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THE MUSHROOM PICKERS

BY JAKI MCCARRICK



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Author's Note

The Mushroom Pickers is essentially a quest play that begins with Laura's return to the Irish border town she left years before, during the 'Troubles'. She believes that the emotional and psychological fractures within herself will somehow be healed by this homecoming. But the place to which Laura has returned is itself a site of fracture and, from the most unlikely source (Frank McElroy), she learns that whatever her issues they cannot be resolved at home.

I was twelve years of age when my family left London for the Irish border town of Dundalk. Until 2005 there were British military checkpoints between Dundalk – and Newry in the North. I grew up then with a strong sense of a divide between two places, which, perhaps, would have been muted in some way had we lived further North, in Belfast (the eye of the storm, as it were), or in Dublin (a mere fifty miles from the border but which, during the Troubles, seemed to be a world apart). Imaginatively, the border has, therefore, always held a power for me. Not just because it is a place between two different states, sets of identities etc – and all the dramatic potentiality that comes with that – but because of its obvious metaphorical potential. Borders are sites of liminality; they are where the fractures are – political, economic, social, psychological. The sense of waiting for something to happen is palpable in such places, life has a heightened quality, is never fully at ease with itself.

The Mushroom Pickers is my first play, and I knew when I set out to write it that I wanted it to be a portrait of life as-it-is-lived in an area rarely referred to in modern Irish theatre. It owes much to my love of Chekhov and his ability to 'illuminate characters and speak with their tongue'. It is, finally, both a political play and a snapshot of life in a particular place and time.

Jaki McCarrick,
September 2015

The Mushroom Pickers was first produced by Theatrepublik at the Southwark Playhouse, London on 2nd May 2006. The cast was as follows:

PHILIP McDONALD . . . . . Michael Culkin
LAURA McDONALD . . . . . Catherine Cusack
NANCY TONER . . . . . Caroline John
TOM McELROY . . . . . Sam Kenyon
FRANK McELROY . . . . . John Kirk
OWEN O'GORMAN . . . . . David Rolston
Director . . . . . Svetlana Dimcovic
Designer . . . . . Polly Laurence
Lighting Designer . . . . . Benjamin Polya
Sound Designers . . . . . Simon Perkin
Gareth Burcher

Prior to this the play had a staged reading on the main stage of the Old Vic Theatre, London, with the following cast:

PHILIP McDONALD . . . . . Michael Culkin
LAURA McDONALD . . . . . Aisling McLaughlin
NANCY TONER . . . . . Fidelma Cullen
TOM McELROY . . . . . Gary Egan
FRANK McELROY . . . . . Dermot Byrne
OWEN O'GORMAN . . . . . Shane Gately
Director . . . . . Jaki McCarrick

The Mushroom Pickers was presented by Alloy Theater Company at the Gene Frankel Theatre, New York, on February 12th, 2009, with the following cast:

PHILIP McDONALD . . . . . Timothy Roselle
LAURA McDONALD . . . . . Maxine Linehan
NANCY TONER . . . . . Karen de la Penha
TOM McELROY . . . . . David Sedgwick
FRANK McELROY . . . . . Jonathan Tindle
OWEN O'GORMAN . . . . . Drew Sutherland
Director . . . . . Hondo Weiss-Richmond

CHARACTERS

FRANK McELROY – late thirties/early forties, manager of McElroy Mushroom Nurseries. A loner with a past.

TOM McELROY – late thirties, Frank's brother, co-runs the business. An ex-priest.

PHILIP McDONALD – fifties, Laura's widowed father. Works part-time as a mushroom picker.

LAURA McDONALD – early thirties, Philip's daughter, a promising actor recently returned to Monaghan from London.

NANCY TONER – fifties, a mushroom picker; once a noted ballroom dancer.

OWEN O' GORMAN – thirties/forties a mushroom picker – with Republican sympathies and a love for Nancy.

A stroke (/) denotes the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

Words in square brackets are not to be spoken.

TIME AND PLACE

Around 2002 (a few years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, 1998). The action takes place in rural County Monaghan, Ireland.

