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A Play in One Act

THE OPEN WINDOW

H. H. MUNRO (Saki)

A Dramatization by

JAMES FULLER



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE OPEN WINDOW)

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THE OPEN WINDOW

A Comedy in One Act

For One Man, Three Women and Two Extras

CHARACTERS

Framton Nuttel. *a visitor*

Mrs. Sappleton. *the hostess*

Vera. *the niece*

Maria. *the maid*

Two Extras

PLACE: *The living room of an English country home.*

TIME: *Recently.*

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Mrs. Sappleton's living room (main set): table, sofa, easy chair, tea table, dark prints on walls and as many other furnishings as space permits.

OPTIONAL: Bookcases along walls.

VERA: Note and envelope, sweater or jacket.

MARIA: Small silver tray, tea tray with tea service (napkins, cups, plates, spoons, cream and sugar, biscuits, tea and hot water).

MRS. SAPPLETON: Wrist watch.

EXTRAS: Shotguns, dog on leash.

TEMPO

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

THE OPEN WINDOW

SCENE: *The living room of a country home in England. As the curtain opens, we discover a pleasant English living room. It is furnished rather fully with comfortable old furniture (preferably of some standard period). The walls have prints of hunting scenes or dark oil portraits of ancestors. The room may double as a library, with bookcases along one wall. D R is a sofa with a small table in front of it for serving tea. U C there are French windows, opening on an exterior background that shows several trees in the distance. U L is an easy chair, with a table beside it. In the wall D L is a doorway. The whole atmosphere of the room is one of pleasant country charm, perhaps a little heavy and cluttered, and in no sense sophisticated.*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *VERA SAPPLETON, an attractive, casually dressed young lady of sixteen, is reading a note that has been brought to her on a little silver tray by MARIA, the maid, an attractive twenty-year-old, dressed in a maid's costume.*

VERA *(slowly folding the letter and returning it to its envelope).* It's a letter of introduction to my aunt from that woman who rented Bellingham Hall the summer before last.

MARIA. My oldest sister, the one that got married, worked for them. Very nice they were, she said.

VERA. What does he look like?

MARIA. I never met him.

VERA. No, no--the young man who brought this letter of introduction.

MARIA. I thought you meant the man my sister worked for but if it's the person waiting in the hall, he's nice enough. He looks as if he might be an Oxford man except for his tie.

VERA. Well, I'll try and entertain him until my aunt is ready. You better take the letter of introduction to her.

MARIA. Yes, miss.

VERA. But show the young man in first.

MARIA. Yes, miss. *(Goes to door D L.)*

(VERA straightens her dress slightly and crosses to the chair U L. As soon as she sits in it she looks around to the door--realizes she is poorly placed --gets up and walks a few steps over to the sofa. She seats herself carefully, adjusting her skirts so she presents an attractive appearance. While she is finishing this maneuver the door D L opens and FRAMTON NUTTEL walks in. He is followed by MARIA.)

MARIA*(announcing the caller)*. Mr. Nuttel.*(Goes out DL closing the door behind her. FRAMTON NUTTEL is a well-dressed, attractive young man, perhaps a trifle pale of complexion and nervous of manner.)*

VERA *(rising and extending her hand, speaking pleasantly)*. How nice to meet you, Mr. Nuttel. I am Vera Sappleton. My aunt will be in presently. In the meantime you must try to put up with me.

FRAMTON *(crossing, shaking hands with her diffidently)*. It is most kind of you to receive me.

VERA. We're delighted to have you call. We don't get many visitors here in the country.

FRAMTON. My sister recommended Hampton Heath

as a wonderful quiet spot. She and her husband had a most enjoyable season here.

VERA. Won't you sit down?

FRAMTON (*who has been shifting somewhat nervously from one foot to the other*). Thank you. (*Looks around and decides to settle for the easy chair U L. VERA reseats herself on the sofa in the same pose that she had assumed previously.*)

VERA. Everyone will be delighted to meet you. It's lovely here but it does get a bit dull sometimes.

