

forgiven me what's to keep you in Ireland? There's your sisters could take care of your mother and why should you have had the burden all these years, don't you deserve a life? And if they say no, isn't there the home in Oughterard isn't ideal but they do take good care of them, my mother before she passed, and don't they have bingo and what good to your mother does that big hill do? No good. (Pause.) Anyways, Maureen, I will leave it up to you. My address is up the top there and the number of the phone in the hall, only let it ring a good while if you want to ring and you'll need the codes, and it would be grand to hear from you. If I don't hear from you, I will understand. Take good care of yourself, Maureen. And that night we shared, even if nothing happened, it still makes me happy just to think about it, being close to you, and even if I never hear from you again I'll always have a happy memory of that night, and that's all I wanted to say to you. Do think about it. Yours sincerely, Pato Dooley.

*Spotlight cuts out, but while the stage is in darkness Pato continues with a letter to his brother.*

Dear Raymond, how are you? I'm enclosing a bunch of letters I don't want different people snooping in on. Will you hand them out for me and don't be reading them, I know you won't be. The one to Mick Dowd you can wait till he comes out of hospital. That must be an awful thing, almost drowning in silage. The one to poor Girleen you can give to her any time you see her, it is only to tell her to stop falling in love with priests. But the one to Maureen Folan I want you to go over there the day you get this and put it in her hand. This is important now, in her hand put it. Not much other news here. I'll fill you in on more of the America details nearer the time. Yes, it's a great thing. Good luck to you, Raymond, and P.S. Remember now, in Maureen's hand put it. Goodbye.

## Scene Six

*Afternoon. Ray is standing near the lit range, watching TV, somewhat engrossed, tapping a sealed envelope against his knee now and then. Mag watches him and the letter from the rocking-chair. Long pause before Ray speaks.*

**Ray** That Wayne's an owl bastard.

**Mag** Is he?

**Ray** He is. He never stops.

**Mag** Oh-h.

**Ray** (pause) D'you see Patricia with the hair? Patricia's bad enough, but Wayne's a pure terror. (Pause.) I do like *Sons and Daughters*, I do.

**Mag** Do ya?

**Ray** Everybody's always killing each other and a lot of the girls do have swimsuits. That's the best kind of programme.

**Mag** I'm just waiting for the news to come on.

**Ray** (pause) You'll have a long wait.

*The programme ends. Ray stretches himself.*

That's that then.

**Mag** Is the news not next? Ah no.

**Ray** No. For God's sake, *A Country Fecking Practise*'s on next. Isn't it Thursday?

**Mag** Turn it off, so, if the news isn't on. That's all I do be waiting for.

**Ray** turns the TV off and idles around.

**Ray** Six o'clock the news isn't on 'til. (He glances at his watch. Quietly, irritated.) Feck, feck, feck, feck, feck, feck, feck, feck, feck. (Pause.) You said she'd be home be now, didn't you?

**Mag** I did. (Pause.) Maybe she got talking to somebody, although she doesn't usually get talking to somebody. She does keep herself to herself.

**Ray** I know well she does keep herself to herself. (*Pause.*) Loopy that woman is, if you ask me. Didn't she keep the tennis ball that came off me and Mairtin Hanlon's swingball set and landed in yere fields and wouldn't give it back no matter how much we begged and that was ten years ago and I still haven't forgotten it?

**Mag** I do have no comment, as they say.

**Ray** Still haven't forgotten it and I never will forget it!

**Mag** But wasn't it that you and Mairtin were pegging yere tennis ball at our chickens and clobbered one of them dead is why your ball was in our fields . . . ?

**Ray** It was swingball we were playing, Mrs!

**Mag** Oh-h.

**Ray** Not clobbering at all. Swingball it was. And never again able to play swingball were we. For the rest of our youth, now. For what use is a swingball set without a ball?

**Mag** No use.

**Ray** No use is right! No use at all. (*Pause.*) *Bitch!*

**Mag** (*pause*) Be off and give your letter to me so, Ray, now, and I'll make sure she gets it, and not have you waiting for a lass ruined your swingball set on you.

