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ALFIE

A Play in Three Acts

by Bill Naughton

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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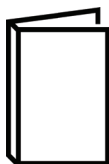
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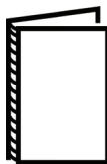


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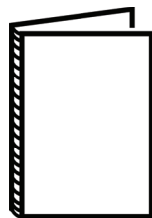
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Irish-born but British-bred Naughton (1910-1992) was a key figure in postwar English literature, one of the earliest of the kitchen sink school of writers, and he was an incredibly prolific producer of everything from short stories to screenplays to diaries. Bill Naughton was born June 12th, 1910 in Ballyhaunis, County Mayo. While he was still a small child his family moved to Lancashire where his father worked down the pit. He was educated at St Peter and St Paul School, Bolton. During the war, he was a Civil Defence driver in London. He worked as a lorry driver, weaver and coal bagger and began his writing career by noting down everything he heard in his everyday life in these jobs. He died in 1992. His best-known play *Alfie* was filmed twice, first with Michael Caine and subsequently with Jude Law.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Repertory Companies need not be put off this Play because of the large cast and the number of settings.

At the Duchess Theatre, each scene was set by two or three essential pieces of furniture, which were carried on in full view of the audience. The furniture was concealed behind a movable flap attached to a post in the middle of the stage, but Repertory Companies can quite easily use cut-outs or, in fact, no scenery at all.

Regarding the cast, there are several ways in which the number required can be cut to six men and five women, and, indeed, by a slight alteration, Perc can be eliminated in the cafe scene to bring the number of men down to five.

There are various ways of doubling, but a convenient one would be as follows:

Siddie	double for Carla	
Gilda	"	" Vy
Humphrey	"	" Sharpey and Joe
Woman Doctor	"	" Ruby
Harry	"	" Mr Smith
Lily	"	" Flo

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ALFIE

Produced by Peter Saunders and The Mermaid Theatre Trust
Ltd at the Duchess Theatre, London, on the 22nd July 1963,
with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

ALFIE	John Neville
SIDDIE	Glenda Jackson
GILDA	Gemma Jones
HUMPHREY	David Battley
WOMAN DOCTOR	Audine Leith
HARRY CLAMACRAFT	George Waring
JOE	Jerry Verno
LILY CLAMACRAFT	Marcia Ashton
CARLA	Maureen Davis
PERC	Patrick Mower
LACEY	Patrick Connor
FLO	Edna Landor
ANNIE	Mary Hanefey
LOFTY	Alan Townsend
RUBY	Margaret Courtenay
SHARPEY	David Battley
VY	Wendy Varnals
MR SMITH	Norman Wynne

Directed by Donald McWhinnie

Designed by David Myerscough Jones

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

*The action of the Play passes in various rooms and places
in and around London*

ACT I

Scene One	Near a parked car
Scene Two	Gilda's bed-sitting-room in South-East London
Scene Three	A cubicle at a chest clinic

ACT II

Scene One	A room in a sanatorium
Scene Two	A transport café
Scene Three	Alfie's room in Lambeth
Scene Four	Ruby's flat
Scene Five	A bar in a pub
Scene Six	Alfie's room in Lambeth

ACT III

Scene One	Alfie's room in Lambeth
Scene Two	The corridor outside Ruby's flat
Scene Three	Near a parked car

Time—the present

ACT I

Scene One

Scene—Near a parked car.

The screen up right is set from right to center. The screen up left is set from left to center. The screens center are set diagonally up right to down left. The car is presumed to be parked behind the diagonal screens.

When the curtain rises, the stage is empty. The lights come up. ALFIE enters down left from behind the screen. He is a tall, slim, chirpy, good-looking Londoner well in his thirties, but has the youthful and perky air of one who seems to have escaped the normal adult responsibilities and emotions. He is particular about his toilet and dress and of a simple almost innocent egotism that women find attractive. He is given to self-examination about what he likes and does not like, yet tells himself that life is only a giggle, and he quickly suppresses the occasional squeak of humanity from within. At the moment he is spruce and spry. Conspicuous over his left shoulder and across the left lapel of his jacket is a large spotless white handkerchief which is secured by being tucked inside his jacket. He moves down center and casually addresses the audience.

