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The Gap Year

by Clare McMahon

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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The Gap Year was developed through Fishamble: The New Play Company's *A Play for Ireland* in association with the Lyric Theatre. *The Gap Year* was first produced at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast in association with Commedia of Errors on the 3rd of September 2022. The cast was as follows:

KATE MULGREW Carol Moore
OONAGH MADDEN Marion O'Dwyer
ROISIN MCANESPIE Libby Smyth
FR DONNELLY / PAT / PAUL / EDDIE Frankie McCafferty
KIERAN / CAMPERVAN MAN / FIONNTAN / ETHAN Keith Singleton
CAOIMHE / JOSIE / SISTER THOMASINA / ALISON / TOURIST / CATHERINE Meghan Tyler

Special appearance from Matthew Cavan

THE COMPANY

WRITER	CLARE MCMAHON
DIRECTOR	BENJAMIN GOULD
SET DESIGNER	STUART MARSHALL
LIGHTING DESIGNER	JAMES MCFETRIDGE
COSTUME DESIGNER	ENDA KENNY
SOUND DESIGNER	GARTH MCCONAGHIE
DRAMATURG	REBECCA MAIRS
CASTING DIRECTOR	CLARE GAULT CDG
CHOREOGRAPHER	FLEUR MELLOR
VOCAL COACH	BRENDAN GUNN
VIDEOGRAPHER	WILL McCONNELL

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	JIMMY FAY
SENIOR PRODUCER	MORAG KEATING
HEAD OF PRODUCTION	ADRIAN MULLAN
PRODUCTION MANAGER	SIOBHÁN BARBOUR
SCENIC CONSTRUCTION MANAGER	COURTENAY DRAKOS
SCENIC CONSTRUCTION ASSISTANT	JACK McGARRIGLE
COMPANY STAGE MANAGER	AIMEE YATES
STAGE MANAGERS	STEPHEN DIX, LOUISE GRAHAM
DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER	KERRI MCGIMPSEY
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	JUDE BARRISCALE
COSTUME SUPERVISOR	GILLIAN LENNOX
MAKE-UP ARTIST/HAIR	CAROLINE REYNOLDS
DRESSER	NIAMH MOCKFORD
SENIOR PRODUCTION TECHNICIAN	IAN VENNARD
TECHNICIANS	LIAM HINCHCLIFFE, DECLAN PAXTON, CORENTIN WEST
CHIEF LX	JONATHAN DALEY
STAGE TECHNICIAN/FLYMAN TECHNICIAN	PATRICK FREEMAN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 2017 I sent an email: Benjamin and I's company Commedia of Errors would like to bring my first play *Shakespeare's Women* to the Naughton Studio, at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast. And when we met with the Lyric, we could not have dreamed that would be the start of this creative relationship with the theatre we both grew up visiting. I feel truly humbled that five short years later *The Gap Year* will be my main stage debut, and not only that but that I get to take this step with my creative collaborator and supporter Benjamin Gould.

The Gap Year was first developed with Fishamble theatre company in partnership with the Lyric in 2018. They wanted a play for Ireland. A weighty want but a challenge that I grabbed with both hands. What could I share that would speak to those from all walks of life on this island? It was an idea about new beginnings, that it was never too late to start again and the power of female friendship. In 2019 I submitted the play for the New Playwrights Programme at the Lyric and continued to develop and explore the script. I remember sitting with the incomparable Rebecca Mairs in the café bar saying, "I just don't know what this play is. I can't be an expert on every county in Ireland." And she kindly told me to wise up, I wasn't writing a guidebook for the tourist board – although if they want to get in touch I do know a fair amount these days. Rebecca asked me what I really wanted to say, and that simple question unlocked it. Most of us have been lucky enough to grow up with a mummy, or a granny or an aunt, who took on the weight of the world to get us through this life. *The Gap Year* is about them getting their turn. It's about hope and heart and new beginnings.

In January 2020 Benjamin and I were invited to take the play to New York for Origin Theatre's 1st Irish Festival. It had a rehearsed reading in the American Irish Historical Society as part of the festival's 'Vital Voices' programme, and hearing the response of the American audience only solidified our belief that it was a play for everyone.

