

THE LISTENERS

(Based on the poem, *The Listeners*
by Walter De La Mare)

By
DAVID KERBY-KENDALL



Radius

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain



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Category: Radius E-Publication 2021

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Radius

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain
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LIST OF CHARACTERS

Bobbie	A young woman in her early 20s
Chris	A middle-aged man
Frances	An elderly lady in her 60s
Billy	A young man – late 20s/early 30s
Sara	A woman in her early 40s
Traveller	Any age and can be either male or female

The setting is a room in a large house, possibly in the depths of a forest, but seemingly a long way from civilisation.

ACT 1

A room in a large house, possibly in the depths of a forest, but seemingly a long way from civilisation. The room is furnished, but there is nothing technical in it (TV, radio, etc). Sara, Frances Billy, Bobbie and Christopher (Chris) onstage. Billy and Chris are playing chess, Bobbie is humming quietly to herself, Sara is meditating whilst lying on the floor, Frances is reading.

There is a sudden noise offstage

BOBBIE : Is there anybody there?

CHRIS : It's just some blackbirds, Bobbie; they're nesting in the turret.

BOBBIE : Oh.

Bobbie begins to sing

FRANCES : *Must* you sing that infernal song?

BOBBIE : I like it.

FRANCES : Has it ever occurred to you that the rest of us may not?

BILLY : I don't mind, Bobbie.

FRANCES : No, you wouldn't.

CHRIS : Perhaps if you didn't sing it quite so much; it sounds a little screechy.

FRANCES : It sounds like a cat being ironed.

Sara sits up

BOBBIE : Sorry, Sara, did I wake you up?

SARA : No. I was meditating. Helps to control my stress levels.

FRANCES : What have you to be stressed about?

SARA : Being in the same room as you, for a start.

Bobbie wanders around, staring at her mobile and trying to get a signal

SARA : Give it up, Bobbie! You're up and down every five minutes. There's no bloody signal.

BOBBIE : I need to see what me friends are doing. And, when I was in that corner yesterday, I nearly got a bar.

SARA : How can you 'nearly' get a bar? That's like being 'nearly' pregnant.

BOBBIE : Steph was going to put 'er wedding photos up. I know I couldn't go but..... she's me mate and I really want to see 'em.

FRANCES : Well, you can't.

CHRIS : Have some understanding, Frances; for younger people their phone is an emotional crutch.

FRANCES : To me a Brahms sonata is an emotional crutch but I do not have that, either. It does not always have to be about the young.

SARA : I'm surprised they didn't provide a TV or radio; at least we could have caught up on some news.

CHRIS : Why would we want to? It's all depressing: war, famine, pandemics...

BILLY : The UK coming last in the Eurovision Song Contest again.

CHRIS : It's not a joke, Billy, the news channels think the public thrives on bad news. And I think they're right. It's the schadenfreude effect; we see others suffering and it makes us feel better about our own repetitive little lives.

BILLY : Come on, Chris, it's not that bad. A radio would be nice, wouldn't it? Anyone ever listen to *I'm Sorry, I Haven't A Clue*? So funny. I used to listen to it with my grandparents every Sunday. Loved that thing they did with giving words alternative definitions.

SARA : The Uxbridge English Dictionary.

BILLY : *Asterisk*: the chances of being hit by an asteroid.

SARA : *Cardiology*: the study of knitwear.

BILLY : *Eyesore*: a carpentry tool made by Apple.

SARA : My favourite was *Gelatine*: a device for cutting the heads off Jelly Babies.

BILLY : Ha! Mine was *Focaccia*: someone with no interest in the far east. Such cool memories. I don't think my grandparents ever turned their radio off. Gran said it was like a reliable friend: consistent, never encroached, always there in the background. I used to fall asleep to the shipping forecast. 'Malin Head – south west veering west – 5, maybe 6 later – 1010; falling'. No idea what

it means, but it did the trick every night.

BOBBIE : What were your grandparents like, Billy?

BILLY : Amazing. National Ballroom champions. Still Lindy Hopping in their early eighties. Even danced when they were making breakfast. Gran would do a pirouette, then throw the frying pan to Grandad who would do a triple time-step as he cracked the eggs into it....or occasionally onto the floor if he didn't quite get the 'hop' in the right place. Gran would chuck slices of bread at him as she did a shuffle-ball-change. Sometimes she'd miss and he'd say, 'Too much shuffle, dear; not enough ball.' 'Don't I know it', she'd say.

BOBBIE : Awwwww. They sound like they was really in love.

BILLY : Totally. Still saw themselves as teenagers. They met at a dance competition when they were eighteen.

SARA : Was it love at first sight?

BILLY : Definitely. 'She danced so beautifully', Grandad said, 'It was like an angel on ice'. Gran said, 'His Bolero was mightily impressive.' 'I don't think I know that step', I said. 'It's not a step, dear, it's a euphemism'.

CHRIS : Wonderful to see yourself as ageless. I wish I knew how they did it.

BILLY : They said that age was a state of mind. They told everyone that nothing had changed since they were teenagers: their hemlines maybe a bit lower and their waists a bit larger but their spirits still danced on tables and kissed behind the chippie.

SARA : The bodywork can be faded as long as the engine still goes.

BOBBIE : Did you live with your Gran and Grandad?

BILLY : Yes. My parents died when I was three. Car accident..... Sorry, Chris.

CHRIS : No. No, that's fine. That's awful for you. I'm so sorry.

BILLY : Gran and Grandad weren't very well off but they paid for me to go to public school and then uni. They insisted I would have no debt when I came out. They treated me like an adult even when I was a kid; asking my opinion on decisions they were making. I remember feeling so grown up because I got to choose the wallpaper in the lounge when I was seven.

CHRIS : Are they still alive?

BILLY : No, they died three years ago; on the same day; two hours apart. It was only then I found out that, in order to pay for my education, they had bankrupted themselves.

: Oh, Billy.

BILLY : Yes; world sort of fell apart. You need that rock, don't you? Except you don't realise that you need it until it disappears under the sea. Lost my job, couldn't pay the rent on my flat and..... that's how I ended up living on the streets. But I made some of the best friends of my life living rough. There were no judgements, no social divisions. We had nothing so we were all equal.

CHRIS : But you suffered, Billy.

BILLY : Yes, but there were more happy days than sad.

BOBBIE : You're lovely, Billy. And always remember, every silver cloud has a lining.

CHRIS : I think grandparents should run the world. There would be no wars: just bedtime stories and board games.

BILLY : And cake.

CHRIS : Yes, and cake.

FRANCES : Well, they most certainly could not make a worse job of it than the politicians.