

The Far-Off Hills

A Comedy in Three Acts

Lennox Robinson

1931

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THE FAR-OFF HILLS

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

LENNOX ROBINSON

CHATTO & WINDUS, LONDON

1931

For permission to perform this play and for information as to the fee payable, application must be made to Messrs. Curtis Brown, 6 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2. For permission to perform the play in Ireland, application should be made to The Secretary, Irish Playwrights' Association, Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

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TO
HESTER

CHARACTERS

PATRICK CLANCY

MARIAN

DOROTHEA ('Ducky') } *his daughters*

ANNA ('Pet')

DICK DELANY

OLIVER O'SHAUGHNESSY

HAROLD MAHONY

SUSIE TYNAN

PIERCE HEGARTY

ELLEN NOLAN

The first and third acts take place in the Clancys' dining-room, the second act in the girls'—Ducky's and Pet's—bedroom. No time elapses between the first and second acts, but several weeks elapse between the second and third.

THE FAR-OFF HILLS

ACT I

The dining-room at the Clancys'. A comfortable unpretentious room. It is Sunday night, after supper, the three CLANCY girls are clearing the table, their father, PATRICK, is still sitting at it. The eldest girl, MARIAN, is about twenty-two years old, her dress is markedly plain and dark, DOROTHEA—just past seventeen—and ANNA—a year younger—are quite gaily dressed. Their father is a man of fifty.

MARIAN (*directing operations*). Those spoons are clean, they can go on the sideboard. . . . That's Father's glass, he'll want that.

PATRICK. I've dropped my handkerchief. Could you find it for me, Pet?

PET (*otherwise ANNA*). Here it is.

MARIAN. Take those flowers out, Anna, they're withered. And put on a kettle of water. I suppose Ellen isn't in yet.

PET. Not likely. She's a date with Donough to-night.

(She goes out with the flowers.)

PATRICK. Are you there, Ducky?

DUCKY (*otherwise DOROTHEA*). Yes, Daddy.

PATRICK. Get me my stick, like a good child.

DUCKY. Here you are.

MARIAN (*having completed piling a tray*). Take that to the kitchen, Dorothea. . . . Gently! Goodness' sake, you'll drop the whole thing. I'll open the door. *(She gets DUCKY safely out, shuts the door, takes whatever remains on the table—napkins, clean silver, etc., and puts them on the sideboard. Then, to her father)* Come, dear, I'll get you to the fire.

PATRICK. All right. *(He rises, groping with his stick. MARIAN slips her arm into his.)* Don't bother, I can manage. I know the way by this time.

MARIAN. Better be sure than sorry.

(She guides him across the room and to a comfortable chair by the fire. He settles into it and sighs deeply.)

MARIAN (*folding up the table-cloth*). Such a sigh! What ails you? There's not a word out of you the whole evening.

PATRICK. I'm feeling a bit low in my mind, Marian, and that's the truth.

MARIAN. Why so?

PATRICK. Coming out of Mass this morning I was speaking to Oliver O'Shaughnessy, telling me he was of a man he met yesterday who had a cataract for fifteen years and it's not ripe to operate on yet. Fifteen years! That's a terrible long time, Marian. Mine's only seven or eight years old—only three since I knew it *was* a cataract—but it seems a lifetime.

MARIAN. Well, indeed I wish Oliver would keep such news to himself. Sure, didn't Doctor O'Grady say you were going on grandly, and that you could be operated on in another six or eight months?

PATRICK. He did, but them cataracts are terribly uncertain. It might be that the operation would be a failure and I'd go blind altogether. Do you remember the awful bit in the papers a week or two ago about the man who blew his brains out on account of losing his sight? Dick was reading it to me. It's making me feel an old man, this groping about in dimness and darkness, and it's on my mind all the time the way I'm standing in your way and tying you down here. Sometimes I think I'd be better dead, better be lying along with your mother in Kilmore.

MARIAN (*laughing*). Such ulagoning! To hear you any one would think I was trying to get a husband and losing my looks on account of you. Thank God they don't care at the convent how I look, and anyway, if you had the eyes of a hawk itself I couldn't go in there till the children are educated, and that won't be for another year or so.

PATRICK. You're a good girl, Marian, what would we do without you. Dick Delany was saying today what an awful hardship it was on you not to have gone into the convent years ago.

MARIAN. Well, you can tell Dick Delany to mind his own business. (*She comes and sits near him.*) And now look, Father, I want to speak seriously to you. In a year's time, with the blessing of God, you'll be seeing as well as you ever saw and I'll be free to take my vows. You'll be here in the house with the two children, they'll be nearly grown up, they'll be maybe thinking of marriage, and you must be very careful what class of people you let come into the house. Do you see?

PATRICK. You mean I must encourage likely young fellows?

MARIAN. I don't want you to encourage any one in particular, but there's some I want you to *discourage*. You mustn't let the riff-raff of the town be here day in day out.

PATRICK. Riff-raff?

MARIAN. Oliver O'Shaughnessy and Dick Delany.

PATRICK (*a little indignantly*). They're not riff-raff. They're old friends of mine, two decent honest men.

MARIAN. They never did a day's work in their lives.

PATRICK. Sure why should they? Haven't they, each of them, their little bit of property?

MARIAN. They're always drinking.

PATRICK. No one ever saw them drunk.

MARIAN. They're for ever at races and coursing matches and reading low papers and telling bad stories.

PATRICK. Ah, what harm. They wouldn't hurt a fly.

MARIAN. Father, you can't really think they're fit company for two young girls like Dorothea and Anna?

PATRICK. Well, the children have a great grah for them. And they're not likely to want to marry either of them. Two old bachelors!

MARIAN. But they'll give this house a low name. They mustn't come here so often, Father, I've made up my mind to that.

PATRICK. They're about the only company I have now.

MARIAN. Well, you must have them less often or have them outside. Sometimes when I think how this house is likely to go to pieces when I'm out of it, I feel that maybe God wants me to stay and look after it.

PATRICK. No, no. I wouldn't for anything in the world stand between you and the convent. I'll try and behave myself. I'll give Oliver and Dick a hint not to come here so often. I mustn't do anything that might spoil the chances of Pet and Ducky.

MARIAN. You and your Pets and your Duckys! I suppose you'll never remember, Father, that they were christened Anna and Dorothea?

PATRICK. A pair of damned consequential names.

MARIAN. The names of two saints, Father. Saint Anna—she was the mother of the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Dorothea—she was a virgin martyr and her tomb is in Rome.

PATRICK. Anna was named after your mother's mother, a malignant old woman. And Dorothea after an aunt of my own in the hopes she'd leave her the bit of money. But it all went in masses, bad luck to her.

MARIAN. You shouldn't say a thing like that, Father . . . I wish to goodness you'd called *me* by a saint's name.

PATRICK. You were called after a woman your mother took a great fancy to, a woman in a book. Your mother used to be reading it the months before you were born. 'Marian Halcombe,' it's often she repeated the name, and the book was 'The Woman in White.'

MARIAN. Well, I'll have a new name, a saint's name, when I'm a nun. And now I'll read to you a bit. But you won't forget about giving Oliver and Dick the cold shoulder?

PATRICK. I'll remember.

MARIAN. It's for your good I'm speaking—and for the children's good. I'll get the paper. (*She rises and goes to a side-table.*)

PATRICK. Ah, don't bother about the reading.

MARIAN. No bother at all. It wouldn't be Sunday night if you hadn't your reading, and Harold, I suppose, will be here soon, so the quicker we begin the better. (*She comes back with the 'Observer.'*) What would you like to hear about?

PATRICK. What paper have you?

MARIAN. The 'Observer,' of course.

(PATRICK *sighs*.)

MARIAN. Isn't it a wonder, Father, you never heard of the 'Observer' till I started to get it for you.

PATRICK. Oh, I had heard of it.

MARIAN. There's this Mr. Squire writing about Doctor Johnson—the man who wrote the dictionary, you know—that ought to be very interesting. Will I begin with that? You can stop me if you don't like it.

PATRICK. Oh yes, anything at all.

MARIAN. 'The Great Lexicographer'—that's what it's called.

PATRICK. Lexicographer? What the hell is that?

MARIAN. We'll find out as we go along. That's what I like about the 'Observer,' we always learn something from it. (*Starting to read*) 'The Great Lexicographer'——

(*A knock on the hall door is heard.*)

MARIAN. Who can that be? It's a bit early for Harold.

PATRICK (*a little cheerfully*). It mightn't be Harold, it might be——

MARIAN. Who?

PATRICK. I dunno.

MARIAN. Ellen isn't in yet, I'll make the children open the door and send Harold into the garden for half an hour. (*She goes to the door; opens it and listens.*) Oh, they've opened the door. I declare it sounds like Oliver O'Shaughnessy's voice. Isn't that a great bother now? Perhaps I'd better see him. The children might let him in.

PATRICK. But—but he might have an important message for me.

MARIAN. What message could Oliver have? That's Dick Delany's voice with him. I'll hunt them.

PATRICK. But—but, Marian, I think they want to see me.

MARIAN. I've no doubt they do. But they won't. Sunday night and all.

PATRICK. Marian, it will be awful to turn them from the door.

MARIAN. What's awful about it? 'Tisn't as if you had asked them up.

PATRICK. Well, in a way I did.

MARIAN. You did?

PATRICK. At Mass this morning——

MARIAN. Oh, this comes of letting you go to late Mass with Anna and Dorothea.

PATRICK. I didn't exactly ask them, but——and you hadn't told me then that you were so set against them.

MARIAN. You've known this long time what I think of them. But I suppose they must come in since you've asked them and they're here.

PATRICK. We could go into my little room. We'd be no trouble to any one there.

MARIAN. You'll stay here. What a botheration. And we were going to have such a nice evening over the paper.

PATRICK (*cheerfully*). Yes, but that's all off now. And—and Marian, what about a little drop of something to drink?

MARIAN. There's whiskey in the decanter and plenty of soda and glasses.

PATRICK. How much whiskey, Marian?

MARIAN. Enough.

PATRICK. I see.

MARIAN. They're coming.

(She goes to the sideboard and brings to the table a decanter, syphon, and glasses. OLIVER O'SHAUGHNESSY and DICK DELANY come in, followed by DUCKY and PET. All have been laughing and talking. The two men are hearty middle-aged men, a little younger than PATRICK. OLIVER is a stronger person than DICK.)

OLIVER. }
DICK. } Good evening, Marian.

MARIAN. Good-evening.

OLIVER. Here we are, Paddy.

DICK. We took you at your word.

PATRICK. I'm delighted you've come, boys. Sit down.

OLIVER (*going to sit the other side of the fire*). Am I taking your chair, Marian?

MARIAN. No.

DICK (*sitting beside PATRICK*). I'll camp here.

OLIVER. I've been making Ducky and Pet laugh at the story of how old Mossy Burke found himself engaged to the widow.

DUCKY (*preparing to settle down*). It's a killing story, Daddy.

PET. I split my sides laughing. Poor old Mossy!

MARIAN (*to PET*). What about your practising, dear?

PET. I'm sick practising.

MARIAN. You'd better do twenty minutes' scales. Sister Mary Bridget says your scales are terribly weak.

PET. Oh, Marian!

OLIVER. Sunday night too!

MARIAN. Yes, the poor child. Isn't it hard on her? Run along, Anna. (*ANNA is going.*) It's very

important for her to get that scholarship. And this poor child has to work at her book-keeping. Come along, Dorothea. (*She links her arm in DUCKY'S and is going out.*) I'll be back in a few minutes, Father. (*The three girls go.*)

PATRICK (*in a whisper*). Is she gone?

OLIVER. She is.

PATRICK (*with relief*). Ah! Now tell me, did they find the body?

OLIVER. They did.

DICK. Cut up into small pieces and in the governess's trunk.

PATRICK. For goodness' sake! Is that a fact?

DICK. True as gospel.

OLIVER. When he was arrested he turned very pale——

DICK. But protested that he was innocent, and the sergeant——

PATRICK. When who was arrested?

OLIVER. Huntingdon.

DICK. The rabbit-farmer. Surely to God, man, you know that much.

PATRICK. I know nothing. Not a thing since you gave me the news on Friday. I got Ducky to search the 'Observer' this afternoon, but there wasn't a word about it in the whole bloody paper.

OLIVER. And do you mean to say you don't know about the Luton mystery? That's better again than the governess thing.

PATRICK. Not a syllable.

DICK. Oh, the Luton thing is grand. A double murder. Have you the paper on you, Oliver?

OLIVER. I have. (*He pulls out a disreputable Sunday newspaper.*) There's a picture of Huntingdon and a map of the rabbit-farm. The cross marks where the knife was found.

PATRICK. I wish I could see it. Before we begin, boys, help yourselves. Marian left the drink on the table, I think.

DICK. Right. (*He goes to the table, his face falls when he sees the contents of the decanter.*) Hm!

PATRICK. Isn't it there?

DICK. Oh yes, *it* is there. Singular number.

PATRICK. What do you mean? Hurry up or she'll be back.

DICK (*fetching decanter and glass*). How much will you have?

PATRICK. A stiff one. Talking of murders always makes me a bit dry. (*DICK gives him a good glass of whiskey which practically empties the decanter.*) . . . I get you, Dick. You mean there's not enough drink for the three of us. But Marian swore there was. She—what'll I do?

DICK. Don't worry, Paddy. I brought a drop with me—in case. Sure we all know Marian's a bit strict with the liquor.

PATRICK (*very distressed*). You make me feel ashamed. And when I think of the old days before I got so blind and helpless——

OLIVER. Ay, indeed, those were the times. But don't fret yourself. In a short while, please God, you'll be walking round as brisk as a bee and as keen as a hawk.

PATRICK. I wouldn't mind if she wasn't such a damned good girl. Think of the way she's looked after us since the poor mother died. Sure, she's been mother herself to Ducky and Pet and never a grumble out of her, though her heart's away the whole time with the nuns at Mount Vincent.

DICK (*who has taken a large flask out of his pocket and is now distributing drinks*). Well, sure Pet and Ducky are nearly grown up now, she can skip off with herself to Mount Vincent before the end of the year.

PATRICK. She swears she won't leave me till the operation is well over, and God knows that might be years away.

OLIVER. Heaven forbid! Here's to you, Paddy! (*He drinks.*) I often thought it a pity Marian wouldn't get married. I mean, if she had some fine young fellow breaking his heart about her and she breaking her heart for him, I bet you she'd throw you and the children overboard, and you'd all then have an easier life. But of course the Church will wait, there's no fear of the Church jilting her—God forgive me if I'm saying anything disrespectful. Poor Marian, she's a grand girl really, 'tis a pity she takes everything so seriously.

