

Yeats William Butler

**The Collected Works in  
Verse and Prose of  
William Butler Yeats. Volume...**



William Butler Yeats

**The Collected Works in Verse and  
Prose of William Butler Yeats.  
Volume 3 of 8. The Countess  
Cathleen. The Land of Heart's  
Desire. The Unicorn from the Stars**

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## **Yeats W.**

The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats.  
Volume 3 of 8. The Countess Cathleen. The Land of Heart's Desire.  
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**William Butler Yeats**  
**The Collected Works in Verse and Prose**  
**of William Butler Yeats, Vol. 3 (of 8) / The**  
**Countess Cathleen. The Land of Heart's**  
**Desire. The / Unicorn from the Stars**

**THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN**

*'The sorrowful are dumb for thee.'*  
*Lament of Morion Shehone for Miss Mary Bourke.*

*To Maud Gonne.*

## **PERSONS IN THE PLAY**

Shemus Rua, *a peasant*  
Teig, *his son*  
Aleel, *a young bard*  
Maurteen, *a gardener*  
The Countess Cathleen  
Oona, *her foster-mother*  
Maire, *wife of Shemus Rua*  
Two Demons *disguised as merchants*  
Musicians  
Peasants, Servants, &c.  
Angelical Beings, Spirits, and Faeries

**The scene is laid in Ireland, and in old times**

## THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

### ACT I

*The cottage of SHEMUS REA. The door into the open air is at right side of room. There is a window at one side of the door, and a little shrine of the Virgin Mother at the other. At the back is a door opening into a bedroom, and at the left side of the room a pantry door. A wood of oak, beech, hazel, and quicken is seen through the window half hidden in vapour and twilight. MAIRE watches TEIG, who fills a pot with water. He stops as if to listen, and spills some of the water.*

#### MAIRE

You are all thumbs.

#### TEIG

Hear how the dog bays, mother,  
And how the gray hen flutters in the coop.  
Strange things are going up and down the land,  
These famine times: by Tubber-vanach crossroads  
A woman met a man with ears spread out,  
And they moved up and down like wings of bats.

#### MAIRE

Shemus stays late.

#### TEIG

By Carrick-orus churchyard,  
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,  
Nor ears, nor eyes: his face a wall of flesh;  
He saw him plainly by the moon.

**MAIRE**

**[Going over to the little shrine.]**

White Mary,  
Bring Shemus home out of the wicked woods;  
Save Shemus from the wolves; Shemus is daring;  
And save him from the demons of the woods,  
Who have crept out and wander on the roads,  
Deluding dim-eyed souls now newly dead,  
And those alive who have gone crazed with famine.  
Save him, White Mary Virgin.

**TEIG**

And but now  
I thought I heard far-off tympan and harps.

*[Knocking at the door.]*

**MAIRE**

Shemus has come.

**TEIG**

May he bring better food  
Than the lean crow he brought us yesterday.

*[MAIRE opens the door, and SHEMUS comes in with a dead wolf on his shoulder.]*

**MAIRE**

Shemus, you are late home: you have been lounging  
And chattering with some one: you know well  
How the dreams trouble me, and how I pray,  
Yet you lie sweating on the hill from morn,

Or linger at the crossways with all comers,  
Telling or gathering up calamity.

### **SHEMUS**

You would rail my head off. Here is a good dinner.

*[He throws the wolf on the table.]*

A wolf is better than a carrion crow.  
I searched all day: the mice and rats and hedgehogs  
Seemed to be dead, and I could hardly hear  
A wing moving in all the famished woods,  
Though the dead leaves and clamber of four forests  
Cling to my footsole. I turned home but now,  
And saw, sniffing the floor in a bare cow-house,  
This young wolf here: the crossbow brought him down.

### **MAIRE**

Praise be the saints!*[After a pause.]*  
Why did the house dog bay?

### **SHEMUS**

He heard me coming and smelt food – what else?

### **TEIG**

We will not starve awhile.

### **SHEMUS**

What food is within?

**TEIG**

There is a bag half full of meal, a pan  
Half full of milk.

**SHEMUS**

And we have one old hen.

**TEIG**

The bogwood were less hard.

**MAIRE**

Before you came  
She made a great noise in the hencoop, Shemus.  
What fluttered in the window?

**TEIG**

Two horned owls  
Have blinked and fluttered on the window sill  
From when the dog began to bay.

**SHEMUS**

Hush, hush.

[He fits an arrow to the crossbow, and goes towards the door. A sudden burst  
of music without.

They are off again: ladies or gentlemen  
Travel in the woods with tympan and with harp.  
Teig, put the wolf upon the biggest hook

And shut the door.

[TEIG goes into the cupboard with the wolf: returns and fastens the door behind him.]

Sit on the creepy stool  
And call up a whey face and a crying voice,  
And let your head be bowed upon your knees.

[He opens the door of the cabin.]

Come in, your honours: a full score of evenings  
This threshold worn away by many a foot  
Has been passed only by the snails and birds  
And by our own poor hunger-shaken feet.

[The COUNTESS CATHLEEN, ALEEL, who carries a small square harp, OONA, and a little group of fantastically dressed musicians come in.]

### CATHLEEN

Are you so hungry?

### TEIG

[From beside the fire.]

Lady, I fell but now,  
And lay upon the threshold like a log.  
I have not tasted a crust for these four days.

[The COUNTESS CATHLEEN empties her purse on to the table.]

### CATHLEEN

Had I more money I would give it you,  
But we have passed by many cabins to-day;  
And if you come to-morrow to my house  
You shall have twice the sum. I am the owner  
Of a long empty castle in these woods.

## MAIRE

Then you are Countess Cathleen: you and yours  
Are ever welcome under my poor thatch.  
Will you sit down and warm you by the sods?

## CATHLEEN

We must find out this castle in the wood  
Before the chill o' the night.

