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SF PERUSALS

ROUNDELAY

Five Linked Short Plays to Be Performed in
No Particular Order

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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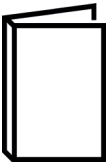
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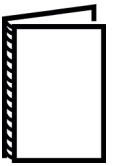
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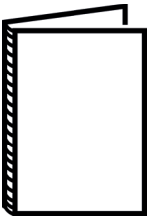
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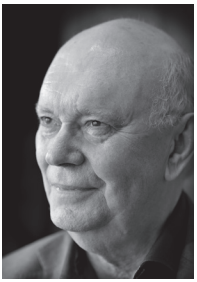
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Roundelay consists of five short, self-contained plays, written to be played in any sequence.

There are therefore (apparently!) 120 possibilities as to the order in which they could be performed.

Many are connected, sometimes through shared characters, sometimes through overlapping narrative.

Some are prequels to others, being themselves in turn sequels to others.

It is hoped that during a run they will be played in as many different orders as there are performances, employing simple staging to allow minimal gaps between each scene.

Ideally, there should be a single interval after the first three plays, whichever those may be.

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FIRST PERFORMANCE INFO

ROUNDELAY

Roundelay consists of five one-act plays: The Agent, The Judge, The Novelist, The Politician and The Star.

First performance at Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough: Round auditorium on 9 September 2014.

Tour premiere: 21 January 2015
at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford
Staging: End-stage

With the following cast:

Tom	**RUSSELL DIXON**
Blanche/Mrs Miller	**ALEXANDRA MATHIE**
Roz	**KRYSTLE HILTON**
Lindy Kuze/Mrs Kuyper	**BROOKE KINSELLA**
Russ	**RICHARD STACEY**
Lance/Sean	**LEIGH SYMONDS**
Ashley/Leo	**NIGEL HASTINGS**
Gale	**SOPHIE ROBERTS**

Subsequent UK tour cast 2015:

Tom	**RUSSELL DIXON**
Blanche/Mrs Miller	**SARAH STANLEY**
Roz	**KRYSTLE HILTON**
Lindy Kuze/Mrs Kuyper	**BROOKE KINSELLA**
Russ	**RICHARD STACEY**
Lance/Sean	**LEIGH SYMONDS**
Ashley/Leo	**NIGEL HASTINGS**
Gale	**ELIZABETH BOAG**

Director: **ALAN AYCKBOURN**
Design: **MICHAEL HOLT**
Lighting: **JASON TAYLOR**
Fight Director: **ALISON DE BURGH**

CHARACTERS

BLANCHE HOLGATE – 40s
TOM HOLGATE – her father, a retired judge, 70s
RUSS TIMMS – a clergyman, 30s
GALE DEVONNE – an entrepreneur, 30s
ASHLEY KUYPER – a neighbour, 40s
ROZ PERKINS – a schoolgirl, 16
LINDY KUZE – an escort, mid 30s
LANCE – an enforcer, 40s
MRS MILLER – a choreographer, 40s
LEO AXMINSTER MP – 40s
SEAN MCKINTYRE – a journalist, 30s
MRS KUYPER – a constituent, 70s

SETTINGS

A neutral area. Onstage at the start there are eight randomly placed pieces of furniture to be used throughout the evening, rearranged accordingly with additional coverings and minimal trimmings added or subtracted as are considered necessary. These are: –

A desk, a swivel chair, a sofa, a low coffee table, an armchair, a small table (dining height) and two upright chairs.

There is one interval after the third play (whichever that is) and minimal breaks between the others.

***

Suggested doubling for a company of eight: –
BLANCHE / MRS MILLER
AND
LINDY / MRS KUYPER

THE AGENT

CHARACTERS

GALE DEVONNE – an entrepreneur, 30s
LANCE – an enforcer, 40s
ASHLEY KUYPER – a neighbour, 40s

Scene: One morning in a room in Gale's apartment which serves as her office.

The spare room in **GALE***'s town centre apartment which she has made over as her business office. Morning.*

A sofa with coffee table, an armchair, a desk with a phone, a swivel chair and two upright chairs. A table near the window.

One door.

GALE *enters.*

She is speaking into her mobile as she enters.

GALE *(into her phone)* ...No, listen darling...this is your very first professional audition, darling, and this man is a very, very important producer, indeed...believe me, in British film circles you can't get bigger than Leo Axminster...yes, even him...now it's important, darling, you swallow your pride and do exactly what he asks you to do...within reason... you're not to glare at him or swear at him or for God's sake head-butt him, as you've been known to do in the past... Best behaviour now. Your career rests in the balance...if he likes you...that's a big door opened for you...yes!

The front door buzzer sounds. **GALE** *rises, still talking, and moves slowly to the window.*

Good... Good... Oh and, darling, don't forget to ask him for my casting fee, will you? ...No, no, that's not the way it works, not at all. When you get to my level, darling, they pay me for the privilege... Yes.

As she looks out of the window, the buzzer sounds again. **GALE**, *seeing who it is, reacts alarmed.*

Oh my God! Darling! I must dash, now. All the phones here are ringing like crazy. It'll be Hollywood waking up. And, darling, remember you're Rose now. Rose Perkins. Not Roz. No, well you'll get used to it. Forget Roz. Dreadful name. No ring to it. Just think of it on the marquees! 'Bye now!

