

Absent Friends Audition Extracts

About the show:

Absent Friends is a dark comedy about the reunion of old friends. It is set during an afternoon tea party that has been arranged for Colin, who is grieving the loss of his fiancée. His friends are on edge with what to say to him to comfort him. The anticipation of Colin's arrival exposes the fractures in their relationships. The play, at heart, is about relationships and how problems in one's life, that have been bottled up, will always come to the surface...

Other important themes include the idea of "taboo", death, friendship, marriage/infidelity, motherhood, unfulfillment and coping mechanisms.

Director's vision:

I envision a complete modernisation of this classic play. I aim to make the problems in each of the characters' lives feel like characters themselves – like the elephants in the room that emotionally weigh them down. I want to explore the idea of "Britishness" and humour as a coping mechanism. The play will have intense, rising tension that inevitably erupts. The show will be bold with abrupt tonal shifts that keeps an audience fully engaged and dealing with the task of whether to laugh or cry (a dark comedy – the best genre!)

I am looking for a creative team and cast that are hardworking and detail-focused to bring this great script to life with me!

Characters:

- **Diana:** The hostess, hosting the party to cheer up Colin, but is deeply unhappy, approaching a life "turning point," and dealing with a failing marriage. She is convinced that her husband is having an affair with one of the guests, Evelyn.
(Think neurotic 'yoga mum')
- **Paul:** Diana's husband, a selfish, distracted man having an affair with Evelyn.
(Think cocky 'finance bro')
- **Evelyn:** John's wife, who is cold, disinterested in her own baby, and having an affair with Paul. She is a moody young mum tethered to a hopelessly incompetent husband, John.
(Think alternative 'Effy Stonem' wannabe)
- **John:** Evelyn's husband, who is anxious, stressed, and uncomfortable with the social gathering. A brilliant, comedic character! HATES the topic of death and awkward silences.
(Think a very British awkward chap; a buffoon)

- **Marge:** A cheerful yet oblivious woman married to an unseen, hypochondriac husband (Gordon) whom she treats like a child. Marge is an eccentric lady who acts like a mother to her permanently ailing partner.

(Similar to John. A gossipy, vivacious and loud lady who hates silences.)

- **Colin:** A recently bereaved man whose fiancée drowned; he is ironically the calmest and most functional person in the room. Colin serves as a catalyst and agent of chaos for the eruptive climax of the play.

(Think an annoyingly positive guy who has 'found himself' on his 'gap yah' travels)

DIANA EXTRACT

DIANA I'd seen it in the window of this shop when I walked to school. It was red with one of those little collars and then trimmed round the neck and the sleeves. I used to pass it every day. They'd put it on this window dummy. A little child dummy. It was a really pretty dummy. Not like some of them.

A proper face. It had very very blue eyes and sort of ash coloured hair, quite short and it was standing in the middle of this sort of false grass. I wanted that coat so much. And Barbara used to say, you'll never get Mother to buy you that.

But I did. And on my birthday, I put it on and I felt, oh, so happy you can't imagine. And then we were all going for a walk and we were just going out and I happened to catch sight of myself full length in the mirror in the hall. And I looked like nothing on earth in it. I looked terrible.

I wanted a red one especially. Because I had this burning ambition, you see, to join the Canadian Royal Mounted Police.

People used to say "You can't join the Mounted Police.

You're a little girl. Little girls don't join the Mounted Police.

Little girls do nice things like typing and knitting and nursing and having babies." So I married Paul instead. Because they refused to let me join the Mounted Police. I married him because he kept asking me. And because people kept saying that it would be a much nicer thing to do than. .. and so I did.

And I learnt my typing and I had my babies and I looked after them for as long as they'd let me and then suddenly I realised I'd been doing all the wrong things. They'd been wrong telling me to marry Paul and have babies, if they're not even going to let you keep them, and I should have joined the Mounted Police, that's what I should have done. I know I should have joined the Mounted Police. [Starting to sob] I want to join the Mounted Police. Please... [She starts to sob louder and louder till they become a series of short staccato screams]

MARGE extract

MARGE (into the phone) Hallo... Jumjums? It's Margie, darling. How are you feeling? ...Oh—oh. Well listen, Jumjums, can you manage to get across to the chest of drawers, sweetie? ...By the window, yes... You'll find them in the top drawer...That's right, darling... Can you manage that all

right on your own? ...Right (Pause. To DIANA) He wants the nose drops, he's all bunged up, poor love... (She stands listening)

Oh, darling-you must be careful, Jumjums... Yes, I know it shouldn't be there... Never mind, well rub it, rub it better. (Covering the phone, to the others) Banged his leg. (Into the phone) All right? I'll be here if you want me. You know the number. I'll be home soon...
Yes... Yes, I will. I'll phone you later. Bye-bye, Jumjums, bye-bye, darling... Bye. (Pause) Bye-bye. (Pause) Bye. (She rings off) Honestly, I don't know what I want children for, living with Gordon. I get through first-aid tins like loaves of bread. (She returns to the armchair)

PAUL and DIANA extract

PAUL Right. I'll leave you ladies to it, if you don't mind. Ta ta. Look after yourselves. I've got things to do upstairs.

DIANA Don't be too long, will you, dear?

PAUL How do you mean?

DIANA I mean, don't stay up there for too long.

PAUL No, I've just got a bit of work to do, that's all.

DIANA Well, tea will be in a minute. You'll be down for that.

PAUL No. You don't want me down here, I'll...

DIANA You must come down for tea. Colin's coming.

PAUL Colin who?

DIANA Colin. You know, Col...

PAUL Oh, that Colin. Is he?

DIANA Oh, don't be so stupid. You know he is. I told you.

PAUL Did you?

DIANA I arranged it a fortnight ago.

PAUL You never told me.

