

Act 3

SEAN O'CASEY

Boyle I'm telling you . . . Joxer . . . th' whole worl's . . . in
a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis!

Curtain.

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS

To the gay laugh of my mother
at the gate of the grave

Characters

Jack Clitheroe (a bricklayer), Commandant
in the Irish Citizen Army
Nora Clitheroe, his wife
Peter Flynn (a labourer), Nora's uncle
The Young Covey (a fitter), Clitheroe's cousin
Bessie Burgess (a street fruit-vendor)
Mrs Gogan (a charwoman)
Mollser, her consumptive child
Fluther Good (a carpenter)
Lieut. Langon (a Civil Servant), of the Irish Volunteers
Capt. Brennan (a chicken butcher), of the Irish Citizen Army
Corporal Stoddart, of the Wiltshires
Sergeant Tinley, of the Wiltshires
Rosie Redmond, a daughter of 'the Digs'
A Bartender
A Woman
The Figure in the Window

Residents
in the
Tenement

Act One – The living-room of the Clitheroe flat in a
Dublin tenement.

Act Two – A public-house, outside of which a meeting is
being held.

Act Three – The street outside the Clitheroe tenement.

Act Four – The room of Bessie Burgess.

Time – Acts One and Two, November 1915; Acts Three
and Four, Easter Week, 1916. A few days elapse between
Acts Three and Four.

Act One

The home of the Clitheroes. It consists of the front and back drawing-rooms in a fine old Georgian house, struggling for its life against the assaults of time, and the more savage assaults of the tenants. The room shown is the back drawing-room, wide, spacious, and lofty. At back is the entrance to the front drawing-room. The space, originally occupied by folding doors, is now draped with casement cloth of a dark purple, decorated with a design in reddish-purple and cream. One of the curtains is pulled aside, giving a glimpse of front drawing-room, at the end of which can be seen the wide, lofty windows looking out into the street. The room directly in front of the audience is furnished in a way that suggests an attempt towards a finer expression of domestic life. The large fireplace on right is of wood, painted to look like marble (the original has been taken away by the landlord). On the mantelshelf are two candlesticks of dark carved wood. Between them is a small clock. Over the clock is hanging a calendar which displays a picture of The Sleeping Venus. In the centre of the breast of the chimney hangs a picture of Robert Emmet. On the right of the entrance to the front drawing-room is a copy of The Gleaners, on the opposite side a copy of The Angelus. Underneath The Gleaners is a chest of drawers on which stands a green bowl filled with scarlet dahlias and white chrysanthemums. Near to the fireplace is a settee which at night forms a double bed for Clitheroe and Nora. Underneath The Angelus are a number of shelves containing saucepans and a frying-pan. Under these is a table on which are various articles of delftware. Near the end of the room, opposite to the

fireplace, is a gate-legged table, covered with a cloth. On top of the table a huge cavalry sword is lying. To the right is a door which leads to a lobby from which the staircase leads to the hall. The floor is covered with a dark green linoleum. The room is dim except where it is illuminated from the glow of the fire. Through the window of the room at back can be seen the flaring of the flame of a gasolene lamp giving light to workmen repairing the street. Occasionally can be heard the clang of crowbars striking the setts. Fluther Good is repairing the lock of door, right. A claw-hammer is on a chair beside him, and he has a screwdriver in his hand. He is a man of forty years of age, rarely surrendering to thoughts of anxiety, fond of his 'oil' but determined to conquer the habit before he dies. He is square-jawed and harshly featured; under the left eye is a scar, and his nose is bent from a smashing blow received in a fistic battle long ago. He is bald, save for a few peeping tufts of reddish hair around his ears; and his upper lip is hidden by a scrubby red moustache, embroidered here and there with a grey hair. He is dressed in a seedy black suit, cotton shirt with a soft collar, and wears a very respectable little black bow. On his head is a faded jerry hat, which, when he is excited, he has a habit of knocking farther back on his head, in a series of taps. In an argument he usually fills with sound and fury generally signifying a row. He is in his shirt-sleeves at present, and wears a soiled white apron, from a pocket in which sticks a carpenter's two-foot rule. He has just finished the job of putting on a new lock, and, filled with satisfaction, he is opening and shutting the door, enjoying the completion of a work well done. Sitting at the fire, airing a white shirt, is Peter Flynn. He is a little, thin bit of a man, with a face shaped like a lozenge; on his cheeks and under his chin is a straggling wiry beard of a dirty-white and lemon hue. His face invariably wears a look of animated anguish, mixed with irritated defiance, as if everybody was at war with

him, and he at war with everybody. He is cocking his head in a way that suggests resentment at the presence of Fluther, who pays no attention to him, apparently, but is really furtively watching him. Peter is clad in a singlet, white whipcord knee-breeches, and is in his stocking-feet.

A voice is heard speaking outside of door, left (it is that of Mrs Gogan).

Mrs Gogan (outside) Who are you lookin' for, sir? Who? Mrs Clitheroe? . . . Oh, excuse me. Oh ay, up this way. She's out, I think: I seen her goin'. Oh, you've somethin' for her; oh, excuse me. You're from Arnott's . . . I see . . . You've a parcel for her . . . Righto . . . I'll take it . . . I'll give it to her the minute she comes in . . . It'll be quite safe . . . Oh, sign that . . . Excuse me . . . Where? . . . Here? . . . No, there; righto. Am I to put Maggie or Mrs? What is it? You dunno? Oh, excuse me.

Mrs Gogan opens the door and comes in. She is a doleful-looking little woman of forty, insinuating manner and sallow complexion. She is fidgety and nervous, terribly talkative, has a habit of taking up things that may be near her and fiddling with them while she is speaking. Her heart is aflame with curiosity, and a fly could not come into nor go out of the house without her knowing. She has a draper's parcel in her hand, the knot of the twine tying it is untied. Peter, more resentful of this intrusion than of Fluther's presence, gets up from the chair, and without looking around, his head carried at an angry cock, marches into the room at back.

(Removing the paper and opening the cardboard box it contains) I wondher what's that now? A hat! (She takes out a hat, black, with decorations in red and gold.) God, she's goin' to th' divil lately for style! That hat, now, cost more than a penny. Such notions of upperosity she's

gettin'. (*Putting the hat on her head*) Oh, swank, what!
(*She replaces it in parcel.*)

Fluther She's a pretty little Judy, all the same.

Mrs Gogan Ah, she is, an' she isn't. There's prettiness an' prettiness in it. I'm always sayin' that her skirts are a little too short for a married woman. An' to see her, sometimes of an evenin', in her glad-neck gown would make a body's blood run cold. I do be ashamed of me life before her husband. An' th' way she thries to be polite, with her 'Good mornin', Mrs Gogan,' when she's goin' down, an' her 'Good evenin', Mrs Gogan,' when she's comin' up. But there's politeness an' politeness in it.

Fluther They seem to get on well together, all th' same.

Mrs Gogan Ah, they do, an' they don't. The pair o' them used to be like two turtle doves always billin' an' cooin'. You couldn't come into th' room but you'd feel, instinctive like, that they'd just been afther kissin' an' cuddlin' each other. . . . It often made me shiver, for, afther all, there's kissin' an' cuddlin' in it. But I'm thinkin' he's beginnin' to take things more quietly; the mysthery of havin' a woman's a mysthery no longer. . . . She dhresses herself to keep him with her, but it's no use – afther a month or two, th' wondher of a woman wears off.

Fluther I dunno, I dunno. Not wishin' to say anything derogatory, I think it's all a question of location: when a man finds th' wondher of one woman beginnin' to die, it's usually beginnin' to live in another.

Mrs Gogan She's always grumblin' about havin' to live in a tenement house. 'I wouldn't like to spend me last hour in one, let alone live me life in a tenement,' says she. 'Vaults,' says she, 'that are hidin' th' dead, instead of homes that are sheltherin' th' livin'.' 'Many a good one,' says I, 'was reared in a tenement house.' Oh, you know, she's a well-up

little lassie, too; able to make a shillin' go where another would have to spend a pound. She's wipin' th' eyes of th' Covey an' poor oul' Pether – everybody knows that – screwin' every penny she can out o' them, in ordher to turn th' place into a babby-house. An' she has th' life frightened out o' them; washin' their face, combin' their hair, wipin' their feet, brushin' their clothes, thrimmin' their nails, cleanin' their teeth – God Almighty, you'd think th' poor men were undhergoin' penal servitude.

Fluther (*with an exclamation of disgust*) A-a-ah, that's goin' beyond th' beyonds in a tenement house. That's a little bit too derogatory.

Peter enters from room, back, head elevated and resentful fire in his eyes; he is still in his singlet and trousers, but is now wearing a pair of unlaced boots – possibly to be decent in the presence of Mrs Gogan. He places the white shirt, which he has carried in on his arm, on the back of a chair near the fire, and, going over to the chest of drawers, he opens drawer after drawer, looking for something; as he fails to find it he closes each drawer with a snap; he pulls out pieces of linen neatly folded, and bundles them back again any way.

Peter (*in accents of anguish*) Well, God Almighty, give me patience! (*He returns to room, back, giving the shirt a vicious turn as he passes.*)

Mrs Gogan I wondher what he is foostherin' for now?

Fluther He's adornin' himself for th' meeting tonight. (*Pulling a handbill from his pocket and reading*) 'Great Demonstration an' torchlight procession around places in th' city sacred to th' memory of Irish Patriots, to be concluded be a meetin', at which will be taken an oath of fealty to th' Irish Republic. Formation in Parnell Square at eight o'clock.' Well, they can hold it for Fluther. I'm up th'

pole; no more dhrink for Fluther. It's three days now since I touched a dhróp, an' I feel a new man already.

Mrs Gogan Isn't oul' Peter a funny-lookin' little man? . . . Like somethin' you'd pick off a Christmas Tree
When he's dhressed up in his canonicals, you'd wondher where he'd been got. God forgive me, when I see him in them, I always think he must ha' had a Mormon for a father! He an' th' Covey can't abide each other; th' pair o' them is always at it, thryin' to best each other. There'll be blood dhrawn one o' these days.

Fluther How is it that Clitheroe himself, now, doesn't have anythin' to do with th' Citizen Army? A couple o' months ago, an' you'd hardly ever see him without his gun, an' th' Red Hand o' Liberty Hall in his hat.

Mrs Gogan Just because he wasn't made a Captain of. He wasn't goin' to be in anything where he couldn't be conspishuous. He was so cocksure o' being made one that he bought a Sam Browne belt, an' was always puttin' it on an' standin' in th' door showing it off, till th' man came an' put out th' street lamps on him. God, I think he used to bring it to bed with him! But I'm tellin' you herself was delighted that that cock didn't crow, for she's like a clockin' hen if he leaves her sight for a minute.

While she is talking, she takes up book after book from the table, looks into each of them in a near-sighted way, and then leaves them back. She now lifts up the sword, and proceeds to examine it.

Be th' look of it, this must ha' been a general's sword
All th' gold lace an' th' fine figaries on it Sure it's twiced too big for him.

Fluther A-ah; it's a baby's rattle he ought to have, an' he as he is with thoughts tossin' in his head of what may happen to him on th' day o' judgement.

Peter has entered, and seeing Mrs Gogan with the sword, goes over to her, pulls it resentfully out of her hands, and marches into the room, back, without speaking.

Mrs Gogan (as Peter whips the sword) Oh, excuse me! . . . (To Fluther) Isn't he th' surly oul' rascal!

Fluther Take no notice of him . . . You'd think he was dumb, but when you get his goat, or he has a few jars up, he's vice versa. (He coughs.)

Mrs Gogan (she has now sidled over as far as the shirt hanging on the chair) Oh, you've got a cold on you, Fluther.

Fluther (carelessly) Ah, it's only a little one.

Mrs Gogan You'd want to be careful, all th' same. I knew a woman, a big lump of a woman, red-faced an' round-bodied, a little awkward on her feet; you'd think, to look at her, she could put out her two arms an' lift a two-storeyed house on th' top of her head; got a ticklin' in her throat, an' a little cough, an' th' next mornin' she had a little catchin' in her chest, an' they had just time to wet her lips with a little rum, an' off she went. (She begins to look at and handle the shirt.)

Fluther (a little nervously) It's only a little cold I have; there's nothing derogatory wrong with me.

Mrs Gogan I dunno; there's many a man this minute lowerin' a pint, thinkin' of a woman, or pickin' out a winner, or doin' work as you're doin', while th' hearse dhrawn be th' horses with the black plumes is dhivin' up to his own hall door, an' a voice that he doesn't hear is muttherin' in his ear, 'Earth to earth, an' ashes t' ashes, an' dust to dust.'

Fluther (faintly) A man in th' pink o' health should have a holy horror of allowin' thoughts o' death to be festherin' in his mind, for - (with a frightened cough) be God, I

think I'm afther gettin' a little catch in me chest that time – it's a creepy thing to be thinkin' about.

Mrs Gogan It is, an' it isn't; it's both bad an' good It always gives meself a kind o' thresspassin' joy to feel meself movin' along in a mournin' coach, an me thinkin' that, maybe, th' next funeral 'll be me own, an' glad, in a quiet way, that this is somebody else's.

Fluther An' a curious kind of a gaspin' for breath – I hope there's nothin' derogatory wrong with me.

Mrs Gogan (*examining the shirt*) Frills on it, like a woman's petticoat.

Fluther Suddenly gettin' hot, an' then, just as suddenly, gettin' cold.

Mrs Gogan (*holding out the shirt towards Fluther*) How would you like to be wearin' this Lord Mayor's nightdhress, Fluther?

Fluther (*vehemently*) Blast you an' your nightshirt! Is a man fermentin' with fear to stick th' showin' off to him of a thing that looks like a shinin' shroud?

Mrs Gogan Oh, excuse me!

Peter has again entered, and he pulls the shirt from the hands of Mrs Gogan, replacing it on the chair. He returns to room.

Peter (*as he goes out*) Well, God Almighty, give me patience!

Mrs Gogan (*to Peter*) Oh, excuse me!

There is heard a cheer from the men working outside on the street, followed by the clang of tools being thrown down, then silence. The glare of the gasolene light diminishes and finally goes out.

(Running into the back room to look out of the window)
What's the men repairin' th' streets cheerin' for?

Fluther (*sitting down weakly on a chair*) You can't sneeze but that oul' one wants to know th' why an' th' wherefore I feel as dizzy as bedamned! I hope I didn't give up th' beer too suddenly.

The Covey comes in by door, right. He is about twenty-five, tall, thin, with lines on his face that form a perpetual protest against life as he conceives it to be. Heavy seams fall from each side of nose, down around his lips, as if they were suspenders keeping his mouth from falling. He speaks in a slow, wailing drawl; more rapidly when he is excited. He is dressed in dungarees, and is wearing a vividly red tie. He flings his cap with a gesture of disgust on the table, and begins to take off his overalls.

Mrs Gogan (*to the Covey, as she runs back into the room*) What's after happenin', Covey?

The Covey (*with contempt*) Th' job's stopped. They've been mobilized to march in th' demonstration tonight undher th' Plough an' th' Stars. Didn't you hear them cheerin', th' mugs! They have to renew their political baptismal vows to be faithful in *seculo seculorum*.

Fluther (*forgetting his fear in his indignation*) There's no reason to bring religion into it. I think we ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can, so as to keep it out of as many things as possible.

The Covey (*pausing in the taking off of his dungarees*) Oh, you're one o' the boys that climb into religion as high as a short Mass on Sunday mornin's? I suppose you'll be singin' songs o' Sion an' songs o' Tara at th' meetin', too.

Fluther We're all Irishmen, anyhow; aren't we?

The Covey (*with hand outstretched, and in a professional tone*) Look here, comrade, there's no such thing as an Irishman; or an Englishman, or a German or a Turk; we're all only human bein's. Scientifically speakin', it's all a question of the accidental gatherin' together of mollycewels an' atoms.

Peter comes in with a collar in his hand. He goes over to mirror, left, and proceeds to try to put it on.

Fluther Mollycewels an' atoms! D'ye think I'm goin' to listen to you thryin' to juggle Fluther's mind with complicated cunundhrums of mollycewels an' atoms?

The Covey (*rather loudly*) There's nothin' complicated in it. There's no fear o' th' Church tellin' you that mollycewels is a stickin' together of millions of atoms o' sodium, carbon, potassium o' iodide, etcetera, that, accordin' to th' way they're mixed, make a flower, a fish, a star that you see shinin' in th' sky, or a man with a big brain like me, or a man with a little brain like you!

Fluther (*more loudly still*) There's no necessity to be raisin' your voice; shoutin's no manifestin' forth of a growin' mind.

Peter (*struggling with his collar*) God, give me patience with this thing . . . She makes these collars as stiff with starch as a shinin' band o' solid steel! She does it purposely to thry an' thwart me. If I can't get it on th' singlet, how, in th' Name o' God, am I goin' to get it on th' shirt?

The Covey (*loudly*) There's no use o' arguin' with you; it's education you want, comrade.

Fluther The Covey an' God made th' world, I suppose, wha'?

The Covey When I hear some men talkin' I'm inclined to disbelieve that th' world's eight-hundhred million years

old, for it's not long since th' fathers o' some o' them crawled out o' th' sheltherin' slime o' the sea.

Mrs Gogan (*from room at back*) There, they're afther formin' fours, an' now they're goin' to march away.

Fluther (*scornfully*) Mollycewels! (*He begins to untie his apron.*) What about Adam an' Eve?

The Covey Well, what about them?

Fluther (*fiercely*) What about them, you?

