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CHARACTERS:

LARRY: Slick, slight, whimsical -looking, aged thirty-four, with a strong Dublin accent.

MRS. LARRY: A fine figure of a woman, aged thirty-two, her accent is not so strong and inclines rather to 'grandeur.'

WIDOW: A buxom, healthy girl of twenty, good-humoured and witty.

DOCTOR: Traditional villain, moustache and all. Very ponderous delivery. Aged about forty.

SEAMUS: The local pharmacist; a mean-looking type, deferential and of course untrustworthy. About forty.

GRAVEDIGGER: A very lugubrious individual dressed in the peculiar white garments in vogue in Glasnevin. Aged about fifty.

TAILORS: All speak with the accent of Dublin; they vary in age according to the actors available, but Number Five must be young and healthy. Their clothes are of no particular Period, but suggest Irish country dress.



1ST TAILOR

Love is the proper food of
man

2ND TAILOR

Woman curses every plan

3RD TAILOR

I married twice and would
again

4TH TAILOR

I married once and there's my
pain

5TH TAILOR

I could love all that pass the
door

6TH TAILOR

My wife has never passed the
door

1ST TAILOR

I rhymed out poetry in my
youth

To net the love I had for one;
But now that time has crossed my knees
rd. sooner slumber in the sun.

2ND TAILOR

I've never met the woman yet
I'd trust around the corner;
Give them leg-bail and they're gone
With hangman or informer.

3RD TAILOR

My grandpapa taught me the trick
To hold a woman's love—
Treat her decent and she'll snuggle
Like hand inside a glove.

4TH TAILOR

My wife would drink the Shannon dry
And after that the Barrow;
Do you wonder that my Sot
Has whiskey in his marrow'

5TH TAILOR

Each girl that passes by inclines
My mind to thoughts of fern and heather,
A haystack in an Autumn field
A bed of curling hair or feather;
Every blouse invites a glance,
Every mouth demands a kiss—
Here I stitch the world away
Who would be laying that by this.

6TH TAILOR

Marry son and you will find
Lovers not cake, but bread and butter;
Lay your needle on the shelf
And out you go, into the gutter.

2ND TAILOR

My grandfather was married twice,
One wife was good and one was bad;
But which was bad and which was good
Was a puzzle always to my grandad.

5TH TAILOR

Tell us all about his marriage,
I'd talk of women till night cracked down,
Were his wives fair or were they black
Were they red or were they brown?
Had they what would fill the hand,
Or was that flat which should be round?

Were they symmetrically planned,
With here a vale, and there a mound?

4TH TAILOR

Did they guzzle wine at night
And hide the bottle in a ditch?

5TH TAILOR

Or did they leave the curtains back
And stand at the window without a stitch?

3RD TAILOR

Were they modest wives and mothers,
Washing, scrubbing, cleaning, cooking?

6TH TAILOR

Dressed demurely, softly speaking?
Gently loving, and good-looking?

1ST TAILOR

Love is the proper food of man
And love talk must delight the mind,
So tell us friend how your grand-da
Disliked one wife and found one kind.

2ND TAILOR

My grandfather was married first
When he was nineteen years of age,
And she was great and he was small,
She the book and he the page;
For fifteen years they lived together
And it always was spring weather.

5TH TAILOR

So 'twill be when I am wed,
She the body, I the head.

2ND TAILOR

One day my grand-da took a walk
And past the outskirts of the town
Saw, kneeling by a recent grave,
A woman in a mounting gown.

[The curtains of the inner stage are opened and the WIDOW is discovered kneeling beside a grave and fanning it while she chants. She is a buxom, healthy, handsome girl of twenty who is doing her best to look mournful.]

WIDOW

One for love and one for death
And one for every day of life;
One for every hour I've wept
And one for every faithful wife.

[Enter LARRY, who stands looking at her. He is a slick, slight, whimsical-looking man with a strong Dublin accent.]

WIDOW

One for love and one for death
And one for every day of life;
One for every hour I've wept
And one for every faithful wife.
One for love and one for death . . .

[She notices LARRY and falters, but continues softly to herself as she fans the grave.]

LARRY

I wonder what ails her at all
To be fanning the earth of a grave,
It's the queerest thing I've ever seen,
But I better step up and be brave
And question this queer looking act.
She's a gas looking widow all right
With her leg stripped up to the knee,
Though indeed it's a very nice sight.

[to WIDOW]

What's your trouble, woman dear?
That's a doleful song I hear..

WIDOW

One for every hour I've wept
And one for every faithful wife.

LARRY

I was just passing by on the road
And I saw yourself here at your job,
And the first thought that popped in my head
Was that someone had come in to rob;
But as soon as I looked at yourself
And the eyes gone back in your head
I knew that you were no prowler
But one lamenting her dead.

WIDOW

One for love and one for death
And one for every hour of life.

LARRY

I've seen people beating their breast,
I've seen old ones tearing their hair,
But fanning a grave is an act
That I've never seen anywhere.

WIDOW

One for every hour I've wept
And one for every faithful wife.

LARRY

Did you ever meet Michael Molloy
That was fighting in India a while?
Well, he says that when one of them dies
He's burnt to be buried in style;
Right up on the fire will go Jem,
Stretched out all ready to burn,
And the missus is hooshed up beside him
And the two of them cooked to a turn.

WIDOW

One for love and one for death
And one for every faithful wife.

LARRY

There's another I read of one time
Called Dido, a queen of some sort
Got caught in a jam with a sailor
Whose anchor was dropped in her port;
Well, of course Jem packed up one fine day,
Went home to the kids and the wife
Never saying a word to me lassie—
He set too much store by his life.
When me bold girl gets up in the morning
And hears the terrible news
She jumps up on top of a bonfire
And soon she's burned down to her shoes.

WIDOW

One for every hour I've wept
And one for every faithful wife.

LARRY

Fair enough; if you won't talk
I'd better continue with my walk.

WIDOW

Don't leave me. This is the second day I've spent
In this dirty, cold and miserable spot

LARRY

I wouldn't say it was healthy at all,
Come down to the corner and have a ball
Of malt, or better come home with me
And the missus will make you a scald of tea.

WIDOW

And leave my work undone that any Shower
May ruin in a quarter of an hour?

LARRY

Arrah, what work? If the Gardai caught you here
They'd get two doctors and certify you queer.

WIDOW

Would you have me break the promise that I made?

LARRY

Instead of 'Therefore' and 'Because'
Will you tell us what the promise was?

WIDOW

My Johnny died, the finest man you'd see
In two day's walk, a healthy, lusty man
That never saw a doctor in his life.

LARRY

I've a cousin a doctor in Merrion Square,
As decent a man as ever grew hair.

WIDOW

'Twas oysters that
finished Johnny.
Oysters and stout
Lobsters and
prawns and
shrimps, cockles
and perrywinkles,
Crayfish and
crabs with claws
like garden
shears, Cockles
and mussels, raw
or cooked in
mills; All strange
fish delighted
him. Gallons of
stout he'd drink,
then brown bread
and butter And
raw eggs in the
morning, downed
with sherry.

LARRY

That was a fearsome galaxy of food,
In Pace of killing it should have done him good.

WIDOW

And yet it killed him. Thursday Jack the Fish
Brought up three dozen oysters and a crab,
And Johnny, sitting in the blazing sun,
Opened the lot and downed them like a calf
Butting a can of milk. Before the night
Was out he was lying roaring in his bed
Shouting he'd died for love of me, and no R
In the month. Friday his nails turned blue,



His hair fell out. He called me over close
And caught my hands in his. "Promise," says he,
"That till the clay is dry over my grave

You'll never marry another. Promise," says he,
"That you'll remember Johnny that died for you."
And so I promised, though I still can't see
How stuffing shellfish down his throat was love!

LARRY

Lobsters are lecherous, they say,
And oysters amorous,
And even Hercules, that powerful man,
Found love laborious.

WIDOW

Those were before my time, but Johnny was
A fine, big, strong, hefty lump
Of a man, a kindly man, a very loving
Man, a man that slept but little in the night
And gave me little sleep, but would lie down
And slumber in the day in any ditch.

LARRY

So that's why you're making yourself a slave,
Because you promised to dry his grave?

WIDOW

He never mentioned a word-like that, he said
Only I shouldn't marry till the earth
Was dry, and here I am two days at work
And maybe will have to work another week.

LARRY

Why break your heart with all this hurrying?
Is there another waiting with a ring?

WIDOW

Didn't I say I loved my
husband well? A finer,
stronger man I never
met, And since the day
that I was seventeen,
And that's a good three
years, no man has ever
Touched me or kissed
me, held me in the dark,

Tip-tapped with fingers
under a table cloth,
Whispered through door
crack, waited under
windows. I never loitered
coming home from
Mass. My eyes behind
drawn curtains kept their
distance And if the men
that passed me in the
street Turned round to
stare I never noticed
them— Stand out of the
light there now, you'll
shade the sun Or keep
the breeze from blowing
on the clay.

