

**Ann
Jellicoe**

**The
Knack**

a comedy

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THE SPORT OF MY MAD MOTHER

Ann Jellicoe

Kenneth Tynan described this play as a '*tour de force* that belongs in no known category of drama. It stands in the same relationship to conventional playmaking as jazz does to conventional music: in an ideal production it would have the effect of spontaneous improvisation, or of a vocal *danse macabre* that makes up its own rules and language as it goes along.'

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Ann Jellicoe

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Faber Paperbacks

THE KNACK

by the same author

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THE SPORT OF MY MAD MOTHER

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3 JELLIPLAYS

THE KNACK

A Comedy

by

ANN JELLICOE

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To
ROGER and KEITH

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved and applications for performances in all countries should be made to Margaret Ramsay Ltd., 14 Goodwin's Court, London, W.C.2. No performance of the play may be given unless a licence has been obtained prior to rehearsal.

This play was first presented by The English Stage Company at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge on 9th October 1961 with the following cast :

Tom	Terry Palmer
Colin	Ronald Falk
Tolen	David Sumner
Nancy	Rita Tushingham

Directed by Keith Johnstone

Designed by Alan Tagg

It was subsequently produced in London at the Royal Court Theatre on 27th March 1962 with the following cast :

Tom	James Bolam
Colin	Philip Locke
Tolen	Julian Glover
Nancy	Rita Tushingham

Directed by Ann Jellicoe and Keith Johnstone

Designed by Alan Tagg

CHARACTERS

- TOM:** Smallish in size. Vigorous, balanced, strong and sensitive in his movements. He speaks with a great range of pitch, pace and volume and with immense energy and vitality.
- COLIN:** Tall and uncoordinated. Explodes into speech and talks jerkily, flatly, haltingly. Basically a strong and intelligent man, but unsure of himself. Gets very angry with himself.
- TOLEN:** Once an unpromising physical specimen he has developed himself by systematic physical exercise. His body is now much as he would like it to be. He appears strong, well-built, full of rippling muscle. All his movements are a conscious display of this body. He almost always speaks with a level, clipped smoothness and a very considered subtlety of tone.
- NANCY:** Aged about seventeen. Potentially a beautiful girl but her personality, like her appearance, is still blurred and unformed. She wears an accordion-pleated skirt.

The acting area should be as close to the audience as possible.

ACT ONE

A room. The room is in the course of being painted by TOM. The distribution of the paint is determined by the way the light falls. There is a window up left in the back wall and another down right. The paint is darkest where the shadows are darkest and light where they are most light. The painting is not smooth, pretty or finished, but fierce and determined. Onstage there is a step-ladder, a divan, two simple wooden chairs; a pair of chest expanders hangs from the door (down left).

Curtain up. TOM onstage. Enter COLIN.

COLIN: Er . . . I . . . er . . .

TOM: Fabulous. It's fabulous. It's fantastic.

(Pause.)

COLIN: Er . . .

TOM: Is it dry yet?

COLIN: Where?

TOM: Anywhere.

(COLIN tries.)

COLIN: Getting on.

TOM: Good.

(Pause.)

COLIN: I . . . er . . .

TOM: I hate that divan. *(Pause.)* More white there perhaps. More white. *(Pause.)* Here. How does the light fall?

COLIN: Eh?

TOM: The light. Get with it. White where it's light,
black where it's dark, grey in between.
(Pause.)

COLIN: Oh yes . . . yes.

TOM: Yes? Good. More white. (He takes a brush of
black paint and paints.) Blast. (He gets a rag,
looks at wall, considers it and then starts working
black paint with rag.) Yes? Yes? (Pause.) Yes?

COLIN: It's not in the system.

TOM: Eh?

COLIN: White where it's light, black where it's dark.

TOM: It's nice. I like it.

COLIN: You're so messy. Everything's messed. It's so
badly done.

TOM: I'm not, I'm not a decorator. It looks different,
yes?

COLIN: Different?

TOM: Yes.

COLIN: To what?

TOM: To before I moved in. (Pause.) He won't like it.

COLIN: Who won't?

TOM: It'll annoy him. It'll annoy Tolen. It'll enrage
him.

COLIN: The house doesn't belong to Tolen.

TOM: He'll say it's childish.

COLIN: It's my house. I rent it, so it's mine. (Pause.)
There's a lot of stuff in the passage.

TOM: Ha ha! Because Tolen didn't think of it first.

COLIN: The passage is all bunged up. I want to bring
my bed downstairs.

TOM: What's Tolen's first name?

COLIN: He says he hasn't got one.

TOM: Not got one?

COLIN: He never uses it. I want to bring my bed . . .

TOM: If he never uses it . . .

COLIN: . . . My bed downstairs.

TOM: He must have it.

COLIN: I want to bring my bed——

TOM: Well bring it down! What?

COLIN: I can't get it out of the front door.

