

# **LADY BETTY**

**By Declan Donnellan**

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**This play was commissioned and first performed by Cheek by Jowl. Original music was written by Paddy Cunneen, and is available separately.**

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**LADY BETTY**  
**BY DECLAN DONNELLAN**

**0 PROLOGUE**

[Enter Chorus]

CHORUS SINGS: *Who will listen to our story?  
Who will hear what we must tell?  
Who will ride with us to glory?  
Who will share our horse to hell?*

BETTY: Have you told them who I am?

CHORUS SINGS: *Forgive us.*

BETTY: Cut my image in the air.

CHORUS SINGS: *Forgive us.*

BETTY: Etch my features in their hearts.

CHORUS SINGS: *Forgive us*

BETTY: Sing my song.

CHORUS SINGS: *Lady Betty loved a Lord.  
Had her baby sold abroad.  
Lady Betty loved her porter.  
But made do with bread and water.  
What has Lady Betty done?  
Why does blood seep from her son?*

*In the prison, if you dare,  
Listen to her final prayer.  
Come the morning birds do sing  
But you can't see Betty swing.*

*Lady Betty likes to draw  
The face before it drops the jaw.  
Pray to Jesus that she might  
Not smile upon your face tonight.*

BETTY: And is that it all? Is that all me now? Broken words?  
Flesh it for them. Pump it with blood the way I was young.  
Dance my story in the dirt. (They dance)  
Harder, harder.....

[The chorus dress two of their number as Lord John and Lady Sarah and Betty as an eighteenth century shepherdess]

## 1 THE PAINTING SCENE

SARAH: Please stand still. And try not to smile.

JOHN: It is as impossible for Betty not to smile as it is for the Irish landscape not to appear picturesque.

SARAH: Do you enjoy being picturesque Betty?

BETTY: Yes, Madam.

[They laugh]

SARAH: Do you know what “picturesque” means, Betty?

BETTY: No, Madam.

[They laugh]

JOHN: It means like a picture, Betty.

BETTY: Yes, your lordship.

SARAH: Can you draw, Betty?

BETTY: No, madam.

SARAH: Then I should smile upon his lordship, Betty. He might teach you.

[Silence]

JOHN: The light has gone.

SARAH: Home, Betty.

BETTY: Yes, madam.

SARAH: The hills are dissolving.

JOHN: Why is nothing ever quite real in this fascinating country?

SARAH: It’s the damp.

BETTY: There was more of a move to it than that. Not like the three oul’ stone faces in the O’Connor’s field. More of a quick to it, an edge to it than that. And music too.

[Bodhrans]

BETTY: Not the bodhrans, you ommadawns but angels, there were angels. I remember them, playing pipeens on a ceiling.

**2a THE MINUET (Betty and John dance a minuet)**

JOHN: You must keep a straight face, Betty.  
BETTY: Yes, Sir.  
JOHN: Extend the foot, so.  
BETTY: Yes, Sir.  
JOHN: It is all a question of balance.  
BETTY: Yes, Sir.  
JOHN: You're better than I am.  
BETTY: Yes, Sir. No, Sir!  
JOHN: Do you find me picturesque, Betty?  
BETTY: Yes, Sir.  
JOHN: Or is it just the dance?  
BETTY: There is no difference, Sir.  
[They dance]  
BETTY: Sir!  
JOHN: What?  
BETTY: Jesus, did you hear it?  
JOHN: Hear what?  
BETTY: The cry. The wail. There it goes again.  
JOHN: There's nothing. I heard nothing.  
BETTY: Sir. It's a banshee, Sir.  
JOHN: And what, pray, is a banshee?  
BETTY: She sings. Before a death.  
JOHN: There'll be no dying tonight. Could you love an Englishman, Betty?  
BETTY: ...  
JOHN: Or would you rather strangle me in my bed?  
BETTY: Jesus, I'd kill the one that'd lay a finger on you.  
JOHN: Will you love me, Betty?  
BETTY: Yes, Sir.  
JOHN: Will you forgive me, Betty?

**2b**     SMALL ANIMAL

BETTY:                    Then what happened?

CHORUS:                 He crushed her to his chest and branded kisses on her face.

BETTY:                    No, no.

CHORUS:                 He threw her to the ground, and fell upon her, like a lion at his prey.

BETTY:                    No.

CHORUS:                 He slid his key into her lock.

BETTY:                    No. There were angels.

CHORUS:                 Each gripped the other like skin on meat and rocked and sobbed ‘til dawn walked past with naked feet. Which way was it Betty? Tell us, Betty for the love of...

BETTY:                    I have a small animal growing in my stomach. It is eating out my insides. It has a tongue of flame. Wait, don't walk past for the love of God, help me.

CHORUS:                 Hail Holy Queen...

BETTY:                    I've tried to hold my breath and smother it. But it burns and burns. I've taken big gulps of the cold air to blow it out but the flame leaps out of my mouth and down my nose.  
Help me Liamog; help me Mrs Hanrahan.

MRS HANRAHAN:     There's Mass in Kilteven's field.

BETTY:                    It is speaking to me. But the flame tongue is so deep inside I cannot hear what it says.

SEAMUS:                 It's a sin you know to always be dreaming.

BRIDIE:                  Dreaming on a Sunday's the worst.

BETTY:                    I think I can hear the tongue calling my name.

MR HANRAHAN:        Leave the dirty thing alone.

BETTY:                    The flame-tongue is licking me inside.

CHRISTY:                She's raving with hunger.

BETTY:                    The rain is boiling on my skin.

MR HANRAHAN:        Sure she's just letting on. Aren't we all as hungry as herself.

BRIDIE:                  And us without shame or stain?

BRIDGET:                Come to mass and pray to St. Blaise.

MRS HANRAHAN:     No pray, to the Blessed Virgin. The Blessed Virgin is great.

MR HANRAHAN:        It's not the Blessed Virgin that one'll be wanting.

### 3 THE MASS SCENE

FATHER MOLLOY: Is it then for you to cast the first stone? That day in Jerusalem even the coldest Pharisee went away and left our sweet Saviour to draw in the earth. Are the people of Roscommon better than the people of Jerusalem? And will you then throw dirt at a poor, simple woman who bore her baby and didn't butcher him in her womb like many another? Will you send her from your doors cold and hungry? Will you throw her out of Roscommon? Your flesh is shrunk for lack of food but your spirit will starve for lack of mercy. It is not your thin bodies that disgust Christ, but your famished souls.

BETTY: Why did you shame me?

FATHER MOLLOY: There is no shame in front of men and women, Betty. Only God may judge. Only God may be the executioner.

BETTY: And God will be your judge too. You have turned them against me.

FATHER MOLLOY: Despair is the only sin without forgiveness.

BETTY: You have made me alone. Who forgives being alone?

FATHER MOLLOY: God loves you. You can never be alone. He in His infinite wisdom perceives that you are good. You looked after your child. You were right to give him to the charity. You will never know him but he proves that you are good.

BETTY: Don't give me your good. I wish I'd stuck a knife in his little head rather than given him to you.

FATHER MOLLOY: Pray to Jesus that He forgive you, Betty.

BETTY: I wish I'd been a whore in Galway rather than hide in your skirts. Why was I the fool to listen to you?

FATHER MOLLOY: I took you in when you had no home. I fed you when you were hungry. I loved you when you were alone.

BETTY: And a queer, cold love it was. You peering at me as I scrubbed your floor.

FATHER MOLLOY: Down on your knees and pray to Christ, to forgive you.

BETTY: I'll never kneel to you. What right have you to tell me how to live?

FATHER MOLLOY: Jesus gives me the right. Jesus Christ. Only begotten son of the Virgin who shed His blood for you, who in His supreme love for us blind sinners gives us His flesh to eat at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Will you reject that supreme love in your pride and in your vanity?

BETTY: I had no pride till I was insulted. I had no vanity till I was shamed. I spit out his blood.

#### **SCENE 4: THE EGG SCENE**

\*LUCY SINGS: *Free as the lark,*

MEN: Betty leaves Roscommon

LUCY SINGS: *Free as the summer frosts,*

MEN: Betty lives in a hovel

LUCY SINGS: *Free as the hawthorn,*

MEN: Betty gathers firewood

LUCY SINGS: *And Betty scribbles in the dirt as free as silence*

MEN: As free as poverty

BETTY SINGS: *Give me some eggs*

CHORUS SINGS: *Our eggs are rotten for you*

BETTY SINGS: *Give me some milk*

CHORUS SINGS: *Our milk is sour for you*

BETTY SINGS: *Give me a praty*

CHORUS SINGS: *Get out you dirty whore, there is no food for you in Roscommon*

BETTY SINGS: *Please, I'll go to the Masses in the fields – I have the terrible pain of hunger. Please I'll go to the masses in the fields – only feed me*

CHORUS: *Who could feel a woman who would spit out Jesus' blood Holy Mother of God we'd starve in hell.*

CHORUS SINGS: *Get out you dirty whore, there is no food for you in Roscommon.*

BETTY: I am sorry. Take me back.

CHORUS: Indeed we will not.

BETTY: Christ the Son tells you to forgive with His blood.

CHORUS: It is Satan who has made you mad.



BETTY: I see His blood in the sky, it says “Give her some porter”

CHORUS SINGS: *Get out you dirty whore, there is no food for you in Roscommon.*

BETTY: Christ is drawing a picture with His blood. It’s like a sausage. The Virgin is drawing a picture too, in Her own Son’s blood.

BIRDIE: What is it a picture of, Betty?

BETTY: Nothing.

BIRDIE: What is it a picture of, Betty?

BETTY: Give me an egg and I’ll tell you.

CHORUS: Get out, you dirty whore.

CHORUS: In another country they’d hang you as a witch.

BETTY: Give me food and I’ll tell you what I can see.

CHORUS: We don’t want to see the foul things you can see.

CHORUS SINGS: *Get out you dirty whore, there is no food for you in Roscommon.*

BETTY: I can see the maggots eating your hearts.

CHORUS: Get out.

BETTY: I can see the flies drinking your blood.

CHORUS: Get out.

BETTY: And I curse you, and your children.

LIAMOG & MAN: Get out, you dirty, smelly thing. I’d beat you but I’m frightened of catching the pox.

MRS HANRAHAN & WOMEN: Liamog don’t you be talking to a one like that – and you descended from the High Kings of Erin.

MR HANRAHAN & MEN: Let God be her judge. Let him send her to hell. Time will stitch her a bad life.

BETTY: I make drawings in the air, so no bugger can rub them out. I am drawing a man. Shall I dress him in a fine suit? Shall I make him smile? Can you see who I am drawing, Liamog?

LIAMOG: Could you draw something for me, Betty?

BETTY: What?

LIAMOG: Could you draw me a fry in a pan?

BETTY: Maybe I could.

LIAMOG: Draw us up the smell of a pair of sausages spitting in the pan.

MRS HANRAHAN: Liamog, come here or I'll lather you.

LIAMOG: Draw yourself a bellyful of food.

CHRISTY: Betty, don't listen to them, I'll give you an egg.

BETTY: Christy?

CHRISTY: A fine big egg with a brown yolk.

BETTY: Give it to me.

CHRISTY: Here's your egg.  
[Christy drops a stone on the floor]

BETTY: Get out, you bastarding scutters! God strike you blind!

CHRISTY: Curse us again, Betty. We love it. Whip us Betty, with your tongue. It's gorgeous.

BETTY: May the little maneen shrivel between your legs.

