

# Smile!

A PLAY IN ONE ACT



2:30PM  
SATURDAY 27TH FEBRUARY

MCCRUM LECTURE THEATRE,  
CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE

FREE ADMISSION

Produced by Cambridge University  
Christian Drama Society

**SMILE!**  
**A Play in One Act by James Baker<sup>1</sup>**

**Scene One**

*There are two chairs on the stage, centrally but a little way apart.*

**S**, a girl of about nineteen, walks forward between the chairs and stands centre-stage. Two **Masked Figures** (the same actors as Alex and Tommy, to be introduced shortly) come and stand either side of her, the first holding a red balloon, the second a large Bible.

**Masked Figure 1**      (cheerfully) Smile! Have a red balloon! (He passes the balloon to S.)

**Masked Figure 2**      Smile! Jesus loves you!

*The two Masked Figures turn and exit in opposite directions, leaving A alone.*

**S**                    I don't feel like smiling.

I don't feel like doing anything.

*She stares forward for a long time.*

**Scene Two**

**S** sits in one of the two chairs, staring ahead expressionlessly. **Alex** enters with a number of red balloons.

**Alex**                Hi.

**S** nods.

**Alex**                Can I sit down?

**S**                    OK.

*He pulls the remaining chair closer to her, and sits.*

**Alex**                How are you?

**S**                    I'm OK.

*Silence.*

**Alex**                Would you like a balloon?

**S** looks at him blankly, and takes one without comment.

**Alex**                You know about the tea and cakes in the JCR later?

**S**                    What?

**Alex**                Tea and cakes. You know, like every week. Daisy and me, the welfare officers, we're giving them out.

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<sup>1</sup> Scriptures are taken or adapted from the New International Version (NIV).

**S** Why?

**Alex** To – oh just, you know, if people want them. And if people want a chat ...

**S**, *who very much does not want a chat with Alex and Daisy over tea and cake, just nods.*

**S** Right.

**Alex** How have you been, anyway?

**S** Oh, alright. *(Pause.)* What about you?

**Alex** I've been fine. Bit busy handing out balloons.

You don't really want me here, do you?

**S** *(lying)* No, no ... it's fine.

**Alex** It's OK; I can tell when I'm not needed. I'd better get going with these. *(He holds up the rest of the balloons.)* Talk some other time, yeah?

**S** Maybe.

**Alex** *nods, and walks out. S sighs, then after a little while goes out as well, holding the balloon.*

### Scene Three

*Enter S (still with the red balloon) and Emily, rushing from opposite directions without seeing each other; they collide, and Emily drops whatever she was carrying –*

**S** Oh – Emily! Sorry!

**Emily** Don't worry about it ...

**S** Let me help you ...

*She helps Emily pick everything up,*

**Emily** Why have you got that balloon?

**S** *(shrugging)* I dunno; Alex gave it to me ...

*Pause.*

**S** How are you?

**Emily** Yeah ... You?

**S** I'm OK ... well, not really ...

**Emily** Do you want to talk about it?

**S** Yeah.

**Emily** Come on, let's sit down.

*They grab chairs, and sit, facing another at a distance a little like doctor and patient.*

**Emily** This is ridiculous, sitting like this. I'm your friend; I'm not your counsellor!

**S** We always sit like this when – when we talk.

**Emily** Well, I don't think we should.

*She moves her chair closer, to sit side-by-side with S.*

**Emily** What's troubling you?

**S** Oh ... just the usual ...

**Emily** Oh ... come here ...

*She puts an arm around her and pulls her in close.*

**S** Everything seems so dark, sometimes. Even in the daytime, it just seems so dark.

**Emily** I know, I know. I – I'm still praying for you.

**S** I'm praying too. But sometimes my prayers just don't seem to get through.

**Emily** Don't say that. They always get through.

**S** I cry every night. My pillow gets so wet ...

**Emily** It doesn't matter. It's OK to cry.

Is there anything in particular that's bothering you?

**S** Nothing – nothing more than usual. I mean everything. I mean – nothing we haven't talked about before. No – that's not right ... but I'm not sure I can talk about it now. I don't have the strength now ...

