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SF PERUSALS

Gates of Gold

Frank McGuinness

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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GATES OF GOLD was produced by Warren Baker and Sally Jacobs, The Artists' Theatre Group at Theater B on February 19, 2009 in New York City. The performance was directed by Kent Paul, with sets by Michael Schweikardt, costumes by Nanzi Adzima, lighting by Phil Monat, hair design by Leone Gagliardi, original music by Robert C. Rees, casting by Barry Moss. The production technical director was Jason Adams, production electrician was Amy Harper, and the production properties master was Sven Nelson. The production stage manager was Kathleen E.G. Munroe. The cast was as follows:

KASSIE . . . . . Diane Ciesla
ALMA . . . . . Kathleen McNenny
RYAN . . . . . Seth Numrich
GABRIEL . . . . . Martin Rayner
CONRAD . . . . . Charles Shaw Robinson

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

GABRIEL – 60s
CONRAD – 60s
KASSANDRA – 50s, 60s
ALMA – 20s, 30s
RYAN – 20s

Scene One

(In the bedroom **GABRIEL***, expertly, barely applies make-up before the mirror. In the living room* **CONRAD** *stands behind the armchair.* **ALMA** *sits on the couch.)*

CONRAD. I think it is fair to warn you, Gabriel will not be the easiest of patients.

ALMA. Jesus, does he speak Swedish?

CONRAD. Swedish?

ALMA. The last one I nursed, she spoke Swedish – morning, noon and night. Nearly drove me demented. But in the end I picked up a few words. We got into conversation. And she left me a dictionary in her will.

CONRAD. A Swedish dictionary?

ALMA. English.

CONRAD. Why?

ALMA. She caught on I was never a great speller. So I looked on the bright side.

CONRAD. Do you still possess it?

ALMA. Don't use the word possess. It smacks to me of the devil.

CONRAD. Do you believe in the devil?

ALMA. I believe in nothing. I've watched people dying. I've heard them breathing their last. Gasping. There's no devil. There's no God. There's just people panicking.

CONRAD. You're not afraid of death?

ALMA. I'm not afraid of life. I'm a bit afraid of children. Sometimes they tell the truth.

CONRAD. Gabriel does resemble a child at times.

ALMA. No, he doesn't. He's an old man.

CONRAD. He's younger than I am.

ALMA. So am I. What's your problem?

CONRAD. Miss –

ALMA. Campbell. Alma Campbell. That's my name, Alma.

CONRAD. Miss Campbell –

ALMA. You don't like me. I don't care if you do. The man in that bedroom is dying from a shortage of breath. I know about that way of dying. Are you giving me a job?

GABRIEL. Hire her.

CONRAD. You've a sharp tongue, Miss Campbell, and I don't think you are aware of who it is you're nursing.

GABRIEL. A dying old fool who's getting his comeuppance.

CONRAD. This is a man who has distinguished the theatrical profession for more than forty years.

GABRIEL. The bitch, I am only thirty-three. Admittedly that was in a previous existence. I don't like to talk about it.

CONRAD. He has served the stage as an actor, a writer, a designer and a director.

GABRIEL. He did not excel in all of these –

CONRAD. He did not excel in any of these –

GABRIEL. I have heard your words and will keep them in my heart.

CONRAD. Still, these onerous duties have taken their toll on him. He can no longer touch alcohol –

GABRIEL. Oh, boo-hoo.

CONRAD. He's always been devoutly religious. He's growing even more so.

GABRIEL. Listen to Our Lady of Fatima.

CONRAD. I don't believe you're right for this job. I too have a sharp tongue. You have failed this audition.

ALMA. Audition?

CONRAD. Young woman, I'm a busy man – I have no time –

ALMA. – to nurse a difficult bastard that's blown every nurse you've hired so hard out of the water that her arse left the imprint of itself on the front door. I'm willing to give it a go, are you?

CONRAD. Why?

ALMA. You are desperate.

CONRAD. Is he dying?

ALMA. Yes.

GABRIEL. No.

(silence)

No.

