



REHEARSAL

BY JOHN EMMS

EXCERPT

A SMITH SCRIPT

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Characters

The company

Felicity Rogers - Writer/ Director

Tom Rogers - Producer/Actor

Mary Johnson - Actor

Voice Off (Simon) - Sound/lighting
crew (*can double with Snapper, if last
four lines are pre-recorded*)

Play-within-a-play characters

Sebastian Harcourt - mid to late 30s

Laura Beaumont - mid 30s

Det. Ch. Insp. Snapper

Setting

Time - the present, more or less

Early evening. The set represents part of a barn laid out for performance of a play, including stage area representing a living room, but can be as elaborate or minimal as desired. If layout of the venue permits part of the auditorium can be used as the audience area. Backstage area is not in view.

Felicity, an efficient-looking woman in her late 30s or early 40s holding script and with a mobile phone to her ear, is sitting in the audience area. **Tom**, scruffy, forties, ready to play Sebastian, is sitting on a sofa on the stage.

For clarity, dialogue etc. from the play-within-a-play is inset, until the plays become merged after the entrance of Snapper.

Felicity: For God's sake, Jackie - answer the bloody phone!

She bangs the phone on the floor, looks at it, then holds it to her ear again.

Tom: That won't help.

Felicity: It helps *me*. I'm pretending it's her. (*Putting the phone in her bag*) I suppose I shouldn't be surprised she's reluctant to turn up. I never thought we'd have to put on a production in a barn.

Tom: I got the best venues I could.

Felicity: If you ever summoned up sufficient ambition to raise enough money to attract reliable actors and respectable venues this sort of thing would never happen.

Tom: Because, dear, respectable venues expect more than you're capable of providing. So would reliable actors; if there were any...

Felicity: *You're* criticising *my* directing skills? You couldn't direct your way to the nearest post office.

Tom: ...and you would insist on writing your own play.

Felicity: There's nothing wrong with my play. It's your refusal to take direction which is the problem. On the other hand, stuck with you, husband dear, as my lead actor as well as producer I suppose I can't expect a lot.

Tom: No, dear.

Felicity: (*checking her watch*) Right. It's 7.30. Dress rehearsals wait for no man. Or woman. (*Calling*) OK. Sebastian's Solace. Act 1, scene 1. Action!

Tom: We're not in Hollywood, dear.

Felicity glares at him.

Lights on stage fade up. Mary, late 30s, playing Laura, enters carrying a handbag and a coat.

Mary: Now, Sebastian, don't forget there's the kitchen floor to clean and the bathroom to wipe down.

Tom: Yes, dear.

Mary: And empty the kitchen waste and make sure the wheely bin lid is properly closed or cats get in.

Tom: Yes, dear.

Mary: And don't have the television on too loud or that woman next door will complain again. God! I'm so fed up with this place. If you had sufficient ambition to get promotion we could have a detached house in a decent area. But no, you're happy to be a lowly civil service clerk, living in a poky terraced house in Holloway.

Tom: Yes, dear.

Mary: And remember to make the bed as soon as you get up.

Tom: Laura, you've been on enough of these jaunts for me to know this all by heart.

Mary: Well, just behave yourself. And don't keep eying up that new girl across the road. It makes you look pathetic.

Tom: I don't eye her up. I just notice her approvingly.

Mary: *(busying herself checking in her handbag and putting her coat on)* Well, don't make a fool of yourself. She's not going to be interested in you. In fact it's difficult to imagine anyone being interested in you. I can't remember now what I saw in you myself.

Tom: Thank you, dear. That makes me feel really good.

Felicity: More aggression, please.

Tom: *(to Felicity)* Yes, dear.

(More aggressively) Thank you, dear. That makes me feel really good.

Felicity: Not enough.

Tom: On the contrary, dear. Too much, I think you'll find.

Felicity: Tom, I keep telling you. Sebastian is aggressive towards Laura. He's fed up with her constant nagging and...

Tom: Yes, dear. But he keeps it within himself and takes it out by having it away with a variety of girls. There is no point in being aggressive to a nagging wife. I should know.

Felicity: One girl. And when have I ever nagged you?

