

The Banshee

The characters are:

Padraic O'Shaughnessey, the Poet.

Clara, his wife.

Mrs. Huntingdon, her mother.

Gregory, an old butler.

The Dark Woman of the forest.

The time is:

About ten o' clock on a late October evening.

The place is:

The living room in Padraic O' Shaughnessey's country house in which there are two large windows at the back, left and right. Between them hangs a 15th century tapestry depicting Prometheus chained to the rock, an eagle plucking at his left side, and two or three eagles hovering over him. In front of this tapestry is a reproduction of one of Michel Angelo's "Slaves" (The Louvre).

Down left is a large Italian Renaissance fireplace, above which hangs a painting of Sebastian, also of the same period. There is a doorway up left.

There is every evidence of discerning taste and knowledge of art in the atmosphere of the room. It is lit by many candles, tall and slender.

The Play

Gregory, the old butler is bringing in a wicker wooden basket which he places back of the fire place. He trims the tall candles, he puts a log on the fire. Then the window, back right, is opened from without, and the Dark Woman is seen looking into the room.

She laughs her elfish laughter, and talks weirdly and withal wisely and sweetly to the old man, who knows her well, and who is kind and understanding with her. She asks for the "royal prisoner", meaning Paradiac, the poet. And the Dark Woman speaks with passionate tenderness of him and his surroundings. As steps are heard from without she slips away from the window leaving it open.

Mrs. Huntingdon, entering, reproves Gregory for leaving the window open, then looking at him suspiciously asks if that "dreadful woman" has been there. For she has heard him talking.

She dismisses Gregory after requesting him to shut and lock the window, which he does.

She sits before the fire taking up a book to read. But she cannot attend to her book. She looks uneasily at the window from time to time. She gets up and tries the lock, and is satisfied that it is secure. She returns and devotes herself to her book.

After a long moment the window opens slowly and noiselessly. And reveals the Dark Woman without. She speaks scornfully to the woman within.

Mrs. Huntingdon rises in anger and fear, and threatens the woman, to drive her away.

The Dark Woman only laughs her disturbing laughter and says strange wild things which terrify the other woman, and she repeats her angry threats, in a towering rage. Finding her words like a much stary wind, she calls her daughter Clara, who comes hurriedly in answer to the call. As she does so, with another exasperating laugh the Dark Woman fades from sight into darkness.

Clara and her mother have an agitated talk about the Dark Woman and about Padraic, the poet, Clara´s husband, whom she connects with this uncanny being from the forest. Clara tells her mother of late visits to the forest which Padraic has been making, and they sneer at his idea that he is a poet, and has it in him to write great things. As they talk, the Dark Woman appears for the third time at the window, and rails at the two women, accusing them of crushing and killing the spirit, the genius of the man who is in their tolls.

Clara replies harshly to the Dark Woman, but the mother is almost swooning with terror. Laughing wildly the Woman again goes away.

Padraic enters, disturbed and questioning about the noise and excitement which he has heard. They tell him that “wild woman” has been there, and she speaks of her with wonder in his voice as “the woman of the forest, the little dryad”.

There is fury in the two women at this tones; and even as he speaks she is heard singing a wild sweet song of love in the distance. His face lights, and he listens like one entranced. They berate him with hard words, and in a moment of passion Padraic bids them go to their beds... he is going out into the night.

Padraic is lost in some strange depth. He raises his eyes and looks at the Prometheus, and adresses it; then at the “Slave” and at the falling Icarus. They are all bound even as he, and in extremity.

Gregory enters, and Padriac greets him eagerly. The old man seeks to perform some service for his beloved master, but his offers and suggestions all elicit a “no, thank you”.

Padriac insists on the old man sitting down with him, and he reads some of his lines, but they are thin and meaningless, and one by one he tears them, and throws them into the fire. He talks to Gregory about his early hope of being a true and great poet. He is inspired to say some wondrous things to the old man, expressing what has been repressed within him for so long.

Then he sends Gregory away telling him he wishes to be alone. Gregory reluctantly leaves him.

Padriac pushes the unburned bits of paper about in the fire. As he does so he hears the Dark Woman singing in the forest. She comes nearer and nearer. She is at the window. She opens it, and sings her song again. Padraic is enchanted. He speaks to her. She springs upon the window-sill, and answers him with high gayety.

He begs her to come in, and she does so, telling him she has come to take him to the forest. He replies that it is too soon, but she will not be put off. She looks at his beautiful things, at the bound Prometheus, at the “Slave”, at the falling Icarus. They are all strange to her.

She comes and sits at the arm of his chair, She touches his face, his hair, and calls him her friend, her poet, her little child.

He turns to her eagerly, with longing. He is filled with a great passion for her and her wide free forest. He holds her, and she bends over him full of love and wild purpose. She lays her arms about his neck and gazes into his face. Then she withdraws her arms and holds his face with her hands, her lips approaching his, as she looks strangely, adorningly into his eyes. She kisses him. She kisses him deeply, until she draws the breath, the very soul out of him, and at last his white hands fall at his side, his body relaxes in his chair. His soul has come to hers, and she draws away and looks at the lifeless body there. She speakss to the man she sees with the eyes of her spirit, tall, strong, beautiful, speaks to him and with the consciousness that he is indeed going with her, she goes swiftly to the window, spring to the sill and out into the night singing.

There is a tap at the door, another. Gregory enters, and sees his master asleep, as he thinks. He moves quietly about. Then feeling a strangeness, goes to the chair where the poet's still body is. Grief and terror are in his face and in his voice. He goes for the women.
