

DEIRDRE

BY

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DEIRDRE



MUSICIANS.

FERGUS, *an old man.*

NAISI, *a young king.*

DEIRDRE, *his queen.*

A DARK-FACED MESSENGER.

CONCHUBAR (*pronounced Conochar*), *the old King of Uladh, who is still strong and vigorous.*

DARK-FACED EXECUTIONER.

SCENE: *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier: they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.*

First Musician. I have a story right, my wanderers,
That has so mixed with fable in our songs,
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and this house
Is an old guest-house built for travellers
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal house,
And there are certain hills among these woods,
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

DEIRDRE

Second Musician.

That famous queen
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?

First Mus. [*going nearer to the brazier.*] Some dozen
years ago, King Conchubar found
A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there 's nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there
But that she 'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage day,
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,
Naisi, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
Carried her off.

Sec. Mus. The tale were well enough
Had it a finish.

First Mus. Hush! I have more to tell;
But gather close that I may whisper it:
I speak of terrible, mysterious ends—
The secrets of a king.

Sec. Mus. There 's none to hear!

First Mus. I have been to Conchubar's house and
followed up
A crowd of servants going out and in
With loads upon their heads: embroideries
To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes

DEIRDRE

To strew upon the floors, and came at length
To a great room.

Sec. Mus. Be silent ; there are steps !

[*Enter FERGUS, an old man, who moves about from door to window excitedly through what follows.*

Fergus. I thought to find a message from the king.
You are musicians by these instruments,
And if as seems—for you are comely women—
You can praise love, you'll have the best of luck,
For there'll be two, before the night is in,
That bargained for their love, and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time
To weigh a happy music with a sad ;
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the son of Usna and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

First Mus. Deirdre and her man !

Fergus. I was to have found a message in this house,
And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Rogh ?

First Mus. Are Deirdre and her lover tired of life ?

Fergus. You are not of this country, or you'd know
That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

First Mus. We have no country but the roads of the
world.

Fergus. Then you should know that all things change
in the world,
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

First Mus. An old man's love
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure ;
His jealousy is like his love.

Fergus. And that's but true.

DEIRDRE

You have learned something in your wanderings.
He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,
But I alone, thought it impossible ;
Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,
I had my way, and all's forgiven now ;
And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
That I lack tongue for.

First Mus. Yet old men are jealous.

Fergus. [*going to door.*] I am Conchubar's near friend,
and that weighed somewhat,
And it was policy to pardon them.

The need of some young, famous, popular man
To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,
And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.
They have been wandering half-a-dozen years.

First Mus. And yet old men are jealous.

Fergus. [*coming from door.*] Sing the more sweetly
Because, though age is arid as a bone,
This man has flowered. I've need of music, too ;
If this grey head would suffer no reproach,
I'd dance and sing—

*[Dark-faced Men with strange, barbaric dress and
arms begin to pass by the doors and windows.
They pass one by one and in silence.]*

and dance till the hour ran out,
Because I have accomplished this good deed.

First Mus. Look there—there at the window, those
dark men,

With murderous and outlandish-looking arms—
They've been about the house all day.

Fergus [*looking after them.*] What are you ?
Where do you come from, who is it sent you here ?

First Mus. They will not answer you.

DEIRDRE

Fergus. They do not hear.

First Mus. Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes
That have seen many lands, they are such men
As kings will gather for a murderous task,
That neither bribes, commands, nor promises
Can bring their people to.

Fergus. And that is why
You harped upon an old man's jealousy.
A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's fame
Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.
They may have brought him Libyan dragon-skin,
Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

First Mus. If these be merchants, I have seen the
goods
They have brought to Conchubar, and understood
His murderous purpose.

Fergus. Murderous, you say?
Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?
But I'll not hear.

First Mus. It may be life or death.
There is a room in Conchubar's house, and there——

Fergus. Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.
There 's many a one that would do more than that,
And make it prison, or death, or banishment
To slander the high King.

[Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.]

He is my friend;
I have his oath, and I am well content.
I have known his mind as if it were my own
These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought
Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit

DEIRDRE

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DEIRDRE

By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
That common things are lost, and all that 's strange
Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.

[*Going to the door again.*]

Quick! quick! your instruments! they are coming now.
I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song;
But what is it to be? I'd have them hear
A music foaming up out of the house
Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse
Of some old time not worth remembering,
And all the lovelier because a bubble.
Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,
Of Lughaidh Redstripe or another; no, not him,
He and his lady perished wretchedly.

FIRST MUSICIAN [*singing.*]

'Why is it,' Queen Edain said,
'If I do but climb the stair . . .

Fergus. Ah! that is better. . . . They are alighted
now.

Shake all your cockscombs, children; these are lovers.
[*FERGUS goes out.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN.

'Why is it,' Queen Edain said,
'If I do but climb the stair
To the tower overhead,
When the winds are calling there,
Or the gannets calling out,
In waste places of the sky,
There 's so much to think about,
That I cry, that I cry?'

DEIRDRE

SECOND MUSICIAN.

But her goodman answered her :
‘Love would be a thing of naught
Had not all his limbs a stir
Born out of immoderate thought ;
Were he anything by half,
Were his measure running dry.
Lovers, if they may not laugh,
Have to cry, have to cry.’

[DEIRDRE, NAISI, and FERGUS have been seen for a moment through the windows, but now they have entered.]

THE THREE MUSICIANS. [*together.*]

But is Edain worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew ?
Praise the beautiful and strong ;
Praise the redness of the yew ;
Praise the blossoming apple-stem.
But our silence had been wise.
What is all our praise to them,
That have one another's eyes ?

Deirdre. Silence your music, though I thank you for it ;
But the wind 's blown upon my hair, and I
Must set the jewels on my neck and head
For one that 's coming.

Naisi. Your colour has all gone
As 'twere with fear, and there 's no cause for that.

Deirdre. These women have the raddle that they use
To make them brave and confident, although
Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o' their cheeks.
You'll help me, women. It is my husband's will

DEIRDRE

I show my trust in one, that may be here
Before the mind can call the colour up.
My husband took these rubies from a king
Of Surracha that was so murderous
He seemed all glittering dragon. Now wearing them
Myself wars on myself, for I myself—
That do my husband's will, yet fear to do it—
Grow dragonish to myself.

[*The Women have gathered about her. NAISI has stood looking at her, but FERGUS brings him to the chess-table.*

Fergus. We'll play at chess
Till the king comes. It is but natural
That she should fear him, for her house has been
The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

Naisi. If I were childish and had faith in omens,
I'd rather not have lit on that old chessboard
At my home-coming.

Fergus. There's a tale about it—
It has been lying there these many years—
Some wild old sorrowful tale.

Naisi. It is the board
Where Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
Who had a seamew's body half the year,
Played at the chess upon the night they died.

Fergus. I can remember now, a tale of treachery,
A broken promise and a journey's end—
But it were best forgot.

[*DEIRDRE has been standing with the Women about her. They have been helping her to put on her jewels and to put the pigment on her cheeks and arrange her hair. She has gradually grown attentive to what FERGUS is saying.*

DEIRDRE

Naisi. If the tale's true,
When it was plain that they had been betrayed,
They moved the men and waited for the end
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds
They hardly winked their eyes when the sword flashed.

Fergus. She never could have played so, being a
woman,
If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.

Deirdre. I have heard the ever-living warn mankind
By changing clouds and casual accidents,
Or what seem so.

Naisi. It would but ill become us,
Now that King Conchubar has pledged his word,
Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.

Deirdre. There's none to welcome us.

Naisi. Being his guest,
Words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves.

Deirdre. An empty house upon the journey's end!
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest?

Fergus. He is but making ready
A welcome in his house, arranging where
The moorhen and the mallard go, and where
The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.

Deirdre. Had he no messenger?

Naisi. Such words and fears
Wrong this old man who's pledged his word to us.
You speak as women do that sit alone
Marking among the ashes with a stick
Till they are terrified.—You are a queen:
You should have too calm thought to start at shadows.
[To FERGUS.] Come, let us look if there's a messenger
From Conchubar. We cannot see from this

DEIRDRE

Because we are blinded by the leaves and twigs,
But it may be the wood will thin again.
It is but kind that when the lips we love
Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears
Our ears be deaf.

Fergus. But now I had to threaten
These wanderers because they would have weighed
Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.
If I had thought so little of mankind
I never could have moved him to this pardon.
I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

[*NAISI and FERGUS go out. The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards CONCHUBAR'S house.*

First Mus. If anything lies heavy on your heart,
Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

Deirdre. You've been in love?

First Mus. If you would speak of love,
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the kisses
That were upon our lips, and when we are old
Their memory will be all the life we have.

Deirdre. There was a man that loved me. He was old ;
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.
He has made promises, and brought me home ;
But though I turn it over in my thoughts,

DEIRDRE

I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook.

First Mus. I have heard he loved you,
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.

Deirdre. You mean that when a man who has loved
like that
Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,
And that love drowned and floating is but hate ;
And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,
Till he has killed ; and that, though the day laughs,
We shall be dead at cock-crow.

First Mus. You have not my thought.
When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied till my passion had run out,
That could I carry him away with me,
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

Deirdre. Ah ! now I catch your meaning, that this
king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

First Mus. 'Tis you that put that meaning upon words
Spoken at random.

Deirdre. Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,
Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random ; if they hint at it at all
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.

First Mus. We have little that is certain.

Deirdre. Certain or not,
Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it ;
I never have met any of your kind,

DEIRDRE

But that I gave them money, food and fire.

First Mus. There are strange, miracle-working, wicked stones,
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons.

Deirdre. The hot Istain stone,
And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.

First Mus. They have so great an influence, if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.

Deirdre. O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory,
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe!

First Mus. I have seen a bridal bed, so curtained in,
So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
And learned that a bride's coming.

Deirdre. And I the bride?
Here is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,
For she but died and mixed into the dust
Of her dear comrade, but I am to live
And lie in the one bed with him I hate.
Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this
When Conchubar first chose me for his wife,
I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,
But now there is worse need.

Naisi. [*entering with* FERGUS.] Why have you called?
I was but standing there, without the door.

Deirdre. I have heard terrible mysterious things,
Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

Fergus. Why, that's no wonder. You have been
listening
To singers of the roads that gather up

DEIRDRE

The stories of the world.

Deirdre. But I have one
To make the stories of the world but nothing.

Naisi. Be silent if it is against the king
Whose guest you are.

Fergus. No, let her speak it out,
I know the High King's heart as it were my own,
And can refute a slander, but already
I have warned these women that it may be death.

Naisi. I will not weigh the gossip of the roads
With the king's word. I ask your pardon for her :
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.

Deirdre. Am I to see the fowler and the cage
And speak no word at all ?

Naisi. You would have known,
Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.

Deirdre. Though death may come of it ?

Naisi. Though death may come.

Fergus. To those that slander kings.

Deirdre. Then I will say
What it were best to carry to the grave.
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.
It was for him, to stir him to desire,
I put on beauty ; yes, for Conchubar.

Naisi. What frenzy put these words into your mouth ?

Deirdre. No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy
To change what shifts with every change of the wind,
Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings ?
Was I not born a woman ?

DEIRDRE

Naisi. You're mocking me.

Deirdre. And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

Naisi. What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight?

Deirdre. Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men's hearts
And lack it in themselves?

Naisi. Come, I command it :
We'll to the horses and take ship again.

Fergus. Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy
With crafty words.

Deirdre. Were we not born to wander?
These jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword
Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me ;
But who can tell what change can come to love
Among the valleys? I speak no falsehood now.
Away to windy summits, and there mock
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird !

Fergus. Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel up
That has brought death to many. I have poured
Water upon the fire, but if you fly
A second time, the house is in a blaze,
And all the screaming household will but blame
The savage heart of beauty for it all ;
And Naisi, that has helped to tar the wisp,
Shall be a hunted outlaw all his days.

Deirdre. I will be blamed no more. There's but
one way :
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery

DEIRDRE

And houseless wandering on the man I loved.
These wanderers will show me how to do it ;
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars.
Oh, that the creatures of the wood had torn
My body with their claws !

Fergus. What, wilder yet !

Deirdre. [to NAISI.] Whatever were to happen to
my face

I'd be myself, and there's not any way
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

Naisi. What have you told to put such frenzy in her ?

Fergus. Yes, speak it out.

Naisi. I give you my protection,
Are you afraid to speak ? Does the king love her ?
Will no one answer ?

Deirdre. Tell out all the plot,
The plan, the network, all the treachery ;
Tell of the bridal chamber and the bed,
The magical stones, the wizard's handiwork.

Naisi. Ah ! now I understand why it is you fear
To waken death with words. Take care of Deirdre :
She must not fall alive into his hands,
Whatever the cost.

Deirdre. Where would you go to, Naisi ?

Naisi. I go to drag the truth from Conchubar,
Before his people, in the face of his army,
And if it be as black as you have made it,
To kill him there.

Deirdre. You never would return ;
I'll never look upon your face again.
Oh, keep him, Fergus ; do not let him go,
But hold him from it. You are both wise and kind.

DEIRDRE

Naisi. When you were all but Conchubar's wife, I
took you ;

He tried to kill me, and he would have done it
If I had been so near as I am now.

And now that you are mine, he has planned to take you.
Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man ?

[*Dark-faced MESSENGER comes into the house, unnoticed.*

Messenger. Supper is on the table, Conchubar
Is waiting for his guests.

Fergus. All's well, again !

All's well ! all's well ! You cried your doubts so loud
That I had almost doubted.

Naisi. I would have killed him,
And he the while but busy in his house
For the more welcome.

Deirdre. The message is not finished.

Fergus. Come quickly. Conchubar will laugh, that I—
Although I held out boldly in my speech—
That I, even I——

Deirdre. Wait, wait ! He is not done.

Mess. Deirdre and Fergus, son of Rogh, are summoned ;

But not the traitor that bore off the queen.

It is enough that the king pardon her,
And call her to his table and his bed.

Naisi. So then, it's treachery.

Fergus. I'll not believe it.

Naisi. Tell Conchubar to meet me in some place
Where none can come between us but our swords,
For I have found no truth on any tongue
That's not of iron.

Mess. I am Conchubar's man ;
I take no message but he bids me do it.

[*He goes.*

DEIRDRE

Naisi. I bid you. I will have you swear to take it.

[He follows MESSENGER out.]

Fergus. Some enemy has paid him well for this.
I know King Conchubar's mind as it were my own ;
I'll learn the truth from him.

[He is about to follow NAISI, but DEIRDRE stops him.]

Deirdre. No, no, old man,
You thought the best, and the worst came of it ;
We listened to the counsel of the wise,
And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.
Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me ;
It may be that his passion is asleep,
And that we may escape.

Fergus. But I'll go first,
And follow up that Libyan heel, and send
Such words to Conchubar, that he may know
At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

[NAISI enters.]

Naisi. The Libyan, knowing that a servant's life
Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and mocked.

Fergus. I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-hooks,
And carry you in safety to the ships.

My name has still some power. I will protect,
Or, if that is impossible, revenge. *[Goes out by other door.]*

Naisi. *[who is calm, like a man who has passed beyond life.]* The crib has fallen and the birds are in it ;
There is not one of the great oaks about us
But shades a hundred men.

Deirdre. Let's out and die,
Or break away, if the chance favour us.

Naisi. They would but drag you from me, stained
with blood.
Their barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,

DEIRDRE

And I would have you die as a queen should—
In a death chamber. You are in my charge.
We will wait here, and when they come upon us,
I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's over,
Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.

Deirdre. I will stay here; but you go out and fight.
Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them leaving it,
We shall be ever friendless.

Naisi. What do they say?
That Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of his
Sat at this chessboard, waiting for their end.
They knew that there was nothing that could save them,
And so played chess as they had any night
For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.
I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.

[*to MUSICIANS.*] Had you been here when that man and
his queen

Played at so high a game, could you have found
An ancient poem for the praise of it?
It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew
Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,

DEIRDRE

As though she'd say : 'There's nothing happening
But that a king and queen are playing chess.'

Deirdre. He's in the right, though I have not been
born

Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot.
And though I have loved better than that queen,
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.

Oh, singing women, set it down in a book
That love is all we need, even though it is
But the last drops we gather up like this ;
And though the drops are all we have known of life,
For we have been most friendless—praise us for it
And praise the double sunset, for naught's lacking,
But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

Naisi. Light torches there and drive the shadows out.
For day's grey end comes up.

[*A MUSICIAN lights a torch in the fire and then crosses
before the chess-players, and slowly lights the torches
in the sconces. The light is almost gone from the
wood, but there is a clear evening light in the sky,
increasing the sense of solitude and loneliness.*

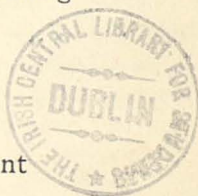
Deirdre.

Make no sad music.

What is it but a king and queen at chess ?
They need a music that can mix itself
Into imagination, but not break
The steady thinking that the hard game needs.

[*During the chess, the MUSICIANS sing
this song.*

Love is an immoderate thing
And can never be content,
Till it dip an ageing wing,
Where some laughing element



DEIRDRE

Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.

What 's the merit in love-play,
In the tumult of the limbs

That dies out before 'tis day,
Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
All that mingling of our breath,
When love longing is but drouth
For the things come after death ?

[*During the last verses DEIRDRE rises from the board
and kneels at NAISI's feet.*]

Deirdre. I cannot go on playing like that woman
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.

Naisi. It is your move. Take up your man again.

Deirdre. Do you remember that first night in the woods
We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,
When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,
Saw leaves above us ? You thought that I still slept,
And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,
Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that 's over, we'll be different ;
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.
And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

[*CONCHUBAR comes to the door.*]

Mus. Children, beware !

Naisi. [*laughing.*] He has taken up my challenge ;
Whether I am a ghost or living man
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.

[*Turns to fetch spear and shield, and sees that
CONCHUBAR has gone.*]

DEIRDRE

First Mus. He came to spy upon you, not to fight.

Naisi. A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.
He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting, but has come too near,
And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.
Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it's topsy-turvey. I upon you.

[*He rushes out after CONCHUBAR.*]

Deirdre. You have a knife there, thrust into your
girdle.

I'd have you give it me.

Mus. No, but I dare not.

Deirdre. No, but you must.

Mus. If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.

Deirdre. [*snatching knife.*] There is no mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge. [*Goes to the door and looks out.*]

Mus. You have taken it,
I did not give it you ; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

Deirdre. The leaves hide all, and there's no way to find
What path to follow. Why is there no sound ?

[*She goes from door to window.*]

Mus. Where would you go ?

Deirdre. To strike a blow for Naisi,
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash ? They have met by this !

Mus. Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much,
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred ?

DEIRDRE

Deirdre. [*going towards them.*] Women, if I die,
If Naisi die this night, how will you praise ?
What words seek out ? for that will stand to you ;
For being but dead we shall have many friends.
All through your wanderings, the doors of kings
Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth
Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this
[*Gives MUSICIAN a bracelet.*
To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

Mus. Have you not been paid servants in love's house
To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors ?
And though you have suffered all for mere love's sake
You'd live your lives again.

Deirdre. Even this last hour.

[*CONCHUBAR enters with dark-faced Men.*]

Conchubar. One woman and two men ; that is a quarrel
That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose
Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.

[*The dark-faced Men drag in NAISI entangled in a net.*

Naisi. I have been taken like a bird or a fish.

Conchubar. He cried 'Beast, beast !' and in a blind-
beast rage

He ran at me and fell into the nets,
But we were careful for your sake, and took him
With all the comeliness that woke desire
Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient—
I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

Deirdre. What do you say ? Have you forgiven him ?

Naisi. He is but mocking us. What's left to say
Now that the seven years' hunt is at an end ?

Deirdre. He never doubted you until I made him,
And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

DEIRDRE

Conchubar. But his young blood is hot,
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly wronged,
Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.
Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of youth
You carried her away; but I've had time
To think it out through all these seven years.
I will show mercy.

Naisi. You have many words.

Conchubar. I will not make a bargain; I but ask
What is already mine.

[*DEIRDRE moves slowly towards CONCHUBAR while
he is speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.*]

You may go free

If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.
The doors are open, and the floors are strewed,
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness,
By races that are germane to the sun,
And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins—
For when they're wounded the wound drips with wine—
Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands
The crown and robe.

Deirdre. Oh, no! Not that, not that.
Ask any other thing but that one thing.

DEIRDRE

Leave me with Naisi. We will go away
Into some country at the ends of the earth.
We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one
That will not praise you if you pardon us.
'He is good, he is good,' they'll say to one another;
'There's nobody like him, for he forgave
Deirdre and Naisi.'

Conchubar. Do you think that I
Shall let you go again, after seven years
Of longing and of planning here and there,
And trafficking with merchants for the stones
That make all sure, and watching my own face
That none might read it?

Deirdre. [to NAISI.] It's better to go with him.
Why should you die when one can bear it all?
My life is over; it's better to obey.
Why should you die? I will not live long, Naisi.
I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living;
Oh no, no, no! You will go far away.
You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi, speak,
And say that it is better that I go.
I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,
For I will take it all upon myself.
Conchubar, I will go.

Naisi. And do you think
That, were I given life at such a price,
I would not cast it from me? O, my eagle!
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night's above?

Deirdre. It's better, Naisi.
It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.
For what am I, to be remembered always?
And there are other women. There was one,

DEIRDRE

The daughter of the King of Leodas ;
I could not sleep because of her. Speak to him ;
Tell it out plain, and make him understand.
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,
Say that I will not.

Naisi. Would I had lost life
Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,
Because you were my wife, or that the worst
Had taken you before this bargaining !
O eagle ! If you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits, and call out,
And you could never come there, being banished.

Deirdre. [*kneeling to CONCHUBAR.*] I would obey, but
cannot. Pardon us.
I know that you are good. I have heard you praised
For giving gifts ; and you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.

[*Unseen by DEIRDRE, NAISI is gagged.*
The very moment these eyes fell on him,
I told him ; I held out my hands to him ;
How could he refuse ? At first he would not—
I am not lying—he remembered you.
What do I say ? My hands ?—No, no, my lips—
For I had pressed my lips upon his lips—
I swear it is not false—my breast to his ;

[*CONCHUBAR motions ; NAISI unseen by DEIRDRE, is
taken behind the curtain.*]
Until I woke the passion that's in all,
And how could he resist ? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong man,

DEIRDRE

Who is not foolish at the council board
Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light
And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
Moves him to mirth, not madness. [*She stands up.*

What am I saying?

You may have need of him, for you have none
Who is so good a sword, or so well loved
Among the common people. You may need him,
And what king knows when the hour of need may come?
You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.
Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
'I am Conchubar—I have no need of him.'
You will cry out for him some day and say,
'If Naisi were but living'——[*She misses NAISI.*] Where
is he?

Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?
Where is he, O, where is he?

[*She staggers over to the MUSICIANS. The EXECUTIONER has come out with sword on which there is blood; CONCHUBAR points to it. The MUSICIANS give a wail.*

Conchubar. The traitor who has carried off my wife
No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre,
For he that called himself your husband's dead.

Deirdre. O, do not touch me. Let me go to him.
[*Pause.*

King Conchubar is right. My husband's dead.
A single woman is of no account,
Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,
The bacon hanging—and King Conchubar's house
All ready, too—I'll to King Conchubar's house.
It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

DEIRDRE

Conchubar. But why are you so calm?
I thought that you would curse me and cry out,
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.

Deirdre. [*laughing.*] You know too much of women
to think so;
Though, if I were less worthy of desire,
I would pretend as much; but, being myself,
It is enough that you were master here.
Although we are so delicately made,
There's something brutal in us, and we are won
By those who can shed blood. It was some woman
That taught you how to woo: but do not touch me:
I shall do all you bid me, but not yet
Because I have to do what's customary.
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,
And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all's in order; and all this I'll do
For Naisi, son of Usna.

Conchubar. It is not fitting.
You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,
And there are plenty that can do these things.

Deirdre. [*motioning CONCHUBAR away.*] No, no. Not
yet. I cannot be your queen,
Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.
When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,
He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
'There's so much owing'.

Conchubar. You are deceiving me.
You long to look upon his face again.
Why should I give you now to a dead man
That took you from a living?

[*He makes a step towards her.*]

DEIRDRE.

Deirdre.

In good time.

You'll stir me to more passion than he could,
And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this :
That I go look upon him that was once
So strong and comely and held his head so high
That women envied me. For I will see him
All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
It's better when you're beside me in your strength,
That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,
And not the shape I loved. Look at him, women.
He heard me pleading to be given up,
Although my lover was still living, and yet
He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell him,
How changeable all women are. How soon
Even the best of lovers is forgot,
When his day's finished.

Conchubar.

No ; but I will trust

The strength that you have praised, and not your purpose.

Deirdre. [*almost with a caress.*] It is so small a gift and
you will grant it

Because it is the first that I have asked.

He has refused. There is no sap in him ;

Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.

He has refused me the first thing I have asked—

Me, me, his wife. I understand him now ;

I know the sort of life I'll have with him ;

But he must drag me to his house by force.

If he refuse [*she laughs*], he shall be mocked of all.

They'll say to one another, 'Look at him

That is so jealous that he lured a man

From over sea, and murdered him, and yet

He trembled at the thought of a dead face !'

[*She has her hand upon curtain.*]

DEIRDRE

Conchubar. How do I know that you have not some knife,
And go to die upon his body?

Deirdre. Have me searched,
If you would make so little of your queen.
It may be that I have a knife hid here
Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slaves
To search me for it. *[Pause.]*

Conchubar. Go to your farewells, queen.

Deirdre. Now strike the wire, and sing to it a while,
Knowing that all is happy, and that you know
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,
And by what man, and lie close up to him,
For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-crow.
[She goes behind the curtain.]

First Mus. They are gone, they are gone. The proud
may lie by the proud.

Sec. Mus. Though we were bidden to sing, cry nothing
loud.

First Mus. They are gone, they are gone.

Sec. Mus. Whispering were enough.

First Mus. Into the secret wilderness of their love.

Sec. Mus. A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said?

First Mus. Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.

*[Shouting outside. FERGUS enters. Many men with
scythes and sickles and torches gather about the doors.
The house is lit with the glare of their torches.]*

Fergus. Where's Naisi, son of Usna, and his queen?
I and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.

Conchubar. You have come too late.
I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine;
She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.