Tom: Never, dear, of course.

Mary: Can we just get on? Felicity, can't you keep your comments till the end?

Felicity: Yes, I'm sorry, Mary. But while we're on pause, you're still not classy enough. Laura's class emphasises that a poky terraced house in Holloway is beneath her. That's where the laughs are. After all, it is a comedy.

Tom: Oh, is it? Sorry, I hadn't picked that up.

Felicity: Ha, ha, Tom. Carry on, please.

Sebastian materialises in a darkish corner behind Felicity. He is attractive, late thirties/early forties, casually dressed, but in the height of taste and extremely well-spoken. No-one notices him. He watches the proceedings with interest, making his opinion clear though without speaking. Meanwhile...

Tom: (*exaggerating aggression*) Thank you, dear. That makes me feel really good.

Mary: (*more classy*) Well, you know what you're like. Goodbye, then. I'll see you on Sunday evening.

She gives him a very perfunctory kiss and exits.

Tom: (*Waits till he hears the front door slam then picks up the phone and dials.*) Sandra?...She's gone...Yes. Where are you?...Brilliant. You can be here in no time. See you in a minute...Yes, love you too. Mwah!

*He blows a kiss down the phone, then hangs up before selecting a CD and putting it on, quietly. It's some form of seductive jazz. Offstage the front doorbell rings. **Tom** is on his way to answer it when*

his own mobile phone also rings, with a ringtone as different from seductive jazz as is possible.

Felicity: What the hell is that? Why have you brought your mobile on stage?

Tom: Sorry, sorry. I thought it was off. (*He takes his mobile out and is about to switch it off, then pauses*) Oh. It's Jackie. Hang on. (*He answers the phone*) Hello?...What?

Felicity: Jackie? She's supposed to be about to come on stage, not on the bloody phone. (*Climbing onto the stage*) Give me that!

Tom: (*still on his mobile*) Where are you?...*What?*...Oh, all right...Yes. But why don't you tell her yourself?...Oh. OK. (*He breaks the connection, switches his phone off and puts it back in his pocket*) She's not coming. She didn't want to talk to you. She's going to text.

Felicity: *What?* But why? Where the hell is she? What exactly did she say?

Tom: You'd better wait for her text. (*Front doorbell rings again*). I think the backstage crew is wondering what's going on.

Felicity: Why? If anyone can see we don't have a Sandra, he can.

Her phone beeps to indicate a text has arrived. She punches a button and reads it.

Felicity: Well, just listen to this. 'Fed up with play. Not funny. Boring. In fact it's shot. Resigning. Jackie.' What does she mean 'It's shot'?

Tom: I don't think she does mean it's *shot*, exactly.

Felicity: Right. Sod her! I'll play the part. I know it well enough. After all, I did write it.

Sebastian reacts, then laughs silently.

Tom: OK. Just go backstage and lose fifteen years and you'll be fine.

Felicity: Listen. When you've learnt how to play Sebastian, then you can comment.

Sebastian laughs out loud. **Felicity** turns and sees him.

Felicity: Hello. Can I help you?

Sebastian: No, I'm fine thanks. Just watching.

Felicity: Oh. Well, feel free to buy a ticket and come any other night. This is a rehearsal and is not open to the public.

Sebastian: I think you need me.

Felicity: Really? And why would we need you? Whoever you... (*The front doorbell rings continuously. She shouts angrily backstage*) Oh, shut up, Simon! It's all under control. (*She hesitates, looking at Sebastian, then, as the bell rings again exits impatiently to backstage, continuing offstage*). For Christ's sake, Simon! Just give me a moment and you can ring the bloody bell again and I'll continue as Sandra.

Brief pause, then...

...the doorbell rings. **Tom** exits to the front door.

Tom: (off) Hello, gorgeous. You look stunning. (He enters with **Felicity**. She is now wearing a coat and carrying a small overnight bag.) Come on in, darling. You're quite safe. She's off for the weekend now. Have a seat.

Felicity: Thank you, sweetie-pie.

She sits on the sofa.

Sebastian: This is all wrong, isn't it?

Felicity: Haven't you gone, yet?