BRIDGET: You witch!

BETTY: May your tits drop sour milk!

BRIDGET: Come on home now. It's not the dirty talk from her we should be listening to.

CHRISTY: She put her smell on me.

BRIDGET: You shouldn't have made me come, Mam'll kill you.

## **5 THE FIRST NIGHT SCENE**

CHORUS SINGS: *Night opened Betty's door.*

BETTY SINGS: *She never fails to come.*

CHORUS SINGS: *Night smelt her way across Betty's floor*

BETTY SINGS: *She loves me like a sister*

CHORUS SINGS: *Night took Betty by the hand.*

BETTY SINGS: *She's the only friend I have. Sit yourself down Night, I have no food to give.*

NIGHT: I do not come alone, I have three gifts.

BETTY: What kind of gifts are they, Night?

NIGHT: You'll see, soon enough.

BETTY: Is it three eggs? Is it three eggs with fine brown yolks.

NIGHT: It is not.

BETTY: Is it three hens, then, clattering down the road?

NIGHT: There are no hens lurching down the road to disturb our peace.

BETTY: Is it three goats? Sweet Night, let it be three little goateens with fine, pink tits on them to give me milk. Or purple meat to pump my cheeks till I'm bold as a lady in a picture.

NIGHT: There are no goats for you to swallow.

BETTY: Arrah Jesus, Night. I'm starving. I could eat your oul' stick. Or the dirt floor. Or my rags. Give me something to eat quick, Night, for your talk is getting soft and I'm thinking you're in your dotage and have no gifts for me at all.

NIGHT: I am in no dotage. I have three gifts and the first of them is Silence.

[Enter Silence]

BETTY: Jesus, what kind of a thing is this at all?  
[Silence does not speak]

BETTY: cont... What kind of a thing are you, Silence? I think you are a murderer. You have smothered the wind when she whistles through the hawthorn. You have stifled the nightingale. Can you hear the thud of my heart? Can you hear my breath come and go? Please, Silence, I'll do anything for you. Don't kill me. I can be still with you. I can be a part of you.

NIGHT: Leave the lad alone and don't deafen him with your clatter. I have three gifts, and the second of these is Cold.

[Enter Cold] [Violin]

COLD: Come here, Betty. Give us a squeeze.

BETTY: What are you?

COLD: I am Cold, Betty. Let me put my arms around you.

BETTY: You can keep your fingers to yourself, Cold.

COLD: I adore you, Betty. Let me touch your skin. And the small hairs on your neck.

BETTY: What would you want with a sunken thing like me?

COLD: Let me sink my hands between your thighs.

BETTY: In the name of Jesus, will you not talk filthy. Isn't there many other young thing with high nipples to tighten at your touch?

COLD: I am sick with desire for you, Betty. You have bits of me already inside you. Sparks of cold for me. I feel the ice harden in my bowels. I am as stiff as a board. Can you feel me scorching your ears.

BETTY: Silence, Silence shut him up.

COLD: Come to me, Betty.

BETTY: Oh dear, deep Night, save me from Silence and Cold. Spare me. I will do anything for you.

NIGHT: I have three gifts...

BETTY: No more.

NIGHT: I have three gifts. The first is Silence, the second is Cold, and the third is a knock on the door.  
[Thunderous knocking]

## **6 THE GEORGE SCENE**

GEORGE: Where exactly is Roscommon?

OLIVER: You know perfectly well, George.

GEORGE: Are there pretty shepherds in smocks?

OLIVER: Probably.

GEORGE: There is no such place as the past.

OLIVER: Only a fourteenth baronet could say that.

GEORGE: The future offers you its palm.

OLIVER: I have no future till I have found the past.

GEORGE: You don't know what she looks like.

OLIVER: I remember her smell.

GEORGE: I am sure one Irish peasant smells very much the same as another. She's probably dead.

OLIVER: The priest will show me my mother's grave.

GEORGE: The priest. How picturesque. Will you become a papist and enlist with the Rebels.

OLIVER: You are tedious, George.

GEORGE: I? It is you who are tedious, Oliver. These romantic speculations about the peasantry are no longer the fashion.

OLIVER: You know I have never cared for fashion.

GEORGE: Come to Italy with me. Come to Paris. The dawn starts in Europe. You could be a great artist. Come to Rome, come to Venice.

OLIVER: Kiss me, George. I must go.

GEORGE: Will you throw everything away? Everything my family ever gave you?

OLIVER: Do not sneer at me.

GEORGE: It is you who are the snob, Oliver. Most eager young men of questionable ancestry are content to paint themselves with an imaginary coat of arms. But Oliver's origins are too handsome to be etched on his footman's buttons, for Oliver was born to a broken-hearted shepherdess on a remote Irish bog. Now this broken-hearted shepherdess, let us call her Phyllis.

OLIVER: Betty.

GEORGE: Phyllis....was unable to raise her tiny swain in the bucolic simplicity which was his birthright, for cruel destiny snatched him from her cradle and Phyllis's babe was imprisoned in one of the largest country mansions in Europe, where an evil Baronet and his Lady inflicted upon the child every indignity invented by the modern British aristocracy. He was bathed and primped and waited upon. He was taken to the orchestra and the play, he was presented at court. In fact he was tormented with every

rack and screw that vile civilisation could invent, till near every spark of his rustic splendour was dulled. But brave Oliver still carried within him the immense remoteness of that Irish bog, and whenever in later life he was importuned to be the intimate of a lonely English nobleman, he would parade his separateness, his oneness. Oliver stooped to many inconveniences to accommodate his English captors, but he never stopped to love them.

OLIVER: You upbraid me, George, with things that are untrue. I can never return your love until I discover who I am.

GEORGE: Ridiculous!

OLIVER: Goodbye. If we cannot part as friends then let us not part in anger.

GEORGE: The past will destroy you. And that, I suppose, is precisely what you must want; for the supreme act of selfishness is self-destruction.

### **7a THE DOUBTS SCENE**

[Oliver in front of Betty's door][Violin]

OLIVER: Who are you who follow me like gulls?

CHORUS: We are the doubts you had.  
Or should have had.  
We are the questions you asked.  
Or should have asked.  
What do you see?

OLIVER: I see the sea. The sea sees me. It waves its snow white hand at me.

CHORUS SINGS: *The Irish sea's a bitter sea.  
It stings the wound and blurs the eye  
It churns the meat within the gut  
And chucks the spew to stain the sky*

CHORUS SINGS: *But most of all it loves to brag  
That if it spies a star too smart  
It grabs him with a snot-green fist  
And drags him down through fog and mist  
And holds him flickering to it's heart*

OLIVER: Who was that face upon the road? [Drums]  
It turned upon us as we rode  
He was my age I think  
He had skin as white as paper  
And hair as black as ink  
He ended laughing at his friend

CHORUS: We do not know

OLIVER: I'm sure it was not me.  
For his feet were bare and his coat was torn.

CHORUS: What do you search for?

OLIVER: I do not know.

CHORUS: The bog is full of holes  
Like the brain  
And if you trip upon the rush  
You will not find yourself again.

OLIVER: Be quiet.

CHORUS: We'll be gone.

OLIVER: No. Do not go  
All this I know.  
That I am bound  
To scrape and dig  
Till I have found  
The water shining  
Underground

CHORUS: Then beware  
You'll find your face  
Reflected there.

[Drums }  
Now we are at the brink. What have you found?

OLIVER: Poverty is disgusting, I think. Is this a door?

CHORUS: Did you want more?

OLIVER: Shall I knock?

CHORUS: Shall you?

## 7b OLIVER

[Drums and then knocking]

BETTY: What's that. Is it Paudeen Gar? For rent?  
NIGHT: Silence will shift him.

[Silence moves]

OLIVER: Is there anybody there?

BETTY: Musha, I'll speak to him.

COLD: You'll feel my fingers on your neck.

BETTY: I will speak

OLIVER: Is anyone in there?

BETTY: It's a Frenchie!

NIGHT: From London?

COLD: An Englishman is bad luck.

BETTY: Whoever it is will be perished entirely.

OLIVER: Do not be afraid.

NIGHT: There's nobody here but Night.

OLIVER: I'm cut with the wind.

COLD: There's nobody here but Cold.

OLIVER: Is there anybody there?

SILENCE: .....

BETTY: There's nobody here.

OLIVER: Yes there is. For pity's sake let me in!

BETTY: The Whiteboys said "no rent or they'll know the reason why."

OLIVER: I want no rent. My horse stumbled in the bog. It's a bitter night.

BETTY: Roscommon's only two miles.

OLIVER: I'm lost.

BETTY: Are you a Frenchie, or what?

OLIVER: I am not. Madam, please let me in out of the night and the cold.

BETTY: Do you have an egg? It's twenty years since I had an egg.

OLIVER: No. No. I have no egg.

BETTY: Then what use are you.

OLIVER: I have gingerbread

BETTY: What kind of thing is that? Is it food or what?

OLIVER: It is food. It is. I bought it in Liverpool.

BETTY: Will you give it to me if I let you in?

OLIVER: Yes. Yes. Yes.

BETTY: Wait now till I open up.

NIGHT: Don't let him in. He might have a lantern.



BETTY: What harm?  
NIGHT: You foolish thing. Do you want him to see your oul' face?  
[Betty lights a candle]  
COLD: But what will he think of your oul' rags, Betty? Your broken teeth will frighten him away. Only I can see the crystal in the rock.  
BETTY: Arrah, whisht now! Do you think I'm a fool? Isn't it yourself that's after him? Another second in the bog and he'll be still as glass and your boy-bride, till Morning cracks him with her feet.  
NIGHT: Do not gaze into the stranger's face.  
BETTY: You were always the jealous oul' yoke, Night. Do you think to keep me from the eyes of men with your sooty veil? Off to Arabia with you. We're Christian here.  
OLIVER: Open up, in the name of all that's holy.  
BETTY: Arrah come in now, ou' that. Sure you must be petrified entirely from hair to toe. Come in now till I see you.  
[Violin] [Oliver enters]

### **8a HOMECOMING**

OLIVER: My God.  
BETTY: What kind of a thing is this at all?  
OLIVER: My God.  
BETTY: What have you blotted from me this long while  
You bad two?  
Is it hands and feet like this?  
COLD: Skin is just a bubble, Betty.  
NIGHT: Prick it see.  
OLIVER: Madam, I.....  
SILENCE: - [moves quickly]  
BETTY: [To Silence] And what secrets have you shut up this age? You stitched thing. Limpet! I'll rip you from the rock!  
[She chases Silence]  
OLIVER: Good God Almighty!

BETTY: Now Sir. You promise.

OLIVER: What?

BETTY: You gave your word. Your ginger thing.

OLIVER: Here, I have it in my bag.  
[She devours the gingerbread]

OLIVER: Careful. It's in muslin.

BETTY: Jesus. Oh. Jesus.

OLIVER: I have some brandy too. If you'd like. And some chocolate.

BETTY: Oh Jesus. Jesus. Give me. Fill me with it.  
[She devours all]

OLIVER: My God!

CHORUS: What do you see?

OLIVER: I see a pig  
Is this what snorts beneath my wig?  
Was it this I came to dig?  
Is this the pool beneath the bog?  
Is this the mirror in the fog?

OLIVER: Madam. I must go.

BETTY: Again?

OLIVER: The storm is almost past.

BETTY: He is not. The storm's just lurking for a fine young lad the like of yourself. He'll set fire to your face and chase you with thunder 'till the bog sucks you own into a ditch. Stay. Talk at me. Fill me with words. Don't mind Silence. Stay. You're a quiet one yourself.

