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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE

Based on the novel by
Neil Gaiman

Adapted by
Joel Horwood

SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE was first produced at the Dorfman Theatre, National Theatre, 11 December 2019 and the Duke of York's Theatre, 26 October 2021. The cast at the Duke of York's was as follows:

BOY . . . . . James Bamford
ENSEMBLE . . . . . Charlie Cameron
LODGER / ENSEMBLE . . . . . Jeff D'Sangalang
GINNIE HEMPSTOCK. . . . . Siubhan Harrison
SIS / ENSEMBLE. . . . . Grace Hogg-Robinson
OLD MRS HEMPSTOCK . . . . . Penny Layden
POLICEWOMAN / ENSEMBLE . . . . . Charleen Qwaye
URSULA / SKARTHACH . . . . . Laura Rogers
DAD . . . . . Nicolas Tennant
LETTIE HEMPSTOCK . . . . . Nia Towle
ENSEMBLE . . . . . Peter Twose

Understudies

SIS / POLICEWOMAN / ENSEMBLE . . . . . Ruby Ablett
OLD MRS HEMPSTOCK / URSULA / POLICEMAN. . . . . Emma Bown
SIS / LETTIE HEMPSTOCK. . . . . Charlie Cameron
BOY . . . . . Jeff D'Sanglang
DAD / LODGER / ENSEMBLE. . . . . Kieran Garland
GINNIE HEMPSTOCK / URSULA / OLD MRS HEMPSTOCK/ ENSEMBLE . . . . . Miranda Heath
LETTIE HEMPSTOCK. . . . . Grace Hogg-Robinson
BOY/ LODGER/ POLICEWOMAN/ POLICEMAN/ ENSEMBLE . . . . . Tom Mackley
GINNIE HEMPSTOCK / ENSEMBLE. . . . . Charleen Quaye

Score composed, produced, recorded and mixed by Jherek Bischoff at Sweethaven: Jherek Bischoff (Bass, Percussion, Synth, Piano, Strings, Ukulele), Paris Hurley (Violin), Madeline Falcone (Violin), Marta Sofia Honer (Viola), Caleigh Drane (Cello), Lacey Jo Benter (Vocals), Kelci Hahn (Vocals), Jodie Landau (Vocals), Anna Schubert (Vocals) and Michael Farrell (Piano).

Director	Katy Rudd
Set Designer	Fly Davis
Costume and Puppet Designer	Samuel Wyer
Movement Director	Steven Hoggett
Composer	Jherek Bischoff
Lighting Designer	Paule Constable
Sound Designer	Ian Dickinson for Autograph

Magic and Illusions Director and Designer	Jamie Harrison
Puppetry Director	Finn Caldwell
Casting Director	Lauren Evans
Original Casting	Alastair Coomer CDG and Naomi Downham

******

Associate Set Designer & Draftsperson	Tim Blazdell
Associate Movement Director	Vicki Manderon
Associate Lighting Designer	Louise Anderson
Ammonite	Technical Lighting Consultant – Rob Casey for Ammonite
Associate Sound Designer	Christopher Reid
Magic and Illusions Associate	John Bulleid
Associate Puppetry Director	Gareth Aled
Voice/Dialect Coach	Kate Godfrey
Resident Director	Sophie Dillon Moniram
Assistant Movement Director	Rachel-Leah Hosker

******

Production Manager	Marty Moore
Deputy Production Manager	Jody Robinson
Costume Supervisor	Jessica Dixon
Wigs, Hair and Makeup Supervisor	Giuseppe Cannas
Wigs, Hair and Makeup Supervisor Assistant	Daisy Beer
Prop Supervisor	Lizzie Frankl for Propworks
Props Assistants	Laura Cunnick & Zoe Wilson for Propworks
Puppet Supervisor	Daisy Beattie

******

Company Stage Manager	Robin Longley
Deputy Stage Manager	Rebecca James
Assistant Stage Manager (Book Cover)	Sean John Edwards
Assistant Stage Manager (Illusions/Puppets)	Robert Perkins
Head of Wardrobe	Rosy Emmerich
Deputy Head of Wardrobe	Natalie Bird
Wardrobe Assistant	Ciara Baron
Wardrobe Dresser	Maisie Wilkins
Head of Wigs, Hair and Makeup	Rachel Lidster
Wigs, Hair and Makeup Assistant	Juliet Johnson
Head of Automation	Abbie Gingell
Sound No. 1	Vicki Hill

