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SF PERUSALS

BLACKOUT

A Play

by Davey Anderson

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-05258-3

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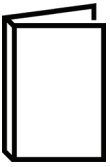
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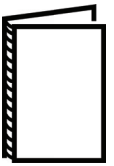
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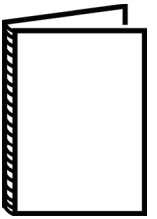
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote this play, but the story isn't mine. It belongs to a young man from the east end of Glasgow who allowed me to interview him about his life. He was eighteen at the time and was being mentored because, when he was fifteen, he committed a violent crime and was currently serving a probation sentence.

We met in a small room with sofas and we talked. Sometimes we drank tea. I asked questions and he answered. I was amazed by how articulate he was and how willing to share his thoughts, feelings and anecdotes. I went away with several hours of audio recordings from our conversations, which I then edited into a short narrative.

This is not to say that the following text is a verbatim transcript — although most of the words are his rather than mine. The play that emerged is a fictionalised account of the events surrounding the crime this young man committed, told with a fair amount of creative licence and, crucially, with certain key details left out.

The play was written to be performed by members of the Citizens Young Co, based at the Citizens Theatre in the Gorbals, Glasgow. It was written before I knew whether I would be working with only one or, potentially, twenty performers. It is therefore flexible in terms of cast size and works best, I think, when the performers form a tight, physically energetic ensemble.

In the original production there were no lights, no sound effects, no music, no specific costumes and the set consisted of four chairs with the audience seated on three sides surrounding the stage. Of course, other productions have been and will be more elaborate than this. My only request to directors is that you leave some things to the audience's imagination.

Davey Anderson

For James (both of them)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This play could not have been written without the support of Barnardo's Youth Involvement Project, Easterhouse. Special thanks to Oli Higham and Frank Connelly.

BLACKOUT

Blackout was commissioned by the National Theatre and premiered as part of their Theatre of Debate season at the Lyttelton Theatre on 4th July 2008.

The play was developed with the support of the Citizens Theatre / TAG Theatre Company and was first performed by members of the Citizens Young Co:

Fraser Hamilton
James Harkness
Rea Karnowski
Katrina Lamont
Martin McLeod

Director Davey Anderson
Young Co. Director Neil Packham
Assistant Director Rea Karnowsli

This production was then revived by the Citizens Theatre / TAG Theatre Company and toured schools throughout Glasgow with the following cast:

Claire Dyer
Fraser Hamilton
James Harkness
Keira Lucchesi
Scott McKay

The play was subsequently performed by various young theatre companies across the UK as part of the New Connections programme 2009. It has also been translated into Portuguese and performed by teenagers in São Paulo, Brazil as part of Conexões 2009.

CHARACTERS

JAMES
MA
DA
GRANDDA
POLIS GUY
KEY WORKER
TEACHER
FRIENDS
BULLIES
FRIENDS OF FRIENDS
JUDGE

All the members of the performing company act as a chorus, or a collective of storytellers.

ONE

Imagine

You wake up

You open your eyes

And you're like that

Where am I?

A small room

Bright lights

White walls

A metal door

Oh my God!

Imagine you wake up and you're in a jail cell.

You go up to the door

You bang your fists

Screaming

Shouting

What am I doing in here?

And imagine the polis guy comes up to the door

And he's like that

Keep it doon.

And you're like

Whit did I dae?

Aw, you don't know?

You shake your head

Whit?

And the polis guy just looks at you like you're a pure thug or something.

Imagine he just looks at you and he goes

You're getting charged with attempted murder, wee man.

You'd be like that

Aw naw

What did I do?

And you'd start remembering

Everything

Right from the beginning

You would try to remember

How did I get here?

TWO

So you'd start remembering your dad.

He was a woman beater.

He beat up your mum every day

From the day they got married right up to the day they got divorced

He used to beat her to a pulp.

So she stopped working

She wouldn't go out the house

Cos she was embarrassed.

She didn't want to walk down the street with her face all black and blue.

And you'd remember that your ma didnae want you to grow up to be like him.

She wanted you to be a famous lawyer

Or a famous doctor

Or a famous whatever.

And you'd remember that you were poor.

But you weren't poor poor

Cos your mum still made sure there was a dinner on the table every night.

She'd give you her last penny

She didn't care about herself.

But you'd remember that you never really spoke to her.

Cos you'd come home from school and go straight up the stairs.

James?

Aye.

Your dinner's out.

You'd come down

Grab the plate

Thanks, Ma.

Back up the stairs.

So you never really spoke to her.

THREE

But you'd remember your granddad.

He was the closest thing you had to a proper father.

He put you under his wing

He did everything a dad would do

He'd hold your hand

He'd walk you down to the shops

He'd play daft wee games with you

But best of all, he'd take you to the Rangers game every Saturday.

He'd take you to see the Orange Walks.

You'd remember how he taught you to play the flute

But you'd not to play The Sash

Or hang the Ulster flag out the window.

He taught you to keep that kind of thing to yourself.

But then he got his cancer.

You'd remember that.

So every night you'd go and sit with him

Play a game of cards

Help him do a jigsaw

Have a cup of tea and look out the back window.

You'd remember that that was where the boys fae your scheme used to fight with the boys fae the scheme doon the road.

They'd run at each other with bottles and bricks

Then it would be poles and baseball bats

And then it would be knives.

You'd be looking out the window going

Is that a wee boy with a sword?

Am I really seeing this?

And you and your granddad

You would just sit there and go

What are they fighting for?

Cos your grandda never went out and started hitting people.

He got his point across with his mouth, not with his hands.

He would just have to talk to you and people would listen to him.

And you'd remember you always wanted to grow up to be just like him.

FOUR

But when you were growing up, you didnae have that many pals.

Cos you were too quiet

You were shy

You were the wee, shy, nerdy boy

You didnae fit in with anybody.

And the pals you did have, they just used you, if you know what I mean.

Cos, know if it was a pure brilliant sunny day, they would all go away and leave you in the house.

But know if it was raining outside, they would come roon tae your bit and go

Hi James

I've no seen you in ages

How have you been?

Can we come in and sit for a while?

They didnae care about you

They just wanted somewhere tae sit.

FIVE

And say it was at school

You would get beaten up for being a goth

Just cos you had long hair and wore black combats.

They used to call you

The gimp!

Haw, look at him.

Ya dirty goth!

Dae you shag deid people?

Whit?

You go up the graveyards and hing aboot there, din't ye?

Naw.

Aye ye dae. I've seen ye.

Pure digging up the coffins and raping the corpses.

Ya dirty beast!

And you'd remember the beatings.

One of the bullies would take off his belt

He'd wrap it round his knuckles

And whack you with it.

Ah!!!

Then they'd throw you down the stairs

Don't!

Kick you in the ribs

Stop it!

Death to the gimp!!

And they would swagger off

And leave you there, lying on the ground

Curled up into a wee ball.

You'd remember that.

You'd remember every punch.

SIX

And you'd remember you had nobody to turn to
Cos your grandda was in the hospital
So you'd just sit in your room and watch horror films
Night after night
Or read books about serial killers.
Or just look at all the pictures.
You had a bloodlust for it.
It gave you a thrill
Reading about killers
Cos they're normal people
But they're mysterious.
What makes them tick?
What makes them go insane?
What can make somebody dae it tae somebody?
It fascinated you.

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