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SF PERUSALS

ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS

More Plays Than One

by Michael Frayn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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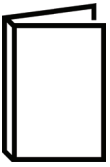
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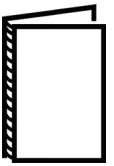
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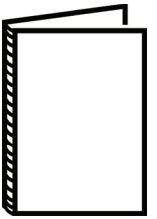
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Frayn was born in London in 1933. He began his career as a reporter for *The Guardian* and later *The Observer*. After leaving *The Observer* he continued to write as a columnist as well as publishing novels and plays for television and stage.

His plays for stage include: *Copenhagen, After Life, The Two of Us, Alphabetical Order, Donkeys' Years, Clouds, Balmoral (Liberty Hall), Make and Break, Noises Off, Benefactors, Alarms and Excursions, Look Look and Here, Make and Break*. Other translations include: four Chekhov full-length plays – *The Cherry Orchard, Three Sisters, The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* and four one-act plays – *The Evils of Tobacco, Swan Song, The Bear and The Proposal*.

ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS

First presented, by Michael Codron and Lee Dean, at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford, on 15th July 1998 with a slightly different selection of plays and the following cast:

Nicky Henson
Felicity Kendal
Robert Bathurst
Josie Lawrence

Directed by Michael Blakemore
Designed by Lez Brotherston
Lighting by Paul Pyant
Music by Terry Davies
Sound by John A Leonard

Subsequently presented at the Gielgud Theatre, London, on 14th September 1998, with the same cast.

A new production, presented by Ian Fricker and Richard Temple, opened at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford, on 8th June 2011 with the current selection of plays and the following cast:

Aden Gillett
Belinda Lang
Robert Daws
Serena Evans

Directed by Joe Harmston
Designed by Simon Scullion
Lighting by Ben Cracknell
Sound Design and Composer: Matthew Bugg

CHARACTERS

ACT I

Alarms

NICHOLAS
JOHN
JOCASTA
NANCY

Doubles

MILES
MELANIE
LAURENCE
LYNN

ACT II

Leavings

NICHOLAS
NANCY
JOCASTA
JOHN

Look Away Now

APTLY
BLOSS
CHARR
VOICE OF STEWARDESS

Finishing Touches

VICTORIA
EDWARD

Pig in the Middle

LUCY
ALAN

Toasters

SPOTT
MUCH
CANDLE
VOICE OF SPEAKER

Immobiles

DIETRICH
CHRIS
NIKKI
MOTHER

The plays are to be performed by a team of two actors and two actresses: **Actor A** and **Actress B**, both in their mid-forties; **Actor C** and **Actress D**, both in their mid-thirties.

The likely distribution of parts would be:

ACT I

	Actor A	**Actress B**	**Actor C**	**Actress D**
Alarms	John	Jocasta	Nicholas	Nancy
Doubles	Laurence	Lynn	Miles	Melanie

ACT II

	Actor A	**Actress B**	**Actor C**	**Actress D**
Leavings	John	Jocasta	Nicholas	Nancy
Look Away Now	Aptly	Charr	Bloss	Stewardess
Finishing Touches	Edward	—	—	Victoria
Pig in the Middle	—	Lucy	Alan	—
Toasters	Speaker	Spott	Much	Candle
Immobiles	Chris	Mother	Dietrich	Nikki

The action takes place in a dining-room (**Alarms** and **Leavings**), two hotel bedrooms (**Doubles**), a commercial aircraft (**Look Away Now**), a room with dining table and two chairs (**Finishing Touches**), another room (**Pig in the Middle**), in a room at a business conference (**Toasters**) and in the environs of twelve different telephones (**Immobiles**).

Time—the present

ACT I

Alarms

A dining-room. Evening.

There are three entrances: right, left and center. There is a dining-table with four chairs. On the table are a bottle of wine and an ingenious new corkscrew. There is a phone and answering machine.

When the play begins, the stage is empty.

From off left comes the sound of the front door opening and guests arriving.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

NICHOLAS *and* **NANCY** *enter left, ushered in by* **JOHN**.

NICHOLAS Just us?

