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SF PERUSALS

FARCICALS

Two Short Farces

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-11362-8

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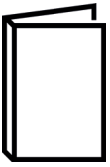
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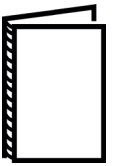
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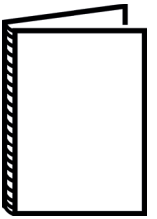
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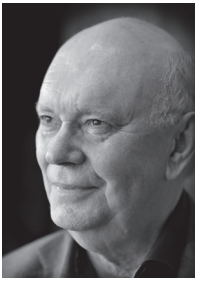
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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 eighty plays, many one act plays and a large amount of work for the younger audience. His work has been translated into over thirty-five 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*; and at Chichester Festival Theatre, major revivals of *Way Upstream* in 2015, and *The Norman Conquests* in 2017.

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. He has been inducted into American Theater'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.

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FARCICALS

Farcicals consists of two one-act plays, which ran individually and as a double bill during the premiere season and tour.

Farcicals World premiere (as double bill): 4 September 2013 at The McCarthy auditorium, Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough

With the following cast:
Penny Bottlecamp ELIZABETH BOAG
Lottie Bulbin SARAH STANLEY
Teddy Bulbin, Lottie's husband TERENCE BOOTH*
Reggie Bottlecamp, Penny's husband KIM WALL

Director: ALAN AYCKBOURN
Design: JAN BEE BROWN
Costumes: JULIA PERRY-MOOK

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* * Bill Champion took over the role of Teddy during the 2014 UK tour which premiered at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford on 24 January 2014, before being presented at the Brits Off Broadway festival, 59E59 theatres, New York, opening on 7th June, 2014.

CHARACTERS

PENNY BOTTLECAMP
LOTTIE BULBIN
TEDDY BULBIN – Lottie's husband
REGGIE BOTTLECAMP – Penny's husband

SETTING

An area of the Bulbin's country garden, during a summer evening.

THE KIDDERMINSTER AFFAIR

The **BULBIN***'s garden in summer on a warm evening.*

An unlit barbecue is set up ready, together with garden seating and a table or two. **LOTTIE***, small and anxious, enters with* **PENNY***, tall and assured.*

PENNY *(as they enter)* ...I don't believe it. Lottie, are you sure? Are you certain you've got this right?

LOTTIE *(distraught)* Penny. I'm almost positive. I didn't want to believe it at first, but...

PENNY A love affair?

LOTTIE Yes.

PENNY What, Teddy?

LOTTIE I'm almost certain he's having one.

PENNY Well I'm – I'm knocked sideways. Lottie, this has absolutely hooked me for six... It's unbelievable!

LOTTIE *(miserably)* I just don't know what to do, Penny, I really don't. I'm sorry, I'm in a bit of a state. I've already had a drink or two to steady my nerves...

PENNY Yes, well do go easy, darling. You know what you're like after a drink or two. Listen, Lottie, have you told anyone else about this?

LOTTIE No. Only you. You're the first person I ran to. Instinctively. You're my one and only best friend and you have been ever since schooldays, haven't you? Ever since I was thirteen, I've turned to you in times of need. You've always been a pillar of strength for me, Penny, you know.

PENNY Yes, darling, and I'm still here for you.

LOTTIE Remember how you used to stand up for me at St Olaf's when I was being bullied...?

PENNY Now, that's all in the past now, Lottie, you have to forget that. Put it behind you, darling –

LOTTIE I never will, Penny. I'll never forget you standing up for me. You remember that time when they all started calling me Porky-pudge? The whole school. Do you remember that? Porky-pudge!

PENNY Children can be so cruel... Especially growing girls.

LOTTIE Porky-pudge. You know, I still wake up in the night sometimes to hear someone shouting in my ear... Porky-pudge! Porky-pudge!

PENNY Who on earth's shouting that, Teddy?

LOTTIE Teddy? Heavens, no! No, it's a voice in my dreams... Teddy does shout out in the night sometimes but nothing like that.

PENNY What does he shout? What sort of things?

LOTTIE Oh, he has these recurring horse riding dreams, apparently. He yells out, giddy up, old girl! And whooaa! Whoaa! Easy, now, easy!

