

SL&NCR

An Entertainment that goes from A – Z

(but not in that order)

by

Carlo Gébler

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written permission from:**

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Time: a Saturday in September 1957.

Location: a platform, Enniskillen railway station.

PROCESSIONAL

The cast drag railway gurneys loaded with baskets of props, station signs, et cetera (everything they need for their show, in other words), plus a battered tombola.

ALL (*chanting*). Sligo, Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway
... Timetable operative until further notice ...

The cast divide; half recite the up times and the other half the down times.

Up trains ... Week Days, Saturdays ... departing Sligo
6.20 a.m., 6.30 a.m., 11.15 a.m. and 4.00 p.m., calling at
Ballysodare, Collooney, Dromahair, Manorhamilton,
Glenfarne, Belcoo, Florencecourt and Enniskillen ...

Down Trains ... Week Days, Saturdays ... departing
Enniskillen 6.20 a.m., 1.45 p.m., 2.00 p.m. and 7.20 p.m.,
calling at Florencecourt, Belcoo, Glenfarne, Manorhamilton,
Dromahair, Collooney, Ballysodare, Sligo ...

All the cast come together for the next part.

All trains will stop at Abohill, Ballintogher, Ballygawley
Kilmakerrill and Lisgorman Halts on notice to the Guard at
preceding stations.

The Master of Ceremonies steps forward. The M.C. wears a mortar board and a tatty scholar's gown.

M.C. Ladies, gentlemen, members of the travelling public
We're here to entertain and we'll be done before the next
train departs. Our subject today is close to your hearts:
the Sligo, Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway. So, ladies
and gentlemen, without further ado ...

ALL. A one-minute history of the SLNCR.

The act enabling construction between Enniskillen and
Carrignagat Junction, Collooney, from where the Midland and
Great Western Railway line ran on to the Sligo railhead,
and connections north and south, passed in Westminster,
August 11th 1875.

The money to build the line came from local landlords
and businessmen, Sir Robert Gore-Booth, Henry William Gore-
Booth, The Earl of Enniskillen, Arthur Loftus Tottenham, et
cetera, et cetera.

Of course there wasn't enough cash and no contractor
would undertake the job for the remuneration available.

So Arthur Loftus Tottenham, chairman of the board,
resigned his position and, along with the engineer,
Frederick Barry, starting 1877, set about constructing the
42 mile line himself, though not himself; obviously he had

help. Carrignagat Junction was finally reached, November 7th 1882.

The line was built as cheaply as possible: so there were many sharp curves, many steep gradients, numerous level crossings and very few bridges.

Today the SLNCR is run by dedicated railwaymen and loved by the people of the counties it traverses. M.C. Though they still call it the slow, late and never come regular ... Ba boom. I'm glad you're not laughing: that shows taste. (Alternatively: Laughing at that? You're letting yourself down, you know that.) All ready? ALL. Yes.

PROLOGUE

M.C. Ladies and gentlemen, for your delectation our A to Z of the SLNCR.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. What have we?

The letter 'U' is shown to the audience.

U

M.C. And 'U' is for?

ALL. UTA. The Ulster Transport Authority. Our story doesn't start there but it might end there.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. We're offering £15,000.

M.C. That's the railway man from the south.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. Yes.

M.C. And that's the railway man from the north. The only subject on their agenda today, Wednesday 3rd September, 1957: keep the line or close it.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. So?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. So ...

M.C. Because the SLNCR is in Ireland *and* Northern Ireland, it can't be nationalised. That's why it's stayed private but received subventions from both states.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. You'll match what we're offering?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. No.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. You won't?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. No.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. You match us, the line lives on.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. If we matched it, yes, it would.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. But you're not matching?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. We're not minded to.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. Why not?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. We have to close the line from Enniskillen to Omagh and Belfast. So why would we give money to a line from Sligo to Enniskillen when it won't connect up with another line?

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. You're not going to match our funds because you're closing your own railway? You're going to close one railway and force another to shut.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. There's no need for that tone.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. The line is part in the north, part in the south, it employs people, they pay tax, don't we want to –

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. (*Interrupting*) No.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. You're putting us out of business.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. Don't let us stop you keeping the SLNCR going.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. Which won't connect, to anything, once you close the lines in the north.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. The world is changing. You can't stop progress. It's unstoppable.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. And this is progress?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. Yes.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. I hate to think what the opposite is.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. It's outlived its usefulness.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. Moving thousands and thousands of cattle, as the line does, it makes money. Doesn't that make it useful?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. It is only a hundred and twenty pounds. And you're subsidised.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. What's your point?

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. I'm waiting for the tired old argument about the importance of the line connecting people.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. You can't put a price on that. It's a service, and society needs its services. Folk need to get about, to connect, to socialise.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. There'll still be letters. People will still visit each other without the train.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. Fifteen thousand pounds. Sterling. That's our offer. Match that. And you have a whole line. It's a bargain.

UTA REPRESENTATIVE. If you think it's so important for people to toddle backwards and forwards from Enniskillen to Sligo, you fire away. We won't stop you. But we're getting rid of all our railways. Too expensive. The future is petrol. And you know the best thing about the man who drives a car? He's not in a union and he pays for his own repairs. Halleluiah.

CIE REPRESENTATIVE. But he doesn't pay for the upkeep of the roads. They're even more expensive than the railways.

M.C. We've shown you the peril, now the glory.

ACT 1

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. What have we?

The letter 'B' is shown to the audience.

M.C. And 'B' is for?

ALL. Brexit.

M.C. Wrong century. Put it back.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'E' is shown to the audience.

E

M.C. 'E' is for?

ALL. Enniskillen.

JOURNALIST. Enniskillen, the start of my journey during the last winter of the SLNCR.

M.C. A journalist sent to cover a journey before the line goes.

JOURNALIST. At five minutes after the advertised time we chug, a trifle bumpily, out of Enniskillen's railway station. I notice a sliver of glass in one of the carriage windows is missing and has been plugged with a crumpled paper bag. It had been a big day in Enniskillen, the day of the fair; I had taken in the sights and the smells, the lively chatter of the cattlemen, the brouhaha of the cattle; but only one minute out on the SLNCR line heading for Sligo, we're rattling along a private green lane. At the iron bridge over the Erne, I look back and get a last

glimpse of Enniskillen framed between tree trunks, rising like an Irish Venice from its lagoons.

Following Florencourt we are out in wild dark Fermanagh, with enormous vistas of untidy sky and vast black plains that had once been forest.

We pass along the shore of Lough Macnean. The view across the lough is infinitely sad, a symphony in black and silver, with the black mass of Cuilcagh Mountain (beyond which the Shannon rises) as a back-drop across the water. We traverse a narrow neck of land between the upper and lower loughs; halt at a solid-looking station of grey stone where the platform name-boards dramatically announce 'Belcoo and Blacklion'. Then, rattling and vibrating, we begin to climb, into the desolate upland emptiness of Glenfarne.

"Kelly by name, Kelly by nature," announces the Irish customs officer as he climbs aboard the carriage. He takes a good look at us, we're twelve, like the Apostles, judges us not to be worthy of attention and climbs out again. We chug on deep into the Irish Republic and the lonely heart of Leitrim. I begin to wonder how the driver is going to penetrate the wild tangle of mountains and win through to the Atlantic.

Win through we do and the way we do is summed up in a single word – evasion. We evade the mountains and the mountains evade us. The tangle of untidy black peaks slide mysteriously to the right, and we are up on a plateau, clattering past water hydrants and a jungle of locomotives into the station at Manorhamilton.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'A' is shown to the audience.

A

M.C. 'A' is for?

ALL. Abohill Halt.

M.C. One boiling summer's day.

A sign: Abohill Hall. Violent sunlight. PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO fanning themselves.

PASSENGER ONE. Hot isn't it?

PASSENGER TWO. Hot isn't in it.

PASSENGER ONE. The air going in is like ... ?

PASSENGER TWO. Drinking hot tea?

PASSENGER ONE. Something like that.

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO fanning themselves.

PASSENGER TWO. You sleep?

PASSENGER ONE. Not in this heat.

PASSENGER TWO. I'm down to just a sheet. But without the weight of the blankets I don't sleep. I put the blankets back, I'm too hot and I don't sleep.

PASSENGER ONE. It's tricky.

PASSENGER TWO. You can't win so you can't. Summer really doesn't suit us, does it?

PASSENGER ONE. Winter doesn't either.

PASSENGER TWO. Blooming dandelions don't seem to mind the heat.

PASSENGER ONE. They don't.

PASSENGER TWO. Hell of a lot of them.

PASSENGER ONE. That's cinders for you.

PASSENGER TWO. What?

PASSENGER ONE. The cinders along the line, they love it dandelions do. They thrive on cinders.

PASSENGER TWO. Cinders?

PASSENGER ONE. Yes.

PASSENGER TWO. Now you mention it, there are always masses along the line. So it's cinders? You learn something everyday.

PASSENGER ONE. If you're lucky.

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO panting, fanning.

PASSENGER TWO (*looking round*). It isn't Ireland, look at it, it's all brown.