DEIRDRE

I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull
This apple among the winds. Open the curtain,
That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

[*The curtain is drawn back. The MUSICIANS begin
to keen with low voices.*]

No, no; I'll not believe it. She is not dead—
She cannot have escaped a second time!

Fergus. King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon her.
What's this but empty cage and tangled wire,
Now the bird's gone? but I'll not have you touch it.

Conchubar. You are all traitors, all against me—all.
And she has deceived me for a second time.
And every common man can keep his wife,
But not the King.

[*Loud shouting outside: 'Death to Conchubar!'
'Where is Naisi?' etc. The dark-skinned men
gather round CONCHUBAR and draw their swords;
but he motions them away.*]

I have no need of weapons,
There's not a traitor that dare stop my way.
Howl, if you will; but I, being king, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.

THE END.

2
THE KING'S THRESHOLD

BY

W. B. YEATS



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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

KING GUAIRE

SEANCHAN (*pronounced* SHANAHAN)

HIS PUPILS

THE MAYOR OF KINVARA

TWO CRIPPLES

BRIAN (*an old servant*)

THE LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

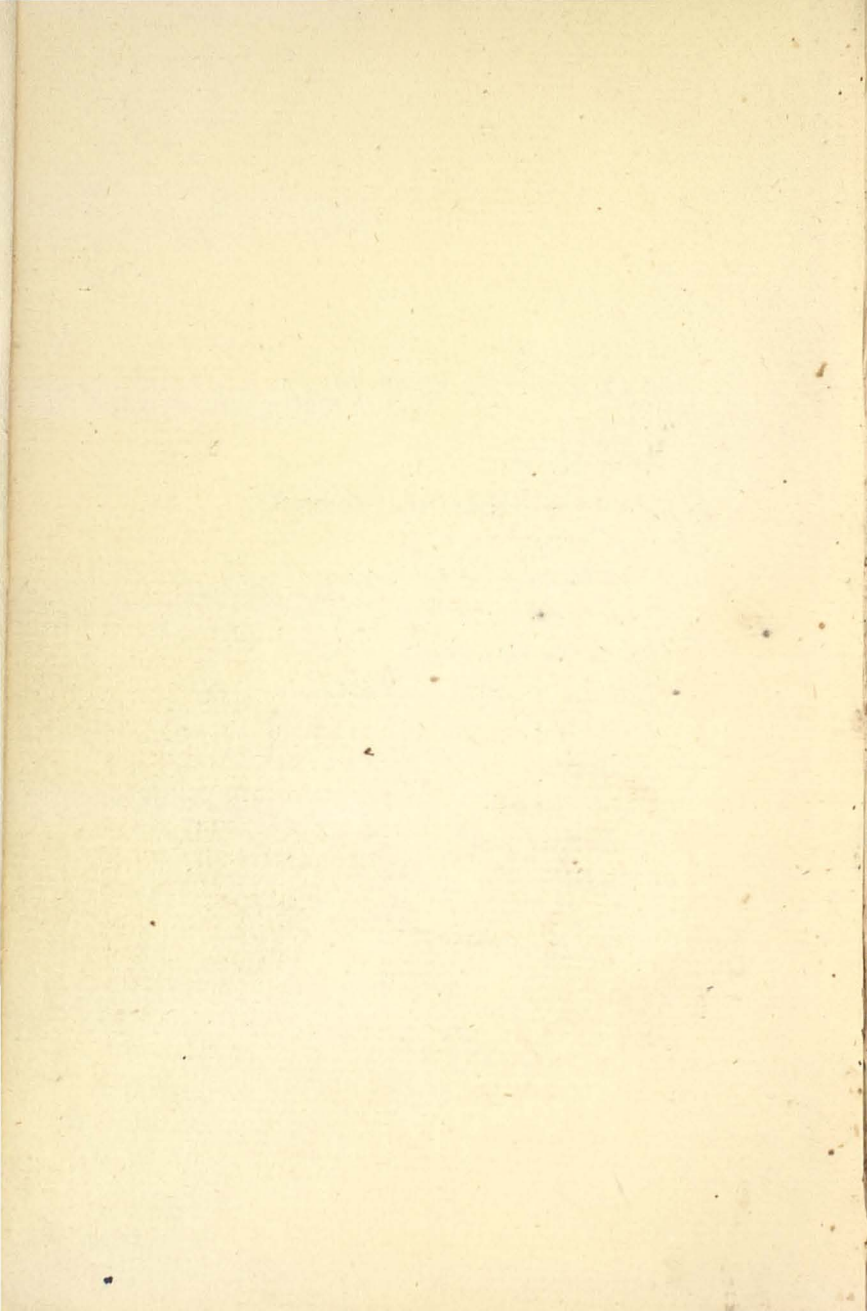
A SOLDIER

A MONK

COURT LADIES

TWO PRINCESSES

FEDELM





THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

PROLOGUE.*

An OLD MAN with a red dressing-gown, red slippers and red night-cap, holding a brass candlestick with a guttering candle in it, comes on from side of stage and goes in front of the dull green curtain.

Old Man. I've got to speak the prologue. [*He shuffles on a few steps.*] My nephew, who is one of the play actors, came to me, and I in my bed, and my prayers said, and the candle put out, and he told me there were so many characters in this new play, that all the company were in it, whether they had been long or short at the business, and that there wasn't one left to speak the prologue. Wait a bit, there's a draught here. [*He pulls the curtain closer together.*] That's better. And that's why I am here, and maybe I'm a fool for my pains.

And my nephew said, there are a good many plays to be played for you, some to-night and some on other nights through the winter, and the most of them are simple enough, and tell out their story to the end. But as to the big play you are to see to-night, my nephew taught me to say what the poet had taught him to say about it. [*Puts down candlestick and puts right finger on left thumb.*] First, he who told the story of Seanchan on King Guaire's threshold long ago in the old books

* Written for the first production of *The King's Threshold* in Dublin, but not used, as, owing to the smallness of the company, nobody could be spared to speak it.—W.B.Y., 1904.

told it wrongly, for he was a friend of the king, or maybe afraid of the king, and so he put the king in the right. But he that tells the story now, being a poet, has put the poet in the right.

And then [*touches other finger*] I am to say: Some think it would be a finer tale if Seanchan had died at the end of it, and the king had the guilt at his door, for that might have served the poet's cause better in the end. But that is not true, for if he that is in the story but a shadow and an image of poetry had not risen up from the death that threatened him, the ending would not have been true and joyful enough to be put into the voices of players and proclaimed in the mouths of trumpets, and poetry would have been badly served.

[*He takes up the candlestick again.*]

And as to what happened Seanchan after, my nephew told me he didn't know, and the poet didn't know, and it's likely there's nobody that knows. But my nephew thinks he never sat down at the king's table again, after the way he had been treated, but that he went to some quiet green place in the hills with Fedelm, his sweetheart, where the poor people made much of him because he was wise, and where he made songs and poems, and it's likely enough he made some of the old songs and the old poems the poor people on the hill-sides are saying and singing to-day. [*A trumpet-blast.*]

Well, it's time for me to be going. That trumpet means that the curtain is going to rise, and after a while the stage there will be filled up with great ladies and great gentlemen, and poets, and a king with a crown on him, and all of them as high up in themselves with the pride of their youth and their strength and their fine clothes as if there was no such thing in the world as cold in the

shoulders, and speckled shins, and the pains in the bones and the stiffness in the joints that make an old man that has the whole load of the world on him ready for his bed.

[He begins to shuffle away, and then stops.]

And it would be better for me, that nephew of mine to be thinking less of his play-acting, and to have remembered to boil down the knap-weed with a bit of threepenny sugar, for me to be wetting my throat with now and again through the night, and drinking a sup to ease the pains in my bones.

[He goes out at side of stage.]

Steps before the Palace of KING GUAIRE at Gort. A table in front of steps at one side, with food on it, and a bench by table. SEANCHAN lying on steps. PUPILS before steps. KING on the upper step before a curtained door.

King. I welcome you that have the mastery
Of the two kinds of Music: the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instruments,
And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully, that all the Art's but Speech
Delighted with its own music; and you that carry
The long twisted horn, and understand
The heady notes that, being without words,
Can hurry beyond Time and Fate and Change.
For the high angels that drive the horse of Time—
The golden one by day, by night the silver—
Are not more welcome to one that loves the world
For some fair woman's sake.

I have called you hither
To save the life of your great master, Seanchan,
For all day long it has flamed up or flickered
To the fast cooling hearth.

Oldest Pupil. When did he sicken?
Is it a fever that is wasting him?

King. No fever or sickness. He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.

Oldest Pupil. My head whirls round;
I do not know what I am to think or say.
I owe you all obedience, and yet
How can I give it, when the man I have loved,
More than all others, thinks that he is wronged
So bitterly, that he will starve and die
Rather than bear it? Is there any man
Will throw his life away for a light issue?

King. It is but fitting that you take his side
Until you understand how light an issue
Has put us by the ears. Three days ago
I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Who long had thought it against their dignity
For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At my own table. When the meal was spread
I ordered Seanchan to a lower table;
And when he pleaded for the poets' right,

Established at the establishment of the world,
I said that I was King, and that all rights
Had their original fountain in some king,
And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
Where there was the most honour. My courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Shouted approval; and amid that noise
Seanchan went out, and from that hour to this
Although there is good food and drink beside him,
Has eaten nothing.

Oldest Pupil. I can breathe again.
You have taken a great burden from my mind,
For that old custom's not worth dying for.

King. Persuade him to eat or drink. Till yesterday
I thought that hunger and weakness had been enough;
But finding them too trifling and too light
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave,
I called you hither, and all my hope's in you,
And certain of his neighbours and good friends
That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King. Because if I gave way,
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it may be
The very throne be shaken.

Oldest Pupil. I will persuade him.
Your words had been enough persuasion, King;
But being lost in sleep or reverie,
He cannot hear them.

King. Make him eat or drink.
Nor is it all because of my good name
I'd have him do it, for he is a man

That might well hit the fancy of a king,
 Banished out of his country, or a woman's
 Or any other's that can judge a man
 For what he is. But I that sit a throne,
 And take my measure from the needs of the State,
 Call his wild thought that overruns the measure,
 Making words more than deeds, and his proud will
 That would unsettle all, most mischievous,
 And he himself a most mischievous man.

[He turns to go, and then returns again.]

Promise a house with grass and tillage land,
 An annual payment, jewels and silken ware,
 Or anything but that old right of the poets.

[He goes into palace.]

Oldest Pupil. The King did wrong to abrogate our
 right ;

But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,
 Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan ;
 Waken out of your dream and look at us,
 Who have ridden under the moon and all the day,
 Until the moon has all but come again,
 That we might be beside you.

Seanchan. *[Half turning round, leaning on his elbow, and speaking as if in a dream.]* I was but now

In Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,
 With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast flesh
 Rose round me, and I saw the roasting spits ;
 And then the dream was broken, and I saw
 Grania dividing salmon by a stream.

Oldest Pupil. Hunger has made you dream of roast-
 ing flesh ;

And though I all but weep to think of it,
 The hunger of the crane, that starves himself

At the full moon because he is afraid
Of his own shadow and the glittering water,
Seems to me little more fantastical
Than this of yours.

Seanchan. Why, that's the very truth.
It is as though the moon changed everything—
Myself and all that I can hear and see;
For when the heavy body has grown weak,
There's nothing that can tether the wild mind
That, being moonstruck and fantastical,
Goes where it fancies. I had even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the words
Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by.

Oldest Pupil. I am your oldest pupil, Seanchan;
The one that has been with you many years—
So many, that you said at Candlemas
That I had almost done with school, and knew
All but all that poets understand.

Seanchan. My oldest pupil? No, that cannot be,
For it is some one of the courtly crowds
That have been round about me from sunrise,
And I am tricked by dreams; but I'll refute them.
At Candlemas I bid that pupil tell me
Why poetry is honoured, wishing to know
If he had any weighty argument
For distant countries and strange, churlish kings.
What did he answer?

Oldest Pupil. I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. But why must I stand here,

Repeating an old lesson, while you starve?

Seanchan. Tell on, for I begin to know the voice.
What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish?

Oldest Pupil. If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman,
That looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

Seanchan. But that's not all:
For when I asked you how a man should guard
Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,
Comparing them to venerable things
God gave to men before he gave them wheat.

Oldest Pupil. I answered—and the word was half
your own—
That he should guard them as the Men of Dea
Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King guards
His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse
The jewel that is underneath his horn,
Pouring out life for it as one pours out
Sweet heady wine. . . . But now I understand;
You would refute me out of my own mouth;
And yet a place at table, near the King,
Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.
How does so light a thing touch poetry?

[SEANCHAN is now sitting up. He still looks dreamily
in front of him.]

Seanchan. At Candlemas you called this poetry
One of the fragile, mighty things of God,
That die at an insult.

Oldest Pupil. [To other PUPILS.] Give me some true
answer,

For on that day we spoke about the Court,
And said that all that was insulted there
The world insulted, for the Courtly life,
Being the first comely child of the world,
Is the world's model. How shall I answer him?
Can you not give me some true argument?
I will not tempt him with a lying one.

Youngest Pupil. Oh, tell him that the lovers of his music
Have need of him.

Seanchan. But I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick o' time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have voices,
Even in anger, like the strings of harps;
And how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle?

Youngest Pupil. [*Throwing himself at SEANCHAN's feet.*]

Why did you take me from my father's fields?
If you would leave me now, what shall I love?
Where shall I go? What shall I set my hand to?
And why have you put music in my ears,
If you would send me to the clattering houses?
I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
For how could I sing verses or make music
With none to praise me, and a broken heart?

Seanchan. What was it that the poets promised you,
If it was not their sorrow? Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are not you the youngest of my scholars?
And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.

And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
On these bare steps.

Youngest Pupil. O master, do not die!

Oldest Pupil. Trouble him with no useless argument.
Be silent! There is nothing we can do
Except find out the King and kneel to him,
And beg our ancient right.

For here are some
To say whatever we could say and more,
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that is no use.

[*Raises YOUNGEST PUPIL.*

If it seem well that we beseech the King,
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the stones
In silence, and come with me silently.
Come with slow footfalls, and bow all your heads,
For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.

[*They lay harps and trumpets down one by one, and then go out very solemnly and slowly, following one another. Enter MAYOR, TWO CRIPPLES, and BRIAN, an old servant. The MAYOR, who has been heard, before he came upon the stage, muttering 'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' etc., crosses in front of SEANCHAN to the other side of the steps. BRIAN takes food out of basket. The CRIPPLES are watching the basket. The MAYOR has an Ogham stick in his hand.*

Mayor. [*As he crosses.*] 'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsmen,' 'Grazing land.'

Those are the words I have to keep in mind—
'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsmen,' 'Grazing land.'
I have the words. They are all upon the Ogham.
'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsmen,' 'Grazing land.'
But what's their order?

[*He keeps muttering over his speech during what follows.*

First Cripple. The King were rightly served
 If Seanchan drove his good luck away.
 What 's there about a king, that 's in the world
 From birth to burial like another man,
 That he should change old customs, that were in it
 As long as ever the world has been a world?

Second Cripple. If I were king I would not meddle
 with him,
 For there is something queer about a poet.
 I knew of one that would be making rhyme
 Under a thorn at crossing of three roads.
 He was as ragged as ourselves, and yet
 He was no sooner dead than every thorn tree
 From Inchy to Kiltartan withered away.

First Cripple. The King is but a fool!

Mayor. I am getting ready,

First Cripple. A poet has power from beyond the world,
 That he may set our thoughts upon old times,
 And lucky queens and little holy fish
 That rise up every seventh year——

Mayor. Hush! hush!

First Cripple. To cure the crippled.

Mayor. I am half ready now.

Brian. There 's not a mischief I'd begrudge the King
 If it were any other——

Mayor. Hush! I am ready.

Brian. That died to get it. I have brought out the
 food,

And if my master will not eat of it,
 I'll home and get provision for his wake,
 For that 's no great way off. Well, have your say,
 But don't be long about it.

Mayor. [*Goes close to SEANCHAN.*] Chief Poet of Ireland,

I am the Mayor of your own town Kinvara,
 And I am come to tell you that the news
 Of this great trouble with the King of Gort
 Has plunged us in deep sorrow—part for you,
 Our honoured townsman, part for our good town.

[Begins to hesitate; scratching his head.]

But what comes now? Something about the King.

Brian. Get on! get on! The food is all set out.

Mayor. Don't hurry me.

First Cripple. Give us a taste of it.

He'll not begrudge it.

Second Cripple. Let them that have their limbs
 Starve if they will. We have to keep in mind
 The stomach God has left us.

Mayor. Hush! I have it!

The King was said to be most friendly to us,
 And we have reason, as you'll recollect,
 For thinking that he was about to give
 Those grazing lands inland we so much need,
 Being pinched between the water and the stones.
 Our mowers mow with knives between the stones;
 The sea washes the meadows. You know well
 We have asked nothing but what's reasonable.

Seanchan. Reason in plenty. Yellowy white hair,
 A hollow face, and not too many teeth.
 How comes it he has been so long in the world
 And not found Reason out?

*[While saying this he has turned half round. He hardly
 looks at the MAYOR.]*

Brian. *[Trying to pull MAYOR away.]* What good is
 there

In telling him what he has heard all day!
 I will set food before him.

Mayor. [*Shoving BRIAN away.*] Don't hurry me!
It's small respect you're showing to the town!
Get farther off! [*To SEANCHAN.*] We would not have
you think,

Weighty as these considerations are,
That they have been as weighty in our minds
As our desire that one we take much pride in,
A man that's been an honour to our town,
Should live and prosper; therefore we beseech you
To give way in a matter of no moment,
A matter of mere sentiment—a trifle—
That we may always keep our pride in you.

[*He finishes this speech with a pompous air, motions to
BRIAN to bring the food to SEANCHAN, and sits on seat.*

Brian. Master, master, eat this! It's not king's food,
That's cooked for everybody and nobody.
Here's barley-bread out of your father's oven,
And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse, your honour;
It's wholesome, and has the good taste of the sea.

[*Takes dulse in one hand and bread in other and presses
them into SEANCHAN's hands. SEANCHAN shows by
his movement his different feeling to BRIAN.*

First Cripple. He has taken it and there'll be nothing
left!

Second Cripple. Nothing at all, he wanted his own sort.
What's honey to a cat, corn to a dog,
Or a green apple to a ghost in a churchyard?

Seanchan. [*Pressing food back into BRIAN's hands.*] Eat
it yourself, for you have come a journey,
And it may be eat nothing on the way.

Brian. How could I eat it, and your honour starving!
It is your father sends it, and he cried
Because the stiffness that is in his bones

Prevented him from coming, and bid me tell you
 That he is old, that he has need of you,
 And that the people will be pointing at him,
 And he not able to lift up his head,
 If you should turn the King's favour away;
 And he adds to it, that he cared you well,
 And you in your young age, and that it's right
 That you should care him now.

Seanchan. [*Who is now interested.*] And is that all?
 What did my mother say?

Brian. She gave no message;
 For when they told her you had it in mind to starve,
 Or get again the ancient right of the poets,
 She said: 'No message can do any good.
 He will not send the answer that you want.
 We cannot change him.' And she went indoors,
 Lay down upon the bed, and turned her face
 Out of the light. And thereupon your father
 Said: 'Tell him that his mother sends no message,
 Albeit broken down and miserable.' [*A pause.*]
 Here's a pigeon's egg from Duras, and these others
 Were laid by your own hens.

Seanchan. She has sent no message.
 Our mothers know us; they know us to the bone.
 They knew us before birth, and that is why
 They know us even better than the sweethearts
 Upon whose breasts we have lain.

Go quickly! Go
 And tell them that my mother was in the right.
 There is no answer. Go and tell them that.
 Go tell them that she knew me.

Mayor. What is he saying?
 I never understood a poet's talk

More than the baa of a sheep!

[Comes over from seat. SEANCHAN turns away.

You have not heard,

It may be, having been so much away,
How many of the cattle died last winter
From lacking grass, and that there was much sickness
Because the poor have nothing but salt fish
To live on through the winter?

Brian.

Get away,

And leave the place to me! It's my turn now,
For your sack's empty!

Mayor.

Is it 'get away'!

Is that the way I'm to be spoken to!
Am I not Mayor? Amn't I authority?
Amn't I in the King's place? Answer me that!

Brian. Then show the people what a king is like:
Pull down old merings and root custom up,
Whitewash the dunghills, fatten hogs and geese,
Hang your gold chain about an ass's neck,
And burn the blessed thorn trees out of the fields,
And drive what's comely away!

Mayor.

Holy Saint Coleman!

First Cripple. Fine talk! fine talk! What else does
the King do?

He fattens hogs and drives the poet away!

Second Cripple. He starves the song-maker!

First Cripple.

He fattens geese!

Mayor. How dare you take his name into your mouth!
How dare you lift your voice against the King!
What would we be without him?

Brian.

Why do you praise him?

I will have nobody speak well of him,
Or any other king that robs my master.

Mayor. And had he not the right to? and the right
To strike your master's head off, being the King,
Or yours or mine? I say, 'Long live the King!
Because he does not take our heads from us.'
Call out, 'Long life to him!'

Brian. Call out for him!

[Speaking at same time with MAYOR.]

There's nobody 'll call out for him,
But smiths will turn their anvils,
The millers turn their wheels,
The farmers turn their churns,
The witches turn their thumbs,
Till he be broken and splintered into pieces.

Mayor. [At same time with BRIAN.] He might, if he'd
a mind to it,

Be digging out our tongues,
Or dragging out our hair,
Or bleaching us like calves,
Or weaning us like lambs,
But for the kindness and the softness that is in him.

[They gasp for breath.]

First Cripple. I'll curse him till I drop!

*[Speaking at same time as SECOND CRIPPLE and MAYOR
and BRIAN, who have begun again.]*

The curse of the poor be upon him,
The curse of the widows upon him,
The curse of the children upon him,
The curse of the bishops upon him,
Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom!

*Second Cripple. [Speaking at same time as FIRST
CRIPPLE and MAYOR and BRIAN.]*

The curse of wrinkles be upon him!
Wrinkles where his eyes are,

Wrinkles where his nose is,
Wrinkles where his mouth is,
And a little old devil looking out of every wrinkle!

Brian. [*Speaking at same time with MAYOR and CRIPPLES.*] And nobody will sing for him,
And nobody will hunt for him,
And nobody will fish for him,
And nobody will pray for him,
But ever and always curse him and abuse him.

Mayor. [*Speaking at same time with CRIPPLES and BRIAN.*] What good is in a poet?
Has he money in a stocking,
Or cider in the cellar,
Or flitches in the chimney,
Or anything anywhere but his own idleness?

[*BRIAN seizes MAYOR.*]

Mayor. Help! help! Am I not in authority?

Brian. That's how I'll shout for the King!

Mayor. Help! help! Am I not in the King's place?

Brian. I'll teach him to be kind to the poor!

Mayor. Help! help! Wait till we are in Kinvara!

First Cripple. [*Beating MAYOR on the legs with crutch.*]

I'll shake the royalty out of his legs!

Second Cripple. [*Burying his nails in MAYOR's face.*]

I'll scumble the ermine out of his skin!

[*The CHAMBERLAIN comes down steps shouting,*
‘Silence! silence! silence!’]

Chamberlain. How dare you make this uproar at the
doors,
Deafening the very greatest in the land,
As if the farmyards and the rookeries
Had all been emptied!

First Cripple. It is the Chamberlain.

[*CRIPPLES go out.*]

Chamberlain. Pick up the litter there, and get you gone!
Be quick about it! Have you no respect
For this worn stair, this all but sacred door,
Where suppliants and tributary kings
Have passed, and the world's glory knelt in silence?
Have you no reverence for what all other men
Hold honourable?

Brian. If I might speak my mind,
I'd say the King would have his luck again
If he would let my master have his rights.

Chamberlain. Pick up your litter! Take your noise
away!
Make haste, and get the clapper from the bell!
Brian. [*Putting last of food into basket.*] What do the
great and powerful care for rights
That have no armies!

[*CHAMBERLAIN begins shoving them out with his staff.*

Mayor. My lord, I am not to blame.
I'm the King's man, and they attacked me for it.

Brian. We have our prayers, our curses and our
prayers,
And we can give a great name or a bad one.

[*MAYOR is shoving BRIAN out before him with one hand.*

*He keeps his face to CHAMBERLAIN, and keeps bow-
ing. The CHAMBERLAIN shoves him with his staff.*

Mayor. We could not make the poet eat, my lord.

[*CHAMBERLAIN shoves him with his staff.*

Much honoured [*is shoved again*—honoured to speak
with you, my lord;

But I'll go find the girl that he's to marry.

She's coming, but I'll hurry her, my lord.

Between ourselves, my lord [*is shoved again*], she is a
great coaxer.

Much honoured, my lord. Oh, she's the girl to do it;
 For when the intellect is out, my lord,
 Nobody but a woman's any good. [*Is shoved again.*
 Much honoured, my lord [*is shoved again*], much
 honoured, much honoured!

[*Is shoved out, shoving BRIAN out before him.*
[All through this scene, from the outset of the quarrel,
SEANCHAN has kept his face turned away, or hidden
in his cloak. While the CHAMBERLAIN has been
speaking, the SOLDIER and the MONK have come
out of the palace. The MONK stands on top of steps
at one side, SOLDIER a little down steps at the other
side. COURT LADIES are seen at opening in the
palace curtain behind SOLDIER. CHAMBERLAIN is
in the centre.

Chamberlain. [*To SEANCHAN.*] Well, you must be
 contented, for your work
 Has roused the common sort against the King,
 And stolen his authority. The State
 Is like some orderly and reverend house,
 Wherein the master, being dead of a sudden,
 The servants quarrel where they have a mind to,
 And pilfer here and there.

[*Pause, finding that SEANCHAN does not answer.*

How many days
 Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,
 And the King's nobles, and myself, and all,
 Who'd gladly be your friends, if you would let them?
 [*Going near to MONK.*

If you would try, you might persuade him, father.
 I cannot make him answer me, and yet
 If fitting hands would offer him the food,
 He might accept it.

Monk. Certainly I will not.
I've made too many homilies, wherein
The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished
Who will obey?

Chamberlain. [*Going to other side towards SOLDIER.*]
If you would speak to him,
You might not find persuasion difficult,
With all the devils of hunger helping you.