PENNY Yes, that could get irritating after a time, I would imagine. Now getting back to this business of Teddy... How can you be so sure that he's having an affair, Lottie? How can you know for certain?

LOTTIE Well, he's frequently away for the occasional night and sometimes whole weekends, but then he's always done that. Ever since he diversified and went into lawn mowers. I mean, when he was just in tractors it wasn't quite so bad, but lawn mowers take him up and down the country continuously. Up and down, up and down, nearly every week.

PENNY And how do you know? About the affair?

LOTTIE You see, these trips have just got more and more frequent of late and he's away overnight far more than he used to be. And then the other night... I found...

PENNY You found what?

LOTTIE He…he gave me his suit…the pinstripe that he likes to wear when he's at mowing conventions and so on…he gave it to me to be cleaned…while he was away…and I was checking the pockets just to make sure, he hadn't left any… loose change…business cards…mobile phones and so on…

PENNY Yes, Lottie dear, what did you find?

LOTTIE I found… I found a bill.

PENNY A bill?

LOTTIE A hotel bill. From a Travelodge.

PENNY Go on.

LOTTIE In Kidderminster. Made out for Mr and Mrs Bulbin… One night with full English times two. He'd even used our married name, Penny…

PENNY *(involuntarily)* Oh the bloody idiot!

LOTTIE What?

PENNY *(angrily)* How can men be quite so idiotic? They're utterly thoughtless, aren't they? And I don't mean by thoughtless that they're inconsiderate, though they're that as well. I mean that they don't have a single thought in their stupid heads, do they? They just don't think at all! Use their tiny brains! They don't have a speck of intelligence, nothing! They never think of anyone but themselves!

She pauses, breathing deeply. Her burst of anger spent. **LOTTIE** *is a little startled by her friend's vehemence.*

I'm sorry, Lottie, forgive me. That sort of behaviour gets me riled.

LOTTIE Obviously.

PENNY *(irritably)* Where are they, our two, anyway? What are they both doing?

LOTTIE They're in Teddy's study. Watching the cricket highlights.

PENNY Well, they should be out here. Getting this wretched barbecue ready. I suppose they're going to leave it all to us to do?

LOTTIE Oh, no. Not the barbecue. That's strictly Teddy's department. I couldn't possibly interfere, not with his barbecue...

PENNY No, it's an extraordinary thing about men, isn't it? Especially those that refuse point blank ever to set foot in a kitchen, men who would never dream of venturing within two feet of a stove and as for the sink – they simply run a mile. But as soon as a barbecue's mentioned, "No, no, better leave this to me, old girl. Men's work, don't you know? Tricky thing, grilling chunks of chicken, or charring a perfectly good steak beyond all recognition. Besides, it gets a teensy bit hot for your dainty little hands, dearest..." I mean it's still perfectly OK for us women to do all the hard work. Preparing and marinating, spending hours on end chopping up the wretched salads that none of the men bother to eat. And that we women are then left finishing up for weeks afterwards for breakfast. Perfectly acceptable for us to clear up the unholy mess they've left behind them afterwards... And then at the end of it, they expect us to stand here and bloody well applaud, "Jolly well done, darling, bravo, delicious!" Well sod them, that's what I say, sod the lot of them!

LOTTIE *(nervously)* Gracious! You are in a mood today, Penny. What on earth's wrong? Is there something wrong?

PENNY I'm angry for you, darling. For you.

LOTTIE I can't bear the thought of that happening in some Travelodge. I know, I tell myself sometimes that I'm terribly lucky to have him in the first place. God knows why he chose me out of all the... He could have had the pick of us, couldn't he? ...All my friends were green with jealousy. "Why you, Lottie?" they kept saying. "What on earth made him choose you?" They were mystified. They were all in love with him,

too, of course, every single one of them. Even you, Penny, I remember at one point.

PENNY Me? No, no, no. I never was. Me?

LOTTIE Oh, come now, Penny, I remember you giving him sheep's eyes...