PASSENGER ONE. It is Ireland, only with the green gone.

PASSENGER TWO. Ireland without the green's not natural ...
it's not Ireland.

PASSENGER ONE. The sun's natural so if the sun makes it
brown it is natural. And it is high summer after all.

*Quietly to begin, growing louder, the creaking sound of the
rails expanding in the intense heat of the summer.*

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO stop panting and fanning.

PASSENGER TWO. What's that?

PASSENGER ONE. Don't know.

PASSENGER TWO. That's definitely not natural

PASSENGER ONE. Is it the track?

*PASSENGER ONE gets down onto the track and puts hand close
to one of the rails.*

PASSENGER ONE. You could fry an egg on that.

*PASSENGER ONE spits onto the rail and listens to his spit
sizzling.*

PASSENGER TWO. That definitely isn't natural.

PASSENGER ONE puts his ear close to the rail.

PASSENGER ONE. It's the rails, they're complaining about
the heat, that's the noise you're hearing..

A train's whistle in the distance.

PASSENGER TWO. Look sharp. She's coming.

PASSENGER ONE gets back up on the platform.

PASSENGER ONE. Never heard the like.

PASSENGER TWO. Me neither.

The train approaches. PASSENGERS ONE and TWO flag it down.

The train stops.

GUARD. You look cooked.

PASSENGER TWO. It's like an oven out here.

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO climb into carriage.

PASSENGER ONE. The rails are singing in the heat like a kettle.

GUARD. Righto ladies and gents. Everyone hungry?

Dinner's here. Piping hot. Two fine specimens roasted to perfection.

PASSENGER TWO. Hilarious.

PASSENGER ONE. Not.

GUARD. Left your sense of humour at home?

The GUARD blows his whistle. The train pulls off. The empty halt and the creaking sound of the rails— weird, loud, alarming.

M.C. There'll be more hot railway lines later.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. What have we?

The letter 'B' is shown to the audience.

B

M.C. 'B', back so soon? All right, what is 'B' for and don't say —

ALL (interrupting M.C.). Bond Store.

IRISH CUSTOMS OFFICER KELLY appears with a jar filled with whiskey and a hydrometer, followed by FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH and FIFTH WORKER, plus the ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN, all carrying jam-jars. KELLY fills the jam-jars of the FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH and FIFTH WORKER.

KELLY. When goods come from the north en route to Sligo, if all the customs papers are in order and the duty payment cheques are attached the goods are cleared immediately at Manorhamilton. (*Waving jar*) The exception is whiskey. When whiskey comes, it comes in huge barrels, the wagons with the barrels are uncoupled from the train and put straight into the Bond Store. The track runs right through the store so that bit's easy-peasy, lemon squeezy. The doors are locked for the night. Come the morning, I test the whiskey. A dirty job but someone has to do it. (*Waving jar*) I draw a sample from each barrel: (*waving hydrometer*) I test it for strength: the rate of duty is based on strength. (*Waving jar*) The tested whiskey, a pint or two can't be put back in the barrels, so, it goes 'on the market'.

KELLY has reached the ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN.

KELLY (*to ENGINE DRIVER and FIREMAN*). Should you be drinking?

ENGINE DRIVER. Why wouldn't we?

FIREMAN. We're not out for while. I haven't even fired up yet.

ENGINE DRIVER. We'll be grand. Don't worry about us.

KELLY gives the ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN a smaller quantity than he gave the WORKERS; this leaves a measure in his own jam-jar.

FIREMAN. What do you call that?

KELLY. Your measure.

The FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH and FIFTH WORKER groan in mock horror.

ENGINE DRIVER. It's only a dribble.

KELLY. If you don't want it, give it back.

FIREMAN. What I hate more than anything on this earth is a mean fellow.

KELLY raises a toast. The FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH and FIFTH WORKER respond fulsomely: the ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN respond curtly. All drink.

KELLY. Exciting brew. Like syrup.

ENGINE DRIVER. Nothing to get excited about.

FIREMAN. I agree.

M.C. There's bad blood there. I predict there'll be more where that came from. On ...

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'X' is shown to the audience.

X

M.C. 'X' is for? 'X' marks the spot?

ALL. If you like. And ... Xavier and Irene.

M.C. Xavier and Irene.

ALL. They're in love.

M.C. Ah ... and here they come with a box of gramophone needles.

IRENE and XAVIER with a rattling box of gramophone needles approach a stretch of the railway line.

M.C. The train's coming. They're going to have to sharpen their act if we're going to get this touching scene in.

IRENE and XAVIER crouch down side by side at the track.

IRENE (*Laying needles in the shape of the letters as she speaks*). X ... A ...

XAVIER (*following suit*). I ... R ... E ...

IRENE. V ... I ... E ...

The train getting closer.

XAVIER. N ... E ...

IRENE. R ... perfect.

The train is close.

XAVIER. Here we go.

IRENE and XAVIER step back. The steam train hurtles past.

IRENE and XAVIER return to the piece of track on which they've 'written' their names in gramophone needles.

IRENE (*peering down*). Look ... it's written in steel on iron, our names, Xavier and Irene.

M.C. Surprisingly common, writing names with gramophone needles on SLNCR tracks. Better than carving your name on a tree too.

IRENE. This marks the spot where we became official. You do know that?

XAVIER. I didn't.

IRENE. Too late, you can't back out now.

M.C. That's how you do it, ladies.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'F' is shown to the audience.

F

M.C. 'F' is for?

ALL. Firebox.

The ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN already seen in 'B'.

ENGINE DRIVER. How to cook on an engine.

FIREMAN. Get the fireman's coal shovel. Wash it under scalding water from the engine's boiler.

ENGINE DRIVER. Hygiene at all times.

FIREMAN. Lay eggs, pudding, bacon, sausage, as required on said shovel.

ENGINE DRIVER. Open hungry firebox and stick shovel in.

FIREMAN. Wait and watch. It's hot in there. This part is quick. Just a second or so.

ENGINE DRIVER. Withdraw shovel.

FIREMAN. Turn everything.

ENGINE DRIVER. Re-insert shovel.

FIREMAN. Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle ... dinner.

M.C. That's how manys a feed was cooked, oh yes.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'H' is shown to the audience.

H

M.C. 'H' is for?

ALL. Huckster.

A train pulls up and the HUCKSTER (carrying a basket with the goods he's selling) climbs aboard a carriage with four PASSENGERS.

HUCKSTER. Papers? Fags? Matches? Chocolate? Oranges?
Best value going.

PASSENGER ONE. Got an Indo?

HUCKSTER. Have I an Indo? Your lucky day sir.

The HUCKSTER hands over the newspaper.

PASSENGER ONE (*taking paper, handing back coin*). Can you change that?

HUCKSTER. I'm sure I can. Plenty of change, sir. Let's see.

The HUCKSTER produces fist of money and slowly starts to root through the coins.

PASSENGER ONE. Hurry up. We'll be leaving any second.

HUCKSTER. No silver, I'm counting the coppers out as fast as I can.

GUARD (*to HUCKSTER*). Come on, off.

The HUCKSTER jumps down from the compartment.

PASSENGER ONE. Hey, where's my change?

The GUARD blows his whistle.

HUCKSTER. I'll catch you another day.

The train pulls off.

M.C. (*to HUCKSTER*). You ever worry you'll get caught?

The HUCKSTER shrugs.

Meanwhile, inside the carriage as the train pulls away.

PASSENGER ONE. He's just robbed me of two bob.

PASSENGER TWO. Could have been worse.

PASSENGER THREE. Could have been ten bob.

PASSENGER FOUR. That's what he stiffed a fellow for last week.

PASSENGER ONE. He took a ten bob note last week with this malarkey?

PASSENGER TWO. Absolutely.

PASSENGER THREE. He does it all the time.

PASSENGER FOUR. Famous for it.

PASSENGER TWO. Coins Ciaran

PASSENGER THREE. That's what they call him.

PASSENGER FOUR. Everyone knows him.

PASSENGER ONE. Why didn't you warn me?

PASSENGER TWO. Well ...

PASSENGER THREE. To tell you the truth ...

PASSENGER FOUR. We thought the scene was worth two bob.

M.C. (*indicating audience to PASSENGER ONE*). They all enjoyed it too.

ACT 2

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'M' is shown to the audience.

M

M.C. 'M' is for?

ALL. Manorhamilton.

JOURNALIST. We pull away and Manorhamilton drops behind us, receding into our recent past. We begin the long descent to Dromahair, Collooney, and Yeats Country. Grey December dusk

is falling. The sky is the colour of old putty. Near Dromahair we run for half a mile through a magnificent avenue of beeches, as if down the private avenue to a gentleman's mansion. Far below in the gathering dust, the spire of Collooney punctuates the last stage of the journey.

Some alight.

We chug on deeper into Yeats Country. At Ballysodare, on the shore of a long landlocked arm of the Atlantic, an old woman translated for Yeats the Gaelic ballad about a young man who had gambled away his bride. The story became 'The Host of the Air':

He played with the merry old men
And thought not of evil chance,
Until one bore Bridget his bride
Away from the merry dance.

