

The Project Gutenberg Etext of Riders to the Sea by J. M. Synge

Copyright laws are changing all over the world, be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before posting these files!!

Please take a look at the important information in this header. We encourage you to keep this file on your own disk, keeping an electronic path open for the next readers. Do not remove this.

Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts

Etexts Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971

These Etexts Prepared By Hundreds of Volunteers and Donations

Information on contacting Project Gutenberg to get Etexts, and further information is included below. We need your donations.

Riders to the Sea

by J. M. Synge

July, 1997 [Etext #994]

The Project Gutenberg Etext of Riders to the Sea by J. M. Synge

*****This file should be named rdrse10.txt or rdrse10.zip*****

Corrected EDITIONS of our etexts get a new NUMBER, rdrse11.txt.
VERSIONS based on separate sources get new LETTER, rdrse10a.txt.

This etext was prepared by Judith Boss of Omaha, NE.

We are now trying to release all our books one month in advance of the official release dates, for time for better editing.

Please note: neither this list nor its contents are final till midnight of the last day of the month of any such announcement. The official release date of all Project Gutenberg Etexts is at Midnight, Central Time, of the last day of the stated month. A preliminary version may often be posted for suggestion, comment and editing by those who wish to do so. To be sure you have an up to date first edition [xxxxx10x.xxx] please check file sizes in the first week of the next month. Since our ftp program has a bug in it that scrambles the date [tried to fix and failed] a look at the file size will have to do, but we will try to see a new copy has at least one byte more or less.

Information about Project Gutenberg (one page)

We produce about two million dollars for each hour we work. The fifty hours is one conservative estimate for how long it we take to get any etext selected, entered, proofread, edited, copyright searched and analyzed, the copyright letters written, etc. This projected audience is one hundred million readers. If our value per text is nominally estimated at one dollar then we produce \$2 million dollars per hour this year as we release thirty-two text files per month, or 384 more Etexts in 1997 for a total of 1000+ If these reach just 10% of the computerized population, then the total should reach over 100 billion Etexts given away.

The Goal of Project Gutenberg is to Give Away One Trillion Etext Files by the December 31, 2001. [10,000 x 100,000,000=Trillion] This is ten thousand titles each to one hundred million readers, which is only 10% of the present number of computer users. 2001 should have at least twice as many computer users as that, so it will require us reaching less than 5% of the users in 2001.

We need your donations more than ever!

All donations should be made to "Project Gutenberg/CMU": and are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. (CMU = Carnegie-Mellon University).

For these and other matters, please mail to:

Project Gutenberg
P. O. Box 2782
Champaign, IL 61825

When all other email fails try our Executive Director:
Michael S. Hart <hart@pobox.com>

We would prefer to send you this information by email (Internet, Bitnet, Compuserve, ATTMAIL or MCIemail).

If you have an FTP program (or emulator), please FTP directly to the Project Gutenberg archives:
[Mac users, do NOT point and click. . .type]

```
ftp uiarchive.cso.uiuc.edu
login: anonymous
password: your@login
cd etext/etext90 through /etext96
or cd etext/articles [get suggest gut for more information]
dir [to see files]
get or mget [to get files. . .set bin for zip files]
```

GET INDEX?00.GUT

for a list of books

and

GET NEW GUT for general information

and

MGET GUT* for newsletters.

Information prepared by the Project Gutenberg legal advisor

(Three Pages)

START**THE SMALL PRINT!**FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS**START

Why is this "Small Print!" statement here? You know: lawyers.

They tell us you might sue us if there is something wrong with your copy of this etext, even if you got it for free from someone other than us, and even if what's wrong is not our fault. So, among other things, this "Small Print!" statement disclaims most of our liability to you. It also tells you how you can distribute copies of this etext if you want to.

BEFORE! YOU USE OR READ THIS ETEXT

By using or reading any part of this PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, you indicate that you understand, agree to and accept this "Small Print!" statement. If you do not, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for this etext by sending a request within 30 days of receiving it to the person you got it from. If you received this etext on a physical medium (such as a disk), you must return it with your request.

