

The In-Between Times

A one-act play by

Annie Kissack

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First performed, Erin Arts Centre, Port Erin, Isle of Man, 2 October 2021.
Commissioned by Culture Vannin, 2021.

CAST

KATE, a well-off Manxwoman in her late 30s. Quiet, bookish, she has married 'above her station'

PAUL, her husband, an enterprising Douglas businessman of Manx descent

ALICE, a young and inexperienced household servant

LOUISA, a forceful campaigner for moral reform

ELLIS, her ineffectual husband

SCENES

Scene 1: Parlour of Paul and Kate Corrin's middle-class house in Upper Douglas. Evening of 30th April 1866 (May Eve)

Scene 2: Wellington Meeting Rooms. 11th May 1866 (*Old-calendar* May Eve)

Scene 3: Parlour. Same evening.

Scene 4: Parlour. Two years later. Evening of 30th April 1868 (May Eve)

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SCENE 1

SCENE. *A middle-class parlour in a house in Upper Douglas mid-1800s. It is April 30th, May Eve. A small rectangular dining table and four chairs are set towards the front of the stage, slightly off-centre. On the table there are a couple of books, documents/papers of some sort, some embroidery. Another more comfortable low chair is set further back, closer towards the other side of the stage. A small card-type table is beside it. An umbrella stand holding a walking cane is placed to the far right of the dining table. There is a bureau against the back wall.*

SONG- (*Tappaghyn Jiargey or other traditional Manx Maytime tune/song may be heard playing / being sung as curtains open.*)

(*Lights on Kate sitting at table. She appears to be reading aloud from a book which is causing her some mild amusement or is it exasperation?*)

KATE Now when arrived the eleventh of May,
 As I have heard old Manxmen say,
 Each horse was snugly stall'd,
 And cows from off the grassy plain,
 Ere Sol had kiss'd the western main,
 Were promptly homewards call'd...

Mm! Few horses and cows round here anymore! (*She reads on in silence for a few seconds until...*)

Swains in homely glee? Fiendish ire? Well you're hardly Mr Tennyson I'm afraid, Mr William Kenish, and though May time in Maughold may once have had its charms- not to mention its witches, I'd rather look out of the window to see what May Eve 1866 in Douglas brings.

(*She yawns and closes book, leaving it on table, then gets up, moves towards centre stage to stand at an imagined window. Spotlight on Kate. She speaks aloud to herself while looking out.*)

KATE Lights flickering out on the Headland! Bonfires- so many bonfires! Who would have thought it after all these years? It's nearly May already! Months and years crowd in so thick upon each other. May Eve, May Day...those strange and lovely things out there are coming from another world now, another place.

The lights on the hill look so pretty from here, the shapes and shadows of the smoke rising and falling. If I could see further perhaps there would be furtive figures up there on the skyline. Leaping over small flames to put an end to winter. And maybe more things it's best not to see or think of, best done out of sight. (*She pauses and smiles slightly.*) Goodness, Kate Corrin, what are you thinking and you a respectable married woman? There'll be ones making a fuss tomorrow. There always are.

(*Turning to a slightly different viewing point.*) There's such a good view from this house. And the sea from the top of the road. Soon there will be far more houses all pushing up around us, tall houses, nicely-appointed - so says Paul, he should know. But will I still see the far hill and the night clouds flocking to rest ragged on the top? (*Wistfully*). Maybe, from up the top of the house, Alice's room perhaps. (*Pause*). The whole Island is changing. It must. I suppose I must too. (*Pause*). Perhaps I should start by **not** talking to myself. A bad habit, so my husband says, but who else is there to talk to?

(*Spotlight on Kate fades. She moves towards the bureau at the back of the stage, pauses as if to look for something and then exits.*)

(*Full lights go up on Paul Corrin, her husband, who enters and paces angrily around the parlour.*)

PAUL Alice, Alice! Where is the girl? The point of employing servants in this house is beyond me.

ALICE (*from off-stage*). Yes, I'll be with you soon Mr Corrin. I'm sorry. (*She rushes in and makes to shut the windows.*)

PAUL There you are at last. I've told you to the shut those windows, all of them and the bedrooms, and keep them shut. All this infernal smoke. What's the matter with everyone? As if we're not sitting up here with that appalling stink from the quayside drifting up three hundred and sixty-five days a year and now the fools are lighting fires just about everywhere, like it's going to be cold. Cold, cold, and nearly May? Ridiculous!

(KATE *enters and sits at table, soon busy with embroidery.*)

KATE Good evening husband. (*To Alice*). Thank you for doing that Alice. The smoke is disturbing to Mr Corrin and myself.

PAUL It is. Keep the windows shut! (*He starts to pick up Kate's book from the table, puts it down shaking his head and roots impatiently around in some papers, looking for something.*)

ALICE That's no problem Mrs Corrin. Not so fond of that ole smoke meself. I'll be away off to check on those bedrooms right away.

KATE Yes, thank you Alice.

(*Alice exits.*)

PAUL Where are they Kate? They are not where I left them.

KATE What is it you've lost Paul?

PAUL The plans of course, for the new terrace. I was only explaining them to you yesterday. They are not *lost!* Someone has *removed* them. It will either be you or Alice. I hardly think Mrs Craine would ever venture out from her kitchen.

KATE Yes, I remember. I'm sorry Paul. Perhaps I put them in the bureau - for safety. Alice was going to dust. (*She goes to the bureau and produces some large documents, laying them on the table.*) These are they are they not?

