



**West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education**

Vidyasagar Bhavan

9/2, Block DJ, Sector-II, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 91

**No : L/PR/183 /25**

**Date: 20.03.2025**

**Notification Regarding Revised Syllabus of English [B]**  
**Ref : Notification Memo No : L/PR/454/24 dated 13.12.2024**

You are being requested to refer to the document enclosed herewith illustrating the two texts newly added in the revised syllabus of English [B] [ Class-XII Semester 3].

**Unit 1 : Prose**

**[ One Prose replaced ]**

| Sl No | Topic                      | Marks | Hours |
|-------|----------------------------|-------|-------|
| 3     | 'The Bet' by Anton Chekhov | 03    | 07    |

- ' A Room for One's Own : Section on Shakespeare's Sister' by Virginia Woolf will be replaced by the above-mentioned text.

**Unit 3 : Drama**

**[ One Drama replaced ]**

| Sl No | Topic                            | Marks | Hours |
|-------|----------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1     | 'Riders to the Sea' by J.M.Synge | 05    | 20    |

- ' Tara ' by Mahesh Dattani will be replaced by the above-mentioned text.
- Students will go through the same drama in Sem 3 for MCQs and in Sem 4 for Descriptive Type Questions respectively..

All are requested to check our Notification Section and Download Center on a regular basis for the latest uploads.

Prof.(Dr.) Chiranjib Bhattacharjee  
PRESIDENT  
(WBCHSE)



## **The Bet**

**Anton Chekhov**

### **About the Author**

*Anton Chekhov* (1860-1904) was a Russian playwright and short-story writer, considered one of the greatest writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His works are known for their subtle character development, poignant observations of human nature, and a blend of humor and melancholy. Chekhov's writing often explored themes of social isolation, disillusionment, and the complexities of human relationships. He is a master of the short story form, known for his economy of language and ability to create vivid and memorable characters in just a few pages.

### **About the Text**

*"The Bet"* explores several complex themes, including the nature of freedom, the meaning of life, and the value of material wealth. The story raises questions about what truly constitutes a fulfilling existence. Is it physical freedom, intellectual pursuit, or the accumulation of riches? Chekhov uses the extreme situation of the bet to examine the psychological impact of isolation and the transformative power of knowledge. The story also delves into the themes of pride, regret, and the ultimate contempt for worldly

possessions when faced with existential questions. The banker's initial arrogance and the lawyer's acceptance of the bet both stem from a certain kind of pride, which is ultimately challenged and overturned by the lawyer's profound transformation. The story leaves the reader pondering the true meaning of happiness and the sacrifices people make in its pursuit.

IT WAS a dark autumn night. The old banker was walking up and down his study and remembering how, fifteen years before, he had given a party one autumn evening. There had been many clever men there, and there had been interesting conversations. Among other things they had talked of capital punishment<sup>1</sup>. The majority of the guests, among whom were many journalists and intellectual men, disapproved of the death penalty. They considered that form of punishment out of date, immoral, and unsuitable for Christian States. In the opinion of some of them the death penalty ought to be replaced everywhere by imprisonment for life.

“I don’t agree with you,” said their host the banker. “I have not tried either the death penalty or imprisonment for life, but if one may judge a priori<sup>2</sup>, the death penalty is more moral and more humane than imprisonment for life. Capital punishment kills a man at once, but lifelong imprisonment kills him slowly. Which executioner is the more humane, he who kills you in a few minutes or he who drags the life out of you in the course of many years?”

“Both are equally immoral,” observed one of the guests, “for they both have the same object—to take away life. The State is not God. It has not the right to take away what it cannot restore when it wants to”.

Among the guests was a young lawyer, a young man of five-and -twenty. When he was

---

<sup>1</sup> Death sentence

<sup>2</sup> The Latin term means without empirical evidence.

asked his opinion, he said:

“The death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral, but if I had to choose between the death penalty and imprisonment for life, I would certainly choose the second. To live anyhow is better than not at all.”

