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I Do Solemnly Declare

A Play

Simon Farquhar

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE

First performed at Aberdeen Arts Centre as part of the Scottish Community Drama Association Festival of One-Act Plays on 24th February 1997. The cast was as follows:

Nigel Sheridan	Simon Farquhar
Eve Sheridan	Dianne Hogg
Gemma Sheridan	Jenny Tims
James Sheridan	Sandy Lamb

Produced and directed by Simon Farquhar
Stage Manager Oliver Knox

CHARACTERS

Nigel Sheridan, late 30s
Eve Sheridan, his wife; late 30s
Gemma Sheridan, their daughter; mid-teens
James Sheridan, their son; mid-teens

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of the Sheridans' family home deep in suburbia

Time — the present

I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE

The living-room of the Sheridan family home deep in suburbia. Early evening

There is a single door, R*; this leads off to the kitchen, hallway and front door. The room is a little in need of redecoration as if the happiness of the family is taken for granted and not worked at. There is a sofa at an angle* L*, with a handbag on it; a table with a selection of drinks and glasses* DL*; and a long sideboard along the wall displaying the usual selection of ornaments, family photographs, a vase of flowers and some birthday cards.* R *is a small dining table, with chairs, and in front of this a television*

It becomes clear that when the characters stare out to the audience they are looking through an imaginary window on to other homes in the sensible suburbs. The street never changes, there is no noise, no disorder, everything is safe

When the play begins, a brief chorus of "Suburbia" by The Pet Shop Boys rings out. The Lights come up to reveal James and Gemma seated on the R *of the table, their mother Eve opposite them. Both children are in their mid-teens, and dressed very differently. Gemma is quite prim and reserved, James is more extrovert. Eve is in her late thirties. She is attractive and takes pride in her appearance, but is dressed and made-up to look motherly and respectable, with no hint of vanity. In her clothes and manner, as much as in her surroundings, she is old for her years. Each of the three is holding up a pair of playing cards; Eve has a drink in one hand too. All three figures are momentarily frozen; then James cautiously selects one of his mother's cards*

During the opening exchange, Eve stares into space

James Damn. (*He throws down his cards in frustration and goes to sulk on the sofa*) I'm sick of this, you just bloody cheat the whole time.
Gemma Bloody hell, you're pathetic. Showing off just because you lose a stupid game of cards. (*With a teasing smile*) Child!
James Look, shut up, will you?

Pause

Gemma (*with mock tenderness*) Want to play something else?
James (*evenly*) No.
Gemma All right, all right, moody. (*She moves to the sideboard and produces a Scrabble set from it*) Scrabble? All right, Mum?

Eve downs the last of her drink and nods, trying to flash a smile

(*Setting the game up; to James*) Oh, for God's sake stop sulking. Spoilt brat.
James Get stuffed.
Gemma (*moving to James and pulling his ear*) I'm sorry, what was that?
James (*in agony*) OK, OK, I'm sorry.
Gemma And the rest.
James I'm sorry my darling sister for being so rude and so immature.
Gemma Come on, then.

James and Gemma smile and return to the table, the picture of happiness. James holds up a finger behind Gemma's back

James Dad's late. (*Pause*) Mum? Hallo?
Eve (*suddenly alert*) Mmm?
James I said Dad's late.
Gemma He was going to the TV studios this afternoon. He's probably got held up.

The game is now completely set up

Right, I'm going first.
James Bloody hell.
Gemma Whose birthday is it?
James (*wearily*) Go on, then.

Gemma pauses, considers for a moment, then lays letters on the board

Gemma A-D-U-L-T. Adult. (*To James*) Maybe one day.
Nigel (*off*) I'm home.

Eve moves to pour another drink

Nigel enters, carrying a leather briefcase and a small Harrods carrier bag. He is in his late thirties, flamboyant and wearing a respectable suit. He waltzes in full of energy and enthusiasm despite it being the end of a long day. His home seems to reflect his character very little, suggesting his thoughts are usually elsewhere

Eve does not even turn to look at her husband as he enters; she stands by the drinks table holding her refilled glass

Gemma
James } (*together*) Hi Dad.
Nigel (*cheerfully*) Hallo! (*He presents the shopping bag to Gemma and kisses her*) Happy birthday, darling.

Gemma dives into the bag and produces a compact disc

(*Ruffling James' hair*) Hiya, son. (*To Gemma*) That's just a little extra something I saw today. Is it the right one?
Gemma Yes thanks, it's great.

Nigel goes over to Eve and makes to kiss her on the cheek

Nigel Hi, darling.

Eve swiftly turns away and sits back down. Nigel stands still for a moment, looking a little puzzled but unconcerned

(*Reflecting quietly, comically*) What the hell have I done?

James What was the review like?

Nigel (*in an instant a master of ceremonies, amusing and entertaining to behold*) It seems, old son, that our national press, in all their wisdom, when they're not attached to the bottoms of the Royal Family, are as incapable as they ever were at producing an intelligible review of something. (*He opens his case and produces a copy of the* Evening Standard *which he reads from*) I quote: "Those who sat through the play "Unlawful Impediment" last night might well ask why an hour and a half was devoted to the age old theme of true love when nothing was said that we didn't already know." (*He breaks off*) The joys of omniscience ... (*He returns to the paper*) "This curious tale of a man's affection for his girlfriend's mother was stretched to breaking point as the intricacies of each character's emotional turmoil were explored endlessly, all to little avail. Stark urban backgrounds were contrasted uneasily with the man's desperate attempt to combat social stigma in order to find happiness in a cruel modern world. An unpleasantly cynical sense of humour" — me? — "made an odd bedfellow with the notion that 'love hopes to conquer all in a world too strong for it.' An unsatisfactory ending claiming that 'all that is permitted in poetry is laughed at when tried out on society' fell flat on the ear. Perhaps love and love alone does justify ninety minutes and three painfully ordinary characters, but writer Nigel Sheridan must do more before I am convinced." I'd hate to be this guy's wife. "Mixing the sonnets of Shakespeare with the grime of urban reality made for a very bitter-sweet cocktail I for one found hard to swallow and left an unpleasant aftertaste." Thank you very much.

Gemma Never mind, you're always saying there's no such thing as bad publicity.

Nigel Yes I know.

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