

COMING FOR A VISIT: A Short One-Act Play

By

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Cast of Characters

MRS. McNULTY: Female, 50-60
TIMOTHY WAGNER: Male, 19

Scene

Mrs. McNulty's house in Galway City, Ireland. Left, the kitchen: a table, two chairs, kettle on the stove. A picture of the three Kennedy boys, and another of Pope John XXIII. Right, a sitting room: overstuffed chair, electric fire, chest.

Time

An afternoon in late summer, 1965.

Mrs. McNulty, alone, opens the oven, looks in, then shuts it. She checks her watch, puts on a raincoat, and exits by way of the sitting room.

MRS. MCNULTY

(Pause. Off stage.)

Go on inside, I'm tellin' ya!

TIMOTHY

(Off stage)

Thank you, but---

MRS. MCNULTY

(Off stage.)

I'll be back in a flash.

TIMOTHY

(Off stage.)

But lady, I---

MRS. MCNULTY

(Off stage.)

Into the house! I will not have ya stayin' outside in the pourin' rain!

Sound of the door slamming. Timothy enters the sitting room. He wears a pack on his back, under a poncho, and his jeans are soaked from the knees down. He looks about suspiciously, then takes off his poncho and pack; and then, after a moment's reflection, puts them back on and makes for the door.

MRS. MCNULTY (cont'd)

(Off stage.)

You might drown on the way to the corner and back!

Door slam. She enters, wet.

TIMOTHY

Look, lady, I---

MRS. MCNULTY

(Extracting a newspaper from under her raincoat, brandishing it as a trophy.)

But I did bring home my paper, and kept it from gettin' the least bit wet!

(CONTINUED)

TIMOTHY

I really appreciate this, but---

MRS. MCNULTY

(Turning the fire on.)

Is it waitin' for me to undress you, you are?

TIMOTHY

Uh...I, uh...

MRS. MCNULTY

Will you have some tea now, or---

TIMOTHY

Tea? No, I---

MRS. MCNULTY

Or will you be puttin' it off till after you've had your bath?

TIMOTHY

I have to go.

MRS. MCNULTY

(Stopping him, pulling off his poncho.)

Don't you be drippin' on my floor. Now, set your boots by the fire and come into the kitchen.

She exits to the kitchen, hangs up the poncho and her raincoat, and makes tea. Tim takes off his pack, his boots, and his socks.

MRS. MCNULTY (cont'd)

There's a loaf in the oven and two kippers in the fridge. Where in the blessed world were you goin' on a day like this?!

TIMOTHY

South.

MRS. MCNULTY

Then you would be comin' from the north, I expect.

TIMOTHY

From Donegal.

MRS. MCNULTY

Well, that's a good thing! At least Donegal is a place. Empty it may be, and lonely, but it's right there where it belongs. If it's only "south" you're headin', how will you know when it's time to stop?

(CONTINUED)

TIMOTHY

I stopped.

MRS. MCNULTY

You surely did. You're lucky it was Mrs. McNulty came upon ya, and you sloggin' southward through a Galway flood. I've four rooms you can choose from, but only one catches the mornin' sun. Are you a late sleeper, or do ya like to wake up with the dawn's first gleam?

(Pause.)

Do ya sleep late, I said?

(Pause.)

For it's a bright mornin' often follows a rainy day.

TIMOTHY

I'll be leaving when the storm lets up.

MRS. MCNULTY

You'll find Brian Doyle's bathrobe in the lower dresser drawer. And they'll none of 'em be back for three weeks, if you're worryin' you'll be driven out in the night. What's your name?

TIMOTHY

(Appearing barefoot at the kitchen door.)

Tim.

MRS. MCNULTY

Then have ya no dry socks?!

(Sitting him down, and wrapping dish towels around his feet.)

Tell me your full name.

TIMOTHY

Timothy Wagner.

MRS. MCNULTY

But ya can't sit around in these soggy trousers!

TIMOTHY

Is the tea ready yet?

MRS. MCNULTY

And your mother's side: would that be Irish?

TIMOTHY

Some of it, I guess.

MRS. MCNULTY

You guess?!

(CONTINUED)

TIMOTHY

She's got some Polish, some Greek, some Cherokee---.

MRS. MCNULTY

Are you from Oklahoma, then?

TIMOTHY

Huh?

MRS. MCNULTY

Indian territory!

TIMOTHY

What do you know about---?

MRS. MCNULTY

I spent last August on a Greyhound bus! From sea ta shinin' sea, and back again. It makes no sense you wanderin' about the bleakest part of Ireland.

TIMOTHY

I'm from New Jersey.

MRS. MCNULTY

Then have ya never heard of Brian Doyle?! He lives in Hackensack.

(Pause.)

Ah, 'tis a big place. Brian was the first of my boys to leave.

TIMOTHY

What "boys?"

MRS. MCNULTY

Why, for twenty years I've been lettin' rooms to the University lads. In the summers I have an empty house.

The energy which has been driving her drains. She gets the tea and some biscuits, and sits down with Tim at the table.

MRS. MCNULTY

Read the paper. I'll not blather any more.

TIMOTHY

I don't read newspapers.

MRS. MCNULTY

Is that how you drink your tea?!

(CONTINUED)

TIMOTHY

What---?

MRS. MCNULTY

Not a drop of milk?! Nor any sugar at all?! Well, have a biscuit, at least.