ALFIE Are you all settled in nicely? Right, we'll start. My name's...

SIDDIE *(off behind the screen; calling)* Alfie! Where've you got to?

Two short blasts on a car horn are heard.

ALFIE (*to the audience*) That's Siddie. She wants me back in the car with her. Seein' ya.

ALFIE exits behind the screen left. The lights dim to black-out.

(*offstage*) Here we are, then.

SIDDIE (*offstage*) You were a long time.

ALFIE (*offstage*) I've been waterin' my geranium.

SIDDIE (*offstage; laughing*) Alfie! Are you starting all over again?

ALFIE (*offstage*) What about it if I am?

SIDDIE (*offstage*) Suppose the police was to come along?

ALFIE (*offstage*) Wot about it—the windows are all steamed up, and the doors are locked—'ere, pull that rug over the top just in case.

SIDDIE (*offstage*) Mind you don't ladder my stockings with your ring.

There is a sudden, continuous blare from the car horn.

(*offstage; alarmed*) What's up, Alfie? Shut it off.

ALFIE (*offstage*) It's you. Take your knee off the steerin'-wheel.

SIDDIE (*offstage*) I can't. I can't move. I'm stuck.

ALFIE Look out—I'll knock it off.

There is a slap, a thud and the horn ceases.

SIDDIE (*offstage*) Sorry, I got the cramp in my thigh.

ALFIE (*offstage*) I've told you before to be careful where you're putting your leg.

SIDDIE (*offstage*) I was only trying to be helpful.

The lights come up.

ALFIE enters down left from behind the screen, adjusting his trousers.

ALFIE I can help myself. 'Ere, what time did your old man say he'd be waiting for you at the station at Purley?

SIDDIE (*offstage*) Oh, never mind him!

ALFIE (*moving center*) That's just who I am going to mind. Never spoil a good thing. That's what you women can't get into your nuts. Come on, enough's as good as a feast.

SIDDIE enters left from behind the screen, doing up her skirt and generally tidying herself up. She is aged thirty-three, a married saleswoman, on the hard side, and feels herself better class than ALFIE. She lives at Purley and likes a night out.

SIDDIE (*moving to left of ALFIE*) You've soon changed your tune.

ALFIE That horn put me off—if you want to know. I hate a din at a time like that.

SIDDIE adjusts her stockings and straightens the back seams, takes her compact and comb from her handbag, combs her hair, then takes out her lipstick. This goes on in silence for a time.

SIDDIE (*doing her lips*) Don't forget your napkin.

ALFIE I'd better not. (*He puts the handkerchief in his pocket*)

SIDDIE Know what I thought, Alfie, when I first saw you put your handkerchief over your shoulder?

ALFIE What?

SIDDIE I thought you were going to take out your fiddle and play it.

ALFIE whispers something saucy in her ear. SIDDIE bursts out laughing. ALFIE takes a pair of panties from his pocket and lightly throws them to SIDDIE.

ALFIE Here, don't catch cold.

SIDDIE *exits laughing behind the screen left.*

(He moves down center and addresses the audience) A married woman, see—they're every one of 'em in need of a good laugh. *(As he continues the speech, he takes out the handkerchief, carefully wipes all trace of lipstick from his lips and face, then dusts his shoes and throws the handkerchief away)* It never strikes their husbands. I always say, if you make a married woman laugh you're halfway there with her. 'Course, it don't work with a single bird—it'll set you off on the wrong foot. *(He removes one or two long hairs from his shoulder and holds them up for a moment)* Get one of them laughing and you don't get nothin' else. *(He takes out a comb-like clothes brush and brushes himself down)* You can never get this make-up off blue serge. It don't 'alf stick—all that pancake mixture, see, ruins the lapel, makes it shine.

SIDDIE *is heard laughing.*

Just listen. Know what, it was dead glum when I met it tonight. *(He pockets the brush, takes out a comb and combs his hair)* I listened to all its problems, then I got it laughing. It'll go 'ome 'appy. I reckon I've done its old man a real good turn, but I'd have a job making him see it. *(He keeps active as he talks)*

SIDDIE *enters left from behind the screen.*

All right now?

