

Riders to the Sea Summary

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"Michael's Clothes and a Family's Fear: The play takes place on an island near Ireland. It starts in a small kitchen inside a cottage. The kitchen has fishing nets, raincoats, and cooking tools. There are three women: Cathleen, about 20 years old, Nora, and their mother, Maurya. Cathleen is making bread and spinning thread. Her younger sister, Nora, comes in and asks where their mother is. Cathleen says Maurya is lying down.

Then Nora shows Cathleen a small bundle. A young priest gave it to her. Inside are a shirt and socks from a dead man found in Donegal. It might be their brother, Michael. Suddenly, the wind blows the door open. Cathleen asks Nora if priest will stop Bartley or not. Priest tells Nora that God will protect Bartley from harm. He says God won't take all sons from Maurya.

Cathleen thinks they should not open the bundle now. She is afraid Maurya might come and see it. Cathleen hears Maurya moving in the next room. Cathleen hides the bundle quickly in the attic upstairs. She puts more turf into the oven for baking. The bread is for Bartley's journey across the sea.

Bartley's Journey to the Galway Fair: Maurya comes in and says Bartley should not go to sea today because the weather is bad. Maurya begs Bartley to stay at home and not go to sea. Bartley says he must take the risk of going to sea despite the dangers. He informs his mother that the boat only comes once every two weeks. If he misses it, his family loses their chance to sell horses at the Galway fair. It is very important for their family. He emphasizes it's a "good fair for horses" (prices are high). It makes this trip vital for their survival. Their poverty leaves no choice. Maurya thinks the young priest will stop him.

Nora says the priest will not stop Bartley. Bartley wants to go no matter what. Bartley, the last surviving man of the Maurya family, comes in. He looks sad and quiet. He quickly asks for a rope. Cathleen had put the rope up high so the pig would not eat it. Maurya tries to stop Bartley from taking the rope. She says they might need it if Michael's body comes back from the sea. Maurya is sad because she paid a lot of money for wood to make Michael's coffin, but they do not have his body. Bartley does not think they will find Michael's body.

Bartley uses the rope to make something for his horse. Bartley asks Cathleen to do some work in his absence. But Maurya does not think Cathleen can do them. Maurya asks what will

happen to her and her daughters if Bartley dies. She tries to stop Bartley from going to sea, but Cathleen says, "Young men have to go to sea." Bartley leaves.

Maurya's Fears: Maurya cries and says she will lose her last son before the day ends. Cathleen tells her she should have blessed Bartley and not said bad words before he left. Cathleen remembers they forgot to give Bartley his bread. She tells Maurya to bring the bread to Bartley and bless him. Nora gives Maurya Michael's old walking stick to help her walk. Maurya is sad because the young people are gone and only leave their old things behind.

The Truth About Michael: After Maurya goes to say goodbye to Bartley. Meanwhile, Cathleen and Nora open the bundle. They untie the knots and take out a piece of a stocking. They count the stitches and realize it must belong to Michael. Nora remembers she made a mistake and dropped four stitches when knitting it. Now they know for sure Michael is dead. They feel very sad and cry. All that's left of him is a piece of a shirt and a stocking.

Maurya's Vision & Tragic News: Cathleen sees that Maurya is coming back. She says they should not tell her about Michael until Bartley returns. They try to look busy. Maurya comes in slowly, still holding the bread. Cathleen asks her what happened. Maurya starts to cry. She says, in a weak and scared voice, that she saw Michael. Cathleen gently tells her that Michael's body was found far away and he had a proper burial. Then Maurya describes that when she tried to say "God speed (bless) you" to Bartley, she couldn't speak. She also says she saw Michael, looking nice and clean. He is riding a gray horse behind Bartley. Cathleen starts to cry again. She thinks this is a bad sign and that Bartley will die too. Nora tries to stay hopeful. She remembered the young priest's promise that God would not leave Maurya destitute.

Maurya's Despair and Bartley's Death: Maurya is very sad and unaware of what's around her. She talks about how all her sons, her husband, and her father-in-law have died at sea. Then, Nora and Cathleen hear someone shouting from the shore. Some old women come into the house and kneel. Maurya asks who has died. She wonders how they can know if it's Michael since he was lost at sea for so long. Cathleen tells her it really is Michael. She shows her the clothes from the bundle.

On the way, Bartley drowns when his gray pony knocks him into the sea. While he's riding to catch a boat for the Galway fair. The waves sweep him onto sharp rocks. Thus, Bartley has died. More people from the town come into the house. They carry Bartley's body inside on a wooden board, covered with a piece of sail. One woman tells Cathleen that Bartley's horse knocked him into the sea. Maurya lost her husband and five sons to the sea; Bartley was her last son. His death means the sea has taken every man in her family. Maurya says, "They're all gone now" when villagers carry in Bartley's drowned body. Bartley's death is Bitter Peace to

Maurya. She says she has nothing left to her that the sea can snatch from her. She admits defeat against nature's power, ending her lifelong fear.

Maurya's Final Acceptance: The women in the house start crying loudly. As Maurya puts Holy Water on Bartley, and says: "*May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul...*". She accepts her fate. She consoles herself and thinks no one can live forever. The sea has taken her husband, father-in-law, and all sons. Now she will finally have "a great rest." Cathleen thinks about how Maurya has become so "old" and "broken." Maurya then prays for the souls of her sons and everyone who is still alive. She says, "No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied." That means everyone will die someday, and we just have to accept it.