

CAITHLEEN 1

In your next group today—the one P.M. tour—in that group not a single person will have read this book.

CAITHLEEN. I beg your pardon.

ROBERT. Your next group will look like a cliché of a tour group: the noisy woman from Texas—the plodding Germans and photo-happy Japanese—the usual sandy-haired Australians who seem to travel the earth in search of some form of *tension*.

CAITHLEEN. How do you know who's in my next tour?

ROBERT. And finally, in that group, there will be a young man. He's twenty.

CAITHLEEN. You're traveling with him?

ROBERT. Yes—I suppose I am stuck with him.

CAITHLEEN. And his name?

ROBERT. Robbie. Robert. Same as mine. At first you'll think he's cute, or amusing, or harmless.

But he's not harmless.

And neither are you.

Start

*Beat.*

CAITHLEEN. It's my lunch hour. Excuse me.

*She starts off—*

ROBERT. They won't have the rolls you like.

*—but this stops her.*

At Finnerty's. You'll be too late. They'll be sold out of the rolls—like they sometimes are if you get there much past noon. You'll buy a packet of crisps instead. But you won't like them. You'll give them to Robbie. He'll eat anything. He'll offer to go with you—to get a roll somewhere else. But you'll say: "Oh, Robbie—nothin' compares with Finnerty's."

*She gives him a hard stare.*

CAITHLEEN. (*Sharp, with purpose.*) Okay—you tell me. Right now—

ROBERT. What?

CAITHLEEN. —you tell me to my face: How do you know these things about me? I bet my Da put you up to this!—

ROBERT. I don't know what you're talking about—

CAITHLEEN. (*Overlapping.*) —he as much as admitted to it—the other night—my Da—rolled home from the pub stinkin' of smoke

other night—my Da—rolled home from the pub stinkin' of smoke and the perfume of some Hatch Street whore. Said "*Don't tempt me, Caithleen—cause I'll do it! I'll drum up a way to scare you straight—so you won't end up like your lunatic mother.*" He had her committed, you know. They hauled her away to St. Brendan's. My Da—my Da did that to her!—but I bet you know that—I bet he told you things about me—things to make me scared—make me feel like I'm going mad like my Ma did—

ROBERT. If you'd let me explain—

CAITHLEEN. (*Overlapping.*) —that's how it started with her, you know: Time stopped behavin' like it should. Things in the past or future refused to stay where they belonged. People started showin' up in her days and they'd be the *wrong age*.

An' no matter how much I told her "It's a dream Mama, it's an odd stray thought of a thing"—no, she wouldn't be put off the idea—not at all—till she was so scared—scared of people showing up *with no regard to the time it was in their lives*. An' she kept seein' *a boy with wild black hair*—an' she kept sayin' "*I know what that boy's gonna do one day!*"—oh, she'd pray an' she'd moan an' that's when my Da would come in an' put an end to things with a hard open hand.

*Pause.*

I don't want to be her. End up like her.  
Do I?

*He stares at her.*

Do you know? If I end up like her?

ROBERT. No.

CAITHLEEN. No, I don't?

ROBERT. No, I don't know.

*Robert offers Caithleen a handkerchief from his pocket.*

*She looks at him—takes the handkerchief—wipes her eyes.*

I was here. Years ago. I took this tour.

CAITHLEEN. How many years?

ROBERT. Thirty-five.

CAITHLEEN. Wow. You're old.

ROBERT. (*A smile.*) Yes.

CAITHLEEN. I wasn't here. I wasn't born, you know.

*He says nothing.*

There was a girl. She was like me. I remind you of her. Is that what you're saying?

ROBERT. Yes. I guess that's what I'm saying. She was like you.

CAITHLEEN. I doubt that.

ROBERT. Why?

CAITHLEEN. Thirty-five years?! Boys here don't remember me for more than an hour.

ROBERT. Oh, that's not true—

CAITHLEEN. Take one look—turn their heads—and poof: I'm gone. It's all right. I'm "cool" with it. But oh my, what must she have been like...*this thirty-five-year girl?*

*Pause. He is staring at her.*

Stop please.

ROBERT. What?

CAITHLEEN. You're starin'. Felt sorta good at first but now—

ROBERT. Oh, yes, of course.

CAITHLEEN. —now I feel like a framed picture or an animal in the zoo.

ROBERT. Sorry.

*She gives the handkerchief back to him.*

CAITHLEEN. So you took this tour, years ago. And now you teach this book. And all these years later—you've come back to...what?

ROBERT. You'll laugh.

CAITHLEEN. Hope so. I like to laugh.

ROBERT. No—

CAITHLEEN. Used to laugh a lot more.

ROBERT. —you'll think I'm mad.

CAITHLEEN. Better you than me.

(*Leans in.*) Why are you here, Robert? **STOP**