

Schrodinger's Flat  
By Tom Moran

SETTING

The place: An apartment in Dublin, Ireland  
The time: the 1950's

CHARACTERS

ADAM, 40's-50's  
MARCIA, 40's-50's

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SCENE 1

(The living room of an apartment. A door stage left leads to the hallway, another stage right to a kitchen. On a table center stage sit a cardboard box, keys and a note. There is also a couch. ADAM and MARCIA enter from hallway with luggage.)

ADAM

How come the fellow didn't lock the door?

MARCIA

Erwin said it was easier to leave us the keys here than to hand them off.

ADAM

Or is he just avoiding us?

(ADAM walks offstage left.)

MARCIA

Might be. He's been irritable with me ever since we got into a dust-up over unified field theory.

ADAM (O.S.)

You know those testy Germans.

MARCIA

He's Austrian, actually.

(ADAM reenters, holding tin cans.)

ADAM

How come none of the cans in the pantry are labeled?

MARCIA

Erwin doesn't like labels. He says they ruin the inherent mystery at the core of the universe.

ADAM

You people are very odd.

MARCIA

(shrugs)

It's a free housesit, dear. Isn't this what you wanted? A change of scenery?

ADAM

Absolutely. That house. It's starting to feel like a prison.

MARCIA

I understand.

ADAM

It would have been nice to go farther away than just across town, though.

MARCIA

We can take a real vacation at the end of the semester, when I'm through teaching. When Steven is back.

ADAM

If he's back.

(ADAM shakes his head, then notices the note.)

ADAM (cont.)

It looks like Erwin left us a note. (reads)  
"Instructions for cat care?"

MARCIA

What?

ADAM

You didn't tell me there was a cat. I have allergies.

MARCIA

I know. I'm sorry, hon, he didn't tell me.

ADAM

Well, this won't work. Back to the cell block, I guess.

MARCIA

Oh, come, it's not as bad as all that (Pause.) Steven had to leave someday, Adam.

ADAM

Of course, but to just disappear. With no notice, no address, nothing. Not even a note.

(MARCIA pats ADAM's back.)

MARCIA

He's impulsive. Just like his dad. He'll be back. It'll be sudden, and unexpected, but he'll be back. And anyway we've done everything we can to find him.

ADAM

He could be anywhere. What are we supposed to do?

MARCIA

We're supposed to get on with things. So let's at least do it somewhere new. Look. Right downtown! Lovely view of the Liffey. No schools. No lawns. Just adults being adults. Right where we belong.

ADAM

That was a terrible way to phrase things. And, as previously noted - cat.

MARCIA

Well, it doesn't seem to have set off any sneezing fits. Wherever it is.

ADAM

True. (reads.) "The cat is in this box. It's an experiment. Whatever you do, do not open the box." What?

MARCIA

What?! Let me see that.

(MARCIA reads the note and looks at the box.)

MARCIA

Oh my god, he did it.

ADAM

Who?

MARCIA

Schrodinger. (Pause.) The owner of the apartment.  
Erwin Schrodinger.

ADAM

Explain.

MARCIA

Schrodinger is an authority on quantum mechanics.  
Which includes the theory of superpositions. Which  
dictates that quantum systems such as atoms or protons  
can exist in multiple states simultaneously. It's a  
paradox.

ADAM

(sarcastic)

Oh, so he put a cat in a box. Of course.

MARCIA

Along with a decaying radioactive element, a Geiger  
counter, and a flask of poison.

ADAM

Good lord. This is getting rather sadistic.

MARCIA

You leave the cat in there for a while. The element  
either emits an atom or doesn't. If it does, it trips  
the Geiger counter, which breaks the flask.

ADAM

Dead cat.

MARCIA

Or, no decay, no counter, no break, cat lives to claw  
on the drapes another day. But because the atom is in  
a state of superposition, it can have decayed or not  
decayed simultaneously. Thus - until we look in the  
box, the cat is both alive and dead at the same time.

ADAM

You know, I am one hundred percent a dog person, and  
even I can't get behind this.

MARCIA

Sometimes science requires sacrifices.

(ADAM looks closely at the box.)

ADAM

So there's a cat in here? And it may be alive or dead?

MARCIA

Or both.

ADAM

Seems like it's probably dead.

MARCIA

What makes you say that?

ADAM

I don't see any air holes.