DICK. Yes, indeed. God forgive me, but I hate to think of her a nun. I'd like to see her well married.

PATRICK. She's never looked at a boy. Since she's been a child she's been all for the nuns. And the only man who might want to marry her is Harold Mahony—and what good is he?

OLIVER. Oh, devil a bit. I think it's the blessing of Providence to have him the way he is—tied up to a wife in the asylum. 'Twould be awful to have the like of him free to marry again and maybe rear up a long family as lugubrious as himself.

PATRICK. God help him, 'tis enough to make any man dismal to have his wife go mad on him on the honeymoon.

OLIVER. Ah, it's eight years ago. He should be over it by this. Talking of honeymoons, did you see the queer case in to-day's paper?

DICK. The poor fellow that was drowned at Aberystwyth?

OLIVER. Drowned? My dear man, don't you believe it. That clothes-on-the-shore trick is an old game. Believe you me, the honeymoon wasn't all it ought to have been and he decided to cut his losses.

PATRICK. For goodness' sake!

DICK. I think 'twas just a common drowning.

OLIVER. Then who was the strange man seen boarding the train at midnight at a little station two miles out from Aberystwyth? Answer me that.

PATRICK. Whisht! There's voices. She's coming back. We'll try and slip away to my little room.

And listen, boys, you mustn't stay too long to-night—I'll tell you why later. Hide the paper.

OLIVER. Right, right.

(He clumsily stuffs the paper into his pocket. MARIAN comes in with SUSIE TYNAN and PIERCE HEGARTY. SUSIE is a pleasant-looking woman of about forty, PIERCE an energetic young man of twenty-two.)

MARIAN. Here's Susie, Father, and she's brought her nephew with her.

SUSIE. My poor sister Francey's son. You remember Francey, Patrick, who married Hegarty the cattleman in Cork?

PATRICK. I do, of course.

SUSIE. And I think you saw Pierce once before when he was a baby. Shake hands with him, Pierce.

PATRICK *(shaking hands)*. How do you do? You'll excuse me not getting up. He seems a fine young man, Susie. There's a good grip in his hand.

SUSIE. He *is* a fine young man, Patrick, and a clever one into the bargain. And, Pierce, that's Mr. O'Shaughnessy, and that's Dick Delany—two of the biggest ruffians in the town.

OLIVER. You're very hard on us, Susie.

SUSIE. I know you. You can't throw dust in my eyes.

PIERCE. I've met both these gentlemen before.

SUSIE. Where?

PIERCE. Mallow Races, Shelbourne Park, The Maze, and Delahunty's bar here two nights ago.

SUSIE. The villains!

MARIAN. Sit down, Susie. Won't you take a chair, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. Thank you, Miss Clancy. *(They all sit.)*

SUSIE. You know, Patrick, it makes me feel an old woman to have a grown-up nephew.

PATRICK. Indeed you're not old, Susie, sure your sister was years older than you.

SUSIE. She was, of course. All the same——

OLIVER. Your aunt is one of the ornaments of our little town.

SUSIE. Go on out of that! Praise from you is a great compliment indeed. Where are the girls, Marian?

MARIAN. Dorothea is working at her book-keeping and Anna is practising.

SUSIE. Practising? I thought I heard a jingleation of scales as you let us in the front door. Sure it's hardly Christian to be playing scales on a Sunday evening. Fetch them down, for goodness' sake. I want them to meet Pierce.

MARIAN. I think they should be left to their work, Susie.

SUSIE. Ah, nonsense! Pierce is dying to see them. Aren't you, Pierce?

PIERCE. Sure.

SUSIE. If you won't get them, I'll get them myself.

MARIAN. Very well. (*She goes out. PIERCE politely opens the door for her.*)

PATRICK. Will you excuse us, Susie, if we go into my little room. We'll only be a check on the young people if we stay here and—and we've a bit of business to talk over, haven't we, Oliver?

OLIVER. To be sure. About that—about that little matter.

DICK. And it's very important to get it settled to-night.

SUSIE. Oh, off with you. (*The men start to go, OLIVER guiding PATRICK.*) Don't forget your flask, Dick. (*He retrieves it from the chair he has left it on.*) You'd better take the syphon with you, it will be a great assistance to you in settling that little 'bit of business.' I see, Oliver, you've that low Sunday rag in your pocket.

OLIVER. How well you recognise it.

SUSIE. Oh, Pierce was reading it to me all the afternoon. Don't spill the precious liquor, Dick. Well, you're the pretty trio! (*She gets them out of the room and shuts the door.*) Those are the two nicest idlest men in Glencarrig.

PIERCE. And Mr. Clancy?

SUSIE. Oh, Paddy has a heart of gold. He's the best friend I have in the town. Poor man, 'tis the wretched life he has now, nearly blind and Marian is a little tight with him. But she's a good girl, maybe too good. Here are the other girls now.

(*MARIAN, DUCKY, and PET come in.*)

SUSIE. This is Ducky and this is Pet. (*They shake hands.*) Didn't I tell you, Pierce, that there was no lack of pretty girls in this town. And isn't he a fine young man, girls, though he is my nephew?

PIERCE. I take after you, Aunt Susie.

MARIAN. Sit down all of you. Where's Father?

SUSIE. Oh, need you ask. Gone into his little room with his cronies and tumblers of whiskey and newspapers full of murders. They'll be there all night talking gossip and slander—God bless them.

MARIAN. I hate those two being so much around the place.

SUSIE. Ay, my dear, they're your father's old friends, and God knows he couldn't have too many friends just now.

MARIAN. But they're—ah well, never mind. . . . Are you making a long stay, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. I hope so, Miss Clancy.

SUSIE. It's a great secret, girls, but he's going to set up for himself here. Since my poor sister Francey died he's got no one, and so he's coming to live with me.

PET. Oh, isn't that lovely!

DUCKY. Susie's got the nicest house in the town and a grand garden.

PET. And a tennis-ground.

DUCKY. And a conservatory.

PET. It's a lovely house for a dance.

PIERCE. Do you like dancing?

PET. Oh, I dote on it. But we're very backward here. I don't know all the new steps.

PIERCE. Will you let me teach you?

PET. Oh, will you? You'd be a dote if you did.

MARIAN. Are you setting up in business here, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. Sure. A garage, taxis, chars-à-bancs, 'buses.

MARIAN. The people are very quiet here. Though we're not forty miles from Dublin we're quite off the track. I'm afraid you won't do much business.

PIERCE. They won't be quiet long. I'm a rouser. I've bought Boland's place. Bought it at ten o'clock last night.

MARIAN. Bought Boland's, that big place? How long are you here?

PIERCE. Since Thursday night. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a rusher, but I always know my own mind and Boland's suits me A1. I'm going to run up a picture-theatre in the vacant lot beside it.

PET (*with a sigh of ecstasy*). Oh!

DUCKY. Won't that be grand!

PET. We're blue-mouldy here, Mr. Hegarty.

PIERCE. You don't look it.

PET. We are. The people here have ivy growing on them.

MARIAN. I don't agree with you, Anna. We have a lot of entertainments, Mr. Hegarty—of a quiet kind. We have a Shakespeare Society; not many towns in Ireland the size of Glencarrig have a Shakespeare Society; and they have a public reading once a year in the Assembly Rooms—not in costume, of course.

PIERCE. Good. I'll get up plays. I've done a lot of that. You'll all have to act.

(DUCKY and PET *groan with delight*.)

PIERCE. I think it's a fascinating little town, it only wants stirring up.

MARIAN. It's a very pretty town, don't you think. The river—and the spire of the chapel—have you noticed them?

PIERCE. Surely.

SUSIE. They look lovely from your garden, Marian.

MARIAN. Yes, we've one of the nicest views in the place.

PIERCE. I wish you'd show it to me.

MARIAN. I will some time.

PIERCE. Why not now?

MARIAN. Now?

PIERCE. Yes.

MARIAN. It's getting rather dark.

PIERCE. The spire will look stunning against the sunset.

MARIAN. Ah, it lies to the east.

PIERCE. Exactly. The light will just fall on it.

MARIAN. You could see it to-morrow.

PIERCE. I may be dead to-morrow.

MARIAN. Very well. Excuse me for five minutes, Susie. Will you come, Mr. Hegarty?

PIERCE. Sure. (*He opens the door for her.*)

MARIAN (*as she goes out*). The garden is rather a mass of weeds, I'm afraid, but you see my father's health—(*They disappear.*)

SUSIE. Well, girls, what do you think of him?

PET. He's a dote, Susie.

DUCKY. And not a trace of a Cork accent.

PET. I hate the Cork accent, 'tis very low.

SUSIE. I'd like to see any nephew of mine attempting to have a Cork accent. As a matter of fact he's lived there very little.

PET. Where's he been?

SUSIE. All over the place. My brother-in-law died when he was only fifteen—that's seven years ago—and there he was left to look after his mother. Well, he knuckled to, did this thing and that, and everything he touched turned to gold. He ran a cinema, he ran a chocolate factory, he ran greyhounds. Greyhounds and chocolates—everything was first past the post. He's enough money now to buy Boland's, and he has a couple of thousand in the bank besides. He's like an American—indeed he was in the States for eight months.

PET. And his mother's dead?

SUSIE. He's a bird-alone. But I think he'll settle down here now. He'll love getting hold of a quiet little town like this and making it hum.

PET. You know when he said that just now about the picture-house—I thought maybe he'd have me to play the piano in it.

DUCKY. And I could be his secretary. He'd want a secretary, wouldn't he, Susie?

SUSIE. Of course he would. But I thought, Pet, you were going to win scholarships and be a first-class piano-player?

PET. Oh, that's all Marian and her plans. God bless you, Susie, for delivering me from them scales to-night.

DUCKY. You shouldn't say 'them,' it's 'those.'

PET. Ah, shut up. Does this suit you better? 'Those damned scales.'

SUSIE. Pet!

DUCKY. It's no use shouting at us, Susie. We're fed up. Marian's making life hell.

SUSIE. Ducky! Such language!

DUCKY. I'm not cursing and swearing. There *is* a place called hell.

PET. And this house is it.

SUSIE. You must make allowances for Marian.

DUCKY. }
PET. } We do.

SUSIE. And remember all she's done for you.

DUCKY. }
PET. } We do.

SUSIE. And that she's very fond of you and your father.

PET. We know all that, but it's come to this that we can't bear her being fond of us any longer, and we've a great plan—will I tell her, Ducky?

DUCKY. Yes.

PET. Well, maybe you'll think us very interfering, Susie, and of course it's—well, in a way, it's your own business entirely, and we wouldn't make the suggestion only we love you terribly and we love father too and—and—tell her you, Ducky.

DUCKY. Well, you see it's like this. Now you mustn't be surprised at what I'm going to say or angry or anything like that. But—but you see mother died more than ten years ago.

PET. We were only little children, we hardly remember her.

DUCKY. And—and you see Marian ought to go into the convent, and she won't go as long as father is the way he is and—and—tell her, Pet.

PET. Well—well—you see how it is, Susie.

SUSIE. I don't.

PET. We love you terribly.

DUCKY. You've said that before.

PET. I know I have. Tell her yourself.

DUCKY (*desperately and rapidly*). We think 'twould be grand if you'd marry Father. There!

(SUSIE goes into a fit of laughter.)

PET. It's nothing to laugh about.

DUCKY. Maybe you don't like him, but you go on about him as if you did.

SUSIE. So it's a stepmother you want?

DUCKY. Yes.

PET. You.

SUSIE. Well, I've often heard of girls hating the idea of a stepmother, this is the first time I've heard of girls begging for one.

DUCKY. Maybe the other girls hadn't a sister like Marian or a stepmother like yourself.

PET. Go on, be a dote, marry him.

DUCKY. You'll never regret it.

PET. He's terribly easy to get on with.

DUCKY. He's very little in the house.

PET. You wouldn't see him from breakfast to dark.

DUCKY. He doesn't drink—just a glass now and again with Oliver and Dick.

PET. He doesn't bet or gamble, an odd game of whist is all he ever plays.

DUCKY. For ha'penny points.

SUSIE (*laughing*). Stop, for goodness' sake, or I'll split my sides. Are you serious in this?

PET.
DUCKY. } We are.

SUSIE. Well, I'll be serious too. I'm very fond of your father, and I think he's fond of me—in fact I know he is.

DUCKY. How do you know?

SUSIE. Something he began to say one time, three years ago, we were walking up the Rocky Road, then Marian came round the corner——

PET. She would.

SUSIE. And he broke off, but I knew he'd return to the subject again if he got the chance.

PET. And didn't he get the chance?

SUSIE. My dears, the very next day was the first time he went to Doctor O'Grady about his eyes, and of course once he knew he was in for cataract it was good-bye to love-making.

DUCKY. Why so?

SUSIE. Well, Ducky, your father is a very scrupulous man. I don't think he'd consider it fair to ask any one to marry him in his present condition.

PET. Would you marry him the way he is?

SUSIE. I would.

PET. Couldn't you ask him to marry you?

SUSIE. Pet! Such a suggestion!

PET. Well, you could sort of lead him on, *you* know.

SUSIE. I don't.

PET. Oh, Susie!

DUCKY. Will I speak to him for you?

SUSIE. You'll do nothing of the kind.

DUCKY. What'll we do then? We must do something.

SUSIE. Let things take their course. Leave it to God.

PET. Sure we've been leaving it to Him these years and years.

SUSIE. Ssh! Isn't that a knock?

PET. It's sure to be Harold. If it is, for goodness' sake come out into the garden, Susie, and we'll send Marian in to him. Run and open the door, Ducky. (*DUCKY goes.*) Isn't it awful to have that Harold coming here every Sunday night with his long face and his sort of tombstone manner?

SUSIE. Poor Harold. Coming here to chat with Marian is about the only diversion he has.

PET. He spoils every Sunday night. His being here drives me to bed before my time.

SUSIE. He has a great feeling for Marian.

PET. Well, I wish her joy of him. He's a lovely beau for any girl to have. I'm not surprised his wife went mad. Any girl would have to be a bit cracked to marry him. Here he is.

(*HAROLD comes in, indeed he is a sad young man.*)

HAROLD (*shaking hands*). Good-evening, Miss Tynan.

SUSIE. Good-evening, Harold.

HAROLD (*shaking hands*). Good-evening, Pet.

PET. 'Evening.

SUSIE. Won't you sit down, Harold. (*He sits.*) Lovely weather, isn't it?

HAROLD. Yes, but the evenings are closing in, we're drawing very near the winter.

