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THE NORMAN CONQUESTS

Table Manners

Living Together

Round and Round the Garden

by Alan Ayckbourn

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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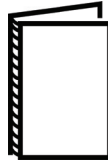


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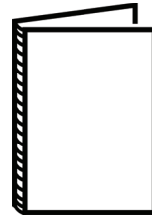
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Ayckbourn has worked in theatre as a playwright and director for over fifty years, rarely if ever tempted by television or film, which perhaps explains why he continues to be so prolific. To date he has written more than 79 plays, many one act plays and a large amount of work for the younger audience. His work has been translated into over 35 languages, is performed on stage and television throughout the world and has won countless awards.

Major successes include: *Relatively Speaking*, *How the Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *Bedroom Farce*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, and *The Norman Conquests*. In recent years, there have been revivals of *Season's Greetings* and *A Small Family Business* at the National theatre, in the West End *Absent Friends*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, *Relatively Speaking* and *How the Other Half Loves*. In 2015, Chichester mounted a very successful revival of *Way Upstream*.

Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph theatre from 1972 – 2009 where almost all his plays have been first staged, he continues to direct his latest new work there. In recent years, he has been inducted into American Theatre's Hall of Fame, received the 2010 Critics' Circle Award for Services to the Arts and became the first British playwright to receive both Olivier and Tony Special Lifetime Achievement Awards. He was knighted in 1997 for services to the theatre.

Image credit: Andrew Higgins.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

After a lifetime of playwriting (I first started as an unpublished writer at the age of ten!) my career has moved steadily forward from the status of untried tyro through to establishment figure to ageing experimentalist!

The work has reflected this. From the early tried and tested plays, (*Relatively Speaking*, *How the Other Half Loves*, *The Norman Conquests*, etc.) which thankfully people still seem happy to produce and come to see, through the middle period, larger scale so called “social” pieces (*Man of the Moment*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*) to the more recent smaller scale departures such as *Private Fears in Public Places*, *Snake in the Grass* and *Haunting Julia*, I have continued to experiment with shape and form, whilst I hope continuing to deepen my characters.

Throughout this, though, I have always needed to remind myself of the over riding prime directive drummed into me at an early age by my mentor, Stephen Joseph, that above all else a playwright is a story teller.

To keep an audience in their seats you need to involve them in a constantly unfolding series of unexpected twists and turns. These can, of course, be the narrative of the story itself as in *Relatively Speaking* or, as with *Woman in Mind* say, through the psychological development of the characters.

One of the nicest things people can ever say to me, coming out of a new play for the first time of seeing it, is “Well, I never saw THAT coming!”

Alan Ayckbourn

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TABLE MANNERS

TABLE MANNERS

First presented by the Library Theatre Co., Scarborough in June 1973 and subsequently by the Greenwich Theatre Company in May 1974, and in London by Michael Codron at the Globe Theatre in August 1974, with the following cast of characters:

NORMAN	Tom Courtenay
TOM	Michael Gambon
SARAH	Penelope Keith
ANNIE	Felicity Kendal
REG	Mark Kingston
RUTH	Bridget Turner

The play directed by Eric Thompson
Setting by Alan Pickford

The action passes in the dining-room of a Victorian vicarage-type house during a weekend in July

ACT I

Scene One	Saturday, 6 p.m.
Scene Two	Sunday, 9 a.m.

ACT II

Scene One	Sunday, 8 p.m.
Scene Two	Monday, 8 a.m.

Period – the present

ACT I

Scene One

The dining-room. Saturday, 6 p.m.

It is a fine evening, the sun streams through the french windows of the room. There are four chairs with a solid table, a sideboard, two window-seats and a couple of easy chairs. The room is large and high-ceilinged, and like the rest of this Victorian vicarage-type building, badly needs redecorating.

As the curtain rises, ANNIE in a baggy cardigan, jeans and raffia slippers, enters with a flower vase of water. She thumps this down in the middle of the table, picks up the roses which lie beside it and drops them into the vase. She gives the whole lot a final shake and that, as far as she is concerned, concludes her flower arrangement.

SARAH (*offstage*) Hallo! Hallo, we're here!