He bore her away in his arms,
The handsomest young man there,
And his neck and his breast and his arms
Were drowned in her long dim hair.

O'Driscoll scattered the cards

And out of his dream awoke:
Old men and young men and young girls
Were gone like a drifting smoke;

But he heard high up in the air
A piper piping away,
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay.

It is dark now, the lights of Sligo are shining in the distance. We chug on past Ballysodare like a small badly-lit ship sailing up a dark estuary after the hazards of the ocean. Land imminent. We are almost there, Sligo town, almost there.

M.C. Still to go all the way back. That's the train for you, up, down, up, down, that's all it does.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. What have we?

The letter 'D' is shown to the audience.

D

M.C. 'D' is for?

ALL. Dandelion.

M.C. Dandelion?

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Yes.

*A line of track with dandelions everywhere, a dandelion
jungle.*

M.C. The weed?

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. *Taraxacum*, yes.

M.C. Call it what you will, it's still a weed.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. See my leaves with tooth-like edges;

Blow my clocks to tell the time;

See me flaunting by the hedges,

In the meadow, in the lane,

Gay and naughty in the garden;

Pull me up—I grow again,

Asking neither leave nor pardon.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. Sillies, what are you about

With your spades and hoes of iron?

You can never drive me out —

Me, the dauntless Dandelion!¹

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. A gorgeous sight in bloom —

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. — those beautiful flowers turn to

white globes of seeds.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. "Puffballs".

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. Some rush to pick them ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Blow ...

¹ From *The Flower Fairies* by Cicely Mary Barker. Copyright Frederick Warne & Co and the Estate of Cicely Mary Barker.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. And know the time.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Others rush to pick them ...

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. Close their eyes ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Make a wish ...

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. And blow.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. The seeds carry their thoughts and
dreams to loved ones ...

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. They think.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Or ...

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. They get all the seeds off in a single
breath ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. – the person they love will love them
back.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. But if seeds remain ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. The one they love ...

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. – has reservations about them.

The sound of finches.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Listen ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER (*looking through binoculars*). Look at the
finches.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER (*looking through binoculars*). What do
you think I'm doing.

*Finches chirruping and flittering about. A pure moment of
bright marvellous sound.*

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. There was a dandelion

With lovely fluffy hair

That glistened in the sunshine

And in the summer air

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. And oh! This pretty dandelion

Soon grew old and grey

And sad to tell!

Her charming hair

Blew many miles away.²

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. How many finches do you think?

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Sixty? Eighty? A hundred.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. Amore, more I'd say. All feeding on
dandelion seeds.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. O Little Soldier with the golden
helmet,

What are you guarding on my lawn?

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. With your green gun

And your yellow beard,

Why do you stand so stiff?

There is only the grass to fight!³

² From *Old Mother Goose's Rhymes*.

³ First published *Anthology of Massachusetts Poets*, (1922),
William Stanley Braithwaite, ed. (1878 – 1962)

M.C. *The News of the World* says all human life is on its pages, we have more on our railway.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'P' is shown to the audience.

P

M.C. 'P' is for?

ALL. Plush, a bolt of plush, a luxurious, very expensive fabric.

M.C. Or if you prefer, 'P' is for probe. The scene is laid in the Manorhamilton marshalling yards.

FIRST WORKER (*seen in 'B', carrying a bolt of cloth under his coat*). Lads!

ENGINE DRIVER. What?

FIRST WORKER. Would you be going across?

ENGINE DRIVER. No, we're going to the moon.

FIREMAN. Course we are. Why?

KELLY slips on and watches the unfolding scene.

FIRST WORKER. To answer that, I must decide, can I trust you?

ENGINE DRIVER. If it's going to be like that then we must decide can we trust you?

FIRST WORKER. No one likes the thought of a fine ... or jail, least of all me.

FIREMAN. Us neither.

FIRST WORKER. Let's see if we can agree on something.

ENGINE DRIVER. Go on.

FIRST WORKER. Kelly, the customs man, you know him?

FIREMAN. How could we not?

FIRST WORKER. Want to know what I think of him?

ENGINE DRIVER. Go on.

FIRST WORKER. He's a waste of space?!

FIREMAN. If you say so?

FIRST WORKER. Yes I do.

ENGINE DRIVER. Your point is?

FIRST WORKER. It's what you think too. Come on.

FIREMAN (*interrupting*). That would be saying.

ENGINE DRIVER. But... if we was forced to swear ... in a court of law ...

FIRST WORKER. You'd say ... he was a waste of space.

FIREMAN. Maybe something a bit stronger.

ENGINE DRIVER. Only the judge would stop us, wouldn't he?

FIRST WORKER. Yes, but you'd be thinking it. You'd be thinking he's a —

FIREMAN (*interrupting*). Have you got something?

The FIRST WORKER produces a bolt of plush loosely wrapped in brown paper from under his coat.

FIRST WORKER. Could you bring this across?

ENGINE DRIVER. You'd get a big fine if you were caught with that.

FIREMAN. Even a few days in the Crum.

ENGINE DRIVER. Definitely a few days in the Crum.

FIREMAN. Why do it?

FIRST WORKER. You'll be here tomorrow, this time.

ENGINE DRIVER. Might.

FIRST WORKER. I'll be here too. Here's two notes, I'll have them with me, and your names will be on them.

The FIRST WORKER shows two notes as proof.

ENGINE DRIVER. Why should we trust you?

FIRST WORKER. This is a valuable bit of plush. We might all be railway men but you could just smuggle it over and keep it. Say it was yours. What could I do? Nothing. It would be gone. So, I'm trusting you, aren't I? And I'm saying, trust me back. This time tomorrow, a note each.

FIREMAN. We can put it in the bunker, under the coal.

ENGINE DRIVER. Not a bad idea. All right. We'll do it.

The FIRST WORKER hands the bolt of plush across. The ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN hide the bolt of plush under the coal in the tender behind the engine. KELLY slips off stage.

FIRST WORKER. Leave it in Enniskillen luggage office in the name of Bernard Feeney.

ENGINE DRIVER. Will do.

The FIRST WORKER stalks off whistling. KELLY enters (carrying a steel probe in sections). The FIRST WORKER passes KELLY as he exits. KELLY begins to screw the sections of probe together. The ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN spot KELLY as he works.

ENGINE DRIVER. Oh no.

FIRMAN. He's got his probe.

ENGINE DRIVER. Which only means one thing: he's going to go poking in our coal.

FIREMAN. Doesn't mean he'll find it though. I've put it deep, real deep. He'll only stab the surface.

ENGINE DRIVER. No, he'll find it. He's going to probe deep, deep, deep, all the way to the floor, and he won't stop till he's found what he's looking for. That's us up the creek.

FIREMAN. There's a note each, you saw, that's a lot of cash. Think what we can do with that money?

ENGINE DRIVER. Not much if we're sitting in a cell.

FIREMAN. He won't find it.

ENGINE DRIVER. Too risky. Get rid of it.

FIREMAN. I don't want to.

ENGINE DRIVER. Hoke it out and stick it in the firebox.

FIREMAN. What if I won't?

ENGINE DRIVER. Then you can look forward to the Crumlin Road Goal with me. The screws won't be nice but in comparison to me they'll be angels.

The FIREMAN drags the bolt of plush from under the coal and flings it into the firebox. We hear the flames roaring as the plush burns. KELLY comes up.

FIREMAN. Oh look'ee what's turned up.

KELLY. Have you got anything to declare?

ENGINE DRIVER. My genius.

KELLY. A bolt of plush?

FIREMAN. Have we any plush?

ENGINE DRIVER. Plush? No, I don't think we've any plush.

KELLY. Oh really. No bolt of plush. You sure? It wouldn't be lying under the coal there in the tender, would it?

FIREMAN. No, there's just coal, that's all, lots and lots of it, certainly no plush.

KELLY. Move back.

KELLY gets up on to engine footplate. The FIRST WORKER slips on and stands watching.

KELLY. Let's have a look, shall we.

KELLY drives the steel pole into the coal at various points. He works slowly at first but then frustration at not finding the bolt of plush sets in and he increases his

pace. But no amount of speed will deliver what he wants and finally he must acknowledge defeat and give up.

FIREMAN. No luck?

ENGINE DRIVER. Shame.

KELLY gets down.

FIREMAN. Better luck next time.

KELLY. Today the God's smiled but one day, one day the Gods are going to scowl. When they do, you'll be done for, both of you.

KELLY passes the FIRST WORKER and goes off.

ENGINE DRIVER. Somebody isn't happy.

FIREMAN (*indicating FIRST WORKER*). What'll we say to your man?

ENGINE DRIVER. Plush if I know. Plush went up in smoke?

The ENGINE DRIVER sounds the whistle. The FIREMAN gives the FIRST WORKER the thumbs down. The engine moves off.

M.C. They told himself they'd have done time if they hadn't put his plush in the furnace. Nothing he could say.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'L' is shown to the audience.

L

M.C. 'L' is for?

ALL. Level crossing.

