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SF PERUSALS

EVERYBODY'S FRIEND

A Play

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SAMUEL  FRENCH

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CHARACTERS

Mrs Roberts
Miss Elsa Furley
Miss Daisy Loxton
Doctor (this character can be male or female)

Optional non-speaking characters

Mrs Craven
Mrs Morley
Mrs Bains
Mrs Dale
Mrs Maxby

The action takes place in two old people's flats, similar in design, and on the landing and balcony between

PRODUCTION NOTE

Miss Loxton's door need not be practical, but a panel which can be broken by Miss Furley's crutch (e.g. of cardboard or balsa-wood) would be useful. Mrs Roberts will be helped with some of her entrances if there is room to get round behind the backing.

If resources are limited the non-speaking characters need not appear. Mrs Roberts may indicate them in the direction of the audience.

EVERBODY'S FRIEND

Miss Loxton's and Miss Furley's flats are adjacent. Miss Furley's flat is austere with only one plant on the sideboard, while Miss Loxton's is filled to overflowing with pot plants. Otherwise, the rooms are a mirror image of each other, both with windows on to a small balcony thirteen floors up

In front of the flats is the landing with Miss Furley's front door on one side and Miss Loxton's on the other. Off each flat is a door leading to a kitchen

Lights up on the landing

Mrs Roberts is busy with mop and bucket. Mrs Craven hurriedly crosses the landing with the barest nod to Mrs Roberts

Mrs Roberts Cleanliness is next to you know what, Mrs Craven. How's Mr Craven? Been giving him the bran, have you? Mr Roberts always believed in bran.

By now Mrs Craven is out of sight

Huh! Always in a hurry, that one. More haste, less time to be friendly, I say. One of these days somebody is going to need help, and when they do . . .

A muffled cry comes from Miss Furley's door. Mrs Roberts listens for a second or two, then hurries over to it

Miss Furley (*off*) Help! Help!
Mrs Roberts (*with her ear to the door*) Is that you, Miss Furley?
Miss Furley (*off*) Help!
Mrs Roberts Did you say "Help"?
Miss Furley (*off*) Help!
Mrs Roberts What's the matter?
Miss Furley (*off. Slowly and louder*) My leg. I fell. I dragged myself to the door, but I can't reach the catch.
Mrs Roberts Your leg, you said?
Miss Furley (*off*) Broken.

Mrs Roberts Broken? Don't you worry. I'll dial nine-nine-nine. We'll soon have you in hospital.
Miss Furley (*off*) No!

Mrs Roberts picks up her mop and bucket and hurries off

The Lights fade and come up on Miss Furley's flat

Miss Furley is in the easy chair. The Doctor is packing

Miss Furley No. No. No. No.
Doctor My dear Miss Furley, try to see sense. You can be looked after in hospital. Here . . .
Miss Furley Save your breath, Doctor. I refuse to be moved.
Doctor You can't stay here.
Miss Furley I shall not leave.
Doctor You're . . .
Miss Furley An obstinate old woman?
Doctor I was about to say, suffering from some confusion.
Miss Furley Not to mention a broken leg. It's a disagreeable situation and I'm in some pain in spite of your sedatives, but my mind is quite clear, and made up.
Doctor I cannot take the responsibility. You should be in hospital.

Mrs Roberts enters

Mrs Roberts Can I help?
Miss Furley What are you doing here?
Mrs Roberts The front door was open. Mrs Roberts, Doctor. The one who phoned. The duty that lies nearest, you know. I've always been one for the duty that lies nearest, even when Mr Roberts was alive. What can I do now?
Miss Furley Nothing.
Mrs Roberts The ambulance is downstairs. They are good, aren't they?
Miss Furley Tell them to go away.
Mrs Roberts But you need the ambulance.
Miss Furley Allow me to be the judge of that.
Doctor You are not the doctor in this case, Miss Furley.
Miss Furley I am the patient, and I know my rights.
Doctor You could die.

Miss Furley I shall not be parted from . . . (*She breaks off, slightly confused*) I shall not . . . Leave me.
Mrs Roberts Yes. Leave us a minute, Doctor. (*She pushes the Doctor towards the door*)
Doctor What the . . . ?
Mrs Roberts (*in a heavy whisper with a wink and a nod*) Just a minute.

