

THE OTHER INCIDENT

A one-act play

by

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THE OTHER INCIDENT

The WOMAN is sitting at the table, staring intently ahead. One can tell that she is listening. She gets up and moves restlessly up and down the room. She hears a car door slam, rushes to the window, sees what she expects to see and sits down at the table again. She puts her head in her hands and, after composing herself, waits, staring at the door.

The MAN enters the room. He stands at the door for a moment, looking at her. He sighs and goes to the window. We see his back as he stares out of the window.

The WOMAN turns slowly to look at him.

WOMAN: Well?

MAN: It's all over.

WOMAN: (*turning to face the audience*) All over.

MAN: (*turning to her from the window*) Yes, it's all over. Finito.

WOMAN: Just like that?

MAN: More or less.

WOMAN: Didn't he say anything?

MAN: Not much. What did you expect? Did you think he'd rave and gnash his teeth?

WOMAN: I don't know. I expected something. A gesture of some sort.

MAN: People don't say much about these things. Not in real life. Not like the films.

WOMAN: He must have said something.

MAN: You want me to give you a blow-by-blow account of the proceedings?

WOMAN: I'd like to be told what happened, what was said.

MAN: You want all the grubby little details?

WOMAN: What d'you mean, grubby. I thought you said he didn't say anything.

MAN: Well, he didn't ... not much. We had a rational discussion about the situation, that's all.

WOMAN: You mean you talked about me?

MAN: You came into it, naturally. We couldn't very well discuss the situation without mentioning you, could we? I mean you are leaving him, aren't you? That is what I went there to discuss with him, isn't it?

WOMAN: Of course.

MAN: That is what we agreed, after all.

WOMAN: Tell me exactly what happened.

MAN: Everything?

WOMAN: In detail.

MAN: We had a civilized discussion. That's all. We talked it through, man to man.

WOMAN: All right. Show me.

MAN: You want me to act it out in front of you, just like that?

WOMAN: Not exactly. Just tell me what he said ... what happened.

MAN: All right.

The man goes to the door and stands there as though preparing himself for a big confrontation.

MAN: I rang the bell, but there was no response ... he didn't come. Not straightaway. So I put my ear to the keyhole. You don't want to hear all this, do you?

WOMAN: Of course. You put your ear to the keyhole. What did you hear?

MAN: Music.

WOMAN: Ah, he was playing music. What was it?

MAN: How can I remember details like that? I wasn't listening, was I? I was thinking about why he didn't open the door.

WOMAN: But you must remember something.

MAN: Mozart, I think it was. One of the concertos.

WOMAN: (*obviously disappointed*) Mozart?

MAN: No, come to think of it, it was Mahler, that thing they played in 'Death in Venice'. Yes, I'm sure it was that.

WOMAN: Are you absolutely certain?

MAN: Yes, that was it, all those strings. Is it so important?

WOMAN: Significant. It could be. What happened then?

MAN: Well, so I knocked and, after a minute or two he did actually deign to open the door ... just an inch or two and looked round it...

WOMAN: What did he look like?

MAN: Like a man looking round a door. He looked like Frederick Mann, actually.

WOMAN: But he is Frederick Mann.

MAN: That would explain it.

WOMAN: Don't be silly. I mean, did he look normal? Was there anything unusual about his appearance?

MAN: He was wearing a bow tie, as far as I can remember.

WOMAN: I'm not talking about dress. Did he look different in any way? Unusual?

MAN: Unusual?

WOMAN: I mean, was he angry, depressed, anything like that?

MAN: As a matter of fact, he did look a bit odd. Now you come to mention it, it did cross my mind he might have been crying.

WOMAN: Crying!

MAN: It was only a trick of the light. Actually, I think he was asleep when I rang.

WOMAN: Asleep?

MAN: I can't imagine how anyone could sleep with all those strings wailing away in their ears.

WOMAN: And then you went in?

MAN: Oh yes, he invited me in as soon as he recognized me.

WOMAN: Then what?

MAN: I went in. I saw the glass, the half empty bottle, and I realised he'd been drinking.

WOMAN: Oh, he was drunk?

MAN: I wouldn't say he was drunk. He'd just had a few. As soon as he realised what I was there for, he got another glass and poured me a drink. And then ... well it's a bit ridiculous but he sort of proposed a toast.

WOMAN: What do you mean: he proposed a toast?

MAN: He drank my health. Said I was a good chap.

WOMAN: He said that?

MAN: Something like that.

WOMAN: Did he mention me?

MAN: As a matter of fact he proposed your health too.

WOMAN: Sounds like a rugby reunion.

MAN: It established the tone. I told you we had a civilized discussion.

WOMAN: And then you told him.

MAN: More or less.

WOMAN: Well, did you or didn't you?

MAN: Yes, I said I told him.

WOMAN: What exactly? What precisely did you say?

MAN: I said: listen, Frederick, I think you should know something.

WOMAN: Like that? You said it like that?

MAN: I said: listen, Frederick, I think you should know that Thelma and I have come to an arrangement.

WOMAN: You said that: an arrangement?

MAN: I might have used the word 'understanding'. Yes as a matter of fact I think I used the word 'understanding'.

WOMAN: 'Thelma and I have come to an understanding'.

MAN: I thought that was the best way of putting it.

WOMAN: What did he say?

MAN: He said 'cheers'. You see up to that point we hadn't actually had a chance to drink anything

WOMAN: Didn't he say: 'What understanding?' Something like that?

MAN: Actually I was surprised at how quickly he caught on. He sort of squinted at me over his glass and said: 'So you and Thelma have decided to live together?'

WOMAN: Were those his actual words?

MAN: No. What he actually said was: 'So she's decided to shack up with you after all, has she? I could see it coming a mile off.'

WOMAN: He didn't say that, did he?

MAN: Those were his very words.

WOMAN: The bastard!

The WOMAN gets up from the table and walks about the room in some agitation.

The MAN watches her in surprise.

The WOMAN swings round on him.

WOMAN: Is that all?

MAN: Well, that's it in principle. I thought I'd spare you the trimmings. But that's it in a nutshell.

WOMAN: You didn't say anything in my defence, I suppose?

MAN: What was there to defend? I mean, Frederick's not a complete idiot. He must have noticed something was going on. But, I agree: he could have put it a little less brutally.

WOMAN: *(shaking her head)* A little less brutally! I thought you were going to tell him how we felt about one another.

MAN: Yes, well. That didn't seem quite appropriate, with him swaying about with the bottle in one hand and a glass overflowing onto the carpet in the other. In any case, there wasn't time.

WOMAN: Wasn't time? You've been gone ages. You must have had all the time in the world.

MAN: Yes, but you see, I couldn't just leave him. I felt obliged to stay and help him clean up.

WOMAN: Clean up? Oh, you mean the wine on the carpet? Since when have you been Frederick's lackey?

MAN: It wasn't like that at all. It had nothing to do with the wine on the carpet. It had something to do with the other incident.

WOMAN: What other incident?

MAN:

The other thing that happened while we were talking things over. The accident.