**The Man of the House -**Literature Notes

**SUMMARY**  
This short story is about a little boy called Sullivan who has a sick mother. Sullivan is initially unconcerned about his mother’s illness, and mildly pleased, because he got to stay home and play at being the ‘man of the house’. However, his initial delight changes to concern on the second day due to his fear that his mother has pneumonia. The second night and the third day are even more frightening because he had to fetch the doctor and travel to the North Dispensary to get her medication. At the dispensary he meets a young girl who tricks him into drinking, and sharing the medicine, with the result being an empty bottle to take home to his mother. Sullivan suffers extreme guilt as a result of this and goes home crying. His mother consoles him and forgives his childish misdemeanor.   
  
**SETTING**

* A town called Cork, in England.

**CHARACTERS**  
*Sullivan*

* A very responsible little boy.
* Enjoys playing at being a man by taking care of his mother and the household chores.

*Mother*

* A sickly lady.
* She feels guilty that her son has to display such maturity by taking care of her.
* Displays what a loving mother she is by understanding that Dooley is an innocent boy that succumbed to peer pressure.
* She also takes excellent care of her son when she is able to do so.

*Minni Ryan*

* She is a family friend who advises Dooly during the course of his mother’s illness.
* A middle aged woman who is very knowledgeable.
* Very pious and gossipy; according to Dooly.

*Doctor*

* He was a fat, loud voiced man.
* He was the cleverest doctor in Cork.

THEME  
*Love & family relationship*  
This is shown in the relationship between the mother and her son. Sullivan is frightened that his mother will die of pneumonia, so, despite his fear, he enters a public house (pub) in order to ensure that she gets her home-made remedy, and travels to an unsavory neighbourhood in order to get her medicine. The mother is equally devoted to her son, as seen in her guilt over the fact that he has to take care of her. She is also very understanding when he succumbs to the peer pressure of drinking her medicine. She understands that one cannot expect a child to be a man, no matter how well he does at playing at being a man. Her love for her child is also manifested in the pride she feels when he displays the level of maturity akin to an adult.  
  
*Innocence*  
The fact that Sullivan does not recognize that his new friend is using him for a taste of his cough syrup proves that he is still an innocent young man, at least in relation to the ways of the world. Despite playing at being a man, he is still an innocent child. His reaction, after realizing that he was used, also points to his innocence. He reacts in the manner that any child would, he ran home crying.  
  
  
Contributor: Leisa Samuels-Thomas