

The Lady With The Dog

CHARACTERS :

MARY-JANE WATSON

PETER PARKER

- both in their early thirties

SETTING : A park bench overlooking the Penryn River.

TIME : The Present. Early morning on a work day in Spring

SYNOPSIS:

It is early morning on a spring day not long after sunrise. The action takes place by a park bench a few metres from the bank of the Penryn River. MARY-JANE WATSON, in her early thirties, formerly an infant school teacher and the widow of a biology teacher, has brought Freddie, her eleven year old Beagle, to the park for his morning run. Chasing a belligerent drake into the river Freddie quickly gets into difficulties. A passing jogger, PETER PARKER, also in his thirties, single, a chartered accountant and aspiring painter was alerted by Mary-Jane's frantic cries and runs to assist. Stripping off his sweatshirt, jogging pants and trainers Peter plunges into the swirling river. Desperately he tries to capture the panicked dog while Mary-Jane can only watch the life and death struggle –

- as the curtain rises.

A Hero in The Park is the story of two lonely people thrown together by a tragedy that awakens their grief, loneliness, ambitions, hopes and dreams and which ultimately allows them to take a first heroic step into the future.

LIGHTS UP ON – A PARK BENCH, ANGLED TOWARDS STAGE RIGHT, IN FRONT OF WHICH STANDS MARY-JANE LOOKING AWAY OFF STAGE RIGHT. SHE IS CLUTCHING A DOG LEAD; HER EYES WIDE OPEN IN TERROR.

MARY-JANE Oh, please – please – please.
 Yes ! You've got him ! Oh thank God !
 Oh you wonderful, wonderful - !
 Oh GOD ! NO ! He's getting away ! Catch him ! Please !
 (THEN SUDDENLY FROZEN IN HORROR, UNTIL)
 Nooo - !

- SHE CRUMPLES AS HER BODY DRAINS OF HOPE AND SHE SLUMPS ON THE BENCH SOBBING.

A PAUSE.

SHE SEEMS UNAWARE OF PETER AS HE ENTERS FROM STAGE RIGHT, OUT OF BREATH AND DRIPPING WET FROM HEAD TO TOE, AS ARE HIS UNDERPANTS AND RUNNING SOCKS, WHICH ARE ALL HE IS WEARING.

PETER I. I am – so sorry.
 (GLANCING BACK AS HE CONTINUES)
 I thought I had him – but he just wriggled free and – it was like he wanted to save himself – he wouldn't let me.
 I couldn't – it's all the rain we've had. I've never seen the river as full as this –
 (UNTIL HIS EXCUSES FAIL HIM)
 I'm sorry –

MARY-JANE TURNS AND LOOKS ACCUSINGLY AT HIM –

SHE LOOKS AWAY AGAIN – AND BURIES HER FACE IN HER HANDS –

PETER I'm really very sorry –

PETER STANDS WATCHING HER – UNTIL HE SHIVERS – AND THEN HE GOES TO THE FAR LEFT OF THE STAGE AND PICKS UP HIS TRACK SUIT TOP WHICH ALONG WITH A PAIR OF MEN'S JOGGING PANTS AND A PAIR OF MEN'S RUNNING SHOES ARE STREWN ACROSS THE UPSTAGE WHERE HE DISCARDED THEM BEFORE ATTEMPTING THE RESCUE. HE RUBS DOWN HIS BODY WITH THE SWEATSHIRT BEFORE PUTTING IT ON.

MARY-JANE I ought to go down and see if – perhaps he might have managed –

PETER No, I'm afraid he won't. I tried to follow him down but he was – I'm afraid he – he won't – I'm sorry -

HE PICKS UP THE TRACK SUIT TROUSERS AND PUTS THEM ON. HE IS NOW STANDING CLOSE TO HER AND HE HESITANTLY, SYMPATHETICALLY, REACHES OUT TO TOUCH HER BUT SHE FLINCHES FROM HIS TOUCH –

HE GOES TO THE FIRST OF HIS SHOES – PULLS OFF HIS SOCKS AND STARTS TO TRY TO PUT THE SHOE – THEN REALISES HE HAS TO UNDO THE LACES WHICH HAD BECOME TIGHTLY KNOTTED WHEN HE PULLED OFF THE SHOES BEFORE DIVING IN –

PETER Have you had him long ? Freddie.

