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UNDOUBTEDLY MISS EDGEWORTH

Yeats said that in your youth
 you ran wild in Ireland:
 Cut out squares in a checked tablecloth.
 Trampled through the glass of hothouse frames
delighting in the crash.

Unfortunate genius he called you
 because afterwards the boarding school
 in Derby did its work so well,
 taught you the arithmetic of fear:
 How easily they could all do without you,
 your father especially, holed up in his study
 or traveling by moonlight to talk botany,
 marrying another young wife.

For Yeats you spoke just once in your work,
 in your first book, your *great genius*,
 that *natural talent for the unexpected*
 lost in the daily rounds of daughter. Of duty.
 Of all those novels written between four
 in the afternoon and five.

*She could not persuade herself to trust
 nature, to set down in tale and novel
 the emotions and longings and chances . . .*
 But for Yeats this was an abstract regret:
 When the woman he himself loved
 most in the world got up from tea in 1897
 to continue the political work she'd begun
 (that day, to tend those the police had batoned
 in the Jubilee Riot), he told them to lock
 the door. He stood up in the club
 in Rutland Square, demanding reasons,
 explanations. He helped them to bar her way.

FIRST MEETING

She'd come out in her slippers
kept a hansom cab waiting.

It was 1889. Bedford Park.
She rode all the way from Belgravia
to meet Jack Yeats and his son. Pushy man,
the father. But this poet
struggling to paint, she liked

his sad smile. *I make the cloak of Sorrow.*
Of course she said she loved his poems.
And that was the one thing he heard.
Like many men, he was frightened.
He hid his fingers stained with paint.

Years later she forgot the occasion
entirely, the leave-taking, and then
stepping out into Blenheim Road,
how the wind rose like a keen.
Dead leaves battened down her loose hair.

Instead, she remembered O'Leary
filling her arms with books—Thomas Davis,
Mangan and Ferguson—because she'd said
*I want to work for Ireland. I want you
to show me how.* Willie followed her home

from tea and they spoke of John's years
in Portland Jail breaking stones
after the rising. In this way the poet
became confidante, friend. A character
in her own story.