

**YEATS
WILLIAM
BUTLER**

POEMS

William Yeats

Poems

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Poems:

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W. B. Yeats

Poems

PREFACE

During the last year I have spent much time altering "The Countess Cathleen" and "The Land of Heart's Desire" that they might be a part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre. I had written them before I had any practical experience, and I knew from the performance of the one in Dublin in 1899 and of the other in London in 1894 that they were full of defects. But in their new shape – and each play has been twice played during the winter – they have given me some pleasure, and are, I think, easier to play effectively than my later plays, depending less upon the players and more upon the producer, both having been imagined more for variety of stage-picture than variety of mood in the player. It was, indeed, the first performance of "The Countess Cathleen," when our stage-pictures were made out of poor conventional scenery and hired costumes, that set me writing plays where all would depend upon the player. The first two scenes are wholly new, and though I have left the old end in the body of this book I have given in the notes an end less difficult to producer and audience, and there are slight alterations elsewhere in the poem. "The Land of Heart's Desire," besides

some mending in the details, has been thrown back in time because the metrical speech would have sounded unreal if spoken in a country cottage now that we have so many dialect comedies. The shades of Mrs. Fallan and Mrs. Dillane and of Dan Bourke and the Tramp would have seemed too boisterous or too vivid for shades made cold and distant with the artifice of verse.

I have not again retouched the lyric poems of my youth, fearing some stupidity in my middle years, but have changed two or three pages that I always knew to be wrong in "The Wanderings of Usheen."

W.B. YEATS.

June, 1912.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

I have added some passages to "The Land of Heart's Desire," and a new scene of some little length, besides passages here and there, to "The Countess Cathleen." The goddess has never come to me with her hands so full that I have not found many waste places after I had planted all that she had brought me. The present version of "The Countess Cathleen" is not quite the version adopted by the Irish Literary Theatre a couple of years ago, for our stage and scenery were capable of little; and it may differ more from any stage version I make in future, for it seems that my people of the waters and my unhappy dead, in the third act, cannot keep their supernatural essence, but must put on too much of our mortality, in any ordinary theatre. I am told that I must abandon a meaning or two and make my merchants carry away the treasure themselves. The act was written long ago, when I had seen so few plays that I took pleasure in stage effects. Indeed, I am not yet certain that a wealthy theatre could not shape it to an impressive pageantry, or that a theatre without any wealth could not lift it out of pageantry into the mind, with a dim curtain, and some dimly lighted players, and the beautiful voices that should be as important in poetical as in musical drama. The Elizabethan stage was so little imprisoned in material circumstance that the

Elizabethan imagination was not strained by god or spirit, nor even by Echo herself – no, not even when she answered, as in "The Duchess of Malfi," in clear, loud words which were not the words that had been spoken to her. We have made a prison-house of paint and canvas, where we have as little freedom as under our own roofs, for there is no freedom in a house that has been made with hands. All art moves in the cave of the Chimæra, or in the garden of the Hesperides, or in the more silent house of the gods, and neither cave, nor garden, nor house can show itself clearly but to the mind's eye.

Besides rewriting a lyric or two, I have much enlarged the note on "The Countess Cathleen," as there has been some discussion in Ireland about the origin of the story, but the other notes are as they have always been. They are short enough, but I do not think that anybody who knows modern poetry will find obscurities in this book. In any case, I must leave my myths and symbols to explain themselves as the years go by and one poems lights up another, and the stories that friends, and one friend in particular, have gathered for me, or that I have gathered myself in many cottages, find their way into the light. I would, if I could, add to that majestic heraldry of the poets, that great and complicated inheritance of images which written literature has substituted for the greater and more complex inheritance of spoken tradition, some new heraldic images, gathered from the lips of the common people. Christianity and the old nature faith have lain down side by side in the cottages, and I would proclaim that peace as loudly

as I can among the kingdoms of poetry, where there is no peace that is not joyous, no battle that does not give life instead of death; I may even try to persuade others, in more sober prose, that there can be no language more worthy of poetry and of the meditation of the soul than that which has been made, or can be made, out of a subtlety of desire, an emotion of sacrifice, a delight in order, that are perhaps Christian, and myths and images that mirror the energies of woods and streams, and of their wild creatures. Has any part of that majestic heraldry of the poets had a very different fountain? Is it not the ritual of the marriage of heaven and earth?

These details may seem to many unnecessary; but after all one writes poetry for a few careful readers and for a few friends, who will not consider such details unnecessary. When Cimabue had the cry it was, it seems, worth thinking of those that run; but to-day, when they can write as well as read, one can sit with one's companions under the hedgerow contentedly. If one writes well and has the patience, somebody will come from among the runners and read what one has written quickly, and go away quickly, and write out as much as he can remember in the language of the highway.

W.B. YEATS.

January, 1901.

