



CHAPATTI

BY CHRISTIAN O'REILLY



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To Ailbhe and C il n

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following:

John Mahoney, for daring to read the play on his flight home when he really wasn't supposed to; for championing it; and for his wonderful performance as Dan.

Penny Slusher, for her stellar performance as Betty.

BJ Jones (Artistic Director, Northlight Theatre), for his exquisite direction.

Tim Evans (Executive Director, Northlight Theatre), Paul Fahy (Artistic Director, Galway International Arts Festival), and John Crumlish (Chief Executive, Galway International Arts Festival), for believing in the play and bringing their beautiful production to Chicago and Galway.

The team behind the production — Jack McGaw (Scenic Design); Rachel Laritz (Costume Design); JR Lederle (Lighting Design); Denis Clohessy (Composer and Sound Design); Kristin Leahey, Ph.D. (Dramaturg); Laura D. Glenn, AEA (Production Stage Manager [Chicago]); and Rita Vreeland (Production Stage Manager [Galway]).

All those at Northlight Theatre and Galway International Arts Festival, who helped launch *Chapatti* into the world.

My wife, Ailbhe, and son, Cólín, for always being there when I need them.

My agent, Emily Hickman, for her support and belief in my work.

The Town Hall Playwrights' Group in Galway, for reading the play and for their feedback.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A writer friend once told me that every project has a personality. When you write a play, you find yourself hoping for a certain outcome. The bottom line is that you want it produced. But this doesn't always come to pass. A play can lie on the shelf and never find a stage. But some projects won't give up. They keep pulling at your sleeve or poking you in the ribs. They have stubborn, dogged personalities.

I first tried writing *Chapatti* as a short film script and then as a radio play, but somehow I felt unsatisfied — or maybe it did. It kept poking me in the ribs and telling me I hadn't figured out how to write it yet. I started to feel that it needed an audience that could share the experience.

And so I tried writing it as a stage play, initially using interweaving monologues. As it developed, I added some interaction between the two central characters, Dan and Betty. The fact that both Dan and Betty live alone — and, indeed, are lonely — suggested to me that I had finally stumbled upon the right form for this story: one in which they each get to tell their tale to an audience that is willing to listen.

I sent the play out. It came back and I revised it. I sent it out again. I continued to believe in it, knowing it had something. The Town Hall Playwrights' Group, set up during my two-year term as playwright-in-residence at the Town Hall, Galway, read it and gave me excellent feedback, as did other trusted friends and readers. But I became distracted by other projects and it went back on the shelf.

And then it started poking me again. I started thinking about John Mahoney in the part of Dan. He is an actor who transmits great humanity to his characters, one who can be tender, curmudgeonly, and funny at the same time — exactly what I wanted for Dan. He has starred in many great productions in Galway during many Galway International Arts Festivals (GIAF). He was starring in one — Bruce Graham's *The Outgoing Tide* — when I got the notion to drop a copy of the play in to him at the Town Hall. I texted my

wife, Ailbhe. “Am I crazy?” I asked. She replied right away, “What have you got to lose?” GIAF Artistic Director Paul Fahy had also urged me to aim high with this play. And so I went for it.

Three months later, John Mahoney emailed me to say he loved the play and wanted to play the part of Dan. His passion for it paved the way for a co-production between Northlight Theatre of Chicago and Galway International Arts Festival. Under the guidance of director BJ Jones and actors John Mahoney and Penny Slusher, the play was brought beautifully to life, playing to full houses and standing ovations in Chicago and Galway.

Every project has a personality. Some are more dogged than others.

CHAPATTI was originally produced onstage by Northlight Theatre (BJ Jones, Artistic Director; Timothy J. Evans, Executive Director), Chicago, IL, and Galway International Arts Festival (Paul Fahy, Artistic Director; John Crumlish, Chief Executive), opening on March 14, 2014. It was directed by BJ Jones; the scenic design was by Jack Magaw; the costume design was by Rachel Laritz; the lighting design was by JR Lederle; the original music and sound design were by Denis Clohessy; the dramaturg was Kristin Leahey, Ph.D.; and the stage manager was Laura D. Glenn. The cast was as follows:

DAN.....John Mahoney
BETTY..... Penny Slusher

CHAPATTI was originally commissioned and produced for radio by RTÉ Radio Drama.

CHARACTERS

DAN, 60s

BETTY, 60s

CHAPATTI

Dan

Lights up on Dan.

“How are you this fine morning, Chap? Are ya hungry.”

