

‘Shows From The Songs’



**Playlets and Monologues for 1-4 actors
inspired by Irish songs.**

Green Curtain Theatre
www.greencurtaintheatre.co.uk

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ABOUT 'SHOWS FROM THE SONGS'

In 2017 Green Curtain Theatre were invited to perform at a small arts venue in West London on a semi regular basis. We put together a show that comprised of a number of monologues and playlets that could be performed 'script in hand' in a small space. Each of these short pieces had been inspired either by an Irish song or song written by someone with Irish connections. The audience joined in with the singing and it was a great success. We subsequently repeated this format at a number of locations in the London area. Below are some of the pieces which I wrote for these sessions which reflect elements of the life of the Irish diaspora in Great Britain.

In '**The Rare Ould Times**' two people meet in a pub and find that they have something in common in spite of having initial reservations about each other.

In the mid-1960s, the Irish singer Val Doonican had a hit with an old music hall song '**Delaney's Donkey**'. In this piece I imagined what might happen if Delaney's donkey heard the song and found out that she was a bit of a 'star'.

Eleanor Rigby is set in the graveyard of a church in Liverpool in the 1970s and tells the imaginary story of what happens when an American turns up looking for someone of that name.

In the **Kentish Town Waltz** we meet two young Irish entrepreneurs as they wait on their bankruptcy hearing outside a London courtroom. Will a surprise letter bring them any luck?

Red is the Rose is a monologue spoken by a care worker at an old people's home. The weekly 'singing and reminiscing' session has just finished and this has prompted the care worker to question what he really knows about Tommy, one of the residents.

Whiskey in The Jar

In this monologue an elderly nun who has seen the religious community which she joined in the 1940s shrink to almost nothing, explains how a 'drop of the hard stuff' helps her get through the day.

I'll Tell My Ma

In this monologue we meet a young Irish woman new to London, who falls victim to a bit of 'photoshopping' when she has her first date with someone she met through an online dating site.

My Lovely Leitrim is a monologue about the racism experienced by an elderly Irishwoman as she raised her daughter in England.

Do get in touch if you would like to perform any of these pieces either whole or in part and I will help you in any way I can. **However please make sure that you read the text below.**

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THE RARE OULD TIMES

"The Rare Ould Times" was composed by Pete St. John in the 1970s for the Dublin City Ramblers. It is sometimes called "Dublin in the Rare Ould Times". It was subsequently recorded by a variety of other artists including the Dubliners.

In this playlet the characters speak to themselves and to each other, this is indicated by the punctuation where the direct speech is in quotation marks.

SETTING

London March 2008. An Irish pub near Paddington West London, it is early afternoon and the pub is empty apart from Rory a barman of mixed Irish African heritage. Above the bar a banner reads Cead Mille Failte. (One hundred thousand welcomes)

Man For fook's sake. What is it about London pubs that they cannot bear to be empty? Five minutes until the Cheltenham Festival kicks off. Cream of the Irish stud. Finest jump jockeys in the world. Me mate down the bookies after giving me a mental fookin' racing tip. I'm about to turn the telly up and what happens? *(A woman in her early 40s enters dressed in black).*

Woman I smile, say "you're open" but he just nods

Man I don't care if you're lonely Missus you'll not be getting any convo out of me.

Woman Miserable sod. This is an Irish pub. Read the sign 'Cead Mille Failte'. 100,000 welcomes. One would do, you can keep the other nine hundred and ninety-nine.

Man You're not interrupting me racing.

Woman Agency probably. Who would want to work in a dump like this?

Man Why can't she go and warm her arse on another pub's radiator?

Woman Tell you a secret love. Leave a pub door open and people walk in. And guess what? You have to serve them.

Man "What can I get you?"

Woman He sounds Irish.

Man "To drink".

Woman "Black coffee would be sensible but after the morning I've had. Oh look". *(Moves towards the hats).*

Man The Guinness hats. Irish identity repackaged in 100% polyester manufactured in the Philippines. Won't solve the housing crisis back home but great for all the 'plastic paddies' who'll call in over the next few days.

Woman I attempt a joke. "They have got me confused". *(Woman picks up hat and places it on her hand and twirls it).*

Man "Confused?"

Woman "The black with a white on top. Should I have a cappuccino or a Guinness?"

Man Not even funny. Tell you what, you can drink the whole fookin' pub try missus for all I care. Just choose what you want before the jockeys mount their steeds. And the accumulator, that is going to change my life, starts running.

Woman "A small Paddy".

Man I knew it. Throat back, 'down in one'. Come back for another

Woman "And one of these". (*Woman puts a Guinness hat on*).

Man Think again Mrs. You're not singing and interrupting me racing. (*Man takes the hat from her*). "Sorry not on sale yet".

Woman "Don't want them to sell out before Paddy's Day?"

Man "Bosses' call. I only work here."

Woman "Following orders?"

Man "Indeed". I pour her drink. She downs it in one. "Looks like you needed that."

Woman Oh God he thinks I have a drink problem.

Man She bangs her empty glass on the bar. We exchange glances, then:

Woman "Are you Irish?"

Man This is what fascinates no irritates. No fookin' annoys me. The switching of 'you' and 'are.' If my dad had been Polish, Italian, Spanish instead of Nigerian, her question would be rhetorical. You're Irish she'd say, the warmth in her voice implying recognition, belonging. But being of mixed race means I must confirm my nationality. I could belittle her. Sneer at her lack of knowledge and say: 'Did you not know that they've been black people living in Ireland since the 18th century?'

Woman "Thin Lizzy were one of my favourite bands."

Man Is Phil Lynott the only mixed-race Irishman you've ever heard of? For Chrissake Missus he's been dead for nearly thirty years.

Woman "Whiskey you're the divil"

Man "In the jar. Thin Lizzy's big hit was 'Whiskey in the jar'".

Woman "Well, I'll have mine out of that bottle".

Man Has she come from a funeral? Looking to drink herself into oblivion on a dull March afternoon? Red Alert Rory. You don't want to be cleaning up her puke when you could be watching the parade ring for the 3:20. "You mentioned coffee"

Woman "I thought your job was to sell alcohol".

Man She sounds annoyed, I expect more abuse but then

Woman "You're right. It won't cure anything."

Man I detect sadness. "A bad day?". She looks away. Silence.

Woman "I expect the conditions are better over here".

Man So she wants to change the subject. "Dublin's okay". I say. London's not getting the upper hand. They had that for 800 years.

Woman "Not what it used to be".

Man I'm about to say 'do you know it'? When a voice from inside belts me on the back of my head. Zip it. Or before you know it you'll be arm in arm down Moore Street with her, turning right for Connolly past the GPO before crossing the bridge towards Trinity with the ghost of Patrick Pearse, Yeats and Joyce following behind you.

Woman *(Sings). "Ring a ring a Rosie as the light declines. I remember Dublin city in the rare old times. Lovely song. My mums from Dublin, says the place has changed. "Passing tales and glory haunting children's rhymes". Remembers playing in the street. All the children laughing, singing, dancing to nursery rhymes. What was it they used to sing? 'Eenie meenie miney mo, catch a nigger...'. Sorry. Jesus I didn't mean*

Man "Raised on songs and stories were you? Me ma taught me the words to them all before we went back".

Woman "Back".

Man "Born here, Birmingham 1979. Five when we went over".

Woman "Peggy Dignan. The woman in the song who runs away with the fella."

Man "The African student?"

Woman "When he took her off to Birmingham he took away my soul."

Man Her eyes light up. I don't believe it. She looks at me. Jaysus she isn't going to? She is.

Woman "It wasn't your mum was it?"

