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A SISTER TO ASSIST 'ER

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tation.



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A SISTER TO ASSIST 'ER

A PLAY IN ONE ACT.

BY

JOHN LE BRETON.

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A SISTER TO ASSIST 'ER.

CHARACTERS.

MRS. MILLIE MAY (*a Monthly Nurse*) ... MR. FRED EMNEY.
MRS. McMULL (*her Landlady*)... MISS SYDNEY FAIRBROTHER.

SCENE : *A shabby bed-sitting room.*

*Produced on September 11th, 1911, at the County Theatre,
Kingston-on-Thames.*

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A SISTER TO ASSIST 'ER.

SCENE.—*A shabby bed-sitting room. Bed in one corner, old screen partly hiding it. Two sugar cases, one on the other, curtained by old chintz, as cupboard. These filled with empty bottles. Table centre. Two chairs. Door back.*

MRS. MAY *discovered listening at almost closed door.*

MRS. MAY. Cat! (*slams door and comes half way front. Stops and rushes back to door. Opens door*) You're no lady; you thing! (*slams door and comes half way front. Goes back again and opens door*) You! You! You're a woman! A woman! Woman! (*slams door and comes front and removes cape and bonnet and almost fingerless gloves*) There! That had her one. The truth is bound to come out if once I get hold of it. Seventeen times 'as she give me notice since half-past nine o'clock Tuesday last. Just because I owe her a few weeks' rent. Five to be exact, and *Rent* mark you, for a hole like this. What *am* I to do. Where's that telegram. (*reads*) "Come immediately. Urgent case. Dr. Robinson." There . . . there's luck, the fust job I've 'ad for three months. I don't know what's coming to the Birth Rate in England—that can't be Free Trade. Come immediately—yes—I dessay. But, *how*, my good man—*How!* Here's me with me box packed—an' can't move—for a few paltry weeks' rent. Last week she was all for saying "pay up or go"—and now it's "pay up or you don't go." Yah! I hates these weathercock minds. If that woman was on'y a lady, I'd put up with 'er 'orrible ways, and, if I wasn't a lady meself, I'd tell 'er as she's on'y a low, common woman, as 'asn't got a decent dress to 'er name, and no respectabul lady would be *seen* calling 'er what she is; a tallow-complexioned . . .

Enter Mrs. McMULL hurriedly.

MRS. McMULL. What was you a-saying? What was you a-calling me?

MRS. MAY. Can't a lady speak to 'erself without you spying and listening, and keyholeing? I've been used to ladies——

MRS. McMULL. And where, may I ask?

MISS MAY. Not 'ere. And let me tell you as listeners never 'ear no good of theirselves. Not as anyone ever said any good of you ever. You're on'y fit to be a skeleton. And look at yer 'air, if you call it 'air.

MRS. McMULL. I decline to demean meself by conversationing with you. Are you a-going to pay me my rent or not? Fourteen weeks you've been 'ere, and me not even seen the colour of your money for the last five.

MRS. MAY. Five weeks! Is that all? Why I thought by your language it was five years at least. I shouldn't let all the neighbourhood know I was broke for fifteen bob.

MRS. McMULL. Broke! Me broke! Why it's you as is broke!

MRS. MAY. Me? Is it me as is 'owling fer fifteen shillings? Is it me as is abusive because I ain't got it? Oh! if my sister could but see me now, she'd cry 'er eyes out.

MRS. McMULL. If she's so rich as you say she is, it's a pity she don't pay your debts.

MRS. MAY. Debts? Meaning fifteen shillings. Why she wouldn't think of such a paltry amount. If it was pounds she'd give me a cheque. But fifteen shillings, I'd be ashamed to ask 'er for it.

MRS. McMULL. *If* she's so rich it's a wonder she lets 'er on'y sister go a-nursing—

MRS. MAY. If you on'y understood the upper classes, you'd know why. Independence is our motter. It's on'y ther lower classes as worries about money. It's obless and oblige with us.

