A Pretty Shitty Love

by Katherine Chandler

Created from an original idea by
Francesca Goodridge and
Katherine Chandler

SAMUEL FRENCH

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A PRETTY SHITTY LOVE was first produced at Theatr Clwyd on Friday 8th July 2022. The production was directed by Francesca Goodridge and assistant direction by Amy Roberts, design by Lulu Tam, lighting design by Jess Bernberg, video design by Libby Ward, movement direction by Yandass Ndlovu. The composer and sound design was by Alexandra Faye Braithwaite. Casting direction by Polly Jerrold, the technical manager was Geoff Farmer with senior technician for lighting Chris Skinner, senior technician for stage Nic Samuel and senior technician for sound & AV Matthew Williams, WHAM Consultation by Lindy Davies. Wardrobe management by Debbie Knight, workshop management by Steve Eccleson, the workshop deputy was Rob Wilson, scenic artist by Katy Salt. The Company Stage Manager was Harriet Stewart, and deputy stage management by Natasha Guzel. The Producer was Ric Watts and Production Manager Jim Davis. The Head of Production was Hannah Lobb. The cast was as follows:

HAYLEY. . . . . .Danielle Bird
CARL . . . . . Daniel Hawksford

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the teams at Theatr Clwyd.

Thank you to all the funders and supporters of Theatr Clwyd.

The Carne Trust has been instrumental in creating the Theatr Clwyd Carne Traineeship for Directors in Wales. Francesca Goodridge, director of *A Pretty Shitty Love*, was one of the first two participants of the scheme.

Thank you to Shan Cornelius Gwilliam, Wendy Goodridge, Marillier & Hester Evans, Crayg Ward, Georgia Henshaw, Kristian Phillips, Gwawr Loader and Scott Arthur.

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CHARACTERS

HAYLEY
CARL

Pre recorded characters:
PRISON OFFICER
PRISON VOICEMAIL
CARL VOICEMAIL
HAYLEY VOICEMAIL
STACEY
MAM

SETTING

Swansea, South Wales

TIME

2016

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Although this story is inspired by a true-life story, the play is a work of fiction.

Francesca Goodridge (director) and myself spent time with Stacey Gwilliam and committed to a thorough research and development process before taking on Stacey's story.

We are deeply saddened that Stacey is no longer with us to have continued the journey to production. During the process we hold Stacey and her family in our thoughts.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play organically separates into sections. Buried, monologues, letters, strikes and buried.

We wanted to work collaboratively with our creative team in the 'Buried' sections to achieve a sensory experience. We didn't want these sections to be dialogue heavy. Stacey's actual words and how she described being buried are used throughout these sections.

I felt the monologues section were the most in control the play should be. Things are okay for both characters at this point, life is okay. We wanted this to be an easy watch and enjoyable.

Everything shifts in the letters section. Either character can speak the words, which can be prerecorded or live and all is to play for theatrically. But we should feel a definite shift in the tone from beginning to end of this section.

The strikes are chaotic and creative. In contrast to the control of the first monologues. We never felt the violence/actions had to be performed and found creative ways to represent it.

Movement, sound, lighting, video and design all play significant roles in this production.

Dedicated to the memory of Stacey Gwilliam

ONE

(Buried)

Darkness.

For a while.

For a while there is nothing but dark.

Slowly we hear something.

Breathing? Breeze? Sea?

We might catch a voice.

A sound.

A laugh.

A bird.

We might catch the light.

There might be blue.

Just a flash.

There is green.

There is brown.

A flash of blue.

Laughter.

There is laughter.

Sounds.

There are sounds, louder now.

Birdsong.

There are birds, definitely birds.

Footsteps.

There are footsteps, moving away.

Don't go.

Grabs.

Reaches.

Grabs.

Breathe.

Breathe.

Breathe.

A huge intake of breath. Louder than a gasp. Bigger than a gulp. A breath for life.

She breathes.

In.

Out.

Breathes.

Takes her time.

And we find we're no longer in the dark.

She breathes.

In.

Out.

Breathes.

She finds her place.

She looks at us.

Maybe smiles at us a bit.

HAYLEY. It's difficult to know where to start.

(She looks at us.)

(Takes us in.)

I know

(Looks at someone in the audience.)

Let's go back.

(Someone else.)

Lets go back to the day my Dad took me to the lake.

(Takes a breath.)

Lets do that.

(Maybe there's an echo of sound from before – Breathing? Breeze? Sea?)

It was summer
There was heat.
And there was a lake in the middle of Wales
We lived in Swansea
We didn't have a car
And the bus only took you a bit of the way.
So we walked.
And we walked.
Me and my Dad walked into nowhere

Looking for a lake
Through fields and woods
And I kept walking with him even though I wanted to go home.
I didn't want to disappoint him
He was already disappointed enough.
I'm nine and I don't know where we are.
All the time we're walking he's telling me to have faith
I tell him I have faith
Have faith in me, he says with a mouth that slurs
I have faith in you, I say
I say please. I remember saying please. It was important he knew.
Please, I have faith.

(A breeze.)

And then we're lost

(Wind through trees.)