A lively discussion arose. The banker, who was younger and more nervous in those days, was suddenly carried away by excitement; he struck the table with his fist and shouted at the young man::

“It’s not true! I’ll bet you two millions you wouldn’t stay in solitary confinement for five years.” “If you mean that in earnest,” said the young man, “I’ll take the bet, but I would stay not five but fifteen years.”

“Fifteen? Done!” cried the banker. “Gentlemen, I stake two millions!”

“Agreed! You stake your millions and I stake my freedom!” said the young man

And this wild, senseless bet was carried out! The banker, spoilt and frivolous<sup>3</sup>, with millions beyond his reckoning, was delighted at the bet. At supper he made fun of the young man, and said:

“Think better of it, young man, while there is still time. To me two millions are a trifle, but you are losing three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you won’t stay longer. Don’t forget either, you unhappy man, that voluntary confinement is a great deal harder to bear than compulsory. The thought that you have the right to step out in liberty at any moment will poison your whole existence in prison. I am sorry for you.”

And now the banker, walking to and fro, remembered all this, and asked himself:

---

<sup>3</sup> lighthearted to the point of being a bit silly

“What was the object of that bet? What is the good of that man’s losing fifteen years of his life and my throwing away two millions? Can it prove that the death penalty is better or worse than imprisonment for life? No, no. It was all nonsensical and meaningless. On my part it was the caprice<sup>4</sup> of a pampered man, and on his part simple greed for money....”

Then he remembered what followed that evening. It was decided that the young man should spend the years of his captivity under the strictest supervision in one of the lodges in the banker’s garden. It was agreed that for fifteen years he should not be free to cross the threshold of the lodge, to see human beings, to hear the human voice, or to receive letters and newspapers. He was allowed to have a musical instrument and books, and was allowed to write letters, to drink wine, and to smoke. By the terms of the agreement, the only relations he could have with the outer world were by a little window made purposely for that object. He might have anything he wanted— books, music, wine, and so on—in any quantity he desired by writing an order, but could only receive them through the window. The agreement provided for every detail and every trifle<sup>5</sup> that would make his imprisonment strictly solitary, and bound the young man to stay there exactly fifteen years, beginning from twelve o’clock of November 14, 1870, and ending at twelve o’clock of November 14, 1885. The slightest attempt on his part to break the conditions, if only two minutes before the end, released the banker from the obligation to pay him two millions.

For the first year of his confinement, as far as one could judge from his brief notes, the prisoner suffered severely from loneliness and depression. The sounds of the piano could be heard continually day and night from his lodge. He refused wine and tobacco. Wine, he wrote, excites the desires, and desires are the worst foes of the prisoner; and besides, nothing could be more dreary than drinking good wine and seeing no one. And tobacco spoilt the air of his room. In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character; novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on.

---

<sup>4</sup> A sudden and unaccountable change of mood or behavior.

<sup>5</sup>all the small, seemingly insignificant details

In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. He did not read books. Sometimes at night he would sit down to write; he would spend hours writing, and in the morning tear up all that he had written. More than once he could be heard crying.

In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies—so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered. In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request. It was during this period that the banker received the following letter from his prisoner:

“My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!” The prisoner’s desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two shots to be fired in the garden.

Then after the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospel<sup>6</sup>. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred learned volumes should waste nearly a year over one thin book easy of comprehension. Theology<sup>7</sup> and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books

---

<sup>6</sup> the first four books of the New Testament in the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books tell the story of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection.

<sup>7</sup>the study of God and religious beliefs.

quite indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences, then he would ask for Byron<sup>8</sup> or Shakespeare<sup>9</sup>. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry, and a manual of medicine, and a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another.

The old banker remembered all this, and thought:

“To-morrow at twelve o’clock he will regain his freedom. By our agreement I ought to pay him two millions. If I do pay him, it is all over with me: I shall be utterly ruined.”