**Emily** But we can talk about it sometime, yeah?

**S** Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

**Emily** No pressure, though. Any time you want.

*They sit in silence for a little while.*

**Emily** What do you think about pandas?

**S** Pandas?

**Emily** Yeah; I've been thinking a lot about pandas. What do think about them? They're kind of funny, aren't they?

*S bursts out laughing. Emily joins in.*

**S** I love you, Ems ...

**Emily** I love you, too ...

**S** That's just the sort of crazy thing you always say ... what do you think about pandas?

*She collapses in giggles.*

**S** Here I am, all morose, and you just ask the most random questions –

**Emily** (*jokingly*) I'm sorry.

**S** It's great having a friend like you. It makes me feel so much –

*She is interrupted by a crackling voice over a PA system, or someone speaking through a megaphone:*

**Announcer** *Your attention is required. Tea and cakes will now be served in the JCR. Repeat: tea and cakes will now be served in the JCR.*

**S** *stands up hurriedly.*

**S** Sorry. I'd better be going.

**Emily** (*surprised*) You're going to the tea and cakes?

**S** No. But I don't want Alex to come and find me.

*She leaves, but Emily remains where she is.*

*Enter Tommy, a dishevelled fellow with a guitar and a "Smile! Jesus loves you" T-shirt.*

**Emily** Hey, Tommy.

**Tommy** Hi there, girl. How ya doing?

**Emily** Oh, alright ...

**Tommy** Chin up. Something bothering you?

**Emily** Oh – nothing more than usual ...

**Tommy** Cheer yourself up. What I always say to myself is, "Smile! Jesus loves ya!" 'Cos if Jesus loves ya – and mark my words he does – if Jesus loves ya then yeh ain't got nothing to worry about. (*He strums a chord, and sings:*) "Oh, happy day!" –

*He is interrupted by the Announcer:*

**Announcer** *Attention please. Attention. Tea and cakes are now being served in the JCR.*

**Tommy** Mm, tea and cake. Can't say no to a bit of tea and cake.

**Emily** Do you want to go and get some?

**Tommy** Yes, let's.

*So they leave together.*

#### **Scene Four**

*Two chairs. S sits reading in one, alone. Enter Alex, with balloons.*

**Alex** Hey.

**S** Oh ... hi.

**Alex** Would you like a balloon?

*Frowning slightly in confusion, she takes one.*

**Alex** What are you reading?

**S** *hesitates, about to hide the book, but thinks better of it.*

**S** Oh – just the Bible.

**Alex** *sits down next to her.*

**Alex** Which bit?

**S** The middle bit.

**Alex** *looks confused.*

**S** Here – read it.

*She hands him the book, pointing to the place. He reads:*

**Alex** “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and every day have sorrow in my heart?” [Ps. 13:1-2a]

Has God forgotten you?

**S** No. But sometimes it feels like it.

*She takes the Bible back from him.*

**Alex** I didn't know the Bible had bits like that in it.

**S** Well, now you do.

**Alex** You're not supposed to think like that though, are you? God can't be too happy with you, saying you're a Christian, and then saying he's hiding from you –

**S** I don't think that's right.

**Alex** Why not?

**S** If he thought that, he wouldn't have put these bits in the Bible, would he?

**Alex** I guess not ... if ...

*He trails off, not wanting to say something S might take as offensive: the suggestion that God didn't write the Bible at all.*

**S** The Bible doesn't pretend that there isn't pain and hurting in the world. It doesn't tell us to live in some airy fairy land where everything's always alright. God knows about suffering.

**Alex** Why doesn't he – ?

*But he breaks off. S doesn't follow up on the unfinished question.*

**Alex** Why are you reading that bit?

**S** 'Cos it helps to know that God knows about pain. It helps to know that people in the past suffered too. They were people that God loved, and they loved him in return – they suffered too, and God didn't scorn their suffering. That God doesn't scorn [~~my~~ suffering] –

*Now she breaks off, not wanting to discuss her own pain.*

**S** The Psalms. It's the Book of Psalms – lots of them are like this, people crying out to God. I – I read them a lot.

*She stands up.*

**S** I'm sorry. I need to go now.

**Alex** That's alright.

**S** Thanks for the balloon.

*And she walks out. Alex follows her.*

### Scene Five

*Two chairs still; S sits in one of them. Alex enters with a number of red balloons.*

**Alex** Hi.

*S nods and gives him a small smile.*

**Alex** Can I sit down?

**S** OK.

*He sits.*

**Alex** How are you?

**S** I'm OK.

*Silence.*

**Alex** I –

**S** Why have you got all these balloons?

**Alex** Oh – it's for Mental Health Awareness Week.

**S**                   *(perplexed)* They're balloons ...

**Alex**               Yeah. The idea is that we hand out balloons to people, get them thinking –

**S**                   Thinking about balloons?

**Alex**               Thinking, “why do they keep giving us balloons?”

**S**                   Er ... yeah.

**Alex**               It's because of M.Haw.

**S**                   M.Haw?

**Alex**               Mental Health Awareness Week.

**S**                   I don't get it.

**Alex**               People see the balloons, and ask “why are there all these balloons?”, and we tell them about Mental Health Awareness Week. So they become aware of mental health.

**S**                   Oh.

                      I think I'm already aware of mental health.