MRS. McMULL. It's my belief you ain't got no sister at all. And, what's more, you never 'ad a sister.

MRS. MAY. There's shamelessness, and 'er with 'er own carriage, as might call 'ere any day, if the place was a little more respectable.

MRS. McMULL. Seeing's believing. When I see 'er I may believe as she 'as thousands and keeps 'er six servants. Not before.

MRS. MAY. If you was anything but a woman you'd know a lady when you seen one.

MRS. McMULL. Don't you dare to woman me. I'll fetch the perlice if you call me again. And I'm tired of giving you notice.

MRS. MAY. And 'oo arst you to? But that's done it. Now I don't stop 'ere no longer unless you erpologise. You woman.

MRS. McMULL. That's enough! Pay up and go—Creature!

MRS. MAY. Woman!

MRS. McMULL. Creature !

MRS. MAY. Woman ! Woman ! Woman !

MRS. McMULL. (*bursting into tears*) I'll set my lawyers on you for that. I've never listened to sich awful abuse in all my nat'ral. Never ! And in me own 'ouse too. But you wait. You just wait ! That's all I arst. You just wait.

Exit MRS. McMULL.

MRS. McMULL. (*going to door*) Woman ! Woman ! (*shuts door*) I suppose she means it too. I never see a woman take erfence so easy. And me said next to nothing. But I don't see azactly 'ow I'm going to get out and on'y one and fi'pence in the wide. It 'ud cost me a bob to move my box to the station—and then there's the fare to Bristol—and me medicine at the—Why, I want a sovereign without her frowsy rent, and there's £4 certain and board—and lodging, and extras. (*thinking*) I wonder if I could do it ? I wonder if she'd be took in ? She's a bit of a—— Yus, I will. I'll do it. I'll run ercross ther wiy and borryer Phoebe Bell's best costoome and bonnet, what she borryered from 'er misses when she left. She'll be out I know, and I can frighten that landlady of 'ers. Easy ! She won't dare to stop me. And I'll borryer the old woman's specs. I shall look a treat. I'm one as pays fer dressing. I'll teach 'er what's due to a lady.

Enter MRS. McMULL, holding out a paper.

MRS. McMULL. Here's your notice, written. You've got to quit up and deliver within twenty-four hours. And you don't take your boxes with you neither.

MRS. MAY. (*going*) I'm sorry for you now, my poor woman. You've done for yourself, now. I'm off to see my fam'ly slicter ; he'll put yer through it. Deformation of character—through living in your 'ouse. There'll be no option for you this time ; though, as me sister wrote me on'y larst week—what can yer expect from a woman ? A woman !

Exit MRS. MAY.

MRS. McMULL. A disgrace to 'er sect, that's what she is. No clars ; that's her all over. And her sister. *She's* got no sister. If she were a lady I wouldn't mind so much. A real lady can be friendly with another lady, even if it comes to words. But out she goes as I'm a living lady. And what has she got in my cupboard ? (*sees box*) Oh, look at that, now ? There's me lady's box all ready packed, if you please. Lucky I noticed it—I know 'em. She'd a been out of the

winder and down the drain-pipe with it, if I 'adn't a-been sharp. And then where's my rent? I'll just have a peep and see what she's got in it. Locked! That marks her—there's trustfulness, I *don't* think. Who does she suspect wants to look in her dirty box—at her bits of rags? I hope she ain't pinched any of my ornaments. No, they're all here. Where's the "Love one another"? She's took it. I'll 'ave her locked up—if she has. (*finds it*) Well, that's manners, upon my word. Look at that—using a lady's motter to keep the flies out of a bit of dripping. Scandalous! Ah! This teapot was never used for tea. (*shakes it, and vainly tries to get the lid off*) Blow the lid! It's some plan of 'ers, so as no one can look in. And there's something inside. More gin, o' course. I'll make sure. (*drinks from spout—splutters*) Poison! Done a-purpose. Parafin! And in a teapot. No lady would ever keep 'er parafin in a teapot. (*knocking*) 'Ulloa! What a knock! Sounds like the Lord Mayor and all 'is plecemen. (*knockings*)

MRS. McMULL *goes to door and comes back with* MRS. MAY *disguised, in smart clothes and specs.*

MRS. MAY. Is Mrs. May in, my good woman?

