Irish Girl Rebel Tells of Dublin Fighting: Moira ...
By Joyce Kilmer.
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Irish Girl Rebel Tells of Dublin Fighting

Moira Regan. Now Here, Served in Post Office, the Headquarters of the Irish Republic, and Carried Dispatches for the Leaders

By Joyce Kilmer.

MOIRA REGAN is a slight, gray-eyed girl. There is a charming flavor of County Wexford in her manner and in her voice. But back of her gray eyes and charming manner there is a depth of tragic experience. For Moira Regan has worked night and day in a beleagured fort, has breathed air redolent with gunpowder, and heard the groans of men torn by shot and shell. She has seen her friends led away to death, their bodies to be thrown into a pit of quicklime. Moira Regan took part in the uprising in Dublin last Easter week, and did active service in the Post Office, which was the headquarters of the forces of the Irish Republic. She is now living in New York.

She tells of her experiences quietly, without gesture and without emotion. But her voice is vibrant with restrained passion when she tells of the deaths of Padraic Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, Thomas MacDonagh, and James Connolly, and there is a strange fire in her gray eyes when she speaks of the April evening when for the first time she saw the flag of the Irish Republic floating on its staff at the head of O'Connell Street.

Here is Moira Regan's story. It is more than the narrative of an eyewitness—it is the narrative of a friend of and fellow-worker with Plunkett and Pearse and MacDonagh—of one who shared with them the hopes, ambitions, perils, and pains of their brief but great adventure.

"At 6 o'clock on the evening of Easter Monday I went down O'Connell Street to the Post Office," she said. "But that was not my real entrance into the affairs of the uprising. You see, I belonged to an organization called Cumann na Mban—the Council of Women. We had been mobilized at noon on Monday near the Broad Stone Station, being told that we'd be needed for bandaging and other Red Cross work.

"But late in the afternoon we got word from the Commandant that we might disperse, since there would not be any street fighting that day, and so our services would not be needed. The place where we were mobilized is three or four blocks from the Post Office, and we could hear the shooting clearly. There were various rumors about—we were told that the Castle had been taken, and Student's Green and other points of vantage. And at last, as I said, we were told that there would be no street fighting, and that we were to go away from the Broad Stone Station and do what good we could.

"When I got to the Post Office that evening I found that the windows were barricaded with bags of sand, and at each of them were two men with rifles. The front office had been made the headquarters of the staff, and there I saw James Connolly, who was in charge of the Dublin division; Padraic Pearse, Willie Pearse, O'Rahilly, Plunkett, Shane MacDiarmid, Tom Clarke, and others sitting at tables writing out orders and receiving messengers.

"On my way to the Post Office I met a friend of mine who was carrying a message. He asked me had I been inside, and when I told him I had not, he got James Connolly to let me in.

"I didn't stay at the Post Office then, but made arrangements to return later. From the Post Office I went to Stephen's Green. The Republican army held the square. The men were busy making barricades and commandeering motor cars. They got a good many cars from British officers coming in from the Fairy House races.

"The Republican army had taken possession of a great many of the public houses. This fact was made much of by the English, who spread broadcast the report that the rebels had taken possession of all the drinking places in Dublin and were lying about the streets dead drunk. As a matter of fact, the rebels did no drinking at all. They took possession of the public houses because in Dublin these usually are large buildings in commanding positions at the corners of the streets. Therefore the public houses were places of strategic importance, especially desirable as forts.

"That night there was not much sleeping done at our house or at any other house in Dublin, I suppose. All night long we could hear the rifles cracking—scattered shots for the most part, and now and then a regular fusillade.

"On Tuesday I went again to the Post Office to find out where certain people, including my brother, should go in order to join up with the Republican forces. I found things quiet at headquarters, little going on except the regular executive work. Tuesday afternoon my brother took up his position in the Post Office, and my sister and I went there, too, and were set at work in the kitchen. There we found about ten English soldiers at work—that is, they wore the English uniform, but they were Irishmen. They did not seem at all sorry that they had been captured, and peeled potatoes and washed dishes uncomplainingly. The officers were imprisoned in another room.

"The rebels had captured many important buildings. They had possession of several big houses on O'Connell Street near the Post Office. They had taken the Imperial Hotel, which belongs to Murphy, Dublin's great capitalist, and had turned it into a hospital. We found the kitchen well supplied with food. We made big sandwiches of beef and cheese, and portioned out milk and beef tea. There were enough provisions to last for three weeks.

"About fifteen girls were at work in the kitchen. Some of them were members of the Cumann na Mban, and others were relatives or friends of the Republican army which James Connolly commanded. Some of the girls were not more than sixteen years old.

"We worked nearly all Tuesday night, getting perhaps an hour's sleep on mattresses on the floor. The men were shooting from the windows of the Post Office, and the soldiers were shooting at us, but not one of our men was injured. We expected that the Inniskillings would move on Dublin from the north, but no attack was made that night.

