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WAITING FOR GOD

A Play in Two Acts

by Michael Aitkens

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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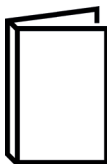
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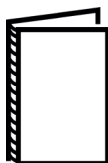


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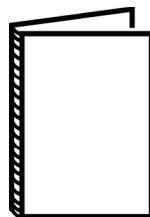
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael has worked all over the world and has had over two hundred scripts produced for film and television. In Australia he wrote for many medical, detective and comedy series and won the Best TV Script award. He was awarded a fellowship to the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, where he wrote the TV comedy *Alive and Kicking*. In the UK he is best known for originating many series including *Waiting for God* (BAFTA nominated), *Class Act*, *Trial by Marriage*, *The River*, *Life as We Know It*, *Truckies*, *Fear*, *Stress and Anger*, *Roy's Raiders*, *Honey for Tea* and *A Perfect State*. He was a core writer on *Midsomer Murders* and has written episodes of *The Last Detective*, *Murder in Suburbia*, *Stay Lucky* and *Moon and Son*. He has had three stage plays performed in Sydney, Hawaii and Jersey but only writes for theatre when he can afford it. He lives in Jersey and London, has two daughters and likes fishing in faraway places.

James Seabright presents *Waiting for God*; it began its UK Tour on 25 April 2017 in Eastbourne with the following cast and creatives:

TOM BALLARD	Jeffrey Holland
DIANA TRENT	Nichola McAuliffe
SARAH CHASE	Joanna Bending
GEOFFREY BALLARD	David Benson
DENNIS SPARROW	Peter Cadden
HARVEY BAINES	Samuel Collings
DOCTOR HENRY	Corinna Marlowe
JANE EDWARDS	Emily Pithon
Director	David Grindley
Designer	Jonathan Fensom
Lighting Designer	Jason Taylor
Sound Designer	Fergus O'Hare
Casting Director	Stephen Moore
Production Managers	Ben Arkell
	Patrick Malony
Company Stage Manager	Simon Bannister
Deputy Stage Manager	Julie Whitcombe
Acting Assistant Stage Manager	Anna Westlake
Costumer Supervisor	Emma Lindsay
Props Supervisor	Lizzie Frankl
Photography	Geraint Lewis
Touring Wardrobe Supervisor	Sara Markwick
Fight Director	Paul Benzing
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CHARACTERS

DIANA TRENT	An elderly but very feisty woman.
TOM BALLARD	An elderly man. Whimsical. Lovely.
JANE EDWARDS	(30s) Sad, flustered and lovesick.
HARVEY BAINES	(30s) Vain and incompetent shyster.
SARAH CHASE/DOCTOR	(30s) Diana's niece. Successful, charming. (Doubling as DOCTOR in Scene Eight)
GEOFFREY BALLARD/DOCTOR GYNO	(40s) TOM 's son. A dull clod and multiple cuckold. (Understudies DENNIS and HARVEY)
DENNIS SPARROW	A dithering vicar. (Understudies TOM and GEOFFREY and appears as BASIL in Scene Two)
DOCTOR JENNY HENRY/UNDERTAKER	(Understudies DIANA and appears as MILLY DAWKINS in Scene Two)
Other understudies:	
YOUNGER ACTRESS FOR JANE/SARAH/	(appears where required
DOCTOR HENRY	as a supernumerary)/ Acting ASM.

SETTING

One all-purpose set that doubles as verandah, apartments, hospital, church, doctor's room, fairground and Bournemouth seafront.

TIME

Running time approx 2 hrs 25 mins including one interval of 15 mins.

To Lucy and Daisy

ACT ONE

Scene One

The Bayview Retirement Home.

A verandah/conservatory.

Curtain up to reveal an all-purpose set designed to encompass various locations suggested more by lighting and furniture rather than traditional flats.

The conservatory/verandah is shared by two adjoining apartments. Each side of the conservatory has a set of outdoor furniture: a simple table and two chairs.

DIANA TRENT, in her dressing gown, is sitting at her table playing a card game of solitaire.

Fade music, bring up bird sounds. DIANA sighs and mutters to herself as she turns over the cards.

DIANA Oh for goodness sakes. Damn thing never comes out.

She glances round to see if she is being watched and then flicks a card over her shoulder. She is cheating at solitaire.

