

Set Dance

by Angela Sherlock

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Dance at home

I was thinking,' said Willie, as he stood at the sink, 'of going over to Leenane for the fair.' He swirled water over the plates and laid them out on the wooden draining board. His brother said nothing. 'It is next Tuesday,' he went on, 'so that would mean...' Christy interrupted him. 'I know when it is. And since we are not in present need of a ram, why are you going?' Willie thought a moment before he turned round to face into the room.

His brother still sat at the table, the paper spread across the oil cloth, and he was glaring up at Willie. The October evening had darkened the windows and Christy read by the light of an oil lamp at his elbow. In the grate, peat glowed and flickered, sending shadows around the walls. 'Just to see some of the fellas,' said Willie, 'and maybe...' He paused. 'There's a dance in the evening. I was, er, I was thinking of maybe looking in there.' Christy snorted and rustled the paper.

'So, it's to the dance you are going?' His voice rose in scorn. 'And who was it you were thinking of dancing with? I do not imagine there will be any women your age looking for partners.' Willie was startled by the anger in his brother's voice and he hunched his shoulders

defensively.

‘It is only for a bit of craic, Christy. Sure it’s not often that we get away and I thought...’

‘What did you think? That you’d find some girl to marry? Another Nora Geraghty? Someone daft enough to marry a fifty-year-old Mayo farmer – who is going bald?’ He smacked his hand down on the paper. ‘And how were you thinking of getting to Leenane? And back afterwards, with drink taken, I suppose?’ Willie folded his arms across his chest and fixed his eyes on Christy’s receding hairline.

‘John-Joe has two rams he is taking and I will ride with him. I had thought, Christy, that you might like to come too, but...’ He did not allow the smile to reach his lips as he turned to the sink. The reflection that looked back at him from the darkened window reassured him that he need not worry about his age, or his hair. He heard Christy’s chair scrape over the flags as he stood.

‘I will see about the butter,’ he announced as he crossed through to their dairy room. Willie could hear the bad-tempered clatter of churns and pans as he wiped the dishes and returned them to the dresser. Nora Geraghty. Ah now, there was an opportunity missed. A lovely young

woman, indeed. And didn't she marry that O'Reilly fella, back from the States with money in his pocket. He's not much younger than me, Willie told himself, and I would say we are about the same height. Though she's taller, that's true. And on his way out to the cowshed Willie was painting pictures of the pretty women he would meet at Leenane and how he would sweep one off in his arms and bring her back to the farm.

The bedroom was a problem, though, he had to admit. Christy was the firstborn and so had moved into their parents' bedroom with the big double bed that stood brave in the middle of the room. The boys had been conceived and born in that bed, and both their parents had died in it. Shouldn't the handsome room be relinquished to him and his bride, even though he was the younger? When he went up to his own room that night, Willie felt aggrieved at the smallness of it and the narrowness of his bed. But he had pleasant dreams and awoke good humoured enough to cajole Christy into coming with him and John-Joe the next week. And, truth to tell, there was not much persuading needed.

A rain storm battered the brothers into wakefulness the day of the fair and both felt glum as they moved around the dark kitchen. They took tea only, for John-Joe was coming up to collect them. 'We'll get

away early and ye can eat at Leenane,' he had assured them. Christy piled blocks of the slow burning stone peat onto the embers, so that they would not come home in the night to a cold house. While he was counting out their money from the rusty box that was kept under the stair, Willie stood at the door, on the watch for John-Joe. They were to go out down the boreen and wait for him at the lower gate but the rain was flying everywhere and they would not stand out in it longer than need be.

'Sure, the only thing that Mayo has plenty of is bad weather,' he said, looking mournfully out into the wet darkness.

'Ah, well,' said Christy, coming to stand beside him. 'Isn't it a good thing, then, that we are off to Galway for the day?' And they grinned at each other.