SARAH enters. She wears a light summer coat and dress. She is breathless.

ANNIE Sarah!

SARAH (*embracing her*) Annie dear...

ANNIE Good journey?

SARAH Oh, yes, yes, not too bad. Reg drove far too fast as usual but we got here—oh, it's lovely to come down. I've been looking forward to this weekend away from it all for weeks. Weekend? It's barely a day. You've no idea how that dreary little house of ours gets me down.

ANNIE Oh, it's not bad.

SARAH Try living there sometime. Not a decent shop, not a cinema, not even a hairdresser—except some awful place I can't go into because of the smell. I said to Reg, for goodness' sake you're an estate agent, surely you can get the pick of anywhere and then we finish up in somewhere like that. You're so lucky, Annie, you have no idea. Just to see a tree once in a while and the birds—I really miss it. Now then, how are you, let's look. Oh, Annie darling, you look just the same. Your hair...

ANNIE (*self-consciously smoothing her tangle*) I know—I haven't brushed it today. I washed it, though, this morning.

SARAH What's the good of washing it if you don't brush it. It's like a gorse bush.

ANNIE Well, nobody sees it. The postman, the milkman, couple of cows and Mother.

SARAH And Tom.

ANNIE Oh, yes. Tom.

SARAH You mustn't forget Tom. And how's Mother?

ANNIE No better, no worse. She hasn't felt like getting up, not for weeks...

SARAH Well, you should make her. She needs to.

ANNIE Old Wickham says if she doesn't want to, don't make her.

SARAH Wickham? Oh, yes, I've never really cared for him. His eyes are too close together. Still, I suppose he's all right as a doctor. He must be better than ours. I mean, this business with my back was practically criminal.

ANNIE Your back?

SARAH Surely I wrote and told you? I'm sure I did. I was so upset I wrote to everybody.

ANNIE Oh, yes.

SARAH Annie, I must buy you a new jumper, remind me.

ANNIE I'm attached to this one.

SARAH I should think you are—you were wearing it at Christmas. We'll have to chisel it off you... Mmm, lovely flowers. Now tell me. Where are you going?

ANNIE When?

SARAH For your weekend, where are you going?

ANNIE Well...

SARAH Oh, come on. Don't be so secretive.

ANNIE Well—I was going to Hastings.

SARAH Oh, lovely! Hastings is gorgeous. I think I was there with Reg just before we were married. There's a heavenly little pub somewhere...

ANNIE No, well I couldn't get in at Hastings.

SARAH Couldn't get in?

ANNIE No, it was all booked. I forgot it was summer.

SARAH Oh. Yes. Well, where are you going?

ANNIE I rather fancied East Grinstead.

SARAH East Grinstead?

ANNIE Yes.

SARAH What an extraordinary idea. What on earth made you choose there?

ANNIE Well, it sounded—interesting.

SARAH Yes, I suppose it is. I've never heard of anybody having a holiday in East Grinstead. I suppose they do—but I've never heard of anybody.

ANNIE Well, I am.

SARAH Yes. I think I'd have almost preferred Eastbourne but...
(*Displaying her outfit*) Do you like this?

ANNIE Super.

SARAH (*taking off her coat, touching the back of the chair for dust, then putting the coat over it*) It was like a tent on me when I bought it, but I had it altered. I'm rather pleased. Now, you're to leave everything to me. I'm taking over. Just tell me what pills and potions Mother has and when she has them and then off you go.

ANNIE I've written it down somewhere. I'll show you. The only difficult things are her drops.

SARAH Oh well, if they're difficult Reg can cope with them. He's going to do most of the running up and down stairs anyway. I mean, this is a holiday for me, too. She's his mother. He can do something for her for a change.

ANNIE How is he?

SARAH Reg? (*With a big sigh*) Oh well, he's still Reg you know. I've tried God knows I've tried, but he'll always be basically Reg. You'll know, he's your brother after all. There are times when I think he's sleepwalking. I have to force him to make an effort. Heaven knows how he runs a business. I'd certainly never let him sell a house of mine.

ANNIE I've left you a cold supper.

SARAH Oh, you shouldn't have bothered.