ABOUT PROJECT GUTENBERG-TM ETEXTS

This PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, like most PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etexts, is a "public domain" work distributed by Professor Michael S. Hart through the Project Gutenberg Association at Carnegie-Mellon University (the "Project"). Among other things, this means that no one owns a United States copyright on or for this work, so the Project (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth below, apply if you wish to copy and distribute this etext under the Project's "PROJECT GUTENBERG" trademark.

To create these etexts, the Project expends considerable efforts to identify, transcribe and proofread public domain works. Despite these efforts, the Project's etexts and any medium they may be on may contain "Defects". Among other things, Defects may take the form of incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other etext medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

LIMITED WARRANTY; DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES

But for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described below,

[1] the Project (and any other party you may receive this etext from as a PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext) disclaims all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees, and [2] YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE OR UNDER STRICT LIABILITY, OR FOR BREACH OF WARRANTY OR CONTRACT, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES, EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES.

If you discover a Defect in this etext within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending an explanatory note within that time to the person you received it from. If you received it on a physical medium, you must return it with your note, and such person may choose to alternatively give you a replacement copy. If you received it electronically, such person may choose to alternatively give you a second opportunity to receive it electronically.

THIS ETEXT IS OTHERWISE PROVIDED TO YOU "AS-IS". NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, ARE MADE TO YOU AS TO THE ETEXT OR ANY MEDIUM IT MAY BE ON, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE.

Some states do not allow disclaimers of implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of consequential damages, so the above disclaimers and exclusions may not apply to you, and you may have other legal rights.

INDEMNITY

You will indemnify and hold the Project, its directors, officers, members and agents harmless from all liability, cost and expense, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following that you do or cause: [1] distribution of this etext, [2] alteration, modification, or addition to the etext, or [3] any Defect.

DISTRIBUTION UNDER "PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm"

You may distribute copies of this etext electronically, or by disk, book or any other medium if you either delete this "Small Print!" and all other references to Project Gutenberg, or:

[1] Only give exact copies of it. Among other things, this requires that you do not remove, alter or modify the etext or this "small print!" statement. You may however, if you wish, distribute this etext in machine readable binary, compressed, mark-up, or proprietary form, including any form resulting from conversion by word processing or hypertext software, but only so long as
EITHER:

[*] The etext, when displayed, is clearly readable, and does *not* contain characters other than those intended by the author of the work, although tilde (~), asterisk (*) and underline (_) characters may be used to convey punctuation intended by the author, and additional characters may be used to indicate hypertext links; OR

[*] The etext may be readily converted by the reader at no expense into plain ASCII, EBCDIC or equivalent form by the program that displays the etext (as is the case, for instance, with most word processors); OR

[*] You provide, or agree to also provide on request at no additional cost, fee or expense, a copy of the etext in its original plain ASCII form (or in EBCDIC or other equivalent proprietary form).

[2] Honor the etext refund and replacement provisions of this "Small Print!" statement.

[3] Pay a trademark license fee to the Project of 20% of the net profits you derive calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. If you don't derive profits, no royalty is due. Royalties are payable to "Project Gutenberg Association/Carnegie-Mellon University" within the 60 days following each date you prepare (or were legally required to prepare) your annual (or equivalent periodic) tax return.

WHAT IF YOU *WANT* TO SEND MONEY EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO?

The Project gratefully accepts contributions in money, time, scanning machines, OCR software, public domain etexts, royalty free copyright licenses, and every other sort of contribution you can think of. Money should be paid to "Project Gutenberg Association / Carnegie-Mellon University".

*END*THE SMALL PRINT! FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS*Ver.04.29.93*END*

This etext was prepared by Judith Boss of Omaha, NE.

RIDERS TO THE SEA
by J. M. SYNGE

INTRODUCTION

It must have been on Synge's second visit to the Aran Islands that he had the experience out of which was wrought what many believe to be his greatest play. The scene of "Riders to the Sea" is laid in a cottage on Inishmaan, the middle and most interesting island of the Aran group. While Synge was on Inishmaan, the story came to him of a man whose body had been washed up on the far away coast of Donegal, and who, by reason of certain peculiarities of dress, was suspected to be from the island. In due course, he was recognised as a native of Inishmaan, in exactly the manner described in the play, and perhaps one of the most poignantly vivid passages in Synge's book on "The Aran Islands" relates the incident of his burial.

