

The Land Of Heart's Desire

By William Butler Yeats

CHARACTERS

MAURTEEN BRUIN

BRIDGET BRUIN, his wife

SHAWN BRUIN, their son

MAIRE BRUIN, wife of Shawn

FATHER HART

A FAERY CHILD

SCENE: *In the Barony of Kilmacowan, in the county of Sligo, at a remote time.*

SETTING: *a room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep alcove on the right. There are benches in the alcove, and a table; a crucifix on the wall. The alcove is full of a glow of light from the fire. There is an open door facing the audience, to the left, and to the left of this a bench. Through the door one can see the forest. It is night, but the moon or a late sunset glimmers through the trees, and carries the eye far off into a vague, mysterious world. MAURTEEN BRUIN, SHAWN BRUIN, and BRIDGET BRUIN sit in the alcove at the table, or about the fire. They are dressed in the costume of some remote time, and near them sits an old priest, FATHER HART, in the garb of a friar. There is food and drink upon the table. MAIRE BRUIN stands by the door, reading a yellow manuscript. If she looks up, she can see through the door into the wood.*

BRIDGET BRUIN

Because I bade her go and feed the calves,
She took that old book down out of the thatch
And has been doubled over it all day.
We should be deafened by her groans and moans
Had she to work as some do, Father Hart,
Get up at dawn like me, and mend and scour;
Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like you,
The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

BRIDGET BRUIN

You are too cross.

BRIDGET BRUIN The young side with the young.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

She quarrels with my wife a bit at times,
And is too deep just now in the old book!
But do not blame her greatly; she will grow
As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
When but the moons of marriage dawn and die
For half a score of times.

FATHER HART

Their hearts are wild
As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET BRUIN

She would not mind the griddle, milk the cow,
Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

FATHER HART

I never saw her read a book before;
What may it be?

MAURTEEN BRUIN I do not rightly know;
It has been in the thatch for fifty years.
My father told me my grandfather wrote it,
Killed a red heifer and bound it with the hide.
But draw your chair this way--supper is spread;
And little good he got out of the book,
Because it filled his house with roaming bards,
And roaming ballad-makers and the like,
And wasted all his goods.--Here is the wine:
The griddle bread's beside you, Father Hart.
Colleen, what have you got there in the book

That you must leave the bread to cool? Had I,
Or had my father, read or written books
There were no stockings stuffed with golden guineas
To come, when I am dead, to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART

You should not fill your head with foolish dreams.
What are you reading?

MARIE BRUIN How a Princess Edane,
A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May Eve like this,
And followed, half awake and half asleep,
Until she came into the Land of Faëry,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue;
And she is still there, busied with a dance,
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,
Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

Persuade the colleen to put by the book:
My grandfather would mutter just such things,
And he was no judge of a dog or horse,
And any idle boy could blarney him:
Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART

Put it away, my colleen.
God spreads the heavens above us like great wings,
And gives a little round of deeds and days,
And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,
And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,
Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes,
Half shuddering and half joyous, from God's peace:
And it was some wrecked angel, blind from tears,
Who flattered Edane's heart with merry words.
My colleen, I have seen some other girls

Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
And they grew like their neighbours and were glad
In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes;
For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age bring the red flare again.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

That's true--but she's too young to know it's true.

BRIDGET BRUIN

She's old enough to know that it is wrong
To mope and idle.

SHAWN BRUIN I've little blame for her;
And mother's tongue were harder still to bear,
But for her fancies: this is May Eve too,
When the good people post about the world,
And surely one may think of them to-night.
Maire, have you the primroses to fling
Before the door to make a golden path
For them to bring good luck into the house?
Remember, they may steal new-married brides
After the fall of twilight on May Eve.
(MAIRE BRUIN *goes over to the window and takes flowers from the
bowl and strews them outside the door.*)

FATHER HART

You do well, daughter, because God permits
Great power to the good people on May Eve.

