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PONDLIFE KAPPA MIKEY & ADDIE

by Robert Alan Evans

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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Author's Note

It's fun to look at your friends and decide what age they are inside. Some people I know are about five-years-old, still running around in circles, getting excited and hitting me on the head with rolled up bits of newspaper. Another person I know has the body of a forty-year-old, but is still about twelve inside; forever wandering around the playground looking at the tarmac and wondering who will be his friend. I also have a friend who is stuck at fifteen, listening to songs about misery and unable to throw away T-shirts that don't fit anymore. I think I am probably about ten. And that's what these plays are about. Being about ten.

Maybe being young really is easy for some people. I don't know. There were those ones who seemed to be good at everything. The ones who appeared to have a sophisticated grip on things that were, to me, a mystery; what clothes to wear, what music to listen to, who had snogged Bethan behind the bins. But I'm fairly sure that even they had moments of existential panic. When they were at home, staring at the ceiling, listening to the sounds of the house, surely they too wondered what it all meant and why things were the way they were. I, for one, had no idea, but one thing I knew for certain, was that it was not going to be easy and I would need all my wits about me, if I wasn't going to mess up and reveal the fact that I was completely and utterly confused.

When I was ten, I used to have the feeling that somehow I was being watched. We had bunk beds and I would sometimes lie in the bottom bunk and peel bits of woodchip from the wallpaper, then I would worry that the wall had people behind, just watching. They were scientists, I knew this because they had white coats on, were in a laboratory and some of them were wearing safety glasses (why they needed the glasses I never found out). And the wall would at some point lift up and reveal these people. They would confirm that my life so far had been an experiment. In some ways it would be a relief. Finally, it would all make sense. They would tell me that of course I was having these feelings, that actually everyone had them, that they had all just been pretending to see if they would still rise up in me. And they had, so the experiment was over. Everyone would be pleased with the results, pleased with me. What these feelings

were, I'm not quite sure, as a boy who was gay they were probably about desire, but what matters is that I thought I was the only one having them. A play is a good way to ask questions, especially of a young audience, to ask why things are the way they are, to show that being young is not easy, to take their lives and their problems every bit as seriously as most theatre takes the lives of older people.

The plays are also a result of working with Andy Manley and Gill Robertson and as such are also filled with some of their experiences. They introduced me to working with young people and for that I will be forever grateful. To learn how to keep a young audience entertained is to learn precision, how not to be self-indulgent and the importance of being completely honest with your audience. They know when you're floundering around and they love it when you respect their imaginations and give them something difficult.

Finally, a note on all three plays. They are storytelling pieces. They can be told in whatever way you want. One actor, two, thirteen, it doesn't matter. In France, *Pondlife* has been told by a man and a saxophonist, a woman with a projector and once by fifty school children. They are written to be performed in theatres with full lights, sound and set and also stripped back to nothing, in school classrooms and halls, where a live performance can thrill every bit as much. This flexibility was always a goal of the work and an attempt to get good stories to young people wherever they might be.

Robert Alan Evans
2016

PONDLIFE

Created by Robert Alan Evans,
Andy Manley & Gill Robertson

Written by Robert Alan Evans

First performed by Catherine Wheels Theatre Company
on 2nd May 2008

This story begins with two men.

About my age.

Two men. Walking towards each other. That's the beginning and the end of this story.

And I'll tell you where.

An airport.

The lounge. Busy with people. Kids screaming, grannies sitting, mums perusing the perfume aisle, spraying clouds of Chanel No 5, already on their holiday. All waiting to board. Waiting to fly away to somewhere else.

No one notices these two men.

Except the cleaner. Mopping away. Sees them walking towards each other.

Two pairs of shoes. White patent leather come all the way from Los Angeles and brown brushed suede come all the way from Edinburgh.

Walking. Closing the gap.

About to meet.

For the first time in thirty years.

Best friends they were once.

Swore an oath on it when they were ten. Sitting in the woods one evening. Sky above going dark.

Best friends forever.

Didn't know they'd have a fight. Didn't realise their friendship would end.

But our story starts before then. Before all that. Back when they first met.

School bell rings.

*

Simon and Martin. Standing in front of P6 after the Easter holidays.