OLIVER: Am I?

BETTY: And who is it you might be? I'm wondering.

OLIVER: Who am I?

BETTY: And maybe what it is you'd want

OLIVER: What do I want?

BETTY: But I'm sure as death I know the place you're from.

OLIVER: Where am I from?

BETTY: You're from Hell.

OLIVER: No. No. I'm from London.

[He laughs]

BETTY: Is it London is it? With its fine women like loaves of bread? You'll stay. There is not much turf in it but it's a warm bed I'll make you with my biteens of cloth. [Cold reacts]

OLIVER: If I stay just for this night, may I use the last of this candle to write a letter?

BETTY: You may of course  
 And its many a fine poem you'll be writing  
 And many a fine picture you'll be drawing  
 And we'll banish the Night, Cold and Silence with your  
 White skin and red gold.

COLD: You are my sweetheart, Betty!

NIGHT: Don't vex me, Betty. Night's revenge is as deep as nothing itself.

BETTY: Silence will look after you!

COLD: Do not laugh at us. We are your only friends.

OLIVER: I must be gone in the morning.

BETTY: Is it Morning is it? Jesus that one's a bitch. Her cheeks are just paint. Mary, mother of us all, but I'll choke that strumpet. Many a time she's played her jokes on me. Many a time she's knocked, smiling, at my door and handed me a baby day. But no soon as Morning turns her naked feet the baby shrivels in my arms. I've seen the day starve at my tits. And how I've howled and keened for morning to bring me another day that I can kiss, another baby day to throw its arms about me. Another child with sunlight between its fingers. But always and ever the baby pukes and coughs and shuts its two blue lids and all I can hear is morning laughing with her lads. She'll do the same for you, so do not go. The secrets that I know, we'll share And I'll show you all the things I have seen.

[Violin]

NIGHT: Do not tell!

BETTY: I'll show you the black hole in the sun.

COLD: Do not tell the secrets of our passion.

BETTY: And I'll take you to the fire in the coffin.

NIGHT & COLD: Beware our revenge.

BETTY: And I'll tell you the secret of Silence

When I cut it out of his heart.

OLIVER: Thank you, but I think it would be better if you let me write my letter.  
BETTY: [Sings] Come to me. Night. Wise Night.  
NIGHT: You can get round me and Silence but Cold is cut to the quick.  
BETTY: Cold. Handsome Cold. Help me. If you ever desired me. Tell me.  
How can I keep him? It is his gold I want. Not his thin thighs.

[Violin]

NIGHT: You've made Cold jealous.  
BETTY: Help me Night! You were always a sister to me.  
COLD: There is only way to keep him, and his gold.  
BETTY: How? Tell me! Any oul' way. Tell me  
COLD: You know.  
BETTY: Do I?  
COLD: You do.  
BETTY: Night. Help me. Do I know?  
NIGHT: I'm sure you do.  
BETTY: Silence. How can I keep him and his gold?  
SILENCE: .....  
NIGHT: Silence knows too.  
BETTY: What shall I use?  
COLD: [The drums] The knife. The big oul' knife.  
BETTY: Where is it?  
NIGHT: Here. This I'll show.  
BETTY: Where can I bury him?  
COLD: Beneath the hawthorn. I'll keep the wolves away.  
NIGHT: I'll hide you from the eyes of Roscommon.  
BETTY: Shall I kill him, Silence? [Music stops]  
OLIVER: Forgive me, I am tired.  
COLD: Do it when he sleeps.  
BETTY: Sleep then. You two help me make the bed here where the floor is dry.  
NIGHT: No-one can sleep by the  
piercing flame of a lantern.  
BETTY: I shall quench the lantern for you.

OLIVER: No, leave me the light. Please.

BETTY: Yes, sir.

COLD: Maybe he is too hot. Suffocated beneath his coat and your old blankets.

BETTY: Are you too cold, sir? Shall I warm you?

OLIVER: Thank you, no. I will return for London at first light.

NIGHT: Your last light was your last light.

BETTY: Silence. How shall I send him to sleep, Silence?

SILENCE: ...

BETTY: Is silence best?

SILENCE: ...

COLD: Silence is useless. Freeze him to sleep.

NIGHT: Silence breeds thoughts in his brain, like maggots under the belly of a cheese

BETTY: You are no help at all, Silence.

SILENCE: ...

BETTY: I am sick to the death with you.

SILENCE: ...

COLD: Sing to him, Betty. Sing the gossoon a song. That'll send him off to sleep. That'll teach Silence.

NIGHT: [Violin] Sing to him, Betty. Sing him a lullaby. You are my nightingale.

## **8b MURDER**

BETTY: Shall I sing to you, sir?

OLIVER: Madam?

BETTY: Shall I sing you into a sleep as deep as peace itself?

MAN: Shut out her song

WOMAN: It will send you on a journey whose destination is further than Roscommon,

MAN: Or London

WOMAN: Or Peace itself.

BETTY: I'll sing you a song you'll never forget to make you forget.  
 [Betty sings him a lullaby in Gaelic]

NIGHT: Well?

COLD: Well?

BETTY: It's the song. It's made my eyes sore.

NIGHT: This is no time for sentiment.

COLD: You're the soft one, Betty.

BETTY: My mother sang it to me when I was sick.

COLD: No! It is his beauty that has set your liver on fire.

BETTY: I do not cry for him! It is for meself I weep. That so many years should have withered before such a fine, pink little pig should stray into my kitchen. That my beauty should be broken before I hear him squeal.

COLD: Paint your cheeks with his blood, Betty.

BETTY: Where's the oul' knife?

NIGHT: Here.

BETTY: It's not sharp enough.

COLD: Quiet, I'll ice its edge into a razor.

NIGHT: And I'll hide the flash from his eyes.

BETTY: And your eyes out there, don't ye fix me like that. Which of ye would ever pity me? Starvation is a terrible, stretched out kind of a door to nothing. Who is this young gossoon to ye anyway? Is his life worth more than mine? And would ye spare his little life? Do ye think that if Hunger started his jig in your bellies, you'd give so much as a sob before ye'd stick in the knife? The second jab and ye'd be frying his bollocks in a pan.

CHORUS: Do not listen to her. She is the mother of lies.

BETTY: Will you be quiet now, or I'll miss my mark.

COLD: Here, on the throat, where the pulse is swelling.

BETTY: Will ya be quiet, or I'll hurt him when the knife goes in and he'll squeal like a piggeen.

NIGHT: Here, stab here, where the shadow falls beneath the chin.

CHORUS : She warned the dagger in her breast  
 And placed it on his pumping skin  
 And waited till the breath went out,  
 So no cry could escape when the knife went in  
 And in and in. And in.

COLD: And in to his hottest heart.

NIGHT: And in to his brightest blood.

CHORUS: And in.

BETTY: And in. And in.

CHORUS: And in.

WOMAN: Now.

MAN: This now.

WOMAN: Was a now of emptiness.

[Violin]

MAN: Not full like a vein but tired as the skin that the snake has thrown, limp as the cock that's shot.

WOMAN: Betty now, with her Night and the Cold.

MAN: Waited for something, they knew not what.

WOMAN: And Silence held the room. Silence had a walk now, around his place.

[Violin stops] [Silence dances]

BETTY: What is the wait for? Do you know, Silence? Does anyone know what the wait is for?

COLD: It is for the Dawn. [Violin]

BETTY: I'd forgotten that whore. Haven't I the surprise for Miss Daybreak?

NIGHT: Is it morning on the tear so soon? That one will rip me if I don't shift.

COLD: [Drums] I'll see you home, or dirty Dawn will pull me down between her legs and splatter me in dew across the bog.

BETTY: Are you frightened of her too, Silence?

[Night and Cold Leave. Enter Dawn]

Stay with me. Don't be frightened of her clatter.

**9a DAWN**

MORNING SINGS: *I am sore as hope  
I blister and I rot like truth.  
I am sore as hope  
I blister and I rot like truth.*

[Music stops]

BETTY: Good morning, Dawnbreak. What bastard have you to stiffen in my arms.

MORNING: There is no day for you to murder. There's no more sun for you to slay.

BETTY: Then why have you come?

MORNING: The wait was not for me. But for my three gifts. The first of these is Gold.

BETTY: Then it is true. Gold is as red as the moon.

MORNING: The second of these is Blood.

BETTY: Money and blood I smell and see, but what is the third?

MORNING: The third is the biggest surprise. It is a letter.

BETTY: Is it a letter to me? Then read it, Dawn. My eyes have seen so much tonight that they are as tired as Spring itself.

OLIVER: [He begins the letter]

Dear George, all my impressions are so confused, my senses in such a turmoil, that I know not where to begin. In the first place, an entreaty: take me back! In the second, an apology: you were right, and I was wrong. There's no escape from love. Ireland is a chimera, Roscommon the fantasy of a spoilt child. Betty is no shepherdess. She sleeps like a sow in her own dirt and eats like a sow in her own farrow. Her manner is ingratiating, her heart cold. She is a voluptuary. Her eyes flash indecency – it was much for me to protect my own honour in the night. And to think this ogress could be my own mother.

BETTY: Stop! Stop! Listen!

MORNING: It is only the cock.  
I have made him crow.

BETTY: No! Listen!



MORNING: It is only the lark.  
I have made her sing.

BETTY: There is something laughing!

MORNING: It is only Betty.  
I have made her laugh.

BETTY: Why is she laughing?

MORNING: I do not know.

BETTY: Do you not feel sorry for her?

MORNING: There is no time for that kind of thing.

BETTY: Then give me her bonnet. Give me her shawl. I will go out now, and tell Roscommon what she has done. I tell you Daybreak, I'm sick as a dog of her. With her belly always screeching for food. I'm ashamed at what she'd tempt me with. Her head was full of bits of men. Her memory teemed with things she'd sucked. Show me the lad with those big stains on him. Jesus. Doesn't it make you almost pity her?

MORNING: Pity, what kind of a thing is that?

BETTY: Sure, you're right, Dawnlight. It's a mercy to Betty that they'll hang her, with a picture like that in her head. But Roscommon must see. Will you help me, Dawn?

MORNING: I will indeed. Off you go into Roscommon, and I'll draw every angle of her dirt floor. I'll paint the skin more white and the blood more red. I'll sharpen his body into a sculpture. I'll show.

BETTY: Aren't you the fine young thing, Morning, with flame in your hair and the lead in your eyes and I'll love you like a daughter from this out. I shall call at the Hanrahans' first. Mrs Hanrahan has two woollen shawls and one son left. I'll borrow MacGuire's ass and ride into Roscommon. They'll know what to do.

**9b HANRAHANS**

[Knocks]

MRS HANRAHAN: Jesus, Liamog, will you answer the door and if it's Mrs O'Bryne tell her I am at my toilet and there's no work for Bridie till Sunday.

[Door opens]

MRS HANRAHAN: Jesus is it oul' Betty, is it? Well be off with you. Don't be coming to me for the stumpeens of bread. Haven't I trouble enough to feed my own Liamog.

BETTY: I regret, Mrs Hanrahan, I never take tea in the forenoon, but thank you all the same. I regret I come on a most serious matter.

MRS HANRAHAN: Have you gone mad, Betty? Jesus, if my husband catches you, he'll string you up for killing the cock. Don't we know well it wasn't the fox.

BETTY: Nor cake, I fear I have given it up for lent.

