

KATE + EILEEN

EILEEN. Well, I have one bad arm and one arm with a knock.
KATE. The knock will go away.
EILEEN. The knock will go away.
KATE. And you'll be left with the one bad arm.
EILEEN. The one bad arm will never go away.
KATE. Until the day you die.
EILEEN. I should think about poor Billy, who has not only bad arms but bad legs too.
KATE. Billy has a host of troubles.
EILEEN. Billy has a hundred troubles.
KATE. What time was this his appointment with McSharry and his chest?
EILEEN. I don't know what time.

START
KATE. I do worry awful about Billy when he's late in returning, d'you know?
EILEEN. Already once you've said that sentence.
KATE. Am I not allowed to repeat me sentences so when I'm worried.
EILEEN. You *are* allowed.
KATE. (*Pause.*) Billy may've fell down a hole with them feet of his.
EILEEN. Billy has sense enough not to fall down holes, sure. That's more like something Bartley McCormick'd do is fall down holes.
KATE. Do you remember the time Bartley McCormick fell down the hole?
EILEEN. Bartley McCormick's an awful thick.
KATE. He's either a thick or he doesn't look where he's going proper. (*Pause.*) Has the egg-man been?
EILEEN. He has but he had no eggs.
KATE. A waste of time him coming, so.
EILEEN. Well it was nice of him to come and not have us waiting for eggs that would never arrive.
KATE. If only Billy would pay us the same courtesy. Not with eggs but to come home quick and not have us worrying.
EILEEN. Maybe Billy stopped to look at a cow like the other time.
KATE. A fool waste of time that is, looking at cows.

EILEEN. If it makes him happy, sure, what harm? There are a hundred worse things to occupy a lad's time than cow-watching. Things would land him up in hell. Not just late for his tea.
KATE. Kissing lasses.
EILEEN. Kissing lasses.
KATE. (*Pause.*) Ah, no chance of that with poor Billy.
EILEEN. Poor Billy'll never be getting kissed. Unless it was be a blind girl.
KATE. A blind girl or a backward girl.
EILEEN. Or Jim Finnegan's daughter.
KATE. She'd kiss anything.
EILEEN. She'd kiss a bald donkey.
KATE. She'd kiss a bald donkey. And she'd still probably draw the line at Billy. Poor Billy.
EILEEN. A shame too.
KATE. A shame too, because Billy does have a sweet face if you ignore the rest of him.
EILEEN. Well he doesn't really.
KATE. He has a bit of a sweet face.
EILEEN. Well he doesn't really, Kate.
KATE. Or his eyes, I'm saying. They're nice enough.
EILEEN. Not being cruel to Billy but you'd see nicer eyes on a goat. If he had a nice personality you'd say all well and good, but all Billy has is he goes around staring at cows.
KATE. I'd like to ask him one day what good he gets, staring at cows.
EILEEN. Staring at cows and reading books then.
KATE. No one'll ever marry him. We'll be stuck with him 'til the day we die.
EILEEN. We will. (*Pause.*) I don't mind being stuck with him.
KATE. I don't mind being stuck with him. Billy's a good gasur, despising the cows.
EILEEN. I hope that the news from McSharry was nothing to worry o'er.
KATE. I hope he gets home soon and not have us worrying. I do worry awful when Billy's late in returning. (*The shop door opens and Johnnypateenmike, an old man of about the same age as them, enters.*)

HELEN + BARTLEY + BILLY

HELEN. They loved you? Would you love you if you weren't you? You barely love you and you *are* you.

BARTLEY. (*Winded.*) At least Cripple Billy doesn't punch poor lads' ribs for them.

HELEN. No, and why? Because he's too fecking feeble to. It'd feel like a punch from a wet goose.

BARTLEY. (*Excited.*) Did ye hear Jack Ellery's goose bit Patty Brennan's cat on the tail and hurt that tail....

HELEN. We *did* hear.

BARTLEY. Oh. (*Pause.*) And Jack didn't even apologise for that goose's biting and now Patty Brennan....

HELEN. Didn't I just say we fecking heard, sure?

BARTLEY. I thought Billy mightn't have heard.

START

HELEN. Sure Billy's busy thinking about his drowned mammy and daddy, Bartley. He doesn't need any of your days-old goose-news. Aren't you thinking about your drowned mammy and daddy, Billy?

