



Preview Script

“A Bit Of A Do”
&
“Once An Actress”

A Bit Of A Do
Once An Actress

by Tony Layton

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A Bit Of A Do.

Synopsis.

Maggie sees herself as a pillar of the local community. She has a comfortable life style in a cul-de-sac of peace and tranquillity, plus a secure and happy marriage with good old, obedient, Harry, or so she thinks. In reality, she is rather pompous with attitudes that are fixed in the past.

When her friend, Moira, starts running sex-aid parties, Maggie's balloon is fatally pricked. Her reactions ensure that things will never be the same again. When Moira's marriage fails, she moves in with Maggie, who unwittingly gets a rude awakening to the facts of modern-day life.

Characters (1f)

Maggie A middle-aged northerner, respectable, with middle class pretensions.

Set.

Scenes 1, 2 and 3 An armchair and coffee table.

Scene 4 A white plastic chair and a white wooden table.

Running Time

35 minutes (approx).

Authors Note

I'm sure that all directors would agree that scene changes should be as brief as possible, and I would hope that they would fill the gaps with their own choice of suitable music to help maintain the dramatic interest and tension.

A Bit Of A Do.

Scene One.

An armchair is centre stage, next to which is a small wooden table. The area is lit with a pool of white light. Maggie enters into the light. She is wearing a white towelling dressing gown and has a towel over her head, turban style. She is carrying a make-up bag. She sits with a contented sigh.

That's better. Nothing like a good old soak. I love it. When he's out I pamper myself. And why not? If he's here I've no chance. As soon as I'm in the bath, he's knocking on the door. And when he's in there ... well, I don't know what he gets up to. It takes an age whatever it is. So, now I wait until the coast is clear. Much better.

She starts her manicure.

We've had this new jacuzzi fitted. Worth every penny. Moira, my pal down the road, she had one put in a few months ago. Wonderful thing. Sensuous isn't the word. I could stay in it all day. It was one of those Ann Summers party's that I first got a taste for it. Moira's in to that sort of thing. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm not a prude, but vibrators and sexy knickers do nothing for me. We had a good laugh though, and er ... we all had a go in the Jacuzzi ... one at a time, although Liz Cotter did offer to rub my back. "No, ta Liz, thank you very much. I think I can manage". She's funny that one. Never worn a skirt. Always trousers. Our token lesbian. I suppose every street's got one if you only knew. She bought one of those strap-on things ... a black one ... very large. I didn't know where to look. She pranced around the room. It was flopping everywhere. I couldn't help it, I had to laugh. We all had a good giggle over that. Sad really. Nice girl. Social worker. I don't think she's got a girl friend. Not in this neighbourhood anyway.

When I told Harry about it he said, "Why didn't you get a pair of pants or something? We could do with a bit of spice". I told him, "Harry, I'm not a tart. If it's a tart you want, you know what you can do". That made him think. Stopped him dead in his tracks. You see, he doesn't argue. He's always been like that. The silent type, that's Harry. In my book there's nothing wrong with an occasional argument. It clears the air. Sets boundaries. Adds a bit of vitality to a relationship. But as soon as I confront him about anything at all he clams up. He either digs his head in a book, or turns up the hi-fi. It riles me that does.

Anyway, it was my birthday a few days later and there was this parcel on the breakfast table. Lovely paper and beautifully wrapped. Must have been done in the shop because he's useless at that sort of thing. So I opened it, and there they were. 'Black Desire' they were called. Suspenders, the lot. I could see he was watching me over his newspaper, smiling. "Very kind", I said, "but thank you, no. This is not me. Take them back and go to Marks or Littlewoods. Half the price and more sensible".

I don't blame him entirely, of course. The whole world's gone sex mad hasn't it. Everywhere you look it's sex, sex, sex ...

I was brought up never to use the 'F' word. I still can't say it. It sticks in my throat. I watch these films, you know, and it's 'F' this and 'F' that, every other word. That's not art, is it. That's not entertainment. It's not even clever. That's not what I want to hear, thank you very much.

I can hear my mother now. "Maggie, don't allow yourself to be dragged into the gutter. Language should enhance the soul not demean it". You know, I never heard her swear. Never. On the other hand, my father never stopped. She'd say, "Put your fingers in your ears, Maggie. It's not his fault. It's the war".

