

PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

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After You

By
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Characters

Jill Gough (Widow of Barry)

Chris (Her son, aged 16)

Steve McCullough

PRELUDE

- JILL You think they'd tell you, wouldn't you? You think they'd say: *you know them stories your so fond of? – you know, the ones with the happy endings – well, it's not always like that.* You think they'd tell you. But then why should they? I mean you wouldn't listen.
- CHRIS Don't really want to talk about it; think about it. I mean, he was my dad. When I was growing up and that, he was there for me; always there for me. And when he died I missed him like mad. But now... I don't know... It's doing my head in.
- JILL Was it a shock? Well, yes and no. You think you know someone – well, he was my husband for heaven's sake; we'd been married nineteen years – so, yes, it was a shock. But in a funny way it was... Well, in a funny way it was a relief. To finally know, you know. But I can't say I understand. Because I don't.
- STEVE He dreaded it. The thought of the truth coming out – like that – it terrified him. I'm glad he's not here to have to deal with it cos I'm not sure he could've dealt with it like. He would have tied himself in knots: told even more lies. And whatever anyone thinks, he hated lying. Nearly as much as he hated himself sometimes.
- JILL And where we go from here is anybody's guess. I've been trying to work it out. *(beat)* Yeah. *(Pause)* Answers on a postcard only.

SCENE ONE

A cemetery. Chris enters and stands by a grave. Some fading flowers in a vase. Pause. Jill enters with a fresh bunch of flowers.

- JILL You might've waited for me.
- CHRIS Forgot you didn't know the way.
- JILL Alright, there's no need – *(beat)* Let's not have a row, eh? Not here; not today. *(pause)* Oh yes, I remember now: that tree. *(looking at the grave)* It looks all right, doesn't it? *(silence)* Chris.

CHRIS What?

JILL The stone: it looks all right.

CHRIS I've seen it before.

JILL Yeah. *(reading)* *Beloved Husband and Father.* Not very original.

CHRIS They all say something like that.

JILL I suppose.

CHRIS *(reading)* *Beloved Wife and Mother... Beloved Son... Dear Gladys:*
Sleeping soundly now.

JILL I should hope she is. *(pause)* You think it's alright, then?

CHRIS Yeah.

JILL Yeah. *(pause)* Well, we'd better get these in water.

CHRIS I'll go get some.

JILL Had you better –

CHRIS There's a plastic bottle by the tap; you just use it and put it back
when you've finished.

JILL Oh. Right. What a good idea. *(pause)* Well, go on, then.

*Chris goes. Jill kneels to unwrap the flowers and cuts the ends with a pair of scissors taken from
her pocket. She takes the fading flowers out of the vase, looks at them for a moment.*

JILL Sometimes I'm so angry. Still. With you. With what you did. To me.
To us. To Chris. You've him to thank I'm here at all. He never lets
up: dropping hints. Like little bombs. *(pause)* I don't know what to
do with him. It's like walking on broken glass. Oh, it's all right for
you, you're out of it; you can do no wrong: *Saint Barry.* *(pause)* He
misses you, I know he misses you – God knows, I miss you – and I
think that's why he wanted, you know, to talk about you all the
time. But what could I say? Could hardly tell him the truth, could I?
So I said nothing. And when he started, I changed the subject. So
now he doesn't bother. Now we hardly speak. Now there's silence.
And I blame you for that, too.

Pause. Chris has returned. Jill turns to him.

JILL Did you bring these? *(beat)* They're lovely.

CHRIS They're dead

JILL Not all of them.

CHRIS *(Handing her the bottle)* It doesn't matter.

She fills the vase with water and begins to arrange the flowers. She stops.

JILL Do you want to do it?

CHRIS You do it.

Jill finishes the arrangement and wraps up any debris in the paper but forgets to retrieve the scissors. They kneel/stand in silence for a time.

JILL Doesn't seem like a year, does it? *(pause)* I know things haven't been easy. *(Chris shrugs)* I mean with us –

CHRIS You never talk about him.

JILL Course I do!

CHRIS You don't. You change the subject.

JILL *(standing)* There, that looks all right, doesn't it?

CHRIS See.

JILL What? I was just... *(pause)* We should be getting back.

CHRIS Only just got here.

JILL Well, we've done what we came for.

CHRIS You have.

JILL *(beat)* Oh. Right. I'll wait by the gate. There's a bench.

Jill goes. Chris looks at the grave.

CHRIS Guess what: I did two minutes, twenty-six. Personal best. Came third. Yeah. *(pause)* Told you I'd get her here. *(pause)* Anyhow, she's been now. Yeah.

He goes. Steve enters, with flowers, looking for the grave. Having found it, he looks at it for a

time.

STEVE Did you think I'd forgotten you? Didn't like to before. Like I'd be intruding; God knows. But I thought, today... Can you hear all this? Are you floating about somewhere? Is that how it works? Anyhow. Not much news. Business is gradually picking up. *(pause)* Our Julie's having another baby. That'll be one more birthday to forget. What else? I've joined a gym. Can you tell? It was either that or lay off the booze. I joined a gym. It's called making an effort. I'm *making an effort*. *(beat)* It doesn't work. *(pause)* I had to ring the Parks Department, you know, to find out where you were. You're number 5204, do you know that? Avenue B plot 5204. I was always the one with the number: McCULLOUGH: Corporal: 7690437. For some reason you always found that hilarious. God knows why. Typical bloody civilian. Well, Gough: Plot 5204, now we're even stevens.

Pause. He remembers what he's holding.

STEVE Flowers. *(seeing the floral arrangement)* Someone's beat me to it. Story of my life, eh? Expect Jill's been. Never thought...

Steve lays his flowers on the grave, still wrapped. Chris has entered. Steve turns to go.

CHRIS 'Scuse me.

