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Joggers

A Play

Geraldine Aron

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-12124-1

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CHARACTERS

Walter Shapiro (Wally)
Augustus Armstrong (Gus)
Norma Shapiro
Sylvie Armstrong

The action takes place on the beach and on the lawns of a hotel in a seaside resort, during the course of one week

Time—the present

Scene 1 The beach
Scene 2 The hotel lawns
Scene 3 The beach
Scene 4 The hotel lawns
Scene 5 The beach

Joggers was first performed at Brian Astbury's Space Theatre in Cape Town, South Africa in 1979. Derek Lyndon, Ken Berry, Sue Hanson and Yvonne Copley were directed by Roland Stafford, who also designed the sets.

For Richard

PRODUCTION NOTES

When *Joggers* was first staged, a small budget inspired the following simple but very effective sets:

The beach was indicated by a couple of polystyrene rocks on which the characters sat from time to time. A few pebbles were scattered around, and there was also a small mound of sand for sifting purposes. The main prop was an umbrella holder in which a sign with a SWIMMING symbol was stood. The scene change from the beach to the hotel lawns was done by two scene shifters dressed as hotel waiters who removed the rocks etc. and wheeled on two beach loungers and a small table. The SWIMMING sign was replaced by a beach umbrella, which was then opened. Norma and Sylvie walked on during this and thanked the waiters for their trouble. The background remained the same for all scenes—it was a sort of cellophane curtain with a fluffy cloud pinned to it.

The luxury hotel aspect was covered by borrowing thick towels from an authentic hotel chain, and by silly drinks, abrim with flowers and fruit, served in coconut or pineapple shells.

Music to cover the scene changes should be chosen with great care so that it has relevance to the play. In the original production, contemporary music from the Top Twenty was used, with or without lyrics, but selected for its mood—the play opened with something cheerful for jogging, Sylvie's weeping was accompanied by a nostalgic piece, and so on.

JOGGERS

SCENE 1

The beach. Early morning

There are a couple of rocks (polystyrene) big enough to sit on, some pebbles and a small mound of sand for sifting. A SWIMMING sign stands in an umbrella holder. Off stage L *is the hotel and off stage* R *is a continuing stretch of beach. The audience is the sea*

When the Lights come up, Wally is jogging earnestly. A successful and prosperous businessman, he has recently become interested in fitness. He is wearing a tracksuit, and is clearly a man of good taste, well-groomed. His jogging style is short—knees low, chin up. His nostrils flare with effort. There is a Black-out, during which Wally removes his tracksuit. As the Lights come up again, Wally is towelling himself dry, as if he has just come out of the water. He bellows and springs about, scrubs at his chest-hair, tosses his head, puffs out his cheeks, bares his teeth, jiggles his jowls, etc.

Gus enters R *and stands slightly up stage, watching Wally. Gus is also in his mid-forties, but he is smaller and less prosperous than Wally. He has dreadful taste in swimwear, and wears a comb in the waistband of his leopard-skin scants. At the moment he is wearing a vest and shorts over his trunks, and is carrying a hotel towel. Gus has also been jogging. In fact, he has been following Wally and is now looking forward to making his acquaintance. Slightly breathless, he watches Wally, a friendly smile ready, then nods cheerfully*

Gus How's the water this morning?

Wally (*noticing him for the first time*) Champagne!

Gus You can't beat it, eh—specially after a spot of exercise.

Wally Sets you up for the day—a real tonic. You been in yet?

Gus Not yet. To tell you the truth, I'm more of a pool man myself.

Wally You're kidding! You mean you'd rather swim in that mixture of chemicals and urine than in this? Well, each to his own. (*He sits on one of the rocks and takes from beneath it a plastic bag containing a bottle of petrol and a wad of cotton-wool. He begins to remove scabs of oil from the soles of his feet*)

Gus That's a good idea, keeping a supply of that handy. I was just saying to my wife yesterday, the hotel should keep a kit like that in the lobby. I said to her, I said "It's no use them complaining about oil on the carpeting if they're not interested in supplying the means to get it off." It's obvious really, don't you think?

Wally Did you mention it to the manager?

Gus (*after a pause*) No, I didn't, but I intend to. They ask you for your comments when you leave. I told the wife I might put it on the card, as a suggestion. Better late than never, eh?

Wally Oh, are you at the end of your stay then?

Gus No fear—we only arrived yesterday. Another six days to go. And you?

Wally We've booked in for three weeks. (*He consults his watch*) One down and two to go. (*He slaps his belly*) I've never felt better.

Gus Three weeks, eh? I didn't know you could come for three weeks. We had a choice between the fifteen-day Bonanza or the seven-day Getaway Plan. Being as it's our first time here we went for the Getaway. Didn't want to risk our entire leave, you know how it is. (*He shakes his head, remembering*) Whew. Wouldn't be the first time. So what do they call your package?