MRS HANRAHAN: Will you be gone ou' that. He'll go light if he sees you.

BETTY: Such a pillar, Mrs Hanrahan. Never one to throw the first stone.

MR HANRAHAN: Who is it Peggy? Will you let the divel in, whoever it is. There's a draft from Siberia splintering the turf.

[Sees Betty]

Jesus, you ou' witch. Will you be gone? If anyone from Roscommon sees you here, I'll break every bone in your body.

BETTY: Thank you. I will rest here till my carriage returns.

MR HANRAHAN: Is she conscious?

MRS HANRAHAN: She's mad now, entirely.

MR HANRAHAN: Be gone now, or I'll flatten you, you bad ou' yoke, you.

BETTY: So very kind.

[Enter Seamus, Christy, Bridie, Paddy and Bridget]

SEAMUS: Be Jesus, your right, she's here.

HANRAHAN: Arrah, will ye get out.

CHRISTY: God almighty, she's sat on the floor like a queen.

HANRAHAN: Liamog, will ye clear them?

BRIDIE: Is it clear us?

BRIDGET: Clear us? Is it?

BRIDIE: And us without shame or stain.

MRS HANRAHAN: Now ladies, he meant no harm.

BRIDIE: Some folks would rather starve than let a one like that in.

BETTY: It is so very, very kind of you all, but I have no time to socialise.

BRIDGET: Will you listen to her ladyship?

BETTY: I must report a terrible tragedy.

CHRISTY: What's she blathering about?

MR HANRAHAN: She's gone mental.

BETTY: But a murder has been committed.

LIAMOG: A murder will be committed if you don't get out.

BETTY: In her little hovel, on the dirt floor lies a poor lad in a pool of blood. Betty is the murderer. The victim is her son.

CHRISTY: Sure you have no son, you daft thing.

PADDY: She's gone now for good.

BRIDGET: Look at her. Isn't she a picture?

MRS HANRAHAN: Come on now Betty.

SEAMUS: Get along with you.

BETTY: Go back to Betty's place and see.

PADDY: Sure Jesus, who could get into that place with that smell on it?

BETTY: Go and see.

MRS HANRAHAN: Come on now old girl.

BETTY: I will go nowhere, till you see what you have done.

MR HANRAHAN: Arrah, Liamog. Will you run off up to her house or she'll be here all day.

LIAMOG: Yes, Da.  
[EXIT Liamog]

BETTY: I knew I could rely on you, Mr Hanarahan.

CHORUS: (laughter)

BETTY: I'm sure you will know what to do. That women. There was never any luck on her.

BRIDGET: You're right there, your ladyship.  
  
(laughter)

CHRISTIE: You could never trust a woman like that.

(laughter)

BETTY: Quite right. Her morals were so loose.

CHORUS: (laughter)

MRS HANRAHAN: It'll bring you no luck to ye, laughing at her.

(laughter)

BETTY: I disagree, Mrs Hanrahan. Laughter is the weapon of Christ. Laughter kills the Night, Cold and Silence. Laugh at Betty, that's right.

(much laughter)

[Enter Liamog]

LIAMOG: Jesus. Jesus Christ. Mary Mother of God. Help us all. There's a man dead in Betty's. He's soaked in blood. He has two big eyes on him.

MRS HANRAHAN: Who is he?

LIAMOG: Arrah Jesus, I didn't look.

BETTY: I've told you. It's her son.

LIAMOG: Be quiet you bitch! Don't let her near me! She's satan!

[Violins and drums]

CHORUS SINGS: *Lynch her.  
Stone her.  
She has shamed Roscommon.  
Lynch her.  
Stone her.  
She has shamed us all.*

BETTY SINGS: *Yes. Yes. Find her. Find her.*

CHORUS SINGS: *You stupid woman. You are Betty.*

BETTY SINGS: *Yes, yes. Find her, find her.*

CHORUS SINGS: *You are Betty, don't pretend to be mad.*

BETTY SINGS: *Who am I?*

CHORUS SINGS: *You are Betty! Tie her down. Bring her to the militia. You'll not slip away. We have you.*

BETTY SINGS: *Tell me who I am.*

CHORUS SINGS: *You are Betty. Don't let on you're mad. You have killed a man. We have you.*

BETTY: I am not mad. You're hurting me.  
Tear me apart. But I tell you I am not mad.

CHORUS: She is mad.

BETTY: I have the eyes of a hawk.  
I have the smell of a hound.  
I wish I had no head.  
I wish I had no brain.  
But I have.  
I am not mad. I see everything with the hard clear light.  
I am Betty.

BRIDIE: Jesus protect us! She's possessed.

BETTY: I will come for you all like a thief in the night.

MAN: Hold her down.

LIAMOG: Send for the militia.

BETTY: It is you who are mad.

## **10 O'LEARY'S SONG**

[Enter O'Leary]

O'LEARY: Arrah! Jesus, Mary and Joseph, clear the stage. Ladies and gentlemen, let's have a look at yez. Isn't it a terrible thing to fight your way to the theatre of a night and have to put up with the likes of this. All this suffering and screaming. And sure you all trying to hold down your wretched little jobs, and hoping you catch the last bus home, and coming to the theatre in the hope of a little cheer to get yez through the rest of your miserable week and what do you get but grunting and groaning. I can hear yez all saying "O'Leary" will you entertain us in the name of all that's holy and give us a little ember to light us through the dark of our working lives. And O'Leary will oblige. O'Leary always obliges. Here now is a jolly little song from the Emerald Isle to give yez a secret little smile as yez lean over your computer keyboards tomorrow.

[Music, whistles, drums, violin]

SINGS: "Did you ever see an Irishman wear a funny hat?"

Did you ever see an Irish man go rat-tat-tat?  
Did you ever see an Irishman fall down flat?  
No! You've never seen an Irishman do anything like that.  
De deedle de deedle de deedle dee dee."

CHORUS: [Repeat]

O'L How's that for the crack? And nothing political in it, as God is my witness.

PRISONER: O'Leary?

O'L: Now what?

PRISONER: Will you get us some opium for Tuesday?

O'L: Is it opium, is it? Don't you know well, there are no drugs in Ireland. Do ye want me to hang as well as yourself?

PRISONER: Please, O'Leary. It's the only thing that'll put me out at dawn. I'm frightened I'll cry when I hear the crowd. I asked the English chaplain for some but he was charging two guineas.

O'L: Mother Mary help me, don't you know you must never buy your narcotics from a protestant. He'll flog you a spoonful of Epsom salts and you'll swing as sane as a mathematician from Trinity.

PRISONER: Help me, O'Leary.

O'L: How much have you got?

PRISONER: I have three shillings and fivepence. And my buttons. And my coat.

O'L: Dunne gets that.

PRISONER: And I must leave something for my mother. And the priest to say a mass. And to be buried.

O'L: It's a fierce expensive business altogether, being hanged.

PRISONER: What'll I do?

O'L: I'll tell you what. Let me look after your financial resources. And I'll take care the priest, your mother and undertaker. I'll even say a prayer for you myself.

PRISONER: Oh here, O'Leary, take it.

O'L: And the buttons.

PRISONER: Here.

O'L: I'll bring you over the opium later.

PRISONER: I'll pray for you in heaven.

O'L: I don't mind if you pray for me in hell. Himself has big ears. And now ladies and gentlemen a word or two about Roscommon jail. This fine lump of a building with its draw bridges and battlements is nearly as big as the tiny town it feeds on. The astute observer will notice that one of its little windys, on the third floor, is slightly taller than the rest. But gaols are not about bricks and mortar, ladies and gents, gaols are about people, and so let us proceed without further ado to the personnel. Myself is O'Leary. I fix. And I oblige. And I give satisfaction, which is not to be sneered at in this vale of tears. Above them all comes the Governor, Captain Mills. He's the boss. He hires and he fires. But if a big-wig is captured, now, the likes of the notorious and flamboyant whiteboy, Michael Flynn, Mills has to answer to the Sheriff. And the Sheriff lives in Athlone Castle and the Sheriff answers to the Lord Lieutenant of the province of Connaught, who rules from Galway. And Galway is on all matters, political, executive and social answerable to Dublin Castle, and Dublin Castle is answerable to Whitehall, and Whitehall is answerable to God and the British taxpayer.

O'L SINGS: "Did you ever see an Irishman wear a funny hat?  
Did you ever see an Irish man go rat-tat-tat?  
Did you ever see an Irishman fall down flat?  
No! You've never seen an Irishman do anything like that.  
De deedle de deedle de deedle dee dee."

CHORUS: "Did you ever see an Irishman wear a funny hat?  
Did you ever see an Irishman go rat-tat-tat?  
Did you ever see an Irishman fall down flat?  
No! You've never seen an Irishman do anything like that.  
De deedle de deedle de deedle dee dee."

CURTAIN

ACT 2

**11 CAPTAIN MILLS AND THE BURNING**

O’L: Now, another little Irish ditty, ladies and gentlemen, about Captain Mills and the torching of his house at Fairymount, by Michael Flynn and the Whiteboys.

[Music, whistles and drums]

O’L SINGS: *There was a Captain Hector Mills who lived beyond the pale  
The hapless man was governor of the great Roscommon jail  
His missus and her mother had apartments at the top  
But he made them close the curtains when a neighbour took the chop*

CHORUS: *His missus and her mother had apartments at the top  
But he made them close the curtains when a neighbour took the chop*

O’L: *Although the Captain’s lovely wife had elegance and taste  
This english rose was wilting and her cheeks had turned to paste*

MRS MILLS: She cried: Pardonnez-moi dear, I find it hard to cope  
When they splutter and the shiver at the finish of the rope”.

CHORUS: *She cried “Pardonnez-moi dear, but I find it hard to cope  
When they splutter and they shiver at the finish of the rope”.*

MRS MILLS: (spoken) Creak Creak Creak. C’est affreux!

O’L: *Now Captain Mills the governor lived in terror of his wife.*

MILLS: *He said: “To make you happy is the object of my life  
So please don’t be so angry with your great big husky bear  
And I’ll build my little fox-cub a little fox-cub lair”.*

CHORUS: *So please don’t be so angry with your great big husky bear  
And I’ll build my little fox-club a little fox-cub lair*

MRS MILLS: On Fairymount, with three storeys. Thatched.

CHORUS: *Now, all the thatchers thatched, and all the builders built  
And Captain Mills had killed his silly matrimonial guilt.  
But the afternoon that Mrs Mills had made her chintzs match  
She, smelt a smell. It was burning thatch.*

O’L: *But the afternoon that Mrs Mills had made her chintzs match  
She smelt a smell. It was burning thatch.*



MRS MILLS: (spoken) Ahh! There's a mob, burning down my brand new thatched house. Mills, do something. Mama always said you'd come to nothing.

MILLS: Yes my little fox-club. Anything you say.  
Sergeant, quickly. There's a mob torching our new house.  
You're a fighting man, what's your advice?

SERGEANT: *"The poor old poor are starving and the'll die for want of bread  
If they can't get grain or eggs or milk, they'll eat your head instead.  
If they stand and fight and challenge us we must leave them alone.  
If they scatter we can flatten them and batter them to bone.*

CHORUS: *If they stand and fight and challenge us we must leave them alone.  
But if they scatter we can flatten them and batter them to bone*

O'L: But unfortunately for the mob. Their leader, the notorious and dangerous Whiteboy Michael Flynn.....

CHORUS: Michael Flynn!

O'L: ...took fright, and shouted 'To the bog, boys!'

