

ROBERT 1

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.

Start *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?

Robert looks at her.

ROBERT. Well, the truth is—

He stops, and turns to the audience, as—

Caithleen is frozen, in place.

...I can't tell her. Not really. Can't tell her about the birthday party I had a few weeks back. Some friends arranged it. My sons couldn't get away from work—both are real busy with their own families—but they sent along a funny video they'd made. Even my ex-wife sent a card.

We ate and drank. Candles were blown out. Cake was eaten. And it should have been... I mean as I sat there, taking in this very sweet, very fun, nice little event in my honor—it should have been, I should have felt...warm. Content. Grateful. But...

It was then I realized that there is a...coldness in me. Masked—yes. Managed well—to be sure. But that night I knew...down deep, at the center of me...I am made of something cold.

And I think that started here.

In Dublin.

With her.

And I can't tell her that.

Robert turns back to Caithleen—as she unfreezes and repeats the exact question:

CAITHLEEN. *(As before.)* Why are you here, Robert?

ROBERT. Well, the truth is...I'm meeting someone. Someone I haven't seen in thirty-five years.

CAITHLEEN. *(A smile, enjoying this.)* Is it a woman—a lady-friend?

ROBERT. Yes. I wrote her a letter.

CAITHLEEN. With a flower pressed inside?

ROBERT. Well—yes—as a matter of fact—

CAITHLEEN. Oh, that's so romantic—

ROBERT. Maybe—I'm not—

CAITHLEEN. *(Overlapping.)* —but has no one told you?

Before he can respond.

It's impossible! To go back to a time. A place, maybe. But not a time.

ROBERT. *(Beat.)* I guess we'll find out.

CAITHLEEN. An' anyway—can I ask you somethin'?

ROBERT. Of course.

CAITHLEEN. Do you know for sure they're out of my rolls at Finnerty's?

ROBERT. It's half-twelve already.

CAITHLEEN. Truly?

ROBERT. I could buy you a coffee.

CAITHLEEN. Or a pint.

ROBERT. Or a pint, yes. Shall we do that now?

CAITHLEEN. I should catch up with Davey. Have my lunch.

She is packing her book inside her bag.

ROBERT. You mean "Darlin' Davey"?

CAITHLEEN. Yes—but I don't know how you know that. He could care less about Joyce or Dublin—he'll tell you straight to your face that he's in it for nothin' but the "pretty tourist snatch."

(Off his look.) What?

ROBERT. You've got a mouth on you.

CAITHLEEN. So I hear.

ROBERT. Like Molly Bloom.

CAITHLEEN. *(Proudly.)* Molly Bloom is the hero of that book.

ROBERT. *(Laughs.)* Are you kidding? The hero of *Ulysses* is the reader! Whoever can make the great slog to the end.

CAITHLEEN. But the end is the best part!

ROBERT. And the only chapter you ever read, I bet. Molly Bloom, left all alone. Eight sentences that changed the world.

CAITHLEEN. If only they had.

Caithleen starts to go.

ROBERT. When you meet Robbie, don't ask him if he's serious.

CAITHLEEN. If he's "serious"?

ROBERT. Yes. Serious about you.

CAITHLEEN. Why would I ask him that? **STOP**

ROBERT. And when you reach out your hand to him—if he hesi-