



AUTUMN, WINTER, SPRING, SUMMER  
BY  
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Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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# ***Autumn Winter Spring Summer***

*A play by Peter Drake*

Dramatis Personae (in order of appearance)

**BEV**

**LOUISE**

**RACHEL**

**HELEN**

All four women are in comfortable middle age.

There should be no other limitation on casting.

Note to Director

In the script, a single asterisk (\*) denotes a short advancement in time. This could be just a few seconds or minutes and should be indicated by a short blackout. A double asterisk (\*\*) indicates that a period of several months has elapsed. Here the blackout should be longer.

Please note that this is the shorter (festival) version of the play.

Running time is approximately 50 minutes.

## AUTUMN

*An ordinary suburban living room comfortably furnished with sofa, chairs, coffee table, book case filled with books and framed photos. There is a sideboard on which we see some plates covered in tin foil.*

**BEV** enters, carrying a vase of flowers. She surveys the room for a moment then sets the flowers down in the middle of the sideboard before stepping back to admire them. Unhappy with their position, she rotates the vase by 90 degrees. Again, she steps back to admire them before putting them on the coffee table. After a moment she puts them back on the sideboard. Her mobile phone rings which she answers hesitantly. She continues to tidy as she speaks

Bev Mum?... Mum is that you?... Hi Mum, yes its Bev...Did you mean to ring? Mum. It's Bev. You've rung me at home...Is everything OK?...Have I seen Dad? ...No...No...I expect he's on his way home now...

*(She looks sorrowful for a moment, then glances at her watch)*

I know...Try not to worry...I'll ring later, Mum, OK?...Mum – I'm going to have to go. Louise will be here in exactly (*glances at watch*) thirty seconds...OK...OK...Love you... Bye.

*She rings off then addresses the audience as she faffs around straightening cushions etc.*

(cont.) 'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.'

Rather appropriate given my Mum's state of health. Her world is the past. For her, the present is not so good... and the future...well, that's not something I want to think about. (*Smiles brightly*). So – book club night and my turn to have everyone round. We've not been going long but already it's...something I look forward to.

*She glances at her watch then pours two glasses of wine. The doorbell rings.*

BEV (*calls*) It's open!

**BEV** stands next to the door, holding the glass of wine out like a waitress at a wedding party

**LOUISE** enters. She takes the wine and they both sit down

LOUISE (*with feeling*)

May God bless you Bev. You deserve a large, shiny medal.

BEV What on Earth for?

LOUISE For services to mental health in the community

BEV A difficult day from the sound of it.

LOUISE You might say that. I've come straight from work. I've two creatives off sick, a client moaning about her account and I've had to deal with an intern who's being a total pain. She doesn't seem to understand that 'creative discussion' involves more than rubbishing people's ideas at a brainstorming session, especially if that person is a senior account manager. Honestly, bloody millennials! Brought up to believe that every fleeting thought they have is worth its weight in gold.

BEV Oh dear.

LOUISE Oh dear indeed. It's happened before so I've had to issue a final warning.

BEV With a bit of luck she'll take the hint

LOUISE I doubt it, somehow. Once she realised she was getting a warning she became defensive and started sounding off about how hard it is for a woman to be taken seriously in a company made up mostly of men. I reminded her that I actually own the company at which point she very sarcastically asked me what happened to the sisterhood.

BEV Ah the sisterhood – now I think I saw them heading off to the pub with Father Christmas, The Tooth Fairy and the Perfect Man

LOUISE That's another thing. Please don't talk to me about perfect men

BEV Oh no. I thought it was all going well. Has it gone wrong?

LOUISE It hasn't gone wrong. It's gone quiet. Completely quiet. It's as if he never existed. I email, I ring, I leave messages. No reply. Nothing. I've been bloody *ghosted*!

**BEV** looks at her for a moment, perplexed then laughs, despite herself.

BEV            You've been what?

LOUISE        Tell me you know what ghosted means.

BEV            I've never heard of it.

LOUISE        Ghosted, as in he acts like a ghost. Rather than tell you directly, he just disappears. Have you never heard the term? My daughter uses it all the time.

BEV (*nods, slowly understanding*)

                  Ghosted. Right. I must remember that one.

LOUISE        Bloody man! Still I suppose it's better than being bread crumbed

**BEV laughs**

BEV            OK – bread crumbing?

LOUISE        Where he doesn't want to break it off completely so he leaves the odd bread crumb around – a short text, message on your phone once in a while, that kind of thing. Just enough to keep you interested

BEV (*genuinely shocked*)

                  Is that really how people behave these days?

LOUISE        Oh God, yes. I tell you. It's a different game now, girl. Completely bloody brutal.

