

SMALL TALK

A one-act play

by

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SMALL TALK

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Characters

Myles - A Toff, who loves golf
Gordon - A retired senior Policeman
Julia - A Primary School Head teacher
Anne - A Care Home Supervisor
Patrick - An Inventor with no money
Peter - An Academy Head teacher

It's a Friday evening in Suburbia, where Julia and Gordon are having a few friends for drinks before attending an executive dinner in town. Myles and Anne have both been invited to stay the night, whilst Peter and Patrick are driving home after the event. The initially relaxed atmosphere gradually wanes as the conversation deepens, and personal feelings are exposed. Then there is more...

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(The curtain rises on the living room of an executive home in suburbia. Myles, a guest, is asleep in a chair facing the audience, with an empty glass on the table beside him. The door is ajar and French windows are closed. The silence is broken by Julia, the woman of the house, calling loudly to her husband Gordon)

Julia: *(Loudly off stage)* You'd better go and find him. Peter will be here soon and you know what he's like on timings.

Gordon: *(Enters, he responds to himself)* Ya wohl Frau ubergruppen fuhrer! Sometimes it's like living at prep school fifty years after I left. *(He sees M. asleep)* Ah Milo you old skinflint, time to emerge from hibernation. *(Gently nudges him awake)*

Myles: Umm, *(Takes a deep breath)* ahhh...

Gordon: Time to get ready for the next round.

Myles: What's the score now?

Gordon: To what are you referring? *(Poking the fire)*

Myles: Shoes, or are we on dresses now?

Gordon: *(Chuckles)* We're not at that stage just yet. Still on face painting. You want a cup of tea or coffee? Something stronger?

Myles: *(Looks at clock on mantle piece)* Is that really the time!

Gordon: Yep. Nearly two hours since you finished the Madeira. *(Moves back to M.)* So what's it to be? Tea or whiskey?

Myles: Must have been a quality bin. No headache and sight as clear as a Beijing Skyline. A little whiskey with cuboids of ice would be delicious, thank you.

Gordon: Sure? How about something soft before resuming the hard stuff. It's going to be a long night ahead. *(Draws curtains of the French window)*

Myles: *(Moves in his chair)* A glass of water on the side. Very Loyal. Is there anything useful to which I can turn my wart ridden hands before we leave?

Gordon: *(Demonstrating)* Can you still master tap turning? Bath or shower, whichever you fancy.

Julia: *(Off stage)* Have you found him yet? Anne has just arrived so can you show her in and bring her bag up. She's in the yellow room tonight.

Gordon: *(Loudly to J.)* Alright, will do. *(Both men look at each other)* Don't say a word. I'll get you that drink now. *(Exits as J. enters through the same door)*

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- Julia: *(enters)* Darling, Anne's arrived, can you, *(She sees M.)* Myles dearest were you asleep?
- Gordon: On my way. *(exits)*
- Myles: You know that man sustains his dynamics through power sleeping, and to that end I was in commission. *(Trying to stand up)*
- Julia: Why do you have to talk in riddles all the time. Simply accept that you passed out after lunch and now you feel like mud. *(Looks at herself in the mirror above the mantle piece)*
- Myles: You look fantastic Julia. Never a hair out of place. *(Sits down again)*
- Julia: Flattery will get you everywhere. *(Turns to face M.)* You think the red shoes or the marigold? *(Lifting her feet for inspection)*
- Myles: *(Ponders)* On this occasion I prefer Marigold. However I am unsure about the blouse. It appears to inflate your trunk.
- Julia: My trunk? *(Spinning to look in the mirror)* Honestly Myles, what on earth do you know about skin inflation. My nose is discreetly powdered.
- Myles: *(Again tries to stand)* Not you nose dear girl, your trunk, torso, *(Pointing)* top half of your body. No bosom definition.
- Julia: *(Looks in mirror again)* Umm? You think a little more figure hugging?
- Anne: *(Enters)* Hello Julia! Hello Myles. *(Walks to kiss J. first then M.)*
- Julia: Maybe. Hello Anne darling. M here has been showing off his interest in female apparel. You look wonderful, Myles what do you think?
- Myles: *(to A.)* Sensational combination. Elegant without being too sleek, rich in tincture, allowing the natural pigment to radiate against a backdrop of warmth and seduction.
- Anne: So completely full of bullshit. Honestly one day someone will believe you. *(Looks at J.)* Love your shoes Julia. Where did you get them?
- Myles: *(Feeling outnumbered)* I really must pop outside for a breath of air. Thought of water makes me a little light-headed. *(Exits through French window)*
- Julia: Harvey Nicks for the red, and A & N for the marigold.
- Anne: Oh, I didn't notice the different colours, silly me. Both lovely though.
- Julia: Has Gordon offered you a drink yet? Did he show you which room you're in tonight? The yellow one next to our ensuite.

