



PLAY-SCRIPT

*Prison Notebooks based on the Civil War Journals
of Dorothy Macardle*

A *DMAPP PRODUCTION

Devised by Sharon Mc Ardle and Declan Gorman

Performer & Researcher: Sharon Mc Ardle

Writer and Director: Declan Gorman

Choreographer: Ella Clarke

Singer: Sophie Coyle

Costume: Anne Stacey Coburn

Hair & Makeup: Aisling Quinn

Set Construction: Bernard Dunne

Production Assistant: James Cassidy

Lighting Design: Pedro Pacheco

*DMAPP: Dorothy Macardle Archive & Performance Project

The play comprises of five acts and is set in Mountjoy and Kilmainham prison between November 1922 and May 1923. Prologue, Epilogue and Interlude are set at various other times and places.

PROLOGUE: 'Memory'

ACT 1: Early Days at Mountjoy Gaol: November 1922

Scene 1: A parcel arrives

Scene 2: A stand-off with Pauden

Scene 3: Early Days

Scene 4: Vigil

Scene 5: Burnt offerings

Scene 6: Execution of Childers

Scene 7: A Victory

ACT 2: Mountjoy: December 1922 to February 1923

Scene 1: Dissent, Protest and In-Fighting

Scene 2: Dreams

INTERVAL

ACT 3: Transfer to Kilmainham Gaol: February 1923

ACT 4: Kilmainham Gaol: February – March 1923

Scene 1: A Great Cage

Scene 2: A visit from Nora Connolly

Scene 3: The Whirligig Dream

Scene 4: Homemaking

Scene 5: Betty's Dreams

INTERLUDE: 'Trauma'

ACT 5: The Kilmainham Tortures: Removal to North Dublin Union May 1923

Scene 1: Spectral Woman

Scene 2 : The Kilmainham Tortures

EPILOGUE: 'Release'

PROLOGUE: 'Memory'

Prison. A vacant cell, sparsely furnished. There is a faint, haunting soundscape of banging doors, women's distant voices, indiscriminate gunfire; newsboys calling out. A jail door bangs shut. Blackout. Gaslight gradually begins to fill the room. A woman has appeared, spectral and striking. She stands, gazing at the barred window. She speaks as if from a faraway dream.

WOMAN Memories behave in a curious way; they advance and retreat, rearranging themselves in new perspectives... Questioned about my own recollections, I felt baffled by the scatter of fragments- broken plans, altered allegiance, discarded hopes, that were all I could see, until the kaleidoscope turned. (She turns to face the audience – still far off – lights begin to warm) Then, I thought, a pattern began to emerge; rhythmic movement. A circle, small at first, enlarged itself, multiplied, like the rings of an eddy. Recurrences and reversal occurred. I imagine that for many people destiny moves like this. 'And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges'.

ACT 1: Early Days at Mountjoy Gaol, November 1922

Scene 1: A parcel arrives

Lights brighten suddenly. The actor now assumes the persona of a young 'ordinary criminal' prisoner. She staggers under the weight of a large wooden box. There is the sound of happy laughter and chatter.

GIRL Parcel! Parcel now for Miss Dorothy Macardle! Hello ladies. Aah!... are yiz playin' Bridge? Oh lovely! (She sets the box down on the table.) There y'are now Miss Macardle!

DOROTHY (waving goodbye) Thank you, Agnes!

The chatter stops, there is an expectant silence. Dorothy opens her parcel and takes out various wrapped and potted foodstuffs.

DOROTHY (still to herself) Preserved meats of all kinds, jam and biscuits, bread... innumerable delicious things. All that will last! (She begins to repackage everything.) I am burying against the day when we prisoners shall forfeit parcels for some protest or stand we shall take!

She glances again over each shoulder, as if suddenly conscious of hungry women who might be advancing on her!

DOROTHY (continuing) But from the card game in the corner, I sense such pathetic picturings of food and groans of hunger coming forth from the players that I cannot forbear....

(Casually) Would anybody like some ... bread and ham? ... At first, a gasp, then an ecstatic silence- then ... (Squeals of excitement are heard.. She dispenses ham sandwiches.) A choral hymn of rapture! (Pause) Anyone for a ... sec-ond-ham-sand-widge? (Louder ecstasy and giddiness) And oh, such intoxicated hilarity!

She laughs along with the soundtrack, until she morphs into the persona of another woman, descended from the vigil upstairs.

WOMAN (urgently) Girls! Girls! Please! Less noise! Less noise! Miss MacSwiney!!!

Dorothy makes a sheepish gesture of faux-guilt, and re-parcels the food. She glances upwards towards the upper wing.

Lights dim. We sense she is alone now. She rummages anew in the box.

DOROTHY (Wryly) Hmm... The effects of ham in a prison! ... but we had an exciting tea! Now, something else buried in here for which I have been starving...

She carefully takes out a notebook, a pen and a bottle of ink, and sets them on the desk.

DOROTHY At last, after fourteen days, my pens and paper have come!

She goes to the door peephole to make sure no-one is looking.

DOROTHY The soldiers gaze on the female prisoners while we sleep.

Having established that no-one is looking, she now goes around to various holes in the wall and other hiding places and takes out tiny folded up pieces of paper. She lays these out on the table, trying to order them.

DOROTHY

Vigil

Prison Moods

Prison Hatings

Prison Likings

Golden rules

Prison Letters

Prison Books

Prison Dreams

When she is satisfied, she opens the ink bottle, dips, and with an immense sigh of liberation writes.

DOROTHY This afternoon my pens and paper came and I have begun, at last, to write this account: A Journal of Mountjoy, by Dorothy Macardle: November 1922. God Speed the Work.

She now picks up one of the loose pages and squints at it,

DOROTHY Suffolk Street. November 9th. Day Of.... My... Arrest!

She begins transcribing. On the soundscape: Lorries; distant gunfire; occasional shouts.

DOROTHY (Reading, with a sense of conclusion) Mountjoy Jail ... Those familiar gates outside which I had stood so often in anguish for those within, opened before us and closed behind. We were Republican Prisoners of War!

Sound of a metal door banging.

Scene 2: A stand-off with Paudeen

VOICE Dorothy! Dorothy!

DOROTHY Coming Lily! Some trouble afoot on the landing. Paudeen, our comical little deputy Governor strutting about.

PAUDEEN As of today, yeer all required to be in yeer cells, by five o'clock and all de cells to be locked up for de night.

DOROTHY Brighid O'Mullane spoke up.

BRIGHID What? Just this evening, is it?

PAUDEEN Noh! every evening hence-farward! New orders! Off to yeer beds now!

BRIGHID I will in my Paudeen go to bed at five o'clock in the day! Whose orders is this?

PAUDEEN Portobello! HQ!

BRIGHID (folding her arms) I'll tell you what O'Keeffe. Go back again and consult your Governor. Ladies. We need a meeting!

PAUDEEN I'll give ye five minutes.

He makes a gesture of a put-upon man, but struts off to leave the women to their meeting.

DOROTHY Brigid O Mullane, a commandant of Cumann na Mban to the last hair in her head!

BRIGHID Comrades, this is not political treatment! There's only one thing for it!

DOROTHY She has what Erskine Childers once called a 'Die for Ireland Face'.

BRIGHID We must protest!

DOROTHY To some of the young and warlike spirits this thought seemed exhilarating. To my unadventurous spirit it was repellant in the extreme.

Paudeen returns

PAUDEEN Yeer five minnits is up!

BRIGHID We refuse to go to our cells!

PAUDEEN Ah look – would ye be reeeeezonable! The Governor can do nothing now until he hears from Portobello! A few days is all!

DOROTHY Lili O'Brennan was our committee spokeswoman.

LILI I'm... I'm not sure... what do the rest of ye ladies think?

DOROTHY. Then I said: "Lili, how about we give them until five o'clock Monday, and if it is not reversed by then, we refuse to obey?" This was put to the vote. Patience had the majority. Paudeen scurried off and we retired to our cells, the Suffolk Street political women, I felt, covered with the contempt of the warrior sect!

Scene 3: Early Days

She returns to her desk and writes.

DOROTHY On arrival at Mountjoy we were delivered into the hands of the wardresses, searched and shown into a long bare cell. This was the hospital. We seven, the Suffolk Street women, were to be kept here. Then, the questioning began, of what lay heavily on my heart.

A WOMAN Well, here we are!

DOROTHY (nervously) Yes. Here we are.

WOMAN And we all know Mary MacSwiney is on hunger strike

DOROTHY Yes.

WOMAN And the four women held above us are also on hunger strike. So, must we, in loyalty, hunger strike too?

