

AND ALL HIS SONGS WERE SAD

A Full-length Play ;

By Mattie Lennon

SCENE ONE

Time; 1937.

Set; A stretch of country road in late autumn as daylight is fading. Centre back is a small open shed with straw bedding and dying foliage on either side. It contains a milking-stool.

(A middle-aged man with clay on his boots and carrying a spade enters from R. Two boys aged about fourteen, Willie McSweeney and the more precocious Sean McCarthy, enter from L. They meet centre stage)

MAN: Good evening to yis both.

WILLIE: Have you them all dug?

Man : Almost.

Willie: How far is it to Limerick?

MAN: *(without "breaking his step")* Twenty-six statute miles

SEAN; When a stranger tells you how far we have to go will you believe him? Will we lie down here? It's getting dark and my feet are sore.

WILLIE: My feet are sore too, we must be after walking thirty mile.

SEAN: It's not thirty miles from Listowel to Newcastlewest.

WILLIE: How far is it?

SEAN: Well. It's six miles to Duagh. It's another four and a half to Abbeyfeale, and twelve and a half from Abbeyfeale to here. Twenty-three miles altogether.

WILLIE: Well aren't you the smart fellow.

SEAN: *(Sitting down on milking-stool, milking an imaginary cow in time to the tune as he sings)*

***I'm intelligent Sean McCarthy.
An' I'm known to all the boys,
I live at the foot of Haley's wood
With muck up to my eyes.***

WILLIE: You made that up didn't you?

SEAN : I wrote that, Willie, when I was seven years old. But I did get a bit of help from the Tailor Roche.

WILLIE: What was that rhyme that you got slapped for saying in school?

SEAN: That was written by Paddy Drury from Knockanure. Paddy was working for the Vicar. And the Vicar's housekeeper, Kate Nealon, according to Paddy, kept her loins exceptionally well girded (even by the standards of the day) and out of bounds to Paddy. Then Paddy found himself jobless when he expressed his bewilderment and frustrations in verse,

***Kate Nealon's virtue remains intact
'Tis locked up hard and tight.
One puzzling aspect of that fact,
How does she piss at night?***

WILLIE: You were always different. You always noticed things that the rest of us missed. Maybe that's what The School-Master meant when he said that you were special.

SEAN; I suppose everyone is special in their own way. But if you don't play football in Galvin's field and pitch-and-toss on the Forge road you're considered a sissy. My brother Mick always said I was a dreamer; that I was going around in a daze.

WILLIE; What does Mick think of you going to join the army?

SEAN; He doesn't know, he's in London. But I don't think he'd mind me joining the Irish Army, sure he went to join the Free State army himself. Then when he got there recruiting was closed down for Easter. Oh, he was too cute to tramp to Limerick. He hopped on the train when it stopped at the level-crossing and stowed away. He once threatened all sorts of things on me if I ever even thought of joining the British Army.

WILLIE; I didn't think Mick was like that.

SEAN; He's not. A girl he was great with was after being drowned in Bundoran. The Doctor said he had a nervous breakdown.

WILLIE; He still wouldn't want you to join the English Army?

SEAN; Three years before I was born the Black-and-Tans kicked down the door of the house at my grandmother's wake and shot the little dog. Mick was there. He remembers that.

And another night they nearly shot him and my father.

WILLIE; And that made him turn against the English.

SEAN; It did an' it didn't. In the first letter he sent home he told my mother how kind the English people were and about how a London cop had given him half-a-crown.

WILLIE;(losing interest in what Sean is saying) You that's good at sums....what year would you have to be born to be seventeen now.

SEAN; Nineteen twenty....why?

WILLIE; When we tell the army people in Limerick we're seventeen they might try to catch us out.(Both take off their boots and sit down on the straw and there is silence for a few moments)

WILLIE; (Suddenly) Is it true that girls go for fellows in uniform?

SEAN; I don't know much about girls or what they go for. Although my uncle, the Tumbler McCarthy, gave me a bit of advice about them but I can't vouch for the validity of it. I think he was a bit hard on the fairer sex. Do you know what a man that doesn't like women is called?

WILLIE: No. What?

SEAN: A Misogynist.

WILLIE: (Not impressed) What did the Tumbler tell you?

SEAN: The Tumbler was a man that spoke in Parables. He said, " Remember Seaneen, be careful of the mule with the calm look. You know what to expect from the mule with the mad eyes, but the hoor with the docile eyes will kick you when your mind is on other things".

WILLIE: I suppose you'll write a song about this some time. Or can you write about hardship?

SEAN; Of course you can. According to Shelley;

*Most wretched men are cradled into poetry by wrong.
The learn in suffering what they teach in song.*

And didn't Dickens write about hardship?

WILLIE; If his feet were skinned from traipsing the roads to get away from the hunger and bogs of North Kerry he mightn't be so fond of the pen.

SEAN; Whatever about the hunger, the bog is part of us. You don't grow up in the bog....you grow up with the bog. It's not so much a place...it'smore of a feeling.

WILLIE; A feeling? What sort of a feeling.

SEAN: I don't know, but it's there. (Thoughtfully) I think no matter where I'm posted in the army, in my head, I'll still hear the wild geese over Lyrocrompane and the trout jumping in the Cashen. When the wind howls at night it seems to be calling to me and wanting to tell me something....a tormented wind begging to be listened to.

WILLIE: How would the wind be tormented and want to be listened to?

SEAN: Sure tormented people want to be listened to. Maurice Walse, the writer from Ballydonoghue had it summed up.

WILLIE: How?

SEAN: He wrote, " A place acquires an entity of it's own, an entity that is the essence of all the life and thoughts and griefs and joys that have gone before".

I know what he means. In my own case how could I ever forget things like the sheer, lunacy of the Rambling House that I experienced as a barefoot child? The stories of people like the Whisper Hogan and the liltling of "Doodledom". They're things that a person would carry with them for.....

