

GRACE (1)

GRACE: I'd like to say something... before I make my wish and cut my cake. It's been twenty-five years – almost to the day – I decided up there in my room never to speak again... or play. It was a week before my fourteenth birthday. Dad was going to take me to see a pianist we both loved at a concert hall in London. My birthday present. But then he... he left. I think I was probably only going to stop speaking and playing until he returned from... wherever he'd gone to... however long that would be: a week – or two – a month... a year even. But he never did. He never called or wrote... or so I was led to believe. Over the years I never stopped hoping the front door would open and he'd come walking through and I'd be complete again... speak and play again. Every time I heard the door a part of me imagined it might be him returning. Discovering his letters and postcards in the piano felt like that... almost. I've called him. I think mine was the last voice he was expecting to hear. It was good to speak after all this time. And now? Am I complete? I have closure perhaps, but completeness...? Connecting with him again hasn't given me that. That... I need to find myself... for myself.

GRACE closes her eyes.

JONATHAN: Grace?

GRACE: Shh! I'm making my wish.

GRACE opens her eyes. She picks up the cake knife.

Now, who's for a piece of birthday cake?

GRACE (2)

GRACE V.O.: *(Through speaker.)* Hello everyone. I know I've been incommunicado for a few weeks now, but it's been necessary for me to find a place – a space somewhere, elsewhere – just to be... and play. There's a piano where I am and I've been practising every day. I'm giving a concert to a small group next week. It's the first time I would've performed for an audience – anybody – for a very long time. I'm sorry I can't tell you where it is, but I'll play you one of the pieces at the end of this message: Chopin's Nocturne opus 9 no 2 in E flat major. Perhaps, in fact, that's the chief reason I asked Jonathan to gather you all here so I may truly speak to you through my playing. I will say a few words, however to each of you. Chloe... I hope the end of the world comes for you... in a good way, I mean and that you finally return to your home planet. Frances... I'm wishing you success with your centre and that it proves to be the hub of creativity you envision it to be. I'm sure it will. Eric... perhaps you will buy your dream cottage by the sea somewhere on the Jurassic Coast, with a dog or two... or a cat or two. Matthew... I hope you find a way to sorting things and returning to the family home – your own family home – as fun as it may be to indefinitely stay up in the attic surrounded by your toys. And Jonathan... may you continue to thrive as the new 'butterfly' Jonathan... whatever adventures he takes you on. I hope you all find the happiness that lives within you... that only *you* can find for *you*... and nobody else can give you. So... now the music.

JONATHAN (1)

- FRANCES: So, you're expecting people to believe the 'thoughts' and 'feelings' of the Earth – as you so put it – can cause a huge body of gas, fire, plasma – or whatever the sun's comprised of – to suddenly be extinguished?
- CHLOE: Well... it can.
- FRANCES: I'm sorry, I can't believe that.
- JONATHAN: That's because, like most people in their extreme ignorance, you're failing to realise everything's connected. Every particle, every nano particle, is entangled intrinsically. The damage we've done here, on every conceivable level, has sent irreversible seismic shock-waves throughout our solar system... to infinity and beyond.
- MATTHEW: 'To infinity and beyond!'. Good film that.
- JONATHAN: And we, the pitiful vermin that we've become, once the sun's gone out, must live our remaining days in darkness as the Earth becomes a frozen ball of uninhabitable ice.
- CHLOE: Satisfied?
- FRANCES: Not really.
- CHLOE: Well, the prophesy doesn't care what you think.
- FRANCES: It's several thousand years old, I presume, this prophesy.
- CHLOE: It is.
- FRANCES: So it really didn't matter what humanity did, or didn't do, in the interim since our doom was inevitable, according to the prophesy. It was carved in tablets of stone, I'm assuming. So we should really be letting us pitiful vermin off the hook a little... in my opinion.
- JONATHAN: Not in mine. Not off any hook at all. The history of *us* has been a story of greed, corruption, oppression, war, destruction... you name it, the list is endless. We've been nothing but bad news since we first crawled out of the stinking swamp, carved the first axe, fashioned the first spear and slaughtered the first mammoth... before turning on each other. It's time up now for us humans. Au revoir, sayonara, auf wiedersehen, adios.
- MATTHEW: (*Checks watch.*) In seventeen minutes... and nine seconds precisely.

JONATHAN (2)

JONATHAN: Matthew. Eric.