PAUL (*grabbing them from her impatiently.*) Yes... and please leave my work alone in future. If I *wanted* you to take on the role of assistant maidservant in this house, I would have employed you as such. But you are my wife and I need you to ...well, think a little more. Look, oh, I'm sorry I'm being harsh my dear, but this is our future you understand? *Our* future, *our* prosperity? Indulge me! (*He spreads out what appears to be a large sheet of architectural plans on the table. Kate looks over his shoulder.*) Now here is where the present so-called Boarding School for Young Ladies is, on the corner- that'll have to go - poor repair, and the land behind here is what I have in my sights. I think we can safely say Robinson will sell if the price is right but there'll be some work to persuade him. (*Alice enters. She speaks from the doorway, proffering a visiting card towards Kate.*)

ALICE Excuse me but will I be showin' the visitors through now?
(*Kate takes the card and reads it while Alice waits for a response.*)

PAUL *(to Kate)*. Visitors? At this hour? Are they expected? Ah yes, I remember. Of course. Yes Alice, make haste; show them in! *(He coughs.)* This smoke- I swear it seeks you out. I have quite the cough now. *(To Alice who is looking at him, slightly concerned.)* Go on girl, bring them in! *(Alice leaves.)*

(to Kate). Who is to disturb our peace now Kate? Remind me? *(He closes the papers with great care and puts them back in the bureau.)*

KATE It's a Mr and Mrs Ellis Stephenson, Paul. The husband is a distant business acquaintance of yours I believe. It is, apparently, urgent, this visit, hence the late hour.

PAUL Stephenson? Let me think- the timber merchant? Odd chap? Said to have an unusually forth-right wife. Has his eye on a nice plot up Glencrutchery way. A rather pleasant development. Contacts Kate! We will cultivate them. We must be particularly charming my dear.

KATE Of course.

ALICE *(From doorway, introducing the visitors.)* Mr and Mrs Stephen Ellison

LOUISA *(bustling in.)* Ellis Stephenson, Ellis Stephenson!

KATE Please do come in Mrs Stephenson, Mr Stephenson.

(Ellis follows his wife in, bowing awkwardly; he carries a briefcase. Alice follows behind them both.)

ALICE *(flustered)*. Oh pardon me Ma'am; I got a bit muddled with yer names. This is Mr and Mrs *(slowly)* Ellis Stephenson.

ELLIS *(quietly to Alice)*. Quite so, quite so. Don't concern yourself young woman. You would not be the first.

(Alice nods and exits, rolling her eyes, none too pleased. Paul looks mortified. Kate smiles.)

(Louisa Stephenson scowls, looking around the room as if searching for hidden audiences. Ellis is apparently more timid or just resigned to being spoken over. He is ill at ease and fidgets with his brief-case and pocket-watch throughout the scene.)

PAUL Yes of course, do come in and sincere apologies for the tardiness of our maid. From the country you know, Sulby way.

ELLIS *(vaguely but pleasantly)*. Oh yes...quite so. Sulby? Very erm... distant. Don't mention it. *(He shakes hands with Paul.)* Er! Ellis Stephenson and Mrs Ellis Stephenson here, as er... I feel we now have established. How do you do? Pleased to make your acquaintance.

KATE And we're pleased to meet you both.

LOUISA *(stepping forward to take control. She gives them both a brisk nod.)* Delighted I'm sure on all counts. Now, let us not beat about the bush. We come to you on a mission. Isn't that so Mr Stephenson?

ELLIS *(awkwardly, fiddling in his briefcase.)* Yes, indeed, I believe so.

KATE I am intrigued. In that case you *really* must sit down and take tea with us.

PAUL *(to Ellis)* ...or perhaps something stronger?

LOUISA I *won't* take tea. It is an addictive substance and I like to keep myself clean and focussed. As does Mr Stephenson, of course.

ELLIS *(settling himself awkwardly into the low chair besides the card table, distracted, apparently, by the briefcase.)* Yes... yes... focussed. *(To Paul)* Er... no thank you old chap.

PAUL Very good of course, as you wish. *(Paul begins to cough.)* Do excuse me. The weather appears to have taken a turn for the worse.

LOUISA Weather? You must know as well as I do that this is *not* weather. This is smoke! This is burning... this is devilry...which is my point!

PAUL *(still coughing though it is easing)*. I see! *(He does not!)*

ELLIS Ssh, sh, go slow, my dear!

LOUISA *(to Ellis)* I will not be silenced Mr Stephenson. The matter before us is an urgent one as Mr Corrin has just reminded us. *(To Paul)* I trust you are recovered?

PAUL Thank you. I'm fine now. *(Paul, Kate and Louisa draw up chairs round the table. Ellis remains seated some distance away, from where he fidgets repeatedly.)*

ELLIS *(to himself)*. Good show, good show. Never without a pocket handkerchief that's what I say! Now where the devil... *(He starts to root through his pockets again, distracted.)*

LOUISA *(to Kate)*. Mrs Corrin my dear, I do not believe we have met but I have been advised of your most excellent demeanour and charity towards the less-fortunate and the foolish in our society.

KATE Thank you. You are too generous.

LOUISA Not at all. And you, Mr Corrin, are also most well-regarded. An up-and-coming citizen of our little town. A man of vision I am informed

PAUL You flatter me. But yes, I have my connections, and yes, I do have, well... visions for this town, if you like. A new town for new times.

LOUISA Then we have common interests Mr Corrin. You may not be aware that I am a Writer of Some Influence?

