

# Love So Blind

By

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**TIME:** Four weeks in late Autumn, early 1950's.

**CHARACTERS:** Gusty Flynn --thirty-six years old, blind.  
Tommy Boylan--fourteen years old.  
Peg Boylan--thirty-three years old, Tommy's mother.  
Mikey Downey--sixty-four years old, naive, slow character.  
Stormy Brien—twenty-eight years old, bully.

**LOCATIONS:** Small cabin of Gusty Flynn, on south coast of Ireland, within sight of the sea.

Small cabin, rented by Peg Boylan, a half-mile from Gusty Flynn's cabin.

**AT THE CURTAIN:** Interior of Gusty Flynn cabin, Grandfather clock ticking in background. Gusty and Tommy, still as statues, looking out cabin window. Cabin in gloom, dusk approaching.



## Scene 1

D'you miss it, Gust?

Tommy

What?

Gusty

The sea.

Tommy

Sure, isn't it outside the door.  
to shape it with a whittling knife.)

Gusty  
(Gusty picks up a piece of wood and begins

Tommy  
Going to sea, being on the boats. D'you miss it?

Gusty  
(Long pause) I loved it, being on the boats, to feel the spray on my face and the decks  
move under me, to watch the sky change on a still night, as the sun set and night crept in.  
It felt like I was the only man on the planet.

Tommy  
I'll go some day.

Gusty  
(Pause.)

Hmmm.

Tommy  
Nothing changes here.

Gusty  
So slow it seems like it doesn't.

Tommy  
How old were you?

Gusty  
Fourteen, I was fourteen...a long time ago.

Tommy  
I'm that age.

Gusty

You are, and a fine young fella for fourteen.

Tommy

Peg doesn't want me going.

Gusty

And why would she? No mother wants her child leaving – and you an only child. (Pause)  
They say education is the wave of the future.

Tommy

Education and staying in school, that's all I hear any more. What did we do when we didn't have to go to school? Weren't we out in the world learning something every day, a trade or a skill, how to make a few shillings?

Gusty

'Tis all about schooling now.

Tommy

And what if you have a bad teacher? What kind of education will you get then? Might you not come out a bigger amadan than before you went in and turned away from schooling for the rest of your life? Might you not?

Gusty

You might also meet a good teacher and set your sights on being an educated man. Fourteen he is and he has all the answers, the wisest fourteen-year-old in this village of Saint Augustine. Tommy Boylan is skeptical of education.

Tommy

The two teaching in there, sure they've never been past Kilmac. What do they know about the world?

Gusty

I'm telling you and you're not listening. The knowledge is in the books and the books are in the library. I didn't have the schooling and it held me back. Have you ever been inside the door of the library?

Tommy

No.

Gusty

Well, there you are, spouting off and knowing nothing.

Tommy

What's wrong with Able Seaman?

Gusty

Nothing for an uneducated man like me. I didn't have a knack for learning. I was born to the sea, but I never wanted to study the books. As soon as the boat docked, I was gone, done up like a dog's dinner, half a jar of Brylcreem on my head.

Tommy

(Pause) How about the women?

Gusty

Oh sure, I had my share - women and taverns. Easy come, easy go.

Tommy

You saved no money?

Gusty

Not enough. I thought I'd be young and strong forever.

Tommy

How was the work?

Gusty  
(Laughs.)

'Twas grand.

Tommy

Well, you have good memories. At least you got that out of it.

Gusty

Memories fade, Tommy. So, stay in school, book-learning is what the future is all about.

Gusty  
(Beat.)

Turn up the lamp, the dark is coming in.

(Tommy turns up the lamp.)

And close the shutters.

(Tommy closes the shutters.)

Gusty

How's your mother?

Tommy

She's good and she's bad - happy enough one day and contrary the next.

Gusty

She's a good woman, your mother.

Tommy

When she's in a black mood, 'tis better to be gone from her.

Gusty

You should be there for her. She had a hard enough life.

Tommy

(Heatedly.)

I try my best but I'm stubborn myself. When the other fella was around, she was miserable. Now he's gone, she's miserable.

Gusty

She's fearful he'll show up. But hold your tongue with her. She's scarred a bit, Peg is.

Tommy

I suppose you're right.

Gusty

She had a hard life, always a struggle.

Tommy

And don't we all struggle?

Gusty

(Laughs and tousles Tommy's head.)

The only struggle in your life right now is struggling out of bed in the morning.

Tommy

(Indignantly.)

The Christian Brothers school is no picnic. They'll kill one of us, one of these days.

Gusty

(Puts his hand on Tommy's shoulder.)

Don't we all go through rough times. Isn't it the way it's meant to be. What did the man upstairs say: Suffer little children... And me, I had the world in my hands..., not a care in the world till the eyes got messed up...

Tommy

(Eager.)

Tell us another one, Gust. How about rounding the Cape, when you thought you were goners.

Gusty

Aye, lost two overboard that night. I was nearly the third.

Tommy

You never said that.

Gusty

(Long pause) There was an old man in Cairo, I got to know him, hung around the docks with a begging bowl. A beggar, I suppose, but he begged with dignity.

Tommy

Did you know his name?

Gusty

I never asked and he never told me.

Tommy  
(Impatient.)

And what happened?

Gusty

I never passed him without throwing something in. If I had enough beer in the belly and was feeling good, I'd give him more. Here I was, top of the world, strong and healthy, money in my pocket, travelling the world...

Tommy

But what about the storm?

Gusty

By God, you're an impatient one. Will you listen for a minute and shut your gob?

Tommy

But...

Gusty

...so I never passed him without putting my hand in my pocket. My mother used to say that – give a hand when you can, and it'll come back tenfold. Anyway, I was off watch, but I'd go up on deck, to try and think things out, and watch the stars, and wonder about everything. Who or what was out there? Where did all this come from? Where did we come from? Where were we going? When it got rough and stormy, I'd go up there, too. There was something about it I liked, the wind howling and the rain coming across in sheets and it seemed to me, then, I was closer to some kind of answer. (Pause) But it could be dangerous. Anyway, I was up there and out of nowhere - and it can happen that way, I've seen it often enough - a storm came up, the wind whipping and snapping, the rain torrential, so you couldn't see your hand before you. I was off in another world, taking it all in. And then, I was sliding across the deck, heading overboard, heading for the water. If I went over, man nor God could save me, the waves mountainous, little or no visibility. If I went over, I was gone and I knew it – and I was heading over. Then I saw the beggar's face (stops for long seconds) and my hand is grasping the rail. I didn't see the rail, didn't see anything. It was like someone placed my hand there. Things were happening at blinding speed. I had no time to react. Superman couldn't have reacted that quickly. (pause) That face is forever etched in my brain, the face I saw that night, brown face, brown eyes, black beard and the eyes staring into mine with a look that was saying,

it's going to be all right, garsun, it's going to be all right.

Tommy

He saved your life.

Gusty

(Staring into space for a few moments.)

I'm just telling you what happened. I looked for him in Cairo, after. Never saw him again.

Tommy

Why did you see his face?

Gusty

Don't know.

Tommy

He saved your life because you gave him money.

Gusty

I don't know these things. It's not as simple as that.

Tommy

What goes around, comes around?

Gusty

Like I said. I'm only telling you what happened. Anyway, (pause) so Peg is grouchy? It was that bloody marriage.

Tommy

He's my father, Gusty but he's a mean, contrary man and we're better off without him. He treated people bad, and he treated myself and Peg bad.

Gusty

She thinks he might show again, like a bad penny.

Tommy

She finally told him to get out and never come back. He came at her, full of drink, but she stood her ground, picked up that big blackthorn that was her father's and was ready to use it and he knew she would. He looked at me and he looked at her, turned on his heel and left. That's going on four years now.

Gusty

Isn't it a fright, the badness in some people. Isn't he tied into the Brien's somewhere?

Tommy

They're second cousins, I think.



Gusty

(Pause) Anyway, we sail out of Houston, in the State of Texas, through the Florida straits and into the North Atlantic Ocean. Fifty or fifty-one, I think it was. She was an oil tanker on a regular run to Amsterdam, well-kept, with a stopover scheduled somewhere in the Azores, the sun splitting the stones every day, and as good a crew as I've seen in many a year sailing. I was a greaser down in the engine room, an easy enough hitch. Keep the engines running smooth and there'd be no bother. The captain was a decent man, from the old school, tough but fair. Do your job and do it right, he said, and no man will mess with you, and he was right. But if you were a slacker...

Tommy

Shiver me timbers, Gust.

Gusty

What about, 'shiver me timbers.'

Tommy

Isn't that what sailors say?

Gusty

(Gusty looks in his direction and shakes his head.)

Anyway, as I was saying....

Tommy

But what does it mean, Gusty?

Gusty

(Impatiently.)

Arrah, sailors don't say that. It's an old saying from Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, that's all, when the boats were timber, I suppose.

Tommy

And the timbers shook.

Gusty

They shook, creaked and shivered when the weather was bad...

Tommy

Did you sail on one?

Gusty

One, a long time ago, an old coaster, and I'll tell you, there's no sound worse. Near human it is, the moaning and shrieking as the wood twists and stretches. Put that together with the wind whistling through the sails and the sea crashing on the deck. D'ye know what a boat is? A boat is a hole in the water surrounded by wood.

Tommy

I never heard that one. 'Tis good, Gusty. A hole in the water surrounded by wood.

Gusty

That's all it is. And the sea? Well the sea can be capricious and cruel but it respects bravery - and punishes stupidity. The sea has a mind of its own, and a power that's hard to fathom. Did you ever hear tell of a tsunami, a giant wave that comes out of the ocean. It can wipe a country clean, taking all before it, killing thousands. There are stories that go back centuries and sailors know them.

Tommy

That's hard to believe.

Gusty

Well, it's true. The biggest waves *you* ever saw are out by Ballyvoile. They're not even in the penny halfpenny class.

Tommy

I'm not saying you're wrong.

Gusty

There's no power like sea power. Sure, we don't even know half of what's down there, maybe never will. We sail across the oceans with our fancy looking uniforms and our fancy boats and when we make it to the other side, we feel invincible. That's when the sea rears up and turns us into trembling, frightened little boys. There's no room on board a ship for arrogance or stupidity.

Tommy

Or any where else, I suppose.

Gusty

You suppose right. D'ye know, you better head off home before Peg comes bursting in here looking for you and reading me up and down for filling your head with these oul' stories.

Tommy

I told her I enjoy the times here and I could be up to worse. I'll head away anyway. I'll drop by tomorrow.

Gusty

Slan leat, mo buachaillin. (goodbye, my small boy)

## Scene 2

Stage goes dark for a long moment then:  
(Saturday morning, shutters open, sun shining, Gusty shaving over a sink with a straight-backed razor, in front of a mirror)

Tommy

Do you ever cut yourself, Gusty?

Gusty

If the razor is sharp, it rarely happens. And I keep it sharp.

