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# **FAMILY ALBUM**

by Alan Ayckbourn

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*FAMILY ALBUM* was first produced by the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough (Round auditorium), on 6th September, 2022. The performance was directed by Alan Ayckbourn, with set and costume design by Kevin Jenkins and lighting by Jason Taylor. Sound by Alan Ayckbourn and Sound Associate Paul Stear. The Deputy Stage Manager was Sue Volans. The two Assistant Stage Managers, Jude Deeno and David Lomond, also played the non-speaking removal men roles. The cast was as follows:

**JOHN STANTON** ..... Antony Eden  
**PEGGY STANTON** ..... Georgia Burnell  
**SANDRA DICKENS** ..... Frances Marshall  
**ALISON STANTON-HICKS** ..... Elizabeth Boag  
**JESS STANTON-HICKS** ..... Tanya-Loretta Dee  
**TWO REMOVAL MEN** ..... Jude Deeno & David Lomond

## CHARACTERS

### February, 1952. Moving In

**JOHN STANTON** – 29, a warehouse supervisor, ex RAF

**PEGGY STANTON** – 27, a housewife, his wife

### July, 1992. The Birthday Party

**SANDRA DICKENS** – 48, a former primary teacher, daughter of John and Peggy

### November 2022. Moving Out

**ALISON STANTON-HICKS** – 40, a freelance graphic designer, daughter of Sandra

**JESS STANTON-HICKS** – 38, her partner, a BBC researcher

### c1952 and 2022

**TWO REMOVAL MEN** – non-speaking and very different in both time periods

## SETTING

The front living room of 27, Byfield Crescent, SW19.

## TIME

Between the years 1952 and 2022.

The three time periods are often seen simultaneously.

In **ACT TWO**, in all cases, a certain time has elapsed.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

The following serves as a family tree, showing all the unseen, offstage family members as well as the ones we will see on stage, and referencing their point in time during each phase of the action.

### February, 1952. Moving In

The Grandparents:

**JOHN STANTON** – 29, a warehouse supervisor, ex RAF,  
**PEGGY (MARGARET) STANTON (NEÉ CADDICK)** – 27, a housewife, his wife

Their Children:

**SANDRA (SANDY)** – 8  
**RICHARD (DICKIE)** – 6

### July, 1992. The Birthday Party

The Parents:

**SANDRA (SANDY) DICKENS (NEÉ STANTON)** – 48, a former primary teacher  
**JEREMY DICKENS** – 45, her husband, a sports master

Their Children:

**TERENCE** – 14  
**EDWARD** – 12  
**ALISON** – 10

Sandra's parents, **JOHN** – 69 and **PEGGY** – 67 are in a retirement home

Sandra's brother, **RICHARD** – 46, is now a dispensing chemist

### November 2022. Moving Out

The Children:

**ALISON STANTON-HICKS** – 40, a freelance graphic designer  
**JESS STANTON-HICKS** – 38, her partner, a BBC researcher

Alison's brother, **TERENCE** – 44, is now a QC

Alison's brother, **EDWARD** – 18, deceased

Alison's parents are both deceased. **JEREMY** – 70 and  
**SANDRA** – 78

Alison's grandparents are both deceased. **JOHN** – 90 and  
**MARGARET** – 96

**TWO REMOVAL MEN** – c 1952 and 2022 (non-speaking and very different in both time periods)

## ACT ONE

*(The front living room of 27, Byfield Crescent, SW19.)*

*(The action moves freely from time period to time period.)*

*(There is a single doorway, common to all periods, leading to the rest of the house, upstairs and downstairs as well as to the front door. A front window looking out onto the street.)*

*(The room is devoid of furniture at the start in the earliest period, 1952. The **STANTONS, JOHN** and **PEGGY**, are in the process of moving in on a late February afternoon. **PEGGY**, a twenty-seven year old mother and housewife, enters from the hall. She is unfamiliar with her new house and moves rather cautiously to the centre of the empty room. It is clearly unheated and she has opted to keep her coat on. She stands for a moment looking round her with a certain pleasure and excitement.)*

**PEGGY.** *(To herself.)* Hello, room. Hello, house.

*(From the hall, the 1952 doorbell rings.)*

*(Starting, clearly unfamiliar with this.)* Oh! Doorbell!

*(She hurries to the window and takes a quick peek out.)*

They're here already!

