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Dramatic Publishing

The
ELOPEMENT
of
MEGAN
O'FLAHERTY

With the Ghost From
Tinkers' Hollow

COMEDY/DRAMA BY MICHAEL JOHNSON

The ELOPEMENT of MEGAN O'FLAHERTY

With the Ghost From
Tinkers' Hollow

Comedy/Drama. By Michael Johnson.

Cast: 4m., 3w., 1 either gender, extras.

The year is 1900. We're in a tiny, impoverished village in Connemara, Ireland, its remoteness continually punished by sleet, cold rains and howling gales. Megan O'Flaherty, a young, plain barmaid in a local pub, is to be married in four days to the village braggart. But all changes in the most unforeseen way. Megan hears a voice whisper to her from the shadows in the pub. It is a voice like no other she has ever heard, and its tenderness and poetry quickly charm, console and woo

her heart. For this voice she would give her first kisses and, in these kisses, her heart. This plain barmaid would fall passionately in love for the first time, not with her husband-to-be, but with a ghost! Megan's father, Timothy O'Flaherty; her fiancé, Michael O'Donovan; the Widow Peggy; the Rag Lady and the entire village have much to say about this situation as they fill the stage with

Irish wisdom and hilarity!

Unit set. Approximate running time: 2 hours, with one intermission. Code: E79.

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Comedy/Drama

by

MICHAEL JOHNSON



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(THE ELOPEMENT OF MEGAN O'FLAHERTY
WITH THE GHOST FROM TINKERS' HOLLOW)

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“You have taken the east from me, you have taken the west from me;
you have taken what is before me and what is behind me;
you have taken the moon, you have taken the sun from me;
and my fear is great that you have taken God from me!”

— *The final lines from “Donal Óg,” an anonymous Gaelic poem translated by Lady Augusta Gregory, 1901*

For My Daughter,
Merlita,
May you find the love
That smiles at you,
Beyond the Masks of Life and Death

THE STORY

The year is 1900. A tiny village in a desolate place in Connemara, Ireland, a place pounded and punished continually by cold winds and cold rains and its own cold remoteness. A young plain barmaid in a local pub is to be married in four days. Then, shortly thereafter, she is to sail with her new husband to America, full of hopes and dreams for all of the things that her primitive upbringing has deprived her of.

But all would change, and in the most extraordinary way.

As Megan O’Flaherty climbs the stairs to her bed, only a few nights before her wedding day, she hears a voice whisper from a dark corner of the pub. It is a whisper unlike any other whisper she has ever heard, and it speaks sweet words that no man has ever spoken to her heart before. It is a voice without a body, a voice that she alone can hear, and it will come to haunt her dreams and her waking with a sweetness that she has never thought possible. For this voice, she would change her frowns to smiles, and her curses to prayers. For this voice, she would adorn her hair with flowers. For this voice, she would forsake all of her dreams. For this voice, she would bear calumny and the harsh opinions of the world. For this voice, she would die.

The simple, brusque barmaid, Megan O’Flaherty, is to fall in love for the first time in her life. Not with her husband-to-be, nor with any other man: Megan O’Flaherty is to fall in love with a ghost.

Suddenly, this simple barmaid would be faced with some of the most crucial and timeless dilemmas of the human condition: between a simple, plain existence and one of luxury and opulence; between the agitated and incensed countryside that thought her crazed or possessed by devils and a voice in her heart that professed that what she is hearing and feeling is truer than all the ignorant superstitions being cast upon her; between the world of the flesh and the unseen world of the Spirit; and between a million false illusions of love and the simple candle flame of love itself.

Between the scenes of this story, Irish music is played (live or recorded).

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The Elopement of Megan O'Flaherty With the Ghost From Tinkers' Hollow

CHARACTERS

MEGAN O'FLAHERTY: A young, plain, blunt barmaid with both a roughness and a vulnerability of hidden tenderness about her. She is to marry Michael O'Donovan in four days and leave her bleak existence in Ireland for America shortly thereafter. Seen as **YOUNG WOMAN** in the introduction of the play.

GHOST: A young sensitive man, formerly **SHEABAN MOORE** who has been killed in a bloody brawl while attempting to protect the honor of his sweetheart. He has wandered for a century on this side of the grave to once more find the one he has left behind.

MICHAEL O'DONOVAN: The village braggart who is big and strong, but slow of wit. He owns a great boisterous temper, but has a coward's heart. He is to marry Megan O'Flaherty in four days.

