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EDEN END

A Play in Three Acts

BY

J. B. PRIESTLEY

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EDEN END

Produced at the Duchess Theatre, London, on September 13th, 1934, with the following cast of characters :

WILFRED KIRBY	<i>John Teed.</i>
SARAH	<i>Nellie Bowman.</i>
LILLIAN KIRBY	<i>Alison Leggatt.</i>
DR. KIRBY	<i>Edward Irwin.</i>
STELLA KIRBY	<i>Beatrice Lehmann.</i>
GEOFFREY FARRANT	<i>Franklyn Bellamy.</i>
CHARLES APPELBY	<i>Ralph Richardson.</i>

The Play produced by IRENE HENTSCHEL.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY

The action takes place in the sitting-room of Dr. Kirby's house at Eden End, in the North of England, the last week in October, 1912.

ACT I.—Tuesday Afternoon.

ACT II.—Friday Afternoon.

ACT III.—SCENE 1.—Saturday Night.

SCENE 2.—Sunday Afternoon.



To face page 7—"Eden End"]

[Photograph by Pollard Crowther.

EDEN END

ACT I

SCENE.—*Sitting-room of DR. KIRBY'S house, Eden End. A comfortable, well-worn room furnished in the taste of an earlier period. A door at the back, preferably up a few steps, leading from the rest of the house. A door on the R. leading to a small room, originally the nursery, now used by SARAH to sit in and do small jobs. A window at L. looking out upon a distant grey-green hill of the North-Country type. A bookcase on right wall. A telephone prominently placed in corner near door up C. Up stage on L. a cottage piano and old piano-stool.*

(*See Photograph of Scene.*)

TIME.—*An afternoon of early autumn in the year 1912.*

WILFRED *is discovered at the piano, carefully picking out with one finger, and sometimes vamping an accompaniment with left hand, a waltz refrain from "Gipsy Love."* He is wearing a tweed suit but a linen collar and dark tie. He is about twenty-four, and though sunburned and in possession of a small moustache, he looks young, unsophisticated. After a few moments, during which he can improve a little and even attempt to sing the tune, SARAH enters through door on R., carrying some things she has presumably been ironing in her little room. SARAH is an old North-Country nurse, now about seventy, a queer old creature, at once simple and shrewd, and very earthy. She still slaves for all the family, but her tone towards them is still indulgent, as if they were children.

WILFRED. I'm getting it, Sarah. I'm getting it.

SARAH (*going to above table L.C.*). You've been at it long enough. (*She puts a pile of shirts on the table.*)

WILFRED. Now just listen. (*He plays again. Wheeling round.*) What do you think of that?

SARAH. It sounds like proper playing—a'most.

WILFRED. Not so much of the *almost*. What more do you want?

SARAH. Well, I'm not saying you're not doing very well with it. But you'll never shape at it like Miss Stella, never in all your born days you won't.

WILFRED. Do you know how many times you've said that?

SARAH. For playing and singing and such-like——

WILFRED. She was wonderful. I know. (*He turns back to piano and plays some chords.*) Well, I'm wonderful too.

SARAH (*going up to him and dusting his shoulder*). You're a right untidy lad.

WILFRED. I'm not a lad.

SARAH (*coming back to above table*). Bother I've had wi' your clothes.

WILFRED (*turning to her*). Did you do anything to my blue shirt?

SARAH. Ay, that's mended. And two more beside. And two of the doctor's.

WILFRED. When I'm in Africa, Sarah, black women wash my clothes.

SARAH. I remember seeing four black women once at Martinbro Fair. Black as your boots they were. And fuzzy hair.

WILFRED. Where I work, when I go away, there are thousands and thousands of people like that. And I'm the boss. And then when I come home on leave, you call me a lad.

SARAH. These women kept rubbing their teeth with bits of stick, I remember. And I fancy it was the same year you went and fell into that duck-pond just outside Martinbro. You wor only a little lad and you had your best sailor suit on. (*She goes to door up c., taking clothes with her.*)

WILFRED. What would you do if you saw a hippopotamus?

SARAH. I don't know what they are. I've no time to be botherin wi' such little things now.