MARCIA

True. The idea is postulated on the cat having an independent air supply.

ADAM

This is sounding more and more theoretical.

MARCIA

And also based on the notion that one cannot examine the box to study the status of the cat.

ADAM

But what if we hear it meow?

MARCIA

Then the experiment has a fatal flaw.

ADAM

So we just leave it here? Until when?

MARCIA

Until Schrodinger comes back, I suppose.

ADAM

That's not for a week! How could the cat survive that long?

MARCIA

There's also an independent supply of food and water. Theoretically.

ADAM

There's that word again. It's not theoretical, now is it? I'm letting the poor thing out.

MARCIA

Just leave it, Adam.

ADAM

It's in the middle of the common room! Are we just supposed to work around it for a week?

MARCIA

I am a scientist, Adam, and while I have had my disagreements with Ernst, I understand the importance of experimentation. If he says don't touch the box, we don't touch the box.

ADAM

So the cat is trapped in there. Straddling life and death. An enigma. An unknown.

MARCIA

By definition.

ADAM

Why does it have to be a cat?

MARCIA

I don't know, Adam.

ADAM

I mean, he could have used a mouse. Or a housefly. Or an amoeba! I would not be facing any moral conundrum right now if this box contained Schrodinger's paramecium.

MARCIA

(shrugs)

There's no conundrum about it. Science is science.

ADAM

Isn't science about wanting to know? Don't you think we have enough uncertainly in our lives already without throwing this poor cat on the pile?

MARCIA

I have lodged my opinion. You - you do what you have to do. I'm hungry. I'm going to open a couple cans of things, boil them, and hope for the best.

(MARCIA exits to kitchen. ADAM inspects the box. Sound of electric can opener.)

MARCIA (o.s.)

Number one: split pea soup.

(ADAM prods the box gently. Sound of electric can opener.)

MARCIA

Number two: pineapples. Ugh. I guess there'll be an experiment of sorts in the kitchen as well.

(ADAM gingerly picks up the box and shakes it. Sound of pots and pans from the kitchen.)

ADAM

I shook the box, Marcia.

MARCIA (o.s.)

Don't tell me, I don't want to know.

ADAM

Feels like a cat in there. It could be, anyway. It's not moving.

MARCIA (o.s.)

That's because you probably just broke the vial of poison.

ADAM

What? Are you serious?

(MARCIA reenters.)

MARCIA

I told you not to touch it.

(ADAM sniffs the box.)

ADAM

Doesn't smell like anything.

MARCIA

It's airtight, remember?

ADAM

Dammit! I don't understand this. I don't understand you.

MARCIA

Steven was nineteen, Adam. It was time for him to find his own way.

ADAM

Don't change the subject.

MARCIA

I'm not.

ADAM

What do you mean?

MARCIA

I'm saying that we cannot know whether he's in Donegal or Dar Es Salaam. Having the time of his life or passed out in a ditch.

ADAM

Alive or dead.

MARCIA

Alive or dead.

ADAM

You said this cat experiment is based on theory. Not fact.

MARCIA

Yes.

ADAM

Are there alternate theories?

MARCIA

Some people believe the cat is alive and dead in alternate universes. Some believe that superpositions

can only exist for a fraction of an instant, whether they are observed or not.

ADAM

What do you believe?

MARCIA

The relational interpretation. The superposition doesn't exist because it is already being observed.

ADAM

By whom?

MARCIA

The Geiger counter, for one. But also, the cat.

ADAM

So you're saying that...

MARCIA

...that what we see, and what we think, are irrelevant. Because what is happening is happening regardless.

ADAM

I see.

MARCIA

Do you?

ADAM

Yes.

(ADAM grabs the keys and uses them to cut open sealing tape on the box. MARCIA watches silently. He reaches into the box and pulls out a throw pillow and a note. ADAM reads the note and hands it to MARCIA.)

MARCIA

(reads)

"Thanks, Marcia. Now we will never know."

ADAM

Very, very odd.

MARCIA

He's also something of a prick.

ADAM

(sniffs)

That stuff in the kitchen smells terrible.

MARCIA

I agree. Shall we leave this place and find somewhere to eat? Explore the neighborhood?

(ADAM looks at the pillow.)

ADAM

What is happening is happening regardless.

MARCIA

Yes.

(ADAM tosses the pillow on the couch.)

ADAM

Let's go.

(Blackout. End of play.)