

Mena: There is the gift of £200 for us if there is a marriage. [*Long pause.*] Think of the start it would give us. How many times would you bend your back to make it? Long enough we were scraping: you said it yourself. Consider it, will you? It is what we wanted always. Sive will be well off and we will be rid of your mother and her taunting.

Mike: No! No! A million thousand times no! It would sleep with me for the rest of my days. It would be like tossing the white flower of the canavaun on to the manure heap. It is against the grain of my bones, woman. Will you think of it? Think of what it is! Sive and that oul' corpse of a man, Seán Dóta!

Mena: [*Soothing motherly tone.*] Will you sit down and be said by me.

Mike: I will not sit! ... I am going out!

Mena: [*Repeating his words, her voice filled with sarcasm.*] You are going out! [*Changes to a tone of boldness.*] Well, if you are going out, I am going with you.

Mike: [*Lifts his right hand.*] There is a finish, girl, to our talk. Leave me to myself. I have a wish to go by myself. Let me be. [*He looks at her, filled with doubt.*]

Mena: [*Pause.*] Go away! Go away with you. Go away, man of straw.

Mike: [*Harshly, loud-voiced.*] I am no man of straw. Will you not leave me be with myself?

[*Suddenly, in a violent fit of temper, he knocks over the chair upon which he has been sitting and goes out, slamming the door. MENA rises and follows him through the door, leaving it open after her, still calling his name.*

When both are gone, the old woman comes from the room and looks out after them. She goes to the fire, produces her pipe and lights it. She has only just sat down when a young man enters; aged about nineteen, he is good-looking and manly, his voice cultured and refined. His entrance is somewhat hurried. He is LIAM SCUAB. He carries a few short planks and a bag of tools.]

Liam: I never saw such commotion. First I saw Thomasheen Seán Rua, the matchmaker, sneaking away over the mountain from this house. Next I saw Mike hurrying out of here as if the devil were after him and, last of all I saw Mena running after Mike, calling his name. What's going on at all? Have they all gone mad? [*He puts his tools and planks on table.*]

Nanna: You'd better not be caught here. There will be trouble. Mike Glavin has no liking for you or any of yours, Liam.

Liam: I wouldn't have called only I was sure there was nobody here but Sive and yourself. I was up the road making a door for Seamus Dónal. Where is she?

Nanna: [*Archly.*] Where is who?

Liam: [*Smiling.*] Come on, you oul' schemer! You know who I mean.

Nanna: [*Rises and calls to SIVE's room.*] Sive, Liam Scuab is here. [*SIVE enters.*]

Sive: Liam! ... what brought you?

Liam: I was passin' by; just going the road on business.

Sive: [*Suddenly alarmed, breaks away.*] You'll be caught! [*To NANNA.*] Where is Mena ... my Uncle Mike ... He'll have a fit, Liam!

Nanna: Be careful, let ye, and keep a watch. If 'tis a thing ye're caught together there'll be no more peace in his house. [*Exit NANNA.*]

Liam: [*Taking SIVE's hand.*] Will you be able to steal out tonight?

Sive: If I can, but if I don't come at the time, don't wait.

Liam: I'll wait till the crack of dawn, anyway.

Sive: Be careful. Uncle Mike hates you.

Liam: What harm if he does. He might as well hate me as anybody.

Sive: [Pause.] I wonder what Mena and Uncle Mike are doing in the bog?

Liam: Who knows? I saw Thomasheen Seán Rua, the matchmaker, leaving here too, a while back.

Sive: Thomasheen Seán Rua! What did that devil want?

Liam: Nothing good, I'll warrant. Imagine making a marriage between two people who never saw each other before.

Sive: Horrible?

Liam: They say it is necessary in country places.

Sive: It's horrible, Liam. Would you marry somebody you never saw before?

Liam: I would marry nobody but you, Sive, I love you. How would I marry anybody but you!

Sive: [Pause.] You'd better go. If we're found together ...!

Liam: [Takes his possessions from table.] I'll wait tonight until you come.

Sive: If I don't come when I say, go home. It's cold and lonely waiting in the dark.

Liam: It's cold and lonely, too, at home.

Sive: Look, if I don't come, I'll meet you on the road from school tomorrow.

Liam: Try to come if you can.

