

Robyn Bryant is Dying

– a one act play in several scenes and fragments by Rosalind Kentwell

Characters:

Robyn Bryant: single woman, aged between 20 and 35

Cathy: Robyn's friend, appropriate age, pregnant

Doctor

Doctor's wife

Lecturer

Poppy

Robyn's mother

Andrew: Cathy's husband

Sandy) friends of Robyn and Cathy

Di)

The actors playing Robyn and Cathy should play only these parts. Robyn should be on stage sitting or lying on the chaise-longue throughout the play. The poems and the other parts can be divided between as many, or as few actors as desired. A satisfactory cast would be two men and four women as well as Robyn and Cathy.

Staging

The stage setting should be very simple with areas suggested mainly by lights.

Essential furniture should be set and left in place. This is a chaise-longue OP with a chair beside it on its P side, and two chairs facing each other Up Stage and slightly P of Centre. Also set should be Robyn's knitting, a couple of pillows and an afghan rug on the chaise-lounge.

FRAGMENT ONE

ROBYN BRYANT IS DYING - announced loudly

(1) Funeral:- Few bars of funeral march.

Minister & relations fade in and out with comments about the deceased (not Robyn) more & more bitter, ends with a wild burst of hysterical laughter.

SCENE ONE

Young Dr. at home talking to wife (who is not on stage).

(2) Doctor:- Robyn Bryant is dying

My patient Robyn Bryant is dying.

Wife: (off stage) I won't be a moment dear.

Doctor: I knew underneath, I suspected from the first - the first test, I knew she would die before long — but I didn't say, didn't say anything - just went on with the tests. Tests and more tests. In and out of hospital pretending, always pretending. Just one more test Miss Bryant, a small operation Miss Bryant, it won't hurt Miss Bryant. Lies, all lies, but it mattered. I was lying to myself too. A young woman like that - why should she die.

Wife:- (off stage) Why don't you get the car out dear?

Doctor:— Today I said to myself "Today I will stop pretending. Today I will tell her. So I did.

Wife:— (Off stage) We won't be very late.

Doctor:- I went into the ward and I drew the screens around her bed. She smiled at me. She smiled at me — politely. I said to her "Miss Bryant" I said. She said

Robyn's voice (miked):— I wish you would call me Robyn.

Doctor:— So I said to her Miss Bryant there is something I must tell you. Miss Bryant you have a terminal illness. I didn't look at her. I am very sorry Miss Bryant I said. Then I left. I did not look back. The screens remained in place. She is going home tomorrow. Going home to die. It doesn't matter does it — I mean life is a terminal illness after all.

Wife: (entering) What was all that about dear?

FRAGMENT TWO

On waiting for her to recover or die

How long is seven days?
Eternity of waiting
But wink and blink of bliss.
We waited seven days
Eternity of hoping,
But it was not for this.
Not for the pain of waiting still
Of aching moments frozen fast
Of endless plodding hours to fill
And bitter minutes inching past.
How long is seven days?
Today it is forever.

SCENE TWO

(Poppy's poses must be absolutely spot on)
Lecturer: Ladies and gentlemen, today's lecture is an illustrated talk on grief.
As you may know there are five stages of grief and, with the help of my assistant I hope to amplify these for you.
The first stage is shock and denial (to assistant) Poppy, position please (assistant takes up symbolic shock position). You see here the expression of shock and horror. The hands, held forward, so, reject the bad news. It is not unusual for sufferers to spend several days in this state depending of course on the severity of the grief provoker which I shall here after refer to as the pro. Now, the second stage, is anger. Poppy please. As you can see the characteristics of this state are anger, possibly even rejection of God on the one hand, and man on the other. A characteristic statement at this time is,....
Poppy:_(realistically) Why did it happen to me?
Lecturer:_(a bit startled by her vehemence) Yes
Poppy:_(as before) Why did it happen to me
lecturer: Thank you Poppy. The subject may in fact never progress past this state which I hypothesize to be the cause of much of the world's undirected anger.
The third stage is one which may be omitted dependant upon the irrevocability of the pro_ This is BARGAINING. (Poppy takes pose). Notice the idea of exchange involved in this stage the subject makes some promise or offers some less desired object in exchange for the reprieve of the pro.
We move on from here to the fourth stage which is depression. (Poppy takes pose). This stage also may last quite a long time. Notice the drooping, weighed down appearance of this state. Finally we reach the fifth stage - acceptance. Thank you Poppy. A state of readiness to go on from the grief, to take it to one self and grow from it.