The bird song comes up a fraction. DIANA looks up. Tuts.

Oh do shut up. Damn birds. Tweet bloody tweet. All day long.

DIANA *calls to the next apartment.*

Henry! Hurry up with the crossword. My brain's turning to porridge over here... *(no response)* Henry, are you deaf? Oh yes... He is deaf.

She sighs and goes back to her cards.

JANE *(offstage)* Yoo hoo. Good morning.

DIANA Oh dear God. Not now, not Jane.

JANE EDWARDS, *the flustered, assistant manager of Bayview, enters.* DIANA *sighs and looks bleak as JANE bustles around tidying.*

JANE Good morning, Diana. Lovely day today.

DIANA It's cold and wet and they're forecasting a plague of frogs.

JANE But God gave you this day to enjoy.

DIANA Well bully for God. Did he also give me the brittle bones, the furred arteries, the irritable bowels and the flatulence that could rip out a palm tree?

JANE Um... I see you're not dressed yet.

DIANA So?

JANE *lifts her clipboard.*

JANE Well I was wondering if you'd...been.

DIANA Been?

JANE To the little room? To have your morning tinkle?

DIANA I beg your pardon.

JANE Harvey needs to know who's in the plastic sheet club as the laundry costs are a bit extra. I'll go and have a looksie, shall I? Check for damp bits.

As JANE goes to straighten up DIANA hooks her round the neck with her walking stick. Squawk etc. and pulls her face down to hers.

Diana!

DIANA You really are quite unspeakable.

JANE Please. You're hurting me.

DIANA Pah!

DIANA *lets her go.* JANE *straightens up and rubs her neck.*

JANE Oh goodness. Oh deary me. What on earth brought that on?

DIANA You haven't a clue, have you? Not a clue!

JANE I never have with you.

DIANA *shakes her head and sighs.*

DIANA I didn't mean to hurt you. I apologise.

JANE I forgive you.

DIANA Thank you.

JANE *does a bit more clearing up with sidelong glances at DIANA.*

JANE We're going on the big outing soon.

DIANA Oh hoo-bloody-ray. Harvey trying to kill us off again?

JANE Harvey is a very good man.

DIANA He's a bent little shyster who should be kebabbed from tonsils to Khyber Pass.

JANE That's very hurtful.

DIANA If you do it right.

JANE I happen to love Harvey very much.

DIANA Jane, he doesn't even like you touching him.

JANE Some men just find it difficult to express themselves on an emotional level.

DIANA Because they don't have an emotional level. Because they're smarmy little toads who live in the damp and fetid basement of the emotions.

JANE I'm not listening. We're going to Lourdes this year. Can I book you a seat on the minibus?

DIANA I don't do God. Or miracles. Or death by mini bus.

JANE A little faith might do you good.

DIANA Faith, Jane, is what helps you God-botherers make the quantum leap between the rational and the totally bloody ridiculous. I, on the other hand, am a sensible, clear-thinking atheist... Thank God.

JANE turns to go but stops and looks out the window.

JANE Oh... Um... I see your niece has left her car here. A Porsche.

DIANA Sarah lives in Chelsea so when she goes away she leaves her car here to stop the Russians stealing it.

JANE It's just that Harvey was a little worried you might actually try and drive it.

DIANA had not thought of this before but the idea makes her look up and smile.

DIANA Never crossed my mind.

JANE Sarah's so good the way she always comes and sees you.

DIANA Only because she's hoping that one day she'll find me dead as a parrot in a blender. She just wants my money.

JANE Harvey says persecution mania is very common amongst senior citizens.

DIANA Don't you call me a senior citizen.

JANE Well what are you then?

DIANA What do I look like?

JANE A senior citizen.

DIANA And when did I become a senior citizen?

JANE When you turned sixty of course.

DIANA Jane, on my sixtieth birthday I was hanging out of a helicopter on the Afghan borders, snapping various warlords as they tried to shoot my arse off.

JANE Goodness how colourful.

DIANA In decent cultures they don't have senior citizens. They have elders whom they respect and revere. Here they call us bed-blockers and leave us out in the snow to be eaten by wolves.

JANE Oh Diana. How did you get to be you?

DIANA Just lucky, I guess.

DIANA goes back to playing solitaire. JANE watches her for a moment.

JANE Do you enjoy playing with yourself?

