Full Length Play - *Stammer*

and

Critical Essay - **“**Resurrecting the Past, to inform the Present: Creating an ‘Irish’ Play”

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

MRes in Playwriting Studies

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University of Birmingham

September 2014

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Abstract

The following thesis submission contains a new full-length play, *Stammer,* which explores financial meltdown, its effects on the family environment and the malleability of language, as well as a critical essay entitled **"**Resurrecting the Past, to inform the Present: Creating an 'Irish' Play". This critical essay places this new play within the recognisable framework of the 'Irish' play, considering aspects of place, in particular previous representations of the West of Ireland, as well as assessing how, thematically, the play links with previous Irish works from the early twentieth century to the present day. While it references similarities, it also highlights how the play deviates from the canon of modern and contemporary Irish drama, and the means by which it attempts to respond to the current social and political climate in Ireland. This essay also elaborates on depictions of stammering in film and drama, and how *Stammer* seeks to represent disfluency in a new light. Finally, this essay will document the important moments of progression when writing *Stammer*, and the difficulties that were encountered, from the first draft to the play's final form.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to my supervisor, Fraser Grace, for his encouragement and advice when writing the enclosed play, and throughout the MRes programme.

Thank you to my fellow playwrights and classmates, Hannah Roe and Joshua Elliott, for the many enjoyable conversations and excursions in Selly Oak last year. Many thanks also to Emer McHugh for proofreading and providing feedback on the enclosed play.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh to my parents, Declan and Mary, and to my sisters, Eimear and Aoife, for their unwavering encouragement and support throughout my university education. A special thanks also to Darren for his constant love and kindness.

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Stammer

Dramatis Personae

Alan Tansey, *former Builder. Forties.*

Sarah Tansey, *Alan's daughter. Fourteen.*

Louise Tansey, *Alan's older sister, Furniture Shop Owner. Forties.*

Martin Tansey, *Alan and Louise's father, former Auctioneer. Sixties.*

Brian Laverty, *Carpenter. Forties.*

John O'Donnell, *Accountant. Forties.*

Setting

The play is set in the present day, in the west of Ireland.

The action takes place in the back room of Martin's house. There is a kitchen area with a small table and chairs, as well as a couch, an armchair and a coffee table. There are two doors visible: the door to a utility room, with coat hooks, a washing machine, and the (off-stage) back door; the second door in the kitchen leads to the hallway and the rest of the house.

A hypen (/) after a word denotes an interruption by another character.

An ellipsis (…) denotes a trailing off, or a break in dialogue.

Prologue

Sarah stands, wearing her school uniform, in the middle of a classroom, facing her audience. She fidgets, an expression of panic on her face, as she looks at the book in her hands. As she speaks, her voice is muffled, strained and aimed at her feet. She taps her hands against her leg, agitatedly; her face and throat redden, as she physically battles to get the words out. Her shoulders shake, and her body tenses with each sound. This worsens over the course of her recital.

Sarah T-tuuur-nning … and … t-t-tuuur-nning … in tthe www … wwwwide-nnnning g-g-gyre /

Thhhhe fffaaa … fffaaaal … c-c-con … c-c-c … c-c-cannot … hear thhhhe fffaaa /

A chair squeaks against the floor. Pause. She looks up, hoping for an escape, but none comes.

Sarah Hear … thhe ffffaaal … fffaaall-c-c-c-conner /

Things ffffaaall a … p-p-part… thhe ccccentre c-c-c-c …

Another squeak. She opens her mouth to speak, but there is no sound.

Blackout.

Act One

Scene One

A dark autumn evening; the sound of lashing rain outside. The room is in darkness. The back door is thrown open and closed; the sound of heavy breathing as Martin enters. He fumbles for the light switch, and light filters into the main room. Eventually, he flips another switch and illuminates the sitting room. Drenched, he wears a heavy raincoat and boots, and stands bent forward. He fills a glass of water and drinks; he steadies himself against the worktop, still panting. Sarah's jacket and bag are thrown on the floor.

Martin (*Under his breath*.) Lockin' my doors now, is he. (*He stretches out his leg, and winches. Sees the bag. Pause. He moves towards the hallway door.*) Are ya going to move this bag or is the maid doin' it for ya? Well? … Ya deaf now as well?

Martin straightens up, and squares his shoulders in preparation. Sarah enters, her face red and swollen.

Martin You're not deaf so?

Sarah Wwwhat?

Martin Deaf!

Sarah No?

Martin Then how is it, ya didn't hear me batterin' the hell out of that front door, and you up there?

Sarah Wwhen?

Martin When? I've been hammerin' that bastardin' bell the last five minutes!

Sarah I d-d-don't think that wworks.

Martin What?!

Sarah The b-b-bell. I d-don't think it wwworks.

Martin Well … well, ya should've been listenin' out the more then!

Sarah I'm … I'm ssssorry. I d-d-didn't hear /

Martin What in God's name were ya at, then?

Sarah (*Pause.*) Listening to mmmusic.

Martin Christ! (*Nods at the kettle.*) Would ya ever boil that thing. I'm cut to the bone.

Sarah fills the kettle and boils it.

Martin How did ya get in, then?

Sarah I've a key.

Martin A what?

Sarah For the back door.

Martin Where d'ya get a key for that?

Sarah D-Dad.

Martin And I'm assuming he gave ya that, knowin' the front one was goin' to be locked?

Sarah I g-guess.

Martin And where's that eejit son of mine now?

Sarah I'm only home.

Martin (*Pause.*) Is that a place for your coat? Did he teach ya no manners?

Sarah goes to hang her coat on the chair.

Martin Put it here on the range and it might dry some bit.

She hangs it on the range; Martin does the same. She gets the tea ready.

Martin Ya can let mine sit a while this time; let it get some strength in it.

Sarah Was it not sstrong this mmorning?

Martin It was watery and milky, and not near enough sugar in it.

Sarah Three ssugars?

Martin Strong, three sugars, not much milk. Hardly rocket science, is it?

Sarah Right …

Martin Jesus, the howl of that wind. It's … *tyrannical*. (*Looks up expectantly. Louder, with emphasis.*) *Tyrannical*!

Sarah Yes.

Martin *Drochstoirm (druh-store-um*).

Sarah Ssorry?

Martin Drochstoirm: bad storm.

Sarah (*Pause.*) Lá g-gaillshíonach (*law geal-she-nuck*).

Martin What?!

Sarah A sstormy day.

Martin You're only showing off now.

Sarah You sstarted it.

Martin (*Pause.*) Listening to music, were ya?

Sarah Ya.

Martin With the door closed?

Sarah Ya …

Martin Only, I didn't hear any music when I was callin' ya.

Sarah I had it turned down then.

Martin Ah. (*Pause.*) Ya might want to put some cold water on your eyes there – they're a bit swollen lookin' … almost like you might've been …

Sarah I wasn't.

Martin No shame … if you were. No shame in a cry.

Sarah (*Pause.*) I had to ssspeak in c-class.

Martin Oh and that went well, I suppose?

She gives him a look.

Martin That teacher's only an aul bitch makin' you do that the way ya are; you should be made exempt from that lark. Can you not complain or something?

Sarah No. She says I p-put it on fffor attention.

Off-stage, the front door opens and closes. Alan enters from the hall; he stands tall and straight, and is well dressed in slacks and a jumper.

Martin Why the hell was that front door locked?

Alan Hi Dad.

Sarah Hi D-Dad.

Alan Hi, love. Home long?

Sarah No, few mminutes.

Martin Answer the question: why was it locked?

Alan Because it's not safe to leave it unlocked.

Martin This is my house, and I say it's not to be locked. There's no need for it.

Alan No doubt Mike McCormack said the same, and his place was cleared out last month.

Martin People have more respect for this house.

Alan That's what worries me.

Martin What's that supposed to mean?

Alan You know well what it means: if you'd any sense, you'd keep your money in a bank and not in that box of yours.

Martin I don't remember hearin' any complaints about where I kept it when it was yourself gettin' money from it?

Alan I've no interest in your little box.

Martin Really? Selling your home to pay your debts… that was pretty *drastic*, wasn't it? I think ya'd only jump if I went up and brought some notes down for ya, wouldn't ya, Alan?

Alan Mightn't ya need those notes yourself for a wheelchair one of these days? Or even better, wouldn't it be a good thing to pre-order a nice coffin for yourself with them?

Martin (*Pause.*) You're not too old for a slap.

Alan Neither are you.

Martin Ya couldn't kick a three-legged dog.

Alan Well, we both know the great Martin Tansey could hit anything small and weak.

Silently, Sarah exits.

Martin (*Pause.*) I took a walk up your side of the town earlier … to look at your unfinished edifice, that shopping centre.

Alan A walk all the way up town? I'm surprised ya made it back alive.

Martin Ya didn't think the name, Ardcairn, a bit … *ominous* no?

Alan There was nothing there.

Martin Ardcairn: high burial ground. All very … *prophetic*, wasn't it? … But, ya know, Alan, they've a lovely job done on the graffiti up there. D'ya ssee that?

Alan I'm getting it cleaned.

Martin And those empty shops and office spaces are gettin' fierce drab lookin' as well. Will ya knock them, son, or what'll you do? Be … what are they … *squatters* in next. That'd be a fair liability on ya, wouldn't it?

Alan It would. That's why I keep the place locked. And like there, no one, will be able to get in or out of this house without a key, not even you.

Martin Ungrateful shit, if it weren't for me, ya'd be out on your hole in the street.

Alan (*Pause.*) I know that. … With Sarah here, I'd just prefer if we kept the house locked. … It's only temporary. We won't be here long.

Martin (*Pause.*) What'll ya do if it doesn't work? The grand plan? Say all these people ya owe money to**,** say they don't *bite the bait*?

Alan They will.

Martin Ya haven't thought about that?

Alan I have; I'm just not worried.

Martin Imagine bankruptcy will be the only option for ya; hand everythin' over to the State.

Alan I'm nowhere near having to do that.

Martin See, I thought the way it was, was that if ya couldn't pay your debts and ya'd no way of doing so, ya were forced into bankruptcy? Is that not it?

Alan No, not for someone like me.

Martin Well that's good.

Sarah re-appears and stands in the doorway, listening.

Alan (*Pause.*) It is.

Martin (*Pause.*) 'Cause no one who was forced into, not only unemployment, but financial and social impotence, would be welcome in this house, or

could expect any bit of support from me again … so, ya'd want to sort yourself out sooner rather than later, wouldn't ya?

Alan Always good to know I've you to depend on.

Martin Best you're aware. Now, ya can bring that tea into the sittin' room for me. And, when ya've that done, there's a bag of turf out in the shed, ya might bring that in and load up that range? Right? That's a good lad.

Martin exits to the hall. Pause. Alan sits, and flicks through his phone. Embarrassed, Sarah re-enters. Pause.

Sarah Mmaybe … we shouldn't lock the door.

Alan He'll get used to it.

Sarah B-but he really doesn't wwant /

Alan What were you at that you didn't hear him?

Sarah Nothing, I wwwas … listening to music.

Alan (*Pause.*) How'd you get on today?

Sarah They mmade mme ssspeak again.

Alan Speaking in front of people … it's difficult for everyone.

Sarah Not for you.

Alan It's about performing; all you 've to do is *sound* confident. You just need more practice. (*Pause.*) Which teacher was it? Lavelle?

Sarah Jordan. (*Pause.*) Lavelle was asking after you though; mmmet him in the hall.

Alan Oh, how's he?

Sarah Good. Says its quiet wwithout us there and that he www /

Alan Take a breath.

Sarah That he ... will c-call in one of the d-days.

Alan That'd be nice, wouldn't it?

Sarah We c-could always … go ssee him?

Alan That mightn't /

Sarah The leaves wwill have turned. It's nicest around now.

Alan Maybe, at the weekend, we can go.

Sarah I wwonder wwill the apples … be out.

Alan Probably.

Sarah We c-could pick a few, like b-before.

Alan The gate will be locked.

Sarah What if we c-climbed the b-back wall?

Alan Sarah, we don't live there anymore.

Sarah They wwon't notice them g-gone!

Alan We'll get some apples at the market on Saturday. (*Pause.*) Have ya spoken to your mum yet?

Sarah She's callin' at five.

Alan (*Moves towards her.*) Go up and change; you're soaked through. Last thing we need's you sick.

Sarah I'll b-bring him his tea.

Alan I'll do it. Go on you.

As she turns, Alan puts his hand on her shoulder and hugs her. Pause. She picks up her

bag and exits to the hall, leaving the door open. From the next room, Martin laughs, presumably at the television. Grudgingly, Alan pours the tea and exits.

Blackout.

Scene Two

The following afternoon; the weather is calmer and light spills in through the window. Louise and Alan are standing around a new orthopaedic armchair. A bag of turf sits by the range.

Louise Is it a bit big?

Alan No, not at all.

Louise Really?

Alan It's gargantuan, Louise. He's going to hit the roof.

Louise The doctor said it'd be good for his back.

Alan I thought it was his leg that was the problem?

Louise The two sort of feed into one another. (*Pause.*) It didn't look this big in the picture. … D'ya think should I return it?

Alan It's here now, might as well keep it. If nothing else, we'll get a laugh out of his reaction.

Louise You shouldn't wind him up so much.

Alan He gives as good as he gets.

Louise (*Pause.*) Did he say when he'd be back?

Alan I didn't ask him.

Louise And I told him I'd be here at five. (*Looks out the window.*) She's gone a good while as well, isn't she?

Alan She likes the walk.

Louise Like Dad, that way.

Alan gives her a look.

Louise (*Pause.*) She told me about yesterday.

Alan Barely a word out of her all evening.

Louise You need to send her to someone, Alan.

Alan She'll grow out if it.

Louise She's fourteen, she isn't going to grow out of it. It'll only get worse.

Alan She barely stammers when she's here with us, it's just /

Louise At school, in shops, when anyone new comes into a room, in any new social situation /

Alan It's nerves.

Louise Look, I know you didn't like the sound of it, but … there's another course starting up in Galway in a few weeks /

Alan Lou, we've been through this.

Louise Hear me out. We could go up, stay for a few days, and just see how it goes, whether it works or not.

Alan There's nothing wrong with her, she doesn't need all that /

Louise Why can't we ask her and see what she says?

Alan I told you already, I can't deal with any more changes right now, ok?

Louise Not even when it's this important?

Alan I said no, Louise!

Louise You're so bloody selfish sometimes.

Pause. Alan closes his eyes and takes a breath.

Alan I shouldn't have yelled there. Sorry.

Louise You're more like him than you think, you know.

Alan Maybe, in a few weeks, we can look at sending her. Once things are more settled. How about that?

Louise A few weeks is a long time for her.

Alan In the grand scheme of things, a few weeks won't kill her. … Can we leave it at that?

Louise Hardly much choice, do I?

Alan Lou.

Louise Fine.

Alan Thank you. (*Pause.*) Do you want a drink?

Louise No, thanks.

Alan You sure? One of the few things I can claim as mine around this place?

Louise Too early for me yet.

Alan Right. (*Pause. Alan takes out a bottle of brandy and a glass and fills a drink for himself.*) Did I tell you, I've a new tenant for Ardcairn?

Louise That'll be a help with 'getting things settled'.

Alan It will. (*Pause.*) But, even with that, with the repayments, I'm still fairly … short.

Louise Short?

Alan And I was wondering … if you'd be able to help me out?

Louise Help you out?

Alan With a loan.

Louise Of how much?

Alan How much d'ya have?

Louise Give me a number, Alan.

Alan Thirty, forty grand.

Louise You think I have forty grand?!

Alan Well, I don't need all that - fifteen or twenty would get me started. I should be able to get the rest off the Credit Union.

Louise I thought the aim was to get out of debt, not take more on?

Alan You say that, but I need money to clear the debts in the first place. Once the debt is out of the way, I'll get back into the routine, and pay the new ones off. The money's for the lads – I can't leave them stuck.

Louise You're paying them entirely out of loan money?

Alan I told you I sold some units in Ardcairn.

Louise Ya've hardly enough out of that.

Alan Well, a few people are backing me. Privately.

Louise Who?

Alan I'm going to pay them in instalments, once I'm back on my feet.

Louise Who, Alan?

Alan People who still have it; they want it confidential.

Louise So, this is the master plan? To take out even more loans to pay off your debts? 'Cause that worked brilliantly the first time 'round for you!

Alan I can't let people think I'm beaten Lou. That's it then.

Louise Who cares what people think!

Alan I do! I'm where I am because of this town and what it thinks of me, what it thinks of us! …That aul' biddy above objected out of spite. And they egged her on /

Louise Here we go.

Alan She went and halted my planning permission, the entire development, just to screw me over. If it had gone through when it should've, Ardcairn would have been built and open long before the crash. But she wouldn't budge. And that's just typical of this town. It never gives ya an inch.

Louise Do you hear yourself? That 'biddy' was an old woman looking after her own. She's a right to her privacy Alan /

Alan God forbid some passer-by might have had a view of her hydrangeas.

Louise It mattered to her.

Alan A garden? Everything in it dies every winter, for Chris' sake. It's worthless.

Louise Don't be so arrogant. That house and what's around it, is all that woman has, and if I was her, I'd have halted your precious planning just the same.

Alan I'm not trying to upset you.

Louise Well, you're sure as hell pissing me the frick off.

Alan Is that a 'no', so?

Louise It's a 'I'm thinking' about it.

Alan (*Pause.*) I need you to help me with this.

Louise What about Dad? Have you asked him?

Alan You know well he'd never give it to me.

Louise No, you're just too proud to ask him!

Alan You think he'll help after me selling the house, and his precious plot of land it was built on? He spent half an hour last night ranting about the place, about Granddad and this craic. I know for a fact he'd not give it to me. And d'you know, I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of saying no. I'm sorting this without him. (*Pause.*). I need you for this. … You know well involving Dad in this would only make things worse between us. Please? … Sarah and I … we need a fresh start. If I can start paying people, I'll be able to climb my way out of this …

Louise Things aren't brilliant with me, Alan. The shop …

Alan I'll get it back to you. Every cent. I'm not always going to be in this position.

Louise Furniture isn't exactly the best area to be in now.

Alan I'd have given it to you, if you'd ever have asked me.

Louise (*Pause.*) I could try and … I could get maybe … fifteen together.

Alan That'd be great. Really great.