ANNIE Well, I knew you wouldn't want to be...

SARAH You shouldn't have bothered.

ANNIE I left it all out for you on the—

SARAH You really shouldn't have bothered.

ANNIE —kitchen table.

SARAH Lovely.

ANNIE I was just laying things in here.

SARAH Oh, there's no need for that. We'll eat with our fingers. We're on holiday, for heaven's sake.

ANNIE We do have knives and forks. (*She takes two sets of knives, forks and spoons from the sideboard to the table*)

SARAH I'll find them, don't bother. Now please, just get changed and go.

ANNIE Okay. (*She starts to move to the door*)

SARAH Oh. I nearly forgot. How's Tom?

ANNIE Tom? Oh, fine. I think.

SARAH Still seeing a lot of him?

ANNIE Oh, yes. He's generally around. When he's not out curing his sick animals. He's here at the moment, actually. The cat's got something wrong with its paw.

SARAH (*arranging the flowers*) It must be fascinating being a vet. It's a pity in a way he's not a proper doctor.

ANNIE He is a proper doctor. He just prefers animals to people.

SARAH That came from the heart.

ANNIE No. He just likes animals. Don't think he's very fond of our cat, but he likes most animals.

SARAH Yes, he's a bit—heavy going, isn't he? I've always found him a trifle ponderous. Perhaps it's shyness.

ANNIE No, I think he's probably ponderous.

SARAH So he hasn't—er—shown any more interest?

ANNIE In what?

SARAH Well, you. At Christmas, we thought he was beginning to sit up and take notice of you just a little. Pricking up his ears.

ANNIE Like a mongrel with a pedigree bitch.

SARAH Yes, well...

ANNIE Honestly, stop trying to pair us off. He just comes round when he's bored, that's all.

SARAH A man doesn't spend as much time as Tom does round here without having a very good reason. Believe you me. You don't have to be psychic to know what that is.

ANNIE Well, if it's that he's never asked for it and even if he did he wouldn't get it. So I don't know why he bothers. (*She sets out the knives and forks*)

SARAH Annie! You're getting dreadfully coarse.

ANNIE Oh, you're just a prude. (*She takes out two side plates, two napkins and two rush mats, and sets them on the table*)

SARAH No, I'm not a prude. No, I've never been called that. You can't call me a prude. That's not fair, Annie. I mean, I don't care for smutty talk or dirty jokes. I just don't find them funny. Or particularly tasteful. But that isn't being a prude. That's normal decent behaviour which is something quite different.

ANNIE Yes.

SARAH I won't have the television set on at all, these days.

ANNIE Anyway, all that happens is that Tom comes round here like he has done for years. I feed him. He sits and broods. Sometimes we talk. That's all.

SARAH Talk about what?

ANNIE (*disarranging the flowers as she moves around the table*)
Oh, super exciting things like does the kitchen ceiling need another coat and distemper and hardpad and foot and mouth and swine vesicular disease. Then I pot Mother and retire to bed—alone—itching.

SARAH Oh.

ANNIE And count diseased sheep crashing headlong into the gate. Look for all I know he may be passionately in love with me. He may be flashing out all sorts of secret signals which I just haven't noticed. But he's never even put a hand on my knee. (*Reflecting*) God forbid.

SARAH But you're fond of him?

ANNIE He's—very kind. Yes, I like him a lot. I sometimes miss him when he's not here. I suppose that means something.

SARAH Yes. You see, I was rather hoping—I know it's wicked of me—I was rather hoping that you were both planning to go off for this weekend together.

ANNIE Oh. No.

SARAH You're not, are you?

ANNIE (*uneasily*) No. Not at all.

SARAH Are you sure?

ANNIE Of course I'm sure.

SARAH You're looking very shifty.

ANNIE I'm not. Honestly. No. Stop it.

SARAH Stop what?

ANNIE Looking at me like that.

SARAH Like what?

ANNIE Like that. Stop it.

SARAH You're a dreadful liar.

ANNIE I'm not.