Soldier. I will not interfere, and if he starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance.

Chamberlain. One of us must do it.
It might be, if you'd reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion
That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or the King's house, we'd be as little thought of
As summer linen when the winter's come.

First Girl. But it would be the greater compliment
If Peter 'd do it.

Second Girl. Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat; he's such a bag of bones!

Soldier. I'll never trust a woman's word again!
There's nobody that was so loud against him
When he was at the table; now the wind's changed,
And you that could not bear his speech or his silence,
Would have him there in his old place again;
I do believe you would, but I won't help you.

Second Girl. Why will you be so hard upon us, Peter?
You know we have turned the common sort against us.
And he looks miserable.

First Girl. We cannot dance,

Because no harper will pluck a string for us.

Second Girl. I cannot sleep with thinking of his face.

First Girl. And I love dancing more than anything.

Second Girl. Do not be hard on us ; but yesterday
A woman in the road threw stones at me.
You would not have me stoned ?

First Girl. May I not dance ?

Soldier. I will do nothing. You have put him out,
And now that he is out—well, leave him out.

First Girl. Do it for my sake, Peter.

Second Girl. And for mine.

*[Each girl as she speaks takes PETER's hand with her
right hand, stroking down his arm with her left.
While SECOND GIRL is stroking his arm, FIRST
GIRL leaves go and gives him the dish.]*

Soldier. Well, well ; but not your way.

[To SEANCHAN.] Here's meat for you.

It has been carried from too good a table
For men like you, and I am offering it
Because these women have made a fool of me.

[A pause.]
You mean to starve ? You will have none of it ?

I'll leave it there, where you can sniff the savour.

Snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself !

But if I were the King, I'd make you do it

With wisps of lighted straw.

Seanchan. You have rightly named me.

I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns

That are upon the edge of those great waters

Where all things vanish away, and I have heard

Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.

I am out of life ; I am rolled up, and yet,

Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll

For you, King's dog! Go to the King, your master.
Crouch down and wag your tail, for it may be
He has nothing now against you, and I think
The stripes of your last beating are all healed.

[*The SOLDIER has drawn his sword.*

Chamberlain. [*Striking up sword.*] Put up your sword,
sir; put it up, I say!

The common sort would tear you into pieces
If you but touched him.

Soldier. If he's to be flattered,
Petted, cajoled, and dandled into humour,
We might as well have left him at the table.

[*Goes to one side sheathing sword.*

Seanchan. You must need keep your patience yet
awhile,

For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air
To swallow before I have grown to be as civil
As any other dust.

Chamberlain. You wrong us, Seanchan.
There is none here but holds you in respect;
And if you'd only eat out of this dish,
The King would show how much he honours you.

[*Bowing and smiling.*

Who could imagine you'd so take to heart
Being put from the high table? I am certain
That you, if you will only think it over,
Will understand that it is men of law,
Leaders of the King's armies, and the like,
That should sit there.

Seanchan. Somebody has deceived you,
Or maybe it was your own eyes that lied,
In making it appear that I was driven
From the King's table. You have driven away

The images of them that weave a dance
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.

Chamberlain. You mean we have driven poetry away.
But that's not altogether true, for I,
As you should know, have written poetry.
And often when the table has been cleared,
And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
And I repeat it him. My poetry
Is not to be compared with yours; but still,
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured—
In some measure.

Seanchan. If you are a poet,
Cry out that the King's money would not buy,
Nor the high circle consecrate his head,
If poets had never christened gold, and even
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey-faced metal,
Precious; and cry out that none alive
Would ride among the arrows with high heart,
Or scatter with an open hand, had not
Our heady craft commended wasteful virtues.
And when that story's finished, shake your coat
Where little jewels gleam on it, and say,
A herdsman, sitting where the pigs had trampled,
Made up a song about enchanted kings,
Who were so finely dressed, one fancied them
All fiery, and women by the churn
And children by the hearth caught up the song
And murmured it, until the tailors heard it.

Chamberlain. If you would but eat something you'd
find out
That you have had these thoughts from lack of food,
For hunger makes us feverish.

Seanchan.

Cry aloud,

That when we are driven out we come again
Like a great wind that runs out of the waste
To blow the tables flat ; and thereupon
Lie down upon the threshold till the King
Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.

Monk. You cannot shake him. I will to the King,
And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die.
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him.

First Girl. 'Twas you that stirred it up.
You stirred it up that you might spoil our dancing.
Why shouldn't we have dancing? We're not in Lent.
Yet nobody will pipe or play to us ;
And they will never do it if he die.
And that is why you are going.

Monk. What folly 's this?

First Girl. Well, if you did not do it, speak to him—
Use your authority ; make him obey you.
What harm is there in dancing?

Monk. Hush ! begone !
Go to the fields and watch the hurley players,
Or any other place you have a mind to.
This is not woman's work.

First Girl. Come ! let's away !
We can do nothing here.

Monk. The pride of the poets !
Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise,
And King and Church neglected. Seanchan,
I'll take my leave, for you are perishing
Like all that let the wanton imagination
Carry them where it will, and it's not likely

I'll look upon your living face again.

Seanchan. Come nearer, nearer!

Monk. Have you some last wish?

Seanchan. Stoop down, for I would whisper it in your ear.

Has that wild God of your's, that was so wild
When you'd but lately taken the King's pay,
Grown any tamer? He gave you all much trouble.

Monk. Let go my habit!

Seanchan. Have you persuaded him
To chirp between two dishes when the King
Sits down to table?

Monk. Let go my habit, sir!

[*Crosses to centre of stage.*]

Seanchan. And maybe he has learned to sing quite softly

Because loud singing would disturb the King,
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends
After the table has been cleared. Not yet!

[*SEANCHAN has been dragged some feet clinging to the MONK's habit.*]

You did not think that hands so full of hunger
Could hold you tightly. They are not civil yet.
I'd know if you have taught him to eat bread
From the King's hand, and perch upon his finger.
I think he perches on the King's strong hand.
But it may be that he is still too wild.
You must not weary in your work; a king
Is often weary, and he needs a God
To be a comfort to him.

[*The MONK plucks his habit away and goes into palace.*
SEANCHAN holds up his hand as if a bird perched upon it. He pretends to stroke the bird.

A little God,

With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.

First Girl. There will be no more dancing in our time,
For nobody will play the harp or the fiddle.
Let us away, for we cannot amend it,
And watch the hurley.

Second Girl. Hush! he is looking at us.

Seanchan. Yes, yes, go the hurley, go to the hurley,
Go to the hurley! Gather up your skirts—
Run quickly! You can remember many love songs;
I know it by the light that's in your eyes—
But you'll forget them. You're fair to look upon.
Your feet delight in dancing, and your mouths
In the slow smiling that awakens love.
The mothers that have borne you mated rightly.
They'd little ears as thirsty as your ears
For many love songs. Go to the young men.
Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?
Go from me! Here is nothing for your eyes.
But it is I that am singing you away—
Singing you to the two young men.

[*The Two Young Princesses come out of palace.*
While he has been speaking the GIRLS have shrunk
back holding each other's hands.

First Girl. Be quiet!

Look who it is has come out of the house.
Princesses, we are for the hurling field.
Will you go there?

First Princess. We will go with you, Aileen.
But we must have some words with Seanchan,
For we have come to make him eat and drink.

Chamberlain. I will hold out the dish and cup for him
While you are speaking to him of his folly,

If you desire it, Princess. [*He has taken dish and cup.*]

First Princess. No, Finula
Will carry him the dish and I the cup.

We'll offer them ourselves. [*They take cup and dish.*]

First Girl. They are so gracious ;
The dear little Princesses are so gracious.

[*PRINCESS holds out her hand for SEANCHAN to kiss it.*]

He does not move.

Although she is holding out her hand to him,
He will not kiss it.

First Princess. My father bids us say
That, though he cannot have you at his table,
You may ask any other thing you like
And he will give it you. We carry you
With our own hands a dish and cup of wine.

First Girl. Oh, look ! he has taken it ! He has taken it !
The dear Princesses ! I have always said
That nobody could refuse them anything.

[*SEANCHAN takes the cup in one hand. In the other
he holds for a moment the hand of the PRINCESS.*]

Seanchan. Oh long, soft fingers and pale finger-tips,
Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand !
Oh, you have fair white hands, for it is certain
There is uncommon whiteness in these hands.
But there is something comes into my mind,
Princess. A little while before your birth,
I saw your mother sitting by the road
In a high chair ; and when a leper passed,
She pointed him the way into the town.
He lifted up his hand and blessed her hand—
I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your hands ;
I will find out if they are contaminated,
For it has come into my thoughts that maybe

The King has sent me food and drink by hands
That are contaminated. I would see all your hands.
You've eyes of dancers; but hold out your hands,
For it may be there are none sound among you.

[*The PRINCESSES have shrunk back in terror.*

First Princess. He has called us lepers.

[*SOLDIER draws sword.*

Chamberlain.

He's out of his mind,

And does not know the meaning of what he said.

Seanchan. [*Standing up.*] There's no sound hand
among you—no sound hand.

Away with you! away with all of you!

You are all lepers! There is leprosy

Among the plates and dishes that you have carried.

And wherefore have you brought me leper's wine?

[*He flings the contents of the cup in their faces.*

There, there! I have given it to you again. And now
Begone, or I will give my curse to you.

You have the leper's blessing, but you think

Maybe the bread will something lack in savour

Unless you mix my curse into the dough.

[*They go out hurriedly in all directions. SEANCHAN is
staggering in the middle of the stage.*

Where did I say the leprosy had come from?

I said it came out of a leper's hand, [*Enter CRIPPLES.*

And that he walked the highway. But that's folly,

For he was walking up there in the sky.

And there he is even now, with his white hand

Thrust out of the blue air, and blessing them

With leprosy.

First Cripple.

He's pointing at the moon

That's coming out up yonder, and he calls it

Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

Seanchan. He's holding up his hand above them all—
King, noblemen, princesses—blessing all.

Who could imagine he'd have so much patience?

First Cripple. [*Clutching the other CRIPPLE.*] Come
out of this!

Second Cripple. [*Pointing to food.*] If you don't need
it, sir,

May we not carry some of it away?

[*They cross towards food and pass in front of SEANCHAN.*]

Seanchan. Who's speaking? Who are you?

First Cripple. Come out of this!

Second Cripple. Have pity on us, that must beg our
bread

From table to table throughout the entire world,
And yet be hungry.

Seanchan. But why were you born crooked?
What bad poet did your mothers listen to
That you were born so crooked?

Cripple. Come away!

Maybe he's cursed the food, and it might kill us.

Other Cripple. Yes, better come away. [*They go out.*]

Seanchan. [*Staggering, and speaking wearily.*]

He has great strength
And great patience to hold his right hand there,
Uplifted, and not wavering about.

He is much stronger than I am, much stronger.

[*Sinks down on steps. Enter MAYOR and FEDELM.*]

Fedelm. [*Her finger on her lips.*] Say nothing! I will
get him out of this

Before I have said a word of food and drink;
For while he is on this threshold and can hear,
It may be, the voices that made mock of him,

He would not listen. I'd be alone with him.

[MAYOR goes out. FEDELM goes to SEANCHAN and kneels before him.

Seanchan! Seanchan! [He remains looking into the sky.
Can you not hear me, Seanchan?

It is myself.

[He looks at her, dreamily at first, then takes her hand.

Seanchan. Is this your hand, Fedelm?

I have been looking at another hand

That is up yonder.

Fedelm. I have come for you.

Seanchan. Fedelm, I did not know that you were here.

Fedelm. And can you not remember that I promised
That I would come and take you home with me
When I'd the harvest in? And now I've come,
And you must come away, and come on the instant.

Seanchan. Yes, I will come. But is the harvest in?
The air has got a summer taste in it.

Fedelm. But is not the wild middle of the summer
A better time to marry? Come with me now!

Seanchan. [Seizing her by both wrists.] Who taught
you that? For it's a certainty,
Although I never knew it till last night,
That marriage, because it is the height of life,
Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake:
There had come a frenzy into the light of the stars,
And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry
Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.
But some that are within there made a noise,
And frightened them away.

Fedelm. Come with me now!
We have far to go, and daylight 's running out.

Seanchan. The stars had come so near me that I caught
Their singing. It was praise of that great race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white-bodied,
With a high head, and open hand, and how,
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the world.

Fedelm. But you will tell me all about their songs
When we're at home. You have need of rest and care,
And I can give them you when we're at home.
And therefore let us hurry, and get us home.

Seanchan. It's certain that there is some trouble
here,
Although it's gone out of my memory.
And I would get away from it. Give me your help.

[*Trying to rise.*
But why are not my pupils here to help me?
Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.

Fedelm. Come with me now, and I will send for them,
For I have a great room that 's full of beds
I can make ready; and there is a smooth lawn
Where they can play at hurley and sing poems
Under an apple-tree.

Seanchan. I know that place:
An apple-tree, and a smooth level lawn
Where the young men can sway their hurley sticks.

[*Sings.*]

The four rivers that run there,
Through well-mown level ground,
Have come out of a blessed well
That is all bound and wound

By the great roots of an apple,
 And all the fowl of the air
 Have gathered in the wide branches
 And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes with her hands.*

Fedelm. No, there are not four rivers, and those
 rhymes

Praise Adam's paradise.

Seanchan.

I can remember now,
 It's out of a poem I made long ago
 About the Garden in the East of the World,
 And how spirits in the images of birds
 Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab-tree.
 They come before me now, and dig in the fruit
 With so much gluttony, and are so drunk
 With that harsh wholesome savour, that their feathers
 Are clinging one to another with the juice.
 But you would lead me to some friendly place,
 And I would go there quickly.

Fedelm. [*Helping him to rise.*] Come with me.

[*He walks slowly, supported by her, till he comes to table.*

Seanchan. But why am I so weak? Have I been ill?
 Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak? [*Sinks on to seat.*

Fedelm. [*Goes to table.*] I'll dip this piece of bread
 into the wine,

For that will make you stronger for the journey.

Seanchan. Yes, give me bread and wine; that's what
 I want,

For it is hunger that is gnawing me.

[*He takes bread from FEDELM, hesitates, and then
 thrusts it back into her hand.*

But, no; I must not eat it.

Fedelm.

Eat, Seanchan.

For if you do not eat it you will die.

Seanchan. Why did you give me food? Why did you come?

For had I not enough to fight against
Without your coming?

Fedelm. Eat this little crust,

Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

Seanchan. I must not eat it—but that's beyond your wit.
Child! child! I must not eat it, though I die.

Fedelm. [Passionately.] You do not know what love
is; for if you loved,

You would put every other thought away.

But you have never loved me.

Seanchan. [Seizing her by wrist.] You, a child,
Who have but seen a man out of the window,
Tell me that I know nothing about love,
And that I do not love you? Did I not say
There was a frenzy in the light of the stars
All through the livelong night, and that the night
Was full of marriages? But that fight's over,
And all that's done with, and I have to die.

Fedelm. [Throwing her arms about him.] I will not be
put from you, although I think
I had not grudged it you if some great lady,
If the King's daughter, had set out your bed.
I will not give you up to death; no, no!
And are not these white arms and this soft neck
Better than the brown earth?

Seanchan. [Struggling to disengage himself.] Begone
from me!

There's treachery in those arms and in that voice.
They're all against me. Why do you linger there?
How long must I endure the sight of you?

Fedelm. O, Seanchan! Seanchan!

Seanchan. [*Rising.*] Go where you will,
So it be out of sight and out of mind.
I cast you from me like an old torn cap,
A broken shoe, a glove without a finger,
A crooked penny; whatever is most worthless.

Fedelm. [*Bursts into tears.*] Oh, do not drive me from
you!

Seanchan. [*Takes her in his arms.*] What did I say,
My dove of the woods? I was about to curse you.
It was a frenzy. I'll unsay it all.
But you must go away.

Fedelm. Let me be near you.
I will obey like any married wife.
Let me but lie before your feet.

Seanchan. Come nearer. [*Kisses her.*]
If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,
The kiss of multitudes in times to come
Had been the poorer.

[*Enter KING from palace, followed by the two PRINCESSES.*]

King. [*To FEDELM.*] Has he eaten yet?

Fedelm. No, King, and will not till you have restored
The right of the poets.

King. [*Coming down and standing before SEANCHAN.*]

Seanchan, you have refused
Everybody that I have sent, and now
I come to you myself; and I have come
To bid you put your pride as far away
As I have put my pride. I had your love
Not a great while ago, and now you have planned
To put a voice by every cottage fire,
And in the night when no one sees who cries,
To cry against me till my throne has crumbled.

And yet if I give way I must offend
 My courtiers and nobles till they, too,
 Strike at the crown. What would you have of me?

Seanchan. When did the poets promise safety, King?

King. Seanchan, I bring you bread in my own hands,
 And bid you eat because of all these reasons,
 And for this further reason, that I love you.

[SEANCHAN *pushes bread away, with FEDELM's hand.*
 You have refused it, Seanchan?

Seanchan. We have refused it.

King. I have been patient, though I am a king,
 And have the means to force you. But that's ended,
 And I am but a king, and you a subject.
 Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither;

[*Enter COURT LADIES, MONK, SOLDIER, CHAMBER-
 LAIN, and COURTIERS with PUPILS, who have
 balts round their necks.*

For you can have your way. I that was man,
 With a man's heart, am now all king again,
 Remembering that the seed I come of, though
 A hundred kings have sown it and resown it,
 Has neither trembled nor shrunk backward yet
 Because of the hard business of a king.

Speak to your master; beg your life of him;
 Show him the halter that is round your necks.

If his heart's set upon it, he may die;

But you shall all die with him. [Goes up steps.

Beg your lives!

Begin, for you have little time to lose.

Begin it, you that are the oldest pupil.

Oldest Pupil. Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right
 of the poets.

King. Silence! you are as crazy as your master.

But that young boy, that seems the youngest of you,
 I'd have him speak. Kneel down before him, boy;
 Hold up your hands to him, that you may pluck
 That milky-coloured neck out of the noose.

Youngest Pupil. Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right
 of the poets.

Oldest Pupil. Gather the halters up into your hands
 And drive us where you will, for in all things,
 But in our Art, we are obedient.

[They hold the ends of the halter towards the KING.]

The KING comes slowly down steps.

King. Kneel down, kneel down; he has the greater
 power.

There is no power but has its root in his—
 I understand it now. There is no power
 But his that can withhold the crown or give it,
 Or make it reverend in the eyes of men,
 And therefore I have laid it in his hands,
 And I will do his will.

[He has put the crown into SEANCHAN's hands.]

Seanchan. *[Who has been assisted to rise by his PUPILS.]*

O, crown! O, crown!

It is but right the hands that made the crown
 In the old time should give it where they please.

[He places the crown on the KING's head.]

O, silver trumpets! Be you lifted up,
 And cry to the great race that is to come.
 Long-throated swans, amid the waves of Time,
 Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
 It waits, and it may hear and come to us.

[The PUPILS blow a trumpet blast.]

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To
FLORENCE FARR

O Rose, thou art sick.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

• BRIDGET BRUIN

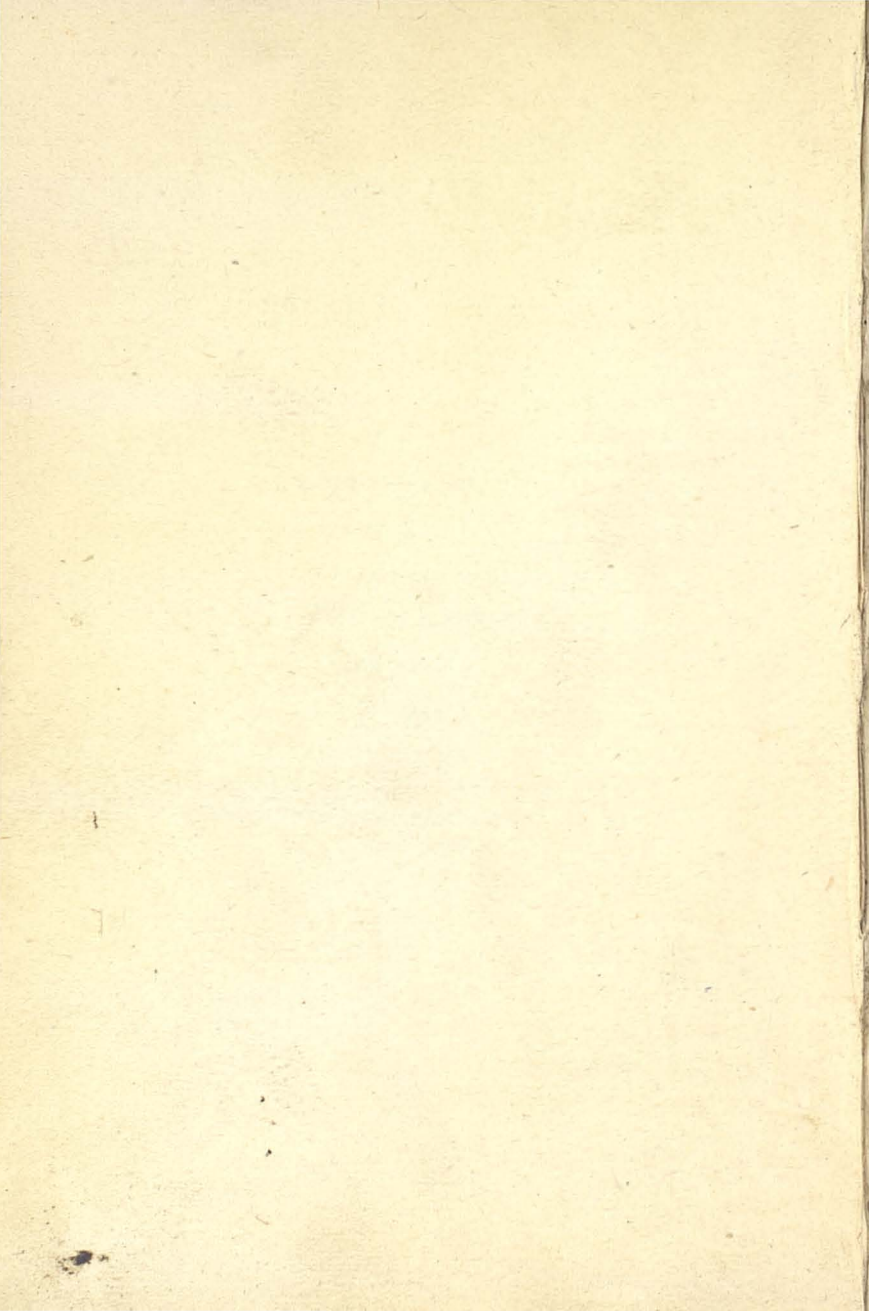
SHAWN BRUIN

MARY BRUIN

FATHER HART

A FAERY CHILD

*The Scene is laid in the Barony of Kilmacowen, in the
County of Sligo, and at a remote time.*





THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

SCENE.—*A room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep alcove to the Right. There are benches in the alcove and a table; and a crucifix on the wall. The alcove is full of a glow of light from the fire. There is an open door facing the audience to the Left, and to the left of this a bench. Through the door one can see the forest. It is night, but the moon or a late sunset glimmers through the trees and carries the eye far off into a vague, mysterious world. MAURTEEN BRUIN, SHAWN BRUIN, and BRIDGET BRUIN sit in the alcove at the table or about the fire. They are dressed in the costume of some remote time, and near them sits an old priest, FATHER HART. He may be dressed as a friar. There is food and drink upon the table. MARY BRUIN stands by the door reading a book. If she looks up she can see through the door into the wood.*

BRIDGET

Because I bid her clean the pots for supper
She took that old book down out of the thatch;
She has been doubled over it ever since.
We should be deafened by her groans and moans
Had she to work as some do, Father Hart;
Get up at dawn like me and mend and scour

Or ride abroad in the bolsterous night like you,
The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN

Mother, you are too cross.

BRIDGET

You've married her,
And fear to vex her and so take her part.

MAURTEEN (*to* FATHER HART)

It is but right that youth should side with youth ;
She quarrels with my wife a bit at times,
And is too deep just now in the old book !
But do not blame her greatly ; she will grow
As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
When but the moons of marriage dawn and die
For half a score of times.

FATHER HART

Their hearts are wild,
As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET

She would not mind the kettle, milk the cow,
Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

SHAWN

Mother, if only——

MAURTEEN

Shawn, this is half empty ;
Go, bring up the best bottle that we have.

FATHER HART

I never saw her read a book before,
What can it be ?

MAURTEEN (*to SHAWN*)

What are you waiting for ?
You must not shake it when you draw the cork ;
It's precious wine, so take your time about it.

(*To Priest.*)

(*SHAWN goes.*)

There was a Spaniard wrecked at Ocris Head,
When I was young, and I have still some bottles.
He cannot bear to hear her blamed ; the book
Has lain up in the thatch these fifty years ;
My father told me my grandfather wrote it,
And killed a heifer for the binding of it—
But supper's spread, and we can talk and eat
It was little good he got out of the book,

Because it filled his house with rambling fiddlers,
And rambling ballad-makers and the like.
The griddle-bread is there in front of you.
Colleen, what is the wonder in that book,
That you must leave the bread to cool? Had I
Or had my father read or written books
There were no stocking stuffed with yellow guineas
To come when I am dead to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART

You should not fill your head with foolish dreams.
What are you reading?

MARY

How a Princess Edane,

A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May Eve like this,
And followed half awake and half asleep,
Until she came into the Land of Faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.
And she is still there, busied with a dance
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,
Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top.

MAURTEEN

Persuade the colleen to put down the book ;
My grandfather would mutter just such things,
And he was no judge of a dog or a horse,
And any idle boy could blarney him ;
Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART

Put it away, my colleen ;
God spreads the heavens above us like great wings
And gives a little round of deeds and days,
And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,
And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,
Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes
Half shuddering and half joyous from God's peace ;
And it was some wrecked angel, blind with tears,
Who flattered Edane's heart with merry words.
My colleen, I have seen some other girls
Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
And they grew like their neighbours and were glad
In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes ;
For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age bring the red flare again.

MAURTEEN

That's true—but she's too young to know it's true.

BRIDGET

She's old enough to know that it is wrong
To mope and idle.