Louise I'd need to check some things first, before I could be sure of the amount.

Alan That's fine.

Louise And you need it, when?

Alan Soon as possible, really.

Louise (*Pause.*) Think I'll take that drink now.

Alan takes out another glass and fills a drink for Louise.

Louise One condition.

Alan What?

Louise You and Dad: you have to try.

Alan I do try!

Louise No, you don't. I want an end to the insults. It's not right. Whatever about a new house, learn to live in this one first. That's my price.

Alan Fine. I'll try.

Louise Good.

Alan (*Pause.*) Lou, there's one more thing.

Louise Course there is.

Alan I'm thinking of having a party.

Louise Where?

Alan Here.

Louise What for?!

Alan Brighten the place up a bit.

Louise It's been a long day, Alan.

Alan It'd be to bring everyone together, to finalise things. Could you give me a hand with getting it together? Maybe next Friday?

Slam of the front door, followed by the thud of heavy boots in the hall.

Louise At this stage, I might as well.

Alan Great, thanks Lou.

Martin enters from the hall; Louise meets him at the door, and blocks his view.

Louise Nice walk, Dad?

Martin (*Tired.*) Was out at the graveyard.

Louise D'ya see the flowers I left?

Martin I did.

Louise Was half afraid they'd be nicked. That's the new thing: stealin' flowers off graves and sellin' them on the cheap at the market.

Martin Only scum do that.

Louise Does the stone need cleanin', do you think?

Alan It's fine, Lou.

Louise Mam would've been particular about it.

Alan The stone is grand.

Martin She's not askin' ya to fork out for it, ya little leetch! She's only lookin' out for what her mother would've wanted. (*To Louise.*) It's grand for another year, so it is. (*Moves past her.*) What the hell is that?

Louise It's a chair.

Martin I know well it's a chair – what's it doing here?

Louise It's a present. I thought you might like an upgrade.

Martin There's nothing wrong with the old chair.

Louise Of course there isn't.

Martin I never said I wanted a new one.

Louise Ah Dad, come on. You know, I'm only trying to help.

Martin Trying to help?

Louise Yes!

Martin (*Pause.*) You've been talking with that … doctor again, haven't ya?

Louise It's a gift from me, that's all.

Martin A pure crook, he is, always trying to get money out of us, makin' out that I'm … that I'm … but I'm not!

Louise Course you're not. It was only a … I thought you'd like a new one, that's all. For the change.

Martin There's nothing wrong with my things!

Louise Why don't you try it for a few days, see if you like it? … Please? For me?

Begrudgingly, he sits.

Martin It's stiff.

Louise You didn't see Sarah out on your travels? She's been out walking, as well.

Martin No. She wasn't comin' from the town, anyways. … I can't get comfortable in this thing!

Martin shifts uncomfortably. Louise gives Alan a knowing look, nodding towards their father.

Alan (*Hesitant*) Was the graveyard … quiet?

Martin and Louise stare at him. Pause.

Martin Of course, it was fuckin' quiet. It's a fuckin' graveyard!

Alan I meant did ya see anyone ya knew. Alive. Walking about.

Martin No. It's the kinda place where ya keep your head down. Ya'd know if ya'd ever bother your arse goin' out.

Alan I do go out! I was there only the other week.

Martin *She* does go every week.

Louise Mam wouldn't have minded how often /

Martin Don't you be defendin' him; he should be able to speak for himself. (*To Louise.*) Have the heard the latest he's at? This place locked up so no one, not even me, can get in or out of it! I've to use a bloody key to get into my own house!

Louise Ah, Dad.

Martin And, if there was a fire, how'd we get out? We'd be stuck, roastin' away, if he'd his way.

Louise There's also less chance of a robber comin' in and smotherin' you himself, if it's locked, isn't there?

Martin It's that he's afraid of one of his knacker friends comin' to get him in the middle of the night. That's why he wants the place locked.

Alan Well, to be sure, we both know no one calls here to see you anymore.

Martin What's that supposed to mean?

Alan D'ya have any friends, Dad? Does anyone ever call in here for ya these times?

Martin Lots of people do call in.

Alan I haven't seen them. Who are they? … Hmm? Ya've me and ya've Louise, and who else?

Martin (*Pause.*) How's your wife, son?

Louise Dad!

Martin Is she with the same man, or has she a new one? … Do ya even know?

Alan Don't bring her into this.

Martin But Louise and I would only love to know how Emily is doing! Is it Spain, she's in now? In the old holiday home, is it? (*Pause.*) Don't you forget, son, that if it wasn't for me, you'd have no home to go to at all.

Alan Well, lucky for you, you won't have to put up with us much longer.

Martin Oh, is that so, now?

Alan It is.

Martin Louise, d'ya hear this? The debt is gone, is it?

Alan Almost. I've payment for everyone organised, ready for distribution.

Martin Well, isn't that the ticket!

Alan Louise will tell you. Between the house and the units in Ardcairn, I've enough to pay everyone that's owed money. … We're even going to have a party to revel in my good fortune, aren't we Louise?

Martin Where?

Alan Here! Like old times; this place thronged with people! One last hurrah!

Martin You will not.

Alan Excuse me?

Martin This is my house, and there's to be no parties here.

Alan I live here as well, I can have a party if I want!

Martin You live here because I allow you to live here. I decide what happens under this roof, not you.

Alan (*Pause.*) I'm right in what I said before: it's that you're embarrassed, isn't it? Afraid of having people here, of them seein' ya.

Martin Why would I be afraid?

Alan Between the bad back, and the bad leg, you're hardly able to hold yourself up anymore.

Martin I'll tell ya why I don't want a party … 'cause I'd be ashamed to see you prancing about this house, my house, the way you used do, wining and dining, acting like nothing has changed. That's why. And I know well ya will. And ya'll do it despite the fact that you owe money to half the men in this town, and despite the fact that you have destroyed your name and reputation. You think I should be embarrassed? … Try lookin' at yourself in the mirror. 'Cause I tell ya, what I do see walkin' round this place, is only a pathetic sight of a man.

Alan (*Pause.*) You let me have the party …

Martin And he's back for more!

Alan Let me have the party, and … I guarantee … I'll be gone by next month. For good.

Martin Next month?

Louise You can't promise that. He doesn't mean that.

Alan Of course I do. It's all arranged. Let me have the party next Friday, and by this day next month, I'll be gone.

Martin (*Pause.*) If you're so desperate to be homeless, fine, ya can have your little party – but don't expect me to welcome you back a second time when it all blows up in your face.

Alan and Louise look to one another, as Martin settles into his chair.

Blackout.

Scene Three

A week later; early afternoon on the day of the party. Martin sits reading the paper, as Sarah empties shopping bags. She wears casual jeans and a t-shirt, and hums the opening lines of the Pogue's 'Rainy Night in Soho'. Martin stops reading and listens to her.

Martin Would ya not sing it out properly?

Sarah Ssorry, I'll stop.

Martin I don't mean for ya to stop. I'd like to hear the words.

Sarah I've it on my … phone; wwill I p-put it … playing?

Martin Leave it.

Sarah Ssorry.

Martin And stop apologisin'! You shouldn't be apologisin' all the time. Stand by what you've said.

Sarah OK.

Martin They say it's good for the muscles, the singin'. Helps them relax.

Sarah I g-guess.

Martin This documentary … they had people singin'. And the stammer did disappear when they were at it. D'ya know about that?

Sarah Ya.

Martin Did ya see it?

Sarah What?

Martin The programme?

Sarah No.

Martin I've it recorded in the front room for ya.

Sarah Thanks.

Martin You should watch it. Very professional, the whole thing.

Sarah I don't really like ssingin' in … front of p-people.

Martin Or speakin' much either. Practice is all you need. When Molly had something to sing, something she wanted right, she'd be singing the song from one end of the day to the other till she'd perfect it. That's the only way to do it.

Sarah Granny ssang?

Martin Your Dad never told … ? Was like breathing to her. (*Like she's standing in front of him.*) When we'd go out, everyone would be at her to sing something. It'd go dead quiet … her voice like … velvet, clear and soft … floating up in the air. And her with the big brown curls gatherin' 'round her face … like someone ya'd see in a film. Only real. … Ya don't remember her, no?

Sarah Not really.

Martin Suppose you were only young when … ye didn't call over much anyhow.

Sarah Wwhy?

Martin He was busy.

The shopping is unpacked. Sarah takes glasses from the cupboard and arranges them on the worktop. Martin looks at her quizzically.

Sarah Dad asked me to p-put them out.

Martin Why's he not doing all this?

Sarah He's c-collecting his ssuit at the … cleaners.

Martin scoffs.

Sarah Wwhy d-do you … do that?

Martin What?

Sarah That sssound. When I ssay ssomething about D-Dad. Is it … because wwe're here?

Martin No.

Sarah Wwhat then?

Martin It's nothing to do with you.

Sarah He's, he's trying really hard. I don't like p-people talking about him /

Martin Who's 'people'? Are people talkin' about him?

Sarah No. I … I know you d-don't wwant us here, b-but you treating him like you d-do, it d-doesn't help anything.

Martin I've no problem with you being here /

Sarah Wwwhat's he done that you're so angry all the time /

Martin It's nothing to do with you; it's between me and him /

Sarah No. I live here too, so it's as mmuch about mme as it is about him.

Martin (*Pause.*) Look, I'm sorry I made the sound, alright?

Sarah You sshouldn't do it.

Martin I won't.

Sarah Thanks. (*Pause.*) Wwould you like some tart?

Martin What?

Sarah (*Louder.*) Apple Tart. I mmade ssome for tonight. Would you like ssome?

Martin I would.

She takes an apple tart from the fridge, cuts a slice and puts it on the plate.

Sarah Heated?

Martin Cold is fine.

Sarah Ice-cream?

Martin The thing on its own is grand.

Slowly, he walks to the table. Sarah puts it in front of him and he begins eating.

Martin Where'd you learn to make this?

Sarah Mammy taught me.

Martin It's lovely. Can really taste them apples.

Sarah Not too much ssugar?

Martin Never too much ssugar. … Should go down well, this.

Sarah Mam used to make it a lot. For when people would be over.

Martin Ye were always one for the parties, sitting out on that bloody … patio he built out the back.

Sarah We'd go out to the garden usually, out under the trees …

Martin You and your apple trees.

Sarah My name is c-carved on every tree there.

Martin Every one? Why everyone?

Sarah They were mmy trees.

Martin When d'ya do that?

Sarah I'd ssome done … before. I c-carved into the rest when … Dad told me we'd to g-go. I'm g-going to … get it back ssomeday.

Martin It's sold.

Sarah Not fforever.

Martin Usually people buy places to live there a long time.

Sarah Eventually, I'll g-get it back. It … doesn't b-belong to those p-people.

Pause. Martin is surprised, but impressed.

Martin Always thought that house was too big.

Sarah No, sspacious.

Martin And echoey. Nightmare to keep warm. Much warmer in here. Molly insisted on that range. Savage heat out of it, even in the winter. (*Pause.*) Great … *cluthaireacht* (*clu-her-ructh*) in this house.

Sarah C-cluthaireacht?

Martin Ya don't know that one? ...Well, Ms Know-it-all, cluthaireacht is shelter … place of warmth, safety.

Sarah C-clochaireacht.

Martin No, cluth. Cluthaireacht. Be precise in how you say it.

Sarah Cluthaireacht.

Martin That's it. The pronunciation's important. Ya need to be sure in what you're saying, otherwise, you'll end up saying the opposite … *clocharach* (*cloc-hur-ruck)*.

Sarah Clocharach?

Martin Clocharach: stony place.

Sarah C-Cluthaireact … Clocharach. Ssimilar sound.

Martin Very easy for one to become the other. (*Pause.*) A lot ya can get from the old words, things. Important to hang on to them.

Sarah I know.

Martin (*With urgency.*) 'Cause people, they stop carin'. … But, ya have to value … your heritage. It's who we are, where we come from. … D'ya understand?

Sarah (*Nods. Pause.*) I've to say a speech at school.

Martin A speech?

Sarah Louise's helping me.

Martin Well, can you say it?

Sarah On my own. I can ssay ssome of it. Could you read it wwhen it's d-done?

Martin I'm not much good at the … You say it out loud and I'll tell you.

Sarah Thanks. … Dad doesn't know.

Martin That's hardly much change.

Sarah He doesn't know a lot of things.

Martin That's obvious.

Sarah (*Pause.*) With the sspeech, I don't wwant them to sstart … laughing again.

Martin No one will laugh.

Sarah (*Pause.*) You don't know wwhat it's like. Wwhen I'm up there, and I open mmy mmouth, all I can feel is this rock, here, in my throat … and the mmore I try … the b-bigger and harder it g-gets … till its like I'm … choking on my own b-breath. And then … then I look up … and everyone's … staring, and … g-grinning … and … everything … sseems to stop … and … I can't b-breathe ...

Martin Ya have to learn … to …

Sarah Wwhat?

Martin (*Pause.*) Did I ever tell you about my father? Hmm? Your great-grandfather? Well, when he was young, he'd nothing to his name startin' out and people used laugh at him. They'd pull the piss of him, 'cause unlike the rest of his family, he wasn't let go to school – he was slow… with words, with readin', ya know? But I tell ya, he learned them all, 'cause he went and he got himself a job in town, when they were openin' up the factory, and soon he was makin' more money and was up higher than all the ones who'd laughed at him. And the first thing he did when he'd money enough, was buy himself a site of land, the very place you used to live. The place gave him status, made him someone worth listening to. Showed he was made of something.

(*Pause.*) D'ya understand? … People are always goin' try to make ya feel small, Sarah; ya need to be able to fight back.

Sarah How?

Martin Well… you'll … I think that's … something you'll have to figure out yourself.

Sound of the front door: Louise enters, wearing jeans, a jumper and runners, and carrying shopping bags. She rushes over and puts the bags on the table.

Louise Exercise for the week carrying them in here. What're you eating?

Martin Tart. Sarah made it.

Louise Couldn't keep your hands off it till tonight, no?

Martin She offered it to me!

Louise Don't get excited. Only teasing.

Sarah Do you wwant ssome?

Louise Watching the figure, love. Jeez, I'm wrecked. And I've to get my hair done yet. You'd never know who he has invited. Could meet my future husband at this.

Martin God help him.

Louise A bit of encouragement once in a while wouldn't go a miss, ya know!

Martin I think you were given too much encouragement from too many lads in the past, so I do.

Louise Dad!

Martin You're too picky is your problem.

Louise You're right. Wouldn't I be better off if I'd no standards at all and jumped on top of the first man I saw?

Martin Well, at least Sarah might have some cousins that way.

Louise Oh, and where's the man himself then? The great bearer of offspring? The host of all festivities?

Martin Collectin' his suit at the drycleaners, if ya please.

Louise And I suppose you've been flat out with the preparations?

Martin Better things to do with my time.

Louise (*Mock sympathy.*) Course you do.

Martin This whole night's ridiculous.

Louise You used to love havin' people round! You and your gang sitting 'round the table, swapping stories.

Martin Ah.

Louise Sarah, when we were small, we used be afraid to repeat the things we heard in this kitchen, in case we'd end up in front of a judge.

Martin You talk some amount of shite.

Louise That's what you used say to us. That if we went repeatin' things, we'd be in trouble with the law.

Sarah Wwhat did ye talk about?

Louise Oh, who's buying this field or that house. What price was got on this farm. Only the way his lot'd talk, ya'd swear it was confidential state business.

Martin Was more likely I didn't want ye reiteratin' the news that was said, and not the auctioneerin'.

Louise Ah, the deals and the tin box!

Martin (*Loud.*) That's enough now!

Louise I was only jokin' /

Martin I said, enough!

Pause.

Sarah I was telling G-Granddad about my speech.

Louise More importantly, have you told your Dad yet?

Sarah He's a lot on today.

Louise He's enough time to have a conversation /

Sarah I thought mmmaybe it could be a ssurprise?

Louise A surprise?

Sarah I'll tell him about it c-closer to the time. When it's ffinished. We, the three of us … could wwork on it together and then, invite him to the ffinal thing?

Louise I'm not gone on the idea of not telling him …

Sarah Ffor now, just for now.

Martin Our little secret.

Louise Temporarily.

Sarah Till it's ready.

Louise I guess, I mean, as long as you tell him at the end.

Sarah Exactly! Wwhen can we sstart? Tomorrow?

Martin We'd need to make sure Alan's not here though, if it's a secret.

Louise Let's call it a surprise.

Sarah Can wwe g-go to yours, Lou?

Louise What excuse'll we use?

Sarah I'll say I'm g-going for a wwalk, and then … we'll mmeet at your house. How about twelve?

Martin Twelve it is!

Louise Let's get through tonight first, and we can see how tomorrow fares then.

Sound of the front door closing; Alan bustles in from the hall, and throws a suit bag on the back of the chair.

Alan Well all! How are the preparations coming?

Louise A shopful of alcohol bought and deposited.

Alan And I see you've helped yourself to some of Sarah's tart, Dad?

Martin Nice to know someone in this house can make something on their own.

Alan Ah now, none of that! You'll have to be better tonight. You'll scare off the company with that puss on ya.

Martin How's the house hunting going?

Alan Viewed a house just this afternoon, what's going to be my house!

Sarah Wwhat?

Louise Already?

Sarah Wwwhere?

Alan Up in the Oaks estate. No. 6! Wooden floors, big sitting room. We'll need to buy some new furniture for it. And a new TV. What do you

think Sarah? Thought we could buy some surround sound when we're at it – the works!

Sarah Wwwhen c-can I sssee it?

Alan Tomorrow? We'll make a day of it – get some lunch in town, and head over. We'll get some boxes in Duff's when we're in. (*Pause.*) You won't mind if we leave some of the boxes around here, Dad, will ya? We'll be quicker packing that way.

Martin Debts sorted, banks appeased and a new house – all in the one-week. It's almost … unbelievable, the whole thing.

Alan Good business tactics.

Martin Would they be same tactics that bankrupted ya? Or are they some new ones ya acquired along the way?

Alan I hope you're not nervous about tonight, Dad. I know you're not used to talking to people so much anymore. I wouldn't be worried though … I'm sure everyone will speak good and loud so even you'll hear them.

Martin (*Stands.*) Well, if anyone gets a word in over your shite talk, wouldn't it be a miracle.

Alan Ah, don't be sore. Come on, we'll have a drink together to get us started.

