

© 2001. Anne Phelan. Sample. **Maura and Katinka**. For scripts and performance rights, contact anne@annephelan.com.

Characters:

Maura Rafferty

Irish peasant woman, late 20s to 40s

Katinka Medve

Hungarian woman, educated, late 20s to early 30s

Time: The time of the play ranges from 1898 to 1960.

Setting: The set is an abstract evocation of the main waiting room at Ellis Island. The workshop production set consisted of two large panels suggesting the large window in the room and a door with a translucent window in it. Center stage left had an old steamer trunk, and center stage right had a battered wooden crate.

A workshop of an earlier version of **Maura and Katinka** was performed at The Producers Club, New York City, October 20-22, 1999, produced by Spirit Productions. It was directed by M.L. Kinney, with set and costumes by Meganne George, lights by Rychard Curtiss and original music by Raul Rothblatt. Jeanne Hime played Maura and Danielle Duvall played Katinka.

The playwright gratefully acknowledges the help of Sandor Ács and Peter Viereck.

Scene One: Prologue

(Upstage is a door. Center right is a battered wooden crate. Center left is a steamer trunk. MAURA enters through the door, carrying a ticket and HER hat. SHE closes the door behind HER and crosses down left. SHE sits on the trunk and puts down her hat. KATINKA enters, leaving the door open. SHE crosses down toward MAURA, and tries to make friends. MAURA jumps up and crosses down right to avoid KATINKA. KATINKA shrugs, and sits on the trunk)

MAURA:

(Out)

My ticket number is 7263244.

KATINKA:

(Out)

My ticket is number 67.

MAURA:

(Out)

For H.M.S. Catalonia.

KATINKA:

(Out)

Transworld Airlines flight six, from Schwechat [Shvay-shaht].

MAURA:

(Out)

From Queenstown.

KATINKA:

(Out)

Vienna airport.

(To MAURA)

Psst!

(MAURA turns a little upstage, nervously)

KATINKA (Contd.):

On way there, I see famous *Riesenrad* [Ree-zehn-rahd]- big wheel, you go round and round on it- in Prater Park. Orson Welles rides it in “Third Man” movie.

MAURA:

(To KATINKA)

Shh!

(Out)

Ireland. Queenstown’s a large city in Ireland.

KATINKA:

(Out, points to destination on the ticket)

I came to New York.

MAURA:

(Out, points to destination on the ticket)

I came to Boston.

MAURA & KATINKA:

With not much more than a ticket.

MAURA:

Tis only a piece of paper.

KATINKA:

(To MAURA, rises and crosses down, holding HER ticket up)

You see? This change me. This paper.

MAURA:

(To KATINKA)

A piece of paper changes forever. You can never go back.

KATINKA:

(To MAURA, as SHE crosses toward HER)

Could maybe go back. But no. Never the same.

(KATINKA exits through the upstage door)

End of Scene

Scene Two: Maura Rafferty**MAURA:**

(MAURA walks upstage center, and turns to face the audience)

Now, then, when I got off of the ship, this is what I said. My name is Maura Bridget Rafferty. I'm 24 years old. I'm unmarried. I'm a servant. I can read. I can write. I'm a British citizen. I'm from County Mayo, Ireland. My cousin Nora Dugan herself paid my passage. I hold \$17. This is my first time coming to America. I'm going to stay with my cousin, Siobhan Costello, 516 Sheridan Street, Somerville, Massachusetts. I've never been in prison. I've never been in an almshouse. I've never been in a lunatic asylum. I'm not deformed or crippled. I'm not after coming to America by reason of any offer, solicitation, promise or agreement, express or implied, to labor here. I'm not a polygamist. I'm not an anarchist.

(Crosses down so that SHE stands below the trunk)

I wanted to come to America in the new year, to spend one more Christmas back home, but the crossing's rougher in the winter. Didn't want to be tossed about like a stone skipping on a river. So I crossed in September. Where I come from, County Mayo, is rough country- all peat bogs and mountains. Not good for much if you're not a sheep. In Ireland, people say: "County Mayo, God help us" like that's the full name of the place. I've four sisters and one brother. One sister, Pegeen, and Muriel, my mother, are dead. I pray for their souls every night.