Martin looking around to see who he might make friends with. Shirt ironed, shoes polished, tie on straight.

And then Simon. Different. Long hair a mess over green eyes, his tie on wrong. Like it doesn't really belong to him.

The two of them standing, shuffling under the gaze of P6. Everyone already settled, already friends.

'Now Martin, tell us where you've moved from.'
Mrs Nangle the class teacher.

'Now come on Martin, don't be shy.'

Martin knows this is dangerous. Hasn't had time to get rid of his accent.

'Birmingham.'

The class start to snigger.

'What did he say Miss?'

'Birmingham.'

'And does anyone know what you're called if you're from Birmingham?'

No?

A Brummie, isn't that right Martin?'

Only someone who wasn't from Birmingham would say that, but Martin nods anyway, just wants to sit down.

Brummie. Brummie. It's racing round the class. Mrs Nangle saying something about spoons. About how Birmingham is famous for spoons and that makes everyone laugh more.

'Spoon face'

'Spoon boy'

'Class. Class. Now settle down. I don't want to hear any more remarks. Sharon MacGuinness and Colin Maxwell, that includes you.

Now, this is Simon.'

Simon nods. But doesn't say anything. The class stare, but he doesn't seem to care. He is staring at the poster of the solar system on the back wall. He just turns the collar of his jacket up and stands there. Waiting. Martin sees he has odd socks on. One brown, one green.

'Boys, you sit over there.' There are two spaces at the side of the class. Martin looks around, doesn't want to sit next to Simon, but there is nowhere else.

'Now class, as it's the first day back, I want you to draw your favourite day of the holidays. Let your imaginations run wild.

...

Not too wild Sharon.'

Martin gets up to borrow some colours. Maybe talk to some of the boys. But as soon as he approaches, each table seems to close up. No-one will let him near them. He goes back to his desk and there, in the middle, is the biggest pencil case Martin has ever seen. Old fashioned, like it's knitted, and overflowing with colours. Chalk pastels, oil pastels, huge fat felt-tips, everything you might need. Simon pushes them over.

'Thanks.'

‘No problem’, says Simon and gets back to his picture.

Martin gets to work drawing his pals playing football back in Birmingham. Then he notices Simon’s picture. A blue sky with clouds drifting across the page, and something coming out of them. Soon it becomes a horse, a horse galloping out of the clouds. Strange but good. Really good.

‘Hoh! That is amazing!’ Judith Montgomery has come across, noticed Simon’s picture.

‘Miss! Look what Simon’s done.’

The whole class stop.

‘Simon McGurk! Well. Well. Well. It seems we have our very own Cézanne in the class.’

Everyone ‘umms’ and ‘ahhs’ at Simon’s picture. Mrs Nangle sticks it up on the wall. Susan Topping says it’s just like her horse Princess which she rides every weekend.

Only Sharon’s voice can be heard complaining.

‘It’s meant to be your holidays. How’s a flying horse your holidays?’

Breaktime.

Class pile out. Colin and Stewart barge past laughing. ‘Out the way spoonface.’

Martin finally finds his way to the playground. A football’s being kicked about. Thinks about joining in. In Birmingham

he would've been straight in there. Right at the front. Calling to his friends. Shouting for the ball.

...

Leaves it.

Sees Simon on the other side of the playground. Alone as well.

Lunch. Martin stands with his tray looking for somewhere to sit. Just a sea of faces, then he hears a voice.

Sharon McGuinness, waving at him, smiling. Anoushka Osborne sits beside her, flicking her hair. And at the end of the table Colin and Stuart are playing Top Trumps.

'Martin!

Hey Martin!

Over here.'

'Martin. We were just trying to remember where it was you were from again.

Where was it?'

'Birmingham.'

'Where?'

'Birmingham.'

'Will you say something for me?'

'Okay.'

'Say "My name's Martin".'

‘My name’s Martin.’

“And I’m a Bummy”.

‘Shut up.’

‘Bummy. Go on Martin. Say it.’

There’s a crowd gathered now. All waiting.

‘Say it!’

Stuart and Colin are watching now. Waiting for the fight.
Waiting for Sharon to turn mental.

‘SAY IT!’