KATE Really, how interesting. If I might ask, what do you write Mrs Stephenson? Perhaps some poetry?

LOUISA Poetry is lies; I write the truth of what I see. However, as a member of the weaker sex naturally, I am forced to hide myself within a 'nom de plume'.

PAUL *(amused in spite of himself)*. Fascinating. Do tell.

ELLIS (*aside*). Oh she will, she will!

LOUISA To you alone I will reveal that I am none other than ‘Very Concerned of Upper Douglas’, that most regular correspondent in the Mona’s Herald. (*Laughs*) I have you there!

PAUL Indeed, the radical rag. Yes, I admit, you *do* have me there. We progressives must remain incognito, eh? I have read your most regular correspondence with an eagle eye, (*to Ellis*) though I confess I had no idea that your wife, Mr Stephenson, was the power behind that particular pen.

ELLIS (*muttering*). She certainly has a way with words. (*A stern look from Louisa conveys the unspoken message that he is in the wrong place and he moves to join the company around the table.*)

LOUISA. And Mr Corrin, I believe *you* to be the very gentleman writing under the name of ‘An Observer’. Am I correct?

PAUL Actually, yes, you are. You’ve found me out! One does one’s best in the name of progress. The Times, the Herald, foot in both camps.

LOUISA May I say your proposals for the movement of the outdoor markets indoors were most interesting?

PAUL Thank you. I wish more thought so. These people are most reluctant to modernise. Perfectly good hall, purpose-built, why I had a hand in the design myself. But no! There they all are, outside in all weathers, filth, dirt. One might almost think they *like* it out there.

LOUISA Quite! And meanwhile, disease is rife, alcohol fuels fists and children run wild and ignorant of the Lord. You yourself, as a gentleman with your contacts in the building profession can hardly be indifferent to the living conditions of the feckless and profane living hardly two streets away from this very house. I have seen such vice in England and now I see it here.

PAUL Indeed. So how might me and my dear wife be of assistance Mrs Stephenson?

LOUISA In a word sir, we fight! Myself and a few of the more concerned citizens fearful for the morality of this town must ready for the battle!

ELLIS (*muttering*). Oh dear!

PAUL The battle?

LOUISA Desperate times Mr Corrin, desperate times! Tonight, this *very* night, young men and women of the lower sort will, unchaperoned, take to the hills for this so-called burning out of witches. Some sort of mass license to misbehaviour; wrong-headed, morally dangerous and contrary to scripture. A superstitious rite, redolent of the dark and diabolical worship of the Druids. We claim to be God-fearing people Mr Corrin; this must be stopped.

PAUL I share your concerns; such behaviours hardly attract the better class of person to come to live amongst us, though I am at a loss how one might proceed. Really, I think these sort of things might best be left to those of the clerical persuasion.

LOUISA Oh do excuse me, but what fiddlesticks! Many are too fearful to fight this battle but I am not! True leadership is what is required and if a man cannot be trusted then it is to the women we must look. What do you say Mrs Corrin?

KATE Well, certainly there are some...

PAUL Are we *mere* gentlemen to be excused then, to leave you ladies to your most pressing debate? Mr Stephenson and myself may have some er... practical business concerns of mutual interest. (*He gets up to leave and gestures to Ellis to follow.*)

ELLIS (*getting up*). Don't mind if I do old chap, leave the ladies yes, yes... (*aside to Paul*). Do you know *timber* at all? Large delivery on next week's Packet...might you be...

LOUISA Sit down Ellis, do! (*He does so and starts to look at his watch as if it might be broken.*)

KATE Paul, I do think you should stay if Mrs Stephenson has such an important message to convey.

(*Paul sits down again, frowning.*)

LOUISA Important message ? Certainly! Mr Corrin; have you considered how few of the lower classes can actually read your worthy disputations in the local newspapers! Neither can they read my poor efforts. But they have *ears* and may be roused to rationality and true religion yet! Education is all! And who will be the educators, that is the thing? Mr Stephenson, is that not the thing?

ELLIS The thing...yes, education, quite the thing.

LOUISA Me and my committee have called a meeting for the Reformation of the Moral Character of the Manx Peasantry and the Abolition of Superstitious Practices. What do you think of the title Mrs Corrin? It does cover the issues in a nutshell I feel.

KATE Yes, I think people will understand to what you refer.

ELLIS (*to himself*). RMCMPASP... a nutshell?

PAUL (*getting up*). And when can we look forward to this meeting- a public one, I presume?

LOUISA (*Getting up as if to leave*).

The inaugural meeting will be a week on Tuesday at the Wellington Hall. Accommodation for several hundred - standing. I will be addressing it, naturally, and am looking for your support. Mr Corrin, you bear a Manx name. You may have some influence among your work force, contacts, and of course, there will be the issue of financing the campaign. I am sure you would be more than willing to help us along in that direction. And you, Mrs Corrin, perhaps you might consider joining us?

(*Kate stands up*).

KATE I will consider what you say Mrs Stephenson, and thank you, Alice will show you out.

LOUISA Thank you. I leave you some information and me and my committee look forward to hearing from you very soon. The information please, Mr Stephenson!

ELLIS Yes, yes, the briefcase. I have it somewhere. Ah, here we are now. A pleasant evening. (*He opens case and hands over some short pamphlets to his wife who slams them down on the table triumphantly!*)

LOUISA Please read and take note. Thank you and I bid you both good evening!

(*Louisa exits first, leaving a few leaflets on the table.*)

ELLIS (*following behind her, muttering as he leaves*). Yes, a pleasant evening... (*To Paul*). And timber, excellent source, think on...

