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SF PERUSALS

THE NORMAN CONQUESTS

Round and Round the Garden

A Comedy in Two Acts

by Alan Ayckbourn

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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THE NORMAN CONQUESTS, by Alan Ayckbourn. "Table Manners," "Living Together," and "Round and Round the Garden." Directed by Eric Thompson; setting and lighting by Robert Randolph; costumes by Noel Taylor; stage manager, Milt Commons. Presented by Lester Osterman, Richard Horner, in association with Martin Richard Richards and Victor D'Arc, Robert Fryer, James Cresson and Michael Codron. Opening night was December 7, 1975 at the Morosco Theater, 217 West 45th Street.

THE CAST

NORMAN ..... Richard Benjamin

ANNIE ..... Paula Prentiss

TOM ..... Ken Howard

SARAH ..... Estelle Parsons

REG ..... Barry Nelson

RUTH ..... Carole Shelley

ACT I

Scene 1

The garden. Saturday, 5.30 p.m.

The garden is overlooked by a Victorian, country-vicarage-type house with terrace and french windows leading directly into the sitting-room. Once obviously well laid out, it is now wildly overgrown. There is an entrance to the tennis court and the road, and another—above an old statue and through some brambles—which leads round to the same direction: these also go to the front of the house

Tom, a thoughtful, pensive man, enters above the statue. He is casually dressed in week-end country clothes. He stands gazing rather aimlessly about him, then wanders down to a barrel on which is a cup and saucer. He picks up the cup and is surprised to find the saucer stuck to it. After considering this for a moment, he replaces cup and saucer

Annie enters from the tennis-court. Red-faced and shiny, she wears a very old sweater, button-up and too large, jeans and gumboots. She also has on a pair of gardening gloves and carries six roses and a pair of scissors. She stops on seeing Tom

Annie (*casually*) Oh, Tom. Hallo.
Tom Hallo, Annie.
Annie Didn't know you were here this afternoon.
Tom Yes. I thought I'd just look up your cat if I could. See that paw of his.
Annie Oh, yes, fine.
Tom I put a dressing on it but it's probably come off by now.
Annie Probably.

A pause

Tom Lovely day.
Annie Yes.
Tom You'll be going off soon, I take it.
Annie Yes.
Tom Oh. Have a good time.
Annie Thanks.
Tom Don't get lost.
Annie I can't get far in a day. Any sign of Reg and Sarah?
Tom Haven't seen them.
Annie Hope they're not going to be late. I'll have to hang on till they come just to make sure they know where everything is for Mother.

Tom Yes.
Annie She's been lying up there moaning all day because I'm going away. You'd think I was off for a year, instead of a couple of nights.
Tom I'll look in if you like. Make sure they're coping.
Annie They'll manage.
Tom Nice of them to offer, wasn't it?
Annie Sarah and Reg?
Tom Yes.
Annie (*putting five roses on the terrace and clipping the sixth*) Why shouldn't they? She's his mother, too, after all. It's high time they did offer. They get off very lightly. So does Ruth for that matter. They're all perfectly happy to leave me to cope for nine-tenths of the year. The least they can do is to spare me a couple of days. Not that I'll ever get Ruth to do anything. Far too busy with her high finance. But Reg and Sarah are perfectly capable . . .
Tom Quite.
Annie What will you be doing?
Tom When?
Annie This week-end.
Tom Oh, you know. Mooching about.
Annie On your own?
Tom Probably.
Annie That's what I'll be doing.
Tom Ah. Well, I'll think of you, wherever you are, mooching about while I'm—mooching about here.
Annie Thanks. (*Pause*) Silly, really.
Tom What?
Annie Well—both of us in different parts of the country, stuck on our own . . .
Tom Yes. Funny thing, life.
Annie Yes. (*Pause*) What's the time?
Tom Er—just gone five-thirty.
Annie Oh.
Tom When are you leaving?
Annie I'm catching the bus in the village. That's providing Reg and Sarah arrive in time.
Tom I can run you down in the car.
Annie No . . .
Tom If you look like being . . .
Annie No, I'd rather walk.
Tom Won't you have a case?
Annie No. It's all right. I don't mind carrying suitcases. I quite enjoy it. The walk . . .
Tom Oh. Any idea where that cat is?
Annie Probably outside here somewhere. I must get on. Prepare for my lone trip.
Tom See you before you go then.
Annie Yes.

