

She Sells Sea Shells

A Play

CAST LIST:-

Elliot – 21 years old when the play begins. Referred to as Elliot or Original Elliot.

Young Elliot – 9 year old Elliot. Always referred to as Young Elliot to distinguish between the two.

Damian – Elliot’s father. 30 – 50 years old.

Faye – Elliot’s mother. 30 – 50 years old.

Bernard – 70 or older.

Amy – Elliot’s childhood friend. 9 years old.

Genevieve – Early 20s.

Julie – Late teens/early 20s.

Waitress

Woman/Paramedic/Doctor – Voice-over only.

A dark stage. Elliot steps forward.

Elliot: The sound, when you listen into a shell, is not the sound of the ocean, although that is what it is commonly believed to be. It is the sound of blood, rushing through your veins, projected back at you. Sometimes, when I listen to the inside of a shell, it is not to imagine myself stood on a beach looking at the endless sea. It is to remind myself that I am still alive.

The sound of the raging sea. The sound continues for a few seconds, then we hear gulls etc. Julie steps forward, a bag of chips in her hand. Elliot and Julie slip into a naturalistic scene, staring out at the audience as though looking out at the sea.

Julie: I love the smell of the sea. The salt makes the air feel tingly and alive. Don't you agree, Elliot?

Elliot: I don't know.

Julie: Do you want a chip? They're still warm.

Elliot: No. Thank you.

Julie: Elliot, I have something to tell you.

Elliot: I thought you might.

Julie: Now, promise not to be angry...

Elliot: I don't get angry. Just disappointed. Again. And again. And again.

Julie: It's just not working out.

Elliot: I know.

Julie: It's not that I don't think you're a nice guy. I think you're great. You're funny and you're caring and... It's just... Look, it's difficult to explain...

Elliot: Julie, just tell me.

Julie: I don't want to hurt you...

Elliot: I've been hurt before.

Julie: Which is why this is so much more difficult...

Elliot: Just get it over with.

Julie: We've been together a while now. But, when two people are together, in a relationship, there should be a spark.

Elliot: I know.

Julie: And I don't think we have that spark.

Elliot: I think we had it.

Julie: Yeah, maybe we did. But I don't think we have it anymore.

Elliot: Go on.

Julie: Look, I don't want to hurt you. I don't want to hurt your feelings.

Elliot: That's very thoughtful of you.

Julie: Don't be too upset.

Elliot: I'm not upset.

Julie: Don't lie to me, Elliot.

Elliot: Do I look like I'm lying to you?

Julie: Recently, it seems like you're always lying to me.

Elliot: What is this about, Julie? Come on, spit it out.

Julie: You know what I'm going to say. Can't we just leave it at that?

Elliot: No!

A brief silence. The scene has been relatively quiet until the last line. The shout should shock not just Julie but the audience as well. Elliot then reverts back into his normal self.

Elliot: I'm sorry.

Julie: No, I'm sorry.

Pause.

Julie: Are you sure you don't want a chip?

Elliot: I told you, I'm not hungry.

Julie: Come on, Elliot. There'll be other girls, you know that.

Elliot: Yeah, I know.

Julie: And you'll smile with her, just like we did. And laugh. And have fun.

Elliot: ...And fall in love?

Julie: Yes.

Elliot: ...Just like we did?

Julie falters, her smile wavers.

Julie: Not exactly.

Elliot: But I *am* in love with you.

Julie: And...that's nice.

Elliot: Are you in love with me?

Julie: Maybe.

Elliot: What does that mean?

Julie: It's not important. You will be happy again, Elliot. I promise.

Elliot: How can you promise that? How can you possibly expect me to accept that?

Julie: Everyone goes through periods of upset...but they come through it, and then they're stronger than ever.

Elliot: Not me.

Julie: How do you know that?

Elliot: I'm not like other people, Julie. I'm not normal.

Julie: Of course you are. But people fall in and out of love all the time. It's just what happens. Time changes things.

