

Pairs and Letters

A 60' play for theatre

by Suzy McKeever

CAST

Hannah Born 1972	<i>Northern Irish</i>
Hannah: child	“
Hannah: university student	“
Hannah: adult	“
Hannah: old	“
Aunt Lou Hannah’s aunt, born 1953	<i>Northern Irish</i>
Uncle Peter Hannah’s uncle, born 1953	<i>Northern Irish</i>
Connor Hannah’s son, born 2010	<i>English</i>
Chris Hannah’s father, born 1950	<i>English</i>
Pat Hannah’s mother, born 1950	<i>Northern Irish</i>
Evan Biochemistry student, later Hannah’s husband, born 1970	<i>English</i>

PROLOGUE

BEDROOM: 1987 (Hannah 15)

Aunt Lou: *(from Kitchen)* Hannah! Dinner's ready!

Hannah: Be down in a minute! *(To herself)* Watson and Crick discover deoxy-ribo-nucleic-acid – in 1962. Two polynucleotide chains coil around each other. One strand opposite the other. DNA contains instructions for development, functioning, growth and reproduction
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Aunt Lou: Hannah!

Hannah: Two secs! *(To herself)* Each polynucleotide chain is composed of ... nucleotides. Each nucleotide is symbolized by a single letter: A, T, C, or G. The double helix is stabilised by two forces. Hydrogen bonds between the nucleotides, and base stacking interactions among aromatic nucleobases... hnh?

Aunt Lou: Han –

Hannah: Coming!

KITCHEN: 1987

Aunt Lou: He has a right.

Uncle Peter: Does he? Didn't he give that up when –

Hannah races into the kitchen

Aunt Lou: And here she comes. The whirling dervish.

Aunt Lou is dishing up plates of food. Hannah sits at the table.

Uncle Peter: What was so interesting you were willing to risk your dinner? It'll be in the dog before you blink.

Aunt Lou: Och go on with ya– the day you let me get a dog...

Hannah: Biology!

Uncle Peter: Oh yeah? Try me. I was a proper whizz in school.

Aunt Lou: A whizz at getting Fs...

Hannah: DNA. It's all about pairs. And letters.

Aunt Lou: See?

Uncle Peter: Well – there you have it. Another aspect of the never-ending sectarian bollocks. We weren't taught about DNA, were we Lou? One of the few things all sides agreed on.

Aunt Lou: We'd not much need of it either.

Uncle Peter: Another 'conspiracy of silence'.

Aunt Lou: More your mother's cup of tea than mine. She had all the brains.

Hannah: They think one day you'll be able to change your genes.

Uncle Peter: I do that most days.

Aunt Lou: Oh Pete! We all saw that coming - from beyond the hills that are beyond the hills, beyond the other hills that –

Uncle Peter: Yeah yeah yeah. It's my privilege to tell uncle-jokes

Aunt Lou: So why would you change your genes? With a 'g' Pete! Slow ones at the back of the class be quiet!

Hannah: To take out the faulty ones. Ones that cause disease.

Aunt Lou: Och go on. Real 'God's work', eh?

Hannah: Not once people know how to do it. Imagine – being able to change people on a - on a level smaller than cells, I don't know what they're called - and save them from terrible diseases. You might not even need doctors. Everything could be fixed in your genes.

Uncle Peter: I tell you what's real god's work - this shepherd's pie missus! De-LISH!

Aunt Lou: Things would still happen to people though – accidents and the like – a broken arm or a leg –

Hannah: Yeah – of course. OK so you'd still need doctors. But cancers, diseases – loads of things - could be cured, stopped before they could ever happen.

Hannah stands and picks up her plate.

Aunt Lou: Now you sit back down

Hannah: I'm just going to finish up something

Aunt Lou: Hannah – not again...!

Hannah: I didn't understand it earlier – before I forget...

Hannah leaves the kitchen.

Aunt Lou: She'll not eat another bite, will she?

Uncle Pete: I'll take it for lunch tomorrow. She'll eat when she eats.

Aunt Lou: And what shall I do with this?

Aunt Lou waves a letter in the air.

Uncle Pete: Put it with the others. There'll be a time when it's right for her to see. Not now. Not before her exams eh?

ACT 1: Letters

LIVING ROOM: 2057 (Hannah is 85, Connor 47)

Connor brushes Hannah's thin white hair. She holds up a mirror.

Connor: Am I doing the right thing? How do you ever know if it's the right thing? I mean I'm not exactly a catch... Maybe *she* won't turn up. Oh God. Wedding day nerves. Sorry – my hands are shaking. Do you remember what it was like for you? OK – we're getting somewhere. I'll just fix this with a ribbon.

Hannah: A single ribbon

Connor: You probably don't remember. Yes – a single ribbon - like you asked for. You got that one under the radar with Marie. Though I'm not sure how. This wedding has been planned to within an inch of its life.

Hannah: A single bloody ribbon!

Hannah throws down the mirror. It smashes.

Connor: Christ!