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Anne: Yes he has thanks. (*Moving to sit down*) God I've been on my feet all day and I really do need to sit down for a while. Has he (*Pointing to F-window*) been here long?

Myles: Came up yesterday. We, they, the boys had a late night and then we had the golf-widows and their dullard husbands here for lunch.

Anne: Heavy sessions?

Julia: Wait till this evening is over, then ask. The academics will win hands down. We'll need fans to hide our yawns. Peter Evans, without his new wife thank the Lord, and Patrick Shannon are both joining us here before we all leave for Buggles. Are you Okay to drive back afterwards?

Anne: What about a taxi? I really could do with a night off.

Julia: Have you any idea how expensive they are at 1 o'clock in the morning. They charge an arm and a leg after midnight. (*mimics*) It's aw rite for you guvnor, sum of us hasta ern a crust.

Gordon: (*Enters carrying tray and three drinks*) Moaning about the hoi polloi again is she? Myles done a runner? (*Offers A. a drink*) Gin and tonic.

Anne: Thank you. Tell me, how is the lovely Marcus getting on?

Gordon: He's in top form...

Julia: (*Interrupts G.*) He's really loving his voluntary work, but says the conditions are a little bit too basic for comfort. However, he's making a lot of new friends and thinks the locals appreciate his endeavours. Darling boy!

Anne: So glad to hear. (*Takes a long gulp*) Umm, that's good.

Gordon: Darling, same for you?

Julia: Did you bring that from upstairs? No point in dirtying another glass just for me. (*Turns to leave*) Why don't you keep that one for Patrick and I'll bring my glass down in a minute. Popping up to rethink my top. Mr Armani felt it was inappropriate as it didn't show off my cleavage.

Gordon: Don't listen to him. You look great honestly.

Anne: Seconded!

Julia: No, I think he has point, besides I need a decision on the shoes. Won't be long promise. (*As she exits, turns her voice to G.*) Actually darling a little top up would be divine, thanks. (*Exits*)

Gordon: Yes darling.

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Anne: *(Pause)* You're a saint, you know that. Never a tut-tut or sigh, just yes darling. Why have you not got a single brother who badly needs to be of looked after?

Gordon: *(Takes a slug of G&T)* I have, but he's in the States. You'll just have to settle with what you've already got your eyes on.

Anne: Meaning?

Gordon: *(Turns to leave)* I'd better get Jules her drink. Glad you were able to come tonight. *(Looks towards f-window)* Seve's back. I'll leave his whiskey here. *(Puts glass on table)* Be gentle. *(Exits)*

Myles: *(Enters)* Sorry about that. Really needed to clear the old bonce. Our hosts are far too generous with the contents of their cellar. Very loyal.

Anne: *(Points at whiskey)* Your drink I believe. *(She drinks)*

Myles: I really did mean what I said earlier about your get-up. Smashing. Big hit with the golfer. *(Takes a sip)* Umm, watery but sensible. Now Anne before I leave you again to find the magic slipper, tell me what you've been up to since we last encountered.

Anne: Oh not a lot really. Same old, same old. *(She drinks)*

Myles: Come now, you can't fob me off with that over used line.

Anne: Well let me think. Mister Thomson died last Friday, and I've been asked to attend

his funeral as a representative of the Home. But to be more accurate, it's because

he has no family or friends and it would be too heartless to say farewell to him from an empty church. Missus Inglebury, fell over in the dayroom on Tuesday and cracked her pelvis. However, as she attempted to pull herself up, Missus Storey tried to help, but she fell, badly bruising her face and shoulder when she

hit

the book-stand. Shelia, one of our two non migrant helpers, quit her job

yesterday

saying it was too undignified to mop up men's urine from the baking tray put out

to catch the rain drips from the leaking flat roof. The annual inspection...

