

THE IRISH CURSE is dedicated to the memory of Patrick Quinn, who dedicated his life to improving the lives of actors everywhere.

ACT I

(A small plain meeting hall in Saint Sebastian Catholic Church in Brooklyn Heights. It is about 5:30 on a rainy Wednesday afternoon in late summer. There is a bank of windows on one side of the room and a door on the other.)

(JOSEPH FLAHERTY, an ex-Georgian in his forties, enters the room. He is short, chubby, dressed quite conservatively, and has what under better circumstances would be an Irish choirboy's face. He carries a briefcase. He finds a light switch and turns on the lights. He is followed by RICK BALDWIN. RICK is early twenties, well-built, smart, with an expansive, buoyant personality. He searches his backpack as JOSEPH sets up folding chairs.)

RICK. So I get on the bus – I'm psyched – I had a pretty cool day – I do the Metrocard thing – I say "how ya doin'" to the driver – he grins, he knows me, he's my bud – and I'm like – where's a seat – cause the frigging bus is packed – stuffed – like full – so I glance all the way to the back seat – and sitting there – like a frigging madonna or something – is –

JOSEPH. OUCH!

(JOSEPH squeals and drops a chair. His furiously grabs his finger. There is rage on his face; he looks as if he has just been thrown into a Dante's seventh circle of Hell.)

RICK. What?!

JOSEPH. I caught my finger – in the goddamn chair –!

RICK. You okay? Is it bleeding?

JOSEPH. Great! I just said "goddamn" in church –

RICK. Let me look at it –

JOSEPH. You're not a doctor!

RICK. Sort of!

JOSEPH. "Sort of!" "Sort of!"

RICK. I know enough to help with a pinched finger.

JOSEPH. (*bending his finger*) It's all right!

RICK. You sure?

JOSEPH. Yes. See!

(*He wiggles his hand, trying to make it better.*)

Ouch! Shit! Now I just said shit!

(*Making a face, JOSEPH goes back to lining up the chairs. He's making a big show of doing it with a hurt digit. RICK gets a protein bar and a fruit smoothie from his backpack.*)

RICK. So – coming here – on the bus – I'm looking down the aisle – and there, like a frigging mental vision – there's this babe – this frigging goddess – I mean, hi-ya-momma – Joseph, she is so checking me out – I check her out – she smiles – I smile – I let her know I'm interested – we get off the bus – together – walk through the rain – I chat her up – she's a bonds trader –

JOSEPH. Rick –

RICK. – taking the frigging the bus–

JOSEPH. – are you gonna – ?

RICK. – we go into Starbucks –

JOSEPH. – let me – ?

RICK. – we chat some more –

JOSEPH. – you're not gonna – are you – ?

RICK. Huh?

JOSEPH. – are you going to help me?!?

RICK. (*understanding*) Oh.

JOSEPH. Oh!

RICK. Sorry. I'm an "A" hole.

(*unwraps the protein bar and helps JOSEPH with the chairs*)

RICK. Anyway – we have a couple of Frappaccino lattes – they're good – I go into the john – coffee goes right through me – she follows me – she fricking follows me! – We make out in the john – in the john – with release! – Then she gives her number – get this – get this – her name is Wednesday – swear to God – babe's name is Wednesday!

JOSEPH. There's always a babe, isn't there, Rick?

RICK. Huh?

JOSEPH. I mean – you're on the bus, you're on the subway, on your bike, at the gym, at church, Mickey D's –

RICK. I don't do Mickey D's, Joseph. Too greasy. I don't eat fast food –

JOSEPH. There's always a babe. Always checking you out. Always asking you home –

RICK. This sounds like a jealousy issue –

JOSEPH. Don't use that stuff against me!

RICK. You used the stuff about the babes – !

JOSEPH. Because you were talking about babes!

RICK. I was telling you about something that happened.

JOSEPH. Did it, Rick? Did it really happen? Is there really always a babe?

RICK. What's with you?

JOSEPH. I want to know. Is there always a babe? If there is could you steer one in my direction? Introduce me around? Talk me up? Because I swear, if I don't get laid soon, I'm going to fuck that folding chair.

RICK. Joseph – you're in church!

JOSEPH. I already said "shit" and "goddamn."

(*STEPHEN enters, soaking wet and in a lousy mood. He loudly announces to the others:*)

STEPHEN. I hate this fucking city.

