

# MEMORY JUNK

A short play by Neil Sharman

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## **Memory Junk**

### **A short play by Neil Sharman**

*A front room. A woman is seated. Her husband comes in, taking off his scarf and coat. Both are middle aged.*

WIFE: How was The Rose and Crown tonight? Was it busy?

HUSBAND: Yes. Not bad actually. For a Monday. For these times.

WIFE: Nice to be able to get out again, I bet. Surely?

HUSBAND: Well, yes. Sort of. I mean it's weird. It's not like pubs were. It feels sort of a bit Russian, Cold War.

WIFE: What do you mean?

HUSBAND: Well, everyone sitting at their own table. Nodding when they need serving. No rounds allowed, just your own drink and you can't go up to the bar, which is right there. A beautiful Victorian bar made to stand at.

WIFE: What makes it 'Cold War'?

HUSBAND: It just feels cold and distant. Untrusting, I suppose.

WIFE: In the First World War they banned rounds of drinks in Britain, you know.

HUSBAND: Yes, I'd forgotten that, actually. Maybe there is a British precedent, though it only feels mildly warmer than my analogy.

WIFE: Who was in. Anyone you knew?

HUSBAND: Well, it's A.B.C.D night. I never knew how few of my friends had surnames towards the start of the alphabet until they introduced this 'Social Spacing in Pubs' law.

WIFE: So, you drank alone?

HUSBAND: Alone at my table, yes. But I did venture to talk to a few people, I'm not a shy teenager

WIFE: You were never a shy teenager.

HUSBAND: Just a shite teenager

WIFE: Probably, but probably less shite than most. All teenagers are shite. Our two were. So, who did you chat up?

HUSBAND: A bloke called Mark from Canary Street. You'd know him if you saw him. I think his kids are younger, though he looks our age. Anyway, you'd know him.

WIFE: Do you know him from the bus?

HUSBAND: No, he's a homeworker, I think. Lucky sod. He works for Google so it's all screens, no need to actually go anywhere.

WIFE: He's not been snapped up by a bio-tech then?

HUSBAND: Clearly not on their hit list. He says everyone at Google's really old now and he quite likes that. He reckons they all grew up together, went through their precocious stage together and now it's a far more chilled out company to work for. The poaching bio-techs have stripped out all the...

WIFE: Ambition?

HUSBAND: Wankers.

WIFE: So, he doesn't want to be snapped up by a bio-tech himself, then?

HUSBAND: Ah well, a dilemma he doesn't need to face, I suspect. But it didn't stop him talking about bio-techs and their crazy capers

WIFE: What are they crazily capering about now? What's the new reason they've cooked up for people to sign over their DNA?

HUSBAND: MONEY! Money money money. Remember it? Remember when it made the world go round? Remember when there was enough to go round? Remember when I could buy a round because I had some - and because I was allowed to approach the bar, your honour?

WIFE: I remember when I could get a job to earn some

HUSBAND: And when I earned double what I earn now

WIFE: So, have you sold your DNA to the bio-tech's then? What did you get for it? Ten bob?

HUSBAND: No. No, but Mark was talking about something interesting.

WIFE: Which is?

HUSBAND: Experiences.

WIFE: What experiences?

HUSBAND: Well, Experiences Incorporated, to be exact.

WIFE: Which is?

HUSBAND: A new bloody bio-tech, of course

WIFE: And their angle?

HUSBAND: Memories. They buy your memories.

WIFE: Do they!

HUSBAND: It seems so. But not your good memories. Mark showed me an ad on his phone, and it was about a couple who were worried about never remembering their wedding day, but the ad said they would always remember their wedding day, in fact they'd remember it more and remember the good bits more

WIFE: Right. So, you're not thinking of forgetting ours?

HUSBAND: No.

WIFE: Though I could forget the sty I had. Well, I sort of have forgotten it, I turned my head for every photo. If it's not on the photos, it never existed.

HUSBAND: Well, that's sort of the point. Experience Inc make that point, you lose the bad part of your memories, even if they're just tiny details, like a speck in your eye.

WIFE: A sty

HUSBAND: A sty. They just suck that memory out. Bang, never happened, not just because it's not on a photo, it never happened in your memory. They go into your mind, you see.

WIFE: My wacko siren is sounding

HUSBAND: ...and they search around your memories for dark memories. They can determine the parts of your memories that make the brighter bits of memory, which are the good bits, not as bright as they could be. Then they can..

WIFE: Zap out the shit memories?

HUSBAND: No, they translate them to a text summary and list them. And then you run down a tick list and say what you want to keep. There are three levels, the mildly bad – like your sty. Then there's the really bad, so tick tick tick, get rid of them. Then there's the subconscious stuff your memory has blocked out like post-traumatic stress or, as the ad said, like when women's brains forget the pain of childbirth.

WIFE: Not forgotten. Fucking painful.

HUSBAND: Yeah, so you pick and choose, you see, you don't get rid of anything that's not what they call a 'junk memory' because you've retrieved it from the junk folder, but if you keep any negative stuff it means the good memories are always a bit dimmer than it might otherwise be. That's their sell, make all the good memories amazing. Whoop whoop?

WIFE: Right