BILLY. I am.

HELEN. You've never been on the sea since the day they died, have you, Billy? Aren't you too scared?

BILLY. I *am* too scared.

HELEN. What a big sissy-arse, eh, Bartley?

BARTLEY. Sure anybody with a brain is at least a biteen afraid of the sea.

HELEN. *I'm* not a biteen afraid of the sea.

BARTLEY. Well there you go, now. (*Billy laughs.*)

HELEN. Eh? Was that an insult?!

BARTLEY. How would that be an insult, saying you're not afraid of the sea?

HELEN. Why did Cripple Billy laugh so?

BARTLEY. Cripple Billy only laughed cos he's an odd boy. Isn't that right, Cripple Billy?

BILLY. It is, aye. Oh plain odd I am. (*Helen pauses, confused.*)

BARTLEY. Is it true you got nigh on a hundred pounds insurance when your mammy and daddy drowned, Billy?

BILLY. It is.

BARTLEY. Jeebies. Do ya still have it?

18

BILLY. I have none of it. Didn't it all go on me medical bills at the time?

BARTLEY. You don't have even a quarter of it?

BILLY. I don't. Why?

BARTLEY. No, only if you had a quarter of it you could probably buy yourself a pretty classy telescope, d'you know? Oh you could.

HELEN. Do you have to bring telescopes into fecking everything, you?

BARTLEY. I don't, but I like to, ya bitch. Leave me! (*Bartley dashes out of the shop as Helen advances on him. Pause.*)

HELEN. I don't know where he gets the fecking cheek of him from, I don't.

BILLY. (*Pause.*) How are ye two sailing to Inishmore, so, Helen? Ye've no boat.

HELEN. We're getting Babbybobby Bennett to bring us in his boat.

BILLY. Are you paying him?

HELEN. Only in kisses and a bit of a hold of his hand, or I *hope* that it's only his hand I'll be holding. Although I've heard it's a big one. Jim Finnegan's daughter was telling me. She knows everybody's. I think she keeps a chart for herself.

BILLY. She doesn't know mine.

HELEN. And you say that like you're proud. I suppose she wasn't sure whether you had one, as mangled and fecked as you are.

BILLY. (*Sadly.*) I have one.

HELEN. Congratulations, but would you keep it to yourself? In more ways than one. (*Pause.*) Me, the only ones I've seen belong to priests. They keep showing them to me. I don't know why. I can't say they whetted me appetite. All brown. (*Pause.*) What have you gone all mopy for?

BILLY. I don't know, now, but I suppose you intimating me mammy and daddy preferred death to being stuck with me didn't help matters.

HELEN. I wasn't intimating that at all. I was saying it outright.

BILLY. (*Quietly.*) You don't know what was in their heads.

STOP

19

HELEN. Uh-huh? And do you? (Billy bows his head sadly. *Pause. Helen flicks him hard in the cheek with her finger, then moves off.*)

BILLY. Helen? Would Babbybobby be letting me go sailing to Inishmore with ye?

HELEN. What have you to offer Babbybobby, sure? He wouldn't want to go holding your mangled hand.

BILLY. What has Bartley to offer Bobby, so, and he's still going with ye?

HELEN. Bartley said he'd help with the rowing. Could you help with the rowing? (Billy lowers his head again.) What would you want to be coming for, anyways?

BILLY. (Shrugging.) To be in the filming.

HELEN. You? (She starts laughing, slowly, moving to the door.) I shouldn't laugh at you, Billy ... but I will. (She exits laughing. *Pause. Eileen returns from the back room and slaps Billy across the head.*)

BILLY. What was that fer?!

EILEEN. Over my dead body are you going to Inishmore filming, Billy Claven!

BILLY. Ah I was only thinking aloud, sure.

EILEEN. Well stop thinking aloud! Stop thinking aloud and stop thinking quiet! There's too much out thinking done in this house with you around. Did you ever see the Virgin Mary going thinking aloud?

BILLY. I didn't.

EILEEN. Is right, you didn't. And it didn't do her any harm! (Eileen exits to the back room again. *Pause. Billy gets up, shuffles to his mirror, looks himself over a moment, then sadly shuffles back to the table. Bartley opens the shop door and pops his head inside.*)

BARTLEY. Cripple Billy, will you tell your aunty or your pretend aunty I'll be in for me Mintios later, or, not me Mintios but me sweeties generally.