Once the pandemic hit I worried it would sit in the drawer until life returned to some sense of normality. But again the Lyric stepped up, they produced multiple audio plays as part of their Listen at the Lyric programme, and *The Gap Year* was chosen. The feedback from that recording was truly uplifting. As we all lived through fear and tragedy, audiences wanted stories about hope and humanity. They needed heart, and fun and fearlessness; *The Gap Year* could give them that.

It was then Benjamin started discussions with Jimmy Fay and the Lyric about making the play in association with Commedia of Errors. He has been an advocate for this story, and my voice, from the start. His dedication alongside the Lyric's commitment has lead us all to this moment. It takes great faith to put on an ambitious play like this,

a new writer, coming out of the pandemic, a largish cast, Jimmy and the Lyric's belief in us has been life changing. I think together we've made something quite special, and I'm hugely grateful to the amazing cast, creatives, production, and entire staff at the Lyric for making this happen. We may be a small corner of the world but we always punch above our weight.

Finally, I am so proud that this play puts the focus on women over the age of sixty – we all know they long deserve their stories to be told. I can't wait to share it with them. I hope they enjoy seeing themselves in the spotlight for once, as Kate, Oonagh and Roisin go on an adventure of a lifetime.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The Gap Year is a timely and exciting new play and a gift for a director. It's full of comedy, heart and warmth – offering actors and directors the chance to explore some truly difficult topics, and universal truths, through a lens of light entertainment. Clare's work rattles at high pace and yet still gives each moment its time in the spotlight. A little like working with Shakespeare, her writing has been finely crafted to give the wily director, or actor, all the clues they need to understand how it should be played. Each punctuation mark, each pause has been carefully thought through. If you can't quite land it right, try something else and once it starts to flow and pop you know you're onto a winner! Don't get me wrong, the process hasn't been without its challenges – it's a big play and there's a lot to do. Spanning across the whole of Ireland and conveying the sense of time and distance travelled are no mean feats, nor is the sheer variety of settings, characters and moments. What we've tried to offer is just a little taste, or a series of 'polaroid snapshots', of a year's worth of moments, feelings and memories to spark audiences' imaginations and allow anyone who watches to piece together the rest for themselves.

It's been a joy to work on this play and to engage with all of the groups and people that have fed into making our production. I'd like to thank them all, as well as The Lyric Theatre and of course Clare for letting me direct it. *The Gap Year* doesn't just offer audiences the chance for discussion, and it's not just the characters whose experiences have fed into rehearsals. Working with our team on this production has changed all of our perspectives at least a little. Shared experience and the discussions it inspires are truly the greatest gifts that theatre can give. *The Gap Year* has certainly been an experience for me and I hope it is for you too. See it, read it, share it, but most of all enjoy it.

THANKS

A lone writer is never alone.

With heartfelt thanks to Fishamble: New Play Company for first selecting this idea with the Lyric Theatre, Belfast for their *A Play for Ireland* programme, 2018. Sincere thanks to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for its continued support, especially through the Support for Individual Artist award, the New Playwrights Programme 2019 and 1st Irish Festival, New York 2020. Huge thanks to Rebecca Mairs for continually believing in me and these women's stories, to Jimmy Fay for his endless hard-work, and the whole Lyric Theatre team for making it happen. Thank you to Paula McFetridge for her continued support. Thank you to George Heslin and Origin Theatre Company. Thanks to all the wonderful actors who contributed to the research and development stages including: Seamus O'Hara, James Doran, Laura Hughes, Carol Moore, Libby Smith, Julia Dearden, Maria Quinn, Cathan McRoberts, Terry Donnelly, Polly McKie, Bernadette Quigley, David O'Hara, Paul O'Brien, Jack McLaughlin, Grainne Duddy and Tim Palmer. Thank you to Siobhan Kelly & Rosie McClelland who read a very early idea aloud even though it had no end.

Thank you to all those I spoke to during my research of Ireland, especially Julie Kinsella, Grainne (who's surname I didn't catch), Eileen Kilkenny, Paddy & Breda Clarke, Aileen Hennessey, Maura Leavy, Dymrna and Philip Cribbin, Briege and Eleanor at Ashford, Lawrence & Kate McMahon and everyone I met along the road.

