

The Rope: Auditions Sides

Description: *Abraham Bentley is a tall, lean stoop-shouldered old man of sixty-five. His thin legs, twisted by rheumatism, totter feebly under him as he shuffles slowly along by the aid of a thick cane. His face is gaunt, chalky-white, furrowed with wrinkles, surmounted by a shiny bald scalp fringed with scanty wisps of white hair. His eyes peer weakly from beneath bushy, black brows. His mouth is a sunken line drawn in under his large, beak-like nose. A two weeks' growth of stubby patches of beard covers his jaws and chin. He has on a threadbare brown overcoat but wears no hat.*

BENTLEY—*(comes slowly into the barn, peering around him suspiciously. As he reaches the table and leans one hand on it for support, Mary darts from underneath and dashes out through the doorway. Bentley is startled; then shakes his cane after her.)* Out o' my sight, you Papist brat! Spawn o' Satan! Spyin' on me! They set her to it. Spyin' to watch me! *(He limps to the door and looks out cautiously. Satisfied, he turns back into the barn.)* Spyin' to see—what they'll never know. *(He stands staring up at the rope and taps it testingly several times with his stick, talking to himself as he does so.)* It's tied strong—strong as death—*(He cackles with satisfaction.)* They'll see, then! They'll see! *(He laboriously creeps over to the bench and sits down wearily. He looks toward the sea and his voice quavers in a doleful chant.)* "Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." *(He mumbles to himself for a moment—then speaks clearly.)* Spyin' on me! Spawn o' the Pit! *(He renews his chant.)* "They hunt our steps that we cannot go in our streets; our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come."

Description: *Annie is a thin, slovenly, worn-out looking woman of about forty with a drawn, pasty face. Her habitual expression is one of a dulled irritation. She talks in a high-pitched, sing-song whine. She wears a faded gingham dress and a torn sunbonnet.*

ANNIE—(*enraged by the repetition of this quotation*) You quotin' Scripture! Why, Maw wasn't cold in the earth b'fore you was down in the port courtin' agen—courtin' that harlot that was the talk o' the whole town. And then you disgraces yourself and me by marryin' her—her—and bringin' her back home with you; and me still goin' every day to put flowers on Maw's grave that you'd fergotten. (*She glares at him vindictively, pausing for breath.*) And between you you'd have druv me into the grave like you done Maw if I hadn't married Pat Sweeney so's I could git away and live in peace. Then you took on so high and mighty 'cause he was a Cath'lic—you gittin' religion all of a moment just for spite on me 'cause I'd left—and b'cause she egged you on against me; you sayin' it was a sin to marry a Papist, after not bein' at Sunday meetin' yourself for more'n twenty years! And the carryin's-on you had the six years at home after I'd left you—the shame of the whole county! Your wife, indeed, with a child she claimed was yourn, and her goin' with this farmer and that, and even men off the ships in the port, and you blind to it! And then when she got sick of you and ran away—only to meet her end at the hands of God a year after—she leaves you alone with that—your son, Luke, she called him—and him only five years old!

Description: *Sweeney is a stocky, muscular, sandy-haired Irishman dressed in patched corduroy trousers shoved down into high laced boots, and a blue flannel shirt. The bony face of his bullet head has a pressed-in appearance except for his heavy jaw, which sticks out pugnaciously. There is an expression of mean cunning and cupidity about his mouth and his small, round, blue eyes. He has evidently been drinking and his face is flushed and set in an angry scowl.*

SWEENEY—He did. (*disappointedly*) But for all the good it does us we might as well be no wiser than we was before. (*He broods for a moment in silence—then hits the table furiously with his fist.*) God's curse on the auld miser!

ANNIE—What did he tell you?

SWEENEY—Not much at the first. He's a cute one, an' he'd be askin' a fee to tell you your own name, if he could get it. His practice is all dribbled away from him lately on account of the drink. So I let on I was only payin' a friendly call, havin' known him for years. Then I asked him out to have a drop o' drink, known' his weakness; an' we had rashers of them, an' I payin' for it. Then I come out with it straight and asked him about the will—because the auld man was crazy an' on his last legs, I told him, an' he was the lawyer made out the will when Luke was gone. So he winked at me an' grinned—he was drunk by this—an' said: "It's no use, Pat. He left the farm to the boy." "To hell with the farm," I spoke back. "It's mortgaged to the teeth; but how about the money?" "The money?" an' he looks at me in surprise, "What money?" "The cash he has," I says. "You're crazy," he says. "There wasn't any cash—only the farm." "D'you mean to say he made no mention of money in his will?" I asked. You could have knocked me down with a feather. "He did not—on my oath," he says. (*Sweeney leans over to his wife—indignantly*) Now what d'you make o' that? The auld divil!

Description: *Luke is a tall, strapping young fellow about twenty-one with a coarse-featured, rather handsome face bronzed by the sun. What his face lacks in intelligence is partly forgiven for his good-natured, half-foolish grin, his hearty laugh, his curly dark hair, a certain devil-may-care recklessness and irresponsible youth in voice and gesture. But his mouth is weak and characterless; his brown eyes are large but shifty and acquisitive.*

LUKE—Hahaha! Not this chicken! And you say he ain't crazy! Gee, that's too good to keep. I got to have a drink on that. (*Sweeney pushes the bottle toward him. He raises it toward the rope.*) Here's how, old chum! (*He drinks. Sweeney does likewise.*) Say, I'd a'most forgotten about that. Remember how hot he was that day when he hung that rope up and cussed me for pinchin' the hundred? He was standin' there shakin' his stick at me, and I was laughin' 'cause he looked so funny with the spit dribblin' outa his mouth like he was a mad dog. And when I turned round and beat it he shouted after me: "Remember, when you come home again there's a rope waitin' for yuh to hang yourself on, yuh bastard!" (*He spits contemptuously.*) What a swell chanct. (*His manner changes and he frowns.*) The old slave driver! That's a hell of a fine old man for a guy to have!