

THE MAGIC HOUR (EXTRACT)

Extract from Act Two

A London hospital waiting room.

The actors are on stage in the gloom behind. The figure of a middle aged man, grey skinned, in a security guard uniform comes centre stage as the very recognisable intro to the Pogues' Fairy Tale of New York strikes up.

The recording is old and scratchy, like a record from the fifties. It suddenly jumps badly from the intro into the middle verse. The figure mimes both male and female voices:

FIGURE/MCCORMACK

...You're a bum, you're a punk /
You're an old slut on junk /
Lying there almost dead on a drip
in that bed / You scumbag you
maggot / You cheap lousy faggot /
Happy Christmas your arse I pray
God it's our last. / And the boys
of the NYPD choir's still singing
Galway Bay / And the bells were
ringing out / For Christmas day.

I could have been someone / Well
so could anyone-

The record is badly scratched and the last line is repeated and repeated. The figure looks bereft, lost on stage and for words.

He exits stage as the scratched up lyrics and music fade.

Lights go up on Dominic and Father Farrell sitting, still tense from an argument. They turn to Brian in the door.

DOMINIC

She's not here yet?

Brian comes into the room. Brian has just smoked a joint.

BRIAN

Probably traffic.

There is an uncomfortable pause.

FARRELL

(calmer now, to Dominic)
Maybe you can have a search for
her.

BRIAN

Yes, you go and check.

Brian sits by the Father.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Father Farrell and I have
important things to talk.

Dominic hesitates. The priest nods his head that it is
okay. Dominic heads away.

There are some moments as the priest and Brian sit side by
side. Both trying to find a way into conversation.

FARRELL
So Brian, how're you feeling?

BRIAN
It's a difficult time, Father.

Farrell nods his head wisely.

FARRELL
Brian-

BRIAN
Father.

FARRELL
In all our lives. There are these
moments-

BRIAN
Yes Father.

FARRELL
These small windows of time-

BRIAN
Yes, I should have been there,
this morning.

FARRELL
But there are these times. When
we can do things or see things
clearly.

BRIAN
I was stuck in work you see.

FARRELL
And alternatively those windows
when we do things we regret.

Pause.

FARRELL (CONT'D)
Things we wish we could change.
Things we should have done. And
things we shouldn't have done.

BRIAN

(eager)

Yes. Things we should have done.

FARRELL

And things that weren't right.

BRIAN

Oh God, yes Father.

FARRELL

These small windows when you are
tempted, not tempted, but when
you are tested, when
circumstances come together.

Brian is shaking his head vigorously.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

Sometimes we do things in those
spaces, those slices of time,
that are good.

Farrell searches for an example.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

Maybe there's a pretty girl you
like. And you're nervous but you
ask her out anyway and she
accepts and it's wonderful, you
know?

Brian is following attentively, but confused now.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

But then. Maybe you were afraid
to ask. And your best friend gets
to take her to the village fair.
And maybe you go along and you
have too much rum and make a holy
show of yourself.

Pause.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

And then it's in the past and it
cannot be erased. You are left
with regret. It's those moments
I'm talking about. Do you
understand?

Brian is nodding eagerly.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

In our lives. All of us.
Important moments that can live
with us the rest of our
existence.

BRIAN
Exactly Father.

FARRELL
Believe me Brian, even myself,
silly things, too much sun, silly
things.

Brian is following him excitedly.

FARRELL (CONT'D)
What I mean is, there are these
small moments -

BRIAN
(agreeing eagerly)
Magic Hours.

FARRELL
What? Well yes, okay, magic
hours. I mean, it doesn't have to
be an hour necessarily. But it is
that. It is exactly that.

Those precious moments that we
have to recognise; fleeting
moments, when we can do - or not
do - regretful things.

BRIAN
(agreeing)
It is important not to miss these
times.

FARRELL
It is almost like the devil is
testing us-

BRIAN
Or God.

FARRELL
Well the devil Brian. Maybe God,
yes, he is putting us in a place
and a situation. And maybe
feelings inside us, emotions we
don't understand or control.
Maybe lust, not lust, but anger,
maybe violence even.

Brian is nodding excitedly.

BRIAN
This is exactly how I feel
Father.

