

Banshee

by Brian C. Petti

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BANSHEE

ACT I Scene 1

A bed is illuminated in low light. A man is in it, clutching his pillow to the side of his head, eyes open. He is terrified into motionlessness by a female VOICE, which sounds as if it is coming from a dropped phone receiver.

VOICE. Hello...

Hello...?

Hello...Mr. Sullivan?

Is anyone there?

Are you there, Mr. Sullivan?

Mr. Sullivan if you are there, please pick up the phone.

Hello...? (I think I can hear somebody breathing...)

Sir!? Can you hear me?

I have your case in front of me. I wish you would pick up the phone.

Mr. Sullivan?

Hello?

Sir, I know how to help you if you will let me.

Please pick up the phone if you are there.

Sir? (*Lights fade.*)

Scene 2

The kitchen of a railroad apartment in Chelsea, New York, 1981. There is a table center with a burning cigarette in an ashtray. Stage left of the table is a small gas range. Upstage of the range is the front door of the apartment, adorned with an aging bumper sticker that reads "Kennedy For President". The stage right wall has an ancient Frigidaire with an equally ancient clock radio on top of it. Downstage right of the Frigidaire is the suggested doorway to the unseen rest of the apartment. Upstage right of it is an open

door to the bathroom, where JUNIOR is in the process of shaving in an unseen mirror. He is forty, with sad blue eyes and high Irish cheekbones on an otherwise weathered face. He is dressed in blue uniform pants and a tee shirt. KIT, his mother, cooks at the range, humming a barely audible Irish tune. She is fifty-seven but appears older in a housecoat and kerchief. She speaks in an Irish brogue.

JUNIOR. Ma! Ma, did you iron my shirt.

KIT. Of course I ironed your shirt.

JUNIOR. Where is it?

KIT. Can't you see it in there?

JUNIOR. No. I looked.

KIT. Sure, isn't it hanging up on the curtain rod right next to you? (*JUNIOR searches behind him and pulls out a hanger with a blue dress shirt with an insignia on the pocket.*)

JUNIOR. Sorry, Ma.

KIT. Ah the creature, you're just nervous is all. Finish your shaving and have some eggs and tea.

JUNIOR. Nah, just the tea today.

KIT. Sure, you'll be needing something on your stomach for your first day, and for the medicine and all.

JUNIOR. I can't eat Ma.

KIT. I'll just make the eggs.

JUNIOR. I'll eat lunch later.

KIT. Well, the eggs will be here if you want them.

JUNIOR. Don't waste them, Ma.

KIT. You'll be the one wasting them.

JUNIOR. Ma, just the tea. Okay?

KIT. Is that the way you want to start a new job, then? Sure, you'll be starving all morning. After everything you put me through the past two months, would you have me worrying all day about you?

JUNIOR. I'm all right, Ma. There's nothing to worry about.

KIT. "Nothing to worry about" says he! Spoken by someone who's never had a child. (*Beat*) At least you'll be better off working down the docks. Won't be

out God-knows-where until all hours of the night. Would you be wanting toast as well?

JUNIOR. No, Ma. No toast. *(Beat)* I liked reporting. It suited me.

KIT. Chasing the police all over the city, seeing all manner of debauchery...it's not a wonder you ended up where you did.

JUNIOR. If they'd kept my job for me I'd be doing it still. And isn't Neilie a cop himself?

KIT. He's different.

JUNIOR. Why? He sees all sorts of awful stuff.

KIT. Ah, but he don't let it wear on him the way you do. He's got his family and such to keep him straight.

JUNIOR. Who needs psychiatrists when you've got everything figured out.

KIT. A mother knows her own sons, for-the-love-of-God. *(NEIL enters through the front door. He is dressed in an NYPD uniform. He resembles his brother JUNIOR, but is two years younger and has a smiling, optimistic bearing.)* Ah, there's the boy!

NEIL. Hiya Ma. How you doing, Junior?

KIT. He's still talking about that horrible reporting. After you go through all you went through to get him this job.

NEIL. It was nothing Ma. Jun?

JUNIOR. Fine. I'm fine.

KIT. Sure he couldn't find his shirt two inches from his nose not a minute ago.

NEIL. You cooked, huh? I haven't eaten...

KIT. This is for Junior.

JUNIOR. I told ya I just wanted tea Ma.

KIT. Ah, come off it!

NEIL. You sure Jun?

JUNIOR. Go ahead. I told her I can't eat.

KIT. Ah, he does it just for spite. Whatever I tell him to do he does the opposite. God forbid the man should listen to his mother and get a decent meal in his stomach.

NEIL. Maybe he's just not hungry Ma.

KIT. Who's not hungry after sleeping all night? Going off to face the world

with nought but a cuppa tea...

NEIL. Ma. Lay off.

KIT. What am I doing but speaking the truth in me own kitchen? Sure, doesn't he know how I worry about him after what he put me through? What have I ever done but try to help...

JUNIOR. (*Sharper*) I can't eat, Ma. My stomach's a mess. Alright?

KIT. Have you your gloves? You'll be sure to freeze yourself solid out there in that wind.

