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Skylight

A Play

David Hare

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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SKYLIGHT

*For Nicole
à la folie*

Skylight was first performed in the Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre, London, on 4 May 1995. The cast was as follows:

Kyra Hollis Lia Williams
Edward Sergeant Daniel Betts
Tom Sergeant Michael Gambon

Director Richard Eyre
Designer John Gunter
Lighting Mark Jonathan

The play transferred to Wyndham's Theatre, London, on 13 February 1996 with the same cast. It was then presented on Broadway on 10 September 1996 in the same production, with Christian Camargo playing Edward Sergeant and with lighting by Paul Gallo.

The play was subsequently revived at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on 14 June 1997 in the original production, with the following cast:

Kyra Hollis Stella Gonet
Edward Sergeant Theo Fraser Steele
Tom Sergeant Bill Nighy

This is the definitive edition of *Skylight*, incorporating all the textual changes made during its West End and Broadway runs.

Characters

Kyra Hollis

Edward Sergeant

Tom Sergeant

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare.

W. B. Yeats,
'The Stare's Nest by My Window',
Meditations in Time of Civil War

Act One

SCENE ONE

A first-floor flat in north-west London. There is a corniced plaster ceiling, and underneath the evidence of a room well lived in: patterned carpets which have worn to a thread and a long wall of books. The kitchen area at the back of the room looks cluttered and much used. There is a main entrance onto the landing outside. Off to the other side, a bedroom and bathroom.

At once through the main door comes Kyra Hollis. She is just past thirty. She is returning to her flat, blue with cold. She is quite small, with short hair and a practical manner. She has a heavy overcoat wrapped round her, and is wearing thick woollen gloves. She is carrying three large plastic bags. She puts two down at once on her work table and takes the third into the kitchen area. She takes out a packet of spaghetti and some tins of tomatoes. Then she turns, not taking her coat off, as she comes through the main room again. She goes on through into the bedroom. The sound offstage of the bath being turned on. In the kitchen, an Ascot flares.

At the main door, which is still open, a tall young man appears. He is eighteen. He has blue jeans, leather gloves and a denim jacket. He has turned the collar up against the cold. He has a Walkman round his neck. He is also carrying three plastic bags. His name is Edward Sergeant. He comes in a pace or two, then stands, uncertain, hearing the sound of the bath.

After a moment, Kyra reappears on her way back to her shopping bag. She looks across the room, taken aback.

Edward The door was open . . .

DAVID HARE

Kyra My goodness.

*They stand a moment, both lost for what to say next.
Then she gestures back offstage.*

Just hold on a minute, I'd started running a bath.

*She goes out. He stands, still not coming further into
the room. Then she reappears.*

Edward It's my fault.

Kyra No.

Edward I shouldn't have called in like this. I've grown.
Yeah, I know. Everyone says that.

Kyra How tall are you?

*But as he blushes, before he can answer, she moves
towards him.*

Well, will you give me a kiss?

She kisses his cheek. Then he raises his plastic bags.

Edward I brought these.

Kyra What's this?

Edward Some beer. It's a present.

Kyra Thank you.

Edward And some rap records. I don't know how much
you know about this stuff.

Kyra Nothing.

Edward I just spent £30 in that shop round the corner.
That's why I'm here. It's next to the Nepalese restaurant.
There's this great specialist rap shop. All my friends go
there. Then I realised you must live round here.

SKYLIGHT

Kyra That's right. I do.

Edward waits, not knowing what to say.

Edward I had the spare time. I'm in my gap year. If you know what I mean.

Kyra Yes, of course.

Edward Out of school, not yet at university. I'm doing what everyone does.

Kyra You have a job?

Edward Yeah. I'm selling frankfurters outside football grounds. If you come close you can smell them.

Kyra It's all right, thanks, I'll stay over here.

She smiles, but she still has not asked him to sit down.

Edward It's freezing.

Kyra I know. Close the door. You gave me a shock standing there.

Edward (*as he closes the door*) I'm feeling embarrassed.

Kyra Why?

Edward I've never done this.

Kyra Hold on, I've got a small fire in here.

Edward looks round nervously, as she gets a small electric fire out and plugs it in.

Edward It's a very nice place.

Kyra My God! You are growing up. When did you start saying dumb things like that? 'It's a very nice place'! When I knew you, Edward, you always spoke your mind. You came to the point.

Edward Ah. OK. The point is my father.

DAVID HARE

Kyra has a glimmer of humour, as if she is about to reply. But instead she stands up and looks at the miserable one-bar fire.

