



Odd Man Out

Irish drama in five acts

by Christian Lanciai (1995)

Dramatis Personae:

Maureen
Dennis
Pat
Nolan
Murphy
a newspaper boy
Agnes
Ethel
Teresa
the police inspector
Grandmother
a number of policemen
father Tom
his housekeeper
Shell, birdman
Johnny

Maude and Rosie, sisters
Sam, Rosie's husband
Guests at the pub
Fencie, the pub-owner
Griffin
4 bartenders
Lukey, artist
A lady
Edward, her partner
Tober, failed medical student

The action is in Belfast.

The play is a dramatization of F.L.Green's novel "Odd Man Out", which also has been filmed. The film tells the story chronologically, while this drama sticks to the more dramatic literary form of the novel, so that Johnny does not appear until in the middle in a flashback of the action, after first the turbulence around Johnny has been visualized and disposed of.

The Northern Irish problem complexity has probably never been better presented than in this story: the desperate resolution of idealism to apply measures of violence can only turn into a self-destructive tragedy, which at its best could have a cleansing purgative result.

A tip: the best help for staging the play would be to see Carol Reed's film "Odd Man Out" from 1947.

Easter 1995

Copyright © Christian Lanciai 1995.

Odd Man Out

Act I scene 1. Maureen's house.

Maureen You shouldn't have let him do it.

Dennis I know, but I tried. He insisted.

Maureen But he is ill!

Dennis I know. He refused to realize that he was taking a risk.

Maureen That's just how you are, all of you. You are so devoted to the idealism of your organization that you lose perspective! You turn into sanctimonious fanatics with no detachment who sacrifice your lives, for what? For established criminality!

Dennis Maureen, you are in his organization yourself.

Maureen I know, but I love him!

Dennis I wanted to take his place and carry through the operation in his stead, but he refused. He had planned it for so long and so well. He wanted to do everything himself.

Maureen But why do they linger? Why don't they never come back?

Dennis They will come. The way Johnny planned it for almost six months they had to succeed. (*A car with screeching breaks stopping outside.*)

Maureen There they are!

Dennis Yes, it must be them.

(*enter Pat, Nolan and Murphy very much excited with some fat briefcases*)

Where is Johnny?

Pat He was left.

Dennis What do you mean?

Nolan The whole operation almost failed.

Dennis What happened?

Murphy Johnny was slow and loitered. When he finally came out after us he stopped at the top of the stairs, as if he was dizzy and reeled.

Nolan Then some damned cashier came out with a gun, stopped Johnny and would not let him go down.

Dennis What happened?

Pat There was a fight. Someone fired. Johnny was wounded.

Murphy The cashier was left lying on the stairs.

Dennis And you went off without Johnny?

Pat No, Johnny almost entered the car.

Nolan But not completely.

Dennis Who was driving?

Nolan Pat.

Pat Johnny came half way into the car, and then I drove off. Everyone came rushing out of the bank. Another second, and we would all have got caught. The others tried to get Johnny into the car but let go of him in the middle of the street.

Dennis Didn't you stop to pick him up?

Nolan Yes, Pat stopped a few blocks away.

Pat We saw Johnny rising from the street and running away. We couldn't back to pick him up.

Murphy We tried to wait for him at the end of the street, but he never reached it.

Nolan We lost the sight of him and went here.

Dennis And he was wounded?

Nolan Yes, in the arm.

Dennis Then he has hidden somewhere and is hoping for us to find him. But obviously you got all the money.

Murphy We got in a hurry, so we had to leave some on the way.

Dennis The organization owes you some thanks. But we must save Johnny. Make sure the money gets out of the house at once. The police could be here at any moment.

Maureen Ethel and Agnes will soon be here with their prams.

Dennis The sooner the better. The rest of us must find Johnny, each one trying his own way. I think I know where he could be hiding.

Murphy One who knows the entire underworld is Teresa.

Dennis She is not reliable.

Pat Johnny could be at her place. She always takes care of us when we get into trouble.

Nolan Pat and Murphy will take the rest of visiting her. I am good at foiling the police.

Dennis Whatever you do, don't tell her anything. And take no risks.

Murphy We know what we are doing.

Dennis I hope so.

Maureen The same goes for you, Dennis.

Dennis What?

Maureen Take no risks.

Dennis Johnny is worth everything we can to get him back. He was sitting sixteen years in a British prison for nothing. He is our brain. He runs the whole organization.

Maureen And the cashier who was left on the steps? Is he dead?

Pat (uncertain) We don't know.

Nolan He was just lying there.

Dennis We will know in good time.

Murphy If he is dead, it was Johnny's first homicide, and then we will have the whole world against us.

Newspaper boy (outside) Extra! Extra! Cashier murdered in brutal bank robbery! The murderer wounded but at large! Extra! Extra!

(silence)

Murphy A fine way to start a day.

Dennis Then we know what we can expect. The whole police force and the army will chase us relentlessly.

Maureen It couldn't have been an intentional murder.

Dennis The English don't care. All they see now is *the Murderer* written in scarlet.

Pat Here are the prams.

Murphy We had better vanish.

Dennis Each one on his own way. We'll rejoin here tonight at six.

Nolan With or without Johnny.

Dennis Rather earlier with Johnny. (*enter Ethel and Agnes*)

Agnes The prams are in the court. Did you get the money?

Ethel Was the operation successful?

Maureen Everyone is here except Johnny. He will come later.

Dennis Let's get lost. Come on, boys! (*The men leave except Dennis.*) Thanks for your help, Maureen.

Maureen You haven't succeeded yet. Thank me when you have saved Johnny.

Dennis He found security here in this house. You kept him safely concealed for six months.

Maureen I did my duty. He escaped an unjust punishment. Leave now, Dennis, before the police arrive. We will hide the money.

Dennis I will not be back without Johnny. (*leaves*)

Ethel What happened?

Maureen Johnny was struck with doubts, perhaps remorse, and was left. He was shot in the arm by a cashier, whom Johnny shot to death in self-defence.

Agnes And where is Johnny now?

Maureen Somewhere out there.

Ethel Come, girls! Let's at least save the money!

(*They set about it, emptying the briefcases to pack the money in the prams.*)

Scene 2. At Teresa's.

(The doorbell sounds. Teresa, an affected dame of more than middle age, far too well made up and masked to be honest, opens.)

Teresa Pat and Murphy! That was ages ago! Come in, come in!

Pat You are just as good as always, Teresa. (*They come in.*)

Teresa But what are you doing here? How dare you show yourselves in town? You are known as members of the organization!

Murphy We have lost Johnny.

Teresa So you are looking for him? Is it worth it? All policemen are chasing him, and you as well!

Pat We must find him. We can't just leave him.

Murphy Wounded also.

Pat Have you heard something, you, who knows the entire underworld?

Murphy It would be best if someone had taken care of him, some of your friends, perhaps some of your dealers or smugglers...

Teresa You are wrong. I have no such connections.

Pat What are you living on then?

Teresa (*adjusting her hair*) My husband was rich and passed away.

Murphy Come on, Teresa. You are still delivering liquor to every illegal joint in all Ireland.

Teresa But why do we stand her quibbling? Make yourselves comfortable and have a drink! Are you hungry? Do you want food?

Pat We knew you would comfort us, Teresa. (*making himself comfortable sitting down*)

Murphy Do you still have that eminent *Cutty Sark* from old times?

Teresa Is that what you prefer? Yes, it's still valid. Make yourselves comfortable, and I will go to the kitchen and warm up some food for you. (*offers them glasses of whisky rather filled up*)

Pat Have you really heard nothing, Teresa?

Teresa Only that your leader shot an innocent cashier to death. That's murder. The organization has never committed murder before.

Pat It was a mistake.

Teresa Of course it was a mistake. What happened?