*(She goes out to the front door.)*

*(As soon as she has gone, the lights change and it is now a July afternoon with the sun streaming through the front window. In the hall, a phone is ringing insistently.)*

*(We are now in the 'middle' period, July 1992, where there is currently a child's tenth birthday party in progress in the adjoining dining room. This room is accessed by way of a double doorway recently knocked through by the owners during the previous decade. It is therefore non-existent to the residents occupying the house during the earlier period in February 1952.)*

*(As the phone rings on insistently, the doors to the dining room open and SANDRA, a mother of three in her late forties, sticks her head out to listen. She is clutching a glass of what could be orange squash but is probably something far stronger. During the course of the afternoon she becomes steadily more intoxicated. She was, twenty years ago, what was known in those days euphemistically as 'a child of the sixties'. Behind her can be heard the chatter of a dozen or so excited children's voices.)*

**SANDRA.** *(Calling back to them.)* Sshh! Sshh! Sshh! Just a minute, kids! Sshh, a moment!

*(The dining room sounds die down slightly.)*

*(Confirming the phone ring.)* Yes! You're quite right, it is, it's ringing! You're quite right!... What's that? ... Yes, it could, it could well be Daddy now, Alison,

couldn't it? Naughty Daddy's late again isn't he? After he promised this morning. Wait there quietly, everyone please! Jennifer, you're in charge remember! Jennifer's in charge, everyone so do exactly as Jennifer tells you! Ali darling, it's your party, help Jennifer to look after your guests, please! See they behave properly! Mummy won't be a moment!

*(She closes the dining room doors and the sounds cut off from within.)*

*(To herself, catching her breath.)* Jesus wept! How much longer?

*(As the phone continues to ring, she makes her way to the hall in a somewhat uncoordinated fashion and goes out. After a moment, it stops ringing.)*

*(The lights change back again to February 1952 and **PEGGY** re-enters having let in the **REMOVAL MEN**. During the next, she busily divides her attention between the window, checking on the unloading progress outside and the hallway, as the **REMOVAL MEN** pass with various neatly labelled cartons and tea chests.)*

**PEGGY.** *(Calling behind her to the **REMOVAL MEN**.)* That one has a red label and it goes in the kitchen, as well. Anything with a red label goes in the kitchen. Straight down the hall again, please...

*(A **REMOVAL MAN** appears in the hall doorway presenting her with a blue labelled tea chest.)*

*(Distracted.)* Yes, same again, kitchen please. *(Calling him back.)* No, wait! Wait! Just a tick! Hasn't that got a blue label? That's meant for the dining room! Next door in the dining room! Next door on the right! *(Calling*

*after him.*) If we ever find where on earth I packed the kettle, I'll make you that cup of tea I promised! *(To herself.)* If we've got any tea to spare, that is. I've a nasty feeling we're running out.

*(Another box is presented.)*

*(Checking this.)* What's this, then? Ah, yes. Yellow label? Most important! Children's room! Precious toys! Mustn't lose the toys whatever we do! Upstairs! Children's room! Top of the stairs, turn left, small back bedroom.

*(The REMOVAL MAN departs.)*

*(Calling after him.)* Where your colleagues have just taken the bunk beds.

*(SANDRA returns from the hall, now holding the cordless phone. As she crosses back to the dining room doors, the lights change briefly.)*

**SANDRA.** *(Muttering to herself as she crosses.)* Bloody wrong numbers! Where the hell have you got to, Jerry, you bugger? Coping here all on my own! You promised me, you promised...

*(She opens the dining room doors.)*

*(A burst of children's voices from within.)*

*(As she does so.)* Sorry, kids! False alarm! Alison's daddy's done a runner! *(To herself.)* Yet again!

*(She closes the door behind her and the sounds cut off.)*

*(PEGGY remains anxiously at the window. Needless to say, neither woman is aware of the other, nor indeed are any of the characters from the different time periods. As the lights change back to 1952, a REMOVAL MAN backs*

*on supporting one end of a fairly large three-seater sofa, bearing a green label.)*

**PEGGY.** *(Prattling excitedly.)* Ah, now! Yes, right. Green label! That does go in here! Do mind the new paintwork, won't you? If there's even so much as the teeniest scratch, my husband will go absolutely mad. Everything's just so sparkling new, it's terrifying. I mean once the children run loose in the place, it's never going to last, is it? *(She laughs.)*

*(During the last, the **REMOVAL MEN** have struggled to move the sofa to the middle of the room. It's clearly quite heavy. They wait.)*

*(Chattering on excitedly.)* It's just that this is our first place together, you see, our first proper home of our very own, you see, so it's all rather special, just at present. Up till now, as you probably noticed, we've been camping out with my parents, just the two rooms. We have been ever since the war. But now, thank heavens, we're able to get back to some sort of normality, at last. Get on with our own lives.

