



Shea of the
White Hands
by Rose Scollard

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Shea of the White Hands premiered with Maenad Productions at the Pumphouse Theatres February 23 - March 11, 1995, It was directed by Alexandria Patience, and produced by Michelle Wong and Sandi Somers. Set and lights were designed by Sheena Ross. Nikki A. Bade and Jami Harding were stage managers. Drummer/ Projectionist was Kevin Fischer. The accompanying slide show was produced by Sandi Somers. *Shea of the White Hands* was a finalist in the Susan Smith Blackburn Awards in 1995.

Cast:

Shea Carrie Schiffler
Tris Michael Novak
Brigid Hilary F. Allan
Isobel Rowan F. Fisher
Young Tris Patrick Creery
Mark, Man, Vocals Vincent E. Bodnar
2nd Man, Tin Whistle, Vocals Larry Austen
Young Girl, Violin Brigitte Dajczer
Woman, Washerwoman, Vocals Dawn Novak

Director Alexandria Patience
Producer, Design consultant/slide show Sandi Somers
Producer, and Publicity Michele Wong
Stage Manager Nikki A. Bade
Interim Stage Manager Jami Harding
Set and Light design Sheena Ross
Costumes and Props Alexandria Patience
Scenic artists Dorothy Debiche, Brigitte Dajczer, Dawn Novak
Publicity Charlotte Lee
Drummer/projectionist Kevin Fischer
Box Office Goddess Nancy Cullen
Publicity Design Mark Washeim
Poster Cathie Hahnel
Program Fred Holliss
Promotion photographs Andrea Johnson
Set construction Gavin Ross, Andrew Smith

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SHEA OF THE WHITE HANDS

CHARACTERS

Shea
Tris
Brigid
Young Tris
Isobel

Mark/2nd Man
Young Girl
Woman / Washerwoman
Man

SET

The set is simply a bare stage with a few simple pieces to represent items in the various areas — bathtub/bench, settee-cum-bed, Tris's bed. The action takes place in the present in a suburban house in Toronto, and twenty years ago in Belfast. The past will be lit with a golden light, the present with normal lighting.

Music was an integral part of the premiere production and suggestions for music are included in the script. All tunes are in the public domain. All may be substituted with other music except where the verses of the songs are woven into the script.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

(In the dark a fiddle plays a round or two of *Twopenny Jig*. The lights come up slowly on four sombre figures. The music dies and one of the figures raises her head.)

YOUNG GIRL: This dream I had, I was getting ready for school, putting on my blazer and hair ribbons. My shoes were waiting at the door but when I went to put them on they were full of meat. I pushed them away but my mammy says, "Sure, that's regulations now. Put them on." So I had to put them on and go to school that way. And at school everyone's the same, blood seeping up through the white of their socks and this rotten smell everywhere. But we go on with our lessons as if it's normal. The teacher says nothing about it either, but when she bends over to look at my work a maggot drops from her blouse.

(Sound of a drum being tuned and a few dramatic raps. Spot on second figure, a woman.)

WOMAN: I was coming up the road from Sawyer's with my bit of cabbage and a pound of sausage, and when I turned the corner by St. Mary's there they were, slabbing him as easily as a spring lamb. My husband, Gerry, getting killed in front of me, his legs tottering, but the mouth on him going on as always. It was his big mouth that killed him. Talking back

once too often about the wrongs and rights of things. "There are no rights," that's what he said. "In this bloody madness there are no rights at all, on any side. Only wrongs." This is what angered them.

One of their stabs went right through his eye and I heard the death rattle as he sank to the ground.

I didn't want to go over to him. I didn't want to gather up his poor skin and bones into my arms. It would've been the finish of me. Just a silly man who never did anybody any harm. Just couldn't keep the mouth shut on him. Well they shut it for him, didn't they? His own people.

(Again the sound of a drum being tuned, followed by a chap or two.)

MAN: My Dolly was killed in the spring of the year. A stray bullet. It was one of those restless Sundays, taunting and threatening from both sides. She was calling the children in and a stray bullet penetrated her heart. She died instantly. Her funeral was the biggest I'd ever been to. People came by the hundreds from all over the city. And the flowers and the condolences poured in for weeks after. And the whole time, the whole time of watching over her and the funeral and the publicity, you know what the worst thing was? All I wanted to think about, all I could think about, was my old girl friend. The one I went with before I met Dolly. Sneaking down to the shore, the two of us, with a couple of lagers. Kissing and fooling about in the sunshine. The screams and laughs of us. That's all I could think about.

(Intrusive sound of the tuning drum.)

MAN: Will you quit that tyrannical racket. There's people trying to think.

2ND MAN: (Lifts his head) He's getting ready for the parade.

MAN: The parade's not for days yet.

2ND MAN: It's clear you know nothing of drumming, otherwise you'd know he has to start tuning for a performance days ahead. A bit each day. A little tightening and little chapping. Then the next day a bit more tightening, a bit more chapping.

MAN: Well it's a bloody nuisance having to listen to it.

2ND MAN: It's an old, old art form. Youse fellows think you have all the culture; well we have our traditions as well. Our music.

MAN: Music! You call banging on an old skin music?

2ND MAN: Indeed I do. It's a celebration of dexterity and

MAN: It's a celebration of tyranny and an excuse to scare the wits out of people. When I hear that racket I hear the blood lust tolling out to me from the other side.

2ND MAN: I used to take sides right enough. My whole family worshipped at the shrine of King Billy. King Billy and the Battle of the Boyne. A battle that happened three hundred years ago. . . . Sides! My Da had a coin he treasured. It was his lucky piece, King Billy on a horse. Never went anywhere without it. Carried it for years and years. One day my son Willy was home from college. Da pulls out the coin and our Willy has a look at it. "That's not King Billy," he says. "It's James." Well my Daddy went all the colours of the Union Jack. "What are you on about? I'm telling you it's King Billy." "But look here, Granddad," says the boy "Round the edge? It says *jacobus*. That's Latin for James. You've been treasuring King James all along."

MAN: And what did your Da say?

2ND MAN: Oh he was angry. "That's what happens," he says. "You educate the young and they turn it against you. Never trust knowledge to the young."

WOMAN: And your son. What does he do?

2ND MAN: He's dead. Cut down by the Provos. Me other son was killed by a British bullet.

WOMAN: That's unbearable.

2ND MAN: I used to Drum in the parade every July. The Glorious Twelfth. I was a good drummer too. Leading a bunch of old men in fancy dress with banners of imagined glory. The glorious nothing. What's a bunch of showy banners compared with the lives of your children.

(Drum roll)

WOMAN: I don't know how you can bear to hear that. Considering your feelings about the parade and your sons and all.

2ND MAN: But the drums are different. I could talk on all night about them. The way they're made. Their quarrelling nature. About the thirst of the drums. If you go marching in the rain with a true Lambeg drum, by the end of the day it's like beating an old dishcloth. They drink up the water, you see. Drink it up. Yes the drums are well known for that. If you set a bucket of water under a drum she would drink it up in a night.

MAN: And what about a bucket of blood? Would she drink that?

(The drummer drums on, making a continuous clatter that increases in volume till it is too deafening to endure. The light fades out.)

SCENE ONE

The present: A house in suburban Toronto

(Violent hammering on a door replaces the drumming. Lights come up on BRIGID, a woman in her sixties, still good looking, pulling a robe over her night gown.)

BRIGID: Will you hold your horses. I'm coming!

(Opens door and a man in his forties stumbles in, supported by a girl of twenty or so. The girl is wearing a faded, studded jean jacket several sizes too large over a skinny little leather skirt well up her thighs, and a black crepe tube top. A number of rings and jangling bangles decorate both hands and wrists. Black lace-up ankle boots complete her costume.)

BRIGID: What's going on? Was there an accident? I'll call the ambulance.

SHEA: No. We've been to the hospital already.

BRIGID: You should have stayed there, by the looks of him.

SHEA: He wouldn't. He made me bring him here.

BRIGID: Here? Why here?

SHEA: He said you were a nurse.

BRIGID: How would he know?

TRIS: (Raises his head.) Brigid.

BRIGID: My God, Tris?

TRIS: Aye Brigid. Bloody *deja vue*, isn't it.

BRIGID Oh my God. (Clutching her throat.) Get him out of here!

SHEA: He said you would help him.

BRIGID: I don't want him in my house!

SHEA: You can't just turn him away!

BRIGID: I don't want him under my roof!

SHEA: Where will I take him?

BRIGID: Anywhere but here.

 (TRIS coughs violently. Spits up blood.)

SHEA: I can't handle this! (Turns away from the blood.)

BRIGID: (Wipes his mouth.) He's spitting up blood! What's wrong with him?

SHEA: (Not looking at him.) The doctors said there's a piece of metal in his lungs.

BRIGID: Go on with you!

SHEA: They think it's been in there for years but now it's shifting. They weren't sure they could operate. Tris wouldn't wait for the test results. He made me help him out of bed and bring him here.

BRIGID: Well he can't stay here.

SHEA: But why?

BRIGID: Because he's a murdering bastard, that's why!

SHEA: Are we talking about the same person?

BRIGID: Who are you talking about?

SHEA: Tris McCann. He's a peace activist.

BRIGID: And what book of fables have you been reading?

SHEA: He was a peace worker in Northern Ireland in the seventies.

BRIGID: Is that what he told you?

SHEA: He's well known. He even went to jail for his beliefs.

BRIGID: He went to jail because he was a terrorist.

SHEA: Well, of course, that's how they would label him.

(TRIS groans, spits up more blood.)

SHEA: Oh God! What are we going to do?

BRIGID: I'm calling an ambulance.

TRIS: (Struggling to his feet.) No ambulance. Brigid's right. This is an imposition. Come on Shea, we'll go.

SHEA: (Shivering, frightened.) Where, Tris? It's two o'clock in the morning.

TRIS: We'll get a hotel.

SHEA: And then what? What if you get worse? (Turns to BRIGID.) I wouldn't have brought him, you know. But he said you were his friend.

BRIGID: Not for many years. (Looks on him for a moment or two and then on SHEA. Gives in reluctantly.) I must be out of my mind. Help me get him into the den. There's a bed in there.

(They carry him into the den, settle him on the bed. There's a faint scritch of the violin. In the shadows, 2ND MAN moves restlessly.)

BRIGID: I can't believe something that's been resting in him all these years would suddenly start to act up.

SHEA: It didn't start up on its own. About a month ago he was in a G8 demonstration that turned violent. He got pushed down and kicked in the chest. He had terrible pains for a day or two but then they went away. The doctor said his lungs have probably been hemorrhaging all this time.

BRIGID: He should never have left the hospital.

