

# SUGGESTED TEXTS: Contemporary

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Below are a selection of scenes from previous Physical Lab residencies and productions. Though actors are welcome to bring any text to the workshops, these are scenes which we believe lend themselves particularly well to the training and methodologies of the Lab.

If you want work with any of the scenes below, please make sure you are as familiar with your chosen character and the play as a whole prior to the workshop.

## OLD TIMES

### [Kate: "I remember you dead" \(f\)](#)

Kate and Deeley, a middle-aged married couple, receive an unexpected visit from Anna, an old friend of Kate's. As the evening progresses, Anna, who has not seen Kate in many years, and Deeley begin to remember a possible past encounter. Suddenly Kate intervenes to challenge their recollections of the past.

## THE CARETAKER

### [Mick: "What a strange man you are" \(m\)](#)

When Mick's gentle, trusting brother Aston brings home a tramp named Davies, Mick is not happy. Here he confronts Davies about the inconsistencies in the latter's account of himself.

### [Aston: "I used to go there quite a bit" \(m\)](#)

**(this text is much longer than our other suggestions- you may wish to choose an extract)**  
Throughout *The Caretaker*, Aston is shown to be trusting and perhaps too simple. Here, he tells the horrifying story of what happened to him.

## THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

### [Goldberg: "I've never lost a tooth" \(m\)](#)

Mr Goldberg is sent by a mysterious, terrifying organisation to bring in the play's main character, Stanley, who allegedly betrayed them. Here Goldberg has an unexpected moment of crisis.

## PEOPLE, PLACES, & THINGS BY DUNCAN MACMILLAN

### [Emma: 'With a play you get instructions'](#)

**Please note, Physical Lab work with gender blind casting and character genders are listed (m/f) as they appear in the original text for reference only.**

## Old Times “ I remember you dead”

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**KATE:**

(To ANNA.) But I remember you. I remember you dead.

Pause

I remember you lying dead. You didn't know I was watching you. I leaned over you. Your face was dirty. You lay dead, your face scrawled with dirt, all kinds of earnest inscriptions, but unblotted, so that they had run, all over your face, down to your throat. Your sheets were immaculate. I was glad. I would have been unhappy if your corpse had lain in an unwholesome sheet. It would have been graceless. I mean as far as I was concerned. As far as my room was concerned. After all, you were dead in my room. When you woke my eyes were above you, staring down at you, You tried to do my little trick, one of my tricks you had borrowed, my little slow smile, my little slow shy smile, my bend of the head, my half closing of the eyes, that we knew so well, but it didn't work, the grin only split the dirt at the sides of your mouth and stuck. You stuck in your grin. I looked for tears but could see none. Your pupils weren't in your eyes. Your bones were breaking through your face. But all was serene. There was no suffering. It had all happened elsewhere. Last rites I did not feel necessary. Or any celebration. I felt the time and season appropriate and that by dying alone and dirty you had acted with proper decorum. It was time for my bath. I had quite a lengthy bath, got out, walked about the room, glistening, drew up a chair, sat naked beside you and watched you.

Pause

When I brought him into the room your body of course had gone. What a relief it was to have a different body in my room, a male body behaving quite differently, doing all those things they do and which they think are good, like sitting with one leg over the arm of an armchair. We had a choice of two beds. Your bed or my bed. To lie in, or on. To grind noses together, in or on. He liked your bed, and thought he was different in it because he was a man. But one night I said let me do something, a little thing, a little trick. He lay there in your bed. He looked up at me with great expectation. He was gratified. He thought I had profited from his teaching. He thought I was going to be sexually forthcoming, that I was

about to take a long promised initiative. I dug about in the window box, where you had planted our pretty pansies, scooped, filled the bowl, and plastered his face with dirt. He was bemused, aghast, resisted, resisted with force. He would not let me dirty his face, or smudge it, he wouldn't let me. He suggested a wedding instead, and a change of environment.

## **The Caretaker “What a Strange Man You Are”**

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### **Mick:**

What a strange man you are. Aren't you? You're really strange. Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, you're just completely unpredictable. You're nothing else but a wild animal, when you come down to it. You're a barbarian. And to put the old tin lid on it, you stink from arse-hole to breakfast time. Look at it. You come here recommending yourself as an interior decorator, where upon I take you on, and what happens? You make a long speech about references you've got down at Sidcup, and what happens? I haven't noticed you go down to Sidcup to obtain them. It's all most regrettable but it looks as though I'm compelled to pay you off for your care taking work. Here's half a dollar.

*He feels in his pocket, takes out a half-crown and tosses it at Davies feet. Davies stands still. Mick walks to the gas stove and picks up the Buddha.*

**(Davies. (slowly). All right then...you do that...you do it...if that's what you want...)**

Mick. THAT'S WHAT I WANT!