(*Paul and Kate sit back at the table.*)

KATE Goodness! (*She resumes her embroidery.*)

PAUL (*perusing leaflet in a half-interested way*). Damn the woman. She's after money of course! Why can't old Stephenson keep her quiet? No backbone.

KATE She's certainly a most unusual lady to be addressing a meeting like that. And brave I suppose, although no care for how she might be regarded.

PAUL Mm! Well, *you* wouldn't do that, would you Kate? Stand up and say what you really think. And thank goodness. You see, the way *you* are, Kate, as my wife, *what* you are affects how I am perceived in society. How *we* are perceived. Families, reputation...they matter Kate.

KATE You could have married better Paul.

PAUL Well of course, but damn it Kate, it was you I wanted. Your family is well-regarded here, not wealthy admittedly, but of long-standing and respectable. And as you know, my own father made a good name for himself in Liverpool over the years. I always intended to follow in his footsteps, but *here* back on his native soil with you by my side; rational, reasonable, forward-looking. I only ask *you* move along those same paths with me. I am not always convinced we share that particular vision.

KATE I've never opposed you in what you do. And I would never make a show of you Paul, you know that.

PAUL No! You're loyal and I'm irritable this evening. Ignore me. (*He pauses to read further from leaflet.*) Let's see what our Writer of Some Influence has to say. (*He flicks open a page and reads aloud.*) Fires of Baal? What the heck? Where have these people come from? Do you know Kate, one can hardly believe that that idiot Stephenson is actually running a successful import business. But he is! Useful contacts at the bank obviously. And that wife is nothing but a harridan- *and* worse, a religious enthusiast. When these people get God, they've always got to shout about it. Leave the muscular Christianity to those of us with muscles I say. (*He pauses.*) Still I might consider a donation- depends who's backing her. If I support them, I trust that fool Stephenson will remember me for it.

KATE I trust he will. (*smiling to herself*). Now I must resume the embroidery and consider how to arrange a prior engagement a week on Tuesday.

PAUL Yes - you do that Kate, clever girl. What's this? (*reading again*). Crosses tied to the tails of cows? How ridiculous! It *is* ridiculous Kate. Tell me *you* think it's ridiculous, please.

KATE Maybe... but surely harmless.

PAUL To *you* maybe, my dear. I daresay you know more of these things being raised in this island. Maybe, I won't ask, you once indulged in a little bit of this 'primrose magic' yourself. But you do not understand the modern world, Kate. You read too much poetry. You must ensure it does not cloud your judgement.

KATE (*still contemplating the idea of primroses*). Primrose magic- that sounds lovely Paul. Yellow flowers to keep off the fairies, they were saying. Yes, we all thought that would help. Your family too, I suppose, before they left for England. Harmless enough.

PAUL Well don't get any ideas. I do not want rotting weeds strewn on my doorstep or bits of twig up there catching cobwebs. Tell Alice- just in case she imagines I'm going blind in my old age. No primroses. No mess! No criss, cross... crish...

KATE crish cuirns?

PAUL Those yes. This is a foolish conversation. I have a letter to write. The bank. We will talk later. (*He leaves, putting leaflet on table. Kate gathers her embroidery and exits as lights go down.*)

SCENE 2

SCENE. *Early evening, two weeks later at the Wellington Hall, Douglas. Louisa is about to address a large public meeting.*

(MUSIC- Christ who sits on Zion's Hill or similar suitable campaign music of the era. As music fades out, spotlight goes up, first on an alarmed-looking Ellis, quickly removed by Louisa. During this meeting, from time to time there is heckling from off-stage.)

LOUISA Ladies and gentlemen and all right-thinking people of Douglas, we thank you for your appearance at our public meeting held here this evening.

(Voices of Hecklers from off-stage calling 'Sit down! Let the gentlemen speak! Shameful!' etc.)

LOUISA No, I will not sit down and I will not be silenced. The gentlemen will have their turn. Again, I thank you all for your attendance here tonight. So gratifying to see so many. Perhaps we may have some more space towards the back?

(Shouts of 'Get on with it!' etc.)

So why do we meet here tonight? The presence of some respectful gentleman of the cloth here on the platform behind me, also some gentlemen from amongst our enlightened business community, may indicate to you the general importance of this gathering, which is, ladies and gentlemen... *(Shouts of 'No ladies here!' Guffaws from off-stage. Louisa pauses but remains in control.)*

LOUISA ... which is, ladies and gentlemen, for the launch of a new movement; the Reformation of the Moral Character of the Manx Peasantry and the Abolition of Superstitious Practices, the RMCMPASP in short. *(Further laughs, cheers and boos from off-stage. Louisa waits for near silence which comes eventually.)*

Consider! We live in times of great uncertainty, change. We must hold fast to what we know is *good*. But not all that we know *is* good. Not all that we know comes from God.

We are all too aware that on this Island, paganism is rife. The same unlettered country-man who bows his head before the Lord on Sunday, will cower before the evil eye on Monday. You know of what I speak. *(Slowly with emphasis)*. Only two weeks previously, on the very eve of May we all witnessed the spectacle of the hills near our very homes rising up in flames high enough to threaten the very heavens themselves. Our ears were sorely pained by the devilish cries of primitive instruments, horns, drums, a very cacophony! Are these the actions of a civilised race? I say they are not!

