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SF PERUSALS

THE B*EASTS

by Monica Dolan

SAMUEL FRENCH

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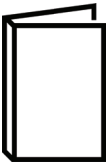
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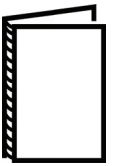
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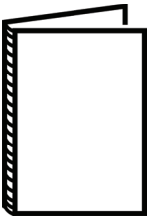
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monica Dolan is a British/Irish citizen who was born in Middlesbrough and brought up in Woking. She trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has been working as an actress for over twenty years. In 2012 she won a BAFTA for her role as Rosemary West in the TV drama *Appropriate Adult*, and is otherwise best known for *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa, W1A, The Falling, The Arbor* and *Eye in the Sky*. She has done extensive theatre work with the Royal Court Theatre, the National Theatre, the RSC, Shared Experience, and Out of Joint.

Monica co-wrote *Underbelly,* which won the London New Plays Festival in 1998, and is currently developing a four-part historical drama for television with Trevor Bentham and Snowed-In Productions.

She lives in Hammersmith.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

At the end of an early reading of *The B*easts*, the first question at the hosting theatre came from the young education representative. Was *The B*easts* a true story? I was astonished. I almost laughed. No, I said, of course not! She then told me that as part of her recent outreach work, she had visited some schools in Manchester. A common question she had been asked by many of the female pupils, she said, was how old you have to be to be allowed a boob job.

Was some of *The B*easts* too strong, too shocking? I asked. No, she said, because we are so immersed in a rape culture.

We have seen padded bras and bikinis for seven-, eight- and nine-year-olds come and go from Matalan and Primark, kids' pole-dancing kits from Tesco and the sale of shoes with heels for little girls still resolutely defended by Next and Gap, on the grounds that they sell. Which seems to have become a good – if not the only – reason for anything. And David Cameron emphasising that the responsibility for these things must be with companies and retailers themselves, and any legislation and accountability lying with government is not the answer.

Since writing, we have seen Katie Price vilified in the press and social media for posting a picture of her nine-year-old daughter, made-up, in a pouty and provocative pose, where the child appears more like a young woman in her late teens. Katie is someone who left school and started out working in a care home and then training as a nurse. By "morphing" into Jordan, she became rewarded by society in every possible way for the heightened celebrity sexualisation of herself. Now, somehow, when it comes to "maximising" her daughter's "potential", we are surprised at her behaviour and disgusted. Somehow we expect a miracle of instant amnesia of past survival and business experience in a person the moment she becomes a mother.

With companies exploiting a loophole to target engagement with children on the internet, we have seen the sneaky rise of "advergames", where a cute product-related character is put in an online game for children to play, thereby increasing – and prolonging - the child's engagement with the advertising and

product, while the child is seldom aware that what they are engaging with is an advert at all. Brands interact directly with kids on Facebook.

There are no age regulations on cosmetic procedures for children except in relation to tanning or tattoos, and nothing to protect them from the cosmetics industry. So we now have online games that promote cosmetic procedures like botox for the under eighteens – "Plastic Surgery Princess" and "Pimp My Face" – many are plastic surgery simulators that show children how their bodies can be altered. Makeover apps and Cosmetic Surgery games target children as young as nine.

The news has reported the criminal acts of surgeon Ian Paterson – in Britain – performing unnecessary mastectomies in the public and private health arena, and mutilating patients for personal grandeur and financial gain.

Breast enhancement is advertised pre-watershed on television during *Dinner Date*.

So, yes, all of the elements necessary for *The B*easts* to be a reality, seem to me to be in waiting and in place. But, as with many of our problems that have gone before, no doubt we will sleepwalk into the normality of them until – should we still be equipped to notice it – we see some effect on a middle-class child.

Monica Dolan
July 2017

“The great ambition of women is to inspire love”

Molière

*The B*easts* was first produced by Suzanna Rosenthal for Something For The Weekend, and previewed at the Etcetera and the Bush Theatre before premiering on 5 August 2017 at the Big Belly, Underbelly, Cowgate, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017.

TESSA Monica Dolan

Director – John Hoggarth

Designer – James Button

Lighting Design – Tom Clutterbuck

This script went to press during rehearsals, and may differ from the text in performance.

CHARACTERS

TESSA – is a woman in her forties. She is a psychotherapist. Earthed, empathic, intelligent, neutral, sharp, dry, caring.

