SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

The Bespoke Overcoat

A Play

Wolf Mankowitz

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



© WOLF MANKOWITZ, 1953

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 transmitted, stored in a retrieval system, or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, manuscript, typescript, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

Rights of Performance by Amateurs are controlled by SAMUEL FRENCH LTD, 52 FITZROY STREET, LONDON W1P 6JR, 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.**

Licences 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 announcements and on all programmes; and that the integrity of the author's work will be preserved.

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 C

In Theatres or Halls seating Six 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.

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 consent before starting rehearsals or booking a theatre or hall.

ISBN 0 573 04223 3

CHARACTERS

Morry, a tailor
Fender, a warehouse clerk
Ranting, his employer
A Clerk

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Love is a luxury which very poor people can afford, and *The Bespoke Overcoat* is a story of this love. It is not a love which conquers all. Fender does not get enough food, or a tailor-made overcoat, in this life. In life he does not find satisfaction, except in so far as he is able to accept with humour and humility the deprivations forced upon him. It is because this humour and humility is shared with his friend that Fender, in spite of everything, would prefer to go on living. To prefer to go on living is to love in the context of this story and, because this is loving at its most deprived, the story is a sad one.

In producing *The Bespoke Overcoat* that remarkable artist Alec Clunes concentrated entirely upon this feeling which, by its intensity, animates a piece which is not well-constructed. The story was written without any direction for staging or the production of effects. The only stage, the only effects, the only theatre I had in mind were in the heart of a drunken tailor. There was no indication of time past or time present, because a twinge of conscience lasts a moment or a life-time, and *The Bespoke Overcoat* is about the unreasonable conscience felt by the poor who love the poorer with a love which conquers nothing.

So Alec Clunes' production, which was, in effect, the writing of the play for the practical stage, dispensed with sets, used the barest properties, used darkness broken by three constantly moving areas of light, to tell a simple story with great simplicity. He realized that Fender was not a ghost and that this story was not a ghost-story; he understood that *The Bespoke Overcoat* was a sustained, typically over-long Jewish joke—than which there is no sadder and no funnier story. And I am deeply grateful to him for having understood so much, for having made it available to other people, and for having taught me in the process, as he has taught so many other artists, something of the meaning of theatre.

WOLF MANKOWITZ

THE BESPOKE OVERCOAT

SCENE I

The action of the play is distributed among three separate areas permanently set and used in turn.

Area "A", *midstage* R., *is* RANTING'S *warehouse, which consists of a sizeable table, placed obliquely, with a chair or stool* L. *and to the* U.S. *end of it.* U.S. *of the table, and rather behind it, a large rack supports a selection of overcoats on hangers.*

Area "B" *is* D.S.C. *and has no furnishing.*

Area "C", *midstage* L., *is* MORRY'S *room, which consists of a mattress lying obliquely on the floor, and beside it* R., *at the* U.S. *end, a chair.*

These three areas are encompassed by a black surround with entrances D.R., D.L., *and* U.C. *During the entire play, these are in total darkness, as are any two of the acting areas not being used. Throughout, the stage directions will be related to the areas described.*

When the curtain rises MORRY *is standing in the area* "B", *with a navy blue overcoat over his arm. A barrel organ is playing, off, and fades out as the light at* "B" *fades in.*

MORRY. Fender dead. That old man Fender dead. Funny thing. You're a good tailor, he used to say. You're a good tailor. No, you're a good tailor. Look around. I don't care where you look, he says, you are a number one tailor. Look at this coat, he says. What, that old coat? A coat must be twenty years old. Mind you, I can tell straightaway by the cross-stitch it's my coat. It's your coat, he shouts. You made it. Twenty-two years ago I come to you for a coat. This is him. I still got him. You got a good point. I tell him, I'm a good tailor. It's only the truth. I'm a good tailor. Straightaway, I see I made a mistake. I fell in. How much, Fender says, will you take to mend a coat like this? I ask you. It's falling to pieces on his back. I told him straight, no nonsense. Look, Fender, I told him, I can run you up a pair of trousers from lining canvas you can walk up Saville Road nobody can tell you from the Prince of Wales. But, Fender, do me a favour. Take the coat somewhere else. A new coat I can make, but the Union says no miracles. A rag, that's all. I got my clients to think about. Good afternoon. A lovely piece of worsted. Mind you, I got a suit length here: in a hundred year you wouldn't see nothing better. Clients. Fender dead. An old man. (*Turns* U.S., *still speaking.*) He sits in that stone

cold warehouse all day long. (*Turns head round to audience.*) Who could mend such a coat? (*Moves slowly* U.S. *to* C. *exit.*) That's enough. (*Light starts to fade.*) Leave me alone. All this nagging, nagging. (*He has gone, and so has the light.*)

SCENE 2

As the light fades in on "C". *sitting cross-legged and hunched on* MORRY'S *mattress is* FENDER. *He rubs his hands.*

FENDER. Oi. How that Morry can thread a needle in this cold, I don't know. Such a cold.

MORRY (*entering* U.S.C.). I got trouble of my own. After all, I'm in Bond Street? I'm a merchant prince? I'm not even a limited company.

FENDER. I thought you was a limited company.

MORRY (*turning*). Me? Never. What do I want with shares and directors? So—what can I do for you? It's late, but . . .

FENDER. To be managing director is not a nice thing? You got no ambition? Terrible cold in here. My old guvernor—managing director three companies. Chairman—six companies. But what a man! (*Rises.*) Look, Morry. I still got no overcoat. Put on the gas ring.

MORRY. Fender! You ain't dead?

