



***Rumours* –a farce by Neil Simon**

Reading: 30th August 2019 at 7.45pm, Auditions: 1st and 2nd September 2019 at 7.45pm

Performances: 16th to 23rd November 2019

Thank you for your interest in this lively play from the master of modern farce. This is the cast list in descending order of time on stage. Basically there are four couples (party guests) plus two police officers. It's set in the 1990s – the plot would never work in the age of mobile phones ...

- David Cumming – tax expert accountant – and wife Claire, both unwittingly sucked into the charade. (Acting age 30s/50s)
- Cassie and Glenn Bevans – quick thinking barristers. (30s/50s)
- Katy and Brian Cusack – a devoted older couple, Katy a slightly hippie TV cook (think Mary Berry meets Madame Arcati) Brian a somewhat bemused psychoanalyst. (50s/60s)
- Benedict Cooper-Key – aspiring MP and “Mr Cool” – with his nervous, suspicious wife Carol (30s/50s)
- Collins and Carter –police officers, great cameo roles at the end of the play. With a few script amendments could be 2M, 2F, M/F

Here is a brief selection of pieces we might use for the reading part of the auditions. There should be opportunities for group work too. If you can't make the audition dates, please let me know and we will try to make other arrangements.

Flavia Bateson, Director

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Claire, David

Claire

This is most bizarre.

David

Food. Food. I'm starving (*Grabs bag and tries to open it with one hand and teeth*)

Claire

Yes there's plenty of it in the kitchen but nothing's cooked. Everything's ready to go but not a soul to see to it. Cassie started to tell me something and then she clammed up. (*David continues to wrestle with the bag*) And why are they taking so long to get dressed? What can it be about I wonder?

David

What are you getting at?

Claire

The rumours.

David

What rumours?

Claire

Don't pretend you haven't heard ... the rumours.

David

Of course I've heard bits of idle gossip but I refuse to take any notice. Charlie is one of my best friends, known him since prep school. And I've given him the benefit of my expertise on tax affairs for years.

Claire

Quite so. I agree with you completely. I won't be party to it either.

David (*After a pause*)

All right. I'll tell you what I've heard. Come over here out of earshot. (*Moves downstage with Claire*) There is talk about Charlie and Viv. No one of course will tell it to my face, but it seems your friend Vivian is having a bit of a ... of a ...

Claire

Bit of a what?

David

Well an affair if I have to spell it out. She's doing something with someone sometime somehow, is that clear enough?

Claire

What nonsense. David you are so naïve. Open your eyes. Vivian's not having anything with anyone. It's your friend Charlie who's running up hotel bills from here to Birmingham.

David

Charlie? My friend Charlie? Not a chance. No way. He wouldn't even look at another woman.

Claire

He may be doing rather more than just looking. I heard it from a very good source at the tennis club.

David

Not our tennis club? (*Claire nods*) What a bunch of hypocrites. Sitting around in their flash Nikes and Reeboks destroying people's lives. Disgraceful. Who told you?

Claire

Karen Hamilton-Brown.

David

Karen Hamilton-Brown. I might have guessed it. That woman has a mouth big enough to swallow a can of tennis balls.

David

Wasn't it Karen Hamilton-Brown who started the other rumour?

Claire

What other rumour?

David

You know. About us.

Claire

Oh that wasn't Karen Hamilton-Brown. That was me. When we were going through a difficult patch, remember? I confided in a couple of friends. But Karen didn't start the rumour about Charlie. It was someone you don't know, Henry Forbes-Greene. Who is he anyway?

Claire

A new member. Voted in last week. In fact you voted for him, by proxy, we were in Madeira.

David

I don't believe it. An unknown new member by proxy spreads rumours about my best friend? Who plays tennis with him?

Claire

No one. He's a social member. Just uses the club for lunch.

David

This unknown non-tennis playing social proxy new member just eats lunch and spreads rumours ...? What does he do for a living?

Claire

He sells BMWs.

Cassie, Glenn

Cassie

I can't believe this is happening. *(She crosses to the cigarette box, reaches for one)*

The telephone rings

(Calling out) Glenn the phone is ringing

The phone continues to ring. She doesn't want to answer it, hesitates then rushes and picks it up

Hello? Dr Dudley. Oh Dr Dudley, I'm so glad it's you. Sorry, yes I know ...

The bedroom door opens and Glenn rushes out

Glenn

Is that Dudley?

Cassie *(Into the phone)*

Yes I'm sorry about your presentation but this is an emergency.

Glenn

Is that Dudley?

Cassie *(Into the phone)*

I'm Cassandra Bevans. You remember my husband, Glenn? You, Glenn, Charlie Brooks, were all at school together? And it's Charlie I'm calling about.

Glenn

Is that Dudley?

Cassie *(Turning angrily, hand over phone, to Glenn)*

It's Dudley! It's Dudley!