SIDDIE *(crossing to right of ALFIE)* Yeh. What about you?

ALFIE I'm all right. What about next Wednesday?

SIDDIE Same place, same time, suits me.

ALFIE Know what, I think we should change our rendezvous just in case he chances to follow you.

SIDDIE He'd never think of following me.

ALFIE That's the mistake all you married women make. You think because your husbands was clot enough to marry you, they won't see nothin'. Where d'you tell him you was goin'?

SIDDIE I said I was going to the pictures with Olive.

ALFIE Wot pictures?

SIDDIE Oh, just the pictures.

ALFIE (*appealing*) Nah, never be vague like that, that plants suspicion. No wonder there is all this broken marriage and divorce about.

SIDDIE Suspicion? Why—it would never even occur to that husband of mine that any other man could want to take me out.

ALFIE I see wot you mean. (*He takes a roll of peppermints from his pocket and hands one to her*) 'Ere, suck this sweet, Siddie, so he don't smell the gin.

SIDDIE I don't care if he does smell it.

ALFIE (*entreating*) Nah, don't be like that, gal—be 'uman. You an' me is having a good time, ain't we? Why should we hurt that poor geezer, he ain't doing us no harm.

SIDDIE (*crossing below ALFIE to left of him*) Stop preaching. (*She adjusts an ear-ring*)

ALFIE I'm not—but why can't you keep him happy in his ignorance? What's wrong with that?

SIDDIE (*shortly*) All right, all right!

ALFIE That's better. Now, you go home and amuse him, be nice to him—understand me?

SIDDIE Why the hell should *I* amuse him? Let him amuse himself.

ALFIE (*pained*) Ain't you got no heart, Siddie?

SIDDIE (*moving close to him*) I've got feelings.

ALFIE puts his arm around her, but is worried about his lapel.

ALFIE Well, forget 'em for once and go home and be really nice to him—like you have been to me.

SIDDIE You want to see everybody happy, eh?

ALFIE Why not? I don't believe in making anybody unhappy or making an enemy. You could be crossing the Sahara desert and he'd be just the geezer you'd run into. Anyway, I don't see why the husband shouldn't have a good time, as well.

SIDDIE So long as you don't have to give it to him.

ALFIE I would if I were built that way. You don't want to allus think of yourself in this life, gal. *(He looks at his watch)* 'Ere, you'd better be off—he'll be stood there waiting for you at the station.

SIDDIE Aren't you seeing me to the platform?

ALFIE Better take no chances. We might be seen.

They kiss.

SIDDIE Same place, same time next week?

ALFIE I'll ring you at work—now, be nice to him—

SIDDIE crosses up right.

—and don't wear that tight skirt next week.

SIDDIE No, I won't—I'll come with me skin-tight slacks on.

SIDDIE laughs loudly and exits up right. The lights dim out except for a spotlight on ALFIE who moves down center and addressed the audience. He talks with quiet, intimate conviction. He is unfamiliar with the accepted standards of morality, and is unaware of any ironic overtones to anything he does or says. He tells you a thing in his way and you can take it in your way. He is so confident that the logic of what he says will be understood that he does not emphasize the fact if something moves

him. His voice tends to lose force rather than gain at emotional moments. He attends to his dress throughout.