Wishes he was in Birmingham. Wishes he was back home.
Wishes someone would rescue him.

And then he hears a voice.

‘Martin. Mrs Nangle wants to see you. In class.’

It’s Simon.

‘Says you’ve got to come now.’

Sharon closes in on Simon. Eyeballs him. He doesn’t move.
She steps away. Away. Get away quick.

‘What does she want? Mrs Nangle?’

‘Nothing. Just looked like you needed a hand.’

And that was it.

They spend the rest of that day together. The rest of that week.

In class they start their project for the term.

‘Prehistoric Man. The Stone Age.’

Mrs Nangle shows them a picture of a caveman. Neanderthals they were called.

Big hands drooping down to the floor. Jaw jutting out from thickset eyes.

Simon whispers that it looks a bit like Sharon McGuinness. Draws a picture of Sharon as a cave woman, hair wild, carrying a club and screaming.

Martin has to look at Mrs Nangle to stop from laughing.

It’s so funny that they draw the whole of Sharon’s table, all in a group, hitting each other with clubs.

Stuart, Colin, Anoushka and Sharon; The Neanderthals.

By the end of the week they have started to make a comic. Each story has the Neanderthals trying to do something, like inventing the wheel, but then they always end up hitting each other with it. Simon says that if he wants, Martin can stay over his on Friday and they can work on it properly.

*

Simon’s house is one of the old ones on the hill. Martin’s mum says they’re drafty, but Martin likes it.

Simon’s room is on the top floor and all the way up there are things everywhere. Enough to make Martin’s mum have a fit. Books piled high, ornaments and pictures all over the walls.

On the landing is a deck chair with a parasol open, just standing there.

Simon’s room is amazing. It’s like a warehouse full of stuff; animal skulls, a dinosaur tooth, a glass tank full of stick insects. And stacked on shelves along a whole wall is Simon’s pride and joy, his comic collection. All neatly sorted, he has everything, Batman, The Silver Surfer, the Fantastic Four. All going way back.

He tells Martin that if they do their comic right. Get it published. It could make them millions. Millions!

They get to eat pizza and work on the comic and later, as they go to sleep, they tell each other what they'd do with a million pounds.

Martin says he'd buy a plane and fly it round the world.

Simon says he'd buy the school and make Sharon clean it.

That term Martin's mum notices his room changing. New things appearing over the Aston Villa posters. A picture of a monster with the word 'Noush' written below. A crystal growing on some string and then finally, when she's hoovering under his bed, she knocks against something.

'What is this?'

'A sheeps skull.'

'Where did you get it from?'

'Simon lent it to me.'

'It's disgusting. I won't have it in the house.'

'It's really old we reckon. Probably Neolithic.'

'What about other friends? Have you got any other friends?'

Martin shrugs.

'You should go out. Play football. You love football. Remember? Could never get you away from it back home.'

'Does the school have a team?'

'Don't know.'

'You should try out for the team. Get back into it. You were the best player back home.'

*

Martin doesn't try out.

Instead they work on the comic. Simon does most of the drawings and Martin realises he's pretty good at thinking up the stories. He thinks of one where Noush tries to eat Sharon and one where Stuart gets adopted by a diplodocus. At school they're pretty much left alone. And Martin's not bothered. He stops caring about football. Stops caring if people think they're weird. Together they're fine and the summer holidays get closer and closer. Then, in the last week of term, Judith Montgomery drops a bombshell.

'Sharon's heard about your comic. She reckons it's nasty. They all do. Says she's going to punish you. They all are. On the last day.'

Martin was terrified.

Five days to go till the end of term.

Five

Four

Three

Two

One

Martin wakes up. Thinks about Shazza's meaty hand hitting his face.

But Simon doesn't seem bothered. Just comes in and sits in class as normal. They put the finishing touches to the cavemen display and all the while the Neanderthals are looking over at Simon and Martin. Spooking them.

'Hi Martin.'

‘Hi Martin.’

‘You’re going to get it Martin.’

Then, just before the final bell, Mrs Nangle notices something.

‘Something’s wrong with the display. One of the cavemen is missing. I think it’s yours Judith.’