**Alex**               Yes – but not everyone is, so ... Would you like a balloon?

**S**                   Will that help?

**Alex**               Help what?

**S**                   Oh ... nothing ...

*She takes the balloon. An awkward silence.*

**Alex**               Look, I – I need to go now. I've got a lot of cakes to buy. Um – see you, then.

**S**                   See you.

*One after the other, they both leave.*

### **Scene Six**

**S and Emily together.**

**S**                   I remember the day I met you.

**Emily**             I met you then too.

**S**                   Sometimes when you meet someone you don't much like them. Of course that doesn't always last.

**Emily**             First impressions don't always count for much.

**S**                   And sometimes someone can be part of your life for ages and ages and –

**Emily** – and you never really feel like you get to know them.

**S** It never stops being awkward. But when I met you ...

**Emily** Go on.

**S** Sometimes when you meet someone it's wonderful. Right from when you meet them, it's wonderful.

From the moment I met you there was never any doubt that we'd be friends. I can still remember it so clearly ...

**Emily** It was a Christian Union thing.

**S** Yes. I'd just arrived. We were gathered around a table.

**Emily** There was tea and cake.

**S** There's always tea and cake.

**Emily** I had a blueberry muffin.

**S** You spat it out.

**Emily** I don't like blueberries.

**S** The boys were talking about –

**Emily** – duck-sized lions.

**S** “Would you rather fight a duck-sized lion or a lion-sized duck?”

**Emily** A duck-sized lion's basically just a kitten, isn't it?

**S** A lion-sized duck would be scary, though.

**Emily** I'd rather not fight either, to be honest.

**S** I laughed when you spat out the muffin.

**Emily** You couldn't help yourself.

**S** Our eyes met. We smiled.

**Emily** I couldn't help but laugh too.

**S** Neither of us really cared about duck-sized lions, to be honest.

**Emily** But we got talking, just the two of us.

**S** And somehow, right then, as we were talking over cake, I knew you were special.

**Emily** I felt the same way.

**S** Felt you were special?

**Emily** Felt *you* were special.

**S** Over the next few months I got to know you better.

**Emily** A lot better.

**S** And everything I discovered, everything I learned about you, only cemented the feeling I'd had on that very first afternoon – that you were someone special. Special to me, that is.

And then I found out.

**Emily** That I was sad too.

**S** When you really love someone, when they mean as much to you as you did and do to me – you just want them to be happy. You don't want them to be sad.

**Emily** I'd had a bad year, before I met you. Problems with family. I'd been to the doctor, been diagnosed with depression. I was on medication, going to counselling ...

**S** But you seemed so happy on the outside.

**Emily** It's easy to be happy on the outside. And to be honest, when I was with you, most of the time – I was happy.

It was all the rest of the time I wasn't.

**S** When I found out – when you told me – I couldn't stop crying. I cried all night. Of course I always cry at night, but this time it was different. This time it wasn't about me. This time it was worse.

That's the problem with having friends. They break your heart.

*The scene ends.*

### Scene Seven

**Tommy**, *onstage, humming to himself. Enter Alex, rushing somewhere; he pays Tommy no attention as he passes.*

**Tommy** Jesus loves you, Alex!

**Alex** (*turning*) Um – not today, thank you.

**Tommy** If not today, then when? When better to embrace the all-encompassing joy of Jesus Christ?

**Alex** Er – I've not got time for that now ...

**Tommy** *goes up to him.*

**Tommy** Are you happy, Alex?

**Alex** I – well, I guess – happy enough ...

**Tommy** Jesus can make you happy, Alex. Listen.

*He strums a chord on his guitar. But Alex interrupts before he has a chance to go any further.*

**Alex** Sorry – I – I really have to go. Here, take a card.

*He hands Tommy a card from his pocket; Tommy looks at it, confused, then reaches into his own pocket for a tract.*

**Tommy** Would you like - ?

**Alex** Not now, thanks. See you later.

**Tommy** Oh – OK then. Bye.

*Alex starts to leave.*

**Tommy** Oh – and thank you for the tea and cakes last Thursday! They were great. Praise God for cake, eh?

**Alex** Yeah, no problem. Bye.

*And he leaves. Tommy shrugs, returns the tract to his pocket, and leaves, studying the card Alex gave him.*

### Scene Eight

**S and Alex.** *As is now customary, Alex gives S a red balloon, which she accepts without comment. Then he reaches into his pocket and draws out a wad of postcards.*

**Alex** Would you like to fill in a card?

**S** Er – why?

**Alex** Oh, it's for – it's for MHaw. I mean, Mental Health Awareness Week. That's a mouthful, when you keep saying –

**S** *(interrupting)* What have the cards got to do with it?

**Alex** Well, the idea is that you fill in a card and –

**S** *(interrupts again)* What does that achieve?

**Alex** Well, we thought – I mean, the mental health people – the people who are in charge of this sort of thing –

**S** Who put them in charge?

**Alex** Dunno. They did, I guess. Anyway, they want people to fill in these cards, talking about mental health issues, and we'll put them up on a board in the JCR and –

**S** What do you mean, talking about mental health issues?

**Alex** Oh, you know, just to encourage people to be more open ...

**S** What if people don't want to be more open? What if they don't want a card on the wall in the JCR telling everyone they're crazy?

