

THE LIE

A one-act play

by

Joyce Brannelly

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THE LIE

CAST

Julia Adams – the wife

Dr Craig – female GP

Beverley Page – the friend

Eve Adams – the mother-in-law

Scene 1: GP's surgery

Scene 2: Beverley Adams's flat in Richmond

Scene 3: Julia's living room in her Highgate house

Scene 4: GP's surgery

THE LIE

SCENE 1: INT – AM – GP's SURGERY

(DR CRAIG is looking through the records of her next patient. She is an attractive woman in her mid-thirties. There is a knock on the door)

GP

Come in!

(JULIA ADAMS, also attractive and in her late thirties, enters. She appears rather nervous and agitated.)

GP

(hand outstretched to greet)

Hello, Mrs Adams. Welcome to our little flock. I see by your records that you were previously a patient of Dr Brady.

JULIA

Yes, that's right.

GP

Is there any reason why you changed doctors?

JULIA

My friend, Mrs Johnson, is a patient of yours. She's been telling me for years how caring you are, and that you were a good listener.

GP

That's as good a reason as any, I suppose. You appear to have had some problems with sleeping. Oh, please, do sit down.

JULIA

Yes, and it's getting worse I'm afraid. I only manage to sleep for a couple of hours.

GP

(consulting her notes)

Dr Brady put you on Mogadon?

JULIA

Yes, but they're no good at all. Is there anything stronger I could take?

GP

There are various new drugs which could be prescribed, but insomnia is a bit tricky to deal with.

JULIA

THE LIE

Is that what I've got, doctor?

GP

Sound like it! I'll put you on a course for a week to start with, just to see how you get on with it. We will do some tests on you after that. But, tell me, is there anything that's specifically worrying you?

JULIA

(relieved to divulge her anxieties)

A good many things, actually, doctor.

GP

Well, I suggest you start by telling me what they are – it may help. (sits back in her chair and looks directly at Julia)

JULIA

My husband is slowly trying to send me out of my mind.

GP

That's a very strong statement. What evidence do you have for making it?

JULIA

The other day, for example, the steak was missing from the fridge. My husband swore that it had never been in there. When I went to his car the next morning to replenish the tissue box, he had hidden the steak in the glove compartment. Then a picture went missing from the landing wall, and he insisted that I had sold it to an antique shop. He swore blind that he had seen it in their window. When I went up into the loft to store some bits and pieces, I found the painting behind some old mirrors. This sort of thing happens every day. At one time I began to doubt my own sanity. Maybe I was doing these things without my knowledge.

GP

Hmmm, well, it does sound bizarre, I must say. It's a bit like that film *Gaslight*. Have you ever seen it – made in the 1940s? It's often on the television in the afternoons.

JULIA

No, I don't think I have.

GP

Where Anton Walbrook hides his wife's jewellery in the bureau, and accuses her of going out of her mind.

JULIA

There is something else doctor...

THE LIE

GP

Go on then, I'm listening.

JULIA

My husband is having an affair. It's been going on for almost a year. We share the same bed, but that's all.

GP

You have no physical relationship with him?

JULIA

None!

GP

I suppose it must be hard to keep two women happy at the same time. I'm wondering if it wouldn't be better to go to the Marriage Guidance Council, then the two of you could go along together.

JULIA

Oh, no, I could never do that! He would make my life hell. I'm afraid to do anything now, because he has taken away all my confidence. He's also stopped my housekeeping money. I have to ask him for every penny.

GP

Do you go out to work?

JULIA

I used to, but I had to give it up. I just couldn't concentrate at the computer. I made so many mistakes, and I cost the firm a lot of money. If I hadn't resigned they would have sacked me anyway. So you see, doctor, he has me exactly where he wants me. He makes me beg for everything.

GP

Well, Mrs Adams, I'm not going to deny that you have one hell of a problem on your hands. Between the insomnia and the unfaithful husband, you've got more than your fair share. Perhaps if we can get you sleeping better you might be able to cope with the rest. (consults files) Oh, I see that we don't appear to have your address.

JULIA

I did give it to your assistant when I rang.

GP

THE LIE

She's usually very efficient, but obviously not on this occasion.
What is your address?