"On Wednesday I was sent out on an errand to the north side of the city. O'Rahilly was in charge of the prisoners, and he was very eager that the letters of the prisoners should be taken to their families. He gave me the letter of one of the English officers to take to his wife, who lived out beyond Drumcondra. It was a good long walk, and I can tell you that I blessed that English officer and his wife before I delivered that letter!

"As I went on my way, I noticed a great crowd of English soldiers marching down on the Post Office from the north. The first of them were only two blocks away from the Post Office, and the soldiers extended as far north as we went—that is, as far as Drumcondra. But nobody interfered with us—all those days the people walked freely around the streets of Dublin without being interfered with.

"As we walked back, we saw that the British troops were setting up machine guns near the Post Office. We heard the cracking of rifles and other sounds which indicated that a real siege was beginning. At Henry Street, near the Post Office, we were warned not to cross over, because a gunboat on the river was shelling Kelly's house—a big place at the corner of the quay. So we turned back and stayed that night with friends on the north side of the town. Our home was on the south side.

"There was heavy firing all night. The firing was especially severe at the Four Courts and down near Ring's End and Fairview. The streets were crowded with British soldiers; a whole division landed from Kingstown.

"That was Wednesday night. On Thursday we thought we'd have another try at the Post Office. By devious ways we succeeded, after a long time, in reaching it and getting in. We found the men in splendid form, and everything seemed to be going well. But the rebels were already hopelessly outnumbered. The Sherwood Foresters had begun to arrive Tuesday night, and on Wednesday and Thursday other regiments came to reinforce them. Now, a division in the British Army consists of 25,000 men, so you can see that the British were taking the rising seriously enough.

"The British soldiers brought with them all their equipment as if they were prepared for a long war. They had field guns and field kitchens, and everything else. Most of them came in by Boland's Mills, where de Valera was in command. They suffered several reverses, and many of them were shot down.

"The chief aim of the British was, first of all, to cut off the Post Office. So on Thursday messengers came to Pearse and Connolly, reporting that the machine guns and other equipment were being trained on the Post Office. But the men were quite ready for this and were exceedingly cheerful. Indeed, the Post Office was the one place in Dublin that week where no one could help feeling cheerful. I didn't stay there long on Thursday morning, as I was sent out to take some messages to the south side. I had my own trouble getting through the ranks of soldiers surrounding the Post Office, and when I eventually delivered my messages I could not get back. The Post Office was now completely cut off.

"Thursday evening, Friday, and Saturday I heard many wild rumors, one insistent report being that the Post Office was burned down. As a matter of fact, the Post Office was set on fire Friday morning by means of an incendiary bomb

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Dublin Post Office and Ruined Buildings Near It Just After the Rebels Had Been Ousted by British Troops. (C) American Press Assn.

which landed on top of the door. All the other houses held by the rebels had been burned to the ground, and the people who had been in them had gone to the Post Office, where there were now at least 400 men.

"The Post Office burned all day Friday, and late in the afternoon it was decided that it must be abandoned. First Father Flanagan, who had been there all the time, and the girls and a British officer—a Surgeon Lieutenant, who had been doing Red Cross work, were sent to *Jervis Street Hospital* through an underground passage. Then all the able-bodied men and James Connolly (who had broken his shin) tried to force their way out of the Post Office, to get to Four Courts, where the rebels were still holding out. They made three charges. In the first charge O'Rahilly was killed. In the second many of the men were wounded In the third the rebels succeeded in reaching a house in Moor Lane back of the Post Office. There they stayed all night. They had only a little food and their ammunition was almost exhausted. So on Saturday they saw that further resistance was useless, and that they ought to surrender, in order to prevent further slaughter.

"There were three girls with the men. They had chosen to attend Commandant Connolly when the other girls were sent away. One was now sent out with a white flag to parley with the British officers. At first she received nothing but insults, but eventually she was taken to Tom Clarke's shop, where the Brigadier General was stationed. Tom Clarke was a great rebel leader, one of the headquarters staff, so it was one of the ironies of fate that the General conducted his negotiations for the surrender of the rebels in his shop.

"Well, the Brigadier General told this girl to bring Padraic Pearse to him. Pearse came to him in Clarke's shop and surrendered. Pearse made the remark that he did not suppose it would be necessary for all his men to come and surrender.

"'But how,' said the General, 'can I be sure that all your men will lay down their arms?'

"'I will send an order to them,' said Pearse. And he called to him Miss Farrell, the girl who had been sent to the General, and asked her would she take his message to his men. She said she would, and so she took the note that he gave her to the rebel soldiers that were left alive, and they laid down their arms.

"There are a few things," said Moira Regan, "that I'd like every one in America to know about this rising, and about the way in which the British officers and soldiers acted. When the rebels surrendered they were at first treated with great courtesy. The British officers complimented them on the bold stand they had made, and said they wished they had men like them in the British Army. But after they had surrendered they were treated in the worst possible way. They were cursed and insulted, marched to the Rotunda Gardens, and made to spend the night there in the wet grass. They were not given a morsel of food.

