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SF PERUSALS

Living Together

A Comedy in Two Acts

Alan Ayckbourn

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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THE NORMAN CONQUESTS, by Alan Ayckbourn. "Table Manners," "Living Together," and "Round and Round the Garden." Directed by Eric Thompson; setting and lighting by Robert Randolph; costumes by Noel Taylor; stage manager, Milt Commons. Presented by Lester Osterman, Richard Horner, in association with Martin Richard Richards and Victor D'Arc, Robert Fryer, James Cresson and Michael Codron. Opening night was December 7, 1975 at the Morosco Theater, 217 West 45th Street.

THE CAST

NORMAN ..... Richard Benjamin

ANNIE ..... Paula Prentiss

TOM ..... Ken Howard

SARAH ..... Estelle Parsons

REG ..... Barry Nelson

RUTH ..... Carole Shelley

ACT I

SCENE 1

The sitting-room. Saturday, 6.30 p.m.

It is a high-ceilinged Victorian room in need of redecoration. A french window leads to the garden, and a door to the rest of the house. Furnishings include a settee, easy chair, pouffe, a small table, a coffee-table, and a fireplace in front of which is a brown fur rug

As the CURTAIN *rises, Sarah, in a light summer coat and dress, is in the process of lifting a suitcase from the floor on to the table to open it. Reg enters from the garden in cap and sports jacket, carrying another bag and a large pile of magazines tied with string. He is followed by Norman, bearded in woolly hat and raincoat, carrying his own battered suitcase. Norman flings himself into the easy chair and sits grumpily. Reg puts the magazines on the table behind the settee*

Reg That's the lot. Well, come on. Where is she then? Where is she? Where's my little sister?

Sarah Ssh. Mother's resting.

Reg Oh. (*Wandering back to the window*) We ought to cut down the vegetation in the tennis court and have a game, Norman. Fancy a game?

Norman I hate tennis.

Sarah I thought you were in a hurry to go somewhere, Norman.

Norman Not at all.

Reg Yes, I thought you said you had a—librarians' conference.

Norman It's been cancelled.

Reg When?

Norman About ten seconds ago. Due to lack of interest.

Reg Funny lot these librarians. Now, where's Annie, do you know?

Sarah She's in there.

Reg Ah. (*He moves to the door*)

Sarah Wait.

Reg Why?

Sarah She's busy. Tom's in there with her, having a talk.

Reg Well, she can talk to Tom any time. I've come all the way to see her.

Sarah Wait.

Reg What made her change her mind? About going? I mean, I thought the idea was, we came down here, nursed Mother for the week-end and Annie went off somewhere and had a good time. No point in us being here now, is there? Might as well not have come. Not that I mind. Nice to see the country. Beautiful evening. No kids . . .

Sarah Where did you pack that present for Mother?
Reg What present?
Sarah The bed-jacket. The blue bed-jacket, it was wrapped in tissue. Where is it?
Reg Never set eyes on it.
Sarah (*removing a large playing board, bits of cardboard, etc. from the case*) What's all this you've packed?
Reg My game.
Sarah Why did you want to bring it down here?
Reg I thought there might be someone around, we could try it out. I've invented it, I want to try it out. I mean, the kids won't play it with me, you won't play it with me—how do I know if it works if no-one'll play it? Norman can play.
Norman Eh?
Sarah I should think Norman's had enough of games, haven't you, Norman?
Reg Eh?
Sarah Anyway, Norman's going in a minute, aren't you, Norman?
Reg What's all this? What's going on between you two?
Sarah I'll tell you later.
Reg (*putting the game on the coffee-table*) Oh, yes . . . ? If you're planning an affair, let me know and I'll book my holiday.
Sarah (*giving up her search*) Oh well, that's that. No present for Mother. You've forgotten to pack it. Oh well, I'll give her these magazines and tell her we'll send the bed-jacket on to her. It took me ages to make that. If you knew how I hated knitting.
Reg We do. We know. We sat round all winter watching her with bated breath. One dropped stitch and you could say good-bye to your supper . . . Hey, one of my little men is missing.
Sarah Oh, my God.
Reg I've lost my Chief Superintendent. Is he at the bottom of the suitcase? (*He goes to look in the suitcase*)
Sarah I have no idea. Our house is littered with little men.
Reg And she's complaining. (*He chuckles*)
Sarah You're very pensive, Norman.
Norman I'm wondering which is the cleanest and quickest way to finish myself off.
Reg Well, don't get married. That's long and messy. Ah-ha, here he is. (*He holds up a small cardboard figure on a base which he has rescued from the suitcase*) The Chief Superintendent in person. Nearly had a nasty accident. Got himself tangled up in a nasty web of blue woolly . . . oh.
Sarah Give that to me. (*She retrieves her bed-jacket from Reg*)
Reg (*putting the figure with the game*) It was there all the time. Just needed a good copper to find it.
Sarah Would you mind taking these upstairs.
Reg (*taking the suitcases*) My pleasure. (*He moves to the door whistling*)
Sarah And don't wake Mother if she's dozing.
Reg I'll go and say hallo to Annie first.