Tommy

When d'ye think I'll be shaving?...

Gusty

When there's something there to shave, I suppose.

Tommy

I'd say it'll be soon.

Gusty

What's the hurry?

Tommy

Thomasheen Walsh is shaving already, as he never stops telling me.

Gusty

What age is he? His father would be Thomas, too. There's a big family of them there.

Tommy

Sure, isn't he my age. He's in my class, when he's there – which isn't often. The father takes him away at least two days a week.

Gusty

Well, there's no need to be shaving until you have a good beard going. Razors cost money.

Tommy

You're a dab hand with that razor, Gust.

Gusty

Why wouldn't I? I do it every day.

Tommy

I'd like a razor like that some day.

Gusty

This was my fathers. German steel, boy, the best. I'd watch him when I was a little boy, stropping the razor on his belt, applying the lather with the brush, stretching the neck, twisting the head and beveling the razor in all directions. He never rushed.

Tommy

He enjoyed it.

Gusty

He did. Did you have the bit of breakfast yet?

Tommy

No.

Gusty

Set the table and I'll be with you in a minute. There's a nice pot of jam in the cupboard.

(Tommy sets the table and makes the tea, cuts the bread and puts the butter and jam out.

It's obvious that he's familiar with Gusty's kitchen. Gusty finishes up his shaving and joins him. Tommy starts to laugh. Gusty stares at him.)

Tommy

I was talking to Owen Dunne. He told me that Patrick got up in the middle of the night, came down from the loft, ate the pigs head that was hanging on the back of the door...

Gusty

They're a strange family.

Tommy

...but he burned the oul' ladder to cook the pigs head and Owen, next morning, fell from the loft when he missed the ladder. Now he's not talking to Patrick.

Gusty

They have their own way of doing things, a bit cracked, I suppose, like us all.

Tommy

Sure, they're worse than cracked. Did you know that they bring the horse into the house?

Gusty

That's because they don't have a stable.

Tommy

You're not supposed to bring animals that big into the house. Imagine if one of the Yanks was visiting or one of the cousins down from Dublin and they found a horse in the kitchen. They'd think we were barbaric in this village.

Gusty

They might, but better they leave him inside than standing out in the dampness all night. That's their livelihood, y'know, bringing gravel from the strand with the horse and cart.

Tommy

And picking winkles. (periwinkles - marine snails)

Gusty

And picking winkles.

Tommy

So, you don't think it's strange?

Gusty

They make an honest living, don't they? (silence)

Tommy

And Kate Tobin, wanting to be buried with her Bingo card and twenty Sweet Afton. (Irish cigarettes) That wasn't strange, Gusty, ha?

Gusty

She did?

Tommy

She did.

Gusty

(Shrugging.)

Did it not give her comfort to know that she'd have them with her?

Tommy

And when she gets to Heaven, they'll say, good girl, you are, Katie. We haven't had a Sweet Afton up here in months...

Gusty

They might.

Tommy

...all they have here are those American ones and they're like smoking oul' rope.

Gusty

Who's to know. Maybe what you're saying is true.

Tommy

I think the whole village is daft. Maybe God is after forgetting about us, forgot we were ever there, so is not keeping an eye on things, y'know Gusty? Maybe he had a list of villages and a big drop of water fell and hit our name and he wiped the drop and wiped our village right off his list. Maybe his eyesight wasn't that good, and he didn't realize....

Gusty

Forget about going to sea. With that imagination you should be a writer.

Tommy

There's no money in that. What d'ye think of the Yanks, Gust?

Gusty

Well, they reckon, guess and calculate everything but other than that, they're all right.

Tommy

They're loud, though?

Gusty

That's the way they were brought up, say what they have to say. They have their ways like us all, I suppose.

Tommy

Everything is new in that country, but they're mad for knocking things down and building 'em again even when there's no reason for it. That's what I hear. But then they buy old things from other countries and take them over there, because they want to look at old things. You see, they have nothing old in that country. We were here hundreds of years before them. But if they keep knocking stuff down, how will it ever get old?

Gusty

You're as wise as I am but they're hard to stop when they get going.

Tommy

Is Mikey getting the messages (groceries) for you, okay?

Gusty

He is.

Tommy

The usual, I suppose, tea, bread and milk.

Gusty

Tea, bread and milk, boy.

Tommy

You'd live on tea and bread. Any letters?

Gusty

Who'd be writing to me?

Tommy

Anything from the Seamen's Union? When they write to you, answer right away or they'll think you're dead and drop you. They're only looking for an excuse.

Gusty  
I'll let you know as soon as a letter crosses my door.

Tommy  
John Joe Kelly is your postman.

Gusty  
He is.

Tommy  
Keep an eye on him. He's fond of the drop...

Gusty  
He seems okay.

Tommy  
...Although he couldn't be worse than Joe Regan. That was one bad egg. D'ye know what that man told Mrs. O'Dea?

Gusty  
No.

Tommy  
Her daughter sent her a package from America...

Gusty  
That would be Cathleen.

Tommy  
...and Joe couldn't cycle the bike up the boreen with the package. (country road) ...

Gusty  
She'd turn your head, that one.

Tommy  
Who?

Gusty  
Cathleen, the middle one.

Tommy  
(Indignantly.)  
Would it be all right if I finished the story?

Gusty

By God, you're hot.

Tommy

You don't interrupt when someone tells a story.

Gusty

I was contributing, not only contributing but also clarifying.

Tommy

Would you hold your clarifying until the end. Now I don't know where I was.

Gusty

The package was too heavy for Joe.

Tommy

(In a deep, slow voice.)

Oh, yes. So he says to Mrs. O'Dea, "Tell your daughter not to be sending those big f...ing packages from America because they're too heavy for me to be delivering."

Gusty

By God, that was cheek.

Tommy

Imagine saying that to a customer. If we all stopped taking the post, he'd be out of a job, wouldn't he, and he wouldn't be so high and mighty then, would he, Gusty?

Gusty

He would not, boy.

Tommy

Did you ever take that medical exam in Dublin? 'Tis free. You're entitled to that through the Union.

Gusty

No. You'd go up to them in great shape and come back with something wrong.

Tommy

Well, you're looking a bit shook lately.

Gusty

I never felt better. (Indignant)

Tommy

A grown man needs spuds, bacon and cabbage, to keep his strength up.

Gusty

There's nothing better than a bit of hairy bacon with the bit o' cabbage. I used to go mad for the cabbage water.



I could cook that for you. Tommy

You're a cook now? Gusty

Peg showed me, in case.... Tommy

In case what? Gusty

She's always making plans in case. Tommy

In case what, what? Gusty

In case something happens to her, God forbid - or I must emigrate, God forbid - or for some reason, I'm left on my own - God forbid. Tommy

She's a worrier right enough. Gusty

All the women worry. Tommy

And why wouldn't they, with the men worse than the children. (pause) They say there's a bad summer coming. Gusty

Another one? Tommy

And we wait for summers that never come. I miss the summers. Gusty

D'ye remember that one five years ago, "the sun shining brightly in the blue sky and high up in the heavens, the lark was filling the air with melody and from tree and bush came the soft notes of the starling and blackbird and robin." Nice, ha? Tommy  
(Enthusiastically.)

Where did you steal that? Gusty

Tommy

Made that up myself. That was a gre-a-t summer. Five weeks and not a drop of rain, the farmers complaining, as usual. I never put a shoe on while it lasted. Sometimes I'd stand in melted tar on the road and 'twould squeeze up between my toes. Tar is wicked to get off...

Gusty

How did ye get it off?

Tommy

Butter, boy, plenty of butter. I'd have to sneak it out of the house. When I asked Peg, she said, are you mad and the price of butter? You can wear it off and maybe it'll teach you to be more careful. But you're getting none of my butter for your tar.

Gusty

Butter is good. Paraffin is better.

Tommy

Where would I get money for paraffin?

(Door bursts open. Peg comes in.)

Peg

Tommy, you're supposed to be helping the Murrays.

Tommy

One day was enough with her. She treated me like a bleddy slave.

Peg

You do what I tell you.

Gusty

Ah, Peg, isn't he fine here.

Peg

He's going to the dogs when he's here.

Gusty

He's a great help to me.

Peg

He's learning nothing here.

Gusty

We do have great chats.

Peg

What's he hearing from you, Gusty, your exploits before the mast, on the high seas, women and whiskey in every port? You knew every bar from here to Hong Kong.



Gusty

Wasting wouldn't be the right word. (pause) Go ahead, Tommy.  
(Tommy looks at his mother defiantly, shrugs resignedly and goes out the door. Before Peg exits and slams the door behind her.)

Peg

Leave him be, Gusty, leave him be.

### Scene 3

(Mikey Downey enters with noisy footsteps.  
Gusty is whittling by the fire. Tommy is  
tidying up, bringing sticks in for the fire, etc.)

Gusty

Well, Mikey.

Mikey

(Taken aback.)

Now how could you know it was me?

Tommy

How is it going, Mikey?

Gusty

And why wouldn't I?

Mikey

(Scratching his arse.)

Well, Tommy.

(Mikey turns and contemplates Gusty.)

Before I opened my mouth, you knew. How is that? You're supposed to be blind, now, aren't you?

Gusty

And stop scratching your arse.

Mikey

(Pulls his hand away quickly.)

There you go. How did you know I was scratching my arse?

Gusty

Don't I hear the grass growing, so why wouldn't I hear you scratching your arse – and we all have a certain odor about us.

Mikey

Sure, isn't my odor like everybody else. Aren't we all atin' the same grub. Don't we all wash with the same soap.

How often? Gusty

What? Mikey

Do you wash? Gusty

Often enough. Three or four times a week. Too much is no good for you, y' know. Mikey  
(Contemplating.)

That's what they say, right enough. Too much or too little is a problem, whether 'tis drinking or washing or atin' a dinner. Gusty

Ah, the world is full of problems - and mysteries. D'ye know what Peter Grant told me? The knowledge that man has is phenomenal. Now listen to this. He told me that all the stars in the sky are planets... Mikey  
(Tommy sits down and prepares to listen to Mikey's pronouncements.)

True enough. Gusty

...and millions, imagine, millions of them up there. Mikey

I believe that's true too. Gusty

I wouldn't know which or whether. But then he tells me some are inhabited... by people, sez I? He said I didn't say that now, did I? But then he said, whoever or whatever they are – that they talk through their arse. Mikey

They talk through their arse? Gusty

They talk through their arse? Tommy

That's what the man said. Could that be, Gusty? Mikey

Gusty

Anything's possible, I suppose, but that's reaching.

Mikey

Imagine having to talk through your arse.

Gusty

That wouldn't be easy.

Mikey

Exactly, exactly what I was thinking. But Peter said it could come in handy for they could talk and eat at the same time...

Then he tells me that the Queen of England never farts.

Gusty

The Queen of England never farts.

Mikey

The Queen of England never farts, that's right. Well?