FLYNN: To the bog, boys!

O'L: And the mob scattered in the direction of the Clooncagh river.  
  
*The Clooncagh river had one bridge and it was made of wood  
It never could support a mob as every good bridge should.  
With a splutter and a shudder and a gasp that froze their blood  
The bridges neck was broken and the mob rolled in the mud*

CHORUS: *With a splutter and a shudder and a gasp that froze their blood  
The bridge's neck was broken and the mob rolled in the mud.....*

CHORUS: Stuck deep in. Silent save for the rushing icy water. As still as death.

MAN: *Suddenly a shadow swung across the burning sun  
A soldier shouted to his friends and pointed with his gun  
But the wind and the river softly bore the screams away  
And the soldiers could be heroes on another sunny day.*

CHORUS: *But the wind and the river softly bore the screams away  
And the soldiers could be the heroes on another sunny day.*

O'LEARY: Don't be so sad, ladies and gentlemen. This is the funny bit.

WOMAN: *Now Widow Reilly's empty belly plays her cruel games.  
It bullies her to brave the thatch and dash into the flames.*

O'L: *She finds a filch of bacon, all a-sweat with blood and grease*

WOMAN: *And through the door she lets a roar  
'If this be war, there never should be peace!'*

CHORUS: *She finds a filch of bacon, all a 'sweat with blood and grease  
And through the door she lets a roar  
'If this be war, there never should be peace!'*

O'LEARY: Wasn't that grand, now? How's that for the crack? And there was nothing political in it as God is my judge.  
And now we come to the prisoners. Near a hundred and twenty souls.

PRISONERS: O'Leary. Get me some turf.....  
Give me a light.....  
Light me a fire!

O'LEARY: Sure the rigours of Roscommon gaol will seem like luxury itself when they're hollerin' below. It won't be a fire you're wanting then.

PRISONERS We're entitled to three sods of turf a day each.  
That's our rights.  
And you sell it.

O'LEARY: That's a calumny, so it is. Haven't I me fingers worn to the bone fetching and carrying for yez. If I sold the turf, wasn't it to mend the roof? You'll miss your oul' O'Leary when you're baking shit in the downstairs ovens. One of the little diveleens will be taking a break from sawing off your left leg. And he'll say 'Well, Malachi, tell us what it was like in the blue above. Was it really all green and wet? And did you have such a thing as a friend?' And ye'll say 'I did. And his name was O'Leary. And a finer lad there never was in the province of Connaught. He was my mother when I was in gaol. He near killed himself runnin' about for us.'

And the little diveleen will scratch one of his horns, and a green tear will drop out of his one red eye. 'Arrah, Jaysus, Malachi!' he'll say. 'Don't ye be makin' me cry. Your legs only half off, and haven't I to peel your head before tea time?'

[Enter Mills]

## 12 THE WAKE SCENE

MILLS: O'Leary, is all this absolutely necessary?

O'L: It is, Captain Mills sir, and if you take my advice sir, with the deepest respect, Sir you'll chip in yourself for a few bottles of the creature to see Flynn out the window.

MILLS: But surely a wake is for the bereaved family after death.

O'L: Normally sir, yes sir, you've hit the nail on the button sir. It is a colourful Irish tradition to send a peasant to his creator while being Toasted by his kith and kin, but in this case, Sir, in the case of a man about to be hanged, particularly in the case of a Whiteboy as notorious as Michael Flynn, himself, sir it is customary to throw the wake the night before sir, so himself can get the full benefit of the soirée thrown in his honour while he is still sensible enough to appreciate it, so to speak, your Honour.

MILLS: But all these frightful keening women, O'Leary.

O'L: Flynn's mother, sir, and assorted female relations. You'd be as well to humour them sir, if you want to avoid the trouble of Athlone and Ballybaunis.

MILLS: There is absolutely no question, Mr O'Leary, that there should be a repetition of the ridiculous incidents an Athlone and Ballyhaunis. Dunne is a professional executioner. He lives within the prison. He is protected by a battery of horse. I tell you candidly, O'Leary, Dublin will be scandilised when they learn that Trenchard and Pollock made a mess of hanging Michael Flynn, because their hangmen were intimidated. The Castle will learn that it can count on Mills to preserve law in his county. There will be justice. There will be reason. There will be order. Frightened of Flynn? Ridiculous. Let that young peasant inflame the mob with his waistcoats and his bragadoccio. Tell him now who he will swing with in the morning. Catch him now in his cups. Lay it on thick, O'Leary, you'll hear him change his tune. Put two bottles of whiskey to my account at Dwyer's, O'Leary.

[Exit Mills]

[Enter Flynn and Chorus of Mouners]

FLYNN: Arrah, Jesus, will you quit your keening and give me a tune. Play up lads.

[Music]

Play up and wake the dead. Put light in the windows. Let Roscommon see Flynn can keep court, higher than the Connors or the de Frayns. We'll scare the shit out of Paudeen Gar with his Catholic shops and Catholic farms. Good Jesus what kind of way to live is that? Play up! Play up! They'll get no sleep tonight in their prosperous little beds. Wake the opportunist little buggers!

[The Wake dance]

MOURNERS SING: *Dance to the wind  
And dance to the rain  
But dance in my heart  
And you'll burst into flame*

FLYNN: You've grown too fat from the droppings of the gaol, O'Leary

O'L: I can't complain Mr Flynn.

FLYNN: Jesus O'Leary, you'd squeeze milk out of a dead cow. How in hell's name can you make Roscommon pay for a seat at a hanging when the poor out' town is as thin as O'Connor in his tomb.

O'L: Your reputation goes before you Sir, and after Ballyhaunis and Athlone it's a mighty crowd that's been travelling to see you Sir.

FLYNN: You lick my arse as hard as you lick Mill's, but all you'll swallow is shite.

O'L: Thank you, Sir.

MAN: Cheer up Mrs Flynn it may never happen.

MAN: True, Mrs Flynn, after Athlone and Ballyhaunis, I think it's with the whiskey they're trying to kill him.

[laughter]

FLYNN: Who's the hangman here in Roscommon?

O'LEARY: Mr Dunne, sir, his mother's the midwife at Creggs.

MAN: I've a suspicion, Mrs Dunne won't be able to get her son out of bed in the morning.

WOMAN: If Mr Dunne knows what's good for his mother he'll have a sore head.

MAN: Another toast. To Michael Flynn!

MAN: To Michael Flynn, the unstoppable, the unhangable, the immortal.

CHORUS: To Michael Flynn the immortal.

WOMAN: Fill your glass, Mrs Flynn.. Sure it's another wake for your son you'll be at in Dublin, and then in London. Isn't is a fine way to see the Eastern World.

WOMAN: Begod but Frenchies will be here b'then and we can spend our holidays in Paris.

MAN: And maybe have a wake at the Palais Royal. Only then it'll be for King Georgie on the Guillotine. And then they'll crown Michael, President of the Revolution.

FLYNN: Keep your nonsense to yourself. You're drunk.. O'Leary, who's the mysterious gentleman who will share my tumble in the morning?

O'LEARY: Saving your honour sir, there's no tumble in Roscommon, sir, no, nor no gallows since they built this fine place, sir. There's a balcony sir, on the third floor. They drop you off that sir. And it's not a gentleman to hang sir.

FLYNN: Come come, O'Leary, mend your speech. He who dies with me is my brother and all my brothers are gentlemen.

O'L: But it isn't a gentleman, sir. It's a woman.

MAN: Begod but you're all right in there Flynn. She'll keep you warm in the wind.

FLYNN: A lady! And what is this lady's name?

O'L: Betty, sir.

FLYNN: Not Betty, but Lady Betty! And pray, of which particular misdemeanor is Lady Betty guilty?

[laughter]

Was she rude to her lapdog?

[laughter]

O'L: No, Sir. She killed her son. Sir.

[silence]

FLYNN: What?

O'L: Stabbed him, sir, while he was asleep, sir, to steal his money, sir. Tore his throat, near cut off his head, sir. There was even evidence of licentiousness and cannibalism, sir.

FLYNN: Is this some kind of a joke, O'Leary?

O'L: On my honour, sir.

FLYNN: Fetch Mills immediately.

O'L: Yes, sir.

MAN: Flynn, I...

FLYNN: Be quiet! Get my mother and women out of here. Its shamed I am they've heard such filth. Get them out.

[The women go]

O'L: Captain Mills, Sir.

[Enter Mills]

MILLS: You asked to see me, Mr Flynn.

### **13 THE MILLENIUM SCENE**

FLYNN: I am Michael Flynn. I am not ashamed to die. But I will not have that women share my scaffold. I will die in purity. I will be remembered for my high deeds, and I will not have my story polluted by a monster who murdered her son.

MILLS: If it's billing you are worried about Mr Flynn, I can assure you that your name only appears in the advertisements. And my turnkey assures me that Roscommon is already heaving with honest Irishmen who have come to celebrate the triumph of good over evil, when you two hang.

FLYNN: They have come to lend me moral support. They will sing hymns to my glory. Long after you all rotten my name and the names of all Whiteboys will light the path for the young. They will brag that they saw me to my last.

MILLS: Unfortunately, Mr Flynn it appears that the majority of Roscommon is only interested in the end of the women Betty.

FLYNN: Ridiculous.

MILLS: I assure you Mr Flynn, for all your dandy airs, your vulgar waistcoats, your emptiness, that the hoots are no longer for you. The crowd is a harlot Mr Flynn, and now they love the women you are pleased to call

Lady Betty. My turnkey, here Mr O'Leary assures me that the town is doing a roaring trade in effigies of the woman Betty, and broadsheets and ballads of her astonishing crime. Your politics, Mr Flynn, have been eclipsed by sensation.

FLYNN: You underestimate the poor.

MILLS: You are simple Mr Flynn.

FLYNN: She is an abomination before nature.

MILLS: But mother nature gave us this abomination, and nature is the mother of us all.

FLYNN: So why do you hang your brothers and sisters, Captain?

MILLS: Why do you shoot them?

FLYNN: Why do you starve them?

MILLS: Mr Flynn, torching my house will not feed the poor. Nor will hamstringing a few of McGowan's cattle. Commerce will fill stomachs, and some Irishmen are discovering that profit tastes delicious. Ask Mr O'Leary here.

O'L: Arrah sure, Captain Mills, politics is not one of my strong points.

MILLS: Revolution is as cheap a fashion as your cravat, Mr Flynn. Commerce will achieve the millenium without your bloody patriotism.

FLYNN: But I am not a Patriot, Captain.

MILLS: Many a peasant has shed his blood for you, Mr Flynn, in the opposite belief.

FLYNN: We Whiteboys couldn't give a damn in hell where the landlords come from. You English will be chased into the sea soon enough, with French or American bullets in your backs maybe. You don't matter. What does matter is the likes of Paudeen Gar. Small Catholic farmers who want to get bigger by pressing the debt, by turning out the widow, money grabbing little swindlers like your turnkey, O'Leary. They pump blood into your quaint expiring system and they must be destroyed. Come the Millenium Captain Mills, there will be no landlords, no turnkeys.

[Enter Dunne]

MILLS: Mr. Dunne, just in time. I was beginning to tire of my friend's cliches.

DUNNE: If I might take some measurements, sir.

FLYNN: My neck is 16 inches, I weigh eleven stone four pounds, and I am five feet ten inches.

MILLS: More like five feet eight inches, Mr. Dunne.

FLYNN: Ask your colleagues at Athlone and Ballyhaunis, if you can piece them together.

