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Red Peppers

A Comedy with Music

by Noël Coward

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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ISBN 978-0-573-62442-1 Printed in U.S.A. #912

RED PEPPERS

Produced by John C. Wilson at the National Theatre in New York City on November 24, 1936, as one of a series of nine one-act plays by Noel Coward, under the title of "TONIGHT AT EIGHT-THIRTY." The play was directed by the author and the cast was as follows:

GEORGE PEPPER	*Noel Coward.*
LILY PEPPER	*Gertrude Lawrence.*
BERT BENTLEY	*Anthony Pelissier.*
MR. EDWARDS	*Alan Webb.*
MABEL GRACE	*Joyce Carey.*
ALF	*Kenneth Carten.*

The action of the play takes place on the stage, a dressing-room, and the stage again of the Palace of Varieties in one of the smaller English provincial towns.

The time is Saturday night, present day.

Sheet music, two songs, available $1.25 each, plus postage

RED PEPPERS

First produced at the Opera House, Manchester, and subsequently at the Phœnix Theatre, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.2, in January, 1936, with the following cast of characters:

GEORGE PEPPER	*Noel Coward.*
LILY PEPPER	*Gertrude Lawrence.*
BERT BENTLEY	*Anthony Pelissier.*
MR. EDWARDS	*Alan Webb.*
MABEL GRACE	*Alison Leggatt.*
ALF	*Kenneth Carten.*

The action of the play takes place on the stage, a dressing-room, and the stage again of the Palace of Varieties in one of the smaller English provincial towns.

The time is Saturday night, present day.

RED PEPPERS

The interlude occurs in The Palace Theatre of Varieties in one of the smaller English provincial towns on a Saturday night.

GEORGE *and* LILY PEPPER *are a singing and dancing comedy act. They are both somewhere in the thirties. They have been married for many years and in the Profession since they were children. Their act consists of a "Man About Town" Dude number, for which they wear smooth red wigs, tails, silk hats and canes, and a "Sailor" number, for which they wear curly red wigs, sailor clothes with exaggerated bell-bottomed trousers and carry telescopes.*

GEORGE *and* LILY *have just finished one number before a front cloth street scene.*

GEORGE. If you will allow my wife and I time to change our costumes, we will give you our famous nautical extravaganza.—Thank you, Bert. (*He runs off to* R.)

(*The orchestra plays one blaring refrain of their sailor number, at the end of which they enter doing a sailor's roll with their telescopes under their arms. In the middle of the number they do their patter, which consists of a series of well-worn quick-fire gags, then they do one more refrain, a soi-disant hornpipe and their exit, in course of which* LILY *drops her telescope.*)

SAILOR NUMBER: "HAS ANYBODY SEEN OUR SHIP?"

Verse 1.

BOTH. What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
So the saying goes.
We're not tight but we're none too bright,
Great Scott! I don't suppose!

We've lost our way
And we've lost our pay,
And to make the thing complete
We've been and gone and lost the bloomin' fleet!

Refrain 1.

Has anybody seen our ship,
The H.M.S. "Peculiar"?
We've been on shore
For a month or more,
And when we see the Captain we shall get
"what for."
Heave ho, me hearties,
Sing Glory Halleluiah.
A lady bold as she could be
Pinched our whistles at "The Golden Key,"
Now we're in between the devil and the deep
blue sea!
Has anybody seen our ship?

(*Ad lib. from the orchestra.*)

LILY. Here, George! Who was that lady I saw you walking down the street with the other morning?

GEORGE. That wasn't a lady, that was my wife!

LILY. Keep it clean. Keep it fresh. Keep it fragrant!

GEORGE. Was that your little dog I saw you with in the High Street?

LILY. Yes, that was my little dog.

GEORGE. What's his name?

LILY. Fruit Salts.

GEORGE. Fruit Salts?

LILY. Yes, Fruit Salts.

GEORGE. Why?

LILY. Ask him—Eno's!

GEORGE. Keep it clean. Keep it fresh. Keep it fragrant! (*To* VIOLINIST.) It'll never get well if you pick it. (*To* LILY.) Why did you leave school?

LILY. Appendicitis.

GEORGE. Appendicitis?

