SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

SF PERUSALS

Over My Dead Body

A comedy

Derek Benfield

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



© 2005 BY DEREK BENFIELD

Rights of Performance by Amateurs are controlled by Samuel French Ltd, 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR, and they, or their authorized agents, issue licences to amateurs on payment of a fee. **It is an infringement of the Copyright to give any performance or public reading of the play before the fee has been paid and the licence issued.**

The Royalty Fee indicated below is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

Basic fee for each and every performance by amateurs in the British Isles	Code L

The Professional Rights in this play are controlled by THE AGENCY, 24 Pottery Lane, Holland Park, London W11 4LZ.

The publication of this play does not imply that it is necessarily available for performance by amateurs or professionals, either in the British Isles or Overseas. Amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to the appropriate agents for written consent before starting rehearsals or booking a theatre or hall.

ISBN 0 573 11599 0

The right of Derek Benfield to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Please see page iv for further copyright information

CHARACTERS

Gerald James, a widower

Shirley Tyler, his daughter

Mark Tyler, his son-in-law

Amanda Eddison, his sister-in-law

Isobel French, an old friend

Carol Capstick, a cleaning lady

The action of the play takes place in the drawing-room of Gerald's and Helen's house in the country

ACT I Early evening on a Friday in late summer
ACT II Later the same evening

Time — the present

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

(See also page ii)

This play is fully protected under the Copyright Laws of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the United States of America and all countries of the Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions.

All rights including Stage, Motion Picture, Radio, Television, Public Reading, and Translation into Foreign Languages, are strictly reserved.

No part of this publication may lawfully be reproduced in ANY form or by any means — photocopying, typescript, recording (including video-recording), manuscript, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise—or be transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, without prior permission.

Licences for amateur performances are issued subject to the understanding that it shall be made clear in all advertising matter that the audience will witness an amateur performance; that the names of the authors of the plays shall be included on all programmes; and that the integrity of the authors' work will be preserved.

The Royalty Fee is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

In Theatres or Halls seating Four Hundred or more the fee will be subject to negotiation.

In Territories Overseas the fee quoted above may not apply. A fee will be quoted on application to our local authorized agent, or if there is no such agent, on application to Samuel French Ltd, London.

VIDEO-RECORDING OF AMATEUR PRODUCTIONS

Please note that the copyright laws governing video-recording are extremely complex and that it should not be assumed that any play may be video-recorded for whatever purpose without first obtaining the permission of the appropriate agents. The fact that a play is published by Samuel French Ltd does not indicate that video rights are available or that Samuel French Ltd controls such rights.

Other plays by Derek Benfield
published by Samuel French Ltd

Anyone for Breakfast?
Bedside Manners
Beyond a Joke
A Bird in the Hand
Caught on the Hop
Don't Lose the Place!
Fish Out of Water
A Fly in the Ointment
Flying Feathers
Funny Business
In at the Deep End
In for the Kill
Look Who's Talking
Off the Hook!
Panic Stations
Post Horn Gallop
Running Riot
Second Time Around
Touch and Go
Two and Two Together
Up and Running
Wild Goose Chase

ACT I

The drawing-room of Helen's and Gerald's house in the country has three doors: one leading into the hall; one, on the opposite side, into the garden; and the third into the kitchen. The unseen dining-room (which plays an important part in the evening's events!) can be reached from both the hall and the kitchen. The furniture is tasteful antique: a desk below the hall door; a sofa centrally with a table behind it and a coffee table beside it; and an armchair with a table on which is a photograph of Helen. Below the garden door is a welcoming drinks table. Helen — now deceased — had good taste (if we are to assume that the taste is hers and not Gerald's) and the result is relaxing and welcoming. A pleasant place to live. And to die, for that matter ...

It is early evening on a Friday in late summer and the sun is shining

Nobody about. Then a head appears — rather furtively — around the door from the hall. The head belongs to Gerald, a pleasant, jovial man of 69. Seeing no sign of anyone he tiptoes across to the television set. He smiles mischievously, an ageing schoolboy, and turns the set on

Gerald is not alone, however. His daughter Shirley looks in from the hall, laden with shopping, and sees what he is up to

Shirley Didn't take *you* long!

Gerald jumps nervously, turns and sees her

Gerald What?
Shirley Mother's only been buried a week and already you're turning the television on.

Gerald turns the television off guiltily

Gerald I didn't hear you arrive.
Shirley Don't tell me you've become a secret telly watcher since the funeral?
Gerald I wanted to see the news.
Shirley They're hardly likely to mention it on that.
Gerald No. No, of course not! (*He laughs nervously*) It's old news now, anyway. Well — a week old.

Shirley puts down her shopping and runs to him emotionally and takes his hand

Shirley You always watched the television *together*! That's what I meant.
Gerald But your mother's not here anymore.
Shirley Exactly! And you can't watch it on your own.
Gerald Not *ever*?
Shirley Well ... Not quite so soon — after ...

Gerald thinks about this for a second

Gerald Why not?
Shirley (*sentimentally*) Because *she's* not watching it ...
Gerald She might be for all we know. They probably have digital in heaven by now.
Shirley Anyway, what would the neighbours think? We only buried Mummy a week ago and already you're watching the television.
Gerald It was only the news. I wasn't watching *Heartbeat.*
Shirley (*sadly*) But don't you see? You were doing it on your *own.*
Gerald I haven't much choice, have I?
Shirley You're supposed to be grieving.
Gerald I *am* grieving. That doesn't mean I can't keep up with what's going on in the world.
Shirley Mummy would expect you to be grieving.
Gerald No, she wouldn't.
Shirley How do you know?