SUSIE. Oh come! We're only just into September.

HAROLD. The twelfth—no, to-day's the thirteenth. Yes, the thirteenth of September. A few more weeks and winter is with us again.

SUSIE. I often think the nicest weather of the year comes in October.

HAROLD. Do you? Yes, sometimes we used to have a fine October, long ago.

SUSIE. The 'Mail' says we're going to have grand weather next month.

HAROLD. I wouldn't believe in that.

PET. What did you do with Ducky?

HAROLD. She went into the garden to tell Marian I had come.

PET (*to SUSIE*). Look at her, trying to steal a march on me. Come on, Susie. We're going into the garden, Harold. There's a grand new young man there, Susie's nephew.

HAROLD. I met him yesterday.

SUSIE. Isn't he a fine young man, Harold?

HAROLD. He seemed very lively.

SUSIE. Well, he's young.

HAROLD. Yes, let him enjoy it while he can.

PET. We'll hurry Marian in to you. Come, Susie.

(They go out.)

(HAROLD left alone sighs a little and wanders about the room. He notes the empty decanter, shakes his head sadly and murmurs, 'He's drinking again.' MARIAN comes in.)

MARIAN. I hope I haven't kept you waiting, Harold. *(She shakes hands.)* Sit down.

HAROLD. I can't stay long. The cob is lame. . . . It's too damp for you to be in the garden at this hour, the mist from the river is dangerous.

MARIAN. It's a lovely evening.

HAROLD. Yes. One doesn't notice the dampness, but next day—rheumatism, neuralgia, bronchitis perhaps.

MARIAN. I was showing Mr. Hegarty the view across the river.

HAROLD. That's Miss Tynan's nephew? Do you like him.

MARIAN. No. A horrid young man. All push and hustle.

HAROLD. Yes. That was the opinion I formed of him.

(A silence.)

MARIAN. Well, is there any news? I haven't seen you since last Sunday.

HAROLD. No news, I think. Except that my orchard was robbed.

MARIAN. Well, isn't that a shame?

HAROLD. It always is—every year. Except last year.

MARIAN. All the orchards in the place are robbed. You were lucky to escape last year.

HAROLD. But I had no apples last year. My whole place is going to rack and ruin, the house is filthy.

MARIAN. I don't think it's as bad as you make out. Mary Hennessy looks after you pretty well.

HAROLD. Ah no, it's not like a home—but how could it be? I sit alone there in the evenings over an empty grate or a dying fire and it gets darker and darker, darker and darker.

MARIAN. Well, of course it does.

HAROLD. And I think of my ruined life and—and I think of you, Marian.

MARIAN. Now, Harold, I've told you often enough to put thoughts like that out of your head. Apart from everything else it isn't right, it's a sin. You're a married man still, it's a sin for you to be thinking of any other woman.

HAROLD. I know, but I can't help it.

MARIAN. Oh yes, you can.

HAROLD. And I know, too, that you don't care a bit for me.

MARIAN. I'm very fond of you, Harold, but not that way.

HAROLD. You're a sort of a saint, Marian. I don't think it can be much of a sin to be in love with a saint.

MARIAN. Oh, I'm not quite a saint yet. Let's talk of something else. How's the farm? Have you your oats saved?

HAROLD. Yes.

MARIAN. That's good.

HAROLD. But such a light crop, hardly worth the saving.

MARIAN. Oats are light everywhere this year, there'll be a good price for it.

HAROLD. So I've been told, but I doubt it. I was wondering would you and your father come out some day this week—Wednesday, say.

MARIAN. We would, to be sure. Father always enjoys the little drive.

HAROLD. I'd send the trap for you, but I'm sure the cob will be dead lame by Wednesday.

MARIAN. Oh, we'll borrow a car.

HAROLD. Come about tea-time. (*He hiccups.*) Excuse me.

MARIAN. And ask Mary Hennessy to make those lovely little hot cakes. They're delicious.

HAROLD. Do you really like them? I always think she puts in too much soda—so indigestible. (*He hiccups.*) There. I've a hiccup. I knew I felt something coming on. I'd better go.

MARIAN. Sure you've only just come. Stay and have a cup of tea. Don't mind the hiccup, I know you're liable to them. Hold your breath.

HAROLD. I'd better go. Really I only came in to fix up about Wednesday. With the lameness of the cob I suppose we'll take the best part of an hour getting home, and Dan Mulcahy's driving, he'll want to get back to his supper and his wife and children. (*From now till he goes he hiccups from time to time very gently.*)

MARIAN. Oh, let Dan wait for once.

HAROLD. I couldn't, Marian. I think I ought to go. (*He rises.*)

MARIAN. Well, I know you're the most obstinate man once you make up your mind to a thing.
Won't you even see Father before you go?

HAROLD. Where is he?

MARIAN. In the little room with Oliver and Dick.

HAROLD. Oliver and Dick? Ah, no. How are the eyes?

MARIAN. Worse. Of course we must expect that. The quicker the sight goes the sooner the operation.

HAROLD. As long as it doesn't go too quickly. Ah well, I hope the operation will turn out well, I hope it will.

(PIERCE *comes in.*)

PIERCE. I have to fly, Miss Clancy. I've a lot to do to-night, estimates to draw up and all that sort of thing. Aunt Susie is staying behind. Good-evening, Mr. Mahony.

HAROLD. Good-evening.

PIERCE. Ripping weather, isn't it? Well, good-night, Miss Clancy, I hope I'll see you soon again.

MARIAN. Good-night.

HAROLD. Good-night, Marian. Don't forget Wednesday if it's fine—but it looks like a change.

MARIAN. We'll come wet or fine, I warn you. Good-night.

PIERCE. Are you buzzing too? You're very short and sweet.

HAROLD. Am I?

PIERCE. Even shorter and sweeter than I am. (HAROLD *stalks out.*) I say, did I get his goat saying that?

MARIAN. You mean—offend him?

PIERCE. Yes.

MARIAN. He never takes offence. He's very gentle.

PIERCE. He's not exactly a natural comic, is he? Still, that hiccup's rather pet. But it takes all sorts, as they say. Do you know, Miss Clancy, I'm going to love this place, 'dote' on it—isn't that Pet's word? Aunt Susie's a topper, the people seem all decent and nice, I bought Boland's for a song—there's only one fly in the ointment.

MARIAN. What is that?

PIERCE. Your sisters tell me you're going to be a nun.

MARIAN. What difference on earth can that make to you?

PIERCE. Oh, one pretty girl the less in a small place like Glencarrig is a very serious matter.

MARIAN. Well—really——

PIERCE. Shouldn't I have said that? I'm sorry. I'd better evaporate before I say something worse.
Good-night. See you soon (*and he dashes out*).

MARIAN. Goodness gracious. How I hate that sort of young man. *(But she drifts to a mirror and does something to her hair. She hears voices outside and stops. The door opens, OLIVER and DICK are guiding PATRICK back, she is behind the door and they don't see her.)*

OLIVER. Are you all right now?

PATRICK. I'm as right as rain, boys.

DICK. Good-night so.

PATRICK. Good-night. It was kind of you to look in.

OLIVER. Not at all. The inquest's to-morrow, there'll probably be a good account of it in Tuesday's 'Mail.'

PATRICK. Will you come up Tuesday night so?

OLIVER }
DICK. } We will.

PATRICK. And bring the paper.

DICK. Certainly.

OLIVER. I bet there'll be a lot of developments in that Luton case, too. We'll be off. Come, Dick. *(They go.)*

MARIAN *(coming forward)*. I'm here, Father. Take my arm. *(She steers him to his chair.)*

PATRICK. I hunted them, Marian, I hunted them. I remembered what you said and I hunted them.

MARIAN. But I heard you asking them for Tuesday.

PATRICK. Oh, did you?

MARIAN. I might as well say nothing, for all you care.

PATRICK. That's not true.

MARIAN. You pay no attention to me, I'm only wasting my breath.

PATRICK. I can't give up my old friends altogether.

MARIAN. I'll speak to them myself.

PATRICK. You'll do nothing of the sort.

MARIAN. I will. You can't stop me.

(There is an obstinate silence. MARIAN lights a lamp.)

MARIAN. Will I read to you?

PATRICK. No.

MARIAN. I'd like to. That bit about Doctor Johnson——

PATRICK. I don't care a thraneen about Doctor Johnson. An old bags, that's all he was.

(Another silence. SUSIE and the girls come back.)

SUSIE. Pierce had to go, Marian. Did he see you before he went?

MARIAN. He did.

SUSIE. I suppose I should be pushing off too.

PATRICK. You'll not go yet. For the love of God, Susie, sit down and talk to me for a bit.

MARIAN. Yes, do. It's time you were thinking of bed, girls.

PET. Sure it's not half-past nine.

MARIAN. Twenty to ten. And you'll have to be up at seven, as you missed your book-keeping and your scales to-night. Off with you.

DUCKY. Oh, Marian!

MARIAN. No delaying now. And no reading in bed, mind.

DUCKY. Good-night, Daddy. *(She kisses him.)*

PATRICK. Good-night, Ducky.

PET. Good-night, Daddy. *(She kisses him.)*

PATRICK. Sleep well, Pet.

DUCKY. 'Night, Susie. You see it is hell.

PET. Don't forget what we said, Susie. And there's no time like the present. *(They kiss her and go out followed by MARIAN.)*

PATRICK *(after a pause)*. I'm annoyed, Susie, I'm annoyed.

SUSIE. Why so?

PATRICK. My house had always a name on it for hospitality, hadn't it?

SUSIE. To be sure.

PATRICK. It was a place where my friends would always find a welcome and a good drop of liquor and a good cigar, wasn't it?

SUSIE. It was.

PATRICK. There are no cigars now because Marian says a blind man can't get enjoyment out of tobacco, there's never more than a weeshy drain of whiskey so that my friends come to see me with flasks in their pockets, there's no welcome for them, they feel intruders. I was forced to ask Oliver and Dick to go away to-night before they'd been half an hour in the house. I was disgraced here to-night, Susie.

SUSIE. Ah, not at all.

PATRICK. I felt near crying when Dick whipped out his flask.

SUSIE. What matter.

PATRICK. It does matter, Susie. It hurts me more than I can say. And now she threatens to talk to them herself, to forbid them the house.

SUSIE. I think it's preying more and more on her mind that she can't go and be a nun.

PATRICK. I wish the nuns joy of her. She's trying to make this place a sort of a convent. She's giving Ducky and Pet the hell of a life.

SUSIE. That's the very word they used to me to-night.

PATRICK. Did they? Dear, dear! And they're the best little girls that ever stepped. She's breaking their spirit.

SUSIE. I wouldn't say it's altogether broken yet. Still, they'd be happier if she was out of it.

PATRICK. But how can she go? Sure I'm getting more helpless every day.

SUSIE. If you had a—a housekeeper.

PATRICK. I couldn't bear a strange woman around me.

SUSIE. Oh well, she needn't be altogether a stranger.

PATRICK. You're thinking of some old one like Nellie Daly?

SUSIE. I wasn't exactly thinking of Nellie.

PATRICK. Who have you in your mind then?

SUSIE. Oh, there's others besides Nellie.

PATRICK. I don't know who they are. Kattie Burke? You wouldn't want me to have the like of her.

SUSIE. I wouldn't let her inside the house . . . the girls were telling me of the walk they had this afternoon.

PATRICK. Were they?

SUSIE. Yes. They walked up the Rocky Road.

PATRICK. Did they.

SUSIE. I don't know when I was that way last—not for ages.

PATRICK. I can tell you one time you were there. A May evening along with myself.

SUSIE. Was I?

PATRICK. Have you forgotten?

SUSIE. I think—I'm beginning to remember.

PATRICK. Do you remember Marian coming round the corner.

SUSIE. I think I do.

PATRICK. Ah, Susie, if she hadn't—

SUSIE. Yes, Paddy?

PATRICK. If she hadn't—oh, never mind.

SUSIE. If Marian hadn't come—what, Paddy?

PATRICK. Nothing.

SUSIE. We're such old friends, Paddy, that I'll tell you what would have happened if Marian hadn't come round the corner. You'd have asked me to marry you.

PATRICK (*in a low voice*). I would.

SUSIE. And I'd have said yes.

PATRICK. Would you, Susie, would you? I'm glad to know that, though it's too late now. Maybe God sent Marian that day. If He hadn't you'd have been tied up now with a blind old man.

SUSIE. I'm going to be tied up in a week or ten days.

PATRICK. What? What are you saying?

SUSIE. I'm going to be married.

PATRICK. You're——? Who is it? Who's the damned——? Who is he?

SUSIE. Yourself, Paddy. (*He is too astonished to speak.*) Of course if you've changed your mind since that day on the Rocky Road, say so and that's an end to it.

PATRICK (*feebly protesting*). I'm old, I'm nearly blind, if the operation goes against me I'll be stone-blind.

SUSIE. You're only pushing fifty, I'll be forty next month. There's not a deal to choose between us in age.

PATRICK. You're ready to marry a blind man?

SUSIE. I'm ready to marry you.

PATRICK. Susie, my dear. Susie. Oh, God bless you, Susie, I could cry.

SUSIE. You're a dreadful foolish man, Paddy.

PATRICK. Give me your hand, Susie my dear. I suppose I'm too old for kissing and romancing, but I'll do this anyway. (*He gropes for her hand, finds it and kisses it courteously.*)

SUSIE (*half crying*). Don't, Paddy, don't. It's as if—as if you were making out that I'm something wonderful, and I'm not. It's you that are wonderful. (*She strokes his hand.*)

PATRICK. We'll have the grand times, won't we, Susie?

SUSIE. We will.

PATRICK. And you'll look after me till I get my sight, and Marian will be free to go into the convent?

SUSIE. Yes.

PATRICK. But the children—what will they say?

SUSIE. What can they say?

PATRICK. It will be a great blow to them, a stepmother coming in on top of them. I'll have to break it to them very gently.

SUSIE. I think maybe I'd better do that.

PATRICK. Do you think they'd take it better from you? It'll be a terrible surprise to them.

SUSIE. It will. Leave them to me, Paddy. You tell Marian.

PATRICK. All right. But break it to them very gently. One good thing is, Marian will be delighted;

we're pleasing one person besides ourselves, thank God.

(MARIAN comes in with three cups of tea on a tray.)

MARIAN. I made you a cup of tea, Susie.

SUSIE. Thank you, dear. (She takes it and spills a little.)

MARIAN. Your hand is shaking. What ails you, Susie?

SUSIE. Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.

MARIAN. You're looking funny. Are you not feeling well?

