

BILL

**"BILL"**

A female monologue

© by

Tony Breeze,

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## BILL

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BILL

CHARACTERS

Anne.....An old lady of indeterminate years whose children have grown up.  
She vibrates with warmth and humour and still has a wicked twinkle  
in her eye

Dedicated to the love that existed  
between a wonderful old couple,  
Bill and Anne

## BILL

(The scene is the living room of an old person's house, which may be indicated by whatever props thought necessary. If time is limited for setting, the essentials needed are two armchairs, a table and perhaps a window frame or symbol thereof. It is suggested that introductory music be used in the form of the song entitled "Bill" or an instrumental version of it. At the conclusion of the music an old lady comes into the room carrying a tea tray)

Anne (To Bill off) I'll take it into the front room, love. Do you hear '?(To herself) Deaf as a post (To Bill) And don't forget to change your shirt, I'm not having you coming down here looking like Worzel Gummage! ... (To herself) He comes off that allotment, straight in the back door looking like I don't know what ... (To Bill) Your collar studs are in the drawer if you can't find them... (She looks around for the best place for the tray) Now then where shall we have it? Over here? No, the sun will be in his eyes - he can't stand the sun in his eyes... over here? Yes, this is better (Puts down the tray on a table) I'll just pull the curtains a fraction (she does so) ... (To Bill) Have you found it? (To herself) You spend half your life ironing shirts for them and then they can't find them - they need looking after like babies (She sits in one of the chairs) Yes, this is better ... I wouldn't care if he liked wearing them - he can't stand collars and ties ... "If God had wanted me to wear a collar and tie," he says, "I'd have been born with one!" (To Bill) Are you coming or aren't you '?(To herself) I think I'll just pull that curtain a fraction more...

I hope he's left his boots outside - he comes in without a care in the world, mud all over the place and who has to clear it up? Muggins of course (To Bill) Come on love, its going cold... (To herself) He can't stand cold tea ... I've not forgotten anything? Cups, saucers, plates, cakes - he'll not eat one, you watch, every day I bring him a cake and without fail he'll not eat it - "Meat's what a man needs after a hard days work," he says "meat not cakes," . . . I still think its nice to have a little something special every now and then... Men! Who can understand them? One minute everything's all right and then it's all wrong ... I wouldn't care, but he spends so much time in that allotment - "To get away from your nagging" he says - the cheek - I don't nag - at least I don't think I do - you've got to speak your mind I say, its no good bottling things up ... some do though, bottle it all up and then when it's built up enough, out it comes - I'm not like that, I'd sooner say it and get it over with - like that allotment - "It's too big," I told him, "It's too much for you" ... "Nonsense," he says, "Where would I be without my allotment? "One day," I said, "We're going to come down there and find you in a bad way - like that time you had the funny turn in the garage"... I went out there and found him sitting on a box looking as white as a sheet. "What've you done?" I said - "I don't know," he says, "I just came over all funny"...The doctor said it was a stroke, a warning, he said, to take it easy... and what does he do? As soon as he's able he's back down there digging away - "If I'm going to drop," he says, "I'll drop in harness" - he talks as if he was a carthorse! It's not as if we needed all the stuff he grows - barrowfuls he brings back - "What am I going to do with all this? I said, "We cant eat all this"... "We'll eat it," he says, "You wait and see" ...He ends up giving half of it away to neighbours - good hearted he is, like

## BILL

that - I wouldn't have him any other way though... (To Bill) "Are you coming for this tea or aren't you? ... (To herself) The back garden would be quite big enough if you ask me, we could grow all we need in there - but no, he won't have it - "The day I give up my allotment, "he says "Is the day they carry me out"

(Going to the window) It's looking nice though, the garden, even if I say so myself ... I do like a nice garden ...you can tell a person's character from the garden they keep, that's what I always say... there's some round here - they let things go to rack and ruin ... a bit of colour all the year round, that's what I like to see... (She sees a cat in the garden) Oh no, it's there again (Knocks on the window) Go on! Get out of it! Go and do your business in your own garden ... I can't stand cats - mucky things - I wouldn't care if it did it on its own patch but it always heads for ours (Knocks again) Go on! Scram! Before I get Bill onto you - "I'll sort it out," he says," An injection of lead is what it needs, right between the ears!" He would as well, he's daft enough - and then where would we be? ... I've told her - I've told her about it. "It keeps doing its business in our garden," I said, but I'm sure she thinks I'm making it up... "My little Fergy-Wergy?" she says "Are you sure? I don't think he would because he's got his own tray and he's ever so intelligent - I'm sure he wouldn't do a thing like that"...If Bill catches it there'll be trouble... still, they're not all like her round here, thank goodness - "Fanny Adams," he calls her, "Fanny Adams" indeed! (She chuckles to herself)