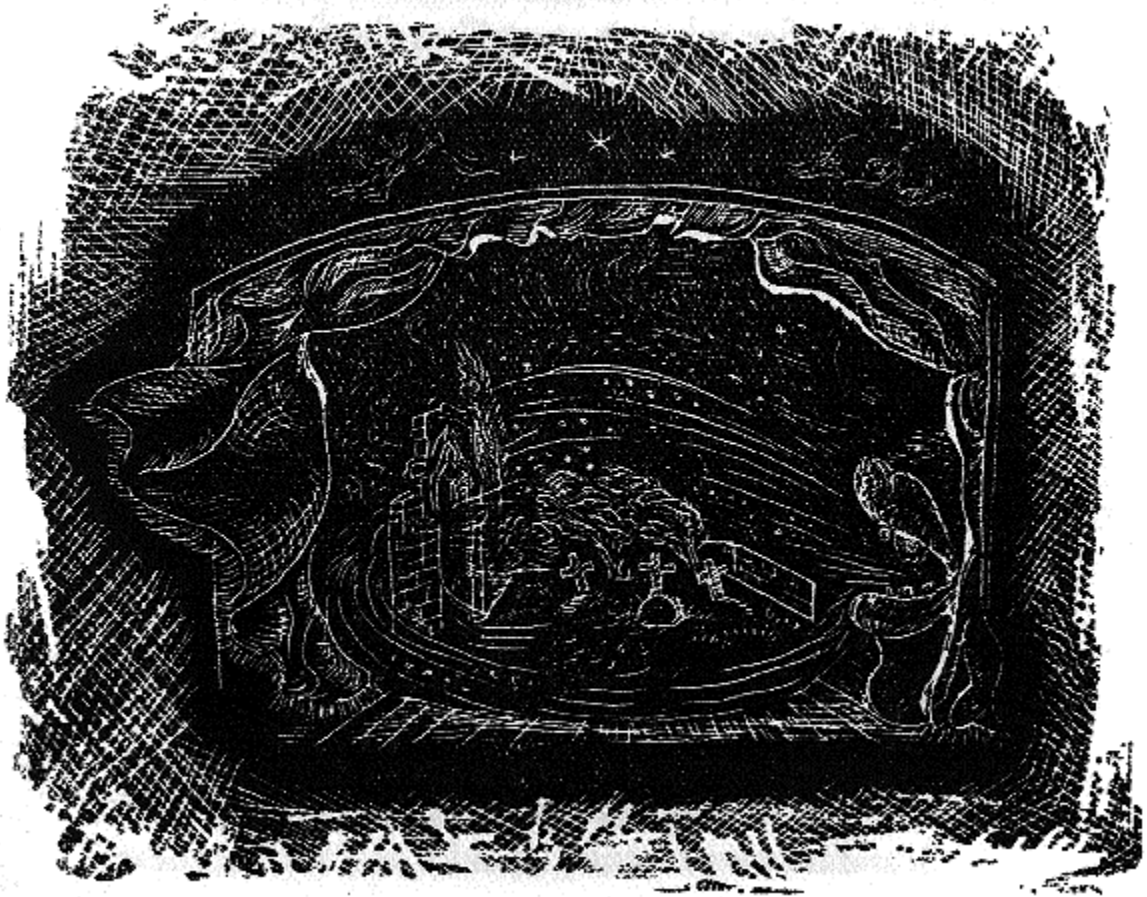
LARRY

If you're as anxious to dry the grave as that
I'd better help by fanning with my hat.

[They fan together and the WIDOW coons.]

WIDOW

September keep you, Johnny,
October hold you tight,
November and December snows Cover you soft and light.



In January the clay will sink,
The winds of February and March
Will howl around the Churchyard
And through the ruined arch;
April will swell the daffodil
And my heart, filled with Spring,
Forget the Winter and the snows
Remembering how to sing.

LARRY

If I were you I'd employ a man
To do this with an electric fangs

[Enter the GRAVEDIGGER.]

GRAVEDIGGER
How are you Larry? Might I enquire

Are you cooling your tea or starting a fire?

LARRY

"A fine fire when it starts!" as the fox says.

- No, I'm helping this lady to dry
The clay that you piled on her husband
Who had the misfortune to die.

GRAVEDIGGER

Sure he won't notice if it's wet or dry
Any more than we will bye and bye.

WIDOW

I promised my husband that while the clay
I'd never marry again, and so it's love
That keeps me here at work.

GRAVEDIGGER

Love is it? Love?
There's love enough in this half acre to set
A generation's poets up in stock-in-trade.
Scandals, elopements, suicides and broken hearts.
They're all one here with usury and trickery,
Villainy and bribery, corruption and depravity.
Love won't warm them now or keep them coot
And that's a truth that should be taught at school

WIDOW

Keep that story for the Autumn nights
Or Winter evenings, locked in bitter ice,
And tell it then to monks or sandalled friars.
The fiery kiss of love can melt the snow.

LARRY

I've often read a paper by its glow.

GRAVEDIGGER

Do you think that the poor soul on deathbed

Staring at Peter's Gate with watery eye
Would barter one half-minute of eternity
Against a bedded year with the likeliest bride
He ever held, looked after or imagined?

LARRY

Death is a mask to frighten children
Or old men doddering to the grave
But lovers at their hedge-school, loving
From kiss to kiss need not be brave,
And I . . .

WIDOW

The night is down and dew will damp
The earth that all day long I've worked to dry.

LARRY

I never knew a female yet,
Maiden, wife or widow-woman
Would let a man say out his say,
And I suppose you're only human.
You'd be amazed the brilliant thoughts,
The poems, epigrams and wit
That my wife nearly kills at birth
With, "Close the door before you sit!"

GRAVEDIGGER

Much good your wit and epigram
Will do you in your final hours,
When all the poetry you will hear
Is "R.I.P." and "Prayers, not flowers."

LARRY

The tinker dreams at night of cans,
The horsey man of hock and crupper,
And men whose livelihood is death
Can scarcely pick a bone for supper
Without a thought of graves and worms;
And, even knocking back a drink,
May see not porter in the glass
But half a pint of doomsday ink!

And men of your profound Procession
Can never let the living live;
Undertaker, priest and doctor
Think every man a fugitive.

WIDOW

You'd talk the cross off twenty ass's backs.

LARRY

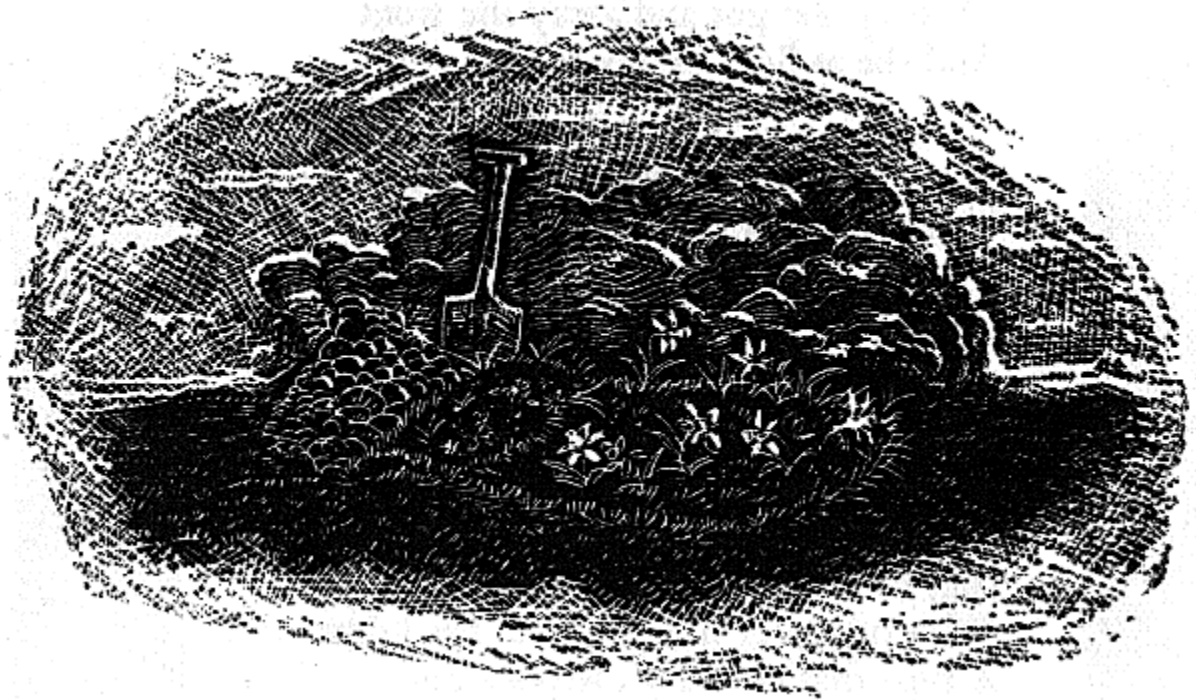
You'd do no good to-night I'd say,
If rain comes on your work is spoiled;
So leave your job and come with me,
The wife will have the kettle boiled.

WIDOW

Ah, perhaps I'd better; I'm very tired, my hand
Can scarcely hold the fan, my fingers ache,
My eyes are bloodshot and my hair dishevelled.
Maybe a night of sleep, a cup of tea,
A breakfast in the morning will renew
My strength.

GRAVEDIGGER

Better go home and rest and pray,
And I'll attend the grave. 'Twill only Cost
Ten shillings a year. I'll plant primroses and pansies.
You'll have a garden fit for any corpse.
And come again in Spring when airs are soft,
You'll find the earth is dry, the roots well taken;
Instead of dank and dismal heavy clay
A flowered bed-spread turned down to welcome you.



And I'll be waiting with my spade in hand
To tuck you in and wish you safe good-night.
Only the dead tucked away in the clay
Are happy and safe till Gabriel's day.
Only the body whose blood is cold
Cares nothing for lust, ambition or gold;
Only the man who's hid out straight
Can tell disloyal from true faith.

WIDOW

Well then poor Johnny knows my heart
And knows I've done a widow's part.
I'll come again when wind and sun
Have finished what I've well begun.

LARRY

Then let's be going. Take my arm.

WIDOW

I will and welcome. Where's the harm?

[They go off and the curtains of the inner stage are drawn.]

2ND TAILOR

Then up she got and away she went
And she as light as any feather.

5TH TAILOR

What would your grandmama have thought
If she had seen those two together?

2ND TAILOR

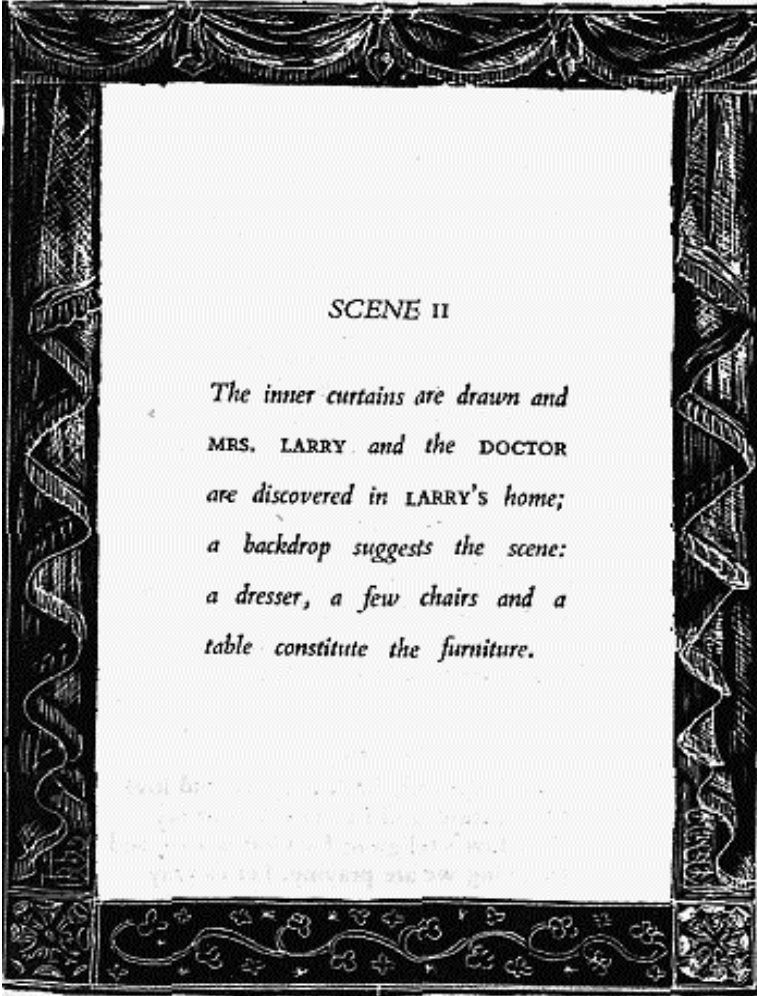
My grandmother was safe at home,
As virtuous as a sitting hen;
Not for her the cross-roads dance
Or conversations with strange men.
She was a woman of thirty-two,
Big, robust and domineering,
Who ruled her husband, ran her house—
A type that's swiftly disappearing.
She was talking with the doctor
Who called when grandpa was away.

