

Sarah Side

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ACT I

SCENE 1

The dining-room. Saturday, 6 p.m.

It is a fine evening, the sun streams through the french windows of the room. There are four chairs with a solid table, a sideboard, two window-seats and a couple of easy chairs. The room is large and high-ceilinged, and like the rest of this Victorian vicarage-type building, badly needs redecorating

As the CURTAIN rises, Annie in a baggy cardigan, jeans and raffia slippers enters with a flower vase of water. She thumps this down in the middle of the table, picks up the roses which lie beside it and drops them into the vase. She gives the whole lot a final shake and that, as far as she is concerned, concludes her flower arrangement

Sarah (off) Hallo! Hallo, we're here!

Sarah enters. She wears a light summer coat and dress. She is breathless

Annie Sarah!

Sarah (embracing her) Annie dear . . .

Annie Good journey?

Sarah Oh, yes, yes, not too bad. Reg drove far too fast as usual but we got here—oh, it's lovely to come down. I've been looking forward to this week-end away from it all for weeks. Week-end? It's barely a day. You've no idea how that dreary little house of ours gets me down.

Annie Oh, it's not bad.

Sarah Try living there sometime. Not a decent shop, not a cinema, not even a hairdresser—except some awful place I can't go into because of the smell. I said to Reg, for goodness' sake you're an estate agent, surely you can get the pick of anywhere and then we finish up in somewhere like that. You're so lucky, Annie, you have no idea. Just to see a tree once in a while and the birds—I really miss it. Now then, how are you, let's look. Oh, Annie darling, you look just the same. Your hair . . .

Annie (self-consciously smoothing her tangle) I know—I haven't brushed it today. I washed it, though, this morning.

Sarah What's the good of washing it if you don't brush it. It's like a gorse bush.

Annie Well, nobody sees it. The postman, the milkman, couple of cows and Mother.

Sarah And Tom.

Annie Oh, yes. Tom.

Sarah You mustn't forget Tom. And how's Mother?
 Annie No better, no worse. She hasn't felt like getting up, not for weeks . . .
 Sarah Well, you should make her. She needs to.
 Annie Old Wickham says if she doesn't want to, don't make her.
 Sarah Wickham? Oh, yes, I've never really cared for him. His eyes are too close together. Still, I suppose he's all right as a doctor. He must be better than ours. I mean, this business with my back was practically criminal.
 Annie Your back?
 Sarah Surely I wrote and told you? I'm sure I did. I was so upset I wrote to everybody.
 Annie Oh, yes.
 Sarah Annie, I must buy you a new jumper, remind me.
 Annie I'm attached to this one.
 Sarah I should think you are—you were wearing it at Christmas. We'll have to chisel it off you . . . Mmm, lovely flowers. Now tell me. Where are you going?
 Annie When?
 Sarah For your week-end, where are you going?
 Annie Well . . .
 Sarah Oh, come on. Don't be so secretive.
 Annie Well—I was going to Hastings.
 Sarah Oh, lovely! Hastings is gorgeous. I think I was there with Reg just before we were married. There's a heavenly little pub somewhere . . .
 Annie No, well I couldn't get in at Hastings.
 Sarah Couldn't get in?
 Annie No, it was all booked. I forgot it was summer.
 Sarah Oh. Yes. Well, where are you going?
 Annie I rather fancied East Grinstead.
 Sarah East Grinstead?
 Annie Yes.
 Sarah What an extraordinary idea. What on earth made you choose there?
 Annie Well, it sounded—interesting.
 Sarah Yes, I suppose it is. I've never heard of anybody having a holiday in East Grinstead. I suppose they do—but I've never heard of anybody.
 Annie Well, I am.
 Sarah Yes. I think I'd have almost preferred Eastbourne but . . . (*Displaying her outfit*) Do you like this?
 Annie Super.
 Sarah (*taking off her coat, touching the back of the chair for dust, then putting the coat over it*) It was like a tent on me when I bought it, but I had it altered. I'm rather pleased. Now, you're to leave everything to me. I'm taking over. Just tell me what pills and potions Mother has and when she has them and then off you go.
 Annie I've written it down somewhere. I'll show you. The only difficult things are her drops.

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Sarah Oh well, if they're difficult Reg can cope with them. He's going to do most of the running up and down stairs anyway. I mean, this is a holiday for me, too. She's his mother. He can do something for her for a change.
 Annie How is he?
 Sarah Reg? (*With a big sigh*) Oh well, he's still Reg you know. I've tried God knows I've tried, but he'll always be basically Reg. You'll know, he's your brother after all. There are times when I think he's sleep-walking. I have to force him to make an effort. Heaven knows how he runs a business. I'd certainly never let him sell a house of mine.
 Annie I've left you a cold supper.
 Sarah Oh, you shouldn't have bothered.
 Annie Well, I knew you wouldn't want to be . . .
 Sarah You shouldn't have bothered.
 Annie I left it all out for you on the—
 Sarah You really shouldn't have bothered.
 Annie —kitchen table.
 Sarah Lovely.
 Annie I was just laying things in here.
 Sarah Oh, there's no need for that. We'll eat with our fingers. We're on holiday, for heaven's sake.
 Annie We do have knives and forks. (*She takes two sets of knives, forks and spoons from the sideboard to the table*
 Sarah I'll find them. don't bother. Now please, just get changed and go.
 Annie Okay. (*She starts to move to the door*)
 Sarah Oh. I nearly forgot. How's Tom?
 Annie Tom? Oh, fine. I think.
 Sarah Still seeing a lot of him?
 Annie Oh, yes. He's generally around. When he's not out curing his sick animals. He's here at the moment, actually. The cat's got something wrong with its paw.
 Sarah (*arranging the flowers*) It must be fascinating being a vet. It's a pity in a way he's not a proper doctor.
 Annie He is a proper doctor. He just prefers animals to people.
 Sarah That came from the heart.
 Annie No. He just likes animals. Don't think he's very fond of our cat, but he likes most animals.
 Sarah Yes, he's a bit—heavy going, isn't he? I've always found him a trifle ponderous. Perhaps it's shyness.
 Annie No, I think he's probably ponderous.
 Sarah So he hasn't—er—shown any more interest?
 Annie In what?
 Sarah Well, you. At Christmas, we thought he was beginning to sit up and take notice of you just a little. Pricking up his ears.
 Annie Like a mongrel with a pedigree bitch.
 Sarah Yes, well . . .
 Annie Honestly, stop trying to pair us off. He just comes round when he's bored, that's all.

STOP