"The man chiefly picked out for insult was *Tom Clarke*. He was very shamefully treated—it was a great contrast to the way in which the British officers spoke to him at the time of his surrender.

"The next morning the prisoners were marched to Richmond Barracks on the other side of the city from the Rotunda. One of the prisoners, Sean MacDiarmuid, was very lame, but was obliged to march with the rest. And on the way the crowds of English soldiers in the streets kept shouting, 'Shoot the dogs! What's the use of taking them any further?'

"Now, all the headquarters staff had surrendered. Notice was sent around that a truce had been arranged. The priests had arranged this. Miss Farrell was sent around in a motor car with Pearse's note calling on all the rebels to surrender. Now, most of the fighting stopped, except for sniping from the roofs, and for some heavy fighting at Ring's End, which continued for two days.

"The treatment of the prisoners in the jails was horrible. Many of the men arrested were not at all in sympathy with the Sinn Fein movement. The British arrested every one who had advocated the restoration of the Irish language, or had lectured on Irish literature, or had worked for the cause of Irish manufactures—they arrested every one, indeed, who had been conspicuously associated with anything definitely Irish.

"In one small room eighty-four prisoners were kept for two weeks. For two days they were not permitted to leave the room at all for any purpose. For thirty-seven hours they were without food. Then some dog biscuits were thrown in among them and they were given a bucket of tea. Later they were taken out of the room once a day. All their money was taken from them, but a few of them managed to hide a shilling or so, which they used to buy water of the soldiers.

"After the court-martial they were taken to Kilmainham Jail. There they were put into the criminal cells, without even plank beds. I went to visit one of the leaders, a particular friend of mine, and there was in his cell a blanket and a coverlet—nothing else at all.

"The night before they were to die the prisoners were left to write letters, and some of them were permitted to receive visitors for the first time since their capture. Padraic Pearse was not allowed to see any one. MacDonagh was not allowed to see his wife; he was allowed to see his sister, a nun. The food given them was scanty in quantity and poor in quality. On the morning that he was shot he was given for breakfast a little dry, uncooked cereal, with nothing to put on it.

"The prisoners were shot in the yard of Kilmainham Jail. Then the bodies were taken, in their clothes, outside Dublin to Arbor Hill Barracks and thrown into quicklime in one large trench. In every case the bodies were refused to the relatives of the dead men.

"One thing that would strike you about the conduct of the rebels was the absolute equality of the men and women. The women did first-aid work and cooking, and some of them used their rifles to good advantage. They just did the work that was before them, and they were of the greatest moral aid.

"About eighty women were taken prisoner and thrown into cells in Kilmainham Jail. There were no jail matrons; there was no one in charge of them but soldiers, who took every opportunity to insult them. They were not allowed to leave their cells for any purpose for two days. They were treated just as the men prisoners were treated. The women slept over the yard while the men were shot. They would be awakened in the morning by the sound of the quick march, the brusque command, and the sound of the rifles. One woman imprisoned in Kilmainham Jail was the Countess Plunkett."

Moira Regan was asked what advantages had come to Ireland as a result of this insurrection.

"Well," she replied, "for one thing it has shown England that things in Ireland are not all right—that Ireland is not 'the *one bright spot*'—that Castle Government in Ireland is a perilous thing. It has made conscription in Ireland impossible. And had it not been for the rising we should have had conscription by now. And Ireland cannot spare any more men. As it is, a great many of the young men of Ireland joined the British Army, being led to do so by Redmond's urging and by the plea that Ireland should fight for Belgium, and that the small nations of the world should stand together. This was Redmond's great recruiting argument. I wonder how he reconciles this with the words he used to Asquith the other day in the House of Commons when he said: 'You betrayed Belgium, now you are betraying Ireland!'

"But the greatest result of the rising, the thing that will justify it even if it were the only good result, is the complete and amazing revival of Irish nationality. We have been asleep—we had been ready to acquiesce in things as they were, to take jobs under the Castle Government and to acquiesce in the unnatural state of affairs. But now we have been awakened to the knowledge that there is a great difference between Ireland and England, that we are really a separate nation. Even the people who were not in sympathy with the rebels feel this now.

"We have been living in a country that had no national life. And suddenly we were shown that we had a national life—that we were a nation, a persecuted and crushed nation, but, nevertheless, a nation.

"*You cannot understand the joy of* this feeling unless you have lived in a nation whose spirit had been crushed and then suddenly revived. I felt that evening, when I saw the Irish flag floating over the Post Office in O'Connell Street, that this was a thing worth living and dying for. I was absolutely intoxicated and carried away with joy and pride in knowing that I had a nation. This feeling has spread all over Ireland; it has remained and it is growing stronger. We were a province, and now we are a nation; we were British subjects, and now we are Irish. This is what the rising of Easter week has done for Ireland."

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