

# American Wake

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## PROLOGUE

### *A. Gurteen*

*(Matt, Nora, Eileen and Tadgh – who are about to emigrate to America – speak to the audience. Tadgh is standing over a bike lying on the ground. It has a flat tire.)*

#### **TADGH**

Eastern Galway. Away from Connemara and the coast. *(Northwest)* That way is Athenry, the nearest town of any size. *(Northeast)* That way is Ballinasloe, bigger, it sits on the road to Dublin. Farther east is Athlone, with a crossroads north and south. Here, no town. A village: Gurteen. One pub, one store, one church, one-room school, one graveyard – where I hope I will not be buried.

#### **NORA**

Next to the graveyard is a ruined church, part of an abbey in the old time, bits of wall here and there, a patch of stone floor. Small, really.

#### **EILEEN**

More stories about the place than anything else. “Once upon a time” the king of these parts made a murderous threat to the abbot here: “Do as I say or you’ll have a dead body in your graveyard every Monday.” So nobody is buried in Gurteen on a Monday –

#### **MATT**

But kids playing in the ruins keep an eye out every Monday for something dead, a bird, a mouse, anything that will prove the curse. If they find it, they place the carcass on the flat stone bed covering St. Kerrill –

#### **NORA**

That will give the creature good rest. Everyone buried in Gurteen is brought for a calming moment to St. Kerrill's grave and laid on it. For eternal rest.

#### **EILEEN**

Kerrill lived at the abbey, or so we think. And there’s St. Kerrill's well out in the bog. Every family draws a bit of water from it to keep in the house, like holy water.

#### **MATT**

*(As one of the old folk might say it)* Keeps you safe from t’under and lightnin’. No one in Gurteen has ever been struck by lightning, thanks to Kerrill.

**TADGH**

K-E-double R-I-double L, my middle name, I was born here. *(He looks down at the bike.)* I don't want to die here. *(Spins the flat wheel)* I am dying here. Eleven of us under the thatch, two rooms and a loft, I'm the second son. Chores that blacken and break your nails, make your fingers thick and your back bent, and for what? It's poor land, really. Rock. Bog. You could graze cattle, but who's got cattle? Who's got anything here? *(Again he looks down at the bike.)* Last winter the postboy's job opened up. *(This sounds like a great opportunity.)* Five pounds a year! And they give you a bike, see – but you have to keep it in tires out of your own pocket. The bastards. Up and down these miserable ditches they call roads – Hello Timmy-Post, have we got mail? – and now this flat puts me over five pounds. Too far gone to fix. So I've been peddling all year for nothing. *Nothing.* That's killing. *(He stands the bike up, roughly.)* They won't be laying me on Kerrill's grave. I'll depart this life restless. And “'t'under and lightnin' “? I wouldn't mind some noise and bright lights – America, and make something of myself. *(A restless tight circle with the bike)* I'm 17.

**NORA**

It's 1927.

**MATT**

A Monday.

**EILEEN**

Somewhere in the graveyard a fresh carcass.

**TADGH**

I'm going to America or I'm dead.

***B. The Ticket***

*(It is some weeks before the American wake. Thomas, Tadgh's older brother, is reading a newspaper article in the loft. He quietly whistles an American tune, such as “Yankee Doodle Dandy” or “The Sidewalks of New York.” At the outset, Tadgh is in the foreground, not looking at Thomas, as if the conversation were a memory. Later the two interact in the same space, as if the scene were happening in the present. By the end of the scene, Tadgh has returned to the foreground.)*

**THOMAS**

Did the Cartys kick you out? *(No answer)* Don't tell me you're sleeping with the McDermotts tonight? Crowded under the same roof with your own brothers and sisters?

**TADGH**

It's just as crowded at the Cartys.

**THOMAS**

Why live over *there*, then? When was the last time you spent the night here?

*(No answer)*

**TADGH**

What're you reading?

**THOMAS**

About New York City. People from all over creation piled up on each other. Living on the third floor, working on the fifth floor, higher maybe, ten floors, *fifteen*. Crowded. People in a hurry, making money and spending it, going to music shows, picture shows, blocks full of them –

**TADGH**

Broadway.

**THOMAS**

"The Great White Way." Nightclubs.

**TADGH**

And jobs.

*(Thomas looks up and nods. He seems scared. Tadgh looks at Thomas for the first time.)*

Will you miss the farm, Thomas?

**THOMAS**

I dunno. It's hard to imagine.

**TADGH**

*(What's to imagine?)* You'll be working in one of Uncle John's stores, stocking shelves, bagging groceries, deliveries, adding up bills. Can't be that different from a store in Athenry, except bigger – more stuff, more people, in a bigger hurry.

**THOMAS**

What's the rush?

**TADGH**

They're going somewhere. They're not just hanging around waiting to keel over. If you go to America, you have to make your own way.

**THOMAS**

"Sure and the streets are paved with gold."

**TADGH**

*(More insistently)* Will you miss the farm?

**THOMAS**

You're welcome to it.

**TADGH**

That's a laugh.

**THOMAS**

It's the luck of the draw, Tadgh. They ask the first son first. What'll it be, the farm or America? You get the farm.

**TADGH**

Because you pick America.

**THOMAS**

Be grateful you're not number 3 or 5 or 9 and looking at twenty years of penny-saving to buy a plot when you're forty. You'll have your own land. I'd be happy in your place.

**TADGH**

Then why don't you take the farm?

**THOMAS**

*(Resisting the temptation)* And wouldn't it be a backward thing to turn down a ticket to America. And a job when I get there.

**TADGH**

Do you want to go?

**THOMAS**

*(He is not at all certain.)* I do, yeah.

**TADGH**

*(Tadgh needs to know if Da favors Thomas.)* Did Da tell you to go?

**THOMAS**

Did.

**TADGH**

The ticket came.

**THOMAS**

From Uncle John? When?

**TADGH**

Two days ago. Postmarked Garden City, Long Island, New York.

**THOMAS**

And just like you, Timmy-Post, to be getting here late with it. Where is it then?

**TADGH**

I'm taking it, Thomas.

*(Thomas is stunned. Tadgh returns to the foreground as the light on Thomas slowly fades.)*

**THOMAS**

It's my ticket.

**TADGH**

There's no name on it. You'll be happier on the farm. *(By way of explaining why he has taken the ticket)* If you go to America, you have to make your own way.

*(Fierce music, such as Planxty's "The Queen of the Rushes / Paddy Fahey's Jig." The four emigrants dance in a line across the stage. By the end of this dance the American wake is on stage: banter, high jinks, games, drink, music – all manner of celebration. At one point we see Tadgh avoid his mother.)*

# ACT ONE

## 1. I hate a wake

*(Matt is the foreground at the outset, preoccupied. He enters the scene gradually. Perhaps some of the young men finish a nonverbal game during the first part of this scene, then exit.)*

### MICK PAT

I hate a wake. I do hate a wake. It's been no time at all since Packie died. Here we sit another long night. Waiting our turn, wondering where we are in line.

### MATT

It's not really a wake, is it? *(A burst of laughter from elsewhere in the room)*

### MICK PAT

Anybody dying. Reminds us. Bíonn an bás ar aghaidh an tseandúine agus ar chúl an duine óig.

*(It sounds ominous. Matt looks at him. Mick Pat says it again in English.)*

Death stares the old in the face and lurks behind the backs of the young.

### MATT

*(A bit spooked)* I'm just going to America.

### MICK PAT

A shock every time. You forget about death when you get too busy living. Then Packie is gone of a sudden, and now tonight –

### MATT

There's nobody dead, Mick Pat.

### MICK PAT

It's not just the one getting buried that we cry for. It's everybody that's dead – and all the rest of us dying. One big sea of grief, and death is the river draining into it.

### MATT

I'm not dying! *(More laughter)*

**MICK PAT**

Have they done away with it in America?

**MATT**

I'm young.

**MICK PAT**

Young enough to be waked twice. Tonight's your first and the last will be who knows when. Sure and this is the harder night, Matt, you'll be resting easier at the next one.

**MATT**

It's a spree! A send-off for the four of us that're going. A bit of the bottle drink, dancing –

**MICK PAT**

Wouldn't we dance at any man's wake?

**MATT**

The lads all fooling around –

**MICK PAT**

The games, that's the way of it.

**MATT**

It's just to say good-bye, Mick Pat, an American wake, it's not serious!

**MICK PAT**

Are you planning to come back then, Matt?

**MATT**

To live?

**MICK PAT**

To die.

**MATT**

*(He senses all over again how final his leaving will be.)* No.

**MICK PAT**

Then it's a wake. Good-bye for good, it's a wake. *(Mick Pat takes a long drink.)*

## 2. Hungry grass

*(Outside. Nora is the foreground, deep in a welter of conflicting thoughts. Donal approaches. He is by nature a buoyant soul, and he is in denial of his grief.)*

**DONAL**

Where were you this morning, Nora, after breakfast? No one could find you.

**NORA**

I went walking.

**DONAL**

To have a last look?

**NORA**

And to think. My head gets spinning about America, Da, the excitement: I'm going! *(Her tone changes.)* I woke up this morning from a dream: I could see myself leaving Ireland, I was on the boat – like it was really happening. Not a happy dream, Da.

**DONAL**

The time has come, that's always a surprise. Did tramping about help your spirits any?

**NORA**

*(Shaking her head)* Sleepwalking around the place.

**DONAL**

America will wake you up.

**NORA**

I was lying in bed and I couldn't for the life of me think why I'm going.

**DONAL**

Because in America you're going to have a good full life.

**NORA**

I feel empty worrying about myself. What's best for Nora Maloney – and who might *that* be, off on her own, as if she had no family any more. And what will get her up in the morning? I lay in bed thinking about you and Aunt Bea, what will happen to Matt when he gets to Philadelphia, Mick Pat will be all by himself –

**DONAL**

Life here will go on as it has, only we'll be happier knowing there's a future for you and Matt beyond.

**NORA**

I was in a field this morning the other side of Carty's. A piece of McDermott land that sinks down into a gully, so you can't see a house or a wall. Just the grass. Like the land was deserted. Like nobody lived here any more.

**DONAL**

That's poor land now up that way.

**NORA**

All of a sudden, Da, I felt this hunger like I was starving, like I hadn't eaten for days. I'd just had breakfast and there was bread in my pocket but no thought to eat it. Only this hunger, and me standing there in the grass like I was taking root.

**DONAL**

That was hungry grass then.

**NORA**

Hungry grass?

**DONAL**

Your grandparents would tell stories. There was only the hunger that time – everybody; if you weren't dead you were hungry. Livestock dead in the fields. Not an egg because the hens had been eaten.

**NORA**

Even the grass?

**DONAL**

Hungry grass. Fed by hunger. It gets passed down.

**NORA**

I could feel it in me today, Da.

**DONAL**

Sure and that hunger is on every Irishman ever went to America.

**NORA**

And when I get there will it go away?

### **3. The two at once**

*(At the top of the scene, Matt is engaged in a game which also gives focus to Nora.)*

**BRID**

*(Measuring Donal's loss against her own)* Losing the two at once. Matt and Nora on the same boat. Sure and your brother will be taking it hard.

**BEA**

He will. But his heart is set on it.

**BRID**

*(To herself)* And no other children. *(To Bea, who is also losing Matt and Nora: a condolence)* No heir for the farm.

**BEA**

Matt now, he won't say it, but a good part of him wants to stay, I think. He's no farmer, God knows – he should be working with his head, a bright boy like that. Very bright he is. Please God, he'll get schooling in America.

**BRID**

The brother and sister leaving together. I heard that another time, in Knocknagantee it was. They had the American wake for them, and then it was morning, time to change into their traveling clothes. Out came the girl in her Sunday best, and she was in tears. No sign of the brother. Finally he appears, and isn't he dressed for nothing but work, and a reaping hook over his shoulder. “Are you going like that?” says his sister. “By God, says he, I'm on dry land and I'll stay on it.” He went out to bring in the corn and off went his sister to America.

**BEA**

Sure and it's the girls that are more set on leaving. Even Nora, who never from the day she could think had a thought that was only for herself. Well, she has no mother to hold her here. And my brother telling her to go.

**BRID**

You raised her from a baby, Bea, and Matt like your own son, but a child who wants to go will find the reason for leaving home. Musha, giorraíonn beirt bóthar. *(She repeats the old saying in English, as if to draw more comfort from it.)* Two shorten the road. If Matt must leave, then he might as well go with Nora, isn't that it? The two at once.

**BEA**

And only one broken heart for my brother. *(She listens to her brother sing.)*

**DONAL**

*(He sings a verse of "The Galway Ghost.")*

*I sailed away to Amerikay,  
To the sidewalks of New York.  
So far away from Galway Bay,  
From Dublin and from Cork.  
I'm a Yankee now, and that is how  
I'll stay till my life's end.*

**4. Domestic Work**

*(In the loft. Eileen is in the foreground, preoccupied with her own misgivings about leaving. She enters the conversation in stages. Nora is inspecting and refolding an assortment of hankies, gifts that she is packing for America.)*

**NORA**

Domestic work, that's the best. In America it pays better than the mills or the shops. I get a roof over my head and my meals in the bargain, and they give me a uniform so I won't be wasting money on clothes. What I make will go into my pocket free and clear.

**MOIRA**

And you'll be doing what exactly?

**NORA**

Cooking most of the day. Down in the kitchens. Or else I'll be in the laundry. Ironing. Working the washing machine.

**MOIRA**

And what would a washing machine be like?

**NORA**

I'll be finding out soon enough.

**EILEEN**

*(Without looking at them)* Can I send you my laundry from Chicago?

**MOIRA**

It won't bother you? To be a servant?

**NORA**

I'm sailing off with a handful of coins in my pocket and a couple of dresses in a sack. It's no time to be proud about washing people's drawers. *(A more positive tone)* If they like me, I might be sent upstairs.

**MOIRA**

They won't be Irish.

**EILEEN**

There *are* wealthy Irish, Moira, even an Irishman can make money in America.

**NORA**

But I wouldn't work for one.

**MOIRA**

And why ever not? You'd feel less strange, wouldn't you, among your own kind?

**NORA**

What I'm willing to do for strangers I would never do here. Yes ma'am, no ma'am, and please may I clean up your mess. Keep my mouth shut and my moods to myself, no gawking about at guests. I'll only do domestic work a far way from home.

**MOIRA**

How big is the place?

**NORA**

*(Nora fades from dry fact to fantasy. What she imagines is exciting and intimidating and lonely.)* 259 rooms. Bedrooms and bathrooms and dressing rooms. A room for playing music and one for reading books. Rooms for games, for guns, for smoking. Enormous rooms, sofas everywhere, and they move about, the rustle of finery, ladies like paintings that walk. A sunlit room for breakfast, and a great dark hall for dinner with a table that would not fit in this cottage and 64 chairs.

*(Eileen and Moira try to place themselves in this immense world.)*

**EILEEN**

And where will you live?

**NORA**

In the basement.

**MOIRA**

How many with you?

**NORA**

My own room. My own bed. *(They are all stunned. To have one's own bed!)* There's a little window with a big view: my own view of a grand estate, not just wild country but a park, where every tree and stone has been thought about, nothing by accident.

**MOIRA**

I can't imagine it.

**NORA**

It's hard to picture anything enormous here. Three rooms. Living on top of each other, nowhere that's mine. In America I'll have a room to go into at night and shut the door, my own door – *(Nora is upset.)*

**MOIRA**

You could come back some day.

**EILEEN**

To what, Moira? Should she come crawling back with her hard-earned money and marry – what, an old man with a potato patch and a bit of bog? She's leaving all that behind.

**MOIRA**

And every lad with gumption will be on the boat with her, is that it? Can't a man have ambition without emigrating?

**EILEEN**

What will he do here? If he's not the oldest, it's helping out on the farm, taking the odd job for a boy's wages, he'll be gray at the temples and still living at home. Even the heir – my brother will one day get the farm, but what girl will marry the life my mother had?

**MOIRA**

And if every girl in the parish goes to America, what will happen to the men?

**EILEEN**

What would happen to them if we stayed? Isn't it the God's truth that they need us to go? It's emigration that's been keeping the country alive. I suppose it would buy Ireland a dozen times over, all the money that's come from America. Exile the children and wait for a piece of their paychecks in the mail. We're the only cash crop, but they have to plant us abroad.

*(A burst of lively music. A flash of dancing. Matt encounters Moira, but they do not speak. She moves away from him. It is apparent that there is some tension between them. Liam and Thomas meet at the wall to conspire. Paudy is hanging around them.)*

## **5. For the crack**

**LIAM**

So what will it be for the crack tonight?

**THOMAS**

They've an oak tree out back. A fistful of acorns in the hearth – that'll start the proceedings off with a bang.

**PAUDY**

What's cooking in the pot?

**THOMAS**

A bit of beef my mother brought, she's fixing up a stew.

**LIAM**

We could filch the meat. Sneak an old boot in the pot.

**THOMAS**

Some tasty socks.

**PAUDY**

Underwear! Some of the girls' underwear! Ribbons and lace and the salty crunch of their sweat from dancing.

*(Thomas and Liam glance sheepishly at each other. Paudy's obsession with underwear is weird and embarrassing.)*

Do you want me to ask around for the loan of some bloomers?

**LIAM**

You'll be getting in trouble again, Paudy. Keep notions like that to yourself. *(To Thomas)* Mick Pat will be dozing off before long. Always some fun in that.

**THOMAS**

We should go easy on him tonight, I think.

**LIAM**

After the wake for Packie Keane, you mean? *(Nodding)* It was a terrible thing we did when we sewed Mick Pat's coat tails to the shroud.

*(They burst out laughing.)*

**THOMAS**

Has the tobacco been passed around yet? We could pepper it.

**LIAM**

Oh, the sneezing when the smokers lit up at Packie's wake was something fierce!

**THOMAS**

The force of it well-nigh blew all the couples off the thatch.

**PAUDY**

What were they doing up on the thatch?

**LIAM**

Who?

**PAUDY**

Those couples. At Packie's wake.

**LIAM**

*(What else would they be doing?)* They were courting.

**PAUDY**

Were they doing it up there?

*(The young men of Gurteen never discuss sex. Liam and Thomas are ill at ease.)*

**LIAM**

Doing what?

**PAUDY**

It!

**LIAM**

I've no idea at all what you're talking about.

**PAUDY**

What were they doing then up on the thatch?

**THOMAS**

*(Trying to shut Paudy up)* Keep an eye out tonight, Paudy, and you'll see courting in every corner.

**PAUDY**

*(Paudy is becoming feverish with the question.)* Is it the priest? Are they in corners and up on the thatch because of the priest?

**LIAM**

The priest knows better than to show up at a wake till he's wanted for the blessing in the morning.

**PAUDY**

*Then why are they hiding?*

**LIAM**

They're not hiding, for God's sake. Where else can they go? They're not going to spoon out in the middle of the room for everyone to watch.

**PAUDY**

Why not?

**THOMAS**

Because it's not decent.

**PAUDY**

If it's not decent, why are they doing it?

**THOMAS**

That's how you drive yourself crazy, Paudy. Let it go.

**PAUDY**

I can't let it go. I can feel it sticking to me like me skin. Only I'm supposed to keep it to meself. *(A discovery)* It's like underwear.

## 6. Misunderstanding

*(Up on the thatch. They have been arguing. An uncomfortable silence.)*

**MATT**

I just thought you would come after me. Save every penny and first thing, send you the ticket.

**MOIRA**

You never asked.

**MATT**

I thought we had an understanding.

**MOIRA**

Not about going to America. Why have I been away studying this long year? So I could teach school.

**MATT**

You could teach on the other side.

**MOIRA**

I don't know a thing about America.

**MATT**

They speak English, Moira. One and one make two the same as here.

**MOIRA**

Do they now? And does the one ask the other one what she thinks before he agrees to sail off? That's what I'd teach a child over here.

**MATT**

I want you to come after me.

*(No answer. He starts to leave. Moira is no longer on the attack.)*

**MOIRA**

Does that mean you're not coming back?

*(The moment is unresolved. Eileen and Nora take focus.)*

## **7. Gifts**

**EILEEN**

I've been given so many stockings this week, I might open a hosiery shop when I get over there.

**NORA**

*(She has one of her hankies.)* Lucky you. It's been hankies with me. My nose could be running for the next ten years, and I'd never get through the pile of them.

**EILEEN**

Did you get anything, you know, "personal"?

*(They play the old biddies who have been giving them advice and little presents.)*

**NORA**

"Sure in America you'll be needing some decent underwear!"

**EILEEN**

"A lovely little something to cover you from head to toe."

**NORA**

"With a little bit of lace like a christening gown."

**EILEEN**

If the old biddies are as small-minded over there, Nora, I'm going straight into girlie dancing at the burlesque.