Murphy Johnny got dizzy. He stopped and reeled on top of the steps to the bank after the robbery. Then that cashier caught up with him and tried to scare him with a gun. There was a fight, and both their guns went off. The cashier was shot to death, and Johnny was wounded in the arm.

Teresa And you drove off leaving him there?

Murphy No, we got him into the car but only half way. He fell off in a bend. When we tried to pick him up again he was gone.

Teresa So he is out there somewhere hiding, wounded, perhaps dying.

Murphy That's why we must find him.

Pat Before the police.

Teresa And money? Was the robbery successful?

Murphy It's safe. It's already delivered.

Teresa But all Belfast is chasing you. Do you think you have a chance?

Pat Only if we can find Johnny. Perhaps you could help us getting him out of the country?

Murphy You have done it before.

Teresa I shall think about it. Relax now, and I will get you some food. (*leaves*)

Pat What do you think of her? Is she reliable?

Murphy There are many warnings of her, and the organization has forbidden its members to have anything to do with her, but she knows everything about the whole town. She is in direct touch with her illegal joints and brothels by her bootleggers. If anybody knows where Johnny is, it's her. If she doesn't know it nobody does.

Pat Still I think we took a risk by coming here.

Murphy Had she known anything it would have been worth the risk.

Pat But now she knew nothing. Instead she tried to pump us.

Murphy Take it easy. You'll have good whisky and food as well.

Pat Yes, we could do with that.

Murphy After such a day.

Pat Yes. (*a short ring as when someone ends a telephone call*)

Murphy (*alarmed*) Did you hear?

Pat Yes.

Murphy Who do you think she called?

Pat If it was the police she is done for. (*produces his gun*)

Murphy Calm down. No panic! Perhaps someone called her?

Pat We never heard any signal.

Murphy This smells bad. But don't frighten her with that. It would only make matters worse.

Pat Perhaps we should scam?

Murphy Yes, perhaps. Let's steal out without anyone noticing.
 (They try quietly to leave and encounter Teresa in the door.)

Teresa *(acting)* My friends, I am sorry, but I just learned that the place is crowded with policemen, and they are on their way here. Someone saw you enter my place. You must leave at once before the police arrive!

Murphy And the food?

Teresa Some other time! Hurry!

Pat Thanks anyway for the whisky, Teresa!

Teresa Thanks for the visit! Off with you now! *(outs them. They hardly get time enough to don their hats.)*

Teresa *(closes the door behind them)* That's that! *(stands with her back to it when police sirens are heard with screeching car breaks.)*

Police *(voices from outside)* In the name of the law, surrender!
 Hands up!

(Gunfight outside: automatic pistol and revolver shots. Then dead silence.)

 Are they both dead?
 Stone dead!

Teresa *(with a sigh of relief)* Poor boys!
 (A knock on the door. Teresa opens to the police inspector.)

Inspector They tried to pull their guns. One of them fired, but we fired first.

Teresa Will you now believe that I am an honest woman? Now you have evidence that I rather help the police than criminals!

Inspector Thanks for the cooperation, but it was foul play. I hope it will not come out among your friends and that you could keep them a bit longer next time. It's always better to catch criminals alive than dead.

Teresa Poor boys! I have known them for ten years, since they were youngsters.

Inspector Yes, shed your crocodile tears, Teresa. So they knew nothing about Johnny?

Teresa No one knows anything about Johnny. Everyone is looking for him.

Police Two of those who were with them are in any case out of the game. The third one remains. Then we must unravel the whole organization. But first we must get Johnny! Alive!

Teresa Yes, inspector. If I hear anything I will let you know.

Police No one trusts you, Teresa. Strange that these two did.

Teresa They took a chance. They thought I knew something.

Police And by your clumsiness we shall now never know what they knew about the organization. Play your cards better next time! Or else there will neither be any protection or reward!

Teresa Yes, inspector. *(The inspector leaves. She closes the door after him with a deep sigh.)*

At least I made an effort at a step in the right direction. At least my husband would have thought so. Those rebels have no chance anyway in the long run.

(goes to the mirror and tries to improve her looks.)

Act II scene 1. Maureen's house.

Grandmother You love him!

Maureen So what!

Grandmother No good could come out of such a relationship.

Maureen Love demands no goodness. It demands only self-sacrifice.

Grandmother For such a man? A bank robber? A murderer?

Maureen A tragic idealist, a victim to the society of control!

Grandmother He has killed! He deserves to be killed himself!

Maureen We can't judge him until we know the whole truth. I believe he shot the cashier by mistake.

Grandmother You kept him hidden here for six months, and during that time the claws of his black soul got hold of you. Now you will never get rid of him. These mad Irishmen who by whisky and exaggerated twisted notions about themselves only turn into bragging incompetent duds and criminal alcoholics will always end up badly. My husband was the same. They all die with a curse on their lips to their own damnation no matter how pious they were as Catholics, and no love could help them.

Maureen Here is Dennis at last. *(winks through the window)*

Grandmother Does he look happy?

Maureen No, his hat covers his eyes.

Grandmother There you are. Only bad news as usual. If there is anything that would destroy any Irishman it's politics. Your Johnny will drag us all into destruction and hell.

Dennis (enters) Has the police been here?

Maureen Not yet.

Dennis They will come any moment. I can't stay long.

Maureen What have you learned?

Dennis I succeeded in trailing Johnny. He had hidden in an old shelter. There was still a smell of him in the room and traces of his blood on the floor. But he had left.

Maureen Then at least he is still alive. Do you know where he went?

Dennis If he had enough strength to leave that place he has strength enough to survive. We don't know how serious his wound was, but we know that he is bleeding. His traces of blood will catch attention everywhere. His chances are small, but they are. It all depends on him. Is the money safe?

Maureen It has reached its destination and can no longer be traced.

Dennis At least something good in all the mishaps.

Grandmother Money! All you can think of is money, without your noticing what beasts they make of you. Money makes all people criminal and evil.

Maureen Do you know anything about the others?

Dennis (with a sigh) Too much. Pat and Murphy are dead. Those fools went to Teresa's place, and she probably betrayed them. We shall never know. No Irishman will ever be able to trust her any more. The police arrived, and when they came out from Teresa's they were shot down. They say that Pay and Murphy fired the first shots, but I doubt it. I know the English. They take no chances.

Maureen And Nolan?

Dennis He was close to finding Johnny when the police caught up with him. He committed the mistake of trying to run away. He boarded a tram, that had a breakdown, because there were too many people on it, and no one wanted to get off. The driver asked the police for help, then Nolan escaped, but the police followed him and shot him from behind. They probably thought he was Johnny.

Grandmother Three dead for the organization, three lives wasted and sacrificed because the idealism of the organization forced them to criminality. What kind of an organization and idealism is that? Is then the ultimate momentum of your manly idealism insane suicide? That will make no human happiness.

Maureen Quiet, grandmother. So there is only you left. What will you do?

Dennis I must go underground. The whole organization now depends on me. There is still hope, but it is as small as it is for Johnny. I must not get caught.

Police (outside) Open up in the name of the law! (*thumps the door*)

Maureen The police!

Dennis If the emergency gets worse I'll have to escape to America. We have powerful friends there. But I will not leave unless Johnny is with me or dead.

Maureen Run!

Dennis So long! (*escapes by the back door*)

Police (outside) Open up, or we break the door!

Maureen Take it easy, grandmother. We have seen and heard nothing.
(*goes calmly to open the door*)

police At last! We have orders to search the house.

Maureen Help yourselves.

(*The inspector indicates to the others to search the house. They start immediately.*)

Inspector This is where he stayed, isn't it?

Maureen We know nothing.

Inspector No, of course. He escaped here and stayed hidden here for six months, and you know nothing about it.

Maureen I don't know whom you are talking about.

Inspector The whole town knows who I am talking about but not you. I talk about the bank robber and the murderer, who murdered an innocent cashier! This time your organization has gone too far! All Ireland has turned against you!

