

NELL MURPHY'S COTTAGE

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WILLIE FLYNN was after buying a new mowing machine, a single Pierce horse drawn, the first one in the area. The neighbours came to have a look and admire this wonderful machine. Willie announced that he would be taking it out next day for a "trial run". He had purchased a Clydesdale horse, a new set of harness and a raking machine as well. "Where did all this money come from?" Jim Daly asked Tom Reilly, as Willie came down the road proud as a peacock with his horse and machine. "That aunt of his died in America last year, she never married and I hear she was very well off. Before, during and after the War parcels of clothes and Lipton's tea arrived from America. In bad times she was very good to Willie and his family". "I wish them well," Tom said, "it couldn't happen to a nicer family and I see they are putting up a new hayshed as well." The horse and mower went into the meadow. Old timers marvelled at this wonderful machine. Willie explained the workings as best he could. The mowing arm was lowered and the "Clydesdale" took a right turn "A wonderful machine". Jim Daly said to Tom Reilly, as Willie, the horse and mower disappeared from view. They all waited patiently for the horse mower and driver to arrive back at the starting point. Willie seemed confused. "I took a wrong turn" he said sheepishly, "I should have gone to my left". "Is there any reverse on it Willie?" Mick Quinn said jokingly, "Mind your own business" Willie snapped back. "You are only jealous, yourself and your auld grey ass," Willie and Quinn

never saw eye to eye, after some persuasion the horse turned around and faced in the other direction, but no matter how hard Willie tried he wouldn't budge. He coaxed him and threatened him but all to no avail. Finally, he had no option but to take him out from under the machine. "He is nervous with all the people around," Willie tried to explain.

"How did you get on?" Mary his wife asked when he arrived home. "It will take time for the horse to get used to it, I will try him again tomorrow when there is no one around. That Mick Quinn, got on my nerves. He continued with his smart remarks. It would be more in his line if he kept that thieving ass at home. He has everyone around pestered he destroyed Jim Daly's potatoes last week".

Tom Regan was doing a bit of painting, They were having the Station in a few weeks time. Willie as just about to sit down at the table to have his dinner when Mary gave a shout from the back kitchen. "Look out Willie." "Out where?" Willie asked. "Out in the Farmyard" she replied, "at the stack of oats". Willie's blood boiled when he saw the rear end of Quinn's Donkey sticking out of the stack. With his dander up he left the dinner table and headed down the road for Quinn's. Mick was having a drop of tay when a knock came to the front door. Kate opened it. "Is Mick in?" he asked. "Mick" she shouted "Willie Flynn wants you". Mick came out quickly. "Good day Willie, anything wrong?" "No" Willie replied. "I have the thresher and was

hoping you would come down and give a hand". "I'll be down when I finish my tay" Quinn replied. "It's nice to see you and Willie are on good terms" Kate said "You always want your neighbour and life is too short to be squabbling and fighting." Quinn set off with the pitchfork on his shoulder. "Don't bother holding my dinner," he said, "Mrs Flynn will look after us". Willie was waiting at the farmyard gate when he arrived, he walked in and looked around. "Where's the thresher?" he asked. "Look at him," Willie answered. By this time the donkey had burrowed his way three quarter ways into the stack. For once, Quinn was stuck for words. Fearing trouble ahead Mary had arrived on the scene. "Take him our of here as quick as you can, if you can find reverse" Quinn prodded and poked him and the donkey backed out. "I hope that bad oats doesn't do him any harm," Quinn said as he left the Farmyard. Mary was glad to see him go. She held Willie back as he made a swipe at Quinn. He had the upper hand now, but Quinn had the pitchfork. "I'll get my own back on that so and so" he said to himself as he made his way home with the grey donkey in tow. "Are ye finished already?" Kate asked him when he walked into the kitchen. "The thresher broke down," he replied, "it could be a while before its fixed, I'll be here for the dinner" he added. "You were there to help when your neighbour needed you," Kate said "that's all that matters". "I'll sit down and have my dinner in peace" Willie said, "that donkey won't bother us any more". "I'll go

