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KIN

by Max Dickins

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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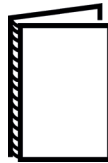


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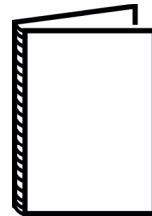
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Kin, started with a question. A question that had been niggling me for a while. When we say we love our family, what does that actually mean? Because it's not the same love we feel for our romantic partners, and if it isn't that, what exactly is it? So at the heart of this play is a love story between two sisters. It's a story about siblings, therefore. I have both a brother and sister. I know from experience that siblings have a unique and often tempestuous relationship. Depending on the day of the week, your sibling can be your best friend or your greatest enemy. Love and hate are tightly helixed.

It isn't just simple rivalry. (Although that no doubt exists.) It's much more complicated than that. The psychotherapist Dorothy Rowe, an expert on sibling relationships, says the central cause of tension between siblings is each's ability to 'annihilate' the other. In short, your sibling knows you so well that, whether by word or deed, they can destroy your sense of self in just a moment. This is because the idea of who we are as individuals doesn't just exist in us, it exists in relationship to other people. Specifically in relationship to how they treat us. Most people will indulge our version of who we are out of politeness. But siblings will happily trample all over it, whether they mean to or not. After all, your sibling knows exactly who you are. Or at least they *knew* exactly who you *were*. But that's another story.

On a more mundane level, siblings tend to be excellent at taking the piss out of each other. And therefore I've endeavoured to make this play funny. I hope I've succeeded. This play needs humour. It's too bleak without it. However I urge you to make the comedic moments your own. The set-pieces I've written are diving boards not strait jackets. If I was vain enough to offer you advice, which I clearly am, it would be this: aim to make these moments as truthful as possible. How did *your* mum dance? Also try to make them as specific as you can. How *exactly* did she dance? It's wise to follow Steve Martin's dictum that a comedian should be 'abnormally fond of the precision which creates movement'. All author's notes need a pretentious quote, and so now I've ticked that particular box I'll bid you goodbye. I look forward to watching your production.

Max Dickens, July 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sure it will be no surprise to you that putting on a play requires the input and hard work of a large number of people. I have been lucky to work with a talented bunch. Firstly, I'd like to thank Oliver Senton, the director, for his warm encouragement and insightful feedback as I developed the script. And not least for his work in the rehearsal room once it was finished. He brought the best out of everyone. The cast – Abigail Burdess and Kate Alderton – also brought great vigour and intelligence to their roles. My words seemed to have more heft in their mouths: it was a thrill to see. Then there is the producer, Suz Rosenthal and her team at Something for the Weekend who made all of this possible. Simon Scullion and Alex Johnston deserve plaudits too, they worked wonders with a small budget. Finally, I am – as ever – indebted to Kelsey Richards: you are a wonderful script editor; to Naomi Petersen: your notes have helped so much; and to the many actors who were involved in readings at various stages. Thank you to you all for helping me realise my vision for this piece. I'll never forget it.

This is for my agent, Becky Williams.

Thank you for all the inspiration.

CHARACTERS

SARAH – the eldest sister. Mid-late forties. City girl. Power haircut.

LILLY – the younger sister. Mid-forties. A mother. The air of an art teacher about her.

This script went to print during rehearsals and may differ from the text in performance

ACT ONE

This is dusty Midwest America. Idaho maybe? We're inside a humble bungalow. It's remote. In a small, rural town which is even more remote. The middle of nowhere.

As the audience enter, a local American radio station plays. A mix of cheesy DJs, silly American ads about car lots, and old rock songs. Perhaps there is a radio on stage, lit by a light?

The stage is split into two rooms. There is a door between the two. One is a small bedroom. In the bed is a body. We can't see his face, but we know he is there. In the adjacent living room, near the front of the stage, is a small round kitchen table surrounded by four chairs.

When the lights come up LILLY (mid-forties, English) is standing facing SARAH (mid-late forties, English) on opposite sides of the room. SARAH has her luggage next to her. The show opens with an awkward silence between them that we sense has started before the lights go up. It should be as long as anyone can bear.

SARAH It's not what I expected. This place.

LILLY No?

SARAH I thought it would be bigger.

LILLY Right. Well. This is it.

A pause.

SARAH It's very clean.

LILLY It wasn't clean when I got here.

SARAH Right. Well...well done.

A pause.

LILLY I like your dress...

SARAH Oh. This thing. It's ancient.

A pause.

You look well.

LILLY Do I? Oh. Thank you. *(Beat)* So do you.

SARAH I don't know about that. It was a long flight.

A pause.

You've changed your hair.

LILLY Have I?

SARAH Yeah.

A pause.

It's nice. Lovely style. Like you've not really made an effort.