I have worse news for you, ladies and gentlemen. Barely credible I concede in this day and age. We have received reports from the heart of distant Andreas, of individuals engaged in horrible animal sacrifice! Animal sacrifice! To what? To whom? Are we the savages of Borneo? *(Shouts of No from off-stage.)* I say that we are not, and we must take our place in the world as good, sober, responsible and Christian citizens of this small outpost of the British Empire. Join us and we will by the sweat of our brows wipe superstition from the land! Let the battle commence! God save the Queen!

(Cheers and cries of God save the Queen from off stage. Campaign music plays as spotlight on Louisa dims and she exits. Dim background light on parlour as Alice sets out the table for Scene 3.)

SCENE 3

SCENE. *Later on the same evening in the Corrin household. Kate is at the table with her embroidery. Paul's top hat is to one side of the table and a walking cane is also left lying out on the table. The other walking cane is still in its stand. Paul has also left an account book out.*

(Kate yawns and puts down her embroidery as Alice enters.)

ALICE *(from door)*. Is there anything else you require me to do Mrs Corrin?

KATE No I don't think so. Mr Corrin is attending his campaign meeting tonight. He may be late. Come and sit yourself down Alice. Take a rest. You must be worn out.

ALICE Thank you Ma'am.

(Alice enters and pulls up chair.)

KATE Ah, but you never stop. You have so much go about you.

ALICE Well a great house like this does not clane itself.

KATE Mr Corrin is always very particular.

ALICE He is indeed.

KATE Mr Corrin likes to keep a well-run house. It could not be done without you Alice. And Mrs Craine of course.

ALICE Thank you Ma'am. I hope my work is to the satisfaction of the both of you.

KATE Yes very much, thank you, but life cannot, should not be all work.

ALICE True but... I shouldn't say perhaps, there are many of us who have no choice Ma'am.

KATE Of course- I like your honesty Alice, although I should really inform you that Mr Corrin does sometimes find it a trifle, erm... impertinent. I've told him it's because you're young, but you should take care with maintaining the boundaries.

ALICE *(sulkily)*. Boundaries is it? I'm sorry to be *(hesitating to pronounce this properly)* imper...tinent. No offence to yourself or Mr Corrin intended. Perhaps I should return to the kitchen now?

KATE No, don't do that please. I'd rather you stayed here. The house is quiet without my husband and Mrs Craine has gone home.

ALICE As you wish Ma'am. *(She stares ahead, still annoyed. There is an awkward silence.)*

KATE *(trying to change subject)*. Do you read Alice?

ALICE No Ma'am. Not so much.

KATE *Can you read?*

ALICE (*curtly*). What I *need* to, Ma'am.

KATE Oh! (*pause*). It can be very... *freeing*...reading .

ALICE I daresay.

KATE It helps you think of things, imagine things, get ideas; perhaps even find who you really are.

ALICE I *know* exactly who I am Ma'am. Alice Corlett, aged twenty, native of the village of Sulby, maidservant. That's all.

KATE You are more than that surely? You must have ideas, dreams, plans? Even at work, your mind can be somewhere else perhaps? For example, I don't know... when scrubbing the scullery or...what do you actually *think* of when you're carrying the coal upstairs?

ALICE (*coldly*). If you want the truth Ma'am, I think I'd rather *not* be carrying it up at all; it's heavy awful and it's a great big lump of a bucket we have, and there's a hole on its way. Coal dust gets just about everywhere and I'm not thankful at all to that big cuss of a fella who invented a staircase.

KATE Mm. No. Sorry. That was a foolish thing for me to say. Perhaps one day...

ALICE There's no stairs in the house I come from I can tell you. And not much of what you'd call rooms either.

KATE This house will have seemed very different to you when you first came.

ALICE (*wanting to talk in spite of herself*). It was. I was lookin' for all the people who might be livin' in it, and I found only the two of you. Our Mary's ones are livin' nine of them to two rooms in Barrack Street.

KATE Well then, I'm very glad you're here Alice. I really am. (*She pauses.*)
If I might be so bold, and not myself impertinent, might I ask you are you still walking out with the young man, Alfie, whatever his...?

ALICE (*starting to laugh*). Oh him? I am not Mrs Corrin. We were goin' strong that's true but well, he can't say hey nor haw for himsel' so I'm set on better.

KATE Oh I'm sorry.

ALICE Don't be Mrs Corrin. He was never up to much. Awful lumpy with a significant sort of mother at him. Besides there's another I'll be seeing Sunday.

KATE Quick work! I hope that works out for you Alice. A nice husband in time maybe?

ALICE Ah no, traa dy liooar Ma'am.

KATE Yes...time enough. Indeed, a chance to start again. Now summer's here.
(*She pauses, reflecting, but as Alice starts to get up to leave, Kate resumes the conversation and Alice sits down again.*)

KATE (*animated*) I wonder did you hear the news? One of those fires got out of hand a week or two ago on May Eve. Up over at Callow's place. The papers are full of it.

ALICE Aye. I heard there was a bit of a musthaa up there; they were sayin' the ole fella got his breeches near burnt off him and his backside all hangin' out and some were sayin' he was hoppin' and cursin' fit to waken the dead but it was him that started it anyway, the fool.

KATE (*laughing in spite of herself*). I doubt those particular details made it into the newspaper somehow. People like to exaggerate. I wonder what it's all about really? All this burning?

ALICE I don't know at all. Clearin' the ground, startin' again? No offence Ma'am but I'm thinking with this burnin' and firin' an' all; well everyone *needs* to be clearin' the place out from time to time. Like meself with the spring clanin'; or even Mr Corrin and his gran' new developments. All starts from clearing the lan', till the next time. I suppose there's not much difference.