TO SOME I HAVE TALKED WITH BY THE FIRE

While I wrought out these fitful Danaan rhymes,
My heart would brim with dreams about the times
When we bent down above the fading coals;
And talked of the dark folk, who live in souls
Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees;
And of the wayward twilight companies,
Who sigh with mingled sorrow and content,
Because their blossoming dreams have never bent
Under the fruit of evil and of good:
And of the embattled flaming multitude
Who rise, wing above wing, flame above flame,
And, like a storm, cry the Ineffable Name,
And with the clashing of their sword blades make
A rapturous music, till the morning break,
And the white hush end all, but the loud beat
Of their long wings, the flash of their white feet.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

"The sorrowful are dumb for thee"
Lament of Morion Shehone for Miss Mary Bourke

TO MAUD GONNE

SHEMUS RUA	A Peasant
MARY	His Wife
TEIG	His Son
ALEEL	A Poet
THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN	
OONA	Her Foster Mother
Two Demons disguised as Merchants	
Peasants, Servants, Angelical Beings	

The Scene is laid in Ireland and in old times

SCENE I

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

MARY

What can have made the grey hen flutter so?

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

TEIG

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

MARY

There is something that the hen hears.

TEIG

And that is not the worst; at Tubber-vanach
A woman met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

MARY

What can have kept your father all this while?

TEIG

Two nights ago, at Carrick-orus churchyard,
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,

Nor eyes, nor ears; his face a wall of flesh;
He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

MARY

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

(TEIG *goes to door.*)

TEIG

Mother!

MARY

What is it?

TEIG

In the bush beyond,
There are two birds – if you can call them birds —
I could not see them rightly for the leaves.
But they've the shape and colour of horned owls
And I'm half certain they've a human face.

MARY

Mother of God, defend us!

TEIG

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

MARY

You'll bring misfortune with your blasphemies

Upon your father, or yourself, or me.
I would to God he were home – ah, there he is.

(SHEMUS *comes in.*)

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

SHEMUS

I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter.
Although I tramped the woods for half a day,
I've taken nothing, for the very rats,
Badgers, and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought,
And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.

TEIG

Then you have brought no dinner.

SHEMUS

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

MARY

What, did you beg?

SHEMUS

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

TEIG

You said that you would bring us food or money.

SHEMUS

What's in the house?

TEIG

A bit of mouldy bread.

MARY

There's flour enough to make another loaf.

TEIG

And when that's gone?

MARY

There is the hen in the coop.

SHEMUS

My curse upon the beggars, my curse upon them!

TEIG

And the last penny gone.

SHEMUS

When the hen's gone,
What can we do but live on sorrel and dock,
And dandelion, till our mouths are green?

MARY

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

SHEMUS

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

MARY

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

SHEMUS

Who's passing there?
And mocking us with music?

(A stringed instrument without.)

TEIG

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

SHEMUS

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

MARY

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

SHEMUS

My curse upon the rich.

TEIG

They're coming here.

SHEMUS

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

MARY

Had I but time to put the place to rights.

(CATHLEEN, OONA, *and* ALEEL *enter*.)

CATHLEEN

God save all here. There is a certain house,

An old grey castle with a kitchen garden,
A cider orchard and a plot for flowers,
Somewhere among these woods.

MARY

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

CATHLEEN

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

MARY

Then you are Countess Cathleen?

CATHLEEN

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

OONA

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

CATHLEEN

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

MARY

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

CATHLEEN

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

SHEMUS

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

CATHLEEN

So you are starving even in this wood,
Where I had thought I would find nothing changed.
But that's a dream, for the old worm o' the world
Can eat its way into what place it pleases.

(She gives money.)

TEIG

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

CATHLEEN

I gave for all and that was all I had.
Look, my purse is empty. I have passed
By starving men and women all this day,
And they have had the rest; but take the purse,

The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle.
But if you'll come to-morrow to my house
You shall have twice the sum.

(ALEEL *begins to play.*)

SHEMUS (*muttering*)

What, music, music!

CATHLEEN

Ah, do not blame the finger on the string;
The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times
And find distraction for my thoughts, or else
Pine to my grave.

SHEMUS

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

OONA

Have done.

Sorrows that she's but read of in a book

Weigh on her mind as if they had been her own.

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

ALEEL (*singing*)

Were I but crazy for love's sake

I know who'd measure out his length,

I know the heads that I should break,

For crazy men have double strength.

There! all's out now to leave or take,

And who mocks music mocks at love;

And when I'm crazy for love's sake

I'll not go far to choose.

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

Enough!

I know the heads that I shall break.

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

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

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

SHEMUS

So that fool's gone.

TEIG

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

MARY

You never thanked her ladyship.

SHEMUS

Thank her,
For seven halfpence and a silver bit?

TEIG

But for this empty purse?

SHEMUS

What's that for thanks,
Or what's the double of it that she promised?
With bread and flesh and every sort of food

Up to a price no man has heard the like of
And rising every day.

MARY

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

SHEMUS (*to MARY, who has gone to close the door*)

Leave that door open.

MARY

When those that have read books,
And seen the seven wonders of the world,
Fear what's above or what's below the ground,
It's time that poverty should bolt the door.

SHEMUS

I'll have no bolts, for there is not a thing
That walks above the ground or under it
I had not rather welcome to this house
Than any more of mankind, rich or poor.

TEIG

So that they brought us money.

SHEMUS

I heard say
There's something that appears like a white bird,
A pigeon or a seagull or the like,
But if you hit it with a stone or a stick
It clangs as though it had been made of brass,
And that if you dig down where it was scratching
You'll find a crock of gold.

TEIG

But dream of gold
For three nights running, and there's always gold.

