

Script Sample

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The Bald Soprano

by Eugène Ionesco

In a new translation by Rob Melrose

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[A middle class English interior, with English armchairs. An English evening. Mr. Smith, English, in his English armchair and English slippers, smokes his English pipe and reads an English newspaper, next to an English fire. He has English eyeglasses, a little grey English moustache. Next to him, in another English armchair, Mrs. Smith, English, mends English socks. A long moment of English silence. The clock strikes seventeen English times.]

MRS. SMITH

Look, it's nine o'clock. We've eaten the English soup, fish, potatoes with lard, salad. The children drank the English water. We've eaten well this evening. That's because we live on the outskirts of London and because our name is Smith.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Potatoes are very good with lard, the salad oil was not rancid. The oil from the grocer on the corner is much higher quality than the oil from the grocer across the street, it is even better than the oil from the grocer at the end of the street. But I don't want to tell them their oil is bad.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Nonetheless, it's still the oil from the grocer on the corner that's the best...

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Mary cooked the potatoes well, this time. The last time she did not cook them well. I like them only when they are well cooked.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

The fish was fresh. They made me lick my lips. I had two helpings. No, three helpings. That made me have to go to the bathroom. You took three helpings as well. Yet on the third helping, you took less than the first two, while I took much more. I've eaten better than you have, this evening. Why is that? Usually, it's you who eats more. You haven't lost your appetite.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Yet, the soup was perhaps a bit too salty. It was saltier than you. Ha, ha, ha. It also had too many leeks and not enough onions. I'm sorry I didn't advise Mary to add some star anis. The next time, I'll know better.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Our little boy wanted to drink some beer, he's going to love getting drunk, he's like you. Did you see how he was looking at the bottle? But I poured water from the carafe into his glass. He was thirsty and he drank it. Helen is like me: she's a good housekeeper, economical, plays the piano. She never asks to drink English beer. She's like our youngest who only drinks milk and eats only porridge. That's because she's only two years old. Her name is Peggy.

The bean and quince tart was fantastic. It would have been nice perhaps to have a little glass of Australian Burgundy with dessert but I did not bring wine to the table so as not to give the children a bad example of gluttony. They must learn to be sober and measured in life.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Mrs. Parker knows a Rumanian grocer named Popesco Rosenfeld, who just arrived from Constantinople. He is a great specialist in yogurt. He has a diploma from the school of yogurt-makers in Andrinople. I will go to him tomorrow to buy a big pot of Rumanian folk yogurt. One doesn't often find such things here, on the outskirts of London.

[Mr. Smith continuing to read, clicks his tongue]

Yogurt is excellent for the stomach, the kidneys, the appendicitis, and the apotheosis. That's what I was told by Doctor Mackenzie-King, who takes care of the children of our cousins, the Johns. One can have confidence in him. He never prescribes medicines other than those he has tried out on himself. Before operating on Parker, he first operated on his own liver, even though he wasn't the least bit sick.

MR. SMITH

But then how come he survived and Parker died?

MRS. SMITH

Because the operation was a success with the doctor and was not a success with Parker.

MR. SMITH

Then Mackenzie is not a good doctor. The operation should have succeeded with both of them or both of them should have died.

MRS. SMITH

Why?

MR. SMITH

A conscientious doctor should die with his patient if they can't get well together. A captain of a boat goes down with the boat, in the waves. He doesn't save himself.

MRS. SMITH

You can't compare a sick person with a boat.

MR. SMITH

Why not? A boat has illnesses too; besides your doctor is as healthy as a ship; that's why he should have died at the same time as his patient like a doctor and his boat.

MRS. SMITH

Ah! I hadn't thought of that... Perhaps you're right... anyway, what conclusion do you take from this?

MR. SMITH

That all the doctors are charlatans. And all the patients too. Only the Navy is honest in England.

MRS. SMITH

But not the sailors.

MR. SMITH

Naturally.

[Pause]

MR. SMITH

[Still with his newspaper]

There's one this I don't understand. Why does the newspaper always give the ages of the deceased but never the ages of the newly born? It doesn't make sense.

MRS. SMITH

I never asked myself that before.

[Another moment of silence. The clock sounds seven times. The clock sounds three times. Silence. Clock sounds zero times.]

MR. SMITH

[still with his newspaper]

Oh, it says that Bobby Watson died.

MRS. SMITH

My goodness, the poor thing, when did he die?