DOROTHY I had known for weeks that editing the "Freedom" newspaper would lead to my arrest – and I had been able to contemplate imprisonment serenely. But in the last few days I had become afraid - that to be arrested would make it necessary to do this terrible thing. If we went on hunger strike, they would probably let us die. Lili spoke.

LILI Well, I would do it, but I wouldn't urge it on anyone else. I am ill anyway.

DOROTHY I had written of the ultimate sacrifice: Terence and now Mary MacSwiney. Was it only for the sacrifice of others that I was ready? I knew I had no reason but fear of death and agony for not doing this thing. (Pause) I grew unutterably ashamed. I prayed then to Terence MacSwiney not to God, and the pure thought of the Republic grew strong in me - strong enough to make it possible. (To the others) I will do it! I will hunger strike too!

A tense silence falls. Dorothy looks around at the other women.

DOROTHY ... Eventually Cecilia spoke out.

CECILIA Shure, lookit, I'll tell you what, girls.... Shure we'll all have the supper tonight and we can decide in the morning!

Giggles of relief.

DOROTHY Tea and bread were brought in and they all had supper. But for me, the hunger strike had already begun. I couldn't eat or drink. After a while I slept.

A voice

SIGHLE Peek-a-boo! Tally ho! Wakey wakey Ladies!

Dorothy runs to the peephole.

DOROTHY Girls, girls! Sighle at the peephole.

VOICES

Sighle Humphreys!

Are you not on hunger strike?

How is your mother?

How is Miss MacSwiney?

SIGHLE Miss MacSwiney is wonderful still! She's a brick! Mum isn't well, however: wouldn't give up the strike unless I did. (She chortles) So I did! I just had rashers and egg! Hoho, not at all girls, just some form of dreadful porridge, but it's all over and no! You girls are not under any circumstance to go on strike! Miss MacSwiney won't have it! She prefers to go it alone!

DOROTHY And that determined us finally. I confess it was a lightening of the heart to me.

Quiet murmur of the Rosary. She now makes a sign of the cross with the awkward moves of a Protestant unfamiliar with it.

DOROTHY On Sunday, Mrs Humphreys summoned us upstairs to Miss MacSwiney's cell. We went in one by one. She was lying on her side, among white blankets and pillows. She looked up smiling and spoke in a voice less faint than I had feared. What she was doing seemed

almost terrible in its splendor to me! Afterwards, Mrs Humphreys led a rosary on the bare stairway. She is the mother Catholic here. Three times daily she shepherds the women to a little altar they have made with sweet and pious ingenuity; where candles light up a gilded picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. I knelt among them, half asleep.

CUT SECTION

I think my praying worthless, but I am quite sure that there are some of these religious, pure hearted women whose prayers have power. And it is for their intentions that we are all praying now... in order... as Miss MacSwiney asked for them, - first that her sister may be let in – her sister Annie McSwiney has begun a hunger strike outside the prison gate, but they won't let her visit: second that Erskine Childers may be saved from execution and third for her own release. She kneels down and grips her hands together, as if mock-earnestly mimicking her own efforts at devout Catholic prayer. I prayed so strongly and at my first vigil for the first of these intentions, trying to thrust my will on the prison governor, appealing to the invisible powers, that I felt sure almost that they would bring her sister in- ... (truthfully now) ... but when I prayed for Erskine Childers it became clear to me that prayer must be always only for the highest spiritual thing and that this is the meaning of that perplexing, "Thy will be done", which used to seem to me to annul their prayer. I knew that I must pray for the purification of Ireland... and pray for his life only if the sacrifice of it was not necessary to that end_ It seems to me that he might very probably be spared.... But when I pray for Miss MacSwiney I feel desolate, because it seems that the people of Ireland could not be purified again and quickened without her death. She rises, mildly exercised by this theological riddle. Then she lightens. When I questioned Lili about all this, I found her thoughts had gone just the other way and I think she is more likely to have caught the truth! Prayer!

The murmur of the Rosary again. She hears her own voice echoing – as if in a dream

DOROTHY (V/O) Miss MacSwiney. Her slow suffering. The ghastly withering of life to which she is deliberately going: the hideous miracle which has turned Ireland's gratitude and pity for her into a wicked hatred that could let her die.

She staggers to her feet and weaves about, mouthing silent words, her eyes wide, until she eventually keels over in a faint. Now she hears other voices.

- Are you alright, Dorothy?
- Miss Macardle has fainted! Give her room!
- She's hardly eaten for three days since she got here!
- She feels cold, lift her up!.
- Nurse! Nurse Dunne!
- Lay her on the bed, girls. She's fainted, that's all. Bring her tea in a cup – tea in a cup

DOROTHY (half-waking, hears the gentle meow of a kitten) Meow! A loveable little kitten came to visit me. They say he is a little convict. We have christened him Rory Beg. Psh-wsh-wsh... Roh-ree....

She falls into a deeper sleep.

Scene 4: Vigil

A match is struck. A small, squat candle flares and settles. Dorothy holds it a little away from her chin, uplighting her face. She appears to be in a trance.

DOROTHY:

- Lily O'Brennan?
- Yes, Our Lady!
- Do you wish to offer yourself to God- to endure suffering...to help atone for the sins by which he is offendedto implore for the conversion of sinners?
- Yes, Our Lady, I do...

She blows out the candle and wakes, suddenly.

DOROTHY In the evening, Tessie and I keep vigil by the bedside of Miss MacSwiney.—As we prepare to ascend, Lily comes down quiet and glowing, her little white face like a child saint's.

LILI (Aglow) O Tess! Dorothy!

DOROTHY She begins telling fantastic things, with such sweet wonder that it is certain she believes it all in the depths of her heart. ... Lili, when did this happen?

LILI Just now, Dorothy. During my vigil. The candle! Oh, it was guttering out and the melting wax as it fell formed itself into one figure after another

DOROTHY My goodness! What figures?

LILI The Madonna and the saints- St. Patrick, and the holy mother and child.

DOROTHY (continuing her narration) Quite evidently this little mystery had filled her with happiness and hope.

She tends to Miss MacSwiney.

A clock ticks slowly.

The nightly vigil: peace-giving and strengthening.

But how intolerably slowly, left to itself in solitude and silence, time goes!

We hear Tess whispering a prayer.

I cannot pray as they do, the Roman Catholics,. Indeed I can scarcely ever pray at all,...

Dorothy goes to the wall and presses her forehead against it.

But sometimes, I can image things!

I image the opening of the gates,

I image the release of Miss MacSwiney –

I can call on invisible, beneficent powers,

but I cannot ever know

whether they hear or heed.

I do this with an intensity that may, perhaps, help a little to bring these things to pass.

CUT SECTION

Dorothy sits, calmly, and writes in her journal.

Never was a heretic more completely captured in the atmosphere of an alien world than I am here. I am sure that nothing that can happen will ever make me a member of the Roman

Catholic Church. There is a quaint child-likeness in it, a fantastical exactitude about the unimaginable other world which would always shut the like of me outside. Yet, I am sure that of all religions in the world it affords the most openings into spiritual life, most magic for the revealing of unseen powers.

The Rosary is murmured again – more ‘realistic’ now, and in Irish.

Clock continues to tick. She returns to the bedside.

So slowly the moments are passing over Miss MacSwiney,
every moment loaded with patience and pain.

She lies, eyes closed,
her rosary between her folded hands,
endurance in every line.

She opens her eyes when she knows one is watching
and smiles.

CUT SECTION _ And one has to say some

light-hearted, tranquil thing.

And she is troubled that we
are losing a little sleep.

The ticking stops.

This evening, when I came on Vigil after Lili, there was a sense that surprised and subdued me of benign presences. It was as if they were leaning over us waiting for our prayers. Miss MacSwiney was very peaceful, although wide awake. There is no doubt that receiving the sacrament has given her fresh strength.

She kneels.

The ticking stops. Miss McSwiney dozes. Dorothy whispers to Tess.

She’s asleep now!

They move away and kneel.

Tessie and I were both kneeling outside her door when a strange mystery happened.

Lighting warms, casting benign shadows. She watches astonished, as though observing a figure moving across the space. She rises to follow the figure, stopping to gaze down the stairs as it vanishes. She returns quietly and goes onto her knees again.

TESS (whispers) Dorothy? Did you....? (Dorothy nods.) Someone passed. I heard a foot fall. Didn't it stop beyant on the stairs.

DOROTHY (softly) Ssshhh! (She rises and peeks in the sick woman's door.) She's wide awake in there.

TESS Who was it Dorothy? There was someone.... Like a –

DOROTHY A brotherly presence?

TESS Jeeezis! Terence MacSwiney? (Dorothy gestures – Maybe... Who knows?) Well that's alright, like! Terence MacSwiney, here!!!

