

The Well of the Saints

by

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Characters	3
ACT I.....	4
ACT II.....	18
ACT III	28

Characters

MARTIN DOUL, weather-beaten, blind beggar

MARY DOUL, his Wife, weather-beaten, ugly woman, blind also, nearly fifty

TIMMY, a middle-aged, almost elderly, but vigorous smith

MOLLY BYRNE, fine-looking girl with fair hair

BRIDE, another handsome girl

MAT SIMON

THE SAINT, a wandering Friar

OTHER GIRLS AND MEN

SCENE

Some lonely mountainous district in the east of Ireland one or more centuries ago.

ACT I

[Roadside with big stones, etc., on the right; low loose wall at back with gap near centre; at left, ruined doorway of church with bushes beside it. Martin Doul and Mary Doul grope in on left and pass over to stones on right, where they sit.]

MARY DOUL. What place are we now, Martin Doul?

MARTIN DOUL. Passing the gap.

MARY DOUL -- [raising her head.] -- The length of that! Well, the sun's getting warm this day if it's late autumn itself.

MARTIN DOUL -- [putting out his hands in sun.] -- What way wouldn't it be warm and it getting high up in the south? You were that length plaiting your yellow hair you have the morning lost on us, and the people are after passing to the fair of Clash.

MARY DOUL. It isn't going to the fair, the time they do be driving their cattle and they with a litter of pigs maybe squealing in their carts, they'd give us a thing at all. (She sits down.) It's well you know that, but you must be talking.

MARTIN DOUL -- [sitting down beside her and beginning to shred rushes she gives him.] -- If I didn't talk I'd be destroyed in a short while listening to the clack you do be making, for you've a queer cracked voice, the Lord have mercy on you, if it's fine to look on you are itself.

MARY DOUL. Who wouldn't have a cracked voice sitting out all the year in the rain falling? It's a bad life for the voice, Martin Doul, though I've heard tell there isn't anything like the wet south wind does be blowing upon us for keeping a white beautiful skin -- the like of my skin -- on your neck and on your brows, and there isn't anything at all like a fine skin for putting splendour on a woman.

MARTIN DOUL -- [teasingly, but with good humour.] -- I do be thinking odd times we don't know rightly what way you have your splendour, or asking myself, maybe, if you have it at all, for the time I was a young lad, and had fine sight, it was the ones with sweet voices were the best in face.

MARY DOUL. Let you not be making the like of that talk when you've heard Timmy the smith, and Mat Simon, and Patch Ruadh, and a power besides saying fine things of my face, and you know rightly it was "the beautiful dark woman" they did call me in Ballinatone.

MARTIN DOUL -- [as before.] -- If it was itself I heard Molly Byrne saying at the fall of night it was little more than a fright you were.

MARY DOUL -- [sharply.] -- She was jealous, God forgive her, because Timmy the smith was after praising my hair.

MARTIN DOUL -- [with mock irony.] -- Jealous!

MARY DOUL. Ay, jealous, Martin DouL; and if she wasn't itself, the young and silly do be always making game of them that's dark, and they'd think it a fine thing if they had us deceived, the way we wouldn't know we were so fine-looking at all.

[She puts her hand to her face with a complacent gesture.]

MARTIN DOUL -- [a little plaintively.] -- I do be thinking in the long nights it'd be a grand thing if we could see ourselves for one hour, or a minute itself, the way we'd know surely we were the finest man and the finest woman of the seven counties of the east (bitterly) and then the seeing rabble below might be destroying their souls telling bad lies, and we'd never heed a thing they'd say.

MARY DOUL. If you weren't a big fool you wouldn't heed them this hour, Martin DouL, for they're a bad lot those that have their sight, and they do have great joy, the time they do be seeing a grand thing, to let on they don't see it at all, and to be telling fool's lies, the like of what Molly Byrne was telling to yourself.

MARTIN DOUL. If it's lies she does be telling she's a sweet, beautiful voice you'd never tire to be hearing, if it was only the pig she'd be calling, or crying out in the long grass, maybe after her hens. (Speaking pensively.) It should be a fine, soft, rounded woman, I'm thinking, would have a voice the like of that.