SHEA: He said there was something he needed to do. He was so desperate I couldn't refuse him.

SHEA: (While BRIGID makes TRIS comfortable, SHEA sits forlornly on the side of the bed.) Some honeymoon, eh?

BRIGID: Honeymoon! You're not married to him?

SHEA: Ten days ago. In Vancouver.

BRIGID: You're too young for him. You should be going with fellows your own age.

SHEA: I can't bear men my age. They're all so gauche, so irrelevant. Tris is like me. He sees the world for what it is.

BRIGID: Really!

SHEA: O.K then, call it fate. We came together at the right time in the right place and there was no stopping us. (Catches BRIGID looking skeptical.) I guess you don't believe in fate.

BRIGID: Oh I believe in fate. More than you think. Anyway, you keep an eye on him. We need more blankets. And some towels. (Exits.)

(TRIS comes to.)

SHEA: Tris.

TRIS: I'm all right. Where's Brigid?

SHEA: She's getting more blankets. She's not very happy to see us.

TRIS: No, I don't imagine she is. (Pause) The others will feel the same way, no doubt.

SHEA: What others?

TRIS: She lives with her daughter and son-in-law. Isobel and Mark.

SHEA: I haven't seen anyone. Just Brigid.

TRIS: No, Isobel's here. She has to be. (Pause) There are things I haven't told you, Shea.

SHEA: What things?

(Scratching of violin)

TRIS: (Looking off) What was that?

SHEA: What? Nothing.

TRIS: I thought I saw something. (Coughs a little.) Someone.

SHEA: You must try not to cough.

TRIS: This thing in my lung. It's a fitting retribution.

SHEA: Maybe if you could sleep . . .

TRIS: I don't want to sleep. Too many bad dreams waiting for me. See there?
(2nd MAN comes into view) Get away! Stay away from me!

(2ND MAN drifts off just as BRIGID returns with a number of blankets, towels, a basin of water.)

SHEA: It's just Brigid.

BRIGID: What's wrong?

SHEA: He thought he saw someone.

TRIS: (Weakly) It was probably Mark.

BRIGID: It wasn't Mark. (She unloads the sheets onto the end of the bed.) Mark's in Montreal.

TRIS: Montreal! I know I saw somebody.

BRIGID: There's nobody in the house but me. (SHEA jumps up to help her, spilling some of the water in her anxiety.)

SHEA: Sorry. I just wanted to help.

BRIGID: If you really want to help you could make a pot of tea.

SHEA: Tea. No problem.

BRIGID: The kitchen's down the hall.

(SHEA moves to the kitchen area.)

BRIGID: That poor child. What were you thinking of? A young girl like that.

TRIS: I married her for her innocent white hands.

BRIGID: She should be reaching out to life, not to some worn out assassin.

TRIS: Don't be so hard. (Pause) Shea keeps me safe.

BRIGID: She thinks you're a hero. You've not told her about your past, have you?

TRIS: I've been waiting for the right opportunity. It never seems to happen.

BRIGID: And now you're married. (He coughs up more blood) Can you not keep still!

TRIS: There's something I want to ask you, Brigid.

BRIGID: Not now.

TRIS: No, it's important. I want . . . Ughhh (A moment of pain) I want to see her, Brigid. I want to see Isobel.

BRIGID: What! (Shaken) What are you talking about? You can't see Isobel.

TRIS: You don't still hold a grudge after all these years.

BRIGID: Grudge? Is that what you call it? The deaths of four innocent people and you call it a grudge? We were shocked, Tris. Devastated! All the care we took of you and you betrayed us. You betrayed everything we stood for.

TRIS: I've spent my whole life trying to make amends. Even in prison. Nearly twenty years, Brigid.

(BRIGID is silent)

TRIS: I just want to see her for a couple of minutes, one last time. I don't even have to see her. She's in Montreal you said? A phone call. Just a phone call. Just give me her phone number.

BRIGID: I can't.

TRIS: Why not?

BRIGID: I don't want to discuss it.

TRIS: Where's the harm in it? You wouldn't deny a man the last rites, would you?

BRIGID: You try to rest now. (She goes out, barely maintaining control.)

TRIS: Brigid!

(Music bridge, *Sheebeg Sheemore*. BRIGID leaves TRIS and makes her way to the kitchen area and SHEA.)

SCENE TWO

(SHEA sets out cups and milk and sugar. BRIGID enters, still visibly shaken. She's holding a small photo album.)

SHEA: Are you OK?

BRIGID: A ghost walking on my grave. A cup of tea will set me right.

SHEA: The kettle's on. (Pause) Brigid. You called Tris a terrorist. What was all that about?

BRIGID: Look, I'm not interested in dredging up the past. I came to Canada to get away from all that.

SHEA: I can understand that. It's just that something is really playing on his mind. He keeps talking about all the bad things he's done.

BRIGID: You come here and you think, " A new country, a fresh start." But you're still rooted over there. Your dreams and fantasies, all that dark part of you stays behind. You can't get away from the pain and the nightmares.

SHEA: I didn't mean to upset you.

BRIGID: Ah, it's not your fault. It's just I never expected to see him again. It's been nearly twenty years.

SHEA: Twenty years!

BRIGID: Before you were born, probably. The dark ages, right?

SHEA: Where did you know him from?

BRIGID: Tris? His cousin Mark brought him to me. He had terrible wounds. It was the middle of the night just like now. Only it was in Ireland.

SHEA: Twenty years ago. He must have been young.

BRIGID: Young and bad. They were all young and bad. My daughter was the same.

SHEA: Your daughter?

BRIGID: Isobel. (Looks at picture in album.)

SHEA: Isobel? Tris just mentioned her.

(SHEA takes picture. ISOBEL moves out of the shadows.)

SHEA: She looks so serious.

BRIGID: She was in mourning for her Uncle, my brother Morris.

SHEA: What's this chain she's wearing?

BRIGID: Morris was killed in a street fight. The knife that killed him broke off in the wound. She kept it on that chain.

SHEA: What?

(ISOBEL holds up a little fragment of metal that hangs on a chain round her neck.)

BRIGID: The fragment of knife blade they found in my brother's brain.

SHEA: Eugh, gross. (She moves to the background, still listening.)

BRIGID: That's what I told her.

(Lights up full now, a golden, rosy light, on ISOBEL in black turtleneck and slacks.)

BRIGID: Will you put that thing away! You've got to get over it, Isobel. It isn't healthy for a young girl to be so consumed with revenge.

ISOBEL: They left him to die at the side of the road!

BRIGID: Keeping that bit of knife, but. It's morbid. Throw it away.

ISOBEL: I won't! It keeps my hatred alive. I won't rest till he's avenged.

BRIGID: For God's sake, Isobel, Morris was no angel. Don't be making a saint of him.

ISOBEL: I won't rest!

(Knock at door.)

BRIGID: Who's knocking at this time of night? Be careful now. It could be anybody.

(ISOBEL answers the door. There's a commotion and she returns with MARK half-carrying YOUNG TRIS.)

BRIGID: Mark! What is it? Who's this?

MARK: My cousin, Tris. He's in a bad way.

BRIGID: (She helps MARK carry him across the room.) Put him on the sofa here. Watch it. (They ease him onto the sofa) There now. What happened to him?

MARK: You know better than to ask that.

ISOBEL: You should take him to the Royal.

MARK: They'll turn him in, won't they? You've got to do something for him, Brigid.

BRIGID: I think he's beyond my skills. But let's have a look at him. God save us!

(BRIGID pulls away his clothing and all three are repelled by the stink.)

ISOBEL: Ohh! The stench!

MARK: There's a terrible rotten smell to him, right enough.

BRIGID: It's gangrene. How long ago did this happen? I don't know if I can deal with this.

MARK: You have to. You're the only one I can trust.

BRIGID: Why not Dr. Kelly? He won't turn him in. He's helped a lot of the fellows.

MARK: Well Tris here isn't one of the fellows. He's. . . well, he's a Prod.

ISOBEL: I thought you said he was your cousin!

MARK: He is. My Auntie Lena went through an ecumenical period back in the fifties.

BRIGID: Isobel, get the carbolic and those old sheets in the back of the press.

MARK: Brigid, you're an angel.

BRIGID: You could make yourself useful too. Get him into the parlour. I'll bring the whiskey.

MARK: I don't think he'll need it. He's out like a light.

BRIGID: The whiskey's not for him. It's for me.

(Back to normal lighting and SHEA in the present)

SHEA: And you cured him. Of gangrene?

BRIGID: It took weeks. He got to be one of the family.

SHEA: So it's true. You were friends.

BRIGID: He was a pushy young hooligan! But you couldn't help liking him. Even when you knew the worst. He charmed you into it. He could win you over to anything.

SHEA: And Isobel? Did he win her over too?

BRIGID: Isobel? (Avoiding SHEA's eyes) They fought like cats and dogs the whole time he was with us.

SHEA: Yeah she was a scrapper, that's for sure. (Picks up picture) "I won't rest till he's avenged." And beautiful too. I'll bet she broke a lot of hearts.

BRIGID: She was in love with Mark. There's a picture of them together. (Takes the album and flips through it) Yes, here.

SHEA: This is Mark? He looks a little old for her.

BRIGID: You should talk! No, she and Mark, they'd been going together for months. Mark proposed to her soon after Tris came. Mark was a wonderful man. One of the stars of the peace movement.

SHEA: It really bums me out. The way everyone in the sixties and seventies was so active. I mean people my age were leading *significant lives*.

BRIGID: And Isobel was leading the significant life earlier than most. She was fourteen when she went on her first march.

SHEA: Fourteen!

BRIGID: I didn't mind the marches so much. I marched myself. But then it got violent. There she was, taunting the police and throwing Molotov cocktails at the tanks.

SHEA: Unbelievable!

BRIGID: I couldn't keep her at home, it was too exciting out there.

SHEA: No kidding!

BRIGID: Then Mark came along and put a name to what she was fighting for. He was deeply involved in peace and non-violence, and he made her see it was the only way to go.

SHEA: Tris is just the same.

BRIGID: How did you come to meet him?

SHEA: I was studying Irish literature at the time. I was in love with everything Irish and he just fell from the sky.

He came to our college as guest lecturer. *Strategies for Peace in the Twenty-first Century*. He was *brilliant*. I went up and talked to him after his lecture and we've been talking ever since.

This was supposed to be our honeymoon, driving across the country together. And then yesterday morning, coming into the city, he started coughing up blood.

BRIGID: He'll be all right. Don't worry. Tris is a tough one. He's recovered from worse than this.

SHEA: It's so strange. I knew Tris had this past. I mean you can't get to your forties without some kind of past. But this is the first time I've thought about how it really was twenty years ago, with him twenty years younger.