Advance and retire

Although the brothers were not trading the day was full of interest for them. The black faced rams of Leenane were famous and Willie and Christy prodded and examined and questioned along with the best of them. They agreed privately that John-Joe could have got a better price

but to his face congratulated him on his business acumen. They watched with delight as one pair of rams started to bang their skulls together, the smaller driving the bigger beast into the corner of the pen then attacking with his horns and drawing blood. 'Whose are they?' Christy asked his neighbour, but no one seemed to know the owner and the circle of men did not trouble themselves to intervene.

'Why don't you stop them?' Willie turned to see a small woman beside John-Joe. 'Why don't you stop them? Sure, they'll kill each other.' John-Joe looked down upon her indulgently. 'Ah, missus, and why would we? They'd need to be parted and where are they to be put? The owner would think we were stealin' them.' She shook her head, and Willie was delighted at the way her hair danced and glinted. She felt him looking at her and turned to him, a frown creasing her forehead and her lips parted to speak. He looked away quickly to find Christy smiling at him.

'Not that one, I think, boy,' he whispered. 'That's Kate Calvey and she must be at least twenty years younger than you.'

'Then she's twenty-three years younger than yourself,' Willie retorted, anger making his voice carry so that Kate heard and looked hard at him. Just then, the owner of the fighting rams arrived and strode

through the crowd. He grabbed the aggressor by his haunches and pulled the ram away.

‘Will we go in for a pint now?’ said John-Joe and the three of them pushed their way into the crowded bar. Christy insisted that he should pay and while he was struggling up to the counter, Willie interrogated John-Joe.

‘Is she married, that Kate Calvey? And where is she from? And do you know her people?’ His eagerness amused John-Joe but, although he set himself up as an authority on everything, he knew nothing of the woman and was obliged to avoid giving straight answers. Christy shoved his way back to them with three pints held high, jammed precariously against each other. The fair had enticed farmers from many miles around and the room was full of their smell and their voices. Willie tried to draw back from his neighbour, his eyes sliding away from the ugly red swelling that protruded through his hair. As he looked around, it seemed to him that many of these men were disfigured. There were blemishes on faces, hunched backs, mutilated hands. He wondered if perhaps he did not look quite handsome in comparison. The trio drank several pints then bundled down the road for a meal of stew, piled high with potatoes. There was not a woman in the place; men, many of them

ancient and solitary, were dotted down the long tables. He sat opposite a silent old fellow, a mass of white hair sprouting from his head and his cheeks and his chin. When Willie went up to pay he saw the old man was bent over his wad of money, secretively counting out the notes, dipping his head up and down to check that no one was watching.

The daylight was beginning to fade when they stepped out into the street. Willie stopped to admire two pups that were lined up for sale. He bent down to examine them and their mother came over to inspect him. When Willie put out his hand to stroke her, the bitch cringed and her owner put out his boot to shove her away. As they went off down the street, Christy said, 'I'd not trust that one. Did you see the fear in that bitch? And if I'm not mistaken that's one of Henry McNally's boys. A bad lot.'

Christy and John-Joe decided that another drink was in order before going to take a look in at the dancing, but Willie felt the need of a walk, 'to settle me stomich'. He wandered down the road and stood looking into the darkening waters of the harbour. Away to the west, where the fjord opened out into the Atlantic, there was still some light hanging above the horizon. He looked up at the great shoulders of mountain that crowded against the sky and a fit of melancholy seized

him. Had he really thought there would be some woman here who would like the look of him? All those dances he had gone to when he was a young man tumbled into his memory to taunt him. He had set out with such high hopes. The shoes polished, the shirt ironed and crackling with starch and his big hands scrubbed to a painful redness. There was always that pause outside the dance hall door, when he would gather himself in tight as the music rolled out to greet him. Then it was quickly over to the bar, head up and staring straight ahead, to join the other lads. They stood in a cloud of tobacco smoke and held on fiercely to their pints while reviewing the groups of young women who stood around on the other side of the hall.

