

Behind the Nets

A drama in one-act

by

Peter Pitt

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Behind the Nets**

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Synopsis

It is 1937. Sybil is worried as her husband, Norman, has been held overnight by the Police. Josie, her sister-in-law, calls to inquire why her brother isn't at work at the bank.

When she finds Sybil doesn't have the answer, she leaves to investigate what has happened to him. Soon after, Norman returns home, followed a little later by Josie. What Norman and Josie explain to Sybil, so outrages her, that she is tempted to do something that could affect all of their lives.

Behind the Nets

Cast (In order of appearance)

Sybil, About 38, Housewife.

Josie, “ 32, Sister-in-law.

May, “ 35, Next door neighbour.

Norman, “ 43, Sybil's husband.

Setting - Front room of a house in a London suburb

Time - 1937.

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A front room of a 1930's house, with a bay window and lace curtains. It is furnished with a three piece suite with antimacassars, and a sideboard on which there is a radio.

Also there is a birdcage on a stand in which there is a budgerigar. Sybil, a woman in her early fifties, is standing looking out of the window. She lets the net curtain drop back into place and turns towards the audience. She is agitated and moves over to the sideboard where there is a packet of cigarettes. She takes one and lights it. It is obvious that she isn't a smoker, she takes a couple of puffs, coughs, pulls a face and stubs it out.

Sybil *(To herself)* I thought they were supposed to calm you down. *(She turns the radio on and pauses)* Oh come on, come on, warm up.

Announcer *(Voice fading in)* This is the National Programme, there will now be a talk by the Right Honourable Charles Pettinger on the matter of

Sybil *(Turning dial until she finds dance music)* Radio Luxemburg, that's better, *(turning towards budgerigar)* isn't it Freddie?

Sybil flops down on the couch. A few seconds later there is a loud 'ratta-tat-tat' at the front door which startles Sybil. She gets up and exits.

Sybil *(Offstage)* Oh, it's you, Josie.

Josie *(Striding into the lounge)* So what's the matter with my brother?

Sybil *(Following her in)* He's not here.

Josie I phoned the bank and they said he was off sick.

Sybil *(Moving to radio and turning it off)* I wish he was off sick. *(She sits down).*

Josie Why? What's happened?

Sybil I don't know, the police are holding him.

Josie *(Light-hearted)* What's he done, robbed the bank?

Sybil *(Annoyed)* You always think everything is funny, but it's not.

Josie I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be flippant, but it can't be that bad. *(She sits down beside Sybil).*

Sybil *(Holding back tears)* It is, it's awful.

Josie *(Sympathetic)* Tell me what it is.

Sybil Last night, I'd just gone up to bed when there was a knock at the door- I thought it was Norman and he'd lost his key- but it wasn't, it was a policeman. He told me that Norman was being held at the police station.

Josie Why?

Sybil He said he couldn't tell me, but said they might let me see him.

Josie And?

Sybil I went to the station, but I only managed to speak to him for a few minutes.

Josie And why were they holding him?

Sybil I'm not sure. Norman wouldn't tell me.

Josie But you must know what the charge is?

Josie All I know they were holding another man as well and they're both in court this morning.

Josie We must go. *(Standing up)* We should be there for him.

Sybil *(Stands up)* No. No, he forbade me to go.

Josie Well, he didn't forbid me. We have to find out what he's been charged with.

Sybil *(Blocking Josie's path)* He doesn't want anyone to know about it.

Josie Doesn't he. *(Annoyed)* Oh why haven't you got a telephone?

Sybil Norman said we didn't need one.

Josie Ridiculous.

Sybil They're putting one in next week. He has to have to have one now, with his promotion at the bank.

Josie Well, we have to know what this is about. I'll nip home and phone the Magistrates Court, and see if we should go. Why don't you come with me?

Sybil No. I'll stay here *(Looks at wristwatch)* It's almost mid-day and I shouldn't think the court sit on a Saturday afternoon. I'll wait here in case he comes.