Wally We're not on a package.

Gus Oh. Then it must be costing you a bomb. My wife and I worked it out last night; all meals would stand you in for almost *twice* the cost of an inclusive package. Now me and Sylvie can eat ourselves silly three times a day and it doesn't cost us a bean. Personally, I've never been able to see why anyone would be stupid enough to go it alone when they could be enjoying a package. Work it out for yourself: they flew us here, collected us from the airport in a luxury coach. We get full board, plus two half-day tours to the Cango Caves and the Wilderness, a welcoming cocktail party with free drinks, the lot! And all for less than the price of a week at ordinary bed and breakfast rates.

Wally I don't know how they do it and make a profit.

Gus Because of suckers like you—that's how they do it! (*He stops*) No offence meant—but it does make you think, you must admit.

Wally My wife and I prefer to be independent. She doesn't like package tours.

Gus But what's not to like? We all sleep in the same rooms, all get the same grub, don't we? Just give me one example of how it's an advantage to be freelance, as it were.

Wally Mmmm, let's see. Well, for one thing, the freelancers don't have to wear armbands with "Cheapskate" written on them.

Gus (*after a pause*) That's a good one! Armbands with—wait till I tell Sylvie that. She'll have a good laugh!

Wally Then again, we're not sprayed with D.D.T. as we come through the doors, we can have as many baths as we like and if we don't want to have singsongs in the bar we get a special dispensation.

Gus (*laughing*) A special dis—I can see you've got a good sense of humour, anyway. And that's more important than a head for business, eh. D.D.T.! My name's Gus, Gus Armstrong, Jo'burg.

Wally Wally Shapiro, Cape Town.

They shake hands. Gus cleans his feet with the petrol, sitting on the other rock. Wally stands up and does some breathing exercises

I knew a Rhodesian called Angus. Red-haired bloke. Used to farm tobacco up there. Got out just in time by the looks of it. Converted his cash into Persian carpets and set up a wholesale business in Aberdeen.

Gus That so? Nice crowd, the Scots. Although actually—just to put the record straight—I'm not actually an Angus. I'm more of an Augustus, if the truth be known. Not a name I particularly like, but what can you do.

Wally Oh, I see.

Gus I've known the odd Shapiro, though. My dentist is a Shapiro. The wife won't go to him because he hasn't got this new laughing-gas business. But I reckon a bit of pain never killed anyone, so I'm not changing. Then there was Shapiro Agnew . . .

Wally Spiro.

Gus I beg yours?

Wally Spiro Agnew. A Greek.

Gus (*after a pause*) You know, I believe you're right. Well, let's see, that little ballerina, Phyllis Shapiro. Wonderful! Terrific! Saw her on the telly.

Wally Spira.

Gus (*after a pause*) Ah well, what's in a name, as Shakespeare said. Don't know about you, but I reckon I'm just about ready to tuck into the old bacon and eggs. Are you a breakfast man, Wally?

Wally Coffee and toast, usually.

Gus That wouldn't do for us, not on holiday. Mind you, I can understand it—the prices they charge if you're not on a package!

Both men stand. Wally conceals his bottle of petrol, etc. beneath the rock and drapes his towel around his shoulders. Suddenly he and Gus adopt more controlled stances. They pull in their tummies, looking off L

Lovely looking girl that. I saw her on the dance floor last night. I said to my wife—I'll bet that one's a handful the way she's carrying on. Everything hanging out, the hair flying around. Had a drop too much, I'd say. Still, it's different on holiday really . . . She must be searching for pansy shells . . . People get away with murder on holiday. Take on another identity in a way. All part of the fun. Sylvie and I spend hours guessing what people do before we meet them. You ever played the guessing game, Wally?

Wally You mean wondering if people are having dirty week-ends, that sort of thing?

Gus Oh, not necessarily that. More if they're well-off or not. Where they're from. Package tour or freelance, ha ha. (*He slaps Wally's back*) Take our shapely young beachcomber, Sylvie's christened her the Sex Bomb. Say we're sitting in the bar, enjoying a cocktail . . . Suddenly Sylvie will say to me, casual-like, "Don't look now, but here comes S.B!" Then there's T.W. —that's Tight Wad, and C.H.—that's—well, and so on.

Wally C.H.?

Gus Ach, it's just a silly game we play amongst ourselves. Harmless. Between ourselves.

Wally Sure. So what's C.H.?

Gus Chopped Herring. Nothing ethnic or anything. Just our little joke.

Wally Chopped Herring. Chopped Herring—that'll be the woman in the white dress, with the turban. Am I right?

Gus Ach, I wish now I'd never mentioned it.

Wally Am I right though?

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