Fifteen years before, his millions had been beyond his reckoning; now he was afraid to ask himself which were greater, his debts or his assets. Desperate gambling on the Stock Exchange, wild speculation and the excitability which he could not get over even in advancing years, had by degrees led to the decline of his fortune and the proud, fearless, self-confident millionaire had become a banker of middling rank, trembling at every rise and fall in his investments. “Cursed bet!” muttered the old man, clutching his head in despair “Why didn’t the man die? He is only forty now. He will take my last penny from me, he will marry, will enjoy life, will gamble on the Exchange; while I shall look at him with envy like a beggar, and hear from him every day the same sentence: ‘I am indebted to you for the happiness of my life, let me help you!’ No, it is too much! The one means of being saved from bankruptcy and disgrace is the death of that man!”

It struck three o’clock, the banker listened; everyone was asleep in the house and nothing could be heard outside but the rustling of the chilled trees. Trying to make no noise, he took from a fireproof safe the key of the door which had not been opened for fifteen years,

---

<sup>8</sup> George Gordon Byron (Lord Byron) was a major English Romantic poet.

<sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist.

put on his overcoat, and went out of the house.

It was dark and cold in the garden. Rain was falling. A damp cutting wind was racing about the garden, howling and giving the trees no rest. The banker strained his eyes, but could see neither the earth nor the white statues, nor the lodge, nor the trees. Going to the spot where the lodge stood, he twice called the watchman. No answer followed. Evidently the watchman had sought shelter from the weather, and was now asleep somewhere either in the kitchen or in the greenhouse.

“If I had the pluck to carry out my intention,” thought the old man, “Suspicion would fall first upon the watchman.”

He felt in the darkness for the steps and the door, and went into the entry of the lodge. Then he groped<sup>10</sup> his way into a little passage and lighted a match. There was not a soul there. There was a bedstead with no bedding on it, and in the corner there was a dark cast-iron stove. The seals on the door leading to the prisoner’s rooms were intact.

When the match went out the old man, trembling with emotion, peeped through the little window. A candle was burning dimly in the prisoner’s room. He was sitting at the table. Nothing could be seen but his back, the hair on his head, and his hands. Open books were lying on the table, on the two easy-chairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner did not once stir. Fifteen years’ imprisonment had taught him to sit still. The banker tapped at the window with his finger, and the prisoner made no movement whatever in response. Then the banker cautiously broke the seals off the door and put the key in the keyhole. The rusty lock gave a grating sound and the door creaked. The banker expected to hear at once footsteps and a cry of astonishment, but three minutes passed and it was as quiet as ever in the room. He made up his mind to go in.

At the table a man unlike ordinary people was sitting motionless. He was a skeleton with

---

<sup>10</sup> To search for something blindly or uncertainly with hands.



the skin drawn tight over his bones, with long curls like a woman's and a shaggy<sup>11</sup> beard. His face was yellow with an earthy tint in it, his cheeks were hollow, his back long and narrow, and the hand on which his shaggy head was propped was so thin and delicate that it was dreadful to look at it. His hair was already streaked with silver, and seeing his emaciated<sup>12</sup>, aged-looking face, no one would have believed that he was only forty. He was asleep.... In front of his bowed head there lay on the table a sheet of paper on which there was something written in fine handwriting.

“Poor creature!” thought the banker, “he is asleep and most likely dreaming of the millions. And I have only to take this half-dead man, throw him on the bed, stifle him a little with the pillow, and the most conscientious<sup>13</sup> expert would find no sign of a violent death. But let us first read what he has written here....”

The banker took the page from the table and read as follows:

“To-morrow at twelve o'clock I regain my freedom and the right to associate with other men, but before I leave this room and see the sunshine, I think it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.

“For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forests, have loved women.... Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc<sup>14</sup>, and from there I have seen the sun

---

<sup>11</sup> Untidy

<sup>12</sup> abnormally thin or weak

<sup>13</sup> extremely careful and thorough in doing what is right or proper.

<sup>14</sup> Elbrus is located in the Caucasus Mountains of Russia, near the border with Georgia. and Mont Blanc is situated in the Alps mountain range, on the border between France and Italy, examples of the heights of

rise and have watched it at evening flood the sky, the ocean, and the mountain-tops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the storm-clouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens<sup>15</sup>, and the strains of the shepherds' pipes; I have touched the wings of comely<sup>16</sup> devils who flew down to converse with me of God.... In your books I have flung myself into the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms....