Man My mom wasn't from the Liberties, she had nothing to do with religion so you can forget the 'rogue child of Mary' bit Missus. "My mum was a receptionist at the university where he studied engineering."

Woman "Was she?" *(Moves her hands away from her stomach to make her dome shape).* "When they left Dublin?"

Man "Together two years before I was conceived."

Woman "A true love match then."

Man “Not really, he scarpered as soon as he found out about me. A white girlfriend was okay as long as precautions worked”.

Woman “Oh”

Man “My dad’s family is from West Africa. High up in government. A child of mixed race. Well. Racism is not confined to white people.”

Woman “Perhaps it was for the best, Dublin skin doesn’t do so well in the heat. Sun creams weren't what they are today.”

Man Has this woman ever heard the word offensive? But why be angry with her? ‘Twas me da who walked out. “Another?”. I lift her empty whisky but glass, but she shakes her head. I'm missing me racing. The colts from the 2 o'clock will be back in their boxes, the fillies for the 2:30 in the parade ring. I'll be fooked if I'm missing the big one. “You can sit on the sofa in the corner if you've got a couple of hours to kill”.

Woman “Songwriters. A strange breed aren't they? Leave out the most important bit”.

Man What.

Woman “Why she left him in the first place”.

Man “Why do any relationships break up?”.

Woman “I lost her to a student fella with the skin ‘as black as coal’.”

Man “So?”

Woman “Can't you see the writer goes on about how great Dublin was but there's this line. She left me for a student with a skin as black as coal. And then what? Nothing. Why did they go. Were they forced out? Did people hate them because they were different colours? Was she a great looker and were the Irish fellas were mad because they couldn't have her? What's rare about a place where black man and a white woman can't live together?”

Man “You tell me.”

Woman Then for some reason I don't know why. I tell him about my mum and Leroy. “You'd think that a devout Catholic like her will be delighted that her daughter had met her future husband at church.”

Man A Bible basher. Turn the telly on quick.

Woman “I was smitten when I first saw him at my grans anniversary mass. Attended every single carnival workshop he ran for the Church after that”.

Man “Carnival?”

Woman Notting Hill. Leroy was from Saint Lucia. Caribbean. He came alive on that weekend. That was before the cancer finally got to him. Died a year ago today. Thirty-seven.

Man Jesus that's only 11 years older than me. "I'm sorry. That's far too young".

Woman "I know"

Man Her eyes are filling with tears. Say something. Ask her if they had kids.

Woman "Wanted to, but the oncologist said wait until after the treatment. By then it was too late, the chemo destroyed more than the cancer cells. I don't know what upset him most, the news that he had eighteen months to live or knowing that there was no chance of there ever being a Leroy junior.

Man Fook. Why don't you keep your big mouth shut.

Woman "He looked a bit like you. Handsome".

Man "God help him". That sounds feeble, what a stupid fookin' thing to say.

Woman "He'd have been so proud. Did you ever meet your dad? When you were older like? When the anger had died down and it was all 'too long ago' to be cross? Did you did he ask you to come and see him in Africa?" He's shaking his head you stupid woman what have you done now?

Man I fall silent. Not because I don't want to tell her or because I'd rather watch the horses but because I can't. I fight back with tears. It's the words. Did he asked you to come and see him in Africa? I don't reply. Instead, I clench my fists. Think back to the small boy who saved his pocket money to buy airmail letters and stamps. All those letters I wrote to 'somewhere in Africa' to an address I found in one of mum's old diaries. Telling my dad how much I wanted to see him. That all the other lads in the class had a dad, even if they were working in sites in England or America. I didn't mind if he didn't have the money for the airfare to Africa I understood. But if he could just see his way to finding the money for a stamp, or maybe a photo, then perhaps the other boys in the class might stop calling me a black bastard. I didn't mind the 'black'. I'm proud of that bit. Don't the best singers and dancers in the world look like us? And sure when did anyone ever call someone with ginger hair and freckles cool? It's the 'bastard' bit that hurts. Don't cry you feckin eejit. Man up. But I can't and my shoulders shake as I mumble. "An A.B.D Missus. An Absent Black Dad. He didn't wanna know me. I don't know who he is proud of Missus but it isn't me".

Woman I wish I had a tissue to force into his clenched fist but I haven't. Instead, I lay my hands on him the way I did with Leroy when the injustice of the cancer got to him and the irony of 'only the good young die young' hit him right between the eyes'.

Man I know all about racism suffered by black people in Ireland and everywhere else. I've heard the shit that's coming out about what happened to kids in care. I know all about the 'issues' and why they should make me angry. But on this day it's become personal. It's about the letters that little boy sent to his dad. The letters that were returned 'address unknown'. I pick up two glasses and open a bottle of Jameson. I measure out two large doubles. I stop thinking that my luck might change if my accumulator bet comes in. I stop in 'the now', angry at my loss in the same weight way that she is at hers. I hand her a glass 'Slainte', I say. "To this rare old time".

THE END

DELANEY'S DONKEY

Delaney's Donkey was an old music hall song written by William Hargreaves (1880-1941). The song became very well known when Val Doonican an Irish singer had a hit with it in the British and Irish charts in 1969.

SETTING

The action takes place outside a donkey's stall. The 'donkey' is sitting on a stool in her stall filing her nails. The owner, a man from Dublin, enters upstage left carrying a bucket of cold water and a wire brush. The donkey has the personality of a difficult woman who is permanently offended, she clearly has the upper hand in this relationship. NB The actress playing her might want to take inspiration from Miss Piggy in the muppets and give her a Dublin accent.

Delaney On your feet. Time to get going. *(Pause)* Ah come on will ye. *(Pause)* Come on fook's sake, ye lazy..., good for nothing.

Donkey Insulting me won't get you very far.

Delaney Look at what I've got for you *(Holds out his hand on which there are some rightly coloured tablets that looked like sweets)*

Donkey *(Donkey stands up)* Bribery, now is it?

Delaney A treat - go on- try them.

Donkey *(Donkey picks up a couple of 'sweets' and looks at them)* And ye think sweets will make up you for what you've done?

Delaney Now what?

Donkey You don't know?

Delaney No idea. Come on let's get cracking.

Donkey *(Donkey sits down as she is not going to cooperate)*

Delaney *(Pause)* Give us clue at least.

Donkey *(The donkey makes a nod towards the radio at the side of the stage).* That radio is a great source of information.

Delaney Oh.

Donkey "And, now destined for the charts we have the latest song by Ireland's own, Val Doonican".

Delaney A big star.

Donkey I suppose the Delaney would be you?

Delaney Fame at last. Isn't it great?

Donkey For Val, you or me?

Delaney Great lyrics and a catchy tune.

Donkey Great lyrics my arse. That Valerie deserves a good kicking.

Delaney Why?

Donkey So ‘temporarily lazy and permanently tired’ is what I am is it?

Delaney That’s what’s upsetting you.

Donkey That Valerie’s lucky I don’t have him up before the advertising standards council.

Delaney Valentine.

Donkey His command of the English language makes me want to weep.

Delaney I didn’t have you down as an intellectual snob.

Donkey “A leg at every corner balancing his head. And a tail that lets you know, which end it wanted to be fed.” Hardly W B Yeats, more “Mrs Brown’s Boys” wouldn’t you say?

Delaney You should take it in the spirit.

Donkey What feckin spirit?

Delaney “Delaney had a donkey that everyone admired”. That first line’s a great tribute to you.

Donkey One line before a cavalcade of abuse.

Delaney Ach a bit of fun.

Donkey Then console me by telling me who me admirers are.

Delaney Riley rates you.