Tom Better search out my patient. (*Calling*) Pussy, puss, puss . . .

Tom goes off by the tennis-court

Annie stands for a moment looking after Tom

Annie (*at length, exasperated*) Oh . . .

Annie goes off to the house, taking the cup and saucer

A pause

Norman enters stealthily by the statue. Despite the bright sunshine of the late July afternoon, he has on a rather grimy mac and a woolly hat. He is bearded, a rather aimless sort of beard. He carries a battered cardboard suitcase. Not surprisingly, he is perspiring furiously. As the house comes into his view, he stops, smiles to himself, puts down his case and, at peace with the world, breathes in the country air

Tom (*off, distant*) Kitty—kitty—kitty—cat—cat—cat—kitty—kitty—kitty . . .

Norman, on hearing this, dives swiftly for cover, forgetting his case which he leaves standing in the middle of the path. Tom's voice fades into the distance. Norman remains hidden

Annie enters and picks up the remaining roses. She stops as she sees Norman's case. She approaches, curious, and stares at it. She looks about her

Annie Hallo? Anyone about?
Norman (*hidden, muffled*) Annie . . .

Annie stares about her

Annie . . .
Annie Norman?
Norman (*showing himself*) Annie!
Annie Oh—you've come . . .
Norman Yes.
Annie But what are you . . . ?
Norman I couldn't wait. I had to see you.
Annie But we agreed . . . Oh, Norman, honestly. You are the limit . . .
Norman (*passionately*) Oh, my darling . . . (*He moves romantically to her but stops suddenly. With a cry*) Oh—God!
Annie (*alarmed*) What's the matter?
Norman These bloody brambles. Why doesn't somebody clear these bloody brambles?
Annie Hang on—stop flailing about . . . (*She takes his hand to pull him clear*)

Norman (*yelling*) Don't pull! Don't pull! It's impaled in my leg.
Annie (*bending to free him*) All right. Wait—wait . . .
Norman Aaaah!
Annie Ssh.
Norman You must have hands like asbestos. (*As Annie frees him*) Aaah! Aaah! Aaah! (*Hopping away and sitting on the barrel*) God!
Annie Mother's resting, you know. You'll wake her up.
Norman (*rolling up his trouser leg*) Look at this. I'm scratched right down my leg.
Annie If Mother's woken up before she's ready to wake up, she doesn't know where she is. It takes me an hour to explain.
Norman Look, blood—bleeding . . .
Annie Let's see. (*She bends to look*)
Norman Careful! Deformed for life.
Annie Hold these. (*She hands Norman the roses*)
Norman (*taking them and dropping them immediately with another yell*) Aaah!
Annie Ssh.
Norman It's a death trap, this garden.
Annie Look, will you please be quiet.
Norman Only been here two minutes, lost three pints of blood. (*He sucks his hand*)
Annie Oh, Norman, do shut up. You're so weedy.
Norman (*indignantly*) Weedy? (*He rises*)
Annie A real weed. (*She starts to pick up the flowers*)
Norman (*romantic again*) Oh, Annie . . . (*He reaches out and touches her leg*)
Annie (*pulling away, irritated*) Don't. Just a minute.

Norman stares at her a second, then sits again

Norman I'm exhausted.
Annie I should think so. In that coat.
Norman It was raining in Fulham.
Annie Was it?
Norman Metaphorically it was.
Annie Oh.
Norman (*expansively*) Ah, the sun, the sun, the sun . . .
Annie Norman . . .
Norman Mmm?
Annie What are you doing here?

Norman laughs secretively

No, seriously, Norman. What's the point of our making all these arrangements, of trying to make absolutely sure no-one was going to get upset—no-one was going to get hurt and then you turn up here.
Norman I wanted to see you. I was frightened you'd changed your mind.
Annie But I'm supposed to meet you. We're supposed to meet. In the village, at the back of the post office, seven o'clock.