NOTE

The lines from Patrick Kavanagh's 'Inniskeen Road: July Evening', 'Shancoduff' and 'The Long Garden' are reprinted from *Collected Poems*, edited by Antoinette Quinn (Allen Lane, 2004), by kind permission of the Trustees of the Estate of the late Katherine B. Kavanagh, through the Jonathan Williams Literary Agency.

Scene One

A small cottage house in Ballybay, Co. Monaghan. A fireplace to one side. Over the mantelpiece hangs a framed photograph of a young woman, with 'Raglan Road, 1954' typed on the bottom. A bunch of wrapped blue carnations are on the table. **PHILIP** *is standing looking out of the window while eating his cereal. He lightly marks some dance steps. Enter* **LAURA** *with the post,* **PHILIP** *stops dancing.* **LAURA** *sees flowers on the table, looks for and finds a vase, blows the dust off it.*

PHILIP Your mother would have appreciated those flowers.

LAURA She would.

PHILIP That was a good match. But pioneers and *pissheads* don't go.

LAURA They don't. *(goes to get water for flowers)*

PHILIP All the money I've wasted on her. I wish I could have back all the money and all the time I've wasted on that woman.

LAURA You're obviously not compatible.

PHILIP You wouldn't know what frame of mind she'd be in. With your mother it was always like… so… but with her, well. People who drink will always find some excuse.

LAURA *(off)* It's not that she's bad…

PHILIP Certainly she is.

LAURA …she's just not like Mum. *(brings flowers back in the vase)* Can we put the light off please?

PHILIP No. I won't be able to read the paper.

LAURA You're not reading.

PHILIP I will be after my Weetabix.

LAURA But the curtains are open. People can see in.

PHILIP What harm?

LAURA It's depressing. *(she puts off the light)* I hate a light on in the day.

PHILIP Women.

LAURA No, not women. Stupid. *(puts on the radio)*

PHILIP Anyway, who's passing that'd be looking in?

Beat.

LAURA Will she go in do you think? She's always nice to me no matter what.

PHILIP Expect so. I got no sleep so I'll give it a skip myself. Tell the brothers I'll make up time tomorrow.

LAURA But how will I get to Clones?

PHILIP Ah! I'll drive ya up, don't worry. The truck can take you home.

LAURA Da! They pack them like sardines into that truck. It's embarrassing. Please pick me up.

PHILIP Aye. OK. *(puts on the light and reads the paper)* There's sweets over there.

LAURA Nancy's sweets?

PHILIP Mine! Yours if you want them now.

LAURA We'll see. *(puts off the light)* A woman's touch does wonders around this place.

PHILIP It does surely.

LAURA Don't be a stubborn get.

PHILIP No. She's no class of a woman at all. A class 'A' long string of misery, that's what she is.

LAURA You'll make it up. You always do.

PHILIP I'll hardly get rested with driving you there and picking you up again.

LAURA Exactly. You may as well come in and do a day's work.

PHILIP Let the bitch miss me.

LAURA You know, I think your whole life can be determined by which way your love affairs swing you.

PHILIP Well, what else is there?

LAURA Money? Paying the bills? Keeping the house in order? Mum would've…

PHILIP She'd want me to be happy.

LAURA So do I.

PHILIP Certainly you do.

LAURA Maybe you should visit the grave. *(exits to kitchen)*

PHILIP Maybe. *(looks at the photo over the mantelpiece)* Why have ya 'Raglan Road' typed up onto this photo?

LAURA *(off)* Only told you a thousand times. I'm staking a claim kind of thing. Mummy always said Patrick Kavanagh wrote that poem about her. Met her in the bookies in Dublin. A wee girl down from Monaghan working away in Grafton Street. Isn't that the story? Kavanagh had a penny bet and handed her the poem on a bit of paper.

PHILIP Ah, that fella was a moron.

LAURA *(off)* Wished she'd kept the bit of paper. Be worth a fortune now. Kavanagh seems to be getting his dues at last. 'It was the garden of the golden apples, / And when the Carrick train went by we knew/ That we could never die till something happened, /like wishing for a fruit that never grew.' That was the other one we did at school.

