



Grace Chapple

WRITER'S NOTE

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My mum grew up in Northern Ireland, in a tiny little town with too many pubs and many more bombs. It was never my home, though I did spend a lot of sunless summers and snowless Christmases there visiting our grandparents. I could never understand why they didn't leave, like my mum did as soon as she got the chance. Then, I reached my 20s, and I suddenly started going back as often as I could.

In 2019 I moved away from home for the first time in order to study writing. As a moody young artist, I naturally thought a lot about what it means to leave home for greener pastures, and whether it is somehow nobler to stay behind and water the grass you're standing on. I thought a lot about the friendships I was leaving behind, certain in the belief that we could never be as close as we were again. And I thought a lot more about my mum and her siblings, of those who

chose to stay through The Troubles, and those who left.

It was a lot to think about. So, I started writing this play instead.

In 2021, I was working behind the bar at Belvoir St Theatre when Artistic Associate (now Head of New Work) Dom Mercer looked past my FOH staff uniform and agreed to read my new play. He then passed it along to someone else on the Artistic team who he felt might enjoy it – the Andrew Cameron fellow of that year, and the best director I know – Hannah Goodwin. As the fellow for that year, she got to choose a work to present in the 25A program. By some miracle, she chose mine.

Creating *Never Closer* for 25A was one of the best experiences of my life. Everyone involved gave so much more than could have reasonably

been asked of them, and we wouldn't be here today without them. If you came and saw *Never Closer* in 25A; if you recommended it to a friend, or posted about it on your socials; *thank you*. It is because of the insane community response that we now have the privilege of doing it all again. The lesson: support indie theatre!

There are so many more people to thank for helping this play get all the way to the big stage.

First and foremost, thank you to my mum. This work would not exist without your stories, and your love and support. Also, thank you to Rosie, Grandad, and the rest of the Ronan clan who provided the anecdotes and language tips that have filled out my fictional Irish world.

An enormous thank you to Hannah Goodwin, as well as Dom Mercer, Eamon Flack, and the rest of the team at Belvoir – not just for supporting this play, but also me as an artist. To the cast – Emma, Raj, Mabel, Phil, Ariadne, and Adam – thank you for being so good I had no choice but to keep working, refining, and desperately trying to make the words worthy of you. To my agent Natalie, who took me on when I only had

one little independent play to show for myself – thank you for believing in me. Thank you to everyone who's ever read it aloud for me and brought your own flavour to these characters, and to everyone who's ever read it silently and offered me your honest (kind) advice – particularly Mum, Hannah, Dom, Jackson, Dan, and Bmac. Thank you to my family – Jane, Vince, Rose, Nuala, and Corban – for your endless encouragement and support. And thank you to my Perth friends – for meaning so much to me that I had to write this play to cope with leaving home behind.

And finally, thank YOU for buying your ticket. I've spent a lot of the last five years working on *Never Closer*, and much of the rest of it working as a casual at Belvoir. This story sits so close to my heart, and the characters and world have come to mean so much to me. To be making my main stage debut, with this play, with *this* audience, feels completely unreal.

I hope you enjoy your time in our wee play. Take your coat off and pop your feet up. The kettle's just boiled.



Adam Sollis, Emma Diaz, Ariadne Sgouros,
Raj Labade, Mabel Li & Philip Lynch