The Covey Adam an' Eve! Is that as far as you've got? Are you still thinkin' there was nobody in th' world before Adam an' Eve? (*Loudly*) Did you ever hear, man, of th' skeleton of th' man o' Java?

Peter (*casting the collar from him*) Blast it, blast it, blast it!

Fluther (*viciously folding his apron*) Ah, you're not goin' to be let tap your rubbidge o' thoughts into th' mind o' Fluther.

The Covey You're afraid to listen to th' thruth!

Fluther Who's afraid?

The Covey You are!

Fluther G'way, you wurum!

The Covey Who's a worum?

Fluther You are, or you wouldn't talk th' way you're talkin'.

The Covey Th' oul', ignorant savage leppin' up in you, when science shows you that th' head of your god is an empty one. Well, I hope you're enjoyin' th' blessin' o' havin' to live be th' sweat of your brow.

Fluther You'll be kickin' an' yellin' for th' priest yet, me boyo. I'm not goin' to stand silent an' simple listenin' to a thick like you makin' a maddenin' mockery o' God Almighty. It 'ud be a nice derogatory thing on me conscience, an' me dyin', to look back in rememberin' shame of talkin' to a word-weavin' little ignorant yahoo of a red flag Socialist!

Mrs Gogan has returned to the front room, and has wandered around looking at things in general, and is now in front of the fireplace looking at the picture hanging over it.

Mrs Gogan For God's sake, Fluther, dhrop it; there's always th' makin's of a row in th' mention of religion . . .
(*Looking at picture*) God bless us, it's a naked woman!

Fluther (*coming over to look at it*) What's undher it?
(*Reading*) 'Georgina: The Sleepin' Vennis'. Oh, that's a terrible picture; oh, that's a shockin' picture! Oh, th' one that got that taken, she must have been a prime lassie!

Peter (*who also has come over to look, laughing, with his body bent at the waist, and his head slightly tilted back*)
Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee!

Fluther (*indignantly, to Peter*) What are you hee, hee-in' for? That's a nice thing to be hee, hee-in' at. Where's your morality, man?

Mrs Gogan God forgive us, it's not right to be lookin' at it.

Fluther It's nearly a derogatory thing to be in th' room where it is.

Mrs Gogan (*giggling hysterically*) I couldn't stop any longer in th' same room with three men, afther lookin' at it!

She goes out. The Covey, who has divested himself of his dungarees, throws them with a contemptuous motion on top of Peter's white shirt.

Peter (*plaintively*) Where are you throwin' them? Are you thryin' to thwart an' torment me again?

The Covey Who's thryin' to thwart you?

Peter (*flinging the dungarees violently on the floor*) You're not goin' to make me lose me temper, me young Covey.

The Covey (*flinging the white shirt on the floor*) If you're Nora's pet, aself, you're not goin' to get your way in everything.

Peter (*plaintively, with his eyes looking up at the ceiling*) I'll say nothin' . . . I'll leave you to th' day when th' all-pitiful, all-merciful, all-lovin' God 'll be handin' you to th' angels to be riev'in' an' roastin' you, tearin' an' tormentin' you, burnin' an' blastin' you!

The Covey Aren't you th' little malignant oul' bastard, you lemon-whiskered oul' swine!

Peter runs to the sword, draws it, and makes for the Covey, who dodges him around the table; Peter has no intention of striking, but the Covey wants to take no chances.

(*Dodging*) **Fluther**, hold him, there. It's a nice thing to have a lunatic like this lashin' around with a lethal weapon!
(*The Covey darts out of the room, right, slamming the door in the face of Peter.*)

Peter (*battering and pulling at the door*) Lemme out, lemme out; isn't it a poor thing for a man who wouldn't say a word against his greatest enemy to have to listen to that Covey's thwartin' animosities, shovin' poor, patient

people into a lashin' out of curses that darken his soul with th' shadow of th' wrath of th' last day!

Fluther Why d'ye take notice of him? If he seen you didn't, he'd say nothin' derogatory.

Peter I'll make him stop his laughin' an' leerin', jibin' an' jeerin' an' scarifyin' people with his corner-boy insinuations! . . . He's always thryin' to rouse me: if it's not a song, it's a whistle; if it isn't a whistle, it's a cough. But you can taunt an' taunt - I'm laughin' at you; he, hee, hee, hee, hee, hee!

The Covey (*singing through the keyhole*)

Dear harp o' me counthry, in darkness I found thee,
The dark chain of silence had hung o'er thee long -

Peter (*frantically*) Jasus, d'ye hear that? D'ye hear him soundin' forth his divil-souled song o' provocation?

The Covey (*singing as before*)

When proudly, me own island harp, I unbound thee,
An' gave all thy chords to light, freedom an' song!

Peter (*battering the door*) When I get out I'll do for you, I'll do for you, I'll do for you!

The Covey (*through the keyhole*) Cuckoo-oo!

Nora enters by door, right. She is a young woman of twenty-two, alert, swift, full of nervous energy, and a little anxious to get on in the world. The firm lines of her face are considerably opposed by a soft, amorous mouth and gentle eyes. When her firmness fails her, she persuades with her feminine charm. She is dressed in a tailor-made costume, and wears around her neck a silver fox fur.

Nora (*running in and pushing Peter away from the door*) Oh, can I not turn me back but th' two o' yous are at it

like a pair o' fightin' cocks! Uncle Peter . . . Uncle Peter . . .
UNCLE PETER!

Peter (*vociferously*) Oh, Uncle Peter, Uncle Peter be damned! D'ye think I'm goin' to give a free pass to th' young Covey to turn me whole life into a Holy Manual o' penances an' martyrdoms?

The Covey (*angrily rushing into the room*) If you won't exercise some sort o' conthrol over that Uncle Peter o' yours, there'll be a funeral, an' it won't be me that'll be in th' hearse!

Nora (*between Peter and the Covey, to the Covey*) Are yous always goin' to be tearin' down th' little bit of respectability that a body's thryin' to build up? Am I always goin' to be havin' to nurse yous into th' hardy habit o' thryin' to keep up a little bit of appearance?

The Covey Why weren't you here to see th' way he run at me with th' sword?

Peter What did you call me a lemon-whiskered oul' swine for?

Nora If th' two o' yous don't thry to make a generous altheration in your goin's on, an' keep on thryin' t' inaugurate th' customs o' th' rest o' th' house into this place, yous can flit into other lodgin's where your bowsey battlin' 'ill meet, maybe, with an encore.

Peter (*to Nora*) Would you like to be called a lemon-whiskered oul' swine?

Nora If you attempt to wag that sword of yours at anybody again, it'll have to be taken off you an' put in a safe place away from babies that don't know th' danger o' them things.

Peter (*at entrance to room, Back*) Well, I'm not goin' to let

anybody call me a lemon-whiskered oul' swine. (*He goes in.*)

Fluther (*trying the door*) Openin' an' shuttin' now with a well-mannered motion, like a door of a select bar in a high-class pub.

Nora (*to the Covey, as she lays table for tea*) An', once for all, Willie, you'll have to thry to deliver yourself from th' desire of provokin' oul' Pether into a wild forgetfulness of what's proper an' allowable in a respectable home.

The Covey Well, let him mind his own business, then. Yestherday, I caught him hee-hee-in' out of him an' he readin' bits out of Jenersky's *Thesis on th' Origin, Development, an' Consolidation of th' Evolutionary Idea of th' Proletariat*.

Nora Now, let it end at that, for God's sake; Jack'll be in any minute, an' I'm not goin' to have th' quiet of this evenin' tossed about in an everlastin' uproar between you an' Uncle Pether. (*To Fluther*) Well, did you manage to settle th' lock, yet, Mr Good?

Fluther (*opening and shutting door*) It's betther than a new one, now, Mrs Clitheroe; it's almost ready to open and shut of its own accord.

Nora (*giving him a coin*) You're a whole man. How many pints will that get you?

Fluther (*seriously*) Ne'er a one at all, Mrs Clitheroe, for Fluther's on th' wather waggon now. You could stan' where you're stannin' chantin', 'Have a glass o' malt, Fluther; Fluther, have a glass o' malt,' till th' bells would be ringin' th' ould year out an' th' New Year in, an' you'd have as much chance o' movin' Fluther as a tune on a tin whistle would move a deaf man an' he dead.

As Nora is opening and shutting door, Mrs Bessie

Burgess appears at it. She is a woman of forty, vigorously built. Her face is a dogged one, hardened by toil, and a little coarsened by drink. She looks scornfully and viciously at Nora for a few moments before she speaks.

Bessie Puttin' a new lock on her door . . . afraid her poor neighbours ud break through an' steal . . . (*In a loud tone*) Maybe, now, they're a damn sight more honest than your ladyship . . . checkin' th' children playin' on th' stairs . . . gettin' on th' nerves of your ladyship . . . Complainin' about Bessie Burgess singin' her hymns at night, when she has a few up . . . (*She comes in half-way on the threshold, and screams.*) Bessie Burgess 'll sing whenever she damn well likes!

Nora tries to shut door, but Bessie violently shoves it in, and, gripping Nora by the shoulders, shakes her.

You little over-dressed throllope, you, for one pin I'd paste th' white face o' you!

Nora (*frightened*) Fluther, Fluther!

Fluther (*running over and breaking the hold of Bessie from Nora*) Now, now, Bessie, Bessie, leave poor Mrs Clitheroe alone; she'd do no one any harm, an' minds no one's business but her own.

Bessie Why is she always thryin' to speak proud things, an' lookin' like a mighty one in th' congregation o' th' people!

Nora sinks frightened on to the couch as Jack Clitheroe enters. He is a tall, well-made fellow of twenty-five. His face has none of the strength of Nora's. It is a face in which is the desire for authority, without the power to attain it.

Clitheroe (*excitedly*) What's up? what's after happenin'?

Fluther Nothin', Jack. Nothin'. It's all over now. Come on, Bessie, come on.

Clitheroe (*to Nora*) What's wrong, Nora? Did she say anything to you?

Nora She was bargin' out of her, an' I only told her to g'up ower o' that to her own place; an' before I knew where I was, she flew at me like a tiger, an' thried to guzzle me!

Clitheroe (*going to door and speaking to Bessie*) Get up to your own place, Mrs Burgess, and don't you be interferin' with my wife, or it'll be th' worse for you . . . Go on, go on!

Bessie (*as Clitheroe is pushing her out*) Mind who you're pushin', now . . . I attend me place o' worship, anyhow . . . not like some o' them that go to neither church, chapel nor meetin'-house . . . If me son was home from th' threnches he'd see me righted.

Bessie and Fluther depart, and Clitheroe closes the door.

Clitheroe (*going over to Nora, and putting his arm round her*) There, don't mind that old bitch, Nora, darling; I'll soon put a stop to her interferin'.

Nora Some day or another, when I'm here be meself, she'll come in an' do somethin' desperate.

Clitheroe (*kissing her*) Oh, sorra fear of her doin' anythin' desperate. I'll talk to her tomorrow when she's sober. A taste o' me mind that'll shock her into the sensibility of behavin' herself!

Nora gets up and settles the table. She sees the dungarees on the floor and stands looking at them, then she turns to the Covey, who is reading Jenersky's Thesis at the fire.

Nora Willie, is that th' place for your dungarees?

The Covey (*getting up and lifting them from the floor*) Ah, they won't do th' floor any harm, will they? (*He carries them into room, Back.*)

Nora (*calling*) Uncle Peter, now, Uncle Peter; tea's ready.

Peter and the Covey come in from room, back; they all sit down to tea. Peter is in full dress of the Foresters: green coat, gold braided; white breeches, top boots, frilled shirt. He carries the slouch hat, with the white ostrich plume, and the sword in his hands. They eat for a few moments in silence, the Covey furtively looking at Peter with scorn in his eyes. Peter knows it and is fidgety.

The Covey (*provokingly*) Another cut o' bread, Uncle Peter?

Peter maintains a dignified silence.

Clitheroe It's sure to be a great meetin' tonight. We ought to go, Nora.

Nora (*decisively*) I won't go, Jack; you can go if you wish.

A pause.

The Covey D'ye want th' sugar, Uncle Peter?

Peter (*explosively*) Now, are you goin' to start your thryin' an' your twartin' again?

Nora Now, Uncle Peter, you musn't be so touchy; Willie has only assed you if you wanted th' sugar.

Peter He doesn't care a damn whether I want th' sugar or no. He's only thryin' to thwart me!

Nora (*angrily, to the Covey*) Can't you let him alone, Willie? If he wants the sugar, let him stretch his hand out an' get it himself!

The Covey (*to Peter*) Now, if you want the sugar, you can stretch out your hand and get it yourself!

Clitheroe Tonight is th' first chance that Brennan has got of showing himself off since they made a Captain of him – why, God only knows. It'll be a treat to see him swankin' it at th' head of the Citizen Army carryin' th' flag of the Plough an' th' Stars (*Looking roguishly at Nora*) He was sweet on you, once, Nora?

Nora He may have been . . . I never liked him. I always thought he was a bit of a thick.

The Covey They're bringin' nice disgrace on that banner now.

Clitheroe (*remonstratively*) How are they bringin' disgrace on it?

The Covey (*snappily*) Because it's a Labour flag, an' was never meant for politics What does th' design of th' field plough, bearin' on it th' stars of th' heavenly plough, mean, if it's not Communism? It's a flag that should only be used when we're buildin' th' barricades to fight for a Workers' Republic!

Peter (*with a puff of derision*) P-phuh.

The Covey (*angrily*) What are you phuhin' out o' you for? Your mind is th' mind of a mummy. (*Rising*) I betther go an' get a good place to have a look at Ireland's warriors passin' by. (*He goes into room, Left, and returns with his cap.*)

Nora (*to the Covey*) Oh, Willie, brush your clothes before you go.

The Covey Oh, they'll do well enough.

Nora Go an' brush them; th' brush is in th' drawer there.

The Covey goes to the drawer, muttering, gets the brush, and starts to brush his clothes.

The Covey (*singing at Peter, as he does so*)

Oh, where's th' slave so lowly,
Condemn'd to chains unholy,
Who, could he burst his bonds at first,
Would pine beneath them slowly?

We tread th' land that . . . bore us,
Th' green flag glitters . . . o'er us,
Th' friends we've tried are by our side,
An' th' foe we hate . . . before us!

Peter (*leaping to his feet in a whirl of rage*) Now, I'm tellin' you, me young Covey, once for all, that I'll not stick any longer these titherin' taunts of yours, rovin' around to sing your slights an' slanders, reddenin' th' mind of a man to th' thinkin' an' sayin' of things that sicken his soul with sin! (*Hysterically; lifting up a cup to fling at the Covey*) Be God, I'll –

Clitheroe (*catching his arm*) Now then, none o' that, none o' that!

Nora Uncle Pether, Uncle Pether, UNCLE PETHER!

The Covey (*at the door, about to go out*) Isn't that th' malignant oul' varmint! Lookin' like th' illegitimate son of an illegitimate child of a corporal in th' Mexican army! (*He goes out.*)

Peter (*plaintively*) He's afther leavin' me now in such a state of agitation that I won't be able to do meself justice when I'm marchin' to th' meetin'.

Nora (*jumping up*) Oh, for God's sake, here, buckle your sword on, and go to your meetin', so that we'll have at least one hour of peace! (*She proceeds to belt on the sword.*)

Clitheroe (*irritably*) For God's sake hurry him up ou' o' this, Nora.

Peter Are yous all goin' to thry to start to thwart me now?

Nora (*putting on his plumed hat*) S-s-sh. Now, your hat's on, your house is thatched; off you pop! (*She gently pushes him from her.*)

Peter (*going, and turning as he reaches the door*) Now, if that young Covey –

Nora Go on, go on.

Peter goes. Clitheroe sits down in the lounge, lights a cigarette, and looks thoughtfully into the fire. Nora takes the things from the table, placing them on the chest of drawers. There is a pause, then she swiftly comes over to him and sits beside him.

(*Softly*) A penny for them, Jack!

Clitheroe Me? Oh, I was thinkin' of nothing.

Nora You were thinkin' of th' . . . meetin' . . . Jack. When we were courtin' an' I wanted you to go, you'd say, 'Oh, to hell with meetin's,' an' that you felt lonely in cheerin' crowds when I was absent. An' we weren't a month married when you began that you couldn't keep away from them.

Clitheroe Oh, that's enough about th' meetin'. It looks as if you wanted me to go, th' way you're talkin'. You were always at me to give up th' Citizen Army, an' I gave it up; surely that ought to satisfy you.

Nora Ay, you gave it up – because you got th' sulks when they didn't make a Captain of you. It wasn't for my sake, Jack.

Clitheroe For your sake or no, you're benefitin' by it,

aren't you? I didn't forget this was your birthday, did I? (*He puts his arms around her.*) And you liked your new hat; didn't you, didn't you? (*He kisses her rapidly several times.*)

Nora (*panting*) Jack, Jack; please, Jack! I thought you were tired of that sort of thing long ago.

Clitheroe Well, you're finding out now that I amn't tired of it yet, anyhow. Mrs Clitheroe doesn't want to be kissed, sure she doesn't? (*He kisses her again.*) Little, little red-lipped Nora!

Nora (*coquettishly removing his arm from around her*) Oh, yes, your little, little red-lipped Nora's a sweet little girl when th' fit seizes you; but your little, little red-lipped Nora has to clean your boots every mornin', all the same.

Clitheroe (*with a movement of irritation*) Oh, well, if we're goin' to be snotty!

A pause.

Nora It's lookin' like as if it was you that was goin' to be . . . snotty! Bridlin' up with bitterness, th' minute a body attempts t'open her mouth.