The other element in the story which Synge introduces into the play is equally true. Many tales of "second sight" are to be heard among Celtic races. In fact, they are so common as to arouse little or no wonder in the minds of the people. It is just such a tale, which there seems no valid reason for doubting, that Synge heard, and that gave the title, "Riders to the Sea", to his play.

It is the dramatist's high distinction that he has simply taken the materials which lay ready to his hand, and by the power of sympathy woven them, with little modification, into a tragedy which, for dramatic irony and noble pity, has no equal among its contemporaries. Great tragedy, it is frequently claimed with some show of justice, has perforce departed with the advance of modern life and its complicated tangle of interests and creature comforts. A highly developed civilisation, with its attendant specialisation of culture, tends ever to lose sight of those elemental forces, those primal emotions, naked to wind and sky, which are the stuff from which great drama is wrought by the artist, but which, as it would seem, are rapidly departing from us. It is only in the far places, where solitary communion may be had with the elements, that this dynamic life is still to be found continuously, and it is accordingly thither that the dramatist, who would deal with spiritual life disengaged from the environment of an intellectual maze, must go for that experience which will beget in him inspiration for his art. The Aran Islands from which Synge gained his inspiration are rapidly losing that sense of isolation and self-dependence, which has hitherto been their rare distinction, and which furnished the motivation for Synge's masterpiece. Whether or not Synge finds a successor, it is none the less true that in English dramatic literature "Riders to the Sea" has an historic value which it would be difficult to over-estimate in its accomplishment and its possibilities. A writer in The Manchester Guardian shortly after Synge's death

phrased it rightly when he wrote that it is "the tragic masterpiece of our language in our time; wherever it has been played in Europe from Galway to Prague, it has made the word tragedy mean something more profoundly stirring and cleansing to the spirit than it did."

The secret of the play's power is its capacity for standing afar off, and mingling, if we may say so, sympathy with relentlessness. There is a wonderful beauty of speech in the words of every character, wherein the latent power of suggestion is almost unlimited. "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." In the quavering rhythm of these words, there is poignantly present that quality of strangeness and remoteness in beauty which, as we are coming to realise, is the touchstone of Celtic literary art. However, the very asceticism of the play has begotten a corresponding power which lifts Synge's work far out of the current of the Irish literary revival, and sets it high in a timeless atmosphere of universal action.

Its characters live and die. It is their virtue in life to be lonely, and none but the lonely man in tragedy may be great. He dies, and then it is the virtue in life of the women mothers and wives and sisters to be great in their loneliness, great as Maurya, the stricken mother, is great in her final word.

"Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied." The pity and the terror of it all have brought a great peace, the peace that passeth understanding, and it is because the play holds this timeless peace after the storm which has bowed down every character, that "Riders to the Sea" may rightly take its place as the greatest modern tragedy in the English tongue.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

February 23, 1911.

RIDERS TO THE SEA

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First performed at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, February 25th, 1904.

PERSONS

MAURYA (an old woman) . . . Honor Lavelle

BARTLEY (her son) W. G. Fay

CATHLEEN (her daughter). . . Sarah Allgood

NORA (a younger daughter). . Emma Vernon

MEN AND WOMEN

RIDERS TO THE SEA

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First performed at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, February 25th, 1904.

SCENE. -- An Island off the West of Ireland. (Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel. NORA, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.)

NORA

[In a low voice.]

Where is she?

CATHLEEN

She's lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping, if she's able.

[Nora comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.]

CATHLEEN

[Spinning the wheel rapidly.]

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.

[Cathleen stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.]

NORA

We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

CATHLEEN

How would they be Michael's, Nora. How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

NORA

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 a clean burial by the grace of God, and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."

[The door which Nora half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.]

CATHLEEN

[Looking out anxiously.]

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

NORA

"I won't stop him," says he, "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."