Sarah I've told you, she's . . .
Reg I haven't seen her for three months. She's my sister. I want to say hallo.
Sarah She and Tom are . . .
Reg Oh, to blazes with Tom.

Reg goes out to the house, whistling

Sarah (*turning her attention to Norman*) It's no good sitting there looking sorry for yourself. I'm appalled at you, I really am.
Norman (*jeering*) Jealous?
Sarah Don't be disgusting. Annie of all people. How could you? What on earth made you do it?
Norman I haven't done anything.
Sarah Annie has told me everything.
Norman Has she? And what could she possibly tell you?
Sarah About you two—last Christmas. In this house. With your wife ill upstairs—rolling about with her sister on this very rug.
Norman Oh—that—that was just festive fun.
Sarah And if that isn't enough, planning to sneak off with her for some sordid week-end.
Norman There's nothing sordid about East Grinstead. She wanted to come. I wanted to go. Don't you see? It would have been something different for her—exciting. And for me. She's stuck here, all on her own, day after day looking after that old sabre-toothed bat upstairs . . .
Sarah Will you not refer to Mother like that.
Norman Oh, come on. She's not your mother, she's not my mother. She's a mother-in-law. Fair game. I'll call her what I like. You ought to hear what Annie calls her sometimes. Anyway, we happen to love each other. Me and Annie, that is, not me and mother-in-law.
Sarah Don't be ridiculous. You're married to Ruth.
Norman What's that got to do with it?
Sarah And Annie, I may remind you, has her fiancé to consider.
Norman (*scornfully*) Her who?
Sarah Her—well—her whatever she calls him—Tom.
Norman Tom.
Sarah Yes. He may not be ideal in many ways but beggars can't be choosers . . .
Norman She's not a beggar.
Sarah Maybe not. But it would be stupid to make out she had a very wide choice as regards a possible husband. She's not—well . . .
Norman She's beautiful.
Sarah I'm not going to argue. Certainly no-one could describe her as beautiful. I'll admit she has a great deal of . . .
Norman Anybody I love is automatically beautiful.
Sarah Oh, Norman, don't be ridiculous.
Norman Have you never felt that way? Perhaps you've never been in love. Maybe that's your trouble. Was Reg never beautiful in your eyes?

Sarah I'm not discussing my private life . . .

Norman You're being free enough with mine, aren't you?

Sarah Yours doesn't happen to be particularly private, does it? It happens to involve about half a dozen people. You, Annie, Ruth, Tom, Reg, me and Mother.

Norman I've never asked Mother for a week-end anywhere. (*Moving to the window*) Look at that cat up there. He's still up that tree. Tom was trying to get it down. He can't be much of a vet. What sort of a vet are you, when you terrify your patients into climbing trees? Something wrong with his basket-side manner, I'd say. What do you say, Sarah? Would you say you were a fulfilled person?

Sarah I don't know what you mean.

Norman Are you happy then?

Sarah Yes—mostly. Occasionally. Now and then. I don't know. I don't have time to think about it. When you've a family like mine you're too busy . . .

Norman You're very lucky. I can't say Ruth and I are happy.

