



SCENES FROM
A HOMECOMING

SCENE ONE

FERGUS ANTHONY



Scenes from a Homecoming

SCENE ONE

Fergus Anthony



Scenes from a Homecoming
Scene one
Fergus Anthony

Copyright © 2022 Fergus Anthony Chapman
All rights reserved.
Cover designed by Fergus Anthony Chapman.

contact: fergusanthonywrites@gmail.com
blog: www.fergusanthony.com

CONTENTS

Scenes from a Homecoming

[Scene 1](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also Available](#)

[Join Me](#)

SCENE 1

Frank Moran entered his childhood bedroom for the first time in over twenty years. He flicked on the light switch; a forty-watt bulb in its dusty shade gave the room a derelict patina. He went to the window to draw back the curtains and see the room in natural light. His head pulled away as the opening curtain revealed a new darkness. A beat or two before Frank realised tinfoil covered the glass. He stepped away and looked about the room, as if the explanation were somewhere in the shadows.

A thin brown line, drawn by years of damp, defined the edges of each roll of wallpaper. The same paper Frank had helped his father to hang? The old man taught him to align each roll so the pattern moved unbroken around the room, bright flowers and birds in flight. Could it really be the same paper? Now the flowers had lost their bloom and the birds were phantom wings; the ghosts of angels.

The bed was definitely the same, a small brass double handed down from Frank's grandmother. He returned from work one day to find his own bed broken up for firewood and this mini monstrosity in its place. When he asked what was going on, his father nodded towards the room, 'You won't be riding any women in this house.' If he had known Frank was still a virgin, the old man would have been secretly ashamed and worried his son was a queer. When Frank sat on the bed for the first time, his misery amplified the sound of the springs so much he felt sure they would hear it on the moon. The metal frame moved like a ship in a storm and he joked that was what killed his grandmother. His old man slapped him in the face. 'Don't be a gobshite all your life!'

Now, Frank scoffed at the bed and few bits of furniture: softly curving hand-me-downs in walnut and mahogany that he didn't realise were antiques and worth a fortune. The landscape of his childhood, less real to him now than the movie sets he had come to dominate. In his mind it compared very badly to the angular severity of his home in Los Angeles. He had only gone into the room to use the mirror.

Frank stood 6 foot 2 in the bedroom mirror. He had to strain to study his appearance in the dirty glass. His teeth were whiter than in his youth and his hair reflected the same Elvis-black it had since he first left home. He stopped the examination, distracted by a gang of sepia ancestors looking over his shoulder. His great-grandfather in his Connaught Rangers uniform posed in a make-believe grotto, artificial sunlight shining on his bald head. The photograph had been taken a few days before he went to fight in the second Boer War. The regimental motto *Quis Separabit* (Who will separate us), in faded black ink across the bottom of the photograph was added by his widow when she received word he had been killed. Beneath that photograph, almost an echo, Frank's grandfather in his British army uniform, going this time to kill *The Hun*. Although the Kaiser had been a good friend to Ireland, the promise of Irish freedom was more important. As a child Frank heard these and other stories. He tried to imagine their lives; tried to view the world through their eyes. What kind of men were they? His father presented another shining head, but no uniform. Frank glanced at his old man in the past and then stepped back from the mirror. He turned to face the gallery of baldies, all but one.

Uncle Peter. Frank was 10 years younger than Uncle Peter, who was 10 years younger than Frank's father. As a child Frank marvelled the symmetry. Uncle Peter was always well dressed, and at seventeen became a founding member of the Musical Society. Coupled with his camp manner, this led some people to conclude that Peter was a queer. Why else did he not have a girlfriend? In fact, Peter had a type. He saw *Bringing Up Baby* when he was seven years of age and fell in love with Katherine Hepburn. He adopted Cary Grant as a style icon because that, he was sure, would lead to her. But there was no Katherine Hepburn in his small Irish town, and so when sex became the most important thing in the world, his love life consisted of discreet affairs with various wives while he saved up his fare to America. He loved music, movies and thrillers, and introduced his nephew to the songs of Jacques Brel, the novels of Ian Fleming, and the movies of Cary Grant, telling young Frank MacGillycuddy that Grant's real name was Archibald Leech and that he had grown up in poverty in England; then he went to America, became Cary Grant, and from that moment on, his life was an *Amazing Adventure*. As a parting gift before leaving Ireland Uncle Peter taught Frank *The James Bond Test*: when in doubt about your wardrobe, always defer to James Bond. Ask yourself, 'Is this something James Bond would wear?' if the answer is 'No', take it off.