Myles: *(Interrupts)* Understood. Loud and clear. Shitty day, shitty week! Shitty job? You need a holiday dear girl. A fortnight away from the dirge of monotony makes a world of difference to us all.

Anne: *(In disbelief)* Wouldn't that be wonderful. Understaffed already and I scurry off to Butlins in Ianapolis with a bus load of sex starved housewives, knocking back mojitos and already wearing their white body-hugging clothes in readiness to grill themselves in 45 degrees. What message would that send to my superiors about how seriously I consider my position as supervisor.

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Myles: Does supervisor qualify as management?

Anne: Oh for god's sake Myles, what the hell does it matter. *(Empties her glass and holds out to M)* Can I have another one of these? Please.

Myles: I'll see to it immediately *senorita*.

Anne: *(Points at table)* There's one there on the table Gordon made for Julia. I'm sure she won't notice if I drink it.

Myles: Bonne idee! *(Passes glass to A and sits close)* Chin chin! *(Both drink)* Life is an obdurate challenge. It never does what it says on the tin or whatever that ridiculous euphemism is supposed to mean. Unfurl your responsibilities for the evening and join the fast swelling ranks of the AMIANS. Almost made it and nearly sixty.

Anne: Bully for you. *(Bitterly)* I nearly made it ten years ago, but then he bunked off with that miserable cow he thought he was in love with. Serves him bloody well right she took him for half of everything. I could have made him very happy you know. Very, very happy. *(Biting back the tears)*

Myles: A bit of a fool was Nicholas. Still! Water under the bridge and all that.

Anne: What is it with you men? How can you just say that and pretend it's all forgotten. Honestly where are your emotions. I spend all day, everyday, looking after men and women, some who had once been married for years and years, decades even. They're still awash with emotion and miss their partners like it was only yesterday they died or were banished to an outrageously expensive retirement home for certain socially unacceptable disorders. *(Gulps again from her drink)* Come on Myles, do me a favour and show some sympathy. I didn't do anything wrong with Nick. He just played me. Bastard! *(Reaches for her handbag)*

Myles: Steady on.

Anne: Not you, you lovely person.

Myles: I thought for a moment you'd googled my ancestry. *(Making light of it)* Spotted the out of wedlock arrival.

Anne: *(Embarrassed)* Oh, I didn't mean to...

Myles: No, not at all. If my parents had waited any longer before marrying, I could have been the best man! Very Loyal *(Laughing)*

Julia: *(Off stage)* Gordon, I think Peter's arrived. I can hear a car churning up the gravel at the front.

Anne: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to take it out on you.

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- Myles: Better out that in. Get it off your chest on a Friday and by Monday it's in your humility folder. Unfurl your tangles and enjoy the now.
- Anne: *(Smiling)* I'll try for the unfurling, only on condition that you'll be my escort for the evening, and promise to take advantage of me!
- Myles: Good lord Anne, I do believe you're making a pass. *(Excitedly)* Steady the Buffs, the Fusiliers are watching. Offer accepted and now I must really go and re-clothe myself. *(Squeezes her hand in affection)*
- Anne: *(Getting up)* Keep me company for a cigarette? I'm starting to twitch.
- Myles: *(Heads to f-window)* Out here should be fine. I haven't had one for ages.
- Anne: Come on Buffy. *(Exit happily with M.)*
- Julia: *(Enter with Peter.)* How long is it since we last saw each other? Months I suppose, but then doesn't time flash by when we're all so busy.
- Peter: Indeed it does. Never a dull moment in the playground of life.
- Julia: Playground of life. That's a well coined euphemism coming from the head teacher.
- Peter: Unintentional pun I assure you. But you caught my drift.
- Julia: What a good idea you giving Patrick a lift. Does he live near you?
- Peter: No miles away, but it seemed to make sense for one of us to do the driving and let the other enjoy a drink. So he very kindly offered to pick me up and drop me off on his way home. *(Rubbing his hands in nervous boredom)*
- Julia: Bit of a nuisance this drink driving business. After all these years we're still being caught in the dilemma as to who draws the short straw. *(Looks at herself in mirror)*
- Peter: Police are only doing their job.
- Julia: I'm sure they are, but honestly we can't even pop out to the local for a meal and a bottle of wine, without worrying which of us needs to chew mints on the drive home.
- Peter: They say that statistically that is the most likely instance when accidents occur and result in serious injury. *(Moves very near J.)*
- Julia: *(Aware of his closeness)* Do you like it? *(Raising her wrist to P's. nose)* Eau de Bobby Brown. Your new wife might possibly wear it, but then again maybe not. *(Moving away from P.)* It's for the more mature woman you see. Mature as in age, not behavioural. Now what do you think of this top? Myles assured me that I wasn't showing enough cleavage in my previous attire. *(Poses)*