JUNIOR. They're in my room. I'll go get them. (*JUNIOR exits stage right.*)

KIT. (*Quickly to NEIL*) You have to look after him.

NEIL. I am. I got him the job, didn't I?

KIT. All the way out there on 11th Avenue with the mutant fish in the Hudson?

NEIL. It's steady work.

KIT. He was a writer! What is he going to do with himself out there with nothing to do but think and eat himself up.

NEIL. I'm sure they'll keep him busy doing what they're paying him to do, Ma. Why don't you try to relax.

KIT. Relax? What if he's not ready?

NEIL. They wouldn't have let him out if he wasn't ready. (*JUNIOR reenters, in his full uniform (blue pea coat with the same insignia on the pocket and a hat with a badge on the front of it.)*)

JUNIOR. I'm ready. Gloves, hat and long johns.

KIT. Don't forget your lunch.

JUNIOR. Thanks Ma. (*To NEIL*) You finished eating my breakfast?

NEIL. I'm done. Good eggs Ma.

KIT. You keep your jacket up around your neck, do you hear me? You'll catch your death.

JUNIOR. I will.

NEIL. He'll be fine. C'mon Jun, we don't want to be late.

KIT. But what about the...

NEIL. I got this, Ma. He'll have a police escort.

KIT. You eat your lunch.

NEIL. He'll eat his lunch. Say goodbye Junior.

JUNIOR. Goodbye Junior.

KIT. Not goodbye. Goodbye's forever...say "so long".

JUNIOR. So long Ma. I'll see you later. (*JUNIOR kisses KIT'S cheek.*)

NEIL. OK Ma, take care.

KIT. (*To NEIL.*) You...you remember what I said.

NEIL. No problem. (*They exit as lights fade.*)

Scene 3

NEIL drives JUNIOR in his squad car.

NEIL. Did Ma wash behind your ears this morning?

JUNIOR. Would ya please?

NEIL. You know she's just doing it because she cares about you.

JUNIOR. Yeah, I know.

NEIL. You, ah...gave us all a scare there.

JUNIOR. Yeah. (*Beat*) Listen, I never got a chance to thank you for the job...

NEIL. Ah, stop...

JUNIOR. No, really. I appreciate it.

NEIL. Do it for a week before you thank me. Some of those truck drivers are real pieces of work.

JUNIOR. Yeah, well...I'll have to get used to it I guess. You didn't have to drive me, you know, I coulda taken a bus.

NEIL. What the hell, it's on my way. As long as you don't play with the siren or shoot someone we're all good.

JUNIOR. I'll try to control myself. (*Beat*) How's Maria and the kids doing?

NEIL. They're good, real good. You know, crazy as usual, but nobody's sick or in the hospital. How you been doing?

JUNIOR. I'm fine. You know, ready to get back to things. Time just drags when you don't have a reason to get up.

NEIL. You know that guy on Cosmos said we're in the last second of the last month of the last year on the cosmic time line.

JUNIOR. You shouldn't watch public television Neil, in your hands it's a dangerous thing.

NEIL. I'm just saying time is relative. When you're not thinking about it goes by like those flipping calendars in the cartoons.

JUNIOR. That's about the level of shows you should be watching.

NEIL. Gee they couldn't do anything about you being a wise ass while you were in there? *(Beat)* So, what, you on some medication?

JUNIOR. Yeah, yeah. They wanted me to talk to someone too, but you know I couldn't bring myself. Could you imagine Pop ever doing such a thing?

NEIL. Nah, not Pop. But you know times have changed. You gotta do what helps you.

JUNIOR. Talking to some complete stranger. Could you do it?

NEIL. Nah, I guess not. But then again, I ain't the one who's cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs. *(The BROTHERS look at each other wryly, as if a discomfort between them has just been thrown off. JUNIOR laughs.)*

JUNIOR. Finally. I think that's the first time somebody's really spoken to me since I got out. There's so many eggshells around me I feel like a short-order cook.

NEIL. Nobody knows what to say. You can't blame them.

JUNIOR. I don't. It don't make it any easier.

NEIL. *(Beat)* Hey, you know pitchers and catchers are starting soon. You gonna get your tickets for opening day?

JUNIOR. Haven't missed a Yankee opening day in twenty-something years. I ain't gonna start now. You want to come along?

NEIL. Maybe later in the season. Gotta give my Mets a chance first.

JUNIOR. The Mutts, please. There may not be much of a season at all this year, with this strike they're talking about.

NEIL. You heard about that?

JUNIOR. Yeah, in between drooling and staring into space I managed to read a newspaper once in a while.

NEIL. I didn't mean...

JUNIOR. I'm kidding. Jeez.

NEIL. *(Beat)* So...you been seeing anybody, Jun?

JUNIOR. Yeah, I met a nice little manic depressive girl on the ward. She sleeps a lot, but when she's awake she's a pistol...

NEIL. I'm serious.

JUNIOR. Believe it or not my dance card is wide open. Whattya been talking to Ma?

NEIL. Nah, nah, nothing like that. It's just...there's this girl I know is all.