BRIGID: Sometimes it's better just to let the past alone. What good can come of it?

SHEA: No! I want to know everything about Tris. How can you understand someone if you don't know their history?

BRIGID: And what if you don't like their history?

SHEA: I believe in facing up to the truth, pleasant or unpleasant. I bet Isobel was the same.

BRIGID: Isobel. She faced up to things, all right. But she always went overboard. When she found out about Tris she nearly swung for him.

SHEA: Found out what? Tell me!

BRIGID: When Mark brought Tris to us, I knew who he was. The recent events. I couldn't miss it. I'd've had to be deaf. And stupid. But Isobel. She just saw him as another kid. A sparring partner.

The day she found out, he was taking a bath in front of the fire.

(Musical bridge, fiddle music, *Haste to the Wedding*. Young TRIS sets up his bath and gets into it.)

SCENE THREE

(Golden lights up on YOUNG TRIS in the tub, humming jauntily . His clothes are in a heap on the chair.)

BRIGID: He was having a cozy soak in the old tin tub. Isobel was prowling on the sidelines like a big cat.

(SHEA watches while BRIGID takes the kettle and warms up his bath.)

BRIGID: How's that?

YOUNG TRIS: It's grand!

ISOBEL: All this fuss! Can he not fix his own bath?

BRIGID: Go and get some extra towels.

ISOBEL: Let him get his own towels!

BRIGID: (BRIGID sighs and goes out for towels.) Never mind.

(ISOBEL comes into the bathing area. YOUNG TRIS, still humming, eyes her warily, not certain what to expect from this impulsive, adolescent creature. She is bold and outlandish in manner. She starts to tease YOUNG TRIS, opening a bottle of scent.)

YOUNG TRIS: Don't bother me now.

ISOBEL: I'm not here to bother you, Sire, but to enhance your pleasure. Shall I scrub your back? Wipe your feet with my hair? Regrettably, we haven't any ass's milk, but how about a little Chanel #5? (Pours a little in tub.)

YOUNG TRIS: Get away. Cut it out!

ISOBEL: Would you not like your back scrubbed?

YOUNG TRIS: I would not. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What would your fiancé think?

ISOBEL: About what?

YOUNG TRIS: Being in the room with a naked man.

ISOBEL: A man. Is that what you are? (Holds up a sock.) Well your feet are big enough at any rate. If only everything was. (Flicks sock at him.)

YOUNG TRIS: He must be out of his mind, marrying you.

ISOBEL: Oh?

YOUNG TRIS: He thinks he's getting a wife but what he's getting is a troublesome brat. I mean it. Mark's a serious man with serious goals.

ISOBEL: (Looks in his wallet.) I've got news for you. You're broke.

YOUNG TRIS: Put that down.

ISOBEL: Just seeing if you belong to any secret societies.

(Picks up his jacket, finds a switch blade knife in his pocket and flicks it open.)

YOUNG TRIS: Put that away. You'll cut yourself.

ISOBEL: Deadly little item, isn't it? The point's missing.

YOUNG TRIS: Aye, probably still in the gut of some miscreant.

(This statement twigs her attention. She grasps at the neck pouch. Then hurriedly, fumbling, she opens the pouch and pulls out the fragment of steel she keeps there. She holds it to the knife. It's a perfect fit.)

ISOBEL: Miscreant, is it? *Miscreant!!*

YOUNG TRIS: What? No! Wait.

ISOBEL: You're the one!

YOUNG TRIS: Wait! I can explain!

ISOBEL: You killed Morris.

YOUNG TRIS: Get away from me!

ISOBEL: You fucking murderer!

(In a white rage ISOBEL attacks YOUNG TRIS, who leaps from the tub in terror. She chases him round the room and is only stopped from murdering him by BRIGID returning with the towels.)

YOUNG TRIS: Stop it! You're going to kill me!

ISOBEL: That's the idea!

BRIGID: What's going on? Isobel! Stop it! *Stop* it!

(BRIGID grabs ISOBEL and pulls her away. YOUNG TRIS grabs a towel. He is weak and trembling.)

ISOBEL: He's a fucking murderer!

BRIGID: Leave him alone, now. Leave him alone!

ISOBEL: (Struggling) He's the bastard who killed Morris! Look. This is his knife. It fits perfectly.

YOUNG TRIS: It was self-defence!

ISOBEL: Self defence! You lying, cowardly son of a bitch!

BRIGID: (Pulling her back) It was, Isobel. It was self defence.

ISOBEL: (Pause as she absorbs this information) You knew? You knew he was the killer?

YOUNG TRIS: Morris started the fight.

BRIGID: It's true. There were witnesses.

ISOBEL: (Pulls free) You knew and you saved his life? Your own brother's killer?

BRIGID: Morris was a thug, for all he was my brother.

ISOBEL: You knew!

BRIGID: He used the Troubles as an excuse to hurt people. I'm sorry he's dead. But he chose the violent life. I want an end to all this misery. It's got to stop somewhere. And for me it's stopping right here with this man. (YOUNG TRIS has sunk to the floor.) Look, he's burst his wounds.

ISOBEL: Good! I hope he bleeds to death.

BRIGID: Help me get him up. Don't just stand there. (Helps YOUNG TRIS to his feet.) And put that knife down.

ISOBEL: Never!

BRIGID: It's stopping here, Isobel. And you're going to have to accept that.

ISOBEL: Never!

BRIGID: You're going to have to forgive and forget.

ISOBEL: (Runs out.) Never!

BRIGID: You're all right. It's nothing. A little scratch!

YOUNG TRIS: She was going to kill me!

BRIGID: (Picking up the soap) Do you blame her?

YOUNG TRIS: No. (Gets himself up and wraps the towel round himself.) I can't believe you knew who I was.

BRIGID: You're lucky I've reached the age of reason. Ten years ago I'd have finished you off without a second's hesitation.

YOUNG TRIS: I'm sorry about Morris.

BRIGID: Sorrow is a luxury. You'll have to do better than that.

YOUNG TRIS: I will. Anything.

BRIGID: Get yourself onto the decent side of things. Take a page out of Mark's book.

YOUNG TRIS: You have my word, Brigid. (Brigid moves off.) I'll speak to him tomorrow.

BRIGID: (Turns back, points to the spilled water) And clean up that mess. (Sweeps off in the direction of ISOBEL)

(Surprised, YOUNG TRIS begins mopping it up, hastily but ineffectually.

(Musical bridge, fiddle playing *Twopenny Jig*)

ISOBEL: (From the Shadows.) Never!

BRIGID: Isobel. Come over here. I said come here.

ISOBEL: (Clutching the knife to her chest) I'm not giving it to you.

BRIGID: I don't want your wretched knife. I've something for you . (Scribbles on a sheet of paper and hands it to ISOBEL.)

ISOBEL: A phone number?

BRIGID: It's Shawn Faraday's. He was a buddy of your Uncle Morris.

ISOBEL: Yes, I think I've met him.

BRIGID: You can phone him and tell him about Tris if you're so bent on revenge.

ISOBEL: I will. I'll do it right now. (Goes to phone.)

BRIGID: Aye, Shawn will do a good job on him. Not as good as when Morris was with him. But he'll make Tris pay.

ISOBEL: (Dialing) Good!

BRIGID: The way they made Geordie Armstrong pay.

ISOBEL: (Hesitating) Geordie Armstrong? That was Morris?

BRIGID: Geordie was blamed for robbing and raping an old woman.

ISOBEL: Well then, he deserved what was coming to him. (Goes on dialing)

BRIGID: Did you hear what they did to Geordie?

ISOBEL: They found him in a ditch, that's all I know.

BRIGID: Aye but that's not where they killed him. They took him down to an old shed near the docks, hung him from the rafters. They stripped all the clothes off him and they beat him to death with a tire iron. His fingers were all broken, his knuckles, his knees. Everything.

(Isobel puts the phone down.)

BRIGID: You couldn't recognise his face, he was that badly beaten.

ISOBEL: Morris did that? (Touches her pendant.)

BRIGID: Yes Morris! And that's not all. There were over three hundred cigarette burns on his body. And they cut him too . . . everywhere . . . even down below. Oh they had fun with him.

ISOBEL: (Carefully) They did have reason.

BRIGID: For a shot through the back of the head maybe. Not in my books, but maybe there'd be some justification. Just maybe. But for hours of torture and mutilation? And anyway, they didn't have reason.

ISOBEL: What do you mean?

BRIGID: When that old lady was raped, Geordie wasn't even in the country.

ISOBEL: No! You're wrong!

BRIGID: He was visiting his cousin in Scotland.

(ISOBEL turns away, trying to deal with her mother's revelations, clutching her pendant tightly in her fist.)

SHEA: (Coming forward) I can't get over Isobel! Going after him like that with the knife. I'd never have the guts to do that.

BRIGID: Anyone can be swept away, given the right circumstances.

SHEA: Maybe. (Studies picture) It must have been a blow to her. Learning all that about her uncle.

BRIGID: It was. I should have told her sooner. But I had trouble dealing with it myself, let alone telling anybody else.

SHEA: How did you know it was Morris?

BRIGID: I heard him boasting about it. Him and that Farady fellow. They thought it was funny. I would have turned him in. But you didn't know what kind of trouble you'd be unleashing. And I had Isobel to think about. (ISOBEL moves off, pulling the pendant from her neck.) Anyway, he was killed a day or two later.

SHEA: By Tris.

BRIGID: I thought maybe Tris was after him in retaliation for Geordie. But Farady and Morris started the fight. One set of bully boys trouncing another.

SHEA: Tris is not a "bully boy".

BRIGID: Well, to give Tris his due, he did settle down after he was wounded. Mark actually sold him on the idea of peace.

SHEA: Well of course. He's committed to peace and non-violence.

BRIGID: Ah you're right, he is. No sense in dredging up bygone days. (Kettle whistles) That kettle must be boiling.

SHEA: I'll make the tea.

BRIGID: Don't forget to warm the pot, now. I'll get some biscuit's out. And some sandwiches maybe. You look hungry.

SHEA: I haven't eaten since yesterday morning.

BRIGID: There's a drop of soup I could heat up.

SHEA: That would be great. We might even get Tris to take a little.

BRIGID: It wouldn't do him any harm. .

SHEA: A little food, that's what he needs, and some rest. Give that thing in him a chance to settle. Don't you think?

BRIGID: Aye, he'll be fine. Don't you worry.

(Lights dim and the fiddle and whistle play a distorted version of *The Girls of Belfast City*.)

SCENE FOUR

(Dim light on TRIS asleep. MARK moves out of the gloom humming *The Girls of Belfast City.*)

MARK: (Slowly and tentatively) "I'll tell my ma. . . when I get home. The girls won't leave. . . the boys alone." Tris? Is that you, Tris?