Sarah Well, I'm not surprised if you . . . (*Checking herself*) She's not the easiest person I admit.

Norman No.

Sarah Then neither are you.

Norman I'm very warm and affectionate, you know.

Sarah Yes. So are dogs. But they don't make particularly good husbands.

Norman Ah well, like me, they invariably marry—lady dogs. Perhaps I should leave her.

Sarah Yes, do. Please do. I think it would be better for both of you. But for heaven's sake, clear off completely and whatever you do, stop pestering Annie. She doesn't want you, not really.

Norman I supposed you talked her out of going away with me.

Sarah I didn't need to. She'd already made up her own mind. I certainly didn't encourage her . . . I must go up and see Mother.

Norman It was going to be a lovely time. We were going to meet behind the post office in the village at seven o'clock and steal away on the bus to our hotel. Forget everything, everybody, just lie anonymously in each other's arms. Just for a day.

Sarah We'd still be here when you came back.

Norman I feel terribly depressed.

Sarah Serve you right.

Norman You haven't told Tom, have you?

Sarah That's up to Annie. Nothing to do with me.

Norman Nothing? You only talked her out of going.

Sarah I have already said, I did no such thing. It was Annie's decision.

Norman I hope she doesn't tell Tom.

Sarah Why?

Norman It'd upset him.

Sarah It's a bit late to consider his feelings now, isn't it? Having tried to steal Annie from under his nose.

Norman I wasn't stealing her, I was borrowing her. For the week-end.

Sarah Make her sound like one of your library books.
Norman She was borrowing me, too. It was mutual. It was a friendly loan. We never intended to upset anybody. We both agreed. That was the joy of it, don't you see? Nobody need ever have known. If Annie hadn't gone and told you—nobody.
Sarah Oh, well. It's up to Annie if she wants to tell Tom. Nothing to do with me. (*She tries to lift the magazine pile*) Oh, these are far too heavy, I'll get Reg to take them up later. Now, for goodness' sake, Norman, pull yourself together and go home to Ruth.
Norman Why did you stop her going, Sarah? Be honest. Why?
Sarah I've told you why . . .

Sarah goes out to the house with the bed-jacket

Norman (*mournfully*) I really am very depressed. (*He mooches about. He pulls a magazine from the pile and flips through it. Something catches his eye and he starts reading. After a moment, he starts to laugh. He finds the article increasingly hysterical*)

Annie comes in. She stares at him

Annie Norman. (*She closes the door*)
Norman (*springing up guiltily*) Oh. Hallo, Annie.
Annie You all right?
Norman Yes, I was just trying to cheer myself up.
Annie Looks like you've succeeded.
Norman No.
Annie Norman, I'm awfully sorry. Really. I expect Sarah's told you.
Norman She said you'd thought better of it.
Annie Yes. I feel dreadful after all the trouble you've taken. Booking East Grinstead and things. It's just . . .
Norman It's all right. (*Pause*) Oh, why did you let her talk you out of it.
Annie I didn't.
Norman Don't tell me you'd have changed your mind if she hadn't . . .
Annie Things were getting very complicated, you see. I mean, when we were planning it, last Christmas and on the phone and things—well—it was simple then, wasn't it? It was easy just to forget about Ruth and —Tom and so on. Not that Tom's all that important but after all, you are married to Ruth and she is my sister, even if I'm not all that fond of her, but I don't think I'm very good at pretending for very long. Sarah got it out of me in no time.
Norman Yes. She would.
Annie And I don't think I'd have been much fun to be with, anyway. I'd have been worrying all the time. Are you furious with me?
Norman No.
Annie Oh, Norman, you look so miserable. (*Kneeling on the rug*) I am sorry.
Norman Don't . . .

