

After the Pyre

By Adam Croft

a monologue

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Characters

Man — of any age from early thirties upwards

(A man sits in a chair, spot-lit. Another chair is visible in semi-darkness on the other side of the stage. The man appears to be talking to the invisible occupant of this chair. There are no other props on stage. The man is wearing a white shirt, black tie, dark suit jacket and trousers.)

Man: It's funny, isn't it?

(Pause.)

Memory plays these tricks on people. I guess it does that. Sometimes I sit and wonder if that was how it really happened. Somehow I doubt it. I don't think I would have tolerated it. I don't think you would have tolerated it. But things were different then. I remember.

(Pause.)

You could have been someone. You know, you really could have been someone. But you weren't interested, were you? No, you were perfectly happy being a nobody. A fucking nobody.

(Pause.)

I was someone. Once. That was after, of course. After those days at the summer house. The wining and dining, the roaring tarmac, the sun-kissed veranda. Those were the days.

(Pause.)

You probably don't remember. You probably don't recall. But you were always like that, so absent-minded. If it didn't matter, it didn't matter, but it should have been said. It should have been communicated. Communication is the key, they say. That's what they say, isn't it?

(Pause.)

Communication.

(Pause.)

I wish we'd spoken more. Back then. I had so much I wanted to tell you but I never quite

knew how. What are you meant to tell someone you barely know?

(Pause.)

I felt comfortable around you. I want you to know that.

(Pause.)

The buffet was dreadful. Cold pasta salad. Who the fuck eats cold pasta? Probably a French thing.

(Pause.)

You never did know what to do with food. They talk about people being able to burn water, but I reckon you could. You always managed to do the things no-one else could. That tree near the beach front. Take that, for example. I had a good six inches on you then and still you managed to scale it to the top. Still you managed to get there. To see that view. I remember you telling me about it.

(Pause.)

Of course I never saw it. I only had your word for it. But I know you were telling the truth. You always told the truth. Not a word could be wrong. You could do no wrong. Not in my eyes. Not to me. Not you.

(Pause.)

But then life has a funny way of changing things round, doesn't it? What you thought was true is suddenly a lie. Truth no longer exists. Your memories fail you. And you can't prove it ever happened because it's in the past. It's untouchable. Even though we were both there. Even though we both lived it, we still can't prove it.

(Pause.)

But who needs proof? We both know what happened. No-one else matters.

(Pause.)

They were looking right into my eyes, you know. As we spoke of you. As we reminisced. They were looking for something. Searching. As if they knew. As if I was going to give something away. Some small tell or twitch. Or maybe they thought I was going to tell them everything. Your Auntie Sandra gave me a strange look. An odd sideways glance. Just staring. Staring. Like the way people look at a painting in a gallery. Sussing it out. Analysing every brush stroke. I thought her glasses were going to fall off.

(Pause.)

She's doing well. She wanted you to know that. She misses you. I think they all do. But that's to be expected, isn't it? Of course they think I don't. They think they know the way I think. The way I feel. They read too much. They don't know what they think they know.

(Pause.)

No-one knows the details. Sat up in their ivory towers. Ever the observers. They don't see my thoughts. They don't read my memories. Because they're important to me, memories. They're all I have.

(Pause.)