IRENE. Xavier and I got married. It was written in steel on iron, so of course we did. Xavier got work as a milesman and we got a gatehouse at a level crossing. Every day he walks his section, checks it, clears debris, ensures it's safe, while I do the gates. Four trains, each way, Monday to Saturday and specials on Sunday. It's a nice easy straight forward job, except, once a month: Friday, fair day, when men and their cattle are on the move, from dawn to dusk. I hate cattle. Picture this. The gates are over, the road is open, the line's closed off, and the cattle are picking their way over the rails, clip clop, clip clop, different coloured ribbons on their tails, so they don't get mixed up. All nice and straight forward. But oh no, there's a train coming. I have to close the gates. Now the cattle are in the road, waiting, waiting for the train to pass. Cattle don't like waiting. The sheer crush of them bursts the gate open, and they go tearing up the line. I have to go running the other way to stop the train? Sometimes it works, I stop the train, we clear the track, but now and again, some fleet footed beast outruns me, and before I can warn the driver, the engine runs right into it. Smack! Think about it. An engine, heavy, a coal tender, heavy, freight cars, fifteen, twenty of them with

about sixteen head of cattle in each. You add it up, that's tons and tons... now, think of something that weight hitting a cow. It's like a balloon filled with gore being smashed with a mallet. The blood, the mess, the bits, they go everywhere; the wheels, the pistons and what have you get covered, so does the driver and the fireman. You would not believe how much blood a cow holds and how it gets everywhere, hands, eyes, face ... one time the blood went right in the fireman's ear. He couldn't hear for a week. When his ear was syringed what came out was red marzipan, honest to God, red marzipan, like on a Christmas cake ... that's what come out, his ear wax, blood red.

M.C. Did you enjoy that? Go on, you loved it.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'J' is shown to the audience.

J

M.C. 'J' is for?

ALL. January 1947, the Big Freeze.

(The ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN seen before in 'B', 'F' and 'P'.)

ENGINE DRIVER. After New Year, it's very cold

FIREMAN. Hard wind from the east, for about a fortnight.

ENGINE DRIVER. The ground is dry.

FIREMAN. Bone dry.

ENGINE DRIVER. Dry as a bone.

FIREMAN. Are bones that dry?

ENGINE DRIVER. In the sun I suppose ...

FIREMAN. Maybe.

ENGINE DRIVER. The snow starts about two.

FIREMAN. We're in the marshalling yard in Sligo when it starts.

ENGINE DRIVER. Pretty soon the sleepers are covered.

FIREMAN. The ballast is covered.

ENGINE DRIVER. It lies on the rails, like icing, building up.

FIREMAN. We fire our engine.

ENGINE DRIVER. The Hazelwood.

FIREMAN. One of the smaller engines; ideal given the conditions.

FIREMAN. We leave Sligo.

ENGINE DRIVER. Mixed train. Freight and passengers. It's half-three.

FIREMAN. We can't see the tracks but they're there, we're on them.

ENGINE DRIVER. Through the portholes, white is all you see. At the side, white again.

FIREMAN. Beyond the white, you sense, vaguely ... trees, buildings, what-have-you. They're white too. You're in a world of white. It's all white, white, white.

ENGINE DRIVER. By the time we pull into Dromahair, we are pulling twenty golf balls.

FIREMAN. Every wagon is just a big round white ball.

ENGINE DRIVER. I squint down the platform. Can't see anything. Just white.

FIREMAN. The signalman comes. A snowman. Even his eyebrows are white.

ENGINE DRIVER. As we can't see the signal at the top of the platform, he's come to tell us we can go.

FIREMAN. A mile out there's a crossing at Cleen.

ENGINE DRIVER. The snow is so deep you can't see the gatehouse.

FIREMAN. The line now is very curvy.

ENGINE DRIVER. There are four stretches with 10 m.p.h. restrictions.

FIREMAN. We're not even doing ten.

ENGINE DRIVER. We're crawling, one, two, three miles per hour.

FIREMAN. Finally, we creep into Manorhamilton where we meet the 'Down' goods train from Enniskillen.

FIREMAN. And that's it.

ENGINE DRIVER. We're stuck.

FIREMAN. We can't go past each other.

ENGINE DRIVER. That's the end of journey ...

FIREMAN. Our day.

ENGINE DRIVER. For the next fortnight, nothing moves.

FIREMAN. Nothing.

ENGINE DRIVER. Nothing.

FIREMAN. Then, from the Enniskillen train, we 'rescue' a
GNR van.

ENGINE DRIVE. It's got sliding doors.

FIREMAN. We load twenty-five men in it, strong fellows,
with big shovels.

ENGINE DRIVER. Off we shunt back the way we came, heading
for Sligo.

FIREMAN. There are drifts higher than your head.

ENGINE DRIVER. At every drift, we stop.

FIREMAN. Navies out. They clear the drift. Job done, on
we go.

ENGINE DRIVER. At Dromahair we pick up another twelve
lads.

FIREMAN. We keep going ...

ENGINE DRIVER. Clearing drift after drift after drift ...

FIREMAN. There's one every quarter mile. It takes an age,
an absolute age ...

ENGINE DRIVER. Till miracle of miracles ...

FIREMAN. We make Sligo.

ENGINE DRIVER. We are the first train to make Sligo.

FIREMAN. The Dublin and Limerick lines are still snow-bound.

ENGINE DRIVER. Now, what do you think is the biggest shortage in the big snow? (*To audience*). Anyone like to guess?

FIREMAN. Flour.

ENGINE DRIVER. I didn't ask you.

FIREMAN. They don't have a clue ... they're asleep.

ENGINE DRIVER (*to audience*). Why no flour? No train to move it. And what are the consequences of there being no flour do you think?

FIREMAN. You're going to be waiting a long time for an answer from these ones.

ENGINE FIREMAN. No one is able to bake.

FIREMAN. So what everyone wants is bread ... they haven't had any for weeks.

ENGINE DRIVER. So the bakeries, who have flour, get baking and start shipping bread up the line. Pretty soon, however, the bakeries run out of the hampers to put their bread in.

FIREMAN. And they need the hampers because the wagons are full of animal muck.

ENGINE DRIVER. Frozen of course.

FIREMAN. Who wants their bread stacked on shite, even if it is frozen.

ENGINE DRIVER. The animal muck has to be scraped out and thick brown paper laid down ...

FIREMAN. To lay the hot bread on.

ENGINE DRIVER. Every day for weeks ...

FIREMAN. Up and down the line ...

ENGINE DRIVER. The bread wagons roll into station after station ...

FIREMAN. The doors of the wagons open ...

ENGINE DRIVER. And steam ...

FIREMAN. Actual steam ...

ENGINE DRIVER. Warm, yeasty bread steam ...

FIREMAN. Pours out onto the platforms ...

ENGINE DRIVER. And creeps into the signal boxes and the waiting rooms ...

FIREMAN. The goods sheds and the ticket offices ...

ENGINE DRIVER. The smell of bread ...

FIREMAN. Warm, yeasty, freshly baked bread ...

ENGINE DRIVER. Is everywhere.

FIREMAN. Your jacket ...

ENGINE DRIVER. Your shirt ...

FIREMAN. Your hat ...

ENGINE DRIVER. Your hair ...

FIREMAN. Smells of bread.

ENGINE DRIVER. That's what we remember of 1947.

M.C. The big snow ...

ENGINE DRIVER & FIREMAN (*loudly*). Bread.

M.C. Very touching.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'V' is shown to the audience.

V

M.C. 'V' is for?

ALL. Veronica.

VERONICA walks on with difficulty: there's something wrong with her legs.

VERONICA. Lord ... (*to M.C.*) ... Will you get us something to sit on? (*The M.C. obliges*). Here's my story. In those days I'm living a couple of miles outside Manorhamilton, on the Enniskillen side. I've a job in Enniskillen ...

secretary, in a garage, and I cycle to Manorhamilton and catch the first train to work. But don't I live by the line, and don't the line go right by the house? So there's me, I cycle in, I catch the first train, and half an hour later, aren't I chugging along and looking out the window

and there's the house with my bed, which is still warm, floating by. Well, says I, I could be having another forty winks and stepping out of the house and boarding the train as it passes? I shall have to have a word, says I. As it happens (*indicating the ENGINE DRIVER and the FIREMAN seen in the previous scene, 'J'*) I know a particular Engine Driver and a particular Fireman ... knew them as a girl. How lucky is that? So, I have my word and hey presto! When this particular Engine Driver and this particular Fireman are rostered on the first train, I loiter by the line... they slow right down, a mile or two an hour and I step aboard. Just like that. Only time they don't stop is when there's an 'Inspector' aboard. Then they just blow the whistle and fly by: they wave: I wave back. Hard cheese. And then I go in to Manorhamilton, get the next train, and arrive late for work. Doesn't happen often. Mostly, they stop and I hop on. A brilliant arrangement until one fine morning, I get on and I'm right at the back, and ah, we stop and another train runs up behind and bang! Both legs broke. Hospital in Enniskillen for weeks. Now, I'd no ticket of course, and that queers the compo. In the end I gets five shillings for legs that don't work no more. What if that morning had been one of those mornings when they didn't pick me up?