DIANA And I reminded you this morning.

PAUL You didn't tell me.

DIANA This morning, I told you.

PAUL Excuse me, you did not tell me he was coming this morning. You did not tell me anything this morning. I was out before you were up.

DIANA Well, then it must have been yesterday morning.

PAUL That's more likely. But you still didn't tell me.

DIANA I told you very distinctly.

PAUL No. I'm sorry I didn't forget. I never forget things. You're talking to the wrong man. I run a business where it's more than my life's worth to forget things. I've trained myself not to. I never forget.

DIANA Now, Paul. Colin is coming. He is your friend. You can't just go upstairs...

PAUL Excuse me, he is not a friend of mine. He was never a friend of mine...

DIANA How can you say that?

PAUL I just happened to know him, that's all. You'll just have to say to him when he comes that you're sorry, I had no idea he was coming, nobody told me and that I had a lot of work to do upstairs.

DIANA You cannot do that...

PAUL I'm sorry...

DIANA You've got no work to do.

PAUL That's it. No more. I'm not going on with it. I'm going upstairs. I don't want to hear any more about it. I have a lot of work to do. Excuse me please.

MARGE and EVELYN extract

Evelyn, could I have a word with you?

EVELYN What?

MARGE I want you to answer me something perfectly honestly. I want you to be absolutely straight with me. Will you do that, please?

EVELYN What?

MARGE It's been brought to my notice that you and Paul—have—well...

EVELYN What?

MARGE I think you know what I'm talking about.

EVELYN No.

MARGE That you and her husband have been —is this true? Yes or no?

EVELYN Is what true?

MARGE Will you put that magazine down a moment, please.

EVELYN (laying the magazine aside wearily) Well?

MARGE Is it true or isn't it? Yes or no?

EVELYN What?

MARGE Have you been—having—a love affair with Paul?

EVELYN No.

MARGE Truthfully?

EVELYN I said no.

MARGE Oh. Well. That's all right then.

Pause.

EVELYN We did it in the back of his car the other afternoon but I wouldn't call that a love affair.

MARGE You and Paul did?

EVELYN Yes.

MARGE How disgusting.

EVELYN It wasn't very nice.

MARGE And you have the nerve to come and sit in her house...

EVELYN She asked me. (Pause) She needn't worry. I'm not likely to do it again. He'd just been playing squash, he was horrible

MARGE Diana knows about this, you know.

EVELYN Then he must have told her. I didn't.

MARGE She's not a fool. She put two and two together. He didn't want you to come here at all this afternoon. That's a sure sign of a guilty conscience.

EVELYN Most probably because he doesn't like me very much.

MARGE He liked you enough to...

EVELYN Not after what I said to him.

MARGE What did you say?

EVELYN I said thank you very much. That was as exciting as being made love to by a sack of clammy cement and would he kindly drive me home.

MARGE That wasn't a very nice thing to say.

EVELYN He's horrible.

MARGE What a thing to say.

EVELYN Horrible. Worse than my husband and that's saying a lot.

MARGE Poor John. God help him being married to you.

JOHN and EVELYN extract

JOHN I haven't seen him for years. Anyway-I don't know what to say to him. I didn't know this girl of his. I mean, it's difficult.

MARGE I don't think he'll want to talk about Carol.

JOHN No?

MARGE I shouldn't think so. He'll want to forget.

JOHN I hope so. I hate death. Gives me the creeps.

EVELYN Get on.

JOHN It does.

EVELYN You?

JOHN I get all-uggghhh. (He shudders) Don't talk about it.

EVELYN (laughing) Death, death, death.

JOHN Shut up.

EVELYN laughs. Silence. MARGE takes up her knitting.

MARGE I hope they come down before he arrives.

JOHN Disgraceful. On a Saturday afternoon. Whatever next.

(Pause. He jigs about some more) I got that fuel gauge.

EVELYN Oh.

JOHN Got some money off it (He laughs) It had a loose wire. I told the girl it was faulty. She didn't know any better. Got a wing mirror. Had a screw missing off it. Got one of those round the corner and he let me have some interior carpet for nothing. He was throwing it away.

Not a bad day's work, eh?

EVELYN Great.

JOHN You're the one who wanted carpet in the car.

EVELYN Fine.

JOHN Cant do anything right, can I?

EVELYN I just know you. It won't fit when you get it in.

JOHN It'll fit.

EVELYN No, it won't because you got it cheap.

JOHN It'll fit.

COLIN extract

COLIN (rising and collecting up the photos) And I suppose when I first met Carol, it must have passed through my mind, what would I feel like if I did lose her. And I just couldn't think. I couldn't imagine it. I couldn't imagine my life going on without her. And then it happened. All of a sudden. One afternoon. All over. She was caught in this undercurrent, there was nothing anybody could do. I wasn't even around. They came and told me. And for about three weeks after that, I couldn't do anything at all. Nothing. I just lay about thinking, remembering and then, all of a sudden, it came to me that if my life ended there and then, by God, I'd have a lot to be grateful for. I mean, first of all, I'd been lucky enough to have known her. I don't know if you've ever met a perfect person. But that's what she was.

The only way to describe her. And I, me, I'd had the love of a perfect person. And that's something I can always be grateful for. Even if for nothing else. And then I thought, what the hell am I talking about, my whole life's been like that. All through my childhood, the time I was growing up, all the time I lived here, I've had what a lot of people would probably give their right arm for-friends. Real friends, like John and Paul and Gordon and Di. So, one of the things I just wanted to say, Di-Paul-Marge-John-Evelyn and to Gordon if he was here, is that I'm not bitter about what happened. Because I've been denied my own happiness, I don't envy or begrudge you yours. I just want you to know that, despite everything that happened, in a funny sort of way, I too am very happy.