Grandmother Maureen is innocent. She is just a girl.

Inspector No one is innocent who knows and protects a murderer. Where is he?

Maureen We know nothing.

Inspector No, of course.

A policeman No trace of him here, Sir.

Inspector No, of course. And naturally none of the members of the organization have been here? Although the place stinks of tobacco and whisky, which of course only you and your grandmother have copiously consumed? It must have been at least fifteen loafs of cigarette packs and an equal number of bottles of malt whisky. And you know nothing about that as well?

Maureen No, nothing.

Grandmother You are mistaken, inspector. Maureen is a decent girl.

Inspector That has nothing to do with it! She is protecting a murderer!

Maureen And what if he fired in self-defence?

Inspector A robber of banks does not fire in self-defence. He shoots to get away with his loot!

Maureen I still don't know where he is.

Inspector And not Dennis either?

Maureen I don't know what you are talking about.

Inspector Take a good advice, Miss. If you have anything to do with this, then pull out at once! It's a rotten story, where everything can only end in a very bad way.

Grandmother That's what I always said, Maureen. As soon as money enters the game the entire game will rot. The organization was good until they started robbing banks in broad daylight.

Maureen (to the police) Grandmother is old.

Inspector But she obviously knows what she is talking about and more than you do, Miss. But we have learned what we wanted to know. I ask you again to keep out of it. So long, Miss. Come now, let's go.

(All the policemen leave. Maureen gets dressed with some determination.)

Grandmother Where are you going?

Maureen To father Tom.

Grandmother Do you think he knows something about Johnny?

Maureen If no one else knows anything, he at least will know something. Don't expect me back for the night, grandmother.

Grandmother Will you sleep elsewhere?

Maureen No, but I will probably be detained. *(leaves)*

Grandmother These young ones! They hover like drifting leaves for the storm and believe they are themselves setting the wind in motion! Stick to the earth and stay there, I always said. As soon as you start flying and whirling with the wind, you never know where it will blow you until it ends with disaster, and usually you crash to death, like almost all our able young Irish men of some vanity.

Scene 2. At father Tom's.

(He is sitting in his armchair warming up by his fireplace, a very old and small, very wise and complacent man.)

In the next room there is the doorbell ringing. The housekeeper appears, opens the door to let in a bum original with a birdcage. They exchange a few unintelligible words, Shell is allowed to enter and will have to wait while the housekeeper passes through the room, goes to the door to father Tom, knocks and enters.)

Housekeeper Here is a strange man looking for you, father.

Tom Let him enter. I have been expecting him.

Housekeeper Are you warm enough, father? Shall I get some more wood? The weather outside is nasty. *(pokes the fire)*

Tom Has it started snowing?

Housekeeper Yes, long ago.

Tom Poor all those out there with nowhere to go.

Housekeeper Yes, father, but you will let anyone in.

Tom Especially on a night like this.

(The housekeeper returns to Shell and shows him in to the old man. Shell brushes off his last snowflakes and enters.)

I have been expecting you.

Shell But you have never seen me before.

Tom I am father Tom. And you are?

Shell Everyone knows who I am. I am Shell.

Tom Have you brought a cageling?

Shell A lost cageling. The birdie is hurt.

Tom Hurt and still at large?

Shell Yes, badly hurt in the wing. But he still refuses to return to the cage.

(Another call by the doorbell.)

Tom Wait a moment. Here is another. *(goes to the other room just as the housekeeper lets in Maureen by the door.)*

Welcome, my child.

Maureen You know who I am?

Tom No, but I thought you would turn up. Is it snowing heavily?

Maureen Enough, but it is very cold.

Tom It will be a hard night for the homeless.

Maureen How did you know that I would come?

Tom The police have been here making enquiries. I knew nothing and also wish to know nothing.

Maureen I also know nothing. That's why I have come here.

Tom That pleases me. Then none of us have anything to fear. But I will gladly do whatever I can.

Maureen What did the police say?

Tom A great deal and very serious matters. Three friends of the chased man have been killed, and the last of them succeeded in shooting down two policemen before he died. With the innocent cashier, that gives us six victims so far. For what? For a chased robber to remain free?

Maureen I am glad that you don't call him a murderer.

Tom So you are his girl?

Maureen No, but I love him, and like you I wish to do whatever I can for him.

Tom Then we have a common interest. But come in to my fire and warm up. Brush off that snow and don't let it melt on you. Just before you I had another visitor, and he might have something interesting to tell.

Maureen (alarmed) Dennis?

Tom No, he is a birdman. But please come in and get warm. He has a problem with a wing-broken bird who can't fly but still wants to remain free. (*shows the bewildered Maureen in to his room, Shell and the fire. Shell rises when she enters and raises his hat.*)

Shell My name is Shell.

Maureen Maureen. (*They greet each other.*)

Tom Now tell us about your bird, Shell.

Shell It's a strange story. My bird was hard on the other birds in his cage. He wanted so badly to get out, so he constantly hacked on the others, and one day he had killed one of them. The others then became so angry with him, that they hurt him so badly that one wing was hanging limp and broken. He could never fly any more.

Tom Was that when he escaped?

Shell Yes, he got away and never wants to enter the cage any more.

Tom Do you know where he is?

Shell Yes, I know where he is.

Tom And he doesn't want to come in?

Shell He trusts no living being.

Maureen What kind of a bird is it?

Shell (watching her shrewdly) It's a linnet. I call him Johnny. (*Maureen starts.*)

Tom What will you do with him?

Shell He is worth very much. It's a rare specimen. They want to give me 2000 pounds for him.

Tom You can have more, if you bring him to us, so we could fix his wing and make him worth even more.

Shell What would you give for him, father Tom?

Tom Your own freedom.

Shell My own freedom can only be bought for money. I am a poor man. 200 quid would be enough for me. I have no demands but wish to survive. Could you offer me 200 pounds for him?

Tom No, we can't, but we could give you what's worth even more.

Shell What's more worth than money?

Tom Satisfaction. Happiness. Everything is more worth than money.

Shell (shrewdly) The question is if I could get him into the cage and deliver him.

Tom You have perfect bait.

Shell What?

Tom The girl here.

Shell But the police are also after him. The police watch your vicarage and everyone passing in and out. It will be difficult to hide him on the way here. The police could take him away from all three of us.

Tom There is always a way out.

Shell (rising) One more thing. He is bleeding. He could die.

Tom The more important that we attend to him.

Shell I will think about it.

Tom Think it over, and come back later. (*Shell leaves abruptly.*)
Shell knows where he is. We could save him.

Maureen But if the police guard the house he can't come here.

Tom Would you try to stop the police from taking him?

Maureen That would be worse than death for him.

Tom Is it then better for him to die?

Maureen There is another way. I can save him.

Tom How?

Maureen I could get him out of the country.

Tom He has killed a man. He can never get away from that.

Maureen So you want to turn him over to the police?

Tom I want to save his soul.

Maureen So do I.

Tom By making him abscond his crime and justice?

Maureen You said yourself, that there is always a way out.

Tom Is there another way, that I am unaware of?

Maureen Yes, love. (*shows him a gun*)

Tom (shocked) Do you want to kill him?

Maureen Rather that than letting the police take him.

Tom Then you will have a murder on your conscience yourself.

Maureen Not if I follow him.

Tom (even more shocked) My child, this is suicide!

Maureen No, it's love and sacrifice.

Tom So you believe you could save his soul in this extreme manner?

Maureen Yes.

Tom It would be the most painful of operations, and it would take a lot of courage.

Maureen The courage of love is as limitless as it is true.

Tom You have much faith, my child. I wish my own were equal to it.

Maureen Don't you want to help me?

Tom (sighs heavily) Only on one condition. Only if all other alternatives fail.

Maureen So you have nothing against my helping him on board a ship?

