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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Family Album

A Victorian Comedy with Music

by Noël Coward

SAMUEL FRENCH

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FAMILY ALBUM

Produced by John C. Wilson at the National Theatre in New York City on November 30, 1936, as one of a series of nine one-act plays by Noel Coward, under the title of "TO-NIGHT AT EIGHT-THIRTY." The play was directed by the author and the cast was as follows:

JASPER FEATHERWAYS . . .	*Noel Coward.*
JANE	*Gertrude Lawrence.*
LAVINIA FEATHERWAYS . . .	*Joyce Carey.*
RICHARD FEATHERWAYS . . .	*Edward Underdown.*
HARRIET WINTER	*Joan Swinstead.*
CHARLES WINTER	*Anthony Pelissier.*
EMILY VALANCE	*Moya Nugent.*
EDWARD VALANCE	*Kenneth Carten.*
BURROWS	*Alan Webb.*

The action of the play passes in the drawing-room of the Featherways' house in Kent on an Autumn evening in the year 1860.

CHARACTERS

JASPER FEATHERWAYS	*Noel Coward.*
JANE (his Wife)	*Gertrude Lawrence.*
LAVINIA FEATHERWAYS	*Alison Leggatt.*
RICHARD FEATHERWAYS	*Edward Underdown.*
HARRIET WINTER	*Everley Gregg.*
CHARLES WINTER	*Anthony Pelissier.*
EMILY VALANCE	*Moya Nugent.*
EDWARD VALANCE	*Kenneth Carten.*
BURROWS	*Alan Webb.*

The action of the play passes in the drawing-room of the Featherways' house in Kent on an Autumn evening in the year 1860.

FAMILY ALBUM

The scene is the drawing-room of the Featherways' house in Kent, not very far from London.

It is an Autumn evening in the year 1860.

(See Photograph of Scene.)

When the CURTAIN *rises the entire family is assembled. They are all in deep mourning. The music plays softly; an undercurrent to grief.* EMILY *is by the window;* RICHARD *is slightly up* L. *of her;* LAVINIA *is seated at* R. *end of the couch;* JASPER *is standing in front of the fireplace;* JANE *is sitting on the down-stage seat* C; HARRIET *is sitting on the upstage seat* C.; CHARLES *is leaning against the pillar at the back of the couch;* EDWARD *is standing and leaning with one hand on the* L. *side of the pillar up* R.C.

The family group would be static were it not for an occasional slight movement from one or other of them. Apart from the music there is silence for quite a while. EMILY *breaks it.*

EMILY. It has stopped raining.

RICHARD (*moving to the window*). Not quite, Emily, but it is certainly clearing.

LAVINIA. It was fitting that it rained to-day. It has been a sad day and rain became it.

JASPER. True, very true.

JANE. A little sunshine would have been much pleasanter nevertheless.

JASPER. Lavinia has a tidy mind. She likes life to be as neat as her handkerchief drawer.

HARRIET. I hope Mr. Lubbock reached London safely.

JANE. Dear Mr. Lubbock!

LAVINIA. Really, Jane!

JANE. I think he's a sweet man. He read the will with such sympathy.

HARRIET. He coughed a great deal, I thought. I wanted to give him one of my pastilles.

CHARLES. I'm glad you didn't, my dear, they have an alarming flavour and he was already considerably nervous.

HARRIET. They're very efficacious.

EMILY (*pensively—at the window*). I wonder if he knew.

EDWARD. What was that, my love?

EMILY. Papa—I wonder if he knew it was raining?

LAVINIA. Perhaps he was watching—from somewhere above the trees.

HARRIET. Oh! Do you suppose he was?

LAVINIA. I like to think it.

JANE. Do you, Lavinia?

LAVINIA. Of course.

JANE. When I die I hope I shall go swiftly and not linger above familiar trees. It must be painful to watch those you have left, in black and weeping.

EMILY. Oh, don't, Jane, don't! (*She weeps, and sits in the armchair* R.C.)

EDWARD (*comforting her*). There, there, my dear.

HARRIET. Poor Papa!

EMILY. Poor dear Papa!

(*The door opens quietly and* BURROWS, *a very aged butler, enters staggering under the weight of a heavy tray on which is a decanter containing Madeira, and the requisite number of glasses.* RICHARD *goes quickly and relieves him of it and puts it on the table* R.C.)

RICHARD. Oh, Burrows, you should have let Martin carry the tray, it's too heavy for you.

BURROWS (*cupping his ear with his hand*). Pardon, Master Richard?

JASPER (*who has crossed to* BURROWS—*bending down to him and speaking clearly*). You should have let Martin carry the tray, Burrows, it's too heavy for you.

BURROWS. Martin is young, Mr. Jasper. He would have been out of tune with the evening's melancholy. His very bearing would have been an intrusion.

LAVINIA. Thank you, Burrows, that was very considerate of you.

BURROWS. I beg your pardon, Miss Lavvy?

LAVINIA (*loudly*). I said thank you, Burrows, that was very considerate of you.

BURROWS. Your servant to the grave, Miss Lavvy.

JANE. Oh, Burrows!

BURROWS. I beg your pardon, Ma'am?

JANE (*loudly*). I only said "Oh, Burrows," Burrows.

BURROWS. Very good, Ma'am.

(BURROWS *goes out.* JASPER *has returned to the fireplace.*)

HARRIET. Poor Burrows looks very depressed.

JASPER. Burrows has looked depressed for at least thirty years.

JANE. One could scarcely expect him to be hilarious now.

LAVINIA. Hilarious! Really, Jane!

HARRIET. I think sorrow has increased his deafness.

JASPER. He was just as deaf last Christmas really, and that was a gay occasion.

JANE (*with meaning*). Gay!

