

PROMISE NOT TO TELL

A full-length play

by

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PROMISE NOT TO TELL

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Synopsis

Two old (male) friends have arranged to meet up with two old girl school friends that they have not seen (collectively) since their school days, some forty five years previously.

However, the main character, Paul's best friend, David, is holding a very dark secret from Paul; and the other two friends, the girls, are also aware of this concealed "skeleton in the cupboard".

The foursome meet in a seaside tea shop and things go well until Paul's suspicions are aroused... and piece by piece, he begins to find flaws in the camouflaged cover story that has been fed to him until finally, he uncovers the hidden bombshell that has been concealed for over twenty years and he confronts each party concerned.

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Characters

1. Paul The main protagonist. The story centres around this man. He is over sixty. He married in his middle thirties to Leslie and they had one child by that marriage before Paul returned from work one day to find that his wife had, quite inexplicably, deserted him, and she had taken their daughter, Judith with her. Since that time, he has never been able to obtain any information concerning their whereabouts. He has led a fairly singular life since that traumatic time. Paul is a good natured type...but he is quick to react to any injustice dealt out against him.

2. David This has been Paul's best friend from school days. They meet up occasionally whenever David finds himself in Paul's area. David has an address in the North of England and Paul has never ventured that far to meet his friend or his friend's wife. David is a hearty fellow, quick-witted and gregarious. He is 60 plus.

3. Anthea A school friend of the other three characters. Anthea is kindly and good natured...and tends to be a little light headed at times. Her husband is Tony, an architect who now has financial problems. She is 60 plus.

4. Heather The forth school friend. Heather is less gullible than Anthea. She is also more matter of fact, but she has a caring nature. She is married to Mervyn, a property developer who has a kinky side to his nature. (60+)

5. Jean The owner of the Copper Kettle tea house where the reunion takes place. Jean is over fifty, cheerful and has a good sense of humour.

6. Judy Judy is Jean's twenty three year old assistant. Judy is a single, cheery happy-go-lucky type.

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The play opens with any music related to secrets: e.g. the Beatles song, 'Do you want to know a secret' (but drama societies must apply for their own permission regarding music performance rights)

The set is the interior of a seaside café. A round table and four wooden chairs and a counter are the only essential items. The kitchen staff enter/exit stage right and the visitors to the café enter by the café door stage left.

The entire play is set in the teashop on the coast in Pagham, Sussex.

A reunion between four former pupils of a Surrey School has been arranged to commence at the Copper Kettle at one o'clock on a Wednesday in late August. The people due to meet are, Paul, David, Anthea and Heather.

Jean is the teashop owner and her assistant is Judy.

The play starts with Paul entering the shop...which, at the time, is empty.

Paul Anyone at home?Shop! (rings bell on counter).

(Eventually Jean, the manager, arrives behind the counter).

Jean (Drying her hands) I'm sorry to keep you waiting.

Paul Quite all right.

Jean It's always a bit slack down here at this time of the year.

Paul Yes, I'd expect so...what with the tourist season rapidly tailing off...and with this ghastly weather.

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Jean Is it still raining.

Paul I'm afraid so.

Jean And there's only me and Judy here today to cover now that the holidaymakers have gone. After August, we usually just get the locals in. Can I get you something?

Paul Oh yes...Just a cup of tea for the moment, thanks. I'm waiting for some old friends to arrive soon.

Jean That's nice.

Paul Yes, I hope so. You won't believe it. I haven't seen a couple of them for over Forty five years.

Jean (While getting the tea) Amazing...I'll bet you'll never recognize them.

Paul Actually, I think I might. I can still remember them all as if it were yesterday. We all went to the same school together.

Jean All guys together, is it.

Paul No, there's two girls...well, perhaps I should say, ladies coming...as well as an old friend of mine that I have managed to bump into a few times over the years.