*He hurls the Buddha against the gas stove. It breaks.*

*(passionately)* Anyone would think this house was all I got to worry about. I got plenty of other things I can worry about. I've got other things. I've got plenty of other interests. I've got my own business to build up, haven't I? I got to think about expanding...in all directions. I don't stand still. I'm moving about, all the time. I'm moving...all the time. I've got to think about the future. I'm not worried about this house. I'm not interested. My brother can worry about it. He can do it up, he can decorate it, he can do what he likes with it. I'm not bothered. I thought I was doing him a favour, letting him live here. He's got his own ideas. Let him have them. I'm going to chuck it in.

## The Caretaker “I used to go there quite a bit...”

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**ASTON.** I used to go there quite a bit. Oh, years ago now. But I stopped. I used to like that place. Spent quite a bit of time in there. That was before I went away. Just before. I think that ... place had a lot to do with it. They were all ... a good bit older than me. But they always used to listen. I thought ... they understood what I said. I mean I used to talk to them. I talked too much. That was my mistake. The same in the factory. Standing there, or in the breaks, I used to ... talk about things. And these men, they used to listen, whenever I ... had anything to say. It was all right. The trouble was, I used to have kind of hallucinations. They weren't hallucinations, they ... I used to get the feeling I could see things ... very clearly ... everything ... was so clear ... everything used ... everything used to get very quiet ... everything got very quiet ... all this ... quiet ... and ... this clear sight ... it was ... but maybe I was wrong. Anyway, someone must have said something. I didn't know anything about it. And ... some kind of lie must have got around. And this lie went round. I thought people started being funny. In that café. The factory. I couldn't understand it. Then one day they took me to a hospital, right outside London. They ... got me there. I didn't want to go. Anyway ... I tried to get out, quite a few times. But ... it wasn't very easy. They asked me questions, in there. Got me in and asked me all sorts of questions. Well, I told them ... when they wanted to know ... what my thoughts were. Hmmnn. Then one day ... this man ... doctor, I suppose ... the head one ... he was quite a man of ... distinction ... although I wasn't so sure about that. He called me in. He said ... he told me I had something. He said they'd concluded their examination. That's what he said. And he showed me a pile of papers and he said that I'd got something, some complaint. He said ... he just said that, you see. You've got ... this thing. That's your complaint. And we've decided, he said, that in your interests there's only one course we can take. He said ... but I can't ... exactly remember ... how he put it ... he said, we're going to do something to your brain. He said ... if we don't, you'll be in here for the rest of your life, but if we do, you stand a chance. You can go out, he said, and live like the others. What do you want to do to my brain, I said to him. But he just repeated what he'd said. Well, I wasn't a fool. I knew I was a minor. I knew he couldn't do anything to me without getting permission. I knew he had to get permission from my mother. So I wrote to her and told her what they were trying to do. But she signed their form, you see, giving them permission. I know that because he showed me her signature when I brought it up. Well, that night I tried to escape, that night. I spent five hours sawing at one of the bars on the window in this ward. Right throughout the dark. They used to shine a torch over the beds every half hour. So I timed it just right. And then it was nearly done, and a man had a ... he had a fit, right next to me. And they caught me, anyway. About a week later they started to come round and do this thing to the brain. We were all supposed to have it done, in this ward. And they came round and did it one at a time. One a night. I was one of the last. And I could see quite clearly what they did to the others. They used to come round with these

... I don't know what they were ... they looked like big pincers, with wires on, the wires were attached to a little machine. It was electric. They used to hold the man down, and this chief ... the chief doctor, used to fit the pincers, something like earphones, he used to fit them on either side of the man's skull. There was a man holding the machine, you see, and he'd ... turn it on, and the chief would just press these pincers on either side of the skull and keep them there. Then he'd take them off. They'd cover the man up ... and they wouldn't touch him again until later on. Some used to put up a fight, but most of them didn't. They just lay there. Well, they were coming round to me, and the night they came I got up and stood against the wall. They told me to get on the bed, and I knew they had to get me on the bed because if they did it while I was standing up they might break my spine. So I stood up and then one or two of them came for me, well, I was younger then, I was much stronger than I am now, I was quite strong then, I laid one of them out and I had another one round the throat, and then suddenly this chief had these pincers on my skull and I knew he wasn't supposed to do it while I was standing up, that's why I .... anyway, he did it. So I did get out. I got out of the place ... but I couldn't walk very well. I don't think my spine was damaged. That was perfectly all right. The trouble was ... my thoughts ... had become very slow ... I couldn't think at all ... I couldn't ... get ... my thoughts ... together ... uuuhh ... I could ... never quite get it ... together. The trouble was, I couldn't hear what people were saying. I couldn't look to the right or the left, I had to look straight in front of me, because if I turned my head round ... I couldn't keep ... upright. And I had these headaches. I used to sit in my room. That was when I lived with my mother. And my brother. He was younger than me. And I laid everything out, in order, in my room, all the things I knew were mine, but I didn't die. The thing is, I should have been dead. I should have died. Anyway, I feel much better now. But I don't talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that café. I never go into them now. I don't talk to anyone ... like that. I've often thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me. But I want to do something first. I want to build that shed out in the garden.