Thank you to the Stroke Association and their members for their time and thoughts, thanks to Ruth McCarthy at Outburst, thanks to Abbeyfield & Wesley, Radius Housing and all those I have worked with who manage their Alzheimer's with fight and grace. Thank you to Matthew Cavan, Marcus Hunter-Neill, The Vault and Eastside Arts.

Sincere thanks also go to the Lir Academy, Trinity College especially Graham Whybrow, Loughlin Deegan and the family of Patricia Leggett to whom I will always be grateful. Thanks to the board at Commedia of Errors, especially outgoing member Sally Visick, for her support and belief over the years.

Heartfelt gratitude as always to my wonderful in-laws June and David, life-long supporters of the arts. Thanks to my brother Aidan, partner Danielle and to my extended family and friends who always support and champion me.

I am eternally grateful to my ever-supportive parents Owen and Cecilia, who have always encouraged me to dream big and not take no for an answer. Through the many, many junctures of this career I chose, they

have had unceasing faith in me. And that belief made me believe. Thank you.

Finally, thank you to my unceasing supporter, friend and inspiration, Benjamin. You inspire me each and every day and your belief in me and my plays have been life-changing. I will always be grateful to have met you in the stage left wing of the NTL studio theatre, 1999. You handed me my prop baton as I readied to chase Fagan's gang, and sometimes I got distracted talking to you, but you always made sure I didn't miss my cue. Even then you were a director. Thank you.

CHARACTERS

KATE MULGREW – 63
OONAGH MADDEN – 61
ROISIN MCANESPIE – 62
FR DONNELLY – 50s, local priest
KIERAN – 30s, camp activities manager
CAOIMHE – young mother
PAT – 50s, recovering from a stroke
JOSIE – nurse, Pat's daughter
CAMPERVAN MAN – late 20s
SISTER THOMASINA – young nun
FIONNTAN – 30s, hitch-hiker
EDDIE – 60s, Oonagh's ex
ALISON – 24, drunk partier
PAUL – 60s, Roisin's husband
ETHAN – 20s, Drag artist
TOURIST – 30s
CATHERINE – 30, Kate's daughter
TANGO-DANCER

SETTING

Ireland

TIME

Present day

NOTES ON TEXT

These roles can be played by three female actors (60s), two male actors (50s, 30s) & one female actor (20s/30s).

Punctuation denotes delivery and does not conform to the rules of grammar.

/ an interruption

... a trailing off

SUGGESTED SONG LIST

The following songs were used in the original production. Please see note on piii for clearance rights or footnotes on guidance.

- #1 “Que Sera Sera” – Doris Day and Frank De Vol
- #2 “Downtown” – Petula Clark
- #3 “Dancing Queen” – Abba
- #4 “If You Leave Me Now – Chicago
- #5 “Holding Out For A Hero – Bonnie Tyler
- #6 “No More Tears (Enough Is Enough) – Donna Summer and Barbara Streisand

*This play is dedicated to the memory of Kate McManus,
Roisin McMahon and Monica Donnelly.
Three women who would've loved a wee trip.*

PROLOGUE

(June, County Antrim.)

(Darkness. A single, flickering, red light towards the back of the stage. The smell of old wood, damp coats and dust. The lights slowly rise, an earthy yellow and burnt orange. Centre an old wooden bench, on it a small congregation, heads bowed.)

(Quiet humming of the hymn “Be Not Afraid”.)

FR DONNELLY. Joseph Mulgrew was a much-loved husband, father, grandfather, friend and colleague.

(The humming gets louder, the congregation start singing as they stand.)

*(They face the audience, sombre. **KATE** steps forward.)*

KATE. May his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace/

ALL. Amen.

(The lights blackout and there is a cacophony of sounds; traffic, birdsong, a dog barking, a supermarket announcement, the sound of a hoover and Radio 4’s Women’s Hour.)*

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(The lights rise. We are in a dainty, floral living room. Everything matches. A vase of rhododendron sits on the coffee table.)

(OONAGH is on the settee. Her ankles crossed as she plays with her wedding band. KATE enters carrying a tray of tea and biscuits.)

OONAGH. Apparently he did it last weekend.

KATE. Milk?

OONAGH. Just a dash. At the top of the hill.

KATE. Sugar?