PHILIP What's that you're muttering out there?

LAURA People here in Kavanagh country are just choked up with jealousy.

PHILIP Kavanagh country me arse.

LAURA *(comes in with two cups of tea. Gives one to* **PHILIP**. *She goes back out and comes in with a bucket of fire fuel: briquettes, coal, sticks, some rolled-up paper, and some firelighters. Goes about trying to build a fire)* Maybe you should try a bit of poetry with Nancy. Women like that.

PHILIP Yes, but that's the proper stuff.

Beat.

LAURA Did you like any of the plays I was in at all I wonder?

PHILIP Some. When I could understand the gist of it. But that's all behind you now.

LAURA Aye. All gone. *(continues with the fire)* Remind me – who did you say was the eldest of the brothers?

PHILIP Frank, of course.

LAURA That's what I… but I wasn't… *(she stops. The fire won't light)* All right. This is where I begin to wonder if I made the right decision to come home. Why didn't you ever get central heating?

PHILIP Rubbish! Going to be a blinder of a day. You won't need a fire.

LAURA It's hot water I need. So I can stand under that hose you call a shower.

PHILIP Right. Use the firelighters and put the briquettes round them. *(she follows this instruction)* That's it.

LAURA Mam used do this every morning. And in darkest winter, too. I could never get up for school unless I knew it was warm down here – and there'd she'd be.

PHILIP A class piece of work that woman. I should know by now that a man can only get such a woman once in his

life. If he's lucky. She'd be far advanced now with that fire I can tell you. But for a thirst on her. For the wee bottle of orange.

Pause.

LAURA Come with me to the grave next time.

PHILIP Best place for my flowers anyway.

LAURA Nancy's not so bad.

PHILIP Ah! Give it here. *(takes over building the fire)*

LAURA What's wrong with you?

PHILIP The woman said I couldn't dance. Says to me last night: "you loused up pretty big-time in Galway, you stupid bastard."

LAURA Was she drinking?

PHILIP Locked. Women should keep away from drink. From pubs as well.

LAURA Maybe you're just not compatible. I don't want you to suffer.

PHILIP We were late once in Galway so we lost the championship. But she was at fault last night. Cocked it up goodo but she'd not admit it. On top of all that I still offered to get her fish and chips.

LAURA And?

PHILIP She said she'd call the cops on me so I says, go on ya drunken whoor.

LAURA For fuck's sake.

PHILIP And I was so vexed I drove into a ditch the other side of the border.

LAURA Da! Why didn't you… are you hurt?

PHILIP I'm grand. Fella from Belfast helped. Grand lad. Said he'd never seen a Lada the like of mine – as old as mine and still in mint condition. But a ten ton

bloody weight to push out of a ditch in the dead of night, I tell ya that. Folks are cagey across the border about helping a man stuck on the side of the road at that hour, and then you'd be nervous about the type of fella that *would* stop. Grand lad though. Ah! Nancy has her troubles.

LAURA Haven't we all. *(lights up a cigarette)*

PHILIP Says her house is haunted. Haunted! That one doesn't know what a haunted house is. *(puts on the TV by pressing on/off switch. Now the TV and radio are on.* **LAURA** *turns off the radio)*

Where's the plunger?

LAURA It's called – a 'remote control'.

PHILIP Any post?

LAURA *(sorts through the post on the table)* Hollywood contract for me. Dues for the church.

PHILIP The cheek.

LAURA Bloody barefaced. And all the goings on they had.

PHILIP Had – and are having. A bottomless pit of it, it seems. Mrs Reenan still collects them, ya know. The dues. Holds her hand out every week for the little envelope. "Your dues", she says to me in that whining voice. And I say, every single time, "there's no Jews living here, Mrs Reenan" but she never gets it.

He grabs the little packet of envelopes and throws them into the fire.

LAURA Now. Quarter past eight. I'll get myself together then we'll head.

Beat.