Annie What?
Norman Don't kneel on that rug if you don't mind. It reminds me.
Annie Oh, yes. Our rug. (*She gives a short giggle*) I got the fire-tongs mended.
Norman Oh, yes.
Annie Tom fixed them.
Norman Oh. What does he have to say about all this?
Annie Tom? I don't think he knows.
Norman He doesn't?
Annie I haven't told him.
Norman Oh.
Annie Sarah might.
Norman I bet she will. She said she won't. But she will. She'll be dropping big circular hints. She's never kept a secret in her life . . .
Annie She'll have to chalk it up in huge letters. You know, I'm really very fond of Tom but he really is terribly heavy going. Like running uphill in roller skates. Not like you. "Beautiful sunset, isn't it, Tom?" "Um." Everything's um. Probably works a treat when he's stamping out swine fever but it's pretty boring over dinner. "Do you like the wine, Tom?" "Um." Honestly. Norman?
Norman Mmm? I mean, yes.
Annie What are you going to tell Ruth?
Norman What I was going to tell her anyway. I've been on a conference.
Annie Which finished early?
Norman Something like that. We ran out of things to talk about. What does it matter. She won't care. She probably thinks I'm in the attic mending the roof.
Annie I didn't know assistant librarians had conferences.
Norman Everybody has conferences.
Annie You'll be able to get back all right?
Norman Yes.
Annie Oh dear . . .
Norman What?
Annie You look so limp. Like an old tea towel.

Annie impulsively leans forward to kiss him on the cheek

Reg enters

Annie jumps away and straightens the corner of the rug

Reg (*standing awkwardly*) Er—hallo again. Excuse me, just came in for something. (*He stands uncertainly*)
Norman What?
Reg What? Yes—what? Er . . . (*He picks up the waste-paper basket from behind the settee table*) Ah. This is it. This is it. Thank you. Carry on.

Reg goes out

Norman Do you ever get the feeling you're being watched? Sarah's secret agent. Our days together are numbered.
Annie So are our minutes.
Norman (*rising and going to the window*) Come on then.
Annie What?
Norman It's now or never. What do you say?
Annie What is?
Norman We can be through the gap in the hedge and half-way down the lane before they realize we've gone.
Annie (*drawing back*) Oh, Norman . . .
Norman What's to stop us? I love you—you love me—we're in love. We should be together. It's right. Believe me, it's right. We have right on our side.
Annie (*doubtfully*) Well . . .
Norman Don't you see, we're not alone? We've got the whole tradition of history behind us. We're not the first lovers who've ever done this—stood up to the whole establishment and said to hell with the *status quo*, we don't care what's meant to be, we mean this to be. Us. And there's nothing can stand in our way, you know. Not if you think about it. What is there to stop us?
Annie Mother's pills . . .
Norman Eh?
Annie I can't just rush away. I have to explain to them about Mother's pills.
Norman (*passionately*) My God! The course of true love shattered not by the furies, not by the fates but by Mother's bleeding pills.
Annie Not only that.
Norman It's all right. That's enough to be getting on with. Don't swamp me with any more overwhelming arguments. Dear Juliet, my shoelace has come undone, I cannot join you in the tomb. Love, Romeo. Dear Tristan, owing to a sudden tax demand . . .
Annie All right, Norman, all right.

Pause. Norman simmers down

Norman That's it then.
Annie Yes. That's it.
Norman Oh.

A pause

Tom enters from the house

Tom Ah.
Norman Gone. All gone.
Tom Glad I've caught you.
Norman Oh, it's Tom. Hallo, Tom. (*He shakes Tom's hand*) Haven't seen you for ages. How are you?
Tom Fine. Just been talking to you in the garden, haven't I?

Norman Oh, yes. I forgot. I think it was me.
Tom Don't quite follow you.
Norman It was probably me. On the other hand it could have been you.
Tom Me what?
Norman Talking to yourself.
Annie Norman . . .
Tom Hang on, I'm getting confused here.
Norman How unusual.
Annie Norman . . .
Norman Anyway, my mistake.
Tom (*doubtful*) Yes. I—wanted a word with you.
Annie (*moving to the door*) I'll get on out there.
Tom No. Hang on. Hang on a second, Annie. Would you mind.

