

# THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*The living-room/kitchen of a rural cottage in the west of Ireland. Front door stage left, a long black range along the back wall with a box of turf beside it and a rocking-chair on its right. On the kitchen side of the set is a door in the back wall leading off to an unseen hallway, and a newer oven, a sink and some cupboards curving around the right wall. There is a window with an inner ledge above the sink in the right wall looking out onto fields, a dinner table with two chairs just right of centre, a small TV down left, an electric kettle and a radio on one of the kitchen cupboards, a crucifix and a framed picture of John and Robert Kennedy on the wall above the range, a heavy black poker beside the range, and a touristy-looking embroidered tea-towel hanging further along the back wall, bearing the inscription 'May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the Devil knows you're dead.' As the play begins it is raining quite heavily. Mag Folan, a stoutish woman in her early seventies with short, tightly permed grey hair and a mouth that gapes slightly, is sitting in the rocking-chair, staring off into space. Her left hand is somewhat more shrivelled and red than her right. The front door opens and her daughter, Maureen, a plain, slim woman of about forty, enters carrying shopping and goes through to the kitchen.*

MAG. Wet, Maureen?  
MAUREEN. Of course wet.  
MAG. Oh-h. (*Maureen takes her coat off, sighing, and starts putting the shopping away.*) I did take me Complian.  
MAUREEN. So you *can* get it yourself so.  
MAG. I can. (*Pause.*) Although lumpy it was, Maureen.  
MAUREEN. Well, can I help lumpy?  
MAG. No.  
MAUREEN. Write to the Complian people so, if it's lumpy.  
MAG. (*Pause.*) You do make me Complian nice and smooth. (*Pause.*) Not a lump at all, nor the comrade of a lump.  
MAUREEN. You don't give it a good enough stir is what you don't do.  
MAG. I gave it a good enough stir and there was still lumps.  
MAUREEN. You probably pour the water in too fast so. What it says on the box, you're supposed to ease it in.  
MAG. Mm.  
MAUREEN. That's where you do go wrong. Have another go tonight for yourself and you'll see.  
MAG. Mm. (*Pause.*) And the hot water too I do be scared of. Scared I may scould meself. (*Maureen gives her a slight look.*) I do be scared, Maureen. I be scared what if me hand shook and I was to pour it over me hand. And with you at Mary Pender's, then where would I be?  
MAUREEN. You're just a hypochondriac is what you are.  
MAG. I'd be lying on the floor and I'm not a hypochondriac.  
MAUREEN. You are too and everybody knows that you are. Full well.  
MAG. Don't I have a urine infection if I'm such a hypochondriac?  
MAUREEN. I can't see how a urine infection prevents you pouring a mug of Complian or tidying up the house a bit when I'm away. It wouldn't kill you.  
MAG. (*Pause.*) Me bad back.  
MAUREEN. Your back back.  
MAG. And me bad hand. (*Mag holds up her shrivelled hand for a second.*)  
MAUREEN. (*Quietly.*) Feck.... (*Irritated.*) I'll get your Complian

so if it's such a big job! From now and 'til doomsday! The one thing I ask you to do. Do you see Annette or Margo coming pouring your Complian or buying your oul cod in butter sauce for the week?

MAG. No.

MAUREEN. No is right, you don't. And carrying it up that hill. And still I'm not appreciated.

MAG. You *are* appreciated, Maureen.

MAUREEN. I'm not appreciated.

MAG. I'll give me Complian another go so, and give it a good stir for meself.

MAUREEN. Ah, forget your Complian. I'm expected to do everything else, I suppose that one on top of it won't hurt. Just a ... just a blessed fecking skivvy is all I'm thought of!

MAG. You're not, Maureen. *(Maureen slams a couple of cupboard doors after finishing with the shopping and sits at the table, after dragging its chair back loudly. Pause.)* Me porridge, Maureen, I haven't had, will you be getting? No, in a minute, Maureen, have a rest for yourself.... *(But Maureen has already jumped up, stomped angrily back to the kitchen and started preparing the porridge as noisily as she can. Pause.)* Will we have the radio on for ourselves? *(Maureen bangs an angry finger at the radio's 'on' switch. It takes a couple of swipes before it comes on loudly, through static — a nasally male voice singing in Gaelic. Pause.)* The dedication Annette and Margo sent we still haven't heard. I wonder what's keeping it?

MAUREEN. If they sent a dedication at all. They only said they did. *(Maureen sniffs the sink a little, then turns to Mag.)* Is there a smell off this sink now, I'm wondering.

MAG. *(Defensively.)* No.

MAUREEN. I hope there's not, now.

MAG. No smell at all is there, Maureen. I do promise, now. *(Maureen returns to the porridge. Pause.)* Is the radio a biteen loud there, Maureen?