LILY. Yes, appendicitis.
GEORGE. What do you mean—appendicitis?
LILY. Couldn't spell it!
GEORGE. I heard you had adenoids.
LILY. Adenoids?
GEORGE. Yes, adenoids.
LILY. Don't speak of it.
GEORGE. Why not?
LILY. Adenoids me!
BOTH. La la la la—la la la la!
GEORGE. I saw a very strange thing the other day.
LILY. What was it?
GEORGE. Twelve men standing under one umbrella and they didn't get wet.
LILY. How's that?
GEORGE. It wasn't raining!
LILY. Do you know what a skeleton is?
GEORGE. Do I know what a skeleton is?
LILY. Do you know what a skeleton is?
GEORGE. Yes.
LILY. Well, what is it?
GEORGE. A lot of bones with the people scraped off!
LILY. Keep it clean. Keep it fresh. Keep it fragrant!
GEORGE. Why is getting up at six o'clock in the morning like a pig's tail?
LILY. I don't know, George. Why is getting up at six o'clock in the morning like a pig's tail?
GEORGE. Twirly.
LILY. Where did you go last night?
GEORGE. The cemetery.
LILY. Anyone dead?
GEORGE. All of 'em!

Refrain 2.

BOTH. Has anybody seen our ship,
The H.M.S. "Disgusting"?
We've three guns aft
And another one fore,
And they've promised us a funnel for the next world war.

Heave ho, me hearties,
The quarter-deck needs dusting.
We had a binge last Christmas year,
Nice plum pudding and a round of beer,
But the Captain pulled his cracker and we cried, "Oh, dear!
Has anybody seen our ship?"

Refrain 3.

Has anybody seen our ship,
The H.M.S. "Suggestive"?
She sailed away
Across the bay,
And we haven't had a smell of her since New Year's Day.
Heave ho, me hearties,
We're getting rather restive.
We pooled our money, spent the lot,
The world forgetting, by the world forgot,
Now we haven't got a penny for the you know what!
Has anybody seen our ship?

Verse 2. (*If necessary.*)

What's to be done with the girls on shore
Who lead our Tars astray?
What's to be done with the drinks galore
That make them pass away?
We got wet ears
From our first five beers,
After that we lost control,
And now we find we're up the blinking pole!

(*Their exit consists of a neat walk off together, one behind the other, with their telescopes under their arms. Unfortunately, in course of this snappy finale,* LILY, *who is behind* GEORGE, *drops her telescope and hurriedly retrieves it, thereby ruining the whole effect.* GEORGE *shoots her a look of fury and mutters something to her out of the corner of his mouth. The* CURTAIN *falls and*

they take a call before it, breathless and smiling, but with a certain quality of foreboding behind their smiles.)

The CURTAIN *rises on the interior of their dressing-room. It is a fairly squalid room, for although they are comparatively well known in the provinces, they have never, to date, achieved the dignity of the star dressing-room or the pride of topping the bill. The room is three sides of a square. Down stage on the* R. *there is a door leading to the passage. Up stage* C. *there is a lavatory basin. Up* R. *and up* L. *are wooden hanging arrangements for clothes.*

GEORGE'S *dressing-place is on the right, and* LILY'S *is on the left.*

(*See Photograph of Scene.*)

As the CURTAIN *rises on the scene they both enter in silence, but wearing expressions of set rage. They are still breathless and extremely hot.* GEORGE *goes to his dressing-place and* LILY *goes to hers. They both take off their wigs and fling them down, then, still in silence, they proceed to rip off their sailor clothes. These are made with zippers in order to facilitate their quick change.* LILY *is wearing a brassière and silk knickers, and* GEORGE *a vest and drawers. They both have black shoes with taps on them and black socks and sock suspenders.*

GEORGE (R.). Now then. (*He sits.*)

LILY (*putting on her dressing-gown,* L.). Now then what?

GEORGE (*contemptuously*). Now then what!

LILY. I don't know what you're talking about. (*She sits.*)

GEORGE. Oh, you don't, don't you?

LILY. No, I don't, so shut up.

GEORGE. I suppose you don't know you mucked up the whole exit!

LILY. It wasn't my fault.

GEORGE. Whose fault was it then—Mussolini's?

LILY (*with sarcasm*). I see. Funny, hey?

GEORGE (*witheringly*). I suppose you didn't drop your prop, did you? And having dropped it, you didn't have to go back for it, leaving me to prance off all by meself—who d'you think you are, Rebla?

LILY. Never mind about that—the exit was too quick.

GEORGE. It was the same as it's always been.

