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JUST BETWEEN OURSELVES

A Play

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Just Between Ourselves

First presented in London by Michael Codron at the Queen's Theatre, on 22nd April 1977, with the following cast of characters:

Dennis	Colin Blakely
Vera, his wife	Rosemary Leach
Neil	Michael Gambon
Marjorie, Dennis's mother	Constance Chapman
Pam, Neil's wife	Stephanie Turner

The play directed by Alan Strachan

The action takes place in the garage and pathway of Dennis's home

ACT I	Scene 1	February, Saturday around noon
	Scene 2	May, Saturday afternoon
ACT II	Scene 1	October, Saturday evening
	Scene 2	January, Saturday morning

Time—the present.

ACT I

Scene 1

A garage attached to a medium-price executive house on a private estate, belonging to Dennis and Vera. February

Our view is of one side of the house, and looking into the garage through its side wall. The downstage wall, and one end wall, of the garage are constructed as an open framework. The "up-and-over" garage door remains closed throughout the action. An L-shaped workbench runs round one corner of the garage and about half-way along the downstage wall. It is littered untidily with tools, etc., and the whole place is filled with the usual garage junk, boxes, coils of rope, garden chairs, etc. In the midst of this, sideways on, a small popular car, at least seven years old, stands neglected. In the upstage wall of the garage is a grimy window with crowded shelves on either side. There is a dilapidated, flat-topped oil stove below the car, and a wooden box on the floor above the car to facilitate the actors being seen when they are behind it. Below the garage a paved walkway runs the full width of the stage—widening out to a "sitting area"—with a garden gate leading off at the corner. Opposite the "up-and-over" door a small door, opening outwards, leads across a small dustbin yard to the back door of the house. The dustbin is below the house door. Between the wall of the house and the garage, above the dustbin yard, there is a fairly high fence with a holly tree above it. On either side of the gate there are flower-beds with small ornamental trees and one or two withered shrubs. There is a square, brick flower-tub with a dead geranium plant (which is exchanged for a flowering geranium in the summer scene) situated in the centre of the downstage wall of the garage

Dennis, *in his forties, is busy at his workbench. He is prodding at an electric kettle with a screwdriver muttering to himself. After a moment,* **Vera,** *his wife a few years younger, emerges from the back door of the house. She is followed by* **Neil,** *in his late thirties and smartly dressed in contrast to* **Dennis** *who has on his week-end clothes*

Dennis (*frowning at the kettle*) That goes in there—and then that one goes—through there to that one—which should join up with the other one. In which case ...

Vera (*knocking gently on the garage door*) Dennis—Dennis.

Dennis (*still absorbed*) But in that case, that one—should be joined to that one ... (*calling*) Hallo—(*returning to the kettle*)—unless that's the earth. In which case, it's that one.

Vera (*struggling with the door, trying to open it*) Dennis.

Dennis Come in. (*Back to the kettle*) On the other hand, if that's the earth which one is the live one ... ?

Vera Dennis dear, can you open the door for me please. It's stuck again.
Dennis Hang on, hang on, hang on. Live—earth—neutral.
Vera (*to Neil apologetically*) It's always sticking.
Neil Ah.
Dennis Earth, neutral, live.
Vera My husband's going to fix it as soon as he has a moment but ... Dennis dear.
Dennis (*backing towards the door keeping his eyes fixed on the kettle*) Right. In which case, if that's the earth it goes in there ... Hang on—not in there—right. Stand back.
Vera (*to Neil*) Stand back.

Vera and Neil back from the garage door. Dennis heaves against it, and it flies open

Dennis I'll tell you one thing, the fellow who invented the electric kettle ... (*Seeing Neil*) Ah. Afternoon.
Neil Good afternoon.
Vera Dennis dear, this gentleman's come to look at the car.
Dennis At the car?
Vera Mr ... Sorry, I've forgotten your name.
Neil Mr Andrews.
Dennis Pleased to meet you, Mr Andrews, come in, come in.
Neil Thank you.
Vera This is my husband, Mr Crowthorne.
Neil (*shaking hands with Dennis*) How do you do?
Dennis Excuse the jumble. The place is due for a spring clean. Amazing what you collect.
Neil Yes, yes.
Dennis Amazing. I mean, where does it all come from. Just look at it. I mean, where does it all come from.
Neil Yes, yes. Accumulates.
Dennis Accumulates. That's the word, accumulates.
Vera How's my kettle?
Dennis Coming along, coming along.
Vera It just wasn't heating up at all. Your mother's making tea in a saucepan.
Dennis Well, I'll tell you, my love, I'll give you a little tip shall I. A little tip when you're next using an electric kettle. They work far better when you don't keep slinging them on the floor.
Vera I couldn't help it. I just caught it with my elbow.
Dennis (*to Neil, laughing*) Caught it with her elbow.

