

GALSWORTHY
JOHN

FOUR SHORT
PLAYS

John Galsworthy
Four Short Plays

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John Galsworthy

Four Short Plays

A Satiric Trifle

CHARACTERS

HERSELF.

LADY ELLA.

THE SQUIRE.

THE MAID.

MAUD.

THE RECTOR.

THE DOCTOR.

THE CABMAN.

HANNIBAL and EDWARD

HALL-MARKED

The scene is the sitting-room and verandah of HER bungalow. The room is pleasant, and along the back, where the verandah runs, it seems all window, both French and casement. There is a door right and a door left. The day is bright; the time morning. [HERSELF, dripping wet, comes running along the verandah, through the French window, with a wet Scotch terrier in her arms. She vanishes through the door left. A little pause, and LADY ELLA comes running, dry, thin, refined, and agitated. She halts where the tracks of water cease at the door left. A little pause, and MAUD comes running, fairly dry, stolid, breathless, and dragging a bull-dog, wet, breathless, and stout, by the crutch end of her 'en-tout-cas'].

LADY ELLA. Don't bring Hannibal in till I know where she's put Edward!

MAUD. [Brutally, to HANNIBAL] Bad dog! Bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

LADY ELLA. Maud, do take him out! Tie him up. Here! [She takes out a lace handkerchief] No – something stronger! Poor darling Edward! [To HANNIBAL] You are a bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

MAUD. Edward began it, Ella. [To HANNIBAL] Bad dog! Bad dog!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.]

LADY ELLA. Tie him up outside. Here, take my scarf. Where is my poor treasure? [She removes her scarf] Catch! His ear's torn; I saw it.

MAUD. [Taking the scarf, to HANNIBAL] Now!

[HANNIBAL snuffles.] [She ties the scarf to his collar]

He smells horrible. Bad dog – getting into ponds to fight!

LADY ELLA. Tie him up, Maud. I must try in here.

[Their husbands, THE SQUIRE and THE RECTOR, come hastening along the verandah.]

MAUD. [To THE RECTOR] Smell him, Bertie! [To THE SQUIRE] You might have that pond drained, Squire!

[She takes HANNIBAL out, and ties him to the verandah. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR Come in. LADY ELLA is knocking on the door left.]

HER VOICE. All right! I've bound him up!

LADY ELLA. May I come in?

HER VOICE. Just a second! I've got nothing on.

[LADY ELLA recoils. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR make an involuntary movement of approach.]

LADY ELLA. Oh! There you are!

THE RECTOR. [Doubtfully] I was just going to wade in —

LADY ELLA. Hannibal would have killed him, if she hadn't rushed in!

THE SQUIRE. Done him good, little beast!

LADY ELLA. Why didn't you go in, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. Well, I would – only she —

LADY ELLA. I can't think how she got Edward out of Hannibal's awful mouth!

MAUD. [Without – to HANNIBAL, who is snuffling on the verandah and straining at the scarf] Bad dog!

LADY ELLA. We must simply thank her tremendously! I shall never forget the way she ran in, with her skirts up to her waist!

THE SQUIRE. By Jove! No. It was topping.

LADY ELLA. Her clothes must be ruined. That pond – ugh! [She wrinkles her nose] Tommy, do have it drained.

THE RECTOR. [Dreamily] I don't remember her face in church.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Who is she? Pretty woman!

LADY ELLA. I must get the Vet. to Edward. [To THE SQUIRE] Tommy, do exert yourself!

[MAUD re-enters.]

THE SQUIRE. All right! [Exerting himself] Here's a bell!

HER VOICE. [Through the door] The bleeding's stopped. Shall I send him in to you?

LADY ELLA. Oh, please! Poor darling!

[They listen.] [LADY ELLA, prepares to receive EDWARD. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR stand transfixed. The door opens, and a bare arm gently pushes EDWARD forth. He is bandaged with a smooth towel. There is a snuffle – HANNIBAL has broken the scarf, outside.]

LADY ELLA. [Aghast] Look! Hannibal's loose! Maud – Tommy. [To THE RECTOR] You!

[The THREE rush to prevent HANNIBAL from re-entering.]

LADY ELLA. [To EDWARD] Yes, I know – you'd like to! You SHALL bite him when it's safe. Oh! my darling, you DO – [She sniffs].

[MAUD and THE SQUIRE re-enter.]

Have you tied him properly this time?

MAUD. With Bertie's braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! but —

MAUD. It's all right; they're almost leather.

[THE RECTOR re-enters, with a slight look of insecurity.]

LADY ELLA. Rector, are you sure it's safe?