Martin Better things to do than sit here listenin' to you and your talk.

Alan (*Filling a drink for himself.*) Oh? And what great things have you planned for your day? Regale us!

Martin I'm going to the graveyard.

Alan Oh.

Louise Do you want some company?

Martin No.

Martin exits. Sarah looks after him, and then turns to look out the window.

Alan He's in fine form, as always.

Louise He was.

Alan You got on alright with me gone, Sarah? He didn't have you shining the floors or anything?

Sarah No.

Alan Good. All set for tonight? Gonna help me keep everyone in chat?

Sarah I d-d-don't know any of them …

Alan It's not about what you say, it's how you make them feel. It'll be good practice for you.

Sarah (*Pause.*) If it's OK, I might go … for a wwalk … while it's bright. There's time for me to go, isn't there?

Alan Sure … but don't be too long. You'll need to get ready soon.

Sarah I know. (*Exits via the back door.*)

Alan (*Pause.*) Thanks for getting the drink for me, Lou. I'll get ya back.

Louise Don't worry about it.

Alan Good feeling about tonight.

Louise We'll be well fed and watered anyway.

Alan I've been thinking about those classes, by the way, the speech therapy.

Louise Really?

Alan And you're right, Sarah should go to them. After tonight, after we get all the crap sorted, we'll sit her down and discuss it properly. The three of us. She's too intelligent, too good for people to be laughing at. That's never happening again.

Louise Did something hit you in the head?

Alan No, it's just…. I feel like she's gotten … quieter lately. Have you noticed that? It's this house. She doesn't seem to want to talk anymore.

Louise It's nothing to do with the house, Alan.

Alan Well, she won't be here long anyway …

Louise You're not seriously going to move next month? Would ya not think it wise to pay off your debts *before* you move? How can you even afford a new house?

Alan It's done, Lou. I've talked to half of them already; they jumped at what I offered. Could have offered less and they'd have taken it. And I'm only going to lease the new place; I can easily manage a lease. Ya should see the room for Sarah – it's huge, ensuite and all. I think she'd like it, it's much bigger than her old room.

Louise Alan, it's too fast.

Alan I want a home, Lou. Somewhere Sarah and I can be happy.

Louise She's happy here!

Alan How the hell could she be, with him at her all the time!

Louise They get along!

Alan Impossible.

Louise For fuck sake, Alan. For once, can you at least try and listen to me!

Alan Alright. Sorry.

Louise You're putting too much pressure on yourself to change everything overnight and I'm telling you, there's no need. Talk to Dad; you know well this threat of his is only aul' talk.

Alan Lou, I appreciate everything you've done, I'm not just saying that, I really do … but let's, let's not dampen the mood for tonight? Let's just enjoy having people over, having a few drinks. Like old times? … Look, I'll think about it, OK? Maybe we can wait a little longer.

Louise Please do.

Alan I will.

Louise Tonight … it'll be great.

Alan My return Lou. After tonight, everything is going to be just like it was.

Alan raises his glass to Louise, and drinks.

Blackout.

Scene Four

Later that night: the party is in full swing. The back door is open and we hear the buzz of conversation and music outside. Inside, empty bowls and plates are stacked by the sink; wine bottles and various containers are on the worktop and table. Alan, now wearing his suit, is rooting through a cupboard. Brian, in more modest clothing, looks on, curious.

Alan Where are ya? … Yes! (*Takes out a bottle of Midleton Rare whiskey.*) The ginger lady herself! The secret stash! (*Takes down two glasses, pours and hands one to Brian.)* Now, drink that and tell me what you think.

Brian That's top shelf, that is.

Alan (*Points at the label on the bottle.)* Have a look at this. … See that?

Brian Midleton Rare. … Is that your name on it?

Alan Signed by the master distiller. Limited run. Bottle number 84. Addressed to yours truly.

Brian Where in God's name did ya get that?

Alan Christmas present, few years back … off a client. Real beaut, this. (*Swirls it slightly, smells and drinks.*) Feel that on your throat. Liquid gold, isn't it?

Brian Gorgeous.

Alan Top shelf. Don't take it out for anyone, you know!

Brian I'll keep my mouth shut.

Alan Do! Don't want to go sharing it with them lot - wouldn't appreciate the quality.

They drink. Brian lifts up his glass, and looks up at the colour of the drink.

Alan D'ya know, we should be doing the like of this more, you and me. Hardly see each other these days!

Brian Not true, I saw you on Monday in O'Donoghue's.

Alan Not like this though! Not just the two of us talking, havin' a couple of quiet ones. Always yobos wanted to butt in on us in there.

Brian Ah.

Alan Now that lounge in O'Donoghue's is no place for a right chat. Matt Ring commentin' on everything ya've to say.

Brian There's worse out there.

Alan Him with the racin' blarin' on the telly, turned up as high as it'll go, and he's up at the counter then, roarin' up at it. Silences the place out. He'll close that place so he will, and then, then, we'll be properly stuck.

Brian And it's the only half decent place with Rogers' gone.

Alan Ah, but Rogers' wasn't busy even when things were good though, was it?

Brian Well, it would be on a Thursday night …

Alan What'd ya be doing there on a Thursday?

Brian There'd be a band. I'd go in for the chat, maybe some dancin' /

Alan And you'd be swanning around the floor then?

Brian Well, if there was anyone worth dancin' with, I might.

Alan Maybe I should've gone in there more when the goin' was good.

Brian You and Emily would've looked well. (*Pause.*) Before.

Alan Ah, she'd only two left feet on her.

Brian We'll have to find a new spot then, set you up with a new woman!

Alan Ah … I'd be past that lark now.

Brian You're not! We'd get ya a nice young one /

Alan Right, we'll see.

Brian (*Pause.*) Didn't think I'd see another party in this aul place. Hasn't changed much in the last twenty years.

Alan Martin Tansey isn't so fond of change.

Brian These chairs are new, aren't they?

Alan Just the armchair; for the old man's back.

Brian Many a good night in here - us pourin' in, and landin' at that table. Conferences all night about the latest goin's on. Ya remember?

Alan I do.

Brian And your Dad'd arrive, with his own set, only ragin' to hear all.

Alan And Mam with the big fry on first thing.

Brian Without fail. … And not a penny to any of us.

Alan Earnings gone in the pub and chipper the night before. Broke for the week.

Brian Sure, ya didn't need it then.

Alan No. … Did I tell ya, I've news?

Brian Oh?

Alan My home house: sale's gone through. Keys handed over.

Brian (*Unsure.*) And … are you happy with the price?

Alan I am.

Brian That's good.

Alan You know I didn't want to sell.

Brian Was there no way to keep it? I though the way it was /

Alan Sold it on my own decision. Wanted to sort myself out, you know?

Brian Many wouldn't have …

Alan Done me good though! With the centre and everything, feel like I'm really moving again. (*Watching Brian's reactions closely.*) Even sold a few of the shops up above. And d'ya know, the job you did on them, the workmanship on the doors, the fixtures – everyone admires them. People are full time saying it to me.

Brian Important to keep the quality up.

Alan Honestly though, I'm not just sayin' it, I'm always getting' comments about them. … It's a balls though, all this isn't it?

Brian Ah, it is.

Alan The state the country's in.

Brian Don't know if I ever saw it this bad.

Alan All went cock-up, didn't it? Nothing's gone to plan. Nothing's like … I thought it would be. But, even sayin' that, d'ya know, I'd hate to leave anyone stuck?

Brian Who would?

Alan Well, ya see, with everything, the house, the shops, I'm finally able to start into the payment, start sortin' people out. And I thought of you and all ya did. I wanted to talk to you first, d'ya know? Now, I can't give you as much as I want, as much as you *should've* got /

Brian (*Guarded.*) No?

Alan Fifty percent.

Brian Fifty percent?

Alan This month.

Brian This month?

Alan Into your account. Fifty percent. I know it's not what we agreed … but with the market, it's unlikely the rest of the units will ever rent ... I've had to re-evaluate, re-calculate.

Brian Fifty percent ...

Alan I have to talk to the other lads yet, but that's as much as anyone is getting. Banks included.

Brian You're only giving them the fifty percent?

Alan They've enough, the bastards. They're the ones who got us where we are. … If I gave them more, I wouldn't be able to pay anyone else. That's the least amount they'll accept from me … that's why I can only likewise give out the fifty percent to everyone.

Brian And the rest …? When would the rest /

Alan I don't have it myself, Brian. Had to sell the house to even get that together. Fifty percent is a lot ...

Brian No, it is. I was just … I was hoping you'd be able to pay me the /

Alan And it's more than most are getting the way things are. People, other builders, they're goin' in for bankruptcy, givin' up responsibility for what they promised /

Brian Get out jail free card!

Alan D'ya know McMahon's in Castlebar? That big development – the hotel, flats, houses … was it a hundred houses? Fully finished – highest standard. How many d'ya think he sold? How many would ya say?

Brian I dunno, maybe fifty … ?

Alan Ten. That's how many. Sold ten. Then skipped the country; declared bankrupt in England. Didn't pay the plumbers, the roofers, the carpenters. No one. And they'll never be paid, and McMahon doesn't care. Doesn't give a shit about them.

Brian Shouldn't be allowed. They should drag people like that back to face punishment, and throw them in jail /

Alan It's cowardly is what it is. … I sold my home.

Brian You did … oh, I know that.

Alan Moved back here.

Brian With your Dad of all people! Never thought I'd see that!

Alan Necessary.

Brian This month? This month, you're sayin'?

Alan (*Fills Brian's glass with more whiskey.*) Personally guarantee, it'll be in your account by the end of the month.

Brian Fifty ... is a lot, when I consider …

Alan You'll take it?

Brian I mean, it's not what we said…

Alan Nothing is like it was. Everything has dropped.

Brian I'm not sayin' … I know, everyone is getting less these times …

Alan By the end of the month, Brian. Personally guarantee that. In your account. … It's, honest to God, as much as I can offer. And if I had it …

Brian Oh, I know that. … It's a lot … half … the way things are …

Alan It is.

Brian Should we … Do we need to draw something up?

Alan I've an appointment with my solicitor next week; I'll check with him then.

Brian D'ya want me to come in with you? I should probably be there …

Alan No need. Leave it to me.

Brian Are ya sure?

Alan Don't ya worry, I'll sort it.

Brian Well, ya can call me anytime …

Alan Come on, we've to celebrate, right?

Brian Next week though? You think we'll get it all sorted that quick? 'Cause, I've the lads and /

Alan Wednesday – I'll have it ready to sign by Wednesday. Guarantee that. Come on, get that into ya. Can't be bringin' this beaut out with me.

Clink glasses and drink. Alan fills Brian's glass again and puts the bottle back in the press. They head for the door, and meet Sarah, who looks uncomfortable in a party

dress.

Alan Ah, Sarah, you remember Brian?

Sarah Hi.

Brian You're not leaving us?

Sarah shakes her head.

Brian Good, good.

Brian exits to the back door.

Alan Where are you off to?

Sarah Looking for c-candles. To keep off the b-bugs.

Alan Good. Do me a favour now: keep on eye on people's drinks, right? If they look empty, just fill 'em up. Want to make sure everyone is enjoying themselves!

Sarah I wwill.

Alan (*Kisses her forehead.*) Good. And don't go disappearing again. There's people that want to talk to you!

Alan exits. Sarah rummages in the presses. A few moments later, John enters, a phone in one hand and his coat in the other.

John Ah Sarah, I haven't seen you all night!

Sarah Hi.

John You're alright there? Looking for something?

Sarah C-c-c-caaand …

John Candles?

Sarah (*Quiet.*) Yes.

John Can I help … ?

Sarah shakes her head.

John Right. … Eh, have you seen your dad around?

Sarah He … jjjjj … jjj …

As Sarah speaks, her body tenses and she drums her hands against her legs.

Sarah (*With difficulty.*) He … www…. www …

John (*Awkward.*) I just wanted to have a quick word with him. … Before I go.

Sarah He … www ….

John (*Moves towards the hallway.*) Is he upstairs … maybe?

Sarah He … wwwwent outside.

John (*Confused.*) Just now?

Sarah (*Exhausted.*) He … www … Yes. Now.

John Looking at my phone … must've missed him.

Sarah nods.

John (*Unsure*.) How is school going these times? …. Have you come across my Katie? She'd be younger than you, in her second year.

Sarah (*Pause. Sarah lowers her head, physically struggling to get the sound out*) I d-d-d-d-d-don't … ttthhhhh…

Awkwardly, John looks away and shifts uncomfortably.

John You … eh… should come over to the house sometime and ye can … talk …

Louise enters from the garden; she is well dolled up for the night.

Louise All OK John?

John (*Relieved.*) Looking for Alan.

Louise He's outside.

John I've to work in the morning – wanted to say I was off.

Louise On a Saturday?

John Quiet in the office; get a good run on it for the week ahead …

Louise Ah. OK, Sarah?

She nods.

John How's all with you? How's the shop going?

Louise Quieter than usual, but surviving.

John Has that tiling place beside you any sign of opening?

Louise No, no I don't think so.

John Difficult area to be in now. The way things are.

Louise It'll … pick up. Things always pick up.

John Yes, suppose it's the reaction still. … I'll be off.

Louise Sarah, do you want to grab your dad?

John You never got your candles.

Louise I'll do it; I know where they are.

John It was nice … talking to you, Sarah.

With her head hanging low, Sarah exits. Louise searches through the press, and takes out two large yellow candles.

John It must be difficult for her … with the …

Louise It's harder when there's this many people around; a lot of pressure on her.

John I hope I didn't /

Louise She's fine.

John Good, good.

Alan enters, holding his glass of whiskey.

Louise Mind yourself on the way home, John; I'll see you again.

Louise exits, and closes the door behind her.

Alan Not going already! You haven't even had a drink yet!

John I've the car …

Alan How's Laura doing? Feeling better?

John Yes, migraine has eased off now, apparently. She was sorry to miss all this.

Alan Well, she's missed. Ages since we were all together. Especially in this house! The memories of us lot running around here! (*Pause.*) Next time.

John Only you'd have a barbeque this time of the year.

Alan Ah, Sarah and Louise wanted it! We didn't get much opportunity when it was warmer. Still, turned out a nice evening. Weather was good to us. Great to have us altogether – rare we all get to see each other.

John We must make amends. I'll have to have you and Sarah over. Was just saying it to her there. My Katie is big into the basketball these times … Sarah might like to join her at it? Does she like sport? You used to play a lot?

Alan Before the knee went. But, yes, I'm sure she'd love to head out. We must bring the next generation together!

John Yes, yes. (*Pause.*) Well … I better be getting on /

Alan Not now! Too early for departure just yet. We're only getting started!

John I said I'd get back before the kids were in bed.

Alan Another drink before you go! I've this great whiskey that I've been saving. Real top shelf - you'll have to have a glass!

John I'm not drinking /

Alan Or a coke! A 'mineral'? We haven't talked all night. I don't know when I last saw you. You're never around.

John (*Goes to leave.*) Next week /

Alan You know, I love having people around again; reminds me of home, nights in the house!

John You were always a good host.

Alan Good times in the house … before it had to go.

John And it's sold?

Alan It is.

John (*Pause*.) Good. Well, thanks again …

Alan Before you go, if I can't get you to stay, there is something I'd like to have a word about. Financial matters.

John We don't need to discuss that tonight. Next week? Come into see me next week, and we'll go through it then.

Alan You know how much I appreciated your help, John /

John You should go enjoy the rest of the party /

Alan At the beginning, you backed me …

John I was happy to help /

Alan And when everything started to unravel /

John We don't need to get into this /

Alan I appreciated it. You and Laura, with Ardcairn … and then when Emily left … you know, I'm very grateful.

John We were happy to do it. And things seem on the up? Sarah's really growing up; Laura is always asking for her. You've got to bring her over. My crew would love to see her. We'll make a day of it. Maybe next Saturday?

Alan With the repayments, your support /

John We're all feeling it, but we're /

Alan I want to pay /

John We discussed this before, I can /

Alan I can't pay it right now /

John The end of the month is fine /

Alan See the thing is, it mightn't be possible for me to pay it … up front, as planned.

John (*Pause.*) What?

Alan I don't think it's possible.

John But … you said last that /

Alan There's so many people. It's just not possible right now.

John (*Pause.*) Alan, I will need you to pay me back.

Alan I will. I won't leave you in the lurch. With the house and my other investments dealt with, I'm prepared to offer you sixty percent. Immediately! This month, as promised.

John If we worked out a time-frame … maybe I could /

Alan That's all I can give.

John Sixty percent?

Alan Yes.

John Alan, I need the original back. I can't do without it /

Alan Now, I've talked to the other investors and discussed it /

John What? When?

Alan This week, tonight. Everyone agrees, that it's the best deal. I can give sixty percent, but nothing more. Financially, it's not possible.

John We have a contract! You signed to reimburse me. It was a loan, Alan. It's not negotiable.

Alan I can't honour the interest.

John (*Growing angry.*) I'm not talking about the interest – I'm talking about the principal itself. You talked to everyone? They've all agreed, without consultation? Without even discussing it?

Alan I've discussed it /

John Together, we went in it together. It should be discussed together. That's the way this was done. Above board from the start. I oversaw your entire enterprise, setting everything up and now you try to exclude me?

Alan I don't have any more money to my name … I've given up everything just to get this deal this far, you know that, you've seen my accounts. I've sold everything to get sixty percent, get even close to this.

John (*Pause.*) So … you're saying I've no choice?

Alan I thought you'd understand. Everyone else /

John Am I, am I the last one?

Alan Well, yes … you are. The others have all agreed.

John Over drinks. Over your whiskey, of course they agreed.

Alan John. Please, be reasonable.

John Me be reasonable? (*Pause.*) Alan, you're not the only one feeling this. You're not the only one with bills to pay and a family to fuckin' worry about.

Alan I know that.

John Do you? Do you know what I gave up for your little project? What we all did?

Alan I know it hasn't been easy. I see that.

John Laura's not working. D'ya know that? She was laid off. Hardly a demand for many Special Needs Assistants now, despite the mad house masqueradin' as Leinster House. There's plenty in dire need of fuckin' guidance. (*Pause*.) Sixty percent ... you promised the whole thing by the end of the month. Less than two months ago, you sat in my sitting room and told me that.