MRS. McMULL. No, mum, she ain't, mum. Won't you please to sit down?

MRS. MAY. What, not in! Didn't she get my telegram?

MRS. McMULL. Yes, she did get a telegram. I brought it up with my own 'ands.

MRS. MAY. I don't think I'll wait. Would you please to say as 'er sister Mrs. Le Browning called?

MRS. McMULL. 'Er sister! Oh! Yes, mum. I was sure you was. If I may say so, there's a strong fam'ly likeness. Won't you come in a minute. Mrs. May won't be long, and the 'ouse do seem so lonely without 'er, that I 'ope she'll be as quick as I want 'er to be.

MRS. MAY. I'll wait a few minutes, then. But I daren't wait no longer or the 'orses might get cold.

MRS. McMULL. (*placing chair for her visitor, who sits beside table*) Oh, you've drove over then, mum. Now I've got an 'orrer of 'orses. My pa used to keep quite a quantity, but nothink would injuce me to go near them,

MRS. MAY. Ho! Hindeed! The on'y thing as I object to in 'em is that they do make such a dust. My mouth is full of it.

MRS. McMULL. Can I presoom to offer you a cup o' tea?

MRS. MAY. There's nothink I should like better, but I dasent. Tea acts like poison on my sistern. It does, I assure you.

MRS. McMULL. I can quite believe it, mum. You being so ercustomed to ther best of everythink. But is there anythink else I can offer you, mum? I'm sure as your dear sister would be dreadful worried if she knew you was dry and wouldn't take nothink.

MRS. MAY. If you should 'appen to 'ave a little barley water ready made——

MRS. McMULL. There! And I 'ad some in ther 'ouse on'y a month or two back, but if you was going to stay an hour or two——

MRS. MAY. I wouldn't trouble you fer ther world. I suppose you 'aven't a drop of Madery Sherry wine 'andy? No? Then pray don't worrit. The doctors order me gin, on'y it's such common stuff that I suppose you don't keep it in the 'ouse.

MRS. McMULL. Well, to tell you the honest truth, mum, I 'ave a little as I keep in case o' measles in the 'ouse. If you'll excuse me for one moment. (*going*)

MRS. MAY. Ho! certainly!

MRS. McMULL. If I'd known as we was going to 'ave ther pleasure of seeing you, I'd 'ave 'ad the other. I shan't be one moment.

Exit MRS. McMULL.

MRS. MAY. Yah! Yer old cat! Yah! Done her—I've done her—she don't know me. My poor Aunt Phoebe was right after all. I'd 'a made a fortune on the stage. (*imitating* MRS. McMULL) I shan't be a minute. Ole cat? I knew she kep it, and yet when I arst 'er to lend me ar a pint or so the other day, she swore as she never 'ad none. But she ain't rekernized me. Now I'll lead 'er on.

Enter MRS. McMULL *with a bottle of gin and glasses.*

MRS. McMULL. Your dear sister was on'y saying to me this very afternoon; "Daisy dear," she says to me, "if my sister calls," she says, "you'll know 'er from 'er likeness to me." "Then," I says, "all I can say is that she must be a very good-looking lady," I says. Any water, mum? No! Ah! you take it as a tonic, same as me. My respex, mum.

MRS. MAY. In which toast I will include my sister, Mrs. May.

MRS. McMULL. Ho! certainly, mum. With all me 'eart—fer a nicer, genteeler lady than your dear sister I've never 'ad the pleasure of meeting yet. (*they drink. Fill up and continue drinking*)

MRS. MAY. I dessay as you've noticed, mum, as my sister is a very proud nature. She's never arst me fer nothink in

all 'er life, and me on'y too willing to give 'er hundreds if she'd on'y accept it.

