

SEAN O'CASEY



COLLECTED PLAYS

Volume Two

THE SILVER TASSIE
WITHIN THE GATES
THE STAR TURNS RED

LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO LTD
NEW YORK • ST MARTIN'S PRESS
1964

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*First Edition 1949
Reprinted 1950, 1952, 1959, 1964*

MACMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED
St Martin's Street London WC 2
also Bombay Calcutta Madras Melbourne

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED
70 Bond Street Toronto 2

ST MARTIN'S PRESS INC
175 Fifth Avenue New York 10 NY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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THE SILVER TASSIE

A Tragi-Comedy in Four Acts

STAGE VERSION

TO
EILEEN
WITH THE YELLOW DAFFODILS
IN THE GREEN VASE

NOTES

THE Croucher's make-up should come as close as possible to a death's head, a skull; and his hands should show like those of a skeleton's. He should sit somewhere *above* the group of Soldiers; preferably to one side, on the left, from view-point of audience, so as to overlook the Soldiers. He should look languid, as if very tired of life.

The group of Soldiers — Act Two — should enter in a close mass, as if each was keeping the other from falling, utterly weary and tired out. They should appear as if they were almost locked together.

The Soldiers' last response to the Staff-Wallah's declaration, namely, "To the Guns!" should have in these three words the last high notes of "The Last Post".

The song sung at the end of the play should be given to the best two (or one) singers in the cast. If, on the other hand, there be no passable singer among the players, the song should be omitted.

Perhaps a more suitable Spiritual than "Sweet Chariot" would be chosen for Harry to sing. For instance, "Keep Inchin' Along", or "Keep Me from Sinkin' Down".

The Chants in the play are simple Plain Song. The first chant is given in full as an example of the way in which they are sung. In the others, the dots . . . indicate that the note preceding them should be sustained till the music indicates a change. There are three parts in each chant: the Intonation; the Meditation; and the Ending. After a little practice, they will be found to be easy to sing. The Soldiers having the better voices should be selected to intone the chants, irrespective of the numbers allotted to them as characters in the book of the play.

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

(As they appear)

SYLVESTER HEEGAN

MRS. HEEGAN, *his wife*

SIMON NORTON

SUSIE MONICAN

MRS. FORAN

TEDDY FORAN, *her husband*

HARRY HEEGAN, D.C.M., *Heegan's son*

JESSIE TAITE

BARNEY BAGNAL

THE CROUCHER

1ST SOLDIER

2ND SOLDIER

3RD SOLDIER

4TH SOLDIER

THE CORPORAL

THE VISITOR

THE STAFF-WALLAH

1ST STRETCHER-BEARER

2ND STRETCHER-BEARER

1ST CASUALTY

2ND CASUALTY

SURGEON FORBY MAXWELL

THE SISTER OF THE WARD

ACT I.—Room in Heegan's home.

ACT II.—Somewhere in France (*later on*).

ACT III.—Ward in a Hospital (*a little later on*).

ACT IV.—Room in Premises of Avondale Football Club
(*later on still*).

ACT I

The eating, sitting, and part sleeping room of the Heegan family. A large window at back looks on to a quay, from which can be seen the centre mast of a steamer, at the top of which gleams a white light. Another window at right looks down on a side street. Under the window at back, plumb in the centre, is a stand, the legs gilded silver and the top gilded gold; on the stand is a purple velvet shield on which are pinned a number of silver medals surrounding a few gold ones. On each side of the shield is a small vase holding a bunch of artificial flowers. The shield is draped with red and yellow ribbons. To the left of the stand is a bed covered with a bedspread of black striped with vivid green. To the right of the stand is a dresser and chest of drawers combined. The fireplace is to the left. Beside the fireplace is a door leading to a bedroom, another door which gives access to the rest of the house and the street, on the right. At the corner left is a red coloured stand resembling an easel, having on it a silver-gilt framed picture photograph of Harry Heegan in football dress, crimson jersey with yellow collar and cuffs and a broad yellow belt, black stockings, and yellow football boots. A table on which are a half-pint bottle of whisky, a large parcel of bread and meat sandwiches, and some copies of English illustrated magazines.

Sylvester Heegan and Simon Norton are sitting by the fire. Sylvester Heegan is a stockily built man of sixty-five; he has been a docker all his life since first the muscles of his arms could safely grip a truck, and even at sixty-five the steel in them is only beginning to stiffen.