MAURTEEN

I've little blame for her ;
She's dull when my big son is in the fields,
And that and maybe this good woman's tongue
Have driven her to hide among her dreams
Like children from the dark under the bed-clothes.

BRIDGET

She'd never do a turn if I were silent.

MAURTEEN

And maybe it is natural upon May Eve
To dream of the good people. But tell me, girl,
If you've the branch of blessed quicken wood
That women hang upon the post of the door
That they may send good luck into the house?
Remember they may steal new-married brides

After the fall of twilight on May Eve,
Or what old women mutter at the fire
Is but a pack of lies.

FATHER HART

It may be truth.
We do not know the limit of those powers
God has permitted to the evil spirits
For some mysterious end. You have done right (to
MARY);
It's well to keep old innocent customs up.

*(MARY BRUIN has taken a bough of quicken wood
from a seat and hung it on a nail in the door-
post. A girl child strangely dressed, perhaps
in faery green, comes out of the wood and
takes it away.)*

MARY

I had no sooner hung it on the nail
Before a child ran up out of the wind;
She has caught it in her hand and fondled it;
Her face is pale as water before dawn.

FATHER HART

Whose child can this be?

MAURTEEN

No one's child at all.
She often dreams that some one has gone by,
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

MARY

They have taken away the blessed quicken wood,
They will not bring good luck into the house ;
Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God ?

FATHER HART

Colleen, they are the children of the fiend,
And they have power until the end of Time,
When God shall fight with them a great pitched
battle
And hack them into pieces.

MARY

He will smile,
Father, perhaps, and open His great door.

FATHER HART

Did but the lawless angels see that door

They would fall, slain by everlasting peace ;
And when such angels knock upon our doors,
Who goes with them must drive through the same
storm.

*(A thin old arm comes round the door-post and
knocks and beckons. It is clearly seen in
the silvery light. MARY BRUIN goes to door
and stands in it for a moment. MAURTEEN
BRUIN is busy filling FATHER HART'S plate.
BRIDGET BRUIN stirs the fire.)*

MARY *(coming to table)*

There's somebody out there that beckoned me
And raised her hand as though it held a cup,
And she was drinking from it, so it may be
That she is thirsty.

*(She takes milk from the table and carries it to
the door.)*

FATHER HART

That will be the child
That you would have it was no child at all.

BRIDGET

And maybe, Father, what he said was true ;

For there is not another night in the year
So wicked as to-night.

MAURTEEN

Nothing can harm us
While the good Father's underneath our roof.

MARY

A little queer old woman dressed in green.

BRIDGET

The good people beg for milk and fire
Upon May Eve—woe to the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.

MAURTEEN

Hush, woman, hush!

BRIDGET

She's given milk away.
I knew she would bring evil on the house.

MAURTEEN

Who was it?

MARY

Both the tongue and face were strange.

MAURTEEN

Some strangers came last week to Clover Hill ;
She must be one of them.

BRIDGET

I am afraid.

FATHER HART

The Cross will keep all evil from the house
While it hangs there.

MAURTEEN

Come, sit beside me, colleen,
And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days,
Like the good glow of the turf; and when I die
You'll be the wealthiest hereabout, for, colleen,
I have a stocking full of yellow guineas
Hidden away where nobody can find it.

BRIDGET

You are the fool of every pretty face,
And I must spare and pinch that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.

MAURTEEN

Do not be cross ; she is a right good girl !
The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart.
My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change
Done well for me and for old Bridget there ?
We have a hundred acres of good land,
And sit beside each other at the fire.
I have this reverend Father for my friend,
I look upon your face and my son's face—
We've put his plate by yours—and here he comes,
And brings with him the only thing we have
lacked,
Abundance of good wine. (*SHAWN comes in.*) Stir
up the fire,
And put new turf upon it till it blaze ;
To watch the turf-smoke coiling from the fire,
And feel content and wisdom in your heart,
This is the best of life ; when we are young
We long to tread a way none trod before,

But find the excellent old way through love,
And through the care of children, to the hour
For bidding Fate and Time and Change goodbye.

*(MARY takes a sod of turf from the fire and goes
out through the door. SHAWN follows her
and meets her coming in.)*

SHAWN

What is it draws you to the chill o' the wood?
There is a light among the stems of the trees
That makes one shiver.

MARY

A little queer old man
Made me a sign to show he wanted fire
To light his pipe.

BRIDGET

You've given milk and fire
Upon the unluckiest night of the year and brought,
For all you know, evil upon the house.
Before you married you were idle and fine
And went about with ribbons on your head;
And now—no, Father, I will speak my mind—
She is not a fitting wife for any man——

SHAWN

Be quiet, Mother !

MAURTEEN

You are much too cross.

MARY

What do I care if I have given this house,
Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
Into the power of faeries !

BRIDGET

You know well
How calling the good people by that name,
Or talking of them over much at all,
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MARY

Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house !
Let me have all the freedom I have lost ;
Work when I will and idle when I will !
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind.
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

FATHER HART

You cannot know the meaning of your words.

MARY

Father, I am right weary of four tongues :
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,
And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

(SHAWN BRUIN *leads her to a seat at the left of
the door.*)

SHAWN

Do not blame me ; I often lie awake
Thinking that all things trouble your bright head.
How beautiful it is—your broad pale forehead
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair !
Sit down beside me here—these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MARY

O, you are the great door-post of this house,
And I the branch of blessed quicken wood,

And if I could I'd hang upon the post,
Till I had brought good luck into the house.

*(She would put her arms about him, but looks
shyly at the priest and lets her arms fall.)*

FATHER HART

My daughter, take his hand—by love alone
God binds us to Himself and to the hearth,
That shuts us from the waste beyond His peace,
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN

Would that the world were mine to give it you,
And not its quiet hearths alone, but even
All that bewilderment of light and freedom,
If you would have it.

MARY

I would take the world
And break it into pieces in my hands
To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN

Then I would mould a world of fire and dew,
With no one bitter, grave or over wise,

And nothing marred or old to do you wrong,
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MARY

Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN

Once a fly dancing in a beam of the sun,
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament
Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold
With my warm heart for ever ; the sun and moon
Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll ;
But your white spirit still walk by my spirit.

(A Voice singing in the wood.)

MAURTEEN

There's some one singing. Why, it's but a child.
It sang, "The lonely of heart is withered away."
A strange song for a child, but she sings sweetly.
Listen, listen !

(Goes to door.)

MARY

O, cling close to me,
Because I have said wicked things to-night.

THE VOICE

The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away.
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air ;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue ;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
"When the wind has laughed and murmured and
sung
The lonely of heart is withered away !"

MAURTEEN

Being happy, I would have all others happy,
So I will bring her in out of the cold.

(He brings in the faery child.)

THE CHILD

I tire of winds and waters and pale lights.

MAURTEEN

And that's no wonder, for when night has fallen
The wood's a cold and a bewildering place,
But you are welcome here.

THE CHILD

I am welcome here.
For when I tire of this warm little house
There is one here that must away, away.

MAURTEEN

O, listen to her dreamy and strange talk.
Are you not cold?

THE CHILD

I will crouch down beside you,
For I have run a long, long way this night.

BRIDGET

You have a comely shape.

MAURTEEN

Your hair is wet.

BRIDGET

I'll warm your chilly feet.

MAURTEEN

You have come indeed

A long, long way—for I have never seen
Your pretty face—and must be tired and hungry,
Here is some bread and wine.

THE CHILD

The wine is bitter.

Old mother, have you no sweet food for me?

BRIDGET

I have some honey.

(She goes into the next room.)

MAURTEEN

You have coaxing ways,
The mother was quite cross before you came.

*(BRIDGET returns with the honey and fills a
porringer with milk.)*

BRIDGET

She is the child of gentle people; look
At her white hands and at her pretty dress.

I've brought you some new milk, but wait a while
And I will put it to the fire to warm,
For things well fitted for poor folk like us
Would never please a high-born child like you.

THE CHILD

From dawn, when you must blow the fire ablaze,
You work your fingers to the bone, old mother.
The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you must work your fingers to the bone
Because your heart is old.

BRIDGET

The young are idle.

THE CHILD

Your memories have made you wise, old father ;
The young must sigh through many a dream and
hope,
But you are wise because your heart is old.

(BRIDGET gives her more bread and honey.)

MAURTEEN

O, who would think to find so young a girl
Loving old age and wisdom ?

THE CHILD

No more, mother.

MAURTEEN

What a small bite ! The milk is ready now. (*Hands it to her.*) What a small sip !

THE CHILD

Put on my shoes, old mother.

Now I would like to dance now I have eaten,
The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,
And I would like to dance until the reeds
And the white waves have danced themselves asleep.

(*BRIDGET puts on the shoes, and the CHILD is about to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks and covers her eyes.*)

What is that ugly thing on the black cross ?

FATHER HART

You cannot know how naughty your words are !
That is our Blessed Lord.

THE CHILD

Hide it away !

BRIDGET

I have begun to be afraid again.

THE CHILD

Hide it away !

MAURTEEN

That would be wickedness !

BRIDGET

That would be sacrilege !

THE CHILD

The tortured thing !

Hide it away !

MAURTEEN

Her parents are to blame.

FATHER HART

That is the image of the Son of God.

THE CHILD (*caressing him*)

Hide it away, hide it away !

MAURTEEN

No, no.

FATHER HART

Because you are so young and like a bird,
That must take fright at every stir of the leaves,
I will go take it down.

THE CHILD

Hide it away !
And cover it out of sight and out of mind !
(FATHER HART *takes crucifix from wall and
carries it towards inner room.*)

FATHER HART

Since you have come into this barony,
I will instruct you in our blessed faith ;
And being so keen witted you'll soon learn.
(*To the others.*)

We must be tender to all budding things,
Our Maker let no thought of Calvary
Trouble the morning stars in their first song.

(*Puts crucifix in inner room.*)

THE CHILD

Here is level ground for dancing ; I will dance.

(Sings.)

"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away."

(She dances.)

MARY (*to SHAWN*)

Just now when she came near I thought I heard
Other small steps beating upon the floor,
And a faint music blowing in the wind,
Invisible pipes giving her feet the tune.

SHAWN

I heard no steps but hers.

MARY

I hear them now,
The unholy powers are dancing in the house.

MAURTEEN

Come over here, and if you promise me
Not to talk wickedly of holy things
I will give you something.

THE CHILD

Bring it me, old father.

MAURTEEN

Here are some ribbons that I bought in the town
For my son's wife—but she will let me give them
To tie up that wild hair the winds have tumbled.

THE CHILD

Come, tell me, do you love me?

MAURTEEN

Yes, I love you.

THE CHILD

Ah, but you love this fireside. Do you love me?

FATHER HART

When the Almighty puts so great a share
Of His own ageless youth into a creature,
To look is but to love.

THE CHILD

But you love Him?

BRIDGET

She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD

And do you love me too?

MARY

I do not know.

THE CHILD

You love that young man there,
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

MARY

Queen of Angels and kind saints defend us !
Some dreadful thing will happen. A while ago
She took away the blessed quicken wood.

FATHER HART

You fear because of her unmeasured prattle ;
She knows no better. Child, how old are you ?

THE CHILD

When winter sleep is abroad my hair grows thin,
My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms ;
I'll soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can tell
When I was born for the first time ? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
That blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER HART

O she is of the faery people.

THE CHILD

One called,
I sent my messengers for milk and fire,
She called again and after that I came.

*(All except SHAWN and MARY BRUIN gather
behind the priest for protection.)*

SHAWN *(rising)*

Though you have made all these obedient,
You have not charmed my sight and won from me

A wish or gift to make you powerful ;
I'll turn you from the house.

FATHER HART

No, I will face her.

THE CHILD

Because you took away the crucifix
I am so mighty that there's none can pass,
Unless I will it, where my feet have danced
Or where I've whirled my finger-tops.

(SHAWN *tries to approach her and cannot.*)

MAURTEEN

Look, look !

There something stops him—look how he moves his
hands

As though he rubbed them on a wall of glass !

FATHER HART

I will confront this mighty spirit alone ;
Be not afraid, the Father is with us,
The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,

And He who died and rose on the third day,
And all the nine angelic hierarchies.

*(The CHILD kneels upon the settle beside MARY and
puts her arms about her.)*

Cry, daughter, to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD

You shall go with me, newly-married bride,
And gaze upon a merrier multitude.
White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds,
Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him
Who is the ruler of the Western Host,
Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

SHAWN

Awake out of that trance—and cover up
Your eyes and ears.

FATHER HART

She must both look and listen,
For only the soul's choice can save her now.

Come over to me, daughter ; stand beside me ;
Think of this house and of your duties in it.

THE CHILD

Stay and come with me, newly-married bride,
For if you hear him you grow like the rest ;
Bear children, cook, and bend above the churn,
And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
Until at last, grown old and bitter of tongue,
You're crouching there and shivering at the grave.

FATHER HART

Daughter, I point you out the way to Heaven.

THE CHILD

But I can lead you, newly-married bride,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity ;
For we are but obedient to the thoughts
That drift into the mind at a wink of the eye.

FATHER HART

By the dear Name of the One crucified,
I bid you, Mary Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD

I keep you in the name of your own heart.

FATHER HART

It is because I put away the crucifix
That I am nothing, and my power is nothing.
I'll bring it here again.

MAURTEEN (*clinging to him*)

No.

BRIDGET

Do not leave us.

FATHER HART

O, let me go before it is too late ;
It is my sin alone that brought it all.

(*Singing outside.*)

THE CHILD

I hear them sing, "Come, newly-married bride,
Come, to the woods and waters and pale lights."

MARY

I will go with you.

FATHER HART

She is lost, alas !

THE CHILD (*standing by the door*)

But clinging mortal hope must fall from you,
For we who ride the winds, run on the waves,
And dance upon the mountains are more light
Than dewdrops on the banner of the dawn.

MARY

O, take me with you.

SHAWN

Beloved, I will keep you.
I've more than words, I have these arms to hold
you,

Nor all the faery host; do what they please,
Shall ever make me loosen you from these arms.

MARY

Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD

Come, newly-married bride.

MARY

I always loved her world—and yet—and yet——

THE CHILD

White bird, white bird, come with me, little bird.

MARY

She calls me!

THE CHILD

Come with me, little bird.

(Distant dancing figures appear in the wood.)

MARY

I can hear songs and dancing.

SHAWN

Stay with me.

MARY

I think that I would stay—and yet—and yet——

THE CHILD

Come, little bird, with crest of gold.

MARY (*very softly*)

And yet——

THE CHILD

Come, little bird with silver feet !

(MARY BRUIN *dies*, and the CHILD goes.)

SHAWN

She is dead !

BRIDGET

Come from that image ; body and soul are gone.
You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves,
Or bole of an ash-tree changed into her image.

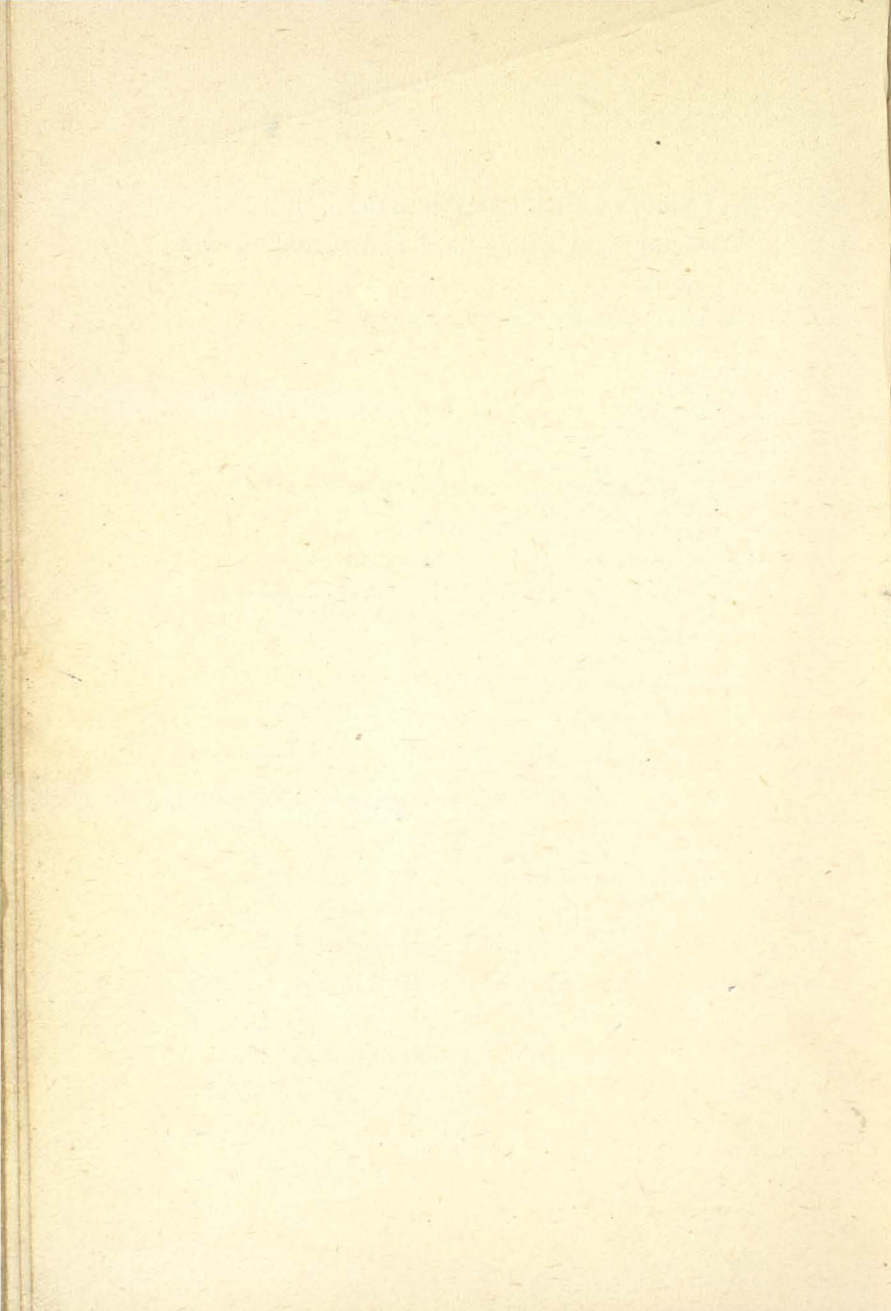
FATHER HART

Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey,
Almost out of the very hand of God ;
And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart.

*(Outside there are dancing figures, and it may be a
white bird, and many voices singing :)*

“The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away ;
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air ;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and
sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue ;

But I heard a reed of Coolaney say—
‘When the wind has laughed and murmured and
 sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away.’”



NOTE

THIS little play was produced at the Avenue Theatre in the spring of 1894, with the following cast : Maurteen Bruin, Mr. James Welch ; Shawn Bruin, Mr. A. E. W. Mason ; Father Hart, Mr. G. R. Foss ; Bridget Bruin, Miss Charlotte Morland ; Maire Bruin, Miss Winifred Fraser : A Faery Child, Miss Dorothy Paget. It ran for a little over six weeks. It was revived in America in 1901, when it was taken on tour by Mrs. Lemoyne. It has been played two or three times professionally since then in America and a great many times in England and America by amateurs. Till lately it was not part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, for I had grown to dislike it without knowing what I disliked in it. This winter, however, I have made many revisions and now it plays well enough to give me pleasure. It is printed in this book in the new form, which was acted for the first time on February 22, 1912, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. At the Abbey Theatre, where the platform of the stage comes out in front of the curtain, the curtain falls before the priest's last words. He remains outside the curtain and the words are spoken to the audience like an epilogue.

W. B. YEATS.

ABBAY THEATRE, DUBLIN.

March, 1912.

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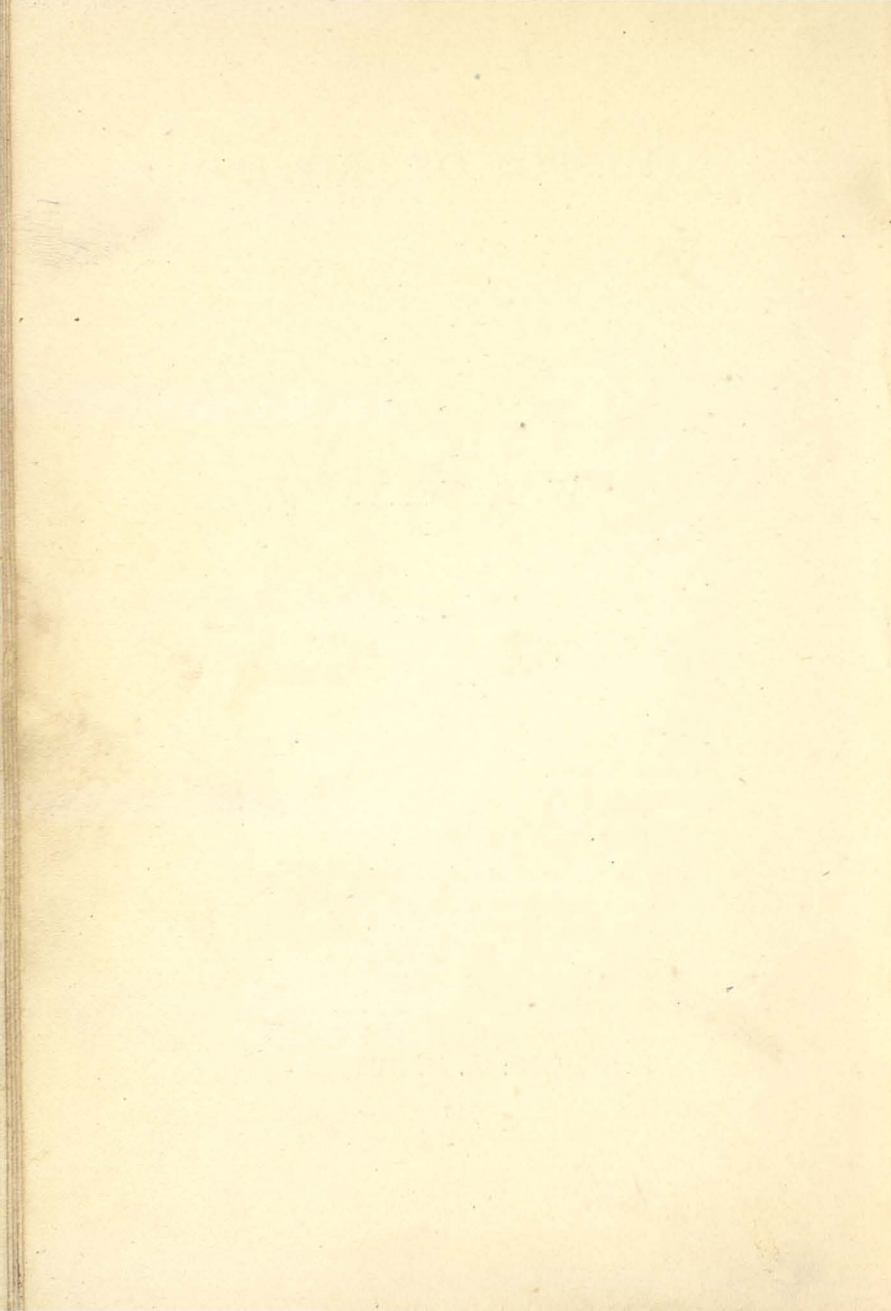
4

THE POT OF BROTH

BY
W. B. YEATS

LONDON : A. H. BULLEN

1911



THE POT OF BROTH.

JOHN CONEELY.

SIBBY CONEELY.

A TRAMP.

SCENE: *A cottage kitchen. Fire on the hearth; table with cabbage, onions, a plate of meal, etc. Half-open door. A TRAMP enters, looks about.*

Tramp. What sort are the people of this house, I wonder? Was it a good place for me to come to look for my dinner, I wonder? What's in that big pot? [*Lifts cover.*] Nothing at all! What's in the little pot? [*Lifts cover.*] Nothing at all! What's in that bottle, I wonder? [*Takes it up excitedly and tastes.*] Milk! milk in a bottle! I wonder they wouldn't afford a tin can to milk the cow into! Not much chance for a poor man to make a living here. What's in that chest? [*Kneels and tries to lift cover.*] Locked! [*Smells at the key-hole.*] There's a good smell there—there must be a still not far off.

[*Gets up and sits on chest. A noise heard outside, shouts, footsteps, and a loud, frightened cackling.*]

Tramp. What in the earthly world is going on outside? Anyone would think it was the Fiannta-h-Eireann at their hunting!

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Sibby's voice. Stop the gap, let you stop the gap, John! Stop that old schemer of a hen flying up on the thatch like as if she was an eagle!

John's voice. What can I do, Sibby? I all to had my hand on her when she flew away!

Sibby's voice. She's out into the garden! Follow after her! She has the wide world before her now!

Tramp. Sibby he called her. I wonder is it Sibby Coneely's house I am in! If that's so it's a bad chance I have of going out heavier than I came in. I often heard of her, a regular old slave driver that would starve the rats. An old niggard with her eyes on kippeens, that would skin a flea for its hide! It was the bad luck of the world brought me here, and not a house or a village between this and Tubber. And it isn't much I have left to bring me on there. [*Begins emptying out his pockets on the chest.*] There's my pipe, and not a grain to fill it with! There's my handkerchief that I got at the coronation dinner! There's my knife and nothing left of it but the handle. [*Shakes the pocket out.*] And there's the crumb of the last dinner I got, and the last I'm likely to get till to-morrow. That's all I have in the world, unless the stone I picked up to peg at that yelping dog awhile ago. [*Takes stone out of other pocket and tosses it up and down.*] In the time long ago I usedn't to have much trouble to find a dinner, getting over the old women and getting round the young ones! I remember the time I met the old minister on the path and sold him his own flock of turkeys. My wits used to fill my stomach then, but I'm afraid

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they're going from me now with all the hardship I went through.

[*Cackling heard again and cries.*

Sibby's voice. Catch her, she's round the bush! Put your hands in the nettles, don't be daunted!

[*A choked cackle and prolonged screech.*

Tramp. There's a dinner for somebody, any way! That it may be for myself! How will I come round her, I wonder? There is no more pity in her heart than there's a soul in a dog. If all the saints were standing there bare-foot she'd bid them to call another day. It's myself I have to trust to now, and my share of talk. [*Looks at the stone.*] I know what I'll do, I know what Charlie Ward did one time with a stone, and I'm as good a man as he is any way. [*He jumps up and waves the stone over his head.*] Now, Sibby! If I don't do it one way I'll do it another. My wits against the world! [*Sings.*

There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's cabbage for me,
And broth for you,
And beef for Jack the journeyman.