Donkey That eejit.

Delaney Thinks you’ve the makings of a fine racer.

Donkey For a half mile race? More ‘plastic tooth mug’ than Hennessey’s Gold Cup, I’d say.

Delaney There’ll some nice clean hay to sleep on if you win.

Donkey Whoopi do.

Delaney One lump, no two lumps of sugar - soaked in the finest whiskey to celebrate.

Donkey Four lumps and it better be a fifteen-year-old single malt.

Delaney You drive a hard bargain. Anyway, Riley thinks you’re a natural. He’s been taking a good look your backside

Donkey I beg your pardon.

Delaney At the top of your legs.

Donkey At the top of my what?

Delaney (*Pats his backside*) It's where your racing potential's located.

Donkey What? Tell that pervert Riley from me that if I ever catch him looking at me again. I'll give him such a kick, that it won't be his own racing potentials, but something that rhymes with it, that he'll be worried about. (*Delaney picks up the bucket as if he is about to wash the donkey*). And what do you think you're doing?

Delaney Wash and brush up. You want to look well don't you?

Donkey (*Donkey puts her hoof in the bucket and takes it out again*) On your bike buster.

Delaney What's wrong now?

Donkey You can throw that over yourself.

Delaney You're used to cold water.

Donkey Exactly. 'Used to cold water' was before a song about me was heading for the top of the charts. You better be putting some 'hot' in that if you want my cooperation

Delaney ?

Donkey And some scented bubbles. (*Pause*) For me rider

Delaney You want to put that little John McGee in a bubble bath?

Donkey A 'rider' is the list of things that stars want in their dressing room. Not the feckin jockey. You're very ill informed.

Delaney Hot water and bubbles. Anything else I have to do to please you?

Donkey A bit of lotion would be nice.

Delaney For your skin?

Donkey The song says I should be embrocated. So go up to the shops there and buy me a nice perfumed embrocation. Quality mind- so don't be thinking of popping into Poundland.

Delaney Any particular scent?

Donkey Some kind of flowers would be nice. Oh, and perfume to dab behind my ears. I want smell good when they pin the winning rosette on me.

Delaney You're a bloody donkey – you're supposed to smell of straw not Lilies of the Feckin Valley.

Donkey Well, if that's your attitude. (*Donkey goes back into the stalls*)

Delaney Okay. Okay. (*Delaney goes to leave*)

Donkey Before you go. There's the small matter of animal welfare.

Delaney ?

Donkey Who's this Hogan, Logan and all the bally crew? "Lined up attacking it, kicking it and smacking it". They better not be thinking of doing that to me..

Delaney No one will touch you.

Donkey ?

Delaney They won't be able to catch you

Donkey ?

Delaney Can I trust you to keep a secret?

Donkey ?

Delaney The pills, I've just given you.

Donkey Pills! You said 'sweets'.

Delaney Sweets, pills does it matter?

Donkey Oh God help us and save us there's something wrong with me.

Delaney There's nothing wrong with you.

Donkey It's too bad for you to tell me isn't it?

Delaney As if I would be putting you in a race if you were sick.

Donkey It's a distraction because you can't face telling me.

Delaney For fook's sake.

Donkey I've seen what happens when donkeys get sick. Their ears fall out. Their tails stand up in shock. Oh my God, oh my God. I won't be able to go out of the stable

Delaney What the fook are you talking about now?

Donkey What does a donkey's tail cover? Exactly. (*Pause*)The shame of it. Me hooves will rot away. How will I walk? I shall end my days an earless, footless, toothless wreck rotting in a pile of hay.

Delaney The only thing that you're likely to die of is over imagination. (*Takes a bottle out of his pocket*). Look at the label on that.

Donkey He expects me to be able to read in my condition.

Delaney Amphetamine sulphate.

Donkey Sulphate. Isn't that the stuff they put on matches?

Delaney No. It's called 'speed'. It's going to cause the most amazing chemical reaction in you blood stream. Do wonders for you.

Donkey He's drugged me - he's trying to kill me. I need to raise the alarm. Hee Haw. Hee Haw. Help me someone.

Delaney Would you just shut up for a second.

Donkey Hee haw. Hee haw. Call the guards.

Delaney For fuck's sake. Speed's all the rage these days. Pop stars take it so they can party all night. They don't need sleep.

Donkey He wants to work me till I drop.

Delaney No. Improve your life. You'll live like a Beatle.

Donkey If being a donkey isn't bad enough, he wants to send me further down the evolutionary scale.

Delaney Okay a Rolling Stone then.

Donkey Stuck on a mountain top in the cold and the rain.

Delaney The Beatles and Rolling Stones are pop stars not insects and rocks. I thought you listened to the radio. Have you not heard of Ringo or Mick Jagger? Now do you want to move out of this dump or not?

Donkey Does Val have a rocking chair and a woolly jumper?

Delaney Those little tablets will make you run fast. They're not called 'speed' for nothing. Turn you into a thoroughbred racer. You're going to be a winner. Transform our lives.

Donkey Really?

Delaney Listen. Yer man, Doonican is after doing us all a big favour. His song is being played so often that everyone thinks that any donkey owned by a man called Delaney is the biggest feckin uselessness of a beast.

Donkey Delaney's useless donkey- thanks a million.

Delaney That's the whole point.

Donkey Oh so, you're happy to see me insulted.

Delaney No I just want everyone thinking that you've haven't 'a snowball in hell's' chance of winning the race.

Donkey Great.

Delaney Don't you understand? Everyone thinks that you're as lazy as the donkey in the song. No one in their right mind will want to bet on you. But with the tablets inside you, you'll be after storming in ahead of the field.

Donkey So?

Delaney You should see the length of the odds on you. Riley and meself have bet a fortune on you. Jaysus the money you'll make us. All the woman of London chasing after me. Me wi' a fine new suit and fast car and style.

Donkey I suppose I'll be ignored.

Delaney There'll be a nice new stable for you with a field out the back. I'll get ye company. Male company. How about that?

Donkey A male donkey you say?

Delaney Big stallion fella wi' a fine mane and.. *(Pause)* Have you heard the expression 'being hung like a horse'?

Donkey *(Takes out a mirror)* Jesus would you look at the state of me. You've let me let meself go.

Delaney You're fine

Donkey I'll need to get me ears permed. A new harness and some cosmetic dentistry. I want to have a nice smile and fresh breath.

Delaney Anything you want

Donkey Me life'll be changed you say?

Delaney Won't we live like the millionaires? Here have a few more 'sweets' just to be sure like. *(Delaney puts his hand out and the donkey takes some more sweets)*

Donkey Oh God, me head's gone dead buzzy. What's after happening to me? *(Donkey's demeanour suddenly changes, she rears up, snorts, stamps her hooves)*. Something inside tells me that I'm raring to go.

Delaney Great stuff. I knew you could do it.

Donkey Get that McGee child on me back now.

Delaney Brilliant - the tablets are working, hang on a sec.

Donkey Let me out, I need to get me down the racetrack now. *(Donkey runs out, Delaney tries to block him, they dance around each other)*

Delaney Relax the race isn't for another couple of hours.

Donkey I can't wait that long. Me, body is all reared up. It says 'go' and when you're body says go, you have to go. Get out my way ye useless *(Pushes past Delaney and gives him a big kick)*

Delaney Ouch that hurt. Hey you. Come back here now. D'you hear me?

Donkey But I'm full of speed now. Show me the starting line. *(Donkey runs off pursued by Delaney)*.