SHAWN BRUIN

They can work all their will with primroses;
Change them to golden money, or little flames
To burn up those who do them any wrong.

MARIE BRUIN (in a dreamy voice)

I had no sooner flung them by the door
Than the wind cried and hurried them away;
And then a child came running in the wind
And caught them in her hands and fondled them:
Her dress was green: her hair was of red gold;
Her face was pale as water before dawn.

FATHER HART

Whose child can this be?

MAURTEEN BRUIN No one's child at all.
She often dreams that someone has gone by
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

MARIE BRUIN

They will not bring good luck into the house,
For they have blown the primroses away;
Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God?

FATHER HART

Colleen, they are the children of the fiend,
And they have power until the end of Time,
When God shall fight with them a great pitched battle
And hack them into pieces.

MARIE BRUIN

He will smile,
Father, perhaps, and open His great door,
And call the pretty and kind into His house.

FATHER HART

Did but the lawless angels see that door,
They would fall, slain by everlasting peace;
And when such angels knock upon our doors
Who goes with them must drive through the same storm.
*(A knock at the door. MAIRE BRUIN opens it and then goes to the
dresser and fills a porringer with milk and hands it through the door,
and takes it back empty and closes the door.)*

MARIE BRUIN

A little queer old woman cloaked in green,
Who came to beg a porringer of milk.

BRIDGET BRUIN

The good people go asking milk and fire
Upon May Eve--Woe on the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.
I knew you would bring evil on the house.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

Who was she?

MARIE BRUIN Both the tongue and face were strange.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

Some strangers came last week to Clover Hill;
She must be one of them.

BRIDGET BRUIN I am afraid.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

The priest will keep all harm out of the house.

FATHER HART

The cross will keep all harm out of the house
While it hangs there.

MAURTEEN BRUIN Come, sit beside me, colleen,

And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days
Like the good glow of the turf, and when I die
I will make you the wealthiest hereabout:
For hid away where nobody can find
I have a stocking full of yellow guineas.

BRIDGET BRUIN

You are the fool of every pretty face,
And I must pinch and pare that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

Do not be cross; she is a right good girl!
The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart.
My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change
Done well for me and for old Bridget there?
We have a hundred acres of good land,
And sit beside each other at the fire,
The wise priest of our parish to our right,
And you and our dear son to left of us.
To sit beside the board and drink good wine
And watch the turf smoke coiling from the fire
And feel content and wisdom in your heart,
This is the best of life; when we are young
We long to tread a way none trod before,
But find the excellent old way through love
And through the care of children to the hour
For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-bye.
*(A knock at the door. MAIRE BRUIN opens it and then takes a sod of
turf out of the hearth in the tongs and goes out through the door.
SHAWN follows her and meets her coming in.)*

SHAWN BRUIN

What is it draws you to the chill o' the wood?
There is a light among the stems of the trees
That makes one shiver.

MARIE BRUIN

A little queer old man
Made me a sign to show he wanted fire
To light his pipe.

BRIDGET BRUIN You've given milk and fire,

Upon the unluckiest night of the year, and brought,
For all you know, evil upon the house.
Before you married you were idle and fine,
And went about with ribbons on your head;
And now--no, father, I will speak my mind,
She is not a fitting wife for any man--

SHAWN BRUIN
Be quiet, mother!

MAURTEEN BRUIN
You are much too cross!

MARIE BRUIN
What do I care if I have given this house,
Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
Into the power of faeries!

BRIDGET BRUIN You know well
How calling the good people by that name
Or talking of them over much at all
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MARIE BRUIN
Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house!
Let me have all the freedom I have lost;
Work when I will and idle when I will!
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame!

FATHER HART
You cannot know the meaning of your words.