(Crosses herself)

My da's Donal Rafferty. When my da dies, my brother Eamon will inherit the land. Deirdre, the oldest sister, has the dowry. Da's trying to find her the best off husband he can. They all do. There's no romance in being poor. That's why fathers look for husbands with means. Romance is a luxury for them that has. My other sisters Una and Sheila can come to America or go into the convent. My last sister, Nuala, is simple-

MAURA (CONTD.):

minded, so she'll stay with Da. She cannot ever leave Mayo. What's unfamiliar upsets her- new people, new sights. She loves the old things; her most prized possession is the black shawl that was our mother's. She sleeps with it, like a Midas with his gold. Da took Nuala on a trip to the village, once. Where we are in Mayo, there're no trees. But Nuala, she sees trees for the first time, scared the heart out of her. She thinks they're after coming for her. Going to fall on top of her and crush her. Da had to bring her home to stop her wailing. Once I finish paying my doctor bills, and pay back Nora for my passage, then I can send Da money to save for Nuala.

(Crosses center)

There's nothing else for Una and Sheila, unless they want to wait on Eamon hand and foot for the rest of their lives. I'm thinking Eamon wouldn't mind, he hasn't the money for to hire a skivvy. None of us girls has education to speak of. We didn't finish school. We can write our names and cipher and read enough. Eamon's schoolmaster used to tell his class: "Boys, study American history and geography. Because that's where most of you are going."

(Laughing, crosses down of the crate)

Eamon's so thick he can barely lace his own boots. America's not for him. He's a way with the sheep and the poteen- that's all he'll get and all he'll need.

(Crosses above the trunk)

Da fishes a *currach*. He'll have none of these new-fangled wooden boats; cowhide was good enough for his da and it's good enough for him. And it's a blessing, because we got sick of the sight of fish, but none of us starved to death, even in the worst of it. Most all the Mayo coast is cliffs. We've only one near path to the sea and it's terrible boggy. The sea itself is no easy thing. Go out on a fair morning, and you'll hit a squall before noon. As it came from nowhere. Da could tell aforehand.

(Sits on the trunk)

Fair weather of a morning, but he'd just sit and in a few hours, the sea would be thrashing

MAURA (CONTD.):

currags about like corks in a washtub.

(Crosses center)

There was pirate *currags* once, robbing the English. When he was a small boy, Eamon was after saying he wanted to be a pirate. But none of us was after picturing it. Many the night we'd go to bed hungry if the sea was too rough to fish. But we was better off than most.

(MAURA to the trunk and sits)

Da grew up in the Great Hunger. He tells of the dead- in cabins, in the road. Rats eating the bodies. Cats, starving dogs. I can never look on a dog without a wee tremble. Knowing that if it was him or myself, I'd be no different to him than a table scrap. There was no food- even the seaweed was eaten up. Starving children, too weak to cry. Da's brother lost the hair in his head, but it grew back on his face. He was just a boy, not out of dresses yet. They died of black fever, the relapsing fever that'd turn you yellow, dysentery, the famine dropsy- you'd swell up and burst. And if that didn't get you, starvation or the emigration would.

(Rises)

In '46, the whole of Ireland run out of coffins. So each village has one coffin with a trap door, that they'd use then to get the body to the grave. There was no funerals for the poor. Not even shrouds for the bodies. Dump them in the pit and sprinkle some quicklime on top. Less care than you'd take burying a dead cat. That's what became of Mother's da.

(Crosses center)

County Mayo God help us is in the west of Ireland. So in Mayo when you say you're going West, it means either to America or to die. Some do come back from here, but most don't. No one I know who's come here has gone back. They're more likely to emigrate to the wilds of the Amazon than go back to Ireland. They all send money. Sometimes a photograph, of a baby or a husband the family back home in Ireland'll never

MAURA (CONTD.):

meet.

(Crosses center right)

There's a tale of an old man in Sligo who got an envelope from America. He opened it and found photographs of his sons. "Ach," he said, "I know what they look like.

Pictures of Abraham Lincoln on \$5 bills, those're the only pictures I need."

(MAURA crosses center, between the crate and the trunk)

Tis a free country here. You see boys and girls playing together. In Ireland, from the time we're babies we're not to mix with the boys. We weren't to talk to them. And if you were caught, or some old crone turned you in to Father Gormley, it was a bad penance. So when Da had a wake for me- "American wakes" they call them- I told him to ask the boys and the girls as well. No penance for me- I'd be far and away. And they all came.

(SHE hums a dance tune and dances a bit)

Poteen and dancing all night. I swear during the wake, I was after hearing a banshee cry under the window. Directly after Patsy Dugan stopped dancing with me, but before Colleen O'Malley passed out. I didn't remember it until I had the fever, but I heard it. But no one was even like to die- surely not Colleen, she'd just taken a drop too many- so I didn't dwell on it.

(Hums the song again)

The old women, they keen for the departing soul, like for the dead. Which you will be to them.

(Crosses right of the crate)

When the sun rises, you walk round the cottages and say your farewells. Da took me down to the sea, to a boat for Queenstown. Da calls it *Cobh* [Kohv], the old name.

