



Preview Script

For The Love Of Sara

a one act play

by

Tony Layton

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Published by :

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Publication History:

February 2005 : First Edition

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Preview Script (based on ISBN 1 904458 41 6)

FOR THE LOVE OF SARA

Ben is sitting on the chair stage left of table. He is still, upright and tense. He is dressed in a white suit, white shirt and white tie. Carl enters stage right, dressed in a black suit, white shirt and grey tie. He takes a moment to observe Ben.

Carl And how are we today? *(Pause)*. What a day. Don't think this wind is ever going to stop. It goes right through you. It's like the Arctic out there. *(Pause)*. And on top of that we've got this blasted, constant rain. One week of sunshine and they'll all be yelling "drought", mark my words. Then, I suppose, we do need the rain. Couldn't live in a desert, could you? I like to see the green. The seasons. However, wouldn't say no to a blue sky occasionally, eh? Yes, well...here we are. *(He takes out a notebook and pencil from his jacket pocket, sits and writes)*. "Tuesday, the 6th of January. Time, 12:15. Benjamin Weiss. Session ... the seventh". There! How was Christmas? *(Pause)*. Ben?

Ben What?

Carl How did you get on ... over Christmas? *(Pause)*. I'm always glad to see the back of it, myself. *(Pause)*. So, how are you feeling? *(Pause. He stands and moves behind Ben, placing his hands on his shoulders)*. Let's try to relax. Take a deep breath. Now let it out slowly. Another ...

Crossfade to screen. The midwife is leaning over Jenny who is in the delivery position, screaming loudly

Midwife Come on, Jenny. Another deep breath. Call the Paed! Tell her we've got a delay in the second stage. It's okay, Jenny. You're nearly there. Come on! You've got to help me now. Okay? Push! Push!

A long scream from Jenny fades, as we crossfade to stage right.

Carl Come on, Ben. You're too tense. Breathe in deeply. And out slowly. That's it. One more. Good! Drop your head onto your chest ... and roll it around slowly ... slowly ... and reverse. Control it. That's it. Don't jerk. Keep it smooth. And stop! Now close your eyes. Breathe in deeply ... and as you breathe out I want you to let all the tension float away. Once again. Breathe in. Now feel the tension just ebbing away ... drifting away. Now you're relaxed. You feel comfortable. You're safe. I want you to go on a short journey. Keep your eyes closed. That's it. *(He starts a tape player which plays soothing music. This fades when switching to the screen and resumes when the action returns to stage right)*. You're drifting in a small boat. It's warm. It's a warm summer's day. You're lying in the boat. It's a beautiful river. The water's smooth ... like glass. Willows form a canopy over you. Through their branches you can see the sun, bright and dappled. The air is fresh and warming. You feel happy and safe. This is a good feeling. You've never been happier. All is well with the world. All is well.

Crossfade to the screen, where we see the shadow of the midwife holding a baby.

Midwife Here she is Mr Weiss. Your baby daughter. All is well. A lovely little girl. You should be very happy.

The shadow of Ben (2) appears.

Ben (2) Everything all right?

Midwife They're both fine. We did have to use forceps, and there was a bit of a problem with breathing at first, but the baby pinked up nicely eventually. Your wife's had a few stitches but she's all right.

Ben (2) Can I hold her? *(The baby is handed over gently)*. I love that smell. That new baby smell.

Midwife She's gorgeous. Got a name yet?

Ben (2) We thought 'Sara'.

Midwife Lovely! Sara. Lovely!

Crossfade back to stage right.

Carl And in the distance you see an island. You can smell the perfume from the exotic plants that grow there. They're everywhere. Breathe in. Your lungs fill with the perfume. You're drawing closer.

Crossfade to the screen. Ben (2) and Jenny are looking into a pram.

Jenny And here's a beautiful flower for you, Sara. A buttercup. Let's see if you like butter. There.

Ben (2) Why doesn't she smile? Or cry? All she does is sleep.

Jenny Give her time. You're all right aren't you my beauty. You're perfect. My little doll.
Ben (2) She is a doll. My beautiful doll.
Jenny We wouldn't swap you for the world, would we? Not for the world.
Ben (2) Sara! Come on, Sara! Smile for daddy. Open your eyes. Come on!
Jenny She's tired. All that milk. Doesn't she look sweet.
Ben (2) All I want is one smile. One smile would do.

Crossfade to stage right.