Gerald moves away, wondering how he would know. He thinks of something

Gerald She told me.
Shirley (*doubting this*) When?
Gerald What does it matter when? Did you bring the evening paper? (*He forages amongst her shopping*) Or am I banned from that, as well? (*He finds it*) Ah ...
Shirley (*persisting*) When?
Gerald (*looking up from the evening paper; innocently*) What?
Shirley When did Mummy tell you that she wouldn't expect you to grieve?
Gerald Oh — (*lying*) three weeks ago.
Shirley Two weeks before she died?
Gerald At school you never used to be good at sums. What happened?
Shirley What day was it?
Gerald Can't remember.

Shirley She was making this important statement about the possible nature of your grieving and you can't remember the day?
Gerald I *can* remember the day! Just not the name of the day.
Shirley (*going to him*) All right — what did she say, then?
Gerald (*hiding in the newspaper*) H'm? When?

Shirley takes the paper from him and casts it on to the sofa

Shirley Three weeks ago! On an apparently unmemorable day of the week.
Gerald It *was* memorable.
Shirley But you've forgotten?
Gerald No! It was memorable for what she said, not for the name of the day.
Shirley Go on, then! What did she say?

Gerald drifts away, avoiding her eyes

Gerald She said — and you may find this difficult to believe — she said that if she went first ... (*He hesitates, uncertainly*)
Shirley You make it sound as if she was going to Harrogate.
Gerald (*persevering*) If she pre-deceased me, she didn't want me to grieve.

Shirley thinks this rather out of character for her mother

Shirley Mother said that?
Gerald Yes. I told you.
Shirley She said you weren't to grieve?
Gerald Yes.
Shirley Not *ever*?
Gerald Well — not to excess.
Shirley And you think a week is excessive?
Gerald I'm only telling you what she said! (*He dives into Shirley's shopping to escape*) You seem to have been doing a lot of shopping.
Shirley Yes. I'm going to cook you a lovely big dinner tonight.
Gerald (*not keen*) Ah ...
Shirley Don't you like the idea?
Gerald I shall probably be busy grieving.
Shirley You can grieve and eat at the same time.
Gerald Well, I ... I'm not very hungry. (*He sits on the sofa and rescues the evening paper*)

Shirley immediately becomes sad. She runs to Gerald sympathetically, sits down and embraces him

Shirley Of course you aren't! How could you be? I shouldn't have asked.

How can you be expected to eat at a time like this? I'm sorry, Daddy. I shouldn't have suggested it. It was thoughtless of me.

Gerald No, no! It's just that I had a double hamburger at lunchtime.

Shirley (*unable to believe her ears*) A double hamburger?

Gerald Yes. (*A beat*) With french fries and a green salad.

Shirley (*getting up in surprise*) Daddy! How could you?

Gerald Well, I was hungry *then.*

Shirley You were eating a double hamburger a week after Mummy's funeral? What will people think?

Gerald She told me to.

Shirley When?

Gerald hesitates briefly

Gerald Three weeks ago.

Shirley (*suspiciously*) On the same day that she talked about grieving?

Gerald Yes. It was a sort of double-whammy. She said whatever happened I must try to eat properly. And be *seen* to eat properly.

Shirley I don't believe you!

Gerald You can ask her. Oh, no — of course you can't, can you?

Shirley Mummy would never say a thing like that. Hamburgers in public after her funeral indeed!

Gerald Not immediately after. I didn't go straight there from the graveyard. If I'd known I was going to be cross-examined I'd have asked her to put it in writing.

Shirley (*looking critically at Gerald's sports jacket*) And I think that jacket's a bit lively a week after burying your wife.

Gerald (*glancing at his jacket*) Is it? Oh.

Shirley You haven't been on the links, have you?

Gerald Links?

Shirley Golf links! Isn't that what you call it?

Gerald (*realizing*) Oh. Yes. No, I haven't.

Shirley I'm very surprised.

Gerald That's not a very nice way to speak to a grieving widower.

Shirley But you're not an ordinary grieving widower, are you, Daddy?

Gerald What do you expect me to wear? Sackcloth and ashes? Anyway, I promised Helen not to wear dark colours.

Shirley (*giving him an old-fashioned look*) When?

Gerald (*guiltily*) H'm?

Shirley Three weeks ago?

Gerald (*gratefully*) Yes!

Shirley You must have been very surprised. All these requests — out of the blue — about your impending widowerhood when she wasn't expecting to die.

Gerald Of course she was expecting to die.
Shirley (*anxiously*) She told you that?
Gerald No. But we had both retired. And after retiring death's the only definite thing left on the agenda. (*He grins at her*)
Shirley (*giving him a push*) Oh, Daddy ... ! Did Mummy make any *other* requests about your life as a widower? Join the local darts club? Something like that?
Gerald No — of course not!
Shirley I'm very surprised. She seems to have spent a lot of time compiling her list of post funeral promises.
Gerald (*defensively*) Well, *I* did the same!

Shirley looks at him, uncertain whether he is sending her up or not

Shirley You mean you gave Mummy a similar list of requests in case *you* went first?
Gerald Yes. We were having one of those conversations. You know how it is.
Shirley (*laughing*) No, I don't!
Gerald No, no! Of course you don't! Elderly conversations. Wanting-to-leave-everything-tidy conversations.
Shirley Like a pre-nuptial agreement?
Gerald Yes. Only this was a pre-probate agreement.
Shirley But how could you know which of your agreements was going to apply?
Gerald First past the post.