KATE That's very profound of you. Although I hope Mr Corrin's legacy will last a long time yet.

ALICE (*warming to her subject and not particularly interested in Mr Corrin's legacy*). As I see it, there's winter and there's summer- and they just keep comin' back, the same old pattern and you can't have one without the other.

KATE Probably not.

(*She gets up and walks towards front stage, reminiscing.*) You're too young to remember this, but I remember when I was very small seeing the fight between Summer and Winter. But it wasn't really a fight. A sort of procession.

ALICE Me mother said it was a great thing down in Castletown, May Day. Even the quality was in. And there was this big man, some old Deemster, doffin' his hat at the Queen, terrible serious. More notice taken of him than the Queen herself!

KATE I hoped one day I'd have been picked for the Maceboard- that's what they were calling the little girls all dressed up with fancy flowers following the Queen of May. I hoped that I'd get a pretty ribbon or some such. But no! And I remember there on the other side was old Winter all drab as you like. Summer won the battle of course.

ALICE And so she should. Always till winter comes grabbin' at her toes again, trippin' her up.

KATE And whose side would you be on Alice? Winter or summer?

ALICE Summer of course- and all those pretty dresses at her most like.

KATE Winter's not all bad though. Stories round the fire. The look of the hills on a clear day just after snow.

ALICE And the rumble in your stomach when there's nothin' much to fill it.

KATE (*returning to sit at the table with Alice.*) True. I *do* remember that, Alice. A little. From earlier. Things have turned out very differently for us. Chance, I suppose. But there are things from the old life I miss. The way of talking easy perhaps.

ALICE It's a difficult thing Ma'am, talkin' easy, between ourselves.

KATE Inappropriate most would say. Mr Corrin would certainly say so.

ALICE Well he's not here tonight, is he?

KATE No. He's out, fighting for our future. I feel left behind sometimes. You know it can be lonely in my position too, Alice. Time goes on; nothing much changes for me.

ALICE Nothin' changes! How can you be sayin' that and you now in this lovely big house with time for well... doin' whatever you fancy... pardon me Ma'am.

KATE That's unfair Alice.

ALICE I'm sorry Ma'am. I spoke out of turn.

KATE Yes, you did. Even so, what I intended to say was...well when I married, I became someone else. And that was it.

ALICE Need it be like that though? I wouldn't know of course but I'm sure that that Mrs Stephenson woman didn't change *one little bit* when she got married...unfortunately!

KATE Her husband might have done though! But in a way I admire her; she has spirit. She doesn't let things rest.

ALICE Aye, she's got *go* alright! There's ones in like that. And other ones that's stoppin' right where the good Lord put them and no shiftin'. Like me grandmother. Now *nothin'* changes for that one, least not in her head, though her legs are not so good as they were. Never been out of Sulby and not for startin' now.

KATE There are a few like that still.

ALICE She'd say what are people *doin'*, goin' changin' things for? Tonight is the **rale** May Eve she's tellin' me; she doesn't hold with ones messin' up the calendar, tellin' you what to do, and when to do it. Same with the Christmas- she'll be keepin' it in January till her dyin' day

KATE (*after pause*). Goodness! So tonight's the *real* May Eve then?

ALICE That's what the ole granny is sayin'. She'd be up out there on the mountain herself if she wasn't so gone in age. Lookin' for divilment most like. But she'd need take care she wasn't took for an ole buitch herself.

KATE Indeed she would! (*pauses*). So if she's right about dates, tonight, the eleventh of May, is the *true* May Eve? So, tomorrow is the *true* May Day? Well, then we are surely still in a sort of in-between time, that's neither one thing or the other? That's strange...dangerous. Almost like you're crossing a river between two parishes and you don't yet know the side you're on.

ALICE I suppose so. Especially if you fall in!

KATE (*ignoring her and continuing*). I wonder what such a time as that might be like? I'm not really talking about the river of course, but the space between the two banks I suppose.

ALICE Pardon me Ma'am but I'm not sure I'm really understandin' what you're sayin'.

KATE Paul- er, Mr Corrin, says that to me often. But Alice, just think, if there was a time when one might do what one likes, say what one likes, be what one likes, surely you would embrace it? You could be free to choose; you might be Summer or Winter...

ALICE old or young...

KATE God or the Devil...

ALICE servant or missus...

KATE a man or a woman?

(She notices the top hat and gets an idea.) A man! I wonder what it's like to be someone else?

ALICE Ma'am?

(To Alice's amazement, Kate suddenly removes the hat from the table, briefly places it above her head then replaces it. She then sees the walking cane on the table, lifts it and stands up, brandishing it in mock challenge of Alice, in imitation of the stagey excesses of Victorian melodrama. Alice, alarmed at first, gradually realizes that this is game she is supposed to play.)

KATE *(in deep voice)*. I am Winter's champion. I challenge you to a fight. Do you accept?

ALICE *(laughing awkwardly while attempting a refined voice.)* I do Ma'am, but Mr Corrin may not think much of your usin' his hat.

(She begins to stand to face Kate.)

KATE Choose your weapon Alice. You're young and summer's champion. En garde!

ALICE Ma'am?

(KATE gestures towards the other walking cane which is in the umbrella stand just behind Alice. Alice laughing, but still incredulous, picks it up and a short, very ritualized 'sword' fight ensues.)

KATE Take that Madame!

ALICE I will *not* sir!

KATE Then do your worst!

ALICE I will!