M.C. Not a dry eye in the house? Or perhaps you think she got her just deserts.

ACT 3

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'R' is shown to the audience.

R

M.C. 'R' is for?

ALL. Return, from Sligo to Enniskillen.

JOURNALIST. AT 6.15 next morning, in the bitter blackness of December, I climb aboard my carriage at Sligo station. The guard looks at me in astonishment. It's the same guard from the 'Down' train I took the previous day. It is also, judging by the crumpled paper bag wedged where the shard of glass is missing from the window, the same carriage. At 6.20, with flashing of lanterns, we are off on our journey through the tangle of mountains to Enniskillen. The section of track reaching out ahead of us into darkness is lit by our not-very-brilliant headlights, which I watch as they swing this way, now that, as the line curves this way, now that. We slide into Ballysodare which, like the stage of a play-set after the curtain has gone up, is suddenly illuminated as the lights are turned on. A few sleepy travellers get off, a few more get on. A bicycle is left

propped in a brightly lit little waiting room, to await the arrival of the postman who will take possession and then cycle round the lanes making his deliveries for years and years to come.

We slide off and threaded ahead of me all along the line, one dark station after another, their Station Masters waiting for us, for me, lanterns waving in the winter dawn, as they wait for the moment, as we pull up, when they will work the switch. The lights come on and illuminate their buildings and platform.

At Manorhamilton we slide to a stop. The driver switches off his headlights. In the moment of miraculous early morning winter light that follows, our opposite number, the 'Down' train from Enniskillen chugs in and stops on the line beside us.

Seamas alights at Manorhamilton. He is a small, dark man who falls on me with the frenzied curiosity of Robinson Crusoe on discovering an outsize Man Friday. (*SEAMUS the character materialises in front of the journalist*).

SEAMAS. I'm on my way to Liverpool you know.

JOURNALIST. Are you?

SEAMAS. Having a holiday.

JOURNALIST. And why not?

SEAMAS. Where's you for?

JOURNALIST. Dublin.

SEAMAS. Living down there are you?

JOURNALIST. Yes.

SEAMAS. You're a long way from home. Why are you here?

JOURNALIST. I'm writing a piece, for the papers, about this railway, before they close it.

SEAMAS. Heard about that. Terrible idea. That's why I'm having me holiday now.

JOURNALIST. Why Liverpool if you don't mind me asking?

SEAMAS. I've kin there.

JOURNALIST (*rhapsodic*). Great city at night, Liverpool ... those towering office buildings honeycombed with light, the roar and clatter of the dock-side traffic, the lighted ferry boats, the floodlit funnels of the liners, the sounds of ships' sirens hooting in the distance – a poor man's New York which you're getting for the price of a return ticket. Now that's what I call a bargain.

SEAMAS. Don't know about that.

JOURNALIST. What are you on about, you're getting a holiday for the cost of a ticket?

SEAMAS. I meant the New York part. Liverpool isn't like New York at all.

JOURNALIST. Isn't it?

SEAMAS. It's a kip.

JOURNALIST. Oh.

SEAMAS. But like I said, it's a free kip.

JOURNALIST. Right.

SEAMAS. You was late in?

JOURNALIST. We were?

SEAMAS. You was.

JOURNALIST. Might have had something to do with being stuck behind a rabbit for miles and miles.

SEAMAS. Big one was it?

JOURNALIST. Size of a small collie. White scut. Hop, hop, hop, he went, and behind him we followed clackety, clackety, clackety, choo-choo ...

SEAMAS. He didn't have the myxsoma-whatever-you-call-it?

JOURNALIST. I'd say not.

SEAMAS. Lucky rabbit to escape that.

JOURNALIST. Lucky again to escape being flattened by a train engine.

SEAMAS. Very rare now, rabbits, you know, on account of that myxoma-thing. Do you know what that's doing to the foxes?

JOURNALIST. I don't

SEAMAS. Without the rabbit, their standard dish, the foxes are having to resort to all kinds of carry on. They're

going wild, eating anything and everything, you wouldn't believe it.

JOURNALIST. If I was wandering those black hills out there I think I'd go wild myself.

M.C. And he would too.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'Q' is shown to the audience.

Q

M.C. 'Q' is for?

ALL. Queer.

M.C. What?

ALL. Queer ticking at the end of a hot summer's day.

The evening of the scorching day seen in 'A'. Slanting sunlight. Inside a carriage, nearing Abohill Halt.

PASSENGER ONE. Every time you touch the road with your boot it's like getting stuck to flypaper. (*PASSENGER ONE imitates the sound of walking on sticky tarmac*).

GUARD. You have to stick around. Ba boom.

PASSENGER TWO. Terrible.

PASSENGER ONE. Cruel don't you think?

PASSENGER TWO. His jokes?

PASSENGER ONE. No. Flypaper.

GUARD. Don't dead flies remind you of currants?

PASSENGER TWO. What are you on about?

PASSENGER ONE. Imagine being stuck to a melting road and having to wait till you died? That's what it's like being stuck to flypaper.

PASSENGER TWO. I'm not a fly. So I don't have to worry.

PASSENGER ONE (to GUARD). You must be roasting.

GUARD. Dying.

PASSENGER TWO. Take the jacket off.

GUARD. Can't. Company rules.

PASSENGER ONE. Seriously?

GUARD. Oh yes.

PASSENGER TWO. Management. Blooming insane.

GUARD. Got to keep up appearances. Imagine if I didn't have the jacket on.

PASSENGER ONE. No one would know who you are.

The engine whistle.

GUARD. You for Abohill?

PASSENGER TWO. We are.

GUARD. Got you there, safe and sound.

PASSENGER ONE. Nice chatting.

PASSENGER TWO. Soon as we're off, he'll be, 'That guard. Yackety, yackety, yackety. Would he ever just shut up.'

The train stops. PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO alight.

The GUARD blows his whistle. The train pulls off.

PASSENGER ONE. 'Yackety, yackety, yackety. Will he ever just shut up.' I say that about you all the time!

PASSENGER TWO. Ha ha.

The train disappears. Now silence and in the silence – clear, precise and audible – click, click, click.

PASSENGER TWO. What's that?

PASSENGER ONE. That queer ticking?

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO look around trying to identify the origin of the sound. They realise it seems to be coming from the rail bed. PASSENGER ONE gets down from the platform and approaches a length of rail. PASSENGER ONE touches the rail.

PASSENGER TWO. Still hot?

PASSENGER TWO climbs down and touches the rail.

PASSENGER TWO. That's so hot.

PASSENGER ONE. Metal's cooling ... that's the ticking.

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO stare along the line into the distance. The ticking – strange, ethereal, spooky.

PASSENGER ONE and PASSENGER TWO do not move.

M.C. (returning). Well how about that?

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. What have we?

The letter 'G' is shown to the audience.

G

M.C. 'G' is for?

ALL. Glenfarne.

M.C. The 'Up' train from Sligo is approaching Glenfarne.

In the carriage FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY with boxing gloves around their necks and all holding paper bags bulging with sweets. As the train puffs along the FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOYS scoff sweets and re-stage their bouts. But as the train pulls into Glenfarne station (where the IRISH CUSTOMS OFFICER KELLY, already met in 'B' and 'P', stands waiting on the platform) the FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY hide the bags. When the train stops the carriage door is opened and KELLY puts his head in.

KELLY. Everybody off.

FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY alight.

KELLY. Hello boys, how are you?

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Fine.

KELLY. Anything to declare?

SECOND PORTORA BOY. No.

THIRD PORTORA BOY. We aren't smugglers.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. We're athletes.

KELLY. In your prime are you?

KELLY glances into the carriage and sees the badly hidden bags of sweets.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Absolutely.

SECOND PORTORA BOY (*quietly*). We'd have laid you out cold.

KELLY. Heard that. How were your bouts?

THIRD PORTORA BOY. Thrashed them in Sligo.

KELLY. Really.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. We pulverised them.

KELLY. Is that so?

FIRST PORTORA BOY. They're all in hospital.

SECOND PORTORA BOY (*quietly, smirking*). Flaky Fenians.

KELLY. Heard that too.

THIRD PORTORA BOY. We're the toughest of the tough.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. You don't mess with us.

KELLY. I see.

SECOND PORTORA BOY. You frightened?

KELLY. Quaking. On you go.

The PORTORA BOYS alight. As the train pulls away the PORTORA BOYS wave their bags of sweets at KELLY.

FIRST, SECOND, THIRD & FOURTH PORTORA BOY (*jeering*). You don't mess with us, you don't mess with us.

KELLY (*signalling*). Signal box, stop the train!

The train stops. KELLY approaches carriage with PORTORA boys.

KELLY. You saw the uniform and you thought, We'll show him? We can pull the wool over his eyes. Is that it?

The FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY are silent. KELLY. Nothing to say. Throw them out. Onto the platform. Come on. All your sweets. Come on.

The FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY throw their bags of sweets onto the platform. KELLY gathers the bags into a heap and makes as if to stamp on them. Freeze.

