

## The Plough and the Stars – Act 3 - Summary

Some five months have elapsed since the action in the pub in Act 2. It is Easter Week 1916 and Jack has taken part in the rising.

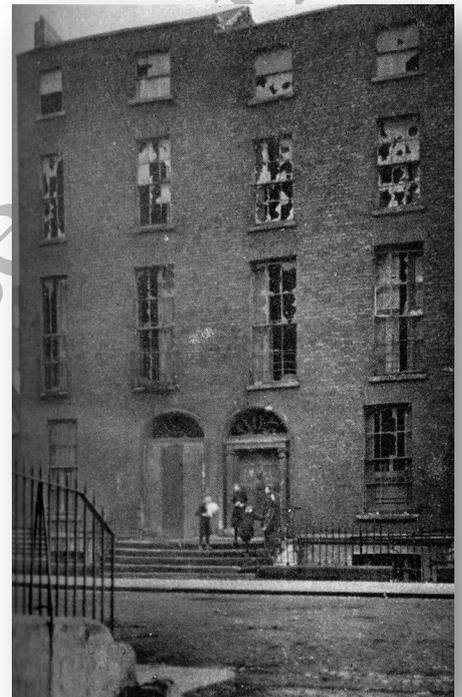
We are back at the front of the Georgian building, which has been subdivided into tenement dwellings, one of which is the Clitheroes' home. From this perspective we can see that the building, which would have been elegant and well maintained in its day, is now suffering from age and neglect. The beautiful Georgian front door is barely hanging on its hinges and the glass in the fanlight above it is broken, save one pane. The windows – except for the Clitheroes' –

are dirty and have ragged, grimy curtains. Five stone steps lead from the front

door down to the footpath. To the left of the house is a laneway. At the corner of the street is a streetlight.

Mrs Gogan is helping Mollser to a chair, which stands on the path to the left of the front steps. She wraps a shawl around Mollser's shoulders and tells her that the sun will do her

a world of good. She is vainly trying to detect some improvement in her



daughter's condition and asks her if she is feeling comfortable. Tiredly and weakly, Mollser says that she is fine. Mrs Gogan asks her how she is feeling and Mollser says that she's all right except for a horrible, sinking feeling. Mrs Gogan dismisses this and says it might just be that her stomach is out of order. She asks Mollser if she thinks her breathing is any better. Mollser replies that it is and Mrs Gogan seems pleased, expressing her belief that Mollser is on the road to recovery. She continues with her questioning, asking Mollser if she feels stronger and steadier on her legs. Mollser, who is fed up with all these questions, replies irritably that they might be a bit better, she's not sure. Mrs Gogan says even a small improvement is a good sign and asks Mollser if she was coughing more than usual the night before as she, Mrs Gogan, thought she heard her. Mollser assures her that she wasn't.

Mrs Gogan changes the subject now, explaining that she was kept awake the previous night by the sound of gunfire. She was also worried about Fluther because he had run off into the streets where the fighting was taking place in order to find Nora Clitheroe and bring her home. (*Nora is pregnant.*) Nora had gone off in search of Jack. Mrs Gogan was terrified that Fluther would be injured and possibly even killed. Her focus switches back to her daughter again and she asks her if she is cold. Mollser again repeats that she's all right and Mrs Gogan tells her to stay well wrapped up. At that moment she sees Peter and The Covey hurrying back towards the house and she remarks that it's a sign of the strangeness of the time when the pair of them are together.

Peter and The Covey appear, breathless and excited. Mrs Gogan asks if they saw any sign of Fluther or Nora and also wants to know how things are looking in town. She says she has heard that there is fierce fighting at the GPO and that the British soldiers are lying dead everywhere.

Peter tells her that they saw no sign of either Fluther or Nora and Mrs Gogan frets that they should have held Nora back from going to look for Jack, by force if necessary. She says she has visions of Nora lying in a hospital bed, mortally wounded.