JONATHAN stands still and stares up at the sun for a few moments. The playing stops.

Sungazing. It's very beneficial. So is this – standing like this – barefoot on the earth. That's what I did every day. I dug a hole in the earth and planted my feet into it and stood there. Sometimes for hours on end. The grass is good too if you can't dig a hole.

ERIC: So... you lived in the woods?

JONATHAN: I did.

ERIC: What did you eat... squirrels?

JONATHAN: Not squirrels, Eric, cheese and pickle sandwiches mainly – courtesy of Andy, the minister of the local Unitarian Church. He came across me while walking his dog. I told him my story and he brought me sandwiches and tea each day. I died... actually died, you know.

MATTHEW: In the woods?

JONATHAN: In the hospital. For three minutes, they said. I knew I had because I was out of my body – up above – looking down on it lying there and watching all of them busily trying to resuscitate me. The strange thing was, was that it all felt perfectly normal, perfectly... natural. I then thought about Grace and before I knew it I was here – up there – looking down on her sitting in the chair.

MATTHEW: She said she sensed you up there.

JONATHAN: She did. She looked up, but she couldn't see me. I was invisible to her. Seeing her sitting there in the chair there looking up at me, it was clear – all too clear – the way I'd been with her... to her. That's when I knew.

ERIC: Knew? Knew what?

JONATHAN: I had to return. For her. And for me, but certainly for her. And no sooner had I had that... epiphany, you could say, I was back again in my body in the hospital. N.D.E.

ERIC: What?

JONATHAN: Near death experience. That's what they call it. There's actually a club, an N.D.E. club. I'll have to get in touch with them. And when I was compos mentis enough in my hospital bed, I understood what I had to do. I had to go off somewhere – somewhere remote – to be alone... by

myself... with myself. And as soon as I felt I could muster the energy... off I went. It's was hard at first, but soon I got acclimatised to the 'lifestyle' and I could start the process of transformation from the cocoon Jonathan to the butterfly Jonathan. Andy, the minister, was a Godsend – literally – with his flasks of tea and sandwiches and his golden retriever Sheeba. Beautiful dog. It meant I didn't have to go foraging for berries or drinking rain water. Not sure how I would've managed there. Yes, Andy, a good man... service oriented. I volunteered myself and Grace to go on his tree plant the week after next. He does it every year, takes a group of disadvantaged youths into the country to plant trees. Just outside of Manchester this year for ten days. Accommodation's pretty basic by the sound of it, but that's not the point, no, giving – giving back – that's what it's all about in the end. Not on how much we've amassed for ourselves through our ambition... our greed... our selfishness. There're so many things I intend for us to do together – Grace and me – similar types of adventures to Manchester. And now she's speaking again, that gives her a greater freedom to engage with the kids... young adults... ex-offenders... whoever.

ERIC: Ex-offenders?

JONATHAN: They need our kindness too, Eric, just as much as anyone... more so perhaps it could be argued.

ERIC: And Grace has agreed to this, has she?

JONATHAN: She has.

MATTHEW (1)

MATTHEW: Train-set coming through.

MATTHEW places the box on the lawn. He looks off DSL.

Maybe I can power it from the shed. That would be all right, wouldn't it? Run the track down to the door. Hopefully it'll be flat enough. If there's derailments on a regular basis I'll need to give it a going over with the hover mower. Don't worry, Grace, I will make a start on the greenhouse soon, as promised. Now then... let's have a look.

He opens the box and takes out items.

Track, track, track, track, track. Track, track, track, track, track.
Track, track, track, track, track. Track, track, track, track, track.

GRACE takes her notepad and writes 'I think I sensed him' on it. She shows it to MATTHEW.

Track, track, track, track, track. What's that?

MATTHEW looks at the notepad.

(Reading.) 'I think I sensed him'. Sensed him? Sensed who? Jonathan you mean? Sensed him where?

GRACE points up.

You sensed him up there? Just now? No, Grace, he's not up there. Don't go imagining the worst. I'm sure he's in the hospital still... safely in his body. Besides, I think they would've called if something... don't you? Look, the Mallard. Remember the Mallard? Yes? No, we've just got to be prepared for the fact that it may take a bit of time for him to be one hundred percent again.

He looks off DSL.