(TRIS comes to, slowly.)

TRIS: Mark. Thank God. Brigid said you were in Montreal.

MARK: What does she know. "They are handsome. . . they are pretty. . ."

TRIS: Where's Isobel?

MARK: "They are the girls of Belfast city."

TRIS: Will you get Isobel for me.

MARK: She is courting, one....two (his voice turns ominous)

TRIS: For God's sake, Mark.

MARK: All I ever really wanted was to be a song and dance man.

TRIS: *Mark!*

MARK: It's true. Put on dancing clogs and play the spoons and sing poignant airs. My ma was terrified. She hid all the spoons in the house.

TRIS: Aunt Mary did that?

MARK: We had to sup our broth out of a cup. Don't you remember?

TRIS: (Shakes his head.) I do not.

MARK: She stopped making puddings altogether. I loved to sing and she wouldn't let me.

(Sings)

My Aunt Jane, she called me in
And gave me tea out of her wee tin.

(MARK pulls out a pair of spoons and clatters them ineffectually.)

TRIS: Damn it, Mark. Will you stop that crap?

MARK: I love to sing, so I do. All the old come all ye's. "Come all ye young fellows so noble and bold, I'll tell you the story dada pum pum pum pum."

There's a lot you don't know about me, Lad. No one really sees me for what I am. They see me through the eyes of other people. It's what people say about me — that's where I get my reputation.

TRIS: What are you going on about? I don't understand you.

MARK: You know, I could go around pinching babies. That's right. Let's say I spent the whole morning pinching babies. Thirteen babies all in tears because of me.

TRIS: Where would you even find 13 babies?

MARK: Sure they're all over the place. Outside the shops in their prams. The parks. The seashore. Dozens of them. Anyway, what was I saying? Yes, I pinch 13 babies. Set them all to screaming and yelling and what would happen? Brigid would say, "That Mark's such a lovely man!" And that's all anyone would hear. "A lovely man!" and all them babies would be forgotten. (Clatters his spoons furiously.)

TRIS: For Christ's sake Mark, will you put those down for a minute, and tell me where Isobel is. I've got to see her.

MARK: Isobel? Sure Isobel's no fun. You wouldn't get Isobel singing a tune or having a go at the spoons. No fun at all.

(Sings and clacks the spoons)

My Aunt Jane, she called me in
And gave me tea out of her wee tin.
Half a bap with sugar on the top
And three black lumps out of her wee shop.

(Mark ends with a flourish and shuffles off in a little dance humming the tune as he goes.)

TRIS: Mark! Come back here. Mark.

(TRIS watches him leave in despair and frustration. But his torments aren't over. The music of *My Aunt Jane* turns eerie and distorted and a WASHERWOMAN enters with a large basket of washing.)

TRIS: Not yet. I'm not finished.

(WOMAN, expressionless, passes him by without noticing him. She moves away from him, then turns and begins scrubbing a shirt. When she wrings it out, it drips with blood. TRIS cries out in horror.)

TRIS: Get away! Get away from me!

(She slowly fades out. TRIS sits heavily on the bed and searches clumsily but with great need for cigarettes.)

SCENE FIVE

(SHEA comes running to TRIS.)

SHEA: Tris! I heard you cry out!

TRIS: It was nothing.

SHEA: What are you doing out of bed? (Tries to help him.)

TRIS: There was a woman here just now. And Mark.

SHEA: There's nobody here.

TRIS: I'm running out of time, Shea. There's death all about me.

SHEA: This is really weird. This is not like you!

TRIS: You don't know me, Shea.

SHEA: Don't say that.

TRIS: You don't know what I did.

SHEA: I know all about it. It was kill or be killed. Brigid told me.

TRIS: She knows nothing about it. Get us a cigarette, will you.

SHEA: You're coughing up blood!

TRIS: I need a cigarette.

(Desperately finds him a cigarette and lights him up with fearful hands.)

TRIS: I know I'm scaring the life out of you.

SHEA: That's the understatement of the year. (Manages a grin)

TRIS: When you're young, Death is the last thing on your mind.

SHEA: You're wrong, you know. I think about death all the time.

TRIS: Get away.

SHEA: I do. When I was little, Death was like this big moving belt. Like a conveyor belt. You just moved slowly along it and got tipped off at the end. I used to see it every night before I went to sleep. The only thing that made it OK was all the people in front of me. You know, grandparents, aunts and uncles, even your parents. They made this long row and you knew that you were safe as long as there were other people to be tipped off before you. I could say, OK, so it's scary, but for tonight there's Gran and Grampa and my other Gran. And Auntie Beverly and Uncle Jim. They all get to go first. This was how I'd get myself to sleep. They're all gone now. Every one of them. When my Mom died last year my first thought was, "There isn't anyone ahead of me now." Isn't that terrible? My own Mom.

TRIS: Is that why you married me, to have someone ahead of you on the belt?

SHEA: No. What a thing to say!

TRIS: Maybe that's why I married you.

SHEA: But I'm younger than you are.

TRIS: So I'd have someone I could reach back to, to slow the process.

(She pulls her hand away.)

TRIS: Look at you.

SHEA: What?

TRIS: The trappings of the young. It never ceases to amaze me. The chewed off hair, the trashy clothes, the little tattoo. All the symbols of transition.

SHEA: You think I look stupid?

TRIS: Far from it.

SHEA: Didn't you have symbols?

TRIS: We did. Bell bottoms, and minis, and whirly-swirly psychedelic patterns on everything.

SHEA: And everyone had long hair.

TRIS: You bet.

SHEA: Did you?

TRIS: I did. (Dreams a bit.) Isobel too. A great cloud of dark hair.

SHEA: I know. I saw her picture.

TRIS: A recent shot?

SHEA: No it was taken just after Morris was murdered.

TRIS: What!

SHEA: (Hurriedly) Only it wasn't really murder but self defence. Brigid made that very clear.

TRIS: I hope so. What else did she tell you.

SHEA: About Isobel trying to kill you in your bath. And about her wedding to Mark.

TRIS: She told you about the wedding?

SHEA: Just that they got married. I suppose it was a big bang-up affair.

TRIS: Not at all. In fact, it was just the opposite.

SHEA: What do you mean?

TRIS: They'd been engaged for about a year. When the day finally rolled round, Mark was in hiding. It was dangerous work being a peace activist. You were a target for both sides. Anyway, there was a price on Mark, and Isobel had to go to his hideout to get married. Brigid wasn't too keen on this. She was starting to get second thoughts about Isobel marrying Mark.

SHEA: Why?

TRIS: Oh, he was a few years older. A bit on the serious side. .

SHEA: Brigid told me he was a wonderful man.

TRIS: Oh, he was. He was. All the same. . . .Well, you know how mothers are.

SCENE SIX

(Golden light up on BRIGID adjusting ISOBEL'S collar.)

BRIGID: That's a lovely frock. Could you not put it on when you get there? Keep it nice and fresh.

ISOBEL: There? I don't know where "there" is. And there might not be time to change.

BRIGID: You will be careful, won't you, going off with a stranger. Mark should have come and got you himself.

ISOBEL: I'd be in more danger if he had. You know there's a price on him.

BRIGID: Are you sure you're doing the right thing?

ISOBEL: I thought you liked him, Mam.

BRIGID: I do. He's a lovely man.

ISOBEL: Well then?

BRIGID: It's just he's older, you know.

ISOBEL: He's just past thirty.

BRIGID: That's not what I mean. He's very serious and you. . . well you've not

ISOBEL: Not what?

BRIGID: Well, you know. You're still

ISOBEL: (Smiles) A virgin?

BRIGID: What I'm saying is, sometimes your attitude to men changes as you get older.

ISOBEL: I love him, Mother.

BRIGID: You haven't been swept off your feet. One of these days you could

ISOBEL: Oh Mother. Mark and I are permanent. It's for life.

BRIGID: I'm sure it is, Love. But you can't blame me for worrying. I've something for you. (Goes to the cabinet and gives her a bottle.) It's wine. I made it myself. A present for the wedding night.

ISOBEL: You made this?

BRIGID: I used to make it a lot. It was in great demand at one time, when I used to do that kind of thing.

ISOBEL: What kind of thing?

BRIGID: Anyway, it's a bed-time drink. Don't open it till you're married. Promise me?

ISOBEL: Mother! This is an aphrodisiac, isn't it? A love potion!

BRIGID: Take it before you go to bed. Drink it with Mark. And only Mark. I'm serious now. It should ensure one or two things.

(They embrace lovingly. YOUNG TRIS enters.)

ISOBEL: What are you doing here?

YOUNG TRIS: I'm here to escort the blushing bride to her beloved.

ISOBEL: You!

YOUNG TRIS: I'm the best man.

ISOBEL: Mark promised me it wouldn't be you!

BRIGID: Now Isobel, you'll be in good hands with Tris.

ISOBEL: Mark promised!

BRIGID: Are you leaving right away?

YOUNG TRIS: They're sending a car for us at four in the morning. I thought I'd just camp out on your sofa.

BRIGID: Four in the morning. I don't know if I'll be awake to see you off.

(BRIGID and ISOBEL embrace again.)

YOUNG TRIS: I'll take good care of her.

BRIGID: I'm counting on it.

(ISOBEL watches BRIGID fondly till she exits. Then casting a murderous look at YOUNG TRIS she turns her back on him. He smiles wickedly as the light fades on them.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Normal lights up on TRIS and SHEA. TRIS is very quiet.)

SHEA: So what happened next? Tris?

TRIS: Light me another one of these, would you.

SHEA: No way!

TRIS: It's soothing me. You notice I haven't coughed since I started smoking.

(SHEA lights up another for him.)

SHEA: You should be lying down.

TRIS: I just need to rest. (Pain overcomes him and frightens her.)

SHEA: Oh God! You're not going to die, are you?

TRIS: I'm all right. Don't fuss. (Finds his cigarette is out.) I'm not lit.

SHEA: It's dangerous to smoke in bed. (With trembling hands lights up for him. He takes a deep drag.)

TRIS: If you see smoke pouring out the holes in my chest, don't panic.

(He smokes, lost in thought. SHEA paces about.)

SHEA: It's Isobel, isn't it?

(He smokes without comment)

SHEA: She's the one you came to see.

TRIS: (Long pause) She's the only one who can heal me.

SHEA: The doctors will fix you up.

TRIS: No. That's not what I mean. I need . . . her forgiveness.

SHEA: Oh Tris. She's forgiven you long ago. She knew what Morris was like.

TRIS: Morris?

SHEA: Morris was a murderer and a sadist. Isobel knew that.