**Alex** (*uncomfortable*) Well – I mean – we thought maybe people might just want to make a pledge on the card, you know, to be more open about mental health stuff, or to be more willing to listen to people who –

**S** Why should people be more open?

**Alex** What?

**S** Why should people be more open about their feelings?

**Alex** Well, um – you know, it might help. Might help them to seek treatment, to know they're not alone. It might help other people to be more accommodating.

*She doesn't respond.*

**Alex** Would you like a card?

**S** No thank you. I – I need to go now. I have a lot of reading to do. See you.

**Alex** Bye then ...

*But she has already got up and walked out. Alex sighs, then leaves in the opposite direction.*

### Scene Nine

*Reenter S: angry.*

**S** I don't *want* people to understand me! I don't *care* if you know how I feel! I don't want to be a special snowflake – “Look at me, I'm different, everyone needs to change the world so *I* fit in.” I don't want that. I don't care about any of that.

I just want to be happy.

*She covers her face and stands for a few moments, then walks out.*

### Scene Ten

**Alex**, *sitting alone on the side of the stage, holding a balloon, thinking about what S said to him.*

**Alex** “Why should people be more open about their feelings?”

Maybe she's right. What's the point of it all?

Can we ever really stop the pain? We can get people to talk, send them to therapy make the world a nicer place for them, even make them better – but does it really help? Still the world spins on. Still life ticks away, till there's nothing left ... cancer, heart attack – the flame we've been working so hard to tend is snuffed out, just like that. Nobody's happy forever.

*He drops the balloon, and walks out.*

*Two figures in black enter and remove the two chairs.*

## Scene Fourteen

**Tommy**, *singing to himself with his guitar, when Emily enters.*

**Emily** Hi, Tommy.

**Tommy** Hey.

*He carries on singing.*

**Emily** Tommy?

**Tommy** Yep?

**Emily** Can I ask you something? Do you really think we can be happy all the time?

**Tommy** Yeah, of course – if we just trust Jesus. He didn't save our souls so we could be sad, did he? We just have to put our faith in him.

**Emily** But Jesus wasn't happy all the time, was he? People in the Bible weren't happy all the time.

**Tommy** Then they should have put their faith in God, and sung happy songs to remind them.

**Emily** But Jesus had faith in God – he was God. And even he was sad sometimes.

**Tommy** Well ... that ... that was different.

**Emily** I'm sorry, Tommy – I don't think you're right. I don't think we can be happy all the time. Not yet.

**Tommy** Pray to God, and he will give you whatever you ask for.

*He strums another chord, and is about to sing when Emily interrupts:*

**Emily** Not everything, Tommy.

Come on, do you want to go for coffee?

**Tommy** Yeah, that would be nice. That would be nice. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord for coffee!

## Scene Eleven

**S and Emily** together. **S** gazes sadly at her friend.

**S** I remember the first time you were almost angry with me.

*Flashback. S and Emily together, in the kitchen, cooking. S is stirring a mixing bowl, but it's not going well:*

**Emily** (*frustrated*) How long have we got?

**S** Five minutes ...

**Emily** Five minutes? Oh, we're never going to get this done in five minutes ... we should never have agreed to this – oh, pass me the spoon –

*S passes her one.*

**Emily** No, the other one –

*S passes her the right one, and moves to put down the bowl –*

**Emily** (*angrily*) Don't –

*S freezes, horrified. Emily catches herself, and proceeds more calmly:*

**Emily** Don't put that there.

*S steps forward into the present again.*

**S** In that moment – that moment when I thought you were angry – I was so afraid. I didn't want to lose you. I didn't want you to go away forever.

**Emily** That's silly. I'd never leave you.

**S** I know. But it's happened before.

**Emily** I definitely wouldn't give up on you for something as silly as that.

**S** I know. I didn't say the way I felt was rational. But I still felt it.

You know, Emily, it really helps talking to you.

**Emily** It helped talking to you as well.

**S** I thank God for you every day. Without you, I don't know if I ...

Thank you, Emily. Thank you so much for listening to me. I know I say such stupid things sometimes ... Thank you so much for being my friend.

*She embraces her. They hug tightly for several seconds.*

**Emily** It's almost six. Coming to dinner?

**S** Yeah. Yeah, OK.

*Exit both.*

## Scene Twelve

*S alone: quiet this time, not cross.*

**S** What difference does it make to me if everybody knows I'm sad? Why should I walk around with a sign on me telling people how I feel? What difference does it make? I'll still be sad.

I don't want people to understand. I just want to be happy again.