The Covey says they can do nothing to help as O'Connell Street is too dangerous on account of all the fighting and shops are on fire. Peter says that they saw mounted British soldiers armed with lances and The Covey interrupts to describe the scene. He says the soldiers were trotting along, spurs and sabres jangling, arrogantly and confidently looking forward to routing the Irish rebels but that the men in the GPO sent them scattering with a volley of gunfire.

Peter is delighted with all this talk and says that the rebels mean business. The Covey tells Mrs Gogan that Patrick Pearse came out of the GPO with his men and he read out the Proclamation of Irish Independence.



Mrs Gogan is astonished to hear this news and even more so to hear Peter's account of the British gunboat *Helga* coming up the Liffey and shelling Liberty Hall (the headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and the Citizen army). Peter claims to have heard that people living on the quays had to crawl on their stomachs to get to Mass because of all the bullets flying around Boland's Mills.

At that moment, Bessie Burgess appears at the top window. She roars down at the group below, saying she hopes they're happy now and that if they were men

they'd get their guns and fight. She says they are in trouble now and points out that Peter is not carrying his sword now that the actual fighting has started.

Mrs Gogan warns Peter and The Covey to ignore Bessie, saying that she has been singing 'Rule Britannia' all morning.

Peter wonders what has happened to Fluther and hopes that he hasn't come to harm. He says that Fluther is very impetuous. Mrs Gogan leaps on his words, telling him of a dream she had the night before in which she saw a dead body being carried into the house on a stretcher and she recognised the corpse as Fluther's.

Peter, who has been looking down the street, spots Fluther and Nora on their way back to the house. The Covey says Nora must be wounded or something as Fluther is carrying her. Fluther appears, half-carrying and half-leading Nora. She is pale and strained-looking and her clothes are dusty. Mrs Gogan rushes over to ask Nora what has happened but Fluther answers for her, saying she's all right and just exhausted from lack of sleep. He asks Mrs Gogan to bring her inside and put her to bed. Mrs Gogan asks Nora if she heard any news of Jack and Nora says she didn't. She says that the men she asked for news of him accused her of shaming Jack and all the women of Ireland by making such a fuss and searching for him. They said women must learn to be brave. Nora tells Mrs Gogan that she didn't need to be told to be brave as by going out into the midst of the fighting she risked her life for love of her husband. She becomes hysterical as she cries that Jack will surely be killed and his death will be offered up as a



sacrifice to all the dead Irish patriots of the past.

From the upper window, Bessie Burgess resumes her insults of those below, saying that she has no sympathy for the women who encouraged their men to rebel against the British. She says that the stories they told to make the men fight were just fairy tales and hopes the rebellion is quickly crushed. Bessie is furious at the thought of the rebels taking advantage of the fact that the British were at war in Europe and says that their actions are akin to stabbing the men in the trenches in the back. (*Bessie sees the British soldiers fighting in WWI as fighting for the Irish as well as the British because Ireland is under British rule. Therefore, she sees the rebels as traitors.*) Bessie starts to sing 'Rule Britannia' again and Fluther shouts up at her, calling her an ignorant old trollop.

Mrs Gogan tries to reassure Nora, saying that lots of women have sent their husbands and sons off to fight in the rebellion and that she is sure Jack will come home. Nora is not calmed by these words and says that she feels as if every shot fired is fired at Jack, and that if he is killed it will kill her. She disagrees with Mrs Gogan's claim that women have 'handed over' their sons or husbands to be killed and says that no woman would happily let her loved ones go and fight. Anyone who says otherwise is lying. While Nora was at the barricades searching for Jack, one woman told her she was disheartening the men with her behaviour and that she wasn't worthy to carry a fighting man's son, the way she was acting. Nora physically attacked the woman who said this and was pushed away from her and off down the streets. She cursed the rebels who had reduced her to wandering the streets like a mad woman looking for her husband.

Peter, who has been listening to all of this, tells Nora to have patience and that everybody has to put up with awful people who hinder and torment others. The

Covey says he wouldn't mind the rebellion so much if they were fighting for something worthwhile. Fluther assures Nora that nothing bad will happen to Jack.