LILLY Thanks very much.

SARAH No. I meant that in a good way.

LILLY It was a compliment?

SARAH Yeah. As in. The style... It's informal. Relaxed. Like you've spent no money on it at all –

LILLY It was quite expensive, actually –

SARAH *(trying to be nice)* No. That's what I mean. *(Beat)* It's like the 'just got out of bed look' men like to have now. It actually takes a lot of effort to look so lazy...

A pause.

LILLY Decent flight?

SARAH Fine. Yeah.

A pause.

LILLY Watch any good films?

SARAH I watched a documentary about Josef Fritzl.

LILLY Right.

SARAH *pulls a bottle out of a bag.*

SARAH I brought some champagne. Picked it up in duty free.

LILLY Champagne? I didn't realise we were celebrating. Is this a celebration?

SARAH I don't know. Do you feel like celebrating?

LILLY I don't know.

A pause.

He won't drink it.

SARAH He always loved champagne! The flash bastard. Any excuse. Well he called it champagne. It was usually...

LILLY Lambrusco.

SARAH Yes!

LILLY Sarah. He has days to live. Maybe hours.

SARAH Look. I came as fast as I could...it's just...

LILLY Work?

SARAH Yeah. Work. And...

LILLY Yeah.

SARAH I didn't know...

LILLY I understand...

SARAH I didn't know whether I wanted to come at all.

A pause. SARAH puts the bottle of champagne down on the sideboard.

I thought he had a dog? Or have I made that up?

LILLY A terrier. Yes. I've shut him in the kitchen... We'll have to decide what we do with it. We'll have to decide what we do with everything.

SARAH Let's split everything down the middle. Including the dog.

LILLY You should have the dog.

SARAH What does that mean?

LILLY Nothing.

A pause. LILLY sits down. Returns to sorting a load of papers into two piles.

SARAH How are the kids?

LILLY Fine. Thank you.

SARAH Thirteen and nine, aren't they? Tricky age.

LILLY They're sixteen and twelve.

SARAH Tricky age.

A pause.

Still living in Stroud?

LILLY Yes. No reason to leave.

SARAH The world is bigger than Stroud you know.

A pause. SARAH goes to sit down, irritably brushing hair from the seat first.

I fucking hate dogs.

LILLY You used to *love* them.

SARAH You've remembered that wrong.

LILLY When Dad brought Bruce home you didn't sleep for a week! You *adored* him.

SARAH Until he bit me. He bit my leg. Took a chunk out. I've still got the scar. Don't you remember that?

LILLY It wasn't his fault.

SARAH It wasn't his fault? He fucking bit me!

LILLY He was a rescue dog. He'd been through a lot.

SARAH Dad had him destroyed. He had to after that. I suppose.

LILLY He might have changed.

SARAH No. The die had been cast. That dog was a cunt. *(Beat)*
Where does he keep the booze? I need a drink...

LILLY He keeps the hard stuff in the cabinet.

SARAH goes to pour herself a drink. Scotch. Far too big.

SARAH I bought him some fags too. Silk Cut. Nice fat brick.

LILLY Sarah! He's got cancer!

SARAH Not lung cancer.

LILLY He was oddly proud of that. Like he'd proved the medical establishment wrong. Like he'd won.

SARAH *(pulling out a cigarette)* If cancer isn't a good excuse to have a fag I'm not sure what it is. Do you mind if...?

LILLY Not indoors.

SARAH Christ. You've changed.

LILLY Are you drunk?

SARAH What?

LILLY Are you? Are you drunk?

SARAH No.

Another pause.

So...do we have a time frame?

LILLY What do you mean?

SARAH As in...do we know when he might die?

LILLY It's hard to be precise about these things.

SARAH Right. (*Beat*) Ideally he'd die by Friday.

LILLY Ideally?

SARAH I've really got to get back for a meeting.

LILLY Of course. Yes. Sorry. One second.

As if shouting to her dad.

'Dad, if you wouldn't mind getting on with it...Sarah's got to get back.'

SARAH I didn't mean it like that. This is a hard time to leave work for me. OK? The worst...

A pause.

LILLY Do you want to see him?

SARAH Is he awake?

LILLY No.

SARAH Is he conscious?

LILLY In and out.

SARAH I'm nervous.

LILLY Nervous?

SARAH I'm not good at small talk.

LILLY It's not a cocktail party Sarah.

SARAH I can't chat unless someone's talking back... It was bad enough when he was healthy. He'd ring me up on Christmas Day and we'd dry up.

LILLY He called you on Christmas Day?

SARAH He'd call me twice a year. Christmas Day. And on FA Cup Final day. Weirdly.

LILLY You were always his favourite.

SARAH Don't say that.