SUSIE. I'm feeling grand.

MARIAN. Here's your tea, Father.

PATRICK. Leave it on the table. I'll have it later.

SUSIE. I think—I think I'll run up to the children for a minute. There's a little bit of news I want to give them. You know what it is, Patrick, you can be telling Marian.

(She goes out quickly, leaving the door open.)

MARIAN (getting up to shut it). Wisha, poor old Susie. It's a pity she never got married, isn't it, Father?

PATRICK. Ay.

MARIAN. She's quite settling down into an old maid. Her nephew makes her seem quite an old woman.

PATRICK. Does he? The jackanapes.

MARIAN. What was her news anyway?

PATRICK. Sit down beside me, I'll tell you.

MARIAN (sitting). Well? You seem very solemn over it.

PATRICK. It's good news, Marian, the best you could hear. It's—Susie and I—we're—we're going to—be married!

(Before MARIAN can recover from her astonishment and speak, the curtain falls.)

ACT II

The girls' bedroom. A simple pretty room with two beds in it. The beds lie side by side, their ends towards the audience. A small table is between them and a chair. There is a lighted lamp on the table, and by its light DUCKY is lying in bed reading. PET, before a mirror, in her nightdress, is brushing her hair.

PET. Once Marian goes into the convent, I'm going up to Dublin to get a real Eton crop.

DUCKY (*deep in her book*). Hm!

PET. And I'm going into pyjamas—biscuit-coloured ones. I hate these stuffy nightdresses.

DUCKY. I'm going to stick to nightdresses and I'm going to let my hair grow. You must look ahead.

PET. I don't believe long hair is coming back as quick as that.

DUCKY. Sure, God alone knows what the fashions will be by the time Marian is out of this. Maybe we'll be back to skirts with trails and leg-of-mutton sleeves.

PET. I have hopes of Susie.

DUCKY. I haven't.

PET. I felt to-night there was something in the air. I think Daddy is a bit fed-up with things. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he asked her to-night to marry him. Didn't you hear him asking her to stay and talk to him?

DUCKY. There's nothing in that. Susie's a wash-out. All this silly wait-till-you're-asked business!

PET. She's the only one who stands up to Marian. . . . Did you see the beastly way Marian collared Pierce to-night and made him go off with her to the garden?

DUCKY. I saw it. Rotten. I know he'd far rather have stayed and talked to us. But that's her game always. A spoil-sport, that's what she is.

PET. And of course, as she's going to be a nun, the men feel completely safe. It's really an awful handicap to us to have a sister going into a convent. We never get a look-in. Look at Charlie and Willy and Maurice O'Callaghan—they stick to Marian all the time, we can't get in a word edgewise.

DUCKY. True for you. If she doesn't go into the convent soon, we'll die old maids.

PET. It's awful. And the dear knows what they see in her; she's got a decent sort of a skin, not too bad a figure and nice hair, but that's about all. And the way she dresses——! She looks half a nun already.

DUCKY. Oliver O'Shaughnessy took my breath away the other day saying how nice-looking she was. I think the man's demented.

PET. And Dick raving another time about her cleverness. I'd like him to be living in the same house with her for a month and he'd change his tune. (*She gazes in the mirror.*) I wish to God I had a different class of a nose!

DUCKY. What sort do you want?

PET. I'm not sure. Any sort would be better than this . . . Ah sure, forget it, child, forget it!

(She blows out the candles on the dressing-table, kicks off her slippers and makes for bed.)

DUCKY. Have you said your prayers?

PET. Mind your own business. *(She settles into bed.)* I do think he's rather attractive.

DUCKY. Who?

PET. The cat.

DUCKY. I suppose you mean Mr. Hegarty.

PET. I mean Pierce. He was calling me 'Pet' before he'd finished. Did he call you 'Ducky'?

DUCKY. No.

PET. Ah-ha!

DUCKY. You're welcome to him.

PET. Sour grapes.

DUCKY. Go to sleep. I want to read.

PET. Marian will catch you. What's the old book?

DUCKY. Never mind.

PET. Some cheap, romantical nonsense, I'll be bound.

DUCKY. It's not. It's 'The First Violin,' by Jessie Fothergill.

PET. I know it. Tripe!

DUCKY. It's not.

PET. Put it up against 'The Long Long Trail' and where is it?

DUCKY. All right. No one's asking you to read it.

(A silence. PET starts to laugh.)

DUCKY. What ails you?

PET. Mossy Burke and the widow.

DUCKY. Oh, wasn't it killing?

PET. Could she have him up for breach? Will he really have to marry her?

DUCKY. Oliver said he would.

PET. The unfortunate poor man! *(They both laugh until the beds shake.)*

DUCKY. Ssh! There's a step. *(They listen.)* It's Ellen going up to her room. Let's have her in. I'm dying to know how she got on this evening.

PET. Oh yes. Let's call her.

PET. }
DUCKY. } (*chanting in chorus*). Ellen! Ellen! Ellen! Ellen!

(ELLEN *appears*. A buxom servant, not in her first bloom. She is dressed for out-of-doors.)

ELLEN. What do you want?

DUCKY. Come in a minute. (ELLEN *does so*.) Shut the door. (*She shuts it*.)

ELLEN. What is it?

DUCKY. How did you get on to-night? (ELLEN *is silent*.) Ah, go on. Tell us.

ELLEN. Too curious you are.

PET. Go on. You always tell us. Sit down here. Did Donough turn up? Did you meet him?

ELLEN. I did. (*But she doesn't enlarge on the subject*.)

PET. After Benediction, I suppose?

ELLEN. Yes.

DUCKY. Did you walk up the river as you said you would?

ELLEN. We did.

PET. Ah, for goodness' sake, Ellen, don't be so close in yourself. Sit down and tell us. What sort of an evening had you?

ELLEN (*with a sniff*). I've a toothache.

PET (*sitting up in bed*). Ducky, she's done it again! Oh, Ellen, Ellen, after all we said to you!

ELLEN (*halfcrying*). I know, I know.

PET. Who is it this time?

ELLEN. A grand young fellow I saw in the Chapel—Mrs. Moriarty's nephew's cousin I believe he is—Clarence his name is. Isn't that a grand name? And what was Donough compared to him?

PET. So you chucked Donough?

ELLEN. At the waterfall I gave him the push, and we've parted for ever.

DUCKY. Oh, Ellen! Isn't that the third since Christmas?

ELLEN. It is.

DUCKY. You've a right to be ashamed of yourself.

ELLEN. I know, I know.

PET. Did you give him back the ring?

ELLEN. Of course.

PET. Tch, tch! And we warned you, and we told you to be careful. And Donough was so steady and so nice, and a day will come, Ellen, when you'll have run through all the men in the

town, and you'll be getting old and you'll think then of all the chances you've thrown away and of our warnings. But 'twill be too late!

ELLEN (*desperately*). I know, I know. But what can I do? I was wild about Donough till I got engaged to him—I was wild about all the others. If I could only get married quick 'twould be all right, but while I'm waiting to be married some one else sails across my path and I think what a fool I'd be to tie myself for life to the man at my side. And oh, if you could see Clarence! He's lovely, and a couple of years younger than Donough.

DUCKY. Have you spoken to him?

ELLEN. Not yet. But I'm promised an intro' for to-morrow night.

PET. Tch, tch! You're hopeless, Ellen. There's no use talking to you.

ELLEN. Not the least good in the world. It's what my poor father used to be saying—'Tis the far-off hills are green.'

DUCKY. And I suppose Clarence is the greenest yet?

ELLEN. He is so.

PET. You'll be engaged to him in a week and you'll jilt him in favour of some other will-o'-the-wisp.

ELLEN. I suppose so.

DUCKY. And you're getting quicker and quicker. A year or two ago you'd stick to the one man for six months or more. But now—three men since Christmas! I don't know what's going to become of you.

ELLEN. I'm awful. I know I am. (*She puts her hand to her cheek.*)

PET. Don't expect us to pity you for the toothache. It's your own fault.

ELLEN. I don't know how it is, but love always flies to me teeth. Every tooth in my head is aching. I won't sleep a wink to-night.

DUCKY. Serve you right. Look here, make it up with Donough to-morrow and let Clarence go his road.

ELLEN. I couldn't. If you could see him! He was dressed in dark navy, and that lovely sort of sleek shiny hair.

DUCKY. He sounds awful common.

ELLEN. He's grand. Wonderful! Romantic!

PET. Ah, nonsense.

ELLEN. With a sort of sad, far-away look in his eyes.

PET. Oh, Ellen.

ELLEN. And a little halt in his step. I suppose he did wonders in some war or other. . . . I'll go and take off my hat now and make a sup of tea for the master and Miss Marian.

DUCKY. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

ELLEN. I am. I wish I was dead—only for Clarence. Good-night to you. (*She goes out.*)

PET. Well, isn't she a caution?

DUCKY (*meditatively*). 'The far-off hills are green.' I suppose there's something in that saying. Things seem grand—until we have them.

PET. How do you mean?

DUCKY. Maybe when Marian goes into the convent things won't be as good for us as we think they'll be, and maybe the convent won't be all Marian expects.

PET. Ah, give over your sermonising. I'm going to sleep.

DUCKY. Good-night so.

PET. If Marian sees the light of that lamp she'll have your life.

DUCKY. Let her. I don't care. Ellen's disturbed me. I couldn't sleep. And I'm just at the bit in the book when everything's going wrong.

PET. Skip on to the last page and see if they marry.

DUCKY. No, no. I couldn't do that.

(*There is a tap at the door.*)

PET. There's Marian. Now you're caught.

DUCKY. I don't care. Come in.

SUSIE (*putting her head in*). Are you asleep, girls?

PET. Not a bit of us. Come in, Susie.

SUSIE (*coming in*). I didn't want to go home without having a word with you.

PET. Sit in here between us. Wait, I'll move the lamp. (*She puts it on the dressing-table. SUSIE sits between the two beds.*)

DUCKY. What's happening below, Susie?

SUSIE. Marian's talking to your father!

PET. Any fear of her coming up?

SUSIE. Not for a bit, I think.

PET. Thank God. . . . Well, Susie?

SUSIE. Well what?

PET. You know. Anything doing? Any news?

SUSIE. Oh! (*She begins to laugh.*)

DUCKY. What are you laughing at?

(*SUSIE goes on laughing.*)

PET (*in excitement*). She's done it, Ducky! I believe she's done it!

DUCKY. Have you, Susie? Have you?

SUSIE. I——

(She goes off again into a fit of laughter.)

PET *(jumping till the bed shakes)*. She's done it! she's done it! she's done it!

DUCKY. She has! she has! she has! Oh, have you, Susie?

SUSIE. I've come up to break something to you.

DUCKY. Break? Merciful God, Pet, she's after refusing him!

PET. Not at all. She'd never dare face us if she had.

SUSIE. Your father says I must break it to you.

PET. Ah, give over your breaks. Tell us first, yes or no, are you going to marry him?

SUSIE. I am.

PET. Susie! You're a dote! *(She flings herself out of bed and embraces her.)*

DUCKY *(hopping out of bed too)*. Oh, Susie!

SUSIE. Into bed the two of you. You'll get your deaths.

PET. Not a death. She's going to marry my father! She's going to marry my father! *(She pirouettes round the room.)*

SUSIE. Have conduct, Pet. Suppose Marian was to come in.

PET. Ah, let her. *(But the girls get back into their beds.)*

DUCKY. It seems too good to be true. How did you bring it about?

SUSIE. Oh, I did nothing to bring it about.

PET. You were saying you'd leave it to God. Did you, Susie?

SUSIE. Yes.

DUCKY. I don't believe it.

PET. Did you sort of lead him on the way I advised you?

SUSIE. Not at all. He took the bit between his teeth; there was no holding him.

DUCKY. } Glory!
PET. } Imagine Father!

DUCKY. How does he feel over it? Is he wild out with delight?

SUSIE. He's very pleased with himself. But he's thinking maybe you two will take it badly.

DUCKY. Badly?

PET. The creature!

SUSIE. I'm here to break the news very gently to you and to ask you to forgive him.

PET. Tch, tch! Well, aren't men very simple?

SUSIE. Much you know about them.

PET. I know that much. . . . Oh, Susie, I'd love to have heard it. I suppose you'll never tell us what really happened?

SUSIE. Never.

DUCKY. When'll you be married, Susie?

SUSIE. I don't know. We didn't get on to that. Marian came in with tea.

PET. Is he telling her now?

SUSIE. I suppose so.

DUCKY. She'll be dying down with delight.

PET. She can go off to Mount Vincent now, there's nothing to stop her. Oh, Susie, you will be married soon, won't you?

SUSIE. The sooner the better as far as I'm concerned.

PET. Will you have bridesmaids, Susie?

SUSIE. At my age? Have sense, Pet.

DUCKY. Oh, for God's sake, don't go in for one of them quiet weddings. I hate quiet weddings. Sure, what's the use of a wedding unless it's plastered over with bridesmaids and rice and champagne and jollification.

PET. We could be bridesmaids and Pierce could be the best man.

DUCKY. And you could leave for the honeymoon in Pierce's motor-car to catch the boat at Dun Laoghaire. 'The honeymoon will be spent on the Continent'—that always reads well.

PET. What sort of a going-away dress will you have?

DUCKY. Pale brown, Susie, and a small rose-coloured hat. I adore rose and brown.

SUSIE. Do you know, girls, I've not given one of those things a thought yet.

PET. You haven't!

SUSIE. No.

PET. Glory! Isn't that extraordinary? I suppose you're thinking—you're just thinking of Daddy?

SUSIE. Yes.

PET (*sobered*). Well!

DUCKY (*sobered*). I'm awfully glad about this, Susie. I am indeed. There's nothing I'd like better.

PET. Nor I.

SUSIE. I know, I know. You're two darling girls. I'll try and be good to you, I'll do my best by you.

PET. We're easy to manage, Susie, we are indeed. But we must be led, not driven.

SUSIE. I see.

DUCKY. We want a bit of humouring. I mean, there's times when I'm not inclined for book-keeping and short-hand and all that, and then it's no use forcing me.

SUSIE. I see.

PET. And you mustn't be always at me about scales.

SUSIE. Sure I don't care if I never hear another scale in my life.

PET. That's the best news yet. You're a dote, Susie.

SUSIE. Whisht! That's the tap of your daddy's stick.

(They are silent. PATRICK and MARIAN come in. PATRICK is rather solemn. MARIAN a little exalted.)

SUSIE. Sit here, Patrick. *(He sits between the beds.)*

PATRICK. My dear children! Susie has told you?