Nora believes that wherever Jack is, he is thinking of her and wishing he were with her but that he is not brave enough to leave his post and return home. Mrs Gogan disagrees that the men stay where they are because they are cowards but Nora angrily repeats that they are. She says that she saw the fear in the eyes of the men at the barricades. There was a dead man lying in the road by the barricade, his body horribly contorted. The men were afraid to look at him and although they laughed at her and shouted at her, she could see they were afraid underneath it all.

Mrs Gogan gently leads Nora towards the door of the house, saying that if she and Jack had been married longer she wouldn't have found the parting so painful. She assures Nora that she will feel better after a little lie down.

As Nora goes into the house she turns towards Fluther and thanks him for saving her life by coming to find her. She walks into the house, crying that the rebels have taken away the little bit of happiness she had.

Bessie Burgess comes out of the house as Nora and Mrs Gogan enter. She walks past them with her head held high in the air but when they have gone in, she quietly slips Mollser a mug of milk.

Fluther, Peter and The Covey decide to play a game of coin toss, betting on the outcome. Bessie insults them as she walks past, telling them that their rebel leaders have made it almost impossible to get a bit of bread and asking them why they aren't fighting, if they are men. She says that all Irish people are

snakes.

Fluther tells others to ignore her and to start the game. He asks Mollser how she is doing and tells her that drinking a mug of milk is very good for her. This reminds him of the topic of drink in general and he announces that the rebellion has done one good thing in that it has made it impossible to get a drink in a pub anywhere. Fluther is

convinced that if the rebellion lasts a week, he'll be so used to doing without alcohol that he won't touch it again.

As the men begin to play their game, a loud boom of a big gun is heard. They are startled and Fluther is shocked to think that the British might be using heavy artillery. The Covey is scornful of Fluther's surprise and says that the British would use anything in their fight against the Irish. Fluther says that the British are not playing fair.

Peter worries that a shell will land on them and The Covey says if it did that Peter would be off to heaven in a fiery chariot. Peter asks The Covey if he is going to start picking on him again in the middle of all the chaos and fighting that is going on around them. Fluther encourages The Covey to toss the coins again and the three men's focus shifts back to the game.



Bessie Burgess returns, breathless, excited and wearing a new hat, has a fox fur around her neck, three umbrellas under her right arm and a box of biscuits under her left arm. She says that looting has broken out everywhere and that she saw one group of people pushing a piano down the street and she also saw an old woman pulling a double bed out of a shop window. She also says the rebels have been ordered to fire on the looters.



Mollser speaks up, asking Bessie to help her into the house, as she is feeling unwell.

Bessie puts down her looted goods in the hall and hurries to help Mollser.

The Covey declares that Bessie is selfish because she didn't come and tell them about the looting opportunities until she had taken plenty for herself. Fluther calls after Bessie, asking if she heard of any pubs damaged in the fighting. Bessie replies that she did not and Fluther, in a burst of enthusiasm, says she will hear of one soon! The Covey tells Fluther to hurry up as they are wasting time that could be spent looting and they start running down the street. Peter asks if they are going to leave him there and Fluther says it's up to him to go with them if he wants. Peter is worried because Bessie said that the Volunteers were shooting looters. The Covey and Fluther tell him that if he is shot they'll dress his corpse in his fancy uniform and give him a Christian burial. Peter is outraged and accuses The Covey of teaching Fluther how to mock and taunt him.

A fashionably dressed, middle-aged, stout woman enters. She is terrified and

makes her way over to the three men, asking them to show her a safe route to her home in Rathmines (a well-to-do area of Dublin). She says she was visiting



a friend and found herself unable to get a taxi or a tram to take her home because of the fighting.

Fluther is courteous but unhelpful, telling her one route is as safe as another and moving away from her. She catches his coat and begs him to bring her part of the way home but he says he must go to rescue some things

from burning buildings. The Covey urges Fluther to hurry up and they rush off. The woman turns to Peter and tells him she is completely lost. She asks him to help her find her way to Rathmines but he refuses outright, asking her if she thinks he is likely to risk his life helping her. He says he might be shot and left with a limp which would give Fluther and The Covey another reason to mock him. He walks off into the house and leaves the woman standing outside. The woman leaves, complaining about how awful and frightening the fighting is.