OONAGH. One please. He brought a picnic, the whole caboodle, blanket, Prosecco, sandwiches, and inside one of the Tupperwares/

KATE. Biscuit?

OONAGH. Please. Not the chocolate one, I'm trying to be good. Inside one of the Tupperwares was an old Polly Pocket. Do you remember those? Those tiny plastic toys. Am sure your girls had them?

KATE. Oh hundreds of them, and they still fought over who got the pet shop one.

OONAGH. So he gave her an old Polly Pocket of a wedding day – how imaginative – and when she opened it up, there was the ring... I was lucky if I got a packet of Rolos from the garage... so she said yes and that's it. He's marrying the florist. And I'm going to be a divorcee at sixty-one.

KATE. I'm sorry, Oonagh.

OONAGH. Anthony is going to be his best man. Couldn't make it for my 60th birthday party but is flying back to give his Dad away at the bloody altar.

KATE. They're having it in a church?

OONAGH. The Church of Ireland are happy to marry them. Did I not tell you? That's the florist's club... but, here, how are you feeling this week?

KATE. Fine.

OONAGH. Did the girls bring you out?

KATE. We went to the new garden centre. Barry got a wee tomato plant, says he's going to grow it. No doubt Catherine will secretly water it when he gets fed up.

OONAGH. She'll have to sellotape a few tomatoes onto it if it doesn't work out.

KATE. Exactly.

OONAGH. Is he still getting upset?

KATE. Every time he comes over. Can barely get him through the door. They're talking about a grief counsellor. It's that funny age you know? He remembers Joe. Would be easier if he didn't... easier for us all really.

(Beat.)

OONAGH. You don't mean that, Kate.

KATE. ... No. I don't.

OONAGH. Did Father Donnelly call?

KATE. Sat here all evening. A full dinner and nearly a whole pack of biscuits.

OONAGH. That's nice he called.

KATE. Oh yes, exactly what I needed. To entertain the priest.

OONAGH. He's only being thoughtful.

KATE. I could do without it.

OONAGH. Ah it must be lonely for him. I think he's a nice man. And him and Joe got on well.

KATE. I suppose.

(Beat.)

OONAGH. Those flowers are lovely.

KATE. Rhododendrons. Joe's favourite.

OONAGH. Of course... the summer's here at last.

KATE. Will you go away with your sister, or ones from the shop?

OONAGH. Sure me and her fight the bit out. And those ones all have their own families... (*She sips.*) I was thinking, maybe, we could go somewhere?

KATE. You and me?!

OONAGH. Don't sound so appalled.

KATE. I'm not, I'm just... I don't think so.

OONAGH. Would you not fancy a wee break somewhere? We could go to a spa, or Spain maybe, or even Florida?! I haven't been anywhere since Lanzarote and that was before I got the suite re-covered.

KATE. I couldn't.

OONAGH. Why not?

KATE. I can't leave the girls. It's not even a month since Joe...

OONAGH. The girls have their families, they have work, friends. Meanwhile you're sitting here waiting on the one time a week they bring you to the bloody garden centre!

KATE. What would it look like, me just heading off on holiday after Joe/

OONAGH. Well, what else have you planned? You just going to stew here until it's respectable for you to start living again?!

KATE. Oonagh, now I appreciate what you're doing but/

OONAGH. If you don't want to sit here and entertain the priest then come on, a week off?! A week, Kate. What's a week? Anywhere you like.

KATE. Would be nice to get out of the house.

OONAGH. Course it would! I'm sick of this place. I can't walk down the street but for someone asking me about Eddie and his flipping wedding. I'm fed up of it. A florist called Flora, it's bloody ridiculous.

KATE. Where would we go?

OONAGH. It's June, we can go anywhere we like in June. The schools aren't off yet.

KATE. Nowhere foreign. I couldn't face getting on a plane.

OONAGH. I've heard there's a lovely hotel in Fermanagh, lakes and walks and a good restaurant.

KATE. That might be nice. A bit of luxury.

OONAGH. We'll have ourselves a pamper.

KATE. We could ask Roisin?

OONAGH. We'd have to prise her away from those boys, but it'd do her good.

KATE. It would.

OONAGH. That's a yes then?

KATE. ... Yes. OK. Just a few days, now. A spa or a hotel or something. The three of us. Why not.

