

Clifden's Daughter

A full-length play

By Mary Santarelli

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MILLIE (HEALY) WHELAN - A widow in her 70s, living in Clifden, Ireland

DECLAN BURKE - Dubliner, 20s, whose business card features his embellished job title, "Bioinformatician and Concierge Genealogy Tour Specialist"

FERGUS/MAGPIE - Millie's dead husband, 70s

FATHER BRIAN - Youthful Clifden priest, 30s

LUCY PUCCINI - American landscape architect, 40s

EAMON HEALY - "Semi-dead" second cousin of MILLIE, frozen in time as a 30-something, 80s rock band bass guitarist

MUSICIANS - Perform offstage for scene transitions and appear onstage in ceili scene; could feature fiddler, flutist, tin whistler, guitarist, or any combination

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP on the interior of a farmhouse overlooking the coastal town of Clifden, Ireland. Present day.

Photograph-covered walls. A modest kitchen with some modern conveniences, adjacent living room with flat-screen TV, lace-curtained front door. Table and chairs downstage. Above a sofa upstage is a large window unto the world, which offers a glimpse of rolling hills, church spire, and idyllic ocean blue.

Offstage are (HOOLEY MUSICIANS), poised to delight... because every Irish tale must offer music!

Farmhouse owner MILLIE enters, a spry woman in her 70s, in casual attire that's unapologetically mismatched, and hip American running shoes. She's carrying wildflowers and a large envelope.

MILLIE

(to flowers)

Let's get you in some water.

MILLIE deposits flowers on the table, glides toward her kitchen. She folds the envelope without opening it, tosses it into a wastebasket.

MILLIE

Does the bank have no shame in sending hate mail to a pensioner?

She fumbles under the sink, retrieves a vase, brings it to the table, arranges the flowers with great affection.

MILLIE

We'll pay a visit to Margaret today... ah, swallowed up by grief in that cavernous house... refusing to answer the door...

(MORE)

MILLIE (CONT'D)

(trimming stems)

... her Neal's neckties strung on the mantel like holiday garland...

MILLIE

... poor aul' dear... counting the days until they lay together in the family plot, after some such tragedy befalls her. If she's lucky, she'll choke on an oyster and go quickly. No suffering. That's what I say the rosary for. I'll have no plastic tubes down the throat!

MILLIE picks up a stalk of willowherb --

MILLIE

(to flower)

It'll be up to you, my purple friend, to brighten up her house... Lord knows, she's joined the parade of the pathetic. Ah, how painful to watch Margaret disappear... quitting card club, the Altar Society. Letting her garden go dormant...

(passionately)

I'd like to kick the *eejit* who told her that mourning must entail dressing in black for twelve months! Coupled with the rain and fog strangling us... *anyone* would go mad! Even *I'd* be crackers.

*Suddenly, there's a knock on the door, startling MILLIE. She drops the flowers. Through the curtains, a man's silhouette can be seen. She stealthily tiptoes toward the door, parts the curtains ever-so-slightly to see --**A handsome young man, DECLAN, in suit and tie. He peeks through lace, charming MILLIE with a flashy smile and eager wave.*

DECLAN

(through door)

G'morning!

MILLIE

(through door)

If you're here to butcher me an' bury me in a shallow grave... I'll put up a good fight.

(air punches)

I happen to know Conor McGregor's second cousin, once removed. She showed us a few defensive jabs while we were waiting at the bus stop.

DECLAN

Mrs. Whelan, I just spoke with your neighbor. Sheila, is it? She said you'd be home.

MILLIE

Damn her.

DECLAN

If I may've a moment to introduce myself?

MILLIE

(opens door)

A moment is... painfully short, young man.

MILLIE blocks DECLAN at the threshold. She beholds the stranger... with a briefcase at his feet.

MILLIE

(eyeing him)

Ah, so you're sellin' something... suppose nobody would butcher an old lady wearing a suit like that. Imagine, the splatter of blood on such fine wool!

(impatient exhale)

So you know, the last thing we bought from a traveling salesman was a hair tonic for Fergus... 'twas the "bald spot of '72."

DECLAN

Lovely.

MILLIE

'Twasn't. Swindled us out of two pounds and the tonic didn't do *a thing* to improve his bald head... Instead, his nose hair came in like a bramble patch! Nearly called for hedge clippers!

(politely, while closing door)

Afraid I'm on a tight budget these days, so... g'day!

*DECLAN slides a business card under the door.
MILLIE picks it up, and as she scrutinizes it --*

DECLAN

(through door)

I'm not a peddler... *or* a predator. If I might've a chance to explain... I think you'll find my reason for being here quite... pleasing, really. Of no expense to you, Mrs. Whelan.

MILLIE

(reading business card)

"Declan Burke. Bioinformatician and Concierge Genealogy Tour Specialist."

(amused)

What load of *shite* is this?

DECLAN

(through door)

Please forgive my awkward intro, Mrs. Whelan. I assure you... a wooden spoon wouldn't go amiss if my own gran had a stranger at her door. Ah, em... perhaps you'll let me begin again? My name is Declan Burke, and I've come from Dublin.

MILLIE slowly opens the door.

MILLIE

A jackeen?

DECLAN

Well, em... yes, missus. And, em... you're very hard to reach. *Very* hard... I searched for you on Facebook... tried tracking down an email, phone number...

MILLIE

Ah, you'd *never* catch me with the buttons.

DECLAN

My letters to you also went unanswered.

MILLIE

(glances at wastebasket)

Hmmm... must've been tossed in the recycling.

DECLAN

You see, it was *very important* I locate you. On behalf of my client... who has been searching for you. Only thing I'm offering is meaningful, life-affirming connection.

MILLIE

One of those kinky dating services, is it?

DECLAN

Oh my... oh, God! No, no no. Mrs. Whelan. Nothing kinky here... I assure you. You've seen my card... the corporate logo... impressive gold embossing, right?

MILLIE

(folding her arms)

Takes more than gold ink to impress me.

DECLAN

(spins, showcasing his attire)

Would a dating broker dress so well?

DECLAN blots his upper lip sweat with a pocket square -- which endears him to MILLIE.

Muffling her laughter, MILLIE ushers DECLAN inside.

MILLIE

One for the theatrics, are ye? Have a seat at the table. I'll wet the tea.

As MILLIE busies herself in the kitchen, DECLAN advances toward the table, sets down his briefcase.

DECLAN

(scans farmhouse interior)

Brilliant!

DECLAN reaches for a chair -- the one chair with a worn, hand-crocheted cushion.

MILLIE sees this and panics --

MILLIE

Not there! Sorry. That's for Fergus.

DECLAN

(jumps to a different chair, confused)

Fergus, your husband?

MILLIE

Yes.

DECLAN

My apologies for the error. I thought you to be a widow. My research suggested --
(stops himself)

Might Fergus be joining us, then?

MILLIE

It's unlikely.

(a chuckle builds to unabashed laughter)

He'd have to climb out... an' brush himself off!

DECLAN
(realizing Fergus is dead)

Ah, sorry!

MILLIE
(laughter trailing off)

It's been eight years now.

(makes sign of cross)

But we still visit. Fergus was a quiet man... content to just stand there and grin while I fluttered about at parties and church doings. Nothing much has changed. I do all the talking.

(points to empty chair)

It's why I said to take me off your kinky dating list.

DECLAN

Mrs. Whelan, I don't --

DECLAN exhales in frustration, retrieves papers from his briefcase, wipes unrelenting perspiration.

MILLIE deposits the tea tray, biscuits. Begins to pour. Her delight in doing so suggests it may have been too long since she's hosted a guest at her table.

MILLIE

I'd have offered vanilla chai latte... or whatever you young people overpay for these days... but I'm no barista. Milk? Sugar?

DECLAN

However you'll have it, thank you.

(shuffles papers)

Mrs. Whelan, it's an honor to welcome you into this fulfilling experience...

MILLIE
(sits opposite DECLAN, drops sugar cubes in tea)

So you know... I've wilting flowers to deliver to a grieving friend who's purged her wardrobe of anything pastel... or white...

DECLAN

Okay, then. I'll be sure to wrap it up by the time we've emptied your lovely teapot.

(a wink)

Belleek, is it?

MILLIE

‘Tis.

DECLAN

Of course.

(presents a brochure)

Welcome to Legacy Tours. Headquartered in Dublin.

(clears throat)

What we do is engage clients... mostly American... who *desperately* want to explore their Irish ancestry. It’s all the rage!

MILLIE scrutinizes the brochure as she sips tea.

The long silence has DECLAN shifting in his chair, tapping his pen on the table.

DECLAN

Perhaps you’ve questions?

MILLIE

(perusing brochure)

Would ye look at these fancy suitcases... nothing at all like the trunks their great grandparents carried when they got off the boat in New York. Filthy, some with mice settled in... good luck charms to guard against drowning... or a statue of the Blessed Mother their mummies insisted they take... in case they never laid eyes on each other again.

MILLIE folds up the brochure, tosses it aside.

Taken off-guard, DECLAN stares at it.

DECLAN

Em, that was over a century ago, Mrs. Whelan. One could argue those great, great grandparents were justified in leaving Ireland behind... for a better life. The diaspora resulted in generations that were greatly improved by the American Dream.

MILLIE

American Dream! Ha!

This triggers something in MILLIE, and she pushes back from the table. DECLAN panics, refills the tea, shoves a biscuit in his mouth... anything to buy more time.

DECLAN

(chewing, crumbs flying)

Delicious! Strawberry cream? Reminds me of the platter my gran set out on Sundays. So grateful for a bite... yes, yes. Truly grateful. We Burkes are prone to lightheadedness.

MILLIE

(skeptical)

Are ye now?

DECLAN

The blood sugar drops, next thing... I'm coming-to on the floor. In this case, *your* floor.

DECLAN grabs another biscuit. Gulps tea.

MILLIE

(a slight grin)

Ah, 'twould be an odd circumstance to explain... what, with the insatiable neighbors and Clifden's love of gossip... by the time smelling salts brought you around, you'd be my hunky errand boy harboring a fetish for "old jam"... or some such silly thing...

Upon hearing this, DECLAN spits out his tea.

MILLIE

Certainly don't want to take chances. I suppose if we have to wait until your blood sugar comes up... or goes down... or does whatever it needs to do so that I'm not calling the medics... we've a few minutes for "closing arguments."

DECLAN

Closing arguments?

MILLIE

I'm absolutely addicted to "*Law & Order*" on the telly. Legalese rolls off my tongue.

DECLAN seizes his moment, sets up a tabletop easel and colorful genealogy chart.

DECLAN

At Legacy Tours, we partner with a personalized genomic company, which uploads autosomal DNA profiles... from just a small vial of saliva. Within minutes... boom! Genetic matches from the database appear! Irish relatives our clients are *desperate* to meet.

MILLIE

(glancing at chart)

Desperate, are they?

DECLAN

Desperate *enough*... to pay for first-class airfare... private transport, five-star accommodations, chef-prepared meals, personalized tours, and... what has brought me *here*... the highlight of it all... a family reunion! On Irish soil!

MILLIE

How much do clients pay Legacy Tours for this... reunion?

DECLAN

Mrs. Whelan, it would be rather indelicate for me to discuss --

MILLIE

If you're conning me into participating, I'd like to know the particulars.

*DECLAN ponders this for a long moment,
loosens his tie.*

DECLAN

(mumbling)

Twenty thousand.

MILLIE

Pardon?

DECLAN

Twenty thousand... euro. For a *customized* package. The return-on-investment is impossible to quantify --

MILLIE

(in shock)

Twenty. Thousand. Euro.

DECLAN

But these are once-in-a-lifetime experiences. If you merely consider --

MILLIE

Oh, Love... you've knocked on the wrong door. This aul' gal sees right through your clever scheme.

DECLAN

No, no... we pride ourselves on total transparency. Extensive research of my client's ancestry brought me to Clifden. To *you*.

MILLIE

I've never spit into a test tube... so why would I show up in your database?

DECLAN

A fantastic question! As long as we have a cross-referenced cluster of DNA matches, we can map out the family tree using corroborating documents and triangulation. Most of our American clients are meeting distant Irish relatives, which is why they depend on us for investigative efforts.

MILLIE

Em, is this client on the Whelan side... or the Healys'?

DECLAN

She is a relative of yours. A Healy.

MILLIE

She. The client's a woman?

MILLIE sips tea, increasingly entertained.