Glenn

Why couldn't you just say so?

He goes back into the bedroom, closes the door.

Cassie *(Into the phone)*

Dr Dudley, I'm afraid there's been an accident and we felt, well, since you know Charlie as a friend as well as his doctor, and well, in the circumstances, as my husband is a barrister he... You see we arrived at Charlie's house moments ago and as we were getting out of the car, we suddenly heard this enormous –

Glenn *(Rushing out of the bedroom)*

Don't, don't say anything. Don't tell him what happened

Cassie *(Covering phone)*

Don't tell him? What about Charlie?

Glenn

He's going to be all right. Just a powder burn. Don't tell Dudley about the gunshot.

Cassie

Don't tell him? They've just dragged the poor man away from an award presentation at a Medical Society dinner.

Glenn

Tell him ... he stumbled down the stairs and hit his head, but he's OK now.

Cassie

But what about the blood?

Glenn

The bullet went through his ear lobe. It's nothing. We mustn't let him know.

Cassie

But I already said we were getting out of the car when we heard an enormous – what? (*Into phone*) One moment, Doctor.

Glenn

We heard ... we heard ... (*Coming down*) we heard an enormous thud!

Cassie

Thud?

Glenn

When he tripped down the stairs.

Cassie

Good. Good. That's good (*Into the phone*) Dr Dudley, I'm so sorry my husband was just giving me an update. Yes, well, we heard this enormous thud, yes thud. It seems Charlie must have tripped on the stairs. But he's all right, apparently.

Glenn

He's sitting up in bed. He'll call him in the morning.

Cassie

He's sitting up in bed. He'll call him in the morning.

Glenn

You!

Cassie

You! He'll call you in the morning.

Ben, Carol

Ben

Oddly friendly for a waiter don't you think?

Carol

If only you'd told me earlier we were going out. Do I look all right after the quick change from pilates?

Ben prefers to look at himself in the mirror and straightens his tie.

Ben

Yes. Fine.

Carol

My hair isn't right, is it? I saw you looking in the car. You know it's what you don't say that drives me insane. Plenty of time for everyone, except for me. And I'm just the wife, totally taken for granted. Heaven forbid I should show any sign of imperfection. I'd be landed with divorce papers the next morning.

Ben

What is all this constant mention of divorce? I've absolutely no intention ... what has got into your head?

Carol

What are we doing here anyway? They're not people I know. Presumably people you need to make an impression with. It's going to be a tedious evening and I'd prefer to go home.

Ben

Go home? We've only just arrived. We haven't seen anyone yet except the waiter.

Carol

I suppose you're going to expect me to act as if nothing has happened?

Ben

Nothing has happened. What are you talking about?

Carol

Don't you lie to me. Everyone knows about you and that cheap tawdry little tart.

Ben

For goodness sake, keep your voice down. Nothing is going on. I hardly know the woman. She's on the Conservative Party fundraising committee, that's all. I met her and her husband at two cocktail parties, for God's sake.

Carol

Two cocktail parties?

Ben

Yes.

Carol

Do you think I'm blind, or stupid, or that I don't know what's been going on?

Ben

You don't know what's been going on because nothing has been going on!

Carol

I've known about you and Karen Hamilton-Brown for over a year now.

Ben

Well that's quite amazing since I only met her four months ago. Now will you please lower your voice? The waiter must be listening to every word.

Carol

You think I care about the kitchen staff? *(She opens the door)* My friends know everything. The hired domestic help doesn't matter one iota.

Ben

Do you know what's got into you Carol? It's my political ambitions. You feel threatened because there's every possibility of my becoming a very prominent member of parliament. Minister material even.

Carol

Are you worried that I might just behave badly, angel? Am I the shrew of a wife who's giving you such a thorny time? Well, I'll tell you something Mr Super Duper Cooper-Key ... tongues are wagging in very high places.

Ben

For goodness sake Carol. Why are you so hyper tonight? So pent up. What's causing this bizarre behaviour?

Carol takes out a six inch long quartz crystal from her bag and holds it on her forehead

It's that bloody pathetic mumbo-jumbo crystal again. God knows it's dangerous. Like petrified cocaine. Please put it away. Don't let my friends see what you're doing.

Carol

Don't let my friends see what you're doing then.

Katy, Brian (plus Clare, Cassie, Glenn, David)

Brian

I've got it. Here's what we'll do. Charlie's going to want to know what Glenn told us. Glenn tells Charlie ... that Charlie had a benign wart removed from his ear in the morning, but it's fine. Then suddenly Vivian's mother broke her hip this afternoon. Vivian took her to hospital and is going to stay with mum overnight tonight. Zofia, thinking the party was off, left the food and went home. It all happened so quickly, they forgot to call us. We arrived here. We understood the mistake. We decided to cook the dinner ourselves. There's your story.