Clitheroe Is it any wondher, turnin' a tendher sayin' into a meanin' o' malice an' spite!

Nora It's hard for a body to be always keepin' her mind bent on makin' thoughts that'll be no longer than th' length of your own satisfaction. (*A pause. Standing up*) If we're goin' to dhribble th' time away sittin' here like a pair o' cranky mummies, I'd be as well sewin' or doin' something about th' place.

She looks appealingly at him for a few moments; he doesn't speak. She swiftly sits down beside him, and puts her arm around his neck.

(*Imploringly*) Ah, Jack, don't be so cross!

Clitheroe (*doggedly*) Cross? I'm not cross; I'm not a bit cross. It was yourself started it.

Nora (*coaxingly*) I didn't mean to say anything out o' the way. You take a body up too quickly, Jack. (*In an ordinary tone as if nothing of an angry nature had been said*) You didn't offer me me evenin' allowance yet.

Clitheroe silently takes out a cigarette for her and himself and lights both.

(*Trying to make conversation*) How quiet th' house is now; they must be all out.

Clitheroe (*rather shortly*) I suppose so.

Nora (*rising from the seat*) I'm longin' to show you me new hat, to see what you think of it. Would you like to see it?

Clitheroe Ah, I don't mind.

Nora suppresses a sharp reply, hesitates for a moment, then gets the hat, puts it on, and stands before Clitheroe.

Nora Well, how does Mr Clitheroe like me new hat?

Clitheroe It suits you, Nora, it does right enough.

He stands up, puts his hand beneath her chin, and tilts her head up. She looks at him roguishly. He bends down and kisses her.

Nora Here, sit down, an' don't let me hear another cross word out of you for th' rest o' the night.

They sit down.

Clitheroe (*with his arms around her*) Little, little, red-lipped Nora!

Nora (*with a coaxing movement of her body towards him*) Jack!

Clitheroe (*tightening his arms around her*) Well?

Nora You haven't sung me a song since our honeymoon. Sing me one now, do . . . please, Jack!

Clitheroe What song? 'Since Maggie Went Away'?

Nora Ah, no, Jack, not that; it's too sad. 'When You Said You Loved Me.'

Clearing his throat, Clitheroe thinks for a moment, and then begins to sing. Nora, putting an arm around him, nestles her head on his breast and listens delightedly.

Clitheroe (*singing verses following to the air of 'When You and I Were Young, Maggie'*)

Th' violets were scenting th' woods, Nora,
Displaying their charm to th' bee,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Th' chestnut blooms gleam'd through th' glade, Nora,
A robin sang loud from a tree,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Th' golden-rob'd daffodils shone, Nora,
An' danc'd in th' breeze on th' lea,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Th' trees, birds, an' bees sang a song, Nora,
Of happier transports to be,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Nora kisses him. A knock is heard at the door, right; a pause as they listen. Nora clings closely to Clitheroe.

Another knock, more imperative than the first.

I wonder who can that be, now?

Nora (*a little nervous*) Take no notice of it, Jack; they'll go away in a minute.

Another knock, followed by a voice.

Voice Commandant Clitheroe, Commandant Clitheroe, are you there? A message from General Jim Connolly.

Clitheroe Damn it, it's Captain Brennan.

Nora (*anxiously*) Don't mind him, don't mind, Jack. Don't break our happiness . . . Pretend we're not in. Let us forget everything tonight but our two selves!

Clitheroe (*reassuringly*) Don't be alarmed, darling; I'll just see what he wants, an' send him about his business.

Nora (*tremulously*) No, no. Please, Jack; don't open it. Please, for your own little Nora's sake!

Clitheroe (*rising to open the door*) Now don't be silly, Nora.

Clitheroe opens door, and admits a young man in the full uniform of the Irish Citizen Army – green suit; slouch green hat caught up at one side by a small Red Hand badge; Sam Browne belt, with a revolver in the holster. He carries a letter in his hand. When he comes in he smartly salutes Clitheroe. The young man is Captain Brennan.

Capt. Brennan (*giving the letter to Clitheroe*) A dispatch from General Connolly.

While Clitheroe reads out the letter Brennan's eyes are fixed on Nora, who droops as she sits on the lounge.

Clitheroe (*reading*) 'Commandant Clitheroe is to take command of the eighth battalion of the ICA which will

assemble to proceed to the meeting at nine o'clock. He is to see that all units are provided with full equipment; two days' rations and fifty rounds of ammunition. At two o'clock a.m. the army will leave Liberty Hall for a reconnaissance attack on Dublin Castle. – Com.-Gen. Connolly.' I don't understand this. Why does General Connolly call me Commandant?

Capt. Brennan Th' Staff appointed you Commandant, and th' General agreed with their selection.

Clitheroe When did this happen?

Capt. Brennan A fortnight ago.

Clitheroe How is it word was never sent to me?

Capt. Brennan Word was sent to you . . . I meself brought it.

Clitheroe Who did you give it to, then?

Capt. Brennan (*after a pause*) I think I gave it to Mrs Clitheroe, there.

Clitheroe Nora, d'ye hear that?

Nora makes no answer.

(*There is a note of hardness in his voice.*) Nora . . . Captain Brennan says he brought a letter to me from General Connolly, and that he gave it to you . . . Where is it? What did you do with it?

Nora (*running over to him, and pleadingly putting her arms around him*) Jack, please, Jack, don't go out tonight an' I'll tell you; I'll explain everything . . . Send him away, an' stay with your own little red-lipp'd Nora.

Clitheroe (*removing her arms from around him*) None o' this nonsense, now; I want to know what you did with th' letter.

Nora goes slowly to the lounge and sits down.

(*Angrily*) Why didn't you give me th' letter? What did you do with it? . . . (*He shakes her by the shoulder.*) What did you do with th' letter?

Nora (*flaming up*) I burned it, I burned it! That's what I did with it! Is General Connolly an' th' Citizen Army goin' to be your only care? Is your home goin' to be only a place to rest in? Am I goin' to be only somethin' to provide merry-makin' at night for you? Your vanity'll be th' ruin of you an' me yet . . . That's what's movin' you: because they've made an officer of you, you'll make a glorious cause of what you're doin', while your little red-lipp'd Nora can go on sittin' here, makin' a companion of th' loneliness of th' night!

Clitheroe (*fiercely*) You burned it, did you? (*He grips her arm.*) Well, me good lady –

Nora Let go – you're hurtin' me!

Clitheroe You deserve to be hurt . . . Any letter that comes to me for th' future, take care that I get it . . . D'ye hear – take care that I get it!

He goes to the chest of drawers and takes out a Sam Browne belt, which he puts on, and then puts a revolver in the holster. He puts on his hat, and looks towards Nora. While this dialogue is proceeding, and while Clitheroe prepares himself, Brennan softly whistles 'The Soldiers' Song'.

(*At door, about to go out*) You needn't wait up for me; if I'm in at all, it won't be before six in th' morning.

Nora (*bitterly*) I don't care if you never come back!

Clitheroe (*to Capt. Brennan*) Come along, Ned.

They go out. There is a pause. Nora pulls the new hat

from her head and with a bitter movement flings it to the other end of the room. There is a gentle knock at door, right, which opens, and Mollser comes into the room. She is about fifteen, but looks to be only about ten, for the ravages of consumption have shrivelled her up. She is pitifully worn, walks feebly, and frequently coughs. She goes over to Nora.

Mollser (*to Nora*) Mother's gone to th' meetin', an' I was feelin' terrible lonely, so I come down to see if you'd let me sit with you, thinkin' you mightn't be goin' yourself . . . I do be terrible afraid I'll die sometime when I'm be meself . . . I often envy you, Mrs Clitheroe, seein' th' health you have, an' th' lovely place you have here, an' wondherin' if I'll ever be sstrong enough to be keepin' a home together for a man. Oh, this must be some more o' the Dublin Fusiliers flyin' off to the front.

Just before Mollser ceases to speak, there is heard in the distance the music of a brass band playing a regiment to the boat on the way to the front. The tune that is being played is 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'; as the band comes to the chorus, the regiment is swinging into the street by Nora's house, and the voices of the soldiers can be heard lustily singing the chorus of the song.

Soldiers (*off*)

It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go;
It's a long way to Tipperary, to th' sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly, farewell Leicester Square.
It's a long, long way to Tipperary, but my heart's right there!

Nora and Mollser remain silently listening. As the chorus ends and the music is faint in the distance again, Bessie Burgess appears at door, right, which Mollser has left open.

Bessie (*speaking in towards the room*) There's th' men marchin' out into th' dhread dimness o' danger, while th' lice is crawlin' about feedin' on th' fatness o' the land! But yous'll not escape from th' arrow that flieth be night, or th' sickness that wasteth be day . . . An' ladyship an' all, as some o' them may be, they'll be scattered abroad, like th' dust in th' darkness!

Bessie goes away; Nora steals over and quietly shuts the door. She comes back to the lounge and wearily throws herself on it beside Mollser.

Mollser (*after a pause and a cough*) Is there anybody goin', Mrs Clitheroe, with a tittther o' sense?

Curtain.

Act Two

A commodious public-house at the corner of the street in which the meeting is being addressed from Platform No. 1. It is the south corner of the public-house that is visible to the audience. The counter, beginning at Back about one-fourth of the width of the space shown, comes across two-thirds of the length of the stage, and, taking a circular sweep, passes out of sight to left. On the counter are beer-pulls, glasses, and a carafe. The other three-fourths of the back is occupied by a tall, wide, two-paned window. Beside this window at the right is a small, box-like, panelled snug. Next to the snug is a double swing door, the entrance to that particular end of the house. Farther on is a shelf on which customers may rest their drinks. Underneath the windows is a cushioned seat. Behind the counter at Back can be seen the shelves running the whole length of the counter. On these shelves can be seen the end (or the beginning) of rows of bottles. The Barman is seen wiping the part of the counter which is in view. Rosie is standing at the counter toying with what remains of a half of whiskey in a wineglass. She is a sturdy, well-shaped girl of twenty; pretty, and pert in manner. She is wearing a cream blouse, with an obviously suggestive glad neck; a grey tweed dress, brown stockings and shoes. The blouse and most of the dress are hidden by a black shawl. She has no hat, and in her hair is jauntily set a cheap, glittering, jewelled ornament. It is an hour later.

Barman (*wiping counter*) Nothin' much doin' in your line tonight, Rosie?

Rosie Curse o' God on th' haporth, hardly, Tom. There isn't much notice taken of a pretty petticoat of a night like this . . . They're all in a holy mood. Th' solemn-lookin' dials on th' whole o' them an' they marchin' to th' meetin'. You'd think they were th' glorious company of th' saints, an' th' noble army of martyrs thrampin' through th' sthreads of paradise. They're all thinkin' of higher things than a girl's garthers . . . It's a tremendous meetin'; four platforms they have – there's one o' them just outside opposite th' window.

Barman Oh, ay; sure when th' speaker comes (*motioning with his hand*) to th' near end, here, you can see him plain, an' hear nearly everythin' he's spoutin' out of him.

Rosie It's no joke thryin' to make up fifty-five shillin's a week for your keep an' laundhry, an' then taxin' you a quid for your own room if you bring home a friend for th' night . . . If I could only put by a couple of quid for a swankier outfit, everythin' in th' garden ud look lovely –

Barman Whisht, till we hear what he's sayin'.

Through the window is silhouetted the figure of a tall man who is speaking to the crowd. The Barman and Rosie look out of the window and listen.

Voice of the Man It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the sight of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the use of arms . . . Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood . . . There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them!

The figure moves away towards the right, and is lost to sight and hearing.

Rosie It's th' sacred thruth, mind you, what that man's afther sayin'.

Barman If I was only a little younger, I'd be plungin' mad into th' middle of it!

Rosie (*who is still looking out of the window*) Oh, here's the two gems runnin' over again for their oil!

Peter and Fluther enter tumultuously. They are hot, and full and hasty with the things they have seen and heard. Emotion is bubbling up in them, so that when they drink, and when they speak, they drink and speak with the fullness of emotional passion. Peter leads the way to the counter.

Peter (*splutteringly to the Barman*) Two halves . . . (*To Fluther*) A meetin' like this always makes me feel as if I could dhrink Loch Erinn dhry!

Fluther You couldn't feel any way else at a time like this when th' spirit of a man is pulsing to be out fightin' for th' thruth with his feet thremblin' on th' way, maybe to th' gallows, an' his ears tinglin' with th' faint, far-away sound of burstin' rifle-shots that'll maybe whip th' last little shock o' life out of him that's left lingerin' in his body!

Peter I felt a burnin' lump in me throat when I heard th' band playin' 'The Soldiers' Song', rememberin' last hearin' it marchin' in military formation, with th' people starin' on both sides at us, carryin' with us th' pride an' resolution o' Dublin to th' grave of Wolfe Tone.

Fluther Get th' Dublin men goin' an' they'll go on full force for anything that's thryin' to bar them away from what they're wantin', where th' slim thinkin' counthry boyo ud limp away from th' first faintest touch of compromization!

Peter (*hurriedly to the Barman*) Two more, Tom! . . . (*To*

Fluther Th' memory of all th' things that was done, an' all th' things that was suffered be th' people, was boomin' in me brain . . . Every nerve in me body was quiverin' to do somethin' desperat!

Fluther Jammed as I was in th' crowd, I listened to th' speeches pattherin' on th' people's head, like rain fallin' on th' corn; every derogatory thought went out o' me mind, an' I said to meself, 'You can die now, Fluther, for you've seen th' shadow-dhreams of th' past leppin' to life in th' bodies of livin' men that show, if we were without a titther o' courage for centuries, we're vice versa now!' Looka here. (*He stretches out his arm under Peter's face and rolls up his sleeve.*) The blood was BOILIN' in me veins!

The silhouette of the tall figure again moves into the frame of the window speaking to the people.

Peter (*unaware, in his enthusiasm, of the speaker's appearance, to Fluther*) I was burnin' to dhraw me sword, an' wave an' wave it over me –

Fluther (*overwhelming Peter*) Will you stop your blatherin' for a minute, man, an' let us hear what he's sayin'!

Voice of the Man Comrade soldiers of the Irish Volunteers and of the Citizen Army, we rejoice in this terrible war. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields . . . Such august homage was never offered to God as this: the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country. And we must be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding of blood there is no redemption!

The figure moves out of sight and hearing.

Fluther (*gulping down the drink that remains in his glass,*

and rushing out) Come on, man; this is too good to be missed!

Peter finishes his drink less rapidly, and as he is going out wiping his mouth with the back of his hand he runs into the Covey coming in. He immediately erects his body like a young cock, and with his chin thrust forward, and a look of venomous dignity on his face, he marches out.

The Covey (*at counter*) Give us a glass o' malt, for God's sake, till I stimulate meself from th' shock o' seein' th' sight that's afther goin' out!

Rosie (*all business, coming over to the counter, and standing near the Covey*) Another one for me, Tommy; (*to the Barman*) th' young gentleman's ordherin' it in th' corner of his eye.

The Barman brings the drink for the Covey, and leaves it on the counter. Rosie whips it up.

Barman Ay, houl' on there, houl' on there, Rosie!

Rosie (*to the Barman*) What are you houldin' on out o' you for? Didn't you hear th' young gentleman say that he couldn't refuse anything to a nice little bird? (*To the Covey*) Isn't that right, Jiggs? (*The Covey says nothing.*) Didn't I know, Tommy, it would be all right? It takes Rosie to size a young man up, an' tell th' thoughts that are thremblin' in his mind. Isn't that right, Jiggs?

The Covey stirs uneasily, moves a little farther away, and pulls his cap over his eyes.

(*Moving after him*) Great meetin' that's gettin' held outside. Well, it's up to us all, anyway, to fight for our freedom.

The Covey (*to Barman*) Two more, please. (*To Rosie*)

Freedom! What's th' use o' freedom, if it's not economic freedom?

Rosie (*emphasizing with extended arm and moving finger*) I used them very words just before you come in. 'A lot o' thricksters,' says I, 'that wouldn't know what freedom was if they got it from their mother.' . . . (*To Barman*) Didn't I, Tommy?

Barman I disremember.

Rosie No, you don't disremember. Remember you said, yourself, it was all 'only a flash in th' pan'. Well, 'flash in th' pan, or no flash in th' pan,' says I, 'they're not goin' to get Rosie Redmond,' says I, 'to fight for freedom that wouldn't be worth winnin' in a raffle!'

The Covey There's only one freedom for th' workin' man: conthrol o' th' means o' production, rates of exchange, an' th' means of disthribution. (*Tapping Rosie on the shoulder*) Look here, comrade, I'll leave here tomorrow night for you a copy of Jenersky's *Thesis on the Origin, Development, an' Consolidation of the Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat*.

Rosie (*throwing off her shawl on to the counter, and showing an exemplified glad neck, which reveals a good deal of a white bosom*) If y'ass Rosie, it's heartbreakin' to see a young fella thinkin' of anything, or admirin' anything, but silk thransparent stockin's showin' off the shape of a little lassie's legs!

The Covey, frightened, moves a little away.

(*Following on*) Out in th' park in th' shade of a warm summery evenin', with your little darlin' bridie to be, kissin' an' cuddlin' (*she tries to put her arm around his neck*), kissin' an' cuddlin', ay?

The Covey (*frightened*) Ay, what are you doin'? None o'

that, now; none o' that. I've something else to do besides shinannickin' afther Judies!

He turns away, but Rosie follows, keeping face to face with him.