CATHLEEN

Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA

Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind.

[She goes over to the table with the bundle.]

Shall I open it now?

CATHLEEN

Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done.

[Coming to the table.]

It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.

NORA

[Goes to the inner door and listens.]

She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

CATHLEEN

Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east.

[They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney; Cathleen goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. Maurya comes from the inner room.]

MAURYA

[Looking up at Cathleen and speaking querulously.]

Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

CATHLEEN

There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space. [Throwing down the turf] and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.

[Nora picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.]

MAURYA

[Sitting down on a stool at the fire.]

He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

NORA

He'll not stop him, mother, and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

MAURYA

Where is he itself?

NORA

He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker' tacking from the east.

CATHLEEN

I hear some one passing the big stones.

NORA

[Looking out.]

He's coming now, and he in a hurry.

BARTLEY

[Comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and

quietly.]

Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

CATHLEEN

[Coming down.]

Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

NORA

[Giving him a rope.]

Is that it, Bartley?

MAURYA

You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards (Bartley takes the rope). It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up to-morrow 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.

BARTLEY

[Beginning to work with the rope.]

I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses I heard them saying below.

MAURYA

It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara.

[She looks round at the boards.]

BARTLEY

How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

MAURYA

If it wasn't found itself, 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 itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?

BARTLEY

[Working at the halter, to Cathleen.]

Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

MAURYA

How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

BARTLEY

[To Cathleen]

If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

MAURYA

It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drownd'd with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?

[Bartley lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel.]

BARTLEY

[To Nora.]

Is she coming to the pier?

NORA

[Looking out.]

She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails.

BARTLEY

[Getting his purse and tobacco.]

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.

MAURYA

[Turning round to the fire, and putting her shawl over her head.]

Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

CATHLEEN

It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?

BARTLEY

[Taking the halter.]

I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the gray pony'll run behind me. . . . The blessing of God on you.

[He goes out.]

MAURYA

[Crying out as he is in the door.]

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

CATHLEEN

Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on every one in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?

[Maurya takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.]

NORA

[Turning towards her.]

You're taking away the turf from the cake.

CATHLEEN

[Crying out.]

The Son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread.

[She comes over to the fire.]

NORA

And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

CATHLEEN

[Turning the cake out of the oven.]

It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever.

[Maurya sways herself on her stool.]

CATHLEEN

[Cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to Maurya.]

Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

MAURYA

[Taking the bread.]

Will I be in it as soon as himself?

CATHLEEN

If you go now quickly.

MAURYA

[Standing up unsteadily.]

It's hard set I am to walk.

CATHLEEN

[Looking at her anxiously.]

Give her the stick, Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

NORA

What stick?

CATHLEEN

The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

MAURYA

[Taking a stick Nora gives her.]

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.

[She goes out slowly. Nora goes over to the ladder.]

CATHLEEN

Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

NORA

Is she gone round by the bush?

CATHLEEN

[Looking out.]

She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.

NORA

[Getting the bundle from the loft.]

The young priest said he'd be passing to-morrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

CATHLEEN

[Taking the bundle.]

Did he say what way they were found?

NORA

[Coming down.]

"There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."

CATHLEEN

[Trying to open the bundle.]

Give me a knife, Nora, the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

NORA

[Giving her a knife.]

I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

CATHLEEN

[Cutting the string.]

It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago -- the man sold us that knife -- and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be seven days you'd be in Donegal.

NORA

And what time would a man take, and he floating?

[Cathleen opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a stocking. They look at them eagerly.]

CATHLEEN

[In a low voice.]

The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

NORA

I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put the one flannel on the other [she looks through some clothes hanging in

the corner.] It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

CATHLEEN

I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it [pointing to the corner]. There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do.

[Nora brings it to her and they compare the flannel.]

CATHLEEN

It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?

NORA

[Who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out.]

It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

CATHLEEN

[Taking the stocking.]

It's a plain stocking.

NORA

It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

CATHLEEN

[Counts the stitches.]

It's that number is in it [crying out.] Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keem him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

NORA

[Swinging herself round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes.]

And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?