BILLY. I will, Bartley.

BARTLEY. Me sister just told me your idea of being in the filming with us and I did have an awful laugh. That was a great joke, Billy.

BILLY. Good-oh, Bartley.

BARTLEY. They may even bring you to Hollywood after. They may make a star out of ya.

BILLY. They might at that, Bartley.

BARTLEY. A little cripple star. Heh. So you'll remind your aunty I'll be in for me Mintios later, or, not me Mintios but me....

BILLY. Your sweeties generally.

BARTLEY. Me sweeties generally. Or if not later then tomorrow morning.

BILLY. Good-bye Bartley.

BARTLEY. Good-bye, Cripple Billy, or are you okay there, Cripple Billy, you do look a little bit sad for yourself

BILLY. I'm fine, Bartley.

BARTLEY. Good-oh. (Bartley exits. Billy wheezes slightly, feeling his chest.)

BILLY. (Quietly.) I'm fine, aye. (Pause. *Blackout.*)

Scene 3

A shore at night. Babbybobby fixing his curragh. Johnny enters, slightly drunk, walks up to him and watches a while.

START

JOHNNY. I see you're getting your curragh ready, Babbybobby. BOBBY. I am, Johnnypateen.

JOHNNY. (Pause.) Are you getting your curragh ready so?

BOBBY. Didn't I just say I was getting me curragh ready?

JOHNNY. You did, aye. (Pause.) So you're getting your curragh ready. (Pause.) All spick and span you're getting it. (Pause.) All nice and prepared like. (Pause.) All ready for a trip or something. (Pause.) That's a nice boat, that is. A nice boat for a tripeen. And it's even more nice now that you've got it all prepared for yourself. (Pause.) All prepared and ready.

BOBBY. If it's a question you have to ask me, Johnnypateen, go

ahead and ask me the question and don't be beating around the bush like some fool of an eejit schoolchild.

JOHNNY. I have no question to ask you. If Johnnypateen has a question to ask he comes right out and asks it. You don't see Johnnypateen beating around a bush. Oh no. *(Pause.)* Just commenting on how nice your curragh is all. *(Pause.)* How nice and ready you're getting it. *(Pause.)* Nice and ready for a trip or something. *(Pause. Angry.)* Well if you won't tell me where you're going I'll fecking be off with meself!

BOBBY. Be off with yourself, aye.

JOHNNY. I will be off with meself. After your treatment!

BOBBY. I gave you no treatment. You never tell me any JOHNNY. You did give me treatment. You never tell me any news. Your Mrs. up and died of TB the other year, and who was the last to know? I was the last to know. I wasn't told until the day she died, and you knew for weeks and weeks, with not a thought for my feelings....

BOBBY. I should've kicked her arse down the road to tell you, Johnnypateen, and, d'you know, I've regretted not doing so ever since.

JOHNNY. One more time I'll say it so. So you're getting your curragh ready. All nice and prepared for a *trip* or something, now.

BOBBY. Ask me a question outright and I'll be pleased to give you the answer, Johnnypateen. *(Johnny stares at Bobby a second, fuming, then storms off. Bobby continues with the boat. Quietly.)* Ya stupid fecking eejit! *(Pause. Calling off L.)* Who's that shuffling on the stones?

BILLY. *(Off.)* It's Billy Claven, Babbybobby.

BOBBY. I should've guessed that. Who else shuffles?

BILLY. *(Entering.)* No one, I suppose.

BOBBY. Are your aunties not worried you're out this late, Cripple Billy?

BILLY. They'd be worried if they knew but I snuck out on them.

BOBBY. You shouldn't sneak out on aunties, Cripple Billy. Even if they're funny aunties.

BILLY. Do you think they're funny aunties too, Babbybobby?

BOBBY. I saw your Aunty Kate talking to a stone one time. BILLY. And she shouts at me for staring at cows.

BOBBY. Well I wouldn't hold staring at cows up as the height of sanity, Billy.

BILLY. Sure, I only stare at cows to get away from me aunties a while. It isn't for the fun of staring at cows. There *is* no fun in staring at cows. They just stand there looking at you like fools.

BOBBY. Do you never throw nothing at them cows? That might liven them up.

BILLY. I wouldn't want to hurt them, sure.