Kyra I've plugged it in. I think you'll find it makes very little difference. The last few weeks it's been so damp I find you barely see it. Here, we even have indoor fog. You sit on that side of the room and peer, thinking, I'm sure it's on, I'm sure the fire is on. But you can't actually see. Do you want tea?

Edward No, thank you.

Kyra So why not tell me what you came here to say?

She rubs her mittens together, still on the opposite side of the room. It seems more like Russia than England.

Edward I'm not sure what you know. Did you know my mother had died?

Kyra I knew she had cancer. How long ago?

Edward It's about a year now.

Kyra A year?

Edward Dad hasn't told you?

Kyra I haven't seen him.

Edward That's why I came here today. I wasn't passing by . . .

Kyra No.

Edward I don't suppose anyone does. Pass by this area, I mean. Unless, I suppose, they're desperate to get from Willesden to South Finchley. Which I can't imagine most people are.

Kyra sits, not reacting to this familiar satire about her address.

Did you . . . I mean, you lost your parents . . .

SKYLIGHT

Kyra I did. My father recently. My mother died young. I barely knew her.

Edward Once they're dead, I find they keep changing. You think you've got hold of them. And it's like you say, 'Oh I see. So that's what she was like.' But then they change again in your memory. It drives you crazy. Now I'd like to find out just who she was.

Kyra Alice?

Edward Yes. It's also . . . you see . . . I don't know . . . it's had an effect on my father.

Kyra Why, surely.

Edward I mean if you see him . . . I'd love it. I mean, if you did.

Kyra Why?

Edward Because he's changed.

Kyra And?

She is giving nothing away. He becomes more nervous again.

Edward Now I'm really embarrassed. I'm guessing. I think you can help him.

Kyra Help Tom? Tom needs help?

Edward Well, at least that's what I think.

Kyra is still so silent he is unnerved.

The tea actually . . . I would like the tea now. I'd like some tea to help get me through.

He laughs at this sudden admission of his own nervousness and Kyra too seems to relax as she gets up to put the kettle on.

How am I doing? Am I doing all right?

Kyra You're doing fine.

Edward You don't think I'm being obnoxious? I mean, it's none of my business. If you want you can send me away.

Kyra You can say what you like. It's not going to bother me.

Edward I don't really know the whole history. I mean, between Dad and you.

Kyra Ah. So is that why you're here?

Edward No, I mean, yes, well, partly. But also Dad's got very peculiar. I am here for his sake as well. (*He has started to pace round the room.*) It can get pretty strange, I promise you. Silence at dinner, that kind of thing. We moved to Wimbledon.

Kyra My God!

Edward I know. Well, that doesn't help. The sense of all that sort of *nature*, trees and flowers, sort of flapping around. He did it for Mum, to give her some peace at the end. But now it just seems pointless and spooky. Me, I get on a bus and head for the street.

Kyra brings mugs and teabags.

I keep saying, Dad, you're not dead, you're fifty. It's too early for lupins. Jesus! What I liked about Dad, he was sort of ageless. I think that's why he was such a success. All ages, all types. He knew how to reach them. But now he's in this kind of hideous green fortress.

Kyra Does he talk to you? About what he feels?

Edward You know Dad. He's not what you might call 'emotionally available'. But also . . . let's face it . . . well, I can be quite a shit.

SKYLIGHT

He faces Kyra directly.

Have you read Freud?

Kyra Some.

Edward I read some recently. I told Dad everything had to come out. That you pay a price. Is that true?

Kyra I don't know.

Edward For everything you repress there's a price to be paid.

Kyra You told him that?

Edward Yes.

Kyra And how did he take it?

But Edward is too preoccupied even to notice her question.

Edward It was the night before last. It was Sunday. We had the mother of all arguments. We had the most terrible row. I suppose I left home.

Kyra You did? Where did you go? Do you have a girlfriend?

Edward Sort of. There's a girl who's willing to take me in. She does the frankfurters with me.

Suddenly he starts defending himself from some unspoken attack.

So. I don't know. I'm only eighteen. I don't like the word 'girlfriend'. All that stuff's finished. Relationships. Permanence. It's out of date, I think. I stayed there last night. I'll stay there tonight.

Kyra Yes, but have you rung your father?

DAVID HARE

Edward looks at her resentfully, turning the question aside with a joke.

Edward She's the only girl who'll sleep with me. Because at least we both smell the same.

Kyra goes back to get the boiling kettle.