TIMOTHY O'FLAHERTY: The owner of the local pub, Timothy's Drink House, and the father of Megan O'Flaherty. A hopeless alcoholic who is elderly, kindly and at times passive with drink and dotage.

BLIND FIDDLER: A merry blind fiddler who has been blind since his birth. He is spry and nimble, one who constantly jigs, fiddles and moralizes. He is a ragged figure and wears a great baggy coat and possibly a ragged cap. He is possessed of a partial clairvoyance and continually exhibits a glassy stare. Blind Fiddler is a unisex character, possibly, and preferably played by a young woman.

RAG LADY: An old lady, a wanderer of the roads, dressed brightly and outlandishly with feathers and a bright mismatched wardrobe. She bears a brightly patched bag of rags.

WIDOW PEGGY: Like Rag Lady, she is a gossip and a wanderer of the roads. She is a widow, although none can remember her husband. She is dressed always in black, mourning, although her veil and dress have long been turned to rags. She is hunched, with a hump in the middle of her back.

FATHER GALLAGHER: The dead local priest, resting in a simple board coffin on two wooden chairs in the pub. His memory as a storyteller and a wild cursor pervades the play. He is a corpse with a spark of life left in him. Most of his antics are unseen and unnoticed by the others present.

KEENERS 1–2: Two old women. Can easily be doubled with other characters.

HUNTERS 1–3: Three men hunting the murderer. Can easily be doubled with other characters.

VOICES OF THE MOB: Always unseen. At various times they surround the pub with weapons and torches and screaming imprecations. The more voices the better. Voices and props of all offstage participants may be used: pans, horns, drums, etc., anything to cause a great ruckus.

The Elopement of Megan O’Flaherty With the Ghost From Tinkers’ Hollow

ACT I

INTRODUCTION

(Darkness onstage, with the set pieces invisible or only dimly seen. Offstage, the sudden tramping, grumbling and general chaos of a mob is heard. Several gun shots. The mob passes and the voices of HUNTERS 1–3 are heard. The men may be seen in silhouette, or only heard and not seen, shouting to one another on opposite sides and from different places of the stage.)

HUNTER 1. This way! Come! This way! The lass and her sweetheart murderer limped away this way!

HUNTER 2. The deuce and the divil! It was this way they limped into the dark night, and a path of white flowers painted with the red drops of the killer’s blood!

HUNTER 3. I do not think it was that or the other way, but straight ahead it is they’ve gone!

HUNTER 1. Seven curses upon the blackness of this black night, an’ the moon a sliver no more help than the sparkle in a sheep’s eye.

HUNTER 3. It is a time for dogs it is; dogs, and lanterns, and an army of men to flush ’em from the bogs or the bushes they be crawled and crouched in.

HUNTER 2. Some have gone to fetch the hounds of Emer O’Connor they have, and they the best hounds in the shadows of the three hills for the smelling of drops of blood on the grass and the leaves.

HUNTER 1. Is Sean O'Keely dead?

HUNTER 3. He is dead surely, stabbed with the knife of a butcher of pigs clean through his heart!

HUNTER 1. And the one who stabbed him with the big knife?

HUNTER 3. He has a great hole in his side no touch of a saint could heal.

HUNTER 2. An' he and the lass weaselin' away into the night to moan his last moans and pray his last prayers.

HUNTER 3. Let us return to the whiskey house where was the bloody scene, and there wait for men and lanterns, and the smart hounds of Emer O'Connor. There's not the blood in him to run far, and I'm thinkin' the hounds and the lanterns be findin' a corpse, and not a man with a living breath still in him. Come.

(The men leave, but darkness remains onstage. As they leave, SHEABAN MOORE and a YOUNG WOMAN enter, the YOUNG WOMAN supporting SHEABAN, with his arm around her neck. The YOUNG WOMAN is weeping but trying desperately to stifle her sobs. They struggle to the middle of the stage where SHEABAN's strength gives out. A pool of light dawns on them. The YOUNG WOMAN sits, exhausted, and SHEABAN remains standing, clutching his side in obvious pain. SHEABAN wears a white shirt, and a great part of it is soaked in bright red blood. The YOUNG WOMAN is dressed nicely, and over her blouse she wears a lovely wine red shawl. In the background, only half distinguishable in the shadows, are KEENERS 1-2, kneeling with their faces bent to the ground. They are dressed and veiled completely in black.)

