

ATONEMENT

Playing Age: 45+
Drama

BRIONY TALLIS, 60s, talks about her last novel during a TV interview.

BRIONY

It's my last novel. I'm dying. My doctor tells me I have something called vascular dementia, which is essentially a continuous series of tiny strokes. Your brain closes down, gradually you lose words, you lose your memory, which for a writer is pretty much the point. (Beat). So that's why I could finally write the book, I think. I had to. And why, of course, it's my last novel. Strangely enough, it would be just as accurate to call it my first novel. I wrote several drafts as far back as my time at St Thomas' Hospital during the War. I just couldn't ever find the way to do it. The novel is entirely autobiographical. I haven't changed any names, including my own. But that was not the problem. I had, for a very long time, decided to tell the absolute truth. No rhymes, no embellishments. And I think... you've read the book, you'll understand why. I got first-hand accounts of all the events I didn't personally witness, the conditions in prison, the evacuation to Dunkirk, everything. But the effect of all this honesty was rather pitiless. You see, I couldn't any longer imagine what purpose would be served by it. By honesty. Or reality. Because, in fact, I was too much of a coward to go and see my sister in June, 1940. I never made that journey to Balham. So the scene in which I confess to them is imagined. Invented. And, in fact, it could have never happened. Because Robbie Turned died of septicaemia at Bray-Dunes on June the first, 1940. The last day of evacuation. And I was never able to put things right with my sister, Cecilia, because she was killed on the 15th of October, 1940, by the bomb that destroyed the gas and

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BRIONY (SEGUE)

water mains above Balham tube station. So... my sister and Robbie were never able to have the time together they both so longed for, and deserved. And which, ever since, I've... ever since I've always felt I prevented. But what sense of hope, or satisfaction, could a reader derive from an ending like that? So, in the book, I wanted to give Robbie and Cecilia what they lost out on in life. I'd like to think this isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness. I gave them their happiness.