# The Easter of the Soul

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It is hardly likely that a goddess may die. Then Eastre, the old Saxon goddess of spring, must be laughing in her muslin sleeve at people who believe that Easter, her namesake, exists only along certain strips of Fifth Avenue pavement after church service.

Aye! It belongs to the world. The ptarmigan in Chilkoot Pass discards his winter white feathers for brown; the Patagonian Beau Brummell oils his chi-gnon and clubs him another sweetheart to drag to his skull-strewn flat. And down in Chrystie Street —

Mr. “Tiger” McQuirk arose with a feeling of disquiet that be did not understand. With a prac-tised foot be rolled three of his younger brothers like logs out of his way as they lay sleeping on the floor. Before a foot-square looking glass hung by the win-dow he stood and shaved himself. If that may seem to you a task too slight to be thus impressively chronicled, I bear with you; you do not know of the areas to be accomplished in traversing the cheek and chin of Mr. McQuirk.

McQuirk, senior, had gone to work long before. The big son of the house was idle. He was a marble-cutter, and the marble-cutters were out on a strike.

“What ails ye?” asked his mother, looking at him curiously; “are ye not feeling well the morning, maybe now?”

“He’s thinking along of Annie Maria Doyle, impudently explained younger brother Tim, ten years old.”

“Tiger” reached over the hand of a champion and swept the small McQuirk from his chair.

“I feel fine,” said he, “beyond a touch of the I-don’t-know-wbat-you-call-its. I feel like there was going to be earthquakes or music or a trifle of chills and fever or maybe a picnic. I don’t know how I feel. I feel like knocking the face off a policeman, or else maybe like playing Coney Island straight across the board from pop-corn to the elephant boudabs.”

“It’s the spring in yer bones,” said Mrs. McQuirk. “It’s the sap risin’. Time was when I couldn’t keep me feet still nor me head cool when the earthworms began to crawl out in the dew of the mornin’. ‘Tis a bit of tea will do ye good, made from pipsissewa and gentian bark at the druggist’s.”

“Back up!” said Mr. McQuirk, impatiently.

“There’s no spring in sight There’s snow yet on the shed in Donovan’s backyard. And yesterday they puts open cars on the Sixth Avenue lines, and the janitors have quit ordering coal. And that means six weeks more of winter, by all the signs that be.”

After breakfast Mr. McQuirk spent fifteen minutes before the corrugated mirror, subjugating his hair and arranging his green-and-purple ascot with its amethyst tombstone pin-eloquent of his chosen calling.

Since the strike had been called it was this particular striker’s habit to hie himself each morning to the corner saloon of Flaherty Brothers, and there establish himself upon the sidewalk, with one foot resting on the bootblack’s stand, observing the panorama of the street until the pace of time brought twelve o’clock and the dinner hour. And Mr. “Tiger” McQuirk, with his athletic seventy inches, well trained in sport and battle; his smooth, pale, solid, amiable face — blue where the razor had travelled; his carefully considered clothes and air of capa-bility, was himself a spectacle not displeasing to the eye.

But on this morning Mr. McQuirk did not hasten immediately to his post of leisure and observation. Something unusual that he could not quite grasp was in the air. Something disturbed his thoughts, ruffled his senses, made him at once languid, irritable, elated, dissastisfied and sportive. He was no diagnostician, and he did not know that Lent was breaking up physiologically in his system.

Mrs. McQuirk had spoken of spring. Sceptically Tiger looked about him for signs. Few they were. The organ-grinders were at work; but they were always precocious harbingers. It was near enough spring for them to go penny-hunting when the skating ball dropped at the park. In the milliners’ windows Easter hats, grave, gay and jubilant, blossomed. There were green patches among the sidewalk debris of the grocers. On a third-story window-sill the first elbow cushion of the season — old gold stripes on a crimson ground — supported the kimonoed arms of a pensive brunette. The wind blew cold from the East River, but the sparrows were fly-ing to the eaves with straws. A second-hand store, combining foresight with faith, had set out an ice-chest and baseball goods.

And then “Tiger’s” eye, discrediting these signs, fell upon one that bore a bud of promise. From a bright, new lithograph the head of Capricornus confronted him, betokening the forward and heady brew.

Mr. McQuirk entered the saloon and called for his glass of bock. He threw his nickel on the bar, raised the glass, set it down without tasting it and strolled toward the door.

“Wot’s the matter, Lord Bolinbroke?” inquired the sarcastic bartender; want a chiny vase or a gold-lined epergne to drink it out of — hey?”

“Say,” said Mr. McQuirk, wheeling and shooting out a horizontal hand and a forty-five-degree chin, “you know your place only when it comes for givin’ titles. I’ve changed me mind about drinkin — see? You got your money, ain’t you? Wait till you get stung before you get the droop to your lip, will you?”