Neil smiles

If I told you, Mr Andrews, the things my wife had caught with her elbow ...
Vera (*shy and embarrassed*) All right.
Dennis You would not believe it, Mr Andrews, cups, saucers, dinner plates, radio sets ...
Neil Really.
Dennis Whole tray of glasses.

Vera Dennis ...
Dennis And that's just for this month. You ever want a demolition job doing, Mr Andrews, she's your woman. (*He laughs*)

Neil joins in half-heartedly. Vera less so still

Elbows going away like pistons ...
Neil Well, I suppose we all tend to—occasionally.
Dennis Yes, quite (*Hugging Vera*) I was only joking, love, only joking. I'm always pulling her leg, aren't I, love? Eh? I'll have it fixed in a jiffy. I'll bring it in.
Vera Right. I'll make you both some tea when the saucepan's boiled. (*She moves to the door then turns back to Neil*) Do you take sugar, Mr ...
Neil No, thank you. Unfortunately. I'm afraid I'm unable to take it.
Vera Right then. (*She turns to leave*)

Marjorie, a woman in her sixties, comes out of the back-door

Marjorie Vera dear, there's a terrible smell of gas ...
Vera All right, Mother, I'm coming. Excuse me.
Marjorie I'm sure this stove still isn't right.
Dennis Check the pilot light, Vee. Check it hasn't blown out.
Marjorie It hasn't been right since I gave it that thorough clean.
Vera All right, Mother, all right.
Dennis Vee'll see to it, Mother.

Vera and Marjorie go back into the house

My mother, you met my mother?
Neil Yes, I met her on the way through to ...
Dennis Sixty-six.
Neil What?
Dennis Sixty-six years old.
Neil Really?
Dennis Not bad for sixty-six.
Neil No, no.
Dennis It's the pilot light, you see. It's in a cross draught. It's very badly sited that stove. They should never have put it there. I'm planning to move it. Right, now. You've come about the car, haven't you?
Neil That's right.
Dennis Well, there she is. Have a look for yourself. That's the one. (*He pushes the rubbish off the bonnet*)
Neil Ah.
Dennis Now, I'll tell you a little bit about it, shall I? Bit of history. Number One, it's not my car. It's the wife's. However, now before you say—ah-ha, woman driver—she's been very careful with it. Never had a single accident in it touch wood. Well I mean, look you can see hardly a scratch on it. Considering the age. To be perfectly honest, just between ourselves, she's

a better driver than me—when she puts her mind to it. I mean, look—considering it's, what now—seven—nearly eight years old. Just look for yourself at that bodywork.

Neil Yes, yes.

Dennis I bought it four years ago for her. It was then as good as new—virtually. Three years old and as good as new it was.

Neil It looks very good.

Dennis It is really, amazingly good.

Neil I suppose being under cover ...

Dennis Ah yes, well, quite. As I was just about to say, being under cover as it is.

Neil Important.

Dennis Vital. Vital to keep a car under cover. I mean, frankly that's why we want to get rid of it. I want to get my own car under cover. I don't know if you saw it when you were coming in, parked just out there on the road.

Neil Yes, I think I ...

Dennis It's doing it no good at all. It's an urgent priority to get that car under cover. You've got a garage, I take it?

Neil No.

Dennis Ah. Well, when I say that, with a car like this one, it's not as vital as with some cars. I mean, this one—(*he slaps the bonnet*)—this is a very, very sturdy vehicle indeed. As a matter of fact, they're not even making them any more. Not this particular model. They took up too much raw material. They're not economic to make. There's a lot of raw material in this. Mind you, there's no problem with parts. They're still making the parts, they're just not making the cars. Not that you'll ever need a part. We've never needed a part not in four years. No, as a matter of fact, I'll let you into a little secret. This car has barely been out of this garage in six months.

Neil Really?

Dennis Barely been out. As a matter of fact, frankly, just between ourselves, the wife's had a few, what shall I say, health worries and she hasn't really been up to driving.