TIMOTHY

Thank you.

MRS. MCNULTY

Will ya be votin' for Bobby Kennedy for President? He's going to run some day. I'm sure he will.

(Pause.)

And why didn't ya stay in Donegal, if you're so determined to be hidin' your head in the sand?

TIMOTHY

May I have another?

MRS. MCNULTY

(Pushing the biscuit plate over to him.)

Must ya even ask?!

TIMOTHY

I was well brought up.

(Pause.)

Get away every summer, do you?

MRS. MCNULTY

I had never left the twenty-six counties before last year. Will ya be wantin' one egg or two with your kippers?

TIMOTHY

Two. And a glass of Guinness.

MRS. MCNULTY

Aha! He's got a taste for it!

TIMOTHY

Been living on the stuff.

MRS. MCNULTY

And you so well brought up?

TIMOTHY

You thumb a ride, you get three or four miles down the road, and then part company.

MRS. MCNULTY

In a pub.

(CONTINUED)

TIMOTHY

And I can't resist your Irish hospitality.

MRS. MCNULTY

Then you will be stoppin', after all!

TIMOTHY

I want to...I have to---

MRS. MCNULTY

To what?!

TIMOTHY

It's time I started---

MRS. MCNULTY

---time you started south again, is it?! It's time you---

TIMOTHY

I'm going east from here.

MRS. MCNULTY

---time you went runnin' again, spinnin' with the dial of a crazy compass, reelin' through the storm! My boys go off---oh, yes they do---but it's a better life, at least, that **they** go lookin' for!

TIMOTHY

I'd trade places with them if I could.

MRS. MCNULTY

Then you **do** know what you want!?

TIMOTHY

I want to be a Donegal Irishman! To be a potato-eating, sheep-shearing simpleton who lilt away his life in Gaelic! To free myself forever from that...that world out there you find so glorious!

MRS. MCNULTY

And when I've saved enough, I'll be off again. Donegal, indeed!

TIMOTHY

Yeah, well, it ain't exactly Hackensack.

MRS. MCNULTY

My next trip is to the Holy Land.

TIMOTHY

You'll like it there.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MCNULTY

Have you been to Jerusalem, then?

TIMOTHY

I've been doing the Grand Tour. Ireland was supposed to be the last stop. I was heading for Shannon when...

MRS. MCNULTY

Oh, if it's a plane you have to catch, then---!

TIMOTHY

No. No hurry.

MRS. MCNULTY

Have you been away long?

TIMOTHY

Over a year.

MRS. MCNULTY

Ah, Brian is so happy now.

(Pause.)

You've changed your plans, have you?

TIMOTHY

You're proud of Brian.

MRS. MCNULTY

He's a fine man! And what a house! With a swimmin' pool, and divin' boards, and---!

TIMOTHY

From here, I will be going to Sweden.

MRS. MCNULTY

But not until tomorrow, surely?

TIMOTHY

Is he ever coming home?

MRS. MCNULTY

For a visit. "One day," he promised me last summer, "I'll be comin' for a visit."

TIMOTHY

I was just at the post office.

He pulls out a letter, and lays it on the table.

MRS. MCNULTY

From Sweden, is it?

(CONTINUED)

TIMOTHY

From my mother.

MRS. MCNULTY

But she must want you home. Surely she does.

TIMOTHY

Surely.

MRS. MCNULTY

Yet you turn...you turn and run off and you leave her?! You're selfish, Timothy! You're an unfeelin' boy...unfeelin', and selfish, and cruel!

Tim gets up, goes into the sitting room, and starts putting on his socks. Mrs. McNulty follows.

MRS. MCNULTY (cont'd)

You close off your heart, and you run off to the ends of the Earth without a thought for---. Oh, dear lord, the bread is burnin'!

She rushes back into the kitchen, and takes the bread out of the oven.

MRS. MCNULTY

Have you ever tasted home-baked soda bread?

Tim stops putting on his soggy socks. He contemplates them for a moment, then takes them off. While Mrs. McNulty, assuming he's dressing to leave, talks in the kitchen, Tim takes off his pants, gets Brian's robe from the chest, and puts it on.

MRS. MCNULTY

Let's see...let's see. A little dark, maybe. No...no, it isn't charred a bit! You are not to leave till it's cool enough to---! Ha! But I have no right to keep ya. 'Tis a fine loaf, though, a perfect loaf. You'll never taste a better. You dressin' to go and...oh, wasn't it myself that drove you out? Mmmm...with some butter melted in---! Surely it was...it was myself. The butter's fresh, and I have apricot preserves.

(Picking up the letter.)

A grand place, America, grand and prosperous. With back yard pools and---. But you'll not find soda bread the likes of this in any of your fifty states! Your mother has a graceful hand. And there's feelin' in it. You can see there's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MCNULTY (cont'd)

feelin'. Brian told me when he left he would be comin' home again, he would be comin' home to stay. "When I've made my fortune," he said. His "fortune," is it! Ah, those years away...all those years have changed him.

(Reading the letter idly.)

"...an order to report..." A graceful hand, she has. "...to report for induction into..."

(Realizing.)

A graceful and a feelin' hand. No, Brian isn't---! But can it really be he isn't Irish any more? One day...maybe one day he'll be comin' for a visit.

Tim, in Brian's robe, enters the kitchen and slices himself a piece of bread; Mrs. McNulty smiles.

###THE END###