Uncle Peter's actual parting gift was the idea of America and a new name as escape routes to a better life. At the time, Frank had recently started secondary school where he was given the nickname *Fartboy*, partly because he shared a name with a mountain range: MacGillycuddy's Reeks, and partly because on his first day, a teacher whom they would come to know as *The Farting Teacher*, (sometimes also called *The*

Pennyfarther, because he cycled to work.) sniffed the air and said, 'Who cut their finger? God lads, somebody reeks in this classroom.'

Some of the kids sniffed the air without catching any smell, but that didn't stop one boy shouting out, 'MacGillycuddy, sir.'

'What's that?'

'Sir, MacGillycuddy Reeks, sir.'

'Oh very good. Very good.'

'Sir, I never farted, sir.'

'Now now, MacGillycuddy, don't be telling lies.'

'I did not fart.' Frank turned from the teacher to the boy, and almost cursed him, but the teacher spoke first, 'Watch it, boy.'

'Sir, I did not fart. I swear it.'

The teacher smiled at the classroom as he spoke, inviting the kids to join him. 'Methinks he doth protest too much, what, lads?'

His new classmates' laughter and being singled out by the bullying teacher shocked Frank. He expected secondary school to be different, an improvement on the random violence of primary school. Now he decided it was just an older version. His classmates were gobshite farmers and the teacher was a prick. Well, Frank decided, at least he wasn't one of them. He might have to suffer now, but he made up his mind that he was only passing through.

'Sir, methinks a pig always smells his own first. Sir!' The wide-eyed silence that followed focused the attention of the class on Frank. He loved it, so different from moments before. He had changed the room. But now, he knew, he would pay for it.

'Is that right?' the teacher tapped a finger on his desk. 'Up here. Fartboy.'

Frank received *six of the best* (the edge of a ruler across his knuckles) for using offensive language, and another six for lying about having farted. For the next two years, until the Farting Teacher retired, Frank was his whipping boy.

Uncle Peter was in his mid-twenties in the photograph, a headshot sent from New York where he was trying to become a star on Broadway. He wrote that he was in the process of changing his name to Cash Huxley, so that when he finally met his idol he could shake his hand and say, 'I'm Cash,' and get the reply, 'I'm Cary. Hey, Cash and Cary. We should do a movie together.' 'Huxley,' Peter explained, was 'David Huxley', Cary Grant's character in *Bringing Up Baby*. The letter finished with Peter's belief that Grant would take young Cash Huxley under his wing and show him the ropes and guide him through that magical and dangerous world. When Frank eventually got to America he tried to find his Uncle, but no one he spoke to had ever heard of either Cash Huxley or Peter MacGillycuddy. A couple of people thought they recognised a face in the photograph Frank brought with him. He looked like someone they might have known a long time ago. A couple of people thought the photograph was the work of Billy Name. It wasn't, it was just a photo Frank brought from home. Billy Name meant nothing to Frank, and he thought they were making fun of him, like the *Long Weight* he had been sent to collect in his first job. (After ten minutes someone asked, 'Is that long enough for you?') One man though it was a picture of his former barber, *but I don't think he was Irish, and he moved anyway. Not sure where.* If Frank had persisted he would have discovered the barber was married in Albany. He had three children: Cary, David, and Francis, and his wife looked like Katherine Hepburn.

All that remained was the letter which Frank had kept, although he hadn't thought about it or read it in years. Now, looking at the headshot, Frank saw a different Uncle Peter, not cool but lost, and he smiled to think how this deluded man had set the course of his life. He smiled at a thick line of scalp that showed where Uncle Peter parted his hair. Had he done anything about it? Or followed the family tradition? In his own mid-twenties Frank found a similar thick line on his head. He touched his hair where the line had been; thank God for transplants.