Neil Oh, I'm sorry to ...

Dennis Oh, she's better now. She's very much better now. But she's gone off driving altogether. You can see, look—look at that clock there—I'll be surprised if it's done fifty thousand. (*Peering in*) Here we are.

Neil also peers in

Fifty-five thousand two hundred and fifty two miles—well, fifty-five, fifty thousand, round about that figure.

Neil Amazing.

Dennis Peanuts for a car like this. It's hardly run in.

Neil Right.

Dennis Have a look for yourself anyway. Feel free.

Neil Thanks.

Neil wanders round the car aimlessly; Dennis follows him

Dennis I'd let you have a test drive in it now but—actually it's a bit embarrass-

ing—the up and over door there, you see it's gone and jammed itself somehow, can't get it open at all. Still that's my next job.

Neil Oh. Well, it'll be important, won't it to ...

Dennis Oh, surely surely. Wouldn't expect you to consider it without a run around. Still you can have a preliminary look. See if it's the sort of thing you're looking for.

Neil Oh yes.

Dennis Here. We can have a butchers at the business end. Just a tick. (*He releases the bonnet*) There she is.

Neil Oh yes. (*He looks at the engine*)

Dennis Not bad, eh?

Neil No.

Dennis Economic.

Neil Really.

Dennis Very smooth runner.

Neil Ah.

Dennis I'll tell you what I can do for you, I can turn it over for you. Then you can hear the sound. (*He opens the door and gets into the driver's seat*)

Neil Oh well, that's ...

Dennis Keys are in it, I think—yes, right. I can't run it for too long, not in an enclosed space, you understand but—bit of choke—right—stand by for blast off.

Neil stands by the car, holding the bonnet open. The engine turns over but fails to start

She'll be a little bit cold.

The engine fails to start again

Come along, my beauty. She's been standing, you see.

Dennis tries again. It fails to start

Come on, come on, you bastard.

The engine turns and starts to fire. Neil keeps hold of the bonnet, shaking it gently to denote engine vibration

There we are. (*He climbs out of the car and joins Neil*) Listen to that. Purring like a kitten.

Neil Beg your pardon?

Dennis (*yelling above the din*) That's with the bonnet open, of course.

Neil Yes.

They stand and survey the turning engine. After a moment it starts to misfire. Dennis pushes against the side of the car to keep it going. The engine peters out. Silence

Dennis Battery'll be a little flat, I expect.

Neil Probably.

Dennis Once it's had a bit of a run round. Desperately needs a good run. Do you do a lot of driving? (*He turns off the ignition*)

Neil No. As a matter of fact, I don't drive at all.
Dennis Eh? (*straightens up D/S of window, look at Neil*)
Neil No, I never got round to learning. My wife drives.
Dennis Oh, it's for your wife then, is it?
Neil That's right.
Dennis Oh I see, I see. Surprise, is it?
Neil That sort of thing, yes.
Dennis Surprise. That's nice. That's nice. Does she suspect? Does she know where you are today then?
Neil Yes.
Dennis Ah.
Neil She's here as well.
Dennis Here?
Neil I left here in your front room, talking to your mother.
Dennis Well, doesn't she want to come and have a look? Since she's here.
Neil No, I don't think so.
Dennis Well, of course it's an ideal woman's car. Not too big, you see. And it's got the radio. That comes with it, of course. It's a good radio. (*He opens the car door, gets in, and turns the radio on*)

There is a buzzing noise. Dennis turns it off quickly

It won't work of course, not while it's in the garage. And then you've got your mirrors behind the sun visors here.
Neil (*looking in the car*) Oh yes.
Dennis Little touches like that. Sort of thing a woman looks for.
Neil Handy.
Dennis (*getting out of the car*) Oh yes. Funny her coming all this way with you and then not wanting to see it for herself.
Neil We hadn't far to come.
Dennis She prefers to leave it to the expert, does she?
Neil Oh, I'm not an expert. No, I was going to have this car delivered for her this morning from another man.
Dennis Ah.
Neil Only he let me down at the last minute.
Dennis It's undersealed, you see. Have a look underneath, see. (*He looks underneath the car*)
Neil (*bending down to look*) He sold this car of his to somebody else. Phoned me late last night. I didn't want to let her down. Oh yes, very nice.
Dennis Important to underseal.
Neil So I had to phone round in a hurry this morning. (*He rises, and suffers a mild spasm of indigestion*) Excuse me.
Dennis (*rising*) You all right?
Neil Oh yes. Just a touch of indigestion.
Dennis Oh dear. Been living it up, have you?
Neil No, no. I only get it when I bend down. Nothing serious.
Dennis That's odd. Sure it's indigestion?
Neil I think it is.
Dennis Could be something else.

