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Dramatic Publishing



A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

JOHN OSBORNE

Look Back in Anger



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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CAST

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

JIMMY PORTER
CLIFF LEWIS
ALISON PORTER
HELENA CHARLES
COLONEL REDFERN

The action throughout takes place in the Porters' one-room flat in a large town in the Midlands.

TIME: *The present.*

ACT ONE: *Early evening. April.*

ACT TWO, *Scene One: Two weeks later.*

Scene Two: The following evening.

ACT THREE, *Scene One: Several months later.*

Scene Two: A few minutes later.

The first performance in Great Britain of LOOK BACK IN ANGER was given at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London, on 8th May, 1956, by the English Stage Company. It was directed by Tony Richardson, and the décor was by Alan Tagg. The cast was as follows:

JIMMY PORTER.....*Kenneth Haigh*
CLIFF LEWIS.....*Alan Bates*
ALISON PORTER.....*Mary Ure*
HELENA CHARLES.....*Helena Hughes*
COLONEL REDFERN.....*John Welsh*

CLIFF [*tying the bandage*]. That too tight?

ALISON. Fine, thank you.

CLIFF. Is it . . . Is it? . . .

ALISON. Too late to avert the situation? [*Places the iron on the rack of the stove.*] I'm not certain yet. Maybe not. If not, there won't be any problem, will there?

CLIFF [*sits down in chair*]. And if it is too late? [*Her face is turned away from him. She simply shakes her head.*] Why don't you tell him now? [*She kneels down to pick up the clothes on the floor, and folds them up.*] After all, he does love you. You don't need me to tell you that.

ALISON. Can't you see? He'll suspect my motives at once. He never stops telling himself that I know how vulnerable he is. Tonight it might be all right—we'd make love. But later, we'd both lie awake, watching for the light to come through that little window, and dreading it. In the morning, he'd feel hoaxed, as if I were trying to kill him in the worst way of all. He'd watch me growing bigger every day, and I wouldn't dare to look at him.

CLIFF. You may have to face it, lovely.

ALISON. Jimmy's got his own private morality, as you know. What my mother calls "loose." It is pretty free, of course, but it's very harsh, too. [*Picks up shirt on floor, drops it.*] You know, it's funny, but we never slept together before we were married.

CLIFF. It certainly is—knowing him!

ALISON. We knew each other such a short time, everything moved at such a pace, we didn't have much opportunity. And, afterwards, he actually taunted me with my virginity. He was quite angry about it, as if I had deceived him in some strange way. He seemed to think an untouched woman would defile him.

CLIFF. I've never heard you talking like this about him. He'd be quite pleased.

ALISON. Yes, he would. [*Crosses D R, puts shirt in drawer.*] Do you think he's right?

CLIFF. What about?

ALISON. Oh—everything?

CLIFF. Well, I suppose he and I think the same about a lot of things, because we're alike in some ways. We both come from working people, if you like. Oh, I know some of his mother's relatives are pretty posh, but he hates them as much as he hates yours. Don't quite know why. Anyway, he gets on with me because I'm common. [*Sits. Grins.*] Common as dirt, that's me. [*She puts her hand on his head, and strokes it thoughtfully.*]

ALISON. You think I should tell him about the baby? [*He gets up, and puts his arm around her. They embrace.*]

CLIFF. It'll be all right—you see. Tell him. [*He kisses her.*]

[*Enter JIMMY. He looks at them curiously, but without surprise. They are both aware of him, but make no sign of it. He crosses to the armchair, and sits down next to them. He picks up a paper, and starts looking at it. CLIFF glances at him, ALISON'S head against his cheek.*]

CLIFF. There you are, you old devil, you! Where have you been?

JIMMY. You know damn well where I've been. [*Without looking at her.*] How's your arm?

ALISON. Oh, it's all right. It wasn't much.

CLIFF. She's beautiful, isn't she?

JIMMY. You seem to think so. [*Picks up paper, sits in chair c.*]

CLIFF and ALISON still have their arms around one another.]

CLIFF. Why the hell she married you, I'll never know.

JIMMY. You think she'd have been better off with you?

CLIFF. I'm not her type. Am I, dullin'?

ALISON. I'm not sure what my type is.

JIMMY. Why don't you both get into bed, and have done with it.

ALISON. You know, I think he really means that.

JIMMY. I do. I can't concentrate with you two standing there like that.

CLIFF. He's just an old Puritan at heart.

JIMMY. Perhaps I am, at that. Anyway, you both look pretty silly slobbering over each other.

CLIFF. I think she's beautiful. And so do you, only you're too much of a pig to say so.

JIMMY. You're just a sexy little Welshman, and you know it! Mummy and Daddy turn pale, and face the East every time they remember she's married to me. But if they saw all this going on, they'd collapse. Wonder what they would do, incidentally. Send for the police, I expect. [*Genuinely friendly.*] Have you got a cigarette?