SHEMUS

You might be starved before you've dug it out.

TEIG

But maybe if you called, something would come,
They have been seen of late.

MARY

Is it call devils?
Call devils from the wood, call them in here?

SHEMUS

So you'd stand up against me, and you'd say
Who or what I am to welcome here. (*He hits her.*)
That is to show who's master.

TEIG

Call them in.

MARY

God help us all!

SHEMUS

Pray, if you have a mind to.

It's little that the sleepy ears above
Care for your words; but I'll call what I please.

TEIG

There is many a one, they say, had money from them.

SHEMUS (*at door*)

Whatever you are that walk the woods at night,
So be it that you have not shouldered up
Out of a grave – for I'll have nothing human —
And have free hands, a friendly trick of speech,
I welcome you. Come, sit beside the fire.
What matter if your head's below your arms
Or you've a horse's tail to whip your flank,
Feathers instead of hair, that's but a straw,
Come, share what bread and meat is in the house,
And stretch your heels and warm them in the ashes.
And after that, let's share and share alike
And curse all men and women. Come in, come in.
What, is there no one there? (*Turning from door*)
And yet they say
They are as common as the grass, and ride

Even upon the book in the priest's hand.

(TEIG lifts one arm slowly and points toward the door and begins moving backwards. SHEMUS turns, he also sees something and begins moving backward. MARY does the same. A man dressed as an Eastern merchant comes in carrying a small carpet. He unrolls it and sits cross-legged at one end of it. Another man dressed in the same way follows, and sits at the other end. This is done slowly and deliberately. When they are seated they take money out of embroidered purses at their girdles and begin arranging it on the carpet.)

TEIG

You speak to them.

SHEMUS

No, you.

TEIG

'Twas you that called them.

SHEMUS (*coming nearer*)

I'd make so bold, if you would pardon it,
To ask if there's a thing you'd have of us.
Although we are but poor people, if there is,
Why, if there is —

FIRST MERCHANT

We've travelled a long road,
For we are merchants that must tramp the world,
And now we look for supper and a fire
And a safe corner to count money in.

SHEMUS

I thought you were ... but that's no matter now —
There had been words between my wife and me
Because I said I would be master here,
And ask in what I pleased or who I pleased
And so... but that is nothing to the point,
Because it's certain that you are but merchants.

FIRST MERCHANT

We travel for the Master of all merchants.

SHEMUS

Yet if you were that I had thought but now
I'd welcome you no less. Be what you please
And you'll have supper at the market rate,
That means that what was sold for but a penny
Is now worth fifty.

(MERCHANTS *begin putting money on carpet.*)

FIRST MERCHANT

Our Master bids us pay
So good a price, that all who deal with us
Shall eat, drink, and be merry.

SHEMUS (to MARY)

Bestir yourself,
Go kill and draw the fowl, while Teig and I
Lay out the plates and make a better fire.

MARY

I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS

Not cook! not cook!
Do not be angry. She wants to pay me back
Because I struck her in that argument.
But she'll get sense again. Since the dearth came
We rattle one on another as though we were
Knives thrown into a basket to be cleaned.

MARY

I will not cook for you, because I know
In what unlucky shape you sat but now
Outside this door.

TEIG

It's this, your honours:
Because of some wild words my father said
She thinks you are not of those who cast a shadow.

SHEMUS

I said I'd make the devils of the wood
Welcome, if they'd a mind to eat and drink;
But it is certain that you are men like us.

FIRST MERCHANT

It's strange that she should think we cast no shadow,
For there is nothing on the ridge of the world
That's more substantial than the merchants are
That buy and sell you.

MARY

If you are not demons,
And seeing what great wealth is spread out there,
Give food or money to the starving poor.

FIRST MERCHANT

If we knew how to find deserving poor
We'd do our share.

MARY

But seek them patiently.

FIRST MERCHANT

We know the evils of mere charity.

MARY

Those scruples may befit a common time.
I had thought there was a pushing to and fro,
At times like this, that upset the scale

And trampled measure down.

FIRST MERCHANT

But if already
We'd thought of a more prudent way than that?

SECOND MERCHANT

If each one brings a bit of merchandise,
We'll give him such a price he never dreamt of.

MARY

Where shall the starving come at merchandise?

FIRST MERCHANT

We will ask nothing but what all men have.

MARY

Their swine and cattle, fields and implements
Are sold and gone.

FIRST MERCHANT

They have not sold all yet.
For there's a vaporous thing – that may be nothing,
But that's the buyer's risk – a second self,
They call immortal for a story's sake.

SHEMUS

They come to buy our souls?

TEIG

I'll barter mine.

Why should we starve for what may be but nothing?

MARY

Teig and Shemus —

SHEMUS

What can it be but nothing?

What has God poured out of His bag but famine?

Satan gives money.

TEIG

Yet no thunder stirs.

FIRST MERCHANT

There is a heap for each.

(SHEMUS *goes to take money.*)

But no, not yet,
For there's a work I have to set you to.

SHEMUS

So then you're as deceitful as the rest,
And all that talk of buying what's but a vapour
Is fancy bread. I might have known as much,
Because that's how the trick-o'-the-loop man talks.

FIRST MERCHANT

That's for the work, each has its separate price;

But neither price is paid till the work's done.