Neil Could it?
Dennis Possibly. I'd get it looked at, if I were you.
Neil Think so?
Dennis No harm. I mean, nine times out of ten you're probably right it's indigestion but the stomach's a peculiar thing.
Neil Is it?
Dennis Yes. I've had experience with stomachs.
Neil Have you?
Dennis (*closing the bonnet*) Better safe than sorry.
Neil Anyway this chap let me down, you see, at the last minute. So I went through the small ads again this morning and, er, there was your advert. So I spoke to your wife.
Dennis I see, yes.
Neil I didn't want to disappoint her. Birthday, you see.
Dennis Birthday? It's your wife's birthday then?
Neil Yes.
Dennis Today?
Neil Yes.
Dennis Good heavens above. Pisces, eh?
Neil What?
Dennis Her star sign. Pisces.
Neil Oh yes.
Dennis You better keep an eye on her, mate.
Neil How do you mean?
Dennis They can get very moody can Pisces. Very moody brooding people. Unless you keep a very close watch on them. What sign are you, as a matter of interest?
Neil Er well, Scorpio I think.
Dennis (*with a yell*) Scorpio.
Neil Yes.
Dennis Living with a Pisces.
Neil Yes.
Dennis Good grief.
Neil Is that bad?
Dennis Perfect, perfect. Made for each other. Couldn't be better.
Neil Oh, good.
Dennis You don't look like a Scorpio. My mother's a Scorpio. She's a typical Scorpio. I mean, she's got the Scorpio bone structure. But you don't look a bit like a Scorpio. What date are you?
Neil Twenty-eighth of October.
Dennis (*with another wild yell*) Twenty-eighth of October! I don't believe it. I do not believe it.
Neil Eh?
Dennis You won't believe this. You will not believe this. You were born on exactly the same day as my mother.
Neil Oh.
Dennis Exactly the same day. Exactly the same day.
Neil Coincidence.

Dennis This was meant. I'm sure it was meant. It's extraordinary.
Neil Yes, yes it is.
Dennis Ah, well. Scorpio, eh? I'll have to keep an eye on you.
Neil Really.
Dennis Oh yes. Very deep waters, Scorpio. Very deep, secretive, scheming and occasionally, I regret to say, devious.
Neil Oh, well. I'll watch it then.
Dennis What a coincidence. Incredible. You don't have to worry about me though. I'm a Taurus.
Neil Oh good.

Vera comes out from the kitchen with two cups of tea

Vera Dennis.
Dennis Ah ha. That sounds like an Aquarius. The water bearer bringing the tea. (*He wrenches open the door*)
Vera Here's your tea.
Dennis Vee, now you won't believe this, Vee, we have just discovered that Mr Andrews here has exactly the same birth date as Mother. Isn't that extraordinary?
Vera Oh, coincidence.
Dennis To the day. Both Scorpios. Exactly the same date.
Vera Not the same year though
Dennis Same year? Oh yes, rather. Exactly the same year. Mr Andrews here will be sixty-seven next birthday, won't you, Mr Andrews?
Vera No, I said not the same ...
Dennis Same year. Get on with you. Same year. (*He hugs her*)
Vera Careful. I'll drop them.
Dennis Well, it won't be the first time.
Vera Dennis ...
Dennis Aquarius. You can tell, can't you? Typical bloody dopey Aquarius. Aren't you, my love?
Vera Sugar's in it, Mr Andrews. (*She hands Neil his tea*)
Neil Oh. Is it? Thank you.

Vera hands Dennis his tea

Dennis You given Mrs Andrews some tea?
Vera Yes, she's talking to Mother.
Dennis Well, I don't know about talking to Mother. I think she ought to be out here with me and Mr—look, can I call you by your Christian name, all this Mr this and Mr that.
Neil Neil.
Dennis Neil. Right, I'm Dennis. This is Vera. Vee she prefers.
Neil How do you do.
Dennis Well, don't you think we ought to ask er—your wife ...
Neil Pam.
Dennis Pam—Brian's wife's called Pam, isn't she?
Vera Yes.