Suppose I'm glad to be home all the same, Da. *(exits upstairs)*

PHILIP *puts the TV off. Touches and smells flowers. Practices some steps. Looks at the picture of the woman. Puts on the light. Stokes the fire. Sings:*

> ON RAGLAN ROAD ON AN AUTUMN DAY I MET
> HER FIRST AND KNEW THAT HER DARK HAIR
> WOULD WEAVE A SNARE THAT I MIGHT ONE DAY
> RUE; I SAW THE DANGER, YET I WALKED ALONG
> THE ENCHANTED WAY, AND I SAID, LET GRIEF BE
> A FALLEN LEAF AT THE DAWNING OF THE DAY.

Sung to the air of The Dawning of The Day.

PHILIP But for a thirst on her. For the wee bottle of orange.

Fade lights.

Scene Two

*McElroy Mushroom Nurseries. The mushroom nurseries consist of poly-tunnels: long semi-circular structures covered on the outside in black plastic. Inside the tunnels mushrooms grow in abundance in aisles of waist-high containers. There are packaging materials to one side, humidity and temperature apparatus to another. The radio is on. (***LAURA** *is wearing lace gloves; the others – standard-issue latex)*

NANCY Laura, is that yourself?

LAURA *(whispering)* Of course. Who else would I be? And why are you whispering?

NANCY *(low-voiced)* I had an argument with your father last night. I don't want him to see me.

LAURA Save the whispers. He's not here. Not coming in today at all except maybe to pick me up. I told Tom it was his back.

NANCY Ah, you're very loyal to him. A lovely quality. He takes a row very badly does Philip. While I can just keep on cracking the whip.

LAURA You're a regular trooper, Nancy.

NANCY Just because he doesn't take a drop he thinks that everyone else who does is an alcoholic.

LAURA He means well.

NANCY Anytime I'm down I take a few whiskeys, like any normal person, and you'd swear I was putting heroin into my veins the way your father carries on. He's so…

LAURA Dramatic?

OWEN "Come back Nancy Toner – you're missed at the Kesh, come back Nancy Toner to me". *(sung to the tune of Percy French's* Come Back Paddy Reilly To Ballyjamesduff*)*

NANCY Give over, Owen! Well, I didn't want to use that particular word with you in the acting and all, but ya know what I mean, Laura.

LAURA Certainly. I know what you mean.

NANCY Has anyone recognised you from the telly yet?

LAURA No! And, don't worry, I'm glad. Wouldn't want to be asked for my autograph with my hands and face covered in this shit, would I? Having to explain that I'm just earning a few bob while I sort out my life?

OWEN Will you be joining us tonight Nancy twinkle toes, now himself is out of the picture?

LAURA No time wasted there, eh Nancy?

NANCY Sure I said nothing to him. *(to* **OWEN***)* I don't know what you're talking about.

OWEN Aha, you know rightly so you do. The lovebirds were heard scrapping over something. I was told. In The Kesh.

NANCY Well, you're as safe as houses amongst this ignorant lot, Laura. If yer not on reality telly – likes of him down there will know shag all about ya. Ya know, it's worse you're getting, Owen O'Gorman. Bloody worser. *(to* **LAURA**) Bad as your father is, he has the decorum at least to keep the small talk *quiet*. That's a big ignorant get. Tell him nothing.

OWEN The Kesh is not the same without you, Nancy.

NANCY Do yourself a favour Owen and find yourself a bloody Mrs O' Gorman.

OWEN Time has stolen all possibility of that. Anyway, there is a Mrs O' Gorman. Me darling mother. Though a man has needs no mother can provide.

NANCY Aw, get away from me you vegetable. *(Enter* **TOM McELROY***)* No hope for ya. A riddling if ever there was one. A big, ignorant, charmless riddling…

TOM Oh, there's always hope, Nancy. There's always hope.

NANCY Tom. And how are you this lovely autumn day?

TOM Not a bother. Let's hope it keeps up for the harvest party next week, eh? *(***TOM** *goes over to the thermometer to check temperature; he adjusts it slightly)* Has our Frank been in already?

