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SF PERUSALS

BRIGHT SHADOW

A PLAY OF DETECTION
IN THREE ACTS

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY



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www.samuelfrench.co.uk
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For Amateur Production Enquiries

United Kingdom and World
excluding north america
plays@samuelfrench.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

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BRIGHT SHADOW

Produced by the Oldham Repertory Theatre Club at the Coliseum, Oldham, on April 3rd, 1950, with the following cast of characters :

(*in the order of their appearance*)

PAMELA FOTHERINGHAM	*Penelope Davis*
MAJOR GEORGE BUTTERSHAW	*Harry Lomax*
COLONEL PHILIP RISBOROUGH	*Charles Simon*
MRS PROBUS (*the housekeeper*)	*Ivy Collins*
LESLEY DEREHAM (*the Colonel's niece*)	*Pauline Yates*
PETER WARTON	*John Trevor*
IVOR KEMP	*Ken Marshall*
DOUGLAS BARROW	*Alan Foss*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES.

The action of the play passes in the sitting-room of Colonel Risborough's house, Fenston Manor.

ACT I—A Wednesday afternoon in Autumn, 1946.

ACT II—Thursday evening.

ACT III—Friday evening.

BRIGHT SHADOW

ACT I

SCENE.—*The sitting-room of* COLONEL RISBOROUGH'S *old country house, Fenston Manor. A Wednesday afternoon in Autumn*, 1946.

The room is comfortable and shows obvious signs of being thoroughly lived-in. There is a broad window R. *overlooking the grounds. Across the corner up* R. *there is a door which leads to the hall, entrance, kitchen, etc. The fireplace is in the wall* L. *In the up* L. *corner above the fireplace there is a small staircase of which the last few steps can be seen. At the top of the stairs, there is a small landing and, out of sight of the audience, a door which can be locked. The staircase leads to the upper part of the house, bedrooms, etc., but there is also access to these rooms via the door up* R. *The ceiling is low and heavy. There are some fine old pieces of furniture and old family portraits hang on the walls. A large sideboard stands* C. *of the back wall, and there is a desk and chair at the window* R. *A comfortable settee stands* L.C. *with a small coffee table below it. Easy chairs stand* C. *and* R.C. *At night, the room is lit with big heavy standard lamps. The switches are above the door up* R. *There is a bell-push in the wall above the fireplace.*

(*See the Ground Plan and Photograph of the Scene.*)

When the CURTAIN *rises it is late afternoon. The window curtains are open and a late sunlight streams in. The fire is burning cheerfully, and the standard lamps have not yet been lit.* COLONEL PHILIP RISBOROUGH, MAJOR GEORGE BUTTERSHAW *and* PAMELA FOTHERINGHAM *are seated cosily around the fire. They have just finished tea. The* COLONEL *is seated on the settee at the* L. *end of it. He is in his seventies, a tall, beaky, fine-drawn type who is now old even for his years. He speaks slowly and carefully, and moves in the same fashion. He is dressed in old well-cut tweeds. The* MAJOR *is seated in the easy chair* C. *He is in his late sixties and, in marked contrast to the* COLONEL, *is a roly-poly type, carelessly dressed, with a rather foolish face and a bland manner. He smokes his pipe and has an unfinished whisky and soda on the* R. *edge of the coffee table.* PAMELA *is seated on the settee at the* R. *end of it. She is a widow in her thirties, and is a fairly handsome, smartish, town-and-country type, with a superficial assurance that covers something deeply uneasy and uncertain about her. She smokes a cigarette. There is silence*

for a few moments. The COLONEL, *rather erect, is brooding, and the other two are lolling and smoking in one of those silences that come at the end of tea among people in the country, well acquainted with each other.*

PAMELA (*making an effort to overcome her lazy feeling*). What's the time? (*She glances at her wrist watch.*) Well after five. I must fly.

MAJOR (*lazily*). You rush about too much.

COLONEL (*mildly*). Everybody does now. No point in it.

MAJOR. No point at all.

PAMELA. It's all right for you chaps. And anyhow, if I hadn't done some rushing this afternoon, I couldn't have joined you for our nice cosy little tea.

MAJOR (*smiling*). Then we forgive you.

COLONEL. Certainly. And delighted to see you again, Pamela. Did you say you were staying at the Lodge some time now?

PAMELA. About a month, I hope, though the whole place is horribly leaky and draughty these days—it's winter in there already—and my new married couple that I brought down from town have already started to shake their fat heads and grumble.

COLONEL. Never cared for married couples. One of 'em's always a passenger.

