

A LOT TO DO WITH LOVE

A one-act play

by

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CAST LIST

- LUCAS, 45 (male): Successful antique dealer and auctioneer, father of 3, attractive, Well educated, notoriously impatient; following a car accident, he is in a coma throughout the play, but very real to others, so preferably not a dummy.
- ANN, 42 (female): Wife to Lucas, former teacher, mother of 3; tidy, faithful and conscientious.
- LILY, 42 (female): Lucas's lover for the past 7 years, passionate, elegant, unconventional, she neither sews nor spins.

SYNOPSIS

Following a car accident, Lucas has been in hospital some months, comatose on 'life support'. The play opens with Lily at his side with music recalling their shared love. She times her departure, with a kitchen pinger, to avoid Ann whose visiting habits she knows and who soon arrives with news to 'tell' her husband of their disabled daughter. Two more visits, Ann's (the second, off-schedule) interrupted by Lily returning for forgotten tape cassette. A brief meeting, causing more distaste than suspicion, is followed by a mime sequence of four alternating visits, characteristic of each woman and indicating passage of time. During this Ann finds a handkerchief of Lucas's dropped – as it only could have been – by Lily, and immediately demands an explanation. Lily acknowledges, rather than admits, their affair, insisting that it has taken nothing from Ann nor in any way endangered her marriage. Ann, furious, threatens to have her thrown out, then sobs her rage at Lucas. But Lily returns, answers Ann's questions including one about the affair beginning the night her disabled (surviving) twin daughter was born and, justifying their continued relationship in terms of love still needed by Lucas from both, challenges Ann's conception of marriage. Their next joint visit is on Lucas's birthday, honoured with a bottle of Lily's wine loosening tongues and resentments in – eventually – giggling reminiscence. Finally the day comes when hope of Lucas recovering is given up, and Ann has to decide about stopping the life support. Lily is with her and shares the moment's gravity and sorrow in a heartfelt embrace. The last scene is at the grave where, separately, Lily and Ann say goodbye to Lucas and to each other.

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SET

Private room in hospital with bed, drip stand, heart monitor (screen facing centre stage so not seen, but intermittently heard), chair, table for cards and flowers, shelf for stereo, and lidded bench seat downstage left concealing grassy mat (mound) needed for final graveside scene. Something like this would do.

PROPS

ANN'S: Large bouquet of flowers, outdoor coat, knitting, child's drawing, skipping rope.

LILY'S: Nice vinyl stand-up carrier bag, glass with lilies-of-the-valley, cassette tape, sketch pad and pencils, scarf, wine, glasses and corkscrew, walkman headset.

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SLOW (2nd) MOVEMENT OF MOZART'S CLARINET CONCERTO IS PLAYING WHILE LILY, IN CHAIR, LEANS OVER BED STROKING LUCAS'S HAND. CARRIER BAG BESIDE HER ON FLOOR

LILY: Out of Africa, Lukey, remember? Robert Redford's old wind-up gramophone. Cried like the rain, didn't I? You just cleared your throat and passed the wine. Big emotional moment and you . . . Can't even clear your own throat now, poor darling. Beastly tubes all over the place. But you can hear. I know you can, I just – (LISTENING) So lovely. So sad, but I'm not crying. I'm not. Not till you're out of this. Out of here, and we'll get the video again, and I'll cry again, and you'll . . . be your old self again: arriving late, leaving early, cursing all the idiot drivers on the road. Impatience on wheels – Worse than ever probably, after this. But then patience itself with anything old, interesting, battered but well-made and worth holding onto. Talking about myself, you realise: youngest antique in the house. And not for sale. Any old chair, any old picture – even the piano, at a price, but I'm free. Aren't you lucky? Free for the asking, any time, any place as long . . . As long as you want, and I'm the lucky one, of course I am. Knowing you. Loving you. Having you.

SHE LETS GO HIS HAND, LEANS BACK AND STARES AT THE HEART MONITOR

Having. Having? Have. Have had. Will have. Will, and I –

KITCHEN TIMER IN BAG RINGS LOUD AND LONG, MAKING HER JUMP

- will have to make myself scarce: we both know what that means: just time for –

SHE TAKES FLOWERS IN GLASS FROM BAG, SMELLING THEM

Mmm, lily of the valley, just to . . . remember?

SHE RISES, HOLDING THEM A MOMENT NEAR HIS FACE

Lovely smell. And look, the glass you always used to fancy, isn't it?

SHE TURNS TO THE TABLE, MOVING CARDS TO MAKE ROOM

Where you can see it when you decide to wake up. Now, better safe than . . .

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SHE TURNS TO RADIO, REMOVING TAPE IN MID TUNE

Sorry, I'll bring it back. Friday we can hear it all over again.

SHE RETURNS TO THE BED AND KISSES LUCAS ON THE MOUTH

Sweet dreams Luke. Sweet dreams.

LEAVING, SHE PAUSES AT THE DOOR

Till Friday, dear . . . heart.

