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FONDLY REMEMBERED

by Gareth Armstrong

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gareth has combined the roles of actor, director, and writer throughout a career that has taken to him to over fifty countries. He has been a member of the RSC, performed at Shakespeare's Globe and in the West End. He has directed a wide repertoire of work all over the UK as well as in Europe and America. He wrote his own one-man show, *Shylock*, which toured internationally for ten years. Since then he has specialised in creating solo theatre pieces for other performers, and *Wilde Without the Boy*, his dramatisation of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, tours internationally. His other published work includes a memoir, *A Case for Shylock – Around the World with Shakespeare's Jew*, with a foreword by Judi Dench, and an instructional book for actors, *So You Want To Do A Solo Show*. He records audiobooks, video games, has played three different running characters in *The Archers* and is an occasional contributor to the BBC programme *From Our Own Correspondent*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are lots of plays about funerals. Funerals offer plenty of scope for drama. But a Memorial Service, when the emotions are less raw, and people can say what they *really* think, is much more fertile ground for comedy.

This play was written for a particular group of highly talented actors, all of whom had reached pensionable age. They found, as so many seniors do, that although they were still keen to work and had a wealth of experience to offer, the professional opportunities became fewer with age.

It was from a dinner party conversation that the idea of a play written specifically and exclusively for them became a reality. We didn't want it to deal with subjects that normally preoccupy writers dealing with *the third age:* dementia, bereavement, loneliness and death. We wanted it to reflect the reality of shared lives, memories, and the positive things that come with being more mature. Several similar get-togethers yielded a wealth of stories, a mountain of gossip and an almost indecent amount of laughter. All those elements are part of celebrating a life, and theatre should be a celebration of life.

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Rev. Kevin Morris.
David Roper and all at Heavy Entertainment.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

First performance on 17th June 2015 at the Tabard Theatre, London.

CAST LIST

(in order of appearance)

DONALD SOWERBY – Frank Barrie

REV. THOMAS HALDANE – Philip York

CRESSIDA BRENT – Lucinda Curtis

ZOE SEYMOUR – Josie Kidd

BARRY DUMONT – John Griffiths

SETTING

The play is set in St. Augustine's Church, East London

TIME

The present

ACT 1

An afternoon in mid-June

Interval – 20 minutes

ACT 2

Scene (1) A week later

Scene (2) One year later

Director: Gareth Armstrong
Original music: Simon Slater
Lighting Design: Thomas Bezant
Assistant Director: Amy Wicks
Assistant Stage Manager: Travis Brown

CHARACTERS

Every member of the cast is well over pensionable age.

DONALD SOWERBY
Handsome, moderately successful, but aware of not fulfilling his early promise. His private and social lives are complicated by drink and an acerbic personality, which can also make him amusing company.

REV. THOMAS HALDANE
A former City broker, now vicar of a depressed East End church. Urbane and gentle, but sometimes frustrated by his work. He is intrigued by his contact with a different set of people who bring out his diplomatic and conciliatory skills.

CRESSIDA BRENT
A single woman, for whom work and an unrequited love have dominated her life. A born organiser whose bossiness cannot disguise an emotional and sometimes sentimental personality.

BARRY DUMONT
An easygoing gay man who has never let career or ambition get in the way of enjoying himself. He's astute about himself and other people and not beyond taking emotional risks in his later life.

ZOE SEYMOUR
A woman not ashamed of her past, and with no plans not to make the most of her present and future. She has no intellectual pretension and is prone to verbal howlers, but these make her a lively and engaging personality.

Scene One

The stage is in total darkness except for a red votive light down stage right. It barely illuminates a small statue. A church organ is heard, playing softly. The music fades. We could be in a confessional.

DON *(sotto)* Bless me Father… *(Pitched)* it's bloody dark in here.

TOM Rewiring. Still can't remember where the switches are.

DON I don't carry my lighter any more. I'm on the verge of giving up.

TOM Sorry?

DON *(pitched)* I'm on the verge of giving up.

TOM Oh nil desperandum, old chap. Never give up. *(Bumps into something)* Shit!

DON Are you okay?

TOM Barked my shins.

DON There's that emergency light over there.

TOM Jesus.

DON Shins again?

TOM No the light. It's Jesus. But I don't remember a switch anywhere near Him.

TOM *finds switch and illuminates a large vestry-type of room with boarded up windows, dark paint. It is full of old chairs, pews, cardboard boxes, piles of hymn books etc.*

Thank goodness for that.

DON Where are we?

TOM The choir room. Well, it was the choir room when we had a choir. Now as you can see it's more of a storeroom.

DON Don't worry; it'll do for us.

TOM A bit gloomy I'm afraid.

DON Why did you cover up the windows?