(*She goes out and closes the door.*)

WILFRED (*making a complete revolution on piano-stool*). Good old Sarah!

SARAH (*reopening door*). You get on wi' your piano playing, and frame a bit better.

(*She closes door.*)

(WILFRED *begins playing again, then leaves off, as if in disgust with himself.*)

(*Off.*) What about Gregson's, Miss Lilian?

LILIAN (*off*). All right, I'll look after that.

(*Hearing the voices off stage, WILFRED hastily plunges into a very noisy, inaccurate rendering of the waltz.*)

(LILIAN KIRBY *enters*. *She is a year or two older than her brother; neither pretty nor ugly; neatly but not well dressed in indoor clothes. She has more sweetness of character than would superficially appear from what she says and does. When she is not taking refuge in sarcasm, she is quick and eager.*)

LILIAN (*going to chair below fire*). What's that awful row?
(*She picks up book, which is lying open on chair.*)

WILFRED (*shouting above his playing*). That's the waltz from "Gipsy Love."

LILIAN (*sitting on pouf to read her book*). It sounds a mess.

WILFRED (*finishing his playing and turning to her*). That's because I can't play it properly.

LILIAN. That's obvious.

WILFRED. You ought to hear it as they do it. Gertie Millar and Robert Michaelis.

LILIAN (*ironically*). Wonderful!

WILFRED (*ignoring this, eagerly*). You know—somehow—it completely carried me away. It's rot, I suppose—

LILIAN (*now trying to read*). Of course it's rot.

WILFRED. Yes, but just think. (*He breaks off.*) You *might* listen, Lilian. Hang it all, I'm not always here to tell you things. And I listen to you.

LILIAN (*looking up from book*). Go on then.

WILFRED (*warming as he goes on*). Just think of it. Back from Africa. London. First night on leave. A jolly good dinner with two other chaps from the Company. Then Daly's. (*He rises and goes above table to R. of it.*) Lights, and everybody in the stalls dressed, stunning girls, the band playing—and then Gertie Millar—and oh—everything. Do you know, Lilian, I felt quite queer. I nearly cried.

LILIAN. Did you?

WILFRED. I didn't really cry, you know. But I nearly did. Felt like it.

LILIAN. That's the only bit you haven't told me twenty times already.

WILFRED (*hotly*). That's not true.

LILIAN. Sorry, but it is.

(*WILFRED goes to piano and looks through pile of music on it.*)

I can tell you the names of the chaps—as you call them—who went with you that night. One was called Patterson, and he comes from Cumberland and he's a good footballer. The other's called Bell—Bell—Bellingham—

WILFRED (*gloomily over his left shoulder*). Bellington.

LILIAN. That's it. Not much difference. He's called Bellington and he comes from Devonshire, and he's got a sister who's married to a Captain in the Navy. There!

WILFRED (*huffily, going to window*). Sorry. Didn't know I'd been boring you.

LILIAN (*beginning to read*). You haven't. Don't apologize.

(*She looks at him as he stands looking out of the window. He starts to whistle.*)

By the way, you wouldn't like to walk into the village to give an order to Gregson's, would you?

WILFRED. No, thanks. (*He whistles a little of the waltz.*)

LILIAN. Then I suppose I'll have to go. Soon. (*She begins reading again.*)

WILFRED (*turning to look at her*). Don't you ever get tired of reading?

LILIAN (*without looking up*). Yes.

WILFRED. You're always reading.

LILIAN (*without looking up*). I'm not.

(*WILFRED crosses above table to her.*)

I spend most of the day looking after this house, and Dad, and you when you're at home.

WILFRED. Yes, but the minute you've done you begin reading. (*Leaning over her, from above her, to see the title—his head close to hers.*) What's that?

LILIAN. Wells's new book. "Marriage." (*She goes on reading.*)

WILFRED (*going to club fender*). You never seem to stop reading H. G. Wells. I don't know how you can stick him. I can't. Doesn't seem to *like* anything. He always makes me feel so uncomfortable. What's the point of reading if it makes you feel uncomfortable? It's bad enough in real life. (*He takes out packet of cigarettes.*)

LILIAN (*still reading*). That's stupid.