EXIT LILY STAGE LEFT. HEART MONITOR BEEPS WHILE LIGHTS GO DOWN,
THEN COME UP ON ANN AT TABLE READING CARDS

ANN: Nell and Robert, 'Love and hang in there'. Pat and Frances Jury, 'Love and prayers'. 'Holding the fort' from all at the office. Speedy Home Clearance, 'Best wishes for a 'speedy' – (huh!) – recovery', and where have they been for the past six months? Terry from . . . now where? Novo Sibirsk. Another one to save for his . . .

SHE PUTS DOWN THE CARD AND PICKS UP LILY'S FLOWERS

Flowers again. And no card again.

SHE HAS ANOTHER LOOK AT TERRY'S CARD

Not likely from the other end of Russia. (TAPS GLASS) Not from any florist either: not crystal, not hand picked. More like someone from the office – or maybe one of the night staff; they're very kind. After all this time, very . . . not that you'd notice.

SHE REPLACES FLOWERS, KNOCKING OVER CARD & CROSSES
TO BENCH SEAT & TAKES OUT KNITTING

Flowers all over the house, and when's the last time you so much as . . .

SHE CROSSES TO CHAIR VIA TABLE, PICKING UP AND REPLACING CARD

'Love and prayers' and 'hang in there'; that's about all anyone can do, Lucas. . . Love you, pray for you and . . . wait for some sign, some sound, some slightest little –

SHE SITS

(FIERCELY) If you think that's easy, you've got a –

SHE BITES HER TONGUE AND STARTS KNITTING

Want to know why I'm knitting when no one over the age of four would

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be seen dead round here in anything home made? Well that's why, because it's not easy, day after day, loving you, praying for you and hanging in while that bloody machine up there (NOT LOOKING) is the only thing that believes you're still alive.

ANN KNITS AND THE MACHINE BEEPS

So I knit blankets for earthquake victims in Borneo – Borneo? Or the next lot; the rate I'm going. Bound to be another lot somewhere. Earthquakes. Volcanoes. Genocide. And we think we've got . . .

MORE KNITTING, MORE BEEPS

Sally sends her love. And the boys of course, but Sally specially. She wants you to know about her new brace. They've decided not to operate yet, but this brace is much better, and she said tell daddy she did nine skips today. With a rope. By the garage. Nine skips without falling down, and she bets you never did as many as that. (PAUSE) Not wrong is she Lucas? Things you managed to skip over the years didn't have a lot to do with rope. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays. Camping with the children, sailing, skiing. Always going to be another time: next year, one day, some day; never now. Now has always been too busy hasn't it? Too busy on the go, on the make – on the road. Then all of a sudden off the road and upside down in a ditch, and we've got more time 'now' than we know what to do with. All the time there is to be together, and you might as well be on another planet, you daft beggar, while I sit here knitting blankets for bloody Borneo.

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN WHILE MONITOR BEEPS AND ANN LEAVES, THEN UP ON LILY WITH BAG AT WINDOW

LILY: (RECITING) Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths
Enwrought with gold and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,

SHE TURNS TOWARDS THE BED

Then there's the bit about making them – the cloths, right? – into a carpet, but being too poor, and it goes on:

So I have spread my dreams under your feet
Tread softly because you are treading on my dreams.

SHE PAUSES AS IF FOR A REACTION, BEFORE CROSSING TO SIT ON CHAIR, PUTTING DOWN BAG & TAKING LUCAS'S HAND

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‘Tread softly’. Only you’re the one with the dreams. Well, I hope so. When your eyelids flicker. Sometimes. Supposed to be a sign of dreaming, isn’t it? (MUSING) ‘In the night and the light and the half light’. Half light, the light and . . . (BRIGHTLY) and I’m the one to tread softly, not you, poor love; not yet anyway. Not till you’re back in your size thirteens, then you can tread softly in my rotten attic and find a few more treasures to sell, otherwise it’s going to have to be the piano. The man came about the roof and said the stable’s even worse than the kitchen, and that’s already filling up about fourteen buckets every time it rains.

LILY CONTINUES WHILE SORTING THROUGH HER BAG

Do you think you could try and get better before I get washed away? You try to get better, and I’ll try to find the book. It’s not all Yeats, but we can get that one right, and since you don’t think you like poetry, I can read you one a day till either you change your mind or you’ll have to get better just to make me shut up. (RISING WITH BAG & RETRIEVED TIMER) And I’m not waiting for the bell this time, see?

SHE SHOWS, CLICKS OFF & ADDRESSES TIMER

Teach you to go off in the bus. (TO LUKE) By the church, honestly! Nearly jumped out of my seat, and some joker got a big laugh asking if it was buns in the oven. ‘Wife on the way’ would have got a bigger one, wouldn’t it?

SHE CHECKS HER WATCH

Three o’clock, and (TO TIMER) I don’t need telling, thank you very much. (REPLACING TIMER IN BAG) Horrid noise anyway. Strident. Not going to leave you with ‘strident’. Nicer leaving you with this.