Sebastian: It's best if I stay.

Felicity: I'll tell you if I ever agree. In the meantime, if you refuse to leave, you could at least please keep quiet. Carry on, Tom.

Sebastian smiles and takes a seat in the front row. Meanwhile...

Tom: Would you like a drink? I've got some Baileys hidden in here. (He opens the cupboard, takes out Baileys and whisky) Take your coat off.

Felicity: OK. Look - I thought I'd come in this to save time. (She stands, takes off the coat and does a pirouette, looking coyly at **Tom**.)

You'll have to imagine I'm in a sexy nightie.

Tom: I'd rather not if you don't mind. Er...oh yes...

Good lord, Sandra, how could you come on the tube dressed like that?

Felicity: I had my coat on. Don't you like it?

Tom: I love it.

Felicity: Show more nerves, Tom. The situation is still worrying you.

Tom: No, it isn't, dear. He's too happy with young and sexy Sandra to be nervous. Or he would be if she was.

Felicity: So you know what it's like to have a young and sexy girlfriend as well as a nagging wife, do you?

Tom: What do you think?

Felicity: Well, now you ask, I find it difficult to imagine anyone being interested in you, let alone someone young and sexy. In fact I can't remember now what I saw in you myself.

Tom: Where have I heard that before? Anyway, why do you think Jackie phoned me and only texted you?

Felicity: Probably because she's scared of me.

Tom: Good point.

Mary: *(off)* Can you please get on with it!

Tom: OK....

On the contrary, I love it. Come here!

*He pulls **Felicity** to him and kisses her passionately.*

Felicity does not respond and after a short while breaks away and pushes him off.

Tom: Um, it says 'passionate kiss', remember? You wrote it.

Felicity: Yes, well, I'll need to get used to that again. And show some nerves! You haven't done anything quite like this before.

Tom: Of course I have. Or Sebastian has

Felicity: (*ignoring him*) Mary! You've missed your cue!

There is the sound of the front door opening and closing.

Mary: (*off*) Sebastian!

Tom and Felicity react.

Felicity: Oh, my God! I thought she'd gone.

Tom: She had! You'd better hide.

Felicity: (*running around*) Where?

Tom: (*grabbing her and pushing her towards the sofa*) Behind the sofa.

Quick!

Felicity hides behind the sofa. **Tom** looks round, notices her coat and bag, picks them up and throws them after her. **Felicity** lets out a squeal of pain as **Mary** enters.

Mary: What on earth was that?

Tom: Oh, I just stubbed my toe on the sofa. (*He holds his foot and hops around, uttering a squeal as similar as possible to Felicity's, which isn't very similar at all.*) Why have you come back, dear?

Mary: I forgot my phone. It must be in...(she sees the bottles) Oh. Making yourself comfy, are you?

Tom: Well, I thought I would. While I could.

Felicity: (*from behind the sofa*) For heaven's sake, Tom, be more hesitant. You're thinking up answers on the hoof. Don't be so glib.

Tom: Felicity, dear, I intend to play him exactly as I see him. So you might as well keep quiet.

Felicity: Oh God, please, somebody - show me how to get the real Sebastian into this man's thick skull.

Sebastian: (*climbing on the stage*) I knew you'd need me eventually.

Felicity: (*startled, rising*) That was not addressed to you. Get off the stage. Who the hell are you, anyway?

Sebastian: I'm Sebastian.

Felicity: Sebastian who?

Sebastian: You should know. You created me.

Felicity: *Created you?*

Tom: What...the real Sebastian? But that's absurd.

Felicity: Don't talk nonsense. There isn't a real Sebastian.

Sebastian: Ah, but there is. When you created me I came into existence. And I've been getting the feeling that there's perhaps a teensy-weensy problem. So I came to see. And the fact is - you clearly don't know me. Your own character. You've got me entirely wrong. So I'm offering to help.

Mary: How bizarre.

Felicity: Don't be ridiculous. Anyway, even if you were the 'real' Sebastian, it's Tom who needs help, not me. Sebastian's my character. I can do what I like with him.