Gusty

Well, what?

Mikey

Don't you want to know why?

Gusty

Why?

Mikey

First, they don't say fart. They say expelling gas and Royalty, high up Royalty never expels gas. They were trained that way over hundreds of years, so they wouldn't be embarrassed in public, you see.

(Tommy is convulsed with laughter but tries to hide it from Mikey.)

Gusty

I didn't know that. By God, we live and learn.

Mikey

I can see the point of it. Imagine her Majesty walking down a reviewing line and going puff, puff as she walks along. It would take from the dignity of the occasion entirely.

Gusty

It certainly would.

Mikey

Only the higher up Royalty now, mind you. That's why they like to marry royalty. So, it doesn't dilute the ability. That's what Peter said.

Gusty

This is very interesting stuff.

Mikey

I tell you, I was there with my mouth open, listening to him. The knowledge of that man.

Gusty

What else did he tell you?

Mikey

Well, when they started practicing first, it was very difficult, but it got easier and easier. Now it's bred in them.

Gusty

And I never even heard about it.

Mikey

But the ones who intermarry with the commoners, they lose the ability. Or it's a come and go situation. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. (Long silence) Do you know how Royalty started?

Gusty

According to Peter Grant?

Mikey

He said, once, hundreds of years ago, somewhere in some country, this man got a bit of property and money together. But in the street when he'd meet the neighbors and townspeople, they'd say "Well Jack, how is she cuttin'? Isn't it a grand day and how is the wife and how are the daughters and are you doin' all right with the land and the crops?" Conversation that ordinary people would have.

Gusty

This is how Royalty began?

Mikey

Hang on now. Hold your horses there, young fella. But you see - Jack, we'll call him, Jack didn't want to be seen as an ordinary man. So, one day, he says to the wife, from now on, Nora, the workers and the servants will have to bow to us and call me Sir Jack and you Lady Nora and Nora said why and he said because we're better than them and she said we are?

We are from now on, he says, looking at her severely and she went along with him as she usually did. (pause) All his family were a bit quare, and she knew that before she married him. (pause) Anyway, she went along with him and the workers and servants went along for the craic too. They knew he was cracked – the whole place knew it -and they thought there was no real harm in it. But he believed it and after a while, they believed it and their children believed it because they believed it.



Who? Gusty

Who what? Mikey

I'm a bit confused. Gusty

Sure, I was too, when he was telling me. Now, pay attention. Jack - Sir Jack - and his wife Nora - Lady Nora - believed it, and their children believed it because they believed it. Are you right? Mikey

Their children believed it because who believed it? Gusty

(confused) All the others. Mikey

The servants and workers? Gusty

No (pause) Yes. Mikey

Okay, I'm right. Gusty

Anyway, as time passed, they forgot how or when it happened, when he became better than them. Human nature being what it is, a lot of the people liked having someone better than them living in their townland... Mikey  
(Looks at him, a little confused.)

I've met a few of them. Gusty

...and boasted about Sir Jack and Lady Nora living there. So people in other townlands wanted their own Sir and Lady and of course there was always someone to oblige them. Mikey

Isn't that the truth. Gusty

So, their children were Royalty, too. But now they were fighting with each other for more land and building bigger and bigger houses they called castles. So, they start taxing the Mike

people and that's when they fell out with the common people. When they fell out, of course, they had to build walls to protect their property. Now they were providing jobs too, with the building and renovating going on. There were some great jobs going in them big castles they lived in.

Gusty

I imagine there were.

Mikey

At times, all they did was walk about bowing to everybody they met, carrying trays of food and drink and if they had a drink or a bit of food off the tray, themselves, what harm if they didn't overdo it, y'know. Now how hard is that?

Gusty

So that's how Royalty started. And that's where all the jobs came from.

Mikey

Arra no, didn't we have saints and monasteries way before them, and a lot of work going around the monasteries.

Gusty

You better be going, or you'll be late for your tea.

Mikey

By God, you're right and the mother will be boiling mad if that happens. That's wan thing that gets her going, being late for the grub. She loses it, boy. Good luck to ye.

Tommy

How is the mother, Mikey.

Mikey

Good boy, good, she's good. And how's yourself.

Tommy

Never better.

Mikey

You're getting big. (Turns to Gusty) By God, look at the size of him. He's nearly a man.

Gusty

How old is the mother now?

Mikey

She's stuck at eighty now for ten years or more. She's up before me in the morning and after me to bed at night. Three or four hours of sleep and she's like a wattie\*. I don't know where they got her. And if I don't get eight hours in the bed, I'm fit for the boneyard. (Wagtail - Irish bird\*)

Tommy  
I wouldn't take you for a day over forty. You're fresh.

Mikey  
I'm wearing good, boy and I passed sixty a couple of years ago.

Tommy  
Go 'way.

Mikey  
That's what the mother told me.

Gusty  
Go ahead, Mikey. She'll be waiting for you. Come in next week.

Mikey  
I will, I will.  
(Mikey exits.)

## Scene 4

(Tommy comes in, nose bleeding, distressed.  
Gusty brings him to the sink and cleans him up.)

Gusty  
Well?

Tommy  
Well, what?

Gusty  
One of the Brien's?

Tommy  
Who else?

Gusty  
(Angry)  
Didn't I tell you to stay away from them?

Tommy  
You wouldn't expect me to run away, would you? I have a right to walk where I want.

Gusty

No, but right or wrong, they're trouble. You must stay clear of them, Tommy. There's badness in them. There's no honor in that family.

Tommy

If I had a father, Gusty, but I don't. And you can't help me. I have to stand up for myself. If it's put up to you, you must, Gusty, or they'll not respect you.

Gusty

And why can't I – help you?

Tommy

(quiet) You're blind, Gusty.

Gusty

I'm blind but I'm not helpless.

Tommy

You're my best friend, Gust.

Gusty

So, you have to fight even if you're going to get a beatin'?

Tommy

Even if you're going to get a beatin'.

Gusty

(sighs)

'Tis a strange world we live in. One drop of blood and civilization vanishes.

Tommy

That's the way it always was.

Gusty

We talk about the barbarians. One drop of blood and we are the barbarians.

Tommy

Would you have, (pause) backed down?

Gusty

(Long pause) If I knew then what I know now, maybe, yes.

Tommy

I don't believe you.

(Gusty stares in his direction)

Tommy

I was scared, Gusty. But that was all the more reason. I couldn't let them see I was. I'd

never live it down. I'd rather take the beating.

Gusty

I suppose you're right. Goddammit, why are they like they are? Always on the lookout for something said or done against them, real or imagined. Blow-ins fighting and causing trouble and dissension in the village. And they turn others mean. If they'd only pack up and leave, 'twould be a reasonable place. The people are generally good-hearted and helpful to each other.

Tommy

They should have run them out years ago, but they won't stand up to them.

Gusty

They have their own troubles with out bringing more on their heads.

Tommy

Would you go up against them?

Gusty

Oh, my days of confronting and fighting are well behind me.

Tommy

But if they put it up to you?

Gusty

If they put what up?

Tommy

Go on now, Gust, you know what.

Gusty

Listen to me, this isn't high noon and I'm not Gary Cooper. Stay out of their way, do you hear me?

Tommy

I'm just saying...

Gusty

Drop it now?

Tommy

All right, all right.

Gusty

Good man.

Tommy

What's the story on women, Gust?

Gusty  
Look, leave the women alone for a few more years.

Tommy  
But...

Gusty  
But my arse.

Tommy  
Sure, a bit of knowledge can't hurt.

Gusty  
To the wrong young fella it could do a lot of damage.

Tommy  
Suit yourself.

Gusty  
I could talk from now to next week about women and we'd only be scratching the surface. What do you want to know?

Tommy  
Everything.

Gusty  
Ah, you'll never know everything about women. If you realize that, you have a chance. The fool that thinks he knows them, he's in for a big suck-in. Admit your ignorance, be willing to put in serious time trying to understand them and you have a chance.

Tommy  
You make them very complicated altogether.

Gusty  
That's because they are.

Tommy  
So how would I go about it?

Gusty  
If you were older and looking to settle down with a good woman, what kind of woman would you be looking for. Is that what you're asking?

Tommy  
I want to know about them, Gusty.

Gusty

And don't we all. There's no two the same, that's for sure.

Tommy

So where would you start?

Gusty

Well, if she was easy enough to talk to, if she was pleasant, if you just liked her like you might like another boy.

Tommy

Like Mick Joe Landers, who's in my class. We could talk for hours.

Gusty

There you go.

Tommy

But there's more?

Gusty

Well, you'd want one who feels the same about things as you would. What does she want from life. Does she want to accomplish something. Is she ambitious.

Tommy

I'd want one who'd back me up. I mean, who'd help me if I had a bit of a business going.

Gusty

Fair enough. What else?

Tommy

Who'd take care of me – if I'd take care of her.

Gusty

There you go. They want a lot of what we want. Someone who'd back them up and take care of them.

Tommy

Are they worth the trouble?

Gusty

The sorry fact is we can't do without them.

Tommy

How about love? How would you know when you're in love?

Gusty

I knew you were going to ask that.

Tommy

How would you?

Gusty

Do you want a straight answer.

Tommy

I do.

Gusty

There's no such thing as love.

Tommy

Ah, go 'way, didn't I see it in the pictures.

Gusty

I'm telling you, there's no such thing as love. If people only realized that, there wouldn't be half the trouble and dissension and dissatisfaction in the world.

Tommy

Every second picture is about love.

Gusty

And there's the problem – the Hollywood version of life, where if we're not in love we're miserable and if we are in love, we walk around perpetually happy. Which is why more than half the planet is walking around miserable. I'm telling you; the matchmakers will come back yet and not a day too soon. They have a lot of sorting out to do.

Tommy

So...

Gusty

There's physical attraction and there's mental attraction where that person's mind attracts, how he or she thinks...

Tommy

Like enjoying a good chat with someone?

Gusty

Their take on the world and how they handle it. Then there's what they call compatibility and then there's respect. But it can't be just physical. Any one of the others is probably reason enough to settle down with someone and if it's more than one, so much the better.

Tommy

So you never found one compata... compat...

Gusty

Compatible. I did, I did but...



Tommy  
But what?

Gusty  
Ah, it's a long story.

What about the women you met at sea?

Gusty  
It's different when a man's at sea. He's here today and gone tomorrow, shipped out for weeks at a time. He's fed up with seeing the same old faces, cooped up in a small cabin with two or three others. Cabin fever, they call it. When he's on shore leave, he's not looking for respect, compatibility or a good mind.

Tommy  
(reflecting) He's sowing his wild oats before he settles down.

Gusty  
It's a loneliness, is what it is. We're not meant to be alone. Women give men something...that they need, that they crave, something that only a woman can give. Maybe it has something to do with who we are and how we got here.

Tommy  
What do you mean?

Gusty  
Well, if you see two dogs stuck together, like you saw last week, that's part of it.