(Sean looks over and sees the Willie is asleep. He finds a cigarette packet in the straw, tears it open, produces a stump of a pencil, and starts to write. As he is writing, in his head he can hear his own voice singing "Blow The Candles Out" .

***There is a mansion on the hill where my love does reside,
Through the windows I do watch, I see my love inside.
I am cold and hungry, my aching heart does shout,
Oh, come into my arms love and we'll blow the candles out.***

***The door it silent opens and my love comes to me,
I do rush to his arms and hold him tenderly.***

**One stolen hour all in the night, he cries my name aloud,
Oh, take me in your arms love and we'll blow the candles out.**

**His mother she does slight me for I am not his kind,
I have no courtly manners and am I nor refined.
The waiting stars up in the sky, they pass by a cloud,
Take me in your arms.....**

(As twilight slowly turns to darkness he lies down and the song fades out)

CURTAIN.

.....

SCENE TWO.

Set; The same as in scene one.

(It's the next day. Willie and Sean enter from Stage R. looking dirtier and more travel-worn than the evening before)

WILLIE: How far would you say we walked since this time yesterday?

Sean: Thirty-five miles if you subtract the distance between Newcastlewest and Patrickswell, where we got the lift with the blacksmith.

WILLIE: You'd nearly be better walking than listening to his blather.

SEAN: Ah, he was very interesting. I could listen to him all day....The story about the Troubles....how young Willie was shot in that town in West Limerick. That would be a lovely line in a song, "He died in Shanagolden on a lonely summer's night ". *(Sings)*

***And you fought them darling Willie all through the summer days
I heard the rifles firing in the mountains far away
I held you in my arms love and your blood ran free and bright
And you died by Shanagolden on a lonely summer's night.***

WILLIE: There's no fear of us being shot in action anyway, even our own army wouldn't have us. It was a wasted journey.

SEAN; It's hard to know when anything is wasted. We learned something.

WILLIE; Oh we did. We learned that you should have worn a long trousers for a week or a fortnight before you tried that trick. The minute you dropped your brother Mick's trousers for the medical examination your man knew by your weather-beaten legs that you weren't long out of short trousers. Seventeen how are you!
(Sean looks pensive)

WILLIE; What's wrong with you?

SEAN; I have an ache.

WILLIE: I'm sore all over. That was a long walk. We're not used to walking that far in one go.

SEAN: Not that kind of an ache; an ache in my brain.

WILLIE: A headache?

SEAN: Not quite. An ache to write a song that will be published...and sung....especially sung *(dreamily)* Or to have a record made of one of my songs. Imagine what it must be like to be passing a house, maybe miles from home, and to hear your song played on the gramophone.

WILLIE: Do you think that will ever happen?

SEAN: It's not likely to happen in Kerry anyway. When I was still in school I wrote this song "Horo My Johnny". And when I asked O 'Leary in Listowel to print it he said,"waste o' time, who in the name of Christ wants to horo my Johnny.

WILLIE: What sort of a song was it?

(Sean sings Horo My Johnny)

Chorus;

**Oh! Horo my Johnny will you come home soon,
The winter is coming and I'm all alone.
The candle is burning in my window low,
And the wild geese they are going home.**

**A young man's love is something to behold,
First it burns and then it soon grows cold.
He'll whisper in the moonlight and your hand he'll hold,
Then he'll vanish like the morning dew.**

Chorus.

**He'll court you by a meadow in the summertime,
When first you love it is the sweetest time.
He'll promise you a golden ring and then one day,
He'll vanish like the morning dew.**

**You'll be waiting for his footsteps in a lonely room,
Listen by the window he'll be coming soon.
Your heart it will be breaking by the early dawn,
For he's vanished with the morning dew.**

Chorus.

**So come all you young men who are in your prime,
A young maiden's love is like the rarest wine.
When first you taste it 'tis a golden time,
And sweeter than the morning dew.**

WILLIE: What sort of things can you make a song about?

SEAN: You can compose a song about anything.

WILLIE: This road?

SEAN: Yes....I suppose so.

WILLIE: But this is the road to nowhere.

SEAN: (*Brightening up*) That's great., (*Sings*)

***The Road to nowhere turned dark with ugly alien gore
The Quiet Man was dreaming of the Key Above the Door.***

WILLIE: What's that about?

SEAN: It's about a couple of things. It's acknowledging the titles of the works of Maurice Walshe, the man that I told you about yesterday. And more importantly it's about our search.

WILLIE: Our searchfor what?

SEAN: I don't know. We don't always know what we're searching for. I saw in the Reader's Digest where Albert Einstein said, "If I knew what I was looking for it wouldn't be called research".

WILLIE: You read a lot. I can't settle down to read.

SEAN: There are many ways of reading; it's not all about books. You can listen, that's a form of reading. You can read the seasons and the landscape... And people. Most of all you can read people. You can learn everything from people. James Joyce says that he never met a boring person.

WILLIE: He didn't spend much time around Listowel then.

SEAN: Listowel has no boring people. It has kind people and it has nasty people. It has clever people and people that are not so clever. But we can learn something from them all.

WILLIE: A lot of them say that you have a great imagination.

SEAN: I think I got it from my mother's side. My uncle, the Salmon Roche, had great stories. Unkind people would call them lies. When I was small he told me about one time he made a scarecrow. And the scarecrow was so effective that not alone did the crows not take any potatoes but they left back the ones they took the year before.

WILLIE, That's a cod.

SEAN, And he had another story about a cleaving straddle.. He was drawing out turf with an ass and cleeves.. Do you know the creels that you see on the backs of donkeys. You'd see them nowadays on postcards and such like? Well up in Rathea they're called "cleeves" and they're held in position by a "cleaving-straddle"; which is a saddle-like harness with a spike, or hook, on either side to hold the cleeves.

Anyway the Salmon was using said mode of haulage when, due to inadequate upholstering, didn't he cleaving-straddle irritate and cut the ass, leaving a nasty lesion on either side of his backbone. (The ass's now, not the Salmon's)

The weather being warm of course the flies attacked the open wounds, which festered (savin' your presence) developing into two raw nasty-looking holes in the ass's back.