I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead,
And a stone at your head,
So as I'd marry poor Jack the journeyman.

THE POT OF BROTH.

John's voice. [Outside.] Bring it in, bring it in, Sibby. You'll be late with the priest's dinner.

Sibby's voice. Can't you wait a minute till I draw it?

Enter JOHN.

John. I didn't know there was anyone in the house.

Tramp. It's only this minute I came in, tired with the length of the road I am, and fasting since morning.

John. [Begins groping among the pots and pans.] I'll see can I find anything here for you. . . . I don't see much . . . maybe there's something in the chest.

[He takes key from a hiding place at back of hearth, opens chest, takes out bottle, takes out a ham bone and is cutting a bit from it when SIBBY enters, carrying chicken by the neck. JOHN drops the ham bone on a bench.]

Sibby. Hurry now, John, after all the time you have wasted. Why didn't you steal up on the old hen that time she was scratching in the dust?

John. Sure, I thought one of the chickens would be the tenderest——

Sibby. Cock you up with tenderness, indeed! All the expense I'm put to! My grand hen I've been feeding these five years! Wouldn't that have been enough to part with! Indeed, I wouldn't have thought of parting with her itself but she had got tired of laying since Easter.

John. Well, I thought we ought to give his reverence something that would have a little good in it.

Sibby. What does the age of it matter? A hen's a hen

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when it's on the table. [*Sitting down to pluck chicken.*] Why couldn't the Kernans have given the priest his dinner the way they always do? What did it matter their mother's brother to have died? It is an excuse they had made up to put the expense of the dinner on me.

John. Well, I hope you have a good bit of bacon to put in the pot along with the chicken.

Sibby. Let me alone. The taste of meat on the knife is all that high-up people like the clergy care for, nice genteel people, no way greedy like potato diggers or harvest men.

John. Well, I never saw the man, gentle or simple, wouldn't be glad of his fill of bacon, and he hungry.

Sibby. Let me alone, I'll show the Kernans what I can do. I have what's better than bacon, a nice bit of a ham I am keeping in the chest this good while, thinking we might want it for company.

[*She catches sight of TRAMP and calls out.*

Sibby. Who is there? A beggar man is it? Then you may quit this house if you please, we have nothing for you.

[*She gets up and opens door.*

Tramp. [*Comes forward.*] It is a mistake you are making, ma'am, it is not asking anything I am. It is giving I am more used to. I was never in a house yet but there would be a welcome for me in it again.

Sibby. Well, you have the appearance of a beggar, and if it isn't begging you are, what way do you make your living?

Tramp. If I was a beggar, ma'am, it is to common

people I would be going and not to a nice grand woman like yourself, that is only used to be talking with high-up noble people.

Sibby. Well, what is it you are asking? If it is a bit to eat you want, I can't give it to you, for I have company coming that will clear all before them.

Tramp. Is it me to ask anything to eat? [*Holds up stone.*] I have here what's better than beef and mutton, and currant cakes, and sacks of flour.

Sibby. What is it at all?

Tramp. [*Mysteriously.*] Those that gave it to me wouldn't like me to tell that.

Sibby. [*To JOHN.*] Do you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe?

John. Your mind is always running on the Sidhe since the time they made John Molloy find buried gold on the bridge of Limerick. I see nothing in it but a stone.

Tramp. What can you see in it, you that never saw what it can do?

John. What is it it can do?

Tramp. It can do many things, and what it's going to do now is to make me a drop of broth for my dinner.

Sibby. I'd like to have a stone that could make broth.

Tramp. No one in the world but myself has one, ma'am, and no other stone in the world has the same power, for it has enchantment on it. All I'll ask of you now, ma'am, is the loan of a pot with a drop of boiling water in it.

Sibby. You're welcome to that much. John, fill the small pot with water. [*JOHN fills the pot from a kettle.*]

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Tramp. [*Putting in stone.*] There now, that's all I have to do but to put it on the fire to boil, and it's a grand pot of broth will be before me then.

Sibby. And is that all you have to put in it?

Tramp. Nothing at all but that,—only maybe a bit of an herb for fear the enchantment might slip away from it. You wouldn't have a bit of the Slán-lus in the house ma'am, that was cut with a black-handled knife?

Sibby. No, indeed, I have none of that in the house.

Tramp. Or a bit of the Fearaván that was picked when the wind was from the north?

Sibby. No, indeed, I'm sorry there's none.

Tramp. Ora sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs?

John. There's plenty of it by the hedge. I'll go out and get it for you.

Tramp. O, don't mind taking so much trouble; those leaves beside me will do well enough.

[*He takes a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and puts them in.*]

Sibby. But where did you get the stone, at all?

Tramp. Well, it is how it happened: I was out one time, and a grand greyhound with me, and it followed a hare, and I went after it. And I came up at last to the edge of a gravel pit where there were a few withered furze bushes, and there was my fine hound sitting up, and it shivering, and a little old man sitting before him, and he taking off a hare-skin coat. [*Looking round at the ham bone.*] Give me the loan of a kippeen to stir the pot with . . .

[*He takes the ham bone and puts it into the pot.*]

John. Oh ! the ham bone !

Tramp. I didn't say a ham bone, I said a hare-skin coat.

Sibby. Hold your tongue, John, if it's deaf you're getting.

Tramp. [*Stirring the pot with the ham bone.*] Well, as I was telling you, he was sitting up, and one time I thought he was as small as a nut, and the next minute I thought his head to be in the stars. Frightened I was.

Sibby. No wonder, no wonder at all in that.

Tramp. He took the little stone then—that stone I have with me—out of the side pocket of his coat, and he showed it to me. "Call off your dog," says he, "and I'll give you that stone, and if ever you want a good drop of broth, or a bit of stirabout, or a drop of poteen itself, all you have to do is to put it down in a pot with a drop of water and stir it awhile, and you'll have the thing you were wanting ready before you."

Sibby. Poteen ! Would it make that ?

Tramp. It would, ma'am ; and wine, the same as the Clare Militia uses.

Sibby. Let me see what does it look like now.

[*Is bending forward.*]

Tramp. Don't look at it for your life, ma'am. It might bring bad luck on anyone that would look at it, and it boiling. I must put a cover on the pot, or I must colour the water some way. Give me a handful of that meal ?

[*SIBBY holds out a plate of meal and he puts in a handful or two.*]

John. Well, he's a gifted man !

THE POT OF BROTH.

Sibby. It would be a great comfort to have a stone like that.

[*She has finished plucking the chicken which lies in her lap.*]

Tramp. And there's another thing it does ma'am since it came into Catholic hands. If you put it into a pot of a Friday with a bit of the whitest meat in Ireland in it, it would turn it as black as black.

Sibby. That is no less than a miracle. I must tell Father John about that.

Tramp. But to put a bit of meat with it any other day of the week it would do it no harm at all, but good. Look here now, ma'am, I'll put that nice little hen you have in your lap in the pot for a minute till you see. [*Takes it and puts it in.*]

John. [*Sarcastically.*] It's a good job this is not a Friday?

Sibby. Keep yourself quiet, John, and don't be interrupting the talk or you'll get a knock on the head like the King of Lochlann's grandmother!

John. Go on, go on, I'll say no more.

Tramp. If I'm passing this way some time of a Friday I'll bring a nice bit of mutton, or the breast of a turkey, and you'll see how it will be no better in two minutes than a fistful of bog mould.

Sibby. [*Getting up.*] Let me take the chicken out now.

Tramp. Stop till I help you, ma'am, you might scald your hand. I'll show it to you in a minute as white as your own skin, where the lily and the rose are fighting for mastery. Did you ever hear what the boys in your own parish were singing after you being married from them—such of them that had any voice at all and not choked with crying, or senseless with the drop of drink they

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took to comfort them and to keep their wits from going, with the loss of you. [SIBBY *sits down again complacently.*

Sibby. Did they do that indeed ?

Tramp. They did, ma'am, this is what they used to be singing : [Sings.

X

The spouse of Naoise, Erin's woe,
Helen and Venus long ago,
Their charms would fade, their fame would flee,
Beside mo gradh, mo stor, mo chree,
My Sibby, O!

[SIBBY *takes a fork and rises to take out the chicken;*
TRAMP *puts his hand to stop her and goes on.*

Her eyes are gray like morning dew,
Her curling hair falls to her shoe,
The swan is blacker than— [Looks round for a
simile, then at his hand.] my nail,
Beside my queen, my Granuaile,
My Sibby, O!

[SIBBY *half rises again;* TRAMP *puts up his hand.*
Wait till you hear the end. [Sings.

The King of France would give his throne
To share her pillow (what's the rhyme at all ?)
So would I myself. . . .

[SIBBY *begins to keep time with fork.*

The Spanish fleet is on the sea
To carry away mo gradh, mo stor !
My Sibby, O!

THE POT OF BROTH.

Sibby. [*Stands up with the fork in her hand and sings to herself* "The Spanish fleet is on the sea," etc.—To JOHN.]

I always knew I was too good for you !

[*She goes on humming.*]

John. Well, he has the old woman bewitched.

Sibby. [*Suddenly coming to her wits.*] Did you take the chicken out yet ?

Tramp. [*Taking it out and giving it a good squeeze into the pot.*] I did, ma'am, look at it there.

[*She takes it and lays it on the table.*]

John. How is the broth getting on ?

Tramp. [*Tasting it with a spoon.*] It's grand ; it's always grand.

Sibby. Give me a taste of it.

Tramp. [*Takes the pot off, and slips the ham bone behind him.*] Give me some vessel till I give this sky-woman a taste of it.

[JOHN gives him an egg-cup, which he fills and gives to

SIBBY. JOHN gives him a mug, and he fills this for himself, pouring it back and forward from the mug to a bowl that is on the table, and drinking gulps now and again. SIBBY blows at hers and smells it.

Sibby. There's a good smell on it anyway. [*Tasting.*] It's lovely ! Oh, I'd give the world and all to have the stone that made that !

Tramp. The riches of the world wouldn't buy it, ma'am. If I was inclined to sell it the Lord Lieutenant would have given me Dublin Castle and all that's in it long ago.

Sibby. Oh ! couldn't we coax it out of you any way at all ?

Tramp. [*Drinking more soup.*] The whole world wouldn't coax it out of me, except maybe for one thing. . . . [*Looks depressed.*] Now I think of it, there's only one reason I might think of parting it at all.

Sibby. [*Eagerly.*] What reason is that ?

Tramp. It's a misfortune that overtakes me, ma'am, every time I make an attempt to keep a pot of my own to boil it in, and I don't like to be always under a compliment to the neighbours, asking the loan of one. But whatever way it is, I never can keep a pot with me. I had a right to ask one of the little man that gave me the stone. The last one I bought got the bottom burned out of it one night I was giving a hand to a friend that keeps a still, and the one before that I hid under a bush one time I was going into Ennis for the night, and some boys of the town dreamed about it and went looking for treasure in it, and they found nothing but eggshells, but they brought it away for all that. And another one. . . .

Sibby. Give the loan of the stone itself, and I'll engage I'll keep a pot for it. . . . Wait now till I make some offer to you.

Tramp. [*Aside.*] I'd best not be stopping to bargain, the priest might be coming on me. [*Gets up.*] Well, ma'am, I'm sorry I can't oblige you. [*Goes to door, shades his eyes and looks out ; turns suddenly.*] I have no time to lose, ma'am, I'm off. [*Comes to table and takes up his hat.*] Well, ma'am, what offer will you make ?

THE POT OF BROTH.

John. You might as well leave it for a day on trial first.

Tramp. [*To JOHN.*] I think it likely I'll not be passing this way again. [*To SIBBY.*] Well now, ma'am, as you were so kind, and for the sake of the good treatment you gave me, I'll ask nothing for it at all. Here it is for you and welcome, and that you may live long to use it. But I'll just take a little bit in my bag that'll do for my supper, for fear I mightn't be in Tubber before night. [*He takes up the chicken.*] And you won't begrudge me a drop of whiskey when you can make plenty for yourself from this out. [*Takes the bottle.*]

John. You deserve it, you deserve it, indeed. You are a very gifted man. Don't forget the kippeen!

Tramp. It's here.

[*Slaps his pocket and exit. JOHN follows him.*]

Sibby. [*Looking at the stone in her hand.*] Broth of the best, stirabout, poteen, wine itself, he said! and the people that will be coming to see the miracle! I'll be as rich as Biddy Early before I die!

JOHN comes back.

Where were you, John?

John. I just went out to shake him by the hand. He's a very gifted man.

Sibby. He is so indeed.

John. And the priest's at the top of the boreen coming for his dinner. Maybe you'd best put the stone in the pot again.

CURTAIN.

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To
MAUD GONNE

"The sorrowful are dumb for thee"

Lament of Merion Shehane for Miss Mary Bourke

SHEMUS RUA	...	...	...	...	...	A Peasant
MARY...	...	...	...	...	...	His Wife
TEIG ...	...	...	...	...	...	His Son
ALEEL	...	...	...	...	...	A Poet

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

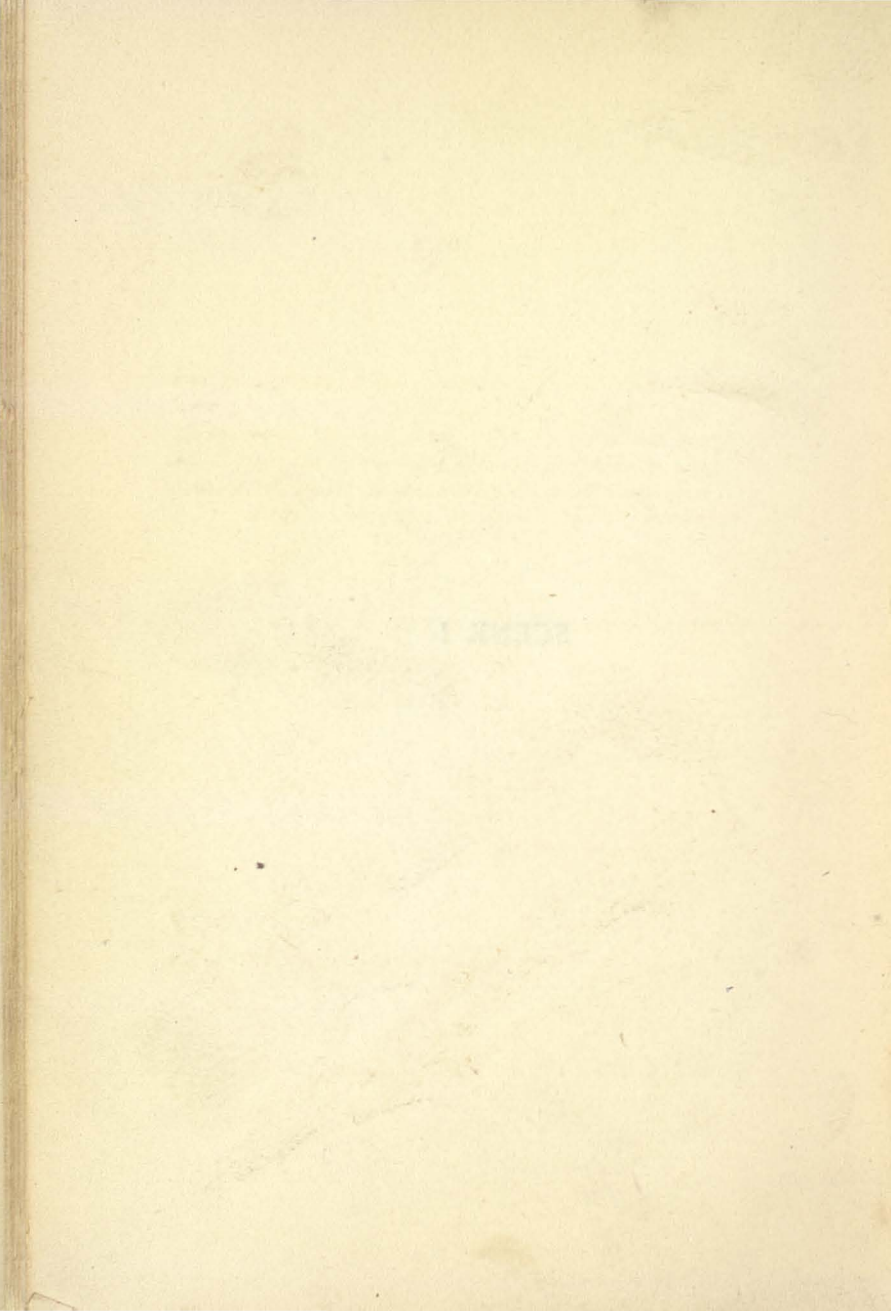
OONA Her Foster Mother

Two Demons disguised as Merchants

Peasants, Servants, Angelical Beings

The Scene is laid in Ireland and in old times

SCENE I



SCENE.—*A room with lighted fire, and a door into the open air, through which one sees, perhaps, the trees of a wood, and these trees should be painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky. The walls are of one colour. The scene should have the effect of missal painting.* MARY, a woman of forty years or so, is grinding a quern.

MARY

What can have made the grey hen flutter so?

(TEIG, a boy of fourteen, is coming in with turf, which he lays beside the hearth.)

TEIG

They say that now the land is famine struck
The graves are walking.

MARY

There is something that the hen hears.

TEIG

And that is not the worst; at Tubber-vanach

A woman met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

MARY

What can have kept your father all this while?

TEIG

Two nights ago, at Carrick-orus churchyard,
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,
Nor eyes, nor ears; his face a wall of flesh;
He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

MARY

Look out, and tell me if your father's coming.

(TEIG goes to door.)

TEIG

Mother!

MARY

What is it?

TEIG

In the bush beyond,
There are two birds—if you can call them birds—
I could not see them rightly for the leaves.

But they've the shape and colour of horned owls
And I'm half certain they've a human face.

MARY

Mother of God, defend us !

TEIG

They're looking at me.

What is the good of praying ? father says.
God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep.
What do they care, he says, though the whole land
Squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth ?

MARY

You'll bring misfortune with your blasphemies
Upon your father, or yourself, or me.
I would to God he were home—ah, there he is.

(SHEMUS *comes in.*)

What was it kept you in the wood ? You know
I cannot get all sorts of accidents
Out of my mind till you are home again.

SHEMUS

I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter.
Although I tramped the woods for half a day,

I've taken nothing, for the very rats,
Badgers, and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought,
And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.

TEIG

Then you have brought no dinner.

SHEMUS

After that
I sat among the beggars at the cross-roads,
And held a hollow hand among the others.

MARY

What, did you beg?

SHEMUS

I had no chance to beg,
For when the beggars saw me they cried out
They would not have another share their alms,
And hunted me away with sticks and stones.

TEIG

You said that you would bring us food or money

SHEMUS

What's in the house?

TEIG

A bit of mouldy bread.

MARY

There's flour enough to make another loaf.

TEIG

And when that's gone ?

MARY

There is the hen in the coop

SHEMUS

My curse upon the beggars, my curse upon them !

TEIG

And the last penny gone.

SHEMUS

When the hen's gone,

What can we do but live on sorrel and dock,
And dandelion, till our mouths are green ?

MARY

God, that to this hour's found bit and sup,
Will cater for us still.

SHEMUS

His kitchen's bare.

There were five doors that I looked through this day
And saw the dead and not a soul to wake them.

MARY

Maybe He'd have us die because He knows,
When the ear is stopped and when the eye is stopped,
That every wicked sight is hid from the eye,
And all fool talk from the ear.

SHEMUS

Who's passing there ?
And mocking us with music ?
(*A stringed instrument without.*)

TEIG

A young man plays it,
There's an old woman and a lady with him.

SHEMUS

What is the trouble of the poor to her ?
Nothing at all or a harsh radishy sauce
For the day's meat.

MARY

God's pity on the rich.

Had we been through as many doors, and seen
The dishes standing on the polished wood
In the wax candle light, we'd be as hard,
And there's the needle's eye at the end of all.

SHEMUS

My curse upon the rich.

TEIG

They're coming here.

SHEMUS

Then down upon that stool, down quick, I say,
And call up a whey face and a whining voice,
And let your head be bowed upon your knees.

MARY

Had I but time to put the place to rights.

(CATHLEEN, OONA, and ALEEL enter.)

CATHLEEN

God save all here. There is a certain house,
An old grey castle with a kitchen garden,
A cider orchard and a plot for flowers,
Somewhere among these woods.

MARY

We know it, lady.

A place that's set among impassable walls
As though world's trouble could not find it out.

CATHLEEN

It may be that we are that trouble, for we—
Although we've wandered in the wood this hour—
Have lost it too, yet I should know my way,
For I lived all my childhood in that house.

MARY

Then you are Countess Cathleen?

CATHLEEN

And this woman,
Oona, my nurse, should have remembered it,
For we were happy for a long time there.

OONA

The paths are overgrown with thicket now,
Or else some change has come upon my sight.

CATHLEEN

And this young man, that should have known the
woods—

Because we met him on their border but now,
Wandering and singing like a wave of the sea—
Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come
That he can give no help.

MARY

You have still some way,
But I can put you on the trodden path
Your servants take when they are marketing.
But first sit down and rest yourself awhile,
For my old fathers served your fathers, lady,
Longer than books can tell—and it were strange
If you and yours should not be welcome here.

CATHLEEN

And it were stranger still were I ungrateful
For such kind welcome—but I must be gone,
For the night's gathering in.

SHEMUS

It is a long while
Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it.

CATHLEEN

So you are starving even in this wood,
Where I had thought I would find nothing changed.

But that's a dream, for the old worm o' the world
Can eat its way into what place it pleases.

(She gives money.)

TEIG

Beautiful lady, give me something too ;
I fell but now, being weak with hunger and thirst.
And lay upon the threshold like a log.

CATHLEEN

I gave for all and that was all I had.
Look, my purse is empty. I have passed
By starving men and women all this day,
And they have had the rest ; but take the purse,
The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle.
But if you'll come to-morrow to my house
You shall have twice the sum.

(ALEEL begins to play.)

SHEMUS *(muttering)*

What, music, music !

CATHLEEN

Ah, do not blame the finger on the string ;
The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times

And find distraction for my thoughts, or else
Pine to my grave.

SHEMUS

I have said nothing, lady.
Why should the like of us complain?

OONA

Have done.

Sorrows that she's but read of in a book
Weigh on her mind as if they had been her own.

(OONA, MARY, and CATHLEEN go out. ALEEL
looks defiantly at SHEMUS.)

ALEEL (*singing*)

Were I but crazy for love's sake
I know who'd measure out his length,
I know the heads that I should break,
For crazy men have double strength.
There! all's out now to leave or take,
And who mocks music mocks at love;
And when I'm crazy for love's sake
I'll not go far to choose.

(*Snapping his fingers in SHEMUS' face.*)

Enough!

I know the heads that I shall break.

(He takes a step towards the door and then turns again.)

Shut to the door before the night has fallen,
For who can say what walks, or in what shape
Some devilish creature flies in the air, but now
Two grey-horned owls hooted above our heads.

(He goes out, his singing dies away. MARY comes in. SHEMUS has been counting the money.)

SHEMUS

So that fool's gone.

TEIG

He's seen the horned owls too.
There's no good luck in owls, but it may be
That the ill luck's to fall upon his head.

MARY

You never thanked her ladyship.

SHEMUS

Thank her,
For seven halfpence and a silver bit?

TEIG

But for this empty purse?

SHEMUS

What's that for thanks,
Or what's the double of it that she promised?
With bread and flesh and every sort of food
Up to a price no man has heard the like of
And rising every day.

MARY

We have all she had;
She emptied out the purse before our eyes.

SHEMUS (*to MARY, who has gone to close the door*)

Leave that door open.

MARY

When those that have read books,
And seen the seven wonders of the world,
Fear what's above or what's below the ground,
It's time that poverty should bolt the door.

SHEMUS

I'll have no bolts, for there is not a thing
That walks above the ground or under it
I had not rather welcome to this house
Than any more of mankind, rich or poor.

TEIG

So that they brought us money.

SHEMUS

I heard say.

There's something that appears like a white bird,
A pigeon or a seagull or the like,
But if you hit it with a stone or a stick
It clangs as though it had been made of brass ;
And that if you dig down where it was scratching
You'll find a crock of gold.

TEIG

But dream of gold
For three nights running, and there's always gold.

SHEMUS

You might be starved before you've dug it out.

TEIG

But maybe if you called, something would come,
They have been seen of late.

MARY

Is it call devils ?
Call devils from the wood, call them in here ?

SHEMUS

So you'd stand up against me, and you'd say
Who or what I am to welcome here. (*He hits her.*)
That is to show who's master.

TEIG

Call them in.

MARY

God help us all !

SHEMUS

Pray, if you have a mind to.
It's little that the sleepy ears above
Care for your words ; but I'll call what I please.

TEIG

There is many a one, they say, had money from them.

SHEMUS (*at door*)

Whatever you are that walk the woods at night,
So be it that you have not shouldered up
Out of a grave—for I'll have nothing human—
And have free hands, a friendly trick of speech,
I welcome you. Come, sit beside the fire.
What matter if your head's below your arms

Or you've a horse's tail to whip your flank,
Feathers instead of hair, that's but a straw,
Come, share what bread and meat is in the house,
And stretch your heels and warm them in the ashes.
And after that, let's share and share alike
And curse all men and women. Come in, come in.
What, is there no one there? *(Turning from door)*

And yet they say

They are as common as the grass, and ride
Even upon the book in the priest's hand.

(TEIG lifts one arm slowly and points toward the door and begins moving backwards. SHEMUS turns, he also sees something and begins moving backward. MARY does the same. A man dressed as an Eastern merchant comes in carrying a small carpet. He unrolls it and sits cross-legged at one end of it. Another man dressed in the same way follows, and sits at the other end. This is done slowly and deliberately. When they are seated they take money out of embroidered purses at their girdles and begin arranging it on the carpet.)

TEIG

You speak to them.

SHEMUS

No, you.

TEIG

'Twas you that called them.