TOM Couldn't afford to replace the glass. After the riots.

DON I was a choirboy you know. Rather beautiful treble. So they tell me. Is it okay if we move things about a bit? We'll put it all back when we've finished.

TOM Was he a man of faith?

DON Douglas?

TOM Yes.

DON I don't think so. If he was he didn't make a song and dance about it.

TOM You knew him a long time?

DON Getting on for half a century.

TOM Were you close?

DON That's a hard one. We knew each other very well for a while.

TOM It's just that we never met, and I'd like to get a rounded view before I say my piece.

DON What piece?

TOM I always like to welcome people and speak about a life… well, a life well lived. I assume it was?

DON What?

TOM A life well lived?

DON Oh he *lived* well! He lived very well.

TOM I'm not sure that's the same thing.

DON Okay, I'll try and fill you in. Just ask away.

TOM *(gets out notebook)* I'll just jot a few things down. Family?

DON Not in the true sense of the word. Mistresses. Several.

TOM Ah. Will…any of them be here?

DON Probably not.

A very sharp tap on the door and immediately **CRESSIDA** *enters.*

CRESSIDA Oh Don! You're here before me.

DON We agreed two pm.

CRESSIDA It's exactly 1:56. You're early.

DON Sorry.

CRESSIDA I wanted to organise things.

DON Of course you did. Like what?

CRESSIDA I don't know. Put some chairs out.

DON Well, you'll be spoilt for choice here won't you? This is Reverend Haldane.

TOM Tom please.

DON This is…

CRESSIDA I'm Cressida. Hello.

TOM We were just talking about Douglas.

CRESSIDA He never mentioned you.

TOM No he wouldn't have. We never met.

CRESSIDA So what were you saying about him?

TOM I was asking about him…to get some idea of his life.

CRESSIDA Don't ask Don. You'll get a very distorted view.

DON Thank you.

CRESSIDA Well you hadn't seen him for years.

DON Why would I? In the circumstances…

CRESSIDA Oh don't bring that up now. It's hardly an appropriate time to air old grudges, and anyway it was decades ago.

TOM I'll be officiating you see, so I'd like to…

CRESSIDA Do you have to?

TOM Well it is my parish. It's customary for the vicar to welcome people, and say a few…

CRESSIDA If you must.

TOM And can you tell me, roughly, what other contributions there will be?

CRESSIDA That's why we're here.

TOM Will there be a printed order of service?

CRESSIDA It's not a funeral.

TOM I know.

CRESSIDA It's a memorial. A celebration.

DON He means the running order darling. Overture, beginners, top of the bill…

CRESSIDA Oh a programme. I hadn't that of thought.

TOM I'm happy to give you some guidance if you need it. We always use a local printer. Very reasonable. And will you need the organ? There'll be a charge I'm afraid if you want Mr. Cummings to play.

DON If we need the organ I'm sure Cressida can squeeze something out. She could find the lost chord if anyone can.

CRESSIDA Try not to be funny Don.

TOM There's a portable keyboard over there if you want to make use of it.

DON That'll be much more our style.

TOM Any idea how large the congregation will be?

DON He means the audience Cressi.

CRESSIDA Packed I hope.

TOM It's just that I've discovered that the numbers do decrease if the person to be celebrated is…over a certain age.

CRESSIDA Not for Douglas. Don't you know who he was?

TOM That's what I'm hoping to find out.

CRESSIDA *(checking watch)* The others are going to be late. I knew it. *(She begins to rearrange chairs)*

DON What sort of vicar are you, Tom?

TOM Non-stipendary.

DON Is that the same as non-conformist?

TOM No, no. We're quite High here actually. It means I don't have a stipend.

DON Ah! I'm sorry. *(Beat)* What's a stipe end?

TOM It means that although I'm a vicar I don't get a commensurate salary. In brief, I don't get paid.

DON Nothing?

TOM Expenses. Some petrol allowance. Phone bill. The vicarage…

DON Ah, is it an imposing pile? Dozens of bedrooms, library, big garden?

TOM No it's a one-bedroom flat off the High Road. The vicarage was demolished years ago.

DON That doesn't seem very fair. No stipe end and no proper vicarage.

TOM Well, it's a vocation. I was called.

DON Really? Who called you?

TOM Well… God.

DON Oh. What did he say?

TOM No, mine is a *vocation*. A calling. I was in the City you see – over thirty years, nearly forty, serving Mamon. I knew I had to do something else, something more meaningful with my life.

CRESSIDA *(banging a final chair down noisily)* I told you!

DON What did you tell us darling?

CRESSIDA They're late.

DON Only just.

CRESSIDA Still.

TOM How many are we expecting?

DON We're expecting another two.