Tom Even with that I wish to help you, for your love is great, and it is pure and true.

Maureen (*rising, glad*) Then we are agreed.

Tom But we need Shell to help us. (*another doorbell signal*)

Maureen Could it be Shell? (*The housekeeper lets in the police inspector.*)

Tom No, it's too soon.

(*enter the police inspector*)

Inspector Sorry to bother you again, but we saw the girl entering your place. I must have a word with you in private.

Maureen I am leaving.

Tom Wait in the next room, my child. Lie down and rest. It will do you good.

Maureen Yes, father. (*leaves*)

Inspector (*when they are alone*) Did you learn anything?

Tom No. The girl knows as little as I do. None of us knows where he is.

Inspector It's extremely important that we find him before his own gang members do. They could execute him just to silence him or make it impossible for us to talk with him.

Tom As I said: we know nothing.

(*Maureen has listened and now quietly walks out into the snow.*)

Inspector I think you know more than you wish to admit. Who was that tramp who visited you?

Tom A simple man from the slums. He devotes his life to his cagebirds. One of them has escaped, and he is looking all over town for him.

Inspector A very simple man in other words.

Tom You saw his empty birdcage which he carries around. All make fun of him. He is to be pitied.

Inspector Yes. But the girl has contacts. You can tell her that we caught Dennis.

Tom Alive?

Inspector No. Unfortunately we had to shoot him. He shot down five policemen before we got him.

Tom Tragic, tragic, unbearably tragic.

Inspector But don't let her know.

Tom You wish to use my obligation of silence to fool her?

Inspector Your obligation of silence remains an obligation of silence, father. Get us Johnny, and she will be free.

Tom So you wish me and her to give over Johnny to you?

Inspector We are the law and justice. It is your duty to let us have him if you can. To the law he is a murderer.

Tom He is wounded and perhaps dying.

Inspector He can only get medical help from us. No regular doctor wants to handle such a case, from fear of being arrested as an accomplice. We can save his life, father, and perhaps only we.

Tom So you wish to save his life to be able to execute him?

Inspector The law will judge his case. It might be just a sentence for life.

Tom Which is better?

Inspector Do your duty, father. You don't have to do anything more than give us a tip.

Tom I will give you that tip. (*rises and opens a window. The snow comes blowing in.*)
He is out there somewhere. No one wants to let him in, since, as you say, no one wishes to be branded as his accomplice. Is that some weather for a human being, perhaps wounded to death, to be forced to spend the night in, Inspector? Your law only threatens and scares him, and he would rather die out there than come in to you. He could have acted in self-defence. Perhaps he was forced to kill the cashier in order not to be killed himself. We shall never know who fired first, and Johnny perhaps fired by mistake or without aiming. But your law doesn't care just because he has been sentenced before and is a robber. It doesn't care about Johnny's soul if only it gets hold of Johnny's body for execution. But I am responsible for Johnny's soul, Inspector, and it is my duty to save it, if necessary from your hands, which only are eager to punish and kill and fight violence with more violence. I don't believe in such vicious circles, Inspector. They are just a waste. Only the soul is worth any effort in this life.

Inspector Obviously you don't want to cooperate.

Tom Yes, but only constructively.

Inspector Then save him for us, father. And save the girl. Good night.

Tom No, Inspector. Unfortunately I have to try to save both him and the girl from you, which will place your law in an awkward position.

Inspector You will then be a collaborator and criminal.

Tom No, Inspector. There is a law and justice standing above the mundane law and order.

Inspector Suit yourself. If Johnny is not caught before midnight your vicarage will be placed under surveillance and all your visitors questioned.

Tom I can't stop you from that.

Inspector You will have a bad political reputation.

Tom I don't think so. False rumours usually fade out to nothing.

Inspector I have warned you. This business could lead to civil war, and I don't want a priest to end up on the wrong side, for then he will no longer be a credible priest. There is no priest in town more respected than you.

Tom That's because I am the oldest.

Inspector Then you should consider it even more carefully. (*leaves. Discovers that Maureen is gone.*) Where is the girl?

Housekeeper She left.

Tom You see, Inspector. Even innocence escapes your justice. Isn't that a clear sign that your justice isn't infallible?

Inspector And how do you know she is innocent?

Tom Johnny never loved her. It's only she who loves him.

Inspector This is only getting worse all the time. (*leaves*)

Housekeeper Do you think they will catch the wanted man?

Tom It will be a long and difficult night for all of us. That's all I know. Keep awake, sister. Both Shell, the girl and the police could be back any moment.

Act III scene 1.

(Johnny in the shelter, wakes up in a delirium.)

Johnny Am I then still in prison? Wonderful! I had such an unbearable dream. I never dreamt anything so terrible. I dreamt that I shot and killed a human being. How can you dream anything so ghastly? He turned on me in front of my face with a gun loaded, by all means, a venomous nobody who imagined to be brave, so I struck him down only for that, but he dragged me down in his fall. We had just robbed a bank, only a small robbery to finance a few operations, and then that lackey intervenes, ambitious to be a hero. We struggled and tried to wrench each others' guns out of the other's hands, when suddenly both went off. He shot me in my shoulder, and I shot him in his heart. I knew at once he was dead. But I never wanted to kill him! He just died because he wanted to fight me! But how come that I remember it all so dreadfully clear? (*rises from the bench, gives a scream of pain. Terrified:*)

I slept but didn't dream. I dreamed only when I thought it was a dream. Only the terror of the dream was real – everything else was a dream. I have actually killed a man. If only I hadn't killed him! Why couldn't anyone have stopped me?

(*Pat and Murphy appearing as ghosts.*)

Pat! Murphy! What are you doing here? How could you find me? No one else has come here!

Murphy It's your fault that we are dead. Only because of you and your organization we were shot to death.

Johnny Is this a new dream or is it reality?

Pat We are as real as you, and you will soon be one of us, for you are already dying. That's why you see us already.

Johnny And the money? What about it?

Murphy Don't worry. It has reached its destination. Your organization will survive even if all its members will die for you. But then there will be no one left to be able to use your money.

Johnny Deliver me, o God, from this terrible dream of reality!

Pat First you must walk through hell alive until you die. You have a long via crucis ahead of you.

Murphy If you are lucky you will join us before midnight. (*they leave*)

Johnny No, wait! Stay on! Please linger a moment!

Dennis (enters as a ghost) So, there you are! I looked for you in the wrong shelter. Well, I hadn't been able to do anything anyway, since we were both obviously doomed anyway.

Johnny Dennis! And Nolan? What about him?
Nolan (appears) Don't worry! Dennis disposed of five policemen before they got him! At least we made a deeper hole in the established order than the damned control society made in our organization. I wish we had got more down the drain for your sake, since you after all was the chief of the organization.
Johnny No, no, I never wanted to kill!
Nolan Then why did you kill?
Johnny You have given me the deaths of nine men to atone for!
Dennis Ten including you.
Johnny I don't count, for I am damned.
Nolan Say that again when you reach the end of your last walk. *(leaves)*
Dennis See you later, Johnny. I will not proceed down to hell until you also have tumbled down. *(leaves)*
Johnny No, no, it's just a dream! This insufferable reality is just a dream, for reality cannot be that cruel!
Nolan (outside) It was only made by you yourself!
Johnny No!
Dennis (outside) It's no use protesting. Only atonement could be of any use.
Johnny Then give me all the sufferings in the world, but let me atone for my crime! *(Suddenly there is light and complete silence. One of the lights of the city has reached the shelter.)*
A beam of light. It calls me up to the world above. It summons me to my walk to death. May anything happen! I can't remain here and hide like a wretched coward when the whole world is suffering! Come on, suffering! Lead me on the right way to my atonement! *(staggeres out of the shelter with great pains.)*

Scene 2. A small English home.