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** continue to wait.)*

*(Considering the best position.)* Yes. I think the best place for that is against that wall there, don't you?

*(They move the sofa to the wall.)*

*(As they do so.)* I mean, don't get me wrong, my parents have been wonderful, tremendously supportive. And so generous. Most of this furniture used to be theirs and they've simply gifted it to us. Like that sofa for instance – *(Re-considering.)* – No, I'm sorry, I think on second thoughts, it's better against that wall there, would you mind? I'm awfully sorry –

*(They move the sofa to the other wall.)*

*(As they do so.)* I mean, since my husband left the Air Force he's landed a pretty good job, of course, we mustn't complain, we've been awfully lucky but by the time he'd dealt with the mortgage and so on, we could never have afforded a sofa like that, not in a month of Sundays. *(Reconsidering again.)* No, that's not right either. It doesn't belong there, not at all. We were right the first time. Sorry, would you mind, as you were before –?

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** move the sofa back again.)*

*(As they do so.)* No, I mean, that sofa is genuine Victorian. It was built to last. Not like some of the cheap utility stuff these days. The Victorians knew how to make them, didn't they? Good old British craftsmanship, solid mahogany, best quality horsehair – no that's still not right, I'm sorry, I think what we'll need to do is wait till we get everything else in here before we finally decide. I'll need to consult my husband, he should be home from work any minute now. Thank you so much, do carry on with your unloading, won't you?

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** move back towards the door.)*

*(A sudden second thought.)* Oh, I say, I say! Before you go, I know you're going to hate me for this, you're really going to loathe me, but would you be terribly sweet and just try it in the middle here? Thank you so much.

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** return and start to move the sofa once again.)*

*(As they do so, laughing.)* Sorry. I know you must be thinking this is the very last time we move house for this woman! The very last time! I think it's so important, isn't it, to get these things right? I mean, in the end, you have to live with it, don't you?

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** place the sofa in the middle of the room, facing the window.)*

*(Making final adjustments.)* Little bit towards me.

*(They make the adjustment.)*

Little bit more. Whoaa! Little bit back. That's it! Whoaa! That's perfect. Absolutely spot-on. Thank you. I can't thank you enough. Thank you so much.

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** leave. **PEGGY** studies the sofa for a second and then sits on it.)*

No, this is perfect. We can sit here and look out on the street, can't we? *(Craning her neck.)* Just about. No, this is lovely. Lovely.

*(The lights change back to the 1992 state as the phone starts ringing again in the hall. This time it quickly cuts off and, in a moment, **SANDRA** comes out of the dining room, accompanied by the usual children's hubbub, this time with the phone clamped to one ear, covering the other with her free hand. **PEGGY** sits, oblivious, on the sofa in her own dream world.)*

**SANDRA.** ...well, where are you exactly? Jerry, it's her bloody birthday... you knew it was her birthday... yes you bloody did because I reminded you this morning... don't forget Alison's party... that was the last thing I said to you as you walked out the door... now she keeps asking, "Where's Daddy? Is Daddy coming?"... Well, when are you coming home? When can I tell her to expect you? ...Jesus, Jerry, of course she does. She worships the bloody ground you walk on, you know that... she doesn't want me, she wants you... only you're never here for her, are you...? No, never. You weren't even there for her christening, were you?

(**SANDRA** goes out into the hall, as she talks.  
The lights change back to 1952.)

**PEGGY.** (*Murmuring happily to herself.*) Oh, this is heaven! It's such a peaceful house... so peaceful. We're going to be so happy here, I know we are.

(*The **REMOVAL MEN** return carrying a writing desk and stool. They pause in the doorway.*)

Ah! Yes, please, that's another green label, well done, that's in here, thank you. (*Considering.*) I think – just along that wall there, don't you?

(*The **REMOVAL MEN** place the writing desk in position.*)

(*As they do so.*) I was just thinking, this sofa's in the perfect position, you know. Perfect. It means that from here I can see out of the – Oh, look! There he is now, my husband's just arrived. (*Waving and mouthing.*) Hello, darling!