Ben One smile. That's all. One smile.
Carl Smile?
Ben One ... smile ...
Carl Try not to talk. Just listen. I want you to keep relaxed. Totally relaxed. That's it. Now, you reach the island. It's magnificent. It's a paradise. It's a perfect setting. You've always wanted to be in a place like this. It's what you've always dreamed of.

Crossfade to the screen where Jenny is standing with young Sara.

Jenny And look at the garden, Sara. And look at the sand. Isn't that good. You can play for hours in there. It's perfect. You're going to be very happy here, Sara. I've got a good feeling about this place. It's miles better than everywhere else.

Enter the Nurse.

Nurse So? Any decision?
Jenny I think we've decided. Haven't we Sara.
Nurse How old is she?
Jenny Six ... nearly seven.
Nurse And what do you think, Sara? Would you like to come here and play with the other children?
Jenny My husband did explain?
Nurse I like to treat them all as normally as possible. We have a few who don't talk, but they all have their own little idiosyncratic ways of communicating. Sometimes it's a shrug of the shoulders or the movement of an eyelid. There's always something.

Crossfade to stage right.

Carl Now you're lying down in soft, long grass. Bees and insects buzz and drone on the warm breeze. Birds drift lazily, rising and falling slowly on the thermals. Rising, floating, falling.... rising, floating, falling....

Crossfade to the screen.

Ben (2) Run to me, Sara! Come on! Run! Come on! Get up! Don't worry about the dirt. It'll brush off. Run! Run! Come on. You can do it. You can do it.

Enter the Nurse.

Nurse We've all got to have patience, Mr Weiss. She'll do it in her own time.
Ben (2) Why does she keep falling?
Nurse Her co-ordination is much better than it was. We must always look on the bright side.
Ben (2) But why does she keep falling?
Nurse The brain is very complex, Mr Weiss.
Ben (2) (*Sternly*) I know the brain is very complex. I do know that. I know that her co-ordination is better. But she is still falling over. She's eight years old and she's still falling over.
Nurse I'd rather you didn't shout, Mr Weiss. It upsets the other patients. You're very fortunate if you must know. Sara is a very attractive child. She's a little angel. A little angel.

Crossfade to stage right.

Carl Now you're moving into the centre of the island. Shafts of bright, golden light filter through the trees. There's a glade. There it stands in the golden light. You move into it. There is someone you want to be with. You're pleased to see this person. You love this person. There's a golden halo around this person's head.

Crossfade to the screen.

Doctor We've done the scan and the good news is that there doesn't appear to be anything nasty lurking in the undergrowth ... no tumours or anything like that.

Jenny So, is there anything you can do, Doctor?

Doctor I wish I could do something. We've traced the problem back to the time of birth when we understand that there was a degree of asphyxia, a delay during the second stage I believe.

Jenny That was only for a minute or two.

Doctor Three minutes, according to the paediatricians report. I'm sorry. At least we now know there is some hearing there and her vision is excellent. If it's any comfort I have known other cases like Sara's where very keen intelligence has developed. Very keen.

Jenny Will she ever speak.

Doctor I've known cases like this when speech suddenly occurs. Miracles do happen. We don't know how, but they do. We live in hope. How old is she now?

Jenny Twelve.

Doctor Yes. Well. We, er ... live in hope.

Crossfade to stage left.

Carl And now we're leaving the island. We're back in the boat and you're floating away. But you'll be back. Whenever you want to return it's waiting for you. Anytime. *(He turns off the music)*. And so ... open your eyes. How do you feel now?

Ben Cold.

Carl pours a glass of water and hands it to Ben.

Carl I think you're making excellent progress.

Ben Do you.

Carl Yes I do. The first time I saw you ... well, do you remember what you were like?

Ben I can't remember.

Carl Hardly knew your own name. You couldn't do what you're doing now. You couldn't hold a glass, and you couldn't relax. I reckon that's progress. That's real progress.

Crossfade to the screen.

Ben (2) You call that progress?

Nurse I do. I call that real progress.

Ben (2) I don't. I don't call that progress. I can't see any improvement. None whatsoever.

Nurse I think you'll have to accept my professional judgement, Mr Weiss.

Ben (2) I don't think you're doing anything for her. In fact, I think she's going backwards. We're wasting our time here.

Nurse When your daughter came here, Mr Weiss, she couldn't even eat her food properly. She was untrained socially. We put all that right. Now she can at least eat her food like a civilised human being.

