

THE MATCH

By Jason Hall

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CHARACTERS:

MEREDITH – A woman in her 30s, Mum of Raymond.

CLAIRE – A woman in her 30s, Mum of Polly.

THE TIME & PLACE:

Present day.

Round 1 – On the street outside a school.

Round 2 – At a gym.

Round 3 – In a cemetery.

Round 4 – In Claire's house.

NOTE ON DEVELOPMENT

This script was developed as part of a Company of Angels (now Boundless Theatre) programme entitled 'The Commissioners'. The idea of the 'The Commissioners' is that a playwright and director lead a workshop with students to answer the question 'What is important to me right now?' and then the playwright goes away and writes a first draft of a short play based on that experience. The young people read and feedback on that first draft, effectively 'commissioning' the writer to proceed with his/her idea. The students – in this case one class at Highgate School in north London – continue to read and feedback on future drafts of the script. The final version of the play is then performed for the entire school using professional actors.

NOTE ON PERFORMANCE:

The play is intended to have the feel of a competitive sport between two players. In this version of the script the language of boxing is used; however, the imagery of fencing was used to excellent effect in the original production at Highgate School (and then at Latitude Festival). Other sports, such as tennis, taekwondo, table tennis, wrestling, etc. can be used instead. Scenes (or 'rounds') begin and end with the sound of a bell or whistle. The action of the play should occur in a strip of space between two halves of the audience.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

The two characters are competing for the audience's approval of their arguments. The audience can show their support for a character by moving to that character's 'corner' between rounds, holding up coloured cards, etc. This concept should be introduced by someone (i.e. the director or stage manager) who can act as a referee or announcer before the start of the play.

ROUND 1

The bell rings.

Actors on stage.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* She's walking -

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* I better hurry -

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* She's practically running -

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* So much to do -

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* And *I'm* running just to catch up –

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* If you leave it too late the car park at Tesco is simply –

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* And she gets to this smart little Mini –

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Well it's simply the *worst*.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* Which I assume is hers.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* But I hear –

MEREDITH Claire!

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* So I hesitate.

MEREDITH Oh, Cla-ire!

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And I turn.

MEREDITH Oh, I am so glad I caught you.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And I see...this.

MEREDITH I'm Meredith.

CLAIRE Oh?

MEREDITH Raymond's mother?

CLAIRE Oh?

MEREDITH Raymond Ledger, Polly's classmate?

CLAIRE Oh!

MEREDITH How are you?

CLAIRE Oh, yes of course, Ray!

MEREDITH Raymond.

CLAIRE Ray from her class.

MEREDITH Raymond – but, yes.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* I look at her. She looks...let's just say she's not exactly glamorous.

MEREDITH I wondered if I could have a second of your time.

CLAIRE You can have two seconds.

(Light laughter.)

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* What I'm really thinking about is Tesco but –

MEREDITH This is a little...tricky.

CLAIRE What is?

MEREDITH Raymond tells me that Polly is having a...

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Oh, dear.

MEREDITH A party.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Here we go.

MEREDITH For her birthday.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Is she really doing this?

MEREDITH Commonly known as a – a – a birthday party.

(Light laughter.)

MEREDITH Raymond says that most of the class - maybe *all* of the class – have been invited.

CLAIRE Well –

MEREDITH Except him.

CLAIRE Ah.

MEREDITH So you see.

CLAIRE Yes.

MEREDITH Obviously you see.

CLAIRE Obviously.

MEREDITH Do you see?

CLAIRE No.

MEREDITH Raymond feels...left out.

CLAIRE Ah, poor Ray.

MEREDITH Raymond.

CLAIRE But...you know.

MEREDITH Know what?

CLAIRE Kids.

MEREDITH What about them?

CLAIRE Kids will be kids!

MEREDITH Yes but –

CLAIRE Anyway, I hate to dash off, but Tesco you see –

MEREDITH So you'll have a word with her?

CLAIRE I'll - ?