It's not just the allotment that's too big, it's this house as well - I tried to tell him "We don't need all this room," I said, "Now the kids have gone - What do we need three bedrooms for? We only use the one"... "I'm not moving," he says, "I like it where I am. You can't cope with new places at my age" ... I tried persuading him but it was no good. "What about the stairs?" I said, "One day we're not going to be able to manage, those stairs, I have trouble as it is" ... "I'm not living in any bungalows," he said - "For seventy years I've gone up to bed and I don't intend changing now" - he can be so cantankerous ... I even tried to persuade him to put our names down for one of those "warden assisted" complexes - he says, "I'm not living in no old folks home!" - "It's not a home," I said, "It's warden assisted - that means if you want help you can ask for it" ... He thinks it's all community singing and whist drives - I tried to tell him but he wouldn't have it.

"And what if our Michael and Sarah wanted to come and see us?" he says, "What would we do then? Tell them to stay in a hotel?" ... "It's not as if they come very often," I said. "They've got their own lives to lead," he says... I suppose they have but you still miss them - you can't bring up your own flesh and blood and then just forget about them... he says I worry too much - Was that the phone? "If they're going to ring," he says, "They'll ring, and worrying won't do any good". (Mimics daughter) "We'll put the phone in Mum so we can keep in touch," she said and then the calls get less and less - we might as well not have it for what use it is

(To Bill) Bill? This tea's going cold ... it's just as well I didn't pour it (She picks up a framed photograph of the children) Look at them...who'd have

## BILL

thought they'd turn out the way they did - pillars of respectability and didn't they used to fight - hammer and tongs ... I was pregnant with Michael when we first moved in here ..."Our first home," you said, "Our very own place" ... the garden was a mess then, builders rubble all over the place – and echo – didn't it echo? - I still remember it to this day... "Let me carry you over the thresh-hold," you said - and then you nearly dropped me! ... Orange boxes we had for furniture and pleased we were to have them... "Give us a chance," you said, "And we'll have this place looking like a palace"... happy days ... we didn't have much but what we had was paid for.

I can even remember the night Michael was born like it was yesterday - I'd been having a fancy for pomegranates – don't ask me why – I couldn't get to sleep with the smell of the paint and then I felt the baby coming - "I've started," I said - You didn't believe me. "Another false alarm," you said - but it wasn't - and didn't you panic - "Hold everything," you said - as if I could - the midwife only just got here in time - no hospital babies in those days - the women of today don't know the half - and you boiling water for all you were worth ... "What do you want all that for?" the midwife said - "It's what they do in the films," you said - "Its a baby" she says, "Not a fish !" We didn't half laugh.

(Looking at photo) He was good to you though, wasn't he? Strict but fair ... you never felt his hand, though he threatened it many a time - do you remember the time you were cheeky to me? "You'll apologize to your mother," he said 'And then straight to bed - no tea for you my lad" ... and then I crept up later with a tray for you – it's a good job he never knew - at least I don't think he knew... and then you came along young lady ..."How would you like a little baby brother?" we said, never dreaming it would be a girl ... "It's a girl!" you said, "I don't want a girl!" - As if we could do anything about it - "Cant you take it back?" you said!

You'll never know how much we struggled, working all the hours God sends just to get you two what you wanted - and you never appreciated it - not a care in the world. Still, I suppose that's the way it should be, play today and pay tomorrow...