Norman I got here early.
Annie Well, you'll have to go away for an hour. I haven't even packed.
Norman Where am I supposed to go?
Annie I don't know. Go and walk round the Abbey.
Norman That's five miles away. I'm not walking five miles just to wander round some ruin with a suitcase.
Annie I don't want you here when Reg and Sarah arrive. And I've got to see them in. I've got to show them where everything is for Mother. All her bottles and pills and God knows what. And which is their towel. I mean, there's masses. I can't just rush off. Anyway, Tom's here . . .
Norman (*scornfully*) Tom.
Annie He's only round the front of the house, looking for the cat.
Norman Tom. Ha!
Annie And don't say it like that. I don't say Ruth, ha!
Norman I don't mind if you do. I say it.
Annie Not to her face, you don't.
Norman How do you know?
Annie I bet you don't. I've seen you with her.
Norman How do you know what I say to her face behind your back?
Annie I know you. More important I know my sister.
Norman She'll have got my note by now.
Annie Note?
Norman Telling all.
Annie All what?
Norman It's all over between us. That ever since we stayed here last Christmas, something wonderful happened. You and I were all that mattered. That everything else . . .
Annie You didn't? You didn't say that?
Norman That the love between us . . .
Annie If you said that, I warn you, I'll ring her up this minute . . . (*She moves away*)
Norman (*alarmed*) Where are you going?
Annie To ring her up.
Norman All right, all right. I didn't. I didn't leave her a note. Promise.
Annie Promise?
Norman Promise.
Annie So long as you haven't. I mean—well, after all she is my sister. I'm fond of her. Quite. We've already agreed it's stupid to—upset everything just for us. We're being terribly adult, aren't we? You said we were—in your letter . . . Far better we two just go away quietly to a little hotel somewhere, get it all off our chests—out of our system—God, I'm making it sound like a laxative—you know what I mean—work it all off, that's what I mean. Then you go back to Ruth and live happily ever after—or as happily as you can seeing it's Ruth and I come back to Mother and—and—look after her . . .
Norman And then? When your mother finally pegs out?
Annie Oh well. I'll face that when it comes.
Norman Yes, you'll have to.

Annie There's Tom. He's hovering in the background.
Norman The creeping vet.
Annie He's done a lot to help here, you know. He did all the kitchen ceiling for me. Two coats. He's a jolly good vet, too. He has a marvellous way with animals. Actually, he's better with them than he is with people really.
Norman You'll have to start going around on all fours then, won't you?
Annie Oh, shut up. I don't know why you're so nasty about him, he likes you very much.
Norman He takes you for granted. Here you are—a beautiful girl. Vibrant. He could marry you tomorrow. He could make you happy. And what does he do? He spends more time with that cat than he does with you.
Annie Well, he's a vet, isn't he?
Norman Vet. V.E.T. Very Egocentric Twit. He doesn't deserve you.
Annie And you do?
Norman No. But I'm strangely engaging.
Annie No, you're not, you're foul. I don't think I want to come with you after all. I've changed my mind. I'll give Mother a blanket bath, it'll be much more fun.
Norman I love you.
Annie Oh, Norman . . . When you look like that, I almost believe you. You look like a—what are those things?
Norman Greek gods. (*He does a "Greek god" attitude*)
Annie Old English sheepdogs.
Norman Oh, great.
Annie They're super dogs. All woolly and double-ended.
Norman I'm not woolly and double-ended.
Annie You are a bit. You're like a badly built haystack.
Norman I'm going.
Annie Yes, you'd better before Tom . . .
Norman (*taking her hand, suddenly very serious and intense*) Good-bye, my darling.
Annie (*suppressing her laughter*) Oh, Norman, do stop it.
Norman What?
Annie Oh, I'm sorry, I . . . (*She starts laughing*)
Norman (*hurt*) What?
Annie It's just you're so—terribly quaint.
Norman (*huffily*) If it's quaint to be romantic . . . I mean, if you prefer me to knock you down . . .
Annie Try it.
Norman If that's what you want. Where's the romance? Where's the romance gone? Destroyed by the cynics and liberationists. Woe betide the man who dares to pay a woman a compliment today—he bends to kiss her hand and wham—the old karate chop on the back of the neck and she's away with his wallet. Forget the flowers, the chocolates, the soft word—rather woo her with a self-defence manual in one hand and a family planning leaflet in the other.
Annie Oh, Norman, you are stupid.

