

Connect 4

By Julie Taylor

This play is a continuous piece of action.

Lighting is used to create a split stage which indicates the two different streams of action: the two living characters versus the two dead characters. Blackouts on one half of the stage can be used to make changes of posture, or simple additions/changes to props or costumes for the 'living' duo. The other pair, deceased and commenting from the 'other side', require no costume changes or props.

The two worlds do not meet – there is no physical interaction – although near the end of the play Linda tries to make direct contact (physical or auditory) with Joanne. She doesn't quite break the invisible wall, but there should be a sense that Joanne had 'felt' or 'heard' Linda on some level.

The play opens at the funeral of Linda and Bruce (who have been tragically killed in a car accident). Chris and Joanne are attending the funeral. They are part of a larger friend group that regularly attended social events at the home of Linda and Bruce.

Characters are all of a similar age – they are believably part of the same friend group.

Characters:

Chris - Male love interest

Joanne – Female love interest

Linda – (dead) friend of Joanne/Bruce's wife

Bruce – (dead) friend of Chris/Linda's husband

At the post funeral reception

Chris: Joanne, lovely to see you again.

Joanne: You too. Obviously not ideal circumstances...

Chris: No. I think I'm still in shock.

Joanne: Same. When I got the phone call, I could hardly believe it was real.

Chris: Such a tragic accident! (*beat*) Actually, I was thinking of calling you a couple of weeks ago. I had a spare ticket to a concert, and thought you might have been interested...

Joanne: But you didn't call?

Chris: No. I went on my own. I realised I don't have your number.

Joanne: Of course. It was always Linda that organised our events.

Chris: Maybe another time?

Joanne: That would be lovely!

Chris: I need to get your number first...

Cut to the other side of the stage. Lights up on Linda and Bruce.

Linda: I can't believe it! They're flirting with each other!

Bruce: You always hoped they'd get together.

Linda: But not at our funeral!

Bruce: Why not?

Linda: I just thought they'd be more grief stricken... It hardly seems appropriate.

Bruce: Well, it's his last chance to get her number. Go Chris, I say.

Linda: After years of politely eyeing each other up, they finally exchange numbers at OUR FUNERAL! Well, at least he finally grew a pair...that's something.

Bruce: (*ignoring her*) I don't think much of the catering... no chocolate eclairs, no booze. It all seems a bit stingy.

Linda: (*sighing*) Men!

Cut to a new evening. Joanne is on her phone talking to her best friend.

Joanne: He's coming over for dinner tonight. Hopefully I'll get some clarity on where this is going. I'm confused. Does he like me as a friend, or does he want something more? I guess if he brings flowers....

The doorbell rings.

Joanne: He's here!

Joanne puts down her phone and opens the door. Chris enters carrying flowers, a card, and a bottle of wine.

Cut to Linda and Bruce commenting on the date.

Linda: It's a date.

Bruce: He's always fancied her. I could tell.

Linda: The flowers are a lovely gesture.

Bruce: A bit O.T.T.

Linda: It's romantic.

Bruce: He probably just wants to get a leg over.

Linda: They both want to take things slowly.

Bruce: Yeah right.

Linda: I wonder when she'll serve the dessert.

Bruce: No need. Looks like he's finding her sweet enough...

Linda: Oh, my goodness.

Bruce: So much for taking things slowly!

Linda: I don't want to look!

Cut to Joanne and Chris kayaking on a beautiful, but chilly, day. The setting is very romantic. Paddles can be used, or the actors can mime the paddling movement as required. They stop and rest their paddles to enjoy the incredible atmosphere.

Chris: This is breath-taking! And peaceful.

Joanne: It feels really spiritual – just us communing with nature...

Chris: An unbelievable canvas. Such majesty!

Joanne: Should we head back? Everyone else has returned...

Chris: Let's just paddle to the next headland... We can cross there and explore the other shoreline on the way back.

They pick up their paddles and continue their journey.

Cut to Linda and Bruce.

Linda: Such a beautiful way to spend his birthday! Joanne really nailed it – he's always loved the great outdoors.

Bruce: Yeah, spot on.

Linda: A shame Joanne got so cold. By the time they got back, she could hardly get out of the kayak – she was frozen stiff!

Bruce: Sharing body heat was a brilliant solution.

Linda: Get your mind out of the gutter. She certainly put a lot of thought into creating a special day. More than he did for her birthday...

Bruce: He got her a card...and a massage voucher. What's wrong with that?

Linda: Nothing, I suppose. But it didn't require a great deal of imagination.

Bruce: I thought you always loved the beauty vouchers I got you?

Linda: Yes... But it's fun to think of something a bit different – something memorable...

Bruce: Like that zip-lining trip! Gazza and I had the best day! Hooning through the bush at high speed, sharing a few beers... It was awesome!

Linda: I always wanted to try zip-lining...

Bruce: A bit late now. Sorry, love.

Linda: The thing is...when I booked for two, I always assumed you'd take me. Not Gazza. It was supposed to be romantic.

Bruce: Oh, I never thought of that...

Linda: Clearly.

Cut to a Saturday afternoon. Joanne is on her phone talking to her best friend.

Joanne: I'd love to see that film! Would tomorrow work instead? Or an evening next week? It's just that Chris is cooking dinner for me tonight... It's too late to cancel now. *(She listens)* No, I am not turning into one of those boring people who ignores their friends once they have a partner. It's just a bit last minute. *(She listens)* Yes, tomorrow afternoon would be fine. Shall we meet at 2? Great. See you then.