[MIKE enters angrily.]

Mike: What's this? [Louder:] What's this, I say. What are you doing in my house, Liam Scuab? How dare one of your breed cross my door in!

Sive: [Timorously:] He was passing by!

Mike: He was passing by! He was! He was, like a rat when he saw the nest empty. He came stealing and sneaking when we were outside.

Sive: He was not sneaking and he was not stealing.

Mike: Go to your room ... Go on! [Exit SIVE.]

Liam: [Calmly:] No blame to Sive.

Mike: I know your breed, Scuab, and what you are and I know what you're looking for.

Liam: There's no need to sound so dirty about it.

Mike: I know what you're after, Scuab.

Liam: [Calmly:] I make no denial about it. I'm after Sive.

Mike: I know well what you're after.

Liam: You know one thing and I know another. I say I am after Sive and nothing more than that. I love her.

Mike: Like your snake of a cousin loved her mother moryeah and fooled her likewise. Like your snake of a cousin that tricked her mother with the promise of marriage and left her a child with no name.

Liam: [Calmly:] I know who Sive's father is. It is no fault of mine.

Mike: It was the fault of your cousin and ye're the one breed.

Liam: You know as well as I do that he would have married her. You know he went across to England to make a home for her but he was drowned. He never knew she was with child when he left.

Mike: You bring your tale well, don't you? Quick words and book-readin' like all belonging to you. Like your bloody cousin.

Liam: He died, didn't he? What more do you want?

Mike: I want for you to leave here and keep away from Sive. I want that you should never set eyes on her again or you will pay as dear as your cousin paid, maybe.

Liam: You will not command the lives and happiness of two people who love each other.

going around stealing the dead out of their graves we are. 'Twould be a black day for us if we robbed a widow or stole a poor-box from the chapel. Isn't it only bringing two people together in wedlock we are?

Mena: When will he give the money?

Thomasheen: Seán Dóta is only the half of a fool, not a full one! When the knot is tied, and not before. I have the night wasted in talking with ye. The cocks will be crowing by the time I'm home. [*He goes towards door and turns with his hand on the latch.*] A warning! [*He cocks his thumb towards the old woman's room.*] Watch the oul' one up there! She have the makin's of trouble.

[*Exit THOMASHEEN SEÁN RUA. MIKE rises, takes a cup from the dresser and goes to the tankard. He takes off the cover and dips the cup; withdrawing it, he drinks with relish.*]

Mena: I would have made tea for you!

Mike: Tea is scarce enough without wasting it this hour of the night. [*He replaces the cup, stretches his hands and yawns. He scratches his head roughly.*] I have an early start in the morning and a hard day before me tomorrow. I think I'll go to the bed.

Mena: Will you not wait for Sive?

Mike: She will be all right. What can harm her? I have no heart somehow for looking her in the face.

Mena: I think I could sleep myself. [*She arranges the fire with tongs while MIKE unlaces and removes his boots.*]

Mike: Would my mother have mind, do you think, for tea?

Mena: There is no fear of her! Hasn't she her pipe?

[*MENA loosens her hair, goes to the lamp, and lowers the wick. She turns and exits by the door at side of hearth. MIKE places his boots under the working-table and in his socks crosses the kitchen and exits by the same door.*

The kitchen is empty, eerie-looking in the bad light.

The door of the old woman's room opens and she enters the kitchen. She tiptoes to the door of her son's room and listens for a moment. Satisfied, she

turns away and raises the wick of the lamp. She then sits at her place by the fire. She takes the tongs and re-makes the fire. With a look around her she unearths her pipe and thrusts it into her mouth. She finds matches and lights up. She sits thus for a moment or two.

Suddenly the door opens and SIVE enters. She leans against closed door and holds her hands to her breast, breathing heavily.]

Nanna: Where were you until this hour of the night?

Sive: [*Unties her head scarf.*] Down the bohareen at Seamus Dónal's for the loan of a rail for Uncle Mike ... That old man, Seán Dóta! Oh! [*She shakes her head and covers her face with her hands.*]

Nanna: [*Querulously.*] Seán Dóta?