Quickly Frank turned to the mirror. Did his clothes pass the test? They did. Now he was ready. That readiness gave weight to his muscles. He trembled like a first-night actor in a play. But this was not a play he wanted to be in, at least not in this place. If it were a movie script he would have turned it down. He shivered. He had been there three days now and had yet to go into town. He hadn't even looked up his old friends. Still, he felt disappointed they hadn't looked him up. All necessary arrangements had been made over the phone. He took a taxi straight from the airport to the house. When the driver asked 'What do you do yourself?', and Frank told him, the journey became an education in the genius of Steven Segal:

'Pure mighty, his fillums are!' Frank made appropriate noises at appropriate moments and an hour later arrived at his childhood home with a new appreciation for both Steven Segal and the world he, Frank, had escaped.

He found what he suddenly thought of as *the latchkey* under a flowerpot by the backdoor. The same flowerpot as when he was a child? Maybe. He picked up the key and let himself into the house.

Now, confronting his ancestors, Frank heard the sound of a car pulling up outside. Automatically he looked to the window, and then shook his head. Why had his father done that? Why cover the glass with tinfoil? It looked like something that belonged in a gallery. Frank crossed the room and stood for a moment before this flimsy artwork. He pictured his father at an art exhibition, and laughed because it was too ridiculous. The foil was thicker in some parts than in others, and patches of dirt, coloured by time and the weather, looked arranged to form a pattern. Newer patches, small silver squares and rectangles caught the light and drew the eye. He scratched a jagged patch of morning from the foil and put his eye to the glass. A broken old couch on the lawn took him by surprise, although he'd looked and wondered at it when he arrived. He turned his attention to the cars parked just outside the wall, and listened to the sound of an engine rev. Would the driver sound his horn?

It was time. Frank closed his eyes and drew a breath, in through the nose and out through the mouth, to centre himself; again, again. He went to the mirror to check his clothes and hair one last time. 'Looking good.' He nodded. 'You can do this.'

Frank opened the front door to his father's house and stepped out into a glorious morning. It was the kind of Irish summer he remembered only from postcards. Lustrous blues and eloquent greens called across the world inviting whoever had money to come *Visit Beautiful...* wherever. He took a moment to fill his lungs with good fresh country air. A faint smell of cow shit surprised him with a sense of freedom. For a moment he forgot why he had returned. Then something flickered at the edge of his vision and Frank looked up to see a raven; a note of evil, he thought, a moment of darkness, climbing, diving and wheeling in the blue. He watched the bird fly over the fields and out past the new houses his father had written him about. When was that? Jesus, it must have been twenty years ago. He recalled his father's description: 'Piles of shite! Plasterboard and timber stuck together with a few bits of nails. Someone is going to get killed.' Beyond the houses, Frank knew, what remained of the town hung on after suffering the effects of a bypass. What had been passing trade now simply passed, taking jobs along the way. More jobs vanished when a supermarket complex opened about ten miles away. Frank wondered if there was anything he could do to help the town, his home town, the town that had made him, recover. He immediately waved the idea aside, it was just cheap sentimentality.

A week earlier in LA this trip ached with romance. Frank saw himself returning home in a blaze of glory. The children he had known jostling to claim acquaintance with the man he had become, the star he had become; the vindication of all his earlier hopes. Now, standing on the threshold of his childhood home, doubt held his hand. It was just a strange town in the arsehole of nowhere. The children he had known were gone, consumed by adults he had never met, and all of his earlier hopes meant nothing. He looked down to the cars and found a black Mercedes limousine waiting for him. He hadn't ordered the car, and when, at the removal, the undertaker had arranged to pick him up, Frank assumed it would be an ordinary car. But no, they sent a fucking limo! Worse, it was the same model the gossip magazines said Frank owned, but which he couldn't actually afford. Now, nervous about turning up to his father's funeral in a limo, Frank also worried that if he refused the car, and walked, people would find fault with that too. He pulled the door closed and walked down the path. He found himself admiring the scrolling metalwork of the gate. In Frank's childhood this gate inspired the hope of sculpture. He pictured great iron masterpieces rolling across the fields. Only he and the cows would understand. Later it was just a gate. Now it hinged on romantic memories, none of which were true.