The ass, tired after a hard day's work, went out and lay down at the back of the house under a hawthorn tree. And what do you think but didn't a couple of haws fall into the holes in his back. The holes eventually healed but the next Spring didn't two little whitethorn trees sprout up out of his back.

Do you know what the Salmon did? (according to himself). He waited for them to grow fairly strong and then he sawed them off about four inches from the base. And thereafter he had the only ass in Ireland with a permanent cleaving-straddle.

(When Sean notices that Willie is not amused by his story he sits down on the stool and puts his head in his hands)

WILLIE; Are you coming home or are you going to stay here?

.....
SEAN: (*Standing up and moving slowly towards the right*)

I'm doing neither. I've been thinking..... I left home yesterday to better myself and at the first sign of rejection I turned back. My people were mountainy people and they wouldn't be impressed. A mountainy person shouldn't turn back. (He turns around and shakes hands with Willie)

SEAN: Goodbye Willie. *(Sean exits) Willie, mesmerised, mumbles "goodbye", hesitates centre stage before exiting and Sean can be heard singing "Finuge".*

***There is a cabin by a glen,
The place where I was born.
There eagles fly the summer sky
To greet the smiling morn.
Finuge, Finuge, oh golden wood
You meadows wild.....
(Song fades out)***

CURTAIN.

SCENE THREE.

Time; 1980.

Set; a narrow boreen with a small bridge-wall running three-quarters the length of stage. It is Summer and wild flowers are in bloom at the end of the wall. There is a sound of water gurgling.

Sean McCarthy (now in his mid-fifties) is sitting on the low wall smoking a Meerschaum pipe. He is casually dressed in a good quality tweed jacket and twill trousers. He is writing in a copybook. A girl can be heard approaching singing a pop song. *(Maggie Sheehan enters. She is aged about fourteen or slightly more and is dressed in a school uniform. She is a lively, pleasant girl)*

MAGGIE: Hello.

SEAN: Hello girleen. You have a lovely voice. What's your name?

MAGGIE: Maggie Sheehan.

SEAN: Ah, your father was Tim Sheehan. He died young, may he have a bed in Heaven. He was a dancing teacher..... and a powerful singer. That's where you got the voice from; you didn't lick it off the ground.

MAGGIE: My mother says I got it from her.

SEAN: Yes, she was a Stack from Lyre. A talented family too you got it on the double. (*Pauses*) You don't know me.

MAGGIE: I do so. You're Sean McCarthy, the songwriter.

SEAN: That's right, but a young one like you wouldn't be interested in my songs.

MAGGIE, Yes I would and Sister Ignatious asked me to sing one of your songs yesterday.

SEAN: Which one?

Maggie: "Where Wild Winds Blow".

SEAN: And did you know the words of it?

MAGGIE: I did, I know the words of all your songs.

SEAN: Yerrah, no you don't. I wrote 160 songs. How would you know the words of them all?

MAGGIE: Which one do I not know?

SEAN: Eh....eh.... Cloheen.

(*She sings Cloheen*)

***I have seen the green fields of my native Cloheen,
I have walked in the valley by a rippling stream,
I've seen the proud eagle soar high in the sky,
I have cried o'er the grave where my Mary does lie.***

***These twenty five years I have sailed the seas wide,
I have watched golden sunsets with sadness my guide.
The memories haunt me, at night I do dream,
I still walk with my Mary along by Cloheen.***

***I can still see her standing where the bright waters flow,
And the Church where we married so long, long ago.
I welcome the morning it brings peace of mind,
From the dreams of the young love that I left behind.***

***The day of our marriage, we walked hand in hand.
No prouder man walked on this green fertile land.
No honeymoon bower, no baby to cry,
Just a quiet lonely grave, where my Mary does lie.***

***So adieu lovely Mary, rest well in Cloheen,
In your grave you've found peace by the rippling stream,
The proud eagle guard you from high in the sky,
And a rose marks the grave where my young love does lie.***

SEAN: That song was born when an old man pointed a gnarled finger at a clump of briars and bushes to show me a famine grave. When I asked how many perished he looked dreamily at Knockanoir and said, "Only one, the rest took the cattle boat to America". "You'll have no trouble finding it" he said. And I didn't. When I scraped the moss off a flat stone I could read the inscription, MARY R.I.P.

Then I wondered... Was she young?....Was she beautiful?....Did she have a lover....? Did her eyes shine when she heard a young man singing in a moonlit meadow?

I had no way of knowing. But I used my imagination to put her story in song. And some day your story will be told in song. And it will be a story of success. You'll go places girl. You have the voice, you have the personality and you have the confidence.

SEAN, (*As if to himself*) I sang songs, wrote songs and poems. I wrote stories. I even wrote a book but I didn't have the confidence. The world didn't succeed in taking Sands's bog out of me. Whether I was in Fort Sade or Philadelphia I always perceived myself as a Kerry bogman, who couldn't spell, typed with one finger and had no idea where commas went. But that's another story.

Maggie; You have plenty of other stories but I have to be going, bye.

SEAN; Go nEirigh an Bhotair leat.