MILLIE

You... or shall I say, Legacy Tours... will collect twenty thousand euro... and the highlight of the tour is meeting a blood relative? In this case, *me?*

(jokingly)

Imagine her disappointment.

DECLAN

Not at all! She will be delighted!

(brushes Millie's arm)

Would you be willing, Mrs. Whelan? To meet my client?

MILLIE stares at DECLAN, wrestling with her indecision.

MILLIE

(arises, paces)

Hmmm... Would I be willing... would I?

DECLAN

Perhaps we can... forgive the metaphor... unpack any lingering concerns you may have?

MILLIE

I'll need to think it over. Alone. Meantime, make yerself useful... bring up a bucket of briquettes... from the shed, would ye?

DECLAN stands, unable to ascertain if MILLIE is teasing.

MILLIE

(grins)

Off you go!

DECLAN

(scanning his suit and shoes)

But my --

MILLIE opens the door. DECLAN exits, closing the door behind him, shaking his head.

In the empty farmhouse, MILLIE peruses family photos hanging on the wall as if touring a museum.

Offstage, DECLAN'S shoveling of briquettes can be heard, interspersed with muffled curses, "feckin'" this and "feckin'" that.

MILLIE

(to portrait of Fergus)

Would you have opened your heart, Love? 'Twould be nice to have company... a reason to set out the silver. Frightening how comfortable this version of life has become...

(fights back tears)

... table for one... Liam and Darcy's empty bedrooms... a toy chest for the grandchildren who've never come to open it. Sometimes, I'd swear I hear the soundtrack of our aul' life...

DECLAN enters carrying a bucket. MILLIE quickly gathers herself, tucking sadness into repressed places for safekeeping... at least, for now.

DECLAN

(deposits bucket by fireplace)

Alright, then.

(returns to table)

You've reached a verdict?

MILLIE

Still mulling it over. Tell me, what emerged from the Healy gene pool? Chin dimples... flat feet... love of the drink... perhaps an extra muscle beneath the tongue that aids in the art of gossip? *Science* tells us who we are, does it?

DECLAN

Traits and markers are revealed. But our clients want *connection*. To the homeland.

MILLIE

(sits at table)

It seems you know a great deal about me... but you -- Declan Burke -- are still a mystery.

MILLIE refills teacups, settles into conversation.

DECLAN

What would you like to know?

MILLIE

This Legacy Tours... 'twas a dream-come-true?

DECLAN

Actually, I consider my work a tribute to my gran whom I mentioned earlier... Clare. All of her children, except my father, left Ireland.... left holes in her heart. She rarely saw them. Many grandchildren, great-grandchildren... never had the chance to meet her. Anyway, a friend with Legacy Tours recruited me. He thought it matched my skill set...

(a wink)

Given my charm and wit.

MILLIE

(teasingly)

Ha! Charm, I'll give you. Wit could use a bit o' sharpening.

(sips tea)

Was your friend right? This position suits you?

DECLAN

Oh, yes... quite well. Facilitating these meetings... is very gratifying, Mrs. Whelan.

(emptying teacup)

Which brings us full circle.

(an expectant smile)

Would you consider meeting my client?

MILLIE places another biscuit on Declan's saucer. He consumes it in one bite... trying to hurry her along.

MILLIE

What happens if the once-in-a-lifetime experience goes arseways?

DECLAN

By “arseways,” you mean...

MILLIE

Well... these are people who’ve never met. Throw into the mix jet lag, a bottle of Jameson, buried family secrets --

DECLAN

(rises, sweeping gestures)

You have my assurance, such a scenario is virtually impossible... given Legacy Tour’s attention to detail. There’s a brief introduction... an embrace... flowing, *happy* tears.

*DECLAN defaults to tour-guide mode,
showcasing the space --*

DECLAN

(runs hand across sofa)

You’ll make her feel welcome, fix her tea, and invite her to sit on this lovely and inviting chintz heirloom.

(points to fireplace)

While a fire crackles... you’re lost in conversation and laughter... sharing stories, family traits. A hand-knit blanket set out is a nice touch.

(points to coffee table)

Think of this as your visual display space... for memorabilia.

(confidently)

It’ll be very moving...

*MILLIE glides toward the window, motions for
DECLAN to join her. Together, they gaze upon
Clifden, the Atlantic in the distance.*

DECLAN

A stunning view.

MILLIE

Ever notice how waves dance? Advance and recede... over and over. Life’s like that... ye know, there’s a rhythm.

(a beat)

And water is many things... even tears... salty, like the ocean... tears spent while imagining what might’ve been...

DECLAN

(softly, on MILLIE'S sadness)

Your son is in America? Fantastic that Aer Lingus offers so many nonstop flights now.

MILLIE

Perhaps for travelers who aren't gripping their seats... praying Novenas. I've been told sitting next to me on an airplane is a dreadful ordeal.

(points to photo)

Yes, my son Liam's a surgeon in Boston. I blame his failure to visit on his career... it's much more acceptable... than the truth. My daughter Darcy moved east, to London. She comes home now and again... but it's been awhile, not since the pandemic.

MILLIE moves away from the window.

MILLIE

Ah, enough of my lamenting!

DECLAN

Perhaps this is just what you need as well... the chance to meet your chin-dimpled, flat-footed, drunk and gossipy American relative.

MILLIE

Perhaps. If I were younger... not so cynical.

Just then, a MAGPIE (a large puppet, handled by actor who plays FERGUS) appears at the window, pecks loudly on the glass, startling them.

MILLIE stares at the MAGPIE, then waves to shoo it away. The MAGPIE pecks again.

DECLAN

Is it a magpie?

MILLIE

'Tis. One magpie is bad luck... but the luck turns from bad to good if you salute it, or tell it the time of day. If a magpie looks you in the eye, as it did to me, it respects you.

DECLAN

You made eye contact with the bird?

MILLIE

For a moment.

DECLAN

Mrs. Whelan, I find it... peculiar... that you're skeptical about the science of DNA and algorithms built by a billion-dollar industry... but you're willing to accept magpie communication and curses? D'you see the irony?

MILLIE

It looked me in the eye!

DECLAN takes this in, collapses in laughter. Much to his surprise, MILLIE advances toward the door and opens it.

MILLIE

I'll not be the object of your condescension. There's a train back to Dublin at half-two.

DECLAN

No, no, no. My apologies, Mrs. Whelan. I never intended to --

MILLIE

Find another Irish relative for your client. I'm not interested in reunions with strangers. D'you see the irony?

DECLAN

But there aren't many of her *Healys*... still in Ireland... except for ones six feet deep.

Flustered and frantic, DECLAN gathers his papers, dismantles his display.

DECLAN

Wait!

(groveling)

Perhaps my fatal error was burying the lead. There is monetary compensation involved... for *you*.

MILLIE

My people survived famine... took on the Black and Tans... I meself ran this farm alone after Fergus died. Don't assume I can be bought.

DECLAN

Everyone can be bought.

MILLIE

Not Millie Whelan.

DECLAN

(a serious tone)

I hoped it wouldn't come to this. I really did...

MILLIE

Come to... *what?*

Briefcase in-hand, DECLAN pauses at the open door; leans in.

DECLAN

I know about... your *situation*.

MILLIE

My situation?

DECLAN

Yes.

MILLIE

What situation might that be?

DECLAN

The unfortunate one.

MILLIE stares at DECLAN, suppresses emotion, for now.

DECLAN

The taxes... in arrears.

MILLIE

Ahhh.

MILLIE floats across the room, to a watercolor painting of her Clifden property hanging on the wall. She tenderly traces the hills, roofline of her house.

DECLAN trails behind her.

DECLAN

We can work out compensation... for hosting such a high-profile client. A sum that would allow you to keep your farm. The house. At least buy a little time...

MILLIE

Who told you, so? Sheila?

DECLAN

It's public record.

MILLIE

(points defiantly at DECLAN)

This "situation" was your insurance policy... in case I turned you down? I've served you tea... a week's worth a-biscuits. Least you can do is lay out some truth. D'you get a bonus? Meaningless "likes" on your egocentric insta-book... or twitting app... or some such hedonistic affirmation?

DECLAN

It's a competitive field... quite cutthroat among tour specialists... and more companies popping up, trying to outdo Legacy Tours.

MILLIE

I'm expected to welcome this woman as a Healy... have a glorious time together in Clifden... and I'll *never* see her again! At least you'll finally afford a flat of your own near Stephen's Green. An Italian leather sofa, maybe? Yes, yes... think of all the accoutrements of a proper bachelor pad you'll be able to afford.

DECLAN takes this in, quietly. Dejected.

MILLIE is hitting a nerve.

MILLIE

(pretends to address a courtroom judge)

Yes, your honor, I intend to cross-examine the witness...

(to DECLAN)

Do you even *have* a gran named Clare... who served you strawberry cream biscuits on Sundays? Stood at the dock and waved children off? Was any of it true?

DECLAN says nothing, and therefore, says it all. He stares at his feet, until finally --

DECLAN

The truth? The *truth* is... I've never met my gran. My ma found herself in her own *situation* at fifteen. Her parents... disowned her. Disowned me. Never held me. Never saw me. My own grandparents.

MILLIE

(plops on sofa arm)

Ah, so you've come to the realization early in life... often, "family" is the source of our deepest heartache.

DECLAN

Yeah, I'm a modern-day Dickens character.

(impassioned)

And if this tour... with this client... doesn't measure up... I'll be right back in Finglas. My colleagues are ruthless. Trust me, their tactics are far more unethical than mine. I do have dreams, Mrs. Whelan... I do. Dreams that couldn't be further away from a flat near Stephen's Green.

(choked up)

At night, when I'm in bed and staring at the ceiling, I think about the day I rescue my ma from public housing... find a lovely place for her. With a separate bedroom. A window that doesn't overlook train tracks. Maybe even somewhere like Wexford.

MILLIE

(tenderly)

I hope she knows how deeply you care for her... that you dream on her behalf. Mammies need to know these things...

MILLIE stands, turns away from DECLAN, avoiding eye contact, given what's about to transpire --

MILLIE

I -- I'm very sorry to disappoint you, Declan. You'll have to find another Healy.

DECLAN

They've scattered, as you well know. Besides, Connemara is so scenic, absolutely charming... and *you're* the Healy in Clifden close enough to matter to her.

MILLIE

Why would I matter to *her*... when I don't even matter to my --

MILLIE abruptly stops herself, then heads for the door -- politely signaling he should leave.

MILLIE

I've enjoyed our tea.

DECLAN picks up his briefcase once more, heads for the door.

DECLAN

(deflated)

As have I. You've my card... if you change your mind.

*MILLIE nods, DECLAN exits.**MILLIE removes the tea tray from the table, carries it toward the sink. As she does this, the lone MAGPIE appears at the window. MILLIE stares at it, prompting it to peck on the glass insistently.**MILLIE is drawn once again to the farm watercolor on the wall.*

MILLIE

Ah, Fergus. I'd sell off the acreage, but I'll never surrender the home we brought our babies into... the home your father built. 'Twould be the death of me.

*Perturbed by the bird's persistent tapping, MILLIE salutes the MAGPIE. Winks at the MAGPIE. Sticks her tongue out at the MAGPIE. All to no avail.**MILLIE paces. The MAGPIE'S pecking on the window is unrelenting. She covers her ears --*

MILLIE

Alright, then!

She rushes to the door and throws it open... steps onto the threshold --

MILLIE

(calling out)

Declan!

MUSICIANS play an upbeat tune...

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP on the farmhouse -- with a crackling fireplace, a smoldering sunset now visible through the window unto the world.

DECLAN and MILLIE are conversing in her living room. On the coffee table, a whiskey bottle and glasses have been laid out. It's apparent they have partaken.

MILLIE

(while laughing)

One whiskey... 'tis a toast. Three whiskeys... we're kneeling in the confessional!

DECLAN

(praying hands)

Forgive us, Father Jameson, for we have sinned! Perhaps we've a lighter penance, considering our reconciliation.

MILLIE

Suffice it to say... at least three Hail Marys!

(glances at watch)

Ye missed the last Dublin train.

DECLAN

I've a mate not far from here. He's picking me up, letting me stay the night.

MILLIE

Grand. Ah, so I don't forget... will the sum from Legacy Tours be paid in advance of the visit?

DECLAN

An installment prior, and the balance to be paid at the conclusion of her visit. Does this mean you're -- ?

MILLIE

Getting there.