Thus Mr. Quirk added mutability of desires to the strange humors that had taken possession of him.

Leaving the saloon, he walked away twenty steps and leaned in the open doorway of Lutz, the barber. He and Lutz were friends, masking their sentiments behind abuse and bludgeons of repartee.

“Irish loafer,” roared Lutz, “how do you do? So, not yet haf der bolicemans or der catcher of dogs done deir duty!”

“Hello, Dutch,” said Mr. McQuirk. “Can’t get your mind off of frankfurters, can you?”

“Bah!” exclaimed the German, coming and leaning in the door. “I haf a soul above frankfurters to-day. Dere is springtime in der air. I can feel it coming in ofer der mud of der streets and das ice in der river. Soon will dere be bienics in der islands, mit kegs of beer under der trees.”

“Say,” said Mr. McQuirk, setting his bat on one side, “is everybody kiddin’ me about gentle Spring? There ain’t any more spring in the air than there is in a horsehair sofa in a Second Avenue furnished room. For me the winter underwear yet and the buckwheat cakes.”

“You haf no boetry,” said Lutz. True, it is yedt cold, und in der city we haf not many of der signs; but dere are dree kinds of beoble dot should always feel der’approach of spring first — dey are boets, lovers and poor vidows.”

Mr. McQuirk went on his way, still possessed by the strange perturbation that he did not understand. Something was lacking to his comfort, and it made him half angry because be did not know what it was. Two blocks away he came upon a foe, one Conover, whom he was bound in honor to engage in combat.

Mr. McQuirk made the attack with the characteristic suddenness and fierceness that had gained for him the endearing sobriquet of “Tiger.” The defence of Mr. Conover was so prompt and admirable that the conflict was protracted until the onlookers un-selfishly gave the warning cry of “Cheese it — the cop!” The principals escaped easily by running through the nearest open doors into the communi-cating backyards at the rear of the houses.

Mr. McQuirk emerged into another street. He stood by a lamp-post for a few minutes engaged in thought and then he turned and plunged into a small notion and news shop. A red-haired young woman, eating gum-drops, came and looked freezingly at him across the ice-bound steppes of the counter.

“Say, lady,” he said, “have you got a song book with this in it. Let’s see bow it leads off —

“When the springtime comes well wander in the dale, love,

And whisper of those days of yore — “

“I’m having a friend,” explained Mr. McQuirk, “laid up with a broken leg, and he sent me after it. He’s a devil for songs and poetry when he can’t get out to drink.”

“We have not,” replied the young woman, with un-concealed contempt. “But there is a new song out that begins this way:

“‘Let us sit together in the old armchair;

And while the firelight flickers we’ll be comfortable there.’”

There will be no profit in following Mr. “Tiger” McQuirk through his further vagaries of that day until he comes to stand knocking at the door of Annie Maria Doyle. The goddess Eastre, it seems, had guided his footsteps aright at last.

“Is that you now, Jimmy McQuirk?” she cried, smiling through the opened door (Annie Maria had never accepted the “Tiger”). “Well, whatever!” “Come out in the ball,” said Mr. McQuirk. “I want to ask yer opinion of the weather - on the level.”

“Are you crazy, sure?” said Annie Maria.

“I am,” said the “Tiger.” “They’ve been telling me all day there was spring in the air. Were they liars? Or am I?”

“Dear me!” said Annie Maria — “haven’t you noticed it? I can almost smell the violets. And the green grass. Of course, there ain’t any yet — it’s just a kind of feeling, you know.”

“That’s what I’m getting at,” said Mr. McQuirk. I’ve had it. I didn’t recognize it at first. I thought maybe it was en-wee, contracted the other day when I stepped above Fourteenth Street. But the katzenjammer I’ve got don’t spell violets. It spells yer own name, Annie Maria, and it’s you I want. I go to work next Monday, and I make four dollars a day. Spiel up, old girl — do we make a team?”

“Jimmy,” sighed Annie Maria, suddenly disappearing in his overcoat, “don’t you see that spring is all over the world right this minute?”

But you yourself remember how that day ended. Beginning with so fine a promise of vernal things, late in the afternoon the air chilled and an inch of snow fell — even so late in March. On Fifth Ave-nue the ladies drew their winter furs close about them. Only in the florists’ windows could be perceived any signs of the morning smile of the coming goddess Eastre.

At six o’clock Herr Lutz began to close his shop. He beard a well-known shout: “Hello, Dutch!”

“Tiger” McQuirk, in his shirt-sleeves, with his hat on the back of his bead, stood outside in the whirling snow, puffing at a black cigar.

“Donnerwetter!” shouted Lutz, “der vinter, he has gome back again yet!”

“Yer a liar, Dutch,” called back Mr. McQuirk, with friendly geniality, it’s springtime, by the watch.”