Before Frank had put his hand on the gate, the driver's door of the limo opened and a man in his twenties climbed out. He jogged around to the back of the car and opened the door. It was the driver's first funeral. He remembered his training as Frank sat into the car: comfort the bereaved with a nod of the head and a 'Sorry for your troubles.' Frank thanked him and he closed the door. It locked with a satisfyingly heavy sound, the sound of success. The driver jogged back to his own side and sat into the car. Another satisfyingly heavy 'clunk' when the door closed. As the car pulled away from the house, Frank stared out of the window, a little annoyed with the limo, and with his own enjoyment.

At the turning into town a line of six men stood and watched the funeral pass. A couple of the men made the sign of the cross. Another waited to relight his cigar. A fourth blessed himself and said, 'Name of Jesus Christ.' All wore the same high-visibility jackets of the County Council, which is what drew

Frank's attention. He thought they might be a guard of honour for the old man: Frank's father had been a bin-man for thirty years. But no, Frank realised they were only there to clean the road sign. Apart from the uniform, they could have been the same men he had passed so often in his youth, doing the same job in the same way; Frank made a mental note as he passed.

One to clean the sign.

One to hold the ladder.

Two directing traffic.

One doing nothing in particular.

One talking to a child who might have been his daughter. Frank thought this because she appeared to be bringing him his lunch.

She wasn't his daughter. She was twelve and he was twenty-seven. He thought she looked kind of juicy and he knew she would get juicier as she grew. He planned on being the first one to squeeze her, but only when she was legal, he wasn't one of them dirty lads. They would get engaged when she turned eighteen and married on her twentieth birthday. The girl knows nothing of the life he has planned. She has very definite ideas about her future. There is dementia in her family, and when she found out she counted up the years she would lose to the condition. She added to this all the years spent in necessary sleep, and all the years given over to work. She broke down crying when she discovered how little useful, disposable time she would have to spend as she pleased. When she stopped crying she decided she had no time to spend on kindly half-wits or puling infants on the tit, 'puling' being a word she had recently discovered; it was one of the things that made her decide to be a writer. She will have her final abortion at 24, and publish her first novel the following year.

The funeral moved on, slowing to navigate potholes as they approached the railway line that served as the town's unofficial border. It seemed as though Frank were paying his last respects to the long-closed factories and abandoned houses that lined the road.

They continued into town, where white-washed shop windows displayed yellowing FOR SALE signs. Farther on, Frank caught sight of young men leaning in a bookie's doorway. A scene so familiar he wondered how many were following their father's trade. More shuttered shops along the main street. Then, as if someone were making a statement, a mannequin in one display window gave the finger to the world, while across the street, another mannequin offered her heart.

Leaving the town behind, they soon slowed to turn in at the church grounds where a large crowd had gathered. Despite expecting the crowd, Frank began to shake. He wondered at his old man's popularity that so many would come to see him off. Would they do the same for Frank? What if they were there for some other reason? Some people just went to church every day. Others went to funerals because that was what they did, it was a day out. Frank wondered if any of them had brought tea and sandwiches. He turned his attention to his hands; holding them out, he spread his fingers as wide as they would go, and tried to will calm solidity into his muscles. When that didn't work he removed himself from the situation by affirming that it was *just another performance space. The performance space is the safest place in the world.* He became so engrossed in this work that he didn't notice the limo stop. The opening door jolted him back to the world and all of his progress boiled away in fear. His trembling foot as he stepped from the car. And then, touching ground, a new relaxation blossomed in Frank, as if it had been transplanted from the Earth. He felt it like a sudden nostalgia. He almost leapt from the car. Just in time, he remembered why he was there: to see off the old man. Frank adopted a suitable attitude, a kind of practiced melancholy, but he couldn't quite mask his delight at being a star again, even in this shithole. The parting crowd made him think of Charlton Heston. It must have been like this at the Red Sea!

