

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN

by

John M. Synge

Web-Books.Com

In the Shadow of the Glen

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First performed at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, October 8th, 1903.

PERSONS

DAN BURKE (farmer and herd) . George Roberts
NORA BURKE (his wife) . . . Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh
MICHEAL DARA (a young herd) . P. J. Kelly
A TRAMP W. G. Fay

SCENE. -- {The last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow.

Cottage kitchen; turf fire on the right; a bed near it against the wall with a body lying on it covered with a sheet. A door is at the other end of the room, with a low table near it, and stools, or wooden chairs. There are a couple of glasses on the table, and a bottle of whisky, as if for a wake, with two cups, a teapot, and a home-made cake. There is another small door near the bed. Nora Burke is moving about the room, settling a few things, and lighting candles on the table, looking now and then at the bed with an uneasy look. Some one knocks softly at the door. She takes up a stocking with money from the table and puts it in her pocket. Then she opens the door.}

TRAMP {Outside.} Good evening to you, lady of the house.

NORA

Good evening, kindly stranger, it's a wild night, God help you, to be out in the rain falling.

TRAMP It is, surely, and I walking to Brittas from the Aughrim fair.

NORA Is it walking on your feet, stranger?

TRAMP On my two feet, lady of the house, and when I saw the light below I thought maybe if you'd a sup of new milk and a quiet decent corner where a man could sleep {he looks in past her and sees the dead man.} The Lord have mercy on us all!

NORA It doesn't matter anyway, stranger, come in out of the rain.

TRAMP {Coming in slowly and going towards the bed.} Is it departed he is?

NORA It is, stranger. He's after dying on me, God forgive him, and there I am now with a hundred sheep beyond on the hills, and no turf drawn for the winter.

TRAMP {Looking closely at the dead man.} It's a queer look is on him for a man that's dead.

NORA {Half-humorously.} He was always queer, stranger, and I suppose them that's queer and they living men will be queer bodies after.

TRAMP Isn't it a great wonder you're letting him lie there, and he is not tidied, or laid out itself?

NORA {Coming to the bed.} I was afeard, stranger, for he put a black curse on me this morning if I'd touch his body the time he'd die sudden, or let any one touch it except his sister only, and it's ten miles away she lives in the big glen over the hill.

TRAMP {Looking at her and nodding slowly.} It's a queer story he wouldn't let his own wife touch him, and he dying quiet in his bed.

NORA He was an old man, and an odd man, stranger, and it's always up on the hills he was thinking thoughts in the dark mist. {She pulls back a bit of the sheet.} Lay your hand on him now, and tell me if it's cold he is surely.

TRAMP Is it getting the curse on me you'd be, woman of the house? I wouldn't lay my hand on him for the Lough Nahanagan and it filled with gold.

NORA {Looking uneasily at the body.} Maybe cold would be no sign of death with the like of him, for he was always cold, every day since I knew him, -- and every night, stranger, -- {she covers up his face and comes away from the bed}; but I'm thinking it's dead he is surely, for he's complaining a while back of a pain in his heart, and this morning, the time he was going off to Brittas for three days or four, he was taken with a sharp turn. Then he went into his bed and he was saying it was destroyed he was, the time the shadow was going up through the glen, and when the sun set on the bog beyond he made a great lep, and let a great cry out of him, and stiffened himself out the like of a dead sheep.

TRAMP {Crosses himself.} God rest his soul.

NORA {Pouring him out a glass of whisky.} Maybe that would do you better than the milk of the sweetest cow in County Wicklow.

TRAMP The Almighty God reward you, and may it be to your good health. {He drinks.}

NORA {Giving him a pipe and tobacco.} I've no pipes saving his own, stranger, but they're sweet pipes to smoke.

TRAMP Thank you kindly, lady of the house.

NORA Sit down now, stranger, and be taking your rest.

TRAMP {Filling a pipe and looking about the room.} I've walked a great way through the world, lady of the house, and seen great wonders, but I never seen a wake till this day with fine spirits, and good tobacco, and the best of pipes, and no one to taste them but a woman only.

NORA Didn't you hear me say it was only after dying on me he was when the sun went down, and how would I go out into the glen and tell the neighbours, and I a lone woman with no house near me?

TRAMP {Drinking.} There's no offence, lady of the house?