Alan Well, things have changed … I can't anymore. Things've fallen through. But sixty percent, that's … that's €200,000. You're the largest amount. It wasn't easy for me to get that /

John I was the largest investor, of course, it's the largest fuckin' amount! (*Pause.*) And what about the banks? What will you do about them? What are you spinning them?

Alan You know well I have to pay the banks.

John Give them less. They won't miss it. … I need it much more than any bank. I have my own debts: mortgage on the house, escalating tax, I've

lost a bloody ton of business with the downturn … I've the kids … I'm counting on that money. Jeez, the others all agreed?

Alan Yes.

John (*Pause.*) Give the bank less. They don't need it as much as I do.

Alan I can't go in with less, they won't take it. You know that. I don't even know for sure if they'll take this. I sold my house, John. I sold my home to get this!

John (*Pause.*) I'm sorry … that you had to sell … but you came to me, and as a friend, when I had it, I helped. I don't have it now, Alan. I … I have the taxman, the bank, everyone on my back already. I can't help anyone else anymore. I've a family … my family … we don't do charity anymore.

Alan I'm not asking for charity.

John You're asking for mercy.

Alan What's that supposed to mean?

John Legally, you owe me the full amount. Even at that, I'm doing you a massive fuckin' favour. I've waived the interest. Anything less than reimbursement of the loan is an insult. Anyone can see that.

Alan You'll bring me to court, is it?

John Don't sound so incredulous. It's not the first time you'll have been in a courthouse. And if the others are thick enough to accept your 'deal' now, I doubt they'll hold by it, when it falls even lower. How do I know you won't lower the price again?

Alan I'll put it in writing. We'll go to a solicitor.

John Your word is shit.

Alan Please, John.

John I'm sorry.

Alan Seventy percent.

John The full amount.

Alan (*Pause.*) Seventy five percent. That's … I can't go any higher. I need what's left for … for Sarah … to keep afloat.

John You have to give me more … and you know that.

Alan Excuse me?

John I've enough to sink you. If you don't give me what you promised, what my family and I need to survive, I'll go straight to the Tax Office. I'm sure they'd love to hear about your investments ... You and your deceptive, sweet talk, doubling the cost and inflating expenditure to get your loans. How will the bank take that news? Or what about you pocketing company earnings for your own personal means. For your Mediterranean holidays. How would your other 'investors' take that news?

Alan You … they'd do you as well. You were the accountant. You'd be implicated.

John Anonymity is a great thing, Alan. (*Pause.*) You know I can go to the Revenue. They'll crucify you. If you force me, I'll drop you. I'll not have you ruin my family.

Alan I'm not trying to ruin you - I'm trying to pay you back!

John Cheat me out of what's mine.

Alan I've … nothing else. Honestly.

John You've always had a hand at finding money for yourself.

Alan What you're asking for is impossible.

John Well, make it fuckin' possible. Either you pay me or I'll call them. You'll have the courts and jail time to contend with then. Let's see you talk your way out of that, eh? (*Pause.*) I'll give you till the end of the month, as we agreed … if I don't hear from you…

Alan Then, I'll hear from you.

John (*Goes to leave. Stops.*) I'm sorry Alan, but I need it more. We need it more. … Say goodbye to the others for me.

He exits to the hall. Alan stands alone, visibly shaken. He takes out the bottle of whiskey and drinks from it. Pours and drinks again. Pause. He throws the glass into the sink and it shatters. Pause. Sarah appears at the back door.

Sarah Hel-lo?

Alan Hmm?

Sarah Wwhat're you d-doing?

Alan N-nothing … just … I'm just … taking a little break …

Sarah I thought I heard …

Alan Dropped my glass.

Sarah Oh. Is … John g-gone?

Alan Wanted to get home early.

Sarah He wwanted me to go out and mmeet his … daughter, but … I d-don't know her /

Alan You don't have to go.

Sarah No?

Alan If you don't want to, no.

Sarah Thanks …

Alan I'll be out in a minute.

Sarah Is everything … OK?

Alan Of course.

Alan doesn't move. Sarah goes to him, and gently places her hand on his shoulder. After a few moments, he puts his hand on hers.

Blackout.

Act Two

Scene One

The following month: a bright, winter's morning. Boxes are scattered around the room, labelled bedroom, kitchen etc. A bowl of apples sits on the worktop. Louise and Sarah, in casual clothing, stand in the centre of the room; Sarah holds a bundle of pages. Martin sits at the table, leafing through a book.

Louise Let it fill your lungs … from the pit of your belly, up to your chest and up out of your mouth. *BREATHE AND HOLD.*

They breathe in and hold, but for a few moments too long, so that they become red-faced. Sarah looks askance at Louise.

Louise Annnnddd out.

They breathe out.

Martin Ye look ridiculous.

Louise Now, take your time with what you're saying. Muse over the words. (*With a roll.*) RRRRrrruminate over how they will sound!

Sarah *Rrr … Rrr…*

Louise Roll your tongue more.

Martin There's nothing about 'r' rolling in here!

Sarah (*Failing miserably.*) Rrrrr.

Martin Pulling the piss, is all ye're at.

Louise Right. Ready to give it another go?

Sarah visibly straightens up; she stretches her shoulders and yawns exaggeratedly.

Martin Make sure you do that outside the room tomorrow.

Louise She will.

Martin Not in front of people, ya know? They won't understand.

Louise She knows.

Sarah breathes deeply in and out; her speech is dramatic and full of optimism, but almost too much so.

Sarah Ladies and Gentlemen, teachers and sssstudents, p-parents. Today, I would like to sspeak to you about language, about … communication, a topic which I ffeel is essential in today's … world. In recent years, we have all experienced … change: … change of circumstance, of … school, … friends. … The actions of the p-past have transformed a ssafe and … comforting environment into a … discordant reality of uncertainty. Yet, such a p-period of insecurity p-provides us with the opportunity to renew: to rebuild and improve, wwhat … we … may have taken for g-granted, to … diversify and to recalibrate. If we are to

reimagine a … community ffor our … future, … we … must endorse the … p-power of language, the simple exchange of sspeaking and listening, of understanding and empathising with one another. The topic of … communication therefore, I … believe, is a vital instrument in the rejuvenation of our ssociety, and thus will fform the b-basis of this … speech hereafter /

Martin Ah, ya can do that better!

Louise Would you ever stop interrupting her!

Martin Ya need to take your time with them ps. You're trippin' over them still.

Louise She knows that!

Martin Would ya want me not to say it and then for her to realise it in front of everyone? They're a harsh sound. Whole mouth goes into the p.

Louise You missed your calling, Dad. Maybe you should've been a speech therapist?

Martin Don't I hear her strugglin' with the ps and the ss and the ds. It's common sense.

Louise You're an authority, so?

Sarah It's ffine, Lou. I want to know. They'll laugh if I … get it wwrong /

Louise You won't get it wrong.

Martin You will not – you'll show them poxy brats what you're made of, so ya will. Them and their shitty smiles.

Sarah And their p-pudgy ffaces.

Louise Great, you're rubbing off on her.

Martin We do think the same way: we both want success.

Sarah And ye're c-coming to hear it?

Martin Of course we are.

Louise Have you told your Dad?

Sarah I'm … telling him tomorrow.

Louise You need to give him some sort of notice.

Sarah I'm wwaiting for the right moment.

Martin I'll not save him a seat if he's late.

Louise Thanks for that. Now can we please try and run through the whole thing, without interruptions?

Sarah's phone rings; tentatively, she takes it out of her pocket.

Martin Those bloody phones!

Sarah It's Mam.

Martin Say your speech once through and then call her.

Sarah She g-gets mad wwhen I d-don't /

Martin Fine. Fine! Off you go, off you go.

Sarah Back in a ffew mminutes. (*She exits to the hall.*) Hi Mam …

Martin (*Pause. Looks closely at Louise.*) What are you doin' with your life?

Louise Excuse me?

Martin You're here more than I am. Do ya not have things to do?

Louise You've not complained before /

Martin And are you working still?

Louise Of course, I am!

Martin Not that outrageous a question; not everyone is who was.

Louise Everyday. Monday to Friday.

Martin No.

Louise Yes.

Martin You were here last Friday afternoon. Threeish. You usually don't close till six.

Louise Half day.

Martin Are ya busy? You're getting on alright in there?

Louise Do you want me to come around less? Is that what you're after?

Martin I'm only askin' how your work's goin'.

Louise You know it's quiet. But, I still have lots of business and I'm hanging in just fine, thanks.

Martin Good.

Louise Yes, yes, it is.

Martin I'm glad to hear you doin' OK.

Louise I am.

Martin 'Cause, if ya needed anythin'...

Louise You'd what?

Martin Well, if ya did. If you were stuck. You could let me know.

Louise I think your son could do with more help than me.

Martin Offer's there. Your mother wouldn't have wanted to see ya stuck.

Louise Thanks.

Martin (*More upbeat.*) She's improvin', isn't she?

Louise She works hard.

Martin She does.

Louise (*Pause.*) You'll miss the bustle when they're gone.

Martin Ah, he's only left them boxes there to make a point.

Louise He's left them there as they'll be easier to carry out that way. They have to go somewhere.

Martin Have you seen this new house?

Louise Sarah has.

Martin She doesn't seem to keen. …

Louise Alan told me she liked it.

Martin She's only putting it on. And d' ya notice it's not one of his own? Wouldn't bring himself so low as to live in one of them matchbox houses.

Louise He built some lovely places.

Martin He didn't build anythin'. He just talked at people and had them do it.

Louise People usually don't build entire estates with their bare hands.

Martin I built my house.

Louise And even you had help.

Martin My brothers.

Louise Well, I surely wasn't going messing with bricks and mortar for him, so he'd to make do.

Martin (*Pause.*) D'ya know, Alan's more like Molly than you; he's softer than either of us.

Louise That actually may be the first nice thing you've ever said about him.

Martin It's not good for a man to be soft.

Louise And there we go.

Martin And he's more jittery.

Louise There's a lot of pressure on him.

Martin Well.

Louise Well?

Martin Would you ever make me a cup of tea?

Louise How much of it do you drink?

Martin Sarah would like some tea.

Louise Oh, would she?

Martin It's good for the throat. The warmth … it does loosen the muscles up.

Louise (*She boils the kettle.*) Loosens, is it?

Martin (*Pause.*) Do ya think a stammer is hereditary?

Louise Who'd she have got it from?

Martin Well, do ya or don't ya? Can it be handed down? Inherited?

Louise Don't know; I doubt it.

Martin See that's the thing. People often say things can't be handed down and then two generations do get something. Sure, isn't that the way ya get cancer?

Louise I don't think it's that simple.

Martin And heart disease?

Louise Again, I think medicine is a tad more complicated than that sort of reasoning.

Martin So you don't?

Louise Maybe it was a doctor you were meant to be?

Martin (*Pause.*) Should you've been a teacher?

Louise Why?

Martin You're good with children. With Sarah. … You'd have been a good mother, I think.

Louise (*Pause.*) Well.

Martin (*Pause.*) Well.

Louise takes down cups and the teapot. Sarah enters.

Sarah All d-done.

Louise Ya weren't long. How's your mum?

Sarah Ffine.

Martin Where's she now?

Sarah Spain … still. (*Pause.*) Will I sstart from the b-beginning or …?

Martin Do. And remember, if you feel … 'it' coming on, take a breath and say it from the top of that.

Louise Seems I wasn't the only one sent to the speech and drama lessons round here.

Martin Isn't it here in this book!

Louise I'm just sayin'.

Sarah (*Pause.*) Ladies and Gentlemen, teachers and students … parents. Today, I would like to sspeak to you about language, about … communication, a topic, which I … feel, is especially vital in today's

world. In recent years, we have all experienced … change … change of c-circumstance /

Sound of the front door. Frantically, Sarah takes the sheets and the book off the table and puts them into her schoolbag.

Martin He'd have to come back early, wouldn't he?

Louise Ya should tell him now.

Martin She'll tell him in her own time.

Alan enters, carrying a brown paper bag; from this, he takes out a bottle of champagne.

Alan Hello! Hello all!

Louise Hello is right! What's all this for?

Alan I have just returned from my solicitor's /

Martin Getting sued again, are ya?

Alan Where I signed the lease on my new house. Yup! (*Bangs table.*) This day two weeks, we will be settled in our new home! Sarah, you'll need to get on with your packing now? No delay! We can be in from next Monday, so let's aim for that.

Sarah Mmmonday?

Alan (*Gets glasses from the press.*) Now, who's for champagne? Jeez, ya never thought to invest in proper glasses, Dad, no?

Martin I'd bloody better things to worry about than … And you should mind your money and not be wasterin' it like ya do.

Alan After my frugal stay here! No, no, no. Only the best from here on. (*Pours and drinks.*) Ah … a long while since I've had a proper glass of Moët! … Last chance Dad? Toast my success? Told you I'd manage it!

Martin It's worse you're gettin'. Better uses of my time than drinkin' to your stupidity. (*Exits.*)

Alan Well, Sarah? Ya excited? Cut a serious deal on the price. (*Fills up his and Louise's glasses.*) Drink up, Lou!

Louise Mind it, will ya! I've to drive later.

Alan Arrah, who'll know if you have an extra wee glass! Tell the guards my news – I'll invite them round to the new house for a drink myself! … And what are ye all at? Congregated here in the kitchen!

Louise This and that.

Sarah Wwwe wwere about to mmmake t-tea.

Alan No more tea. Too much bloody tea!

Loud knocking on the front door.

Alan Visitors! Sarah, will ya get that?

Sarah exits.

Alan Lou, I owe you one. (*Clinks glass.*) My guardian angel! My saviour!

Louise You're acting the proper eejit now.

Sarah enters with Brian, who is visibly agitated.

Alan Ah, Brian! Talk about timing. Have a glass – we're celebrating!

Brian Celebratin'?

Alan Signed a lease on a new house! Sarah and I are only days away from freedom! Independence! You'll have a glass!

Brian No, I won't.

Alan Come on, you'll have a glass with me.

Brian I didn't come here for champagne … I need to talk to ya.

Alan What about?

Brian I need to talk to ya, in private.

Louise We'll leave you to it.

Sarah and Louise exit to the hall.

Alan All OK, Brian?

Brian How much d'ya give him?

Alan Sorry?

Brian John O'Donnell. How much d'ya give him?

Alan The same rate as you /

Brian He told me ya gave him more.

Alan He told you that I …

Brian He told me.

Alan Well, I'm sorry, but I paid each and everyone the same flat amount of /

Brian Nearly four hundred grand. That's more than fifty percent. That's way over what ya said you were givin' him, what you were givin' anyone.

Alan I didn't give him four hundred grand.

Brian Why'd he lie?

Alan You know what John's like.

Brian No, what's he like? What's John like?

Alan Likes to be the one at the top, the one in control.

Brian Did you give him more?

Alan Brian, really after all we've /

Brian I just want the truth, Alan.

Alan (*Pause.*) I gave him what we agreed.

Brian What who agreed?

Alan What everyone agreed to.

Brian Why would he say otherwise?

Alan Come on, how long have we been friends? You know me better than this? Think I'd leave ya in the lurch? Me? After everythin'? When I owe ya so much to begin with? You know I'd give ye all more if I could.

Brian So you're sayin' … he lied?

Alan I'm sayin', I think, he's more mistaken. … Or maybe he's just tryin' to sound bigger than the rest of ye, tryin' to make out he got more to sound more important.

Brian Sound more important …

Alan Why would he say it, otherwise? To deliberately upset you? To send you in here, hoping we'd start a fight? He's always been jealous of us, always trying to drive us apart. You know how competitive he is, since we were young.

Brian You know how it is with the business. I laid off /

Alan I know that.

Brian John wouldn't need it so much. He'd just say it, ya know?

Alan Sure, didn't he buy that Land-Rover only the year before last? No man on the bread-line would keep a hold of wheels like that. The resale value on those is huge, massive, would pay your mortgage for I don't know how many months. I tell ya, if he was in trouble, that'd be the first thing he'd sell. … Why would I give a man like him more, when I know well he's doin' so well? If I'd more money to give, he'd be the last man I'd go to. He has savings, collaterals; he doesn't need it.

Brian You know, I could do with more too /

Alan I'd give it, if I had it.

Brian And that's the truth?

Alan Absolutely.

Brian Was … only talk, maybe. … Or maybe … could he have been confused over the amount?

Alan Miscalculated the percentage. Now that could be it. All the letters after his name, John always thought he knew it all, didn't he? Next night

we're out, we'll say it to him. What a laugh – the accountant who can't count!

Brian You're … you're telling the truth, Alan?

Alan (*Pause.*) It's a mistake, Brian. A misunderstandin', is all.

Brian (*Pause.*) I didn't mean to barge in or … /

Alan No need to apologise. You'll have some champagne. Toast my new home.

Brian No, no. Too early yet …

Alan Ah now. Come on, a toast to new beginnings, a toast to the pair of us? A drop won't hurt ya!

Brian You're no good for me.

Alan (*Gets him a glass and fills it.*) Cheers!

Brian (*Unconvinced.*) Cheers!

Alan Sorry, not the best glassware. Best the old man has.

Brian It's fine … by me. … Ya must be excited about the new place?

Alan Yes, we are. Awkward, logistically, movin' again and that … But it's for the best. Sarah's very unhappy here. She needs a place to call home, ya know?

Brian And, your dad's well? Ya'll tell him I was askin' for him.

Alan I will.

Brian Right. Good. John … must've …

Alan He's just talk.

Brian Yes …

Alan Where'd he even tell ya?

Brian O'Donoghue's.

Alan Ah, here. Only aul' drink talk on him. Ya'd best pay no heed to anything said in there.

Brian I'll go home.

Alan I'll call ya in the mornin'?

Brian Right. Good luck with the packin'.

Alan I'll walk ya to the door.

Brian Ah, I know my way out by this stage. Thanks.

Brian exits; Alan looks at the champagne bottle tentatively, pours another glass and drinks it back in one. He takes out his phone and dials, but there is no answer. He grabs keys from the table and exits via the back door.

Blackout.

Scene Two

Early afternoon. Alan sits at the kitchen table, with Louise standing over him; his keys are on the table.

Louise Why didn't you come to me with this before now?

Alan I didn't want you involved.

Louise I'm already involved!

Alan There wasn't a builder in the country who didn't /

Louise 'Cause that'll be a great defence before Revenue. (*Pause.*) I don't understand, why'd John tell him? You paid him what he asked for?

