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SF PERUSALS

LOVE IN A SUBURB

A Comedy in One Act

by

PHILIP JOHNSON

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CHARACTERS

QUEENIE TREMAYNE.
JUTTY.
MRS. DOBSON.
SADIE DOBSON.
EDWIN BOSWORTH.
LILY BOSWORTH.
TONY MORTIMORE.

The play happens in the sitting-room of the Dobsons' house in one of the London suburbs, on a Sunday evening in late Spring.

N.B.—All stage directions are given from the point of view of the audience.

LOVE IN A SUBURB

The SCENE *is the sitting-room of a small villa in one of the outer suburbs of London.*

The one door is R.C. *back. This, when open, leads to a tiny hall, and so to the rest of the house and the front door which, invisible to the audience, is off* R. *In the middle of the* R. *wall is a window draped with lace curtains looped back by satin ribbon, the whole being framed by a pelmet and side hangings of patterned cretonne. Nothing can be seen through the window save a rather angry-looking bush which lives in the tiny front garden. The fireplace must be presumed to be in the fourth wall. The furniture is depressingly undistinguished.* L.C. *is a square table, with straight-back chairs to front, back and* R. *of it. Two more straight-back chairs are placed against the* L. *wall, and between them is a glass-fronted china-cabinet, on top of which is a glass-encased clock which is not going. Against the back wall, to* L. *of the door, is a side-board, upon which are several vases, including two fairly large ones holding dyed pampas grass, a number of framed photographs, a cruet and a large, wide-eyed doll, with a mop of hair, and wearing nothing but a scrap of tinsel ribbon tied in a bow. In the upstage* R. *corner of the room is a standard lamp with a long-fringed shade. Against the* R. *wall above the window, is a chair of the semi-easy kind, and in front of the window is a bamboo table upon which is some kind of plant growing in a highly-coloured pot. Below the window, against the wall, is a bureau and a small chair. Upon the bureau is a telephone and a few books and magazines. In the centre of the room, set at a slight angle, is a settee with two or three brightly-coloured cushions of very glossy silk. To* R. *of this, and rather more down stage, is an easy-chair placed at*

an angle to face down L. *There are a number of pictures on the walls, all of them, like the furniture, completely undistinguished. Such, then, is the main furnishing of the room. Other pieces may be added at the discretion of the producer, who must bear in mind that the general effect must be one of unswerving refinement and respectability, allied, as is so frequently and unhappily the case, to utter lack of taste. The only objects which do not appear to quite "belong" are the doll and the cushions on the settee.*

At six o'clock on a Sunday evening in late spring, the sole occupant of the room is MISS QUEENIE TREMAYNE. QUEENIE *yields to the description: "fair, fat and forty." Her hair is a gleaming riot of golden waves and curls; her figure is—well—shall we say full-blown? She is lavishly made up: lips crimsoned into a luscious Cupid's bow, cheeks carmined, eyelids faintly but unmistakably blued.* QUEENIE *is wearing, when we first meet her, an elaborately trimmed but not very fresh-looking dressing-gown and ostrich-feather-tipped mules. To sum up one's impression,* MISS TREMAYNE *certainly looks something to write home about—though not perhaps to one's mother. . . . She is sitting on the* L. *end of the settee, leaning well back, and polishing her scarlet nails with a buffer. Beside her, on the settee, is a little pile of about half a dozen picture postcards. For a moment, she continues polishing; then, breaking off, she holds out her hand to study the effect, utters a* "H'm!", *breathes hard on her nails and starts again. There is a knock at the door.*

QUEENIE (*calling*). Come right in!

(*The door opens and* JUTTY, *the servant, appears.*)

Oh, it's you, dear, is it? Come in!

(*The only colour in* JUTTY'S *face is at the extreme tip of her nose, which is faintly flushed with pink. She*

has a permanent cold, and a tendency to break into loud snuffling giggles. She has some difficulty in negotiating the door, for she is carrying a tray which really needs the support of both hands. Upon it are a cut-glass decanter of wine, several wine-glasses, and a small plate of biscuits.)

JUTTY (*having got herself into the room—closing the door with her foot*). I'm ever so sorry to disturb you, Miss Tremayne.