(Enter two middle-aged ladies supporting Johnny between themselves.)

Maudie Do you think he is badly wounded?
Rosie Didn't you see how the car hit him directly?
Maudie He seems to have broken his arm.
Rosie Yes, what luck that we caught sight of him, and that I have taken a course in first aid! Now I can practise! Place him carefully there in the armchair! That's it!
Maudie He looks very exhausted.
Rosie Yes, he naturally had a bad shock.
Maudie Look, how bloody he is! And the hand!
Rosie The car must have caused some severe wound, however that could have happened. Go to the kitchen, Maudie, and get me a vessel with boiled water.
(Johnny slowly awakens from his unconsciousness.)
Maudie At least he is alive. *(goes out)*

Rosie Yes, and before we are finished with him he shall be completely restored. There you are, my poor fellow! How do you feel, Sir?

Johnny (groggy) Where am I?

Rosie You were hit by a car. Fortunately me and my sister saw how it happened. We collected you directly from the street. Now I will bandage you before you may go out again.

Johnny But I can't stay here. I... (*faints again*)

Rosie He is worse off than I thought. (*opens his coat, is taken by surprise.*)
Maudie!

Maudie Yes, what is it, dear?

Rosie Come here and look.

Maud (coming) What is it?

Rosie He hasn't just broken his arm. This is serious. We must cut up his sleeve.

Maud But you can't just ruin his clothes without first asking his permission?

Rosie I have taken the first aid course, not you. I know what must be done. Hurry on with the water! (*gets some scissors and starts cutting. Maud goes out again.*)

We can't remove your coat, my friend, when you are as badly hurt as this. Therefore I must cut it up. There! (*finds Johnny's holster inside the arm and takes out a revolver.*)

Could this really be true? Have we brought *him* into the house?

Maud (bringing the water) Here is the water.

Rosie Maudie! (*shows her the gun*)

Maud (softer) What will you do?

Rosie When Sam gets to know this he will be furious. But we can't drive him out. We must bandage him first.

Maud How badly hurt is he?

Rosie He is shot through the arm, and the bullet is still there. It must be removed, and that's something I cannot do. He must be operated on. All we can do is to bandage his wounds in the meantime, so that at least he will not bleed to death.

Maud Of all men we had to get him into our house!

Rosie He has lost much blood. He must have been bleeding all day.

Maud Is he dying?

Rosie I don't know.

Maud If he dies here we will be in trouble.

Rosie That will be Sam's chief argument. But we must do our duty. (*dresses his wounds*) He is just a fellow being, and we can't just let him die.

(*The main door is heard.*)

Maud Here is Sam now.

Rosie Alert the defence, and stand up to an attack.

Sam (opens the door brusquely) What have you got into the house? There are traces of blood in the stairs! Don't tell me it's something the cat has brought in again! (*sees the whole situation*)

Rosie Be quiet, Sam. The man here was hit by a car, and I give him the first aid. That's all.

Sam (sees the revolver) But that is a revolver! (*understands everything*)

He can't stay here.

Rosie Do you want his death on your conscience?

Sam If he dies under my roof you will put me in a jam!

Rosie That's exactly why he must live.

Maud How wise you are, Rosie.

Sam Then bring him alive and drive him out!

Rosie Don't be inhuman, Sam.

Maud What if a doctor said that to his nurses so that their patients could hear it.

Sam Of all unwanted men you had to bring in the most unwanted of all! All Belfast is chasing him! Do you want to bring all shotgun idiots here chasing him dead or alive like to Teresa's house?

Rosie Don't mention that name. She betrayed her guests.

Maud All the town knows that already.

Rosie We will not do the same.

Sam But I will before the police or his friends come here! There is a reward of 2000 pounds to anyone who informs on him.

Rosie (interrupting her work) Shame on you, Sam! The mere thought!

Maud Informers are worse than Englishmen.

Rosie Do you want to get unrest and misery for the rest of your life?

Sam I just don't want him in here.

Johnny (has patiently listened to the whole debate) You need not worry. I will leave.

(*silence*)

Rosie He has more decency than you, Sam.

Sam (somewhat embarrassed, fetches a bottle of whisky, approaches Johnny)

At least take this before you go. You can manage on it for hours.

Johnny Thanks. (*drinks*)

Maud (cautiously) Do you really think it's good for him?

Sam It's the best medicine there is.

Rosie For men.

Sam There could be nothing better for Johnny.

(*Johnny gets up not without some difficulty.*)

Rosie Are you sure you can manage?

Maud It's raining outside.

Johnny Thanks for your kindness. I can manage.

Maud Are you sure?

Sam He is a man, Maud. If he made it out there alone against all those militant policemen all this time, he will surely manage.

Johnny Thanks for your hospitality. Goodbye.

Rosie Don't forget your hat. (*puts it on him*)

Johnny Thank you. (*staggers out*)

Maud And the revolver?
Sam Give it to me. It will go straight down the drain. (*takes it and leaves*)
Rosie At least we did our best, Maud.
Maud Imagine that such a man could be wanted for murder!
Rosie Perhaps he was innocent.
Maud Yes, it looks rather as if the whole world were out to kill him.

Scene 3. The pub.

(Inside a pub richly decorated with beautiful pictures, with many visitors and private tables and a number of bartenders. Nice atmosphere.)

Customer 1 How is business, Fencie?
Fencie (the owner, bartender) Has never been better.
Customer 2 Is it thanks to Lukey's paintings?
Fencie I don't know. Perhaps. The mood here has improved since I changed the name. It attracts people. Lukey's paintings add to the atmosphere. Art always does, no matter how mad the artist is. (*laughter*)
Customer 3 Is he still living on Griffin?
Fencie Yes, Griffin hasn't tired of the follies of the genius yet. He still believes the fool is a genius.
Griffin Good evening, gentlemen.
Fencie Welcome, Griffin! What will it be?
Griffin The usual thing. Is the third crib vacant?
Fencie Of course. Make yourself at home.
Griffin I expect Lukey here tonight. Show him directly in to me when he comes.
Fencie He is not as welcome.
Griffin Come on, Fencie! You made him decorate the whole joint for you for almost nothing! Since then your house has always been full! And now you tell me Lukey isn't welcome! If I let that word out, no one will come here any more, until Lukey is welcome again!
Fencie Last time he was here he broke up the place and caused damages for fifty pounds! He can't behave among people!
Griffin You were paid for his damages, and you owe him more than that for the pictures he gave you for nothing.
Fencie Well, he is of course as welcome as ever, but if he misbehaves again he will be thrown out directly!
Griffin (calming) If necessary I will help you. (*enters his crib*)
Fencie Look out for Lukey, boys, and watch him if he comes!
Bartender 1 Not that rotten egg again!
Bartender 2 Have you prepared the straitjacket?
Bartender 3 Send him at sea! There he will have naval battles free of charge!

Customer 2 Cheers to Lukey, the maddest and greatest artist in the block, the Caravaggio of Belfast!

Customer 4 Who the devil is Caravaggio?

Customer 2 Michelangelo, you know, that lunatic who broke his back just to paint frescoes in the ceiling.

Customer 4 O, that one. *(shares the toast)*

(Suddenly enter Johnny reeling in, casting a brief wild glance about and then disappears in the first compartment. None of the customers have seen him, but all bartenders are immediately worried.)

bartender 1 Did you notice?

Bartender 2 This will be harder than Lukey.

Bartender 3 Was it that rumoured hero himself, who everyone wishes to see but no one has caught sight of?

Bartender 4 Who else? You must have seen the wounded arm and the wild eyes? Only a wounded murderer has such looks.

Fencie Stick to it, boys. Keep the customers happy. No one has seen him.

(goes swiftly and smoothly with a double whisky to the first compartment.)

Bartender 1 Hush! The boss will fix him.

Bartender 2 The boss fixes everything.