JULIA

54 Cadogan Gardens. Do you know it doctor?

GP

(shocked)

Yes – yes, I do.

JULIA

You seemed surprised.

GP

Well, I was! I just wasn't expecting one of my patients to afford a house in Cadogan Gardens. They are fetching well over two million on today's market. (still quite stunned) I would love one of those Georgian houses, but I'm afraid they are well out of my price range.

JULIA

Twenty years ago, we only paid 50,000 for it.

GP

Well, you certainly did very well there. Tell me about this other woman. Do you know who she is?

JULIA

No, I don't, but this one is different.

GP

How do you mean?

JULIA

This affair has gone on for over a year. My husband really loves this one. He loves her so much that he is willing to send me insane to keep her.

GP

But, what would be his motive?

JULIA

I expect he wants to have me sectioned and put in an institution. If I was mad he would have power of attorney. He could claim the house, and have his lover with him. That's what all this is about. All his other affairs have only lasted a few weeks.

GP

You mean... there have been others?

THE LIE

JULIA

Oh, heavens, yes – dozens. It all started five years ago when his doctor told him that he could never give me a child. It seemed to make him sex mad. I suppose he thought if he couldn't get a woman pregnant the world was his oyster. But I always knew when they were over, because he always came back to my bed, and, for a short while at least, things got back to normal. But for a whole year he has never touched me. That's why I know this one is different. To lie next to him and be completely ignored is torture.

GP

I can imagine! But, surely if he's been unfaithful that many times you would have got used to it by now.

JULIA

But he has never tried to send me out of my mind before, and denied me my conjugal rights.

GP

I wish I knew how to help you. I suppose the answer would be to let this woman have him, providing of course he lets you keep the house.

JULIA

He would *never* do that. He adores the house, almost as much as I do. I wish I had more proof doctor. If he physically attacked me I would have bruises, but there is no evidence when the mind is bruised. He's clever you see, he knows exactly what he is doing.

GP

Do you ever sit down and talk to him about all this?

JULIA

He says the same thing over and over, that I am having a mental breakdown – and perhaps I am. It's only the last six months that he's taken to staying away at weekends. When I took his jacket to the cleaners I found a hotel receipt in the pocket. It was for a two-night stay in a London hotel. He must have spent the weekend with her.

GP

What explanation did he give for being away every weekend?

JULIA

THE LIE

That he was attending conferences in Liverpool, and it wasn't worth travelling back late at night, and as the firm paid the hotel expenses, he made the most of it.

GP

It sounds as though he did just that! Is there somewhere you could go for a couple of days to get away from everything?

JULIA

Where can I go doctor? I don't have any money.

GP

Isn't there a friend you can stay with? I think you need a complete change. It would do you the world of good.

JULIA

I have an elderly aunt in Essex who might put me up, but she is very old now and I wouldn't want to worry her with my problems.

GP

I'd put you up myself if I had the room, although it's not strictly ethical.

JULIA

That's kind of you doctor, and thank you for listening to me. It's been such a relief to talk to someone about it. I feel so alone at the moment, bottling everything up inside me. Just the thought of that woman coming into my house – the house I have spent my entire married life in, frightens me. What can I do doctor – where will it all end? (starts to cry)

GP

Come on now, take a hold of yourself! You have to hang in there as long as you can. If necessary I can refer you to a psychiatrist.

JULIA

(shocked)

A psychiatrist?

GP

Yes, it's quite obvious you are on the verge of a breakdown. (writes out a prescription and hands it to Julia). See how you get on with these new tablets. They have a calming effect. Come and see me in a couple of weeks, or earlier, if you have to. As your friend said, I am a good listener. But, as your doctor, I will do everything in my power to help you, but you have to help yourself as well.

JULIA

THE LIE

How do I do that, doctor?

GP

By staying calm! These tablets will help you to do that. After all, your husband is only one tiny spec on the universe. You can conquer this, I know you can. The important thing is to get away – anywhere – promise me that you will.

JULIA

Yes – yes, I promise!

GP

Good! Well, you know where I am if you need me. Don't bother with an appointment, just come along and I'll fit you in.