**PAUDY**

*(Paudy, invisible up to now, has been spying on them.)* Why don't you give us a little preview tonight?

**NORA**

Mary, mother of God! Are you determined to give every girl in the parish the creeps?

*(Eileen's response to this scare is uncharacteristic of her and a measure of how edgy she is tonight. Her offer is in fact inconceivable to any young person in Gurteen.)*

**EILEEN**

If I show you my new underwear, will you promise to behave yourself tonight?

**PAUDY**

*(Taken by surprise, and off balance)* Oh, I've seen a girl's underwear –

**EILEEN**

Not on me you haven't.

**PAUDY**

*(Incredulous)* Don't be pulling my leg.

**EILEEN**

I'm not joking. I'll go out in the shed and put it on, and when I'm ready you can come in and have a look.

**PAUDY**

Do you mean it? In your underwear?

**EILEEN**

With the lace. And nothing under it.

**NORA**

*(Really shocked)* Eileen!

**EILEEN**

I'm off to America in the morning. I'm not packing my reputation, so I might as well leave it with Paudy.

**PAUDY**

You can't. You can't be showing me your new underwear.

**EILEEN**

Paudy, once in your life a girl is offering you something that no boy in this parish will ever see. A good long lingering look at me.

**PAUDY**

Your underwear –

**EILEEN**

In my underwear.

**PAUDY**

Your underwear is cooking in the stewpot on the stove.

**NORA**

Oh Paudy, no, you didn't!

**PAUDY**

For the crack.

**EILEEN**

Well the joke's on you, Paudy Hayes, and no more funny than usual.

**PAUDY**

I could wash it. I could wring it out.

**EILEEN**

Paudy, I'm giving it to you. You can do with it what you want.

**PAUDY**

Would you mind putting it on if it was a little wet?

*(Music)*

**NORA**

Don't be pushing your luck, Paudy.

## **8. Underground**

*(Brisk communal banter. Imagining America is an intense, energetic, mysterious sport.)*

**MATT**

I'm sick of the muck this time of year.

**THOMAS**

Sure if there's earth and rain in America, they've got mud there too.

**MATT**

The streets are cobblestone.

**TADGH**

More concrete now than cobblestone. In New York anyway. *(To Thomas)* You're thinking like a farmer.

**GERRY**

And where does the rain go then?

**MATT**

Down drains, Gerry. Underground.

**TADGH**

Pipes right out to the river. "Sewers."

**MATT**

It's carried away underground.

*(They try to imagine this.)*

**MICK PAT**

*(An inquiry)* "Concrete" now...

**MATT**

They pour it out, Mick Pat, and it hardens.

**LIAM**

Like a mortar –

**MATT**

Harder than that –

**LIAM**

– and they smooth it out.

**MATT**

Streets and sidewalks, right up to the buildings.

**THOMAS**

No bare ground?

**TADGH**

Central Park. Bigger than this farm.

**MATT**

There are parks in Philadelphia too.

**TADGH**

Empty lots.

*(They imagine all this.)*

**MICK PAT**

Isn't that hard on the feet then?

**LIAM**

You're not walking everywhere.

**TADGH**

Streetcars. Right up to your door.

**MATT**

And subways.

**GERRY**

*(He's heard about the subways, but he looks to Matt for confirmation.)* Underground.

**MATT**

In tunnels.

**PAUDY**

With the sewers?

**LIAM**

They've got it organized.

**MATT**

Different levels.

**TADGH**

*(Gesturing vaguely about levels)* Gas pipes, water pipes, the electric.

**LIAM**

All underground.

**GERRY**

And it's the government puts all that down there, then?

**MATT**

Public Works.

**TADGH**

And it's Irishmen giving out the jobs.

**THOMAS**

And would you be willing to work underground?

**MATT**

It's good pay.

**PAUDY**

Like a mole.

**TADGH**

Plenty of Irishmen have started down there and worked their way up. Maybe picking up trash – plenty of work for the city.

**MICK PAT**

"Trash" now...

**TADGH**

What you throw out. Um... stuff you don't want.

**MICK PAT**

What would that be now?

**MATT**

Food.

**THOMAS**

No pigs.

**MATT**

Right.

**THOMAS**

No garden.

**MATT**

Right.

**GERRY**

So you throw it out –?

**PAUDY**

Where?

**TADGH**

Anything you don't want: wrapping, a bottle, old clothes –

**MICK PAT**

Can they find no use for such things in America?

**LIAM**

You don't need it. You can get it new.

**GERRY**

Where do they put it, the trash?

**MATT**

They dump it, Gerry, and cover it up.

**PAUDY**

Underground.

**THOMAS**

Aren't the Irish down there working!

**PAUDY**

Up to their knees in slop, nothing new there.

**TADGH**

*(Getting impatient)* They have places they put it. Big trucks, they load them up, they haul it someplace outside the city and they dump it.

**LIAM**

It's all organized. It's not like here. They're not sitting around in the country flicking ashes on dirt floors. The floors are... *(He can't think of the word.)*

**MATT**

Wood.

**LIAM**

Covered. Designs. Flowers and circles and squares, all drawn out.

**GERRY**

Rugs.

**MICK PAT**

What would a Yank be doing then with his ashes?

**MATT**

You flick your ashes in a little dish.

**TADGH**

More like a bowl, I think.

**MATT**

Which is sitting on a stand next to your chair.

**LIAM**

It's all organized.

*(A brief pause in which one or another of them who is smoking becomes momentarily self-conscious about disposing of his ashes.)*

**MICK PAT**

And the pub?

**PAUDY**

Underground, so you can piss right into the sewers. It's all organized.

**MICK PAT**

In a city like that, the number of people needing a pint –

**MATT**

There's two or three of them every block.

**TADGH**

Open till four in the morning.

**MATT**

And they're open again at six.

**GERRY**

*(Quiet)* Jesus.

**LIAM**

Is anybody sober?

**MICK PAT**

Isn't it a grand country!j

**TADGH**

They've got jobs over there. They're not staring into a pint all day.

**THOMAS**

That many pubs, I doubt they're sitting empty.

**TADGH**

*(Tadgh can't take it any more.)* They're not “pubs.” “Bars.” “Saloons.” *(He goes outside.)*

**MICK PAT**

I wouldn't mind drinking till four in the morning, but getting up again at six...

*(The conversation dissolves, and individuals head off in different directions.)*

**MATT**

I won't miss the rain. I've been damp all my life.

**GERRY**

Have they built a roof over Philadelphia, Matt?

**MATT**

You don't have to be walking out in it, soaked by the time you get where you're going.

**LIAM**

You take a streetcar.

**MATT**

Or you're working inside.

**PAUDY**

Or you're underground.

**MICK PAT**

*(Mick Pat talks to himself.)* Underground: potatoes, roots, burrowers and the dead.

*(Mick Pat's next speaking scene is "Mirror" (#19). He may exit here for a while.)*

## **9. In the shelter of each other**

*(Away from the wake. Moira has been crying. At the outset she is watching Matt, who is off by himself.)*

**MOIRA**

Do you remember, Gerry, the wake for Máirtín Keane that died in America?

**GERRY**

Do. Packie's son. Killed on the railroad. Buried in New Mexico. There was discussion, I remember, was that in the States. Santa Fe, was it?

**MOIRA**

His father set up a bed for his wake, and around it the candles, the same as he was here.

**GERRY**

And old Packie, God rest his soul, Packie was saying they must do something for his son at the graveyard, but there was nothing to bury.

**MOIRA**

The whole parish turned out. The priest said the prayers at the church and there was the procession, and the six walking in front who would have carried the casket. And we stopped at St. Kerrill's grave to give him good rest. *(With conviction)* Máirtín Keane was here.

**GERRY**

*(Trying to follow her)* Remembered, like.

**MOIRA**

*Here.* We brought him back, Gerry. It's more true Máirtín's here than in New Mexico. Doesn't matter where you go and leave your bones. Where your people are, that's where you really die.

**GERRY**

In the shelter of each other people must make their lives. Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireas na daoine. In the shelter of each other.

**MOIRA**

Marty Keane now. Dying all by himself. Can you imagine that, Gerry? No shadow of kin or neighbor across his grave. Stuck in the ground in New Mexico. He'd be there still if we hadn't been here to grieve him home.

## **10. The Matt who goes**

*(Matt is doing some chore, his last here at home. Thomas watches and occasionally helps. They are both restless. Thomas, who never really decided whether he wanted to go or stay, tries to talk about this with Matt, who he knows is struggling with the same issue. Thomas starts straightforwardly, as is his custom.)*

**THOMAS**

Was it hard now, Matt, deciding to go?

**MATT**

No.

**THOMAS**

*(Taken aback by the curt answer)* It would be clear, I suppose, that America was the sensible choice.

**MATT**

No.

**THOMAS**

*(Testing the water)* You could go either way.

**MATT**

Sometimes.

**THOMAS**

Other times you were sure.

**MATT**

For a while.

**THOMAS**

That you should go.

**MATT**

Or stay.

**THOMAS**

*(So you felt like me.)* You could go either way.

**MATT**

Going or staying wasn't the point, Thomas.

**THOMAS**

*(He knows what Matt must mean.)* The point was deciding.

**MATT**

The point was *what* I was deciding.

**THOMAS**

A big decision.

**MATT**

The Matt who goes to Philadelphia, thirty years from now would he even recognize the Matt who stays here? They'd be nothing alike. Because of deciding...

**THOMAS**

Which Matt Maloney you're going to be.

**MATT**

*(Matt sees that Thomas understands, so he is frank.)* Or not deciding.

**THOMAS**

You should be grateful the decision isn't being made for you.

## **11. I can't stand it here**

**EILEEN**

Having the choice. I can't imagine it. Someone who doesn't *have* to leave. Not like us.

**TADGH**

Us, is it?

**EILEEN**

I think you have to go as much as I do.

**TADGH**

I never got myself mixed up in politics now. I wasn't sneaking off at night like your brothers. Like yourself. What was it you were up to when you would disappear, Eileen?

**EILEEN**

I could ask you the same. Wasn't your father always looking for you when there was serious work to be done?

**TADGH**

I was doing nothing to make me worry about informers. Will you be looking over your shoulder all the way to the boat, I wonder?

**EILEEN**

When I get to America I'll be looking straight ahead.

**TADGH**

Do you ever hear from your brother? Do you even know where he is?

**EILEEN**

No.

**TADGH**

Maybe you'll see him on the other side.

**EILEEN**

America's not the answer to all our problems.

**TADGH**

It'll answer mine.

**EILEEN**

And was it the letters from America that convinced you, Timmy-Post?

**TADGH**

I wasn't reading the mail I delivered.

**EILEEN**

You read people's faces when you put the letters in their hands. News from the new world! The gaping mouths on us gawking at the picture postcards. All the grand success stories –

**TADGH**

It's not a fat rosy future lies ahead of me. The work I'll get will break my back same as here. It'll be a store or a truck or a factory, the railroad maybe, loading and lifting.

**EILEEN**

But you've got to go.

**TADGH**

*(Tadgh moves downstage.)* I can't stand it here. *(He grins.)* I can't stand it here.

## 12. Uncle Jimmy

*(Eileen is listening to Tadgh, but he is also, despite his shyness of strangers, talking to us.)*

### **TADGH**

Nights like this people say what they have to say more than once. I suppose there's some necessity – saying goodbye the once won't do. You hear it the first time, but it gets repeated anyway. Like my Uncle Jimmy. Like my Uncle Jimmy. Who said everything twice. Who said everything twice.

My Uncle Jimmy was a sweet man, really. A lovely man, I never knew anyone to be angry with him. Over what? Off to the fields in the morning, and in the evening he'd be home with the women, never at the pub, sitting at the hearth with an odd job in his lap, something to make or to mend before he turned in. Except in the spring. *Except* in the spring – that was Uncle Jimmy's season, when he came into his own. He was a long man with the livestock when they were birthing, and every farm in the parish would want him when the time came. For much of the spring he'd be up all night, watching a cow or a ewe or a mare, playing the midwife, knowing how to put his arm up in there and turn a calf around if it was coming wrong. If any dumb creature was in trouble that way, Jimmy McDermott was the man. That time of year it was a common sight at daybreak to see him stumble home like the drink was on him, but it was only his wanting sleep. I'm home, he'd say, coming in the door, and he'd say it once more, crawling up in the loft to spend the rest of the morning on his back: I'm home. My grandmother would treat him like a sick child, bringing some breakfast up to him in bed.

Year in, year out, and all year he waited patiently for spring. He was one of those would never have left the home he was born in. His Mammy would take care of him and when her mothering gave out, he would take care of her, and by then he'd be – well, they call them bachelors, but they're more like old maids. After he was old enough to tell the difference, I don't think he went near a girl who wasn't a relative. Sure he wouldn't know what to say to a woman unless she wrapped herself in a sheepskin and went out to the barn to give birth. As far as that goes, he was never going to grow up. He would never have left Gurteen. Except he fooled us all one afternoon and made a fast exit. Collapsed and died in his mother's arms. It was late in the afternoon, in spring. He'd just come in from the fields for a bite before he went off to do what was closest to his heart. But his heart wasn't strong, it seems. We should've known that: a weak heart. We should have known from the way he said everything twice. Strong hearts speak their piece and they're done. But Uncle Jimmy echoed everything he said. It's a grand day today, he'd say. It's a

grand day today. The same way each time. You tripped over your own foot, he'd say to me if I'd taken a tumble. You tripped over your own foot. It could be really annoying. Let's play some cards, he'd say, and you'd jump up to get the deck but he'd say it again anyway. Let's play some cards. Like he was treading water all the time, or running in place, not going anywhere, just repeating himself. He was only 37 when his heart gave out. I'll be going now, he said to his Mammy, like he was off to work. His last words. In his usual fashion, of course, he said his last words twice: I'll be going now.

The day we buried him I knew I had to get out, or I'd never grow up either, never get far enough away to know I was on my own. If I stayed, it would be the same old story, the same old story, straight through to my funeral. My own little plot close by Uncle Jimmy's. It was me being lowered in that stony ground as much as him. We went back to my grandmother's after the burial, and halfway through the meal it came out of my mouth: I've decided to go to America. Every head turned my way, and me sitting at the table in Uncle Jimmy's chair, and at that moment I realized nobody had ever looked at Uncle Jimmy when he spoke. We just went about our business waiting for him to say it again. Maybe that's why he always *did* say it again, hoping someone would look at him, like everyone was looking at me now, at Uncle Jimmy's funeral supper. I could see they'd all heard me, and they knew I meant it. But I said it to their faces, for Uncle Jimmy, and so I'd never have to say it again: I've decided to go to America.\*

### 13. The ones who know

*(Bea and Brid are bringing refreshments: Bea has the soda bread that Tadgh eats in the next scene and Brid is bringing a kettle to the hearth.)*

**BEA**

Tadgh is taking it very hard, I think.

**BRID**

It's a stone face he shows the family.

**BEA**

It's not the ones crying all night who are the most sorry.

**BRID**

---

\* "Uncle Jimmy" was not included in the original production.

*(Brid is looking at Tadgh.)* It's the ones who know they'll never return.

*(Tadgh impulsively dances a quick step.)*

#### **14. Cigarettes and soda bread**

##### **SEAMUS**

*(Seamus arrives at the wake, making a grand entrance as he sings a verse of "The Slip Jigs and Reels." He then joins a spirited conversation in progress around the table.)*

*And he did like the ladies, and the rise and the fall  
Of their ankles and their dresses down on the dance floor;  
And the rolling the dice, and the spinning the wheel,  
But he took most delight in the slip jigs and reels.*

##### **GERRY**

American cigarettes, now.

##### **LIAM**

Lucky Strikes.

##### **PAUDY**

Means Fine Tobacco. L.S.M.F.T.

##### **LIAM**

*(Overlapping)* M.F.T. Would somebody have some Irish M.F.T. for me? A bit of miserable fatal tobacco.

##### **GERRY**

I saw an advert said the best for your health were Chesterfields.

##### **SEAMUS**

Sounds Brit.

##### **DONAL**

It'll be golden tobacco making your fingertips yellow over there, Tadgh.

##### **GERRY**

Flicking only the finest ash.

**LIAM**

They use bowls.

**SEAMUS**

Does he even smoke?

**LIAM**

He'll smoke over there.

**TADGH**

Cigars, maybe.

*(Laughter)*

**GERRY**

Do they breathe that in, then? Cigar smoke?

**SEAMUS**

He'll find out.

*(Laughter)*

**LIAM**

Write us about that, Tadgh.

*(Seamus casually and habitually applies pressure to sore points. Everyone knows that Tadgh is self-conscious and bitter about how little schooling he's had.)*

**SEAMUS**

And will you be paying someone over there to write your letters for you?

*(Gerry, in characteristic fashion, tries to smooth things over.)*

**GERRY**

He's been to school, Seamus.

**LIAM**

How many years?

**PAUDY**

Same as me. *(In the singsong of a young schoolboy)* 1-2-3, A-B-C, the earth's round, heaven's up, hell's down, *(change of tone)* the fields are that way.

**GERRY**

He worked for the Post, he knows all about letters.

**TADGH**

*(Indirectly answering Seamus's barb)* I'll go to night school.

**DONAL**

*(After a beat of waiting for more information about this new concept)* At night?

**TADGH**

For adults. To get ahead. You work days, at night you learn something.

**DONAL**

And does everyone go to school at night?

**TADGH**

Only if you want to. It's a free country.

**DONAL**

Land of the free. America.

**SEAMUS**

This is a free state, Donal.

*(The next lines overlap. Donal's emotional investment in his side of the argument has a great deal to do with the fact that his two children are emigrating. Seamus is challenging Donal's decision to send them off.)*

**DONAL**

And a poor state, we're still doubled over –

**SEAMUS**

You own your own land now, you're not paying rent –

**GERRY**

There they go.

**DONAL**

– digging potatoes and breaking our backs building walls and for what?

**SEAMUS**

It's only a handful of years since we got them off our backs!

**GERRY**

Now, now, now, now, hey! Where's the bottle?

*(It is located and passed to Seamus.)*

Let's not be suffering the Uprising all over again tonight. It's a celebration,

**SEAMUS**

It's a wake.

**GERRY**

An American wake. It's not a corpse we're sitting up with. The lad's alive and it's his last night in Ireland! *(He toasts Tadgh.)* Sláinte!

**DONAL**

More power to him if he wants to go to school. That's what I'm hoping for my Matt. *(Toasts)* Good luck to you, Tadgh. God bless. America's just the place. Go make your fortune.

**SEAMUS**

You won't miss the old sod? She needs good men, with ambition –

**DONAL**

Don't be telling him something so ridiculous as he has a reason to stay. Ireland offers nothing to –

**TADGH**

*(The tone is aggressive.)* I'm going. And I'm not coming back.

*(It's a bit of a shock to hear this out loud, and without any sense of lament.)*

**DONAL**

Of course you're not coming back.

**GERRY**

Which does make it a wake, but happier than most, since you get to enjoy it yourself before you're gone.

*(Another toast, which Paudy and Liam join.)*

Tadgh McDermott. Up and went to America. We never saw him again.

**PAUDY**

He went up in a cloud of fine tobacco. L.S. –

**LIAM**

*(Climbing up on the table)* M.F.T. Lucky Strikes. Striking gold, sure it can happen for anyone over there: common as cigarettes, plentiful as the U.S. dollar.

*(Liam sings a line from “The Slip Jigs and Reels” and inserts Tadgh’s name in it.)*

*Hello land of plenty, Tadgh has come for his share.*

Donal, I'm standing here in your kitchen and I'm hungry.

**DONAL**

And you're drunk. Get something to eat.

*(Liam and Paudy leave.)*

A cup of tea, then. *(Donal rises.)*

**SEAMUS**

*(To Tadgh)* Have you the *right* to go, that's the question.

**DONAL**

Right or no, Seamus, has he a choice? Do any of us have a choice? Wasn't it fat mail from America kept Timmy-Post here peddling around Gurteen? Dollars, Seamus: the food on our tables, the clothes on our backs. There's nothing greener in Ireland than a greenback. *(Donal leaves.)*

**TADGH**

*(Fiddling with a cigarette butt)* Here we dig in our pockets to scrape up enough for a couple or three butts. A man over there takes home a carton – 20 a pack, 10 packs.

**SEAMUS**

200 cigarettes? And how long does it take a man to smoke that many in America?

*(Bea arrives with a plate of food. There is evident tension between Seamus and Bea, who refuse to acknowledge each other. Seamus leaves.)*

**GERRY**

Would that be some of Brid's special soda bread?

**BEA**

It would.

*(Gerry takes some.)*

For her son!

*(Gerry leaves. Bea holds the plate out to Tadgh, but he shakes his head.)*

Do you feel like you're dead, then?