JASPER (*reprovingly*). Hush, Jane.

HARRIET. A bereavement in the house must affect the servants profoundly, although I must admit I heard Sarah singing in the pantry this morning.

EMILY (*horrified—rising and crossing to* R. *of the couch*). This morning!

HARRIET. It was quite early.

LAVINIA. Disgraceful!

HARRIET. She was singing very softly, and it *was* a hymn.

LAVINIA. Nevertheless, I hope you scolded her.

HARRIET. I hadn't the heart, she has such a pretty voice.

CHARLES. What hymn was it?

HARRIET. "For those in peril on the sea."

LAVINIA. Most inappropriate.

JASPER. Sarah's young man is a sailor, you know he's in the "Brilliant."

CHARLES (*with interest*). That's a Three-Decker.

EDWARD (*moving* C.). Yes. She carries one hundred and fourteen thirty-two pounders (*moves up to* RICHARD), two sixty-eight pounders and four eighteen pounders.

EMILY. Oh, Edward, how clever of you to know.

RICHARD. A fine ship, I have seen her at anchor.

CHARLES. Surely not a hundred and twenty guns? (*He moves to* RICHARD *and* EDWARD.)

EDWARD. Yes, she is the same class as the "Britannic" and the "Prince Regent."

RICHARD. Cast-iron muzzle-loaders, I presume?

EDWARD (*enthusiastically*). Yes, their recoil is checked by stout rope breechings.

CHARLES. How are they elevated?

EDWARD. Quoins—and trained by handspikes.

RICHARD. Oh—handspikes.

JANE (*with slight mockery*). Handspikes, Lavinia—do you hear that?—they're trained by handspikes!

LAVINIA. I declare I'm more at sea than Sarah's young man.

JANE. Oh, Lavvy—a joke—how sweet!

(EMILY *sits* L. *of* LAVINIA *on the couch.*)

EMILY (*hugging her*). Darling Lavvy!

LAVINIA. Behave, Emily—let me alone.

JASPER. It seems odd that the solemnity of this particular family reunion should be dissipated by gunnery.

LAVINIA. Such irrelevance, on such a day.

EDWARD. It was my fault, I apologize.

JANE. With so much to be done, so much to be decided.

LAVINIA (*raising her handkerchief to her eyes*). Oh, dear!

JASPER. Steel yourself, Lavinia—be brave.

LAVINIA. I'll try.

HARRIET. We must all try. (*She rises and moves* R.)

(CHARLES *and* RICHARD *go to the table on which* RICHARD *has placed the tray.*)

CHARLES. Jane—a little wine?

JANE. Thank you, Charles.

CHARLES. Harriet?

HARRIET. Thank you, Charles.

RICHARD. A little Madeira, Emily?

EMILY. Just a drop, please.

RICHARD. Lavinia?

LAVINIA. No, thank you.

HARRIET. Oh, Lavvy, a little sip would warm you.

LAVINIA. I am not cold.

(EDWARD *hands wine to* HARRIET *and* JANE.)

JASPER (*brusquely*). Come, Lavvy, don't be annoying.

LAVINIA. How can you, Jasper——

JASPER. I insist—here—— (*He gives her a glass.*)

JANE. We should drink a toast.

LAVINIA. You should be ashamed.

JANE. Don't be alarmed, I meant quite a gentle toast.

RICHARD. An excellent idea.

CHARLES. Why not?

LAVINIA. As though this were a moment for celebrating.

CHARLES. Again—why not? (*Handing wine to* JASPER.)

JASPER (*sternly*). Charles—behave yourself!

JANE. Charles is right. Why not indeed!

LAVINIA. I am at a loss to understand your behaviour this evening, Jane.

JANE. A billiard-room—I heard Charles and Harriet discussing it—they're going to have a billiard-room——

HARRIET. It's an extravagance—I told Charles it was an extravagance.

JANE. Never mind, you can afford it now.

CHARLES. That's what I say. (*He takes a glass to* EDWARD *and then returns to the table.*)

JANE. Isn't it splendid!—Isn't it absolutely splendid?

* *

LAVINIA (*immeasurably shocked*). What!

JANE. About Charles and Harriet being able to afford a billiard-room, about Emily and Edward being able to send John and Curly to Eton, about you, Lavinia, being able to buy a little house anywhere you like, about Jasper and me living here——

RICHARD (*above the table* R.C.). What about me?

JASPER. I think Crockford's should be congratulated —that's where all your money goes.

RICHARD. Touché, Jasper—a new black fleece though, for the blackest of black sheep.

EMILY. Where will you go, Lavvy?

LAVINIA. I feel this conversation to be abominably out of place.

(JANE *rises, puts down her glass and crosses to the couch in front of* LAVINIA *and kneels.*)

JASPER. Think, Lavvy—a little house in some gay country—France or Italy—you've always loved foreigners—a little villa in the sun—you can paint your pictures—blue seas and cypresses—you could take tabby with you, she's an insular cat, but I doubt whether French or Italian mice taste so very different——

JANE. We'll all come and stay with you, Lavinia.

RICHARD (*crossing to* R. *of couch*). Hurrah, Lavinia —smile and say Hurrah!

LAVINIA (*struggling*). No—no——

(HARRIET *rises and moves over* L.)

EMILY. Yes—yes——

LAVINIA. Be still, Emily—for shame!

HARRIET. Her mouth twitched—I saw it.

JASPER (*tickling the back of her neck*). Come along, Lavvy——

LAVINIA (*slapping his hand away*). How dare you, Jasper!

JANE. Think of Mrs. Hodgson's bonnet at the funeral—do you remember?—I nudged you——

LAVINIA (*breaking at last into laughter*). Oh, dear—

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