(Crosses below the crate)

America tisn't easy. It has possibility, that it does. At least possibility in the mind. The Protestants, they say horrid things about the Irish servant girls. In the big houses, the mistress calls all the girls Maggie or Bridget. She can't be bothered to learn the names.

MAURA (CONTD.):

They're only Micks, after all. You'd learn a dog's name, wouldn't you? Some say we're all spies for the Pope. I'm not telling tales, I've seen such books for sale: The Female Jesuit. The Spy in the Family. They say we're good for nothing but laziness and gossiping too much. Our house tisen't so big; I do the laundry. Nora cooks. In the winter, I shovel the snow and stoke the furnace. I work six in the morning to midnight, seven days a week. And every other Sunday afternoon is my own. I'm lucky to have a position. Some places wouldn't want to have to see a face like mine. As it is, the children call me "scary Maura." Not a reference to my disposition.

(Crosses center)

When Nora first started cooking there, the missus asked for melon at luncheon. And Nora'd never seen such a thing - she thought it was a squash. So she cut it into pieces like you'd cut a squash and boiled it. And the missus had a new story for her ladies' teas- I've heard her tell it.

(Crosses below crate)

One girl from the Mayo Society, Mona Madden, she told us her house was full of those free-thinkers. They don't go to church. They're not Jews- they don't worship anywhere. And they've two darling little girls, who're not baptized. Well, Mona was at a loss. A total loss. They're not her children of course, but she'd see their pretty little faces and think of them spending all eternity in limbo. It was too much for herself. She took them over to St. Columba's one afternoon and had them properly christened. Her mistress found out and she laughed. Mona was afraid she'd let her go. She made Mona promise never to take them to church again. Tisen't easy to make the holy days of obligation. The missus doesn't like to give us the time to go to mass. We said she could take the time out of our wages, but she'd have none of it. So we can't make First Friday devotions, we've had to give it up. Siobhan goes and prays we'll be allowed to, some day.

(Crosses left of the trunk)

My cousin Nora- she calls herself "Amy" now because she says it's more American- she came over first. Then she brought her sister, Siobhan, who married Rory Costello. He's

MAURA (CONTD.):

a barkeep. And the last sister, Maeve, joined the Carmelite Order. Maeve has terrible rickets and scurvy, Nora's mother says. None of that in America, I tell myself. But when I got off the boat in East Boston, I saw children as thin as the ones back home. Filthy, ragged things. I can't get my mind 'round it still. In a country where Nora earns \$4 a week and meals and a place to sleep, they can't feed children? And there's no Godless English stealing the land and taxing them to death? It's a mystery.

(Crosses down left)

In Boston, there's societies for your county, so I joined the Mayo. They've picnics and excursions if you've the time. And the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union is a grand thing. They'll put food on the table if you're out of work, and bury the dead if there's no other means. After I got off the boat, I stayed for a few nights with Siobhan and her husband, while Nora looked for a job for myself. There's plenty of jobs, she says, though I was glad to work in the house she does. For the company. I was still getting my land legs. Wobbly from the sea. It's only eight days from Queenstown, but crowded in steerage. 200 women. And some youngsters. No air. They didn't want us near the first and second class passengers, so we can't get on deck very often. When we were nearly to Boston, the ship's doctor came down into steerage. If you had a mark, you got a card and got to go on the deck. If you didn't have a mark, you got a vaccination. It was for the smallpox. If you didn't get that card, you couldn't go ashore. They'd keep you in quarantine. My turn came. He looked at my arm- there was no mark. I'd gotten the vaccine in Queenstown - the landlady where I stayed the night told me to. That you couldn't get in the States without it. It didn't leave a scar. I didn't think on it. I was too excited about the journey. And the train! I saw my first locomotive- a puffing black dragon of a thing. I told the ship's doctor that I'd had the vaccine. Himself heard me. He looked again and saw no scar. I needed to get off the boat. I let him stick me again. He gives me a card, and I gone up on deck with the others.

(Crosses to trunk and sits)

The doctor I saw later on, he said some don't scar after. They're not after knowing why.

MAURA (CONTD.):

I have no vaccine scar. Just the pox scars.

