

Dearest One Excerpt

TIME

Late 1800s.

PLACE

An unnamed fishing village somewhere in the Canadian Maritimes.

SETTING

The stage is divided into three areas. At one end is a pier overlooking the harbour. At the other end is GEORGE's room. It's on the same road as the pier. There is a door to his room. Inside, there is a bed, a sink, a small table and one chair, a trunk by the bed for his clothes and a guitar on a wooden stand. In the middle of these two areas is the main room of the Sleeping Mermaid. It has a partial bar counter, two tables with chairs and nautical bric-a-brac on the walls. It has three entrances: a door to the outside that is only suggested; an exit behind the counter to the kitchen; and an exit to the interior of the pub building.

NOTE: Ideally, there should be no intermission. However, if one is needed, it should come between Scenes 5 and 6.

SCENE 1

The stage is dark. We hear a guitar playing “Scarborough Fair.” After a moment, the lights slowly come up. It’s night. BETH stands on the edge of the pier, looking out to sea. She is dressed for the autumn night chill. She clutches a small purse and stands motionless. Waiting. She remains there throughout the scene. The music begins to fade out as GEORGE enters from the audience aisle. He is wearing a light, fall jacket. The lights come up on the Sleeping Mermaid. Onstage, GEORGE stops and looks at the woman. She turns and sees him and retreats into the shadows. He then goes into the pub. MAGGIE is behind the counter wiping it down.

MAGGIE

Evening, George.

GEORGE

Evening, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Did you see her?

GEORGE

What?

MAGGIE

Is she still there?

GEORGE

Still there?

MAGGIE

The woman. On the wharf. Did you see her?

GEORGE

Oh, yes. Who is she?

MAGGIE

Damn if I know. I went out there earlier. To ask if she was all right.

GEORGE

And?

MAGGIE

The girl didn't say much. Just nodded and turned away. A slip of a girl not out of her teens by the looks of it.

GEORGE

A fisherman's wife.

MAGGIE

She'll not be that. Looks too fine to me. I told her she could wait inside if waiting she be at. But she shook her head, no.

GEORGE

Oh well. (*sits at counter*) Another mystery for you to solve.

MAGGIE

Not much of a mystery, if you ask me. Waiting for her lover, no doubt. Just another silly girl.

GEORGE

Maggie, you have a romantic heart.

MAGGIE

Maybe I do. But what is worth more than having a little romance in your heart?

GEORGE

(*yawns*) If you say so.

MAGGIE

All the boats are in the harbour so whoever she's waiting for, he ain't from around here.

GEORGE

Maybe she's just out for her constitutional.

MAGGIE

George, you know nothing about women. They don't go out for evening constitutionals unless it's on the arm of a gentleman.

GEORGE

Well, you're probably right.

MAGGIE

I am. At least about you. When was the last time you took a nice girl out on a constitutional?

GEORGE

Why I take one out everyday. Walking back from the mill with all the girls.

MAGGIE

Well, you'd do yourself a right favour if you chose one of them girls. Maybe that would make you less ornery.

GEORGE

I'm not ornery.

MAGGIE

You will be when I tell you all I gots left is my mutton stew. The mill crowd just about cleaned me out of all my food at dinner. And I knows how you hate my mutton stew.

GEORGE

I don't hate it, Maggie. I just don't like it.

MAGGIE

(as she goes to what would be a front window) Beggars can't be choosers. Well, she's still there.

GEORGE

(stands) Do you want me to go out and talk to her?

MAGGIE

Now what are you going to say to a girl in the middle of the night on a dark pier? Why with your hulking ways, you'll scare her half to death.

GEORGE

Well, I don't intend to scare her.

MAGGIE

Sit down. I'll bring you your dinner. *(as she exits to get his food)* You're a late one tonight.

GEORGE

(calls after her) Two of the looms broke down and it took me a while to get them up and running.

MAGGIE

(enters with a plate of stew and some rolls) What did you say?