THE RECTOR. [Hitching at his trousers] No, indeed, LADY Ella – I —

LADY ELLA. Tommy, do lend a hand!

THE SQUIRE. All right, Ella; all right! He doesn't mean what you mean!

LADY ELLA. [Transferring EDWARD to THE SQUIRE] Hold him, Tommy. He's sure to smell out Hannibal!

THE SQUIRE. [Taking EDWARD by the collar, and holding his own nose] Jove! Clever if he can smell anything but himself. Phew! She ought to have the Victoria Cross for goin' in that pond.

[The door opens, and HERSELF appears; a fine, frank, handsome woman, in a man's orange-coloured motor-coat, hastily thrown on over the substrata of costume.]

SHE. So very sorry – had to have a bath, and change, of course!

LADY ELLA. We're so awfully grateful to you. It was splendid.

MAUD. Quite.

THE RECTOR. [Rather holding himself together] Heroic! I was just myself about to —

THE SQUIRE. [Restraining EDWARD] Little beast will fight – must apologise – you were too quick for me —

[He looks up at her. She is smiling, and regarding the wounded dog, her head benevolently on one side.]

SHE. Poor dears! They thought they were so safe in that nice pond!

LADY ELLA. Is he very badly torn?

SHE. Rather nasty. There ought to be a stitch or two put in his ear.

LADY ELLA. I thought so. Tommy, do —

THE SQUIRE. All right. Am I to let him go?

LADY ELLA. No.

MAUD. The fly's outside. Bertie, run and tell Jarvis to drive in for the Vet.

THE RECTOR. [Gentle and embarrassed] Run? Well, Maud — I —

SHE. The doctor would sew it up. My maid can go round.

[HANNIBAL. appears at the open casement with the broken braces dangling from his collar.]

LADY ELLA. Look! Catch him! Rector!

MAUD. Bertie! Catch him!

[THE RECTOR seizes HANNIBAL, but is seen to be in difficulties with his garments. HERSELF, who has gone out left, returns, with a leather strop in one hand and a pair of braces in the other.]

SHE. Take this strop — he can't break that. And would these be any good to you?

[SHE hands the braces to MAUD and goes out on to the verandah and hastily away. MAUD, transferring the braces to the RECTOR, goes out, draws HANNIBAL from the casement window, and secures him with the strap. THE RECTOR sits suddenly with the braces in his hands. There is a moment's peace.]

LADY ELLA. Splendid, isn't she? I do admire her.

THE SQUIRE. She's all there.

THE RECTOR. [Feelingly] Most kind.

[He looks ruefully at the braces and at LADY ELLA. A silence. MAUD reappears at the door and stands gazing at the braces.]

THE SQUIRE. [Suddenly] Eh?

MAUD. Yes.

THE SQUIRE. [Looking at his wife] Ah!

LADY ELLA. [Absorbed in EDWARD] Poor darling!

THE SQUIRE. [Bluntly] Ella, the Rector wants to get up!

THE RECTOR. [Gently] Perhaps — just for a moment —

LADY ELLA. Oh! [She turns to the wall.]

[THE RECTOR, screened by his WIFE, retires on to the verandah to adjust his garments.]

THE SQUIRE. [Meditating] So she's married!

LADY ELLA. [Absorbed in EDWARD] Why?

THE SQUIRE. Braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! Yes. We ought to ask them to dinner, Tommy.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Wonder who they are?

[THE RECTOR and MAUD reappear.]

THE RECTOR. Really very good of her to lend her husband's — I was — er — quite —

MAUD. That'll do, Bertie.

[THEY see HER returning along the verandah, followed by a sandy, red-faced gentleman in leather leggings, with a needle and cotton in his hand.]

HERSELF. Caught the doctor just starting. So lucky!

LADY ELLA. Oh! Thank goodness!

DOCTOR. How do, Lady Ella? How do, Squire? – how do, Rector? [To MAUD] How de do? This the beastie? I see. Quite! Who'll hold him for me?

LADY ELLA. Oh! I!

HERSELF. D'you know, I think I'd better. It's so dreadful when it's your own, isn't it? Shall we go in here, doctor? Come along, pretty boy!

[She takes EDWARD, and they pass into the room, left.]

LADY ELLA. I dreaded it. She is splendid!

THE SQUIRE. Dogs take to her. That's a sure sign.

THE RECTOR. Little things – one can always tell.

THE SQUIRE. Something very attractive about her – what! Fine build of woman.

MAUD. I shall get hold of her for parish work.

THE RECTOR. Ah! Excellent – excellent! Do!

THE SQUIRE. Wonder if her husband shoots? She seems quite-er – quite —

LADY ELLA. [Watching the door] Quite! Altogether charming; one of the nicest faces I ever saw.