Simon Norton is a tall man, originally a docker too, but by a little additional steadiness, a minor effort towards self-education,

a natural, but very slight superior nimbleness of mind, has risen in the Company's estimation and has been given the position of checker, a job entailing as many hours of work as a docker, almost as much danger, twice as much responsibility, and a corresponding reduction in his earning powers. He is not so warmly, but a little more circumspectly dressed than Sylvester, and in his manner of conduct and speech there is a hesitant suggestion of greater refinement than in those of Sylvester, and a still more vague indication that he is aware of it. This timid semi-conscious sense of superiority, which Simon sometimes forgets, is shown frequently by a complacent stroking of a dark beard which years are beginning to humiliate. The night is cold, and Simon and Sylvester occasionally stretch longingly towards the fire. They are fully dressed and each has his topcoat and hat beside him, as if ready to go out at a moment's notice. Susie Monican is standing at the table polishing a Lee-Enfield rifle with a chamois cloth; the butt of the rifle is resting on the table. She is a girl of twenty-two, well-shaped limbs, challenging breasts, all of which are defiantly hidden by a rather long dark blue skirt and bodice buttoning up to the throat, relieved by a crimson scarf around her neck, knotted in front and falling down her bosom like a man's tie. She is undeniably pretty, but her charms are almost completely bidden by her sombre, ill-fitting dress, and the rigid manner in which she has made her hair up declares her unflinching and uncompromising modesty. Just now she is standing motionless, listening intently, looking towards the door on right.

Mrs. Heegan is standing at the window at right, listening too, one hand pulling back the curtain, but her attention, taken from the window, is attracted to the door. She is older than Sylvester, stiffened with age and rheumatism; the end of her life is unknowingly lumbering towards a rest: the impetus necessity has given to continual toil and striving is beginning to slow down, and everything she has to do is done with a quiet

mechanical persistence. Her inner ear cannot hear even a faint echo of a younger day. Neither Sylvester nor Simon has noticed the attentive attitude of Mrs. Heegan or Susie, for Sylvester, with one arm outstretched crooked at the elbow, is talking with subdued intensity to Simon.

Sylvester. I seen him do it, mind you. I seen him do it.

Simon. I quite believe you, Sylvester.

Sylvester. Break a chain across his bisseps ! [*With pantomime action*] Fixes it over his arm . . . bends it up . . . a little strain . . . snaps in two . . . right across his bisseps !

Susie. Shush you, there !

[*Mrs. Heegan goes out with troubled steps by door. The rest remain still for a few moments.*]

Sylvester. A false alarm.

Simon. No cause for undue anxiety ; there's plenty of time yet.

Susie [*chanting as she resumes the polishing of rifle*] :

Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain :

He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.

[*She sends the chant in the direction of Sylvester and Simon, Susie coming close to the two men and sticking an angry face in between them.*]

Susie. When the two of yous stand quiverin' together on the dhread day of the Last Judgement, how will the two of yous feel if yous have nothin' to say but " he broke a chain across his bisseps " ? Then the two of you'll

know that the wicked go down into hell, an' all the people who forget God !

[She listens a moment, and leaving down the rifle, goes out by door left.]

Sylvester. It's persecutin', that tambourine theology of Susie's. I always get a curious, sickenin' feelin', Simon, when I hear the Name of the Supreme Bein' tossed into the quietness of a sensible conversation.

Simon. The day he won the Cross Country Championship of County Dublin, Syl, was a day to be chronicled.

Sylvester. In a minor way, yes, Simon. But the day that caps the chronicle was the one when he punched the fear of God into the heart of Police Constable 63 C under the stars of a frosty night on the way home from Terenure.

Simon. Without any exaggeration, without any exaggeration, mind you, Sylvester, that could be called a memorable experience.

Sylvester. I can see him yet *[he gets up, slides from side to side, dodging and parrying imaginary blows]* glidin' round the dazzled Bobby, cross-ey'd tryin' to watch him.

Simon *[tapping his pipe resolutely on the hob]*. Unperturbed, mind you, all the time.