The first act of bravery was to select one and ask her for a dance. Willie, of course, had started by choosing the beauties but over the years he contented himself with the girls who were last to be asked out onto the floor. He was a good dancer, upright and lively, his feet making the intricate patterns and cheerful stamps on the boards that the music demanded. And he loved the feel of a woman in his arms as couples swung across the set. But it was afterwards that he failed. When the music was over and the dancers stood panting and laughing, he had no words to say. Nothing would come into his head, not the weather or the

crops or any questions to draw her out. Willie would mumble his thanks and retreat to the bar, his disappointed partner returning to her friends. He had watched in agony as they put their heads together and, he felt sure, judged and found him wanting. Christy, too, he imagined, had suffered in much the same way but it was never spoken of. Over the years, Willie lost all hope and with his hopes went his dancing.

He turned back to the lights of the village and marched up the road. If Christy and John-Joe were for going home, then he would not be at all sorry. But when he shouldered his way into the dance hall they were in the thick of it and he knew he would have to stay. The thought of another pint made his gorge rise. The brothers had developed abstemious habits simply because the farm lay so far from the Bridgeport road that to go out for a night's drinking was not practicable. A bottle of whisky was kept on the dresser, its shoulders dusty because visitors were so few. Sometimes a tinker would trade them some poteen for a night's lodging, but the flask of clear, fiery liquid could sit for years untouched.

‘Do you not dance, then?’ Her voice made him turn in surprise. She had put her hair up since the afternoon and was tapping her foot in time to the music.

‘I do so,’ he blurted out, then was instantly seized with the fear that he would have lost all his skill. ‘At least, I...I used.’

‘Well then, perhaps you should ask me...’ Kate Calvey tipped her head to one side and Willie’s heart seemed to tilt within him at the same angle. Without a word, he held out his arms and the pair moved out onto the dance floor.

Show the lady

As the music got into his feet, Willie forgot to feel self-conscious. He swung back and forth, holding her hand, or her elbow, or her waist, as the dance demanded. She bobbed up and down, opposite, beside him, across the set, and, to his heart’s joy, all the movements lived again in his feet. Willie did not know that he was smiling. When the dance ended he came to a standstill, panting and laughing. That Kate Calvey had no more words than he did was an added delight. He put his hand upon her elbow and guided her from the floor.

‘Would ye like a drink?’ he asked, and hurried off to the bar. But there was a crowd before him and by the time he got back, Kate was gone. He stood with her glass of cordial in his hand and Willie O’Brien

felt like a fool.

‘Sure, she’s only off with John-Joe.’ Christy was beside him, waving across the dance floor to where little Kate was linking arms with John-Joe, his mighty belly wagging between them in a friendly way. Willie tapped his foot and looked unconcerned and did not know what to do with her glass. When the set ended and she came from the floor, Kate threw him a grateful glance as she gulped the liquid down. Her hair was damp with sweat and he looked with longing at the sheen of it on her upper lip.

The musicians took a break then, which left the trio of men with only conversation to entertain her. John-Joe launched into the story of selling his rams and the journey back they would have on the narrow, dark road to Bridgeport.

‘Oh, ye are from Bridgeport then?’ she asked Willie, but Christy replied for him.

‘Near enough, but out beyond the crossroads, on the road to Killeen then a ways up into the hills.’ He hurried on. ‘A good little farm we have, with some cattle and some sheep. We keep some poultry and also the sow, but a woman is needed to turn that into a profitable

enterprise, with all the rest we have to do.’ Kate ignored this and asked,

‘And who is minding it for you this day?’ which sent Christy off into a tirade against young Tommy Shelton and the mess he would have made of the work. Willie shifted from foot to foot but was finally obliged to struggle through the mass of bodies and go out the back of the hall to relieve himself. The morning’s rainclouds had been battered away by the wind coming in off the sea and he stood to look up at the stars in the black sky. When he went back in, Kate was gone, danced off first by Christy and then John-Joe, and didn’t Christy get another dance in before they lost her. His last sight of her was being spun across the set by the McNally boy.