Tommy  
Mating.

Gusty  
Mating. But it's not just about... mating. It's more than physical.

Tommy  
How do you mean?

Gusty  
Perpetuating the species. Did you ever hear that?

Tommy  
No.

Gusty  
Well, it means to have offspring to carry on the name and genes. Man and woman have a built-in urge to perpetuate the species, as do all life on earth. That's why life adapts, to survive, to live.

Tommy  
Is that why Peg worries about me?

Gusty  
What do you mean?

Tommy  
She thinks I'll be perpetuating...

Gusty  
Arrah, go 'way out that. You wouldn't know one end from the other.

Tommy  
I'll learn soon enough.

Gusty  
Too soon, boy.

Tommy  
So, a good woman is important.

Gusty  
I think it is. A good woman will make all the difference...

Tommy  
And a bad one?

Gusty  
Get on your horse and ride out of town. They'll make life hell for you.

(Silence.)

Gusty  
What was the fight about?

Tommy  
Mickey Brien, said people were talking, that we shouldn't be up here. I said what business was it of his? He said it wasn't right, that Peg was married – she should know better. That's when I hit him.

Gusty  
That's his mother talking.

Tommy  
She's a witch. Why shouldn't we come up here? Aren't we friends?

Gusty

People love to gossip. (pause) He's a big young fella.

Tommy

The bigger they are, the harder they fall, boy. I got the better of him this time.

Gusty

Don't be getting carried away now, Rocky. He's like all the Briens, stupid – but dangerous.

Tommy

The Widow has 'em that way.

Gusty

Was it the gug (bad) eye made her that way, I wonder?

Tommy

(Solemnly.)

They say you can get a bad eye like that from going to bed with a wet head.

Gusty

What? A wet head would twist the eye like that. Ah sure, that's only a piseog. (superstition)

Tommy

I'm telling you, that's what they say.

Gusty

Maybe one eye was so beautiful, the other couldn't stop looking at it.

Tommy

(Bursts out laughing.)

Except there's nothing beautiful about either one.

(Silence.)

Tommy

Did you know that swans mate for life, Gust?

Gusty

I've heard that.

Tommy

And when their mate dies, they never mate again.

Gusty

I didn't know that.

Tommy

'Tis wicked sad. There's a lake up in the west of Ireland, full of swans that lost their

mates and they're all alone for the rest of their lives. Even though there's male and female there, they swim away all day, all alone and never look for company. Doesn't that beat all, Gusty?

Gusty

That's their nature, I suppose.

Tommy

And take rabbits. They're at it day and night, what you were talking about, perp..pet...

Gusty

Perpetuating the species.

Tommy

They breed three times a year - and maybe more for all we know, and rarely the same pair.

Gusty

I suppose that's their nature, too.

Tommy

How do we fit in at all, Gust?

Gusty

We?

Tommy

How do we fit in?

Gusty

That's the big question.

Tommy

Are we like the rabbit or the swan?

Gusty  
(ponders )

I'd say we go from one extreme to the other and that's where the trouble starts. If we were one or the other, we'd be better off.

Tommy

You never married yourself, Gust?

Gusty

No, I never did.

Tommy

Did you ever nearly?

I did. I wanted to. Gusty

What happened? Tommy

Things didn't come together. Gusty

And you couldn't make them? Tommy

I couldn't. Gusty

If you wanted badly enough, you could have. Tommy

You could howl at the moon sometimes and it won't happen. (Silence) Gusty

Is it true that the good die young? Tommy

Ah, that's only a saying from the Westerns. Gusty

I love the Westerns. Tommy

Did you know Tyrone Powers people came from Kilmacthomas. Gusty

They're hardy down there. Tommy

You'd stumble over Powers down there. Gusty

We played them in a match once. They'd ate you with a pinch of salt. Tommy

They take it seriously, right enough. Gusty

You'd take your life in your hands playing them. Tommy

Gusty

It's like life or death for them. (pause) I used to sail with a young fella from there, a namesake of mine, Flynn but the spitting image of Tyrone Power. He could switch heads with him. His mother was a Power. It's strange how it stays in the family over generations.

Tommy

The looks?

Gusty

Did you hear about the Yank that came to Tallow?

Tommy

No.

Gusty

His people were gone for nearly a hundred years. They were Hickeys originally from just outside the town. Well, he was walking away down the town and an oul' fella comes up behind him and says to him: How long are you home for? And the Yank says, What do you mean? I'm from Oregon. And the oul' fella says, you're wan of the Hickeys. Well, the Yank was dumbfounded. And the Yank says, my grandmother was Ellen Hickey from Tallow. How the hell did you know? Arrah, he says, don't all you Hickeys walk funny. I'd know ye anywhere.

Tommy

Go 'way.

Gusty

I'm telling you. Sure, isn't it the same in Italy where Valentino came from, the men there the spitting image of him. And he died young, too.

Tommy

It's a pity the Briens wouldn't die young.

Gusty

One is worse than the other in that family.

Tommy

The badness will keep them going.

Gusty

I think 'twas vinegar they got in place of mother's milk.

Tommy

(Laughing.)

Maybe that's what happened.

(Silence.)

Tommy

Well, are you going to tell the story or what?

Gusty

Let me see now. (pause) In 1945, we set sail from Rosslare in the County of Wexford. The skipper was Swedish. Couldn't speak a word of English and day and night he marched up and down the deck, with big boots on him, cursing and muttering under his breath. I came on board with a wicked hangover and was sick for three days, a fierce storm blowing...

Tommy

(With a straight face.)

Bad porter, probably.

Gusty

...The three days felt like three weeks. I said to my mate, we must be near Cardiff by now and he said are you coddling me? We're four miles off Rosslare, haven't moved a mile in three days. The Irish Sea was like a Devil's cauldron, bubbling and boiling, spitting and spiteful. Waves breaking over the bow and the trough so deep I thought I could see the bottom. Hatches battened and head down we stayed quiet so as not to attract attention, for a storm is a vengeful creature and with the sea doing its bidding, unstoppable.....

(From offstage, we hear "Tommy, Tommy!")

Gusty

Whisht.(quiet) You're wanted.

(Peg enters, stands by the door. Gusty and

Tommy look at her. She walks over to

Tommy, puts her arms around him and tousles  
hair.)

his

Peg

It's time you went home, Tommy. I have a few things to talk over with Gusty.

Tommy

Will you be all right, Gusty? (Gusty nods) I'll drop by tomorrow.

(Tommy leaves. )

Gusty

I thought you'd be around.

Peg

(Silent for a while.)

It's not good for him to be spending so much time here.

Gusty

The gossips are at it.

Peg  
Did you not know they would?

Gusty  
They're like fleas in a bed. They'll always be with us.

Peg  
(Angrily.)  
So, we should ignore them?

Gusty  
Let them talk. After a while they find something else to talk about. That's how people are, Peg. Old news doesn't interest them.

Peg  
This old news does.

Gusty  
For a while, only for a while.

Peg  
(Bangs her hand angrily on table.)  
But they're raking up the old stuff, looking close at Tommy. I thought it was all done with.

Gusty  
You have nothing to be ashamed of. Your husband was a blackguard, and you gave him the run. When he was gone, we came together...

Peg  
But I do, when they pass me with a smirk on their inquisitive faces, whispering to each other, tongues wagging and heads nodding...

Gusty  
I suppose it takes their minds off their own troubles.

Peg  
...Mass and Communion in the morning and gossip all day after.

Gusty  
Some of them, true enough.

Peg  
Enough of them. They get a few curtains on the window, an indoor toilet and a bicycle outside the door and they walk around with their noses in the air.

Gusty



They're all damaged, Peg, survivors but damaged. There's eight hundred years of damage there.

Peg

That woman Brien and her snotty kids are the worst. A black cat has black kittens.  
(Long silence.)

Gusty

Are you keeping' your head above water?

Peg

(Looks resentfully at him.)

The allotment still comes from him. I take it day by day and when I can, I put a little aside for Christmas and his birthday.

Gusty

The boy's a credit to you.

Peg

No thanks to you, filling his head with yarns and half-truths about your exploits all over the world.

Gusty

There's no harm in those yarns.

Peg

But he's not listening to me. It's in one ear and out the other. I don't want him going to sea. I don't want that life for him.

Gusty

There was nothing else years ago. Half the village emigrated in the last twenty years, and it happens every generation.

Peg

I don't want the sea for him.

Gusty

It paid well. It was what my father and his father before him did - and your husband, Jimmy.

Peg

Jimmy should have drowned at sea and put us all out of our misery.  
(Silence.)

Gusty

He was no good.

Peg

A good for nothing.

Gusty

You married him.

Peg

You left. What was I to do?

Gusty

I said I'd be back. I didn't know when.

Peg

When they come back, they're old and useless.

Gusty

I wrote.

Peg

Twice. You wrote twice in what five or six years and never came back. I longed for news from you, anything, to tell me you hadn't forgotten, that you were thinking about me, us. I was running the farm, doing the work of two men, the mother and father getting old and feeble before my eyes.

Gusty

I was never much for writing.

Peg

I felt abandoned and worn out, my life an unending battle to see some future, feel some optimism.

Gusty

I couldn't say when I'd come, I kept thinking, another six months and I'll be set and something would happen – but I said I'd be back and you had a right to consider someone else.

Peg

It was you I wanted.

Gusty

And when he asked you, you said yes.

Peg

It was a way out, don't you understand. A woman with no dowry, stuck on a small farm, barely eking out a living. Jimmy was good-looking. He was always that. He could be charming. But he's as empty as a churn turned upside down, Jimmy is Jimmy's first priority. Our first night together, I knew I had made a terrible mistake.

Gusty

You should have waited.

Peg

He had no more sense than a chicken scratching in the yard. He spent money like a drunken sailor, which he was, most of the time. (Silence)

Gusty

If you only had waited.

Peg

If I only had waited. If you weren't blinded, you might still be sailing the seven seas.

Gusty

I couldn't say when I'd be back. I didn't know how long it would take.

Peg

You were nowhere near ready to give it up. Even then, it had a hold on you.

Gusty

There was nothing here. I had to stay with it for a while.

Peg

How much were you saving, Gust, and how much were you leaving in the shebeens out foreign?

Gusty

I was saving, but when a man works hard, he's entitled to a drink.

Peg

You'd still be out there

Gusty

No, no, Peg. I wanted you, dreamt about you, about settling down. That life at sea is for a young man. Make your money and get out. Maybe I wasn't as disciplined as I should have been. But I was making no money for the first few years. When we met, I was seventeen, just starting to make the good money.

Peg

You left me all alone, Gusty, all alone. (Silence)

Gusty

I did. I did and I can't go back and change it. (Peg rises, looks at him, makes a move towards him, then turns and leaves.)

## Scene 5

(Gusty is alone in cabin. Stormy pushes door open without knocking.)