SHEMUS (*coming nearer*)

I'd make so bold, if you would pardon it,
To ask if there's a thing you'd have of us.
Although we are but poor people, if there is,
Why, if there is——

FIRST MERCHANT

We've travelled a long road,
For we are merchants that must tramp the world,
And now we look for supper and a fire
And a safe corner to count money in.

SHEMUS

I thought you were . . . but that's no matter now—
There had been words between my wife and me
Because I said I would be master here,
And ask in what I pleased or who I pleased
And so. . . . but that is nothing to the point,
Because it's certain that you are but merchants.

FIRST MERCHANT

We travel for the Master of all merchants.

SHEMUS

Yet if you were that I had thought but now
I'd welcome you no less. Be what you please
And you'll have supper at the market rate,
That means that what was sold for but a penny
Is now worth fifty.

(MERCHANTS *begin putting money on carpet.*)

FIRST MERCHANT

Our Master bids us pay
So good a price, that all who deal with us
Shall eat, drink, and be merry.

SHEMUS (*to MARY*)

Bestir yourself,
Go kill and draw the fowl, while Teig and I
Lay out the plates and make a better fire.

MARY

I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS

Not cook ! not cook !

Do not be angry. She wants to pay me back
Because I struck her in that argument.
But she'll get sense again. Since the dearth came
We rattle one on another as though we were
Knives thrown into a basket to be cleaned.

MARY

I will not cook for you, because I know
In what unlucky shape you sat but now
Outside this door.

TEIG

It's this, your honours :
Because of some wild words my father said
She thinks you are not of those who cast a shadow.

SHEMUS

I said I'd make the devils of the wood
Welcome, if they'd a mind to eat and drink ;
But it is certain that you are men like us.

FIRST MERCHANT

It's strange that she should think we cast no shadow,
For there is nothing on the ridge of the world
That's more substantial than the merchants are
That buy and sell you.



MARY

If you are not demons,
And seeing what great wealth is spread out there,
Give food or money to the starving poor.

FIRST MERCHANT

If we knew how to find deserving poor
We'd do our share.

MARY

But seek them patiently.

FIRST MERCHANT

We know the evils of mere charity.

MARY

Those scruples may befit a common time.
I had thought there was a pushing to and fro,
At times like this, that overset the scale
And trampled measure down.

FIRST MERCHANT

But if already
We'd thought of a more prudent way than that?

SECOND MERCHANT

If each one brings a bit of merchandise,
We'll give him such a price he never dreamt of.

MARY

Where shall the starving come at merchandise?

FIRST MERCHANT

We will ask nothing but what all men have.

MARY

Their swine and cattle, fields and implements
Are sold and gone.

FIRST MERCHANT

They have not sold all yet.
For there's a vaporous thing—that may be nothing,
But that's the buyer's risk—a second self,
They call immortal for a story's sake.

SHEMUS

They come to buy our souls?

TEIG

I'll barter mine.
Why should we starve for what may be but nothing?

MARY

Teig and Shemus——

SHEMUS

What can it be but nothing?
What has God poured out of His bag but famine?
Satan gives money.

TEIG

Yet no thunder stirs.

FIRST MERCHANT

There is a heap for each.

(SHEMUS *goes to take money.*)

But no, not yet,

For there's a work I have to set you to.

SHEMUS

So then you're as deceitful as the rest,
And all that talk of buying what's but a vapour
Is fancy bread. I might have known as much,
Because that's how the trick-o'-the-loop man talks.

FIRST MERCHANT

That's for the work, each has its separate price;
But neither price is paid till the work's done.

TEIG

The same for me.

MARY

Oh, God, why are you still?

FIRST MERCHANT

You've but to cry aloud at every cross-road,
At every house door, that we buy men's souls,
And give so good a price that all may live
In mirth and comfort till the famine's done,
Because we are Christian men.

SHEMUS

Come, let's away.

TEIG

I shall keep running till I've earned the price.

SECOND MERCHANT

(who has risen and gone towards fire)

Stop; you must have proof behind the words.
So here's your entertainment on the road.

(He throws a bag of money on the ground.)

Live as you please; our Master's generous.

(TEIG and SHEMUS have stopped. TEIG takes the money. They go out.)

MARY

Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.
You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

SECOND MERCHANT

Curse to your fill, for saints will have their dreams.

FIRST MERCHANT

Though we're but vermin that our Master sent
To overrun the world, he at the end
Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon
And quench the stars in the ancestral night.

MARY

God is all powerful.

SECOND MERCHANT

Pray, you shall need Him.
You shall eat dock and grass, and dandelion,
Till that low threshold there becomes a wall,
And when your hands can scarcely drag your body
We shall be near you.

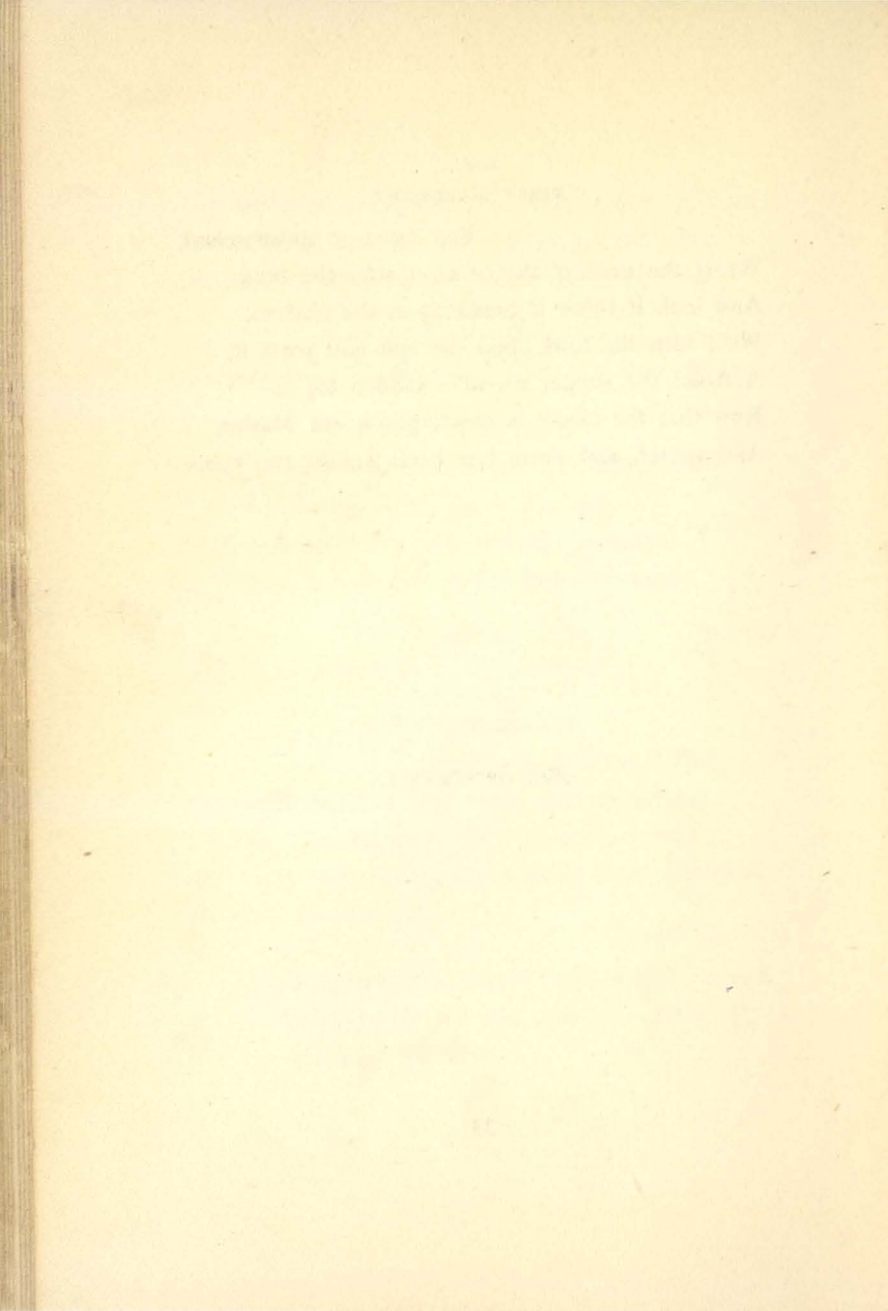
(MARY faints.)

(The FIRST MERCHANT takes up the carpet, spreads
it before the fire and stands in front of it
warming his hands.)

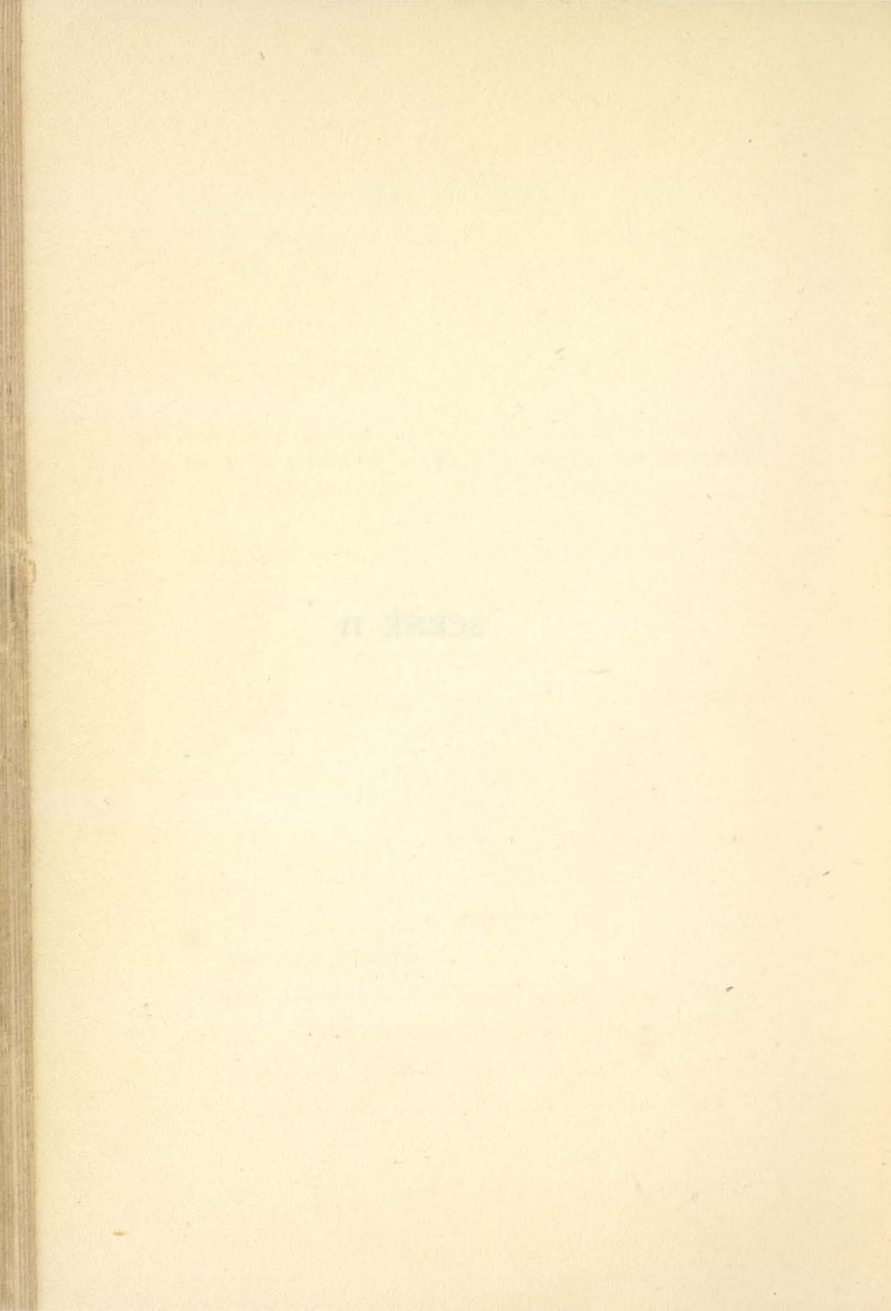
FIRST MERCHANT

Our faces go unscratched,
Wring the neck o' that fowl, scatter the flour
And look if there is bread upon the shelves.
We'll turn the fowl upon the spit and roast it,
And eat the supper we were bidden to,
Now that the house is quiet, praise our Master,
And stretch and warm our heels among the ashes.

END OF SCENE I.



SCENE II



FRONT SCENE.—*A wood with perhaps distant view of turreted house at one side, but all in flat colour, without light and shade and against a diapered or gold background.*

COUNTESS CATHLEEN *comes in leaning upon ALEEL'S arm. OONA follows them.*

CATHLEEN (*stopping*)

Surely this leafy corner, where one smells
The wild bee's honey, has a story too?

OONA

There is the house at last.

ALEEL

A man, they say,
Loved Maeve the Queen of all the invisible host,
And died of his love nine centuries ago.
And now, when the moon's riding at the full,
She leaves her dancers lonely and lies there

Upon that level place, and for three days
Stretches and sighs and wets her long pale cheeks.

CATHLEEN

So she loves truly.

ALEEL

No, but wets her cheeks,
Lady, because she has forgot his name.

CATHLEEN

She'd sleep that trouble away—though it must be
A heavy trouble to forget his name—
If she had better sense.

OONA

Your own house, lady.

ALEEL

She sleeps high up on wintry Knock-na-rea
In an old cairn of stones ; while her poor women
Must lie and jog in the wave if they would sleep—
Being water born—yet if she cry their names
They run up on the land and dance in the moon
Till they are giddy and would love as men do,
And be as patient and as pitiful.

But there is nothing that will stop in their heads
They've such poor memories, though they weep for it.
Oh, yes, they weep ; that's when the moon is full.

CATHLEEN

Is it because they have short memories
They live so long ?

ALEEL

What's memory but the ash
That chokes our fires that have begun to sink ?
And they've a dizzy, everlasting fire.

OONA

There is your own house, lady.

CATHLEEN

Why, that's true,
And we'd have passed it without noticing.

ALEEL

A curse upon it for a meddlesome house !
Had it but stayed away I would have known
What Queen Maeve thinks on when the moon is
pinched ;

And whether now—as in the old days—the dancers
Set their brief love on men.

OONA

Rest on my arm.
These are no thoughts for any Christian ear.

ALEEL

I am younger, she would be too heavy for you.

*(He begins taking his lute out of the bag ;
CATHLEEN, who has turned towards OONA,
turns back to him.)*

This hollow box remembers every foot
That danced upon the level grass of the world,
And will tell secrets if I whisper to it.

(Sings.)

Lift up the white knee ;
Hear what they sing,
Those young dancers
That in a ring
Raved but now
Of the hearts that brake
Long, long ago
For their sake.



OONA

New friends are sweet.

ALEEL

"But the dance changes,
Lift up the gown,
All that sorrow
Is trodden down."

OONA

The empty rattle-pate! Lean on this arm,
That I can tell you is a christened arm,
And not like some, if we are to judge by speech.
But as you please. It is time I was forgot.
Maybe it is not on this arm you slumbered
When you were as helpless as a worm.

ALEEL

Stay with me till we come to your own house.

CATHLEEN (*sitting down*)

When I am rested I will need no help.

ALEEL

I thought to have kept her from remembering

The evil of the times for full ten minutes ;
But now when seven are out you come between.

OONA

Talk on ; what does it matter what you say,
For you have not been christened ?

ALEEL

Old woman, old woman,
You robbed her of three minutes peace of mind,
And though you live unto a hundred years,
And wash the feet of beggars and give alms,
And climb Croaghpatrick, you shall not be pardoned.

OONA

How does a man who never was baptized
Know what Heaven pardons ?

ALEEL

You are a sinful woman.

OONA

I care no more than if a pig had grunted.

(Enter CATHLEEN'S Steward.)

STEWARD

I am not to blame, for I had locked the gate,
The forester's to blame. The men climbed in
At the east corner where the elm-tree is.

CATHLEEN

I do not understand you, who has climbed?

STEWARD

Then God be thanked, I am the first to tell you.
I was afraid some other of the servants—
Though I've been on the watch—had been the first,
And mixed up truth and lies, your ladyship.

CATHLEEN (*rising*)

Has some misfortune happened?

STEWARD

Yes, indeed.

The forester that let the branches lie
Against the wall's to blame for everything,
For that is how the rogues got into the garden.

CATHLEEN

I thought to have escaped misfortune here.
Has any one been killed?

STEWARD

Oh, no, not killed.
They have stolen half a cart-load of green cabbage.

CATHLEEN

But maybe they were starving.

STEWARD

That is certain.
To rob or starve, that was the choice they had.

CATHLEEN

A learned theologian has laid down
That starving men may take what's necessary,
And yet be sinless.

OONA

Sinless and a thief !
There should be broken bottles on the wall.

CATHLEEN

And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken
God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world,
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love

Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world.

(Enter TEIG and SHEMUS.)

STEWARD

What are you running for? Pull off your cap,
Do you not see who's there?

SHEMUS

I cannot wait.
I am running to the world with the best news
That has been brought it for a thousand years.

STEWARD

Then get your breath and speak.

SHEMUS

If you'd my news
You'd run as fast and be as out of breath.

TEIG

Such news, we shall be carried on men's shoulders.

SHEMUS

There's something every man has carried with him

And thought no more about than if it were
A mouthful of the wind ; and now it's grown
A marketable thing !

TEIG

And yet it seemed
As useless as the paring of one's nails.

SHEMUS

What sets me laughing when I think of it,
Is that a rogue who's lain in lousy straw,
If he but sell it, may set up his coach.

TEIG (*laughing*)

There are two gentlemen who buy men's souls.

CATHLEEN

O God !

TEIG

And maybe there's no soul at all.

STEWARD

They're drunk or mad.

TEIG

Look at the price they give.

(Showing money.)

SHEMUS *(tossing up money)*

"Go cry it all about the world," they said.

"Money for souls, good money for a soul."

CATHLEEN

Give twice and thrice and twenty times their money,
And get your souls again. I will pay all.

SHEMUS

Not we! not we! For souls—if there are souls—
But keep the flesh out of its merriment.
I shall be drunk and merry.

TEIG

Come, let's away.

(He goes.)

CATHLEEN

But there's a world to come.

SHEMUS

And if there is,
I'd rather trust myself into the hands

That can pay money down than to the hands
That have but shaken famine from the bag.

(He goes out R.)

(Lilting)

"There's money for a soul, sweet yellow money.
There's money for men's souls, good money, money."

CATHLEEN (*to ALEEL*)

Go call them here again, bring them by force,
Beseech them, bribe, do anything you like ;

(ALEEL goes.)

And you too follow, add your prayers to his.

(OONA, who has been praying, goes out.)

Steward, you know the secrets of my house.
How much have I ?

STEWARD

A hundred kegs of gold.

CATHLEEN

How much have I in castles ?

STEWARD

As much more.

CATHLEEN

How much have I in pasture?

STEWARD

As much more.

CATHLEEN

How much have I in forests?

STEWARD

As much more.

CATHLEEN

Keeping this house alone, sell all I have,
Go barter where you please, but come again
With herds of cattle and with ships of meal.

STEWARD

God's blessing light upon your ladyship.
You will have saved the land.

CATHLEEN

Make no delay.

(He goes L.)

(ALEEL and OONA *return*)

CATHLEEN

They have not come ; speak quickly.

ALEEL

One drew his knife
And said that he would kill the man or woman
That stopped his way ; and when I would have
stopped him
He made this stroke at me ; but it is nothing.

CATHLEEN

You shall be tended. From this day for ever
I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own.

OONA

Their eyes shone like the eyes of birds of prey.

CATHLEEN

Come, follow me, for the earth burns my feet
Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
May escape from beak and claw ; all, all, shall come
Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.
From this day out I have nothing of my own.

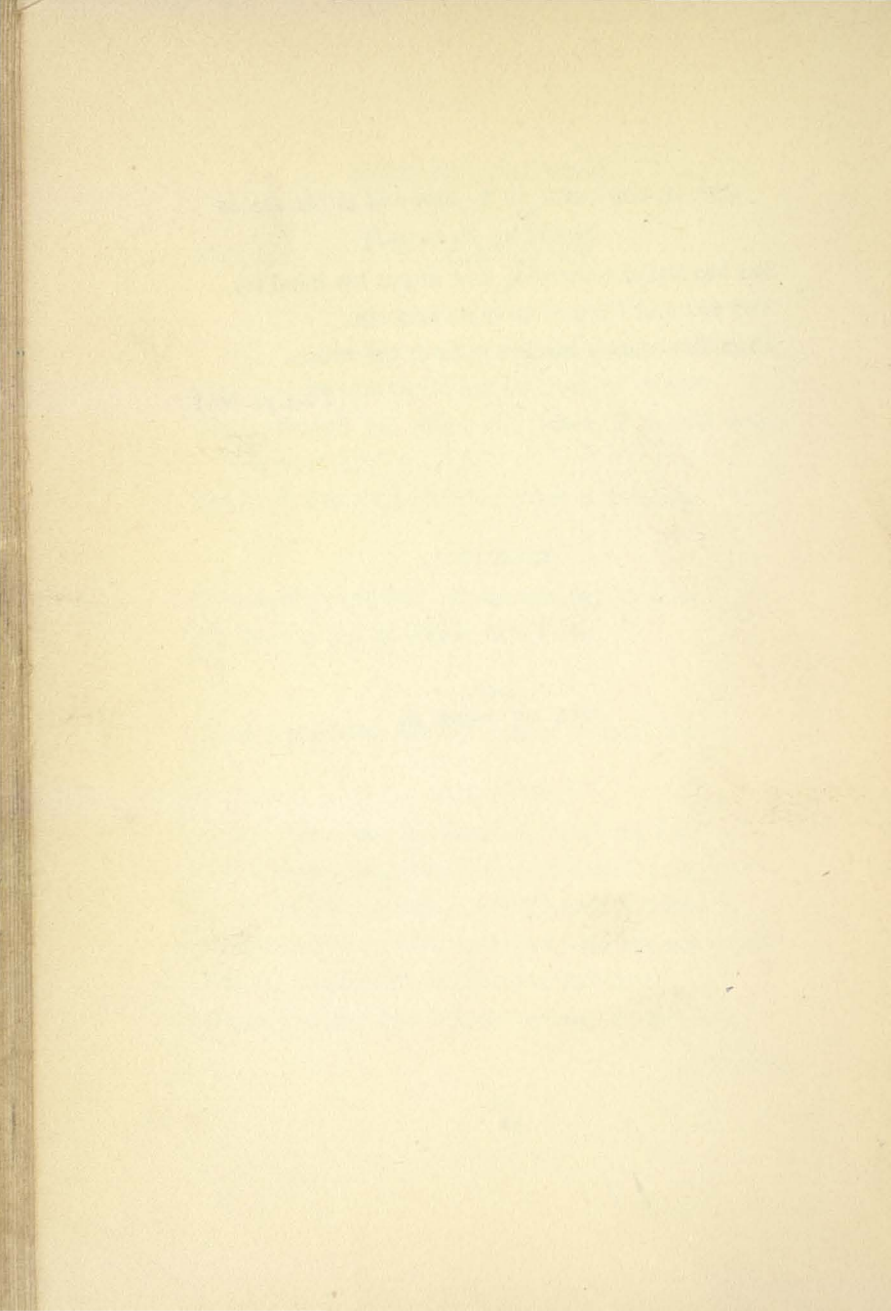
(*She goes.*)

OONA (*taking ALEEL by the arm and as she speaks
bandaging his wound*)

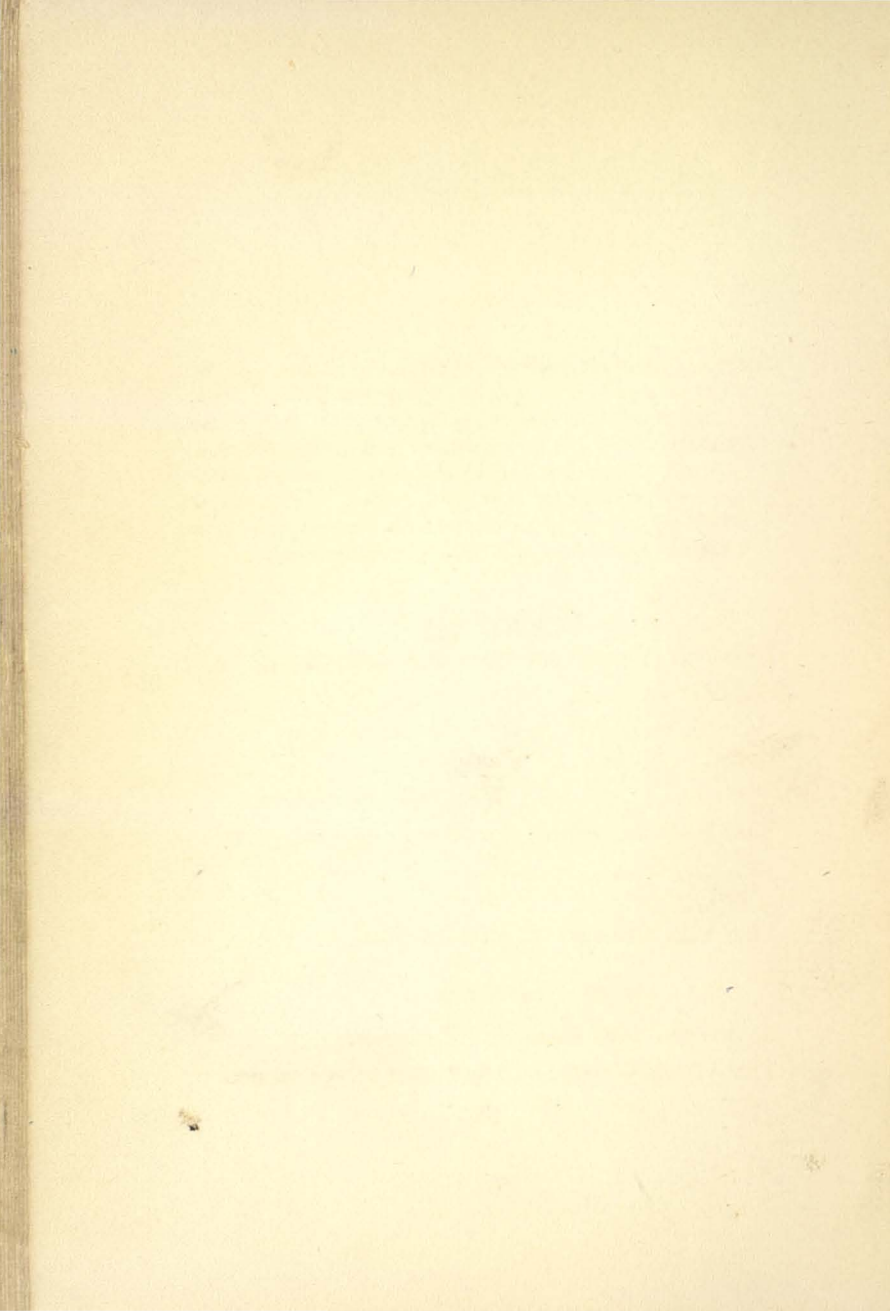
She has found something now to put her hand to,
And you and I are of no more account
Than flies upon a window-pane in the winter.