JULIA

Thank you doctor for your support.

GP

I'm just doing my job. I'm not a religious person, Mrs Adams, but I'll certainly try and say a prayer for you tonight.

JULIA

You are very kind, doctor – goodbye.

(JULIA exits.)

(DR CRAIG immediately picks up her telephone and dials out. Receiving no response, she leaves a message on the answer-phone.)

GP

David, it's Janet. I have to see you urgently. Meet me tonight at Tony's Bar at ten. I have just met your wife and I'm devastated at what we are doing to her. This relationship ends as from now. After tonight I never want to see you again. And please, don't be late.

SCENE 2: INT – PM – BEVERLEY JAMES'S FLAT

(One week later. The flat is spacious, airy, but very untidy. BEVERLEY (a friend) and JULIA are enjoying afternoon tea.)

JULIA

These cakes are scrumptious. They must have cost you a bomb.

THE LIE

BEVERLEY

Who's worrying?

JULIA

Well, I thought I must bring something with me. Your favourite – Helena Rubenstein.

BEVERLEY

Gosh, it's so expensive.

JULIA

It was so good of you to put me up like this, and at such short notice.

BEVERLEY

Don't be stupid, that's what friends are for.

JULIA

Mind if I take another one. (Helps herself)

BEVERLEY

Eat them all. I bought them for you. I'm on a diet. Mind you, I bought a gateau in that patisserie last weekend, it was nearly fifteen quid! I got the shock of my life when she boxed it up. She makes wedding cakes which I believe start at a hundred quid.

JULIA

French pastries are wonderful aren't they? Oh, Bev I felt I had to get away for a while.

BEVERLEY

Anytime honey. I've told you to come whenever you feel like it, but you never do. In fact, I'm a bit disappointed in you.

JULIA

Oh – why?

BEVERLEY

I thought once you had given up your job, I'd see a bit more of you, but it didn't happen did it?

JULIA

I'm sorry, Bev, but it's this awful insomnia. I sleep so little that I don't have the energy to do very much.

BEVERLEY

Incidentally, why did you give up your job? You'd been there for years.

THE LIE

JULIA

I kept falling asleep at the computer. I made so many mistakes, cost the firm a fortune.

BEVERLEY

Are you worrying about anything? It's not David is it?

JULIA

Not David what?

BEVERLEY

I mean, you haven't problems in your marriage?

JULIA

You could say that.

BEVERLEY

Well, tell me about it. I am one of your oldest friends – remember?

JULIA

David has been in an affair for over a year. This one has lasted the longest.

BEVERLEY

You mean there's been more than one?

JULIA

Many more.

BEVERLEY

What!

JULIA

He's had a succession of affairs for the last five years.

BEVERLEY

Why just the last five years?

JULIA

That's when the doctor told him he could never give a woman a child. It seemed to unleash an insatiable sex drive. Maybe I could never satisfy him, but the affairs are not the main issues right now.

BEVERLEY

I would say the affairs are the ONLY issue. They certainly would be for me.

JULIA

THE LIE

His cruelty is far worse.

BEVERLEY

Cruelty?

JULIA

He's slowly trying to send me out of my mind.

BEVERLEY

I'm confused here! What are you on about?

JULIA

It's hard to explain without sounding crazy already, but he's doing it slowly. In fact, so slowly that I failed to notice it for a while.

BEVERLEY

Oh, Julia, you know what an imaginative mind you've got. You couldn't have got those children's books published if you hadn't got a vivid imagination. All those stories about fairies and witches – what do you expect?

JULIA

This is not imagination. I have solid proof of the little pranks he has played on me. Don't ask me to explain them – I won't.

BEVERLEY

But why would he do this?

JULIA

To get me certified I expect, then he'd have control of everything.

BEVERLEY

Oh, for heavens sake Julia, you're becoming paranoid. He must love you, he always comes back.

JULIA

For the same reason that I don't leave, where would he go when his women have tired of him?

BEVERLEY

Look, Julia, you've got to sort yourself out. You will make yourself ill.

JULIA

I *am* ill, Bev! Why do you think my GP's referring me to a psychiatrist?

BEVERLEY

He is?