## The Birthday Party “I’ve never lost a tooth”

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**GOLDBERG:** You know what? I've never lost a tooth. Not since the day I was born. Nothing's changed. (*He gets up.*) That's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been as fit as a fiddle. All my life I've said the same. Play up, play up, and play the game. Honour thy father and thy mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. What do you think, I'm a self-made man? No! I sat where I was told to sit. I kept my eye on the ball. School? Don't talk to me about school. Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I'm telling you, I'm telling you, follow my line? Follow my mental? Learn by heart. Never write down a thing. And don't go too near the water. And you'll find—that what I say is true.

Because I believe that the world ... (*Vacant.*)....  
Because I believe that the world ... (*Desperate.*)....  
BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD ... (*Lost.*)....

*He sits in chair.*

Sit down, McCann, sit here where I can look at you.

*MCCANN kneels in front of the table.*

(*Intensely, with growing certainty.*) My father said to me, Benny, Benny, he said, come here. He was dying. I knelt down. By him day and night. Who else was there? Forgive, Benny, he said, and let live. Yes, Dad. Go home to your wife. I will, Dad. Keep an eye open for low-lives, for schnorrers and for layabouts. He didn't mention names. I lost my life in the service of others, he said, I'm not ashamed. Do your duty and keep your observations. Always bid good morning to the neighbours. Never, never forget your family, for they are the rock, the constitution and the core! If you're ever in any difficulties Uncle Barney will see you in the clear. I knelt down. (*He kneels, facing MCCANN.*) I swore on the good book. And I knew the word I had to remember—Respect! Because McCann— (*Gently.*) Seamus—who came before your father? His father. And who came before him? Before him? ... (*Vacant—triumphant.*) Who came before your father's father but your father's father's mother! Your great-gran-granny.

*Silence. He slowly rises.*

And that's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been as fit as a fiddle. My motto. Work hard and play hard. Not a day's illness.

*GOLDBERG sits.*

With a play you get instructions. Stage directions. Dialogue. Someone clothes you. Tells you where to be and when. You get to live the most intense moments of a life over and over again, with all the boring bits left out. And you get to practice. For weeks. And you're applauded. Then you get changed. Leave through stage door. Bus home. Back to real life. All the boring stuff left in. Waiting. Temping. Waiting tables. Babysitting. Cleaning up endless shits and missing out on opportunities because you need to pay rent. Answering phones and serving canapes. Nothing permanent. Can't plan. Can't get a mortgage or pay for a car. Audition comes in. Try to look right. Sit in a room with people who look just like you, all after the same part. Never hear back. More waiting. Or if you get the part it'll be sitting around in rehearsal and backstage making less than you did temping. Make these friendships with people, a little family, fall in love onstage and off and then it's over and you don't see them again. And you try not to take it personally when people who aren't as good as you get the parts. When you go from being sexy ingenue to the tired mother of three.

But you keep going because sometimes, if you're really lucky, you get to be onstage and say things that are absolutely true, even if they're made up. You get to do things which feel more real to you, more authentic, more meaningful than anything in your life. You get to speak poetry, words you would never think to say but which become yours as you speak them:

*When he shall die take him and cut him out in little stars, and he will make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night, and pay no worship to the garish sun.*

I played Antigone and every night my heart broke for her dead brother. Then my own brother died and I didn't feel anything. I missed the funeral because I had a matinee. I'm not avoiding talking to the Group because I've got something to hide. It's the opposite. If I'm not in character I'm not sure I'm really there. I'm already dead. I'm nothing. I want to live a hundred lives and be everywhere and fight against the infinitesimal time we have on this planet.

I find reality pretty difficult. I find the business of getting out of bed and getting on with the day really hard. I find picking up my phone to be a mammoth fucking struggle. The number on my inbox. The friends who won't see me anymore. *\*The Instagram photos and bullshit, the mass shootings and fake news.* The moral ambivalence you have to have to just be able to carry on with your day. I find the knowledge that we're all just atoms and one day we'll stop and be dirt in the ground, I find that overwhelmingly disappointing.

And I wish I could feel otherwise.

I wish I could be like you. Or my mother. To feel that some things are predetermined and meaningful and that we're somewhere on a track between the start and finish lines. But I can't because I care about what's true, what's

actually, verifiably true. You're able to forfeit rationality for a comforting untruth so how are you supposed to help me? You're looking at the world through such a tight filter you're barely living in it. You're barely alive.

Drugs and alcohol have never let me down. They have always loved me. These are substances I can put into my bloodstream that make the world perfect. That is the only absolute truth in the universe. I'm being difficult because you want to take it away from me. So sorry.

Acting gives me the same thing I get from drugs and alcohol. Good parts are just harder to come by.

**Note: This monologue has been slightly edited & rearranged from its original text. I changed one line (see asterisk\*) to make it more relevant to what is happening in current events now. Much respect to the playwright.**

**\*This text has been edited for relevance. Original text is: *'The food pictures and porn videos, the bombings and beheadings.'***