1ST TAILOR

I thought you said your grandmother
Was anything but light and gay?

2ND TAILOR

Think no evil of my grandmother;
She loved the doctor as a brother!



SCENE II

*The inner curtains are drawn and
MRS. LARRY and the DOCTOR
are discovered in LARRY'S home;
a backdrop suggests the scene:
a dresser, a few chairs and a
table constitute the furniture.*

DOCTOR

Mrs. Larry, tell me this,
Have you ever traded kiss,
Squeeze or hug or tender
sigh,

Clasp of finger, wink of eye
With a fellow such as I?

MRS. DORY

Never, doctor, since I wed
Has any young man turned
my head;

I have been entirely true
And never has the vile
cuckoo

Doubled his note for such as
you.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Larry, tell me then,
Do you hate the race of men?
Are you to love an infidel?
Or would you know why I
excel
In what doctors know, but
never tell?

MRS. LARRY

Sin grows from curiosity
Was the first thing Larry
taught to me;

And I decided long ago
That I would never wish to Know
Why lover's voices tremble so.

DOCTOR

Love is the only healthy sport, and love
Is education, and I've heard some say
Pleat love's religion; for God is love, and so
In loving we are praying. Let us pray

Together, Mrs. Larry. A healthy mind
Within a healthy body is happiness,
And neither's truly healthy without love;
So love's my prescription for all nature's ills.
If I were married to you, Mrs. Larry,
'Tis long till I would leave you here alone
To be blown on by every black night wind
And frightened by every stroller. In my arms
You'd be as safe as fledgling in the nest.

MRS. LARRY

I never catch a cold, and beggarmen
Who once come skulking after night has fallen
Never return, for I've a bitter tongue;
And 't isn't often Larry is so late . . .

DOCTOR

That sounds like him now coming through the gate .

[Enter LARRY and the WIDOW.]

LARRY

Evening Doctor; Hello Mary.
There's a widow-woman here
That's tired and hungry, cold and sick
Because she said she'd persevere
In drying up the cold, damp clay
Over her husband's new-made grave;
Three days so far she's on the job
Working like a nigger slave.

DOCTOR

And that's a very decent, wholesome thought,
But the churchyard for the quick is a lonesome spot.

MRS. LARRY

Bring her in to warm her bones;
That's no night for jingling knees
Upon the churchyard tombstones.

WIDOW

I'm half afraid to court the light,
My hair is tossed, my face is white.

DOCTOR

And what poor woman who has lost her husband
In the last great lottery of all regards
Her looks? Come, woman, to the fire and warm
The good life back into your empty veins
And tell us why you promised to dry the clay.

WIDOW

I never promised such a thing,
But only that I'd never wed
Until the grave had dried again
That had become his bed.

MRS. LARRY

And you intend to marry again?
Oh, shame! If Larry here should die
I'd wear my widowed black until
The world wore black for me; and I
Would drench the clay so with my tears
It would not dry for twenty years.

WIDOW

I was a faithful wife, and still
Am faithful to his memory;
But had I died and Johnny lived
I'd not expect such constancy.
The nights are cold in Winter and
Two make a warmer bed, so why
Shiver in loneliness until
The heating time of July?

MRS. LARRY

These are no thoughts to speak or even to thirds
Lest someone pin them to the page with ink
And spread them through the land to end all mourning
And end all patient love with ribald scorning;
Your love was not love if you can think of loving,
Your faithfulness was easy of removing.

WIDOW

I am too tired to argue, let me be.

LARRY

I promised the poor girl a cup of tea.

MRS. LARRY

I will be silent since she is your guest
And only think more bitterly the rest.
Come then and warm your body, heat your blood.

LARRY

Let's go and get the girl a bit of food.

[They go, and after a moment the DOCTOR goes to the window and makes a signal.
SEAMUS enters.]

SEAMUS

Here is the phial you ordered with the brew
Of deadly drugs distilled and double distilled
Which only the Italian Borgias knew
And used when supper guests were to be killed.
Long in a withered book the secret hid
Like the flushed vampire that for centuries lies.
One drop upon the eyelid blinds, one drop
Mixed with the food and all the company lilies.

DOCTOR

I fear the key to pleasure
comes too late For the giant
Honour guards that gate.
However, I'll not weep to see
him die And perhaps will
breach the fortress bye and
bye,
To which for two years I
have brought artillery,
Reinforcements, great field
weapons, infantry

To batter down those walls.
Seamus, I dream
Of the capitulation, terms
made, war ended And the
commander-in-chief in the
chief palace Entertained by
the sweetest foe that ever
fought— And in this phial is
the father of that thought.

SEAMUS

I'm a man that's an adept at
playing that game, And
however it's played the result
is the same— I've courted
them old and I've courted
them young, I've courted a
slut with a vinegar tongue,
I've courted wee lassies as
high as your knee And I've
courted an old one a hundred
and three. I've brought them
small presents and I've
brought them great,
I've played them and
hooked them with varying
bait,
I've landed fat widows,
young wives and old maids
For mine is the best of all
slouthering trades, I've
fooled them and kissed them
and kept them at play Till
the cock blew Reveille the
following day— But the
finest of fish are the ones
that escape And the sweetest
of fruit is the ungathered
grape.

DOCTOR

Here in the bottle we'll drop
the good sup And Larry will
soon fill himself the fist cup;
And once he is bundled from

mind and from sight Mrs.
Larry will soon find it cold
in the night.

SEAMUS

Hurry up, for I hear them returning again; So in with the poison.

DOCTOR

So be it, and Amen.

[LARRY, MRS. LARRY and the WIDOW return.]

WIDOW

Now I fed a better woman,
Now once more I'm nearly human;
Where in the world can any find
A better poultice for the mind?

LARRY

There was never a thing like a cup of tea
To put the heart of life in me;
A heat by the fire and a sup of punch
Would put a head on the greatest dunce;
A sup of punch and good company
Are better again than a cup of tea.

MRS. LARRY

I never believed in stimulants
Backache powders or liniments;
Clear spring water and wheaten bread
And eight good hours in a feather bed . . .

DOCTOR

Eight good hours in a feather bed,
A sneeze in the morning to clear the head—
Whoever tries this experiment
Need use no powder, paint or scent.

LARRY

But a sup of malt when a man's well fed

Gives extra curves to a feather bed;
Here's the bottle and here's the cup,
Will you join me Doctor in a sup?

DOCTOR

Old Mother Nature for my sins
Has given a patient a pair of twins,
And by my reckoning this is the night
When they are due to come to light.

LARRY

Tell me, Seamus, will you drink?
There's twice the pleasure when glasses clink;
Then taste and touch and sight and smell
Are joined by hearing that Laughing bell.

SEAMUS

I took the pledge when I was young
And never has my pointed tongue
Lapped porter, whiskey, wine.
So pardon me if I decline.



LARRY

Good fortune then; here's luck; here's health.
In fact, here's everything but wealth.

DOCTOR

Here in the glass the future glows.

LARRY

Tip her up and down she goes.

[He dnmks.]

WIDOW

He's turning pale; he's sweating at the pores.
He drops the glass, throws back his head and snores.
And now the eyes are turning in his head.

[The DOCTOR feels his pulse very cursorily.]

DOCTOR

Unless I'm much mistaken he is dead.

MRS. LARRY

Dead did you say? Dead did you mean?
Hold a mirror to his lips.
Whiskey may kill by inches
But it never kills by sips.

[SEAMUS holds a mirror to LARRY'S mouth.]

SEAMUS

This mirror, which delights in apeing
Man and his hundred actions, sees
Nothing to counterfeit in him—
Prepare his obsequies.

DOCTOR

I'm very much afraid he's gone

Where Winter, Summer, Spring
Have all one climate, and the Autumn
Brings no cool weather in.

MRS. LARRY

Dead did you say? Now rain
come pouring down From
every sullen cloud, now
wave on shore. Moan with
my grief, now garden strip of
leaf And flower, and mourn
in nakedness. To thinly A
little golden drop could rip
like lightning through the
fabric of his life and leave
me only An empty,
punctured bag drooped on
the floor. Mourn for my man
who grew beside me, sturdy
[n every weather, brave to
the wind, alert So all dark
sounds of night, prepared for
any Enemy but this, this
treason in His pleasure cup,
his little laughing drop.

DOCTOR

This is the hand that waits on every landing
to trip the foot. Larry's a lucky man
TO die in company, in gusty mirth.
Not for him the wrinkled sheet, the sour
Unrested head, the table rich with bottles.
Death took him suddenly as one might take
A glass of sherry at a friendly wake.

WIDOW

He's with my Johnny, and it's strange
That two young men who never met
Are thrown together now forever,
Caught in the same net.

MRS. LARRY

Laughter was frothy in this room awhile,

Concealing, like the cuckoo-spit, green death
That now slips in and bleaches all the colours.
Empty on their racks the suits are hanging,
Mere foolish cloth whose meaning was their wearer;
And this poor empty body that was shining
Craves only a small freehold of the earth.
Send for the neighbours, hang crape upon the door;
But let me creep to a comer of the mind
Until the coffin thumps upon the stair.