PENNY He's not my type. Teddy's not my type. Not at all. Teddy? All that alpha male swagger. All that surface charm...tall, good looking, superficially sexually attractive men – they're ten a penny, aren't they? No, give me Reggie...any time. Reggie's much more – my type of man. No disrespect to Teddy, but with my men I like to look below the surface a bit – in the hope there's something there. With Reggie, if you dig deep enough, eventually you're sure to find something interesting. That's my hope, anyway.

LOTTIE Yes. I think Reggie's really sort of deep, isn't he? He always comes over as deep. A bit of a philosopher. He always gives you that intense, penetrating stare when you talk to him, doesn't he? As if he's analysing every word you're saying to him...

PENNY He's probably trying to work out what you're talking about. Listen, Lottie. If you want to keep that husband of yours, you're going to have to take positive action, dear.

LOTTIE Positive action? What sort of positive action?

PENNY Start up a love affair of your own, darling. Give him a taste of what it's like to be on the receiving end. They don't like that, they never do.

LOTTIE *(flustered)* Oh, no I couldn't...me? I could never...not in a Travelodge in Kidderminster. Can you see me...? With some...? No, I couldn't, Penny, I really couldn't.

PENNY You don't have to go the whole hog with him. You don't have to go all the way, do you...?

LOTTIE Not all the...? You mean, just sort of take my top off for him, that sort of thing –?

PENNY Maybe not even that. Flirt, darling, you remember how to flirt, don't you? Remember the old sheep's eyes, you used to give Teddy? Try them on another man. Start working the old magic again, Lottie.

LOTTIE Oh, I don't –

PENNY Come on, darling, you can do it! God! It worked well enough with Teddy, didn't it? Whatever you did to him, dear, you saw off the field, didn't you? You showed the rest of us a clean pair of heels?

LOTTIE *(laughing nervously)* I don't think I did anything with Teddy as far as I can remember. I just kept dropping things and falling over, mostly. I got so terribly nervous when I was with him, you see. Terrified. He was always picking things up for me. Helping me back on my feet, dusting me down, you know. He was very considerate, in those days. Now he just tends to sit there and shout "Whoops" or "Clumsy!".

PENNY If you want him back, darling, my advice is to give it a go. You know Lottie, I have to say, I'd hate to think that this woman – whoever she is – would endanger your marriage. That was never her intention. I presume. She probably just fancied a fling, that's all. A taste of – something she was unable to taste before.

LOTTIE A taste of Teddy?

PENNY If you like. But now she's tasted – that's – in all probability – satisfied her inner craving...so, as far as she's concerned, this woman, she's probably popped him safely back in the fridge, her pangs satisfied.

LOTTIE This all sounds very distasteful. I don't think I'd care to meet this woman. Her hands all over Teddy, treating him like some sort of midnight snack.

PENNY The point I'm making, if you don't want him roving elsewhere, is you need to win him back. Reclaim as your own. The next time you're out with him together somewhere in public, the first man who gives you a second glance,

CHLOË WITH LOVE

The **BOTTLECAMP***'s garden in summer on a warm evening.*

Garden seating and a table or two.

LOTTIE*, small and anxious, enters with* **PENNY***, tall and assured.*

PENNY *(as they enter)* ...yes, well they do, they tend to do that, Lottie, after a while. I mean, most men barely have an attention span of more than twenty minutes. So how on earth can you possibly hope to keep their attention after years of marriage. They're small children, most of them, darling. You have to keep poking your head round the corner of their pram and shouting "Boo!" at them. No, it's a sad fact of life. They all wander off eventually but with any luck you'll find they'll wander back again, provided you make it worth their while.

LOTTIE Does Reggie tend to do that? Wander off?

PENNY No. But then I tend to make it worth his while not to wander off. I work on the marital, high-voltage electric fence principle. If he tries to make a break he knows he'll be fried. No, Reggie's properly house-trained. I'm afraid with Teddy you've married a wanderer, darling.

LOTTIE Yes, I'm afraid I may have done. When he married me and promised to love me for ever, I couldn't believe my luck. Everyone was after him, you know...all we girls at St Olaf's. Do you remember, Penny, when he came to give that careers talk to the sixth forms. So handsome in his pinstripe suit and his blue tie...and those blazing eyes, so full of passion...

PENNY Oh, yes, I remember. A short history of lawn mowers, wasn't it? I'm afraid I gave that one a miss.