**TADGH**

Don't start.

**BEA**

It is a wake.

**TADGH**

*(By way of saying it's not that serious an occasion)* And we're all getting drunk, Bea.

**BEA**

*(The reason why we're drinking)* Aren't we losing four of you to America in one night.  
*(Bea glances over toward Brid.)* Your mother's asking herself is it her cooking sending you to America – you didn't eat anything. You should spend some time with her tonight.

*(Tadgh takes a bit of soda bread.)*

The wake, you know, it has a reason.

**TADGH**

The wake is a spree for all of Gurteen. Free whiskey, cakes like a holiday –

**BEA**

The wake is our grief at letting you go.

**TADGH**

It's a pagan business altogether, waking the dead. *(How absurd it all is!)* Keeping vigil so the soul won't be stolen –

**BEA**

You won't have any soul at all if you keep pretending it doesn't hurt to go away. Hold your breath tonight and you'll smother the rest of your life.

**TADGH**

Isn't advice plentiful the night of a wake. Everybody telling me what I should be feeling, so that later we can all have a good cry. And in the morning you'll walk me to the crossroads and wave me off.

**BEA**

Will you miss us?

**TADGH**

*(He evades the question.)* I won't miss Ireland. *(He takes a bit more bread.)* Maybe Mammy's soda bread –

**BEA**

Will you miss *us*, your family?

**TADGH**

*(He looks at her, knowing he'll miss her.)* Ohhhh... I left the family a while ago, Bea, didn't I?

**BEA**

You didn't always hate it here. Weren't you up to big doings as a boy, forever running about, never in the house –

**TADGH**

Even with the doors wide open and the day streaming in, the place felt locked and shuttered. Keeping the world out and me in.

**BEA**

And now you'll be free.

**TADGH**

Off to the land of the free.

**BEA**

That's a brave decision for a boy of 17.

**TADGH**

Home of the brave.

**BEA**

It can't be that easy. It can't cost nothing.

**TADGH**

*(He might say something else, but he says this.)* I'll work hard, Bea. I'll work hard. *(An earnest offer, to atone for leaving)* Can I send you something from America?

**BEA**

*(Bea won't be bought off.)* Your mother's been wondering will she see you at all tonight.

*(She leaves. Tadgh reaches for the bread and gorges himself till he gags. Music plays as the lights cross-fade to Matt, Nora and Eileen. Tadgh eventually joins them.)*

## 15. Messages

**MATT**

My Aunt Bea has a tin she keeps her savings in. Nobody knows about it (so she thinks) but herself. Years of egg money and sewing, the odd job. It's only once in a while she sneaks it out of the chimney to make a deposit and see how much she's got. I stuck a note in the box last night. "Hello, Aunt Bea, it's Matt. Your secret is safe. I'm missing you in America. Remember me. Remember me." We read that last bit in school, it's Shakespeare: the farewell of a ghost. "Remember me." That's all I could think to say.

**NORA**

I rolled up a note and left it sticking out of the neck of a bottle. I don't want my father to find it for a long time, so it will surprise him to be thinking of me. So I hid it in a corner behind his shearing tools. It'll be July before he picks them up.

**EILEEN**

And what will he find?

**NORA**

Nothing my own. Just a bit of an old song. *(She begins to sing a lyric adapted from "The Home I Left Behind." She does not face the others or the audience.)*

*It was early one morning with a sad and broken heart*

*That I stood at the hearth on my father's floor, saying it's sad we both must part,*

*With his trembling arms around my neck, as the tears his eyes did blind –*

*(She breaks off singing and speaks the last line in a fierce tone that cuts through the sentimentality of the song.)* "As I tore out from his arms in the home I left behind." He'll have to imagine me singing it.

**EILEEN**

Some of the things they sent me to do were a little dangerous. So they gave me a gun, just in case. I kept it buried out in the bog. Last week I decided my family better have it. Just in case. But I couldn't think how to give it to them. My father would start shaking and my mother would let go the tears. So I took the bullets out and stuck it down in the potato bin. Not too far, they'll get to it by the end of next week. I left a note in the barrel of the gun: "The bullets are in the flour. Just in case. Your daughter is safe in America." It was never really discussed, you know, what all I was up to. My parents pretended like they didn't notice I was gone for a day or two every once in a while. I don't blame them – they caught it from me, and what happened to my brothers: the silence. It's up to them whether they talk about it now that I've had to leave the country. My guess is the gun will end up back in the bog or at the bottom of Lough Inagh. It'll be coming on supper when my mother finds it in the bin, and she'll bring it to my father. His hand will be trembling when he takes it, and nothing will be said. A moment of silence for their daughter.

*(Eileen, Matt and Nora are caught up in imagining the moment.)*

**TADGH**

*(As if in earnest)* I'm leaving every soul in Gurteen an Irish blessing written in my blood. *(Drops the spoof)* I'm not the sort for leaving messages, is that it? *(Playing their point of view)* Pity Tadgh now, he barely knows his ABCs, how could he manage to –

**EILEEN**

*(Cutting off this all too familiar theme)* Did you write a message?

**TADGH**

No. It's not that there's nothing to say, or that I don't care to be remembered. But words now – *(He risks telling them.)* I went up the mountain to the pasture where my sisters stay the summer in the sod huts. All the family go up there sometime, bringing the girls their food, visiting. It's a rocky place altogether. I set to work with the stone, and I built – well, I dunno what you'd call it. A circle, the height of a wall, and inside it I put a bench part way round. In the center I stood some stones, big ones now – it took me the month to do it, levers and all my strength and the horse when I could get him. I set the stones so they all line up with the setting sun. So every night there'll be a long shadow coming from that direction. All the way from – wherever I end up in America. I don't know what they'll make of it. Stare at it like one of the old places. Maybe some dusk they'll be walking around it and get themselves lined up with the sun. Standing in the shadow. Facing west. The light dying. Again. No words, like in the old times, before writing.

*(They are all looking west.)*

They didn't have the words either.

## **16. Reading the rake**

**LIAM**

I don't believe she can tell the future.

**THOMAS**

It came true enough for me. Soon as Uncle John wrote my father that he was sending over a ticket, I went straight to her cottage. She took me to the hearth and she scattered the ashes right there. What's the question, she says? Should I be going to America, says I, and what will happen to me there? One question at a time, she says – which is it?

**LIAM**

The first question is inside the second.

**THOMAS**

Exactly my thinking, and that's what I asked her, to tell my fortune in America. It'll cost you a month of eggs, she says, four a week. Spit on her palm and her grip was as firm as any man's selling a horse or a field.

**LIAM**

And then she read the ashes.

**THOMAS**

I had first to rake them with my fingers. One stroke with the two hands. And then she read the rake. Sat down on her haunches, holding her head, and she lets out a long slow breath over the ashes. Just enough air to stir them alive.

**LIAM**

*(Reluctantly caught up in the scene)* They say it's the dead who speak through the ashes.

**THOMAS**

All of a sudden she turns around and shoots me a look, like maybe I'm doing something behind her back. Rake them again, says she, and with her own hands she erases what mine had writ before. We go through the same business. This time she holds her skirt up to her face. She stands up and her face is still covered.

**LIAM**

What did she say?

*(Unexpectedly, Maggie speaks from a shadowy area.)*

**MAGGIE**

Have you got a ticket to America then?

*(Thomas instinctively answers her, as if he has somehow been transported back in time. Liam looks at him wide-eyed.)*

**THOMAS**

It's coming in the mail.

**MAGGIE**

There's nothing for you in America. You're not there.

**THOMAS**

*(Thomas tells her what he now knows.)* I'm not going to America.

**MAGGIE**

That's what I'm after telling you. *(Maggie approaches them.)* What happened to the ticket?

**THOMAS**

*(Confusion)* My brother is taking it.

**MAGGIE**

It's for the better.

**THOMAS**

Is it?

**MAGGIE**

The farm will do well. *(Gestures "five" and "two")* On the fingers of one hand your sons, and two daughters. Your wife is here tonight.

**THOMAS**

*(Stunned)* Is she now? And who would she be?

**MAGGIE**

I'm not a matchmaker.

**THOMAS**

*(Grateful)* Can I get you something, Maggie?

**MAGGIE**

Sure if I drank all the whiskey offered me at a wake, I wouldn't know tomorrow what happened tonight, and would you be asking me tonight what will happen tomorrow?

**THOMAS**

I was thinking maybe a soft-boiled egg.

**MAGGIE**

*(That's more like it.)* Wouldn't a boy with your sense be wasted in America.

*(Thomas leaves.)*

**LIAM**

You could see all that about him in the rake of the ashes? The five sons and the two daughters?

**MAGGIE**

Give or take a couple of kids, what's the difference?

**LIAM**

Would you read me my fortune?

**MAGGIE**

I don't need any more eggs this month.

**LIAM**

Butter. A whole crock.

**MAGGIE**

Three crocks.

**LIAM**

Two.

**MAGGIE**

And a jar of jam. Take it or leave it.

**LIAM**

Done.

*(They spit on their palms and shake hands. She holds his hand a moment, searching his face, then goes to get some ashes from the hearth.)*

I'd not want to be bargaining with you for a cow or a pig.

**MAGGIE**

*(She spreads the ashes.)* Rake. With the two hands, one good stroke.

*(He rakes the ashes.)*

What's the question?

**LIAM**

My future. Two crocks of butter and a jar of jam's worth.

**MAGGIE**

That buys you one question. What'll it be?

**LIAM**

*(Liam can sense his future. He wants Maggie to change it.)* There's only one thing I want in life. When will I be getting married? And the children we'll have, like that, the boys and the girls.

*(She crouches, holding her head. A long, slow exhale over the ashes. She sways. A sharp turn, and she looks at him. She covers her face with her skirt, then drops it and rises.)*

**MAGGIE**

No children.

**LIAM**

*(He resists a fortune that he knows is true.)* I'm going to get married.

**MAGGIE**

No wife.

**LIAM**

It would be no surprise to me if she were here tonight.

**MAGGIE**

Your farm will do all right.

**LIAM**

It'll go to my eldest son.

**MAGGIE**

You're the last of your line in Ireland.

**LIAM**

Don't be digging my grave, you bloody witch!

**MAGGIE**

You asked me to read your rake. Most reach down trembling, they know the odds of scratching out a future for themselves. I'm sorry for what's in the ashes, lad, but you might have looked about and seen what's in store without coming to me.

**LIAM**

*(He is hurt and means to hurt back.)* Crazy barren hag. You think all the girls here are going to end up spinstered like you.

**MAGGIE**

*(Maggie stares inside him and answers calmly.)* Most of them will end up in America. Some who stay will be taking care of their parents or their brothers, like Bea. Not the marrying kind. The rest will have a fair choice of husbands.

**LIAM**

But not me.

**MAGGIE**

Not you.

**LIAM**

Wouldn't I be the last one they'd pick.

**MAGGIE**

I don't know is it easier or harder knowing the future. It saves you the heartache of hope.

*(Liam crouches and stares at the ashes. He places his hands as he did when he raked the ashes and retraces the lines as if to feel what they portend. He brushes off his hands.)*

**LIAM**

Briseann an dutcas trí shúilibh an chait. The breeding comes out in the eye of a cat. I'm the bottom of the barrel, Maggie. I'm the scraping of the pot.

*(Liam leaves as Thomas returns with the egg. Maggie bends down to the ashes, searching them.)*

**MAGGIE**

Would he be a last-born?

**THOMAS**

He would. End of the litter.

**MAGGIE**

And he's the last at home?

**THOMAS**

He is. Three already in America, and his sister Eileen off tomorrow. A brother killed in Derry with the Republicans. Another son they don't know where he is – hiding.

**MAGGIE**

*(A reading of Liam's future)* The parents will be his children then. He'll be coaxing their last steps. Propping them up in chairs close to the fire. Carrying them to bed. Scraping bits of soft food off their chins. Washing them. White lies to protect their growing innocence.

**THOMAS**

*(Not sure what to make of all this)* He's a good son, very good to them.

**MAGGIE**

He'll never forgive them. Sure and he'll be ending up a hermit like Mick Pat. He's already a real woman-hater, that boy. You can tell him for me I won't be needing the butter or the jam. *(She starts to leave.)*

**THOMAS**

Here's your egg then. Is she dark-haired?

**MAGGIE**

Who?

**THOMAS**

The girl I'm going to marry. Which way am I looking? A redhead?

**MAGGIE**

When I look in the ashes, all the women's hair is kind of gray. *(She leaves.)*

**THOMAS**

I was hoping to marry younger.

*(Lively music, a bit of dancing, yelps.)*

## **17. Dancing with strangers**

*(As Nora dances herself to a seat, she encounters Seamus, who does a brief step with her.)*

**SEAMUS**

Are you having good crack then, at your own wake?

**NORA**

I am.

**SEAMUS**

And you should. At the next wake given for you, you won't be up for the dancing.

**NORA**

A corpse can dance at a wake. Didn't they get Packie up for a set just last month.

**SEAMUS**

But corpses are clumsy partners, always dragging their feet. Never an unexpected step. And no fun at all to flirt with.

**NORA**

I'm sure you've tried, Seamus.

**SEAMUS**

Won't you miss the dancing in America?

**NORA**

They know how to dance. Our legs don't forget on the trip over.

**SEAMUS**

You can't dance with strangers.

**NORA**

And why not?

**SEAMUS**

With strangers it's all the getting acquainted steps, your feet are asking polite questions and tapping out the chit chat: "How are you, Nora?" "Not too bad." "Isn't it lovely

weather.” Real dancing jumps right into serious conversation, like picking up with an old lover. But you have to know her rhythms, the size of her slide and the height of her kick, how she likes to surprise you, what move she's afraid of. You have to know all that to get down to dancing.

**NORA**

So you think they're all sitting around over there?

**SEAMUS**

They're busy introducing themselves to strangers – explaining where they come from to people who've never set foot in the place. It's common ground we dance on, Nora. Common ground. Maybe they're hopping around in America, but they're not dancing.

**NORA**

Sounds lonely.

**SEAMUS**

Imagine a roomful of Irish hugging the walls, and their fingers are dancing on their knees. Music is playing, the floor is empty, and none of them can get to their feet.

## 18. Time

*(Up on the thatch)*

**MOIRA**

*(A challenge)* Will you ever feel America is *home*, Matt. Can you go some other place and call it home and it's not even Ireland? Different sky, different air in your lungs. Bend down to something growing in the Yankee earth, and it will likely be a leaf you've never seen before, and a funny pale shade of green. So many things you won't even know the word for, like Adam before he'd named everything in Eden. And what was his punishment but exile, being forced to leave –

**MATT**

It's not just a place, Moira – home. It can be anywhere. A spider builds its web between two trees, or in the rafters above your bed. Take a broom to that web, walk through it – wherever the spider lands, it'll build a new web, spinning home right there, it doesn't matter where.

**MOIRA**

And it doesn't matter to you, Matt? Where? *(He does not answer.)* I was up toward Ballyferriter yesterday, and I stopped at the beehive huts.

**MATT**

What for?

**MOIRA**

Just to look around. I like the old places. Eight or nine hundred years old, those huts, that's what they say, and not a bit of mortar holding the stones. They still keep the rain out, you know.

**MATT**

Was it raining then?

**MOIRA**

It was not, but guess what?

**MATT**

*(Without a hitch)* You came upon a crock of fairy gold and we're set for life and I've no need to go to America.

**MOIRA**

Almost as good. I found a place I could hide you if you decide to run away tomorrow.

**MATT**

I am running away tomorrow.

**MOIRA**

I don't mean to America. I found a passageway. At the beehive huts. Underground. Up to the hill it goes and right on through to the other side.

**MATT**

Why?

**MOIRA**

To escape! In case the Vikings attack, or –

**MATT**

Maybe they were trying to dig their way out of the country.

**MOIRA**

Why do you talk like that? You're just trying to convince yourself. You'd be happy enough to stay.

**MATT**

And do what? How would we live, Moira? You have your schooling, you'll be able to go off somewhere and teach. But on a farm like this, we'd barely be getting by –

**MOIRA**

And what's wrong with getting by? Haven't we been getting by all these –

**MATT**

We weren't getting by! We were dying! A million of us. And we were leaving. Wasn't it a couple million left in those ten starving years, and a million before that, and millions since. The belly of an emigration ship, Moira, that's been our escape tunnel, and it runs all the way to America.

**MOIRA**

It's time for the leaving to stop. We've been on this island who knows how long. We've *survived*, just like the beehive huts. Escaping each day into the next.

**MATT**

I don't know about a life of escaping every day. Wouldn't it be nice to get a little ahead of what we're running away from?

**MOIRA**

What is it we're running *to*? Are you really sure they have more over there than we do? In America now, they're ahead of us, you're right about that. Because they ran away and never stopped running. But they've no time. Time is scarce over there, it's expensive and people hold onto it like a wallet. Have you never seen a friendly American? He smiles at you and waves and he thinks that's being sociable. He squints up at the sky, aims his camera at the hills – so much for the fine points of the landscape and the weather. You know how we are: every field has a name, every hill, every inlet and point and peninsula has a story and a name. Do you think they have time for that in America? Here we've time enough for whatever we need to do, and when we're finished we have time to spare. For each other. It's not so much the place you're going to will be different, Matt. It's the time. It's the travel in time will make you homesick. (*An intense experience of the present moment*) This wake, staying up the night, all these hours people are spending with you, because you'll have no more time with them come the morning. You'll be gone for good, and even in Ireland forever is a long time.

**MATT**

*(He starts to leave.)* Those beehive huts are empty, Moira. Nobody lives there anymore.

**MOIRA**

I want you to stay.

*(Someone lilts; Nora and Eileen dance.)*

## 19. Bitches

**LIAM**

*(To himself)* Bitches. The bloody lot of them, bitches, the whole damn – *(Nora and Eileen laugh.)* Bitches!

*(Paudy appears out of nowhere.)*

Let them all go to America and leave us in peace.

**PAUDY**

Why aren't you dancing tonight?

**LIAM**

What's the use of dancing?

**PAUDY**

To be with girls! They were looking at me funny even before I was sent away, but now they've got the excuse that I'm a certified nutcase. Why won't they dance with you?

**LIAM**

Nothing comes of dancing.

**PAUDY**

You mean like up on the thatch?

**LIAM**

What are you talking about?

**PAUDY**

*(Confidential and electric)* Doing it. Up there. You said yourself that couples were courting up on the thatch at Packie's wake.

**LIAM**

*(Liam is still in a black mood.)* There's nothing dirty about courting, Paudy! They're just talking and joking up there. *(Very gradually, Liam imagines that he is living the scene he creates.)* She puts her head on his shoulder. They get quiet. If she sighs, he can feel the warm air on his chest. They're breathing each other in. Faces closer than eyes can focus. And then, maybe, they kiss. *(A shaky recovery)* There's an exchange of saliva. That's what they're doing up on the thatch.

**PAUDY**

If it isn't dirty, *(Paudy glances down at his crotch)* how come I feel the back of every button in me trousers?

**LIAM**

Because you're a pervert. You're oversexed. Peeking in windows. Stealing girls' underwear off clotheslines. Imagine climbing up on the altar and dressing the Virgin Mary in unmentionables.

**PAUDY**

Virgins wear underwear too! Nuns, martyrs, the whole sainted lot of them. The mother of God was conceived immaculate but she wore underwear.

**LIAM**

It was a crazy thing to do! Look, Paudy, you're better off like you are. The girls are thinking about themselves, they don't give a damn about you. They want to go to America, wear fancy clothes and marry Yanks. Or they're looking for the biggest farmer and the best match. They don't care who's lonely, or what you might feel for them, that you'd treat the one that could love you like a queen. *(Liam is in the presence of the woman he might have married. He speaks quietly and seems very young.)* Aren't you scared of girls, Paudy?

**PAUDY**

Everybody's scared of girls, Liam.

**LIAM**

To hell with them then. Stuff every ship leaving Ireland with the crowd of women looking to escape us.

**PAUDY**

Without women we'll die off.

**LIAM**

Aren't we dying off already, Paudy. Let them all sail away and put us bachelor boys out of our misery.

**PAUDY**

I *like* women. Maybe too much, something about me scares them off, but women make me hope I won't get put away again. I like having them around.

*(Moira and Eileen are dancing a jig.)*

**LIAM**

There's the difference then, Paudy. I can't stand them dancing around me. Heads high, bodies rigid, feet stomping all over my heart. And if I catch an eye, looking away. Like I was something to be suffered, they'd be having a grand time if it wasn't for me, the bloody bleeding bitches.

**PAUDY**

Do you really hate the women like that?

**LIAM**

I think I do.

**PAUDY**

*(To himself)* How come I'm the one that's crazy?

## **20. Mirror**

**NORA**

Have you been eating all right, Mick Pat?