(The lights change, a school bell rings, ROISIN stands 'holding' the hands of two boys.)

ROISIN. Hello Matthew, hello Luke. How was school today? No, we're not going to the shop. Oh, don't pull so hard love, Granny's arm will be break off. You played football, did you? No I don't think Granda could manage football, not with his bad knee. Well golf isn't really that like football. Football is for the young to

play. He's the same age as me. You don't think I'm old? That's very kind of you... no, that doesn't mean we can go to the shop.

(Lights change and we hear birdsong and distant roadworks.)

OONAGH. *(On the phone.)* Yes, a family room for three. It's for my friend, newly-widowed, a wee treat. Does that include breakfast?

(Lights change and we hear piano music and the ten o'clock news.)*

KATE. *(On the phone.)* No, I'm fine Catherine, it's just Oonagh. She wants to get away for a little break, and I said I'd go with her. It's hard on her, all this with Eddie. Yes, and Roisin. It'll be good for them both.

(Lights change and we hear children's TV and kids playing.)*

ROISIN. *(On the phone.)* They've asked me to go with them and I've said yes. I'm afraid you're just going to have to think of something, Nuala. Maybe your Dad or / well, I'm sorry. I am sorry but it's not for me it's for Kate and Oonagh. They need cheering up and I think I should go with them. I know I haven't seen them for a while, I was too busy minding the boys. I know you're grateful, love... I don't have to ask your father's permission to go away with my friends! Right, well, I'll see you when I get back. Yes, I've your washing here. Love you.

(Lights change and the three women come together centre stage, the sounds build to a cacophony around them.)

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ACT ONE

Summer Scene One

(Donegal, late afternoon.)

(Three smallish tents, one green, one purple, one pink, are pitched on the stage. ROISIN sits in front of the centre tent, on a purple camp chair. She is peeling potatoes into a small purple basin. KATE stands facing out, in deep reverie. Both are dressed in full camper gear. ROISIN sings the first four lines of a '60s song.)*

KATE. Those clouds are moving in.

(ROISIN sings the chorus.)

KATE. Told you that'd be the case.

KATE. Rosh?

ROISIN. ... Hmm?

KATE. Clouds are coming, I'm telling you.

ROISIN. Donegal's green for a reason.

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KATE. We should've got the campervan.

ROISIN. We took a vote and tents are more authentic.

KATE. They'll not be so authentic when they're washed into the bloody bog.

ROISIN. We agreed it would be a good experience.

KATE. They'll be digging us out of the turf in two hundred-years. Trying to figure out why three women in their sixties were camping in Donegal.

ROISIN. It'll make a great story for our clog.

KATE. What?

ROISIN. We're going to clog our experiences. Sixty and touring Ireland.

KATE. It's not clog.

ROISIN. It is. You chat and then log it. It's clog.

KATE. It's blog, or vlog, not bloody clog. A clog is a shoe from Amsterdam, nothing to do with the internet, even I know that.

ROISIN. Regardless of what you call it, we are doing Donegal in a tent. That was the agreement.

(Pause.)

KATE. Where is Miss Adventure?

ROISIN. She's away to see the activities manager to find out what's on tonight.

KATE. God help us.

ROISIN. If it's a quiz you need to stop her from drinking vodka, I still haven't got over losing to the over-eighties at the parish fundraiser.

KATE. I might have a quiet night tonight. Make sure the tent survives those clouds.

ROISIN. Kate!

(Enter OONAGH and KIERAN.)

OONAGH. Ladies, look who I finally got my hands on.
This is Kieran.

KIERAN. Hello. I hope you're settling into your spot OK?

ROISIN. It's lovely Kieran, the view is wonderful.

KATE. Do you know the forecast for tonight?

KIERAN. Do you know, I don't.

OONAGH. Guess what ladies? There is an informal music session in the rec room at nine.

KATE. Oh Lord above.

KIERAN. Oonagh tells me we've a wonderful singer in our midst?

ROISIN. Well, I was, in my day, and Kate here can play the piano.

KIERAN. Ah will you come down to the rec room and have a go? We have an old piano there.

KATE. No, thank you. There'll be young ones, far more capable.

OONAGH. Now that is totally against the ethos of this place. Isn't it, Kieran?