PET. }
DUCKY. } She has.

PATRICK. You'll have to forgive me. I know that no one can ever again be the same to you as your poor mother, but in a little while you'll be out in the world, and Marian, of course, will be gone from us and I'd be very lonely. Susie and I have been good friends this many a long year and—and you'll have to forgive your selfish old father.

PET. }
DUCKY. } We do.

PATRICK. Of course I know all this is a terrible surprise to you, the last thing in the world you could ever expect to happen.

DUCKY. It took my breath away.

PET. You could have knocked me down with a feather when Susie broke the news.

PATRICK. I know. . . . I know. You're good little girls to take it so well. One grand thing is, it'll free Marian. I won't be standing between her and the convent any longer.

DUCKY. Isn't that splendid?

PET. Aren't you delighted, Marian?

MARIAN. I am indeed. But I feel sort of bewildered at the suddenness of it all. I haven't kissed you, Susie; I haven't wished you all the happiness in the world. *(She rises, goes to her and kisses her.)* God bless you, Susie. May the two of you be very happy.

SUSIE. Thank you, Marian.

(MARIAN goes back to her place.)

PATRICK. To-morrow you could go and see the Mother Superior in Mount Vincent, couldn't you, Marian?

MARIAN. The Mother Superior?

PATRICK. She'd tell you how soon you'd be likely to be able to begin.

PET. I suppose you could be off in a week or ten days.

MARIAN. Week or ten days? (*Smiling sedately*) I can hardly get off as quick as that. Of course I'll have to wait and see Father's operation well over.

PET. What?

DUCKY. Marian!

PATRICK. Sure, won't Susie be able to look after that job?

MARIAN. It wouldn't be nice, Father, to expect her to do the like of that before she was married to you.

PATRICK. But—but—sure, Susie, you'll marry me, won't you, without waiting for the operation?

SUSIE. I will, to be sure, Patrick. I'll marry you next week if you like.

PET. Hurrah!

MARIAN. Oh . . . I didn't understand that. I thought, of course, the whole thing depended on how the operation turned out.

PATRICK. Not at all.

DUCKY. Susie doesn't mind a little thing like that, do you, Susie?

SUSIE. Not a bit in the world.

MARIAN. I see. . . . I see. . . . That's very good of you, Susie. But I don't think it's fair to ask it of you.

SUSIE. Why not?

MARIAN. Well, I'd like Father to get married with his eyes open.

SUSIE. That's rather a queer thing to say, Marian.

MARIAN. I don't mean it in any queer way. When I'm in the convent there isn't any one in the world I'd prefer before yourself to be with Father. All I mean is, that I don't like the idea of your marrying him and he half blind. What will people say?

PATRICK. Well then, I don't care a damn what people say. I want to marry Susie and she's ready to marry me, blind and all, and that's all that matters.

MARIAN. I see. . . . I think it's rash.

PATRICK. Of course it is. All marriages are rash.

PET. They'd be no fun if they weren't.

MARIAN. And then it's so awkward your nephew being with you now.

SUSIE. What's awkward about it?

MARIAN. Of course you'll live at your place, won't you, till the children are educated and I'm out of this?

SUSIE. What?

PET. } What?

DUCKY. What d'you mean?

PATRICK. What are you talking about, Marian?

MARIAN. There's so little room here, Father, and Susie, of course, will like to have a house to herself. She's been accustomed to that for years. This place won't be a real home for the two of you till the children and I are out of it.

PATRICK. But won't the nuns take you in at once?

MARIAN. I suppose they would. But I must think of the children. I couldn't go till they're educated and out in the world.

PET. Till we're educated?

DUCKY. Do you mean to say you're not going into the convent right away?

MARIAN. How can I?

PET. What's stopping you?

MARIAN. You—and Dorothea.

PET. How am I stopping you?

MARIAN. Your practising. Who's to look after that if I'm not here? Susie hates the sound of a piano.

SUSIE. I do not. But I hate scales.

MARIAN. And Anna's scales are the most important thing at the moment. Sister Mary Bridget says that if she doesn't—

PET. Oh, shut up about Sister Mary Bridget. Look, Marian, I promise I'll practise two hours every day; I will, Marian, I will indeed.

MARIAN (*smiling maternally*). I couldn't trust you. . . . And Dorothea's book-keeping!

DUCKY. I'll work my fingers to the bone. I'll take correspondence classes.

(MARIAN, *smiling, shakes her head*.)

PATRICK. We'd all help to keep their nose to the grindstone, Marian.

MARIAN. I'm sure you would at first, Father, but it wouldn't last long. You're too soft with them. And I must think of the children before everything, before the convent even. But if you're really set on marrying Susie at once, maybe Susie could take you in at her place—if her nephew wasn't too much in the way.

SUSIE. Oh, it's a big house. Pierce would be no bother.

MARIAN. 'Twould be only for a year or two, Susie.

DUCKY. A year or two! (PET *groans*.)

SUSIE. What do you say, Patrick?

PATRICK. I'd be very content at your place, Susie. You've a grand lovely house. After all, I've no feeling for this house, we're only in it a matter of five years.

SUSIE. Very well so. I think that's a good idea of yours, Marian. Your father and I will get married as soon as can be—very quietly—and he'll come up and live at my place. I'll be able to make him very comfortable up there.

PET (*with a wail*). Susie, are you deserting us?

SUSIE. Not at all. I'll only be the other end of the road.

DUCKY. You're thinking of nothing in the world but your own happiness.

PET. And after all you owe us.

SUSIE. I don't owe you a thing.

PET. Oh Susie! And it was our idea.

SUSIE. What was?

DUCKY. If we hadn't told you to lead him on——

PET. And not to go on leaving it to God——

SUSIE. Shut your mouths the pair of you. Don't mind them, Patrick. They're getting a little too free and easy in themselves. Marian's right, they want a firmer hand over them than yours or mine.

PATRICK. I don't know in the world what they're saying.

SUSIE. It's as well you shouldn't.

PET (*to DUCKY*). She's deserted us. She's gone over to the other side—lock, stock, and barrel.

DUCKY. She has. God forgive you, Susie.

SUSIE. He will.

MARIAN. Well, is all that settled, Father? You'll marry Susie whenever you like and go up to her place, and I'll stay on here with the girls?

PATRICK. That suits me all right.

SUSIE. A most satisfactory conclusion. I don't think anything could have turned out better.

PET (*wildly*). No, no, no! It's wicked of us to be standing between Marian and her vocation; it's not fair to us to ask us to do such a thing, is it, Ducky?

DUCKY (*solemnly*). I couldn't endure it, Father, I could never endure it. It would come between me and my work. I'd never get a long tot right knowing that I was keeping Marian from Mount Vincent!

PATRICK. Dear, dear. I don't know what to say, 'tis difficult to please every one. I want to do what's right by you all, I don't want to think too much of what I want myself. I think it's for Marian to decide, she has the clearest head of any one here.

MARIAN. Well, I'm content with the arrangement. I wouldn't like, Father, to go away yet, not till the children are out in the world. It's as if God had laid a task on me when mother died, and it would be shirking it to throw it up until it was finished. A few years more in this house—what are they?—not so very much. I'll stay, I'll look after the children, I'll do my duty by them. That's all settled now and no more words about it.

PET.
DUCKY. } *Groan.*

PATRICK. You're a good girl, Marian. God bless you.

SUSIE. I wouldn't doubt you.

MARIAN. I'm sure I'm doing the right thing. It's as if—as if God wasn't ready for me yet.

(There is a knock at the door.)

MARIAN. Who can that be? Come in.

ELLEN (*putting her head in*). Mr. Mahony's back again!

MARIAN. Harold? What for?

ELLEN. I dunno. But he's wanting to see you—very particularly.

MARIAN. I'll go down. Is he in the dining-room?

ELLEN. I left him in the hall.

MARIAN. Bring him into the dining-room and make some more tea.

ELLEN. I will not. I'm going to bed. Me teeth are raging. (*She goes.*)

MARIAN. What on earth can Harold want at this hour? I'll have to go down.

SUSIE. We'll all go. (*She rises.*) Good-night, girls.

PET. I'll never forgive you.

SUSIE. That won't come between me and my night's rest.

MARIAN. Come, Father.

PATRICK (*rising*). Good-night, children. I've got you the best stepmother in the world.

DUCKY. So you think.

(There is a knock at the door.)

MARIAN. Come in.

HAROLD (*outside, not opening the door*). It's me—Harold!

MARIAN. I know. Come in.

HAROLD (*opening a crack of the door*). Ellen told me to come up. I've—I've something to tell you.

MARIAN (*going to the door and opening it wide*). For goodness' sake, don't be so shy, Harold. The children are in bed, but what matter?

HAROLD (*coming in unwillingly*). I have some news for you.

MARIAN. And we have some for you. Most exciting news. We'll have it with our tea.

HAROLD. I don't want any tea. I'd rather tell you now.

MARIAN. Yes. What is it? (*He doesn't speak.*)

PATRICK. Has anything happened, Harold?

SUSIE. Is it bad news?

HAROLD. Driving out of town—I met Doctor O'Grady——

MARIAN. Yes—yes——?

HAROLD. He was looking for me, to give me a message.

MARIAN. Who from?

HAROLD. The—the asylum!

SUSIE. About your wife?

HAROLD. Yes, about Molly—poor Molly. (*He stops, unable to go on.*)

PATRICK. I hope it was good news he brought you, Harold.

HAROLD. Maybe the best, the best for Molly, anyway. She's—she died this afternoon, quite suddenly; the doctor at the asylum telephoned to Doctor O'Grady and asked him to give me the message, being Sunday there were no telegrams.

MARIAN. Oh, Harold!

PATRICK. God rest her soul!

SUSIE. The poor creature!

HAROLD. I thought I'd like you to know at once, you're the best friends I have. I'll—I'll go home now. My poor little Molly. (*He breaks down; he stumbles towards the door.*)

MARIAN (*going to him*). Harold! (*They both go out.*)

SUSIE. Well, well, isn't that a terrible thing? Poor Molly Molloy! I remember well the day she got married and how gay she was, and to think that it was all to end like this.

PATRICK. The poor little girl! And how pretty she was. But there was always a mad streak in those Molloys from Ballysilla.

SUSIE. There was. Her own father warned Harold against it. Eight long years she's been shut up.

PATRICK. And I believe never a chance of her getting better. Look at it how you will, 'tis a merciful release.

SUSIE. Harold will feel strange now, free after all these years. God knows 'twas an unnatural way for him to be, married and yet single as it were.

PATRICK. God help him, you'd have to pity him.

SUSIE. Maybe I'd better go after him. Perhaps he'd spend the night at my place instead of going out to his own lonely house.

PATRICK. Yes, indeed. 'Twould be kind of you, Susie, to make him spend the night in town.

SUSIE. Pierce would be company for him, he's very cheery. I'll go. Good-night, children.

PET.

DUCKY. } Good-night.

PATRICK. Give me a hand to my room, Susie.

SUSIE. Come on. (*She guides him to the door.*)

PATRICK. Good-night, girls.

PET. }
DUCKY. } Good-night, Daddy.

(PATRICK and SUSIE go out.)

DUCKY. My God, isn't that an awful thing?

PET. The poor man! Didn't he look deathly pale?

DUCKY. Marriage is a great lottery after all.

PET. It is indeed. I don't think I could ever venture. Ah, I could, I suppose.

DUCKY. Do you think there's any fear of this scaring Daddy and Susie?

PET. Why should it?

DUCKY. Suppose Susie went mad on the honeymoon.

PET. Not a fear of it. Didn't you hear her saying there was always a mad streak in those Molloy's? There was never a wild strain in the Tynans.

DUCKY. I hope you're right. Anyway, as far as we're concerned, what good is the marriage?

PET. Oh, no good at all. We're worse off than we were before. As long as Father was here there was some one to stand between us and Marian; now we've nothing.

DUCKY. How long was this she said?

PET. A year or two.

DUCKY. A year or two! That's a lifetime!

PET. I'll run away.

DUCKY. You'll be caught.

PET. I won't. I'll change my name. I'll live in Dublin or New York. I'll become very famous.

DUCKY. How?

PET. I'm not sure.

DUCKY. Where'll you get the money?

PET. I have some saved and I'm certain I could coax a pound out of Daddy. Maybe I'll win the sweep at the convent bazaar—I dreamed I had the winning number—then I'd be independent for life.

DUCKY. I'll stick on here, sure I don't want to live anywhere but here. I'd be content if only Marian was out of it. Ssh! some one's coming.

MARIAN (*opening the door*). Father! Oh, where is he?

PET. Gone to his bed. He got Susie to give him a hand to his door.

MARIAN. How early he's gone.

PET. I think he's worn out. Getting engaged at his age must be very trying.

DUCKY. Has Harold gone?

MARIAN. Yes, with Susie.

DUCKY. Such a night as it's been all round!

PET. Marriages——

DUCKY. And deaths——

PET. Daddy engaged——

DUCKY. Poor Molly Mahony dead——

PET. Susie's nephew arrived——

DUCKY. Ellen's engagement off—ah, Marian, isn't life a chequered patchwork after all? I often lie here and wonder is it worth going on with.

MARIAN (*busying herself tidying the room, putting the girls' clothes away*). What nonsense, Ducky. Too many romantical novels you're reading. There's nothing much to grieve about in Molly Mahony's death. She was a burden to herself and a burden to poor Harold. Now he's a free man.

PET. Yes indeed, free to marry again.

MARIAN. Marry again? Oh, he'll hardly do that.

PET. Why not?

MARIAN. Well—indeed, as you say, why not?

DUCKY. I'd never have the nerve.

PET. The nerve for what? Marry Harold?

DUCKY. I mean, if I was Harold and one wife went mad on me I'd never chance another.

PET. If I was passionately in love I'd chance anything.

MARIAN. Her going mad had nothing to do with Harold.

DUCKY. I wonder!

PET. Sure he's enough to drive any one daft.

MARIAN. You're two silly little girls and don't know what you're talking about. Harold Mahony's a most intelligent young man and comes of most respectable people; his family have been in the place for generations; his uncle on the mother's side was a bishop.

PET. A bishop? I never heard that.

MARIAN. In America—but he's dead. The Mahonys themselves were always great people for the Church; there are two cousins and an uncle priests in Connaught.

PET. 'Tis a pity Harold himself didn't go for a priest.

DUCKY. He'd preach grand dismal sermons.

MARIAN. Well, he was the only son and he had the place to look forward to, a nice farm just the right size, neither too big nor too small. The house is old, to be sure, but it's large and well-built—none of your modern ramshackle things—and the garden is grand, if he'd only put a few strands of barbed wire on the walls. I don't think Harold's likely to marry again, but if the fancy took him no young woman could afford to turn him down lightly.

