

Bella

CAST

The stage is empty except for a bench facing front and off centre. A couple in their late sixties is sitting, their attention focused front.

BELLA

Nice flowers.

BILL

Faded.

BELLA

The funeral was last Thursday.

BILL

They were probably old already.

BELLA

Old?

BILL

Yeh. The florists send their old flowers to funerals. As long as they last a day. They don't care.

BELLA

There's not much point them being fresh I suppose. For a funeral.

BILL

Ought to be.

BELLA

Still. There's plenty of them. Lots of wreathes.

BILL

There's a few bob's worth there.

BELLA

What happens to them?

BILL
The flowers?

BELLA
Yes.

BILL
What do you mean?

BELLA
Well, now. What happens to them now?

BILL
The men who work at the cemetery come and take them away I expect.
They have to sort the grave out anyway. It settles.

BELLA
Settles?

BILL
Oh yes. A skilled profession grave digging. You have to learn all the tricks.
That's why there's a mound. Afterwards. To allow for settlement.
Otherwise you'd have holes all over... well not holes, a lot of indentations
in rows. Wouldn't look good.

BELLA
It was a nice funeral.

BILL
It was. The priest was very appropriate because Harry wasn't religious at
all.

BELLA
He was sixty two. That's young nowadays

BILL
Younger than us. Eh? Well he lived on his own. People don't last long
when they live on their own. Couples live longer. I read that.

BELLA
We look after each other. Here, a bought a thermos of coffee and some
sandwiches.

It was unexpected though. BILL

What? BELLA

His death BILL

Oh Yes. Do you want a sandwich? BELLA

Unexpected BILL

Was it? What sort, cheese or corned beef? BELLA

Heart attack BILL

Oh yes. BELLA

Life hangs by a thread. Harry always said that. I'll have the corned beef. BILL

Right. BELLA

Did you put the pickle in? BILL

No. BELLA

You know I can't eat corned beef sandwiches without pickle. I'll have the cheese. Good that we came though. To pay our respects. BILL

Yes. A nice gesture. He'd do the same for us. BELLA

BILL

He was a good mate. Did you put sugar in the coffee?

BELLA

I think so. We knew him a long time. Forty years He always had a joke..at the pub.

BILL

He was born in the West Indies.

BELLA

Oh yea.

BILL

Came here after war. When he was ten.

BELLA

How do you know?

BILL

He told me. He was always going on about the bananas and mangoes he ate as a kid. Said we didn't know what they really tasted like.

BELLA

I forgot he was from the West Indies. But he spoke just like us.

BILL

He voted for Churchill.

BELLA

He was such a gentleman . He spoke really good English.

BILL

Of course he did. West Indies was a British colony. We taught them how to speak proper English. Not like this American gibberish they speak nowadays on TV

BELLA

Here's your coffee. We were teenagers when we first met. Yeh...I remember ..we talked about it... the Wimbledon Palais dancing . That's where we met.

BILL

Did you?

BELLA

Yea.

BILL

Is that a fact.

BELLA

Before the Beatles. You must remember. Rock around the Clock... Bill Haley ...when the clock strikes one two and four...

BILL

I never went there. Not to the Palais. That was rough.

BELLA

No it wasn't. We had the Blossoms. Martha and the Vandellas. It was really good music.

BILL

I didn't like those women singers.

BELLA

Diana Ross?

BILL

Oh she was all right. You put too much sugar in the coffee.

BELLA

That's where I met Harry. At the Palais. Later on he used to go on about that Jimmy Hendrix guy from Jamaica. I don't know why I remember that. I measured it properly

BILL

Could have done with a bit of pickle in the cheese sandwich too. He was very famous. Rock and Roll. What's that Jamaican music... reggii, reggae. Reminds me of that joke Harry used to tell.

BELLA

What joke?

BILL

My wife's gone to the West Indies. Jamaica? No, she went of her own accord.

BELLA

I don't see what's funny about that.

BILL

Jamaica. Did you make her? No she went of her own accord.

BELLA

This is a cemetery. You shouldn't make jokes here.

BILL

Not exactly much of an audience.

BELLA

Me and the girls from school used to go out on a Saturday night. We had a good time.

BILL

You never told me you met Harry before me.

BELLA

Couldn't take him home. That was worse than going out with the Irish. Me mother would have killed me. Where did you meet him?

BILL

I met him when I worked at the geriatric hospital. Him and me used to take the bodies down to the morgue. We were a team.