SARAH Listen, if you are, there's no need to keep it a secret from me. I mean, you said I'm a prude but I've just proved I'm not, surely? I mentioned it first. I think it's splendid. I think if you and Tom were to get away from this house, away from Mother and everything—it's the best thing you could do. It's what you both need. (*She kisses her*) Very sensible.

ANNIE Yes.

SARAH Have a lovely time. I only wish it were me. Not with Tom, of course. But I think that's what we all need now and then, don't we? A nice dirty weekend somewhere. Oh, it's so exciting. I am pleased you're doing it. I think the best bit

is waking up in the morning in a strange room and finding some exciting-looking man beside you and—you've got a double room?

ANNIE It's a bit more complicated than that.

SARAH Oh? How do you mean? You haven't got a double room?

ANNIE No, it's just...

SARAH What? You're not pregnant?

ANNIE No.

SARAH Oh, thank God.

ANNIE No, it's just—oh golly, I didn't mean to tell you.

SARAH Tell me what?

ANNIE It's awfully sordid. You're sure you want to hear?

SARAH Of course, I want to hear.

ANNIE It'll shock you.

SARAH My dear, I've been married for eight years. I've had two children. I think I've just about seen everything there is to see. I defy you to shock me. I honestly defy you.

ANNIE Well. Last Christmas, when you were all here...

SARAH Yes?

ANNIE You and Reg and Ruth and Norman. And then you and Reg left early...

SARAH Because Denise didn't want to miss her dancing classes—yes?

ANNIE And then after that, Ruth was ill...

SARAH Or so she said.

ANNIE Well, she was flat on her back with something for a week and that left Norman and me—more or less to cope. Tom was in Scotland on a course.

SARAH Yes?

ANNIE Anyway.

SARAH I'm beginning dreadfully not to like the sound of this one little bit.

ANNIE Anyway. Golly, I'm getting dreadfully hot.

SARAH Go on. What?

ANNIE Well, you know Norman, he's...

SARAH Yes, I know Norman very well.

ANNIE He's not a bit like Tom. I mean, just the opposite to Tom. Norman doesn't bother with secret signals at all. It was just wham, thump and there we both were on the rug.

SARAH Rug?

ANNIE Yes.

SARAH Which rug?

ANNIE The brown nylon fur one in the lounge... (*She starts to giggle*)

SARAH (*irritated*) What is it? Why are you laughing?

ANNIE (*unable to control herself*) Does it matter which rug?

SARAH I don't think it's funny.

ANNIE No, nor do I. I'm sorry—it's just I'm so embarrassed—oh, gosh...

SARAH Annie, pull yourself together.

ANNIE (*helplessly*) Yes...

SARAH (*thumping the table*) Annie, what happened on the rug?

ANNIE Everything happened on the rug.

SARAH Does Ruth know?

ANNIE No.

SARAH Or Tom?

ANNIE No. (*Drying her eyes*) Oh, dear...

SARAH Well, I blame Norman. That is absolutely typical—fur rug!

This starts ANNIE off again.

It's just the sort of thing... Annie, will you stop making that ridiculous noise—typical behaviour.

ANNIE blows her nose.

Is that it? Was that the only occasion?

ANNIE Oh, yes. Ruth got better and they both went home.

SARAH I suppose it could have been worse. That poor woman. I mean, I don't have a lot of time for Ruth, as you know. Personally, I find her snide little remarks, her violent ups and downs just too much to cope with. I know she's your sister, I'm sorry for talking like this. However, I would not wish my worst enemy married to a man like—not even Ruth. Heaven knows why they married. Never understood it. What did she see in him?

ANNIE Norman says it was uncontrollable animal lust that drew them together.

SARAH Norman told you that?

ANNIE Yes. He says it's died out now. They are like two empty husks.

SARAH Yes. Hardly surprising. Well, believe me, you're well clear of that, dear. You're well clear of that one.

ANNIE You don't think I should then?

SARAH What?

ANNIE Go.

SARAH Go where?

ANNIE This weekend.

SARAH This weekend?

ANNIE With Norman. To East Grinstead.

A pause.

SARAH You were planning to go with Norman to East Grinstead?

ANNIE Yes. He couldn't get in anywhere else.

SARAH You're not serious?