Sylvester. An' the hedges by the road-side standin' stiff in the silent cold of the air, the frost beads on the branches glistenin' like toss'd-down diamonds from the breasts of the stars, the quietness of the night stimulated to a fuller stillness by the mockin' breathin' of Harry, an' the heavy, ragin' pantin' of the Bobby, an' the quickenin' beats of our own hearts afraid, of hopin' too little or hopin' too much.

[During the last speech by Sylvester, Susie has come in with a bayonet, and has commenced to polish it.

Susie. We don't go down on our knees often enough ; that's why we're not able to stand up to the Evil One : we don't go down on our knees enough. . . . I can hear some persons fallin' with a splash of sparks into the lake of everlastin' fire. . . . An account of every idle word shall be given at the last day.

[She goes out again with rifle.

Susie [bending towards Simon and Sylvester as she goes]. God is listenin' to yous ; God is listenin' to yous !

Sylvester. Dtch, dtch, dtch. People ought to be forcibly restrained from constantly cannonadin' you with the name of the Deity.

Simon. Dubiety never brush'd a thought into my mind, Syl, while I was waitin' for the moment when Harry would stretch the Bobby hors dee combaa on the ground.

Sylvester [resuming his pantomime actions]. There he was staggerin', beatin' out blindly, every spark of energy panted out of him, while Harry fainted, dodg'd, side-stepp'd, then suddenly sail'd in an' put him asleep with . . .

Simon. A right-handed hook to the jaw ! } [together].

Sylvester. A left-handed hook to the jaw ! }

Sylvester [after a pause]. A left-handed hook to the jaw, Simon.

Simon. No, no, Syl, a right-handed hook to the jaw.

[Mrs. Foran runs quickly in by the door with a frying-pan in her hand, on which is a steak. She comes to the fire,

pushing, so as to disturb the two men. She is one of the many gay, careworn women of the working-class.

Mrs. Foran [rapidly]. A pot of clothes is boilin' on the fire above, an' I knew you wouldn't mind me slappin' a bit of a steak on here for a second to show him, when he comes in before he goes away, that we're mindful of his needs, an' I'm hopeful of a dream to-night that the sea's between us, not lookin' very haggard in the mornin' to find the dream a true one. [*With satisfied anticipation*]

For I'll be single again, yes, I'll be single again ;

An' I eats what I likes, . . . an' I drinks what I likes,

An' I likes what I likes, when I'm——

[*Stopping suddenly*] What's the silence for ?

Sylvester [slowly and decidedly]. I was at the fight, Simon, an' I seen him givin' a left-handed hook to the jaw.

Mrs. Foran. What fight ?

Simon [slowly and decidedly]. I was there too, an' I saw him down the Bobby with a right-handed hook to the jaw.

Mrs. Foran. What Bobby ? [*A pause.*]

Sylvester. It was a close up, an' I don't know who'd know better if it wasn't the boy's own father.

Mrs. Foran. What boy . . . what father ?

Sylvester. Oh, shut up, woman, an' don't be smotherin' us with a shower of questions.

Susie [who has entered on the last speech, and has started to polish a soldier's steel helmet]. Oh, the miserableness of them that don't know the things that belong unto their peace. They try one thing after another, they try

everything, but they never think of trying God. [*Coming nearer to them.*] Oh, the happiness of knowing that God's hand has pick'd you out for heaven. [*To Mrs. Foran*] What's the honey-pot kiss of a lover to the kiss of righteousness and peace?

[*Mrs. Foran, embarrassed, goes over to window.*]

Susie [*turning to Simon*]. Simon, will you not close the dandy door of the public-house and let the angels open the pearly gates of heaven for you?

Sylvester. We feel very comfortable where we are, Susie.

Susie. Don't mock, Sylvester, don't mock. You'd run before a great wind, tremble in an earthquake, and flee from a fire; so don't treat lightly the still, small voice calling you to repentance and faith.

Sylvester [*with appeal and irritation*]. Oh, do give over worryin' a man, Susie.

Susie. God shows His love by worrying, and worrying, and worrying the sinner. The day will come when you will call on the mountains to cover you, and then you'll weep and gnash your teeth that you did not hearken to Susie's warning. [*Putting her hands appealingly on his shoulders*] Sylvester, if you pray long enough, and hard enough, and deep enough, you'll get the power to fight and conquer Beelzebub.