*She walks off.*

### Scene Thirteen

*Alex and S, talking.*

**S** I – I’m sorry if I was a bit – um – a bit harsh with you earlier.

**Alex** That’s – that’s fine; I don’t mind, I – maybe it is all a bit silly, these card things ...

**Alex** You know, I – I’ve been thinking about what you said.

**S** What? I’ve said lots of things.

**Alex** “Why should people be more open about their feelings?”

**S** Do you have an answer?

**Alex** Not really ... not a good one. I mean – nobody’s happy for ever. Can we ever really stop the pain?

**S** I think – I think there’s more to it than just living, and hurting, and dying. If we only trust in Jesus ... I think we have something better to look forward to than death.

To be honest that’s the only way I manage to deal with the pain.

**Alex** What are you talking about? Heaven?

**S** There’s something it says in another place in the Bible: another of the Psalms, actually:

“Those who sow in tears,  
will reap with songs of joy.” [Ps. 126:5]

That reminds us, that however much we’re hurting now, we won’t be hurting forever. One day, we’ll be so happy, so joyful, that we just won’t be able to stop singing. And we’ll sing forever.

**Alex** *(doubtfully)* Right.

I’m sorry – I don’t want to sound rude – but is that all you’ve got? That’s all you have to make you happy?

It’s a fairy tale.

*The scene closes abruptly.*

### Scene X

**Tommy** *comes on with his guitar and a satchel. He sits on the edge of the stage and puts it down beside him, and takes out a very large Bible from the bag, which he starts to read (the Bible, not the bag).*

**Tommy** *(cheerfully)* Reading God’s word always cheers me up.

*He realises something.*

**Tommy** I shouldn't need cheering up, though. I should already be happy, because of what Jesus has done for me.

But I wasn't happy earlier. I was sad ... sad about Alex. I've tried talking to him, but ... he never seems to listen. What if he never comes to know the Lord?

*He clasps his hands tightly together and bows his head in silent prayer. After several seconds he looks up.*

**Tommy** Should I be sad, God? Should I be happy? I'm not happy all the time, not on the inside. Sometimes I'm sad for bad reasons – but sometimes maybe I'm sad for good ones ...

I don't know. I just don't know.

*He closes the Bible.*

**Tommy** (resolutely) I must be happy. I must try to be happy.

*And he picks up the guitar and walks out.*

### Scene Fifteen

*S, sleeping on the stage, then she awakens and sits up. A knock, and enter Emily.*

**S** Oh ... Emily ... good morning.

**Emily** Morning. I brought you some tea.

**S** No cake?

**Emily** Cake for breakfast?

*S gives a small smile.*

**Emily** Did you sleep well?

*S shakes her head.*

**Emily** Bad dreams again?

*S nods.*

**S** ... and so much time awake, when I wanted to be sleeping – except I'm not sure sleeping is any better, with the nightmares ...

I don't know what to do, Emily.

**Emily** Jesus suffered too, remember. A man of sorrows, they called him. He knows what you're going through.

**S** I know.

**Emily** It gets better, you know. Well, it got better for me, anyway.

**S** But you still have dark days, don't you? Nights when you can't sleep for crying. Mornings where you'd rather lie in bed, cold and hungry, than get up and face the day.

**Emily** Yes, but not as often as I used to. And one day – one day all that will end for good. And it'll end for you as well.

Something's bothering you, isn't it?

**S** It just annoys me, Alex and Daisy and all this Mental Health Week stuff. "Be open. Talk about your feelings." What good's that?

**Emily** I'm sure they mean well. They just want to help.

**S** But it doesn't help.

**Emily** I think it's good of people to want to help you.

**S** But people can't help me. People aren't God. They can't put my soul right.

*A silence, broken by Emily:*

**Emily** You don't have to do it. Nobody's forcing you to do anything.

*S doesn't respond.*

**Emily** It might help. It might help to tell more people. They might be able to help. They might be more sensitive.

**S** Why should they all have to change to help me? It's not their problem. And they're not the ones hurting me. Ordinary people in college, in the street – it's not them who hurt me. What hurts me is inside me. It's in my past. It's in the darkness. It's not out there where the people are. They've nothing to do with it.

**Emily** Don't you think it would help to have more people to talk to?

**S** I've already got someone to talk to. I've got you.

*She leans against Emily, who puts her arm around her.*

**Emily** And Jesus.

**S** Yes, I ...

**Emily** You've been praying, right?

**S** I pray a lot ... though sometimes it feels like I'm crying out into the void and no one's listening ...

**Emily** But not always?

**S** No, not always. Sometimes I can feel him, right there: my love, my Lord. And even though the pain doesn't go away – even though the tears keep flowing, harder than

ever – still I know that one day it will go away, forever. That’s sweeter joy, in a way, knowing that, than a mere temporary end to the pain right there and then would be. I know that he is with me, and he walks with me through the darkness, for he has walked through deeper darkneses himself, and one day he will lead me to the light.