ALFIE 'Ere, the first time I took Siddie out I says to her, "Wot you 'avin'?" So she says, "A vodka and lime." So I goes up to the bar and comes back with a vodka and lime and a light ale. Now, when we'd supped up, I says, "-Wot you 'avin'?" and she says, "A vodka and lime," so I goes up to the bar and comes back with two light ales. So she stares at 'em and she says to me, "I'm a vodka and lime drinker." So I says to her, "That might be, but I ain't a vodka and lime buyer." Know what I mean? "If you want a vodka and lime you go and get yourself one." Now, it was touch and go for a minute, but then she saw where she stood, she drank her light ale and after that we got on beautifully. Most women don't mind paying—wot they don't like is being under obligation. *(He moves down left)* What she don't know is that we won't be seeing much more of her. She's on the way out. When a married bird gets too hot on, that's the time to cool off. The next thing she'll want is to introduce us to each other. I can see it coming. Now, once I've met the husband it don't 'alf put me off the wife. He could be dyin' on his bed an' if I ain't seen him I wouldn't think of him. But once you meet—an' talk—like as not he'd turn out a real good sport. His sort usually are. Touches my heart, know wot I mean. As I'm having it off with her I keep thinking of him 'angin' up his drip-dry shirt, or takin' the bleedin' dog for a walk or arguing in the pub about Chelsea or cricket or summink. *(He takes out a clean, folded white handkerchief and puts it neatly in his outside breast pocket)* You get a lot of that sort—Chelsea supporters.

During the remainder of ALFIE's speech, the next scene is set.

Now I've got to go off and visit a little bird called "Gilda". Now while she ain't stoopid, she is a bit on the simple side.

The speech and action are continuous.

Scene Two

Scene—GILDA's bed-sitting-room in South-East London.

The screen up right is set from right to center. The screen up left is set from left to center. The screens center are set at right angles from center to down right and from center to down left. There is a divan bed right with a small bedside table above it, an armchair center and a small table left.

ALFIE (*over the top of the screen left*) She'd never make a number one. I mean, she ain't the sort of bird you could show off—I mean, she ain't an exciting dresser—but she's a crackin' little standby. For another thing, she ain't a liberty taker. Most birds go mad to get 'old of a bloke, then the first thing they think of is 'ow to go about changin' 'im. Now I told Gilda from the start that I ain't the marrying sort and know wot, she don't mind, she never tries to put the block on me.

The lights come up on GILDA's room.

GILDA *enters right. She is a homely, Cockney girl of twenty-five, wiser of instinct than of mind. She is not smart and knows it, but does not mind. She has the air of a girl expecting her boyfriend. She wears an apron and carries a hot-water bottle, which she puts in the bed.*

She lets me do wot I want and 'ave wot I want and be as I am. 'Course, that might be another way they have of puttin' the block on you. She's a standby and she knows it and any bird wot knows its place in this life can be quite content.

The spotlight on ALFIE dims out.

ALFIE *exits left. There is a knock off left. GILDA removes her apron and flings it off right.*

HUMPHREY *enters left and crosses to center. He is aged forty, and is shy, old-fashioned, earnest and honest. He*

is a bus inspector whose wife did a bunk with a property owner and took their small daughter. He carries a box of chocolates.

GILDA (*turning and moving center*) Did you forget your key? (*She fails to hide her disappointment*) Oh, is it you, Humphrey?

HUMPHREY Yes, I'm sorry for calling so late—I've just finished work.

GILDA Oh, I see.

HUMPHREY Have I come at an awkward time?

GILDA I'm expecting Alfie any minute.

HUMPHREY What, at eleven o'clock?

GILDA What about it?

HUMPHREY I thought he didn't come round on Wednesdays.

GILDA He likes Wednesday night out with his mates, then calling round after.

HUMPHREY Oh, yeh. What kind of mates?

GILDA What difference does it make to me? So long as he's *all* here when he is here—I shall be happy.

HUMPHREY He can do what he wants—eh?

GILDA He'd still do what he wants. Anyway, I wouldn't want to change him.

HUMPHREY Here, I've brought you some chocolates. (*He clumsily hands the box of chocolates to GILDA*)

GILDA Oh, no—you shouldn't have. (*She does not want to take them*)

HUMPHREY Please forgive me for coming round...

GILDA He's all right.

HUMPHREY (*holding his feelings down*) I'm sorry. I don't know why—but I can't get you out of my mind.

GILDA It'll come right. You'll meet somebody else.

HUMPHREY It's not like love—it's like madness. I seem to be full of loneliness and longing for you all the time. It gets in my throat. I can't taste the food I eat.

GILDA *says nothing but looks distressed.*

I'm sorry, I just had to see you. Good-bye.