Shirley realizes that he is joking; they laugh

Mark comes in from the hall. He is in his forties and carries a laptop computer and a briefcase. He is surprised to find Shirley and Gerald laughing

Mark (*anxiously*) Is something wrong?
Gerald No, no. Come on in. Everything's fine.
Mark I heard you laughing.
Gerald We'll try not to do it again.

Mark and Shirley kiss, briefly; a well-practised habit

Mark
Shirley } (*together*) Hallo, darling.

Mark puts down his things and moves to Gerald

Mark (*sombrely*) Hallo, Gerry ...
Gerald (*cheerfully, as if seeing Mark for the first time*) Hallo, Mark! Have a good day?

Mark is slightly taken aback by Gerald's bonhomie

Mark Sorry?
Gerald At the office. You have been at the office today, haven't you?
Mark Ah — yes — all day.
Gerald Good man. So *did* you?
Mark What?
Gerald Have a good day.
Mark Oh. Yes. Quite good. Did you? No — sorry — that's a silly question. Of course you didn't!
Gerald Wasn't a bad day, actually.
Mark (*surprised*) Really? Oh, great!
Gerald I walked around the pond.
Mark (*gazing at Gerald with infinite admiration*) Around the pond? Well done!
Gerald It wasn't very difficult.
Mark Well, *I* think it was bloody brave of you!
Gerald It's not peopled by crocodiles, you know. A few Canada geese, that's about all. And *they're* not too perilous.
Mark I meant ... under the circumstances.
Gerald I have done it before.
Mark What? Since — er ... ? (*He gestures, vaguely*)
Gerald (*amused by Mark's discomfort*) No. Not since — er ... (*He copies Mark's gesture*)

Embarrassed, Shirley hastily gathers up her bags of shopping

Shirley Well, I think I'll go into the kitchen.
Gerald (*indicating*) It's through there. You can't miss it. It's got a fridge and a cooker and a washing machine and things. Easily identifiable. As a kitchen.
Shirley Daddy, I know where it is. Mark and I have been living here for ten days.
Gerald Yes — of course you have. I'd forgotten.
Shirley (*to Mark*) I'm cooking a big dinner tonight!
Mark (*a little fearfully*) Are you? (*To Gerald*) Is she?
Gerald Apparently.
Mark Oh ...
Shirley (*to Mark, pointedly*) Anyway, you want to ... *talk*, don't you?

Mark Do I?
Shirley I'll see you later, then, Daddy.
Gerald I expect I'll still be here.

Shirley nods encouragingly at Mark, smiles at Gerald and goes into the kitchen with her shopping

Mark looks at Gerald, a little apprehensive

Mark A big dinner, eh?
Gerald Sounds like it. And she does seem to be heavily laden.
Mark H'm ... (*Suddenly*) Can I get you a drink?
Gerald (*getting up*) No, no! I'll do it. It is still my house. (*He chuckles, then stops in sudden doubt*) Isn't it?
Mark Yes, of course!
Gerald Oh, good. That is a relief. I was worried about probate, you see. Whisky?
Mark Thanks.
Gerald Water?
Mark No, thanks.

Gerald goes to see to the drinks. Mark sits down on the sofa and tries to relax, without success, crossing and uncrossing his legs

Er ... Er ... See anyone you know?
Gerald Where?
Mark Walking around the pond.
Gerald Oh. No. The local widows haven't started gathering yet.
Mark (*puzzled*) Sorry?
Gerald Never mind. It was meant to be a joke.
Mark (*realizing*) Oh — right. (*So he laughs*) Yes, of course! Widows, eh? Ha! Ha! Yes ... (*His laughter dies*)
Gerald (*arriving with their drinks*) Whisky.
Mark (*taking his drink*) Thanks.

Gerald sits down next to Mark

Gerald Nuts?
Mark (*jumping*) What?
Gerald Nuts? (*He offers the dish of n*uts)
Mark No, thanks. I'm not very good with nuts.
Gerald Really? Don't mind if *I* have some, do you? I mean, you don't object to nuts as such?

Mark No, no — you go ahead.
Gerald They don't bother me, you see. I can usually handle my nuts quite well.

Gerald handles his nuts in silence for a moment. Neither of them has as yet touched his whisky. Gerald realizes that Mark is probably waiting for the starting gun, so he raises his glass

Well — here's to your mother-in-law!

Mark is not good at relationships, and for a moment is unsure to whom Gerald is referring

Mark Who?
Gerald The one in the graveyard.
Mark (*realizing*) Oh — yes — sorry!
Gerald You never *were* good at relationships, were you?
Mark Well, you do have a big family.
Gerald It's smaller than it was.
Mark Ah. Yes. (*Raising his glass*) To my — er — —
Gerald Mother-in-law.
Mark Yes.

They clink their glasses and sip their drinks. A bleak silence. Then Mark suddenly activates himself

Mark Good heavens! I almost forgot!
Gerald What?
Mark I've got something for you.

Gerald considers this

Gerald I hope it's not a cat.
Mark Sorry?
Gerald I've never had a cat, you see. And I'm not going to have one now even if my wife *is* dead.
Mark Oh — no! No — it's not a cat.
Gerald Good. That's all right then.

Mark goes to his briefcase, takes out a small package, brings it to Gerald and holds it out to him. Gerald stares at the package, puzzled

What is it?

Mark It's for you. A sort of present.
Gerald Not my birthday, is it? I don't think I'm up to two big occasions in one week.
Mark I thought you might like them.
Gerald You mean there's more than one of whatever it is?
Mark (*amused*) I should jolly well hope so!
Gerald (*taking the package*) Thanks. (*He waits for a moment, gazing at his present*) Shall I open it *now*?
Mark Unless you'd rather do it in your bedroom.
Gerald Is it something to use in the bedroom, then?
Mark No, no! I just thought you'd prefer to open it in secret.
Gerald You mean you don't want me to open it in here?
Mark Well, you can if you like ...
Gerald Right. I will then. (*He is about to open the package*)
Mark She won't be back for a minute.
Gerald Who?
Mark My wife.
Gerald Shirley?
Mark (*amused*) Well, I haven't got another one. She's in the kitchen.
Gerald I know. She's seeing to the dinner.
Mark So you've plenty of time.