Sebastian: And that is exactly your problem. You can't. Once you've created a character, you see, you have to learn all about him. Understand him. And follow where he takes you. There can be no plot until you know the character.

Tom: True. I've heard of proper writers saying that.

Felicity: I do know my characters. I planned this play and all the characters, including you. I mean, including Sebastian. So please now go.

Sebastian: But my dear lady it's all wrong. Not just me - Laura's wrong, too. I tried to drag you in the right direction while you were writing. But I lost track of you rather quickly.

Tom: OK, OK...so if you're the 'real' Sebastian, tell me - are you aggressive towards your wife?

Sebastian: Certainly not.

Tom: (*to Felicity*) See? I told you. (*To Sebastian*) You keep all your antipathy towards her within yourself, don't you?

Sebastian: No.

Tom: What?

Sebastian: My dear fellow, I'm not married.

Felicity: *What?* Well, that just proves you're not Sebastian.

Sebastian: Not in the least. It proves you don't know me.

Felicity: Does it really? (*She turns to **Mary***) Allow me to introduce you. Your wife!

Mary *curtseys ironically.*

Sebastian: I've seen. That's supposed to be Laura, is it? (*He laughs*)

Mary: *Excuse me!*

Sebastian: And this can't be my apartment, can it? I really wouldn't be seen dead with furniture like this.

Felicity: No. It's your house. Your and Laura's poky terraced house in Holloway.

Sebastian: Holloway? Oh, my word! I wouldn't be seen dead in Holloway, either. I have a very nice apartment in St. Katherine's Dock. *Very nice.*

Mary: Who is this bloke, really?

Tom: But even I know Sebastian can't afford St. Katherine's Dock. Not on what he earns in his lowly job in...wherever.

Felicity: The Department of Work and Pensions.

Sebastian: No, no, no - I work in the Home Office. On police and internal security. I work with Scotland Yard and MI5. The minister and the permanent secretary absolutely rely on me. Excellent salary. And I inherited a nice lump sum from my father, too.

Felicity: But that's not my Sebastian at all. And your father went bankrupt.

Sebastian: It is your Sebastian, you know. Once he's away from Laura your own dialogue reveals a determined character who knows what he wants and takes it. But you don't follow that through. That kind of character doesn't go into a marriage he

knows won't work. And he doesn't vegetate in the depths of the DWP, either. He's a Home Office high-flier. As for my father, I take after him, so naturally he was successful too.

Tom: *(to Felicity)* I always thought there was more to Sebastian.

Felicity: You did not. Anyway, you don't believe all this crap, do you?

Mary: Whether anyone believes it, haven't we had enough of it now?

Felicity: But you heard him, didn't you?

Mary: Well, you and Tom never have agreed about Sebastian.

Felicity: Oh, for heaven's sake, shut up!...*(Mary shrugs and goes to sit on the front row)* So, if you're not married, *Sebastian*, how did you know all about Laura?

Sebastian: Oh, we had a long affair. Nearly married, but then didn't. Like I said, it was clear that after a while we wouldn't be able to stand each other.

Tom: At least you got something right, then, dear.

Sebastian: Lovely girl. So sad really. That's one way you've got her wrong. She knew better than to marry me.

Felicity: But the whole point of my play is their marriage going wrong. That's where the comedy lies. Anyway, what about Sandra, your little bit on the side. Where does she fit into your so-called character?

Sebastian: She's living with me. But while she's out Laura arrives. Out of the blue. Thinking, in fact, that she's at a different apartment. For a party. We haven't met in years. You've got Sandra arriving while Laura's out. It's poppycock.

Felicity: But where's the comedy in that? My version is funny.

Sebastian: Look, dear lady. It isn't a comedy. It's a drama. A tragedy, if you like. We had to split up. I'm too dynamic, too self-centred, work hard, play hard. I have my career, my money and my yacht. Laura had ambition, too. To be a writer. So now I just have casual affairs, like Sandra. She's a bit rough, but quite sweet. Laura and I meet again by accident. We both know it still won't work. But we can't resist each other. All seems happy. But at the end the audience know it'll be a catastrophe. They should be willing us to split again. But we don't. So we're doomed. That's your play!

Felicity: Sounds awful.