DECLAN refills whiskey glasses.

DECLAN

(raises glass)

A toast... to the magpie that changed your mind. One helluva pecker!

Glasses clank and MILLIE downs her whiskey in one swig. She pounds her chest.

MILLIE

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph... the inferno in my throat.

DECLAN

Where I'm from, whiskey is as binding as a handshake.

MILLIE

Ha! Where you're from there are used syringes on the sidewalk. Fine, I'll meet her... assuming she's free of criminal proclivities. So... who *is* this mysterious client?

DECLAN digs in his briefcase, singles out a photograph and stat sheet, places them on the coffee table in front of MILLIE.

DECLAN

Meet Lucy. Until you actually *sign* the Legacy Tour agreement, I cannot divulge her last name.

MILLIE

Lucy.

(studies photograph)

Dimples. Green eyes. A smile that says, *I'm suffering on the inside...* she has to be a Healy.

DECLAN

She's a landscape architect. An acclaimed, sought-after landscape architect.

MILLIE

Where does she live?

DECLAN

She moves around. Her projects take her to luxury resorts and golf courses all over the world.

MILLIE

Nowhere to hang her crucifix? How dreadful.

DECLAN

She owns an oceanfront condo in Miami.

MILLIE

Does she know about *me*?

DECLAN

We don't get into specifics with our clients until we have a commitment. *In writing.*
(slides contract in front of MILLIE)

Just a formality, Mrs. Whelan. Certainly, none of this would pertain to you. And the addendum we discussed. Regarding compensation.

(hands MILLIE a pen)

I just need you to sign the last page.

MILLIE

(scrutinizes contract)

Now that I'm knee-deep in the shite, how is she related to me?

DECLAN

I assure you, there'll be plenty of time to climb the family tree... what, with a two-day stay in Clifden.

MILLIE

(signs contract)

Suppose so. Where may I drop Lucy a note? If I'm playing the part, she'll be impressed by a handwritten, heartfelt Irish invitation, one Healy to another.

DECLAN scribbles the address on his business card, eager to leave before MILLIE changes her mind.

MILLIE

I hope it reaches her before she travels. When will that be, by the way? I'll freshen up the guest room.

DECLAN

Mid-June.

MILLIE

Brilliant. Clifden's lovely in June.

DECLAN quickly tucks the contract into his briefcase, checks his cell phone, rises to leave.

DECLAN

(heads for the door)

My ride's almost here. How might I reach you, Mrs. Whelan? With further updates.

MILLIE

Father Brian's parish secretary Agnes is in my book club and we meet every Tuesday, so you can email me... through her... at "holymoly@stbrigid.org."

DECLAN

I look forward to seeing you again in June.

MILLIE

With my installment?

DECLAN

(a wink)

Of course! Just as we discussed!

Lively FIDDLE MUSIC as DECLAN exits.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 3

*Night has blanketed the farmhouse -- stars
twinkle through the window.*

*MILLIE, wearing a robe and slippers, sits at the
kitchen table, writing in dim light to soft TIN
WHISTLE accompaniment.*

MILLIE

(glances at empty chair)

Fergus, what d'ya think?

(recites from letter)

“Dear Lucy, I look forward to meeting you in June. It is my intention to offer an authentic Healy experience and incomparable Irish hospitality. The weather will be... very Irish, I'm afraid. You're accustomed to Florida, so you will be very disappointed. Though it will be summer here, it will not be warm enough for your tropical wardrobe. Be sure to bring rain gear.”

(to empty chair)

D'you think it wise to reveal the Healy cynicism to this American Lucy?

(a shrug)

Of course. It's probably in her DNA as well.

(back to letter)

“I plan on preparing Irish meals for you during your stay. Please let me know if you have any food aversions I may need to adhere to. I've read about the culinary boycotts in America... no meat, no gluten, no salt, no dairy, no white flour, no sugar, and worst of all... no alcohol. I'll hide the spirits and we'll avoid the pub if you happen to be in recovery. Thank you for letting me know in advance how I can accommodate your preferences. Wishing you a safe journey and palatable airline meals.... Love, Millie Healy Whelan.”

*MILLIE folds the letter, tucks it inside an
envelope. She retrieves Declan's business card
from her purse hanging by the door, then returns
to the table.*

MILLIE

(writes on envelope)

Lucy P-U-C-C-I-N-I. Hmmm. Lucy Puccini. Sounds like an opera star.

*MILLIE finishes the address, tucks the letter
inside her purse.*

Nearby, a photo collage on the wall draws her in. She gently traces the frame of her black-and-white wedding portrait.

MILLIE

(swaying, as in a slow waltz)

Oh, Fergus. How I wish you'd lived long enough to know our grandchildren. Patrick would've followed you around the pasture. You might've made a saddle for the mule so he could ride it when he visited. Let him name it something terribly American, like "Peaches" or "Spike."

(on another photo)

Katelyn would have had you wrapped around every finger, not just her little one! Do you believe she has blonde hair? Still, the Whelan nose... allergic to her woolly jumpers. Everything I knit for her has to be hypoallergenic. You'd have sung to her... something in Irish. How I loved hearing you sing to Darcy when she was drifting off to sleep...

MILLIE turns off the lamp. A SPOTLIGHT serves as moonlight streaming through the window. She slides the chair designated for Fergus under the table.

MILLIE

(heads toward bedroom, offstage)

Good night, Fergus. Wouldn't mind if ye spent a dream token on me. I'd love a visit.

FERGUS appears downstage, but MILLIE will not see or hear him, considering his "altered state." He's wearing worn denim overalls and clutching a hat.

On MILLIE'S exit --

FERGUS

(softly)

Good night, Love.

Fergus softly sings a Celtic lullaby a capella.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP on the farmhouse as FIDDLES or TIN WHISTLES converge in a celebratory reel.

It's morning, and the window unto the world is open, inviting a summer Clifden breeze and birdsongs. MILLIE is wearing a man's plaid shirt, khakis, her trademark American running shoes, and kerchief holding back her hair. She kneads bread dough on the kitchen table, intermittently sprinkling flour.

MILLIE

(to the empty chair)

I went 'round and 'round about currants in the tea brack. Decided yes. Your mother's recipe. We'll learn American Lucy's stance on currants tomorrow. She'll arrive on the half-twelve train. By then, I'll have everything tidied... the quilt is airing out on the line. Sanded and repainted the front door. A bright yellow. First impressions, ye know...

MILLIE forms the dough, places it on a baking sheet, heads to the oven.

Faint whistling can be heard offstage, then a knock at the door.

MILLIE

(calling out)

Be there in a faerie's blink, Father!

MILLIE wipes off her hands, rushes to open her front door. A young priest, FATHER BRIAN, stands at the threshold in a priestly black shirt/white collar and faded Levi jeans, cross-body leather satchel.

MILLIE

(eyeing him)

Father, I've never seen you quite so... *contemporary*.

FATHER BRIAN

(glancing at Levis)

These? Oh, they're an absolute hit with the teens in youth group... and my guitar, of course. If only I could get them to stop requesting Ed Sheeran of me during Confirmation class!

MILLIE

(ushering him inside)

I do enjoy acoustic hymns myself. Had a John Denver poster... 'twas a gift from Fergus... he teased me about a country boy crush...

(catches herself rambling)

You've brought holy water, Father?

FATHER BRIAN reaches into his satchel, pulls out a small plastic water bottle.

FATHER BRIAN

Locked and loaded!

MILLIE

Grand. Prayer book?

FATHER BRIAN

It's a house blessing, not an exorcism... correct?

MILLIE

'Tis.

FATHER BRIAN

(taps head)

I've got it memorized.

MILLIE

I thought it might be nice to light a candle.

As FATHER BRIAN retrieves a sacramental stole from his satchel, MILLIE lights a votive on the kitchen table. She will follow FATHER BRIAN as he moves through the farmhouse.

FATHER BRIAN

(draping stole around his neck)

Agnes mentioned you're expecting a house guest... would you like to include a specific name in the ritual?

MILLIE

I would, Father. Her name is Lucy Puccini. And it's very important this visit goes well...

FATHER BRIAN

Lovely. Shall we begin?

MILLIE/FATHER

(gesturing in tandem)

Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

FATHER BRIAN sprinkles holy water in various areas of the farmhouse --

FATHER BRIAN

God bless the corners of this house, and be the lintel blest...

And bless the hearth...

And bless the board...

And bless each place of rest...

Bless each door that opens wide... to stranger as to kin...

And bless each crystal windowpane that lets sunshine in...

And bless the roofree overhead, and every sturdy wall.

The peace of man, the peace of God, the peace of love on all. May Clifden's people welcome Lucy with the fervor of the Communion of Saints.

FATHER BRIAN/MILLIE

(signs of the cross)

Amen.

MILLIE scurries to the kitchen, retrieves the teapot on the stovetop, sets it on the coffee table where a readied service tray awaits.

MILLIE gestures for FATHER BRIAN to sit on the sofa.

MILLIE

(sits)

Time for a cup?

FATHER BRIAN

For one, thank you... then I'm off to a hospital visit.

MILLIE

(pouring tea)

Not last rites, I hope.

FATHER BRIAN

Ah, thankfully, the other end of the lifespan. A mother and newborn.

MILLIE knocks over the dish containing sugar cubes.

MILLIE

(flustered, corralling cubes)

Lovely.

(an awkward silence)

Em, Father... it's been some months... ye know... since I last confessed. Perhaps with the two of us here, alone, we could get it out of the way?

FATHER BRIAN

(playfully)

Good thing I'm a *contemporary* priest. Fire away.

MILLIE

(sign of the cross)

Very well. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

FATHER BRIAN

May God's mercy descend upon you. Let this confession begin with a contrite heart.

MILLIE

(bows her head)

Of course, I've the usual venials... an occasional obscene gesture when a tourist nearly takes me out at the knees as I'm crossing the road... now and again, a few too many pints...

(recalling)

... yes, and spiritual battle with gluttony... tried to limit myself to one pat of butter, Father, but the bread... fresh from the oven... am I not allowed one guilty pleasure? The bread soaks it right in.

FATHER BRIAN

(nods, grinning)

Perhaps consider the spiritual battle with butter simply a work-in-progress.

MILLIE

Yes, you're right. If Father Gregory can smoke a pack a day behind the rectory rubbish, certainly I can be allowed two pats of butter!

(resuming confession)

Em, there's compulsive envy. It boils up in me like a menopausal hot flash whenever my neighbor Sheila comes by and brags about their Sunday family dinners, the hours she spends rocking grandchildren to sleep when she *knows* my lap is empty.

(MORE)

MILLIE (CONT'D)

Father, I've evil thoughts about Sheila even though I nod and grin and say things like, *how delightful*. In truth, I harbor hateful and vengeful thoughts...

FATHER BRIAN

Remember, Millie... God forgives if we repent.

MILLIE

I haven't repented. I could say a million *Hail Marys* and *Our Fathers*... but when Sheila taunts me as she's hanging the wash on her line, even Michael the Archangel with his heavenly shield could not save me from the snares of the devil.

FATHER BRIAN

You've not acted on your anger... I mean, well... your response to Sheila showed restraint, no?

MILLIE

Suppose so. She'd have no way of knowing that I dream of using her rocking chair as firewood... sneaking her underthings off the line and saying the wind must have stolen them away.

FATHER BRIAN

(muffling laughter)

At least you're being honest with yourself... with God.

MILLIE

My reaction to her yesterday was prideful, Father. Sheila was in her yard feeding chickens, and I, hanging the guest room quilt. For Lucy. I was polite... even when Sheila spoke of the dinner she made and that it was a birthday for so-and-so and the cream cake recipe from the cooking show. But all the while, I plotted my moment... to boast that a relative named Lucy was coming to visit from America... a famous, award-winning landscape architect, and she'd be staying with me in Clifden. There were embellishments, Father. I went on and on and on... about how Lucy and I were very close... until finally, Sheila just walked away.

(drops her head)

I'm afraid my sinful behavior will taint Lucy's visit.

FATHER BRIAN

Mrs. Whelan, it's never too late to repent. And as penance, say the rosary.

(trying not to chuckle)

Perhaps the Blessed Mother will help you resist the urge to burn Sheila's chair and steal her underthings.

MILLIE and FATHER BRIAN erupt into a fit of laughter.

The FIDDLE and / or TIN WHISTLE punctuate Millie's confession with a lively song.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP on the farmhouse. In a bright floral dress, MILLIE paces in her living room, periodically glancing out the window -- at summertime's flowering trees.