Well I hope you have enjoyed my little talk and .. Poppy's poses.... (she smiles faintly). You have?

Man: (storming towards her from the audience) You don't understand Robyn Bryant is dying, Robyn Bryant is dying (etc.)

(He tries to strangle her, Poppy joins in) as the lecturer goes down.

Lecturer: Typical of the second stage, absolutely typical.

FRAGMENT THREE

EMILY DICKINSON

The last night that she lived,
It was a common night,
Except the dying; this to us
Made nature different.

We noticed smallest things, —
Things overlooked before,
By this great light upon our minds
Italicized, as 'twere.

That others could exist
While she must finish quite,
A jealousy for her arose
So nearly infinite.

We waited while she passed;
It was a narrow time,
Too jostled were our souls to speak,
At length the notice came.

She mentioned, and forgot;
Then lightly as a reed
Bent to the water, shivered scarce,
Consented, and was dead.

And we, we placed the hair,
And drew the head erect,
And then an awful leisure was,
Our faith to regulate.

FRAGMENT FOUR

Robyn: You know .. sometimes, before, when I was really happy I'd think ... I wish I could die right now .. nothing could be better than how I am - right this minute -- and sometimes when I was really depressed I'd wish I could kill myself... but it's different now. All those times were just pretending even if I didn't think so at the time. When someone tells you that you're "seriously ill" you can't believe it — you believe it with your head, but you don't really believe it, but.... I mean I don't feel all that sick — not all that

(pause

It's not fair I've tried to do right, and be a good Christian ... I've tried ... and I haven't finished yet and - oh Cathy I want to see your baby.

FRAGMENT FIVE

On a day of golden sun
How could a man die?
How wife and child be torn with misery?
Why Lord.. .Why?
Such a day should not be fair,
But shrouded, dark and violently awry.

SCENE THREE

MOTHER: Yoo Hoo ..Where are you darling -
Hello, well you do look better, today.

ROBYN: I'm alright thanks Mum. What are you doing here, I wasn't expecting you to-day.

MOTHER: Oh, I'm just on my way to see old Mrs. Dunn. I made a pie for her, so I just popped in on my way. I brought you a pie too. It's in the kitchen.

ROBYN: Oh, Mum. You don't need to keep bringing me food. I can

MOTHER: You need feeding up, my girl. It's time you were putting on a bit of weight. Dad and I were just saying last night, that as soon as you're feeling better, we'll all go away for a nice holiday together. I must remember to call in to the travel place for some brochures ----- -

ROBYN: Mum

MOTHER. It'll give you something nice to look forward to, and you can decide where you would like to go. Well if that's all I can do for now, I'd better be getting on to Mrs. Dunn's. She does love to have a chat. I might pop in to-morrow.

What did I do with my keys? Oh, there they are....

ROBYN: Mum....

MOTHER: Yes dear, was there something

ROBYN: No, it's nothing. Don't worry about to-morrow. Cathy's coming over, so I'll be O.K.

MOTHER: Oh good. Such a nice girl. Alright darling. See you soon.
Don't forget the pie.

ROBYN: Good bye Mum (*pause*) Oh God, if only she'd stop pretending! -

SCENE FOUR

Cathy: Hello Robyn.

Robyn: Hello.

Cathy: How are you feeling'?

Robyn: All right.