MR. SMITH

Why do you seem so shocked? You know very well that he's been dead for two years. You remember, you were at his burial a year and a half ago.

MRS. SMITH

Of course I remember. I remembered right away, but I don't understand why you yourself were so shocked to see that in the newspaper.

MR. SMITH

It isn't there in the newspaper. It's been three years since they wrote about his death. I remembered it through the association of ideas!

MRS. SMITH

Too bad! He was so well preserved.

MR. SMITH

It was the prettiest cadaver in Great Britain! He didn't look his age. Poor Bobby, it's been four years since he died and he's still warm. A veritable cadaver-vivant! He was so happy!

MRS. SMITH

Poor Mrs. Bobby.

MR. SMITH

You mean to say "Poor Mr. Bobby."

MRS. SMITH

No, I was thinking of his wife. She is named, like him, Bobby, Bobby Watson. Since they have the same name, you can't distinguish one from the other when you see them together. It was only after his death, that you could really know who was one and who was the other. In fact, even today, there are people who confuse her with the deceased and offer him their condolences. Do you know her?

MR. SMITH

I only saw her once, by chance, at Bobby's burial.

MRS. SMITH

I've never seen her. Is she beautiful?

MR. SMITH

She has normal traits and even so you couldn't say that she is beautiful. She is too big and too stocky. Her traits aren't normal and even so you could say that she is very beautiful. She is a little too small and too skinny. She is a professor of singing.

[The clock sounds five times. A long pause.]

MRS. SMITH

So when are those two thinking of getting married?

MR. SMITH

Next spring at the latest.

MRS. SMITH

We must be sure to go to their wedding.

MR. SMITH

We must be sure to give them a wedding gift. I wonder what?

MRS. SMITH

Why don't we offer them one of our seven silver platters that we got for our wedding that we've never used?

[Short silence. The clock sounds two times.]

MRS. SMITH

It's sad for her to become a widow so young.

MR. SMITH

Fortunately they didn't have children.

MRS. SMITH

That's the last thing they needed! Children! Poor woman, what would she have done!

MR. SMITH

She is still young. She might very well remarry. Mourning suits her very well.

MRS. SMITH

But who will take care of the children? You know very well that they have a boy and a girl. What are their names?

MR. SMITH

Bobby and Bobby like their parents. Bobby Watson's uncle, the old Bobby Watson is rich and he loves the boy. He could easily take care of Bobby's education.

MRS. SMITH

That would be natural. And Bobby Watson's aunt, old mother Bobby Watson could easily take care of Bobby Watson's education as well, the daughter of Bobby Watson. That way the mother of Bobby Watson, Bobby, could remarry. Does she have someone in mind?

MR. SMITH

Yes, the cousin of Bobby Watson.

MRS. SMITH

Who? Bobby Watson?

MR. SMITH

Which Bobby Watson are you talking about?

MRS. SMITH

Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the other uncle of Bobby Watson the deceased.

MR. SMITH

No, it's not him, it's another. It's Bobby Watson, the son of old mother Bobby Watson the aunt of Bobby Watson the deceased.

MRS. SMITH

You mean to say Bobby Watson, the commercial traveler?

MR. SMITH

All the Bobby Watsons are commercial travelers.

MRS. SMITH

What a difficult profession! Even so, you can make a good living.

MR. SMITH

Yes, when there isn't competition.

MRS. SMITH

And when isn't there competition?

MR. SMITH

Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

MRS. SMITH

Ah! Three days a week? And what does Bobby Watson do on those days?

MR. SMITH

He rests, he sleeps

MRS. SMITH

But why doesn't he work during the three days a week when there isn't competition?

MR. SMITH

I can't know everything. I can't answer all of your stupid questions!

MRS. SMITH [offended]

Are you saying that to humiliate me?

MR. SMITH [all smiles]

You know very well that I'm not.

MRS. SMITH

Men are all the same! You stay there all day, a cigarette in your mouth or you powder your nose and you put on lipstick, fifty times a day, if you aren't in the process of drinking non-stop.

MR. SMITH

But what would you say if you saw men acting like women, smoking all day, powdering their noses, putting on lipstick, drinking whiskey?

MRS. SMITH

As far as I'm concerned, I could care less! But you're saying that to bother me, so... I don't like this kind of teasing, you know that!

[She throws the socks and shows her teeth. She gets up. Ionesco's note: In the mise en scene of Nicolas Bataille, Mrs. Smith didn't show her teeth and didn't throw the socks.]

End of Script Sample

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