Look, I'll slip out and see if the others are anywhere near. *(Taking out cigarettes)* Anyway, I'm desperate for a ciggy.

He goes. **CRESSIDA** *and* **TOM** *are left alone. She looks around the room disapprovingly.*

CRESSIDA You know if you often let out this room you should think about tarting it up a bit.

TOM I know. Since we disbanded the choir, well… I did offer it to the local Scouts but they moved in to the Adaboula Bataboulaywa Centre over the road instead. They've got wi-fi there it seems.

CRESSIDA What do Scouts need wi-fi for? I thought it was all dib-dib with them?

TOM It's more tweet-tweet now I think. I tried to start a Bible study group, but there weren't many takers.

CRESSIDA Fancy. Your audience numbers going down too?

TOM What? Oh yes. Single figures some Sundays.

CRESSIDA I remember matinee days like that.

TOM Ah, you're an actress then?

CRESSIDA Good God no! Do I *look* like an actress?

TOM Well… I suppose… I'm not sure…

CRESSIDA Heaven forbid. No, I've got more sense. Don now, he couldn't be anything but an actor could he?

TOM He does have a certain…

CRESSIDA Yes, he does doesn't he.

TOM And the other two you're expecting?

CRESSIDA Unmistakably. You could smell them a mile off.

TOM So Douglas was a colleague?

CRESSIDA He was more than a colleague. He was a mentor. He was a leader. He was inspirational…he was… *(She starts to cry)* He was irreplaceable.

TOM I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. And you were close to him, at the end?

CRESSIDA No. That's what makes this all so distressing. Until about two years ago I used to see him almost daily, and then suddenly, overnight really, he cut himself off. He found an excuse to ask for my key to his flat back, and then even stopped answering my calls. I kept thinking it was my fault, that I'd done something to upset him. He could be very moody you see…only don't put that in your "piece" will you?

TOM Of course not.

CRESSIDA Eventually I gave up trying to get in touch. The next thing I knew was a letter from his solicitors asking me to arrange this memorial. They said it was a request in his will. His will! I didn't even know he'd died. It was a horrible, horrible shock. I didn't get to his funeral. Never said goodbye.

The door opens and **ZOE** *and* **DON** *enter.*

DON Look what I found stepping elegantly from her cab!

ZOE God it's dark in here!

CRESSIDA *(recovering)* Maybe because you've still got your sunglasses on dear.

ZOE Oh what a twat I am! *(Removes dark glasses)* And do you know, the cabbie swore blind there was no such place as St. Algernon's.

TOM It's Augustine's.

ZOE What is?

TOM The church. It's St Augustine's.

ZOE What a depressing name. Algernon is much jollier.

DON He just wasn't a saint darling. Only a character in a play.

ZOE But the cabbie insisted this was the only church in the area that wasn't a carpet warehouse or a lap-dancing club.

DON You're not destined to go that way are you Tom?

TOM I fear it may only be a matter of time. *(To* **ZOE***)* Hello. I'm the Reverend Tom Haldane. Tom.

ZOE Oh Tom hello. Are you the recumbent vicar?

TOM The incumbent yes.

ZOE I'm Zoe. Zoe Seymour.

TOM Zoe Seymour? The Zoe Seymour? Aren't you…?

CRESSIDA And where the hell is Barry?

DON Lost?

ZOE You did check he knew the address?

CRESSIDA I sent you all the same letter.

ZOE Can we start without him?

CRESSIDA We'd only have to go back and start all over again. You know what he's like.

DON It's ages since I saw poor Barry. Bobby Baxter's wake I think it was. He looked a bit rough – you know, dandruff, and odd socks.

ZOE In what way odd?

DON No. Odd socks. Oh never mind.

ZOE Poor Barry. And he was such a handsome devil in his time. I didn't even know Bobby Baxter was dead.

CRESSIDA It was in all the papers dear. Lovely obit in The Telegraph.

ZOE Did they mention his affair with Diana Dors?

CRESSIDA Of course not. His wife's still alive.

ZOE Well *she* could hardly object. When that was going on she was finding solace elsewhere.

TOM Oh really? With whom?

CRESSIDA Zoe, do be a little discreet in front of the vicar.

TOM Tom please.

CRESSIDA In front of Tom.

ZOE *(to* **TOM***)* Did you know Bobby Baxter too?

TOM No.

ZOE I thought everyone knew Bobby.

DON Not many clergymen I suspect dear.

A voice calls offstage.

BARRY Hello? Don… Cressida?

CRESSIDA That's Barry.

She opens the door and calls.

We're here dear. End of the corridor.

ZOE Try not to be too cross with the poor man.

BARRY *appears. He is immaculate in jeans, shiny brogues, and a blouson jacket.*

CRESSIDA Did you get horribly lost dear?