*[The musicians begin to tune their instruments.]*

Do not blame me,  
Good woman, for the tympan and the harp:  
I was bid fly the terror of the times  
And wrap me round with music and sweet song  
Or else pine to my grave. I have lost my way;  
Aeel, the poet, who should know these woods,  
Because we met him on their border but now  
Wandering and singing like the foam of the sea,  
Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come  
That he can give no help.

## MAIRE

**[Going to the door with her.]**

You're almost there.  
There is a trodden way among the hazels  
That brings your servants to their marketing.

## ALEEL

When we are gone draw to the door and the bolt,  
For, till we lost them half an hour ago,  
Two gray horned owls hooted above our heads  
Of terrors to come. Tympan and harp awake!  
For though the world drift from us like a sigh,

Music is master of all under the moon;  
And play 'The Wind that blows by Cummen Strand.'

*[Music.*

**[Sings.]**

Impetuous heart, be still, be still:  
Your sorrowful love may 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.

*[While he is singing the COUNTESS CATHLEEN, OONA, and the musicians  
go out.*

**ALEEL**

Shut to the door and shut the woods away,  
For, till they had vanished in the thick of the leaves,  
Two gray horned owls hooted above our heads.

*[He goes out.*

**MAIRE**

**[Bolting the door.]**

When wealthy and wise folk wander from their peace  
And fear wood things, poor folk may draw the bolt  
And pray before the fire.

*[SHEMUS counts out the money, and rings a piece upon the table.*

**SHEMUS**

The Mother of God,  
Hushed by the waving of the immortal wings,  
Has dropped in a doze and cannot hear the poor:  
I passed by Margaret Nolan's; for nine days

Her mouth was green with dock and dandelion;  
And now they wake her.

**MAIRE**

I will go the next;  
Our parents' cabins bordered the same field.

**SHEMUS**

God, and the Mother of God, have dropped asleep,  
For they are weary of the prayers and candles;  
But Satan pours the famine from his bag,  
And I am mindful to go pray to him  
To cover all this table with red gold.  
Teig, will you dare me to it?

**TEIG**

Not I, father.

**MAIRE**

O Shemus, hush, maybe your mind might pray  
In spite o' the mouth.

**SHEMUS**

Two crowns and twenty pennies.

**MAIRE**

Is yonder quicken wood?

## **SHEMUS**

**[Picking the bough from the table.]**

He swayed about,  
And so I tied him to a quicken bough  
And slung him from my shoulder.

## **MAIRE**

**[Taking the bough from him.]**

Shemus! Shemus!  
What, would you burn the blessed quicken wood?  
A spell to ward off demons and ill faeries.  
You know not what the owls were that peeped in,  
For evil wonders live in this old wood,  
And they can show in what shape please them best.  
And we have had no milk to leave of nights  
To keep our own good people kind to us.  
And Aleel, who has talked with the great Sidhe,  
Is full of terrors to come.

*[She lays the bough on a chair.]*

## **SHEMUS**

I would eat my supper  
With no less mirth if squatting by the hearth  
Were dulacaun or demon of the pit  
Clawing its knees, its hoof among the ashes.

[He rings another piece of money. A sound of footsteps outside the door.]

## **MAIRE**

Who knows what evil you have brought to us?  
I fear the wood things, Shemus.

*[A knock at the door.]*

Do not open.

**SHEMUS**

A crown and twenty pennies are not enough  
To stop the hole that lets the famine in.

*[The little shrine falls.]*

**MAIRE**

Look! look!

**SHEMUS**

**[Crushing it underfoot.]**

The Mother of God has dropped asleep,  
And all her household things have gone to wrack.

**MAIRE**

O Mary, Mother of God, be pitiful!

*[SHEMUS opens the door. TWO MERCHANTS stand without. They have bands of gold round their foreheads, and each carries a bag upon his shoulder.]*

**FIRST MERCHANT**

Have you food here?

**SHEMUS**

For those who can pay well.

**SECOND MERCHANT**

We are rich merchants seeking merchandise.

**SHEMUS**

Come in, your honours.

**MAIRE**

No, do not come in:  
We have no food, not even for ourselves.

**FIRST MERCHANT**

There is a wolf on the big hook in the cupboard.

*[They enter.]*

**SHEMUS**

Forgive her: she is not used to quality,  
And is half crazed with being much alone.  
How did you know I had taken a young wolf?  
Fine wholesome food, though maybe somewhat strong.

*[The SECOND MERCHANT sits down by the fire and begins rubbing his hands. The FIRST MERCHANT stands looking at the quicken bough on the chair.]*

## FIRST MERCHANT

I would rest here: the night is somewhat chilly,  
And my feet footsore going up and down  
From land to land and nation unto nation:  
The fire burns dimly; feed it with this bough.

[SHEMUS *throws the bough into the fire. The FIRST MERCHANT sits down on the chair. The MERCHANTS' chairs are on each side of the fire. The table is between them. Each lays his bag before him on the table. The night has closed in somewhat, and the main light comes from the fire.*

## MAIRE

What have you in the bags?

## SHEMUS

Don't mind her, sir:  
Women grow curious and feather-thoughted  
Through being in each other's company  
More than is good for them.

## FIRST MERCHANT

Our bags are full  
Of golden pieces to buy merchandise.

[*They pour gold pieces on to the table out of their bags. It is covered with the gold pieces. They shine in the firelight. MAIRE goes to the door of pantry, and watches the MERCHANTS, muttering to herself.*

## TEIG

These are great gentlemen.

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

**[Taking a stone bottle out of his bag.]**

Come to the fire,  
Here is the headiest wine you ever tasted.

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

Wine that can hush asleep the petty war  
Of good and evil, and awake instead  
A scented flame flickering above that peace  
The bird of prey knows well in his deep heart.