BOBBY. You're too kind-hearted is your trouble, Cripple Billy. Cows don't mind you throwing things at them. I threw a brick at a cow once and he didn't even moo, and I got him bang on the arse.

BILLY. Sure that's no evidence. He may've been a quiet cow.

BOBBY. He may've. And, sure, I'm not telling you to go pegging bricks at cows. I was drunk when this happened. Just if you get bored, I'm saying.

BILLY. I usually bring a book with me anyways. I've no desire to injure livestock.

BOBBY. You could throw the book at the cow.

BILLY. I would rather to read the book, Bobby.

BOBBY. It takes all kinds, as they say.

BILLY. It does. *(Pause.)* Are you getting your curragh ready there, Babbybobby?

BOBBY. Oh everybody's awful observant tonight, it does seem.

BILLY. Ready to bring Helen and Bartley o'er to the filming? *(Bobby looks at Billy a moment, checks out R. to make sure Johnny isn't around, then returns.)*

BOBBY. How did you hear tell of Helen and Bartley's traveling?

BILLY. Helen told me.

BOBBY. Helen told you. Jeez, and I told Helen she'd get a punch if she let anyone in on the news.

BILLY. I hear she's paying you in kisses for this boat-trip.

BOBBY. She is, and, sure, I didn't want paying at all. It was Helen insisted on that clause.

BILLY. Wouldn't you want to kiss Helen, so?

Scene 4

Bedroom of Mammy O'Dougal, Johnny's ninety-year-old mother. Mammy in bed, Doctor McSharry checking her with a stethoscope, Johnny hovering.

START

DOCTOR. Have you been laying off the drink, Mrs. O'Dougal?
 JOHNNY. Did you not hear me question, Doctor?
 DOCTOR. I did hear your question, but amn't I trying to examine your mammy without your fool questions?
 JOHNNY. Fool questions, is it?
 DOCTOR. Have you been laying off the drink, Mrs. O'Dougal, I said?
 MAMMY. *(Burps.)* I have been laying off the drink or I've sort of been laying off the drink.
 JOHNNY. She has a pint of porter now and then is no harm at all.
 MAMMY. Is no harm at all.
 JOHNNY. Is good for you!
 DOCTOR. So long as you keep it at a pint of porter is the main thing so.
 MAMMY. It is the main thing, and a couple of whiskies now and then.
 JOHNNY. Didn't I only just say not to mention the whiskies, ya thick?
 DOCTOR. How often is now and then?
 JOHNNY. Once in a blue moon.
 MAMMY. Once in a blue moon, and at breakfast sometimes.
 JOHNNY. 'At breakfast', jeez....
 DOCTOR. Johnnypateenmike, don't you know well not to go feeding a ninety-year-old woman whiskey for breakfast?
 JOHNNY. Ah she likes it, and doesn't it shut her up?
 MAMMY. I do like a drop of whiskey, me, I do.
 JOHNNY. From the horse's mouth.
 MAMMY. Although I do prefer poteen.
 DOCTOR. But you don't get given poteen?

BILLY. I won't even see the summer in. *(Pause.)* D'you remember the time Annie made me the jam roly-poly when I had the chicken-pox? And the smile she gave me then?

BOBBY. Was it a nice jam roly-poly?

BILLY. *(Reluctantly.)* Not really, Bobby.

BOBBY. No. Poor Annie couldn't cook jam roly-polies to save the life of her. Ah, I still miss her, despite her awful puddings. *(Pause.)* I'm glad I was able to help you in some way anyways, Cripple Billy, in the time you've left.

BILLY. Would you do me a favour, Babbybobby? Would you not call me Cripple Billy any more long?

BOBBY. What do you want to be called so?

BILLY. Well, just Billy.

BOBBY. Oh. Okay so, Billy.

BILLY. And you, would you rather just be called Bobby and not Babbybobby?

BOBBY. For why?

BILLY. I don't know why.

BOBBY. I do like being called Babbybobby. What's wrong with it?

BILLY. Nothing at all, I suppose. I'll see you in the morning so, Babbybobby.

BOBBY. See you in the morning so, Cripple Billy. Em, Billy.

BILLY. Didn't I just say?