Sive: [*In disgust and fright.*] He was on the road down with me. When we passed by the cumar near Dónal's he made a drive at me! He nearly tore the coat off me. I ran into Dónal's kitchen but he made no attempt to follow. Oh, the way he laughs [*in disgust*], like an ould sick thing. What is the meaning of it all, Gran?

Nanna: [*Draws upon her pipe, SIVE sits near her.*] 'Tis the nature of the man, child, no more! You will find that men are that way. Being old doesn't change them. It's nothing!

Sive: He frightened the life out of me. I never expected it! [*Pause.*] You know, I think, Gran, it was a plan by them ... but it's so hard to believe.

Nanna: It have the appearance of a plan ... Do you know what I think ... there are queer doin's goin' on between Mena and Thomasheen Rua.

[*MENA emerges from her room wearing a long nightdress reaching to her toes almost. The two start when they see her.*]

Mena: [*Crossly, loudly.*] Are ye going to be there for the night gossiping! A nice thing for the nuns to learn about! Get away to bed out of that! Wasting oil, ye are. Go on! Clear away!

for a pair of new tubes in the village. Will I wet a mouthful o' tea for you while you're waiting for the dinner. [SIVE is too surprised to reply.] There is a piece of sweet cake I have put away. You must be tired after your day.

Sive: [Befuddled:] No ... no ... don't bother with the tea! I'll wait until the dinner.

Mena: A cup of milk, so! [Without waiting for reply, she hurries to dresser, takes a cup, fills it and forces it on SIVE.] It must be an ease for you to get away from the nuns and the books, but sure we won't have much more of the schooling now.

[Gently MENA forces SIVE to a chair near the table. SIVE places the cup before her and looks bewilderedly at MENA at the word 'school'.]

Mena: Any of the girls in the parish would give their right hand to have the chance that's before you.

Sive: But ...

Mena: [Quickly before SIVE can reply:] Don't think about it now. Think of the handling of thousands and the fine clothes and perfumery. Think of the hundreds of pounds in creamery cheques that will come in the door to you and the servant boy and the servant girl falling all over you for fear you might dirty your hands with work.

Sive: [Shakes her head several times as though to ward off MENA's words.] You don't know ... you ... you ...

Mena: Sit down now and rest yourself. You could have your grandmother with you. Think of the joy it would give the poor woman to have the run of such a fine house ... and to see you settled there. 'Tis a fine thing for you, my girl and sure, what matter if he's a few years older than you. Won't we be all old in a handful of short years? Ah! I would give my right hand to be in your shoes.

Sive: [Shakes her head continually.] Please, please ... you don't know what you are saying. How can you ask me such a thing?

Mena: Now, tomorrow himself will call to the convent and tell the reverend mother that you will not be going in any more. What would a grown-up woman like you want with spending your days in the middle of children.

Sive: I could never live with that old man. [Entreats MENA:] Fancy the thought of waking in the light of day and looking at him with the small head of him. Oh, my God! No! I could never! ... I could not even think of it!

Mena: [Still motherly:] Nonsense, child! That is nothing. Have sense for yourself. I know what you are going into. Do you think I would not gainsay him if it wasn't the best thing for you. [Places a hand around SIVE's shoulder.] Sit here, child, and drink your milk.

[MENA gently brings SIVE to the chair, seats her and stands behind her with both hands resting lightly on SIVE's shoulders. MENA's face becomes shrewd. SIVE looks vacantly before her - towards the audience.]

Mena: Will you picture yourself off to the chapel every Sunday in your motor car with your head in the air and you giving an odd look out of the window at the poor oinsheachs in their donkey-and-cars and their dirty oul' shawls and their faces yellow with the dirt by them. Will you thank God that you won't be for the rest of your days working for the bare bite and sup like the poor women of these parts.

Sive: [Raises her head and entwines her hands.] Imagine what the girls at school would say! Imagine going to a dance with him, or going up the chapel with him!

Mena: All I know is that you will be independent. You will have no enemy when you have the name of money.

Sive: I don't know what to think or to say. I do not want to give offence, but I will never marry such a man. I will not marry at all!

Mena: [*Motherly again.*] You will change! You will change when you think by yourself of the misery you are leaving; when you think of the way you were born.