Ben (2) We're taking her away. I want her home.

Nurse Have you consulted Mrs Weiss about this?

Ben (2) I don't need to consult her, thank you. This is my affair. This is my daughter.

Nurse If I were you I would talk to her first.

Ben (2) Would you? Pack her bags! She's coming home with me, now. Now!

Crossfade to stage right.

Ben Now! Waste of time.

Carl What?

Ben Nothing.

Carl Waste of time?

Ben What?

Carl Is that what you think? Is this a waste of time?

Ben I don't know what to think.

Carl What makes you feel happy, Ben? *(Pause)*. There must be something.

Crossfade to the screen.

Jenny What about my career? What about that? I love Sara. You know that. But I'm not staying home to look after her. I couldn't do it. I'd go round the bend. I couldn't cope. I'd go mental in no time. I can't function without stimulation. Can you imagine me mooching around the house all day long. You wouldn't like it. I'd be moody ... bad tempered. I'd make your life hell. I would. I would Ben. Sorry! I'm sorry! I think I'm entitled to some happiness, don't you? And don't look at me like that. I've got enough guilt. I don't need any more. Don't try to begrudge me any happiness that I've got. Please!

Crossfade to stage right.

Ben Sorry!

Carl It's okay. Take your time. Is there one day that sticks out? A birthday? An anniversary? A day on the beach? You know the sort of thing. A special day. A happy day.

Ben A happy day.

Crossfade to the screen. The sound of the sea and seagulls, and children playing on the beach is heard.

Ben (2) Come on Sara! Come on! Stick those shells on top! On top! That's it! Great! Well done! Look at it. It's fantabulous! It's super-flipping sonic! It's wunderbar! Magnifico! *(Jenny appears. She stands quietly watching)*. Behold everyone! The great castle of Twit! Beware the horny, one eyed gits of Trog. You shall not pass. This is our land. Strengthen the ramparts. Boil the oil. Stand by the slings. Archers at the ready. Let fly the royal standard of Twit. Yes, great Twits. This is your hour of glory. Today we write a page in history. In a thousand years people will say this was our finest hour. Help! The sea encroaches our defences. Push it back, Sara! Push it back! Build up the walls! Oh, no! *(He laughs. Sara appears, bouncing up and down)*. You're not supposed to dance all over it. Look at it. You're a spy. That's what you are. You're one of those horny, one-eyed gits. That's who you are. Help! We surrender! We're overwhelmed. Have mercy on us. *(Pause)*. Candyfloss anyone? Or how about a raspberry ripple with lots of red syrup? *(Sara stops bouncing)*. Come on. I'll race you.

Sara and Ben race off. Jenny is left alone. She sighs and drops her head. Crossfade to stage right.

Ben Seaweed and candyfloss.

Carl Yes. Go on.

Ben She liked the sea.

Carl Who did? Who liked the sea? Who Ben?

Ben Sara. The sea and the wet sand. She made patterns with her feet. I gave her candyfloss ... and she got hold of some seaweed and draped it around the candyfloss. I laughed and she threw the candyfloss into the sea.

Carl How did you feel?

Ben I wanted to share ... I wanted to share her joy. She ... she didn't understand. She thought I was laughing at her. When I looked concerned, when she threw the floss into the sea, she thought I was angry and she ran back to her mother. I was frustrated ... I ...

Carl Frustrated? Why?

Ben I was the one who cared. I was the one who loved her, who really loved her ... and she was running away from me.

Carl And that was frustrating.

Ben Yes.

Carl You say you're the one who loved her, but didn't your wife love her equally?

Ben No! I don't think she did.

Carl Are you sure about that?

Ben Yes.

Carl Sometimes a parent can't demonstrate their love, but there is usually a bond, an instinctive bond of real love that underpins everything.

Ben Is that what you think?

Carl Even in difficult relationships that special bond is normally there.

Ben Have you ever encountered evil in a person.

Carl Evil? Well, I've certainly seen much hate in people. I've witnessed cruel and callous acts. But in every single case when I've questioned them, they will never admit to being evil. They always have reasons for their actions. They see evil in others, but never in themselves.

Ben So a mother who hates her child is not evil?

Carl Are you saying Jenny hated Sara?

Ben Sara got in her way. It annoyed her.

Carl Let's go back to Jenny. (*Consults his notes*). You met at university. She studied law. Successfully established herself in a firm of solicitors and eventually became a partner. How did you feel about that?