[THE DOCTOR comes out alone.]

Oh! Doctor – have you? is it – ?

DOCTOR. Right as rain! She held him like an angel – he just licked her, and never made a sound.

LADY ELLA. Poor darling! Can I —

[She signs toward the door.]

DOCTOR. Better leave 'em a minute. She's moppin' 'im off. [He wrinkles his nose] Wonderful clever hands!

THE SQUIRE. I say – who is she?

DOCTOR. [Looking from face to face with a dubious and rather quizzical expression] Who? Well – there you have me! All I know is she's a first-rate nurse – been helpin' me with a case in Ditch Lane. Nice woman, too – thorough good sort! Quite an acquisition here. H'm! [Again that quizzical glance] Excuse me hurryin' off – very late. Good-bye, Rector. Good-bye, Lady Ella. Good-bye!

[He goes. A silence.]

THE SQUIRE. H'm! I suppose we ought to be a bit careful.

[JARVIS, flyman of the old school, has appeared on the verandah.]

JARVIS. [To THE RECTOR] Beg pardon, sir. Is the little dog all right?

MAUD. Yes.

JARVIS. [Touching his hat] Seein' you've missed your train, m'm, shall I wait, and take you 'ome again?

MAUD. No.

JARVIS. Cert'nly, m'm. [He touches his hat with a circular gesture, and is about to withdraw.]

LADY ELLA. Oh, Jarvis – what's the name of the people here?

JARVIS. Challenger's the name I've driven 'em in, my lady.

THE SQUIRE. Challenger? Sounds like a hound. What's he like?

JARVIS. [Scratching his head] Wears a soft 'at, sir.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Ah!

JARVIS. Very nice gentleman, very nice lady. 'Elped me with my old mare when she 'ad the 'ighsteria last week – couldn't 'a been kinder if they'd 'a been angels from 'eaven. Wonderful fond o' dumb animals, the two of 'em. I don't pay no attention to gossip, meself.

MAUD. Gossip? What gossip?

JARVIS. [Backing] Did I make use of the word, m'm? You'll excuse me, I'm sure. There's always talk where there's newcomers. I takes people as I finds 'em.

THE RECTOR. Yes, yes, Jarvis – quite – quite right!

JARVIS. Yes, sir. I've – I've got a 'abit that way at my time o' life.

MAUD. [Sharply] How long have they been here, Jarvis?

JARVIS. Well – er – a matter of three weeks, m'm.

[A slight involuntary stir.]

[Apologetic] Of course, in my profession I can't afford to take notice of whether there's the trifle of a ring between 'em, as the sayin' is. 'Tisn't 'ardly my business like.

[A silence.]

LADY ELLA. [Suddenly] Er – thank you, Jarvis; you needn't wait.

JARVIS. No, m'lady. Your service, sir – service, m'm.

[He goes. A silence.]

THE SQUIRE. [Drawing a little closer] Three weeks? I say – er – wasn't there a book?

THE RECTOR. [Abstracted] Three weeks – I certainly haven't seen them in church.

MAUD. A trifle of a ring!

LADY ELLA. [Impulsively] Oh, bother! I'm sure she's all right. And if she isn't, I don't care. She's been much too splendid.

THE SQUIRE. Must think of the village. Didn't quite like the doctor's way of puttin' us off.

LADY ELLA. The poor darling owes his life to her.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Dash it! Yes! Can't forget the way she ran into that stinkin' pond.

MAUD. Had she a wedding-ring on?

[They look at each other, but no one knows.]

LADY ELLA. Well, I'm not going to be ungrateful.

THE SQUIRE. It'd be dashed awkward – mustn't take a false step, Ella.

THE RECTOR. And I've got his braces! [He puts his hand to his waist.]

MAUD. [Warningly] Bertie!

THE SQUIRE. That's all right, Rector – we're goin' to be perfectly polite, and – and – thank her, and all that.

LADY ELLA. We can see she's a good sort. What does it matter?

MAUD. My dear Ella! "What does it matter!" We've got to know.

THE RECTOR. We do want light.

THE SQUIRE. I'll ring the bell. [He rings.]

[They look at each other aghast.]

LADY ELLA. What did you ring for, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. [Flabbergasted] God knows!

MAUD. Somebody'll come.

THE SQUIRE. Rector – you – you've got to —

MAUD. Yes, Bertie.

THE RECTOR. Dear me! But – er – what – er – How?

THE SQUIRE. [Deeply-to himself] The whole thing's damn delicate.

[The door right is opened and a MAID appears. She is a determined-looking female. They face her in silence.]