Sound No. 2	Niki Hulme
Tech Swing	Kj Barham
Tech Swing (Automation)	Dan Turner

National Theatre Productions

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CREATIVES

NEIL GAIMAN | AUTHOR

Gaiman's novels and collections include *Norse Mythology*, *Neverwhere*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *Good Omens* (co-written with Terry Pratchett), *American Gods*, *Stardust*, *Fragile Things*, *The View from the Cheap Seats*, *Art Matters* and the graphic novel series *Sandman*. His books for children include *The Graveyard Book* (Newbery and Carnegie medals for Prestigious Contribution to Children's Literature), *Coraline* and the picture book *Wolves in the Walls* (co-created with Dave McKean). *Coraline* was adapted into a film (BAFTA for Best Animated Film and Academy Award nominee), a musical, and an opera at the Barbican. *Wolves in the Walls* was adapted into a musical by the National Theatre of Scotland. TV adaptations include *Good Omens* and *American Gods* (both Emmy nominated). Film adaptations include *Stardust* and *How to Talk to Girls at Parties*. Radio adaptations of his work include *Good Omens*, *Neverwhere* and *How the Marquis Got his Coat Back*. He has written two episodes of *Doctor Who* and the English language script for the film *Princess Mononoke*. He has also appeared in *Arthur*, *The Simpsons*, *The Big Bang Theory* and *Lucifer*. In 2017 he became a UN Goodwill Ambassador for Refugees and is a Professor in the Arts at Bard College in New York.

JOEL HORWOOD | ADAPTOR

A playwright and dramaturg whose work for theatre includes *The Ocean At The End of the Lane* for the National Theatre; *The Great Elephant Chase* at Burgtheater, Vienna; *Berberian Sound Studio* at the Donmar Warehouse; *The Little Matchgirl and Other Happier Tales* for Shakespeare's Globe and Bristol Old Vic; *I Want my Hat Back* for the National Theatre which received an Olivier Award nomination for Best Family and Entertainment Show; *This Changes Everything* for Tonic Theatre which was nominated for a WGGB 'Best New Play' Award; *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* for Secret Theatre at the Lyric, Hammersmith and on UK tour; *I Caught Crabs* in Walberswick at the Pleasance, Edinburgh, on UK Tour and at the Bush; *Food* which won a Fringe First Award at the Traverse, Edinburgh and *Mikey the Pikey* at the Pleasance, Edinburgh. Work for screen includes *Skins* and *The Reward* which won the RED Connector Grand Prize in 2008. He has also adapted the Radiohead album *OK Computer* for BBC Radio 4.

KATY RUDD | DIRECTOR

Work in theatre includes *Camp Siegfried* at the Old Vic; *The Almighty Sometimes* at the Royal Exchange; *A Curious Night at the Theatre* at the Apollo; and *The Butterfly* at Salisbury Playhouse. As associate director theatre includes *Groundhog Day* (also on Broadway; Olivier Award for Best New Musical), *Lungs* and *The Master Builder* at the Old Vic; *Pinocchio*, *Husbands and Sons* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (also on UK tour) at the National; *Linda* and *The Twits* at the Royal Court; and *Mojo* in the West End. As assistant director work includes *Into the Woods* at Regent's Park; *The Playboy of the Western World* at the Old Vic; and *The Constant Wife* at Salisbury Playhouse.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was June of 2016, when I went to the National Theatre's rehearsal rooms, by the Old Vic Theatre, to meet Katy Rudd and Joel Horwood. I had heard that they wanted to turn my book, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, into a stage play, and I was intrigued. I met them and liked them both. They asked me what had inspired the novel, where it had come from, and I tried to explain it to them, like this:

The Ocean at the End of the Lane is a story about the past, and about memory, and about what we forget and what we carry with us. It's a story about magic and farmhouse food, about history in all senses, about adults and children and survival.

