



Heather Lynn

Adapted from the play *Alice Sit-By-The-Fire* by J.M. Barrie

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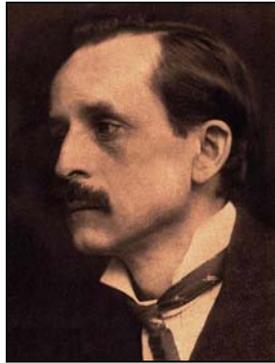
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P.O. Box 1401
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After We Went to Our First REAL Play...

FARCE/SPOOF. Adapted from the play by J.M. Barry. Amy, a dramatic, naïve teenager, has learned the ways of the world by regularly going to the theater, where she has learned about love triangles, covert love letters, and the importance of flinging your cloak back with a flourish when entering a room. When her parents arrive in London after a long military stint, Amy meets her parents and realizes they are largely strangers to her. After having seen five theatrical melodramas that week, Amy's flair for the dramatic goes into overdrive when she mistakenly suspects that her mother, Alice, and Mr. Rollo, a lonely bachelor, have set up a secret rendezvous. To save her mother from scandal and shame, Amy concocts a farcical plot to "save" her. The laughs are nonstop in this side-splitting spoof of 19th century English melodramas!

Performance Time: Approximately 75-90 minutes.



J. M. Barrie (1860-1937)

About the Story

J.M. Barrie is a Scottish novelist and playwright who is best known for his 1904 play *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, which he later adapted into the children's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911). Barrie was ninth of 10 children and his father was a weaver. Barrie was shy and introverted and considered short at just 5'3" tall. As a child, Barrie loved to read books and set his mind to becoming an author, which his family discouraged. Barrie worked as a journalist before publishing his first novel, *Auld Licht Idylls*, in 1888. Barrie and his wife Mary Ansell divorced in 1909 after Ansell refused to end her affair with one of Barrie's associates, Gilbert Cannan. Even after Ansell and Cannan married, Barrie continued to support Ansell by giving her an annual allowance every year on Ansell and Barrie's wedding anniversary. Before his death in 1937, Barrie had written dozens of novels and plays and had a host of literary friends including Robert Louis Stevenson, George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Thomas Hardy, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

Characters

(3 M, 6 F)

COLONEL: Has just returned from his military service in India and is eager to reacquaint himself with his three children; has a mustache; male.

ALICE: Colonel's wife who has just returned from India and is nervous about meeting her children and desperately wants them to like her; female.

AMY: Naïve, romantic teen who thinks she is very mature and loves to go to the theater; has had to raise her younger siblings while her parents were stationed in India; female.

COSMO: Amy's younger brother who goes to a military academy and hates his name; wears a naval uniform; male.

GINEVRA: Amy's best friend, an art student, who loves to go to the theater; female.

FANNY: Household maid; female.

NURSE: Overbearing nursemaid; female.

STEPHEN ROLLO: The Colonel's friend, a lonely bachelor, who has returned from India and runs a tea business in London; unlucky in love, women take no notice of him; wears a lounge jacket; male.

RICHARDSON: Teen daughter of Stephen Rollo's landlady; works as a servant; female.

Setting

London, early 1900s.

Sets

Amy's room. The room has a feminine, crafty look. Amy has either hand painted or hand sewn all the décor in the room but she hasn't finished any of them. There are only two chairs that haven't been "decorated." The table cover and the curtains are pink and have an odd basket of flowers painted on them. There is a stool with a brown velvet cover with words inviting one to sit down but some of the letters have been burned away. White bookshelves hang lopsidedly here and there with pink curtains. Hand-painted pictures hang on the wall of a windmill and an old lady on the shore that Amy painted in school. Pinecones and straw have been glued to the picture frames. Amy has added ribbons to all the lampshades. The flowerpot has a skirt. Near the door is a large screen. There is a fireplace with a hearth rug. In the corner is a milking stool. There is an adjoining door between Amy's room and the nursery.