QUEENIE (*still polishing*). That's all right, Jutty. I'm only doing my nails.

(*Having closed the door,* JUTTY *starts to carry the tray to the table, walking with little hurrying steps which almost develop into a run before she reaches the table and slams the tray down on it.*)

JUTTY. *There! That's* it! And what I say is: may it damn-well choke 'em, one and all!

QUEENIE (*looking up*). Why, dear, what's the matter now?

JUTTY. Matter? Is there ever any need to ask in this 'ouse? (*A jerk of her head towards the door.*) 'Er, of course. Expecting comp'ny to-night, if you please! Comp'ny, indeed!

QUEENIE (*twisting round slightly—surveying the tray*). My! And no expense spared, either, eh? A quarter of a pound of mixed biscuits, no less, and a bottle of mock sherry! What's the celebration, dear?

JUTTY. Don't ask me, for I don't know, and I don't care—and that's that!

QUEENIE (*soothingly*). Now, now, Jutty, don't get all hot and bothered. It never pays. See, sit down a minute.

JUTTY. And 'ave 'er come in and catch me? No fear!

QUEENIE (*resuming her polishing*). You do as I tell you, dear, and sit down. You're as much my servant as hers, aren't you? More, in fact. If she hadn't me here as lodger, she couldn't afford a servant

at all. Sit down.

JUTTY (*going towards down* L). Oh, well, just for a minute, then—thank you, Miss Tremayne. (*She sits on the chair against the wall down* L.)

QUEENIE. Not, of course, that I'm ever referred to as the lodger. (*Affecting a devastating accent.*) Oo, noo, may deah! Ay'm a paying guest. (*She holds out her hand again—studying her nails.*) Silly old cat!

JUTTY. 'Ow she come to 'ave a nice girl like Sadie for a daughter beats me.

QUEENIE (*with a shrug*). Just one of life's mysteries, dear.

JUTTY. I *like* Sadie.

QUEENIE. Me too, dear. 'Course, she isn't my style, really. Too quiet. Still, she's a nice girl, and I like her. . . . But I thought it was your evening out, Jutty.

JUTTY. So it was. I'm 'aving to stop in on account of the comp'ny, drat 'em!

QUEENIE. What a shame, dear! (*Polishing again.*) And were you meeting your gentleman friend?

JUTTY (*with a nod—unenthusiastically*). Same old place, where I've met 'im every blessed night off for the last eight years—outside "The June Moon Café."

QUEENIE. "June Moon"? It sounds romantic, doesn't it?

JUTTY (*gloomily*). I used to think so, but some'ow I don't any more.

QUEENIE (*looking at her*). You don't mean . . . he isn't beginning to cool off, dear?

JUTTY. I dunno. . . . After all, eight years is a long time . . . and I'm beginning to feel he doesn't think about me that way any more—if you know what I mean.

QUEENIE. Do I not! The blackest day in a woman's life, Jutty dear, is when it first dawns on her, that if *he'd* to choose between her and a dozen oysters, the oysters would win at a canter. (*A gusty sigh.*) Heigh-ho! (*Polishing briskly.*)

JUTTY. It isn't anything 'e's said, mind you. It's—oh, I dunno—just little things.

QUEENIE. It always is. . . . You catch him giving you a funny sort of look; or it's chrysanthemums on your birthday, when it's always been orchids before; or it's the way he kisses you, like as if you were his aunt—the one with the hare-lip. Oh, my dear, you can't tell me!

JUTTY. It's the way 'e's taken to slapping me that's made me think.

QUEENIE (*interrupting her polishing—holding the buffer in mid-air*). Slapping you, dear?

JUTTY (*with a nod*). It's just a little trick of 'is—always after we've said good-night and I turn to leave 'im—'e'd give me a little slap on the be'ind—playful, you know. . . . 'E still does, but it doesn't seem so playful any more. . . . I'm sure the other night I 'ardly knew whether 'e'd slapped me or kicked me.

QUEENIE. Well, if you ask me, dear, it's about time you knew where you stood.

JUTTY. Another like that, and I won't be standing at all: I'll be flat on my face.

QUEENIE. Then you take my advice: let him see you're not to be trifled with! Get him in a corner and say straight out, "When are you going to lead me to the altar, Walter?"