I wrote it for my wife, as a short story that just grew in the writing, to tell her where I lived and who I was as a boy. It's not autobiographical: every detail in the book is shaped and changed to be what I needed it to be, even the landscape. But the interior landscape was all true.

There was a farmhouse down the lane that went past my house. Someone, and I'm pretty sure it was my mother, told me it was mentioned in the Domesday Book, the list of every property and farm made in 1086 by order of William the Conqueror, which meant that it was about a thousand years old. And I thought, 'What if the farmers who live there have been there since it was built?' I was seven or eight. By the time I was twelve, the people in the fictional farm had become the Hemp-stock family. They were waiting for me, when I began the story, along with a story my father told me over thirty years after it happened about why he sold our family Mini, and everything I had to say about childhood and loss, family and pain; about grandmother energy, about the families that take you in, about hands you hold that you never want to let go of, no matter what happens.

It was my most personal story.

It became the 2013 UK Book of the Year, which was nowhere near as impressive for me as seeing the road that the buses pull up in at Southsea's Canoe Lake renamed "The Ocean at the End of the Lane". (Later I learned that there was a pitched battle at council level, and I was meant to have a much more impressive road, but the little unnamed bus lane we got was perfect for me – the Canoe Lake was a place I'd been happy as a child.)

Each year I would return to the rehearsal rooms, to watch a readings of the latest version of the play, and give Joel and Katy notes. It felt like they had a vision from the start, it was just a matter of stripping away everything that wasn't part of that vision.

It wasn't until two weeks before it opened, and I was sitting in a brightly lit rehearsal room watching the performers running through the whole

play that I discovered what they had made. There were no costumes, no make-up, no special effects, no magic, not yet, but still, I was embarrassed to realise that there were tears running down my face. That was the moment I knew the play was going to work and work brilliantly. Ten days later, on press night, I was holding my wife's hand as she watched, and she was crying, while on my other side there was a member of the press, making notes for their review. From where I was sitting I could see tears landing on the notepad.

This was something very special indeed. I hope you get to see it performed.

Neil Gaiman

ADAPTOR'S NOTE

I read *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* in one sitting. I started in the morning, intending to put it down at some stage – probably half a mind on the biscuits – but when I finished the epilogue, it was dark outside and I had been crying so much that I resembled a blancmange wearing glasses. The opportunity to adapt Neil's incredible book would go on to become an obsession, themes and moments gaining even greater depth and resonance the longer I lived with the story.

It is hard to adapt a book you love because you want to include every sentence, you want to preserve the glorious thing that you've so directly experienced as literature. But, paradoxically, to do so would be a disservice to the book. Theatre is, of course, its own art form. It is durational, lived, dramatic and, though other writers can make direct address a virtue, I knew my adaptation would need to live without Neil's warm and welcoming narration. So the challenge lay in how to preserve the heart of the story, its characters, impact, action and themes, maybe even a little of the poetry, in living, breathing action and image. Neil speaks of 'Ocean' as a love letter, as his most autobiographical work and an accidental novel. I took these as my pilot lights – love; a desire to understand and be understood; the action of being whisked away or tumbling down a rabbit hole. Of course, there are things from the novel that I have, sadly, had to lose as a result. Changes I have made. Additions also. But, as a huge fan of the novel, these changes were all made safe in the knowledge that I could always go back and read the story in its original form. The book was still there on my shelf. It still is. Thank goodness.

The wonderful thing about adaptation, especially for the stage, is that you are never working alone. From the beginning you are collaborating with the words of – in this case – a terrifying genius. And as you go along, you are supported, challenged, dead-lined and encouraged by a team of incredibly creative people, full of ideas and solutions. In this case, I was lucky enough to work with Katy Rudd (director) from the moment the project began. Katy's vision was integral to our production and allowed me to write in ways that I may otherwise not have attempted. This script is full of the kind of stage directions that might make a lesser director baulk, but Katy always welcomed and encouraged those challenges. Which meant I could focus on the possibilities as opposed to the limitations of what we could achieve on stage.