Stephen Rollo's flat. A comfortable, humble flat. There is a cupboard where crockery is kept. The cupboard is large enough for Amy to hide in. There is a window with drawn curtains and a fireplace with a hearth rug. On the wall is a clock and assorted framed photographs.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: Amy's room, Thursday.

ACT II: Stephen Rollo's flat, 8:30 p.m., later that evening.

ACT III: Amy's room, later that evening.

PROPS

Bathrobe, for Amy
Bath towel
Telegram
Baby shoe
Assorted photographs
Tea tray with a tea set
Food platter with dirty dishes on it
Plate with a pork chop on it
Empty plate
Assorted crockery
Lounge jacket, for Steven
Evening dress, for Amy
Cloak, for Amy
Gloves, for Amy
Tiny toy dagger
Book

Sound Effects

Sound of an outer door slamming
Sound of a cab arriving
Bell ringing
Baby crying
Baby's crying escalating to screaming
Happy baby gurgling sounds
Doorbell
Knock at the door
Sound of a door opening
Sound of someone ascending the stairs

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"She is sentimental, our Amy,
and she has been to the theatre
a bit too often."

-Colonel

ACT I

(AT RISE: Amy's room, Thursday. Amy has washed her hair and is now drying it by the fire. She is wearing a bathrobe and a towel, and her head is bent so far back over the fire that we see her face nearly upside down. Seated near her is Cosmo, dressed in a naval uniform. He is looking at a telegram.)

COSMO: (Gloomily.) All I can say...is that if Father tries to kiss me, I shall kick him.

(Maid enters and announces Miss Dunbar has arrived. Amy rises. Ginevra enters. They slowly approach each other.)

AMY: Are you well, Ginevra?

GINEVRA: Quite well, Amy. How did you sleep?

AMY: I had a good night.

(Cosmo snorts and exits.)

GINEVRA: Amy, shall we go to the theatre tonight?

AMY: Another play? Ginevra, that would be five in one week!

GINEVRA: Yes, but it is also only eight in 17 years.

AMY: And they have taught us so much, haven't they? Until Monday when we went to our first *real* play, we didn't know what life is.

GINEVRA: We were two naïve schoolgirls, Amy...absolutely naïve.

AMY: You are quite right, Ginevra. But we have made up for lost time. Every night since Monday has been a revelation.

GINEVRA: Amy, that heart-gripping scene when the love-maddened woman visited the man in his chambers –

AMY: She wasn't absolutely love-maddened, Ginevra. She really loved her husband best.

AMY: She was most foolish, but we know that she only went to the man's chambers to get her letters back. How I trembled for her then.

GINEVRA: I was strangely calm.

AMY: Oh, Ginevra, I thought that the husband would call at those chambers while she was there. And he did. You remember his knock on the door. Surely, you trembled then?

GINEVRA: Not even then, Amy. Somehow I felt sure that in the nick of time her lady friend would step out from somewhere and say that the letters were hers.

AMY: Nobly compromising herself. Isn't it glorious? Strange, Ginevra, that it happened in each play.

GINEVRA: That's because we always go to the *thinking* theatres, Amy. *Real* plays are always about a lady and two men. And, alas, only one of them is her husband. That is life, you know. It is called a "love triangle."

AMY: Yes, I know. Ginevra, I hope it wasn't wrong of me to go. A month ago, I was only a schoolgirl.

GINEVRA: We both were.

AMY: Yes, but you are now an art student in lodgings with a latchkey of your own. You have no one dependent on you, while I have a brother and sister to...to raise.

GINEVRA: You must leave it to the Navy, dear, to form Cosmo...if it can. And as your sister is only a baby, there will be time enough to raise her right when she leaves her baby carriage.

AMY: But I am their mother for the time being.

GINEVRA: But even mothers go to thinking theatres.