Donkey Come back. Don't you understand I am after putting all our money on you.
THE END

ELEANOR RIGBY

This short play is inspired by the song 'Eleanor Rigby' written by Paul McCartney and recorded by the Beatles for their 1966 album 'Revolver'. Although there is a grave attributed to an Eleanor Rigby in the graveyard of St Peter's Parish Church in Woolton, Liverpool she has no connection with the song or with this play. Both the characters and the events in this play are completely fictitious.

SETTING: Empty stage. Man dressed in black with back to audience is using a spade to fill in a grave. Mason an American in their 30s enters.

Mason Hey! Should you be doing that?

Fr Mc.K I'm fine

Mason Don't you guys have gravediggers over here?

Fr Mc.K Ach a bit of hard work won't kill me.

Mason I'd like to see our pastor doing that.

Fr Mc.K My housekeeper. Last thing I can do for her. Aside from a few prayers and raising a glass in her name.

Mason Where's everyone?

Fr Mc.K Just me, I'm afraid. Dockyard has had its heyday. Work's gone so are the people. You sound as if you have come a long way.

Mason Sorry Father. Mason Lejinski. Framingham, Massachusetts. It's/

Fr Mc.K Near Boston. I have a sister who emigrated.

Mason You don't say?

Fr Mc.K On holiday?

Mason Sort of. My college is closed for the vacation. Thought that I would use the opportunity to follow up on a promise I made.

Fr Mc.K A lecturer then?

Mason History – side interest in genealogy. Family tracing and all that stuff.

Fr Mc.K A 'joiner upper'. Rustling around in graveyards and parish registers.

Mason Not for much longer. They reckon that in about five years' time over 50% of homes in the US will have their own computer. Genealogy will be massive. I'll be able to do all my research without leaving the office.

Fr Mc.K Save you money on the airfares anyways.

Mason I'll miss the travel. I love the old buildings you have over here. Say this church is real beautiful, these red bricks, those lead windows? Victorian?

Fr Mc.K Edwardian.

Mason Is it okay if I...? (*Moves towards the church*)

Fr Mc.K I'd read the demolition notice if I were you.

Mason They're going to knock a beautiful building like this down?

Fr Mc.K No point of having a church that no one attends. Graves will be preserved. The land will be sold.

Mason And you?

Fr Mc.K A long holiday somewhere warm wouldn't go amiss.

Mason These headstones are very worn, they must go way back

Fr Mc.K We've a birth, marriages and deaths register in my office. You can take a look if you like.

Mason No need. My friend wasn't from this part of LIVERPOOL.

Fr Mc.K A fellow American.

Mason Only by adoption, taken as a baby to the US. Just after the war. Pete's dad was most probably a G.I but I'm looking for his mother, the only contact we have is from round here.

Fr Mc.K Well, you're in the right place. Hundreds of US soldiers came through wartime LIVERPOOL. Waving their silk stockings and cigarettes at any girl who'd take notice.

Mason You don't look old enough to remember.

Fr Mc.K Not old enough to understand what the offer of stockings might signify, but young enough to remember my mother's tears.

Mason Your sister in Boston- now I get it.

Fr Mc.K Followed an American soldier back. Broke my mum's heart. Rest of their lives divided by the Atlantic Ocean and an unaffordable air fare.

Mason That's too bad.

Fr Mc K Was. She's long gone.

Mason Like Pete's parents.

Fr Mc K Leaving him with a mystery to solve.

Mason And the money to do it.

Fr Mc K Will he be joining you?

Mason He would have if fate hadn't dictated otherwise. No sooner had we met than the medics gave him six months to live. And they were right. Forty-three years old. Left a wife and couple of kids.

Fr Mc.K Tragic.

Mason Dying wish was to re-establish the bloodline. Wanted his kids to meet their other grandma. So here I am. With a letter of introduction in my pocket along with Pete's hope that I can find the right lady to deliver it to.

Fr Mc.K So, how do we fit in?

Mason I'm looking for a Canon Walsh who I was told could help, but you look too young

Fr Mc.K John McKenzie. I took over here a few years back, just before Paddy Walsh died.

Mason He's dead? Shucks I wish you guys would keep your records updated.

Fr Mc.K (*McKenzie looks at the shovel and then back at Mason*). Sometimes there are other priorities.

Mason Sorry, I didn't mean to suggest.

Fr Mc.K I know. All I can tell you is that he began his ministry in the Far East in the late 1930s but came home because of illness. Whether he was up to running a parish, in wartime Liverpool I don't know. Whatever happened he didn't take over this Church until the mid-1950s.

Mason That's almost 20 years. Say, what would your authorities have gotten him do in between times?

Fr Mc.K Something a bit lighter. A chaplaincy most likely. Youth service, orphanages - mother and baby homes. Many are closed now. Social services might be able to help you.

Mason Thanks for the tip.

Fr Mc.K Wouldn't get your hopes up. It has been a long time and those files can get lost. Pass me those daffodils and then, if you like, you can help me raise a toast in memory of Eleanor and your friend....

Mason Pete. Peter John Rigby-Murphy

Fr Mc.K Rigby-Murphy? Sounds very grand

Mason Murphy was his adopted name - Rigby his mum's. He wanted to leave a final clue on his gravestone. Pete was ever hopeful.

Fr Mc.K Unlike this Eleanor Rigby.

Mason That is Eleanor Rigby?

Fr Mc.K An ‘Eleanor Rigby’.

Mason Can I have that? (*Tries to take the spade*) Come on

Fr Mc.K. What in the name of God do you think you are doing?

Mason Mary E Rigby that was the name on Pete’s birth certificate. Don’t you see the E could stand for Eleanor? This could be her.

Fr Mc.K. Have you any idea how many Rigby’s there are in Lancashire? (*Mason pushes Fr McK. aside*) Hey! What are you doing?

Mason How far down have you put her? How long has she been dead? Where can we get a screwdriver? I just need to see if there’s a likeness

Fr Mc.K Do you want to get the both of us arrested?

Mason No one will ever know. Say, how about a donation. Church roof? Upkeep of the graveyard? You said you fancied a holiday.

Fr Mc.K Absolutely not.

Mason This is such a good opportunity

Fr Mc.K You are aware that bribery is a crime. I think you better go.

Mason (*Mason goes to walk away but then changes his/her mind*). I’m being a real jerk. Sorry. It’s just when you get involved with these families you want to do what’s best for them.

Fr Mc.K I understand.

Mason Can you tell me anything about her? Friends? Family?

Fr Mc.K Not much.

Mason You must know something

Fr Mc.K Not a single visitor in the three years that I knew her. An orphan I believe. She never married. The few friends she had would have been people that she met through the church. But they were rehoused through slum clearance years ago.

Mason Did she ever mention that she had a child and given it up for adoption?

Fr Mc.K What?

Mason (*There is a pause while John McKenzie looks askance*). Come on. People tell priests about their past all the time.

Fr Mc.K Having a child out of wedlock was a terrible scandal back then. Something that many women chose not to talk about.

Mason That doesn’t mean that it didn’t happen.

Fr Mc.K You're forgetting that I waved my own sister off not ten minutes' walk from here.

Mason Who went to the States to start her own family.

Fr Mc.K Started before they left. Ran off with someone else as soon as the second child was born. Not surprising – they barely knew each other. Authorities stepped in took the children. So please don't tell me that I don't understand these things.

Mason But that doesn't mean that Eleanor didn't find herself in the same situation.

Fr Mc.K Pure speculation

Mason You sound annoyed

Fr Mc.K Ten minutes ago you had never heard the name Eleanor Rigby now here you are inventing some cock and bull story. The woman is dead, your friend is dead – let them rest in peace

Mason What would a woman who fell pregnant by a G.I do?