Chain

Their journey home was perilous, John-Joe awash with stout and in constant danger of tipping them off the road. In the end, Willie took the reins and let the other two sag into sleep. He had some difficulty getting them into the house and had to abandon the pair so that he could get the horse stabled and check that young Shelton had carried out all his tasks. When he went back into the kitchen he was relieved to find that John-

Joe was stretched out on the settle, a blanket draped crookedly across him, and Christy seemed to have made it up the stairs.

Willie lay down in his bed and mocked himself for the hopes of the morning. A fifty-year-old farmer, and yes, maybe his hair was thinning a bit, going off to the dance and thinking he could bring back a bride. He could not settle to sleep, remembering the feel of the woman in his arms and the tickle of her hair against his face. He could not bring to mind the colour of her eyes, only that they were bright and full of laughter. What age would she be? And how did Christy know of her? So long since a woman had been in this house. He thought of his mother, a short, round woman who had always seemed old to him. But she had died younger than he was now. Strange to think of that. The yard had been a swirl of poultry in her day and it seemed to Willie that she had always hummed and sung at her work. How long since anyone had sung in this house? He sank into melancholy and at last drifted off into a miserable sleep.

Rain battering at the windows woke him to a grey day that matched his mood. Wrapped in self pity he went down to rake up the fire and was surprised to find John-Joe seated at the table with a plate of bacon and potatoes.

A cheerful 'Ah, young Willie,' greeted him, and Christy turned from the range to say if he wanted eggs he'd to fetch them himself because young Shelton hadn't bothered to collect them yesterday.

'Well, that was a grand day out,' John-Joe announced. 'How's the head, Willie? A lie-in usually does the business and, if not, a fry up is a great cure.'

'Some of us got more sleep than others on the way home,' Willie said shortly, and ignored the grins that his sourness produced. When John-Joe had got his traps together and was ready to set off towards Bridgeport, the brothers walked out with him to close the gates and see him on his way. As he set off he called back over his shoulder,

'Great changes coming, boys. I don't suppose I'll be let sleep in yon kitchen the next time.' As they walked back up the breen, sacks pulled over their heads to keep the rain off, Willie puzzled over the comment.

'Why would he not be?' he shouted through the downpour, but Christy was hunched against the rain and did not hear him. They shook off the wet in the porch and left the sacks on a hook to drip.

'How did Tommy fare yesterday?' Christy asked. 'Apart from the

eggs. Were the beasts in and all well? I was in no state to check after lugging that great galoot to his bed. He's a heavy man and a deal taller than meself...' Willie cut across him.

'What did he mean about great changes?' A dreadful thought came to him. 'He did not...he is not...yesterday, with Kate Calvey...?' Christy frowned at him and when he understood burst into a great shout of laughter.

'John-Joe and that wee girl,' he spluttered. 'Now, that would be something. No, sure, it's her coming here he meant and then he'll not be let sleep the night when he has some drink taken.' Willie's jaw dropped and he stared across the room at Christy. At first he could not summon the words. Kate coming here. There was no sense in it. Unless...

'Why?' he croaked, his throat dry and constricting on the word. 'Why?'

'Why what?' Christy said, and his chin came up as anger began to glint in his eyes. He said no more and folded his arms across his chest. They stood and looked at each other and for some minutes nothing was said. 'Well? What is it that you are asking?' Willie thought then that it

was all lost and so nothing he said could matter.

‘You have come to some arrangement, is it? You...and Kate Calvey?’ He thought his voice sounded very thin in the silence of the kitchen. Christy glared across at him.

‘We have, indeed, come to some arrangement. And as the head of the house amn’t I let make decisions...’ Then his face cleared. ‘Ah, now and weren’t you off out the back when it was settled.’ He clapped his hands together. ‘And I did not tell ye on the road home, now I think of it.’ Willie steadied himself, holding on to the back of the chair, as he waited for the words to come. ‘Her brother is married six months and the wife doesn’t want Kate in the house. You know, two women in the same kitchen.’ Christy paused as a thought struck him. ‘Mind, two men don’t seem to have any trouble with that, for don’t you and me...? Anyway, how it is, Kate is looking for a situation and I told her we were in need of a housekeeper and to look after the hens and all, and I am to fetch her next week.’

