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Beatrice! MacNeil's Play: The Dream' SETTING An old parlour. A single bed occupies the centre floor. It is dusty and unkempt, except for a few worn charms of a woman's hand (lace doilies and delicate pictures)." It appears lonely and desolate. A door and window are off to the left of the stage. CHARACTERS Mickey: An aging widower, close to 70. Murdock: A neighbour, witty with a sense of humour, nearing 70. Bertha) Three widowed sisters. They make no phys- Bessie): ical appearance, but their strident Bethel) voices are heard from behind the door. A young man makes a brief appearance at the door. He is not seen by the audience. (Mickey wakes from a recurring dream. He appears confused until he becomes familiar with the room and the realization of the dream. He sits up in bed and looks over at a picture of his deceased wife, Clara, on a small table--the only physical reminder he has brought from the master bedroom. He begins to speak in a lonely voice:) MICKEY: Dear, dear Clara (smiles sadly), I suppose you're sitting up there laughing now, with your dark eyes taking in all the rubbish that's being recycled through this old head of mine. You're apt to be saying, "Thank God, it's on the inside, Mick? ey, 'cause not much is left on the outside any more." (He pauses, running his hand over his bald head.) Well, you're right, dear woman, but can you remember when this head of mine was fuller than a Liberal's promise, with golden curls, and all the women from here to Baddeck would give anything to get to the roots of it. (He stops and smiles.) And come to think of it, a few of them did. But it was you, Clara, from the moment I saw you throwing rocks into the Barra Strait, it was you who occu? pied my heart until I got up the courage to ask you to marry me, and your mother who got up the courage to tell me to go to hell. But finally we put down roots together and I put down your mother. (He stops and laughs out loud.) I hope she's not listening, Clara; you know, that woman could hear passion mount when she was here. Ah, those were the days, dear woman, when a man was young, with courage as his friend, as well as his enemy. Wasn't it on a Saturday, Clara, in the youth of spring, when I asked you to go picking strawber? ries, and it wasn't until we were halfway up the mountain when you realized it wasn't strawberry season, and you called me something that can't be mentioned in front of a moralist and I called you behind a stump and we forgot all about strawber? ries. But the priest didn't forget about it on Sun? day when he called upon the sins of omission that are always in season. But never mind, Clara, we survived and lived as happily as marriage will al? low and promise will permit. Come to think of it, one of these willing mornings I'm gonna shake some life into these old bones of mine and high-tail it for the mountains to rid my head of this dream, Clara. (A concerned look appears on his face.) Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, don't laugh when I tell you this, my dear, but for the last few weeks I've been dreaming that the McAskill widows, all three of them--you remember them, Clara--Bertha, Bethel, and Bessie, who used to give up arm-wrestling for Lent--wen, by God, in the dream they are compet? ing with each other and the winner will be my new wife. It's damn near the nightmare stage. I got the doors barred and the pellet gun loaded and I find myself in church twice on



Sunday, but nothing can put a dent of ease in my mind. (He rubs his brow as if to erase the dream.) In my last dream Bessie won by default. She kicked Bertha under the table while Bethel was saying her rosary and was too caught up in her devotions to hear Bertha crying for help. I can see them now, one uglier than the other, their chins coming to a point no man would ponder, their greedy fat arms reaching out for me. (He makes the motions.) It's no wonder I'm going bald. I fear the mornings and curse the nights. But I fear the McAskill widows more. They say their husbands died under strange circumstances but I say they must have lived under stranger ones. Who in the hell could take them for wives, when they could have been taken for tractors. Come to think of it, Bertha dug her own husband's grave. She had him buried before his own wake. No body saw much of him in life but less of him in death. Bethel's husband ran off with a chicken farmer's daughter but died mysteriously when he stopped running, and poor Bessie's husband was killed by a falling tree when he and Bessie were cutting pulp. At the wake she was bragging about cutting five cords to his one. Now, dear Clara, can you understand the fear that keeps me to myself and a shadow over the world? With you gone, so went my youth. I'm as old as the seasons and the McAskill widows are getting close to the door. (He drifts off to sleep in a half-sitting position. A loud knock is heard at the door, followed by the sound of a woman's voice.) VOICE: Mickey, oh Mickey, it have something for you. s me, open the door. (23)