JOHN Just you.

JOCASTA Is that all right?

NANCY Wonderful.

NICHOLAS Perfect.

JOCASTA The kids are away on sleepovers.

NANCY Ours are on some nature thing.

JOHN We thought we'd simply flop down exhausted in our braces.

NICHOLAS Turn our mobiles off.

NANCY Turn our mobiles off...

JOCASTA And have a nice quiet evening together.

JOHN Four old chums, four weary fellow-travellers on the road of life, taking shelter for an hour or two from the night and storm.

JOCASTA Something very simple in the oven.

NANCY Smells heavenly.

JOHN The odd bottle of wine. *(He fetches the bottle)*

NICHOLAS More and more like heaven.

JOCASTA Just have a look at the oven...

JOCASTA *exits right.*

JOHN Just open the wine... *(He fetches the corkscrew, and sets to work with it during the following)* Then we can all...

NICHOLAS Flop down.

NANCY Exhausted.

JOHN In our braces.

NICHOLAS Where?

JOHN What?

NICHOLAS Where do you want us to flop down?

JOHN Anywhere. On the floor. Under the sideboard. On a chair... On a chair! Why not?

NICHOLAS On a chair!

NANCY Brilliant.

NICHOLAS Any chair?

JOHN Absolutely any chair that takes your fancy.

NICHOLAS The man's a prince.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

JOCASTA You found somewhere to park?

NICHOLAS Right outside.

NANCY For once!

JOHN An augury, perhaps.

NICHOLAS This is going to be one of the great evenings.

JOHN I'll just get the wine open... *(He struggles with the corkscrew)* Then we'll simply sit and... I don't know...

A sound. Chink.

JOCASTA Whatever one does when one gets the chance at last.

NANCY What *does* one do, as a matter of fact?

NICHOLAS So long since it happened.

Chink.

JOCASTA Talk, perhaps?

NANCY Talk, yes! Talk, talk, talk!

JOCASTA I remember talk.

NICHOLAS Get the wine open, possibly.

JOHN Get the wine open, certainly. *(He renews his efforts with the corkscrew)*

NICHOLAS Or not even talk. Sit here in silence, why not?

Chink.

NANCY Relax. Be.

NICHOLAS Sip our wine.

JOHN *withdraws his fingers sharply from the corkscrew.*

NICHOLAS New toy?

JOHN The point is you don't have to do all that heaving and cursing. You just quite simply... No, hold on... Or possibly...

NICHOLAS Don't you put the... And then...?

JOHN I've got it, I've got it...

NICHOLAS No.

JOHN Or...

NICHOLAS Try...

JOHN Where are the instructions?

JOCASTA I put them in the drawer.

JOHN In the drawer?

JOCASTA With all the other instructions.

JOCASTA *exits.*

NICHOLAS Give it to me.

JOHN It's all right.

NICHOLAS Let me have a go!

JOHN No, if I can just...

Chink.

What?

NICHOLAS What?

JOHN You made a little noise.

NICHOLAS No?

JOHN It wasn't you?

NICHOLAS What sort of noise?

JOHN Sort of—chink.

Chink.

There!

NICHOLAS I thought that was you.

JOHN Me? Going chink?

JOCASTA *enters, with the instructions.*

JOCASTA The instructions for everything—in the drawer.

NICHOLAS Did you hear it?

JOCASTA Did I hear what?

JOHN Chink.

JOCASTA Chink?

NANCY Chink.

JOCASTA What do you mean, chink?

Chink.

NANCY There!

JOCASTA What is it?

JOHN That's what we want to know.

NICHOLAS Something in the house.

NANCY Some electronic thing.

NICHOLAS The phone.

JOHN The phone? Phones don't go—

Chink.

NICHOLAS Listen!

JOHN I've never heard a phone go chink!

NANCY But you've got this special system.

NICHOLAS This wonderful system.

NANCY That sends calls all over the house.

JOHN Yes, but it doesn't go—

Chink.

It *is* you!

NICHOLAS It is *not* me!

JOHN Something in your pocket.

JOCASTA A pager, maybe.