Fr Mc.K Your guess is as good as mine. Deny it initially, cry her eyes out when she knew it was true, begged the fella to marry her, give the baby a name and when she didn't... well

Mason ?

Fr Mc.K Searched the backstreets for women who thought that the unborn child was little more than an inconvenience to be disposed of.

Mason But she's Catholic and poor right so it wouldn't have been an option for her.

Fr Mc.K It was also illegal.

Mason So she could she have turned to a charity like a mother and baby home. Can't you see?

Fr Mc.K I can see nothing but a lot of speculation about a good woman. Eleanor Rigby served this Church well- she would not take kindly to you casting aspersions on her character.

Mason I don't get you. How can a man who thinks enough of someone to dig their burial plot because there was no one else to do it, be so narrow minded as to think that someone poor young girl who finds herself pregnant can be thought of as immoral?

Fr Mc.K So you'll condemn me for respecting how someone may wish to be remembered. Excuse me, this spade will get rusty if it is left out in the rain. (*Goes to walk away*)

Mason At least tell me where the girls went when they left the mother and baby home?

Fr Mc.K If their families hadn't disowned them then they would have returned home?

Mason And girls whose families had?

Fr Mc.K In war time with half of Liverpool blown to bits. The mother and baby home would have hung onto them until they found someone who could offer a young woman bed and board. Perhaps a small wage in return for some housekeeping, childminding duties.

Mason Exactly. Can't you see, what if Canon Walsh was a chaplain at the mother and baby home, he could have taken pity on Eleanor and given her a home

Fr Mc.K What if? What if?

Mason It makes perfect sense. Canon Walsh is about to leave to come here, he needs a housekeeper and offers the job to Eleanor. Probably just for a few years, never expects her to stay for forty. Okay, I know it is a long shot but I have to start somewhere. Come on Father. You of all people understand what it is like for a family to be split up. Help me. The parish will have had activities- there must be photos.

Fr Mc.K Has it occurred to you for one moment that having a child outside marriage might be something, of which Eleanor, if indeed she did have one, was rightly or wrongly deeply ashamed? That it was something that she may have wished to keep secret.

Mason So Canon Walsh and Eleanor are a closed book?

Fr Mc.K I appreciate your wish to help your friend. But even if we could make 'all the dots join up' what good would it do? Your client probably enjoyed a happy life, albeit one where he missed his mother. But a good life is spite of that. Young women like Eleanor, without a home or money could never have provided for him in the way his adopted parents did. Look, by the time I met Eleanor she was a virtual recluse, she spent any free time in her room. If you really want to know I think that she was a deeply unhappy, friendless woman. She barely spoke to me. She was polite right enough. She did not ignore me but she made it clear that she didn't want to talk about herself.

Mason And did Canon Walsh ever tell you why?

Fr Mc.K Paddy Walsh was old, his mind had gone by the time I arrived. Very little of what he said made sense. He had odd habits.

Mason Like what

Fr Mc.K For example, he wouldn't let anyone sit in the chair by the window. Called it 'Eleanor's chair' even though she rarely sat in it.

Mason Bit weird.

Fr Mc.K I didn't pursue it.

Mason You don't think?

Fr Mc.K Now what are you suggesting?

Mason That he knew that Eleanor was hoping that her son would coming looking for her. Look, there's this guy back home. Works in the science faculty. He was telling me about a new technique that the police have started using. It's called DNA or genetic testing. It's something to do with matching people's body cells. Helps them find out if someone was at a crime scene. You can also use it to tell if people are related. It's only in its early stages but, maybe, who knows. Tom is interested in collaborating so it could be really exciting.

Fr Mc.K The 'it' being the curiosity of science overriding respecting what might be the wishes of the dead.

Mason No the 'it' being the decision of man, who when he was offered cutting edge cancer treatment that would have prolonged his life by a few months, chose instead to spend whatever money he had on finding his own mother. Please don't tell me that upholding a reputation is preferable to making a connection that could reconnect a family. All I need from you is something with her cells on – hairbrush, toothbrush.

Fr Mc.K And what if these tests show, as I suspect they will, that Eleanor is not the mother?

Mason Nothing. We'll move on. No harm done.

Fr Mc.K Except the question mark you have placed over my housekeeper's character. (*He walks away*)

Mason Where are going?

Fr Mc.K I'm sorry I can't help you. **(BLACKOUT)**

THE END

THE KENTISH TOWN WALTZ

This short play was inspired by the song 'Kentish Town Waltz' written by the Irish singer Imelda May in 2010. It can be found on her album 'Mayhem'. Lyrically, the song is autobiographical and describes Imelda May's experiences of living in the Kentish Town area in north London and the domestic struggles she endured whilst residing there. The characters and events in this play are completely fictitious.

SETTING

A man and woman are in the waiting room in a Magistrates court in North London. They are there to attend their own bankruptcy hearing. The woman is sitting on a chair, the man comes and sits next to her. He is carrying a copy of the 'Kentish Town News', the local newspaper.

Man Result. Next on the list. Court number two.

Woman Shh!

Man Half an hour and it will all be over.

Woman He'll hear.

Man He's the security guard, not the feckin judge.

Woman What if he's paid to keep his ears open? Extra evidence like.

Man This is London. Not 'Ballybackofbeyond'.

Woman So?

Man Here you have to prove stuff; not have half an idea that something might have happened because someone twitched their curtains and thought, that they might have seen someone doing something, somewhere, sometime.

Woman That's the 'Kentish Town News'. You went back. I thought we agreed

Man So, what if I did? Anyway I'm not like you, I don't feel the need to hang my head in shame. Anyway, I wanted some fags.

Woman Promise me you didn't go anywhere near our pub.

Man Offie under our old flat actually. 125 Kentish Town Road. New managers. Iranian I think.

Woman Thought they didn't drink?

Man Best people for the job. Shelves were well stocked. Grills on the windows, lock on the door. You have to buzz to get in after ten.

Woman Shame that didn't occur to Francie.

Man They could have given him more warning about selling booze after hours.

Woman They'd have closed him down anyway. You've forgotten about the fights that went on all night. Blue flashing lights outside our window until three in the morning.

Man You're right. It was a bit like living on the set of 'The Bill'. Tramps have all gone.

Woman What? Because Francie got closed down.

Man No. Council policy. Clear the streets of drinkers.

Woman What about John Jo? How will he survive?

Man Survive! John Jo. He made more from begging each day than we did in the pub.

Woman Asked me for change of a tenner once and there was I with barely a fiver to my name.

Man *(In an exaggerated 'Irish voice)* 'Pound coins Mister, pound coins'.

Woman Lotto tickets and Pot Noodles from the Pound shop.

Man You were very good to him.

Woman Was I?

Man You know you were.

Woman Too many people like him get lost on the streets of London.

Man Hey. Come on. You did everything you could to find your uncle.

Woman I wanted to be able to tell mum that he was alive.

Man Come here.

Woman Not in here.

Man I love you. You're kind. Most people cross the road to avoid the 'John Jos' of this world but you don't.

Woman Not much point. He used to sit in our doorway begging.

Man Told me you were a great cook.

Woman For pouring boiling water into his Pot Noodle carton?

Man Remember the day he turned up with three pots? Turkey and Stuffing flavour. Wanted to treat us to lunch.

Woman Bankrupt - it sounds awful.

Man Common place. You should see the number of names on the court list.

Woman Still doesn't make it right.

Man It wasn't our fault.

Woman We were the ones who borrowed the money to buy the pub. The ones who can't pay it back.

Man Lots of businesses fail.

Woman It still feels like theft. You're lucky. You don't worry about these things.