M.C. That is what borders do. It isn't pretty. But is it inevitable? Nothing is inevitable.

The whole of scene we have just seen is played in reverse: the dialogue is backwards as well as the actions. And like a film in reverse, it can be speeded up. We go all the way back to the start of the scene and stop.

M.C. 'G' is for?

ALL. Glenfarne.

M.C. The 'Up' train from Sligo is approaching Glenfarne.

Take Two.

In the carriage FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY with boxing gloves around their necks and all holding paper bags bulging with sweets. As the train puffs along the FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY scoff sweets and re-stage their bouts. But as the train pulls into Glenfarne station (where the IRISH CUSTOMS OFFICER KELLY, already met in 'B' and 'P', stands waiting on the platform) the FIRST, SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH PORTORA BOY hide the

bags. When the train stops the carriage door is opened and KELLY puts his head in, and from here we fast forward back down the scene to:

THIRD PORTORA BOY. We're the toughest of the tough.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. You don't mess with us.

KELLY. You do like to talk tough don't you?

SECOND PORTORA BOY. You frightened?

KELLY. Yes.

THIRD PORTORA BOY. Really? No. You're joking.

KELLY. One against four and I'm not as fleet of foot as I was. You wouldn't know. I could be terrified.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. He's having a laugh.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Maybe he isn't coddling.

SECOND PORTORA BOY. Course he is.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. How do you know? Perhaps he didn't like being called a flaky Fenian.

KELLY. Been called worse.

SECOND PORTORA BOY. See, he didn't mind. Knew we was just slagging.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Not we. You. You was "just" slagging.

THIRD PORTORA BOY. Ah now. One for all and all for one.

Don't be letting the four musketeers down now.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. No.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. I'm not letting anybody down. I'm just thinking, out loud. Maybe ...

SECOND PORTORA BOY. Maybe what?

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Maybe ...

KELLY (*to SECOND PORTORA BOY*). I have been called worse but I didn't enjoy being called a flaky so-and-so. How'd you like it if I said something like that to you?

SECOND PORTORA BOY. I wouldn't mind, I'd know it was just banter.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. What are you on about?

THIRD PORTORA BOY. You've got the thinnest skin of any of us.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. You'd be raging so you would.

SECOND PORTORA BOY. Would not.

THIRD PORTORA BOY. You would.

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. You would.

SECOND PORTORA BOY I would not.

THIRD PORTORA BOY. You like to dish out but when it's coming back at you don't like that one little bit.

KELLY. Hang on there gents, let's pause. But not for too long. There's a train waiting to leave.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Right enough.

KELLY (*to SECOND PORTORA BOY*). If you're not enjoying this you definitely wouldn't enjoy a slagging from me. Of

course you wouldn't. Nobody does. You know that. Sticks and stones and all that, it's nonsense. You say something to hurt someone and guess what happens?

SECOND PORTORA BOY (*quietly*). You hurt them.

KELLY. Do we really want to lie on our deathbed and think, Wasn't I great when I said that to that fellow? I really scundered him when I called him Slimy Simon. Well done me. I really put him in his box. Nothing to be proud of, is it?

SECOND PORTORA BOY. Maybe.

KELLY. Maybe. Maybe? I think you mean, that's nothing to be proud about, don't you?

SECOND PORTORA BOY (*quietly*). Yes. (*Garbled*) Sorry.

KELLY. It's not simply name calling is it? It's bigotry. We all live on the same bit of land ... yes we're different but here's all we've got. Look at the railway, it doesn't distinguish, it works for everyone and if it can surely as people we can.

There is a long pause.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. Next time if we're on the train ...

SECOND PORTORA BOY. We'll be a bit ...

THIRD PORTORA BOY. ...a bit more ...

FOURTH PORTORA BOY. ...more polite.

FIRST PORTORA BOY. We will.

SECOND PORTORA BOY. Yes, we definitely will. Sorry.

KELLY. Well that's absolutely delightful. Delightful. I feel a definite change of mood. I think this train is ready to go don't you? You don't have any contraband? No whiskey? No cigarettes? Nothing like that. No, of course you don't. Gentlemen, your chariot awaits. On you go.

The PORTORA BOYS alight. As the train pulls away the PORTORA BOYS wave at the Custom's Officer and the Custom's Officer returns their wave.

M.C. See. It doesn't always have to turn out like you think.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'N' is shown to the audience.

N

M.C. 'N' is for?

ALL. Nelly, the nearly lost sister.

YOUNG IRENE. My mother's Irene, who married Xavier. I'm Irene too, her daughter, oldest of six. Young Irene they call me. My mother used to say there's one question she heard all the time when we was growing up and it drove her mad. "How can you rear children living by the railway, Missus Henry? Isn't it dangerous?" She always said, "If we was beside a road it would be different because the roads aren't dangerous?" Sharp tongue my mother has ...

There's only been the one close shave: middle cub, three years old, found her feet, discovering the world, mad curious about anything, everything. Late one morning she wanders out the gatehouse and up the line. I'm meant to be minding her. I'm not paying attention. I'm up to my oxters with the other children. It comes lunchtime. The Enniskillen goods train is due. I go out to close the gates. I close one, then the other and, as I close the second, I look up the line and don't I see Nelly, she's wearing a red dress, she's easy to spot. She's sitting on her rear end, right in the middle of the tracks quite a long way up, and the train is beyond her. I can see the steam coming out of the funnel. I shout, "Nelly, get off the line." Does she hear? No. I shout again. She still doesn't hear. I start to run. I'm screaming blue murder. The train is coming, I don't know if I'm going to get to Nelly before the train does. "Jeepers, girl, get off the line, get off the line." Now, in my terror, what I haven't seen is I'm not alone. There's a party of men working on the track and they're on the other side of Nelly; one of them, John-Joe Cairns, spots her? He's running back and he's got the train coming up behind him. He's running against the train. The driver and the fireman see him running, but they can't see my sister sat down between the

rails because they're so high and the track curves. They just see this lunatic haring along, like he's decided to race them. They give the whistle a blast, oohh, oohh, just to let him know they're coming up behind, oohh, oohh, and they're going to overtake him, because no man is a match for a steam train, oohh, oohh. But John-Joe isn't having it, harder, harder, faster, faster, the man is outstripping the train, harder, harder, faster, faster, on and on and on, closer and closer, to Nelly playing unaware ...

Meantime I hear the whistle. I see the engine. I don't see John-Joe. All I see is my sister, in red, the great black engine thundering towards her and then, a blur, the train passes and I see the line stretching away westwards behind the brake van. I can't see Nelly, I go down like a sack of spuds ... I'm out cold ... when open my eyes and look up from the ground where I'm lying, the first thing I see is John-Joe Cairns looking down at me holding a red bundle ... our Nelly, alive and kicking, and John-Joe's saying, "Are you all right Miss Henry? You've had a turn Miss Henry." Worst moment of my life that, without a doubt though the scene with my mother when she found out was a close second. Sharp tongue she has, a very sharp tongue. M.C. Don't mess with Irene.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'I' is shown to the audience.

I

M.C. 'I' is also for?

ALL. Inebriated in charge of an engine.

REPORTER. We are alarmed to report serious, potentially lethal incidents on the Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway Monday last. Travelling at night, a SLNCR freight train, pulling twenty wagons, smashed a succession of railway gates rather than waiting for them to be opened. The Engine Driver and his Fireman, who were in charge of the train, were intercepted by the Station Master on their arrival at Enniskillen station. They were found to be intoxicated. An internal inquiry was immediately launched. The Engine Driver and the Fireman can expect to be disciplined.

M.C. There's going to be tears before bedtime, mark my words.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'O' is shown to the audience.

O

M.C. 'O' is for?

ALL. Owen, Owen Maguire, also known as Message Maguire.

Ladies and gentlemen, we give you Owen Maguire.

OWEN MAGUIRE (*in guard's livery*). It's incredible what I get asked. It's incredible what I do. I've a customer in Enniskillen who has me bring his cut-throat razors to Barton-Smiths in Sligo to be ground every week. He's a barber. Has to have them back by Saturday to shave the customers for Sunday Mass. He's a cut above everyone else he likes to say. And then there's driving licenses. I get the form and the 5 bob in Enniskillen and get the licenses at Sligo Courthouse. I do post the Football Coupons for ones in the south up in the north. They always promise ten percent if they make a killing. Haven't seen a penny yet. I settle people's rates. Oh you'd be amazed what I do get asked. I always say 'Yes' because I'm an idiot. Except for fireworks. I won't bring them over to the south. They're illegal there. I'd lose the job if I did, although sometimes I wonder. Sergeant Beggs got wind of what I do, so started my weekly visits to the barracks in Enniskillen for our little chat ... uncommonly interested in everyone I see and everyone I meet is Sergeant Beggs ... you know there's what you don't do if you want to keep your job, like bringing fireworks over, and then, there's what you have to do if you want to keep your job, the little chats! M.C. You wouldn't know what really goes on in anyone's life, would you?

ACT 4

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'Y' is shown to the audience.