JUNIOR. I don't think I need your help in that regard.

NEIL. It's her you'd be helping. She's got a kid and her creep of an ex up and bolts on her, doesn't even leave a forwarding address. She works in dispatch. She's good girl.

JUNIOR. That so.

NEIL. Yeah, she's from the Old Country. Came over for him and now she's left without a soul. She's a bit younger than you, but...you know, that's not that big a deal.

JUNIOR. *(After a pause)* What in the world would a young girl with a kid want with the likes of me, at my age.

NEIL. Jesus Christ, Jun, you're forty. Not dead. Whattya think?

JUNIOR. I think...maybe I need a little time. To get things sorted out. I better get myself straight, you know, before I start...

NEIL. No, I get you.

JUNIOR. Not that I don't appreciate it...

NEIL. No need to explain. It was just a thought.

JUNIOR. *(Changing the tone)* Yeah, you're probably in on it with Ma to try to get me out of the apartment.

NEIL. Are you kidding? If it was up to her she'd be serving you tea in front of the TV until you were old and gray.

JUNIOR. C'mon now.

NEIL. It's true. What would she do with herself if you weren't around?

JUNIOR. *(Beat)* Move in with you?

NEIL. Let's just get you to work, alright? *(Lights fade.)*

Scene 4

The docks on the West Side of Manhattan. Lights represent a truck DRIVER in his cab about eight feet off the ground. JUNIOR is at street level.

JUNIOR. Hold up. Hold up there.

DRIVER. What the hell do you want?

JUNIOR. Slow down there, pal. I need to see your manifest.

DRIVER. I'm not your pal. Where the fuck is Martino?

JUNIOR. I don't know, retired maybe. I'm here now.

DRIVER. Unfortunately I can see that. So now that you introduced your charming self can you get outta my way so I can make my Goddamn delivery?

JUNIOR. Not without your papers.

DRIVER. What the fuck for?

JUNIOR. For you to get through that gate. Now hand them over. (*DRIVER reluctantly hands JUNIOR the manifest.*)

DRIVER. What's your name, douche bag?

JUNIOR. Sullivan.

DRIVER. Alright Sullivan. For the past twenty years Martino has let me offload at Dock 2. He was Italian, you see, so he understood how this whole process works. So why don't you get your potato-eating, jug-eared, Mick ass back in that little vestibule of yours and let me get back on the road before sundown.

JUNIOR. Listen, *pal*, I don't care who used to work here or what they let you get away with. While I'm here, you offload on the dock that's listed on your manifest. So if you want this piece of paper back, just back off.

DRIVER. Oh, I see. The guy with the fake badge wants to play big shot. Tell you what, asshole: I know the guy who works Dock 2 longer than I knew Martino, and he's a guinea too. So whaddya say I drive my rig right through this gate while you shove that manifest as far up your ass as your arm will reach?

JUNIOR. Go ahead and do it.

DRIVER. You think I won't?

JUNIOR. Nah, you seem stupid enough. Of course I'll pick up my phone over there and call that guinea at Dock 2 and make sure your cargo doesn't move an inch. Then I'll get some other guy with a fake badge to call your dispatcher and tell him that because of the damage to our gate, you can't drive any trucks that terminate on the West Side of Manhattan. Should be a good career move for you.

DRIVER. You're a real prick Sullivan.

JUNIOR. Good, you remember my name. Manifest says Dock 5, you gotta turn around.

DRIVER. You've got to be shitting me. I don't even know where the fuck Dock 5 is.

JUNIOR. It's the one with the big "5" out front. Here's your papers.

(DRIVER yanks the manifest out of JUNIOR'S hand.)

DRIVER. Great, you're gonna put me behind schedule. It's been a real pleasure meeting you, you alcoholic-mothered donkey. Hope your ass is fired by the time I come back.

JUNIOR. Don't count on it. Let's back it up... *(Sound of truck backing up while lights fade.)*

Scene 5

The Yankee Stadium bleachers. Sounds of the crowd, the organ, vendors, etc. can be heard. JUNIOR peers through a pair of binoculars while NEIL sits with his hand shading his eyes, struggling to see anything.

JUNIOR. Best way to watch a game.

NEIL. What, through binoculars?

JUNIOR. No, out here in the bleachers. It's where all the real fans are.

NEIL. The people behind home plate aren't real fans?

JUNIOR. Bunch of elitists. In thirty years of coming to Yankee games I never once sat behind home plate.

NEIL. That's because you're cheap.

JUNIOR. I can enjoy the game just as well from here.

NEIL. Yeah, you can almost hear them talking strategy in the dugout fifteen miles away.

JUNIOR. Ah, you're just sore 'cause your team moved out to the coast. I have to take a subway to see my team, you have to take a jet.

NEIL. The Giants aren't my team anymore, I got the Mets. Who the hell's up, I can't see?

JUNIOR. Winfield.

NEIL. I thought he'd be taller. And it looks like he needs a shave.

JUNIOR. He's far away; that's hysterical. With the strike I didn't think we'd ever get a chance to see him play.