MARY-JANE (ABSENTLY) What ?

PETER Had you had him - ?

PETER FEELS HIS QUESTION IS INAPPROPRIATE AND RETURNS TO THE TROUBLESOME KNOT ON HIS SHOE. THEN PULLS BACK THE SLEEVE OF HIS TRACKSUIT AND INSPECTS A MARK ON HIS ARM.

PETER He was a cute little chap. Even when he was trying to bite me
he –

MARY-JANE (SNAPS AT HIM.) Freddie never bit anyone. He was the
sweetest –

SHE STANDS AND MOVES TO STAGE RIGHT AND GAZES OFF AS HE RETURNS
TO HIS TROUBLESOME KNOT AND FINALLY UNDOES IT. HE PUTS THE SHOE
ON AND TIES THE LACE.

PETER I should be going.

MARY-JANE GAZES OFF – TWISTING THE LEAD IN HER FINGERS

MARY-JANE Is the water very deep ?

PETER No. It's just moving so fast. He wasn't able to swim properly.
He panicked, I think. I couldn't get a hold of him.

HE PUTS ON HIS OTHER SHOE - ALMOST UNCONSCIOUSLY SHE KNOTS
FREDDIE'S LEAD INTO A NOOSE.

PETER I'm afraid I have to get to work. (HE STANDS UP)
Is there anyone you could – anyone I could call ? A friend ?
Do you live nearby ? I could walk back with you ?
I really don't want to leave you.

MARY-JANE He was twelve. They said he was about eight when we got
him. So we had Freddie for four years. No. *We* didn't. *I* had
Freddie for four years. Mark and I only had him for two years.
Until Mark died. Then it was just Freddie and me. And now
it's just me.

MARY-JANE FIGHTS TO PULL HERSELF TOGETHER. SHE PUSHES THE LEAD INTO A POCKET OF HER JACKET THEN TURNS TO PETER.

MARY-JANE I'm sorry. You want to go.

PETER Well...if you're sure you'll be alright.

MARY-JANE Yes, yes, I'm fine. Really. Please, go.

PETER Right. Well, goodbye.

MARY-JANE Goodbye –

SHE OFFERS HIM HER HAND – AND HE TAKES IT

MARY-JANE - and thank you.

PETER No – there's nothing to thank me for. I'm afraid I wasn't much help. I wish I could have done more –

PETER TRIES TO LET GO OF HER HAND – BUT SHE HOLDS ON TO IT –

MARY-JANE But you tried. And that was very brave of you. Yes, you must go. You'll catch cold.

AND FINALLY SHE RELEASES HIS HAND –

PETER Right. It looks as though it's going to be a lovely day. There isn't a cloud in the sky.

MARY-JANE No – after all the rain and we finally get a beautiful day.
I suppose that's what made him chase after the ducks – he
hasn't had a proper walk for days – yesterday he just sat by the
window watching the rain – he looked really fed up.

SHE ALMOST LAUGHS AT THE MEMORY AND HE SMILES.
SHE REACHES TO TAKE A BIT OF WEED FROM HIS HAIR AND HE FLINCHES

MARY-JANE Just a bit of weed –

HE STANDS STILL AS SHE PICKS THE WEED OUT OF HIS HAIR.

PETER Thanks. (HE STEPS BACK) Right – well – I'll be off -

HE STARTS FLEXING HIS LEGS, PREPARING TO SET OFF –

MARY-JANE Do you have far to go ?

PETER No. Not far. Just off Broad Street.

MARY-JANE Oh, good. That it's not far.

PETER No. Well, I'd better go –

HE TURNS AWAY -

MARY-JANE I don't know your name.

PETER It's Peter.

MARY-JANE Mary-Jane.

SHE OFFERS HER HAND – SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY HE TAKES IT -

PETER Hello, Mary-Jane.

MARY-JANE Hello, Peter.