Rosie Oh, little duckey, oh, shy little duckey! Never held a mot's hand, an' wouldn't know how to tittle a little Judy! (*She clips him under the chin.*) Tittle him undher th' chin, tittle him undher th' chin!

The Covey (*breaking away and running out*) Ay, go on, now; I don't want to have any meddlin' with a lassie like you!

Rosie (*enraged*) Jasus, it's in a monastery some of us ought to be, spendin' our holidays kneelin' on our adorers, tellin' our beads, an' knockin' hell out of our buzzums!

The Covey (*outside*) Cuckoo-oo!

Peter and Fluther come in again, followed by Mrs Gogan, carrying a baby in her arms. They go over to the counter.

Peter (*with plaintive anger*) It's terrible that young Covey can't let me pass without proddin' at me! Did you hear him murmurin' 'cuckoo' when we were passin'?

Fluther (*irritably*) I wouldn't be everlastin' cockin' me ear to every little whisper that was floatin' around about me! It's my rule never to lose me temper till it would be dethrimental to keep it. There's nothin' derogatory in th' use o' th' word 'cuckoo', is there?

Peter (*tearfully*) It's not th' word; it's th' way he says it: he never says it straight out, but murmurs it with curious quiverin' ripples, like variations on a flute!

Fluther Ah, what odds if he gave it with variations on a thrombone! (*To Mrs Gogan*) What's yours goin' to be, ma'am?

Mrs Gogan Ah, a half o' malt, Fluther.

Fluther (*to Barman*) Three halves, Tommy.

The Barman brings the drinks.

Mrs Gogan (*drinking*) The Foresters' is a gorgeous dhress! I don't think I've seen nicer, mind you, in a pantomime . . . Th' loveliest part of th' dhress, I think, is th' osthrichess plume . . . When yous are goin' along, an' I see them wavin' an' noddin' an' waggin', I seem to be lookin' at each of yous hangin' at th' end of a rope, your eyes bulgin' an' your legs twistin' an' jerkin', gaspin' an' gaspin' for breath while yous are thryin' to die for Ireland!

Fluther If any o' them is hangin' at the end of a rope, it won't be for Ireland!

Peter Are you goin' to start th' young Covey's game o' proddin' an' twartin' a man? There's not many that's talkin' can say that for twenty-five years he never missed a pilgrimage to Bodenstown!

Fluther You're always blowin' about goin' to Bodenstown. D'ye think no one but yourself ever went to Bodenstown?

Peter (*plaintively*) I'm not blowin' about it; but there's not a year that I go there but I pluck a leaf off Tone's grave, an' this very day me prayer-book is nearly full of them.

Fluther (*scornfully*) Then Fluther has a vice versa opinion of them that put ivy leaves into their prayer-books, scabbin' it on th' clergy, an' thryin' to out-do th' haloes o' th' saints be lookin' as if he was wearin' around his head a glitterin' aroree boree allis! (*Fiercely*) Sure, I don't care a damn if you slep' in Bodenstown! You can take your breakfast, dinner, an' tea on th' grave in Bodenstown, if you like, for Fluther!

Mrs Gogan Oh, don't start a fight, boys, for God's sake; I was only sayin' what a nice costume it is – nicer than th' kilts, for, God forgive me, I always think th' kilts is hardly decent.

Fluther Ah, sure, when you'd look at him, you'd wondher whether th' man was makin' fun o' th' costume, or th' costume was makin' fun o' th' man!

Barman Now, then, thry to speak asy, will yous? We don't want no shoutin' here.

The Covey, followed by Bessie Burgess, comes in. They go over to the opposite end of the counter, and direct their gaze on the other group.

The Covey (*to Barman*) Two glasses o' malt.

Peter There he is, now; I knew he wouldn't be long till he folleyed me in.

Bessie (*speaking to the Covey, but really at the other party*) I can't for th' life o' me undherstand how they can call themselves Catholics, when they won't lift a finger to help poor little Catholic Belgium.

Mrs Gogan (*raising her voice*) What about poor little Catholic Ireland?

Bessie (*over to Mrs Gogan*) You mind your own business, ma'am, an' stupefy your foolishness be gettin' dh drunk.

Peter (*anxiously*) Take no notice of her; pay no attention to her. She's just tormentin' herself towards havin' a row with somebody.

Bessie There's a storm of anger tossin' in me heart, thinkin' of all th' poor Tommies, an' with them me own son, dhrenched in water an' soaked in blood, gropin' their way to a shatterin' death, in a shower o' shells! Young men with th' sunny lust o' life beamin' in them, layin'

down their white bodies, shredded into torn an' bloody pieces, on th' althar that God Himself has built for th' sacrifice of heroes!

Mrs Gogan Isn't it a nice thing to have to be listenin' to a lassie an' hangin' our heads in a dead silence, knowin' that some persons think more of a ball of malt than they do of th' blessed saints.

Fluther Whisht; she's always dangerous an' derogatory when she's well oiled. Th' safest way to hindher her from havin' any enjoyment out of her spite, is to dip our thoughts into the fact of her bein' a female person that has moved out of th' sight of ordinary sensible people.

Bessie To look at some o' th' women that's knockin' about, now, is a thing to make a body sigh . . . A woman on her own, dhrinkin' with a bevy o' men, is hardly an example to her sex . . . A woman dhrinkin' with a woman is one thing, an' a woman dhrinkin' with herself is still a woman – flappers may be put in another category altogether – but a middle-aged married woman makin' herself th' centre of a circle of men is as a woman that is loud an' stubborn, whose feet abideth not in her own house.

The Covey (*to Bessie*) When I think of all th' problems in front o' th' workers, it makes me sick to be lookin' at oul' codgers goin' about dhressed up like green-accoutred figures gone asthray out of a toyshop!

Peter Gracious God, give me patience to be listenin' to that blasted young Covey proddin' at me from over at th' other end of th' shop!

Mrs Gogan (*dipping her finger in the whiskey, and moistening with it the lips of her baby*) Cissie Gogan's a woman livin' for nigh on twenty-five years in her own room, an' beyond biddin' th' time o' day to her

neighbours, never yet as much as nodded her head in th' direction of other people's business, while she knows some as are never content unless they're standin' senthry over other people's doin's!

Bessie is about to reply, when the tall, dark figure is again silhouetted against the window, and the voice of the Speaker is heard speaking passionately.

Voice of Speaker The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. Heroism has come back to the earth. War is a terrible thing, but war is not an evil thing. People in Ireland dread war because they do not know it. Ireland has not known the exhilaration of war for over a hundred years. When war comes to Ireland she must welcome it as she would welcome the Angel of God! (*The figure passes out of sight and hearing.*)

The Covey (*towards all present*) Dope, dope. There's only one war worth havin': th' war for th' economic emancipation of th' proletariat.

Bessie They may crow away out o' them; but it ud be fitter for some o' them to mend their ways, an' cease from havin' scouts out watchin' for th' comin' of th' Saint Vincent de Paul man, for fear they'd be nailed lowerin' a pint of beer, mockin' th' man with an angel face, shinin' with th' glamour of deceit an' lies!

Mrs Gogan An' a certain lassie standin' stiff behind her own door with her ears cocked listenin' to what's being said, stuffed till she's sthained with envy of a neighbour thryin' for a few little things that may be got be hard sthrivin' to keep up to th' letther an' th' law, an' th' practices of th' Church!

Peter (*to Mrs Gogan*) If I was you, Mrs Gogan, I'd parry her jabbin' remarks be a powerful silence that'll keep her tantalizin' words from penetratin' into your feelin's. It's

always better to leave these people to th' vengeance o' God!

Bessie Bessie Burgess doesn't put up to know much, never havin' a swaggerin' mind, thanks be to God, but goin' on packin' up knowledge accordin' to her conscience: precept upon precept, line upon line; here a little, an' there a little. But (*with a passionate swing of her shawl*), thanks be to Christ, she knows when she was got, where she was got, an' how she was got; while there's some she knows, decoratin' their finger with a well-polished weddin' ring, would be hard put to it if they were assed to show their weddin' lines!

Mrs Gogan (*plunging out into the centre of the floor in a wild tempest of hysterical rage*) Y' oul' rip of a blasted liar, me weddin' ring's been well earned be twenty years be th' side o' me husband, now takin' his rest in heaven, married to me be Father Dempsey, in th' Chapel o' Saint Jude's, in th' Christmas Week of eighteen hundhred an' ninety-five; an' any kid, livin' or dead, that Jinnie Gogan's had since, was got between th' bordhers of th' Ten Commandments! . . . An' that's more than some o' you can say that are kep' from th' dhread o' destrhuction be a few drowsy virtues, that th' first whisper of temptation lulls into a sleep, that'll know one sin from another only on th' day of their last anointin', an' that use th' innocent light o' th' shinin' stars to dip into th' sins of a night's diversion!

Bessie (*jumping out to face Mrs Gogan, and bringing the palms of her hands together in sharp claps to emphasize her remarks*) Liar to you, too, ma'am, y' oul' hardened thresspasser on other people's good nature, wizenin' up your soul in th' arts o' dodgeries, till every dhrop of respectability in a female is dhried up in her, lookin' at your ready-made manoeuverin' with th' menkind!

Barman Here, there; here, there; speak asy there. No rowin' here, no rowin' here, now.

Fluther (*trying to calm Mrs Gogan*) Now Jinnie, Jinnie, it's a derogatory thing to be smirchin' a night like this with a row; it's rompin' with th' feelin's of hope we ought to be, instead o' bein' vice versa!

Peter (*trying to quiet Bessie*) I'm terrible dawnsy, Mrs Burgess, an' a fight leaves me weak for a long time afterwards . . . Please, Mrs Burgess, before there's damage done, thry to have a little respect for yourself.

Bessie (*with a push of her hand that sends Peter tottering to the end of the shop*) G'way, you little sermonizing, little yella-faced, little consequential, little pudgy, little bum, you!

Mrs Gogan (*screaming*) Fluther, leggo! I'm not goin' to keep an unresistin' silence, an' her scatherin' her festherin' words in me face, stirrin' up every dhrop of decency in a respectable female, with her restless rally o' lies that would make a saint say his prayer backwards!

Bessie (*shouting*) Ah, everybody knows well that th' best charity that can be shown to you is to hide th' thruth as much as our thruer worship of God Almighty will allow us!

Mrs Gogan (*frantically*) Here, houl' th' kid, one o' yous; houl' th' kid for a minute! There's nothin' for it but to show this lassie a lesson or two . . . (*To Peter*) Here, houl' th' kid, you. (*Before Peter is aware of it, she places the infant in his arms. To Bessie, standing before her in a fighting attitude*) Come on, now, me loyal lassie, dyin' with grief for little Catholic Belgium! When Jinnie Gogan's done with you, you'll have a little leisure lyin' down to think an' pray for your king an' counthry!

Barman (*coming from behind the counter, getting between the women, and proceeding to push them towards the door*) Here, now, since yous can't have a little friendly argument quietly, you'll get out o' this place in quick time.

Go on, an' settle your differences somewhere else – I don't want to have another endorsement on me licence.

Peter (*anxiously, over to Mrs Gogan*) Here, take your kid back, ower this. How nicely I was picked, now, for it to be plumped into me arms!

The Covey She knew who she was givin' it to, maybe.

Peter (*hotly to the Covey*) Now, I'm givin' you fair warnin', me young Covey, to quit firin' your jibes an' jeers at me . . . For one o' these days, I'll run out in front o' God Almighty an' take your sacred life!

Barman (*pushing Bessie out after Mrs Gogan*) Go on, now; out you go.

Bessie (*as she goes out*) If you think, me lassie, that Bessie Burgess has an untidy conscience, she'll soon show you to th' differ!

Peter (*leaving the baby down on the floor*) Ay, be Jasus, wait there, till I give her back her youngster! (*He runs to the door.*) Ay, there, ay! (*He comes back.*) There, she's afther goin' without her kid. What are we goin' to do with it, now?

The Covey What are we goin' to do with it? Bring it outside an' show everybody what you're afther findin'!

Peter (*in a panic to Fluther*) Pick it up, you, Fluther, an' run afther her with it, will you?

Fluther What d'ye take Fluther for? You must think Fluther's a right gom. D'ye think Fluther's like yourself, destitute of a tither of undherstandin'?

Barman (*imperatively to Peter*) Take it up, man, an' run out afther her with it, before she's gone too far. You're not goin' to leave th' bloody thing here, are you?

Peter (*plaintively, as he lifts up the baby*) Well, God Almighty, give me patience with all th' scorners, tormentors, an' twarters that are always an' ever thryin' to goad me into prayin' for their blindin' an' blastin' an' burnin' in th' world to come! (*He goes out.*)

Fluther God, it's a relief to get rid o' that crowd. Women is terrible when they start to fight. There's no holdin' them back. (*To the Covey*) Are you goin' to have anything?

The Covey Ah, I don't mind if I have another half.

Fluther (*to Barman*) Two more, Tommy, me son.

The Barman gets the drinks.

You know, there's no conthrollin' a woman when she loses her head.

Rosie enters and goes over to the counter on the side nearest to Fluther.

Rosie (*to Barman*) Divil a use o' havin' a thrim little leg on a night like this; things was never worse . . . Give us a half till tomorrow, Tom, ducky.

Barman (*coldly*) No more tonight, Rosie; you owe me for three already.

Rosie (*combatively*) You'll be paid, won't you?

Barman I hope so.

Rosie You hope so! Is that th' way with you, now?

Fluther (*to Barman*) Give her one; it'll be all right.

Rosie (*clapping Fluther on the back*) Oul' sport!

Fluther Th' meetin' should be soon over, now.

The Covey Th' sooner th' betther. It's all a lot o' blasted nonsense, comrade.

Fluther Oh, I wouldn't say it was all nonsense. Afther all, Fluther can remember th' time, an' him only a dawny chiselur, bein' taught at his mother's knee to be faithful to th' Shan Van Vok!

The Covey That's all dope, comrade; th' sort o' thing that workers are fed on be th' Boorzawzee.

Fluther (*a little sharply*) What's all dope? Though I'm sayin' it that shouldn't: (*catching his cheek with his hand, and pulling down the flesh from the eye*) d'ye see that mark there, undher me eye? . . . A sabre slice from a dragoon in O'Connell Street! (*Thrusting his head forward towards Rosie*) Feel that dint in th' middle o' me nut!

Rosie (*rubbing Fluther's head, and winking at the Covey*) My God, there's a holla!

Fluther (*putting on his hat with quiet pride*) A skelp from a bobby's baton at a Labour meetin' in th' Phoenix Park!

The Covey He must ha' hitten you in mistake. I don't know what you ever done for th' Labour Movement.

Fluther (*loudly*) D'ye not? Maybe, then, I done as much, an' know as much about th' Labour Movement as th' chancers that are blowin' about it!

Barman Speak easy, Fluther, thry to speak easy.

The Covey There's no necessity to get excited about it, comrade.

Fluther (*more loudly*) Excited? Who's gettin' excited? There's no one gettin' excited! It would take something more than a thing like you to flutter a feather o' Fluther. Blatherin', an', when all is said, you know as much as th' rest in th' wind up!

The Covey Well, let us put it to th' test, then, an' see what

you know about th' Labour Movement: what's the mechanism of exchange?

Fluther (*roaring, because he feels he is beaten*) How th' hell do I know what it is? There's nothin' about that in th' rules of our Thrades Union!

Barman For God's sake, thry to speak easy, Fluther.

The Covey What does Karl Marx say about th' Relation of Value to th' Cost o' Production?

Fluther (*angrily*) What th' hell do I care what he says? I'm Irishman enough not to lose me head be follyin' foreigners!

Barman Speak easy, Fluther.

The Covey It's only waste o' time talkin' to you, comrade.

Fluther Don't be comradin' me, mate. I'd be on me last legs if I wanted you for a comrade.

Rosie (*to the Covey*) It seems a highly ridiculous thing to hear a thing that's only an inch or two away from a kid, swingin' heavy words about he doesn't know th' meanin' of, an' uppishly thryin' to down a man like Misther Fluther here, that's well flavoured in th' knowledge of th' world he's livin' in.

The Covey (*savagely to Rosie*) Nobody's askin' you to be buttin' in with your prate . . . I have you well taped, me lassie . . . Just you keep your opinions for your own place . . . It'll be a long time before th' Covey takes any instructions or reprimandin' from a prostitute!

Rosie (*wild with humiliation*) You louse, you louse, you! . . . You're no man . . . You're no man . . . I'm a woman, anyhow, an' if I'm a prostitute aself, I have me feelin's . . . Thryin' to put his arm around me a minute ago, an' givin' me th' glad eye, th' little wrigglin' lump o'

desolation turns on me now, because he saw there was nothin' doin' You louse, you! If I was a man, or you were a woman, I'd bate th' puss o' you!

Barman Ay, Rosie, ay! You'll have to shut your mouth altogether, if you can't learn to speak easy!

Fluther (*to Rosie*) Hou! on there, Rosie; hou! on there. There's no necessity to fluther yourself when you're with Fluther Any lady that's in th' company of Fluther is goin' to get a fair hunt This is outside your province I'm not goin' to let you demean yourself be talkin' to a titherin' chancer Leave this to Fluther – this is a man's job. (*To the Covey*) Now, if you've anything to say, say it to Fluther, an', let me tell you, you're not goin' to be pass-remarkable to any lady in my company.

The Covey Sure I don't care if you were runnin' all night afther your Mary o' th' Curlin' Hair, but, when you start tellin' luscious lies about what you done for th' Labour Movement, it's nearly time to show y'up!

Fluther (*fiercely*) Is it you show Fluther up? G'way, man, I'd beat two o' you before me breakfast!