CATHLEEN

[After an instant.]

Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the

path.

NORA

[Looking out.]

She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

CATHLEEN

Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier 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.

NORA

[Helping Cathleen to close the bundle.]

We'll put them here in the corner.

[They put them into a hole in the chimney corner. Cathleen goes back to the spinning-wheel.]

NORA

Will she see it was crying I was?

CATHLEEN

Keep your back to the door the way the light'll not be on you.

[Nora sits down at the chimney corner, with her back to the door. Maurya comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and Nora points to the bundle of bread.]

CATHLEEN

[After spinning for a moment.]

You didn't give him his bit of bread?

[Maurya begins to kee'n softly, without turning round.]

CATHLEEN

Did you see him riding down?

[Maurya goes on keening.]

CATHLEEN

[A little impatiently.]

God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you?

MAURYA

[With a weak voice.]

My heart's broken from this day.

CATHLEEN

[As before.]

Did you see Bartley?

MAURYA

I seen the fearfulest thing.

CATHLEEN

[Leaves her wheel and looks out.]

God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head,
and the gray pony behind him.

MAURYA

[Starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows
her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice.]

The gray pony behind him.

CATHLEEN

[Coming to the fire.]

What is it ails you, at all?

MAURYA

[Speaking very slowly.]

I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen, since the
day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

CATHLEEN AND NORA

Uah.

[They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.]

NORA

Tell us what it is you seen.

MAURYA

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 [she puts up her
hands, as if to hide something from her eyes.] The Son of God
spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN

What is it you seen.

MAURYA

I seen Michael himself.

CATHLEEN

[Speaking softly.]

You did not, mother; it wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial by the grace of God.

MAURYA

[A little defiantly.]

I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael upon it -- with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

CATHLEEN

[Begins to keen.]

It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

NORA

Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God wouldn't leave her destitute with no son living?

MAURYA

[In a low voice, but clearly.]

It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . . Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house -- six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world -- 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 found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on the one plank, and in by that door.

[She pauses for a moment, the girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.]

NORA

[In a whisper.]

Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?

CATHLEEN

[In a whisper.]

There's some one after crying out by the seashore.

MAURYA

[Continues without hearing anything.]

There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it -- it was a dry day, Nora -- and leaving a track to the door.

[She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.]

MAURYA

[Half in a dream, to Cathleen.]

Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

CATHLEEN

Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be here in this place?

MAURYA

There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was it.

CATHLEEN

It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

[She reaches out and hands Maurya the clothes that belonged to Michael. Maurya stands up slowly, and takes them into her hands. NORA looks out.]

NORA

They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

CATHLEEN

[In a whisper to the women who have come in.]

Is it Bartley it is?

ONE OF THE WOMEN

It is surely, God rest his soul.

[Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.]

CATHLEEN

[To the women, as they are doing so.]

What way was he drowned?

ONE OF THE WOMEN

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

[Maurya has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement. Cathleen and Nora kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.]

MAURYA

[Raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her.]

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, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. To Nora]. Give me the Holy Water, Nora, there's a small sup still on the dresser.

[Nora gives it to her.]

MAURYA

[Drops Michael's clothes across Bartley's feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him.]

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 a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and

maybe a fish that would be stinking.

[She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.]

CATHLEEN

[To an old man.]

Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

THE OLD MAN

[Looking at the boards.]

Are there nails with them?

CATHLEEN

There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

ANOTHER MAN

It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already.

CATHLEEN

It's getting old she is, and broken.

[Maurya stands up again very slowly and spreads out the pieces of Michael's clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.]

NORA

[In a whisper to Cathleen.]

She's quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would any one have thought that?

CATHLEEN

[Slowly and clearly.]

An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?

MAURYA

[Puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on Bartley's feet.]

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 souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and

Shawn (bending her head)); and may He have mercy on my soul,
Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.

[She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the
women, then sinks away.]

MAURYA

[Continuing.]

Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of
the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the
white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we
want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we
must be satisfied.

[She kneels down again and the curtain falls slowly.]

End of The Project Gutenberg Etext of Riders to the Sea by J. M. Synge