**Emily** *smiles softly, and hugs her closer.*

**S** Sometimes I forget though.

**Emily** Forget what?

**S** Forget to pray. Sometimes it’s just me and the monsters, and I forget that I have a defender to help me fight them.

**Emily** *(quotes softly: reassuring, not judging)* “Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh, what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!”

**S** Thanks. It’s always helpful to remember that.

**Emily** It doesn’t matter if you forget to pray. You can always remember again. God won’t go away.

**S** I know.

**Emily** Come on, I’ll leave you to get dressed. See you at church?

**S** Yeah ... yeah, I guess so.

**Emily** *goes out, leaving S alone: then she, in turn, exits.*

### Scene Sixteen

*The violin plays from the melody of “What a friend we have in Jesus”. Enter S.*

**S** They sing happy songs in church, and sometimes sad ones. But being sad isn’t like the songs. Sadness isn’t slow and soft and sweet. Sadness is darkness and screaming.

I never used to cry in church, but now I always do. If you can’t cry in church, where can you cry? I cry more in the happy songs than the sad ones.

*In come Tommy (without his guitar for the first time) and Emily.*

**Tommy** Hey there, girl.

**S** Oh, hi. Hi, Emily.

**Emily** Are you alright? You left church in a hurry ...

**S** Yeah, I ...

**Tommy** Should have stayed for the biscuits. Praise the Lord for biscuits!

What's the matter? Are you sad? Doesn't the singing make you happy?

**S** It doesn't work like that, Tommy.

You can look on the bright side as much as you like, but it doesn't make the darkness go away.

**Tommy** Well, I don't know, Jesus did say –

**S** Are you happy all the time, Tommy? Really?

**Tommy** Well, I ... Even if I am a bit glum sometimes, surely all I have to do is ... I mean, Jesus doesn't want us to be sad, does he?

*(sadly)* I don't want to let him down.

**Emily** Jesus lets us suffer, sometimes, but we don't suffer alone. We join in *his* sufferings. We become more like him.

**Tommy** But – but Jesus didn't die for nothing ...

**Emily** Of course he didn't. And one day, through sharing in his death, we shall share in his reward. Everlasting life – everlasting joy – it will be ours.

**Tommy** *covers his eyes as if trying to stop himself crying.*

**Tommy** I just feel that if I'm sad I'm letting him down ...

**S** Well, you're not. We're all sad sometimes.

**Tommy** I – I want to be joyful, like he says.

**Emily** *puts an arm around him.*

**Emily** It's no good keeping it all bottled in. That won't help. It's no good trying to be happy all the time. We can't make ourselves happy. Temporary superficial emotion – that's nothing. Jesus died to give us so much more than that.

**Tommy** Well ... perhaps you're right ...

**S** Come on – let's be getting going ...

*They leave together. Out rings the voice of the Announcer, but it seems somehow sadder than before:*

**Announcer** *Tea and cakes will now be served in the JCR ...*

*Then silence.*

### **Scene Seventeen**

**S**, *sleeping on the stage. Suddenly she sits up.*

**S** I have such bad dreams sometimes ...

I break everything. I break everybody. Just like ... just like before.

They say I should tell more people how I feel.

*A long pause.*

**S** I'm scared to tell people how I feel in case it makes them go away.

*She lies back down, rolls over and tries to go back to sleep. But it doesn't work. After a little while, she gets up and scrabbles around for her Bible. She opens it, and reads, tears running down her cheeks, her voice cracking:*

**S** Psalm 88 ...  
"You have taken from me my closest friends  
and have made me repulsive to them.  
I am confined and cannot escape;  
My eyes are dim with grief." [Ps. 88:8-9a]

*She reads on in silence, till she comes to the end:*

**S** "All day long your terrors surround me like a flood;  
They have completely engulfed me.  
You have taken my companions and loved ones from me –  
The darkness is my closest friend." [Ps. 88:17-18]

*Blackout.*

### **Scene Eighteen**

*The stage is empty. In the darkness, a man's voice cries out in the anguish of death:*

**Man** My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me? [Ps. 22:1a]

### **Scene Nineteen**

*Lights up on Alex, sitting alone on the side of the stage, blowing up balloons. A knock.*

**Alex** Come in?

*Enter S. She's carrying a bag.*

**Alex** Oh, it's you. Hi.

**S** Hello. Look – um – Alex?

**Alex** Yes?

**S** May I sit down?

**Alex** Yeah. Can I get you some tea or anything? Maybe some cake, I think I have some in here somewhere –

*He starts to stand up.*

**S** No. It's OK. Listen, Alex, I just wanted to say something.

*He sits down again.*

**Alex**           Go on.

**S**                The truth is, I –  
*She takes a deep breath.*

**S**                I’ve been struggling quite a lot with depression recently.

**Alex**           Oh. Do you – do you want to talk about it?

**S**                *(emphatically)* No.  
I – I’ve got other people I can talk to.

**Alex**           Good. Well, it’s always good to have someone you can talk to.

**S**                I just thought – I just thought maybe you should know.  
*She takes a deep breath; now she’s started talking she struggles to stop.*

