

AlfanIna

By

Alan S. Austin

CHARACTERS

Alf 50 +

Ina 50+

It is late evening.

The stage is empty apart from an armchair with its back to the audience and a small table on which there is a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. There is an exit upstage. A man is seated in the armchair .

Sound of him coughing.

His hand reaches for the cigarettes and lighter, picks them up, holds them and puts them down slowly.

Enter Ina. She is holding a broom, wears a head scarf and an apron with a pocket in the front. She carries a box of cleaning materials, polish and sprays as well as a dustpan. She sets these down and re-enters with a Hoover (vacuum cleaner).
The place is a small village in England.

INA

Isn't it time you did something?

(pause)

I said isn't time you did something?

ALF

What?

INA

You can't sit there all day.

ALF

I didn't think that.....

(interrupting)

INA

I have to do my chores. This house doesn't stay clean on its own.

ALF

I was wondering...if...

INA

Stay there if you want ! I'll just clean around you. *(She cleans around his chair area and dust the table. She frowns when picking up and replacing the cigarettes.)* You'd think after being together all these years, you would have the common sense to be out of the house when I'm cleaning. I always clean the living room on Thursday evening after work. You know that.

ALF

I'm...

INA

Unbelievable! You live with someone for years and believe that some how, some day they'll change... not a lot...just a little bit. That they'd know what you're thinking. *(pause)* Anticipate. That's it, anticipate. You keep waiting, hoping, but it never happens.

ALF

I've always tried to adapt... be sensitive...

INA

Sensitive?

ALF

But...

(SFX of truck)

INA

There's those lorries again. Did you hear them? I think they're carrying chickens this time. I heard clucking. Last week it was sheep. They're taking them to that slaughter house up the road that they re-opened after the war.

ALF

Wouldn't it be...?

INA

(SFX of a truck)

There's another one. Listen. Pigs.. Oh, how they stink! They're squealing. Poor things. They know they're going to be slaughtered.

ALF

They're killed humanely.

INA

Oh yes. They use one of those stun guns... then they cut their throats. Very humane. Shut the window.

(Alf does not move)

ALF

Is it supper time?

INA

This used to be a decent place. Nice neighbors. Not anymore...not with that slaughterhouse up the road.

ALF

I'd like some liver and bacon.

INA

I've got to clean this place up first. Look at the dirt. It's everywhere. As soon as you've cleaned it, it's dirty again. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth it... cleaning.

ALF

I could go out and get fish and chips if you like. Is it Friday?

INA

(She pauses)

My mother always kept her house clean. "Cleanliness is next to godliness", she used to say. She really had it tough. Not like nowadays. All this education. Sitting around. Talking. She cleaned her house from top to bottom once a week. She had this boiler for the clothes... with lots of steam. Clean sheets on Monday and on Tuesday she did my dad's stuff...always smelled something awful after a day's work. He was a butcher. Funny warm smell there was. Must have been the blood from the beasts, you know.... dried.. difficult to get out those stains.

ALF

There's someone at the door.

INA

Goodness me, look at the time. I'll never get this place cleaned up properly.

ALF

I'll go and answer it.

(He doesn't move but Ina goes to the door, opens it and closes it - no one there.)

INA

There's nobody. Could do with a new carpet in here you know. A nice Indian one. I'd like that.

ALF

I'd like a cigarette but I'm trying to give it up... smoking.

INA

I'm glad I've got my hoover. It's a good one. I got it on hire purchase. Took me a year to pay it off.

ALF

I only had one yesterday.

INA

We've never had it easy - not like some people.

(There's a screech of tires, lights flicker
and there's a resounding crash)

What was that?

ALF

Sounds like an accident.

INA

It is. Look... a lorry's gone into a lamp post ...the back's come off . Dear me, the sheep are getting out. Somebody ought to stop them. Alf, why don't you see if you can help ?

ALF

I don't know anything about sheep.

INA

Surely, you could do something. Go and lend a hand.

ALF

Alright.

(Alf gets up and goes upstage. Stops.
Turns. Picks up cigarettes and lighter.
Turns, pauses. Exits)

INA

(goes to window)

Fancy that. An accident. The road's not safe there. I hope the driver's alright. Alf's talking to him. Look at all those wires hanging down from the electrical pole.

(she shouts)

Herd them. Get a stick. Don't frighten them. Stupid bugger. You can tell he was born in a town. I grew up in the country... we knew about sheep.

We met at a dance . I thought Alf looked so handsome in his uniform. I wanted to marry the town teacher...he loved romantic poetry... but he liked my best friend and married her instead. Alf was from... somewhere else ... he spoke differently.