MARIE BRUIN
Father, I am right weary of four tongues:
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,

A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,
And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

(SHAWN BRUIN *comes over to her and leads her to the settle.*)

SHAWN BRUIN

Do not blame me: I often lie awake
Thinking that all things trouble your bright head--
How beautiful it is--such broad pale brows
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair!
Sit down beside me here--these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MARIE BRUIN

Oh, you are the great door-post of this house,
And I, the red nasturtium, climbing up.
(She takes SHAWN'S *hand, but looks shyly at the priest and lets it go.*)

FATHER HART

Good daughter, take his hand--by love alone
God binds us to Himself and to the hearth
And shuts us from the waste beyond His peace,
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN BRUIN

Would that the world were mine to give it you
With every quiet hearth and barren waste,
The maddening freedom of its woods and tides,
And the bewildering light upon its hills.

MARIE BRUIN

Then I would take and break it in my hands
To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN BRUIN

Then I would mould a world of fire and dew
With no one bitter, grave, or over wise,

And nothing marred or old to do you wrong,
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MARIE BRUIN

Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN BRUIN

Once a fly dancing in a beam of the sun,
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament
Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold
With my warm heart forever; and sun and moon
Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll;
But your white spirit still walk by my spirit.
(*A VOICE sings in the distance.*)

MARIE BRUIN

Did you hear something call? Oh, guard me close,
Because I have said wicked things to-night;
And seen a pale-faced child with red-gold hair,
And longed to dance upon the winds with her.
A VOICE (*close to the door*) The wind blows out of the gates of the
day, The wind blows over the lonely of heart And the lonely of heart
is withered away, While the faeries dance in a place apart, Shaking
their milk-white feet in a ring, Tossing their milk-white arms in the
air; For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing Of a land
where even the old are fair, And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say, "When the wind has laughed and
murmured and sung, The lonely of heart is withered away!"

MAURTEEN BRUIN

I am right happy, and would make all else
Be happy too. I hear a child outside,
And will go bring her in out of the cold.
(*He opens the door. A CHILD dressed in pale green and with red-
gold hair comes into the house.*)

THE CHILD

I tire of winds and waters and pale lights!

MAURTEEN BRUIN

You are most welcome. It is cold out there;
Who would think to face such cold on a May Eve?

THE CHILD

And when I tire of this warm little house
There is one here who must away, away,
To where the woods, the stars, and the white streams
Are holding a continual festival.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

Oh, listen to her dreamy and strange talk.
Come to the fire.

THE CHILD

I will sit upon your knee,
For I have run from where the winds are born,
And long to rest my feet a little while.
(She sits upon his knee.)

BRIDGET BRUIN

How pretty you are!

MAURTEEN BRUIN Your hair is wet with dew!

BRIDGET BRUIN

I will warm your chilly feet.
(She takes the child's feet in her hands.)

MAURTEEN BRUIN

You must have come
A long, long way, for I have never seen
Your pretty face, and must be tired and hungry;
Here is some bread and wine.

THE CHILD

The wine is bitter.

Old mother, have you no sweet food for me?

BRIDGET BRUIN

I have some honey!

(She goes into the next room.)

MAURTEEN BRUIN You are a dear child;

The mother was quite cross before you came.

(BRIDGET returns with the honey, and goes to the dresser and fills a porringer with milk.)

BRIDGET BRUIN

She is the child of gentle people; look

At her white hands and at her pretty dress.

I've brought you some new milk, but wait awhile,

And I will put it by the fire to warm,

For things well fitted for poor folk like us

Would never please a high-born child like you.

THE CHILD

Old mother, my old mother, the green dawn

Brightens above while you blow up the fire;

And evening finds you spreading the white cloth.

The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,

But you work on because your heart is old.

BRIDGET BRUIN

The young are idle.

THE CHILD Old father, you are wise

And all the years have gathered in your heart

To whisper of the wonders that are gone.

The young must sigh through many a dream and hope,

But you are wise because your heart is old.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

Oh, who would think to find so young a child

Loving old age and wisdom?

(BRIDGET *gives her more bread and honey.*)

THE CHILD No more, mother.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

What a small bite! The milk is ready now;

What a small sip!

THE CHILD

Put on my shoes, old mother,

For I would like to dance now I have eaten.

