

SCENE ONE

The McLennan household / funeral home,  
in the Irish town of Innadalog, 1936.

Most of the stage (from stage left) is the living room of the house. It is fairly sparse, with a rectangular table and three chairs. On the table sit three glasses, a notepad, a pencil, a deck of cards, and a cribbage board. There is a door upstage that leads to the rest of the house, and a door on the stage right side that leads to the graveyard next door. The graveyard takes up a small portion of the stage right.

It is nighttime. Billy Stutter digs a grave. He is in his mid-twenties, and he works (and lives) with quiet resolve. Taliesin McLennan, an Irish spitfire of the same age, arrives behind him, out of breath.

*[Playwright's note: Since the central character of this play barely speaks, it's important that time be taken to register his non-verbal responses. The paragraph breaks in speeches to Billy represent moments where the characters should pause to gage his reaction. Obviously, the extent to which they are genuinely reading his reaction or just projecting his response will depend upon the moment.]*

TALIESIN

Digging a grave, are ya, Billy?

Sure, and don't it just be my luck? Your house be right on the other side of the graveyard, yet I go to your house by the road and then search high and low through Innadalog, and all for fear of walking through a graveyard at night. And with me family running a funeral home, no less. I be a doolally, and that's a fact.

At any rate, I needed you to check the spelling on another letter for me.

She produces a letter from her pocket and hands it to Billy.

He takes it from her and starts correcting it, while still taking in what she's saying.

TALIESIN (CONT'D)

I know, I know. It's daft to care about the spelling in love letters, but I want 'em to be perfect. His certainly are.

It's terribly romantic, don't you think? We've never even met, and yet I think he may know me better than anyone else alive. Although I suppose you're learning a lot about me reading these letters. But I trust you, Billy.

Like having a second brother, it is.

And it's only to see you fight Terry O'Reilly that he spent his leave in Innadalog in the first place.

I only wish he'd had the nerve to talk to me then. Then I'd at least know what he looks like.

I was surprised to find no one at your house, Billy. Sure, you do get out and about, but your auntie, well, she's virtually a shut-in, what with her poor health and all. Did she maybe not hear me? Is her hearing gone too?

It would have to be pretty bad, for sure I knocked on that door loud enough to raise the dead, and--

Oh, Billy. I'm sorry. She was a good woman, she was. Raising you after your parents died, and all. Me uncle was very fond of her, you know. All of us were.

I'll make some arrangements for a funeral. Small, like.

Course, we do prefer that people not be digging their own graves. Why take away from my eejit brother the one job he's good at?

But seeing how much work you've already done, and how you're a friend of the family, we'll make an exception. But don't be telling anyone.

Ha! Look who I'm talking to! Not like the worst stutterer in Ireland's likely to go running off at the mouth!

Well, it all seems a tad trivial now, but...how's the letter looking, Billy?

Billy finishes up his editing and hands her back the letter.

## TALIESIN (CONT'D)

So...leaving aside the spelling...that's the kind of letter a fella, a soldier fella, would like to get, yeah? Enthusiastic but not desperate? Sensual but chaste?

What? What?!? It's alright to be out of your mind when you're in love. Do you know the other day, I thought I heard him calling out to me?

I'm walking around Beggar's Pond, just passing the time, minding my own business, when I hear a man's voice saying "I love you", with a faint echo. "I love you." At first, I thought it must just be the waves, but then I remembered that ponds don't have waves. So what was it then?

"I love you, I love you." "I love you, I love you." A tad simple for poetry, perhaps, but lovely all the same.

Your house be right on top of Beggar's Pond, so next time you see me walking out there, you make sure to give a listen. You'll hear it.

Thanks for the help, Billy. And sorry about your auntie.

Taliesin makes her way to her house, enters, and goes off to bed. Billy watches after her, his gaze lingering. Then he returns to his digging.