Cut to Bruce and Linda

Bruce: I don't know why she's bothering with make-up. It's only dinner at his place.

Linda: Maybe she feels more confident? More attractive?

Bruce: The sexy underwear is definitely worth the effort though...

Linda: A pity Chris doesn't do the same...

Bruce: What?!

Cut to Joanne. She calls Chris (he is in in another space on their half of the stage).

Chris: Hi Jo. Sorry, it's a bit noisy. I'm in the supermarket picking up some extra veges. Can I call you back later?

Joanne: (*speaking loudly*) No worries. I just wanted to know what time I should turn up?

Chris: Oh, sorry, I should have called earlier. There's been a change of plan. My kids are coming over for dinner now.

Joanne: You still want me to join you?

Chris: Best not. How about lunch tomorrow?

Joanne: (*Stung by his response*) Might be tricky. I'm going to the cinema with a girlfriend.

Chris: I didn't realise you had other plans. Could you postpone? I'd love to see you.

Cut to Bruce and Linda

Linda: Unbelievable!

Bruce: He's just being a good Dad...

Linda: I can think of better adjectives... unthinking, unfeeling, selfish...

Bruce: That's a bit strong.

Linda: You think it's OK to cancel a date with no notice?!

Bruce: Surely, she could have dinner **with** his family?

Linda: You heard him: "best not".

Bruce: Why not?

Linda: He's embarrassed. His kids are horrible to Joanne. They ignore her or make snide comments... They're downright rude.

Bruce: So, I guess the makeup was a waste of time...

Linda: Sadly, yes.

Cut to Joanne. Same evening. She is texting Chris goodnight (texts can be spoken)

Joanne: Hope you had a lovely family dinner. Sweet dreams.

Chris: Kids stood me up. They had a better offer.

Joanne: Oh no!

Chris: Fun night anyway. Katy turned up with a bottle of red.

Joanne: Katy?

Chris: My physio. Finding it tough after marriage breakup. Needed someone to talk to.

Joanne: Lucky you were home.

Chris: Wasn't it? She popped in on the off chance.

Joanne: With a bottle of red?

Chris: Yes. Great timing. Went well with the dessert.

Joanne: *(after a beat)* After midnight. Time for bed. Night.

Chris: What are our plans for tomorrow?

Joanne sees the message but doesn't respond.

Chris: *(talking to himself)* She must've gone to sleep...

Cut to Linda and Bruce

Linda: Words fail me.

Bruce: I didn't know his physio was a woman...

Linda: Shut up.

Cut to Joanne and Chris. *Joanne has picked Chris up from the airport after he has been away on a hiking/sight-seeing trip for 2 weeks. They are in her car. Joanne mimes driving actions during the conversation.*

Chris: Thanks so much for picking me up. I know it's a long drive to the airport.

Joanne: I was happy to do it. And it's been lovely hearing about your adventures.

Chris: Such an amazing experience! We're so lucky in New Zealand to be able to access great walks like that.

Joanne: The pictures you sent were stunning.

Chris: A bit of a photo dump, sorry. We were out of cell phone coverage for most of the trip.

Joanne: Here we are. Home! You must be looking forward to your own bed...

Chris: And a long soak in the bath!

Joanne: Are you hungry? I can grab some takeaways if you'd like...

Chris: Thanks, no need. My kids are cooking dinner as a welcome home gift...probably a peace offering after they bailed last time! Why don't you come in and have a pre-dinner drink with us?

Joanne: *(Stung)* Thanks, but no... I wouldn't want to intrude.

Chris: *(Yawns)* My priorities tomorrow are laundry and emails. Maybe we can catch up later in the week?

Joanne: Sure...

Chris gives her a fleeting kiss, gets out of the car, and retrieves his backpack.

Chris: Thanks, Jo. *He exits.*

Joanne sits alone in the car.

Joanne: I feel so lonely.

Linda: Leave him. *(She moves closer to her. Attempts to reach out to her.)* Leave him.

Bruce: What are you doing? You can't interfere like this? *(He attempts to drag her away from Joanne)*

Linda: *(She screams at Joanne.)* Walk away.

Joanne: Maybe I should just walk away?

Bruce: Just leave them alone. I don't know why you're so upset.

Linda: Jo's my friend and your friend is treating her like dirt.

Bruce: He's just putting his family first...

Linda: She went out of her way! Two hours of driving to the airport and back, listening to him go on about his trip... He didn't ask about her once.

Bruce: A bit inconsiderate...

Linda: And he's lying. He didn't tell her about the female hiker he exchanged numbers with.

Bruce: He's a man. He was probably only being friendly.

Linda: Oh, that's his excuse, is it? He's a 'man'.

Bruce: Why are you so uptight? There's no need for all this drama. Just because he's a bit thoughtless. I didn't plan date nights either and we were happily married for twenty years.

Linda: The jury's out on that one.

Bruce: What do you mean?

Linda: Happily married? That's open to interpretation.

Bruce: What are you talking about?

Linda: I told you I thought we should see a counsellor.

Bruce: But that wasn't anything serious?! We were happy, weren't we?

Linda: I don't know. I never got the chance to find out. And now I'm stuck in the afterlife with the man who killed me.

Bruce: What are you talking about? I didn't kill you. It was an accident.

Linda: Men are so full of shit! Stop lying! You were the sober driver that night. You promised me you wouldn't drink.

Bruce: And I didn't. Well, only one or two. I was fine.

Linda: I saw the autopsy report. Your blood alcohol level was almost three times the legal limit. I would never have got in the car with you if I'd known. *(Beat)* I don't think I can ever forgive you.