Gusty

If it isn't the bould Stormy himself. You never knocked on a door in your life.

Stormy

Well, Gusty?

Gusty

What have you been up to?

Stormy

You're better off not knowing, in case you're ever called to testify.

Gusty

You're staying out of trouble?

Stormy

Trouble finds everybody, sooner or later. Didn't it find you, Gust.

Gusty

I have no complaints. I have a roof over my head, a few shillings to rattle in my pocket. What more would a man want?

Stormy

I wouldn't be happy in your position, blinded and all. It must be a terrible feeling – to wake up and the sight gone.

Gusty

A man adjusts. I can smell and taste and hear. When I hear a lark sing of a fine morning, I don't know if I'd give it up to see again.

Stormy

Arrah, go 'way. Is it coddling me you are? You mean if you had a choice, you'd rather be blind than deaf?

Gusty

Maybe.

Stormy

I'd break heads if it happened to me.

Gusty

No. There was no good shouting and screaming.

Stormy

I'd say you were fit to be tied.

Gusty

I wondered how I'd react, how I could compensate for the blindness.

Stormy

(Indignant)

How could you co-co-commisate for losing the sight in your eyes? Is it coddling me you are?

Gusty

You'd be surprised, Stormy, you'd be surprised.

Stormy

How would I be surprised?

Gusty

Right now as we're talking, you're about six feet away from me, looking around and taking everything in.

Stormy

(Jumping back)

Maybe.

Gusty

With your hands in your pockets, rocking back and forth.

Stormy

How the hell did you know that?

Gusty

My eyes are gone but my hearing is better than ever.

Stormy

You're having me on now, Gusty.

Gusty

So what brings you here?

Stormy

(Ignore Gusty's question.)

You were a tough man in the ring years ago, Gusty Flynn. I'd say you were good enough to make a career of it, once.

Gusty

"Twas only a passing interest.

Stormy

By God, you had a right hook that would floor a bullock

Gusty

I was young and strong, a bit too strong in the head at times.

Stormy

I took a couple of wallops myself from you – but that was a long time ago, before the blinding.

Gusty

You were contrary and a mouth on you.

Stormy

The mother always said, if you're pushed, push back and if you're fighting, hit first and hit often.

Gusty

Nothing wrong with that, if there's just cause, as the solicitors say.

Stormy

I make it just, just before I hit 'em. Ha ha.

Gusty

You know the old saying about living by the sword, don't you, Stormy. Well the same applies to fighting and violence. If you live by it, you'll die by it.

Stormy

(Coming over and leaning into Gusty.)

I'm prepared to take that chance.

Gusty

Well, you're consistent. I'll say that for you.

Stormy

And why wouldn't I? Who's to stop me, Gusty – nobody around here that I know of.

Gusty

There's always somebody. That's what you don't understand.

Stormy

Where is he? Point him out.

Gusty

Ah, Stormy, the oul' village would be a much quieter place if you only settled down, tried to get along with people.

Stormy

A bunch of hypocrites, the lot of them. They look down on my family. I know what

they're saying. The Briens do this and the Briens do that. Oh, the Briens, they'd steal the eye out of your head. The Briens are nothing but thieves and trouble makers. Because I work for no man but myself...

Gusty

Doing what, Stormy?

Stormy

None of your damn business. We make an honest living, we do. Everything that's stolen around here, oh it's the Briens. Sure what would you expect, aren't they half tinkers? I know what's being said about us. They haven't the guts to say it to my face because if they did, I'd stick a fist down their throats. I'm sick and tired of them all, knowing they lie behind my back and none with the courage to say it to my face.

Gusty

If you leave them alone, they'll leave you alone.

Stormy

They better, or they'll regret it

Gusty

There you go again, threatening and blustering. You should try living the righteous life, help your neighbor, be kind to the less fortunate.

Stormy

Like you, is it, Gust. You're less fortunate. A man blinded in his prime is less fortunate, I'd say.

Gusty

No, I consider myself a fortunate man. Things could be worse, a lot worse.  
(Stormy is walking around, fingering objects  
and checking out the contents of the cabin.)

Gusty

Keep your hands in your pockets, Stormy.

Stormy

And if I don't, what will you do about it? Do you realize you're blind, man? You don't talk to me like that. "Keep your hands in your pockets, Stormy". Are you calling me a thief? Is that what you're saying?

Gusty

(Sarcastically)

You better be on your way. Your mother will be looking for you.

Stormy

(Angrily)

Leave my mother out of this. You don't talk about my mother, okay?

Gusty  
(Resignedly)

Okay, Stormy.

Stormy

Now, the reason I stopped by is I know that Boylan youngfella spends a lot of time up here with you. That's his business and your business. But that youngfella has a mouth on him that never stops. Tell him to stay away from my brother, Mickey. If they tangle again, he'll answer to me.

Gusty

If you lay a hand on him, you'll answer to me.

Stormy

If he as much as looks crooked at Mickey, I'll lay a hand on him and (pause.) I'll deal with you.

Gusty

You'll deal with me, Stormy.

Stormy

I will and take my chances.

Gusty

You're too cocky. It's been too long since you took a beating.

Stormy  
(Laughs.)

It's been so long, Gusty boy, that I don't remember when. But I'm in shape, I'll tell you that.

Gusty

You spent a bit of time in jail, lately.

Stormy

I did, and worked the bags there, too.

Gusty

How was it?

Stormy

A bunch of lachicos, dossers, every one of them. Drunk and disorderly's, most of them. One yoke, they called him the small bottle king. He'd get drunk on a small bottle of Guinness. Imagine that. I don't know what the country is coming to, at all.

Gusty

They're not as hardy as they used to be, right enough.



Stormy

They should be ashamed to call themselves Irishmen. (Beat.) Now, Gusty, I'm telling you because I have respect for you. Keep that youngfella away from the Briens, or there'll be hell to pay.

Gusty

I'll handle him. If you have any complaints, come to me.

Stormy

Once and once only, I'm telling you. Now good day to you, Gusty.

## SCENE 6

(Peg in her kitchen. Tommy comes in.)

Peg

I wish you wouldn't spend all your time at Gusty's, son.

(Tommy says nothing, looking out the window, like Gusty)

Tommy

He's my friend and he needs me.

Peg

He likes to be independent. He manages well enough on his own.

Tommy

He's lonely, too.

Peg

What do ye talk about?

Tommy

He has a great way with a story.

Peg

I don't know if he's spinning tall tales half the time, with those stories of all the places he's been and all the things he's done.

Tommy  
(Defiantly.)

Gusty is no liar.

Peg

He embellishes.

Tommy

He's not that either.

Peg

We seem to spend more time arguing than talking lately. There was a time we could talk for hours, when you were smaller; you spouting off to beat the band. I liked you better then.

(Peg goes over and stands behind Tommy and puts her arms around him)

Could we be like that again?

Tommy

I'm not small anymore.

Peg

I'm worried about everything, you and me, money, this place, the future.

Tommy

We'll be alright.

Peg

I think I should be doing something - to secure our future, and I don't know what to do. I get a feeling something bad is going to happen. I don't know what or when. I feel like taking you and running away, somewhere, anywhere. I worry when you're out of my sight. And when you walk out the door, I think is this the last time I'll see him.

Tommy

Ah, that's madness.

Peg

It is, but I can't shake it.

(Peg draws closer and holds him in her arms)

You're staying clear of the Briens?

Tommy

I have no business with them.

Peg

They're best avoided. They never stop scheming from one minute to the next, Stormy just out of jail and bulling for trouble.

Tommy

What was he in for?

Peg

Blackguarding, what else.

(long silence)

I wish our lives were better. I wish so much for you, that your life be good, that you'll be happy. God, happiness, so tough to find, and tougher for a woman in this day and age. Men have some say in their destiny; they can sail in ships, study for any trade or profession, bred to be wage earners. But what does a woman have, unless she's rich and a rich woman in her own right is as rare as a dodo bird. There's such inequality in the world. I don't know if we'll ever get it straightened out.

Tommy

When I'm working, we'll be on the pigs back. Wouldn't you like to travel, to see some of the places Gusty saw? I can't wait.

Peg

I suppose I would, eventually. Now all I want is a bit of security and to see you fixed up and having a good life. You might have to go away to have it. There's not much here and nothing much on the horizon. But God is good.

Tommy

If you had plenty of money and you could have anything you wanted, what would it be?

Peg

I think I'd have a little bake shop, bread and scones, jam tarts, apple and blackberry pies. I love to bake - when I have the time and the money - the kneading of the dough, mixing the ingredients. There's something about baking that settles me no matter how bad things are.

Tommy

It's the only time I hear you sing.

Peg

There must be something about it.

Tommy

You'd be a good bake shop woman. You make great cakes and soda bread. And you're good at making ends meet, too.

Peg

But if I was rich, I'd want to sing.

Tommy

To sing for a living! Is it coddling me, you are.

Peg

I used to sing. There were great sean-nos singers on my mother's side and I used to get compliments on my singing years ago.

Tommy

But who makes money singing?

Peg

If “ifs” and “ands” were kettles and pans, there wouldn't be a need for tinkers. (pause)  
Did you ever hear of Turlough O' Carolan?

Tommy

Who?

Peg

I don't know what they teach ye in school. Ye know every battle, none of which we won.....

Tommy

And what about the battle of Clontarf in 1014 when Brian Boru defeated the Vikings and Patrick Sarsfield and Hugh O'Donnell and Hugh O'Neill. What about them?

Peg

We make more out of losing than winning, boy, and dying. Another martyr for the cause. We have them lining up to be martyrs. Anyway, O' Carolan was a blind harpist who composed hundreds of tunes and became famous throughout Ireland.

Tommy

I never heard of him.

Peg

He was born in sixteen hundred and something - the seventeenth century and the music he made, it was as if it came straight from Heaven. I heard it years ago when I was very young.

Tommy

If he was so good, why isn't he famous?

Peg

Because he didn't die for Ireland. He got smallpox when he was 18. It blinded him so his mother bought him a harp and apprenticed him. When he was 21, she gave him a horse and a bit of money and he set off to make his own living.

(Peg looking into the distance. It's quiet for a moment or two.)

Tommy

She was a wise woman.

Peg

He played at all the big houses throughout the land, composing as he went. In 1738, I believe it was, he came back to his patron. All musicians had patrons then. That's how they survived. Painters too. He was sick and knew he didn't have much time so he wrote his last composition 'Farewell To Music', took to his bed and died. That tune would bring tears from a turnip.

Tommy

Could we hear it sometime?

Peg

I wish I could. But there are few musicians playing, anymore.

(Pause.)

They've made us ashamed of that kind of music. The young people aren't interested.

Tommy

I'll be working in a few years and I'll be sending money home, Peg. I'll get that music for you, and plenty more too. We'll have a good life yet, the two of us and there'll be no more struggling. As soon as I start working, we'll want for nothing in this house.

Peg

What trade or profession will you choose?