Cathy: We missed you in the group ... we had a concert Saturday for the bowl's club. They gave me one of your songs - you know, the one about not being able to get a husband —— which looked really silly in my condition. Still all things considered the concert didn't go too badly only we missed you. Di did the duet with Sandy but it just didn't seem the same somehow We've got another

Robyn: Shut up. Just shut up you silly grinning bitch. I don't want to know.

Cathy: Robyn (not shocked, hurt)

Robyn: What's so special about you that you get everything - a husband, a baby coming, you even get to sing my solos - I've got nothing and I never will have now. It isn't fair.

(Cathy gets up)

Cathy: Perhaps I'd better go.

Robyn: (Grabbing her) No Cathy ... no. I didn't mean it

Cathy. I'm just so miserable, and scared and resentful. Oh Cathy I'm sorry.

(They hug each other - comforting each other)

Robyn looks up after a bit.

Robyn: Cathy.

Cathy: Um.

Robyn: Is it nice being pregnant'?

Cathy: Um.

(Pause)

Robyn: I'm glad you miss me.

FRAGMENT SIX

John DONNE.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,
For, these, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor death, nor yet can'st thou kill me.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do goe,
Rest of their bones and souls deliverie,
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, Kings and desperate men,
And doest with poison, warre and sickness dwell,
And poppie or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than they stroake: why swell'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death thou shalt die.

SCENE FIVE

Cathy is sitting in her kitchen..

Andrew (husband) enters.

Andrew: (Kissing her) You look tired darling.

Cathy: Just a bit.

Andrew: Busy day?

Cathy: To not really, just

Andrew: just *what*?

Cathy: Nothing.

Andrew: It's Robyn isn't it. You've been to see her again.

Cathy: Yes I have.

Andrew: Well I wish you wouldn't - it always makes you upset and it's not right.

Cathy: Andy don't.

Andrew: Well it isn't. Why should she involve you in her problems.

You shouldn't have to be upset, especially not at the moment.

Cathy: Andy, Robyn is my closest friend and she's dying. How can I not be involved?

Andrew: You don't have to go and see her every day. It's too much of a strain. She shouldn't expect it.

Cathy: She doesn't expect it.. I want .to go.

Andrew: It's not fair.

Cathy: That's what she said. 'It's not fair. I've got nothing and I never will have now.' It's not true of course. She hasn't got anything in the way of material blessings but she's got courage and faith. She still has all the qualities that make her who she is.

Andrew: But Cathy.

Cathy: Andy listen. I go to see Robyn not just because I can help her, but because she helps me. Death isn't a far off spectre that might happen one day. It happens to people every day and we might as well learn to face it, because we can't run from it for ever.

Andrew: Why now'?

Cathy: Why not now?

Andrew: Because ... beca —

Cathy: (She is getting upset)

Because it hurts? Things do you know. I expect it will hurt a bit having the baby, but that's not important, the important thing is the new life. Well if we believe that death is a kind of new life we have to learn to accept the hurt.

Andrew: I know but

Cathy: Look, I love Robyn, so inevitably the fact that she's dying hurts. What do you want me to do, pretend that it's not happening? People do you know. Robyn's mother is always going on about "when she gets well". Well I'm not going to do that and I don't want you to tell me I shouldn't get hurt —— Andy

(She is crying — he takes her in his arms)

Just help me Andy.

FRAGMENT SEVEN

CHANT Ps.130 (A suitable setting can be found in the Methodist Hymn Book number 59)

1. Out of the depths have I cried unto thee O Lord.
2. Lord hear my voice.
Let thine ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
3. If thou Lord shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand?
4. But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.
5. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait and in his word do I hope.
6. y soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.
7. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy and with him is plenteous redemption.
8. And He shall redeem Israel: from all his iniquities.

GLORIA

FRAGMENT EIGHT

Cathy: Lord, I don't understand. God God, I want to say thank you for what I've got, for my home and my good health and everything, but I feel so guilty when I think of Robyn. If you've given me such a lot why not her. Please God, heal her, she doesn't want to die, I don't want her to die

Robyn: Dear God,' I'll try and accept, I'll try not to complain. God, even Jesus didn't want to die. I'll try and be brave and keep holding on to you, but God, please God let me still be alive when Cathy's baby's born. Please.