TEIG

The same for me.

MARY

Oh, God, why are you still?

FIRST MERCHANT

You've but to cry aloud at every cross-road,
At every house door, that we buy men's souls.
And give so good a price that all may live
In mirth and comfort till the famine's done,
Because we are Christian men.

SHEMUS

Come, let's away.

TEIG

I shall keep running till I've earned the price.

SECOND MERCHANT

(who has risen and gone towards fire)

Stop; you must have proof behind the words.
So here's your entertainment on the road.

(He throws a bag of money on the ground.)

Live as you please; our Master's generous.

(TEIG and SHEMUS *have stopped*. TEIG *takes the*

money. They go out.)

MARY

Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.
You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

SECOND MERCHANT

Curse to your fill, for saints will have their dreams.

FIRST MERCHANT

Though we're but vermin that our Master sent
To overrun the world, he at the end
Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon
And quench the stars in the ancestral night.

MARY

God is all powerful.

SECOND MERCHANT

Pray, you shall need Him.
You shall eat dock and grass, and dandelion,
Till that low threshold there becomes a wall,
And when your hands can scarcely drag your body
We shall be near you.

(MARY *faints.*)

(*The FIRST MERCHANT takes up the carpet, spreads it before the fire and stands in front of it warming his hands.*)

FIRST MERCHANT

Our faces go unscratched,
Wring the neck o' that fowl, scatter the flour
And look if there is bread upon the shelves.

We'll turn the fowl upon the spit and roast it,
And eat the supper we were bidden to,
Now that the house is quiet, praise our Master,
And stretch and warm our heels among the ashes.

END OF SCENE I

SCENE II

FRONT SCENE. —*A wood with perhaps distant view of turreted house at one side, but all in flat colour, without light and shade and against a diapered or gold background.*

COUNTESS CATHLEEN *comes in leaning upon ALEEL'S arm. OONA follows them.*

CATHLEEN (*stopping*)

Surely this leafy corner, where one smells
The wild bee's honey, has a story too?

OONA

There is the house at last.

ALEEL

A man, they say,
Loved Maeve the Queen of all the invisible host,
And died of his love nine centuries ago.
And now, when the moon's riding at the full,
She leaves her dancers lonely and lies there
Upon that level place, and for three days
Stretches and sighs and wets her long pale cheeks.

CATHLEEN

So she loves truly.

ALEEL

No, but wets her cheeks,
Lady, because she has forgot his name.

CATHLEEN

She'd sleep that trouble away – though it must be
A heavy trouble to forget his name —

If she had better sense.

OONA

Your own house, lady.

ALEEL

She sleeps high up on wintry Knock-na-rea
In an old cairn of stones; while her poor women
Must lie and jog in the wave if they would sleep —
Being water born – yet if she cry their names
They run up on the land and dance in the moon
Till they are giddy and would love as men do,
And be as patient and as pitiful.
But there is nothing that will stop in their heads
They've such poor memories, though they weep for it.
Oh, yes, they weep; that's when the moon is full.

CATHLEEN

Is it because they have short memories
They live so long?

ALEEL

What's memory but the ash
That chokes our fires that have begun to sink?
And they've a dizzy, everlasting fire.

OONA

There is your own house, lady.

CATHLEEN

Why, that's true,
And we'd have passed it without noticing.

ALEEL

A curse upon it for a meddlesome house!
Had it but stayed away I would have known
What Queen Maeve thinks on when the moon is pinched;
And whether now – as in the old days – the dancers
Set their brief love on men.

OONA

Rest on my arm.
These are no thoughts for any Christian ear.

ALEEL

I am younger, she would be too heavy for you.

*(He begins taking his lute out of the bag, CATHLEEN,
who has turned towards OONA, turns back to him.)*

This hollow box remembers every foot
That danced upon the level grass of the world,
And will tell secrets if I whisper to it.

(Sings.)

Lift up the white knee;
Hear what they sing,
Those young dancers
That in a ring
Raved but now
Of the hearts that brake
Long, long ago
For their sake.

OONA

New friends are sweet.

ALEEL

"But the dance changes.
Lift up the gown,

All that sorrow
Is trodden down."

OONA

The empty rattle-pate! Lean on this arm,
That I can tell you is a christened arm,
And not like some, if we are to judge by speech.
But as you please. It is time I was forgot.
Maybe it is not on this arm you slumbered
When you were as helpless as a worm.

ALEEL

Stay with me till we come to your own house.

CATHLEEN (*sitting down*)

When I am rested I will need no help.

ALEEL

I thought to have kept her from remembering
The evil of the times for full ten minutes;
But now when seven are out you come between.

OONA

Talk on; what does it matter what you say,
For you have not been christened?

ALEEL

Old woman, old woman,
You robbed her of three minutes peace of mind,
And though you live unto a hundred years,
And wash the feet of beggars and give alms,
And climb Croaghpatrick, you shall not be pardoned.

OONA

How does a man who never was baptized
Know what Heaven pardons?

ALEEL

You are a sinful woman.

OONA

I care no more than if a pig had grunted.

(Enter CATHLEEN'S Steward.)

STEWARD

I am not to blame, for I had locked the gate,
The forester's to blame. The men climbed in

At the east corner where the elm-tree is.