**MICK PAT**

Not too bad.

**NORA**

I don't like the color of your skin. You can't live on just potatoes and a sup of tea.

**MICK PAT**

I'll get by.

**NORA**

I won't be here to bring you vegetables from Aunt Bea's garden. Or apples. You must come by and let her know what you need. Will you do that?

**MICK PAT**

Bea has your father to look after.

**NORA**

I don't want you going hungry! Why don't you stop by of an evening for some supper, and you can sit here by the fire and listen to the talk. There's always people in and out the door to visit with my father.

**MICK PAT**

I don't like them poking into my business. Too many questions altogether. How's the health now, Mick Pat? And every one of them hoping I'm dying.

**NORA**

Nobody's wanting you to die, Mick Pat.

**MICK PAT**

So they can pounce on my land. They know I've nobody to leave it to. If Matt was staying now –

**NORA**

Mick Pat, it's not enough land. Matt's got ambition. "Not too bad" isn't good enough for a young man nowadays, getting by isn't good enough.

**MICK PAT**

He'll have no land at all in America.

**NORA**

He won't need it in Philadelphia. He should be going to school. He's got a head on his shoulders and he wants to use it, he won't miss the farm.

**MICK PAT**

A city full of strangers, all of them wanting to get a hand in his pocket.

**NORA**

Matt will make friends.

**MICK PAT**

*(Heartfelt)* Friends are not land. Friends die on you.

**NORA**

You miss Packie, I know.

**MICK PAT**

Like the other half of my soul he was. Not a day we didn't lean against a wall and pull out our pipes. One cloud of smoke and below it the four legs of us.

**NORA**

Wasn't it a shock how sudden he went.

**MICK PAT**

Ní heaspa go díth carad. (*He says it again in English, for emphasis.*) No need like the lack of a friend. The day he was buried, I went straight home from the graveyard – I'd no stomach for the supper they were serving. I never stirred that day from my hearth. I'd nowhere to go and no urge to light my pipe. Sat there the whole night. Maybe I dozed in the chair. The next morning I got up with the sun, and the old habit was to shave. I lathered the soap and looked in the mirror – and I could not see my face. My eyes were searching like, I looked over and over. Not a trace of myself could I find in the glass.

**NORA**

(*Trying to fathom what he's said*) You were upset.

**MICK PAT**

It wasn't anything in my head, Nora. I'm telling you what I saw. Nothing where there should be me.

**NORA**

(*Imagining that empty mirror, and fearing it*) How long was it before that feeling went away?

**MICK PAT**

I'm not back yet.

**NORA**

In the mirror?

**MICK PAT**

Nothing yet.

## 21. Choices

*(Tadgh is walking his bike and Eileen is pursuing him. Both are agitated. They end up near Moira, who is off by herself, reading a book.)*

**TADGH**

Doesn't every farmer in Ireland put himself and his family first?

**EILEEN**

You're forgetting about cutting the turf together, everybody joining up to bring in the hay. That's something bigger than the one family.

**TADGH**

Do you think you'll be seeing that on the other side? Where you're going now – Chicago? You'll be working in some factory or a shop and if you've any sense you'll be looking out for yourself.

**EILEEN**

Do you really think you'll make your way all on your own? Like that Horatio Alger fellow in the books? American fairy tales.

**TADGH**

And how do you think the U. S. of A. got where it is? People like me coming over. Hungry and fed up all at once. And looking out for number one.

*(The next three lines overlap and escalate to a shouting match. Moira's outburst caps their argument.)*

**EILEEN**

It's only the bosses can afford to look out for themselves.

**TADGH**

And aren't the Irish running Boston and Philadelphia and many another city hall?

**EILEEN**

Are we running the factories or the railroads, the banks?

**TADGH**

A hell of a lot of big shot Yanks are us!

**MOIRA**

They are not us! They chose to leave. The Irish are those who choose to stay.

*(The next exchange is quiet.)*

**EILEEN**

And those of us who *can't* stay must choose how we're going to live when we get there.

**TADGH**

*(In touch with his fear of America)* A fellow like me doesn't get many choices. No skill or schooling to sell. I've only the two big hands and a strong back and a knot in my stomach from worrying will I get played for a sucker. And I will, don't you know. *(He focuses for a moment on his bike.)* They'll put something over on me the first day I set foot in New York. And they pull the fast ones there a lot faster than the tricks been played on me here. Only in America I'll have money in my pocket at the end of the week. They pay a lot better over there for being taken.

## 22. Frog bread

*(Maggie approaches Matt and Nora.)*

**MAGGIE**

Can I bake you some frog bread? To take with you on the boat?

**MATT**

*(He's not heard of this.)* Why is it called "frog bread"?

**MAGGIE**

It's made with a frog. Is it the likes of you we're sending to America?

**NORA**

You put a frog inside a loaf of bread, Maggie?

**MAGGIE**

And you're the sister, are you? Not an ounce of sense between you. There's no brains in your blood.

**MATT**

*(Masking his amusement)* What's the recipe?

**MAGGIE**

It's an oatmeal bread. And into the dough you mix the frog –

**NORA**

Is the frog alive or dead?

**MAGGIE**

*(A simple answer to a dumb question)* It's alive when you catch it, and then you roast it. By that time it's dead. *(Back to the recipe)* Then it's pulverized –

**MATT**

How do you pulverize it?

**MAGGIE**

You have to roast it real good. Till it's black. That takes a while.

**NORA**

And after that the pulverizing is a cinch.

**MAGGIE**

Well there's hope for *you* anyways. If you want some frog bread I'll need a good size specimen. *(Maggie gives Matt the once-over, then speaks to Nora.)* You had better do it yourself. Down to the lough, stick your toes in the water and bring up a belch. When the boy-frog comes over to marry your foot, you grab him.

**MATT**

Frog bread now. That's a cure from the old days, is it?

**MAGGIE**

'Tis. For the fever.

**MATT**

Times have changed, Maggie. The crossing is a lot faster these days, we're not dying on top of each other down in the hold.

**MAGGIE**

It's not the boat gives you the fever. Aren't you burning already, and the flush of it in both your faces. It's not a cure for where you're going, frog bread. It's a cure for leaving home.

### **23. Exile**

*(This split scene is comprised of three separate conversations: Seamus and Moira; Eileen, Thomas and Tadgh; and later, Gerry and Maggie.)*

**SEAMUS**

*(Seamus is examining Moira's book, which is about the voyage of Brendan.)*

Don't let them tell you different, it was St. Brendan who discovered America. Brendan the Navigator.

**MOIRA**

He wasn't looking for America.

**SEAMUS**

He found it anyway.

**MOIRA**

He didn't really have a destination.

**SEAMUS**

He was going *somewhere*.

**MOIRA**

Yes and no.

**SEAMUS**

He left Ireland, he had to be going somewhere else.

**MOIRA**

He was keeping his vow.

**SEAMUS**

Which was?

**MOIRA**

To leave Ireland.

**SEAMUS**

And why would he swear to that?

**MOIRA**

It was a holy thing to do: to leave home and wander.

**SEAMUS**

A pilgrim.

**MOIRA**

A pilgrim for good.

□ □

**EILEEN**

I dunno can I still imagine staying here, Thomas. Tied for the rest of my life to a farm.

**THOMAS**

There was a time I thought about leaving.

**EILEEN**

What made you decide to stay?

**THOMAS**

*(Revealing nothing)* Some things get decided for you.

**EILEEN**

By your father? Was he wanting Tadgh to go?

*(We hear Tadgh's voice unexpectedly.)*

**TADGH**

He left it to us. *(Tadgh moves to join them.)* One gets the farm, one goes to the States.

**EILEEN**

*(To Thomas)* So how did you decide?

*(Thomas looks at Tadgh.)*

□ □

**SEAMUS**

Are you telling me, Moira, that Brendan the Navigator never found his way back to Ireland?

**MOIRA**

I dunno. I dunno can you ever come back once you've taken the vow to be an exile. He kept moving. The Island of Sheep, the Paradise of Birds, the Fiery Mountain, and every Easter he landed on the back of that great whale. Sailing in circles, year after year.

**SEAMUS**

And somewhere in there he discovered America. And he called it the Promised Land.

**MOIRA**

Whether it was America or not, Seamus, promised land or no, he didn't stay. He moved on.

☐ ☐

**THOMAS**

If I left here, the leaving wouldn't be over when I got to America. It would keep on, I'm thinking. All the time leaving. The travellers now, living like they do, like gypsies, always on the move, camping wherever they happen to be. Lost their farms, so they took to the road – and never got off it. Nowhere to go, only the next place to make a bit of money.

**TADGH**

I've felt that long as I can remember. There's a road that never stops and I'll always be on it. Maybe some traveller family stole your real brother and left me in his place.

**THOMAS**

*(In a roundabout way, Thomas forgives Tadgh – and makes staying his own decision.)*

Then it's right you should be going and not me. I don't want to be a traveller all my life.

**TADGH**

*(This is the only apology Tadgh can offer his brother.)* A traveller leaves a place because he has to, it's in his blood. Doesn't matter if there's nowhere he wants to go. He'll never stay.

☐ ☐

**MOIRA**

There's an island out in the Atlantic – not a real place now, a legend – an island up in the air, like it's hovering: the Island of St. “Brandon.” D'ye think that's him? Floating around in the sky, because he can't come down. No way to anchor because he vowed to live without a home.

☐ ☐

**TADGH**

That's America now. People keep moving. Everyone of them come from somewhere else, and they vowed to leave. “By God I'm getting out of here! I'm going.” *(He begins to sing “Path Across the Ocean.”)*

*There's a path across the ocean, there's a track across the sea.*

??

**MAGGIE**

First he fasted on Brandon Mountain. For forty days.

**GERRY**

How many were with him?

**MAGGIE**

Fourteen. Fourteen hungry monks. Light-headed when they came down to the water.

??

**TADGH**

*There are green sunny lands in some foreign country.*

??

**GERRY**

The boat was in the inlet, was it?

**MAGGIE**

Ox-hides tanned with the bark of oak. Flax stitches. Wool grease plugging the tiny holes. Leather thongs holding the frame. Strong it was, and fragile.

??

**TADGH**

*I will leave my native Irish home and sail across the sea*

??

**GERRY**

And then Brendan set out.

**MAGGIE**

Patches of light sailing across the fields as if to follow him. The tide keening on the shore. Leaving behind some monks waving, sheep grazing, rock, the green, Ireland.

??

## SEAMUS

Imagine poor Brendan thinking he'd found the Promised Land of the Saints. Little did he know how lost he was. America.

### 24. Building the ship

*(An improvised wake game is played: "Building the ship." Gerry announces the game and gathers everyone. What's first? Laying the keel, says Mick Pat, who is cajoled into helping out with this old game. Tadgh, Matt, Liam, Thomas and Paudy sit one behind the other atop the table; Gerry and Mick Pat ad lib as they work. The arm of one man is "hammered" with a potato or a sod of turf under the armpit of the man in front. Other arms are comically attached and hammered. Then legs are wrapped round the man in front, the prow and stern are formed, etc. Now the ship must be made watertight, and so it is "tarred" with liberal applications of soot to faces. "Erecting the mast" is next. The men lay back on the table. Mick Pat shyly retreats at the approach of the young women, one of whom is lifted by the others. She is held high in a seated position, with her legs splayed, and she is carried ceremonially over the length of the "ship." Seamus and Donal are stamping their feet. From the young men comes a low groan, which builds in volume and intensity. One male arm with a clenched fist is slowly raised amidships, and the men all sit up with a loud cheer. Gerry, as leader of the game, stands on a chair and plays the crowd.)*

## GERRY

I left old Ireland far behind, and for Amerikay I started. We weren't a day out before all hands on board were as sick as drunken tailors.

*(On the "ship" a quick spate of retching. They improvise the scene that Gerry creates.)*

We listed starboard, we listed port. The sea threw us forward and pitched us aft. We climbed the crest of every wave and down the other side. Me stomach went in so many directions that me insides were out and me outsides were in. Such a time I never had in me life.

*(Gerry initiates a verbal game: every line must conform to the pattern he initiates, and every other line must be rhymed. Gerry indicates whose turn it is.)*

Such tossing and tumbling,

**SHIPMATES***(Each in turn)*

Such growling and grumbling,

Such crushing and crashing,

Such slashing and smashing,

Such sweating and swearing,

Such twisting and tearing,

Such heaving and howling –

*(A playful altercation has flared.)***GERRY**

All right now, that's enough of that.

*(The sound of wind and sea has slowly crept in.)*

All hands on deck! Man the oars!

*(The men extend fists to either side, as if holding oars. Gerry climbs on a chair behind them, as if he were standing in the stern.)*

Here we go, men. Give it your best.

*(They begin to row in unison, leaning forward and backward with each stroke.)*

America's that way. No time to rest.

We're on our way now. We're rowing west.

*(The ship transforms into St. Brendan's. A bit of the Brendan saga stirs inside Maggie.)***25. Brendan looks back****MAGGIE**

Now Brendan is sailing along the coast, wanting to stay close until he must turn west and chase the sun to its place of rest. He sails in the shade of crumbling cliffs, footed by great slabs of fallen rock.

*(Gerry looks upward.)*

Then he looks up and sees the ruins of the fort called Dun Mór, protected seaward by the cliff itself. It had been there before Patrick came, before Christ was born, before iron. It won't be there forever, thinks Brendan. The cliff beneath it will collapse, its ramparts will tumble into the sea. The whole of Ireland eaten away like that. How could the world have gotten so old? Won't we all have to leave and go elsewhere? Not east, where we came from, that way is older still. We must find a new world, younger.

*(As if Brendan is giving an order)* West across the sea.

*(Gerry gestures westward.)*

God give us landfall there.

*(Gerry turns to look back. One at a time, the sailors stop rowing and look.)*

Then Brendan looks back at the coast.

*(Maggie breathes in audibly – that peculiarly Irish mannerism that sounds like a little gasp.)* The beauty of it. Fields creeping up the hills.

*(Gasp)* Ireland. Am I crazy for leaving it?

*(Gasp)* Will I ever be back?

*(Gasp)* Am I crazy?

## ACT TWO

### 26. Nora's leaving vision

*(The sound of wind and sea, as at the end of the first act. In the dark a match is struck: Maggie, in profile, lights a long clay pipe. Lights up on Nora, who stands above Maggie on a high perch.)*

#### NORA

I had a vision come to me of my leaving. *(Nora gasps just as Maggie did in the last scene.)* Woke up, my bed shaking in the middle of the night, and soon as I opened my eyes, didn't I know I was on the boat, and the engine pulsing as fast as my heart. The crowd on the dock has disappeared behind a flock of flapping handkerchiefs, and I feel my arm waving back, though under the blanket it lies heavy and still. *(Urgently)* How quickly can I scan, and how hard, the way to etch this last view and memorize the stones stacked in walls, the reeds bundled in thatch, this wave, that wisp of smoke, the sand blowing off a dune. Cottages creep closer and fields shrink. The only thing growing is the breadth of the landscape, and me looking left and right to take it in, broad glances wider than any embrace. When I can see each end of Ireland without turning my head, that's when the country starts to fade, the green going gray. Overhead the few seabirds who have not turned back and a cloudless sky I do not recognize. From now on even the light of day will be foreign. What is left of Ireland is a black shape low in the water. My eyes sink and I stare a while at the wake, I stare at the wake, the wake, and I won't sleep this first night, though I'm exhausted. Ireland thins to a faint flat line on the horizon. When there is nothing more to see, I move to the bow of the boat.

### 27. Woman-hater

*(Seamus and Mick Pat are sitting at the table. Donal is nearby. At some distance from the table, Gerry and Eileen are dancing a waltz. Paudy watches them.)*

#### SEAMUS

Would you look at that Eileen dancing now, and the sweat sticking the dress to her like we'd fished her out of the sea. Can't you taste her brine burning your tongue?

**MICK PAT**

Is it me you're talking to?

**SEAMUS**

Isn't that how a bachelor boy like yourself gets to dreaming, and you watching a girleen like her dancing?

*(Seamus improvises a sly snatch of song.)*

*There were notions in his head*

*About motions in his bed*

**MICK PAT**

It's not me you're singing about, Seamus.

**SEAMUS**

Isn't it the silent ones now have the secrets.

**MICK PAT**

I've no secrets, and that's the God's truth.

**SEAMUS**

Ah, that's the devilish lie you give to all the women of the parish. Every one of them hot with hope that one day you'll say the word to her. Isn't that how you're playing it, Mick Pat –

**MICK PAT**

Ah no, you're –

**SEAMUS**

*(Overlaps)* And all the while leading the men to believe you're a woman-hater, so our guard will be down. Poor Gerry now hasn't the faintest suspicion how you're eyeing Eileen behind his back.

**MICK PAT**

I am not.

**SEAMUS**

*(To Donal)* Isn't the guilt written all over him? We must make an honest man of you, Mick Pat, and save our women from your treachery. *(Calls)* Gerry lad! Give it a rest and let Eileen catch her breath over here.

**MICK PAT**

*(He begins to panic.)* Eileen? No! Don't – Leave her now, she's busy dancing.

**EILEEN**

Oh God, not Seamus Slattery, is it?

**GERRY**

*(To Seamus)* We're dancing.

**EILEEN**

It's hard to believe he was ever a ladies' man.

**GERRY**

What's hard to believe is that he finally got married.

**EILEEN**

The billy goat.

**SEAMUS**

Gerry lad!

**GERRY**

Is that what the girls call him? He's just "Twisty" Slattery with the men.

**SEAMUS**

Mick Pat here says you're no man to keep step with a fast-footed girl like her.

**GERRY**

There's a spin on everything he throws at you, and never a straight line.

**SEAMUS**

I'm the man now, says Mick Pat, could make Eileen stand her ground instead of beating a retreat to America.

*(Eileen stops dancing.)*

**MICK PAT**

I said no such thing.

*(Gerry resumes the dance, trying to head off a confrontation.)*

**GERRY**

Twisty can be standing in front of you and hit you from behind.

**SEAMUS**

*(To Gerry)* Would any girl with a thirst on her be tempted to stay by a cup of weak tea like yourself.

*(This time Gerry stops dancing.)*

Says Mick Pat. Strong drink she needs to keep her in Ireland – meaning himself, as I take it. *(Seamus turns from Mick Pat to Donal.)* Have I got it right now, Donal?

**MICK PAT**

No such – I never –

**EILEEN**

What is it you're after, Seamus?

**SEAMUS**

*(He sings lines from "The Youth of the Heart.")*

*It was drinking strong brandy has led me to say  
That the girls of this country have led me astray.*

What do they call it in America, Eileen, when a boyo muscles his way into a dancing with a girl? Cutting in, isn't that it? That's what Mick Pat here said he was intending to do. Cut in on Gerry there –

**MICK PAT**

Twisty –

**SEAMUS**

So he can dance with you. On your feet, then, Mick Pat.

*(Seamus lifts Mick Pat to his feet.)*

**DONAL**

That's enough now, Twisty.

**SEAMUS**

And button your fly, you must look sharp if you're cutting in.

**GERRY**

Has the drink got hold of you, Seamus?

**PAUDY**

*(To Gerry)* Too much of that or too little of something else he should be getting at home.

**SEAMUS**

Now give him a tap on his shoulder, Mick Pat, so he knows your intentions of taking the girl away from him.

**MICK PAT**

I've no thought of that, Gerry, pay him no mind.

**SEAMUS**

There are more matches made at wakes than at any wedding, isn't that the truth, Eileen. Mick Pat here has been peeking at you through the bottom of his glass and it isn't your foot work he's been admiring. Look her in the face now and speak your mind so the poor girl knows where she stands.

**EILEEN**

*(Crossing toward Seamus and Mick Pat)* Now listen, Seamus –

**MICK PAT**

*(In reaction to the approach of Eileen, who stops in dismay as Mick Pat goes to pieces)* I won't be looking – or speak – I never now – may God strike me dumb – Gerry!

**GERRY**

It's all right, Mick Pat. Twisty Slattery's got an arm lock on you but he's going to let go now, isn't that right, Seamus?

**SEAMUS**

As soon as the man has spoken plainly and for all to hear what his intentions are.

**MICK PAT**

*(Mick Pat stammers and hides his face in his jacket lapel.)* But I never – God's help on me! Mother of Mercy –

**EILEEN**

You don't have to say a word, Mick Pat, I know it's just –

*(Mick Pat bursts into tears. Eileen moves toward him.)*

Mick Pat! It's all right –

*(Mick Pat recoils from Eileen and begins gasping convulsively, as if unable to catch his breath.)*

**MICK PAT**

Nora!

*(Donal sends Eileen to get Nora.)*

**DONAL**

Isn't there enough crack to be had at a wake without torturing the poor man.