No response from the pickers.

(towards **NANCY***)* Always up and about before any other body has stirred, roaming around the place on his lonesome. Some people never change, eh Nancy?

NANCY A leopard doesn't change his spots, Tom.

TOM Owen, I hope you're not slowing the ladies down with your tall tales?

OWEN Well, I was about to say, Tom, we had a queer visitor to The Kesh last night.

TOM Is that right? How queer d'you mean?

OWEN A crippled chuckie*. Lost his leg in an operation on the other side in '72.

TOM The Kesh is full of Ra** heads, Owen. Keep yourself away, man.

OWEN Says he'd secretly buried the leg in Dundalk Cemetery and called into the Kesh for old times sake purely to commiserate the anniversary of the loss of his limb. He bought every man in the place a pint.

TOM A generous gesture.

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* Slang word, sometimes used in Ireland to refer to members of the IRA. It derives from the Irish *Tiocfaidh*, meaning 'come', from the IRA slogan, *Tiocfaidh ar la*, meaning 'our day will come.'
** Ra from IRA.

OWEN A decent fella. But he said things would be rearing up again in no time.

NANCY Aye. They will if the likes of you takes drink from the likes of him.

TOM Now, if Philip is laid up, Laura, you can always get the van to pick you up by your way you know?

LAURA Thanks Tom.

TOM How's the quality this morning, Nancy?

NANCY The best batch yet. They're beautiful altogether.

TOM Thank you, Jesus.

NANCY Thank you, Jesus, it is rightly.

TOM It's good to have you working for us, Laura. Yourself – and Nancy there of course – undoubtedly bring a bit of class to the place.

LAURA Glad to be of service, Tom.

TOM *(noticing* **LAURA***'s lace gloves)* And aren't they just the sweetest wee gloves. *(exit* **TOM***)*

NANCY The darling of them two lads he is. *(she sorts the punnets into a crate and stacks the crate on top of others)* Takes care of his mother. A sober eloquent son a woman would gladly have dwell in her house. One that would never leave his mother in a torment, with nothing but black hills and bloody ghosts for company.

OWEN "Come back Nancy Toner to me."

Enter **FRANK McELROY**. *He checks the collected punnets and adjusts* **TOM***'s thermometer settings. Walks through the aisles, stops by* **LAURA**.

FRANK I see you haven't the chaperone today.

LAURA I explained to…

FRANK Will you be working the rest of the week?

LAURA I hope so. Only, the 'chaperone' has the wheels.

FRANK Well, if you can't come in with him, the van goes by your way, you know?

LAURA Yes. I took it once. It was a bit… cramped.

FRANK You get used to it. So, what you say was wrong with Philip?

LAURA Pulled something. In his back. I did tell Tom. He'll be in tomorrow.

FRANK Good. That's what I like to hear. Got to keep this ship afloat, you know?

Beat.

LAURA Look Frank, my understanding was that this job is, well, casual, you know? Is that right?

FRANK 'Casual' needs its planning too. I don't want no pickers one day then a million and one the next. In case you hadn't noticed this is a business we're running here.

Beat.

LAURA OK. I'll do my best to help you with your planning.

FRANK If you wouldn't mind.

Beat.

Our gloves not good enough for you?

LAURA They make my hands sweat.

FRANK Well, so long as you keep them babies the way we like them here I don't give a fuck what you wear.

LAURA *(aside)* Gimp.

FRANK *(moving further down aisle)* Well, Owen. How are ya?

OWEN Grand thanks, Frankie.

FRANK What you up to tonight? Anything fancy?

OWEN Heading out for one or ten pints. You know I hate the drink.

FRANK Aye, I know.

OWEN Straight to *The Black Kesh*, Frank. Before I see the Ma.

FRANK Aye. You don't like eating on an empty stomach.

OWEN That's it.

FRANK Nancy.

NANCY Frank. *(exit* **FRANK***)*

Beat.

What was he wanting with you?