NORA No offence in life, stranger. How would the like of you, passing in the dark night, know the lonesome way I was with no house near me at all?

TRAMP {Sitting down.} I knew rightly. {He lights his pipe so that there is a sharp light beneath his haggard face.} And I was thinking, and I coming in through the door, that it's many a lone woman would be afeard of the like of me in the dark night, in a place wouldn't be so lonesome as this place, where there aren't two living souls would see the little light you have shining from the glass.

NORA {Slowly.} I'm thinking many would be afeard, but I never knew what way I'd be afeard of beggar or bishop or any man of you at all. {She looks towards the window and lowers her voice.} It's other things than the like of you, stranger, would make a person afeard.

TRAMP {Looking round with a half-shudder.} It is surely, God help us all!

NORA {Looking at him for a moment with curiosity.} You're saying that, stranger, as if you were easy afeard.

TRAMP {Speaking mournfully.} Is it myself, lady of the house, that does be walking round in the long nights, and crossing the hills when the fog is on them, the time a little stick would seem as big as your arm, and a rabbit as big as a bay horse, and a stack of turf as big as a towering church in the city of Dublin? If myself was easily afeard, I'm telling you, it's long ago I'd have been locked into the Richmond Asylum, or maybe have run up into the back hills with nothing on me but an old shirt, and been eaten with crows the like of Patch Darcy -- the Lord have mercy on him -- in the year that's gone.

NORA {With interest.} You knew Darcy?

TRAMP Wasn't I the last one heard his living voice in the whole world?

NORA There were great stories of what was heard at that time, but would any one believe the things they do be saying in the glen?

TRAMP It was no lie, lady of the house. . . . I was passing below on a dark night the like of this night, and the sheep were lying under the ditch and every one of them coughing, and choking, like an old man, with the great rain and the fog. Then I heard a thing talking -- queer talk, you wouldn't believe at all, and you out of your dreams, -- and "Merciful God," says I, "if I begin hearing the like of that voice out of the thick mist, I'm destroyed surely." Then I run, and I run, and I run, till I was below in Rathvanna. I got drunk that night, I got drunk in the morning, and drunk the day after, -- I was coming from the races beyond -- and the third day they found Darcy. . . . Then I knew it was himself I was after hearing, and I wasn't afeard any more.

NORA {Speaking sorrowfully and slowly.} God spare Darcy, he'd always look in here and he passing up or passing down, and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while {she looks over at the bed and lowers her voice, speaking very clearly,} and then I got happy again -- if it's ever happy we are, stranger, -- for I got used to being lonesome. {A short pause; then she stands up.}

NORA Was there any one on the last bit of the road, stranger, and you coming from Aughrim?

TRAMP There was a young man with a drift of mountain ewes, and he running after them this way and that.

NORA {With a half-smile.} Far down, stranger?

TRAMP A piece only.

{She fills the kettle and puts it on the fire.}

NORA Maybe, if you're not easy afeard, you'd stay here a short while alone with himself.

TRAMP I would surely. A man that's dead can do no hurt.

NORA {Speaking with a sort of constraint.} I'm going a little back to the west, stranger, for himself would go there one night and another and whistle at that place, and then the young man you're after seeing -- a kind of a farmer has come up from the sea to live in a cottage beyond -- would walk round to see if there was a thing we'd have to be done, and I'm wanting him this night, the way he

can go down into the glen when the sun goes up and tell the people that himself is dead.

TRAMP {Looking at the body in the sheet.} It's myself will go for him, lady of the house, and let you not be destroying yourself with the great rain.

NORA You wouldn't find your way, stranger, for there's a small path only, and it running up between two sluigs where an ass and cart would be drowned. {She puts a shawl over her head.} Let you be making yourself easy, and saying a prayer for his soul, and it's not long I'll be coming again.

TRAMP {Moving uneasily.} Maybe if you'd a piece of a grey thread and a sharp needle -- there's great safety in a needle, lady of the house -- I'd be putting a little stitch here and there in my old coat, the time I'll be praying for his soul, and it going up naked to the saints of God.

NORA {Takes a needle and thread from the front of her dress and gives it to him.} There's the needle, stranger, and I'm thinking you won't be lonesome, and you used to the back hills, for isn't a dead man itself more company than to be sitting alone, and hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?