Put the village over there. Hopefully no-one will trip over it. That would be quite terrifying for the inhabitants: giant trips over village, eh Grace? Then again, he might just open his eyes and be walking around again as if nothing had happened... or very little. Miracles can occur... and do... on a regular basis... sometimes. The post office. The Butcher's. Looks like they've all been the home to a few spiders over the years. Hopefully both locomotives are still fully operational. You know, Grace, I think they were probably the happiest times in my life: me up there in my room playing with my trains and listening to you on the piano. The same bits of music again and again... and again and again and again. You were determined to get it right. Whatever the day, whatever the weather. And then when you played the whole piece it

sounded... beautiful. And that's coming from me: a musical ignoramus. I didn't get an inch of your talent. All I got from Dad was his nose... and ears, the rest I got from Mum. People used to stop in the street to listen to you. I often wanted to go outside and say to them 'that's my sister, that'. I never did though. Village green... ducks on the pond. See.

GRACE writes 'Do you ever think about him?' on her pad and shows it to MATTHEW.

(Reading.) 'Do you ever think about him?' Dad? Not really, no. Cottages.

MATTHEW (2)

MATTHEW enters DSL carrying the train engine.

MATTHEW: Now what's your problem? Oh, morning Frances. The Mallard in action again. Well, it was. It'll need to go in for repairs once more. Grace has been enjoying it, haven't you Grace? She has. One hundred and twenty-six miles an hour this one goes. Not this one, of course, the real thing I mean. Held the world record for steam locomotives.

FRANCES: Surely it's time now isn't it, Matthew?

MATTHEW: Time? Time for what?

FRANCES: Time now to put the toys back in the box and for joining the big people in the big people's world again.

MATTHEW: I'm here supporting Grace.

FRANCES: You're here avoiding reality, Matthew. Burying your head in your train set, hoping the slings and arrows of life will somehow pass you by. That's hardly support for your wife and daughter. How long's it been now? Two months? She must be really missing you.

MATTHEW: Laura? No, she really isn't.

FRANCES: I'm meaning your daughter. Carys is it?

MATTHEW: I'm not so sure either, I haven't heard from her for a while.

FRANCES: She's probably forgotten who you are.

MATTHEW: No, I think she's starting to discover boys.

FRANCES: Even more reason for you to be there for her. Marriage counselling works wonders for most couples... so I've heard. I'll make you that tea, Grace.

FRANCES exits into the house.

MATTHEW: I'm not going to go just because *she* wants me to. I'll go if you want me to go, Grace... not *her*. You don't want me to go, do you? No, I didn't think so. You're finding me a comfort and a support being here, aren't you Grace? Yes, you are. I know you are. Having said that, I have been considering it and it probably is time to move out of the house now and into the shed. I think the shed will give me some breathing space. Plus I'll be at hand too in the control room for any emergencies on the track. That will be all right won't it, Grace? Of course, I'll go straight back into the house again the moment Jonathan returns. Yes, it's definitely a little too crowded in there with the three of

us and there's no sign of *her* going any time in the near future, is there. Is there? No. Yes, I'm sure he'll be back soon, Grace. I'm sure he's just out there – somewhere – getting some... perspective on... things. We all need to do that from time to time, don't we? That's what I'm doing here: getting some... perspective on... things. I'm sure that's what he's doing, Grace. (*Train.*) Okay... take this back for repairs.

FRANCES (1)

FRANCES: Grace? Here you are. Good, we're alone. Poor you, I had no idea. You're surrounded by some very toxic people... very toxic indeed. She's two wheels short of a bicycle that one, isn't she? And *him*. You should've told me. We seriously need to talk. Not that I don't have my own toxic people to deal with. I come home after a hard day at work to find her lying on the sofa – Holly – half-dressed, drinking and smoking and watching something mind-numbing on the TV at full volume. Well, she's had her ultimatum.

MATTHEW: (*Off.*) Steady as she goes. That's it!

FRANCES: Anyway, I've got the drawings to show you. It's a run-down church hall with some outside areas. Completely overgrown at present. Certainly a project. (*Mobile.*) Have a look at the floor plan. Can you see? That's the hall. Perfect for my groups. No... *our* groups, as I want you to see this as your baby too, just as much as mine. Which also means I'd like your creative input every step of the way.

MATTHEW enters DSR.

MATTHEW: Firework. He's setting it off from the roof. I'll just...

MATTHEW tentatively takes the firework.

(*Checks watch.*) Eleven minutes and... Yes... Right.

MATTHEW exits DSR.