Special thanks to

Jonathan Holloway, Toby Whithouse, Joanna Griffin, Zoe Boyle, Nick Payne, Marc Wootton, Jacqui Somerville and Mountview Theatre School, Nadine Rennie, James Button, Alan Harris, Jenny Van Der Lande, Rebecca Maltby, Ann Dolan, Paul Dolan, Madani Younis, Stewart Pringle and all at The Bush, John Hoggarth, Ria Parry, North Wall Arts Centre, Woking Library, Shepherds Bush Library, Suzanna Rosenthal and all at SFTW, Chris Lincé, Tom Clutterbuck, Laura Rourke, Will Hollinshead, Livi Shean, Tish Jones, Chloé Nelkin, Helen Atkinson-Wood, Wendy Nottingham, Lara Stubbs, Louise Breckon Richards and Sarah Ball.

For My Family

In the dark, **TESSA** *is on the phone.*

TESSA *(message)* Oh Ali, it's me. I think you're playing five-a-side. Look, just... I'm just leaving a message because I think your dad's left his phone off, so just in case you happen to see him. Just get him to call me. Bye, darling.

As the lights come up **TESSA** *hangs up and puts her phone in her bag. She sits on a chair with a small table beside. It has a glass of what looks like whisky and an electronic cigarette, which she screws in and starts smoking.*

Mmm. Don't often get time for a break. Having more these days. Having to. Make space for them. Well, these are good *(referring to the e-cigarette)*. I didn't actually smoke before really. I suppose if I was young there would be some debate about the advertising and whether that got me into it. Because everyone's protecting the young. Well, "meatily"* if not virtually. So yeah. These are meant to be good. I mean, they are good. There's a lot of talk about whether they are actually promoting them as a health thing over this side of the world in order to support the tobacco industry elsewhere. Because while the tobacco industry has its healthy cut of the healthy electronic market over here, cigarettes are being sold to kids in Africa. Their cigarettes. Sometimes one at a time. Supporting itself by looking good in one area. Fucking Peter to make love to Paul, you could say. It relies on having the life-long customer.

So yeah, it's just my way of relaxing really. You can't get all moral about it. Well, you can. I mean, I should be glad I'm doing this really. Could be doing yoga or something,

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* This refers to "meat-space", which is cyber-speak for "the real world", the human space that we live in, as opposed to the "virtual" world or cyber space.

I suppose. But I mean, imagine what someone like me in all this has to do to relax? I've just been dealing with the mother. Where would they start? Does it look as if the child isn't inherently innocent and good? I mean, people are outraged by that. Something inside everyone balks at that. But then who's to say what she wanted was good or bad. I suppose it all comes down to just whether you think they are something filthy or whether they just are. Just there. Are they innocent? Do we have to look at ourselves and say, what have we done to make the child insist on this? We can't look at the child and say the child is to blame. If there is anything to be to blame for. That would ruin our notion of what innocence is. So we just blame the mother.

Sorry, I'm doing that thing that old people do, of coming up to you and starting talking about something in the middle of it and expecting you to know what I mean and then getting frustrated when you don't and not taking you through the first bit. Not very…clinical thing to do. Not very clear, but then, you know, I'm used to asking questions really. And making connections between the answers and making notes. That's my modus operandi. I don't often get like this. But yeah, so, I'll take you through. And maybe you'll make the connections and maybe you won't. I don't expect you to make notes.

So as you'll probably know, she didn't want to see me. Karen (we'll call her Karen – as you probably know, her name isn't anything like Karen, but we'll call her Karen) didn't want to see me. Well, she didn't initiate, didn't approach me. She had to see me after it all got so…big. I can see her point in not wanting to come. If she agrees to accept psychiatric help then that is to admit that she is, or has been in some way, ill. And I can see how there could be some debate about that. But everyone feels satisfied in some way if she agrees to see a psychotherapist, I suppose. The society doesn't want to punish her – can't punish her really – even though it loathes what she did, but it must acknowledge and separate what she did from the norm, so she has to come and see me. It

doesn't want any more of what she did happening. Or not exactly what she did, but what she enabled. But then if a hundred businessmen decide that it could be the norm, who knows. Maybe it will be.

When she came, it had already got really big. You maybe know about it all anyway, but some of you might not, so I suppose I will tell you. She was very ragged the first time she arrived with me, Karen. Wouldn't talk for a while. And I used to do my usual of asking her what her thoughts were, what she had been thinking about when she was silent. And often she still wouldn't talk. I suppose that's what happens when you have been harangued by journalists and they have squeezed you dry, and undeniably it was a…story. I'm breaking doctor/patient confidentiality but I suppose, well… let's just say it's between you and me. I'm going to have to talk about this sometime. I will have to write another report. I will probably have to speak to the press or at least be quoted in the press at some point, and, who knows, if I ever start giving lectures, we'll call her Lila and Karen might be an important case study, or an experience for the novel, so…best if I process it with you. Why not. It's unusual for me too, you know. Unprecedented. I suppose the real point of interest is that it didn't happen in America first.