DOCTOR

Send for the Undertaker now,
The Priest and echoing Clerk;
Roll in the barrels, fill the house
With all traditional carouse
To keep away the dark.

SEAMUS

Call in the neighbours to the fire,
Give every man a pipe and glass
And let him smoke and drink and smile
Rejoicing that he lives awhile,
Fanned by the wings that pass.

DOCTOR

The man that's dead would grudge no man
Another while to walk the earth;
He'd be the first to fill a can—
So let us drink his health again
At his hospitable hearth.

SEAMUS

[to the audience.]

Good friends, I bring you sorry news;
Poor Larry's dead. Come mourn with us,
Shake Mrs. Larry's hand and say,
How swift, how sad, how soon it was.
Walk to the room and see him stretched
Cold in the W where he was hot,
Then kneel and pray in gratitude
That he is dead and you are not.

DOCTOR

Come to the wake-house, change your tie,
Take from the shelf the dismal face,
Prepare to droop the mournful eye
And slow the living, youthful pace.
And when your duty words are said
Tobacco waits, and wine and cakes,
Whiskey and stout and living men
To light your wit up— Come to the wake.

SEAMUS

Come to the wake and say, 'Alas!
My dearest friend, the bravest best . . .
But he is in a better place,
Secure with Him that knows the rest.'
Say, 'He is free from bills and bores,
A dazzling soul in purest white
Preparing for eternity
Of nightless day and dayless night.'

DOCTOR

But as you speak relish the heat
That circulates about your bones—
Eternity for you may be
Unending gnashing, endless groans.
Then, as you pass the bottle, think
That still your senses pleasure take
In all the foolish weaknesses
That are forbidden—Come to the wake.

[Enter GRAVEDIGGER.]

GRAVEDIGGER

Come to the wake. Come to the wake.
The greatest pleasure is a fake.
You cannot have and eat your cake.
Death watches in at every chink,
He's in the pleasure-cup you drink
And every epigram you make
Says, Come to the wake. Come to the wake.

[The inner curtains ate drawn.]

2ND TAILOR

And so he died. The house was readied
To bring the neighbours in;
The hams were bought, the barrels brought
The whiskey and the gin,
Clay pipes with greedy, droughty mouths
And high-grade snuff go Shot
The neighbour women laid him out,
The neighbour men with thoughts of stout
Were lounging at the door.

1ST TAILOR

That was a wake to please the mind,
But what dead man today
Can say he's waked in proper style?
The neighbours kneel and pray,
But dance or song we're told is wrong,
The dumb piano stands
Grim as a coffin all night long,
The flesh is weak, but memory's strong
And longest in this land.

5TH TAILOR

All summer long I've stitched and cut
And sewn the buttons on,
My legs are cramped, but thought is free
And youth must have its fun;
I'd jump a five-barred gate, and I
Could leap a mile in thought,
So why not jump bade fifty years
To snuff and hams and pipes and beers
That our forefathers bought?

2ND TAILOR

Time is a name to frighten children
Or old men near the grave,
But youth can catch his withered beard
And drag him from his cave.

1ST TAILOR

And even Time must bow to those

Who snip and cut and weave.
The Fates who tailor life as we
Shape trouser-leg or sleeve.

2ND TAILOR

These three old women rule w all,
Clotho and Atropos
And Lachesis; call on their power
To ferry us across.

5TH TAILOR

[intones]

Aunt Clotho come, Aunt Atropos
And kind Aunt Lachesis;
Lend us a skiey horse with wings
To leap Time's precipice.

6TH TAILOR

I'll not indulge in any magic,
And I'll tell Father Pat
The kind of goings on that's going . . .

[There is a f ash of lightning and a peal of thunder.]
Oh murder! What was that?

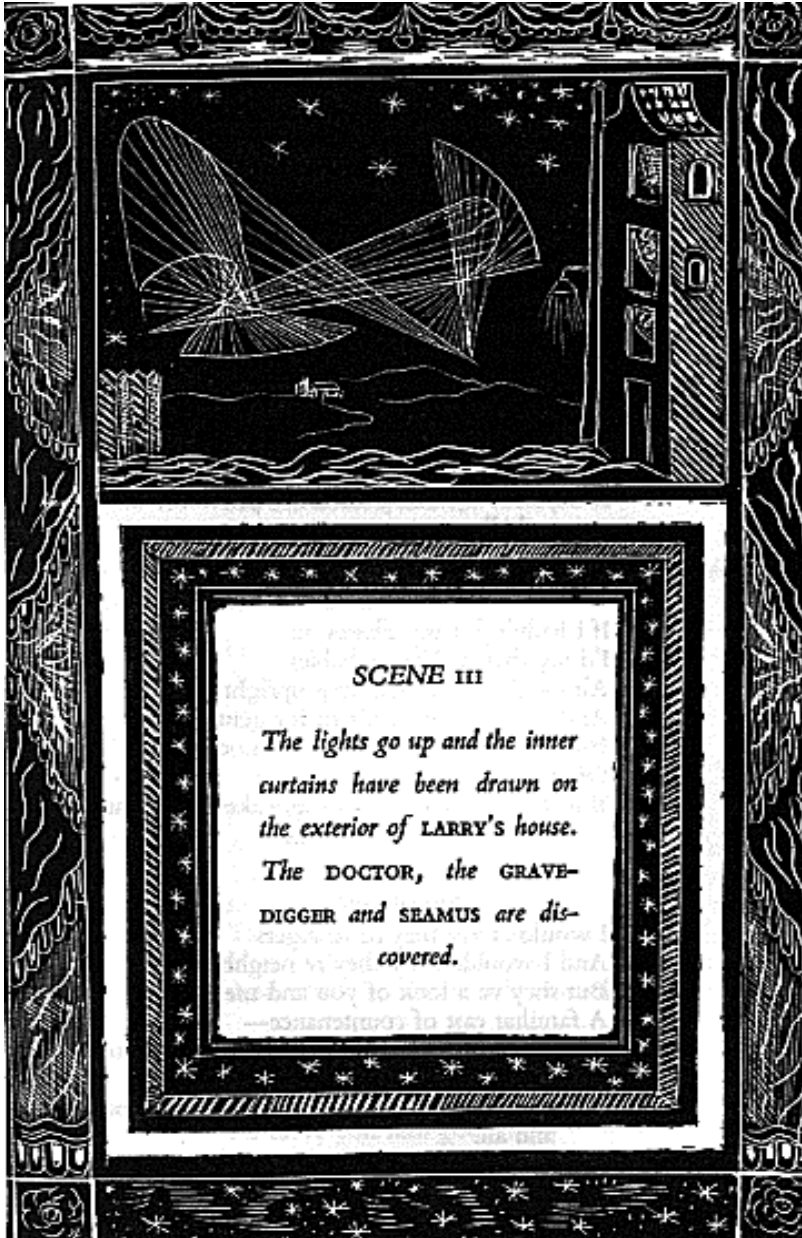
4TH TAILOR

I'll not believe that Time is fluid,
Time was, Time is, will be;
A day once slipped into the past
Hiss joined eternity.

[Lightning, thunder, complete Darkness.]

3 RD TAILOR

Either a storm is blowing up
Or we are blowing down.
Wings are about us and the past
Vivid as when men drown.



5TH TAILOR

Aunt Atropos has cut the
thread
That binds us in to-day.
Come to the wake, boys,
join the gang.
To day is yesterday.

SEAMUS

Will you come along and
join us
And walk into the parlour,
There's whiskey and tobacco
there
And Pot wine for the ladies;
You're six strange men I
never saw
This side of Ireland's island
But you're welcome to the
wake-house one
and all

DOCTOR

If I hadn't got my glasses on
I'd say that they were babies
Although they're standing
upright
And have clothes that's fit
for gentlemen;
But there's something of the
innocence
Of birth about their faces,
But they're welcome to the
wake-house one

and all.

GRAVEDIGGER

I wouldn't say they're strangers
And I wouldn't say they're neighbours,
But they've a look of you and me
A familiar cast of countenance
They're Yanks, maybe, some neighbours' sons
We're born across the water,
But they're welcome to the wake-house and
and at

1ST TAILOR

It's hard to understand it,
But we're the golden future
That lights the gloomy day for you,
A Christmassy shop window,
We're the sons that you have fathered
Between two walls of darkness
But we're coming to the wake-house just the
same.

DOCTOR

May I introduce the pharmacist,
And this our grave gravedigger
I'm the doctor, and the three of us
Assist men in and out of life.

[SEAMUS and the GRAVEDIGGER shake hands and then wander away.]

I'll not believe your story
And as a psycho-analyst
I'd say you weren't too steady in the brain.

2ND TAILOR

Larry is my grandfather
And I know all the twist of it,
The silver words you whisper
In my grandma's golden ear,
The little drop that Seamus there
Slipped in the deoch a' dorus—
And what's to follow after is as plain.

DOCTOR

I'll poison you, I'll shoot you,
I'll carve you into gobbets;
Your flesh will melt like water
Your livers turn to stone.
Seamus will kick your heads like balls
From here to Ballyferriter—
As I said before you must be all insane.

5TH TAILOR

We're the future, and untouchable,
And some of us not born at all;
We're here to see the finish
Of this tragedy or comedy.

Pretend we never happened,
-Scrape our faces from your memory—
But we're coming to the wake-house just the same.

[They go off and SEAMUS and the GRAVEDIGGER rejoin the DOCTOR.]

DOCTOR

I thought that I was talking
To six madmen for an instant,
But they were humorous fellows
Who were anxious for a joke.
I'm sure poor Mrs. Larry
Will be anxious for my company—
I'd better hurry back and stake my claim.

GRAVEDIGGER

Thoughts of death should be your comrades
As you walk the house of death,
The cloistered eye and rigid mouth
Remind you that your breath
Might falter in an instant—
This evening Larry laughed,
Called Death a children's bogeyman
But which of us was day

DOCTOR

Before that bogey catches me
I'll thank him for his courtesy
In clearing roads before me
That were guarded well and jealously.
Death is a friend to servants who
Walk in his footsteps cautiously,
I'll hail him as the god of love
Whose bolt was shot unerringly.

SEAMUS

Here's herself arrayed in black
Stepping from the back-door,
Walking in the shadowed eaves;
The noisy woe of those she leaves
Follows her through every crack
And meets her at the front door.

DOCTOR

Fatherly and humanly
I'll speak to her most courteously,

Half a priest and half a man;
No half suspicion of my plan
Will loiter even fleetingly
Until she's grown all womanly.

