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Cold Salmon

A Play

John Bowen

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

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FOUNDED 1830

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CHARACTERS

Harry Farnham
Elsie
Angie Outhwaite
Beth Farnham
Liz
Janice
Pearson
Rosemary
Lester
Dad

The action of the play takes place in the neglected graveyard of a little church

Time: the present. A summer's day

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Some of the characters are dead and some are living. The dead can see and hear the living, but are unable to communicate with them. The living cannot see or hear the dead and do not know that they are there.

The Dead

Harry Farnham, 64. Harry died in 1970 and has been waiting by his grave ever since for his wife to join him.

Elsie, 70s. Impossible to be sure when she died because her grave is unmarked. She waits by it in the vague hope that some member of her family will turn up to look for her some day.

Dad, 60s. He died earlier in the year and was cremated. His family has assembled to scatter his ashes at the tomb of his ancestors.

The Living

Angie Owthwaite, late 50s. Harry's daughter.

Beth Farnham, early 90s, although the actress playing her should be younger. Harry's wife, grown old and deaf and rather gaga; she has to be in a wheelchair for any outing. At the end of the play, Beth dies and is able—now looking much younger—to join her husband.

Liz, 30s. Daughter to Dad. A teacher. Unmarried.

Janice, early 40s. Sister-in-law to Liz. Socially mobile upwards, a great one for the finer things in life.

Pearson, early 40s. Brother to Liz, husband to Janice.

Rosemary, 14. Daughter to Pearson and Janice. Sulky, unhappy: her parents worry that she may become anorexic.

Lester, late 20s. Younger brother to Liz and Pearson. Gay but not in the least camp.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The church, although mentioned, is not seen. What is essential is that the church and graveyard are high on a cliff above the sea, probably somewhere on the Lancashire coast, but any company mounting the play is at liberty to site it on any other more local cliff and adjust the dialogue and dialect accordingly. The edge of the cliff is not far from the front of the stage: we do not need to bother with a fence or low wall which would only interfere with sight-lines.

Depending on the year when the play is performed, time references can be adjusted, as long as the year of Harry Farnham's death is about 28 years before the date of the performance.

The easiest way to make the humps in front of the gravestones might be to use Gro-bags covered with the plastic grass found in green-grocers' shops. The large grave would use three Gro-bags pushed together and one across them at the top; the small grave would need only one Gro-bag. The Gro-bag at the top of the large grave should have a (concealed) slit in it so that earth can be removed and an urn inserted.

COLD SALMON

A day in summer—late morning or early afternoon

A section of the neglected graveyard of a little church, now hardly used

We are concerned with two graves, one a rather grand family tomb, the other near it but a little farther downstage, smaller, with only one occupant. The family tomb has a large gravestone—large enough for us to be able to conceal one male actor, Dad, and one smallish female ASM behind it from the beginning of the play. The inscriptions on the slab—names and dates and such—have weathered and are no longer readable

The other gravestone is smaller, just a stone cross on a base. Here the inscription is recent enough for us to be able to read it...

*Sacred To the Memory of
HARRY FARNHAM
1906-1970
Gone But Not Forgotten*

...and it covers only half the space available on the headstone

Both stones have a sort of hump in front of them to mark the grave itself. On the hump in front of the small grave is a container with dead flowers in it. A third, unmarked, hump is DL

At the beginning of the play two people are on stage. Both are dead, waiting for the living. Harry, sixty-four years old, stands behind his

gravestone. Elsie is in her seventies and sits propped against the end of the unmarked grassy hump, extreme DL. They do not need any special make-up, but both should be dressed entirely in grey: grey cardigan, shirt, trousers, socks and shoes for Harry; shapeless grey dress, stockings and shoes for Elsie

Elsie I sit here. The years go by, but nobody comes.

Harry How could they? Unmarked grave: you could be anywhere.

They should have stumped up for a plaque.

Elsie They'd no money. Never had. She used to borrow from *me*, and I'd ad nowt but me pension. Come round with a packet of Mint Imperials of a Wednesday and go through me purse before she went to Bingo. I could do with one of them Mint Imperials now. Something to suck, it's occupation. (*She pauses*) You'd think someone might look in.

Harry Your lot? They've moved most like. Sold up. Moonlight flit.

Elsie There was plenty of those.

Harry They could be passed on themselves by now. How long is it—forty year you've been here? *She* won't wait around. She'll be away up to the great Bingo Hall in the sky.

Elsie There was kids—two girls and a lad—my grandchildren. They might take it into their heads. I'll sit a bit longer.

Angie is heard from UL

Angie (*off*) Here we are, then, Mother!

Angie appears, pushing her mother, Beth, in a wheelchair, and comes down to Harry's grave. Angie is in her late fifties, Beth in her nineties (though the actress who plays her should be much younger). Beth is deaf and never says anything in answer to a question but "very nice". On her lap there is a plastic bag containing a pot of seasonal flowers. She is wearing a long coat, to cover up the grey clothes beneath, and a hat

Not a drop of rain, and as for the wind up here it's the merest

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