Annie sits on the settee

Norman Recriminations. Here they come. (*He sits in the easy chair*)
Tom Um?
Norman Nothing.
Tom The point is . . . (*He pauses uncertainly and wanders to the window*) Is that cat still up that tree, by the way?
Norman Hanging on grimly. As we all are.
Tom I suppose he'll come down eventually . . . The point is, something seems to be going on which I've not been let into.
Norman Has it?
Tom Apparently. Sarah was talking about something.
Norman (*to Annie*) What did I tell you?
Tom What?
Norman Come on, let's have it. What did she say?
Tom That's it, you see. I couldn't make it out.
Norman You couldn't?
Tom Not really.
Norman Oh—good.
Annie Would you both like something to drink?
Tom Thought perhaps you could enlighten me.
Norman Yes, please. A great deal.
Annie I'll see what we've got.

Annie goes out

Tom Annie's a bit angry with me.
Norman Is she?
Tom Yes. You know she was planning to go away this week-end?
Norman Yes.
Tom Well, reading between the lines, I think she was rather hoping that old you-know-who would go with her.
Norman Who?
Tom Me.
Norman You?

Tom Yes.
Norman She asked you?
Tom Very obliquely.
Norman Must have been.
Tom Now she's not going. And it seems to be my fault.
Norman It is.
Tom You think so?
Norman Definitely. If she's not going away, it's entirely due to you.
Tom Yes, I was afraid of that. The question is, how do I get myself out of the dog's kennel and back in the pantry.
Norman I beg your pardon?
Tom Back in her good books.
Norman Very difficult.
Tom Is it?
Norman Want my opinion?
Tom I'd welcome it.
Norman I think you've given her too much. I think she's in danger of being spoilt. She's taking you for granted.
Tom Really?
Norman She's taking everyone for granted. What she needs is a bit of the old boot.
Tom Boot?
Norman Bit of the rough stuff.
Tom Oh, come on. Boot? Come on . . .
Norman Metaphorical.
Tom Oh, metaphorical boot. What's that exactly?
Norman Tell her she's damned lucky to have you around. And the next time she's planning holidays for two, she can come and ask you politely if you'd like to come. If you don't watch it, she'll walk all over you. Couple of sharp words, she'll jump. Tell her she looks a mess. If she wants to be seen around with you in future, she'd better smarten up her ideas. She looks like something that's fallen off a post van. I mean, what the hell right has she to promise something and then let you down at the last minute? It would serve her right if you belted her one and gave her rabies. That's my opinion. (*He pauses breathless*)
Tom (*very bewildered*) Is it?
Norman She'd respect you for that.
Tom Well, I'll bear it in mind but . . .

Annie enters with three wineglasses, three bottles of wine tucked under her arms, and a corkscrew. She is having difficulty

Annie It'll have to be the home-made stuff.
Tom (*leaping up*) Oh, let me . . . (*He takes a bottle which appears to be slipping from under her arm*)
Annie Thanks.

Tom catches Norman's eye. Norman shakes his head disapprovingly. Tom

stares at the bottle he is holding. Annie stands waiting for Tom to take the other bottles from her. Instead, Tom puts his bottle back in her arms and sits on the settee

Oh, thank you so much. That's a great help. Don't put yourselves out, will you.

Norman No.

Tom No.

Annie (*putting the things on the settee table*) What's got into you two?

Norman Nothing.

Tom No.

Annie Well, if you want a drink, you can damn well open them. (*She sits on the settee*)

Tom hesitates and finally gets up. Norman clucks disapprovingly

Tom Well—parsnip or dandelion?

Norman We have a choice?

Tom Both last year's. I think I'd recommend the parsnip. It's slightly mellower. The dandelion's rather lethal. Oh, and there's some carrot.

Annie Don't touch the dandelion—it's a killer. I didn't mean to bring it in.

Tom Parsnip then?

Norman Dandelion.

Tom You sure?

Norman Positive.

Tom Oh well . . . (*He starts to open the bottles*)

Annie I have a feeling there's trouble brewing in the dining-room. I passed the door just now and Reg and Sarah seemed to be limbering up.

Norman That should set the seal on the week-end.

Annie As long as Mother doesn't hear them.

Tom No, we don't want her upset.

Annie It won't upset her. She'll insist on being carried downstairs to be in at the kill. There's nothing she likes better than a good row.

Norman In the old days she used to start them all.

Annie She and Sarah. She really loathed Sarah.

