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SF PERUSALS

THE CAT'S MOTHER

by Erica Murray

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-11560-8

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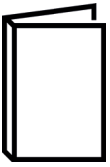
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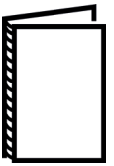
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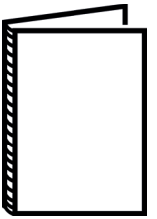
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Erica is originally from County Limerick, Ireland. She holds an MFA in Playwriting from The Lir Academy, Trinity College Dublin. She has been a member of the Soho Theatre Writer's Lab where she wrote *The Cat's Mother* which was then long-listed for the Verity Bargate Award 2017. She has been a member of the inaugural New Playwright's Programme at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast where she developed her play *All Mod Cons*. It was given a staged reading at The Lyric and has had a subsequent reading in New York as part of the Origin Irish Theatre Festival. Erica now lives in London.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Where a "–" appears in the dialogue it means this sentence has been cut off by the next character's line, which should run immediately after it.

The stage directions and commentary are there for you to get a sense of the tone of the play.

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The Cat's Mother, produced by Wildcard, previewed at The King's Head Theatre on the 16–17 July 2018. It premiered at Underbelly, Cowgate on 2 August 2018 as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with the following cast and creatives:

CIARA	Sarah Madden
SINEAD	Eimear O'Riordan
MARGE/GEMMA/DR. HILL/TINA/ JEANNINE/ROSIE	Kate Kennedy

Writer	Erica Murray
Director	Jackie Fisher
Producer	Joey Dawson
Set Design	Ciara Murnane
Sound Design	Cameron Macauley
Light Design	David Doyle
Costume Design	Hannah Hodge

The Cat's Mother ran for two nights at VAULT Festival on 7–8 February 2018 with the following cast:

CIARA	Doirrean May White
SINEAD	Philippa Carson
MARGE/GEMMA/DR. HILL/TINA/ JEANNINE/ROSIE	Kate Kennedy

WITH THANKS TO

Everyone at Samuel French, especially Steven and Charlie. Every friend who read or performed this script in some form or other; Philippa Carson, Doireann O'Byrne, India Mullen, Lauren Coe, Gillian Greer, Sarah Madden, Eimear O'Riordan, Barley Beal, Rachel Gleeson and the one and only Kate Kennedy. Thanks for all your creativity and enthusiasm. Big thank you to Jessi Stewart at Independent Talent for all her support. Thanks to Deirdre O'Halloran for her guidance during Soho Writer's Lab and Pencil Bandit for our brilliant image. To Jackie and Joey for making this play happen and all the designers who worked on the production. And a huge thanks to my parents for their consistent encouragement and support on every adventure.

For my Mom.

Thank you for being a constant source of inspiration...

CHARACTERS

CIARA – female, late twenties/early thirties, Irish
SINEAD – Ciara's younger sister, late twenties, Irish.
MARGE/GEMMA/DR. HILL/TINA/JEANNINE/ROSIE – all Londoners and they should be played by the same actress.

SETTING

The action primarily takes place in Ciara's tiny living room in her flat in Clapham, London.

The room should be small and cramped with an exit leading off to her kitchen, bedroom and hallway.

All other scenes are set in various places across London. These can be staged in the same setting or in a more abstract space but feel free to play with the set design to evoke the different spaces.

TIME

The time is present day and the action is chronological.

This script went to press during rehearsals and may differ from the text in performance.

Scene One

A small living room in **CIARA***'s flat in Clapham, London. It is a Friday evening.*

The two sisters are just after coming into the room. **SINEAD** *has a huge suitcase, maybe she is panting from carrying this up several flights of stairs. She is definitely sweating.*

There is a couch pushed to one side and a deflated airbed laid out in the middle of the room.

SINEAD So, this is it?

CIARA No, Sinead, I took you into a stranger's apartment.

SINEAD Just wondering because it's so...

CIARA What?

SINEAD It's very nice. The, the...things.

SINEAD *gestures vaguely around her.*

CIARA My home away from home!

SINEAD It's lovely. It's small?