A MOMENT AS SHE STILL HOLDS HIS HAND – AND THEN SHE RELEASES IT.

PETER Well, hello - and goodbye.

MARY-JANE Yes.

PETER Goodbye. (HE STARTS TO GO)

MARY-JANE Please don't go.

HE STOPS AS SHE SLUMPS DOWN ON TO THE BENCH.

MARY-JANE I'm sorry but - . I don't know what to do.

HE WANTS TO GO BUT –

PETER Look, perhaps you shouldn't stay here.
You've had a nasty shock.
Ah, I could walk with you up to Broad Street – there's a café
there and –

MARY-JANE I've lost everything. I'm completely alone. I'm very scared.

PETER But there must be someone who could –

MARY-JANE There was just Mark – and Freddie. And now they're both gone. (SHE LOOKS AROUND)

Mark used to bring Freddie here every day – before he went to school. Mark had to be there by eight – but he said that watching Freddie running around, so inquisitive and happy, meant however much of a struggle the kids might be he always had something to think about – something that would make him smile. Perhaps you saw him when you were running ? Mark was tall, and he was fair with -

PETER I – I don't think - I don't always run in the morning – sometimes I just have too much on my mind. Work – and stuff.

MARY-JANE Oh. What do you do ?

PETER I'm an accountant.

MARY-JANE Oh – that's nice.

PETER No it's not.

MARY-JANE Oh, well I suppose – people always make jokes about accountants -

PETER It just isn't what I want to do with my life.

MARY-JANE Well, what do you want to do ?

PETER I want to paint. I really want to be a painter. I paint people.

MARY-JANE You're a portrait painter ?

PETER Not really. I like to paint people doing things. I don't like ordinary portraits. Just someone sat on a chair looking out at the world. I mean they're fine for kings and queens, or generals or famous people. We know what they've done. But I want to paint ordinary people – doing what ordinary people do. I think then we'd understand each other better. I don't think we pay enough attention to each other – I think we should stop and pay attention to each other. I'm sorry, I'm just rambling on.

MARY-JANE No, you're not.

PETER What do you do ?

MARY-JANE I don't really do anything. After Mark died I lost interest. I used to teach. At an infants' school. But when Mark became ill I took time off and I nursed him. We came to Cornwall so that we could start a family – but after Mark died - I couldn't bear to – I didn't have the courage to go back into a classroom full of children.

(BEAT)

But you should do what you want to do. You shouldn't waste time doing something you don't like.

PETER I know. But it would be crazy to give up a good job – I don't think I've got it in me –

MARY-JANE But you were crazy enough to jump in a river to rescue my dog.

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PETER That was a moment of madness –

MARY-JANE Perhaps your *life* deserves a moment of madness.

PETER

Perhaps.

(A PAUSE)

You know, I've never told anyone about giving up being an accountant. Even my fiancée.

MARY-JANE

Well, I certainly think you ought to tell her.

PETER

Oh no, she's not my fiancée any more. We split up at Christmas.

MARY-JANE

Oh. That must have been sad.

PETER

Yes. It was a shock. When she told me. We should have been married this June. And then on Christmas Eve – we were in Italy, skiing – she suddenly said, I don't think you're very enthusiastic about this wedding. I said that I was, I was very enthusiastic. But then she said, no – actually I don't think you're very enthusiastic about love. I was, really I was.

MARY-JANE

But she didn't know about the painting ?

PETER

Oh, yes. She knew I painted. She thought it was a nice hobby.

MARY-JANE

But she didn't know about wanting to give up being an accountant ?

PETER

No.

MARY-JANE

Well then, you can hardly blame her.

PETER

Oh ?

MARY-JANE Because you had a secret from her. And she guessed.
She didn't know what the secret was – but she guessed it was
something. Women always do. And that's why she dumped
you.
So, you have to make a decision. You need courage.

PETER Be a hero in my own life.

MARY-JANE Yes. Yes, we both have to be brave.

MARY-JANE PUTS HER HAND ON HIS, GIVES IT A REASSURING SQUEEZE,
THEN LETS GO OF HIS HAND AND STANDS UP.

