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Mrs Affleck

A play

Samuel Adamson

from Henrik Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*

Samuel French — London
www.samuel french-london.co.uk



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MRS AFFLECK

First performed in the Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre, London, on the 27th of January, 2009, with the following cast:

Rita Affleck	Claire Skinner
George Constantine	Omar Brown / Rene Gray
Audrey Affleck	Naomi Frederick
Oliver Affleck	Alfie Field / Wesley Nelson
Alfred Affleck	Angus Wright
Flea	Josef Altin
Jonathan Mortimer	Phil Cheadle
Waitress	Cassie Atkinson
Sophia Constantine	Sarah Niles
Tea-House Patrons/Passers-By	Alan Devally
	Stephanie Lodge
	Hugh O'Shea
	Daniel Pinto

Directed by Marianne Elliott
Designed by Bunny Christie
Lighting Design by Neil Austin
Music by Stephen Warbeck
Sound Design by Christopher Shutt

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CHARACTERS

Rita Affleck, 31

Alfred Affleck, Rita's husband, 39

Oliver Affleck, their son, 9

Audrey Affleck, Alfred's half-sister, 31

George Constantine, Sophia's son, 9

Flea, 16-19

Jonathan Mortimer, 27

Waitress

Tea-House Patrons / Passers-By

Sophia Constantine, George's mother, Jamaican, 30

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place on the edge of a small town on the Kent coast in late spring, 1955.

ACT I

Rita's house

ACT II

SCENE 1 A seaside tea-house

SCENE 2 At the beach

PRODUCTION NOTE

When characters speak over the top of one another, a forward slash indicates approximately where the overlapping speech begins.

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Other plays by Samuel Adamson
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The Cherry Orchard (Chekhov)
A Doll's House (Ibsen)
Pillars of the Community (Ibsen)
Three Sisters (Chekhov)



ACT I

A house on the edge of a small town on the Kent coast, not far from the sea. Late Spring, 1955. Sunday. The sun is shining

Rita, 31, is in the kitchen. She is wearing a summer dress, reading Lucky Jim, and smoking listlessly. A door is open to a path which leads to the street. George, 9, lingers outside, holding a gun. Eventually, Rita yells

Rita George. I've seen you, George. Come in if you want. Put one foot in front of the other, you can do it. It's a portal to a whole new world. *(She laughs)* Suit yourself.

Rita smokes. After a time, she approaches the door to the rest of the house and listens. George eases his way into the kitchen. Rita turns and starts

There you are. Run away again?

George shakes his head

You want to see Olly?

George nods

You can't, he's up to his neck in *King Lear*. Yes, I know it's Sunday, but his father's back. Back from the lochs. *(She smokes and offers George a cigarette)* Cigarette?

George doesn't know what to do. Rita laughs

So, what are we going to do, hmn? If you don't smoke?

George is silent

My sister-in-law will be here soon. With a bit of luck, she'll bring a cake.

George is silent

It's not really an equitable arrangement, is it — me doing all the talking? I'll tell you about my whole life, but you have to return the favour. Has your mother found work?

George nods his head, but the nod turns to a shake

You have to go back to London, you know. Why did you leave? There's nothing here. Tell her that, George. (*She resumes reading*)

George stares. Rita laughs at something in the book and slams it closed

I don't know how long he'll be, I've got no cake, so if you're not going to talk ...

George Tell Olly I see Flea.

Rita Who's "Flea"?

George Him doing all the houses. Rat killer.

Rita Rat killer? And how does he manage that? (*Taking the gun*) With a gun?

George (*shaking his head*) Fire.

Rita Fire? Really?

George nods

Audrey, 31, enters down the outside path, with a bunch of daisies and her school teacher's briefcase

Tell him yourself. And this, young man, (*pointing the gun directly at him*) is mine.

George doesn't move

Audrey Alfred?

Rita drops the hand holding the gun. George leaves the house. Audrey and George pass each other on the path

George exits

Rita? Alfred?

