

Brian Friel

**THE
HOME
PLACE**



Gallery Books

Characters

MARGARET O'DONNELL
CON DOHERTY
SALLY CAVANAGH
JOHNNY MACLOONE
CHRISTOPHER GORE
DAVID GORE
DR RICHARD GORE
PERKINS
CLEMENT O'DONNELL
MARY SWEENEY
TOMMY BOYLE
MAISIE MCLAUGHLIN

Set

Most of the action takes place on the unkempt lawn in front of The Lodge, the home of Christopher Gore and his son, David. The only house-interior we see is the breakfast room at right angles to the stage right. The French windows in this room open on to the lawn.

The house is approached by an (unseen) avenue off right. A crescent of trees encloses the entire house and lawn; it seems to press in on them. This meniscus is most dense down stage left. (Left and right from the point of view of the audience.)

Time and Place

Summer, 1878. Ballybeg, County Donegal, Ireland.

The Home Place was first produced at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, on 1 February 2005, with the following cast:

CHRISTOPHER GORE	Tom Courtenay
MARGARET O'DONNELL	Derbhle Crotty
DR RICHARD GORE	Nick Dunning
CON DOHERTY	Adam Fergus
JOHNNY MACLOONE	Michael Judd
PERKINS	Pat Kinevane
MARY SWEENEY	Brenda Larby
SALLY CAVANAGH	Laura Jane Laughlin
CLEMENT O'DONNELL	Barry McGovern
DAVID GORE	Hugh O'Connor
TOMMY BOYLE	Bill Ó Cléirigh/Kenneth McDonnell
MAISIE MCLAUGHLIN	Leanna Duke/Ciara Lyons

Directed by

Set/Costume Design by

Lighting by

Adrian Noble

Peter McKintosh

Paul Pyant

ACT ONE

for Gary McKeone

An early afternoon in late August. The sun is shining. The countryside is still.

MARGARET O'DONNELL enters right. She is in her early thirties; a handsome woman of intelligence and quiet conviction. She has been to the clothes line off right and carries a large laundry basket. She empties the clothes on to the lawn and begins separating the garments.

Suddenly, in the far distance, a school choir begins singing Thomas Moore's 'Oft in the Stilly Night'.

The music, at first scarcely audible, then slowly increasing in volume, is in opulent three-part harmony. The ethereal, sophisticated singing in this unlikely setting is wondrous.

The moment she becomes aware of the singing MARGARET stands motionless, enraptured. Then she is drawn as if mesmerized to the edge of the lawn, shields her eyes from the sun and looks down at the distant school stage right, the source of the music. She stands there for two full verses, absorbing the music, listening with her whole being, now and then silently mouthing the words of the song.

At the end of the first verse CON DOHERTY emerges suddenly and very briefly from the thicket left. He is in his mid-twenties: lean, keen features. He is soft spoken and very controlled. Everything he says and does is considered. The moment he sees MARGARET he melts back into the thicket.

SALLY CAVANAGH enters the breakfast room with her zinc bucket and shovel. She is in her early twenties; alert, saucy, astute. She goes to the French windows and for a few seconds observes MARGARET in her enchantment.

SALLY Will I clean out the grate now or — ?

She tails off because MARGARET is in a different world. She goes inside and begins lifting the ashes from the grate.

The second verse of the song comes to an end: MARGARET is freed. She picks up her basket and goes towards the breakfast room. Just as she is about to go inside she catches a glimpse of a bird flying above the thicket stage left. She stops and looks for it, but it has vanished.

She goes into the breakfast room and busies herself putting clean antimacassars on the couch and armchairs.

SALLY Must be on the batter again.

MARGARET What's that?

SALLY Your da. He has the choir out in the playground. Do you not hear them?

MARGARET (*Sniffing*) Some of these aren't properly aired.

SALLY Showing off before the boss here; that's why he takes them outside; so that the sound will carry up here to The Lodge. Wasting his time: Mr Gore pays no heed to him.

MARGARET Weren't ironed properly either (*antimacassars*).

SALLY All the same no teacher ever made them sing as well as your aul' fella does — especially when he's on the batter. And the drunker he is the better they sing for him. Strange that, isn't it?

MARGARET When you're finished there put the chickens back into the henhouse.

SALLY You told me to let them out.