**Ray** *thinks about it, tempted, but grudgingly decides against it.*

**Ray** I'm under strict instructions now, Mrs.

**Mag** (*tuts*) Make me a mug of tea so.

**Ray** I'm not making you a mug of tea. Under duress is all I'm here. I'm not skivvyng about on top of it.

**Mag** (*pause*) Or another bit of turf on the fire put. I'm cold.

**Ray** Did I not just say?

**Mag** Ah g'wan, Ray. You're a good boy, God bless you.

*Sighing, Ray puts the letter — which Mag stares at throughout — on the table and uses the heavy black poker beside the range to pick some turf up and place it inside, stoking it afterwards.*

**Ray** Neverminding swingball, I saw her there on the road the other week and I said hello to her and what did she do? She outright ignored me. Didn't even look up.

**Mag** Didn't she?

**Ray** And what I thought of saying, I thought of saying, 'Up your oul hole, Mrs', but I didn't say it, I just thought of saying it, but thinking back on it I should've gone ahead and said it and skitter on the bitch!

**Mag** It would've been good enough for her to say it, up and ignoring you on the road, because you're a good gosawer, Ray, fixing me fire for me. Ah, she's been in a foul oul mood lately.

**Ray** She does wear horrible clothes. And everyone agrees. (*Finished at the range, poker still in hand, Ray looks over the tea-towel on the back wall.*) 'May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the Devil knows you're dead.'

**Mag** Ayc.

**Ray** (*funny voice*) 'May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the Devil knows you're dead.'

**Mag** (*embarrassed laugh*) Ayc.

**Ray** *idles around a little, wielding the poker.*

**Ray** This is a great oul poker, this is.

**Mag** Is it?

**Ray** Good and heavy.

**Mag** Heavy and long.

**Ray** Good and heavy and long. A half a dozen coppers you could take out with this poker and barely notice and have not a scratch on it and then clobber them again just for the fun of seeing the blood running out of them. (*Pause.*) Will you sell it to me?

**Mag** I will not. To go battering the polis?

**Ray** A fiver.

**Mag** We do need it for the fire, sure.

**Ray** *tuts and puts the poker back beside the range.*

**Ray** Sure, that poker's just going to waste in this house.

**Ray** *idles into the kitchen. Her eye on the letter, Mag slowly gets out of her chair.*

Ah, I could get a dozen pokers in town just as good if I wanted, and at half the price.

*Just as Mag starts her approach to the letter, Ray returns, not noticing her, idles past and picks the letter back up on his way. Mag grimaces slightly and sits back down. Ray opens the front door, glances out to see if Maureen is coming, then closes it again, sighing.*

A whole afternoon I'm wasting here. *(Pause.)* When I could be at home watching telly.

**Ray** *sits at the table.*

**Mag** You never know, it might be evening before she's ever home.

**Ray** *(angrily)* You said three o'clock it was sure to be when I first came in!

**Mag** Aye, three o'clock it usually is, oh aye. *(Pause.)* Just sometimes it does be evening. On occasion, like. *(Pause.)* Sometimes it does be late evening. *(Pause.)* Sometimes it does be night. *(Pause.)* Morning it was one time before she...

**Ray** *(interrupting angrily)* All right, all right! It's thumping you in a minute I'll be!

**Mag** *(pause)* I'm only saying now.

**Ray** Well, stop saying! *(Sighs. Long pause.)* This house does smell of pee, this house does.

**Mag** *(pause. Embarrassed)* Em, cats do get in.

**Ray** Do cats get in?

**Mag** They do. *(Pause.)* They do go to the sink.

**Ray** *(pause)* What do they go to the sink for?

**Mag** To wee.

**Ray** To wee? They go to the sink to wee? *(Piss-taking.)* Sure, that's mighty good of them. You do get a very considerate breed of cat up this way so.

**Mag** *(pause)* I don't know what breed they are.

*Pause. Ray lets his head slump down onto the table with a bump, and slowly and rhythmically starts banging his fist down beside it.*

**Ray** *(droning)* I don't want to be here, I don't want to be here, I don't want to be here, I don't want to be here...

**Ray** *lifts his head back up, stares at the letter, then starts slowly turning it around, end over end, sorely tempted.*

**Mag** *(pause)* Do me a mug of tea, Ray. *(Pause.)* Or a mug of Complan do me, even. *(Pause.)* And give it a good stir to get rid of the owl lumps.