CIARA It is. Lovely and small.

SINEAD I didn't imagine it like this at all.

CIARA *thinks of saying "What do you mean by that?" but instead says:*

CIARA So, you like it?

SINEAD I do. It's very you.

CIARA *is unsure if this is a good thing.*

CIARA Thank you... *(An awkward pause)* You can sit down, you know?

SINEAD I'm fine!

CIARA Okay. Em, if you need the toilet, or anything, it's in my room.

SINEAD It's fine, I'll hold it.

CIARA Is everything okay?

SINEAD Perfect!

CIARA You're kind of sweating, Sinead?

SINEAD I'm just acclimatizing. Very hot here.

CIARA I know, right? One of my favourite things about London; you actually get to wear your summer clothes!

CIARA *strains a laugh at her own semi-joke but* **SINEAD** *doesn't bother.*

So, I've got the airbed out! And you can put away your stuff, if you like, there's some hanging space in the cupboard in the hall, but I guess you're not really here for too long, maybe a bit pointless?

SINEAD Whatever you think.

CIARA Sorry, I haven't blown it up yet, the thingy was hiding from me.

CIARA *gestures towards the pump.*

I had just found it when you buzzed the door.

SINEAD No worries, I can do it later –

CIARA No, no, no, no, I'll do it now! You just relax.

CIARA *goes and starts blowing up the airbed while* **SINEAD** *stays standing looking extremely unrelaxed.*

SINEAD So. Em. I was going to –

CIARA You've brought a huge bag! Planning on moving in?!

SINEAD *does some nervous tittering.*

Seriously though, your flight is on Monday evening, right?

SINEAD Em, yeah, about that –

CIARA Because I have this Skype conference thing I can't get out of that evening so I won't be able to drop you to the airport, but otherwise, I definitely would.

SINEAD It's fine, we can figure it out closer to the time.

CIARA Yeah, of course, it's ages away. We've got the whole weekend ahead of us!

SINEAD Yeah, because the thing is –

CIARA I just wanted to get that out of the way in case I forgot, because you know me, I might forget!

SINEAD Yeah, no, Ciara, that's totally fine, I –

CIARA It's basically the same journey you just did, but backwards! I mean; it's exactly the same.

CIARA *does some nervous tick laughter now.*

SINEAD Yeah. Honestly. It's grand. Listen, I really need to –

CIARA Speaking of work! Before we get this weekend of "lols" started, do you mind if I send a teeny, tiny, quick email? Just want to finish something off so it's off my mind. Thirty seconds? Then I'm all yours, promise.

SINEAD *weighs this up and decides she can wait another thirty seconds.*

SINEAD Sure. Go ahead.

CIARA You're sure you're okay?

SINEAD Yeah! You?

CIARA Dreamy. Can't wait to catch up properly.

CIARA *disappears into her phone and starts mumbling the draft of her email.*

SINEAD *still doesn't sit down. She tries to count thirty seconds in her head but only gets to eight.*

SINEAD So, listen, I really think we need to talk about Mam.

CIARA Yes. I agree. We do need to talk about... *(She gets distracted by her email again)*

SINEAD That's actually why I came over.

CIARA Sinead, just one more second.

CIARA *quickly reads through her last sentence and clicks send.*

Yes! Done and done. Happy Friday to me! Okay, sorry, go on. What were you saying about Mum?

SINEAD Okay, so, em... So, you know she's gotten quite... I guess, I don't really know how to explain it without saying... I don't want to say "agressive" or "hard to handle" but...

CIARA Mmhm, mmhm.

SINEAD But, yeah, I do kind of mean that, I suppose.

CIARA Okay. That's okay.

SINEAD Because, because to be honest with you, she is hard to handle! And em, I know that's not a nice thing to say about your own mother, but it's realistic in situations like these. And I think at this stage, I need to start being more realistic so... I'm finding it pretty impossible to deal with her on my own.

CIARA *is kind of fake listening and responding by now.*

CIARA Mm, I can imagine.

SINEAD Yeah...can you?

CIARA Absolutely. It must be so hard.

SINEAD It really is, Ciara.