## **SHEMUS**

**[Bringing drinking-cups.]**

I do not understand you, but your wine  
Sets me athirst: its praise made your eyes lighten.  
I am thirsting for it.

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

Ay, come drink and drink,  
I bless all mortals who drink long and deep.  
My curse upon the salt-strewn road of monks.

*[TEIG and SHEMUS sit down at the table and drink.]*

## **TEIG**

You must have seen rare sights and done rare things.

**FIRST MERCHANT**

What think you of the master whom we serve?

**SHEMUS**

I have grown weary of my days in the world  
Because I do not serve him.

**FIRST MERCHANT**

More of this  
When we have eaten, for we love right well  
A merry meal, a warm and leaping fire  
And easy hearts.

**SHEMUS**

Come, Maire, and cook the wolf.

**MAIRE**

I will not cook for you.

**SHEMUS**

Maire is mad.

*[TEIG and SHEMUS stand up and stagger about.]*

**SHEMUS**

That wine is the suddenest wine man ever tasted.

### **MAIRE**

I will not cook for you: you are not human:  
Before you came two horned owls looked at us;  
The dog bayed, and the tongue of Shemus maddened.  
When you came in the Virgin's blessed shrine  
Fell from its nail, and when you sat down here  
You poured out wine as the wood sidheogs do  
When they'd entice a soul out of the world.  
Why did you come to us? Was not death near?

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

We are two merchants.

### **MAIRE**

If you be not demons,  
Go and give alms among the starving poor,  
You seem more rich than any under the moon.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

If we knew where to find deserving poor,  
We would give alms.

### **MAIRE**

Then ask of Father John.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

We know the evils of mere charity,  
And have been planning out a wiser way.  
Let each man bring one piece of merchandise.

**MAIRE**

And have the starving any merchandise?

**FIRST MERCHANT**

We do but ask what each man has.

**MAIRE**

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

**FIRST MERCHANT**

They have not sold all yet.

**MAIRE**

What have they?

**FIRST MERCHANT**

They have still their souls.

[MAIRE *shrieks. He beckons to TEIG and SHEMUS.*

Come hither.  
See you these little golden heaps? Each one  
Is payment for a soul. From charity  
We give so great a price for those poor flames.  
Say to all men we buy men's souls – away.

*[They do not stir.*

This pile is for you and this one here for you.

**MAIRE**

Shemus and Teig, Teig —

**TEIG**

Out of the way.

*[SHEMUS and TEIG take the money.*

**FIRST MERCHANT**

Cry out at cross-roads and at chapel doors  
And market-places that we buy men's souls,  
Giving so great a price that men may live  
In mirth and ease until the famine ends.

*[TEIG and SHEMUS go out.*

**MAIRE** [*kneeling*]

Destroyers of souls, may God destroy you quickly!

**FIRST MERCHANT**

No curse can overthrow the immortal demons.

**MAIRE**

You shall at last dry like dry leaves, and hang  
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

## FIRST MERCHANT

You shall be ours. This famine shall not cease.  
You shall eat grass, and dock, and dandelion,  
And fail till this stone threshold seem a wall,  
And when your hands can scarcely drag your body  
We shall be near you.

*[To SECOND MERCHANT.]*

Bring the meal out.

*[The SECOND MERCHANT brings the bag of meal from the pantry.]*

Burn it. [MAIRE faints.  
Now she has swooned, our faces go unscratched;  
Bring me the gray hen, too.

*The SECOND MERCHANT goes out through the door and returns with the hen strangled. He flings it on the floor. While he is away the FIRST MERCHANT makes up the fire. The FIRST MERCHANT then fetches the pan of milk from the pantry, and spills it on the ground. He returns, and brings out the wolf, and throws it down by the hen.*

These need much burning.  
This stool and this chair here will make good fuel.

*[He begins breaking the chair.]*

My master will break up the sun and moon  
And quench the stars in the ancestral night  
And overturn the thrones of God and the angels.

## ACT II

*A great hall in the castle of the COUNTESS CATHLEEN. There is a large window at the farther end, through which the forest is visible. The wall to the right juts out slightly, cutting off an angle of the room. A flight of stone steps leads up to a small arched door in the jutting wall. Through the door can be seen a little oratory. The hall is hung with ancient tapestry, representing the loves and wars and huntings of the Fenian and Red Branch heroes. There are doors to the right and left. On the left side OONA sits, as if asleep, beside a spinning-wheel. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN stands farther back and more to the right, close to a group of the musicians, still in their fantastic dresses, who are playing a merry tune.*

## CATHLEEN

Be silent, I am tired of tympan and harp,  
And tired of music that but cries 'Sleep, sleep,'  
Till joy and sorrow and hope and terror are gone.

*[The COUNTESS CATHLEEN goes over to OONA.]*

You were asleep?

## OONA

No, child, I was but thinking  
Why you have grown so sad.

## CATHLEEN

The famine frets me.

## OONA

I have lived now near ninety winters, child,  
And I have known three things no doctor cures —  
Love, loneliness, and famine; nor found refuge  
Other than growing old and full of sleep.  
See you where Oisín and young Niamh ride  
Wrapped in each other's arms, and where the Fenians  
Follow their hounds along the fields of tapestry;  
How merry they lived once, yet men died then.  
Sit down by me, and I will chaunt the song  
About the Danaan nations in their raths  
That Aleel sang for you by the great door  
Before we lost him in the shadow of leaves.

## CATHLEEN

No, sing the song he sang in the dim light,  
When we first found him in the shadow of leaves,

About King Fergus in his brazen car  
Driving with troops of dancers through the woods.

[She crouches down on the floor, and lays her head on OONA'S knees.

### OONA

Dear heart, make a soft cradle of old tales,  
And songs, and music: wherefore should you sadden  
For wrongs you cannot hinder? The great God  
Smiling condemns the lost: be mirthful: He  
Bids youth be merry and old age be wise.