(*aghast*) ‘Uhhhhh! Someone stole it Miss.’

‘Now Judith I hardly think that’s true.’

‘It is. It is Miss. How else would it have gone?’

‘Now class. I want whoever touched Judith Montgomery’s caveman to hand it back. No harm done.’

But no one says anything.

‘One last chance.’

Silence.

‘Well, we shall all be staying here until someone speaks.’

‘Oh Miss!’

Sharon McGuinness grabs her bag and slams it on the table in front of her. And that’s when everyone sees what looks like a head roll out of the bag and across her table. Even Sharon just stares as it rolls to a halt. A pair of painted caveman’s eyes looking back at her.

‘No way Miss. It wisnae me!’

Martin looks at Simon and sees he is grinning.

‘Right. Class. You’re all dismissed. Have a lovely summer. Sharon McGuinness. You’re staying right here.’

SONG: “MR BLUE SKY” – by ELO

Sprint out of school. Past the confused Neanderthals.

Past the huddle of kids.

No more school.

No more nothing.

Just SUMMER!

They crawled, and climbed, and reached, and grabbed, and hid, and whispered, and shouted!

They chased, and ran, and jumped, and caught, and laughed, and balanced, and fell.

Simon and Martin spent the whole summer together.

Smell of cut grass.

Mr Bridges walking his weird dog.

Radios playing the hit of the summer.

The gleam of it all.

An aeroplane scoping its way across the brilliant blue.

They ran. To where the town turned to country. They ran through the bit of woods.

They found a place where they could make a den. Surrounded by trees. Set a trap so if anyone came they’d know about it.

They broke and climbed. Climbed so you could see the hills,
the town. Leaned back and watched the clouds.

They rolled down The Biggie. Headfirst sometimes. Climbed
round the graveyard wall. Dead people, but they were alive.
ALIVE!

Chopped the stinging nettles down with sticks.

Then the sticks turned into lightsaber as they finally saw the
film everyone had been talking about.

Star Wars.

The noise of lightsabers.

‘Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you’re my only hope!’

‘Use the Force Luke.’

They fight with lightsabers.

Then it came, the last day of the holidays. That evening they
sit in their den and swear an oath. To stick together and never
join the dark side. Never!

*

Thunder

First day back at school it rains.

Shoes wet. Summer gone.

They traipse into class.

Everyone the same, but different.

Colin’s been to Spain and seen a bullfight.

Anoushka’s been to France and seen a baguette.

Sharon’s been to Bognor and seen a dead rat.

Martin sits next to Simon on a table for four.

The class stare at their new teacher.

‘Right class.

My name is Truman.

T. R. U. M. A. N.

P7. Final year. You Will Be Adults. No more softy softy. Do as I say, when I say. Now. First thing. Wednesday. A trip. The Botanic Gardens. Hmmm. Exciting. You will take slips home. You will get permission. Second. Football trials. No excuses. You will try out. Understood.

So. Now. Art.

...

My Favourite Day of the Holiday.

...

Draw!'

Simon and Martin started to draw their summer. But Martin soon stopped and watched as Simon drew everything. Everything they'd done.

Mr Bridges' dog. The woods. The tombstones in the graveyard. But all mixed into one.

Mr Truman comes and stands behind. Looks at the picture.

'And this is?'

It's the holidays Sir.

'Mmmmm.

...

Ah! Now, Sharon isn't it? Much better. You can actually see what it is.'

'It's my sister Sir, in Bognor.'

'And in her hand?'

'That's the rat. She's the one that found it.'

*

Wednesday morning the bus comes to take them to the Botanic Gardens.

Pile on.

Best seats. Where are the best seats?

Sharon MacGuinness barges past.

‘Noush! Noush! Come on.’

Sharon and Anoushka claim the back of the bus. Sharon showing off her new shoes.

Her new sparkling white shoes.

In front of them are the rest of the Neanderthals.

Simon and Martin sit halfway up opposite Judith Montgomery who is telling everyone about her car sickness.

‘My mum says I shouldn’t sit over the wheel, it’s worse when I sit over the wheel. I’ve got special bangles. Magnetic bangles, they stop you getting sick. That’s what my mum said. Miss, Miss! Do you like my bangles, they stop you getting sick?’