BARRY I wouldn't have got lost at all if you'd got the postcode right. Dmitri put it into the GPS and we ended up in a car park. Anyway the only church near where you sent us turned out to be a lap-dancing club. Dmitri had to dash off, so I put the right code into my iPhone and…voila!

CRESSIDA Who's Dmitri?

DON You've got an iPhone?

ZOE What's a GSP?

TOM GPS.

ZOE That's what I said.

TOM So you're all here then?

DON Full company.

ZOE Barry, this is the vicar, Tim…

TOM Tom. Tom Haldane.

BARRY Barry. Barry Dumont.

TOM Right. Well, I'll just pop upstairs and check that the ladies doing Sunday's flowers aren't coming to blows over the chrysanths. Is there anything else you need?

CRESSIDA We'll be fine.

BARRY Don, is that your 911 GT3 outside?

DON My what?

BARRY The Porsche. Is it yours?

DON I came here on the bus. Two buses in fact.

TOM Actually it's mine.

ALL Yours?!

DON But you haven't even got a stipe end?

TOM No. But I've got a pension from Merryl Lynch and another from Goldman Sachs. Mamon and I parted on quite good terms.

He goes.

DON Bugger me. And I was feeling sorry for him.

BARRY Lovely car.

CRESSIDA What do *you* know about cars?

BARRY They're a passion of Dmitri's. He's looking to upgrade his Lancia. He'd love that Porsche.

CRESSIDA Your friend Dmitri. Is he…?

BARRY Yes.

CRESSIDA Ah. Well, come on everyone let's get started.

They sit in an arc of chairs as laid out by **CRESSIDA**.

Now I've brought you each a little notebook and a pen.

ZOE How thoughtful.

DON It's just like school isn't it. And Cressida's monitor of course.

ZOE Head girl surely.

CRESSIDA Well someone's got to get things going.

BARRY Quite right C. Do you want us to write our names on the front in best writing?

CRESSIDA That'll do. Now. It looks like we'll have to let that vicar kick off. You don't suppose he'll want to say a prayer do you?

ZOE It's what vicars do darling.

DON Just think of him as the warm-up man Cressi. Who's on after the reverend?

CRESSIDA I thought I should say a few words first. As I knew him the longest. Just something about Douglas's life. His achievements. His contribution to the…to the… How much he meant to us all…and how much we all…

She starts to cry.

ZOE Oh darling don't do that. You'll set us all off.

BARRY We must all try and be professional about this. It's what Douglas would have wanted.

DON *I* am being. Perfectly professional. Would you rather I did this bit? I promise I'll stay dry eyed. Throughout.

CRESSIDA I'll be alright…

ZOE …on the night. Come on, let's all pull our socks together.

CRESSIDA Well this is what I've written so far… "Douglas Bartlett was a remarkable man, and in the 1970s was a towering figure in the world of regional theatre…

DON "Towering"? He was barely five-foot-eight.

CRESSIDA ..."From humble beginnings he went on to found the Living Laboratory Theatre in Hartlepool where we four were all privileged to work with him. His work as Artistic Director there was innovative and daring…

ZOE Daring's the word! He got me to do the first full-frontal nude scene in the whole of County Durham.

BARRY But the lighting was very discreet Zoe. Nobody could see anything.

ZOE What about that matinee when a man in the front row brought a torch?

CRESSIDA "His innovative approach to the classics and new plays attracted national attention…

DON Just a shame that Hartlepool wasn't quite ready for him.

CRESSIDA Will you let me finish! "His later career was blessed with some commercial success and I'm sure all of you here today will want to join with us, his friends and colleagues, in paying tribute to his talent, his professionalism, his zest for life, his generosity…

DON Aaaaah! Brwwwwwsh phoooom!

ZOE Whatever's the matter?

DON This is a church. That was a thunderbolt. Generous? Douglas? Did Douglas ever even buy you a drink?

ZOE Several.

DON That's because he wanted to get into your knickers. Barry?

BARRY No. But he didn't want to get into my knickers. Not that I didn't offer.

DON Cressida?

CRESSIDA I hardly drink.

DON Well that line about his "generosity" will get the first laugh of the show.

CRESSIDA "…his *generosity*". It's nothing to do with buying drinks Don. I'm talking about his generosity as an artist.

DON Aaaah. An artist.

CRESSIDA Admit it Don. You were always jealous of Douglas's success.

DON I was no such thing. Yes, he may have made a bit of money, but I thought he sold out, compromised his standards. He couldn't wait to turn his back on proper, meaningful theatre. And that play he did in the West End, remember *Don't Tell Katey*?

ZOE As a matter of fact I starred in it.

BARRY I understudied the juvenile lead.

CRESSIDA And I stage-managed it.

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