Do you remember the time we took you both to the seaside? We had to stay in that caravan and then it rained – didn't it rain? I've never seen rain like it - and the wind - you both thought the van was going to blow over – you ran in terrified in the middle of the night - "We've come to keep you company" you said. "Skegness is so bracing" - they weren't kidding... you weren't bothered though, the next day you were off - "Can we go for a paddle in the sea, Mum? Paddle? It took us half an hour to find the damned sea ... And those donkeys, I'll never forget the donkeys looking so sad. You wanted to bring one home with you - "We can always keep it on Dad's allotment," you said

(To Bill) Bill I'm not telling you again - if you think I'm wasting my time boiling kettles for you, you're mistaken

## BILL

(To herself) I'm wasting my breath - he'll come when he's ready - never been a man to hurry, has your Dad - "All in good time," he used to say, "All in good time" - I remember that dolls house he made for you - he took his time over that but it was worth it - you couldn't buy one like that in the shops, now could you? ... And you weren't left out Michael - "If I've made for one," he said, "I'll make for the other" - it was a lovely fortress as well - I'll bet we've still got that somewhere in the attic ... one of these days I'm going to have a good clear out up there get rid of everything - I've tried before but every time I do, I look at those toys and I think "No, they'll do for the grandchildren"

I can still remember that first day you both went to school on your own - "Hold his hand," I said, "And be careful crossing that road" - I can see you now stood at that gate waving goodbye - "They're growing up," I thought, "They'll soon be off your hands" ... and when you'd had your first day you thought that was it - "Do we have to go again tomorrow?" you said.

This house has seen some things - the birthdays - creeping round playing hide and seek, pretending we didn't know where you were... the scout meetings, the girl guides and the drama club - I remember that time you were rehearsing for the school play - "Who knocks on yonder gate?" you said and a voice from outside saying "Its only me, the insurance man"!

There were sad times as well - do you remember Sandy? - what a lovely dog - mongrel collie but you'd never have known it - I still remember the day your Dad brought him home - "I've brought some'at for you," he said and his hand went into his coat and there was the loveliest brown collie pup you've ever seen - the puddles he left us weren't lovely though, were they? And who had to clean it up? Yours truly. The pair of you played with that pup till it could play no more. It caused us some trouble though as well - I don't believe in animals in bedrooms but that dog used to weigh me up and creep up the stairs when it thought I wasn't looking. I wouldn't care if either of you took it out, it was me or Bill that got lumbered ...

(To Bill) You remember Sandy, don't you Bill? ... (To herself) Of course he does, he was his pride and joy - had him trained better than any dog I've ever seen - one word from him and that dog knew - It's the vibrations you know, they know things about people that we'll never know... I cried my eyes out the day he got knocked down - Me? The one that always cursed the mess and the dog hairs and your Dad blaming himself for leaving the gate open - it wasn't his fault though, it could have happened any time ... (To Bill) I was just saying Bill, about Sandy, he was a lovely dog wasn't he? ... (To herself) He cried as well when we found him - the first time I'd ever seen him shed a tear - tried to make out he had something in his eye - men! So proud - there's nothing wrong with crying...

That was the first time but not the last - I remember the night he came home from work, sat down to his tea and I knew there was something not right - he just sat there looking at it and I was just going to say, "You don't look very happy with yourself" when he burst into tears. I didn't know what to do - "What's the matter," I said and he said he didn't know, he were just fed up

## BILL

with everything ... its a good job you two didn't see him... that's the difference with men and women - with us we can let it all out, have a good weep and get it over with, but not with them

This pot will be cold (feels teapot) It is as well - there'll be the devil to pay if he comes down to cold tea - I'll just slip the kettle on again... (To Bill) I'm just putting the kettle on again Bill - are you all right? You've not had another of your funny turns have you? Of course not, don't be silly

(She goes out with teapot and returns after a few seconds)

I don't know what they've done to this water, there doesn't seem to be the pressure there was - they ought to leave things alone, what with chemicals and the like, you don't know what you're drinking nowadays. . . that reminds me of the time - (To Bill) Bill? Do you remember that time with the hosepipe? (She laughs to herself) Him watering the garden and those two little monkeys hiding round the corner had turned it off - he was just looking to see what the blockage was when they turned it back on again - he was soaked! (To photos) You thought you were in for it then, didn't you? But he just laughed - there wasn't much else he could do.