FARRELL

I mean times when we do something, something we regret.

BRIAN

When we miss the chance, to accept our Calling.

FARRELL

Yes, exactly. Well not a Calling exactly. When we are faced with a clear choice of good and evil, Brian.

He looks into Brian's eager face.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

When maybe we are pushed and feel aggrieved and want to strike out.

BRIAN

But we have to be strong.

FARRELL

Sometimes we make the wrong choices, Brian. We do things wrongly.

BRIAN

(eager)

I know that Father, I know that.

FARRELL

We are not strong enough for the hour.

BRIAN

(agreeing and excited)

For the Magic Hour.

Farrell lays a hand on his arm.

FARRELL

I know you know Brian. But I want you to know that God knows.

BRIAN

And we mustn't waste the Hour.

FARRELL

We must strive always to do the right thing. Even when it is hard, even when we are provoked. Even when we are provoked by those we love.

Brian is nodding enthusiastically.

FARRELL (CONT'D)
We can talk to God. We can tell
him how we feel. Any guilt.

He searches Brian's face for signs of wanting to confess.

FARRELL (CONT'D)
Any shame.

BRIAN
These are times to be strong.

Farrell grips Brian's arm.

FARRELL
So is there anything you want to
tell me Brian?

BRIAN
Lots Father.

FARRELL
About your father?

Brian thinks hard on this.

BRIAN
Not really Father.

Farrell is frustrated.

FARRELL
Brian, there is something you
could do for me.

BRIAN
Anything, Father.

FARRELL
I always think this is important,
At times like these. I want you
to tell me something about your
dad.

Brian is concentrating on the priest's words.

FARRELL (CONT'D)
It's important to remember, to
say do you recall when he did
this and wasn't that typical.

BRIAN
Typical?

FARRELL
It is important Brian, now he is
gone.

(MORE)

FARRELL (CONT'D)
A clear, simple memory,
(hurriedly) I mean something
good, something positive.
Something that says this was a
good man.

Brian is furiously trying to summon up a memory.

FARRELL (CONT'D)
Something that says this was a
religious man.

BRIAN
(suddenly finds an
appropriate memory)
He loved funerals Father.

FARRELL
What?

BRIAN
That was his thing.

FARRELL
Funerals? Can you not think about
something happy man. Something
that brought out the joy in him.

BRIAN
(eager)
Exactly, yes, joy, that was
funerals.

He loved a good funeral.
He would go to the funerals of
people he didn't know.

FARRELL
Why for Christ's sake?

BRIAN
To represent the family he said.

Pause.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
He used to rate them. Mostly it
was about how generous they were
with drink and how much singing
there was.

FARRELL
Singing?

BRIAN
He had very firm ideas about what
constituted a good funeral.
(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)

People had to have drink and remember the dead and then sing.

FARRELL

So a wake?

BRIAN

The worse thing was when they gave you a bottle of beer and some small sandwiches and that was your lot.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

How could you send someone away and be so miserable he used to say. He said there were funerals when he felt ashamed for the corpse.

FARRELL

People do have different ways.

BRIAN

We have to make sure there is lots to drink. You'll come Father?

FARRELL

Well I -

BRIAN

To his funeral. I mean obviously Father Donaghue, he's our priest. But you will come?

FARRELL

We'll see Brian.

BRIAN

Dad always said the English didn't know how to die. He said they didn't know how to organise a proper delivery into the next world. They would give you tea and cut off sandwiches and stand around being polite.

Pause.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

I think what he enjoyed most was the formality of the grief. Sorry for your troubles; Have a glass Dennis; Okay so; Sorry for your loss, missus; Have another Dennis; Just a small one; Give us a song; No, I couldn't; Go on Dennis; Well maybe later;

(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Make a space for Dennis there;
And then he would be forced into
it.

FARRELL

Into what?

BRIAN

Singing. There wasn't much
opportunity for it in his life.
That's why he loved the funerals.
It was the formality of it. The
way you could wrap up all of your
emotions into a tight fist of
condolences and refilled glasses
and then release them.

FARRELL

Through singing?

BRIAN

Through drink. And through
singing. You remember John
McCormack?

FARRELL

The Irish tenor?