TOM: You want to bring your bed——?

COLIN: There's too much stuff in the passage.

TOM: I put the stuff in the passage.

COLIN: There's a chest of drawers behind the front door. You can't get out.

TOM: Or in. Where's Tolen?

COLIN: Out. (*Pause.*) Seeing a girl.

TOM: Oh.

COLIN: There's too much stuff in the passage.

TOM: Why do you want to bring your bed downstairs?

COLIN: The wardrobe and the chest of drawers. We'll bring them in here.

TOM: What!

COLIN: Temporarily.

TOM: No.

COLIN: So I can get the bed through the front door.

TOM: We'll bring the bed in here and take it out through the window.

(*Slight pause.*)

COLIN: You only put the wardrobe outside while you were painting.

TOM: I don't want it back. The room's so beautiful.

COLIN: But you must be practical——

TOM: This blasted thing——

COLIN: You've got to sit——

TOM: The bottom's falling out.

COLIN: You've got to sleep——

TOM: Chairs!

COLIN: You can't sleep on the floor. Chairs?

TOM: On the floor. Sleep on it! I think I'll put the mattress on the floor!

COLIN: What!

TOM: Yes! The mattress on the floor. An empty—an empty beautiful room! What an angle! Look! Upwards? What an idea!

(COLIN *sinks bewildered on to a chair.*)

You marvel, you! (*Seizes COLIN's chair.*) On the wall! Out of the way! Off the floor! I'll hang them on the wall!

COLIN: Oh no!

TOM: Oh yes! (*Throws mattress on floor.*) Help! You! Come on! Help me! Help me! Colin! My God, what a splendid idea!

COLIN: There's too much stuff in the passage.

TOM: Put it in the basement.

COLIN: We haven't got a basement.

TOM: Give it to Tolen! Put it in Tolen's room! Yes! Come on, help me! Oh! A beautiful empty room! Why do you want to bring your bed downstairs?

COLIN: Getting another.

TOM: Oh?

COLIN: A bigger one. Six foot.

(*Pause.*)

TOM: Let's get this shifted.

COLIN: Hadn't we better bring mine in first?

TOM: Into the basement. Give it to Tolen.

(*Noise, (off), of motor-bike which shudders to a stop outside the front door.*)

COLIN: We haven't got a basement.

TOM: Tolen. That's his motor-bike.

(Sound of somebody trying front door.)

COLIN: It's Tolen. He can't get in. *(Shouting.)* Be with you.

(Exit TOM and COLIN with divan. Enter TOLEN through window upstage. COLIN appears at window and disappears.)

COLIN: *(off)*. Not there.

TOM: *(off)*. What?

COLIN: *(off)*. He's disappeared.

TOM: *(off)*. That's odd.

(Enter TOM through door followed by COLIN.)

COLIN: Oh there you . . .

TOLEN: Your windows are rather dirty.

TOM: Let's wash them.

COLIN: I—I've got some Windolene.

(Exit COLIN.)

TOM: What's that?

COLIN: *(off)*. For cleaning windows.

(Pause. Re-enter COLIN with Windolene which he hands to TOM.)

TOM: *(reading label)*. Wipe it on Windolene,
Wipe it off window clean.

(TOM wipes some of the Windolene on the bottom half of the window.)

TOLEN: Washing with clean water and then polishing with newspaper would have less electro-static action.

COLIN: Oh?

TOLEN: Would repel dirt more efficiently.

(TOM starts to experiment with the various shapes he can make.)

TOLEN: Now you must do the top half, Tom.

(TOM hoists the bottom half of the window up and

crosses to window D.R. and puts on the Windolene there.)

TOLEN: You do realize, Tom, that in order to clean the window, you have to wipe off the Windolene? *(Pause.)* The white stuff has to be polished off the window.

TOM: Let's get that bed down, shall we, Colin?

COLIN: You can't leave that stuff on.

TOM: Oh?

TOLEN: You can't leave it on. "Wipe on sparingly with a damp cloth and wipe off immediately."

TOM: It's as good as net curtains, only better.

COLIN: Net curtains?

TOM: You should paint your windows white, Tolen. White reflects heat. You'll be O.K. when the bomb drops.

(Exit TOM.)

COLIN: What? What did you say?

TOM: *(off)*. O.K. when the bomb drops. O.K. when the . . .

COLIN: Net curtains?

(Exit COLIN. Pause. TOLEN is about to exit when he hears bumps, crashes and yells, off. This resolves into dialogue):

COLIN: *(off)*. It won't go round.

TOM: *(off)*. It will.

COLIN: *(off)*. It won't. Take it apart.

TOM: *(off)*. What?

COLIN: *(off)*. Take it to bits.

TOM: *(off)*. Oh, all right.

COLIN: *(off)*. Can you take the head?

TOM: *(off)*. The what?

COLIN: *(off)*. The head! Hold the head! The head!

TOM: *(off)*. Help!