RICK. Look, Joey, you just need to relax –

JOSEPH. I have told you a million times – do not – on pain of death and disfigurement – do not call me Joey –

RICK. Sorry –

JOSEPH. Italian boys are named Joey. Someone who gets killed by the Mob is named Joey! My name is Joseph. I know it sounds Italian, thereby giving you some tacit permission to shorten it to Joey, but I am Irish and it is Joseph!

RICK. Okay. Joseph. Relax. You'll get laid, bud. It'll happen. Then you'll tell me about it!

JOSEPH. Easy for you to say. You and your "babes."

RICK. Well...I'm a hottie.

JOSEPH. Don't mess up what you got at home. Okay? All that screwing around behind her back. That girl loves you. She doesn't care about your limitations. Or your shortcomings –

RICK. Bite me, choir boy!

JOSEPH. What?!

RICK. My *limitations* – !

JOSEPH. I didn't mean it like that –

RICK. My *shortcomings* – !

JOSEPH. Ricky, come on, it's just a figure of – !

STEPHEN. You two are like a couple of old queens –

RICK. You don't even know what this is all about – !

STEPHEN. I don't give a shit – both of ya – just shut your fucking traps!!

JOSEPH. And what are you gonna do if we don't? Handcuff us? Take us over to the station house? *Shoot* us? Here. Let me go for my wallet so you got an *excuse!*

STEPHEN. (*He sits, takes out an iPhone and taps away on it.*) Know something, Joseph? When I met you – I thought you were a fag –

JOSEPH. You *what?*

RICK. Oh, God –

STEPHEN. I thought you were a big ol' queer –

RICK. We're *never* gone hear the end of this!

STEPHEN. A *major* homo sissy boy –

JOSEPH. And why did you think that, Stephen?

RICK. 'Cause you're a priss ass –

STEPHEN. Naw, that's not it –

RICK. 'Cause he wouldn't screw his wife so she dumped him for another guy?

JOSEPH. You Yankee piece of shit – !

STEPHEN. (*mockingly*) We're in a *church*, for Chrissake!

RICK. Z'at why?!

STEPHEN. No, Staten Island Ferry Boy, that's not why –

RICK. Then *what?*!!

STEPHEN. Queers don't like their names to be shortened. They want to be called by their entire name. Not Joey or Joe. *Joseph*. Not Mike or Mikey. *Michael*.

JOSEPH. Not Steve or Stevie.

(*pointedly*)

Stephen.

STEPHEN. Yeah.

JOSEPH. Well I'm *not* gay.

STEPHEN. Duh.

JOSEPH. What's *that* supposed mean?

STEPHEN. It means "duh."

JOSEPH. I know it means "duh." What did you *mean* by "duh."

RICK. He meant "duh."

JOSEPH. But what's "duh" supposed to *mean?*

STEPHEN. It means "duh."

(*grinning at him*)

Duh.

JOSEPH. You think just 'cause you're so handsome – because you are so goddamn good-looking –

STEPHEN. I'm tall, too – don't forget tall –

JOSEPH. Well, you can't talk to me like that!

STEPHEN. After we all finished, I got up. The bailiff started to laugh. He said I musta been lying on the steno machine. I had the keyboard imprinted over my ass. So I made the stenographer type on me.

(A boyish-looking man of about 50 enters. He is in a priest's collar and uniform. This is FATHER KEVIN SHAUNESSY. Behind KEVIN, in the doorway, is a sexy young Irishman in his late twenties, KEIRAN RILEY.)

KEVIN. These are the other guys – Keiran, come on inside.

RICK. Yeah, we don't bite.

STEPHEN. *(eyeing KEIRAN)* Unless you ask –

KEVIN. Gentlemen, this is Keiran. Stephen. Joseph. And –

RICK. *(extending his hand to KEIRAN)* Rick. Rick Baldwin.

KEIRAN. *(with an Irish lilt)* Are you one of the Baldwins?

RICK. Naw. But I did meet Alec once. You know, like in person, he has chest hair growing up to his chin?

KEIRAN. Does he?

RICK. Yeah, he's a freak.

KEIRAN. I like his performances in the fillums.

STEPHEN. *(shaking KEIRAN's hand)* You really are Irish.

KEIRAN. Reilly on my father's side. Gallagher on me mum's.

STEPHEN. Dad was a Fitzgerald. Ma was a Rice.

KEIRAN. Do you know their counties?

STEPHEN. Naw. We're like fourth generation.

KEIRAN. You're an awfully big lad, Stephen. What do you do? Some sort of sport?

STEPHEN. I'm an undercover cop. We track down illegals. You got a green card?

KEIRAN. Well, I – I – I have it right here – somewhere –

STEPHEN. Kidding, guy! It was a joke!