[SIVE *eagerly turns and looks innocently at MENA. She is changed suddenly to an eager girl awaiting the solution of a problem that has for a long time baffled her.*]

Sive: Surely you don't remember when I was born. [*Her eyes widen as she looks at MENA. For the first time she takes an interest in MENA's soliloquy.*] Nobody ever told me about my father or mother or what sort of people they were.

[SIVE *looks into MENA's face searching for the truth.*]

Mena: I will tell the tale. Himself would never bring himself to say it. You would think it was some kind of a blemish that should be hidden and sure, what was it, only the work of nature. Your mother, God grant her a bed in heaven, was a nice lie of a girl. Your father took himself away quickly out of these parts and, if he is alive, never made himself known. There was no blame to your mother, God help her. Your grandmother, for all yeer talking and whispering behind my back, was never the one to come out with the truth.

Sive: But my father ... wasn't he drowned in England?

Mena: Your father was never a father, God forgive him. He straightened his sails and disappeared like the mist of a May morning. It was no wonder your mother died with the shame of it. No blame, achree! [*With feeling then.*] No blame to what is mortal. Do you think it is how two people will stay apart forever who have blood becoming a flood in their veins. It is the way things happen ... [*conviction*] ... the sound of fiddles playing airy hornpipes, the light of a moon on the pale face

of a river, the whispered word ... the meeting of soft arms and strong arms ... [*pauses.*]

Sive: I thought you said you'd tell me about my father.

Mena: [*Unaccountably vexed.*] I'm telling you your father was nothing. He was no father. He had no name. You have no name. You will have no name till you take a husband. Do you see the hungry greyhound or the mongrel dog? It is the same way with a man. It is no more than the hunger. It is time you were told, my girl. You are a bye-child, a common bye-child – a bastard!

[SIVE *attempts to rise. MENA roughly pushes her back in the chair.*]

Mena: You will sleep with that old woman no longer. [*She flings the schoolbag across the room.*] There will be no more school for you. School is a place for schoolmasters and children. Every woman will come to the age when she will have a mind for a room of her own. I mind when I was a child, *when I was a woman*, there were four sisters of us in the one room. There was no corner of a bed we could call our own. We used to sit into the night talking and thieving and wondering where the next ha'penny would come from or thinking would it ever come to our turn to meet a boy that we might go with, and be talking with and maybe make a husband out of. We would kill [*vexed*]. We would beg, borrow or steal. We would fire embers of fire at the devil to leave the misery of our own house behind us, to make a home with a man, any man that would show four walls to us for his time in the world. [*In a voice of warning:*] Take no note of the man who has nothing to show for himself, who will be full of rameish and blather, who would put wings on ould cows for you but has no place to make a marriage bed for you. Take heed of a man with a piece of property. He will stand over his promise. He will keep the good word for you because he has the keeping of words ... Now go to the room and be sure to think of what I said.

[SIVE rises instinctively goes towards her own room but remembering, turns and exits by the far door to MENA's bedroom.]

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

[MENA sits at the table preparing the shopping list for the wedding. There is a knock on the door.]

Mena: [Listens a moment.] Come in!

[Enter LIAM SCUAB. He looks around the kitchen.]

Mena: You have the devil's own gall coming here. Lucky for you that Mike is away.

Liam: I don't give a hatful of bornacks for Mike or for you either. I come here to see Sive.

Mena: What do you want Sive for?

Liam: I want to talk with her.

Mena: You put a journey on yourself for nothing. Sive isn't here. [Turning away to re-arrange fire.]

Liam: How is it her bike is up against the wall of the house?

Mena: [Angry:] Are you telling me she's here? Are you making a liar out of me in my own house?

Liam: I didn't call you a liar. I only thought you might be making a mistake.

Mena: [Loudly:] Same thing, isn't it? Didn't I say she wasn't here?

Liam: There's no harm if I wait for her so. I won't be in your way.

Mena: You have no business here. If Mike finds you there will be war. You're not wanted in this house. Clear off on your road and don't be vexing me.

Liam: I have no wish to make an enemy out of you. I will wait till she comes.

Mena: [*Violently:*] Will you have your own way in all things, will you? Will you be coming into people's houses causing trouble. Get away out of here or I'll get the tongs to you.

Liam: I love her!

Mena: [*Mimicking:*] You love her! You do! You love her! You gomail.