The Covey (*contemptuously*) Tell us where you bury your dead, will you?

Fluther (*with his face stuck into the face of the Covey*) Sing a little less on th' high note, or, when I'm done with you, you'll put a Christianable construction on things, I'm tellin' you!

The Covey You're a big fella, you are.

Fluther (*tapping the Covey threateningly on the shoulder*) Now, you're temptin' Providence when you're temptin' Fluther!

The Covey (*losing his temper, and bawling*) Easy with

them hands, there, easy with them hands! You're startin' to take a little risk when you commence to paw the Covey!

Fluther suddenly springs into the middle of the shop, flings his hat into the corner, whips off his coat, and begins to paw the air.

Fluther (*roaring at the top of his voice*) Come on, come on, you lowser; put your mits up now, if there's a man's blood in you! Be God, in a few minutes you'll see some snots flyin' around, I'm tellin' you When Fluther's done with you, you'll have a vice versa opinion of him! Come on, now, come on!

Barman (*running from behind the counter and catching hold of the Covey*) Here, out you go, me little bowsey. Because you got a couple o' halves you think you can act as you like. (*He pushes the Covey to the door.*) Fluther's a friend o' mine, an' I'll not have him insulted.

The Covey (*struggling with the Barman*) Ay, leggo, leggo there; fair hunt, give a man a fair hunt! One minute with him is all I ask; one minute alone with him, while you're runnin' for th' priest an' th' doctor.

Fluther (*to the Barman*) Let him go, let him go, Tom: let him open th' door to sudden death if he wants to!

Barman (*to the Covey*) Go on, out you go an' do th' bowsey somewhere else. (*He pushes the Covey out and comes back.*)

Rosie (*getting Fluther's hat as he is putting on his coat*) Be God, you put th' fear o' God in his heart that time! I thought you'd have to be dug out of him Th' way you lepped out without any of your fancy side-steppin'! 'Men like Fluther', say I to meself, 'is gettin' scarce nowadays.'

Fluther (*with proud complacency*) I wasn't goin' to let

meself be malignified by a chancer . . . He got a little bit too derogatory for Fluther . . . Be God, to think of a cur like that comin' to talk to a man like me!

Rosie (*fixing on his hat*) Did j'ever!

Fluther He's lucky he got off safe. I hit a man last week, Rosie, an' he's fallin' yet!

Rosie Sure, you'd ha' broken him in two if you'd ha' hitten him one clatther!

Fluther (*amorously, putting his arm around Rosie*) Come on into th' snug, me little darlin', an' we'll have a few dhrinks before I see you home.

Rosie Oh, Fluther, I'm afraid you're a terrible man for th' women.

They go into the snug as Clitheroe, Captain Brennan, and Lieut. Langon of the Irish Volunteers enter hurriedly. Captain Brennan carries the banner of The Plough and the Stars, and Lieut. Langon a green, white and orange Tricolour. They are in a state of emotional excitement. Their faces are flushed and their eyes sparkle; they speak rapidly, as if unaware of the meaning of what they said. They have been mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches.

Clitheroe (*almost pantingly*) Three glasses o' port!

The Barman brings the drinks.

Capt. Brennan We won't have long to wait now.

Lieut. Langon Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.

Clitheroe You have a mother, Langon.

Lieut. Langon Ireland is greater than a mother.

Capt. Brennan You have a wife, Clitheroe.

Clitheroe Ireland is greater than a wife.

Lieut. Langon Th' time for Ireland's battle is now – th' place for Ireland's battle is here.

The tall, dark figure again is silhouetted against the window. The three men pause and listen.

Voice of the Man Our foes are strong, but strong as they are, they cannot undo the miracles of God, who ripens in the heart of young men the seeds sown by the young men of a former generation. They think they have pacified Ireland; think they have foreseen everything; think they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead, and, while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland, unfree, shall never be at peace!

Capt. Brennan (*catching up The Plough and the Stars*) Imprisonment for th' Independence of Ireland!

Lieut. Langon (*catching up the Tricolour*) Wounds for th' Independence of Ireland!

Clitheroe Death for th' Independence of Ireland!

The Three (*together*) So help us God!

They drink. A bugle blows the Assembly. They hurry out. A pause. Fluther and Rosie come out of the snug; Rosie is linking Fluther, who is a little drunk. Both are in a merry mood.

Rosie Come on home, ower o' that, man. Are you afraid or what? Are you goin' to come home, or are you not?

Fluther Of course I'm goin' home. What ud ail me that I wouldn't go?

Rosie (*lovingly*) Come on, then, oul' sport.

Officer's Voice (*giving command outside*) Irish Volunteers,
by th' right, quick march!

Rosie (*putting her arm round Fluther and singing*)

I once had a lover, a tailor, but he could do nothin' for
me,
An' then I fell in with a sailor as strong an' as wild as th'
sea.
We cuddled an' kissed with devotion, till th' night from
th' mornin' had fled;
An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin' boy
Was dancin' a jig in th' bed!

Dancin' a jig in th' bed, an' bawlin' for butther an'
bread.
An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin' boy
Was dancin' a jig in th' bed!

They go out with their arms round each other.

Clitheroe's Voice (*in command outside*) Dublin Battalion
of the Irish Citizen Army, by th' right, quick march!

Curtain.

The corner house in a street of tenements: it is the home of the Clitheroes. The house is a long, gaunt, five-storey tenement; its brick front is chipped and scarred with age and neglect. The wide and heavy hall door, flanked by two pillars, has a look of having been charred by a fire in the distant past. The door lurches a little to one side, disjointed by the continual and reckless banging when it is being closed by most of the residents. The diamond-paned fanlight is destitute of a single pane, the framework alone remaining. The windows, except the two looking into the front parlour (Clitheroe's room), are grimy, and are draped with fluttering and soiled fragments of lace curtains. The front parlour windows are hung with rich, comparatively, casement cloth. Five stone steps lead from the door to the path on the street. Branching on each side are railings to prevent people from falling into the area. At the left corner of the house runs a narrow lane, bisecting the street, and connecting it with another of the same kind. At the corner of the lane is a street lamp.

As the house is revealed, Mrs Gogan is seen helping Mollser to a chair, which stands on the path beside the railings, at the left side of the steps. She then wraps a shawl around Mollser's shoulders. It is some months later.

Mrs Gogan (*arranging shawl around Mollser*) Th' sun'll do you all th' good in th' world. A few more weeks o' this weather, an' there's no knowin' how well you'll be
Are you comfy, now?

Mollser (*weakly and wearily*) Yis, ma; I'm all right.

Mrs Gogan How are you feelin'?

Mollser Better, ma, better. If th' horrible sinkin' feelin' ud go, I'd be all right.

Mrs Gogan Ah, I wouldn't put much pass on that. Your stomach maybe's out of ordher . . . Is th' poor breathin' any better, d'ye think?

Mollser Yis, yis, ma; a lot better.

Mrs Gogan Well, that's somethin' anyhow . . . With th' help o' God, you'll be on th' mend from this out . . . D'your legs feel any sthronger undher you, d'ye think?

Mollser (*irritably*) I can't tell, ma. I think so . . . A little.

Mrs Gogan Well, a little aself is somethin' . . . I thought I heard you coughin' a little more than usual last night . . . D'ye think you were?

Mollser I wasn't, ma, I wasn't.

Mrs Gogan I thought I heard you, for I was kep' awake all night with th' shootin'. An' thinkin' o' that madman, Fluther, runnin' about through th' night lookin' for Nora Clitheroe to bring her back when he heard she'd gone to folly her husband, an' in dhread any minute he might come staggerin' in covered with bandages, splashed all over with th' red of his own blood, an' givin' us barely time to bring th' priest to hear th' last whisper of his final confession, as his soul was passin' through th' dark doorway o' death into th' way o' th' wondherin' dead . . . You don't feel cold, do you?

Mollser No, ma; I'm all right.

Mrs Gogan Keep your chest well covered, for that's th' delicate spot in you . . . if there's any danger, I'll whip you in again . . . (*Looking up the street*) Oh, here's th' Covey an' oul' Pether hurryin' along. God Almighty,

sthrange things is happenin' when them two is pullin' together.

The Covey and Peter come in, breathless and excited.

(*To the two men*) Were yous far up th' town? Did yous see any sign o' Fluther or Nora? How is things lookin'? I hear they're blazin' away out o' th' GPO. That th' Tommies is sthretched in heaps around Nelson's Pillar an' th' Parnell Statue, an' that th' pavin' sets in O'Connell Street is nearly covered be pools o' blood.

Peter We seen no sign o' Nora or Fluther anywhere.

Mrs Gogan We should ha' held her back be main force from goin' to look for her husband . . . God knows what's happened to her - I'm always seein' her sthretched on her back in some hospital, moanin' with th' pain of a bullet in her vitals, an' nuns thryin' to get her to take a last look at th' crucifix!

The Covey We can do nothin'. You can't stick your nose into O'Connell Street, an' Tyler's is on fire.

Peter An' we seen th' Lancers -

The Covey (*interrupting*) Throttin' along, heads in th' air; spurs an' sabres jinglin', an' lances quiverin', an' lookin' as if they were assin' themselves, 'Where's these blighters, till we get a prod at them?' when there was a volley from th' Post Office that stretched half o' them, an' sent th' rest gallopin' away wondherin' how far they'd have to go before they'd feel safe.

Peter (*rubbing his hands*) 'Damn it,' says I to meself, 'this looks like business!'

The Covey An' then out comes General Pearse an' his staff, an', standin' in th' middle o' th' street, he reads th' Proclamation.

Mrs Gogan What proclamation?

Peter Declarin' an Irish Republic.

Mrs Gogan Go to God!

Peter The gunboat *Helga's* shellin' Liberty Hall, an' I hear the people livin' on th' quays had to crawl on their bellies to Mass with th' bullets that were flyin' around from Boland's Mills.

Mrs Gogan God bless us, what's goin' to be th' end of it all!

Bessie (*looking out of the top window*) Maybe yous are satisfied now; maybe yous are satisfied now. Go on an' get guns if yous are men – Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun! Yous are all nicely shanghaied now; th' boyo hasn't a sword on his thigh now! Oh, yous are all nicely shanghaied now!

Mrs Gogan (*warningly to Peter and the Covey*) S-s-sh, don't answer her. She's th' right oul' Orange bitch! She's been chantin' 'Rule, Britannia' all th' mornin'.

Peter I hope Fluther hasn't met with any accident, he's such a wild card.

Mrs Gogan God grant it; but last night I dreamt I seen gettin' carried into th' house a sthretcher with a figure lyin' on it, stiff an' still, dhressed in th' habit of Saint Francis. An, then, I heard th' murmurs of a crowd no one could see sayin' th' litany for th' dead; an' then it got so dark that nothin' was seen but th' white face of th' corpse, gleamin' like a white wather-lily floatin' on th' top of a dark lake. Then a tiny whisper thrickled into me ear, sayin', 'Isn't the face very like th' face o' Fluther?' an' then, with a thremblin' flutther, th' dead lips opened, an', although I couldn't hear, I knew they were sayin', 'Poor oul' Fluther, afther havin' handed in his gun at last, his shakin' soul

moored in th' place where th' wicked are at rest an' th' weary cease from throublin'.

Peter (*who has put on a pair of spectacles, and has been looking down the street*) Here they are, be God, here they are; just afther turnin' th' corner – Nora an' Fluther!

The Covey She must be wounded or something – he seems to be carryin' her.

Fluther and Nora enter. Fluther has his arm around her and is half leading, half carrying her in. Her eyes are dim and hollow, her face pale and strained-looking; her hair is tossed, and her clothes are dusty.

Mrs Gogan (*running over to them*) God bless us, is it wounded y'are, Mrs Clitheroe, or what?

Fluther Ah, she's all right, Mrs Gogan; only worn out from thravellin' an' want o' sleep. A night's rest, now, an' she'll be as fit as a fiddle. Bring her in, an' make her lie down.

Mrs Gogan (*to Nora*) Did you hear e'er a whisper o' Mr Clitheroe?

Nora (*wearily*) I could find him nowhere, Mrs Gogan. None o' them would tell me where he was. They told me I shamed my husband an' th' women of Ireland be carryin' on as I was . . . They said th' women must learn to be brave an' cease to be cowardly . . . Me who risked more for love than they would risk for hate . . . (*Raising her voice in hysterical protest*) My Jack will be killed, my Jack will be killed! . . . He is to be butchered as a sacrifice to th' dead!

Bessie (*from upper window*) Yous are all nicely shanghaied now! Sorra mend th' lasses that have been kissin' an' cuddlin' their boys into th' sheddin' of blood! . . . Fillin' their minds with fairy tales that had no

beginnin', but, please God, 'll have a bloody quick endin'!
 . . . Turnin' bitter into sweet, an' sweet into bitter . . .
 Stabbin' in th' back th' men that are dyin' in th' threnches
 for them! It's a bad thing for anyone that thries to jilt th'
 Ten Commandments, for judgements are prepared for
 scorners an' sthripes for th' back o' fools! (*Going away
 from window as she sings*)

Rule, Britannia, Britannia rules th' waves,
 Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!

Fluther (*with a roar up at the window*) Y'ignorant oul'
 throllope, you!

Mrs Gogan (*to Nora*) He'll come home safe enough to
 you, you'll find, Mrs Clitheroe; afther all, there's a power
 o' women that's handed over sons an' husbands to take a
 runnin' risk in th' fight they're wagin'.

Nora I can't help thinkin' every shot fired 'll be fired at
 Jack, an' every shot fired at Jack 'll be fired at me. What
 do I care for th' others? I can think only of me own self
 . . . An' there's no woman gives a son or a husband to be
 killed – if they say it, they're lyin', lyin', against God,
 Nature, an' against themselves! . . . One blasted hussy
 at a barricade told me to go home an' not be thryin' to
 dishearten th' men . . . That I wasn't worthy to bear a
 son to a man that was out fightin' for freedom . . . I
 clawed at her, an' smashed her in th' face till we were
 separated . . . I was pushed down th' street, an' I cursed
 them – cursed the rebel ruffians an' Volunteers that had
 dhragged me ravin' mad into th' sthreeets to seek me
 husband!

Peter You'll have to have patience, Nora. We all have to
 put up with twarthers an' tormentors in this world.

The Covey If they were fightin' for anything worth while,
 I wouldn't mind.

Fluther (*to Nora*) Nothin' derogatory 'll happen to Mr
 Clitheroe. You'll find, now, in th' finish up it'll be vice
 versa.

Nora Oh, I know that wherever he is, he's thinkin' of
 wantin' to be with me. I know he's longin' to be passin' his
 hand through me hair, to be caressin' me neck, to fondle
 me hand an' to feel me kisses clingin' to his mouth . . . An'
 he stands wherever he is because he's brave? (*Vehemently*)
 No, but because he's a coward, a coward, a coward!

Mrs Gogan Oh, they're not cowards anyway.

Nora (*with denunciatory anger*) I tell you they're afraid to
 say they're afraid! . . . Oh, I saw it, I saw it, Mrs Gogan
 . . . At th' barricade in North King Street I saw fear
 glowin' in all their eyes . . . An' in th' middle o' th'
 sthreet was somethin' huddled up in a horrible, tangled
 heap . . . His face was jammed again th' stones, an' his
 arm was twisted round his back . . . An' every twist of
 his body was a cry against th' terrible thing that had
 happened to him . . . An' I saw they were afraid to look
 at it . . . An' some o' them laughed at me, but th' laugh
 was a frightened one . . . An' some o' them shouted at
 me, but th' shout had in it th' shiver o' fear . . . I tell you
 they were afraid, afraid, afraid!

Mrs Gogan (*leading her towards the house*) Come on in,
 dear. If you'd been a little longer together, th' wrench
 asundher wouldn't have been so sharp.

Nora Th' agony I'm in since he left me has thrust away
 every rough thing he done, an' every unkind word he
 spoke; only th' blossoms that grew out of our lives are
 before me now; shakin' their colours before me face, an'
 breathin' their sweet scent on every thought springin' up in
 me mind, till, sometimes, Mrs Gogan, sometimes I think
 I'm goin' mad!

Mrs Gogan You'll be a lot better when you have a little lie down.

Nora (*turning towards Fluther as she is going in*) I don't know what I'd have done, only for Fluther. I'd have been lyin' in th' streets, only for him . . . (*As she goes in*) They have dhruv'n away th' little happiness life had to spare for me. He has gone from me for ever, for ever . . . Oh, Jack, Jack, Jack!

She is led in by Mrs Gogan as Bessie comes out with a shawl around her shoulders. She passes by them with her head in the air. When they have gone in, she gives a mug of milk to Mollser silently.

Fluther Which of yous has th' tossers?

The Covey I have.

Bessie (*as she is passing them to go down the street*) You an' your Leadhers an' their sham-battle soldiers has landed a body in a nice way, havin' to go an' ferret out a bit o' bread God knows where . . . Why aren't yous in th' GPO if yous are men? It's paler an' paler yous are gettin' . . . A lot o' vipers, that's what th' Irish people is! (*She goes out.*)

Fluther Never mind her . . . (*To the Covey*) Make a start an' keep us from th' sin o' idleness. (*To Mollser*) Well, how are you today, Mollser, oul' son? What are you dhrinkin', milk?

Mollser Grand, Fluther, grand, thanks. Yis, milk.

Fluther You couldn't get a better thing down you . . . This turn-up has done one good thing, anyhow; you can't get dhrink anywhere, an' if it lasts a week, I'll be so used to it that I won't think of a pint.