Customer 2 Any problem, boys? Why do you look so worried?

Bartender 2 What bartender would not be worried by the news that Lukey is on his way here?

Customer 1 Did you hear that, boys? Lukey is on his way here! Then we'll have a party again tonight!

Bartender 3 If he tries to celebrate anything we will throw him out.

Fencie (by Johnny) Listen! Here is a round! Then get out!

Johnny (completely groggy) Whaat?

Fencie Drink it, damn it! It's my best whisky, if you'll only get lost! *(helps him with the glass)*

Johnny (turns it over by mistake) Sorry, Sir.

Fencie What a waste! My best quality! Then stay put, but keep quite still!

(sighs heavily, like a man with a suddenly hopeless problem, leaves the compartment and bolts it with a wedge, so that no one can enter or leave it.)

bartender 2 Did you fix him, boss?

Fencie He has had his whisky, and he doesn't complain. We'll have to get rid of him after closing time.

Lukey (entering suddenly bawling in a grand style, an impressing original of a pretentious artist) Where the hell is that damned shit of a birdman? I will flay him alive if only I get hold of him!

Customer 2 (informing the others) Lukey. *(to Lukey)* What poor devil is it you wish to flay this time, Lukey?

Lukey That bird devil with the canary!

Customer 2 But you are staying at his place. Why don't you flay him at home? Do you need a pub for flaying a canary bird?

Lukey He ran away from me! He escaped as that fart of a coward he is!

Customer 3 And why do you have to flay him?

Fencie No trouble here, Lukey. Then you go out directly. And Shell isn't here. He has not been here today.

Lukey Then he will be, as sure as my name is Lukey! And I will wait for him here! And I will wring his neck here in your public rooms!

Griffin (looking out from his compartment) Come in here, Lukey. I want to talk business with you.

Customer 3 Tell me first why you wish to wring the neck of such a tiny creature.

Lukey He wants to sell Johnny's life for two thousand pounds! He wants to sacrifice an Irishman! He wants to make money as an informer! That infected parasite of a human plague!

Customer 2 You might need some money yourself. Are you sure you don't intend to share the reward?

Customer 1 And how could Shell have anything to do with our Johnny?

Lukey (desperate) Shell has found him and hides him and wants to sell him when I wish to paint him! A double! Two!

Fencie Have your double and then join Griffin. I hardly think Shell could have found Johnny. He is just making things up as usual and making a show of it.

Bartender 1 Shell has been alone all day today, except when he was at father Tom's.

Fencie Quiet, Hubert! I'll handle this.

Griffin Come on, Lukey! I have a glass for you!

Lukey (steals a bottle from the bar and joins Griffin) Do you have some new ungrateful customers for me?

Griffin Indeed!

(They get together and start drinking and talk in private. Shell turns up at the exit, looks around in the pub and then cautiously enters with his empty birdcage.)

Bartender 2 Not another one!

Bartender 1 Now we'll never avoid Lukey's berserk rounds.

Bartender 3 Prepare yourselves, keep alert and look out!

Fencie What do you want, Shell?

Shell (shrewdly) I saw a piece of bandage fluttering by the lamppost. Could my wounded bird have found his way in here?

Fencie There is nobody here, Shell. This is no place for you.

Shell I know. But I feel a scent here. I am never wrong. Someone is here.

Fencie Your bird is not here, Fencie. Go and look somewhere else.

Shell (shrewdly) May I look – *(indicates the first compartment)* in there?

Fencie What do you want, Shell?

Shell My bird is hurt and needs help.

Fencie Here is a glass for you. *(offers)* What kind of a bird is it?

Shell A rare jailbird. He is bleeding in his left wing.

Fencie And if I had him safe and wished to get rid of him?

Shell Then I would warrant his safe delivery.

Fencie Who wants him?

Shell Father Tom.

Fencie After closing time, Shell. Come back after closing time.

Shell It's rather soon. May I wait here?

Fencie I would rather not. We can't warrant your safety here.

Shell Why not?

Customer 2 (*drunk, wants more fun*) Hello, Lukey! Your canary is here by the bar!

Lukey (*reacts immediately, breaks out of his compartment*) Where is that cackling turkey clout?

Shell (*gets in a hurry*) See you later, Fencie.

Lukey (*brawling*) Stop him! Stop the thief! Stop the murderer! Stop the slave trader! Stop the informer! Stop that accursed Judas!

Johnny (*suddenly giving out a long heart-rending scream. Everything comes off and turns to death silence. Even Shell forgets to run away, immediately seeing the danger.*)

Lukey Such a scream you only hear once in your life. The ultimate despair of man. The definite discovery of death by the living. The totally abandoned loneliness. The ideal model!

Shell The bird is mine, Lukey! The bird is mine!

Customer 1 Bedlamites!

Lukey There you are, you unplucked paltry poultry! Did you imagine you could save your life and escape me, you who want to sell life to executioners for money, you imbecile hyena bastard of a cackling turkey vulture! (*chases Shell, who quickly gets away and hides behind the bar. Lukey jumps up spreading havoc and destruction everywhere, upsetting bottles and glasses, the panic keeps spreading, customers get sullied, and a full scale Irish bar fight breaks out.*)

Johnny (*screaming*) I am guilty!

Bartender 1 Time, gentlemen!
(*Nothing can stop the fight.*)

Fencie Get them out, everyone of them, even by force if necessary!

A lady Help me out of here, Edward!

Edward (*her partner*) I'll never visit a pub in Ireland again!
(*The fight goes on relentlessly. The only one who doesn't take part in it is Johnny, who stays unmanageable in his crib, and Griffin, who watches it with some melancholy, as he can guess the consequences.*)

Lukey (*has trampled into Shell's birdcage*) What devilish fox-traps are you keeping at the pub, Fencie?
(*The row continues raving, and most customers leave most willingly. Shell tries to resist the mob but gets mercilessly thrown out with the others.*)

Shell (*desperately*) Don't touch my canary! It was I who found him!

Bartender 1 There is no room for him in your cages, Shell.

(Finally the bartenders succeed in driving them all out and overpowering the raving Lukey. Johnny and Griffin are still there but not Shell, who has been thrown out with the others. Fencie faces Lukey with his arms crossed.)

Fencie This was the last time, Lukey. You have caused damages for 220 pounds. How will you pay?

Lukey (subdued) Fencie, you know me. I haven't got a penny.

Fencie Maybe your sponsor here is willing to pay. *(turns to Griffin)*

Griffin (has made a decision) This time you are on your own, Lukey. *(walks straight out)*

Fencie 220 pounds, Lukey, or six months in prison. What is your choice?

Lukey Have you nothing better to suggest? You know that I would rather hang myself than go to prison.

Fencie Then there is only one more alternative.

Lukey Anything, Fencie! I'll redecorate the entire pub for you if you want it!

Fencie (opens the first compartment) Take care of this man and get him out of here!

Lukey (can't believe his senses) Are you serious?

Fencie That, or six months in prison! Make your choice!

Lukey You want to get rid of him alive?

Fencie If I want. *(to the bartenders)* Get Gin Jimmy here! He may drive them away to hell if he wants, as long as they both leave together!

Lukey (more and more sober) Can you get Gin Jimmy here? The only reliable coach in Belfast? Then I will take care of Johnny! I will take him to a safe place!

Fencie I sure hope so! No place was more unsafe than this one after your arrival here!

Lukey I know, but I will better myself.

Fencie That's what you always say. But now even Griffin has abandoned you.

Lukey There are others. And now I'll start painting!

Fencie (ironically) Indeed? *(to the others)* Has the coach arrived?

Bartender 2 Gin Jimmy is waiting outside.

Fencie Help them out of here! But carefully! No one must see it!

(All bartenders help each other getting out Johnny and Lukey as two helpless drunks.)

Fencie (turns to the destruction of his pub) What a profession!