She ends the call and immediately speed dials another. She moves to the window again and looks out anxiously.

(into phone) Come on, Lindy... Answer! Answer it! You can't be asleep at this hour, you lazy cow! ...Come on! *(Getting a response)* Oh, thank God! Lindy, it's Gale...yes... I've been trying you for ages... Yes, lucky you... Listen... Lindy, are you awake now? ...You sure? Because this is urgent...

Her flat's doorbell rings this time. **GALE** *now looks anxiously towards the door.*

I need somewhere for a night or two... No, I've still got this flat – It's just I've got the decorators in at the moment, darling, there's tins and ladders everywhere... It's a nightmare...yes –

A heavy knocking on the front door.

Yes, you can hear them now...yes... Listen, Lindy, would you mind awfully if I came round right now? ...No, I really don't mind at all, darling, I'll take you as I find you...we're mates, aren't we...?

More heavy knocking.

Just hark at them, will you! What are they up to in there? Listen, I can be there in about –

More knocking. **GALE** *moves to the door as she speaks. She is now contemplating possible escape routes. Her options are apparently limited.*

Lindy! Need to go! I have to go!

She hurries out of the door, still clutching the phone.

Offstage, a sudden final loud thud, and a crash as the front door is splintered off its hinges and falls to the hall floor. A cry as **GALE** *re-enters, staggering backwards, as if she has been given a hefty shove.*

She loses her footing and sits in the middle of the floor.

(winded and slightly shocked) Oh, God!

The doorway is filled by **LANCE**, *a big man in his forties. Seeing him,* **GALE** *covers her head protectively with her arms, presenting a defensive bundle.*

Don't hit me! Please don't hit me! Please!

LANCE *(cheerfully)* Good morning, Gale. Hope we didn't wake you. Come on. Up you get then.

GALE I can't. I think my legs are broken.

LANCE Come on. That was only a gentle push. *(Stepping forward and offering his hand)* Here, allow me.

GALE *(misinterpreting the gesture, protecting her face)* No!

LANCE Come on, Gale, I'm not going to hurt you… Up you get!

She cautiously accepts his offer of help. He takes her hand and pulls her to her feet.

(smiling) I won't hurt you. Not yet, anyway…

GALE*'s other hand is still clutching her phone. He takes it from her, whilst retaining his grip on her other hand. From her expression, he is clearly holding it very tightly.*

(as he takes the phone) Allow me. *(Into the phone)* Hallo…who am I speaking to? …Oh, Lindy! 'Morning, Lindy. Unusual for you to be up and about at this time. This is Lance. I'm afraid Gale's unable to come to her phone at present… No, she's fine, Lindy. She's in good hands. We're here to take care of her. Now, Lindy, you go back to bed now, like a good girl,

get your beauty sleep, alright? Remember, you're working tonight, aren't you, darling?

He ends the call and tosses the phone on to the sofa, smoothly taking **GALE***'s other hand as he does so.*

Didn't realise you two were friendly, you and Lindy. She didn't tell us that. Naughty girl. Could have saved us a lot of trouble finding you. Have a word with her later. She must be a rare friend for you, Gale. In your hour of need...

GALE *(tensely)* Would you let go of me, please...?

LANCE ...and I can assure you, Gale, this is certainly your hour of need, girl.

GALE You're hurting my hands!

LANCE Mr Simmons is very cross with you. You're in his bad books, you are. Naughty girl, aren't you? Going to get a smacking, I wouldn't doubt.

He gives her hands an extra squeeze for good measure. **GALE** *whimpers, half in pain, half in fear.*

GALE I'll find the money, I promise. I know exactly where I can get it. Two more days, I swear...

LANCE Too late, Gale. Too late. Really. Time is up, girl. Mr Simmons trusted you. He gave you his trust. You've hurt him deeply, Gale. You've wounded him. I'm afraid it's payback time, sweetheart. If someone hurts him, chances are he'll hurt them. And guess who that's going to be, Gale? Guess who? *(Squeezing her hands)* Can you guess?

GALE *(with a squawk)* Me!

LANCE *(squeezing again, his face close to hers)* Yes, you, Gale! You!

GALE You're breaking my hands, you bastard!

LANCE *(pulling her towards the door)* Come on! Off we go!

GALE *(resisting)* Will you let go!

LANCE *(continuing to pull)* Come on! Want me to carry you, then, do you?

GALE If you don't let go, I'll scream the place down. I swear I will! There's other flats in this building. They're all occupied, you know.

LANCE This block's full of pensioners, we checked.

GALE They've all got phones though, haven't they? They hear me screaming, they'll have the emergency services round here before we reach the front door.

LANCE Why should they bother? They probably won't even hear you.

GALE You haven't heard me scream. Now please, Lance, let go, please. I won't be any trouble. I'll come with you, quiet as a mouse. I promise. But please, just let go. *(Slight pause)* I give you my word. *(In a tiny voice)* Please.

LANCE *looks at her, decides to trust her and releases her hands.* **GALE** *gasps and winces as the pressure is released. She rubs her hands to restore the circulation.*

(flexing her hands tentatively) I'm going to be covered in bruises, now.