SHE LEANS OVER LUCAS, LOOSENING HER COLLAR

(WHISPERING) Diorissimo in case you’re wondering my next birthday.

SHE KISSES HIS EYELIDS AND MOUTH

And this. And this. And this.

SHE CROSSES AND PAUSES AT DOOR

Nicer for me too, darling. Much. (MOUTHS A PARTING KISS)

EXIT LILY STAGE RIGHT JUST MOMENTS BEFORE ENTRY OF ANN

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WITH FLOWERS WRAPPED IN PAPER. SHE APPROACHES BED, OBSERVING
LUCAS CLOSELY

ANN: Change of plan dear, I'm early. Everything moved up so Suki can go to the vet. (UNWRAPPING FLOWERS) Get done in time to come home with the children after school. Or undone actually. Undone, silly girl. When it comes to gallivanting, you've got to say that dog has not got very good taste.

LAYING DOWN FLOWERS, SHE CROSSES TO BENCH & TAKES OUT VASE

Not a lot of sense either. Down the road's Great Dane, according to the boys. Last day of term, and think nothing of it: only remember when she starts to show, and all very righteous: 'dirty old man ought to be put down'. Still time though, the vet says, but the sooner the better, so . . .

SHE RETURNS TO BED, GATHERING UP FLOWERS

I'll just get some water for these. Back in a minute, all right?

EXIT STAGE LEFT WITH VASE AND FLOWERS. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY
STAGE RIGHT ENTER LILY, GOING DIRECTLY TO REMOVE TAPE FROM
STEREO BEFORE ADDRESSING LUCAS

Didn't see that did you? I'm not the sort of scatty person always – (SHRUGS) At least I remembered. In the car park, and still time on the meter. Almost enough for another . . . Better not. (SCRABBLING IN BAG FOR CASE) Nice to leave it on repeat, playing you lovely dreams, darling. Nice, but not sensible. Raise eyebrows, wouldn't it? Cause questions. Questions you can't answer for yourself. Wouldn't anyway, would you? Probably shouldn't either with the family, or –

STAGE LEFT ENTER ANN WITH FLOWERS

LILY: (STILL SCRABBLING) Oh I'm so sorry, I didn't know you were here. I just came back for - I just left a few minutes ago and realised I'd forgotten something. Just popped back in to –

ANN: And you are?

LILY: Lily. Ttt, can't find it. Lily Freeman. How do you do.

LILY EXTENDS A HAND THAT ANN, NOT NEEDING BOTH FOR FLOWERS,
COULD BUT DOES NOT TAKE.

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ANN: You're a friend of my husband?

ANN PUTS FLOWERS ON TABLE BESIDE LILY'S & ARRANGES THEM

LILY: Yes, I manage to get in quite often. Important to keep visiting, isn't it. Talking, company, just being here, and he's always been very good to me.

ANN: Lily Freeman? He hasn't told me – in the business are you, antiques?

LILY: (AMUSED) You could say that. He's bought a lot of my stuff. I've got a house full of 'stuff' he likes, and holes in the roof I can't afford, so every time it rains he takes another picture, another chair, mangle, wash-board; you know the sort of thing.

ANN: He sells them for you?

LILY: He sells the family heirlooms; props up the family home. For a few more years anyway. (PAUSE FOR REPLY) Lovely flowers. Lovely scent. I always try to bring ones that smell.

ANN VISIBLY STIFFENS, THEN TURNS ROUND

ANN: And something else that's going to raise eyebrows? Cause questions?

LILY GIVES HERSELF TIME TO THINK BY SITTING ON BENCH
AND RESUMING SEARCH OF HER BAG

LILY: I hope you don't mind; sometimes I bring music. Of all the senses they say hearing is the last to – you know, and music's so . . . so . . . (FINDS CASSETTE CASE) Here it is. What I did this morning is forget the tape, so I came back in case . . .

LILY HAS TROUBLE FITTING TAPE INTO CASE, ANN REMOVES
IT FROM HER AND SUCCEEDS

ANN: In case (READING) Mozart Clarinet concerto is not one of the family favourites brought in by . . . (HANDS BACK TAPE) . . . one of us.

LILY: (WITH DIGNITY) Thank you. (RISING) I've got a meter running out. Maybe I'll see you again some time. (SOFTLY TO LUCAS) Goodbye Luke. (FORMALLY TO ANN) Goodbye.

EXIT LILY STAGE LEFT. ANN STANDS A MOMENT LOOKING AT DOOR,
LUCAS & DOOR AGAIN BEFORE BINNING LILY'S FLOWERS.

ANN: Lilies, huh!

LIGHTS DOWN AND UP AGAIN ON A DREAM-SPEED MIME SEQUENCE –
LUCAS'S POINT OF VIEW AS IT WERE – EACH 'VISIT' NOT MORE THAN