KATE Halt! This will not do; the sides are too well-matched. I declare a tug of war instead. Here take hold of this Alice.

(Alice puts down her cane and takes the other end of Kate's)

Pull, pull! There we are, perfectly matched. As strong as each other.

(loudly). I am Winter! I will not let you go!

ALICE *(shouting louder)*. You must. I am the Summer! Let the Summer in!

(They spin each other round, repeating their cries until they collapse laughing onto the chairs, accidentally knocking objects onto the floor, including the hat.)

ALICE *(After a pause to get her breath, she looks round and sees the chaos.)* Jee bannee mee! We are in an awful jarood here. My mother would call this making a show of yourself.

KATE Mine too. I don't know what came over me... us! *(They get up and sort out the chairs, the hat, the other displaced objects and themselves.)*

ALICE I had better put that hat back where it was *(She looks at hat carefully before replacing it.)* Good! No jeeill done there at all.

(Kate and Alice stare at the table for a few seconds, regaining their breath, then look at each other. Kate feels particularly awkward.)

ALICE It's alright you know, Ma'am. Just ommijagh- foolishness. *(pausing before changing subject)* Did you ever really get to dress up and go round with the... Maceboard... are they calling it?

KATE Heavens no, too young. I was just watching. Just once. My mother held me up on her shoulders. It didn't feel wicked at all - just happy. Just like a play it was. A true play.

(PAUL's voice is heard from off-stage.)

PAUL Hello! Hello! Are you in here Kate? Where's Alice?

ALICE *(to Kate)*. I'm away off then. I enjoyed our er...play. Mrs Corrin. There'll be no word out of me, don't you worry at all. And thank you.

KATE Till next year then and the in-between times. *(She nods then gestures silence.)*

(Alice leaves. Kate checks Paul's accounting book is in order on the table, looking up as Paul enters the room.)

PAUL *(flustered)*. That Stephenson woman is insufferable. But annoyingly, she's right in a way. If she could only direct her jabbering energies to the real issues of this town, we'd be up there with well, Ipswich or somewhere. *(He sits down.)* Ah, there's the hat I was looking for. Took the other one.

KATE Good. I'm glad. Was Mrs Stephenson the only speaker?

PAUL Certainly not, though probably the loudest. Actually, some quite sensible chaps there too, as long as you leave religion out of it. Stephenson himself too; he *can* speak by the way...we were talking afterwards. We must *build* you know Kate. A model of urban development we'd be.

(He pauses waiting for Kate to agree but she looks down, saying nothing.)

No stinking slums, no grasping natives, fewer lawyers, less crime. Proper English too; you would hear that spoken. Do you know that outside of this town, a third of the population, one third, cannot speak English properly? Well of course you know. You probably can jabber away with the rest of

them with their *butchering* and their *balding*! But I have had it up to here with fairies and witches, tonight! As for sacrifices, biblical or otherwise, I have had my fill! I live in the real world. No more public meetings for me. I went. She has her donation. I consider my civic duty done.

KATE It's been a long evening for you. You look tired dear. Did she make you stand on the stage?

PAUL No! My piety is obviously suspect. But we had the Revd. So and So and Minister Such and Such with their platitudes and warnings. We'll all go up in the next big flame apparently! Unless we repent. I suspect we'll go up in flames next May Eve anyway unless the fire service improves.

KATE (*smiling*). Surely not?

PAUL Oh yes, we're all for it according to our dissenting brethren; they are much the worst.

KATE The Methodists? (*smiling to herself*). Oh yes; absolutely, the worst sort!

PAUL Are you laughing at me? I never know if you are or not.

KATE Laughing at you? Of course not! (*She gets up and moves over to the side of the room as if to look at curtains.*) Look! There are no dissenters lurking behind the curtains and the last time I looked, no witches either so you are quite safe! And our own fire has died down here nice and quiet. You've had a busy evening. Are you not going to ask me about mine?

PAUL Why? You were reading surely- as usual? Anything untoward in the annals of fairyland?

KATE No! Just a short conversation with Alice.

PAUL I see. Well I have some figures to reconcile now and I will probably be up half the night so do not wait up. (*He opens the account book.*) Someone has to bring the money in, think straight. (*He coughs.*) This cough is still troublesome. A whisky may do the trick.

KATE Very well. Good night, Paul.

PAUL Goodnight Kate.

(*Kate moves to stand by Paul who is looking down. She places her hand over his hand and moves as if to kiss him lightly on the cheek, but instead holds back. Lights slowly dim as Kate exits.*)

SONG *The Parting Glass* or *Arrane Oie Vie* is heard as Paul studies his accounts, still coughing slightly. During the course of the song he frowns, closes book, picks up hat and cane and leaves.

With lights dimmed, Alice enters and prepares the parlour for Scene 4, setting out a jar/ small vase of primroses on the card table and placing a basket containing sheep's wool and ash twigs beneath the main dining table. An accounting book is left prominent on the dining table.)

SCENE 4

SCENE May Eve 1868, two years later. It is early evening and still light at the start of the scene. Kate is at the dining table in the parlour. She is in mourning clothes.

KATE *(to herself)*. Poor Paul. It's been more than a year now, almost two. It's a pity he's not here to walk up the road and see how his square is developing, see how his dreams for Douglas are slowly coming to pass. Paving, railings, neat little gardens though there's not much growing in them yet. He saw the way the world was changing and had the sense to change with it I suppose. Not that it did him good. Well, he's gone now and I'm still left with these wretched books and ledgers. No more poetry books for me. My financial situation is apparently somewhat precarious. I'll have to let Alice go - there's a position at the Cowley household I believe. I'll miss her.