*The doorbell rings. BEV exits. LOUISE walks to the sideboard and takes a peep at what is under the silver foil. She seems impressed.*

*After a moment, BEV and RACHEL return.*

RACHEL       Well, hello, stranger!

LOUISE        Rachel! Hello!

**LOUISE greets RACHEL with a hug**

(*cont.*)        You look *revoltingly* well. I thought you teachers were supposed to be too stressed to speak.

RACHEL For six weeks of the year we are the least stressed species on the planet. A cottage in the south of France. Sunshine. A little bit of heaven.

LOUISE Stop it! Stop it! I don't want to hear any more.

BEV What can I get you, Rache?

RACHEL Ooh - what you got?

BEV White wine OK?

RACHEL More than OK

*The others sit as BEV pours a glass and hands to RACHEL*

LOUISE So, tell, how's Ellie? Pretty loved up last time I spoke to you – Joey isn't it?

RACHEL Joey? Oh, Joey, Joey, my darling boy come back to us! Whatever you did, we forgive you!

BEV Oh no! It's all over.

RACHEL Has been for a while.

LOUISE Why? What went wrong?

RACHEL Oh I don't know. Honestly, my daughter, sometimes I wonder about her. She just announced one day that she and Joey were history. Way too boring and conventional she said, although it didn't seem to be a problem for two years. Poor boy, I feel for him, although to be fair it didn't take him long to get fixed up again.

BEV Oh, that's nice. You're still in touch with him.

RACHEL Good God no. I'm stalking him on Facebook. He's going out with a dental student from Nottingham so I think we've seen the last of him.

LOUISE So how is Ellie filling her days, now the exams are all done with? How did she get on?

RACHEL Very well, actually. Three A stars. Not exactly unexpected.

BEV So it's off to university for her?

RACHEL I don't know. She doesn't know. She's having a gap year, but doesn't quite know what to do.

LOUISE That's not like her. She's always been so organised.

RACHEL I know. She's been a different girl since the results came out. Actually, she's been a bit of a pain, to be honest. Quite rude and uncooperative.

BEV Oh, she just wants to get out into the world and broaden her horizons. All that studying and book work. She's ready for a change.

RACHEL Andy isn't exactly helping matters. She's spending a lot of time at his place, which I'm fine with; he is her father. Just that pretty well everything I suggest he seems to contradict.

BEV Not very helpful.

LOUISE Sorry Rachel, I hadn't realised the two of you had ...

RACHEL Separated? No – it's only happened recently. He's got a flat in town. I – we - felt that we needed a bit of space to think. I'm hoping that the solitude will help him get his head together.

*A slightly awkward pause*

BEV So. We're just waiting on Helen.

RACHEL Who's Helen?

BEV She's the new Jenny, who sends her love by the way

LOUISE How's she getting on?

BEV Really well she says. She's joined a book club!

RACHEL Wow. That was quick.

BEV She says it's very different over there. Apparently, they all dress up for the meetings and it's very competitive. Everyone wants to be top dog and dominate proceedings. And... (*leans in to whisper*) they have men in the group!

LOUISE No way! Really?



BEV Oh yes, and they have to appoint a chairman every meeting to keep everyone in order. They all keep interrupting each other so she says. The behaviour's dreadful sometimes

RACHEL Even by the low standards of the male sex?

BEV No – it's the women that are the worst. Razor sharp nails some of them. Razor sharp.

LOUISE Blimey. I hope she's all right.

BEV Oh she's doing well. They all kow tow to her because she has an English accent. They think she's a female version of Stephen Fry

*Laughter*

RACHEL Good for her. Flying the flag for the old country.

*The doorbell rings*

BEV Ah - that'll be HELEN now

**BEV exits**

LOUISE Have you met her?

RACHEL Nope – don't know anything about her. Friend of BEV's I guess.

**HELEN and BEV enter**

HELEN (*speaking to BEV as they enter*)

I'm so sorry I'm late. I was stuck into something and I completely lost track of time.

BEV It's fine - don't worry. You didn't miss anything. Everyone, this is HELEN

RACHEL Hi, I'm Rachel

LOUISE Louise. Have we met before? You seem familiar.

HELEN It's possible. What do you do for a living?

LOUISE I run a small public relations firm in town. How about you?

HELEN I work with children who have been excluded from school.

RACHEL Oh – so you're a home tutor?

HELEN Not quite. I run an organisation that uses drama as way of encouraging self – expression

LOUISE That sounds amazing.

HELEN Well I'm not sure about that...

BEV Oh take it from me, it is. Hel' writes all the scripts for the kids to perform. She's fantastic.

*BEV pours HELEN a glass of wine*

RACHEL Might I have seen some of your work? I go to the theatre quite a lot.