Bartender 1 Don't complain, Fencie. You don't have to clean it up.

Fencie I thought I could run the place with only bartenders, but unfortunately I also need dishwashers, cleaners and chucker-outs, which makes the business less agreeable.

Bartender 1 But you still have all of Lukey's paintings. And sometimes a regular refreshing fight is needed to attract more customers.

Fencie You could be right, Hubert. We have to see it more at length. Or else we might as well give up at once. But please get to work and start cleaning up the mess. If we are lucky we could open as usual again already sometime tomorrow. *(starts clearing the mess)*

Act IV scene 1. Lukey's studio.

Tober Snow and death in Belfast. Why do I live? The only thing I have to brag about is a lost career. Still you stay on in life, like a cynical parasite, who watches his pathetic fellow beings with disdain, who are all even more lost as failures than yourself, especially here in Ireland. *(a door is heard)* And here comes the most pathetic failure of them all.

Shell (rather messed up, enters)

Tober Where is your birdcage?

Shell The bird is lost anyway. The cage was lost in the brawl at the pub. Lukey trampled it down.

Tober Have you been there?

Shell My bird was there.

Tober Why do you always call him yours? The whole world owns him and not only you. You have still not succeeded in getting a single farthing for him.

Shell But it was I who found him.

Tober How?

Shell At the cemetery. He was lying there all covered in snow. That was too early, I thought, so I went to father Tom.

Tober And tried to sell him, like a canary. How much did you ask for him from father Tom?

Shell Only two hundred.

Tober And how much was he willing to offer you?

Shell Nothing specific.

Tober When Lukey heard it he was ready to murder you.

Shell He tried it at the pub. He floored everyone else but me.

Tober That's *Tober* all right. So he ruined the whole place all over again?

Shell And now he is in prison. This time he didn't get away. Griffin walked out on him.

Tober And what on earth did you do at the pub?

Shell My canary had left the cemetery. I found his bandage outside the pub. So he was in the pub.

Tober Among all those people?

Shell No. One compartment was plumbed. They kept him hidden there.

Tober Till after closing time, no doubt. So where is he now?

Shell (sadly resignedly) Either turned over to the police or to the organization, I believe.

(A door is heard, and Lukey's voice.)

Lukey (outside) Careful now, my boy. One step at a time.

Tober He is bringing along some drunk.

Shell Strange that he was left at large.

Lukey (opens the door with Johnny) I finally got him! Now I shall start painting!

Tober Is that your bird, *Shell*?

Shell How did you do it, Lukey?

Lukey Shut up, you cannibal of a vulture! It certainly was no thanks to you! Give us a hand instead! (*Tober helps them.*)

Tober This man is badly hurt.

Lukey Put him in the model armchair and make sure he stays alive while I draw his portrait! This is the dying Christ himself! I will never get another chance like this again!

Tober Opportunist! He is dying!

Lukey That's why I have to paint him right now!
(*They put him carefully in the armchair for models on a small podium with curtains around. Tober examines him.*)

Tober He must to a hospital at once!

Lukey Never!

Shell You can operate him, Tober. You were a doctor.

Tober I never finished my studies. I can extract the bullet and bandage him properly, but then he must go to a hospital. He needs a blood transfusion. Or else he will die.

Lukey First I must paint him.

Shell If he gets to a hospital they will kill him. Do you want to take him to a hospital to save his life only for them to be able to execute him, Tober?

Tober I don't care what they will do to him afterwards. Boil me some water and get me some soap. Let each man do what has to be done.

Lukey You if anyone could save his life, Tober! Do so, that I may eternalise him!

Tober And you charge me with inhuman cynicism when I save his life, when you don't care if he dies or not as long as you may paint him first!

Lukey Art is eternity! A picture always lives longer than its object!

Tober But you are not painting Johnny. You use his dying eyes to be able to paste them on your Patricks and all your saints and all your morbid crucifixions!

Lukey Ecstasy, Tober! Ecstasy is all that matters! Everything else is mortal! We are all subject to the eternal law of ecstasy! Only ecstasy survives!

Tober Madman!

Lukey Those who are not creative always refuse to acknowledge the ingenious mystery of creativity.

Shell Will he survive?

Tober (*operates*) Only if he comes to a hospital. I do what I can but it's far from enough.

Shell Look! He awakens! (*Johnny wakes up and raises his head.*)

Lukey Exactly! A heroic pose! Keep it still! That suffering expression! It's Jesus himself right on the cross!

Tober He has only had some whisky both inside and outside. You can feel it from the smell. Get me some brandy, Shell. We need some anaesthetic here.

Johnny (*half unconscious*) What are you doing to me?

Tober I try to remove the bullet. Then at least you can be properly bandaged, so that your wounds won't open up again.

Johnny Where am I? You are no doctor.

Tober I almost became one. You are in safe hands.

Shell (*brings the brandy*) No one here wishes to harm you in any way, my poor little wing-broken bird.

Johnny I have seen you before.

Lukey Keep your head still!

Johnny (*indicates Lukey*) What is he doing?

Tober He tries to paint you.

Johnny Why?

Tober It's his profession, like the brothel keeper has hers. Usually he only keeps naked models in this chair.

Johnny Then why does he paint me?

Tober He wants to know why you are painting him, Lukey.

Lukey I eternalise him! I create him! I capture his soul!

Johnny You must not do that.

Tober (*with considerable effort*) There! Finally! There it was! Here was the thorn in your flesh, Johnny! (*shows the bullet in tweezers*) It was stuck deep!

Johnny I don't care in the least. But that man over there must not try to capture my soul.

Lukey It's already done!

Tober He is only painting you, Johnny. Take it easy.

Johnny No, he is doing me harm!

Shell He is upset. He can't take being painted.

Lukey It's almost finished now.

Johnny Stop! (*Rises*)

Tober Sit down, Johnny. I am not finished yet.

Johnny He must not paint my soul!

Shell Why not?

Johnny I don't want it to be seen! I have killed a man! It is black! It is contaminated! It is dying!

Lukey Saint Patrick himself in his essence! Or is it Saint Teresa herself in her highest ecstasy? This will be better than Caravaggio!

Johnny (*rising again*) You have no right to save my life! You have no right to paint me! What am I doing here? Let me get out of here!

Lukey Do you still mean that art cannot be immortal, Tober? Come here and have a look! It would make any atheist change his mind!

Tober The body is mortal. We can prolong its life but no more than that. And everything performed by the body is subject to the same law.

Lukey You know nothing about Life, Tober!

Tober But the more about death. Not even you can fool it.

Lukey That's exactly what I can! Come and look!

Shell (*sees it*) A remarkable picture. Is it Saint Patrick himself?

Lukey Even better!

Shell Christ in the moment of death?

Lukey Even better!

Shell I give up.

Lukey It's life itself! It's the faith, hope and love that never dies!

Johnny (*to Tober*) Don't try to stop me. (*rises again and walks over to the portrait.*) It's not fair.

Lukey What's wrong?

Johnny (*furious*) You try to drag down my soul to your base, human and mundane level! (*destroys the portrait*)

Lukey He is mad!

Shell No, only unhappy.

Tober Leave him be.

Lukey He has ruined my masterpiece!

Shell Blame yourself, Lukey. You destroyed the entire pub.

Johnny Would I allow you to steal my soul, all that I have left, the only thing I can take with me away from here?

Tober Your picture was too good, Lukey. That's why he destroyed it.

Johnny Let me out of my prison!

Shell My little bird, I know a girl who is waiting for you. She can bring you out of the country.

Johnny Maureen?

Shell She is waiting for you at father Tom's.

Tober Take him away from here, Shell, before Lukey himself batters him to death.

Lukey No risk, Tober. I am finished. I let him go. He is free. Take him wherever you want, Shell. He is right. We are all just parasites on his soul, I with my art, you, Tober, with your cynical healing, and you, Shell, who just wanted money for him. We all deceived ourselves. I shall never paint again.