He looks at me as if to say, “Does a dog shit in the park?”

“Weetabix or Chum,” I offer him.

Another look.

“Weetabix? Are you sure?”

A dirty look.

“How ’bout a bit of both?”

A bit of a grin.

“That’s what you meant all along, I suppose.”

He barks.

I mash the two of them in, the Weetabix and the Chum, with a bit of milk, but no sugar — bad for the teeth, the vet said.

Then I sit down at the piano and watch his face.

The gobbling stops and he looks at me, warning me.

I lift the lid and the ears prick up.

Then I start playing. (*Hums “Chopsticks.”*)

And Chapatti all of a sudden howls and barks, and I try to laugh.

’Cos laughing’s what me and Martha used to do when she was here. When she was lying on my bed watching me.

And she’d howl too and even I’d join in and there’d be nothing but howling or laughing out of the three of us.

But Chapatti’s still howling now and she’s not here and I try to laugh, I try to find it funny like I promised to, but I can’t. I just can’t. It’s like my funny bone’s been amputated.

“Alright, Chap.”

He keeps barking.

“Alright, Chap.”

He howls.

(Shouting.) “Alright, Chap!” *(Pause.)*

He looks out from under the bed.

“I’m sorry, Chap. I’m sorry. Come here to me.”

I go down on my knees, look under the bed.

He looks at me for a moment, not sure why I’ve changed.

But then he trots out and I stroke his ears.

The tail starts wagging again, banging against the leg of the piano.

I close the lid.

We eat our breakfast in silence.

Betty

Lights up on Betty.

I open the front door and some windows to freshen the place up.

“Good morning, Peggy! Rise and shine! I’ve landed with the ham. It’s sitting here on the kitchen table waiting to be cut up into little pieces for her ladyship! It’s getting very ham-barrassed. I’ve the newspaper as well. It’s sitting beside the ham, waiting for its crossword to be done. It’s getting very cross.”

I hear a bit of a groan as I’m putting the kettle on.

“What’s that, Peggy? I can’t hear you. All I can hear is some old hag groaning at me when I know she’s well able to speak.”

Then I hear a thud on the floor, so I go and investigate.

I get a slight smell when I reach the door.

It gets stronger when I open it.

I look in and she looks back at me tearfully and says, “I want to die! I want to die!”

I pick up the glass she’s thrown onto the floor and the teeth that have fallen out of it and as I wash them at the wash-basin I ask her what poor Prudence would do if she wasn’t around to feed her.

Poor Prudence, who is lying there at her feet, purring away out of politeness, with her poor stomach empty.

“You’d feed her!” Peggy cries. “You’d feed her.”

CHAPATTI

by Christian O'Reilly

1M, 1W

Romance is a distant memory for two lonely animal-lovers living in Dublin. When forlorn Dan and his dog Chapatti cross paths with the amiable Betty and her nineteen cats, an unexpected spark begins a warm and gentle story about two people rediscovering the importance of human companionship.

"Unfolding in a deft mix of heartache, despair and gentle comedy, the story is a mix of zesty self-narration and beautifully limned scene work. And it leaves you cheering for these two characters' hard-won moments of happiness." —**Chicago Sun-Times**

"[An] exquisite dramatic pas de deux ... Christian O'Reilly's earnest, compassionate look at loneliness and our universal need for companionship, whether in the form of pets or other people ... will soon become a staple in theatres the world over. It speaks to everyone, but especially to the heartache and seclusion often felt by older men and women. Smiles, laughter and a few tears may be shed, but audiences will never forget the beauty and poignance of this tender story about two people who learn how to love."

—**ChicagoTheatreReview.com**

"CHAPATTI depicts an astute picture of emptiness but also presents a sense of hope and how one can be freed from the shackles of despair at the most unexpected moment. CHAPATTI is about the bravery to move forward no matter how unfamiliar and scary it may seem."

—**BuzzNews.net**

"... poignant, funny and surprising ... Deeply emotional but never cloying or sentimental ... O'Reilly's dialogue isn't the fluffy, gentle stuff of by-the-numbers rom-coms. It's barbed, edgy and often mordant. This is a love story that comes hand-in-glove with tragedy, both the tragedy of having loved and lost and that of never having loved at all. With a narrative that gracefully moves from direct address to conventional dialogue ... CHAPATTI is a mix of charm and intensity ... truly a rich, wonderful experience."

—**ChicagoTheaterBeat.com**

Also by Christian O'Reilly
THE GOOD FATHER

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