

A Bird In The Bush

A play in one act
Written by Ron Nicol

Spotlight Publications

A Bird in the Bush

CAST (in order of appearance)

Bernard

Marjorie, his wife

Kate, their younger daughter

Jessica, their elder daughter

Malcolm, Jessica's fiancé

Setting: A bedroom

Time: The present; a hot summer's night

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A darkened bedroom. Marjorie is in bed. Creaking floorboards as footsteps slowly approach. The door opens and a shaft of light spills into the room. Marjorie stirs. Bernard furtively creeps in, tiptoes to the dressing table and slides open a drawer. Kate stealthily enters behind him and raises her arm to strike. At the crucial moment Marjorie switches on the bedside light

Bernard (*turning*) Aaah!

Kate (*as he turns*) Aaah!

Bernard is cowering in front of Kate, who is brandishing a tennis racket. They both turn towards Marjorie and react as she rises like a vampire in its coffin to sit up in bed

Bernard/Kate Aaah!

Marjorie What's going on?

Kate I heard somebody creeping about. I thought it was a burglar.

Bernard That was me!

Kate I know it's you *now*. I can see it's you *now*. I didn't know before though, did I? Sneaking into that drawer – I thought you were stealing Mum's jewellery.

Marjorie I don't have any jewellery, Kate, and if I did I wouldn't keep it in that drawer. Is that a tennis racket?

Kate It was the first thing I could find.

Marjorie A tennis racket? What for?

Kate You don't think I'd be playing tennis in the middle of the night, do you? To hit the burglar with, of course.

Marjorie You wouldn't have hit your own father!

Kate I didn't know it was him, did I? I thought it was a burglar.

Marjorie Kate, your father wouldn't be creeping about in the middle of the night sneaking into drawers, would he?

Kate But he *was* creeping about in the middle of the night sneaking into drawers!

Marjorie You're right. Why were you creeping about in the middle of the night sneaking into drawers, Bernard?

Bernard I thought everybody was asleep.

Kate We were - till you woke us up.

Marjorie What on earth were you doing? Creeping about scaring people.

Bernard It's my house. I'll creep about if I want.

Kate Talking about scaring people, what *is* that stuff on your face?

Marjorie Night cream. It's to rejuvenate my skin.

Kate Oh, Mum, don't be taken in by that. It doesn't work. Women are constantly spending fortunes on products with overstated claims. There's no way you can renew your skin.

Marjorie It's not renewing - it's rejuvenating.

Kate It can't give you younger skin, no matter what it says.

Bernard Not at your age.

Kate Not at any age.

Marjorie I don't care. If it makes me look better and feel better I might as well give it a try.

Bernard You look fine, love. I like you as you are.

Kate There you are, Mum, Dad likes you as you are.

Bernard Of course I do. There's nothing wrong with looking a bit faded. It's your age. Things start to go wrong. Like a car. Once you've had the best years out of it, it needs more upkeep. A good going over now and then...

Marjorie A good going over!

Bernard Till it's had its day. Then you trade it in for a new one...

Kate So you're going to trade Mum in, are you?

Marjorie He certainly is not! He'll put up with me as I am.

Bernard That's what I'm saying. I like you as you are. Wrinkles show character ...

Kate (*warning*) Dad! Shut up!

Bernard What? What've I said?

Marjorie (*ominously*) If you really don't know...

Bernard Now see what you've done, Kate. You've annoyed your mother.

Kate I've annoyed her! Me!

Marjorie It's all right, Kate love. Go on back to bed.

Kate I think I'd better. Goodnight Mum. Night, Dad.

Marjorie Goodnight.

Bernard Sleep well.

Kate exits. Marjorie immediately turns on Bernard

Marjorie What on earth were you doing, Bernard?

Bernard Sorry, love, got a tummy ache. I was looking for those tablets. Those diarrhoea ones.

Marjorie They're in the kitchen drawer. If you're going to get them, do it quietly.

Bernard I was being as quiet as I could. Creeping about, I was.

Marjorie I know, I heard you creeping. So did Kate, obviously. Those floorboards need fixing.

Bernard They need to be taken up and re-laid. Lined with hardboard or something.

Marjorie You've been saying that for years.

Bernard I'll get round to it.

Marjorie All that creaking. Do you have to slam that bathroom door?

Bernard It sticks.

Marjorie I told you to fix it before they came.

Bernard I haven't had time.

Marjorie You said it would take half-an-hour.

Bernard More than half-an-hour.

Marjorie Half-an-hour, you said. Simple, you said.

Bernard Hardly simple, Marjorie.

Marjorie A few strokes with the plane, you said. Half-an-hour, easy.

Bernard I never said it was easy.

Marjorie Half-an-hour, you said.