Swing

Willie heard the trap and retreated to the door of the dairy. He saw Kate

wrinkle her nose as she stepped into the kitchen and he sniffed the air to see what had offended her. Onions? Peat? Or maybe it was the dogs. Christy called him from the yard and Willie was obliged to reveal himself.

‘Well, Mr O’Brien,’ she said, holding out her hand and he had to come and shake it and mumble a response. Then,

‘My brother wants me, I think,’ he said and hurried outside.

‘She’s brought a lot with her,’ Christy complained, as they heaved the trunk down. ‘Is it all frocks, or what? Sure, we haven’t as many clothes as this between the pair of us.’

‘No, Mr O’Brien,’ Kate called from the door. ‘It’s a lot of books too, and they do weigh heavy.’ Christy reddened but his embarrassment was masked by the effort of carrying the trunk in. Kate thanked them.

‘But what am I to call ye? You cannot both be Mr O’Brien.’ Christy said what about their names and asked Willie to show Kate her room while he saw to the horse. Willie went up the stairs before her, worrying which part of his anatomy was level with her eyes. The boards creaked as he led her down the passage and the door creaked as he opened it. Kate laughed and said she’d not be able to creep about at

night without getting caught, then, and he stood back to let her see in.

It was a narrow room, the bed down one side and a dresser below the window. Three hooks were embedded in the wall and a wonky little stool sat just inside the door. He realised it was even smaller than his own but Kate shook herself and said it was grand. Willie thought from the tone of her voice that perhaps it was not, and tried to make amends.

‘We, er, we can put up some shelves for you...for the books, you know...and, er, perhaps somewhere for...for clothes...’ He left her to get settled and went back down to heave the trunk across to the bottom of the stairs. Since it would not fit in her room, Kate was obliged to make trips up and down with armfuls of garments and books, and Willie took himself off to the top field after the first terrifying glimpse of a bundle of stays and chemises.

The afternoon was awkward and the evening promised to be worse. Christy and Willie met in the yard before the light fell, worrying about what to do next.

‘Will she eat some of that stew, d’you think? She’ll not have had time to cook, yet, and...’ Christy shrugged his shoulders, grimacing his ignorance of what to do next.

‘Do housekeepers sit wi’ ye in the evenin’?’ he asked. ‘Do they need entertainin’ or what?’ Willie paled at the thought, having no notion of how one entertained a woman beyond bobbing around a dance floor with her.

But Kate Calvey sorted them out. The meal was in progress by the time they went in and all she asked about was the breakfast and the poultry for the morning. She left the brothers at the table while she moved between the kitchen, the dairy and her room. The two ate in their usual silence, uncomfortably aware of her brisk movements and the creak of the boards overhead when she went upstairs. Willie felt awkward about leaving the dishes on the table but, ‘Pish!’ Christy whispered to him, ‘Isn’t that what we’re paying her for?’ This left them with little occupation for the evening and they sat stiffly on either side of the fire with sections of the Gazette opened, but largely unread.

‘What happens about washing?’ Willie whispered across to his brother and they stared at each other in horror. Their evening ablutions were performed at the kitchen sink, the morning wash usually at the pump in the yard, and the tin bath was brought in on Saturdays. They were still contemplating this difficulty when Kate came back down.

‘Have ye’s a jug and basin,’ she asked, ‘to take up the stairs to my

room?' The brothers stared at her, then, when he understood, Christy shook himself and got up.

'I think Mama had one. I don't know where it's got to...' but Willie was before him.

'Bottom of the larder,' he said, 'in the dairy.' and hurried out to get it for her. Kate went to put a pot of water on the range but Christy carried it over for her.

'A bit heavy,' he muttered then did not know where to put himself, so he stood on the hearth and looked at his boots until Willie came back in.