Norman Yes. I really do love you, Annie.
Annie Do you?
Norman Yes.
Annie That's a pity.
Norman Why?
Annie For everyone. Golly, look at this garden. It's like a jungle. Old Mr Purdy's got his leg again. He's been off a fortnight.
Norman (*uninterested*) Oh.
Annie Mrs Purdy says it's a war wound but I think it's gout. He's a terrific drinker. All day. The potting shed's full of his empties. He says they're for weed killer but he's got enough there to defoliate the whole of Sussex. If you look out of the window at tea time, you can see him draped over his spade. Like an old bag of fertilizer . . .
Norman Seven o'clock, then, back of the post office. (*He goes to move*)
Annie Seven o'clock. I say, it's awfully exciting in a way, isn't it? I mean, do you know I haven't been away from this place for nearly two years, what with Mother and one thing and another. I'm longing to see the sea again. I've forgotten what it looks like.
Norman Ah.
Annie Where did you say we were going? Hastings. Why did you choose Hastings?
Norman Well—it looks sort of close on the map.
Annie I'm not complaining. I mean, I'm sure Hastings is super.
Norman Yes. As a matter of fact, I wasn't able to get a vacancy after all —not in Hastings.
Annie Oh.
Norman It's summer, you see.
Annie Yes, I've noticed.
Norman Ah, well, I'd forgotten.
Annie So we're not going to Hastings?
Norman I'm afraid not.
Annie Where are we going?
Norman Well, I managed after a bit of trouble to get us fixed up in East Grinstead. They had a cancellation.
Annie (*digesting this*) Oh, well. Super. East Grinstead, then. I haven't been there, either.
Norman It was the best I could do. It's on the way to Hastings.
Annie Lovely.
Norman (*leering*) Not that we'll see much of it—eh?
Annie (*blankly*) How do you mean?
Norman Well . . .
Annie Oh. (*Doubtfully*) Oh, yes. (*She thinks*) I expect we'll want some fresh air at some stage though, won't we? I mean, we won't—all the time. I mean, if it's a hotel they'll want to make the beds and—change the soap—so I expect we'll get time for a bit of a snoop around, just a bit.
Norman (*unconvinced*) Oh, yes . . .
Annie It'd be a shame to go all the way to East Grinstead and then not

see anything of it at all. I mean, what the hell, let's do what we said and have a really *dirty* week-end. I mean, absolutely *filthy* but, you know, if it's all . . . Makes Jill a dull girl. (*She laughs*) God, I'm putting this awfully badly.

Norman You've just pulled a button off.

Annie Mmm?

Norman Your woolly thing. You've just pulled the button off.

Annie (*finding it in her hand, absently*) Oh, yes. (*She puts the button in her pocket*)

They are both embarrassed now

Norman I stopped off in the village. Bought some new pyjamas.

Annie Oh. Super. In my honour?

Norman Yes.

Annie Better than wearing the same ones you do with Ruth.

Norman Yes.

Annie I mean, just because you're unfaithful there's no need for your pyjamas to be as well.

Norman No.

Annie I'm afraid you'll have to put up with my sensible flannelette. They're quite pretty but they're going round the knees and elbows.

Norman Ah.

A pause

Annie Well.

Norman Yes.

A pause

Would you like to have a look at my pyjamas now?

Annie Well, I . . .

Norman A sort of sneak preview.

Annie I think I'd rather wait until . . . (*She pauses—listens*) Was that the bell?

Norman Bell?

Annie Ssh. Mother's bell. She's awake. Now, you must go. See you at seven. (*As she hurries into the house*) I'll have a bath before I leave.

Annie goes into the house

Norman stares after her. He stands looking uncertain. He opens his case and removes a pair of cellophane-wrapped pyjamas. He stares at them critically. He places them on the statue and steps back to see what effect they have from a distance

Tom (*off*) Kitty—kitty—kitty . . .

Norman hides behind the statue

Tom enters from the tennis-court

Cat—cat—cat—kitty—kitty—kitty. (*He spies the cat up a tall tree*) Ah, there you are.