NEIL. *(Beat)* It's good to see you back among the living.

JUNIOR. Yeah, it was touch and go there for awhile.

NEIL. Must have been tough.

JUNIOR. It was no picnic.

NEIL. *(Pause)* What was it like in there?

JUNIOR. We all wore bibs and had hula-hoop contests every night.

NEIL. C'mon...

JUNIOR. What do you want to know for?

NEIL. What if insanity runs in the family? I gotta know what I'm in for.

JUNIOR. You're about as subtle as a fart in church.

NEIL. You can blame me for being curious?

JUNIOR. There's a game going on here.

NEIL. Hey, if you don't want to tell me...

JUNIOR. What can I say? It was hell. I couldn't move. Or at least I convinced myself I couldn't move. I felt like if I did, the walls would come toppling down on each other, just one by one like when you break up a cardboard box. Only I was at the center of the box and there were invisible wires connecting every muscle in my body to the corners of the room, so if I twitched or moved my pinkie the wrong way everything would go straight to hell.

NEIL. *(Long pause)* You want a beer?

JUNIOR. Yeah, I'll take a beer.

NEIL. Two here! *(A vendor passes them two beers. NEIL raises a toast.)* To the comeback of baseball.

JUNIOR. To comebacks. *(They both drink.)*

NEIL. How's the job going?

JUNIOR. Depends. How much do you enjoy being screamed at all day by people who hate your guts?

NEIL. You know you're talking to a cop, right? Lemme see. *(Takes binoculars)* Jim Spencer! There's an Irishmen for you.

JUNIOR. He's a stiff.

NEIL. You don't like Jim Spencer? Whattya kick puppies and spit on babies? Guy's one powerful son of a Mick.

JUNIOR. Strikes out too much.

NEIL. Yeah but when he gets a hold of it he's our best chance of getting a ball out here on the Jersey Shore.

JUNIOR. You kidding? The way he's going he'd have to hit the ball twice to reach us.

NEIL. I don't know, I've seen him hit a few shots.

JUNIOR. Yeah, well. Everybody gets lucky sometimes.

NEIL. Speaking of...you given any more thought to maybe meeting that girl I mentioned?

JUNIOR. You still on about that?

NEIL. She's still complaining about not being able to find anybody.

JUNIOR. You know I never caught a ball? Hundreds and hundreds of games—sometimes I'm the only one left out here if it's a blowout. You'd think I would have gotten one by now.

NEIL. Maybe it's because you sit in a different area code, Jun. You gonna answer me or what?

JUNIOR. You like her so much why don't you see her yourself?

NEIL. First of all, shut your mouth I'm a happily married man. Second of all, if I was single you think I'd ever mention her to you at all?

JUNIOR. You're priceless Neil.

NEIL. I have to live vicariously, what can I tell you. Unfortunately for me, you've all I got. Plus she's an absolute doll, Jun, I'm telling ya...*(Crack of the bat)...*Whoa! *(There is the sound of a bat crack. The crowd noise intensifies.)*

JUNIOR. Holy shit!

NEIL. He caught one!

JUNIOR. Here it comes! Here it comes! (*JUNIOR and NEIL reach for the ball upstage right, which hits off JUNIOR'S palm and bounds away.*) I got my hand on it. It hit me right in the palm.

NEIL. Jeez, Jun, you had it.

JUNIOR. I never got that close before. It was right in my freakin' hand. Look at that, it's turning red!

NEIL. Yeah that ball was smoked. (*Beat*) You all right?

JUNIOR. Yeah, yeah. Fine. Whew! You saw that, right? I was that close.

NEIL. I saw it.

JUNIOR. Thirty years I never got a hand on a ball. Thirty years!

NEIL. You were due for one.

JUNIOR. I guess so. (*There's a long pause as the brothers sit down, the crowd noise subsides, and they settle back into their previous position.*) So...what's this girl like? (*Blackout.*)

Scene 6

A bar/restaurant on the West Side of Manhattan in the 20s. CARA and JUNIOR sit at a table, a tad uncomfortably. Both are dressed nicely, but by no means fancily. CARA is 27, attractive in her youth and naturally curious.

CARA. 'Tis a nice place.

JUNIOR. Yeah, it's alright. This is where my family came when we buried my Pop.

CARA. Wow...

JUNIOR. Boy that was a stupid thing to say.

CARA. Ah, no...

JUNIOR. No, that was really thick.

CARA. I've heard worse.

JUNIOR. Must be thin pickings out there in the dating pool.

CARA. You've no idea. (*Beat, realizing what she's said*) Oh Christ, now I said something dense.

JUNIOR. Ah, please. As nice as you look tonight, you get a pass.

CARA. Well, thank you kind sir. That wasn't stupid at all. (*They share a*

smile.)

JUNIOR. (*Beat*) Neil told me you work in dispatch.

CARA. Sure, I do.

JUNIOR. You like it there?

CARA. Well enough. The boys are a lot of fun. They all get a kick out of me brogue.

JUNIOR. Reminds them of their mothers.