AMY: Whether my real mother does, Ginevra, I don't even know. This is a very strange position I am in...awaiting the return from India of my parents I have not seen since I was 12 years old. I don't even know if they will like the house. The rent is what they told me to pay, but perhaps my decorations won't appeal to them. They may think my housekeeping is flawed.

GINEVRA: Amy, it would be simply wrong of us not to go to the theatre tonight.

AMY: I can't go.

GINEVRA: Why not?

(Cosmo enters, still holding the telegram.)

AMY: Cosmo, show Miss Dunbar the telegram.

GINEVRA: *(Reads telegram.)* "Boat arrived Southampton this morning."

AMY: A day earlier than expected.

COSMO: *(Gloomily.)* It's the other bit I am worrying about. *(Reads telegram.)* "Hope to reach you this afternoon. Kisses from both to all. Deliriously excited. Mummy and Dad. Hugs, kisses." *(Makes a face.)*

AMY: Surely, you want a kiss from your mother.

COSMO: Yes...it's Father I am worrying about...with his "kisses to both from all." All I can say is that if Father comes slobbering over to me— *(Sound of the outer door slamming startles Cosmo, Amy, and Ginevra. Rehearsing his greeting.)* "How are you, Father? I'm glad to see you, Father. It's a long journey from India. Won't you sit down?"

(The Nurse is heard in the adjoining room. There is a door between the two rooms. Cosmo peeps through the door and signals to Amy and Ginevra that all is well.)

AMY: How silly of us! It is only the nurse with the baby. *(Sighs.)* Poor Nurse, I suppose I had better show her the telegram. She is sure to cry. She looks upon Mother as a thief who has come to steal the baby from her.

(Amy exits into the adjoining room where she confronts the Nurse with the telegram. The Nurse bursts into tears. Amy tries to comfort her. Amy enters and signals to Ginevra. Ginevra exits up the stairs. Crying, Nurse enters.)

NURSE: I have had her for 17 months. She was just two months old, the angel, when they sent her to England, and she has been mine ever since. Most babies have one look for their mammas and one look for their nurse, but she knew no better than to have both looks for me! My reign is over!
(Exits to the nursery, wailing.)

COSMO: *(To Amy.)* Do you think Molly will prefer Nurse over Mother?

AMY: It is the way of children.

COSMO: Shabby little beasts.

AMY: You mustn't say that, Cosmo. But, still, it is hard on Nurse. Of course, in a sense, it's hard on all of us...I mean, to be expecting parents in these circumstances. There must be almost the same feeling of strangeness in the house as when a baby is expected.

COSMO: *(Gloomily.)* I suppose it is a bit like that.

AMY: *(Suspiciously.)* What do we really know about Mother, Cosmo?

COSMO: There are her letters...

AMY: Can one really know a person by their letters? Does she know you, Cosmo, by your letters to her?

COSMO: Well, I try to please her in my letters.

AMY: Perhaps in her letters she says things just to please us.

COSMO: *(Nervously fidgeting.)* This is pretty low of you, just as I was trying to make the best of it.

AMY: All I want you to feel... *(Approaches him.)* ...is that as brother and sister, we are allies, you know...against the unknown.

COSMO: Yes.

AMY: I have tried to be a sort of mother to you, Cosmo.

COSMO: I know. Amy, do we know anything about them at all?

AMY: We know some facts, of course. We know that Father is much older than Mother. *(In a low voice.)* Mother is 40.

COSMO: *(In a lower voice.)* I thought she was older.

(Amy shudders.)

AMY: Of course, we must be prepared to see her look older.
(Amy and Cosmo exchange forlorn glances.) We seem to know a good deal about them, and then we know some other things by heredity.

COSMO: Heredity? That's a drink, isn't it?

AMY: *(Smiles.)* No! It's something in a play. It means that if we know ourselves well, we know our parents also. In Mother's youth, she was one who did not love easily, but when she loved once, it was forever. A nature very difficult to understand, but profoundly interesting. I can feel her within me, as she was when she walked down the aisle on that strong arm to honor and obey Father henceforth. They did not care that they had to leave their native land...they were together for life.