(pause)

Like I would bust a woof like you.

KEIRAN. A "woof?"

* Start

KEVIN. *(knows where this is going)* It's an American expression, Keiran. It means – a –

STEPHEN. *(interrupting, laying on the charm)* A pal. A bud. Like someone you just met.

KEIRAN. Oh. I like that. A woof.

STEPHEN. *(looking at him, like a dog)* Woof!

KEVIN. Stephen –

RICK. Down boy.

KEIRAN. *(shaking hands)* Joseph. Right?

JOSEPH. That's correct.

KEIRAN. Are you – ?

JOSEPH. My daddy's people were Flahertys. My poor mama was a Mulrooney. Oil and water! Oil and water! Mama used to say living with a Flaherty was like living with your own black cloud. She walked right out when I was fourteen. Said it was that or hanging herself and being a good Catholic she just couldn't find it in her heart to commit a mortal sin with no possibility of redemption. I hated her at the time but I have come to see she was acting not out of selfishness but self-preservation. She was an exceptional woman.

KEIRAN. *(not expecting that much detail)* I'm sure she was.

KEVIN. Well. I guess that's everybody. We should start. I'll make the speech.

STEPHEN. *(as they all sit)* Do you need to?

KEVIN. It's required when we have someone new.

RICK. Oh you just like making speeches!

(to KEIRAN)

Father Kevin does a little acting. On the side.

KEIRAN. Does he now?

STEPHEN. Oh yeah.

KEVIN. Stephen –

STEPHEN. He was on *Law and Order* last week.

RICK. Playing a priest!

JOSEPH. He was *very* good.

KEVIN. It was only a few lines. One scene. We were in the courtroom. I had heard this young hoodlum's confession and they wanted me to break my vows and repeat what he had said but I wouldn't.

(pause)

I got to cry.

KEIRAN. I saw it! You were good!

KEVIN. It's the third time I've been on. Haven't had a top of the show credit yet. There's always next season.

KEIRAN. Do you mind me asking – did you make good money?

KEVIN. Yeah. I'm going to use it to get new pictures. Okay. Here's the speech. I think you'll appreciate hearing it.

KEIRAN. Especially from a film star.

KEVIN. Not really a film star –

KEIRAN. Well a telly star, then!

KEVIN. (taking a moment, preparing, doing his "speech") Good evening, everyone. I'm Father Kevin Shaunessy.

RICK, STEPHEN, JOSPEH. Hi, Father Kevin.

KEVIN. I'm the pastor here at Saint Sebastians. And I'd like to welcome you all tonight. This is a *support* group. That's why we're all here. I will be acting as moderator. There's a phone list on the table. My number's there if need it. Add yours if there're any changes. Now. You'll each take a turn. Talk about what's on your mind this week. And oh – please turn off your cellphones. A couple of rules. This is a house of God. No profanity. You can talk about whatever you *need* to but try to exercise a little good taste and discretion –

STEPHEN. That's directed at me.

KEIRAN. Is it?

STEPHEN. I have a sex addiction. I go to *that* group on Tuesdays.

KEIRAN. You have a sex addiction in addition to – ?

STEPHEN. Yeah. Probably *because* of it.

KEVIN. Keiran, I know this is uncomfortable for you but I think you should start. Tell us about how you found us and – uhm – well – just go ahead –

(KEIRAN sits there in silence for a long time. His mouth is dry and he isn't sure what to say.)

KEVIN. Take your time.

KEIRAN. Do I have to say *everything*?

KEVIN. As much as you feel comfortable sharing.

KEIRAN. I mean, you want to know about my – my –

KEVIN. Well – if you – want to – talk about it –

KEIRAN. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph...

(*horrified*)

In detail?! Like a description?!

KEVIN. No. NO! Just your feelings *about* it.

KEIRAN. Oh, thank God!

STEPHEN. Damn.

KEVIN. Ste-phen.

STEPHEN. It's what I live for.

(KEVIN takes a moment to get on track.)

KEVIN. Well then. Okay. Keiran.

(*like he's on a set*)

"Action!"

(*Silence. KEIRAN looks at JOSEPH.*)

KEIRAN. How do I start?

JOSEPH. You can sit or stand –

KEIRAN. I'll sit.

RICK. Introduce yourself, say why you're here.

KEIRAN. Don't know if I can –

RICK. What?

KEIRAN. Say the words – out loud –

KEVIN. Keiran, that's the point of the group. When you say things out loud, they lose their power.

KEIRAN. Can someone else go first, please? So I can see how it's done.

KEVIN. Well –

KEIRAN. Just this once!