Mrs. Foran. I'll be in a doxological mood to-night, not because the kingdom of heaven'll be near me, but because my husband'll be far away, and to-morrow [*singing*]:

I'll be single again, yes, single again;
An' I goes where I likes, an' I does what I likes,
An' I likes what I likes now I'm single again!

Simon. Go on getting Harry's things ready, Susie, and defer the dosing of your friends with canticles till the time is ripe with rest for them to listen quietly.

[Simon and Sylvester are very self-conscious during Susie's talk to them. Simon empties his pipe by tapping the head on the hob of the grate. He then blows through it. As he is blowing through it, Sylvester is emptying his by tapping it on the hob ; as he is blowing it Simon taps his again ; as Simon taps Sylvester taps with him, and then they look into the heads of the pipes and blow together.]

Susie. It must be mercy or it must be judgement : if not mercy to-day it may be judgement to-morrow. He is never tired of waiting and waiting and waiting ; and watching and watching and watching ; and knocking and knocking and knocking for the sinner — you, Sylvester, and you, Simon — to turn from his wickedness and live. Oh, if the two of you only knew what it was to live ! Not to live leg-staggering an' belly-creeping among the pain-spotted and sin-splashed desires of the flesh ; but to live, oh, to live swift-flying from a holy peace to a holy strength, and from holy strength to a holy joy, like the flashing flights of a swallow in the deep beauty of a summer sky.

[Simon and Sylvester shift about, self-conscious and uneasy.]

Susie *[placing her hand first on Simon's shoulder and then on Sylvester's].* The two of you God's elegant swallows ; a saved pair ; a loving pair strong-wing'd, freed from the gin of the snarer, tip of wing to tip of wing, flying fast or darting swift together to the kingdom of heaven.

Simon *[expressing a protecting thought to Sylvester].* One of the two of us should go out and hunt back the old

woman from the perishing cold of watching for the return of Harry.

Sylvester. She'll be as cold as a naked corpse, an' unstinted watchin' won't bring Harry back a minute sooner. I'll go an' drive her back. [*He rises to go*] I'll be back in a minute, Susie.

Simon [*hurriedly*]. Don't bother, Syl, I'll go; she won't be farther than the corner of the street; you go on toasting yourself where you are. [*He rises*] I'll be back in a minute, Susie.

Mrs. Foran [*running to the door*]. Rest easy the two of you, an' I'll go, so as to give Susie full time to take the sin out of your bones an' put you both in first-class form for the kingdom of heaven. [*She goes out.*]

Susie. Sinners that jeer often add to the glory of God: going out, she gives you, Sylvester, and you, Simon, another few moments, precious moments — oh, how precious, for once gone, they are gone for ever — to listen to the warning from heaven.

Simon [*suddenly*]. Whisht, here's somebody coming, I think?

Sylvester. I'll back this is Harry comin' at last.
[*A pause as the three listen.*]

Sylvester. No, it's nobody.

Simon. Whoever it was 's gone by.

Susie. Oh, Syl, oh, Simon, don't try to veil the face of God with an evasion. You can't, you can't cod God. This may be your last chance before the pains of hell encompass the two of you. Hope is passing by;

salvation is passing by, and glory arm-in-arm with her. In the quietness left to you go down on your knees and pray that they come into your hearts and abide with you for ever. . . . [*With fervour, placing her left hand on Simon's shoulder and her right hand on Sylvester's, and shaking them*] Get down on your knees, get down on your knees, get down on your knees and pray for conviction of sin, lest your portion in David become as the portion of the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Perizzites and the Jebusites !

Sylvester. Eh, eh, Susie ; cautious now — you seem to be forgettin' yourself.

Simon. Desist, Susie, desist. Violence won't gather people to God. It only ingenders hostility to what you're trying to do.

Sylvester. You can't batter religion into a man like that.

Simon. Religion is love, but that sort of thing is simply a nullification of religion.

Susie. Bitterness and wrath in exhortation is the only hope of rousing the pair of yous into a sense of coming and everlasting penalties.

Sylvester. Well, give it a miss, give it a miss to me now. Don't try to claw me into the kingdom of heaven. An' you only succeed in distempering piety when you try to mangle it into a man's emotions.

Simon. Heaven is all the better, Susie, for being a long way off.

Sylvester. If I want to pray I do it voluntarily, but I'm not going to be goaded an' goaded into it.

Susie. I go away in a few days to help to nurse the