Norman appears, staring in disbelief. Tom turns from looking up at the tree, sees the case, stares at it, turns, and sees Norman

Oh, hallo, Norman. Didn't know you were here.

Norman Tom. (*He shakes Tom's hand*)

Tom You and Ruth down to lend a hand, are you?

Norman How do you mean?

Tom With Annie going away. Are you down to help out?

Norman More or less.

Tom Where's Ruth?

Norman She's not here.

Tom Oh. I thought you said she was.

Norman No, I never said she was. You're the one who said she was.

Tom (*deciding he has lost the thread of this conversation*) Look at that daft animal.

Norman Mmm?

Tom See it? The cat—up there.

Norman Oh, yes.

Tom (*calling*) Avoiding me—aren't you? (*To Norman*) Septic paw.

Norman Uggh.

Tom Last time I looked at it, we two had a mild disagreement. (*To the cat*) Didn't we? Yes. (*To Norman*) Not the most sociable animal.

Norman Vicious brute. Kills on sight for pleasure.

Tom Well, I can't really treat a patient who's thirty foot up a tree. Think I'll call it a day. No way of luring him down.

Norman You could sling a brick at it.

Tom Hardly.

Norman Breach of professional etiquette?

Tom Something of the sort. (*Seeing Norman's pyjamas*) Good Lord, what on earth are those?

Norman Ssh. They look like wild pyjamas. Don't disturb them, they're nesting.

Tom Yours, are they?

Norman Yes. I better put them away before they savage someone. (*Snatching them, pretending they are attacking him, then cramming them back in the suitcase*) Go on, get in you brutes. In, in—get in. (*He slams the lid triumphantly*) The tops are all right, it's the bottoms you've got to watch.

Tom (*impassive through this*) Seen Annie yet?

Norman No. Yes. Why?

Tom Well. What's your opinion?

Norman What of?

Tom Man to man? Between you and me?

Norman What?

Tom I mean, it's very odd, isn't it?

Norman What is?

Tom Her holiday. I mean, there's nothing wrong in having a holiday, but why the mystery?

Norman Mystery?

Tom Practically sneaking off. Won't say where she's going. What she's going to do.

Norman Perhaps she doesn't want people to know.

Tom Not like Annie, that. She's usually very open. Frank sort of person. No secrets. Know what I mean?

Norman Really.

Tom I mean, I've known her a long time . . .

Norman That doesn't give you ownership of her.

Tom No. Gives me interest. Concern.

Norman I should stick to coaxing cats out of trees.

Tom (*thoughtfully*) Hastings.

Norman Eh?

Tom I've got a feeling she's set her sights on Hastings.

Norman Oh?

Tom She keeps bringing it up. In passing. You know—"Do you think it'll be warm in Hastings at this time of year?"—that sort of thing. Sometimes she tries to confuse the scent. Makes it Deal or Brighton. But Hastings is the commonest. I'm betting even money on Hastings. (*Calling*) Pussy—pussy—puss. The question is—and I'd like your advice on this, Norman . . . (*He pauses, gazing up into the tree*) The point is, Norman, should I or should I not offer to go to Hastings, too? I've been turning it over in my mind, should I or shouldn't I?

Norman No.

Tom Why is she going, I ask myself. Is she going as a gesture a covert invitation aimed at me? Is she asking me to come with her, in fact?

Norman No.

Tom Is she saying, I'm going to Hastings. If you care about me at all, you must come to Hastings?

Norman No.

Tom Having first, of course, told me, in so many words, by a series of hints exactly where she was going.

Norman Hastings.

Tom Yes.

Norman No. You've got the wrong end of the stick. If you want my opinion, that is subtle woman's language for stuff you, I'm off.

Tom No. I don't see that. I think I'll have to have it out with her.

Norman I wouldn't bother.

Tom I'm giving that cat up for today. Coming in?

Norman No, I'm going.

Tom Oh. I thought you said you were staying.

Norman No, I'm just passing through on my way to East Grinstead.

Tom Really? Business?

Norman Yes. International Association of Assistant Librarians' Annual Conference.

Tom Jolly good.