Tommy

If I go to sea...

Peg

Oh for God's sake, forget about the sea. The good jobs at sea are gone. Even Gusty will admit that.

Tommy

We'll see, we'll see. I'll make my way okay. I'll not be throwing my money around and I'll save something every week

Peg

Ah, we'll be alright. I should be more optimistic and not be throwing cold water on everything. How will the good times ever come if we can't imagine them and dream them.

Tommy  
(Reflecting.)

Were you ever in Killarney or up the Clare coast? They say it's nice there. We could visit, maybe take Gusty with us? He's stuck up in that cottage when the weather's bad. He doesn't get out much.

Peg

He seems happy enough. He wants no pity from us or anybody else. He's proud and stubborn.

Tom

Sure he's stubborn as a mule

Peg

Did you ever wonder why the Earth is round? Why all the other planets are round? I often think about it. There's some message there for us. What does it all mean? Our life is round, too, circular. We start out helpless, little babies and end up helpless, old and worn out, with no more strength than we started out with. But in between we become strong, and forget that we were weak and little once, and relied on others to survive. Some of us become cruel and arrogant. There's the temptation that God puts in our way. We forget so easily that we were helpless and will be again. We know only the present, feel our strength and try to impose on others. But somewhere, somehow, we have to answer for how we live our lives. What goes around, comes around.

Tommy

D'ye know what Gusty said just the other day?

Peg

What did your friend Gusty say?

Tommy

He said - and this will be a test of your Irish - fiche blian ag fas, fiche blian faoi bhliath, fiche blian faoi neart, fiche blian ag dul arais.

Peg

Twenty years a-growing, twenty years in flower, twenty years in strength, twenty years returning.

Tommy

There's the circle again.

Peg

That's in the Celtic tradition. That's why they put a circle on the Christian cross. They saw everything in a circle, from the dawn of the day to darkness and dawn again. And the seasons of the year passing, repeating themselves, it seems forever.

Tommy

What goes around, comes around.

Do unto others...

Peg

We answer to God?

Tommy  
(pause)

Whoever. Life is a mystery and the mystery won't be revealed till we go.

Peg

You mean Heaven or Hell.

Tommy

I don't know. It's a mystery.

Peg

Sure I learned all that in Catechism.

Tommy

All I'm saying is do the best you can...

Peg

Do you think your mother and father is in Heaven?

Tommy

I don't know. I hope so. They deserve a bit of peace.

Peg

You don't go much to the grave. Were they hard on you?

Tommy

No, not really. They just came from a different time.

Peg

I never knew them.

Tommy

You didn't. She was wrapped up in the religion but she was a kind woman. He was all taken up with the little bit of land he had – poured everything he had into it, gave him nothing only heartache. The Irish and land, a bad combination. There's many would eat their young for land.

Peg

But they were good people.

Tommy

Peg

They were good stock. They worked hard and they prayed.

Tommy

But my father was no good. He didn't come from good stock...

(Pause.)

...I could never be like him – could I?

Peg

Oh, son, son – you're better than him, much better. There's nothing of Jimmy in you, nothing, do you hear me. There are things I'll explain someday, about Jimmy and me. Some day we'll sit down and talk, a good talk you and me. But you're nothing like Jimmy. You have Gusty's gentleness.

Tommy

From all the time I spend up there, I suppose. (Pause) Do you like Gusty, Peg?

Peg

He's a good man. Why do you ask?

Tommy

Well, I enjoy his company and...

Peg

(Interrupting.)

So?

Tommy

(laughing)

So, he wouldn't be a bad catch for you. He has the cottage a...

Peg

I'm married, Tommy. I can't be with another man. Don't you know your religion?

Tommy

I do, I do but what if Jimmy's – dead?

Peg

And what if he came back tomorrow? What then?

Tommy

I'm not living with him. If he moves in, I move out, I'm telling you Peg.

Peg

I won't be living with him and he won't be moving in, not after the way he treated us. But I'm married to him and there's no divorce.

Tommy

I wish there was.



Peg

You marry and you stay married till death, that's the way it is.

## Scene 7

(Gusty sitting by the window, whittling on a piece of wood. Tommy is sweeping the floor with a broomstick.)

Gusty

You never asked about my eyes.

Tommy

I didn't.

Gusty

Why not?

Tommy

I said to myself, when he's good and ready, he'll tell me.

Gusty

It seems such a long time ago, like I've been blind forever. But I remember when and how, the sights, the smells, like it was happening in slow motion, expressions on faces, the last faces I saw... We were in a bar in Cairo, four of us, two Jose's, myself and Sammy, who had just signed on. I didn't know much about him and hadn't drank with him. Seemed like he was okay, quiet, a very quiet man. But he couldn't drink and when he did, he got ugly. He was an ugly drunk. Three drinks, three mind you, and he's cursing and swearing all around him. I warned him, he quieted down, then he started up again. Somebody insulted him, and he wanted satisfaction. Soon the whole bar was at it and wouldn't you know he couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag. Someone threw a pitcher of hot oil at Sammy. He ducked and it hit me in the face.

Tommy

Must have burned the face off you.

Gusty

'Twas like sticking my face into a pot of boiling water. An old man there put a salve on my face. Last face I ever saw, making signs over me, looking into my eyes and shaking his head.

Tommy

You never sailed again?

Gusty

The face healed but the eyes were gone. After a month in the hospital, they shipped me

home - a small pension. I was forty one years old. My sailing days were over. (Silence)

Tommy

You're happy enough here, aren't you?

Gusty

Why would I be complaining? Haven't I all I want here. I enjoy whittling the wood and I'm getting better all the time.

Tommy

But you still miss the sea?

Gusty

Divil a care I have here.

Tommy

But you still miss the sea?

Gusty

(exasperated)

Tell me a man that sailed and didn't miss the sea. It gets in your blood, it's there forever and when your people sailed for generations, more so.

Tommy

You don't want me going.

Gusty

If it gets a hold of you, it never lets go.

Tommy

You're saying what Peg wants.

Gusty

I'm telling you what I believe. It's a hard life in many ways, hard on wives and children.

Tommy

The money is good.

Gusty

For now. But they're taking on more and more unskilled and paying less. They don't tie knots, furl sails, climb rigging anymore.

Tommy

Why did you come back?

Gusty

I thought maybe someone...(Silence) Why did I come back? That's a good question. There were warmer and cheaper places I could have hung my hat. But as a man gets

older, he's drawn back to where he came from. It's like the salmon, coming back to where they started. I wanted to be buried with my people, I suppose. Don't think I didn't consider other places. But that's the way it's been, forever it seems. The men from this village go to sea at fourteen, spend their youth away and come home to die. It's as simple as that.

(Silence.)

Tommy

You think I should stay in school?

Gusty

I know you should stay in school.

Tommy

Gusty, I hate school. The teachers have their pets. Headmaster Foley looks at me like I have the plague or haven't washed for a week. If he sees a hole in the arse of my pants, he calls me up and shows it to the whole class.

Gusty

And haven't you?

Tommy

What?

Gusty

Washed in a week.

Tommy  
(Indignantly)

And Peg making sure I scrub myself 'til I think my skin will fall off.

Gusty

I'm only pulling your leg. Your mother is the cleanest woman I've come across in all my travels.

Tommy

Where I'm concerned, she is.

(Silence.)

Gusty

I wouldn't steer you wrong, Tommy.

Tommy

But you'd go along with Peg?

Gusty

Only if she's right.

Tommy

I'll leave this place sometime, I'll have to, for the money isn't here. But if I leave, she'll be all alone. She'll have money though, I promise that.

Gusty

When you finish school, you'll know better.

Tommy

Maybe. (silence)

Gusty

Isn't this a grand little cabin, Tommy?

Tommy

(Gets up and walks around.)

And a grand spot, too.

Gusty

Augustine Flynn, my grandfather built it in 1865, with his own hands - thatched the roof, too. Do you see that grandfather clock? He brought that back from Germany, must weigh ten stone or more. He signed off in Liverpool, I believe, took it across to Cork Harbour, onto the bus, into Waterford City, changed for the bus here and on his back a three mile hike up the hill to the cabin.

Tommy

By God, he must have been some man.

Gusty

It hasn't missed a tick since.

(Pause.)

A great man on the fiddle, too, they say. That's his fiddle on the wall.

Tommy

You didn't inherit any talent for it, that's for sure. I heard you one evening and I approaching the cabin.

Gusty

(Laughs.)

I tried till I was blue in the face, to play the damn thing.

Tommy

I thought it was all the cats in the village in there scratching and fighting.

Gusty

It's strange. Look at Mikey Downey who's missing more than a little at the best of times but can coax music out of that fiddle that would bring tears to any eye.

Tommy

What about your father Thomas?

Gusty

I never knew him. He died young, consumption, they say. May he rest in peace.

(Tommy and Gusty bow their heads for a moment).

Mikey used to get the messages for him. My father loved fresh bread, with the steam coming out of it. He'd cut a slice for Mikey with butter a quarter inch thick and sprinkle sugar on top of that. Whoever got the messages for him got the slice of bread all done up with the butter and sugar. He was a good man, by all accounts.

Tommy

He's up in Heaven right now, Gusty. You had a brother?

Gusty

No, no brothers or sisters. My mother died fifteen years after.

Tommy

They're down in the graveyard?

Gusty

They are, under the sea wall. A wet spot when the tide is high and the waves break over, which is often the case. But that's the family plot. That's where we go, generations of Flynns and Youngs buried there.

Tommy

The mother's name was Young?

Gusty

Aye.

Tommy

That's life, boy.

Gusty

We're born, cause a bit of damage, decline and die.

(Silence)

Tommy

I do enjoy the oul (old) chat with you, Gusty.

Gusty

And I suppose you're better than talking to myself.

Tommy

Sure, isn't myself and Peg like family to you, and if I didn't come, who would?

Gusty

(Sarcastically.)

I'd wither away if you didn't come. Anyway, away with you before Peg comes looking for you.

Tommy

I'll see you tomorrow.

## Scene 8

(Gusty alone in cabin. Tommy enters.)

Tommy

Had a bit of a run in with the Widow.

Gusty

You did?

Tommy

Crossed the road to confront me. She was ranting and raving about me attacking her Mikey. But I stayed real calm, like you said, Gusty. I said to her, Mrs Brien, I'd never lift a hand to strike another - unless I was provoked and your Mikey provoked me. And she said, how was that? And I said, how was what? I was having a bit of fun with her.

Gusty

The wrong people to have a bit of fun with.

Tommy

She said, how were you provoked? I could see the anger in her, mean and vicious looking, the bad eye rotating like mad. So I said he had me up against the wall, so close that when he spoke, he was spitting into my face. So I defended myself as any man has a right to. Sure, you're not a man, she said to me in a contemptuous tone. You're only a boy, a poor skinny, ugly excuse for a boy, and I said, I might be poor and skinny, Missus, but ugly I never was. And she said, you will, you will when the Briens are finished with you, Mr High and Mighty. You'll be very ugly, for you'll be cut all over with maybe a few teeth missing into the bargain, and you won't have as much guff out of you, I'll bet. So I said to her, well, Missus, if you're meant to hang, you'll never drown and I walked away whistling before she could say another word.