I wonder if he'd like a bit of music - (To Bill) Would you like me to put some music on, Bill? ... (To herself) I know what he'll say, "If you want music on, put it on" He's never been a great romantic - I even had to trick him into coming to that first dance - got his sister to drag him along - the things you have to do to get a man ... I'd wanted him for ages - not exactly childhood sweethearts but not far off - its funny how you see one man and you think "That's the one for me - he'll do" ... what was it they were playing? Its on here somewhere... ah yes (she puts on music and begins to dance)

"If you were the only boy in the world  
And I was the only girl  
Nothing else would matter in the world today  
We could go on loving in the same old way  
A Garden of Eden just made for two  
With nothing to mar our joy..."

Better turn it down (she does so)... He was a lovely dancer, ever so light on his feet ... and then he walked me home, just as I'd planned - standing there on the doorstep I thought, "He's never going to kiss me" - but he did

I'd better check that kettle (She goes out and comes in with fresh tea)

Its ever so funny looking back, the things we were going to do, the plans - I sometimes wonder if we'd gone to Canada - we nearly did - I suppose we'll never know ... still, we haven't done badly, we've got the house, two lovely children and we've got each other - there's not many can say that after nearly fifty years ... fifty years? It doesn't sound much when you say it fast ... I sometimes sit by this fire and wonder where it all went, the times we had - the children used to come down here after their bath - (To Bill) Do you remember

## BILL

Bill? - (To herself) wrapped in their towels all clean and shiny as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths - "Tell us a story," they used to say, "Tell us about the old days" - as if it was a fairy tale ... but it wasn't a fairy tale - living in one room at your mother's, the dole queues and the ration books, making soup with a bit of scrag-end and a few potatoes - they don't know they're born today, they don't know the half - we managed though - I don't know how we did, but we managed

There were some good times though, it wasn't all bad - (To Bill) Do you remember when you had that money left to you and you came home that day with your surprise? "Surprise?" I said, "What are you playing at?" and we went outside and there it was - our very first car - I was mad - "What do we need a car for?" I said and you said "We'll be able to go to Skeggy every weekend!" - as if anybody wants to go to Skegness every weekend! ... There was Michael sat in the car pretending to drive and Sarah in the back seat doing the royal wave - we really thought we'd arrived - it certainly gave the neighbours something to talk about ... it took us some places as well did that old banger and there were places it didn't get to - breaking down every five minutes - we used to be driving along and a cloud of steam would come out of the front. "Its only the water," you used to say, "She just needs a rest" and we had to sit in a lay-by till it'd cooled down and then fill it up with whatever we could find - the kids thought it was great - "Can we go exploring?" they said - and I sat there knitting while you got yourself covered with oil - and if it wasn't the water it was the fan belt - do you know, that car got through more pairs of stockings than I did! But it got us home, one way or another it got us back - and I was always pleased to get home, I can tell you.

If this house could speak it'd tell the history of this family - it knows more about us than we know ourselves - every mark on the paintwork, every dent, has its own story... You know what sticks out in my mind though the most? The Christmases... when they were little was the best, we didn't know it at the time, but they were - our Michael saying there was no Santa Claus and us telling Sarah to shout up the chimney for what she wanted - she did as well, just to be sure - and then the Christmas Eves when they wouldn't go to sleep in case they missed anything - leaving the pies and the sherry out for Santa - creeping into their rooms when they were asleep hoping they wouldn't wake up - we tried to say it was for the kids but on reflection, Bill, it was more for us

Christmas mornings were the best - "Look Mum, look what he's brought me!" and Michael giving us that knowing look - all the kids out in the road on their new bikes and roller skates - if only they'd known the struggle we had to get them ... it was worth it though, in the long run, the school uniform for the senior school and all the other expenses - you never realize when you're young just what your parents go through till its your turn ... and then they start to grow up, to compare you with everybody else - "So-and-so's got this and so-and-so's got that"..."Why can't we move Dad?" they kept asking - "Why cant we move to a bigger house?" ... But we couldn't afford it, could we, even if we'd wanted to? ... and all we could do was make excuses - "We're all right here, we've got all we need - smaller houses need less heating," we used to

## BILL

say"... and I wondered sometimes when they'd been out visiting if they were comparing us - I know I did when I was young ... as you grow bigger your parents grow smaller - did you know that Bill ?