### CATHLEEN

Tympan and harp awaken wandering dreams.

### A VOICE [*without*]

You may not see the Countess.

### ANOTHER VOICE

I must see her.

[*Sound of a short struggle. A SERVANT enters from door to R.*

### SERVANT

The gardener is resolved to speak with you.  
I cannot stay him.

### CATHLEEN

You may come, Maurteen.

[*The GARDENER, an old man, comes in from the R., and the SERVANT goes out.*]

**GARDENER**

Forgive my working clothes and the dirt on me.  
I bring ill words, your ladyship, – too bad  
To send with any other.

**CATHLEEN**

These bad times,  
Can any news be bad or any good?

**GARDENER**

A crowd of ugly lean-faced rogues last night —  
And may God curse them! – climbed the garden wall.  
There is scarce an apple now on twenty trees,  
And my asparagus and strawberry beds  
Are trampled into clauber, and the boughs  
Of peach and plum-trees broken and torn down  
For some last fruit that hung there. My dog, too,  
My old blind Simon, him who had no tail,  
They murdered – God's red anger seize them!

**CATHLEEN**

I know how pears and all the tribe of apples  
Are daily in your love – how this ill chance  
Is sudden doomsday fallen on your year;  
So do not say no matter. I but say  
I blame the famished season, and not you.  
Then be not troubled.

**GARDENER**

I thank your ladyship.

## CATHLEEN

What rumours and what portents of the famine?

## GARDENER

The yellow vapour, in whose folds it came,  
That creeps along the hedges at nightfall,  
Rots all the heart out of my cabbages.  
I pray against it.

*[He goes towards the door, then pauses.]*

If her ladyship  
Would give me an old crossbow, I would watch  
Behind a bush and guard the pears of nights  
And make a hole in somebody I know of.

## CATHLEEN

They will give you a long draught of ale below.

*[The GARDENER goes out.]*

## OONA

What did he say? – he stood on my deaf side.

## CATHLEEN

His apples are all stolen. Pruning time,  
And the slow ripening of his pears and apples,  
For him is a long, heart-moving history.

## OONA

Now lay your head once more upon my knees.  
I will sing how Fergus drove his brazen cars.

*[She chaunts with the thin voice of age.]*

*Who will go drive with Fergus now,  
And pierce the deep woods' woven shade,  
And dance upon the level shore?  
Young man, lift up your russet brow,  
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,  
And brood on hopes and fears no more.  
You have dropped down again into your trouble.  
You do not hear me.*

## CATHLEEN

Ah, sing on, old Oona,  
I hear the horn of Fergus in my heart.

## OONA

I do not know the meaning of the song.  
I am too old.

## CATHLEEN

The horn is calling, calling.

## OONA

And no more turn aside and brood  
Upon Love's bitter mystery;  
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,  
And rules the shadows of the wood,  
And the white breast of the dim sea  
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

**THE SERVANT'S VOICE [*without*]**

The Countess Cathleen must not be disturbed.

**ANOTHER VOICE**

Man, I must see her.

**CATHLEEN**

Who now wants me, Paudeen?

**SERVANT [*from the door*]**

A herdsman and his history.

**CATHLEEN**

He may come.

*[The HERDSMAN enters from the door to R.]*

**HERDSMAN**

Forgive this dusty gear: I have come far.  
My sheep were taken from the fold last night.  
You will be angry: I am not to blame.  
But blame these robbing times.

**CATHLEEN**

No blame's with you.  
I blame the famine.

### HERDSMAN

Kneeling, I give thanks.  
When gazing on your face, the poorest, Lady,  
Forget their poverty, the rich their care.

### CATHLEEN

What rumours and what portents of the famine?

### HERDSMAN

As I came down the lane by Tubber-vanach  
A boy and man sat cross-legged on two stones,  
With moving hands and faces famine-thin,  
Gabbling to crowds of men and wives and boys  
Of how two merchants at a house in the woods  
Buy souls for hell, giving so great a price  
That men may live through all the dearth in plenty.  
The vales are famine-crazy – I am right glad  
My home is on the mountain near to God.

*[He turns to go.]*

### CATHLEEN

They will give you ale and meat before you go.  
You must have risen at dawn to come so far.  
Keep your bare mountain – let the world drift by,  
The burden of its wrongs rests not on you.

### HERDSMAN

I am content to serve your ladyship.

*[He goes.]*

## OONA

What did he say? – he stood on my deaf side.  
He seemed to give you word of woful things.

## CATHLEEN

A story born out of the dreaming eyes  
And crazy brain and credulous ears of famine.  
O, I am sadder than an old air, Oona,  
My heart is longing for a deeper peace  
Than Fergus found amid his brazen cars:  
Would that like Edain my first forebear's daughter,  
Who followed once a twilight's piercing tune,  
I could go down and dwell among the Sidhe  
In their old ever-busy honeyed land.

## OONA

You should not say such things – they bring ill-luck.

## CATHLEEN

The image of young Edain on the arras,  
Walking along, one finger lifted up;  
And that wild song of the unending dance  
Of the dim Danaan nations in their raths,  
Young Aleel sang for me by the great door,  
Before we lost him in the shadow of leaves,  
Have filled me full of all these wicked words.

*[The SERVANT enters hastily, followed by three men. Two are peasants.]*

## SERVANT

The steward of the castle brings two men  
To talk with you.

## **STEWARD**

And tell the strangest story  
The mouth of man has uttered.

## **CATHLEEN**

More food taken;  
Yet learned theologians have laid down  
That he who has no food, offending no way,  
May take his meat and bread from too-full larders.

## **FIRST PEASANT**

We come to make amends for robbery.  
I stole five hundred apples from your trees,  
And laid them in a hole; and my friend here  
Last night stole two large mountain sheep of yours  
And hung them on a beam under his thatch.

