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SF PERUSALS

Drowning on Dry Land

A play

Alan Ayckbourn

Samuel French — London
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DROWNING ON DRY LAND

First performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, on the 4th May 2004, with the following cast:

Charlie Conrad	Stephen Beckett
Linzi Ellison	Melanie Gutteridge
Jason Ratcliffe	Adrian McLoughlin
Hugo de Préscourt, QC	Stuart Fox
Gale Gilchrist	Billie-Claire Wright
Marsha Bates	Sarah Moyle
Simeon Diggs	Paul Kemp

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop
Lighting by Mick Hughes

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CHARACTERS

Charlie Conrad, a celebrity, mid-thirties
Linzi Ellison, his wife, thirty-three
Jason Ratcliffe, his manager, fifties
Hugo de Préscourt QC, a barrister, forties
Gale Gilchrist, a TV journalist, mid-twenties
Marsha Bates, a children's entertainer, thirties
Simeon Diggs, her lawyer, forties
Laura, a girl of about ten (non-speaking)
Katie, a girl of about eight (non-speaking)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in and around a folly in Linzi's and Charlie's garden

ACT I An afternoon in June

ACT II
Scene 1 An afternoon in August
Scene 2 An afternoon in January

Time — the present

It is folly to drown on dry land
English proverb

Other plays by Alan Ayckbourn published by Samuel French Ltd:

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Body Language

Callisto 5

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FlatSpin, GamePlan
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Ernie's Incredible Illucinations

Family Circles

Gizmo

Henceforward ...

House & Garden

How the Other Half Loves

Intimate Exchanges

It Could Be Any One of Us

Joking Apart

Just Between Ourselves

Man of the Moment

Mr Whatnot

Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays

My Very Own Story

The Norman Conquests:
Living Together,
Round and Round the Garden
and Table Manners

Relatively Speaking

The Revengers' Comedies

Season's Greetings

Sisterly Feelings

A Small Family Business

Snake in the Grass

Taking Steps

Ten Times Table

Things We Do for Love

This Is Where We Came In

Time and Time Again

Time of My Life

Tons of Money (revised version
of the farce by Will Evans and
Valentine)

Way Upstream

Wildest Dreams

Wolf at the Door (adapted from
Les Corbeaux by Henry Becque,
translated by David Walker)

Woman in Mind

A Word from Our Sponsor

ACT I

Linzi's and Charlie's garden somewhere in rural southern England, an hour or so's drive from London. A fine afternoon in June

It is a big, well-tended garden with a terrace, a lawn and, round at one side, a paddock. However, we don't see much of this, for what we are looking at is "The Folly", a nineteenth-century, stone-built circular tower. At ground level it is open in a stone-pillared semi-circle, to form a south-facing open seating area. There are three or four good-quality garden chairs and a low table in the semi-circle. At the back are two archways, each leading directly on to a shallow stairway, one going up, the other leading down. By some architectural sleight of hand (fortunately not one we are going to be called upon to explain!) the two are actually the same staircase. People attempting to climb the staircase through one doorway will find, despite an optical and sensory impression to the contrary, that they have actually climbed nowhere. Similarly, those who choose to descend will find that they, too, have miraculously remained on the same level

When the CURTAIN *rises the garden is lit with bright summer sunshine*

In a moment Linzi and Marsha enter from the direction of the house

Linzi is thirty-three. Outwardly, she has the good looks, poise and physical image that many women would happily kill for; but these do not satisfy Linzi. In her current restless, unhappy inner state she is given to changing her image on an almost daily basis

Marsha, in her thirties, is by contrast far less overtly glamorous. There is a nervousness and lack of confidence about her that has been accentuated by the glamour of her surroundings. She is dressed in her casual work clothes

It is apparent that whilst Marsha is doing her very best to impress her present temporary employer, Linzi is showing only scant interest in Marsha

Linzi … no, your best bet is to bring it up this way ...
Marsha Yes, I will … I'm so sorry, I ——
Linzi ... as I say, you should have parked round the side of the house there ...