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- Jean Oooo... it's not one of those Friends Reunited 'do's, is it.
Old girlfriends meet old boyfriends.
- Paul No, no... My friend David fixed it up. They're all well
married and content. I'm the only one that's single and
living alone...and I'm certainly not in the market for
some lonely widow to come and join me in squandering
all my hard earned cash...thank you very much.
- Jean (In jest) Oh shame...just when I was thinking I was in
there with a chance.
- Paul I've now got to the stage where, there's only one person
I truly want to please.
- Jean And that's yourself... Y'know, I think you've got the right
idea. So you haven't seen your friends since schooldays?
- Paul Yeah, it's funny ...Anthea has kept in loose contact with
Heather over the years...and Heather has occasionally
seen Davewhereas I haven't seen either of the two
womenfolk. Now we're just getting together like the old
schooldays...when we all used to sit together on the school
fields in the afternoon immediately after consuming those
God awful school dinners....Yuk! They were horrible.
- Jean Yes...I've never been able to face a tapioca pudding since
my own schooldaysor period pie.

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Paul What?

Jean Oh you remember jam roly-poly puddings?...surely?

Paul Oh God...Is that what you called them.

Jean I think that's what drove me into this business. I always wanted to cook properly...without afflicting anyone else to those dried up, half cold apologies for decent grub *we* used to get dished up with.

Paul Still, we survived...all through that...and the rationing after the war...and here we are, still here and battling away well into this new millennium.

Jean So you wouldn't be trying to rekindle the burning embers of a past relationship with either of these ladies...by any chance.

Paul No...not really....Heather and Anthea were more like sisters to me and David...but who knows....maybe there *were* latent feelings of a simmering lust within the group.....but I don't really recall itthough I always wondered why kiss chase was such a popular diversion with the girls.

Jean What made you choose my teashop for your get-together, then?

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(Jean hands over the tea to Paul).

Paul Thank you. Now that's a bit of a soft spot actually. *This* place...*this* town...*this* lowly seaside backwater...its very name has a very strong poignant resonance for me.

Jean What? Pagham?

Paul Ooo Pagham...the very name snaps at my heart strings.(in French dialect spoof dramatic trauma) Pagham sur mare. My 'heart... it stirs for Pagham.

Jean C'mon....It's not the most exotic of places. So a lost love lived around here then ?

Paul It's just possible...but in all seriousness...and I never usually discuss this with *anyone*... it *could* be that my 'lost love,' if that's the correct term for her, has been here... maybe even still is here.

Jean Sounds interesting....Go on. Tell me more.

Paul Well, it's my wife actually.

Jean I thought you said you said you were single.

Paul Well, I'm as good as...however, until I can find my wife, officially, I'm still married.

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Jean What makes you think she might be here, then. Haven't you got her address. I mean, surely she didn't just pack up and go ... without any explanation.

Paul Exactly that. I had no idea that was her plan. I returned from work one day...and there she was....missing...no note...no indication...and certainly, no dinner in the oven.

Jean And nothing from her since then?

Paul Not a peep....and that was over twenty years ago...oh, and here's the worst thing...when she decamped, she took my daughter with her.

Jean Oh no....that's terrible.

Paul Yes it is terrible...was terrible. My little girl...I'll never get over it....just over a year old at the time...and it's now twenty two years later...and I've still no clearer explanation of what happened...and I've seen neither hide nor hair of either of them since then.....vanished, gone.

Jean Where are you from, Mr ...?

Paul Oh call me Paul. I'm from Surrey....A little village called East Horsley. Do you know it?

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Jean (Considers) No....Did your wife come from round here then? Anyway, what's her name. I might know her.

Paul It's Leslie...Leslie NewittNo, she's not from round here. The only scrap of information to link her with this place, I got from the police.

Jean Wouldn't they give you the complete address?

Paul No, they're very protective towards deserting wives. Particularly in cases where they've been fed with lies and distortion...y'know.

Jean She'd lie to the police?

Paul Oh yeah....She'd say anything to keep me off her tail.....it's pretty usual in these cases...the favourite fabrications are...allegations of being a victim of violence etc..... but none of that nonsense could have been further from the truth...but there we are.

Jean But you think she's here, do you?

Paul Yes, it was something I picked up on...it was inadvertently let slip in one of their discussions.....something I heard...sounded like, "She's O.K. in the place in Paghham". I'm sure he said, "Paghham".

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Jean They didn't arrest you?