GILDA Shall I make you a cup of tea? I've got the kettle on.

HUMPHREY *shakes his head and turns to go.*

(she takes his hand) Try not to lose heart, Humphrey—you never know what happens—you'll find someone...

HUMPHREY I can only think of you.

HUMPHREY *exits left. GILDA stands for a few moments, chocolates in hand, looking helpless and sorry, then puts the chocolates on the chair, picks up a transistor radio from the bedside table, switches it on and lays it on the bed. The music is the second part of Mozart's "SONATA IN A MINOR". GILDA then picks up a hand mirror from the bedside table, looks at herself, touches up her hair, replaces the mirror, picks up a scent-spray, sprays a little on herself, then sprays the room. Footsteps are heard off left. GILDA puts the spray on the bedside table.*

GILDA That you, Alfie? *(She moves right center)*

ALFIE *enters left, wearing a raincoat.*

ALFIE *(crossing to center)* 'Course it's me—who the 'ell else could it be? *(He removes his raincoat and flings it to GILDA)* Coo! There ain't 'alf a pong in 'ere.

GILDA It's Phul Nana, the scent of Araby. Don't you like it?

ALFIE *(crossing to the bed)* Nah, I like everything to smell as it is. Natural. Know what I mean? *(He picks up the transistor, adjusts it until some jazz music is heard, then puts it on the bedside table)* I don't like a scent coverin' up a smell.

That's a mistake you women make, and more often than not a normal man prefers the *smell* to the scent. See what I mean? (*He moves to GILDA and kisses her*)

GILDA I'm just going to make some coffee, Alfie.

ALFIE Nah, not just yet. Never shove things at me as soon as I come in, gal. I 'ate anythink like that. I like to get my bearings first. I've just had a few light ales. Wait till they get down. (*He picks up the chocolates and sits in the chair*)

GILDA Have you had a good time, Alfie?

ALFIE Not bad, not bad at all.

GILDA Have you bin with your mates?

ALFIE I've had a few beers—what's up?

GILDA I thought I could smell Chanel Number Five.

ALFIE Eh? Nah, it's my after-shave lotion. It's got a feminine touch, see?

GILDA (*after a brief pause*) I see.

GILDA exits left with the raincoat. ALFIE helps himself to a chocolate. GILDA re-enters and crosses to right of ALFIE.

ALFIE I thought I saw that geezer Humphrey going off.

GILDA He was here, but he only stayed a minute.

ALFIE (*detached*) 'Ere, you ain't 'avin' it off with him, are you?

GILDA I couldn't bear another man to kiss me since I've known you.

ALFIE (*satisfied*) I just wondered. What did he call round for, then—just to give you the chocolates? (*He hands the box to GILDA*)

GILDA puts the chocolates on the bedside table and switches off the transistor.

GILDA No—to tell me he loved me.

ALFIE Get off!

GILDA It's true. (*She moves to right of ALFIE*)

ALFIE Human beings are funny, aren't they? (*He puts his arm around GILDA*)

GILDA *kisses* ALFIE.

GILDA Do you love me, Alfie?

ALFIE Shall we say I like you a lot. (*He gives her a sexy kiss*) I will have that coffee, after all.

GILDA I'll not be a minute.

GILDA *gives ALFIE a quick kiss and exits right. ALFIE puts his feet up on the bed, notices something there, puts his hand out and feels the hot-water bottle.*

ALFIE (*to himself*) Hot-water bottle! She's getting a bit previous. (*He takes a small diary from his pocket, peruses it then calls*) Is today the twenty-second?

GILDA (*off right; calling*) Er—yes—I think so. Why?

ALFIE (*calling*) 'Ere—shouldn't our little friend have arrived on the nineteenth?

GILDA *enters right carrying a tray with cups and a pot of coffee. She puts the tray on the table left and pours two cups of coffee.*

GILDA Don't worry—he'll turn up.

ALFIE Well, he's always so punctual. I don't like it when he's overdue. How're things at the caff?

GILDA (*handing a cup of coffee to ALFIE*) Do you know, I took over fifty-two pounds on the till today. Isn't it wonderful! (*She collects her own cup of coffee*)

ALFIE What's wonderful about it? 'T ain't as if it were your money.