JUTTY (*who has a literal mind*). 'Is name's Ben.

QUEENIE. Then why not just—"Say when, Big Ben!"

JUTTY. 'E isn't big, neither: 'e's just a paltry little squit of a man, that's all.

QUEENIE. Well, say something to him, anyway! Letting him ride roughshod over you like this! I'd be ashamed!

JUTTY. For two pins, I'd chuck 'im. I would, too, if I thought I could get another.

QUEENIE (*polishing again*). There's plenty of other fish in the sea, dear, surely.

JUTTY (*gloomily*). So there may be; 'e's the only

one I've ever come near to landing. And what's more, I'm not getting any younger, and I can't pretend I am—not with a name like mine. It was one thing for us to win the Battle of Jutland, but it was another for my parents to go and call me after it. It dates me for ever.

QUEENIE. And what of it. You should never let age get you down, dear. I don't—or at least, I shan't when the time comes. . . . And another thing, Jutty: you should use a little make-up on your evenings out. Just the merest touch—discreet, you know—like me.

JUTTY. I never 'ave. My dad was that dead against it. Leave your face as Nature made it, was 'is motto.

QUEENIE. It was my dad's, too—till the day I took his shaving things to the rag-and-bone man and swapped 'em for a couple of air-balloons and a bird-warbler. That shut him up all right. (*She tosses the buffer on to the table.*) Oh, well, that's that!

JUTTY (*rising*). And I guess I'd better be getting a move-on, eh. (*Suddenly espying the postcards on the settee.*) Ooh, Miss Tremayne, are them the photos you promised you'd show me?

QUEENIE. Oh—yes, I'd forgotten.

JUTTY (*hurrying to* R. *of* QUEENIE—*snatching up the postcards*). Ooh, let me look! Let me look!

QUEENIE (*rising*). That's right, dear. Give your eyes a treat. (*She takes a cigarette from a box on the table and proceeds to light it.*)

JUTTY (*studying the first of the postcards*). Ooh!—Ooh, but, Miss Tremayne, it's beautiful! And look what it says! (*Reading.*) "Miss Queenie Tremayne as 'Prince Charming'." There!

QUEENIE. Theatre Royal, Hanley, nineteen never-mind-what.

JUTTY. Ooh, but you don't 'alf look lovely in tights, miss, eh?

QUEENIE. I think I may say I filled them all right, dear.

JUTTY (*looking at another postcard*). And this one,

too! Just look! (*Reading.*) "Miss Queenie Tremayne. 'Jack and the Beanstalk'."

QUEENIE. Grand Theatre, Runcorn.

JUTTY. Just see all these lovely spangles on your bodice! 'Ow you must 'ave glittered!

QUEENIE. The chandelier at the Odéon was a foggy night, compared.

(*The telephone bell rings.*)

There! That'll be Birdie! (*Snatching the postcards.*) You can see them some other time, dear.

(*She tosses the postcards on to the settee, hurries to the bureau, lifts the receiver, and sits. During the commencement of* QUEENIE'S *telephone speech, Jutty goes to the table, alters the position of the tray slightly, then goes up stage and off, closing the door behind her.*)

(*At the telephone.*) Hullo? . . . Birdie, dear, I thought it was you! . . . Oh, I'm all right. I took a couple of Aspros before I went to bye-byes, and woke up as right as rain. . . . Yes, dear, I know. . . . Well, dear, I'm sure I'd no wish to make a scene, I'm not that sort, but when it came to her insinuating I was common, it was time to speak up for myself—her, if you please! What? . . . No, I did not. My exact words, dear, were "You may have been two years in Non-Stop Revue, in a pair of black stockings and a bit of cellophane, but even that doesn't mean that you're a lady." . . . Yes, dear of course I will. . . . No, not "The Unicorn." I can't stand that parrot there. It makes a noise like drawing corks every time it sees me. . . . Yes, dear, "The Golden Anchor," saloon-bar, and I'll tell you all about it. . . . Bye-bye, Birdie dear, see you later.

(*Replacing the receiver, she leans back, takes a deep draw at her cigarette, and sends a cloud of smoke curling ceilingwards. The door opens and* MRS. DOBSON *enters. She is in the early fifties: a rather*

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