Second draft, December '91.

ALWAYS WITH YOU

by

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Always With You was commissioned by Token Gestures Theatre Company to tour to fifth and sixth formers in Leeds schools. It formed part of a day long programme. The usual pattern was for the first half of the play to start the day. This would be followed by workshops looking broadly at the areas of definition - what is HIV and AIDS? - and transmission - how do you 'get' it?
The second half of the play would begin the afternoon session and would lead into workshops on safer sex and the negotiation of safer sexual practices.
It was written to be performed by three actors, one male and two female, though it would lend itself well to a cast of four or five.
Performer One takes the parts of 'ONE', CAROLINE AND JANE.
Performer Two takes the part of 'TWO' and TAMSIN.
Performer Three takes the parts of 'THREE', MARTIN AND JOE.

The first half runs approximately forty five minutes.
The second half runs approximately forty minutes.

1961 music (Tape)

ONE	They straggle back from assembly to open their desks for the last time.
TWO	Consider what to take and what to leave behind.
THREE	Check that they have made their mark.
ONE	Finger chewing gum, ageing and grey, moulded to the underside of a chair,
THREE	Or a name carved on a table top.
ONE	Ann G Loves Paul S. Forever.
THREE	Mr Twigget is a ...
TWO	Here a short word has been removed
ONE	To be replaced in another hand by ...
THREE	A very nice man?
TWO	Baggins was 'ere. 1961.
ONE	Boredom kills.
THREE	Life is a four letter word.
ONE/TWO/THREE	Their bags are full. What else is there to take with them? They glance around the room.
TWO	Avoiding the eyes of those they've seen almost every day for so long.
THREE	Unwilling to acknowledge that this moment
ONE	Will never recur.
ONE/TWO/THREE	Their last day at school.
THREE	Jim flexes his taut rugby captain's body and strolls across to Hazel.
ONE	Star of the tennis court, who, perched elegantly on the desk, smiles into his eyes.
THREE	In a voice both deep and melodic, he says, 'Um, er, 'Azel...?'
ONE	Her heart skips a beat. Yeah. Terror and delight are mingled.
THREE	Party. Tonight. My house. Do you want to ...?
ONE	I might. She turns her head away coyly.
TWO	To see Angie, seething.
THREE	She has been gazing adoringly at Jim, as usual.
TWO	Her last chance of an invitation. TWO - AS ANGIE - MOVES TOWARDS THREE, JIM, GAZING AT HIM. SHE MAKES THE SOUND OF HER HEARTBEAT.
TWO	Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.
THREE	Jim is approaching, languidly.
TWO	BECOMING LOUDER AND FASTER. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

THREE WALKING PAST AND 'LEAVING'. See you, Ange.

TWO Boom, boom, boom. BECOMING SLOWER AND MOURNFUL.

See you, Jim. ALMOST INAUDIBLE .

THREE, HAVING TAKEN JIM OUT OF THE ROOM BECOMES PHIL.

THREE Little Phil, as opposed to Big Phil, the school's champion shotputter, has watched Angie flick her perfect hair over her perfect shoulders, unravel her perfect legs and cross the room.

TWO TURNS TO FACE HIM.

Her eyes seem to be drilling into the depths of his soul.

His last chance.

Phil takes a deep breath.

ONE Expanding his chest to tis full 36 inches.

THREE Go. CROSSING TO ANGIE. Angie. Here's my phone ...

TWO Oh, Phil. SHE BEGINS TO CRY.

THREE Number.

SHE CONTINUES TO CRY. HE PUTS HIS ARMS ROUND HER AND HOLDS HER.

It's alright, Ange.

ONE Caroline hovers by the door, tugging her sweater over her stomach. It's a habit that's hard to break, even though, after six months, everyone knows her secret.

SHE CROSSES TO HER DESK.

She takes out her books and places them in neat piles on top of her desk.

THREE Martin watches horrified as she tears each one into small pieces, her dark hands moving against her bulging stomach.

Well, maybe that was all she was good for.

ONE Mr Carter. English. HOLDING A BOOK IN HER HAND.

She'd liked the way his bum wiggled when he wrote on the board. Imaginative, he'd called her.

Other teachers hadn't been so polite.

'Dreamy' and 'Inattentive', they'd said.