GILDA No—but I like to feel they're doin' all right, and it keeps you busy.

ALFIE Ain't it time you started that fiddle I told you about? Playing the piano on the till.

GILDA Oh, I couldn't do that, Alfie.

ALFIE It must be the only till in London that ain't bent.

GILDA Luigi and his wife treat me like one of the family.

ALFIE That's more reason to do 'em.

GILDA But I'm happy as I am, Alfie.

ALFIE You could still be 'appy with a few hundred nicker in the bank—instead of tuppence-ha'penny.

GILDA perches on the left arm of ALFIE's chair. There is silence for a few moments as they sip their coffee.

GILDA Have another chocolate, Alfie.

ALFIE (*ignoring this*) You worry me, gal. If you don't pull yourself together you'll end up dead rough.

GILDA Me? How come, Alfie?

ALFIE You're idle—you think you're honest, but in fact you're mentally idle. Not slow—idle.

GILDA (*trying to interrupt*) But, Alfie...

ALFIE Nah, listen, you got yourself in a rut, see. Now, suppose I'd been like that—easy-going, then I wouldn't have needed no car—so's every night I'd 'ave to be runnin' for the bleedin' last bus, instead of staying on here with you.

GILDA But I'd still be as happy with you, Alfie, if you had no car.

ALFIE Look here, gal, if you say you're happy once more I'll begin to doubt it. Straight up, I will.

GILDA But money isn't everything, Alfie.

ALFIE It's only people who ain't got none talk like that.

GILDA I'm not ashamed—I owe nothing.

ALFIE Then you should be ashamed. (*He puts his arm around her*) Wot you gotta get in that little head of your'n, gal, is that nobody don't 'elp you in this life—you gotta 'elp yourself. Why, if you'd only fiddled five bob a day you'd 'ave two hundred nicker on one side by this. I 'ate talkin' to you like this, gal—it makes me feel like a ponce.

GILDA (*rising*) I'll be all right, Alfie. (*She puts her cup on the tray*)

ALFIE You won't. Not unless you turn over a new leaf.

GILDA *picks up the tray and moves to left of ALFIE.*

I've always had a fiddle on every job I've done—because a fiddle gives you an interest in your work—and I believe everybody should take an interest in their work. (*He rises and puts his cup on the tray*)

GILDA *crosses to right with the tray.*

An interest keeps you young. 'Course, there's a right and wrong way of going about it. Never be cheerful on a job if you're doing a fiddle.

GILDA *exits right. The lights on the room fade. The spotlight comes up on ALFIE.*

(*He moves down left and addresses the audience*) 'Ere, I was on a nice little fiddle a short time back, driving for one of these super-market firms, see, and the loader would slip me an extra crate of canned salmon on.

While ALFIE speaks, the room is set for the next episode. The hot-water bottle is removed from the bed.

And I'd flog it to the manager and share the bunce with the loader. One day I was loading up— (*He reels it off very fast and demonstrates*) and whistling away when I spots the guv'nor with his eye on me. "You sound cheerful, Elkins," he says. I tumbled at once I should never have whistled.

So I says, "Yeh, some mornings I feel chirpy." So he says, "You can't be feeling all that chirpy on what I'm paying you, you must be working a nice little fiddle." So I says, "That's defamation of character, mate. I'll have to see my union." And he says, "Don't come it—'ow do you think I got where I am? I'm satisfied," he says, "so long as you do your job well and don't get too greedy, else you'll kill the goose..." I was quite glad of that little tip.

The spotlight on ALFIE fades.

ALFIE exits left. The lights come up on the room.

GILDA enters right. She surveys herself sideways and frontways, taking in her stomach and smoothing it. She pulls her stomach in and her behaviour suggests worry one moment and hope the next. She appears more confident and sits in the chair. Footsteps are heard off left.

GILDA *(rising and moving left center)* Is that you, Alfie?

ALFIE enters left. He wears his raincoat.