NICHOLAS I haven't got a pager.

NANCY You've got your—

NICHOLAS What?

NANCY —little whatsit thing.

NICHOLAS What—this?

NANCY No...

NICHOLAS This?

JOHN Pocketsful of the stuff.

NANCY That's electronic.

NICHOLAS Yes, but it doesn't go—

Chink.

NANCY What—me?

JOCASTA Something in your bag.

NANCY Don't be silly.

NICHOLAS Let's have a look.

NANCY No!

NICHOLAS *I* got everything out of *my* pockets.

NANCY I don't keep things like that in my bag! There's nothing in there that could possibly go—

Chink.

NICHOLAS It's the opening thing.

JOHN The opening thing?

NICHOLAS Your new bottle-opening thing.

JOHN Going chink?

NICHOLAS To remind you.

JOHN To do what?

NICHOLAS To open the wine.

JOCASTA Yes. Come on.

Chink, chink.

NICHOLAS There! Twice! Chink chink! It's getting desperate!

JOCASTA No, but as soon as you touched it!

NANCY Try not touching it!

NICHOLAS Put it down!

NANCY Listen...!

NICHOLAS Silence.

NANCY Wait... Wait...

NICHOLAS You see?

NANCY If you don't touch it it doesn't go—

Chink.

NICHOLAS It's the oven.

JOCASTA The oven?

NANCY You said you've got something in the oven.

JOCASTA The oven doesn't go—

Chink.

NANCY No, but the timer thing.

JOCASTA The timer thing? The timer thing goes—

There is a buzz (continuous).

Excuse me…

JOCASTA *exits right.*

NANCY *Something* in the kitchen, though. The microwave.

NICHOLAS Or the food-processor.

NANCY The coffee-maker.

NICHOLAS The coffee-grinder.

The buzzing stops.

NANCY The toaster.

NICHOLAS The toaster?

JOHN How can a toaster go—?

Chink.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

JOCASTA Anyway, let's all just forget about it.

JOHN But it's plainly trying to tell us something.

JOCASTA But if we don't know what it is…

NICHOLAS It could be something important.

JOCASTA It can't be *that* important!

JOHN But it's plainly *meaningful*!

Silence.

NANCY Listen!

NICHOLAS What?

NANCY It's stopped.

Silence.

JOCASTA Right. It's stopped. Where were we? What were we talking about?

NANCY The chink.

JOCASTA Before that.

NICHOLAS I can't remember.

JOCASTA Open the wine, at least.

JOHN I'm trying to.

Buzz (continuous).

JOCASTA Sorry.

JOCASTA *exits right.*

NANCY Timer?

JOCASTA *(offstage)* Sometimes you turn it off, and two minutes later...

NICHOLAS It's rather nice, the buzz.

NANCY Like bees.

JOHN Soporific.

NANCY Summer afternoon.

NICHOLAS Glass of wine in front of you...

JOHN Turn it *off*!

JOCASTA *(offstage)* I'm trying to!

The buzzing stops.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

JOCASTA I keep meaning to get the man. Sorry.

NICHOLAS And at least we haven't got the—

Chink.

NANCY It's some sort of creature.

NICHOLAS Creature?

NANCY A cricket. A frog. Some sort of tropical frog. Perhaps it was someone's pet, and it escaped. Now it's trapped somewhere.

Chink.

It's getting desperate.

Chink.

NANCY It's in the ceiling…

They watch. Chink.

JOCASTA It's the smoke alarm.

NANCY Oh my God.

NICHOLAS The house is on fire.

JOHN Except it isn't.

NANCY Is it?

NICHOLAS The machine says it is!

JOHN Well, it's wrong.

NICHOLAS A smoke alarm must know more about smoke than you do!

JOHN It's lying.

NICHOLAS That's a terrible accusation.

JOHN There is no smoke.

NICHOLAS There must be smoke.

JOHN Look!

NICHOLAS I don't need to look. I can hear.

NANCY I can smell burning.

They all sniff.

Buzz (continuous).

NICHOLAS I can smell buzzing.

JOCASTA Sorry.