LAURA Prince Charming? He wanted to pin me down to exact working hours. That's precisely why I came to work in these tunnels. I thought it would be more casual, breezy like. In one day, off the next. Someone like that takes the joy out of it. He lives and breathes these little white mushrooms. There has to be something in that. Small, round, white frigid little fucks. I bet he even has a mushroom for a John Thomas.

NANCY A John …? Oh, Jesus, no. Isn't that the strong silent type? In my experience they usually are very well equipped.

LAURA He's also the moody and psychotic type. I can tell a mile off. And *they* usually have big problems in that department.

NANCY Well, I wouldn't be surprised. I wouldn't be surprised at all.

LAURA I don't need it. The hassle.

NANCY You don't.

LAURA Tom's sweet – but him!

NANCY The runt of the two.

LAURA Or maybe something that rhymes with runt.

NANCY *laughs.*

Ah, Nancy. You know, my mother always said, never let the sun go down on a row. So it's a shame you and dad didn't make it up.

NANCY There you are. Can't be helped.

Silence (apart from the radio).

LAURA I need a cigarette.

Takes off her gloves. Slips outside the tunnel door and bolts it.

Da was right. It *is* a blinder of a day. *(lights up her cigarette)* Got to quit. Soon. Just need to let this place wash over me. Relax. Take it all in. Then I'll get back on my feet.

Enter **FRANK McELROY** – *exiting from another tunnel.*

FRANK Not allowed to be alone in Ireland.

LAURA What's that supposed to mean?

FRANK Privacy. Having a moment to yourself. It's a sorta crime here. Means you're up to something. Like, just there – you were away with the fairies.

LAURA I'm on my break.

FRANK Always remember my father mentioning Philip McDonald had a daughter went over to London, did well in the acting.

LAURA Right.

FRANK A mystery as to why you're back in this god-forsaken place.

LAURA You can take the girl from Monaghan…

FRANK Oh aye. The unluckiest county in Ireland.

LAURA I like it.

Beat.

How d'you mean 'unlucky'?

FRANK The lotto, for instance. The big jackpot. Never been won in Monaghan. I find that a pure embarrassment.

LAURA A matter of time, surely?

FRANK Highest suicide rate in Ireland.

LAURA In Monaghan?

FRANK Aye. We're like the Slavs. Melancholic.

LAURA Well, I'm not home for the excitement. In need of a little respite, actually.

FRANK Respite is it? *(pause)* This must be a bit of a change for you then.

LAURA Yes. Gives me time to think.

FRANK God, that'd be a luxury for me!

LAURA Something new for me, too. Spent most of my life on a certain focused road, you know? 'Tunnel vision.' And I haven't done a lot of… reflection. So, this wonderful cultivated mushroom farm of yours, and Tom's, may well be the making of me.

FRANK That's funny.

Pause.

Sorry, I was a bit smart with you inside. This trigger tongue of mine.

LAURA No problem. I should head back in.

FRANK Ah, you're in no rush.

LAURA All right. If you say so.

Pause.

So. Why – mushrooms?

FRANK My father started the business. He saw a rising sophistication in the Irish food markets and went for it. Wasn't for any particular passion for them.

LAURA I wish I could make decisions like that. Cold, brutal and profitable.

FRANK You need a cold brutal personality.

LAURA Cigarette?

FRANK Don't mind if I do. *(takes the offered cigarette,* **LAURA** *lights it)*

LAURA Where is he now, your da?

FRANK Bermuda.

LAURA But your ma is here?

FRANK She doesn't like the heat.

LAURA You couldn't get much hotter than this.

FRANK Sure you can. But this is good enough heat for me.

LAURA Me too. I'd forgotten that Monaghan with the weather is Eden itself.

FRANK Or, as they say around here – you can't beat it with a stick.

Beat.

LAURA And you've a great view of the lake.

FRANK 'Laura.' Is that your real name, like? Or is it one of those – flashy acting names?

LAURA *Flashy?* The one thing I am not is flashy. I was named after a Sinatra song. Laura – I think it was called. She's a dream figure. Kind of appropriate.

FRANK Is it?

