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Departure

A Play

Stephen Smith

Samuel French – London
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DEPARTURE

First performed by Waterbeach Community Players at the Sawston Drama Festival on March 25th, 1988 with the following cast:

Rosemary Gibbs	Sue Blow
Mandy Gibbs	Catherine Jones
Dennis Tippitt	Chris Shinn
Sheila Tippitt	Rosemary Jolley

The play was directed by **Stephen Smith**
Designed by **Mark Easterfield**
With the assistance of Julie Petrucci, Tony Sawford, Judy Hanson, Stephen Cannie and Paula Cannie

CHARACTERS

Rosemary Gibbs
Mandy Gibbs
Dennis Tippitt
Sheila Tippitt

The action takes place in a corner of a departure lounge at Gatwick Airport

Time—the present

DEPARTURE

A Sunday afternoon in October in a secluded corner of a departure lounge at Gatwick Airport

Along the back and R *are display boards advertising various airlines and duty-free goods. Two 3-seater benches are* CS *and a litter-bin is* L. *The whole area has been cordoned off to be cleaned and litter abounds. Various cleaning equipment has been left but the cleaners have gone for a break and there is a sign saying, "Cleaning in Progress". All entrances and exits are made* L

As the CURTAIN *rises Rosemary Gibbs and her daughter Mandy, rush on ignoring the sign. Rosemary is in her forties. She has dyed black hair, large glasses and wears over-bright clothes. She has a large bandage on her leg and is carrying a shopping bag. Mandy is about twenty years younger than her mother and virtually a carbon copy*

Rosemary (*out of breath*) I think we'll be safe here, Mandy.
Mandy Yes, Mum.
Rosemary I don't know what came over that man.
Mandy No, Mum.

Mandy stands around gormlessly, while her mother surveys the untidy scene and then starts to tidy up and clean everything in sight

Rosemary Look! They don't keep these places clean enough. There's dust on the back of this seat. Some people just don't seem to have pride in their work anymore. What must foreigners think when they arrive here, seeing all this dust? They must think we are a bunch of mucky devils, that's what they must think.
Mandy Shall I help?
Rosemary No, it's all right Mandy. You're on holiday.
Mandy So are you.
Rosemary Mothers are never on holiday, Mandy. They may change their environment, but they are never on holiday. Hopefully, one day you'll find that out.

Mandy I don't know if I want to be a mother if it means I'll never get another holiday.

Rosemary That's not the attitude, Mandy. The joys of motherhood and marriage far outweigh the disadvantages. You want to make a mark on this world, don't you?

Mandy I suppose so.

Rosemary Then one of the best ways is to have children. When I'm dead and buried, my memory will live on through you. Besides you can't stay under my wing all your life—you must build your own nest before it's too late. We don't want you ending up on the shelf, do we?

Mandy No, Mum.

Rosemary Meeting people on holiday is the ideal time to get to know them—catch them off guard when they are away from their normal way of life. They don't have as many inhibitions and are desperate for friendships, for someone to talk to. That's your chance, Mandy.

Mandy Yes, Mum.

Rosemary You have been practising your smile, haven't you?

Mandy Yes, Mum. (*She forces a smile*)

Rosemary (*admiringly*) Ah!

Mandy All I can do is try my best.

Rosemary And that's all I can ask from you. Don't worry, you have one big advantage.

Mandy What's that?

Rosemary Me as your mother. Someone who makes friends easily, someone who people like to talk to. This is the environment in which I thrive. That's why we are here, away from everyone else, in case some poor soul is on their own in need of companionship.

Mandy I thought we came here because that rude man told you to sod off.

Rosemary hurriedly moves to clean the other seat

Rosemary Er . . . no. You have to excuse him, Mandy. I think he was feeling unwell. He obviously didn't know what he was saying. After talking to him for half an hour, I noticed his face was turning a funny colour. I think he may have contracted some kind of erotic disease, so I thought it safest if we left him. We don't want to ruin our holiday, do we?

Mandy No, certainly not.

Rosemary There seems to be a lot of it about. I've noticed it in other people, too. It seems to affect people's temper. No doubt they'll find a cure for it in time. Now, how does that look? (*Surveying everything that she has just cleaned*)

Mandy Fit to eat your dinner off.

Rosemary Thank you Mandy and that's what we will do in a roundabout way. Come and take the weight off your feet.

They both sit down and Rosemary rummages around in her bag, eventually producing a packet of biscuits

When you are on a journey . . .

Mandy Always be prepared.

Rosemary That's right.

Mandy Like a Boy Scout.

Rosemary Girl Guides in our case, Mandy. Have a biscuit.

Mandy Thanks, Mum.

Rosemary Once started we will have to finish all these biscuits you know.

Mandy Why?

Rosemary Because you are not allowed to take food out of the country.

Mandy Why's that?

Rosemary Because of the risk of spreading rabies. If, for example, a Spaniard ate one of these biscuits, he could get rabies because his body isn't used to English food.

Mandy Does that mean we can get rabies from Spanish food?

Rosemary No, because we've had the injections.

Mandy Those tetanus injections?

Rosemary That's it. Tetanus is Spanish for rabies, Mandy. Now Spain has joined the EEC it should no longer be necessary because we'll all be eating the same food but it's best . . .