So. When I took Karen back to the beginning of it, when we started to try and examine everything, she told me that "call her Lila" was normal, had been a normal little girl. Strong-willed though. But that should be a good thing, shouldn't it? She was lively and intelligent. Precocious in some ways, Lila, according to Karen. Karen is her mum. Was her mum. I'm treating Karen, did I mention that? Because I have to. So, yeah, so. Lila's dad left them when she was about… two… That happens to lots of children, of course, though. Lila was…she was an only child and I suppose they looked at her – Karen looked at her in terms of being…lively. The disturbing thing for adults can be that children display what they – the adults – read as sexual or sexualised behaviour, but of course it is more complicated than that. The adults

are disturbed because they feel like a response is invited in them, but, of course they suppress any impulse because their protective instincts as a healthy adult, coupled with their intellect, sees the wider picture, and this can come out as what can be perceived by the child as a reprimand or rejection. And, of course, in a simple way, flirting is an important skill to learn and needs to be nurtured. It's one of the ways people get on. Well. When I did a bit of digging with Karen I did discover a couple of instances, where it all started – or after it had already started a bit. Or started enough for people to see. What you have to remember is a lot of these things, these impulses, are healthy things, but they just get distorted. Or maybe it's the world that gets – is – distorted, but you see, it's my job to get people to fit in with the world, distorted or not, so that they feel happy. Or, not sad. Or...functioning. So, yeah, when I did a bit of digging with Karen, she did remember a specific one of these instances.

It was when Lila would have been about three and one of her ex-husband's friends came to the house and you know, this man, this friend, he had his own kids and everything and he was – I suppose, the way Karen described it, he was objectively sexy – he would have been like a Heathcliff or Mr Rochester, "all man", troubled, should-have-been-and-had-wanted-to-be-a-rock-star objectively sexy. I mean, the Brontës would have been quite immature when it came to sexual and marital relationships, so all the safely ideal brutish, mannish, non-nice, love the "throw-down", caveman, whip-me-beat-me-call-me-trash sort of man is on the inside and on the out. Like it might be in a fantasy. So this guy seemed a bit like that. What, if he was a woman, you would call "available". Anyway, like I say, he was probably slightly coming out the other side of realising he would never be a rock star and starting to mourn it, and he was at Karen's house and, the way she described it, the whole thing was bewildering for him. He was sat down, just sat on the sofa talking to Karen and then three-year-old Lila comes in

and she sees – she had never seen him before – and her mum introduces her and she starts hiding behind her mum but not really, really for his benefit, and then giggling and screeching and doing things to show off. She leaves the room then and comes back a few moments later in her plastic Dream Dazzler high heels and princess tutu, and then she lifts up her tutu a couple of times and shows him her pants, and he tries to carry on the conversation with Lila's mum and then she, Lila, she properly screeches and pants off and climbs on him and is bouncing on his lap and she's giggling in his face and Karen's just saying her name, half trying to get her to stop and half trying to ignore it, and the man, the not rock star friend, he is just aghast and bewildered and doesn't know how to respond. And Karen described this to me and then described the man's response, which was as if Lila was a weirdo and a freak, somehow to blame, but then I took her through it again, I said, I asked her in the session if Lila's dad was inclined to ignore Lila, not look at her, start to not respond to her even before he left. And Karen went quiet. I could see her thinking back through times, seeing Lila's dad not looking at the child and snubbing her. So it – that – is not so not normal really, because if you are being ignored, you up the ante, don't you? To get to be noticed. And the girl's programming is to be desired. However, whenever that starts. Which seems to be an eternal matter for debate. It can happen healthily. Well, it used to.

So then, you know, time went by. There were probably more instances of it. The lively child, Karen trying to contain it, but Lila strong-willed and then witty at the same time, which can be difficult and shameful for a mum if you're trying to keep charge but your daughter is more intelligent than you. On examination, I discovered that even when he lived with them, Lila's dad would always have his chair pointing away from Lila, usually aimed at the TV. Or simply looking at his phone. Perhaps as if he was avoiding something. So. A man about the house pointing in her direction was a matter for

celebration. A raven-haired, swarthy man with the embers of his inner rock star still glowing near the surface, a matter for euphoria.