CONRAD. Is he aware of that?

GABRIEL. Yes.

ALMA. No.

CONRAD. Can you, as the Irish say, put manners on him?

ALMA. Manners?

CONRAD. Can you prepare him for dying?

(silence)

I warn you, Gabriel does not like the truth.

ALMA. Neither do I.

CONRAD. I didn't think you did.

ALMA. Then I have the job?

CONRAD. Are you that desperate?

ALMA. Do I have the job?

*(***CONRAD** *sits in the armchair and looks at* **ALMA**. **GABRIEL** *tries to stand and nearly falls. He steadies himself against the table. A strange light intensifies on the joint portrait. He is breathing with difficulty. He makes his way to the bed and sits there.)*

GABRIEL. Our eyes met.

(a sharp breath)

Not our eyes, our faces touched.

(a sharp breath)

Do you remember my face when I was young? And you were always older, an old man. Always sensible – always accurate. Always.

(a sharp breath)

ALMA. There's not much work for nurses at the minute.

GABRIEL. There's not much work for actors at the minute.

ALMA. I'm willing to clean your man's arse, but I'm not going to lick yours.

GABRIEL. I think we should do something brave.

ALMA. What did you mean by audition?

GABRIEL. We should start a theatre and do the work we want to do.

ALMA. I'll need living quarters here if I'm to nurse him properly.

(a series of sharp breaths)

I know next to nothing about you. I know you're queers – I couldn't give a tinker's curse. I've been warned and I don't care. I need a job. You said it, I'm desperate.

GABRIEL. I swear I'll be good, I'll behave.

ALMA. What's your answer?

GABRIEL. I'm not asking you to love me. I'm asking you to live with me.

CONRAD. You're not up to him.

ALMA. I'm willing to make an effort.

GABRIEL. Can we try?

CONRAD. It won't last.

ALMA. Have you had any better offer?

CONRAD. It can't last.

GABRIEL. Who else would love you? I know how you hate yourself. I know how you hide what you are from yourself. I've heard you at night.

(a sharp breath)

Weeping –

(a sharp breath)

Weeping –

(a sharp breath)

Weeping.

CONRAD. He believes himself still to be a beautiful man.

GABRIEL. So frightened they would laugh at you – Women.

CONRAD. Can you respect that lie he persists in telling to himself?

GABRIEL. I won't let them laugh – I won't laugh –

CONRAD. He is not a fool, but he is a liar.

GABRIEL. Love me.

ALMA. I've nursed old men. I've nursed old women. I've nursed children. I've nursed the dying.

CONRAD. Gasping for breath.

ALMA. Gasping.

GABRIEL. Hire her.

CONRAD. You're hired.

ALMA. So are you.

Scene Two

(Dawn is breaking. The sitting room is in darkness. A light burns softly in the bedroom. **GABRIEL** *lies awake in bed.* **ALMA**, *near sleep, sits singing lowly to keep herself awake. She hums, 'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls', occasionally singing some words.)*

GABRIEL. My mother sang that when I was a child, in Spain.

ALMA. I didn't know you were Spanish?

GABRIEL. I was born in Salamanca. My mother was of Irish descent – a descendant of the Wild Geese, the Irish aristocrats who fled to Europe. My father was a priest – a student priest at the Irish seminary of Salamanca. They could not be married but she reared me. Each year on her birthday, May the twenty-second, a yellow rose would be left on her doorstep. That was her name, Rosa – for St. Rose of Lima, a Peruvian anchorite willingly buried alive in the walls of a convent, burning with love of God. My mother turned into an anchorite burning with love for my father. She never left the walls of our house after I was born in Salamanca. And I never, ever saw my father. Sing more – sing me another song.

(She sings a verse from 'Cutting the corn down in Cresshlough today'.)

ALMA. Dear Danny, I'm taking the pen in my hand
To tell you we're just out of sight of the land.
In a big anchor liner we're sailing away
And we're leaving old Ireland for ever today.
Oh It's good to be you who is taking your tay
Where they're cutting the corn down in Cresshlough today.