No, I suppose we all go through this sex thing don't we. The whole business wears a bit thin at times. Confidentially, I think we've had a very successful sex life, Harry and me. Nothing kinky of course. I made that straight from the start; on the honeymoon. He wanted me to ... er ... kiss his willy. "No thank you, Harry", I said. "I don't think my parents would enjoy the thought of me doing that sort of thing". He never asked me again.

In fact, I told Moira about that incident at the party and she laughed. She said, "You don't know what you're missing". Then, that's what I expected her to say. Apparently, it turns out that every one does it these days, even royalty. I said to her, I said, "Moira, you do what suits you, and I do what suits me. Okay?". And I said, "If we don't have high moral standards what do we have? Anarchy". That rubbed the smile off, double quick sharp. Oh, yes!

Talking about standards I'll never forget when Harry popped the question. I said, "Although I love you very much, do it properly and talk to my parents. Get their permission and we'll see". That's what we did then. Everyone did. He went white and very quiet. To be honest I thought he was going to change his mind. But no. He went through with it. They grilled him for two hours. Dad used to be a military policeman in the war. Sergeant. I think he enjoyed bringing some of his old expertise to bear. I don't know what they said to him. I wasn't in the room. All I know is that Harry never tried any funny business until our wedding night.

He took those things back, 'Black Desire' and that lot, and bought me a nice set of thermals. Much more sensible, and very comfortable.

It's our thirtieth wedding anniversary this year. Thirty years! That's gone like a shot. At least we've kept together, that's the important thing. Through thick and thin, as they say. Not like the majority these days. Three years is too long for most of 'em. The moral core has been eaten away hasn't it. Not that we haven't had our moments. Then, who doesn't? Again, it's a matter of standards isn't it. That's what it's all about. Standards.

Fade lights.

Scene Two.

When the lights come up, Maggie is revealed in the chair knitting. She is wearing a comfortable cardigan and long skirt, her hair in rollers. She is knitting a large sweater.

I love knitting. Not many around here do, but I do. I love it. Got it from my mother. She was a great knitter. She could knock one of these up in no time. "Maggie", she'd say, "always keep your hands and your mind busy. A bored mind is the devil's playground". How right she was. You see it everywhere. Chaos lurks in dark corners.

This is for the WI jumble. Got to make an example. They asked me to take on the chair for another year last week. That's six years on the trot. A local record. And, if I may say so, I'm very proud of it. Joan, the secretary said, "Maggie", she said, "where would we be without your organisational skills?".

Actually, we've had a bit of a do. Moira, you know, my pal down the road, well, she moved in with us last night. Right out of the blue. It was late. I was in bed listening to 'Sailing By' and there was this ring at the door bell. Harry went down and there she was. I knew her and Jim were going through a funny patch, but there was no excuse for what he did to her. Covered her in dog dirt. Dog dirt! Can you imagine? Her hair was all matted. She was stinking. What could we do? We couldn't turn her away. So I took her into the jacuzzi and did what I could. What a job. I tell you, it didn't half turn my stomach.

She couldn't speak for hours. And then it all poured out. Of course they're like chalk and cheese her and Jim. Very introverted is Jim. Normally, would never say boo to a goose. Works on the council. Health and Welfare. Apparently word got out that Moira had got a bit carried away at one of her Ann Summers get togethers, and Jim wasn't best pleased. I can perfectly understand Jim. He's got his position to think of, and what man in his right mind wants his wife to cavort around in one of those strap-on things. Embarrassing! But I can't condone what he did. Who could? I told Moira, I said, "Moira love", I said, "what he did to you was brutal and savage. And, I said, "he ought to be put away to cool off".

I washed all her undies, what there was of them. Her pants wouldn't have covered a postage stamp. I lent her my dressing gown and she went upstairs for a lie down ... so she could decide what to do.

Over breakfast she asked if she could stay here for a couple of days. I confess I did hesitate, for a moment, then I thought, "Maggie, you're a Christian, and what is the Christian thing to do". So I said yes, and there it is. That's the arrangement. Luckily we're more or less the same size so I've lent her a few of my frocks to slip into.