The Covey (*who has taken from his pocket two worn*

coins and a thin strip of wood about four inches long)
What's th' bettin'?

Peter Heads, a juice.

Fluther Harps, a tanner.

The Covey places the coins on the strip of wood, and flips them up into the air. As they jingle on the ground the distant boom of a big gun is heard. They stand for a moment listening.

What th' hell's that?

The Covey It's like th' boom of a big gun!

Fluther Surely to God they're not goin' to use artillery on us?

The Covey (*scornfully*) Not goin'! (*Vehemently*) Wouldn't they use anything on us, man?

Fluther Aw, holy Christ, that's not playin' th' game!

Peter (*plaintively*) What would happen if a shell landed here now?

The Covey (*ironically*) You'd be off to heaven in a fiery chariot.

Peter In spite of all th' warnin's that's ringin' around us, are you goin' to start your pickin' at me again?

Fluther Go on, toss them again, toss them again . . . Harps, a tanner.

Peter Heads, a juice.

The Covey tosses the coins.

Fluther (*as the coins fall*) Let them roll, let them roll. Heads, be God!

Bessie runs in excitedly. She has a new hat on her head, a fox fur round her neck over her shawl, three umbrellas

under her right arm, and a box of biscuits under her left. She speaks rapidly and breathlessly.

Bessie They're breakin' into th' shops, they're breakin' into th' shops! Smashin' th' windows, battherin' in th' doors, an' whippin' away everything! An' th' Volunteers is firin' on them. I seen two men an' a lassie pushin' a piano down th' sthreet, an' th' sweat rollin' off them thryin' to get it up on th' pavement; an' an oul' wan that must ha' been seventy lookin' as if she'd ddrop every minute with th' dint o' heart beatin', thryin' to pull a big double bed out of a broken shop-window! I was goin' to wait till I dhressed meself from th' skin out.

Mollser *(to Bessie, as she is going in)* Help me in, Bessie; I'm feelin' curious.

Bessie leaves the looted things in the house, and, rapidly returning, helps Mollser in.

The Covey Th' selfishness of that one – she waited till she got all she could carry before she'd come to tell anyone!

Fluther *(running over to the door of the house and shouting in to Bessie)* Ay, Bessie, did you hear of e'er a pub gettin' a shake up?

Bessie *(inside)* I didn't hear o' none.

Fluther *(in a burst of enthusiasm)* Well, you're goin' to hear of one soon!

The Covey Come on, man, an' don't be wastin' time.

Peter *(to them as they are about to run off)* Ay, ay, are you goin' to leave me here?

Fluther Are you goin' to leave yourself here?

Peter *(anxiously)* Didn't yous hear her sayin' they were firin' on them?

The Covey and Fluther *(together)* Well?

Peter Supposin' I happened to be potted?

Fluther We'd give you a Christian burial, anyhow.

The Covey *(ironically)* Dhressed up in your regimentals.

Peter *(to the Covey, passionately)* May th' all-lovin' God give you a hot knock one o' these days, me young Covey, tuthorin' Fluther up now to be tiltin' at me, an' crossin' me with his mockeries an' jibin'!

A fashionably dressed, middle-aged, stout woman comes hurriedly in, and makes for the group. She is almost fainting with fear.

Woman For Gawd's sake, will one of you kind men show any safe way for me to get to Wrathmines? . . . I was foolish enough to visit a friend, thinking the howl thing was a joke, and now I cawn't get a car or a tram to take me home – isn't it awful?

Fluther I'm afraid, ma'am, one way is as safe as another.

Woman And what am I gowing to do? Oh, isn't this awful? . . . I'm so different from others . . . The mowment I hear a shot, my legs give way under me – I cawn't stir, I'm paralysed – isn't it awful?

Fluther *(moving away)* It's a derogatory way to be, right enough, ma'am.

Woman *(catching Fluther's coat)* Creeping along the street there, with my head down and my eyes half shut, a bullet whizzed past within an inch of my nowse. . . . I had to lean against the wall for a long time, gasping for breath – I nearly passed away – it was awful! . . . I wonder, would you kind men come some of the way and see me safe?

Fluther I have to go away, ma'am, to thry an' save a few things from th' burnin' buildin's.

The Covey Come on, then, or there won't be anything left to save.

The Covey and Fluther hurry away.

Woman (to Peter) Wasn't it an awful thing for me to leave my friend's house? Wasn't it an idiotic thing to do? . . . I haven't the slightest idea where I am . . . You have a kind face, sir. Could you possibly come and pilot me in the direction of Wrathmines?

Peter (indignantly) D'ye think I'm goin' to risk me life throttin' in front of you? An' maybe get a bullet that would gimme a game leg or something that would leave me a jibe an' a jeer to Fluther an' th' young Covey for th' rest o' me days! (With an indignant toss of his head he walks into the house.)

Woman (going out) I know I'll fall down in a dead faint if I hear another shot go off anyway near me – isn't it awful!

Mrs Gogan comes out of the house pushing a pram before her. As she enters the street, Bessie rushes out, follows Mrs Gogan, and catches hold of the pram, stopping Mrs Gogan's progress.

Bessie Here, where are you goin' with that? How quick you were, me lady, to clap your eyes on th' pram . . . Maybe you don't know that Mrs Sullivan, before she went to spend Easter with her people in Dunboyne, gave me sthricht injunctions to give an accasional look to see if it was still standin' where it was left in th' corner of th' lobby.

Mrs Gogan That remark of yours, Mrs Bessie Burgess, requires a little considheration, seein' that th' pram was left on our lobby, an' not on yours; a foot or two a little to th' left of th' jamb of me own room door; nor is it needful to

mention th' name of th' person that gave a squint to see if it was there th' first thing in th' mornin', an' th' last thing in th' stillness o' th' night; never failin' to realize that her eyes couldn't be goin' wrong, be sthretchin' out her arm an' runnin' her hand over th' pram, to make sure that th' sight was no deception! Moreover, somethin's tellin' me that th' runnin' hurry of an inthrest you're takin' in it now is a sudden ambition to use th' pram for a purpose that a loyal woman of law an' ordher would stagger away from! (She gives the pram a sudden push that pulls Bessie forward.)

Bessie (still holding the pram) There's not as much as one body in th' house that doesn't know that it wasn't Bessie Burgess that was always shakin' her voice complainin' about people leavin' bassinettes in th' way of them that, week in an' week out, had to pay their rent, an' always had to find a regular accommodation for her own furniture in her own room . . . An' as for law an' ordher, puttin' aside th' harp an' shamrock, Bessie Burgess 'll have as much respect as she wants for th' lion an' unicorn!

Peter (appearing at the door) I think I'll go with th' pair of yous an' see th' fun. A fella might as well chance it, anyhow.

Mrs Gogan (taking no notice of Peter, and pushing the pram on another step) Take your rovin' lumps o' hands from pattin' th' bassinette, if you please, ma'am; an', steppin' from th' threshold of good manners, let me tell you, Mrs Burgess, that's it's a fat wondher to Jennie Gogan that a lady-like singer o' hymns like yourself would lower her thoughts from sky-thinkin' to sthretch out her arm in a sly-seekin' way to pinch anything dhriven asthray in th' confusion of th' battle our boys is makin' for th' freedom of their country!

Peter (laughing and rubbing his hands together) Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee! I'll go with th' pair o' yous an' give yous a hand.

Mrs Gogan (*with a rapid turn of her head as she shoves the pram forward*) Get up in th' prambulator an' we'll wheel you down.

Bessie (*to Mrs Gogan*) Poverty an' hardship has sent Bessie Burgess to abide with s'trange company, but she always knew them she had to live with from backside to breakfast time; an' she can tell them, always havin' had a Christian kinch on her conscience, that a passion for thievin' an' pinchin' would find her soul a foreign place to live in, an' that her present intention is quite th' lofty-hearted one of pickin' up anything shaken up an' scattered about in th' loose confusion of a general plunder!

By this time they have disappeared from view. Peter is following, when the boom of a big gun in the distance brings him to a quick halt.

Peter God Almighty, that's th' big gun again! God forbid any harm would happen to them, but sorra mind I'd mind if they met with a dhrop in their mad endeyvours to plunder an' desthroy.

He looks down the street for a moment, then runs to the hall door of the house, which is open, and shuts it with a vicious pull; he then goes to the chair in which Mollser had sat, sits down, takes out his pipe, lights it and begins to smoke with his head carried at a haughty angle. The Covey comes staggering in with a ten-stone sack of flour on his back. On the top of the sack is a ham. He goes over to the door, pushes it with his head, and finds he can't open it; he turns slightly in the direction of Peter.

The Covey (*to Peter*) Who shut th' door? . . . (*He kicks at it.*) Here, come on an' open it, will you? This isn't a mot's hand-bag I've got on me back.

Peter Now, me young Covey, d'ye think I'm goin' to be your lackey?

The Covey (*angrily*) Will you open th' door, y'oul' -

Peter (*shouting*) Don't be assin' me to open any door, don't be assin' me to open any door for you . . . Makin' a shame an' a sin o' th' cause that good men are fightin' for . . . Oh, God forgive th' people that, instead o' burnishin' th' work th' boys is doin' today with quiet honesty an' patience, is revilin' their sacrifices with a riot of lootin' an' roguery!

The Covey Isn't your own eyes leppin' out o' your head with envy that you haven't th' guts to ketch a few o' th' things that God is givin' to His chosen people? . . . Y'oul' hypocrite, if everyone was blind you'd steal a cross off an ass's back!

Peter (*very calmly*) You're not going to make me lose me temper; you can go on with your proddin' as long as you like; goad an' goad an' goad away; hee, hee, hee! I'll not lose me temper.

Somebody opens door and the Covey goes in.

The Covey (*inside, mockingly*) Cuckoo-oo!

Peter (*running to the door and shouting in a blaze of passion as he follows the Covey in*) You lean, long, lanky lath of a lowsey bastard . . . (*Following him in*) Lowsey bastard, lowsey bastard!

Bessie and Mrs Gogan enter, the pride of a great joy illuminating their faces. Bessie is pushing the pram, which is filled with clothes and boots; on the top of the boots and clothes is a fancy table, which Mrs Gogan is holding on with her left hand, while with her right hand she holds a chair on the top of her head. They are heard talking to each other before they enter.

Mrs Gogan (*outside*) I don't remember ever havin' seen such lovely pairs as them, (*they appear*) with th' pointed toes an' th' cuban heels.

Bessie They'll go grand with th' dhresses we're afther liftin', when we've stitched a sthray bit o' silk to lift th' bodices up a little bit higher, so as to shake th' shame out o' them, an' make them fit for women that hasn't lost themselves in th' nakedness o' th' times.

They fussily carry in the chair, the table, and some of the other goods. They return to bring in the rest.

Peter (*at door, sourly to Mrs Gogan*) Ay, you. Mollser looks as if she was goin' to faint, an' your youngster is roarin' in convulsions in her lap.

Mrs Gogan (*snappily*) She's never any other way but faintin'!

She goes to go in with some things in her arms, when a shot from a rifle rings out. She and Bessie make a bolt for the door, which Peter, in a panic, tries to shut before they have got inside.

Ay, ay, ay, you cowardly oul' fool, what are you thryin' to shut th' door on us for?

They retreat tumultuously inside. A pause; then Captain Brennan comes in supporting Lieutenant Langon, whose arm is around Brennan's neck. Langon's face, which is ghastly white, is momentarily convulsed with spasms of agony. He is in a state of collapse, and Brennan is almost carrying him. After a few moments Clitheroe, pale, and in a state of calm nervousness, follows, looking back in the direction from which he came, a rifle, held at the ready, in his hands.

Capt. Brennan (*savagely to Clitheroe*) Why did you fire over their heads? Why didn't you fire to kill?

Clitheroe No, no, Bill; bad as they are they're Irish men an' women.

Capt. Brennan (*savagely*) Irish be damned! Attackin' an' mobbin' th' men that are riskin' their lives for them. If these slum lice gather at our heels again, plug one o' them, or I'll soon shock them with a shot or two meself!

Lieut. Langon (*moaningly*) My God, is there ne'er an ambulance knockin' around anywhere? . . . Th' stomach is ripped out o' me; I feel it - o-o-oh, Christ!

Capt. Brennan Keep th' heart up, Jim; we'll soon get help, now.

Nora rushes wildly out of the house and flings her arms round the neck of Clitheroe with a fierce and joyous insistence. Her hair is down, her face is haggard, but her eyes are agleam with the light of happy relief.

Nora Jack, Jack, Jack; God be thanked . . . be thanked . . . He has been kind and merciful to His poor handmaiden . . . My Jack, my own Jack, that I thought was lost is found, that I thought was dead is alive again! . . . Oh, God be praised for ever, evermore! . . . My poor Jack . . . Kiss me, kiss me, Jack, kiss your own Nora!

Clitheroe (*kissing her, and speaking brokenly*) My Nora; my little, beautiful Nora, I wish to God I'd never left you.

Nora It doesn't matter - not now, not now, Jack. It will make us dearer than ever to each other . . . Kiss me, kiss me again.

Clitheroe Now, for God's sake, Nora, don't make a scene.

Nora I won't, I won't; I promise, I promise, Jack; honest to God. I'll be silent an' brave to bear th' joy of feelin' you safe in my arms again . . . It's hard to force away th' tears of happiness at th' end of an awful agony.

Bessie (*from the upper window*) Th' Minsthrel Boys aren't feelin' very comfortable now. Th' big guns has knocked all th' harps out of their hands. General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade An' th' professor of chicken-butcherin' there, finds he's up against somethin' a little tougher even than his own chickens, an' that's sayin' a lot!

Capt. Brennan (*up to Bessie*) Shut up, y'oul' hag!

Bessie (*down to Brennan*) Choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken!

Lieut. Langon For God's sake, Bill, bring me some place where me wound 'll be looked afther Am I to die before anything is done to save me?

Capt. Brennan (*to Clitheroe*) Come on, Jack. We've got to get help for Jim, here – have you no thought for his pain an' danger?

Bessie Choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken!

Clitheroe (*to Nora*) Loosen me, darling, let me go.

Nora (*clinging to him*) No, no, no, I'll not let you go! Come on, come up to our home, Jack, my sweetheart, my lover, my husband, an' we'll forget th' last few terrible days! . . . I look tired now, but a few hours of happy rest in your arms will bring back th' bloom of freshness again, an' you will be glad, you will be glad, glad . . . glad!

Lieut. Langon Oh, if I'd kep' down only a little longer, I mightn't ha' been hit! Everyone else escapin', an' me gettin' me belly ripped asundher! . . . I couldn't scream, couldn't even scream D'ye think I'm really badly wounded, Bill? Me clothes seem to be all soakin' wet It's blood . . . My God, it must be me own blood!

Capt. Brennan (*to Clitheroe*) Go on, Jack, bid her goodbye with another kiss, an' be done with it! D'ye want Langon to die in me arms while you're dallyin' with your Nora?

Clitheroe (*to Nora*) I must go, I must go, Nora. I'm sorry we met at all It couldn't be helped – all other ways were blocked be th' British Let me go, can't you, Nora? D'ye want me to be unthru to me comrades?

Nora No, I won't let you go I want you to be thru to me, Jack I'm your dearest comrade; I'm your thruet comrade They only want th' comfort of havin' you in th' same danger as themselves Oh, Jack, I can't let you go!

Clitheroe You must, Nora, you must.

Nora All last night at th' barricades I sought you, Jack I didn't think of th' danger – I could only think of you I asked for you everywhere Some o' them laughed I was pushed away, but I shoved back Some o' them even shtruck me, . . . an' I screamed an' screamed your name!

Clitheroe (*in fear her action would give him future shame*) What possessed you to make a show of yourself, like that? . . . What way d'ye think I'll feel when I'm told my wife was bawlin' for me at th' barricades? What are you more than any other woman?

Nora No more, maybe; but you are more to me than any other man, Jack I didn't mean any harm, honestly, Jack I couldn't help it I shouldn't have told you My love for you made me mad with terror.

Clitheroe (*angrily*) They'll say now that I sent you out th' way I'd have an excuse to bring you home Are you goin' to turn all th' risks I'm takin' into a laugh?

Lieut. Langon Let me lie down, let me lie down, Bill; th' pain would be easier, maybe, lyin' down . . . Oh, God, have mercy on me!

Capt. Brennan (*to Langon*) A few steps more, Jim, a few steps more; thry to stick it for a few steps more.

Lieut. Langon Oh, I can't, I can't, I can't!

Capt. Brennan (*to Clitheroe*) Are you comin', man, or are you goin' to make an arrangement for another honeymoon? . . . If you want to act th' renegade, say so, an' we'll be off!

Bessie (*from above*) Runnin' from th' Tommies – choke th' chicken. Runnin' from th' Tommies – choke th' chicken!

Clitheroe (*savagely to Brennan*) Damn you, man, who wants to act th' renegade? (*to Nora*) Here, let go your hold; let go, I say!

Nora (*clinging to Clitheroe, and indicating Brennan*) Look, Jack, look at th' anger in his face; look at th' fear glintin' in his eyes . . . He himself's afraid, afraid, afraid! . . . He wants you to go th' way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin' you an' missin' him! . . . Turn round an' look at him, Jack, look at him, look at him! . . . His very soul is cold . . . shiverin' with th' thought of what may happen to him . . . It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you from recognizin' th' same fear that is in your own heart!

Clitheroe (*struggling to release himself from Nora*) Damn you, woman, will you let me go!

Capt. Brennan (*fiercely, to Clitheroe*) Why are you beggin' her to let you go? Are you afraid of her, or what? Break her hold on you, man, or go up, an' sit on her lap!