Mrs Gogan comes out of the house, pushing a pram. Bessie rushes out after her and stops her, grabbing the pram. She asks Mrs Gogan what she thinks she is doing with it, claiming that the pram's owner left Bessie in charge of it. Mrs Gogan fights back, hanging onto the pram and claiming



in turn that it was she who minded the pram, not Bessie. She says she suspects that whatever Bessie is planning to do with it is not legal. Bessie also holds onto the pram and accuses Mrs Gogan of being a busybody, sticking her nose in everyone's business and complaining about everything. She says that she obeys the laws of Great Britain, not of Ireland.

Peter appears at the door and announces that he will go looting with them to see 'the fun'. Mrs Gogan takes no notice of him but continues arguing with Bessie Burgess. She says that she is surprised a woman who claims to be so religious would contemplate looting and taking advantage of the fight for freedom. Peter laughs at them and says he will go with them to give them a hand. Mrs Gogan suggests he gets in the pram like a baby and they'll push him down town. Bessie says her conscience is quite clear and that all she intends to do is pick up anything scattered around on the road in the confusion.

Bessie and Mrs Gogan walk off, both holding the pram and continuing to bicker. Peter starts to follow them but then hears the boom of a big gun once more and changes his mind. He says that while on the one hand he wouldn't like anything bad to happen to Bessie and Mrs Gogan, he doesn't feel too much sympathy for them because, after all, they are looting. He sits down on the chair Mollser had been using and smokes his pipe.

The Covey reappears. He is carrying a huge sack of flour and a large ham. He asks Peter to open the door for him but Peter refuses, saying he is not The Covey's servant. He berates The Covey for looting while brave men are fighting. The Covey calls him a jealous hypocrite who is too cowardly to go looting himself. Peter says he won't be goaded into losing his temper. At that moment, someone opens the door and The Covey goes in. From inside he calls 'Cukoo – oo' mockingly to annoy Peter. Peter, despite having said he wouldn't

do so, loses his temper and rushes after The Covey, cursing and shouting.

Mrs Gogan and Bessie return, looking delighted. Bessie is pushing the pram, which is filled with clothes and boots, on top of the pile is a fancy table, which Mrs Gogan is holding steady. In her other hand she holds a chair she has balanced on her head. The women are chatting amicably. Mrs Gogan is admiring the shoes they got and Bessie says they will go beautifully with the dresses they took, especially when she has added a bit of extra material to the front of the dresses so they are not so low-cut and are more suitable for respectable ladies like themselves. They begin to bring their loot inside. Peter, who is watching sourly, tells Mrs Gogan that Mollser looks very ill and that Mrs Gogan's youngest baby – who Mollser is minding – is bawling crying. Mrs Gogan snaps back that Mollser is always ill.

A rifle shot rings out and Mrs Gogan and Bessie rush for the door, which a panicked Peter tries to shut before they get in. Mrs Gogan shouts at him to stop being a coward and to open the door. They all retreat inside.

There is a pause; then Captain Brennan comes in supporting Lieutenant Langon, whose arm is around Brennan's neck. Langon's face is ghastly white and he is in agony. After a few moments, Jack Clitheroe enters, pale and nervous and holding a rifle at the ready.

Capt. Brennan angrily asks Jack why he shot over the heads of the looters rather than shooting to kill them. Jack replies that even though they are looting they are Irish men and women after all. Brennan is furious, saying that the looters are 'slum lice', taking advantage of the men who are fighting for their freedom. He says that if Jack doesn't shoot them next time, he will.

Langon moans, asking if there is an ambulance coming for him. Brennan tells

him to keep his spirits up and they'll get help soon.

Nora rushes out of the house, looking exhausted and dishevelled, but relieved and delighted to see Jack. She throws her arms around his neck, crying that she thought she'd never see him again and asking him to kiss her. He does so, saying that he wishes to God he had never left her. She tells him it doesn't matter now that they are back together and she asks him to kiss her again. He tells her not to make a scene and she promises not to, explaining that she is just overwhelmed with joy to see him again.