LOTTIE Oh, that was just the title. But there was so much more than lawn mowers to his talk, Penny. The mowers were just a metaphor.

PENNY A metaphor for what?

LOTTIE For everything. A metaphor for life. You see, we're all of us just so many blades of grass, Penny, on Life's Lawn, you see. We all have our brief moment of growth and then finally we're all of us, the greatest down to the smallest, we're all mown down and swept away into bins...

PENNY And turned into compost?

LOTTIE Even the greatest of us. No blade of grass, however tall, is spared the mower. We all eventually turn brown, shrivel and die.

PENNY Finally ending pushing up the daises? Completely buggering up the lawn for next year, quite.

LOTTIE Oh, no, no. I know you're laughing at me, Penny. You are so naughty! But if only you'd been there when Teddy talked. All of us, hanging on his every word...he was completely riveting. And he chose me. Of all the blades of grass on that spring afternoon in that stuffy school hall...

PENNY It was you he plucked.

LOTTIE At the end, he called for questions. And no one was putting their hand up, you see. I don't think anyone else had the faintest clue what he was talking about, so in the end I very timidly stuck my own hand up. It was so unlike me to do that, it took tremendous courage, I can tell you. And immediately he pointed straight at me and he said, "Yes? That very attractive young lady, the one with the rosy cheeks, right at the back there –" I was blushing like mad you see, I always used to...

PENNY Yes, I remember.

LOTTIE ...And I stumbled and stammered out something, asking him what he considered was the optimum height for rotary

cutters for a first spring trimming – I made most of it up... And then a few weeks later, in the holidays, he invited me to lunch in his factory canteen. Gave me a guided tour afterwards. He absolutely swept me off my feet. Until that moment I never realised there were quite so many different types of mower.

PENNY *(gently)* Yes it's a very romantic and touching story, Lottie. And I love it more each time you tell it, darling. But now it's all gone a teeny bit off course, hasn't it? And yes, you've drifted a degree or two but I'm sure it's nothing too serious, at present. But in my view, it's time you made a few corrections to your navigation. Adjusted your marital tiller. Because otherwise, believe me, given time you'll find yourselves way off course. Leading eventually to one of you abandoning ship. And I'm sure you don't want that.

LOTTIE *(distraught)* Oh, no, no. That would be my worst nightmare, Penny. If Teddy left me, I don't know what I'd do – I think I'd – just simply – I don't know what I'd – I don't know!

PENNY Lottie! Lottie! Simmer down. Gently now. You mustn't get yourself in a state, dear. Teddy's not going to leave you.

LOTTIE You're sure?

PENNY I promise. Teddy knows which – Teddy knows when he's well off. He knows that, in you, he's found a treasure. But if you want my advice, darling –

LOTTIE Oh, yes. I do, I really do need your advice, Penny, more than anything! That's why I came to you. I always turn to you. You know I do. You're my one and only best friend in the world, aren't you? You know that.

PENNY I'm very fond of you too, Lottie.

LOTTIE Ever since you stood up for me at school with all those awful bullies – the way they used to tease me with – with...

PENNY Porky-pudge!

LOTTIE Oh, God! Please don't even say it!

PENNY Sorry. That's all in the past. I mean look at you now. You're practically lissom. Practically.

LOTTIE You think so? I don't think I'd ever describe myself as lissom. Look, you see, I'm beginning to go, Penny, just round here, you see. But what can you do to stop it. The doctor said to me you can't fight gravity, Mrs Bulbin, it pulls us all down in the end –

PENNY Now Lottie! Now listen to me, Lottie! You need to buck your ideas up darling, you have developed a very negative self image and it is not helping you one tiny jot. You have to start saying to yourself over and over again, "I am attractive! I am a beautiful woman!" Over and over to yourself. Go on, Lottie! Say it! I am attractive... Come on, now!

LOTTIE *(tentatively)* I am attract – do you think I'm a beautiful woman, Penny?

PENNY Yes I do, Lottie. I most certainly do.

LOTTIE Thank you.

PENNY You may not be everyone's cup of tea but nonetheless. To a lot of people, you are drop dead gorgeous. As I'm sure you are to Teddy.