Norman Exciting. (*Looking up in the tree*) Don't jump! Think of your wife and kittens.
Tom Well, I'd better pop in.

Tom starts to move towards the house. Norman picks up his case

Reg appears round the side of the house. He wears his cap and sports jacket and carries two suitcases and a bundle of magazines tied with string

Reg Oy—oy.
Tom Ah!
Norman Oh, no.
Reg Hallo, hallo. Who's this shifty-looking pair?
Tom Hallo there, Reg.
Reg Tom. (*He slaps him*) Norm. Surprised to see you. You're both looking good. Both looking good.
Tom Yes—yes.
Reg What a day, eh? What a day. Ought to be knocking a ball about, eh? Well, that little lot took us—(*he checks his watch*)—sixty-two minutes exactly. Door to door. Forty-nine, nearly fifty miles as the crow flies. Know the trick? There's a trick to it. Don't take the A two-six-four. Take the A two-seven-two and then branch off on to the B two-one-three-nine. It looks longer but it isn't.
Tom I usually take the A two-eight-one.
Norman Oh, my God.
Reg (*laughing*) How long does that take you?
Tom About an hour and a half.
Reg Door to door?
Tom Yes.
Reg Well, it would. You're going round the houses. If you want to go that way, you'd do better to go through East Grinstead.
Norman (*jumping guiltily*) What, what?
Reg East Grinstead.
Norman Oh.
Tom Is Sarah here?
Reg Yes, yes. I think she went straight up to see Mother. (*Striding about*) Well, look at this for a day. What about this sunshine? Just the ticket. (*Spotting something in the tree*) Hallo, hallo. Anyone here a bird-watcher?
Norman Uh?
Reg Bird-watcher, are you? Like watching birds? (*He laughs*) What do you make of that? Eh? You're a vet. What do you make of that?
Tom Yes.
Norman Good gracious, it's a cat.
Reg Cat. (*He laughs*) See it? Cat.
Tom Silly creature.
Reg Mother's cat, isn't it?
Tom Yes.

Reg Oh. Before I forget. Got another vet joke for you.
Tom Oh, yes.
Reg (*putting his arm round Tom's shoulders*) Question: what happens when a vet walks through a deep puddle? Answer: he gets vater in his vellingtons.
Tom Ha!
Reg Vater in his vellingtons! Heard that the other day. Tickled me.
Norman Ha!
Reg What brings you here today, Norman? I didn't expect to see you. Ruth with you?
Norman No.
Reg Thank goodness for that. No offence, but thank goodness for that.
Tom He's passing through.
Norman Just passing through.
Reg Really?
Tom Going to East Grinstead.
Reg Ah, now. From here? You'll be going from here?
Norman Well, since this is where I am, it seems a good place to start.
Reg Turn left out of here—not right—through the village, then take the right fork past the pub—brings you on to the A two-seven-two. Save you ten miles.
Norman No, I don't fancy that way.
Reg Why not?
Norman I haven't got a car.
Reg Ah, well. Catch the bus.
Norman I'll do that.

Tom wanders to the house

Reg Where are you going?
Tom Just in.
Reg Try and persuade that wife of mine to put the kettle on.
Tom Ah.
Reg Ah!

Tom goes into the house

Norman How is she?
Reg Who?
Norman That wife of yours.
Reg I don't know. She's all right. When I last looked at her. (*He laughs*) Well now, what's going on?
Norman Eh?
Reg She off with Tom? Our Annie? Going off for a sly one with Tom?
Norman Is she?
Reg Obvious. As soon as she wrote to Sarah—asked us to come and look after Mother for the week-end—I thought, hallo, what's up.
Norman And Sarah?
Reg Sarah?

Norman What did she think?

Reg No idea. Didn't ask her. No, she's off with Tom. You could tell he was a bit on edge. Looked guilty. He must have been desperate.

Norman What do you mean, desperate?

Reg I mean. Knowing him. Not exactly one for taking the plunge, is he? Been hanging around here for, what, three years? And I bet you they haven't got further than a fumble on the sofa. Well, I'm glad. Glad for Annie. She's a bright girl. Not a great beauty but her heart's in the right place. Easy temperament, good around the house . . .