“Your books have given me wisdom. All that the unresting thought of man has created in the ages is compressed into a small compass in my brain. I know that I am wiser than all of you.

“And I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage<sup>17</sup>. You may be proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the face of the earth as though you were no more than mice burrowing under the floor, and your posterity, your history, your immortal geniuses will burn or freeze together with the earthly globe.

“You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path. You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness<sup>18</sup> for beauty. You would marvel if, owing to strange events of some sorts, frogs and lizards suddenly grew on apple and orange trees instead of fruit, or if roses began to smell like a sweating horse; so I marvel at you who exchange heaven for earth. I don't want to understand you. To prove to you in action how I despise all that you live by, I renounce<sup>19</sup> the two millions of which I once dreamed as of paradise and which now I despise. To deprive myself of the right to the money I shall go out from here five hours before the time

---

earthly experience that the lawyer explores vicariously through books

<sup>15</sup> (In Greek mythology) Creatures whose singing lured sailors to their death.

<sup>16</sup> attractive or pleasing

<sup>17</sup> something that appears to be real or possible but is actually not.

<sup>18</sup> Quality of being extremely ugly or unpleasant.

<sup>19</sup> Formal rejection of something.

fixed, and so break the compact....”

When the banker had read this he laid the page on the table, kissed the strange man on the head, and went out of the lodge, weeping. At no other time, even when he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange, had he felt so great a contempt for himself. When he got home he lay on his bed, but his tears and emotion kept him for hours from sleeping.

Next morning the watchmen ran in with pale faces, and told him they had seen the man who lived in the lodge climb out of the window into the garden, go to the gate, and disappear. The banker went at once with the servants to the lodge and made sure of the flight of his prisoner. To avoid arousing unnecessary talk, he took from the table the writing in which the millions were renounced, and when he got home locked it up in the fireproof safe.

## Quick Recall

**1. What was the subject of the initial discussion at the banker's party?**

- a) Love and marriage
- b) Capital punishment
- c) The stock market
- d) Literature and philosophy

**2. How long was the lawyer supposed to stay in solitary confinement?**

- a) 10 years
- b) 15 years
- c) 20 years
- d) 5 years

**3. Assertion (A):** The lawyer left his confinement before the bet ended.

**Reason (R):** He realized that material wealth and worldly pleasures were meaningless.

- a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- b) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- c) A is true, but R is false.
- d) A is false, but R is true.

**4. Assertion (A):** The banker was relieved when the lawyer left early.

**Reason (R):** The banker had become wealthy by the end of the 15 years and was ready to pay.

- a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- b) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- c) A is true, but R is false.
- d) A is false, but R is true.

**5. Match the items in Column A with their corresponding descriptions in Column B .**

| Column A                     | Column B  |
|------------------------------|---|
| A. The Banker                | 1.Symbolizes materialism and fear of loss                           |
| B. The Lawyer                | 2. Represents the pursuit of knowledge and eventual disillusionment |
| C. The Bet Agreement         | 3.A test of human endurance and conflicting values                  |
| D. The Lawyer's Final Letter | 4.Rejects material wealth and questions life's meaning              |

**Options:**

- a) A-1, B-2, C-3, D-4
- b) A-2, B-3, C-1, D-4
- c) A-3, B-4, C-2, D-1
- d) A-1, B-3, C-4, D-2



## Riders To the Sea

### **About the Dramatist**

*John Millington Synge* (1871–1909) was a pioneering Irish dramatist and poet whose work significantly contributed to the Irish Literary Revival. Synge is renowned for his vivid portrayals of rural Irish life, often drawing on local dialects, folklore, and the stark realities of island existence. His plays, characterized by lyrical dialogue and a deep empathy for his characters, explore themes of myth, tradition, and the sometimes tragic interplay between humanity and nature. Synge's innovative dramatic style, which blended naturalism with poetic symbolism, paved the way for a more authentic representation of Irish cultural identity on the stage.