BOBBY. I forgot. I'm sorry, Billy. *(Billy nods, then shuffles away.)*

BOBBY. I forgot. *(Billy looks back. Bobby makes a gesture with his hand.)* Oh, and Billy? *(Billy bows his head, nods, and exits R. Pause. Bobby notices I'm sorry. (Billy bows his head, nods, and picks a Bible up out of it, looks at it a moment, then tosses it back into the sea and continues working on the boat. Blackout.)*

MAMMY. I don't get given poteen, no.
 JOHNNY. *Now.*
 MAMMY. Only on special occasions.
 DOCTOR. And what qualifies as a special occasion?
 MAMMY. A Friday, a Saturday or a Sunday.
 DOCTOR. When your mammy's dead and gone, Johnny-pateen, I'm going to cut out her liver and show it to you, the damage your fine care has done.
 JOHNNY. You won't catch me looking at me mammy's liver. I can barely stomach the outside of her, let alone the inside.
 DOCTOR. A fine thing that is for a fella to say in front of his mammy.
 MAMMY. I've head worse.
 JOHNNY. Leave me mammy alone now, you, with your mangling. If she's been trying to drink herself dead for sixty-five years with no luck, I wouldn't start worrying about her now. Sixty-five years. Feck, she can't do anything right.
 DOCTOR. Why do you want to drink yourself dead, Mrs. O'Dougal?
 MAMMY. I do miss me husband Donal. Ate be a shark.
 JOHNNY. 1871 he was ate be a shark.
 DOCTOR. Oh you should be trying to get over that now, Mrs. O'Dougal.
 MAMMY. I've tried to, Doctor, but I can't. A lovely man he was. And living with this goose all these years, it just brings it back to me.
 JOHNNY. Who are you calling a goose, ya hairy-lipped fool? Didn't I go out of me way to bring Doctor McSharry home to ya?
 MAMMY. Aye, but only to go nosing about Cripple Billy Claven is all.
 JOHNNY. No, not ... not.... Ah you always go spilling the beans, you, ya lump.
 MAMMY. I'm an honest woman, me Johnny-pateen.
 JOHNNY. Honest me hairy hole.
 MAMMY. And you didn't get me drunk enough. *(The Doctor packs up his black bag.)*
 DOCTOR. If I'm only here under false pretences....

JOHNNY. You're not here under false pretences. Me mammy did seem awful bad earlier ... cough, Mammy... *(Mammy coughs.)* But she seems to be over the worst of it, you're right there, although, now, while you're here, Doctor, what is all this about Cripple Billy? He wouldn't be in a terrible way, would he? Maybe something life-threatening, now? Oh I suppose it must be something awful serious if you go writing letters to him.
 DOCTOR. *(Pause.)* Did you ever hear of a thing called doctor-patient confidentiality, Johnny-pateenmike?
 JOHNNY. I did, and I think it's a great thing. Now tell me what's wrong with Cripple Billy, Doctor.
 DOCTOR. I'm going to open up that head of yours one day, Johnny-pateen, and find nothing inside it at all.
 JOHNNY. Don't go straying off the subject now, you. Tell me what's wrong with ... or was that a clue to the subject, now? There's something on the inside of his head that's wrong? A brain tumour? He has a brain tumour!
 DOCTOR. I wasn't aware....
 JOHNNY. Tell me he has a brain tumour, Doctor. Oh that'd be awful big news.
 DOCTOR. I'm off home, I thank you for wasting me precious time, but before I go I'll just say one thing, and that's I don't know where you got your information from this time o'er Cripple Billy, for it's usually such accurate information you do get, oh aye....
 JOHNNY. Polio, polio. He has polio.
 DOCTOR. But as far as I'm aware, apart from those deformities he's had since birth, there is nothing wrong with Billy Claven at all, and it would be better if you didn't go spreading fool gossip about him.
 JOHNNY. *(Pause.)* TB. TB. Ah it must be TB. *(The Doctor walks away.)* Where are you off to? Don't go hogging all the decent news, you! *(The Doctor has exited.)* Ya beggar! Is Billy in such good health that rowing to Inishmore in the freezing morning as he did this day'll do him no harm, so? *(Pause. The Doctor returns, thoughtful.)* Didn't that get him running back quick?
 MAMMY. Like a cat with a worm up his arse.

KATE. I can feel it in me bones, Eileen. From the minute he left I knew. Cripple Billy's dead and gone.