Gerald considers this for a moment

Gerald She's a slow cook, then, is she?
Mark Well — you know — she does need to consult a cookery book occasionally.
Gerald (*knowingly*) Ah — yes.

They laugh

Mark So you should have plenty of time.
Gerald It won't take me very long to open this package.
Mark I didn't mean that.
Gerald Doesn't Shirley like to see people opening packages?
Mark Well — that depends what's in it, doesn't it?
Gerald I see. (*He thinks about this*) What *is* in it?
Mark I can't tell you that! It's a surprise!
Gerald It certainly is! A surprise *and* a secret, apparently. A secret from Shirley, that is.
Mark Well — she doesn't know about it, yes.
Gerald And you don't *want* her to know about it?
Mark It might be better.

Gerald For her not to know about it?
Mark Yes. She might take it as an insult.
Gerald Oh, dear. I'd better open it, then. And if you hear Shirley coming back give me the nod and I'll hide whatever it is under the sofa.
Mark Right! (*He smiles conspiratorially*)
Gerald Here we go, then.

Gerald starts to open the package — very carefully. Mark notices his caution

Mark It's all right. It won't explode.
Gerald That *is* a relief. I don't want to join Helen just yet!

Gerald opens the package to reveal a few dainty sandwiches. He picks one up and looks at it, puzzled naturally

Sandwiches?
Mark Yes. (*A beat*) Smoked salmon.
Gerald Smoked salmon sandwiches?
Mark Yes. On brown.
Gerald Oh. Right ... (*He stares at the sandwiches*)
Mark (*in sudden panic*) You do *like* smoked salmon, don't you?
Gerald Oh, yes. Yes. Especially on brown.
Mark Good! I was sure you would.
Gerald You were right. My favourite.
Mark I thought it would be a nice surprise.
Gerald It is! And it's the first time.
Mark Sorry?
Gerald Nobody's ever given me a present of smoked salmon sandwiches before.
Mark Really?
Gerald Not that I can remember, anyway. It's quite a new departure.
Mark (*pleased*) I did the right thing, then?
Gerald You certainly did.
Mark Great.

A pause. Gerald considers, gazing at the sandwiches. Mark waits for a moment

(*Anxiously*) Well, go on! Don't hang about!
Gerald You mean I've got to eat them *now*?
Mark That was the idea. I thought you'd be dying for them. Sorry! I didn't mean to say dying. Longing! Longing for them. I thought you'd be a bit peckish left on your own all day. Sorry! I didn't mean to say left on your own!

Gerald That's all right, Mark. And please don't think I'm not grateful, because I am. It was a very nice thought. Very nice indeed. Fancy you — busy at your lap-top — suddenly thinking, "I'll take the old man some smoked salmon sandwiches — on brown — because that's what he'll be dying for — longing for!" It's just that I ... I can't understand why.

Mark (*puzzled*) Why?

Gerald Yes.

Mark You said you *liked* smoked salmon sandwiches.

Gerald Yes. I do.

Mark So why do you ask why?

Gerald Because I don't understand ... *why* you did it.

Mark Ah.

Gerald You see? It is unusual.

Mark Ah. Yes. (*With difficulty*) Well ... You see — poor old Shirley ...

Gerald (*puzzled*) Sorry?

Mark She means well. In the kitchen department. But — (*he glances around to make sure she is not returning*) let's face it, Gerry, she's a pretty poor cook.

Gerald Well, I didn't like to ...

Mark But she *is*!

Gerald Yes, I know, but — —

Mark So I thought — after ten days of Shirley's cooking — you might be glad of something you really like.

Gerald (*realizing*) Ah! That's what you meant about not insulting her? You didn't want Shirley to know about the — er ...

Mark Smoked salmon sandwiches.

Gerald Yes.

Mark Exactly!

Gerald That's all right. It can be our little secret.

Mark Great!

Gerald It was very considerate of you, Mark, and I do appreciate it.

Mark (*anxiously*) Get on with them, then!

Gerald Oh — right. (*He takes a sandwich and starts to eat it, slowly*)

Mark watches him hopefully

Mark OK?

Gerald H'm. Very nice. Very nice indeed. Better than the rissoles last night, eh?

Mark Yes — rather!

They laugh together. Gerald does not embark on a second sandwich

What's the matter?

Gerald Nothing. They're very nice. But I ... I'm not very hungry.

Mark suddenly realizes how difficult it must be to eat when you have just lost your wife, and sits beside Gerald sympathetically

Mark Oh, God! Of course you're not! I should have realized. I'm so sorry, Gerry. It's bound to affect your appetite, losing your wife like that.
Gerald (*modestly*) Well, yes, it's not as if she was just trying to find her way out of Tesco's, is it?
Mark No. Bound to put you off your food a bit. (*He starts to eat a sandwich himself*) H'm. These are rather good.
Gerald It wasn't that, though.
Mark (*eating*) H'm? Not the fact of your wife dying? Sorry! I didn't mean to say dying — —
Gerald Well, not *just* that.
Mark Then what?
Gerald (*a little ashamed*) Well, at lunchtime I ... I had a double hamburger in the pub near the pond.

