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MR. & MRS. SPARKES

Six One Act Plays

by Mabel Constanduros
and Howard Agg

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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INTRODUCTION

The following plays are six little events that happen to Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes, a quiet, domesticated couple living in a small suburban house near London.

They all take place in the little sitting-room of the Sparkes' house. It is a neat, bright, soulless-looking room, furnished in fumed oak and deep fawn moquette with splashes of brown: quite pleasant and comfortable but, like hundreds of its kind, entirely without character.

Up R. is the door, with below it the fireplace. On each side of the fireplace is an easy chair, and beside the one up stage is a rack with books and papers in it. Opposite the fireplace are french windows leading out to the small garden. Below the french windows is a small table on which is the telephone. Another table, circular in shape, is in the centre of the room. Against the back wall is a cabinet holding books in one section and a hugger-mugger assortment of cheap china ornaments in the other. There are one or two familiar prints on the walls—such as "The Soul's Awakening" and "Wedded"—in nice brown frames picked out with gold. Also, there is a picture of Mr. Sparkes's mother and Mrs. Sparkes's father in similar frames. Here and there, dotted about the room, are little pieces of pottery and brass which Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes have picked up on their holidays; and over the fireplace are a handsome pair of antlers which they bought recently at a second-hand shop—because they like antlers.

* * * * *

As Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes figure in each play, and Mrs. Bocking and the Inspector in others, it will be as well to describe them here, at the beginning:

MR. NELSON SPARKES is a little man: kind, meek and tolerant—except, occasionally, with his wife, when he can be quite surprisingly terse and dominating. He speaks very precisely and lends to every topic of conversation—be it the weather, gardening, or the morning train—a serious consideration that is most impressive, though in anyone else it would seem a little comic. He is very contented with

his lot in life, which is that of a traveller in a cheese firm. He has no sense of humour, but in spite of it manages to be likeable.

MRS. SPARKES—or “Mummie”—is quiet, gentle and unobtrusive, and always very conscious of her husband’s superiority, which one doesn’t suppose she has ever thought of questioning. She listens with awe and admiration to his exploits in the big world of Cheese and Commerce into which he is whisked every morning by the 8.35 train, and thinks how noble and clever he is. Sometimes she is a little fussy in her over-eagerness to keep him healthy and comfortable, and this annoys him: also her grasp of a subject can be very feeble, due to her almost complete credulity, and this annoys him even more. But what are these tiny flaws, he often asks himself, in a wife who is in every other way “a treasure”?

MRS. BOCKING is a gaunt, sharp-featured lady with an acid tongue and a genius for gossip. Beside her Mummie presents the spectacle of a chirping little wren against a swooping hawk. She lives next door to the Sparkeses.

THE INSPECTOR—her brother—is a powerful-looking man with a brusque, down-to-business manner and a sharp eye. But there is a kind look in his face. He always wears plain clothes and an overcoat and carries his hat in his hand all the time he is on the stage.

* * * * *

There are other characters in the plays, but they will best be described as and when they appear.

PLAYS

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These plays were first produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation, commencing June 16th, 1941, with the following casts:

NELSON SPARKES	<i>Richard Goolden.</i>
MUMMIE	<i>Mabel Constanduros.</i>
MRS. BOOKING	<i>Phyllis Morris.</i>
SYDNEY CARTER	<i>Jack Livesey.</i>
NURSE SCHOFIELD	<i>Muriel Ake.</i>
THE SAILOR	<i>Carl Bernard.</i>
INSPECTOR	<i>Arthur Young.</i>
AUNT REBECCA	<i>Dora Gregory.</i>
SHARPE	<i>John Bryning.</i>
ALICE	<i>Betty Hardy.</i>

Plays produced by MARY ALLEN.

THE WHITE RUSSIAN*

CHARACTERS

NELSON SPARKES.

MUMMIE.

MRS. BOOKING.

INSPECTOR.

When the CURTAIN rises it is just after lunch on a Saturday afternoon, and MR. SPARKES is sitting in his chair by the fire (the one up stage) stooping down to tie the laces of his gardening shoes. He is wearing an old tweed jacket, which he always uses to garden in, with a pair of dark trousers turned up well over his shoes to prevent them getting dirtied.

The door of the room is open and in a moment MUMMIE comes in. She has on a summer frock of a rather drab, lifeless material with a necklace of cheap glass beads.

MUMMIE. Oh, ducksie, would you like a cup of tea before you go in the garden? It'll freshen you up.

NELSON. No, dear, I'm afraid I haven't time. I've got a big afternoon in front of me. I'm sticking the peas, you know.

MUMMIE. Are you, dear? How exciting.

NELSON. Oh, Mummie, I forgot! How stupid of me. *(He puts his hand in his pocket.)*

MUMMIE. What, dear?

NELSON. Your birthday present. I meant to give it you at lunch and I forgot all about it.