EILEEN. But didn't the doctor assure us five times there was nothing wrong with Cripple Billy?

KATE. Only so not to hurt us that assuring was. It was Johnny-pat who had the real story all along, same as about Billy's mam and dad's drowning he always had the real story.

EILEEN. Oh lord, I see Babbybobby coming up the pathway towards us.

KATE. Does he look glum, Eileen?

EILEEN. He does look glum, but Babbybobby usually looks glum.

KATE. Does he look glummer than he usually looks?

EILEEN. (Pause.) He does.

KATE. Oh no.

EILEEN. And he's taken the hat off him now.

KATE. That's an awful bad sign, taking the hat off ya.

EILEEN. Maybe just being gentlemanly he is?

KATE. Babbybobby? Sure, Babbybobby pegs bricks at cows.

(Bobby enters, cap in hand.)

BOBBY. Eileen, Kate.

EILEEN. Babbybobby.

BOBBY. Would you be sitting down a minute there for yourself, now, Eileen? I've news to be telling ye. (Eileen sits at the table.)

I've just brought the two McCormicks home, and I was supposed to bring yere Billy home, I know, but I couldn't bring yere Billy home because ... because he's been taken to America for a screen test for a film they're making about a cripple fella. Or ...

I don't think the *whole* film will be about the cripple fella. The cripple fella'd only be a minor role. Aye. But it'd still be a good part, d'you know? (Pause.) Although, there's more important things in the world than good parts in Hollywood films about cripple fellas. Being around your family and your friends is more important, and I tried to tell Cripple Billy that, but he wouldn't listen to me, no matter how much I told him. Be boat this morning they left. Billy wrote a letter here he asked me to pass onto ye. (Pause.) Two or three months at minimum, Billy said

in Kerry with no ears at all on him.

EILEEN. (Pause.) That's a great piece of news.

JOHNNY. Don't ask me how he hears because I don't know and I don't care. Me second piece of news, Patty Brennan's cat was found dead and Jack Ellery's goose was found dead and nobody in town is said to've seen anything, but we can all put two and two together, although not out loud because Jack Ellery's an awful tough.

KATE. That's a sad piece of news because now it sounds like a feud is starting.

JOHNNY. A feud is starting and won't be stopped 'til the one or the two of them finish up slaughtered. Good. I will take six eggs, Mrs., for the omelette I promised me mammy a fortnight ago.

EILEEN. What was the third piece of news, Johnny-pateen?

JOHNNY. I mention me mammy and nobody even asks as to how she is. Oh it's the height of politeness in this quarter.

KATE. How is your mammy, Johnny-pateen?

JOHNNY. Me mammy's fine, so she is, despite me best efforts.

EILEEN. Are you still trying to kill your mammy with the drink, Johnny-pateen?

JOHNNY. I am but it's no use. A fortune in booze that bitch has cost me over the years. She'll never go. (Pause.) Well now, I have me eggs, I've told you me two pieces of news. I suppose that's me business finished here for the day.

KATE. The ... the third piece of news, Johnny-pateen?

JOHNNY. Oh, the third piece of news. Wasn't I almost forgetting? (Pause.) The third piece of news is Babbybobby's just pulled his boat up on the sands, at the headland there, and let the young adventurers off. Or, let *two* of the young adventurers off anyways, Helen and Bartley. There was no hide nor hair of Cripple Billy in that boat. (Pause.) I'm off to have Babbybobby arrested for throwing stones at me head. I thank you for the eggs. (Johnny exits. Pause. Kate sadly caresses the old sack hanging on the wall, then sits at the table.)

KATE. He's gone from us, Eileen. He's gone from us.

EILEEN. We don't know at all that he's gone from us.

HELEN + BARTLEY

ACT TWO

Scene 1

The shop, summer, four months later. A couple of flyers for Man of Aran, being shown at the church hall, hang on the walls. The sweetie boxes and a stone lie on the counter, beside which Bartley stands, pursing his lips dumbly and doing other stuff for a few moments to fill in time as he waits for Kate to return. Helen enters carrying a few dozen eggs.