Johnny I am sorry. I apologise. I am sore and over-sensitive and can't distinguish any more between reality and delirium. Take me to father Tom, birdman. He and Maureen will be my last station in life.

Lukey (*to Tober*) Is he really dying?

Tober Yes, if he doesn't get a blood transfusion.

Lukey Maybe it's best that way. Justice is no fun in this country.

Tober Perhaps we have reason to envy him.

Shell Come now, Johnny. Take it easy and carefully. (*leads Johnny tenderly out*)

Lukey Perhaps I could restore the portrait? There was everything in it that I ever dreamt of painting.

Tober I am sure you can, Lukey. Use your experience of him for all your ecstatic saints.

Lukey A glimpse of life in its highest truth – no more;
as brief a moment as a flash of lightning,

wonderful and unforgettable, but brief, the briefest of all moments – that’s the inspiration, the divine gift, the creative urge, that must determine every artist’s destiny, and when that moment has passed on, everything else is but the darkest of all nights, and it never ends, since it is the black relentless abyss of reality.

Tober You are learning, Lukey. Perhaps you might end up an artist after all.
Lukey Shut up! (*drinks brandy*)

Act V scene 1. At father Tom’s

(He is sitting in his armchair by the fire, sleeping.)

There is a knock. Enter the housekeeper with a glass of warm milk on a tray.

Housekeeper Wake up, father Tom. You should go to bed. Here is your hot milk.

Tom (wakes up) What is the time?

Housekeeper Past eleven.

Tom Has there been no one calling for me in the meantime?

Housekeeper No.

Tom Just you wait. There will soon be action. Anything could happen before midnight. (*The doorbell rings.*) There you are. Now it begins.

(*Housekeeper goes out and Tom follows. She opens the door.*)

Shell Is father Tom still here?

Tom Yes, he is, Shell. Come in, please. Is it snowing that much? You look like a snowman, my good fellow! Take off your clothes, and let your coat dry!

Shell I have him, father.

Tom Do you? So. Where?

Shell I had to hide him out there. Policemen are swarming around here. But I have him for you and for his girl. She could get him out of the country.

Tom If only that were possible.

Shell Is the girl not here?

Tom She left when the police came. We must find her at once. The police will surely be here again before midnight. (*to the housekeeper*) You have no idea of where she went?

Housekeeper How could I? She sneaked out without my noticing it!

Tom Yes, she is of the discreet kind. But they are the more efficient and have the stronger will. She will be sure to come back. (*the doorbell*)

Shell Could it be her?

Tom Or the police.

Housekeeper I will open. (*opens to Maureen*)

Maureen Everything is ready. I have talked with the captain. He will wait until midnight.

Tom Good. Let’s go at once. Show us the way, Shell.

Shell Can I have my reward, father?

Tom Reward?

Shell You promised me a world of rewards with both happiness and satisfaction.

Tom (smiles) Oh yes. I think I could promise you some faith as well.

Housekeeper You are not going out, father, in this weather? At your age?

Tom (at a loss, observes his housekeeper's forbidding attitude) You go ahead. I will follow.

Maureen We can't wait. Show the way, Shell.

Shell (who hasn't removed his coat, leaves at once with Maureen.)

Housekeeper Well, father, now perhaps you will consider it and stay at home?

Tom I am sorry, but to a soul in need no priest has the right to give his body any consideration. Dress me quickly! *(She unwillingly dresses him.)*

Scene 2. Outdoors.

Johnny (alone, covered with snow) If only I was allowed to die! But each time that birdman leaves me it's only for me to find new open doors to new phases of life, although I doubtlessly am dying. I would like to cry out to all policemen: Here I am! Come and get me! Come and kill me! But it would be wrong. I must not fall into their hands. I would rather freeze to death and vanish the back way. Give me anything, but not the false, mundane so called justice!



Maureen (turns up) Johnny!

Johnny Maureen! Where is that funny man?

Maureen He lost a shoe and fell behind. A boat is waiting for us. We must hurry. Do you have enough strength to walk?

Johnny If you help me. Are you all alone? No policemen?

Maureen We are all alone.

Johnny The streets around here have been crowded with policemen. I feel fenced in and surrounded. But we must not get caught! Anything but that!

Maureen Yes.

Johnny Did the money get through?

Maureen Every penny.

Johnny And my friends?

Maureen All dead.

Johnny Then it was true. Then I must also die.

Maureen No, Johnny! Live for me! Live for freedom!

Johnny You can die for freedom, but it is unattainable if you only live for it.

Maureen Come on, Johnny! We do have a chance! The rescue is waiting!

Johnny Too late. Do you see the flashlights? It's policemen. They have discovered us.

Inspector (outside) Thanks for your help, Maureen! We knew that you would lead us to him! The game is over, Johnny! There is no way out this time!

Maureen (crying out) Father Tom! Father Tom!

Tom (outside) Coming, my girl! Coming!

Johnny Did you bring the police here?

Maureen They must have followed me.

Johnny Careless girl! Our first rule was always never to trust a woman. That's why I could never love you.

Maureen Trust me, Johnny. The police will never catch you.

Johnny If you can arrange it you are clever. You may kill me, but don't let the world get hold of me.

Maureen I will follow you, Johnny.

Johnny Where? They are coming, Maureen, and we have no chance to make it. I don't intend to let them get me. What will you do? We must settle with eternity now.

Maureen I will follow you, Johnny. Just take it easy.

Johnny I am already dying, Maureen, but you have the right to live.

Maureen I hid and protected you for six months. I am already done for as your accessory.

Johnny Judged for having helped me out to freedom?

Maureen There is no one in this world that you cannot fool, not even the law, justice and death.

Johnny How?

Maureen I have your gun, Johnny. It will not hurt.

Johnny If you fire against them they will shoot us down, and then it will hurt.

Maureen There is a better way.

(a ship is heard hooting with a fog-horn at a distance)

Johnny Hurry. That's our boat going.

Maureen Just be calm, Johnny. Trust me for once. I know what I am doing.

(shoots him in his neck and then herself in the heart)

Tom (outside) Two shots! Hurry on, Shell! Forget your blasted shoe!

Shell (*outside*) But I can't walk in the snow in my socks!

(*The inspector, Tom and some other policemen arrive at the spot simultaneously.*)
a policeman (examines the bodies, discovers the gun) Both dead. Two shots fired.

Inspector No one expected anything like this. We were too late, father.

Tom No, we arrived rather conveniently and in any case not too early.

Inspector What do you mean?

Tom The girl managed to save him and herself just in the right moment to make us all witnesses.

Inspector Was it planned?

Tom Yes, it was planned.

Inspector Did you know about it?

Tom Yes, I knew about it.

Inspector Why didn't you say anything?

Tom Consider, inspector. Behold these two young beautiful beings, and ask your conscience: wouldn't it have been better if they could have got away alive?

Inspector You are right, father. Now they got away anyway but only with death.

Tom They are laughing at us now, for they have made themselves deserving of life.

Inspector I leave the metaphysics to you. Cover them and bring them to the station. The operation is concluded. (*leaves. The bodies are covered and carried out by the policemen. Father Tom is left alone in quiet meditation.*)

Shell (*reaching him*) What happened?

Tom It's all over, Shell.

Shell Are they dead?

Tom While you were searching for your shoe, they left this world.

Shell And my reward?

Tom Your reward, Shell, will only be emptiness. Because that's all that finally expects anyone who expects anything of this world. (*leaves*)

Shell Fooled! And did anyone have any joy or use of him as dead? And she as well! No, it's too much. I was innocent in any case. I only brought them together. (*makes a gesture of mystification with his hands and leaves in the opposite direction.*)

The End.

(Italy, Easter, 9-15.4.1995,
English translation
2-7 October 2019)