MUMMIE. Not another one, dear? You gave me a lovely cake of soap last week. Don't you remember?

NELSON. Ah, but Nelson's been an extravagant boy. Look! *(He hands her, with some ceremony, a small paper packet.)*

MUMMIE *(taking it gingerly)*. What is it?

NELSON. Open it carefully and you'll see.

(MUMMIE begins to unwrap first a layer of brown paper, then tissue paper, then more tissue paper, finally revealing a little cardboard box.)

MUMMIE *(opening it)*. I can't think what it is.

* Please see page 6.

NELSON. I hope you'll like it.

MUMMIE (*the box is open—her eyes shining*). Oh, ducksie! A brooch! That isn't for me?

NELSON. Yes.

MUMMIE. Oh, but—it isn't a real emerald?

NELSON. Well, Mummie, that's not a very nice thing to say. Don't you like the brooch?

MUMMIE (*taking the brooch out of the box and holding it up*). Like it! I shall never dare to wear it. I never *saw* such a stone. Look at the way it catches the light. (*With sudden concern*.) Nelson. You're—all right, aren't you?

NELSON. Quite, dear. Except that cheese always rises a little, you know. Why?

MUMMIE. Because, Nelson, if this emerald's real it must have cost—well—pounds and pounds.

NELSON. I expect it did when the Czar bought it.

MUMMIE. The Czar! Not of Russia?

NELSON. Yes, dear. There isn't a Czar of anywhere else.

MUMMIE. But, ducksie, you didn't know the Czar.

NELSON. No, dear; but to-day I met a white Russian who did.

MUMMIE. A white what, dear?

NELSON. Russian. You know, dear, some Russians *were* white.

MUMMIE. Oh, were they? And what colour were the others?

NELSON. I'm afraid I forgot to ask him. You see, he was so busy telling me about the Crown Jewels. His mother brought a lot of them out of Russia.

MUMMIE. Why, dear?

NELSON. Well, dear, you see, she was a friend of the Czar's, and he lent her his silver aeroplane to escape from Russia.

MUMMIE. Who, dear?

NELSON. His mother.

MUMMIE. Whose mother, dear? You're muddling me.

NELSON. The white Russian's.

MUMMIE. Oh. You see, dear, you hadn't told me before that he had a mother.

NELSON. Well, Mummie, everyone has a mother.

MUMMIE. Unless they're orphans, dear.

NELSON. Well, he wasn't. When his mother was flying in the Czar's silver aeroplane over the sea, another aeroplane started to chase them.

MUMMIE. There!

NELSON. And this white Russian's mother, who was a very impetuous lady, leaned out of the aeroplane window to shake her fist——

MUMMIE. Fancy.

NELSON. No, dear, it's not fancy—it's true. She shook her fist so hard that all the Crown Jewels fell into the sea, except the Grand Duchess Sonia's emerald brooch.

MUMMIE. And why didn't that drop too, dear?

NELSON (*in a low voice*). Well, dear, to tell you the truth, it—fell down her corsage.

MUMMIE (*understandingly*). Oh! Oh, I see.

NELSON. Poor fellow, it was all that was left between him and starvation.

MUMMIE. What? The corsage?

NELSON. No, the brooch. He was so hungry, Mummie, he'd have taken anything for it. All he asked me was twenty-five shillings. I gave him twenty-five-and-six.

MUMMIE. Quite right to be generous, dear. (*Putting the brooch back in the box, and laying the box down on the table in the centre of the room.*) I think I'd better put it away at once. It's far too valuable to wear. Put your scarf on, dear, if you're going to garden. It was sweet of you, ducksie. You might easily have spent that twenty-five-and-six on that stuffed seagull you wanted so much.

NELSON (*going to the french windows*). It had gone, dear. I asked. (*Suddenly stopping—looking out.*) Mummie! Look out of the window. There's a dog walking right over my lettuces. Oh, that is too bad. Grrr! Booo! (*He waves his hands.*) People have no right to let their dogs tromple over other people's gardens. (*Calling out.*) Hi! Hi! Call off your dog! It's trompling on my garden. Mr. Brown!

(*He vanishes through the open french windows, still calling.*)

MUMMIE (*calling after him*). Ducksie! You've forgotten your scarf. Oh dear, oh dear . . .

(*A bell rings in the house.*)

Now, I wonder who that is, and the lunch not cleared away.

(*She crosses to the door and goes out into the hall. Her voice in the hall.*)

Oh, it's you, Mrs. Bocking. Do come in, won't you?

MRS. BOCKING (*coming in*). So sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Sparkes, but could I borrow half a teacupful of flour?

MUMMIE. Certainly. Sit down while I get it.

MRS. BOCKING. Thank you.

MUMMIE (*going towards the door*). Do excuse the mess I'm in. Mr. Sparkes got back rather late. You know what men are: the later they are, the longer they take over their meals.