[SEAMUS and the GRAVEDIGGER go as MRS. LARRY approaches, walking at the back of the stage.]

Mrs. Larry, do you wander
In the night-time unattended,
Loveless in your grieving time,
In the dark time unbefriended?
A fate like yours might make us wonder
Whether God beholds the sparrow
And leaves poor man to stumble dark
Into a pit of sorrow.
Do not resent the arm that presses
Your widowed waist, its innocence
Is as the veil that shields your beaux
From every light offence;
And if my lips should touch your ear
In whispering a grieving word
Think it no more than if the sky
Caress a widowed bird;
And if my tears should stain your cheek
Think that the self-same grief
Reddens our eyelids. Heart to heart
Let sorrow be our chief
Ah, do not take the hand I kiss
In sorrowing friendship, rather leave
Those five poor fingers in my five
And let the decade weave
A rosary; and do not wander
So by night-time unattended.
While I am at your side you'll find
All your grieving thoughts befriended.
Friendship is sometimes more than love,
In friendship there's no jealousy,
No crazed possession of the loved,
No passionate redundancy.
In friendship I could kiss your lips,
Could hold you in my arms embraced,
My hands might wander, but my blood
Be like spring water, cool and chaste.
You are no wanton like that widow
Whose death-room thoughts were gay,
Who squandered hours of weeping time
In comforting the clay.
No man can ever jostle Larry
Out of your mind I know;
No thought of marriage-bed can mar

The friendship that I owe
To Larry's memory, no other ring
Can ever dominate your finger;
So, if I kiss your salted lips,
Permit my lips to linger.

MRS. LARRY

I have spoken of faithfulness to memory,
Of eternal widowhood and mourning garments,
But now, with Larry stretched and suddenly dead,
The hours filled up with mourners, winter in
The bedroom and the misery of remembrance
Standing in every object in the room
I begin to wonder if my heart can be
So fixed, so constant.
My ship is captainless,
No star, no astrolabe, no chart—Marie
Celeste I stagger blindfold on my course
Lost between continents of memory.
There's no one now to grasp my hatf-seized thought,
To tease my sleepy silence, no one now . . .

DOCTOR

But, Mrs. Larry, you have me,
All thoughtfulness and sympathy.

MRS. LARRY

It isn't the thoughtfulness and sympathy
That break my heart for Larry, but the million
Mornings and evenings, the toothbrush by the
mirror,
The nightshirt on the floor, the tiny actions.

DOCTOR

Wouldn't it be pleasant,
Be pleasant and delightful
If all you've lost you could regain,
Fill every jug and glass full
And find that life was right again
And pleasant and delightful.
The blood that's pumping from my heart
Is salty, rich and red,
My nose not pinched in pointed death
And if I cannot catch my breath
It's all because my moidered head
Is overflowing, packed and full
With images of board and bed

Most pleasant and delightful.
The leaden casket round your heart
Is crushing it to death now,
Smash it and leap to life again—
That's breaking up no marriage-vow;
The lips that once were dedicate
To Larry, now are free to kiss,
Kiss me, and, in parenthesis,
Change wine of love for watered hate,
Fill every jug and glass full
It's pleasant and delightful.

MRS. LARRY

Doctor, your words go stamping through my heart
Smashing china and delicate bric-a-brac;
All's in a storm, the curtains floating free
And I'm afraid what may become of me.
All that was bright and tidy, known and safe
Is suddenly blown down and I without a home.

DOCTOR

Trust your medical adviser to know best,
Come into my waiting, loving arms and rest.

[They embrace, the curtains are drawn on the inner stage and the tailors appear on the outer.]

2ND TAILOR

The dirty dog. I knew his scheme.

1ST TAILOR

The dirty murderer you mean.

4TH TAILOR

The dirty bowsey is what I'd say.

5TH TAILOR

The dirty scut has got away
With murder and seduction too.
Well, boys, what are we going to do?

2ND TAILOR

We're the future, and I'm
doubtful
That we can meddle in the past,

This play is fifty years of age
And we're not even in the cast.
But maybe what is happening
now

Did happen fifty years ago
And maybe if we take a part
We can assure our future too.
There's a little poisoned bottle
On the shelf inside the room,
There's a glass or two of liquor
going round
And a brokenhearted woman
wanders under-neath the
moon,
And the god of love forever
gazes down.

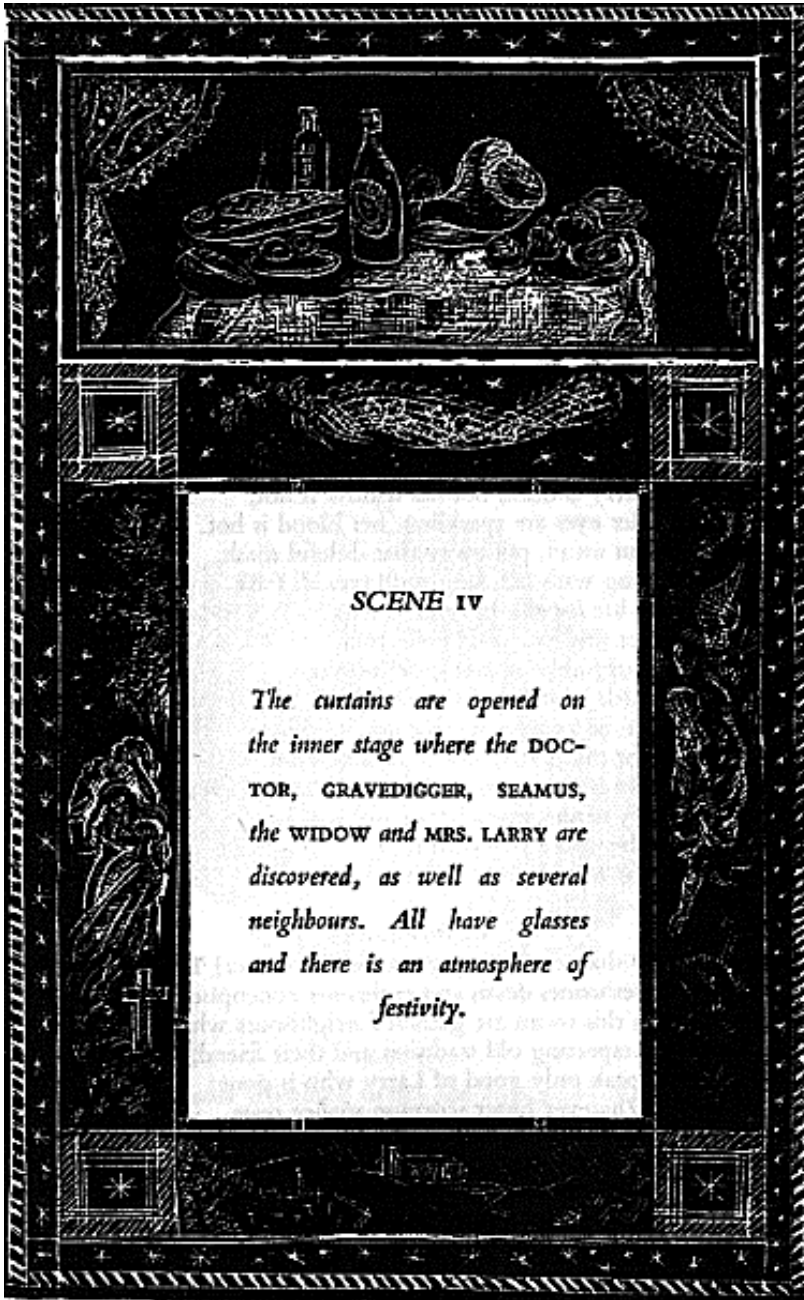
Now if one of us could nobble
That little poisoned drop
And Dour it in the doctor's
glass of malt
The doctor and his scheming
and his wicked
heart would stow
So come on boys—which of
you is worth his salt?

5TH TAILOR

I wouldn't be a murderer and
Risk my precious soul,
But seeing as the man is dead
I'll pass the poisoned bowl.
If the man is dead a second death
Can do him little injury . . .

2ND TAILOR

And if he's not we'll constitute
His hangman, judge and jury.



DOCTOR

Cease to mourn now,
 cease to mourn,
 The wake is over and
 grief is gone,
 Larry is dead and
 weeping eyes
 Will bed him no softer in
 paradise,
 And if he's gone to
 another place
 He'll not be cooled down
 by a mourn face.
 I've good news, best
 news, news of joy,
 This is the gold without
 alloy,
 This is the wine of the
 vintage year,
 This is the story with
 never a tear.
 Put back that mask upon
 the wall,
 Rejoice with me, laugh
 one, laugh all,
 Larry is dead, but his
 widow is not,
 Her eyes are sparkling,
 her blood is hot.
 Put away, put away that
 doleful mask,
 Sing with me, sing with
 me, all I ask

Is life for death, resurrection,
 Let this be a gold collection.
 Larry alive meant little to you,
 Little to me, but dead it's true
 He becomes a symbol and we weep
 For the pretty life we cannot keep.
 I've good news, strange news, the best ever known,
 pay is returned and sorrow is gone,
 This wake will turn to a wedding tune

For Mrs. Larry will marry me soon.

GRAVEDIGGER

O shame! O most disgraceful conduct! This
Dethrones death and enthrones concupisence.
In this room are gathered neighbours who,
Respecting old tradition and their friend, -
Speak only good of Larry who is gone;
Whatever bitter scorpion malice rears
Is for a season drugged, and Larry wrapped
In silk ant satin glory for his passing
You talk of marriage while the blood is still
Fluid within his veins, not yet so sluggish
That a miracle-word might not restore him living.
And do you say that Mrs. Larry now,
Forgetting duty and the grief she owes
Can think of lust? I'll not be party to
This impious flouting of experience.

DOCTOR

Because the husband's death is that a reason
Why, Indian-like, the wife should perish too?



WIDOW

Because I worked to dry the cold grave clay
This woman called me wanton, but I obeyed
My husband's dying words. Her husband's grave
Is not yet dug and yet she calls the banns.
I begin to feel that perhaps the event has shown
That I was the loyal wife who made no promise
But loved in steadfastness and was prepared
To love again. My Johnny knew it all
And only asked a widow's mite of sorrow.

SEAMUS

Whatever's happy, whatever's gay
Is virtuous and good;
Whatever's ill and sodden-eyed
Is evil to the blood.
What man has ever courted sorrow
When joy was courting him?