TRIS: You don't know anything about it. I've got to talk to her.

SHEA: But she's not here.

TRIS: I know. She's in Montreal with Mark.

SHEA: Perhaps we could call her. Brigid must have her number.

TRIS: She won't give it to me.

SHEA: Why not?

TRIS: I'm not in Brigid's good books at the moment.

SHEA: She must have it written down somewhere. A phone book or something. There's a phone in the hall. It might be there.

TRIS: Could you look?

SHEA: Only if you lie still.

TRIS: On my honour. (Lies back)

(She exits.)

TRIS: (Softly) Isobel.

(From the shadows, 2ND MAN sings a verse from *She Moves Through The Fair*. As he sings, ISOBEL turns and smiles lovingly at TRIS.)

SECOND MAN: My young love said to me, "My Mother won't mind."
And my Father won't slight you for your lack of kind."
And she moved a ways from me and this she did say,
"It will not be long, Love,
Till our wedding day."

SCENE EIGHT

(The song ends and the golden light comes up on YOUNG TRIS and ISOBEL. TRIS watches from the gloom.)

ISOBEL: So he takes off all his clothes, right?

YOUNG TRIS: Go on.

ISOBEL: And he was glorious looking. A young Apollo. And he comes and stands over her in all his glory. And she says, "This must be my lucky night."

YOUNG TRIS: Go on.

ISOBEL: And he says, "It is indeed. I'll do anything in the world you want me to. All you have to do is state what you want in three words, and three words only." And she looks up at him and she says

YOUNG TRIS: And she says, "Paint my house."

ISOBEL: Oh!

YOUNG TRIS: They were telling that one before the flood.

ISOBEL: If you knew it, why did you let me go on like that?

YOUNG TRIS I like seeing you make a fool of yourself.

(YOUNG TRIS fills his glass.)

YOUNG TRIS: So. Have you seen Mark . . . in all his glory?

ISOBEL: (Pause) Of course.

YOUNG TRIS: You have? And you're still marrying him?

(She thumps him.)

ISOBEL: Mark's a fine looking man!

YOUNG TRIS: Really.

ISOBEL: Better than some I could mention.

YOUNG TRIS: Oh! And what's that supposed to mean? (She laughs.) You mean the night you tried to slice me up? Well, let me tell you something. When a man's getting hacked to death he's not trying for a prize winning hard-on.

(They drink in silence)

YOUNG TRIS: So tell me now, are you going to make him happy?

ISOBEL: Don't you think I can?

YOUNG TRIS: I'm sure you can, but do you want to? This is a serious question. Somebody has to ask it on your wedding night.

ISOBEL: You and my Mam. I do love him, you know. And I desire him, since you're all so worried. (Sips at her whiskey.) I think he's a very sexy man. He's so tall and elegant. And so buttoned-up all the time. I want to undo those buttons.

YOUNG TRIS: I'll drink to that.

ISOBEL: I like the way he looks. The colour of his skin and his hair. That red gold colour? I love it. The way he combs it to hid his little thin patch. It makes him more appealing.

And his clothes, too. He always looks sharp. Even when he's slopping around. (Drinks reflectively) And I like his mind.

YOUNG TRIS: Ah. I knew we'd get to the dirty stuff.

ISOBEL: He's a man of principle! He knows where he's going and he understands the way the world works. This peace movement's a grand thing. I'm with him a hundred percent.

YOUNG TRIS: Very good.

ISOBEL: So I passed the test, sir?

YOUNG TRIS: With flying colours. This bottle's empty. Is there another one?

ISOBEL: There's an inch of sherry that's been hanging around since Christmas.

YOUNG TRIS: We must have something to drink. (Picks up Brigid's cordial.) What's this?

ISOBEL: You can't touch that. (Taking it away from him) It's something my Mammy made. It's for Mark and me on our wedding night.

YOUNG TRIS: She made it herself? (Takes it back.) It looks good.

ISOBEL: (Retrieving it) No really, Tris. She said it's for the two of us. No one else. Me and Mark.

YOUNG TRIS: That sobersides? He's never going to drink that. (She hesitates, turning the bottle in her hands.) He's a teetotaler!

ISOBEL: You're right. He is.

YOUNG TRIS: Well then.

(ISOBEL opens the bottle and pours some into his glass.)

YOUNG TRIS: You too. (She fills her own glass) That's the stuff. Here's to long life and the pursuit of love.

ISOBEL: (She raises the glass reluctantly.) My Mam's going to kill me.

(YOUNG TRIS drains his glass and looks at her.)

YOUNG TRIS: Go on then.

(ISOBEL drinks.)

YOUNG TRIS: Bottoms up.

(They look at each other.)

ISOBEL: The car's going to be here.

YOUNG TRIS: (Quietly.) Not for half an hour. (Takes and pours the bottle.) Have another glass.

ISOBEL: I should get my bag.

YOUNG TRIS: Plenty of time.

(They drink again.)

YOUNG TRIS: Heady stuff.

ISOBEL: Yes.

YOUNG TRIS: (Moving in.) So, about this thin patch of Mark's. How exactly does he comb it?

ISOBEL: Oh, I don't know. It's just kind of cunning.

YOUNG TRIS: (Bends his head.) Show me.

ISOBEL: You don't have a thin patch.

YOUNG TRIS: I see. How about your patch? Is it thick or thin?

ISOBEL: (Jumps up and moves away) Don't be talking like that!

YOUNG TRIS: (Softly) It seems kind of unfair. You've seen all of me and I haven't even seen the tops of your arms.

ISOBEL: (Turning to him) Don't be doing that!

YOUNG TRIS: Don't you want me to see the tops of your arms?

ISOBEL: This is the wine talking.

YOUNG TRIS: Aye. It's very talkative wine. Very garrulous. I can feel it chatting away in the ends of my fingers and toes. And that's not the only place it's speaking.

ISOBEL: We have to stop this right now.

YOUNG TRIS: The best man always gets to kiss the bride, you know.

ISOBEL: After the wedding.

YOUNG TRIS: Well, shouldn't we practise?

ISOBEL: (Letting him embrace her.) I don't think this is a good idea.

YOUNG TRIS: I don't think I can get through the night if we don't practise. (They kiss long and deep as the golden light fades.)

(Music: The Friar's Britches.)

ACT TWO

PROLOGUE

(In the dark a fiddle plays a round or two of *Two Penny Jig*. Then as the lights come up slowly the four figures from the first prologue enter to the theme of *Raglan Road*, played by the fiddle and penny whistle. The music dies and one of the figures raises her head.)

WOMAN: This morning, the funniest thing happened. I was brushing my hair, leaning over and brushing it from the nape, up and over, giving it a good currying, then upright and brushing it back into place. There I was, doing it the way I always do, when all of a sudden, on an impulse, I took the scissors and cut away a bit from the front, a bit of hair that has been bothering me for some time. I snipped it away and it was like a boil had burst in my soul and there it was, my thirty-year-old face staring back at me in the mirror.

I've become such a bundle of gloom lately, my face hanging down as if gravity was going to pull me cheeks and chins into the grave, but now here was my old face handed back to me.

I've been skipping about all day, feeling a million years younger and plans and ideas crowding into my skull and I've got back all that old inner store of humour and aplomb. Aplomb. That's a great feeling.

MAN: She stuck in her thumb and pulled out aplomb.

WOMAN: That's good. That's very good. You'll be joking your way into heaven, lad, when the time comes. I hear St. Peter loves a bit of repartee.

2ND MAN: Heaven for me would be a big garden. I could spend my whole time there, soaking up the day and listening to the birds. The happiness of a robin, for example, when the hose is turned on. The way it'll chirrup

from the rhododendrons and hop down to the dampened lawn, and very soon it has a wriggling worm in its beak and begins the slow slicing and pecking process that makes it into food.

YOUNG GIRL: Eughh. That's horrible.

2ND MAN: It's nature's way.

YOUNG GIRL: But is it heaven's? You said heaven.

MAN: Well that's his idea of heaven, isn't it. Worms getting ripped apart and all kinds of disgusting things. And drums too, no doubt. Will there be drums there in that heaven of yours?

2ND MAN: Why would you want to know? You won't be going there. You'll be heading the other way.

MAN: I will indeed if that's the best heaven can offer. When I go down below I imagine there'll be sand there, a huge underground shore stretching out beside a magical sea.

There'll be a freshly washed look to it and a clean salt smell. The sand will be yellow as butter and the sea will be brilliant blue.

YOUNG GIRL: I'd like to go there.

MAN: You will. You'll run along that shore through the shells and bits of polished glass and the little stilty birds. And a little dog will be running along beside you.

YOUNG GIRL: I always wanted a dog.

(Drum roll.)

2ND MAN: Shh! Wait! Something's happening. Yes. There's a white van stopping across the road there, and two men getting out, and there's a woman walking by with her grocery bag.

WOMAN: All I know is I'm feeling great. My old face back and everything's great and that young girl coming towards me. . . .

MAN: I see her too. And your grocery bag and the men coming away from the van, walking fast but not fast enough.

WOMAN: There's an unholy bang.

(Clatter of drum and flare of light)

2ND MAN: A man's hit on the head with a cabbage.

MAN: The street rises up like a cloud of bees.

YOUNG GIRL: A couple of bits stung me.

MAN: That's all I remember.

(Everyone slips away. WOMAN hums a haunting air as she into the gloom.)

SCENE ONE

(Lights up on TRIS in bed. He lies with his eyes closed, obviously very weak. BRIGID is clearing up the plates from a meal.)

BRIGID: You haven't eaten a thing.

TRIS: I'm not hungry.

BRIGID: A drop of soup would strengthen you.

TRIS: You know what would strengthen me, Brigid. A bloody phone number. Is it too much to ask?

BRIGID: Tris!

(BRIGID looks at him, stricken. SHEA enters.)

SHEA: Can I help you with that?

BRIGID: (Moving off with the plates.) No. I'll take care of this. You stay here with him. Keep him from moving about.

(As soon as BRIGID leaves TRIS sits up and beckons to SHEA.)

TRIS: Come over here. (The effort makes him cough.)

SHEA: You've got to lie still.

TRIS: Did you find the phone book?

SHEA: Yes. (She retrieves it from her pocket.) But the number's not there.

TRIS: Give it here. (Takes it from her and fumbles through it. He doesn't find what he's looking for. Tries a couple of places in the book. Then puts it down in despair.) It's not there.

TRIS: Brigid must have it off by heart. That's why it's not in here.

SHEA: Why don't we ask Brigid again.

TRIS: I just did! She wouldn't give it to me. (Sinks back) I have to speak to Isobel. There's something I need to say. To explain. . . .(drifts off wearily.) You don't know what it's like to have so much to explain.