**Ray** If it was getting rid of owl lumps I was to be, it wouldn't be with Complan I'd be starting. It would be much closer to home, boy. Oh aye, much closer. A big lump sitting in an owl fecking rocking-chair it would be. I'll tell you that!

**Mag** *(pause)* Or a Cup-a-Soup do me.

**Ray** *grits his teeth and begins breathing in and out through them, almost crying.*

**Ray** *(giving in sadly)* Pato, Pato, Pato. *(Pause.)* Ah what news could it be? *(Pause. Sternly.)* Were I to leave this letter here with you, Mrs, it would be straight to that one you would be giving it, isn't that right?

**Mag** It is. Oh, straight to Maureen I'd be giving it.

**Ray** *(pause)* And it isn't opening it you would be?

**Mag** It is not. Sure, a letter is a private thing. If it isn't my name on it, what business would it be of mine?

**Ray** And may God strike you dead if you do open it?

**Mag** And may God strike me dead if I do open it, only He'll have no need to strike me dead because I won't be opening it.



**Ray** (pause) I'll leave it so.

**Ray** stands, places the letter up against a salt-cellar, thinks about it again for a moment, looks **Mag** over a second, looks back at the letter again, thinks once more, then waves a hand in a gesture of tired resignation, deciding to leave it.

I'll be seeing you then, Mrs.

**Mag** Be seeing you, Pato. Ray, I mean.

**Ray** grimaces at her again and exits through the front door, but leaves it slightly ajar, as he is still waiting outside. **Mag** places her hands on the sides of the rocking-chair, about to drag herself up, then warily remembers she hasn't heard **Ray**'s footsteps away. She lets her hands rest back in her lap and sits back serenely. Pause. The front door bursts open and **Ray** sticks his head around it to look at her. She smiles at him innocently.

**Ray** Good-oh.

**Ray** exits again, closing the door behind him fully this time. **Mag** listens to his footsteps fading away, then gets up, picks up the envelope and opens it, goes back to the range and lifts off the lid so that the flames are visible, and stands there reading the letter. She drops the first short page into the flames as she finishes it, then starts reading the second. Slow fade-out.

### Scene Seven

*Night. Mag is in her rocking-chair, Maureen at the table, reading. The radio is on low, tuned to a request show. The reception is quite poor, wavering and crackling with static. Pause before Mag speaks.*

**Mag** A poor reception.

**Maureen** Can I help it if it's a poor reception?

**Mag** (pause) Crackly. (Pause.) We can hardly hear the tunes. (Pause.) We can hardly hear what are the dedications or from what part of the country.

**Maureen** I can hear well enough.

**Mag** Can ya?

**Maureen** (pause) Maybe it's deaf it is you're going.

**Mag** It's not deaf I'm going. Not nearly deaf.

**Maureen** It's a home for deaf people I'll have to be putting you in soon. (Pause.) And it isn't cod in butter sauce you'll be getting in there. No. Not by a long chalk. Oul beans on toast or something is all you'll be getting in there. If you're lucky. And then if you don't eat it, they'll give you a good kick, or maybe a punch.

**Mag** (pause) I'd die before I'd let meself be put in a home.

**Maureen** Hopefully, aye.

**Mag** (pause) That was a nice bit of cod in butter sauce, Maureen.

**Maureen** I suppose it was.

**Mag** Tasty.

**Maureen** All I do is boil it in the bag and snip it with a scissor. I hardly need your compliments.

**Mag** (pause) Mean to me is all you ever are nowadays.

**Maureen** If I am or if I'm not. (Pause.) Didn't I buy you a packet of wine gums last week if I'm so mean?

**Mag** (pause) All because of Pato Dooley you're mean, I suppose. (Pause.) Him not inviting you to his oul going-away do tonight.

**Maureen** Pato Dooley has his own life to lead.

**Mag** Only after one thing that man was.

**Maureen** Maybe he was, now. Or maybe it was me who was only after one thing. We do have equality nowadays. Not like in your day.

**Mag** There was nothing wrong in my day.

**Maureen** Allowed to go on top of a man nowadays, we are. All we have to do is ask. And nice it is on top of a man, too.