GABRIEL. You have a good voice, but a man should sing that song. I can remember my father used to, when I was a child, on our ranch in the Argentine. He emigrated from Ireland to work as a cowboy and he struck lucky. He met my mother –

ALMA. St. Rose of Lima –

GABRIEL. That was her name, yes. Lima. She was born there.

ALMA. In Peru?

GABRIEL. Peru. Now she was performing with a circus troupe in Buenos Aires. The woman was a natural on the flying trapeze. The night he attended, didn't she fall? He raced into the circus ring and caught her in his arms. Extraordinary I know, but the truly extraordinary thing was, this Peruvian girl spoke fluent Connemara Gaelic. She'd learned it from a sailor who'd been a student priest in the Irish seminary –

ALMA. In Salamanca.

GABRIEL. You have remarkable powers of deduction. My father married her, but the tragedy was he didn't speak a word of Gaelic as he was from Wales. Argentina is overrun with Welsh people! They are all called Jones and they do unspeakable things with wooden spoons.

ALMA. How many fathers and mothers do you have?

GABRIEL. As many as are necessary to survive them. They tend to die but not to fade away. So it's imperative to remember every detail about them, particularly those details they could never have known themselves. That way they might still live, or is that the medication speaking?

ALMA. You tell me – that's what I'm here for.

GABRIEL. To listen to me babble?

ALMA. You speak lovely. My old fella rarely spoke. The mother wouldn't let him get a word in. A bit of a mismatch. I put it down to geography. He was from Kerry. She was a Dublin woman, through and through. The woman never shut her mouth. Such a load of *rameis* –

GABRIEL. *Rameis?*

ALMA. Kerry word. Means nonsense. I only heard my da crack one joke in his life. He told Ma *rameis* means wisdom. He'd say, 'Woman, you are full of *rameis*.' She would beam scarlet with pleasure. I suppose she must

ALMA. *(cont.)* have loved him. He was a handsome fellow when he was younger. Image of my brother. My brother was the image of my father.

GABRIEL. Was?

ALMA. Car accident. God. My twin. Gone. You should be sleeping. I'm keeping you awake. You'll have to shut me up. I learned the gift of the gab from Ma.

GABRIEL. Did he look like you?

ALMA. My father?

GABRIEL. Your twin brother?

ALMA. You'd know we were brother and sister.

GABRIEL. I have a sister. She has a son.

ALMA. I know. They're coming to visit you. Are you up to seeing them?

GABRIEL. Her – yes. Him – him –

ALMA. Your nephew?

GABRIEL. He has broken my heart.

ALMA. My brother broke many a heart. Eejit. I can get word to put them off.

GABRIEL. No, this is their house. It will be. His house. Conrad will see to that.

ALMA. Lucky to have it all arranged so there's no fights.

GABRIEL. No fights, yes.

ALMA. Do you get on with your sister?

GABRIEL. She too has the gift of gab. Did you get on with your brother?

ALMA. I'll pass on that. Listen, you've to tell me when you need anything. I'll do what I can. I don't believe in suffering for the sake of it.

GABRIEL. I do.

ALMA. Then that's the difference between us.

GABRIEL. Perhaps. Who knows?

ALMA. Jesus, now you are sounding like my father. Who knows? His old refrain. Da, can we have bicycles for Christmas? Who knows? Can we have roller skates? Who knows?

GABRIEL. *Qui sait?* Guy de Maupassant wrote a short story called 'Qui Sait?' Who knows? I barely remember what it was about. Something to do with suffering. What was the point of suffering?

ALMA. Fuck all, sunshine. That French boy would know that if he'd seen what I have.

GABRIEL. You must tell me all you've seen, my dear.

ALMA. Call me by my name – it's Alma.

GABRIEL. How terribly Latinate.

*(***CONRAD** *appears in the living room where light has broken through. He has been asleep in the armchair all night.)*

Alma – beloved. Alma mater – beloved mother.

ALMA. Don't call me that. I'm nobody's mother. I never will be.