What man has hankered after Winter
With Spring in leaf and limb?
'Twill be pleasant and delightful
When the fire is heaped again,
When the bottle in the evening
Makes a tent against the rain;
As pleasant as the Summer
When the sun appears to stand
Day long above the hayfield
Till the fairest cheek is tanned
And the hair is bleached like linen,
The earth ripened and caressed
Till the ageing hand of Autumn
Plucks the roses from her breast.
Then pleasant, oh, most pleasant
The vigil of the Spring
When the heart gropes upward
Toward's the year's replenishing
Till joy bursts through in crocus
And the earth becomes a bower
Of daffodil and hawthorn,
Almond and cherry-flower.

WIDOW

But sorrow also has its season,
My Johnny's dead and I
Will wait to take another
Till his cold grave-clay is dry.

DOCTOR

And that's a chorus that I'm tired of,
All you need is a man
And then the grave and the teary eye
Can dry as best they can.

MRS. LARRY

I was the loyallest wife that ever
Wore a wedding-ring,
And I was ready to mourn until
My coffin was hammering;
But the doctor assures me that doctors know
The poison that thins the blood,
And if I marry it's only because
He's convinced it will do me good.
I'll pray every night for Larry s safe keeping

In heaven or purgatory,
And if he's gone where my prayers can't help,
Why then they may help me.
Larry is dead, your Johnny is dead
And there's many another gone,
And if we had waited a year or two
We could be blamed by none.
But in widowhood an hour of weeping
May equal a year as a wife,
And the doctor says a widow unmarried
Insults her married life,
Saying in black that her husband failed
Both at board and bed—
And loving my Larry as I did
I'll not insult the dead.
[Enter the TAILORS]

6TH TAILOR

Oh, Mrs. Larry
You should be ashamed of yourself!
What will all the neighbours say?
You should be on the shelf:
You find yourself a husband
With the old one scarcely gone,
And oh! Mrs. Larry,
You surely know it's wrong.

1ST TAILOR

Oh, Mrs. Larry,
You should be ashamed of your life.
As tree and bark are allied
So are a man and wife;
I've never seen a widow
So soon a husband take,
And oh! Mrs. Larry,
What will become of the wake?

5TH TAILOR

Oh, Mrs. Larry,
What will the clergy say?
They'll think it isn't decent
If you want to wed to-day;

The priest who comes to bury
Will scarcely stay to wed,
And oh! Mrs. Larry
It isn't time for bed.

4TH TAILOR

Oh, Mrs. Larry,
What will the doctor think? -
In a month or two he'll wonder
Which was the weakest link;
And maybe he'll consider
That such a rusted chain
If once it could be parted
Might easily snap again.

3 RD TAILOR

And oh! Mrs. Larry,
Warning take from me,
The apple that is sweetest
Is highest on the tree;
The open city captured
Is thought no victory,
Takes no place in history
With Veni. Vidi, Vici!

2ND TAILOR

Oh, Mrs. Larry,
Consider posterity,
Though the Doctor speaks to your heart now
The future speaks through me;
The gun you hold is loaded,
The drink is poisoned drink,
The house is mined, the warrants signed,
So pause a while and think.

DOCTOR

Think no longer, think no more,
Thought is the enemy of joy,
The heart knows best what road to take,
Change funeral meats for wedding calve
And make me Larry's viceroy.

MRS. LARRY

I'm frightened of these gentlemen
Who spoke so very strangely.

DOCTOR

I know how to deal with them,
A drink will very quickly stem
Their flood of whimsicality.
[To the TAILORS].

So fit the tankards, fill the pots,
Drink to Mrs. Larry's eyes,
Drink to me and drink to you,
Drink to what we're going to do;
Drink to your shocked surprise.
Here men, fill your glasses up.

5TH TAILOR

Will you join us, doctor, in a sup?

[The TAILORS go into a huddle in the front of the staged]

3RD TAILOR

Fill the doctor the best in the house.

2ND TAILOR

Fill the doctor the very best drink.

4TH TAILOR

Fill him a glass that'll curl his toes,
Shill it with doomsday ink.

1ST TAILOR

Fill him a ball of brimstone malt
Triple-distilled from the tears of the damned
That'll melt his bones and curdle his blood
And crackle his skin till Hell's door is slammed

6TH TAILOR

Arsenic, strychnine, sulphuric acid,

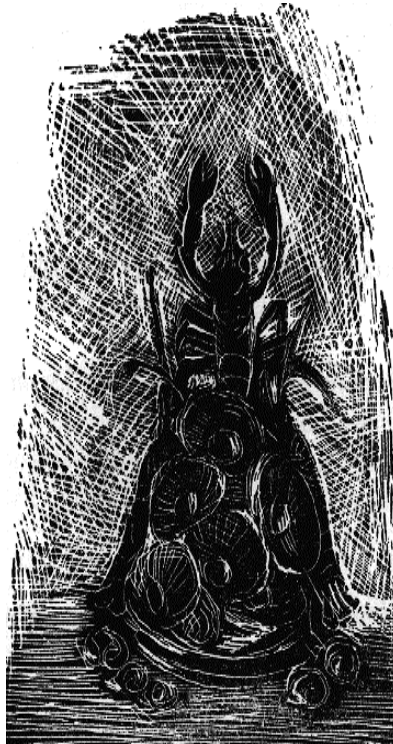
Poison distilled from the rankest root,
Hyoscine and Chemist's bane
That fatten the gallows with annual fruit;
Pour it out for him, sour {lat. stout for hints
Bluestone poteen, claret cup,
Christmas whiskey laced with Red Bidy,
Bath-brewed beer and Johnny Jump-Up.

2ND TAILOR

And here is worse for him, here's my curse for him,
May his tongue be as dry as St. Patrick's Day
And the devils scratch it for striking matches
While pints of good porter around him spray.

5TH TAILOR

It's time he started on his way,
Blow the whistle, wave the bag,
There is no stop this side of Hell.
[To the DOCTORS]
Carry your bag, mister, carry your bag.



DOCTOR

I'm not going anywhere,

I invite you to a drink
And all you do is gossip there.

5TH TAILOR

I know, our manners stink.

DOCTOR

Pull the corks now, fill the glass,
To all the sensual world proclaim,
A marriage with thy neighbour's wife
Is worth an age without a dame.

[THE FIFTH TAILOR takes the poisoned bottle, and as he pours it and then as it is
passed by one
TAILOR to the other the following verses are spoken.]

2ND TAILOR

Come and watch the birdie
Take his little sip
Between the hand and bottle,
Between the glass and lip,
Between the lip and throttle
There can be many a slip.

4TH TAILOR

Come and watch the birdie
Take his glass of malt,
Between the dish and finger,
Between the meat and salt
It's possible to linger
To make a fatal fault.

3RD TAILOR

Pour it for the birdie
Never spill a sip,
Careful with the bottle,
The glass goes to the lip,
He pours it down his throttle—
Here's to auld acquaintanceship.

[As the next verses are spoken the TAILORS and NEIGHBOURSS dance in a ring
around the
DOCTOR who is standing dazed in the centre of the stage.]

5TH TAILOR

Dance, dance the doctor's dance,
Old tradition's desecrated,
Forget the dance of death and prance
Like Harlem hoodlums liberated.

1ST TAILOR

Dance, dance the doctor's dance,
Joy, he says, is reinstated,
See the bright new age advance,
Civilized, sophisticated.

4TH TAILOR

Dance, dance the doctor's dance,
Soon he will be liquidated,
Send for the nurse and ambulance
That wait on the intoxicated.

3 RD TAILOR

Dance, dance the doctor's dance,
I fear it's almost terminated,
Notice the wildness of his glance
Which indicates he's addle-pated.

6TH TAILOR

Dance no mores he has the stance
Of one whose heart's incinerated;
He's trying to make utterance
Although he's more than spiflicated.

[The dancing stops suddenly and the DOCTOR speaks in a very hoarse voice.]

DOCTOR

Here's your very good health,
Here's very good cheer.
Damn it, what's in the bottle?

My head isn't clear.
My brain-pan is melting,
My heart's turned to stone.
Damn it what's in the bottle?
Oh damn it, I'm done.

VOICE'S

Oh, what's happened?
He's going to die.
He's dead already.
That's all my eye.
Stand back, give him air.
Smelling~salts, water,
Hot-bottles. A chair.
It must be his heart.
A stroke maybe.
Did he mix his drinks?
Bring a cup of tea.

SEAMUS

For what ails him this minute there's only one cure,
It's quick and it's certain and never has failed;
Quick blood from the living can save him from death—
Who'll give him a pint before he has paled.?

GRAVEDIGGER

I'll not be over anxious to venture my life
In meddling with death. What death grapples on
Is better abandoned. If one victim escaped
The next life Death demanded might well be my own.

SEAMUS

The Doctor's my friend and I'm wining to dram
A pint of hot blood from the first volunteer
And pump it in steaming to rally his heart.
The knife's sharp and ready. What bids do I hear?

MRS. LARRY

I'd be first with my offer, but I'm not too sure That my blood soup is right. What's wrong
with your own? Or there's men here with gallons of blood they could spare Whom stout
and high living have much overblown.

SEAMUS

I'd be first with my offer myself if I could, But I handle the knife and it wouldn't be right.
Hurry up, if the blood gets congealed in his veins
You can order his coffin. We can't wait all night.

WIDOW

There wasn't much talk of transfusion of blood
When Larry was dying, his symptoms the same;
I'll not venture my life on the point of your knife,
You could have saved Larry if that was your aim.

SEAMUS

Bedamn, I forgot that the blood of a man
Who isn't long dead is as good as my own;
I'll puncture his heart and draw of a quart—
Poor Larry was healthy and his wild oats well sown.

2ND TAILOR

You'll do no such a thing you murdering villain,
'Twas yourself and the doctor that murdered the man;
You'll not get your hands on his body it'll warrant you
I'll have him carved up by no charlatan.

GRAVEDIGGER

Oh, loathsome, unnatural, bestial crime.
And why did they murder the innocent lad?

5TH TAILOR

Not for money or power, but to get for the Doctor
His wife, the one treasure the poor fellow had.

MRS. LARRY

I'll not believe there's murder done,
My Larry died as men must die,
So, Seamus, if you need the blood
Take it from Larry speedily.

5TH TAILOR

The only thing that killed the doctor
Was his and Seamus's villainy;
I fed him from the poisoned bottle
He's dead of his own whiskey.

