

THE GOOD FATHER

BY CHRISTIAN O'REILLY



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To Ailbhe and C il n

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following:

Garry Hynes (Artistic Director, Druid Theatre Company), for taking a risk on this play and on an unknown, unproven playwright; for challenging every line during the crucible of rehearsal; for getting the very best out of me and my writing; and for her beautiful production for Druid.

Actors Derbhle Crotty and Aidan Kelly, for fearlessly pushing me to find emotional honesty in my characters during rehearsal rewrites, and for their heartbreaking performances as Jane and Tim in the original Druid production.

The team behind the original Druid production — Francis O'Connor (Design), Rupert Murray (Lighting Design), Patrick Fitzgerald (Music), Donal Shiels (Producer), Tim Smith (Stage Manager), Sarah Lynch (Assistant Stage Manager), Charlie McBride (New Writing Manager), and all at Druid.

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

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

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I started my writing career as a screenwriter of film scripts. It soon dismayed me to discover that most film scripts don't get produced. I was brought up in Listowel, county Kerry, in the South-West of Ireland, birthplace of playwright John B. Keane, and was therefore surrounded by theatre growing up. It was seeing a local production of his play *Sive* that got me thinking about writing plays for the first time. I was seduced by a number of things — the audience reaction, the live experience, and the opportunity for a writer's words to be spoken as intended. I had attempted screenwriting because I loved writing dialogue but was beginning to see that theatre was a more suitable form.

My first play was an adaptation of a screenplay. It wasn't very good and it wasn't produced. My second, a one-act called "It Just Came Out," was a comedy about equality, set within a changing Ireland. Having recently moved to Galway, in the West of Ireland, I submitted it to Druid Theatre Company, which had set up a new writing scheme for emerging playwrights called the Debut Series. Druid liked the play and staged it. For the first time, I had that extraordinary experience of seeing actors take ownership of my characters, of bringing them to life onstage, of watching an audience watching my words in action.

I met Druid's artistic director, Garry Hynes, shortly after its run, and she asked me what I was working on. I told her about *The Good Father* and she asked to see it when it was ready.

The Good Father was sparked by a few impulses. I wanted to write about the shared humanity of two people from contrasting social backgrounds. I wanted to write about a man with a strong desire to be a father who never thought he'd get that chance. And I wanted to write an unexpected love story.

Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* showed me a way to structure *The Good Father* — as a series of snap-shots taking place over a year.

I submitted it, more in hope of feedback than production, to Druid in February 2002. To my amazement, I soon received a

phone call from Garry Hynes saying she wanted to stage it for the 25th Galway Arts Festival that July.

I am indebted to director Garry Hynes and cast Aidan Kelly and Derbhle Crotty, for challenging the play with such honesty and imagination in the rehearsal room, and for helping it become the play it is today.

The Druid production was a hit and has led to other productions. I am delighted that DPS has chosen to publish it and am hopeful that it will be seen far and wide across America.

THE GOOD FATHER was first performed at the 25th Galway Arts Festival in Galway, Ireland, on July 19, 2002, presented by Druid Theatre Company. It was directed by Garry Hynes; the designer was Francis O'Connor; the lighting designer was Rupert Murray; and the music was by Patrick Fitzgerald. The cast was as follows:

JANEDerbhle Crotty
TIM..... Aidan Kelly

CHARACTERS

JANE

TIM

THE GOOD FATHER

ACT ONE

Scene 1

*Tim, early 30s, sits in the corner of Rachel's living room, a glass in his hand, nodding to loud music — a rock song like U2's "New Year's Day."** He looks awkward and out of place and is drinking quickly in a futile effort to lose his self-consciousness. Bottles of beer, vodka, and Coke sit in a plastic bag at his feet. Jane, early 30s, enters and looks drunkenly at him from across the room. He nervously smiles at her. She looks away. He gulps his drink. She feels nervous, but also drunk and bloody-minded. He does his best to correct his posture and look cool. They have to shout to be heard above the music, which gradually fades down.

TIM. Howaya!

JANE. Hi.

TIM. Great party!

JANE. Do you think so?

TIM. I love this song.

JANE. I hate it. Why are we listening to it?

TIM. I could put somethin' else on?

JANE. I know everyone here.

TIM. That's great.

JANE. Is it?

TIM. I don't know anyone, only Rachel.

JANE. How do you know Rachel?

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

TIM. I painted her kitchen.

JANE. You missed a bit.

TIM. Did I?

JANE. Behind the fridge. I was reaching for a mince pie and it fell behind. I found a packet of Pringles instead. I won't tell.