SHEA: Well maybe we could find something with her phone number or her address. An envelope. Or a receipt.

TRIS: And where would we find that?

SHEA: I can search the hall again. And this room It's a den or an office or something. Probably lots of papers here.

TRIS: You're wasting your time.

SHEA: (Glad to have a plan of action) No. We'll search this room top to bottom if we have to, drawer by drawer, cupboard by cupboard.

TRIS: A waste of time.

(She looks through a few things on a shelf and finds a photo album packed with papers.)

SHEA: This looks promising. Photographs and letters and stuff. (Brings it over to him.) A couple of unpaid bills. A letter from Ireland. (Looks through letter quickly.) These photographs! Definitely the seventies. I love old photographs. Isn't that Isobel? In the blue dress?

TRIS: (Taking the photograph.) Let me see. That's Isobel and Mark's wedding photo. I was best man. See?

SHEA: That's you? Your hair is so long. I always think long hair makes men look like angels. Here's one of you and Isobel. You seem very close.

TRIS: We were. Close.

(She goes on looking, very hard. The fiddle plays *Haste to the Wedding* as the lights come up on Isobel and Young Tris lying together.)

SCENE TWO

(Golden lights up on ISOBEL and YOUNG TRIS lying together.)

YOUNG TRIS: It's better than that field last week with the stinging nettles, isn't it? Better than the old bath shed at my Granny's? And Mrs. Delaney's wardrobe, it's surely better than that, the way it creaked and shook.

ISOBEL: You can joke all you want but I still feel rotten. Cheating on Mark in his own bed. What if he walked in here?

YOUNG TRIS: He's in Dublin, isn't he? He'll never know. (He touches her and she pulls away.) I almost wish he would walk in here. I want him to know about us. I want to tell him everything.

ISOBEL: No!

YOUNG TRIS: We could go away. Leave the country altogether. Make a good life for ourselves.

(ISOBEL says nothing.)

YOUNG TRIS: Why can't we?

(ISOBEL runs a hand over his shoulder and chest. Stops at a scar and traces it.)

ISOBEL: How is it that men get so wrecked up? I mean, you look at any man and his body is racked and ruined. All stitched up and mended. It's as though you can't be a man if you don't look like an old darned-up sock.

YOUNG TRIS: We do it so women can stitch us up again. Make us the subject of their sewing circles.

ISOBEL: And what shall I tell them at the "sewing circle" about this one?

YOUNG TRIS: Received from Brian Fullerton behind Farrel's Pub on the occasion of me bashing his head in. September 3rd 1967.

ISOBEL: And these three on your neck? When did this happen?

YOUNG TRIS: Sometime in 1969. Caught in a shower of flying street rubble. Belfast confetti.

ISOBEL: And this?

YOUNG TRIS: 1970. I was defending a damsel in distress.

ISOBEL: What sort of distress?

YOUNG TRIS: I'll show you if you like.

ISOBEL: No thanks. What are these funny marks on your knees?

YOUNG TRIS: Two years ago. Black and Deckering.

ISOBEL: (Pulls back her hand as if burnt.) Is that what it is? My God! Why?

YOUNG TRIS: Some paramilitary bugger didn't like the look of me. I was lucky. Lately instead of just knee-capping you they do everything: elbows, knees and ankles.

ISOBEL: (Pulling away in horror) I haven't heard of that!

YOUNG TRIS: They call it a six pack.

ISOBEL: Ohh!

YOUNG TRIS: Some of us see it as a challenge, you know. I'd a mate who really got off on it. He was stealing cars and they pulled him up one day, knee capped him and told him to wisen up. He was no sooner back on his feet than he stole another car, drove it round to the house of the fellow that did it

to him, pumped the horn, and mooned him when he came to the window.

ISOBEL: And?

YOUNG TRIS: They did it again. And he did it again. Then they told him to get out of the country. His ma had him on the ferry to Stranraer the next morning. He's out in Canada now, running a pet shop. Where are you going?

ISOBEL: I'm getting dressed. (Looks at him) It doesn't exactly lead to mad passionate lovemaking, does it? Knee-capping and six packing .

YOUNG TRIS: You're the one who started it, wanting to know about my scars.

ISOBEL: I know.

YOUNG TRIS: Come on, we'll have a little drink and in a minute or two we'll be in the mood again.

ISOBEL: No we won't.

YOUNG TRIS: Well I'm having a drink You're not kicking me out just yet. (Takes the bottle, which is holding up a few books. He notices one and picks it up.) What's this? A book of dirty pictures?

ISOBEL: It was a wedding present from one of Mark's campy artist friends. Mark hates it.

YOUNG TRIS: *Erotic tales and Illuminations*. Looks like the Book of Kells run amok.

ISOBEL: That's why he hates it. He feels it's a sacrilege.

YOUNG TRIS: So it is. But it's great, isn't it? The way all the beginning letters are illuminated with sassy little pictures. Look at this "T", for instance. It's so intricate, weaving up into a trellis and spilling over the edges into

leafy tendrils with lovebirds nestling. Little human lovebirds with their bums in the air.

ISOBEL: You're making that up. (Tries to get the book but he keeps it out of reach.)

TRIS: (Turns the page.) And here's an "I". Your initial. (Studies it.)

ISOBEL: And what's that like?

YOUNG TRIS: It's rather a tormented-looking thing. Twists and twines about all over the page and then gets all mixed up with a . . . pig.

ISOBEL: I don't believe it! Show me!

YOUNG TRIS: (Keeps book from her.) Shall I read you a story? Here's one: *The Ring of Passion*.

ISOBEL: That's a good one, actually. It's about a magic ring. If a man puts it on his finger as far as the first knuckle, it makes his pecker shoot up to twice the size.

YOUNG TRIS: Handy. And what about the second knuckle?

ISOBEL: (She throws her arms wide, one up, one down.) Whoosh! He gets pinned to the ceiling.

YOUNG TRIS: Here's a bit about a king riding in a carriage.

ISOBEL: That's a great bit! He steals the ring from his travelling companion.

YOUNG TRIS: (Reading) The king pushed the ring on his finger past the first knuckle, past the second all the way to the base of his finger. Before the king knew what was happening to him, his dick shot out of his pants, breaking a hole through the front of the carriage, braining the poor coachman and knocking the horses out of their traces.

(YOUNG TRIS throws himself laughing on the bed. ISOBEL falls down with him.)

(Lights back to normal on SHEA, still holding picture, and TRIS)

SHEA: What are you smiling about?

TRIS: Nothing, just a memory.

SHEA: All those memories that don't have me in them. (Looks at picture.) This other Tris with this other story. You were dreamy looking. I wish I could step back into that old life of yours and be part of it.

TRIS: You wouldn't like it. Belfast in the seventies was a bloody awful place, believe me.

SHEA: But it was meaningful. There was a purpose to things.

TRIS: It was never that simple. Nothing ever turned out the way you expected. Or hoped.

SHEA: I've never made a decision that affected anyone. I've never done anything that matters.

TRIS: That's not true. What you do matters a great deal to me.

SHEA: A life of action. A significant life. I would give anything to step into this picture.

(SHEA studies photograph fiercely.)

SCENE THREE

(The golden light comes up on YOUNG TRIS searching for Isobel.)

YOUNG TRIS: Isobel. Quit playing about! Isobel. (Loudly) Isobel!

ISOBEL: (Steps out of the shadows. She's wearing a cream-coloured trench coat.)
What's all the racket?

YOUNG TRIS: I thought you weren't coming.

ISOBEL: I said I was.

YOUNG TRIS: I know, but . . . (Kisses her.)

ISOBEL: I'm worried about Mark.

YOUNG TRIS: Mark! Worry about me for a change. I've been waiting half an hour in the cold and damp.

ISOBEL: If he finds out, it would kill him.

YOUNG TRIS: You never should have married him.

ISOBEL: I had to marry him. I love him.

YOUNG TRIS: Then why are you here?

ISOBEL: You know full well why I'm here. It's called *lust*.

YOUNG TRIS: Don't say that.

ISOBEL: If it could be found and cut out with a knife I'd have the operation tomorrow. Tomorrow! I love my husband.

(He stops her mouth with kisses.)

YOUNG TRIS: It's me you love: me me me me me me.

(She succumbs passionately to his kisses. They twist and move about in the shadows clinging to each other, then move off. TRIS rises up and follows, straining to see them. Instead he sees MAN and WOMAN moving towards him. He turns away from them to find his way blocked by YOUNG GIRL and 2ND MAN. They face TRIS silently.)

TRIS: No. . . . No!

SHEA: (Jumps up) What is it?

TRIS: This place is full of ghosts.

SHEA: I should never have brought you here.

TRIS: I brought myself here. To this point of reckoning. It had to be. I was just hoping I'd see her before

SHEA: Before what?

TRIS: (Points to the shadows.) See there? Murray McNeice. 49 years old. (2ND MAN steps forward.) Former Orangeman and Lambeg drummer. One son killed by the Provos as an example. The other killed by a British bullet in a street demonstration.

SHEA: There's nothing there.

TRIS: I killed Murray!

(He beckons again.)

TRIS: Molly Coltraine. (WOMAN steps forward.) 58 years old. Husband killed by the IRA for talking against the organization. She was murdered by me.

SHEA: Tris, there's no one there!

TRIS: I *killed* her. (He grabs SHEA by the shoulders and pushes her towards MAN.) Look there! Gerry Travis, 45 years old. Wife killed by a Loyalist sniper after 23 years of marriage. Gerry Travis was murdered by me. And Kathleen. (YOUNG GIRL steps forward.) Kathleen McGee. 15 years old. School girl. Practised the violin an hour a day. Honours student. Was undergoing psychiatric counselling for nightmares.

SHEA: Tell me what you're talking about!

TRIS: I planted a bomb. It was a fuck-up from beginning to end. Badly planned, badly executed. It went off way before it should have. This bit of metal in my chest was from that bomb.

SHEA: It really happened?

(Flare-up of lights and the four figures drift away.)

TRIS: Four bystanders were killed. Innocent people. People who had already suffered too much.

SHEA: You know all their names.

TRIS: Names, life histories, aspirations. I was a long time in jail.

SHEA: But you didn't mean to kill them.

TRIS: I meant to set the bomb. I might just as well have stood them up against a wall and pulled the trigger.

SHEA: You paid for your crime. If it was a crime.

TRIS: (Holds up her hand.) Look. No stains. No traces of powder. How can you possibly understand?

SHEA: You think I'm naive, don't you. If it's naive to want the person you love most in the world to be well and happy, then yes. But you don't have to suffer forever. I really believe you can work through this.

TRIS: I believe that too. And that's why I need Isobel. She's my absolution.

