

tend to but that's what would happen because that's your nature and you can't help yourself.

GERRY. Not this time, Chrissie. This time it will be —

CHRIS. Don't talk any more; no more words. Just dance me down the lane and then you'll leave.

GERRY. Believe me, Chrissie; this time the omens are terrific! The omens are unbelievable this time!

(They dance off. After they have exited the music continues for a few seconds and then stops suddenly in mid-phrase. MAGGIE goes to the set, slaps it, turns it off. KATE moves away from the window.)

KATE. They're away. Dancing.

MAGGIE. Whatever's wrong with it, that's all it seems to last — a few minutes at a time. Something to do with the way it heats up.

KATE. We probably won't see Mr. Evans for another year — until the humor suddenly takes him again.

AGNES. He has a Christian name.

KATE. And in the meantime it's Christina's heart that gets crushed again. That's what I mind. But what really infuriates me is that the creature has no sense of ordinary duty. Does he ever wonder how she clothes and feeds Michael? Does he ask her? Does he care?

(AGNES rises and goes to the back door.)

AGNES. Going out to get my head cleared. Bit of a headache all day —

KATE. Seems to me the beasts of the field have more concern for their young than that creature has.

AGNES. Do you ever listen to yourself, Kate? You are such a damned righteous bitch! And his name is Gerry! — Gerry! Gerry!

(Now on the point of tears, she runs off.)

KATE. And what was that all about?

MAGGIE. Who's to say?

KATE. Don't I know his name is Gerry? What am I calling him? — St. Patrick?

MAGGIE. She's worried about Chris, too.

KATE. You see, that's what a creature like Mr. Evans does: appears out of nowhere and suddenly poisons the atmosphere

in the whole house — God forgive him, the bastard! There! That's what I mean! God forgive me!

(MAGGIE begins putting on her long-laced boots again. As she does she sings listlessly, almost inaudibly.)

MAGGIE. 'Twas on the Isle af Capri that he found her
Beneath the shade of an old walnut tree.
Oh, I can still see the flowers blooming round
her,

Where they met on the Isle of Capri.'

KATE. If you knew your prayers as well as you know the words of those aul pagan songs!... She's right: I am a righteous bitch, amn't I?

MAGGIE. 'She was as sweet as a rose at the dawning
But somehow fate hadn't meant it to be,
And though he sailed with the tide in the
morning,

Still his heart's in the Isle of Capri.'

(MAGGIE now stands up and looks at her feet.)

Now. Who's for a fox-trot?

KATE. You work hard at your job. You try to keep the home together. You perform your duties as best you can — because you believe in responsibilities and obligations and good order. And then suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile it can't be held together much longer. It's all about to collapse, Maggie.

MAGGIE. *(Wearily.)* Nothing's about to collapse, Kate.

KATE. That young Sweeney boy from the back hills — the boy who was anointed — his trousers didn't catch fire, as Rose said. They were doing some devilish thing with a goat — some sort of sacrifice for the Lughnasa Festival; and Sweeney was so drunk he toppled over into the middle of the bonfire. Don't know why that came into my head ...

MAGGIE. Kate ...

(MAGGIE goes to her and sits beside her.)

KATE. And Mr. Evans is off again for another twelve months and next week or the week after Christina'll collapse into one of her depressions. Remember last winter? — all that sobbing

and lamenting in the middle of the night. I don't think I could go through that again. And the doctor says he doesn't think Father Jack's mind is confused but that his superiors probably had no choice but send him home. Whatever he means by that, Maggie. And the parish priest did talk to me today. He said the numbers in the school are falling and that there may not be a job for me after the summer. But the numbers aren't falling, Maggie. Why is he telling me lies? Why does he want rid of me? And why has he never come out to visit Father Jack? *(She tries to laugh.)* If he gives me the push, all five of us will be at home together all day long — we can spend the day dancing to Marconi.

(Now she cries. MAGGIE puts her arm around her. MICHAEL enters L.)

But what worries me most of all is Rose. If I died — if I lost my job — if this house were broken up — what would become of our Rosie?

MAGGIE. Shhh.

KATE. I must put my trust in God, Maggie, mustn't I? He'll look after her, won't he? You believe that, Maggie, don't you?

MAGGIE. Kate ... Kate ... Kate, love ...

KATE. I believe that, too ... I believe that ... I do believe that ... *(MAGGIE holds her and rocks her.)*

CHRIS enters quickly L., hugging herself. She sees the boy at his kites, goes to him and gets down beside him. She speaks eagerly, excitedly, confidentially.)

CHRIS. Well. Now you've had a good look at him. What do you think of him? Do you remember him?

BOY. *(Bored.)* I never saw him before.

CHRIS. Shhh. Yes, you did; five or six times. You've forgotten. And he saw you at the foot of the lane. He thinks you've got very big. And he thinks you're handsome!

BOY. Aunt Kate got me a spinning-top that won't spin.

CHRIS. He's handsome. Isn't he handsome?

BOY. Give up.

CHRIS. I'll tell you a secret. The others aren't to know. He has got a great new job! And he's wonderful at it!

BOY. What does he do?

CHRIS. Shhh. And he has bought a bicycle for you — a black bike — a man's bike and he's going to bring it with him the next time he comes.

(She suddenly embraces him and hugs him.)

BOY. Is he coming back soon?

CHRIS. *(Eyes closed.)* Maybe — maybe. Yes! Yes, he is!

BOY. How soon?

CHRIS. Next week — the week after — soon — soon — soon! Oh, yes, you have a handsome father. You are a lucky boy and I am a very, very lucky woman.

(She gets to her feet, then bends down again and kisses him lightly.)

And another bit of good news for you, lucky boy: you have your mother's eyes!

(She laughs, pirouettes flirtatiously before him and dances into the kitchen.)

And what's the good news here?

MAGGIE. The good news here is ... that's the most exciting turf we've ever burned!

KATE. Gerry's not gone, is he?

CHRIS. Just this minute.

(AGNES enters through the back door. She is carrying some roses.)

He says to thank you very much for the offer of the bed.

KATE. Next time he's back.

CHRIS. That'll be in a week or two — depending on his commitments.

KATE. Well, if the outside loft happens to be empty.

CHRIS. And he sends his love to you all. His special love to you, Aggie; and a big kiss.

AGNES. For me?

CHRIS. Yes! For you!

MAGGIE. *(Quickly.)* Those are beautiful, Aggie. Would Jack like some in his room? Put them on his windowsill with a wee card — 'ROSES' — so that the poor man's head won't be demented looking for the word. And now, girls, the daily dilemma: what's for the tea?

CHRIS. Let me make the tea, Maggie.

MAGGIE. We'll both make the tea. Perhaps something thrilling with tomatoes? We've got two, I think. Or if you're pre-