Y

M.C. 'Y' is for?

ALL. Yellow.

JOURNALIST. Yellow is the colour of dawn streeling across Lough Macnean, followed by a riot of red, green and turquoise. The sun blazes in the sky and its reflection blazes in the water. Even Seamas, my companion, elated at the prospect of Liverpool, is reduced to silence by this scene.

We shuffle along in low gear, driving a sheep before us up the track towards Enniskillen: this is not one of those railways where you tear ahead regardless as long as the lights show green – besides I don't doubt the engine driver knew the sheep's owner. In the universe that is the SLNCR everybody knows everybody. It's that sort of a railway. Eventually, the sheep decides it isn't going to make it as far as Enniskillen; it peels away and we rattle on again, only to halt at Belcoo and Blacklion Then on again along the shore of Lower Lough Macnean, with the remnants of the fiery dawn still blazing in the water. Pale winter sunlight seeps over the flat black land of

Fermanagh. In a quiet, country fashion, passengers slip aboard at every station. By Florencecourt we are full. Every seat is spoken for. We rattle over the iron bridge and there again is the fascinating vista of Enniskillen, framed between tree trunks, rising from its lagoons like an eighteenth-century print that's strayed from the library of a Georgian scholar. In more senses than one that print-like eighteenth century vista is the end of the line – for in next to no time, they will be tearing up the tracks. That's their plan, those imbeciles we call our masters. M.C. That's the press man's opinion, not mine ... though as it happens ...

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'W' is shown to the audience.

W

M.C. 'W' is for?

ALL. Wort, as in ragwort.

As before, railway line with dandelions and now ragwort too, bright yellow, bitter smelling.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. There are many worts and the commonest is the common ragwort, *Senecio Jacobæa*.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. In Irish, *buachalán*.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Golden yellow, bitter smelling.

SECOND BIRDCATCHER. Not a native.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Sicily, that's where it hails from.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. A specimen was in the Oxford University Botanical Gardens.

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Some seeds escaped ...

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. And were carried in the slipstream of trains ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. Through Britain. Then through Ireland.

SECOND BIRDWATCHER. It's considered native to the Irish countryside but that's an error. It was introduced ...

FIRST BIRDWATCHER. By error.

M.C. And the moral here is this: railways change landscapes: they knit into them: they grow into them: they become the landscape and the landscape becomes the railway: that's a fancy way of saying, they're part of a place and everyone's life – they all grow together into something. So when you tear a railway out, you tear out something living. Why would you do that? You'd have to be mad to do that, wouldn't you? That's what they want to do.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'K' is shown to the audience.

K

M.C. 'K' is for?

ALL. King Kehoe, King of the Smugglers.

Irish Customs Office, Manorhamilton. IRISH CUSTOMS OFFICER KELLY (who we've already met in 'B', 'P' and 'G') invites KING KEHOE into his office. KING KEHOE wears an old-fashioned stove-pipe hat.

KELLY. Come and rest your weary bones my friend.

KING KEHOE. If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd just as well stand outside.

KELLY. On a night such as this, deepest winter, the train running late, I absolutely insist. You shall know hospitality, sir. I shall not let you catch a chill.

KING KEHOE. My hat and coat will keep me snug outside, sir. I assure you, I have no need to be inside.

KELLY. In this lovely snug warm room, with its magnificent stove burning away in the corner, the hat and coat can safely be removed and you can take your ease in the very comfortable chair beside the stove.

KING KEHOE. I think I'll keep the hat and coat about me sir. What if the train suddenly rushes in? I don't want to be delaying myself gathering up my things and then miss it.

KELLY. That's hardly likely, is it? I'm the Customs Officer, and every passenger's luggage must be scrutinized. The train won't go till I say I'm done. You are not going to miss it.

KING KEHOE (*seeing he has no alternative and stepping in*).

Oh well, sir, since there seems to be no alternative. But I warn you, I prefer to keep my hat and coat on.

KELLY. As you wish. But one warning will be met with another. Please, take the chair. I insist, you must sit.

KING KEHOE. Since it seems so important, it would be impolite to refuse.

KELLY. It would.

KING KEHOE gingerly settles in the chair by the stove.

KELLY. I think some heat is called for.

KING KEHOE. Oh certainly not sir. I'm warm enough.

KELLY. Not warm enough as far as I'm concerned.

KELLY opens the stove and throws on more sods. KELLY closes the stove. Inside the stove, the roar of the sods catching.

KELLY. Nothing like the sound of a stove catching.

KING KEHOE. I prefer the sound of wind blowing, ice cracking and snow falling.

KELLY. That seems perverse.

KING KEHOE. I think I've thawed out now. I'll take my leave sir. I'll go out and wait on the platform.

KELLY. But you've only just sat down. Don't be silly. Stay.

KING KEHOE. Don't think I will.

KELLY. I insist.

KING KEHOE. I really prefer not to.

KELLY. And I really prefer you stay. I want you to get first warm, this winter evening, and then lovely and toasty.

KING KEHOE. Actually, I am too warm.

KELLY. Take off your coat and hat then, sir.

KING KEHOE. Don't think so.

KELLY. The head is where we lose most of our body's heat. If you want to cool down, you just have to take off your hat.

KING KEHOE. I like my hat on my head.

KELLY. What's that?

KING KEHOE. What's what?

KELLY. There's a little spot of grease. Just on your left temple.

KING KEHOE touches the spot KELLY pointed at.

KING KEHOE. Perspiration.

KELLY. Really?

KING KEHOE licks the end of his finger.

KING KEHOE. Tastes salty. Like sweat.

KELLY. Salty like sweat.

KING KEHOE. Yes.

KELLY. Not salty like butter?

KING KEHOE. Salty like sweat.

KELLY. There's no need for that tone.

KING KEHOE. What tone?

KELLY. The aggrieved belligerent tone when King Kehoe the Smuggler is caught with his stove-pipe hat stuffed with pounds and pounds of butter.

KING KEHOE. What are you talking about?

KELLY. Your hat is stuffed with butter. Now I can't make you take your hat off your head. But I can make you sit here till all the butter that's in there melts and runs down your face.

KING KEHOE. You not got anything better to do with your time?

KELLY. I don't.

KING KEHOE. When you dangle your grandchildren on your knee, and they ask you, "What you did with your life?" you'll tell them this was what you did?

KELLY. Course.

KING KEHOE. They'll think you're a small, pathetic, mean-spirited, hard-hearted fellow who added nothing to the sum of human happiness.

KELLY. Never knew you were such a philosopher.

KING KEHOE. You wouldn't know anything because you've spent your whole life being a petty little bureaucrat.

KELLY. Like you've spent your whole life dragging goods, on which duty has not been paid, backwards and forwards across the border cheating the state. Duty which otherwise would have paid for doctors and teachers ...

KING KEHOE. And customs men, like you.

KELLY. Good point.

KING KEHOE. I have never done what you allege. Never ... ah, what's that I hear.

The sound of the train approaching. KING KEHOE stands.

KING KEHOE. Well, I thank you, sir, for your very kind hospitality. I believe that's my train approaching.

KELLY blocks KING KEHOE'S exit. KELLY rubs a finger over KING KEHOE'S forehead and looks at his greasy finger end.

KELLY. Yellow sweat. Now there's a rarity.

KELLY touches his tongue to the end of his finger.

KELLY. Buttery perspiration. That's a new one on me.

KING KEHOE. I don't want to miss my train. Step aside.

KELLY steps sideways. KING KEHOE steps around him towards the door.

KING KEHOE (*halting in doorway*). By the way, I never raise my hat to anyone in a uniform or authority. That's how I've got as far in life as I have. Good evening.

KING KEHOE goes out onto the platform. The train pulls up.

KELLY (*calling after KEHOE*). I'll be waiting for you Kehoe the next time you pass through.

KING KEHOE. You'll be waiting a long time. Good evening.

M.C. What a brat.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'S' is shown to the audience.

S

M.C. 'S' is for?

ALL. Spaghetti.

IRENE. Tracks aren't continuous. There's a space every so often, and the clackety-clackety-clack you hear is the wheel running over the space. The point of the space is so when it's hot the track has space to expand, longways. But when it's really hot, the track ends hit one another and then they bend sideways, this way and that way, like spaghetti. They go wibbly-wobbly ... which happened right near the gatehouse one boiling day, on an incline. The train comes, a freight, a lot of cattle wagons, the lines are all bendy and the engine comes off the rail, onto the sleepers, rolls sideways snapping the coupling to the coal tender, topples sideways, the engine driver and the fireman jump free ... I heard the whole engine, tons and tons in weight, falling, whoomp, onto the ground, an incredible

noise. I came out to see. I saw the back part of the train still on the rails ... no engine pulling it! It starts to roll back down the incline its just gone up. I'm at the foot of the incline and I see the twenty wagons, less the engine, sliding back, coming towards me. The guards van is right at the back, it passes me first.