### **About the Drama**

*Riders to the Sea* is one of Synge's most celebrated one-act plays. Set on a remote Aran Islands backdrop, the play centers on the relentless struggle of an Irish family against the overwhelming force of the sea. The narrative focuses on the grief and resignation of the women, particularly the elderly mother, who has already lost many of her sons to the treacherous waves. Through its stark, poetic language and atmospheric intensity, the play

explores themes of fatalism<sup>1</sup>, the indomitable power of nature, and the enduring human spirit in the face of inevitable loss.

## RIDERS TO THE SEA

### A PLAY IN ONE ACT

#### PERSONS

MAURYA (*an old woman*).

BARTLEY (*her son*)

CATHLEEN (*her daughter*)

NORA (*a younger daughter*)

MEN AND WOMEN

---

<sup>1</sup> Fatalism is the belief that all events and outcomes are predetermined and inevitable, often due to some greater force or natural law. In this view, human actions have little influence on the ultimate course of events, leading to a resigned acceptance of fate.

*An Island off the West of Ireland. (Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins<sup>2</sup>, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel. NORA, a young girl, puts her head in at the door.)*

**NORA.** *[In a low voice.]* Where is she?

**CATHLEEN.** She's<sup>3</sup> lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping, if she's able.

*[Nora comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.]*

**CATHLEEN.** *[Spinning the wheel rapidly.]* What is it you have?

**NORA.** The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal. *[Cathleen stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out<sup>4</sup> to listen]*

---

<sup>2</sup> Waterproof clothing

<sup>3</sup> Mother

<sup>4</sup> Bends



**NORA.** We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

**CATHLEEN.** How would they be Michael's, Nora. How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

**NORA.** The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean<sup>5</sup> burial by the grace of God, and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death<sup>6</sup>," says he, "with crying and lamenting."

*[The door which Nora half closed is blown open by a gust<sup>7</sup> of wind.]*

**CATHLEEN.** [Looking out anxiously.] Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?

**NORA.** "I won't stop him," says he, "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute<sup>8</sup>," says he, "with no son living."

**CATHLEEN.** Is the sea bad<sup>9</sup> by the white rocks, Nora?

**NORA.** Middling bad<sup>10</sup>, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind. *[She goes over to the table with the bundle.]* Shall I open it now?

**CATHLEEN.** Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done. *[Coming to the table.]* It's a long time<sup>11</sup> we'll be, and the two of us crying.

---

<sup>5</sup> Decent

<sup>6</sup> Cry herself till death

<sup>7</sup> Strong breeze

<sup>8</sup> Lonely

<sup>9</sup> Rough

<sup>10</sup> Neither rough nor calm

<sup>11</sup> Likely to take long time

**NORA.** *[Goes to the inner door and listens.]* She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

**CATHLEEN.** Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft<sup>12</sup>, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east.

*[They put the ladder against the gable<sup>13</sup> of the chimney; Cathleen goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. Maurya comes from the inner room.]*

**MAURYA.** *[Looking up at Cathleen and speaking querulously.]* Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

**CATHLEEN.** There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space. *[Throwing down the turf]* and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.

*[Nora picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.]*

**MAURYA** *[Sitting down on a stool<sup>14</sup> at the fire.]* He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

**NORA.** He'll not stop him, mother, and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

**MAURYA.** Where is he itself?

**NORA.** He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker' tacking<sup>15</sup> from the east.

**CATHLEEN.** I hear some one passing the big stones.

**NORA.** *[Looking out.]* He's coming now, and he's in a hurry.

---

<sup>12</sup> Essentially a dedicated storage space for turf—that is, peat, which is cut from bogs and used as fuel.

<sup>13</sup> Table

<sup>14</sup> A simple seat, typically without a back or arms.

<sup>15</sup> Describes a scenario where a hooker boat is altering its course by turning into the easterly wind, a fundamental sailing technique to optimize navigation under varying wind conditions,

**BARTLEY.** [Comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly.] Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

**CATHLEEN.** [Coming down.] Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

**NORA.** [Giving him a rope.] Is that it, Bartley?

**MAURYA.** You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards [*Bartley takes the rope*]. It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God.