CARA. Jays, I hope that's not the case. Everybody's a Casanova, on the radio at least.

JUNIOR. I can imagine. You must get asked out a lot.

CARA. That's one way of putting it. But my cop-dating days are done. I tried it once and the lad drove me mad with his philandering. He was on a private stakeout every night.

JUNIOR. You're kidding. With you at home?

CARA. He could have had a harem waiting for him and it wouldn't have mattered. As I found out later he nearly did.

JUNIOR. What precinct was he with?

CARA. The 109 out in Queens.

JUNIOR. I don't know anyone from out there.

CARA. You know a lot of your brother's friends?

JUNIOR. No. Well, yeah, I know some of those fellas too. I was a Manhattan (*Beat*) writer for a lotta years, so I got to know a few of the men in blue.

CARA. I hope I didn't offend.

JUNIOR. Nah, not at all. I wouldn't date a cop either.

CARA. That's funny, Jeremiah.

JUNIOR. Jerry, please. It was my Pop's name but it makes me sound like an Old Testament prophet.

CARA. I suppose I shouldn't be talking about me old boyfriend while I'm sitting here with you.

JUNIOR. As long as you're sitting here with me.

CARA. Where else would I be?

JUNIOR. I'm sure you've got options.

CARA. Sure we all have, don't we? (*Beat*) Tell me about your father.

JUNIOR. Pop? He was a big, silent Irishman. Came from a family of twelve back in Cork and every one of them, women and men, were giants. He came over to find work when Neil and I were just babes. Just after that they stopped all boat traffic to and from the States due to the war. So the next time we saw him it was like meeting a stranger. I was about five or so and my Ma said, "Go ahead and shake hands with your father." And there was this...huge, red-haired behemoth, with his tremendous hand engulfing my little one. It was like making God's acquaintance. I don't think I ever stopped feeling that way about him. *(Beat)* You got more than you bargained for with that answer.

CARA. No more apologizing, for either of us. You say what's on your mind and I'll do the same. OK?

JUNIOR. OK. *(Beat)* How old are you?

CARA. Twenty-seven.

JUNIOR. I'm...not twenty-seven. *(There is a short silence.)*

CARA. I've an eight-year-old daughter.

JUNIOR. Yeah, Neil told me.

CARA. She's me reason for being. I don't get a lot of second dates when lads hear that.

JUNIOR. That's their loss. *(Beat)* I...ah...had a kind of medical problem within the past year. I had...well the doctors called it a...

CARA. Nervous breakdown.

JUNIOR. Neil filled you in, huh?

CARA. He said you were doing real well. Back to work and all?

JUNIOR. Yeah, yeah. I'm on medication that does the trick.

CARA. Do you want to talk about it?

JUNIOR. Not particularly.

CARA. Then we don't have to. *(Another brief silence.)*

JUNIOR. You have very kind eyes. *(CARA takes his hand.)*

CARA. You have a beautiful, brilliant white soul.

JUNIOR. You can see souls?

CARA. Not always. But I can see yours. *(They share another smile, then let go of each other's hands.)*

JUNIOR. I'm hungry. Are you hungry?

CARA. Starving. I skipped lunch for this.

JUNIOR. This place has the best fish and chips in the city. And I've tried a lot of places

CARA. I'd have to be crazy to pass that up. *(CARA realizes what she's said and claps her hand over her mouth.)*

JUNIOR. Well...I've been crazy, and I'm telling you you shouldn't.

CARA. Get something else and we'll share. Unless you have one of those germ phobias as well.

JUNIOR. Nah, I'm not one of those lunatics.

CARA. This insanity of yours has great entertainment potential.

JUNIOR. Oh, I'm sorry, you must have been talking to Jerry. I'm one of his many other personalities.

CARA. Cara. Pleased to meet you.

JUNIOR. *(Conspiratorially)* So between you and me...how's the date going so far?

CARA. You promise this doesn't get back to Jerry?

JUNIOR. We rarely speak.

CARA. Well...just between us...I think I'd like to get to know him a bit better.

JUNIOR. Really? We're talking about the same Jerry, right?

CARA. I think so. He's about your size. And he looks an awful lot like you.

JUNIOR. That's the guy. Personally I never found him to be the least bit interesting. To each his own, I guess. *(They smile at each other as lights fade.)*

Scene 7

JUNIOR leads CARA through the front apartment door into the kitchen.

JUNIOR. Here it is. I guarantee you it wasn't worth the walk up.

CARA. It's where you live. It's worth four floors to see that.

JUNIOR. If you say so. I'm afraid I can't show you much more than the kitchen. We'd have to go through my mother's bedroom to get to the rest of the place.

CARA. I don't think we'll have a need to be crawling over your poor sleeping Ma just to quench me curiosity. Is this where you eat?

JUNIOR. Unless there's a Yankee game on.

CARA. Big fan?

JUNIOR. Oh yeah.

CARA. Obsessed?

JUNIOR. Haven't had much else to occupy my time lately.

CARA. Hmm.

JUNIOR. "Hmm" what?