FRANCES: Yes, it's long been a dream of mine, creating a community like this of like-minded people doing our like-minded things together. I've already got some workshops in mind. 'Finding the voice of your inner warrior' is one. Perhaps that's one you can take, Grace. Anyway, I'm running ahead of myself: selling the hide before the hunt. Let's do lunch together soon. I know a lovely Italian restaurant that's just opened near me. It's got the cosiest atmosphere. A perfect place to talk. And we do need to talk, Grace. Here, I'll show you their website.

MATTHEW: (*Off.*) You've got yourself caught on the aerial, Jonathan. You need to back up a bit. That's it, you're free now.

FRANCES: (*Mobile.*) See, looks cosy, doesn't it?

FRANCES (2)

FRANCES: Tea, Grace? Nod for 'yes'. Shake of the head for 'no'. Was that a nod or a shake? I'll assume it's a nod... unless I see a definite shake. Chai tea with a dash of milk. It's comforting.

A train whistle sound is heard from MATTHEW off, DSL.

I'm sorry, but your parents did a terrible job of housetraining that man. He can't seem to pick up – or clear up – anything, can he? He was probably waited on hand and foot growing up and not expected to do a thing. Am I right? Women's work. I don't know how many times I've told him to put the toilet seat down after use. Now he's just about learned that he can't seem to lift it up properly.

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CHLOE (1)

CHLOE: Oh. Hello.

ERIC: Hi.

CHLOE: Is Grace inside?

ERIC: No.

CHLOE: Then who were you calling to?

ERIC: To Grace.

CHLOE: I thought you said she's not in there.

ERIC: She's not. I was calling to see if she is... *was* – or isn't... wasn't. Make sense?

CHLOE: No. She'll come out for me... if she's in there.

CHLOE puts the cake on the table and crosses to the USR doors.

(Calling into house.) Grace? It's Chloe. Yoohoo. Grace? I've made you a cake.

ERIC: I'll make sure she gets it.

CHLOE: So will I.

ERIC: You must be feeling more than a tad embarrassed, I would've thought.

CHLOE: About what?

ERIC: About the world not coming to an end.

CHLOE: There was a mistake with the date, or a difference of interpretation of the ancient calendar to be more accurate.

ERIC: Ah.

CHLOE: It's now to be August the twelfth.

ERIC: I'll put it in my diary.

GEORGE: I caught a glimpse of your wife on your doorstep yesterday. I must say she's looking extremely thin.

ERIC: That's because she doesn't eat anything except tinned pilchards.

AUDITION PIECES FOR SAVING GRACE

CHLOE: Perhaps she would appreciate those flowers.

ERIC: No... she wouldn't.

CHLOE: All women love flowers.

ERIC: Not her.

MATTHEW enters DSL.

MATTHEW: Hello, Chloe. *(To ERIC.)* Any luck?

CHLOE: Luck?

MATTHEW: He didn't tell you? Frances is coming here.

CHLOE: The Gremalian. What does she want?

MATTHEW: To stay apparently.

CHLOE: Here?

MATTHEW: Yes.

CHLOE: With Grace?

MATTHEW: And me.

CHLOE: Did Grace invite her?

MATTHEW: I think she invited herself.

CHLOE: No, she can't.

MATTHEW: That's what I said.

CHLOE: Just like a Gremalian to wheedle their way into where they don't belong. They're the most detested species in their part of the galaxy.

ERIC: Can we keep things on planet Earth please?

CHLOE (2)

CHLOE: I'm back. Well, that was the most pointless two weeks in Cheltenham.

ERIC: *(To Grace. Shopping bag.)* I... I need to take these to...

ERIC exits USL.

CHLOE: She really is starting to lose her marbles: my sister Delphine. She talks complete gibberish for most of the time and laughs uncontrollably for no apparent reason. And her cooking is as horrendous as ever. It's the telephone from now on, no more home visits. How are you, Grace? I see your brother's still here. And the Gremalian, I presume she is too. Too much to hope for that she's cleared off. Yes. Now, Grace, we need to discuss Norfolk, August the twelfth and the revised farewell to planet Earth and our return home. Which also happens, of course, to be your birthday. So a double celebration. It should be a sizeable gathering of Karapalian sisters ready for transportation home. We can book a room in the hotel and stay the night before. Yes? There we can prepare ourselves for our journey away from the scoffers and detractors.

FRANCES enters from the house.

Speaking of which.

FRANCES: Oh, *you're* back.