LILY. It was too quick, I tell you, it's been too quick the whole week; the whole number's too quick——

GEORGE. Bert Bentley takes that number at the same tempo as he's always done.

LILY. You and your Bert Bentley. Just because he stands you a Welsh rarebit at the Queen's you think he's God Almighty.

GEORGE. Bert Bentley's the best conductor in the North of England and don't you make any mistake about it.

LILY. Best conductor my foot! I suppose he thinks it's funny to see us leaping up and down the stage like a couple of greyhounds.

GEORGE. If you're a greyhound, I'm Fred Astaire.

LILY. Oh, you're Fred Astaire all right, with a bit of Pavlova thrown in—you're wonderful, you are—there's nothing you can't do, except behave like a gentleman.

GEORGE. Oh, so you expect me to behave like a gentleman, do you? That's a good one, coming from you.

LILY. Oh, shut up, you make me tired.

GEORGE. I make *you* tired! I suppose it was me that mucked up the exit—I suppose it was me that dropped me bloody telescope!

LILY (*heated—rises and crosses* C.). Now look here, George Pepper——

GEORGE (*rises and crosses* C.). Stop George Peppering me—why can't you admit it when you're in the wrong? —You mucked up the exit—nobody else did—you did!

LILY. Well, what if I did? It was an accident, wasn't it? I didn't do it on purpose.

GEORGE. It doesn't matter how you did it or why you did it—you did it.

LILY (*screaming*). All right, I did it!

GEORGE (*triumphantly*). Well, don't do it again.

(*There is a knock on the door.*)

LILY. Who is it?

ALF (*outside*). Me. Alf.

LILY. All right, come in.

(ALF, *the callboy, enters. He is laden with the* PEPPERS' *discarded evening suits, silk hats and canes. He plumps them down.*)

ALF. There.

GEORGE. Thanks. (*He gets some money out of his coat pocket.*) Here, tell Fred to pop out and get me twenty Player's and a large Guinness.

LILY (*taking her clothes*). Why can't you wait and have it with your steak?

GEORGE. You mind yours and I'll mind mine.

ALF. You'll have to wait until Mabel Grace is finished.

LILY (*taking his clothes*). She's been finished for years as far as I'm concerned.

GEORGE. What's the matter with Mabel Grace?

LILY. Ask the public, dear; just ask the public.

ALF (*about to leave*). Same as usual, I suppose, between the houses?

GEORGE. Yes, and tell 'em not to forget the salt, like they did last night.

ALF. Righto.

(ALF *goes out.*)

(LILY *starts to pack various things into a large hamper which has emblazoned on it in large black letters:* "*The Red Peppers.*")

GEORGE. What did you want to say that about Mabel Grace for in front of him?

LILY (*grandly*). It happens to be my opinion.

GEORGE. Well, in future you'd better keep your opinions to yourself in front of strangers.

LILY (*mumbling*). If you're so fond of Mabel Grace I wonder you don't go and ask her for her autograph—she'd drop dead if you did. (*She goes to the basin to wash.*)

GEORGE. Mabel Grace is an artist and don't you forget it—she may be a bit long in the tooth now, but she's a bigger star than you'll ever be, so there!

LILY (*crossing* L. *for a towel*). You make me sick, sucking up to the top-liners.

GEORGE (*washing at the basin up* C.). Who sucks up to the top-liners?

LILY. You do—look at Irene Baker!

GEORGE. What's the matter with Irene Baker?

LILY. When last heard from she was falling down drunk at the Empire, Hartlepool.

GEORGE (*coming to her*). That's a dirty lie: Irene never touches a drop till after the show, and well you know it.

LILY (*contemptuously*). Irene! It was Miss Baker this and Miss Baker that, the last time you saw her.

GEORGE. That's all you know. (*He crosses* R. *above the basket.*)

LILY. Trying to make me think you got off with her, eh? What a chance!

GEORGE. Oh, shut up nagging!

LILY (*muttering*). Irene——!

GEORGE. If a day ever dawns when you can time your laughs like Irene Baker does, I'll give you a nice red apple!

LILY. Time my laughs! That's funny. Fat lot of laughs I get when you write the gags.

GEORGE (*grandly*). If you're dissatisfied with your material you know what you can do with it. (*Putting on his dressing-gown.*)

LILY. I know what I'd like to do with it.

GEORGE. You can't even do a straight walk off without balling it up.

LILY. Oh, we're back at that again, are we?

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