HELEN Probably not unless you are interested in special needs education. Most of the youngsters have communication difficulties.

RACHEL How interesting. So the students perform the plays?

HELEN Sometimes they do. Sometimes we record them on tape and play them back so they can hear themselves speaking. Sometimes we just ... read the script and use it as a basis for discussion. It all depends.

LOUISE It sounds fascinating.

HELEN Well – it can be hard work, but yes, I think so.

BEV I do too. I think they're lucky to have you

HELEN Oh you're being very kind

BEV Hel's being modest. I've seen some of her work. It's incredible what she does with them all. She's fab (*hugs HELEN*) Shall we all sit down?

*They move to the sofa and chairs and sit down. HELEN looks around for a source of light and adjusts her chair slightly so it is brighter. She squints for a moment and we become aware that her eyesight is not as good as it might be.*

BEV Okay. So. Helen – did you get a chance to read the book?

HELEN I did, yes. Loved it

BEV                   Excellent. Then we'll all have lots to say.

*(looks around the group)*

                          So. Who's first?

                          How did we all get on with The Go Between?

*An awkward pause - no one wants to be the first to speak.*

(cont.)               Did we ... all enjoy it?

*Nothing from the others who glance around at each other*

(cont.)               Okay. Is it still relevant?

*Another pause, then they all speak at once - urgently and passionately*

BEV                   Well, personally, I thought it was fantastic, having thought that it would be stuffy and old hat. I was totally wrong!

LOUISE               I loved the way the motivation of the two protagonists slowly revealed itself

RACHEL              I just felt so sorry for Leo; he was completely innocent and lost in this world

HELEN                It was such an insight into a time gone by. Who on Earth would fall for that kind of behaviour now?

BEV *(laughs)*       OK. OK - now shall we remember the rule? Let's try not to talk across each other

*A five second pause, then they talk again, this time following on one after the other with no pause*

LOUISE               It was a real rite of passage for the boy. I loved how he went back in the final chapter and she did the same thing again, fifty years later...

RACHEL              ...I'm not sure about all of this class ridden society stuff. Do we really need to be reminded about how things were a hundred years ago..?

BEV                   ...Does human nature change that much? I mean... really? People are still manipulative and cruel...

HELEN ...It just goes to show how little people change. We all think of the past as somehow being better than now.

BEV Ok (laughs) – so lots of ideas. Er, where to start? LOUISE?

*As LOUISE speaks, the lights dim, and her voice grows quieter. The others nod and make murmurs of agreement as she speaks.*

LOUISE I saw the film before I read the book so perhaps I am being influenced by that, but even now it's so wrong that class colours everything - even the two boys were affected by it and they were what? Ten?

\*

*Lights up to reveal the women standing at the side board where they are helping themselves to the food.*

LOUISE Bev, this is bloody fabulous. What on Earth is it?

BEV It's something we had when we were in the Alps a couple of years ago. I've been meaning to make it since then but never got around to it

HELEN Does it have a name?

BEV It's called a tartiflette. It's a traditional Alpine dish. You just caramelize a few onions or shallots, bung in some garlic and fry it all up. You can do it with salmon or bacon – up to you. Knock up a gratin with some decent spuds, add a bit of cream and maybe a bit of white wine then season. Melt a reblochon cheese over the top.

*A pause*

Took me five minutes.

*The others are impressed*

LOUISE I'm not leaving without the recipe

RACHEL Me neither

HELEN I hadn't realised there would be refreshments

RACHEL Oh God yes. And no pressure *whatsoever* to make it utterly delicious and something no one has ever had before.

**LOUISE** *laughs*

HELEN Right. Right. OK

*(smiles brightly)*

LOUISE You can bluff you way through the book but woe betide you if you backslide on the food

BEV Ignore Lou, Helen. She's only joking

*Nervous laugh from HELEN*

\*

*Stage lights down, spotlight up on RACHEL who addresses the audience. The others cannot hear her. The others reset the stage whilst RACHEL speaks – simple Christmas decorations. A change of costume might be appropriate.*

RACHEL A book club! I mean - really?

*(Laughs softly to herself)*

When Bev suggested we should start one up, I thought - *come on!* – everyone knows the only thing that gets read at a book club is the label on the wine bottle.

I gave it three months.

That was a year ago.

*(Smiles to herself)*

Oh, so many times I've thought to myself 'I'm going to quit. I'm too busy, or I'm too tired. But, as R.L Naquin said

*(Adopts American accent in the manner of a mafioso)*

'Nobody quits the book club. Once you're in, you're in forever.'

*(Reverts to her normal accent)*

Book Club is like... it's like the Hotel California.

You can check out any time you like...

But you can never leave.

*Slow fade to black*

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