ANNIE Yes.

SARAH But how could you even think of it?

ANNIE He asked me.

SARAH What has that to do with it?

ANNIE Well, I wanted a holiday...

SARAH Yes, but—this wouldn't be just a holiday. I mean, I mean, you just don't go off on holiday with your sister's husband.

ANNIE It was only a weekend. I needed a holiday.

SARAH Well, you could have gone on your own.

ANNIE (*slightly angry*) I didn't want to go on my own. I'm always on my own.

SARAH But did you realize what you would be getting yourself into?

ANNIE Well—the way Norman put it—it sounded simple. Just a weekend.

SARAH Norman will put it any way which suits Norman. Did you think of Ruth? And Tom?

ANNIE Oh, to hell with Tom. He could have asked me if he'd wanted to, but he didn't. If I wait to be asked by Tom, I won't even get on an old folks' outing.

SARAH Well, what about Ruth?

ANNIE That's up to Norman. He wrote to me and then he phoned and asked me and I suddenly thought, well yes—I

think, actually if I'm being really truthful and, knowing Norman, I didn't think it would ever happen.

SARAH You were certain enough about it to get Reg and I down. We've had all the trouble of having to take the children to their grandparents so that we wouldn't have to bring them down here because we knew they would disturb Mother. I've had all the trouble of delegating responsibility for the Bring and Buy Sale which I'm sure will be a disaster because I'm the only one among them with any sort of organizing ability. And Reg has had to cancel his golf.

ANNIE I'm sorry. I've been feeling sick all morning. I'm sorry.

SARAH Yes, well I'm sure we all are.

ANNIE Well... *(She moves to the door)*

SARAH Where are you going?

ANNIE I don't know. I was just—I don't know.

SARAH I think it's just as well we are here. You quite obviously need a rest. Now, I want you to sit down here and leave everything to me.

ANNIE No, it's all right, I...

SARAH And let's get this quite clear to start with. You are not going anywhere. Not while I'm in this house.

ANNIE What about my weekend?

SARAH You can have your weekend here. Reg and I will cope. That's what we came down for. You can rest. You can certainly forget the idea of going anywhere with Norman. That's final. You're staying here.

ANNIE Yes. I rather thought I would be.

SARAH What you need is rest.

TOM *enters from the garden.*

TOM Ah.

SARAH Tom! How nice to see you, Tom. (*She shakes TOM's hand*)

TOM Hallo, Sarah. Keeping fit?

SARAH Tom, I've just been saying I think Annie's honestly been overdoing it.

TOM Really? Do you think so?

SARAH You really must take more care of her, Tom. We all expect you to keep an eye on her, you know, when we're not here.

TOM Do my best.

SARAH She's rather your responsibility.

TOM Yes, can't have that. Been trying to get that cat out of the tree. Your cat's gone up a tree, Annie.

ANNIE Oh.

SARAH Anyway, Annie's just decided she's not going away this weekend. She's going to stay here and have a good rest.

TOM Septic paw, you know.

SARAH And Reg and I will be here to look after her.

TOM That's good news. Aren't you going then?

ANNIE No.

SARAH With your help, of course, Tom. You must stay for supper.

TOM Supper?

SARAH Mustn't he, Annie?

ANNIE Why not.

TOM Save me opening a tin at home.

SARAH Lovely. Now, I must just pop up and see Mother. Then I'll come down and organize everything. Leave it all to Reg and me. Where is Reg? I asked him to bring the cases in ages ago.

TOM I left him in the garden.

SARAH What's he doing in the garden?

TOM Nothing much. Just talking to Norman.

SARAH Norman? Norman is here?

TOM Yes.

SARAH Norman is here, under this roof?

TOM No, he's in the garden. We were chatting away.

SARAH Oh, my God. Chatting about what?

TOM Various subjects. Cats. And his pyjamas.

SARAH Pyjamas?

TOM Yes, he was showing them to me.

SARAH Do you mean he's wearing them?

TOM No. He was just generally waving them about.

SARAH Tom, stay here with Annie. Don't move. Stay here. I'll be back.

SARAH *hurries out to the garden.*

TOM Did you know Norman was here?

