

LAMPS OF FIRE

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Lamps of Fire by Marian Nesbitt

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MARIAN NESBITT

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By *Marian Nesbitt*

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Author of

**Basil's Brothers; Writ in Remembrance;
The Priest's Hiding Place; The Crown of Life,
and other stories**

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*"Jealousy is hard as hell:
the lamps thereof are
lamps of fire and flames."*

CHAPTER I

I, MOLLY DESMOND, aged exactly eighteen years, stood leaning on the balcony of a pleasant room overlooking a small, but beautiful lake. Though my eyes were accustomed to the wide view of shimmering water, solemn mountains, and wooded park-like slopes, the scene never lost for me its singularly irresistible charm; and though, on this brilliant midsummer morning, my thoughts were busy with other things, I still felt acutely conscious of all the brightness and loveliness around. It was the fourteenth of June, and my birthday; but, save for one note, I had received no greetings, no gifts, none of those numerous letters which imagination pictured as so delightful. I was an orphan, and sufficiently alone in the world; but none

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the less did I know the bitter regret of those who can look back to a home and a happiness gone beyond recall. Both my parents had died in my earliest childhood, when I was too young either to understand or to realize the greatness of my loss. Till my fifteenth year, I had an absolutely unclouded existence. O those golden days, how sweetly their memory lingers in my heart! How sad and time-worn I sometimes feel now—how far removed from the simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything that was mine then! And yet, as I have just remarked, I was only eighteen.

I had been brought up in Ireland; my mother's only brother, the parish priest of a small place on the southwest coast, gladly received me into his house, notwithstanding the fact that a three-year-old child was likely to be

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far from an agreeable inmate. Dear, dearest Uncle Neil! What a world of love and reverence he awoke within me. No mother could have been more tender, no brother a more delightful good comrade than he. I simply worshipped him, and fully concurred in Biddy's statement—Biddy was our housekeeper, of whom, despite her earnest desire for our welfare, we both stood a little in awe—that "his Riverence was the powerfulest preacher in the whole diocese"; and "the handsomest," I always took care to add. Nor would I allow for a moment that he could ever have been more good to look upon—no, not even in the days when his now silver-white hair was as dark as the thick, black, upcurling lashes that fringed his clear grey eyes—eyes that reflected their owner's pure and child-like soul, and seemed posi-