Gusty

Provoking her won't help the situation.

Tommy

I was well able for her, though.

Gusty

You had plenty of oul' guff, like she said.

Tommy

So what was I supposed to do, run away with my tail between my legs?

Gusty

No, but steer clear of them, they're bad.

Tommy

'Tis not New York or Singapore we're talking about, 'tis only a small village. How can I avoid them?

Gusty

Just use your best judgement, that's all I'm saying.

Tommy

(Smiling.)

Guess who this is?

(Tommy gets up , puts Gustys old gaberdine

on, sticks hands in pockets, sways as if drunk, a  
bit of chalk sticking from corner of mouth)

Who was the man... Who was the man who rode... Who was the man who rode the white horse....

(Swaying.)

...across the bridge... Who was the man who rode the white horse across the red bridge...

( Tommy paused, swayed, cocked his head,  
opened his gaberdine, swaying dangerously.

His voice grows stronger.)

Who was the man who rode the white horse across the red bridge at midnight on Christmas Eve? It was I....

Gusty

Poor John Paul Casey.

Tommy

Drunk as a lord, he was.

Gusty

Home from England and drunk every day till he boards the train heading back.

Tommy

I've never seen him sober.

Gusty

No good to his family.

Why do they get that way, Gusty? Tommy

I suppose different reasons. Gusty

He's drinking but he's not enjoying it. Tommy

Stopped enjoying it, a long time ago. Gusty

He throws money around like water. Tommy

The drink is a curse when a man can't control it. Gusty

Or a woman. Tommy

Or a woman... How's Peg? Gusty

She seems better. I heard her humming to herself the other day. Tommy

It's awhile since that happened. Gusty

The first time in a long time. Tommy

She has a lovely voice. Gusty

I never heard her sing. Tommy

You never heard her sing? Gusty

She said a dream of hers was to be a singer. But I thought she couldn't sing. Tommy

If she's in a good mood, ask her to sing "My Lagan Love". Gusty



That's a powerful song, but hard to sing. Tommy

She sings it as good as the best. Gusty

Did you ever hear 'Michael Dwyer'? Tommy

The poem? Gusty

I'll give you a little blast, if you want. Tommy

And you won't charge me for the privilege?  
(Tommy begins to recite)  
At length, brave Michael Dwyer, he and his trusty men.... Gusty

Good man yourself. Gusty  
(claps)

How was it? Tommy

There's a bit of talent there alright. Gusty

That's a great poem. Tommy

And you did it justice. Gusty

Here, put them in your pocket. Gusty  
(taking some coins out)

What, for the recitation? Tommy

No, just because I feel like it. Gusty

I can't take it. Tommy

Gusty  
Take it. Can't a man spend his money foolishly?

Tommy  
You didn't have to, you know.

Gusty  
(exasperated)  
If I had to, I wouldn't. Go buy yourself a bottle of lemonade and a few sweets and enjoy them.

Tommy  
Are you going soft on me, now Gusty?

Gusty  
(laughing)  
I'll go hard on you with a boot up your arse, if that's what you need. Remember, tiptoe round the Briens.

Tommy  
Right you are sez I as I tiptoe out the door.  
(Tommy exaggerates tiptoeing out he door. Gusty shakes his head in a gesture of resignation)  
(Peg enters, agitated. Gusty alone in cabin.)

Peg  
I'll strangle that woman one of these days. Sometimes I think she's the devil herself.

Gusty  
The widow Brien.

Peg  
Told me that Tommy attacked her little Mikey.

Gusty  
He's twice the size.

Peg  
She didn't want her youngfella associated with "people like us." That everybody knew....

Gusty  
(interrupts her angrily)  
She gossips from dawn to dusk, that woman, the original bad apple.

Peg  
I'm afraid for Tommy. They're worse than the tinkers.

Gusty

We must tell him, Peg.

Peg

Back then I was like Tommy, running to you with my troubles. You were the one keeping me sane. I spent too much time here and now it's coming back to hurt my little boy. That marriage was such a mistake.

Gusty

But the boy wasn't. (pause) Why did you you ever take Jimmy back?

Peg

Why, why, why. He told me that we were married for eternity, in the eyes of the church, that God would punish Tommy for my sins. He wanted us to be a family and if I gave him a second chance, he would be a better husband and father. He beseeched my mother and my mother beseeched me. It was all I heard. In the eyes of God, I was married to this man and we should work it out. We must work it out.

Gusty

A tramp he was, always and ever.

Peg

There are things that can never be worked out. He was worse than ever, drinking and carousing with his cronies every chance he got and my mother telling me, let him sow his wild oats. Hated the boy, kicked him if he got in the way and otherwise ignored him.

Gusty

I didn't know. I should have been there to protect the boy.

Peg

He knew he wasn't the father and he had that over me. If he played the father, I'd put up with him. I took it for as long as I could, but he was wearing me down and I was losing hope so I confronted him and put him out.

Gusty

But he didn't make it public, just left like that?

Peg

He was gone the next day, going on two years now and there's not a day passes that I fear he'll walk in my door again.

Gusty

I wish I had known.

Peg

I was all alone, trying to protect my son. You were on the high seas, in touch with no one, doing whatever you were doing, dead for all I knew. (pause) You weren't much help. Not as much as a farthing. (Gusty remains silent)

You had the allotment

Gusty

I did, but without it I was on the thin edge of starvation.

Peg

But you had it.

Gusty

There were times when I was barely making it You're a strange man, Augustine Flynn, a good man with fine ways, strong but with a gentle way about you, different than the rest. But you sat up here in your cosy little cabin and never inquired if we were eating good or bad or not at all.

Peg

Tommy would have let me know.

Gusty

What?

Peg

If ye were having difficulties

Gusty

Couldn't you talk to me? Didn't you have a tongue in your head?

Peg

Easy, now, Peg, easy.

Gusty

Easy now, Peg, easy, he says. Do you know how hard it was for me? Then you came back but stayed away. How I wanted to run up, to lay my head on a shoulder, have someone hold me and comfort me.

Peg

I didn't want to interfere. You had enough trouble with the bad marriage and he then leaving.

Gusty

His leaving was the best part of the marriage.

Peg

It was what you wanted, that I keep my distance.

Gusty

But what we had between us, did it mean anything to you, did it?

Peg

Gusty  
We were doing it your way.

Peg  
(slump)  
I know, I know.

Gusty  
(softly)  
I wish you had come to my cabin, you and the boy.

Peg  
I was so sure then the way it had to be. I couldn't leave one to live under another man's roof.

Gusty  
Married to one and sleeping with the other.

Peg  
(hotly)  
Yes, and the whole village disapproving. They would have taken it out on Tommy.

Gusty  
We'd be together and they'd get used to it

Peg  
If you only knew how much I wanted that. This cabin was my sanctuary. I prayed that some day, somehow, things would work out and we'd be together, the three of us taking care of and loving each other. I prayed 'twould happen soon before this God-forsaken place changed me into something I didn't like, before it squeezed out...

Gusty  
Easy now, Peg.

Peg  
....every ounce of love and compassion left in me. But I couldn't. They would have made his life miserable. (Gusty begins to pace, agitated. Peg rocks back and forth, sitting on a stool, staring into space.)

Gusty  
He'd have handled it. He'd have a real father. And you, were you not entitled?

Peg  
(Speaks in a monotone)  
I had big dreams and great expectations once, a good man to love and be loved by, a little house - and children.....

Gusty

And you made a mistake. Don't we all, Peg?

Peg

...When I told my mother, she said put those daydreams out of your head, child. God put us on this earth to suffer, and if we don't suffer, we don't enter heaven....

Gusty

Don't we have the right to a bit of peace and happiness? What kind of God would deny us that? Ha, what kind of God?

Peg

...We must embrace pain and suffering, she said. Life is, and should be, hard work and sacrifice till the day we die. (pause) She wasn't far wrong.

Gusty

Where did this God come from, this vengeful, merciless God? He's not the God I pray to.

Peg

What luck did your God bring to you, Gusty? What God would blind a man in the prime of his life.

Gusty

I hold no grudge. Nobody twisted my arm. We make our bed and we lie in it.

Peg

I'm tired of lying in my bed.

Gusty

(Animated, strides over to where Peg is sitting)

Peg, it doesn't have to be like this. You loved a strong, young man once, and that man looked in your eyes and said he loved you back. That man can look in your eyes no more, but he loves you no less.

Peg

Oh, Gusty. Do you mean that? Is there still a chance – for us, for the three of us. Surely there's some place we can go, to live in peace, to watch our son grow strong with love and security and a father who loves and honors him. Is there a chance, Gusty?

Gusty

Peg, (pause) the allotment, the monthly allotment from the bank in Dublin...

Peg

( interrupting and speaking slowly)

It - was - you. Of course, now it makes sense. It was never Jimmy. His nature was to take, and take and take. He wasn't a giver. And it wasn't your nature to standby and do nothing.

Gusty

I wouldn't let you down, Peg.

Peg

It makes my heart sing that it was you, Gusty.

Gusty

I'll sell this cabin and we'll move. It doesn't matter where. We'll get a little place and we'll have money enough. The pension will be more than sufficient. Why did it take me so long to figure that out. We can be together, the three of us, if that's what you want.

Peg

It's all I ever wanted. Do you really mean it, Gusty, do you? But you couldn't sell this cabin? This is where your father and his father before him lived. It'd be like trampling on their graves.

Gusty

Sure they're gone now and it's not where I'm living that's bothering them, I'm fairly certain. And didn't they move from somewhere else to come here, didn't they?

Peg

But it can't be that easy. If it was, why didn't we do it before?

Gusty

Because we didn't hope, didn't dream, didn't work to make the dream come true. Maybe we believed too much in that vengeful God. We let life happen when we should have made it happen. Maybe I didn't want to leave the cabin, didn't know if a fine woman like you would want a blind man. Don't you see, Peg. I've wanted you and the boy to be with me forever and yet sat on my arse, smoked my pipe and did shag all. We still have a few good years left and what we do with them is up to us.

( Gusty walks over and puts on the gramophone. He turns to Peg )

Gusty

We haven't danced together in a long while.

Peg

And I haven't danced since.

Gusty

( Put his hands to Peg's face and feels her face)

You're a sight for sore eyes.

Peg

A nice compliment from a blind man.

Gusty

I see you as clear now as the first time I laid eyes on you. I smell the same clean smell.

Peg  
Hold me, hold me and stop your raimeising\* (going-on\*)  
(They dance for a few minutes.)

Gusty  
Will you come with me, you and Tommy?