DOROTHY (narrating) We were pleased by this mysterious visit, but later, when we told those who came to relieve us, they grew terrified of our "ghost".

Scene 5: Burnt Offerings

Dorothy wakes in her cell, sniffs at the air, then climbs to look out the window. Uncertain what has bothered her, she steps down again.

DOROTHY Next evening, after the rosary, Sighle slipped into my hand a thin, folded, close-written note. It was from Madame McBride ... and had come underground.

She drops on one knee under a light, to squint at the letter. As she reads, the lighting turns orange-red and fans out to fill the room. The crackling sound of a fire is faintly heard.

DOROTHY Dear Dorothy.

V/O There has been an appalling raid on Number 73

She reads on, initially in silence and apparent disbelief. She rises to her feet and then issues a howl of despair.

DOROTHY No! No, no, no, no!

She starts to gesture in anguish and re-reads aloud. On the soundtrack, we hear the voice of Madame McBride echoing.

V/O & DOROTHY The house has been shot up. They painted skulls and cross bones on your sitting room walls with green paint. They made a bonfire in the road of all your papers and manuscripts, your plays ... even your college lectures. Some of your pupils were passing by. They were picking up fragments of your lectures on Hamlet in the street for souvenirs.

Dorothy falls to knees. Burnt papers and ashes have blown in. She reaches about and clutches desperately, trying to catch them as they swirl around her.

DOROTHY Everything burnt!

The people of my vanished plays- born out of my imagination, foredoomed, never to be given life.

She gathers ashes and papers to her, like a mother gathering infants to her bosom.

DOROTHY One by one they thrust themselves into my memory,

She presses some burnt pages to her face, inhaling the aroma of her burnt creations.

Poor Cassandra is crying out to me from among the flames. Oh, Cassandra you were so wild and beautiful!

She sweeps another bunch of ashes to her and brings it to her bosom.

And Asthara! I cannot believe you dead. You, that had three nights of such rapturous, enchanted life.

She searches frantically for another text among the ashes but cannot find it.

And Dervorgilla, I am sure that she is gone. Ah, my Dervogilla, infinitely innocent, tragic and noble.

She picks up what appears to be an irreparably charred notebook and contemplates it.

My Rhythm Book: eight years of theory and quotations. All my work, I had published nothing. My poetry is all over now!

Lighting reverts gradually to normal. She collects herself.

Everything burnt. It was a shattering thing to hear.

But courage creates courage. And I remembered that allegiance to the Republic had cost me nothing. What sort of a loss is this, compared to the loss of a brother?... This was my baptism perhaps.

She goes and sits on a chair, as though by a bedside.

I was quite recovered by the time I went into Miss MacSwiney and gave her Madame's message and told her quite light hearted about the raid. But she is too wise and too understanding to be deceived! "Shame to burn your manuscripts! Shame!" "Furniture- other things, I would not mind, but your manuscripts!"Her distress greater than my own! "It is nothing to be very sad about' I replied. And so, I convinced myself. It has hardly troubled me since ... except in little moments. ...

She paces about, determined to suppress her pain. She goes to a hole in the wall from which she extracts a stubby pencil and a piece of paper. She turns the page up and down and around to find an unmarked corner, sits and scribbles.

The people of my plays! They are burnt offerings to the Republic of Ireland, my tragic women; may the Gods be appeased! When my good paper and ink comes, I could write my little play again from memory- I hope. And stories that are forming here, in my mind.

She finds another blank space on a page, and scribbles furiously. We hear her voice.

DOROTHY The Prisoner: A short story by Dorothy Macardle. 'The worst thing was losing the sense of time... a crazy notion would come that there was no such thing as time in prison at all...I used to think that time went past outside like a stream, moving on, but in prison you were in a kind of whirlpool-

DOROTHY time going round and round with you, so that you'd never come to anything, even death, only back again to yesterday and round to today and back to yesterday again'.

On the soundtrack, we hear a female voice –singing a haunting Spanish folk/love song.

Dorothy looks up.

DOROTHY Nóinín! She sings at night for Miss Mc Swiney. She is a woman quite different from any others perhaps because of her French girlhood and her South American adventures.

Other voices from around the jail join in. After a while, faltering, Dorothy begins to sing along from the loneliness of her cell. Lights fade to grey as the singing trails off.

Scene 6: Execution of Childers

The gentle and soothing sounds of water splashing. Dorothy rises, caresses her hair, face and body, luxuriating. She speaks dreamily.

DOROTHY A rumor and a promise has been throbbing in the air for a week. This morning it was fulfilled- the bathroom water was hot! I lay in deep water and washed with flower-scented soap, at peace with the world.

She rises and towels her hair, then ties the towel up in a turban. She climbs to look out.

Afterwards, I climbed up and found a place where the tainted glass of the window was scratched clear and I saw the canal and the streets all jolly in the cold sunlight, and a woman going out in a fur coat and the white smoke of a train. And it seemed to me that to be anywhere in the free air of the world, whether poor or hungry is all a human being should need or desire.

Her reverie is broken by the sound of a bullet shattering a glass pane. She turns and cries out, releasing a pent-up agony.

Oh God! They have condemned Erskine Childers to death! One of the most noble and faithful champions Ireland has. I worked with him for a little time and it is the brightest, grandest memory! Lili thinks he will be shot tomorrow at dawn!

She reefs the towel from her head and weeps into it.

Love for him rushes over me like a stormy ocean of pain. I would have drowned in it, I think, only Lili is so marvelously brave. He is her great friend! Her life's work is his, and yet she can bear this as he will be bearing it himself. ... In the afternoon, I look across the room and she is playing cards, her face smiling and sweet....

LILI Oh you better hide, Dorothy Macardle! Here comes Mother Humphreys with her sewing box!

Dorothy begins to sew.

DOROTHY It is a code that I am learning only slowly from the others, who have learnt to endure things for the Republic- That when there is much to suffer – talk must be all about happy foolish things. Mrs Humphreys makes us all sew shirts for soldiers – apparently there are penniless men in the I.R.A.

She rises and perambulates. The sounds of ball and bat.

A new recreation ground has been prepared for us. A circular grass plot with three narrow circular stone paths – so narrow that if two walk side by side one keeps slipping down. We walk around slipping down; round and round and round in a caged monotony. This is a hateful place, but....

SIGHLE Tally Ho! Dorothy, do join in!!!

DOROTHY Sighle Humphreys, her frail blue eyes and coils of beautiful hair.

She reaches, as if to catch a ball and throw it back, smiling.

It is surprising how enjoyable mere physical exercise of one's limbs and muscles can be. But today I came in very tired. I lay down and watched the nine red barred squares of fading sunlight moving along the wall.

Nóinín begins to sing – a beautiful sacred, traditional Irish song.

DOROTHY (weeping softly again) Nóinín sings– the music seems to fill the prison and melt away the walls. There is nothing going on in the universe but that sorrowful Irish tune and the sacrifice in that little cell. Mary MacSwiney - the latest of a million martyrdoms.

A rattle of military drums. She sits up, very alert. Nóinín's song can still be heard but faintly.

Nov 17th Four boys have been secretly tried and executed by the Free State for illegal possession of a revolver.

Another drumroll

Lili comes in, her little white face aglow-

LILY Erskine Childers ... his case is deferred until Monday, Dorothy - to the Court of Appeal.
He may be saved!

Drumroll

DOROTHY Monday...

A news vendor's voice can be heard, but it is indistinct. Dorothy springs to the window.

LILI What's he saying Dorothy? What's the newsboy calling?

DOROTHY Hush Lilli!

VOICEOVER – (Slows down to drag pace). Erskine Childers executed. Read all about it!

Nóinín's song comes in now – a keening wail.

DOROTHY They have done a hideous, unutterable, never to be forgiven thing. Erskine Childers :selfless in his devotion to Ireland as a woman might be in love.-The reign of terror has begun. God save Ireland from these corrupt and evil men! And God help de Valera!

The song ends. Military drums again. Wild howling on the soundtrack – shooting and screaming.

That night it seemed as if hundreds of voices were raised in a savage, triumphant- howling. It made me think of blood hounds tearing a human victim in a Grand Guignol play... I prayed for quiet to fall on those savage spirits...but the noises went on and on.

Scene 7: A Victory

DOROTHY The next morning I am with Miss MacSwiney. She is suffering more than I have seen her ever before, her hands clutching and twisting from the maddening tingle and irritation of the nerves of her arms. She lets me massage her poor, thin wrists with eau-de-cologne. I think she was a little easier... but then, in marched Brigid O'Mullane.

BRIGID Miss MacSwiney – we need your advice.