[*There is a sound without, and MIKE enters.*]

Mena: Look, what's before you! Look at him and don't blame me, because he wouldn't go for me.

Mike: [*In overcoat with cap, places sack and whip aside and throws cap on table.*] I see him! [*MIKE sits on the sacks.*]

Liam: I mean no harm, Mike Glavin, to you or your wife.

Mike: [*Taking off his boots.*] What do you want, Scuab?

Liam: I want to see Sive.

Mike: [*Mutters thoughtfully:*] You came to see Sive, did you? Sive, faith, of all ones! What do you want to see her for, Scuab?

Liam: To have a talk with her.

Mike: [*Calmly:*] No, you'll have no talk with her.

Liam: Only for a moment.

Mike: She's in my care. You'll have to talk with me.

Liam: I know you won't heed me but I was told that Sive was getting married.

Mike: Who told you that?

Liam: The two tinkers, Carthalawn and Pats Boccock. They were singing a song. It was easy to read the news.

Mena: Now for sure you're a fool, when you pay attention to the grunting of pigs.

Liam: They make sense in their own way.

Mike: 'Tis nonsense.

Liam: If it is nonsense, so, tell me why is Thomasheen Seán Rua, the matchmaker, coming here every day and often twice in the day?

Mike: He has how own business with me. You're like a magistrate with your foxy digs at us.

Liam: All right, so, but what is the reason for another thing?

Mike: What other thing?

Liam: The old man, Seán Dóta, the farmer, he is coming here every day now too.

Mike: Is he now, and what do you make out of it all?

Liam: I have heard him talking to himself on the road.

Mena: Talking to himself, will you tell us?

Liam: I have heard him.

Mena: And what does he be saying?

Liam: Things about Sive, and how he will warm her before she is much older. A lot of other things, too, but most of it not fit to mention again.

Mike: [*Crossly:*] So what if he does? What is it to you?

Liam: I know he will marry Sive.

[*MIKE and MENA exchange shrewd looks.*]

Mike: Ah, yerra, you're going farther from sense with every word.

Mena: Sure, isn't that what I told him.

Liam: It's hard to believe it could be true.

Mike: There is no truth at all to it, man.

Liam: Oh, for God's sake, will the two of you stop treating me like a child. The whole parish knows what's going on. It is the talk at every crossroads that Sive

is matchmaking with Seán Dóta. In the village the public-houses are full with the mockery of it.

Mike: [*Advancing a step.*] I've come to the last sod with you, Scuab. Get out of this house before I be tempted to take a weapon in my hands. [*Clenches his fists.*] You'd better be going, Scuab, or I'll take the whip to you.

Mena: And I the tongs. I'll put streaks on you worse than a raddle-stick.

Liam: [*Pleads:*] In the honour of God, I beseech you to forget about violence. I tell you I want no trouble. If I have upset ye, I'm sorry, but surely if ye know God ye must think of this terrible auction. Ye must know that a day will dawn for all of us when an account must be given. Do not think of me. I promise I will leave these parts till Sive is a woman. I swear that on my dead mother. But do not give her to that rotting old man with his gloating eyes and trembling hands.

Mike: [*Less angrily:*] Enough, Scuab! Go! [*Turns aside.*]

Mena: Wasn't it one of your breed that blackened her mother's name, wasn't it? Oh, the cheek of you, you upstart out of the gutter.

Liam: Think, woman, I beg of you! Think, Mike Glavin! Forget about yourselves and see it with good eyes instead of greedy ones. Have you knowledge of the Crucified Son of God? [*Shakes his head with emotion.*] Are you forgetting Him who died on Calvary? Are you forgetting the sorrow and terrible sadness of His bloody Face as He looks at ye now? Will ye stand and watch each other draw the hard crooked thorns deep into His helpless body?

Mena: [*Violent temper.*] Gerraway out-a that! Get away!

Liam: [*Backing towards the door.*] Nothing in Heaven or Hell could move ye to see wrong!

[*MENA whips the sharp knife off the dresser.*]

Mena: I'll open you! I'll open you if you vex me more.

Liam: I'm going. You'll live to remember this night.

[*Exit LIAM. MENA scowlingly replaces the knife and looks at MIKE who stands sullen.*]

Mena: What's wrong with you now?