THREE Martin staches his collection of Goods and Very Goods, Nines and Tens, into his bag. He won't be saying goodbye. His group will be back in September to do 'A' Levels.

ONE She'd shown them. She'd been first at something. Though Moira would be the first to marry. August the Thirty First at The Church of The Sacred Heart. She'd been promised an invitation.

Births, Marriages and ...

THREE — Martin is ready to leave.

ONE — Caroline is ready to leave.

THREE/ONE — A last look around them.

THREE — Jezz and the lads are plastered.

ONE — The long-nail brigade are discussing what to wear tonight at Romeo's.

THREE — The no-hopers are launching exercise books across the room in the direction of the bin.

TWO — The Sad-Cases wait for someone to notice they are leaving, before drifting out unseen.

ONE/THREE — Caroline/Martin picks up her/his bag, swings it over her/his shoulder and almost bumps into Martin/Caroline.

MARTIN — Sorry.

CAROLINE — Okay. See you

MARTIN — Yes. See you

ONE/THREE — But she/he knows she/he won't. In a few years she'll/he'll have forgotten his/her name and even his/her face.

1961 music to fade / cross fade TO R.M

1961 music comes back in

Jazz Classic

SCENE TWO

Fades

THE MUSIC, 'ROUND MIDNIGHT' IS PLAYING. MARTIN PUTS A PULLOVER ROUND HIS SHOULDERS AND STANDS IN THE FRENCH WINDOWS LOOKING OUT INTO THE GARDEN. HE INHALES THE EVENING SMELLS OF DAMP EARTH AND LISTENS TO THE MUSIC. HE LOOKS UP AT THE SKY.

THREE — A summer sky, broken by the pale beginnings of stars and a faint crescent moon. Martin looks out into the mild dusk. He checks the roof tops and the trees. No sign yet. He'll see it clearly tonight. If it comes.

On the lawn a girl with grass-stained knees hammers a red ball against the wall and talks to herself. It won't come while she's there. But later, when she's in bed, then he'll see it.

Martin returns indoors and begins to write.

His first letter to his daughter.

MARTIN — Mr dear Tamsin, July 14th, 1988, your tenth birthday, and for me, one of the happiest. I've been watching you playing in your new buttercup yellow dress.

I can see you in the garden now while I lie here on the sofa. It feels as though you'll always be there playing and I'll always be here watching.

Your ball rolls in through the open door. I try to get up. But my legs bow.

HE FALLS BACK ON TO THE SOFA AS TAMSIN, AGED TEN, RUNS IN AFTER HER BALL.

TAMSIN — Dad? Are you alright?

MARTIN — Yes, yes. I'm alright. A bit shaky suddenly.

TAMSIN — Shall I get Mum?

MARTIN — No, love. You go on. I'm fine.

You pick up the ball and turn to look at me, at once a child, bewildered by her parent's weakness, and a small adult struggling to understand my pain.

SHE LEAVES. HE CALLS AFTER HER.

MARTIN — Tamsin!

3 — I imagine I'll explain everything to you. Everything.

TAMSIN — What? IRRITATED.

MARTIN — PAUSE. Isn't it past your bedtime?

TAMSIN — No!

MARTIN — Go on. Upstairs.

TAMSIN — Aw, Dad. SHE GOES OFF.

MARTIN — I can't explain now. You're still a child. I won't know you as the young woman you'll become.

Through these letters then I want you to know me as the man I was and am. I want you to understand this illness - not only how it changed my body but how it changed my mind and heart.

Hmm, so solemn. HE CRUMPLES THE LETTER AND TAKES ANOTHER SHEET OF PAPER. HE IS ABOUT TO WRITE.

Now I don't know where to begin.

THREE

He puts down his pen, walks to the window and looks out once more over the garden. Up on the eaves he sees the great ochre eyes of the owl, watching.

MARTIN

Beautiful.

THREE

But he remembers that it had once seemed frightening.

Cross fade from RM → fantastic (2 mins)

SCENE THREE

MUSIC, A FUTURISTIC TEENAGE FAVOURITE, PLAYS LOUDLY AND THEN FADES.

ONE — A smaller house now. No French windows and protecting trees but fence posts and potted plants stand guard. Jane waits on the doorstep for Tamsin.

She inspects last year's new paint, already blistered. Why does nothing ever last these days?