SHEA: What can she say that I can't say to you? She'll tell you the very same things.

TRIS: (Grabbing her hands) My absolution.

(SHEA pulls away and runs off.)

SCENE FOUR

ISOBEL: Every time we meet I seem to be wearing this coat.

YOUNG TRIS: You're lovely in it. Your coat of intrigue and passion.

ISOBEL: Yes. You can smell the lust clinging to it.

YOUNG TRIS: Damn it, Isobel. Why do you say these things?

ISOBEL: We've got to put an end to this, Tris.

YOUNG TRIS: Let's get away out of here. Go to Canada or the States. England even.

ISOBEL: What about the cause?

TRIS: Screw the cause.

ISOBEL: You don't know what you're saying.

YOUNG TRIS: This whole peace thing is a dead end. Sure the minute anyone does anything conciliatory, there's a gunman at his door.

ISOBEL: It seemed so simple at first. Just rally all the right-thinking people.

YOUNG TRIS: Yeah, but one bully boy cancels out a thousand peacemakers.

ISOBEL: We need to focus on political action now, get laws in place. That's what Mark says.

YOUNG TRIS: Every law that's put in place divides people even more. Where are you going?

ISOBEL: I'm meeting Mark in twenty minutes.

YOUNG TRIS: What about us?

ISOBEL: Tomorrow. That's what I came to tell you. I can get away tomorrow afternoon for an hour. (Moves off.) I'll see you then.

YOUNG TRIS: Jesus. Jesus! (Echoed by TRIS.)

(Music bridge, Twopenny Jig.)

SCENE FIVE

(BRIDGET is drinking in the kitchen. ISOBEL calls out to her.)

ISOBEL: Mam. Mam. (BRIGID, well into her cups, looks up reluctantly.) You've been ignoring me all day.

BRIGID: Och I haven't.

ISOBEL: You have. It's me and Tris, isn't it? You know about us. You don't approve.

BRIGID: I never said that.

ISOBEL: I don't approve myself. I've pretty well made up my mind. I'm breaking it off with him, Mam.

BRIGID: With Tris? Do you think that's wise?

ISOBEL: Don't you?

BRIGID: The whole thing's a great confusion to me. On the one hand there's Mark, a good and decent man.

ISOBEL: Exactly!

BRIGID: And on the other hand there's Tris, the man you should have married.

ISOBEL: Mother!

BRIGID: You should. I knew it, too. I should have said, you know. I should have done something.

ISOBEL: What could you have done? I loved Mark. And I still do.

BRIGID: Of course you do. You have a good life with him.

(Silence.)

BRIGID: But with Tris you could have a *great* life. He's not the ne'er do well he seems, Isobel. He's got a brain or two in his head.

ISOBEL: Mam! Anyone would think you were in love with him yourself.

BRIGID: Get away with you! What a thing to say to your mother!

ISOBEL: What a thing for you to say. Run away with Tris. I love Mark!

BRIGID: He's mother-ridden.

ISOBEL: What does that mean?

BRIGID: Tris is your man. I knew it all along and I didn't do anything

ISOBEL: Tris is a know-nothing.

BRIGID: You think Mark has all the answers. With Tris you might find an answer or two for yourself. You should go away with Tris. Leave the country. Find your life.

ISOBEL: I can't abandon Ireland.

BRIGID: Ireland. What's Ireland doing for you? You've no existence. Just a lot of running about and putting your life on the line. When are you going to have a home? Or children?

ISOBEL: Peace is our child, Mammy.

BRIGID: Aye. And an abortive wee baby that is.

ISOBEL: Mam! (Turns away deeply shocked.)

SCENE SIX

(SHEA comes upon BRIGID with her drink and ISOBEL's picture.)

SHEA: I thought you'd gone to bed.

BRIGID: I can't sleep. How's Tris?

SHEA: He's having nightmares and . . . well it's almost like he's having visions. He keeps talking about people who died. In a bombing incident.

BRIGID: He told you about that?

SHEA: He told me their names, their occupations, their histories. He seemed to know everything about them.

BRIGID: It's what he went to jail for. He set a bomb and four innocent people were killed. It was a dreadful shock to us. Isobel nearly went mad. She cried about it for days.

SHEA: He paid for his crime. He spent all those years in jail.

BRIGID: At the time I didn't think I could ever forgive him.

SHEA: That's why you didn't want him here.

BRIGID: God knows he's no different to the rest of us. We all cling to our bloody history. Here. Have a glass of this.

SHEA: Thanks. I will.

BRIGID: Do you want water with it?

SHEA: No, neat is fine. I drink it neat with Tris all the time. (Sits beside BRIGID and picks up photo.) I just don't know what to do. Tris. . . He's going through something terrible and I just seem irrelevant to him.

BRIGID: You're hardly irrelevant. He married you, didn't he?

SHEA: Yes but . . . He hasn't slept with me.

BRIGID: He hasn't? Och well, it's early days.

SHEA: He was going to. On our wedding night we had a beautiful suite, with a fireplace. And champagne. It was so dreamy and romantic. And sexy too. I know he felt . . . desire for me. . . and then, when he poured the champagne, we were just taking the first sip, raising our glasses in a toast to each other and . . . He went all cold. Said it was late and

BRIGID: It happens to them all, Love. Especially at his age.

SHEA: I don't think it was that. Anyway, you're right. It's early days. (Picks up ISOBEL's picture.) I don't ever seem to get a grip on my life. Not like Isobel.

BRIGID: Tris has told you about her, has he?

SHEA: A little. I envy her. She was so involved in her life.

BRIGID: She was involved all right. Over her head.

SHEA: And then she came to Canada. All that involvement and she came here. Why did she leave Ireland?

BRIGID: She had to. She and Mark made a lot of enemies. There are people with vested interests. There always are. People who don't really want the fighting to stop. They were such innocents in some ways, the two of them.

In the end there were too many death threats. Mark was fearless on his own behalf but then they started on Isobel. They were pulled out of their car one night and these masked bastards held a gun to her head in front of Mark. Threatened to blow her head off. God only knows why they didn't go all the way. Maybe his name was enough to stop them. Whatever it was they let them go and Mark brought her over here. Said it was time, anyway, to settle down and have a family. I came out too. You can't have a family without a Granny, can you? I was glad to leave it all behind. (Takes a long draft.) She never did have children.

(A groan from TRIS. Both women listen.)

BRIGID: That man should be in hospital.

SHEA: I know. But taking him against his will, the struggle might. . . .

BRIGID: Yes, I've been thinking the same thing. Any struggle or sudden shock. It could just push him over.

SHEA: Oh God!

BRIGID: Oh, don't listen to me. I'm just blathering on.

SHEA: You know he'd go if you'd just . . .

BRIGID: Just what?

SHEA: Let him speak to Isobel. Give him her phone number.

BRIGID: I can't, Love.

SHEA: Brigid. Why are you holding out like this? Is it some kind of punishment?

BRIGID: You don't understand.

SHEA: All Tris wants is her phone number. Is that so bad. He just wants to talk to her..

BRIGID: Isobel's dead.

SHEA: Dead!

BRIGID: She died last September. Of cancer. In that very room he's in now.

SHEA: This can't be true!

BRIGID: I still have some of her things there. A few things she wouldn't let go of. An old raincoat. Photographs. A book or two. I've never had the heart to go through any of it. Just left it all there the way it was.

SHEA: Dead!

BRIGID: Mark's in Montreal right now. Lecturing at McGill. He calls me every week. He's a good man.

SHEA: This is so unbelievable! I've been building up such a picture of her. So vital. And Tris. He talks about her as if she's still alive.

BRIGID: He doesn't know. I couldn't tell him, could I? Not the shape he's in.

SHEA: My God. How am *I* going to tell him?

BRIGID: You can't tell him! If he's lucky and if they can operate, then that's the time to tell him. After he's been fixed up.

SHEA: But how will I get him to go to the hospital?

BRIGID: You'll have to find a way. I'll call the ambulance. You go in there and talk to him.

SCENE SEVEN

(Music bridge -- *Sheebeg Sheemore*. YOUNG TRIS enters and drinks solemnly. Behind him ISOBEL crosses to the bed and lies down. He sits beside her and strokes her hair.)

YOUNG TRIS: It's always like this. You promise to meet me and then when we meet there's all this depression and misery.

ISOBEL: I'm sorry.

YOUNG TRIS: You called me, remember.

ISOBEL: I did. I wanted to tell you something.

YOUNG TRIS: (Getting up abruptly) I don't want to hear it.

ISOBEL: You have to hear it, Tris.

YOUNG TRIS: Here, let's have a drink. (Picks up book.) Let's have a drink and a story.

ISOBEL: No.

YOUNG TRIS: Come on. *The Giant of Ballynahinch*. What's that one about?

ISOBEL: I haven't read it.

YOUNG TRIS: Well, I'll read it.

ISOBEL: Tris. I'm trying to be serious here.

YOUNG TRIS: (Sits beside her and reads) "The Giant of Ballynahinch. It's well known, if you get a hold of a fairy, that he has to take you to his crock of gold or grant you some equivalent wish.

"Well, when Maudie O'Hara of Cairnlow had the luck to grab onto the wee man coming out of her gooseberry bushes, she didn't lose her presence of mind. She said, *Pair me up with the biggest set of balls in the Kingdom of Ballynahinch.*"

ISOBEL: (Smiling in spite of herself.) Tris.

YOUNG TRIS: Ah. Like that, do you?

"Well, the little man wasted no time in granting her wish. She'd scarcely latched onto his arm when there was this great flash of lightning and she found herself clinging to the private articles of a man ten times her size.

"He was that big, she could scarcely see the top of him. And while she thought it was rude to be grabbing onto his balls she didn't like to let go, for it was a good thirty foot drop to the floor.

"Just at that moment the giant reached down to scratch himself and this big hand closed round her.

"What have we here?" he bellowed, nearly bursting her eardrums.

"I was hoping for a little dalliance, says Maudie, but the fairy pulled a fast one.

"Och now, don't give up too soon, said the Giant. I'm all for it, if you are.

"The giant got right down to work. But it was like being caressed by a battering ram. Maudie wondered if she'd survive the night.

"Then sometime in the wee hours, Maudie realized that the giant's head was a lot closer to hers.

"The truth was, the Giant was starting to shrink"

(Till now ISOBEL has been disapproving but interested. Now the story starts to work on the both of them, creating an irresistible erotic tension.)

"Not only that, she could see he was a finely made man: hair thick and springy as a river god's, thick arms, narrow hips, and a fine hard flat of muscle over his pelvis. She spent the rest of the night in a torment of desire.