Rita puts the gun in her pocket or in a drawer

Hello?

Rita Audrey, thank God.

Audrey Rita, that little ...

Rita (*grabbing the flowers*) Coloured boy, yes, George.

Audrey I've —

Rita Never seen anything like it, I know; I've been under attack.

Audrey What?

Rita I commandeered his gun.

Audrey (*taken in for a moment; admonishing*) Honestly ... Where's he come from?

Rita London, with his mother. They've run away from something. He's taken a shine to Olly.

Audrey But where does he live?

Rita I don't know. No need to look so terrified, Audrey. Just a child. Come in.

Audrey How are you, Rita?

Rita How do you think, with all the excitement? It's go, go, go. Today I read this book, from Jonathan: terrific. I painted Princess Margaret on a hard-boiled egg, and yesterday I bought some more things, and ... Thank God you're here. I suppose you're dying to see him?

Audrey (*nodding*) Where is he?

Rita Busy: Olly: *Lear*.

Audrey Oh, no ... not today? You should do something, Rita.

Rita Why haven't you been to see me the whole time?

Audrey Olly should be outdoors; what's Alfred thinking?

Rita What's he going to do, run the miracle mile? It's none of my business.

Audrey Rita.

Rita It's not.

Audrey Then I'll say something.

Rita If you think it's broken, you fix it. You're the teacher. Fine. (*Referring to the flowers*) What is the actual — rationale?

Audrey takes the flowers back and finds a vase, etc. Rita smokes. Silence

Did you catch the bus?

Audrey Yes.

Rita You weren't expecting lunch?

Audrey I only want to see Olly and Alfred — and you. The strangest thing, Rita ... I knew Alfred was back before we spoke. I heard his voice last night. There's a chapter in *Jane Eyre*: Jane hears / Rochester ...

Rita You mean telepathy, Audrey?

Beat

Audrey Stupid.

Rita No, no ... If you heard him across the moors, you heard him. How are things in Margate?

Beat

Audrey No call, nothing, but somehow / I knew —

Rita He sent me a wire. "Home Saturday eve stop Have had revelation stop." What do you make of that?

Audrey What does it mean?

Rita No idea. A riddle, in a wire; I'm not fond of riddles, it's put me on edge.

Audrey He didn't explain when he got home?

Rita He was exhausted and Olly had a bellyache and the television set died — the whole town's prostrate with grief about it, and ... Here I am.

Audrey Let me make you a cup of tea.

Rita No, thank you. Where have you been?

Audrey At home. School.

Rita I'd have killed for company. Alfred's obviously the sole attraction. You don't care about me, do you?

Audrey Of course I do. I've been a little busy, / that's all.

Rita So have I, climbing the walls. George has been twice. Jonathan comes almost every day.

Beat

Audrey I think Alfred should go away every year to work. He hasn't since the war.

Rita Why would you say that? He needs a sabbatical from the fishwife?

Audrey Rita, you know what I mean. Sometimes he has to clear his head. Doctor's orders, / yes?

Rita Yes, it's why we live *here*; and not doctor — psychoanalyst, not doctor — and when he goes, what about me?

Audrey He wasn't away for that long!

Rita You know nothing, *nothing*.

Beat

Audrey No. How could I? No one to miss.

Rita I didn't / mean ...

Audrey It's all right.

Rita I'm sorry. I know you'd let Alfred decamp for a bit every spring; if you were married you'd do it *yourself*, because you're modern and practical, and have *work*; there'd be some school-mistressy need to visit Brontë country or Hiroshima or wherever.

Audrey Rita —

Rita I could do that, there are plenty of places I could go. But I'm not the same as you. I'm sorry. Something's happened. He's different.

Audrey Not ill?

Rita No! He's got colour. He's the new model Alfred, on the outside at least. If I didn't know better I'd say he'd been sleeping / with someone —

Audrey For once, please ...

Rita —there's something in the Highlands water, let me tell you: I think it might be *potent*, Audrey, I really do.

Beat

Audrey Has he finished his book?