Bemused, the Doctor goes out

Miss Furley I don't want to—talk.
Mrs Roberts (*walking to the window*) Nice place here.
Miss Furley Are you satisfied now you've seen inside?
Mrs Roberts You can see right over the railway. (*Going to Miss Furley*) You've got friends, Miss F.
Miss Furley I don't make friends.
Mrs Roberts A friend in need is worth a handful of get-well cards. We can visit you in hospital.
Miss Furley I have always lived on my own. If I have to die that way . . .
Mrs Roberts If you're worried about this flat . . .
Miss Furley I'm not . . .
Mrs Roberts (*looking round*) Leave the spit and polishing to me. Let me have the key, and I'll come in and dust. Clean the windows, too. Water the plant. (*She picks it up*)
Miss Furley (*almost beside herself*) Take your hands away from it.
Mrs Roberts (*understanding*) Ah! (*She puts the plant down*)
Miss Furley (*apologetically*) It—can't bear to be touched. I can handle it, of course. It's used to my fingers.
Mrs Roberts You couldn't take this to hospital with you.
Miss Furley I wipe the leaves regularly. It—appreciates little attentions.
Mrs Roberts You could show someone else how to wipe them.
Miss Furley I'm not leaving it.
Mrs Roberts If anything happened to you, there'd be nobody to wipe the leaves.
Miss Furley Go away. Please.
Mrs Roberts I'm not much of a one for greenery myself. I'm better with plastic. I've still got a bunch of daffodils they gave away with soap flakes years ago. But Miss Loxton now . . . You know Miss Loxton, don't you?

Miss Furley No.

Mrs Roberts Not Daisy Loxton next door? She's a wonder with pot plants. She talks to them.

Miss Furley She . . .?

Mrs Roberts "A few words of encouragement are worth all your fertilizer", she told me.

Miss Furley Miss—?

Mrs Roberts Loxton. She'd be about your age, give or take a year. You ought to have a word with her. I'll nip round and see if she's in.

Miss Furley There's no need.

Mrs Roberts A stitch in time could save a leg, Miss Furley. If Daisy Loxton were to look after your plant . . . The ambulance is still here.

Miss Furley I told the doctor . . .

Mrs Roberts I'll take it to Daisy Loxton, shall I? (*She picks up the plant*) I can come out to the hospital. Any time you like. I'll let you know how it's getting on. You don't have to worry about a thing. All right, Doctor, you can come in now.

Mrs Roberts goes into the kitchen

The Doctor enters, glaring back

Doctor Perhaps a tranquillizer . . . Not for you, Miss Furley. For me after two minutes with that woman . . . Don't you worry. We'll soon have you in plaster.

The Lights fade and come up on Miss Loxton's flat

Mrs Roberts enters with Miss Loxton, who carries the plant

Mrs Roberts (*laughing*) Of course we ought not to laugh with the poor dear done up in plaster. Shock takes people different ways. The day after we buried Mr Roberts I sat through *The Sound of Music* three times running.

Miss Loxton Tell her I give him a drop of cold tea every morning.

Mrs Roberts Cold tea? (*She laughs*) With milk and sugar?

Miss Loxton You don't know much about plants, Mrs Roberts. I make a good strong pot first thing in the morning. Nothing like a real dark cup for waking you up. When the pot's near empty I fill her up with cold water. That's for my dears. You

tell your Miss Furley I treat him no better and no worse than my other dears.

Mrs Roberts Pull the other one, Daisy Loxton. It's got bells on.

Miss Loxton I'm afraid you don't know much about anything, Mrs Roberts. I don't have favourites. 'Tisn't fair when they're all doing their best. That's the trouble with this world. Them as has has their hases added to. Them as hasn't are pushed into corners and forgot. Well, it's not like that here. I love them all. Don't I, my lovelies?

Mrs Roberts Is that what I'm supposed to tell Miss F.?

Miss Loxton Tell her, weak tea and affection.

Mrs Roberts Weak tea.

Miss Loxton And affection.

Mrs Roberts shrugs her shoulders and goes out

Miss Loxton Especially affection.

The Lights fade and come up on the landing and Miss Furley's flat Miss Furley enters her living-room supported by crutches, and followed by Mrs Roberts

Miss Furley No, no. Don't support me. I may be assisted by crutches but I can manipulate them myself.

Mrs Roberts I'll keep popping in to make sure you're all right.

Miss Furley (*lowering herself into her easy chair*) Mrs Roberts—I—I am grateful for all you have done. I realize that I should have been in a sorry plight if you had not answered my call for help. But I shall not need—constant attendance. (*Looking wildly around*) Where is it?

Mrs Roberts I warned you to take it easy.

Miss Furley Where—is—it?

Mrs Roberts At your age you don't mend as fast as a youngster.

Miss Furley What have you done with it?

Mrs Roberts Don't jump off the deep end. You never know where you may land. (*She laughs*)

Miss Furley (*struggling to get out of the chair*) You lied, didn't you? Anything to keep her calm. That was the official attitude. How did you dispose of the remains? Did you bury them? Burn them? Throw them out with the potato parings? What have you done with the pot?

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