For a time, I was fine. Helped Siobhan make new curtains and put them up. Rode the horsecar to see the city. Much finer than Queenstown. Started working at Nora's house. Until one afternoon I was stoking the furnace and felt so cold, like my blood was changed for sleet. Nora found me lying on the cellar floor. They took me back to Siobhan and Rory's. My fever went so high they did everything they could to bring it down. They even cut off my hair. It wasn't half so curly before they cut it. It's grown, some; not so fast as I'd like. It's the only vanity left to me. Siobhan put me in the back bedroom. I was sick - I couldn't eat for days. My muscles ached, my head burned. Twas like the fires of hell was in my brain. And strange dreams- so real that life felt more like dreaming than the dreams did. Rats crawling all over me, biting with teeth like razors. I set fires to stop them, they came through the flames. I set a river on fire between me and the rats, I couldn't stop them. Then Mother was there, and the rats ate her alive. Twas horrible. And then the fever started to decline. But my face had hard lumps on it. I could feel them brushing against the pillow. And they spread, all over me, even to the tops of my feet. The bumps turned into blisters- they were agony. They hurt so I couldn't bear to have the weight of a sheet touch them. Then the blisters burst. The stench was - I never imagined that anything so foul could come from my person. And poor Siobhan- she never left my side. Never let on how horrid it was. The only treatment for smallpox is to keep the sores clean. And she washed, and washed me, as gently as she could. "You're one of the lucky ones," she'd say. "You're going to live. And you'll not go blind."

(Rises and crosses center)

The first day I can remember clearly, I lifted my head off the pillow and looked at the room. The bureau was there and the rocking chair. But the mirror was gone from the wall. Siobhan or Rory had moved it. She told me later that the doctor was after

MAURA (CONTD.):

suggesting it. That some that seen themselves too soon, they don't want to live. And they don't- they will themselves to die. But I needed to see. Siobhan brought me a hand mirror- she didn't want to. I had no idea. I'd never been handsome, but now....

(MAURA puts on HER hat, and covers HER face with the veil. Faces upstage)

I hadn't cried since we laid Mother in the ground. I cried as much with shame of my vanity as for my new pathetic face. The saltwater tears burned the wounds, but I couldn't stop myself.

(Turns downstage)

I don't go out of the house without wearing this hat and veil. Not even to shovel the snow. And for the house, a doctor's fitted me with glasses. The fever made all my eyelashes fall out. Dust gets in my eyes if I don't cover them.

(Crosses down left)

I always thought that some boyo would come along one day. Not a prince, but a steady enough man. And I'd take care of him instead of rich people's houses. And if God was willing, a little one or two. But no man worth having is desperate enough for this face.

(Crosses up center and pauses. Then, whirls around and faces the audience)

I told the doctor on the ship that I'd had the vaccination. What else could I do? If he didn't give me the paper, I'd be trapped in the quarantine shed for the rest of my natural life, or they'd send me back.

(Crosses center)

Go back to die the way my ma did? Herself a scarecrow wracked with consumption and a hard life, looking like an old crone when she died at 38? It wasn't the work of the fairies. It wasn't what the bloody priest was always after saying, that the famines were the wrath of God on the Irish people, for practicing the old ways- appeasing the fairies, dancing at *lughnasa* and that. It was the English. And they care no more for their own, the Protestants in Ireland, than they do for us. I've heard my uncle Neil tell of being in

MAURA (CONTD.):

Cork City in Black '47. The worst year of the worst famine. He went down to the docks to look for work, and saw soldiers with guns. He thought they'd be guarding ships unloading provisions.

(Crosses right)

They were loading ships bound for Liverpool with beef, eggs, rashers of bacon. Behind the soldiers stood the starving, watching the food go across the sea to their masters. And the ships carried boxes full of the dead. Their hair and clothes, to sell in England. They were after selling the hair for wigs and the clothes for rags. So a fine lady in London may purchase a wig of fine famine hair and pay for it with pound notes, made from famine rags. And that's as much as herself will ever know of Black '47.

(Crosses center)

There's a trial. I sued Cunard, the steamship company. The County Mayo Society and the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union paid for a barrister for me. It went on to the Massachusetts Supreme Court. I didn't understand it all. "Master-servant" and "negligence" and "tort"- they said those words again and again. The barrister himself made me get up in open court. Get up myself on the witness stand so he could ask me questions. I hated all those eyes on me. That jury box of men staring at me as if I was some freak of nature. He made me lift my veil. The way they looked at me. I didn't want their bloody pity. I never wanted that from anyone.

(Crosses left)

By the end of the trial, I'd had enough. Then there was two appeals. The barrister said the case wasn't about whether I told the doctor I'd had the vaccine before, I did. It wasn't about whether he heard me. He did. All that mattered to them was that I didn't say no.

(Sits on the trunk)

I remember the famine in '79. I heard stories about Black '47 all my life. But I didn't hear of the smell. The potatoes with the blight- that smell- all the sulfur of hell in that stench. When Da was too weak to cut turf for the fire, we brought the sheep in the house