LANCE Would you just look at this place! Get a load of all these pictures, then! Who are all these people, anyway?

GALE They're clients.

LANCE Clients?

GALE I'm an agent, a theatrical agent, aren't I?

LANCE And these are all your clients?

GALE *(guardedly)* Most of them. Some of them are.

LANCE *(studying one of them)* Including this one? Who's this then? Looks like Chuck Norris.

GALE It is Chuck Norris.

THE JUDGE

CHARACTERS

TOM HOLGATE – a retired judge, 70s
LINDY KUZE – an escort, 30s
LANCE – an enforcer, 40s

Scene: Evening. The sitting room of a hotel suite.

A desk with a swivel chair. On the desk, a framed, fifty-year-old photograph of an attractive young woman in her twenties.

Across the other side of the room, a sofa with cushions and a coffee table plus an easy chair. Centrally, a table with a white cloth, laid up for dinner for two and two dining chairs.

One door into the room leading to an upstairs landing. Another door leads to the bedroom and bathroom.

LANCE, *a big man in his forties, is currently standing by the table. He is dressed as a hotel waiter. He studies the table. He adjusts the cutlery. He appears slightly apprehensive, giving anxious glances towards both doors.*

In the background, the TV set drones on. Another local news interview with **LEO AXMINSTER MP**.

LEO *(his* **VOICE***)* ...now you're talking to a born countryman here, Jon. Anyone who knows me will tell you I'm country stock, born and bred. My grandfather was a farmer, as was my great-grandfather and so was my great-great-grandfather – my family are all from solid farming stock and I assure you I yield to no one in my love of the British countryside –

VOICE In which case, Mr Axminster, surely –

LEO *(his* **VOICE***)* – my family have grown up over generations tilling the soil, experiencing first hand the joy, the tears, the excitements and the disappointments, that only a true farming community can know about –

VOICE In which case, Mr Axminster, surely you'll concede that –

LEO *(his* **VOICE***, laughing)* No, no, Jon, please be fair! Allow me to finish – Marianne has made her point, very forcefully and colourfully and I've no doubt sincerely – and I fully appreciate her concerns. No one in their right mind who purchased their home in the middle of a green field site, wants to look out over acre after acre of concrete and red brick – but I can assure her that isn't going to be the case. Not a bit of it. That, if I may say so and with due respect to Marianne, is simply alarmist talk! Now if she'd only taken the time to read –

VOICE But the report states categorically –

LEO *(his* **VOICE***)* – if she'd only taken the time to read –

VOICE – the report states very clearly and unambiguously –

LEO *(his* **VOICE***)* – to read the report in its entirety, there are provisos which I promise go a long way to addressing her concerns – I can put her mind at rest on that. This talk of the mass destruction of hedgerows, the loss of indigenous wildlife, the uprooting of trees is simply not true. Nothing could be further from the truth. I repeat, not one single healthy tree is at risk. If you study the facts you'll find that, quite to the contrary, we are actually planting more trees. In the past five years, I'm proud to say, as a result of our New Green Britain initiative, we will have planted more trees than the previous government managed in twenty years of disastrous office. I mean, personally I adore trees, I grew up with trees all around me and I learnt from a very early age to respect them. My own garden is filled with trees. Many of which I got down on my hands and knees and helped plant myself…

During this: –.

LANCE *(calling to the bedroom)* Lindy! Come on, get a move on then!

LINDY *(offstage)* Alright! I'm coming! These bloody hooks…

LANCE *(calling)* He'll be here in a minute!

LINDY *(offstage)* Alright! Alright! Alright! Who designed this fucking thing, anyway?

LANCE *shakes his head.*

After a moment, the phone on the desk rings.

LANCE *hurries to answer it.*

LANCE *(into phone)* Yes? ...Where are you, Denzil? In the foyer? ...Well bring him up, then... We're all ready here... *(With a glare towards the bedroom)* As ready as we ever will be... Yes, bring him up... Oh...and Denzil! Use the service lift. Not the main one... Yes, the one round the side, opposite the bar... See you in a minute.

He hangs up.

(he marches to the bedroom doorway, calling) Come on! He's here now!

LINDY *(offstage)* Oh, shit!

LANCE *(calling)* He's on his way up. Come on, get your arse out here, girl!

He grabs the remote from the coffee table and kills the unseen TV sound.

(as he does so, to the TV) And you can shut up and all!

As he does this, **LINDY** *enters from the bedroom. Although she is in her 30's, she is dressed rather formally in an authentic period evening gown dating back some fifty years or more. Her hair and make-up are done in a suitably matching style. Although the overall impression is of someone rather beautiful,* **LINDY** *walks stiffly and awkwardly. She is clearly unused to what she is wearing.*

LINDY *(presenting herself)* Well?

She stands. **LANCE** *studies her.*

LANCE Turn round.

LINDY *revolves on the spot.*

LANCE *picks up the photograph from the desk and holds it up, comparing it to* **LINDY**. *There is a striking resemblance between the two.*

That's not bad. Not bad at all.

LINDY I can hardly breathe.

LANCE What, the dress too tight?

LINDY Everything's too tight.

LANCE It's your size. They made it in your size.