**S**                I’m getting better, I think. Maybe. The pills help, I suppose. But ...  
*She sits down next to him, though with a little distance between them.*

**S**                Sometimes I don’t know why I’m sad. It doesn’t feel right to be sad, when Jesus has done so much for me.  
*She reaches into her bag, pulls out her Bible, moves closer to show him.*

**S**                There’s a bit in the Psalms that helps with this:  
*(she reads)* “Why are you downcast, O my soul?  
Why are you so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.” [Ps. 42:5-6a/11]

**Alex**           How does that help?

**S**                It helps to tell myself that I’m not thinking right. That’s what the writer does here: he says to himself “Soul! Why are you sad? Trust God. Praise God.”

**Alex**           Does that make everything OK?

**S**                It doesn’t mean I stop being sad, not always. But it means I remember. I remember what’s important.

**Alex**           What’s that?

**S**                Jesus. He’s what’s important. Not me. Not how I feel.  
Maybe before I made it sound like the psalms are all sad and gloomy. But in fact they’re so much more than that. There’s good bits, too.

**Alex**           *(not actually all that interested)* Really?

**S** Nearly all the sad ones have happy bits too. About who God is and what he's done for us. That one I was telling you about – Psalm 13, wasn't it?

**Alex** Um –

*She flicks to it.*

**S** Even after all the writer's been through, he still ends like this:

“But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the LORD's praise,  
for he has been good to me.”

[Ps. 13:5-6]

He's been so good to me. He's done such awesome things. No matter how hard life seems, we can carry on praising him for that.

*She realises suddenly she's said much more than she really meant to.*

**S** (*standing up*) Oh – I'm sorry.

**Alex** Sorry? What for?

**S** I must be boring you ...

**Alex** No, no – not at all. It's – it's really interesting, hearing how people cope.

*He stands up too. A brief but awkward silence.*

**Alex** It's OK, if you want to talk to me about stuff. Talk as much as you like, I won't mind. It's always good to have someone to talk to, like I said.

**S** *just nods.*

**Alex** Anyway ...

**S** I – I need to go.

**Alex** Oh. OK.

**S** Bye.

**Alex** Bye then.

**S** Have fun with your balloons.

*She gathers up her things and walks out. Alex tosses away the balloon he was holding.*

**Alex** I shouldn't have said that.

(*scornfully quoting himself*) “It's really interesting, hearing how people cope.” But people aren't textbooks. They don't exist to study, to satisfy my intellectual curiosity.

People are people.

*(though S isn't there to hear him)* I'm sorry.

*And he exits.*

## Scene Twenty

**S**, alone.

**S** Look at you all, you unhappy people. What have you got? Reason and education and hoping everyone will be nice to one another? People aren't nice. Hoping people will be nice won't stop the wars. Telling people to be nice won't end the fighting. Education won't make people nice. Reason won't make people nice. You can give your presidents and your prime ministers the best education the world will offer and it still won't stop the bombing and the gunning and the dying.

*Enter the President, who solemnly addresses us:*

**President** Look at us! Look at all we've achieved! We have reason! We have science! We have clean water and good food and the best universities! Our country, our culture, is the greatest this world has ever known.

**S** And yet you still go to war. Still people are sad and angry and crying. And you think you can stop it all, with science and reason and education. You think, even without God, that you have hope.

It's just a fairy tale.

*Exit both.*

*The two black figures return with the chairs, placing them at angles some distance apart.*

## Scene Twenty-One

**Alex**, sitting on the floor centre-stage, surrounded by deflating balloons.

**Alex** Every morning when I get up, I say to myself: "Everyday, in every way, it's getting better and better." Positive thinking, that's the way. Optimism.

But it's not true.

*A knock on the door.*

**Alex** Who is it?

**Emily** It's me: Emily.

**Alex** Come in.

**Emily** enters, carrying a bag.

**Emily** I thought I'd just pop by and – oh, are you alright?

**Alex** stands up.

**Alex** Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Er – would you like some tea? Cake?

**Emily** I've just had lunch, actually. But I could maybe do with some tea – you can never have enough tea ...

*Emily takes a chair and brings it forward while Alex sets about preparing the tea, his back to the audience. His answers to Emily's questions are short and uninformative.*