MARGARET The falcon's back. I'll have to get someone up to shoot him. The sergeant will do it for me.

SALLY Did I hear Mr Gore leave very early this morning?

MARGARET Before breakfast. David and himself. The memorial service for Lord Lifford.

SALLY Doesn't seem all that long, does it?

MARGARET This day four weeks exactly.

SALLY That long? God, that was one dirty job. And no sign of the peelers lifting anybody either.

MARGARET They will in time.

SALLY I hope they do. Well maybe I do — God knows

they've questioned enough. Every man and boy in the parish must have been dragged in. All the same he was a bad beast, Lifford. The Lecher Lifford — wasn't he well named?

MARGARET Put a newspaper under that bucket, Sally.

SALLY I worked there for a whole year, you know. And I was only twelve at the time. Until my brother Manus came and took me away.

MARGARET You've told me.

SALLY If Lifford had been about that day Manus would have given the bugger a hammering he wouldn't have forgot. Listen!

Stopped (*music*). Your da's probably nipped across to the pub. In all the four years I was at school he never let me into the choir — just because my name was Cavanagh. 'Never met a Cavanagh who wasn't a crow.'

MARGARET Our visitors are leaving this evening. You can change the sheets in the guest room; and the towels.

SALLY You must have been in his choir in your day?

MARGARET I was.

SALLY Course you were. Weren't you his pet? (*Pause*) Do you never go home now at all, Maggie?

MARGARET You'll need to dig some potatoes for the dinner. And take down the curtains in the sitting room and soak them in cold water. And clean the windows in the pantry.

SALLY Anything else, Maggie?

MARGARET Don't forget to put the chickens inside.

MARGARET goes into the house. SALLY finishes her job at the grate and goes out to the lawn to empty the ashes off stage right. CON emerges from the thicket left.

CON (*Whispers*) Sally!

She looks round, alarmed. She sees him. A second

of unease: is MARGARET watching? Now she dashes to the right and flings the bucket recklessly into the trees. Then, brushing down her dress, she crosses quickly to CON. They talk in whispers.

SALLY Are you off your head? You shouldn't be jouking about up here!
CON That's a great welcome.
SALLY When did you get back from England?
CON At three this morning.
SALLY God, it was the longest two weeks ever! What were you at over there?
CON Meeting people; travelling around; addressing small groups.
SALLY That must have been rare fun.
CON Has to be done.
SALLY Just you and that queer bucko from Dungannon — Stephen — ?

He puts a finger on her lips.

CON Shhh.
SALLY And why are you dodging about up here?
CON To see you, Sally.
SALLY I'm sure! You look exhausted, Con.
CON The two visitors are still here?
SALLY Leaving today.
CON What time?
SALLY This evening, I think. Why?
CON They're going straight to the Aran Islands?
SALLY How do you know that? What are you up to, Con?
CON Look at that anxious face.

Another figure emerges from the thicket and stands beside CON. JOHNNY MACLOONE is a very large man in his sixties.

SALLY Who's he? Who are you?
CON He's from Meendoran.

SALLY What's your name?
CON Johnny MacLoone.
SALLY What are you doing up here?
CON He's with me.
SALLY Will you let the dummy speak!
JOHNNY Mind your mouth, girl.
SALLY He's not a dummy!
JOHNNY Watch yourself, woman.
CON He's a friend of mine, Sally.
SALLY What's all this about?
CON Will you meet me tonight?

MARGARET has returned to the breakfast room with fresh cushion covers.

MARGARET Sally!
SALLY Bitch. (Calls) Coming! (To CON) Where?
CON Behind Roarty's forge.
SALLY When?
CON I have to meet somebody at eight. Ten o'clock?
SALLY Jesus, Con, you're not up to something stupid, are you?
CON If you're not there at ten I won't wait.

She gives him a quick, flirtatious kiss on the cheek.

SALLY Yes, you will. (To JOHNNY) 'Bye, chatterbox.

She runs back to the breakfast room. The two men merge into the thicket.

I left the bucket of ashes sitting here, didn't I?
MARGARET Were you talking to somebody?
SALLY What's that?
MARGARET Who were you talking to, Sally?
SALLY Con Doherty from Ballybeg.
MARGARET I thought that wastrel had left the country?
SALLY Comes and goes.