FRAGMENT NINE

Emily DICKINSON.

The bustle in the house
The morning after death
Is solomnest of industries
acted upon earth, -
The sweeping up the heart,
And putting love away
We shall not want to use again
Until eternity.

SCENE SIX

Di and Sandy - two of Robyn and Cathy's friends.

Sandy: Cathy suggested we ask Robyn to help us with the new duet.

Di: That did you say?

Sandy: Said I'd ask you.

Di: You been to see her yet?

Sandy: No.

Di: What hospital's she in?

Sandy: She's at home.

Di: How come?

Sandy: She wanted to. She can still look after herself apparently. Cathy visits her every day.

Di: Well I s'pose she can. She's not working or anything.

Sandy: Um ... Do you want to?

Di: .What?

Sandy: Ask her to help.

Di: D'you?

Sandy: Not really. -

Di: You going to go and see her?

Sandy: I don't know. I don't want to.

Di: Me neither, I wouldn't know what to say.

Sandy: No, nor me. I mean what can you say to someone who is dying? Sorry about that.

Di: I know, but I'll probably have to go or I'll feel guilty. She was a friend after all.

Sandy: Yeah, Cathy really put pressure on me. You know. "Robyn's really unhappy that she hasn't seen you. - She'd love to feel that she could still be useful."

Di: That's not fair - that's a kind of blackmail. Maybe it doesn't upset Cathy, but I get upset just thinking about it.

Sandy: Robyn and Cathy were pretty close and if Cathy goes every day then she probably doesn't want us.

Di: Cathy's probably just trying to make out how good she is.

Sandy: No I don't think she's doing that, but you're right about the blackmail.

Anyway,, Robyn probably doesn't want to see us. If she's that sick too many visitors would be tiring.

Di: Yes. Anyway I sent a get well card.

SCENE SEVEN

Robyn: (With baby knitting)

Then I've finished this I'm going to knit a jacket. So you pick one out that you like and get the wool for me, okay.

Cathy: You don't have to do that.

Robyn: I know I don't have to — I want to. Anyway .. where's your knitting?

Cathy: You know perfectly well I don't knit.

Robyn: I thought every mother to be had to knit furiously all the time.

Cathy: Wretch.

Robyn: I think I'll make a little cardigan after that, for when the baby's a bit bigger.

(Pause) Cathy is thinking she (Robyn) won't live that long.

Robyn is knitting. —

And I've been thinking ... when I get better I'm going to get a puppy, a little golden Labrador bitch. I like labs they're so friendly and gentle. It'd be nice to have a puppy to look after. I'd train it to sleep in a basket by my bed, but I wouldn't spoil it. I'd train it not to jump on people or chew the furniture. We could go for walks together. you and your pram and me and my dog.

Cathy: (Almost crying) It'd be nice, wouldn't it.

Robyn: (Taking her hand) It's alright you know. I'm just imagining what might happen.

FRAGMENT TEN

MEASURE FOR MEASURE [Shakespeare]

Claudio: Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and in certain thought
Imagine howling — 'tis too horrible
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

SCENE EIGHT

Robyn and Cathy t silently holding hands for a bit.

Robyn: I read in a book once that fear of death is a sort of biological survival mechanism so we won't go rushing about doing mad things and getting killed all over the place.

(Long pause)

It doesn't help much.

(Another long pause)

Voice Over: Let not your heart be troubled: yet believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place you, I will come again and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also. Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.

Robyn and Cathy kiss each other goodbye. Robyn gets up slowly and silently and walks away without looking back until she reaches the exit. She turns and smiles slightly then moves on.

The light in the exit brightens slowly with the words

Voice Over: I am the Resurrection and the life.
He that believeth on Me, though he were dead,
yet shall he live.
And who so—ever liveth and believeth in me
shall never die.