'There's a wee crack in the ewer,' said Willie, 'but it should do until we get into Bridgeport and buy ye another.' Kate looked at his dusty offerings but only smiled across at the men.

'And a towel?' she asked, which caused another difficulty. No clean towel was to be found in the kitchen or the dairy but Willie had a thought.

'The press in your room, Christy,' he said. 'Mama had lots of things up there.' So all three trooped up to look, Christy first, carrying the lamp.

‘Well, now, this is a grand room,’ Kate said, which embarrassed Christy, for the blankets were thrown back, exposing a grubby sheet. A pair of long johns hung over the bed rail, and a slightly rank smell was detectable. The press was a vast mahogany piece, grimy with dust, which took up most of one wall. The brothers had raided its contents for what they needed downstairs and had not looked inside it for many years. They stood to watch as Kate went through the shelves until she turned and said,

‘Downstairs with ye both. I’ll help meself and tell ye’s what I’ve taken. Oh, and if that water’s boiled one of you might fill the jug and put it up in my room.’ They turned away quickly, Willie diving out first and galloping down the stairs to obey her. He had, then, to struggle back up with the hot jug, Christy coming behind him with the basin. There was nowhere to put it down in her room except upon the floor, the stool having lurched alarmingly when Willie planted the jug on it.

It was becoming obvious to them that having a woman in the house might not be all plain sailing. The brothers went early to bed that night. It seemed the simplest thing to do.

Round the house and mind the dresser

It took Kate Calvey less than three weeks to accomplish the transfer to the big bedroom. Publicly, Christy pretended not to mind. After all, it was reasonable with all the bits she had, and now she could also use it as her sitting room and leave the brothers the kitchen for the evenings. Privately, his resentment simmered and Willie feared that he would demand an exchange of their rooms, since he was the older. Kate, however, set about soothing Christy. She always referred questions of management to him and listened respectfully to his advice. Willie began to notice extra rashers creeping onto Christy's plate. Kate was all eager attention when he came back from the market in Bridgeport, laughing at his tales and praising his skills.

A harsh winter set in and the work out of doors was punishing. The sky seemed always to be heavy with grey clouds and frost lay on the ground all day. Ice formed on the insides of the windows upstairs and when all the heat was gone from the stone water bottle Willie woke up shivering. He had taken to wearing one of his father's old nightcaps and he tugged it down over his ears, which were nearly numb with the cold. Should he go down and get a coat to put over him? The weight would produce some heat but the thought of stepping out into the cold

deterred him. He was burrowing deeper under the blankets, tucking his hands between his knees, when he heard a door creaking open, followed by the groan of floorboards. Now, if Christy was going down for a coat maybe he would fetch one up for Willie. He was about to call out when he heard another bedroom door shut. No one had gone downstairs.

Willie lay awake for most of that night, rigid with anger and sorrow. The tension did not leave him until the sky was beginning to lighten.

Nothing was said the next morning but he was sure Christy was unusually cheerful. He waited for news of the wedding but it did not come. Each night he would try to stay awake, tormenting himself with every creak that the old house gave out as it shifted under the burden of the cold. In the days he took to watching and listening, but Kate and Christy seemed to go on much as before. Never talkative, he now withdrew into silence, responding only in grunts, and Christy took a rise out of him for it.

‘Could youse not get out more than one syllable?’ he asked. ‘Surely to God, you could keep a civil tongue in your head now there’s a lady in the house.’ They were out in the yard, working on the pump which was beginning to seize up in the cold. Willie threw down his

wrench and stood up square to his brother, his fists bunched.

‘I do not need you, nor your damned lady, to be telling me how to behave.’ He stood, red in the face, eyes hard, but Christy only looked at him in surprise. Kate saw, though. She was watching through the kitchen window and was at the door in a trice.

‘Willie,’ she called. ‘Would you ever do something for me? I’m wanting to wash the curtains in the parlour and I cannot get them down on my own. If you could oblige me, by standing on a chair, and perhaps we could do it together...’