THE RECTOR. Er – er – your master is not in?

THE MAID. No. 'E's gone up to London.

THE RECTOR. Er – Mr Challenger, I think?

THE MAID. Yes.

THE RECTOR. Yes! Er – quite so

THE MAID. [Eyeing them] D'you want – Mrs Challenger?

THE RECTOR. Ah! Not precisely —

THE SQUIRE. [To him in a low, determined voice] Go on.

THE RECTOR. [Desperately] I asked because there was a – a – Mr. Challenger I used to know in the 'nineties, and I thought – you wouldn't happen to know how long they've been married? My friend marr —

THE MAID. Three weeks.

THE RECTOR. Quite so – quite so! I shall hope it will turn out to be – Er – thank you – Ha!

LADY ELLA. Our dog has been fighting with the Rector's, and Mrs Challenger rescued him; she's bathing his ear. We're waiting to thank her. You needn't —

THE MAID. [Eyeing them] No.

[She turns and goes out.]

THE SQUIRE. Phew! What a gorgon! I say, Rector, did you really know a Challenger in the 'nineties?

THE RECTOR. [Wiping his brow] No.

THE SQUIRE. Ha! Jolly good!

LADY ELLA. Well, you see! – it's all right.

THE RECTOR. Yes, indeed. A great relief!

LADY ELLA. [Moving to the door] I must go in now.

THE SQUIRE. Hold on! You goin' to ask 'em to – to – anything?

LADY ELLA. Yes.

MAUD. I shouldn't.

LADY ELLA. Why not? We all like the look of her.

THE RECTOR. I think we should punish ourselves for entertaining that uncharitable thought.

LADY ELLA. Yes. It's horrible not having the courage to take people as they are.

THE SQUIRE. As they are? H'm! How can you till you know?

LADY ELLA. Trust our instincts, of course.

THE SQUIRE. And supposing she'd turned out not married – eh!

LADY ELLA! She'd still be herself, wouldn't she?

MAUD. Ella!

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Don't know about that.

LADY ELLA. Of course she would, Tommy.

THE RECTOR. [His hand stealing to his waist] Well! It's a great weight off my – !

LADY ELLA. There's the poor darling snuffling. I must go in.

[She knocks on the door. It is opened, and EDWARD comes out briskly, with a neat little white pointed ear-cap on one ear.]

LADY ELLA. Precious!

[SHE HERSELF Comes out, now properly dressed in flax-blue linen.]

LADY ELLA. How perfectly sweet of you to make him that!

SHE. He's such a dear. And the other poor dog?

MAUD. Quite safe, thanks to your strop.

[HANNIBAL appears at the window, with the broken strop dangling.
Following her gaze, they turn and see him.]

MAUD. Oh! There, he's broken it. Bertie!

SHE. Let me! [She seizes HANNIBAL.]

THE SQUIRE. We're really most tremendously obliged to you. Afraid we've been an awful nuisance.

SHE. Not a bit. I love dogs.

THE SQUIRE. Hope to make the acquaintance of Mr – of your husband.

LADY ELLA. [To EDWARD, who is straining]

[Gently, darling! Tommy, take him.] [THE SQUIRE does so.]

MAUD. [Approaching HANNIBAL.] Is he behaving?

[She stops short, and her face suddenly shoots forward at HER hands that are holding HANNIBAL'S neck.]

SHE. Oh! yes – he's a love.

MAUD. [Regaining her upright position, and pursing her lips; in a peculiar voice] Bertie, take Hannibal.

THE RECTOR takes him.

LADY ELLA. [Producing a card] I can't be too grateful for all you've done for my poor darling. This is where we live. Do come – and see —

[MAUD, whose eyes have never left those hands, tweaks LADY ELLA's dress.]

LADY ELLA. That is – I'm – I —

[HERSELF looks at LADY ELLA in surprise.]

THE SQUIRE. I don't know if your husband shoots, but if —

[MAUD, catching his eye, taps the third finger of her left hand.]

– er – he – does – er – er —

[HERSELF looks at THE SQUIRE surprised.]

MAUD. [Turning to her husband, repeats the gesture with the low and simple word] Look!

THE RECTOR. [With round eyes, severely] Hannibal! [He lifts him bodily and carries him away.]

MAUD. Don't squeeze him, Bertie!

[She follows through the French window.]

THE SQUIRE. [Abruptly – of the unoffending EDWARD] That dog'll be forgettin' himself in a minute.

[He picks up EDWARD and takes him out.] [LADY ELLA is left staring.]

LADY ELLA. [At last] You mustn't think, I – You mustn't think, we – Oh! I must just see they – don't let Edward get at Hannibal.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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