I was greatly supported in the development of the play by Ben Power, Steven Hogget, Sam Wyer, Rachel Taylor, Josie Walker, a whole host of designers, actors and stage management, friends and family. This adaptation was truly the result of a group of people embracing the freedom to play. Much like the protagonist. And to examine the thought experiments at the heart of Neil's story, of childhood and of theatrical

form itself. But none of this would have been possible if Neil hadn't been so generous and supportive from the beginning. So mega thanks with a side of gratitude and some whipped appreciation on top to him.

A script is only ever a blue-print. It only becomes a play with help from others, be they involved in developing and realising the production or attending a performance. And this one, more than most, feels like a play that is for, with and about all of us. I hope you enjoy it.

Joel Horwood

NOTES ON STAGING

Anyone attempting to stage this text is encouraged to fully embrace the theme of "play". Imagination is a subject of the text and as essential to a piece of theatre as to any child's game. So hopefully my stage directions will feel inspirational and challenging as opposed to prohibitively nuts.

A dash ('-') indicates an interruption

A slash (/) indicates the point at which the next speaker starts their line (ie. the dialogue overlaps)

An ellipses (...) denotes a trailing off

An ellipses in place of a line indicates the impetus to speak or an inability to speak.

CHARACTERS

BOY
LODGER
POLICEWOMAN
POLICEMAN
ENSEMBLE
LODGER
GINNIE HEMPSTOCK
SIS
OLD MRS HEMPSTOCK
URSULA
SKARTHACH
DAD
LETTIE HEMPSTOCK
MAN

SETTING

1983 and now-ish.

PROEM

(Now-ish. **MAN** *is dressed for a funeral, stood among mourners, burying a coffin.)*

PROLOGUE

*(***MAN** *is standing beside a duck pond in rural Sussex in a misty, winter's dusk.)*

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Can I help you?

*(***MAN** *realises that* **OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK** *is stood on the opposite side.)*

MAN. Oh! I'm so – I would've knocked, I didn't realise anyone was still living – Not that – I just – I drove here because… I wanted to… Sorry, psychopath, in your garden – You must be Mrs. Hempstock.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. …

MAN. I used to play here when I was –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. You're Lettie's friend.

MAN. Yeah, that's right.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Come looking for her, have you?

MAN. She won't remember me. We met ages ago, she gave me some of the milk, 'straight from the cows'. Just used to muck about around the duck pond here, fields, woods, all over –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Before you had your heart eaten out of your chest.

MAN. …sorry?

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Wearing the right clothes for a hard day there.

MAN. Yeah. My Dad. I think you met him once, didn't you?

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Look just like him, you do.

MAN. …

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Complicated man. Wasn't he?

MAN. People are probably wondering where I've got to, I'm supposed to be at the thing with the sandwiches, tea, didn't speak at the…um…so –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. *(Staring at his chest.)* Ah. There it is.

MAN. What's that?

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. The hole. Slowly growing back but still a hole.

MAN. Yeah. Look, you're not on your own here, are you?

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. No.

MAN. OK. But shall we just take a look inside –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Inside what?

MAN. The house, just cos you seem a little confused.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. *Me* confused?

MAN. OK, I'll just pop in to –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. "Pop"?

MAN. Just to make sure –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. You won't pop into anything, thank you very much. See, I don't think you called this a 'duck pond' back then. But you'll never get any two people to remember anything the same, whether they were there or not. Now, what was it our Lettie used to call this, hey?

MAN. I think "The Sea" or something.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. "The Sea"?

MAN. Something like that, only it, sort of, meant more.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Did it?

MAN. Yeah, bigger –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Bigger?

MAN. You know, more, um, expans – Ocean! This was Lettie's ocean.

*(***OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK** *passes* **MAN** *a cup of tea that seems to have appeared from nowhere, he takes it automatically.)*

It was my birthday. I met her on my *twelfth* birthday.

(A black Mini looms out of the mist.)

Our car had gone missing, the police called when they found it, it was near here and I knew my present was in the back so I ran.

*(***BOY** *runs to meet the car and yanks open the door excitedly –* **DEAD LODGER** *falls out.)*

POLICEMAN. Oi, back! Now.