(*They go out.*)

END OF SCENE II.



SCENE III



SCENE.—*Hall in the house of COUNTESS CATHLEEN. At the Left an oratory with steps leading up to it. At the Right a tapestried wall, more or less repeating the form of the oratory, and a great chair with its back against the wall. In the Centre are two or more arches through which one can see dimly the trees of the garden. CATHLEEN is kneeling in front of the altar in the oratory; there is a hanging lighted lamp over the altar. ALEEL enters.*

ALEEL

I have come to bid you leave this castle and fly
Out of these woods.

CATHLEEN

What evil is there here
That is not everywhere from this to the sea?

ALEEL

They who have sent me walk invisible.

CATHLEEN

So it is true what I have heard men say,
That you have seen and heard what others cannot.

And bid him shelter all that starve or wander
While there is food and house room.

CATHLEEN

He bids me go
Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp, when
the trees
Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
And talk among the rustling of the reeds,
When night hunted the foolish sun away
With stillness and pale tapers. No—no—no !
I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep
Because that life would be most happy, and here
I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep
Because I had longed to look upon your face,
But that a night of prayer has made me weary.

ALEEL (*prostrating himself before her*)

Let Him that made mankind, the angels and devils
And dearth and plenty, mend what He has made,
For when we labour in vain and eye still sees
Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN

How would that quiet end ?

ALEEL

How but in healing ?

CATHLEEN

You have seen my tears
And I can see your hand shake on the floor.

ALEEL (*faltering*)

I thought but of healing. He was angelical.

CATHLEEN (*turning away from him*)

No, not angelical, but of the old gods,
Who wander about the world to waken the heart—
The passionate, proud heart—that all the angels,
Leaving nine heavens empty, would rock to sleep.

*(She goes to chapel door ; ALEEL holds his clasped
hands towards her for a moment hesi-
tatingly, and then lets them fall beside him.)*

CATHLEEN

Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.
This heart shall never waken on earth. I have
sworn,
By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
To pray before this altar until my heart

Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there
Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

ALEEL (*who has risen*)

When one so great has spoken of love to one
So little as I, though to deny him love,
What can he but hold out beseeching hands,
Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly
They have overdared?

(*He goes towards the door of the hall. The
COUNTESS CATHLEEN takes a few steps to-
wards him.*)

CATHLEEN

If the old tales are true,
Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar-maids;
God's procreant waters flowing about your mind
Have made you more than kings or queens; and not
you
But I am the empty pitcher.

ALEEL

Being silent,
I have said all, yet let me stay beside you.

CATHLEEN

No, no, not while my heart is shaken. No,
But you shall hear wind cry and water cry,
And curlew cry, and have the peace I longed for.

ALEEL

Give me your hand to kiss.

CATHLEEN

I kiss your forehead.
And yet I send you from me. Do not speak ;
There have been women that bid men to rob
Crowns from the Country-under-Wave or apples
Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all
That they might sift men's hearts and wills,
And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble
That lay a hard task on you, that you go,
And silently, and do not turn your head ;
Goodbye ; but do not turn your head and look ;
Above all else, I would not have you look.

(ALEEL goes.)

I never spoke to him of his wounded hand,
And now he is gone. (*She looks out.*)
I cannot see him, for all is dark outside.

Would my imagination and my heart
Were as little shaken as this holy flame!

*(She goes slowly into the chapel. The distant
sound of an alarm bell. The two MER-
CHANTS enter hurriedly.)*

SECOND MERCHANT

They are ringing the alarm, and in a moment
They'll be upon us.

FIRST MERCHANT *(going to a door at the side)*

Here is the Treasury,
You'd my commands to put them all to sleep.

SECOND MERCHANT

Some angel or else her prayers protected them.

*(Goes into the Treasury and returns with bags
of treasure. FIRST MERCHANT has been
listening at the oratory door.)*

FIRST MERCHANT

She has fallen asleep.

*(SECOND MERCHANT goes out through one of the
arches at the back and stands listening.
The bags are at his feet.)*

SECOND MERCHANT

We've all the treasure now,
So let's away before they've tracked us out.

FIRST MERCHANT

I have a plan to win her.

SECOND MERCHANT

You have time enough
If you would kill her and bear off her soul
Before they are upon us with their prayers;
They search the Western Tower.

FIRST MERCHANT

That may not be.
We cannot face the heavenly host in arms.
Her soul must come to us of its own will,
But being of the ninth and mightiest Hell
Where all are kings, I have a plan to win it.
Lady, we've news that's crying out for speech.

(CATHLEEN wakes and comes to door of chapel.)

CATHLEEN

Who calls?

FIRST MERCHANT

We have brought news.

CATHLEEN

What are you ?

FIRST MERCHANT

We are merchants, and we know the book of the
world

Because we have walked upon its leaves ; and there
Have read of late matters that much concern you ;
And noticing the castle door stand open,
Came in to find an ear.

CATHLEEN

The door stands open,
That no one who is famished or afraid,
Despair of help or of a welcome with it.
But you have news, you say.

FIRST MERCHANT

We saw a man,
Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allen,
Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair Head
We saw your grain ships lying all becalmed
In the dark night ; and not less still than they,
Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the sea.

CATHLEEN

My thanks to God, to Mary and the angels,
That I have money in my treasury,
And can buy grain from those who have stored it up
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.
But you've been far and know the signs of things,
When will this famine end?

FIRST MERCHANT

Day copies day,
And there's no sign of change, nor can it change,
With the wheat withered and the cattle dead.

CATHLEEN

And heard you of the demons who buy souls?

FIRST MERCHANT

There are some men who hold they have wolves'
heads,
And say their limbs—dried by the infinite flame—
Have all the speed of storms ; others, again,
Say they are gross and little ; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled—like us, lady—

Yet all agree a power is in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting-net
About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor vapours, were it not
You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN

Praise be to God, to Mary, and the angels
That I am wealthy ! Wherefore do they sell ?

FIRST MERCHANT

As we came in at the great door we saw
Your porter sleeping in his niche—a soul
Too little to be worth a hundred pence,
And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns.
But for a soul like yours, I heard them say,
They would give five hundred thousand crowns and
more.

CATHLEEN

How can a heap of crowns pay for a soul ?
Is the green grave so terrible a thing ?

FIRST MERCHANT

Some sell because the money gleams, and some
Because they are in terror of the grave,

And some because their neighbours sold before,
And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,
In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind ;
To this—full of the gaiety of the lost—
Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN

There is a something, Merchant, in your voice
That makes me fear. When you were telling how
A man may lose his soul and lose his God
Your eyes were lighted up, and when you told
How my poor money serves the people, both—
Merchants forgive me—seemed to smile.

FIRST MERCHANT

I laugh

To think that all these people should be swung
As on a lady's shoe-string,—under them
The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

CATHLEEN

There is a something in you that I fear ;

A something not of us ; were you not born
In some most distant corner of the world ?

*(The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listening
at the door, comes forward, and as he comes
a sound of voices and feet is heard.)*

SECOND MERCHANT

Away now—they are in the passage—hurry,
For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts
With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin
With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT

Farewell ; for we must ride
Many a mile before the morning come ;
Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

*(They go out. A number of PEASANTS enter by
other door.)*

FIRST PEASANT

Forgive us, lady, but we heard a noise.

SECOND PEASANT

We sat by the fireside telling vanities.

FIRST PEASANT

We heard a noise, but though we have searched the
house
We have found nobody.

CATHLEEN

You are too timid,
For now you are safe from all the evil times,
There is no evil that can find you here.

OONA (*entering hurriedly*)

Ochone ! Ochone ! The treasure room is broken in.
The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

(PEASANTS *raise a lamentable cry.*)

CATHLEEN

Be silent. (*The cry ceases.*) Have you seen nobody?

OONA

Ochone !
That my good mistress should lose all this money.

CATHLEEN

Let those among you—not too old to ride—

Get horses and search all the country round,
I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

*(A man with keys at his girdle has come in while
she speaks. There is a general murmur of
"The porter! the porter!")*

PORTER

Demons were here. I sat beside the door
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

OLD PEASANT

God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN

Old man, old man, He never closed a door
Unless one opened. I am desolate,
Because of a strange thought that's in my heart:
But I have still my faith; therefore be silent;
For surely He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull and shapeless ease;

But sometimes—though His hand is on it still—
It moves awry and demon hordes are born.

(PEASANTS *cross themselves.*)

Yet leave me now, for I am desolate,
I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

(*She comes from the oratory door.*)

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again
I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take
These two—the larder and the dairy keys.

(*To the PORTER.*)

But take you this. It opens the small room
Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore,
Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal.
The book of cures is on the upper shelf.

PORTER

Why do you do this, lady; did you see
Your coffin in a dream?

CATHLEEN

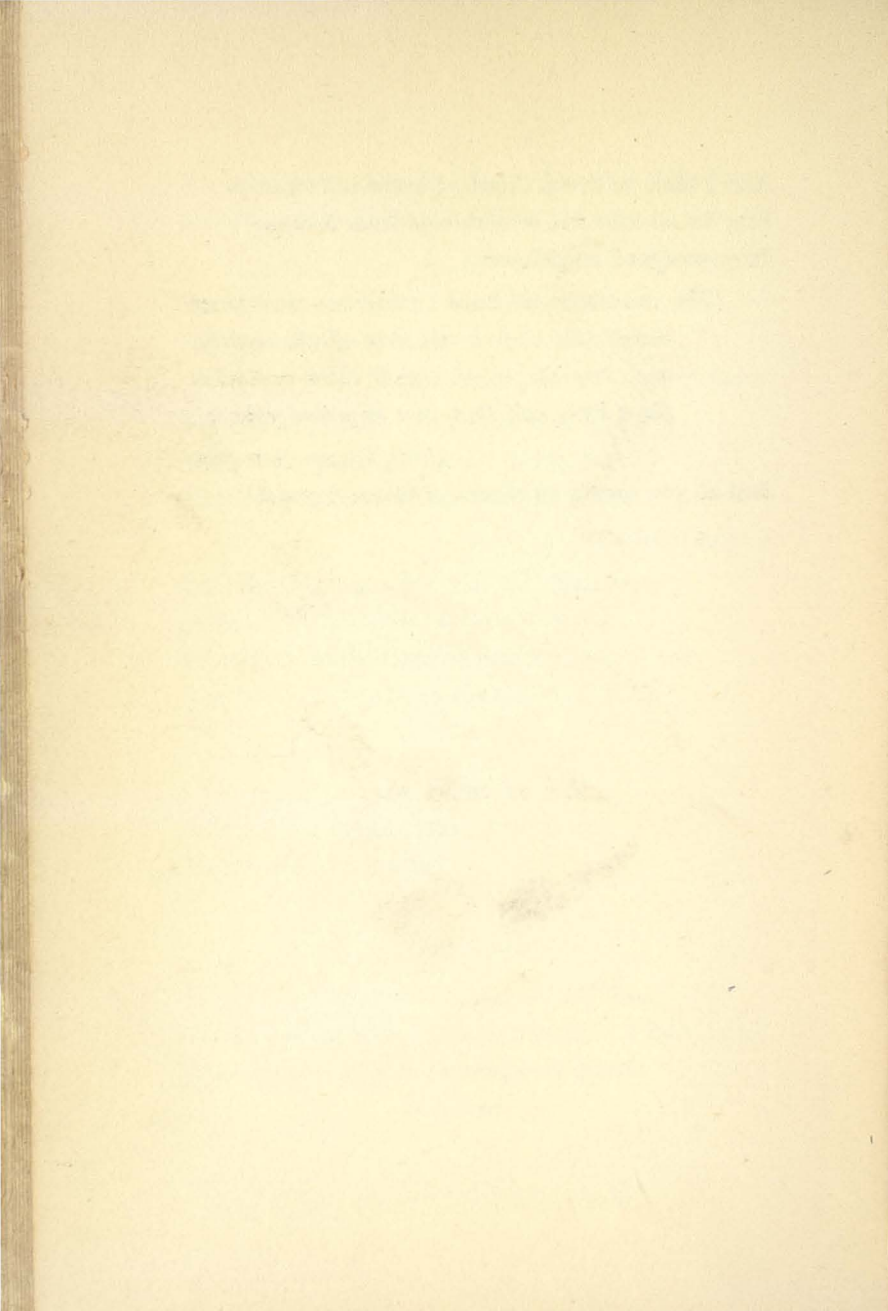
Ah, no, not that.
But I have come to a strange thought. I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,

And I must go down, down—I know not where—
Pray for all men and women mad from famine;
Pray, you good neighbours.

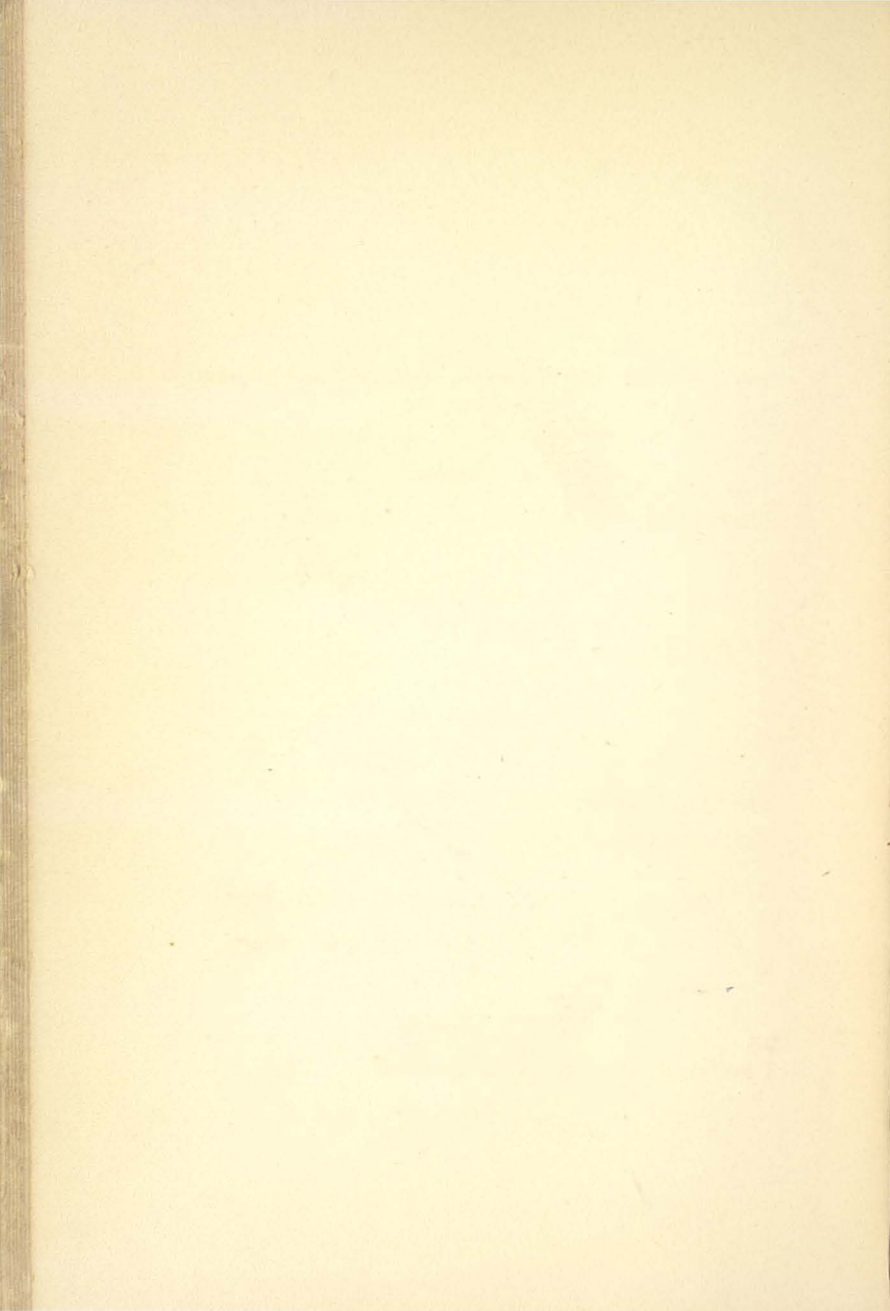
*(The PEASANTS all kneel. COUNTESS CATHLEEN
ascends the steps to the door of the oratory,
and turning round stands there motionless
for a little, and then cries in a loud voice:)*

Mary, Queen of angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

END OF SCENE III.



SCENE IV



SCENE.—*A wood near the Castle, as in Scene II. A group of PEASANTS pass.*

FIRST PEASANT

I have seen silver and copper, but not gold.

SECOND PEASANT

It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT

It's beautiful.

The most beautiful thing under the sun,
That's what I've heard.

THIRD PEASANT

I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT

I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT

But doesn't a gold piece glitter like the sun?
That's what my father, who'd seen better days,
Told me when I was but a little boy—
So high—so high, it's shining like the sun,
Round and shining, that is what he said.

SECOND PEASANT

There's nothing in the world it cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT

They've bags and bags of it.

*(They go out. The two MERCHANTS follow
silently. Then ALEEL passes over the stage
singing.)*

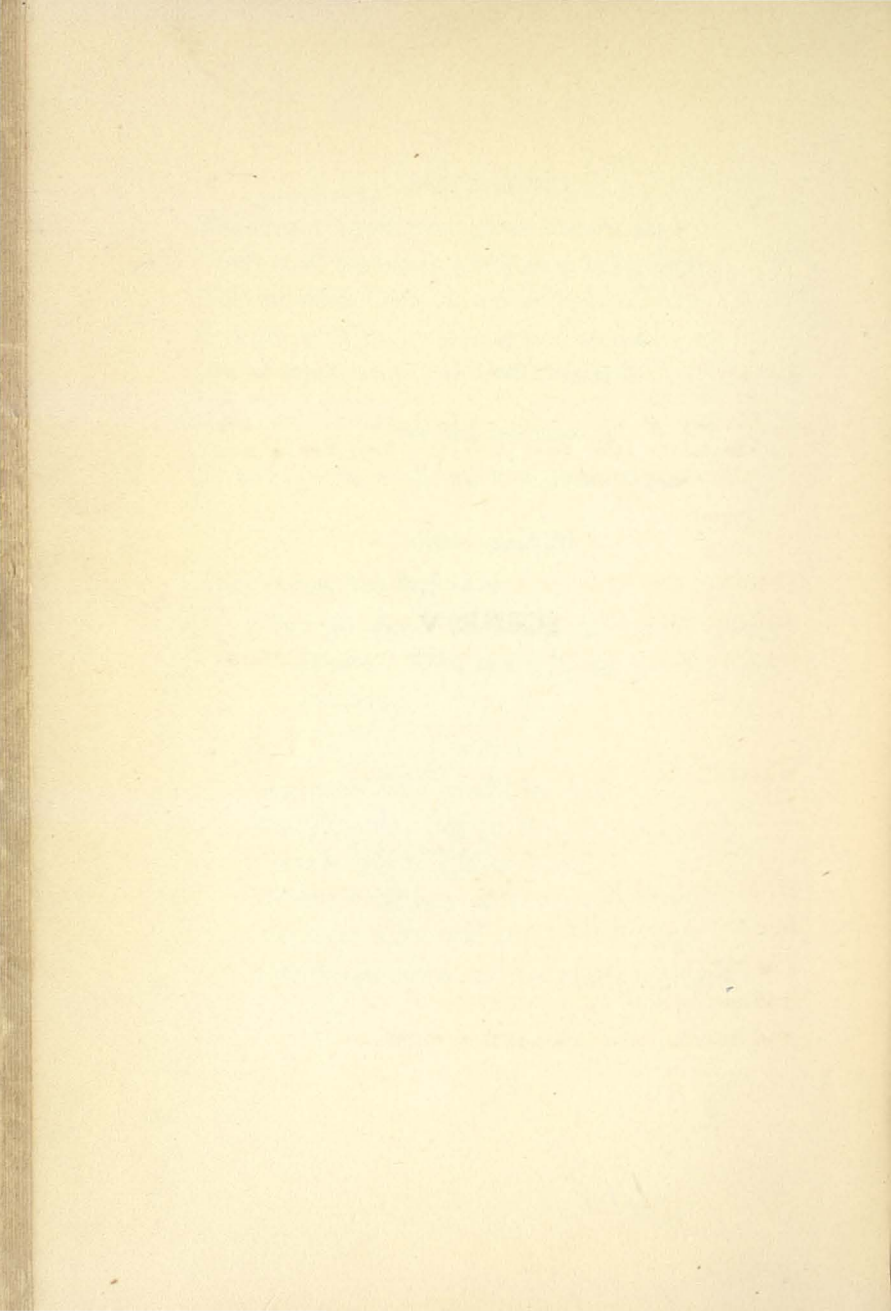
ALEEL

Impetuous heart be still, be still,
Your sorrowful love can never be told,
Cover it up with a lonely tune.
He who could bend all things to His will
Has covered the door of the infinite fold
With the pale stars and the wandering moon.

END OF SCENE IV.

SCENE V





SCENE.—*The house of SHEMUS RUA. There is an alcove at the back with curtains; in it a bed, and on the bed is the body of MARY with candles round it. The two MERCHANTS while they speak put a large book upon a table, arrange money, and so on.*

FIRST MERCHANT

Thanks to that lie I told about her ships
And that about the herdsman lying sick,
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT

What has she in her coffers now but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT

When the night fell and I had shaped myself
Into the image of the man-headed owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw with all their canvas full of wind
And rushing through the parti-coloured sea

Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal.
They're but three days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT

When the dew rose
I hurried in like feathers to the east,
And saw nine hundred oxen driven through Meath
With goads of iron. They're but three days from us.

FIRST MERCHANT

Three days for traffic.

(PEASANTS *crowd in with* TEIG and SHEMUS.)

SHEMUS

Come in, come in, you are welcome.
That is my wife. She mocked at my great masters,
And would not deal with them. Now there she is;
She does not even know she was a fool,
So great a fool she was.

TEIG

She would not eat
One crumb of bread bought with our master's money,
But lived on nettles, dock, and dandelion.

SHEMUS

There's nobody could put into her head
That Death is the worst thing can happen us.
Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank
With all the lies that she had heard in chapel.
Draw to the curtain. (TEIG *draws it.*) You'll not play
the fool
While these good gentlemen are there to save you.

SECOND MERCHANT

Since the drought came they drift about in a throng,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds.
Come, deal—come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT

Who will come deal with us?

SHEMUS.

They are out of spirit, sir, with lack of food,
Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these;
The others will gain courage in good time.

MIDDLE-AGED-MAN

I come to deal—if you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in a book*)

"John Maher, a man of substance, with dull mind,
And quiet senses and unventurous heart.
The angels think him safe." Two hundred crowns,
All for a soul, a little breath of wind.

THE MAN

I ask three hundred crowns. You have read there
That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT

There is something more writ here—"Often at night
He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor,
And thereon wonders if there's any man
That he could rob in safety."

A PEASANT

Who'd have thought it?
And I was once alone with him at midnight.

ANOTHER PEASANT

I will not trust my mother after this.

FIRST MERCHANT

There is this crack in you—two hundred crowns.

A PEASANT

That's plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT

I'd give him nothing.

SHEMUS

You'll get no more—so take what's offered you.

(A general murmur, during which the MIDDLE-AGED MAN takes money, and slips into background, where he sinks on to a seat.)

FIRST MERCHANT

Has no one got a better soul than that?
If only for the credit of your parishes,
Traffic with us.

A WOMAN

What will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT *(reading in book)*

"Soft, handsome, and still young"—not much, I think.
"It's certain that the man she's married to
Knows nothing of what's hidden in the jar
Between the hour-glass and the pepper-pot."

THE WOMAN

The scandalous book.

FIRST MERCHANT

“Nor how when he's away
At the horse fair the hand that wrote what's hid
Will tap three times upon the window-pane.”

THE WOMAN

And if there is a letter, that is no reason
Why I should have less money than the others.

FIRST MERCHANT

You're almost safe, I give you fifty crowns.

(She turns to go.)

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS

Woman, have sense—come, come.
Is this a time to haggle at the price?
There, take it up. There, there. That's right.
(She takes them and goes into the crowd.)

FIRST MERCHANT

Come, deal, deal, deal. It is but for charity

We buy such souls at all ; a thousand sins
Made them our Master's long before we came.

(ALEEL enters.)

ALEEL

Here, take my soul, for I am tired of it.
I do not ask a price.

SHEMUS

Not ask a price ?
How can you sell your soul without a price ?
I would not listen to his broken wits ;
His love for Countess Cathleen has so crazed him
He hardly understands what he is saying.

ALEEL

The trouble that has come on Countess Cathleen,
The sorrow that is in her wasted face,
The burden in her eyes, have broke my wits,
And yet I know I'd have you take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT

We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL.

No, but you must. Seeing it cannot help her
I have grown tired of it.

FIRST MERCHANT

Begone from me,
I may not touch it.

ALEEL

Is your power so small?
And must I bear it with me all my days?
May you be scorned and mocked!

FIRST MERCHANT

Drag him away.
He troubles me.
(TEIG and SHEMUS lead ALEEL into the crowd.)

SECOND MERCHANT

His gaze has filled me, brother,
With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT

Lean forward
And kiss the circlet where my Master's lips
Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither;
You shall have peace once more.

(SECOND MERCHANT kisses the gold circlet that is
about the head of the FIRST MERCHANT.)