PAMELA. I'd call both these two passengers if passengers didn't have such a wretched time of it nowadays. Still, there they are, and the woman can just manage one meal fit to offer company. No use asking you to come over and try it, I suppose?

(*As* PAMELA *says this, the* MAJOR *catches her eye without the* COLONEL *noticing, and shakes his head.*)

COLONEL (*with grave courtesy*). No, my dear. I think George here will tell you I'm not quite fit enough yet to go out.

PAMELA (*hastily*). No, of course not. Later, perhaps. And anyhow, I'll be dashing in from time to time—if you want me to.

COLONEL (*smiling*). Of course. Always delighted to see you, Pamela. Besides— (*his manner changes slightly but noticeably*) I think I forgot to tell you that I'm expecting Diana in a few days' time.

PAMELA (*startled*). Diana!

(*The* MAJOR *catches* PAMELA'S *eye again and nods meaningly at her.*)

COLONEL (*rather testily*). Yes, yes. Why not?

PAMELA (*hastily*). Yes—of course. I wasn't thinking. Lovely to see her again.

COLONEL (*slowly*). When is it, George? My memory's so bad. Next Tuesday, isn't it?

MAJOR (*with a hint of a humouring tone*). That's right, Philip. Tuesday more or less, I fancy. Day I've always been fond of—

Tuesday. Always hated Mondays and Fridays—scratchy sort of days.

PAMELA (*following the* MAJOR'S *lead*). I think I like Wednesday least, though I've not the foggiest notion why.

COLONEL (*rising slowly; gravely*). Excuse me, Pamela. And don't go. Talk to George. But I've just remembered I haven't spoken to Mrs Probus about Diana's room. Must have everything ready for her in good time.

MAJOR (*rising*). Don't trouble, old man. I can attend to it.

COLONEL (*rather testily*). Certainly not. My business. (*He moves above the settee, then to the door up* R.) Least I can do for the child.

(PAMELA *rises.*)

(*He stands by the door.*) But don't run away, Pamela—I shan't be long.

(*He exits slowly and carefully up* R. *The* MAJOR *and* PAMELA *stand watching him.*)

PAMELA (*lowering her voice; urgently*). So he's just the same.

MAJOR (*easily*). Yes. Always will be now, I think.

PAMELA. Lord—I nearly dropped an awful brick. But I'd forgotten for the moment—and when he said so calmly he was expecting Diana—I nearly jumped out of my skin.

MAJOR. My fault—I ought to have warned you he was still the same.

PAMELA. I don't know how you can bear it. I couldn't.

MAJOR. Let's sit down, shall we?

PAMELA (*indecisively*). I really ought to be going.

MAJOR. Don't unless you really must. He'll remember asking you to stay—and he might worry if he finds you've slipped away.

PAMELA. I see. Well, it's the least I can do, I suppose. (*She sits on the settee at the* L. *end of it.*)

(*The* MAJOR *sits in the easy chair* C. *and re-lights his pipe.*)

But as I was saying—I don't know how you bear it. I know I couldn't.

MAJOR. He's an old friend, you know, and gives me a home here—and it's not much to ask in return—just to help him to keep his illusion going. You and I have probably a few illusions too that we'd like one or two people to help us cherish.

PAMELA. I have. One of 'em is that poor Wilfred was still in love with me when he got himself killed. But I'm not sure you've many little illusions, Major Buttershaw. Having a good look at you all over again, I suspect there's more in you than used to meet my eye.

MAJOR (*smiling*). I doubt it. You're flattering me—and very nice, too. But—going back to the Colonel—you must remember

too that I'm a medical man of sorts—old R.A.M.C. wallah, y'know —so I keep a kind of professional eye on him.

PAMELA. What about that wretched woman in the kitchen—Mrs Probus—who was devoted to Di ?

MAJOR. Yes, she takes it badly. Often comes to me in tears and threatens to leave, but I manage to jolly her along somehow. And young Lesley helps.

PAMELA. Ah—yes—there's little Lesley. I'd forgotten about her.

MAJOR. Good girl that. Don't know her well, do you ?

PAMELA. No, not had a chance. Remember, I haven't been round here much since Di's death—and it was after that that Lesley settled here. Not quite my type, I'm afraid. And I'm certainly not hers—remembering some of the cracks she took at me last time I was around. Not got herself engaged or anything yet, I suppose ?

MAJOR (*with a twinkle*). Doesn't get much of a chance, poor kid. But I fancy she has a high standard—my influence probably.