MEREDITH Have a word with Polly.

CLAIRE About Ray?

MEREDITH -mond. Yes.

CLAIRE (*Unconvincing*) I...will...do that...

MEREDITH Oh, wonderful.

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) And I get into my car.

MEREDITH (*To audience.*) She doesn't say goodbye.

The bell rings.

The actors go to their corners.

The audience move (or not).

ROUND 2

The bell rings.

Actors on stage.

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) You would not believe it.

MEREDITH Claire?

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) I'm at my gym.

MEREDITH Claire is that you?

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) Just out from a wonderful massage –

MEREDITH It's me!

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) Feeling so good, my body all relaxed –

MEREDITH Meredith!

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) And I see *her*.

MEREDITH How are you, Claire?

CLAIRE Oh, Meredith.

MEREDITH Yes it's me.

CLAIRE I'm good.

MEREDITH Well good.

CLAIRE Good. What brings you here?

MEREDITH Oh...

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) Did she follow me?

MEREDITH Just looking into some lessons for Raymond.

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) Because that would be weird.

MEREDITH He does love to swim.

CLAIRE Oh?

MEREDITH Yes.

CLAIRE Well –

MEREDITH Which is why he's so looking forward to getting an invitation -

CLAIRE Right.

MEREDITH To Polly's little party –

CLAIRE About that.

MEREDITH Which I hear is a pool party.

CLAIRE Yes –

MEREDITH In your pool.

CLAIRE Look, Ray won't be getting an invitation.

MEREDITH Oh?

CLAIRE Sorry.

MEREDITH You didn't talk to her, did you?

CLAIRE I –

MEREDITH Because it's not too late –

CLAIRE I spoke to her.

MEREDITH You did?

CLAIRE Yes.

MEREDITH Well, what's the problem then?

CLAIRE The problem is it's her party and she's made her decision about who she *wants* to come.

MEREDITH (*To audience.*) I am holding a brochure for swimming lessons.

CLAIRE And she's decided who she *doesn't* want to come.

MEREDITH (*To audience.*) And my hands are slippery with sweat.

CLAIRE Polly just doesn't want Ray.

MEREDITH Raymond.

CLAIRE Whatever.

MEREDITH (*To audience.*) And now I'm crushing the brochure.

CLAIRE It's her choice.

MEREDITH But you're her mother.

CLAIRE And?

MEREDITH Just tell her to invite him. Order her.

CLAIRE I'm not going to do that!

MEREDITH And why not?

CLAIRE Because children should be free to decide who they want to hang out with!

MEREDITH Children should do as their parents tell them!

CLAIRE Oh, like your son?

MEREDITH Yes!

CLAIRE I've heard how well that works for him.

MEREDITH Meaning?

CLAIRE (*To audience.*) I shouldn't say this.

MEREDITH Well?

CLAIRE You wouldn't call him popular, would you?

MEREDITH I don't know what you mean.

CLAIRE Does he bring many friends over?

MEREDITH No, but –

CLAIRE And have you ever thought why that might be?

MEREDITH I suppose you're going to tell me?

CLAIRE I've seen his clothes.

MEREDITH What about his clothes?

CLAIRE It's like his mother dresses him.

MEREDITH I do!

CLAIRE (*She gestures to MEREDITH'S clothes.*) Exactly.

MEREDITH He's only ten, it doesn't matter what he wears.

CLAIRE Yes but there are limits I've seen better clothes on a chihuahua!

MEREDITH I can take your insults but he's just a boy.

CLAIRE I'm just telling you what the other children are saying.

MEREDITH If he doesn't get invited to this party you'll have made my son very, very upset.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Then she walks away. And that relaxed feeling? After my massage? It is definitely...*gone*.

Bell rings.

Actors to their corners.

Audience moves (or not).

ROUND 3

Bell rings.

Actors onstage.

CLAIRE *(Calling)* Hey!

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* I hear –

CLAIRE *(Calling)* Hey, I see you!