CIARA I don't envy you. I'm so happy to provide this weekend of respite, you deserve it!

SINEAD Right, em, yeah. So, I know the last time you saw her she was kind of calm and docile, some of the time at least, but since then –

CIARA She definitely seemed to pick up while I was there though, didn't she?

SINEAD What do you mean?

CIARA She just seemed kind of serene or something to me? Did she not?

SINEAD She definitely seemed to be having a good time, alright.

CIARA I'm glad. Must have been nice for you too, to see her like that?

SINEAD *grits her teeth.*

SINEAD It was. It was a great help having you there…last Christmas.

CIARA My pleasure.

SINEAD So, I've been trying to explain to you how she's become now, you know, I've been trying to show you on the phone –

CIARA Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that, look, I don't think it's really okay to send videos of her in that state.

SINEAD Eh, okay, why not?

CIARA Well, it's an ethical thing, isn't it? She can't consent to it, so…

SINEAD No, but… She doesn't know I'm doing it –

CIARA Exactly.

SINEAD And how else am I going to show you what's going on with her?

CIARA You could explain it?

SINEAD I don't think you really listen to me when I try and explain what –

CIARA I feel very uncomfortable with videos of her like that being out there.

SINEAD They're not "out there"! I'm not showing them to anyone else! I'm just sending it to you so you can see what's happening, you can see what she is like when –

CIARA Still, if anyone got a hold of it –

SINEAD What? What could someone possibly do with a video of a crazy old woman?

CIARA She's not crazy. She has Alzheimer's. And it's really un-PC to use general terms like that about such a serious condition. And I don't know, there are sick-minded people out there, especially these days, who could put it on the internet and –

SINEAD Do what?

CIARA And other people would watch it. And laugh at her. I don't think she would want that. It's going against her right to privacy.

SINEAD Ciara. I wipe her *(mouths it:)* vagina. Her privacy ended a long time ago.

CIARA Well, whatever you do, don't video that.

SINEAD I would never do that! And who do you think watches these videos anyway?

CIARA People who search for disturbing things on the internet, I don't know. There's a market for everything these days, trust me.

SINEAD So, you've watched them then?

CIARA Yes. But I've deleted them off my phone, obviously.

SINEAD And what did you think? When you watched them?

CIARA Well, you're not going to win a BAFTA anytime soon...

SINEAD Ciara, seriously.

CIARA Sorry. Em, yes. They were uncomfortable to watch.

SINEAD She's like that all the time now.

CIARA *looks uncomfortable.*

CIARA Do you want a cup of tea?

SINEAD I don't think we've time.

CIARA What do you mean?

SINEAD I mean... I brought Mam with me.

CIARA You what?

SINEAD She's here.

CIARA You're joking, right?

SINEAD I'm not. I swear.

CIARA She's, she's here?

SINEAD Yeah!

CIARA You're taking the piss?

SINEAD I'M NOT.

CIARA She's *here*?

SINEAD Yes!

CIARA *(looks at suitcase)* Oh Jesus, Sinead... Don't tell me she's –

SINEAD No! For God's sake what's wrong with you?

CIARA Well, where is she then?

SINEAD She's downstairs.

CIARA Our mother is downstairs?!

SINEAD Yes.

CIARA WHAT THE HELL? What's going on?!

SINEAD I'm sorry, I just, I didn't know what to do! You weren't listening to me when I rang you or else you weren't picking up or were too busy to really chat about it –

CIARA Sinead. This was a very bad, bad idea.

SINEAD Who the hell did you think she with this weekend anyway?

CIARA I don't know? I presumed you sorted that out!

SINEAD Exactly! My point proven. You have no idea what's going on with her, no involvement, you leave everything to me, you always, always have –

CIARA Hang on, hang on, hang on; our mother is waiting downstairs?

SINEAD Yes.

CIARA You left an old, senile woman on the street in London?

SINEAD No... I left her in Pret-The-Manager.

CIARA YOU LEFT HER IN PRET?

SINEAD Yes! I asked one of the workers there to keep an eye on her while I told you. I got her a tea, she's fine. I didn't want you to get too much of a fright.