Ben At first, I was pleased for her. She'd worked hard enough.

Carl She was very successful.

Ben Yes.

Carl Single-minded.

Ben Yes.

Carl Success didn't come easily for you though.

Ben The office was re-structuring.

Carl Promotion was difficult.

Ben They wanted me to move, but ...

Carl You didn't want to.

Ben I didn't want to uproot the family. I was thinking of Sara. She came first. She always came first.

Crossfade to screen.

Jenny That's your decision, Ben. Not mine.

Ben (2) Promotion is not the 'be all and end all'. There's more to life.

Jenny Do what you've got to do. It's your life. If you want to sacrifice your career, that's your decision. At least one of us has got a decent job, thankfully.

Ben (2) You're a bitch, d'you know that.

Jenny I've got a life. I want to live it. I am entitled to live a life I've worked bloody hard for it.

Ben (2) Don't you think I want something better than this.

Jenny You've got no spunk anymore, Ben. It's like being married to a mental cripple. We don't do anything, we don't go anywhere. Wake up! Life is passing us by.

Ben (2) Tell you what we'll do.. We'll get rid of Sara. That would solve everything. We could go out every night. We could have a ball. Big holidays, cruises, a bigger car. That's it. We'll get rid of her.

Jenny I can do without all this. I've done my fair share as far as Sara's concerned and don't you forget it.

Ben (2) I've watched you, Jenny. I've seen your share. It's worth shit.

Jenny Don't start all this.

Ben (2) You don't hold her ... you don't kiss her. And I watch your face. She sees that face. She sees that look. There's no love in your eyes ... only hate.

Jenny You can't read my mind. You don't know how I feel.

Ben (2) I can see you don't love her.

Jenny I do love her. I do ... love her.

Ben (2) You love your career.

Jenny Thank you! The more I see of you and this house, the more depressed I get. These walls, these rooms they close in on me. They suffocate me. The place is full of vile memories. Every room, every inch of space reminds me of some pain, some anguish. And you ... you are part of it. You're like a menacing presence. You fit in. You're part of it all. You do nothing for me. I get nothing from you, only coldness. Bitter coldness. No help. No understanding. No support. I need to be with people who are alive, not this.

Ben (2) Then get out.

Jenny I might just do that.

Ben (2) Good! Do it! Do it!

Crossfade to stage right.

Carl Let's look at June the 10th, last year. You went into the office and handed in your notice. Why did you do that?

Ben We had arguments ... every day.

Carl Who did?

Ben Jenny and me.

Carl What about?

Ben I didn't want Sara in one of those places again. I read the papers. There was all this child abuse going on. I couldn't risk it. Someone had to look after her.

Carl So you sacrificed your job.

Ben It was no sacrifice. It's what I wanted to do.

Carl Later that day you went back home and found they'd gone. Not even a note. That must have hurt. *(Pause)*. Are you feeling all right? Can we go on? *(Ben nods)*. So, you went back ... the house was empty ... Sara and Jenny gone. What was the first thing you did? Can you remember?

Ben I was angry.

Carl Yes. Naturally. You'd sacrificed everything for Sara and now she was gone.

Ben I wasn't thinking. It was all ... I was confused.

Carl What did you do? *(Pause)*. Come on, Ben. You can remember. We found an axe. You picked up an axe, didn't you.

Ben I was in the garden. It was lying there. I'd been chopping logs the day before.

Carl Go on.

Ben It was in my hand. It was unreal. I ran into the house and ...

Carl What did you do?

Ben I had to hit something. I can't remember.

Carl The report said you practically destroyed every stick of furniture in the lounge and dining room.

Ben I don't remember.

Carl This is what people find difficult to understand, Ben. One day you're a rational, respectable professional man, then suddenly ... snap!

Ben I don't want this.

Carl What don't you want?

Ben This. Bringing it back.

Carl This is the part we don't like isn't it. We've got to go on. We can't leave it, Ben. We need the truth.

Ben TRUTH? WHAT TRUTH? YOUR TRUTH? MY TRUTH? HER TRUTH? WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

Carl Try to relax.

Ben I am relaxed.

Carl Why are you shouting?

Ben I want to leave.

Carl You know you can't do that.

Ben I need air. I need fresh air. I'm suffocating in here. It's hot. There's no air. I need space. Space.

Carl Let's pause. Take a few deep breaths. Come on!

Ben More space!