A lilting FLUTE accompanies MILLIE as she floats around the farmhouse, straightening this and fluffing that. She primps in the reflection of her chrome toaster, picks something out of her teeth.

MILLIE

(to empty chair)

Suppose it's strange... the exploration of Clifden including a visit with the dead Healys. I've even cleaned the aul' tandem bicycle... how long it's been since you and I rode it.

(a dreamy expression)

What better way for Lucy and me to take in the countryside... the heather is abundant. I suspect she'll love that, as she must tire of tropical specimens.

The slamming of car doors is heard offstage.

MILLIE

They've arrived!

(to empty chair)

How I wish you were here, Fergus. You'd be the first to welcome her in.

There's a knock at the door. MILLIE takes a deep breath, fusses with her hair one last time, flings the door open.

Standing beside DECLAN is LUCY, exuding elegance in gray linen, designer sunglasses.

DECLAN

Millie, I'm thrilled to finally introduce your cousin, Lucy!

MILLIE throws her arms around LUCY -- which disarms her. LUCY melts into the embrace and lingers there --

LUCY

Nice to meet you, Millie.

MILLIE

(ushers them inside)

Cead mile failte! A hundred thousand welcomes!

DECLAN fumbles with his iPhone, poised to take their photo. He coaxes MILLIE and LUCY to squeeze together into the frame.

DECLAN

Let's capture this moment, shall we?

(clicks photos)

Perfect for the keepsake book!

Expending nervous energy, DECLAN runs offstage and returns dragging LUCY'S luggage.

MILLIE

(surveying LUCY)

Hmm. Taller than I expected... no denying you've the Healy forehead.

LUCY touches her forehead, politely grins as she takes in her surroundings with insatiable fascination.

Meanwhile, DECLAN discreetly slides the check under a canister on the kitchen counter.

MILLIE

Lucy Puccini. Oh dear... did I pronounce it correctly?

LUCY disregards the question as she studies photos on the walls, reacting periodically with a gasp, taken in by what she sees --

LUCY

Oh wow.

MILLIE

(on LUCY'S interest in photos)

We'll have plenty of time for who's-who on the wall... once we're alone.

LUCY

(still in her own world)

Great.

DECLAN

(rejoining them)

I've sung your praises, Mrs. Whelan.

MILLIE

(suspiciously)

He has?

DECLAN

Indeed! We've had a memorable trip so far, haven't we, Ms. Puccini? Quite an itinerary... castles and cliffs, museums, pubs, whiskey distilleries, churches, gifts shops.

MILLIE

(to LUCY)

He's exhausted ye!

(leaning in to DECLAN)

You've given her twenty thousand euros' worth, I hope?

While LUCY advances toward a shelf of trinkets, at a safe distance... DECLAN corners MILLIE.

DECLAN

(discreetly, to MILLIE)

I must warn you... it's *impossible* to read her... is she enjoying herself? Are there complaining calls to her friends at the end of the day? Ah, too much mystery hanging in the air...

MILLIE observes DECLAN -- dripping in perspiration, nervously wiping his forehead.

MILLIE

Suppose it's up to *me* to resurrect our chances of a good review... and our bonus. About that... you've the installment?

DECLAN

Of course. It's on your kitchen counter. Under the canister.

MILLIE floats toward LUCY -- whose focus has also shifted to the window. DECLAN trails behind like an eager puppy.

LUCY
(gazing out the window)

Stunning... such potential.

MILLIE
 Hmmm?

LUCY
 Sorry. My horticultural wheels are always turning.

MILLIE
(gazing out window)
 With the sky... the water... 'tis a different watercolor every day.

DECLAN
 Fantastic! This is just the sort of serendipitous awakening our clients often describe! I always say the DNA brings us to this precipice... but the lovely dynamic between two relatives separated by time and distance --

LUCY moves away from the window. MILLIE opens the door for DECLAN, signaling he should leave.

MILLIE
 You'll return at the appointed time?

DECLAN
 Yes. Thursday morning at eight. I'll accompany Ms. Puccini to the airport.
(glancing toward kitchen)
 Mrs. Whelan, as it happens I've time for a cup before I drive back to Dublin...
(to LUCY)

Millie steeps it perfectly... no hint of bitterness, as is often the case, if you ask me...

MILLIE
(playfully)
 We're *not* asking you, Declan. You'll take your tea down the road. Try Dewer's, across from the train station. Tell them Millie sent you.

LUCY grins, mildly amused by the exchange unfolding.

DECLAN
(to MILLIE)
 We've not gone over the tour notes... you know, corporate guidelines... emergency contacts. God forbid...

MILLIE

(to DECLAN)

Two days with me, she'll be posting *glowing* reviews.

DECLAN hands MILLIE a booklet.

DECLAN

It's apparent you're not going to read these. Might I implore you to at least keep them on the premises?

(leaning in)

I'd hate for anything... unexpected, Mrs. Whelan.

LUCY resumes her tour of wall photos with intensity of an exhibit curator.

DECLAN

Have a lovely stay, Ms. Puccini.

LUCY

(not looking up)

Thanks, Declan.

Though it goes unacknowledged, DECLAN waves as he exits. MILLIE closes the door behind him.

A moment later, DECLAN is seen through the window unto the world. MILLIE pulls the shade down.

LUCY has yet to remove her sunglasses, discreetly wipes a tear away.

MILLIE

(turns to LUCY)

Now that we're Declan-free, would you like to freshen up? I'll fix tea... you must be hungry as well. Perhaps you'd rather coffee?

LUCY

Tea would be perfect. Thank you.

MILLIE

(cheerfully)

Well then, make yourself at home... oh, and certainly no need to ready yourself in a "skinny minute." Is that what you say these days?

(MORE)

MILLIE (CONT'D)

My card club exchanges Americanisms, ye know. A couple weeks ago we added “hot second” and “FOMO” to our working vocab.

MILLIE waits for solicited laughter, but it never comes. LUCY grabs her luggage.

LUCY

Mind if I -- ?

MILLIE

(to empty chair)

See what solo life does to me? ‘Twould have been your task.

(to LUCY)

Please, I insist! I believe that packet of Declan’s expressly prohibits clients from dragging their own luggage about the place.

LUCY reacts to MILLIE’s talking to an empty chair with a quizzical expression and scans the room for someone else there. A lighthearted tug-of-war ensues, each woman insisting on playing porter.

LUCY

I can manage. They’re ultra lightweight.

MILLIE

(flexing muscles)

We Clifden gals are a sturdy breed.

LUCY

(grabbing handle)

And stubborn, apparently...

MILLIE

(grabbing handle)

You’ve been promised top-notch hospitality. I’m contractually obligated to deliver.

MILLIE wins the battle, loads up like a pack mule, pulls suitcases offstage.

With MILLIE out of the room, LUCY examines items in the kitchen, spots the Legacy Tours' check under the canister, examines it, returns it as before.

On hearing MILLIE'S approaching footsteps, LUCY retreats to the living room, but she's still staring at the canister.

MILLIE

(reappears, breathing heavily)

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph... you've a heavy load! D'ya load up at the Waterford Crystal factory? Tourists go mad for it!

(pointing)

Your room's down the hall, second door on the left. The loo's on the right.

LUCY heads offstage, but says nothing.

MILLIE

(to empty chair)

They can't help it, no doubt... Americans can be so... *American*, Fergus. An' I can spot 'em a mile away... fanny packs, preppy shorts, fan sweatshirts... just so everyone knows they're from New York or Chicago or went to Notre Dame.

MILLIE fumbles in the kitchen. Over the clatter of dishes and silverware --

MILLIE

(calling out to LUCY)

We'll share the loo. I'm afraid I don't have separate facilities for you... there's a hospitality basket on the counter. A few soaps and lotions made right here in Clifden. I hope you don't mind, but I sampled the clover cream. Took me back to the day Fergus and I rolled around in my parents' field...

(chuckling)

God did punish us for the lust, I assure you... Fergus and I ended up in a patch of nettles... itched for days! We were too embarrassed to visit Doc Maguire, so we said the rosary and prayed the fire beneath our clothes would subside. Not to be confused with the lust. I meant the skin reaction. 'Twas our penance.

MILLIE hustles to and from the kitchen with a tea tray, sandwich platter, places them on the coffee table.

MILLIE waits for LUCY on the sofa.

MILLIE

(to empty chair)

I didn't mind the itching... burning... red-hot hives, Fergus. I'd suffer through it all over again.

LUCY reappears from offstage. The sunglasses are off, revealing her facial features.

LUCY

(sits on sofa)

I don't mind sharing the restroom.

MILLIE

(pours tea)

Grand. 'Tis a relief we've gotten the loo issue ought of the way...

(laughs at herself)

Ha! Relief! Double-meaning in this context, no?

An awkward silence hangs in the room, until --

MILLIE

Okay! Let's discuss the fun to be had in Clifden. "Good craic," as we say here in Ireland. Not to be confused with the street drugs in America... wouldn't have a clue where to get it, anyway.

(on LUCY'S silence)

Sorry. No offense.

LUCY grins, but offers nothing more.

MILLIE

(sliding teacup in front of LUCY)

What do you take? I've sugar cubes... raw sugar... sugar substitute... skim milk... farm-fresh cream -- fully pasteurized, of course... and honey.

(watches LUCY pour cream)

Hope I haven't come on too strong. Perhaps my banter with Declan was impolite? I tend to ramble, which I'm working on... of course, I still chat with my dead husband, Fergus... suppose it makes me seem a bit off...

All that can be heard is the spoon against the teacup as LUCY stirs -- deep in thought.

MILLIE

(on LUCY'S detachment)

Perhaps this'll make up for my poor manners...

MILLIE reaches for a blanket laid across the sofa arm, presents it to LUCY --

MILLIE

I knit this for you. Don't look too closely, though... you'll find my dropped purl stitches. Ah, arthritis.

LUCY stares at the blanket for a long moment.

MILLIE

(increasingly anxious)

D'you like it?

LUCY is captivated by the blanket... emotion building. It's obvious the blanket is really about something else.

LUCY

Millie, were you *paid* to knit this for me?

Blindsided, MILLIE fumbles, spilling her tea.

MILLIE

Heavens, no! The truth is, I deliberated a great deal about the colors of the yarn to use. Nora who owns the knitting shop in town'll certainly testify, as I spent nearly three hours there... leaning toward Aran blues and purples... but then declared the combination too bold for your Miami decor and settled on soft gray and ivory...

(tenderly)

Nora closed up late that day. All with *you* in mind. A Healy. Your arrival's been the talk of the town.

Hearing "Healy" for the first time in this context hits LUCY... she lingers on the sound of it...

LUCY

(softly)

A Healy.

MILLIE

Lucy Healy Puccini. How melodic.

Visibly flustered, LUCY rises, reverently returns the blanket to the sofa arm.

LUCY

I don't want to seem ungrateful... but I'm not sure this visit is the best idea. It might be easier for both of us if I go.

MILLIE

But we've just... please, don't leave! 'Tis a joy to have you here. Clifden would be absolutely cheated if her people didn't get to know you!

LUCY

Don't worry, I'll come up with something plausible. Migraine.

(pulling away)

You'll be able to keep your payment, Millie.

MILLIE

(trailing behind)

I didn't host you for the money. I'm begging... let me explain.

LUCY urgently gathers items, prepping to leave.

LUCY

I get it. A win-win for you and Declan. For Legacy Tours. God, if he insisted on one more photo op to post on social media...

(impassioned)

Look, this probably wouldn't have occurred to either one of you... this isn't just another vacation for me. I didn't come to Ireland for another stamp in my passport.

(with emotion)

Looking out the plane window on our approach to Dublin... the patchwork quilt of green from thirty thousand feet... well, it took my breath away. A feeling came over me like --

(stops herself)

Never mind.

MILLIE

Ah, you've an Irish heart, Love.

LUCY

(detached)

Yeah.

MILLIE dashes over to the kitchen, lifts up the canister, takes the check, rips it into pieces, tosses it up like confetti.

As LUCY absorbs the desperation in MILLIE --

MILLIE

Please... I've a full day planned for us tomorrow! We've much... to *share*... you and I. No photo ops. No social media. Just a full-fledged Healy adventure in Clifden. It's important you know the place your people -- the Healys -- came from.