**Emily** How have you been?

**Alex** OK.

**Emily** Lots of work?

**Alex** Not too much.

**Emily** How's – um – Mental Health Week been going?

**Alex** Alright, I suppose.

*He turns around.*

**Alex** I've been thinking, Emily.

**Emily** Oh, that's always good.

*He grabs the other chair and moves it closer to her, so they sit side-by-side.*

**Alex** Why is there so much suffering in the world?

**Emily** *frowns.*

**Emily** Why do you think, Alex?

**Alex** I dunno ... I guess if everything's just atoms spinning around it's all that you'd expect.

**Emily** Yes.

**Alex** But – but you don't think that, do you?

**Emily** *shakes her head.*

**Alex** Why does God – if – if there is a God – why does he allow so much suffering?

**Emily** Well ...

*Thinking about it, she reaches into her bag and draws out a Bible.*

**Emily** It says in the Bible that the world's broken. Because of the bad things people do, rejecting God, nothing in the world is how it's supposed to be. That's the short answer. The whole story's quite a bit more complicated than that.

**Alex** Even Christians suffer though, don't they? Being a Christian doesn't make everything alright. People like you and ... *(He trails off, unable to mention "S" by name.)* you still suffer.

**Emily** Yes.

**Alex** Why? Why doesn't God look after you?

**Emily** Oh, but he is looking after us! He's the one in control; we can't understand everything he allows to happen, but he understands. He's working everything together for the good of those who love him.  
 [Rom. 8:28]  
 When we suffer, it's for our own good, in the end ... even if – even if it doesn't make sense at the time. But even now I can look back at stuff I've gone through in the past and begin to understand – understand how it was ultimately for the best.

**Alex** I'm not sure it makes much sense to me.

**Emily** It will all end one day. One day God will make everything new again, put everything right. It's already started ...

**Alex** What do you mean?

**Emily** *opens her Bible to the Psalms.*

**Emily** When we suffer as Christians, we're just sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. You know, when he was on the cross, dying, he cried out: "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

**Alex** He thought God had left him? But –

**Emily** He was quoting from one of the psalms. It begins like that.

*The voice of the Man from earlier, echoing out:*

**Man** My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me? [Ps. 22:1a]

**Emily** And it goes on ...

**Man** I am a worm and not a man ... scorned by all, and despised by men. All who see me mock me: they hurl insults, shaking their heads.  
 [Ps. 22:6-7]

**Emily** He feels such pain ...

**Man** I am poured out like water, and my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.  
 [Ps. 22:14]

**Emily** But still he trusts his God ...

**Man** You are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. From my mother's womb you have been my God – you are my strength – I will praise you!  
 [Ps. 22:3,9b,19b,22b]

**Emily** Jesus suffered all that pain for us. We've turned from God; we deserve to be punished by him. But the pain we deserved: he took upon himself. He knows what it is to hurt, much more than we do. But Jesus didn't suffer for nothing. He trusted

God his Father. He knew that all that suffering had a purpose. He did it to bring us to himself. Look, at what it says here, at the end of the psalm:

**Man** All the ends of the Earth will remember and turn to the Lord ... Future generations will proclaim his righteousness, declaring: "He has done it!"

[Ps. 22:27a,31]

**Alex** Yeah, I – I can see how that might be reassuring.

**Emily** Well, think some more about it. Jesus loves you, Alex. He wants to take your pain upon himself.

**Alex** Thanks for telling me all this.

**Emily** No problem. Listen, I've got to be going now – lectures. But like I said, think about this some more, right? And if you want to talk some more ...

**Alex** I – I think I would.

It helps to talk to somebody.

**Emily** Excellent. Well – see you then.

**Alex** Bye.

*Emily leaves. Alex smiles to himself, then picks up another balloon and starts blowing it up as he walks forward off the stage.*

## Scene Twenty-Two

*S, sitting on one of the two chairs. Enter Emily, holding a wrapped present, to come and sit beside her.*

**Emily** How are you?

**S** As bad as ever.

**Emily** I – I bought you something.

*She hands her the present.*

**S** What is it?

**Emily** Open it.

*S opens it. It's a stuffed panda. She laughs.*

**S** Thanks.

This is great.

It's little things like this that make it all seem worth it ...

**Emily** No, it isn't.

**S** *(falling sad again)* Isn't it?

**Emily** No, it isn't. It's the big thing that makes it worth it. Remember what Jesus promises us in the end:

“He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things will pass away.” [Rev. 21:4]

**S** It's going to be OK, isn't it, in the end?

**Emily** Of course it is. He'll make everything new again.

**S** I know the pain doesn't stop, and the darkness doesn't seem to go away, but sometimes when I think about it all, I just feel like ...

**Emily** Go on. It's OK.

**S** Sometimes I just feel like ...

**Emily** That's a good way to feel. One day, maybe, you won't feel anything else. This is just a foretaste of the future.

**S** I just feel like ...

**Emily** Go on. Do it. Don't be afraid. Jesus loves you.

Smile!

**THE END**