Man Why should I? The bankers took the country for millions and I don't see any of them here. Anyway, you shouldn't make it personal, we're not like the people who left the village shopkeeper owing.

Woman Jesus. Why did we do it?

Man One - we got evicted from our flat when Francie got shut down. Two - we wanted to solve the problem of not having a job and not having a place to live at the same time. Three - we thought with there being so many Irish in Kentish Town that we couldn't fail to make money from a pub.

Woman Pinch me next time you see me getting taken in by stereotypes. "A welcome on the mat". What a daft name for a pub. Whose stupid idea was that?

Man In twenty minutes it will all be over.

Woman Why did you walk out on me?

Man Not that again?

Woman Why?

Man I was only gone three days.

Woman I nearly went out of my mind.

Man How many times do I have to say that I'm sorry?

Woman You didn't even leave a note and then you walked back in as if nothing happened.

Man I was stressed.

Woman How? We had hardly any customers.

Man I couldn't take the sadness.

Woman ?

Man It was supposed to be a jolly Irish pub with a warm welcome for everyone only it wasn't. Old guys in the corner nursing a pint all afternoon. Young guys, new to London - full of hope. Started coming in after work for a swift half but after a few weeks they were staying for three pints cos they couldn't face the thought of their bedsitter. No wonder no one else wanted to come in.

Woman And that's why you left? Jesus.

Man Well, what did you want me to do?

Woman You could've have tried to make it a happier place.

Man How? Wear a Guinness hat whilst pulling pints. Have chronically bad country music playing in the background all the time. Nick a 'Boris' bike, some Irish books from the library and stick them in bloody window. Add a sign, pointing down the A5 towards central London saying 'Skibbereen 10 kilometres'.

Woman Maybe we should have hired a comedian.

Man Sometimes you have to admit when you're beaten.

Woman Even so, going walkabout the day before Paddy's Day

Man I couldn't face it. It was like having to do a family Christmas, with its overarching disappointment twice in the same year.

Woman All that bloody lamb you bought.

Man I thought that the smell of free stew would attract new customers.

Woman It wasn't free Sean. It cost us money. And that was before the Health Inspector handed us a heavy fine and closed our kitchen.

Man You have to speculate to accumulate.

Woman Not in some mangy old mutton bought from a stallholder with the dodgiest food standards certificate in north London.

Man He promised me that lamb was fresh from the abattoir. How could it go off after three days? You smelt the stew before you put it out. Jaysus to think I only rang the ambulance because I thought that one of the lads had alcohol, not bloody food poisoning. You, sure that he paid for his drink before he collapsed?

Woman Just be grateful that he recovered.

Man Should have given him another spoonful. Might have finished him off. Could have saved the NHS some money.

Woman And given yourself a twenty-five-year jail sentence.

Man I'll kill him if I catch up with him.

Woman Don't expect me to visit you in prison.

Man (*He goes back to reading the 'Kentish Town News'*) Bloody typical. Look. (*He shows her the paper*).

Woman **"MYSTERY OF EURO MILLIONS JACKPOT WINNER SOLVED"**.

Man Probably gone to some rich bastard who doesn't need it. Listen!

Man (*Reads*)
Camelot have announced that the winning ticket from June's 'Euromillions' jackpots was handed into an off licence in Kentish Town last month. Camelot had been trying to locate the owner of the winning ticket, sold in Highgate village for over a year. Do you know how much houses sell for up there? No wonder he wasn't bothered if he won or not. 'The owner who wishes to remain anonymous....' I bet you do mate. You don't want to be giving a single penny of that to deserving causes. I used to help John Jo pick his numbers. Told me he'd split any winnings he got.

Woman And what good did that do?

Man Be dead handy if he was the winner.

Woman Yeah. We could tell the judge that we'll pay back what we owe.

Man No way. Declaring ourselves bankrupt is out way out. Freedom.

Woman Fantasy.

Man Oh. Manager of the offie asked me if I knew this person (*Hands her an envelope*)

Woman Why didn't you say 'no'?

Man Because it is addressed to you stupid.

Woman It looks official. It is probably another letter from a bloody solicitor.

Man Aren't you going to open it?

Woman I have had as much as I can take of banks and bills and bailiffs. (*She goes to rip it up but he takes it from her and opens it*)

Man She wants you to go in and see her. (*Woman takes the letter briefly reads it and then rips it up*) What are you doing?

Woman Which bit of 'I've had enough' didn't you understand?

Man But the last paragraph said that ... 'you'd hear something to your advantage'.

Woman 'Advantage' and 'North London' are two words that don't go together for us.

Loudspeaker Dempsey and Smith to Court Two please.

Man But/

Woman Any Irish person who did well in London did it because of hard work not stupid dreams.

Loudspeaker Dempsey and Smith to Court Two please.

Woman Come on. (*She rips the envelope in two and places it in the bin*)

Man But
(BLACKOUT) (THE END)

RED IS THE ROSE

Red is the Rose is a traditional song, the writer is unknown but the melody is taken from the classic Scottish folk song, Loch Lomond.

SETTING

The setting for this piece is a care home for the elderly in London which has a number of Irish residents. The speaker is the care worker who runs the Music and Reminiscing sessions. One has just ended and as he tidies away he thinks aloud about Tommy old man who attended the session. Tommy is out of ear shot.

The pianist for our reminiscence sessions asked me about you. *“That auld fella, the one whose face lit up the minute I started playing ‘Red is the Rose’? The fella with the faraway look on his face; I’d say he was somewhere else for sure”*.

I told him that your name is Tommy. That we’d taken you in a few months ago. Rescued you from a life lived under the bridge. But you’re a mystery aren’t you Tom boy? Any records or papers that might tell us anything about you seem to have disappeared along with your memory. You could be seventy but just as easily sixty or even younger. You have no visitors and don’t seem to want to make any friends. Sure, why would you? Haven’t you managed without them long enough?

The care here is good, but your dementia has robbed you of any appreciation. You sit where you are told. Eat what you are given. Look at the TV without really watching. And all this time the expression on your face rarely changes.

Until you come to this group. Where we play the old Irish tunes. ‘Red is The Rose’ means something to you. Your eyes soften as we begin to sing. And when a ray of sunlight settled on you today, I saw a tear fall gently down your face. This is the song. This is your song. This is where life makes sense for you - isn’t it Tom?. And yet the hearing of it releases a pain inside you that goes beyond sadness.

Who is your rose Tommy? You remember her don’t you. And the garden where you met? Were promises of everlasting love made and then let go as the necessity of emigration forced you apart? You’ve thought of her in the intervening years haven’t you? Her memory your constant companions as you followed the work from site to site. A crumbled photo in your chest pocket kept close to your heart.

The song bids her to come over the hill and she does. If only in your mind. She’s there waiting for you isn’t she? Your bonny Irish lass who’s wafted in on the notes of the song and intertwined herself in its manuscript like a rose around a trellis. The melody provides you with a comforting blanket. She’s come for you hasn’t she? Like she did so long ago? In that garden. Maybe in secret. In moonlight or sunlight. But she came - that was the main thing. She came because she loved you. And that gave you dignity. In the poverty and hardship – you knew you were worth something. Because that is what love does for us. And her loves comes again because, once invited into our hearts stays until we banish it. We forget other things but never that.

I answer the accompanist. “All I know is that someone once loved him deeply. And isn’t that, above all else, what we need to know as we approach the end of our lives?”

(BLACK OUT) (THE END)

WHISKEY IN THE JAR

"Whiskey in the Jar" is an Irish traditional song set in the mountains of Ireland, often with specific mention of counties Cork and Kerry.