Steve stops and turns to face Chris.

STEVE Yes?

CHRIS I think you might've made a mistake... Where you've just left your flowers: that's my dad's...

STEVE *(After a time)* You must be Chris.

CHRIS *(Beat)* How – ?

STEVE My name's Steve; Steve McCullough. I was er... I was a friend of your dad's

CHRIS Oh. Right. Sorry. I didn't... Were you at the funeral?

STEVE No. No, I wasn't able to er... No.

Pause.

STEVE Well, I'd better –

CHRIS Was it though work, like?

STEVE What?

CHRIS How you knew him.

STEVE No. Well, not washing machines. No, I er... I've got a garage: repairs.

CHRIS Yeah?

STEVE Eastern Road. Fixed his van a few times.

CHRIS Right

STEVE Well, I'd better be –

CHRIS Today's the anniversary, you know, of when he... when he was killed.

STEVE Right.

CHRIS Did you know?

STEVE Yeah. Yeah, I knew it was around this time.

CHRIS So me and my mum...

STEVE Yeah, I could see someone'd been; with the flowers.

CHRIS Yeah, she thinks she might've left the scissors and they're the good ones from the kitchen.

STEVE Right.

CHRIS Here they are.

Chris picks up the scissors. Pause.

CHRIS There's a plastic bottle over by the tap, you know, if you want any water for the –

STEVE Right.

CHRIS I'll get you some if you like.

STEVE No, it's alright. There wasn't really room.

CHRIS Right.

STEVE Well, I'd better be off.

CHRIS Yeah. Well... Nice to meet you.

STEVE Mind how you go.

CHRIS Yeah.

Chris goes. Steve looks after him.

FIRST INTERLUDE

JILL You've come to fix the washer in the nurses' home. It won't empty and the door's stuck and it's full of washing – my washing as it happens which is why I'm taking such an interest – and you're *Oh yes, we'll have this right in no time.* And you're trying to get the door open. And I'm thinking *but if you open the door without getting it to drain, won't there be a flood?* But you're all spanners and rolled up sleeves so you must know what you're doing, no? Well, as it happens, no. And when you're standing up to your ankles in soapy water and wet washing I'm thinking what a wally. And then you smile. The sort of smile that comes from nowhere and has you smiling back before you know what's happening. I'm thinking what a wally but I'm smiling back. Fatal. Smiles like that: there should be a law.

SCENE TWO

Home. Jill with a pile of Barry's clothes. She takes the clothes off their hangers and puts them in bin liners. She stops at a particular sweater and looks at it. Then holds it to her face and inhales. We can hear an old song. She comes across a leather jacket.

The music is gone. She looks at the jacket for a long time. Chris is there.

CHRIS What you doing?

JILL *(recovering)* What?

CHRIS What you doing?

JILL Oh... Having a clear out, you know. *(and she puts the jacket in a bag)*
You can help me if you like.

CHRIS You can't just throw it away.

JILL I'm not throwing it away.

CHRIS Doesn't look like it.

JILL They're for the charity shop. Might as well do someone some good.

CHRIS They're his things.

JILL Well, if you want to keep –

CHRIS They're all his things.

JILL I know.

CHRIS I don't want them chucked out.

JILL We can't keep them for ever.

CHRIS Why not?

JILL Because you can't. You have to... They're just things.

CHRIS His things.

JILL Yes, alright, his things.

CHRIS *(retrieving it)* His jacket. His favourite jacket.

JILL You don't want that.

CHRIS Why not?

JILL You won't wear it.

CHRIS I will. *(and he puts it on)*

JILL Chris, please. *(pause)* It's been a year.

CHRIS Oh, so that's it, is it? It's been a year so now it's get rid time. Thanks for the memory but we've had enough.

JILL *(beat)* I'm just making some room.

CHRIS For what?

JILL Well, we could have people to stay; friends: you could have friends to stay.

CHRIS Don't want friends staying.

JILL You might.

CHRIS You just want to forget he ever lived.

JILL Now you're talking rubbish.

CHRIS Am I? Yeah? So what's all this about?

JILL I've told you.

CHRIS And this morning at the cemetery: I nearly had to drag you there.

JILL Now that's not true and you know it.

CHRIS You'd never been since the funeral.

JILL I don't see what –

CHRIS You won't even talk about him.

JILL Just because I don't –

CHRIS He was my dad.

JILL That's right.

CHRIS My dad.

JILL Yes, and my husband and God know what else.

CHRIS What's that supposed to mean?

JILL Nothing. *(beat)* Now you can either help me or you can leave me in peace. *(pause)* What? What is it? What are you looking like that for?

CHRIS *(after a beat)* You never even loved him, did you?

JILL What?

CHRIS You can't have.

JILL (*beat*) Don't talk to me about love.

CHRIS Can't talk to you about anything.

JILL Has it ever occurred to you for one second that you might not know everything? That there might be things you don't understand? Has it?

CHRIS I don't know what you're on about.

JILL No, that's right; you don't.

CHRIS But I don't want you chucking all his stuff.

JILL Right then: here. Keep it. Keep the lot; you keep the lot.

CHRIS I will.

JILL His clothes; records; all his – God knows what's in here: letters; bits of rubbish. There: they're all yours; you deal with them but I want them sorted; I want them gone.

CHRIS You must be glad he's dead.

Jill slaps Chris round the face. Pause. Chris goes.

SECOND INTERLUDE

CHRIS Three years old and flying! Aeroplanes: One arm; one leg and up and down and round: a fairground ride. I'm beaming, screaming: don't let go!

Or race you! To the lamp-post; the end of the road: end of the world! Chase me! Look, I'm winning; can't catch me!

Or on your shoulders: eight feet tall – half me; half you – like some fabulous beast. And I can see the world from here.