GEORGE

(attacking food) Two machines down. Damn hard to get them up and running.

MAGGIE

You're a fool, George.

GEORGE

(in between bites) So you're always telling me.

MAGGIE

That Peter Sparks, he's taking advantage of you and he knows it.

GEORGE

No one takes advantage of me.

MAGGIE

No? You're a goddamn fool of a pup if there ever was one. He pays you for sweeping up and hauling, not to be engineering his machines. And on your own time to boot. I'd call that taking advantage.

GEORGE

(eating) Call it what you like. I do it because I like to. Not because he wants me to.

MAGGIE

So why don't you ask the miser for some more money?

GEORGE

Oh, I will. In time.

MAGGIE

In time, he says. You're just afraid he'll say no and then where will you be?

GEORGE

Don't you worry about me. I'll ask him when I'm ready.

MAGGIE

Mmmmm. You're as bad as my first husband. The fool. I kept after him to get him some life insurance and he kept saying he'd get some when he was ready. Ready, my ass. He died before he was ready.

GEORGE

Well, you got the Mermaid. That's like some life insurance.

MAGGIE

Life insurance don't come with debts. It took me two more husbands to pay off all his debts.

GEORGE

(finishes food) Well, that fills a hole.

MAGGIE

I'm glad because that's all that's left.

GEORGE

(stands) It'll do.

MAGGIE

For someone who hates my mutton stew, you sure ate it up right fast.

GEORGE

Hunger overcame my better judgement.

MAGGIE

Well, you'd do well to eat more of that stew. You're getting to look damn skinny, George.

GEORGE

Don't mother me, Maggie. I'm doing just fine with what you feed me.

MAGGIE

Doing just fine. That's a matter of a opinion.

GEORGE

(as he walks to inn's exit) Night, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Your pa came around today.

GEORGE

(That stops him.) Yeah? *(a beat)* What'd he want?

MAGGIE

Oh, you know Paddy. He never says. Just gives you that hound dog look.

GEORGE

Drunk or sober?

MAGGIE

Oh, he seemed sober enough to me. At least he was walking a straight line. But I didn't give him anything to drink. Never saw his money.

GEORGE

When did he come in?

MAGGIE

Around noon.

GEORGE

Huh.

MAGGIE

Now you don't play the fool and be giving him any of your money. He may be your pa, but that don't give him the right to take from you.

GEORGE

Don't worry. I'm just about flat broke 'til payday. All I got is my savings and I'm not touching that.

MAGGIE

Well, see that you don't. *(as he exits)* Breakfast is gonna be early on account of I'm putting in another stove.

GEORGE

What's wrong with the old stove?

MAGGIE

Nothing. Only I need more cooking space. I can't keep up with that mill crowd of yours. We can't make the food fast enough. I'm hiring another cook next week.

GEORGE

Does that mean no more mutton stew?

MAGGIE

No, George. It means *more* mutton stew.

GEORGE

Figures. Night.

(He exits and stops for a moment to look at the girl on the pier. She senses him and moves back into the shadows. He shrugs and goes to the door of his room, takes out his key and unlocks the door. It's pitch dark inside. He can't see PADDY who is sitting on the bed.)

PADDY

Hello son.

GEORGE

(doesn't react) Da. (He lights the lamp on the table and purposely doesn't look at his father.)

PADDY

You don't seem surprised.

GEORGE

Maggie said you'd come around. *(He takes off his jacket and throws it over the chair.)* How'd you get in? Maggie didn't say she gave you a key.

PADDY

Fat chance she'd do that. And if I was to ask her, she'd bite my head off into a hundred pieces.
(*GEORGE busies himself at the sink for something to do.*) If you want to know, your lock's non too secure, son. If you know what to do.

GEORGE

(*finally looking at him*) What do you want?

PADDY

Nothing, son. Just came to pay you a visit.

GEORGE

By breaking into my room?

PADDY

Just wanted to surprise you.

GEORGE

Surprise, hell. Like the last one you gave me when you ran off with all of mum's jewellery.