Josie Very well then, I'll come back later. *(She puts her arm around Sybil)* Keep your chin up, it's probably not as bad as it sounds.

Sybil tries to raise a smile. Josie exits.

Josie *(Offstage)* I'll be back.

Sound of the front door closing. Sybil sits back on the couch. After a moment she rises and goes to the sideboard, opens it, takes a bottle of sherry out and pours herself a glass. She sits again on the couch and sips the sherry before turning towards the birdcage.

Sybil *(To Freddie)* Too bad if he finds out I've been at the sherry. It's his fault anyway. *(She takes another sip from her glass).*

Sound of the front door knocker. Sybil gets up and exits taking her sherry with her. Sound of front door being opened.

Sybil *(Offstage)* Oh, it's you.

May *(Offstage)* I wondered if you were all right.

Sybil *(Offstage)* Yes, yes I'm fine, but I

May *(offstage)* Well you don't look too good.

Sound of door close. May enters followed by Sybil. May is wearing an out-door coat and is carrying a bag of shopping.

May I just saw a woman hurrying down your path and I remembered seeing a policeman call, so I wondered if there was anything I could do for you.

Sybil The woman was my sister-in-law.

May Oh, well, I was only trying to be a good neighbour.

Sybil Thank you.

May You know what they say, a problem told is a problem

Sybil *(Interrupting)* No everything is all right, just a family matter.

May I thought it might have been your hubby.

Sybil *(Startled)* Why? Have you heard something?

May No, should I have?

Sybil No, no. *(Quickly changing subject)* I was having a sherry, would you care for one?

May Don't mind if I do, I'm partial to sherry.

Sybil goes to sideboard and pours her a sherry and tops up her own. May sits down in a chair, putting her shopping bag on the floor beside her. Sybil hands May, her sherry.

May *(Taking glass)* Thanks. *(Sybil sits back on the couch)* I hope you didn't mind me calling.

Sybil No it was nice of you, but I'm perfectly okay.

May *(She takes a drink)* Nice drop of sherry, this.

Sybil *(Fake smile)* Yes.

May All doom and gloom in the papers, isn't it?

Sybil Yes.

May I really don't know what's going to happen.

Sybil No. *(Pause)* Norman thinks things will be better now that Chamberlain has replaced Baldwin.

May I don't know, they're all the same these politicians.

Sybil Yes, I suppose they are.

May Not like on the screen. *(Sybil looks at her)* I went to pictures on Monday afternoon, saw Ronald Colman in Lost Horizon. He played a politician.

Sybil Oh.

May You haven't seen it yet?

Sybil No.

May Well, you should, it's a lovely film. I cried at the end when she turned into an old woman. Oops, sorry, I shouldn't have told you what happened.

Sybil Doesn't matter, I probably won't see it.

May It's worth it, if only to see Ronald Colman. I think he's my ideal man.

Sybil Do you.

May Why, don't you think he's a bit of alright?

Sybil Yes, I suppose he is.

May He's a real gentleman. Wish my Bill was a bit more like him.

Sybil You don't know, he might not be as nice as he is on the screen.

May Why, have you heard some gossip about him?

Sybil (*Smiling*) No, of course not. But you must not go thinking film stars are the same as they appear on the screen, they're acting.

May Yes, I suppose you're right. But I can dream.

Sound of a taxi pulling up outside the house. May hears it and raises herself from her seat to see out of the window.

May Oh, it's a taxi, your Norman's paying the driver.

Sybil (*Getting up and looking out of the window*) I'm sorry May, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave now.

May That's all right, I understand (*she quickly downs the rest of her sherry, put her glass on the sideboard and exits leaving her shopping behind. Sybil follows her, shooing her out*) All right, all right, I'm going.

Sound of taxi driving away and front door being opened.

May (*Offstage*) Hello Mr Jones, I was just leaving.

Sybil (*Offstage*) Norman, are you all right?

Sound of front door closing and Norman enters. He looks slightly unkempt, his suit is a little crumpled and his hair a bit wispy.

Norman What was she doing here?

