



THE HEN CREE

by Tom Kelly

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THE HEN CREE

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Characters:

Anthony, Now, in his late 50's and as an eight-year-old, in 1955.

Granda Tot in his late sixties in 1955.

Maggie, Anthony's Granny, in her late sixties in 1955.

The play is set today on Tyneside and in August 1955. Granny and Granda take eight-year old Anthony on a day trip to visit their son Jimmy and his family at their holiday caravan.

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TYNESIDE 1955: TOT AND MAGGIE'S COUNCIL HOME.
GRANDFATHER TOT AND GRANDMOTHER MAGGIE SIT
EITHER SIDE OF THE COAL FIRE, LIKE TWO BOOKENDS
AND JUST AS STILL AND SILENT.

ANTHONY NOW It's August 1955...I was eight year old.

INDICATING Granda and Granny sit by the fire,
Grandfather's boots are warming before the specially prepared to last
for a day coal fire, flanked *by grey faceless sentries of socks*, they're
very poetic socks. Rosemary Clooney's on the radio
I was singing along. Trying to lift the atmosphere.

SFX: 'MAMBO ITALIANO' (Rosemary Clooney, February 1955)

ANTHONY EIGHT SINGS Hey Mambo, mambo Italiano, Hey
Mambo Italiano...

LOOKS TOWARD GRANDPARENTS AND STOPS SINGING

ANTHONY NOW I sit on the edge of a chair seriously observing
grandfather as he smokes his pipe with a smack and spits in the fire...
INDICATING Maggie, my grandmother, screams as the sizzling
saliva breaks through her deafness.

MAGGIE Tot...what have aa told ye?

GRANDA It's only spit.

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MAGGIE BEGINS TO PUT ON HER MAKE-UP, POUTING INTO A MIRROR AS GRANDFATHER LOOKS AT HER WITH INCREASING ANNOYANCE.

GRANDA De ye want aa trowel to put on that rouge?
INDICATING ANTHONY Ye've got Anthony choked.

MAGGIE Aa'll choke you!

GRANDA, INITIALLY, IGNORES HIS WIFE AS SHE CONTINUES TO GET DRESSED. SHE WEARS A BLACK COAT AND PRODUCES FROM A CARDBOARD BOX, A PINK LUMINOUS HAT, HE LOOKS INCREDULOUSLY AT THE HAT.

GRANDA There's no chance ye'll not be seen.

SHE STUDIOUSLY IGNORES HIM AS GRANFATHER PUTS ON A DARK OVERCOAT.

MAGGIE POINTEDLY ADDRESSING ANTHONY,
IGNORING TOT

I'll leave the lights on... ye can't be too careful...it'll make the burglars think we're in.

GRANDA INDICATING WINDOW Ye've got the curtains closed! No bugger will see we've got the bloody lights on!

GRANNY PUTS OFF THE LIGHTS

ANTHONY NOW We begin our journey to Uncle Jimmy's caravan, an eternity way, outside Newcastle!
LOOKING OUT, PUTTING OUT HAND. It was raining.

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GRANDA Our Jimmy's been there three days and it's belted down every bloody day.... cats and dogs...like bloody stair rods...never bloody stopped...bloody hell.

GRANNY That's where you'll end up.

IGNORING HIM LOOKING AWAY

TO ANTHONY They'll appreciate us making the effort to see them.

THEY LEAVE HOME AND HEAD TOWARDS THE BUS STOP,
THEY STAND AND WAIT.

ANTHONY NOW You'll get used to Granny and Granda's silence. It's part of them: the silence and the *looks*.

MAGGIE LOOKS AT TOT, AS IF WARNING AND BLAMING HIM FOR SOMETHING, ANYTHING. THEY STAND IN THE RAIN AND EVENTUALLY THE BUS ARRIVES. THEY GET ON THE BUS AND MAGGIE PAYS THE CONDUCTOR WITH A FORCED, PROFUSE SMILE. THEY SIT IN SILENCE, FOR SOMETIME.

ANTHONY NOW On the bus to Newcastle Grandmother's hat seemed to get smaller.

GRANNY TO THE WORLD Our Jimmy won't be far away today.

ANTHONY NOW LOOKING OUT At that point we seemed to float through Gateshead and over the Tyne Bridge. We headed to the bus station at Worswick Street.