DOROTHY She sits up again with a seriousness and an effort to concentrate that is painful to see.

BRIGHID Miss Coyle and Miss O'Shea have not been given leave to have their cells unlocked at night. They are planning to protest. What do you think?

Miss MacSwiney Well, it is a concession, not a right. I am afraid, I'll have to ask you to let someone else decide. I am too much concerned...'

DOROTHY (suppressing her rage) Maybe we can chat about this on the landing, Brighid?
(Outside she tears into her) Good God, Brighid! Can you not sort this out some other way?
Can you not see the state she is in.

She bursts into angry tears.

BRIGHID (backing off but unrepentant) Alright! Alright! Look, I'll take it direct to the Governor.

DOROTHY And so it came to a head with this little crisis – the latent conflict which is in the Republic- the difference between the political party and the army, and in here between the militarist element and the 'Suffolk Street' women. We think them vastly pugilistic, they think us willing slaves. We summoned a meeting at 2.30. All came, Brighid in a more reasonable frame of mind. The real issue was faced. It cleared the air.

DOROTHY When it was finished, I called Brighid over to me ... Brighid, I –

BRIGHID It's alright, Dorothy. We are nursing a dying woman now.

DOROTHY Yes.

DOROTHY (narrating) But then later on, a rumour came. The Governor and some men and a strange doctor are coming up. Somebody said the word... release... is it release? – 'It is release!' We crept upstairs and lined up on the landing to give her a silent military salute. We saw the men stooping and lifting the stretcher on their shoulders. Miss MacSwiney held out her hand. One after another stole up and kissed her. She looked up smiling – intensely happy. Then they turned down the stairs and-carried her away.

The others said the rosary, but I went to Tess (Kathleen) who was sobbing on her bed. It was only a result of the excitement and I had her laughing soon. There was hilarious celebration

of course then. Some climbed to the windows and cheered until the sentry fired. Some raided Miss MacSwiney' room for souvenirs – a bit of pumice stone was my share of the loot. They danced and laughed and carried Miss Humphreys shoulder high. I opened shortbread and tinned coffee and prepared a feast.

Then for a moment, I was alone in her white empty cell. It was comforting to kneel by that bed where one had knelt watching such suffering and bury one's head in that pillow and give thanks and be at peace.

Nóinín sings a sweet song; "Siúl a Rún". It rises and then gradually fades away. Lights fade to grey.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2: Mountjoy: December 1922 to February 1923

Scene 1: Dissent, Protest and In-Fighting

Lights fade up but it is still dark. Faintly we hear sounds of celebrations from various cells. A chorus of boisterous women sing an unusually raucous chorus of "Siúl a Rún". One girl's voice is heard shouting, "Get up the Yard, Paudeen O'Keeffe, YeHup!". A single shot is fired. Noise fades. Dorothy wakes and gropes her way, searchingly, along the wall.

DOROTHY I have often heard there is nothing one misses so much as a patient one has nursed. Now, that Miss MacSwiney has gone, all that made this prison glorious is gone - so that one looks around, bewildered, at a new world- and finds it ... a prison! Life has moved away and left us here in a waste space.

Lights brighten. The metallic banging starts up again.

PAUDEEN (Shouting up at certain disrespectful ladies on the landings above) Listen to me! Listen to me now! As a consequence... of yeer insubordinate conduct last night, ye will no longer be attended to by the dacent convict women. Dey won't be bringin' ye up yeer meals

in de future. Hotel Mountjoy is closed for de season! Yeer meals will be deposited down here inside the door and ye can come down and carry dem up yeerselves!

DOROTHY A meeting was held. Sighle was the first to speak.

SIGHLE Bloody Hell! Well, I'm not going down there to lug all those heavy tins and vessels up any stairs.

LILI We could cook our own meals. Someone could run a cookery class.

SIGHLE Bloody Hell! A cookery class? Irish classes, sewing classes.... we'll all come out as chefs, Abbey costume designers and Gaelic poets! Not me! We are held here against our will! Political prisoners!

DOROTHY (narrating again) In the end, it was agreed that our policy should be to go without any food until we are reduced one after another to lying in bed. Then Doctors and Nurses will be required to attend on us and bring us our meals. On this we are sure to win- (she paces about for a moment) But by this evening one day of hunger has already left me very limp.

From outside "Siúl a Rún" is heard again, sung defiantly like a protest song.

DOROTHY (anxious) Four of the girls stayed outside after 5 o'clock. They have refused to come in. Nóinín and I are in our cell, speechless with wrath at this private protest; this disloyalty to the prisoners' council and the ruin of our agreed plans. Anarchy... Fury!

PAUDEEN Drag them in! Tolerate no resistance!

DOROTHY Nóinín and I would not to go out to show interest. But the rest – 35 women - gathered on the stairs-

PAUDEEN Yeer all ordered! ... I order ye now! Get back to yeer cells immediately! All of ye! Right boys! Lock them up! Ev'ry wan o' dem!

The sounds of banging on metal. Squeals and screams. Vulgar language from male voices.

DOROTHY There followed a hideous scrummage, soldiers with girls in their arms, twisting their arms... girls clinging to the railings and door handles.

She sits, still refusing to take part, but eventually cannot contain herself, and leaps up.

DOROTHY I went to the door and saw Miss Humphreys being dragged about by three soldiers, it was too much for my resolution.

DOROTHY (blazing) What kind of men are you? How dare you manhandle a woman like that. O Keefe, you should be ashamed of yourself! (Narrating) But Sighle and the other mutineers were laughing, and jesting.

SIGHLE Hoho girls! We shall all be lynched by these brave Irish soldiers, woo-hoo!

PAUDEEN Lock dem up! Lock dem Up! Feck dem into any cell wit an open door, we'll sort dem out later on!

Dorothy fetches her pen and paper and begins to write.

The effect of prison on republicans is curious. It crystallises into blind allegiance what has been perhaps, a reasoned, clear-eyed faith. I do think that purity of motive; and sincerity of sacrifice are in every one of those whom I am learning to know intimately here. But one fault I find - lack of foresight and calculation. I also sense a longing for cosmopolitan and intellectual experience of which – by their very devotion to an enslaved country – they have been deprived.

She looks up, thinks, then writes again.

Their minds, except on moral questions, are less interesting, less rich... than those of my English friends.

She rises, a little discomfited by what she has just acknowledged and sets the diary aside. Then she picks it up, and writes a few additional words.

But this I know: Our movement remains beautiful and splendid. There remains a religious faith and joy in our cause – a feeling that to go out into a defeated Ireland would be worse than any imprisonment – a feeling that victory must be ours.

Scene 2: Dreams

Music plays softly. Lighting turns a vivid blue. Dorothy rises from her knees and begins a mesmeric, gentle dance. She hears her own voice in V/O as she moves around.

V/O That night, I had a dream that gathered all the happiest things of natural life. It was in England. And all the lovely things that are peculiarly England's haunted my mind.

DOROTHY (Turns over in her sleep and murmurs) Oh, I love England. And I pray - as Erskine Childers once said "that her attitude to Ireland will change completely and finally".

CUT SECTION - V/O I was visiting a woman whom I greatly loved. Her quiet little house was beautiful – hidden in a high walled garden, flowers overflowing into low rooms that were softly lit, softly furnished, and filled with treasures of beaten brass and carved ivory from the far east- all fragrant and full of colour and peace. The woman was created out of many women I have loved: ... Mother, who is friendlier to my imagination than she has been for years...

Indian music again.

V/O In my prison dreams, the world has a charm and innocence I never felt so poignantly before.

Dorothy laughs joyfully.

DOROTHY Look, Donald! See?

V/O I am walking, free with Donald, on a day of sun and seagulls when the Thames is blue. Westminster has lost all its sinister and evil power: only the beauty and ancientness of the great buildings remain, and that grandeur standing in the airy sunshine fills me with joy.

She changes direction.

DOROTHY Another dream. I am on a hill path with mother and Mona.

V/O We are eager, happy, knowing some miracle awaits us at the end, a land of heart's desire. A tunnelled passage leads us upward into utter darkness; so steep that I cry out:

DOROTHY (laughing) No, this is impossible! We shall fall backwards with every step!

V/O But then we discover the path has been cut into shallow steps by some who have gone before, and at last, we come out into a faint green daylight among ancient trees. Before us lies a radiant, blue sea.

DOROTHY (Triumphantly) Look, Mother! Beauty and peace and grandeur! How satisfying to the heart- a Green World, beneath a cloudless heaven.

She now turns, her eyes wide with anxiety.

V/O But it is seldom in the dreams that come to me here that I am safe and free. Either, I am escaping, hunted, or I am free only on parole.