She pinches the dead heads from the pansies, the browning leaves from the geraniums. A shower of petals falls across the step.

Should she call again? Or simply leave? Tamsin has already said she doesn't want to come - but why ? They used to go every Saturday, but these days, these days. She takes a brush and sweeps away the dead flowers.

Maybe today they could make a fresh start.

JANE — CALLING INDOORS. Tamsin!

TAMSIN WHO IS IN HER ROOM, SURROUNDED BY REVISION BUT READING MIZZ, TURNS UP THE MUSIC.

JANE — Tamsin! STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF TAMSIN'S ROOM.

TAMSIN — What? PUTTING DOWN THE MAGAZINE.

JANE — I said, are you coming shopping?

TAMSIN TURNS DOWN THE MUSIC GRUDGINGLY.

TAMSIN — I'm revising.

JANE — Don't you want to choose something for your birthday?

TAMSIN — It's ages till my birthday.

JANE — Three weeks. I've set aside today to shop for it.

TAMSIN — God, mother. Why do you run everything like a military campaign?

JANE — Because I have to. This is the only weekend I'm not working.

It's your last chance to choose something.

TAMSIN — It's my last chance to understand photosynthesis.

JANE — You should take a break. You can overdo it, you know.

TAMSIN — No danger of that.

JANE — Tell me what you'd like then.

TAMSIN — I don't know.

JANE — If you came with me you'd get some ideas.

TAMSIN — Just give me the money.

JANE — I want you to have a proper birthday. Presents to unwrap.

TAMSIN Wrap me up a few bags of ten pees.

JANE HURT. Oh, Tamsin.

TAMSIN We'll buy something after exams.

SHE GOES BACK TO HER BOOKS.

JANE But we'll go out and celebrate on your birthday, eh? Somewhere nice. We might even persuade Joe to come home for the weekend. That'd be lovely. All the family together for your sixteenth.

TAMSIN He won't come home.

JANE Well, we can still go out.

Have a pizza. See a film. Invite Amy like last year.

TAMSIN Mmm, yeah.

JANE You haven't fallen out with her?

TAMSIN No.

JANE She doesn't have to come.

TAMSIN No.

JANE Well? PAUSE. Tamsin?

TAMSIN WITHOUT LOOKING AT HER. What?

JANE Honestly. I don't know why I bother.

SHE LEAVES. TAMSIN THROWS DOWN HER BOOK AND GOES AFTER HER.

TAMSIN Mum, look, I, erm ...

JANE Yes.

TAMSIN Mum, the thing is, you see. I might be going out with someone else on my birthday.

JANE Instead of Amy? Well, I don't mind. Invite who you like as long as youtell me how many.

TAMSIN No. I mean. I might be going out with Chris then.

JANE Chris? Do I know her?

TAMSIN Well, I have mentioned ... It's not a her, it's a him.

JANE Oh. Oh, I see.

TAMSIN He's ...(AT SCHOOL)

JANE Well, darling, that's fine. Absolutely fine. It's up to you what you do on your birthday, isn't it. I'm just here to pay for it.

I'll see you later.

SHE LEAVES.

TAMSIN Oh, why does she have to be like that.

SCENE FOUR

MARTIN August 17th, 1988. My dear Tamsin. It's six o' clock in the morning and I can't sleep. I didn't want to wake Mum by going downstairs so I'm sitting on the bathroom floor wrapped in my old blue dressing gown and writing to you.

The last few days haven't been good. I dosed off yesterday afternoon and surfaced to hear you demanding to know why I was ...

TAMSIN Resting again.

MARTIN Then Mum's voice drifted through, patiently trying to explain. No doubt when you know the truth many of your questions will be answered but many more will come to mind. You might feel angry that I did not talk to you about it. You must understand, my love, that I found it almost impossible to talk to anyone. It wasn't until I met Caroline - she's a volunteer from Aids Action - that I began to open up. And then much of what came out was bitter rage. The anger hasn't entirely left me. I wouldn't want to risk inflicting that on you. There are better ways we can spend our remaining time together.

This morning I'm feeling much stronger. I can hear you stirring next door. I'm looking forward to seeing you staggering bleary-eyed towards the bathroom. Then we'll have breakfast together.

Always with you, dear Tammy. Dad.