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A Small Affair

A comedy

Bob Larbey

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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CHARACTERS

Guy
Judy
Terry
Ellen
Harry
Mona
Janet
Ada
Harriet
Caroline
Mrs Hodge
Mrs Webb
Mrs Platt
Ron
Stevie
Sally
Head of Drama

The action of the play takes place in a TV rehearsal room

Time: the present

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(See also page ii)

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Building Blocks

Half an Idea

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A SMALL AFFAIR

As the CURTAINS *opens, we see a television rehearsal room. It is not a glorious place at all, but fairly dingy. Some chairs are set against a wall, a small table is set nearby. On it is an electric kettle, a jar of coffee, a bag of sugar, a tin of biscuits, plastic spoons and lots of paper cups. Another small, wheeled table is nearby. On it is the floor manager's script, a stop-watch, and a little tub of different coloured pens. An internal telephone is on the wall. The working part of the room is divided into two sets. One is a Prison Governor's Office; the other, a Condemned Cell. Furnishings are sparse, in some cases, makeshift*

Judy, a floor manager, is putting the finishing touches to marking out the floor plan of the sets with coloured tape. She looks like a floor manager used to calming hysterical directors

Guy, a potentially hysterical director, enters. He wears a cravat, a cardigan over his shoulders and a faintly Sixties shirt to prove that he works in television. He carries an executive briefcase. He looks at the rehearsal room and drops the case dramatically

Guy Well, this is absurd! It's ridiculous! It's minuscule!
Judy Good-morning, Guy. Coffee?
Guy How can I drink coffee when they've given me a rabbit-hutch to rehearse in? Two sugars please, Judy.

Judy makes him a cup of coffee. Guy poses discontentedly around

Well, I'm not having it. I'm not standing for it. Get on to Drama and say I'm not standing for it.
Judy I already have—and you are.
Guy Oh? Who says so?
Judy The Head of Drama.
Guy I could make an issue of this.
Judy He advised that you shouldn't make an issue out of this.

Guy Those were his words?

Judy Paraphrased. He's up to his eyeballs, Guy. He's got six plays rehearsing at the same time and he's totally strapped for space. He also pointed out that ours isn't a *big* play.

Guy It would take a man with a small mind to say that. I've half a mind to phone him.

Judy points to the phone. Guy hesitates

More than half a mind! (*He approaches the telephone as though it might bite him. He is about to pick it up when:*)

The phone rings

(*He jumps, then recovers and answers it*) Guy Green. She's what? Why didn't you tell me? So you have. I'll be down. (*He hangs up*) Mona's here!

Judy Shall I order a brass band?

Guy heads towards the door

Guy Judy, she's a star. She's worked in Hollywood.

Judy So did Lassie!

Guy hurries out

Guy (*off*) Terry! You look wonderful!

Terry sighs a long moan off stage

Terry enters, moaning. He is an ageing actor. He has the mother and father of all hangovers and wears dark glasses. He carries a small bag

Judy Terry, how nice to see you again.

Terry Where are you?

Judy goes up to him

Judy Just here.

Terry Hallo, Judy.
Judy How are you?
Terry Worse than I look.
Judy That bad?
Terry Learn the words. I really did mean to learn the words last night.
Judy Then you had a drink or two?
Terry Or seven.
Judy Have a coffee.
Terry I'd prefer euthanasia.

Judy puts a chair under him and he slumps into it. She makes him a coffee

Ellen comes in. She is an emotional middle-aged actress

Ellen I've been in the loo...
Judy Oh, good. Coffee?

Ellen nods

How's Bill?

Ellen shakes her head to indicate that she cannot talk about him. Judy thinks it's going to be one of those days

Terry Hallo, Ellen. I'd get up, but I don't think I can.

Ellen gets herself a chair and sits

Judy Coffee up! (*She takes a cup to Ellen*)
Ellen He trod on my bifocals last night.
Judy Deliberately?
Ellen I don't know! That's the thing, I don't know!
Judy Would you like a biscuit?
Ellen Should I? I don't know.
Judy They're on the table, if you want one. (*She takes Terry his coffee*) Terry?

He takes the paper cup

Terry I sound like a boy, don't I?