Norman Even Mother-in-law has her good side.

Annie Tom's frightened to go up there, aren't you?

Tom Well . . .

Annie She thinks he's a doctor.

Tom Can't get it through to her I'm a vet. She insists I take her pulse, listen to her—chest and other things. Very embarrassing.

Norman She's mad for the feel of manly hands. She knows what she's doing, don't worry.

Tom Yes, I think she does. (*Examining a glassful of wine*) Better just try this first. (*He samples it*)

Annie (*loudly in Norman's direction*) What's it like, Tom?

Tom Um . . . (*He ponders*)

Annie (*raising her eyebrows to heaven, softly*) Um . . .

Tom (*bringing a glass to Annie*) Not bad, not bad, here—parsnip.
Annie Thanks.
Tom (*to Norman*) Dandelion.
Norman Ta.
Annie (*examining her glass*) It's clearer than usual.
Tom Yes.
Annie It's usually like soup. You have to filter it through your front teeth.
Norman (*raising his glass by way of a toast*) Well. Um . . .
Annie (*giggling*) Um . . .
Tom Yes. Cheers. (*Pause*) Um—you know, I've been thinking. (*He sits on the settee*) What would have been rather nice. Too late now—but another year. Supposing there is another year that is . . .
Norman Why? Are you planning to bring the world to an end shortly?
Tom No, no.
Norman This is very potent.
Annie Very. Brewed by Mother. Last thing she did before she was ill.
Norman She knows her spells.
Tom What would have been rather nice . . .
Norman (*finding a bit in his glass*) Ah.
Annie What is it?
Norman Bit of cork. Or a toad's leg.
Tom What would have been awfully nice is if we'd all three gone. Don't you think?

Annie and Norman stare at him

I mean, we all get on well. It would have been rather fun . . .
Norman I beg your pardon?
Tom If Annie and you and I had all gone way together on her week-end.
Norman (*highly amused*) Oh, my God. (*Rising and crossing to the wine*) More wine . . .
Tom Single rooms, of course.
Norman (*taking up the bottle of dandelion wine and returning to his chair*) Oh yes, single rooms.
Tom I didn't mean anything like that.
Norman (*laughing openly*) No. Nothing like that.
Tom What's funny?
Norman (*helplessly*) Nothing.
Annie (*angry*) Oh, Tom, honestly.
Tom Eh?
Annie You're so dim. You're so completely and utterly dismally dim.
Tom What?
Annie You make me mad, you're so stupid. You're boring, slow-witted, dull and utterly stupid.
Tom (*slightly injured, no more*) What have I said now? What have I said now?
Norman Now's the time to knock her down.
Annie I'm fed up with both of you. You've ruined my week-end.
Tom All I said was . . .

Annie (*yelling*) I heard what you said. Thank you very much. I heard what you said.

Norman is still laughing, highly amused by this

And, Norman, just shut up.

Norman does so. A silence

Tom Well . . .
Annie (*muttering*) Stupid men . . .

A crash and a scream from Sarah is heard from the dining-room

Norman Meanwhile, in the dining-room, the first shots are being fired in anger.
Annie (*leaping up*) Oh, no . . . (*Hurrying to the door*) I wish you'd all go away, all of you, and leave me in peace.

Annie goes out leaving her glass on the table

Tom She's like a tiger when she's roused, isn't she?
Norman I've never met a tiger socially, I wouldn't know.
Tom Something's got into her, you know. I think that holiday meant more to her than she's letting on.
Norman Yes, I'm beginning to think that. (*Proffering the bottle*) *Plus de vin?*
Tom No, no. Spoil my dinner. You'd better be careful or you'll finish up here for the night.
Norman That's a point. (*He pours himself another*)

Tom moves to the window

Tom (*calling*) Pussy, pussy. Down, puss. Come down, puss. Pussy, pussy. I wish they'd given the animal a name. I really do.

Norman pours another glass

I should go easy on that. I had a very unpleasant side reaction.
Norman It doesn't show.
Tom Well, I think I'll go and see if I can pour oil on things. Not going immediately, are you?
Norman Not immediately.
Tom Right.