Frank entered the church, accepting sympathy and shaking hands with strangers as he went. He walked along the central aisle, more sympathy and hands, and nodding to nodding heads until he arrived at the front pew. The empty seat shocked him, his energy suddenly dissipated. It seemed a confirmation that he was alone, despite having a wife and child in LA. Ever since he changed his name Frank had considered himself to have no family, yet only there in the church did it seem somehow wrong, like the universe was trying to tell him something. He didn't really believe that, but he had spent the greater part of his life around people who did, and now he wondered if they might be on to something. He stepped into the pew and sat down. The smell of the church brought back his confirmation. He recalled his delight at being selected to have his feet washed by the Parish Priest. He didn't know that it was the performance aspect of the whole thing that thrilled him. For a week after that he was convinced he had a religious vocation. He almost became an altar boy, but couldn't shake the feeling that monsters haunted the shadows. The confessional felt especially dangerous. He stifled a laugh at the memory and stared at

the tabernacle, searching for inspiration. What, exactly, did they expect of him? He looked around to see if he recognised anyone, but every face was a stranger. He began to feel that this was not really his father's funeral; he was just the stiff in the coffin. The funeral service belonged to the people who filled the church: a congregation of strangers in a strange town. He turned to say hello to the people in the row behind, they must have known his father. They offered a few empty pleasantries, like good extras. Together they turned and watched the choir take their places. The choirmaster looked like a beach ball in a white smock, with a carved beetroot face on top. He caught Frank's eye and nodded. Frank returned the gesture.

'There they are now.' The Good Extra nodded to someone over Frank's shoulder at the same time that a young, attractive voice called his name. Frank stood up as he turned, hopeful of a little romance. The young, attractive voice belonged to an ordinary looking woman, around forty years of age. Frank felt he should know her, that he must have known her when they were young. Did she notice his disappointment?

'Sorry for your troubles.' She reached out to shake hands with Frank.

'Thank you.' He took her hand and gently squeezed. She did not return the gesture; she simply smiled and moved along.

The queue snaked its way down the church and out the door. All the 'Sorry for your troubles.' to come made Frank lightheaded. He switched to autopilot, shaking hands and accepting banalities. Then he recognised a watery-eyed expression that made him nervous. In Frank's experience those people were usually harmless, but every now and then you met a nutcase. At least they were in a public place. If there was any trouble, surely someone would step in to help.

The nutcase moved closer. 'Sorry for your troubles.' He shook Frank's hand and moved on.

'Sorry' and 'Sorry' and 'Sorry' and 'Sorry' and Frank was shaking a limp, sweaty hand, belonging to a boy with nervous eyes. He spoke with a sickly voice, 'I'm very sorry about your father. He was a lovely man.'

Frank, surprised, held his hand a moment longer, and then, just as he tried to let go, discovered the boy was holding on. Whispering voices travelled down the line. The boy's face creased into a network of lines, deep and shallow, aging him, as if all the years he had yet to live were focussed on that moment. He struggled with a question, almost certain that this was the wrong place to ask. His face relaxed and with it his grip. Frank had started to pull his hand away when he saw something change in the boy. He had reached a decision. He tightened his grip on Frank's hand; knowing this might be his only chance the boy leaned in. 'Could you get me Liam Neeson's autograph?'

Laughter skipped between the people closest to the boy. They turned to each other, embarrassed.

'What?' Frank only half-hoped he'd misheard. He was barely conscious now of the sweaty palm and bony fingers that held his hand. The boy's face reddened, he stood there mortified, trying to hide. He didn't want yerman going back to Hollywood and telling everybody about the pure fucking bollocks he met at his father's funeral. The boy straightened and squared up to Frank.

'It's not for me, it's for my girlfriend.'

'Oh well in that case...' Frank intended the comment as a joke that would get the boy laughing and move him on; but he stood waiting, a little unsure.

'Right.' The word came slow and almost silent from Frank. Could anyone else hear the old man laughing in the coffin? A woman in the line caught Frank's eye. She offered a tightly closed laughing mouth in condemnation of the boy. She raised her eyebrows, shaking her head.

Frank turned back to the boy. 'Do you mind if I bury my father first?'

'Well I didn't expect you to do it now, so I didn't.'

The boy's hand suddenly jerked up, it was almost a slap, as he felt someone grasp his elbow. He turned to see the choirmaster stood beside him.

'Howya.' The choirmaster nodded to Frank, and then paused to let him take in the full majesty of the lemon-white robe with the cornflower-blue piping at the collar and cuffs, before asking, 'Is everything OK here?'