**SEAMUS**

He's a terrible woman-hater for sure. I was hoping, don't you know, that Eileen might be just the cure for him. *(To Gerry)* A girl that's not at all particular who she dances with.

*(Bea and Nora arrive. Nora goes to Mick Pat.)*

**BEA**

And who else would be making an innocent soul miserable. Another year you'll suffer in hell, and your wicked tongue flaming in the fire.

**SEAMUS**

I was only meaning to help the poor man get past his shyness.

**BEA**

It's not shyness or any other problem he has but you, Twisty Slattery. Can your lecherous mind not comprehend that the man is chaste and has no thought of women.

*(Paudy adds fuel to the fire with a feverish outburst, triggered by the sexual energies underlying what has been going on.)*

**PAUDY**

Sex is natural, it's not a sin.

**SEAMUS**

That's it, Paudy, tell the spinster the facts of life.

**PAUDY**

We're all of us male or female –

**BEA**

Save your lewd thoughts for the loony bin when they send you back. Sex is a weakness of the flesh –

**PAUDY**

But Adam and Eve –

**BEA**

Better to marry than to burn! Don't you be quoting Scripture from that filthy mouth of yours.

**SEAMUS**

Your beloved brother was married, wasn't he, and two of his wicked urges named Matt and Nora are running off in the morning to America. Sure if all women were of your maidenly mind, there'd be none of us here tonight and nothing to celebrate.

**BEA**

I've nothing to celebrate tonight, least of all anything to do with you. Or the dubious pleasure of your company. Sure I've never seen a smile shining in your wife's face. Is the girl even here? And what would she be celebrating, shackled to the likes of yourself, knowing the road home is you staggering ahead of her and tossing abuse over your shoulder. Wouldn't any woman be miserable with Seamus Slattery twisted around her every night, bleating and snorting, and the ratty stench of you.

*(Bea and Nora take Mick Pat to the hearth. Brid comes to the table, glares at Seamus and pours a whiskey. She takes it to Bea, who belts it down.)*

**PAUDY**

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one –

**DONAL**

That's enough of the bawdy stuff, Paudy.

**SEAMUS**

Wouldn't she have made a strong man a strong match.

**PAUDY**

In paradise they were naked and were not ashamed.

**DONAL**

We're not in paradise any more, lad.

**28. The way of it *here***

*(Matt listens intently.)*

**MOIRA**

I'm not saying it's paradise. The people here have every kind of fault, but what makes them special you won't find everywhere. Just here. Isn't that what "local" means? What you can't find any other place. If we had children in America – could I teach them, Matt, what wouldn't *need* teaching if they grew up here? What you learn by watching, working, taking your part. Doing every day what *has to be done*, and making a habit of what's important. The way of it *here* – I could never teach all that. Our children's roots would be set in American soil – rich soil, I'm sure, and nourishing, very nourishing. More than I could ever digest. *(She has worked her way to this discovery.)* Our children would grow up strangers to me.

**DONAL**

*(He sings a verse of "Pay Attention a Moment," also called "The Emigrants' Song.")*

*Their friends all assemble, their neighbors also,  
Their cases are packed, all ready to go.  
The wild grief of their parents no words can portray,  
And they cling to their dear ones as the train pulls away.*

**29. Selfish**

*(In the loft. Nora, who has been listening to her father sing, resumes stacking her clothes on top of a cloth, then bundles them. Eileen's attempts to ease Nora's guilt – which is*

*contagious – are also a conversation she is having with herself. Eileen is worried about deserting Liam, and she will soon offer to bring him over to America – which would leave her parents without the safety net of a child at home.)*

**NORA**

*(Her tone is dark, dry, bleak – nothing sentimental.)* His heart will be broken. It's selfish to be leaving him like this.

**EILEEN**

Wasn't it your father insisting you and Matt should go? And telling you your only future is in America –

**NORA**

What else can he give his children but to send them away? There's no dowry for me, no money for Matt to go to school. *(She glances toward her father.)* He'll die an old bachelor like Mick Pat.

**EILEEN**

You've your own life, Nora, your one life. He doesn't want you wasting it on him.

**NORA**

Is it come to that? Turning our backs, looking out for ourselves?

**EILEEN**

It's natural for young people to be looking ahead!

**NORA**

What's natural is looking after the old folk, the old ways, and life goes on. It's unnatural to be leaving them like this.

**EILEEN**

It's *us* being left, Nora. The old ways are deserting us. Bea and your Da, they'll live out their lives in the old time. They won't feel alone, really, they've got all the generations before them to keep them company. *(In touch with her future)* We'll be the lonely ones, without the old faces, in a world we won't recognize. It's exile for us.

**NORA**

*(Nora needs desperately to give her emigration meaning and purpose.)* Why am I going? I dunno why I'm going.

**EILEEN**

If you can bring your Da any comfort in his last years, won't it be knowing you're settled in the future?

**NORA**

I wish I could take him with me.

**EILEEN**

He wouldn't want to come. He'll be happier in the past. You can send him back letters. And the money, Nora, the money, won't he be needing it when he's too old to farm?

*(Nora leaves. We see her staring at Donal a moment before she goes to Bea.)*

*(To herself)* The money's in America.

### **30. This miserable rock of land**

*(Is he doing the right thing by sending his children into exile? Donal's inner conflict lurks beneath the surface of this story.)*

**DONAL**

I came upon an English fellow the other side of Lough Inagh. Late in the spring it was, and fine weather. He had a satchel strapped to his back and he was swinging a stick. Setting a brisk pace he was, in a hurry like. *(The dialogue is brisk.)*

Are you late? I says to him.

For what, says he?

I dunno, that's what I'm asking you.

Oh no, says he, and now he's laughing, I'm on holiday. Getting away.

From what? I ask him.

From work, says he.

You've come to the right place to get away from work, says I, there's none to be found here.

Then he tells me he works for a big company in Manchester where he must sit at a desk all day. That's what I'm condemned to do for my living, says he, but to be out here, this is heaven: the changing sky, the heather, the friendly, inviting hills, and he's waving his stick: you live in magnificent country. I envy you, he says. Dead serious now, and deep in his throat a sob that won't come out. He dare not look me in the eye, and he's biting his lower lip. The rock, says he, my God, the rock, the *rock*, and he marches off west, shaking his stick at the setting sun.

*(They steep for a moment in the contradictions of this incident.)*

**SEAMUS**

Sure and it's scenery to them: all that magnificent stone, and us breaking our backs digging it up.

**MICK PAT**

Ah 'tis. What is this miserable rock of land but a curse on us.

**SEAMUS**

Too bad there's no market for the rock now, couldn't we ship it all over the world.

**DONAL**

Ah sure if it were worth anything, it would have been carted off by strangers a long time ago.

*(They are silent and still, then a quick game moment breaks the mood.)*

### **31. Mickey Quinn**

**BEA**

*(She is watching Tadgh.)* Would it not be easier on us all if our children just left of a sudden like. None of the long dread, knowing the time is coming. Sure and a child should be taken from us like Packie went.

**BRID**

No warning at all. God rest his soul.

**BEA**

Gone like a Mickey Quinn.

*(Nora has heard the story before. Unlike Brid, Nora does not know who the story is about.)*

The Quinns now were from Ballyeamon, a houseful of children and not a penny for sending them beyond to America. One of the Quinn boys was quick to seize time by the forelock, and that was Mickey. Looked about him at all the emigration. Didn't he fix himself a cart and make it known that anyone going to the boat from this parish could ride with him for a full pound cheaper than the train. It was many a night his fee put dinner on the table for the Quinns. Come the spring, the sap is flowing, and a young couple is running off to America. Would Mickey Quinn help them elope? They set out in the middle of the night, the lovers huddled together in the cart, shivering with the cold and the excitement. It was coming on dawn when they got to the harbor, and the would-be bridegroom reneged. I will not leave Ireland, says he, nor will I marry neither. Before a word could come out of the girl's gaping mouth, didn't Mickey trade the cart and the donkey for the boy's ticket. Off went Mickey Quinn to the boat, with only the home-spun jersey on his back. Twenty years later he returned stiff rich. Whips of money he had, but he was always wanting to come home. I could not stay in Ireland, said Mickey Quinn, only I went to America to find my way back.

**NORA**

*(Nora's preoccupied tone is faraway and flat.)* What happened to the girl, Aunt Bea? In America?

**BEA**

It's not her story. In this story she disappears.

**NORA**

You half expect her to have married Mickey Quinn.

**BEA**

It's not a fairy tale, Nora. He never took a wife, and I'm sure he was happier for it. And if the girl had an ounce of sense, she dried her eyes and kept clear of the marrying kind after that. No matter how far a man goes with you, somewhere down the road he'll turn back.

**NORA**

But Mickey Quinn ends up a rich man, and her story goes nowhere at all –

**BEA**

Is it a happy ending you want? She got herself employed in a rich man's house and worked hard till she had a position upstairs. She brought over her sisters and brothers. When she retired from domestic service, she bought herself a boarding house. It was such a success she bought two more, and she left them to the Church in her will. Is that happy enough for you?

**NORA**

I'm hoping for a bit more of the fairy tale myself. *(Nora starts to go.)*

**BRID**

Be a good girl, Nora, and fetch me a sup of tea.

*(Nora leaves.)*

Nora will learn soon enough how a story turns out different in the telling. Time is a great storyteller. *(She says it in Irish.)* Is maith an scéalaí an aimsir. At least she's dreaming.

**BEA**

She'll wake up. *(Bea rises and starts to leave.)*

**BRID**

That's what I'm after telling you. But it's the dream of America that our children run off to.

**BEA**

Your Tadgh is no dreamer. *(She leaves.)*

**BRID**

*(To herself, as she looks at Tadgh)* And he'll never be happy in America.

*(Nora brings Brid a cup of tea.)*

## 32. Electricity and Liam

*(Mick Pat is asleep at the hearth. Seamus distances himself from this talk about America. As the bottom of the night approaches, tensions surface. Tadgh is on his feet, restless and scared.)*

**TADGH**

I been staring at a book. From America – from my Uncle John, something he studied when he first went over –

**PAUDY**

A school book?

**TADGH**

One of those night schools.

**PAUDY**

*(Continuing his previous question)* What for?

**TADGH**

He says I should go back to school –

**DONAL**

Make something of yourself.

**TADGH**

It's about electricity.

**LIAM**

The kind of thing you need to know over there. They're not living in the Dark Ages, rubbing two sticks together –

**TADGH**

Everything's plugged in – well, everything working on the electric. There have to be wires, inside of cords, running to a lamp say, from a box in the wall, and the electric runs through the wire. A *current*. Electric current. And one thing you have to be careful about is the cord getting frayed, so that little wires are sticking out.

**GERRY**

That's dangerous, is it?

**TADGH**

You can get shocked.

**LIAM**

Of course it's dangerous, they're not fooling around.

**TADGH**

And you lose the power of it. The connection. Some of the electric gets shot off this way and that, a lot of the current might get lost that way.

*(They imagine all this.)*

**DONAL**

Well, be careful.

**PAUDY**

*(He wants to know why they're talking about electricity.)* What's the point?

**LIAM**

The point is we'll never have it here.

**GERRY**

Are you going to study electricity?

**TADGH**

I dunno. I dunno what I'll be able to do over there. After I've worked off what I owe my Uncle John for the ticket.

**GERRY**

There's a fellow working at the mill in Ballymacward got a letter from his brother, he's just off the boat over in Brooklyn. He's been looking about, hoping for something in a factory, or a lorry driver maybe. And he's seen signs, don't you know, outside some companies, right out in the open, "No Irish Need Apply." Quite a bit of that now. "No Irish Need Apply."

*(This sits in the air a moment.)*

You have work waiting, Tadgh, you're lucky that way.

**MATT**

Will I be lucky? I dunno.

**LIAM**

You're escaping this godforsaken place.

**TADGH**

You'll be going to school, Matt. Plenty of work for the likes of yourself.

*(The next lines are tightly spliced. Liam's relentless praise of America is starting to irritate Matt.)*

**DONAL**

And meat every day, white bread –

**LIAM**

Picking up potatoes from a basket in a store –

**MATT**

I don't care for white bread all that much –

**LIAM**

– instead of breaking your back digging them.

**MATT**

– the few times I had it.

**GERRY**

*(To Tadgh)* You'll be sleeping where?

**LIAM**

By himself. He won't have toes twitching either side of his nose.

**TADGH**

*(Responding to Liam)* I'll be sharing a room with other lads.

**LIAM**

You'll have your own bed.

**GERRY**

At the store?

**LIAM**

It's not like here, Gerry.

**TADGH**

In a building near the store.

**LIAM**

It's a civilized country.

**TADGH**

There's an eating room we all share and quite a few bedrooms now. And what they call a living room. All one place.

**GERRY**

Upstairs and down?

**TADGH**

I dunno, Gerry.

**MATT**

It must be a boarding house, like my Aunt Kate's.

**GERRY**

Who cooks?

**TADGH**

I dunno.

**LIAM**

A cook! *(Some laughter)* They're organized over there. Everybody's got his job and the rest is all taken care of.

**GERRY**

*(There is one detail Gerry cannot imagine. To Matt)* And what do you do in a living room, do you suppose?

**PAUDY**

Wake the dead.

**MATT**

I have no idea.

**LIAM**

They *live* over there, they know how to live. What would we do with a living room in Ireland?

**MATT**

You'd be *happy* living in America, I think.

*(Suggesting that Liam could ever be happy is a joke of sorts. But everyone can sense something else beneath the surface.)*

**LIAM**

Me? Happy?

**MATT**

Happier than me. America might suit you, Liam.

**GERRY**

*(To Matt)* Would you rather be staying, then?

**DONAL**

He's not an idiot.

**LIAM**

*(Hastily agreeing)* He'd be a bloody fool not to go.

**MATT**

Liam now, he could plug himself right into America. He could take the full current.

*(Matt's edge makes Liam back off.)*

**LIAM**

Isn't Tadgh after telling us that stuff is dangerous.

**PAUDY**

*(Charged by the electricity in the air)* It's only a way of speaking, Liam.

**MATT**

Me, I'm frayed. I grew up that way. *(He gestures: energy shoots out this way and that.)*  
I'm never plugged into one thing.

**DONAL**

They can fix that up over there, lad.

**MATT**

I'm not hungry like Liam.

**LIAM**

Me? I just can't stomach the way things are.

**MATT**

Same difference.

**LIAM**

*(Apprehensively)* What are we talking about?

**MATT**

*(As he pulls an envelope out of a pocket)* You want a ticket to America?

*(Everyone is stunned.)*

**LIAM**

*(His wide-eyed response is strong enough that it might almost pass for a choice.)* I'll be happier being unhappy over here.

**MATT**

If it's being unhappy you want, Liam, America's just the place. Lots of people are unhappy over there. That's why they went. That's why they'll go places. America's a country for people who are never going to be happy where they are. Would you take the ticket?

**DONAL**

I think there *is* something wrong with your wires.

**MATT**

Over here some people are foolish enough to be content, Da.

**PAUDY**

*(Paudy senses that Liam is as injured as himself and for that reason turns on him.)*

You'd be a bloody fool not to take it, isn't that right, Liam? Only an idiot –

**LIAM**

Such as yourself.

**MATT**

So you'd rather stay?

**DONAL**

*(To dissuade his son from giving away the ticket)* No young man with a head on his shoulders would stay here, Matt.

**PAUDY**

*(Focused on Liam)* Unless he's afraid of the electric stuff.

**MATT**

Will you take the ticket, Liam?

*(Liam is unable to respond.)*

Well, then: you've chosen to stay. I admire that. It takes guts, more guts than I have in going.

*(Liam leaves.)*

**DONAL**

You'll be happier over there, lad.

**MATT**

In my living room, Da?

**PAUDY**

You might learn to like it. *(Paudy manages to make this sound idyllic.)* Your own bed. A cook. White bread. Electric shocks. Just like when I was in the mental hospital, only you'll have to work for it.

*(Everyone stares at Paudy. Mick Pat falls off his stool. Gerry helps him up and walks him out for some air. As they exit, Gerry sings two lines from the chorus of "Goodbye Mick.")*

**GERRY**

*Well, it's goodbye Mick, and goodbye Pat, and goodbye Kate and Mary.  
The anchor's away and the gangway's up, we're leaving Tipperary.*

### **33. A bit of a rake**

*(Seamus starts crossing to Bea as Gerry and Mick Pat are going off. As he gets closer, he begins to act out his "beat up" condition. Seamus and Bea know each other's buttons. Brisk and edgy sparring gives way to reliving painful events.)*

**SEAMUS**

*(Just as Gerry finishes singing)* Oh me back, can I even stand up? Oh me side, did the kick of a donkey ever make me as sore? *(He sits.)* Ohhhhh me backside, wasn't her toe in me arse, dancing jigs all the way through me guts –

**BEA**

And what are you up to then?

**SEAMUS**

Could I be up to anything at all, and the tongue-lashing I'm after receiving?

**BEA**

I'm not in the mood, Twisty Slattery.

**SEAMUS**

You were in the mood a little while ago.

**BEA**

That was then. The once is always enough.

**SEAMUS**

Ah the once, the once, if I could number all the onces in my life.

**BEA**

Wasn't the once all you were interested in.

**SEAMUS**

Have you gotten around yet this evening to the saga of Mickey Quinn?

**BEA**

Once and move on, wasn't that your style.

**SEAMUS**

And the feckless lad who turned tail at the boat to America.

**BEA**

Not that any girl would fall for it twice.

**SEAMUS**

Why is it you never tell the rest of the story?

**BEA**

The story I tell is what happened to Mickey Quinn.

**SEAMUS**

What about the poor jilted girl? What happened to her, I wonder.

**BEA**

It's not her story.

**SEAMUS**

*(He pretends to speculate, as if he did not know the facts.)* Has it never occurred to anyone that she mightn't have gone to America at all? Did she even get on the boat?

**BEA**

In the story she disappears.

**SEAMUS**

Oh, isn't that the truth of it there! Once upon a time a girl disappeared in the story of Mickey Quinn.

**BEA**

It's nobody's business but her own what happened to that girl.

**SEAMUS**

Maybe she turned her heels and went back home. *(Melodramatically)* Mother, forgive me, I'm done with men once and for all. I'll stay home and I'll care for you and Da, I'll give give give and never take anything for myself –

**BEA**

It's godly to be giving and devils who are doing the taking. Isn't that the moral of every girl's story, and Mickey Quinn's couple was no different. *(Gradually she reenters the old dream.)* A girl ready to be took. A boy whose tongue could have taken her anywhere. Away from her family, her townland, her church, away from heaven itself – she'd have gone with him. Away from Ireland to the other side, and when they got to New York they'd keep going, past Philadelphia, past Chicago, going west to the wild frontier. All that way she would have gone with him. *(Bea looks him square in the face. She feels the betrayal all over again.)* But he reneged.

**SEAMUS**

And what else would a rake do but abandon you?

**BEA**

He's not a rake in the story.

**SEAMUS**

*(Explosively)* In real life I'm talking about! *(He lowers his voice.)* In real life he was a bit of a rake, wasn't he, the kind that wooed a girl once and moved on. Didn't everyone in the parish know his reputation?

**BEA**

*(She is as vulnerable right now as she was back then.)* Wasn't she a fool to believe him. Sure and the twisty sort have not a breath of truth in them. The twisty sort open their mouths and out come words that do curlicues in the air, speeches swirling till a heart's dizzy with the dance of them. The twisty sort never tell you straight.

*(The next six lines are a quick volley.)*

**SEAMUS**

Maybe they can't get the tongue to work that way.

**BEA**

The last lie needing a new one, on down the line like that.

**SEAMUS**

Not every tongue has an edge as straight as yours.

**BEA**

What was the first lie started you off, I wonder? Not that I expect an honest answer.

**SEAMUS**

I've no reason to be lying tonight.

**BEA**

Don't I know you're scheming some way or other to pay me back.

**SEAMUS**

I reneged! *(Now Seamus is reliving the past.)* Ran home and hid myself. For just as many miserable years as you did. The wet chill of Ireland come winter and homesick in bloody England all the rest of the year.

**BEA**

I'm sure you stuffed yourself a comfortable mattress with the money you made over there.

**SEAMUS**

And then I met *her*, and it was a second chance to be happy.

**BEA**

Wasn't the old cock proud of himself to be married at last.

**SEAMUS**

Once in my life I get a second chance.

**BEA**

Then something or other was said to his young hen.

**SEAMUS**

Once!

**BEA**

And now she won't show you her rear end.

**SEAMUS**

And never a smile on her face. Do you know, I never lied to her.

**BEA**

Tell it to the priest, I'm not interested in hearing your confession.