(silence)

GABRIEL. I do apologise.

ALMA. I can be extremely touchy. I may be just your nurse –

GABRIEL. Why aren't you a doctor?

(silence)

ALMA. That was for boys.

GABRIEL. Your brother –

ALMA. Had no interest.

GABRIEL. He was beautiful?

ALMA. Very.

GABRIEL. You were in the car with him?

ALMA. Yes.

GABRIEL. You weren't hurt?

ALMA. Not a hair on my head. He was driving. And he was drunk. Fuck him. Let that be an end. Why did I open my mouth?

GABRIEL. You're your mother's daughter.

ALMA. You have an answer for everything.

GABRIEL. Perhaps.

ALMA. Who knows? I've been lying all the time, by the way.

GABRIEL. Somehow I don't believe that.

ALMA. Somehow I don't believe you do.

GABRIEL. You see, I think you tell the truth. How near is death?

ALMA. Near enough.

GABRIEL. Will it be quick?

ALMA. Are you frightened of that?

GABRIEL. Will it be dirty?

ALMA. It always is.

GABRIEL. I'd dislike that. I'd be frightened of that. In that dreadful hospital doing those endless tests they made me drink this revolting stuff to make me shit and shit and shit until I smelt of nothing but what I was drinking – then I was frightened, for I was a fucking, filthy old man, dying in his own dirt. The only consolation is, I'm now ready to play King Lear. His problem is not dementia. It's diarrhoea.

ALMA. Remind me not to miss it. I was never a great one for going to plays. For me it's a waste of time and money. I just sleep through the whole show. Then I wake up at the end and I'm pissed angry with myself.

GABRIEL. Because you missed the performance?

ALMA. Because I missed the interval.

*(***CONRAD** *enters the bedroom. It is now daylight.)*

CONRAD. Alma, go and have some rest, please. I've slept well. We'll manage for a while on our own.

GABRIEL. Conrad has always managed to sleep. It's such an endearing characteristic. I do think his capacity to snatch forty winks defines him. That's why I refer to him affectionately as my log. 'Good morning, my log. So glad to see you, my log. You look refreshed and well, my log.'

(silence)

GABRIEL. *(cont.)* And how are you, Gabriel? Well, Mother here is still alive and kicking. This is a wonder considering the poor old chorus girl has spent the night in a delirium of drugs and obscene dreams.

CONRAD. Then I hope you enjoyed them.

GABRIEL. It is dreadful – dreadful to be dying.

CONRAD. I wouldn't know.

GABRIEL. You will. And It delights me to inform you that dying is remarkably like being stuck in a traffic jam through Limerick.

CONRAD. I have never been through Limerick. If I have, I've sensibly suppressed the memory.

GABRIEL. May God and Limerick forgive you.

CONRAD. I'll take my chance with God. Limerick I leave to your devices.

GABRIEL. Has there ever been any man I have hated more than you?

CONRAD. Your wigmaker?

GABRIEL. I divorce you – I divorce you – I divorce you. We are separated in the eyes of Allah.

CONRAD. Muslims stone men like us, my love.

GABRIEL. I would welcome a little light stoning. It might ease my agony.

CONRAD. Are you truly in agony?

GABRIEL. Yes.

CONRAD. Good.

ALMA. Jesus, I'm off to my bed. You two must have been some tulips in your prime.

GABRIEL. Tulips? Prime? How dare you –

(He has a breathing fit. **CONRAD** *panics.)*

CONRAD. Gabriel – Alma – Gabriel –

(The breathing fit stops.)

GABRIEL. I'm doing my wounded hostess. The kiss of life is not necessary. Where was I? Prime – tulips – this woman compares me to that flatulent Dutch flower?

GABRIEL. *(cont.)* I am *la dame aux camélias*, I am a lily of the valley, I am a rose of Lima, and I bear no resemblance to a tulip. She has crossed me, Conrad. Fire her – fire her on the spot.

CONRAD. You're fired.

ALMA. Right you be.