V/O I am with Donald in London again. I catch his arm.

Music and movement assume a more panicked tone.

DOROTHY Donald! Listen- do listen!.... Donald this is a dream! In a minute I shall wake in gaol! Donald!

DONALD (V/O) No, it's not, sister! (Laughs) I say, are you going to cry? It's not a dream. Really!

DOROTHY (But now she panics again, and reaches out at imaginary walls all sides of her) But it is a dream! O Donald- the walls! The walls!

I wake up, then on my mattress, my hands pressed against the white wall of the cell, and Donald leagues away over the sea.

She gets up and walks about in an effort to shake off the nightmare.

DOROTHY To desire a window and find on all sides only a dead wall! But in the dawn hours between sleep and wake, there is a mysterious region, evasive as a mirage, where my soul lives its own secret life. Harmonious powers flow into my being of which, when I wake, no memory is left; a clear existence that resembles the spirit's existence after death...

One wall suddenly lights up a psychedelic primary green.

CUT SECTION - It was in this state that I lay this morning when a window opened in the wall – a wide, long window, stretching from the ceiling almost to the floor, and outside that window it was a blue August afternoon, and there was a wide lawn with trees. The lawn was not closely clipped, buttercups grew in it and the trees were tall firs, straight and dark, but with borders of shrubs and flower beds. I knew this was a garden where tired men and women

would be coming soon, from acting and lecturing or listening to lectures, and we would be having tea...

V/O A window opens in a wall. Outside is a blue August afternoon, a garden with buttercups and trees, where tired men and women will be coming soon from acting or listening to lectures

A different wall lights up.

Another window opens looking down over the city by night. Outlines of the tall trees; a cloudy sky, dim lit by an unseen moon. The high street-lamps, richly yellow, seem to be hanging eerily from the trees...

The first wall lights again

V/O That wall closes and a new window opens onto a dark- blue, Mediterranean sea, with white foam whirling round a sunken reef:

V/O & DOROTHY. Oh perilous seas - Forlorn....Forlorn! The very word is like a knell.

The distant sound of a school bell ringing.

DOROTHY Girls, open your books at "Ode to a Nightingale":

V/O (Several voices) My heart aches,
And a drowsy numbness pains my sense,
as though of hemlock I had drunk
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains.

DOROTHY: (Suddenly wide awake) Yesterday, Nóinín told my fortune. Someone is going to give me a great shock. And today I hear the council of Alexandra College are depriving me of my post. But the world is before me. When I leave this gaol I will be poor but free. I will maybe write. What windows shall I look out of then... when I am free?

CUT SECTION - DOROTHY: Yesterday, Nóinín told my fortune with cards and frightened me. Someone with whom I have been in close daily intimacy is going to give me a great shock- something to do with money. A group of people are discussing me. My possibilities and my

work. And today I hear that the council of Alexandra College are depriving me of my post. I remember when my sister was staying with me at 73, two or three months ago. We joked about risking all established comfort for adventure and the hope of richer life. I said, "I daresay, Mona, it's quite a good thing to cast your bread upon the waters and burn your boats". I had sent to the council of Alexandra College, a letter telling them I felt constrained to take part in a campaign for the proper treatment of republican prisoners and this might involve public work. I knew this would almost certainly mean dismissal and had no notion of what I should do after that except try to publish my book on the language of poetry at last. Now that book and nearly all my other manuscripts have gone up in smoke. But the world is all before me. I have a family including a good sister and the best of brothers, only that he doubts my cause; the Republic is Greek to him! It is Greek to all of them – my father, an imperial Home- Ruler who thinks we are all in the wrong, does everything for me that money and a blundering unimaginative love could do. Goes humble to the members of the Free State government begging pardon for his erring child, cannot, cannot, cannot understand why I won't sign a parole form. And Mother, a stage Englishwoman of the morning post type, so ashamed of my imprisonment that she will give none but family members letters addressed to me to post. She hits that those who sign the parole form have 'pluck' insinuating, I suppose that I will be a coward, refusing to sign. I wrote her a most bitter letter but tore it up. Mother is wretchedly ill and mustn't be hurt. But I do have good friends, and about £130 a year. I shall not be derelict. When I leave this gaol I will be poor and free. I will maybe write. What windows shall I look out of then... when I am free?

There is a sudden banging on the cell door. She stands up

PAUDEEN: Come out of yeer cells! Ye're all ordered ... (disrespectful yelps)... Listen now!!! Ye are all ordered now ... to assimble in the lower hall!

DOROTHY Since our earliest days at Mountjoy there has been a rumour that Kilmainham Gaol was being prepared for Republican Women. Could this be the call?

PAUDEEN I'm sendin' ye all off to a lovely camp! De fallowing women are to be transferred at midnight. Step forward when your name is called.

... Sighle Humphries, Nora Conolly, Lily O'Brennan, Betty Kiernan, Dorothy Macardle....

Breathing fast, in spite of herself, with the excitement of change – any change – Dorothy steps out her cell. Upbeat Irish music thunders in.

INTERVAL

ACT 3: Transfer to Kilmainham Gaol: February 1923

The sounds of shrill whistles and lorries revving up. Dorothy packs her possessions.

DOROTHY A transfer to Kilmainham! It was a half dismaying, half exhilarating thought. Kill and Maim Them Gaol is a title that most hideous of prisons has earned. Time and again, confirmed as unsanitary and unfit for the habitation of human beings. But its past guests are an illustrious list: Robert Emmet, Parnell and the heroes of 1916...

PAUDEEN Come on! Evirbody out now! Evirbody out!

DOROTHY Paudeen and his army were outside. Only 46 out of the 60 women were to go.

PAUDEEN Move along! Move along!

DOROTHY I joined with Betty, a new girl, as we passed out through the recreation ground and saw our first glimpse for 3 months of the wide night sky.... It was disappointing. There should have been a full moon but the sky was covered with clouds.

The sound of lorries comes in.

We lined up to mount the lorries - over by Kevin Barry's grave. Betty and I linked fingers, not to be separated. Aggie O Shea climbed into the car and the squeal of her old melodeon suddenly filled the air.

She climbs now onto the pile of boxes. The lorries rev up. Faintly we hear a jig on the melodeon.

Behind, in the second lorry, sat the heavenly host, as we called them – the militants from the upper landing - and their ever-raucous hurrah was invading the night.

Melodeon stops.

Then, a shy young soldier approached us, diffidently holding out his hand, as though offering some precious thing.....

The action slows right down. In a balletic gesture, she reaches to connect with the soldier.

... it held a little wet block clay.

The melodeon starts up again, a haunting lament. Dorothy accepts the gift of clay, and savours the feel of it, moving it from hand to hand. She looks up then, into the young soldier's eyes.

From Kevin Barry's grave, he said, and turned his back.

Delicately she takes a handkerchief from her pocket, wraps the clay in it and places it carefully back in her pocket. Her voice drops to a whisper, almost.

I could have cried then- not for Kevin Barry, but for the poor young soldier in green. He was in that army, hunting, maybe executing sometimes, the men who upheld the dear cause- taking the women who upheld it to prison now. And yet he could bring us, as a sacred offering- clay from their graves.

The lament reaches its crescendo and ends. Sound of the lorry pulling away.

He took up his post beside me in the lorry. I had thought of escape, but with him there I had no hope. His rifle was in his hand. The great gates opened- the lorry swayed and grumbled and moved out, down the avenue where I had knelt so often, praying for the republicans who were being hanged inside, praying for Mary MacSwiney, while the soldiers fired over us to drive us away- out of the lower gates and onto the road.

She cranes to look out, over the side of the lorry.

There was not a soul on the road. Dublin was fast asleep. We passed a cinema palace all shut up, then a hoarding bedecked with advertisements for plays, none of which I longed to go to mercifully!

She takes out a letter.

BETTY (whispers) What's that, Dorothy?

DOROTHY A letter to my mother.

BETTY What are you going to do with it?

DOROTHY Drop it on the road and just hope...

BETTY Don't be crazy, Dorothy... The truck behind us, the lights, they will see!

DOROTHY We turned a corner onto North Circular Road. It was for the river I was longing most of all, but so dark was the night, that I could see nothing when we came to it but a gleaming pool.

BETTY (Whispers) Dorothy! Drop your letter now, as we pass Kingsbridge station!

DOROTHY (looks behind) I can't! They're still behind us, curse them! The letter was still in my hand when we drew up at Kilmainham - I was bitterly disappointed – they would have so loved to get it- Mother and Mona and Donald. The young soldier bent down his head.

SOLDIER (Whispers) How long were you in?

DOROTHY Sorry?

SOLDIER In Mountjoy. How long were you in?