**SEAMUS**

*(This floods out.)* No, I'm going to tell you. And bless me, Bea, for I have sinned. But not the way you think. The rake now, he wasn't the Casanova he claimed to be. Oh he winked and he whistled and he looked the girls up and down. He learned a kind of smile that said he knew what the joke was, and the joke was dirty. None of the girls would go near him, of course. But then none of the girls had ever gone near him anyway, not once. Not once.

**BEA**

Am I going to believe that?

**SEAMUS**

Scared as he was, and a bit queer, maybe he come out a little twisted to start with, and he knew the joke would always be on him. So he turned it around. He huffed and he puffed and he blew himself up, and he whispered in people's ears. Lies with a twist to them. And the biggest lie was who he was.

**BEA**

And why would he not be lying now?

**SEAMUS**

So you would know what you done when you poisoned my wife on me.

**BEA**

She deserved to know the truth.

**SEAMUS**

The truth was a pack of lies.

**BEA**

Your lies are the truth about you.

**SEAMUS**

I never slept with all those women before her! The one time – a traveller girl, passing through Ballinasloe, the lads had gotten her drunk.

**BEA**

Keep the filth to yourself.

**SEAMUS**

I had her standing up. They were holding her up, her head lolling on my shoulder, she wouldn't have known me the next day. That was the one time. Not even lying down. All those years, once. Like that.

**BEA**

What ever possessed me to run off with you?

*(A love scene)*

**SEAMUS**

That's it. That's the mystery then. Why would a quiet girl like Bea Maloney be the first to speak up to the rake? And suggest they walk out of the dance.

**BEA**

Away from the village. Wasn't it a black night.

**SEAMUS**

I'd never been in the dark with a girl before. Petrified. Jabbering about the ticket in my pocket, going off to America, a fresh start –

**BEA**

What an awful rake you'd been –

**SEAMUS**

And you believed me.

**BEA**

That you'd been searching hard and what you'd found was me. I believed you.

**SEAMUS**

I was never so surprised in my young life. "You have your ticket to go to the other side, Seamus."

**BEA**

"Well I've got one too. "

**SEAMUS**

As bold as that. Who would have thought it. Bea Maloney taking up with the rake.

**BEA**

Didn't we all have dreams of being different people in America. Nobody knowing the way we were. We could all be somebody else. Just dreaming about it, we could be somebody else.

**SEAMUS**

*(With the urgency of the event)* Before I knew what has happening to me, I was talking to a fellow in Ballyeamon about taking us to the boat –

**BEA**

But you didn't go, Seamus. You didn't go.

**SEAMUS**

A stroke of good fortune for Mickey Quinn.

**BEA**

You drove us back home in his miserable cart.

**SEAMUS**

I made a good bit of money with that cart now. Enough to get me to England. And there I made a good bit more.

**BEA**

Enough to buy you a wife.

**SEAMUS**

She was a gift. I don't know why I was given a wife, God knows I didn't deserve her. Do you know we were happy? Once. I'll never forgive you took her from me.

**BEA**

The score is even then.

*(A burst of lively music. Whoops and dance steps as Thomas, Gerry and Tadgh exit to get ready for the arrival of the Strawboys. Bea starts to go. Seamus yelps, jumps to his feet, dances a step. Bea looks back at him. He grabs and kisses her. Paudy pops up from hiding and sees the kiss, then runs around and about the stage waving a pair of bloomers before he exits.)*

### 34. Love charms

*(Maggie is sitting by herself outside. She strikes a match to light her pipe. Matt speaks to her from a shadowy distance.)*

**MATT**

*(Rather hushed)* How are you, Maggie?

**MAGGIE**

Don't be sidling up to me. State your business.

**MATT**

*(He approaches, mortified by his mission.)* Ah, well. There's a girl.

**MAGGIE**

Will she not look at you?

**MATT**

She will. But here I am going across. I dunno when we'll be seeing each other again.

**MAGGIE**

Is she coming after you?

**MATT**

I dunno.

**MAGGIE**

Will you be coming back?

**MATT**

*(The question is painful, but yes, he will try to come back.)* I'm wanting her to wait.

**MAGGIE**

Has she a sister who sleeps in the same bed?

**MATT**

She does.

**MAGGIE**

The sister must bring you a bit of her hair.

**MATT**

Hair.

**MAGGIE**

Not from her head.

**MATT**

Not from her head.

**MAGGIE**

If you're not following my meaning, there's little point in going on.

**MATT**

No, I'm with you so far.

**MAGGIE**

You must tie each of her hairs around one of your own.

**MATT**

Well, I'm good with a knot.

**MAGGIE**

*(Maggie stares at him, then laughs.)* That's lovely. And where are you tying your little love knots?

**MATT**

In my hair.

**MAGGIE**

Not on your head. Down below.

**MATT**

I'll be able to see what I'm doing.

**MAGGIE**

Tie them good now.

**MATT**

Now Maggie, how many of her – her *hairs* am I wanting?

**MAGGIE**

How many years are you planning to be apart from her?

**MATT**

I see.

**MAGGIE**

But if she wakes up and sees she's been plucked like a chicken, that's too many years and the charm won't work.

**MATT**

And is there something you might be needing, Maggie? I'm grateful for your help.

**MAGGIE**

I'm a poor woman. I've no gift for your going to America but this.

**MATT**

Thanks, Maggie. I'm off then. To talk with her sister, God help me!

**MAGGIE**

Send the sister to me, I'll do the talking. There's no point in the charm if you're dead of mortification.

**MATT**

They call you the handy-woman, Maggie, and now I know why. *(He leaves.)*

**MAGGIE**

*(To herself)* It's a brisk business for romance the night of a wake.

*(Moirra speaks from the shadows.)*

**MOIRA**

Hello, Maggie.

*(Moirra pulls a bottle from behind her back.)*

Would you like a drop of whiskey?

*(Maggie looks at her, waiting. Moirra takes a swig from the bottle and gets to the point.)*

I need your help. *(Moirra puts the bottle down next to Maggie.)*

**MAGGIE**

Don't I know that? Is he one of those going?

**MOIRA**

He is.

**MAGGIE**

And you're wanting him to come back?

**MOIRA**

I am.

**MAGGIE**

Are you sure now? There's little use in a charm if it isn't sure as fate that you must marry him.

**MOIRA**

I'm sure. If he comes back.

**MAGGIE**

You won't go over yourself?

**MOIRA**

*(Moira can feel the risk in her refusal.)* I want him to come back.

**MAGGIE**

What time of the month is it with you?

**MOIRA**

*(What an unexpected question!)* I'm not bleeding.

**MAGGIE**

Let me taste your breath.

*(Maggie begins her instructions while their heads are still close.)*

Your eggs are set. A bit of virgin linen, it must never have been used. Hold it down below so to catch the little flow that's coming out of you.

**MOIRA**

I understand.

**MAGGIE**

When you've got the linen good and wet, it must be sewn inside a garment going with him.

**MOIRA**

A garment.

**MAGGIE**

Pants are best. *(Maggie looks at her.)* In the right vicinity, if you get my meaning.

**MOIRA**

I've only got till morning, I dunno about getting into his pants. *(This is out of her mouth before she realizes what she's said.)*

**MAGGIE**

For heaven's sake, it's a charm. Whatever you can lay your hands on will do.

**MOIRA**

Can I pay you something?

**MAGGIE**

You're leaking even as we speak.

*(Moira starts to leave.)*

Do just as I told you now.

**MOIRA**

*(She stops. Half to herself)* And he'll come back?

*(No answer. Moira turns around, but Maggie is gone.)*

### 35. What's wrong with you?

*(Liam's impulses to escape Eileen's urgent pursuit of him suggest that this scene should travel to several locations.)*

**LIAM**

*(He sings lines from "The Kilnamartyr Emigrant.")*

*I am a lonely exile  
That left my own dear nation*

**EILEEN**

I wish you were going instead of me.

**LIAM**

*For to seek a situation  
In a land beyond the foam*

**EILEEN**

*(Mostly to herself)* It will be a relief. But if I could I'd stay and fight.

*(She stares at her brother, knowing his fate if he stays.)*

**LIAM**

*I hunted for prosperity  
But still it has eluded me.  
Black misfortune followed me –*

**EILEEN**

*(She takes the plunge.)* You need to get out of here, Liam.

**LIAM**

And who'll look after Mother and Da?

**EILEEN**

Are you going to live your life for them?

**LIAM**

Honor thy father and thy mother. It come out of God's mouth even before he mentioned murder. Do me right, do your parents right, and by the way don't be killing, robbing, lying and fornicating each other.

**EILEEN**

It's no joke, Liam, what's happening to you.

**LIAM**

You're leaving, Eileen, you should leave us be.

**EILEEN**

I'm still your sister!

**LIAM**

America's a long way away from here.

**EILEEN**

*(She moves away from him.)* Do you want me face down in the bottom of a bog with a bullet in the back of me head? *(Not looking at him)* You know if I could I'd stay to look out for you.

**LIAM**

Don't I have enough parents?

**EILEEN**

It's not you they're looking out for, Liam, they've been thinking of themselves. You're the one who'll feed them when they can't hold a spoon. You'll fetch the priest for the last rites and hire Maggie to lead the keen. It'll be up to you to see they rest a good long moment on Kerrill's grave –

**LIAM**

Would you have it any different? *(He mutters the Gaelic version of "Many a day we shall rest in the clay.")* Is iomaí lá sa chill orainn –

*(The next lines build to a climax at Eileen's "Mother of Christ!")*

**EILEEN**

You sound like an old man.

**LIAM**

Do unto others.

**EILEEN**

And who'll be there to do unto you if you never have a family of your own?

**LIAM**

Spoken like a Yank. Every man for herself.

**EILEEN**

Mother of Christ! It's *you* I'm thinking about! *(She doesn't want to argue with him.)* I'll send you your passage over. You'll come to Chicago, you can stay with me till you find work.

**LIAM**

*(He looks at her. This is the second offer of a ticket he's had tonight!)* I'd never make it in America.

**EILEEN**

What's wrong with you?

**LIAM**

All those letters coming back to us, "living high and saving plenty," it's not true. A few might make it, but the rest – losing limbs in the factories, living on the street some of them – beggars.

**EILEEN**

*(This reversal from Liam's pro-American talk surprises her.)* Where'd you hear all that?

**LIAM**

Common knowledge. America is a cold, hard place. Every family in the parish has someone suffering on the other side.

**EILEEN**

*(Eileen is only now realizing that Liam has been indoctrinated so as not to emigrate.)*

How come I never heard the story that way? The rest of us kids, we could handle anything, we could go as far as we wanted, because they were getting us ready to leave the nest. But not you. *(Everything is falling into place.)* Doesn't she bring you a cup of warm milk every night, like she would to a sick child? And tucks you into bed.

**LIAM**

Shut up!

**EILEEN**

Don't be yelling at me because you're angry with your mother!

**LIAM**

I'm not angry with her.

**EILEEN**

You should be, and with Da too. The truth is that there's nothing wrong with you and a lot that's right, but you'll never see that if you're looking at yourself through their eyes. *(What she learned this week now makes terrible sense.)* I've been making my good-byes this week. I stopped by the school to see the Master. Do you know he thought you had a talent for maths?

**LIAM**

What difference does it make if I liked maths?

**EILEEN**

The difference is you're not a dolt, but Da told him not to be putting ideas in your head. Do you know what the priest told me? Our mother cornered him after Mass one Sunday: he wasn't to take too seriously anything you might confess. Sure the lad is so backward, it could be nothing but the imaginings of an innocent.

**LIAM**

I'm not an idiot! If he ever heard what really goes on in my head, I'd be saying my penance from one end of the year to the other.

**EILEEN**

Don't you want to be one of our saintly bachelors, sitting up praying with your cows at night? Another tortured soul who's never done what every animal in nature is meant to do. *(And now it dawns on her that his chances for marriage have been curtailed as well, so that he'll stay at home to take care of his parents.)* Speaking of which, how are you doing with the girls these days?

**LIAM**

Nobody strikes my fancy just yet.

**EILEEN**

And are you striking anybody's fancy?

**LIAM**

How would I know?

**EILEEN**

Don't play stupid, you would know.

**LIAM**

I don't think they like me.

**EILEEN**

Why?

**LIAM**

I don't know.

**EILEEN**

Use your head. Have you been hearing me or not? What's wrong with you?

**LIAM**

Nothing's wrong with me.

**EILEEN**

True for you. Do the girls act like there's nothing wrong with you?

**LIAM**

No.

**EILEEN**

Why? Where would they have gotten the idea that you're not the marrying kind? Don't you suppose our mother and father were whispering in every ear that you could never support a wife. A frail constitution, the poor boy, and none too bright or ambitious, not a go-getter at all. Won't he be a burden to us when he gets older. Can't you just hear them?

**LIAM**

*(Liam is stunned by the plain truth.)* They would never do that to me.

**EILEEN**

They've done it, Liam. Concocted all your failings the way you would never leave them.

**LIAM**

They must have been scared. Scared of dying alone.

**EILEEN**

I'm asking you to come across after me. In six months you'll be in America. *(By way of assuaging his guilt and her own)* It's not our fault we have to live in a new world.

**LIAM**

Is that the way we're going? The old folks by themselves? Keeling over and dying by themselves?

**EILEEN**

We'll all of us have to go through this from now on.

**LIAM**

In America. You mean that's how it will be in America.

**EILEEN**

Here too. it will happen here too. You can go to America or you can wait for it to come to you. *(No response from Liam)* I don't want to say good-bye to you angry.

*(Liam says nothing. Eileen starts to leave. His voice stops her. He does not appear to be talking to her.)*

### **36. Ambushes and anger**

**LIAM**

I wake up angry. Angry enough to kick a ewe so hard it dropped to its knees and blood gushed from its mouth like vomit. Angry enough to brain the dog so hard that shite flew out her other end – I dunno will that beast ever come to me again. I don't tell the priest why such things happen, and he doesn't ask. He doesn't want to know. I hate my parents. Not a week goes by I don't imagine them dead. Then I'm lost, like a little one whose parents have disappeared at the fair, and it's deeper than any grave what I'm feeling, it's buried in my flesh, it digs its way up. I can't explain my grief, no more than I can tell my feet why the ground is there. It just is. *(Simply)* It's easier to know why I'll never forgive them. Someone does you wrong, how much it hurts depends how close you are. You measure betrayal by how little you expect it. I figured that out all by myself now. Oh, I'm brilliant at the hate.

*(Liam looks at Eileen, who is transfixed. Strawboys, wearing conical straw masks over their heads, stealthily pop up here and there. They have been looking for Liam and Eileen because it is time for the next game. While the other Strawboys go off to make their grand entrance, one of them – Paudy – sneaks up behind Eileen and impulsively puts his mask over her head. Eileen reacts as if she is being ambushed. In a quick series of practiced moves she has her assassin doubled over. She pulls the mask off her head and realizes what it is. When she recognizes Paudy, it does not lessen her rage. She knocks him down.)*

### **EILEEN**

Ya stupid, stupid, bloody stupid bastard! Ya crazy little shite! Don't ever come up behind me like that. Bloody Christ! Don't be sneaking up on me, Paudy! Not tonight! Not on my last bloody night!

*(We hear the mysterious sound of Brendan's ship approaching. Eileen looks wild-eyed at Liam and grabs Paudy's mask. Paudy bolts off. The elders begin coming on to see the game.)*

Grab your mask, Liam. The Strawboys are here. Brendan the Navigator is going to America.

## **37. Strawboys**

*(The Strawboys enter. In addition to straw masks, some may wear other straw embellishments – such as the St. Bridget's cross hanging from the neck of Abbot Brendan, played by Gerry. Some wear their clothes turned inside out. Brendan sways unsteadily on the "deck" of his ship – a door carried by four sailor monks who swerve as if through heavy seas, while others who walk alongside the door pretend to oar feverishly. For a sail, a sheet has been tied to a broom or a spade, and Gerry pretends he is supporting himself by holding onto the “mast.” The Strawboy performance – improvised, rough theater fueled by drink – is very rapidly paced. It parodies the Brendan story and emigrant fears, but its low comedy is also a vehicle for venting the community's bitterness at losing so many of its young. The humor is therefore edgy and often black. The darkest undercurrent surfaces in the self-denigrating “dumb Mick” chorus at the end.)*

**MOIRA**

Brendan, save us!

**TADGH**

Do something, Brendan!

**LIAM**

Brendan, help us or we'll drown entirely!

**EILEEN**

If you were any kind of a saint at all, wouldn't you do what Jesus did on the Sea of Galilee!

**BRENDAN**

Are you asking me to walk out there in my condition?

**THOMAS**

Blood of Christ, he's been at the sacramental wine.

**NORA**

We need a miracle, Brendan!

**BRENDAN**

Put up your oars, boys. I'm three sheets to the wind: I've only to spread my arms and we'll sail like a frigate to the Promised Land.

**MATT**

Land ho!

*(The boat hits shore and the Strawboys tumble out of their boat formation.)*

**BRENDAN**

And what was it at all you were screaming about, O ye of little faith. Where the hell are we?

**THOMAS**

Holy St. Brendan, are we really here at last? Is this the Promised Land of the Saints?

*(Matt transforms into an Emigration Officer.)*

**EMIGRATION OFFICER**

Welcome to the United States of America.

*(The Strawboys sing wordlessly the opening bars of the Star Spangled Banner.)*

**EMIGRATION OFFICER**

Line up now for disinfection.

*(A couple of Strawboys join Matt to assist with the disinfection.)*

**BRENDAN**

Follow me, lads.

*(A quick, ragged line-up. The Emigration Officer begins with Brendan.)*

**EMIGRATION OFFICER**

Would the saint be kind enough to raise his holy arms over his holy head?

*(Brendan raises his palms heavenward in prayer. The Emigration Officer begins by sprinkling ashes on Brendan.)*

**BRENDAN**

Praise God that brought us from the grime and squalor of verminous hovels to this pure and pristine land.

*(A load of ashes is dumped over Brendan's head.)*

Purge us, O Lord, of any foul offensiveness.

*(Brendan is liberally fumigated with tobacco smoke.)*

Take from us the rank odor of the louse-y life we left

*(He is fumigated with farts.)*

and give to us the fresh sweet smell of this new land.

*(Gerry briefly lifts his mask to fan away the odors.)*

Wash us with its cleansing waters.

*(He is doused from above with water from a teapot.)*

Make us immaculate as the conception of your mother.

*(Whiskey is poured down the front of his pants. Gerry's body language reveals that this really stings. During the litany that follows, the action builds from a spit shine of Brendan's shoes through ever more vigorous scrubbing up his body to a crescendo of blows about his head.)*

*(Starting low and building to a grand climax)* Take from us every blemish and blot, every stain and spot, every tarnish and taint, blotch and splotch, every smear, smudge, smirch, smutch, every grubby, grungy, scabby, scurfy, scummy, slummy, slimy trace of the muck and the mire that we Irish come from. Make us Yanks!

*(The disinfection of Brendan is complete. He collapses.)*

**LIAM**

Holy St. Brendan! They've disinfected him to death.

**TADGH**

Quick! Give him the last rites.

*(Whiskey is poured into a circle of open mouths.)*

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. *(Latin: In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.)*

*(Brendan is loudly spritzed.)*

**ALL**

Amen!

*(Brendan suddenly sits up.)*

**BRENDAN**

And isn't this a lovely day in the paradise called Amerikay!

**ALL**

It's a miracle!

**BRENDAN**

*(Taking charge)* Now lads, why are we here?

**LIAM**

To spread the Christian faith.

**BRENDAN**

All in good time. To *work*, lads. Let's get us a job.

*(A quick scattering. Four of the ensemble become employment agents, each recruiting from an elevated position in a different area of the stage.)*

**EILEEN**

The police are hiring over here!

**MATT**

Good jobs at the steel mill!

**NORA**

Be a miner! There's coal in them thar hills!

**THOMAS**

Transportation is the future of the country! Come join the railroad!

**BRENDAN**

*(To the police agent)* What's the work?

**EILEEN**

Knocking heads, jailing the riffraff, and keeping the peace.

**BRENDAN**

What's the pay?

**EILEEN**

Three dollars a day and we give you your own shillelagh.

*(She bops Brendan on the head with a makeshift straw nightstick. Brendan staggers to the next agent.)*

**BRENDAN**

What's the work?

**MATT**

Pounding out sheets of steel.

**BRENDAN**

What's the pay?

**MATT**

Four dollars a day and we give you a ball-peen hammer.

*(Brendan is bopped on the head with a straw "hammer" and staggers to the next agent.)*

**BRENDAN**

What's the work?

**NORA**

Digging coal.

**BRENDAN**

What's the pay?

**NORA**

Five dollars a day.

**BRENDAN**

And what happens to my head?

*(A bowl of charcoal and ashes is dumped on his head. He staggers blindly to the next agent.)*

What's the work?