Inside the van I see the guard, sheeted in blood, he got a terrible bang when the engine de-railed. He's got the brake wheel and he's screwing it down, he has to stop the train ... one wagon after another flies by, sparks shoot up from under the wheels. I watch the train shoot away up the track it's just come down ... I wonder, "Will it stop? Will the brake work?" ... and then, I watch it slowly, slowly, slowly rolls to a stop ... there's a moment of silence, then the cattle start to roar in their trucks. The train is saved, the cattle are saved, nothing and no one has died, and the cattle, they know, they know this, that's why they bellow like billy-oh. (*She imitates their bellows*). Now that's something you don't hear everyday. M.C. Or forget in a hurry.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

M.C. And what have we?

The letter 'T' is shown to the audience.

T

M.C. 'T' is for?

ALL. Tribunal, the Tribunal of Inquiry.

M.C.- where you're hauled when you're in for it.

REPORTER. Last Tuesday we reported on the special freight train driven recklessly through a set of closed railway crossings. It was a miracle no one was killed or injured. Now we can report on the Tribunal of Inquiry raised on the foot of the incident, held in the Enniskillen Main Office of SL&NCR.

The SL&NCR head office, Enniskillen. The GENERAL MANAGER sits behind a desk. The ENGINE DRIVER and FIREMAN (already seen in 'B', 'F' 'P' and 'J') stand in front of desk.

GENERAL MANAGER (*Ulster accent*). One, you ignore the lights. All of them. Two, you smash through gate after gate after gate. Twelve. Twelve gates. Three, you get to Enniskillen, you fall out of the cab. Drunk. You're seen by the station master. You're drunk. You've driven drunk. Smashed gates, drunk. Now you know perfectly well, how this goes. Of course you do.

ENGINE DRIVER. I'm sorry.

GENERAL MANAGER. What did you say?

ENGINE DRIVER. I'm sorry. I've let the railway down ...

GENERAL MANAGER. And yourself.

ENGINE DRIVER. And myself and my family ... will I be sacked? I've mouths to feed ... I should have thought of that before I took the drink and fired the engine and smashed the gates. I'm very sorry indeed. What I did was wrong, completely and utterly wrong.

GENERAL MANAGER. What does your friend have to say for himself?

FIREMAN. Nothing.

GENERAL MANAGER. Nothing? You've got nothing to say? Why have you got nothing to say?

FIREMAN. Because I haven't.

GENERAL MANAGER. I'd have thought under the circumstances you'd have something to say.

FIREMAN. You thought wrong.

GENERAL MANAGER. Tell you what, go you down to the accounts office, get what's owed you, and clear out. I never want to see you again. Go on. Out. *The FIREMAN slopes off. The GENERAL MANAGER stares at the ENGINE DRIVER.*

GENERAL MANAGER. You know what's going to happen now?

ENGINE DRIVER. I do.

GENERAL MANAGER. Tell me.

ENGINE DRIVER. I go the yard. See the foreman.

GENERAL MANAGER. And what do you say to him?

ENGINE DRIVER. I'm not a driver no more.

GENERAL MANAGER. And what do you say next?

ENGINE DRIVER. I'm ... I'm on ... dung duty.

GENERAL MANAGER. That's right.

ENGINE DRIVER. How long will I be on dung duty?

GENERAL MANAGER. Until I say otherwise.

ENGINE DRIVER. And when will that be?

GENERAL MANAGER. That's for me to know and you to find out. And you can count yourself lucky you're not following himself down to accounts to get your last wage. Right, buzz off.

The ENGINE DRIVER shuffles off.

M.C. The Fireman was too ashamed to stay in Ireland, so he went to Bradford, got a job, foundry. Well he was good with coal and ovens.. Then he died. As for the driver, he never got back on the engines. He spent the rest of his days scraping muck out of cattle trucks.

The M.C. spins the tombola: someone picks out a letter.

The letter 'C' is shown to the audience.

C

M.C. 'C' is for?

ALL. Christmas Eve.

GUARD. This Christmas Eve I'm on the 4.00 p.m. Up train from Sligo to Enniskillen and back on the 7.20 p.m. Down

train. At Enniskillen there's a big palaver attaching extra carriages because we know there's hundreds of extra passengers given the day that's in it. The trains bringing them from Clones and Derry and Belfast are late. We don't leave till 8.00 p.m., forty minutes late. Then at Belcoo, everybody out with all their luggage onto the platform. It all has to be inspected by British customs, that takes an age. Then we go on to Glenfarne, Irish customs, and guess what? Everybody out on to the platform with all their luggage and we repeat the whole business all over again. Customs checks and borders, who's idea was that? It's one blooming country. Sorry, I apologise, I got on the soap box there. Finally we pull out of Glenfarne Station. There's no moon. The night is black, black as the Bible. I'm in the brake van, the guards van, at the back of the long twenty carriage train. In every direction, as far as my eye can go, there's hundreds of Christmas candles, for there's one burning in the window of every single house across the whole of Ireland. As we speed on, the points of light spread. I see stars laid over the country like a great spangled tapestry. We don't make Sligo till after ten. I leave the station. I walk back to my digs. It's Christmas Eve and I can't get home because I'm working. I haven't much to look forward to on Christmas Day... I mean,

the landlady is fine, she'll give me my dinner, but I want to be at home and I won't be at home. I feel low, deflated. Then I have this thought. I've seen the sky lying across the earth, which I've never seen before and I'll never see again ... my lonely feeling vanishes like mist burning away in the sun. I feel exalted.

M.C. I won't say anything, won't spoil the magic. Oh whoops, I just did.

EPILOGUE

The M.C. indicates the tombola.

M.C. No need to spin. Only one letter left.

Someone picks out the letter.

Actor. We saved the best till last. 'Z'.

They show the letter 'Z' to the audience.

'Z'

M.C. You've been waiting for 'Z'. I know you have. "What 'Z' word is there connected to the railway? Be prepared to be amazed. We're not just pretty faces. So ... 'Z' ... 'Z' is for?"

ALL. Zero-six-four T (pronounced 0-6-4T).

M.C. The number of the "Lough" class engines. The last new engines built for the line. The only new engines purchased in the last forty years of the Company's existence. Zero-six-four T is just a run of numbers and an

initial, but behind the number, two names, Lough Melvin and Lough Erne, plain black livery, borders and lettering in red, beauties both. Work horses too. Look what they do! They get us, here to there, there to here, without stinting, without failing, rain, hail or shine, day in day out, week in week out, month in month out, year in year out. Think what this means, for us, for everybody, to be moved around, hither and thither, to be connected. Think what that is, think what that means, think what will be lost with the line being closed. Our masters know the price of everything but of value they know nothing. Nothing. We have buildings, lines, carriages, wagons, waiting rooms, platforms, locomotive works, railway crossings, sheds, gates, sleepers, a whole system. Something so valuable and useful and necessary, and they're just going to scrap it? Throw it away because they want to, with nothing better to put in its place? They have no alternative.. Some buses maybe? Cars? Bicycles? The horse and trap? Shanks pony? Why on earth would you do away with something that works for everyone, on both sides of the border, without anything better to replace it with? Why would you do that? Because petrol is king or the future or something. Nonsense. Governments are meant to

enhance and improve. We have to stop it. We have to stop this.

Blackout. Lights up.

M.C. I'm Nelly, the girl in the red dress on the track.

Actor 1. The Journalist was a friend of the family.

Actor 2. The Engine Driver was my great-uncle.

Actor 3. The Fireman's my father. He left when I was ten and I never saw him again.

Actor 4. Owen Maguire, uncle by marriage.

Actor 5. The Huckster, he's the black sheep of my family.

Actor 6. King Kehoe, hero of our family.

Actor 7. I'm the daughter of Kelly the customs man though I tend, on the whole, not to tell many people.

M.C. We'll spare you the rest. You get the point. We're all connected to everyone you saw. We are the people of the railway.

Blackout. Lights up. The M.C. takes off his gown and mortar board. The other members of the cast throw their props, hats and other bits and pieces into the props basket.

M.C. They closed the line. That's what they would do, isn't it? They were only interested in making things worse, not better. My little brother, Frank, wanted to be an engine driver. It was written in the stars. Suddenly, that was the end of that dream, the railway was over. The

yards were there, in Manorhamilton, not too far from our gatehouse where we lived. Every free minute he got, he was over the fence, into that yard. Once he was in, he was into every shed, every building, every office, every engine, every wagon. There was nothing he didn't explore. After a year of quiet the assets were sold. He watched as the engines were cut up and everything was destroyed. When he left school, he went to the abattoir. That's what he does. He slaughters beasts. There we are. End of story. Good night. *Blackout.*

Note

There are twenty-six scenes, each identified by a letter of the alphabet. The letters come not alphabetically but haphazardly.

Scenes 'E', 'M', 'R' and 'Y' are based on Denis Ireland's article 'A North Western Journey', published in *The Irish Times*, September 1957 and republished by permission of the editor, Douglas Gageby, in *Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway*, N.W. Sprinks, published by the Irish Railway Record Society, 1970. Permission will have to be secured from *The Irish Times* to use this material.

A great deal of information on the Sligo, Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway was derived from *Down Memory Line* by Michael Hamilton.

Carlo Gébler