Hannah picks up a shard of glass, presses her finger to its edge.

Connor: Mum, what now?

Hannah: You know who wore a single ribbon?

Connor: What? Who are you talking about?

Hannah: He told me I had bad blood.

Connor: I'll get a bandage. Oh mum – just stay with me for a few hours.
Come on. Just today.

Hannah: Daphne. On the run. For decade after decade...

Connor: Mum?

Hannah: Connor - go to your room

Connor: Yes, it's Connor – but I'm 47

Hannah: To the right of the window. Where the bed used to be. In the corner, there's a loose board. Lift it. There's a box. Bring it to me.

Connor: Now? Right now? We've got to leave for the church -

Hannah: Get the box. Get the letters. You almost burnt them.

Connor: That wasn't here -

Hannah: You almost threw them away.

Connor: I don't -

Hannah: But they're still here!

Connor: There's nothing left in my room. I cleared it all, remember?

Hannah: I know! Oh Connor! Stop wasting time! Go and get the box!

Connor: Are you - Hannah - where are you right now?

Hannah: I'm in my house.

Connor: And who am I?

Hannah: Connor! You're my Connor. You're my son who's asking all the wrong questions. Go and get the box. You need answers to different questions. Today. Today of all days!

BEDROOM: 1980 (Hannah is 8, Chris, 30, Pat, 30)

Chris: Her chart said her name was Aoife Keene. She and her boyfriend - chart said Sean Fallon - were walking down the Donegall Road. I was

late, rushing, tired from the appendectomy last night. But something about them, they stood out. What is that? You can see it when people are in love. Like a glow or a lightness. They were holding hands as if they hadn't a care in the world.

Pat: Asking for trouble, you mean.

Chris: Well, yeah.

Pat: You're not going to get away with that for long round here.

Chris: They're going past O'Connell's on the corner.

Pat: You're joking. Oh God – I didn't mean. You were there? I thought you'd already be in theatre.

Chris: I told you – I was late.

Pat: Oh Chris – were you hurt? Why didn't you tell me?

Chris: I am telling you

Pat: Everyone was talking about it. The girls in A&E said they were coming in in droves

Chris: The street was busy. But these two really stood out.

Pat: You weren't hurt? How close were you?

Chris: 50, 100 yards away

Pat: Chris! How are you not hurt? Let me look at you

Chris: Honestly – I wasn't hit. I ducked behind a car. I don't know how I knew. But I knew a millisecond before - that it was coming. I saw flames – and ducked.

Pat: Did anyone see you? You're a witness.

Chris: There were loads of people. Like you said – A&E must have been rammed.

Pat: Would anyone remember you?

Chris: I won't be singled out. And I don't remember seeing anyone in particular - except these two. Before and then after - I saw her on the ground, covered in blood. When I got in -

Pat: You just carried on coming into work?

Chris: What else would I do?

Pat: Chris – you'd be in shock. You can't operate like that. What did Dr Willoughby say?

Chris: He just told me to scrub up

Pat: You did tell him?

Chris: Well, no.

Pat: Chris! You really did get hit in the head!

Chris: When I got in, there she was on the table. Bomb had ripped a hole in her stomach.

Pat: She was still alive?

Chris: Mmm. A faint pulse when we started. But there was too much damage. We kept pumping in more blood – but it kept pouring out.

Pat: Did you help – on Donegall Road?

Chris: No.

Pat: Good.

Chris: Oh Pat. I swore an oath.

Pat: We all swore an oath Chris. To do no harm. Not - put ourselves in harm's way. Hippocrates didn't think about IRA spies – looking out for those who help, only to shoot them in the knees later.

Chris: Well it's not just the IRA is it? UVF are as bad.

Pat: Do they know which it was? The girls in A&E didn't know.

Chris: Probably was the IRA then.

Pat: Aoife Keene and Sean Fallon?

Chris: Well, when the girls 'know', they always 'know' it's the proddies.

Pat: Were they just in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Chris: He survived. God knows how. She was just a girl. What could she possibly have done..?

Pat: I'm guessing she wasn't the target. Pub probably was. Or a car, or someone else, or a dog who looked the wrong way at someone, or,

or, or, or, or... Who would ever know. She was just caught up in some nonsense that had nothing to do with her.

Chris: Imagine if that was Hannah

Pat: Don't.

Chris: It's completely insane. A young girl.

LIVING ROOM: 2057

Connor: This is your Dad, isn't it? And your mum. He's writing to you about their life... before you? Were you born yet? Why's he writing to you...? It's dated – 1989. There are hundreds here... Hang on - I thought your parents died in 1986. Did I get that wrong?

Hannah: No. That's what I said.

Connor: But - these are post-marked 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago. Are they all from Chris? The hand looks the same.

Hannah: The letters are from Chris. He sent them to me for years.

Connor: What?!

Hannah: Not directly. I didn't want him to know where I lived. He sent them to Aunt Lou.

Connor: What?! I don't have time for this now – we're supposed to be...