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SF PERUSALS

PORCELAIN

by Margaret Perry

SAMUEL FRENCH

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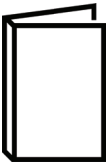
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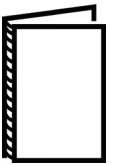
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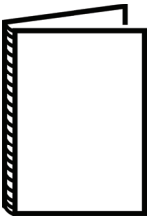
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To my parents, Mary and Ivan. Without your unwavering love and support I don't think I'd be here.

THANK YOUS

To Graham, Neil, Jen, Cathal, Paddy Jo and everyone at the Abbey – thank you from the bottom of my heart for believing in *Porcelain* and taking a chance on me. Special thanks to Jesse Weaver for his incredible dramaturgy and support throughout this process. A huge thank you to the many people who encouraged me and this play along its journey, particularly Deirdre O'Halloran at the Soho Theatre and Catriona Craig at Out of Joint, and to my brilliant friend Maud Dromgoole for our many fruitful conversations about the script. Finally, thank you to my amazing family and friends who've come from Cork, Sligo, London and further afield to see the show. I'm so lucky to have you all in my corner.

The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story by Angela Bourke was an invaluable resource in researching the lives of Bridget and Michael Cleary.

CHARACTERS

HAT – F, twenty-six, Irish
BILL – M, Hat's boyfriend, a Londoner
SARAH – F, Hat's cousin, Irish, a little younger than Hat
SILVERTONGUE – any gender, any age, a shapeshifter
BRIDGET – F, twenty-six, Irish
An imagining of Bridget Cleary
MICHAEL – M, Bridget's husband, Irish
An imagining of Michael Cleary
JOY – Hat and Bill's baby, represented by anything that can be cradled.

SETTING

London and Tipperary, 1895 and now. Part of the stage is a slick, modern space, devoid of personality and full of hard shiny surfaces. Another part is the suggestion of an Irish country kitchen at the turn of the twentieth century. These playing areas should not be rigidly bordered but layer over and bleed into one another. Likewise, Hat's and Bridget's scenes, and their physical worlds, should overlap wherever possible.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A character's name followed by a blank, eg. (**HAT**) indicates a non-verbal response.

1. Starbucks

London, 2017.

SARAH, *in a Starbucks, waiting.* **HAT** *enters, wearing a coat and wheeling baby* **JOY** *in a buggy. If* **HAT** *is cloud,* **SARAH** *is earth.*

SARAH Hi.

HAT Hello.

SARAH *(gesturing to a huge foamy creamy drink with an unintelligible name scrawled across it)* Got you a – this.

HAT *takes the drink and slurps it. Then gulps it. Her hands tremble.*

You didn't need to come out. I could have come to the house—

HAT Didn't want to do it in my house. Didn't want to do it somewhere I have to be again, ever in my life.

SARAH I was wondering why you picked here.

HAT *(viciously)* You'd have preferred somewhere trendier? Somewhere with more exposed wood and – beards?

SARAH No – I'm sorry – I didn't mean to –

Pause.

The coffee's shit, is all.

Pause.

HAT No. I'm sorry. Don't you be sorry. Don't be sorry are you stupid, you're saving me.

SARAH Do you think?

HAT I know you are.

SARAH Because I've been worrying—

HAT Don't worry.

SARAH I've just been thinking—

HAT Don't think about it.

SARAH Have you? Thought about it?

HAT Of course I have. Of course I have Sarah all I've done is think all day all night it's all I've been thinking about.

Pause.

SARAH You'll change your mind.

HAT I won't.

SARAH How do you know?

HAT I wouldn't do that to you.

Pause.

SARAH It's not as simple as this.

HAT It is.

SARAH There's a formal process, Hat, a lot of things to sign.

HAT Find out. You find out and show me where I.

Pause.

SARAH You'll always be welcome. You know that don't you. To come and...

Pause.

That goes without saying really. I think. I'm not sure but I think that should go without saying.

Pause.

What about Bill?

HAT He's been his usual. My walking safety net.

Pause.

SARAH And he thinks, this is the best thing.

HAT He just wants me to be happy.

SARAH Okay. Okay.

HAT It's not like you're a stranger.

Pause.

SARAH When we were kids – never thought what could happen did we. Never ever thought this/

HAT /You remember the Little Princess? Practising that bit where she finds her dad, over and over/

SARAH /running into your arms in the rain.

HAT Rubbing your snotty face all over me.

SARAH I was always crying wasn't I.

HAT I remember.

SARAH I liked it. The intensity of it.

Pause.

You hardly ever cried.

Pause.

HAT I'm sorry I've not been better at keeping in touch. I should have – when you –

Pause.

I should have called you.

SARAH You'd be surprised how few people actually I mean how many people just said nothing. Just acted like I'd never

been pregnant at all, I mean it's not like a real – death you know of a – a whole, person/

HAT /when you moved here, this city can feel so lonely and I should have/

SARAH /It was me too. I haven't really been – I mean I didn't know how to—

Pause.

We're not friends really. Why would we stay in touch? We got shoved together growing up because we're girls and we're the same age but we never really –

HAT Mum and Auntie Claire were determined we would be best friends.

SARAH You were so chatty. I felt like a shy lump whenever you came to visit.

Pause.

HAT I remember when we were kids you said that this was your dream. I remember I sneered at you in my mind. What a small ambition. Anyone can do that. But they can't. I. Know now that they can't.

Pause.

SARAH This is so strange. Just the strangest thing I have ever—

HAT *almost might vomit.*

HAT I need to go.

SARAH Okay.