Mike: Nothing!

Mena: Well, put a stir on yourself. You have a priest to see.

Mike: [*Sighs.*] Aye!

[*Enter SIVE looking a little wan.*]

Sive: I thought I heard the voice of Liam Scuab.

Mena: You thought right! He was here.

Sive: What was he looking for?

Mena: He's a strange one! He came wishing you joy. You'd never think he would. He wished you joy and plenty on your wedding.

Sive: [*In astonishment:*] He wished me joy and plenty!

Mena: [*Nods.*] And he'll pray for your happiness and he's going away altogether to foreign places. That is the last we'll see of him, God help us. That the blessing of God go with him!

Sive: [*In wonder:*] Did he say any more?

Mena: [*To MIKE:*] Did he say any more?

Mike: Mmmmm!

Mena: Divil the word more, only to turn on his heel as airy as you please and off with him.

Sive: He's gone for good? [*Turns towards the room.*] To think that he's gone for good.

Mena: Gone, he is!

Sive: [*Tearfully:*] Oh! Liam could never do a thing like that.

across the bog near the end of the cutaway where the deep holes do be. I thought it might be a shadow.

Mena: [*Composed again.*] And why didn't you say so when you came?

Pats: How was I to know if the sight of my eyes was going or coming? It was only now that you talk about the girl that I think it might have been the girl, Sive.

Thomasheen: You oul' bocock! you oul' dirty twisted bocock! Damn well you knew!

Pats: I did not know, and what is it to me if all the people of the parish ran over the bog in the middle of the night with bare feet.

Mena: What if she fell into a hole ... Oh, my God! [*She shrieks at MIKE.*] Find her! Find her! ... Hurry yourself!

Mike: I'll get a lantern in the stable ...

[*MENA rushes to the room by the fireplace and returns almost immediately with the rubber waders. MIKE kicks off his shoes and pulls on the waders.*]

Thomasheen: I will go with you.

Seán Dóta: I will go along with ye.

Mena: Stay, Seán! I will not stay here alone by myself. Stay, somebody. Stay with me. I won't be alone!

[*From outside, a frantic voice is heard.*]

Liam: Show light! ... Show light! ... Leave open the door ... I am coming over the bog.

[*THOMASHEEN opens the door fully. MENA hurries with the oil lamp to the door. MIKE hurries to the door. All exchange frightened glances.*

They retreat from the door as LIAM draws near. Their faces are horrified as they stand back.

Enter LIAM. He is bareheaded and his clothes are wet. His face is ghastly pale. In his arms he carries SIVE. Her hair is plastered to her head

and her slight body hangs limp in LIAM's arms. LIAM advances without looking to left or right. At the table he stops.

PATS comes forward and with his stick sweeps the table clean. The ware clatters on the ground breaking the silence. Reverently LIAM lays the motionless body on the table.

The water drips on to the floor from both LIAM and SIVE. LIAM folds SIVE's hands across her breast. MENA replaces the lamp.]

Liam: A cloth to dry her hair!

[*MENA hands LIAM a cloth. THOMASHEEN edges in to look at the body, then horrified, edges shyly away and exits, looking around him furtively. He is noticed only by SEÁN DÓTA who follows him, backing, sneaking, to the door. SEÁN exits.*]

Liam: [*Tearfully.*] I saw her running across the bog with only the little frock against the cold of the night. She ran like the wind and she letting cries out of her that would rend your heart. [*Filled with sorrow.*] I called after her but she would not stop. She took her own life. It was a while before I found her. The poor tormented child.

Mena: Drowned, dead.

[*LIAM turns suddenly on MENA, blazing with anger.*]

Liam: [*Cries in anguish.*] You killed her! You ... you ... you killed her! You horrible filthy bitch! That the hand of Jesus may strike you dead where you stand. You heartless wretch that hunted the poor little girl to her grave.

[*MENA retreats, shocked, before him, her hand stupidly covering her mouth.*]

Liam: [*Shrieks.*] Go away! ... Go away! ... You are polluting the pure spirit of the child with your nearness. Go away, witch!

[*LIAM raises the towel clenched in his fist to strike MENA. MENA hurries away back to her room, LIAM begins to dry SIVE's hair with the cloth, lovingly and with care.*]