GRAVEDIGGER

There's double murder, double death.
Oh horror! Oh, most vicious times!
The Decalogue is smashed and now
Crime fathers nameless crimes.

WIDOW

Send the gaurds and coroner
To investigate their death,
Send for the crime reporter
Let him rewrite Macbeth.

3RD TAILOR

We're the future and untouchable,
Judge, jury, hangman, court of appeal;
The doctor's dead at our decree
[To the GRAVEDIGGER.]
Stop gaping like an imbecile.

GRAVEDIGGER

Often at night I see the ghosts
Of those who lived before us climb
Out of the grave to take the air
Until the cock cries parting-time;
And, watching those dusty figures drift
Under the moonlight, have no fear,
For they are now as we will be
When we have passed our final year.
But you six men with innocent eyes
And faces showing no map of care
To guide the traveller frighten me,
For you are now as we once were.

2ND TAILOR

We are the first explorers, the pioneers that came
Out of the virgin country, our flag's a question-mark
Quandry is our name, our sun and moon are dark,
Our faces featureless, our country unnamed.
All that you're doing now is done this fifty years,
The murderer and victim picked clean in the same earth,
The laughter and the tears, the misery and mirth
Are nothing but a story to titillate our ears.
Every action is predestined, you do what you must,
Like God, we stand in loneliness anatomising dust.

MRS. LARRY

Enough of this squawk,
Give over the talk,
Is the Doctor to die
While you squabble and squall?
I don't care if you're heroes
From Rio de Janeiro,
Just shut your big mouths
And put an end to the brawl.

GRAVEDIGGER

There's murder done, your husband's dead,
And would you save his murderer,
This villainous pill-poisoner,
This moribund adulterest.

MRS. LARRY

I've enough of your chat
And I know what I'm at,
If you won't use the knife
I've a pin in my hat.
So give over your brawling,
Your sneers and cat-calling,
And I'll puncture his heart
If I'll only be let.

6TH TAILOR

Let her away to do her worst,
A willful woman is born accursed;

Her story's written and all you say
Won't move her one inch out of her way.
She was the loyallest woman, she said,
That ever warmed a marriage-bed,
But look at her now that her husband's dead,
A shameless, bawdy widow instead.

MRS. LARRY

And am I bawdy in wanting to save
One out of two from an early gravel
Will you all stand by and let the man die
Then drop your tears from a hypocrite cyst

WIDOW

I was strolling through my life With my husband by my side
When death came in between us
And suddenly Johnny died.
Death's a bold rogue, a bad rogue,
A rogue of high degree,
But if I caught one glimpse of him
He'd be no match for me.

5TH TAILOR

You walked into this house to-night
With Larry by your side,
He took one sip of whiskey
And he soon went glassy-eyed.

WIDOW

Death's a bold rogue, a bad rogue,
A rogue of high degree,
But if I'd time to see his face
He'd be no match for me.

2ND TAILOR

The Doctor thought he'd mastered Death
And had him on his side,
But Death put out his hand for him
And took him in his stride.

WIDOW

Death's a bold rogue, a bad rogue,
A rogue of high degree,

But if I stared him eye to eye
He'd be no match for me.

4TH TAILOR

He's come and gone like lightning
Or the turning of the tide,
A flicker of the eyelid
And he has you caught and tied.

WIDOW

He's a bold rogue, a bad rogue,
A rogue of high degree,
But while I'm young and in my health
He'll be no match for me.

GRAVEDIGGER

Death is in your blood this instant,
He walks beneath your skin,
You drank him with your earliest milk—
You cannot fight and win.

MRS. LARRY

He'll be no match for me,
I'll fight him and I'll win,
So, Seamus, give the knife to me
And show where I begin.

SEAMUS

You must make an incision
With care and precision,
A nick that in time
May save ninety-nine.
I've a chart that will show
The way you must go
And how you must drain
The hot blood from his brain.

3RD TAILOR

I'll not pretend that I agree
To teaching her anatomy

SEAMUS

Then you make a new incision
With courage and decision,

Pour the blood in with precision.
And in less than five minutes you'll
see him alive.

MRS. LARRY

Then hand me the scalpel till I make
him revive.

[She takes the knife from SEAMUS and goes into the next room]

2ND TAILOR

There she goes, the door is shut,
Close your eyes and see her work,
She tests the blade, the dangerous slut,
A woman fit for Hare or Burke,
Opens Larry's waistcoat, coat,
Opens the shirt and then the vest
Feels the flesh still warm and soft
On her husband's hairy chest,
Reads the chart and marks the spot,
Puts the knife against the skin,
Closes her eyes and presses hard
Feeling the keen blade sinking in.
There's blood around her fingers now,
Blood in a spout about her hand,
She opens her eyes to grab a cup,
Looks at her murdered husband and . . .

[There is a scream from offstage.]

VOICES

What frightened her? What did she see?
She must have fainted, carry her out.
The door is locked, I can't get in,
What did she see? Why did she shout?

[There is a pause, then steps can be heard coming to the door and eventually it opens and
LARRY appears, very
bloodstained. Shouts and screams from those on stage.]

GRAVEDIGGER

O God in Heaven, the ghosts are out
And it not nearly twelve of the night;
In all my years of churchyard matins
I've never seen a bloodier sight.

SEAMUS

I'm sorry Larry. I didn't moan it.
Give us a chance and I'll repent,
Crawl on my knees through Lough Derg's stones,
Give up cigarettes for the whole of Lent.



GRAVEDIGGER

Are you a ghost or are you a man?
Are you alive or dead?
If you're the Larry that we know
Who's stretched within on the bed?

LARRY

I'm as dead as mutton this very minute,
Dead as a doornail, dead as Queen Anne—
Give us a drink for Moses' sake,
I'm hardly able to stand.
I can hear my heart, like a cheap alarum,
My guts are twisted, my muscles are bound,

There's fried onions sizzling in my ears,
There isn't an organ sound.
I'm as stiff as Nelson above on his pillar,
As weak as the watery drops of bad plain,
My eyes are burnt out like cigarette butts,
Will yis draw us a drink or I'll faint.
Was it brandy I drank on top of whiskey,
Or poteen brewed from Connachtmen's socks,
Or Lunatic Soup or American hooch,
Or was I learning to box?
Oh my blood is spilt and my brain is melting,
And you want to know am I living or dead
And where's my missus in all this ruction,
Will yis give us a drink I said!

SEAMUS

You're dead, so lie down and leave us in peaces
I'd rather be tried and be hanged in Mountjoy
Than listen to ghosts come foraging liquor,
So back to your Hellfire my fine devil's boy.

LARRY

Stop your prattling, stop your tally
Here's my hands for you to feel.
That one's steel and that one's iron,
And here's the one to make you squeal.

[He hits SEAMUS.]

2ND TAILOR

orry him up he's no relation !
Give him a blow or two for me.
H.O.H.A., Hit one, hit all,
Here's when the wake becomes a spree.

GRAVEIGGER

The Doctor is dead or very near it,
He must be waked- De mortuis nil!
I hear no sound from Mrs. Larry
And it's not like her to stay so still.

LARRY

What's going on here? What's all the taller
Who's been poisoned? Where's my wife?
I must have drunk for half a dozen,

I've the worst hangover of all my life.

WIDOW

The Doctor and Seamus poisoned you;
The Doctor drank from the poisoned can,
Your wife went off to carve you up
Thinking your blood would cure your man.

LARRY

My head's not right, my ears are moidered,
Who in the world would want me dead;
Sure I haven't a tosser to my name
Only what I make at the cobbling trade.

6TH TAILOR

'Twas the Doctor that wanted to marry your missus,
And the same one was only too willing, I'd say,
She hadn't you cold till she was out courting
And would have been married before it was day.

LARRY

Come coroners and judges,
Come slaveys, drabs and drudges,
Come counsellors, attorneys and the press,
Come jurymen and peelers,
Come pocket-picking stealers,
Come murderers and perjurers and the rest;
Come and tell us that this story
Is neither strange nor gory,
That wives carve up their husbands every day,
That poison's drunk like tea
And that what has happened me
Wouldn't even make the action of a play.

5TH TAILOR

Come tabloid-paper readers,
Come languid fashion-leaders
And tell us that it wouldn't rate a line
In Boston or New York,
Vienna, London, Cork,
Would make no delicate cheek incarnadine.

LARRY

We had one of them, but the wheel came off it!
You don't need words that length to tell me straight

Am I dead or am I alive, am I sober or still drunk,
Or why this dirty, doped, delirious state?
[GRAVEDIGGER emerges from the room.]

GRAVEDIGGER

Larry, prepare for the saddest news
That ever your ears have opened to hear;
The shock of your rising levelled your wife,
And she's stretched and dead inside by your bier.

LARRY

Is this the one that was using a knife
To carve me up to save your man's life?

TAILORS

It is.

LARRY

Is she the one who couldn't wait
Till the night was out for a second mate?

TAILORS

She is.

LARRY

Is this the one that was willing to wed
The man that had poisoned me, when I was dead?

TAILORS

She is.

LARRY

Is she the wife who said she'd mourn
Till the day that Gabriel blew his horn?
Who said that love should be constant and true
As the mariner's compass or the truest blue?
Who said that the woman who'd marry again
Was ten times worse than a female Cain?

TAILORS

She is.

LARRY

Then to Hell with her!

GRAVEDIGGER

Larry, these are no words
To use of your late respected wife,
She loved and obeyed you for fifteen Bars
And is one half-minute to cancel a life?

LARRY

One half-minute thrown into that scale
Outweighs all the rest of her life.
She's dead, so God rest her, and God forgive
Her, and every faithless wife.
I remember her as pleasant
As the little flowers of Spring
With her eyes as brilliant shining
As her ring;
I remember nights together
And evenings in the twilight
When the last threads of radiance
Were not half as fine a sight
As her face, and then the mornings . . .
But all's cancelled, all's erased
And what she is, not what she was

Fills out the future days.



This morning, rising early
There was dew on every grass-blade,
The air thin and clear as music
And Autumn on the way,
The future calm before me,
A friend in every parish,
Youth tamed and love house-broken—
But this was fate's Payday.
Look at me since this mowing,
The dead in droves about me,
My house turned topsyturvy
And funeral bills to pay.

WIDOW

You're no more misfortunate than I,
With my husband dead and his grave not dry,
The land untilled and the thatch unpatched,

The windows open, the door unlatched.

LARRY

Two houses foundered is a woeful case
Is there ne'er a neighbour around the place?