Rita His notebook's empty.

Audrey Is it? How do you know?

Rita raises an eyebrow

So this — revelation?

Rita Thank God you're here, now at last we'll find out what it is. Yes. (*She smiles at Audrey and takes her hand, then looks up a number, goes to telephone and dials; into the phone*) Hello. Mr Mortimer, please. ... Rita Affleck. ... Thank you.

Audrey What are you doing?

Rita Jonathan. Might bring cake.

Audrey No, no — please, no — hang up.

Rita For God's sake, Audrey, you've got to stop acting like a cloistered — Hello, Johnny. Rita. Alfred's home! ... Didn't we all? ... Last night, all in, went straight to bed. ... He'd love to see you. So would Audrey. ... No, she's here! ... Don't panic, she's playing Snakes and Ladders with Olly. Come for lunch. ... Cod. ... Yes, yes. ... Good. ... Bye. (*She hangs up. After a moment, she smokes*) The daisies are sublime. You and Johnny can go to the harbour and eat whelks or something with the day-trippers. All right, I'll shut up, I know the subject's *verboden*! (*Clutching Audrey's hand*) I missed Alfred so much. I can't explain ... God ... I thought I'd lost him.

Audrey Rita?

Rita If he left and never came back, I / don't know —

Audrey That's not going to happen.

Rita He's a great man.

Audrey I know.

Rita But *I* know it too, that's what I want you to acknowledge — that
Rita knows it.

Oliver, 9, rushes in from the house. He is small for his age and dressed as a cowboy. He is disabled and wears callipers

Oliver Mummy, Mummy! (*Seeing Audrey*) Auntie Audrey!

Audrey Olly!

Oliver Where have you been? I haven't seen you for ages!

Audrey I'm so sorry. Who are you?

Oliver (*with a cowboy accent*) Hopalong Cassidy!

Audrey So you are.

Oliver Mummy got it for me. Because I hop along!

Beat

Rita Aren't you funny, Olly?

Audrey (*taking an "Eagle" comic from her briefcase*) And there I was, thinking you were an Interplanet Space Fleet Pilot of the Future. My mistake.

Oliver (*gasping and grabbing the comic*) Dan Dare!

Audrey Don't tell Daddy.

Rita Audrey, you shouldn't have. (*But in fact she appreciates it*) Thank you. (*To Oliver*) Say thank you.

Oliver Thank you!

Rita You've finished in there?

Oliver Yes, Mummy.

Alfred, 39, enters from the house

Alfred Audrey.

Audrey Hello, Alfred.

Alfred It's good to see you. I didn't know if you were coming.

Rita She caught the bus!

Audrey Welcome home.

Audrey and Alfred are happy to see each other, but physically uneasy. They hug

Rita Look how handsome he is, in his dapper new summer shirt. What do you think?

Audrey His eyes look ... he looks ...

Oliver (*with an American accent*) A million dollars!

Rita (*with an American accent*) He looks a million bucks! (*She caresses Alfred possessively*)

Audrey I thought you weren't coming back till the eleventh of June.

Alfred It was time, suddenly.

Audrey So? Tell me. You finished your book?

Alfred Book? Hmn, book. (*To Oliver*) You answer. Go on.

Oliver He's given it up.

Audrey and Rita look to Oliver

"The tome!" He's given it up.

Audrey Olly?

Oliver It's true!

Alfred He's right. I didn't write a word.

Oliver Not a bloody word.

Alfred } (*together*) { Sssh-sssh ...

Rita } } Oliver.

Oliver We've been talking about it!

Rita It's Sunday, you've been reading Shakespeare.

Oliver No, Mummy.

Audrey But ... what have you been doing for six weeks?

Alfred Rambling. Thinking.

Rita You see? All change. And no time to tell the wife what he's been thinking *about*.

Alfred About us, Rita.

Rita Oh.

Oliver Mummy, may I have a glass of water?

Rita Yes.

Audrey Just — thinking?