Judy No, you've got a nice manly voice.
Terry Being called Terry, I mean. Terry Banks. It sounds like some spotty yob in *EastEnders*. I should be called Terence. Terence Banks!

Ellen decides to have a biscuit and crosses to get one

Ellen No-one would know who you are.
Terry No-one remembers who I was. (*He fumbles in his bag and takes out half a bottle of brandy*)
Judy Is that wise?
Terry Essential. (*He pours brandy into his coffee*)

Ellen takes the lid off the biscuit tin

Ellen Shall I have a Custard Cream or a Garibaldi?
Judy Mona's here, by the way.

Ellen puts the lid back on the biscuit tin. Terry takes a long swig of his laced coffee

Terry That's better. I still can't see the other side of the room, though.

Judy takes off his dark glasses

Ah, there it is. What are we rehearsing in—a Wendy house?

Janet comes in. She is about Ellen's age, but smarter, a very together lady

Ellen Mona won't like it.
Janet Mona's being buttered up. Mona is having lemon tea in the Green Room. Mona has been to Hollywood—in case anyone didn't know.
Ellen She did make a film.
Janet Yes. *A* film. One film in four years.
Judy Did anyone ever see it?
Terry I don't think it was released over here.
Janet She's probably very big in Albania.

Guy enters. He is very nervous

Guy Mona's here! Mona's here, everyone!

Janet All kneel!

Mona enters. She thinks she is twenty-eight, but she is not. She thinks she is a great star, which she is not. She opens her arms wide, almost hitting Guy in the face

Mona Good-morning, my sweets, good-morning!
All Good-morning, Mona.
Guy A chair for Mona, please, Judy.

Judy looks daggers, but picks up a chair

Mona No, no, no. I want to be treated like everyone else.
Judy Good. (*She puts the chair down*)

This is not quite what Mona had expected, but she gets herself a chair and sits

Ellen Would you like a biscuit, Mona?
Mona I daren't. I'm still on a California Diet.
Janet That's a long way to go for your meals.

Mona smiles. She obviously cannot stand Janet. Janet smiles back. The feeling is mutual

Guy (*quickly*) Well, here we are, boys and girls. Now, it's my belief that this play——
Mona Are we reading it through again?
Guy No, Mona, we did that yesterday. As I was saying, it's my belief that this play——
Mona Then why aren't we in the rehearsal room, Guy?

This produces a hush as the others wait for Guy to answer

Guy Well, the thing is, Mona, we are.
Mona You mean, this is it?
Guy Broadly speaking, yes.

Mona gets up

Mona I shall be in the Green Room!

She exits

Guy Mona! (*He looks round helplessly. Appealingly*) Judy?
Judy No, thanks.

Guy sighs and goes out after Mona

Terry Shall we go home or what?
Ellen I suppose if you're a star...
Janet As opposed to an actress.
Ellen Now, that's not fair, Janet. She was wonderful in *Howard's Way.*
Janet The boat acted better than her in *Howard's Way.*
Judy Jealous?
Janet Of course.

Terry gets up

Terry I think I'll have a tinkle.

He goes out

Ellen He looks awful, doesn't he?
Judy You should have seen him when he came in.
Janet Oh, he's a trouper, old Terry. A good actor too—once.
Ellen How is he with lines these days?
Judy A bit like trains. Occasionally they're on time, sometimes they're late—sometimes they never come at all.
Janet Well, he doesn't have much to do. It's a three-hander really.
Judy Not the way Mona sees it.
Ellen Be realistic, Judy. She is a name. I've never been a name. I've always been "I know the face".
Judy There are worse things to be.
Janet Like out of work. Do you know, I haven't done a telly since an episode of *The Bill* six months ago.
Ellen I must have missed that.
Janet That's what everybody says.

Mona and Guy enter, the best of friends

Mona I didn't walk out for me. I walked out for all of us.
Janet And now you've walked back in for all of us.
Guy Mona's been an angel. I explained the situation and she's risen above it.
Janet On wings, presumably?
Mona (*sweetly*) May I have a word, Guy?
Guy Yes, of course.