TIM. Thanks. Did I really —

JANE. I went to college with her. Law.

TIM. She's very nice.

JANE. Do you think so?

TIM. Is she not?

JANE. She's my best friend.

TIM. That's great.

JANE. Why?

TIM. Is it not?

JANE. I'm only joking.

TIM. Oh, right.

JANE. You're very literal.

TIM. Am I? Yeah, I suppose I am. How do you mean?

JANE. I wish I didn't know anybody here.

TIM. Why's that?

JANE. They're all so annoyingly — They send me these emails of their babies. All babies are identical. How come they don't know that? They seem to forget when they become parents.

TIM. They're probably proud.

JANE. Of course they're proud. They're right to be. They're just so — what's the word —

TIM. I'm no good on words.

JANE. Complete? Smug.

TIM. Smug? As smug as a bug in a rug.

JANE. That's snug — as snug as a bug in a rug. You know, smug — self-satisfied?

TIM. Yeah, but if I was a bug in a rug I bet I'd be snug *and* smug.

JANE. If I was one, I'd get stepped on. (*She takes a drink from her glass. It's almost empty.*)

TIM. Do you wanna dance? I'm a deadily —

JANE. What's your name?

TIM. Tim.

JANE. I'm jealous, Tim, that's all it is. Did you hear about Harry?

TIM. No. Who's —

JANE. He moved to New Zealand a week ago. He fell in love with

a girl who travels to work on a canoe. I hope he gets trampled to death by a flock of sheep. I hope she gets a puncture.

TIM. He was your *[fella]* —

JANE. Fiancé. (*Pause.*) Almost. I don't want to talk about it. (*He accepts this and drinks.*) We were taking a break, you see. Before maybe getting married. That's why he went to New Zealand. He wanted to be for a while.

TIM. What did he want to be?

JANE. He didn't want to be anything. That's the point.

TIM. You've lost me.

JANE. Tell me about it. My parents thought it was great that he was going to New Zealand. Went camping there once, the four of us. Dad and Harry bonding over "Ring of Fire." Good ol' Johnny Cash.

TIM. That's a good song, "Ring of Fire." I always sing it after a curry.

JANE. Good for Dad. When I opened my mouth to sing once upon a long time ago, I got, "No, not like that, like this," from Harry. Correcting me. But I didn't want lessons, I wanted to sing. Haven't sung since. Not once. (*Pause.*) One of us is talking too much.

TIM. Are you alright?

JANE. Please don't be sympathetic. I'll only cry. I hate New Year's Eve.

TIM. Yeah, it's a funny one.

JANE. I always feel so lonely. It doesn't matter how many people are celebrating around me. I feel so ... so mortal. I think that's why people celebrate — to escape death, to pretend it's not going to happen. Well let me tell you something, buddy, it's gonna happen and it doesn't matter how many (*Looking into his bag.*) cheap supermarket lagers you drink.

TIM. Well you're a barrel of laughs.

JANE. Thanks.

TIM. Will we dance?

JANE. What are you doing for sex tonight?

TIM. What?

JANE. That's why we're here, isn't it? To find a mate. I can't be bothered with all the ... Why can't people cut to the chase? It's all so stupid. Don't you think it's all so stupid?

TIM. Er ... do you want a drink?

JANE. I want you to agree with me.

TIM. You'll get no argument from me.

JANE. I think it would be healthier ... Don't you think it would be healthier if people just cut to the chase? All this ... all this catching someone's eye in the pub, and you're all dressed up, but you act coy and you chat and laugh with your girlfriends, and you pretend you don't care, but your tits are hanging out, you've got your hair done, you've practically killed yourself at the gym. But you can't go up and talk to him. Oh no, you have to make him think you don't care, so that he'll make all this extra effort. But I'm there to attract. I'm the butterfly who wants to get trapped in the web. It takes time, it all takes time, so why waste time? Do you know what I'm talking about?

TIM. Totally. Just call me Spiderman.

JANE. You see, I knew it. We're on the same wavelength. Aren't you going to get me a drink?

TIM. Sure.

JANE. Am I drunk?

TIM. Well ...

JANE. Good. I can put that on an email and send it to my friends. Me puking my guts out at four in the morning. (*He prepares a drink for her.*) I should be happy for them. I am happy for them. But I don't feel like one of them. (*He gives her the drink.*) It doesn't mean they're happy. It doesn't mean I'm happy. I want them to be happy. I want me to be happy.

TIM. So what's the problem?

JANE. I want to be in love. I want to be in love and I want to have a family and I want it all to be great and I want my father to give me away and I want my parents to be proud of me and I want it all to be great. I want it all to be great. Don't you want it all to be great?