Alan The pair of them, they've have always been close. Could have been out of a sense of loyalty … John won't answer the phone for me to even ask him.

Louise By the sound of it, you've mollified Brian …

Alan Won't last.

Louise What's the worst he can do if you don't pay up?

Alan I don't own any of the work his lads did on Ardcairn …

Louise It's in your building. Of course, you own it!

Alan See, that's it. Until he is paid, he owns his own work. He can go in and take everything out – doors, skirting, shop fittings. All the carpentry. He'll clean it out. Then there'll be more questions /

Louise What's your proposal then?

Alan If Brian insists, I pay him.

Louise Pay him more?

Alan Yes.

Louise With what exactly?

Alan Haven't … quite figured that out yet.

Louise (*Pause.*) Why d'ya do it? Lying to the banks, inflating costs.

Alan It was a different time.

Louise It was fraud then too.

Alan The banks knew. It was how people … got what was needed. It was so rare actual notes or coins passed through your fingers. Was all digits on the screen; a few clicks and edits and you'd an extra ten or fifty grand in your pocket. … It felt normal.

Louise And how does you pocketing company funds enter all this?

Alan I know it sounds … I was going to put it back after a few of the units sold, once I got my own investment back … I didn't know they wouldn't sell. If we hadn't had to delay the building … 'cause a passer-by may've been able to see into someone's back garden, we would have sold every shop front and got the money back. With profit. It was a loan, I was going to put it back.

Louise Is there *anyone* we could ask? Anyone that would give you a line of credit.

Alan Not now. I'm too much of a risk.

Louise And you've nothing else put away?

Alan Only the little I have for the new house.

Louise Forget the house!

Alan I can't. You heard him, I have to be gone by the end of the month /

Louise He didn't mean that.

Alan I signed a lease … what's more, Sarah's seen it. I promised her …

Louise Well then, you'll just have to ask him. Explain what happened. He's always had something stored away.

Alan He'd laugh in my face.

Louise Say it's for Sarah – he'll give it to you for her.

Alan Probably rat me out to the Revenue to spite me ….

Louise We'll ask him together. He'll listen to … Say you need a loan. That you'll reimburse him when you're back on your feet. That you'll pay it back in instalments /

Alan You think that'll convince him? (*Pause.*) What if … if it's for you?

Louise For me?

Alan For your mortgage. He gave you that before … ?

Louise (*Pause.*) How do you … ?

Alan He told me.

Louise Wwhen?

Alan Late one night … after being out. This is ages ago.

Louise (*Quiet.*) It's …

Alan I'm not judgin' you, Lou. Everyone is /

Louise It was a slow month; it was just the once.

Alan Don't get upset /

Louise I've always managed!

Alan I know!

Louise It's important. I'm … perfectly fine on my own. (*Pause.*) He won't let me pay him back. He promised he'd not say …

Alan He was half drunk. He probably doesn't even remember …

Louise He doesn't drink anymore; not enough to be drunk.

Alan He does sometimes. … When he's alone.

Louise (*Pause.*) You knew about my mortgage, and you still came to me for money?

Alan I'd no one else. (*Pause.*) Why didn't you come to me? Before, when you were … when you needed money?

Louise What with you and Emily … I didn't want to … impose.

Alan You wouldn't have been /

Louise Doesn't matter now. (*Pause.*) With Dad, if you explained, if we asked him, he might /

Alan He won't.

Louise We're going to ask him.

Alan There's not a hope of him giving me anything, Lou.

Louise We're asking him. Where's he now?

Alan In his room; having a kip, I think.

Louise I'll get him.

Alan What?! Now?!

Louise You've got so much time, have you?

Alan No, it's just … he'll … we haven't properly discussed, planned /

Louise Oh, because planning is your forte.

Alan We're asking on your behalf? Saying it's for you?

Louise We'll tell him the truth. He deserves that /

Alan Lou, please, I'm beggin' ya. We both know he'll give it to you. He trusts you. When the other investors see Brian stripping the place, they'll be asking why. He'll tell them I broke the contract, and they'll all come demanding more. And what if John joins the lynching ranks? Decides to divulge everything anyway … anonymously. Everything's in my name. He didn't sign anything. The accounts. Pay slips. One letter from him ... and I'm done. The Revenue Commissioners will be after me for fraud. I could go to jail, Lou. Sarah will be sent away. … Paying Brian more is the only way to finish this. … Please. With Dad, it has to come from you.

Louise (*Pause.*) What if Brian tells anyway?

Alan He won't. He'll keep his trap shut.

Louise Look, do something. Make some sandwiches. I'll tell him it's lunch.

Alan He'll know well, he'll /

Louise Just do what I said!

Louise exits to the hall. Alan is frantic; he boils the kettle, and arranges place settings. Martin enters, and sits in the armchair.

Martin Ya didn't say *he'd* be here.

Louise You should be using that stick, Dad.

Martin I don't need it!

Alan Nice nap?

Louise glares at him.

Martin (*Gruff.*) I wasn't havin' a nap. I was readin' the paper.

Louise You'll have some lunch Dad, will ya? A sambo?

Martin Any bacon goin'?

Louise I'll stick it on for ya.

Louise takes rashers out of the fridge and puts them in a frying pan.

Martin Ye're both fierce quiet.

Louise Well then, have you any news?

Martin Where would I have news from and I haven't been out all day? What's the young one at?

Alan She's up doing her homework.

Martin She's a good worker.

Alan (*Off-guard.*) She is.

Martin Knows what she wants.

Alan Yes …

Louise Alan, you might make the tea, will ya?

He shoots up to Louise at the worktop.

Alan (*Whispers.*) Lou, you'll have to ask /

Louise (*Quiet.*) I don't like lying /

Alan You know well he won't give it, if it's for me.

Martin What?!

Louise What?

Martin It's … it's bad manners to be whisperin'.

Alan gives her a pleading look.

Louise Dad … there's something I wanted to run by ya …

Martin Well?

Louise Ya know … I was telling ya about my work … the shop …

Martin Ya were?

Louise Well, it's just that … you know it's been slow … of late.

Martin So you said.

Louise (*Avoids looking at Martin.*) And, I've … fallen a bit behind … of late…
with my bills … and that.

Martin Behind?

Louise Yeah.

Martin It's not like you to be behind?

Louise No.

Martin Is it bad?

Louise It's … not the best.

Martin That's …

Louise I'm sorry.

Martin There's no use bein' sorry about it. Bein' sorry won't change … You work too hard. That's your problem. You're always lettin' people off. I've always said that to ya.

Louise Ya have. I don't know what to do. … I … I feel stuck.

Martin (*Stands up and takes Louise's hands; holds them in his.*) You shouldn't feel stuck. There's no need for that.

Louise I don't know what to do.

Martin Have ya talked to the bank yet?

Louise I … have.

Martin What'd they say?

Louise That … they can't help.

Martin Right … right. And it's a lot, is it?

Louise (*Pause.*) Yeah.

Martin How much is it?

Louise Fifty grand.

Martin (*Taps her hands.*) Stop lookin' so down, love. We'll sort it. (*Smiles.*) Don't you worry.

Alan (*Bangs the pan in frustration.*) These look near done.

Louise takes the rashers and starts making a sandwich.

Martin We'll go into the bank tomorrow, both of us. We'll have a chat. They might give ya a loan … if I back you. We'll see can we set something up.

Alan You're not giving her something yourself?

Martin (*Pause.*) Why would I do that?

Alan You … you did it before?

Martin What?

Alan Her mortgage … ?

Martin How do you …?

Alan You told me …

Martin I'd not tell you that!

Alan Here, one night, you said it.

Martin (*Embarrassed.*) That's between myself and Louise /

Louise It's OK, Dad.

Martin (*Louder.*) I'd not tell him that!

Louise Honestly, it doesn't matter /

Martin Why are you so interested suddenly?

Alan I'm not. … I'm only looking out for her.

Martin (*Pause.*) Looking out for her?

Alan Of course.

Martin There's hardly something else in it, is there?

Louise Why would there be?

Alan Look, you're only getting excited. Ya need to calm yourself /

Martin Don't condescend me, ya little pup. (*Pause. To Louise.*) Are you really stuck for money?

Louise Yes.

Martin And it's for you that you want the money?

Louise Yes.

Martin (*Pause*.) You've never been a good one at the lying.

Louise Why would I lie?

Martin Same reason we lied to Molly about him. 'Cause it's easier.

Louise turns away and sits at the table, unable to meet Martin's gaze.

Alan What the hell does that mean?

Martin Well, Louise, what does it mean?

Louise (*Quiet.*) Dad, please.

Martin Well then, I'll tell ya. It means that when your mother, God rest her soul, was sitting up there in that bed, fadin' away, dying and she'd be askin' for ya, askin' when you'd be callin' in, we'd lie and say you were away, out of the country on business or the like. Say that you called when she was sleepin' and you were askin' for her. And then she'd be boastin' about ya, about you and your house, about your perfect family and your perfect business, and how well you must be doin', how busy you must be. And us havin' to sit and take it. She was facin' death a year, and in that year, you couldn't bother your hole to give her a bit of consolation and come see her /

Alan That's a fuckin' lie /

Martin It's the truth and you can ask your sister. She was half livin' here that time, takin' days off work to drive her to appointments. Used to come in and help her into the bath, and help wash her hair for her. Make sure she

was comfortable. We were makin' excuses for you till the very fuckin' end and now, here you are, lookin' for more off me, after abandonin' your own family.

Alan I came as much as I could.

Martin Another lie.

Alan Why didn't ye call me then, tell me /

Martin (*Loud.*) You should've known!

Alan Look … I'm sorry, I can't undo the past /

Martin Well, that's obvious, considerin' the state ya've landed yourself in /

Alan It's only 'cause the payment with the shops has been delayed and the delay is too long. When I get the rent, I'll pay ya back. Every cent. I'll give ya interest even. It's only a loan.

Martin A loan?

Alan Ya.

Martin Because the payment has been … delayed?

Alan Ya.

Martin Hmm. … Is that sandwich near ready?

Louise brings him the sandwich; he pats her hand, as before and begins eating.

Martin Are they the rashers from the shop? Or the butcher?

Louise The butcher.

Martin Lovely taste off them. … They're proper rashers, now. We'll get them anymore.

Louise Dad, the money is for Sarah as well.

Martin (*Pause.*) So … you admit it's not for you? … No.

Alan No?

Martin (*To Alan.*) I gave you your money. I'll not give ya more to waste /

Alan I wouldn't be a waste. It's to restart everything.

Martin You made your mess and ya can find your own way out of it. Always the same, since you were small. Never valuin' what you are given. Demandin' more and only squanderin' it. Selling things undervalue, sellin' my land /

Alan This again? That place was a shithole!

Martin It was a gift I gave ya!

Alan 'Cause it was worthless. Wish ya'd gifted me some cash and I'd have put it to actual use.

Martin Ungrateful shit. There was history in that place. Your grandfather /

Alan The great legacy! Yes, we all fuckin' know. That it was Granddads' and then it was yours. Legacy? Bollox. I was the first one to do anything with it, I built on it /

Martin And then sold it for tuppence /

Alan Christ! How are we still havin this one fuckin' conversation! Property. Land. It's all meaningless, the whole fuckin' story. It was a pile of rock and muck that could produce nothing, give nothing. In the piss ass back of beyond.

Martin That's what you think?

Alan A shit buy from day one.

Martin I'll not give you a penny.

Alan You'd want to start watchin' your bad back then, ya aul' cripple. … Enjoy your lunch.

Alan exits to the hall. Martin continues eating his sandwich; Louise slumps into a chair, and watches him.

Blackout.

Scene Three

Evening: the light of the day is almost gone. Brian stands, close to the hall door, facing Alan. Sarah's schoolbag leans against the table.

Brian I asked him, Alan. He told me.

Alan It's not like it sounds /

Brian You stood there, there where you're standin' now, and ya promised me ya'd only given him what we agreed, the same as we were all given. Ya lied. To my face. Ya lied to me. Knowin' what that meant. Knowin' that I'd lads laid off, and my own debts are pilin' up /

Alan (*Desperate.*) Brian, you don't understand the pressure /

Brian No, Alan. I do. I do understand.

Alan You do?

Brian And I understand you're moving into this new house, as well, so I do. And I'm wonderin' how suddenly ya'd enough for that, and your champagne and your party, but ya don't have enough to pay me for work done in your building. Now that, *that*, I've some difficulty getting my head around.

Alan The house is for me and Sarah. It's only a lease, Brian … McNamara, the auctioneer, he's giving it for almost nothing, as a favour. I've nothing else to my name /

Brian Then how is it when John put the pressure on, ya'd all the money in the world? Well? How is it possible to pay him more, but not me? How'd ya suddenly get enough money?

Alan I didn't have it. I … took out a loan. From the Credit Union.

Brian A loan. And how is it, ya can't get another one?

Alan It's not possible … I fudged the numbers. I can't do it twice; it's too risky, they'll cop /

Brian Well, here it is. We had a contract, Alan. And you've gone and broken it and lied to my face about it. And I'm no genius, but I'm fairly certain, that there's a legal matter from that, now. That I've some bit of standing in that regard. So either ya pay me, like ya promised originally, or I'll go investigate that further. Those are your options.

Alan I didn't want to lie to you. … But, this time, I really mean it. I've nothin' else.

Brian Ya shouldn't have lied to me, Alan. After everything.

Alan I … didn't know what else to do.

Brian I wouldn't have done it to you. And ya know that, I think. Ya do.

The two men stare at each other, silently. Brian exits without a word. Alan takes out the bottle of whiskey from earlier. He fills a double, drinks and falls into a chair. Sarah enters, holding the script of her speech.

Sarah Dad?

Alan Yeah.

Sarah Are you …?

Alan (*Sharp.*) What?

Sarah I … I p-packed up my room.

Alan Good.

Sarah Took ages.

Alan Had to be done.

Sarah I wwas … wwondering if … maybe you'd like to wwatch a ffilm or ssomething tonight?

Alan I'm out tonight.

Sarah Again?

Alan I've to meet people.

Sarah Wwhat about?

Alan Business.

Sarah It … doesn't have to … be a long ffilm.

Alan Another time, Sarah.

Sarah The thing is … I've this speech …

Alan Speech?

Sarah C-could you listen to it? I have to ssay it in sschool, tomorrow. The entire c-class has to. We'd each to wwrite one and then we've to say it in the hall. Could you listen to it … before you g-go /

Alan Sarah, I'm sorry, I really don't have time.

Sarah What are you d-doing now?

Alan I'm waiting for a call.

Sarah Would you like to … come hear it?

Alan I'm not available tomorrow.

Sarah It's in the evening. (*She goes to her schoolbag and fumbles inside. She takes out a flyer.*) See? P-parents are invited. It's not long. You c-can just sstay for mine. It's only sseven minutes. And I've been p-practising, like you said /

Alan You've given me less than a day's notice!

Sarah I d-didn't wwant to … bother you wwith it … when you'd the move /

Alan I'm very busy tomorrow.

Sarah With wwhat?

Alan Sorry?

Sarah Wwhat are you d-doing?

Alan Meetings.

Sarah Wwhat k-kind of mmeetings? Wwhere are they? /

Alan Business meetings /

Sarah Wwhat d-d-does that mmean!

Alan Banks, loans, insurance /

Sarah They're just ffaceless wwords. Wwwho?

Alan People who deal with banks, loans, insurances.

Sarah You d-don't have any mmeetings. You're only ssaying that.

Alan Don't be stupid.

Sarah You told mmme wwe wwere g-going to go the new house today, to set it up … b-but you wwere g-gone all d-day.

Alan I've had things to sort out /

Sarah Wwhen are wwwe g-going?

Alan Soon. Friday. At the weekend.

Sarah And wwe're mmoving? On Mmmonday?

Alan Yes. Monday. Yes.

Sarah P-p-promise?

Alan Sarah, I don't have time for this.

Sarah I wwwant you to c-c-come tomorrow.

Alan's phone rings.

Alan I have to take this …

Sarah grabs the phone out of his hands.

Sarah Wwho do you mmeet? /

Alan Give that back to me /

Sarah I wwwon't tell anyone!

Alan Sarah, this isn't funny /

Sarah You n-never t-tell me anything anymore!

Alan forces the phone out of her hand, but it stops ringing.

Alan Shit! What the hell was that?

Sarah I wwant to know wwhat's g-g-going on.

Alan With what?

Sarah I'm only g-g-getting used to here.

Alan I told you this was temporary /

Sarah Is the n-next one p-p-permanent?

Alan Nowhere is ever permanent /

Sarah D-did you b-b-buy it?

Alan I'm renting it /

Sarah How long wwill wwe b-b-be there?

Alan For the foreseeable future.

Sarah I wwwant our old house. I wwant to g-go home.

Alan That place doesn't belong to us anymore /

Sarah You sshouldn't have ssold /

Alan I sold it to save us.

Sarah To ssave you.

Alan (*Louder.*) You don't know what you're talking about.

Sarah (*Quietly.*) P-p-please D-dad.

Alan Look, I told you, I'm too busy. Now, that's the end of it, alright?

Sarah P-please, I need you to b-be there, ya haaave to heear mmmy ssspppeech /

The phone starts ringing again.

Sarah P-p-please, just wwwwwait a mmmminute /

Alan For Chris' sake, spit it out!

Sarah tries to speak, but she can't get the words out.

Alan Go to your room. (*She doesn't go.*) Christ. (*He exits, answering the phone as he leaves*) Yes, hello! … Yes, Mr Bennett. Thanks for getting back to me …

Sarah steadies herself against the armchair; she opens her mouth to speak, but lets out a low cry.

Blackout.

Scene Four

Late the following night. Sarah sits at the table beside Martin; her face and clothes are muddied. Louise, also wearing her coat, stands by the back door.

Alan Do you have any idea how worried I've been? You've had us all round the bloody bend looking for /

Louise Alan, shut up!

Alan Don't tell me to shut up!

Martin It's what you say to everyone else.

Alan Don't you start /

Louise Would ye let her speak?

Alan Your school rang; your teacher's livid!

Martin (*Quiet.*) You should've done your speech.

Sarah I c-couldn't.

Alan You don't get to choose when you do and do not go to school.

Martin You were able.

Sarah I d-didn't wwant to anymore … I wwanted /

Alan What? What did you want?

