

Laura Swills

J. M. Synge

A cutting from the play "Riders to the Sea" as used by Adeline Halver-
son. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House, New York.

The scene of the play, "Riders to the Sea," is laid in Maurya's
cottage on an island off the west coast of Ireland. With Maurya live
Cathleen and Nora, her daughters, and Bartley, her son. There has been
Michael too, but two weeks since, he left for the far north and has not
returned. Cathleen is spinning as Nora enters the door.

CATHLEEN: What is it you have?

NORA: The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a
plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal. We're to find
out if it's Michael's they are.

C: How would they be Michael's, Nora?

N: The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's
Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got clean
burial by the grace of God."

C: Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the
horses to the Galway fair?

N: "Let you not be afraid," says he. "Herself does be saying pray-
ers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her desti-
tute, with no son living."

C: Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

N: Middling bad. There's a great roaring in the west--Shall I open
the package now?

C: Did he say what way they were found?

N: There were two men rowing and the oar of one of them caught the
body passing the black cliffs of the north.

Nora opens the bundle and takes out a bit of stocking.

N: The Lord spare us, Cathleen. It's Michael's they are. It's
Michael's. This stocking is the second one of the third pair I knitted.
Tell me is herself coming, I hear a little sound on the path. She is,
Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

C: Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe she'll be
after giving her blessing to Bartley and we won't let on we've heard
anything the time he's on the sea.

They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney. Cathleen
goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft as Maurya
enters with Bartley.

MAURYA: You won't go this day with the wind rising from the south
and west, Bartley?

BARTLEY: I must go. This is the one boat going for two weeks or
beyond it and the fair will be a good fair for horses.

M: You will do well to leave that rope, Bartley. It will be want-
ing in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow
morning or the next morning--or any morning in the week, for it's a
deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God. And if it wasn't found
--that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the
moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a
thousand horses you had, what is the price of a thousand horses against
a son where there is one son only? It's hard set we'll be surely the
day you're drown'd with the rest. What way will I live and the girls
with me?

B: I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming
again in two days, or in three days or maybe in four days if the wind
is bad. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the gray pony'll run be-
hind me--The blessing of God on you.

ms 1

10811410

26/04/06 JCS

He goes out and Maurya cries as he is in the door--

M: Bartley--He's gone now, God spare us and we'll not see him again and when the black night is falling, I'll have no son left me in the world.

C: Why wouldn't you give him your blessing? Isn't it sorrow enough is on every one in this house without your sending him away with a hard word in his ear? Let you go down now to the spring well and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

M: In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place, it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old.

Maurya goes out, but in a few minutes comes back in without looking at the girls.

C: Did you see him riding down? (Pause)

M: My heart's broken from this day.

C: Did you see Bartley?

M: I seen the fearfulest thing--I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare, with the gray pony behind him--I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael with fine clothes on him and new shoes on his feet--

C: You did not, Mother; it wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north.

M: Bartley will be lost now. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house--six fine men, and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now, the lot of them--There were Stephen, and Shawn, were lost in the great wind, and carried up the two of them on the one plank, and in by that door.

The girls start as if they heard something.

C: (Whisper) Did you hear that, Nora? There's someone after crying out by the seashore.

M: There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night. There was Patch drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was setting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, when men came holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it--and it was a dry day, Nora--and leaving a track to the door.

As Nora looks out, she sees men coming toward the cottage. They carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it.

M: What way was he drowned?

C: The gray pony knocked him into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

(Maurya raises her head and speaks as if she did not see the people around her)

M: They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me--I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west making a great stir with the two noises. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening--Give me the Holy Water, Nora, there's a small sup still on the dresser--(She takes it and sprinkles it over Bartley as she speaks) It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now,

and it's time surely. It's great sleeping I'll have in the long nights, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat--They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul and on the soul of Sheamus and Patch and Stephen and Shawn (bowing head) and may He have mercy on my soul, and on the soul of every one left living in the world. Michael had a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living forever and we must be satisfied.



SEMINARIO MULTIDISCIPLINARI
JOSE EMILIO GONZALEZ
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO
RECINTO DE RIO PIEDRAS

Some other good dramatic readings from plays:

THE AMERICAN WAY--Kaufman-Hart
COMEDY AND TRAGEDY--W. S. Gilbert
DARK VICTORY--Geo. Brewer Jr. and Bertram Bloch
FINGER OF GOD--Percival Wilde
JEAN MARIE--Andre Theuriet
JOAN OF LORRAINE--Maxwell Anderson
THE LAST RENDEZVOUS--(From "Cyrano de Bergerac")
LITTLE FOXES--Lillian Hellman
THE MOON IS DOWN--John Steinbeck
SUSAN AND GOD--Rachel Crothers
THROUGH SUFFERIN'--Marc Connelly--(From "Green Pastures")
TRIFLES--Susan Glaspell

WETMORE DECLAMATION BUREAU

Sioux City, Iowa