WILFRED. Why is it stupid?

(*She gives no reply but goes on reading.*)

Geoffrey Farrant was saying just the same thing the other day.

(*She looks up. He guffaws.*)

LILIAN (*crossly*). Don't be absurd. (*She hesitates.*) Did Geoffrey really say that?

WILFRED (*teasing*). Wouldn't you like to know?

LILIAN. It doesn't matter in the least.

WILFRED. Is Geoffrey coming round to-night?

LILIAN. I don't know. He might.

WILFRED (*after lighting a cigarette*). Good old Geoffrey! By Jove, when I was a kid, about fourteen, I used to think he was marvellous.

LILIAN. Yes, I know.

WILFRED. That was when he was mad on Stella. He was my hero all right; regular soldier, captain, wounded in the Boer War—I used to follow him round like a little dog. I must have been a nuisance when he wanted to be alone with Stella. (*Crossing to table.*) She used to tease him and say he came round just to be a hero to me. That's a long time ago. Nearly ten years. (*He sits on edge of table.*) I say.

LILIAN (*rather wearily*). Well?

WILFRED. You see a lot of Geoffrey these days. Does he ever talk about Stella?

LILIAN (*shortly*). No, why should he? Give me a cigarette.

WILFRED. What for? You don't smoke.

LILIAN. I do if I want to. Give me one, please. (*She holds out her hand.*)

WILFRED (*rising and going to her*). Oh, all right, Christabel Pankhurst. (*Giving her one.*) But mind you don't make yourself sick.

LILIAN. Why should I? I'm better at not being sick than you are.

(WILFRED *goes back to table.*)

You admit yourself you're always sea-sick.

WILFRED. That's different. Besides, just you try going through the Bay of Biscay in winter—as I've done, three times now.

LILIAN (*rising and going to mantelpiece for matches*). And then there was the time when we both went on the swings at Martinbro Fair, and you were horribly sick and I wasn't. (*She awkwardly lights cigarette, and then, when it gets going, takes too deep a breath and coughs.*)

WILFRED. You see. Take it easy. What if Dad marches in?

LILIAN. He won't mind. Mother would have minded, but Dad won't. (*She sits in chair above fireplace. She does not make a success of her smoking.*)

WILFRED. One of our chaps in Nigeria told me his father wouldn't let him do *anything*. Terribly strict. That's why he cleared out.

LILIAN. Lucky chap.

WILFRED (*wandering up to the telephone*). You know, when I came home and saw the telephone, brand new, I thought I'd be able to have a lot of fun with it, but I haven't. There's nobody to ring up here in Eden End.

LILIAN. Who were you ringing up yesterday?

WILFRED (*indignantly*). You were listening!

LILIAN. I wasn't. I happened to hear your voice when I was in the hall, putting some things away. Who was it?

WILFRED (*turning away*). Oh—just somebody I know.

LILIAN. A girl, obviously. You're keeping her very dark, aren't you?

WILFRED. I don't know her very well, and, anyhow, she lives miles away, the other side of Martinbro. (*Going towards window.*) Never mind about her.

LILIAN. I'm not minding. But I suspect she's a barmaid and that's why you can get her on the telephone.

WILFRED. You know, Lilian, one thing puzzles me.

LILIAN. And if she's a barmaid, on the telephone, and the other side of Martinbro—

(WILFRED *crosses above table to her.*)

—she's probably at that big pub at the cross-roads near Denly Dene—the "White Hart."

WILFRED (*angrily*). Will you listen ?

LILIAN. Do you really like her, Wilfred ? Or do you just think that being sweet on a barmaid is very manly and West African ?

WILFRED. I'm trying to say something important.

LILIAN. Well, what is it ?

WILFRED. You don't really want to know. You'll only laugh.

LILIAN. You've got to risk that. I mightn't. Tell me.

WILFRED (*crossing to fireplace and leaning against mantel, his back to her, hesitating*). It's difficult to explain. But I feel as if I'm being done in the eye.

LILIAN. You probably are.