PAMELA. Ten to one she'll end up with five children on a ruined poultry farm in North Wales. It's a pity she wouldn't do for . . . (*She breaks off and rises.*) No, that's idiotic— (*she moves restlessly to the fireplace, looks at and touches the ornaments on the mantelpiece*) I'm forgetting. (*She moves restlessly to the sideboard up* C. *and again looks at and touches things on it.*)

MAJOR (*mildly*). Stop flitting about.

PAMELA (*moving to the writing table* R.). I can't help it. You shouldn't have made me stay. (*She fidgets with the pens.*) Suddenly —now—I feel all churned up.

MAJOR. Well, take it easy. And what's idiotic—and what are you forgetting ?

PAMELA (*turning*). Do you know who's coming to stay with me tomorrow ?

MAJOR. No. Are you changing the subject ?

PAMELA. Not really. (*She moves above the easy chair* R.C.) You'll see. (*Rather defiantly.*) Ivor Kemp is coming.

MAJOR (*gravely*). That's not a good idea, is it ?

PAMELA. Oh—I suppose not. But I ran into him in town, and he seemed rather miserable, and he can be so amusing at times—and I felt sorry for him and thought how bored I'd be down here. And why isn't it a good idea ? What does it matter now ? I'll keep him away from the Colonel, of course. And Douglas Barrow is still away, isn't he ?

MAJOR. o, he isn't.

PAMELA (*aghast*). Are you sure ?

MAJOR (*rising*). I caught sight of him in Longbridge only two days ago. (*He picks up his drink from the coffee table, moves to the fireplace, stands with his back to it and drinks, emptying his glass.*)

PAMELA. Oh, Lord ! I told poor Ivor I was certain Douglas was still abroad somewhere. Still—we shall be ten miles apart—

and I'll just have to be careful about asking people who invite us anywhere, if Douglas is going to be there. How did Douglas look ?

MAJOR. As if he was drinking at least as hard as ever. (*He looks at his empty glass.*) And, incidentally, so am I. (*He moves to the sideboard.*) Join me ?

PAMELA. No, thanks, it's too soon after tea. Where do you chaps get all your booze from ?

MAJOR (*pouring out a whisky and soda for himself*). Fellow who runs the wine and spirit department of the brewery at Longbridge used to be our Quartermaster. Besides, nobody here except me does any serious drinking.

PAMELA (*lightly*). But you're quite the little rumpot, aren't you ?

MAJOR. Yes, but it keeps me good-tempered. There's another type, who should never be allowed to touch it, who get angry when they drink.

PAMELA. Like Douglas Barrow, for instance.

MAJOR. Quite so. (*He drinks.*)

PAMELA (*after a pause ; suddenly*). I wish I hadn't come down now. I don't like this. I thought this wretched Diana business was all done with.

MAJOR (*moving to the fireplace*). Well, isn't it ?

PAMELA (*easing down* C.). Somehow it doesn't feel like it. The Colonel still talking about her as if she was alive—giving me the creeps. And I'm here again—and I've gone and asked Ivor Kemp to stay—and Douglas is back again. I don't like it. I don't like it at all.

MAJOR. It's a mere coincidence.

PAMELA. I don't like coincidences of this sort. I'm not sure I believe in them either.

MAJOR (*coolly*). And I'm not sure I do.

PAMELA (*half humorously, half seriously*). You're a comfort, aren't you ?

MAJOR. I try to be. Take it easy. And if you've got something on your conscience, try to forget it. (*He drinks.*)

PAMELA (*eyeing the* MAJOR). What do you mean—something on my conscience ?

MAJOR. I don't know.

PAMELA (*sharply*). I should think not.

(MRS PROBUS *enters noisily up* R. *She is an elderly woman, once a childrens' nurse and now a housekeeper. She is a rather vague, worrying woman, with a slight country accent. At this moment she is extremely worried, almost in tears. She carries a large tray.* PAMELA, *startled, turns quickly.*)

MAJOR. Where's the Colonel, Mrs Probus ?

MRS PROBUS (*agitatedly*). Gone up to her room himself— (*she moves to* R. *of the settee*) and talking about having a fire lit in there—he would go, and nothing I could say would stop him. I know how

it is with the Colonel—and I'm as sorry for him as you are, Major Buttershaw—but I tell you, I can't stand much more of it.

MAJOR. All right—I'll attend to him. (*He drinks, emptying his glass.*) He oughtn't to be up there by himself—it's dangerous. (*He puts his glass on the coffee table and moves up* L.)

MRS PROBUS. I daresay—but I couldn't stop him. You know what he is.

MAJOR. I'll bring him down. Shan't be a minute, Mrs Fotheringham.