ANNIE Yes. I saw him earlier.

TOM Oh. Were you expecting him?

ANNIE Not really, no.

TOM Ah. Well. *(He stares out of the window)*

ANNIE *(in frustration)* Oh.

TOM Put your feet up.

ANNIE What?

TOM I should put your feet up.

ANNIE *(rising and going to the sideboard)* No. Not at the moment. *(She gets out the cruet, two more mats, knives, forks and spoons, and a biscuit tin)*

TOM I'm a bit worried about that paw, you know.

ANNIE Paw?

TOM On the cat. Needs looking at. (*Moving in ANNIE's way*)
Does he have a name, by the way?

ANNIE What? No. Just cat. (*She moves round TOM to the table and lays it*)

TOM That's all right, I don't suppose he minds. Preferable to Oscar or Herbert or something. He probably wouldn't answer to it if he had one. Cats' names are more for human benefit. They give one a certain degree more confidence that the animal belongs to you. Of course, they never do. Cats belong to no one but themselves.

ANNIE Oh, I'm so stupid... (*She bangs down the cutlery*)

TOM All right?

ANNIE Yes. I just feel such a fool.

TOM Oh. Not much answer to that, is there. (*Picking up the biscuit tin*) Mind if I have a water biscuit?

ANNIE Have the lot.

TOM No. Just one. It'll spoil my dinner. Ah, high baked...

ANNIE Tom...

TOM (*crunching*) Um?

ANNIE What did you think when I said I was going away this weekend?

TOM Well, I don't know. I suppose I thought—you were going away this weekend. (*Holding out the tin*) Want one?

ANNIE (*irritated*) No...

TOM They're a bit stale. No, it did occur to me you might have liked someone to come along with you...

ANNIE It did?

TOM And then I thought, well, probably not.

ANNIE Why? What on earth made you think I wanted to go off and sit in some dreary hotel room on my own?

TOM Yes, it did seem rather odd, I must say.

ANNIE How long have you known me?

TOM Oh—years...

ANNIE Years. And in all that time have I ever even hinted that I'd like to go off on my own?

TOM Not as far as I know.

ANNIE (*angrily*) Then why the hell should I suddenly decide to do it now?

TOM Well, I don't know. Simmer down.

ANNIE Why didn't you say—Annie, will you be all right on your own? Would you like company? Someone to come along, too? Someone to talk to? Why didn't you think of saying it? Just once.

TOM Oh, come on...

ANNIE Or was the whole prospect just too awful?

TOM No...

ANNIE Well, then?

TOM You should have said something. You should have asked me along. I'd've come. You should've asked me.

ANNIE (*weakly*) Oh, dear God. Yes, I'd have had to have done.

TOM Don't blame me.

ANNIE I'm not blaming you. Oh—nun's knickers!

TOM Language. You're getting awfully het up. I should put your feet up.

ANNIE I don't want to put my bloody feet up.

ANNIE *stamps out.*

TOM gazes after her, slightly puzzled. He helps himself to another biscuit, then puts the tin on the table. **REG** is heard calling from the garden.

REG (offstage) Annie, Annie, Annie!

REG bursts in from the garden.

Where is she then? Where's that little sister of mine. (Seeing no one but **TOM**) Oh. Where is she?

TOM No idea. Kitchen, possibly.

REG Ah. He's a laugh, you know.

TOM Who?

REG Norman. Goes on and on. Don't know what he's talking about. Makes me laugh, though. I don't care, I like him. She doesn't but I do. Women don't, you know. Not many women like him. Don't know why. Sarah can't bear him. Won't have him in the house. Nor will his wife. (He laughs)

TOM I think Annie gets on all right with him.

REG Ah well. Annie. (He smiles affectionately) She's something special. You'll be all right with her, Tom. Take my word. If you decide to marry any of us, marry her. Not that I'm saying you should but if you did. Mind you, you can't marry Ruth and I don't think you'd fancy me, so there's not much choice, is there? (He laughs)

TOM Um. (Thoughtfully) They're all a bit peculiar at the moment.

REG Who are?

TOM The women. All on edge, for some reason.