CATHLEEN

I do not understand you, who has climbed?

STEWARD

Then God be thanked, I am the first to tell you.
I was afraid some other of the servants —
Though I've been on the watch – had been the first,
And mixed up truth and lies, your ladyship.

CATHLEEN (*rising*)

Has some misfortune happened?

STEWARD

Yes, indeed.

The forester that let the branches lie
Against the wall's to blame for everything,
For that is how the rogues got into the garden.

CATHLEEN

I thought to have escaped misfortune here.
Has any one been killed?

STEWARD

Oh, no, not killed.
They have stolen half a cart-load of green cabbage.

CATHLEEN

But maybe they were starving.

STEWARD

That is certain.

To rob or starve, that was the choice they had.

CATHLEEN

A learned theologian has laid down
That starving men may take what's necessary,
And yet be sinless.

OONA

Sinless and a thief!

There should be broken bottles on the wall.

CATHLEEN

And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken
God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world,
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love
Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world.

(Enter TEIG and SHEMUS.)

STEWARD

What are you running for? Pull off your cap,
Do you not see who's there?

SHEMUS

I cannot wait.

I am running to the world with the best news
That has been brought it for a thousand years.

STEWARD

Then get your breath and speak.

SHEMUS

If you'd my news
You'd run as fast and be as out of breath.

TEIG

Such news, we shall be carried on men's shoulders.

SHEMUS

There's something every man has carried with him
And thought no more about than if it were
A mouthful of the wind; and now it's grown
A marketable thing!

TEIG

And yet it seemed
As useless as the paring of one's nails.

SHEMUS

What sets me laughing when I think of it,
Is that a rogue who's lain in lousy straw,
If he but sell it, may set up his coach.

TEIG (*laughing*)

There are two gentlemen who buy men's souls.

CATHLEEN

O God!

TEIG

And maybe there's no soul at all.

STEWARD

They're drunk or mad.

TEIG

Look at the price they give.

(Showing money.)

SHEMUS (*tossing up money*)

"Go cry it all about the world," they said.

"Money for souls, good money for a soul."

CATHLEEN

Give twice and thrice and twenty times their money,
And get your souls again. I will pay all.

SHEMUS

Not we! not we! For souls – if there are souls —

But keep the flesh out of its merriment.
I shall be drunk and merry.

TEIG

Come, let's away.

(He goes.)

CATHLEEN

But there's a world to come.

SHEMUS

And if there is,
I'd rather trust myself into the hands
That can pay money down than to the hands
That have but shaken famine from the bag.

(*He goes out R.*)

(Lilting)

"There's money for a soul, sweet yellow money.
There's money for men's souls, good money, money."

CATHLEEN (*to* ALEEL)

Go call them here again, bring them by force,
Beseech them, bribe, do anything you like;

(ALEEL goes.)

And you too follow, add your prayers to his.

(OONA, who has been praying, goes out.)

Steward, you know the secrets of my house.
How much have I?

STEWARD

A hundred kegs of gold.

CATHLEEN

How much have I in castles?

STEWARD

As much more.

CATHLEEN

How much have I in pasture?

STEWARD

As much more.

CATHLEEN

How much have I in forests?

STEWARD

As much more.

CATHLEEN

Keeping this house alone, sell all I have,
Go barter where you please, but come again
With herds of cattle and with ships of meal.

STEWARD

God's blessing light upon your ladyship.
You will have saved the land.

CATHLEEN

Make no delay.

(He goes L.)

(ALEEL and OONA return)

CATHLEEN

They have not come; speak quickly.

ALEEL

One drew his knife
And said that he would kill the man or woman
That stopped his way; and when I would have stopped him
He made this stroke at me; but it is nothing.

CATHLEEN

You shall be tended. From this day for ever
I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own.

OONA

Their eyes shone like the eyes of birds of prey.

CATHLEEN

Come, follow me, for the earth burns my feet
Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come
Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.
From this day out I have nothing of my own.

(She goes.)

OONA (*taking ALEEL by the arm and
as she speaks bandaging his wound*)

She has found something now to put her hand to,
And you and I are of no more account
Than flies upon a window-pane in the winter.

(They go out.)

END OF SCENE II

SCENE III

Scene. —*Hall in the house of Countess Cathleen. At the Left an oratory with steps leading up to it. At the Right a tapestried wall, more or less repeating the form of the oratory, and a great chair with its back against the wall. In the Centre are two or more arches through which one can see dimly the trees of the garden. Cathleen is kneeling in front of the altar in the oratory; there is a hanging lighted lamp over the altar. Aleel enters.*

ALEEL

I have come to bid you leave this castle and fly
Out of these woods.

CATHLEEN

What evil is there here
That is not everywhere from this to the sea?

ALEEL

They who have sent me walk invisible.

CATHLEEN

So it is true what I have heard men say,
That you have seen and heard what others cannot.

ALEEL

I was asleep in my bed, and while I slept
My dream became a fire; and in the fire
One walked and he had birds about his head.

CATHLEEN

I have heard that one of the old gods walked so.