And it's getting dark and we're still in the thick of nowhere

So we sit by a tree
And he says he's a fool because he wanted me to see the lake as a life lesson and now the only life lesson to learn is not to have faith in a stupid man
Especially a stupid man who you love
That's the worst kind of faith
And I'm the worst kind of girl if that's the kind of girl I am
And I say well at least I've learnt something

At nine I don't mean it to be funny

But he laughs
And then we both laugh and laugh, and we're slapping our legs, bent double with the laughter

Laughing so loud that

It hurts.
And then he tells me that the lake has a legend.
A lady who appears one day in the middle of the lake

And she walks out of the lake and marries a farmer and the farmer is warned to treat the lady right. Not to strike her. That if he strikes her three times she will return to the lake leaving him with nothing
But the farmer does indeed strike her three times and she does indeed return to the lake, leaving the farmer with nothing
Strike one, Strike two, Strike three then you're out
That's the legend my Dad says and now he's crying
that's the lesson you need to know
I got it – that's my lesson, I got it Dad, I say
Because every now and then bad things happen.

Stupid men do bad things

And sometimes a lady walks back into the lake

And my Dad looks sadder than I've ever seen anyone look ever

And he cries

And I ask him why he's crying

And he waits a while

Your path is worn, he says, *I can see it in you*

And then we stand up and my Dad wipes himself down and he says, *shall we carry on?*
And I want to say no but I say yes.

Yes, I want to find the lake
I still have faith. I still have faith Dad.
I say it even though I don't
And he looks at me and he says

"Fool"

"Hayley, you're nothing but a fool"

And we go home then

And we don't find the lake.

After my Dad left us I thought about his lesson.
It came to me over the years
At first I didn't know what it meant
But then
I got to thinking it was his way of saying
Give me a chance
Everyone deserves a second chance

(Maybe she silently counts three with her fingers [strike one, strike two, strike three].)

(Takes it in.)

(She looks at us.)

(Smiles.)

Okay
You got all that.
Good

(Breathes deep and blows long.)

Now let me tell you about Carl.

TWO

HAYLEY. I know who he is as soon as he walks in
He leans on the counter, digging into his pocket for change
I know Carl from before.
We all knew Carl
We all fancied him
Twenty years ago
I was in school with his brother
Carl counts his change in the palm of his hand
Al's café.
The place is a shithole.
You want a double shift today?
Al throws a tea towel over his shoulder.
"I can't," I say "prior commitments"
Al moans on about pride in work.
In his day, people were grateful for a bit of work.
Nowadays an honest days work is beneath them.
Rather take photo's of themselves and put them on the Wonderweb.
"The internet," I say.
For money, he keeps on, *only mens.*
"Fans," I say "OnlyFans."
He sprays a table and runs a grey cloth over it.
I roll my eyes after him
Carl smiles

CARL. I know you, don't I?

HAYLEY. "You do," I say and I ring up his order in the till
Fried bread or toast?
Sugar in the tea?

CARL. I'm sweet enough,

HAYLEY. He says
And I giggle

Like I'm still at school
Carl Pearce
Jeans so tight I can tell you what he's got in his pockets.
I swear he walks with a theme tune.

CARL. Hayley?

HAYLEY. He's trying to place me

CARL. Was you in school with our Paul?

HAYLEY. I was, yeah
I'd take his brother Paul home to ours.
I always took the stray's home.

CARL. Your mam was good to him

HAYLEY. I hand him his change.
His fingers brush my hand.
I look up

Lock eyes with him

He bites his bottom lip

I felt it in my gut as soon as I seen him
You want red sauce or brown?

CARL. Brown. No sorry, red.

HAYLEY. I felt it
Pulsing across Al's cafe through the greasy air between us

CARL. Both. I want it all…

HAYLEY. I wanted him
Both it is, I say, be five minutes

He sits
With his back to the steaming window
Facing me
Watching me

When I was a girl I wanted to fall in love more than

anything else

I thought that was the goal

Find my prince

Cos that's what you're told

In the fairytales

Life's about love

Simple happy love

And I always wanted that

I know I sound like a twat but it's true

Never found it though

Never looked in the right place

And I looked

In the one night stands and dirty fumbles

In the pissed and the desperate

Trusting those who shouldn't be trusted

Carl stands
Plate cleared
Tummy rubbed
And he says

CARL. See you Hayley John, nice one

HAYLEY. And I say
See me?
And he says,

CARL. You what?

HAYLEY. And I think okay, shit or bust
So I say, will you see me specifically or was you talking more general?
And he looks a bit confused so I push it and I say

What time?
And he says,

CARL. You what?

HAYLEY. And I say, what time was you wanting to see me?
And he says,

CARL. Oh, I didn't mean – that sounds like a date or something?

HAYLEY. And I say, okay it's a date.
And he says,

CARL. You what?

HAYLEY. And I say, what you doing tonight?
And he stands there
And I say, I'll see you at eight – in the Admiral
And I'm trying to think of something cool to follow it with but nothing comes so the date hangs around in the air.
And then he leaves
But he looks back in through the window at me as he walks away.

CARL. Paul's a junkie. My brother. The worst kind of junkie.
The type you step over, grey and shivering in the doorways of Boots.
The type who bring so much crap to your door you end up
wishing they was dead to save you the shit of it all.
That kind.
I'm very clear about the rules of this flat.
From day one I say to him that if he's going to live here, if I'm going to give him that chance – again – then he has to abide by my rules.
At first he does. Cos he knows I got a short fuse.
At first he's grateful.