CARA. I went with a lad once who wouldn't talk to me on the phone when his soccer game was on the telly. Got to be an awful bore. Would you be doing that if I called?

JUNIOR. What inning?

CARA. Fourth?

JUNIOR. I'd take your call.

CARA. What about one out in the ninth?

JUNIOR. I might call you right back.

CARA. At least you're honest.

JUNIOR. Cuppa tea?

CARA. Sure. *(Noticing the old radio)* Is this your mother's?

JUNIOR. Yeah. That thing's older than I am. She's got that 1010 News on all day long.

CARA. She doesn't get out much?

JUNIOR. Ah, she does. She cleans floors still at an office building on 10th, but she can't go in until they're gone for the day. You know between you and her I'm starting to fall into a brogue meself.

CARA. Aren't you the chameleon. So your parents were Irish born?

JUNIOR. Oh yeah. Neil and I were too, we're just too young to remember it.

CARA. I could tell. There's something about the place you can't shake.

(KIT yells into the kitchen from offstage.)

KIT. Hello out there! Is everybody decent?

JUNIOR. We're in the kitchen, Ma. What do you think, we're making out on the table?

KIT. Don't knock over me ashtray!

JUNIOR. Ma, we're just having tea. Come on in. (*KIT enters in her modest nightgown, bathrobe and slippers.*)

KIT. I'm just checking. You never know what you're going to walk into when people are visiting at all hours of the night.

JUNIOR. It's eight-thirty.

CARA. Ma'am, I apologize if we were making too much noise. We didn't mean to wake you up.

KIT. And who might you be?

CARA. I might be Cara.

KIT. Then who are you really?

JUNIOR. Ma...

CARA. My name is Cara, Mrs. Sullivan. It's a pleasure to meet you.

KIT. And where might your baby be while you're spending time in me kitchen?

CARA. How did you know I had a child?

KIT. I know things.

JUNIOR. Neilie told her.

CARA. You'll be glad to hear me girl is staying with a friend of mine, Mrs. Sullivan. We watch each others' wee ones when we go out.

KIT. And how often is that?

JUNIOR. C'mon, Ma...

CARA. Not as often as I'd like, ma'am. Katie has much more of a social life than I do.

KIT. She can be trusted with a baby, Miss social butterfly?

CARA. My daughter is eight, Mrs. Sullivan.

KIT. Eight! Sure, how old were you, twelve?

JUNIOR. That's enough Ma!

CARA. I was nineteen, ma'am.

KIT. Nineteen?! For cripes sake.

JUNIOR. Sure weren't you seventeen when you had me?

KIT. Sure, wasn't I married as well. (*To CARA*) He's forty, you know. Turned so in March. I don't know what he might have told you.

CARA. It didn't come up.

KIT. He could be your...older brother. Your much older brother.

JUNIOR. Go back to bed, Ma.

KIT. Sure, I won't be told what to do in me own home!

JUNIOR. Bed!

KIT. I'm getting meself a glass of milk. *(KIT deliberately gets a glass and pours herself some milk from the fridge.)*

CARA. Good night, Mrs. Sullivan.

KIT. You watch yourself on the subway at this time of night.

JUNIOR. I'll be getting her a cab, Ma.

KIT. A cab?

JUNIOR. Goodnight, Ma.

KIT. You've got work in the morning. *(With nothing more apparent to say, KIT exits.)*

JUNIOR. Sorry.

CARA. No need. *(Beat)* She calls you "Junior"?

JUNIOR. My family does.

CARA. I'll stick with "Jerry" if it's all the same.

JUNIOR. Will you be calling at all after that?

CARA. Not a chance. *(Beat)* But I'll answer if you call.

JUNIOR. Really?

CARA. Truly.

JUNIOR. Doesn't it bother you that I could be your "much older brother"?

CARA. Does it bother you that I have a daughter?

JUNIOR. Not enough to make a difference.

CARA. All right then. *(CARA steps into JUNIOR and kisses him.)* You're a good man. Aren't you?

JUNIOR. I am. I try to be.

CARA. You'll be good to me and mine.

JUNIOR. I will.

CARA. Good. Then I can forgive the ninth inning. *(JUNIOR shakes his head at his good fortune.)*

JUNIOR. Where did you come from?

CARA. The air, the sea, the earth. Kerry. *(JUNIOR kisses her this time as lights fade.)*

SCENE 8

The docks. JUNIOR takes the DRIVER'S manifest.

DRIVER. Well, if ain't the Sheriff of 11th Avenue. You mean they still haven't fired your Erin Go Braless ass?

JUNIOR. Still breaking balls, Vinny. That's what I'm paid for.

DRIVER. Yeah, nobody does it better. Doesn't it ever bother you that every driver in the Northeast wants your Guinness-guzzling head on a stick?

JUNIOR. That's not true; I got some cross-country drivers who hate me too. But none of that's gonna bother me today.

DRIVER. What happened to you, you get laid for a change?

JUNIOR. Something like that.

DRIVER. Don't get used to it. It's only a matter of time before she wakes up one morning and realizes those ears don't belong on a human being.

JUNIOR. Did you ever consider writing self-help books, Vin? You're inspirational.