MARY DOUL -- [sharply again, scandalized.] -- Let you not be minding if it's flat or rounded she is; for she's a flighty, foolish woman, you'll hear when you're off a long way, and she making a great noise and laughing at the well.

MARTIN DOUL. Isn't laughing a nice thing the time a woman's young?

MARY DOUL -- [bitterly.] -- A nice thing is it? A nice thing to hear a woman making a loud braying laugh the like of that? Ah, she's a great one for drawing the men, and you'll hear Timmy himself, the time he does be sitting in his forge, getting mighty fussy if she'll come walking from Grianan, the way you'll hear his breath going, and he wringing his hands.

MARTIN DOUL -- [slightly piqued.] -- I've heard him say a power of times it's nothing at all she is when you see her at the side of you, and yet I never heard any man's breath getting uneasy the time he'd be looking on yourself.

MARY DOUL. I'm not the like of the girls do be running round on the roads, swinging their legs, and they with their necks out looking on the men. . . . Ah, there's a power of

villainy walking the world, Martin Doul, among them that do be gadding around with their gaping eyes, and their sweet words, and they with no sense in them at all.

MARTIN DOUL -- [sadly.] -- It's the truth, maybe, and yet I'm told it's a grand thing to see a young girl walking the road.

MARY DOUL. You'd be as bad as the rest of them if you had your sight, and I did well, surely, not to marry a seeing man it's scores would have had me and welcome -- for the seeing is a queer lot, and you'd never know the thing they'd do. [A moment's pause.]

MARTIN DOUL -- [listening.] -- There's some one coming on the road.

MARY DOUL. Let you put the pith away out of their sight, or they'll be picking it out with the spying eyes they have, and saying it's rich we are, and not sparing us a thing at all.

[They bundle away the rushes. Timmy the smith comes in on left.]

MARTIN DOUL -- [with a begging voice.] -- Leave a bit of silver for blind Martin, your honour. Leave a bit of silver, or a penny copper itself, and we'll be praying the Lord to bless you and you going the way.

TIMMY -- [stopping before them.] -- And you letting on a while back you knew my step! [He sits down.]

MARTIN -- [with his natural voice.] -- I know it when Molly Byrne's walking in front, or when she's two perches, maybe, lagging behind; but it's few times I've heard you walking up the like of that, as if you'd met a thing wasn't right and you coming on the road.

TIMMY -- [hot and breathless, wiping his face.] -- You've good ears, God bless you, if you're a liar itself; for I'm after walking up in great haste from hearing wonders in the fair.

MARTIN DOUL -- [rather contemptuously.] -- You're always hearing queer wonderful things, and the lot of them nothing at all; but I'm thinking, this time, it's a strange thing surely you'd be walking up before the turn of day, and not waiting below to look on them lepping, or dancing, or playing shows on the green of Clash.

TIMMY -- [huffed.] -- I was coming to tell you it's in this place there'd be a bigger wonder done in a short while (Martin Doul stops working) than was ever done on the green of Clash, or the width of Leinster itself; but you're thinking, maybe, you're too cute a little fellow to be minding me at all.

MARTIN DOUL -- [amused, but incredulous.] -- There'll be wonders in this place, is it?

TIMMY. Here at the crossing of the roads.

MARTIN DOUL. I never heard tell of anything to happen in this place since the night they killed the old fellow going home with his gold, the Lord have mercy on him, and threw down his corpse into the bog. Let them not be doing the like of that this night, for it's ourselves have a right to the crossing roads, and we don't want any of your bad tricks, or your wonders either, for it's wonder enough we are ourselves.

TIMMY. If I'd a mind I'd be telling you of a real wonder this day, and the way you'll be having a great joy, maybe, you're not thinking on at all.

MARTIN DOUL -- [interested.] -- Are they putting up a still behind in the rocks? It'd be a grand thing if I'd sup handy the way I wouldn't be destroying myself groping up across the bogs in the rain falling.