(points to empty chair)

Ah, if only Fergus were here to talk you into staying... he'd have told you we counted the days... that we'll make every moment count, so.

LUCY glances out the window, sets down her belongings, returns to the sofa -- hanging on MILLIE's appeal, until finally --

LUCY

Well, I'd hate for these sandwiches to be tossed out.

MILLIE

(sits)

Indeed! 'Tis a sin to waste chicken salad. Don't worry... they're not from me yard. I've also a loaf of my mother-in-law's tea brack. Assuming Declan hasn't overwhelmed you with it already... what, with the touristy places he dragged you through...

(sets out plates, napkins)

Help yerself. Fresh butter, too. From a dairy farmer friend down the road... grass-fed cows, if that's of any concern.

LUCY

(a cleansing breath)

Whew. Thank you.

MILLIE

No bother, Love.

The two women plunge into edibles on the tea tray as conversation unfolds -- quietly, so as not to be heard by the audience -- but to suggest what will carry them through the afternoon/evening.

A lilting flute provides background as --

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP on MILLIE and LUCY, now seated at the kitchen table, where memorabilia and photos are being pored over.

Shifting conversation topics, marked by dimming light, will indicate the passage of time.

MILLIE

(holding up photo)

As you can see, I was not blessed with the Healy goldilocks like yours. Unfortunately, my genes only afforded me the mousy brown, early-graying, cannot-hold-a-permanent-curl head of hair.

LUCY

(paging through a booklet)

Biomarkers flagged me for high cholesterol... nearsightedness... bunions...

MILLIE

(lifts her foot)

Had mine removed last summer! 'Tis the Healy curse.

LUCY

(from booklet)

Some of these are kind of bizarre. A 50/50 chance of matching musical pitch.

(pointing to chart)

Here's another... I carry the misophonia marker... an aversion for the chewing sound. Detached earlobes, facial freckles, and flat feet.

MILLIE

Aha! Flat feet! Wait until I tell Declan! Your family back in America... also flat-footers?

Abruptly, LUCY closes her booklet.

LUCY

Good question.

MILLIE

Sandals are an open invitation for casual comparison, no? You're in Florida... perhaps when they're barefoot on the beach?

LUCY

It's a little complicated.

MILLIE

Hmm. Well, I do suppose feet can be complicated... what, with unsightly growths and overgrown second toes that look a bit like "E.T."

(on LUCY's blank stare)

Ye know, the wrinkly alien. You've seen *E.T.*?

LUCY

Yeah, when I was little.

LUCY stands, turning away from MILLIE.

MILLIE

I've bombarded you with the family archives. Sorry.

LUCY

(dismissively)

No worries. I didn't pack photos anyway.

MILLIE

Suppose they'd be crushed.

(rises, retrieves blanket)

You've had a long day, Love. What, with the train trip and Declan's uninvited commentary.

MILLIE

(hands LUCY the knit blanket)

You may want this for your feet tonight... over the quilt. I've a lovely jaunt planned for tomorrow... full of surprises! Hopefully, you like surprises.

There's a long silence as LUCY stares at the blanket... weighing what words to offer next.

LUCY

Surprises...

(finally, looking up at MILLIE)

You should probably know mine first.

(a deep inhale)

Millie, I was given up for adoption. As an infant.

MILLIE

(nervously)

Em... were you, so?

LUCY

You're actually the first biological relative I've ever met.

MILLIE

Declan didn't share this surprise with me. Come to think of it, we didn't get into specifics at all. I'll blame the Jameson.

LUCY

I asked him not to. I wanted to tell you myself.

MILLIE

Right...

LUCY

Sorry for springing this on you.

MILLIE

Well, it would have been very Irish of Declan to promise not to tell me... but to discreetly share just enough, like, so that I could have my wits about me. I didn't expect I'd be a representative sample for the whole Healy clan.

(paranoia creeping in)

Did you two have a laugh on the way here? Declan telling you, *don't worry, the eccentric old woman won't ask questions... she's already half-crackers speaking to a dead husband...*

LUCY

It was nothing at all like that, Millie. When Declan told me he'd found a relative in Connemara who was just delightful... well, I finally decided to take the trip that I hoped would explain the feelings I've been carrying around my whole life.

MILLIE

Is this a chat that warrants a small one?

LUCY

Definitely.

MILLIE

Well then, let's saddle up, Love.

MILLIE maneuvers to the kitchen and back, with a whiskey bottle and glasses. She deposits them on the table and pours, hands LUCY her glass and hoists her own --

MILLIE

Slainte!

LUCY

(toasting)

Slainte!

Sips are taken. LIGHTS DIM SLIGHTLY.

LUCY and MILLIE now sit at the kitchen table.

LUCY

Where to begin... when your origin story sounds like a soap opera script...

MILLIE

But the perception of adoption and unplanned pregnancies has evolved. I hope you carry no shame of any sort.

LUCY

Trust me, mine's a real doozy. My conception... involved a beautiful young artist who'd emigrated from Ireland to Chicago... and a *married* American man. Two extended families that never knew I existed. You get the picture.

MILLIE

Which must've made Declan's research...

LUCY

Pretty labor-intensive. But I told him I wasn't going to open Pandora's box. All I needed were a name and a place.

MILLIE

Ah... Healy. Clifden.

LUCY

Thankfully, a couple generations removed from the soap opera. Far outside the rejection zone.

MILLIE

There've been waves of Healys who've settled in Boston... my Liam included... and Chicago...

(thinking)

Hmmm... yes, there were a few cousins, perhaps removed once or twice, if we're getting technical. Fiona... and Jack, with his whole family... a dozen altogether, at least...

LUCY

(touches MILLIE's hand)

I'd rather not climb those branches of the family tree. You understand.

MILLIE

Of course. Sorry.

(sips whiskey)

But I do wonder, Love... why *me*?

LUCY

Declan traced my DNA, my genealogy, back to Ireland, and found you. Someone who could show me where I came from... who I came from.

MILLIE

Well, then... I'd better measure up!

LUCY and MILLIE embrace as a TIN WHISTLE serenades them.

LIGHTS FADE.

(INTERMISSION)

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP on a projected background of an Irish meadow, swaying tall grasses, heather. It's the following morning.

Upstage, a vintage tandem bicycle -- with front basket containing a bundled picnic lunch -- is perched on stabilizing blocks. Beneath the bicycle is the rural road laid out before it...

The gentle lilt of the TIN WHISTLE accompanies MILLIE and LUCY -- pedaling as though they are actually moving through the Clifden countryside. MILLIE is steering recklessly, as she periodically points to sights in the distance and turns back to address LUCY.

MILLIE

(pointing)

The tower of Clifden Castle... there, over the hill...

(another direction)

Down there... the Abbey... which me brother said was haunted by spirits of tortured British soldiers, so I've stayed away. Just around the bend, we'll have a million dollar view the tour buses could never get to, what, with the sharp turns.

LUCY

(on scenery)

Breathtaking... could I have been here in a dream, once?

LUCY inhales and exhales, as if entering nirvana.

MILLIE

Fergus and I used to admire the church spires from this very spot.

From offstage, the bird call of the MAGPIE is heard... flying above them, but unseen by audience. MILLIE and LUCY look up at the bird -- distracting MILLIE...

Suddenly, MILLIE abruptly turns the handlebars as if avoiding something in the imaginary road. A horse neighing is heard. LUCY screams.

MILLIE

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! Oh, dear... my peripheral vision isn't the best! Please don't tell Declan I nearly maimed me neighbor's pony!

LUCY

(turns around to check unseen pony)

Surprisingly quick reaction time, Millie.

They laugh, and let go... absorbing the countryside, the calm, the connection between them. Church bells ring as they ride.

MILLIE

Just a couple more hills, then we'll be coming upon the Healy headstones...

(waving to someone unseen)

G'morning, Gerry! Thanks again for the butter! My cousin Lucy loved it!

Hearing this makes LUCY smile.

LUCY

(surveying scenery)

It's like we're wrapped up in a blanket of *Calluna vulgaris*... from the flowering plant family *Ericaceae*...

MILLIE

Ha! We just call it heather, Love.

LUCY

It's a compulsion... knowing something's genus and species.

MILLIE

Did ye figure out Declan's genus and species, then?

LUCY

(laughing)

He's a tough one to classify.

They pedal harder, MILLIE slightly winded, as if going up an incline.

MILLIE

Whew! Shoulda oiled me knees before I hopped on a bicycle!

(labored pedaling)

Lucy, I hope this isn't... too intrusive... stop me if I cross the line. Your family... your parents in America... do they know about your search? Why you've come to Ireland?

LUCY

My mom died when I was a teenager... right in the midst of the rebellious years, so you can imagine how much guilt I've wrestled with. After she was gone, my dad Leo and I grew so much closer. This trip was actually his suggestion. He could just feel that I needed to know more. I'll never forget the day he brought it up. I surprised him in the men's store he owns, and he just started to cry... like he'd been preparing for that one moment my whole life. Then he squeezed my face, kissed my forehead, and told me to go to Ireland to understand my story, but that I'd better not come back preferring Guinness to Chianti.

MILLIE

What a wise and selfless man! But I'm sorry you lost your mom so young. You should be gentle with yourself about how you handled it, Love. Guilt is a prison of the heart.

(wistfully)

How I need to be reminded meself...

LUCY

She battled cancer twice. What kept her going... the dream of holding grandchildren one day. At least she was spared from the disappointment.

MILLIE

Ah, how I relate... the thought of holding grandchildren. I have two in the States, Patrick and Katelyn. But I've never met them in person. Never rocked them, never hugged them. Thank goodness for the iPad, or I'd be reliant on phone calls and snapshots...

(stops herself)

We would have gotten on well, your mammy and me. What was her name?

LUCY

Nina.

MILLIE

How lovely, Lucy. You were their answered prayer.

LUCY

I was.

MILLIE

(lighthearted)

Oh, to have been my parents' answered prayer! More likely, I was a calendar method baby!

MILLIE and LUCY melt into welcome laughter.

MILLIE

Have you any siblings?

LUCY

I wish. A partner-in-crime would have softened some blows. Imagine a huge extended family... cousins running around... dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin. Then there was me. Just once, I wanted so badly to blend into the family portrait. But I always stood out. It's why I've enjoyed looking at all your pictures, Millie. I'd have fit in. Finally, I'd have fit in. Belonging is a basic human need, and sometimes I was starving for it. Not with my parents. I knew how much they loved me. But with the rest of the Puccinis... a different story. I'll never forget overhearing some cousins at a family picnic... I think I was only seven or eight... and they were picking teams for a water balloon toss... and Frankie, who was a few years older, told the captain of their team not to pick me... because I wasn't one of *them*. Of all the stupid things kids say to each other, that is the one comment that's played over and over in my mind.

MILLIE

What a gobshite! Trust me, if Fergus'd overheard such nonsense... he'd have taken a shovel to Frankie's arse! Family... isn't about genetics. It's about love. Battle-tested and unconditional love. Everyone's deserving.

LUCY

Everyone is deserving...

MILLIE

(coasting downhill)

Ye know, I suppose most people -- meself included -- take for granted knowing who we look like... knowing who to blame for our eccentricities...

LUCY

I've always been curious about my ancestors... what of them might manifest in me.

MILLIE

Lucky for you, my poor lung capacity does *not* manifest in you. You're in glorious shape!

LUCY

Are you kidding? It's been a free ride... I haven't been pedaling at all back here!

Their laughter continues along with FIDDLE as the women pedal, enjoy scenery. The MAGPIE joyfully caws overhead.

LUCY

Did that magpie follow us?

(covers head)

It better not shit on my head, Millie!

MILLIE

(looks up, amused)

Ha! No bother! Declan included a shampoo and style in the Legacy Tours' emergency fund!

LUCY and MILLIE erupt in a fit of laughter.

LUCY

You and Fergus must have put a lot of miles on this tandem.

MILLIE

Wish we'd have tallied them. He surprised me with it when Liam and Darcy'd gone... insisted we had years of adventure ahead of us.

LUCY

It must be so hard... without him. You two were lucky to have found each other.

MILLIE

'Twas destiny. Have you been in love?

LUCY

Once. I was engaged to a pilot. For fifteen years. And like so many relationships in my life... I eventually put up walls.

MILLIE

How sad. You've so much to offer.

LUCY

(pedaling harder)

Funny, a lot of people assume I have it all, but what they don't see is the workaholic avoidant behavior... the holidays spent on airplanes... in hotel bars, thousands of miles from home, staring into an empty martini glass.