**THOMAS**

Laying rail for the transcontinental railroad.

**BRENDAN**

What's the pay?

**THOMAS**

Six dollars a day.

**BRENDAN**

*(He covers his head.)* And?

**THOMAS**

We give you free transportation all the way to Sante Fe, New Mexico.

**BRENDAN**

*(He lowers his arms.)* Did you know Marty Keane then?

**THOMAS**

And your very own sledgehammer.

*(He produces a big straw "sledgehammer" and bops Brendan, who collapses.)*

**LIAM**

Holy St. Brendan! Unemployment has done him in!

**TADGH**

Quick! The last rites! In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.

*(Another whiskey spritz.)*

**ALL**

Amen.

*(Brendan leaps to his feet.)*

It's another miracle!

**BRENDAN**

What this country needs is someone to protect the workingman from various and sundry attacks on his head. I'm going into politics.

**LIAM**

You can't go into politics if you're celibate.

**MOIRA**

People expect a politician to have a wife.

**NORA**

And kids.

**THOMAS**

But you've taken a sacred vow never to take your clothes off and stick your pinkie in a girl's navel.

*(Everyone looks at Thomas. Two of the ensemble hurriedly take him aside and explain what really happens. Thomas lifts the mask off his profoundly shocked face.)*

Holy St. Brendan, sure a decent man would never stoop to a filthy trick such as that!

**BRENDAN**

Fortunately, lads, we've got an old monastic tradition to fall back on. I will take a virgin to my bed every night as a test of my chastity. During the day she can campaign with me.

**EILEEN**

A virgin? You mean someone like Twisty Slattery's wife that won't sleep with him?

**BRENDAN**

That's it.

**LIAM**

But Brendan, didn't our mothers warn us about the kind of women we're likely to find in America?

**TADGH**

Aren't they all gold diggers?

**MOIRA**

And after the money we should be sending home?

*(Paudy appears in straw drag: a skirt, braids, etc. He is playing a version of Mae West, with lots of double entendres. This was not part of the scenario and the others are genuinely surprised, but they play along.)*

**PAUDY**

*(To Gerry)* Is that a pair of rosary beads in your pocket or are you happy to see me?

**ALL**

Holy St. Brendan!

**PAUDY**

Say, you're kinda cute, Paddy. Or do they call you Mick 'cause it rimes with –

**BRENDAN**

*(Cutting off the obscenity but reacting if he were completely taken with her)* Isn't she lovely now, and a godsend sure. Hold onto your celibacy, lads. I'm Brendan, the spiritual father to these randy lunks – uh, band of monks.

**PAUDY**

Pleased to meet you, Daddy Brendan.

**BRENDAN**

*(As if interviewing an applicant)* Tell me, Miss, do you make it to confession and communion with any regularity?

**PAUDY**

Sure and making it to communion is something I can't get enough of, I'll confess to that. Why just last night –

**BRENDAN**

Then we can assume you're in a state of grace and ready to meet your Maker.

**PAUDY**

Every woman's graceful when she gets in a state, Daddy Brendan. And I'm always ready to meet –

**BRENDAN**

You are then wholesome –

**PAUDY**

And then some.

**BRENDAN**

– and intact.

**PAUDY**

Are you telling me or asking me or would you like to find out for yourself?

**BRENDAN**

*(As if thoroughly infatuated)* I'm going to run for city council!

**ALL**

Hurrah for Brendan!

**BRENDAN**

I'm going to run for mayor!

**ALL**

Hurrah, hurrah!

**BRENDAN**

I'm going to run for governor!

**ALL**

Brendan, hurrah!

**BRENDAN**

I'm going to run for president!

**MOIRA**

Take that, you Paddy bastard!

*(Someone quickly provides the sound effect: a gunshot. Brendan collapses.)*

**LIAM**

Holy St. Brendan!

**PAUDY**

He's been assassinated!

**TADGH**

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.

*(The usual spritz. No response. Another spritz. No response. The Strawboys start to take a third swig.)*

**PAUDY**

Don't waste any more of that good whiskey, fellas.

**LIAM**

*(Quietly bitter)* The dumb mick.

*(Handkerchiefs come out in a show of mock grief. Paudy improvises rhyming lines, which build on each other, as do the choral responses of the Strawboys as they vilify "the dumb mick." Eileen moves to the place of her leaving vision. )*

**PAUDY**

Big Daddy Brendan is ready for his wake.

**ALL**

The dumb mick.

**PAUDY**

He got big ideas and that was his mistake.

**ALL**

The dumb mick.

**PAUDY**

His mother knew ambition would surely kill him dead.

**ALL**

The dumb mick.

**PAUDY**

But going to America gave Brendan a big head.

**ALL**

The dumb mick.

**PAUDY**

She warned him, she begged him. He wanted to roam.

**ALL**

The dumb mick.

**PAUDY**

He'd be alive today if he'd got drunk and stayed at home.

### **38. Eileen's leaving vision**

*(Eileen un.masks. Maggie is close by, as she was for Nora's leaving vision. Behind and above Eileen, the Strawboys create a ghostly version of the scene she describes. They wave their handkerchiefs.)*

**EILEEN**

A small boat comes to bring us out to the ship. My parents insist on coming with me. They are not used to being on the water. When we pull alongside the ship and it is time

for me to board, my mother is too shaky to stand. *(Eileen extends her arms forward as if toward her mother.)* She holds the bench with both hands, her knuckles white as her face. *(Lowering her arms)* No last embrace, then. My father wobbles to his feet and flaps his hand toward my bag, which he is not steady enough to lift. Suddenly the motion of the sea has made him frail. He is locked in my heart like this: helpless. *(One hand goes to her hair, as if the wind were blowing it.)* The salt wind stiffens my hair as I watch them return to shore.

*(The sail rigged up for Brendan's boat becomes a waving flag.)*

My girlfriends have brought a sheet. They tie it up on an oar to make a flag. It waves at me as the engines begin vibrating the deck, the rail, my hand on a post, my knees, my teeth, my lips. The sheet waves good-bye to me. A great white sign of surrender. My family disappears. And the last bit of motion as Ireland fades is the flag's ghostly flutter. Good-bye. We surrender. We give up.

*(This image holds until Seamus booms his challenge.)*

### **39. Christening**

#### **SEAMUS**

No man ought to leave Ireland but the man that can't help it.

*(Those who were Strawboys respond to Seamus as they move out of the previous scene and go about stashing props. Everyone is aware that the night has grown dangerous. Seamus has an uncanny knack for poking his finger in a wound. It is his genius to sense how everybody else is hurting – because of his own hurt.)*

#### **PAUDY**

Oh Jesus.

#### **GERRY**

Here we go.

#### **DONAL**

All right, Seamus.

#### **THOMAS**

Is it the helpless that are going to America then?

**GERRY**

Don't get him started.

**SEAMUS**

And America is welcome to them.

**DONAL**

It's not the occasion, Seamus –

**SEAMUS**

Here we sit, the proud parents of a infant nation. What better “occasion” to remind the guests of honor that they are abandoning their newborn land?

*(Gerry tries to head off trouble and gives Tadgh a glass.)*

**GERRY**

Would you like another taste of the porter, Tadgh? Seamus dove headfirst into the keg. Ten gallons now! A man could drown.

**DONAL**

Sláinte. Drink up, Tadgh, you won't be getting any of the good stuff over there.

**SEAMUS**

He won't be Tadgh after this night. *(Spells)* T-i-m-o-t-haitch-y. Did you get that much at least before Da and Mammy yanked you out of school. Let's drink to Timothy then. Let's raise a glass to the dead boy at his wake.

**TADGH**

I'm in the wrong going to America, am I? Is it unpatriotic for an Irishman to –

**SEAMUS**

Not if he can't help it.

**TADGH**

What does that mean?

**SEAMUS**

Do you want to hear it in Irish?

**PAUDY**

Oh Jesus!

**GERRY**

*(Under his breath)* Mary and Joseph.

**DONAL**

*(Rises)* Shall we clear our heads in the night air, Seamus?

**TADGH**

You might have emigrated too, but all these years you've chosen to stay, is that it?

**SEAMUS**

I never gave a thought to running off.

**TADGH**

That's not the way I heard it.

**GERRY**

You'll be twisting us all up in a big knot if you go on circling each other –

**SEAMUS**

Would a boy like yourself, Liam, leave his parents and go to America?

**LIAM**

Me? I don't need to go anywhere. Are all of you trying to get rid of me tonight?

**SEAMUS**

Isn't America the promised land, and Gurteen a godforsaken place? Aren't you after praising all the "organization" and "civilization" in the great beyond?

**LIAM**

I'm happy enough staying here.

**SEAMUS**

But even if you were miserable here, you'd have the decency to stay for your parents' sake, am I right? Even if it was *killing* a boy like you to stay –

**DONAL**

All right, Seamus.

**SEAMUS**

Or you, Thomas. Wasn't it you your father favored for America?

**PAUDY**

Christ!

**THOMAS**

I'm staying with the farm.

**SEAMUS**

Sure and it was the brave choice you made. Was it hard coming to that, Thomas? Did you need any help?

**GERRY**

That's enough then, Twisty.

**THOMAS**

I can make up my own mind.

**SEAMUS**

And you'd stay even if the McDermotts invested in another passage over, isn't that it?

**THOMAS**

We don't have that kind of money, Seamus. We've never twisted arms for another few pence.

**SEAMUS**

But if your Uncle Moneybags in Long Island sent it to you in the mail, and if the ticket managed to get to you, a gift free and clear—

**TADGH**

It's no *gift* bringing me over. I'm going like in the old times, a slave till I pay off my debt. I wrote my uncle, I told him I'd break my back doing the foulest work he could find me and I'd do it dirt cheap. Just send a ticket, says I —

**THOMAS**

You asked for the ticket? Does Da know that? I thought it was Uncle John's idea —

**TADGH**

Shut up. (*To Seamus*) I made it happen. I didn't wait for any crock of fairy gold. I sold my uncle on sending me a ticket. That's how it's done if you've got any gumption.

**DONAL**

More power to you, lad.

**TADGH**

But you turned back at the boat, Seamus. Because you haven't the spark for America. The fire God gave you burned out in your gut, and all that ever came of it was hot air and you

blaming all the enemies of Ireland for what you done to yourself. *(Tadgh jabs his finger this way and that.)* It's the English, it's the Protestants, it's the Black and Tans, it's this one or that one selling us out, it's the selfish ones going off to America instead of staying home and suffering with the likes of yourself.

**DONAL**

All right, Tadgh, you've evened the score –

**TADGH**

The only man I'm pointing a finger at now is myself. Because whatever happens to me from here on, good or bad, by God I'm the one will make it happen.

**SEAMUS**

For yourself.

**TADGH**

Not for people who've dug their own grave and won't climb out of it. *(Tadgh addresses everyone in earshot.)* Sure you're a morbid, miserable lot. You love nothing better than congregating around a corpse – oh, the spirits are never higher than when you're celebrating dying. And all of you come here tonight thinking this wake is for me, poor soul, off to exile when he's dying to stay at home. But you've got your ass on backwards, Seamus. It's for you the women should be keening tonight. You're the one with no more future. I'm off to America in the morning, and the long road ahead of me. I'm leaving a cramped wet place where my lungs won't work for a wide-open world where I can breathe. I don't need a wake, I need a christening. *(He pours porter over his head.)* Drink up, Seamus, it's your party. You're the one staying here and dying.

*(Off by herself, Brid begins a lullaby in Irish, which continues under the beginning of the next scene. Tadgh listens to his mother from a distance, but for the moment he is paralyzed and cannot go to her. Thomas goes to sit with her.)*

**40. Stolen babies**

*(Nora's head is in Bea's lap. Bea's hand traces the features of her niece's face. Matt is somewhere where Bea can see him.)*

**BEA**

When you were first born and your mother, God rest her soul, gone early to her grave, you slept next to my bed. My mother had rocked me in that same cradle, I wonder will it ever be used again. She was a great one for the old stories, your grandmother was, and she would be scaring me silly that time, how babies get stolen by the little people. I knew it was nonsense but sometimes I'd wake up at night and reach over in the dark to feel your face.

**NORA**

To make sure I was still there. *(Nora impulsively pulls on her Strawboy mask.)*

**BEA**

I'd be feeling for wrinkles and warts and old lady whiskers, such as there'd be if you'd been snatched and some wizened old creature put in your place.

**NORA**

By the fairies.

**BEA**

That's how they get young blood. 1500 years old, a fairy might live that long, and then it will get switched with a human baby.

**NORA**

Overnight like?

**BEA**

Or whenever the infant might be left alone. When you're busy working and your back is turned.

*(Brid stops singing.)*

It gets quiet. Something too still. You go look in the cradle and there it is staring up at you: shriveled and sickly gray. A funny look in the eyes, eyes that know too much and they're watching you. And the creature is holding its breath.

**NORA**

*(After a suspended moment, Nora takes her mask off. She makes light of the possibility of changelings, but she feels the undercurrent of loss.)* It was mothers scaring their daughters into keeping a close watch on the kids.

**BEA**

Children do get stolen away. You wake up in the dark and you reach over and they're gone. Overnight.

**NORA**

I could come back. I woke up this morning, and I was on the boat, I could see myself leaving. But the boat comes back. I'll be happy to make something of my youth over there – and the money, Aunt Bea – but I could come back.

**BEA**

Bí go maith an ngarlach agus tiocfaidh sí amárach. Be good to the child and she will come to you tomorrow. *(Bea traces Nora's features, as she did earlier.)* Maybe you'd have a touch of gray in your hair and lines in the corners of your face. My baby suddenly old. It wouldn't really be you coming back. A baby that's stolen can never come back.

*(Bea looks over at Matt. Maggie, who is preparing for the keening, lights a candle and holds it over her head. She begins to circle the house and exits.)*

#### 41. Tadgh and Brid

*(Tadgh keeps his distance from Brid for a good while. He knows she is angry with him, and he fears her grief, and his own. Residual aggression from his confrontation with Seamus helps him to tough out the first part of this dreaded encounter. He breaks the ice by reciting the opening of "The Old Woman," a poem by Joseph Campbell.)*

**TADGH**

As a white candle  
In a holy place,  
So is the beauty  
Of an agèd face.

**BRID**

Her brood gone from her,  
And her thoughts as still  
As the waters  
Under a ruined mill.

Is gliobach í an chearc go dtógann sí a hál. (*“A hen has ruffled feathers till her brood is gone.” She does not bother to translate this for Tadgh. Her tone is edgy.*) My face is not aged yet, I hope. Nor my brood gone. Not yet. (*She glances at him.*) You didn't think I'd remember a poem now, did you? Word for word. Weren't you breathless that afternoon, running home from school to recite it for me. A poem, Mammy, it's in English! And do you remember how once you started school you'd get angry with me if a word of the Irish came out of my mouth? Will you speak so that I can understand ye and stop talking Irish!

**TADGH**

It's backward.

**BRID**

(*She lashes out at him.*) It's our mother tongue. Or it used to be. Before we were forbidden to speak it. My father could remember when every child came home from school with a string round his neck and a stick hanging down from it. To remind the parents to speak no Irish in front of their sons and daughters.

**TADGH**

What good is the Gaelic in America when we go looking for work?

**BRID**

That tongue in your mouth has more uses than asking for work. With that tongue you woo your wife and sing your children to sleep and try to find words for the ache in your heart. You bless and you curse with that tongue. It's not foreign words you want for all that.

**TADGH**

You can't mouth malarkey without the Irish, is that it? What I'm needing is more English than I got from reciting poems –

**BRID**

You were needed on the farm. Your father wanted you to learn the farm.

**TADGH**

I was nine years old! The last day I set foot in that schoolhouse. And I've been hobbled ever since, like a goat you don't want to stray. Only instead of a short rope cross the legs, you tied me tongue to hand, so I can't say anything on paper. I'll be lame wherever I go, but I'm still getting out.

**BRID**

And will you be holding that against us all your life? Hating us the whole time you're in America?

**TADGH**

I'll get over it.

**BRID**

When the Statue of Liberty takes a back flip, you will.

**TADGH**

*(Tadgh laughs, surprised.)* Where'd you hear that?

**BRID**

Your Uncle John in Long Island, that horse's fediddy, he was forever writing us the latest wisecracks, just his style.

**TADGH**

*(He comes closer.)* Did he have a wake like this?

**BRID**

He hadn't the heart for one, or the guts to tell us he was going.

**TADGH**

He just went off?

**BRID**

What he did was drive some of my father's stock into town and sell them to buy his fare. He *stole* away, you might say. Just like you.

**TADGH**

*(In guilty defense of himself)* Thomas will be better off on the farm.

**BRID**

Keep telling yourself that as you make your way in America. Though it's Thomas who needs to believe it.

**TADGH**

It's true. Didn't you announce it yourself the very day Uncle John wrote that a ticket would be coming. And as soon as Da asked Thomas if he wanted to go, wasn't that the refrain you kept singing: Thomas would be happier on the farm.

**BRID**

It doesn't matter if it's true or not, you're still a thief. It was Thomas's ticket.

**TADGH**

It was me that wrote to Uncle John, for godsake, you were the one who gave me his address. As long as I never told Da.

**BRID**

And America's just the place you should be going, with all the others thinking only of themselves. I'm grateful it isn't you I'll be depending on when my face is really agèd and I'm squatting on an empty nest.

**TADGH**

*You'll be better off as well then. (It seems they will not be able to reconcile their differences. Tadgh recites from Joseph Campbell's "The Emigrants," as if to say that there is nothing more for him to do but leave.)*

The car is yoked before the door,  
And time will let us dance no more.  
Come, fiddler, now, and play for me  
"Farewell to barn and stack and tree."

Five hours will see me stowed aboard,  
The gangplank up, the ship unmoored.

**BRID**

Christ grant no tempest shakes the sea –

**TADGH**

Farewell to barn and stack and tree.

America's been in my head from the day I was able to walk. Soon as I knew I could go places by myself. If there wasn't an ocean I think I might have set out right then.

**BRID**

On foot.

**TADGH**

Barefoot. How many thousand miles?

**BRID**

You've been waiting hard.

**TADGH**

I have, Ma. Waiting hard. The time is come.

**BRID**

We've another hour.

**TADGH**

The first year now, I'll have to be paying back Uncle John for the ticket.

**BRID**

I'm not worrying about the money.

**TADGH**

When I've paid him off, I'll go looking for a better job, I don't care what kind of work it is. There's big money to be made over there, Ma. Big money.

**BRID**

Your father will be grateful for the help. He'll be looking at more land, that's what he dreams about.

**TADGH**

What about you? Is there nothing you're wanting?

**BRID**

I want to be done with waiting too. Waiting all these years for the first of my children to leave. Tomorrow I'll start waiting for the next one to make up his mind. Or her mind. From now on I'll not be knowing which. It wasn't hard to figure out the first one would be you.

**TADGH**

Do you want some clothes? Something – I don't know what, I won't know what to get unless you tell me, and the size.

**BRID**

Must I be changing the way I dress because I've got a son in America? Your sisters would like something.

**TADGH**

Fine. *(He needs to feel he can send her something.)* And you?

**BRID**

*(Anger hyphenated with grief)* There's not enough money in America to pay for my grief this night. When you walk out that door in the morning, I don't want to hear an English word out of your mouth. Say good-bye in your mother tongue or say nothing.

*(Tadgh starts to go.)*

You've broken your father's heart.

**TADGH**

Because Thomas won't be going to America? If Da favors Thomas so much, he should be happy to have him stay!

**BRID**

God help you in America, you get everything important about other people wrong. A man doesn't send the son he favors to the other side of the ocean. Is that plain enough? Your father kept you out of school so you wouldn't get it in your head to go away.

**TADGH**

*(Confused)* You're saying Da favors me? It was Thomas he wanted to take the ticket –

**BRID**

He'd taken the notion that if you knew you were favored, it would soften you. But you must be toughened so you could bear to stay. Not to mention it would embarrass him to be showing any sign of affection.

**TADGH**

*(Stunned)* Where is he?

**BRID**

Kicking himself across the fields for driving you away. He's not the most graceful man, so that'll take him a while.

*(Tadgh exits. He will reappear in his traveling suit.)*

**MATT**

*(A burst of high-spirited lilting and drumming from "Muirsheen Duirkeen" breaks the mood.)*

*Nyah nyah too rah yah,  
Skiddy eye duh doo dum doo die dah,*

*Nyah nyah too rah yah,  
Skiddy eye duh doo dum dah.*

*(Bea has some contact with Matt en route to Seamus, who is somewhere outside.)*

## **42. Money for school**

**BEA**

I have something to say. New business. It's about Matt. He doesn't want to go.

**SEAMUS**

Are you telling me he's going to renege on America even before he's under way? Is it something comes over all the men in your life?