(Alice enters.)

ALICE Excuse me Ma'am.

(Kate gets up, pleased to see her.)

KATE You're still here? Come in. I thought you'd have gone out; be up there with the young people on the hills, jumping over fires, sounding the horn. *(gesturing to window)* Look at those flames- so beautiful.

(Alice joins her as they both stand at the window, looking out.)

ALICE Ah not me now Mrs Corrin. And yes, they are beautiful. But, I'm thinking of all the lil' creatures that will be homeless now and maybe worse.

KATE O Alice, I hope you don't think...

ALICE Oh no. I didn't mean that at all. It can't be helped Mrs Corrin. You've always been kind to me. I am glad that you are tryin' to get me a new position. How will you manage?

KATE I'll manage somehow thank you Alice. The house will be sold of course.

ALICE I was wonderin'... would it be. Well, I had a little minute to myself earlier and on the way to the bakers I passed a lovely patch of primroses and I picked them and I brought them back here. I thought they'd look well in that jug. I've put them on that table with it being nearly May and all. I hope you don't mind. Look.

(Alice goes to the card table and brings them from there to the main dining table. They both sit down.)

KATE No, of course not, they're lovely. All houses should have primroses. And lots of flowers. Spring flowers. Summer flowers. And yes, I think we should get some crosh cuirn about this place. I do not feel right without knowing it's there somehow. Is it too late do you think?

ALICE Agh, it's never too late! *(Taking out basket from under table.)* Here! Look what I've brought in the basket. There's cuirn and there's wool I took this morning from Caley's field. You know what to do. I'll help you.

KATE Yes I do know what to do, I'm a Ballaugh girl, though I'm a *long* time out of practice. *(They start to make crosh cuirns.)*

ALICE If that Mrs Ellison could see us now!

KATE *Stephenson!*

ALICE That's the one! It's good she can't. She doesn't know the half of it; bit clicky if you ask me. Always was, always will be. No wonder the husband took to drink...well that's the skeet.

KATE The poor woman! Bold though. Perhaps the world is changing.

ALICE It is that and maybe different to what you, me or anyone at all is thinkin'.

KATE Here, help me with this. *(They are quiet for a few seconds, tying up the cuirn.)*

ALICE Do you remember times we were talkin' about the Queen of the May? You were tellin' me how you would be sittin' up on your mother's shoulders watchin' the procession go past and you wantin' to be part of it?

KATE I remember. I can't imagine being that young now! Maybe Alice, one day you will have your own little girl to bring up into the world. You could show her wonders. We were never so fortunate as to have children.

ALICE I'm sorry about that. I'm sorry about Mr Corrin too. I hope I will have children, God willing, but I'm waiting first on a decent offer! But I've got a fella in mind.

KATE What's he like? Tall, dark and handsome?

ALICE No; short, stout and a terrible boil on his nose.

KATE *(laughing)*. He has not! Kind?

ALICE Oh yes. And quiet in his ways- no trouble. He'll do me fine will Dan. *(She pauses and hesitates before continuing.)* But yourself...oh Mrs Corrin, you're a young presentable woman still, if you'll pardon me sayin'. It's not going to be too late for you. It's May Eve. Get the luck in; start again. They'll be flockin' to your doorstep before the year is out.

KATE Oh Alice really. I hardy think so. The thought! The Revd. Cowley and his very wise sayings! Mr Houghton and his very loud voice...

ALICE Dan and his droopy moustache- the best in Ballaugh. *(They both laugh.)* *(Alice gestures for the cross cuirn.)* Here, if you're finished pass it up to me, will you? I'll fix it over the door.

KATE *(Kate passes it over to Alice who then moves to fix it above the door space.)* Well, it might not bring the good fellows in, but it should keep the bad ones out!

ALICE Ah that's *themselves* you're talking about, but, mortal men...that's differen'. *(moving back to sit at the table)*. But there's a way of findin' out about them too. If you *really* want to know who's for you.

KATE And you'll tell me, no doubt. (*Teasing.*) If it involves snails or salt cellars, I will leave you to it. But don't stay up too late! No doubt you will of course, be rising early to wash your face in the morning dew! It does wonders for the complexion I believe.

ALICE Deed there's nothing wrong with *my* face Mrs Corrin, that soap and water cannot cure.

KATE Nothing wrong at all. Goodnight Alice.

ALICE I'll lave you goodnight then Mrs Corrin. All will be well now, I'm sure of that.

KATE All will be well.

(*Alice leaves while Kate rises, takes the jar of primroses from the table, and returns to the window, spot-lit as in Scene 1. SONG sung either by Kate or recorded version of first verse of **The Curragh of Kildare**- ideally the Manx version in English, or similar.*)

The winter it has passed
And the summer's come at last
The small birds are singing in the trees
And their little hearts are glad
Ah, but mine is very sad
Since my true love is far away from me

KATE (*Looking out at audience, a slight smile on her face, wistful. She is still holding the jar of primroses but not looking at them yet.*) Look. The fierce little lights are dying down on the hill. The sun will come up and smoke drift off to sea. The winter is nearly past and with it, its cruelties, its cold. Burnt away to a stubble. Its secrets too are lost and the strange impulses of the heart. To what will we awake? (*Pauses and glances at the flowers before looking out again at audience.*) Will flowers spring up where the waiting ground lies empty? They will, they must. (*Lights go down gradually and curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN