

# ① Robert + Caithleen

ROBERT. The tour lasted for nearly two hours.

CAITHLEEN. To criticism that his novel was not worth reading. Joyce said: "If *Ulysses* is not worth reading then life is not worth living."

ROBERT. But I didn't hear a word of it. Because after she first spoke to me...something...something in me...happened. And so that is the tour I am on today.

And that girl...she is the perfect guide. Because to her—and this is something she told me thirty-five years ago that I only now begin to understand—to her, Time is not a series of neat single notes called "the present"—one played after another. No, to her Time is a *chord*: many notes, past-present-future, all real...all alive...and all played at once.

*A shift: Caithleen turns directly to Robert. The action is continuous.*

CAITHLEEN. May I speak to you for a moment—

ROBERT. (*Still to audience.*) It's impossible, of course—to return to another Time.

CAITHLEEN. Yes—you there—I'm talkin' to you—

ROBERT. (*To audience, somewhat startled/amazed.*) And yet: here I am.

CAITHLEEN. —let's move over here—away from the others—

ROBERT. (*To Caithleen.*) Yes—of course.

CAITHLEEN. (*Calls off:*) DAVEY, WOULD YOU TAKE MY GROUP FROM HERE? O'CONNELL STREET IS NEXT—PLEASE CATCH UP WITH YOU.

*Robert is waving goodbye to the unseen group.*

ROBERT. Good riddance!—right? That was a pretty dull group, if you ask me.

CAITHLEEN. That "dull group" paid good money for this tour and got nothin' but interruptions and bluster from you.

ROBERT. Oh, believe me—I have no desire to interrupt the tour.

CAITHLEEN. You may be some great fan of James Joyce, but you can't just—

START  
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ROBERT. James Joyce is nothing but a trickster!—a charlatan peddling ten pounds of nonsense!

CAITHLEEN. Yes—you told that to my group!—

ROBERT. I'm sorry—can't help myself.

CAITHLEEN. —but the fact is we're a group of fourteen people who don't need your rather pompous thoughts on the matter.

*She starts off.*

ROBERT. Thirteen.

CAITHLEEN. What?

*This stops her.*

ROBERT. Without me, you're a group of thirteen. And I know that troubles you.

CAITHLEEN. (*It does trouble her.*) Yes—it's thirteen now—you're right...

ROBERT. I say let 'em go to the pub!—that's where they'd rather be anyway. They haven't read a word of *Ulysses*! Don't kid yourself—

CAITHLEEN. You don't know that—

ROBERT. (*Overlapping.*) —not ninety percent of the Americans here have read *Huck Finn* from start to end!—any more than the Brits have read *David Copperfield* or the Russians have read *War and Peace*—

CAITHLEEN. That is not the point—

*He grabs her copy of Ulysses.*

ROBERT. (*Overlapping.*) —and so in our group there is only one of us who knows of the obsessive man with bad eyes from a poor family— all prick and no pence—the loner and jokester who will spend years of his life to create literature's One True Lasting Beast—with all its tangle of themes and its Homeric references and its debauchery and riddles and run-on sentences and the bad news for you is that in our group the one and only person who knows all this crap is me.

*He hands the book back to her.*

Here. Read me one phrase—anywhere at all.

(*Off her look.*) Go on. I'll show you. Believe me: I'm not proud of this—

CAITHLEEN. I need to find my group.

ROBERT. Please, Caithleen. Any page you like.

*She looks at him—then turns to a page early in the book.*

CAITHLEEN. (Reads.) “Behold the handmaid of the moon.”

*And Robert—in a surprisingly good Irish accent—is speaking along, and slightly ahead of her. He is not reading.*

ROBERT. “In sleep the wet sign  
calls her hour, bids her rise.  
Bridebed, childbed, bed of death  
ghostcandle. Omnis caro ad te  
e veniet.”

CAITHLEEN. “In sleep the wet  
sign calls her hour, bids her rise.  
Bridebed, childbed, bed of death...”

*Caithleen is reading along silently now—but Robert closes the book in her hands, saying...*

Just listen. It’s for the ear. Not the eyes. Remember? You’re the one who told me that.

*He continues.*

*“He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea...mouth to her mouth’s kiss.”*

*Pause.*

CAITHLEEN. We get a lot of you here. The so-called experts. Making the pilgrimage.

ROBERT. Yes—

CAITHLEEN. Ready to catch us out.

ROBERT. —of course.

CAITHLEEN. And anyway I only say what they’ve trained me to say.

ROBERT. I think you’re quite good, actually—didn’t I tell you that?

CAITHLEEN. No, you didn’t.

ROBERT. I meant to tell you that this time around.

CAITHLEEN. This time around?

ROBERT. I teach that book, Caithleen! Twenty-plus years now and pity the poor students who have to listen to me soldier on about something I have grown to loathe. I wrote my *feckin thesis* on that beast! And yes I know my kind is a dime a dozen—but, believe me, it wasn’t always like this.

~~Ref. can respond.~~

STOP