**BARTLEY.** [Beginning to work with the rope.] I've no halter<sup>16</sup> the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses I heard them saying below.

**MAURYA.** It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara.

*[She looks round at the boards.]*

**BARTLEY.** How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

**MAURYA.** If it wasn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?

---

<sup>16</sup> Another rope

**BARTLEY.** [*Working at the halter, to Cathleen.*] Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber<sup>17</sup> comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

**MAURYA.** How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

**BARTLEY.** [*To Cathleen*] If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up<sup>18</sup> weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

**MAURYA.** It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drownd'd with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?

*[Bartley lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel<sup>19</sup>.]*

**BARTLEY.** [*To Nora.*] Is she coming to the pier?

**NORA.** [*Looking out.*] She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails.

**BARTLEY.** [*Getting his purse and tobacco.*] I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad.

**MAURYA.** [*Turning round to the fire, and putting her shawl over her head.*] Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

**CATHLEEN.** It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?

**BARTLEY.** [*Taking the halter.*] I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the gray pony'll run behind me. . . The blessing of God on you. [*He goes out.*]

---

<sup>17</sup> Cattle dealer

<sup>18</sup> Collect

<sup>19</sup> Flannel is known for its warm and fuzzy texture, often used in clothing like shirts

**MAURYA.** *[Crying out as he is in the door.]* He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.

**CATHLEEN.** Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on everyone in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?

*[Maurya takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.]*

**NORA.** *[Turning towards her.]* You're taking away the turf from the cake.

**CATHLEEN.** *[Crying out.]* The Son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread. *[She comes over to the fire.]*

**NORA.** And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

**CATHLEEN.** *[Turning the cake out of the oven.]* It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever.

*[Maurya sways herself on her stool.]*

**CATHLEEN.** *[Cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to Maurya.]* : Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word<sup>20</sup> will be broken<sup>21</sup>, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

**MAURYA.** *[Taking the bread.]* Will I be in it as soon as himself?

**CATHLEEN.** If you go now quickly.

**MAURYA.** *[Standing up unsteadily.]* It's hard set<sup>22</sup> I am to walk.

---

<sup>20</sup> Unlucky words

<sup>21</sup> Will have no impact

<sup>22</sup> Unable

**CATHLEEN.** *[Looking at her anxiously.]* Give her the stick, Nora, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

**NORA.** What stick?

**CATHLEEN.** The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

**MAURYA.** *[Taking a stick Nora gives her.]* In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old.

*[She goes out slowly. Nora goes over to the ladder.]*

**CATHLEEN.** Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

**NORA.** Is she gone round<sup>23</sup> by the bush?

**CATHLEEN.** *[Looking out.]* She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.

**NORA.** *[Getting the bundle from the loft.]* The young priest said he'd be passing tomorrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

**CATHLEEN.** *[Taking the bundle.]* Did he say what way they were found?

**NORA** *[Coming down.]* "There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen<sup>24</sup> before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."

**CATHLEEN.** *[Trying to open the bundle.]* Give me a knife, Nora, the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

**NORA.** *[Giving her a knife.]* I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

---

<sup>23</sup> Crossed

<sup>24</sup> An Irish term for an illicit, homemade distilled spirit

**CATHLEEN.** *[Cutting the string.]* It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife—and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be seven days you'd be in Donegal.

**NORA.** And what time would a man take, and he floating?

*[Cathleen opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a stocking. They look at them eagerly.]*

**CATHLEEN** *[In a low voice.]* The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

**NORA.** I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put<sup>25</sup> the one flannel on the other *[she looks through some clothes hanging in the corner.]* It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

**CATHLEEN.** I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it *[pointing to the corner]*. There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do.

*[Nora brings it to her and they compare the flannel.]*

**CATHLEEN.** It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?

**NORA** *[Who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out.]* It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

**CATHLEEN** *[Taking the stocking.]:* It's a plain stocking.

**NORA.** It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

---

<sup>25</sup> Compare

**CATHLEEN** [*counts the stitches*] It's that number is in it [*crying out.*] Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen<sup>26</sup> him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

**NORA** [*Swinging herself round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes.*] And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?