BRIAN

They said he sang like John
McCormack. They would be gathered
there, after the funeral, in the
parlour. The old boys. And they
would say sing us a song Dennis
and he would say 'no, no, I
couldn't' but he knew they would
insist and someone would refill
his glass and he would stand up
and they would hush the people in
the corner who were still
talking.

And the silence would spread to
all the rooms in the house. And
he would begin to sing 'Believe
Me If All Those Endearing Young
Charms'.

Pause.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

And that was him then.

FARRELL

And it took a funeral?

BRIAN
It's like what you were talking
about Father.

Pause.

FARRELL
(mystified)
What was I talking about?

BRIAN
The Magic Hour. Those moments.
Like you were saying.

FARRELL
(deeply unsure)
Yes. Of course.

BRIAN
Those were the moments when he
was best in the world.

Dominic enters.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
(eager)
Dominic. Do you remember dad at
the funerals.

DOMINIC
Christ.

FARRELL
Is your mother-?

BRIAN
Him singing?

DOMINIC
I remember him drunk.

BRIAN
They all had drink. It was no
thing to be drunk.

DOMINIC
Drunk and falling over.

BRIAN
Him standing in the middle of the
room and singing 'Believe Me If
All Those Endearing Young
Charms'.

DOMINIC

Trying to sing some ropey old
Irish dirge, and forgetting the
words. And us trying to make him
sit down before he keeled over.

Dominic suddenly remembers something and stops.

Brian is up on his feet, angry.

BRIAN

That wasn't it at all. He had a
rich tenor voice. Everyone
stopped and listened. Everyone
went quiet when he sang.

DOMINIC

It was embarrassing Brian. He
would start the song and then not
remember where he was...

BRIAN

He knew all the words to 'Believe
Me If All Those Endearing Young
Charms'.

FARRELL

(trying to calm things)
It's not important lads -

BRIAN

Take it back.

Brian confronts his brother, full of violence.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Take it back. He was a lovely
tenor. Everyone stopped talking
to listen.

DOMINIC

(placating)
Okay.

BRIAN

It was his moment, his Magic
Hour. When he was connected. It
was real.

FARRELL

Brian -

BRIAN

It's important. We cannot miss
those moments. We have to
recognise them.

DOMINIC

I'm sorry Brian. Take it easy.

BRIAN

That was his time. I see that now. I didn't see it then. I didn't understand what he was trying to say when he sang. But I get it now. I understand it now.

He turns back to the priest.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

He spent 30 years standing guard and he hated every second of it. He wanted to sing. He needed more than anything to sing. At the funerals, that was when they let him. That was when he had his song. That was when he was alive.

DOMINIC

(trying to calm Brian)

Okay.

BRIAN

Don't try to rob him of that now. Don't you piss on that.

Brian sits agitated, head down. Dominic sits, away from him and the priest.

Angela returns. She stops at the door and senses there is an atmosphere.

ANGELA

Can I get anyone tea?

No one pays her any attention.

Brian, calmed now, looks up at Farrell, off on a new tangent.

BRIAN

So Father. Where do you think the church can go now in terms of these allegations?

DOMINIC

Christ.

BRIAN

All these revelations, you know?

DOMINIC

Brian.

BRIAN

Because I have to tell you, it
has shaken my belief.

DOMINIC

Give it a miss.

FARRELL

No it's fine. I wish more people
would just come out and say what
is on their mind.

He looks hard at Dominic. Brian is vindicated.

BRIAN

Thank you Father.

Farrell summons himself up.

FARRELL

The church gets blamed for many
things.

He is still looking hard at Dominic.

BRIAN

We must talk about important
things.

FARRELL

The problems of the world are
laid at our door in new and
numerous ways.

Brian is nodding.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

Every day our enemies and the
media search out new contrivances
to blame us.

Farrell regards his hands in his lap.

FARRELL (CONT'D)

But it is true that there are
issues which we have let ferment.

BRIAN

(agreeing)
Ferment.

FARRELL

We keep trying to draw a line in
the sand on these issues.

BRIAN

(agreeing)
The sand.

FARRELL

And the tide keeps rolling in on us.

BRIAN

Exactly Father, the tide.

FARRELL

It becomes the elephant in the room.

BRIAN

Elephants. Exactly Father.