You wouldn't have changed though even if we could have afforded it, would you? Never very adventurous ... (To herself) I once made coffee for him instead of tea, he nearly choked on it - "What's this?" he said - "Its coffee" I said - "I don't drink coffee," he said and I said, "You should try it. Don't you ever get fed up with doing the same old thing?"... "You've got to have your routines," he said, "So you know where you are" ... I put it down to his army training - every day the same procedure, up at six with the lark, kettle on for a shave - I bought him an electric razor once but he never used it - "You cant beat soap and water," he used to say... and then it was breakfast - "You've got to have a good breakfast inside you to start the day" - then off to the allotment ... "Don't you want any dinner?" I used to say... "I haven't time to stop for dinners"... he might take an occasional apple but generally he'd just work through ... except for Thursdays of course, Thursday is shopping day ... I once said to him, "You don't have to come with me you know, I can always manage on my own," but he wouldn't wear it - "Haven't I always come with you?" he said ... and away we go every Thursday, best bib and tucker - collect the pension from the Post Office then off to the Co-op

I sometimes wonder what I'd do without him if he wasn't here - the smell of his pipe - the sound of him pottering about in the shed - I said to him once "What am I going to do when you're gone?" - You know what he said? "You'll have to buy a dishwasher!" he said - Dishwasher! I ask you... he didn't use to wash dishes though when we were first married but I soon cured him of that! ... Its funny the way you get used to having somebody around even if they are a ruddy nuisance - I suppose you can get used to anything - like corns or ingrowing toe-nails!

My mother didn't want me to marry him - "What do you want to marry the likes of him for?" she said ... she had high hopes for me... "Because I love him," I said ... and she said," What's that got to do with it? That soon wears off" ... but it didn't... (To Bill) It didn't, did it Bill? I said to him the other day, I said, "Do you still love me?" - He said, "Do I what?" - I said, "Do you still love me?" ... He said, "What the devils got into you?" ... "I just wanted to know," I said ... "When a woman starts asking you things like that it means either one of two things," he said, either she's pregnant or she's after money and you cant be pregnant so how much do you want? I gave him such a thump!

I'm sure that was the phone (she goes and returns)

I could have sworn... never mind, they'll have a lot to do - families of their own now - they don't want to be bothering with old fudduds like us - I only wish they'd call more often - I do look forward to them phoning... You know what the little one said to me last time they came? "How old are you Gran?" she said... "Oh", I said "Quite old" ... "Did you know Queen Victoria?" she said

## BILL

- Queen Victoria indeed! And what was it they asked you? Were you in the Fire of London? - The devils!

They had me pulling that chicken bone the last time they came and I got the wish ... you know what I wished for Bill?

(Change of pace and mood)

I wished ... I know you'll think I'm silly - I wished I could have seen her - you know - our first one - I wished they hadn't taken her away before I'd seen her ... (She begins to cry) ... I'm sorry, I'm off again... but you cant go all that time and lose one without feeling something ... she's still with me Bill, after all these years... it would have been her birthday this month... I know you blamed the doctor but you cant hold grudges, it doesn't do, not after all this time ...but I do miss her... I know it sounds silly but she's still with me - I still see her, you know, if I wake in the night. She's standing at the bedroom door or on a sunny afternoon swinging on the gate ... and then I look again and she's gone... they never leave you Bill ... (She cries quietly) ... look at me... after all this time

Come on girl, get a grip - you don't want them thinking you cant cope... that's what that social worker said the other day - she was asking about the mirror - I said, "I put it there so I can see what's going on outside - I don't want people thinking I'm a nosy parker now do I?"... She said, "You can't manage on your own, you know, you should have somebody in to look after you" ... I said, "I've got somebody to look after me, I've got Bill"... and you know what she said? She said, "Bill's gone," she said. "If you keep living here on your own you'll end up talking to yourself, its company you need" ... Now why would I want company when I've got you? You give me enough to do, don't you Bill? You keep me going... I don't know where I'd be without you... (To photos) They don't bother, they've got their own lives to lead but we've got each other haven't we? You and me....

(She appears to see Bill come into the room)

There you are - I wondered where you'd got to... Did you manage to find everything all right? ... Good ... I've made you some fresh tea ... the sun's not in your eyes is it? Because if it is I can pull the curtains ... Now then, shall I be mother?

(The music of "Bill" comes on again as the stage lights fade)

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