In this piece, the speaker is an elderly nun who has spent all her adult life living in a convent in England since entering the order in the late 1940s. At that time there would have been many young Irish women doing the same thing. This included those who entered the 'teaching' orders. However, vocations to the religious life have been in decline since the middle of the 20th century and the large convents that housed these women are no longer needed and many find themselves living in small houses and flats.

SETTING

An elderly nun is standing behind a table. She has just finishing pouring, what looks like water from a jug into a bottle. There is a small bottle containing a dark liquid next to it. The piece begins with the nun putting the jug down and coming to the front of the stage to welcome her 'visitor'. 'The audience should never be sure if the nun is talking to herself or that there is a visitor.

Tis good of you to come Teresa. We don't get many visitors these days. Remind me, how many years was it since you left the school. Fifty? July 1972 so? (*Laughs*). And I look like I'm wearing the same dress? That's because I am. (*She goes to the jug, picks up the two glasses beside it and fills one of them before offering the other to the 'visitor'*) Will you join me? (*She makes a facial expression that shows that the person has refused and puts the empty glass down. She sips from her glass*)

You heard right, the prison service did buy the nuns quarters. Too big for us now. Fortunately, the authorities didn't think that the building needed much in the way of converting, our tiny bedrooms in those long corridors and our high walls were ideal for them. The estate agent, a cheeky young fella cracked jokes about it. And when I told him that we called our bedrooms 'cells' he was off. Asked me "*if being a nun in an enclosed order was that different from being locked up in a high security prison?*" And when I told him that we stayed in the same place for life. Well. "*Tell, you something sister, those prisoners can get parole easier than you. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.*" *Ha, ha, ha, ha.*" I didn't offer him a drop; I can tell you.

There's only Reverend Mother and myself now Teresa. We've our own small flat in the grounds. I'm her 'carer' so I'm allowed out to shop which means I can get hold of me ingredients.

She gets lonely so I've covered the walls in our living room with mirrors. Her mind, eyes and ears are not what they once were so the mirrors make her think that the room is full of old nuns like herself. Sits there chatting away to them all day sure she does. Calls me in when Sister Martha, that's what she calls the reflection of the right-hand side of her face, has a cobweb on her veil. Or when Sister Mary, that's what she calls the one on her left could do with blowing her nose. Keeps asking me to get rid of the nun directly across from her. Can't stand the site of her. Calls her a miserable auld witch.

I put the radio on for her sometimes. A talk show station for the phone in. I picked up a CD of male voice choir singing the nation's favourite hymns at a charity shop. I stick it on at full blast. Makes her think that there are people in the chapel. I don't know what will happen when she realises that they are all men! She's happy enough like, but I think that it would break her heart to know that we are the only two left and there's no more coming.

I expect I'll have to go to one of those Day Centres when me time comes and there's no one to look after me. I think I'll throw this habit away and get some ordinary clothes. Someone spat at me the other day as I was coming out of the chemist. Called me a bitch for what I had done to children. Surprised me. Didn't think that I was that bad a teacher.

So, you see, it's this 'little secret' that keeps me going. I make it from an old family recipe. Poteen was banned in Ireland as you know. Sent people like me 'da' skywards. Me poor mother. One of the reasons I entered the convent. 'Twasn't easy to escape from your home back in the day when you hadn't the price of a bus ticket, should the bus have passed your way, which it never did.

A nun from this convent gave me the chance to get out. She was over in Kerry visiting her cousin and gave a talk at my school. It was 1947, I was thirteen. I learned that the sister had her own room, got fed three times a day and had a change of clothes and new shoes whenever she needed it. She wasn't allowed a boyfriend because she was married to God, who she never saw but who she knew was always there. 'That'd 'twould suit me I thought'. Sure, weren't things better for me ma when me da was nowhere to be seen?

I remember the journey here to England as if it was yesterday. The only time I was to be in a car on a bus, a boat or a train for the next 35 years. I'll never forget the sense of relief as I walked through these gates, knowing I would never ever have to go back.

So here I am ending me days at leisure by having a little drop of this now and again. It helps me sleep at night when the noise from the lads fighting in the main building gets too much. I give Reverend Mother a double shot to knock her out for a few hours when I need a break from her nonsensical chatter. After all, as me da used to say when the larder was bare, there was no turf for the fire but plenty of rain to leak through the roof. "*We'll all get by so long 'as there's whiskey in the jar'*". You sure you won't? Ah well. Slainte. *(She raises her glass)*

(BLACKOUT)

(THE END)

I'LL TELL MY MA

"I'll Tell Me Ma" is a traditional children's song. In Ireland the chorus usually refers to Belfast city and is known colloquially as "The Belle of Belfast City". It can be hard meeting that special person, when you are new to a city and don't have any friend to go out with as this young woman explains.

SETTING: A woman in her 20/30s walks onto the stage carrying a drink. She stops, downs the drink in one and turns to the audience.

I tell you that is the last time I go online looking for a fella. You can't trust the buggers, sure you can't? Well, I couldn't trust this fella that's for sure. You can probably tell from my accent that I am not from round here. I'm from a small place in County Down, there's not much to do there and most people settle down young. It was when my best friend Marie finally decided to make a go of it with Albert Mooney, that I knew that my days of having someone to go out with on a Saturday night were finished. So, I left. Decided to leave home and try my luck in England.

This is the first time that I had tried online dating. I'm a massive James Bond fan and didn't the guy in the first photo that appeared have the look of Daniel Craig about him? Daniel Craig? The James Bond guy with the six pack who comes out of the sea. That's the one. So I "swiped right" and was really excited when he texted me back to arrange a date.

The girls at work were dead jealous. "*Bet there's loads of girls after him.*" they said. Some even told me that he wouldn't turn up. I took no notice and a lot of care getting ready. Make up, hair, new blouse.

We agreed to meet in the Italian restaurant in the high street but when I got there it was empty apart from an old fella sitting on his own. He didn't look a bit like Daniel Craig so I thought I must have the wrong place. I began to walk out when I heard a loud voice behind me "*Roisin did you forget to go to Specsavers?*"

Now my eye sight's perfect so I turn around. Oh my God, the old fella is now waving at me. And he's ancient. This isn't the guy I am supposed to be meeting, is it? My God it is. There's no one else in the restaurant. And how would he know my name if it wasn't him? I want to run away but one of the waiters, a really good-looking fella winks at me calls me over. He pulls back at the chair at the table where yer man is sitting and says "*Senorita*". I've no choice but to go and sit down.

007 and I look at each other. He puts his head to one side like those puppy dogs you see on biscuit tins. Jesus, did his hair just move?

"Well," he says, patting his head as if he has just read my mind "*what do you think?*"

"Your hair has a bit of life in it alright," says I.

"Ach, I like to mix and match me hairstyles. But they can be awful hot." he says. And then, before I know it his 'hair' comes off. He dips his napkin in the water jug and bold as brass wipes the steam off his head. He is as bald as a bloody coot so he is.

I tell you, I'm only glad I'm sitting with my back to the window because I'd die if anyone from work, walks past, sees his baldy, wrinkle head and thinks that I'm not dating James Bond but a bloody potato.

I look at his scrawny face and sunken eyes. And I tell ya I'm not thinking about any future relationship, but 'how long does this guy have to live?'

The waiter comes over. He's ready to wet himself laughing and he's a face on him that tells me I'm not the first one to be in this situation.

He hands me the menu. Now I like to order my own food but before I can say anything 007 says to the waiter: "*We'll have soup, spaghetti and sorbet*". Spraying each word as he says it. I end up with spit, his spit all over my face and even some in my eyes. This is gross. I reach down into my bag for a wet wipe.

