



THE CHILDREN

BY LUCY
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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



THE CHILDREN
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THE CHILDREN was commissioned by and premiered at the Royal Court Theatre (Vicky Featherstone, Artistic Director; Lucy Davies, Executive Producer) on November 17, 2016. It was directed by James Macdonald, the design was by Miriam Buether, the lighting design was by Peter Mumford, and the sound design was by Max Pappenheim. The cast was as follows:

ROSE Francesca Annis
HAZEL Deborah Findlay
ROBIN Ron Cook

The Royal Court Theatre production of THE CHILDREN was produced on Broadway by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) on December 12, 2017, with the same cast and crew. The production stage manager was Martha Donaldson.

CHARACTERS

ROSE

HAZEL

ROBIN

All in their sixties.

KEY

A forward slash (/) indicates an overlap in speech.

A comma on its own line (,) indicates a beat. A beat is shorter than a pause. It can also denote a shift in thought or energy.

The text has been punctuated to serve the music of the play, not grammatical convention. Dashes are used sparingly and generally indicate a hard interruption.

A NOTE ON THE DANCE

In the Royal Court production we used “Ain’t It Funky Now” by James Brown, chosen by the actors from a shortlist, but I haven’t specified this in the text as you could use anything (see special note on songs/recordings at the back of this volume). These are the things we liked about our track that might help you in choosing yours:

1. It is of a period but not defined by that period. The play is not addressing a single generation, and it would be a shame if this moment made it feel like it was.
2. It is credible a group of friends might have choreographed a routine to it.
3. It is quite spare, so doesn’t compete with the dialogue that is spoken over it.
4. It is cool. But not too cool.

THE CHILDREN

The light moves slowly from dark to light.

The effect of a painting being cleaned.

Revealed is:

A small cottage on the East Coast.

A summer's evening.

The sound of the sea through the open door.

It is not usually lived in full time.

Camp has been made here by someone with a domestic hand.

Wild flowers in milk bottles.

Candles in wine bottles.

Tupperware fruit bowl.

The room is at a slight tilt.

The land beneath it is being eroded.

But this should not be obvious to the naked eye, and only becomes apparent when, for example, something spherical is placed on the kitchen table.

And Rose.

Her nose is bleeding.

Blood has spilled down her top.

She looks around the room and does nothing to tend to her nose.

She looks for a long time at a basket of washing on the floor.

Finally she raises her voice.

ROSE. How are the children?

HAZEL. (*Off.*) What? Oh, the—they're fine, they're—just keep holding it Rose! At the bridge. Are you doing it?

ROSE. Yes.

Hazel enters with a towel.

HAZEL. And put your head down!

Rose puts her head down.

Here.

Hazel clamps the towel over Rose's nose. Rose holds it there.

I'm so sorry, Rose, it isn't broken is it? It's not swollen anyway.

ROSE. It's fine.

HAZEL. No I'm mortified. I don't know what—can I, sorry, let me just, I won't hurt you.

Hazel lifts Rose's chin.

She gently wipes the blood from her nose and chin.

Rose watches her.

Look at your lovely top. Would you like me to put it in to soak?

ROSE. No, / that's

HAZEL. Please let me, you can borrow / something

ROSE. No, I don't care, I hate it. It doesn't suit me anymore. Honestly, I'll throw it away.

HAZEL. Oh you can't! Because of this? But I can get that out, no problem, I have a special, it's a stick, for oil-based products.

ROSE. Oil-based?

HAZEL. You know, blood, butter. All dairy really. Sun cream. Semen.

ROSE. That's a big problem you have is it?

HAZEL. Well, when the boys were younger.

ROSE. You have boys?

HAZEL. Very young / I mean, not

ROSE. How many do you have?

HAZEL. What?

ROSE. How many / children?

HAZEL. Please let me wash it. It wouldn't take me ten minutes.

ROSE. It's fine, it doesn't

HAZEL. No but, I feel terrible, I don't know why I got so frightened, just / I thought I was alone

ROSE. I should have knocked.

HAZEL. I wasn't expecting anyone, we're so isolated here / so I just—

ROSE. I did call out. The door was on the latch.

HAZEL. It isn't your fault. I've been on pins all day. And normally you hear the tyres, on the gravel so

ROSE. The taxi dropped me at the top / of the drive.

HAZEL. It isn't your fault it was just feeling you come up behind me, I sort of, I panicked.

ROSE. Fight or flight.

HAZEL. And also, (yes I s'pose) no but and also Rose, when I saw you standing there, Rose don't take this the wrong / way but

ROSE. It's fine, Hazel.

HAZEL. But we heard you'd died!

ROSE. Ah.