They go out

Terry comes in

Terry Are we breaking for lunch?
Judy We haven't started yet.
Ellen (*offering the tin*) Have a biscuit.
Terry What I'd really like is a sherbet dab.
Judy Well, isn't that strange? I don't have any sherbet dabs.
Terry I could pop out.
Ellen Terry, just say "No."
Terry To what?
Ellen We all know the pubs are open.

Terry sits disconsolately

(*To Janet*) I shouldn't have said that, should I?

Janet is looking at the door

Janet?

Guy and Mona enter, Mona looking triumphant

Guy Could you spare me a second please, Janet? Take five, everyone!
Judy We haven't started yet.
Guy All right, Judy!

Guy takes Janet to a corner of the room

It's got to stop, Janet. Mona can't work under these conditions.

Janet Me being the conditions, presumably?
Guy She is the star.

Janet sighs heavily

And I hate to say this, Janet, but you *can* be replaced.
Janet Sorry, sorry, sorry.
Guy Good girl. Now, give me a big cuddle.

Janet allows herself to be cuddled

Right, everybody! Now, let's get to work, work, work!

Everyone stands up in anticipation

Harry, a workman, enters. He wears overalls and carries a bag of tools. He whistles loudly and tunelessly, nodding and winking cheerfully as a greeting. He sets his toolbag down with a thump. He spots the coffee things and sets about making himself a cup

The others all stare

Judy?

Judy goes up to Harry

Judy Good-morning.
Harry Hallo, luv.
Judy We are rehearsing.
Harry That's all right. Don't mind me. You carry on.

Guy stalks over

Guy Look, who are you?
Harry Harry.
Guy I mean, *what* are you?
Harry Maintenance.
Guy Well, what do you maintain?
Harry Everything in this building. You name it, I maintain it.

Guy turns away

Guy Ask him why he's here, Judy.
Judy Why are you here?
Harry Electrics. (*He points*) Here, I know you.
Mona (*preening*) I thought you might.
Harry No, not you. (*To Janet*) You. I saw you in *The Bill.*
Janet (*pleased*) Did you?
Harry Yes. In *The Bill.* Very good, you was, too. Very believable.
Janet Thank you.
Guy *What* electrics?

Harry points L *to the toilets*

Harry In there. Something's shorting on my visual display and that's where it is.
Terry I did hear a buzzing, but I thought it was just me.
Harry Dead give-away, a buzzing.
Guy Look, do you have to do it now?
Harry Well, unless you want the next person who pulls the chain to go up in a sheet of flames, yes.
Judy But you will be in there?
Harry Oh yes. As soon as I've drunk my coffee.
Ellen Would you like a biscuit?
Harry That's very kind of you, love.
Guy Ellen!
Ellen What?
Guy I would like to start.
Ellen Well, I'm ready.
Guy Fine. Good. Judy, be a love and show us the sets, would you?

Judy moves to her coloured tapes

Judy Right. Blue is the Condemned Cell. High window there. Door there. Another door there.
Mona (*referring to the second door*) Where does that door lead to?
Janet The gallows.
Mona Thank you.
Judy Red is the corridor. It overlaps, I'm afraid. (*She moves* R) Yellow is

the Governor's Office. Window there, overlooking the prison yard. Door there.

Harry One of those, is it?

Guy One of what?

Harry One of those depressing pieces.

Guy If you call a play about the ultimate triumph of the human spirit depressing, yes.

Harry I do. (*He picks up his toolbag*)

Guy glares at him

All right, all right. I'm just saying what I think. It won't get watched in our house, I'll tell you that.

He exits into the toilets

Guy So, to work, work, work!

Everybody retires near the coffee table, except for Mona, who wanders about in the Governor's Office

Mona!

Mona I just want to get the feel of it.

Guy But you're in the Governor's Office.

Mona I *know* I'm in the Governor's Office. I must have *been* in the Governor's Office at some stage, surely? I have to feel as though I know the place.

Guy Yes, of course, Mona.

Mona does a moody in the Governor's Office. They all wait. This completed, she moves to the Condemned Cell and sits at the table

Judy Right. Prison Officers, please.

Janet and Ellen go into the Condemned Cell and sit on the other two chairs

Terry!

Terry goes and sits in the Governor's Office. For some reason, he now wears a vicar's dog collar and bib

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