DOROTHY Three months.

SOLDIER Ah dear, ah dear! ... I've heard... I heard it said... some of the old IRA men is working together on a... Look I think yiz'll be out soon, the women'll be released soon.

Pause. Dorothy turns and looks into his eyes.

DOROTHY (Whispers) Will you post a letter for me?

SOLDIER Aye. Certainly I will!

She slips the letter behind her back and into his hand.

DOROTHY A quiet woman spoke up suddenly, in a clear gentle voice. "The British executed my father in there".

SOLDIER (Looks up in anguish – whispers) Who is that woman?

DOROTHY Her name is Nora Connolly. James Connolly's daughter.

SOLDIER (Wretched) Oh God! Oh God!

DOROTHY When is your time up?

SOLDIER Not for six weeks. You see...

DOROTHY Listen to me. Listen to me, man. This... is the saddest chapter of Ireland's history, ever! But there will be very little ill feeling when it's all over, I think.

SOLDIER I hope there won't, I hope there won't.

DOROTHY Then he had to pass us into the gaol.

The lorries rev up and drive away. She gazes up at her new surroundings. Lights fade to black.

ACT 4: Kilmainham Gaol: February – March 1923

Scene 1: A Great Cage

The sound of a prison gate clanging shut.

DOROTHY It is altogether unlike our little prison hospital at Mountjoy. A long, high building, shaped like a narrow horse shoe: iron galleries, iron doors, iron staircase, iron gangway, iron grating from roof to floor - a great cage. Cells on the first gallery have been allocated to Betty and me. I felt as if I had been thrust living into a tomb: the tiny barred window out of reach - the chill, the underground smell, like a mortuary chapel or a white sepulchre. (She shrugs.) For company's sake, I slept with Betty, on the edge of her bed. Breakfast was brought in the morning by wardresses; bread, butter and mugs of tea. We got up then and explored our new house.

She wanders about

At the apex of the horse shoe we found a cold wash house with a concrete floor where the water lies in pools. The window had been broken (Sniffs and enjoys) and a blast of heavens air came through.

She climbs

DOROTHY Climb up, Betty! Look!

BETTY Oh Dorothy, the wide wonderful, living world!

DOROTHY Look – on the roof! (They duck) A sentry.

BETTY And look! People walking! They can see us! Hello-oh! (She waves). And new houses being built – over there, on the slopes.

DOROTHY (suddenly) Come away, Betty! ... (Narrates) It is more than a prisoner can bear, this view of the Dublin Mountains, the Path of Chualann... We walked round the gallery, examining the doors of the cells.

BETTY Look, Dorothy! The funny little names the men carved over their doors- ‘Woodbine Villa’

DOROTHY Haha! ‘Barry’s Hotel’!

BETTY ‘Howth Gunmen’, ‘Dev’s Own’ ... Oh...

DOROTHY What is it, Betty? Oh... Joseph Plunkett’s cell.

BETTY Where he married Grace ...

They search on in sombre silence.

BETTY Oh! ... Oh!

Her eyes fill up with tears.

BETTY The name of our old house, and here, Shawn’s name, my brother!

DOROTHY Oh Betty! (Narrating) And she told me how he lay there after the Four Courts fight, wounded in the lung. No doctor came to him all the six weeks. He was helped by his fellow prisoners and released only to die.

Back down in our own gallery we met Nora Conolly talking to a new-comer. It was Grace Plunkett! She had been brought here in the night, by men in the very uniform that Joseph Plunkett and James Connolly wore. It made me feel it cannot go on long - England has done a thing so abnormal to us. They looked happy those two women – it must be a bitter and proud thing for them, to be here.

Betty and I wrapped ourselves in blankets and sat on my bed trying to get warm. And Betty talked about her brother until we fell asleep (Softly – like a lullaby) - the splendid Shawn – the splendid Shawn – the splendid Shawn

Lights fade. Dorothy caresses Betty's hair in a protective gesture.

Scene 2: A visit from Nora Connolly

Lights fade up again, dim. Dorothy rises and goes directly to her desk to write. Lights brighten. A gentle knock.

DOROTHY Come in!

NORA I'm not disturbing, am I?

DOROTHY Oh! No! ... Not at all. We haven't really met. I'm Dorothy Macardle.

NORA I know. Nora Connolly.

DOROTHY (Nervously) Yes. ... I saw you with Mrs Plunkett ... I couldn't help but...

NORA (Smiles) I hear you are giving lectures!

DOROTHY Not as such. Well... I've given one history lesson to five of the girls.

NORA And how's that going?

DOROTHY Ah, They're keen - content to hear a teacher as ignorant as themselves giving a talk out of a dull book.

NORA (Chuckles) I think you do yourself a disservice Miss Macardle. What is your topic?

DOROTHY A study of Diarmuid Mc Morrogh ... the first cause of all our troubles- But you know all this... I once wrote a play about Dervogilla.

NORA Aye, and it was burned with all your manuscripts, I heard. How terrible! Do you like teaching?

DOROTHY Yes. To be learning and teaching is to be alive again.

(Narrates) I had felt a little afraid of Nora Connolly, as of someone who has travelled far into the unknown. But I had also felt a strong desire to come close to her personality and mind. The relation there was between her and her father was tender, heroic beyond any I have heard of between father and child... and her psychic experiences have been unique.

NORA Am I sorry Father died here as he did? Or am I glad? Well, when I see the blunders the leaders have made, I am tempted to be sorry he's not alive anymore. But, on the other hand, I know if he had not died, we would never have had the Republic.

DOROTHY She is full of imagination - her ways of seeing things are intense and strangely true. But she is ill now, recovering from a breakdown.

NORA It wasn't here, I saw him last. It was at the Castle. He was brought here only at the very end. ... I trained with him from I was seven years old. (she chuckles) He sent me on missions even as a wee child. After the Rising, I went to America, the people there wanted to hear the truth.

NORA My health was suffering. Then one night, father came to me out of the dark...and so I kept on going. The sun left my world when my father died.

Nora leaves.

SCENE 3: The Whirligig Dream

Dream lighting. A march tune plays. Dorothy rises and walks regally in great slow motion steps, like a child playing the part of a portly royal personage. She points at various people as though picking them out. Music fades. Now there is the faint sound of a crowd cheering.

V/O (Dorothy still moving in slow motion, but happily, as herself) I was going through a rejoicing crowd in Dundalk, to meet Mary MacSwiney and DeValera. The Chief had arrived alone- I saw him in a carriage driving away from the market place up-hill. But when the carriage was half way up, he jumped down and began to walk back saying he would like to meet Mary MacSwiney.

Cheering fades away.

DOROTHY She appeared, stepping out of a railway carriage. The emotion of meeting her again, after all the suffering, overcame me so much that I forgot everything else. I put her into a carriage and drove with her into town.

It was not until we had driven some way that I remembered the Chief, walking down to meet her. I was stricken with remorse and fear. He was hunted and I had forgotten him- left him wandering in the open street, the inconsiderate unkindness of it.

Grating, grotesque mechanical sounds come in, mixed with nightmarish fairground music.

DOROTHY The dream turned into something quite different then-

V/O A ghastly vision on the roadside - a man and a boy caught in a whirligig which, gaining mad impetus before my eyes, went out of control and whirled them horribly to death.

She falls to her knees and wakes to find herself cradling the body of the half-remembered dead boy from the dream.

Lights snap back to normal but very dim. She rises. Despair assails her.

DOROTHY What does it mean that Miss MacSwiney forgets the Chief----and turns a different way... leaves him in peril, alone? Oh-oh-oh I am brain sick! And heart sick! ... the dawn is black! Life and courage are ebbd away and the day lies before me, so intolerably long. The sun will rise, the colours will wake, the birds will sing, and yet the knowledge of this falls like a chilling shadow over my spirit for in this prison there will be no colours, no bird-song, not even the light of the sun. And no reason why this imprisonment should ever end. If the Republic is defeated there will be no light or holiness or beauty in Ireland for a long while.

V/O (ghostly echo) It is not those who can inflict the most but to those who can endure the most that will conquer!

DOROTHY Terence MacSwiney....

V/O The life of iron! You must manage to endure this little thing! And as for God, God made this gaol. ... (Fading) You will always be too small a spirit for Ireland's fight, Dorothy!

She shakes her head, as if chasing out the silly fantasy. She takes up the notebook in which she has been writing her fiction. Lights brighten.

DOROTHY The sun did rise and over our ceiling stole a very faint, silvery light. It stayed about an hour, then stole away. It was scarcely light – the shadow of the light only, but it came from the sun. I have written my last story De Profundis. I can live this 'life of iron now'. All's well.