Norman All mod. cons., sunny view facing due south.

Reg What?

Norman You talk as if she's a property up for sale.

Reg No. No. All I'm saying . . .

Norman Better check her over for wood-worm while you're at it.

Reg (*laughing*) Check her over for wood-worm, I like that. (*Producing a bag from his pocket*) Want a toffee?

Norman Not at the moment.

Reg (*having one, the last in the bag*) What takes you to East Grinstead, then?

Norman Oh—business.

Reg Business?

Norman In a way.

Reg Oh, yes?

Norman (*winking*) Yes.

Reg (*laughing, knowingly*) Something lined up?

Norman You might say that.

Reg Bit of stuff?

Norman Just a little bit . . .

Reg Lucky chap. Hasn't got a friend, has she?

Norman She's got a sister but she's married.

Reg Oh, well. I'm not fussy. You're on.

Norman Reckon you'd get past Sarah?

Reg Ah. Well. Not seriously, no. (*He sits on the barrel*) I was only joking. I would never . . . Don't believe in that, personally. Mind you, I've been tempted. When you've been married a few years—you can't help window shopping. You know, the old urge. But you keep it under control, don't you? You have to. Well, *you* may not have to. But I have to. Not that there isn't something to be said for it. I've often thought it might actually help a marriage sometimes. It gets a bit stale, between you, you know. I'm not thinking just for me. For her, too. Sarah. I'm not being selfish. Perhaps if she—went off for a few days with someone—she might—well, it might make her a bit more—you know, give her a fresh—get her going again, for God's sake. If you follow me.

Norman Ah.

Reg Mind you, it'd never work for us. Sarah would never dream of going off. Pity. If she did, I could. But we're not like you and Ruth, you see.

Norman What are we like?

Reg Well—easier . . .

Norman There's nothing very easy about Ruth.

Reg No, I didn't mean easy like that, I meant—well, let's face it—you've always had, what shall we say—an unconventional relationship. Ruth was always a nonconformist, you know. Even when we were kids. I envy those types, sometimes. Mother was another, you know. In a different way. That old lady up there's had a life, I can tell you.

Norman I know.

Reg Wouldn't think so now. But she led our father a dance. Poor man really wasn't up to it. Shut himself in up there—pretended it all wasn't happening. Of course it was. Under his own roof sometimes. Well, it was bound to have an effect. Not so much on me—I was the eldest. Don't know what it did to Annie. She was younger. Think she just let it drift over her. Like she does now, most of the time. But Ruth. Ruth was altogether different.

Norman I know, I live with her.

Reg She took it—oddly.

Norman She's a mess.

Reg Putting it bluntly. She's got Mother's looks, mind you. Attractive, wouldn't you say? Difficult for a brother but—striking?

Norman Oh, yes.

Reg Annie and I always said she had our share, as well. Certainly had mine. I don't think Sarah married me for my looks.

Norman I wonder why she did.

Reg I don't know. That's a good question. I must ask her that sometime. (*He gets up*) Well, get going. She'll be looking for me. (*He picks up his suitcase*) Have a good trip. Think of me . . .

Norman I will.

Reg (*moving to the house, feeling the weight of his suitcase*) What the hell's she put in this one? Must have packed the bloody china cabinet. (*Turning back to Norman*) And another thing. We've got children. You haven't. That makes a difference. Can't go gallivanting off—not with children. Responsibilities. Blast it.

Sarah comes out from the house—smartly dressed in her summer best

Sarah Reg—oh. (*She sees Norman*) Hallo, Norman. (*She shakes his hand*)

Norman Hallo, Sarah. How's Sarah?

Sarah Very well, Norman. Surprised to hear you were here.

Norman Yes. Well, I was passing.

Sarah That's nice.

Norman Yes. Thought I'd look in on the old home.

Sarah Naturally.

Norman (*uneasy at her manner*) Well, I must be off. (*He gathers himself together and picks up his case, preparing to leave*)

Sarah Are you taking those in, Reg?

Reg Oh, yes. Yes . . . (*He starts to move in*)

Sarah I've just been talking to Annie.

Norman (*freezing in his tracks, warily*) Have you?

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