TIMMY -- [still moodily.] -- It's not a still they're bringing, or the like of it either.

MARY DOUL -- [persuasively, to Timmy.] -- Maybe they're hanging a thief, above at the bit of a tree. I'm told it's a great sight to see a man hanging by his neck; but what joy would that be to ourselves, and we not seeing it at all?

TIMMY -- [more pleasantly.] -- They're hanging no one this day, Mary Doul, and yet, with the help of God, you'll see a power hanged before you die.

MARY DOUL. Well you've queer hum-bugging talk. . . . What way would I see a power hanged, and I a dark woman since the seventh year of my age?

TIMMY. Did ever you hear tell of a place across a bit of the sea, where there is an island, and the grave of the four beautiful saints?

MARY DOUL. I've heard people have walked round from the west and they speaking of that.

TIMMY -- [impressively.] -- There's a green ferny well, I'm told, behind of that place, and if you put a drop of the water out of it on the eyes of a blind man, you'll make him see as well as any person is walking the world.

MARTIN DOUL -- [with excitement.] -- Is that the truth, Timmy? I'm thinking you're telling a lie.

TIMMY -- [gruffly.] -- That's the truth, Martin Doul, and you may believe it now, for you're after believing a power of things weren't as likely at all.

MARY DOUL. Maybe we could send us a young lad to bring us the water. I could wash a naggin bottle in the morning, and I'm thinking Patch Ruadh would go for it, if we gave him a good drink, and the bit of money we have hid in the thatch.

TIMMY. It'd be no good to be sending a sinful man the like of ourselves, for I'm told the holiness of the water does be getting soiled with the villainy of your heart, the time you'd be carrying it, and you looking round on the girls, maybe, or drinking a small sup at a still.

MARTIN DOUL -- [with disappointment.] -- It'd be a long terrible way to be walking ourselves, and I'm thinking that's a wonder will bring small joy to us at all.

TIMMY -- [turning on him impatiently.] -- What is it you want with your walking? It's as deaf as blind you're growing if you're not after hearing me say it's in this place the wonder would be done.

MARTIN DOUL -- [with a flash of anger.] -- If it is can't you open the big slobbering mouth you have and say what way it'll be done, and not be making blather till the fall of night.

TIMMY -- [jumping up.] -- I'll be going on now (Mary Doul rises), and not wasting time talking civil talk with the like of you.

MARY DOUL -- [standing up, disguising her impatience.] -- Let you come here to me, Timmy, and not be minding him at all. (Timmy stops, and she gropes up to him and takes him by the coat.) You're not huffy with myself, and let you tell me the whole story and don't be fooling me more. . . . Is it yourself has brought us the water?

TIMMY. It is not, surely.

MARY DOUL. Then tell us your wonder, Timmy. . . . What person'll bring it at all?

TIMMY -- [relenting.] -- It's a fine holy man will bring it, a saint of the Almighty God.

MARY DOUL -- [overawed.] -- A saint is it?

TIMMY. Ay, a fine saint, who's going round through the churches of Ireland, with a long cloak on him, and naked feet, for he's brought a sup of the water slung at his side, and, with the like of him, any little drop is enough to cure the dying, or to make the blind see as clear as the gray hawks do be high up, on a still day, sailing the sky.

MARTIN DOUL -- [feeling for his stick.] -- What place is he, Timmy? I'll be walking to him now.

TIMMY. Let you stay quiet, Martin. He's straying around saying prayers at the churches and high crosses, between this place and the hills, and he with a great crowd going behind -- for it's fine prayers he does be saying, and fasting with it, till he's as thin as one of the empty rushes you have there on your knee; then he'll be coming after to this place to cure the two of you -- we're after telling him the way you are -- and to say his prayers in the church.

MARTIN DOUL -- [turning suddenly to Mary DouL.] -- And we'll be seeing ourselves this day. Oh, glory be to God, is it true surely?

MARY DOUL -- [very pleased, to Timmy.] -- Maybe I'd have time to walk down and get the big shawl I have below, for I do look my best, I've heard them say, when I'm dressed up with that thing on my head.