GABRIEL. This day I disown you, though you may be my only daughter. I send you from this house into sleet and snow.

ALMA. Grand, I love the winter.

GABRIEL. It breaks my heart that you have been so – so –

ALMA. Ungrateful?

GABRIEL. Ungrateful. Goodbye. You may not kiss me.

ALMA. Jesus, you're a right pantomime. Wake me when I need you. I mean when you need me. Give me a couple of hours.

GABRIEL. Alma?

(silence)

Don't drink and drive.

ALMA. You may not kiss me.

(She leaves.)

CONRAD. You like her, don't you?

GABRIEL. I liked a lot of girls. Especially the ones I could exchange frocks with. Alma does not remind me of them. Her dress sense is entirely Canadian.

CONRAD. She's worked out much better than I thought.

GABRIEL. I hate your schoolmarm persona.

CONRAD. You seem to have good fun with her.

GABRIEL. She's quite devoted to you.

CONRAD. Me? No, you –

GABRIEL. I am not well. Not well at all. That's what you say, Gabriel is not well, not well at all. But his nurse seems to have given him a new lease of life. A shot in the arm. I do hope it's heroin. It shortens one's days,

and makes the nights bearable. I loathe the dark, dirty night.

CONRAD. I know.

GABRIEL. Then where were you last night to comfort me the way she did with her stories? I don't know all her secrets yet, but she is revealing herself to me. Near as I am to opening night – or closing, if you prefer – my dear Conrad, you'll be glad I at last have learned your director's patience. I'm learning from the way she sings, the clothes – always the clothes – that are part of her denial. And perhaps she is right to deny herself something. There is a hardness in her that is quite becoming. Like myself, she can turn to stone. No man will ever carve a madonna out of her. She does not yet know the reason for this, and she may never accept it, but the reason is herself, herself alone. If I had to play her, I believe I might be able, for she is her own man, or she will be eventually.

CONRAD. Are you in love with her?

GABRIEL. A dying man looks at a woman and sees his own reflection. That's not love. It's perversity. And yet I am not perverse. I was a good son, a good brother – ask Kassie. And to you, what was I?

*(***CONRAD** *goes to kiss* **GABRIEL**. *He spurns him.)*

Don't come near me. Keep your hands to yourself. Don't touch me.

CONRAD. I have no intention of touching you.

GABRIEL. God's curse on the day you first did.

CONRAD. Do you believe in God?

GABRIEL. I believe in his mother. And that is a lie. I have never done anything but lie to you. You believed me.

CONRAD. Why did you lie?

GABRIEL. You left me –

CONRAD. Never.

GABRIEL. You left our house – our home – our bed. You left me for my flesh and blood, the young man who will inherit. You couldn't wait. You lacked patience. You let yourself down. You betrayed me. Before I die I will do the same. Betray you in Salamanca with a young priest begging the mother of God for intercession that he be forgiven for the sins that stain his vestments. Betray you in Elsinore walking through its haunted corridors waiting to devour the violent soldier who dressed me as Hamlet. In the climb between Florence and Fiesole where the Italian sun fries the air like butter I will do unto you sweating like a pig beneath me what you did to me.

CONRAD. I never lied to nor hated you. I've never betrayed you.

GABRIEL. A million times in your looks at other men.

CONRAD. If a man looks at me, do I look away –

GABRIEL. He looks at you with revulsion.

CONRAD. As you do. As you always have.

GABRIEL. Weeping – weeping – who is weeping, Conrad?

CONRAD. You are.

GABRIEL. I am very tired.

CONRAD. You're not well.

GABRIEL. Not well at all.

(silence)

CONRAD. Are you capable of seeing visitors tomorrow?

GABRIEL. Who is coming to pay homage?

CONRAD. Your sister.

GABRIEL. Her son?

CONRAD. Yes.

GABRIEL. My dear sister, Kassie. A tonic for the nerves. How I look forward to hearing her latest litany of physical and mental ailments. I do believe the only medical condition she has not suffered from is the harelip of the Hapsburgs. I'm sure she is working on it as we speak.

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