KIERAN. I'm not sure/

OONAGH. Are you seriously going to sit there and say you're too old to sing? On your holiday?

KATE. Don't be getting excited Oonagh/

OONAGH. It's only a bit of singing. Why does everything have to be such a big deal?

KATE. You're being melodramatic now.

OONAGH. In Derry, you refused to do anything except look at that bloody wall/

ROISIN. Oonagh/

KATE. I like a bit of culture, it's not all about making a fool of ourselves/

KIERAN. I think I'll go on/

ROISIN. No/

OONAGH. Don't you leave just because Miss Prim here is being a party-poopers.

KATE. We can't party every night, Oonagh, we are not in our twenties! That ship has sailed.

OONAGH. I am well aware of how many ships have sailed, Kate Mulgrew. I have a long record of how many bloody ships have sailed out of my harbour. I thought that was the reason we were here? To embark on a few new ships!

KATE. Will you please just give it a rest/

OONAGH. Fine. You stay here and watch the drips roll down your tent. Roisin and I will be engaging with civilization in the rec room.

ROISIN. I'm not sure if/

OONAGH. Let's take the scenic route. There's a few sheep I haven't said hello to yet.

(ROISIN looks at KATE, smiles anxiously and exits with OONAGH. KIERAN stands awkwardly.)

KATE. Well. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry, Conal.

KIERAN. It's Kieran, but no worries/

KATE. Sorry. Kieran.

KIERAN. Conal's a nicer name, actually. I wouldn't mind it.

(Beat.)

KATE. Would you like a cup of tea?

KIERAN. Ah/

KATE. If you've time?

KIERAN. Sure. That'd be lovely.

*(KIERAN sits on OONAGH's pink chair as
KATE readies the stove.)*

Have you been travelling a while then?

KATE. A fortnight.

KIERAN. Ah right, and have you been getting on well?
(KATE looks at him.) I mean, what have you all seen?

KATE. We've done all of the North now. The cathedrals of Armagh, big houses in Down, castles in Antrim, walls in stroke-city, lakes of Fermanagh and then we gave up on the culture and got tipsy in Tyrone.

KIERAN. That's brilliant. When do you go home?

KATE. We're giving it a year.

KIERAN. Sorry?

KATE. We're doing a year. Around Ireland.

KIERAN. The whole of Ireland?

KATE. Yes. You know, one of those 'Gap Years' all you young ones are obsessed with?

KIERAN. A gap year? Around Ireland?

KATE. Yes, Kieran. Does that sound so surprising?

KIERAN. No, no. I just... well, fair play to you.

KATE. We're going to try and do every county. Oonagh's son's getting married next summer so we need to be back by then.

(KATE gives him the tea and sits beside him on her own green camping chair.)

KIERAN. I went travelling around Australia after my leaving cert. Was a great year.

KATE. Am sure.

KIERAN. I've never really done Ireland, though. Wouldn't even have thought. Are your families excited for you?

KATE. Not sure excited is the word.

KIERAN. I'd have loved it if my mum went off adventuring.

KATE. Roisin's daughters depend on her for childcare. They've had to rearrange things. Oonagh's not got too many commitments now she's retired from the shop, just her son and he's in Spain.

KIERAN. What did your kids say?

KATE. My girls reckon I'll be back home soon enough.

KIERAN. And will you?

KATE. No. I won't... does your mum live here in Donegal?

(Beat.)

KIERAN. I lost my mother. Last year.

KATE. I'm sorry.

KIERAN. 'Lost' is a funny way to describe it, isn't it? As if I had something to do with it. My first touch with grief. 'Cept for pets, you know? But it's just... always there.

KATE. Your first time's hard. When my sister died I was bereft... part of me can't believe I've outlived them all. I smoked until I had the girls, loved late night cheese and a large glass of red. My husband, non-drinker, keen gardener, took our grandson Barry and his dog for a walk every day after school. Then just like that he was gone.

KIERAN. We're all in the queue.

KATE. Sorry?

KIERAN. Some poet said it. "We're all in the queue." Lucky thing is we don't know who's next.

KATE. Jesus, Kieran.

KIERAN. Sorry! I'm being depressing... it's great you're doing this, having a new adventure with your friends. All I did was get a bit drunk and go back to work.