**BEA**

He's got the guts to go through with it, Seamus. But he would rather stay.

**SEAMUS**

Because of the girl.

**BEA**

Because he loves Ireland. That should mean something to you.

**SEAMUS**

And if it does?

**BEA**

How much money do you really have?

**SEAMUS**

And why would I be telling you?

**BEA**

Enough to send the boy to university? I might be able to manage one year myself. Could you manage the rest?

**SEAMUS**

Why would I do that?

**BEA**

Because you've had a lot to drink tonight and it's the wee hours. Because you're not really as twisty as you would like people to think. Because "Once upon a time." Because I'm asking.

*(Seamus, caught by surprise, must really consider the possibility of doing what she asks of him.)*

**SEAMUS**

Haven't you waited till the last hour of a long night. Not a word of this in the daylight, or last week, or last month. Or before you put the poison in my bride's heart.

**BEA**

Nora and Matt are as close as a spinster like me can come to children. Wouldn't my pillow have been damp every night but for having them. The pulse of them beating in my own chest. Nora is set on going, but I have a chance to hold onto the boy, and he is the son of my heart, Seamus, the son of my heart.

**SEAMUS**

A loan, is it?

**BEA**

It will take him years to pay you back, but he will. And he will make something of himself. Wouldn't that be helping Ireland, keeping him here.

**SEAMUS**

Does Matt know you're asking me?

**BEA**

He does not.

**SEAMUS**

What did you tell my wife?

**BEA**

I told her the story of Mickey Quinn.

**SEAMUS**

The whole story.

**BEA**

Including the parts I always leave out.

**SEAMUS**

Why?

**BEA**

Wouldn't you think the hurt had healed itself long ago. And the villain punished by his twisted life. As long as he was lonely as me at night, and the two of us squirreling away our coins like it was always winter coming, and never spring. And then the news he'd gotten married, come back from the seasonal work in England with a young bride, and grinning everywhere he went with her. Seamus Slattery, happy. That's the final twist, I thought.

*(Seamus does not yet know what he will do. Here is another chance at salvation. It is his old hurt that tips the scale.)*

**SEAMUS**

Ahhh no now, there are no final twists. The twisting goes on and on, like the wars of Ireland. Wouldn't it be a new turn for me to give you what you're after asking me. I have the money. I have more than enough money for educating Matt.

**BEA**

And?

**SEAMUS**

And in the morning you can kiss your darling boy good-bye. Seamus Slattery is sending him to America, isn't *that* a twist. Sure and I might even give him a little pocket money. It's a long journey, and he'll be a long time gone, breaking his back over there alongside the millions of other Paddies who can barely read and write. A lot of good his brains will do him over there. Maybe he'll be so miserable he'll come back. Wouldn't that be a consolation to you now, and you grieving that you ever spilled your guts to my wife. Do you know she might have straightened me out, that girl. I might have ended up a happy man, it's true for you about that. And a happy man might have ripped open his mattress and given you the money. But not an old corkscrew like me, have you got that straight now? Not Twisty Slattery.

*(Seamus goes into the house and drinks.)*

### 43. The Place of Loneliness

**MOIRA**

I won't go, Matt. I haven't the heart to emigrate.

**MATT**

*(He takes this in.)* I went to the graveyard this morning. Early. To say good-bye to Nanno and Grandpa. And there were others, God grant them rest, I was glad to have a word with before I left. Just wandering about, maybe saying something out loud, the way you will when you're alone. Passing the time of day with the dead. On my way home I came to Áit an Uaignis. *(His translation sounds like he is wondering what the name means.)* The Place of Loneliness. I'd never thought about it before, why it's there that the funeral processions stop before going on to the graveyard. And what is it at all that's lonely about the place, why it's called that. It's right on the ridge, you know, the village down one slope and the graveyard down the other. Coming over that crest, that's the last time the dead person could see the village. After that it disappears. *(He feels dead.)* That's where I'll say good-bye to you tomorrow morning. Don't be coming along with the convoy all the way to the crossroads. We'll part at Áit an Uaignis. I'll have my last look at you there. Where the dead folk come to their loneliness. *(Matt leaves abruptly, without looking at her.)*

**44. Taking the mickey out of Matt**

*(Donal is talking to Gerry, but Seamus is listening. If Mick Pat is not already at the hearth, he can enter as Seamus is singing.)*

**DONAL**

In those days of course there was no coil or any such device for the castrating. Up went the lamb on the other fellow's back, grab the snout, take the testicles in your mouth... *(He bites.)* Mountain oysters they called them. My father's teeth now were worn down on the one side. *(He bites again.)* Mountain oysters.

*(Matt arrives as Donal is concluding. Matt does not respond to his father's old story, and Donal notices this.)*

**SEAMUS**

*(He sings lines from "Paddy on the Railway" and inserts a reference to Matt and his father.)*

*It's "Paddy, do this" and "Paddy, do that"  
 And no time for a friendly chat,  
 'Twill be the same for Donal's Matt  
 When working –*

And what work will you be doing now, Paddy, in the bountiful U. S. of A.? Will you be  
*(Sings)*

*working on the railway?*

Or will you be digging ditches – there's good money in that, I hear. "Dig here, Paddy. Any gold you find lying about, Paddy, that'll be yours." *(Matt does not appear to be amused.)* Get used to it now, Matt, we're all Paddies over there.

**DONAL**

All right now, Seamus. Will you be taking the mickey out of Matt on his last night?

**SEAMUS**

Go n-éirí go geal leat – mar a dúirt an sweep lena mhac. *(Seamus relishes his translation.)* May you have a bright future – as the chimney sweep said to his son. Some kind of dirty work anyway, that nobody over there will do, only an Irishman fresh off the boat. Unless of course he had an education –

**GERRY**

Give it a rest, Twisty.

**SEAMUS**

– like that lass of yours, Matt. Did she really expect you to stand your ground on a piece of the old sod as poor as this – and her supporting you, I suppose, by going off somewhere to teach school. Sure if you married *her*, your oysters would be shaking like a lamb's on the swallowing side of her teeth –

*(Matt heads toward Seamus. Donal intercepts him.)*

**DONAL**

*(To Seamus)* Ah Jesus, you're an awful idiot. Bring him some tea and scald his throat with it. A crowned and throned royal idiot.

**SEAMUS**

When you do strike gold, Paddy, ship a couple of nuggets back home, won't you. A little something to console your father for going to his grave without an heir.

**DONAL**

*Seamus!*

*(Seamus leaves. Music: lilting. Donal's tone is ferociously upbeat.)*

Get over here, son, and face me in a jig. Step lively now. The best for last, isn't that it? The last steps ever we'll dance.

*(Donal and Matt face each other, motionless. As the light on them begins to fade, we hear the rhythmic footfall of Liam, who is off by himself, dancing a jig. This continues under the first part of Brid's story, as if it were the dancing at Biddie's wake.)*

#### **45. Where's Biddie?**

*(As the lights fade on Donal and Matt, Brid looks up at the sky, sensing the coming dawn, which triggers her story. Bea is nearby but shows no signs of listening.)*

**BRID**

It's unnatural to dread the morning. *(Brid lowers her gaze.)* A girl I knew, years ago now, she decided to steal away during the wee hours of her wake. Afraid that the parting would be too hard on her mother. Only a handful of her friends knew of her plan. It was a jig set we were dancing as daylight came, and the mother was busy with the tea. She'd made flour cakes with currents and raisins, just the two very things that would be never be seen in our parish, only at Christmas. We were just sitting down. The mother looked around. "Where's Biddie?" Innocent as that. "Where's Biddie?" None of us knew. The mother stood in the middle of the floor. "Biddie!" She clapped her hands. "Biddie!" And fainted. Three or four lads lifted her up and carried her out in the air. The dancing was finished after that. *(Brid again looks up at the sky.)* She never saw the daughter again.

#### **46. Slavery**

*(Nora, Eileen and Moira are up on the thatch, each with a different energy. Nora is watching the sky.)*

**NORA**

You can't see it yet, but I feel it coming. It's growing light. (*A serene sense of mission*) In America I'll pay for Matt to go to school. I'll be sending money every month to Aunt Bea and Da. I've cousins in Parknasilla desperate to emigrate, but they've no one in America to earn their passage. You'll be wanting a dowry, Moira, I can help. (*She looks at Moira.*) I don't think you should wait for Matt.

**EILEEN**

And nothing for yourself. It's slavery.

**NORA**

Maybe I've been set in motion like the stars, with a fixed course. But even if every day of my life is as determined as God's will, I'd have it no other way.

**EILEEN**

Scrubbing and sweating down in the basement. A few minutes to yourself before you drop off. Waking exhausted. A uniform hanging in the dark at the foot of your bed.

**NORA**

It won't be weary like that, it won't be dark. It will feel like after confession, when your soul is white. I know why I'm going, and it's not for myself. It's growing light.

**EILEEN**

Do you want to end up a spinster like that aunt of yours in Philadelphia? You're giving up on a life of your own. Maybe I won't be the same Eileen in America, but I'll sure as hell be somebody else.

**NORA**

I'm somebody else already. When I woke up this morning I was on the boat, I could see myself leaving. Maybe it was my soul sailing off. I'm gone already.

**MOIRA**

Your soul stays, Nora. You're leaving your soul behind. What will be left of Nora Maloney a few hours from now? The ties that anchored you here will be cut. Those ties are *you*, Nora, and they'll be cut.

**NORA**

I'll be traveling light.

**EILEEN**

You're *not* cutting the ties, Nora. Something for everybody and nothing for yourself: that'll make you a slave over there.

**NORA**

Aren't the stars all slaves? Going where they must. They don't look unhappy.

**EILEEN**

Are you that afraid to feel guilty? Do you think by taking nothing for yourself –

**MOIRA**

The stars make me still. They make me want to stay right here.

**EILEEN**

Slavery.

*(Maggie enters with her candle and goes to the hearth, where she crouches with her back to the room. After Gerry starts singing, Eileen and Nora go off to change for their departure.)*

## **47. Another famine**

**GERRY**

*(He sings lines from "Path Across the Ocean.")*

*I will leave my native Irish home and sail across the sea.  
Will I ever get a glance, lovely Erin, of thee?*

**DONAL**

*(Very quietly)* You don't have to go to America to be hungry for Ireland. Exile can happen right here. Whether you leave Ireland or Ireland leaves you, what's the difference? *(Donal glances at Mick Pat, who appears to be asleep, and envisions the future of Packie's house and of his own.)* Packie's cottage is empty now, God rest his soul. The thatch will cave in, the door will rot off its hinges. The walls wearing down to a pile of rubble. *(A quiet exclamation)* Isn't the emigration a blight on our children, carrying away the whole crop. And without the children, won't the rest of us starve. Sure and it's another Famine.

## 48. Dreams

### MICK PAT

*(He sings lines from "Goodbye Mick." His eyes are closed.)*

*I'm bound for New York City, boys,  
Three thousand miles away...*

I find myself a quiet spot where I can lean my head back and I'm off. Not a solid sleep, of course. Bursts of singing or dancing jolt me back. Hoots of laughter, howls of grief – no man could sleep through the wailing of an Irish mother losing her child. *Half* sleep, and all around me the swirl of stories and speculations about America. Sometimes the wake is in my dream, sometimes my dream walks out into the wake. Between the two: that's the country now where I like to emigrate. A land of rustic cities, farms wrapped round skyscrapers, great green factories where workers jump into jigs. Happy feet dance cross streets paved with gold to sidewalks of soft concrete. On every corner a trash can, a tobacco stand, a night school, another pub. Everything plugged in. Underground the dangerous currents. Buried. *(Mick Pat opens his eyes, as if slowly awakening.)* And then I wake up.

*(Enter the four emigrants with their suitcases and bundles. They have changed into their traveling clothes, which are like nothing worn in Gurteen. They are apparitions from another world.)*

Dawn. Gray faces, and the darkest are those of the emigrants. Starved for sleep. They have been much too awake this night. You can see it in their faces as they say good-bye: the exhaustion of knowing they will never lay eyes on the America of their dreams. Not awake.

*(Elsewhere, Seamus is weeping.)*

## 49. Paudy's lament

*(Paudy is holed up somewhere outside, hiding from the coming keen and from his own grief, which makes him very anxious.)*

### PAUDY

*(This begins quietly and builds.)* I could forgive them if I were leaving too. I could forgive the lads for taking the merciless mickey out of me, the girls whose underwear got ripped off in my dreams, the priest who won't give me communion, the fellows in white at the hospital hounding me, the parents. Myself. I could forgive the nightly moan of the married men, the cooing in dark corners, the creak and scratch of sex on the thatch and nobody listening but me.

*(The keening begins quietly.)*

I could forgive it all if I were leaving too. Weren't they all born feverish like me? Damp with *desire* – the day in, day out delirium. If I were leaving, I would weep for them. Complicated tears: crying for them, for myself, for the whole damn disappointment that is life here. Aren't we all dying together? Isn't this a wake? It's all the one death, says Mick Pat. One pool of sorrow down below, and isn't it the spring for all our tears.

*(The keening grows louder. Paudy speaks over it.)*

If I were leaving, if I were saying good-bye. If I were leaving.

## **50. Keen**

*(The entire cast is on, dispersed about the stage, facing the audience. The scene is choral, but the grief is real. The women's voices can be added in stages, and it is possible to augment the swell of the keening with taped voices under the actors.)*

### **WOMEN**

Ochón. Ochón Ó.

Ochón. Ochón Ó.

Ochón o ho hon Ó.

### **TADGH**

*(Over the keen, a beat after Paudy finishes)* Here it comes then.

### **WOMEN**

Ochón o ho hon Ó.

### **BRID**

A mac. My son. A mac. My son.

**WOMEN**

Ochón. Ochón Ó.

**BRID**

Ariu! I am losing my son. Why are you leaving? Ochón. Why are you leaving?

**WOMEN**

Ochón o ho hon Ó.

**BRID**

God gave me this son but his hunger is taking him away. Isn't the hunger on you to be leaving your home?

**WOMEN**

Ochón. Ochón Ó.

**BRID**

Go feast yourself in America.

**WOMEN**

Ochón. Ochón o ho hon Ó.

**TADGH**

*(Over the keen)* Malarkey. Old words pasted together, all the howling she's heard at other wakes, and none of it anything her own heart said.

**BRID**

Oh Mary, what sorrow you suffered at the loss of your Son.

**TADGH**

What is it but a lot of Irish moaning.

**WOMEN**

Ochón Ó. Olagón Ó.

Ochón Ó. Olagón Ó.

Ochón. Ochón o ho hon Ó.

*(The women continue this under the next lines.)*

**MICK PAT**

God help the old people, there will be none to bury us with the haste that is on the world.

**LIAM**

Eileen!

**BEA**

Nora Noreen. A chuisle ma chroi. You are the pulse of my heart. Ochón.

**NORA**

Can't I come back, Aunt Bea?

**MICK PAT**

Who will I talk to, Nora my treasure. What woman at all will I talk to? Ochón Ó.

**DONAL**

Mavourneen dheelish, my sweet darling Nora, will you leave me?

**NORA**

I swear by the soul of my mother in heaven I'll come back.

**WOMEN**

Ochón. Ochón Ó.

Ochón. Ochón Ó.

Ochón o ho hon Ó.

*(The women continue this under the next lines.)*

**BEA**

*(To Matt)* Son of my heart. Ochón. Son of my heart. You are my son and my soul is within you.

**MATT**

We'll be sending the money, Aunt Bea. We'll send you the money and clothes and – whatever you need, we'll send the money. We'll work –

**BRID**

Mother of God, I am losing my son! Ochón Ó.

**DONAL**

Won't this house fall to ruin, and no one to live in it after me.

**MATT**

Do you want me to stay then? Haven't you been pushing me out the door!

**DONAL**

The name of Maloney will be gone from Gurteen.

**BRID**

Why are you leaving? Ochón Ó.

**MATT**

Do you want me to stay?!

**BRID**

Arrah, fly away at once. Get away and leave us to our misery. Away with you over the sea, and you will find gold on the streets.

**WOMEN**

Ochón Ó. Olagón Ó.

Ochón. Olagón Ó.

*(The women continue this under the next lines.)*

**MICK PAT**

My woe be to Brendan, who first found the way cross the ocean.

**BEA**

The two at once. Ochón.

**MICK PAT**

Lonely old people, that's the devil's coming age.

**NORA**

For God's sake and ours, shake off your sorrow!

**BRID**

I have lost a son. Ochón o ho hon Ó.

**BEA**

Will you leave me alone behind you, and death calling me every day of my life?

**WOMEN**

Ochón Ó. Ochón o ho hon Ó.

*(Church bells toll. Sunrise. Nora and Matt and Eileen exit, as do all but those in the last scene. Tadgh is isolated in light.)*

## **51. Look back**

*(For the rest of his life, Tadgh will rarely look back. He will continue to suppress his feelings about leaving home.)*

## **TADGH**

It is morning and we are eating what would be breakfast if we hadn't been up all night. I slip out as if to pee. There's a crooked old hawthorn high up the hill, and I head for it. You can lay your whole body along the trunk, stare up at the limbs, breathe sky. Except this morning scraps of memory hang from each branch like the bits of cloth pilgrims tie at holy places. This has always been a spot to get away; now it is become a part of home, and there is nowhere here I can flee, because today I am leaving all of it.

A bit of a shock to lose the safety of the tree. I suppose my stupor helps me get through the good-byes back at the house. Numb embraces. The family's tears soaking into my suit – I will be caked with salt. In my own eyes a Dead Sea stillness. As I go from one to another, the earth is spinning, circling, shifting. The gravity of my birthplace under my feet and above me the pull of who knows what star.

Maybe salmon feel it the day they leave the spawning ground for the sea: an explosion of home in their hearts, so that all those years out in the ocean they'll never forget where they came from. In the back of my head that same kind of fish brain, no words or pictures, just the brute sense of home and a longing to die there.

Except salmon do return. Against the current. Gasping. Up through rapids, sliced by rock. Flung themselves at the falls. Every nerve sick with the fever for a certain place. Dying to get back. It takes a strong net to stop them, and even as you tear out their guts, all the muscles are still swimming home.

Not me. I'm never coming back. Not this cold fish. I am deathly still in my family's embrace. "Say good-bye to your home, then. Say good-bye to our little bit of land." But my lips are tight and I say nothing.

It is time to walk toward the crossroads. With me a convoy of family, neighbors – it's not every day you get to walk at the head of your own funeral. The nape of my neck burns with the urge to look back but I mustn't. The front of me cold. Lot's wife if she never turned round. Look back and I'll turn to salt.

We pass the village. From the crossroads I will walk on by myself – I've told the others I don't want to ride in the cart. When I look at my mother for the last time, Irish spills out

of my mouth, as if I were throwing it up. Beannacht Dé leat, she whispers in my ear. Her blessing. We let go of each other. The convoy turns back. They are waving, I am sure, but I won't look back. I am on my own.

I go a good ways with my head empty, you might say. At one point comes a sharp turn in the road: narrow and hedged high on both sides with brambles. I put my bags down to rest a moment. I realize that surrounded and hidden like that, it doesn't matter if I look back. I turn in the direction of home. There is only the thick growth. I press the side of my face against it till I can feel a few thorns. Then my chest and belly and down below my belt, my arms and legs, all my body straining back home. I swim into the hedge, till there must be blood. In my mouth the taste of salt. I am caked with salt. As if I'd come back already from the sea.

I can't say I feel anything. *(The light on Tadgh slowly fades to black.)* In my fish brain there are no pictures, faces, memories, nothing that was said. It's the stab and prickle of the hedge will come to me whenever I look back. *(He picks up his suitcase and walks off.)*

## **52. Good business for the pub**

*(It is mid-morning. After walking the emigrants to the crossroads, the men have returned to the Maloney house. Paudy is still holed up somewhere outside. This exhausted conversation is, among other things, an exchange of silences. The men are still.)*

**SEAMUS**

That's it then.

*(Silence)*

**DONAL**

No work today then.

**MICK PAT**

Good business for the pub.

**GERRY**

Ah 'tis, 'tis, 'tis.

*(Silence)*

**MICK PAT**

They're Yanks now.

**DONAL**

*(Quiet)* Iii-yah!

**THOMAS**

God help us.

**MICK PAT**

We're a smaller country than we were.

*(Silence)*

**LIAM**

The shame of it. *(After he speaks, his intake of air sounds like a gasp.)*

**THOMAS**

Left behind, you mean?

*(Silence)*

**LIAM**

Ah me. Ah me.

**SEAMUS**

*(Angry)* Sometimes you feel...

*(Silence)*

**DONAL**

Blaming ourselves...

*(Silence)*

**MICK PAT**

Good business for the pub.

*(A slow fade to black. Spirited music bursts in.)*