MRS. McMULL. Ho? Yes. I on'y said to 'er this morning, "my dear," I says, "if I 'ad a sister like you, I'd do my best to please 'er by taking whatsoever she wished to give me. Proud as I ham, I am never too proud.

MRS. MAY. I suppose my sister don't owe you nothink?

MRS. McMULL. Ho! No! Not what you may call owing. There is just a matter o' rent . . . on'y eight weeks—and I woudn't 'ave her think—

MRS. MAY. Ho! indeed! I'm glad it's such a trifle, or I'd 'ave paid it. But it might upset 'er. (*aside*) Eight weeks—Oh! the 'ag"!

MRS. McMULL. I shouldn't 'ave mentioned hit, if you 'adn't a arskt me, mum, I do hassure you. What's ten weeks rent?

MRS. MAY. (*aside*) Go it—go it—I must 'ave been 'ere a fortnight already. (*aloud*) O' course you woudn't, mum. You know what's due to a lady, 'oo better. Still, as my sister is a bit of what we call an eggcenteregg, in 'igh sassiety, and she of'en pertends as she can't pay, just fer fun, you might tell me when it comes to the nex' quarter. Some folks perfer to pay arf-yearly.

MRS. McMULL. Ho! yes, I expect that's it. But as I on'y said to 'er this very morning, "Don't you trouble erbout ther twelve weeks' rent, my love," I says, "Friendship before all," I says.

MRS. MAY. Hindeed! Very propitious of you, mum. Very! I suppose my sister meals with you?

MRS. McMULL. Not always, mum. I wish she would, she'd always 'ave a kind welcome. Like sisters we are. And a dearer creecher, a sweeter, more good temperder lady I never 'ave seen. A horniment to any 'ome.

MRS. MAY. It's most kind of you to say so—most kind. And if you woudn't consider it a liberty, I should like to send you a small present when I send ther rent. If you could buy something fer ten pounds in memoriam of me. joolery—or gloves—or—soap—(*looking at Mrs. McMULL*) Yes—I think soap's best—or anythink—

MRS. McMULL. Delighted, mum—for as I was saying to your dear sister on'y this morning—do 'ave just one more glass, mum. (*filling it*)

MRS. MAY. To oblige you then, mum. Here's wishing you all you wish yourself.

MRS. McMULL. And if I might be erlowed to express ther sentiment, 'ere's wishing as we may become better acquainted, mum.

MRS. MAY. I'm a-going to arst me sister to come and stay at our new 'ouse, and if you'd come with 'er——

MRS. McMULL. Delighted, mum. To know you better is a treat in store.

MRS. MAY. And as me poor sister's 'ealth isn't what it ought to be, if you would kindly see as 'ow she got 'er meals 'ot and reg'lar, and good nourishing food——

MRS. McMULL. You leave it to me, mum. There's nothink can't be too good for 'er. Of course, she's been used to the best when staying with you, I can see.

MRS. MAY. Fourteen course dinner every day. My 'usband will 'ave 'em. You see 'e's made 'is money, and 'e's got nothing ter do but ter enjoy 'isself. And besides——'e's——(*whispers*)

MRS. McMULL. Lor', mum! Riches ain't everything, are they?

MRS. MAY. Well, of course, if——(*whispers*)

MRS. McMULL. Poor dear. Now, my 'usband was quite different. He——(*whispers*)

MRS. MAY. Well, I never. I wouldn't a stood it. They may go too far with me. Up to a point, well, it's all very well, but oncet they go beyond——

MRS. McMULL. My sentiments to a T, mum. But I buried my poor dear ten years ago, and it' wonderful 'ow I miss him still.

MRS. MAY. A man about the 'ouse 'as 'is uses, I will say that. But my sister don't seem to be coming, and ther coachman don't like ther 'orses kep' waiting. They're round the corner now, I expect, so I must be off. 'Ow pervoking her not being here. I can't wait any longer. And I wanted her to come back with me for a couple of days.