(*He sits down, takes a battered school-copy from his pockets and thoughtfully peruses it*)

SEAN: I took a bit of poetic licence with that one. Killury's Golden Corn. Sure Killury wouldn't feed a snipe not to mind grow corn.) As John Joe Kennelly said about Killocrim, "..... if the land was any poorer the crows would have to carry flasks".) But nobody lives in Killury so I won't have any objections from the natives.....but the song.....(closes eyes and sits back) I can hear it....I can hear that young Sheehan one singing it. (*" Sean hears Maggie singing Killury's Golden Corn in his head."*)

*Where are you now Sean Hanrahan
In that cold land far away.
Can you not hear the wild birds call
In the hills across the bay.
The cooing winds are blowing love,
As in the days of yore
And the wild winds keep a rolling
On the lonely Kerry Shore.*

*The soft dew is falling love
Upon the Mountain side.
The meadows green near Beencuneen
Keep singing to the tide.
The piper plays his lonely air
To greet the smiling morn'
And the summer rain keeps falling
On Killury's Golden Corn.*

*The prison yard is dark and bare
Where no man speaks my name.
Van Dieman's peak though sad and bleak,
Can't hide my burning shame.
My eyes grow dim remembering
The love that once I knew
And a smiling maid that loved me there
Where falls the morning dew.*

*Sometimes I dream of my Maura Lee
Though it was long ago.
I hear the wild birds singing free
In the valley down below.
I see you smiling in the sun
To kiss the summer dawn
And the soft rain that keeps falling
On Killury's Golden Corn.*

*The famine walls and mountains tall
That took my youth from me
The cold-eyed stranger came to take
Me o'r the raging sea.
They stole the sunlight from my eyes
And the love my soul did know
And I left you waiting Maura Lee
Where the soft winds gently blow.*

*Once I walked my broken land
To light the burning flame
Through fields and glens we wandered then
To play the freedom games
Some died in lanes with twisted limbs
Where wild flowers sweetly bloom.*

*Their young eyes closed forever now
To a weeping harvest moon.*

*My span of life is over
And peace steals over me
My soul will fly that stormy sky,
Across the raging sea.
Place me near my Maura Lee
In the land where I was born,
Then I'll hear the soft rain falling
On Killury's Golden Corn.*

CURTAIN

SCENE FOUR.

Set; The same as scene three. It is now winter and the vegetation at the end of the bridge wall is dead.
Time 1981 (about eighteen months after scene one).

Sean McCarthy is fishing. He is dressed in a wax-jacket and a Fly-decked hat.

He has a cane rod and is casting across "the fourth wall", facing the audience. Maggie Sheehan enters from L. She has matured and is now wearing makeup, lipstick and high heels. She sneaks up behind Sean and sings the opening line of "John O ' Halloran".

SEAN: Mother o' God you frightened the life out of me. And worse than that you're after frightening the fish. These Smearla trout are elusive hoors at the best of times...that song you're singing..... that was judged the Best Contemporary People's Song by the English Song and Dance Society.....and....yet.....women didn't like it.

MAGGIE: But I'm different. How did you come to write it? Is there a true story behind it?

SEAN: There is. (*He sits on the wall*) I met an 81 year-old, toil-worn Irishman one night in Camden Town. It turned out that he was John O 'Halloran who had left Tralee sixty years before to make his fortune in England. We got talking and his story was an interesting one. I went back to The Mother Redcap every night for five weeks. Although God knows, at the time, I didn't need much encouragement. I sat with him night after night listening to his tales of love, of disappointment, of fighting, working and hardship. Then one night John O 'Halloran was missing....

I found out from the Irish lads that he had died in his lonely bed the previous night.

After a lifetime of toil across the length and breath of England he left tuppence ha'penny and a Scapular Medal.

A couple of days later, as the noise of the London traffic reverberated on the tombstones we buried John O'Halloran. There were only four of us. The Priest, myself and two others.....I went back to my own digs and wrote "John O 'Halloran".

And now that you have frightened my fish you may as well sing it for me.

(*Maggie sings "John O 'Halloran"*)

*My name is John O 'Halloran, and I'm eighty-one years old.
I left my boyhood days behind, for to search for fame and gold.
I left my home in Tralee town, in my twenty-second year.
I would dig the gold on England's shore, and I'd make my fortune there.*

*The weary months in search of work, the tramp through street and road,
A shake-me-down in Camden Town, it was my first abode.
No friendly glance to cheer my heart, no man to shake my hand,
No easy gold only rain and cold, in this God Forsaken land.*

*Go down that trench Proud Irishman, for you are strong and big,
Go take that shovel by the neck, spit on your hands and dig.*

***Tear out the guts from Mother Earth, from the dawn till fading light,
In the nearest pub you'll spend your sub, and you'll hate and love and fight.***

***I have tramped around this country now, for fifty years or more,
I've met some women in my time, the good one and the whore.
I've tramped it down to Preston town, I have skippered in the rain,
I've cursed and prayed, I've been poorly paid,
I've known hunger, joy and pain.***

***I loved a girl in Liverpool, a sweet one from Mayo,
I've slept with girls from Tiger Bay, with teeth like virgin snow.
I have ate my foods in small sheebreens, and I've drunk the porter black,
A dirty bed for to lay my head, where the lice crawled up my back.***

***My bones are getting weary now, and my shoulders they are bent,
My once black hair is grey with care and my money is all spent.
Soon Sargent Death will call me home, and he'll take me by the hand,
Far from Tralee Town, lay my body down, in this God forsaken land.***

***To all the men who dig it out, adieu my friends, adieu,
To young and old, in search of gold, I raise my glass to you.
Go down that trench Proud Irishman, take the shovel in your hand,
There's no easy gold only rain and cold, in this God forsaken land.***

MAGGIE: It's certainly not a jolly song.

SEAN: It's a brutal song. Very few of my songs are jolly. And yet I suppose I expect other people to write funny songs. I once asked Ewen McColl, "Why is there no humour in any of your songs"?

He must have been trying to beat a Kerryman at his own game because he answered with a question. He said, "Why does somebody have to die in all your songs"?

MAGGIE: And he was right.

SEAN: I suppose he was. I was always moved to write by death but I was inspired by other things as well. I remember one winter in London the frost was so bad that all construction work was at a standstill. You'd see fellows "breaking" their Donkey-jackets in the morning before they could put them on.

At the time I was employed by an English pub-landlord, six nights a week, to sing ballads. Of course with no building work there was no money. And that meant there was nobody to listen to my rebel-songs. So I was out of a job until the weather improved. One evening I was lying on my cold, rickety, bed reading a dog-eared Reader's Digest when I came across an article by a writer called Ernest Deeling. The story was headed, "Captain Brady and his Highland Paddy's".

