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SF PERUSALS

TRY IT AGAIN

A One Act Play

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY



LONDON

SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED

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CHARACTERS

COLIN ARLOTT
KRAMER
MRS ARLOTT
CLARE ARLOTT
HELEN CONNOR
MISS GILBERT

The action takes place in the drawing-room of Mrs Arlott's country house, late on a September evening, at the present time

TRY IT AGAIN

SCENE—*The drawing-room of a country house. Evening.*

It can be of any shape and style of decoration preferred by the producer so long as it has large french windows up C *and a door either in the* L *or* R *wall. There is a sofa* RC, *an armchair down* R *and an armchair up* LC. *This furniture may be altered at the producer's discretion.*

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

When the CURTAIN *rises it is a warm September night and the french windows are open. Nothing can be seen outside them—a small black velvet backing is suggested—as the room is brilliantly lit.* MRS ARLOTT, *an elderly woman with a strong character, her son* COLIN, *an attractive but weakish man about thirty-five, his wife* CLARE, *a sensible and fairly attractive woman about thirty, and* HELEN CONNOR, *a very handsome and sophisticated woman in her early thirties, are all discovered in the room.* HELEN *is seated in the armchair* LC, MRS ARLOTT *at the* L *end of the sofa,* COLIN *at the* R *end of the sofa, and* CLARE *in the armchair down* R. *Nothing is said for a moment or two so that the audience may take in the scene. Nobody is relaxed, though* HELEN *is making a good shot at appearing so, and all look either angry or anxious. The most embarrassed and despairing character is, of course, the man,* COLIN. *The pause must be nicely timed and so played by the four that we do not feel anything has come to an end.*

CLARE (*to Mrs Arlott*) Well, it seems I must say it . . .

MRS ARLOTT. Say what, dear?

CLARE (*taking the plunge*) That you shouldn't interfere. It would be much better for all of us if you left us alone to settle our affairs in our own way.

HELEN. I couldn't agree more.

MRS ARLOTT (*stifling her anger*) And is that your opinion too, Colin?

COLIN (*embarrassed but at bay*) I'm afraid it is, y'know, Mother. After all . . .

MRS ARLOTT (*cutting in, scornfully*) No, not "After all" —which merely means you're going to give us one of your vague rambling speeches. And I don't think the rest of us have the time or patience to listen to it.

HELEN. Again, I couldn't agree more.

MRS ARLOTT (*losing her temper*) Oh—do stop making that stupid ill-bred remark.

HELEN. Certainly. But if we're going to talk about breeding and manners, I'd like to say something.

(MRS ARLOTT *tries to interrupt*)

(*Checking her with a more forceful tone*) No, and you're not going to stop me. I'm a guest here. I didn't force my way in, I was asked to come. It wasn't my idea. It wasn't Colin's . . .

COLIN. My hat—no!

HELEN (*to Mrs Arlott*) It was your idea. And from the moment I arrived, six hours ago, you've hardly been barely civil to me. If I'd come down by car instead of by train, I'd have pushed off before dinner. I don't enjoy staying with anybody who clearly regards me as a dose of poison. And if this is a sample of your good breeding and manners . . .

CLARE (*cutting in*) Oh—what does it matter? I agree that she hasn't been very nice to you, but what could you expect? All this is beside the point. Now that we've got so far, let's have it out properly—or give it up and stop talking.

COLIN. That's the only thing to do—pack it up.

CLARE. Yes, of course—you *would* think that!

HELEN. So would any man, if *I* know anything about them . . .

CLARE (*cattily*) And nobody denies you do.

HELEN. A good try, but you're not scoring anything. I think a woman's a fool if she doesn't understand men.

MRS ARLOTT. Possibly. Nevertheless, I don't think

you understand Colin, who happens to be my son. Which is one reason—and this *is* the point, Clare—that I've chosen to interfere, as you call it. You tell me I ought to have left you alone to settle your own affairs in your own way. But it's obvious you can't settle your own affairs. And this concerns me just as much as it does you, perhaps more. Colin is my only child. You can find yourself another husband, if necessary. I imagine that Miss Connor can easily find herself another lover. But I have no other son. And if Colin is unhappy, then I am unhappy. So I felt it was time I *did* interfere.

COLIN. Won't work, though. Sorry, Mother, but it won't, y'know.

MRS ARLOTT. Certainly it will. And the best thing you can do, Colin, is to leave us for an hour.

HELEN. If he goes, then I'm going.

CLARE (*hotly*) That's ridiculous . . .

MRS ARLOTT. And, of course, quite irresponsible. Probably typical.

HELEN (*stung*) Look—don't start saying what's typical about me. You don't know enough. In fact, you don't know anything . . .

MRS ARLOTT. I know that for the past year or so you've been Colin's mistress—and have done your best to break up what could have been a happy marriage . . .

HELEN. Don't talk that nonsense. It simply won't do. There may be women who break up happy marriages, but I've never met one. If Colin had been happily married he wouldn't have wanted me . . .

MRS ARLOTT. Perhaps he didn't . . .

HELEN. Of course he did. Before I wanted him. And when you talk about my being irresponsible, you either forget or don't know that I happen to earn my living—and it's quite a good living, too, and nothing that Colin could offer me would make me stop earning it . . .

CLARE. Then why couldn't you leave him alone?

HELEN. Because he fell in love with me. (*To Colin*) Didn't you?

(COLIN *hesitates miserably*)

CLARE. Well—go on—say it. Or can't you when your mother's here?

COLIN (*unhappily*) Yes, I did.

MRS ARLOTT (*reproachfully*) Oh—Colin! How could you?

HELEN. Why shouldn't he?

MRS ARLOTT (*with forced coolness*) Because, Miss Connor, although Clare has her faults and has never really understood my son, she is a far more suitable wife for him than you would ever be..

CLARE (*with a touch of bitter irony*) Thank you!

HELEN (*to Mrs Arlott; coolly*) You know, I doubt that. He's rather a weak character——

(COLIN *tries to protest*)

—(*turning to him*) yes, you are, darling—it's an essential part of your charm—(*to Mrs Arlott*) and he needs a wife who knows her way about. As I do. But what you don't seem to understand is that I've never offered myself to him as a wife. I'm not husband-hunting—I'm what is called a career woman—and if I was in search of a husband I'd want somebody with more weight than poor Colin has . . .

CLARE (*angrily*) What a horrible thing to say! If you really loved him you couldn't talk like that.

COLIN (*with angry irony*) Don't mind me, anybody! My God—you women!

HELEN. My dear, I know what you mean. I've often felt it myself. We're horrid brutes when we really get going, and the more female we are the worse we are. Still you can't shuffle out of *everything*, darling. Must face the facts sometime.

CLARE. For once I agree with you. And we'll settle this tonight.

COLIN (*angrily*) Settle *what*?

CLARE. Either you go away with her—or you finish with her for ever and stay with me.

HELEN. Unless, of course, he drops both of us and goes back to Mum.

CLARE. Yes, there's that, of course.

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