down to the meadow" he told Mary "and see how I'll get on". He put the horse under the mowing machine, sat on the seat, it was quiet now, no distractions. After a few minutes of praise and encouragement the horse started off and never stopped until the meadow was finished. Willie was delighted. In the distance he could see Quinn walking down the road. Knowing him so well he knew in his heart and soul that he was planning some sort of villainy. It was getting on in the year now and the men were busy gathering the hay, bringing home the turf and digging the potatoes. The day of the Station arrived. All the neighbours were greeted by Willie at the front door. Mick Quinn and Kate arrived. Quinn was welcomed by a half hearted handshake. Father Brady was late, excused himself, 'a sick call, Mary Moran on the Mountain Road'. Confessions were heard in the good room, mass was said in the kitchen, the house and the people within blessed. The women got tea and sweet cake, Bottles of Stout were handed around to the men. Father Brady thanked Willie and Mary for their hospitality. "I see by looking at the Station book that it's the turn of Michael and Kate Quinn to take the Station next Spring". "We will have to get new curtains for the Station," Kate said to Mick on the way home, "they are gone threadbare". "Give them a good wash and they will do good enough" he answered back. The evenings were closing in fast now and some of the men were calling to Nell Murphy's cottage, 'the local rambling house'. Nell's husband had died a few years earlier and her two children had emigrated. The neighbours were very good to Nell. Gave her turf and potatoes. She never wanted for anything, loved the company and was very fond of a game of 25. By November she had a full house, everything was

discussed at Nell's. Willie Flynn and Jim Daly were regular callers. Jim called in one night on a ceilidhe. I see you have visitors at the 'Cutaway', he said to Willie. "That's right" Willie answered, "they came last Wednesday, called a few times, wanted hay for the donkey. The last time they were there I missed turf out of the shed". "The Travellers are sometimes blamed in the wrong too" Jim said. "I'll go home early," Willie announced. "Mary isn't too happy on her own". He got up and left Nell Murphy's cottage. Quinn was in the corner listening to all this, suddenly he had a brainwave, "It's pay back time," he said to himself, waited until the rest of the men were leaving and headed for home. He went into his own shed, got a few sods and clods of turf, went as far as Willie's shed and scattered them in the direction of the encampment. Willie got up next morning and saw the turf on the lane. "Come out and look at this Mary" he shouted, but before she had a chance to talk to him he was on his way to the encampment, with enough evidence now, he confronted the Travellers and had barely enough time to turn before he was chased. Quinn was feeding the calves when he heard the shouting, went to the gate and nearly wet himself when he saw Willie fly by pursued by two burly Traveller women. "Make sure you don't go into reverse" he shouted after him. Luckily the door was open when Willie got as far as the house. "Close the door and lock it" he shouted to Mary as he slumped exhausted into the chair, "if they get in they'll kill me". Quinn was still at the gate when the two women made their way back. "What happened?" he asked innocently, "or why were ye chasing Flynn?" "That fellow said that we stole his turf" one of them replied, "he won't annoy us again". Quinn rubbed his hands in glee. Willie didn't appear out

until the Travellers left. After a few nights he called to Nell's house. Everyone knew what happened between himself and the Travellers, but nothing was said. They were all on Willie's side. "Did you hear the good news Willie?" Jim Daly asked when he arrived later that night. "No. What happened?" he asked quickly. "Quinn's donkey is gone. I heard that the Travellers donkey died, Quinn's donkey was hanging around the camp for a few days, they thought he was a stray, put the harness on him, got him hooked up to the cart and headed for Drumshanbo. Jim Reilly met them just outside the town". Willie took a fit of laughing and couldn't stop. "I'd like to see Quinn's face when he tries to get the donkey back". With the passing of time, the numbers in the 'rambling house' got smaller. Nell got a bad flu and went into Hospital. The 'rambling house' was closed. In her eighties, Nell passed away a few months later. There was a big void now at the crossroads. People stopped going out, no communication like before. Willie Flynn got dementia and went down hill quickly. In the end Mary wasn't able to look after him and he had to go into St Patrick's. By a strange coincidence Mick Quinn got something similar following a stroke and finished up in the same ward as Willie. Jim Daly took the bus into town one day and went to St Patrick's. A nurse directed him to Willie and Mick's ward. The two men were sitting in armchairs, neither of them recognised him. He didn't stay long. "How could the two of them finish up like that", he said to himself. "Babbling away, gone back to their childhood, they don't even know one another". He wiped away a tear as he went out the door. On his journey home great memories came back as he recalled the good times they all had in 'Nell Murphy's Cottage'