LINDY It's not just the dress... It's all this – other stuff.

LANCE Other stuff? What other stuff?

LINDY This stuff underneath. What have I got to wear all that for? It's like I'm in a bloody suit of armour under here.

LANCE It's authentic. Molly said you had to wear it. She says it's authentic.

LINDY It's orthopaedic. Besides, he's not going to know, is he?

LANCE He might. He might want you to take your kit off later.

LINDY I thought this was just dinner?

LANCE Yes, well, after dinner...you never know. Be prepared.

LINDY I'm only being paid for dinner with him. That's what was agreed. Anything after that is extra. I'm charging extra. If we go in that bedroom, we're in overtime.

LANCE You'll be paid! You'll be paid.

LINDY Yes, well...

LANCE Mr Simmons will see you right. Don't worry. Listen, he's paying you a lot of money for this job, Lindy. You'd better make sure you earn it, girl.

LINDY I'll earn it. *(Half to herself)* Every bloody penny of it, if I know Simmons.

LANCE You are clean, I take it? I take it you're clean?

LINDY Yes, I've just had a bath.

LANCE Don't be funny. Whilst you were wallowing in there, you haven't been indulging in any dodgy substances, have you?

LINDY No.

LANCE You sure?

LINDY Positive. I had a sniff of body lotion, does that count?

LANCE I have to say I have severe doubts about you for this job, Lindy.

LINDY Yes. So have I.

LANCE We should have had Gale for this job, she'd have been ideal.

LINDY Yes, well Gale's unavailable. She's done a runner, hasn't she?

LANCE We'll catch up with her, don't worry. Then she's in real trouble. This is an important job, Lindy. Get this one right, you'll be on your way. Mr Simmons doesn't forget. He remembers the ones who do right by him. He's a generous man. He likes to show his gratitude. You fuck this one up and you're dead meat, girl.

LINDY That's encouraging. Nothing like a bit of motivation, is there?

LANCE Now, you remember who you're meeting? You remember his name?

LINDY Tom. His name's Tom.

LANCE You remember your name?

THE NOVELIST

CHARACTERS

BLANCHE HOLGATE – 40s
TOM HOLGATE – her father, a retired judge, 70s
RUSS TIMMS – a clergyman, 30s

Scene: A rainy night in the leaking conservatory attached to the Holgates' house.

A conservatory attached to the **HOLGATES'** *house. A sofa with coffee table, an armchair, a desk, a desk chair, a table, two upright chairs. Two doors, to the house and the garden.*

Rain is heard on the roof. Various receptacles are dotted about the room to catch the drips from the leaking roof, including a three-quarter filled bucket. We hear the drips occasionally throughout the current rainstorm and, from time to time, after the deluge has stopped.

TOM, *a retired judge in his seventies, is waiting anxiously for his guest. Glancing at his watch and giving the occasional impatient look towards the conservatory outer door. He goes and listens at the door to the main house. He moves with difficulty with the aid of a stick.*

A tapping on the outer door. **TOM** *hobbles over to unlock it. Before he reaches it, there is further knocking.*

TOM Just a minute!

He unlocks the door. **RUSS**, *a clergyman aged in his thirties, falls into the room. He is somewhat rain-sodden.*

Heavens above! Come on in... What a night!

RUSS *(breathlessly)* Thanks, Tom! Sorry, I'm a trifle late. Not a good night for driving. Your lane was blocked. I had to come the long way round...

TOM Blocked?

RUSS Tree blown down, I think.

TOM No. Not another one…

RUSS I had to loop round and come through Tussock. *(Indicating his coat)* Mind if I take this off?

TOM Oh, do. Anywhere you like…

RUSS *(removing his coat)* I parked in the drive. By the front door. I hope that's alright?

TOM Fine.

RUSS Only you specified I should come round the side. Through the conservatory, here. Not to use the front door. I must say, it all sounded a bit mysterious.

TOM Yes.

RUSS 'See me first, whatever else you do…' What's it all about? *(Finally removing his coat)* There, that's better! What can I do to help? I'm intrigued.

TOM Well, it's nothing too… Yes, well, no. It's everything, really. I don't quite know where to…

He tails off. A silence. **RUSS** *waits, still holding his coat.*

…begin. No.

RUSS No. What shall I do with this?

TOM It's just that I'd prefer it if you didn't run into Blanche, that's all – Talk to her. Not till after you'd spoken to me – oh, just sling it down over there somewhere – No, frankly, Russ, the point is, I wanted a word with you first, you see… I wanted a… I wanted a…word. Yes.

RUSS Yes?

TOM *(glancing up)* Would you just look at that. The state of that roof. I ask you…

RUSS *(looking up, concerned)* Yes. You've got – you've got one or two leaks up there, haven't you?

TOM One or two… Certainly coming in… Look, you can see where it's coming in there, you see?

RUSS Oh, yes, it's certainly coming in. Look at it. Perhaps you ought to get it fixed? Before it gets any worse. In my experience those sort of things can only get worse. The longer you leave them, the worse they tend to get. Yes, look, this bucket's filling up...nearly full. Yes.

TOM Yes. Mind you, it's been like that since the day they put it up, this conservatory...

RUSS How long ago's that?