PET. Maybe you're right. . . . You can have him, Ducky, I'll stick to my old love—Pierce!

MARIAN. That same Pierce is no addition to the place; I wish he'd settled anywhere but here. But, girls, I don't like you to be for ever talking of men and marriage. You are too young entirely for that sort of thing. You shouldn't have a thought beyond your lessons. There'll be plenty of time later on for thinking of marriage and the like. Do you see?

PET. }
DUCKY. } (*Meekly.*) We see.

MARIAN. That's right. It's only for your good I'm talking. Good-night now; I'll put out the lamp.

DUCKY. Leave it for five minutes. I'll put it out in five minutes, Marian, I swear I will. But I couldn't sleep for a bit, I feel all in a whirl after the night's doings.

MARIAN. Very well. Now I trust you not to keep it lighting long.

DUCKY. You have my word for it.

(*MARIAN is going.*)

PET. Now that I come to think of it, Kate Moriarty always had a soft spot in her heart for Harold.

MARIAN (*stopping at the door*). Kate Moriarty? Nonsense!

PET. It's no nonsense at all. Do you remember that party at Susie's, Ducky, a month or two ago; we were all making game of him and she said he wasn't so bad.

DUCKY. I remember. And she got as red as red and tried to pass it off with a laugh.

MARIAN. Poor Kate! What nonsense! I don't mean it's nonsense for her to have a good word for Harold, but it's nonsense to think he'd ever look at her or consider her for a minute in the light of a wife.

PET. Why wouldn't he? They're about the one age.

DUCKY. And she's due to get her aunt's money, and it's well known the aunt's failing; she'll hardly see Christmas.

MARIAN (*laughing*). Kate Moriarty! Such an idea!

DUCKY. She's a good manager, too; she'd run the farm in great style.

MARIAN. Would she indeed? I grant you she can manage a few hens in a backyard, but I'd be sorry to see her turned loose on Harold's fine farm; she'd bankrupt him in two years. But we're talking rubbish. I know Harold better than any one in the town, and I know that he

wouldn't have Kate Moriarty if she was the last woman on earth. Good-night now. (*She goes.*)

DUCKY (*with a sigh*). It's very hard to please Marian. Crosser and crosser she's getting. The way she took you up about Kate and Harold!

PET. Of course in a way she's right, she does know Harold better than any one else; he comes to see her every week and talks to her for hours, and she——Ducky, I've just thought of something awful!

DUCKY. What is it?

PET. We all know that Harold's been dying down about Marian these years and years?

DUCKY. Well, what of it?

PET. What's to hinder him marrying her now?

DUCKY. Sure, isn't she going to be a nun?

PET. She might sacrifice herself.

DUCKY. Sacrifice? What do you mean?

PET. The way she sacrificed herself for us to-night. If he got sort of passionate about her and she took it into her head that it was her duty to look after him——

DUCKY. And save him from Kate Moriarty——

PET. Marian'd love to look after a big place like his.

DUCKY. And put barbed wire on the garden wall.

PET. Yes. Isn't she always talking about her duty? It's come across me like a flash that she'll think it's her duty to marry him and bring him in here on the top of us.

DUCKY. Oh, wouldn't that be terrible? Harold as a brother-in-law! Goodness knows we've suffered enough as it is. God would never do the like of that to us.

PET. He might.

DUCKY. Harold wouldn't come and live here, anyway.

PET. No, I've thought of something worse. The two of us would be carted out to his ugly old house and we'd be stuck there in the country never seeing a soul or having a bit of life, not a sound from morning to night, only the horses neighing and the calves roaring and the ducks quacking——

DUCKY. Accompanied by your scales and the scrape of my pen hour after hour. Ah, 'tis an impossible thought. Marian couldn't swing round like that.

PET. I don't feel I can trust her, not after the way she went on about Kate to-night.

DUCKY. If she could only become a nun before Harold begins to look around for another wife. We must pray hard for her to become a nun quick. I'll make a novena about it.

PET. I'll make two.

DUCKY. You're terrible, Pet, the things you think of.

PET. Mark my words, that's what'll happen. I've sort of second sight.

DUCKY (*contemptuously*). You haven't.

PET. Well, mark my words, wait and see. I'm going to quench the light. (*She does so.*)

DUCKY. I won't close an eye to-night after what you've said. . . . Ah, it's impossible. She couldn't give up the convent, she couldn't, not for all the Harolds in the world.

PET. Mark my words. Good-night.

DUCKY. Good-night.

Curtain.

ACT III

A few weeks later. The dining-room again, about six o'clock in the evening. The table is laid for an elaborate tea, there are six places at it. The side-table has dishes of meat and sweets on it. MARIAN and the two girls—the girls very smartly dressed but with aprons: MARIAN as plainly dressed as ever—are putting the final touches to the table. They are pulling out chairs when the curtain rises.

MARIAN (*directing, as usual*). Father will sit here with Susie on his right. I'll sit at the other side of Father. Which of you wants to sit next Susie?

PET. Where does Pierce sit?

MARIAN. Oh . . . I suppose he'll have to go beside me.

PET. Couldn't he sit between Ducky and me?

DUCKY. Yes, let's put him there.

MARIAN. No, 'twouldn't be manners to put him anywhere but beside me—goodness knows, I don't want him. You can sit the other side of him, Ducky, you're the elder, and then Pet between you and Susie. That will be right.

DUCKY. I can't imagine why you don't like him, Marian.

MARIAN. I can't imagine why you do.

PET. Every one in the town likes him.

MARIAN. Then I don't think much of the town's taste.

DUCKY. What have you against him?

MARIAN. I just don't like him and I never will, and that's all about it. How Susie ever came to have such a nephew——! However, I can be civil to him for one night.

PET. Will I strike up the Wedding March when they come in?

MARIAN. Indeed you won't—making a show of us all.

PET. I'd love to, and I know it off.

DUCKY. I'm sick hearing you play it. What time is it, Marian?

MARIAN. Just gone six.

DUCKY. Pierce swore he'd have them here on the stroke of six.

PET. Don't you know very well that once Susie gets her nose into Grafton Street she'll be there till the shops shut.

MARIAN. What on earth could she want to buy after the stacks of things she got for her wedding?

PET. Sure she needn't buy anything, just look around and turn things over.

MARIAN (*surveying the table*). Everything's right now, I think. I suppose Ellen has the kettle on?

DUCKY. I think so, but she's very low in her mind. She's after having a coolness with Clarence.

MARIAN. Clarence? Who's Clarence?

DUCKY. Her latest boy.

MARIAN. Ellen and her boys! They're none of your business, Ducky. I wish you wouldn't be talking to Ellen about things like that.

DUCKY. Sure I love hearing how Ellen's campaigns are getting on. The last fella sounds a killing chap.

MARIAN. Ducky! 'Fellas' and 'chaps'! I wish you wouldn't be so vulgar.

DUCKY. Well, we're not all going into convents like you.

MARIAN. Run upstairs, both of you, and take off your aprons and wash your hands and tidy your hairs.

PET. Right-o! (*They start for the door and meet OLIVER and DICK coming in.*)

DICK.
OLIVER. } Good-evening, Marian. Good-evening, girls.

MARIAN (*not at all glad to see them*). Good-evening.

DUCKY.
PET. } (*delighted*). Good-evening, Oliver; good-evening, Dick.

DICK. Has he come yet?

MARIAN. No. Off with you, girls. (*The girls go.*)

OLIVER. We thought we'd just drop in to give him a bit of a welcome.

MARIAN. I see. They maybe won't be here for quite a good while. Pierce took his motor to Dublin to meet them and bring them back. Goodness knows when that will be; it's not like a train.

OLIVER. I know, I know. Ah, sure, we don't mind waiting. (*He sits.*)

DICK. For a wonder I've nothing to do this evening. (*He sits.*)

MARIAN. They'll be dead tired, I'm sure. Not up for much talk or anything.

OLIVER. Now don't mind us, Marian. I know what's on your mind is that we'll stay to supper and upset all your nice little arrangements, but I promise you we won't. If Dick attempts to stay I'll take him by the scruff of the neck and throw him out.

DICK. Oh you will, will you?

MARIAN. I don't like to seem unfriendly, but the table's so small—just holds six.

OLIVER. I know, I know. My sister's the same. She'll make a meal for twenty people and think nothing of it, but if I chance to bring twenty-one, I don't hear the end of it for a week.

DICK. All women are like that. My mother's ditto. But she has to know the name, age, and pedigree of every one I bring to the house—and she wants a full three days' notice of their coming.

OLIVER. Does she get it?

DICK. Never.

MARIAN. Oh, I know you men think meals make themselves—like in the fairy stories. Ah, Oliver, like a good man, don't smoke your pipe in here.

OLIVER. Sorry, Marian. (*He puts it away.*)

DICK. Harold Mahony is back. I saw him in the street a few minutes ago.

MARIAN. Oh, is he? I haven't seen him. How is he?

DICK. Well, I wasn't speaking to him, but he didn't look much cheered up. I don't think his little trip did him any good.

OLIVER. Sure Harold would hate to cheer up.

DICK. He's a free man now, and I don't think a little smile would do him any great harm.

OLIVER. I'll give you five bob the first day he smiles.

DICK. Is that a bet?

OLIVER. It is.

DICK. I'll hold you to it.

MARIAN. Poor Harold! he's gone through a deal. Doctor O'Grady was saying after the funeral that he should go away for a month at least. But he couldn't find any one to go away with him.

OLIVER. I'm not surprised at that. (*HAROLD comes in.*) Oh, talk of the divil!

DICK. I was just saying that I saw you were back.

HAROLD. Yes, I arrived this morning. Good-evening, Marian. (*He shakes hands.*)

MARIAN. How are you, Harold?

HAROLD. Good-evening, Mr. Delany; good-evening, Mr. O'Shaughnessy.

OLIVER }
DICK. } 'Evening, Harold.

MARIAN. Sit down, Harold. (*He sits.*) Well, how are you?

HAROLD (*gloomily*). Oh, I'm all right. A touch of neuritis, but I suppose one must expect that.

MARIAN. That'll wear off now that you're home again.

HAROLD. I doubt it.

OLIVER. Where were you, Harold?

HAROLD. I've been in Connemara for the last fortnight.

OLIVER. D'you like it?

HAROLD. It's beautifully desolate.

DICK. I suppose it rained? Connemara's the divil for rain.

HAROLD. Yes, it rained every day. I didn't mind.

DICK. No, you wouldn't. Were you fishing?

HAROLD. Oh no. I never fish.

OLIVER. The nearest I ever got to Connemara was Galway Races—of course you were too late for them.

HAROLD. Was I? . . . I hear your father's married, Marian.

MARIAN. Yes indeed, and went off for ten days of a honeymoon. But we're expecting them back to-night, any minute now. They're to have tea here and then go to Susie's place. They're to live there, you know.

HAROLD. So I heard. Where did they go for the honeymoon?

MARIAN. The Isle of Man.

HAROLD (*with a sigh*). Ah!

DICK. 'Tis a pity you didn't go to some place the like of that, Harold, some place that would have cheered you up a bit. Them old bogs and mountains aren't the thing for you at all. A bit of a band and a jolly crowd and nigger minstrels—that's what you want. A touch of Blackpool would have done you all the good in the world.

HAROLD. Would it?

OLIVER. I got a killing card from Patrick last night—was I showing it to you, Dick?

DICK. You were. 'Tis one of the best I ever seen.

OLIVER (*fishing it out of his pocket*). Look, Harold, 'twill make you die laughing.

HAROLD (*examining it*). I don't understand it.

OLIVER. Don't you see, that enormous porpoise of a woman—that's his wife—and the scraggy old thing, that's his mother-in-law, and——

HAROLD. I understand it now. (*No smile lights his face.*) It's very vulgar. (*He returns it.*)

OLIVER. I suppose it is vulgar in a way but——Here, Marian, you look at it. (*He hands it to her.*)

HAROLD. Don't bother with it, Marian. It's very low.

MARIAN. Oh, I must see it now that you've all seen it. (*She looks at it.*) Yes, it is vulgar—but it's awfully funny. (*And she starts to laugh, DICK and OLIVER joining in. HAROLD sits mute.*)

DICK. Let's have another squint at it. (*He gets it.*)

OLIVER. Isn't it a terrible thing that poor Patrick can't have seen it? Susie must have chosen it for him. Did you get any cards from them, Marian?

MARIAN. Lots. But they were all scenery.

OLIVER. Ah, sure scenery's no good.

MARIAN. How did you find things when you got home, Harold?

HAROLD. Oh, just as usual. The house is filthy.

MARIAN. Tch, tch!

HAROLD. And while I was away the cat had kittens—that's the third time since Christmas.

MARIAN. I hope they're nice kittens.

HAROLD. Horrid.

OLIVER. Was I ever telling you, Dick, of the cat that—Oh, well, maybe it's not a story to tell before Marian. Come into the garden and have a smoke, I'm famished for a pipe. We'll wait there, Marian, till your father comes.

MARIAN. Very well.

OLIVER. Come on, Dick. We'll see you later, Harold. *(They start to go. OLIVER, as they go through the door)* Well, as I was going to tell you, there was an ould fellow one time had a big tom-cat, and—*(The door closes on the rest of the story.)*

HAROLD. I should be going. I don't want to intrude on your party. I only came in to let you know that I was back.

MARIAN. You wouldn't be intruding, Harold. Father is always glad to see you.

HAROLD. An evening like this you'll be making merry. I won't be any addition to your party.

MARIAN. Don't say that, Harold.

HAROLD. It's the truth. I'm a sort of wet blanket, Marian; I know I am.

MARIAN. You should try and cheer up, Harold, and put all that's past behind you. Poor Molly's at peace now and that's all over and done with, and there's no use fretting over what can't be helped.

HAROLD. I know. But I keep on fretting all the same.

MARIAN. You mustn't. You must start a new life for yourself now.

HAROLD. What have I to live for? Memories of poor Molly, dreams of you.

MARIAN. Put me out of your head.

HAROLD. I can't. It's just part of the bad luck that has dogged me all my life that I should find myself in love with a girl who's going to be a nun.

MARIAN. Oh, but I'm not going to be a nun, Harold.

HAROLD. What? What are you saying, Marian?

MARIAN. I'm not going to be a nun.

HAROLD. You're not—? What's happened? Has your father stopped you? Is it on account of his marriage? Or is it the children?

MARIAN. No one has stopped me—except my own common-sense.