‘Yes dear, very nice. Now P6 and P7 settle down, settle down.’

‘SIT DOWN!’

‘Thank you Mr Truman.

Right driver, off we go.’

The trip takes almost two hours.

It's meant to be fifty minutes, but they have to keep stopping to let Judith off the bus.

She's sick three times properly and twice just some dry retching.

Finally they get there and spend the morning in giant greenhouses like jungles.

It's amazing. Water dripping from the leaves and one giant plant that lets off a fart smell.

After lunch they get into pairs and have to fill in a quiz sheet.

It's a race round the gardens trying to find the answers. The colour of the bandstand, the name of the head gardener, the height of the tallest glasshouse.

Martin and Simon are doing well. Really well. With sticks as lightsabers they use Jedi mind tricks to get the answers.

The only thing they have left to do is find the pond and get the name of the boat there.

A sign for the pond points over a hill. They charge up it.

And there it is.

The pond.

And Sharon and Anoushka already at the edge, kneeling on the jetty.

What are they doing?

Then Martin sees that Sharon is untying the boat. Pushing it off so no one else can get the name.

Before he knows what he's doing Martin lets out a shout.

'Oi!'

And his lightsaber comes out of his hand. Did he throw it? He's not sure, but in mid-air it's suddenly just a stick. Coming down, arcing down. No. No.

It hits the water just in front of Sharon and splashes up on her. Up over her new shoes.

She looks up.

'You!'

And with that she's up. Up the hill and grabbing Martin. No. Not Martin. It's Simon she grabs. And Martin doesn't do anything. He doesn't say 'It was me'. Just stands mute as Sharon pulls Simon down. Down to the pond.

Simon struggles.

'Leave me alone. Leave us alone.'

Gives a last look.

Then he's gone. Sharon has thrown him like a shot-put. Out over the water. Right out and in. He splashes and the water comes over his head.

Martin stands.

Watching as Simon comes up. Splashing. Panicking. He can't swim. Knew that from the summer, Simon can't swim.

Why doesn't he do something? Why doesn't he move? Just standing there.

Then...

Mr Truman rushes past.

He's down. Down to the jetty and in. In after Simon. Picks him up.

The whole class are watching.

They all see Mr Truman trying to calm Simon who is thrashing. Thrashing about.

'Shhhhhh. Shhhhhh. You're okay.'

Eventually Simon calms and that's when he realises he can stand up.

The water only up to his waist.

He looks up. Choked and crying. The class are silent, just standing there looking at this boy, snot coming out his nose, exhausted. This thing covered in mud, weed, the wet green stink of the pond all over him.

And then Sharon says it.

‘Look! Pondlife.

...

It’s Pondlife.’

Everyone laughs.

‘Pondlife McGurk.’

‘Enough!’ snaps Mrs Nangle.

‘ENOUGH!

I want to hear nothing. You hear? Not another word.’

Pondlife.

Martin lends Simon his jumper.

He has to wear Mr Truman’s shorts and a jacket from the driver.

He looks ridiculous.

But the worst is the squelching Simon makes as he walks back to the bus.

And the smell. Sitting on the hot bus. Rising off him. Everyone can smell it. Can see it. Wants to be as far away from Simon as possible. Whispers spread around the bus.

‘Pondlife.’

‘Pondlife McGurk.’

At home Martin thinks about telling his mum. Telling her how it was his fault. How he should've owned up.

Doesn't.

*

The next day at school everything looks normal.

Until they come through the gates.

The sound of 'Pondlife' being repeated around the playground.

In class no one will sit near them.

Even Judith Montgomery asks to sit somewhere else.

On the weekend they go to the den.

Try and light a fire, but everything is too wet from the rain. It just smokes and goes out.

Then finally Simon asks.

'That day, at the pond. Did I look stupid?'

'...'

'I'm sorry if I looked stupid. Just never learned to swim, that's all.

...

Just never learned.'

Martin wants to say, all the thoughts in his head. Say sorry for not helping. Sorry for just standing there. Watching. Simon must've noticed. Must've wondered why Martin didn't help. He doesn't know. Martin doesn't know why he just stood

there. Why doesn't Simon say something? Why doesn't he ask? Just standing there. Just say something. Just ask.