Mark stares at him in disbelief, finishing off his sandwich

Mark You *didn't*?
Gerald Yes.
Mark A double hamburger?
Gerald H'm.
Mark In the pub?
Gerald Yes. (*A beat*) With french fries and a green salad.

Mark gazes at him in admiration, and pats him on the back

Mark Good man! I really admire you, Gerry. You're putting on a brave front. I knew you would. Life has to go on. You don't mind me eating these, do you? I didn't get any lunch.
Gerald Please. Be my guest.

Mark helps himself to another sandwich

The door opens, heralding Shirley's return from the kitchen

Gerald hastily shoves the packet of sandwiches under the sofa and Mark quickly finishes his sandwich, so they look suitably composed when Shirley arrives and looks at them confidently

Shirley Everything's under control.
Mark (*surprised*) Is it?
Shirley Yes! (*Then losing heart*) I think so ...
Mark (*hopefully*) It'll take some time, though, won't it?
Shirley Well, yes. It's got to be cooked, hasn't it?
Mark (*to Gerald, aside*) That'll make a change ... !
Shirley Did you get everything sorted out, then?
Mark Er — yes. We got everything sorted out, didn't we, Gerry?
Gerald Certainly did!

Shirley looks at them suspiciously for a moment

Shirley You're both looking very furtive.
Gerald
Mark } (*together*) No, we're not!
Shirley I hope you're not hiding something from me?
Gerald
Mark } (*together*) No! Never!
Gerald We were having a drink, that's all.
Mark And we never look furtive when we're having a drink.
Shirley Yes, you do!
Gerald Well, *you'd* better have one, then you won't notice. (*Getting up*) What'll it be?
Shirley Oh — sherry, please.
Gerald One sherry coming up. (*He goes to pour a sherry*)

Shirley turns to Mark and mouths silently, "Did you ask him?" Mark pretends not to know what she is saying

Gerald returns with a glass of sherry and notices Shirley mouthing at Mark

Sherry, Shirley!

Shirley hastily covers up and accepts her sherry

Shirley Thanks, Daddy. (*She sits down in the armchair and sips her sherry, then looks at Gerald; hopefully*) So what do you think of the arrangement, then?
Gerald (*blankly*) H'm? What arrangement?
Shirley (*glaring at Mark*) I thought you two had been talking!
Mark We were! We did! We have!
Shirley Good! (*To Gerald*) So what do you think of it?
Gerald Think of what?

Shirley (*glaring at Mark again*) You said you'd been talking!
Mark Yes, but not about that. (*Profoundly*) Your father went for a walk. That's good news, isn't it?
Shirley (*patiently*) I *know* he went for a walk.
Mark Around the pond.
Shirley Yes! He told me!
Gerald Twice, actually.
Shirley What?
Gerald I walked around the pond twice. (*Gesturing*) Once that way, and once that way.
Shirley You must have worked up quite an appetite, then?
Gerald / **Mark** (*together*) No!
Shirley Well, I shall be very disappointed if you don't do justice to my cooking. I've made an extra effort tonight.
Mark Oh. Good ... (*He exchanges a look with Gerald*)
Shirley And as a special treat we're going to have smoked salmon for starters.

Another look between the men

Mark Smoked salmon?
Shirley Yes.
Gerald With brown bread?
Shirley (*puzzled*) If you like.
Gerald Well, that's what you usually have with smoked salmon. Isn't it, Mark?
Mark Yes — it certainly is! (*He tries to conceal his amusement*)
Shirley You do *like* smoked salmon, don't you?
Gerald Oh, yes — we like smoked salmon, don't we, Mark?
Mark Yes! Especially with brown bread.
Shirley Oh, good!
Gerald So — what arrangement were you talking about?
Shirley Sorry?
Gerald You asked what I thought of the arrangement.
Shirley Ah — yes. (*To Mark; hopefully*) Darling ...
Mark (*innocently*) What?
Gerald (*to Mark*) Was there something you were supposed to talk to me about?
Mark (*blankly*) No — I don't think so ...
Shirley Yes, there was! (*To Gerald*) He was supposed to tell you about the plans we've made!

Gerald (*smiling; delightedly*) You're going to India! Oh, good! You've always talked about going there, but I never thought you'd do it. I *am* impressed.
Shirley No, we're not!
Gerald *Not* going to India?
Shirley No.
Gerald Littlehampton?
Shirley We're not going anywhere!
Gerald Oh, dear. What a pity. What plans were you talking about, then?
Shirley Plans for *you*, of course!
Gerald For *me*? I didn't think I'd got any plans. Not now that Helen's gone. Not yet, anyhow. (*He sips his whisky*)
Shirley (*desperately*) Daddy — you can't stay in this house!
Gerald It's not subsiding, is it?
Shirley (*appealing to Mark helplessly*) Mark — —?

Mark, who was enjoying his whisky, tries to be helpful

Mark Shirley's right. You can't stay here on your own.
Gerald But I live here.
Mark Yes — yes, I know you live here, Gerry — —
Gerald Helen and I were married here, and this is our home. The place where we live.
Mark (*wildly*) That's why you can't stay here! You wouldn't like it here now that Helen's dead. Sorry! I didn't mean to say dead!
Gerald (*surprised by this sudden outburst*) What are you suggesting, then?

Shirley and Mark exchange a look. This is it. They've got to do it now. Shirley plucks up courage and says it

Shirley We want you to move in with *us*.

A brief silence as Gerald considers this

Gerald With you?
Shirley With Mark and me and the boys.

There is another brief silence. Then Gerald laughs!

Gerald You're joking, aren't you?
Shirley Of course we're not joking! We'd *like* you to live with us. Wouldn't we, Mark?
Mark (*looking up from his whisky*) Yes — of course we would!