KATE. I could probably be nicer.

KIERAN. Your friend is a force to be reckoned with. She reminds me of my mum.

KATE. All of this is because of her. If you needed her to meet you at the Giant's Causeway in the morning, she'd be there. No questions asked. She's had a rough paper-round herself... suppose I should go have a look at that piano? If I am to redeem myself. I bet it's half out of tune.

KIERAN. What will you play?

(There is the sound of piano music, KATE moves centre, ROISIN and OONAGH join her. ROISIN begins to sing four verses of a '60s pop song.**)*

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Scene Two

(Sligo. Late July.)

(A doctor's waiting room.)

(KATE, OONAGH and ROISIN sit on a long metal bench. OONAGH fills in a form.)

KATE. Did the nurse say how long it'd be?

OONAGH. No, she just told me to fill this in and take a seat.

ROISIN. It's very quiet all the same. For a Friday, isn't it?

KATE. It's Thursday.

ROISIN. It is not?

KATE. It is. All day.

ROISIN. Jesus, I thought it was Friday. If I'd have known that I wouldn't have had fish for lunch.

OONAGH. I can't believe you still carry on with that.

ROISIN. It's the least I can do. He did die for our sins. Oh, did you hear who died?

KATE. How would we hear who died when we're in the middle of Sligo?

ROISIN. Nuala texted me.

OONAGH. She's talking to you again?

ROISIN. Well, she only puts one x at the end but that's an improvement from a full stop.

KATE. She's a selfish blight being annoyed at you.

ROISIN. I spoiled her. No point complaining about it now, it's forty years too late.

KATE. Why is it only you who gets the blame? What about Paul? You'd think he was her own personal taxi!

OONAGH. So who died?

ROISIN. What?

OONAGH. You said someone died, who was it?

ROISIN. Oh. Bertie McGill.

OONAGH. Not Bertie.

KATE. Oh dear.

ROISIN. Took ill quite quickly, into hospital on Sunday night, gone by Wednesday.

(There is a bleep.)

OONAGH. Oh, that's me.

(OONAGH exits.)

(Beat.)

ROISIN. Did you know she was still on the HRT?

KATE. No.

ROISIN. I'd have thought they'd have tried to weane her off it.

KATE. Especially with her family history.

ROISIN. I came off mine straight away.

KATE. I didn't take any.

ROISIN. You did without?

KATE. I did. It only lasted a few months and then nothing.

ROISIN. Lucky you. Mine was two years of hot flushes and cold sweats. Paul said he was going to move into the spare room if I kept kicking off the duvet.

KATE. What did you say?

ROISIN. Told him to go right ahead.

(A young woman enters, pushing a child in a buggy. She sits down beside them.)

(ROISIN smiles down at the buggy. The mother looks up.)

CAOIMHE. Don't bother smiling at him, he's a shite.

ROISIN. Ah, now. Am sure he has his moments.

CAOIMHE. Moments where he makes me question my feckin sanity! This is the third time we are here for him swallowing or shoving a toy somewhere. He's obsessed. Today it's a crayon. Swallowed it. Straight down. Time before that it was a lip balm cap. And the first time he shoved his daddy's cuff link – he'd left it at his bedside – up his bloody nose. We were three hours waiting in A&E on a Saturday night.

ROISIN. Three hours? That's not bad. In Belfast, my grandson waited six hours to check he hadn't broken his toe on the trampoline. Lucky he's only choosing small things, I suppose.

CAOIMHE. I've told him, that's it, *(To the child.)* the doctor is going to take him off his mammy and he'll have to go live with strangers, and how will he like that?! No amount of tidying does it, he keeps finding something!

ROISIN. Wonder what started him on it?

CAOIMHE. I don't know. But I'm mortified going in to see this nurse again. There's only so many times you can say, "my child is a shite", in a polite way. And Josie is lovely, but I do think she'll have to call the services on me this time. *(There is a bleep.)* Oh, that's us. Come on you.

(CAOIMHE exits. ROISIN smiles.)

KATE. Isn't it terrible using that language in front of your child?

ROISIN. Oh it's not the end of the world.

KATE. What sort of example does it set though? We never/

ROISIN. If you start saying "In my day" I'm going to buy you denture cream and a subscription to *Ireland's Own*. (Pause.) I miss the boys.