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* But I don't think it's at me.

CLAIRE *(Calling)* Hello?

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* Because who would shout like that here, in a cemetery?

CLAIRE Meredith Ledger, I see you!

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* That's when I realise who it is.

CLAIRE What are you doing here?

MEREDITH Claire, I – I – I –

CLAIRE Are you following me?

MEREDITH No!

CLAIRE I am here, trying to pay respects to my mother and I look up and I see you!

MEREDITH I just came to lay some flowers. I'm just leaving anyway.

CLAIRE Wait. Last week you cornered me by my car. Then you turned up at my gym. Now you're here. And don't think I didn't see you at my house –

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* Oh no.

CLAIRE On Saturday.

MEREDITH I don't know what you mean?

CLAIRE Don't deny it! I know what you did to Mr. Nibbles!

MEREDITH Mr. who?

CLAIRE Polly's rabbit! You opened Mr. Nibbles' cage, didn't you?

MEREDITH No!

CLAIRE You let him out and now he's gone and all to get revenge on us for the pool party!

MEREDITH No –

CLAIRE Which, by the way, will now be a disaster because Polly is so upset about Mr. Nibbles!

MEREDITH I would never hurt any living thing!

CLAIRE Then why were you sneaking around my house on the weekend? I saw you!

MEREDITH I came to...to drop off a card.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* I don't believe that for a second.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* And then I remember.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* She's a rabbit killer, a bunny butcher!

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* I still have it.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* But she reaches in her purse –

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* Here.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And hands me a card.

MEREDITH It's for Polly. From Raymond.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* It *looks* like a birthday card. I open it, just to be sure.

MEREDITH He wrote it but was too shy to give it to her.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And I read it.

MEREDITH And I thought...maybe I could just slip it in with your post.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And it's...

MEREDITH But when I got to your house, I couldn't do it. Not behind Raymond's back like that.

CLAIRE He's so...he says such kind things about Polly.

MEREDITH I know.

CLAIRE Is she...is she really the only person who's nice to him at school?

MEREDITH He thinks very highly of her. So do I.

CLAIRE He...he must have *some* friends, though?

MEREDITH Not really.

CLAIRE What about after school? Clubs? Sports?

MEREDITH No.

CLAIRE You were going to sign him up for swimming.

MEREDITH No, far too dangerous.

CLAIRE You can't protect your children from everything.

MEREDITH Yes you can.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* She looks down.

MEREDITH If you try hard enough.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* She looks down at her flowers.

MEREDITH If you try hard enough you can protect them.

CLAIRE My mother thought that way. When we left the house she used to hold onto my arm so tight I'd end up with finger-shaped bruises. All that worry, all that stress – it put her in that grave over there, long before her time. I'm not ending up like that.

MEREDITH What you're saying is I'm a bad mother.

CLAIRE No! What I'm saying is... I bet your boy just wants to be a normal ten year old.

MEREDITH I'm not buying Raymond fancy trainers and expensive video games just so the other children will like him. They should like him for who he is.

CLAIRE My daughter *does*.

MEREDITH Then why isn't she asking him to her party?

CLAIRE I...I don't know.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* And suddenly I feel like I might cry.

CLAIRE But it is Polly's choice.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* And I have to get out of here.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And she hurries away. I move to run after her but I'm frozen. Because now I see where she laid the flowers. It's a tombstone. Small. Like for a baby. So, so small.

The bell rings.

The actors go to their corners.

The audience moves (or not).

ROUND 4

The bell rings.

Actors on stage.

MEREDITH The pool is lovely.

CLAIRE Thank you.

MEREDITH I didn't realise it was indoors.

CLAIRE It is a bit of an luxury.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* She's invited us to her house.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* I felt so bad for her.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* But she didn't invite us to the pool party.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* After the whole thing at the cemetery I came straight home and spoke to Polly.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* The pool party was last weekend.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Polly and I decided the best thing would be to invite Meredith and Ray over, just the two of them.