MARY-JANE I think I'm ready to go now.

PETER Oh.

MARY- JANE And you must get to your office. If you're going to leave your
job you should do it properly. You shouldn't just go off and –

PETER - jump into rivers trying to rescue dogs.

(HE STANDS UP)

Well then –

(HE JOGS ON THE SPOT TO WARM UP)

Here I go.

MARY-JANE Good luck.

PETER Thank you. And again – goodbye.

- AND HE GOES

MARY-JANE I've put you under 'Hero'.

PETER: Oh. Thank you.

MARY-JANE And if I hear anything, I'll call you.

PETER: Right. Well, I guess I'd better get going -

MARY-JANE PUTS HER PHONE BACK IN HER POCKET

MARY-JANE Yes.

(THEN JUST BEFORE HE GOES)

Peter. If I called you. Just to tell you – you know, if there's any news.

PETER: Yes ?

MARY-JANE Would you. Would you ask me out – for a drink – or for dinner – do you think you would ask me something like that ?

PETER: Yes, Mary-Jane. Yes, I probably would. If that's alright?

MARY-JANE That's the thing. I don't know if it is alright.

PETER: Oh

MARY-JANE I don't know if I would have the courage to say yes.

PETER: Oh

MARY-JANE I think I would. I think I would say yes.

PETER: Oh – good.

MARY-JANE No, I don't think it is good. In fact I'm almost sure it wouldn't be good.

PETER: Oh.

MARY-JANE So I may not call you.

PETER: Oh. Oh, right. But then I wouldn't know – if there's any news.

MARY-JANE No. That's true. Look, couldn't I call you – if there is any news – but could you *not* ask me out on a date.

PETER: Well, yes – I suppose I could – I mean, I could not - but – I don't want to – I mean I do want to.
But alright then – I will not ask you. I will just – you can just tell me if you have any news and I will say thank you, and – and that's all. How would that be ?

MARY-JANE Hmm?

 (A BEAT)
I don't believe you.

PETER RUBS THE ARM ON WHICH HE WAS BITTEN AS IF HE WAS COLD

PETER: No, really –

MARY-JANE (SMILING) I don't think you're telling me the truth, Peter.

HE FACES HER AND SMILES – A GENUINE SMILE

MARY-JANE (CONT) If you'd been around small children as much as I have, you'd know the signs.

PETER Hmm – wasn't very heroic of me, was it ?
But I'm glad you found me out.

MARY-JANE Really ?

PETER: I didn't like lying to you.

MARY-JANE No. Heroes shouldn't lie.

PETER: No. I won't do it again.

MARY-JANE Good. Now go – Go! Run. Hurry.

PETER GOES STAGE LEFT. SHE WATCHES HIM GO FOR A MOMENT THEN
TURNS AND LOOKS OFF TOWARDS THE RIVER FOR A MOMENT –

THEN SHE SITS ON THE BENCH AND LOOKS UP INTO THE SKY

MARY-JANE Mark. If you're there – well, then I'm sure Freddie is with
you. So please have fun together.
What do you think of Peter ? I think he's a nice man.
He's not you, Mark. I know that.
We thought it you and I would live happily ever after.
But, well, that wasn't to be.
But you know what I'm trying to say. Right ?
If you're listening to me. You know how I feel about you.
What I feel about you. We don't have any secrets. Well, you
do kind of have one secret. Because if you're not listening to
this – then I'm just another crazy lady on a park bench. So, I
think I'll go now.

SHE STANDS UP AND TURNS TO EXIT STAGE LEFT.

THEN SHE TAKES OUT HER PHONE AND DIALS A SPEED-DIAL NUMBER.

SHE WAITS FOR THE PHONE TO BE ANSWERED.

MARY-JANE

Peter. It's me –

(Mary-Jane ? Are you alright ?)

Yes. I'm fine. I – I've decided to be brave.

(So, you're going to be a hero ?)

Yes. I think we both need to be heroes.

(SHE LAUGHS AND STARTS TO GO)

In fact, I think we might need to be super heroes.

FADE TO BLACK AS SHE GOES -

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The End