BOY. Sorry, sorry –

MAN. Dad grabbed me so hard I / had bruises.

BOY. Ow, Dad, sorry –

ACT ONE

(1983. **DAD** *is played by the actor who had been playing* **MAN** *in the prologue.)*

DAD. Forget it! OK? You never saw it, didn't see anything.

POLICEMAN. Is he with you?

DAD. Yeah, you called us, it's our car.

POLICEWOMAN. Stand back, further back.

BOY. Is he dead?

DAD. Wait here. Do not look at him.

*(***DAD** *retrieves* **BOY***'s birthday present from the car.)*

POLICEMAN. *(Into radio.)* Sierra foxtrot four zero, Gavin, you there?

POLICEWOMAN. Oi! D'you think you're doing?

DAD. It's his birthday.

POLICEWOMAN. It's our crime scene 'til we confirm it's a suicide—

BOY. Suicide?

DAD. Yeah, he was our lodger so if you could –

POLICEWOMAN. Right. Well, we're gonna need to take a statement. Can't his Mum / pick him up?

DAD. / She's not around.

POLICEWOMAN. We can get her out of work, / if that's –?

DAD. / She's gone.

POLICEMAN. Kaz can you see a note anywhere?

*(***POLICEWOMAN** *heads for* **POLICEMAN***)*

BOY. But Dad he can't have killed himself.

DAD. Come on mate, let's open this up shall we?

BOY. Cos you asked him, last night, / you asked him if he was OK –

DAD. / Alright, just…/

BOY. / and he said "I'm fine", didn't he? That's what he said, he said –

DAD. Doesn't matter! Doesn't matter what he said. You can never know how anyone else really feels. No matter what they say. That's just… how it is. Hold out your hands, then.

*(***DAD** *puts them on* **BOY***, trying to hold his attention as he does so.)*

You like that Smash comic, don't you?

BOY. Used to.

DAD. Incredible Hulk, Superman, all that?

BOY. Not anymore.

DAD. He's a boxer, isn't he? Superman?

BOY. He's an alien.

DAD. Handy though, good with his fists, and his – Is it his eyes? The lasers?

BOY. Why does he look like that?

DAD. …

BOY. Does everyone look like that when / they die?

DAD. / Right, I need you to run back to the house and call the office for me.

BOY. On my own?

DAD. I have to stay here and I can't leave them wondering where I am, can I?

BOY. No, no, no.

DAD. Mate, it's just up the lane and you can't stay here, can you!?

LETTIE. I can help.

*(***LETTIE** *has suddenly appeared.)*

He can come back with me to the farmhouse if he'd like? It's just over there. Hempstock Farm?

DAD. Right, yeah, I know the one.

POLICEMAN. *(Time for your statement, pal.)* Sir?

DAD. Yeah, OK. What do you think, pal? Won't be for long and you can't stay here.

BOY. Alright.

DAD. I'll come and get you later on.

(... Everything around **LETTIE** *and* **BOY** *fades into the static-crackle of the police radio as the* **POLICE**, **DAD**, *the car and the dead body of the lodger disappear into the mist and smoke.)*

BOY. Hi.

LETTIE. Hullo.

BOY. It's cos there's a dead man in our car. He stole it. And our hose.

LETTIE. Yup. That's how he did it. Drove down here to where no one would see. Bit of mud to seal one end

of the hose to the exhaust, other end through the window, engine on and waited for his blood to turn to Carboxyhaemoglobin and the hypoxiaaah-no… You knew him, didn't you?

BOY. How old are you?

LETTIE. Why?

BOY. I'm eleven – Twelve, I mean. I'm twelve.

LETTIE. I'm… Lettie. *(Offering a hand.)* Lettie Hempstock.

BOY. *(Offering gloved hand.)* Oh.

*(***BOY** *struggles to remove his boxing gloves.)*

LETTIE. Can I –?

BOY. No, just getting used to them – Birthday present – From the car, Dad left them in there last night, that's why I opened the – And I didn't know he'd be in there and be bloody STUPID THINGS!