TOM *(vaguely)* Oh. Thirty five years. At least.

RUSS Ah, well. Probably not still under guarantee then?

TOM I really can't remember. Long term memory's fading a bit I'm afraid. *(Tapping his head)* Like a book, you know. Book of your life. It's as if someone's tearing out all my early pages, one by one. Every time I wake up, I find there's another bit missing. Someone sneaks by in the night, takes away another one. It used to be engraved in stone – *(Tapping his head)* – here, you see? In solid granite. Only now it's as if it's been sand-blasted away.

RUSS How awful for you.

TOM Mostly, you know, when people get older, a lot of them, so they tell me, they tend to lose the short term memory – forgetting where they put their damn glasses, what they did yesterday, or even what day it is today – But what they tend to get in return, you see, the older they get, is their early childhood images. Memory's parting gift before you pop your clogs, like a forgotten photo album up there in the attic of your head. All as clear as if they were taken yesterday. Something for you to treasure, dwell on in your old age. A consolation for every other bloody awful thing you have to put up with in old age. But the point is, I've no longer got an album, it's been mislaid.

RUSS Well. You never know – maybe – you'll come across it.

TOM Maybe. Will you hark at that rain.

They listen. **RUSS** *waits.*

RUSS *(at length, tentatively)* – er... Tom...

TOM No, the point is Nonie – Antonia – we always knew her as Nonie, you know – Nonie was the one who wanted this conservatory. It was her idea. We must have a conservatory, darling. Everyone round here's got a conservatory except for us. We need one to sit in. I said to her, listen, my darling, we've got forty-four other perfectly good rooms we can sit in, what's the point of having another one?

RUSS Ah...

TOM She got her way, of course. As she always did. She got her bloody conservatory. Hardly had a chance to sit in it, though, before she...

Slight pause.

RUSS Oh, yes. Tragic.

TOM Nowadays, nobody sits in it. In summer it gets unbearably hot and in winter it's either freezing cold or soaking wet. Like now. *(Gazing around gloomily)* Just look at it. Coming in everywhere.

A silence.

RUSS I – er...

TOM What's that?

RUSS Was there a special reason you wanted me to call round, Tom? I take it you weren't seeking my advice about leaking roofs... *(Laughing)* Because I'm afraid I'm not an expert... *(He laughs)*

TOM *is silent.*

A pause.

(seriously) I take it it's about Blanche? Since you didn't want me to talk to her. Before I'd seen you? I take it this has something to do with your daughter?

TOM Yes. It does.

A silence. **RUSS** *waits.*

RUSS How is Blanche, by the way? Still on with her writing? I haven't seen her for ages. Not since the funeral. My, that was – heavens – that was a couple of months ago now, wasn't it? I've been meaning to – I meant to look in on you both. Time races by, doesn't it? ...I did mean to drop in. See how you were coping with your loss, both of you. She seemed to take it very... Haven't seen her for ages, Blanche.

TOM No, I can't say I have.

RUSS *(laughing)* You haven't? I find that hard to believe, Tom. It's not as if you aren't both living in the same house. You must run into each other occasionally. Even in a place this size.

TOM She tends to avoid me. Chooses to go her own way. Suits me. I go mine.

RUSS I see.

TOM Since the funeral, you see, we've hardly spoken.

RUSS I sensed she and her mother were especially close...

TOM Yes, they were very close. Always were. Ever since Nonie's accident. Blanche nursed her every day after that. Practically every day. Twenty-eight years ago now. Since Nonie's fall.

RUSS Poor Blanche. That must have been exhausting for her. Mind you, doesn't she have her job? Her part time job? Working for our local MP? That must provide a little variety, I'd have thought.

TOM I can't say I'm too happy about that. Never have been. Her working for that chap. Leo Axminster MP.

RUSS Because of his politics, you mean? Yes, he's quite right wing, isn't he?

TOM Right wing? He makes Genghis Khan look like a Lib Dem. No, it's not his politics so much as his personal life. Very suspect.

RUSS Oh, have you heard something? That is worrying.

TOM Mind you, you expect that, don't you? He's an MP, isn't he? Most of them are bent as hairpins. He's sexually rather dodgy. Into fillies, apparently.

RUSS Fillies?

TOM Girls. Young ones.

RUSS Oh, sorry. My mind was on – horses, for some reason –

TOM Horses? He's not into horses as well, is he? My God, that's even more worrying if he's into livestock.

RUSS No, no, I – er...didn't mean. No, no.

Another silence.

TOM They claimed she'd been drinking, of course. That she was drunk.

RUSS That Blanche was drunk?

TOM No, not Blanche. Blanche has never been drunk in her life. Her mother. That Nonie was drunk.

RUSS Oh, dear, how awful...

TOM Everyone assumed that was the reason for her fall. Nonie's fall was due to drink. She was drunk.

RUSS Well, it's a sad fact of life, isn't it, that at the first opportunity, people are always ready to jump to conclusions, aren't they?

TOM No, they were absolutely right. She was. Completely off her face. In those days, that was Nonie's natural state most of the time. Thirty years ago, that was more or less her norm. In those days, she wasn't a happy woman. Still, she never touched a drop since then. There's nothing like falling down the main staircase there and breaking your neck for sobering you up, is there? *(Wearily)* I don't know, Russ. Maybe I was to blame for her unhappiness in those days. I don't know.