DRIVER. I liked you better when you were miserable.

JUNIOR. Smile and the world smiles with you.

DRIVER. For fuck's sake. I think you're the first happy Irishmen I've ever seen who wasn't drunk. Enjoy it while you can, ya rotten bastard, she'll kick you in the *cogliones* before too long. Then I won't have to look at your gap-toothed, ugly, grinning face.

JUNIOR. You're a prince, Vinny. *(Beat)* Wouldya look at that, manifest says you're on Dock 2. *(Handing the papers back)* Everybody's happy!

DRIVER. You're still a cocksucking asshole, Sullivan.

JUNIOR. You have a good day too, Vin. *(Truck heard pulling away as lights fade.)*

Scene 9

The same kitchen, dark and empty. The stillness of the night is punctured by

KIT'S fearful scream. A moment later JUNIOR leads KIT into the kitchen.

JUNIOR. Relax Ma.

KIT. But I saw him!

JUNIOR. C'mon, sit down.

KIT. He was right there--in the flesh!

JUNIOR. Do you want some tea?

KIT. Tea?! Sure, didn't I just come face to face with your father's ghost and you want me to drink a cuppa tea?

JUNIOR. Sorry Ma.

KIT. Well, put it on then. *(Beat)* Oh, you should have seen him standing there at the end of me bed. His red hair was glowing like a lit match in a dark room. He had his hair again! He was wearing the suit we buried him in, except it had all its buttons and there weren't any holes in it.

JUNIOR. Maybe there's a tailor in heaven.

KIT. Don't you mock me! I tell you I saw him! He had the same flower in his lapel, only now t'were brilliant white, whiter than any white you've ever seen! It outshone the Sacred Heart of Jesus nightlight over me bed!

JUNIOR. Jeez, that thing's like a lighthouse beacon.

KIT. Don't I know it? I tell you he took me breath away. I'm finding it hard to breath still.

JUNIOR. That might be the two packs a day, Ma.

KIT. Ah, I should never have told you. I should have stayed in there with the spirit and let him drag me away to kingdom come. At least then I wouldn't have to suffer your fresh mouth. Look at these hands, shaking like a leaf. Would cigarettes be making me do that? Me nerves half worn away and all you can do is stand there and crack wise? What have I done to deserve such a fate? *(Beat)* Is the tea done?

JUNIOR. Almost Ma. Now listen, when you saw Pop he looked pretty good, right? That's not a bad thing, right? Maybe he just popped in to let you know he was OK. Maybe he was just checking up on you. It doesn't have to be all gloom and doom you know.

KIT. Sure, he wasn't in your room. You didn't have to hear his voice.

JUNIOR. He spoke to you? What did he say?

KIT. Nothing important.

JUNIOR. Ma...

KIT. Ah, now you take it for earnest, do you? Now it's not a figment of me imagination.

JUNIOR. I never said it was, Ma.

KIT. T'were implied. I'm just a crazy old bat you'll be shipping off to a home someday soon.

JUNIOR. Ma, I've gotta be up at six tomorrow.

KIT. Sure, you go get your sleep. You and that girl can be doing God-knows-what in me kitchen until all hours, but God-forbid your own mother is scared out of her wits at an inconvenient time of day.

JUNIOR. Ma, will you just tell me what Pop said?

KIT. I don't think I should.

JUNIOR. Why not?

KIT. You won't like it.

JUNIOR. What won't I like? Did he say something about me?

KIT. What does it matter anyway, it's all in me head...

JUNIOR. Enough, Ma. Tell me what he said about me.

KIT. He said nothing about you.

JUNIOR. About who then?

KIT. I'm not exactly sure. I have me suspicions, mind you...

JUNIOR. For God's sake, Ma, would you tell me what he said?

KIT. Just one word... (*Whispering*) Banshee!

JUNIOR. Banshee?

KIT. Shhh! Stifle yourself! She might hear you!

JUNIOR. Ma, it was just a dream.

KIT. Oh no. No, no, no! It was a visitation.

JUNIOR. What's the difference?

KIT. Your father--God bless his soul and commit it to heaven--appeared to me for a good reason. He means to warn me.

JUNIOR. About a Banshee?

KIT. For cripes sake keep your voice down. Would you tempt the devil hisself?

JUNIOR. Aren't they supposed to be haunting out in the woods somewhere?

What would they be doing in a fourth-floor walk up?

KIT. How should I know? Sure, I wasn't the one who brought it up!

JUNIOR. Maybe you heard wrong. Could Pop have said "bedsheets" instead?

KIT. Are you daft? Sure why would the man be talking about bedsheets? Didn't I make the bed every day for forty years? Now in the hereafter he decides he wants to come talk to me about the sheets?

JUNIOR. All right, all right...but maybe he said something else entirely...

KIT. I know what the man said. He said...that word, clear as a bell. He looked straight into me, sure I can still see the ocean blue of his eyes whenever I close me own. It's like they were trying to say something to me, but they lacked the voice to do so. He was warning me, I tell you. He was determined to get that one word out with all the breath he had left. I felt him struggling. After all those years of marriage you know when the man is trying to impart something important. I can hardly stop meself from shaking just thinking about it.