SHEABAN. Here, stop here, Megan darlin'. My legs have little left, and the gape in my side like the big gill of a fish.

YOUNG WOMAN. Did the knife go deep it did?

SHEABAN. Aye, deep as a fist, but not as deep as the one I sent into the breast of the one said you was a whore of Babylon with the seven divils! I sent his soul to the ovens of perdition for sayin' such a wicked thing!

YOUNG WOMAN. He is a dead man surely, and the blood spillin' in bright red gurgles from his mouth and his ears to the cold grass, and his eyes, wide open and without a blink, starin' like a wood doll into the night of death.

SHEABAN. And the mob of men with posts and stones and murder in their faces?

YOUNG WOMAN. Their boots and their curses have passed us by.

SHEABAN. And no dogs at all, and they sniffin' the bogs and ditches, and howlin' with the taste of my blood upon their tongues?

YOUNG WOMAN. Not a bark or a yelp of one, and besides, they be the stupid kinds of dogs couldn't smell a rabbit if they slept on the hole of a rabbit. It is safe and peaceful we be here, darlin' Sheaban, here in this little dingle of a hollow with the thorn trees blossomin', and the stars like flakes of snow fallin' through those blossoms, and no ragged tramp-folk or tinker-folk here at all, as they so often be here, hammerin' their tin pots, singing their wild songs, and drinkin' their strong pints.

SHEABAN. Then is it Tinkers' Hollow we be in, Megan?

YOUNG WOMAN. It is the Tinkers' Hollow surely.

SHEABAN. It be a sweet place to die.

YOUNG WOMAN. Whist! Listen to ye! It's not here, or in any other green place beneath the sun or stars that you'll be leavin' your bones until they be old and tired and ready for their sleep in the grave!

(The YOUNG WOMAN holds out her arms to SHEABAN, and he lays down in them.)

SHEABAN. A sweet place to die surely, lyin' in a sweet grass the like that Adam himself must have woke upon, and the stars singing.

YOUNG WOMAN. Sssh, you be not speakin' now.

SHEABAN. It be a sweet death for any man to die in the cradle of his true love's arms, and the moon of the harvest in her face, and the seven stars sparkling like jewels in her tresses falling.

YOUNG WOMAN. Do not speak such words at all, Sheaban. You'll not be dying in the cradle of my arms, and we to be married on a bright day not far from this black one, and soon after bringing happy children into the sunshine of this world, and they chasin' butterflies in the hedges full of roses, and ridin' speckled ponies across the green fields.

SHEABAN. No, Megan, it's dying I am surely, and my soul be leavin' like a little petal torn by a great storm with any breath now.

YOUNG WOMAN. I will sniggle away for help. I will knock upon the door of the old man with a twist in his back and the ugly squint in his eye, the one be always a mumble of curses, and he drivin' the red-eared pig with a switch long as a trout pole. I will knock on his door and ask for clean rags, a little whiskey and maybe the back of his mule.

SHEABAN. I'll not leave ya, Megan, if I've any say in the thing at all. I'll stay on this side of the grave and the black curtain hung before it.

YOUNG WOMAN. Hush now! You be speakin' no more of love or hate or black curtains of death, and you with a bucket of blood less than other men to dredge your words, and the gape in your side makin' a wild lunacy to come from your mouth itself.

SHEABAN. I'll sleep in no grave with the leaves and the snows falling over me, not when I know the sun is smiling on your white neck and your white arms, and your voice sweeter than the song of a thrush bird in the May hedges.

YOUNG WOMAN. You whist now! It be crazy and silly words you be speakin'.

SHEABAN. My spirit wanderin' through the mists of death until it finds you again, sick with the want of your white arms and your red lips, and the seven stars sparkling ... (*Winces and dies.*)

YOUNG WOMAN. Hush now, darlin', hush. You'll not be dying in my arms ... and the glory day of our dreams not far from this terrible one ... and our children catching butterflies in the hedges full of roses ... and ridin' the speckled ponies across the green ... (*Realizes that he has died in her arms. Shrieks.*) Oh God, take him not away on the cold wet winds! Take not his sweet words and his sweet kisses from me, and the flowers of the earth and the candles of the stars but a bleakness and a curse of sadness to my heart from this day forth! Oh God, God, God! You've reached into my ribs like a mad beast and tore out the very heart of me!