Paul The police arrest me? No no ...I'd contacted them initially... to report my family missing. After all, they could've been taken away and murdered by someone....What was I to think. So the police *had* to investigate the situation.... But when they established that Leslie...my wife....was O.K. they just dropped it.

Jean Is this the first time you've come here?

Paul No, I've been here a lot....but I've found nothing...checked with the schools and the council list of electors...nothing....Anyway, I'm here today to enjoy the company of old friends. I can't dwell on the past.

(The shop door opens. In comes Judy, Jean's assistant in the teahouse)

Judy Hiya Jean...Sorry I'm late... It's raining again...

Jean Typical.

Judy I'll take this customer if you like.

Paul It's O.K. I've got my order thanks ...I'm waiting here for some friends to come.

Judy Oh good....It's better here when we're busy. (to Paul)

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Why don't you take a seat while you're waiting.

Paul Thank you. (he walks to sit at a table).

(Jean walks away to a back kitchen)

Paul Does it always rain here in Paghham?

Judy Usually.....What time are your friends due in.....(she is interrupted by the door opening...and by Anthea walking in. Judy continues her conversation...) Oh, is this one of your friends.

Paul (Looking up) Anthea! I can see it's you immediately.

(He rushes up to greet Anthea. Judy retires to a point behind the counter)

Anthea Paul!...Is it you?

Paul I hope so....but I might be a complete stranger just wanting a hug. (They hug each other)

Anthea Let's have a look at you. My...you've changed, Paul.

Paul Well, I've discarded the acne, school cap and the conkers. They didn't really conform with my present image.

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- Anthea But you do look well. How are you, darling?
- Paul I'm fine....well, I'm sure you don't want to hear all the distasteful medical details.
- Anthea Oooo don't start me on that. I've been in agony today. I don't travel well.
- Paul Neither does my Fiat...but it goes like a bomb if I service it regularly....perhaps that's what *you* could do with.
- Anthea You haven't changed...you were always such a wag.
- Paul But I haven't got much to wag these days.
- Anthea (Cackling) Stop it Paul...you were never serious... you must be an Arian. You are, aren't you?
- Paul No, born in East Horsley, England....and under the sign of Cancer.
- Anthea (more cackling) The crab!
- Paul You'd better take a seat before you take off.
- Anthea (taking a seat as does Paul). Oh, you're such a tonic, Paul. I'm sorry we never stayed in touch.
- Paul Where have all the years gone, eh Anthea?.... Forty five

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blessed years. Y'know, we'd better not leave it another forty five before the *next* meeting.

Anthea No! ...But we used to have so much fun, you and I, on that school field.

Paul Yes...it was oh so innocent in those days. Do you remember, there used to be a white line painted on the grass to separate the boys from the girls.

Anthea Girls on the left...boys on the right. We all used to sit right along that line, didn't we.

Paul Yes...that line took a hell of a beating.....though we'd never actually cross the line with you girls. Know what I mean?

Anthea Oooo goodness no...there was no hanky panky...Good God, my mum would have killed me. She spent her days...keeping me away from any of those....sort of... *opportunities*. I'd get a lecture from my mum every morning with my vitamin C pills..... It's so different today.

Paul Yeah...today they get pressured into watching lurid sex education films eagerly followed by a hasty distribution of birth pills...for those most inspired by the films.

Anthea I think I prefer it the way it *was*.

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Paul Yeah...these days, they spend so much time *at* it, they're probably all knackered by the time they reach thirty.

Anthea We never got a look in, did we?

Paul (Takes Anthea's hand...says naughtily) And that's why we're still gaggin' for it, past sixty.

(Judy walks up to the table)

Judy Would you like to order something?

Anthea Oh...just a cup of tea for the moment thank you, love.

Judy (writing down the order) O.K. One tea...coming up.

Anthea Haven't you found yourself a nice lady, then? You must have looked around.

Paul Ah no.... Once bitten, twice shy...that's me.

Anthea I almost envy you, being alone and independent.

Paul It's not always wonderful.... It's funny Anthea...you living in this area, Pagham. It's where my wife was last known to be residing.

Anthea Really?