(After a moment, **BOY** *offers his wrist.)*

*(***LETTIE** *happily and easily begins to remove the boxing gloves.)*

LETTIE. Do you like milk? Cos we used to milk our cows by hand but Gran says, "they've invented the machines, be rude not to use them" But this…

*(***LETTIE** *drapes the boxing gloves around* **BOY***'s neck as if he were a pro and retrieves a glass of milk.)*

…hasn't been treated yet so it's still warm.

BOY. From the cow?

LETTIE. *(Handing it to* **BOY.***)* Practically moo-ing.

*(***BOY** *drinks and when he places the glass down it lands on… the table in the firelit*

kitchen of Hempstock Farm. **GINNIE** *spoons porridge into a wooden bowl.)*

Welcome to Hempstock farm!

GINNIE. Such a palaver! All sorts on their way down here now. Lights flashing. Do you eat porridge?

LETTIE. Course he does, who doesn't eat porridge!?

GINNIE. What happened to your trousers?

LETTIE. *(Sitting.)* They're called shorts, Mum.

GINNIE. *(Supplying porridge.)* Knees out in the open, you'll have the badgers after you.

LETTIE. She's joking.

GINNIE. She is not. Love a knee-cap, badgers do. Sit, then.

*(***BOY** *sits and* **LETTIE** *immediately leans close, staring.)*

BOY. Thanks, Mrs –

GINNIE. Best call me Ginnie or it'll get confusing later on. Dollop o' jam, mix it up till it's a pink mess and get it down you. *(To* **LETTIE**.*)* Now, d'you feed the ladies already?

*(***BOY** *is already eating.)*

LETTIE. Yes, mother.

GINNIE. How was Nell's back left, then? Not going lame on us, is she?

LETTIE. She's fine.

GINNIE. Hmm. I'll have a word with her later on. Breathe, love.

BOY. *(Mouthful.)* Sorry, best porridge, ever – Thank you Mrs – um, Ginnie.

LETTIE. This is where you say / you're welcome.

GINNIE. You're very welcome. Sorry. Out of practice. She's never had a visitor before – How long's he staying?

LETTIE. Mum!?

GINNIE. What!? You've got work to do, you have.

BOY. I won't be long, just while Dad speaks to the – the – about...um...

(Beat.)

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Someone say tea?

*(***OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK** *arrives, out of nowhere. Knowing what's coming,* **GINNIE** *makes the tea.)*

Parched, I am. Proper claggy mouth.

LETTIE. This is my Gran.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. *(To* **BOY.***)* Allo again, love.

BOY. Hello, um, Mrs. Hempstock –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. "Old" Mrs. Hempstock, thank you! I was here first. Now, what do I need to know about you.

BOY. I was just saying I won't be long –

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Asking about you love. Not your Dad or the police, you.

BOY. Er... Well... I like stories. I read a lot of stories. *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, The Elric Books, Narnia, most of my lunch breaks I'm reading. Some lunch breaks there's Science Club and science is my favourite cos blackholes and space – I've got a chemistry set, I keep it in the shed and I've called the shed The Lab cos I keep it in there and it's a proper one the lodger gave it to me...

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. What an awful thing to happen. And for you to see. I'm so very sorry.

BOY. I didn't really know him. But you can never really know how anyone else actually feels, can you? No matter what they say.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Is that right?

BOY. …

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK Poor fella. So frightened of nothing. All that money his friends gave him to invest. Course he's promised himself he just likes the feel of it in his pocket. But he's putting on his best suit and it's like a loaded gun all that money in his pocket. Tells himself, "Well it'd be a shame not to be seen about town in all this." Next he's borrowing your Dad's car without telling him and he's down the esplanade, all those twinkling lights. "Well, it'd be a shame not to have a flutter". "I'll just dip into their money to win mine back." "Well, no one can keep losing this long." "Well, the law of averages says…" "Nothing for it but…" And then darkness.

LETTIE. That's not what he wrote though. What he wrote was "To my friends, am so sorry."

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Same thing.

BOY. They haven't actually found a note yet.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Be here all day at this rate, Lettie be a love and nudge 'em toward his top left pocket.

LETTIE. Done.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Best keep an eye out this next little while. Your lodger, doing what he did on The Edges of this farm, he's likely gone and woken something up. There's things what lurk out there, see.