TRAMP {Slowly.} It's true, surely, and the Lord have mercy on us all!

{Nora goes out. The Tramp begins stitching one of the tags in his coat, saying the "De Profundis" under his breath. In an instant the sheet is drawn slowly down, and Dan Burke looks out. The Tramp moves uneasily, then looks up, and springs to his feet with a movement of terror.}

DAN {With a hoarse voice.} Don't be afeard, stranger; a man that's dead can do no hurt.

TRAMP {Trembling.} I meant no harm, your honour; and won't you leave me easy to be saying a little prayer for your soul?

{A long whistle is heard outside.}

DAN {Sitting up in his bed and speaking fiercely.} Ah, the devil mend her. . . . Do you hear that, stranger? Did ever you hear another woman could whistle the like of that with two fingers in her mouth? {He looks at the table hurriedly.} I'm destroyed with the drouth, and let you bring me a drop quickly before herself will come back.

TRAMP {Doubtfully.} Is it not dead you are?

DAN How would I be dead, and I as dry as a baked bone, stranger?

TRAMP {Pouring out the whisky.} What will herself say if she smells the stuff on you, for I'm thinking it's not for nothing you're letting on to be dead?

DAN It is not, stranger, but she won't be coming near me at all, and it's not long now I'll be letting on, for I've a cramp in my back, and my hip's asleep on me, and there's been the devil's own fly itching my nose. It's near dead I was wanting to sneeze, and you blathering about the rain, and Darcy {bitterly} -- the devil choke him -- and the towering church. {Crying out impatiently.} Give me that whisky. Would you have herself come back before I taste a drop at all?

{Tramp gives him the glass.}

DAN {After drinking.} Go over now to that cupboard, and bring me a black stick you'll see in the west corner by the wall.

TRAMP {Taking a stick from the cupboard} Is it that?

DAN It is, stranger; it's a long time I'm keeping that stick for I've a bad wife in the house.

TRAMP {With a queer look.} Is it herself, master of the house, and she a grand woman to talk?

DAN It's herself, surely, it's a bad wife she is -- a bad wife for an old man, and I'm getting old, God help me, though I've an arm to me still. {He takes the stick in his hand.} Let you wait now a short while, and it's a great sight you'll see in this room in two hours or three. {He stops to listen.} Is that somebody above?

TRAMP {Listening.} There's a voice speaking on the path.

DAN Put that stick here in the bed and smooth the sheet the way it was lying. {He covers himself up hastily.} Be falling to sleep now and don't let on you know anything, or I'll be having your life. I wouldn't have told you at all but it's destroyed with the drouth I was.

TRAMP {Covering his head.} Have no fear, master of the house. What is it I know of the like of you that I'd be saying a word or putting out my hand to stay you at all?

{He goes back to the fire, sits down on a stool with his back to the bed and goes on stitching his coat.}

DAN {Under the sheet, querulously.} Stranger.

TRAMP {Quickly.} Whisht, whisht. Be quiet I'm telling you, they're coming now at the door.

{Nora comes in with Micheal Dara, a tall, innocent young man behind her.}

NORA I wasn't long at all, stranger, for I met himself on the path.

TRAMP You were middling long, lady of the house.

NORA There was no sign from himself?

TRAMP No sign at all, lady of the house.

NORA {To Micheal.} Go over now and pull down the sheet, and look on himself, Micheal Dara, and you'll see it's the truth I'm telling you.

MICHEAL I will not, Nora, I do be afeard of the dead.

{He sits down on a stool next the table facing the tramp. Nora puts the kettle on a lower hook of the pot hooks, and piles turf under it.}

NORA {Turning to Tramp.} Will you drink a sup of tea with myself and the young man, stranger, or {speaking more persuasively} will you go into the little room and stretch yourself a short while on the bed, I'm thinking it's destroyed you are walking the length of that way in the great rain.

TRAMP Is it to go away and leave you, and you having a wake, lady of the house? I will not surely. {He takes a drink from his glass which he has beside him.} And it's none of your tea I'm asking either.

{He goes on stitching. Nora makes the tea.}

MICHEAL {After looking at the tramp rather scornfully for a moment.} That's a poor coat you have, God help you, and I'm thinking it's a poor tailor you are with it.