Sybil (*Entering*) Nothing.

Norman Why did you ask her in?

Sybil I didn't, she just walked in, being nose-y, I think.

Norman (*Noticing empty glasses*) And you gave her a drink.

Sybil I was only being polite. Tell me what's happened? I expect you'd like a cup of tea, something to eat.

Norman No, no I don't. I need a drink.

Norman goes to sideboard, opens door and takes out a bottle of whisky.

Sybil That was meant to be for Christmas, it's not been opened.

Norman Forget Christmas, I need it now.

Sybil Wouldn't you prefer a nice cup of tea?

Norman No I wouldn't (*Pouring a large whiskey and drinking half the glass*).

Sybil I'll get you some water.

Norman I don't want any bloody water.

Sybil You've no need to be like that.

Norman Then stop fussing me.

Sybil At least tell me what's happened.

Norman I will, but I must get out of these clothes (*He exits taking whisky glass with him*).

Sound of his footsteps going upstairs. Sybil goes to sideboard and replaces the sherry and whisky bottles in it. She then pick up the two sherry glasses. As she passes the bird cage, she stops.

Sybil (*To Freddie, after taking a deep breath*) Your dad's in a right state, isn't he? Best place for you in that cage. Wish I could get in there with you.

The sound of light tapping on the front, or back door. Sybil reacts and carrying the two glasses with her, exits.

Sybil (*Offstage*) I'm coming.

Sound of door being opened.

May (*Offstage*) Sorry to intrude again, but I left my shopping in your front room.

Sybil (*Offstage*) Well, you'd better come in. Oh, I'll get it for you, May.

May (*Offstage*) No, it's all right, I'll get it.

May enters. Sound of door closing, then Sybil enters.

May Ah, there it is. (*she picks up her shopping bag and whispers*) Is Mr Jones all right?

Sybil Yes, he's all right.

May Only he didn't seem his usual self.

Sybil He's tired, that's all. He'll be back down in a minute.

May Well, if you do need any help.

Sybil I know, you're only next door.

May I hope he feels better.

Sybil Thank you, May.

May I've got my shopping, I'll be off.

May exits followed by Sybil. Sound of door opening.

May (*Offstage*) Let me know, Sybil, if there's anything I can do.

Sybil (*Offstage*) I will. Thank you, May.

Sound of door close. Sybil enters still carrying the two glasses. She notices the seat where May was sitting, deposits the glasses back onto the sideboard, and goes and puffs up the cushion. She then goes over to the bird cage.

Sybil (*To Freddie*) Oh that silly woman does go on, but I suppose she's only trying to be kind.

Sound of footsteps coming downstairs. Norman enters. He's changed into a clean shirt and a sports jacket and has 'Brylcreemed' his hair. He has his glass which is now empty. He goes to sideboard, takes out whisky, pours himself another large one and takes a drink.

Norman (*Looking around him*) I thought I heard voices, not that woman again?

Sybil There's no one here.

Norman takes another drink.

Sybil Well, are you going to tell me now what's happened?

Norman (*He sits down on couch*) I've been put on bail until Monday.

Sybil (*Excited*) Why? What have you done? what have they charged you with?

Norman (*Lowering his head*) Gross indi.....(*he mumbles softly*).

Sybil What? I couldn't hear you.

Norman Gross indecency. (*Looks up at her*) But it's all been a mistake.

Sybil (*She sits in a chair*) You'd better tell me everything that's happened.

Norman (*Taking a drink*) On my way home last night, I needed to go to the toilet. I noticed one in St George's Park. I had only just entered it when a couple of policemen rushed in and arrested me, and also another man who was there. They accused us of indecency.

Sybil (*Shocked*) Surely you explained!

Norman Of course, but they wouldn't listen to me, they wouldn't listen.

Sybil (*Pause*) What were you doing at St George's Park? It's way over the other side of town.

Sound of a 'rata-tat-tat' at the front door. Norman looks relieved.

Sybil (*Getting up to answer it*) Oh no, not again.

Norman I don't want to see anyone.