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SF PERUSALS

MOTHER'S DAY

A Comedy in One Act

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

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CHARACTERS

MRS ANNIE PEARSON
GEORGE PEARSON
DORIS PEARSON
CYRIL PEARSON
MRS FITZGERALD

The action takes place in the living-room of the Pearsons' house in a London suburb

Time: the present

MOTHER'S DAY

SCENE—*The living-room of the Pearson family. Afternoon.*

It is a comfortably furnished, much lived-in room in a small suburban semi-detached villa. If necessary only one door need be used, but it is better with two—one up L *leading to the front door and the stairs and the other in the* R *wall leading to the kitchen and the back door. There can be a muslin-covered window in the* L *wall and possibly one in the* R *wall, too. The fireplace is assumed to be in the fourth wall. There is a settee up* R, *an armchair down* L *and one down* R. *A small table with two chairs either side of it stands* C.

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

When the CURTAIN *rises it is an afternoon in early autumn and the stage can be well lit.* MRS PEARSON *at* R, *and* MRS FITZGERALD *at* L, *are sitting opposite each other at the small table, on which are two teacups and saucers and the cards with which Mrs Fitzgerald has been telling Mrs Pearson's fortune. Mrs Pearson is a pleasant but worried-looking woman in her forties. Mrs Fitzgerald is older, heavier and a strong and sinister personality. She is smoking. It is very important that these two should have sharply contrasting voices*—MRS PEARSON *speaking in a light, flurried sort of tone, with a touch of suburban Cockney perhaps; and* MRS FITZGERALD *with a deep voice, rather Irish perhaps.*

MRS FITZGERALD (*collecting up the cards*) And that's all I can tell you, Mrs Pearson. Could be a good fortune. Could be a bad one. All depends on yourself now. Make up your mind—and there it is.

MRS PEARSON. Yes, thank you, Mrs Fitzgerald. I'm much obliged, I'm sure. It's wonderful having a real fortune-teller living next door. Did you learn that out East, too?

MRS FITZGERALD. I did. Twelve years I had of it, with

my old man rising to be Lieutenant Quartermaster. He learnt a lot, and I learnt a lot more. But will you make up your mind now, Mrs Pearson dear? Put your foot down, once an' for all, an' be the mistress of your own house an' the boss of your own family.

MRS PEARSON (*smiling apologetically*) That's easier said than done. Besides I'm so fond of them even if they are so thoughtless and selfish. They don't mean to be . . .

MRS FITZGERALD (*cutting in*) Maybe not. But it'ud be better for them if they learnt to treat you properly . . .

MRS PEARSON. Yes, I suppose it would, in a way.

MRS FITZGERALD. No doubt about it at all. Who's the better for being spoilt—grown man, lad or girl? Nobody. You think it does 'em good when you run after them all the time, take their orders as if you were the servant in the house, stay at home every night while they go out enjoying themselves? Never in all your life. It's the ruin of them as well as you. Husbands, sons, daughters should be taking notice of wives an' mothers, not giving 'em orders an' treating 'em like dirt. An' don't tell me you don't know what I mean, for I know more than you've told me.

MRS PEARSON (*dubiously*) I—keep dropping a hint . . .

MRS FITZGERALD. Hint? It's more than hints your family needs, Mrs Pearson.

MRS PEARSON (*dubiously*) I suppose it is. But I do hate any unpleasantness. And it's so hard to know where to start. I keep making up my mind to have it out with them—but somehow I don't know how to begin. (*She glances at her watch or at a clock*) Oh—good gracious! Look at the time. Nothing ready and they'll be home any minute—and probably all in a hurry to go out again . . .

(*As she is about to rise,* MRS FITZGERALD *reaches out across the table and pulls her down*)

MRS FITZGERALD. Let 'em wait or look after themselves for once. This is where your foot goes down. Start now. (*She lights a cigarette from the one she has just finished*)

MRS PEARSON (*embarrassed*) Mrs Fitzgerald—I know you mean well—in fact, I agree with you—but I just

can't—and it's no use you trying to make me. If I promise you I'd really have it out with them, I know I wouldn't be able to keep my promise.

MRS FITZGERALD. Then let me do it.

MRS PEARSON (*flustered*) Oh no—thank you very much, Mrs Fitzgerald—but that wouldn't do at all. It couldn't possibly be somebody else—they'd resent it at once and wouldn't listen—and really I couldn't blame them. I know I ought to do it—but you see how it is? (*She looks apologetically across the table, smiling rather miserably*)

MRS FITZGERALD (*coolly*) You haven't got the idea.

MRS PEARSON (*bewildered*) Oh—I'm sorry—I thought you asked me to let you do it.

MRS FITZGERALD. I did. But not as me—as *you*.

MRS PEARSON. But—I don't understand. You couldn't be me.

MRS FITZGERALD (*coolly*) We change places. Or—really—bodies. You look like me. I look like you.

MRS PEARSON. But that's impossible.

MRS FITZGERALD. How do you *know?* Ever tried it?

MRS PEARSON. No, of course not . . .

MRS FITZGERALD (*coolly*) I have. Not for some time, but it still ought to work. Won't last long, but long enough for what we want to do. Learnt it out East, of course, where they're up to all these tricks. (*She holds her hand out across the table, keeping the cigarette in her mouth*) Gimme your hands, dear.

MRS PEARSON (*dubiously*) Well—I don't know—is it right?

MRS FITZGERALD. It's your only chance. Give me your hands an' keep quiet a minute. Just don't think about anything. (*Taking her hands*) Now look at me.

(*They stare at each other*)

(*Muttering*) *Arshtatta dum—arshtatta lam—arshtatta lamdumbona . . .*

(*This little scene should be acted very carefully. We are to assume that the personalities change bodies. After the spell*

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