HAZEL. Yes so it was a bit of a shock.

Lovely you're not of course.

They laugh. Hazel takes off the apron she is wearing, shuts the door.

Sorry, let's—start again! So good to see you. Is it stopping?

Rose takes the towel away from her face.

ROSE. Yes, I think so.

HAZEL. Good, that's good. Sorry, what were you saying?

ROSE. Oh. How many children do you have?

HAZEL. Right yes, after Lauren you mean?

ROSE. Yes.

HAZEL. Three more.

ROSE. Four children! God, / that's

HAZEL. another girl and, and two boys. Not children anymore / of course.

ROSE. fantastic, no, of course. Because Lauren must be, what?

HAZEL. Thirty-eight.

ROSE. thirty-eight!

HAZEL. Thirty-nine at Christmas.

ROSE. Thirty-nine at Christmas.

HAZEL. A grown woman. Did you want to sit down, Rose?

ROSE. I just can't. I can't believe it. Thank you.

Rose sits in a battered armchair.

Without looking she reaches under it and pulls out a footstool, rests her feet on it.

Hazel watches her.

She loved beards, didn't she?

HAZEL. What?

ROSE. Lauren. As a baby. She was cuckoo for beards.

HAZEL. I don't...

Hazel takes a seat herself.

ROSE. Because yes because every time she saw a man with a beard—
d'you remember? She'd stick out her arms and scream with laughter

HAZEL. Well. She was a very friendly little thing at that age.

ROSE. and I s'pose Robin had one, didn't he?

HAZEL. Probably why she was drawn to them, / would you like
some tea?

ROSE. I've always wondered about things like that, (thank you, love
one) if there's a study or something, that charts our relationship to the
things we're drawn to, as children, and how that changes as we grow
up. I mean for instance does Lauren have a husband or partner?

HAZEL. Yes.

ROSE. Oh great. Great, no that's great. And so then does her husband
or partner / have a

HAZEL. She's clean shaven.

ROSE. She's clean shaven is she? Well there you go, no correlation!
I mean, an inverse correlation. Of course you'd have to test a much
wider sample than just Lauren.

HAZEL. Rose.

ROSE. Yes?

Pause.

HAZEL. I'm growing a beard you know.

This morning—I found two hairs on my chin and I looked at them, for a good minute, and I tried to convince myself this was *alright*, it's natural, it's chemical, it's your age, you know?

She takes an apple from the fruit bowl, begins to polish it on her top or a tea towel.

Just oestrogen declining.

Because you know I don't hold with people our age trying to look twenty-two, because you see these women don't you, in the paper, looking like stretched eggs, trying to hide it when all it's doing is shouting it out loud isn't it, "I'm old and I'm frightened of it!" I mean and because I'm *not* frightened of it so so so so but then I thought no. *No* because this is how it starts isn't it, the slow descent into the coffin it starts with two black hairs on your chin that you let run wild one day and you don't even know it but right there, in that moment, you've lost, you've lowered your defences and the enemy's *got in* hasn't it yes so I went at these hairs I went at them ruthlessly with a pair of tweezers and I can't describe to you the sense of triumph.

Hazel puts the apple on the table.

It rolls down the table away from her.

Rose catches the apple, returns it to the bowl.

ROSE. Grandchildren?

HAZEL. What?

ROSE. Do you have grandchildren

Pause.

HAZEL. Oh. Yes. Yes, / Rose

ROSE. Hazel a granny that's insane! I can't / believe it!

HAZEL. Rose I'm sorry. I feel a bit. I might have a glass of water

ROSE. I'll get it.

HAZEL. No, it's fine, I'll—

Rose finds a glass in the first cupboard she opens.

THE CHILDREN

by Lucy Kirkwood

1 man, 2 women

Two retired nuclear scientists reside in an isolated cottage by the sea as the world around them crumbles. Together they are going to live forever on yogurt and yoga, until an old friend arrives with a frightening request.

"[THE CHILDREN] raises profound questions about whether having children sharpens, or diminishes, one's sense of social responsibility. ...a genuinely disturbing play: one not simply about nuclear power but about the heavy price we may pay in the future for the profligacy of the present."
—**The Guardian (UK)**

"...a richly suggestive and beautifully written piece of work... Kirkwood is the most rewarding dramatist of her generation."
—**The Independent (London)**

"THE CHILDREN is tantalisingly hard to define: it is about aging and responsibility. ...It is very English, somewhat menacing, and often funny. ...What THE CHILDREN is not is a polemic about the oft-cited irresponsibility of baby boomers; instead it rather penetratingly asks what they owe younger generations, exactly."
—**Time Out London**

Also by Lucy Kirkwood
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