MAUREEN. A biteen loud, is it? *(Maureen swipes angrily at the radio again, turning it off. Pause.)*

MAG. Nothing on it, anyways. An oul fella singing nonsense.

MAUREEN. Isn't it you wanted it set for that oul station?

- MAG. Only for Ceilidh Time and for whatyoucall.

MAUREEN. It's too late to go complaining now.  
MAG. Not for nonsense did I want it set.  
MAUREEN. *(Pause.)* It isn't nonsense anyways. Isn't it Irish?  
MAG. It sounds like nonsense to me. Why can't they just speak English like everybody?  
MAUREEN. Why should they speak English?  
MAG. To know what they're saying.  
MAUREEN. What country are you living in?  
MAG. Eh?  
MAUREEN. What country are you living in?  
MAG. Galway.  
MAUREEN. Not what county!  
MAG. Oh-h....  
MAUREEN. Ireland you're living in!  
MAG. *Ireland.*  
MAUREEN. So why should you be speaking English in Ireland?  
MAG. I don't know why.  
MAUREEN. It's Irish you should be speaking in Ireland.  
MAG. It is.  
MAUREEN. Eh?  
MAG. Eh?  
MAUREEN. 'Speaking English in Ireland.'  
MAG. *(Pause.)* Except where would Irish get you going for a job in England? Nowhere.  
MAUREEN. Well, isn't that the crux of the matter?  
MAG. Is it, Maureen?  
MAUREEN. If it wasn't for the English stealing our language, and our land, and our God-knows-what, wouldn't it be we wouldn't need to go over there begging for jobs and for hand-outs?  
MAG. I suppose that's the crux of the matter.  
MAUREEN. It is the crux of the matter.  
MAG. *(Pause.)* Except America, too.  
MAUREEN. What except America too?  
MAG. If it was to America you had to go begging for handouts, it isn't Irish would be any good to you. It would be English!

MAUREEN. Isn't that the same crux of the same matter?

MAG. I don't know if it is or it isn't.

MAUREEN. Bringing up kids to think all they'll ever be good for is begging handouts from the English and the Yanks. That's the selfsame crux.

MAG. I suppose.

MAUREEN. Of course you suppose, because it's true.

MAG. *(Pause.)* If I had to go begging for handouts anywhere, I'd rather beg for them in America than in England, because in America it does be more sunny anyways. *(Pause.)* Or is that just something they say, that the weather is more sunny, Maureen? Or is that a lie, now? *(Maureen slops the porridge out and hands it to Mag, speaking as she does so.)*

MAUREEN. You're oul and you're stupid and you don't know what you're talking about. Now shut up and eat your oul porridge. *(Maureen goes back to wash the pan in the sink. Mag glances at the porridge, then turns back to her.)*

MAG. Me mug of tea you forgot! *(Maureen clutches the edges of the sink and lowers her head, exasperated, then quietly, with visible self-control, fills the kettle to make her mother's tea. Pause. Mag speaks while slowly eating.)* Did you meet anybody on your travels, Maureen? *(No response.)* Ah no, not on a day like today. *(Pause.)* Although you don't say hello to people is your trouble, Maureen. *(Pause.)* Although some people it would be better not to say hello to. The fella up and murdered the poor oul woman in Dublin and he didn't even know her. The news that story was on, did you hear of it? *(Pause.)* Strangled, and didn't even know her. That's a fella it would be better not to talk to. That's a fella it would be better to avoid outright. *(Maureen brings Mag her tea, then sits at the table.)*

MAUREEN. Sure, that sounds exactly the type of fella I would like to meet, and then bring him home to meet you, if he likes murdering oul women.

MAG. That's not a nice thing to say, Maureen.

MAUREEN. Is it not, now?

MAG. *(Pause.)* Sure why would he be coming all this way out from Dublin? He'd just be going out of his way.

MAUREEN. For the pleasure of me company he'd come.

Killing you, it'd just be a bonus for him.

MAG. Killing *you* I bet he first would be.

MAUREEN. I could live with that so long as I was sure he'd be clobbering you soon after. If he clobbered you with a big axe or something and took your oul head off and spat in your neck, I wouldn't mind at all, going first. Oh no, I'd enjoy it, I would. No more oul Complan to get, and no more oul porridge to get, and no more....

MAG. (*Interrupting, holding her tea out.*) No sugar in this, Maureen, you forgot, go and get me some. (*Maureen stares at her a moment, then takes the tea, brings it to the sink and pours it away, goes back to Mag, grabs her half-eaten porridge, returns to the kitchen, scrapes it out into the bin, leaves the bowl in the sink and exits into the hallway, giving Mag a dirty look on the way and closing the door behind her. Mag stares grumpily out into space. Blackout.*)