Marsha Yes, I realize now I should have done that. I should have realized ...
Linzi We always keep that side by the kitchen clear for, you know, staff and that ...
Marsha Yes, it was silly of me ...
Linzi ... for tradespeople and suchlike ...
Marsha ... I should have thought …
Linzi You could have parked next to the catering vans. We only allow parking down there in the paddock just for today ...
Marsha Yes, yes ...
Linzi ... overflow parking ...
Marsha ... for the party, yes, of course.
Linzi That's normally the paddock. We had to move the pony, of course.
Marsha Oh, how lovely! You've got a pony! Is that your son's pony?
Linzi No, it's Jade's. Harry's baby sister's. It's her pony …
Marsha Ah! And how old is she?
Linzi Four and a half.
Marsha Heavens! Her own pony already! Lucky little girl!
Linzi Well, you know, kids. Once Harry got his little racing car …
Marsha I always wanted a pony. Always.
Linzi (*abstracted*) And the trampoline …
Marsha But my parents couldn't … You call him Harry, do you? Your son? He's known as Harry?
Linzi He prefers Harry. We don't call him Horsham. Not normally.
Marsha No.
Linzi That's only for the newspapers and that.
Marsha Yes. Well, that's easier, I suppose. Harry. Easier than Horsham.
Linzi (*gazing into the distance*) Harry doesn't like Horsham …
Marsha What made you call him Horsham?
Linzi Sorry?
Marsha Why Horsham?
Linzi (*vaguely*) No …

Pause. Linzi seems miles away. Marsha gazes upwards.

Marsha Quite a tower this. Very high. Unusual. (*Pause*) Wonderful view. I should imagine. From the top. (*Pause*) What date was it built, do you know?
Linzi (*coming out of her reverie*) Listen, do you mind if I leave you to collect your stuff on your own … ?
Marsha No, of course.
Linzi Only I need to get on. All these people arriving …
Marsha Yes. How many children are you expecting?

Linzi (*vaguely*) Kids? About seventy, I think.
Marsha (*a bit taken aback*) Heavens.
Linzi If they all turn up. Then there's the parents on top of that, of course. Getting on for two hundred, all told. We usually try and limit it to two hundred.
Marsha Goodness! Some birthday party … Lucky little boy.
Linzi Well, it's only once a year, isn't it? (*Pause*) Right.
Marsha (*realizing she is being dismissed*) Right. (*Turning to go*) I'll go and …
Linzi You can cope with seventy, can you? You'll be all right with seventy?
Marsha Yes, it's a few more than I'm … but fine …
Linzi I mean, we could split them …
Marsha I mean, usually there aren't quite so ...
Linzi We did for the fire-eater a couple of years ago …
Marsha … no, it'll be fine. I'll just do my broader stuff, don't worry …
Linzi Angie said you could probably cope.
Marsha Yes, it was so kind of Mrs Spencer-Fullerton to recommend me, I ——
Linzi You need a hand then, will you? With your gear?
Marsha No, that's all right …
Linzi I can call someone …
Marsha No, no. I'm used to it.
Linzi Just as you like …

Pause. Linzi still shows no sign of going

Marsha Right, I'll … (*She makes to leave again, then stops. Rather tentatively*) — Er …
Linzi Yes?
Marsha Excuse me for asking ... but will your husband be here today?
Linzi Charlie? He's around somewhere, I think … I hope he is.
Marsha I'm just — I'm just, I'm such a fan of his …
Linzi (*uninterested*) That's nice …
Marsha I'd so love to meet him. He's my — I think I am genuinely his absolute number one fan. I think he's just — What I like about him, you see, is he's not like other celebrities, is he? … You know, some of them, you know, you can't relate to ... not at all … I mean, some of them are great but they're not like ordinary people. If you see what I mean. Whereas your husband, he always comes over as so — *normal*. Do I mean that? Perhaps I mean ordinary? No, I don't mean ordinary, I mean normal. I'd so much like to meet him. Just to tell people I've — Is he like that to live with? He must be.
Linzi Like what?