## **SECOND PEASANT**

His words are true.

## **FIRST PEASANT**

Since then our luck has changed.  
As I came down the lane by Tubber-vanach  
I fell on Shemus Rua and his son,  
And they led me where two great gentlemen  
Buy souls for money, and they bought my soul.  
I told my friend here – my friend also trafficked.

## **SECOND PEASANT**

His words are true.

### **FIRST PEASANT**

Now people throng to sell,  
Noisy as seagulls tearing a dead fish.  
There soon will be no man or woman's soul  
Unbargained for in fivescore baronies.

### **SECOND PEASANT**

His words are true.

### **FIRST PEASANT**

When we had sold we talked,  
And having no more comfortable life  
Than this that makes us warm – our souls being bartered  
For all this money —

### **SECOND PEASANT**

And this money here.

*[They bring handfuls of money from their pockets. CATHLEEN starts up.]*

### **FIRST PEASANT**

And fearing much to hang for robbery,  
We come to pay you for the sheep and fruit.  
How do you price them?

### **CATHLEEN**

Gather up your money.  
Think you that I would touch the demons' gold?

Begone, give twice, thrice, twenty times their money,  
And buy your souls again. I will pay all.

**FIRST PEASANT**

We will not buy our souls again: a soul  
But keeps the flesh out of its merriment.  
We shall be merry and drunk from moon to moon.  
Keep from our way. Let no one stop our way.

*[They go.]*

**CATHLEEN [*to servant*]**

Follow and bring them here again – beseech them.

*[The SERVANT goes.]*

**[*To STEWARD.*]**

Steward, you know the secrets of this house.  
How much have I in gold?

**STEWARD**

A hundred thousand.

**CATHLEEN**

How much have I in castles?

**STEWARD**

As much more.

**CATHLEEN**

How much have I in pastures?

**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 to some distant country and come again  
With many herds of cows and ships of grain.

**STEWARD**

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

**CATHLEEN**

Make no delay.

*[He goes.]*

**[Enter SERVANT.]**

How did you thrive? Say quickly. You are pale.

**SERVANT**

Their eyes burn like the eyes of birds of prey:  
I did not dare go near.

**CATHLEEN**

God pity them!  
Bring all the old and ailing to this house,  
For I will have no sorrow of my own  
From this day onward.

*[The SERVANT goes out. Some of the musicians follow him, some linger in the doorway. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN kneels beside OONA.]*

Can you tell me, mother,  
How I may mend the times, how staunch this wound  
That bleeds in the earth, how overturn the famine,  
How drive these demons to their darkness again?

**OONA**

The demons hold our hearts between their hands,  
For the apple is in our blood, and though heart break  
There is no medicine but Michael's trump.  
Till it has ended parting and old age  
And hail and rain and famine and foolish laughter;  
The dead are happy, the dust is in their ears.

**ACT III**

*Hall of the COUNTESS CATHLEEN as before. SERVANT enters and goes towards the oratory door.*

**SERVANT**

Here is yet another would see your ladyship.

**CATHLEEN [*within*]**

Who calls me?

**SERVANT**

There is a man would speak with you,  
And by his face he has some pressing news,  
Some moving tale.

**CATHLEEN [*coming to chapel door*]**

I cannot rest or pray,  
For all day long the messengers run hither  
On one another's heels, and every message  
More evil than the one that had gone before.  
Who is the messenger?

**SERVANT**

Aleel, the poet.

**CATHLEEN**

There is no hour he is not welcome to me,  
Because I know of nothing but a harp-string  
That can remember happiness.

*[SERVANT goes out and ALEEL comes in.]*

And now

I grow forgetful of evil for awhile.

**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**

Men say that the wise people of the raths  
Have given you wisdom.

**ALEEL**

I lay in the dusk  
Upon the grassy margin of a lake  
Among the hills, where none of mortal creatures  
But the swan comes – my sleep became a fire.  
One walked in the fire with birds about his head.

**CATHLEEN**

Ay, Aengus of the birds.

### **ALEEL**

He may be Aengus,  
But it may be he bears an angelical name.  
Lady, he bid me call you from these woods;  
He bids you bring Oona, your 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 gone.

**[He kneels.]**

For here some terrible death is waiting you;  
Some unimaginable evil, some great darkness  
That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon  
Scattered.

### **CATHLEEN**

And he had birds about his head?

### **ALEEL**

Yes, yes, white birds. He bids you leave this house  
With some old trusty serving-man, who will feed  
All that are starving and shelter all that 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**

**[Throwing his arms about her feet.]**

Let Him that made mankind, the angels and devils  
And death 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 the chapel door; ALEEL holds his clasped hands towards her for a moment hesitatingly, and then lets them fall beside him.]*

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, although 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 – farewell, farewell; and yet no,  
Give me your hand to kiss.

### CATHLEEN

I kiss your brow,  
But will not say farewell. I am often weary,  
And I would hear the harp-string.

### ALEEL

I cannot stay,  
For I would hide my sorrow among the hills —  
Listen, listen, the hills are calling me.

*[They listen for a moment.]*

### CATHLEEN

I hear the cry of curlew.

### ALEEL

Then I will out  
Where I can hear wind cry and water cry  
And curlew cry: how does the saying go  
That calls them the three oldest cries in the world?  
Farewell, farewell, I will go wander among them,  
Because there is no comfort under a roof-tree.

*[He goes out.]*

## **CATHLEEN**

**[Looking through the door after him.]**

I cannot see him. He has come to the great door.  
I must go pray. Would that my heart and mind  
Were as little shaken as this candle-light.

*[She goes into the chapel. The TWO MERCHANTS enter.]*

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

Who was the man that came from the great door  
While we were still in the shadow?

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Aleel, her lover.

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

It may be that he has turned her thought from us  
And we can gather our merchandise in peace.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

No, no, for she is kneeling.