JUNIOR. All right, Ma. Have a sip of tea. *(Beat)* So Pop came back to warn you about...

KIT. Shhh!

JUNIOR. ...that word. What do you think he meant by it?

KIT. You don't understand.

JUNIOR. Understand what?

KIT. I knew I shouldn't have told you.

JUNIOR. When did you know that, when you woke me from a dead sleep? What does it mean, Ma?

KIT. The... *(Whispering)* Banshee. She's a woman.

JUNIOR. Like a witch?

KIT. No, not like a witch altogether. She's a spirit. A vengeful harbinger of death. She comes like the wind in the trees and souls are destroyed in her wake. When she screams that horrible, cursed howl of hers, not a soul can hope to survive her.

JUNIOR. And...?

KIT. It's that girl!

JUNIOR. Who? *(Beat)* You mean Cara?

KIT. Yes!

JUNIOR. For the love of all that's holy, Ma...

KIT. Who else could it be?

JUNIOR. How about anyone else in the world?

KIT. She's the only one. It makes sense.

JUNIOR. Why? Because you don't like her?

KIT. I don't dislike the girl! Sure, I wouldn't have an unkind word to say about her altogether if she weren't trying to steal your soul.

JUNIOR. It was a dream, Ma. Cara is not a Banshee.

KIT. Jesus, Mary and Joseph...

JUNIOR. Banshee! Banshee! Come get me!

KIT. Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women...

JUNIOR. Look at me, Ma.

KIT. Don't interrupt me, I'm praying.

JUNIOR. Tell Mary you'll get back to her.

KIT. Don't you dare. Laugh at me visitation at your own peril, but don't you ever make light of me religion! If you had more prayer in your life maybe you wouldn't have... *(Stopping herself short)*

JUNIOR. Wouldn't have what, Ma?

KIT. Wouldn't have had so much pain in your life. Wouldn't have brought this scourge upon yourself.

JUNIOR. I know what my scourge is...

KIT. Sure, what might you mean by that?

JUNIOR. Nothing Ma.

KIT. Don't tell me nothing, I have ears enough to hear. Is that what they taught you in that place, how to lay all your troubles at your mother's feet? What have I ever done but try to help you? Sure, aren't I trying to do such right now?

JUNIOR. By telling me my girlfriend's a monster?

KIT. By passing on your father's warning! Do you think I asked him to come to me in the middle of the night and say what he said? Sure, what am I but the messenger?

JUNIOR. I'm going back to bed.

KIT. After the fright I had, would you leave me here to face Kingdom Come with nothing but a cuppa tea?

JUNIOR. You want toast too?

KIT. Honor Thy Mother! May God forgive your acid tongue!

JUNIOR. I don't think He's been in a forgiving mood lately.

KIT. So now everything is God's fault?

JUNIOR. No, Ma. It's all my fault. I put myself exactly where I ended up. But somehow here I am on the other side. For the first time in years it feels like I might be able to get back all that time I lost. So what happens? My mother insists that my girlfriend is a mythical Irish harbinger of death who's intent on destroying my soul. I don't know if God is behind this little development, but if He is He certainly has a fantastic sense of irony. If it's all the same to you, I think I'll retreat to my bed and try to reassemble the shambles of my life.

KIT. Haven't you forgotten something?

JUNIOR. What's that Ma?

KIT. Me toast. (*Lights fade*)

SCENE 10

JUNIOR is in the bed, as in the Scene 1. The VOICE seems nearer now, no longer as if from a phone.

VOICE. Mr. Sullivan! Can you hear me? Mr. Sullivan, nod if you hear my voice. We are trying to help you. Answer me!

JUNIOR. I can't.

VOICE. Stay with me. Focus on my voice. Follow my voice back. We need you to stay here.

JUNIOR. Stay where?

VOICE. That's good, keep talking. What are you trying to say, Mr. Sullivan?

JUNIOR. Wh... wh...

VOICE. Tell me where you are. Do you know where you are? We need you to let us help you.

JUNIOR. *(Awakening)* Help... *(CARA suddenly appears behind him in the bed. Her presence should surprise the audience.)*

CARA. What's wrong?

JUNIOR. I had that dream.

CARA. The phone operator?

JUNIOR. It's not a phone call anymore.

CARA. What is it?

JUNIOR. I don't know. She keeps asking me where I am.

CARA. What's your answer?

JUNIOR. I can't answer.

CARA. Well, you're obviously crazier than a loon.

JUNIOR. That's what I thought. It must come from my Ma's side. You wouldn't believe this insane thing she said to me the other night.

CARA. Tell me then.

JUNIOR. She wakes me up in the middle of the night telling me my father "visited" her with a warning. Guess what the warning was?

CARA. Don't lose that terrific girl of yours?

JUNIOR. Even better. She says he was trying to tell her that you were a...
(CARA bolts upright on her knees as if possessed and lets out an unearthly wail as lights go to black.)

INTERMISSION

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