KATE. I wonder how Barry's tomato's getting on.

ROISIN. It feels a bit wrong to be missing a year of their lives. Doesn't it?

KATE. Are you having regrets? You said you wanted to do it/

ROISIN. I do. I do. But do you not feel guilty at the same time?

KATE. ... No. I don't.

ROISIN. Not at all?

KATE. I feel too sad to feel anything as easy as guilt.

(Enter **OONAGH**.)

OONAGH. Ladies! I've just met the most amazing Nurse, Josie, and she says we can stay the night with her!

Scene Three

(Later that day. JOSIE's living room.)

(KATE sits on the settee beside PAT. He is around fifty, smartly dressed, with a thoughtful stare. He is recovering from a stroke, experiencing mild Aphasia. He drinks tea with his left hand. KATE beside him, keeping a helpful eye. ROISIN is ironing.)

(Enter OONAGH.)

OONAGH. I've found some rice, and an old can of sweet and sour. If there's chicken I could do that? What do you think?

KATE. What time did Josie say she'd be home?

OONAGH. No idea. It was all so quick.

KATE. Pat, do you know what time your Josie's home?

(PAT stares at KATE. OONAGH comes towards PAT and kneels beside him, speaks slowly.)

OONAGH. Pat, is Josie home by six?

KATE. You don't need to speak to him like he's stupid.

OONAGH. I'm not! I'm just speaking slowly.

KATE. Any slower and you'd be back in Belfast.

(PAT looks towards OONAGH, then back to KATE, he smiles.)

OONAGH. Well, you try then.

ROISIN. What exactly did Josie say, Oonagh?

OONAGH. Just what I told you. That she would be working but we'd be welcome to stay here as long as we didn't mind keeping an eye on Pat.

Maybe we could call the doctors surgery, see if they'd tell us?

KATE. Pat, is your daughter home by six?

(**PAT** looks at **ROISIN** – he smiles.)

ROISIN. Jeepers Pat, don't you start giving me the glad eye. I've enough trouble with my own husband! I don't need another one.

PAT. (*Slowly.*) Home. Daughter.

KATE. Yes, when is she home?

OONAGH. Is it six?

PAT. (*Slowly.*) One.

(*Beat.*)

OONAGH. One?

KATE. No Pat, it's past one now, it's four o'clock.

OONAGH. Sure we'll just call them.

ROISIN. He'll have trouble with numbers. Hold up your fingers.

KATE. My what?

ROISIN. Your fingers. Look. Pat? What time is Josie home? Is it six? (*She holds up six fingers.*)

(*Beat.*)

PAT. (*Nods.*) Yes.

KATE. Ah, good man yourself! See Roisin, you've the magic touch. That gives us two hours to get the house nice and dinner made.

OONAGH. Will the kids be back before her?

KATE. Ask Pat, are your grandchildren home before six?

(**PAT** *smiles at KATE. He shakes his head.*)

OONAGH. I'll get dinner on then.

PAT. Yum. Yum. (*He giggles.*)

(**OONAGH** *exits.*)

KATE. Stroke or no stroke Patrick Barr you are the same as every other man. A trouble maker! And here's me doing my best nurse. Joe always said I had a terrible bedside manner.

ROISIN. I'd have thought you'd have made a good nurse?

KATE. Sure I haven't your patience. It was always Joe who was the carer. He'd bandage them up when they fell, take their temperature when they were sick. He even sat up with Catherine when she was still at Queens and had partied too hard. Twenty years old, lying on the bathroom floor, with her Daddy sitting on the bath beside her, comforting her. He just has the knack for it... had the knack for it.

ROISIN. My Paul wouldn't even know where we kept the Calpol.

KATE. Your Paul is a man's man.

ROISIN. He's a lazy get.

PAT. Lazy. Get. (**PAT** *giggles.*)

ROISIN. I'm watching you, Patrick. Your Josie warned us about you. Her Daddy the charmer. The stroke may have clipped your tongue, but it hasn't stopped your flirting!

KATE. I'll help Oonagh with the dinner.

ROISIN. No fighting, Kate.

KATE. It's never me who starts it/

ROISIN. Just no fighting in front of Pat. We're guests.