RUSS Blanche's unhappiness?

THE POLITICIAN

CHARACTERS

LEO AXMINSTER MP – 40s
BLANCHE HOLGATE – his part time assistant, 40s
ROZ PERKINS – a schoolgirl, 16
SEAN MCKINTYRE – a journalist, 30s
MRS KUYPER – a constituent, 70s

Scene: Leo's constituency office.

LEO*'s private constituency inner office at his party's local town centre HQ.*

A desk with a swivel chair. A table alongside piled with files and other paperwork. A sofa with coffee table and an easy chair make an informal area. An upright chair for more formal interviews facing across the desk. Another near the door leading to the outer secretary's office.

Another door to **LEO***'s private bathroom.*

LEO*, in his forties, in full evening dress, sits at his desk. He is currently in full flow and at his most charming with* **MRS KUYPER***, a constituent whom he can't wait to get rid of.*

LEO ...no, I say again your point is fully taken, Mrs Kipper. And I'm in total sympathy with you. You have my complete understanding...

MRS K Well, yes, I –

LEO And I do promise you, next Monday morning, as soon as I'm back in Westminster, my feet under my desk, at the first opportunity, I shall button-hole the Minister in person.

MRS K Well no, I –

LEO Because I do know he too is deeply concerned by this problem. And I have his ear, Mrs Kipper, I do have the Transport Minister's ear. And I know for certain this is right at the very top of his agenda, this increasing problem of potholes.

MRS K Well, yes, as I say –

LEO And it's a fact, as you say, that they're on the increase. It's by no means confined to your own back alley, Mrs Kipper, I assure you. But technically, of course, it's a problem for local government, you see...

MRS K Yes, I appreciate –

LEO ...and, to be fair, they have had their hands tied, too. They've been forced to make cut-backs due to the restrictions placed upon them by the Treasury. Which I have to say, in turn, has been entirely brought about by years of neglect by the previous government.

MRS K Yes, well, as I say –

LEO But I do give you my solemn word, Mrs Kipper, that the problem posed by potholes is never far from this government's mind. Particularly when it involves pensioners like yourself –

The intercom on his desk buzzes.

(as he goes to answer) Listen! May I ask you to leave this with me, Mrs Kipper. I promise I'll get back to you, if I haven't had a satisfactory answer by the end of the week, I promise – *(Into phone)* What's that? ...Oh, are they? Are they? Thank you, Blanche – *(Moving to the door)* Listen, I'm so sorry, you'll have to excuse me, Mrs Kipper, I have this local film crew outside, clamouring for an interview – it's all go here – never seems to let up, even at weekends – *(Calling out of the door)* Blanche! Would you mind escorting Mrs Kipper to the lift, if you'd be so kind.

BLANCHE, *in her late forties, his part time local secretary, appears.*

BLANCHE Yes, of course. All finished, have you?

MRS K Yes, I was just saying –

LEO Mrs Kipper and I have been having a right old chin wag, haven't we, Mrs Kipper? *(Wagging a finger at her)* Now, you

mind how you go, my dear. Don't go falling down any more of those potholes in the dark now, will you? *(He laughs)*

MRS K Yes. The street lighting, too. It's dreadful...

LEO Cheerio, then! Cheerio!

BLANCHE *(ushering her out)* This way, Mrs Kuyper.

BLANCHE *and* **MRS K** *go out. We hear the latter's voice complaining into the distance.* **LEO** *remains in the doorway, waving her off into the distance until her voice fades and she is finally out of his sight.*

On the desk **LEO***'s mobile phone rings. He answers it.*

LEO *(into phone)* Yep...no, I'm all finished here, darling... Just got shot of the final one...yep...yep... I've got this last minute TV interview...yes, I know...oh, far less than that...they're just looking for a brief sound bite... Yep, ten minutes at the outside...yep, I'll be there. See you soon, darling. 'Byeee.

He rings off as **BLANCHE** *returns.*

Thank God. Got shot of that wretched woman at last, have we?

BLANCHE Yes, she's a little – Mrs Kuyper can be a trifle persistent, can't she?

LEO How are you keeping, Blanche? I haven't asked you. How're your parents? Both keeping fit, are they?

BLANCHE Well, my father's a little – his memory's going a little, these days, I'm afraid...

LEO *(not listening heartily)* That's the spirit! Glad to hear it.

BLANCHE ...and my mother is still bedridden, of course...

LEO Splendid! Splendid! That's excellent news!

BLANCHE Yes.

LEO What name did you call that woman?

BLANCHE Sorry?

LEO That woman, what did you call her just now?

BLANCHE Who, Mrs Kuyper?

LEO Mrs Kuyper. Is that her name?

BLANCHE Yes.

LEO God, I've been calling her Kipper.

BLANCHE I know you have.

LEO Why the hell didn't you correct me then, Blanche?

BLANCHE I do. I do tell you every time she comes to see you. You never listen, Leo.

LEO Kuyper? What sort of a name is Kuyper?

BLANCHE I think it's possibly Dutch originally.

LEO Dutch? You don't mean she's foreign? What's the point of my wasting time with her if she doesn't even vote?