Gerald Well, *I* wouldn't.

They stare at him in surprise

Shirley Daddy! Why not?

Gerald is uncertain for a moment. Then he invents an escape route

Gerald Well, for one thing — you never make lists.
Shirley Lists?
Gerald Yes ...
Shirley What sort of lists?
Gerald Housekeeping lists. What things are running out. Flour. Sugar. That sort of thing. When the Council Tax is due. Your mother was a great list-maker. It was something you never learned from her. I could never live in a house without lists. (*He suffers at the thought*)
Shirley (*helpfully*) Well ... I could start making lists.
Gerald No! No — you'd never keep it up! If you haven't made lists by your age it's too late to start.
Shirley (*in disbelief*) And that's all that's stopping you coming to live with us?

Gerald thinks perhaps he needs to consolidate

Gerald Well — it's not *just* that.
Shirley Not just lists?
Gerald No.
Shirley What else, then?
Gerald Well — er — (*turning to Mark*) you haven't started oiling your garden tools by any chance, have you?
Mark (*bewildered*) Sorry?
Gerald Spade. Fork. Mowing-machine — that kind of thing?
Mark Ah — no — I'm afraid that's one of my blind spots.
Gerald (*grinning triumphantly*) Exactly! And that would always worry me. If I was a permanent guest at your place ... I'd go into the garden shed — wanting to help with a little light digging — and I'd find the fork all covered in rust. You really should take care of your equipment, you know. I always oil *my* equipment.
Mark You could oil mine *for* me.
Gerald No, no, I couldn't do that! A man has to take care of his own tools.
Shirley So you don't want to come and live with us just because I don't make lists and Mark doesn't oil his tools?

Gerald realizes that he must make a more personal approach

Gerald You wouldn't like me living with you. I'd drive you mad in no time. I'd be in the way. The boys would hate it.
Shirley No, they wouldn't!
Gerald Grandfathers should be taken out and dusted at Christmas and on birthdays. The rest of the year they should be packed away in a cardboard box.
Mark You get on well with the boys. You can talk sport to them. They'd like that. You know all about football and cricket. And you always watch the Ryder Cup.
Shirley Yes! They'd love it!
Gerald (*quietly*) It's not *them* I'm thinking about ...
Shirley (*dramatically*) But you're my father! And you're all alone! And I want you to live with me and my family!

Gerald and Mark do not react to Shirley's dramatics, obviously quite used to them

Gerald Well, that's very sweet of you, Shirley, and I do appreciate it. But I'm afraid it's a non-starter. You see, *this* is my home — Helen's and mine — and we want to go on living here.
Shirley (*emotionally*) But *she's* not here any more!
Gerald Yes, she is. Of course she is. She's over here. (*He picks up the framed photograph of Helen*)
Shirley Daddy, that's just a photograph!
Gerald Yes. But *she's* here as well. Not just in a photograph. She's everywhere. In every room. She'll always be here. (*He puts down the photograph*) I can talk to her while I'm doing the dusting.
Mark If you start wandering about the house talking to pictures they'll take you away in a plain van!
Gerald (*with a grin*) That'll solve the problem, then, won't it?

The front doorbell rings imperiously

Shirley You're not expecting anyone, are you?
Gerald No. But life's full of surprises.
Shirley Perhaps it's the vicar.
Mark You're not expecting the vicar, surely?
Gerald Certainly not! I saw him last week.
Mark (*intrigued*) Did you really?
Gerald You remember! He was at Helen's funeral.

Mark looks blank

He was the one who was dressed up and did all the talking.

Shirley (*gently remonstrating*) Daddy ... !
Gerald You'd better let him in.

Shirley puts down her glass and goes out into the hall

Mark is deep in thought

Mark I didn't know you'd ever *been* in my shed.
Gerald (*at a loss*) Sorry?
Mark My garden shed. When you noticed that I hadn't oiled my tools.
Gerald (*realizing*) Oh. Well, it — it was Easter Monday, I think. Yes, that was it! I'd gone to get out the croquet stuff.
Mark I don't remember that.
Gerald Oh, yes. Very sunny it was.
Mark I must have been away.

Shirley returns, rather uncertainly

Gerald *Is* it the vicar?
Shirley No. Worse.
Gerald Worse than the vicar, eh?
Shirley Aunt Amanda.
Gerald (*surprised*) My sister-in-law?
Shirley Yes.
Gerald That *is* worse than the vicar ... !

Amanda comes in from the hall. She is a confident, enthusiastic woman in her sixties. She is dressed in a smart, dark suit and carries a bunch of lilies

The others all look at her in surprise

Amanda Gerry!

Amanda abruptly passes her flowers to Shirley and crosses down to Gerald. She stares at him for a moment, heavy with sympathy

Oh, Gerry! I'm *so* sorry ... (*She engulfs Gerald in her arms*)

Gerald suffers bravely. Finally, Amanda releases him

Gerald There's no need to apologize.
Amanda (*a little put out*) I wasn't apologizing, Gerry. I was expressing sympathy.

Gerald Oh. Yes. Right. Thank you.
Amanda (*puzzled*) Why should I be apologizing? I'm not late, am I?

Gerald and Shirley exchange a look

Gerald Just a bit, yes.
Amanda The funeral is *tomorrow*, isn't it?
Gerald No. *Last* Saturday.