RICK. All right! Look! *I'll* do it! I'll go!

KEIRAN. Thank you, Rick.

RICK. Hi. My name is Rick. Don't do the "Hi, Rick" thing. I'm twenty-two years old. I live on Staten Island. I go to Staten Island College. I'm studying sports medicine. And the reason I'm here is because I got a small dick. I mean really small. *Really*. Small. Like *small*. Like from the children's menu. Growing up, I always heard it called the Irish Curse. It mostly only happens to us full-blooded Irish guys. Not *all* full-blooded Irish guys because my best bud Dylan is full-blooded Irish and he's hung like giraffe.

(to KEIRAN)

We take showers together. After b-ball. Trust me. The Curse runs in my family. My father's got it. So do both my bros. One of them actually tried to off himself 'cause of it. Dumb fuck.

(to KEVIN)

Sorry.

(back to KEIRAN)

He's okay now. The freak. He took pills. Everything I read about guys with small dicks goes on and on about how it's "all in their head" and "it doesn't make a difference" and my personal favorite, that "it ain't the meat it's the motion" bullshit – sorry, Father – I just get really pissed off because those guys writing those columns are obviously walking around with a Happy Meal in their pants. And I would like to have dragged their collective asses down to the hospital where my bro was lying there with a tube down his throat and make them tell him to his face the size of his dick doesn't matter. It matters! It matters to me. It matters to him.

It matters to all us guys who got royally fucked in that department. And Father, I'm not going to apologize for saying fucked. When I was growing up – I only ever saw my dad and my bros – so I never thought I was different from the other guys. Then when I got to middle school – that's when I found out I was a frigging freak –

KEVIN. Rick. Self esteem.

RICK. Yeah. Right. Self esteem. "I am not my penis." I only *think* I am. I have a lot of trouble not going there – to that dark place. I'm working on it. I even got my dad and both my bros working on it. But they're Irish. Optimism is not exactly a word in their dictionary. I love what I do. Studying the sports medicine. I'm a sports nut. B-ball. Hockey. I run. Hanging around with athletes I learned this trick. I thought they were kidding but they all do it. *Wear a jock*. Always. Under your street clothes. Especially under *jeans*. It takes what you got. Shoves it up front and center. And I stuff it. A sock. Nice white sports tube. Loosely rolled. Great basket, huh?

(modeling for KEIRAN)

It's an illusion but most of Manhattan's walking around with more than what God gave 'em. Anyway. That's my sad story. Boo-hoo. "A million guys out there like me." "Least I got a penis." "It works, doesn't it?" "Yes it does." Any other comments and questions can be e-mailed to me at "Rick-I-Got-A-Small-Dick".com. *Real* website.

(making a fist, raising it)

Self-esteem!

KEVIN. Thank you, Rick.

RICK. Sure. Happy to do it, Father.

KEVIN. You can sit down now.

KEIRAN. Wait.

RICK. Huh?

KEIRAN. You never said *why* you were here?

STEPHEN. Because his schlong is the size of baby corn.

RICK. I wasn't trying to fool you! I was trying to give you some hope. That's all! 'Cause the babes really do check me out –

STEPHEN. 'Cause you got a fucking sock in your pants!!!!

RICK. At least I'm trying, okay!!!! At least I'm making an effort –

STEPHEN. At *what!*

RICK. At being *happy!* Something you are *completely* incapable of!!

STEPHEN. Like you even know who I am!

RICK. I know who you are. We all do. Keiran spent twenty minutes with you and had you pegged. You are sad. Sad and unhappy and lonely. Lonely like Joseph here is lonely and maybe like Father Kevin's lonely and probably Keiran is lonely, too. Lonely like I was before I met my girl. The stupid thing is that we do it to ourselves. Because we think we're not good enough or worthy enough to be in a relationship because we don't have what all the other guys have. I mean, come on – who wants to have sex with a guy with a baby dick? You obviously don't. How many gay men do you speak for? How many *women?* That's gotta be the tape going through our heads every waking second of the day. Because we're guys and what makes us guys is that we have dicks and balls. And when you think you don't have a dick and balls, you must not be a guy.

STEPHEN. Shoving a sock down your pants makes it all better?

RICK. Not *all* better. But better. Wanna know something else? Those babes who look at me? I love those looks. It makes me feel great. Who gives a rat's ass if it's me they're eyeing or the sports sock?

STEPHEN. But it's a lie!

RICK. Who cares if it's a lie? I'm not *selling* them anything. Just a nice look at a big basket. I've only ever had sex with one woman in my life. Angela. And I would never do anything to hurt her. I look at other women but I always go home to her. She knows that.