I read it carefully and promised myself that when times got better I'd travel to Kilkenny and get the full story. Things did improve and the next year I went to Kilkenny. I met a hard-drinking, white-haired historian by the name of Daniel Keegan.

Between songs, political arguments and fishing lies Daniel told me the story and I composed a so.....

MAGGIE, Yes, I know. You wrote "Highland Paddy".

(She sings "Highland Paddy")

***One evening fair as the sun was shining,
To Kilkenny I did ride,
I did meet with Captain Brady -
A tall commander by his side.***

Chorus:

***Then you are welcome Highland Paddy,
By my side you'll surely stand, hear the people shout for freedom,
We'll rise in the morning with the Fenian band,
Rise in the morning with the Fenian band.***

*In the mornin' we rose early
 Just before the break of dawn blackbirds singing in the bushes
 Greetings to a smiling morn.
 Gather round me men of Ireland
 Gather Fenians gather round
 Hand to hand with sword and musket
 Spill the blood upon this holy ground.
 There's a glen beside the river
 Just outside Kilkenny Town
 There we met this noble captin
 Men lay dead upon the ground.
 Chorus
 There's a grave beside the river
 A mile outside Kilkenny Town
 There we laid our noble captain
 Birds were silent when this Fenian died
 All my life I will remember
 I'll remember night and day
 That once I rode into Kilkenny
 And I heard this noble captain say.
 Chorus*

SEAN: I always had great faith in the ballad as the keeper of our heritage. I remember James Connolly's daughter saying, ".....more may be remembered of a country's history and treasured deep in the heart of people through a song or a poem than through the pages of a history book".

MAGGIE: Will you feck off, you and your history. Listen.....I was asked the other day how you came to write "Fair Sinead" and I didn't know. Was she a great love in your life?

SEAN: She was, but not in the way you might think. A few years ago, above in Dublin, I was singing with a Folk-group called "The Weavers". and one day I called to see young Warfield of The Wolfe Tones. His beautiful blue-eyed baby daughter, Sinead, was in her cot playing with a big brown Teddy-bear. I don't know what she thought of the mumbling Kerryman with the hat looking down at her but I went into my brother Mick's pub, The Embankment, in Tallagh and I wrote "My Blue-eyed Fair Sinead" at the counter. I felt compelled to write that song. But then....I always did have a weakness for blue-eyed beauties.

MAGGIE: (*Pretending to be hurt*) And I thought you might have written it for me

SEAN: As it turns out, I wrote them all for you. (*He gestures towards centre stage. She sings "Fair Sinead")*)

*Last night I heard an angel cry sweet dreams did haunt my sleep
 I dreamt of valleys decked with flowers and wild streams running deep.
 And then I heard from far away a moonlight serenade,
 It was my young love calling me, the blue-eyed Fair Sinead.*

*There all in the silent room my treasure she did smile
 Like Helen fair beyond compare she does my heart beguile.
 Golden sunlight in her hair, my lovely Irish maid
 I hold the wide world in my arms the blue-eyed Fair Sinead.*

*Some men travel far and wide great wonders for to see
 The ravaged lands of "Samarkand" or the shores of Gallilee.
 Others strive for the yellow gold for ivory and jade
 But Kings and Queens do envy me the blue-eyed Fair Sinead.*

What fairy wind did bring you here to shine your love on me

***What Guardian Angel from above was watching carefully.
Beside you diamonds will not shine, the brightest jewels do fade,
The stars at night do hide their light for my blue-eyed Fair Sinead.***

***Now close your eyes my lovely one your tiny hand in mine
I will guard my baby girl until the morning time
Peace be on your pillow love, rest well in tender shade
The new born day is breaking soon for my blue-eyed Fair Sinead.***

(Maggie sits down on the wall)

SEAN; *Looking at the pendant she is wearing*) What's that?

MAGGIE, It's a medal.

SEAN: I know it's a medal. What sort of a medal?

MAGGIE, An All-Ireland medal.

SEAN; Listen girl, I don't have much of an interest in sport but I've seen enough All-Ireland medals in North Kerry to know that's not one...you wouldn't see Eddie Walshe or Joe Keohane with anything like that. An All-Ireland medal has a football on it and four.....

MAGGIE: *(Feigning impatience)* It's a Comhalls medal. I won the All-Ireland at the Fleadh.

SEAN: Well good girl. What song did you sing?

MAGGIE, "Lough Sheelin's Side."

SEAN: A lovely song; *(Sings)*.

***Farewell my country a long farewell.
My tale of anguish no tongue can tell.
For I'm forced to fly o'er the ocean wide
From the home I loved by Lough Sheelin's side.***

SEAN; A sad song...like my own songs.

MAGGIE: It's not as sad as your songs. Nothing is as sad as your songs.

SEAN, *(Dreamily)* Maybe some day you'd sing one of my sad songs in an All-Ireland Final.

MAGGIE: I might.

SEAN: What song would you sing?

MAGGIE, What song would I sing?.....What song would I sing?

SEAN; Sure you have plenty of time to decide. I'll be going. Bye. *(He exits right)*

Maggie; *(Absent-mindedly)* Goodbye Sean.

(Suddenly she jumps up and sings "The Beating Of The Drum)

***O run my lovely Nora the time is near at hand,
A thousand men are on parade awaiting the command.
There is handsome Johnny, a shouldering his gun
There standing to attention to the beating of the drum.***

Chorus;

***Hark, hark the drums are beating love no longer can I stay
I hear a bugle calling, a call I must obey.
I must get my rifle and march for many a mile
And fight the German soldiers on the banks of the Nile.***

***Oh, Johnny dearest Johnny don't leave me here to die
My father has disowned me for the bearing of our boy.
Do not use your rifle, love, to take anothers life
Stay at home lovely Johnny and make me your wife.***

***Oh, Darling lovely Nora, you knew the time would come
That I would go a-marching to the beating of the drum
The Queen has sent her orders to come and meet the foe.
To the desert lands of Egypt your Johnny he must go.***

Chorus;

Hear the trumpet sounding now across the barrack square

*I can see the sunlight a-shining on your hair.
Wave to me fair Nora the march it has begun
The blowing of the bugle and the beating of the drum.*

*The war is all over and the ship is sailing in
Happy wives are waiting to greet the fighting men.
Hear the bugle, Nora, just stay a little while,
Your Johnny he lies buried on the banks of the Nile.*

Chorus.