Clitheroe tries roughly to break Nora's hold.

Nora (*imploringly*) Oh, Jack . . . Jack . . . Jack!

Lieut. Langon (*agonizingly*) Brennan, a priest; I'm dyin', I think, I'm dyin'!

Clitheroe (*to Nora*) If you won't do it quietly, I'll have to make you! (*To Brennan*) Here, hold this gun, you, for a minute. (*He hands the gun to Brennan.*)

Nora (*pitifully*) Please, Jack . . . You're hurting me, Jack . . . Honestly . . . Oh, you're hurting . . . me! . . . I won't, I won't, I won't! . . . Oh, Jack, I gave you everything you asked of me . . . Don't fling me from you, now!

Clitheroe roughly loosens her grip, and pushes her away from him. Nora sinks to the ground and lies there.

(*Weakly*) Ah, Jack . . . Jack . . . Jack!

Clitheroe (*taking the gun back from Brennan*) Come on, come on.

They go out. Bessie looks at Nora lying on the street, for a few moments, then, leaving the window, she comes out, runs over to Nora, lifts her up in her arms, and carries her swiftly into the house. A short pause, then down the street is heard a wild, drunken yell; it comes nearer, and Fluther enters, frenzied, wild-eyed, mad, roaring drunk. In his arms is an earthen half-gallon jar of whiskey; streaming from one of the pockets of his coat is the arm of a new tunic shirt; on his head is a woman's vivid blue hat with gold lacing, all of which he has looted.

Fluther (*singing in a frenzy*)

Fluther's a jolly good fella! . . . Fluther's a jolly good fella!

Up th' rebels! . . . That nobody can deny!

(He beats on the door.) Get us a mug or a jug, or somethin', some o' yours, one o' yours, will yous, before I lay one o' yours out! . . . *(Looking down the street)* Bang an' fire away for all Fluther cares . . . *(Banging at door)* Come down an' open th' door, some of yous, one o' yours, will yous, before I lay some o' yours out! . . . Th' whole city can topple home to hell, for Fluther!

Inside the house is heard a scream from Nora, followed by a moan.

Fluther *(singing furiously)*

That nobody can deny, that nobody can deny,
For Fluther's a jolly good fella, Fluther's a jolly good
fella,
Fluther's a jolly good fella . . . Up th' rebels! That
nobody can deny!

(His frantic movements cause him to spill some of the whiskey out of the jar.) Blast you, Fluther, don't be spillin' th' precious liquor! *(He kicks at the door.)* Ay, give us a mug or a jug or somethin', one o' yours, some o' yours, will yous, before I lay one o' yours out!

The door suddenly opens, and Bessie, coming out, grips him by the collar.

Bessie *(indignantly)* You bowsey, come in ower o' that . . . I'll thrim your thricks o' dhrunken dancin' for you, an' none of us knowin' how soon we'll bump into a world we were never in before!

Fluther *(as she is pulling him in)* Ay, th' jar, th' jar, th' jar!

A short pause, then again is heard a scream of pain from Nora. The door opens and Mrs Gogan and Bessie are seen standing at it.

Bessie Fluther would go, only he's too dhrunk . . . Oh, God, isn't it a pity he's so dhrunk! We'll have to thry to get a docthor somewhere.

Mrs Gogan I'd be afraid to go . . . Besides, Mollser's terrible bad. I don't think you'll get a docthor to come. It's hardly any use goin'.

Bessie *(determinedly)* I'll risk it . . . Give her a little of Fluther's whiskey . . . It's th' fright that's brought it on her so soon . . . Go on back to her, you.

Mrs Gogan goes in, and Bessie softly closes the door. She is moving forward, when the sound of some rifle shots, and the tok, tok, tok of a distant machine-gun bring her to a sudden halt. She hesitates for a moment, then she tightens her shawl round her, as if it were a shield, then she firmly and swiftly goes out.

(As she goes out) Oh, God, be Thou my help in time o' throuble. An' shelter me safely in th' shadow of Thy wings!

Curtain.

Act Four

The living-room of Bessie Burgess. It is one of two small attic rooms (the other, used as a bedroom, is to the left), the ceiling slopes up towards the back, giving to the apartment a look of compressed confinement. In the centre of the ceiling is a small skylight. There is an unmistakable air of poverty bordering on destitution. The paper on the walls is torn and soiled, particularly near the fire where the cooking is done, and near the washstand where the washing is done. The fireplace is to the left. A small armchair near fire. One small window at back. A pane of this window is starred by the entrance of a bullet. Under the window to the right is an oak coffin standing on two kitchen chairs. Near the coffin is a home-manufactured stool, on which are two lighted candles. Beside the window is a worn-out dresser on which is a small quantity of delft. Tattered remains of cheap lace curtains drape the window. Standing near the window on left is a brass standard-lamp with a fancy shade; hanging on the wall near the same window is a vividly crimson silk dress, both of which have been looted. A door on left leading to the bedroom. Another opposite giving a way to the rest of the house. To the left of this door a common washstand. A tin kettle, very black, and an old saucepan inside the fender. There is no light in the room but that given from the two candles and the fire. The dusk has well fallen, and the glare of the burning buildings in the town can be seen through the window, in the distant sky. The Covey and Fluther have been playing cards, sitting on the floor by the light of the candles on the stool near the coffin. When the curtain rises the Covey is shuffling the cards, Peter is sitting in a stiff,

dignified way beside him, and Fluther is kneeling beside the window, cautiously looking out. It is a few days later.

Fluther (*furtively peeping out of the window*) Give them a good shuffling Th' sky's gettin' reddher an' reddher You'd think it was afire Half o' th' city must be burnin'.

The Covey If I was you, Fluther, I'd keep away from that window It's dangerous, an' besides, if they see you, you'll only bring a nose on th' house.

Peter Yes; an' he knows we had to leave our own place th' way they were riddlin' it with machine-gun fire He'll keep on pimpin' and pimpin' there, till we have to fly out o' this place too.

Fluther (*ironically*) If they make any attack here, we'll send you out in your green an' glory uniform, shakin' your sword over your head, an' they'll fly before you as th' Danes flew before Brian Boru!

The Covey (*placing the cards on the floor, after shuffling them*) Come on, an' cut.

Fluther comes over, sits on floor, and cuts the cards.

(*Having dealt the cards*) Spuds up again.

Nora moans feebly in room on left.

Fluther There, she's at it again. She's been quiet for a long time, all th' same.

The Covey She was quiet before, sure, an' she broke out again worse than ever What was led that time?

Peter Thray o' Hearts, Thray o' Hearts, Thray o' Hearts.

Fluther It's damned hard lines to think of her dead-born kiddie lyin' there in th' arms o' poor little Mollser. Mollser snuffed it sudden too, aafter all.

The Covey Sure she never got any care. How could she get it, an' th' mother out day an' night lookin' for work, an' her consumptive husband leavin' her with a baby to be born before he died!

Voices (*in a lilting chant to the left in a distant street*) Red Cr. . . oss, Red Cr. . . oss! . . . Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance!

The Covey (*to Fluther*) Your deal, Fluther.

Fluther (*shuffling and dealing the cards*) It'll take a lot out o' Nora – if she'll ever be th' same.

The Covey The docthor thinks she'll never be th' same; thinks she'll be a little touched here. (*He touches his forehead.*) She's ramblin' a lot; thinkin' she's out in th' counthry with Jack; or gettin' his dinner ready for him before he comes home; or yellin' for her kiddie. All that, though, might be th' chloroform she got . . . I don't know what we'd have done only for oul' Bessie; up with her for th' past three nights, hand runnin'.

Fluther I always knew there was never anything really derogatory wrong with poor oul' Bessie. (*To Peter, who is taking a trick*) Ay, houl' on, there, don't be so damn quick – that's my thrick.

Peter What's your thrick? It's my thrick, man.

Fluther (*loudly*) How is it your thrick?

Peter (*answering as loudly*) Didn't I lead th' deuce!

Fluther You must be gettin' blind, man; don't you see th' ace?

Bessie (*appearing at door of room, left; in a tense whisper*) D'ye want to waken her again on me, when she's just gone asleep? If she wakes will yous come an' mind

her? If I hear a whisper out o' one o' yous again, I'll . . . gut you!

The Covey (*in a whisper*) S-s-s-h. She can hear anything above a whisper.

Peter (*looking up at the ceiling*) Th' gentle an' merciful God 'll give th' pair o' yous a scawldin' an' a scarifyin' one o' these days!

Fluther takes a bottle of whiskey from his pocket, and takes a drink.

The Covey (*to Fluther*) Why don't you spread that out, man, an' thry to keep a sup for tomorrow?

Fluther Spread it out? Keep a sup for tomorrow? How th' hell does a fella know there'll be any tomorrow? If I'm goin' to be whipped away, let me be whipped away when it's empty, an' not when it's half full! (*To Bessie, who has seated herself in an armchair at the fire*) How is she, now, Bessie?

Bessie I left her sleeping quietly. When I'm listenin' to her babblin', I think she'll never be much better than she is. Her eyes have a hauntin' way of lookin' in instead of lookin' out, as if her mind had been lost alive in madly minglin' memories of th' past . . . (*Sleepily*) Crushin' her thoughts . . . together . . . in a fierce . . . an' fanciful . . . (*she nods her head and starts wakefully*) idea that dead things are livin', an' livin' things are dead . . . (*with a start*) Was that a scream I heard her give? (*Reassured*) Blessed God, I think I hear her screamin' every minute! An' it's only there with me that I'm able to keep awake.

The Covey She'll sleep, maybe, for a long time, now. Ten there.

Fluther Ten here. If she gets a long sleep, she might be all right. Peter's th' lone five.

The Covey Whisht! I think I hear somebody movin' below. Whoever it is, he's comin' up.

A pause. Then the door opens and Captain Brennan comes into the room. He has changed his uniform for a suit of civvies. His eyes droop with the heaviness of exhaustion; his face is pallid and drawn. His clothes are dusty and stained here and there with mud. He leans heavily on the back of a chair as he stands.

Capt. Brennan Mrs Clitheroe; where's Mrs Clitheroe? I was told I'd find her here.

Bessie What d'ye want with Mrs Clitheroe?

Capt. Brennan I've a message, a last message for her from her husband.

Bessie Killed! He's not killed, is he!

Capt. Brennan *(sinking stiffly and painfully on to a chair)* In th' Imperial Hotel; we fought till th' place was in flames. He was shot through th' arm, an' then through th' lung . . . I could do nothin' for him – only watch his breath comin' an' goin' in quick, jerky gasps, an' a tiny sthream o' blood thricklin' out of his mouth, down over his lower lip . . . I said a prayer for th' dyin', an' twined his Rosary beads around his fingers . . . Then I had to leave him to save meself . . . *(He shows some holes in his coat.)* Look at th' way a machine-gun tore at me coat, as I belted out o' th' buildin' an' darted across th' sthreet for shelter . . . An' then, I seen The Plough an' th' Stars fallin' like a shot as th' roof crashed in, an' where I'd left poor Jack was nothin' but a leppin' spout o' flame!

Bessie *(with partly repressed vehemence)* Ay, you left him! You twined his Rosary beads round his fingers, an' then you run like a hare to get out o' danger!

Capt. Brennan I took me chance as well as him . . . He

took it like a man. His last whisper was to 'Tell Nora to be brave; that I'm ready to meet my God, an' that I'm proud to die for Ireland.' An' when our General heard it he said that 'Commandant Clitheroe's end was a gleam of glory.' Mrs Clitheroe's grief will be a joy when she realizes that she has had a hero for a husband.

Bessie If you only seen her, you'd know to th' differ.

Nora appears at door, left. She is clad only in her nightdress; her hair, uncared for some days, is hanging in disorder over her shoulders. Her pale face looks paler still because of a vivid red spot on the tip of each cheek. Her eyes are glimmering with the light of incipient insanity; her hands are nervously fiddling with her nightgown. She halts at the door for a moment, looks vacantly around the room, and then comes slowly in. The rest do not notice her till she speaks.

Nora *(in a quiet and monotonous tone)* No . . . Not there, Jack . . . I can feel comfortable only in our own familiar place beneath th' bramble tree . . . We must be walking for a long time; I feel very, very tired . . . Have we to go farther, or have we passed it by? *(Passing her hand across her eye)* Curious mist on my eyes . . . Why don't you hold my hand, Jack . . . *(Excitedly)* No, no, Jack, it's not. Can't you see it's a goldfinch. Look at th' black-satiny wings with th' gold bars, an' th' splash of crimson on its head . . . *(Wearily)* Something ails me, something ails me . . . Don't kiss me like that; you take my breath away, Jack . . . Why do you frown at me? . . . You're going away, and *(frightened)* I can't follow you. Something's keeping me from moving . . . *(Crying out)* Jack, Jack, Jack!

Bessie *(who has gone over and caught Nora's arm)* Now, Mrs Clitheroe, you're a terrible woman to get up out of bed . . . You'll get cold if you stay here in them clothes.

Nora Cold? I'm feelin' very cold; it's chilly out here in th' counthry . . . (*Looking around frightened*) What place is this? Where am I?

Bessie (*coaxingly*) You're all right, Nora; you're with friends, an' in a safe place. Don't you know your uncle an' your cousin, an poor oul' Fluther?

Peter (*about to go over to Nora*) Nora, darlin', now –

Fluther (*pulling him back*) Now, leave her to Bessie, man. A crowd 'll only make her worse.

Nora (*thoughtfully*) There is something I want to remember, an' I can't. (*With agony*) I can't, I can't, I can't! My head, my head! (*Suddenly breaking from Bessie, and running over to the men, and gripping Fluther by the shoulders*) Where is it? Where's my baby? Tell me where you've put it, where've you hidden it? My baby, my baby; I want my baby! My head, my poor head . . . Oh, I can't tell what is wrong with me. (*Screaming*) Give him to me, give me my husband!

Bessie Blessin' o' God on us, isn't this pitiful!

Nora (*struggling with Bessie*) I won't go away for you; I won't. Not till you give me back my husband. (*Screaming*) Murderers, that's what yous are; murderers, murderers!

Bessie S-s-sh. We'll bring Mr Clitheroe back to you, if you'll only lie down an' stop quiet . . . (*Trying to lead her in*) Come on, now, Nora, an' I'll sing something to you.

Nora I feel as if my life was thryin' to force its way out of my body . . . I can hardly breathe . . . I'm frightened, I'm frightened, I'm frightened! For God's sake, don't leave me, Bessie. Hold my hand, put your arms around me!

Fluther (*to Brennan*) Now you can see th' way she is, man.

Peter An' what way would she be if she heard Jack had gone west?

The Covey (*to Peter*) Shut up, you, man!

Bessie (*to Nora*) We'll have to be brave, an' let patience clip away th' heaviness of th' slow-movin' hours, rememberin' that sorrow may endure for th' night, but joy cometh in th' mornin' . . . Come on in, an' I'll sing to you, an' you'll rest quietly.

Nora (*stopping suddenly on her way to the room*) Jack an' me are goin' out somewhere this evenin'. Where I can't tell. Isn't it curious I can't remember . . . Maura, Maura, Jack, if th' baby's a girl; any name you like, if th' baby's a boy! . . . He's there. (*Screaming*) He's there, an' they won't give him back to me!

Bessie S-ss-s-h, darlin', s-ssh. I won't sing to you, if you're not quiet.

Nora (*nervously holding Bessie*) Hold my hand, hold my hand, an' sing to me, sing to me!

Bessie Come in an' lie down, an' I'll sing to you.

Nora (*vehemently*) Sing to me, sing to me; sing, sing!

Bessie (*singing as she leads Nora into room*)

Lead, kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on.

Th' night is dark an' I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see

Th' distant scene – one step enough for me.

So long that Thou hast blessed me, sure Thou still

Wilt lead me on;

They go in.

(Singing in room)

O'er moor an' fen, o'er crag an' torrent, till
Th' night is gone.
An' in th' morn those angel faces smile
That I have lov'd long since, an' lost awhile!

The Covey *(to Brennan)* Now that you've seen how bad she is, an' that we daren't tell her what has happened till she's better, you'd best be slippin' back to where you come from.

Capt. Brennan There's no chance o' slippin' back now, for th' military are everywhere: a fly couldn't get through. I'd never have got here, only I managed to change me uniform for what I'm wearin' . . . I'll have to take me chance, an' thry to lie low here for a while.

The Covey *(frightened)* There's no place here to lie low. Th' Tommies 'll be hoppin' in here, any minute!

Peter *(aghast)* An' then we'd all be shangaied!

The Covey Be God, there's enough afther happenin' to us!

Fluther *(warningly, as he listens)* Whisht, whisht, th' whole o' yous. I think I heard th' clang of a rifle butt on th' floor of th' hall below. *(All alertness)* Here, come on with th' cards again. I'll deal. *(He shuffles and deals the cards to all.)* Clubs up. *(To Brennan)* Thry to keep your hands from shakin', man. You lead, Peter.

As Peter throws out a card.

Four o' Hearts led.

The door opens and Corporal Stoddart of the Wiltshires enters in full war kit; steel helmet, rifle and bayonet, and trench tool. He looks round the room. A pause and a palpable silence.

(Breaking the silence) Two tens an' a five.

Corporal Stoddart 'Ello. *(Indicating the coffin)* This the stiff?

The Covey Yis.

Corporal Stoddart Who's gowing with it? Ownly one allowed to gow with it, you know.

The Covey I dunno.

Corporal Stoddart You dunnow?

The Covey I dunno.