START

HELEN. What are you waiting for?
BARTLEY. She's gone in the back to look for me Fripplie-Frapples.
HELEN. Oh you and your fecking Fripplie-Frapples. *(Helen arranges BARTLEY. Fripplie-Frapples are nice sweeties. (Helen arranges the eggs on the counter.) I see you've brought the eggs up.*
HELEN. You, you're awful observant.
BARTLEY. I thought bringing the eggs was the egg-man's job.
HELEN. It was the egg-man's job, but I did kick the egg-man in the shins this after and he didn't feel up to it.
BARTLEY. What did you kick the egg-man in the shins for?
HELEN. He insinuated it was me murdered Jack Ellery's goose and Pat Brennan's cat for them.
BARTLEY. But it was you murdered Jack Ellery's goose and Pat Brennan's cat for them.
HELEN. I know it was, but if it gets bandied around town I'll never be getting paid.
BARTLEY. How much are you getting paid?
HELEN. Eight bob for the goose and ten bob for the cat.
BARTLEY. Why did you charge extra for the cat?
HELEN. Well, I had to pay Ray Darcy for the borrow of his axe.

42

See, the goose I only had to stomp on him. It takes more than a stomp to polish a cat off.

BARTLEY. A planken of wood you could've used on the cat, and saved shelling out for the axe at all.

HELEN. Sure I wanted the job carried out professional, Bartley. A plank is the weapon of a flat-faced child. I wouldn't use a plank on a blue-arsed fly.

BARTLEY. What *would* you use on a blue-arsed fly?
HELEN. I wouldn't use a thing on a blue-arsed fly. There's no money involved in killing blue-arsed flies.

BARTLEY. Jim Finnegan's daughter killed twelve worms one day.

HELEN. Aye, be breathing on them.

BARTLEY. No, be sticking needles in their eyes.

HELEN. Now there's the work of an amateur. *(Pause.)* I didn't even know worms had eyes.

BARTLEY. They don't after Jim Finnegan's daughter gets through with them.

HELEN. What's this stone here for?

BARTLEY. I caught Mrs. Osbourne talking to that stone when first I came in.

HELEN. What was she saying to the stone?

BARTLEY. She was saying 'How are you, stone', and then putting the stone to her ear like the stone was talking back to her.

HELEN. That's awful strange behaviour.

BARTLEY. And asking the stone, then, if it knew how our Cripple Billy was doing for himself in America.

HELEN. And what did the stone say?

BARTLEY. *(Pause.)* The stone didn't say anything, Helen, because stones they don't say anything.

HELEN. Oh, I thought you said Mrs. Osbourne was doing the voice for the stone.

BARTLEY. No, Mrs. Osbourne was just doing her own voice.

HELEN. Maybe we should hide the stone and see if Mrs. Osbourne has a nervous breakdown.

BARTLEY. Sure that wouldn't be a very Christian thing to do, Helen.

43

STOP

EILEEN. (Exiting.) I will be like that. I will be like that. (Long pause, Billy's head lowered. Eileen sticks her head back in.) And I suppose you'll be wanting prairie cakes for your tea too!

BILLY. I would, Aunty.

EILEEN. Taahhh! (She exits again. Pause. Billy looks at the sheet/screen, pulls it back across to its original dimensions and stands there staring at it, caressing it slightly, deep in thought. Bobby quietly enters R., Billy noticing him after a moment.)

BILLY. Babbybobby. I daresay I owe you an explanation.

BOBBY. There's no need to explain, Billy.

BILLY. I want to, Bobby. See, I never thought at all this day would come when I'd have to explain. I'd hoped I'd disappear forever to America. And I would've too, if they'd wanted me there. If they'd wanted me for the filming. But they didn't want me. A blond lad from Fort Lauderdale they hired instead of me. He wasn't crippled at all, but the Yank said 'Ah, better to get a normal fella who can act crippled than a crippled fella who can't fecking act at all.' Except he said it ruder. (Pause.) I thought I'd done all right for meself with me acting. (Pause.) I gave it a go anyways. I had to give it a go. I had to get away from this place, Babbybobby, be any means, just like me mammy and daddy had to get away from this place. (Pause.) Going drowning meself I'd often think of when I was here, just to ... just to end the laughing at me, and the sniping at me, and the life of nothing but shuffling to the doctor's and shuffling back from the doctor's and pawing over the same ol' books and finding any other way to piss another day away. Another day of sniggering, or the patting me on the head like a broken-brained fool. The village orphan. The village cripple, and nothing more. Well, there are plenty round here just as crippled as me, only it isn't on the outside it shows. (Pause.) But the thing is, you're not one of them, Babbybobby, nor never were. You've a kind heart on you. I suppose that's why it was so easy to cod you with the TB letter, but that's why I was so sorry for coddling you at the time and why I'm just as sorry now. Especially for coddling you with the same thing your Mrs. passed from. Just I thought that would be more effective. But, in the long run I thought, or I hoped, that if you had a choice between you being coddled a while and me doing away