CHLOE: And *you're* still here.

FRANCES: Grace, your bath's ready.

CHLOE: We're talking.

FRANCES: Come and have it while it's hot.

CHLOE: I said we're talking.

FRANCES: Grace?

CHLOE: We're talking.

FRANCES: Grace?

CHLOE: You must let me know, Grace, if the Gremalian's been inappropriate with you.

FRANCES: I'm sorry, inappropriate?

CHLOE: I know what your intentions are.

AUDITION PIECES FOR SAVING GRACE

FRANCES: Oh really. Pray, do tell.

CHLOE: Grace isn't that way inclined... and if she were, it wouldn't be you she'd be that way inclined with.

FRANCES: You know something, for someone who knows absolutely nothing about me whatsoever you seem to think you know a hell of a lot.

CHLOE: I know more than I care to know about you.

FRANCES takes a chair and sits.

It's private.

FRANCES: The garden?

CHLOE: Our conversation.

FRANCES: I'd like to hear what nonsense you're filling Grace's head with.

CHLOE: That's absolutely none of your business. Shoo! Shoo!

ERIC (1)

ERIC: Champagne for Armageddon. Sorry, Grace, didn't mean to startle you. Am I the first or has it happened and are we the only two left? Can't say it's looking too end-of-the-worldish up there. Not yet anyway. Jonathan in his shed, I presume. Saying a final farewell to his fellow doomsday-ists online. Your brother still here, is he? What's it been now, four weeks... five? You've made him too comfortable, Grace. Free food, free drink... what's there not to like? You're too nice, that's your problem – the only one you have as far as I can tell. It's not kind to people to be too nice to them. They take advantage of it. He certainly is... in my opinion. None of my damn business, of course, just... I don't like to see anyone – you – being taken advantage of, that's all.

GRACE points towards the fence.

Vicky? No, she won't be coming. She's still not... Every day it's something different: pointy objects, open doors, running water... birdsong. Who's afraid of birdsong for God's sake? But let's not talk about *her*, not when we have so little time before we're all exploded into a billion pieces and flung out to the far reaches of the known universe... if that's what's going to happen to us all. Look, Grace, before anyone else appears, I'd just like to say I can't help hearing *him* sometimes – Jonathan – with you... Not that I've got my ear pressed against the fence or anything, but voices carry... *his* voice. Some of the things he... the words he uses... well, they're not particularly loving ones... sometimes. I just want to say, if you need anyone... someone... me... to... talk to about... anything, I'm here... just next door. Not that we should talk next door. Perhaps a café or park or somewhere a little more... private.

V.O. VICKY: *(Off.)* Get out! Get out! Get out! Get out! Get out!

Sound of window slamming off.

ERIC: It'll just be a moth or something... nothing serious. You know, Grace, I don't think we're too dissimilar – you and me. We're both two people with a great deal to give, both allowing ourselves to be stifled... suffocated perhaps a better word, by the people – the person – we happen to find ourselves with. Don't we owe it to ourselves to... give the great deal we have to... give? Life only comes round once – as far as I can tell – personally I don't want to look back on it one day and regret not having done the things I should've done... or said the things I should've said... to the people... the person... I should've said them to. If you understand what I'm saying, Grace. If you... What I'm saying, Grace, is –

ERIC (2)

ERIC: I'm sorry, but I just don't buy it.

JONATHAN: Buy what?

ERIC: Any of it, quite frankly. Your miraculous 'near death experience', or your incredible 'metamorphoses' in the woods.

JONATHAN: Well... I know what I experienced, Eric.

ERIC: Well... I'm calling it... baloney. Complete and utter... baloney!

GRACE: Eric...

JONATHAN: No, let him finish. Unless you *are* finished.

ERIC: No... no, I'm not. It appears to me that you've returned from your solipsistic, self-exile in the woods just as full of yourself as ever before – more so, in fact, now you're proclaiming yourself to be some do-gooding saviour of humanity.

JONATHAN: Well, I wouldn't say –

ERIC: I haven't finished. And if you think it's a loving thing to do to force Grace into going to Manchester to deal with extremely challenging situations – even for someone who's *qualified* to do such a job, let alone someone who's just learnt to speak again after years of silence – I'm afraid it shows just how completely and absolutely out of touch with anybody except your own self-obsessed... self-centred... self-righteous... self-absorbed... and generally, incredibly selfish... self you are. There... I've finished.