Now that my eyes are clear I take a good look at him. I could walk out but it's Monday night but I haven't eaten since breakfast. I have no money and there's nothing in the fridge. 007 smiles at me. He wants me to say something. I try to be positive.

"You have a very sparkly pair of teeth" I say

"Ay," he says, "*they're good quality. Been in the family for years.*" Jesus what is this man on?

The waiter arrives with the soup and your man asks for another glass of water. I think these must be for the tablets that keep him alive but 'oh no'.

No sooner has our soup arrived than the teeth come out of the mouth and into the glass. I drop my spoon with a shock and ruin me new blouse.

"They belonged to me da," he said. "People said we were the 'living spit' of each other. So, when he died, I got the undertaker to take them out of his mouth before people arrived for the wake. I've only a few of me own teeth left. And what with dental treatment being the price it is, I thought I'd make do. A quick soak in the bleach and then off to me friend who has a paint shop. He used the white metallic paint he uses on radiators to get rid of the tobacco."

My God, I've heard stories of people taking rings and other jewellery from a dead body to keep them in the family like. I think that's okay. But opening someone's mouth and taking out their teeth. Now that is too disgusting for words. Think what would have happened if we'd kissed. I have been in contact with a dead man's gnashers. I think I'm going to 'puke'. Have any other parts of this man's anatomy been acquired elsewhere?

I look him right in the eye. And I mean 'right,' because I swear to God that there was something that looked like a glass marble in the left. Bulging out, like he was too mean to buy a replacement and used a large marble instead.

I tell him I'm going to the loo.

Once away from him, something insides me snaps. I don't mind 'old', I don't mind 'ugly' but I do mind body parts from the dead. There's only one thing for it. I'll have to miss me supper tonight.

What I am going to tell the girls back at work? How am I going to get out of this place without walking past him? There's only a small window in the ladies. I'll never get through it. I knew that I should have stuck to that 'one egg and one orange a day' diet.

I have an idea. I write my phone number on the back of a ten-pound note which I hand to the waiter. I give him a pleading look which says: 'don't make me go back in there'. He winks as he lets me out through the kitchen. I wonder if me ma will believe me when I tell her about this.

(BLACKOUT) THE END

MY LOVELY LEITRIM

Phillip Fitzpatrick from Aughavas, Co. Leitrim wrote the song, "Lovely Leitrim," in tribute to his home county after he had emigrated to America in the 1920s. It became popular when it was recorded by Larry Cunningham, the song is still loved both in Ireland and the US.

SETTING

The interior of a rundown cottage in rural Leitrim.

So, this was it? A run down, time-weathered shack, solitary, rising out of the wilds on the windswept flatlands of Leitrim. The hills to the north too far away or too shrouded in mist to give any definition, leaving only grass and water to make sense of the landscape.

‘This can't be it?’ I thought.

“Are you sure we’ve come to the right place Mum? It looks more like” I covered my mouth hastily less the word ‘cowshed’ slipped out.

Her lovely Leitrim home. The place that she had waxed lyrically about for years but had never let me see. The recent death of my father only enabling this visit.

A small cottage that could have been mistaken for a barn. The holes in the thatched roof open to the grey sky and threatening rain clouds. Stone walls invaded by moss. A threadbare rug barely able to cover the concrete floor. And in the centre and old range. A few broken chairs and, overseeing it all, a picture of the Sacred Heart, its image barely visible through the dust hiding it, as if to say ‘your time is up’.

Suddenly I felt sad and I didn't know why.

“It was a great place,” she beamed. “Back in the day”.

Back in the day indeed. When the lack of employment forced my family to live in conditions which those of us reared in England could barely imagine.

The place from where her father had left. Alone. To Scotland to pick potatoes. Hard backbreaking work. Mum was the youngest and this was clearly reflected in her memories. She only spoke of the fun times on his return not the grind of keeping the family together. No wonder my granny rarely smiled. A largely absent husband and eight children, only six of whom survived past their fifth birthday. Mum could recite their names but say nothing of the grief that accompanied their loss. You simply didn't talk about such things then.

“Leitrim was a very popular place to live you know.”

She referred to the pre famine days of course 1841 when the population had topped one hundred and fifty-five thousand. Emigration had ripped that to shreds. 33,000 by the time she left in the late 60s. Even now, described as the fastest growing population in Ireland, it's still way below that level.

But now she was back. A wisp of a woman in her 80s. Her white hair neatly coiffed, tiny hands peeping out from the plastic mac. Her arms outstretched as she twirled around the small room, smelling the peat from the fire, remembering the music, the dancing and the fun that had happened therein.

“We'd great craic,” she said. “You’d have loved it”

“Really?”

She took my hand. “’Twas shame it all had to change”.

We both knew what that meant. As the youngest she had watched her elder brothers and sisters leave the house one by one. Her turn to go came when Maire, a year her senior returned home from London carrying a battered old suitcase.

My mother had longed for this day, reared as she was on stories of how exciting the city was. Had she given a backward glance, which she didn't then she would have seen tears rolling down her mother's face as she stood alone at the gate.

London provided all she wanted. A good job and the money to stop dressing in 'hand me downs'. The craic that came from Irish pubs and dance halls at the weekend. And after several years of hard work, the icing on the cake - a holiday somewhere hotter and drier than the northwest of Ireland.

It was on the singles holiday that she met my dad, a quiet Englishman. The polar opposite to her own father. A reserved studious man who drank less shouted less and never touched his children. But, as she was to find out to her cost, hugged, laughed and joked a lot less too.

Her marriage brought order. A prosperity that provided a home in suburbia miles away from the Irish community that had made her so welcome in London. But always on her mantelpiece a faded photo of her family outside the door of their cottage. Her own lovely Leitrim home. The photo that had to be slipped into the drawers of the sideboard board when the in laws visited each Sunday.

I dreaded those afternoons. Teas of 'crustless sandwiches', 'neatly cut cake' and gaps in the conversation. My task, to display my praised-filled schoolbooks to my proud grandparents. Play a piece on the piano as if I was some sort of child protégé, hiding the fact that we were almost bribing the music teacher to keep me on.

All to give credence to the benefits of an English upbringing and an opportunity for my grandparents to forgive their only son for our marrying an Irish woman in England in the midst of the Troubles. They offered Mum elocution lessons as an engagement present.

So, I watched as this proud woman lost contact with her Irish roots. I loved my Irish aunts and uncles to their bones. I couldn't understand why my dad never came with us when we visited them.

I was a child at the time, but my heart still ached as I watched this once proud Irish woman shed the 'momento mori' of her Irish identity. As each bomb exploded on the UK mainland the symbols disappeared. Her weekly, 'Leitrim Observer' that she became to embarrassed to order from the local newsagent. The annual box of Shamrock sent by over by her cousin. Cancelled. I only saw her cry once; when, in a shop someone overhearing her ask the butcher for Irish sausages, made 'oinking' noises, before adding "I see they eat themselves".

She learned to hide her Irishness Like so many of the rural Irish forced to emigrate she had humble origins. But as the saying goes: *'it matters less where your journey starts than where you end up'*. Mum formed part of the Irish group that had done well. She had no need for shame.

And as I watched her in her humble family home I knew she'd taken something precious from here, and whatever it was, it was that which made her strong.

Soon the taxi would come back to take us to Knock airport from where we'd fly home. Three days later she'd attend the graduation of her granddaughter at one of England's top universities.

She took my hand as we got into the taxi.

"You see we were great people weren't we?" she said.

I took her hand and squeezed it. "You certainly were". **THE END**