Karen had always read magazines. No big deal. There had always been magazines in the house. I think we realise so little of how powerful our unconscious or subconscious is – and you can say, well, you would say that because that's what you read and work with, it's your stock-in-trade, but it's true. I mean, everyone knows that if someone you live with has a problem with something, the British "intervention" is to leave books about it lying around because they are bound to pick them up. Our environment is something that very powerfully goes into us, affects us. People used to say to a novelist friend, why have you got trains and railways all the way through all your work and, you know, she hadn't realised, hadn't consciously made it a motif, but she had been brought up in a commuter town near a station, and the trains were part of her emotional backdrop, so there you go. So yes, then if you want to add to that that you are dealing with a child, and that its experience of different environments is thus far limited but that its synapses are racing to multiply their journeys with accessing mounting information, then what is happening around them is a super-powerful, potent thing. It is their world. And, you know, some mums are too aware of it and hyper-control their children's environment and become really neurotic about it and then don't realise that that *neurosis* is part of the kid's environment too and they soak all that up too, and so their kids don't build up any immunity and end up being allergic to everything.

So Lila. She started to interact with the magazines. And, I mean, so far so normal. My niece went through a stage of reading the Argos catalogue for hours on end. But then I mean, she did end up going into advertising. She's one of those annoying people who emails you about Creme Eggs on Boxing Day. But the way Karen describes it, the way Lila would interact with the magazines, it was constant. All

day. They would get taken away. She would run after them. Scream. Her attention would get diverted away, it would go back to them. And is it healthy? I mean, it's debatable. Women's magazines. Well, it's not debatable really. They're pretty unhealthy for women, they're pretty shit. And what are they going to do to a three-year-old who already has trouble attracting her dad? Her blueprint for the opposite sex? But let's not get too analytical, I'm getting ahead of myself here.

At first Karen thought she, Lila, was just pointing at the page. And, I mean that's what it would have looked like. Just a child ham-fistedly, unspecifically pawing at a random page, at a picture. You wouldn't particularly notice that what she was pointing at all had one thing in common. I mean, not unless you were looking. And not unless it became emphatic which, after a while, it did. And it's a cliché to say sex sells everything, and of course it does. I often wonder how long things have to be a cliché in order for any of us to do anything about them. If there's money involved, the answer is forever. It will always be a cliché. In fact, it then develops beyond a cliché. It becomes what's called a "universal truth", like "The poor are always with us". You see, I think we always knew that sex sells effectively, but now it has just got to the stage where we no longer feel confident to sell anything without it. Because the other fella might be. Karen and I have since looked through some of the magazines that would have been around at that time. And I mean, there's all the obvious usual sexualized stuff. But also other things. In one of the magazines was a soft-focus Chuka Umunna with the headline – "Could This Be Labour's New Leader?" It was pointed out how young he was – and implicitly eligible – but the thing that was, that was most noticeable was that he was smouldering at the camera. At the women. Unmistakably, he was selling himself. Sex for votes. Fantasise me. Want me. Vote for me. Vote with your C U Next Tuesday. So yeah, it goes on.

So. Another mother might have got rid of the magazines since they were what could be called "more than a diversion". I didn't say a "better" mother. Everyone has magazines. Don't they? She was entitled to her lifestyle. I'm not here to judge Karen. I'll leave that to the world I'm supposed to make her happy in. And then gradually Karen became aware that what it was was that Lila actually wanted something from the – in the magazines. She kept pointing to the page. She kept saying, "Want. Want that". A bit like that *Little Britain* character who kept saying "bitty" to his mum. What a grim comparison that is, actually. So she kept pointing. She couldn't talk very well at this stage but she knew what she wanted, like they do. And her mum would just get her to try and put the magazine down and she would scream. Start really screaming. Have tantrums. Throw herself around the bottom of the lounge, thrashing through violently-tossing curtains. I mean, what do you do? We all do it. We all use diversion tactics to stop that noise. Sometimes you just need the noise to stop – I mean it goes right through you, it's designed to. We've all given them an iPad. We've all given them something to shut them up. So Karen would give in. Of course she would give in. It was the only way to keep her, make her quiet – except it wouldn't make her quiet – she would get to a page, find a page and then find Karen and then point to the page, as if her finger were glued to the page. So small, she could barely hold the weight – some of those magazines have spines and are like books – but her whole small being was involved, she lived to hold that publication to her mum's attention, her whole being's energy inexorably aimed at a single parent.

And Karen would look, exasperated. Make placating sounds for her daughter. Try to get on with her own thing, which was rapidly no thing and no longer her own, try to work. Trying to see what secret the magazine held. Trying to fathom what her daughter wanted. Could possibly want. What could she possibly want? She paid attention, she tried to see a pattern. She saw a pattern. She began to guess when Lila grabbed a

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