BOY. Is this some kind of a game?

GINNIE. Yes.

LETTIE. No.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Sort of.

BOY. …

LETTIE. Right. I'm gonna show him.

GINNIE. That wise, is it?

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. Only one way to find out.

(The Hempstock's Farm begins to dissolve as **LETTIE** *leads* **BOY** *away from his bowl of porridge…)*

LETTIE. Come on. We crossed this to get here when we left the old country.

GINNIE. You're too young to remember right, we didn't just leave, the old country sank.

OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK. You're both wet behind the ears. The old country sank. But I remember the *really* old country, and the really old country blew up.

(…and brings him to the duck pond of the prologue.)

BOY. What are you showing me?

LETTIE. This. My ocean!

(Beat.)

What?

BOY. Well, it's not an ocean, is it?

LETTIE. It is, it's my ocean.

BOY. It's a duck pond.

LETTIE. No, *that*… is a rip in forever. In there *everything* is possible. It's where possibilities begin! It's time and space folded in on itself 'til it's fluid, you can be anywhere at any time and everywhere at every time and that's just the beginning cos –

BOY. Is that a dead fish?

*(**LETTIE** looks and sees that **BOY** is right, there is indeed a dead fish.)*

LETTIE. *(Retrieving the fish.)* Oh, no.

BOY. What are you doing? Are you allowed to –?

*(**LETTIE** retrieves a knife, flicks it open and expertly begins to gut the fish.)*

Woah! You're… you're actually quite good at… That's a lot of blood for a small…

*(From within the fish, **LETTIE** scoops out a coin with the end of her knife.)*

Is that a fifty-pee coin? Why is there a fifty-pence coin in the fish? It couldn't have eaten it, could it –

*(Balancing the coin on the knife, **LETTIE** holds it out towards **BOY**.)*

LETTIE. Maybe something forced her to.

BOY. Forced the fish to… No. What?

LETTIE. See for yourself.

*(**BOY** reaches for the coin but hesitates.)*

BOY. If this is a game, you have to tell me the rules. It's not fair otherwise.

LETTIE. Fun though.

*(**BOY** decides against taking the coin.)*

Your Dad's on his way.

BOY. How do you know?

*(**DAD** arrives and barely notices **LETTIE** and her blood-covered hands.)*

LETTIE. Cos he's just over there.

DAD. Come on, mate. Home time.

LETTIE. Want to meet up tomorrow? Keep… playing?

*(***BOY** *takes the coin from* **LETTIE***'s knife and everything changes as he jogs to catch up with* **DAD.***)*

BOY. Dad?

DAD. Yeah?

(They walk together along the lane towards **BOY***'s home.)*

BOY. Can fish eat coins?

DAD. Hey?

BOY. Could a fish eat a fifty-pence?

DAD. Depends on the fish.

BOY. Could a little pond fish swallow a fifty-pee if you forced it to?

DAD. Why would anyone force –?

BOY. Yeah, and why would someone say a duck pond's really an ocean or do a trick to make it like a fish choked on a coin – cos really it's lying, isn't it? Like the lodger saying he was fine?

DAD. Right, / what did I say about that?

BOY. / He killed himself because of money, didn't he?

DAD. Were you spying?

BOY. Cos he'd lost money – Why would anyone do that? It's stupid.

DAD. It's not stupid! It's the world, life isn't like it is in your books. In the real world money's important, it changes everything. Depending on your job, debt, the

things you want for – for – Cos sometimes it can seem so important that nothing else –

BOY. It's not important to us though, is it?

DAD. What isn't?

BOY. Money. It's not that important to us. Is it, Dad?

(Beat.)

DAD. Look, I need you to not mention any of this to your sister.

BOY. What?

DAD. Yeah, I need you to be a bit of a grown-up about all of this. Not a word.

*(***SIS** *runs in and we are in her bedroom at* **BOY***'s house.)*

SIS. What? When? His stuff's still here and he didn't say goodbye / or anything –

DAD. / Yeah, it was sudden but he – he's moved out. He's gone. Isn't he mate?