CIARA Pret is full of weirdos and creeps!

SINEAD It seemed really nice?

CIARA No, no, it's not. It's not good enough for her, it's average. She'll hate it.

SINEAD Ciara, she has no idea where she is, it could be the Ritz for all she knows.

CIARA The Ritz? Where are we, New York in the 1920s? No one actually goes to the Ritz! Why didn't you let me collect you from the airport, I could have brought her straight here?

SINEAD Because I didn't want you to book us a flight right back.

CIARA Give me some credit.

SINEAD Let's just go get her. You're making me feel nervous now.

CIARA Wait, my mother's coming to my flat? I would have tidied more if I had known!

SINEAD First of all, thanks so much. Second of all, did I mention she has no idea where she is?

CIARA Where's she going to sleep?

SINEAD Your room?

CIARA That's where I sleep! What am I supposed to do?

They both look at the forlorn air mattress.

SINEAD At least it's a double?

CIARA Come on, let's go get her. If she hasn't been kidnapped already.

SINEAD Oh, before we do, there's just one more thing I need to tell you. Please don't kill me, but –

CIARA Sinead. If you're pregnant, I'm not raising the baby.

SINEAD Eh, I'm not, but note taken –

CIARA What is it, then?!

SINEAD I also brought the cat.

Scene Two

A few minutes later.

The counter at Pret A Manger.

CIARA *is ordering from* **MARGE**, *who works there.* **CIARA** *is clearly very flustered.*

CIARA Eh, can I have two large, very large, lattes please, one with soya milk and…a tea?

MARGE English Breakfast?

CIARA Do you have Irish? Irish Breakfast?

MARGE I doubt it.

CIARA No, okay, yes, English Breakfast should be fine. And a muffin. Actually, three muffins. I'll have three gluten-free muffins, two lattes and a tea. That'll do for dinner, right?!

CIARA *does some anxious/polite laughing.*

MARGE Is that everything?

CIARA Unless you have anything stronger than coffee?

MARGE You mean Over or Under the counter?

CIARA Oh, I meant Over, but…?

MARGE Are you alright, Madame?

CIARA Yes? Why?

MARGE My manager doesn't like me to serve caffeine to people who seem…over the limit.

CIARA Excuse me?

MARGE Can I ask how many caffeinated beverages you've had today?

CIARA Eh… I don't know, maybe four?

MARGE Four. Unfortunately, that's our limit. I think you've had enough for one day, don't you?

CIARA What? There's no such thing as "our limit".

MARGE There is now.

CIARA Okay, well, they're not for me, they're for my friends over there.

CIARA *gestures to where* **SINEAD** *and her mother would be sitting.*

MARGE That's what they all say... I'm going to have to wait for my manager.

CIARA Yes, I'd like to speak to them, where are they?

MARGE He's on a cry break.

CIARA A what?

MARGE He's a very sensitive man.

CIARA I see?

MARGE Gets upset at the tiniest thing. All I did was say he needed to lose a few stone –

CIARA Hang on, what's your name?

MARGE Margorie.

CIARA Margorie. I see you here every morning, don't I?

MARGE Five-day contract, so yeah.

CIARA Look I don't want to cause any trouble here but I know I have my rights to buy whatever beverages and snacks I want.

MARGE Actually, I think I have the right to refuse –

CIARA See that woman over there?

MARGE The one with the cat cage? She keeps staring at me. It's freaking me out.

CIARA Well, I'm sorry, but she's my mother. And she's not very well. And now she's staying with me. Uninvited. And, not

that that's a problem as such, it's just... I'm unprepared, okay? I haven't done any food shopping and my flat is a tip. I also haven't seen her in six months so you can imagine how guilty I feel; I'm her daughter and I'm supposed to be looking after her, she's my responsibility now.

MARGE I haven't seen my mother in over a year. And I'm her daughter.

CIARA Well, I'm sorry to hear that. But Margorie, if you could please, please, just give me what I ordered, you'd be doing me a massive favour.

MARGE Yeah, alright. Looks like Mike isn't coming back anytime soon anyway.

CIARA Thank you. And maybe you should call your Mum?

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