HAROLD. I don't understand. What do you mean?

MARIAN. I mean, my eyes have been opened. I see now that what I called my vocation was all girlish romantic nonsense. A month in the convent would have knocked sense into me, but I don't even need that now. I pretended to myself that I was eating my heart out to be away in Mount Vincent, but I wasn't. The truth is I love managing a house and contriving and planning and making people do this thing and that thing. Sometimes I used to get a

half-suspicion that life would be very dull in the convent, but then I'd think of Saint Teresa and the grand time she had reforming everything. Then there came the surprise of Father's marriage and the way was clear for me. I was miserable until I remembered the children and that I must stay and look after them. But that was only a make-up. The truth was that I couldn't bear to be anywhere that I wasn't my own mistress—and as to Saint Teresa, sure she was a great saint and a woman in a million. All I am is a driving, managing, worldly woman.

HAROLD. I'm dumbfounded! I can't believe it! How can you go back on everything now?

MARIAN. I must. I'll look a fool, I suppose, but what matter? Better late than never, as they say.

HAROLD. What does your father think of this?

MARIAN. He doesn't know. No one knows yet, only you. I'm afraid of what the children will say; they hate me—no, they don't, but they don't like me for driving them so hard. I thought it didn't matter what they thought of me, as I'd be out of it soon and they'd live to thank me. But now, if I'm not going away—I declare I don't know what's best to be done.

HAROLD. It's a terrible upset.

MARIAN. It is indeed. Ah well, I've always you to fall back on.

HAROLD. Me?

MARIAN. I'm very fond of you, Harold.

HAROLD. You always told me you never cared for me—that way.

MARIAN. Not do I. But I might.

HAROLD. I see. . . . I think you shouldn't be in too big a hurry to give up the convent.

MARIAN. Do you?

HAROLD. Take your time. I expect this is a little idea of yours that will pass away—a thing of nothing.

MARIAN. If you knew how contented I feel. It's as if I had had a sort of little toothache at the back of my mind all these years and now I've had the tooth out.

HAROLD. I see. . . .

MARIAN. It's grand to feel free to think of—other things.

HAROLD. Ay . . . ay. . . . (*He gets up and walks unhappily about the room. MARIAN watches him with secret amusement.*)

MARIAN (*playing with him*). Sometimes I think that the best thing I could do is marry you at once.

HAROLD (*really startled*). What?

MARIAN. I like you very much and they say the surest love is the sort that comes after marriage.

HAROLD. But—but I couldn't marry a woman who didn't love me.

MARIAN. Well, maybe I do love you. It's very hard to tell the difference between love and like.

HAROLD. It isn't. They're two entirely different things. You'd be terribly unhappy if you married

me just liking me.

MARIAN. I can't imagine being unhappy married to you, Harold.

HAROLD. I've—I've not a great deal of money. I couldn't give you the life you're used to; the farming went to pieces this year.

MARIAN. Yes, you want a capable woman at your back.

HAROLD. You've no idea how bad-tempered and cantankerous I am—and I get terrible black moods of depression, Marian.

MARIAN. I know—from living alone.

HAROLD. And of course, we couldn't get married for ages; it wouldn't be respectful to poor Molly.

MARIAN. That's a pity. What I'd love would be a runaway marriage.

HAROLD. Marian!

MARIAN (*bursting out laughing*). You're an old silly, Harold. You're as romantic and nonsensical about me as I was about the convent. I never believed you were as broken-hearted about me as you made out to be, and I was right. For now when there's a chance of your mending your poor heart you won't take it.

HAROLD. That's unfair. I'm surprised, upset. That's all.

MARIAN. You wanted me as long as you couldn't get me. 'The far-off hills are green.'

HAROLD. I'm very fond of you.

MARIAN. Of course you are, but you don't want to marry me.

HAROLD. You've no right to say that. (*He hiccups.*) Damn! Excuse me.

MARIAN. Ah, be honest, Harold. Tell yourself the truth. I've had courage enough to give up the convent; let you have the courage to jilt me.

HAROLD (*hiccuping gently from time to time*). I don't like the way you're putting it.

MARIAN. That's because you're so romantic. Would you rather I refused you? I will if you like. Then you can tell every one and have a broken heart for the rest of your life.

HAROLD. You're laughing at me!

MARIAN. Of course I am. I wish to goodness I could make you laugh a bit at yourself. I've been laughing at myself for the last ten days, and I feel a different woman.

HAROLD. Maybe I've been a bit of a fool.

MARIAN (*cheerfully*). Of course you have. A big bit.

HAROLD. But look at all I've been through! There was poor Molly, and you were so kind, the only friend I had. And I used to look at you and think and dream . . . and then go back to my lonely house—

MARIAN. I know, and your dying fire, and the evenings getting darker and darker. You're slipping into the old thing again. . . . Come on, Harold; propose to me.

HAROLD. No.

MARIAN. Go on.

HAROLD. I won't.

MARIAN. I promise I'll refuse you.

HAROLD. I wonder!

MARIAN. Honour bright.

HAROLD. I couldn't trust you.

MARIAN. There! Out of your own mouth you're condemned. Ah, go home, Harold, and get some sense.

HAROLD. You're very unkind.

MARIAN. You're a young man, the world's before you. You've a nice house and a good farm, you haven't a care in the world.

HAROLD. Oh! Such a cruel thing to say, Marian.

MARIAN. I know what I'll do. I'll make Oliver and Dick adopt you. Three months' horse-racing and gambling and knocking about would do you all the good in the world.

HAROLD (*with dignity in spite of hiccup*). I'll go home. There's no use talking to you while you're in this mood.

MARIAN. You'll never find me in any other. I'm sick of shams.

HAROLD (*holding out his hand*). Good-night.

MARIAN (*taking it*). Good-night.

HAROLD. In spite of everything, Marian, I'll always think of you as the only woman that——

MARIAN (*dropping his hand*). Now, now; there you're off again. And I won't have that silly hand-pressing business.

HAROLD. I didn't.

MARIAN. Oh, indeed you did. Force of habit, I suppose, and I'll forgive you. But you must break yourself of it. For it's dangerous. I might get so moved that I'd suddenly throw my arms round your neck and kiss you, and then you'd have to marry me.

HAROLD. Oh! (*With a last disgusted hiccup, he goes.*)

MARIAN (*laughing*). Poor Harold! (*She straightens a chair or two, goes to the door and calls*)
Pet! Ducky! Are you ready?

PET'S VOICE. We're coming.

(*A motor-horn is heard, tooting comically.*)

DUCKY'S VOICE. They've come! they've come! That's Pierce's horn.

(*A rush to the hall door, a confusion of voices. MARIAN stands at the dining-room door waiting. PATRICK and SUSIE appear.*)

MARIAN (*kissing him*). Father darling!

PATRICK. Well, Marian!

SUSIE (*kissing her*). Well, Marian, I brought him back safe and sound.

MARIAN. He's looking splendid. (*Helping him out of his coat.*) Did you enjoy yourself, Father?

PATRICK. Ay, I had a splendid time, the best for years.

SUSIE. He went round like a two-year-old.

MARIAN. I wouldn't doubt him.

SUSIE. And I declare, Marian, he danced!

MARIAN. Danced? Father!

PATRICK. I did, Marian, God forgive me. She made me.

SUSIE. I taught him a few steps. And the sight doesn't matter dancing; it's enough if one of the two sees. The first night in Douglas looking at the flappers going around with their eyes tight shut and their noses stuck into the fellows' chests, says I to myself, 'What's to prevent Paddy and I doing the same thing?' So we did. I steered him.

PATRICK. She did indeed. All the same, I felt a bit ashamed, Marian, at my age.

SUSIE. Ah, nonsense! You and your age.

MARIAN. I don't see why you shouldn't, Father, if you like it.

PATRICK. I'm glad to hear you say that, Marian. I thought you'd be wild with me.

MARIAN. As long as you enjoyed yourself, what else matters?

PATRICK. Marian?

MARIAN (*laughing*). Oh, Father, there's a lot happened since you went away.

PIERCE (*appearing with the girls*). I left all the bags in the car; you don't want any of them left here, do you?

SUSIE. No, Pierce. I have a few little things for the girls, but they'll do later.

PET. Oh, have you, Susie? What?

DUCKY. What d'you bring me?

SUSIE. I brought you a lovely what-d'you-call-it.

DUCKY. A what?

SUSIE. Like this, you know. (*She makes a vague gesture.*) And I brought Pet the same sort of thing, only different.

PET. Like what?

SUSIE. Oh, you know—a thing—well, you put it like that—and it's like this. (*She makes vague gestures.*)

PET. You are a tease, Susie.

DUCKY. We'll be up to your place to-night to root them out. I won't sleep till I've seen them. Did you bring us anything, Daddy?

PATRICK. Yes—Douglas Rock!

DUCKY. Ugh!

SUSIE. What's the box in your hand, Pierce?

PIERCE. Just something I got in Dublin. I'll leave it here for the present.

MARIAN. Are you longing for your tea?

SUSIE. Parched. I'm tired, tramping the streets of Dublin all day.

DUCKY. What did you buy?

SUSIE. Nothing, except a religious picture for you, Marian; I didn't see anything in Douglas that would suit you, but this is just your style.

MARIAN. You're very good. I'll make Ellen wet the tea.

SUSIE. Give me a few minutes, Marian, to wash my hands. I'm a mask of dust.

MARIAN. Take Susie upstairs, girls. Oh, Father, did you see Oliver and Dick?

PATRICK. No. Where are they? Are they here?

MARIAN. They called up to see you. They went to have a smoke in the garden. Maybe they didn't hear the car come.

PATRICK. I'd like well to see them.

MARIAN. Would you step into the garden while Susie is tidying herself?

PATRICK. I'd like to.

MARIAN. Very well. But, Father, don't ask them to stay to tea; there isn't room.

PATRICK. I understand.

MARIAN. Give him a hand, Pet.

PET (*taking his arm*). Here you are, Daddy.

DUCKY. Come on, Susie. I have hot water and all. (*The four go out.*)

MARIAN. They're both looking grand, aren't they?

PIERCE. Yes. . . . (*He abruptly takes up the parcel and hands it to MARIAN.*) That's for you.

MARIAN. For me? What is it? Where did it come from?

PIERCE. From Dublin.

MARIAN. Dublin? Is it Susie's religious picture?

PIERCE. No. Something I got. For you.

MARIAN. I didn't ask you to get me anything.

PIERCE. I know. But I got it.

MARIAN. Well, I declare! What is it?

PIERCE. A dress.

MARIAN. A dress? Who for?

PIERCE. Yourself. Who else?

MARIAN (*putting down the parcel*). Well, I think you've got great impertinence to go buy a dress for me, and great impertinence to think for a minute that I'd take it from you. You can bring it back to the shop.

PIERCE. You mean you won't take it?

MARIAN. That's exactly what I mean.

PIERCE. Or even look at it?

MARIAN. Or even look at it.

PIERCE (*chucking the parcel across the room*). Then it can go to hell!

MARIAN. Please don't use language like that here.

PIERCE. Oh, rot!

MARIAN. Whatever made you think of such a thing, buying a dress for *me*?

PIERCE. I hate to see you going around all dull and dowdy—like Adam's aunt. You're the prettiest girl in the town.

MARIAN. Nonsense!

PIERCE. You are, if you gave yourself half a chance. You dress frowsily because you think you're going into a convent. But that's all nonsense—you're not. You're going to marry me.

MARIAN. What?

PIERCE. I fell for you the first minute I saw you. I'm crazy about you. Say you love me, go on.

MARIAN. I hate you!

PIERCE. Rot! Go on, say you love me.

MARIAN. I think you're mad.

PIERCE. Yes, mad about you. And you are about me.

MARIAN. I hate you. I've hated you from the first minute I saw you.

PIERCE. Liar! You fell for me that first Sunday night.

MARIAN. I didn't.

PIERCE. You did. Look at me.

MARIAN (*trying to meet his eye*). I don't want——

PIERCE. You do, you do. (*He kisses her; he has run a cinema, remember*)

MARIAN. You mustn't, you mustn't.

PIERCE. I must, I must. (*He kisses her again.*)

MARIAN. The others will be back.

PIERCE. Let 'em. I want to tell the world.

MARIAN. We're dreaming, aren't we?

PIERCE. Not on your life. I'm real. Pinch me.

MARIAN. How could you?

PIERCE. What?

MARIAN. Ever care for me?

PIERCE. Why not? I knew at once.

MARIAN. I'm plain and dull and dowdy.

PIERCE. Try a touch of Grafton Street. It's there, in that box.

MARIAN. It's not only clothes.

PIERCE. But they make a hell of a difference. Go on, be a sport, slip it on. I spent an hour choosing it.

MARIAN (*breaking away from him*). No, I can't. I can't marry you, Pierce, it's too ridiculous.

PIERCE. Most sensible thing you've done in your life. You're the cleverest woman in the place; I'm the smartest man. Between us, we'll run the town.

MARIAN. Run the town!

PIERCE. You're made for bigger things than chivvying Pet and Ducky. Wait till you've your hands on the garage and the cinema.

MARIAN (*her future dawning on her*). Oh! . . . I hear some one coming. What'll I do?

PIERCE (*rescuing the parcel and giving it to her*). Hop upstairs and get into this.

MARIAN. If I come down in it, what will they say?

PIERCE. They'll tumble to the fact that you're not going to be a nun, that you're going to marry me.

MARIAN. I made up my mind a week ago that I wasn't going to be a nun.

PIERCE. I know. You fell for me the first minute you saw me.

MARIAN. I didn't.

PIERCE. Then why did you bring me out to look at the sunset? . . . They're coming. Fly!

MARIAN. Pierce, be a darling, tell them before I come down. I'd never have the courage.

PIERCE. I'll tell them, of course; nothing easier.

(*She seizes the box and makes for the door and meets SUSIE and the girls coming in.*)

SUSIE. Where are you off to, Marian?

MARIAN. To hurry up tea. (*She goes.*)

DUCKY. I'd better give her a hand. Ellen's good for nothing this evening. (*She goes.*)

PET. Well, Pierce, such goings-on you never heard.

PIERCE. Where? Here?

PET. Nothing ever happens here. In Douglas.

PIERCE. I wouldn't doubt Aunt Susie.

SUSIE. We didn't do anything so out of the way.

PET. Oh, didn't you? What about that evening on the esplanade, and the two men from Manchester?

SUSIE. Ah, shut up about that and tell me how you got on while we were away.

PET. Not so bad, then. Marian wasn't as bad as I expected. But the awful thing is she can't stand Pierce.