ALFIE Now, who the 'ell else could it be? *(He removes his raincoat and tosses it to GILDA)*

GILDA You never know. *(She moves to ALFIE to be kissed)*

ALFIE remembers and kisses her.

GILDA exits left with the raincoat and re-enters immediately.

ALFIE Well, any news? *(He sits in the chair)*

GILDA Oh—not yet.

ALFIE We'll have to do something about this little lot.

GILDA I've tried everything under the sun, Alfie.

ALFIE You mean you've been taking stuff on the quiet? Why didn't you tell me?

GILDA (*moving to left of ALFIE*) I didn't want to worry you.

ALFIE I wondered why you was lookin' so ropey. You don't want to make yourself ill, you know.

GILDA *kisses him with loving affection.*

You ain't 'alf gettin' cooey lately.

GILDA (*hurt*) I'm sorry, Alfie.

ALFIE Nah, I don't mind, except I don't want you to spring it on me. I might not be in the mood, see. (*He kisses her*)

GILDA Do you love me, Alfie?

ALFIE What can I say when you ask? You shouldn't ask, you know. I'll tell you—when I feel like.

GILDA I'll make the coffee.

GILDA exits right. ALFIE puts his feet up on the bed, feels for the hot-water bottle, but it is not there.

ALFIE (*calling*) You ain't 'alf changing lately.

GILDA enters with the tray of coffee and puts it on the table left.

GILDA How do you mean? (*She pours the coffee*)

ALFIE You're not only cooey, but in a way you're more bossified. It's as if I've got to take notice of you, instead of you of me. I don't know how to describe it, but I can feel it.

GILDA (*handing ALFIE his coffee*) Alfie.

ALFIE What?

GILDA I been thinking. (*She collects her coffee and moves to left of him*) Could we go *through* with it?

ALFIE Go through with it! Blimey, what an 'orrible thought!

GILDA Don't worry, Alfie.

ALFIE I ain't gone through with anything in all my life. I mean, I ain't in no condition for getting hitched up.

GILDA You don't need to, Alfie.

ALFIE I mean, if I was to marry you, you might gain a husband, but you'd lose a bleedin' good friend. Know what I mean?

GILDA I've worked it all out.

ALFIE I don't know wot you've worked out, gal, but you gotta think twice before you turn a little creature out in this world.

GILDA I wouldn't turn him out, Alfie. I'd get him adopted.

ALFIE Adopted? What are you talking about? Adopted!

GILDA By a rich woman, see. They're always on the lookout.

ALFIE A rich woman, yeh, I see wot you mean.

GILDA I'd like to do that much for him. I know he'd have a good life, then.

ALFIE 'Ere, but you can't be certain summink's there, can you, yet? *(He pats her with a comic affection on her stomach)*

GILDA I thought I felt him kick, Alfie.

ALFIE jumps as though he had been shot.

ALFIE Kick—how the 'ell can they kick? It won't be the size of my thumbnail.

GILDA That's what they say. I'll tell you next time it happens, Alfie, and you can feel.

ALFIE *(rising)* You'll do nothing of the sort. And listen, if you're going to keep coming out with that sort of talk, I'm off.

GILDA I'm sorry, Alfie.

ALFIE It don't 'alf get on my wick.

GILDA I didn't mean to upset you, Alfie.

ALFIE You don't wanna give way to your impulses like that, because summink a woman might think natural like as not a bloke will find a bit sickenin'.

GILDA Mrs Artoni used to call her husband when she was like that, when it moved.

ALFIE (*moving down right*) Mrs Artoni can call who she wants so long as she don't call me.

GILDA I wasn't thinking. (*She puts her cup on the tray and returns to center*)

ALFIE What you don't realize is that men are more sensitive than women. (*He crosses to left and puts his cup on the tray*) D'you remember that big bird I used to dance with at the *Locarno*? One Sunday night she showed me 'er operation scar wot they made when she was a kid. A long scar it was wiv all white skin round it. Know wot—I got straight outa bed, I did, an' put my clobber on. "Wot's up wi' you?" she says. "I'd sooner go out an' see a bleedin' horror film," I says, "than a thing like that." It don't 'alf put me off, it do.