COSMO: What about Father? What would you say he was like by heredity?

AMY: Quiet, unassuming, yet of an intensely proud nature. One, who if he was deceived, would never face his fellow man but would bow his head before the wind and die. A strong man.

COSMO: Do you mean, Amy, that he is like me?

AMY: I mean that is the sort of man my mother would love.

(Cosmo nods. Ginevra enters, making him Cosmo uncomfortable.)

COSMO: I think I'll go walk up and down outside and have a look at them as they're getting out of the cab. My plan, you see, is first to kiss Mother. Then I've made up four things to say to Father, and it's after I've said them that the awkward time will come. So then I say, "I wonder what is in the evening papers" and out I slip, and when I come back, you will all have settled down to ordinary life, same as other people. That's my plan. *(Exits.)*

GINEVRA: *(Shrugs.)* How strange boys are. Have you any plan, Amy?

AMY: Only this...to leap into my mother's arms.

(Amy and Ginevra exit. Cosmo rushes on, but finding the room empty, he exits. Sound of a cab arriving. Bell rings. The voice of Colonel Grey is heard talking to Fanny, dumping down luggage, selecting from a handful of silver to pay the driver. Alice is heard asking, "Where are they?" Fanny responds. Fanny and a dejected Alice appear in the doorway of the room.)

ALICE: *(To Fanny, woefully.)* All out?! Even...even the baby?

FANNY: Yes, ma'am.

(Alice sits in a chair and cries. Colonel dries her tears. He is trying hard to pretend that having done without his children for so many years that a few minutes more is no great matter. Alice stands and flutters across the room.)

ALICE: Robert, I daresay my Amy painted that table.

FANNY: Yes, ma'am, she did. I suppose, ma'am, I'm to take my orders from you now.

ALICE: *(Timidly.)* I suppose so.

FANNY: The poor miss, it will be a bit trying for her at first.

ALICE: *(Taken aback.)* I hadn't thought of that, Robert.

ROBERT: *(To Fanny.)* Bring your mistress a cup of tea, my girl.

FANNY: Yes, sir. *(Exits.)*

ALICE: *(To Robert.)* It's home! Home! India done...home begun!

ROBERT: *(Happily.)* Home! And we've never had a real one before. Thank goodness, I'm able to give it to you at last.

(Alice darts impulsively from one object in the room to another.)

ALICE: Look at these pictures. I'm sure they are all Amy's work. They are splendid. *(Pause.)* Aren't they?

ROBERT: *(Guardedly.)* I couldn't have done them. *(Looks at the hand-painted curtains.)* She seems to have stopped everything in the middle. Still, I couldn't have done them. I expect this is what is called a "cozy corner."

(Alice finds a baby shoe.)

ALICE: Oh, Robert, a baby's shoe. My baby. *(Presses it to her. Realizes.)* Robert, if I had met my baby coming along the street, I shouldn't have known her from other people's babies.

ROBERT: Yes, you would. Don't break down now. Just think, Alice, after today, you will know your baby anywhere.

ALICE: Oh, joy, joy, joy! *(Suddenly sorrowful.)*

ROBERT: What is it now, Alice?

ALICE: Perhaps she won't like me.

ROBERT: Impossible.

ALICE: Perhaps none of them will like me.

ROBERT: My dear Alice, children always love their mother, whether they see much of her or not. It's an instinct.

ALICE: Who told you that?

ROBERT: You.

ALICE: I've lost faith in it.

ROBERT: Of course, you must give them a little time...

ALICE: With a girl nearly grown up? Oh, when shall things settle down?

(Baby crying is heard. Nurse enters and is at once defensive.)

NURSE: Is it...Mrs. Grey?

ALICE: *(Hastily.)* Yes. Is my child in there?

NURSE: Yes, ma'am.