Marsha You know, normal?
Linzi Pardon?
Marsha (*confused*) I must get on. Excuse me.

Marsha goes off towards the garden

Linzi stands staring after Marsha, frowning

In a moment Jason, a man of around fifty, appears through one of the archways at the back of the tower. He is casually but expensively dressed

Linzi scarcely listens to the following

Jason (*seeing Linzi as he appears*) … you know, it's amazing, that is, Linzi. Every time I come here, it gets me every time. That is brilliant, that is. Whoever designed that was a genius, wasn't he? I mean, when you think about it, eighteen — When was this built, Linzi? Eighteen-eighty — whatever — I mean, when you think about it — in some respects, we've not moved on since those days, have we? Not really. I mean, yes, in some ways, yes. We've got cars, we've got planes, we've got computers, television, light bulbs, mobile phones, you know, all of that — whatever. But in other ways, we haven't really moved on, that's my point. Have we? Not when it comes to design like that. It's amazing. (*He stares back at the passageway*) I don't know how it works. Mathematical, it must be. Don't ask me. I still can't work it out. Sheer brilliance. (*He studies the archway some more*)

Silence

Linzi (*who has scarcely been listening to this*) I'm really pissed off, you know that, Jason?
Jason Mind you, the ancient Chinese did it all before anyway, didn't they?
Linzi You hear me?
Jason What's that?
Linzi I said, I'm really pissed off. I really am. Seriously, Jason.
Jason Well …
Linzi He knew this party was today. He knew it was. You both did. He knows when his own son's birthday is, for Christ's sake. Now he's not going to be there, is he? What am I going to tell Harry? The first thing he'll say is, "Where's Dad? Where's me dad?" He's bound to. What am I going to tell him?
Jason You'll be there, though, won't you?
Linzi I'll be there, yes. I'm always there. He doesn't want me, does he? He's a boy, he wants his dad. He doesn't want me. I could walk out tomorrow, Harry'd never notice.

Jason Ah, come on ——

Linzi 'Cos it's me who has to tell him off all the time, it's left to me, isn't it? Tell him not to do things. It should be his dad doing that, only it's left to me, isn't it? Charlie? He just sits there, smiling. "Oh come on, he's only a lad, Linzi, give him a chance. I was a lad once." He pushed his sister in the swimming pool the other day. She nearly drowned. "Oh, come on, he's only larking about, Linzi. He's just a lad, isn't he?" That's what lads do, apparently. Try and drown their baby sisters.

Jason Don't get in a state, Linzi. This was the only day we could arrange it, I've said. The only day Charlie was free. You know what it's like.

Linzi But he wasn't free, was he? That's the point. He should have been at his son's birthday party, that's what I'm saying. Six years old, his dad should be there. I blame you for this just as much. I blame you too, Jason.

Jason Look, if you don't believe me, I'll show you Charlie's diary. He hasn't got a spare minute between now and Christmas, Linzi.

Linzi Well, I'm telling you now, both of you, I'm not sticking it much longer, I'm really not —— (*She breaks off as she sees Marsha returning from the garden*))

Marsha enters carrying her prop hamper

Marsha (*a little breathlessly*) Excuse me. Yes. Excuse me. (*To Jason, shyly*) Afternoon.

Jason How d'you do.

Marsha exits to the house

Linzi and Jason watch her

Jason Who's that, then?

Linzi She's the — entertainer. You know. For the kids. Angie recommended her.

Jason Ah.

Linzi I hope she can handle them. She seems a bit quiet. Shy.

Jason Well, they often are. Entertainers. Shy. Off stage.

Linzi I never met any. I mean, kids at that age, they're animals. If she's shy with them, they'll have her for tea.

Jason She'll be fine.

Linzi I'll tell you this much, Jason. Just 'cos I've had his kids, I don't plan to spend the rest of my life being a mother, I'll tell you that. (*Irritably*) Where is he, then?

Jason Who?

Linzi Charlie. I thought you were doing an interview out here.