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

Shut the door.  
Are all our drudges here?

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

**[Closing the chapel door.]**

I bid them follow.  
Can you not hear them breathing upon the stairs?  
I have sat this hour under the elder-tree.

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

I had bid you rob her treasury, and yet  
I found you sitting drowsed and motionless,  
Your chin bowed to your knees, while on all sides,  
Bat-like from bough and roof and window-ledge,  
Clung evil souls of men, and in the woods,  
Like streaming flames, floated upon the winds  
The elemental creatures.

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

I have fared ill;  
She prayed so hard I could not cross the threshold  
Till this young man had turned her prayer to dreams.  
You have had a man to kill: how have you fared?

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

I lay in the image of a nine-monthed bonyeen,  
By Tubber-vanach cross-roads: Father John  
Came, sad and moody, murmuring many prayers;  
I seemed as though I came from his own sty;  
He saw the one brown ear; the breviary dropped;  
He ran; I ran, I ran into the quarry;  
He fell a score of yards.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Now that he is dead  
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.  
Did his soul escape you?

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

I thrust it in the bag.  
But the hand that blessed the poor and raised the Host  
Tore through the leather with sharp piety.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Well, well, to labour – here is the treasury door.

[They go out by the left-hand door, and enter again in a little while, carrying full bags upon their shoulders.]

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Brave thought, brave thought – a shining thought of mine!  
She now no more may bribe the poor – no more  
Cheat our great master of his merchandise,  
While our heels dangle at the house in the woods,  
And grass grows on the threshold, and snails crawl  
Along the window-pane and the mud floor.  
Brother, where wander all these dwarfish folk,  
Hostile to men, the people of the tides?

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

**[Going to the door.]**

They are gone. They have already wandered away,  
Unwilling labourers.

## FIRST MERCHANT

I will call them hither.

*[He opens the window.]*

Come hither, hither, hither, water-folk:  
Come, all you elemental populace;  
Leave lonely the long-hoarding surges: leave  
The cymbals of the waves to clash alone,  
And, shaking the sea-tangles from your hair,  
Gather about us. *[After a pause.]*  
I can hear a sound  
As from waves beating upon distant strands;  
And the sea-creatures, like a surf of light,  
Pour eddying through the pathways of the oaks;  
And as they come, the sentient grass and leaves  
Bow towards them, and the tall, drouth-jaded oaks  
Fondle the murmur of their flying feet.

## SECOND MERCHANT

The green things love unknotted hearts and minds;  
And neither one with angels or with us,  
Nor risen in arms with evil nor with good,  
In laughter roves the litter of the waves.

[A crowd of faces fill up the darkness outside the window. A figure separates from the others and speaks.]

## THE SPIRIT

We come unwillingly, for she whose gold  
We must now carry to the house in the woods  
Is dear to all our race. On the green plain,  
Beside the sea, a hundred shepherds live  
To mind her sheep; and when the nightfall comes  
They leave a hundred pans of white ewes' milk  
Outside their doors, to feed us when the dawn  
Has driven us out of Finbar's ancient house,  
And broken the long dance under the hill.

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

**[Making a sign upon the air.]**

Obey! I make a sign upon your hearts.

## **THE SPIRIT**

The sign of evil burns upon our hearts,  
And we obey.

[They crowd through the window, and take out of the bags a small bag each. They are dressed in green robes and have ruddy hair. They are a little less than the size of men and women.]

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

And now begone – begone!    *[They go.*  
I bid them go, for, being garrulous  
And flighty creatures, they had soon begun  
To deafen us with their sea-gossip. Now  
We must go bring more money. Brother, brother,  
I long to see my master's face again,  
For I turn homesick.

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

I too tire of toil.

[They go out, and return as before, with their bags full.]

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

**[Pointing to the oratory.]**

How may we gain this woman for our lord?

This pearl, this turquoise fastened in his crown  
Would make it shine like His we dare not name.  
Now that the winds are heavy with our kind,  
Might we not kill her, and bear off her spirit  
Before the mob of angels were astir?

*[A diadem and a heap of jewels fall from the bag.]*

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Who tore the bag?

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

The finger of Priest John  
When he fled through the leather. I had thought  
Because his was an old and little spirit  
The tear would hardly matter.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

This comes, brother,  
Of stealing souls that are not rightly ours.  
If we would win this turquoise for our lord,  
It must go dropping down of its freewill.  
She will have heard the noise. She will stifle us  
With holy names.

[He goes to the oratory door and opens it a little, and then closes it.]

No, she has fallen asleep.

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

The noise wakened the household. While you spoke  
I heard chairs moved, and heard folk's shuffling feet.  
And now they are coming hither.

**A VOICE [*within*]**

It was here.

**ANOTHER VOICE**

No, further away.

**ANOTHER VOICE**

It was in the western tower.

**ANOTHER VOICE**

Come quickly; we will search the western tower.

**FIRST MERCHANT**

We still have time – they search the distant rooms.  
Call hither the fading and the unfading fires.

**SECOND MERCHANT**

**[Going to the window.]**

There are none here. They tired and strayed from hence —  
Unwilling labourers.

**FIRST MERCHANT**

I will draw them in.

*[He cries through the window.]*

Come hither, you lost souls of men, who died  
In drunken sleep, and by each other's hands  
When they had bartered you – come hither all  
Who mourn among the scenery of your sins,  
Turning to animal and reptile forms,  
The visages of passions; hither, hither —  
Leave marshes and the reed-encumbered pools,  
You shapeless fires, that were the souls of men,  
And are a fading wretchedness.

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

They come not.

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

**[Making a sign upon the air.]**

Come hither, hither, hither.

## **SECOND MERCHANT**

I can hear  
A crying as of storm-distempered reeds.  
The fading and the unfading fires rise up  
Like steam out of the earth; the grass and leaves  
Shiver and shrink away and sway about,  
Blown by unnatural gusts of ice-cold air.