(*The **REMOVAL MEN** move back to the door, nearly colliding with **JOHN**, a brisk, energetic man, a couple of years older than his wife and clearly ex-services. He is holding the day's edition of The Evening News.*)

**JOHN.** (*As he enters.*) Excuse me, have you seen my – Ah! Here you are, darling, you're in here!

**PEGGY.** (*Happily greeting him.*) Darling!

**JOHN.** (*Jocularly.*) What are you up to then, old thing? Lounging about as usual, I see.

**PEGGY.** Just trying out our sofa. I think I've found the perfect place for it, don't you?

**JOHN.** How are these chaps getting on, then? Everything unloaded, is it?

**PEGGY.** I think very nearly. It's all been very efficient. Largely thanks to your brilliant idea with all the coloured labels. It's been quite hectic, here. I'd no idea we had so much stuff.

**JOHN.** Well, your parent's furniture took up most of the van...

**PEGGY.** We needed furniture, darling...

**JOHN.** Yes we certainly did, but...

**PEGGY.** ...we couldn't have survived without furniture, could we...?

**JOHN.** ...No, not at all, but...

**PEGGY.** ...We couldn't all sit on cardboard boxes, could we?

**JOHN.** Yes, yes, point taken, darling. Anyway, sorry to leave you to cope on your own, old thing. Needs must. We've been having a massive stock-take. Took a bit of getting used to for everyone, since I introduced the new filing system.

**PEGGY.** Well, you have to go to work, of course you do. We're all relying on you, darling.

**JOHN.** (*Sitting beside her.*) No, don't get me wrong, it was most generous of your parents, much appreciated. Especially the bed.

**PEGGY.** (*Giggling slightly.*) Yes, 'specially the bed. (*She nuzzles him affectionately.*) And, come to think of it, I'm glad we still have this sofa, aren't you?

**JOHN.** How do you mean?

**PEGGY.** You remember? Whenever you came home on leave, when it was in Mummy and Daddy's drawing room, we used to...

**JOHN.** (*Smiling.*) Oh, yes, yes, of course. Yes. So we did.

**PEGGY.** (*Patting the sofa.*) I think this sofa was partly responsible for Sandra, if you recall...

**JOHN.** Scene of the crime, eh?

**PEGGY.** (*Frowning.*) No! Hardly a crime, darling. I wouldn't call it a crime... we were just too nervous to go up to my bedroom, weren't we?

**JOHN.** Well, you were...

**PEGGY.** I was...

**JOHN.** I blame you entirely for that.

**PEGGY.** (*Indignantly.*) Me? Why me?

**JOHN.** If you hadn't insisted on making such an infernal din about it...

**PEGGY.** (*Somewhat embarrassed.*) I couldn't help that, it was – natural, wasn't it?

**JOHN.** Natural?

**PEGGY.** I mean, for a woman. It's in a woman's nature for most of them.

**JOHN.** (*Amused.*) Well, I won't argue with you there. From my experience, it's in a woman's nature to make a din about most things... (*He laughs.*)

**PEGGY.** (*Laughing affectionately.*) Oh, you're terrible, you're such a tease!

**JOHN.** No, they were particularly thin walls in your parent's house... I still remember your father snoring through the wall next to me, when I was home on leave... it was almost like having him in the same bed as us.

**PEGGY.** Poor Daddy!

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** start to back in with a heavy sideboard.)*

**JOHN.** (*Seeing them.*) Yes, come on in, chaps! Green label! That belongs in here, thank you.

**PEGGY.** Oh, not the dining room?

**JOHN.** No, not blue label. In here. It's green label.  
Definitely in here.

**PEGGY.** I thought that might be better in the dining room?  
I thought perhaps it should be blue label...

**JOHN.** No, darling, green label, green label! (*To the  
REMOVAL MEN.*) Carry on, chaps! Ignore this woman!  
Just along that wall there, please.

**PEGGY.** Are you sure, darling?

**JOHN.** Not according to the plan, darling. We did draw up  
a colour-coded master plan, if you remember.

**PEGGY.** Well, you drew up a master plan.

**JOHN.** (*To the REMOVAL MEN.*) Thank you, that's perfect.  
(*To her.*) Don't you agree, darling, it looks splendid  
there?

*(The REMOVAL MEN depart again.)*

**PEGGY.** Yes, fine. It's just I always associated it with the  
dining room. It sat there in Mummy and Daddy's  
dining room, for years, ever since I was little. We used  
to keep all the cutlery and the condiments in there.  
Along with the best crockery. It was just so handy at  
mealtimes. My sister and I used to love laying the table,  
whenever Mummy allowed us to.