ALEEL

It may be that he is angelical;
And, lady, he bids me call you from these woods.
And you must bring but your old foster-mother,
And some few serving men, and live in the hills,
Among the sounds of music and the light
Of waters, till the evil days are done.
For here some terrible death is waiting you,
Some unimagined evil, some great darkness
That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon
Scattered.

CATHLEEN

No, not angelical.

ALEEL

This house

You are to leave with some old trusty man,
And bid him shelter all that starve or wander
While there is food and house room.

CATHLEEN

He bids me go
Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp, when the trees
Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
And talk among the rustling of the reeds,
When night hunted the foolish sun away
With stillness and pale tapers. No – no – no!
I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep
Because that life would be most happy, and here
I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep
Because I had longed to look upon your face,
But that a night of prayer has made me weary.

ALEEL (*prostrating himself before her*)

Let Him that made mankind, the angels and devils
And dearth and plenty, mend what He has made,
For when we labour in vain and eye still sees

Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN

How would that quiet end?

ALEEL

How but in healing?

CATHLEEN

You have seen my tears
And I can see your hand shake on the floor.

ALEEL (*faltering*)

I thought but of healing. He was angelical.

CATHLEEN (*turning away from him*)

No, not angelical, but of the old gods,
Who wander about the world to waken the heart —
The passionate, proud heart – that all the angels,
Leaving nine heavens empty, would rock to sleep.

*(She goes to chapel door; ALEEL holds his clasped hands
towards her for a moment hesitatingly, and then lets them
fall beside him.)*

CATHLEEN

Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.
This heart shall never waken on earth. I have sworn,
By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
To pray before this altar until my heart
Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there
Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

ALEEL (*who has risen*)

When one so great has spoken of love to one
So little as I, though to deny him love,
What can he but hold out beseeching hands,
Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly
They have overdared?

*(He goes towards the door of the hall. The COUNTESS
CATHLEEN takes a few steps towards him.)*

CATHLEEN

If the old tales are true,
Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar-maids;
God's procreant waters flowing about your mind
Have made you more than kings or queens; and not you
But I am the empty pitcher.

ALEEL

Being silent,
I have said all, yet let me stay beside you.

CATHLEEN

No, no, not while my heart is shaken. No,
But you shall hear wind cry and water cry,
And curlew cry, and have the peace I longed for.

ALEEL

Give me your hand to kiss.

CATHLEEN

I kiss your forehead.
And yet I send you from me. Do not speak;
There have been women that bid men to rob
Crowns from the Country-under-Wave or apples
Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all
That they might sift men's hearts and wills,

And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble
That lay a hard task on you, that you go,
And silently, and do not turn your head;
Goodbye; but do not turn your head and look;
Above all else, I would not have you look.

(ALEEL *goes.*)

I never spoke to him of his wounded hand,
And now he is gone. (*She looks out.*)
I cannot see him, for all is dark outside.
Would my imagination and my heart
Were as little shaken as this holy flame!

(*She goes slowly into the chapel. The distant sound of an alarm bell. The two MERCHANTS enter hurriedly.*)

SECOND MERCHANT

They are ringing the alarm, and in a moment
They'll be upon us.

FIRST MERCHANT (*going to a door at the side*)

Here is the Treasury,
You'd my commands to put them all to sleep.

SECOND MERCHANT

Some angel or else her prayers protected them.

*(Goes into the Treasury and returns with bags of treasure.
FIRST MERCHANT has been listening at the oratory
door.)*

FIRST MERCHANT

She has fallen asleep.

*(SECOND MERCHANT goes out through one of the
arches at the back and stands listening. The bags are at his
feet.)*

SECOND MERCHANT

We've all the treasure now,
So let's away before they've tracked us out.

FIRST MERCHANT

I have a plan to win her.

SECOND MERCHANT

You have time enough
If you would kill her and bear off her soul
Before they are upon us with their prayers;
They search the Western Tower.

FIRST MERCHANT

That may not be.
We cannot face the heavenly host in arms.
Her soul must come to us of its own will,
But being of the ninth and mightiest Hell
Where all are kings, I have a plan to win it.
Lady, we've news that's crying out for speech.

(CATHLEEN *wakes and comes to door of chapel.*)

CATHLEEN

Who calls?

FIRST MERCHANT

We have brought news.

CATHLEEN

What are you?

FIRST MERCHANT

We are merchants, and we know the book of the world
Because we have walked upon its leaves; and there
Have read of late matters that much concern you;
And noticing the castle door stand open,
Came in to find an ear.

CATHLEEN

The door stands open,
That no one who is famished or afraid,
Despair of help or of a welcome with it.
But you have news, you say.

FIRST MERCHANT

We saw a man,
Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allen,
Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair Head
We saw your grain ships lying all becalmed

In the dark night; and not less still than they,
Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the sea.

CATHLEEN

My thanks to God, to Mary and the angels,
That I have money in my treasury,
And can buy grain from those who have stored it up
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.
But you've been far and know the signs of things,
When will this famine end?

FIRST MERCHANT

Day copies day,
And there's no sign of change, nor can it change,
With the wheat withered and the cattle dead.

CATHLEEN

And heard you of the demons who buy souls?

FIRST MERCHANT

There are some men who hold they have wolves' heads,
And say their limbs – dried by the infinite flame —
Have all the speed of storms; others, again,
Say they are gross and little; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled – like us, lady —
Yet all agree a power is in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting-net
About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor vapours, were it not
You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN

Praise be to God, to Mary, and the angels
That I am wealthy! Wherefore do they sell?