MRS. BOCKING. You don't need to tell me anything about men

being late for meals, my dear. You ought to live with my brother—he's an inspector at Scotland Yard, you know. What he costs me in gas hotting up his meals, I simply daren't tell you. (*Suddenly and in quite a different voice.*) My dear. Whatever's this on the table? (*She has caught sight of the brooch lying in the box on the table.*)

MUMMIE (*by her side*). Oh, it's only a little birthday present.

MRS. BOOKING (*slowly and meditatively*). An emerald half-moon brooch set in diamonds. (*Quickly.*) Where did you get that?

MUMMIE. My naughty extravagant husband bought it for me.

MRS. BOOKING. Bought it? Where?

MUMMIE. From a Russian—a white one.

MRS. BOOKING. When?

MUMMIE. To-day. He's just given it to me. Why?

MRS. BOOKING (*impressively*). Have you read to-day's papers?

MUMMIE. No. What with it being Saturday and Mr. Sparkes coming home to dinner and all the shopping, I haven't had a moment.

MRS. BOOKING. Then you don't know about the burglary?

MUMMIE. What burglary?

MRS. BOOKING. Last night. Old Mrs. Crawley. You know, lives in the big white house in its own grounds on the main road—or did live. Broke in, my dear, just before midnight, bashed her on the head with a blunt instrument, and took all her jewels.

MUMMIE. Oh dear. How dreadful! So near here, too. Doesn't make you feel very safe, does it? I'm glad I didn't know, because Mr. Sparkes was out till nearly one o'clock last night.

MRS. BOOKING (*darkly*). Your husband was out till one o'clock last night?

MUMMIE. Yes, he was entertaining a customer. He has to, sometimes, you know, when they buy a lot of his cheeses. They went to a music-hall.

MRS. BOOKING. H'mm. . . . Did you happen to see the programme?

MUMMIE. No, I don't think he brought it home. But he sang a lot of the songs. He was very lively. He can be very comical when he likes, you know.

MRS. BOOKING (*with portentous gravity*). Mrs. Sparkes, far be it from me to plant suspicion where none is, but the most valuable piece stolen from poor Mrs. Crawley last night was an emerald half-moon brooch set in diamonds.

MUMMIE. Really? If you'll just sit down I'll fetch the half-teacupful of flour—

MRS. BOOKING (*with feeling*). Down in this house, Mrs. Sparkes, I cannot sit.

MUMMIE. But why not, Mrs. Booking? There's nothing the matter with you, is there?

MRS. BOCKING. Don't try to throw wool in my eyes, Mrs. Sparkes.

MUMMIE. Throw wool? What do you mean?

MRS. BOCKING. It's no good your seeking to prevaricate with me, Mrs. S. I know all.

MUMMIE. But what do you know, Mrs. Bocking?

MRS. BOCKING. My poor woman, do you mean to say you don't see?

MUMMIE. See what?

MRS. BOCKING (*very darkly and slowly*). The most valuable piece of jewellery stolen from Mrs. Crawley last night was an emerald half-moon brooch set in diamonds.

MUMMIE (*with a gasp—her hands to her face*). Mrs. Bocking!!

MRS. BOCKING. When I came in and laid my eyes on that brooch, you could have knocked me down with a feather.

MUMMIE. But Mr. Sparkes bought it, Mrs. Bocking. He told me so.

MRS. BOCKING. You'd take the word of a burglar?

MUMMIE. Oh, Mrs. Bocking, don't say such things about my husband.

MRS. BOCKING. My poor soul, I know what a dreadful shock it must be. I mean, you didn't know you were marrying a burglar, did you?

MUMMIE. Of course not. And he isn't.

MRS. BOCKING. Oh? Then how do you account for the presence of Mrs. Crawley's brooch on your dining-room table?

MUMMIE (*pitifully*). I've told you, Mrs. Bocking, Mr. Sparkes bought it off a white Russian.

MRS. BOCKING. I don't care if he *said* he bought it off a black Zulu.

MUMMIE. But he did. He even told me the price. It was twenty-five shillings.

MRS. BOCKING. For that! (*Quietly*.) My poor deluded creature, d'you know how much that emerald's worth? Ten thousand pounds.

MUMMIE. Oh, how dreadful! (*She sinks down into a chair by the table*.)

MRS. BOCKING (*towering over her*). D'you suppose any Russian, whatever colour he was, would sell it for twenty-five shillings? No, Mrs. Sparkes. I'm afraid you'll have to face it—unpleasant as it's going to be. Your husband is a secret burglar.

MUMMIE (*faintly*). Oh no!

MRS. BOCKING. And not only that—a manslaughterer, too.

MUMMIE. Oh, don't!

MRS. BOCKING. I'm only being cruel to be kind. What time did you say he came home last night?

MUMMIE (*with a gasp*). After one.