(an abrupt shift)

Are we almost to the picnic spot?

MILLIE

(pointing)

Just ahead, Love. Near the cement cross.

Instruments converge for longer upbeat song during set change (FIDDLES, FLUTE, TIN WHISTLE).

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 8

LIGHTS UP on a projected backdrop -- rolling hills, visible "lazy beds" etched in the landscape.

In the foreground, there are various headstones surrounding a cement cross. The tandem leans up against a tree.

MILLIE and LUCY are sitting on the grass, with their picnic lunch laid out. They enjoy sandwiches and bottles of lemonade.

LUCY

Now that I've turned our casual bike tour into a therapy session... can I ask... why you haven't met your grandkids in person...

MILLIE

Suppose it would be cathartic to finally come out with it... what, with all the flimsy excuses I've given to all of Clifden. They've bought my load of shite for years --

(imitating herself)

Liam and Cara are too busy with med school, law school... Liam and Cara are too busy with studying for boards and the bar exam... Liam and Cara are too busy planning for the wedding... Liam and Cara said they'd stop in Ireland at the tail end of their honeymoon to Italy... Liam's talked of baptizing Patrick in Clifden... Cara's been tied up for months with a big trial... Liam and Cara couldn't make the funeral for Fergus--what, with Katelyn too young to fly overseas...

LUCY

Oh, Millie. They didn't come home for Fergus's funeral?

MILLIE

No. At least Darcy did. And we'd loads of friends who adored Fergus, his side of the family from Cork. Shepherd's pies up to me ceiling. But it tapers off, ye know. There's always the next loss to be dealt with. Nothing prepares you for the feel of an empty home, Love.

LUCY dwells on this for a long moment.

MILLIE

I suppose I'm partly to blame. We did go to Boston for Liam's wedding. Had a brilliant time. Black-tie affair. More silverware than I knew what to do with. But I knew... there was a shift in Liam's heart. He married an American girl, who was lovely enough... but had this air of condescension. Didn't think much of Clifden. Quite likely, didn't think much of Fergus and me. 'Twas a long flight home the day after the wedding... not just because I was gripping Fergus's arm the whole while. Though neither of us ever said it, we knew. We'd lost him. Liam was happier as an American. But after Fergus died, and I found out they weren't coming for the funeral... I let my emotions get the best of me, and I --

(stops herself)

Sorry. I'll leave it there.

LUCY tenderly brushes MILLIE's arm. They share a silent, knowing moment... the moment they realize their feelings of emptiness are collective.

LUCY scans their surroundings, catches sight of the landscape's "lazy beds" in the distance.

LUCY

(pointing)

What crop is planted in rows like that, Millie?

MILLIE

(turns to see)

Ah, the scars of the Irish countryside, as Fergus used to say. Brits called them "lazy beds." They're remnants of our ancestors' toil... before the Great Irish Famine potato blight of 1845.

LUCY

The Healys worked those fields?

MILLIE

Of course. But to call those lazy beds! Damn them! It was backbreaking work. Farmers carried seaweed, sand, crushed shells... piled in parallel ridges... planted seeds in the high places and scooped up soil from the sides. Over a hundred and fifty years ago...

LUCY

I guess I never knew...

MILLIE

Over a million Irish perished in The Great Hunger... it was thought that heaven's gate opened wide.

*LUCY is visibly moved by MILLIE's account.
There's an unspoken prayer offered up.*

MILLIE

The acreage is for sale. I'd hoped the county would at least install a plaque before there's new ownership. So the world never forgets.

LUCY

God, yes. This history can't be lost.

(sips lemonade)

Millie, this may sound weird... but do you think it's possible... this is where my passion for the land comes from? Back to my Healy roots?

MILLIE

I think it's undeniable, Love. You come from a long line of farmers. It's in your bloodline.

LUCY reverently caresses the grass.

*At the same time, MILLIE catches sight of
something in the distance --*

MILLIE

(waving, jumping up)

Father! Over here!

*FATHER BRIAN appears, in funeral vestments
and prayer book in-hand. LUCY rises.*

MILLIE

Whose burial?

FATHER BRIAN

Ah, Peter O'Malley.

(makes sign of cross)

Terrible auto accident, I'm afraid. Closed casket at the wake.

MILLIE

Right. I'd said a rosary. His funeral was in the States, no?

FATHER BRIAN

Yes, but he'd stated in his wishes he wanted to be laid to rest in Clifden.

MILLIE nods.

FATHER BRIAN's tone shifts as he reaches out his hand to shake LUCY's.

FATHER BRIAN

(cheerfully)

You must be the Lucy I blessed the house for? Pleased to meet you.

(they shake hands)

Father Brian.

MILLIE

Oh dear, my manners!

(beaming with pride)

Meet my cousin, Lucy Healy Puccini!

FATHER BRIAN

Welcome to Clifden. We're treating you well, I hope?

LUCY

It's been lovely, Father. It'll be hard to leave.

MILLIE

(softly)

Then *don't*...

FATHER BRIAN and LUCY regard the melancholy in MILLIE -- which she quickly corrects.

MILLIE

Now, Father... don't forget about the ceili! We've a real fiddler, not just my Sony player and a cassette!

FATHER BRIAN

(thumb's up)

Wouldn't miss it, ladies!

(a wink)

Thankfully, I've enough time to brush up on the jig!

(a sudden recollection)

Oh, and Millie... Agnes in our rectory was trying to phone you earlier... someone named Declan has been emailing her incessantly, looking for *you*.

MILLIE

'Tis nothing important, I'm sure. Probably Declan's attempt to meddle.

FATHER BRIAN

Are you sure? Agnes said this Declan seemed desperate to reach you...

MILLIE

Ah, Father. It's just his personality. He's a Dubliner, ye know.

FATHER BRIAN nods, understands perfectly what that implies.

FATHER BRIAN

Well, then... I'll let you resume your adventure... in the cemetery. Hmmm. Interesting choice.

FATHER BRIAN waves as he heads offstage.

FATHER BRIAN

(calling out)

A pleasure to meet ye, Lucy Healy Puccini!

LUCY

You too!

(turns to MILLIE)

A ceili?

MILLIE

'Twas to be a surprise. I'll seal me lips!

MILLIE gathers remnants from lunch, places the bundle in the tandem basket.

MILLIE

C'mon, then... time to introduce you to the dead Healys!

EAMON

(from somewhere unseen)

Hey! Show respect, would ye!

MILLIE and LUCY look at each other, then scan the area, bewildered... neither understanding where EAMON's voice came from.

MILLIE

Did you say something?

LUCY

No... but I *definitely* heard a man's voice!

MILLIE

Perhaps a hooligan, playing hide-and-seek...

(calling out, to an unseen hooligan)

Coulda given me a heart spell, so! Better scatter before I can identify ye!

Satisfied with her stern warning, MILLIE leads LUCY from tombstone to tombstone, as if a seasoned tour guide.

MILLIE

(leaning down)

Poor Nora Healy... died in childbirth, near the end of The Great Famine. 'Tis a wonder a mother could carry a baby at all while she was nearly starved herself.

LUCY

Did she leave other children behind? A husband?

MILLIE

As I recall, at least six or seven... 'twas nothing but loss and heartache in Ireland back then.

MILLIE and LUCY advance toward the next tombstone.

MILLIE

'Tis my great uncle, Seamus. Died a hero taking up arms in the Easter Rising of 1916. Heard it was to impress a Dublin girl he'd been chasing after... but I never believed it. A man who fought alongside him came to my grandparents' farm once... just to tell them that Uncle Seamus saved his life... and to lay flowers here.

LUCY

He went all the way to Dublin to fight?

MILLIE

On foot. Took him ten days, and a rifle to carry.

LUCY gently brushes the tombstone as they continue to the next one.

MILLIE

A tragic farm accident took cousin Diarmuid in 1948. Picked out an engagement ring... a week later, the family picked out his coffin. Fate is cruel. Can't imagine losing Fergus before we'd even had a chance to start our lives together...

The next tombstone stands out as wider than the others.

MILLIE

Here's the only double-plot in the cemetery... Ann and Patrick Healy, buried together. Died within hours of each other... he, of a massive stroke... she, of a broken heart, imagining life without him.

(staring at tombstone)

Sometimes, I wish I'd have gone with Fergus.. Ah, sorry. Didn't mean to heave this onto you.

LUCY moves closer to MILLIE, gently rests a hand on her shoulder. MILLIE turns toward her, and they embrace.

LUCY

Maybe we needed each other, Millie.

MILLIE

I've no doubt, Love.

Suddenly, EAMON jumps up from his hiding place -- behind his tombstone, far stage right.

Dressed in 1980s rock band attire -- leather pants and vest, studded cuffs and boots, sleeveless t-shirt -- with a charred burn hole. Iconic long hair, a bass guitar slung across his chest.

EAMON approaches MILLIE and LUCY with an exaggerated swagger.

EAMON

Geezus, listening to the two a-you is like a *depressing* song! The kind-a song that makes ye want to jump off a cliff!

MILLIE and LUCY are taken aback, cling to each other, try to ascertain whether to run from EAMON or hear him out.

MILLIE
(closely studies EAMON)

You couldn't be...

EAMON fluffs his long locks and grins mischievously. He strums a few notes on his guitar.

MILLIE stares at EAMON for longer than is considered polite.

No... It's not possible.

MILLIE

Where'd you come from?

LUCY

I usually hang out in that vicinity.

EAMON
(pointing to his tombstone)

You're not --

MILLIE

I am! I know it's been awhile... but ye must recognize me?

EAMON

Are rock concerts staged in the cemetery now?

MILLIE
(mockingly)
(sweeping gesture encompassing tombstones)

What an audience!

Hey! Might I remind you I've performed Wembley a few times.

EAMON
(dramatic guitar chords)

Truth is... I'm restricted. Kinda like "house arrest" of sorts.

MILLIE advances toward EAMON's tombstone, studies the etched markings.

MILLIE

What sort of gobshite -- ?

EAMON

(pointing to tombstone)

Right there. Etched in stone for all of eternity. Eamon... Eamon Healy.

EAMON curtsies. MILLIE gasps. LUCY leans in toward MILLIE.

LUCY

Millie, tell me you didn't put any psychedelics in the chicken salad.

MILLIE

(to LUCY, discreetly)

He's just a look-alike having a laugh at our expense, I'm sure... Don't you worry... I'll have him begging for mercy and running for safety.

(to EAMON, with sarcasm)

Is that so? My cousin, Eamon Healy? The Eamon Healy who was electrocuted during a concert in 1983?

EAMON

Cool! I always hoped I'd be a legend...

MILLIE

My cousin, Eamon Healy, is dead.

EAMON

Technically, yes. But I haven't crossed over yet.

MILLIE

That so?

EAMON

This is my purgatory. I've an assignment before I'll be admitted.

(rolls his eyes)

Shoulda laid off the recreational drugs... refrained from shagging the groupies... maybe then I wouldn't be in this predicament... ye know, with the --

(air quotes)

-- leadership.

MILLIE

If you were at all dead... or a ghost... or whatever... we wouldn't see you in flesh-and-blood form, now would we? 'Tis a prank! I was here when the real Eamon Healy was buried.

(MORE)

MILLIE (CONT'D)

(scanning cemetery)

Where are the muckers who put you up to it? Did ye get betting money outta scaring us, so?

LUCY

(to MILLIE)

Maybe we should just go, Millie.

MILLIE

(to LUCY)

I'm not done with him yet...

EAMON

(taps his guitar)

I can prove it, ye know... that I'm the *real* Eamon Healy... the semi-dead legendary bass guitarist from the chart-topping band, *Unhinged*.

MILLIE

(hands on hips)

Is that so? You're mighty full of yerself.

EAMON takes over the stage, shreds on his guitar in an animated solo performance, flipping his hair up and down.

MILLIE and LUCY watch in awe... captivated.

LUCY

Damn.

EAMON ends his solo with a sweeping flourish, kisses his guitar.

EAMON

Yep! Still got it! What d'ya think? Used to make the crowd go mad...

(grinning)

Halter tops thrown at my feet onstage... like flowers at the horse race, I tell ya!

MILLIE

You're quite good... but not necessarily "Eamon Healy good."

LUCY

(to MILLIE)

Tell him you need something more.

MILLIE

I'll need more evidence... or I'll report you to the Garda for loitering.