FIRST MERCHANT

As we came in at the great door we saw
Your porter sleeping in his niche – a soul
Too little to be worth a hundred pence,
And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns.
But for a soul like yours, I heard them say,
They would give five hundred thousand crowns and more.

CATHLEEN

How can a heap of crowns pay for a soul?
Is the green grave so terrible a thing?

FIRST MERCHANT

Some sell because the money gleams, and some
Because they are in terror of the grave,
And some because their neighbours sold before,
And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,

In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind;
To this – full of the gaiety of the lost —
Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN

There is a something, Merchant, in your voice
That makes me fear. When you were telling how
A man may lose his soul and lose his God
Your eyes were lighted up, and when you told
How my poor money serves the people, both —
Merchants forgive me – seemed to smile.

FIRST MERCHANT

I laugh
To think that all these people should be swung
As on a lady's shoe-string, – under them
The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

CATHLEEN

There is a something in you that I fear;
A something not of us; were you not born
In some most distant corner of the world?

(The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listening at the door, comes forward, and as he comes a sound of voices and feet is heard.)

SECOND MERCHANT

Away now – they are in the passage – hurry,
For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts
With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin
With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT

Farewell; for we must ride
Many a mile before the morning come;

Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

(They go out. A number of PEASANTS enter by other door.)

FIRST PEASANT

Forgive us, lady, but we heard a noise.

SECOND PEASANT

We sat by the fireside telling vanities.

FIRST PEASANT

We heard a noise, but though we have searched the house
We have found nobody.

CATHLEEN

You are too timid,
For now you are safe from all the evil times,
There is no evil that can find you here.

OONA (*entering hurriedly*)

Ochone! Ochone! The treasure room is broken in.
The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

(PEASANTS *raise a lamentable cry.*)

CATHLEEN

Be silent. (*The cry ceases.*) Have you seen nobody?

OONA

Ochone!

That my good mistress should lose all this money.

CATHLEEN

Let those among you – not too old to ride —
Get horses and search all the country round,
I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

(A man with keys at his girdle has come in while she speaks. There is a general murmur of "The porter! the porter!")

PORTER

Demons were here. I sat beside the door
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

OLD PEASANT

God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN

Old man, old man, He never closed a door
Unless one opened. I am desolate,
Because of a strange thought that's in my heart;
But I have still my faith; therefore be silent;
For surely He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull and shapeless ease;
But sometimes – though His hand is on it still —
It moves awry and demon hordes are born.

(PEASANTS *cross themselves.*)

Yet leave me now, for I am desolate,
I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

(She comes from the oratory door.)

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again
I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take

These two – the larder and the dairy keys.

(To the PORTER.)

But take you this. It opens the small room
Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore,
Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal.
The book of cures is on the upper shelf.

PORTER

Why do you do this, lady; did you see
Your coffin in a dream?

CATHLEEN

Ah, no, not that.
But I have come to a strange thought. I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,
And I must go down, down – I know not where —
Pray for all men and women mad from famine;
Pray, you good neighbours.

(The PEASANTS all kneel. COUNTESS CATHLEEN ascends the steps to the door of the oratory, and turning round stands there motionless for a little, and then cries in a loud voice:)

Mary, Queen of angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

END OF SCENE III

SCENE IV

Scene. —*A wood near the Castle, as in Scene II. A group of PEASANTS pass.*

FIRST PEASANT

I have seen silver and copper, but not gold.

SECOND PEASANT

It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT

It's beautiful.

The most beautiful thing under the sun,
That's what I've heard.

THIRD PEASANT

I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT

I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT

But doesn't a gold piece glitter like the sun?
That's what my father, who'd seen better days,
Told me when I was but a little boy —
So high – so high, it's shining like the sun,
Round and shining, that is what he said.

SECOND PEASANT

There's nothing in the world it cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT

They've bags and bags of it.

*(They go out. The two MERCHANTS follow silently.
Then ALEEL passes over the stage singing.)*

ALEEL

Impetuous heart be still, be still,
Your sorrowful love can never be told,
Cover it up with a lonely tune.
He who could bend all things to His will
Has covered the door of the infinite fold
With the pale stars and the wandering moon.

END OF SCENE IV

SCENE V

Scene. —*The house of SHEMUS RUA. There is an alcove at the back with curtains; in it a bed, and on the bed is the body of MARY with candles round it. The two MERCHANTS while they speak put a large book upon a table, arrange money, and so on.*

FIRST MERCHANT

Thanks to that lie I told about her ships
And that about the herdsman lying sick,
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT

What has she in her coffers now but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT

When the night fell and I had shaped myself
Into the image of the man-headed owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw with all their canvas full of wind
And rushing through the parti-coloured sea
Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal.
They're but three days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT

When the dew rose
I hurried in like feathers to the east,
And saw nine hundred oxen driven through Meath
With goads of iron. They're but three days from us.

FIRST MERCHANT

Three days for traffic.

(PEASANTS *crowd in with* TEIG *and* SHEMUS.)

SHEMUS

Come in, come in, you are welcome.
That is my wife. She mocked at my great masters,
And would not deal with them. Now there she is;
She does not even know she was a fool,
So great a fool she was.