TRAMP If it's a poor tailor I am, I'm thinking it's a poor herd does be running back and forward after a little handful of ewes the way I seen yourself running this day, young fellow, and you coming from the fair.

{Nora comes back to the table.}

NORA {To Micheal in a low voice.} Let you not mind him at all, Micheal Dara, he has a drop taken and it's soon he'll be falling asleep.

MICHEAL It's no lie he's telling, I was destroyed surely. They were that wilful they were running off into one man's bit of oats, and another man's bit of hay, and tumbling into the red bogs till it's more like a pack of old goats than sheep

they were. Mountain ewes is a queer breed, Nora Burke, and I'm not used to them at all.

NORA {Settling the tea things.} There's no one can drive a mountain ewe but the men do be reared in the Glen Malure, I've heard them say, and above by Rathvanna, and the Glen Imaal, men the like of Patch Darcy, God spare his soul, who would walk through five hundred sheep and miss one of them, and he not reckoning them at all.

MICHEAL {Uneasily.} Is it the man went queer in his head the year that's gone?

NORA It is surely.

TRAMP {Plaintively.} That was a great man, young fellow, a great man I'm telling you. There was never a lamb from his own ewes he wouldn't know before it was marked, and he'd run from this to the city of Dublin and never catch for his breath.

NORA {Turning round quickly.} He was a great man surely, stranger, and isn't it a grand thing when you hear a living man saying a good word of a dead man, and he mad dying?

TRAMP It's the truth I'm saying, God spare his soul.

{He puts the needle under the collar of his coat, and settles himself to sleep in the chimney-corner. Nora sits down at the table; their backs are turned to the bed.}

MICHEAL {Looking at her with a queer look.} I heard tell this day, Nora Burke, that it was on the path below Patch Darcy would be passing up and passing down, and I heard them say he'd never past it night or morning without speaking with yourself.

NORA {In a low voice.} It was no lie you heard, Micheal Dara.

MICHEAL I'm thinking it's a power of men you're after knowing if it's in a lonesome place you live itself.

NORA {Giving him his tea.} It's in a lonesome place you do have to be talking with some one, and looking for some one, in the evening of the day, and if it's a power of men I'm after knowing they were fine men, for I was a hard child to please, and a hard girl to please {she looks at him a little sternly}, and it's a hard woman I am to please this day, Micheal Dara, and it's no lie I'm telling you.

MICHEAL {Looking over to see that the tramp is asleep, and then pointing to the dead man.} Was it a hard woman to please you were when you took himself for your man?

NORA What way would I live and I an old woman if I didn't marry a man with a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills?

MICHEAL {Considering.} That's true, Nora, and maybe it's no fool you were, for there's good grazing on it, if it is a lonesome place, and I'm thinking it's a good sum he's left behind. 28

NORA {Taking the stocking with money from her pocket, and putting it on the table.} I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Micheal Dara, for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain.

MICHEAL {Looking at her uneasily.} What is it ails you, this night, Nora Burke? I've heard tell it's the like of that talk you do hear from men, and they after being a great while on the back hills.

NORA {Putting out the money on the table.} It's a bad night, and a wild night, Micheal Dara, and isn't it a great while I am at the foot of the back hills, sitting up here boiling food for himself, and food for the brood sow, and baking a cake when the night falls? {She puts up the money, listlessly, in little piles on the table.} Isn't it a long while I am sitting here in the winter and the summer, and the fine spring, with the young growing behind me and the old passing, saying to myself one time, to look on Mary Brien who wasn't that height {holding out her hand}, and I a fine girl growing up, and there she is now with two children, and another coming on her in three months or four. {She pauses.}

MICHEAL {Moving over three of the piles.} That's three pounds we have now, Nora Burke.

NORA {Continuing in the same voice.} And saying to myself another time, to look on Peggy Cavanagh, who had the lightest hand at milking a cow that wouldn't be easy, or turning a cake, and there she is now walking round on the roads, or sitting in a dirty old house, with no teeth in her mouth, and no sense and no more hair than you'd see on a bit of a hill and they after burning the furze from it.

MICHEAL That's five pounds and ten notes, a good sum, surely! . . . It's not that way you'll be talking when you marry a young man, Nora Burke, and they were saying in the fair my lambs were the best lambs, and I got a grand price, for I'm no fool now at making a bargain when my lambs are good.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

