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A Cut in the Rates

A play

Alan Ayckbourn

Samuel French - London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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CHARACTERS

Miss Pickhart
Woman/Rosalinda
Ratchet

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(See also page ii)

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A Cut in the Rates

First transmitted on BBC TV Schools in their "English File" series on 21st January, 1984 with the following cast of characters:

Miss Pickhart	Lavinia Bertram
Woman/Rosalinda	Liza Sadovy
Ratchet	Michael Cashman

The action takes place in a street, a study and a cellar

Time — the present

A Cut in the Rates

The outside of a Victorian terrace house. The front door. An upstairs window is open . It is mid-morning

After a moment, Miss Pickhart comes trotting down the street. She stops at the house and, having taken a rather nervous deep breath, raps on the door with the knocker. She waits, clutching her briefcase. She knocks again

Miss Pickhart *(calling)* Hallo, hallo. *(She knocks some more)*

A woman leans out of the window upstairs

Woman You'll find no-one there, love.
Miss Pickhart Sorry, beg your pardon?
Woman It's all shut up. You'll find no-one.
Miss Pickhart Really? I was under the impression——
Woman Not for seven years. Neither of them.
Miss Pickhart I'm on official business from the Town Hall. Will you let me in, please?
Woman It's nothing to do with me. I'm upstairs. *(She starts to go)*
Miss Pickhart I say, just a moment. I say. I'm from the Town Hall.
Woman Stuff the Town Hall. *(She withdraws her head from the window)*
Miss Pickhart Really. *(She hesitates and starts to go. Then, with fresh resolution)* No. I'm not being fobbed off with that. *(She knocks on the door again)* Come on. If you don't open up, I shall be back with someone to open it for me. Come along. Oh——

The door suddenly swings open as she starts to knock afresh

She sticks her nose round the door and enters cautiously

The interior is rather bleak. She is in a hallway leading to a study with a desk, a desk chair, a filing cabinet and a rocking chair. It all seems curiously deserted

Anyone here? Soneone's here. I know you're here, somebody. Come along, who's here?

Ratchet steps out of the shadows. He is a man of indeterminate age, pale and gaunt, and dressed rather incongruously in white tie and tails

(*Starting*) Ah.

Ratchet Good-day.

Miss Pickhart Good ... morning. Are you ... are you Mr Ratchet? Mr T.L. Ratchet?

Ratchet Thomas Ratchet.

Miss Pickhart Good. It's you I've come to see. I knew you were in. You're the owner of this house?

Ratchet I was. I was indeed.

Miss Pickhart Was?

Ratchet No longer, alas. I moved on.

Miss Pickhart Well, that's not according to our information. I'm from the Rating Office and you are clearly listed in our records as being the owner.

Ratchet Indeed. How strange.

Miss Pickhart And I'm afraid it's you I'm calling upon concerning the little matter of unpaid rates.

Ratchet Terrible, how terrible.

Miss Pickhart It is getting very serious. As you well know. You must do. We've written to you on (*consulting her files*) seven occasions. January twelfth, January twenty eighth, February tenth ...

Ratchet I'm sorry. I'm afraid I've been rather out of touch.

Miss Pickhart You've been away?

Ratchet In a sense.

Miss Pickhart It says here you're an entertainer. Is that so?

Ratchet Some years ago. Not any more.

Miss Pickhart You're retired?
Ratchet Permanently.
Miss Pickhart I see. You seem rather young for ——
Ratchet It was enforced.
Miss Pickhart Oh dear. Were you made redundant?
Ratchet Totally. Please sit down.
Miss Pickhart Thank you. (*She sits*) You know, there are schemes you can ...
Ratchet You look a little tired.
Miss Pickhart Well, yes, a little. I'm not used to ... actually, it's my first day back at work.
Ratchet Holidays?
Miss Pickhart No, no. Illness. I had a — I was a little ill.
Ratchet Seriously?
Miss Pickhart No. Yes. Quite. It was — well, it was a little nervous trouble. My — my fiancé he was ... he was ...
Ratchet You have my every sympathy. I grieve your loss.
Miss Pickhart With another woman.
Ratchet Oh, I see.
Miss Pickhart She was— she was— she just ... she ... she just ... I'm over it now. The little ... So. Enough of me. We did discover, by the by, and I'm sure you're aware of this too, that the Gas and Electricity Boards are also pressing you quite heavily for payment.
Ratchet (*nostalgically*) Ah, the dear old Gas Board.
Miss Pickhart If you'll pardon my asking, do you live alone?
Ratchet Alone?
Miss Pickhart I don't mean to pry.
Ratchet I'm never alone.
Miss Pickhart Ah.
Ratchet I wish to God I was.
Miss Pickhart I'm merely trying to establish, you see, whether you're ...
Ratchet My wife died.
Miss Pickhart I am sorry.
Ratchet Seven years ago.
Miss Pickhart Was she ... she must have been very young.
Ratchet Twenty-five.

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