DIANA Would you care to rephrase that?

JANE Would you like me to rustle up someone for you to play with?

DIANA No thank you. I like playing on my own. It's easier to cheat.

DIANA chuckles another card over her shoulder.

And if I get bored I can always get old Henry to join me.

DIANA peers at the next door apartment. JANE looks awkward.

JANE Oh... You haven't heard?

DIANA Heard what?

JANE Henry has gone to a better place.

DIANA His sister's, in Devon?

JANE His father's, in heaven.

DIANA Oh...oh dear. What took him off then?

JANE He just sort of...stopped.

DIANA Terminal boredom. Poor old Henry. He was a nice fellow.

JANE Only here three months.

DIANA Yes... The turnover rate in that apartment is getting quite vulgar. Can hardly hear yourself talk for the thud of falling bodies.

JANE I thought you knew.

DIANA No. They keep these things quiet. Sometimes you see the hearses gliding through the hedgerows like circling sharks. But usually they just slip in under cover of darkness, then the sun comes up and everybody tries to ignore the untouched bowl of Frosties on the breakfast table.

JANE Oh Diana, you do depress me.

DIANA Oh, thank you.

JANE (*exiting*) I'll see you later.

DIANA One down. Who's next?

HARVEY (*offstage*) Here we are.

DIANA The idiot Baines. Oh goody.

HARVEY This is one of our premier apartments. Do have a look round, Mr Ballard.

HARVEY NIGEL BAINES *comes out of the other apartment and sees DIANA beaming at him. He stops.*

Oh... Diana.

DIANA Harvey. What a treat. Got a new boy already, have you? God, you don't want to nod off round here.

HARVEY No negative comments to the clients please. There are no rats here and I do not deal in used body parts.

He calls back inside.

And out here is your own private verandah-style conservatory.

GEOFFREY, *TOM's dull son, comes out of the apartment.*

See, lovely view, light and airy. I'm sure your father will love it here.

GEOFFREY Looks jolly nice. Doesn't it, Dad? Dad?

But Dad is not there. GEOFFREY calls back inside.

Dad. We're out here.

TOM *(offstage)* Coming. Just finishing some old cat food I found in the fridge.

HARVEY *looks alarmed. GEOFFREY laughs nervously.*

GEOFFREY Heheheh. My father's a bit of a joker. Who's that old dear?

GEOFFREY *indicates DIANA, who looks up, very aggrieved.*

HARVEY The verandahs are private but adjoining. That's your father's charming neighbour, Ms Trent.

GEOFFREY *edges across and shouts at DIANA.*

GEOFFREY Hello, dear. How are you?!

DIANA *shouts back even louder.*

DIANA I'm not bloody deaf. Nor am I simple. Jesus Christ!

DIANA *goes inside her apartment.*

GEOFFREY Crikey.

HARVEY *laughs nervously.*

HARVEY Good old Diana. Great sense of humour. We all love Diana. *(calls inside)* Mr Ballard.

GEOFFREY Dad.

There is a pause until TOM's long leg arches out from behind a flat and he comes out doing an impersonation of a large bird. An emu. High stepping, elbows as wings with neck going back and forth and peering at everything. He wears a yellow waistcoat and bow tie. He struts downstage.

HARVEY looks to **GEOFFREY**.

HARVEY What's he doing?

GEOFFREY Um... He's being...an emu.

HARVEY An emu, why?

GEOFFREY Emus like to carefully inspect their surroundings before nesting.

TOM looks **HARVEY** up and down and round the back.

HARVEY Er... There are clauses in the residency contract... incontinence...intellectual stability...

GEOFFREY He's fine... Dad, please. What do you think?

TOM stops being an emu and looks out the window and opens his arms like a rock star opening his show.

TOM Hellooooo, Bayview.

GEOFFREY Pretty good, eh?

TOM Wonderful, Geoffrey. Never seen anywhere so wonderful. It is the eighth wonder of the world... In fact it is so wonderful...

GEOFFREY If you don't like it you can come home.

TOM I don't think your wife would like that.

GEOFFREY Marion loves you, Dad. In her own way.

TOM She tried to bury me under the patio.

GEOFFREY She's just highly strung.

TOM And so she should be.

GEOFFREY Dad, I'm sorry it didn't work out but...

TOM It's okay Geoffy. You're just waving me off on another big adventure. I'll be fine.