Jason No, it's just a meeting. Preliminary. Charlie wanted to meet out here. Interview's not for two weeks.

Linzi Well, where is he? I want a word with him.
Jason Woman hasn't arrived yet, has she?
Linzi So where is he?
Jason On the phone, I think.
Linzi Who to?
Jason I don't know.
Linzi Who're you meeting, anyway?
Jason Gale Gilchrist.
Linzi Gale Gilchrist?
Jason Didn't he tell you?
Linzi (*alarmed*) For God's sake, you're not bringing that woman down here?
Jason Didn't he tell you?
Linzi Charlie? He never tells me anything. He's never here, is he? Gale Gilchrist?
Jason She's all right …
Linzi … she's a monster.
Jason I can handle Gale, don't worry.
Linzi What about Charlie? Can he handle her?
Jason I'll be with him.
Linzi You better had be, Jason, that's all. Why the hell are you letting her come here? Into our home, for God's sake?
Jason Because it's Gale Gilchrist. She's a major player these days, you know that, Linzi. Her viewing figure's off the scale. With Charlie's new sponsorship deal in the pipeline, we could do with her right now.
Linzi She destroys people. That's how she's built her reputation.
Jason And they all love her. Currently she's walking on water …
Linzi You saw what she did to Ronnie the other week. I've heard the BBC aren't renewing his contract now …
Jason Well, that would have all come out sooner or later, anyway, wouldn't it? Ronnie's funny habits. It wasn't exactly the world's best secret, was it? Everybody knew. Didn't need Gale. Once the police confiscated his computer, Ronnie was fair game.
Linzi Well, I'm not talking to her. I tell you, I'm not even saying hallo to her ——
Jason (*soothingly*) Now, Linzi, you can't do that, you know that …
Linzi — and you keep her away from my kids, as well. Poisonous little bitch.
Jason Listen! Listen! Linzi! When she arrives, you and Charlie give her a nice warm welcome, all right?
Linzi No way …
Jason There's nothing she can say about Charlie, is there? Either of you. Unless you give her something. You two greet her — the world's perfect couple ——
Linzi Oh, yes?

Jason Yes! "Welcome to our beautiful home. Now, I must get back to my party, excuse me." That's all you have to say. That's all it is.
Linzi That's all she's getting. From me.
Jason As for Charlie, we don't need to worry about him. There's nothing there for her, is there? That's the joy with Charlie. Mr Clean. No worries, no scandals. He's like a pane of glass, that lad. Nothing to hide. You can see straight through him, can't you? Sheet of glass.
Linzi Yes, like a mirror. Most days you end up talking to your own reflection.

Jason looks at her for a moment

Jason You're in a funny mood today, aren't you?
Linzi I've told you. I've had enough of it.

Marsha appears, making another journey from the house

Marsha (*smiling at them*) Excuse me. One more trip …
Linzi — er — listen, dear, when you do your act, like … You're able to talk louder than that, are you?
Marsha Sorry?
Linzi Louder. When you're performing? Because there's quite a few kids and they can be quite noisy. Some of them. I mean, I think we could find you a microphone, if you'd like one. Save your voice.
Marsha (*a little alarmed*) Oh, no. He never speaks.
Linzi Pardon?
Marsha Chortles. Mr Chortles the Clown, he never speaks. He's a mime, you see …
Linzi He's a what?
Marsha A mime. He's a clown. Mr Chortles expresses himself entirely through silent physicality. He has no need of speech. Didn't Mrs Spencer-Fullerton tell you?
Linzi No, she didn't.
Marsha (*anxiously*) That's not a problem, is it? I mean, you weren't expecting a stand-up, were you? I mean, jokes and things?
Linzi No, I'm sure you'll be fine. It was just the magician we had last year, he was very loud indeed. They could hear him in Dorset.
Marsha Well, I do find as a general rule that the louder you are as a performer, the noisier the children tend to become …
Linzi (*doubtfully*) Oh, yes?
Marsha But that's just my personal experience … Sorry. Excuse me.

Marsha exits again to the garden

Linzi and Jason watch her go

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