

Skelliking Day

A short play by Joe Bergin

With apologies to J. M. Synge!

Characters

Timmy – 50s. A man weary travelling the roads

Maura – 50s. A widow woman.

Sean – Maura's son

Setting

South west Kerry, Ireland. 1910

Summary

Timmy has been travelling the roads for five years trying to escape his past and find answers to secure his future. He arrives at Maura's house and shares with her his fantastic story.

A small two room cottage. The main living area has a front door and a back door. There is a big open fireplace with two chairs beside it, a small table and a small single bed in the corner. On lights, the stage is empty. There is a gentle knocking on the door.

TIMMY: *(From off)* Is there anyone within?

Knocking again. After a while the door slowly opens and TIMMY pokes his head through the door.

God save all here.

He looks around.

Hello.

He moves to the centre of the room. The back door opens and MAURA enters. She gets a fright when she sees TIMMY

MAURA: Jesus, Mary and Joseph! You put the heart crossways in me. What are you doing in here?

TIMMY: I mean you no harm, lady of the house. I'm only looking to rest my feet.

MAURA: Even strangers are welcome here but tis good manners to knock before entering.

TIMMY: I did knock but heard no reply and the door was ajar so I thought it would be safe to come in.

SEAN enters.

SEAN: Does something ail you mother. I heard you scream. *(Seeing TIMMY)* Who is this?

TIMMY: I had no wish to frighten you or cause offence.

MAURA: Tis just a bit of a shock I had Sean. Walking in and finding a stranger in the house

SEAN: Why would you be coming into a house with no one inside? Is it trying to steal from us you are?

TIMMY: I told your mother that I knocked but received no reply /

SEAN: So you thought to walk in as if the place was yours.

TIMMY: I swear to you, I meant no harm.

SEAN: You can turn around now and walk out the way you came in.

TIMMY: I was told the people of Kerry took kindly to strangers. I was mistaken. I will be on my way.

MAURA: Go easy Sean. Sure tis just a traveller seeking rest. Can you not see the tiredness on him?

SEAN: Tis no excuse for entering without an invitation.

MAURA: Leave him Sean. You go about your work.

SEAN: I like it not that he would be here with you on your own.

MAURA: I can see he is a decent man looking for rest and a sup of tea to warm him from his journey. Leave us.

SEAN: Are you certain?

MAURA: To be sure I am. It can never be said that Maura Bean Ni Domnhaill ever refused kindness to a stranger in need.

SEAN: I'll not be far away if you need me.

MAURA: You needn't worry.

SEAN: I'll be back for the dinner so.

SEAN exits.

MAURA: Sit you down now next to the fire and warm your bones for tis a chilly day and no doubt.

TIMMY: You are most kind, woman of the house

MAURA: And what do they call you?

TIMMY: My name is Timothy Reilly but them that know me call me Timmy.

MAURA: My name is Maura. You'll have a cup of tea and some fresh soda bread off the griddle.

TIMMY: I won't lie but it was the smell of that bread that drew me to this house.

TIMMY stands awkwardly.

MAURA: In the name of God, will you sit down and take the weight off your feet.

He does while she pours a mug of tea and slices the bread.

Have you travelled far Timmy?

TIMMY: This day, I must have walked 15 miles. I spent last night in Cahirsiveen.

MAURA: You came across the mountains?

TIMMY: I did indeed. It was a difficult passage.

Maura gives him a slice of bread and a mug of tea.

MAURA: There's your bread and tea.

She watches him eat.

You're not from county Kerry, are you? I can't place your accent.

TIMMY: I was born and reared in North Mayo, near the village of Kilalla.

MAURA: Mayo? You're a long way from home.

TIMMY: Sure, I have no home anymore.

MAURA: How so?

TIMMY: I've travelled the roads these past five years.

MAURA: And what has you moving so much?

TIMMY: I was living with my father, he was an old man. Our house burned down and my father died in the fire. The house was destroyed.

MAURA: That's a terrible tragedy surely. What about your mother?

TIMMY: I hardly remember my mother. She died when I was only a boy. It was just me and my father.

MAURA: Did you not try rebuilding the house?

TIMMY: I thought about it but I didn't have the *gra* for it.

MAURA: Did your neighbours not help you?

TIMMY: I had good neighbours but you see I was cursed.

MAURA: Cursed?

TIMMY: I thought if I went away from that place, I'd leave the curse behind me.

MAURA: What manner of curse are you talking about?

TIMMY: Tis a long story.

MAURA: Sure we have loads of time. I like a good story and I never before met a person who was cursed.

TIMMY: There's not many that I have told this to and them that I have say that I'm mad.

MAURA: I will decide for myself.

TIMMY: You'll not believe me.

MAURA: There's more things on this earth than we can see with our eyes. Tell your story.

TIMMY: It began a year before the house was burned. My father borrowed money from a neighbour, an evil, contrary man that you never saw the like of. A man by the name of Danny Foley. My father agreed to pay him back with interest after a year but nothing would do Danny only to call every month looking for money. It drove my poor father to distraction.

MAURA: Your poor father!

TIMMY: My father was a good man, an honest man and would have payed his debts as promised.

MAURA: I'm sure he would.

TIMMY: You'll not believe me but the day after my father died, Danny came to me looking for the money.

MAURA: The day after? Oh, the wretch!

TIMMY: I would have paid it if I had it but with the house gone, I had nowhere to live and not a penny to my name. I told Danny that I'd have to move away.

MAURA: You could have stayed.

TIMMY: With my father gone, I had no wish to remain there. When Danny heard that he said "do you think you can walk away from your debts? You'll work on my farm for you'll not leave this place until the debt is cleared"

MAURA: A horrible man and your father just dead.