GEOFFREY Are you sure?

TOM Yes really. It's okay. Te absolvo. See you in a few days.

GEOFFREY Oh...okay.

TOM Bye, Geoffy.

GEOFFREY (*exiting*) Bye.

TOM Lovely to have known you...son.

***TOM** waves goodbye and looks a bit sad then pulls himself together and turns back to **HARVEY**.*

Poor boy. His wife is screaming mad.

*But **HARVEY**, unhearing, is checking his clipboard and making notes.*

HARVEY Oh really, that's nice.

TOM Drinks like a fish.

HARVEY Jolly good.

TOM Shags like a rabbit.

HARVEY She sounds lovely. Okay, all done.

TOM So what's on today's agenda?

HARVEY Lunch in the dining room. Meet your new friends?

TOM I look forward to that.

HARVEY Great. I just know you're going to be really happy here, Ben.

TOM It's Tom.

***HARVEY** checks his notes.*

HARVEY You're absolutely right. Sharp as a tack, eh? Jolly good.

***HARVEY** leaves. **TOM** emus around the verandah just as **DIANA** comes back out.*

TOM Hello.

***DIANA** is wary. Nods and grunts.*

My name is Tom... Tom...Jones.

DIANA Oh yes.

TOM Yes. I sing songs and women throw their underwear at me. Sometimes with themselves still in it.

DIANA Oh holy crap. (*yells off*) Jane! Jane!

TOM It's alright. Just kidding. Bit of an ice-breaker. A conversational gambit. Banter, as they call it.

DIANA So you're not Tom Jones?

TOM No.

DIANA Good.

TOM I'm Sir Edmund Hillary.

DIANA Jane!

TOM No, no, I mean metaphorically. See I've arrived here at base camp today. About to set out on the next big adventure.

***TOM** puts out a hand.*

Tom Ballard.

***DIANA** looks at his hand.*

I don't bite.

DIANA I do. Diana Trent. (*They shake hands.*) Step into my office.

TOM So what brought you to this cosy little Sherpa's hut?

DIANA Arthritis and poverty. The favoured cocktail of the over-the-hill mob. Then a dodgy knee job a couple of years back...surgeon was probably very good with tractors...sold my fourth-floor flat and did a deal for life with this place. Fed, watered and buried. Hopefully in that order but I wouldn't count on it...

TOM You didn't have a husband?

DIANA Plenty, but none of them mine.

TOM Heheh. And before the timbers started creaking...?

DIANA Photo journalism. War zones mainly. Like Kate Adie; if you saw me when you were on holiday you knew you'd made a terrible mistake.

TOM *laughs.*

You travel much?

TOM Oh yes, every day I go off on my travels. Without moving an inch. I call it geographical meditation. Up the Amazon, trekking to the poles, down the corner shop... I've been everywhere, man.

DIANA Oh yes?

TOM And sometimes I visit great moments in history. Last week I was at the Battle of Hastings. Right in the thick of it. I said to King Harold, what's that?

He points up. **DIANA** *laughs.*

DIANA That's really terrible.

TOM I can see we're going to get on marvellously.

DIANA (*chuckling*) I can see I'm going to have to shoot myself.

JANE *comes out through TOM's apartment.*

JANE Hello, Mr Ballard. I'm Jane Edwards, manage the care centre here. May I call you Ben?

TOM I'd prefer Tom.

JANE Really? And why's that?

TOM Oh you know, just a whim.

DIANA It's his name, you half-witted puddleduck.

JANE Oh, right... Tom. So we'll see you in the dining room for lunch, shall we?

TOM What's on the menu?

DIANA It's Thursday; chicken cholera. If I were you I'd wait for road-kill Friday. At least there's the element of surprise.

TOM I'm sure whatever it is it'll be wonderful.

JANE I'll put you and Diana at the same table.

JANE *exits.*

TOM Charming girl.

DIANA *tuts and puts her book aside.*

DIANA It's people like you who give the elderly a bad name, being sweet and dotty all over the place. You're an old fuddy-duddy. I, on the other hand, have still got my balls of steel.

DIANA *goes into her room.*

TOM Yes... I can hear them clanging together...like bells in the fog. Bong... Bong... Bong... Here is the six o'clock news.

TOM *reverts to emu and steps off, peering inside his apartment.*

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