BLANCHE No, I think she's a local.

LEO Where's this film crew? Are they here?

BLANCHE They're next door. Waiting in the pub.

LEO Well, what are they doing in the pub? Why aren't they here? I have this charity dinner I need to be at. I can't be late for that... If I'm late for that, Marjory's going to be livid. She keeps phoning me every five minutes as it is...

BLANCHE I don't blame her. She has a point. You're invariably late.

LEO Me?

BLANCHE You're never on time. It must be infuriating being married to you. She has my every sympathy, poor woman.

LEO Oh, don't you start... *(Angrily)* Where's this bloody film crew, then? Where the hell are they? I'm ready. I'm not the one who's late, now, am I?

The bell to the outer office door rings.

BLANCHE *(as she goes)* Alright, calm down, calm down! That'll be them, now.

BLANCHE *goes out briefly.*

LEO Half of them rolling drunk. God, how I loathe and despise journalists!

LEO *takes one or two deep breaths and practices his smile, preparing himself.*

BLANCHE *returns alone.*

(with his charming smile) Ah, come in! Do come in, chaps! Make yourselves – *(He breaks off)* Well, where are they?

BLANCHE It wasn't them.

LEO Who was it? Not another bloody whingeing Dutch constituent, surely?

BLANCHE *(frowning)* No. It's one of your – nieces...

LEO Nieces?

BLANCHE *(distastefully)* One of your so-called – I don't know – whatever you choose to call them. She says her name is Rose or Roz or something.

LEO Rose? I don't know any Rose.

BLANCHE No, I don't think she's one of your regulars.

LEO Oh, my God! Where is she?

BLANCHE Just outside. I left her waiting by my desk.

LEO Well, get rid of her, Blanche! At once!

BLANCHE You want me to send her away?

LEO Of course send her away. I can't see her now, can I? I've got a film crew due here imminently, followed by a Save the Countryside Charity Dinner, for Christ's sake! What were

THE STAR

CHARACTERS

RUSS TIMMS – a clergyman, 30s
GALE DEVONNE – an entrepreneur, 30s
ROZ PERKINS – a schoolgirl, 16
MRS MILLER – a choreographer, 40s

Scene: Saturday afternoon in a church hall in a run-down urban area.

A table and two chairs, centrally placed.

At one side, a sofa untidily piled with the coats and outerwear belonging to young performers currently occupying the hall. Strewn about, an inverted armchair and a coffee table both evidently long unfit for purpose; in a corner, a desk with a swivel chair, apparently the dumping centre for schoolbags, etc.

Two exits, one leading to the foyer and beyond that the front doors of the hall leading to the street.

The other is open to what we imagine to be the far end of the hall. It is from here that we hear offstage rehearsal activity which continues intermittently throughout. This consists of a group of enthusiastic, variously talented teenagers engaged in a music rehearsal for a forthcoming production of Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado. *They are in the midst of a dance number with piano accompaniment. Sounds of feet and the occasional interruption by the female choreographer.*

This continues for a few seconds till we hear **MRS MILLER**, *the choreographer, as her voice cuts in.*

MRS M *(her frustrated voice, offstage)* No, no, no, no, NO! Stop!

The piano stops abruptly. Various young voices raised in protest and dissent.

Roz! Roz! Where are you going? We're in the middle of a rehearsal here! Roz, come back here at once!

ROZ, *a girl of sixteen, stamps on in her practice clothes. As she does so, she flings her script angrily in the direction of the sofa. She pulls up, flushed and panting, partly through physical exhaustion but also in anger and frustration.*

RUSS, *a clergyman aged about thirty, hurries on after her and stands close to her.*

RUSS *(quietly and anxiously)* Roz? Now come on, Roz. You can do it! Roz, come along, now...

ROZ *(quietly, on the verge of tears)* I can't! She's rubbish! She's total crap!

RUSS Roz...

ROZ It's just crap! It just looks totally shit! The whole thing's crap! She doesn't know nothing!

RUSS Roz, now listen! Mrs Miller was a professional choreographer for thirty years –

ROZ Yeah, till they sacked her. Till they kicked her out. Stupid ignorant cow!

RUSS Roz! Now, stop that! Now, you're just being silly!

ROZ I'm not doing this. I'm leaving. I'm not doing this no more...

RUSS Roz, if you walk out now, I warn you –

ROZ All of it's shit! It's stupid and racist. I don't want nothing more to do with it. I'm leaving.

RUSS Roz! Will you calm down, please! Calm down and listen for a minute! Now sit down! *(Firmly)* Sit!

ROZ *sits and calms down a little. During the next,* **RUSS** *retrieves her script and places it on the table beside her.*

Now, we all got together, didn't we, all of us, two months ago, the whole committee – you were there – and we agreed, didn't we, that it was time for something different? We'd done our Shakespeare and we'd done our Chekhov. And we'd

done our – somewhat unfortunate – Pirandello – my fault entirely that – and we all of us agreed, didn't we? No, be fair, we all voted to do a musical. Now we're doing a musical –

ROZ *(sulkily)* We didn't mean this sort of musical, did we? We meant a proper musical.