**CATHLEEN** [*After an instant.*]: Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the path.

**NORA** [*Looking out.*] She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

**CATHLEEN.** Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier she'll be after giving her blessing to Bartley, and we won't let on we've heard anything the time he's on the sea.

**NORA** [*Helping Cathleen to close the bundle.*] We'll put them here in the corner.

[*They put them into a hole in the chimney corner. Cathleen goes back to the spinning-wheel.*]

**NORA.** Will she see it was crying I was?

**CATHLEEN.** Keep your back to the door the way the light'll not be on you.

[*Nora sits down at the chimney corner, with her back to the door. Maurya comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and Nora points to the bundle of bread.*]

**CATHLEEN** [*After spinning for a moment.*] You didn't give him his bit of bread?

[*Maurya begins to keen softly, without turning round.*]

**CATHLEEN.** Did you see him riding down?

---

<sup>26</sup> Shed tears.



*[Maurya goes on keening<sup>27</sup>.]*

**CATHLEEN** *[A little impatiently.]* God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you?

**MAURYA** *[With a weak voice.]* My heart's broken from this day.

**CATHLEEN** *[As before.]* Did you see Bartley?

**MAURYA.** I seen the fearfulest thing.

**CATHLEEN** *[Leaves her wheel and looks out.]* God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head, and the gray pony behind him.

**MAURYA** *[Starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice.]* The gray pony behind him ...

**CATHLEEN** *[Coming to the fire.]* What is it ails you, at all?

**MAURYA** *[Speaking very slowly.]* I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen, since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

**CATHLEEN AND NORA:** Uah.

*[They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.]*

**NORA.** Tell us what it is you seen.

**MAURYA.** I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the gray pony behind him *[she puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes.]* The Son of God spare us, Nora!

**CATHLEEN.** What is it you seen?

**MAURYA.** I seen Michael himself.

---

<sup>27</sup> Crying continuously.

**CATHLEEN** [*Speaking softly.*] You did not, mother; it wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial by the grace of God.

**MAURYA** [*A little defiantly.*] : I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

**CATHLEEN** [*Begins to keen.*] It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

**NORA.** Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God wouldn't leave her destitute<sup>28</sup> with no son living?

**MAURYA** [*In a low voice, but clearly.*] It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . . Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them . . . There were Stephen, and Shawn, were lost in the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on the one plank, and in by that door.

[*She pauses for a moment, the girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.*]

**NORA** [*In a whisper.*] Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?

**CATHLEEN** [*In a whisper.*] There's some one after crying out by the seashore.

**MAURYA** [*Continues without hearing anything.*] There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curragh<sup>29</sup> that turned

---

<sup>28</sup> Deprive her of all of her sons

<sup>29</sup> Traditional Irish boat

over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door.

*[She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.]*

**MAURYA** *[Half in a dream, to Cathleen.]* Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

**CATHLEEN.** Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be here in this place?

**MAURYA.** There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was it.

**CATHLEEN.** It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

*[She reaches out and hands Maurya the clothes that belonged to Michael. Maurya stands up slowly, and takes them into her hands. NORA looks out.]*

**NORA.** They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

**CATHLEEN** *[In a whisper to the women who have come in.]* Is it Bartley it is?

**ONE OF THE WOMEN:** It is surely, God rest his soul.

*[Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of Bartley, laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.]*

**CATHLEEN** *[To the women, as they are doing so.]* What way was he drowned?

**ONE OF THE WOMEN:** The gray pony knocked him into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

*[Maurya has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement. Cathleen and Nora kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.]*

**MAURYA** *[Raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her.]:* They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me....I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain<sup>30</sup>, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. *[To Nora].* Give me the Holy Water, Nora, there's a small sup<sup>31</sup> still on the dresser. *[Nora gives it to her.]*

**MAURYA** *[Drops Michael's clothes across Bartley's feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him.]* It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking<sup>32</sup>.

*[She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.]*

**CATHLEEN** *[To an old man.]:* Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

**THE OLD MAN** *[Looking at the boards.]* Are there nails with them?

---

<sup>30</sup> The first day of November, the day of souls.