There is a long silence.

GILDA Alfie.

ALFIE What?

GILDA Can I?

ALFIE (*turning to her*) Can you wot?

GILDA Can I have it? You know, go through with it—an' 'ave the baby?

ALFIE What you askin' me for? It's your'n, ain't it? There's nobody in the world can stop you.

GILDA goes into ALFIE's arms and starts sobbing. ALFIE is oddly intuitive when he lets himself be and handles her quite tenderly and comforts her.

Steady on, gel—nah then, nah then. Don't break your bleedin' heart. If you want to do a thing and you think it's right, you do it—to hell with 'em. (*He takes the handkerchief from his outside breast pocket and dabs her eyes with it*) Mind my lapel. Now, sit you down there. (*He sits GILDA on the*

chair, then straightens his jacket, relieved to escape from an encounter that was really touching him. Suddenly his face registers doubt and he turns to GILDA 'Ere, you ain't comin' it on me, are you—trying to swing it?

GILDA Swing what?

ALFIE Why, once he's born, swing the old 'filiation order—two nicker a week until he's sixteen.

GILDA *(looking up)* I think you know me better than that, Alfie. *(She bows her head)*

ALFIE I'll take your word for it. *(He moves down left)*

The lights on the room fade to a quarter.

GILDA *risés, collects the coffee tray and exits right. The spotlight comes up on ALFIE.*

(he addresses the audience) Wot got me was the way she asked me could she 'ave the child, the way she looked at me an' begged—as though I were a savage wot might 'ave murdered the poor kid or summink.

While ALFIE speaks, the room is set for the next episode.

Ahter all, wot could I 'ave agin 'im. He'd done me no 'arm.

GILDA *enters right, carrying a cot on a stand which she puts at the foot of the bed. She wears a smock. She takes a woolly toy from the cot and exits right.*

Anyway, she was quite 'appy them months she was carryin', wot to my mind was a bit outa place in a way, 'er not bein' married, see, but it seems to bring some new strength out in a woman when they're like that. Mind you, she came over quite beautified for a time, especially in the early months, an' I told 'er, I said, "Blimey, gal, you ain't as ugly as I thought." I didn't fancy bein' seen out wiv 'er, not a woman in that condition, or anythink like that. But once I'd got used to the idea it didn't work out as bad as I'd thought. Anyway, 'er time comes an' in she goes to the 'ospital for to 'ave it.

I wasn't there, so I didn't know till they told me. Then from all accounts the kid comes out a treat, right bang on the minute, you might say. An' he turns out to be a real bouncer, see, the spit image of me, an' all the nurses go crazy abaht 'im, an' to be quite frank I felt quite pleased with myself, except I don't fancy it when they say, "Smile for daddy," an' all that sort of lark. I don't know why, but it just makes me feel uncomfortable, anything like that.

The lights come up on the room to half.

GILDA enters right carrying a baby and some baby clothes. **GILDA**, hair done differently, blouse open at the front, looking very attractive, more confident, different, mumsie, puts the baby in the cot, puts the clothes on the bed, sits on the end of the bed and sings quietly to him.

Little Gilda 'erself 'as taken on this mumsie look I was tellin' you about, an' I quite like anythink like that, rounded out a bit, see, with a nice feel of flesh to her, but not too flabbified. Well, out she comes, an' I goes round to 'er little room now she's 'ome with the kid, see, who she sets 'er 'eart on callin' "Malcolm", even tho' I warns 'er he'll never forgive 'er for givin' 'im a bleedin' 'andle like that, an' there she is just finished feedin' him. (*He moves to left of the cot*)

The lights on the room come up to full. The spotlight on ALFIE fades.

GILDA Hello, Alfie. (*Softly*) He's just going off.

ALFIE He's got milk all round his chops.

GILDA He's ever so greedy—like 'is dad.

ALFIE Yeh! I expect he knows what he likes.

GILDA Isn't he getting big?

ALFIE Yeh, he's beginning to look quite 'uman.

GILDA I think he's fast asleep now. (*She rises, stoops and kisses the baby*)

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