REG The women are restless tonight, eh? Full moon.

TOM Eh?

REG Probably a full moon. (He bays like a hound and laughs)

TOM No. Something startled them.

REG Norman. Or mice. One or the other. I hear Annie's not going now.

TOM Apparently not.

REG Could have had my golf. If I'd known. Never mind. Better go and see Mother in a minute. Sarah's up there at the moment. I'll wait till she comes down. Two of them, too much of a good thing. I'll put it off as long as I can. Mother always says the same thing. What did you go and marry her for? Biggest mistake of your life. You'll live to regret it. Trouble is, I can never think of a convincing answer. (*He laughs*) She's probably right. I mean, there are compensations. Children—sometimes. Even Sarah—sometimes. But when I sit here in this house and listen to the quiet. You know, I wonder why I left. I had my own room here, you know. All my books, my own desk, a shelf for my hobbies. I'd sit up there in my school holidays—happy as a sandboy. I'd make these balsa wood aeroplanes. Dozens of them. Very satisfying. Mind you, they never flew. Soon as I launched them—crack—nose dive—firewood. But it didn't really matter. It was a hell of a bore winding them up, anyway. I built one for the kids the other day. They didn't really take to it. Where's the guns, Dad? Where are the bombs then? (*He shakes his head*) Oh well, what do you expect.

TOM No, you see—I think I've stopped her from going.

REG Who?

TOM Annie.

REG You have?

TOM Yes...

REG Hope we'll get some dinner soon. I'm getting peckish. (*He takes a biscuit from the tin, leaving the lid off*)

TOM You see, she didn't want to go on her own.

REG On holiday? Ah well. Who does?

TOM She was rather expecting me to offer to come, too.

REG Oh. You should have been in there—like a shot, eh?

TOM Yes.

REG While you had the chance. These are stale.

TOM Now, I've gone and upset her.

REG Oh, dear.

TOM I've never been very good at that sort of thing. Always seem to miss the moment.

REG That's how it goes, isn't it?

TOM Yes. I've let her down. I can feel myself doing it while I'm doing it. I suppose I'll have to find a way of making it up.

REG I shouldn't bother. It'll blow over. Wait for the new moon.

SARAH enters from the house.

TOM picks up some cutlery from the table.

SARAH What are you doing in here?

REG Oh. I beg your pardon. Is the dining-room closed? (*He laughs to TOM*)

SARAH Where's Annie?

REG Getting us something to eat, I hope. Slaving over a hot stove.

SARAH She is not. Anyway, it's a cold meal. Where is she?

REG I don't know.

SARAH You haven't left her in the living-room with Norman.

REG Possibly. What's wrong? He's all right, he won't bite her.

SARAH Oh, my God.

REG Tom'll inject her for rabies, won't you, Tom?

TOM I'll go and look for her if you...

REG Inject her for rabies.

SARAH No, Tom, stay where you are. Reg.

REG What?

SARAH Go and see if they're in there.

REG Why don't you?

SARAH Because I'd rather you did, please.

REG I'm not interested if they're in there. It doesn't matter to me if they're in there or not. You're the one who's interested if they're in there.

SARAH (*sharply*) Will you please do as I ask for once. Besides it'll look much more natural.

TOM I say, what's going on?

SARAH (*soothingly*) Nothing to worry about, Tom, nothing at all.

REG I don't think it'll look more natural. I mean, what's natural about me walking in there, having a look and then walking out again.

SARAH Well, pretend you've gone to fetch something. Use your imagination, for heaven's sake.

REG All right. All right. What am I supposed to be fetching?

SARAH I don't know. Anything.

REG (*moving to the door and then pausing*) What's all this about a cold meal? What sort of cold meal?

SARAH Cold meat and salad. Now, go on.

REG If there's one thing I can't stand when I'm hungry it's salad.

REG *goes out to the house.*

SARAH He's a difficult man. (*She takes the cutlery from TOM and replaces it*) He is such a difficult man. Ask him to do a simple thing for you and there's a twenty-minute argument. Did you talk to Annie? (*She rearranges the flowers*)

TOM Yes.

SARAH Did she—say anything?

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