

### THREE DIALOGUE EXCERPTS FROM 'EMPIRE'

#### EXCERPT 1:

'I want to go to university, William.' She spoke the words quickly. There, it was out in the open.

He looked at her blankly before the words formed in his mouth.

'You *what?*'

'University. It's high time I had an education.'

William pushed his dinner plate away as if he had suddenly lost his appetite. 'What the hell—'

'I've always wanted to learn more – you know that William. There's still time for me to—'

'To what? To make a fool of yourself at University College? It's all *men*, you know, male students.'

'Not exclusively, dear.'

She was trying to hold her patience, to be calm and strategic about the matter.

'Are you unhappy, Margaret? Is there something that makes you so discontented you wish to leave the home every day to attend classes? Am I – are we, for I think of the children too—not *enough* for you?

Frankly, yes, she wanted to reply enthusiastically, but thought the better of it. On the scales of justice, it should not be a contest between one aspect of a woman's life and another. Even Mother had said that. In fact, she was always saying it, and when she had returned from her latest London trip to the Suffragettes, she had told Margaret that all women who were able, were honour-bound to change things, to make sacrifices to do so.

'Of course you are enough. But – you know how you were able to attend university to study as an engineer? How wonderful it was? And all that you learned? . . . So it is for me. I need something else.'

'You need something else?' He spoke the last word as if it was part of a new language he had never before encountered.

'Yes dear. Something else.'

'But—what about your children?'

Something broke in her then and her face turned pink with frustration. Suddenly they were *her* children.

#### EXCERPT 2:

'Adapting to Ireland had not come easily to either of them. There were changes afoot, not alone in the manner of his work, but in people's attitudes. Even his secretaries spoke about independence, and 'democracy', a word which everybody in Burma had loathed whenever it reached their eyes or ears, usually through newspapers such as *The Mandalay Star*. Now too, in Ireland, the families who had lost sons in the Great War were seen as different from those who had mourned for the Volunteers in the Rising. People did not know what to do with solers who returned from Belgium, often limbless, blind, or with parts of their skulls replaced with sheets of metal.'

EXCERPT 3:

‘There is always something,’ Peggy blushed, touching her face as if it had been struck.

But Margaret turned to her again, and, drawing the other woman close, now kissed her shyly on the mouth, then pushed back a long curl that had fallen across Peggy’s face.

‘There,’ she said, blinking slowly, ‘Perhaps I am breaking a rule of affection. I hope you do not object. It means nothing bad.’

‘Of course not, Mrs. How could it be bad?’ Peggy whispered, her eyebrows flickering down in puzzlement, her face now very ruddy.

‘The thing is,’ Margaret murmured, ‘perhaps we’re never as happy as we think we are, or as sad as we think we are either.’