LOTTIE I <u>was</u> to Teddy. I was.

PENNY And will be again. Trust me. Listen, they'll be here soon. We're going upstairs to my bedroom. And I'm going to sit you down and give you a complete makeover –

LOTTIE *(alarmed)* Oh, God. I don't think I could face that –

PENNY Come on! Quick! Quick! Before they both come back!

LOTTIE Really, Penny – I never look good in too much make up...

PENNY That's because, darling, if you don't mind my saying so, on the rare occasions you do wear it, you layer it on with a trowel. Subtlety. Light brush strokes. Accentuate. Gentle shading here. Highlight here. I promise you a transformation.

LOTTIE *(breathlessly)* You think so?

PENNY I am a beautiful woman.

LOTTIE Yes you are, Penny.

PENNY No, darling, you are a beautiful woman. You! Now say it.

LOTTIE I am a beautiful woman.

PENNY Once more.

LOTTIE I am a beautiful –

A car horn sounds.

PENNY Listen, they've arrived. Quickly! Through the back way!

LOTTIE *(as they go)* I am a beautiful woman...

PENNY *bundles* **LOTTIE** *off.*

A moment.

TEDDY *and* **REGGIE** *enter.*

TEDDY, *assured and confident.*

REGGIE, *his friend, slightly less so.*

REGGIE, *the host, carries a bottle of wine on a tray with two glasses.*

REGGIE ...no they're not here. Must be in the house. Penny left these out ready. I presume they're to come down. We thought we'd have the pre-drinks out here. Penny decided we would, anyway.

TEDDY Lottie should have been here by now...

REGGIE Maybe they're up in the bedroom.

TEDDY Discussing shoes.

REGGIE Very probably.

TEDDY Or handbags. That's another favourite topic.

REGGIE Oh, my God. Handbags? Handbag chat? Can't tell you the number of handbag hours I've sat through with Penny. I don't know what you can possibly find to say about a handbag that can't be said in three sentences.

TEDDY One sentence is sufficient. Two word sentence. How much? Want me to go ahead and open this?

REGGIE Oh, please. If you'd be so kind.

TEDDY Better make a start on it, I suppose. *(Looking at the label)* Oh, this is good. This is good stuff. Very good.

REGGIE Oh, good.

TEDDY Yes! Very good indeed, this is.

REGGIE Good, good.

TEDDY Had a good few bottles of this in my time. All very good indeed.

REGGIE Well, the chap in the off license said it was good. Got it at a good price, too.

TEDDY Good man. Which off license you go to?

REGGIE Goodhews.

TEDDY Oh, yes they're pretty good news, Goodhews.

REGGIE I think they're pretty good, yes.

TEDDY Though probably not a patch on Goody's. Though they're a good distance away are Goody's. A good five miles away.

REGGIE Good heavens. That's a good distance.

TEDDY Worth it for a good bargain, though. They have a very good selection. *(Sniffing the glass)* Ah, yes! Good nose! Very good nose.

REGGIE Yes. Good.

TEDDY There you go!

He hands **REGGIE** *a glass.*

REGGIE Thanks.

TEDDY Good health!

REGGIE Good health!

They drink. **TEDDY** *sucks his wine noisily through his teeth, savouring it.*

TEDDY Oh, that is good.

REGGIE Good grief! Very good. Good bouquet, isn't it?

TEDDY *sucks noisily again.*

TEDDY Let the oxygen get to it. Just been opened, you see. Allow it to breathe.

REGGIE Yes, give it air, poor thing.

They both suck noisily.

TEDDY Good full body, hasn't it? Almonds...with just that hint of apricot. Can you taste it?

REGGIE Mmmm. Yes, I think I can taste pistachios. With overtones of prune.

TEDDY Yes, that as well. That as well. Plenty of prune in there. Gives it that full body.

REGGIE There's also some faint walnut somewhere.

TEDDY Probably. Keeps the peppermint company.

They savour their drinks. A silence.

No, it totally mystifies me how on earth women can chatter on together for hours on end about handbags.

REGGIE Goodness knows.

TEDDY Good health, old boy.

REGGIE Good health.

They sip and savour some more.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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