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- Paul It's not a big place, is it. You could easily have bumped into her.
- Anthea No, I haven't.
- Paul (says slowly)...You... haven't seen her?
- Anthea No, never.
- Paul How interesting. You never previously knew her...or even knew what she looked like....but...you've never seen her?
- Anthea (Unconvincingly) No, no ...that's *why* I haven't seen her...(nervous giggle)....because I *wouldn't* have known her if I did see her....would I?
- Paul What astounding logic, Anthea....If I hadn't previously witnessed how positively scatty you can be, I might even have doubted you
- Anthea I bet you live well, Paul.
- Paul Not bad....When I was young, I vowed that when I became elderly, I wouldn't be poor.... well thank heavens, I'm not. How about you, Anthea...any regrets....like with Tony.
- Anthea I've stood by Tony through some bad times.... right the way up to the not so bad times...but good times...I'm still

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waiting.

Paul Well I never. You make marriage sound like some kind of endurance event.

Anthea What...a bit like the Grand National?

Paul Well..... there are similarities.

Anthea You mean, only a few make it through to the end.

Paul (naughtily) And.... maybe too many jumps have taken their toll.

Anthea Oh Paul...you devil.

Paul Heather should be here soon.

Anthea Yes, she's driving over.

Paul Heather's still with her original partner, isn't she.

Anthea (Half giggling) She is...but I wouldn't give him house-room.

Paul Why...does he beat her, or something?

Anthea No...he's just so.....creepy.

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- Paul You don't like Mervyn.
- Anthea Well, at first he seemed O.K. but did you know, he's been arrestedtwice.
- Paul No! Good Lord...what the heck was he up to?
- Anthea The first time, he was picked up for.....you'll never believe it..... What do they call it.....(half whispers) 'flashing'.
- Paul No!
- Anthea Yes, he was over the common...right there...in front of some school kids.
- Paul Well I'm blessed. That's got to be a huge fine at least for something for that.
- Anthea No...he wasn't even charged. He just told the police he'd been caught short.... said he'd only stopped for a 'Jimmy Riddle' behind the trees.
- Paul They believed him?
- Anthea They couldn't be sure, so they let him off with a warning.
- Paul You'd have to give him the benefit of the doubt though, surely.

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- Anthea I wouldn't have said so.... The kids said that he had this huge (next word 'erection' is simply mimed...with a graphic hand gesture).
- Paul (Giggling) Oh that's terrible....but seriously, that is terrible.
- Anthea But that's not all, he was later arrested for doing exactly the same thing from his bedroom window.
- Paul Oh no!
- Anthea Yes...and...he got off again....
- Paul Gee whiz....How come?
- Anthea Said he was getting dressed at the time....
- Paul It's possible.
- Anthea But he was still....(no words...just the gesture indicating, 'erect').
- Paul Oh God....Just dressing....as you do in front of an open window. Well David says Mervyn's always at exhibitions these days....but I always wondered exactly *what* he was exhibiting

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- Anthea Yeah....the police said it would be his final warning.
- Paul So what does Heather think about all this.
- Anthea I think she must be in denial. She said she believes him....she swallowed the whole thing.
- Paul (Laughing) And that sounds like a lot to swallow!
- Anthea Oh Paul.
- Paul What does your Tony think of it?
- Anthea He's horrified...won't let him anywhere near the grand children...he calls him, 'Merv the perv'.
- Paul Merv the perv....(chuckles) Oh dear....Otherwise, Heather's all right, I take it.
- Anthea Yeah...she's O.K.
- Paul With the inflection on the word 'she's', I take it...possibly at someone else's cost.
- Anthea Yes...mine!
- Paul In what way...not cash, you don't mean?
- Anthea You've got it...I wouldn't like to tell you how much,

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though.

Paul But I think you will do...won't you Anthea dear...so.... how much has Heather skinned you for...(Anthea looks back cautiously) go on...how much?

Anthea (after a pause)...Forty grand.

Paul (whistles)...Forty grand...beejapers...that's a load of dosh.

Anthea Much more than I can afford. It was a scheme.

Paul I'll bet it was.

(Judy approaches the table with Anthea's tea)