JOCASTA *exits right.*

The buzzing stops. Chink.

NANCY Perhaps it needs a new battery.

NICHOLAS Perhaps we need the instructions.

JOCASTA *enters right carrying a drawer.*

JOCASTA In here somewhere. *(She dumps the contents—a mass of instruction books—on the table)*

NICHOLAS These are all instructions? Instructions for gadgets? You have gadgets to fit all these instructions?

JOHN Of course not. We throw out the gadgets when they break down.

JOCASTA We never throw out the instructions.

JOHN Hair-curler... Eyebrow-trimmer... Toaster...

JOCASTA We don't need instructions for the toaster! *(She picks up the toaster book and puts it aside)*

JOHN We might. *(He puts the book back in the pile)*

Chink.

NANCY Perhaps it's trying to tell us it needs a new battery.

NICHOLAS *(picking up a book)* Electric carving knife... You haven't got an electric carving-knife!

JOCASTA We threw the electric carving-knife out ten years ago! *(She puts the book aside)*

NICHOLAS *(putting the book back in the main pile)* You never know. Christmas Day. In rushes the man from across the street, desperate. Turkey on the table, fifteen people to dinner, and the carving-knife is going chink.

JOHN *(picking up a book)* Here we are—smoke-alarm.

JOCASTA Right at the bottom. The house could have burnt down by now.

NANCY I think it may just need—

NICHOLAS Yes, we heard you.

NANCY —a new battery.

NICHOLAS Don't be silly. Things don't go—

Chink.

—to tell you they need a new battery.

JOHN *reads the instructions.*

JOHN It needs a new battery.

NICHOLAS It needs a new battery. Obviously.

JOHN *(to* **NICHOLAS***)* Just help me... Thanks.

JOHN *and* **NICHOLAS** *drag the table under the smoke alarm.* **JOHN** *climbs on the table.*

JOCASTA Have we got a new battery?

NICHOLAS Of course you haven't! But if he takes out the old battery, at least it won't keep going—

Chink. Buzz.

JOCASTA *exits right.*

JOHN Doorkeys! On the hook! In the kitchen!

NICHOLAS *exits right and then returns.*

NICHOLAS Doorkeys?

JOHN Hook the...hook the thing.

NICHOLAS *exits right.*

The phone rings.

JOHN Phone!

NANCY I'll get it!

She answers the phone.

(into the phone) Hallo...? No, he's dealing with the chink... The chink... Yes—he's standing on the table.

NICHOLAS *enters right with doorkeys and hands them to* **JOHN**.

Can he...? No, OK, hold on... *(To* **JOHN***)* Rather urgent.

The buzz stops.

JOHN Cordless.

NANCY Cordless...

NICHOLAS Cordless...

They look round helplessly.

JOCASTA *enters right, holding a cordless phone.*

JOCASTA Here...

JOHN Thanks.

NICHOLAS What do I do?

JOHN Press nine.

NICHOLAS *(pressing the button)* Nine.

JOCASTA Not nine!

JOHN Not nine!

JOCASTA You're always doing this!

JOHN I mean eight!

JOCASTA Nine's the living-room! It's gone into the living-room now!

JOCASTA *heads towards the exit center.*

JOHN You don't have to run after it! You can get it back, you can get it back!

JOCASTA You can get it back if you can remember what to press to get it back, but you can never remember what to press!

Buzz (continuous).

Oh, no!

NANCY Living-room? I'll go, I'll go!

JOHN Sit down, sit down!

NICHOLAS They didn't pay whatever it was for this wonderful system to have people go running all over the house like sheep-dogs, rounding up stray calls.

JOHN Just press... What is it?

Chink.

JOCASTA You're going to make a mess of it, whatever you do.

JOCASTA *exits right.*

NANCY It'll just be quicker for me to...

NANCY *exits center.*

JOHN Press Recall.

NICHOLAS *(pressing the button)* Recall.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

JOCASTA No! Not Recall!

JOHN I mean Redial!

NICHOLAS *(pressing the button)* Redial.

JOCASTA Certainly not Redial! You'll never get it back now!

