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SF PERUSALS

A GLASS OF BITTER

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

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CHARACTERS

NORAH GRANT
FRED GRANT
EVIE PELL
DETECTIVE INSPECTOR HAMMOND
ROY

The scene is the sitting-room of the Grants' house in a North London suburb

Time—the present

Time—the present

Scene is the sitting-room of the Grants' house
in a North London suburb

.ve Inspector Hammond

A GLASS OF BITTER

SCENE—*The sitting-room of the Grants' semi-detached villa in a North London suburb. About nine o'clock on an autumn evening.*

It is a comfortably furnished room of an ordinary kind. There is a door in the R *wall leading to the front door and one in the* L *wall leading to the kitchen and the back of the house. There are windows—not high, but the small, low type—in both the* L *and* R *walls. The essential furniture is a small table* C *with an easy chair either side of it; two or three extra chairs and one or two other pieces of furniture as available can be used to dress the stage. The piece can be played without a proper set, merely suggesting the doors and windows and using only the essential furniture.*

(*See the Ground Plan at the end of the play*)

When the CURTAIN *rises* FRED *and* NORAH GRANT *are sitting each side of the table* C, FRED *in the easy chair* R *and* NORAH *in the easy chair* L. *He is reading an evening paper, pipe in mouth.* NORAH *is doing some mending. It is a very quiet, dull, domestic scene, typical of millions. Fred is a man about fifty, pleasant enough but rather formidable, a man who could lose his temper. It is plain he is devoted to his wife. Norah is some years younger, in her middle forties, fairly attractive in a soft, humdrum sort of way. She is equally devoted to her husband but a little afraid of him—he is the boss.* FRED *reads and* NORAH *goes on with her mending for about half a minute or so after the* CURTAIN *rises. Then he puts the paper on his knees and she, looking across, catches his eye, and they smile.*

FRED (*without rising*) I think I'll walk down to the *Lion* and have a glass of bitter . . .

NORAH (*smiling*) Yes, why don't you, Fred?

FRED. Only one, mind you . . .

NORAH. I know . . .

FRED. But I'll linger over it. They certainly don't make much out of me at the *Lion*—still, they always seem very pleased to see me.

NORAH. That's because they know you're a very nice man.

FRED. I hope so. But what they don't know—is that I've got a wife who's better still—one in a thousand . . .

NORAH. Who'd rather stay at home—and finish her mending . . .

FRED. Now you're sure about that?

NORAH (*smiling*) You know I am. So long as we have our night out at the theatre fairly often, I'm satisfied. But you stop that and you *will* get into trouble, Fred Grant.

FRED (*rising*) Wouldn't dream of it. (*He looks round contentedly and then looks at her*) We haven't done badly, have we? For two people who married rather late, didn't have children, we've made a good job of it, if you ask me. Neither of us was the easy marrying kind—you were too reserved, too particular . . .

NORAH (*not annoyed; still smiling*) All right, dear—you needn't rub it in . . .

(*During the next speech* FRED *moves* L *round the table, so that at the end of the speech he is behind Norah*)

FRED. But I admired you for it. Still do. You know me. I thought I didn't want to marry. The way girls had started knocking around—going with anybody anywhere —turning themselves into damaged goods—I used to say to myself, "Nothing doing for you, Fred". And then you turned up—just the opposite—the old-fashioned, good, quiet kind. And—well—here we are. (*He gives her a pat on the shoulder*)

(*He cannot see* NORAH'S *face, which suddenly looks frightened*)

(*Preparing to leave*) Well . . .

NORAH (*stopping him with her voice*) Fred!

FRED (*halted*) What is it?

NORAH. Supposing I *wasn't* really like that—supposing

you'd made a mistake, not about me as I am now but as I was then—would it make any difference?

FRED (*jocular*) And supposing I was a black man five foot high and four foot broad . . .

NORAH. No, that's silly, Fred . . .

FRED. So was your question. They always are—those questions that begin with "supposing". I'm not a little, fat, black man—and I didn't make any mistake about you—thank God! Well, I'll go and earn my glass of bitter. Just one. And I'll come straight back. (*He moves* R *to the door*)

NORAH (*as he goes*) Yes, dear.

FRED (*suddenly returning to her*) But I'll give you a kiss first. (*He bends over and kisses her*) Just to stop you doing any more of that "supposing" . . .

(FRED *exits* R. NORAH *reflects for a few moments, then, with a sort of smiling shrug, as if dismissing an unpleasant possibility, goes on with her work. After another moment we hear a sharp tapping, as if against the window* L. NORAH *looks up, puzzled and rather frightened. After hesitating a moment, as the tapping continues, she rises, goes to the window* L *and peers through the gap in the curtains*)

NORAH (*calling through the window; puzzled*) Who is it? What do you want?

(*We cannot hear the reply.* NORAH *is still puzzled*)

Oh—all right. But I don't see why you shouldn't have come to the front door.

(NORAH *goes out* L *and after a moment returns, followed by* EVIE, *an unpleasant, flash-looking woman about thirty. They move* C)

(*Not liking the look of her*) Well, perhaps now you'll explain . . .

EVIE (*cutting in ruthlessly*) Got a drink?

NORAH. Only some cider.

EVIE (*contemptuously*) Do I look as if I drank cider?

NORAH (*tartly*) No, you don't. But I can't see that it

matters to me what you drink. Who are you? What do you want?

EVIE. You *are* Mrs Grant, aren't you?

NORAH. I told you at the door—yes, I am. But who are you?

EVIE (*with a grin*) I'm Evie—your daughter-in-law . . .

NORAH (*aghast*) I don't believe it.

EVIE. Then why the hell do you think I'm here?

NORAH. That's what I want to know.

EVIE (*with a flash of temper*) And I'm telling you. Look—I haven't time to do a variety act. I'm in a hurry. You've a son who goes by the name of Roy Flower—haven't you?

NORAH (*trying to brave it out*) No—I haven't. I've just told you—my name's Grant.

EVIE (*disgusted*) I know. Don't give me the run-around. Before your name was Grant, you had a son . . . (*She opens her bag to produce a snapshot*) He calls himself Roy Flower now, though I dare say he's had other names. Look—here he is——

(EVIE *shows the snapshot, which* NORAH *obviously recognizes*)

—and don't deny it—you're only wasting valuable time. He's told me all about it or I wouldn't be here, would I? He's your son, isn't he?

NORAH (*reluctantly*) Well, what if he is?

EVIE. I'm his wife . . .

NORAH. I don't believe it.

EVIE (*disgusted*) Oh—for God's sake! What have I to do—show you my marriage lines? As a matter of fact it doesn't matter whether we're married or I'm just living with him or we're only working together . . .

NORAH (*bitterly*) Working at what?

EVIE. Never mind what. But that brings me to the point. It never was healthy—and now they've tumbled to us—we'll be on the run any minute. That's why I came round to the back. They might be following me.

NORAH. Who might—the police?

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