STOP

with meself, you'd choose you being coddled every time. Was I wrong, Babbybobby? Was I? (Bobby slowly walks over to Billy, stops just in front of him, and lets a length of lead piping slide down his sleeve into his hand.)

BOBBY. Aye. (Bobby raises the pipe ...)

BILLY. No, Bobby, no...! (Billy covers up as the pipe scythes down. Blackout, with the sounds of Billy's pained screams and the pipe scything down again and again.)

Scene 4

The shop, late evening. The Doctor tending to Billy's bruised and bloody face. Kate at the counter, Eileen at the door, looking out.

EILEEN. Johnypateenmike's near enough running o'er the island with his news of Billy's return to us.

KATE. This is a big day for news.

EILEEN. He has a loaf in one hand and a leg o' mutton neath each armeen.

KATE. Billy's return and Babbybobby's arrest and Jim Finnegan's daughter joining the nunnery then. That was the biggest surprise.

EILEEN. The nuns must be after anybody if they left Jim Finnegan's daughter join them.

KATE. The nuns' standards must have dropped.

BILLY. Sure why shouldn't Jim Finnegan's daughter become a nun? It's only pure gossip that Jim Finnegan's daughter is a slut.

DOCTOR. No, Jim Finnegan's daughter is a slut.

BILLY. Is she?

DOCTOR. Aye.

BILLY. How do you know?

DOCTOR. Just take me word.

EILEEN. Isn't he a doctor?

START

KATE. Back for good. *(The two smile and exit to the back room, arm-in-arm. After a pause, Billy comes in from the back, sniffing, and turns the oil lamp up, revealing his bloodshot eyes and tear-stained cheeks. He quietly takes the sack down from the wall, places inside it numerous cans of peas until it's very heavy, then ties the cords at the top of the bag tightly around one of his hands. This done, he pauses in thought a moment, then shuffles to the door. There is a knock on it, Billy dries his cheeks, hides the sack behind him and opens the door. Helen pops her head in.)*

HELEN. *(Forcefully.)* All right so I'll go out walking with ya, but only somewhere no fecker would see us and when it's dark and no kissing or groping, cos I don't want you ruining me fecking reputation.

BILLY. Oh. Okay, Helen.

HELEN. Or anyways not much kissing or groping.

BILLY. Would tomorrow suit?

HELEN. Tomorrow wouldn't at all suit. Isn't it Bartley's fecking birthday tomorrow?

BILLY. Is it? What have you got him?

HELEN. I got him ... and for the life of me I don't know why I did because I know now he'll never stop fecking jabbering on about it or anyways won't stop jabbering 'til I give him a big thump in the fecking face for himself and even then he probably won't stop, but didn't I get the fecker a telescope?

BILLY. That was awful nice of ya, Helen.

HELEN. I think I must be getting soft in me old age.

BILLY. I think so too.

HELEN. Do ya?

BILLY. Aye.

HELEN. *(Coyly.)* Do ya really, Billy?

BILLY. I do.

HELEN. Uh-huh. Does this feel soft? *(Helen pokes Billy hard in the bandaged face. Billy yelps in pain.)*

BILLY. Aargh! No, it doesn't feel soft!

HELEN. Good-oh. I'll see you the day after tomorrow for our fecking walk, so.

BILLY. You will. *(Helen kisses Billy briefly, winks at him, and pulls the door behind her as she exits. Billy is left standing there stunned a*

moment, then remembers the sack tied to his hand. Pause. He unties it, replaces the cans on the shelves and hangs the sack back up on the wall, stroking it a moment. He shuffles over towards the back room, smiling, but stops as he gets there, coughing heavily, his hand to his mouth. After the coughing stops he takes his hand away and looks down at it for a moment. It's covered in blood. Billy loses his smile, turns the oil lamp down and exits to the back room. Fade to black.)

STOP