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Peter: I think they, *(Stumbles verbally)* its, your top is delightful. Great colour as well.

Patrick: *(Enter carrying drinks)* Hello Julia, how lovely it is to see you again. *(Moves to kiss J. and gives her a drink)*

Peter: *(Embarrassed, he says to G.)* I was just saying how much I liked the colour of Julia's chiffon.

Julia: *(To P.)* Thank you Peter. *(Steps back asks Pk.)* What do you think?

Gordon: *(enters and gives drink to Peter)* Here you go. Cheers everyone!

Peter: Cheers!

Patrick: Good Luck. *(To J.)* You look fantastic. *(Enthusiastically)* The shoes are spot on.

Julia: Which colour? *(raises skirt to show off both shoes)*

Patrick: Don't notice. Keep them both on and set a new trend.

Gordon: Darling they didn't come here for a fashion show.

Julia: *(Sneers at G.)* Just because you have no interest in what I am wearing. *(Sniffs the air)* Who's been smoking? I can smell cigarettes.

Peter: Not me. Gave up fifteen years ago.

Gordon: Standing as a role model for the students.

Patrick: I've started using e-cigarettes. Feeling better already I must say.

Julia: I hope they ban them in public places. Who are they trying to kid? Smoking is smoking, right? *(Moves towards f-windows)*

Gordon: You're right in a sense. It's all too easy to say the electric cigarettes won't harm non-smokers standing in close proximity.

Patrick: But that is precisely what is not happening. We're not smoking in the conventional meaning of the word. Tobacco is not being burnt.

Peter: I tend to agree with Julia on this. It lowers the bar in terms of definition and understanding.

Patrick: *(To Peter)* Try one! I dare you.

Peter: No thanks.

Julia: *(To M. and A.)* Caught you! And I hope you're not thinking of leaving your butt

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ends stubbed out on the patio? (*Moves back in*)

Myles: No. We're going to toss them into the flower bed as nutrition.

Anne: Not! (*Giggles*)

Julia: Gordon, have we any ash-trays in the house. (*Moves across the room to door*) I don't remember seeing any, but you might have one in your study. (*Exits*)

Anne: (*Enter and shakes head at G.*) Please don't worry Gee. We don't need one honestly. Oh hi Peter, long time no see. (*Moves to greet P.*)

Gordon: Do you know Patrick? (*Introduces A.*) Anne Chambers. Patrick Shannon.

Anne: Hi!

Patrick: Hi! Good to meet you I'm sure.

Gordon: I'd better try and find you that ashtray. You know what Julia's like. (*Embarrassed laugh then exits*)

Myles: (*Enter carrying two fag butts*) Where should I dispose of these chaps? Hello Peter, hello Patrick. Forgive me if I don't shake your hands just now. (*Heads to door with G.*) Anne needs another drink. (*Exits*)

Anne: (*Slumps into chair*) Please forgive me. Just had the day from hell.

Peter: Commiserations.

Patrick: What line of work are you in? (*Sits in chair beside A.*)

Anne: Care for the Elderly.

Peter: We're at opposite ends of the curve. You and I...

Patrick: (*Interrupts*) Specifically?

Peter: I prepare them for this world, and you...

Anne: I work in a Residential Home, in a supervisory capacity.

Peter: ... prepare them for the next.

Patrick: (*Ignores Peter*) Have you always worked in that field?