(She shouts out the window)

Don't chase them...herd them ...Get a stick ...
He came back a different man...after the war.

(She checks her box of cleaning products
and picks out a cleaner)

Three in one it's called. These products get better and better.

(She resumes cleaning)

When you're young you make a lot of choices but you never think about the
consequences. At least I didn't.

(Alf reappears in some distress)

ALF

It got into the garden...the sheep...it jumped over the wall.

INA

Chase it out again...

ALF

It's big and ...

INA

It's a sheep...it's stupid.

ALF

It could be dangerous.

INA

Here take my broom. Whack it one!

ALF

Whack it?

INA

Shoo it.

ALF

All right. I'll give it a go.

(Exit Alf with broom)

INA

I used to wonder what would have happened to me if Alf had been killed during the war
instead of wounded. Sometimes I wish he had been killed. I shouldn't say that but I could
have done something with my life. Got an education. Of course, it's difficult for a man
when he's wounded. He couldn't talk about it so we made the best of it. Never said much
after his operation - couldn't. Something good will always happen, my mother said. Be
patient, she said. Then dad died.

(Re-enter Alf with broom)

ALF

It won't move... it's stuck behind the shed.

INA
Stuck?

ALF
I whacked it like you said.

INA
Maybe you frightened it. Sheep frighten easily you know.

ALF
Now it can't turn round.

INA
Then put a board or something over where it went in and let it quieten down. They're bound to come and get it sooner or later.

ALF
All right.
(Exit Alf with Ina's broom)

INA
I couldn't walk out, could I? He wasn't well. He needed looking after and it was my duty. It wasn't as if ...I could leave...I just had to make do.

(She re-examines her box)

This is good polish... Old English ...brings everything back like new. Of course it could have turned out better... but ...you made your bed. Now lie in it.

(pause)

My mother used to say that. I'll do the kitchen tomorrow after I cook dinner. It's getting dark.

(lights are dimmed)

Got a bit of a headache. I need a new cooker. A gas one. They're quicker. This is coming up like new with this All in One.

(Enter Alf)

ALF
I used the broom handle to block the exit. He's calmed down..

INA
My new broom? All right. Perhaps we could have it for supper on Sunday.

ALF
What?

INA
I was joking.

ALF

The driver's gone to call the police. The sheep have all run away. Except for the one at the back of the shed. Look, I found this on the road. It looks like a gun.

INA

That's not a gun...well it is...sort of ...it's what they use to kill the beasts.

ALF

It must have fallen off the lorry.

INA

Give it to me.

ALF

Is it loaded?

INA

You don't load it...there's a bolt. Give it to me. I'll show you.

ALF

It could be dangerous.

INA

My dad was a butcher. Remember? He used to fatten the beasts up in the side paddock and then slaughter them himself. Used to make a good profit until the tax man caught him. That's what he used.

ALF

Doesn't look as if this would kill anything. I know guns.

INA

You have to prime the bolt. I'll show you. You prime it like this...

(Alf hands the stun gun to Ina as soon as she primes it, the lights go out.)

ALF

What's happened?

INA

The electricity's out.

ALF

It was the accident.

INA

I can't see anything. Alf?

ALF

What?

Where are you? INA

I'm here. ALF

Where? INA

Here. ALF

Touch me. INA

Maybe it's just temporary. ALF

Alf, I can't feel you. Touch me. INA

There. Is that better? ALF
(SFX- click- thud.)

Uuuuuuhhhh..... ALF

Alf? Alf? INA

Ina. ALF

Alf? INA

(The lights come back on. The stun gun is on the floor centre stage. Alf sits centre stage clutching his side. Ina stands behind him.)

Are you all right? INA

I've got a bit of a pain. ALF

INA

It's all right Alf.

ALF

It hurts.

INA

I know.

ALF

Like when I was wounded.

INA

I know.

ALF

Sorry.

INA

About what?

ALF

The sheep.

INA

The sheep's fine.

ALF

A lot of my mates died in the war... I was sort of lucky.

INA

Of course you were . It's all as it was meant to be. I'll help you to the chair. Here take my arm.

(She pulls the chair round, sits herself and he collapses on her lap. He clutches his side)

ALF

It's very cold in here.

INA

I'll call the doctor.

ALF

Yeh... good idea.

INA

I'll get the tea ready in a minute..

ALF

I would like that.....

INA

We'll soon have on your feet.

ALF

Yeah.... I'd like liver and bacon.... hope that sheep's O.K...
(trails off. Pause. She closes his eyes)

Lights down slowly.

SKX A SHEEP BLEATING.