"She encouraged him shamelessly, guiding his hands in the way that gave her the greatest pleasure, desperate to satisfy the itch, painful and delicious, that throbbled in her like a sweet bruise.

"Aroused to the ultimate pitch of desire by his muscle, his leanness, his glorious youth and scarcely harnessed strength, she gave herself up to the moaning that was preliminary to her defeat. The giant responded enthusiastically, grappling with her as if to pull her to the bed. But (YOUNG TRIS wrinkles his brow). . . unpredictably. . . unimaginably, the giant wasn't equal to the task. They remained standing. He was now level with her. She would've been happy with his size a minute previous. And now. . . could it be? . . . She was actually looking ever so slightly down on him.

"Even as Maudie watched he seemed to grow smaller still. It had never occurred to her that the shrinking might not stop. Alas, all too soon, the giant was child sized, diminishing by the moment."

Shite! This is a stupid story.

ISOBEL: Finish it..

YOUNG TRIS: No. I don't like it.

ISOBEL: I'll finish it. (Subdued, she reads to a brooding YOUNG TRIS)

"Chastened and repulsed, Maudie went to the window. It was cold and misty with portents of rain. On the beach far below dark clothed figures hauled in their boats. The wind freshened suddenly and she pulled her cloak about her. The scudding clouds revealed a bleary sun, watery and without promise. Behind her, the giant, red faced and squalling, rapidly dwindled. She paid no heed. Instead she looked below where the fishermen spread their catch like curses on the black rocks."

YOUNG TRIS: Curses! What kind of story is that!

ISOBEL: A cautionary tale.

YOUNG TRIS: And what's the moral?

ISOBEL: That what we're doing is wrong.

YOUNG TRIS: The only thing wrong was in using that book. (Goes to her) We don't need a book to make love.

ISOBEL: (Pushing him away) No. I can't. (Pause) You're not listening to me. This has to end.

YOUNG TRIS: You can't mean that.

ISOBEL: We're just fooling ourselves. We glut ourselves on sex, but we're never satisfied. We pretend our love is noble, but there's no honour in it.

YOUNG TRIS: Oh Jesus!

ISOBEL: I want you to leave.

YOUNG TRIS: You'll feel different in the morning.

(ISOBEL says nothing.)

YOUNG TRIS: Isobel?

(She doesn't answer.)

YOUNG TRIS: If that's what you want. (He goes over to her, takes her shoulders to embrace her. She shrugs him off.) At least a good-bye kiss.

ISOBEL: It's over, Tris.

YOUNG TRIS: It will never be over.

ISOBEL: I married Mark. I'm his wife.

YOUNG TRIS: You married the god-damned peace movement. Well, peace is not going to happen. There will never be peace in our lifetime. In fact I'll bloody well see to it.

ISOBEL: What do you mean! Tris? Tristan! Come back!

TRIS: (Despairing) No! No!

(From the shadows, 2ND MAN sings a verse from *She Moves Through The Fair.*)

SECOND MAN: My young love said to me, "My Mother won't mind."
And my Father won't slight you for your lack of kind."

(ISOBEL comes into TRIS's view and he reaches out to her)

TRIS: My beautiful, my darling girl.

SECOND MAN: And she moved a ways from me and this she did say,

TRIS: I knew you wouldn't abandon me.

SECOND MAN: "It will not be long, Love,/Till our wedding day."

SCENE EIGHT

(ISOBEL slips off as SHEA arrives. TRIS mistakes SHEA for ISOBEL and grasps her hand.)

SHEA: I'd never abandon you, Tris. Never.

TRIS: When you pushed me away I did terrible things. I couldn't help myself I was a madman.

SHEA: I would never push you away.

TRIS: I know. I know that now. I know you had to do it. But I was such a fool, such a bloody fool.

SHEA: Tris, please.

TRIS: You're not wearing it.

SHEA: What?

TRIS: The coat. You always wore it. You called it your coat of passion and intrigue.

SHEA: I don't know what you're talking about.

TRIS: Yes. Always. (He sinks wearily to the bench.)

SHEA: (Looks about.) Coat. Yes. Brigid said something about a coat. "Books and papers and an old coat she couldn't let go of."

(ISOBEL steps forward again holding the coat and SHEA touches it.)

TRIS: Put it on.

SHEA: I don't know, Tris.

TRIS: Go on!

(Reluctantly SHEA puts on the coat, wearing it uneasily)

SHEA: It feels strange.

TRIS: That's better now.

SHEA: Don't get up.

TRIS: Come over here then. Do you know how I've longed to see you. To explain.

SHEA: You don't have to explain anything.

TRIS: But I do. Everything. It was a horrible mistake. I was so angry, I didn't know what I was doing.

SHEA: I know.

TRIS: No you don't! Just let me look at you a while.

SHEA: You know it's funny. All night I've been envying your past, your exciting past, wanting to be part of it. Now, I feel I'm being swept away by it. By Isobel. By this coat. (Finds a letter in the pocket. Reads it) Oh my God!

TRIS: What is it?

SHEA: It's a letter from Isobel . . . to you. (SHEA gives the letter to TRIS. He starts to open the letter, then notices SHEA removing the coat.)

TRIS: What are you doing?

SHEA: I don't want to wear this any more. It feels cold.

TRIS: (Catching her arms) No no. It's a hot coat. Don't you remember? You always said you could smell the lust clinging to it.

SHEA: Lust!

TRIS: Don't you feel it? Isn't it singing through your veins?

SHEA: No!

TRIS: Keep it on.

SHEA: No!

(She takes it off and flings it on the bed.)

TRIS: (Suddenly in the present) Shea. What were you doing with that?

SHEA: I won't take her place.

TRIS: You could never take her place. (He picks up the coat and holds it to his face, inhaling its aroma.) Isobel.

SHEA: You were lovers, weren't you. I knew really. I just didn't want to admit it.

(TRIS says nothing)

SHEA: You cheated on Mark.

TRIS: Any and every chance we could get.

SHEA: Lying and cheating on your best friend. What kind of a life was that?

TRIS: The worst. . . and the best. I'd do it again.

SHEA: You wanted to come here all along. Not just when you got sick.

TRIS: All along. All my life!

(She turns away in pain. Behind her TRIS coughs, chest heaving dangerously.)

SHEA: Why did you marry me?

TRIS: God knows. The only one I've ever wanted was Isobel.

SHEA: Well you can't have her!

TRIS: I don't think you'll have any say in it.

SHEA: She's dead!

TRIS: Don't be childish.

SHEA: *Dead.* She died six months ago of cancer.

TRIS: No!

SHEA: Right in this room.

TRIS: It's not true!

SHEA: Right in this *bed*. (She walks away holding herself, shivering with pain.)

TRIS: No! (Tries to get up. Heaves violently.)

SHEA: A ghost of a marriage, that's all it's been, filled with ghosts. (Grabs up letter and flings it at him.) So read your fucking letter. It's the last you'll ever get from her.

TRIS: Isobel!

SHEA: (Reacting to his cry she clutches her head and closing her eyes.) Stop it! (She turns around.) Tris? No! Don't die on me. Please. (But TRIS doesn't move.) Look, you haven't read your letter yet. See? It's from Isobel. I'll read it to you. (She opens the letter and sinks down beside him.) It's from long ago. It's smeared, I can't tell when exactly, 1980

something. It says, "My Darling Tris, I hate September, I hate the feeling of things closing in. . . "

ISOBEL: (In unison with SHEA) "My Darling Tris, I hate September, I hate the feeling of things closing in. . . "

SHEA: Listen, Tris. Oh God.(Sinks down beside him, laying her head on the bed in despair.) Tris.

(ISOBEL moves to the bench as the lights dim on TRIS and SHEA.)

ISOBEL: My darling Tris, I hate September, I hate the feeling of things closing in and the days darkening and everything dying off. It rained earlier and the air is still damp with it. The smell of wet pavement fills me with longing. What if you were here, I ask myself, here with me in rainy Dublin, side by side like Yeats' wild swans, our bodies scorching the cold companionable sheets.

I'm tired. I've been up all night. We both have. Dealing with the latest round of talks, the unending talks. Mark's in the other room waiting for me to come to bed. I'm sitting here thinking only of you, scribbling yet another unsent letter, doomed like all the others to be burnt to ashes and flung into the dark.

I've been up all night, tired and oppressed with that wrecked feeling you get when you haven't slept. My head is muddled on every subject but one. And you know the one. All the wild ways we met and all the places we ever met, all the places. That field up behind Jamieson's with the old kettle in it and the smell of stinging nettles and gooseberries. The old bath shed at your granny's, the wet wood smell and the carbolic soap, do you remember? I see it as clear as clear, and Mrs. Delaney's wardrobe, that was the best, wasn't it, the way it creaked and shook. And Mrs. D. coming up and wanting to know if you were all right and 'was the pigeons bothering you?' and sneaking away home after she went to bed. And the way I felt afterwards, that slightly sick hysteria feeling, but the

next time the same passionate flinging mood till that little nugget of joy was cracked and went singing through my whole body. Sick, that's how I felt, but proud too. Proud in knowing that I'd done it, enjoyed it and would do it again, knowing that I existed and knowing how to make myself exist.

I know you must be wondering about me, feeling so hurt, so alone in that damned prison. I almost came to visit you once. But that would be it, wouldn't it? I always feel if I sent even one letter that it would be game over and I'd come flying to you. That's how little holds me back, one little pin of a thing holding back the whole dam. Unloose it and the whole flood is let loose.

The biggest problem, the only problem, is not touching you. Not to touch you, that's the hardest, most trialsome part, not to touch you, my dearest, dearest. . .

(The letter slips to the floor as the lights fade slowly on ISOBEL.)

THE END

The following epilogue followed Isobel's lament in the original production. I later decided the best place to end the play, dramatically, was after Isobel's lament. However, the political implications of the neverending nature of the conflict are clear in the epilogue and so it is included here for study purposes.

EPILOGUE

MAN: When I go down below I imagine there'll be sand there, a huge underground shore stretching out beside a magical sea.

There'll be a freshly washed look to it and a clean salt smell. The sand will be yellow as butter and the sea will be brilliant blue. (He looks at YOUNG GIRL) You'll like it there. (She nods and comes over. He puts his arm around her.)

MAN: You will. You'll run along that shore through the shells and bits of polished glass and the little stilty birds. And a little dog will be running along beside you.

YOUNG GIRL: And I'll pick him up. And hug him.

MAN: But when you pick him up he isn't a dog really, he's more like a lion, a little bristling hairless lion. And it feels so good to hold him. The energy pours through you and he shivers in your hands, a little emblem of healing and power to come.

2ND MAN: That's what you say.

(Lights flare and snap out and the violent drumming begins.)