Amanda gazes at him, appalled

Amanda *Last* Saturday?
Gerald Yes.
Amanda But I was in Tanzania. I couldn't possibly have been here last Saturday.
Gerald Well, I'm sorry, but that's when it was.
Amanda Are you sure?
Gerald Yes. Definitely last Saturday.
Amanda Well, why didn't you wait for me?
Gerald We'd already booked the vicar.
Amanda Oh, dear ... ! (*Remembering*) And I went and bought flowers! Lilies, too!
Gerald Very appropriate ...
Shirley They're lovely. Must have cost you a fortune.
Amanda Yes, they did. (*Without enthusiasm*) Well, I suppose *you'd* better have them, then, Shirley.
Shirley No! No — I couldn't! (*She thrusts the flowers back into Amanda's hands*) They were for Mummy.
Amanda Well, they're no good to *her* now! (*She looks around for somewhere to put the flowers and sees Mark for the first time*) Oh, hallo, Mark ... (*She embraces him, sadly but briefly*) I'm *so* sorry to see you.
Mark What?
Amanda On such a sad occasion. (*Confidentially*) Was it *really* last week?
Mark I'm afraid so.
Amanda I don't understand it. Helen *knew* I was going to Tanzania. Mind you, I did wonder when I saw that Gerry was dressed for the links. (*She looks disapprovingly at Gerald's jacket. To Mark*) Go and put these in water, there's a good boy. We don't want them to wilt, do we?
Mark No. Not when you've paid so much for them.

Mark takes the lilies from Amanda and goes out into the kitchen

Amanda gives Mark a critical look as he goes

Amanda (*turning to Shirley*) I always knew he had a sense of humour. (*She goes back to Gerald*) Oh, Gerry — I really am sorry for being late. What *would* Helen have thought?

Gerald I don't expect she'd have been surprised ...

Amanda Gerry! That's very unfair.

Gerald Well, you always were forgetful.

Amanda But my own sister's funeral! And I should have been here to look after *you*.

Gerald That's all right. Shirley and Mark have been staying with me.

Amanda (*not too impressed*) Oh. Well, I'm sure they must have been a great comfort. (*She looks at the framed photograph of Helen*) Oh, that's such a *lovely* picture of Helen ...

Gerald Yes.

Amanda She was the perfect sister to me, you know. And wife to you, too, of course! You poor man — you must miss her dreadfully. (*She notices his drink*) Still, you are drinking whisky. That's a good sign.

Gerald (*taking the hint*) Perhaps I can get *you* one, Amanda?

Amanda Oh, what a good idea! It's been a long day and I'm quite exhausted. (*She sits down on the sofa, exhausted*)

Gerald (*on his way to the drinks table*) Water?

Amanda Don't be silly, Gerry.

Gerald (*catching Shirley's eye*) One whisky, no water coming up. (*He starts to pour*)

Amanda (*suddenly activating herself*) I say! I've got a wonderful idea! I'm so mortified by getting the date of my sister's funeral wrong that I'm going to make it up to you all. (*With great effect*) I'm going to take you all out to dinner tonight. Champagne! The lot. We'll have a proper celebration!

Shirley It was a funeral, Aunt Amanda, not a wedding.

Gerald grins as he returns with a whisky

Amanda A celebration of her *life*. That's what I meant. (*Accepting the whisky*) Oh, thank you, Gerry. (*Raising her glass*) Well, here's to — er — —

Gerald No, no! We've done all that.

Amanda Sorry?

Gerald "Helen", "Mummy", "Mother-in-law" — we've done the lot.

Shirley How about "late sister"?

Gerald tries to stifle a laugh

Amanda (*giving Shirley a stern look*) Don't be flippant, Shirley. It doesn't suit you. (*So she abandons her toast and just sips her whisky*) This isn't the whisky you usually have.

Gerald No.
Amanda You usually have malt.
Gerald Yes. But I'm cutting down now that I'm a widower.
Amanda (*looking at her whisky disapprovingly*) I wondered why you offered me water. So — dinner tonight, then?

Gerald and Shirley exchange a look

Gerald Well — actually — Shirley's already arranged to cook dinner.
Amanda (*looking doubtfully at Shirley*) She hasn't, has she?
Shirley Yes. I'm making a special effort.
Amanda Oh, dear ...

Mark returns with the lilies resplendent in a vase

Mark There we are! How's that? (*He sets the lilies down*)
Shirley Oh, lovely! Well done, darling! They look beautiful.
Amanda So they should. Honestly, the price you pay for flowers these days. Mind you, they look much better *here*. I always think flowers at funerals are such a waste, don't you? Just left there lying in the rain. It's rather sad, really.
Shirley I think they go to hospitals.
Amanda (*unimpressed*) Oh. Do they? Well, I suppose that's all right. (*Turning to Mark*) I was thinking of taking you all out to dinner tonight, Mark.
Mark (*enthusiastically*) Oh, good! What a great idea! I'm starving! Aren't you, darling? (*He sees Shirley's stony look and his enthusiasm dies*) Ah ...
Amanda But apparently Shirley's got it under control.
Mark Has she? Have you? I mean, it's ... It's under way, is it? It can't be — well — you know — put off — can it? Till tomorrow? Put off till ... No? Right. Sorry. I'd forgotten. Nice idea, though. Wasn't it, Gerry? No? Right.
Amanda We'll have to do it another night.
Gerald *Another* night?
Mark What a good idea! (*Moving to Gerald*) Mind you, it'll have to be quick, won't it, Gerry? (*He grins at him*)
Gerald Will it?
Mark Of course it will!
Shirley (*puzzled*) Oh. I didn't know that.
Mark (*teasing him*) You never told us, did you? You old dog! (*To the others*) He never told us, did he?

Shirley and Amanda silently shake their heads in puzzled unison

Your father's a dark horse, Shirley.