Sarah I wwwanted /

Alan Where did you even find her?

Louise The main road. She was walking back here.

Alan So you've been, what, walking the fuckin' countryside?

Sarah (*Pause.*) I wwent home.

Alan This is home.

Sarah No, it's not.

Alan Well, for the next week, it is.

Louise Alan, please.

Sarah I. Wwent. Home.

Alan (*Pause.*) To the house?

Sarah Obviously.

Alan What were you doing there?

She lifts up the schoolbag, zips it open and takes out a plastic bag; she tips it open and apples spill onto the table and floor.

Alan Did anyone see you?

Sarah No.

Alan You can't, you can't just waltz into someone's garden and /

Sarah It's mmy g-garden. They're mmy apples.

Alan No they are not.

Sarah Yes, they are. They're mmy trees, I p-planted them /

Alan I planted them!

Sarah You told me they wwere mmine /

Alan So you skip school to pick apples?

Sarah If I didn't go out there, the b-birds would have g-got at them. Or they'd have g-gone rotten.

Alan So they'd have gone rotten /

Martin You'll never understand. She values those trees. Understands that that place will always belong to this family.

Alan This has you all over it – she'd never have gone on her own.

Sarah (*Growing angry*.) Granddad had nothing to d-do with it!

Alan Sarah, keep your voice down.

Sarah I went. Me! I helped p-plant those trees and I'll p-pick them wwhenever I wwant. They're mmine!

Alan It's a fuckin' miracle they didn't see you /

Sarah They never see me.

Louise You've gone before?

Sarah Every wweek. I p-pick as many as I can c-carry. … I'd rather they'd go b-bad under … my wwatch than with those people. … They think they can replace us and nothing wwill happen. It'll always be ours; I'm making them understand that!

Louise (*Pause.*) What do you mean … making them understand?

Sarah (*Pause*.) I wwent to get the apples. But … when I was 'round the b-back of the shed, I ssaw these b-bricks of c-concrete, all … covered in mmoss and mmuck. (*Looks at her fingers.*) They seemed all ssolid at ffirst, but they're actually full of these tiny holes, all these little rivets and g-grits. Never noticed before. So I threw it in on top of them … in at their p-perfect ffamily p-picture. (*She looks up. They are hanging on her every word; she enjoys this and as she grows more confident, her stammer becomes less prominent.*) They were ssitting at our table, on our chairs, eating d-dinner. And that … boy, that small, bblack haired runt, him and

his red jumper, in my seat. He didn't even c-care! … Does now. … The glass went everywhere. The woman sstarted ssquealing, sscreaming at the man to *d-do ssomething*. He c-comes looking for me and … starts shouting he's going to *c-call the police*. So, I climb up one of the trees and wait. No p-police. … He put this bin bag over the hole in the g-glass, taped it up, trying to keep out the wwind. Blew against it anyway, didn't do mmuch good. …When they went to bed, I wwas back round to the shed again. Put one clean through the ssitting room window and it landed in on this d-disgusting rug, this mmaroon rag *she's* put inside. The b-brick and the … glass d-dirties it all up. And they started running, and they were straight onto the phone to call the guards. For real, this time. Even then, they d-don't even look for me, just walk round the house, and go inspectin' the wwindows. … And she's … bawling at them, acting the little martyr. In our house. When it's her own fault. … They brought it on themselves. … They have to leave.

Pause. Sarah looks up at Alan, pleased.

Alan (*To Martin.*) Are you happy now, Dad?

Sarah You never listen!

Alan Of course, I bloody listen!

Sarah Why did you g-give up? Why d-didn't you try?

Alan They paid me for it /

Sarah (*Growing more upset.*) It wasn't yours to sell - it was mmine. Was mme there all the time. Mme living there. You and Mam were hardly b-between the wwalls b-before a fight'd erupt and one of ye, b-b-both even, would be g-gone. It was only ever ssomewhere to ssleep for you, somewhere to p-pass through. It didn't mmean anything to you. … You'd no right to ssell it. … I ffilled every room with mmyself and it's only holdin' itself t-together t-till I g-get b-back. Wwe have to g-go b-back!

Alan If they cop it was you, they'll sue.

Sarah Are you g-going to tell?

Alan No.

Sarah Then there's no p-problem.

Alan You're going to stop.

Sarah You c-can't mmake me.

Alan I'll lock you in your room.

Sarah I'll g-go out the wwindow.

Alan I'll bar the window.

Sarah I'll c-call Mam. Ssocial services /

Alan You will not.

Sarah I'll live with G-Granddad.

Martin As long as you like.

Louise Dad, please /

Alan (*To Martin.*) You're just lovin' this, aren't you?

Martin I was expectin' it.

Alan You'll be put before the court, they'll put you in care. What the hell is your mother going to say when she hears /

Sarah Nothing. When sshe figures out that I've d-done something she can't b-boast about … she wwon't wwwant me. She d-doesn't wwant mme.

Louise Of course she does.

Sarah Sshe left; she d-doesn't c-c-care wwhat happens to me /

Alan's phone rings.

Louise Leave it.

Alan I've been waiting for /

Sarah You're always wwwaiting for a c-call /

Alan Everything I've done these last few months has been for us. For both of us /

Louise Let it go to voicemail.

Alan No one move. Two minutes.

Alan exits to the hall.

Sarah (*Verging on tears*) *Ssee*?

Louise He doesn't mean it /

Sarah I wwant to g-go home. I wwant things the wway they wwere b-before.

Martin This can be your home.

Sarah Wwwas all for nothing.

Sarah runs out of the room, and into the hall.

Louise Sarah!

Martin Let her be.

Louise (*Pause.*) Tell me you didn't know about all this? Her going off?

Martin I didn't know about the bricks. How could I know she'd do that?

Louise Don't let her stay if Alan goes. It won't help anything.

Martin 'If'. 'If' Alan goes?

Louise When.

Martin Not 'if'?

Louise No. When.

Martin Why'd you say 'if' he goes?

Louise Was a mistake.

Martin Is he not goin'?

Alan re-enters; he puts his phone on the table.

Alan Where's she gone?

Martin Are you staying or going?

Louise She went up to her room.

Alan I told her to /

Martin Are ya?!

Alan What're you saying?

Martin When is it you're goin'?

Alan Dad, I've a bit more to worry about at the minute /

Martin So that's it. It didn't work. All the phone calls. What that one say?

Alan Everything is under /

Louise Do either of ye care what Sarah just said?! What she did?!

Alan Of course I care!

Louise Do you Alan? Because from what I can see you just walked out on her to take a bloody phone-call. Forget the house. Forget Emily. The phone /

Alan What do you expect me to do?

Louise Talk to her!

Alan I'm trying to find her a home.

Martin Tryin'? Where's this house so?

Alan I told you before, it's up in the Oaks.

Martin And that's the truth now? Or would it be a lie, maybe?

Alan Louise, bring Sarah down.

Martin Maybe ya don't have a house. Because you haven't 'it all sorted'. Would that be closer to it all?

Alan Why did you let her go upstairs?

Louise Why did I let? Why didn't you stay?!

Martin Who was on the phone?

Louise Or why don't you go get her?

Alan Can the pair of ye just shut up for a second! I need to think.

Louise That's great. Alan needs more time to think.

Alan Lou, give me a break.

Louise A break. A loan. All I ever do is help you! I've spent the last two months in and out of this house trying to unite this dysfunctional family. And I'm fuckin' exhausted!

Martin Who was on the phone?

Alan It's nothing to do with you.

Martin So important you had to take it and your daughter after saying what she did?

Alan This is all your fault.

Martin How is it my fault?!

Alan The only reason she did all that, was 'cause you filled her head with your bloody stories.

Martin If you hadn't abandoned, ignored her like ya have /

Louise Both of ye, shut up! It's the pair of ye are to blame, so stop trying to pin it on each other and accept responsibility that Sarah did what she did, and she did it to make a point. To both of ye.

Martin I'd nothing to do with all that. … Ya've no right sayin' that. I helped her with her speech just as much as you did /

Louise Did you even listen to it? What she was saying, as opposed to her ps and ds and the rest of it? The bloody topic was about talking to people! It was aimed at ye!

Alan Well considering you kept it from me, how the hell was I supposed to know that?

Louise It was supposed to be a surprise. I told her to tell you ... and she did. She told me what happened, that you yelled at her and walked out. So, whatever about Dad filling her head with fairy-tales, you've made no effort to contradict any of it. You're never here /

Alan That's not true /

Louise It is and I know it for a fact, 'cause I've been picking up the slack of you and your wife for months, you and your shit parenting. And Alan, do you want to know how I've managed to be here so often? Hmm? … Well, here ya are: my business is dead. And why? Because you're not the only one affected by all this, 'cause if no one is building, no one is buying furniture, or decoratin' or any of it. So, I'm closing. I'm closing the shop. … I gave every cent I had for you and Sarah and still, still you couldn't sacrifice a minute's consideration for how the hell I might be feeling. You didn't contact me from one end of the year till the other when you were flying high; it was only when it all went to shit, that suddenly you wanted to be friends with your big sister, that suddenly I was your saviour, your only way out. And now, now, when you've a chance to properly fix things, for us to be some sort of family, all you do is think up new excuses, and lie to half the world to get ahead.

Martin Hasn't learned a thing /

Louise (*To Martin.*) And as for you, if he's got on by talking his way 'round people, he surely learned it somewhere, so you'd best keep your comments to yourself. Ye're cut from the same rancid rag, the pair of ye.

Sound of the front door slamming.

Alan Sarah?

Louise and Alan run out. Martin looks at Alan's phone on the table in front of him, and checks his recent calls list. At the sound of the front door, he drops it, hastily.

Alan She won't speak to me.

Martin Shocker.

Alan sees the phone is alight and looks at it.

Alan It's unlocked.

Martin The door, is it?

Alan My phone. You didn't lock it.

Martin Didn't think phones had locks.

Alan They do.

Martin T'was Brian Laverty ringin' ya.

Alan Had to check for yourself?

Martin He was the man here at the party.

Alan Alzheimers hasn't got you yet.

Martin Brian, your old drinking buddy from school. Brian, the carpenter. Brian, the man you owe money to. Ye've been ringin' each other a lot by the looks of things. He's not so happy.

Alan (*Fills a drink for himself.*) I owe him money.

Martin Ya've been havin' a lot of that, lately.

Alan You're hardly one to judge.

Martin (*Pause.*) Well. I'd best go check on Sarah, shall I? She'll probably be wantin' me, the way she is.

Martin goes to stand, but Alan pushes him back down.

Alan Ya can sit.

Martin I'll sit.

Alan Ya will.

Martin I'm happy sittin'.

Alan And you'll stay sitting.

Martin And I've no business to be standin'.

Alan No.

Martin But you'll be standin' there I think, and you'll want me to stand?

Alan No. I want you to sit.

Martin You want me to stand, so you can tell me to sit. And then I won't and then you can say I started on ya. And you'll paint this big 'aul story then, isn't that it, son? 'Cause all ya've ever done is make up your little sop stories, expecting to be minded, for someone to sort it all out for

you. Hmm? … At least Sarah fights. Understands that that place means something. That it's been in this family for three generations /

Alan Do you hear yourself? All she did was try and enter your twisted little narrative, but she couldn't even follow through with it. She ran and hid up a tree. 'Cause she knew it was wrong. That the stories and the legacy were worthless, that they wouldn't protect her. … And it was the same with me and Lou, when we were kids. Building us up, filling us with talk and dreams, your old words and stories. Things to tell round a counter, but nothing else. Stories can't build, can't feed or shelter you. Not properly. Not long-term. If you'd told us the truth, that life is difficult, that a story doesn't solve your problems, maybe we'd have had some chance.

Martin 'Cause everything's always my fault.

Alan And why? 'Cause what else could ya tell us but your heritage shite? Ya've never achieved anything in your life.

Martin Ya pathetic little shit, I put ya in the position to create in the first place… I wasn't just given what you were. I started from nothing; you've had it easy since day one. And look at ya now! Wife gone, business collapsed, bleeding your sister dry /

Alan I knew you wouldn't help me …

Martin And d'ya know, if I was a millionaire, I still wouldn't give ya a penny.

Alan You can't mean that.

Martin I do.

Alan Knowin' what you know?

Martin Makes no odds to me.

Alan (*Pause.*) I'm sorry, OK? That's what you want to hear. About Mam. The house. Everything aside, I'm asking you to, please, reconsider. I know you have it. If you could just give me enough to pay Brian. … If you don't … Dad, I could lose everything. They'll take Sarah from me. … I'll get out and leave ya in peace. … I'll do whatever ya want. Please … I've got no one else.

Martin (*Pause.*) Go to jail for all I care. You've brought this all on yourself. … Don't be worryin' though. Sarah will be grand here, without ya. Lou and I will make sure she's well looked after.

Alan She's not staying here.

Martin She won't go with you.

Alan She will.

Martin You deserted her.

Alan I never /

Martin Drove her mother away.

Alan I couldn't control Emily.

Martin (*Sneers.*) You couldn't please her.

Martin stands, turns his back on Alan and heads for the door. Something tweaks. Alan shoves Martin and he falls to the ground.

Alan Is this the fight you want, ya vindictive cripple?

Martin Calm down, now /

Alan kicks him brutally.

Alan How does it feel, eh? Being the one on the ground, sufferin' the beatin' /

Martin cries out and tries to scramble away. Alan continues to kick him.

Alan I'll lose everything, but you're too fuckin' spiteful to help me. What kind of father lets his son go through that?

Louise enters at the sound, with Sarah behind. Alan keeps kicking Martin.

Louise Alan!

Martin I don't have /

Louise pulls Alan off Martin, who huddles, terrified on the ground.

Alan Not so strong now are ya?

Louise What the hell is wrong with you?

Louise picks Martin up, like a mother holding up a child. He shakes and hides his face, as he leans against her. Sarah stands motionless, watching them.

Louise Sarah, call an ambulance.

Alan Doesn't deserve help /

Louise Sarah!

Martin (*Hoarse.*) Money's gone.

Louise It's OK, Dad, it doesn't matter.

Alan All over a fuckin' piece of land. I had to sell the place, or the banks would've taken it themselves, and I'd have lost even more money. I'd no fuckin' choice. He knows he's the only one who can save me and he's refusin' to do anything.

Martin (*Louder.*) There's none left!

Alan What would Mammy think of ya now, eh, Dad? Screwing over your own son!

Martin (*As loud as he can muster.*) There's no money left!

Sarah walks forward, slowly; she looks down at Martin.

Martin (*Tired.*) Even if I wanted to, I can't help.

Alan Another lie. You're only saying that now. You couldn't have lost it.

Martin No /

Alan You'd thousands made, from your auctioneerin' and dealin'. I know you've it put away. Martin Tansey, the man who owned the famous fuckin' field. You couldn't lose it, I don't believe you!

Martin They were saying …

Alan Here's the latest story, now. Are ye all listenin', here's the latest fuckin' one. I'm all ears, Dad. Let's hear it, go on! Off with ya!

Martin (*Pause.*) They said … the bank, they said the shares'd be guaranteed. That they couldn't fall. That the money'd be safe and would get bigger … I just had to play the game, and the sum'd get bigger… I put everything in it … the savings, everything meself and Molly had built up … I just went to sleep one night and overnight, it … they weren't … safe. It changed … and … they were all gone. Worthless, the lot o' them, them shares. There's nothing left to give either of ye.

Louise (*Pause.*) Is that …

Martin T'is.

Louise Why didn't you say …?

Martin (*Weak.*) Was my own doing.

Alan backs away from them and begins to break down. Louise cradles Martin; Sarah moves towards Alan.

Louise Christ, you're shakin'. Sarah, get me my phone!

Alan Dad, please, you can't lie now.

Louise Sarah!

Alan When we were small, when people were stuck, they'd come to ya and ye'd sit round the table and ye'd talk … and ye'd fix it and … then, ye'd find a way out. People came to ya, knowin' ya'd find a ... Ya've always, sorted things. Ya've always. …

Louise Will one of ye do something!

Alan Dad, don't … Ya have to help. Please… (*Sarah turns to Alan*) Don't look at me like that, love. … You don't understand. … He's always had money, ever since we were small, he'd find … He has … he made it sound /

Sarah slaps him on the face. Stunned, Alan slumps into the chair.

Blackout.

Scene Five

The boxes and apples are gone, and the room is at it was in Act One. The light of morning streams in through the windows. Alan enters, wearing a jacket, with a bag in his hand. Martin sits in the armchair, his arm in a sling, and a stick by his side.

Martin You're packed.

Alan Last bag.

Martin Louise's collectin' ya?

Alan She's outside.

Martin She's not comin' in?

Alan She's waiting in the car.

Martin Right.

Alan How're ya feeling?

Martin Stiff.

Alan Will I get you a pain killer or /

Martin No.

Alan Right.

Martin Well? Are ya goin' or …?

Alan I wanted …

Martin What?

Alan I wanted to thank you … for letting me stay.

Martin Oh.

Alan Ya can leave the doors unlocked again.

Martin Suppose.

Alan No one barging in.

Martin Louise is to call, still.

Alan Yes, Louise is to call.

Martin She said she'd keep coming.

Alan Good.

Martin She told me … yer man Brian had … emptied out the shops. The fittings and that.

Alan He did.

Martin And that's, what, to go to the courts now?

Alan Waiting to see. (*Pause.*) Why didn't you tell me … about the money?

Martin Not a thing ya discuss.

Alan (*Pause.*) What I did … before … I'm /

Martin We don't need to bring that up /

Alan I am though.

Martin Well.

Alan I shouldn't have /

Martin We all … do lose the run of ourselves /

Alan It shouldn't be an excuse /

Martin (*Sincerely.*) But it is.

Alan takes his keys out of his pocket, and places them on the table.

Martin You should hang onto them … for when you're over to see herself.

Alan Thanks.

Martin Fine.

Alan and Martin look at one another and hold each other's gaze for a moment; there is a sense of awkwardness, but also a feeling of cordiality between them. Martin nods at him, and Alan turns to the door. Sarah enters and walks past him.

Alan I'm off. … You won't change your mind? Louise has a room ready.

She shakes her head. Pause.

Alan I'm sorry I didn't listen to your speech. Lou … she said it was brilliant.

Sarah (*Pause.*) It d-didn't really ssound like me.