Harry's been as good as gold. Good old Harry. A lot of men would have kicked up a fuss but not Harry. He's just taken her up a cup of tea. He's kind like that. Of course, he'll have his eyes opened when he sees her. He's never seen her without make-up before. Not the same person without the mascara and the false eyelashes. I don't go for that sort of thing. Maybe I'll have a dab of scent but as for the rest, well, it's primitive isn't it. I prefer to appear the way God made me, thank you very much.

I did ring Jim to tell him what was happening. He didn't say much ... only to be expected, I suppose. I'm sure they'll both be back together in no time. Couple of days ... back to normal.

That's what I like about our little cul-de-sac; it's a haven of normality. One happy family. We all came here together as newly-weds, and here we've stayed. Gardens are all spick and span. The men make sure of that. "Nicely manicured", as they say. And I can go into any of these houses and you won't find a speck of dust anywhere. In fact, all the ladies joined the WI together, so we've been close friends from the start. Although Moira didn't join. Not from want of trying on my part, though. "Come on, Moira", I'd say, "join the gang. You'd enjoy yourself". But no, she wouldn't have it. There was no persuading our Moira.

We all like Moira, we really do. She's got a very generous nature. Very warm. Very kind. And you'd never find a more humorous character. Never. That's why I don't mind her staying for a couple of days. She's good company and no trouble. No trouble at all. Yes, I've got to admit she's got lots of good qualities. Underneath it all I'm sure she's a Christian. She couldn't be anything else really, could she.

Fade lights.

Scene Three.

Fade up lights. Maggie is revealed wearing a coat and a hat, and sipping a cup of tea.

Just waiting for the taxi. Off to St Anne's again. Mummy's got this gorgeous bungalow overlooking the sand dunes. She's feeling a bit down so I said I'd go and keep her company for a few days. Change of air. Yes. Moira's been here for three weeks now. It hasn't been without incident. Harry's been a tower of strength, he really has. On her third day here Harry went across to see Jim ... to negotiate. But Jim wasn't having any. He'd changed all the locks and all her suitcases were piled up in the garage. Apparently Jim said, "As far as he was concerned the bitch could go to hell". Excuse me.

... the last part of the script has been deleted from this preview copy ...

Once An Actress.

Synopsis

Whilst working in a factory, Sara is persuaded by a friend to attend an audition. She is amazed when she is selected for a part - a lucky break that becomes the start of a short-lived acting career.

She recounts her experiences at drama school where she learns to explore her mind, to develop characters and to handle emotion. Buoyed up with landing her first acting job touring Welsh schools, we learn about her quickly developed talent for coping with the curious and fickle love life of jobbing actors on the road.

When the tour finishes, she returns home and waits for a call from her agent. Whilst waiting, she tells of the many auditions she has attended, and how success could have been hers "if only she would accept nude scenes". With no offers of acting work she turns back time and goes back to a mundane, but paid job, at her old factory.

This single-hander has the uplifting 'Educating Rita' element of a mature woman's intellectual 'rags to riches' tale, but leaves the audience with a distinct feeling of sadness from unexpected, but unfulfilled, ambitions.

Characters (1f)

Sara A thirty-something Liverpudlian.

Time & Place

The present. Somewhere in Britain.

Running Time

35 minutes (approx).

Once An Actress.

I was in the canteen, sucking the icing off my bun. I'll never forget it. Jean, my friend, comes over and she says she's going for an audition.

"A what?", I says. "Audition," she says. "Ya know, for acting an' tha'". "I'm not bloody stupid," I says. "I do know what it is. But you've never acted in your life". "That's all you know," she said, right up close. "I'm always acting. And since I've been married I do a lot of it in the bedroom". "You saucy bitch, Jean Mullins", I said. "You've got to do something", she said, "otherwise what's it all about?"

I knew what she meant. I'd been there. I'd been there three times in all, playing happy families. A few rushed moments of secret sex, followed by marriage, washing, ironing, cleaning, tele, and bed with a man I didn't like anymore.

We all did it. Most of our gang had a couple of squawking kids by the time they were twenty. They were worn out. Call that living? I don't.

I didn't have kids. I didn't want them, to be honest.

Don't get me wrong; I like kids. They're lovely some of them. But I look around at this place and I think what's the point in trying to raise kids in this shit-hole area. Even the men daren't go out alone at night.