A knock at the door

DOROTHY Nora

NORA Have you seen the paper?

DOROTHY Liam Deasy's surrender? De Valera and all the leaders to deliver themselves up... Did he go insane in prison or sign under torture? (Narrating) I saw through the door all the prisoners standing about in groups, stricken, with white faces aghast. I understood what it seemed to mean - a calamitous surrender of the Republic. And yet, I alone, was not struck to the very heart with utter dismay.

(sits to write) I have believed in no policy since the surrender of the Four Courts except refusing to be driven into civil war. But men hold the reins, and it is the way of all men since the birth of the world. When war is made on him, to make war. So the heart rending war of brothers has gone on.

To those who rejoiced in the growing strength of the Republican army, surrender would be the end of the world. To me, it would be the beginning of hope. The Republic is invincible.

All this will look like mere cowardice to the other prisoners... they will think I am wanting my own release ... but it is what I believe, before God.

I went in to Lili O Brennan.

LILY It is worse than the treaty. Read the full statement!

DOROTHY (perusing the newspaper) But, he says he has wanted passionately to stop this war. He was trying to persuade Liam Lynch to make peace.

LILY Maybe! But the first we hear of it is when he is sentenced to be shot and sent out with a recommendation, dictated by them.

DOROTHY Later in the evening I found Nora.

NORA I've been thinking, Dorothy. It might come to some good. Surrender is better than compromise.

DOROTHY Then Lily re-joined us.

LILY The evening paper... Lynch has repudiated Deasy's suggestion; says he had no right, being a prisoner to speak.

DOROTHY (resigned) Ah!

She watches the women leave and calls out, rhetorically after they have gone.

DOROTHY but ... I do think... I think it will not end there!

On the soundtrack, voices of other prisoners calling, "Dorothy!", "Miss Macardle!"

DOROTHY (Rising to her feet) ... Then.... Monday night ... An unthought of disaster.

Voices calling. "Dorothy, come down! She has asked to see you!"

DOROTHY They have arrested Mary MacSwiney again and brought her here.

DOROTHY (She mimics Miss McSwiney's voice) "Now, Miss Macardle, I have to begin all over again". ... The thought is altogether unbearable.

DOROTHY (Conversing) Betty, we can't let her do it alone!

BETTY Hunger strike? But are you not afraid? You told me once –

DOROTHY Thank God, this time, I am not afraid. From tomorrow I will take no breakfast!

(narrating) Next morning I was breakfast orderly. It was rather luck, I thought that my orderly day should come now. In a few days, it might be difficult to give out food.

DOROTHY Anyone for toast? Which cell is Miss McSwiney's? A chorus of astonished voices answered: "Didn't you hear? She was released again during the night!" ... It is a victory cheering to the heart.

And me? I ate the breakfast of my life!

SCENE 4: Homemaking

Lights brighten considerably. Dorothy gathers an armful of boxes and things.

DOROTHY And Now! Word has come from the matron- the upper gallery is to be opened. I can take a sunny cell!

She rushes about hanging pictures and arranging her things as she narrates.

Well! When the doors of our new “suite” were unlocked and Betty and I found ourselves in possession, each, of a wide, pure, brilliant beam of sun, it was a revival of dead hope, joy and life beyond any words. I climbed and looked out at one of the most beautiful views that any window of mine has ever shown.

She steps up on a stool to peek out ... The sound of children laughing in the distance, tram bells, horse hooves.

The happy suburban street; prams, trams and gay advertisement hoardings and sunlit green fields. Since I came in possession of that window, I have not felt like a prisoner at all.

She skips lightly over to the door and peeps.

Through my peephole, I can see a glimpse of the iron cage-work that encloses us. The other peephole is stuffed with a handkerchief full of earth; sacred earth-

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,

Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

High in the wall, hangs that which is the whole solace and comfort of our lives – a sooty jerry can. That means TEA!!! - not prison tea, tasting of ancient tin, but tea as comforting to the soul and as inspiring to the mind as wine of Hippocrene.

She sniffs.

Aah! And it means fried bacon and eggs!

Woo hoo!

All our food is in my wife’s room, Betty keeps the kitchen, I keep the study here.–On the right hand side, a little two- shelved bracket. On the top shelf I have placed five books and a

tall empty glass. How beautiful tulips or daffodils would look in it against the bare, white wall!
There is a pot of face cream and a powder-box, relics of an almost forgotten civilisation.

I have hung a line for my blue dressing gown and my red shawl. A Zulu basket hangs on one of the nails. And the mirror, a little beauty, a present from Mother.

She studies her face and uses mirror to survey wall behind her.

And those pictures of the wall, windows into both my worlds. De la Mare's Poem. 'The faery's in the garden'. And, this one: cut from an English paper, a photo of the noblest man I have ever known- Erskine Childers. It is a good likeness, but I have seen him more vividly in my dreams. I can be resigned now to his death – a death as splendid and as fruitful for Ireland as Emmet's or Connolly's.

SCENE 5: Betty's Dreams

Continuing to study the mirror

I have been thinking about my dream of Miss McSwiney and the Chief ... afraid the dream might be coming true. This morning's paper has a great heading- 'Miss MacSwiney and De Valera – Republican split'

BETTY (Fearfully) Dorothy?

DOROTHY (still gazing in the mirror) Yes Betty?

BETTY Can I show you something?

DOROTHY She showed me a photo of a man in Free State uniform. He used to be in the IRA and was fond of her, but since he went over to the Free State army, she could not be friendly to him at all.

BETTY But now I understand! He has been arrested! Tom is his name. He was working secretly for the IRA all along. His officers discovered a plan and code he had prepared.

She bursts into tears

DOROTHY Oh Betty When did you find out?

BETTY Just today. A friend wrote to tell me ... she says there is bad news of him. And Dorothy, last night I dreamed that he sprang onto a cart I was sitting in. He gripped my hand, and he was gasping as if he was in pain. You've been reading that book about dreams. What does it mean?

DOROTHY It has no meaning, Betty. You were naturally anxious. (Narrating) But I was afraid - Carts were used for executions in the old days.

Back at her desk, she opens a letter.

Meanwhile, Mother writes about the "cheering news" of Deasy's surrender. Mother, Mona ... and Donald - are among the enemy. They are friends to all of me that matters least, enemies to my heart's desires. They will rejoice if all I have worked and been imprisoned for, is utterly broken and crushed. Donald is ashamed of me. He is a member of the privileged English class who have everything to gain and nothing to lose by the oppression of the working class, the subjection of Ireland. Maybe if someone he cared for were the victim... maybe if I had been allowed to die in prison, it would have opened up the way to light and once he saw truth he would, I think, have the courage to live by it.

She writes. The song of loss comes in again. She looks across anxiously at Betty.

Every night now, Betty dreams. How is it that Tom is always there in the wide green field yet Betty is trapped in the tangled, dark place, full of evil and peril, like Ireland now?

The crackling sound of fire comes in. She lies into bed.

And as she dreams of Tom, I dream of my plays. Ah Cassandra... We were both so young, she and I at the making of her. A chaotic drama in the Greek Style.

Distant applause!

And Asthara! I had a fantastic imagination then and mingled Arabian alchemy recklessly with old Gaelic myth.

And Dervorgilla. I wrote her innocent. My poetry is all over now.

BETTY Dorothy?

DOROTHY Yes Betty?

BETTY What is it to dream of white sheets? I dreamt I was sewing away at beautiful white sheets. Is that good?

DOROTHY I'm sure it must be good, Betty, ... I said this, knowing that the surest presage of news of death is to dream that you are making a shroud.

DOROTHY Betty, what are you doing?

BETTY I'm looking out at the half-moon and the sky lighted yellow over it. Sssh! Listen! ... The music of a fancy fair. 'Come back to Eireann' and away over there on the hills, a dog barking. (She weeps softly) The old dog barking; the big farm in Ballywilliam and the wide roads at night.

DOROTHY Come down Betty. (She reaches up and helps Betty down.) And she crept into bed and she cried and cried and cried for long hours till she finally fell asleep.

Dorothy lies awake, listening to the sound of the sobbing girl beside her and the faint strains of a distant concert band.

INTERLUDE/TRANSITION TO ACT 5: 'Trauma'

Lighting turns gaudy, surreal. The sound of the fairground band gives way to the grating opening riff of a 1960's psychedelic rock song. Dorothy suffers a physical convulsion. Her body begins gradually to heave and she is beset by the symptoms of a panic attack. She hears the crackle of fire again. She finds herself pinioned to the wall by some terrible psychic force. On the music track we hear snippets of radio news:

BBC ANNOUNCER This is London! 23rd of December 1958. The death has been announced of the renowned Irish broadcaster Miss Dorothy Macardle. .

