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A Kind of Alaska

(from *Other Places*)

A Play

Harold Pinter

Samuel French – London

New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



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A KIND OF ALASKA

First performed as part of the triple bill *Other Places** in the Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre, London, on 14th October, 1982, with the following cast:

Deborah
Hornby
Pauline

Judi Dench
Paul Rogers
Anna Massey

Directed by Peter Hall
Designed by John Bury

* *Family Voices*, *One for the Road* and *Victoria Station* are available separately in Acting Editions published by Samuel French.

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Please note that all companies presenting *A Kind of Alaska* must give due acknowledgement to the effect that the play was inspired by *Awakenings* by Oliver Sacks MD.

A Kind of Alaska was inspired by *Awakenings* by Oliver Sacks M.D., first published in 1973 by Gerald Duckworth and Co.

In the winter of 1916–17, there spread over Europe, and subsequently over the rest of the world, an extraordinary epidemic illness which presented itself in innumerable forms—as delirium, mania, trances, coma, sleep, insomnia, restlessness, and states of Parkinsonism. It was eventually identified by the great physician Constantin von Economo and named by him *encephalitis lethargica*, or sleeping sickness.

Over the next ten years almost five million people fell victim to the disease of whom more than a third died. Of the survivors some escaped almost unscathed, but the majority moved into states of deepening illness. The worst-affected sank into singular states of “sleep”—conscious of their surroundings but motionless, speechless, and without hope or will, confined to asylums or other institutions.

Fifty years later, with the development of the remarkable drug L-DOPA, they erupted into life once more.

To Mick Goldstein

A KIND OF ALASKA

A woman in a white bed. Mid-forties. She sits up against high-banked pillows, stares ahead. A table and two chairs. A window. A man in a dark suit sits at the table. Early sixties

The woman's eyes move. She slowly looks about her. Her gaze passes over the man and on. He watches her. She stares ahead, still. She whispers

Deborah Something is happening.

Silence

Hornby Do you know me?

Silence

Do you recognize me?

Silence

Can you hear me?

She does not look at him

Deborah Are you speaking?

Hornby Yes.

Pause

Do you know who I am?

Pause

Who am I?

Deborah No-one hears what I say. No-one is listening to me.

Who am I?

Deborah You are no-one.

Pause

Who is it? It is miles away. The rain is falling. I will get wet.

Pause

I can't get to sleep. The dog keeps turning about. I think he's dreaming. He wakes me up, but not himself up. He's my best dog though. I talk French.

Pause

Hornby I would like you to listen to me.

Pause

You have been asleep for a very long time. You have now woken up. We are here to care for you.

Pause

You have been asleep for a very long time. You are older, although you do not know that. You are still young, but older.

Pause

Deborah Something is happening.

Hornby You have been asleep. You have awoken. Can you hear me? Do you understand me?

She looks at him for the first time

Deborah Asleep?

Pause

I do not remember that.

Pause

People have been looking at me. They have been touching me. I spoke, but I don't think they heard what I said.

Pause

What language am I speaking? I speak French, I know that. Is this French?

Pause

I've not seen Daddy today. He's funny. He makes me laugh. He runs with me. We play with balloons.

Pause

Where is he?

Pause

I think it's my birthday soon.

Pause

No, no. No, no. I sleep like other people. No more no less. Why should I? If I sleep late my mother wakes me up. There are things to do.

Pause

If I have been asleep, why hasn't Mummy woken me up?

Hornby I have woken you up.

Deborah But I don't know you.

Pause

Where is everyone? Where is my dog? Where are my sisters?
Last night Estelle was wearing my dress. But I said she could.

Pause

I am cold.

Hornby How old are you?

Deborah I am twelve. No. I am sixteen. I am seven.

Pause

I don't know. Yes. I know. I am fourteen. I am fifteen. I'm lovely fifteen.

Pause

You shouldn't have brought me here. My mother will ask me where I've been.

Pause

You shouldn't have touched me like that. I shan't tell my mother. I shouldn't have touched you like that.

Pause

Oh Jack.

Pause

It's time I was up and about. All those dogs are making such a racket. I suppose Daddy's feeding them. Is Estelle going to marry that boy from Townley Street? The ginger boy? Pauline says he's got nothing between his ears. Thick as two planks. I've given it a good deal of rather more mature thought and I've decided she should not marry him. Tell her not to marry him. She'll listen to you.

Pause

Daddy?

Hornby She didn't marry him.

Deborah Didn't?

Pause

It would be a great mistake. It would ruin her life.

Hornby She didn't marry him.

Silence

Deborah I've seen this room before. What room is this? It's not my bedroom. My bedroom has blue lilac on the walls. The sheets are soft, pretty. Mummy kisses me.

Pause

This is not my bedroom.

Hornby You have been in this room for a long time. You have been asleep. You have now woken up.

Deborah You shouldn't have brought me here. What are you saying? Did I ask you to bring me here? Did I make eyes at you?

Did I show desire for you? Did I let you peep up my skirt? Did I flash my teeth? Was I as bold as brass? Perhaps I've forgotten.

Hornby I didn't bring you here. Your mother and father brought you here.

Deborah My father? My mother?

Pause

Did they bring me to you as a sacrifice? Did they sacrifice me to you?

Hungry for More?

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