WIDOW

There isn't a soul, and it's lonesome too;
And who is going to manage for you?

LARRY

I'll do well enough once the fuss is done
With a bit of steak or a currany bun.

WIDOW

And the house about you going to rack
And ruin, and not a shirt to your back,
The cups unwashed, the table stained,
The curtains ragged, the cat untrained,
Last week's ashes stuck in the grate,
Your dinner eaten from your breakfast plate.
Oh, well I know the way you'll manage
And soon the neighbours will see the damage,
Getting vexed when they have to be sending
Two or three times for the shoes you're mending,
Their boots sucking water at-every puddle,
Heels, soles and teeveens in a miser's muddle,
The heelball missing, the wax-thread flabby,
The old boots wrecked and the new ones shabby,
And before very long you'll see they have found
A cobbler whose soles and heels are sound.

LARRY

I could get a char or a girl by the day.

WIDOW

You know very well what the neighbours would say;
If she was young they'd gossip and gab
And if she was old they'd say that some drab
Slipped in at night when she'd finished her job.
And youth fill or old they'd be certain to rob.

LARRY

I might get a young lad from an orphanage

Who'd work for his keep and a very small wage.

WIDOW

Aye, and have him pinching your cigarettes,
Your socks and ties, and making bets
In the village, and the house hanging down in dirt.
No, that's a scheme that never would work.

GRAVEDIGGER

Then what's the poor fellow supposed to do?

SEAMUS

I suppose you want him to marry you !

WIDOW

The less heard from you the better, my boy.
When you're hanging as high as Gilderoy
And the ballad-singers are singing your crime
Then will be your warbling time.
If you've any sense give your throttle no scope
Till you chirp your last song at the end of a rope.

LARRY

I'll have sense from this out to button my mouth
And talk neither of love nor of jealousy
But take every woman as I find her
Expecting and giving no loyalty.
If unsatisfied wives give a curl of the eye
I'll slither at night through their garden gate;
And if innocent girls have a hankering for knowledge
They'll find me an expert if transient mate.
So, husbands beware, young men take a care,
If you see any woman slip into the dark
If I'm not in the room be certain that soon
She'll discover my bite is as bad as my bark.

WIDOW

This is nothing but the wildest talk,
The girls of the parish are safe as a house,
After fifteen years marriage you're never the man
To throw off the traces and go on the loom.

LARRY

I'm a demon if roused and I'll drink and carouse,

I'll court the young girls unbeknown to the law,
I'll have chislers in dozens till there's nothing but cousins
From here to the sea, and they all with one da.

GRAVEDIGGER

Mind, I'm listening and I'll tell the priest
The nasty scheme that's in your head;
Be sure he'll put a stop to that
And Put a screen round the marriage bed.

LARRY

Let him Put a fence round the island so
For this very night I'll hang out my sign,
"Here young ones! Here's the fellow
That has hotter blood than the best Moonshined

GRAVEDIGGER

'Tis a sorry thing when all is said
That your missus raised you from the dead.

WIDOW

Don't mind him at all, this is all old chat
Can't you see in his eye the fun that he's at;
The priest and the peelers can sleep sound at night
While Larry at home will be sleeping as tight.

LARRY

At every pub where the rates aren't paid
And the owner does an all night trade
I'll know the knock, two, three or four
That will bring Jem hurrying out to the door
With voice tuned down and anxious eye
Up the empty street lest the law come by;
Then down the passage and into the snug
Where the light is & in the cigarette fug,
The half-ones ordered of poisonous stuff
And then the half jarred garrulous gulf
Till the unfamiliar tap at the door
Quenches the light and stills the roar
And cigarettes blooming in the gloom
Are the only signals in the crowded room
And the only noise is the sigh of the drink
As Jem pours the evidence down the sink.
Then maybe the Law will make an entry
Stalking in past the useless sentry,
Notebooks out and deliberate stance

Knowing the alibi in advance,
Making notes of fresh stains of stout
And the simple teetotallers lounging about;
Listening to the touching tale
Of the friendly whiskey, stout and ale
All gratis, and the brandy ready
For the invalid drinker with the heart unsteady,
Hearing how men from three miles away
Happened by chance to pass that way
And drop in for a light for a pipe or a fag—
And the Law with the whole case in the bag
Taking down the fictional name
And the false address from which it came;
The hardy drinkers' alcohol brains
Getting the blood from atrophied veins
Think they're up on a capital charge
And make wild statements to the world at large
Till Jem's unfortunate missus appears
Her hair in pigtails, and in floods of tears
The Law gone into a sort of trance
As she begs on her knees for the one last chance,
"If the licence is endorsed once more.
We can take the name from over the door."
While the boozer reckons up in his head
The money spent and the distance to bed,
The chance of a fine and his name in the news
And all for a dose of murdering booze;
And seeing the drooping, blood-shot eye
The blackened nail and the nicotine dye
Reads in advance the next day's log,
The shattered head, the hair of the dog
And knows too well that next Saturday night
Will present his eyes with a similar sight.

WIDOW

I remember my father's dying injunction—
"Drink fusel oil and take extreme unction!"

LARRY

You're as gamey a woman as ever I met
But women are poison I'm starting to think,
And from this day forward I must be content
With a drag on my pipe and a headful of drink.

WIDOW

The pounds of tobacco you stuff in your pipe
May solace a moment, an hour or a day
But when they are smoked you are left with the pipe

And the pleasure and solace are merely heresay;
But a woman that's healthy and loving and young
Gives pleasure for months, or a year, or a life,
When the throat's harsh with smoke she's still sweet
to the tongue
So who'd chose tobacco in place of a wife?
The drink that's so merry and frisky and gay
So youthful and gallant and brave by lamplight
Is surly and sullen and crazed the next day
And five minutes as long as an hour of the night;
But a woman that's joyous and gamesome and witty
Is as loving at midday as she is at midnight
Her laughter as free and her glances as pretty
In the prose of the day as the verse of starlight
The drink and the horses, the dogs and the fags
Replenish your interest but empty your pockets,
So cling to a woman in satins or rags
And she'll liven your eyes till they sink in their
sockets.

LARRY

Your husband told you to hold your horses
Till the clay on his grave was dry
And I think you'd better obey his wish,
And so, I think, should I.

2ND TAILOR

If your Johnny had known, if you had known,
If Larry had known what is to be
This would be a different story
And there would be no me !
But the coroner and jury will find
Death by misadventure
On Herself and the Doctor; and you will marry
Without a word of censure.
The future is calling to us and we
Must fade out of your sigh;

[As he speaks, the other characters on the stage turn to one another and speak as though the
TAILORS were no longer present.]

Already you've forgotten we're here
So good-luck, and a very good night.

[The TAILORS step to the front of the stage and the inner attains are drawn.]

And so my grandpa married t vice,

One wife was good and one was bad;
But which was bad and which was good
Was a puzzle always to my granddad,
For one talked love to him all day long
And the other one did what the world thought wrong,
Married in haste and didn't repent,
Laughed at love and was well content
To be faithful and happy, witty and good,
No bitter nagger and no prude,
Well able to drink her bottle of stout
And just as well able to do without
Her children neat and her home all shining,
Hers was the gold past all refining,
And, son, my wish for you when you marry
Is that you may be as happy as Larry.

[Curtain]



GLOSSARY

8.—LEG-BAIL: To take leg-bail is to escape from custody, probably from the idea of the leg receiving bail.cf. 'It grieved my heart to see you sail Huroo ! Huroo ! It grieved my heart to see you sail Though from my heart you took leg-bail, Like a cod you're doubled up head and tail, Och, Johnny I hardly knew ye !' (Old Ballad).

11.— ACT: Almost any human action may be referred to, generally satirically or humourously, as an Act, frequently prefaced by the adjectives 'gas' or 'extraordinary. '

11.— GAS: adz. Amusing, funny, queer. n. Fun, amusement.

12.— OULD ONES: Old women. The word 'one' is used in a slightly offensive sense of a woman of any age.

12.— JEM .— Jem is the generic Dubliner. The use of the name is typical of the inveterate Irish reluctance to make a positive statement, since it can substitute for any name, known or unknown. c£ also 'your man' q.v.

12.— HOOSH: To give a leg up, to lift.

13.— BOLD .— A slightly satiric adjective. Generally pronounced Gould.'

13.— FAIR ENOUGH: Very well. This is a cant-phrase of half-humorous acceptance which has achieved vast Popularity in recent years.

13.— BALL OF MALT: A Yes of whiskey. The word Ball is a corruption of 'Boll' a measure of capacity for grain.

18.—A FINE FIRE WHEN IT STARTS: The fox at the time was observing steam rising from a heap of stones, and, misled by the proverb, thought there could be no smoke without fire.

20.— KNOCKING BACK: Drinking. The phrase is used particularly in reference to pints of porter— "Knocking back a pint."

29. — SLOUTHERING: Ingratiating, flattering.

34.—A PIPE AND GLASS: This refers to the old custom at wakes of providing the mourners with drink, generally porter, and clay-pipes and tobacco. In addition snuff was provided in large quantities and passed frequently from hand to hand, each recipient being expected to say a prayer for the repose of the soul of the deceased at each sniff taken. Hence the proverbial expression, "Tossed about like snuff a wake."

46 — MOIDERED: Deafened and confused by excessive noise (also moithered, moythered)

47.— BOWSEY: A low and truculent person. Probably from German bose, angry, unpleasant, the word being introduced by the German troops of William III at the end of the 17th century.

57.—BLUESTONE POTEEN: Harried manufacturers of illicit spirits, known as poteen, frequently become impatient at the desultory 'working' of the contents of their still and insert a quantity of Bluestone, or sulphate of copper, to precipitate the action, with lamentable ejects on their subsequent customers.

57.— RED BIDDY: In England a comparatively innocuous cheap red wine. In Ireland an almost lethal dose of cheap red wine liberally laced with methylated spirits.

57.— JOHNNY JUMP-UP: A particularly potent cider.

57.— AS DRY AS ST. PATRICK S DAY: In Ireland St. Patrick's Day is one of mourning to serious drinkers since all public bars, with the exception of that at a phenomenally successful Dog Show in Dublin, are closed.

61.— POOR LARRY: With exquisite illogicality one who has inherited the wealth of eternity is referred to as poor.

69.— PLAIN: Draught single X porter, still retailing, despite the rise in the cost of living, at eight pence a pint, but no longer, as we are assured it did in Edwardian times, sticking to the counter.