ALISON [*disengaging*]. I'll have a look. [*Goes to dressing table, picks up purse, sits.*]

JIMMY [*pointing at CLIFF*]. He gets more like a little mouse every day, doesn't he? [*He is trying to re-establish himself.*] He really does look like one. Look at those ears, and that face.

ALISON [*looking through her bag*]. That's because he is a mouse.

CLIFF. Eek! Eek! I'm a mouse. [*"Jumps" across to chair C.*]

JIMMY. A randy little mouse.

CLIFF [*dancing around the table, and squeaking*]. I'm a mouse, I'm a mouse, I'm a randy little mouse. That's a Mourris dance.

JIMMY. A what?

CLIFF. A *Mourris* dance. That's a Morris dance strictly for mice.

JIMMY. You stink. You really do. Do you know that?

CLIFF. Not as bad as you, you horrible old bear. [*Goes over to him, and grabs his foot.*] You're a stinking old bear, you hear me? [*CLIFF has grabbed JIMMY's foot "boot style."*]

JIMMY. Let go of my foot, you whimsy little half-wit. You're making my stomach heave. If you don't let go, I'll cut off your nasty, great, slimy tail! [*CLIFF gives him a tug, and JIMMY falls on floor. CLIFF breaks. ALISON watches them, relieved and suddenly full of affection.*]

ALISON. I've completely run out of cigarettes. [*CLIFF is dragging JIMMY along the floor by his feet.*]

JIMMY [*yelling*]. Go out and get me some cigarettes, and stop playing the fool!

CLIFF. O.K. [*He lets go of JIMMY's legs suddenly, who yells again as his head bangs on the floor.*]

ALISON. Here's half a crown. [*Giving it to him.*] The shop on the corner will be open.

CLIFF. Right you are. [*Kisses her on the forehead quickly.*]
Don't forget. [*Crosses upstage to door.*]

JIMMY. Now get to hell out of here!

CLIFF [*at door*]. Hey, shorty!

JIMMY. What do you want?

CLIFF. Make a nice pot of tea.

JIMMY [*getting up*]. I'll kill you first. [*Throws paper at closing door.*]

CLIFF [*grinning*]. That's my boy! [*Exit. JIMMY is now beside ALISON, who is still looking through her handbag. She becomes aware of his nearness, and, after a few moments, closes it. He takes hold of her bandaged arm.*]

JIMMY. How's it feeling?

ALISON. Fine. It wasn't anything.

JIMMY. All this fooling about can get a bit dangerous. [*Sits on edge of table, holding her hand.*] I'm sorry.

ALISON. I know.

JIMMY. I mean it.

ALISON. There's no need.

JIMMY. I did it on purpose.

ALISON. Yes.

JIMMY. There's hardly a moment when I'm not—watching and wanting you. I've got to hit out somehow. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you, and I still can't stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing—something as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board. [*She strokes his head, not sure of herself yet. He sighs.*] Trouble is—

Trouble is you get used to people. Even their trivialities become indispensable to you. Indispensable, and a little mysterious. [*He slides his head forward, against her, trying to catch his thoughts.*] I think . . . I must have a lot of—old stock . . . Nobody wants it. . . . [*JIMMY places head in ALISON'S lap. ALISON strokes hair, then bends to place cheek against hair. He puts his face against her belly. She goes on stroking his head, still on guard a little. Then he lifts his head, and they kiss passionately.*] What are we going to do tonight?

ALISON. What would you like to do? Drink?

JIMMY. I know what I want now.

ALISON. Weil, you'll have to wait till the proper time.

JIMMY. There's no such thing.

ALISON. Cliff will be back in a minute.

JIMMY. What did he mean by "don't forget"?

ALISON. Something I've been meaning to tell you.

JIMMY. You're fond of Cliff, aren't you?

ALISON. Yes, I am.

JIMMY. He's the only friend I seem to have left now. People go away. . . . You never see them again. I can remember lots of names—men and women. When I was at school—Watson, Roberts, Davies. Jenny, Madeline, Hugh. . . . [*Pause.*] And there's Hugh's mother, of course. I'd almost forgotten her. She's been a good friend to us, if you like. She's so fond of you. I can never understand why you're so distant with her.

ALISON [*alarmed at this threat of a different mood*]. Jimmy—please, no!

JIMMY [*staring at her anxious face*]. You're very beautiful. A beautiful, great-eyed squirrel. [*She nods brightly, relieved.*] Hoarding, nut-munching squirrel. [*Lies back on floor. She mimes this delightfully.*] With a gleaming ostrich feather of a tail.

ALISON. Wheeeeeee!

JIMMY. How I envy you. [*He stands, her arms around his neck.*]

ALISON. Well, you're a jolly super bear, too. A really sooooooooooper, marvelous bear.

JIMMY. Bears and squirrels *are* marvelous.