Tom goes out

Norman rises to his feet and finds already he is a bit unsteady. He goes to the window

Norman (*French pronunciation*) Dan-de-lion. (*At the window; calling*) You stay up there, mate. If you come down, he'll only want paying.

Tom returns with his glass

Tom Oh, Lord . . .
Norman Back again?
Tom I think I'll keep out of there for a second. The room's positively knee-deep in home truths—if you know what I mean.
Norman Splendid.
Tom That and biscuits.
Norman Biscuits?
Tom Yes, they seem to have been throwing biscuits around. Water biscuits.
Norman You can do someone a nasty injury with a water biscuit . . .

Annie appears fleetingly in the doorway with a dustpan and brush

Annie All hell's been let loose in there.

Annie goes

Tom Do you need a . . . (*He realizes she has gone*)

Pause. Tom wanders to the table and discovers Reg's game

Tom (*examining it*) What's all this? Looks like another of Reg's home-made games. Looks even more complicated than usual. I better keep out of the way if he decides to play it. Reg gets rather irritated with me. Always very slow on getting the hang of the rules. (*Slight pause*) Norman. Frankly—answer me something.
Norman Mmm?
Tom Do you think I'm dim and dismal? I think that's what she said. Yes, that was it. Dim and dismal and stupid. Do I come across as that?
Norman Um—no. I'd say—you had the good fortune to be born without a single suspicious or malicious thought in your head.
Tom Oh, I don't know.
Norman Yes. Yes, true. And that can get you in a lot of trouble. Because you're more or less on your own, you see. And whenever people feel like taking a really good swing at something, to relieve their feelings, you come in extremely handy. No come back, you see.
Tom I haven't noticed people doing that. You've got the wrong chap.
Norman (*waving a fist in the air*) You've got to develop a come-back. (*Studying Tom*) I mean, looking at you standing there, I don't think there's anyone in there at all. You're somewhere else. That's remote control, all that lot.
Tom That stuff's beginning to tell. I warned you about the dandelion.
Norman Don't worry about a thing.
Tom Well, I'd better go and see if the dining-room's cooled off a bit. I'll take them in a bottle. (*He takes one*)
Norman Want a tip?
Tom What?
Norman Go in there laughing.
Tom Laughing?

Norman There's nothing they like better in this family than a good laugh. Go on. Bring an atmosphere of merriment into the room. (*He gives a false laugh*)

Tom (*copying Norman*) All right. I'll try it. You're a good chap, Norman, you know. A very good chap.

Norman Thank you.

Tom I'm sorry you're having to dash away. To your—conference. Pity you're not staying. You brighten the place up a bit. Pity. Cheerio.

Norman Cheerio.

Tom goes out

Norman laughs

Tom appears at the door laughs and goes

Norman goes to the door and laughs. Tom is heard laughing, off. Norman closes the door, laughing. He finds the gramophone under the occasional table, puts it on the table, opens it, takes the record off the turntable and reads the label, hums a line from "Girls were made to Love and Kiss". He replaces the record. Winds the gramophone up and starts the record. He does a dance to the music and sings as the vocal starts. At one point he opens the door and "sings out" to the corridor. He returns, singing, puts his glass on the floor below the rug, and finally collapses on the rug

Here's to you, Tom, old buddy. Here's to the lot of you.

He sings louder, as—

the CURTAIN *falls*

SCENE 2

The same. Saturday, 8 p.m.

Norman is asleep on the rug, with bottles and a glass beside him. Reg and Tom enter from the house without seeing him

Reg . . . no, no. You say to me, who's there, you see . . .

Tom Oh, it's me who says that. I see. All right. Who's there?

Reg Start again. Knock knock.

Tom Come in—I mean, who's there?

Reg Vet.

Tom Vet?

Reg No. You say, vet who?

Tom Vet who, sorry. Come in—who's there—vet who.

Reg There's no "come in". Start again.

Tom Right-ho. Knock knock.