## **FIRST MERCHANT**

They are one with all the beings of decay,  
Ill longings, madness, lightning, famine, drouth.

[The whole stage is gradually filled with vague forms, some animal shapes, some human, some mere lights.

Come you – and you – and you, and lift these bags.

### **A SPIRIT**

We are too violent; mere shapes of storm.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Come you – and you – and you, and lift these bags.

### **A SPIRIT**

We are too feeble, fading out of life.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Come you, and you, who are the latest dead,  
And still wear human shape: the shape of power.

[The two robbing peasants of the last scene come forward. Their faces have withered from much pain.

Now, brawlers, lift the bags of gold.

### **FIRST PEASANT**

Yes, yes!  
Unwillingly, unwillingly; for she,  
Whose gold we bear upon our shoulders thus,  
Has endless pity even for lost souls  
In her good heart. At moments, now and then,  
When plunged in horror, brooding each alone,  
A memory of her face floats in on us.

It brings a crowned misery, half repose,  
And we wail one to other; we obey,  
For heaven's many-angled star reversed,  
Now sign of evil, burns into our hearts.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

When these pale sapphires and these diadems  
And these small bags of money are in our house,  
The burning shall give over – now begone.

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

**[Lifting the diadem to put it upon his head.]**

No – no – no. I will carry the diadem.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

No, brother, not yet.  
For none can carry her treasures wholly away  
But spirits that are too light for good and evil,  
Or, being evil, can remember good.  
Begone! [*The spirits vanish.*] I bade them go, for they are lonely,  
And when they see aught living love to sigh.  
[*Pointing to the oratory.*] Brother, I heard a sound in there – a sound  
That troubles me.

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

**[Going to the door of the oratory and peering through it.]**

Upon the altar steps  
The Countess tosses, murmuring in her sleep  
A broken *Paternoster*.

**[The FIRST MERCHANT goes to the door and stands beside him.]**

She is grown still.

**FIRST MERCHANT**

A great plan floats into my mind – no wonder,  
For I come from the ninth and mightiest Hell,  
Where all are kings. I will wake her from her sleep,  
And mix with all her thoughts a thought to serve.

*[He calls through the door.]*

May we be well remembered in your prayers!

*[The COUNTESS CATHLEEN wakes, and comes to the door of the oratory. The MERCHANTS descend into the room again. She stands at the top of the stone steps.]*

**CATHLEEN**

What would you, sirs?

**FIRST MERCHANT**

We are two merchant men,  
New come from foreign lands. We bring you news.  
Forgive our sudden entry: the great door  
Was open, we came in to seek a face.

**CATHLEEN**

The door stands always open to receive,  
With kindly welcome, starved and sickly folk,  
Or any who would fly the woful times.  
Merchants, you bring me news?

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

We saw a man  
Heavy with sickness in the Bog of Allan,  
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,  
I still have bags of money, and can buy  
Meal from the merchants who have stored it up,  
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.  
You have been far, and know the signs of things:  
When will this yellow vapour no more hang  
And creep about the fields, and this great heat  
Vanish away – and grass show its green shoots?

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

There is no sign of change – day copies day,  
Green things are dead – the cattle too are dead,  
Or dying – and on all the vapour hangs  
And fattens with disease and glows with heat.  
In you is all the hope of all the land.

### **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 flames – their spirits – only  
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**

The demons give a hundred crowns and more  
For a poor soul like his who lies asleep  
By your great door under the porter's niche;  
A little soul not worth a hundred pence.  
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 lighted, and the strange weariness  
That hangs about you vanished. When you told  
How my poor money serves the people – both —  
Merchants, forgive me – seemed to smile.

## FIRST MERCHANT

Man's sins  
Move us to laughter only, we have seen  
So many lands and seen so many men.  
How strange 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 to the right, comes forward, and as he comes a sound of voices and feet is heard through the door to his left.]*

## SECOND MERCHANT [*aside to FIRST 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: we must ride  
Many a mile before the morning come;  
Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

*[They go out to R. A number of peasants enter at the same moment by the opposite door.]*

### **CATHLEEN**

What would you?

### **A PEASANT**

As we nodded by the fire,  
Telling old histories, we heard a noise  
Of falling money. We have searched in vain.

### **CATHLEEN**

You are too timid. I heard naught at all.

### **THE OLD PEASANT**

Ay, we are timid, for a rich man's word  
Can shake our houses, and a moon of drouth  
Shrivel our seedlings in the barren earth;  
We are the slaves of wind, and hail, and flood;  
Fear jogs our elbow in the market-place,  
And nods beside us on the chimney-seat.  
Ill-bodings are as native unto our hearts  
As are their spots unto the woodpeckers.

### **CATHLEEN**

You need not shake with bodings in this house.

*[Oona enters from the door to L.]*

## OONA

The treasure-room is broken in – mavrone – mavrone;  
The door stands open and the gold is gone.

*[The peasants raise a lamenting cry.]*

CATHLEEN.  
Be silent. *[The cry ceases.]*  
Saw you any one?

## OONA

Mavrone,  
That my good mistress should lose all this money.

## CATHLEEN

You three upon my right hand, ride and ride;  
I will give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

*[A man with keys at his girdle has entered while she was speaking.]*

## A PEASANT

The porter trembles.

## THE PORTER

It is all no use;  
Demons were here. I sat beside the door  
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,  
Whispering with human voices.

## THE OLD PEASANT

God forsakes us.

## CATHLEEN

Old man, old man, He never closed a door  
Unless one opened. I am desolate,  
For a most sad resolve wakes in my heart:  
But always I have faith. Old men and women,  
Be silent; 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;  
At times it crumbles and a nation falls,  
Now moves awry and demon hordes are born.