Dad is a fuckpig. I mean it. I don't think you see it. I talked to some people at work. He commands respect, yes, of course. People who have all that confidence do. But you scratch the surface, you talk to his employees, you find respect can be much more like fear.

Kyra returns with the kettle and starts pouring for both of them.

There's one woman, you know, I happened to talk to her, it was by chance, she's pretty high up, she's worked close to Dad for some time. She knows him well. And she said he is definitely sexist.

Kyra No!

Edward She said without question.

Kyra Thank God she spotted it. Milk?

Edward Oh, so, OK, what are you saying? You think it's me, it's just me being stupid . . .

Kyra No . . .

Edward Father-son. That sort of thing. There's a whole list of things I could tell you. Dad can be a real bastard, you know. (*He holds up a finger and thumb.*) The charm's that deep.

Kyra Are you keeping an inventory?

Edward All right, but you don't have to live with it, you don't have to deal with anyone at all . . . (*He waves airily*

SKYLIGHT

round the flat.) I do. There's always this doom. This heaviness. He comes home every night. Wham! He lands on the sofa. You feel the springs go. One night he actually destroyed a whole sofa. He cracked a sofa he landed so hard! Then –

Kyra Sugar?

Edward Guess his response? Guess his response to it! Next day he just bought a new sofa! A new sofa!

Kyra Well, that seems fair enough.

Edward No, you're wrong. It's an attitude, Kyra. It's all – *Yellow Pages*. Whatever. Leaves on the roof? *Yellow Pages*! The lavatory's blocked? *Yellow Pages*! That's how he lives. He even orders in meals. It's absurd! He flicks through. Pizza! Chinese! It's *Citizen Kane*! Only with *Yellow Pages*. I said to him, Dad, for God's sake get real. Not everything in life is in *Yellow Pages*.

Kyra is just drinking her tea.

Kyra Isn't it grief?

Edward Yes, of course.

Kyra He's grieving.

Edward He's sitting there alone in this bloody great house. Like some stupid animal. Licking his pain.

He turns towards her, more tentative as he talks of his mother.

Mum . . . of course, I mean, everyone said to me . . . Alice wasn't as clever as him. People assumed she was some sort of dumb ex-model. But she kept Dad moving. Now he just sits there.

He is vehement, trying to drive his pain away.

I say, for Christ's sake, it's been almost a year. We knew it was coming. It's been a long time. Let it out, for fuck's sake. Because, I tell you, otherwise . . . it's driving us both bloody mad.

Kyra Are you alone now?

Edward Yes. We're like a married couple. My sister's gone. She's at university. That's what I'm saying. We're both off. We're finished. Almost. Next year, I mean. They make you draw up this list, you know this? This absurd piece of paper . . .

Kyra Of course . . .

Edward Every student goes round: 'Look I've got my CV! . . .'

She grimaces at the mention of the word.

Edward I think I'll study CV when I get there. As my special subject. Why not? We never do anything because we might actually enjoy it. We do it so we can write it all down. You think, 'This is stupid! Doing things just so they'll look good on paper.' But then, I don't know, just tell me, what choice do I have?

Kyra You? You have none.

Edward What do your kids do?

Kyra Mine? Oh well, they're different.

Edward You're teaching in East Ham?

Kyra Uh-huh.

Edward How is that?

Kyra East Ham? Well, it has its drawbacks. I wouldn't say the kids are all great. But at least they're not on the ladder. So perhaps that means . . . they do things for their own sake.

SKYLIGHT

Edward Yeah.

Kyra You don't need a CV to get a UB40.

At once Edward leans forward, intrigued.

Edward No, well, exactly, I mean *exactly*. As you say, it's different.

Kyra It is.

Edward The fact is . . . when I think about that kind of life . . . just ordinary kids . . . I know it sounds stupid, but I feel sort of envious.

Kyra Do you?

Edward I suppose you think I'm just spoilt.

Kyra No.

Edward I'm not saying . . . God knows . . . that my life is too easy, nobody could live alone with my bastard of a father and say that my life is easy at all . . . But I do look at the street, and think, shit! Shit! And here I am heading in the opposite direction.

Kyra just watches as he gestures rather randomly round the flat.

I mean, I think in a way you're so lucky, living like this . . .

Kyra Well, thank you.

Edward I'm not being rude. I mean it. In this kind of place. (*He pauses a second.*) Dad said . . .

Kyra What? What did Dad say?

Edward I suppose he hinted . . . he was implying . . . in a way he was saying that you made a choice.

Kyra looks at him a moment, then gets up to take the tea things out.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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