Reg Who's there—no. I should have started it. Knock knock.
Tom Who's there?
Reg Vet.
Tom Vet who?
Reg Vet kind of door is this, you can't afford a bell. (*He laughs*)
Tom Yes, I think I've got it now—try it again.
Reg That's it.
Tom Oh, is it? Quite simple, really.
Reg Yes . . . (*Seeing Norman*) Good God! Look at that.
Tom Oh. It's Norman. (*They move to him*) Is he all right?
Reg Norman! Norman! (*No response*) He's out like a light.
Tom I thought he'd gone.
Reg So did everybody. When he finally stopped singing and peace descended over the fruit and cream, I thought we'd lost him. Sarah's going to be pleased.
Tom Ought we to move him?
Reg Well, he's not in anybody's way. Oy . . . (*He kicks Norman*)

Norman grunts

(*Moving away*) Leave him, I think. Oh, I'm starving after that meal. Salad. I can't bear salad. It grows while you're eating it, you know. Have you noticed? You start one side of your plate and by the time you've got to the other, there's a fresh crop of lettuce taken root and sprouted up. You have to start again. And it still doesn't fill you. You finish up exhausted and hungry. The only thing that keeps me going when I'm eating a salad is the hope that somebody might have thought it was my birthday and hidden something to eat under all the vegetation. But they never do. A sardine if you're lucky.
Tom (*still with Norman*) He's still breathing.
Reg I should hope so. He's enough trouble as he is without dying on us. The problem with this house is there's no television.
Tom It's very shallow breathing. Do you think I should take his hat off?
Reg He doesn't breathe through the top of his head, does he? Oh I don't know, he might do knowing Norman. (*Bending over him*) If I were you, I'd pull it down over his face—like this. (*He does so*) There you are, great improvement.
Tom It's the dandelion, you see. Look at that, he's had nearly a bottle. Drowning his sorrows, I suspect.
Reg Sorrows?
Tom Well, I was talking to him earlier. He was obviously very disturbed. Depressed . . .
Reg Was he? Well . . .
Tom Don't know why, I'm sure. You know something, though, I've got a theory there's probably a woman at the back of it. Man gets drunk like this, it's generally a woman. Ruth, do you think?
Reg Possibly. Possibly . . .
Tom Perhaps Sarah would know. She usually keeps her ear close to the ground. Better ask her.

Reg (*hastily*) No, I wouldn't, Tom, really.
Tom No?
Reg No. The point is, Sarah did whisper something to me, as a matter of fact. Norman mentioned something to her. Confidentially.
Tom Oh. Did he? Anything we can do to help? I mean, he's a good chap. Pity to see him like this.
Reg Well apparently, he had something lined up for tonight, you see.
Tom Yes, his Annual Librarians' Conference. He told me. He'll have missed that now, won't he?
Reg No, it was something else, you see. He'd apparently lined up a bit on the side.
Tim A bit on the side?
Reg Oh, you know Norman. Any pretty girl—he's away.
Tom Oh, I see. And she's let him down?
Reg Apparently.
Tom I see. Any idea who she is?
Reg No. No. None at all.
Tom Oh. Pity. I mean, it might have been worth almost trying to contact her. Seeing if we couldn't patch things up. Mind you, if she could see him now, she'd probably feel she'd made the right decision.

Annie comes in from the house

Annie I have never known a house where you can have a blazing row over who's going to make the coffee . . . (*Seeing Norman*) Oh, no! Norman! What's the matter with him?
Reg He's taken an overdose.
Annie An overdose? Of what? (*Trying to revive Norman*) Norman—Norman.
Tom Of dandelion wine.
Annie What?
Tom He's had too much of it, that's all.
Annie You mean, he's just drunk?
Reg Give her a prize.
Annie Norman, you idiot—get up. (*She kicks him*)
Norman (*sleepily*) Hallo.
Annie Oh, look at him, he's disgusting. Sarah'll be delighted to see him. I thought he'd gone home.
Tom No, well—actually—we were just saying, he's probably like this because of his bit on the side.
Annie Bit on the side?
Reg Yes, well, we don't want to go into all that now, Tom.
Annie What bit on the side?
Tom Oh, you know Norman. Any pretty girl. He'd got some bit on the side lined up for the week-end. She went and ditched him.
Annie Norman told you that?
Reg No.
Tom You've just said he did.

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