MEREDITH Can you see the children?

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* She always so worried.

MEREDITH *(Waves.)* Hello Raymond love!

CLAIRE I haven't told you about the fox, have I?

MEREDITH What fox?

CLAIRE We've seen a fox lurking in the garden.

MEREDITH What? Now? Is it dangerous?

CLAIRE No, not now. At night.

MEREDITH Oh.

CLAIRE We think he's responsible.

MEREDITH For Mr. Nibbles?

CLAIRE For Mr. Nibbles.

MEREDITH Ah.

CLAIRE So, yes. Mystery solved.

MEREDITH So...?

CLAIRE So...apologies. For accusing you. About Mr. Nibbles.

MEREDITH Apology accepted.

CLAIRE It was just...when I saw you sneaking outside our house –

MEREDITH I'm sure I wasn't sneaking.

CLAIRE It looked like you were sneaking.

MEREDITH I don't think so.

CLAIRE You were doing this. *(She makes sneaking movement.)*

MEREDITH Well. Then. Apologies if it looked like I was sneaking.

CLAIRE Apology accepted.

MEREDITH Well. Isn't this nice?

CLAIRE Isn't it?

MEREDITH All this tea...

CLAIRE And swimming...

MEREDITH And apologising.

CLAIRE *(Waves.)* Hi Polly darling!

MEREDITH And since we're apologising, I suppose it's time for the big one.

CLAIRE Oh?

MEREDITH Yes.

CLAIRE Away you go then.

MEREDITH Away I go?

CLAIRE I'm confused. What's happening?

MEREDITH I'm waiting for you to give me the big apology.

CLAIRE For what?

MEREDITH For not inviting Raymond to the pool party!

CLAIRE I'm not apologising for that!

MEREDITH I should have known!

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* Can you believe her?

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* Can you believe *her*?

CLAIRE It was Polly's party and her decision.

MEREDITH A bad decision!

CLAIRE You two are here *now* aren't you?

MEREDITH Like some shameful little secret, away from everyone else!

CLAIRE Polly was protecting him.

MEREDITH I don't think so!

CLAIRE When I asked her why he wasn't invited, she –

MEREDITH *(Waving.)* Yes, love, we're watching!

CLAIRE *(Waving.)* Great diving you two!

MEREDITH *(Waving.)* Excellent job!

CLAIRE When I asked Polly why she didn't invite him, do you know what she said? That she didn't want it to be like school. She said at school everyone is so mean to him and he's always sad. She didn't want that. She wanted everyone to have fun.

MEREDITH Everyone except Raymond.

CLAIRE You're the one who should be giving me the big apology, by the way! You followed me to my gym!

MEREDITH What – what – what about the names you called Raymond!

CLAIRE I never called him names!

MEREDITH You never apologised for that!

CLAIRE I never called him names!

MEREDITH You said he dresses like a chihuahua!

CLAIRE That's not what I said!

MEREDITH Maybe I'll just get my son and leave now!

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And she moves to go out to the pool.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* But then I stop.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* She stares at the children.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* They're splashing each other.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* And laughing.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* And the sound of their happiness? It echoes all around us.

(Pause.)

CLAIRE You know....we don't have to be friends.

MEREDITH We don't even have to like each other.

(They both wave.)

MEREDITH Polly's welcome over any time she wants.

CLAIRE And you won't mind if I don't come in for tea?

MEREDITH I won't mind at all.

CLAIRE Raymond's welcome back here any time he wants, he's really been a lot of fun today.

MEREDITH Raymond?

CLAIRE Yes. Raymond.

MEREDITH *(To audience.)* I look at Claire.

CLAIRE *(To audience.)* I look at Meredith.

MEREDITH Well. I guess that's that then.

CLAIRE It will be good to be done with all this point-scoring, won't it?

MEREDITH Yes. *(She holds out her hand.)* Good game, though.

CLAIRE Good game.

They shake hands.

Bell goes.

End of match.