Gerald An old dog *and* a dark horse?
Amanda What are you talking about, Mark?
Mark And for what it's worth, Gerry — I think you're making the correct decision. You've got the right attitude! I knew you would have. The moment you told me about walking around the pond. I knew you were on the right track. No sense in mooning about in here all on your own. Life has to go on! So — tell us — we're all dying to know — sorry! I didn't mean to say dying! Longing! Longing to know!
Gerald Longing to know what?
Mark (*playfully*) Which direction are you heading in, old sea dog?
Gerald (*to Shirley*) I'm an old sea dog now ...
Mark Are the Seychelles on your agenda?
Gerald The Seychelles? Good lord, no.
Mark Something more modest, perhaps? (*A terrible thought*) Oh, no! Not the Canaries with SAGA? You wouldn't like that. They're all *old* people.
Gerald I'm not going anywhere!
Mark (*appalled*) You're not?
Gerald No. Whatever gave you that idea?
Mark I saw two suitcases in the hall.
Gerald Well, they're not mine!
Amanda No — they're mine!

The others look at her in horror

Gerald }
Mark } (*together*) *Yours*?
Amanda Yes. Of course.

Gerald and Mark exchange an apprehensive look

Gerald (*trying to be optimistic*) Ah! You're on your way to the airport!
Amanda (*patiently*) No, Gerry. I've just come *from* the airport.
Gerald Yes. But tomorrow you're off again! Is that it? An overnight stop, then off on another of your trips? I know you're an inveterate traveller.
Amanda Oh, no. I've done enough travelling for a while, and now I'm going to settle down.
Gerald Then why have you brought two suitcases *here*?
Amanda Because I'm coming to stay, of course.
Gerald To stay?
Amanda Yes.
Gerald *Here*?
Amanda Yes.
Gerald Why?

Amanda (*as if to a child*) Because this is where you live, Gerry.
Gerald Yes, I know that, but — —
Mark (*helpfully*) I think she means she's staying tonight and going tomorrow. (*He looks at Amanda*)
Amanda No, she doesn't mean that.
Mark Doesn't she?
Amanda Certainly not!
Gerald (*optimistically*) Monday? You're staying for the weekend and going home on Monday?
Amanda Don't be silly, Gerry. If I was only coming for the weekend I wouldn't have brought two suitcases, would I?
Gerald I know! Oxfam! You and Helen always supported the Third World. So you've brought two suitcases to pack up Helen's clothes and take them all to Oxfam.
Amanda (*a little shocked*) Gerry! I think that would be a little premature.
Shirley Yes, Daddy — it certainly would!
Gerald Oh. Right. (*To Amanda*) So why *have* you brought two suitcases, then?
Amanda Because I promised Helen.
Gerald Promised Helen you'd give me your old suitcases?
Amanda They are not old suitcases! I wouldn't be seen dead with old suitcases.
Mark Sorry! She didn't mean to say dead!
Amanda I made a solemn promise to Helen that if anything happened to her I'd look after you. We were having coffee in Selfridges. I remember it quite clearly.
Shirley You mean you were having one of those "elderly" conversations? One of those "wanting-to-leave-everything-tidy" conversations?
Amanda However did you guess?
Shirley A geriatric I know told me all about it. (*She grins at Gerald*)
Mark You promised Helen that you'd look after Gerry?
Amanda Yes. A solemn promise. And a promise I intend to keep.

Gerald tries to re-group his forces, and moves to Amanda

Gerald Ah — now — er ... Now look, Amanda — I think you must have misunderstood. An easy thing to do over coffee. Especially in Selfridges. Helen probably meant that you should stay for just a few days. And Mark and Shirley have been doing that, so it does look as if you've had a wasted journey. (*He grins optimistically*)
Amanda No, Gerry.
Gerald No?
Amanda No. Not just for a few days. For the rest of your life.

They all react, appalled at this prospect

Gerald The rest of my life?
Amanda I don't believe in half measures, Gerry. In fact I've already put my house on the market.
Gerald (*to Mark, aside*) I may as well join Helen *now*! And it would make it easier for the gravediggers. The earth would still be quite loose.
Mark (*quietly*) I'll get you another whisky.
Gerald (*quietly*) Good idea ... !

Mark hastens away to refill Gerald's glass

(*Persevering with Amanda*) Don't *I* have any say in the matter?
Amanda No, of course not. Helen and I knew you wouldn't be in a fit state to make decisions. So we made this one for you. Gerry — I'm trying to help.
Gerald Yes — yes, I know — and I don't want to appear ungrateful, but I'd really rather be here on my own.
Amanda You may think that, Gerry. You may even believe that. But under the stress of what's happened you're not in a position to know what's good for you.
Gerald I *do* know what's good for me!
Mark (*arriving with Gerald's whisky*) Whisky!
Gerald Exactly! (*He takes it and sips some, gratefully*)
Amanda You see, Gerry dear, at the moment you're not thinking straight — that's only natural — but you'll soon get used to the idea.
Gerald I don't *want* to get used to the idea! (*Then he thinks of a way out*) Anyway, I'm afraid it's out of the question!
Amanda Why?
Gerald (*after a quick glance at Shirley*) Because I've already agreed to go and live with Shirley and Mark.

Shirley and Mark react with some surprise

Amanda (*dismissing the idea*)What on earth for?
Gerald Because they asked me. Before you arrived. Didn't you, Shirley?
Shirley (*dutifully*) Y-yes! We certainly did!
Amanda And what did you say?
Gerald I said yes, of course! Didn't I, Mark?
Mark Y-yes ... ! (*He grins at Shirley*)

Mark and Shirley are enjoying Gerald's sudden about-face

Amanda (*in disbelief*) Why on earth did you say that?

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.

SF PERUSALS