EAMON

(closing in on MILLIE)

Hey, hey... settle. I've a got a convincing bit for ye.

MILLIE

(points to her wristwatch)

You've one minute.

EAMON

I only need ten seconds. Fergus talks about *you...* to *me*.

Stone-cold shocked by this revelation, MILLIE falls to her knees. LUCY consoles her.

MILLIE

What -- do you -- ?

EAMON

All the time... I mean, literally *all* the time, kitten. If I'm being honest, sometimes I have to tune him out because he goes on and on... and on... about you. But I do enjoy the magpie stories. It's how he gets your attention, ye know!

MILLIE

(emotion builds)

How do you... communicate? With my Fergus?

EAMON

It's this weird, nebulous existence, in the afterlife... some of the ones who crossed over can visit us... ye know, the black sheep sort, if you will... Fergus is a cool guy. Full-a good advice. Kinda mentoring me through my purgatorial predicament.

MILLIE

(tearful)

Why? Why... can't he visit *me*...

(glances up at EAMON)

Just like you do... so real, like?

EAMON

Sorry, that's not the way it works. Oh, yeah. We "SDs," -- ye know, the "semi-deads" -- are given a little bit of wisdom, and a few tasks, as our ticket out of purgatory... blah, blah, blah.

MILLIE

(tearful, simmering anger)

Next time you see Fergus, ask him why he doesn't visit me then... not even in my dreams! He can laugh, and you can laugh, about his foolish magpie pecks at my window! But I *suffer*... he knows how much I suffer... without him... without Liam and Darcy... without my grandchildren, Patrick and Katelyn to hug and kiss... how dare he! How dare *you*!

MILLIE angrily tries pushing EAMON's headstone over, to no avail.

EAMON turns to LUCY --

EAMON

Could ye help me lighten the mood here?

LUCY

(shoves EAMON)

You're an ass!

LUCY gently helps MILLIE to her feet, guides her toward the tandem. As MILLIE gathers herself, she turns back toward EAMON --

MILLIE

What's yer task... the thing that'll spring you from purgatory?

EAMON

I have to heal someone's heart.

MILLIE

Ha! Good luck with that! 'Cuz ye broke mine into bits!

EAMON

Hey, I'm really sorry about that! Geez, if only I could read me audience a bit better.

MILLIE and LUCY mount the tandem, but EAMON stops them from leaving.

EAMON

My assignment might seem easy to you... but there are rules of engagement for me... that've rendered me a bit hopeless.

LUCY

(to MILLIE)

Millie, this couldn't be part of the whole authentic Irish thing that Legacy Tours line up, right?.

MILLIE

Ah, I shoulda taken ye to the woolen mill.

EAMON

(on their disbelief)

Totally serious! I can only heal someone's heart if I communicate in *song*... and I can't tell them what to do. I can only *lead* them to heal by asking provocative questions. Ye know, point the way to their epiphany.

MILLIE

'Tis heaven's way of saying you're an unworthy sod. Expect you'll camping out here for awhile!

The FIDDLE offers a melancholy ballad as --

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 9

LIGHTS UP on the projected meadow backdrop, with MILLIE and LUCY pedaling on the stationary tandem, facing the opposite direction, headed back to their point of origin.

They ride in silence as the MAGPIE makes itself known with intermittent cawing that sounds remarkably mournful.

MILLIE

Didn't see *that* coming, I assure you. If you're gonna post the review of yer trip, could ye leave out the part about the semi-dead rock band cousin hidin' out in the cemetery?

LUCY

That'll be our secret, Millie.

MILLIE

No matter anyway... I mean, after you've left Clifden.

LUCY

I'll be back.

MILLIE

That phrase... I'll be back... carries no weight... unless, of course, you've designs to be a blow-in.

LUCY

What's a blow-in?

MILLIE

Ah, the foreigners who visit and find these little Irish coastal towns so quaint. Next thing, they're talking to a realtor about buying a small cottage with WiFi and a fabulous view, so they can come to Ireland to unplug from their over-programmed lives! Ha! Sometimes I feel like a bonafide stage prop.

LUCY

That's not at all what I had in mind... I'd come back to visit *you*, Millie.

MILLIE

Tomorrow, Declan comes to collect you. Meeting an Irish relative checked off yer bucket list, right?

LUCY

My visit to Clifden... my time with you...

(a deep inhale)

Millie, is your heart as full as mine right now?

MILLIE

(softly)

Indeed, it is.

*Suddenly, the MAGPIE hovers above them,
cawing incessantly.*

MILLIE

Fine timing, ye got there, Fergus! Hope ye pick up on me sarcasm! Yer friend, Eamon, is waitin' on ye. Back there... fourth tombstone on the right!

(building intensity)

So ye know... I'll *not* accept that *this* is how ye tell me you love me... pecking and cawing! Fly away!

*The MAGPIE's spirited cawing fades as though
the bird is flying away.*

MILLIE

Sorry. Got caught up in me rage. On the bright side, we've one more night before Declan steals you away.

LUCY

Then let's make it count, Millie! Though I have no idea what a ceili is...

MILLIE

Just follow our lead, Love.

FIDDLES offer joyous ceili music as --

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 10

LIGHTS UP on MILLIE's yard. It's twilight. In the distance, a projection of the farmhouse can be seen, lit from within.

Twinkle lights hang from trees that frame the yard -- which will serve as the ceili dance floor. Stage left, upstage, a rustic picnic table becomes a makeshift bar and buffet table.

MILLIE and LUCY busy themselves, arranging edibles and drinks, while --

The FIDDLER and TIN WHISTLER appear, moving in casually choreographed patterns, warming up their instruments in casual riffs. They will participate as musicians and ceili guests.

From offstage -- a bass guitar much like EAMON's can be heard -- prompting MILLIE and LUCY to exchange worried glances.

LUCY

That's not --

MILLIE

No way! Probably an echo from the pub down the lane.

FATHER BRIAN arrives, impressing everyone with his leap-overs. He stops at the picnic table.

FATHER BRIAN

Be sure not to tempt the parish priest with Guinness. I've Mass tomorrow at eight, and I *cannot* be hungover, or Agnes will be sure to recognize it and hand me two aspirin... all the while, staring at me over her bifocals.

MILLIE

(hands FATHER BRIAN a whiskey)

We'll limit ye then, Father. 'Tis for the toast to Lucy.

Suddenly, DECLAN bursts onto the scene, in very casual attire, as though he had no time to consider his appearance. He seems frazzled, beelines over to MILLIE.

MILLIE

(to DECLAN)

If you've designs on collecting Lucy early, I'll refer you to our contract. You're not expected until morning.

DECLAN

No, no, no. Something told me you'd be throwing a lovely farewell for Ms. Puccini this evening... I was right, indeed! A ceili!

LUCY

(approaches)

You're about twelve hours ahead of schedule.

DECLAN

(nervously)

No, no. You've misunderstood. I'm not here to escort you back tonight. We'll stick to the plan. I've merely --

MILLIE interrupts, takes LUCY by the hand, leading her toward the middle of the yard/dance floor.

MILLIE

I'll give you a crash course in ceili dancing!

(to DECLAN)

Fortunately for you, we're one short for even lines... so I guess you'll do. But absolutely *no* soliciting of any kind!

DECLAN

(desperate)

Of course not. I'll just be minding the step count. Ah, em... Mrs. Whelan, might we have a quick word?

MILLIE ignores DECLAN, distributes whiskey.

MILLIE

This being Lucy's last evening here in Clifden, I'll ask ye to raise a glass --

Glasses are hoisted by ceili guests.

MILLIE

Please forgive any inelegance, as Fergus was always the toast-maker in our family... but I'll not let this occasion go without one, so here's the Millie version...

(a cleansing breath)

I'd like to make a toast to Lucy, whose journey brought her here... to these scarred and sacred Healy hills... to the hearth that Fergus and I always hoped would bring joy to those who entered...

(raises glass higher)

To Lucy Healy Puccini... forever to be known as *Clifden's Daughter*. Slainte!

ALL

Slainte!

Glasses clank and whiskey is consumed. LUCY runs to MILLIE and draws her into a tearful embrace.

MILLIE

(wiping tears away)

Enough of the keening... it's time we dance!

MILLIE directs two rows of dancers, facing each other.

MILLIE

(to LUCY)

We'll guide you along. Just remember, we advance and recede in threes. You'll be brilliant.

The FIDDLER commences an opening bar of "Walls of Limerick" music. The lines of dancers -- who are holding hands -- advance and recede in threes, coaxing LUCY in their impromptu tutorial.

As the dance unfolds, hoots and hollers are spontaneously offered up. FATHER BRIAN exaggerates his ceili steps, prompting laughter. The festivity is pure and unabashed. LUCY easily catches on.

The song ends and rows of dancers bow to each other, signaling the dance has ended.

As they break to catch their breaths, FATHER BRIAN and a MUSICIAN congratulate LUCY near the picnic table.

DECLAN guides MILLIE by the arm, to a dark corner where they can speak privately.

MILLIE

You'll not waste what little time I have left with Lucy... on your nonsense.

DECLAN

Ah, if only it were nonsense. It's actually rather sobering... the news I have to share with you. I tried reaching you immediately.

MILLIE

I know about the adoption. Lucy confided in me. We had a good chat about it. She really opened up, so I --

DECLAN

(interrupts)

That's not what I'm talking about.

MILLIE

And I'll not be accepting the last installment from Legacy Tours. I'll have to figure out another way to save my farm. Just didn't seem right...

DECLAN

Furthest thing from my mind. God, if only it were that simple!

MILLIE

Then out with it. Before Sheila sees us out here and decides to crash our party!

DECLAN

(wipes his sweaty forehead)

I'll surely be kicked to the curb... once this gets out.

Unbeknownst to MILLIE and DECLAN, who are conferring in a quiet corner, LUCY has separated from the picnic table conversation to admire the surrounding landscape in early evening light... as though recording the moment in her mind...

but she does this close enough to hear everything DECLAN and MILLIE are discussing.

MILLIE

What've you done?

DECLAN

Seems I've made a mistake. A very unfortunate, life-altering mistake. Coulda happened to any of the tour specialists, I suppose --

MILLIE

(interrupts)

Out with it!

DECLAN

Ah, em... a terrible error which I'll regret the rest of my life.

(clears throat)

Well, em... remember how I described the scientific process... of DNA and ancestry research and lists that go boom?

MILLIE

(wary)

I remember...

DECLAN

Here's the quick version. A new DNA relative popped up yesterday in Lucy's portal... a close relative whose sudden -- and very poorly timed appearance in our database -- pointed to flaws in my research. Truthfully, I inadvertently swung onto the wrong branch of Lucy's family tree...

(pleading for mercy)

Silly orangutan! But when we really think about it, to some degree, we're all genetically connected... especially we Irish. Think about the endogamous nature of our beloved island! Adam and Eve back in the Garden of Eden... for God's sake, we're all related, no?

MILLIE

What do you *mean*? Wrong branch?

DECLAN

Without getting too technical, I had to rely on triangulation studies of Lucy's DNA because there were no close relatives in her portal... until yesterday. My records research involved more shortcuts, you see. Ah, if only I could retrace my steps on the trail of birth records, ship manifests, the census, the D.M.V. in America -- a righteous nightmare...

MILLIE

Oh, dear.

DECLAN

As it turns out, I aligned her with the Healy family tree from Clifden, when in actuality, she is a Healey, from the clan in Westport. I must remind you, Mrs. Whelan, human history is a messy, migratory affair.

MILLIE stands in shock. Meanwhile, LUCY is also shocked from her secret vantage point. She continues to eavesdrop on MILLIE and DECLAN.

MILLIE

Do you mean Healey, spelled H-E-A-L-E-Y? As opposed to *my* H-E-A-L-Y?

DECLAN

(an embarrassed grin)

What a difference an “E” makes!

MILLIE

This can't be... I think your mistake is *the* mistake. We've so much in common...

DECLAN

I'm afraid not, Mrs. Whelan. I've recreated her genealogical path, now, with the Healey relative who is unmistakably, her great uncle. Sorry to say, you and Lucy are not cousins. You're not related at all.

MILLIE

(fury building)

This can't be true!

DECLAN

I'm afraid it is. Please forgive me, Mrs. Whelan.

MILLIE

(wistfully)

Ah... suppose we see what we *want* to see.

(to DECLAN)

You'll say nothing of this... to *anyone*. This would devastate Lucy. She's opened up to me... I to her. We've shared so much...