SUSIE. Can't she?

PIERCE. Are you sure?

PET. Now, Pierce, there's no use shutting your eyes to the fact that she can't bear a bone in your body. I must say it shows her rotten taste, but there it is. Surely you must have noticed it yourself?

PIERCE. Something like it.

PET. Of course. Look, Susie, he'd be coming up every day to see Ducky and me, and he wouldn't be here three minutes before Marian would be in to hunt him.

SUSIE. Well, I'm surprised at Marian. I can't imagine any one not liking you, Pierce.

PET. Ah, of course, Pierce isn't her style at all; they're like oil and water, they'd never mix.

PIERCE. I wouldn't go so far as to say that.

PET. He asked us out in the motor twice, Susie, and Marian wouldn't let us go.

SUSIE. She went herself, maybe?

PET. Catch her! She'd rather be seen dead than with Pierce.

PIERCE. Well now, Pet, just to show that you're not as wise as you think you are, I have the pleasure to inform you that Marian and I——

(PATRICK and OLIVER and DICK come in.)

DICK. Here we are, Susie.

PATRICK. They wouldn't go till they'd shaken your hand, Susie.

SUSIE. I'm glad to see them.

OLIVER. How are you, Susie? Tip-top?

SUSIE (*shaking hands*). First-class, Oliver.

DICK (*shaking hands*). You've knocked ten years off yourself, Susie. And sure Patrick looks about twenty years old.

PATRICK. That's all I'm feeling, Dick.

OLIVER. Well, marriage is a wonder. By the Lord, Dick, we must think of getting married one of these days.

SUSIE. There's little chance of that happening.

OLIVER. Oh, I wouldn't say so.

DICK. I'm not so dead set against it as all that.

SUSIE. I mean, I can't imagine any one who would take you—either of you.

DICK. Susie!

OLIVER. You never appreciated us, Susie.

SUSIE. I never took you at your own valuation, you mean. . . . How are the murders getting on, Oliver?

OLIVER. Wisha, there's little stirring, Susie, little stirring. A terrible slackness in crime at the present moment. I don't know what's come to every one. No one seems to want to do anything out of the common.

DICK. Ah well, there was a decent little suicide in yesterday's paper—that case at Mullingar.

OLIVER. Ph! I wouldn't think much of that. A common bankrupt.

DICK. I think there was more in it than bankruptcy. Did you see what the aunt said when they cut down the body?

OLIVER. A thing of nothing. Mark my words, a thing of nothing. Ah, but please goodness, in a week or two things will freshen up. With the end of the holidays there's generally something doing. Fellas coming back stoney-broke, you know, and taking it out on their wives and the like—meaning nothing personal, Patrick.

PATRICK. Douglas left me without a stiver—but I'm not sure that I'm going to avenge it on Susie.

SUSIE. I'd like to see you try.

DICK. Do you remember that double murder at Wolverhampton? Holidays were at the back of that, nothing else.

PIERCE. Let's talk of something more cheerful. I've a little bit of news for you.

SUSIE. What's that, Pierce?

PIERCE. Oh, it's nothing very much. (*To his own astonishment he gets suddenly shy.*) It's only that Marian—I mean it's just that I—Marian—

ELLEN (*putting her head in through the door—her head is swathed in a bandage*). I'm off to me bed. You can tell Miss Marian.

PET. Bed? Ellen! not before you've brought up the tea?

ELLEN. You can fetch your own tea. Me teeth are raging.

PET. You've done it again!

ELLEN (*sniffing*). He came—Clarence—to the back door five minutes ago, and I gave him the

push for good an' all.

PET. And who is it this time?

ELLEN. Don't ask me. My heart's broken. (*And she goes.*)

PET. Well, isn't she a terror? I'll have to go and give Ducky a hand. (*She goes.*)

OLIVER. That Ellen woman's a sort of a public scandal. There'll be no peace in the town until she's married. Come, Dick, we should be off.

PATRICK. Indeed, you'll do nothing of the kind. You'll wait and have a cup of tea at least. I can't see what's on the table, but I'm sure there's a good spread.

SUSIE. Oh, there's lashings, Patrick.

PATRICK. There you are!

OLIVER. Ah no, I promised Marian I wouldn't stay. As she says herself, the table only holds six.

PATRICK. Six? Many a time in the old days I saw it hold ten and more.

OLIVER. These aren't the old days. Come, Dick.

PATRICK. No, no, boys. Don't go. My first night home and all.

DICK. We sort of pledged our word we wouldn't stay.

OLIVER. We promised.

PATRICK. Wisha, break your promise.

OLIVER. I'll tell you what—we'll drop up to Susie's place later, in a couple of hours' time. Will that suit you? Will you be there by then?

PATRICK. We will.

OLIVER. Any objection, Susie?

SUSIE. Not the least in the world.

PATRICK. Is there anything for them to drink, Susie?

SUSIE. Two bottles of J.J. and a bottle of port—unless Pierce has made away with them when my back was turned.

PIERCE. I didn't touch them.

SUSIE. Very well. Don't insult me by bringing your flask, Dick. You'll be up too, Pierce?

PIERCE. I don't think so. I'll stay here.

SUSIE. With the girls? Marian will hunt you.

PIERCE. I don't think so. You see the fact is—(*He hesitates.*)

OLIVER. We'll be off so.

SUSIE. Don't go for a minute. I've a letter I want you to post; I've been carrying it around all day. I left it in my bag up in Marian's room. I'll get it. I won't keep you a minute. (*She goes out.*)

PATRICK. Sit down again, boys. A woman in a thousand, that's what she is.

OLIVER. You struck gold all right, Paddy.

PATRICK. I did. And what did I ever do to deserve it? Pierce!

PIERCE. Yes?

PATRICK. I'm saying your aunt's a woman in a thousand. You should pray to God that you may have the luck to marry a woman the like of her.

PIERCE. Yes. I'd say Marian is a bit like her.

OLIVER. Marian? Yerra, not at all.

DICK. Marian's a born old maid.

OLIVER. A born nun.

PATRICK. Yet, boys, I wish—God forgive me—that she wasn't going into the convent.

PIERCE. As a matter of fact—she—that is, this evening, I—

(The girls interrupt him by coming in with trays on which is a teapot, toast, eggs, hot cakes, etc. PIERCE helps them to put them on the table.)

DUCKY. Marian wasn't there to give us a hand; we had to do everything. And Ellen's gone to bed with the toothache.

PET. Isn't love a terrible thing, Pierce?

PIERCE. You've hit it, Pet.

DUCKY. The kettle was nearly boiled dry and the toast's as hard as a rock. You'd better call Marian, Pet.

(The three men are talking in low tones among themselves. PIERCE makes a desperate effort to get their attention.)

PIERCE. Don't go for a minute, Pet. Before Marian comes—I want—Mr. Clancy, sir, I have something to tell you.

OLIVER *(coming to the end of some story)*. Did you ever hear better than that?

PATRICK. Well, that beats Banagher!

PIERCE. Mr. Clancy, Mr. Clancy!

PATRICK. Yes, yes. What is it, Pierce?

PIERCE. It's only to tell you that Marian—this evening— *(He stops.)*

PATRICK *(impatiently)*. What's all this about Marian?

PIERCE. Well, only that she—

(SUSIE comes in in some agitation.)

SUSIE. Such a queer thing!

OLIVER. What? You've lost the letter, I suppose.

SUSIE. I haven't. I can't get at my bag. I don't know what's come to Marian, Patrick; she's locked herself into her room and she says she's not coming down to tea.

PATRICK. Not coming to tea?

SUSIE. So she told me. Through the door.

OLIVER. Maybe it's because we're here. Did you tell her we're on the wing?

SUSIE. I did. It's nothing to do with you.

PET. She must be in love, like Ellen!

DUCKY. Did she say she had the toothache? *(They both laugh.)*

SUSIE. Stop your laughing. I don't like it, Patrick. Something strange is up. Her voice sounded queer.

PIERCE. I'll fetch her down. *(He makes for the door.)*

SUSIE. Stop, Pierce. She hates the sight of you; she won't listen to you and the door's locked.

PIERCE. I'll get her out. *(He is gone, leaving the door open.)*

PATRICK. Susie, is anything wrong? Are you scared?

SUSIE. No, Patrick, just a bit puzzled. There can't be anything wrong. She was all right when I was speaking to her here a while ago. Hush! Listen!

(They all listen. PIERCE'S voice can be dimly heard, but not exactly what he is saying. When any one speaks in the room they speak in whispers.)

DUCKY. He's begging her to come out . . . what use is that?

PET. Telling her she's done nothing to be ashamed of. . . .

SUSIE. What can that mean? . . .

DUCKY. He's *ordering* her to come out! . . .

PET. Such a way to speak to her! . . .

SUSIE. He's losing his temper. No, he's not. He's speaking so low now I can't hear what he's saying.

OLIVER. Ssh! . . . It sounds like 'darling'!

DUCKY. }
PET. } Darling?

SUSIE. Ah, nonsense. You're losing the use of your ears.

OLIVER. Ssh! . . . 'Darling' it is! . . . There it goes again!

DICK. And 'sweetheart,' and 'baby,' and—Glory be to God!

SUSIE *(after a tense moment of listening, sinking into a chair)*. Oh, merciful heavens!

PATRICK. What was it, Susie?

PET.
DUCKY. } What?
DICK.

OLIVER. I couldn't catch it.

SUSIE. 'When we're married,' he says——

PET.
DUCKY. } Susie, he didn't!

OLIVER. He must be raving.

SUSIE. Those were his words.

(Every one is aghast with surprise.)

PIERCE'S VOICE (*loudly—he has suddenly lost his temper*). Come out! Come out at once, I tell you!
You won't? I'll give you till I count three, then I smash the door. One——

ALL (*under their breath*). One——

PIERCE. Two——

ALL. Two——

PIERCE. Are you coming? (*A pause.*) Three.

ALL. Three! (*An instant's silence, then a fearful crash.*) Oh!

PATRICK (*after a pause*). Glory be to God!

OLIVER (*in awe*). It's like something you'd read of in the papers.

DICK. Do you think is there any fear he'd strike her or that she'd throw vitriol in his face?

OLIVER. Sure where would she get vitriol?

SUSIE. It's grand . . . grand! I wouldn't doubt Pierce. Ssh! there's a step. They're coming!

(They wait in silence. MARIAN and PIERCE come in. She is dressed in her new dress, she looks very pretty—PIERCE has excellent taste—but she is overwhelmed with shyness. She makes straight for her father and flings her arms round him.)

MARIAN. Daddy, I'm sorry, but I couldn't—and—and—— (*She begins to cry.*)

PATRICK. There, there, darling, don't cry. What's the matter? Did he frighten you? I won't let any one frighten my little girl.

MARIAN. I'm so happy, Daddy. So terribly happy.

PATRICK. That's all right, darling; that's all right.

PIERCE (*considerably ruffled as regards hair and temper*). We're going to get married, sir. That's all the trouble.

PATRICK (*stroking her hand*). I see, I see. That's all right, doaty. There's nothing to cry about in

that.

MARIAN. Oh, Daddy, Daddy!

PATRICK. Ssh, ssh!

PET (*to DUCKY*). Where did she get the lovely dress? I wouldn't know her.

DUCKY. And look what she's done to her hair.

PIERCE. I got that dress. Hold your tongues, and leave your sister alone.

PET. Mind your own business. I was never so glad of anything, Marian (*and she kisses her*).

DUCKY (*following suit*). It's simply grand.

MARIAN. Thank you. You're dears.

SUSIE (*to PIERCE*). You're a nice one.

PIERCE. I am.

OLIVER. The young fellows going now don't lose much time.

DICK. They're rapid. Terrible rapid.

PET. Won't it be lovely to have Pierce living here and helping to educate us?

PIERCE. Not on your life; we'll have a house of our own, thank you.

DUCKY. But our education?

PIERCE. It can go to the dickens; we have more important things to think of than your silly book-keeping and scales.

DUCKY. }
PET. } Oh! Pierce!

PET. Marian, do you hear what he says?

MARIAN. Yes. He's quite right. I don't care if you never get educated.

PET. Marian!

SUSIE. And meantime, the tea is getting blacker and blacker.

MARIAN. Yes. I'm so sorry. It's all my fault. Come, Daddy.

OLIVER. We'll be off. Give me your hand, Marian. The best of luck to you. No, dang it all, I've known you since you were a baby. I'll have a kiss.

DICK. Well, so long as Pierce doesn't smash me in as he smashed in the door——! (*Kissing her*.)

MARIAN. You must neither of you think of going. Sit down.

OLIVER. There won't be room at the table.

MARIAN. There'll be lots of room. Get two more chairs, girls.

DICK. I think now we should drink a health to the engaged couple, and I chance to have a drop with me, and all.

SUSIE. I wouldn't doubt you.

MARIAN. You can keep it. *(She produces a brimming decanter.)*

OLIVER. That's a sight for sore eyes.

DICK. Will I hand it round?

MARIAN. Yes. Don't spare it.

DICK. I won't. Trust me. *(And he busies himself with the glasses.)*

MARIAN. And that's a little present for you, Daddy. *(She puts a box into his hand.)*

PATRICK *(feeling it)*. It's—it's cigars! Is it, Marian?

MARIAN. Yes. *(She sits beside PIERCE.)*

PATRICK. God bless you.

DICK. And now that we've something in our glasses, here's looking at you, Marian, and you too, Pierce, and may you both be——

(The door opens. HAROLD sticks his head in.)

HAROLD. You'll forgive the intrusion, Marian, but my umbrella—I forgot it and there's big banks of black clouds gathering in the west.

DICK *(jumping up and going to him, his glass in his hand)*. You're in the nick of time, Harold. Take that in your hand and drink to the engaged couple. *(He goes back to the table and fills another glass for himself.)*

HAROLD. The engaged couple?

SUSIE. Marian and Pierce. They're going to be married.

HAROLD. Marian and . . . ! Marian going to be married? I'm delighted. I'm simply delighted. *(A smile of relief has begun to spread over his face, it grows broader and broader.)*

DICK. Be the holy, he's smiling. I've won the bet! Five shillings, Oliver, five shillings.

OLIVER. It's worth it.

PATRICK. This little room is as full of happiness as an egg is full of meat. Marian dear, Pierce . . . good luck, God bless you both. *(He has risen, his glass in his hand. All rise except MARIAN and PIERCE. PIERCE has his arm round her, and as the curtain falls he kisses her.)*

THE END

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Transcriber's Notes

Obvious printing errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *The Far-Off Hills* by Lennox Robinson]