Peg  
(embraces him.)  
To the ends of the earth, my fine man, to the ends of the earth.

## SCENE 9

(Commotion on street - off-stage.)  
Tommy is brought in on a stretcher, Peg is by his side. He's bleeding from a severe cut to the forehead and is convulsing.

Gusty  
What happened?

Peg  
Stormy attacked him in the street.....

Gusty  
How did it start?

Peg  
He just walked up to him and started beating him with an Ash plant and him shouting "Whoever lays a hand on a Brien, dies." It was over in seconds.

Gusty  
And nobody helped the boy?

Peg  
I heard the commotion, saw the crowd gathered, never knowing that it was my Tommy involved, and when I got there, Stormy was walking away, twirling his stick, like it was nothing, like he had slapped at a cow.....

Gusty  
(interrupting)  
Did they call the doctor?



Peg

...I screamed at him, what had he done to my boy, but he walked away whistling....

Gusty

Peg,.....

Peg

...proud, he was, as if he had done some great deed..

Gusty

Listen to me. Did they call Doctor Casey?

Peg

She's on her way. He'll be all right, won't he, Gusty? He will. Tommy is as tough as nails. He fell off the sea wall last May and bounced up like he was made of rubber.

Gusty

He'll be all right.

Peg

But he looks terrible, as white as a ghost and covered in blood. His breathing is so shallow. That's not a bad sign, is it? Is it? It's not, is it, Gusty?

Gusty

Go run and hurry up the doctor. I'll be with him. Go on, go on.

Peg

I will, I will, and I'll get a clean shirt for him. Have you soap and everything here?

Gusty

I have. Go on with you. Bring the shirt and the doctor.

(Peg exits. Tommy is deathly still.)

Are you with me, Tommy boy? (long pause)

Tommy

I'm alright, Gust.

Gusty

You'll be all right. I'll straighten out Stormy for you.

Tommy

I got an awful pain in my head. I can't see right.

Gusty

Stay with me now, Tommy, stay with me. The doctor is on his way.

Tommy

Oh God, the pain. He did a job on me, Gusty. Why did he have to beat me like that? I

can't see too good, Gusty. Help me. What's happening to me?

Gusty

I have something to tell you, Tommy, something I should have told you a long time ago.

Tommy

(Calmer now)

Tell me something good, Gusty, like you'll take care of Peg – if anything happens to me.

Gusty

Peg and I were together years ago, and we loved each other very much.

(Tommy starts to moan and shake and suddenly slumps in Gusty's arms.)

Peg will tell you when she comes. I should have told you a long time ago. I wanted to, I did, Peg will tell you. But she said it would be better for you if people didn't know. How I wanted to hold you and tell you the whole story, how we met, Peg and I, and fell in love. Do you know the first time I laid eyes on her? It was down in the Cove and she was swimming, in the early morning. She'd go down there often, no one around and swim away to her heart's content. She loved to swim. Did you know that? She was coming out of the water, when I saw her for the first time. My heart jumped in my chest. I've seen beautiful women in my day but she beat them all. The sun was coming over the horizon behind her, making a halo round her head. Like a Goddess, she was. I thought it must be an apparition or a mirage and then, as she came closer, I saw that it was no mirage. Oh Tommy, you should have seen your mother then, full of the devil, always smiling and sunny. We were so right for each other, from the start. I should have married her then. But I was young and stupid, reluctant to give up the sea and lost her. She was married when I got back and you know the rest. It's going to be okay, now, Tommy. We'll be together, the way it should have been from the beginning and forever, the three of us. We'll be like the Three Musketeers, boy, all for one and one for all. We'll get a nice little cabin, somewhere by the sea, too. And we'll live as happy as the day is long. I'll make it happen, I promise you that. You're my son and I can call you that now, and no man prouder. Oh, we'll have good times. We never went fishing together, did we? Well, we will, we will and we'll walk the hills and talk away like we do. When we come back, Peg will be waiting at the door with a big jug of milk for us, her smiling, seeing her two men together. She'll have the table set with a big pigs head, cabbage and spuds and tell us to mind our manners as women do and bless ourselves before we eat. Then we'll sit down, the three of us, with the lamp lighting, a big fire burning and the noise of the waves breaking on the rocks outside. We'll be eating right then, Tommy boy. (pause) Tommy, don't go, don't leave us now.....Tommy, Tommy.....

(Gusty lets out a howl of despair.)

**SCENE 10**

(Gusty all alone in cottage. Door opens)

Gusty

The man that never knocks.

(Stormy enters silently from the side.)

Stormy

I got the word you were looking for me.

Gusty

You killed a small boy and took a son away from me. You had no right.

Stormy

Well, you finally owned up to what everybody knew. Wasn't he the spitting image of you.

Gusty

A big strong man beat up a small boy. You must be very proud.

Stormy

He beat my brother up, so he had it coming. Nobody lays a hand on a Brien. You were warned right here in this very place, not long ago, so don't blame me.

Gusty

And I said that you'd answer to me.

(Stormy starts to move around the cabin.

Gusty pivots to follow his movement.)

Stormy

It's over, blind man. The boy wasn't meant to die. It happened, so let it be.

Gusty

You'll spend time in jail.

Stormy

(Laughs)

I'll be on the train to Rosslare in two hours. In two days I'll be sailing up the English Channel.

Gusty

What about the Guards (Police.)?

Stormy

They know I'm going. They'll come lookin' after I'm gone.

Gusty

There are witnesses.

Stormy

Not by the time it comes to trial. The Guards know that, too.

Gusty

Then you'll be judged and sentenced here.

Stormy

Cop on, Gusty. Did I ever tell you about the last bastard I gave a beating to. It was in the port of Marseille....

Gusty

I know Marseille.

Stormy

I thought you would. You and me are birds of a feather, hung around the same hellholes...

Gusty

Don't ever say we're alike.

Stormy

...and he came at me with a knife, full of drink he was but as yellow as a whipped cur. He had a score to settle, he said. I gave him a beating years ago, he said. So I gave him another beating but this time slow and methodical. He went to the hospital and never came out of it and it was self-defense. He had the knife and I was defending myself. Do you know his name, Gusty? (Pause) It was Jimmy, your girl-friends husband. Now didn't I do you a favor, Gusty? You should be down on your knees thanking me. Now you can hook up with her.

Gusty

When did this happen?

Stormy

Does it matter when? It happened. I saw his body in the morgue

Gusty

Why didn't you let Peg know?

Stormy

Ah, she'd be upset with me, for causing her husband's death. She'd be crying and carrying on, wouldn't she? Or would she?

Gusty

She didn't have much time for him but she wouldn't want him dead.

Stormy

How about you, Gusty? Didn't I do you a big favor?

Gusty

You didn't do it for me.

Stormy

No, but it clears the way – for you and Peg.

Gusty

(Get up and goes to Stormy)

You killed my son, a small boy starting out on his life and you'll pay for it.

Stormy

You'll have another, maybe more than one.

Gusty

Are you going to fight or talk?

Stormy

How can I fight a blind man. If I tie one hand behind my back and go to my knees, would that help, would it, blind man?

(They begin to circle. Gusty takes a stick from the corner and smashes the lamp. The room is dimly lit.)

Stormy

Nice move but it won't help. Make your mind up and quick. What happened, happened. Give the word and I'll walk out the door, otherwise you're a dead man, like that sheevra of yours.

Gusty

You'll suffer the consequences. You're in my world, now and you better kill or be killed.

Stormy

One down and one to go.

(Stormy rushes at Gusty, who steps aside easily. Gusty moves confidently in the dark. Stormy is becoming wilder, more desperate as time passes. There's an element of fear in his movements. Gusty bides his time. As Stormy rushes in, Gusty strikes him in the throat. He collapses, twitches and is still.)

Gusty

(Kneels by him.)

You didn't want to die, did you, and it made no difference to me.

## SCENE 11

(Peg and Gusty in cottage looking out window.)

Peg

Oh, Gusty, if you could just see out the window. The sky is streaking a half dozen different colors and changing as the sun sets.

Gusty

I think sometimes that's what brought me back, the memory of those sunsets.

Peg

Did we bring all this heartache and anger and sorrow on ourselves somehow?

Gusty

No, it's just life.

Peg

I wonder had it anything to do with a vengeful God?

Gusty

It had nothing to do with a vengeful God.

Peg

If I could go back and do some things differently...

Gusty

We get only one go round, one throw of the dice.

Peg

I have so many regrets. I think back....

Gusty

(interrupting)

Ssssh, quiet now.

Peg

He's in heaven, isn't he, Gusty?

Gusty

If he isn't, there's no God looking out for us.

Peg

(Starts to cry softly.)

Oh, I wish he were here with us. We'd be a family with Tommy here. He was the glue.

Gusty

He was, indeed.

Peg

We wasted so much time, fighting and arguing...

Gusty

We did.

Peg

...and worrying about people and priests and Church.

Gusty

Always wiser after.

Peg

Lamenting how we should have done this and if we'd only known that. A sorry bunch, we are. (Beat.) I should have gone to you.

Gusty

And I should have come home to you. We all made mistakes, Peg.

Peg

But you told him you were his father, Gusty, before he left us?

Gusty

I did, indeed.

Peg

And it made him happy, did it? What did he say again?

Gusty

The best news he heard in years and the answer to all my prayers, he said and a big smile on his face.

Peg

Didn't he have a way with words?

Gusty

Smart as a whip he was.

Peg

Oh, I wish I had been there. He wasn't angry?

Gusty

No, not a bit, Peg.

Peg

Why did he have to leave us? He was my one and only. He was everything to me.

Gusty

He knew that, Peg. He wanted to go to sea so he could provide for you.

Peg

There was great nature in him.

Gusty

He would have been a fine man.

Peg

But why did God have to take him so young?

Gusty

Ah, Peg, it's a crazy old world.

Peg

Why does He allow people like Stormy to terrorize the decent people?

Gusty

There was something missing in that fellow.

Peg

(Crying softly.)

He was born to trouble.

Gusty

Maybe he had no choice, with the mother that reared him.

Peg

We make so much trouble for ourselves. Maybe God has nothing to do with it. Maybe there is no God.

Gusty

Maybe it doesn't really matter, which or whether.

Peg

What do you mean?

Gusty

I'm not sure what I mean, to tell the truth. Maybe we should just leave God out of it and do the best we can, while we're here.

Peg

Follow our conscience.



Gusty

I suppose.

(Sound of footsteps, banging on door. Voice shouts out: “Augustine Flynn, are you within? You are wanted for questioning in the death of John Joseph Brien...”)

Peg

Tell a story, Gusty.

Gusty

Did I ever tell you about the time that I sailed the Greek Islands...

(Guards: “Open the door or we’ll be compelled to break it down.”)

Gusty

It was so beautiful...(Peg is crying softly) ... the white cottages on the hills, with the sea the bluest sea you ever saw... (Music getting louder...banging on door getting louder.)

THE END