'It's fine.' Frank couldn't quite place the choirmaster, but knew he knew him from...

From somewhere along the line a voice called, 'He wants an autograph.'

'Not me,' Frank quickly raised an open palm, his eyes wide and smiling. He worried the situation might become needlessly serious.

'Right.' The choirmaster turned to the boy. They spoke almost in unison so the words came out: 'Not his Philograph.'

Again Frank heard his Father's laughter, and his own became harder to contain. But he knew he had to keep a straight face; that funerals have protocols and any deviation would outlive him. Still, he loved the boy then for bringing his father back to life. Frank decided this would be his final memory of the old man.

'Talk to me later.'

'Sound.' Phil nodded his head with the gruff certainty he had seen in his favourite movies: action-packed stories of men who set the world in order; men who knew they were right, regardless of the facts. The choirmaster began to move Phil on, but he jerked his arm away and turned on the old bastard. If they hadn't been in the church, Phil would have decked him. Instead he curled his top lip into a sneer, trying to cut the choirmaster down to size as he spoke, 'I wouldn't ask him for his autograph at his father's funeral.' Phil turned away, he walked on a little and then realised he should probably give Frank his address now, just in case, so he could send on the autograph. He looked back to see Frank and the choirmaster talking with people in the line. The choirmaster turned and stared at Phil. Looking at them, Phil found something not quite right about Frank. He couldn't put his finger on it, there was just... something. He decided that Frank was just a fucking Yank in disguise, not a real Irishman at all. He probably wasn't much different from the fat bastard choirmaster. Liam Neeson wouldn't be hanging around with the likes of Frank fuckin' Moran. But Phil had promised his girlfriend Liam Neeson's autograph, and Liam Neeson's autograph she would have, even if he had to write the fuckin' thing himself. He moved on, shaking his head and mumbling a disgusted, inaudible, 'Fucking bollocks.' But he didn't know which of them he was talking about.

The choirmaster turned back to Frank, 'Sorry about that. He's harmless really, you know yourself, has his name sewn into his underwear.' Frank wanted to ask how the choirmaster knew such intimate details about the boy, but he said nothing. The choirmaster, Frank decided, was a prick. Each man stood waiting, and neither one knew what for. A shuffling in the line; people eager to offer condolences to the bereaved son of the beloved father who hadn't seen each other in over twenty years.

'It's OK, worse things happen at sea.' Instantly Frank knew it was the wrong thing to have said. The choirmaster shook his head and went back to the choir, happy that he at least, had saved the day from turning into a fucking *Carry On* movie. The line continued, and only after all who wanted to, had met Frank Moran, did the funeral mass begin.

The wake was a simple affair, held at his father's local. Frank put one thousand Euros behind the bar. He had one pint of Guinness as he passed among his guests gathering sympathies and memories, and then he went back to the house.

That is the end of scene one of
Scenes From a Homecoming.

The rest of the book is on the way.
If you would like to be notified when it arrives,
you can follow my blog [here](#).

Thank you for reading.

About the Author

Fergus Anthony is an actor and writer born in Ireland in 1969. Amongst other jobs, he has worked as a kitchen porter, a janitor, a tour guide, as a general labourer in construction.

He has published one novel: *The Company of Thieves*, and the novella *Online Cupid*, exploring of the dark side of online dating.

His theatre credits include Robbie Ross in *Our Country's Good*, The Painter in *The Visit*, and Martin Kavanagh in *Brothers of the Brush*.

His plays, *Examine Your Zip* and *Godot* performed to enthusiastic audiences.

Audience feedback for *Examine Your Zip*:

“Bawdy, witty, observant. Great performances.”

“Great show. Hearty laughs and heartfelt moments.”

“So clever. Excellent. Almost cried at some parts, roared with laughter at others.”

[Also Available](#)

Fiction

[The Company of Thieves](#)

[Online Cupid](#)

[The Man who thought he was Charles Bukowski](#)

Verse

[Very Short Stories](#)

Plays

Examine Your Zip
Godot



Heart & Mind

The icon is based on a woodcarving I made in the late 1990's.
Buy the T-shirt [here](#).

[Join Me](#)

[Blog](#)

[Twitter](#)

All the best,
Fergus.