BELLA

That's not very nice. Working at a morgue.

BILL

Somebody's got to do it. There used to be this competition. Between all the porters. First team who got the dead body trolley, got to collect the body, "first to the trolley got the body," then the undertaker paid us extra, on the side. Harry was friendly with the girl on the hospital telephone exchange so she told us before anyone else if someone died.

BELLA

I would like to take home some of those flowers. A sort of memory of him.

BILL

Now?

BELLA

In a minute. Do you want another? I like sitting here. Remembering things and Harry. He looked just like that actor. What was his name...?

BILL

Harry?

BELLA

That's right.. Harry Belly F ... something...

BILL

Bellafonte.

BELLA

Bellafonte, that's right. That's got my name in it. Bella I remember that.

BILL

He was from Jamica... remember that song... Come Mr Talliman, tally mi bananas.

BELLA

I think he fancied me.

BILL

What? Where did you meet him?

BELLA

No.... Our Harry. Harry over there.

BILL

How do you know he fancied you?

BELLA

A woman knows that. But he never done nothin.... He were a gentleman

BILL

Did you fancy him?

BELLA

Well.... Sort of...

BILL

What do you mean ..sort of...?

BELLA

I was young. It was a long time ago and he was very good looking.

BILL

Good looking?

BELLA

Yeah and he moved well. I liked the way he moved.

BILL

Your getting confused between the two of them

BELLA

No I'm not. Here there's one corned beef sandwich left. More coffee?

BILL

No thanks. Well he's dead now.

BELLA

He was always good company and he was good fun.

BILL

Yeah.

BELLA

Always cheerful. You don't meet a lot of cheerful people nowadays.

BILL

You're right. Everyone complains all the time.

BELLA

And they shouldn't. We have so much to be grateful for. In the war we didn't have nothin'....used to have to sleep down the underground.

BILL

I'll get you those flowers.

BELLA

That would be nice. I'll put them in some water soon as I get home. Help to revive them.

BILL

There's a lot of them. Which ones do you want?

BELLA

I want the chrysanthemums. The white ones.

BILL

(Starts to exit then turns)

Did you ever go out with him?

BELLA

Once.

How was it? BILL

None of your business. BELLA

Come on. BILL

I don't ask you about your girlfriends. Or what you got up to. BELLA

Nothing to tell. BILL

I bet. BELLA

Actually, to be honest I always fancied my best friend's girlfriend. BILL

That was not very nice. BELLA

But she wasn't interested in me. She wouldn't look at me. BILL

What was her name? BELLA

Cynthia. BILL

Cynthia Braithwaite? BELLA

Yes. How do you know? BILL

We were in the same class. She told me how much she fancied you. Come to think of it, that's why I jumped at the chance when you asked me out. BELLA

She fancied me? BILL

BELLA
She had the hots for you.

BILL
I never knew that.

BELLA
Well. Too late now. She's dead .

BILL
Oh no. How did she die?

BELLA
Leukemia or something. She didn't have a happy life. Married an insurance salesman.

BILL
Children?

BELLA
Don't think so.

BILL
Like us then.

BELLA
Don't go there again. You remember what the doctor said. He said you couldn't have children because you had had the mumps.

BILL
I just had a low sperm count. He said I could have had sex with twenty women out there and half of them would have got pregnant.

BELLA
I bet you would have enjoyed that. Twenty women.

BILL
That's not the point. I didn't did I?

BELLA
What?

BILL
Have sex with twenty women.

BELLA

Perhaps you should have.

BILL

I didn't want to. You were always the one.

BELLA

I think you better go and get me those chrysanthemums before you get in any more trouble.

BILL

All right. We can go down the pub later.

BELLA

I don't want a wreath. Make sure they've got stems. Not the dead ones.

BILL

All right. All I ever do is run after you. Do this. Do that....I don't

Exits complaining

BELLA

The ones on the right. Not those. Ya silly bugger. They're too dead looking. Yes those. Are there any more on the other side? Have a look on the other side. Not there. He's as deaf as a post. No need to put your nose in them. Chrysanthemums don't smell. What's the matter with you? Are you praying? Bill? Bill? Just bring me what you can get. Get up off your bloody knees. You'll dirty those trousers. I had them cleaned for the funeral. What's the matter with you. Such an idiot. He must have dropped something. He always has to spoil things. Bill. Bill.? Get up.Bill ?

Harry?... Bill.?.... Harry?

Curtain.