Alfred nods

But, you look — you're miserable when you can't write; I thought you went to Scotland to work hard and break / the back of it.

Alfred Dispatch from the hills: writing is hot air. The best of us is up here. (*He taps his head*) You can type it out if you like, but it's rarely worth the paper you've typed it on.

Rita The man's off his rocker.

Audrey So it seems.

Alfred Quite the opposite. Completely sane.

Oliver Daddy?

Alfred Mmn?

Oliver What's going to happen to all the stuff you've already written?

Alfred When you're old enough, it's yours — if you want it.

Oliver Mine?

Alfred You've got a good head on your shoulders, it might be your calling.

Oliver Mine!

Rita Eureka! *Responsibility and The Bomb* has a fan! (To Oliver) So what *are* we going to do about it?

Alfred Rita ...

Rita No, no, Churchill's out to pasture, he can't save us, but we have Olly.

Oliver knows he's being made fun of

Audrey But if Olly wrote your book what would you do?

Alfred Go back to the Highlands.

Beat. Rita laughs and slaps Alfred's hand

Rita Naughty.

Alfred I like the air there, the space.

Rita (slapping Alfred) Slap.

Oliver I'd rather hike with you in the hills. That's what I'm doing.

They all look at Oliver. Audrey puts the kettle on the stove

Alfred Maybe, Olly.

Oliver Yes — and not Ben Nevis. Everest.

Rita Your father's joking, he's not going anywhere, (to Alfred) are you?

You're joking. (To Oliver) Put the glass in the sink, please. Actually, wash it up.

Audrey Here, let me; Roy Rogers shouldn't / have to.

Oliver Hopalong Cassidy.

Rita Scottish air. What's wrong with Kentish — not fresh enough?

Audrey I beg your pardon.

Oliver It's for Daddy.

You want cliffs? Go to Dover! (To

Audrey It's very smart.

Audrey; snapping) He can do it!

Oliver trips on his shoelace and in the fuss he drops the glass, which breaks

Alfred Careful.

Oliver My shoelace is undone.

Rita So do it up.

Alfred Here ...

With the glass, shoelace and an undone calliper strap to contend with, Alfred and Audrey are over-solicitous. Oliver takes it in his stride. The following dialogue overlaps

Audrey Mind the glass —

Rita He's fine —

Alfred Why don't we all go for a walk?

Rita No. I have plans for lunch.

Oliver Jonathan gave me a catapult!

Alfred Good, just the thing.

Rita That's Mr Mortimer / to you.

Oliver George killed a seagull.

Alfred Who's George? Why?

Oliver Jonathan's taking me swimming!

Alfred Swimming?

Oliver He swam when he was four, and all the others are swimming all summer, so I have to learn too. We're going next weekend. I'm going to ask him. I'm ready.

Alfred Perhaps ...

Oliver I am! Will you come too?

Alfred We'll see.

Oliver Do spacemen swim?

Audrey Is there water on Mars?

Oliver I'm going to be a spaceman and kill Martians.

Audrey (*laughing*) Olly!

Rita (*to Alfred*) Don't look at me — *Journey into Space* — blame the BBC.

Audrey Tell Daddy what you really want to be when you grow up.

Oliver A soldier.

Activity pauses at this

Audrey (*taken aback*) That's not what you told me.

Alfred I don't think so, Oliver.

Oliver Yes. A soldier.

Beat

Alfred No one wants that.

Oliver I'll have to when I'm eighteen.

Rita You silly boy, you think National Service is for the likes of you?

They don't take ... I just mean — some people are exempt.

Alfred It's no life, believe me.

And the conversation is over. Audrey busies herself. Alfred likewise: he looks through the mail. Rita joins him. Oliver doesn't take his eyes off his parents

You shouldn't have dressed him up like that.

Rita You don't know the half of it. He wanted to be Julius Caesar!

She's right, you know, something about your eyes. (*Taking the mail from him*) This can wait, no one died; come with me into the garden.

Oliver deliberately sweeps something off a table or shelf, breaking it

Oliver You went to the war. Jonathan did his National Service in Germany.