TEIG

She would not eat
One crumb of bread bought with our master's money,
But lived on nettles, dock, and dandelion.

SHEMUS

There's nobody could put into her head
That Death is the worst thing can happen us.
Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank
With all the lies that she had heard in chapel.
Draw to the curtain. (TEIG *draws it.*) You'll not play the fool

While these good gentlemen are there to save you.

SECOND MERCHANT

Since the drought came they drift about in a throng,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds.
Come, deal – come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT

Who will come deal with us?

SHEMUS

They are out of spirit, sir, with lack of food,
Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these;
The others will gain courage in good time.

MIDDLE-AGED-MAN

I come to deal – if you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in a book*)

"John Maher, a man of substance, with dull mind,
And quiet senses and unventurous heart.
The angels think him safe." Two hundred crowns,
All for a soul, a little breath of wind.

THE MAN

I ask three hundred crowns. You have read there
That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT

There is something more writ here – "Often at night
He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor,
And thereon wonders if there's any man
That he could rob in safety."

A PEASANT

Who'd have thought it?
And I was once alone with him at midnight.

ANOTHER PEASANT

I will not trust my mother after this.

FIRST MERCHANT

There is this crack in you – two hundred crowns.

A PEASANT

That's plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT

I'd give him nothing.

SHEMUS

You'll get no more – so take what's offered you.

(A general murmur, during which the MIDDLE-AGED MAN takes money, and slips into background, where he sinks on to a seat.)

FIRST MERCHANT

Has no one got a better soul than that?

If only for the credit of your parishes,
Traffic with us.

A WOMAN

What will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in book*)

"Soft, handsome, and still young" – not much, I think.
"It's certain that the man she's married to
Knows nothing of what's hidden in the jar
Between the hour-glass and the pepper-pot."

THE WOMAN

The scandalous book.

FIRST MERCHANT

"Nor how when he's away
At the horse fair the hand that wrote what's hid
Will tap three times upon the window-pane."

THE WOMAN

And if there is a letter, that is no reason
Why I should have less money than the others.

FIRST MERCHANT

You're almost safe, I give you fifty crowns.

(She turns to go.)

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS

Woman, have sense – come, come.
Is this a time to haggle at the price?
There, take it up. There, there. That's right.

(She takes them and goes into the crowd.)

FIRST MERCHANT

Come, deal, deal, deal. It is but for charity
We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins
Made them our Master's long before we came.

(ALEEL *enters.*)

ALEEL

Here, take my soul, for I am tired of it.
I do not ask a price.

SHEMUS

Not ask a price?
How can you sell your soul without a price?
I would not listen to his broken wits;
His love for Countess Cathleen has so crazed him
He hardly understands what he is saying.

ALEEL

The trouble that has come on Countess Cathleen,
The sorrow that is in her wasted face,
The burden in her eyes, have broke my wits,
And yet I know I'd have you take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT

We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL

No, but you must. Seeing it cannot help her
I have grown tired of it.

FIRST MERCHANT

Begone from me,
I may not touch it.

ALEEL

Is your power so small?
And must I bear it with me all my days?
May you be scorned and mocked!

FIRST MERCHANT

Drag him away.
He troubles me.

(TEIG *and* SHEMUS *lead* ALEEL *into the crowd.*)

SECOND MERCHANT

His gaze has filled me, brother,
With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT

Lean forward
And kiss the circlet where my Master's lips
Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither;
You shall have peace once more.

(SECOND MERCHANT *kisses the gold circlet that is
about the head of the* FIRST MERCHANT.)

I, too, grow weary,
But there is something moving in my heart
Whereby I know that what we seek the most

Is drawing near – our labour will soon end.
Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; are you all dumb?
What, will you keep me from our ancient home,
And from the eternal revelry?

SECOND MERCHANT

Deal, deal.

SHEMUS

They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT

I offer this great price: a thousand crowns
For an old woman who was always ugly.

*(An old PEASANT WOMAN comes forward, and he
takes up a book and reads:)*

There is but little set down here against her.
"She has stolen eggs and fowl when times were bad,
But when the times grew better has confessed it;
She never missed her chapel of a Sunday
And when she could, paid dues." Take up your money.

OLD WOMAN

God bless you, sir. (*She screams.*) Oh, sir, a pain went through me!

FIRST MERCHANT

That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

(*Murmur among the PEASANTS, who shrink back from her as she goes out.*)

A PEASANT

How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT

And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT

I tell you there is no such place as hell.

FIRST MERCHANT

Can such a trifle turn you from your profit?
Come, deal; come, deal.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT

I bought your soul, and there's no sense in fear
Now the soul's gone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Give me my soul again.

WOMAN (*going on her knees
and clinging to* **MERCHANT**)

And take this money too, and give me mine.

SECOND MERCHANT

Bear bastards, drink or follow some wild fancy;

For sighs and cries are the soul's work,
And you have none.

(Throws the woman off.)

PEASANT

Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT

Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT

Come quickly; if that woman had not screamed
I would have lost my soul.

ANOTHER PEASANT

Come, come away.

(They turn to door, but are stopped by shouts of
"Countess Cathleen! Countess Cathleen!")

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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