TIMMY: God forgive me but the anger rose up in me and I hit him. I'm not a fighting man but I couldn't help myself.

MAURA: Many would have done the same.

TIMMY: I didn't hurt him, just knocked him down. He got up and there was hate in his eyes. I never saw the like before or since. Then he put a curse on me. He told me that I was alone in the world and I would remain alone for I would never marry while the debt was unpaid.

MAURA: That was a strange thing to say.

TIMMY: The anger left me and I couldn't help but laugh at him. What did I care about that curse. I was never inclined to marry. I had lived for too long as a bachelor minding my father for a curse the like of that to annoy me.

MAURA: Tis easy for anyone to say a curse. Tis a lot harder for it to come true.

TIMMY: Danny had a dark side to him. It was said at night that he would consort with the fairy folk, the bad ones.

MAURA: That's a dangerous game.

TIMMY: He stayed away from me after that but I felt bad about the money owed.

MAURA: Surely to God, you didn't go to work on Danny's farm?

TIMMY: I did not. I got some work with another neighbour, a decent man. As soon as I'd get enough money, I'd pay off the debt and leave that place forever.

MAURA: You were doing the right thing.

TIMMY: Shortly after placing the curse, Danny died. God forgive me but I was glad to hear that news.

MAURA: Indeed, it would be hard to blame you for that. You were free of him.

TIMMY: That's what I thought but the night he died, his ghost appeared to me looking for the money. I thought it was a dream so I put it out of my head but every night since then he appears to me.

MAURA: A man like that wouldn't be let into heaven.

TIMMY: How can I pay a ghost? Danny died with no family so I can't even pay the money to them.

MAURA: That's a terrible state of affairs entirely.

TIMMY: That's why I've been always on the go, travelling. I thought I'd get away from him but that's my curse now. To be haunted til the day I die by the ghost of Danny Foley. I've been five years on the road but he's always somewhere over my shoulder and always with that black toothed grin on him.

MAURA: You poor craythur.

TIMMY: You believe me.

MAURA: I do surely. You don't deserve any of this.

TIMMY: I've always tried to live a good life.

MAURA: So you have to live with curse for the rest of your life.

TIMMY: I met an old wise woman in the county Clare three moons back and she told me that as Danny's curse was that I'd never marry as long as the debt wasn't paid, then maybe if I got married, that would break the curse.

MAURA: That might work surely.

TIMMY: That's why I'm here. She told me of the festival here at the Skelligs held the night before Lent begins where the women have to marry a man if he asks.

MAURA: Skelliging Day?

TIMMY: Aye, that's what she called it.

MAURA: I wouldn't mind that.

TIMMY: It doesn't happen?

MAURA: Sure it's only an excuse for the young lads and lassies to go wild before lent. A stranger asking one of the young wans around here to marry him tonight or any night would get themselves a right slap.

TIMMY: So all my travels have been for nothing? I don't know what I'll do now.

MAURA: You don't need Skelliging Day to get yourself a wife.

TIMMY: I've been travelling the roads so long, I'm never long enough in the one place to meet a woman.

MAURA: That's true

TIMMY: And what woman would take me on and I a tramp of the road?

MAURA: You might be surprised.

He gets up to leave.

TIMMY: No, I'll carry this curse to my grave which God willing won't be too long.

MAURA: You shouldn't be saying things like that.

TIMMY: I've taken too much of your time already Maura. I'd best be on my way.

He starts to leave.

God bless you and thank you for the tea and the bread.

MAURA: Unless ... you'd like to marry me.

TIMMY: You?

MAURA: Why not. I'm a widow now these fourteen years and Sean could do with some help around the farm.

TIMMY: But you don't know me.

MAURA: A few minutes ago you were talkin about forcing a young wan to marry you. I'm offering.

TIMMY: But /

MAURA: I think I know more about you than anyone else in Ireland.

TIMMY: Aye. There's not many that I've told my story to.

MAURA: You seem like a nice man, a good man who tried to do right. A man who's had enough bad luck in his life.

TIMMY: I have surely.

MAURA: You tell a good story and I would like some company around the place. Sean is always out and about. It can get fierce lonely.

TIMMY: What would Sean make of all this?

MAURA: Sean will do as I bid and he'll have no worries about you taking his fortune, I've already signed the cottage and land over to him. It's all his.

TIMMY: And your neighbours?

MAURA: Tis no business of theirs and no concern to me whether they like it or not.

TIMMY: I told you I was never inclined to marry.

MAURA: Do you want to break the curse or not?

TIMMY: I surely do but ... I am not wise in the ways of women.

MAURA: You have never laid with a woman?

TIMMY: God help me, I have not.

MAURA: The offer is there Timmy. We can be married in name and you'll know soon enough if the curse is broken. In time perhaps, we will be married in nature.

TIMMY: It's a tempting offer.

MAURA: What choice do you have? You can wander the roads of Ireland until the feet drop off you or you can rest up here in comfort and see your days out in peace. All I ask is for a bit of work in return.

TIMMY: You would do this for me? You're a good woman Maura. Indeed I think fate led me here.

MAURA: We'll get married and banish Danny Foley out of your life forever.

TIMMY: We will so.

MAURA: Tomorrow is the first day of Lent. I'll have a word with the priest and see will he marry us during lent.

TIMMY: And if he doesn't agree?

MAURA: After five years, another forty days won't seem so bad.

TIMMY: You're a good woman Maura.

MAURA: Take off your boots there and warm them by the fire. I'll make you a hot sup of tea.

He does so while she makes the tea. Lights fade.

END OF PLAY