Rita Honestly, Oliver, how many things must you break?

Beat

Alfred By the time you grow up all that will be over.

Oliver No it won't: the commies. And if everyone else is going —

Rita George came to see you; why don't you go and see if you can find him?

Alfred Who do you mean, "everyone else"? Have your friends been saying something?

Outside, Flea appears down the path. He's wearing an old World War II gas mask over his face

Have they, Oliver?

Oliver shakes his head

This George?

Oliver shakes his head

Then others? Those gangs? Tell me, I want to know.

Oliver They haven't! I'd clobber them if they did. They're bastards!

Audrey Ssshhh. Come here, Olly. (*She holds up the comic book*)

Alfred (*to Rita*) It's getting worse here.

Rita It's all right. Children —

Alfred Thugs. (*Turning on Oliver; suddenly incensed*) Will they be down there now? Can you point them out? Those bastards have to learn who's boss, you hear me?

But Oliver is mesmerized by the man who is now framed in the doorway. (Perhaps Flea doesn't come down the path, but now appears in the door, alarmingly, as if out of nowhere.) As the family turns to look, the kettle gives off its shrill whistle. They stare

Flea removes his gas mask and drops it. And he's a boy, really — perhaps as young as 16, no older than 19. He is cocksure, charismatic and restless; and now, without the gas mask, Teddy-boyish. He is chewing gum. He smoothes his hair back into its quiff and puts a cigarette behind his ear. He can't be heard over the kettle whistle

Flea Found it this morning. I'll sell it to you.

Alfred What?

Flea Or chewing-gum, pocketknives, darts, magazines, yo-yos, pictures of the coronation ...

Rita Audrey. Audrey!

Audrey takes the kettle off the stove

Flea Matches, marbles, watches, fags.

Beat

Alfred No. Thank you. Not today.

Flea You sure?

Alfred Yes. Goodbye.

Oliver (*to no one; amazed*) Flea!

Beat

Rita Olly? (*To Flea*) Are you ...?

Flea (*to Oliver*) Hello. The shy one. Where's your friend? I thought you shared his legs. The rainbow brothers. I saw you yesterday. That's a good secret spot you two have in the trees.

Rita (*laughing*) Flea?

Alfred What?

Beat. Flea looks from Rita to Oliver

Flea What's she telling me, eh?

Rita *Flea, Alfred!*

Flea *(to Rita)* You got something, have you? Pests? That what you mean? Unwanted things? I could get rid of 'em. I could do that.

Rita Yes, I understand. We're clean. Thank you.

Flea What's your favourite colour? Red? *(He produces a small, red card from his pocket and holds it out to Rita)* A delineation of your character.

Rita laughs and stares at Flea. She doesn't take the card. Beat

Nice place.

He puts the card away. Beat

So — Flea. There's traps. Poison. But what I have *(to Oliver)* is better than that. A gift. A dangerous one, but — it ain't right to neglect a gift. I haven't slept for four nights on the trot.

Alfred Please, stop. Don't speak to my son.

Rita That's right, Flea. *(She extracts the gun and aims it at him)*

Audrey starts

Another peep out of you, and I'll have to take you down.

Audrey Rita.

Rita *(pulling the trigger)* Bang, bang. Bang!

Oliver laughs; he has permission to react at last

Oliver *(grabbing the gun)* Bang, bang, bang, Flea! / Stick 'em up!

Rita Get out, Flea-boy, bang, bang!

To their surprise, Flea pretends to die, taking the "bullets" Hollywood-style. He is on the floor. They don't know what to do

Audrey Please, get up. Rita ...

Rita It's just a joke, Audrey, I wouldn't waste a *real* bullet on him.

Audrey You shouldn't have done / that.

Rita Why not? He / shouldn't be here.

Alfred Are you all right?

Rita Look at him!

Audrey Please, stand up.

Rita Oh, all right, you're right, he's our guest! Die on my floor, make yourself at home!

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