The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,

And I would like to dance until the reeds

And the white waves have danced themselves to sleep.

BRIDGET (*Having put on her shoes, she gets off the old man's knees and is about to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks and covers her eyes.*)

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER HART

You cannot know how naughty your words are!

That is our Blessed Lord!

THE CHILD Hide it away!

BRIDGET BRUIN

I have begun to be afraid, again!

THE CHILD

Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN
That would be wickedness!

BRIDGET BRUIN
That would be sacrilege!

THE CHILD
The tortured thing!
Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN Her parents are to blame.

FATHER HART
That is the image of the Son of God.
(THE CHILD puts her arm around his neck and kisses him.)

THE CHILD
Hide it away! Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN No! no!

FATHER HART
Because you are so young and little a child
I will go take it down.

THE CHILD Hide it away,
And cover it out of sight and out of mind.
(FATHER HART *takes it down and carries it towards the inner room.*)

FATHER HART
Since you have come into this barony
I will instruct you in our blessed faith:
Being a clever child you will soon learn.
(*To the others*)
We must be tender with all budding things.
Our Maker let no thought of Calvary

Trouble the morning stars in their first song.
(Puts the crucifix in the inner room.)

THE CHILD

Here is level ground for dancing. I will dance.
The wind is blowing on the waving reeds,
The wind is blowing on the heart of man.
(She dances, swaying about like the reeds.)

MAIRE (to SHAWN BRUIN)

Just now when she came near I thought I heard
Other small steps beating upon the floor,
And a faint music blowing in the wind,
Invisible pipes giving her feet the time.

SHAWN BRUIN

I heard no step but hers.

MARIE BRUIN Look to the bolt!
Because the unholy powers are abroad.

MAURTEEN BRUIN *(to THE CHILD)*
Come over here, and if you promise me
Not to talk wickedly of holy things
I will give you something.

THE CHILD Bring it me, old father!
(MAURTEEN BRUIN goes into the next room.)

FATHER HART

I will have queen cakes when you come to me!
*(MAURTEEN BRUIN returns and lays a piece of money on the table.
THE CHILD makes a gesture of refusal.)*

MAURTEEN BRUIN

It will buy lots of toys; see how it glitters!

THE CHILD

Come, tell me, do you love me?

MAURTEEN BRUIN I love you!

THE CHILD

Ah! but you love this fireside!

FATHER HART I love you.

When the Almighty puts so great a share
Of His own ageless youth into a creature,
To look is but to love.

THE CHILD

But you love Him above.

BRIDGET BRUIN

She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD (*to MAIRE*)

And do you love me?

MARIE BRUIN I--I do not know.

THE CHILD

You love that great tall fellow over there:
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame!

MARIE BRUIN

Queen of the Angels and kind Saints, defend us!
Some dreadful fate has fallen: a while ago
The wind cried out and took the primroses,
And she ran by me laughing in the wind,
And I gave milk and fire, and she came in
And made you hide the blessed crucifix.

FATHER HART

You fear because of her wild, pretty prattle;
She knows no better.

(To THE CHILD)

Child, how old are you?

THE CHILD

When winter sleep is abroad my hair grows thin,
My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms.
I will soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can tell
When I was born for the first time? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
That blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER HART

She is of the faëry people.

THE CHILD I am Brig's daughter.

I sent my messengers for milk and fire,
And then I heard one call to me and came.

(They all except SHAWN *and* MAIRE BRUIN *gather behind the priest for protection.*)

SHAWN (*rising*)

Though you have made all these obedient,
You have not charmed my sight, and won from me
A wish or gift to make you powerful;
I'll turn you from the house.

FATHER HART No, I will face her.

THE CHILD

Because you took away the crucifix
I am so mighty that there's none can pass
Unless I will it, where my feet have danced
Or where I've twirled my finger tops.
(SHAWN *tries to approach her and cannot.*)

MAURTEEN

Look, look!