Elliot: You're not listening to me. I'm different. And not in a good way. I'm dangerous. You're right to stay away from me. Everyone should stay away from me. The further away from me they are, the less likely they are to be hurt.

Julie: I don't understand. Elliot, you're scaring me.

Elliot: Scaring you? Scaring you?

He suddenly pulls a knife from his back pocket.

Elliot: Believe me, Julie, you don't know the meaning of 'scared'.

Julie: What are you doing?

Elliot: You hear that sound? The ocean smashing against the beach?

Julie: Yes...

Elliot: That's the sound of power. And force. And death...

He suddenly lifts the knife, and it seems for a minute as though he's about to stab Julie. Then he slits his own wrists. Blood flows. Julie doesn't react immediately, stunned. Blackout.

The sound of the ocean stops. Lights up.

Young Elliot, aged 9. Standing centre stage, holding a sea shell. He looks out to the audience. Original Elliot watches from the back of the stage, hood pulled over his head, reminiscent, slightly, of the grim reaper.

Elliot's father, Damian, enters. He interacts solely with Young Elliot.

Damian: Elliot! What're you doing out here, son?

Young Elliot: Watching the traffic.

Damian: There isn't any traffic. No cars ever come down this road.

Young Elliot: They do. Sometimes. You just have to be patient.

He continues to look out at the audience. Damian finally notices the shell in his hand.

Damian: What's that?

Young Elliot: What?

Damian: That. In your hand.

Young Elliot: It's a shell. A sea shell. She sells sea shells by the sea shore.

Damian: Where did you get it?

Young Elliot: Amy brought it back for me. From the beach.

Damian: She's been on holiday?

Young Elliot: Yes.

Damian: In the middle of October?

Young Elliot: It wasn't a proper holiday. Just a weekend.

Damian: I hope you said thank you for the shell.

Young Elliot: I did.

Damian kneels down beside Elliot. Elliot keeps on looking out for traffic.

Damian: Have you ever heard about the magical powers of sea shells?

Young Elliot: What magical powers?

Damian: Hold it to your ear.

Elliot raises his eyebrows. Damian laughs.

Damian: Go on, do it. Listen to the shell. Hear its inner beauty.

Elliot holds the shell to his ear, listens for a minute. His eyes widen, and he looks at his father.

Young Elliot: What is it?

Damian: It's the sound of the sea.

Young Elliot: It sounds so powerful. So magical.

Damian: I know.

Young Elliot: Can we go to the sea, Dad? Please?

Damian: Maybe. One day.

Young Elliot: I've never seen the sea.

Damian: Sure you have. You've seen it on the telly.

Young Elliot: It's not the same, though. Why can't we go? Just for a weekend, like Amy's family?

Damian: You know why we can't go at the minute.

Young Elliot: Why not?

Damian: Because of your brother.

Young Elliot: He can stay here, with mum. Me and you can go.

Damian: Look, when your brother's better, we'll all go. All together. For an entire weekend.

Young Elliot: But what if he doesn't get better?

Damian: What?

Young Elliot: What if he...dies?

Damian: Elliot, don't say that.

Young Elliot: Why not?

Damian: Because it's not a nice thing to say.

Young Elliot: But if he does die, can we still go to the beach?

Damian: I've told you, young man...

Young Elliot: I hope he dies. If he dies, then we can have fun again, like before.

Damian: Elliot...

Young Elliot: Ever since he came along, everyone's been sad. If he dies, maybe we can be happy again.

Damian: Right! That's enough! Get inside!

Elliot stares at his father, as though unsure that he's done anything wrong.

Damian: Go on! Get in the house!

When Elliot doesn't move, Damian reaches down to grab him. Elliot ducks out of the way, runs offstage. Damian moves to run after him. The sudden sound of a vehicle – a car approaching fast. Lights sweep the stage to indicate car headlights passing. Then darkness. We hear Damian's voice:

Damian: Elliot! No!