SEAN: (*Entering from Right*) I forgot me bloody fishing rod..

MAGGIE: 'Good enough for you when you wouldn't wait to listen to me.

SEAN: I was listening. That song is the story of a 17-year old Wicklow boy who died by a German bullet. The German bullet couldn't tell the difference between Aldershot and Aughavanagh. Johnny represents every young man who listened to John Redmond and his likes telling them that they were going to fight for the freedom of small nations. And Kitchener (a Kerryman, I'm sorry to say) and his "your country needs you". I was conscripted into the British Army during the Second World War you know. I was a reluctant soldier and I didn't see one angry German but I wrote a song for the British army called " Rudolph Hess". It was sung all over the Middle East. But I'll tell you about that next week.

MAGGIE: You won't see me next weekunless you come to Dublin

SEAN: I won't see yo.....?

MAGGIE, I'm going to live in Dublin. I'm going to be a nurse.

SEAN: Well, I'll miss you. And may God look after you and bless your work. I know you won't lose the run of yourself. And I know you won't lose your Rathea accent. My people came from Rathea. And while I'm no Nostradamus or Colmcille I can predict that you'll come back to Kerry and I know that when you marry you'll marry for love. You know Maggie, not everyone marries for love. I wrote a poem about someone who didn't. Will I read it for you?

MAGGIE: I suppose you will.

(*He takes a sheet of paper from his pocket and reads Darling Kate*)

*You are fair of face, dear Kate, now you're nearing twenty-one,
I hesitate to spoil your dreams, when your life has just begun.
Your father, he is old, a grah, and I am far from strong,
A dowry from John Hogan's son would help us all along.*

*Just think of it, my darling Kate, you would own a motor car,
You'd wear fine linen next your skin and travel near and far.
Hogan's lands stretch far and wide, from Rathea to Drummahead;
He owns sheep and cows and fine fat sows; pyjamas for the bed.*

*I know he's tall and skinny, Kate, and his looks are not the best,
But beggars can't be choosers, love, when you're feathering your nest!
He's been to college in the town; his shirts are always new,
What does it matter if he's old, he's just the man for you.*

*I know you love young Paddy Joe, him with the rakish eye,
I've seen the way you look at him whenever he goes by.
I will admit he's handsome, Kate, but he doesn't own a car,
Sure, he likes to fight and drink al night above in Sheehan's bar.*

*Did I ever tell you, Kate a grah, that I was pretty too?
The summer days seemed longer then, and the sky was always blue!
I was only gone nineteen, and your father fifty-three,
But he owned the land on which we stand and he seemed the man for me.*

*There was a young man lived next door, I loved with all my might,
It was his face that haunted me when your father held me tight;
I longed, dear Kate, down through the years, for the soft touch of his hand.*

But young love is no substitute for ten acres of fine land.

***You will wear a long white dress and a red rose in your hair,
I will throw confetti, Kate, the whole town will be there;
You will make a promise true, to honour and obey,
I will stand on your right hand, and I'll sell my love away.***

***Tears are not for daytime, Kate, but only for the night,
You'll have a daughter of your own and teach her wrong fro right;
Rear her strong and healthy, Kate, pray guidance from above.
Then one fine day when she's nineteen—she might marry just for love.***

SEAN; What do you think of that?

MAGGIE: It's a sorrowful tale of greed, frustration, insecurity....and hope, told as only you can tell it.

SEAN: Thank you. Do you know that some people think that poem is funny and that they're meant to laugh at it. I didn't write many monologues. The songs went well for me. But it was a long haul. Songwriting is a long haul. But it worked out fairly well. (*Looking into the middle-distance*) Few things would give me more pleasure than to hear your voice coming out of a Juke-box in Tralee, or London or New York or South Carolina.....will you record my songs?

MAGGIE: (*Playfully*) Sean McCarthy, I have better things to be doing than recording your oul songs.

SEAN, Better things to be doin....? What better things?

MAGGIE: (*Skipping away*) Aah, that would be telling you.

CURTAIN

SCENE FIVE..

Time; 1990.

Set; A sparsely furnished living room. There are books, notebooks and newspapers scattered around. There is a large picture of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, a rosary Beads and a calendar for 1990 on the wall.

Sean (Now in his mid sixties) is sitting in an armchair writing in a journal. There is a knock at the door).

SEAN, (*Without looking up*) Come in.

(*Maggie enters. She is now in her mid twenties and casually dressed*)

SEAN: (*Surprised jumps up and hugs her*) Maggie. I heard you were back. How are you?

MAGGIE: I'm all right. I'm an oul married woman now.

SEAN, Did I ever tell you what my uncle the Tumbler McCarthy had to say about marriage (I didn't agree with him, mind you)? He told me; " a woman is different from a greyhound. When a greyhound can't chase the hare anymore he can sit by the fire. But once a female has you fettered to a piece of Holy Paper *she'll* sit by the fire and nag you day and night". And another of his spakes was; " What's good for the Nanny is good for the Puck providing they don't lock horns".

MAGGIE: It seems the Tumbler had many profound statements about the nuptial state. Are you sure you didn't agree with him?

SEAN: I didn't. Sure I got married.....Sure enough I was 48 at the time. Herself and myself spend a lot of our time on opposite sides of the Atlantic. So, I'm a happily married bachelor. (*Pause*) I knew you'd come back Maggie. I travelled the world but the bog was always calling. You see Maggie, people like you and me, we can't ever leave, our hearts are rooted here. Someone once asked James Joyce if he would ever return to Dublin and he said, "Did I ever leave?"