JOHN It's that buzzer! I can't think with that buzzer going!

Chink.

NANCY *enters center.*

NANCY It stopped just as I picked it up.

JOCASTA It's ringing in the bedroom now.

NANCY Bedroom, right.

JOCASTA It rings each extension in turn.

NANCY Which bedroom?

JOHN Front.

JOCASTA Back.

JOHN Front first!

JOCASTA Back first!

NANCY *exits center.*

JOHN It doesn't matter—

NICHOLAS He sounded desperate.

JOHN —because it'll end up on the answering machine. We'll hear it on the answering machine...

Chink.

(to **JOCASTA***)* Buzzer, buzzer! *(To* **NICHOLAS***)* We'll pick it up on the answering machine.

JOCASTA You can't pick it up on the answering machine! We're always trying to pick it up on the answering machine, and you can't!

JOHN You can if you do it from the downstairs bathroom.

JOCASTA No, from the study.

JOHN The downstairs bathroom!

JOCASTA The study!

NANCY *enters center.*

NANCY It wasn't the front bedroom—

JOCASTA No, it was the back! *Now* it's the front!

JOHN No, *now* it's the upstairs bathroom! *(To* **JOCASTA***)* Will you stop that *buzzing?* It's driving me mad!

NANCY Upstairs bathroom?

NICHOLAS My turn.

JOCASTA *exits right.*

(to **NANCY***)* You open the wine.

Chink.

JOHN *(to the smoke alarm)* Oh, shut up!

NICHOLAS *exits center.*

Car alarm.

NICHOLAS *enters center.*

NICHOLAS Not yours?

JOHN Or yours?

NICHOLAS Oh *no,* not again!

NICHOLAS *exits left.*

JOHN *(to* **NANCY***)* Open the wine. It sounds as if he might need a drink.

NANCY *picks up the wine and the corkscrew and sets to work.*

The buzzer stops.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

JOCASTA *(to* **NANCY***)* What are you doing?

NANCY Opening the wine.

JOCASTA Not with that thing!

JOHN What do you mean, not with that thing!

NANCY I'm not very good with gadgets.

JOHN It's *easier* with that thing!

JOCASTA I'll get you an ordinary one.

JOCASTA *exits right.*

Doorbell.

NANCY What's that?

JOHN Doorbell.

JOCASTA *enters right.*

JOCASTA Who on earth?

NANCY I'll go.

JOHN *I'll* go! *(To* **NANCY***)* Wine, wine!

JOHN *gets down from the table and exits left.*

JOCASTA *(to* **NANCY***)* Wait! Corkscrew!

JOCASTA *exits right.*

VOICE ON ANSWERING MACHINE *John, it's Peter Pinch, in the accounts office...*

JOHN *enters left.*

JOHN Oh, God, it's got on the answering machine!

VOICE *Sorry to call you at home, but this is a bit urgent...*

JOHN Get off the line, then! I'll call you back!

VOICE *I gather you never pick up the phone in the evenings if it's business, but this really is a bit desperate...*

JOCASTA *exits right.*

VOICE *I'm at the office. There's a bit of a crisis on.*

JOCASTA What's all this?

JOHN I don't know!

VOICE *I'm told you* are *at home this evening, so if you* could *pick it up...*

JOCASTA Pick it up, pick it up!

JOHN Downstairs bathroom?

JOHN *exits center.*

JOCASTA *(calling after him)* Study! Study!

Doorbell.

NANCY The door...

JOCASTA *I'll* go!

Buzz (continuous).

JOCASTA You do the buzzer. No, leave it, leave it.

NANCY I'll do the wine. *(She picks up the bottle and the corkscrew and sets to work)*

JOCASTA No! Wait! Don't do anything!

JOCASTA *exits left.*

JOHN *enters center.*

JOHN I can't! It won't! Nothing happens!

VOICE *John...? John...? I really would be grateful if you* could *pick up the phone...*

JOHN *(to the answering machine)* I *have*! I've gone into the downstairs bathroom and picked it up, and it still doesn't work! *(To* **NANCY***)* Not like that! You'll have your finger off!

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