BOY. ...yeah.

*(***BOY** *takes his boxing gloves off from around his neck and heads for his beloved books.)*

Why do you keep moving my books?

SIS. Why do you keep *not leaving* my room!? The lodger's gone, you can get back in your old room now, go on, move it, pal. Out, bye!

DAD. No, nothing's changing, just gonna make some calls and swap a lodger for a lodger as soon as. So take your hairbrush and let your brother read, yes? Quietly, OK? And sleeping.

*(***DAD** *passes* **SIS** *a hairbrush, she brushes her hair and counts.* **DAD** *leaves but stops in the doorway.)*

SIS. One, two, three…

DAD. Door open or closed?

BOY. / Open, thank you!

SIS. / Closed cos he's too old to be afraid of the dark –

BOY. I am not afraid of the dark!

DAD. Alright! Alright. We're all on the same team, aren't we? Us three. Now, I've got calls to make and I don't want to keep you up. And Happy Birthday. Be a teenager next. Night.

*(***DAD** *shuts the door.)*

SIS. Closed! I win.

*(***BOY** *opens up a book and begins to read.)*

He's being weird, isn't he? Why's he being weird? Why are you both being so –?

BOY. He said to let me read.

*(***BOY** *resumes reading…)*

*(… **BOY**'s reading transports him…)*

(…but then **BOY** *begins to cough, and cough, until he coughs up a fifty-pence coin.)*

DAD. Morning mate, sleep ok? Haven't seen my tie, have you?

SIS. *(Flicking through a cinema programme.)* That new film's on at the cinema, the crystal one, the one with the puppets, you said you'd take us –

DAD. Yeah, yeah, I remember.

SIS. You said we could all go one Saturday.

DAD. Course, yeah. Not tonight but soon.

BOY. When?

DAD. I don't know, soon. *(Finding his tie on the table.)* Why didn't anyone say?

BOY. She's asking when though?

SIS. Why do we still get letters for Mum? She died nearly a year ago, they should know by now –

*(***DAD** *takes the letter.)*

DAD. Toast good, yeah? Toast for everyone?

SIS. You always burn it.

DAD. Oh, and I haven't forgotten about your piano lessons. I'll find someone.

*(***DAD** *gives an impressed sound / face to the mirror /* **BOY.***)*

(Pointing and clicking at his reflection.) "Looking good."

BOY. Why are you getting dressed for work?

DAD. I am dressed for work because the weekend is our busiest time, my friend. So your sister's going to Kelly's /

SIS. / Again? /

DAD. / and you're coming with me!

BOY. To your work?

DAD. Well, I can't leave you on your own, can I?

SIS. Yes!! Letter. For. Me. *(Opens it.)*

BOY. I don't want to follow you around other people's houses all day.

SIS. *(Reading.)* What's prem-aye-um –?

DAD. Premium. Stay in the office then, Karen's in, you can –

SIS. RICH! I am RICH! Look, look!

DAD. *(Reading.)* Wow!

SIS. *(To* **BOY.***)* Premium bonds on your FACE!

BOY. It's "in", "in your face".

DAD. *(Hugging and kissing* **SIS.***)* Congratulations! / Come here, that's brilliant!

BOY. / Dad, toast.

SIS. Alton Towers! Let's go to Alton Towers, right now!

BOY. Toast's burning!

DAD. *(Rescuing toast.)* LOVELY! Bit of charcoal, good for you. Twenty-five pounds, that's great!

SIS. Twenty-five pounds! Count 'em. *(A finger for each word.)* Twenty. Five. Pounds.

BOY. So? I found fifty-pee in a dead fish yesterday.

SIS. Ohmygod, you're so weird.

BOY. And I coughed up another fifty-pee in my sleep, what'll happen when I make myself puke –?

DAD. / Alright, enough!

SIS. / No wonder everyone at school calls you "weirdo", / you weirdo book twat!

BOY. / Shut up, you little –

*(***SIS** *kicks* **BOY.***)*

DAD. Oi! Bedroom!

SIS. He's the one being a dick –

DAD. NOW! We don't hit each other in this family.

*(***SIS** *leaves.)*

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