**Start*

STEPHEN. Are you afraid to have sex with other woman?

RICK. I don't have sex with other women because I love my girlfriend. I know that's inconceivable to you but it's true. I'm a nice Irish Catholic boy, Stephen. Little white lies and all.

KEVIN. You two finished?

STEPHEN. (*after a long beat*) I was wrong. Some guys *are* growers, not showers.

(*The others relax; looking over at RICK.*)

You oughta write gay porn. The story about your buddy at the gym. How big *was* he?

RICK. Soft – two inches. Hard – seven and a half!

STEPHEN. Jee-sus!

(*Silence as they all reflect on that.*)

KEVIN. And with *that* in mind – Joseph?

JOSEPH. Where was I? Oh yeah... Keiran, I'm shy. I've always been shy. When you're five five and balding at sixteen and got a penis that looks like something you'd pop off a bottle of grape Nehi, you got two choices. You can be one of those Napoleon complex nut jobs – or you go the other way – which is to clam up and pretend you don't exist because then no one would ever say anything to you about being short and bald and you stay away from girls because, well, girls are known to like men who can satisfy them and how could a guy with a thumb penis satisfy anyone? So you pray no one will talk to you or ask you any questions and you throw yourself into your work and that's what life is and probably will always be. About work. About being invisible.

KEIRAN. But you were married –

JOSEPH. My crazy wife just took one look at me and fell in love. Don't ask me to explain. She said she liked short guys and that I wasn't a braggart or obnoxious or mean. She liked that I was smart and I could help her with her studies. Which I did. I was so amazed someone could love me like that – I treated her like she was – I don't know – a miracle from God. Which she was –

(remembering)

JOSEPH. (cont.) The most amazing thing, Keiran, the absolute most amazing thing was that she loved sex. Not just liked. Loved. Morning, noon, and night. And she didn't care about my size. She was a virgin on our wedding night and didn't know any different –

RICK. She musta thought *all* guys had bottle tops –

STEPHEN. That's ridiculous! She musta seen a statue of David once. A picture in a magazine!

JOSEPH. She wasn't very worldly, Stephen. She'd never seen any porn. She'd never seen an erect penis! I mean, where would she have? Then the world started to change and there were all these naked guys on cable tv and the Internet – I started getting paranoid about what kind of lover I was – we started having less sex – I was never very good at it anyway – my paranoia didn't help – I was just so small I kept slipping out –

STEPHEN. That's the reason I'm alive today!

JOSEPH. How's that?

STEPHEN. I was lousy at sex. I didn't like to receive, you know, and I couldn't give – I mean, you want to fuck the guy, right, not make him laugh – that's when I started getting all paranoid about my size – when I made the decision – I just started doing blow jobs – never having real sex, you know – I think it saved my life, because of AIDS and stuff –

RICK. So the cocktail wiener saved your life, huh?

(STEPHEN *nods.*)

KEIRAN. Fate's a funny thing.

STEPHEN. I have this friend. He's always bragging about his nine inches of pink steel. What I wouldn't give to just once know what that was like. I mean, there are guys with twelve inches – twelve inches – that's a fucking ruler!

RICK. I can't even imagine –

- end -

STEPHEN. I can! Having that between your legs? I mean seriously, take a ruler sometime and hold it at the base of your cock and see where it hits. I mean, it goes to your knees!

JOSEPH. I've tried it –

RICK. Yeah?

KEIRAN. So have I.

KEVIN. Haven't we all?

STEPHEN. Look at this! Even Kevin's done it! He's a priest! And you want to know why I'm so obsessed with size! It's like guys who don't have any money – it's all they fucking talk about.

RICK. I have a question. Who here has actually measured their dick?

(*They all raise their hands. Even FATHER KEVIN.*)

JOSEPH. I keep doing it – over and over – like it's going to get bigger when I'm not looking –

KEIRAN. I can't believe you've said that –

JOSEPH. You too?

(KEIRAN *nods.* So does STEPHEN.)

STEPHEN. Once a day for me –

RICK. Every Sunday night.

STEPHEN. Okay. So who used to think that if you jerked off a lot it would get bigger?

KEIRAN. A book I read *said* it would – !

JOSEPH. I think I read that book –

RICK. We *all* read that book –

STEPHEN. The other thing I've been wondering – do you think there's a support group for guys who are really hung?

RICK. What do *you* think?

KEIRAN. Makes you wonder what they would complain about –

KEVIN. Now come on – those guys have problems, too.