Dennis Ask Pam out here. After all it's her present. I mean, assuming you're still interested.
Neil Yes. It's just that I don't think she's ...
Vera Oh, is the car for your wife?
Neil Yes.
Vera Oh I see. It's very good. It's a nice little car. I've had very little trouble with it.
Dennis Very little? Now be truthful, Vee, you've had no trouble. Be truthful.
Vera It did break down that once on the ring road.
Dennis Petrol. That was petrol.
Vera Oh yes.
Dennis It's not the car's fault if you don't put petrol in it, is it? Not the car's fault. Whose fault is it if there's no petrol in it?
Vera Yes, all right.
Dennis Whose fault?
Vera Yes, all right, Dennis.
Dennis It's little Vee's fault. Vee's fault that's whose it is. I tell you, Neil, I don't know if your wife's the same but if you do give her a car watch her like a hawk. She'll never put petrol in it. She'll never put water in it. She'll never do the tyres and as for oil—well, they've never heard of oil except on salads. Eh?

Neil laughs. A token laugh

Except on salads, eh? (*He leans on the front wing, helpless with laughter*)
Vera Shall I fetch Pam in here?
Dennis Yes, fetch her in, Vee, fetch her in. Let her have a look at it.
Neil I don't think she's that bothered actually.
Dennis Of course she's bothered. What is it, her first car is it?
Neil No, she had one a long time ago before we were married.
Dennis Well, nearly her first car. Her first car for some time. She'll want to see what she's getting. My God, if I was getting my first car, I'd be ...
Vera Yes all right, I'll fetch her. Drink your tea, Mr—Neil. (*She starts to go*)
Neil Thank you.
Vera Mother burnt herself on that saucepan, Dennis.
Dennis First-aid tin, top shelf over the boiler.
Vera I know, I have already. She says it's the wrong stuff.

Vera goes into the house

Dennis Now, listen. (*He goes to the door, looks through, then comes back*) We must do this thing properly. When Pam comes through the door everything must be right. She comes in the door, what does she see? She sees the car ...

Neil gives a slight belch

You all right?
Neil Yes, fine. I seem to have got the tea with the sugar in.
Dennis What? (*He takes a swig of his own*) Here have this one. That's hardly got any sugar in at all.

They exchange cups. Dennis turns way, appraising the situation. Neil takes a sip of Dennis's tea and reacts unfavourably

She comes in, she sees the car and, how about if you were sitting behind the wheel, no, in the passenger seat, that's it, in the passenger seat and as soon as she sees you, you say to her—happy birthday, my darling Pam or whatever you usually call her, dearest, dear, how would you like this for your birthday? (*He puts his cup on the bench*)

Neil Well, I don't think she's the sort of person who goes for ...

Dennis Look, Neil, there is not a woman who has yet been born who does not respond to a romantic gesture. Come on, man, where's your romance?

Neil Do you mind if I leave this tea?

Dennis Is that too sweet as well?

Neil It's even sweeter.

Dennis It's all right. I'll drink them both. I'll drink them both.

Neil puts his cup on the oil stove

Vera comes out of the house with Pam, a woman in her middle to late thirties

Vera They're just out here.

Dennis Here they come. Here they come. Quick get in the car, quick, quick, quick.

Dennis pushes Neil to the car so that he can get into the passenger seat, then leans against the garage door until Neil is in position

Vera (*tugging at the door handle*) Dennis. Dennis. Can you let us in?

Dennis Just a minute. Just a minute. (*He turns to Neil with a thumbs-up gesture*)

Vera Stand back.

Pam and Vera stand back just in time: Dennis opens the door

Dennis Come in. Come in. (*He backs to the car with arms outstretched*)

Pam enters slowly, sees Neil sitting in the car and stares at him

Neil Hallo. (*He looks out of the passenger window*)

Pam Hallo.

Dennis (*gesticulating wildly to Neil*) Go on.

Pam What are you doing?

Neil Er—just looking at the car.

Pam Oh. (*She moves slowly to the car, kicks the wheel, then moves below it*)

Neil (*looking out of the window*) What do you think?

Pam I said, it's up to you.

Neil Yes, I know but—I mean you're going to be driving it. (*He gets out of the car*)

Pam As long as it goes.

Vera Oh it goes. It did go anyway.

Dennis Still goes.