ALISON. Marvelous and beautiful. [*She jumps up and down excitedly, making little "paw gestures."*] Ooooooooooh! Ooooooooooh! [*Dances around him.*]

JIMMY. What the hell's that?

ALISON. That's the dance squirrels do when they're happy. [*They embrace again.*]

JIMMY. What makes you think you're happy? [*On bed.*]

ALISON. Everything just seems all right suddenly. That's all, Jimmy——

JIMMY. Yes?

ALISON. You know I told you I'd something to tell you?

JIMMY. Well?

[*CLIFF appears in the doorway and leaves door open, picks up paper, stays near door.*]

CLIFF. Didn't get any farther than the front door. Miss Drury hadn't gone to Church after all. I couldn't get away from her. [*To ALISON.*] Someone on the 'phone for you.

ALISON. On the 'phone? Who on earth is it?

CLIFF. Helena something. [*JIMMY and ALISON look at each other quickly.*]

JIMMY [*to CLIFF*]. Helena Charles?

CLIFF. That's it.

ALISON. Thank you, Cliff. [*Moves upstage.*] I won't be a minute. [*Exit.*]

CLIFF. You will. Old Miss Drury will keep you down there forever. She doesn't think we keep this place clean enough. [*Goes to door and closes it. Comes and sits in the armchair down R.*] Thought you were going to make me some tea, you rotter. [*JIMMY makes no reply.*] What's the matter, boyo?

JIMMY [*slowly*]. That bitch.

CLIFF. Who?

JIMMY. Helena Charles.

CLIFF. Who is this Helena? [*Moves to chair C.*]

JIMMY. One of her old friends. And one of my natural enemies. You're sitting on my chair.

CLIFF. Where are we going for a drink?

JIMMY. I don't know.

CLIFF. Well, you were all for it earlier on.

JIMMY. What does she want? What would make her ring up?

It can't be for anything pleasant. [*He settles on the table.*]

Few minutes ago things didn't seem so bad, either. I've just about had enough of this "expense of spirit" lark, as far as women are concerned. [*Goes to chest and picks up pocket-book.*]

CLIFF [*indicating ALISON's handbag*]. Wouldn't you say that was her private property?

JIMMY. You're quite right. But do you know something?

Living night and day with another human being has made me predatory and suspicious. When she goes out, I go through everything—trunks, cases, drawers, bookcases, everything. Why? To see if there is something of me somewhere, a reference to me. I want to know if I'm being betrayed.

CLIFF. You look for trouble, don't you?

JIMMY. Only because I'm pretty certain of finding it. [*Brings out a letter from the handbag. Throws handbag on floor.*]

Look at that. [*Sits on cistern.*] Oh, I'm such a fool. This is happening every five minutes of the day. She gets letters.

[*He holds it up.*] Letters from her mother, letters in which I'm not mentioned at all because my name is a dirty word. And what does she do?

[*Enter ALISON. He turns to look at her.*]

JIMMY. She writes long letters back to Mummy and never mentions me at all, because I'm just a dirty word to her,

too. [*He throws the letter down at her feet.*] Well, what did your friend want?

ALISON. She's at the station. She's—coming over. [*Picks up letter.*]

JIMMY. I see. She said, "Can I come over?" And you said, "My husband, Jimmy—if you'll forgive me using such a dirty word—will be delighted to see you. He'll kick your face in."

ALISON. She's playing with the company at the Hippodrome this week, and she's got no digs. She can't find anywhere to stay—

JIMMY. That I don't believe!

ALISON. So I said she could come here until she fixes something else. Miss Drury's got a spare room downstairs.

JIMMY. Why not have her in here? Did you tell her to bring her armor? Because she's going to need it!

ALISON [*vehemently*]. Oh, why don't you shut up, please! [*Crosses to chest.*]

JIMMY. Oh, my dear wife, you've got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day. If only something—something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! [*Coming in close to her.*] If you could have a child, and it would die. Or let it grow. Let a recognizable human face emerge from that little mass of India rubber and wrinkles. [*She retreats from him. He grabs her and turns her.*] Please—if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognizable human being yourself. But I doubt it. [*She moves away stunned, and leans on the gas stove down L. He stands rather helplessly on his own.*] Do you know I have never known the great pleasure of love-making when I didn't desire it myself. Oh, it's not that she hasn't her own kind of passion. She just devours me whole every time as if I were some over-large rabbit, and lies back afterward like a puffed-out python to sleep it off. That's me. That bulge around her navel—if you're wondering what it is—it's me. Me, buried alive down there, and

going mad, smothered in the peaceful coil of that innocent-looking belly. Not a sound, not a flicker from her—she doesn't even rumble a little. You'd think that this indigestible mess would stir up some kind of tremor in those distended, overfed tripe—but not her! [*Crosses up to the door.*] She'll go on sleeping and devouring until there's nothing left of me. [*Exit. ALISON'S head goes back as if she were about to make some sound. But her mouth remains open and trembling, as CLIFF looks on.*]

CURTAIN