(*He exits up* L. PAMELA *stands and watches* MRS PROBUS, *who moves to the coffee table and begins, rather slowly, to put the tea things on the tray.*)

PAMELA (*quietly*). I must say I don't blame you, Mrs Probus. He gave me a shock—talking about Diana coming here next week. I nearly dropped a very nasty brick.

MRS PROBUS (*stopping her business with the tea things*). Well, what do you think it's like for me—who brought her up since she was a baby—felt about her as if she was my own?

PAMELA. Yes, of course. We all know that.

MRS PROBUS (*almost tearfully*). It's like somebody digging up a grave—not letting the poor thing rest at last.

PAMELA (*breaking* R.). Oh—for God's sake . . .

MRS PROBUS (*looking steadily at* PAMELA). There's no need to start talking like that, Miss Pamela—I mean, Mrs Fotheringham.

PAMELA (*turning; hastily and apologetically*). I know—I'm sorry. Something upset me, too. I wish Colonel Risborough would come down—and then I could say good-bye and go.

MRS PROBUS (*resuming her work with the tea things*). He'll come down if the Major tells him he ought to. That's how it is here now, though you mightn't think it. (*She straightens up, looks at* PAMELA *and lowers her voice.*) Looks like nobody much round here, doesn't he, with his soft pussy way and his pipe and his whiskies?

PAMELA (*confidentially*). You mean—the Major?

MRS PROBUS (*confidentially*). Yes. Looks just like a hanger-on, so to speak, doesn't he? But don't make no mistake about that one.

PAMELA (*moving to* R. *of* MRS PROBUS; *softly*). You sound as if you don't like the Major very much.

MRS PROBUS (*sourly*). I don't know as I like anybody very much any more. And half my time I feel as if I'm walking about in a miserable dream that I can't get out of.

PAMELA (*with a rather false cheerfulness*). Now—Mrs Probus—it isn't as bad as that.

MRS PROBUS (*looking at* PAMELA). Perhaps not, Mrs Fotheringham. But if you'll excuse me—and, after all, I've known you since you were a little girl—I wouldn't say you were feeling so good neither, these days.

(PAMELA *reacts, but tries to pass it off.*)

PAMELA (*crossing below* MRS PROBUS *to the fireplace*). Probably not. But then—who is ?

(LESLEY DEREHAM, *the* COLONEL'S *niece, enters up* R. *She is an attractive girl in her early twenties, with something open and direct about her, in sharp contrast to the other characters we have so far met. Her manner is genuinely cheerful. She wears outdoor walking clothes, with a bright scarf around her neck.*)

LESLEY (*moving* C.). Oh—hello, Mrs Fotheringham.

PAMELA. Hello, Lesley. How are you ?

LESLEY. I'm fine, thank you.

MRS PROBUS (*moving with the loaded tray above the settee*). This tea's finished long since.

LESLEY (*looking at the tray*). It doesn't matter, thanks. I don't want any. (*She takes two scones from the tray.*) I'll just take two of these. (*She eats the scones during the next few speeches.*)

(MRS PROBUS *exits with the tray up* R.)

PAMELA. You seem rather gay.

LESLEY (*easing down* C.). I feel rather gay—somehow.

PAMELA. Any particular reason ?

LESLEY. No. But you know the way sometimes you feel that everything's all right really.

PAMELA. That sounds like a young man to me.

LESLEY (*irritated*). Well, it isn't. And I don't see why it has to be.

PAMELA. It usually is.

LESLEY. Well, this time it isn't. As a matter of fact I've just walked four or five miles by myself, and haven't spoken to a soul—except to exchange the usual good afternoons.

PAMELA. Don't you find it boring here just with two old men ?

LESLEY. Yes, often.

PAMELA. I couldn't endure a week of it.

LESLEY (*dryly*). No, I don't suppose you could.

PAMELA (*imitating a cat*). Miauw !

LESLEY. No, it isn't miauw at all. I wasn't being catty—I was just stating a fact. Where's uncle Philip ? You've seen him, haven't you ?

PAMELA. Yes, we had tea together. Then he went off to see that Diana's room would be ready for her next Tuesday.

LESLEY (*calmly*). Yes, he still won't admit to himself that she's dead. The Major says he never will now—that it's a definite fixed thing he must accept. About everything else he's quite sane—though of course he forgets easily—and rather sweet really.

PAMELA (*staring at* LESLEY). I must say—you take it very calmly.

LESLEY. Well, why not ?

PAMELA (*uneasily*). I couldn't. In fact, I can't.

LESLEY. But why shouldn't you ? After all, he's an old man—

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