Bessie *(coming into the room)* She's afther slippin' off to sleep again, thanks be to God. I'm hardly able to keep me own eyes open. *(To the soldier)* Oh, are yous goin' to take away poor little Mollser?

Corporal Stoddart Ay; 'oo's agowing with 'er?

Bessie Oh, th' poor mother, o' course. God help her, it's a terrible blow to her!

Fluther A terrible blow? Sure, she's in her element now, woman, mixin' earth to earth, an' ashes t'ashes an' dust to dust, an' revellin' in plumes an' hearses, last days an' judgements!

Bessie *(falling into chair by the fire)* God bless us! I'm jaded!

Corporal Stoddart Was she plugged?

The Covey Ah, no; died o' consumption.

Corporal Stoddart Ow, is that all? Thought she moight 'ave been plugged.

The Covey Is that all? Isn't it enough? D'ye know, comrade, that more die o' consumption than are killed in th' wars? An' it's all because of th' system we're livin' undher?

Corporal Stoddart Ow, I know. I'm a Sowcialist moiseif, but I 'as to do my dooty.

The Covey (*ironically*) Dooty! Th' only dooty of a Socialist is th' emancipation of th' workers.

Corporal Stoddart Ow, a man's a man, an 'e 'as to foight for 'is country, 'asn't 'e?

Fluther (*aggressively*) You're not fightin' for your counthry here, are you?

Peter (*anxiously to Fluther*) Ay, ay, Fluther, none o' that, none o' that!

The Covey Fight for your counthry! Did y'ever read, comrade, Jenersky's *Thesis on the Origin, Development, an' Consolidation of th' Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat*?

Corporal Stoddart Ow, cheese it, Paddy, cheese it!

Bessie (*sleepily*) How is things in th' town, Tommy?

Corporal Stoddart Ow, I fink it's nearly hover. We've got 'em surrounded, and we're clowsing in on the bloighters. Ow, it was only a little bit of a dawg-foight.

The sharp ping of the sniper's rifle is heard, followed by a squeal of pain.

Voices (*to the left in a chant*) Red Cr . . . oss, Red Cr . . . oss! Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance!

Corporal Stoddart (*excitedly*) Christ, that's another of our men 'it by that blawsted sniper! 'E's knocking abaht 'ere, somewheres. Gawd, when we gets th' bloighter, we'll give 'im the cold steel, we will. We'll jab the belly aht of 'im, we will!

Mrs Gogan comes in tearfully, and a little proud of the importance of being directly connected with death.

Mrs Gogan (*to Fluther*) I'll never forget what you done for me, Fluther, goin' around at th' risk of your life settlin' everything with th' undhertaker an' th' cemetery people. When all me own were afraid to put their noses out, you plunged like a good one through hummin' bullets, an' they knockin' fire out o' th' road, tinklin' through th' frightened windows, an' splashin' themselves to pieces on th' walls! An' you'll find that Mollser, in th' happy place she's gone to, won't forget to whisper, now an' again, th' name o' Fluther.

Corporal Stoddart Git it aht, mother, git it aht.

Bessie (*from the chair*) It's excusin' me you'll be, Mrs Gogan, for not stannin' up, seein' I'm shaky on me feet for want of a little sleep, an' not desirin' to show any disrespect to poor little Mollser.

Fluther Sure, we all know, Bessie, that it's vice versa with you.

Mrs Gogan (*to Bessie*) Indeed, it's meself that has well chronicled, Mrs Burgess, all your gentle hurryin's to me little Mollser, when she was alive, bringin' her somethin' to dhrink, or somethin' t'eat, an' never passin' her without liftin' up her heart with a delicate word o' kindness.

Corporal Stoddart (*impatiently, but kindly*) Git it aht, git it aht, mother.

The Covey, Fluther, Brennan, and Peter carry out the coffin, followed by Mrs Gogan.

(*To Bessie, who is almost asleep*) 'Ow many men is in this 'ere 'ouse?

No answer.

(*Loudly*) 'Ow many men is in this 'ere 'ouse?

Bessie (*waking with a start*) God, I was nearly asleep! . . . How many men? Didn't you see them?

Corporal Stoddart Are they all that are in the 'ouse?

Bessie Oh, there's none higher up, but there may be more lower down. Why?

Corporal Stoddart All men in the district 'as to be rounded up. Somebody's giving 'elp to the snipers, and we 'as to take precautions. If I 'ad my woy, I'd make 'em all join hup, and do their bit! But I suppowse they and you are all Shinnners.

Bessie (*who has been sinking into sleep, waking up to a sleepy vehemence*) Bessie Burgess is no Shinner, an' never had no thruck with anything spotted be th' fingers o' th' Fenians; but always made it her business to harness herself for Church whenever she knew that God Save the King was goin' to be sung at t'end of th' service; whose only son went to th' front in th' first contingent of the Dublin Fusiliers, an' that's on his way home carryin' a shatthered arm that he got fightin' for his King an' counthry!

Her head sinks slowly forward again. Peter comes into the room; his body is stiffened and his face is wearing a comically indignant look. He walks to and fro at the back of the room, evidently repressing a violent desire to speak angrily. He is followed in by Fluther, the Covey, and Brennan, who slinks into an obscure corner of the room, nervous of notice.

Fluther (*after an embarrassing pause*) Th' air in th' sthreet outside's shakin' with the firin' o' rifles an' machine-guns. It must be a hot shop in th' middle o' th' scrap.

Corporal Stoddart We're pumping lead in on 'em from every side, now; they'll soon be shoving up th' white flag.

Peter (*with a shout*) I'm tellin' you either o' yous two

lowsers 'ud make a betther hearse-man than Peter; proddin' an' pokin' at me an' I helpin' to carry out a corpse!

Fluther It wasn't a very derogatory thing for th' Covey to say that you'd make a fancy hearse-man, was it?

Peter (*furiously*) A pair o' redjesthered bowseys pondherin' from mornin' till night on how they'll get a chance to break a gap through th' quiet nature of a man that's always endeavourin' to chase out of him any sthray thought of venom against his fella-man!

The Covey Oh, shut it, shut it, shut it!

Peter As long as I'm a livin' man, responsible for me thoughts, words, an' deeds to th' Man above. I'll feel meself instituted to fight again' th' sliddherin' ways of a pair o' picaroons, whisperin', concurrin', concoctin', an' conspirin' together to rendher me unconscious of th' life I'm thryin' to live!

Corporal Stoddart (*dumbfounded*) What's wrong, Daddy; wot 'ave they done to you?

Peter (*savagely to the Corporal*) You mind your own business! What's it got to do with you, what's wrong with me?

Bessie (*in a sleepy murmur*) Will yous thry to conthrol yourselves into quietness? Yous'll waken her . . . up . . . on . . . me . . . again. (*She sleeps.*)

Fluther Come on, boys, to th' cards again, an' never mind him.

Corporal Stoddart No use of you gowing to start cawds; you'll be gowing out of 'ere, soon as Sergeant comes.

Fluther Goin' out o' here? An' why're we goin' out o' here?

Corporal Stoddart All men in district to be rounded up, and 'eld in till the scrap is hover.

Fluther An' where're we goin' to be held in?

Corporal Stoddart They're puttin 'em in a church.

The Covey A church?

Fluther What sort of a church? Is it a Protestan' Church?

Corporal Stoddart I dunnow; I suppose so.

Fluther (*dismayed*) Be God, it'll be a nice thing to be stuck all night in a Protestan' Church!

Corporal Stoddart Bring the cawds; you moight get a chance of a goime.

Fluther Ah, no, that wouldn't do . . . I wondher? (*After a moment's thought*) Ah, I don't think we'd be doin' anything derogatory be playin' cards in a Protestan' Church.

Corporal Stoddart If I was you I'd bring a little snack with me; you moight be glad of it before the mawning. (*Sings.*)

I do loike a snoice mince poy,
I do loike a snoice mince poy!

The snap of the sniper's rifle rings out again, followed simultaneously by a scream of pain. Corporal Stoddart goes pale, and brings his rifle to the ready, listening.

Voices (*chanting to the right*) Red Cro . . . ss, Red Cro . . . ss! Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance!

Sergeant Tinley comes in rapidly, pale, agitated, and fiercely angry.

Corporal Stoddart (*to Sergeant*) One of hour men 'it, Sergeant?

Sergeant Tinley Private Taylor; got 'it roight through the chest, 'e did; an' 'ole in front of 'im as 'ow you could put your fist through, and 'arf 'is back blown away! Dum-dum bullets they're using. Gang of Hassassins potting at us from behind roofs. That's not playing the goime: why down't they come into the owpen and foight fair!

Fluther (*unable to stand the slight*) Fight fair! A few hundhred scrawls o' chaps with a couple o' guns an' Rosary beads, again' a hundhred thousand thrained men with horse, fut, an' artillery . . . an' he wants us to fight fair! (*To Sergeant*) D'ye want us to come out in our skins an' throw stones!

Sergeant Tinley (*to Corporal*) Are these four all that are 'ere?

Corporal Stoddart Four; that's all, Sergeant.

Sergeant Tinley (*vindictively*) Come on, then; get the blighters aht. (*To the men*) 'Ere, 'op it aht! Aht into the streets with you, and if a snoiper sends another of our men west, you gow with 'im! (*He catches Fluther by the shoulder.*) Gow on, git aht!

Fluther Eh, who are you chuckin', eh?

Sergeant Tinley (*roughly*) Gow on, git aht, you blighter.

Fluther Who are you callin' a blighter to, eh? I'm a Dublin man, born an' bred in th' city, see?

Sergeant Tinley I down't care if you were Broin Buroo; git aht, git aht.

Fluther (*halting as he is going out*) Jasus, you an' your guns! Leave them down, an' I'd beat th' two o' yours without sweatin'!

Peter, Brennan, the Covey, and Fluther, followed by the soldiers, go out. Bessie is sleeping heavily on the chair

by the fire. After a pause, Nora appears at door, left, in her nightdress. Remaining at door for a few moments she looks vaguely around the room. She then comes in quietly, goes over to the fire, pokes it, and puts the kettle on. She thinks for a few moments, pressing her hand to her forehead. She looks questioningly at the fire, and then at the press at back. She goes to the press, opens it, takes out a soiled cloth and spreads it on the table. She then places things for tea on the table.

Nora I imagine th' room looks very odd somehow I was nearly forgetting Jack's tea Ah, I think I'll have everything done before he gets in (*She tilts gently, as she arranges the table.*)

Th' violets were scenting th' woods, Nora,
Displaying their charms to th' bee,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me.

Th' chestnut blooms gleam'd through th' glade, Nora,
A robin sang loud from a tree,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me.

She pauses suddenly, and glances round the room.

(*Doubtfully*) I can't help feelin' this room very strange What is it? What is it? I must think I must thry to remember . . .

Voices (*chanting in a distant street*) Ambu . . . lance,
Ambu . . . lance! Red Cro . . . ss, Red Cro . . . ss!

Nora (*startled and listening for a moment, then resuming the arrangement of the table*)

Trees, birds, an' bees sang a song, Nora,
Of happier transports to be,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,

An' you said you lov'd only me.

A burst of rifle fire is heard in a street near by, followed by the rapid rok, tok, tok of a machine-gun.

(*Staring in front of her and screaming*) Jack, Jack, Jack!
My baby, my baby, my baby!

Bessie (*waking with a start*) You divil, are you afther gettin' out o' bed again!

She rises and runs towards Nora, who rushes to the window, which she frantically opens.

Nora (*at window, screaming*) Jack, Jack, for God's sake, come to me!

Soldiers (*outside, shouting*) Git away, git away from that window, there!

Bessie (*seizing hold of Nora*) Come away, come away, woman, from that window!

Nora (*struggling with Bessie*) Where is it; where have you hidden it? Oh, Jack, Jack, where are you?

Bessie (*imploringly*) Mrs Clitheroe, for God's sake, come away!

Nora (*fiercely*) I won't; he's below. Let . . . me . . . go! You're thryin' to keep me from me husband. I'll follow him. Jack, Jack, come to your Nora!

Bessie Hus-s-sh, Nora, Nora! He'll be here in a minute. I'll bring him to you, if you'll only be quiet – honest to God, I will.

With a great effort Bessie pushes Nora away from the window, the force used causing her to stagger against it herself. Two rifle shots ring out in quick succession. Bessie jerks her body convulsively; stands stiffly for a moment, a look of agonized astonishment on her face,

then she staggers forward, leaning heavily on the table with her hands.

(With an arrested scream of fear and pain) Merciful God, I'm shot, I'm shot, I'm shot! . . . Th' life's pourin' out o' me! *(To Nora)* I've got this through . . . through you . . . through you, you bitch, you! . . . O God, have mercy on me! . . . *(To Nora)* You wouldn't stop quiet, no, you wouldn't, you wouldn't, blast you! Look at what I'm afther gettin', look at what I'm afther gettin' . . . I'm bleedin' to death, an' no one's here to stop th' flowin' blood! *(Calling)* Mrs Gogan, Mrs Gogan! Fluther, Fluther, for God's sake, somebody, a doctor, a doctor!

She staggers frightened towards the door, to seek for aid, but, weakening half-way across the room, she sinks to her knees, and bending forward, supports herself with her hands resting on the floor. Nora is standing rigidly with her back to the wall opposite, her trembling hands held out a little from the sides of her body, her lips quivering, her breast heaving, staring wildly at the figure of Bessie.

Nora (in a breathless whisper) Jack, I'm frightened . . . I'm frightened, Jack . . . Oh, Jack, where are you?

Bessie (moaningly) This is what's afther comin' on me for nursin' you day an' night . . . I was a fool, a fool, a fool! Get me a dhrink o' wather, you jade, will you? There's a fire burnin' in me blood! *(Pleadingly)* Nora, Nora, dear, for God's sake, run out an' get Mrs Gogan, or Fluther, or somebody to bring a doctor, quick, quick, quick!

Nora does not stir.

Blast you, stir yourself, before I'm gone!

Nora Oh, Jack, Jack, where are you?

Bessie (in a whispered moan) Jesus Christ, me sight's goin'! It's all dark, dark! Nora, hold me hand! *(Bessie's body lists over and she sinks into a prostrate position on the floor.)* I'm dyin', I'm dyin' . . . I feel it . . . Oh God, oh God! *(She feebly sings.)*

I do believe, I will believe
That Jesus died for me;
That on th' cross He shed His blood,
From sin to set me free . . .

I do believe . . . I will believe
. . . Jesus died . . . me;
. . . th' cross He shed . . . blood,
From sin . . . free.

She ceases singing, and lies stretched out, still and very rigid. A pause. Then Mrs Gogan runs in hastily.

Mrs Gogan (quivering with fright) Blessed be God, what's afther happenin'? *(To Nora)* What's wrong, child, what's wrong? *(She sees Bessie, runs to her and bends over the body.)* Bessie, Bessie! *(She shakes the body.)* Mrs Burgess, Mrs Burgess! *(She feels Bessie's forehead.)* My God, she's as cold as death. They're afther murdherin' th' poor inoffensive woman!

Sergeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart enter agitatedly, their rifles at the ready.

Sergeant Tinley (excitedly) This is the 'ouse. That's the window!

Nora (pressing back against the wall) Hide it, hide it; cover it up, cover it up!

Sergeant Tinley (going over to the body) 'Ere, what's this? Who's this? *(Looking at Bessie)* Oh Gawd, we've plugged one of the women of the 'ouse.

Corporal Stoddart Whoy the 'ell did she gow to the window? Is she dead?

Sergeant Tinley Oh, dead as bedamned. Well, we couldn't afford to toike any chawnces.

Nora (*screaming*) Hide it, hide it; don't let me see it! Take me away, take me away, Mrs Gogan!

Mrs Gogan runs into room, left, and runs out again with a sheet which she spreads over the body of Bessie.

Mrs Gogan (*as she spreads the sheet*) Oh, God help her, th' poor woman, she's stiffenin' out as hard as she can! Her face has written on it th' shock o' sudden agony, an' her hands is whitenin' into th' smooth shininess of wax.

Nora (*whimperingly*) Take me away, take me away; don't leave me here to be lookin' an' lookin' at it!

Mrs Gogan (*going over to Nora and putting her arm around her*) Come on with me, dear, an' you can doss in poor Mollser's bed, till we gather some neighbours to come an' give th' last friendly touches to Bessie in th' lonely layin' of her out.

Mrs Gogan and Nora go out slowly.

Corporal Stoddart (*who has been looking around, to Sergeant Tinley*) Tea here, Sergeant. Wot abaht a cup of scald?

Sergeant Tinley Pour it aht, Stoddart, pour it aht. I could scoff hanything just now.

Corporal Stoddart pours out two cups of tea, and the two soldiers begin to drink. In the distance is heard a bitter burst of rifle and machine-gun fire, interspersed with the boom, boom of artillery. The glare in the sky seen through the window flares into a fuller and a deeper red.

There gows the general attack on the Powst Office.

Voices (*in a distant street*) Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance! Red Cro. . . ss, Red Cro . . . ss!

Voices of Soldiers (*at a barricade outside the house; singing*)

They were summoned from the 'illside,
They were called in from the glen,
And the country found 'em ready
At the stirring call for men.
Let not tears add to their 'ardship,
As the soldiers pass along,
And although our 'eart is breaking,
Make it sing this cheery song.

Sergeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart (*joining in the chorus, as they sip the tea*)

Keep the 'owme fires burning,
While your 'earts are yearning;
Though your lads are far away
They dream of 'owme;
There's a silver loining
Through the dark cloud shoining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out,
Till the boys come 'owme!

Curtain.