill not be for want o' fightin' wi' 't.

MRS. A. 'Twill steal on ye when you're weakest, an' come on ye in your greatest need....

MARY. It 'as come to this day an' there is no goin' back. D' ye think I've not seed t' soft, gentle things that are given to other women, an' not envied them? D' ye think I've not seed 'em walkin' shut-eyed into all sorts o' foolishness an' never askin' for the trewth o' it, an' not envied 'em for doin' that? D' ye think I've not seed the girls I growed wi' matin' lightly an' lightly weddin', an' not envied 'em for that, they wi' a 'ouse an' babes an' me drudgin' away in t' farm, me wi' my man to 'and an' only this agin 'im? D' ye think I've not been tore in two wi' wantin' to close my eyes an' walk like others into it an' never think what is to come? There's many an' many a night that I've sat there under t' stars wi' t' three counties afore me an' t' sea, an' t' sheep croppin', an' my own thoughts for all the comp'ny that I 'ad, an' fightin' this way an' that for to take 'up an' let 'un be so rotten, as ever 'e might be; an' there's many an' many a night when the thoughts come so fast that they hurt me an' I lay pressed close to t' ground wi' me 'ands clawin' at it an' me teeth bitin' into t' ground for to get closer an' 'ide from myself; an' many a night when I sat there seein' the man as t' brave lad 'e was when I seed 'un first leapin' down the 'ill, an' knowin' that nothin' in the world, nothin' that I could do to 'un or that 'e could do 'isself, would ever take that fro' me.... In all my time o' my weary waitin' there 'as never been a soul that I told so much to, an' God knows there never 'as been an' never will be a time when I can tell as much to 'im....

MRS. A. My pretty, my pretty, 'tis a waste an' a wicked, wicked waste....

MARY. 'Tis a day an' alf a day agin never a moment....

MRS. A. 'Tis that, and so 'tis wi' all o' us ... an' so 'twill be.... God bless ye, my dear....

[Ann comes down. Mary is looking out of the window.]

ANN. Ye forgot the ribbon for yer 'air, that I fetched 'specially fro' t' town.

MARY. Why, yes. Will ye tie it, Ann?

[Ann ties the ribbon in her hair.]

MRS. A. Pretty, my dear, oh! pretty--

MARY. I'm to walk to t' church o' Tom's arm...?

ANN. An' I to Tom's left; wi' the bridesmaids be'ind, an' the rest a followin'....

[Tom returns, followed by two girls bringing armfuls of flowers. With these they deck the room, and keep the choicest blooms for Mary. Ann and the three girls are busied with making Mary reach her most beautiful. Mrs. Airey goes. At intervals one villager and another comes to give greeting or to bring some small offering of food or some small article of clothing. Mary thanks them all with rare natural grace. They call her fine, and ejaculate remarks of admiration: "The purty bride...." "She's beautiful...." "'Tis a lucky lad, Bill Airey...." The church bell begins to ring.... All is prepared and all are ready.... Mary is given her gloves, which she draws on--when the door is thrown open and Bill Airey lunges against the lintel of the door and stands leering. He is just sober enough to know what he is at. He is near tears, poor wretch. He is not horribly drunk. He stands surveying the group and they him.]

BILL. I come--I come--I--c-come for to--to--to--show--to show myself....

[He turns in utter misery and goes. Mary plucks the flowers from her bosom and lets them fall to the ground; draws her gloves off her hands and lets them fall. The bell continues to ring.]

[Curtain.]