It wasn’t until he was lying in bed that night that he remembered his mother had never washed curtains in December. For how would you dry them? But the thought was lost as his door creaked open and Kate Calvey came into his bed in her nightgown.

Slide and home

‘It’s a girl,’ Adie Lafferty said. The quay was golden with sunlight and the islands in the bay were dancing in the heat haze. Adie had already toured the town with the news, the spreading of which was causing her to take a deal more exercise than usual. She fanned herself and wished

a lady could dispense with stays in this heat. 'It came in the afternoon and was a long time about it, apparently.'

'Did they have a midwife, or what?' asked Mrs Collins. 'And how is Kate Calvey?' She looked over her shoulder then dipped her head closer to Adie. It wouldn't do to be seen gossiping but the whole town was interested in this news. Why, even the Marquis might wish to know of it. She thought she would just look in on his housekeeper before she walked home.

'Didn't Nora O'Reilly go up to do the birthing. She has a midwife for her own deliveries but there's not many in these parts can afford it. And wasn't that very Christian of her, especially,' here Adie's voice dropped to a whisper, 'considering the situation up there.' Her listener nodded, tightening her lips in disapproval.

'Is there any, er, resemblance...um, do they know...?' she asked.

'Not yet,' said Adie, with some satisfaction. 'Maybe time will tell. But the brothers aren't saying.' She paused to fan herself, loosening the top button of her blouse and wiping the sweat from her neck. 'Sure, wouldn't this heat kill yer?' She went on. 'I did ask Nora. I thought Kate Calvey might have said something, called out for one of them, you

know? But that one considers herself too much the lady to be telling an'thing.' She shifted from foot to foot. 'Oh, my feet,' she grumbled. 'I'd best be off now while I can still walk. I have a few others to see yet.' Adie began to move away but turned back for a last word. 'Let's be looking out at church. Father Tiernan was up to the farm as soon as she was showing and the three of them have been coming to Mass bold as brass ever since. There's bound to be a baptism and, you never know, there might yet be a wedding in it.'

Paddy Nolan greeted Adie as she crossed the square and she was glad of the excuse to stop and catch her breath.

'Mrs Lafferty, do you not recognize this fella here?' indicating his son, Patrick. 'Back from England to keep his old dad company. And, yes,' he said, 'we've heard the news. Did you have a hand in that arrangement out at Killeen? For, if so, meself and the boy would be grateful to benefit from yer expertise.' He turned to Patrick. 'Wouldn't a housekeeper like that Kate Calvey just suit the pair of us?' he said, and the laugh he gave, as Adie confided to Dermot that evening, 'was very coarse. A nasty leer on his face, too. I will not be speaking with him again in a hurry.' Dermot only said,

'Yes, my dear,' and kept his eyes fixed on his paper.

Tim Collins shocked his wife by failing to find the event shocking.

‘Didn’t people manage their own affairs fine before the priests got into everything? There’s lots of places in the world where it happens and it seems to me that how the O’Briens and Kate Calvey manage together is nobody’s business but their own.’ She accused him of being a heathen but Tim quite liked that notion and refused to take offense.

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Willie and Christy weathered all the gossip. It was harder for Kate, and Bridgeport never did let the matter quite lie. But she brazened it out, taking her daughter to church every Sunday and always stopping to talk with old Father Tiernan. Going home for breakfast, Philomena would dance up the boren ahead of the trio.

‘Mind out for the mud on your Sunday dress,’ Kate would call after her, but when the dogs dashed out to greet them the warning was forgotten.

‘It’ll wash,’ said Christy, and ‘It’s no harm,’ said Willie, and they smiled down upon their daughter.



Angela Sherlock has worked in engineering and in education, but now lives in Devon where she writes full time. She has published reviews and articles but now concentrates on fiction. 'Set Dance' comes from her collection, *To know they dreamed*, which explores the Irish diaspora. She is currently working on a collection that takes its themes from elements of the periodic table. Her stories have appeared in literary journals and anthologies, the most recent online in *Virtual Zine*. (Website: www.angelasherlock.com)