**JOHN.** Yes, I do remember it in their dining room. In  
my opinion, it never really looked quite right in there.  
Don't complain now, it's where we put it on the plan.  
Where we agreed. It's perfect where it is. Where have  
you put the plan, by the way?

**PEGGY.** (*Guiltily.*) I've - I think I may have mislaid it...

**JOHN.** Mislaid it?

**PEGGY.** I'm sorry, darling, I put it down somewhere,  
I can't think where I -

**JOHN.** For heaven's sake, Pegs! You dozy bumpkin! I spent half the night drawing that up!

**PEGGY.** (*Unhappily.*) Yes, I know you did. I can't think where I left it.

**JOHN.** Everything was marked out to the nearest inch...

**PEGGY.** I think I may have left it back at the other house.

**JOHN.** ...all drawn up to scale. One in twenty.

**PEGGY.** It did all seem rather – if you don't mind my saying so – rather clinical, somehow. If you know what I mean. It was like a sort of military operation, really...

**JOHN.** That's precisely what this is, Pegs, a military operation. It requires precision planning. Everything in its proper place. Everything belongs where it belongs.

**PEGGY.** I just thought it would be nice if we simply moved everything in and then just sort of decided. Once we were in here. Improvised, you know. As the mood took us.

**JOHN.** (*Blankly.*) Improvised?

**PEGGY.** Let it all – you know – choose for itself. Willy-nilly.

**JOHN.** Willy-nilly?

**PEGGY.** Let things go where they feel they're – most happy.

**JOHN.** Right-o. We'd better go round and ask them then, haven't we?

**PEGGY.** No, don't be silly...

**JOHN.** I warn you, if we start asking each stick of furniture where it would prefer to go, we're going to end up living in a very peculiar house, if that's your plan of action, darling. Kitchen stove over here, kids' bunk beds over there, your dressing table in the middle of the hall there...

**PEGGY.** ...no, no, no, that's silly...

**JOHN.** ...it'll be absolute chaos, if every item of furniture was allowed to go where it feels like, we'd probably finish up sleeping on the front lawn.

**PEGGY.** No, John, you know what I'm saying, don't be so mean...

**JOHN.** Yes, I know perfectly well what you're saying, you daft little darling, but then you know perfectly well what I'm saying, too, don't you? So don't start pretending to be dopier than you are. (*Seriously.*) This is our first proper home together, Pegs, as a family. The four of us. You, me, Dickie and Sandy. Now we're no longer glorified lodgers, tiptoeing about the place, for ever talking in hushed whispers. Think of it, Pegs, we're under our own roof at last! No more thin partition walls, no more shushing the kids because granddad's having his nap. We're free, aren't we? Free to do as we choose?

**PEGGY.** (*Catching his tone.*) Yes, quite right, we're free!

(**JOHN** rises. He studies the room. He stares at the writing desk and shakes his head.)

What's the matter?

**JOHN.** (*Staring at the writing desk.*) No, that's not right! Quite wrong!

**PEGGY.** What's that?

(*He crosses to the door.*)

**JOHN.** (*Calling.*) I say! I say! Have you a moment, one of you?

(*The REMOVAL MEN return.*)

That desk is in the wrong place. It should go across the window there. Would you mind?

**PEGGY.** (*Dismayed at the suggestion.*) Oh! Are you sure?

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** move it into position, more or less directly between them and the window.)*

**JOHN.** That's it! That's it! Perfect!

That's much more like it, isn't it? That's where it belongs. Perfect.

**PEGGY.** What? Just there? Across the window?

**JOHN.** It makes sense. That way you'll get the light. See what you're doing.

**PEGGY.** No, but it spoils the view, doesn't it? I mean, sitting here I was enjoying the view. Just now, I could sit here and watch you coming up through the gate. Home from work. Now there'll be a desk in the way, won't there?

**JOHN.** Yes, but look at it this way – *(To the **REMOVAL MEN.**)* – carry on, chaps, ignore her – look at it this way. You'll be sitting at your desk doing your household accounts in a perfectly good light, so there's no strain on your eyes and you can still glance up and see me coming through the gate just the same.

*(The **REMOVAL MEN** have left during the last.)*

**PEGGY.** I'd still like the sofa here. So long as we have curtains, that is.

**JOHN.** *(Doubtfully.)* Curtains in the daytime, it's going to get pretty dark in here, isn't it?

**PEGGY.** No. Net curtains.

**JOHN.** Net curtains?

**PEGGY.** *(Giggling.)* To stop people looking in at us getting up to no good on the sofa.

**JOHN.** Net curtains weren't part of the plan, were they?