I, too, grow weary,
But there is something moving in my heart
Whereby I know that what we seek the most
Is drawing near—our labour will soon end.
Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; are you all dumb?
What, will you keep me from our ancient home,
And from the eternal revelry?

SECOND MERCHANT

Deal, deal.

SHEMUS

They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT

I offer this great price : a thousand crowns
For an old woman who was always ugly.

*(An old PEASANT WOMAN comes forward, and he
takes up a book and reads :)*

There is but little set down here against her.
"She has stolen eggs and fowl when times were bad,
But when the times grew better has confessed it ;
She never missed her chapel of a Sunday
And when she could, paid dues." Take up your
money.

OLD WOMAN

God bless you, sir. (*She screams.*) Oh, sir, a pain
went through me!

FIRST MERCHANT

That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

(*Murmur among the PEASANTS, who shrink back
from her as she goes out.*)

A PEASANT

How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT

And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT

I tell you there is no such place as hell.

FIRST MERCHANT

Can such a trifle turn you from your profit?
Come, deal; come, deal.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT

I bought your soul, and there's no sense in fear
Now the soul's gone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Give me my soul again.

WOMAN (*going on her knees and clinging to*
MERCHANT)

And take this money too, and give me mine.

SECOND MERCHANT

Bear bastards, drink or follow some wild fancy;
For sighs and cries are the soul's work,
And you have none.

(*Throws the woman off.*)

PEASANT

Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT

Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT

Come quickly ; if that woman had not screamed
I would have lost my soul.

ANOTHER PEASANT

Come, come away.

*(They turn to door, but are stopped by shouts of
"Countess Cathleen! Countess Cathleen!")*

CATHLEEN *(entering)*

And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT

In spite of you.

What brings you here, saint with the sapphire eyes?

CATHLEEN

I come to barter a soul for a great price.

SECOND MERCHANT

What matter, if the soul be worth the price?

CATHLEEN

The people starve, therefore the people go
Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them
And it is in my ears by night and day,
And I would have five hundred thousand crowns
That I may feed them till the dearth go by.

FIRST MERCHANT

It may be the soul's worth it.

CATHLEEN

There is more :
The souls that you have bought must be set free.

FIRST MERCHANT

We know of but one soul that's worth the price.

CATHLEEN

Being my own it seems a priceless thing.

SECOND MERCHANT

You offer us——

CATHLEEN

I offer my own soul.

A PEASANT

Do not, do not, for souls the like of ours
Are not precious to God as your soul is.
O! what would Heaven do without you, lady?

ANOTHER PEASANT

Look how their claws clutch in their leathern gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT

Five hundred thousand crowns ; we give the price.
The gold is here ; the souls even while you speak
Have slipped out of our bond, because your face
Has shed a light on them and filled their hearts.
But you must sign, for we omit no form
In buying a soul like yours.

SECOND MERCHANT

Sign with this quill
It was a feather growing on the cock
That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
And all who use it have great honour in Hell.

(CATHLEEN *leans forward to sign.*)

ALEEL (*rushing forward and snatching the
pen from her*)

Leave all things to the builder of the heavens.

CATHLEEN

I have no thoughts ; I hear a cry—a cry.

ALEEL (*casting the pen on the ground*)

I have seen a vision under a green hedge,
A hedge of hips and haws—men yet shall hear

The Archangels rolling Satan's empty skull
Over the mountain-tops.

FIRST MERCHANT

Take him away.

(TEIG and SHEMUS drag him roughly away so that
he falls upon the floor among the PEASANTS.
CATHLEEN picks up parchment and signs, then
turns towards the PEASANTS.)

CATHLEEN

Take up the money, and now come with me ;
When we are far from this polluted place
I will give everybody money enough.

(She goes out, the PEASANTS crowding round her
and kissing her dress. ALEEL and the two
MERCHANTS are left alone.)

SECOND MERCHANT

We must away and wait until she dies,
Sitting above her tower as two grey owls,
Waiting as many years as may be, guarding
Our precious jewel ; waiting to seize her soul.

FIRST MERCHANT

We need but hover over her head in the air,

For she has only minutes. When she signed
Her heart began to break. Hush, hush, I hear
The brazen door of Hell move on its hinges,
And the eternal revelry float hither
To hearten us.

SECOND MERCHANT

Leap feathered on the air
And meet them with her soul caught in your claws.

*(They rush out. ALEEL crawls into the middle of
the room. The twilight has fallen and
gradually darkens as the scene goes on. There
is a distant muttering of thunder and a
sound of rising storm.)*

ALEEL

The brazen door stands wide, and Balor comes
Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted
The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of old
Turned gods to stone ; Barach, the traitor, comes
And the lascivious race, Cailitin,
That cast a druid weakness and decay
Over Sualtem's and old Dectera's child ;
And that great king Hell first took hold upon
When he killed Naisi and broke Deirdre's heart

And all their heads are twisted to one side,
For when they lived they warred on beauty and
peace

With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness.

*(He moves about as though the air above him
was full of spirits. OONA enters.)*

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand it trembled,
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA

God guard her soul.

ALEEL

She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

(He points downward.)

First, Orchill, her pale, beautiful head
Her body shadowy as vapour drifting
Under the dawn, for she who awoke desire
Has but a heart of blood when others die ;
About her is a vapoury multitude
Of women alluring devils with soft laughter ;
Behind her a host heat of the blood made sin,
But all the little pink-white nails have grown
To be great talons.

*(He seizes OONA and drags her into the middle of
the room and points downward with vehement
gestures. The wind roars.)*

They begin a song
And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA *(casting herself face downwards on the floor)*

O, Maker of all, protect her from the demons,
And if a soul must need be lost, take mine.

*(ALEEL kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear
her words. The PEASANTS return. They
carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her
upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL.
She lies there as if dead.)*

OONA

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two !

(She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.)

A PEASANT

We were under the tree where the path turns,
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.
And while we bore her hither cloudy gusts
Blackened the world and shook us on our feet ;
Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld
So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

(One who is near the door draws the bolt.)

CATHLEEN

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

*(OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins
to wail.)*

PEASANT

Hush !

PEASANTS

Hush !

PEASANT WOMEN

Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN

Hush

CATHLEEN (*half rising*)

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman : judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN

And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel ;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep

Too great a while, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell !
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me,
And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child and therefore happy,
Therefore happy, even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair and I must go.

(She dies.)

OONA

Bring me the looking-glass.

(A WOMAN brings it to her out of the inner room.

OONA holds it over the lips of CATHLEEN.

*All is silent for a moment. And then she
speaks in a half scream :)*

O, she is dead !

A PEASANT

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN

The little plant I love is broken in two.

*(ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings
it upon the floor so that it is broken in
many pieces.)*

ALEEL

I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more :
And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful
words
Made you a living spirit has passed away
And left you but a ball of passionate dust.
And you, proud earth and plummy sea, fade out !
For you may hear no more her faltering feet,
But are left lonely amid the clamorous war
Of angels upon devils.

*(He stands up ; almost every one is kneeling, but
it has grown so dark that only confused
forms can be seen.)*

And I who weep
Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change,
And have no excellent hope but the great hour

When you shall plunge headlong through bottomless
space.

*(A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.)*

A PEASANT WOMAN

Pull him upon his knees before his curses
Have plucked thunder and lightning on our heads.

ALEEL

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.

*(A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.)*

Yonder a bright spear, cast out of a sling,
Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark clans
Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.

(Everything is lost in darkness.)

AN OLD MAN

The Almighty wrath at our great weakness and sin
Has blotted out the world and we must die.

*(The darkness is broken by a visionary light.
The PEASANTS seem to be kneeling upon the*

rocky slope of a mountain, and vapour full of storm and ever-changing light is sweeping above them and behind them. Half in the light, half in the shadow, stand armed angels. Their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dented. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The PEASANTS cast themselves on the ground.)

ALEEL

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me, whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things,
And tell of her who lies there.

(He seizes one of the angels.)

Till you speak

You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL

The light beats down ; the gates of pearl are wide.
And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair

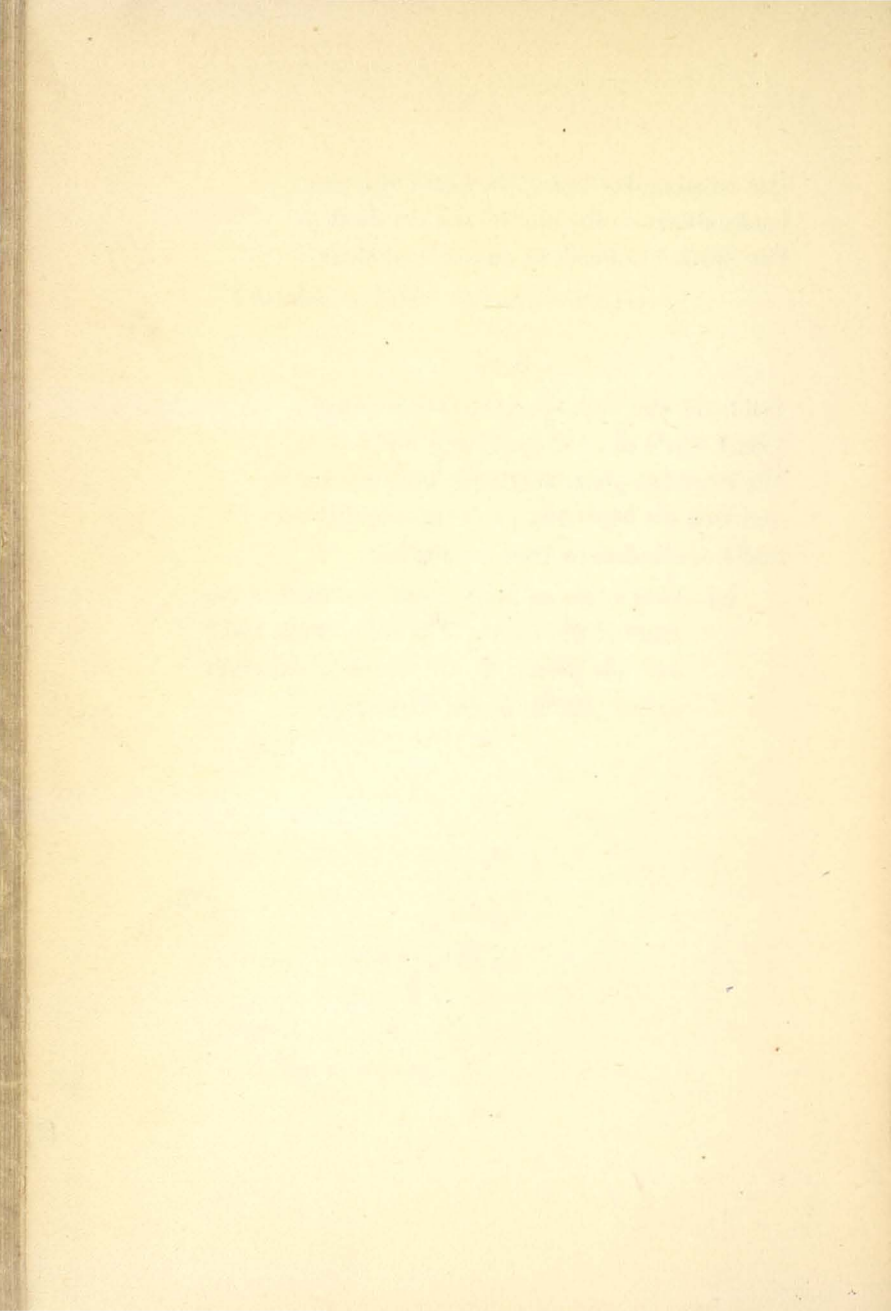
Has fallen on her face ; The Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

(ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.)

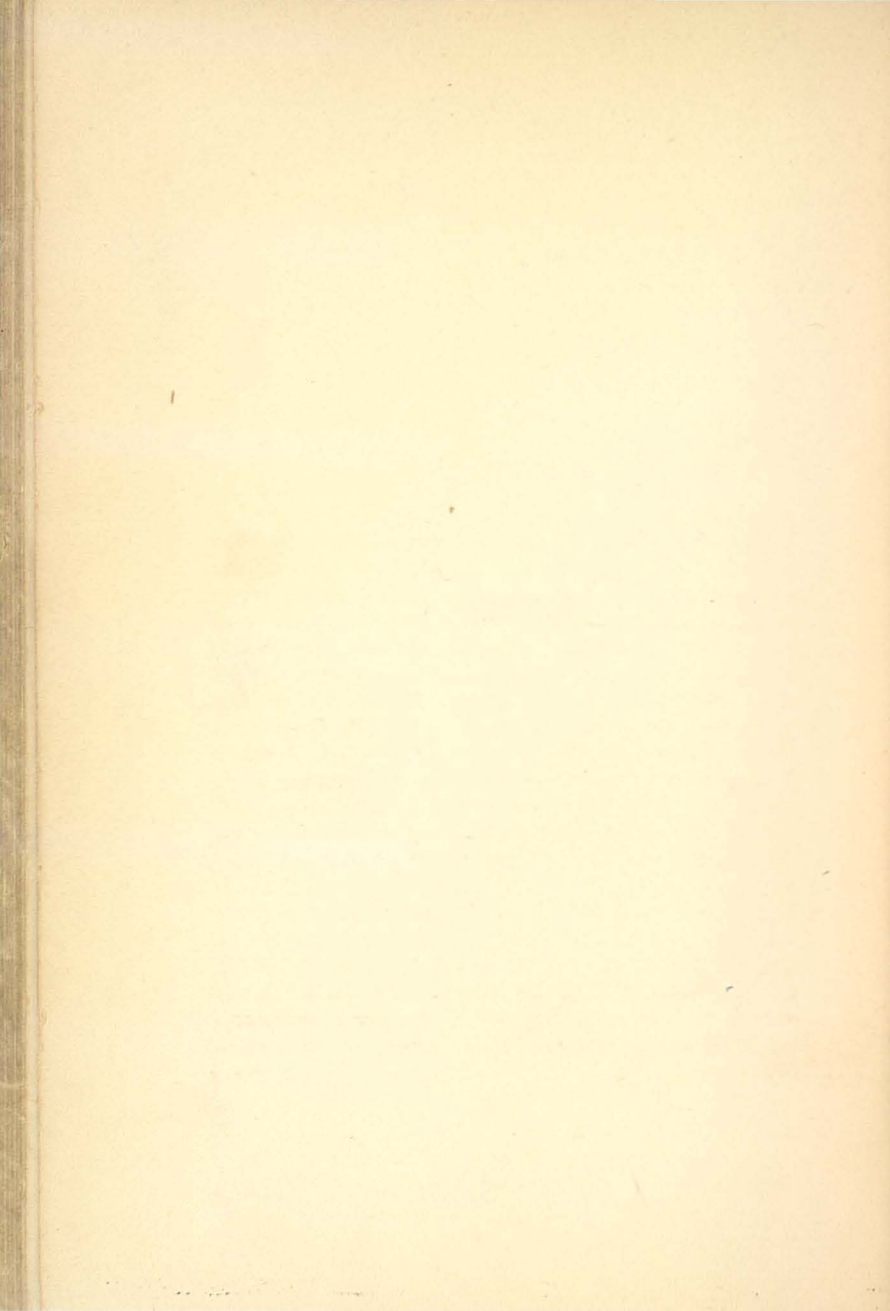
OONA

Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace
That I would die and go to her I love ;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind
And I am broken by their passing feet.

*(A sound of far-off horns seems to come from the
heart of the Light. The vision melts away,
and the forms of the kneeling PEASANTS
appear faintly in the darkness.)*



NOTES



NOTES

I FOUND the story of the Countess Cathleen in what professed to be a collection of Irish folk-lore in an Irish newspaper some years ago. I wrote to the compiler, asking about its source, but got no answer, but have since heard that it was translated from *Les Matinées de Timothè Trimm* a good many years ago, and has been drifting about the Irish press ever since. Léo Lespès gives it as an Irish story, and though the editor of *Folklore* has kindly advertised for information, the only Christian variant I know of is a Donegal tale, given by Mr. Larminie in his *West Irish Folk Tales and Romances*, of a woman who goes to hell for ten years to save her husband, and stays there another ten, having been granted permission to carry away as many souls as could cling to her skirt. Léo Lespès may have added a few details, but I have no doubt of the essential antiquity of what seems to me the most impressive form of one of the supreme parables of the world. The parable came to the Greeks in the sacrifice of Alcestis, but her sacrifice was less overwhelming, less apparently irremediable. Léo Lespès tells the story as follows:—

Ce que je vais vous dire est un récit du carême Irlandais. Le boiteux, l'aveugle, le paralytique des rues de Dublin ou de Limerick, vous le diraient mieux que moi, cher lecteur, si vous alliez le leur demander, un sixpense d'argent à la main.—Il n'est pas une jeune fille catholique à laquelle on ne l'ait appris pendant les jours de préparation à la communion sainte, pas un berger des bords de la Blackwater qui ne le puisse redire à la veillée.

Il y a bien longtemps qu'il apparut tout-à-coup dans la vieille Irlande deux marchands inconnus dont personne n'avait ouï parler, et qui parlaient néanmoins avec la plus grande perfection la langue du pays. Leurs cheveux étaient noirs et ferrés avec de l'or et leurs robes d'une grande magnificence.

Tous deux semblaient avoir le même âge ; ils paraissaient être des hommes de cinquante ans, car leur barbe grisonnait un peu.

Or, à cette époque, comme aujourd'hui, l'Irlande était pauvre, car le soleil avait été rare, et des récoltes presque nulles. Les indigents ne savaient à quel sainte se vouer, et la misère devenait de plus en plus terrible.

Dans l'hôtellerie où descendirent les marchands fastueux on chercha à pénétrer leurs desseins : mais ce fut en vain, ils demeurèrent silencieux et discrets.

Et pendant qu'ils demeurèrent dans l'hôtellerie, ils ne cessèrent de compter et de recompter des sacs de pièces d'or, dont la vive clarté s'apercevait à travers les vitres du logis.

Gentlemen, leur dit l'hôtesse un jour, d'où vient que vous êtes si opulents, et que, venus pour secourir la misère publique, vous ne fassiez pas de bonnes œuvres ?

—Belle hôtesse, répondit l'un d'eux, nous n'avons pas voulu aller au-devant d'infortunes honorables, dans la crainte d'être trompés par des misères fictives : que la douleur frappe à la porte, nous ouvrirons.

Le lendemain, quand on sut qu'il existait deux opulents étrangers prêts à prodiguer l'or, la foule assiégea leur logis ; mais

les figures des gens qui en sortaient étaient bien diverses. Les uns avaient la fierté dans le regard, les autres portaient la honte au front. Les deux trafiquants achetaient des âmes pour le démon. L'âme d'un vieillard valait vingt pièces d'or, pas un penny de plus ; car Satan avait eu le temps d'y former hypothèque. L'âme d'une épouse en valait cinquante quand elle était jolie, ou cent quand elle était laide. L'âme d'une ieune fille se payait des prix fous : les fleurs les plus belles et les plus pures sont les plus chères.

Pendant ce temps, il existait dans la ville un ange de beauté, la comtesse Ketty O'Connor. Elle était l'idole du peuple, et la providence des indigents. Dès qu'elle eut appris que des mécréants profitaient de la misère publique pour dérober des cœurs à Dieu, elle fit appeler son majordome.

— Master Patrick, lui dit elle, combien ai-je de pièces d'or dans mon coffre ?

— Cent mille.

— Combien de bijoux ?

— Peur autant d'argent.

— Combien de châteaux, de bois et de terres ?

— Pour le double de ces sommes.

— Eh bien ! Patrick, vendez tout ce qui n'est pas or et apportez-m'en le montant. Je ne veux garder à moi que ce castel et le champ qui l'entoure.

Deux jours après, les ordres de la pieuse Ketty étaient exécutés et le trésor était distribué aux pauvres au fur et à mesure de leurs besoins.

Ceci ne faisait pas le compte, dit la tradition, des commis-voyageurs du malin esprit, qui ne trouvaient plus d'âmes à acheter.

Aidés par un valet infâme, ils pénétrèrent dans la retraite de la noble dame et lui dérobèrent le reste de son trésor . . . en vain lutta-t-elle de toutes ses forces pour sauver le contenu de son coffre, les larrons diaboliques furent les plus forts. Si Ketty avait eu les moyens de faire un signe de croix, ajoute la légende

Irlandaise, elle les eût mis en ruite, mais ses mains étaient captives—Le larcin fut effectué. Alors les pauvres sollicitèrent en vain près de Ketty dépouillée, elle ne pouvait plus secourir leur misère ;—elle les abandonnait à la tentation. Pourtant il n'y avait plus que huit jours à passer pour que les grains et les fourrages arrivassent en abondance des pays d'Orient. Mais, huit jours, c'était un siècle : huit jours nécessitaient une somme immense pour subvenir aux exigences de la disette, et les pauvres allaient ou expirer dans les angousses de la faim, ou, reniant les saintes maximes de l'Evangile, vendre à vil prix leur âme, le plus beau présent de la munificence du Seigneur tout-puissant.

Et Ketty n'avait plus une obole, car elle avait abandonné son château aux malheureux.

Elle passa douze heures dans les larmes et le deuil, arrachant ses cheveux couleur de soleil et meurtrissant son sein couleur du lis : puis elle se leva résolue, animée par un vif sentiment de désespoir.

Elle se rendit chez les marchands d'âmes.

— Que voulez-vous ? dirent ils.

— Vous achetez des âmes ?

— Oui, un peu malgré vous, n'est ce pas, sainte aux yeux de saphir ?

— Aujourd'hui je viens vous proposer un marché, reprit elle.

— Lequel ?

— J'ai une âme à vendre ; mais elle est chère.

— Qu'importe si elle est précieuse ? l'âme, comme le diamant, s'apprécie à sa blancheur.

— C'est la mienne, dit Ketty.

Les deux envoyés de Satan tressaillirent. Leurs griffes s'allongèrent sous leurs gants de cuir ; leurs yeux gris étincelèrent :—l'âme, pure, immaculée, virginale de Ketty ! . . . c'était une acquisition inappréciable.

— Gentille dame, combien voulez-vous ?

— Cent cinquante mille écus d'or.

— C'est fait, dirent les marchands : et ils tendirent à Ketty un parchemin cacheté de noir, qu'elle signa en frissonnant.

La somme lui fut comptée.

Des qu'elle fut rentrée, elle dit au majordome :

— Tenez, distribuez ceci. Avec la somme que je vous donne les pauvres attendront la huitaine nécessaire et pas une de leurs âmes ne sera livrée au démon.

Puis elle s'enferma et recommanda qu'on ne vint pas la déranger.

Trois iours se passèrent ; elle n'appela pas ; elle ne sortit pas.

Quand on ouvrit sa porte, on la trouva raide et froide : elle était morte de douleur.

Mais la vente de cette âme si adorable dans sa charité fut déclarée nulle par le Seigneur : car elle avait sauvé ses concitoyens de la morte éternelle.

Après la huitaine, des vaisseaux nombreux amenèrent à l'Irlande affamée d'immenses provisions de grains.

La famine n'était plus possible. Quant aux marchands, ils disparurent de leur hôtellerie, sans qu'on sût jamais ce qu'ils étaient devenus.

Toutefois, les pêcheurs de la Blackwater prétendent qu'ils sont enchainés dans une prison souterraine par ordre de Lucifer jusqu'au moment où ils pourront livrer l'âme de Ketty qui leur a échappé. Je vous dis la légende telle que je la sais.

—Mais les pauvres l'ont raconté d'âge en âge et les enfants de Cork et de Dublin chantent encore la ballade dont voici les derniers couplets :—

Pour sauver les pauvres qu'elle aime
Ketty donna
Son esprit, sa croyance même :
Satan paya

Cette âme au dévouement sublime,
En écus d'or,
Disons pour racheter son crime,
Confiteor.

Mais l'ange qui se fit coupable
Par charité
Au séjour d'amour ineffable
Est remonté.
Satan vaincu n'eut pas de prise
Sur ce cœur d'or ;
Chantons sous la nef de l'église,
Confiteor.

N'est ce pas que ce récit, né de l'imagination des poètes catholiques de la verte Erin, est une véritable récit de carême ?

The Countess Cathleen was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkin-son as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as The Countess Kathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who

avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences—even at the Abbey Theatre—are almost ignorant of Irish mythology—or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the proscenium and have a flight of steps at one side up which the Angel comes, crossing towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the balcony which throw their lights into the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary. The room at Shemus Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain—a colour which becomes full of rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The two or more arches in the third scene permit the use of a gauze. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play

when played without interval in this way lasts a little over an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows:—

(MERCHANTS *rush out*. ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.*)

ALEEL

They're rising up—they're rising through the earth,
Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,
And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.
But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round.
Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

(*He moves about as though the air was full of spirits.* OONA *enters.*)

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled.
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA

God guard her soul.

ALËEL

She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

*(He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words.
The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS
CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA
and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.)*

OONA

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two !

(She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.)

A PEASANT

We were under the tree where the path turns
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

(OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.)

PEASANTS

Hush !

PEASANTS

Hush !

PEASANT WOMEN

Hush !

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN

Hush !

CATHLEEN (*half rising*)

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman : judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN

And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth ?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel ;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep
Too great a while, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell !
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me
And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child—and therefore happy,
Therefore happy even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair and I must go.

(*She dies.*)

OONA

Bring me the looking-glass.

(A WOMAN brings it to her out of inner room. OONA holds glass over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is silent for a moment, then she speaks in a half-scream.)

O, she is dead !

A PEASANT

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN

The little plant I loved is broken in two.

(ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon floor, so that it is broken in many pieces.)

ALEEL

I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more ;
And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror
Are but a ball of passionate dust again !
And level earth and plummy sea, rise up !
And haughty sky, fall down !

A PEASANT WOMAN

Pull him upon his knees,
His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,

And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.
Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye !

(A winged ANGEL, carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the R. with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The ANGEL is about to pass out to the L. when ALEEL speaks. The ANGEL stops a moment and turns.)

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things :
And tell of her who lies there.

(The ANGEL turns again and is about to go, but is seized by ALEEL.)

Till you speak
You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL

The light beats down ; the gates of pearl are wide.
And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face ; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

(ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.)

OONA

Tell them to walk upon the floor of peace,
That I would die and go to her I love ;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