*[The peasants cross themselves.]*

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

*[She steps down 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 OLD PEASANT.]* But take you this. It opens the small room  
Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore,  
Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal  
And all the others; and the book of cures  
Is on the upper shelf. You understand,  
Because you doctored goats and cattle once.

## THE OLD PEASANT

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

## CATHLEEN

Ah, no, not that,  
A sad resolve wakes in me. I have heard

A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,  
And I must go down, down, I know not where.  
Pray for the poor folk who are crazed with famine;  
Pray, you good neighbours.

*[The peasants all kneel. The 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!

## ACT IV

*The cabin of SHEMUS RUA. The TWO MERCHANTS are sitting one at each end of the table, with rolls of parchment and many little heaps of gold before them. Through an open door, at the back, one sees into an inner room, in which there is a bed. On the bed is the body of MAIRE with candles about it.*

### FIRST MERCHANT

The woman may keep robbing us no more,  
For there are only mice now in her coffers.

### SECOND MERCHANT

Last night, closed in the image of an owl,  
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,  
And saw, creeping on the uneasy surge,  
Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal;  
They are five days from us.

### FIRST MERCHANT

I hurried East,  
A gray owl flitting, flitting in the dew,  
And saw nine hundred oxen toil through Meath  
Driven on by goads of iron; they, too, brother,  
Are full five days from us.

## SECOND MERCHANT

Five days for traffic.

*[While they have been speaking the peasants have come in, led by TEIG and SHEMUS, who take their stations, one on each side of the door, and keep them marshalled into rude order and encourage them from time to time with gestures and whispered words.]*

Here throng they; since the drouth they go in throngs,  
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.

## A MIDDLE-AGED MAN

I come to deal if you give honest price.

## FIRST MERCHANT

**[Reading in a parchment.]**

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.  
There is this crack in you – two hundred crowns.

*[THE MAN takes them and goes.]*

## SECOND MERCHANT

Come, deal – one would half think you had no souls.  
If only for the credit of your parishes,  
Come, deal, deal, deal, or will you always starve?  
Maire, the wife of Shemus, would not deal,  
She starved – she lies in there with red wallflowers,  
And candles stuck in bottles round her bed.

## A WOMAN

What price, now, will you give for mine?

## FIRST MERCHANT

Ay, ay,  
Soft, handsome, and still young – not much, I think.

*[Reading in the parchment.]*

She has love letters in a little jar  
On the high shelf between the pepper-pot  
And wood-cased hour-glass.

## THE WOMAN

O, the scandalous parchment!

### FIRST MERCHANT [*reading*]

She hides them from her husband, who buys horses,  
And is not much at home. You are almost safe.  
I give you fifty crowns.[*She turns to go.*  
A hundred, then.

[*She takes them, and goes into the crowd.*

Come – deal, deal, deal; it is for charity  
We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins  
Made them our master's long before we came.  
Come, deal – come, deal. You seem resolved to starve  
Until your bones show through your skin. Come, deal,  
Or live on nettles, grass, and dandelion.  
Or do you dream the famine will go by?  
The famine is hale and hearty; it is mine  
And my great master's; it shall no wise cease  
Until our purpose end: the yellow vapour  
That brought it bears it over your dried fields  
And fills with violent phantoms of the lost,  
And grows more deadly as day copies day.  
See how it dims the daylight. Is that peace  
Known to the birds of prey so dread a thing?  
They, and the souls obedient to our master,  
And those who live with that great other spirit  
Have gained an end, a peace, while you but toss  
And swing upon a moving balance beam.

[*ALEEL enters; the wires of his harp are broken.*

### ALEEL

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

### **FIRST MERCHANT** [*reading*]

A man of songs:  
Alone in the hushed passion of romance,  
His mind ran all on sidheoges and on tales  
Of Fenian labours and the Red Branch kings,  
And he cared nothing for the life of man:  
But now all changes.

### **ALEEL**

Ay, because her face,  
The face of Countess Cathleen, dwells with me:  
The sadness of the world upon her brow:  
The crying of these strings grew burdensome,  
Therefore I tore them; see; now take my soul.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

### **ALEEL**

Ah, take it; take it. It nowise can help her,  
And, therefore, do I tire of it.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

No; no.  
We may not touch it.

### **ALEEL**

Is your power so small,  
Must I then bear it with me all my days?

May scorn close deep about you!

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Lead him hence;  
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 will have peace once more.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT kisses the gold circlet that is about the head of the FIRST MERCHANT.*

### **SHEMUS**

He is called Aleel,  
And has been crazy now these many days;  
But has no harm in him: his fits soon pass,  
And one can go and lead him like a child.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; you are all dumb?

## 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 parchment and reads.]

There is but little set down here against her;  
She stole fowl sometimes when the harvest failed,  
But always went to chapel twice a week,  
And paid her dues when prosperous. Take your money.

### THE OLD PEASANT WOMAN [*curtseying*]

God bless you, sir. [*She screams.*]  
O, sir, a pain went through me.

### FIRST MERCHANT

That name is like a fire to all damned souls.  
Begone. [*She goes.*] See how the red gold pieces glitter.  
Deal: do you fear because an old hag screamed?  
Are you all cowards?

### A PEASANT

Nay, I am no coward.  
I will sell half my soul.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

How half your soul?

### **THE PEASANT**

Half my chance of heaven.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

It is writ here  
This man in all things takes the moderate course,  
He sits on midmost of the balance beam,  
And no man has had good of him or evil.  
Begone, we will not buy you.

### **SECOND MERCHANT**

Deal, come, deal.

### **FIRST MERCHANT**

What, will you keep us from our ancient home,  
And from the eternal revelry? Come, deal,  
And we will hence to our great master again.  
Come, deal, deal, deal.

### **THE PEASANTS SHOUT**

The Countess Cathleen comes!

**CATHLEEN** [*entering*]

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