FRAMTON. Dullness! That's just what the doctor ordered.

VERA (*probing for mutual ground*). You've been ill?

FRAMTON. Oh, yes, yes. That's why I am here.

VERA (*moving forward in her seat with interest*). Was it anything . . . special?

FRAMTON (*pompously*). The pressures of academic life. I was working a little too hard. (*Continues with faint superiority.*) I am afraid it was rather abstruse.

VERA. What effect did it have?

FRAMTON. Well--I became very nervous--easily upset, you know.

VERA. And so your doctor recommended Hampton Heath?

FRAMTON. Not specifically.

VERA. But something like it?

FRAMTON. Yes, exactly. He suggested I find some quiet rural place where nothing ever happens.

VERA (*firmly*). I see. So then your sister immediately thought about us?

FRAMTON. Well, not exactly.

VERA. But she did suggest you come down here?

FRAMTON. Certainly. She spoke with much affection of Hampton Heath as a lovely rural part of England, filled with charming people who were interested in hunting and dogs and horses. Things

of that sort

VERA (*warmly*). You'll have quiet and a lot of fun, too. There's simply no end of things to do! Really, there are lots of ways of entertaining yourself.

FRAMTON (*trying to enter into the spirit*). Entertaining one's self. The very thing my doctor told me. Bracing strolls in the country air. (*Takes several deep breaths, as if in anticipation.*) Early to bed--(*Glumly.*)--early to rise.

VERA (*dubiously*). Well--lots of us prefer to hunt instead of just ambling about.

FRAMTON. You hunt?

VERA. A little. I like to ride, but my mare's in foal. I can hardly wait to see what sort of colt she has. I'm hoping for a chestnut, but the Countessa--my mare--is more of a bay herself.

FRAMTON (*condescendingly*). It'll be a regular Irish Sweepstake winner, no doubt. (*Ending it.*) Riding isn't for me.

VERA (*dubiously*). Well--(*Trying another tack.*) The garden is quite lovely this time of year. Roses do beautifully in this cool weather. As if they were having one last fling before winter. (*Eagerly.*) Would you like to see the garden?

FRAMTON (*coldly*). I suppose so. Digging in the ground and all that. (*Sighs.*) Oh, well--my doctor was right. I'll get all sorts of peace and quiet here. (*Not meaning a word of it.*) Of course, I'd love to see your garden--some day. Perhaps--(*Hesitates briefly for an excuse.*)--we had best wait till your aunt . . .

VERA (*understanding*). Of course.

FRAMTON. I suppose there's a village fair that's pretty exciting?

VERA. Now, you're making fun of us.

FRAMTON. I wouldn't think of it.

VERA. There aren't many village fairs any more.

FRAMTON. I'm just a bit out of my milieu, you know. (*Brightens.*) I saw a 'pub' so I know at least I can get a glass of something if it gets cold in the night.

VERA. It closes at ten-thirty.

FRAMTON (*incredulously*). You can't be serious?

VERA (*the perfect lady*). I suppose it all seems impossibly rustic after the excitement of London and the West End.

FRAMTON. Of course, a little of that was involved, too.

VERA. A little of what?

FRAMTON. With so many activities I got quite overtired.

VERA. The theatre, I suppose, the opera . . . I envy you.

FRAMTON. I don't go very often except to musicals, you know, but we had a regular table at the New Way Night Club.

VERA (*inquiringly*). We?

FRAMTON. Just a group of friends.

VERA. It must be pretty exciting for a group to go out together like that.

FRAMTON. Mostly it is, unless something unpleasant comes up.

VERA. What sort of things?

FRAMTON. Just a little spot of trouble now and then.

VERA. Oh?

FRAMTON. Really, nothing much. But sometimes something occurs that puts a damper on things, like when Cecily Hamilton and Peter Smythers were in an auto accident and Cecily's husband sued her for divorce, but one has to expect that sort of thing. Though I'm dashed if I can see how Peter could have risked his new Morgan Four, going around the wrong side of a lorry. (*Pauses a moment.*) Perhaps Cecily encouraged him.