(The YOUNG WOMAN cradles him, while rocking back and forth, and moaning piteously. KEENERS 1–2 lift their faces and begin to keen, and from time to time beat upon their breasts. Two ragged men enter, carrying several planks nailed together and serving as a crude litter. They place SHEABAN upon it, and upon SHEABAN, the shawl of the YOUNG WOMAN, before bearing him away. KEENERS 1–2 stand and follow. The YOUNG WOMAN still kneels, weeping hysterically, her head bent now to the ground.)

SCENE 1

(The YOUNG WOMAN has remained kneeling in the same exact place. Lights dawn, discovering her knelt in a pub, "Timothy's Drink House," a small pub in a tiny, remote village of northwest Ireland. The turn of the century, approximately 1900, with no car or machinery. There are oc-

casional howls of the wind outside, and a little rain, but no thunder and lightning. The pub is simple and spare. The bar surface, or the "drinking boards," is made of simple unfinished boards. Behind it are a few shelves made of the same types of simple boards, with glasses, a few assorted bottles, etc., and a shabby curtain or two hung from them. Several crude stools are set before the drinking boards.

On the opposite wall from the bar is a small fireplace with a small turf fire, several small bundles of small sticks and turf near it, and a number of sacks of flour and potatoes, etc., about it. To one side a small wooden table with four simple chairs, and on its top, a glass with one drooping flower in it. Not far from the fire, and in plain sight to the audience, is a simple wooden coffin, no more than a box of boards, with a dead priest, FATHER GALLAGHER, in it. A Bible rests on the dead priest's chest. A crucifix rests near his head. The coffin is placed upon two chairs, the head of it is raised so that the dead priest is visible to all. A small stand is beside the coffin, a glass, bottle and a small bouquet of flowers upon it.

UC is a door, once again made of slab boards, highly visible to all, and to the right of it is the one window in the pub. Small, drab, raggish curtains hang at its sides. In the back of the bar is a stairway that leads to a little landing, highly visible to all, leading to the sleeping quarters above the pub. The general ambiance of the pub is one of simplicity, poverty and drabness, with here and there a crate and barrel. MEGAN O'FLAHERTY, the barmaid and the daughter of the proprietor, is on the floor, knelt in the same exact way that the YOUNG WOMAN had been knelt, keening for her dead lover. She has tied back and bound up her hair with a kerchief. Beside her is a basin of water. With a cloth, she scrubs the floor. She is pretty, but very plain. There is a certain roughness and brusqueness about her.)

MEGAN. A curse upon these dark spots! If I scrubbed till the sun had no more beams, I'd have no more for my pains than knobby knees and a crooky back. As sure as I've a soul in my breast, these be dark stains from great tears of blood they are: maybe from a chicken without its head, or the throat of a rabbit bit by the tooth of a hound, or maybe from the stabbed heart of a man itself. Ach! These boards will rot before I could ever scrub them clean!

(Wearily and resignedly, MEGAN stands up, takes the basin to the door, opens it and throws the dirty water out. She returns to the shelves behind the bar and places the basin and washrag on one of them. Languidly, she takes a glass and a bottle of whiskey from the shelves and pours a drink. About to drink it, she stops, then looks to the corpse in the coffin.)

MEGAN (*cont'd*). A green hill of blessings on your soul, Father Gallagher.

(MEGAN raises her glass to FATHER GALLAGHER and belts the whiskey. Placing the bottle back on the shelf, she speaks to FATHER GALLAGHER as she does her chores. Beginning with cleaning and drying the glass, then wiping the drinking boards with the same rag she used to scrub the floor. Tidying up the pub as she speaks, she makes her way to FATHER GALLAGHER. Her tone is both despondent and phlegmatic.)

MEGAN (*cont'd*). An' don't ya go blabbin' on the other side of the grave all the things ya been seein' on this side of the grave, Father Gallagher. In or out of that box, you're a man of God, you are. Don't ya dare go wheezin' how Megan O'Flaherty likes to belt the strong drops, or I'm thinkin' you'll be a sorry priest of God when we meet again, be that 'mongst the saved or the damned.

(MEGAN is now looking down at FATHER GALLAGHER. She brushes his hair, tidies his coat, etc., as if pampering him to please her wishes. She speaks more softly and sincerely to him.)

MEGAN (*cont'd*). A green hill of blessings on your soul, Father Gallagher, a green hill and the buttercups pretty as stars upon it.