HAT *just sits there.*

HAT I'm going to go.

SARAH Alright.

HAT *gets up. She does not look into the buggy.*

I'll call you.

HAT Don't.

SARAH I'll call you, check in on you/

HAT /Don't. Please, Sarah.

Pause.

SARAH You have my number.

HAT *tries to say something else, a parting word. She can't. She goes, leaving the buggy behind.* **SARAH** *puts her hand into the buggy, bends over the baby.*

Hello.

A kind of light in her eyes. Then she goes too, in a different direction, pushing the buggy.

2. Walking

Tipperary, 1895. **BRIDGET***'s wearing muddy wellies.*

MICHAEL Cá raibh tú? (*Where were you?*)

BRIDGET Amuigh ag siúl. (*Walking.*)

MICHAEL Cé leis? (*Who with?*)

BRIDGET M'anonar. (*Alone.*)

MICHAEL I'd have come with you.

Pause.

I'd have come, if you'd said.

Pause.

The back of your dress is wet.

BRIDGET I lay in the grass for a while.

3. Congratulations

Tipperary, 2016. **HAT***'s got a pint in front of her.* **SARAH***'s having an orange juice.*

HAT You changed your hair.

SARAH About a year ago.

HAT Oh.

Pause.

It's nice.

SARAH Thanks.

Pause.

So!

HAT So!

SARAH So I hear congratulations are in order!

HAT Yeah. I'm off tomorrow.

SARAH Mum said. London, no less! That's great news. All your hard work and studying finally paying off!

HAT Yeah, well/

SARAH /All those masters degrees.

HAT Just the one.

SARAH Are you sure? I thought you had more.

HAT No.

SARAH Just feels like you've been a student forever.

Pause.

Well sure look, it paid off!

HAT Well it's an admin job. So not exactly what I studied – but it's a start.

SARAH That's so great. I'm so pleased for you.

HAT Can't wait to get out of here.

Pause.

SARAH Kieran and I are buying a house here actually.

HAT Wow. Well this is a – lovely peaceful place to live.

SARAH I'm sure you'll make a splash in London.

They smile at each other for just a little bit too long.
SARAH *rather pointedly sips her orange juice.*

HAT Oh my God, I can't believe I haven't said yet – I heard your news as well, you look great!

SARAH I'm not showing as much as I had hoped.

HAT Is that bad?

SARAH It's stupid but I'd hoped to have that thing where strangers come up to me in the street and ask to feel my belly? You know? But people just think I'm chubby.

HAT No. You look great.

SARAH I don't really.

HAT You do.

SARAH Thanks. But I don't.

HAT You really do.

SARAH Thank you. You don't mean that.

Pause.

HAT How is Kieran?

SARAH Overjoyed.

HAT Good.

SARAH I really wanted him to join us but he's working some extra hours to save some cash for the baby.

HAT I hear babies usually want to head to Vegas and play the slots pretty much as soon as they're born. That's just what I've heard.

Pause.

SARAH It's more for safety stuff, like a really secure buggy and car seat.

HAT I know, I was just. Joking.

SARAH Oh! I forgot that you do that.

HAT Yeah.

SARAH It has been a while. Hasn't it.

HAT Yonks.

Pause.

SARAH So how's your love life?

HAT

SARAH What! I just want to know.

HAT I have a beautiful lover. He will wave his perfectly-ironed handkerchief out of the terminal window and shed a single tear as I board my one-way Ryanair flight.

SARAH Hat.

HAT What.

SARAH I don't know why I bother.

HAT There's nobody.

SARAH Oh.

HAT Sorry to disappoint.

Pause.

SARAH It is great, being single though! I used to make myself a mojito of an evening and just sit on my own for hours.

HAT Yeah?

SARAH It was amazing. The quiet.

HAT I can't tell if you're joking.

SARAH What do you mean?

HAT Never mind.

SARAH I love mojitos. Obviously I love Kieran more though.

HAT Obviously. A mojito can't pick out a car seat.

Pause.

SARAH You're bound to meet a handsome English man.

HAT I might. I might not.

SARAH You're bound to.

HAT I pray for it every night.

Pause.

Listen, you'll have to come visit. Kieran too, and the baby—

SARAH We will, of course, when she's big enough.

HAT She?

SARAH Having a girl. Didn't I tell you? We're having a girl.

HAT Sarah – oh that's amazing. Come here.

She embraces her. A genuine moment.

SARAH You can show her all the sights. Lift her up to look out over the bridges.

HAT I'd love that. You could even stay with me – I mean I don't know where I'll be living yet so it might be a dump but you'd be welcome.

SARAH You're just saying that.

HAT I mean it. Seriously.

SARAH Thank you.

They smile at one another, more warmly this time.

HAT Crazy to think this time tomorrow I'll be there. I get to walk past one of my favourite paintings in the whole world on my way to my office, I can't believe it. Do you want to see?

SARAH Sure.

HAT *takes out her phone and shows* **SARAH**, *the screen a square of light.* **SARAH** *politely looks at it.*

HAT I mean you can look at something on Google Images all you like but it's just a copy. Just *empty* compared to standing in front of the real thing, you know what I mean?

Pause.

SARAH What time's your flight?

4. Gold

Tipperary, 1895.

BRIDGET*'s working at the kitchen table. Her feet are bare, her muddy boots beside her. She's cutting fabric into panels to make a skirt. The fabric is grey. She's engrossed and enjoying the rhythm of cutting and giving shape to the material. After she's cut it up, she reaches underneath it and pulls out a small square of gold silk she's been hoarding. She holds it up to the light, and smiles a private smile.*

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