Tell you the truth, it's a relief to be single again. I watch all my pals struggling to keep house and home together, and one by one I see them all joining in the fastest growing game in town, 'adultery'.

We all say we're not going to do it when we start out, but we do because there's sod all else to do round here, and that's the God's honest truth.

I've got to laugh. I must have been a teenager; anyway, I used to wonder what it would be like to love someone. I'd have dreams. I suppose we all dream, don't we. And in these dreams I'd be really happy, 'cos I was sharing my life with someone I really did love, and he loved me. Then I'd wake up and he wouldn't be there. I'd go down to breakfast with this long face, tears still in my eyes. Stupid cow. Can you believe it?

Anyway, Jean was dead keen to go to this audition. "Come with me," she said. "Come and keep me company". "You want me to hold your hand?" I said. "If I'm going to do it, then you should do it," she said. "Me? You are joking". "I dare you", she said. I dare you to audition with me, or haven't you got the bottle?"

She always does that. She knows I never walk away from a dare. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I went with her. On the bus there, I looked out of the window. Out there, on the streets, it all looked grotty. Boarded up shops, kids making a bloody nuisance of themselves. And I saw my reflection floating above the houses, like a ghost.

“My God,” I thought. “Look at the state of you. You’ve gone to seed, gal. Thirty and past it”. I turned to Jean and said, “Look Jean, you go ahead. I’ll pass if you don’t mind. They won’t want me”. “Shut it,” she said. “Too late! We’re here”. No use arguing with Jean. She’s got this determined mouth and eyes that freeze you to the spot.

It turned out to be an audition for television extras. I had no idea. I thought it was some amateur thing, ya know. Anyway, we were all lined up and this very nice young man in pink jeans and purple sweater said he needed people for a crowd scene in a market, so could we all pretend we were stallholders and try to sell something in a very loud voice. It was bedlam. I mean, I don’t think he knew what he’d let himself in for, I really don’t.

Then he took me to one side and told me that I had a very interesting face. “Do you think so?” I said. “It looks honest and lived in”, he said. “I can see you haven’t been messing around with snips and tucks”. Snips and tucks? I told him I was only thirty, and he took a step back and smiled. I couldn’t believe it. The gob-shite didn’t believe me. It was worse than I thought. Then he said he had a line for me, it meant I’d get extra money and he handed me a script and told me to report for filming in two week’s time.

Filming? Me, filming? I couldn’t soddin’ believe it. Hollywood, look out! Here I come!

Going back on the bus I saw my reflection again. It didn’t look too bad. In fact, it looked okay. Not bad for thirty, anyway. Jean said nothing. They’d ignored her, ya see. She was really pissed off. I felt sorry for her, I really did, but there was no talking to her.

Two weeks later I was there, on site, getting fitted up by wardrobe in a caravan. We were doing a market scene from ‘Oliver Twist’. I was selling cucumbers and cabbages and I had this line, “There’s the little tyke what done it, guv. Come back ‘ere yer rascal. Come back!”.

What a day! All day we was there. Standing around mostly, but it was interesting. To pass the time, I was polishing the cucumbers, and this fella playing a city gent comes over and we had a chat about this and that. In ten minutes he knew my life history, not that there’s a lot to tell. Made me realise what a boring person I was.

I’d done nothing. Been nowhere. I was a nobody and so were all my friends; nobodies. We lived in a grey world, like most people I suppose. We’re the watchers. We see the world on tele, all the glamour, the excitement, the adventure ... that’s where it all is, and we, the mugs, think we’re part of it, but we’re not really, are we. We sit in the dark, munch our crisps, get fat and die too early of a heart attack.

Some of my pals don’t care a toss. They still think that when they pop their clogs they’re off to a better place ... and that’s going to be the really great adventure. I’ve been to some of their funerals and I can’t help having quiet weep, ya know, ‘cos I don’t think that great adventure is up there, and I ask myself what has it all been for?

So, here I am. My bags are packed. I’m ready to go. I handed in my notice last week and the girls cheered ... and wished me luck. Jean said nothing. She went very quiet and ran off to the loo. You see, I decided I had to do something. No-one else could do it. I had to do it for myself. I wrote to this drama school in London, had an audition and they took me on ... just like that. They said I had a lived-in face ... full of expression ... character. I don’t mind that. I like that. I can live with that.