WILFRED. You see, when I'm out there, in Africa, I think of Eden End here—home and you and Dad, and everything, and I long for leave, and when at last it comes—(*turning to her*) well, of course, it's ripping. But then when I've been here a week or two—

LILIAN. It all begins to look dull. Doesn't it ?

WILFRED. Well, not quite as bad as that. (*He crosses towards table.*)

LILIAN. Yes it is. Don't sound so apologetic. I don't blame you.

WILFRED (*drifting below table and up L. of it*). Anyhow, it isn't what I expected. And then I begin to think about Nigeria, and I begin to feel it won't be bad getting back there. But now I know that once I *am* back there I'll be longing to be on leave again, and this place will seem all different. I've got into a sort of life where I'm never in the right place at the right time. (*He sits on chair L. of table.*)

LILIAN. Poor Wilfred. You were just like that when you were at school.

WILFRED. I know. And I thought it would be different when I left school and grew up. Perhaps it will, later on.

LILIAN. Perhaps it will. You've plenty of time.

WILFRED (*building castles with playing cards on table*). Things can't stay like this. When I've more money I shall have more fun on leave. And it'll be more amusing out there when I'm promoted. It's Nineteen Twelve now. In three or four years time—say in Nineteen Sixteen—I may have a district of my own.

LILIAN. Could I come out and see you then ?

WILFRED. You might. Depends where I'm sent.

LILIAN. You may be married before then.

WILFRED. I don't suppose so. Three or four years isn't really a long time. Hurry up, Nineteen Sixteen. Sounds a nice ripe sort of year, doesn't it ?—Nineteen Sixteen. (*He knocks down his castle.*)

(*From the door come three deliberate knocks. The two look at it sharply, rather startled—though they must avoid any nervous jump. WILFRED goes to the door and opens it. SARAH enters, carrying a large basket heaped with old clothes.*)

SARAH (*putting basket on table, breathlessly*). I didn't want to put this down to open the door because I'm not so good at stooping as I was——

(WILFRED *drifts back to L. of table and sits.*)

—gives me palpitations—and I've been stooping enough.

LILIAN. What have you been doing?

SARAH. I've been up in the back garret, samming up these old clothes for the doctor. He wants to give 'em away. Eh, and look what I found. (*She holds out an old fancy costume.*)

LILIAN. What is it?

SARAH. Don't you remember? It's very same dress Miss Stella wore that time she acted in the Town Hall at Martinbro, and they all clapped her so long, and she came back and told her poor mother she was going on the stage for a living, and we had such a do—all shouting and bawling and crying. Don't you remember it?

WILFRED. I do.

LILIAN. Yes, I do now. (*She rises, puts her cigarette out and goes to R. of SARAH.*)

SARAH. And I should think so. I helped her to make it, and right bonny she looked in it. But she never took it with her when she went, and it's been behind some boxes in the back garret. I fancy your mother threw it there. Moths has been at it a bit, but I'm thinking it 'ud clean and mend.

LILIAN. What for? It's quite useless.

SARAH. How do you know? We might send it to her and she might be glad of it for her acting.

WILFRED (*laughing*). You're cracked, Sarah.

SARAH (*indignant*). What's there to laugh at, I'd like to know?

LILIAN. Nothing. Only, you see, we couldn't send it to Stella—even if it would be useful—because we don't know where she is.

SARAH. Isn't she out—you know—where's it? That big place?

WILFRED. Timbuctoo.

SARAH. Not Timbuctoo neither, you daft lad. It's where she said there was all eucalyptus.

LILIAN. It was Australia. But that was three years ago, and we haven't heard anything from her since.

SARAH. Is it three year since we heard last?

LILIAN. Yes. And she's been away more than eight years.

SARAH (*her face working as she fingers the costume*). I didn't think it was so long. I'm getting old and I forget. I'm dreaming half my time.

LILIAN (*looking at the costume and holding it against herself*). I remember. It was pretty. I believe I was jealous because I hadn't one like it.

SARAH. Yes, you wor. You wor a jealous little madam in them days, let me tell you. See. I sewed them on myself for her. It was all a secret. She used to sneak in there (*pointing to door R.*) to try it on. It only seems yesterday. I mun sort these out.

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