Bessie Burgess appears at the upper window and shouts down that the Irish Volunteers are not so full of themselves now that the British guns have sent them running. She says 'General Clitheroe' would rather undress his wife than keep his post at the barricades. She mocks Brennan too and, knowing that he is a chicken butcher in his normal life, says he's come up against something a bit harder to kill than his own chickens now. Brennan roars up at her to shut up but she continues to shout mocking insults down at him.

Jack asks Nora to let go of him but she refuses, clinging to him and telling him that even though she looks terrible now she is only tired and if they can just put the events of the last few terrible days behind them, they will be a happy couple once again.

Langon moans in pain, saying his stomach is ripped apart and asking Brennan if he is badly wounded. He realises that that wetness soaking his clothes is his own blood. Brennan tells Jack to say goodbye to Nora and to help him with the dying man.

Jack tries to leave Nora and says he's sorry for meeting her like this, only to go

again. He asks her if she wants him to let his comrades down by staying with her. Nora says she is his dearest comrade and claims the other soldiers only want him to share their danger so they will feel better. She tells Jack about her search for him and how she was jeered and struck when she screamed his name. Jack is mortified and asks her what she thought she was doing, making a show



of him like that. He asks her if she considers herself different to the other women who let their men go and she says she is no better than other women but that he means more to her than any man does to any woman. She says she meant no harm and that she was only driven mad with terror because she loves him so much. Jack is furious and says that his comrades will say he told her to come for him so he would have to bring her home and would have an excuse to escape the fighting. He says she is turning his brave enterprise into a joke.

Langon begs Brennan to let him lie down but Brennan encourages him to take a few more steps. Langon says he cannot and Brennan turns to Jack, asking him if he is deserting and arranging a second honeymoon or coming with them. Above, Bessie continues to shout insults down at them. Jack turns on Brennan, saying furiously that he has no intention of deserting. He shouts at Nora to let go of him but she will not, asking him to look at Brennan's face and see they

fear in his eyes. She says that Brennan wants Jack to go with him so that a bullet might hit him instead of Brennan. Nora claims that Jack is equally afraid but won't face up to it. Jack struggles to get free of Nora's grasp and Brennan angrily asks him why he is asking Nora to let him go rather than making her. Jack tells Nora that if she won't let go he will force her to and he hands his gun to Brennan so he can pull her hands away from him. Nora cries that Jack is hurting him and pleads with him not to fling her away from him after she has given him everything he wanted. Jack ignores her cries and shoves her roughly away. Nora falls to the ground, calling Jack's name as he takes his gun back from Brennan and leaves with the other soldiers.

Bessie looks out the window at Nora for a few moments, then comes out and picks her up, carrying her into the house.

A moment later, Fluther enters with a wild, drunken yell. He has been looting and is wearing a new shirt and a woman's blue hat. He is carrying a large earthenware jug of whiskey and singing. He hammers on the closed door of the house, shouting to be let in, and seems not to care at all about the gunfire in the background.

Inside the house, Nora screams and moans in pain. Outside, Fluther continues singing and calling for the door to be opened. Bessie opens it and drags Fluther in by the collar, saying it is no time to be dancing around drunkenly with death staring them in the face. Fluther's only concern is for the jar of whiskey, lest he spill all of it. There is another short pause and then Nora screams again. The door opens and Mrs Gogan and Bessie are seen standing in it. Bessie says that they need a doctor but that Fluther is too drunk to go and get one. Mrs Gogan says she'd be afraid to go and anyway Mollser is very ill and needs her. She doesn't think there is any point in anyone going for a doctor as they are unlikely

to get one to come. Bessie says that she will risk it and says that the fright of all that has happened has made Nora go into labour prematurely. She tells Mrs Gogan to go in and she, Bessie, walks out into the street as the gunfire continues. She wraps her shawl around herself and prays for the Lord to help her as she hurries off in search of a doctor.

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