MILLS: You are quite safe, Mr. Dunne. Personally hangings disgust me. I myself have campaigned for their abolition in England. The plummet through the air, the sudden yank. I myself have watched a wretch scream for the better part of an hour and beg his friends to swing on his legs.

FLYNN: Why are you trying to frighten me, Captain?

MILLS: Thank you Mr. Dunne

[Exit Dunne]

MILLS: I have a proposition, Mr Flynn. My turnkey has in his pocket a writ enabling me to commute your death penalty.

FLYNN: What's the catch?

MILLS: Repent and recant tomorrow morning, before the crowd, and I will relieve you.

FLYNN: Death with shame or life with shame? You are dirt, Mills.

MILLS: I will stop at nothing to protect the young from treading in your bloody footsteps.

FLYNN: You might have to pull the bolt yourself.

MILLS: Unfortunately my office forbids me, but then Dunne can no more escape than you can.

FLYNN: Malachi, do not make me hang with that woman.

MILLS: I shall invite you to speak on the balcony, before Mr. Dunne puts the white bag over your head. Think, Mr. Flynn, I offer you life itself.



**14    THE WEIGHING SCENE**

[Enter Lady Betty]

BETTY:                Where am I?

MILLS:                Come in. You are safe from Roscommon within my walls. Here you will not be molested or stoned. Here is my place and you will be treated with justice.

BETTY:                If you bring me some paper, I will make a drawing of you. I can make you as old, or as tall, or as happy as you like. I could give you the boots you could never afford. I could give you the chin your father denied you.

MILLS:                Sit down there on the floor and be quiet.

BETTY:                Who is this man?

MILLS:                He's called Flynn.

BETTY:                He has a queer kind of a head on him. He must have done something terrible.

FLYNN:                You stupid mad owl bitch! Don't you know what you did?  
You've killed your only son!

BETTY:                Betty is a tragic case. I have just taken her features before she dies. I should like to take yours too.

FLYNN:                You made her look at me. You brought her to my cell.

MILLS:                Take him away.

[Flynn is removed]

O'L:                    What's the matter with him, sir?

MILLS:                He has been unhinged by meeting himself.

[Exit Mills]

O'L:                    Drawings is it?

BETTY:                It is one of my accomplishments.

O'L:                    And do you draw people, your ladyship.

BETTY:                If they are, picturesque.

O'L: Lady Betty, yer honour. If I get you the charcoal and the paper could you draw me one of Flynn?

BETTY: Will you give me an egg A praty too maybe?

O'L: I will and if you draw him twice I'll bring you a bottle of porter from Dwyer's. Are we square?

BETTY: We are.

O'L: By the way, there's a priest to see you.

BETTY: What's his name?

O'L: Molloy.

BETTY: What's he want?

O'L: He wants to forgive you your sins.

BETTY: Does he have a gift for me?

O'L: He brings you life everlasting.

BETTY: Does he have any bread?

O'L: Ahh, indeed he does not.

BETTY: Then tell him to fuck off.

O'L: Yes your ladyship.

BETTY: No wait!, wait. Don't forget me egg and praty and porter and bacon. And you'd better show up the priest.

[Enter Mr Dunne to measure Betty]

BETTY: Who's this?

O'L: This is Mr Dunne, saving your highness.

BETTY: Is he to hang?

O'L: In a manner of speaking, yes.

BETTY: What's that in your hand?

DUNNE: It's a measuring ribbon.

BETTY: And what did you want to be measuring me for. Is it a dress maybe?

O'L: It is. A fine big dress. With bits sticking out at the sides. You'll look lovely as the Gunnings.

DUNNE: If I could measure your neck, Madam.

BETTY: Is there a necklace too?

DUNNE: Indeed there is Madam.

BETTY: Make sure its not too tight.

DUNNE: I am expert at my trade.

BETTY: Do what you will. But make me, picturesque.

DUNNE: Madam, I must presume, and pose an indelicacy.

BETTY: Ask away Mr. Dunne. For you're a charming man and I'm sure we will be friends for life.

O'L: You can rely on that.

BETTY: Make free Mr. Dunne.

DUNNE: Madam, do you know how much you weigh?

BETTY: Arrah what kind of question is that? How would I know what kind of weight I am. I'm heavy when I'm tired. That's all.

DUNNE: Madam, I must know the answer. May I lift you?

BETTY: May you what?

DUNNE: May I pick you up

BETTY: You're not such a shy thing at all, are you, Mr. Dunne? Is it put your arms around me and we just introduced and you letting on it was just to find out what weight I am. I'll not let you a near me.

DUNNE: I protest Madam.

BETTY: Stand off. Betrayer.

O'L: He'll give you chocolate.

BETTY: Get out you bastard. Go to Galway for a whore. I am Lady Betty of Roscommon.

DUNNE: Madam you are mistaken.

BETTY: Many a man has lifted me over the years while his friends whistled outside. Many a man has crept through my door in the dark, and he's coax me with a fine song, or an egg maybe, or a pratie. Sometimes he'd hammer me till I burst like a rose in the rain. Sometimes they spat in my eyes and called me names. Sometimes they prayed and wept and asked me to forgive them, but always and ever while his red face banged against my cheeks and his black mouth brayed like an ass at the moon I prayed for age to wither me, to leave me alone in the bog with Night, Silence and the Cold, and no fear of a knock at the door.

DUNNE: Not all men are alike, Madam. I blush at my sex and promise on my honour to revere you as a Lady, till you breathe your last.

BETTY: I will believe you Mr. Dunne, for you have the fine talk on you and I can see you are sore inside. Then hold me Mr. Dunne, and lift me as high as the moon if that will ease your pain for its little beauty I have left to share and little time to share it in.

[Dunne lifts Lady Betty and writes down her weight]

BETTY: You will not betray me Mr. Dunne.

## **15 THE CONFESSION SCENE**

O'L: Father Molloy, Your Ladyship. We will leave you alone.

FR. MOLLOY: Sit with me in the quiet....

BETTY: Indeed Silence was an intimate friend of mine, but I'm sure now I have lost him completely.

FR. MOLLOY: I am glad you asked to see me, Betty. It's a big oul' suffering world isn't it?

BETTY: It is that. It's like you was in nettles.

FR. MOLLOY: Is it life everlasting you want?

BETTY: Oh. It is. It is Father.

FR. MOLLOY: Then you must be forgiven Betty.

BETTY: Who can forgive me?

FR. MOLLOY: Christ, Betty. The living, bleeding, Christ.

BETTY: Then ask him to forgive me, Father.

FR. MOLLOY: Oh, I will Betty. I will indeed.  
But first you must do something.

BETTY: Do what, Father?

FR. MOLLOY: You must forgive.

BETTY: Who?

FR. MOLLOY: Why everyone who was ever wicked to you. Everyone you imagine may have hurt you and everyone who did you harm without you knowing.

BETTY: But can I?

FR. MOLLOY: You can.

BETTY: Christy O'Flaherty, who gave me stones to eat.

FR. MOLLOY: You must forgive.

BETTY: And Johnny Molloy, who threw his business in my face.

FR. MOLLOY: You must forgive everyone who has ever hurt you.  
Even yourself.

BETTY: It's so hard, Father.

FR. MOLLOY: You must. It's the only door to life itself.

BETTY: Then I do, Father.  
I forgive the Hanrahans. Including the mother.  
And the Mullanneys. I even forgive the children.  
I forgive the lads from the militia and Malley's boyos.  
I forgive my mother. And I forgive the wind. And the rain.  
And you, Father.

FR. MOLLOY: You have made Christ laugh with happiness my child.

BETTY: And now, Father. Is it true that I am forgiven?

FR. MOLLOY: Oh my child! It is true!

BETTY: Oh, Father! Father!

FR. MOLLOY: Now pray. Betty.

BETTY: Who to?

FR. MOLLOY: Pray to Mary, Mother of God.

BETTY: Hail Mary, Full of Grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. And now can I go?

FR. MOLLOY: Go where?

BETTY: Why back to my place-eeen in the bog. The dirt floor will be like marble. And the oul' rushes on the roof will be like they was full of angels singin' and laughin' at the wind.

FR. MOLLOY: Betty you must....hang tomorrow.

BETTY: But you said I was forgiven!

FR. MOLLOY: Why so you are my child. By Christ.

BETTY: Then who are you to hang me. If Christ has forgiven me?

FR. MOLLOY: It is the force of law.

BETTY: What law?

FR. MOLLOY: Death doesn't matter, my child. It is simply a door to eternity.

BETTY: You have betrayed me, again!  
If there is a paradise, you are not the way to it. Hell is here.

FR. MOLLOY: Christ died on the cross, so that your sins may be forgiven.

BETTY: Can Christ stop me dying tomorrow? Can he?

FR. MOLLOY: No my child.

BETTY: Then what use is he? What use is his forgiveness?

FR. MOLLOY: You are mad.

BETTY: I am not mad.

FR. MOLLOY: I cannot give you the sacrament.

BETTY: I want no sacrament. Get me bread to eat. I'm starving.

FR. MOLLOY: You frighten me Betty.

BETTY: I tell the truth. Christ was a bastard and Mary should have strangled him in his crib.

FR. MOLLOY: Christ have mercy on us all!

BETTY: Christ! Betrayer! Get out!  
[Exit Father Molloy]

## 16 THE SECOND NIGHT SCENE

BETTY: If they'd left me a pencil, I could have drawn a friend. I'll make a drawing in my brain. I'll picture up my dirt floor, and the wind and the wet well locked out, and a pan of sausages jumping on the fire. And if I push hard at the front of my head. It'll happen.

But there's a strange sweet smell. Is it a lily? Is it candles and waxy stuff? It's as sweet as sickness.  
It's like treacle. What is it?  
Is there only silence?  
Tell me silence.  
Arrah, I cannot hear you yet.  
Night. You tell me.

NIGHT: I will not tell you. Ask the cold.

BETTY: Are you all back with me?

COLD: We are. And we'll never be far from you now, my jewel.

BETTY: What is this smell?

COLD: It is the smell of death.

BETTY: Death! It's got a fine smell. It's like I was asleep in roses.

COLD: It is the only perfume I will let you wear from now my diamond.

BETTY: What is that noise? I can hear singing.

NIGHT: It is a song about you. Listen.

CHORUS SINGS: *Lady Betty loved a lord,  
Had her baby sold abroad,  
Lady Betty loved her porter,  
But made do with bread and water,*

*What has Lady Betty done?  
Why does blood seep from her son?*

BETTY: [Drums] What is that tapping?  
NIGHT: It is feet on the stairs of the jail.  
BETTY: And that clicking, like an owl's clock.  
[Tin whistles]  
NIGHT: It is the key in the lock. It is the window slamming open.  
BETTY: What is that whistling?  
COLD: It is the wind, whispering his song.  
BETTY: Jesus. What is that big pink thing? It is a rose? Or a river?  
NIGHT: It is the face of Roscommon lifted to the dawn.  
BETTY: Dawn is it? Will she scatter ye again? Will you leave me to that bold mouth?  
COLD: Dawn is dead my diamond.  
NIGHT: You'll not suffer that one's clatter again.  
COLD: We'll hide you from her in this little bag.  
BETTY: What bag?  
NIGHT: The white bag the man is putting over Betty's head.  
COLD: It is her bridal veil.  
BETTY: It is no bridal veil.  
COLD: Ssh. Can't you hear the priest saying the prayer. In a moment you will be my wife and you'll buck and moan in ecstasy.  
BETTY: I thought you were my friends.  
NIGHT: We are not. We are your family.  
BETTY: Silence. Help me.  
COLD: Silence has spoken Betty, but you cannot hear him yet.