SEAN; (*Awkwardly, after a pause*) I'm sure you didn't sing any of my songs in Dublin.

MAGGIE: I did so. I won a competition in Rathmines with one of your songs.

SEAN: Good girl, keep winning.

MAGGIE: That reminds me. When I won the All-Ireland you said something to me about "winners" but I was young and I'm afraid I wasn't listening. Do you remember what it was?

SEAN: I do. I was quoting a Greek historian; Polly Bus, or something like that was his name. He said, " Those who know how to win are more numerous than those who know how to make proper use of their victory". But that doesn't apply to you, my love.....wh....what was the song?

MAGGIE: In Shame Love In Shame.

SEAN: Ah. That's a special song. As the poet Shelley said, "The sweetest songs are those that tell the saddest tale". That song was my Salvation. My sister, Peggy McCarthy, the light o' Heaven to her, died on Sunday 10th February 1946.

She got pregnant out of wedlock and became the victim of the times, of gossip and of the so-called moral values of the day.

She was refused admission to three hospitals in north Kerry and she died giving birth on the side of the road. And then, in Death, the gates of Listowel Church were closed against her coffin.

I harboured hatred and resentment for years. Until, I suppose you could say, I became a child again. I told my old schoolmaster about it. "Write about the bloody thing" says he. And I did.....to try and get the hatred out of my system and unsnarl my gut.

The hatred grew less and less each day after I wrote "In Shame Love In Shame". I owe a lot to that song and I haven't heard it sung for years.

MAGGIE; I'll sing it now....and sing it well (*nudges him*) just to show that I know how to, "make proper use of my victory".

(*She sings "In Shame Love In Shame"*)

***They whisper their stories
And they glance with the eye.
They look over my shoulder when I pass them by.
My father and mother they treat me the same,
Hear the nightingale crying in shame love in shame.***

***Oh" cling to me tight love, take hold of my hand.
The road it is long love and harsh in the land.
That's the cross we must carry, for having no name,
Hear the nightingale crying in shame love in shame.***

***I had wings to my feet and of love I have dreamed,
The moon and the stars how friendly they seemed.
The touch of his hand, in the soft summer rain,
Hear the nightingale crying in shame love in shame.***

***Oh! Once in the starlight when he held me close,
Down by the green meadow, where grew the wild rose.
The wind sang of love, Oh! How soft it's refrain,
But the nightingale cries now, in shame love in shame.***

***Now hush little darling, we soon will be there,
A blanket of love, will surround you with care.
No vile tongues will whisper, you will never feel pain.
Hear the nightingale crying in shame love in shame.***

***The meek will inherit, I have heard this decree,
And suffer small children to come unto me.
The sins of the father on your head will be lain,
Hear the nightingale crying in shame love in shame.***

***How mute are the birds now, my bonny young boy.
How deep is the river, how silent your cry.
The waters baptise you, then we'll both have a name.
Hear the nightingale sing there's no shame, there's no shame.***

(*As the song finishes Sean is staring at the ground*)

MAGGIE; What are you day-dreaming about now?

SEAN; I was thinking about how some songs come about. I remember once on a fair-day in Kanturk, County Cork, when I heard children with a skipping rhyme. And many years later I was on a building site in London, hiding under a concrete stairs from the foreman, when I wrote a song around that skipping rhyme. And I was just thinking that if Murphy's foreman had been a bit more vigilant we wouldn't have that particular song.

It spent twenty-six weeks in the top twenty sung by Danny Doyle, a young Dublinman. It has been recorded by dozens of singers around the world and it must have been sung a million times.

MAGGIE: Make that a million and one. (*She sings "Step It Out Mary"*)

***In the village of Kilgory, there's a maiden young and fair
Her eyes they shine like diamonds, she has long and golden hair
But the countryman comes riding, rides up to her father's gates
Riding on a milk-white stallion, he comes at the strike of eight.***

Chorus:

***Step it out, Mary, my fine daughter
Step it out, Mary, if you can
Step it out, Mary, my fine daughter
Show your legs to the countryman***

***I have come to court your daughter, Mary of the golden hair
I have gold and I have silver, I have goods beyond compare
I will buy her silks and satin and a gold ring for her hand
I will buy for her a mansion, she'll have servants to command
I don't want your gold and silver, I don't want your house and land
I am going with a soldier, I have promised him my hand
But the father spoke up sharply: You will do as you are told,
You'll get married on the Sunday and you'll wear that ring of gold
In the village of Kilgory there's a deep stream flowing by
On her marriage day at midnight she drowned with her soldier boy
In the cottage there is music, you can hear her father say:
Step it out, Mary, my fine daughter, Sunday is your wedding day.***

SEAN; I wrote that song on a piece of a cement bag and I always regretted not keeping the original manuscript.

MAGGIE; As concrete proof like? What are you working on now?

SEAN; I'm writing a piece for "The Kerryman". About two years ago they commissioned me to write 100 weekly articles titled "McCarthy's Women" in which I would profile a different woman each week. Well, I was in Tralee yesterday; (I had to go to the hospital for a bit of an oul test), I was talking to the Editor and he said, "Sean, you're after doin' ninety-nine women....."

MAGGIE; WHAT???

SEAN; The Editor told me that I have profiled ninety-nine women to date. "You have one to go, Sean" says he, "Who is it going to be?" I didn't tell him. I just said, "This last one is my favourite". And so she is.

MAGGIE; Who is it?

SEAN; Ah, that would be telling you.

CURTAIN

SCENE SIX.

Set; The same as in Scene five but the papers and books have been tidied up somewhat. "The Kerryman" is lying on a coffee table. (*There is a knock on the door and Maggie enters R.*) *She is wet, wearing a raincoat and carrying an umbrella*

MAGGIE; Hello.

SEAN; (From bedroom) I'll be with you in a minute. I was having a bit of a lie down.