Alan (*Encouraged.*) No, you'd have been great at it. A real performer!

Sarah 'Cause 'it's not what you say, it's how you make them feel'. Right? That's what you said?

Alan Yes, I did say that …

Sarah But, it's mmore than that. What you ssay should mmatter too. You shouldn't just talk to g-get a reaction, or to g-get something out of p-people. It's supposed to mmean something.

Alan Of course it should.

Sarah But you don't do that. You d-didn't do that. You … lied to all those p-people … just to get something out of them.

Martin Sarah, I don't think it's that simple /

Alan I know I did, I know that.

Sarah Why did you?

Alan It just got out of hand. I didn't know … how else to speak to them.

Sarah You should p-probably learn a new way.

Alan Yes.

Sarah I think you should leave.

Alan Please, Sarah.

Sarah I want you to go.

Alan moves towards her, as if to hug her. She turns away. Pause.

Alan OK.

Martin (*Pause.*) I'll … walk ya out, and say hello to that one. (*As he leaves.)* She's gettin' too precious for her own good now; sittin' on her arse out there, with me hobblin' out, the way I am. It's a disgrace, so it is.

They exit, leaving the door open behind them. Sarah is left alone. She looks around the room and then at the audience, closes her eyes and breathes deeply in and out.

Sarah Turning and … turning in the … widening … gyre
The … falcon … c-cannot hear the falconer
Things … fall apart; the … centre cannot ...

Thoughtfully, she smiles, deciding not to finish the line. She goes to the hall door, but stops, hesitantly. She turns and goes to the back door; she gives the room a final look and grins. Relieved, she exits.

Blackout.

Resurrecting the Past, to form the Present: Creating an 'Irish' Play

> The special category of the Irish play conditions the context in which [the] plays are staged, however little […] dramatists themselves may like it. They speak to already formed Irelands of the mind.
>
> – Nicholas Grene. [1]

When creating a new 'Irish' play, or indeed in any arbitrary category of play, one must be mindful that an audience may draw upon previous representations when assessing a new depiction, and thus their assessment may be predicated upon pre-existing expectations. As such, this critical essay will attempt to place the new play, *Stammer*, within the recognisable framework of the 'Irish' play, considering aspects of place, in particular previous representations of the West of Ireland, as well as assessing how thematically, the play links with previous Irish works from the early twentieth century to the present day. While it will reference similarities, it will also endeavour to highlight how the play deviates from the canon of modern and contemporary Irish drama, and the means by which it attempts to respond to the current social and political climate in Ireland. This essay will also elaborate on depictions of stammering in film and drama, and how *Stammer* seeks to represent disfluency in a new light. Finally, this essay will document the important moments of progression when writing *Stammer*, and the difficulties that were encountered, from the first draft to the play's final form.

[1] Nicholas Grene (2005) 'Ireland in Two Minds: Martin McDonagh and Conor McPherson' *The Yearbook of English Studies,* 35 (1): Irish Writing Since 1950. pp. 298-311

The new two-act play, *Stammer,* explores financial meltdown, its effects on the family environment and the malleability of language. By virtue of its engagement with the Irish financial crisis, which has been ongoing since 2008 [2]; its setting in the West of Ireland; and my own nationality, we may denote the play as 'Irish'. However, both 'Irish' and 'Irishness' are problematic terms in the context of theatre, as they are entangled with ideas of authenticity and identity. Historically, the genesis of Irish theatre is linked to the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, which later became the Abbey Theatre; in their manifesto, the founders, W.B Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and Edward Martyn, wrote of their intention to draw upon Ireland's cultural history of oratory and storytelling to show that Ireland was 'not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment … but the home of an ancient idealism' (Harrington, 2009, p. 402). The founders' aim of presenting positive depictions of Ireland, was as a means of counteracting the image of the stage-Irishman,[3] which was common on

[2] The Irish Financial Crisis resulted in Ireland's economic decline into recession in 2008, following a period of unprecedented economic prosperity from the early 1990s until then, known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. For further information on the evolution of the Celtic Tiger, and its eventual demise, please see: Michael Böss (2011) 'The Collapse of 'Celtic Tiger' Narrative', *Nordic Irish Studies,* 10 (1), Dalarna University: Dalarna University Centre for Irish Studies. pp. 119-135

[3] The stage-Irishman, aptly defined in the Oxford Companion to Irish Literature, was presented as 'garrulous, boastful, unreliable, hard-drinking, belligerent (though cowardly) and chronically impecunious' (1996, p. 534-4). The most notable example of stage-Irishman is found in Dion Boucicault's *The Shaughraun* (1874) and *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). For further discussion on the stage-Irishman, and its international reception, please see: Nicholas Grene. (1999) *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP. pp. 5-35

English and American stages at the time. Hence, from the outset, Irish theatre practitioners were preoccupied with national identity and character. Later in the twentieth century, however, playwrights such as John B. Keane, Brian Friel and others, used theatre not as a form of national-promotion, but as one of national-critique, and as a means of re-evaluating issues of Church and State. Christopher Murray describes such Irish drama as putting 'a mirror up to the nation'; however he highlights that '[it] does not give back the real; it gives back images of a perceived reality' (1997, p. 9). Likewise, though *Stammer* acknowledges its place in the 'Irish' dramatic tradition, it is not confined to the historic parameters of the 'Irish' play, which called for deliberately positive images of Irish persons. Instead, it offers a dramatic representation of figures that live in Ireland, and are subject to social and financial realities affecting Irish society.

The original concept for the play developed from an image of a girl who stammered and a desire to explore the Irish Financial Crisis. My first encounter with stammering occurred in June 2011, when I heard recovering stammerers, from the McGuire Programme[4], speaking about their disfluency, as a means of combating their fear of public speaking. The idea of a figure struggling to speak, not only in terms of what they said, but also in the physical struggle of sounding the words out, was compelling, and became the inspiration for Sarah. When crafting the play, it was

[4] The McGuire Programme is run by people who have stammered in the past, and have achieved a form of fluency; the programme seeks to re-train stammerers how to speak, beginning with breathing, and then moving onto sounds and words. The holistic programme also treats the psychological effects of stammering, and how to tackle the anxiety associated with it, principally by using non-avoidance techniques and engaging in public speaking exercises.

decided there would be two principal protagonists, Alan and Sarah, with interlinking objectives: Alan strives for financial security, so that he can provide a home for his daughter; Sarah aspires to fluency in the crafting of a speech for school, although she actually yearns for meaningful communication with those around her. Significantly, the stammer provided an interesting, harmonising metaphor for the thematic concerns of the play: although Alan is ostensibly fluent, his language is warped by his deceptive business dealings, and so, like Sarah, by the end of the play, he must learn a new way of communicating with those around him. As such, the two main strains of my research dealt with the financial meltdown and with stammering itself, both of which will now be elaborated upon.

Responding to Recession:

Stammer was envisioned as an attempt to encapsulate the experience of living through the Irish recession. The onset of the financial crisis in 2008 saw the collapse of the Irish financial and property markets, and dramatic increases in both unemployment and emigration. In 2012, Ireland had the highest net emigration levels in Europe (having had the largest net immigration in 2006), with close to 1000 people leaving the country weekly (Kenny, *Irish Times,* 2013; Ó Fátharta, *Irish Examiner,* 2013); simultaneously, its unemployment levels stood at 14%, the fifth highest in the European Union (‘Statistics’, *Central Statistics Office,* 2013). The experiences of Alan, a near bankrupt builder, mirror those of many entrepreneurs who became unemployed after the crash. By consciously addressing an unprecedented economic and social cataclysm, the play aligns itself with an older tradition of so-called Irish ‘political’ theatre. As mentioned, through the twentieth century, theatre served as an important vehicle for social critique.

One of the earliest and most notable examples of this was Sean O'Casey's 'Dublin trilogy', particularly *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) - a vehement attack on the delusion surrounding the then glorified 1916 Rising and its aftermath, which provided an uncompromising view of Dublin tenement life of that time. Writers such as Brian Friel and Tom Murphy likewise address issues of 'national' importance in their work, such as colonisation (e.g. Friel's *Translations* (1980)), and the detrimental aspects of the Church-State relationship (e.g. Murphy's *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975)).

This trend of 'political' theatre became less prevalent, however, during the boom years and generally in recent times. In *Power Plays,* a documentary aired on RTÉ One[5] in June 2011, journalist and theatre critic, Fintan O' Toole, criticised Irish dramatists from the mid-1990s onwards for failing to engage with the major issues of the day, most notably the property bubble and the decadence of the Celtic Tiger years.[6] In a follow-up article in *The Irish Times,* O'Toole wrote that theatre had 'failed in the most basic way' as it didn't provide a 'vaguely accurate narrative or image of who and where they were' (2011). *Stammer* was written, in part, to answer O'Toole's call for socially motivated plays, acknowledging an absence of such work on Irish stages in recent times. However, one explanation for this lack of engagement by playwrights may be the decline in the actual production of new writing during the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger years. Miriam Haughton highlights the shift from playwright-driven plays, to an increase in devised, collaborative work, such as 'site-specific performances or offsite performances, verbatim theatre, and works which request … active participation from their audiences' during this period (2014, p. 375). For Haughton, the

[5] RTÉ – Raidió Teilifís Éireann – is Ireland's national broadcaster.

[6] See Fintan O'Toole (2011) 'Arts Lives: Power Plays' *RTÉ One***.** June 7, 2011. Dublin: RTÉ One. Available from: http://vimeo.com/38892129

themes of ensemble-based companies, such as Anu Productions and Brokentalkers, 'are of modern Ireland, Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger eras,' in that 'they convey the injustices and fallout from these cultural periods' (2014, p. 383).

While Haughton contrasts the practices of devisers and playwright, generally favouring the former, both are capable of 'interrogating the personal and political dimensions of Irish identities' – as proven by the success of work of O'Casey, Friel and others in the past (2013, p.382). Thus, while *Stammer* is a plot-driven work, written by a single playwright, it endeavours, like Anu Productions and others, to engage with contemporary experiences: it deliberately aims to explore the detritus of the boom through the experience of the Tansey family, and by so doing, analyses the effect of financial catastrophe on the ordinary individual. Moreover, although devised work has become more common in Ireland in recent times, a plot-driven, text-based play is an apposite choice for engaging with contemporary events by virtue of its mobility: due to the site-responsive nature of the work, both Anu and Brokentalkers, more often than not, perform their work in site-specific locations in Dublin, which makes touring problematic, if not impossible[7]. In creating a plot-driven play, performable in any theatrical space, works like *Stammer* are amenable to touring, and

[7] Notably, while both companies have devised and presented work internationally, usually in collaboration with international festivals, they largely based their work in Dublin. Anu Productions' 'Monto Cycle', presented at various Dublin Theatre Festivals (2010-14), was inspired by and is set in the Monto District in Dublin; *Down the Valley* (2010), performed in the Boutique Horel, Limerick (at Belltable Unfringed 2010), has been their only work presented outside of Dublin ('Productions', *Anu Productions*, 2014). *The Blue Boy,* in collaboration with Cork Midsummer Festival in 2011, has likewise been Brokentalkers' only (Irish) performance outside Dublin. ('Touring', *Brokentalkers,* 2014)

as such, are capable of reaching more diverse audiences – in both urban and rural environments. As such, in deliberately attempting to analyse the effects of a significant social event, through the form of the 'well-made play', *Stammer* harks back to writers such as O'Casey and Friel, whose work provoked discussion on contemporary social and economic issues.

While the play is placed in the context of the crash, Alan's tactics are decidedly those of Celtic Tiger businessmen; his gratuitous, even duplicitous language echoes the hyperbolic, contrived macho-speak employed by those in the financial sphere, such as the Anglo-Irish Bank executives, recordings of whom were leaked to Irish newspapers in late 2013[8]. These recordings were retrieved from the bank's internal telephone system, and deal with the lead up to the Irish Government's Guarantee of Irish Banks in 2008. The Banks' executives indicated that seven billion euro was required to save the bank; when queried about how this figure was arrived at, a senior executive laughed in response, and answered:

> 'Just as Drummer [Anglo's then CEO David Drumm] would say, 'picked it out of my arse' … If they [the Central Bank] saw the enormity of it up front, they might decide they have a choice. […] They might say the cost to the taxpayer is too high … if it doesn't look too big at the outset … if it looks big, big enough to be important, but not too big that it kind of spoils everything, then, then I think you have a chance'.

[8] See: Paul Williams. (2013) 'Inside Anglo: the secret recordings.' *Irish Independent* [online] June 24 2013. Available from: http://www.independent.ie/business/irish/inside-anglo-the-secret-recordings-29366837.html

(Williams, *Irish Independent* 2013)

These recordings disclosed that senior banking executives deliberately misled the Irish Government so it would provide the Guarantee needed to keep the banks afloat. This was achieved by under-quoting the funding necessary: while those bank executives stated they were in need of seven billion euro, eventually thirty billion euro was required - a sum which led to the collapse of Ireland's credibility in financial markets.

Alan's belief that he can convince others to accept similarly disingenuous deals is intended to parallel the attitude and tactics of these bankers. This is illustrated in Act One, Scene Four, when Alan hosts a party in Martin's home, to bring together former investors and creditors. When speaking with Brian, a carpenter who worked on the shopping centre, Ardcairn (Alan's failed business venture), Alan's language is imbued with flattery and invocations of good times past. He compliments Brian's work - 'the job you did on […] the doors, the fixtures – everyone admires them. People are full time saying it to me' - and then states, that, consequently, as he can start paying people for their work, he 'wanted to talk to [him] first' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p. 42). Alan uses language as a weapon, actively manipulating Brian's trust to achieve his aims. We learn when he speaks with John, an investor for Ardcairn, that he has spoken to numerous people already and so Brian is not the 'first'. He offers Brian not merely less than he is owed, but also less than what he will offer John, believing that he can get away with doing so. The play therefore dramatises the culture of cronyism and dishonesty that flourished during the Celtic Tiger years, in which deals were more often done on an ad hoc basis in private, social environments, than in offices or boardrooms.

In addition to drawing on the language of bankers, the play also considers the trend of artificially inflating costs, which had become a common practice in acquiring loans in Ireland, and was a factor in Anglo-Irish Bank's toxic loan book. John reveals that Alan overestimated his costs when building Ardcairn, in order to drawdown a higher loan from his bank – a widespread, though illegal practice during the boom: 'you and your deceptive, sweet talk, doubling the cost and inflating expenditure to get your loans' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p.55). If these details were revealed, it could result in criminal proceedings and possible imprisonment. Thus, past misdemeanours dictate present circumstances: Alan must pay John's stipulated figure, to ensure his transgressions remain concealed. To do so, Alan reveals he got a loan from the Credit Union, by '[fudging] the numbers' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p.85), that is, once more inflating his costs to get sufficient funds. Although Alan frequently speaks of 'starting again', to do so, he deploys the tactics of the past: accumulating loans to pay debts, duping investors and creditors, as opposed to acknowledging debt and accepting liability for his past wrongdoings. In this way, the play may be read as a commentary on how a society often reacts after a crash – counter-intuitively, impulsively, even recklessly.

Researching and Understanding Stammering:

While the financial crisis served as one point of inspiration, the image of a girl stammering was the second. When researching other instances of stammering in film and drama, it was noted that stammering is often used as a dramatic device to suggest incompetency. Often in film and television, stammering is shown as indicative of ignorance, innocence, even silliness: the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)

and the television comedy *Mr Bean* (1990) are two particular examples. A recent example of staging a stammer is found in Nina Raine's *Tribes* (2010); the play presents a highly literate, litigious family, who spend most of their time arguing and shouting, rather than listening to one another. While Raine presents sign language as a legitimate, expressive form of communication through the character of Billy, who learns sign over the course of the play, she then relies on the more stereotypical dramatic representation of stammering: as Daniel, Billy's older brother's, mental state degenerates, he develops a stammer. So, even in recent work, stammering becomes a metaphorical device to communicate mental distress. In creating Sarah and her stammer, an effort was made to depict a more realistic stammer, which was true to the actual experiences of stammerers and reflected the daily challenges presented by the disfluency; as such, in the play, disfluency is a driving force of the plot, rather than incidental to the drama.

A notable and constructive engagement with stammering is found in *The King's Speech* (2010), directed by Tom Hooper and written by David Seidler, which explores the relationship of King George V (known as 'Bertie' throughout the film) and his voice tutor, Lionel Logue. In this work, Seidler, who had a stammer as a child, depicted the challenges, both psychological and emotional, produced by stammering, aligning the journey of a stammerer with that of a nation striving to find an authentic voice in a time of war. However, Bertie's stammer is linked to a childhood trauma: as well as general bullying and lack of empathy by his family - 'Father encouraged it […] Said it would make me stop' - Bertie suffered neglect by his nanny, which lead to malnutrition: 'when I was presented to my parents for the daily viewing […] she'd pinch me so I'd cry […and] then she wouldn't feed me. […] Took my parents three

years to notice' (Seidler, 2011, p.48-9). While stammering has a psychological element, insofar as it is exacerbated by nerves and anxiety, there is no scientific or biological link to childhood trauma; indeed there is still no known reason or cure for stammering.[9] Therefore, while Sarah's disfluency may be intensified by a dearth of meaningful communication with those around her, the play, unlike the film, does not link ill-treatment, neglect or intellectual capability with disfluency.

In reviewing the Irish dramatic tradition, no notable example of stammering, outside of instances of incompetency or confusion, was unearthed. Interestingly, however, *Stammer* found a counterpart and unintentional namesake, in Brian Friel's *Translations.* Friel's Sarah is mute, who, over the course of the play, endeavours to say her name, but in the end is silenced completely. Often read as a symbol of the Irish nation[10], her silence has been interpreted as metaphorical, caused by the imposition of the English Ordnance Survey Maps and the English language both of which portend Ireland's colonisation by England. However, the choice of name for Sarah Tansey in *Stammer* was accidental; on the first day of writing, her name was chosen arbitrarily (and indeed, it was thought it would be changed at a later stage, but this was decided

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[9] See: www.stammeringireland.ie/faq.php

[10] The first, and frequently quoted, example of this interpretation was made by Seamus Heaney in an influential review of the play. He writes:

> 'It is as if some symbolic figure of Ireland from an eighteenth-century vision poem, the one who confidently called herself Cathleen Ni Houlihan, has been struck dumb by the shock of modernity'.