(MEGAN continues to halfheartedly clean up the pub with a mop, etc., all the while speaking to FATHER GALLAGHER.)

MEGAN (*cont'd*). Ah, it will be good to leave this lonesome place after all, Father Gallagher, where the only voices are the cryin' gulls, the lappin' waves and the winds ever screechin' like dead men in hell. For what's here for me at all, but for me to grow a crusty hag among the bald stones and the nibblin' sheep, growin' dreepy and squint-eyed from starin' into the cold winds and a smoky hearth, and the apples eaten from my cheeks by the salt of the sea? What at all is here for me but to grow droopy and humpy from carryin' stones and kelp and turf, and maybe big fishes for the big skillet, and to peel turnips and carrots until my hands are as hard as the hooves of a cow? To maybe pluck a chicken for the saints' days, or maybe spit a rabbit over the fire when a clumsy one has stepped into a snare. No, no, good Father, it will be a good thing to leave this forlorn place in a sailing ship with its sails spread like the great white wings of an archangel. And, and well, at my side ... *(Excitement deflates, then quickly resumes.)* such a man as be Michael O'Donovan. *(Looks at FATHER GALLAGHER, as for reassurance.)* Don't ya agree, Father Gallagher? *(Resumes her chores and her boldness.)* Ach! Maybe he drinks a drop or two too much, but he'll get over that. An' maybe he's as lazy as a sow being'milked by its litter in the cool mud

of a summer sty, but, well, he'll get over that. And maybe most would first believe a drunken tinker sayin' he mended pots for Queen Sheba, or a tramp sayin' he rode on an elephant with Hannibal before they would believe Michael O'Donovan killed a rat, but he'll get over that. And maybe, and maybe he doesn't listen to the pretty dreams of a young woman's heart when the winds are moanin' in the thatches, and the fire is purrin' in the hazel twigs, but, well, ah the divil! The two of us know the brute'll never get over the thing of that! (*Resignedly.*) But willy-nilly, he's my darlin', he is, holy Father, and I'll be his bride for the rest of my days come this comin' Sunday in the church with the pigs always sleepin' and gruntin' beneath the benches. The big boast and brute's gonna tote me off to America he is. And maybe my belly will swell over and over with his thick-headed sons, and maybe I'll dance jigs for hills of pennies on a stage, and maybe we'll live in a house will make "Timothy's Drink House" seem the little hole of a weasel, and maybe ...

(Suddenly a fiddle, laughter, and loud singing voices are heard approaching offstage. MEGAN runs to the window and looks out.)

MEGAN (*cont'd*). Here comes a ragged circus of this or that to scare a ghost from a tomb, and my husband-to-be the ringleader fool in the mad middle and muddle of it all.

VOICES. *Come sleet, come wind, come cold, cold rain!*

And what is a pretty dream

But a tinker man's tin?

Come sleet, come wind, come cold, cold rain!

(MEGAN suddenly panics and runs back to the coffin. She makes the sign of the cross, then passionately addresses the dead priest.)

MEGAN. By the holy Mother of God, Father Gallagher, should I marry the bloody lout or not?!

(MEGAN begins to leave the coffin, but seeing the whiskey in the glass near the corpse, quickly belts it, wipes off her mouth and holds her finger in a scolding fashion at the dead priest. She quickly pours some more whiskey in the glass. As she has done these things, the rowdies are just outside the door singing, and then open it as she unconcernedly resumes mopping the floor. Enter MICHAEL O'DONOVAN, BLIND FIDDLER [with his fiddle], RAG LADY and WIDOW PEGGY. All have wet shawls and coats, and remove them and place them near the fire to dry. Unnoticed by the others, MICHAEL smiles brightly at MEGAN and tries to win her attention, wanting to kiss her cheek. MEGAN holds up her mop between them, but finally succumbs, and with a wincing face, receives a little peck on her cheek from him. When he looks away, she wipes off the kiss with the back of her hand.)

ALL *(who entered above)*. And what are pretty dreams

Dreamed on the thrones of kings?

Naught but a tinker pounding his tin!

Naught but a hound baying the wind!

Come sleet, come wind, come cold, cold rain!

Come sleet, come wind, come cold, cold rain!

MEGAN. And have ya no respect for the dead or the living, cavortin' like wild pipers and heathen gypsies? And a holy priest of God in a box of death beneath our own roof, a box the one-legged tinker hammered in the ditch, and the boards good boards without cracks, or warps, or any bit of rot in them at all.