Nice people. Very caring. They even found me digs. A one room bed-sit. Grotty area ... but it’ll do. I can cope with that. I’ve had worse.

A taxi sounds its horn four times.

That’s the taxi. *(She stands and picks up her cases).* Deep breaths. My God, I’m shitting myself.

Fade lights and play music for a short scene change. Lights up to reveal Sara in a black leotard with a cardigan over it; her hair in a brightly coloured scarf. She is reading a script.

When I came here three years ago I knew I was boring, but, my God, I didn’t realise I was that boring. I was a nerd, I really was. I was a poor lost soul full of doubt and self-pity. Silly sod. This place woke me up with a jolt, I kid you not.

The first thing they did, they took us apart ... mentally. We had to search for the real us. I never realised how complicated I was. It was like peeling an onion and finding new layers underneath that you never knew were

there. You see, they said, we can't act and take on the personae of another character until we can truthfully understand ourselves, which is fair enough, I suppose.

I was constantly amazed. For the first time in my life I was seeing the real me. There was a reason for everything I did in life. And it was not all down to me. Other people had made me what I was.

Some of 'em broke down. Couldn't take it. They couldn't face themselves. That's why they wanted to act. They wanted to escape from their own reality ... at least that's what the lecturer said.

Another thing I found out was that I had a brain. I mean, I knew I had a brain but I'd never really used it properly. We have these seminars and we've got to chat about a playwright's motivation and the symbolism in the play and all that, and I find it fascinating. I find ideas just rolling off my tongue. It's like the floodgates being opened. I tell ya, I've got to kick myself sometimes because I don't sound anything like the old me. It's as if, I've always had the ability to talk about abstract things but I've never had the opportunity before.

I'm using words, beautiful words that help me to say things I couldn't say before. When you're on the shop floor and the machinery is clanging away next to you, who can talk about things like motivation and things of a more aesthetic nature. You can't share a sensitive poem with someone, can you? Well, you can't, can you. If you tried they'd think you were off your trolley.

Most of 'em here have come straight from school. They make me feel young. They treat me like a big sister. They come to me with all their personal problems. I don't know why. I'm like an agony aunt.

Talking about agony these lecturers don't half like putting the pressure on. Projects are dumped on you thick and fast. Talk about not knowing your arse from your elbow. I tell you, it's like a bloody mad house here most of the time.

"Have you done that essay, Sara dear?". "Are those costume designs for 'Miss Julie' ready yet?". "I want you word perfect by tomorrow for the run through". It comes at you from every bloody direction.

And you daren't complain. Oh no! You complain and they say if you can't take the pressure love, there's the door. There's hundreds out there want your place. Talk about putting the fear of God into you. It does the trick though. You learn to knuckle down and get on with it.

Some of them don't make it, mind. We've had a few breakdowns. And then there was Jessica. Poor kid topped herself. Eighteen! Very sad. Nice girl. Quiet. Lovely voice. Delicate. One day she was fine, the next day, gone. Makes you think. Threw herself in the river. When she was washed up you couldn't recognise her. She was an only child. At the funeral her parents showed no emotion. Funny that. I was in floods, but not one tear from them. Just silence.

Talk about a roller-coaster of emotions, this is the place. During the past three years I've played tramps, queens, manic women, mistresses, prostitutes, working girls, ladies of leisure ... you name it, I've played it; Lady Bracknell, Duchess of Malfi, Miss Julie ...

When I first came here, if you asked me what I preferred, comedy or tragedy, I would have said comedy, no hesitation. You can't beat a good laugh. But now, I'm not so sure.

We get lots of big names coming here. They often pop in and run a master class or something. At first I couldn't speak to them. There they were, in the flesh, talking to me. The last time I saw them they were about 20 feet tall on a screen, and now here they were, life size. When it comes down to it, they're all like the rest of us. It's all publicity. You get one or two ... full of themselves. They get short shrift. But on the whole they're great.

Finals next week. I'm Lady Macbeth. You daren't say Macbeth around here. "It's 'The Scottish Play', love", they say. Rubbish! If you want to believe in the occult then that's up to you, but don't try to impose your silly beliefs on to me, thank you very much, lovey. I told him, and he didn't like it. "You'll bring disaster down on us all", he said.