There something stops him--look how he moves his hands

As though he rubbed them on a wall of glass.

FATHER HART

I will confront this mighty spirit alone.
(They cling to him and hold him back.)

THE CHILD (while she strews primroses)
No one whose heart is heavy with human tears
Can cross these little cressets of the wood.

FATHER HART

Be not afraid, the Father is with us,
And all the nine angelic hierarchies,
The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,
And He who died and rose on the third day,
And Mary with her seven times wounded heart.
*(THE CHILD ceases strewing the primroses, and kneels upon the
settle beside MAIRE and puts her arms about her neck.)*
Cry, daughter, to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD

You shall go with me, newly married bride,
And gaze upon a merrier multitude;
White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the birds,
Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him
Who is the ruler of the Western Host,
Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

FATHER HART

Daughter, I call you unto home and love!

THE CHILD

Stay, and come with me, newly married bride,
For, if you hear him, you grow like the rest:
Bear children, cook, be mindful of the churn,

And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
And sit at last there, old and bitter of tongue,
Watching the white stars war upon your hopes.

SHAWN

Awake out of that trance, and cover up
Your eyes and ears.

FATHER HART

She must both look and listen,
For only the soul's choice can save her now.
Daughter, I point you out the way to heaven.

THE CHILD

But I can lead you, newly married bride,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity;
For we are only true to the far lights
We follow singing, over valley and hill.

FATHER HART

By the dear name of the one crucified,
I bid you, Maire Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD

I keep you in the name of your own heart!
*(She leaves the settle, and stooping takes up a mass of primroses and
kisses them.)*

We have great power to-night, dear golden folk,
For he took down and hid the crucifix.
And my invisible brethren fill the house;
I hear their footsteps going up and down.
Oh, they shall soon rule all the hearts of men
And own all lands; last night they merrily danced
About his chapel belfry! (*To MAIRE*) Come away,
I hear my brethren bidding us away!

FATHER HART

I will go fetch the crucifix again.

(They hang about him in terror and prevent him from moving.)

BRIDGET BRUIN

The enchanted flowers will kill us if you go.

MAURTEEN BRUIN

They turn the flowers to little twisted flames.

SHAWN BRUIN

The little twisted flames burn up the heart.

THE CHILD

I hear them crying, "Newly married bride,
Come to the woods and waters and pale lights."

MARIE BRUIN

I will go with you.

FATHER HART

She is lost, alas!

THE CHILD *(standing by the door)*

But clinging mortal hope must fall from you:
For we who ride the winds, run on the waves
And dance upon the mountains, are more light
Than dewdrops on the banners of the dawn.

MARIE BRUIN

Oh, take me with you.

(SHAWN BRUIN goes over to her.)

SHAWN BRUIN Beloved, do not leave me!
Remember when I met you by the well
And took your hand in mine and spoke of love.

MARIE BRUIN

Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD Come, newly married bride!

MARIE BRUIN

I always loved her world--and yet--and yet--
(*Sinks into his arms.*)

THE CHILD (*from the door*)

White bird, white bird, come with me, little bird.

MARIE BRUIN

She calls to me!

THE CHILD Come with me, little bird!

MARIE BRUIN

I can hear songs and dancing!

SHAWN BRUIN Stay with me!

MARIE BRUIN

I think that I would stay--and yet--and yet--

THE CHILD

Come, little bird with crest of gold!

MARIE BRUIN (*very softly*)

And yet--

THE CHILD

Come, little bird with silver feet!
(MAIRE dies, and the child goes.)

SHAWN BRUIN

She is dead!

BRIDGET BRUIN

Come from that image: body and soul are gone.
You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves
Or bole of an ash tree changed into her image.

FATHER HART

Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey
Almost out of the very hand of God;
And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart.

A VOICE (*singing outside*)

The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
"When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away."

(The song is taken up by many voices, who sing loudly, as if in triumph. Some of the voices seem to come from within the house.)

[CURTAIN]