Mandy To be on the safe side.

Rosemary Yes.

Mandy So that's why the doctor said we didn't need the injections.

Rosemary Yes, but as you heard me say, he's not the one that is going to go down with rabies if he's wrong.

Mandy He didn't like that, did he?

Rosemary No, he didn't. He said I was off my trolley; but I told

him I pay my VAT and I'm entitled to have as many tetanus injections as I like.

Mandy He had no answer to that, did he?

Rosemary No, we had him there, Mandy. I think I'll get up now—my bottom is still a bit sore. How's yours?

Mandy It's not too bad.

Rosemary It's worth it though, Mandy. At least tomorrow we can sit in a taverna and eat our sangria safe in the knowledge we won't get rabies.

Mandy Shall I go and spend these refreshment vouchers now?

Rosemary Why not? Waste not, want not.

Mandy (*laughingly*) A voucher in the hand is worth ten in the bush.

Rosemary (*pleased*) Well done, Mandy, very funny. Now, you go off and surprise me.

Mandy (*worried*) Aren't you coming?

Rosemary No, I'll go for a wander—see if there is anyone I can be a Good Samaritan to. I'll meet you back here in about ten minutes.

Mandy OK then, Mum.

She exits L

Rosemary notices a dirty mark on one of the seats and rubs vigorously until she is satisfied that it is clean

She packs up all her gear and exits

A few seconds later Dennis Tippitt enters. He is middle-aged and wears a dark suit. He is carrying a "British Airways" hold-all.

He is angrily murmuring to himself and keeps looking in the direction from which he has come. Eventually he sits down and takes out a copy of the News of the World. *He tuts as he reads it while continually looking offstage. Suddenly he sees someone coming and desperately tries to put away the newspaper but can't get the zip of the hold-all undone in time so he has to hide the newspaper under the seat*

Sheila, Dennis's wife, enters. She is a few years younger than him and more suitably dressed for a holiday in the sun. She is carrying a large handbag

Sheila (*without noticing the newspaper*) Ah, there you are, Dennis.

Dennis (*grumpily*) Yes.

Sheila sits down next to him

Sheila I thought I'd lost you.
Dennis No such luck.
Sheila You were supposed to keep an eye on my bag. You know bags are not allowed to be left unattended here.
Dennis I hardly think the ladies' toilets at Gatwick is a top terrorist target.
Sheila It wasn't outside the toilets—it was next to your seat.
Dennis Anyway, no self respecting terrorist would carry a bomb in a bag like that.
Sheila What's wrong with this bag? Mother gave it to me.
Dennis I stand corrected—it must have already been on active service.
Sheila Why did you move?
Dennis Nigerians.
Sheila What?
Dennis Bloody Nigerians, that's what.
Sheila Nigerians?
Dennis They must be breeding like rabbits. There are enough kids running amok in this departure lounge to keep open several village schools.
Sheila What are you on about?
Dennis Not that anybody cares anymore. We used to stick together in the old days but today it is all self. I don't want to get involved. I didn't see anything. It's nothing to do with me. Of course we are leaving ourselves wide open. That's what they want. It makes it easy, doesn't it?
Sheila What?
Dennis Divide and rule.
Sheila As per usual, Dennis, you are not making a word of sense.
Dennis That's what everyone says, but they'll find out when it's too late.
Sheila (*getting some knitting out of her bag*) Is it those children? Have they upset you?
Dennis I was perfectly happily reading my newspaper . . .
Sheila Something has upset you.
Dennis . . . and then one of them sits in your seat. Sneaks up on my blind side and sits in your seat.

Sheila Why didn't you say the seat was occupied?

Dennis Before I had realized what had happened they had me with a pincer movement. I was surrounded.

Sheila (*starting her knitting*) Are we talking about children or commandos?

Dennis They were waiting, you know.

Sheila (*as if talking to a child*) Were they?

Dennis Yes.

Sheila (*not taking a lot of notice*) What for?

Dennis For you to go to the loo.

Sheila I didn't go to the loo.

Dennis They weren't to know that.

Sheila Why were they waiting?

Dennis For you to vacate your seat.

Sheila (*stopping knitting*) Ah I see, it all makes sense now. This is the divide and rule part, yes? (*She starts knitting again*)

Dennis At last I'm getting through. We had prime seats: good view of the aircraft taking off; the television monitors with all the flight information changing every thirty seconds; and a long range view of the security checks in case anything exciting happened there.

Sheila I didn't realize that we were so privileged.

Dennis gets up and looks at the display boards

Dennis Airports are notorious places for long waits. I need things to keep a highly-tuned brain like mine active. Flights have been known to be delayed—not British ones of course, but unfortunately there are foreign airlines using this airport too.

Sheila (*in mock astonishment*) Really. Well, being with a British airline we have nothing to worry about then, do we?

Dennis But we're not, are we? How many times have I told you to buy British, to preserve our national heritage, and what do I find when I look at my ticket? We are flying with a Scandinavian airline.

Sheila Dan-Air!

Dennis I have nothing against them personally. They make fine butter and bacon, and that Bjorn Borg who plays the piano is quite funny; but flying is not one of their strong points. They are a seafaring nation. If we were going by boat, I may have

Hungry for More?

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