TIM. I'll settle for grand.

JANE. But we deserve more than grand. We deserve wonderful. Everyone deserves wonderful.

TIM. I don't think wonderful's all it's cracked up to be.

JANE. What do you mean?

TIM. It's too hard on the eyes and the mouth. All that smilin'. When things are grand, you can just close your eyes and take it handy. It's not so much a buzz, more of a hum.

JANE. A hum? I like that. So what makes you hum?

TIM. Ah, I dunno. Little things. Like takin' the dog for a walk.

JANE. You have a dog?

TIM. Gun-shy Pointer. I call him Banger.

JANE. A gun-shy Pointer? Is that some kind of breed?

TIM. No, it's a gun dog that's scared of guns.

JANE. Oh. Well wouldn't that make him a pointless Pointer?

TIM. Not Banger. He's a deadly dog.

JANE. I've got a dog too — Annabelle. I walk her every day.

TIM. Where?

JANE. Portmarnock Beach.

TIM. I brung Banger there a few times, but he'd jump onto the golf course and chase the rabbits. The golfers used to go ape-shit, 'specially 'cos if he couldn't get a rabbit he'd grab a golf ball. I bring him to Bull Island now.

JANE. I'd go mad without Annabelle. Unconditional love and all that.

TIM. Yeah, I know what you mean. Dogs are great.

JANE. Here's to dogs. *(They clash glasses and sip their drinks.)* So why aren't you in the kitchen looking at baby mugshots? I hope they don't mix them up.

TIM. Why? 'Cos I'm out here talkin' to you.

JANE. But you were on your own when I came in.

TIM. Ah, you know yourself.

JANE. No.

TIM. Couldn't stay in the kitchen, could I, with that bit I missed behind the fridge staring out at me?

JANE. Maybe it's just us then? The odd ones out. *(He's not comfortable with this idea and there's something else on his mind he's not willing to share.)*

TIM. Hey, speakin' of sheep, I know a joke.

JANE. We weren't speaking of sheep, were we?

TIM. A while back, a herd of them trampling your man Harry —

JANE. I think it was a flock. Then again, if they did the job well, they could be a shoal for all I'd care.

TIM. Will I tell you my joke so?

JANE. I don't like jokes.

TIM. I only know the one.

JANE. Go on then. But don't expect me to laugh.

TIM. Knock knock.

JANE. Yes?

TIM. No.

JANE. Oh sorry. Start again.

TIM. Knock knock.

THE GOOD FATHER

by Christian O'Reilly

1M, 1W

It's New Year's Eve and most of the party guests are in the kitchen admiring photos of their babies. But two lonely strangers find themselves cut off from the rest. Jane was invited because she knows the people in the kitchen. Tim was invited because he painted the kitchen. Jane drunkenly asks Tim, "What are you doing for sex tonight?" And a few weeks later she calls him with some unexpected news: she's pregnant ...

"... a refreshing take on a casual coupling and pregnancy ... Peppered with sharp dialogue and witty one-liners, the script hovers between tragedy and comedy as O'Reilly emphasizes the chasm that divides the pair while tracing the ongoing development of their unlikely relationship ... this drama looks likely for future productions this side of the Atlantic."

—Variety

"[O'Reilly's] play is a voyage of discovery ... His handling of dramatic action is so obviously skillful ... a piece of theatre whose power lies in its refusal to pretend. It is what it is: the bones of a play, exposed to the light that shines through it, but identifiably, unmistakably human. Christian O'Reilly's brilliant THE GOOD FATHER ... tap[s] the emotions as few plays do, probing the minds and confusions of two people in trouble with life and each other."

—The Irish Times

"[THE GOOD FATHER's] hilarious banter has the audience in stitches for the better part of two hours and still doesn't interfere with the characters' emotional development. This is inescapable, electric dialogue ... THE GOOD FATHER portrays a relationship that shouldn't happen, but must, and it drags two people, whether they like it or not, from scepticism, to love, to grief, and to hope ... O'Reilly handles the painful turbulence of a modern relationship with remarkable skill, as well as displaying considerable understanding of human psychology ... O'Reilly's dialogue is crisp, incisive and intelligent, and hangs like a garland around the mundane depths of daily misery and pain ... It's the substance of every romantic tale that's ever been told and yet it shines through as if new, thanks to writing that skims along at breakneck pace."

—Irish Independent

"THE GOOD FATHER is a play that will have you laughing one moment and crying unabashedly the next."

—The Poughkeepsie Journal

Also by Christian O'Reilly
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