LAURA Aye. I'm a big dreamer.

FRANK Well, there's nothing the matter with that. We all need dreams. *(beat)* Just how big are these dreams?

LAURA Monstrously big. Ah, they *were* monstrously big. Copping on to myself at last.

Pause.

So what does Frank McElroy dream about?

FRANK What do I dream about? Mushrooms.

LAURA There you go.

FRANK But mostly the wilder variety growing in that there stretch of forest.

LAURA ?

FRANK I learned how to identify the different types of wild mushrooms when I worked in Poland. I'm aiming to supply the top restaurants of Dublin, Belfast and the rest of Europe for premium money. That's one of my dreams.

LAURA I wish you luck. Never tasted a wild mushroom before. Someday maybe.

FRANK Once you develop a taste for them they're very addictive. In Finland people are taught all about gathering mushrooms at school. I'd like to do that too: teach people the wonders of the forest floor.

LAURA Can – anyone go there? I mean could I go? Have a wee gander?

FRANK That's our land – up to the foothills. Take a walk certainly. But if you're here early enough tomorrow morning – that's the best time – after the dew – I'll show you where they grow, and if you're hungry enough, sure maybe we can do breakfast.

LAURA How early?

FRANK Seven. It'll be just bright.

LAURA If I can get there I will.

FRANK It's not for everyone.

LAURA I'd like to learn about the fruits of the forest floor.

FRANK Well, actually a mushroom's more an animal than a fruit. I'll be there anyways. Keep it under your hat mind. Tom and I don't always see eye to eye, but that's brothers for you, eh?

LAURA I should get back. Tear myself away from the hills, the lake, the car-less roads…

FRANK Ah, you're just a recently returned Paddy suffering from sensory deprivation. You'll soon start taking the place completely for granted like the rest of us. And that's the way it should be.

Blackout.

Scene Three

In the same mushroom tunnel, towards the end of the same evening. The radio is on.

OWEN Read in the papers they're thinking of re-opening the old railway line.

NANCY Is it a Peace Process thing?

OWEN I don't know.

NANCY Good if it happens. But don't hold your breath.

LAURA Meant to have been a great service.

NANCY It was. The Great Northern Railway. Used to link the border counties to Dublin and Belfast, over to the sea at Greenore – and up to Bundoran.

OWEN It's the border caused it all to close in the first place.

LAURA How come?

OWEN Too many checkpoints. Cavan crosses the border six times, Monaghan as many.

NANCY Pure vandalism, that's what it was. Whose bright idea was that anyway – to rip up the permanent way, leave one train goin' North, Dublin to Belfast? Plunged Cavan, Monaghan and Leitrim right into the dark ages. Oh I remember the Monaghan trains well. Easy to travel out from here then, see how the rest of the world was doin'.

LAURA Mentioned in Kavanagh's poetry. The train to Carrick.

NANCY Aw Jeez, don't be talking to him about poetry.

OWEN I'm a noted poet sure. Be as good as Patrick Kavanagh was now, tell you that for nothing.

NANCY If it rhymed with *The Black Kesh* you'd be the king of poetry.

OWEN And you'd be Queen.

NANCY Certainly I would not.

Beat.

LAURA Da will be up for me soon.

NANCY That's nice for you.

Beat.

LAURA He said you had – well, 'troubles'.

NANCY Troubles! Don't be talking. Laura, my dog disappeared a couple of weeks ago. Just left and never came back. That's when it started. Sometimes, when I'd say a few prayers, it would stop. Then, the other night, as God is my witness, I saw her.

LAURA Who?

NANCY Twenty one years I am in that house and only now, when my sons are gone, does the bitch decide to show up.

LAURA *Who?*

NANCY The ghost! A young woman! Oh, Jesus and Mary, the thought of it gives me the shits.

LAURA There has to be some kind of proper explanation for that, Nancy.

NANCY *(she follows an instruction sheet to reset temperature and air pressure controls)* I know rightly, and I wish it would hurry up coming. I like it when your father stays. Doesn't seem so bad then.

LAURA Ask him to stay then.

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