RUSS What do you mean? *The Mikado* is a proper musical. It's a classic musical. What else would you call it?

ROZ No it's not, it's opera. Says so on the front of the script. We wanted to do a proper musical with proper singing and dancing. No, listen, I don't mind working with you. I enjoy working with you, Russ, you know I do. I respect you. But I'm not working with her. I don't mind you telling me things 'cos you usually know what you're talking about. But I'm not having her shouting and pushing and pulling, breathing all over me with her horrible bad breath. 'Cos she's crap and I don't respect her, not at all. Either she goes or I do, right? Her or me? Get rid of her.

RUSS Now, be sensible. We can't get rid of her. We need a choreographer.

ROZ Why can't you do it, then?

RUSS Because I'm not a proper choreographer –

ROZ You'd be better than her. I'm saying, I'm not working with her. I'll work with you – I'll even work with old Ratts providing he keeps his hands on his keyboard –

RUSS You really are so stubborn, Roz, sometimes, aren't you? Sometimes you can be…your own worst enemy. I mean, last month, jumping down off the stage in the middle of the Chekhov and punching a member of the audience…

ROZ She kept opening her fucking sweets right through my big speech! She deserved a slapping, didn't she? It was disrespectful – to me!

RUSS Roz, you have real talent. I keep telling you that. You have the makings of something – so exciting and remarkable.

You're capable of creating such – beauty onstage. But there's also this part of you that simply wants to kick it all to pieces. Don't walk away again, Roz. Please. You know how important you are to us. You know that.

ROZ Yes, I know that.

RUSS You've got a great future.

ROZ If I'm given a chance, I have! Otherwise, I'll probably end up like my mum, won't I? With five kids. Playing the clubs.

RUSS Is that what she does? Your mother? I didn't know that.

ROZ Yes. She's retired now.

RUSS I never knew that. What was she, a singer?

ROZ No, she was a – an exotic dancer down at Mustard's Club. Used to be.

RUSS How exciting!

ROZ She used to do an act with this snake.

RUSS Oh, I see. That sort of exotic.

ROZ Till they took it away from her.

RUSS Took it away? Who took it away?

ROZ The sodding council, didn't they? Said she was endangering the health of the animal.

RUSS Good gracious!

ROZ They come and took it off her. Middle of her performance. In the middle of Mustard's, marched in and took it off her. Typical. No one worried about my mum's welfare, did they? About her livelihood? Didn't matter about her, it was all about this fucking stupid snake, wasn't it? Typical!

Slight pause.

No, I'll probably end up like her. Follow the family tradition.

RUSS *(smiling)* Won't you need a snake first?

ROZ *(scowling at his feeble joke)* Look, I'm going home now.

RUSS Roz, you can't! You mustn't throw it all away. Not now we've put in your drama school applications. We've raised most of the money –

ROZ You have, you mean.

RUSS No. We all have. We've raised it together. Most of it. You can't disappoint us now, let us all down. Not just because of her, Mrs Miller. She's not worth it, surely? Giving it all up simply because of her?

A slight pause. Rehearsals at the other end of the hall appear to have stopped temporarily. There is a murmur of voices.

Ah, they've stopped rehearsing. We appear to be taking a break. Now, why don't you grab this opportunity to go back and apologise to Mrs Miller?

Silence.

Please, Roz. For me. For yourself. You'll feel better.

ROZ No. Not till she apologises to me first. She has to know, she can't just grab hold of people like that. Invading their personal space…

RUSS Well, I'll have a word with Mrs Miller. Ask her to be less… invasive… Wait there. Oh dear, you never make things easy do you, Roz? You really are… Sometimes. Just wait there. Please. Promise you won't rush off again like you did last week. You have to promise me!

ROZ Right. Promise.

RUSS *goes off, shaking his head.*

RUSS *(calling as he goes)* Mrs Miller, may I have a quick word with you? In the office, please?

MRS M *(offstage)* Yes, of course, Russell… Has the girl calmed down now? I hope she has…

ROZ *(half to herself)* Stupid old cow...

ROZ *continues to watch the proceedings. She appears unperturbed by the disruption she has caused. She picks up her script.*

As she sits there, **GALE**, *aged about thirty, elegant and smartly dressed, enters through the front door. She hesitates and sees* **ROZ**.

GALE *(calling tentatively)* Excuse me... I say, excuse me.

ROZ, *glaring at her script, looks up.*

You wouldn't by any chance be Roz, would you? Roz Perkins?

ROZ *(guardedly)* I might be.

GALE Yes, I thought you might be. Hi, I'm Gale. Gale Devonne.

ROZ *looks blank.*

We spoke on the phone. You called me a couple of days ago. Force Ten Promotions.

ROZ Oh, yes, right. You're the agent.

GALE *(smiling)* Gale Devonne. Hi. (*She extends a hand)*

ROZ *(accepting it)* Hi.

GALE Mind if I sit down?

ROZ *(without moving)* Help yourself.

GALE Not interrupting anything, am I? Only I saw the sign on the door there. I take it you're still rehearsing?

ROZ No. We're on a break.

GALE Right. Incidentally, would you mind telling me how you got in touch with me?

ROZ Someone gave me your number. I thought I needed an agent, so I called you.

GALE Where did you get it? My number?

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