ALICE: May I go in, Nurse?

NURSE: She's sleeping, ma'am, and I have made it a rule to let her wake up naturally.

ALICE: I'm sure it's a good rule. I shan't wake her, Nurse.

COLONEL: I will. It's the least she can do to let herself be wakened.

ALICE: Don't interfere, Robert.

COLONEL: Sleeping? Why, she cried just now.

NURSE: That is why I came out...to see who was making so much noise. I'm vexed when she cries. I daresay, it's old-fashioned of me.

ALICE: After all, she is my child.

COLONEL: (*Firmly.*) Come along, Alice.

ALICE: I would prefer to go alone, dear.

COLONEL: All right. (*Excited.*) But break it to her that I'm kicking my heels outside.

(Alice goes to the door.)

NURSE: Don't touch her, ma'am. She doesn't like to be touched by strangers.

ALICE: Strangers?

COLONEL: (*Admonishingly.*) Really, Nurse.

ALICE: It's quite true.

NURSE: She's an angel if you have the right way with her.

ALICE: Robert, what if I shouldn't have the right way with her? Nurse, what sort of a way does she like from strangers?

NURSE: She's not fond of a canoodlin' way.

ALICE: Is she not?

(Alice exits into the nursery. Nurse follows her. Fanny enters with the tea tray. Colonel is listening at the nursery door. Cosmo enters and spies the tea tray. He lifts the tray and uses it like a shield to prevent the Colonel from hugging and kissing him.)

COSMO: Hullo, Father.

(Colonel approaches Cosmo.)

COLONEL: Is it—? it's Cosmo!

COSMO: *(Holding the tray out.)* I'm awfully glad to see you.

It's a long way from India.

COLONEL: Put that down, my boy, and let me get a hold of you!

COSMO: *(Holding the tray out.)* Have some tea, Father.

COLONEL: *(Indicating tea tray.)* Put it down. *(Cosmo hesitates, puts the tray down, and grimly prepares for the welcome hug and kiss from his father. Takes Cosmo's hands.)* Let's have a look at you! So this is you!

(Cosmo backs up.)

COSMO: Has Mother gone to lie down?

COLONEL: Lie down? *(Indicating nursery.)* She's in there.

(Cosmo goes to the nursery door and closes it.) Why did you do that?

COSMO: I don't know. I thought it would be...best. This is not the way I planned it, you see.

COLONEL: Our meeting? So you've been planning it! My dear fellow, I was planning it, too! And my plan—

COSMO: *(Hurriedly.)* Yes, I know. Now that's over...our first meeting, I mean.

COLONEL: Not yet. Come here, my boy!

(Colonel sits and draws Cosmo onto his lap. Colonel evidently thinks Cosmo can sit on his lap. Cosmo wants to be nice, but he is at his limit. Cosmo stands.)

COSMO: Look here, Father. Of course, you see...ways change. I daresay, they did it when you were a boy, but it isn't done now.

COLONEL: What isn't done, dear fellow?

COSMO: Oh...well...taking both hands and saying "dear fellow." It's gone out, you know.

COLONEL: (*Chuckles.*) I'm glad you told me, Cosmo. Not having been a father for so long, you see, I'm rather new at it.

COSMO: (*Relieved.*) That's all right. You'll soon get the hang of it.

COLONEL: Could you give me any other tips?

COSMO: Well, there's my beastly name. Of course, you didn't mean any harm when you christened me "Cosmo," but...I always sign "C. Grey" to make the others think I'm "Charles."

COLONEL: Do they call you "Charles"?

COSMO: No, they call me "Grey."

COLONEL: And do you want me to call you "Grey"?

COSMO: No, I don't expect that. But I thought that in front of others, you know, you needn't call me anything. If you want to attract my attention, you could just say, "Pssst!"...like that.

COLONEL: Right you are. But you won't make your mother call you "Pssst"?

COSMO: Oh, no.

[END OF FREEVIEW]