(MAGGIE (*Spotting The Kerryman she takes it up and starts to read*;) "McCarthy's Women..... The last in the series.....by Sean McCarthy.....Maggie Sheehan.....bright future as a folksinger....voice like a nightingale in Renagown.....she loves roses.....but hates ironing.....she comes from a"

(*Sean enters from L. He is dressed in shirt and trousers and in his stockinged feet*).

MAGGIE; You were looking for me.

SEAN; I want you to sing a song.

MAGGIE; You brought me out on a night like that because you want me "to sing a song".

SEAN; There's something else as well.

.....

MAGGIE; Well, I hope it's good. You're after taking me away from my housework (*indicating The Kerryman*) even if I don't like ironing.

Sean; Will you record my songs before I die?

MAGGIE; I don't know the air of that one.....yes I'll record your songs....sometime.

SEAN; Will you do it soon?

MAGGIE; We'll see.....what do you want me to sing now?

SEAN; Dan Malone.

(*She Sings "Dan Malone"*)

*Oh, me name is Dan Malone
I've no place to call me home.
I'm an outcast in the land that I was born in.
And I'm weary of the load
On this long and lonely road.
How I hate to face the sunlight in the morning.*

*Oh the land is rich and wide
But hunger walks beside.
I'm an outcast in this proud land that bore me.
My life is almost done
And my courage is all gone
For the long road that stretches out before me.*

*Then that day so long ago
I met Kitty from me home.
Fair of face, her voice forever charmed me.
But she couldn't bear the load
On this long and lonely road.
Now her grave lies unident' outside Killarny.*

*I have begged from time to time.
I have drunk the golden wine.
I've fought men and I've done my share of lovin'.
I've met wise men; I've met fools.
But we've always known the rules.
A tinker man must always be a movin'.*

*Ah but maybe one day soon
When the heather is in bloom,
I lay my head upon the scented clover.
A man can't always fight,
And so a long winter's night
I'll go to sleep; my troubles will be over.*

*Then remember Dan Malone
As I lie here all alone
Remember me to this proud land that bore me.
I can sleep my time away
In six feet of pauper's clay,
No open road lay stretching out before me.*

SEAN; "I can sleep my life away, in six feet of pauper's clay, No open road lay stretching out before me". Poor Dan Malone. He knew every blade of grass from Dunfanaghy to Valentia Island. He told me his life story one day at a Fleadh in Listowel. It was shortly before he went for the big sleep. I think he was about seventy. I'm three years short of the Biblical span. But I did a fair bit of living. I'm sure I squeezed it in.

MAGGIE; You devoted the first half of your life to writing about death, are you going to spend the rest of it talking about it?
Why don't you write a song about living, like "Sweet Rathcoole".

(She starts to sing "Sweet Rathcoole").

It was up in sweet Rathcoole, one fine bright day in June,

That I first met Katie Conroy when the wild flowers were in bloom.

"Bedad meself" says I "Tis a shameful thing to see

Such a fine big strappin' girl with no man upon her knee.

SEAN; *(interrupting her and handing her an envelope)* I want you to learn this song...as soon as you can. It's called "My Kerry Hill". A lot of my songs were shallow; they lacked depth. But in this, my last song, I have endeavoured to capture it all. The hopes of youth, the pride of ancestry, the fire of patriotism and hopefully the resignation of the dyi.....will you promise me that you'll record my songs?

MAGGIE; Have I ever let you down before?

SEAN; No. When will you record them?

MAGGIE; I dunno. Some year or other. *(Seeing the disappointment on his face)* ah I'm only joking you. As a matter of fact I have booked a studio in Killarney for two days next week to record *(She gestures theatrically)* "The Songs Of Sean McCarthy".

SEAN; Thank God for that.

MAGGIE; *(Exiting R.)* and now I must be getting back to my ironing. It's not a night for roses.

SEAN; God be with you.

SEAN; *(Addressing the picture of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem)* I couldn't tell her.....I didn't have the heart.How could I tell a person as caring as her.....How would I say, "Maggie, I got the results of the tests. I've been diagnosed with cancer.....I have three months to live".

But, with the help of God I'll survive to hear her sing my songs on the radio. *(He sits down and he can hear Maggie singing " My Kerry Hill" to musical accompaniment)*

***The night is long love, the hours grow weary,
Youthful memories soon fade away.
A voice keeps calling from days of yore, love
Magic moments of yesterday.
Do you remember Sweet September,
Young love searching for a golden thrill.
And the days were merry
When we plucked wild berries,
On the verdant slopes of a Kerry Hill.***

***The time is fleeting, the new moon peeping,
Stars are dancing with heel and toe.
An old man's story recounts the glory
Of the brave deeds of long ago.
Children listen with eyes that glisten,
Fish jump high in a mountain rill.
Lovers walking and softly talking
All alone on a Kerry Hill.***

***I often wonder where are my school friends,
Some have gone far across the sea,
And some are weeping or in the Church-yard sleeping
Lying safe where the wind blows free,
Can they hear the banshee wailing,
In the moon-light soft and still
Or hear a piper softly playing***

Forgotten airs on a Kerry Hill.

*I often dream nights of fairest Nora,
I hear her voice in the Summer air,*

*I see her green eyes filled with love light
Moon beams shading her golden hair.
I walked the green land by the meadow
Near the long, long silent mill,
To place a wild rose on a green grave
Where she lies on a Kerry Hill.*

And I remember the green hills burning

*When the strangers with cold eyes came,
Maidens sighing and young men dying,
Like wild flowers crushed in the Summer rain.
Then the bells of freedom chiming.
A moon-lit meadow where young men drill
A green flag flowing, a trumpet blowing
Loud and clear on a Kerry Hill.*

(Sean stands up, takes a Rosary beads from the wall and exits L. singing the last verse himself)

*I must away now from the green groves
My time of talking is surely done,
My bones are weary from life's long journey
My time of being is nearly gone.
To hear again the pipers playing
In the moon-light soft and still
No more grieving I am a-leaving
To say goodbye to my Kerry Hill.*

CURTAIN.

© Mattie Lennon 2006