<sup>31</sup> quantity

<sup>32</sup> Stale fish.

**CATHLEEN.** There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

**ANOTHER MAN.** It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already.

**CATHLEEN.** It's getting old she is, and broken.

*[Maurya stands up again very slowly and spreads out the pieces of Michael's clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.]*

**NORA** *[In a whisper to Cathleen.]* She's quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would any one have thought that?

**CATHLEEN** *[Slowly and clearly.]* An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?

**MAURYA** *[Puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on Bartley's feet.]* They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (*bending her head*); and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.

*[She pauses, and the keening rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.]*

**MAURYA** *[Continuing.]* Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied. *[She kneels down again and the curtain falls slowly.]*

## Quick Recall

Q1. Which theme is most central to *Riders to the Sea*?

- A) The triumph of human ingenuity over nature
- B) The inevitability of fate and the overwhelming power of nature
- C) The struggle for political independence
- D) The beauty of rural life

**Q2. In *Riders to the Sea*, what does the sea primarily symbolize?**

- A) A nurturing provider of life and abundance
- B) A benign backdrop to everyday island life
- C) An indifferent, all-powerful force that governs life and death
- D) A mysterious source of supernatural intervention

**Q3. What does the play suggest about the relationship between the islanders and their environment?**

- A) The islanders can easily master the forces of nature
- B) The isolation of the island leads to a close, harmonious bond with the sea
- C) Human life is perpetually at the mercy of the sea's capricious power
- D) The environment is a minor element in the islanders' daily struggles

**Q4. Assertion (A):** In *Riders to the Sea*, the sea is portrayed as an omnipotent force that determines the fate of the islanders.

**Reason (R):** The repeated tragic losses experienced by the family underscore a fatalistic view of life on the island.

- A) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- C) A is true, but R is false.
- D) A is false, but R is true.

**Q5. Assertion (A):** The isolation of the Aran Islands amplifies the sense of doom in the play.

**Reason (R):** The geographical remoteness limits any escape from the relentless forces of nature.

- A) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- C) A is true, but R is false.
- D) A is false, but R is true.

**Q6. Match the items in Column A with their corresponding descriptions in Column B from the options given below.**

| Column A                         | Column A  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Maurya (the Mother)           | a) Represents the inevitable journey of those claimed by the sea.                         |
| 2. The Sea                       | b) Embodies the sorrow, endurance, and resignation in the face of loss.                   |
| 3. The Title "Riders to the Sea" | c) The philosophical acceptance that life's outcomes are predestined.                     |
| 4. Fatalism                      | d) Symbolizes the indifferent, overpowering force that governs the fate of the islanders. |

- a) 1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (a) 4. (c)
- b) 1. (a) 2. (c) 3. (d) 4. (b)
- c) 1. (d) 2. (a) 3. (c) 4. (b)
- d) 1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (c) 4. (a)

**Q7. Match the items in Column A with their corresponding descriptions in Column B from the options given below.**

| <b>Column A</b>                 | <b>Column B</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1.The sea                       | a. Represents the deep sorrow and inevitability of loss             |
| 2.Maurya’s expressions of grief | b. Signifies the relentless force of nature and fate                |
| 3.The absence of her sons       | c. Creates a realistic portrayal of island life                     |
| 4.Use of local dialect          | d.Highlights the profound impact of tragedy on family and community |

**Options:**

- a) 1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (a) 4. (c)
- b) 1. (b) 2. (a) 3. (d) 4. (c)
- c) 1. (d) 2. (a) 3. (c) 4. (b)
- d) 1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (c) 4. (a)



## **Delve Deep**

1. "The sea has taken all my sons."  
Explain how this line represents the relentless power of nature in the play.  
Comment on the emotional impact this line has on Maurya's character. (2+3)
  
2. Discuss how Synge uses the sea as a symbol of fate, nature's indifference, and the source of inevitable loss in *Riders to the Sea*. (05)
  
3. Discuss how Maurya's grief, resignation, and acceptance of loss embody the theme of human vulnerability against invincible fate. (05)