For the full review, please see: Seamus Heaney, 'Review of *Translations*,' *Time Literary Supplement.* 24 Oct. 1980. p. 1199.

against), a coincidence reflecting the instinctive process of writing the first draft. Yet, that said, it is undeniable that Sarah Tansey was crafted as a representative of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, and is therefore, linked to Friel's incarnation – both signify experiences of Irish figures at critical moments in Irish history. Notably, Sarah Tansey, unlike her historical predecessor, is afforded an opportunity to speak and gains her own form of fluency, a differentiation that offers a possibility of progression and change.

Situating the play in the 'West':

The setting of the 'West' was chosen initially for its familiarity, as it is where I grew up, but the setting is pertinent when considering the economic crash. The West is the most rural region in Ireland, and at the peak of the building boom in 2007, one in four men in the Western region worked in construction, a higher proportion than in the rest of the State. Therefore, the rapid decline in construction had an immediate effect with unemployment in the West rising from 4.4% in 2007 to a startling 14.4% in 2012 (*Western Development Commission,* 2010). The 'West' figures large in the Irish dramatic canon, and numerous playwrights have set their work in the region. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, writers and artists, such as W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory fostered the view of an idyllic West of Ireland as a spring of creativity and of Ireland itself as a repository rich in myth and legend; however, throughout the twentieth century, playwrights would subvert and deconstruct these pastoral associations. J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) is set in a shebeen (rural pub) in Co. Mayo, and is populated by poverty-stricken, socially deprived figures that thrive on stories of physical violence. Synge's imagined 'West', in which Christy Mahon's story of patricide elevates him to heroic status, famously

caused riots when it premiered at the Abbey Theatre due to its portrayal of seemingly primitive and profane 'Western' characters. Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (1984), set in the playwright's native Tuam, Co. Galway, examines the process of mythmaking and storytelling itself, juxtaposing the modernity of a 1984 cottage with the story of the infamous laughing contest – which Mommo, a senile seanchaí (storyteller), endlessly recites, but is unable to finish. Murphy elucidates that while stories may be enabling and illuminating, a retreat into a world of lore is damaging, as its strips the individual of the potential of progression, both emotionally and intellectually.

Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (1997) set in Co. Leitrim, offers a somewhat romanticised image of a rural pub, through the revival of oral storytelling, yet the men's stories paint a lonesome, disadvantaged landscape. That said, the play also correlates the archaic pub with the modern city of Dublin through the telling of Valerie's traumatic story; as Grene rightly highlights, 'loneliness, desolation, sexual perversion, mortality are human experiences common to rural and urban life, the past and the present' (2005, p.308). Martin McDonagh set his *Leenane* Trilogy in Connemara, Co. Galway, and his *Aran Island* Trilogy on the Aran Islands, yet he offers a wholly different version of the 'West' to his contemporary: while McDonagh's plays are notionally set in 'Western' locations, the settings are, as José Lanters writes, are 'a stereotype built around traditional clichés, a throwback untouched even by the feeblest of Celtic Tigers' (2002, p. 215). His ostensible geographic specificity in plays such as *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001) is less about a portrayal of a topographical location and more about, as Shaun Richards deduces, facilitating 'intertextual referencing,' where 'characters and incidents in one

play to become the topic of conversation in another' (2003, p.204).[11] McDonagh's 'West' is a kitsch, tourist-pamphlet inspired one, onto which he maps stories of violence and black comedy. Thus, the 'West' is a consciously imagined location; significantly, it is not figured as arcadia, but as a marginalised, isolated space, populated by lonely and repressed figures, who struggle to find fulfilment.

While *Stammer's* setting of a kitchen / sitting room and its use of the Hiberno-English dialect may, at first, seem redolent of previous works, particularly the domesticity of *Beauty Queen of Leenane*, which deliberately references an older Ireland, the naturalistic action of *Stammer* is far removed from the black-comic world of McDonagh. The play does not attempt to de-mythologise images of the 'West', but rather endeavours to capture and engage with a present, contemporary moment, and a country transformed by modernity, globalization and recession. As such, while works like *Playboy of the Western World* and *The Weir* are peopled by verbose, mellifluous speakers, the characters of this play have a problematic relationship with language (as

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[11] Patrick Lonergan elaborates on the international influences of Australian soap and 1990s American cinema, particularly the work of Quentin Tarantino, on McDonagh's so-called 'Irish' plays. Lonergan aptly aligns McDonagh's setting in the West with that of soap operas, arguing that,

> 'the function of these setting [e.g. *Eastenders* in London and *Neighbours* in Melbourne] is not to represent a place that its inhabitants will recognize as their own … [but] to give a sense that the stories being presented are credible, because the action is situation in an ostensibly authentic setting' (2010, p. 113).

For more, see Patrick Lonergan (2009) *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 101-127

a consequence of the tumultuous time of setting) – as well as struggling to converse meaningfully with those around them. Alan's speech is duplicitous, and, thus, figuratively deformed, while Sarah is constrained by an inhibiting disfluency. That said, the play is linked to the mentioned works by its use of the motif of storytelling. In those plays, we find characters using language in heightened, poetic, yet manipulative ways; figures regularly narrate and re-create stories from their pasts, yet this narration is not the dramatic action - dramatic conflict arises from the tension between the past story and the present reality and the relationship between the story, the storyteller and the other characters. Similarly, in *Stammer,* the figure of the seanchaí is embodied by Martin, who mythologises the land Alan sold prior to the beginning in the play, and, in turn, actively encourages Sarah to see it in terms of family legacy: 'The place gave him status, made him someone worth listening to. Showed he was made of something' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p.33). The predominant 'myth' of this work, therefore, connects the pre-Celtic Tiger and Celtic Tiger eras: historically, status and economic success in rural Ireland was measured by how much land one owned (as dramatized in John B. Keane's *The Field* (1965)), but in the Celtic Tiger, this was redefined and recalibrated into how many houses or properties one accumulated and the market value of those properties. Thus, the historic Irish struggle for land, commoditised and modernised into house hunting, is dramatized by the characters themselves, two of whom represent distinct different generational attitudes: Martin's pre-modern sensibilities are deeply connected with a glorification of land and tradition - 'there was history in that place' - while Alan sees both as worthless and insignificant: 'It was a pile of rock and muck that could produce nothing, give nothing. In the piss ass back of beyond' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p.83). By presenting an older character that is perhaps reminiscent

of characters such as Mag, Mommo, and Old Mahon in earlier 'Western' plays[12], alongside the contemporary Celtic Tiger businessman, the play positions the past and present in direct conflict with one another. In this way, the play offers a contemporary vision of the region, one that certainly acknowledges older roots and depictions, but is populated by contemporary products of the boom.

Crafting the Play:

After the initial idea for the play was discussed at the first supervision, a pitch document was drawn up. However this served as a vague blueprint, rather than a guiding principle in writing the first draft. For example, in the original pitching document, Alan's wife Emily was present as an invalid in the first act of the play, but passed away before the play's conclusion; this character did not have any defining features and did not move the drama further along and so was rewritten in the first draft, instead becoming Alan's ex-wife, who does not feature in person, but is mentioned in passing – indeed, Martin often uses Alan's divorce from his wife as a taunt against him: How's your wife, son? [...] Is she with the same man, or has she a new one?' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p. 22). Likewise, characters such as Brian and John did not feature in the pitch, but were added in the first draft to drive the plot forward and raise the stakes; interactions with these characters provided an opportunity to learn about Alan's enterprise and expose his duplicitous motives, as well as juxtaposing the domestic alongside the larger financial crisis.

[12] These characters appear in *Beauty Queen of Leenane, Bailegangaire,* and *Playboy of the Western World* respectively.

Writing the first draft was an organic process, without a great deal of planning and driven by intuition and curiosity, rather than by an intention to create a watertight drama. Dialogue was written quickly and in spurts. Steve Waters aptly writes that 'we infer a character's inner life from the sum of their external actions' (2010, p. 96), and so the characters' actions, and indeed reactions, helped construct the arc and shape of the play. As the dramatic action takes place in a fixed setting, dynamic exchanges, which illustrated change, were essential; thus, it was decided that scenes would leap forward in time, as a means of propelling the action forward. The greatest leap is found in the break-in time after the interval: we move from the party scene of Act One, Scene Four, where Alan is on the brink of ruin, to Sarah and Louise practicing breathing exercises in Act Two, Scene One. This shift allowed for a greater variety in tone and pace, with the intention of leaving the audience wondering what has happened to Alan's plans.

While the story was developed in the first draft, the challenge of the second draft was to refine the plot, and arrange characters' interactions into coherent and compelling scenes and acts. From the reading of the first draft with fellow students in January, it was evident that there was too much 'chatter' in the play, that it was cluttered with unnecessary exchanges and what Edgar calls 'phatic speech': dialogue that doesn't communicate meaning but rather 'keep[s] the conversation going' (2009, p. 50). These redundant words and interactions were numerous in the first draft, and though they helped establish character, they did not effectively contribute to the dramatic action. Thus, extraneous and unnecessary sections were cut, and each interaction and exchange was assessed as to whether it served the larger purpose of the play. Structurally, scenes were constructed and arranged in a formation of cause and

effect, with each scene and beat reacting to the last, and patterning the next. For example, in the first draft, the main thrust for Alan was simply verbally jousting with his father and preparing for the party (with little reference to moving out), however, analysis of scenes helped accelerate Alan's progression within the drama. In the final version, Alan begins in a state of powerlessness with Martin in Scene One, but when he secures money from Louise, he guarantees he will move out in Scene Two; in Scene Three, he appears to be triumphant, having viewed a new house, but in Scene Four, when the stakes have been raised, he reaches an impasse when John rejects his offer. This process was assisted by reading Edgar's commentary on scene connections: 'scenes exist in relation to one another; they begin by answering questions posed in the last scene and often end by propelling the audience into the next one' (2009, p.123). Additionally, Duncan Macmillan's scenic checklist, proved very beneficial when examining scenes' merits and deciding what encounters were essential, and which extraneous. This checklist was published by the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting on their website in 2013, and consists of twenty-five points with which to test your scene: points included questions on objective, character's tactics to attain objectives, stakes, subtexts and reversals. The checklist served as an accessible reference point, which improved the focus of scenes and is reminiscent of Edgar's recommendation of a scene's programme: a shopping list of important elements to include in a scene (2009, p.9).

Sam Smiley reminds us that, 'a person's life consists of continual action and reaction, response and change. Simply defined, *action is human change*' (2005, p.73). Thus, the play dramatises a particular moment of change – Alan's attempt to gain financial security which leads to the breakup of the family. Creating actions helped

clarify the story of the play, as well as elucidating character's objectives. Edgar defines an action as: 'a brief encapsulation of the narrative progression of a play, structured to convey its meaning' (2009, p.17), i.e., the summation of the plot as a project / reversal. The following is example of Alan and Sarah's actions:

Alan: A man attempts to regain financial security and find a home for his daughter, but in the process, accumulates more debt and alienates himself from her.

Sarah: A girl strives to overcome her stammer and attain fluency, but ends up finding her own, distinctive voice.

This template also ensured characters' evolution – both Alan and Sarah, and their relationship with one another, are transformed by the play's end. Indeed, this project / reversal template proved helpful when fleshing out the characters of Martin and Louise, providing both with a greater raison d'être. For example, though Martin possessed a strong voice early on as Alan's father and combatant, he remained statically hostile and cantankerous in the first draft. By creating an action, and the backstory of his relationship with his wife, his characterisation became more nuanced: his hostility is rooted in the fact that Alan sold the land he gifted to him, and in Alan's treatment of his mother when she was ill: 'you couldn't bother your hole to […] come see her […] and now, here you are, lookin' for more off me, after abandonin' your own family' (O'Callaghan, 2014, p.81). Likewise, Louise, who is unmarried, was motivated to reunite her father and brother, as they are her only family members. Furthermore, she owns a furniture shop, and has also been affected by the collapse of

the property market, but nevertheless agrees to loan Alan money – which embroiled her in both the domestic and financial aspects of the play. Thus, although characters' voices became clear in the first draft, subsequent drafts required a refinement of their objectives, as a means of focusing the play's plot.

The Impact of the Playwrights' Workshop:

Narrative and characters were undoubtedly more polished by the time of the Playwrights' Workshop; however, feedback from working with actors, director Gwenda Hughes, and from the Workshop panel necessitated a reassessment of the role of the stammer. Feedback from the panel generally centred on the opening of the play: originally, Sarah listened to a recording of Winston Churchill, which she was unable to repeat. Panellists questioned the choice of the recording (Churchill's 'finest hour' speech, which he delivered in June 1940) and why a teenager from the West of Ireland would listen to such a recording. Thus, after the workshop, further research around stammering was undertaken: as well as independent research, I attended a speech therapy course in Galway run by the McGuire Programme. This course provided me with a greater insight into the psychological realities of stammering and contributed to the re-examination of Sarah's stammer. Initially, her stammer was triggered by plosive sounds (b, c, g, d) and particular non-plosive sounds (w, s etc.), which were identified as common blocks for stammerers (McGuire, 2013, Chapter 3). However, a number of people interviewed commented that when they were in comfortable situations, with friends or at home, they would not stammer; it was only when a new person entered the room that they would struggle to speak. In light of such commentary, it was decided that the stammer would be present when she spoke, but that it would worsen

when in conversation with new people, such as when she speaks with John at the party. This change of focus meant she could converse with her family relatively fluently, while still allowing the audience to witness her disfluency. Moreover, a new opening was written in the form of the prologue. This experience of Sarah's failing to recite a speech, was spoken of indirectly in the original first scene, performed at the Playwrights' Workshop, but is reworked in the final draft, so we witness the failed recital itself. The prologue immediately establishes Sarah's disfluency, and illustrates both the physical struggle of stammering, and as is explored through the play, the feelings of anxiety and humiliation that the disfluency engenders. 'The Second Coming' by W.B. Yeats[13] was chosen as Sarah's piece, as thematically, the notion of 'things fall apart, the centre cannot hold' resonated with a major concern of the play – the breakup of the family.

An Elusive Ending:

Deciding on the ending of the play was particularly challenging, and indeed neither the pitching document, nor the first draft delivered a satisfactory version: the first draft ended bluntly after Martin rejects Alan's plea for money – not because he lost his money, but out of a sense of utter callousness, which felt unwarranted. The current conclusion was developed in the second draft and polished after the Playwrights' Workshop. In the penultimate scene, Alan assaults Martin, which leads to the revelation that Martin has lost his own savings in the financial crash.[14] Subsequently,

[13]Memorising poetry by W.B. Yeats is common practice for schoolchildren in Ireland, so it was plausible that Sarah would be called to recite such a poem in school.

[14] In 2008, the shares of Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank (AIB), Ireland's two largest financial institutions, depreciated by more than 75% (Böss, 2011, p. 127).

in the final scene, Alan move outs and the two men seem to reconcile, but such a resolution does not take place between Sarah and Alan. Before the Playwrights' Workshop, Sarah repeated the speech by Churchill and went to call her father, suggesting they too might reconcile. After further development of Sarah's character, it felt unnatural that she should forgive her father so quickly. As such, the highpoint for Sarah became her confrontation with her father and her new place of power in the relationship:

> Sarah [...] You shouldn't just talk to g-get a reaction, or to g-get something out of p-people. It's supposed to mmean something.
>
> Alan Of course it should.
>
> Sarah But you don't do that. You didn't do that. You ... lied to all those people ... just to get something out of them.
>
> (O'Callaghan, 2014, p. 110)

Notably, Sarah still possesses her stammer; her triumph is not in achieving fluency, but in her ability to finally converse with her father: it is the usually garrulous Alan that must now listen. Unlike her counterpart in Friel, therefore, Sarah is not rendered mute, but actively speaks out. When Alan and Martin exit, she repeats the earlier poem, but more confidently than before, and then exits in the opposite direction to where the men have exited. This ending does not neatly tie up relationships, but acknowledges some damaged relationships cannot be so easily rectified, and indeed if a new generation

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Martin's loss of fortune, as a result of devalued shares, was a consequence of the crash that impacted many Irish people.

(Sarah) is to move forward, it must do so without the baggage and practices that created the recession. That said, the ending seeks to illustrate a prospect of redemption and promise – whatever the future will bring, it seems likely that Sarah will face it, uninhibited by her stammer and confident in her ability to express herself.

Conclusion:

Stammer may be read in numerous ways: as a treatment on the consequences of living in a recession, as a sensitive exploration of stammering and as a modern engagement with the West of Ireland as a dramatic space. Indeed, though this essay classifies the play as 'Irish', it does so, for the most part, in light of its setting and the nationality of its characters. That said, it is undeniable that the play was inspired by the experience of growing up in Ireland. This play was driven by a desire to capture a moment of experience, to portray the ordinary person grappling with adversity and explore a significant event in Irish social life through the prism of the domestic, private space; furthermore, the play sought to more fully explore language as a form of communication, and how it operates in a domestic setting, as well as how a misuse of language was instrumental in the creation of Celtic Tiger Ireland.

As well as researching the recession, and assessing previous 'Irish' plays, the play sought to explore how best to depict a stammer. British and American film and television were the main source when researching previous interpretations of stammering – thus, the play cannot solely be defined as 'Irish', as my own reading, research and experience extends beyond such a classification. Moreover, this play is a product of the wealth of knowledge accumulated during the MRes programme and from various theoretical texts on the craft of playwriting. Both for myself as a

playwright, and for the characters within the play, who are haunted by residues of the Celtic Tiger, action and knowledge from the past (and from previous works), condition and inform the present moment.

This essay has attempted to document the motivations, and processes behind writing *Stammer*. However, by virtue of its length and scope, it may be beneficial to view this essay as a companion to the play, rather than a comprehensive critical analysis, which in itself would necessitate a more thorough evaluation of the referenced texts, the canon of Irish drama and the script of *Stammer* itself. On a final note, although this play was driven by the personal experience of growing up during the Celtic Tiger years and subsequently, living through the recession, it is hoped that its themes of family history, financial strain, language and community, extend beyond a specifically 'Irish' dimension, and are attractive and plausible for the international reader. More importantly, should the play find its way to a welcoming stage, it is also hoped that it will be an enjoyable and memorable piece of drama for all audience members, be they familiar with the category of the 'Irish' play or not.

Word Count: 5993

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