DOMINIC

Christ.

FARRELL

The church has let down a lot of people.

Brian is nodding authoritatively.

DOMINIC

Brian, we have to sort out the death certificate.

FARRELL

There were things done that cannot be erased -

DOMINIC

The funeral directors.

FARRELL

What is almost as bad, maybe it is worse Brian: There has been what looks like arrogance. And this has been seized on by some as a cover up. We've let people down on many levels.

BRIAN

(sagely)
Levels.

Dominic turns to Angela.

DOMINIC

Is there someone at the hospital we can ask about the certificate?

FARRELL

I have prayed on this.

ANGELA

There has to be an autopsy -

FARRELL
- prayed on it, in my rooms.

BRIAN
Really?

ANGELA
- because of the way he died.

FARRELL
I'm being brutal honest here. It
made me think about my own
Calling...

DOMINIC
His heart went-

BRIAN
(to Farrell)
Really?

FARRELL
- question my own Vocation.

ANGELA
It'll be some days before you can
do anything-

FARRELL
Thinking about how we have got to
this place-

Brian is nodding eagerly.

DOMINIC
His heart went-

FARRELL
And how do we get back? What can
we do to regain trust?

DOMINIC
He just went down-

BRIAN
(excited)
Exactly Father. That is why I
have to join the church.

DOMINIC
It was just his heart-

Father Farrell catches up on what Brian said.

FARRELL
What?

BRIAN
I think I've seen a way, a ladder
back to God.

Farrell and Dominic both stop at Brian's latest comment.

ANGELA
It's procedure.

FARRELL
(unsure but trying to
continue)
This has been allowed to become
an open sore for the church.

BRIAN
(animated)
And we have to lance the open
sore.

FARRELL
Well in a way-

Brian is adamant.

BRIAN
The church is being destroyed in
all this.

FARRELL
Steady on. We have been attacked
many times in our history.

BRIAN
But this is cancer.

FARRELL
I don't think it's cancer Brian.
More a bout of influenza.

BRIAN
I fear the church is already dead-

DOMINIC
Stop this Brian.

FARRELL
(emphatic)
The church is not dead.

Brian slowly rises form his seat, filled with new
revelation.

BRIAN
And it's like we have to save the
soul of the church.

DOMINIC
Christ Almighty. Will you give it
a miss.

FARRELL
(adamant)
What we need to do is confess our
sins.

Farrell is concentrating on his own argument. He does not see that Brian has started to climb up on a chair and then onto the table.

BRIAN
The body of the church is dead
and we have to save the soul.

DOMINIC
(pleading to his brother
on the table)
Stop this Brian.

Farrell is half turned toward the audience. He does not register what is going on.

FARRELL
(more adamant)
If we have done wrong we must
confess to God.

Brian is on the table, filled with revelation.

ANGELA
I'll get matron.

BRIAN
We are in the Hour-

Dominic is panicking now, Angela runs out.

FARRELL
(still not registering
Brian)
Confess to our sins. Receive
absolution. (beat) Then draw a
line under it all.

BRIAN
(full revelation)
It is the Magic Hour.

DOMINIC
Brian-

BRIAN
That Hour after death. That is
where the church is now.

Farrell turns and sees him on the table.

FARRELL

Where did this fucking Hour come from?

BRIAN

It's the holy time, when you can still get forgiveness.

Farrell is shaking his head, angry.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

I have thought about this. We can save the soul after the body has gone.

FARRELL

Brian. You can't do anything after the body is dead. The soul departs immediately.

BRIAN

What about Jesus? Didn't he rise again after death.

FARRELL

Of course he did.

BRIAN

So had his soul departed his body?

FARRELL

No, but, that was Jesus. We are mortal.

BRIAN

But Jesus was mortal wasn't he?

FARRELL

Well yes-

BRIAN

That's the whole point isn't it? God made his son mortal.

FARRELL

Yes but he was mortal in a different way.

Brian pulls back and stares at the priest.

BRIAN

Father, I think you're spending too much of your Sundays on the football pitch.

DOMINIC

Brian, leave the priest alone.

Brian still standing defiantly on the table.

BRIAN

I'm on a Quest.

DOMINIC

Brian, you're on Skunk.

End of extract.