Bernard All right, don't keep on. It's the hot weather. Expands the wood. Makes it stick.

Marjorie You said it was the *cold* weather made it stick.

Bernard It does. It shrinks the wood.

Marjorie You can't have it both ways, Bernard.

Bernard It shrinks in the cold and expands in the heat. It's a well known fact...

Marjorie Don't talk about it - fix it!

Bernard What! Now?

Marjorie Of course not. Do it tomorrow. Last time they were here was Christmas, remember?

Bernard What are you on about now? What's Christmas got to do with anything?

Marjorie You'd tummy trouble then as well. Up and down all night. Slamming that bathroom door. Flushing the toilet. Too much Christmas spirit if you ask me.

Bernard It was that pudding. It was too rich.

Marjorie You shouldn't have eaten so much. You know it doesn't agree with you.

Bernard You kept piling things on my plate.

Marjorie Don't try and blame me, Bernard. You asked for seconds, and thirds, and even then I found you picking away at the leftovers in the kitchen. No wonder you've got so much tummy trouble.

Bernard clutches his stomach and makes for the door

Bernard Won't be long.

Marjorie Make sure you flush.

Bernard I know.

Marjorie Use the spray...

Bernard I know!

Marjorie And don't drip on the floor...

Bernard I *know*!

He exits. Creaking footsteps along the landing

Marjorie And don't slam that door!

The bathroom door slams. Marjorie sighs and plumps up her pillow. She picks up a book from the bedside table and begins to read. After a moment she fans her face with the book, then puts it down, stretches the neck of her nightdress and blows down it. She takes hold of the edge of the sheet and shakes it up and down, making it billow out to create a cooling draught. She sighs again, gets out of bed and crosses to the window, peers through the curtains for a moment, opens the window slightly, closes the curtains and returns to bed. Just as she picks up her book the toilet flushes off. The bathroom door slams. Marjorie sighs. Creaking footsteps. After a moment Bernard enters

Bernard Must be a blockage. Needs something to shift it properly. Clear the passages.

Marjorie Is that toilet playing up again?

Bernard It's my bowels I'm talking about.

Marjorie Bernard! Do you have to be so crude?

Bernard What's crude about natural bodily functions?

Marjorie We don't want to hear about your blocked passages.

Bernard We? You're the only one here.

Marjorie You don't exactly speak quietly.

Bernard You're not bothered about the neighbours, surely.

Marjorie These walls are so thin you hear everything.

Bernard That's not my fault.

Marjorie Slamming doors is your fault.

Bernard They stick.

Marjorie Half-an-hour, you said.

Bernard All right, all right.

Marjorie Other people manage to shut doors quietly.

Bernard I'm not 'other people'. I can do what I like in my own house, can't I?

Marjorie Not when it keeps other people awake.

Bernard I can't tell my bowels not to function just cause we've got people staying.

Marjorie They're not people – they're our daughters.

Bernard Daughters are people, aren't they?

Marjorie You know what I mean.

Bernard I can't stop my digestive juices working because it wakes people up.

Marjorie If you'd stop slamming that door...

Bernard It doesn't close if you don't slam it.

Marjorie Why do you need it closed?

Bernard So people know somebody's in there. So they don't just walk in.

Marjorie Lock the door, then.

Bernard I do, but you have to slam it to get the bolt across.

Marjorie But you close it even when you aren't in there. How can people tell if there's anybody using it?

Bernard You listen, Marjorie. If you can't hear anything, it's empty.

Marjorie I'm not standing listening at bathroom doors. Suppose somebody came along and saw me?

Bernard Who's going to come along? There's only us.

Marjorie There's Jess and Kate.

Bernard Sometimes...

Marjorie I hate to think what people would hear if they listened at the door while you're in there. A regular performance. Proper fireworks display. You should leave the door open.

Bernard What! Let people see me?

Marjorie When you've finished, I mean. When you come out you should leave it open.

Bernard How do you keep any - you know - aromas in, then?

Marjorie You spray before you come out.

Bernard That's no good. Spraying doesn't kill the smell - it only deadens it.

Marjorie It's supposed to kill ninety-nine percent of household germs - you must be the one percent they can't do anything about.

Bernard It's not my fault I've a delicate stomach.

Marjorie Delicate stomach, my foot!

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Plot Summary

It's a hot summer night, and Bernard's stomach ache and his abiding hatred of a cooing pigeon combine to keep his whole family awake. When he determines to track the pigeon to its lair, his daughter's fiancé and the next door neighbour become entangled in his growing fixation. Eventually the police are called, and the play ends with a hectic and hilarious sequence in which Bernard has to face the consequences – and the wrath of his long-suffering wife.

Running time: 40 minutes