But he doesn't.

'Should go home,' is all he says.

'See you tomorrow.'

'...Yeah.'

Monday and it just gets worse. Can't get away from it. Everywhere they go people pointing, staring. And Tuesday. And Wednesday. Pondlife and Bummy. Pondlife and his pal. Finally they are left standing on the edge of the playground. Trying to make themselves invisible so nobody will notice them.

And then on Thursday come the football trials. Have to kick a ball past Mr Truman and into goals. Colin and Stuart can't wait.

'Right boys. Colin!'

(He saves the shot) 'Ohhh! EASY!

Stuart!

(He misses the shot)

Lucky. I slipped there.

Simon...

(He watches the shot go miles out) Unlucky Simon. Maybe next year.'

Then it's Martin's go. He lines up. Takes off. Kicks a blinder. Like a bullet past Mr Truman and into the back of the net.

The others are impressed. Martin can see Stuart and Colin's mouths hanging open, surprised.

'Talent. Definitely. Mustn't waste it.'

Truman picks him for the team.

Stuart and Colin are picked too.

They stay behind for football practice.

‘Right. First match. Longbridge Primary. You. Must. Win.’

They run, dribble, tackle, shoot. They pound up and down the field with Mr Truman, red faced, blowing on his whistle.

And Martin realises. No-one’s calling him names. No-one’s shouting at him. For the first time in ages he’s lost in the middle of things. Not on the outside.

‘Good boys. Good. You’ll be a team yet.’

When they finish, Stuart and Colin say to him that they’re going to carry on. Have a game later. Martin can join them if he wants. Get some more practice.

‘Okay.’

At school Martin doesn’t tell Simon about playing with Colin and Stuart. Just says it’s a pity Simon isn’t on the team too because he’ll be practicing for the game against Longbridge. Simon says:

‘That’s okay. I’m getting on with the comic, I reckon it’ll be finished soon. It just needs a final story from you Martin. Then we can send it off. See if it’ll get published. Can you do one?’

...

Martin?’

‘Course. Course I can.’

Run, dribble, tackle, shoot. Martin practises every day with Colin and Stuart. Reckon they've got a good chance.

The day of the match. Pretty much the whole of P6 and 7 stay behind to watch.

The boys run onto the pitch. Get into position and they're off.
Not good.

Not a good start at all.

Longbridge get control of the ball.

Pass, work it up the field. Pass and score.

NO!

Then within ten minutes they've scored again.

NO!

By the second half Longbridge are walking all over them. The team is in disarray and Martin sees the whole of his class looking on. Disappointed.

And something changes.

Martin can feel it. Just...something takes over inside. Like he can see the whole of the pitch at once. Knows where every player is. He gets the ball. Runs with it. Fast. Dodging. Sliding. A defender runs towards him. He dummies a pass and sprints round. Another goes for the tackle, but Martin dodges and the defender slides across the ground. Finally there's nothing. Just him and the goalie. Feels the moment like it's solid in his hand. A frozen moment and he shoots. Scores. Yes. (*a roar*)

He scores not one, not two, but three goals and then it's the final whistle. Stuart and Colin pile him with joy. Lift him up. They're the winners. Martin's the winner. The winner.

The next day. Everything's different. People are still pointing at him, but Martin can hear what they're saying now. 'He's the one. Hat-trick Martin. Amazing!'

At lunch, standing in the canteen, Martin hears a voice again. Across the room.

'Martin!

Hey Martin.

Over here.'

It is Sharon waving.

Colin and Stuart are waving too.

Anoushka is looking weird.

Her head turned away.

MARTIN *looks around.*

'You.

Come here!

...

We saw you play last night.

Stuart says you were the best. Didn't you Stuart?

And Anoushka thought you were good too, didn't you Noush?

So, what you doing the weekend Martin?'

'Nothing.'

'You should come out with us. Might watch a film over Noush's.'

'I've got to go.'

'Where you going?'

'Meeting –

Meeting someone.'

'Pondlife?'

'...'

'What do you hang around with him for? He's so...weird. If you want you could hang out with us. I'm sure Noush wouldn't mind.'

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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