MRS. McMULL. Well, it's her loss, but my gain, as I should have missed her so.

MRS. MAY. Well, it can't be helped. My train goes at six o'clock, and I must go the stores first and get half a dozen pine-apples for dinner to-night. I've only just time to do it. I am disappointed. Good afternoon.

MRS. McMULL. Any message I can give 'er in case she comes in?

MRS. MAY. What a 'ead you've got. If she should, by chance, come in time, tell her to catch the six o'clock from Waterloo, and come to-night. Here's the address. Mrs. Le Browning. Ah! The Manor House, Birmingham.

MRS. McMULL. If she should come, she'll 'ave your message.

MRS. MAY. That'll do——*if* my sister wants any—which

ain't likely, lend it to her, and I'll send it—with the £10 gift for soap, and the 25 weeks' rent.

MRS. McMULL. Oh, with pleasure.

MRS. MAY. Well, good-bye—I must go.

MRS. McMULL. You don't seem to 'ave been 'ere no time at all. I do 'ope we shall see you again soon.

MRS. MAY. Well, not just yet. We move in two weeks to our new 'ouse. The present one 'as on'y fourteen bedrooms, and when we hentertain it's awkward. But I *must* be off, and I'll leave my sister safe in your 'ands, I know.

MRS. McMULL. She's on'y got to say the word—

MRS. MAY. And as to the trifle of rent—

MRS. McMULL. Why mention it, my dear. What's a matter of eighteen weeks at six shillings a week.

MRS. MAY. I'll tell you what we'll do. Say nothing to 'er, and when you come to stay with me I'll give it to you. Give 'er my love.

MRS. McMULL. That I will. And if she's too late to come on to you I'll get 'er a nice 'ot supper ternight.

MRS. MAY. Ah! you're a kind creecher. Good-bye for the present.

They kiss.

Exit MRS. MAY.

MRS. McMULL. There! That's what I call a lady—kisses yer. No back-biting. If I was ter meet ther Queen I couldn't like 'er better. So sochable too. And I dessay drinks champayne out o' tumblers when she's at 'ome. And me to stay with 'er. I must get a new costoom. I expect she dresses fer dinner, and does 'er 'air d'irectly after breakfast. No curlers there. Quite the lady in every way.

Enter MRS. MAY with old dress on.

Your sister's been, dear.

MRS. MAY. I don't believe it. You're falsifying to me.

MRS. McMULL. To you! I'd rather falsify to a pleeceman than to you. She's reely been. And *such* a lady.

MRS. MAY. And me out. 'Ow pervoking. I meant ter borryer twenty pounds. I meant to 'umble meself so as I could pay you.

MRS. McMULL. Pay me, love? Now don't offend me, please. Such a little matter.

MRS. MAY. You made enough fuss.

MRS. McMULL. That was on'y my fun. Just ter cheer yer up like. I've got a message for yer. You're to catch the six o'clock from Waterloo to Birmingham. She wants you to stop with her for two days.

MRS. MAY. What, at the Manor House. Why I 'aven't a thing to go in—and no money for my fare.

MRS. McMULL. Don't be silly, Millie dear. I've arranged all that with your dear sisters. Here's your box ready packed. No! You must let me carry it down and put it on a cab. And here's a sovereign for your fare.

MRS. MAY. I couldn't touch it. Never a Borrower me. No, I won't go. I owe you for my rent too.

MRS. McMULL. That's all right. Come—as one girl to another. I'm just coming to join you in a week. Come on, dearie, you've just time. Here, take the sovereign——

MRS. MAY. Well, I'll 'umble meself. But, my sister——

MRS. McMULL. Sisters, dear. Sisters, for I feel as if I was your sister.

MRS. MAY. Oh, Sissy—Sissy. Believe me, as time rolls on you'll never forget what a Sister means to a Sister.

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