NIGHT: You will hear what silence has to say in a moment as the balcony crashes beneath your feet, as the sun bleeds into the clouds. While your rope creaks in the wind, silence will whisper his secrets to you.

BETTY: Do you know what he has to say to me?

NIGHT: I do.

BETTY: Tell me Cold, and you can take me. You can run your fingers down my back.

COLD: But Betty. There's many a time I have taken you already. Many a day I have lifted the hair off your neck and bit your nipples. Many a night I have slid my hands between your thighs and shoved my stick of ice into your heart. You were my bride years ago.

BETTY: Then, as my husband, Cold, I command you. Let me tighten my bowels around you. I'll make your ice melt. I'll boil you inside me. Now. Tell me. Now. Or I'll use you. I'll make you spurt till you're a puddle.

COLD: All right. Jesus. Betty.

BETTY: Tell me Silence's secret.

COLD: I'll tell you. He said one word. But it's a big one.

BETTY: But what is it? My lover? Tell me quick.

COLD: He says 'Wait!'

[Enter O'Leary]

## **17 THE HANGING SCENE**

[Enter Dunne]

DUNNE: Mr. O'Leary.

O'L: Yes, Mr. Dunne.

DUNNE: Is it time for me to instruct the audience?

O'L: It is Mr. Dunne. But mind now, you only have five minutes, and it'd be a sin to keep your customers waiting.

DUNNE: On the day of a hanging, such as today, at the appointed hour, in fact in exactly five minutes, Captain Mills, the Reverend Blakeney, myself, Mr

O'Leary and the condemned prisoners climb out onto the narrow balcony, outside the left hand window, on the third floor of the building which is Roscommon Jail. Captain Mills is a stickler for form. It is my duty to place the bag over the prisoners head and the noose over the bag around the prisoners neck. Padre reads the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm and on the words 'shadow of death' Captain Mills asks me to retire with the words 'thank you Mister Dunne'. The hanging apparatus I have devised for Roscommon jail consists of a single hinged lapboard, which forms the forward part of the balcony outside the window. Pulling the bolt inside the window allows the lapboard to fall, leaving the prisoners to pay their debts to morality suspended by a single pulley from the beam above. This is a considerably more humane dispatch than the slow strangulation which still titillates the mobs in England.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, the greatest discovery in the history of hanging has just been made by the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. The Irish 'Long Drop' will revolutionise hangin in Europe and become the chief means of capital punishment throughout the continent for the next two hundred years. The Irish 'Long Drop' which ranges from 5'6" to 14' and death is instantaneous for it results not from strangulation, no, but from the fracture of the transverse processes of the second cervical vertebrae oblongata. Hitherto, there were three positions for the knot. The occipital position.....so

O'L: Thank you Mr. Dunne.

DUNNE: I am sure the ladies and gentlemen would be interested.....

O'L: Thank you Mr. Dunne

DUNNE: The explanation does not require....

O'L: Mr. Dunne, you're sure there'll be no problems today?

DUNNE: What sort of problem Mr O'Leary?

O'L: Well, Roscommon is famous for the volatile nature of it's crowds.

DUNNE: It is impertinent to suggest that any sentimental reservation on my part should hinder the execution of my duty.

O'L: It wasn't her Ladyship I was thinking about, it was Michael Flynn.

DUNNE: Flynn. What problem could there be with Mr Flynn? He measures 5'10" and I have allowed a drop of 7'6". If I allowed a drop of 12', Mr Flynn's head might well be severed from Mr.Flynn's body.

O'L: Jesus, Dunne. Surely you are not so busy with your hinges and ropes that you haven't heard of what happened at Ballyhaunis and Athlone?

DUNNE: A most unfortunate man, Mr. Pollock. His drops may have been too short, but may God rest his soul.

O'L: Have you thought about your mother at Creggs, Mr Dunne?

[Violin, Drums]

[Enter Mills, Padre, Dunne, O'Leary, Flynn and Betty on Balcony]

FLYNN: I don't need the hat, I'll face my maker with eyes wide.

DUNNE: It's the law.

FLYNN: It's your law not ours, my friend and if you knew what's good for your mother you won't be pulling that bolt.

MILLS: Mr Flynn, do you wish to address the crowd? Remember what I hold in my pocket.

FLYNN: Friends, it is with a heavy heart that I come before you again. I confess I am guilty of the crimes for which I am condemned. I am guilty of torching Mill's house. I am guilty of ham-stringing NcGowan's cattle. I am guilty of filling your bellies with his cheap beef. I am guilty of filling your hearts with hope.

MILLS: You are an idiot, Mr Flynn. Dunne, cover his head.

FLYNN: Friends, I am guilty, forgive me my sins.

[His head is covered] [Violins]

MILLS: Padre.

PADRE: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul  
He leads me kin paths of righteousness for his names sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

MILLS: Thank you, Mr Dunne.

PADRE: I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

MILLS: Thank you, Mr Dunne.

PADRE: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; though anointest my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

[Long silence]

MILLS: O'Leary, see what's the matter.  
[Exit O'Leary]  
[Enter O'Leary]

O'L: Dunne's vanished.

MILLS: Find him.

O'L: Yes sir.  
[Exit O'Leary]  
[Flynn laughs. Music]

MILLS: People of Roscommon. This man is a common criminal. A murderer. He was torched your homes, hamstrung your cattle. He is the enemy of prosperity.

FLYNN: I am the enemy of hunger!!

MILLS: This man is a traitor to the nationalist cause. He confessed to me himself that he couldn't give a fig for Ireland. He will hang this morning and I will not be intimidated. See for yourselves. These battlements command a view of four counties. The prison is protected by two companies of horse. No-one will break into my prison.  
[Enter O'Leary]

O'L: Dunne's vanished sir, like a pooka in the wind. They think he slid down the back wall on one of his own nooses.

MILLS: Well O'Leary. Then we have no option. You will pull the bolt yourself.  
[Violin]

O'L: I couldn't sir. I will not. Don't ask me. Frankly there's not a one that'd dare drop Flynn today. Not even Paudeen Gar, whose son he maimed and there's the truth on it.

MILLS: People of Roscommon. The official hangman is unable to fulfil his duty.  
[Crowd music]

MILLS: I offer ten shillings to the man who will hang Flynn today.  
[Silence]

PADRE: Captain Mills.

MILLS: Keep out of this, Padre, render unto Caesar. Two guineas and a bodyguard of horse to the man who is not a coward.

FLYNN: There are no cowards in Roscommon.

[Crowd murmur]

MILLS: It is cowardly to fear the Whiteboys.

O'L: Be careful, sir.

MILLS: I thought you said you were starving? Five guineas will feed you for life.

PADRE: This is not a place for a common auction.

MILLS: Ten guineas. Let Roscommon name its price to hang Flynn.

O'L: Jesus sir, stop now!

MILLS: I know you! You all have your price

[Crowd silence]

FLYNN: Ask me to hang myself. You've just shown me how.

MILLS: O'Leary, I command you to pull the bolt on Flynn and the woman.

BETTY: I'll hang him sir if you spare my life.

I'd hang him as well as the best of you.

MILLS: Will no man hang Flynn for forty guineas?

BETTY: I'll do it for less, sir. I'll do it for my life.

MILLS: We have a hangwoman. O'Leary, show the woman how the noose is set.

O'L: I couldn't touch the noose sir.

BETTY: There's no need, sir. Many a time I have watched as a Moyle Ranger or a Whiteboy danced on air. I have the eye of a hawk. I could see the hair stiffen on their necks and the wind dry their cheeks. I know the office.

MILLS: Padre, say your piece.

PADRE: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...

FLYNN: Betty if you lay a finger on my body you will be dismembered before nightfall.

BETTY: The gaol will be my home.

FLYNN: What kind of a home is that? You'll be living dead.

BETTY: Look at the smiles down there. The big hands waving at me.

FLYNN: Roscommon is shaking its fist at you.

BETTY: Roscommon is drowning in my beauty.

FLYNN: Listen to their curses

BETTY: They are singing hymns to my glory for I have choked death. I have stood on his slimy neck till he's as still a rope.

FLYNN: Pity me, Betty.

BETTY: You're a fine young lump of a man Flynn.

[Flute]

FLYNN: What are you doing?

BETTY: I'm tightening the noose around your neck and I am tying the rope around your hands.

FLYNN: Mother of God.

BETTY: Be quiet now. You'll find good friends inside the bag

FLYNN: Who is the woman with the stick?

BETTY: She is called Night, She will be your mother from now until the end of time.

FLYNN: Who's the dirty owl fella with his icy fingers on my back?

BETTY: That's cold and he'll be your lover.

FLYNN: But there's someone else here. Who is it?

BETTY: Is he a quiet kind of a thing?

FLYNN: He is. But I think he has something to say.

BETTY: That's Silence. Maybe Silence will speak to you soon. Till then I will sing you a lullaby my son.

FLYNN: Do! Aah do!

BETTY: I'll sing you a song you'll never forget, to make you forget.

FLYNN: Sing me to sleep

BETTY: This day you will be with me in paradise.

[Flynn is hanged]

## 18 MRS HANRAHAN'S SCENE

MRS HANRAHAN Mr O'Leary

O'L Yes, Mrs Hanrahan

MRS HANRAHAN I have come for a favour. Liamog has the choke. He's as hot as an egg and has lumpeens.

O'L If it's the dead man's hand you're after, Mrs Hanrahan, he's buried in lime this good two hours. And I'd have to buy the lads more than a few to dig him up.

MRS HANRAHAN It's only...

O'L Even if we were only to dig up his hand, the lad's wouldn't like it. They got kind of sentimental over old Bernie Walsh.

MRS HANRAHAN: It's not only the dead mans hand I'm wanting, Mr O'Leary . Do you think I'm soft? Or superstitious? Jesus, Mary help me. Isn't the deadman's hand only good for the skin? No. It's Betty. I've heard the stories.

O'L: What stories?

MRS HANRAHAN: Don't you now be giving me the slip Malachai O'Leary. Isn't it the talk of all Roscommon that she has the touch?

O'L: And what kind of thing is that, Mrs Hanrahan?

MRS HANRAHAN: That she has the bubble of life itself. That she sucks it out of the dead men. They say she touched a cow from Glinsk, and it bore two fine calves and never knew a bull.

O'L: And why would your Liamog be wanting life? Didn't I see him this forenoon leapin' like frog on the road to Caslterea. Why, I'm wondering,

would you say he has the choke when he's as healthy as a helper at the Balintober fair?

MRS HANRAHAN: It isn't for Liamog at all, you're right Malachi O'Leary. You're too cute for me. It's a personal problem I have. Don't I want another baby now that Liamog's nearly reared.

O'L: But your husbands not well, Mrs Hanrahan

MRS HANRAHAN: You don't have to be telling me Malachi. Arn't I nearly emptied with him? His big sad eyes have pulled me inside out. I'm like an egg that's sucked. But they say Lady Betty can fill a womb with the life she's swiped.

O'L: By Jesus, but you're a clever woman. Jesus, but you'd have to get up early to catch out Peggy Hanrahan. Didn't her ladyship tell me that she can spit on an egg that's frying and double the yoke.

MRS HANRAHAN: Mother of God

O'L: She can make two puppies by pulling one in half.