VERA (*dubiously*). I can see all that must be very exciting. (*Brighlens.*) The hunt ball comes up next month. We'll see you don't miss that. It is really the most colorful event of the fall.

FRAMTON (*not wanting to be involved in anything*). Well, of course, I don't know what my health will be by then. One hopes for the best but . . . (*His voice trails off.*)

VERA. Certainly.

FRAMTON. With so many friends of my sister to call on, I don't want to get *involved* with anyone in particular.

VERA (*realizing he thinks she has been angling for an invitation*). Oh, I wasn't suggesting . . . (*Realizing there is no practical way to say it, continues slowly.*) . . . anything in particular. I'll be there with Henry Hartford. He's got a bay Irish hunter.

FRAMTON (*trying to be of help*). Is this your first dance?

VERA (*stung, but game*). No, I've been going for years and years. (*Pauses, and then continues in a very bright way.*) It certainly was kind of your sister to give you these letters of introduction. Such an opportunity for us all to meet someone from the outside world.

FRAMTON (*falling for it*). She's always thinking of others. She said people hereabouts did so much for her, she really felt quite indebted to them. She gave me several letters and urged me to present them. Really, she's the soul of kindness.

VERA. Then, actually, you know practically nothing about my aunt.

FRAMTON. Aside from her name and address, nothing except that my sister spoke very highly of the whole family.

VERA. Has she been in touch with her recently?

FRAMTON. No, she explained that they had never corresponded. (*VERA'S mood alters subtly at this point. She sits back in her chair and speaks more decisively. She's letting him have it now.*)

VERA. It was probably my aunt's fault because of the tragedy.

FRAMTON. A tragedy? I am sorry to hear that.

VERA. Your sister mentioned it to you, of course?

FRAMTON. Never a word!

VERA. Then it would have been since her time.

FRAMTON (*half rising*). I am sure she wouldn't have wanted me to intrude on you at a time of difficulty.

VERA (*motioning him back*). Oh, no, it happened last year.

FRAMTON (*delicately alluding to his health*). I suppose even the quietest of places have their little upsets.

VERA (*nodding U C toward the open window*). You may wonder why she keeps the window open on an October afternoon.

FRAMTON. It's quite warm for this time of the year.

VERA. It's Aunt. She insists that it be kept the same way.

FRAMTON. What way?

VERA. The way it was last year. You see, this is the anniversary.

FRAMTON. The anniversary of what?

VERA. The tragedy.

FRAMTON (*putting a finger in his collar and easing it*). I am most terribly sorry to hear that. Perhaps I had better call some other time.

VERA. Oh, no. Auntie would be very disappointed. Please sit still.

FRAMTON. Whatever you say.

VERA. Perhaps I should prepare you for meeting her.

FRAMTON (*nervously gulping, and then proceeding*).
Please do.

VERA (*rising and pointing dramatically U C*). Out through that window, one year ago to this very day, her husband, her son and their dog went off for a day's shooting. (*Dramatically.*) They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favorite snipe-shooting ground, all three were engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It was a dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly, without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it.

FRAMTON. I am terribly sorry to hear this. (*Here VERA'S voice loses its self-possessed note and becomes falteringly human. She crosses over, standing just behind and downstage of FRAMTON, whose attention is now riveted upon the open window. The dramatic quality is gone from her speech and she sounds sympathetic and a little faltering, continuing:*)

VERA. Poor Aunt always thinks they'll come back some day and walk in through that window just as they used to do. That's why it's kept open every evening until it is quite dusk.

FRAMTON. Your poor aunt.

VERA. She often told me how they went out. Ronnie, her husband, was singing "Bertie, Bertie, why do you bound?" to tease her because it got on her nerves.

FRAMTON (*turning his head to face her*). A most extraordinary story.

VERA. Of course, we try to humor her.

FRAMTON. Had she been to London to see someone? I mean, they do wonderful things nowadays.

VERA. In every other way she's perfectly all right.

FRAMTON. No nervousness, or anything?