LILLY You're going to have to help me turn him in a minute. Otherwise he gets bed sores. *(Beat)* I will warn you that his balls are very swollen.

SARAH Lilly!

LILLY What?! They are. His balls are very very swollen. *(Beat)* And his scrotum's *massive*. *(Beat)* You could stick a pole under it and camp.

SARAH shoots her an appalled look. Short pause.

SARAH Where's the TV?

LILLY He doesn't have a TV.

SARAH He doesn't have a TV?! This is America. There should be fifteen fucking TVs... What are we going to *do*?

LILLY I don't know. Have a conversation?

A pause.

Dad's been talking a lot about the past. When he's been awake. He's been talking about Mum.

SARAH Where do you sleep?

LILLY I'm sorry?

SARAH Where do you sleep? There's only one bedroom...

LILLY I sleep in there...

SARAH You sleep with Dad?

LILLY No. Not *with* him. I'm on the floor next to him. On a lilo. *(Beat)* He gets frightened at night. He doesn't like to be alone.

SARAH Perhaps I should check into a hotel. Sleep there.

LILLY There's no need.

SARAH It's no big deal. I don't mind.

LILLY There's really no need.

SARAH Motels are so cheap –

LILLY You can sleep on the sofa.

SARAH I've already made a reservation somewhere.

LILLY You might miss it.

SARAH Miss it? I've just got here.

LILLY Dad could die any minute. I think you'll want to be here.
Sleep on the sofa.

SARAH I need a shower. Christ. I stink. Do you mind?

LILLY Let's turn Dad first.

SARAH Yes. Of course.

LILLY Seriously – his balls are like grapefruits.

SARAH Lilly you are absolutely obsessed!

Both sisters laugh.

LILLY (*moving towards SARAH's bags*) Come on then. Let's get you settled. I'll help you unpack. I've got some photos of Tom and Sammy on my iPad if you want to...?

SARAH Yes of course.

LILLY I've told them a lot about Auntie Sarah.

Then LILLY moves to embrace her sister with a hug.

SARAH *evades her.*

SARAH I'm sorry.

LILLY It's fine.

SARAH I'm not... I'm not ready for that.

LILLY I understand. I shouldn't have... I'm sorry.

SARAH Can't the nurse turn him? Isn't that her job?

LILLY How do you know it's a she? A woman. Could be a man.

SARAH But I bet it's a woman. Isn't it?

LILLY You always used to correct me on that. Do you remember?
You used to tell me that '*pronouns create our reality*'.

SARAH Did I? Christ. I sound insufferable.

LILLY You were inspiring, actually.

SARAH Isn't it her/*his* job to turn Dad? He's paying enough.

LILLY Not anymore. When he declined treatment, when he decided he was ready to die, that voided the insurance. We get a state nurse for an hour a day. We could go private but it's \$500 a day –

SARAH I'd pay a lot more than that not to see Dad's balls.

LILLY Dad thought it was a waste of money.

SARAH So you've been doing everything?

LILLY I don't mind... But he's heavy, so if you could help...

SARAH Jesus Christ. Look at this art work. He's done this place up like an Indian restaurant.

LILLY Dad never had much taste.

SARAH No. Mum had all the taste.

LILLY Have you been getting my letters?

SARAH His cactus is dead.

LILLY Have you though?

SARAH How has he managed that?

LILLY Because you never reply.

SARAH They can survive in deserts...

LILLY Did you at least receive them?

SARAH Look. This isn't easy for me. Being here. You know?
It's hard. It's fucking hard, actually.

LILLY So you have read them?

SARAH Do we have to do this now? I've just arrived. Can this not wait? I don't want to do this now.

LILLY There isn't much time. We need to talk. Don't you think?

SARAH Not now. Please. Not in front of Dad.

LILLY Have you received my letters?

SARAH I don't want to play happy families. We've never been a happy family. Not before Mum died. Certainly not after.

LILLY Why are you here then?

SARAH Isn't it obvious?

LILLY I haven't seen you for *twenty years*. Why have you come now?

SARAH Duty. I'm here out of duty.

LILLY That's all?

SARAH My decision to come here... It didn't come from my heart. Or my brain, actually. It's not logical. Me being here. It came from this amorphous third place... Somewhere deep inside me. Which says that this is the right thing to do...

LILLY But you don't want to be here?

SARAH No. I don't *want* to be here. I don't *desire* to be here. I'm compelled to be here. Through some weird primitive response –

LILLY That's all family is to you? Some primitive response?

SARAH Isn't that what everything is?

LILLY No. Some things are built through will. Faith. Pulled together by the power of an idea.

SARAH And isn't family *an idea*? A biological imperative. That's *become* a superstition. This infallible holy grail...

LILLY You wouldn't say that if you had one.

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