DECLAN

It'll be found out eventually. I've lost a night's sleep over this. If I don't set it right --

MILLIE

(pointing in DECLAN's face)

Not a word. Or she'll never come back to Clifden. To *me*. I'll be cast aside.

MILLIE turns from DECLAN, headed toward the picnic table. In the darkness, she bumps into LUCY -- whose facial expression affirms she has heard everything.

MILLIE

(mortified)

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph --

LUCY

-- Can't bail you out this time.

(angrily)

I'm trying to figure out which is worse, Millie... Declan's innocent mistake, which he was trying to correct... or your willingness to deceive me... for selfish gain... because you're lonely and desperate and resigned to living in the past.

(points to MILLIE's running shoes)

I get it... maybe I could be the family member who actually gave a damn about you... instead of sending you shoes to make up for never visiting!

The truth stings, and MILLIE absorbs it... but she does, almost willingly, because deep down, she knows she deserves it. It's her purgatory.

LUCY

Thankfully, I've just enough time to meet my uncle in Westport before my flight tomorrow. I'm sure you agree... it'll be less awkward for all of us if I leave Clifden tonight.

MILLIE

Please, Lucy! forgive me! My concern was for *you* --

LUCY

Thank you for your hospitality, Millie. I really hope you can keep your farm. It's pretty special.

DECLAN

(awkwardly, to LUCY)

Might you be needing a ride, then?

DECLAN dangles car keys, but LUCY just glares at him, then walks away, MILLIE begins to weep. The FIDDLE offers sad, slow-tempo notes.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 11

SPOTLIGHT on LUCY, who's perched on a barstool, with her luggage beside her. Nothing else is visible, except for the small bar in front of her, which also serves as a bed & breakfast check-in desk. LUCY dings the service bell sitting on the bar.

Suddenly, the unmistakable bass guitar of EAMON HEALY can be heard. The solo notes grow louder --

LUCY

(calling out)

Not in the mood for hide-and-seek with a ghost!

EAMON emerges behind the bar, finishing his mini-performance.

EAMON

The preferred term is "semi-dead."

LUCY

I thought you were confined to your domain.

EAMON

Oh, yeah... I usually hang in the cemetery. But I've gotten an exemption... just for tonight. Fergus pleaded my case to higher-ups... He knew ye needed me.

LUCY

Time for me to depart the land of make-believe, Eamon. I'm leaving Ireland tomorrow.

EAMON

So I've heard.

(removing his bass guitar)

Ah, this one's just for show... the spectacle, ye know?

EAMON removes his bass guitar, bends down behind the bar and stands up with an acoustic guitar, straps it on --

EAMON

Goin' back to my roots with this one...

(taps guitar)

Before ye go... I've a new song.

LUCY

Is the song really for *me*, or is it your ticket out of purgatory?

EAMON

(a charming grin)

Alright, maybe a bit of both. Just hear me out.

EAMON climbs atop the bar, sits with legs dangling down. He begins as though he's performing for an amphitheater crowd, but will soften as the song progresses... ending with as much tenderness as he and LUCY can possibly tolerate without breaking down...

EAMON

Here's a brand new tune, called "*Beckoning*." See what ye think.

While gently strumming strings of his acoustic guitar, Eamon transports them both to another realm --

EAMON

In the hills of Clifden, where the shadows dance / A tale unfolds, a second chance. / Through the misty moors and the ancient stones / A story of the heart in windswept tones. (Chorus) What've you been chasing, girl? In the winds so wild? / A phantom of the past, or the laughter of a child? / In the heather's embrace, find a place to call your own. / In the heart of Clifden, where the love has grown. / On a tandem ride, through the emerald green, / A tale of two souls, yet to be seen. / In the rhythm of waves and the magpie's call, / Find the answers, girl, where the shadows fall. / (Bridge) Through the misty veil, where the truth is told, / In Millie's gaze, secrets unfold. / In the whispered winds, and the ocean's roar, / Clifden's Daughter, return once more. / (Chorus) What've you been chasing girl, in the winds so wild? / A phantom of the past, or the laughter of a child? / In the heather's embrace, find a place to call your own. / In the heart of Clifden, where the love has grown. / In the knit of time, where the threads entwine, / A tapestry of life, a design divine. / In the echoes of laughter and the tear-stained years, / Find your solace, girl, in the Irish cheers. / (Outro) So, what've you been chasing, in this Celtic dream? / A family's embrace, or love so keen? / In the rolling hills and the twilight's glow, / Clifden's Daughter, it's time to know.

*LUCY contemplates the lyrics, long after
EAMON's song has ended. They exchange a
knowing glance.*

EAMON

(a wink)

I'll see ye down the road, kitten.

Eamon strums as --

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 12

LIGHTS UP on MILLIE's farmhouse. It's the morning after the ceili. The window unto the world is open, revealing the MAGPIE, quietly perched.

The emptiness of the farmhouse is deeply felt by MILLIE, who sits at the table, stirring her tea. She's still wearing her pajamas and robe.

Suddenly, there's a knock at the door. DECLAN's silhouette can be seen on the other side, holding something.

MILLIE

(calling out)

I'm not here!

DECLAN

(through door)

Mrs. Whelan, I've brought a cake... as a peace offering. And your check. I can just leave them here at your doorstep.

MILLIE

Your check's a waste of paper and ink, as I said last night.

(softly)

Did she make it back to Dublin safely?

DECLAN

(through door)

Suppose so. I'm sure Legacy Tours saw to it. I was taken off the assignment after I brought her to the Westport B & B. Em, I'll be pursuing other professional opportunities, as they say.

MILLIE

May I suggest you double-check spelling errors in your next position?

DECLAN

(through door)

Must admit I deserve that.

MILLIE

You do! An' ye deserve me burying ye under a half-ton of peat... tossing ye into Sheila's bullpen... or worse yet, trapping you in a bus packed with obnoxious tourists, that never stops, just keeps on driving and driving, until can't take it anymore and jump out while it's rounding the bend.

DECLAN

(through door)

A little over-the-top, even for *you*...

MILLIE

What flavor is it? The cake?

DECLAN

(through door)

Lemon with coconut frosting.

MILLIE rises, advances toward the door. She opens it to find DECLAN grinning, holding a pastry box.

DECLAN

There's one more thing you should know... something that may make you feel vindicated.
(on MILLIE's penetrating stare)

Before she left Clifden... she inquired about the land auction. Of the Healy Hills. The lazy beds. Perhaps she had an ulterior motive? A lucrative development in mind?

Without a word, MILLIE grabs the cake, slams the door in his face. By the time MILLIE returns to the table, his silhouette has disappeared.

MILLIE retrieves a plate, napkin, utensils from the kitchen, and returns to the table, sits.

As she opens the pastry box, lifts the cake, cuts a piece -- MILLIE speaks to the empty chair --

MILLIE

Just us again... suppose I can't be angry with you forever. Then I'd really have nobody to talk to... even Margaret has moved on. Oh, not in that regard. She's put her house on the market and is filling out papers to move to America... live with her daughter and son-in-law in Manhattan. It sounds dreadful... but she seems very happy about it all. They've promised her a Broadway show at least once a month...

(MORE)

MILLIE (CONT'D)

it's the first time I've seen her smile since before Neal passed.

(takes a bite of cake, savors it)

Could it be my fault, Fergus? Perhaps if I didn't tell Declan to withhold the truth from Lucy... she'd still be here, and we could have gone to Westport together, just as good friends would have... to find the Healeys with the extra "e." I was selfish. But we'd found such ease with each other, once we got past the awkward tensions... it didn't cross my mind we weren't related at all. I was heartbroken thinking I'd lose her... but if what Declan says is true... that Lucy had designs on developing the Healy Hills into a fancy resort... well, I wouldn't even want to see her again.

(dabs tears with a napkin)

Oh, how my heart hurts, Fergus.

The MAGPIE caws, then there's another knock at the door.

MILLIE

I'm here for *anyone* but you, Declan! An' I could care less if ye were bitten by the mule and bleed out on my porch...

LUCY

(through door)

It's not Declan.

MILLIE sits in stunned silence. She turns to see LUCY's silhouette through the curtained door.

MILLIE heads for the door, opens it. LUCY stands there, smiling -- which takes MILLIE off guard.

LUCY

I forgot something... *important*.

MILLIE ushers LUCY inside, then spots the knit blanket draped across the sofa. She grabs it, hands it to LUCY.

MILLIE

Sorry for the morning clothes... the night's blended into day, I'm afraid.

LUCY

(lifts blanket)

Thank you, Millie.

MILLIE

Headed to Westport, then? Before your flight?

LUCY

I stayed in Westport last night. A sweet B & B. Five-star entertainment. Then I woke up and came straight back to Clifden. And changed my flight... to give me just a little more time.

*Suddenly, DECLAN appears at the window,
beside the MAGPIE, spying on the women.*

MILLIE

Right. To inquire at the realty office? About the land auction?

LUCY

Well, partly... yes. How'd you find out about that?

MILLIE

Clifden is a hotbed for gossip.

LUCY

(emotion building)

Listen, Millie. I realized I don't need Westport. I don't need the Healeys with an extra "e," or chromosomes in common, to help me understand who I am... and *whose* I am.

(moves closer to MILLIE)

I actually crossed paths with Eamon last night. You know, he's more profound than we gave him credit for... and he came up with some lyrics that may very well have sent him to the V.I.P. lounge of the afterlife. Catchy chorus, too... *what've you been chasing, girl?*... made me realize what I thought eluded me was there all along. My journey led me to Clifden... to *you*, Millie... What I left behind...

(clutches blanket)

... wasn't just this. It was part of my heart, and I'm entrusting it to you, for safekeeping, until I return to Clifden. It's why I asked about the Healy Hills. The Healy Hills with only one "e," to be clear.

(a tearful smile)

My interest in the land auction... the lazy beds... is so you and I could grow flowers there... together. Acres and acres of flowers that people could explore and learn about the Famine and honor the hard work... the heartache... of so many Irish. Like walking through a rainbow, Millie. A healing journey where scars had been.

MILLIE

(wipes tears)

I do know a fella who sells flower seeds. Rare ones, too.

LUCY

Perfect. We'll start with him.

LUCY drapes the blanket over the empty chair for Fergus, and takes MILLIE's hands, looks into her eyes.

In the background, DECLAN is seen wiping his own tears -- struck by what's unfolding --

LUCY

Come with me! To America! I'll pay for your flight. Get you a Valium. I can help you pack and whatever you might forget, we can find in Miami. I have month off between projects... we'll plot out the flower farm... assuming the auction goes our way.

(building excitement)

Your son and his family could meet us there... enjoy the beach!

MILLIE drifts into the fantasy LUCY has presented to her and smiles. She tenderly lifts LUCY's hands and presses them against her cheeks.

MILLIE

Oh, Love... that you even offered to take me with you... gives me so much to tell Fergus and Sheila and Agnes. But these days, I'm much more comfortable on a rusty tandem than a Boeing 747...

LUCY is visibly deflated, until --

MILLIE

(a warm smile)

You'll be back. I know ye'll be back... and I'll be waiting for ye, watching out the window, dreaming of the day we pick up where we leave off... hop on the tandem and ride through a rainbow...

MILLIE guides LUCY by the hand, toward the table. She pulls out the chair reserved for Fergus and motions for LUCY to sit in the sacred place... which no longer needs to remain empty.

LUCY sits, overcome by the symbolism of the place she occupies.

MILLIE

D'you like lemon cake with coconut frosting?

LUCY

Sounds lovely, Millie.

MILLIE moves to the kitchen, retrieves another plate, when suddenly, DECLAN leans in through the window, startling the women --

DECLAN

Might you have room for another?

MILLIE

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! I thought you'd left!

MILLIE and LUCY regard DECLAN's sincerity and take pity. They smile, signifying DECLAN has grown on them, earning a place at the table.

MILLIE

(joyfully)

Come inside, then.

DECLAN bursts into the house, sits at the table, grinning. As MILLIE rejoins them, slices two more pieces of cake --

MILLIE

(to DECLAN)

Next time ye visit Clifden, be sure to bring yer mammy.

(pointing to last empty chair)

There's *always* room at Millie's.

DECLAN

Thank you, Mrs. Whelan. She'd absolutely love it.

All musicians wander onstage & joyfully play. The Magpie is heard melodically cawing along...

END.