Carl Close your eyes for a second. Think of that island, that special place.

Ben The island.

Carl Are you there?

Crossfade to the screen.

Jenny He's shut himself away. He's totally isolated. He might as well live on an island. He's totally unstable. I want total custody, your honour.

Judge On what grounds?

Jenny On the grounds that I've outlined, and the fact that my husband has a sudden and violent temper and might endanger my daughter.

Judge Might? Is there any evidence of violence towards your daughter? Is there a past history of violence?

Jenny No your honour.

Judge I can hardly grant sole custody on what appears to be an irrational fear of what might happen.
Jenny But, your honour, there is medical evidence to suggest that my husband has become more unstable. It's on record that he virtually destroyed the family home with an axe. I do not call that reasonable and rational behaviour.
Judge I understand that Mr Weiss was to some extent provoked into committing what was for him a very unnatural act of violence and that there has been no further violence of this kind. There has definitely never been any violence to you or your daughter. Am I correct?
Jenny Yes, your honour.
Judge It is, therefore, my judgement that custody of the child should be joint.
Jenny Yes, your honour.

Crossfade to stage right.

Carl You're trembling. What's the matter?
Ben Joint. He said joint. The Judge said joint custody.

Crossfade to screen.

Ben (2) The Judge said joint custody.
Jenny I know what the Judge said. I'm not denying you joint custody.
Ben (2) How can you sleep at night?
Jenny We're going to the other side of town. I don't trust you, Ben. I want a new life and I want to be able to sleep at night without you banging on the door every five minutes.
Ben (2) I want joint custody.
Jenny You can see her during the holidays.
Ben (2) I want joint custody.
Jenny Goodbye, Ben
Ben (2) *(Grabbing her arm)* Where is she?
Jenny Let go of my arm. Let's try to remain civilised.
Ben (2) Where is she? Please! Where is she?
Jenny She's safe.
Ben (2) Who's with her?
Jenny All you need to know is that she's safe and being ...
Ben (2) Who's with her?
Jenny She's with a trained nanny. An expert.
Ben (2) A child minder?
Jenny An expert ... at great expense to myself.
Ben (2) You leave her alone with a stranger every day?
Jenny She's where she's safe ... and what else could I do?
Ben (2) Leave her with me.
Jenny With you? Look at yourself. You've lost it, Ben. It's sad, but you've lost it. The house is a shambles. You're not the man I married. He had a bit of life in him. A bit of 'get up and go'. I don't know you any more, Ben. I don't recognise you.

Crossfade to stage right.

Carl Are you still on the island?
Ben Island?
Carl Are you still there?
Ben I'm afraid.
Carl What are you afraid of, Ben?
Ben Being alone. The loneliness. The isolation.
Carl But isn't there someone there with you? Someone you love?
Ben She's like a shadow. I try to move closer and she moves away. I want to hold her, I want to tell her that I love her. I want her to tell me that she loves me. Just once. That's all I want. A sign.
Carl It's Sara on this island, isn't it.
Ben Do you think I've lost it?
Carl What do you mean?

Ben Crackers! Loony! Round the sodding twist! Not all there! A sandwich short of a picnic! Stark, raving, mad!

Carl We all have our own madness. I don't know what a so-called normal person is. I've never met one.

Ben I don't feel normal.

Carl How do you feel?

Ben I feel out of myself. I feel as though ...

Carl Yes?

Ben It's like hanging on by my fingernails at the edge of a precipice. I'm afraid of falling. It's him. The stranger. He's inside me. I don't know who he is. I don't know where he's come from. I hate him. I loathe and detest him. He's angry. Vicious.

Carl Can't you tell this stranger to leave?

Ben He won't listen. He's too powerful.

Carl Does he tell you what to do?

Ben I do things ... I say things, I get confused. I don't want to do them.

Carl But you do them. How do you feel afterwards?

Ben I feel angry ... exhausted ... ashamed.

Carl On November the 8th, you went to see your wife. Remember?

Ben November the 8th? I'm not sure. Could have been.

Carl You went to her office and followed her home.

Ben She wouldn't give me her address.

Carl So, you followed her home. Then what happened?

Ben She got out of her car ... went to the door ... I was right behind her. She turned. She looked frightened.

Carl Why, Ben? Why was she frightened?

Ben I saw my reflection in the glass in the door. I wasn't sure who I was. It was more him than me.

... the remainder of this play has been deleted from this preview copy ...

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