TIMMY. You'd have time surely.

MARTIN DOUL -- [listening.] Whisht now. . . . I hear people again coming by the stream.

TIMMY -- [looking out left, puzzled.] -- It's the young girls I left walking after the Saint. . . . They're coming now (goes up to entrance) carrying things in their hands, and they walking as easy as you'd see a child walk who'd have a dozen eggs hid in her bib.

MARTIN DOUL -- [listening.] -- That's Molly Byrne, I'm thinking.

[Molly Byrne and Bride come on left and cross to Martin DouL, carrying water-can, Saint's bell, and cloak.]

MOLLY -- [volubly.] -- God bless you, Martin. I've holy water here, from the grave of the four saints of the west, will have you cured in a short while and seeing like ourselves.

TIMMY -- [crosses to Molly, interrupting her.] -- He's heard that. God help you. But where at all is the Saint, and what way is he after trusting the holy water with the likes of you?

MOLLY BYRNE. He was afeard to go a far way with the clouds is coming beyond, so he's gone up now through the thick woods to say a prayer at the crosses of Grianan, and he's coming on this road to the church.

TIMMY -- [still astonished.] -- And he's after leaving the holy water with the two of you? It's a wonder, surely. [Comes down left a little.]

MOLLY BYRNE. The lads told him no person could carry them things through the briars, and steep, slippy-feeling rocks he'll be climbing above, so he looked round then, and gave the water, and his big cloak, and his bell to the two of us, for young girls, says he, are the cleanest holy people you'd see walking the world. [Mary DouL goes near seat.]

MARY DOUL -- [sits down, laughing to herself.] -- Well, the Saint's a simple fellow, and it's no lie.

MARTIN DOUL -- [leaning forward, holding out his hands.] -- Let you give me the water in my hand, Molly Byrne, the way I'll know you have it surely.

MOLLY BYRNE -- [giving it to him.] -- Wonders is queer things, and maybe it'd cure you, and you holding it alone.

MARTIN DOUL -- [looking round.] -- It does not, Molly. I'm not seeing at all. (He shakes the can.) There's a small sup only. Well, isn't it a great wonder the little trifling thing would bring seeing to the blind, and be showing us the big women and the young girls, and all the fine things is walking the world.

[He feels for Mary DouL and gives her the can.]

MARY DOUL -- [shaking it.] -- Well, glory be to God.

MARTIN DOUL -- [pointing to Bride.] -- And what is it herself has, making sounds in her hand?

BRIDE -- [crossing to Martin DouL.] -- It's the Saint's bell; you'll hear him ringing out the time he'll be going up some place, to be saying his prayers.

[Martin DouL holds out his hand; she gives it to him.]

MARTIN DOUL -- [ringing it.] -- It's a sweet, beautiful sound.

MARY DOUL. You'd know, I'm thinking, by the little silvery voice of it, a fasting holy man was after carrying it a great way at his side.

[Bride crosses a little right behind Martin DouL.]

MOLLY BYRNE -- [unfolding Saint's cloak.] -- Let you stand up now, Martin DouL, till I put his big cloak on you. (Martin DouL rises, comes forward, centre a little.) The way we'd see how you'd look, and you a saint of the Almighty God.

MARTIN DOUL -- [standing up, a little diffidently.] -- I've heard the priests a power of times making great talk and praises of the beauty of the saints. [Molly Byrne slips cloak round him.]

TIMMY -- [uneasily.] -- You'd have a right to be leaving him alone, Molly. What would the Saint say if he seen you making game with his cloak?

MOLLY BYRNE -- [recklessly.] -- How would he see us, and he saying prayers in the wood? (She turns Martin DouL round.) Isn't that a fine holy-looking saint, Timmy the smith? (Laughing foolishly.) There's a grand, handsome fellow, Mary DouL; and if you seen him now you'd be as proud, I'm thinking, as the archangels below, fell out with the Almighty God.

MARY DOUL -- [with quiet confidence going to Martin DouL and feeling his cloak.] -- It's proud we'll be this day, surely. [Martin DouL is still ringing.]

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