FENDER. Sure I'm dead. Would I sit up half the night in the freezing cold if I wasn't dead? I can tell you, I won't be sorry to get back. They got central heating, constant hot water, room service. And the food—as much as you like. Kosher, of course.

MORRY (*holding his head*). I won't touch the rotten brandy.

FENDER. Drinks? You can have what you like, any time, day or night, on the house.

MORRY. Go on. So tell me, Fender. Is it really you?

FENDER (*holding out his hand*). Feel my hand. Feel.

MORRY (*taking his hand*). Believe me, you are cold. That lousy brandy. It kills you. (*Sneezes.*)

FENDER (*sitting on chair*). Gesundheit.

MORRY. Thank you.

FENDER. All I want is to get back. Listen, Morry. You know the first person I met down there?

MORRY. Down there?

FENDER. I tell you, Morry, a secret: everybody goes down there. You know who I met? Lennie.

MORRY. Lennie from Fournier Street?

FENDER. Who else? He's doing the same job. And *what* herrings! I tell you, Morry, I won't be sorry to get back.

MORRY (*kneeling on mattress*). Fender! You don't hold that overcoat

against me, do you Fender? Believe me, if I had known you would catched a cold and died I would give you my own coat.

FENDER. That blankety coat. For that coat I'm here and not at the hotel. Look, Morry. I got nothing against you.

MORRY (*rising to one knee*). You ain't going to haunt me, Fender? You wouldn't haunt an old friend?

FENDER. Don't talk silly, Morry. That haunting is a special job. They don't give it to new residents. For haunting you get a commission.

MORRY (*rising and moving behind* FENDER. *Crossing arms*). So listen, Fender. It goes without saying I am pleased to see you. I'm glad you enjoy being dead. But you won't think I am rude, if I ask what you want of my life?

FENDER. I'll tell you. But first light that gas-ring so at least I won't freeze—listen to me—to death, I nearly said. You don't know, Morry, (*The light begins to fade.*) what sort of life it was at that Ranting clothing company. No wonder I didn't lose any sleep about dying . . . (*The light has gone.*)

SCENE 3

The light fades in on "A". FENDER *is sitting on the stool with his notebook and pencil on the table in front of him. The conversation continues from the previous* SCENE.

FENDER. After that warehouse for forty-three years, any change would be a pleasure. Forty-three years a shipping clerk.

MORRY (*off*). So long?

FENDER. Forty-three years next Purim, if I didn't die before.

(RANTING *enters* D.R. *carrying a board with lists.*)

RANTING (*to behind desk*). And sixty gross denim trousers.

FENDER (*writing*). Sixty gross denim trousers.

RANTING. And forty gross cellaloid collars.

FENDER. Cellaloid collars. Forty gross cellaloid.

RANTING (*tapping with pencil, impatiently*). Cellaloid makes with a C, no S.

FENDER. And what more?

RANTING. Eleven dozen raincoats, Prussian collar.

FENDER. Eleven dozen raincoats.

RANTING. Prussian collar.

FENDER. You know something, Mr. Ranting? It's cold in this warehouse. I said it's cold, Mr. Ranting. I feel the cold something terrible.

RANTING. Fender, I don't think you enjoy your work like in the olden days. (*Sits on table, head turned half* D.S. *towards* FENDER.)

FENDER. What an idea! I enjoy my work? Certainly I enjoy. I feel the cold, that's all.

RANTING. Naturally, you are getting on. The work is hard. Nobody is as young as he used to be.

FENDER. What are you talking, Mr. Ranting? Nobody is as young as he used to be? And how could he?

RANTING. I am saying, Fender, an old man is an old man.

FENDER (*rises*). Certainly. Of course. An old man is an old man. Mr. Ranting, I tell you something: my father, when he was seventy—no, over seventy—he can bend a horseshoe straight with his bare hands. And even he felt the cold.

RANTING (*getting off table*). All I am saying, Fender, is stop driving me mad with your crying "it's so cold, it's so cold". Get a new overcoat; you won't feel it.

FENDER. I make an arrangement with you, Mr. Ranting. I'll take one of the overcoats, the big ones with the sheep-skin lining, and every week from my wages take off a certain sum. (*Holds out his hands.*) A proposition, Mr. Ranting?

RANTING. One of them coats, Fender? Leave me alone. (FENDER *moves as if to speak.*) Hup! A coat like this is worth twenty pound anybody's money. What do you make? With all due respect, Fender, what do you make? You won't live so long to pay off such a coat.

FENDER (*sitting on stool, again*). That's true. So what can you do?

RANTING (*reading from list*). Seventeen dozen pair shooting breeches.

FENDER (*writing*). Seventeen dozen pair breeches.

RANTING. Shooting.

FENDER. Shooting, shooting. (*Indicates the entry in his book.*)

RANTING (*in disgust*). Ah! (*Exit* D.R.)

FENDER (*rising and taking off his coat*). Maybe Morry can mend the old coat again. (*Cross fade lights from* "A" *to* "C".) After all he's a good tailor. (*Turns* U.S. *as the light goes.*)

SCENE 4

(*As the light fades in on* "C" FENDER *is standing* U.S. *of mattress.* MORRY *enters* D.L.)

MORRY. Look, Fender, look. The seams is all rotten. Look, the lining is like ribbons. Look, the material is threadbare.

FENDER. A tailor like you, Morry, to make such a fuss. You should be ashamed.

MORRY (*sitting on chair*). The padding is like an old horse blanket.

FENDER. Who asks for new padding? Only make the coat good. Who cares about the padding, so long as the coat is warm?

MORRY. It can't be done.

FENDER. Don't make jokes, Morry.

MORRY. If I say it can't be done, it can't be done.

FENDER. So, all right, charge a little more.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**