MRS O'H: Mary!

O'L: That she made a soldier pregnant in Kerry, but he hanged himself for shame.

MRS HANRAHAN: Blessed virgin protect us! What will she do to me?

O'L: It's dangerous and only I can control it. If you take a piece of her skirt. Boil it. And drink the water every night when your time comes.

MRS O'H: Oh, Malachi. Could you get me some stitch of her's. Any ou'l bitten. I need a baby. I'm lonely at home.

O'L: She'll charge you.

MRS O'H: How much?

O'L: Two pence

MRS O'H: My God. I'll have to sell the table.

O'L: Take it or leave it.

MRS O'H: Can she promise me a girl for that?

[Music]



CHORUS SINGS: *Give us life.*

BETTY SINGS : *What life is there in my knife?*

CHORUS: *Give us hope.*

BETTY: *What hope is there in my rope?*

CHORUS: *Lift the heat from our heads  
You hold the secret of life in your hands.  
Please you have the passion of the cloud who suffocates the moon.  
Open the doorway of our eyes, fill our stomachs.*

SPOKEN: Your cheeks are red as blood and your song the churchyard bell.

MILLS: Mr. O'Leary, is there any truth in this report?

O'L: What intelligence would this be sir?

MILLS: That Dublin has bribed the Lady Betty to do the hangings at Kilmainham.

O'L: Arrah Jesus but they're a bad load of clatters in Dublin sir.

MILLS: This would be a disaster O'Leary.

O'L: Indeed it would sir.

MILLS: Never has such a peace reigned in Roscommon.

O'L: No sir.

MILLS: She has subdued the county in three years

O'L: Yes sir.

MILLS: Could you speak to her O'Leary? I would myself but I fear I intimidate the poor thing.

O'L: Yes sir. It might help sir if you gave her access.

MILLS: I will not permit you to make money by exhibiting the creature! I have not forgotten that you sold Lady Fitzgerald a private interview with that large young man who throttled his father. There is no room for scandal in my prison.

O'L: There would be no scandal sir. The interest of the ladies and gentlemen is purely scientific besides they'd give her gifts sir and the poor ould thing is besotted with cash.

MILLS: Money is a stranger to your thoughts O'Leary?

O'L: Indeed not sir. But we would all suffer by Lady Betty's defection. Your wife would have to abandon any hope she may cherish of becoming Lady Mills and as Betty depends entirely on my poor offices, I fear I would have to follow her to Dublin.

MILLS: How much do you want O'Leary?

O'L: For myself, nothing sir.

MILLS: How much?

O'L: A hundred guineas plus access.

MILLS: You are a common thief, O'Leary.

O'L: Captain Mills sir...I don't particularly care that you stole thirty counties of bog so I have to hop attendance on reject British Officers and I don't even care that your regiment stole the fishing rights on the Suck so my ignorant oul' mother starved herself to feed me, but you see sir there's only me left to look out for me now and I have only one commodity to sell. So don't you dare call me a thief you feckin' little gobshite or Betty will be on the Dublin mail tonight and you'll lose your little jobeen, so hop up to your little desk on the third floor you ignorant scutter or you'll be back at your Da's grocers in Reading packing tea for Xmas sir.

[Exit Mills]

[Music]

CHORUS SINGS: *Give us life.*

BETTY SINGS: *What life is there in my knife?*

CHORUS: *Give us hope.*

BETTY: *What hope is there in my rope?*

CHORUS: *Lift the heat from our heads,  
You hold the secret of life in your hands.*

**19a BETTY & BRIDIE**

BETTY: And what brings you into my hive, you bold thing? You have eyes on you like two eggs about to hatch. How do you dare tower in front of me, and I with a beauty that can flatten? Is it to beseech life from me, or what?

BRIDIE: I have life enough.

BETTY: Then who is it you intercede for? You pillar?

BRIDIE: For Christy O'Flahertie, the man you will flog. Spare him.

BETTY: Would you ask me break the law, and I, Lady Betty, High Queen of Roscommon and the scourge of justice.

BRIDIE: He stole a sheep. A shitty-arsed sheep. A protestant sheep. And for that they'll batter him.

BETTY: I am the ocean. I break all, drown all, swallow all. And I'll piss salt in your eyes.

BRIDIE: Tear me up then. For I have him swallowed already.

BETTY: I am his bride. The law has betrothed him to me. And this afternoon, when his skin parts beneath the lash, he'll know what it is to be taken entirely.

BRIDIE: But I cut off a bit of him and he's kicking my stomach now. Feel him.

BETTY: Could his Da kick like that?

BRIDIE: He could. He could buck like a foal at the moon.

BETTY: I had a kicker once. He went away. Then he came back and killed me.

BRIDIE: Kiss me Betty. (They kiss)

BETTY: Why did you make me do a thing like that? Haven't you sucked the life out of me. I'll make the bastard buck in an hour.

BRIDIE: He can kiss that way Betty

BETTY: I'll chastise him, for the cracking of my skin. You can have him broken this evening. You can be nurse and cuddle his cuts.

BRIDIE: But it's a weak thing he is. He'll snap like an elder twig and be full of nothing.

BETTY: And how can a fine pillar with two eyes like eggs love a shell of a thing like him?

BRIDIE: For his shell. Maybe. What do I know? What do you know? Don't smash him. He's all I have. If he's a broken thing how will he sing to me when the rain shakes the window? How will he warm me, when I'm as empty as himself. Take him you, and see.

BETTY: Is it love him? Can you spare a bit of man for ugly oul' Betty? Begone you stick! You dirty thing! To tempt Lady Betty with a lad. Begone to Galway, or the North, or I'll call the bailiffs, and they'll burn you for a witch.

BRIDIE: Just taste him

(Exit Bridie)

### **19b BETTY & CHORUS**

BETTY: What way am I?

CHORUS: You are as lovely as the moon unborn.

BETTY: Tell me. All of you.

CHORUS: Your beauty is as sudden as the eclipse  
Or the hole where the star drops

BETTY: More!

CHORUS: You have the passion of the cloud  
Who suffocates the moon

BETTY: More!

CHORUS: Who flattens the Atlantic  
Who charcoals out the lightning

BETTY: Are my cheeks not red?

CHORUS: As red as the petal that's dropped.

BETTY: Is my voice not pure?

CHORUS: As pure as the churchyard bell

BETTY: Is my hair not black?

CHORUS: As black as the eyelid when it is shut.

BETTY: Get out! Get ou' that! Bring me my feathers and me rouge and my jewels and my scent and my powder. Paint angels for me. Paint me angels playing pipeens. There's a gossoon this afternoon. He must ne entertained. Play me a tune to make me beautiful.

{Music}

(Betty is dressed as a lady of fashion)

BETTY: O'Leary, bring the young man in.

O'L: Yes, your ladyship.

O'L: Here he is.

BETTY: Is this the man to be flogged?

O'L: What kind of a question is that? Of course he is. This is Christy O'Flahertie from Ballinlough. Thirty lashes. Salting. And to be turned out before nightfall.

BETTY: He'll get his share, now hop O'Leary. Or you'll feel me yourself.

(Exit O'Leary)

### **19c CHRISTY & BETTY**

BETTY: Do you remember me Christy?

CHRISTY: I do.

BETTY: Do you remember the stone you gave me to eat?

CHRISTY: That wasn't me.

BETTY: It's big you've grown.

CHRISTY: Don't flog me.

BETTY: Aren't you the big gossoon to be freckened of a tanned arse.

CHRISTIE: Aah Jesus. Betty. Lady Betty. For the love of God. I'll give you anything.

BETTY: And what have you to give?

CHRISTY: Me Ma's table and chairs. Three fine chairs.

BETTY: Sure what would I want with your Ma's oul' sticks o' rubbish. Haven't I a grand apartment above, with a bed from France?

CHRISTY: I'll do anything. I'll give you the shilling in my pocket. I'll be your servant forever.

BETTY: Haven't I two servants, above. And a girl to do my toilet. And as for what's in your pocket. What would be in your pocket for an ugly oul' woman like me?

CHRISTY: You are beautiful Lady Betty.

BETTY: Am I now?

CHRISTY: Oh you are, you are!

BETTY: That wouldn't be just the talk.

CHRISTY: It would not.

BETTY: Then prove it.

CHRISTY: What way would I prove your beauty? I'll make up a song about it maybe, or a poem.

BETTY: Haven't I enough poems to my beauty to burst a library? Am I not deaf with the singings of songs galore. Prove it a new way.

CHRISTY: What way?

BETTY: Love me with your white skin today. Put yourself inside me. I'll pull a hen in two and smear your back the like will make them say you're well scourged. Is it yes; or is it no?

CHRISTY: Is there no other way?

BETTY: Do not make me mad!

CHRISTY: How can I do the like of that when I'm just a little lad that never knew a woman yet.

BETTY: Get out you little liar! Jesus but the whipping you'll get, there'll be no white skin left for woman to want.

CHRISTY: If I say yes; will you let my little brother too. He's to be flogged tomorrow.

BETTY: I will say yes. And if he's much younger than you, it's not the same price I'll be asking.

CHRISTY: Then come to me and let it be done.

BETTY: I'll untie you first. And don't be thinking you'll run off. Haven't I choked a dog with my left hand alone.

Talk love to me first.

Talk the like as if I were fifteen and as raw as a calf with eyes as open as the Atlantic itself.

CHRISTY: Come to me, then, Betty

BETTY: I will

CHRISTY: And sing me a song.

BETTY: What kind of a song is it you'd be wanting?

CHRISTY: Sing me a song to make me forget how lovely you are.

[Violin]

BETTY SINGS: *When Octobers jewelled fist  
Breaks the ocean into mist  
Take me in your arms, agra  
And fill me with the spring*

*Make me warm from head to toe  
Take me where the berries grow  
Clear the cloud and melt the snow  
And fill me with the Spring  
Take me in your arms*

*When November lets its horse  
Pound the field and strip the gorse  
Take me in your arms, agra  
And fill me with Spring*

*Make me laugh to see the sun  
Break from its mountain gaol and run  
Faster than the fox from gun  
Fill me with the Spring  
Take me in your arms*

BETTY: Why is he weeping?

What use at all is he for a lover? Why are you weeping? Stop crying. Or Jesus I'll lather you. What do I want with your suffering? Get this out. Aren't I Lady Betty? Down on your knees and pray to me. All of you. Jesus. But I'll give you pain. Quick. Pray.

## **9d FINALE**

CHORUS: Forgive us Lady Betty.

BETTY: Never

CHORUS: Take our songs and our souls, but forgive us Lady Betty!

BETTY: Never!

CHORUS: Take our skins and our nerves, but forgive us, Lady Betty!

BETTY: Never!

CHORUS: Forgive us for yesterday.

BETTY: Never.

CHORUS: Forgive us for today

BETTY: Never

CHORUS: Forgive us for tomorrow

BETTY: Never.

CHORUS: Will our children not be forgiven?

BETTY: Never.

CHORUS: My son?

BETTY: Never.

CHORUS: His daughter?

BETTY: Never.

CHORUS: Her son?

BETTY: Never.

CHORUS: Her daughter? Will you not forgive tomorrow's daughter? But will you not forgive tomorrow's daughter?

BETTY: Wait and see if I do or if I don't. But first dance.

[The Chorus dance]



Dance for a hundred years.

Dance for a thousand years.

Dance the hard dance the way it will deafen the thump in your hearts.

Dance.

Dance.

Dance.

CURTAIN