The lights slowly come up to reveal original Elliot in his same position – at the back of the stage, hood pulled over his head. We continue to hear voices, and perhaps music. The noise should build and get louder.

Woman: Yes, we need an ambulance! A young boy's been hit! I don't know...

Paramedic: What's his name?

Damian: His name's Elliot, but...

Paramedic: This is Elliot Baker, he was involved in a car accident at six thirty this evening...

Doctor: He's currently on life-support. I promise you, Mr Baker, we're trying to do everything we can...

Damian: It was my fault. No cars ever come down that road. I swear I would never have let him...

As the words are spoken, Elliot slowly raises his head to look at the audience. He places his palms together as though in prayer for the little boy. A beeping of the life-support machine joins the crescendo.

Doctor: His heart-rate's dropping. Can we clear the room please...?

Damian: What's going on? What's happening to my boy...?

A long, continuous beep.

Doctor: We've lost him.

It continues.

Blackout.

Beeping stops.

A graveyard. Original Elliot remains in his position from the previous scene. Damian and Faye enter, walking together.

Faye: I never liked funerals.

Damian: Me neither. I can remember when my grandmother died... People were trying to put on a brave face, and it made me angry.

Faye: Why?

Damian: Because a funeral is the time when you say goodbye to people. And goodbyes aren't easy. And crying is hard. Just like a funeral.

Faye: He was our son, Damian.

Damian: I know.

Pause.

Damian: Where's Jake?

Faye: With your mum.

Damian: Are they coming?

Faye: I don't know. It's too cold for Jake. I know you want him here, but... We've got to do what's best for him.

Damian: Do you think it's time to go inside?

Faye: People are starting to arrive.

Damian: ...Faye?

Faye: Yes?

Damian: Hold my hand.

She reaches for his hand.

Faye: You're cold.

Damian: I love you. And I love Jacob. And I love Elliot.

Faye: A family. That's all we ever dreamt of.

Damian: Come on, let's go and make our little boy proud.

Exit.

Original Elliot watches them go, reaches out towards them, looks as though he is about to say something...

Blackout.

Lights up. A settee and an armchair face into each other, set out like a living room. Julie sits on a settee with a cup of tea held in her hands. Damian, slightly older, wearing a jumper, in the armchair. Elliot sits cross legged on the floor between Julie and Damian, clutching the shell, reminiscent of his younger self. He doesn't move. Damian sits as though he is waiting for an answer, or a reply. Finally-

Julie: Two days ago.

Damian: And you haven't seen him since?

Julie: No. I thought you would have.

Damian: He hasn't been back here for a while. A bus took him six months ago and we haven't seen him since then.

Julie: Where was the bus going?

Damian: Only into town. It hit him at the island near Tesco.

Julie: He can't keep doing this. It's selfish. And childish.

Damian: You have to understand that Elliot is different, Julie. People who commit suicide – it's because they feel that they have no other option. They literally don't want to carry on living. For Elliot, suicide is like a temper tantrum. I don't think he even feels the pain of it anymore.

Julie: He might not, but we do.

Faye enters. She appears to have aged a lot since the previous scene. A cardigan is pulled round her shoulders, and she walks with a sort of limp – the beginnings of arthritis.

Faye: I've been on the computer – Oh, Julie, I didn't realise...

Julie: No, it's ok, I'd better get going anyway.

Damian: No, Julie, stay.

He looks at Faye.

Damian: The bugger's done it again.

Faye: When?

Damian: Three days ago.

Faye: How?

Julie: He...erm...he slit his wrists.

Faye sits down and puts her hand in her hands. She sighs.

Faye: They're getting worse.

Damian: No, they're not.

Faye: They are, Damian. If you want to commit suicide because you're upset, you take pills, or you hang yourself. If you slit your wrists... well, then you're just looking for attention.

Damian: Ok, so they're becoming a little more extravagant...

Julie: Have you heard yourselves?