He, by the way, is our director. He's set the play in 1970's Chile. He's a bit of a plonker, but they're everywhere aren't they. Wherever you go in life, there's the plonker who gets your back up.

In two weeks time I'll be out of here, back into the real world. But it's not all doom and gloom. I've had an offer. A job with a touring company, touring schools in Wales. I'm playing the nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet'. Three-month contract. Can't be bad. All experience, and that's what it's all about. You never know what might turn up.

Fade to black. Play Elizabethan-style music for a short scene change. Fade up lights. Sara is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt and is wearing a stylish cap. A suitcase is on a small table and a pile of clothes is on the floor in front of her, down stage. She is picking up clothes, folding them and placing them in the case with great care

Don't ask me where I'm going. I haven't a clue. I'm waiting for a call from my agent, Lucy. There might be something going in Yorkshire tele. As long as it's not touring schools. You can stuff that. I'm not kidding, I've had more sore throats and colds in this job than I've ever had. Every school we went into we'd be blasted with a new set of germs. I ask you, how can you play a tender love scene in front of a crowd of snotty-nosed kids? And when they cough, they cough all over you. Ooh, it doesn't half rile me that does. How the teachers cope I don't know. They deserve medals, all of them. I could do with a dose of sunshine. No chance of that, unfortunately.

When I think back ... my God, I could write a book. I'll tell you one thing, it's certainly been an education.

We were six, all told, in the company; three men, three women. Cosy, I thought. A nice tight ensemble. Between us we should produce some really good work. Well, you can in small groups. You get tuned in to one another, finely tuned. For the first two weeks, it was great. This is it, I thought. This is what it's all been for. This is what I was cut out to do. I'm an actress, I can do it, I feel confident ... fantastic. I've never felt more fulfilled.

We'd just been to a comprehensive school in Swansea and Dawn, our Juliet, comes into my room, crying her eyes out. Turns out she's been having a fling with Donald, our actor/director. He's been two-timing her with Lena. All this has put Peter, our Romeo, into a right state because he thought Donald was being faithful to him, but Donald's real partner was James. Work that one out if you can.

Basically, we'd been employed by a screaming bisexual with an enormous sexual appetite. All I was, in fact, all we were, were part of his hidden agenda.

Next day I called a meeting. "Look", I said, "this can't go on. You're tearing the whole enterprise apart, Donald", I said. "You either choose your partner and make your peace with the others, or we call it a day. What do you say?". He tapped his feet, smiled like a found-out school boy and eventually nodded his head. "Then it must be James", he said. "Good! James it is then", I said. "Now let's get on with the show shall we!".

Have you ever had one of those 'out of body' moments. That was mine. It didn't sound like me talking. My voice had a sort of authority about it. Then I realised, I felt as if there was a bit of Lady Macbeth still inside me, and it was her taking over. Weird! Very weird! Anyway, it gets more weird.

A few days later I was tucked up in bed with a nice gin and tonic and my DH Lawrence, shattered as usual, and Donald comes in. He sits on the bed and takes my hand. "What's this?", I say. "Don't worry. I'm not a wolf. I only want to talk". "Can't it wait. It's been a long day". "I want to say ... and I really mean this Sara, that in this profession, we rarely have the pleasure of working with genius. I've watched you and I firmly believe you have a very rare talent indeed. And may I say, what a deep pleasure it is for me to work with you". I could smell the whisky on his breath. He was leaning forward to kiss me. I pushed him away.

"Goodnight, Donald. Off you go, there's a good boy". "But Sara, I thought there was an affinity between us". "That's my hot water bottle. Now, Donald, do me a favour. *Piss off*". "Don't turn me away. Don't be cruel. I want you. I want to be close to you". "Frustrated are you Donald?". "Yes. I've been frustrated for so long". "Well you know what to do. Go and have a wank, then go to bed. You'll feel better in the morning". He reversed from the bed slowly, like a courtier bowing out of court. Funny bugger.

... the last part of the script has been deleted from this preview copy. Obtain the full scripts for 'A Bit Of A Do' and 'Once An Actress' from ...

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