PADDY

Are you still harping on that? Didn't I write and explain?

GEORGE

(*a beat*) Like I said, Da. What do you want?

PADDY

Can't a father visit his son when he wants to?

GEORGE

It's been three years, Da. Why now?

PADDY

Actually, son. It's been more like four years.

GEORGE

So again I ask, what do you want?

PADDY

Well, funny you should ask. It seems I ran into a spot of trouble.

GEORGE

I don't want to hear about it.

PADDY

Nothing to concern you. (*a beat*) But if you want to know.

GEORGE

I don't.

PADDY

It's like this. I was up in St. Pierre fishing—

GEORGE

Since when did you start fishing? That would be like real work.

PADDY

Oh, not that kind of fishing. More like looking around.

GEORGE

You mean for rum.

PADDY

Actually son, it was gin. There's a good market up and down the coast for gin. Better than rum. Fetches a good price if you can buy it at a good price.

GEORGE

The Mounties after you?

PADDY

Not exactly.

GEORGE

Well, I don't want to know. And you're not staying here, if that's what you're after.

PADDY

Don't get hot under the collar, son. I don't mean to stay here. I'm bunking in with an old pal of mine up by Shady Harbour. 'Til everything sort of calms down. Just thought since I was in the neighbourhood, I'd come and see how you was making out.

GEORGE

Well, you've seen. And now you can get out. And the next time you want to pay me a visit, knock. Don't break into my room.

PADDY

(gets ready to leave) Just having a little fun with you, son. You still working at the mill?

GEORGE

Night, Da.

PADDY

Have they made you foreman yet? (*GEORGE opens the door for him.*) You're looking good, son. Put on a little weight?

GEORGE

Night, Da.

PADDY

Well, night it is. (*out the door*) You won't object if I have a drink with Maggie. For old time's sake.

GEORGE

Why would I object?

PADDY

Well, I'm kinda barging in on your territory. So to speak.

GEORGE

The only barging in I object to is you barging in on people's homes when they're asleep and robbing them.

PADDY

Oh, I gives that up years ago.

GEORGE

Night, Da.

PADDY

Nightie, night, Georgie.

(PADDY exits into the road and GEORGE closes the door. PADDY stops in front of the pub and looks over at BETH who doesn't see him. He enters the pub while GEORGE prepares for bed. MAGGIE has her back to him.)

MAGGIE

(hears him come in) Sorry, Mate. Closing up.

PADDY

Now that's no way to treat a friend.

MAGGIE

You back again? Did you see George?

PADDY

That I did. A fine lad he has turned out to be.

MAGGIE

No thanks to you.

PADDY

You have that right, Maggie. He takes after his dear mum.

MAGGIE

Thank god for that.

PADDY

Amen. Now that we've taken care of religion, how about a drink?

MAGGIE

(gives him a critical look) Oh, all right. As long as you have money to pay. There'll be nothing on the house this time, Paddy Dolan. Not like the last time.

PADDY

Why Maggie, you offend me. Did I not make it up to you when I sent you that money?

MAGGIE

You sent me five dollars. Your bill was more like seventy.

PADDY

Well Maggie, dear. It's the thought that counts.

MAGGIE

Thoughts don't pay the friggin' bills.

PADDY

But yes, I do have money to pay for a drink. And I'll buy you one, too.

MAGGIE

Well, let's see your money. Put it on the counter or you won't even get a glass of water out of me. *(He puts some coins on the counter. MAGGIE examines them.)* Okay. What'll it be?

PADDY

Whatever you're drinking, love.

(She pours both of them a shot of rum. GEORGE sits on the bed with his guitar. He begins to play "Scarborough Fair.")

PADDY

You still have my fiddle?

MAGGIE

Why? You planning on paying what you owe me for it?

PADDY

No. Just asking. (*toasts*) Here's to a long life, Maggie, and a merry one.

MAGGIE

Remains to be seen, Paddy. At least for you. (*They drink.*)

(BLACKOUT)