DOROTHY (Live) Donald! Burning my books. Stop it, Donald..... Stop it!

She is flung from the wall and begins what seems like a manic or possessed "St Vitus" dance. Radio voiceover as music continues.

EAMON DEVALERA (V/O) Dorothy Macardle was one of the most noble and valiant women of our time, a champion of every cause that seemed to be good. She had a horror of hypocrisy or pretence in any form.

Lyrics of song kick in loud – Dance continues – fade under at instrumental break for more voiceovers.

FX: World War II – planes, bombs, heavy artillery. Radio crackle:

BBC (Actual archive V/O) This is the BBC Home and Forces Programme. Here is the news and John Snagg reading it German aircraft carried out a number of raids over Great Britain last night...

DOROTHY (V/O - broadcasting) Fantastic, how the piano and typewriter were twisted scrap, while my new cups and saucers survived!

RADIO EIREANN ANNOUNCER Miss Macardle is also remembered for her humanitarian work on behalf of children orphaned by the war in Europe. –

DOROTHY (V/O) I witnessed babies in cots, their poor little anatomies- clutching at the air with claw-like hands - those burning furnaces did exist...

Hollywood theme music plays.

HOLLYWOOD V/O This is the voice of The Uninvited (scream). Dorothy Macardle's gripping novel of the supernatural comes to the screen!

V/O RADIO EIREANN – LENNOX ROBINSON (Actual) Sooner or later the Abbey took the matter into its own hands! It went up in flames and in glory reflecting the glory of its players and playwrights.

DOROTHY (live) My plays, my manuscripts.... Everything burnt!

BBC V/O Draped in the Irish tricolour, Miss McArdle's coffin was carried to St Finian's Cemetery by surviving members of the IRA Four Courts garrison of 1922.

FX Sound of bombardment – gun salute

RADIO EIREANN Chief mourners were her sister Miss Mona Macardle and brothers Major J.R. Macardle and Mr. Donald F. Macardle.

DEVALERA Dorothy was always a lover of labour and truth. Suaimhneas sioraí dá h-anam dílis.

The music fades, the dance ends, Dorothy falls onto her bed, spent.

ACT 5: The Kilmainham Tortures: Removal to North Dublin Union May 1923

SCENE 1: Spectral Woman

The spectral woman from the Prologue gazes down on the unconscious Dorothy.

WOMAN Memories behave in a curious way ... Questioned about my own recollections, I felt baffled by the scatter of fragments- broken plans, discarded hopes, that were all I could see, until the kaleidoscope turned. ... Wake up, Dorothy. The hunger strike is over.

DOROTHY (baffled – reaches for her notebooks) Hunger strike?

WOMAN Oh, you won't find anything about it there. Only three of your gaol notebooks survived Donald's sorrowful fit: the other three, it would appear, were consumed by fire. Mary McSwiney came back to the prison again – yes a third time, and yes, she embarked upon another hunger strike, and yes, you faced down your dread, put the Republic first and starved yourself to the point of serious illness over a week in solidarity, before you were persuaded to stop and make yourself strong again for the fight that was to come.

Dorothy searches again for her lost notebooks.

WOMAN Don't panic. Your literary manuscript survived. Earthbound. And this. (She hands her a typed page) You were always an unrepentant propagandist! Here

DOROTHY The Kilmainham Tortures?

SCENE 2: The Kilmainham Tortures

Dorothy reads – as one would read a document for the first time.

DOROTHY It was the nineteenth day of their hunger-strike. Mrs O'Callaghan was suffering, and we were very anxious about Miss MacSwiney; she seemed restless, troubled by heart attacks and sudden alarming collapses: we made an urgent report to the Doctor and hoped, every time the gate opened, to see the stretcher- bearers coming in.

At about 3 o'clock word came from the Governor that we were to be removed to the North Dublin Union that night; a meeting of the prisoners was immediately summoned, it was unanimous: to leave the hunger-strikers alone in the empty jail was unthinkable.

BRIGHID (Salutes) Commandant Brighid O'Mullane, Cumann na mBan, A-Wing.

GOVERNOR I know who you are.

BRIGHID Governor Begley. No prisoner will consent to leave this prison tonight until the hunger-strikers are released.

GOVERNOR This is the best I can do. Eighty one prisoners only, will be removed to the North Dublin Union.

BRIGHID And if we refuse?

GOVERNOR Then you will be removed, if necessary, by force.

BRIGHID So tell us this, Governor. Is woman-beating a soldier's work?

GOVERNOR I don't mind that, I have beaten my wife.

Suddenly a rumor flew through the prison; stretcher-bearers had come in: a moment of joyous triumph and then dismay. Mrs. O'Callaghan was released but not Miss McSwiney.

BRIGHID Right girls! Marshal yourselves on the top gallery. We are safely caged in with iron bars all around the horse-shoe. A few of you position yourselves on the iron bridge across the top. A few more at the top of the staircase.

A WOMAN Oh Lord, I'm not standin' at the top of them stairs. They're awful steep! I do get vertigo!!!

BRIGHID Then I will take the stairs.

A WOMAN Now what do we do?

BRIGHID Now... We wait!... Miss Humphreys?

SIGHLE Tally ho! You are to resist but not to attack; you are not to come to one another's rescue; no missiles are to be thrown; above all, for the sake of Miss MacSwiney, whatever is done to you, no one must cry out. ... Mother?... would you like-?

MRS HUMPHREYS (drones) First Sorrowful Mystery, the Agony in the Garden. Our Father who art in Heaven Hallowed by Thy Name, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

DOROTHY After the rosary, we stood three deep arms locked, and sang, as we do every evening, some of Miss MacSwiney's favorite songs.

Chorus sings on the soundscape.

DOROTHY At 10 o'clock, one of the matrons came up the staircase, with a lighted taper.

MATRON Ladies, I implore of you – Please. I have seen the men who are to do the work; C.I.D. and military police men.

SIGHLE Send them up. Tell them to do their worst!

MATRON God pity you, girls, you are going into the hands of men worse than devils.

She slopes away, heavy-hearted. A clock ticks. Then there is the roar of violent men and the banging of metal on metal. Dorothy clings fiercely to the bars.

DOROTHY The gate opened, and the men rushed in, across the compound and up the stairs. Brigid O'Mullane and Rita Farrelly, the first seized, were crushed and bruised between men dragging them down and men pressing up the stairs.

Mrs. Gordon, was next. It was hard not to go to her rescue. She clung to the iron bars, the men beat her hands with their clenched fists again and again; that failed to make her loose her hold and they struck her twice in the chest. Then one took her head and beat it against the iron bars. I think she was unconscious after that;

The men seemed skilled; they had many methods. Some twisted the girl's arms, some bent back their thumbs; one who seized Iseult Stuart kicked her on the stairs with his knee. Florence MacDermott was disabled by a blow on the ankle with a revolver; Sheila Bowen fell with a heart attack.

They beat Kathleen O'Carroll on the head with her shoe. one man thrust a finger down Moira Broderick's throat.

She reads this section from the typescript, in horror, miming the hand over her face.

There was one man with a blackened face. When my own turn came, after I had been dragged from the railings, a great hand closed on my face, blinding and stifling me, and thrust me back down to the ground among trampling feet. I heard someone who saw it scream and wondered how Miss MacSwiney would bear the noise. After that I remember being carried by two or three men and flung down in the surgery to be searched. One of the women searchers was screaming like a drunkard in Camden Street on Saturday night; she struck Mrs. Gordon in the face.

Our instructions not to hit back had been well obeyed. Some soldiers who were on guard there looked wretched. Our own wardresses were bringing us cups of water; they were crying.

She mimics the doctor – takes a long, satisfying drag from a cigarette.

And all the while the prison doctor looked on smiling, smoking a cigarette, he seemed to have come for entertainment; he did nothing for the injured girls.

She drops the cigarette and crushes it under her foot.

Then we were thrown into lorries, one by one, and driven away. It all took five hours.

I declare this to be a full and true account.

Dorothy Macardle

Military Prison, North Dublin Union, May 1st, 1923.

EPILOGUE: 'Release'

A low lament on the concertina

DOROTHY Ten days later.

WARDRESS Miss Macardle. Your release papers are in order. (She glances at them) Your taxi cab is waiting.

Dorothy nods non-committally. She rises, gaunt but determined. The haunting sound of the melodeon deepens. Dorothy packs her pages, pens and trinkets into her ornate box and prepares to leave the NDU.

Music changes to an upbeat and optimistic jig or reel. Dorothy feels the sun on her face, turns and smiles – ever so slightly.

Lights fade to blackout.

THE END