Claire

I wouldn't believe the mother breaking her hip

Brian

Why not?

Claire

She died six years ago.

Brian

Then her father broke his hip.

Claire

He lives in Manchester.

Brian

Does Vivian have any relatives in the Home Counties?

Cassie

She has a cousin Beatrice.

Brian

Then Beatrice broke her hip.

Cassie

Beatrice is married to a doctor. He'd have taken her in.

Brian

Then Vivian broke her hip. The neighbours took her in.

Katy

If Charlie only had a wart removed, Charlie could have taken her in.

Claire

Can't you think of something else?

Brian

I did! I thought of the mother, the father, the cousin, the wart and the hip. Nothing satisfies you people.

Glenn

There's no real logic to it. It's not sounding particularly plausible.

Brian (*Losing control*)

We don't need plausible. The man is in shock, mental anguish and emotional despair. Logic doesn't enter into it right now.

The phone rings. They all look at it. It rings again.

Brian

Oh well. Hallo ... Yes it is. Who's calling please? I see ... very well ... One moment please. (*He covers the phone*) It's a woman. For Ben.

Claire

So?

Brian

It sounds like Vivian.

Glenn

I'll get Ben

Brian (*Into phone*)

Not yet. ... Er Ben is outside just now ... May I say who's calling please. I see ... Ok ... Hold on. (*Covers phone*) I can't tell. She might be disguising her voice. She said "Just a friend"

David

How did she say it?

Brian

She said "Just a friend" How many ways are there to say it?

David

Nervous, sincere, drunk, frantic ...

Cassie

Frightened, guilty, lying ...

Katy

Offhanded, perplexed, deceitful ...

Claire

Ominous, anonymous ...

Brian

This isn't some Noel Coward parlour game you know!

Carter, Collins (plus Glenn, Cassie, Ben)

Glenn

Alright. Alright! I'm David. (*Doorbell rings*) Open the door Ben. (*Collins and Carter enter*)

PC Collins

I'm relieved to see you're not dancing again ... Now then, where is Mr David Cumming?

Glenn

He's right here in this room. I am David Cumming.

PC Collins

Right you are, sir. (*Cassie puts her arm through Glenn's in a wifely way*) And might I ask . who you are ma'am?

Cassie

I'm his wife. His wife's best friend. (*She points to Claire and takes arm away*)

PC Collins

And are you here on your own, ma'am?

Cassie

No officer, I'm with my husband Mr Bevans.

PC Collins

And where is he?

Cassie

He must have gone home early.

PC Collins

Then, to summarise: the host is sleeping, the hostess is in Manchester, one guest is already gone at ten fifteen and another won't get out of a car in the driveway. Not much of a party is it? All right, Mr Cumming. Just tell us in full about the accident. (*Two way radio on WPC Carter's belt squawks*) What's that?

WPC Carter

Headquarters. (*Into the radio*) 1047, WPC Casey. Over. (*Radio squawks again*) Check. (*More radio noise*) Check. Right. (*More noise*) Hold on. (*To Collins*) Red Porsche convertible located just outside Tewksbury. Suspect apprehended. Admitted theft and RTA. Sergeant says to call it a day.

PC Collins

Well that's it then. No harm done and we can be on our way.

Others all talk at the same time "Isn't that wonderful", "Splendid" "What a relief"

PC Collins

There might be some more questioning for you Mr Cumming, at your convenience. No need to take up more of your party time. Thank you and goodnight.

Altogether again "It was our pleasure" "So nice to meet you" "Glad we could be of help"

Ben

Thank you, officer, and goodnight.

PC Collins

Not at all, sir. You know I can't help thinking I've seen your face before.

Ben

Cooper-Key. Ben Cooper-Key. I'm standing as MP for Brighton and Hove. Sorry I couldn't help further with your enquiries.

PC Collins

Well you're not involved with this, unless you witnessed the accident, of course?

Ben

Good heavens, no. My wife and I arrived late. We didn't even hear the gunshots.

Frozen silence. The others look at the floor, ceiling, walls

PC Collins

What gunshots, sir?

Ben (*Innocently*)

Hmmmm?

PC Collins

What gunshots, sir?

WPC Carter's radio squawks.

WPC Carter (*Into the radio*)

1047, Carter. Over. (*Radio noise*) Right. (*Radio noise*) Check. (*Radio noise*) Will do. (*Turns off radio. To Collins*) Neighbours reported hearing two gunshots fired, seeming to come from inside 27 Wangfield Lane. Investigate.

PC Collins

27 Wangfield Lane. How convenient that we're already there. Impressive response time. Well, we seem to have got ourselves two alleged crimes for the price of one. Anyone care to tell us about the gunshots? *All speaking together: "No" "Not really ..." "We didn't hear anything above the music"* No one heard anything then. (*To Ben*) Now who is the woman sitting outside in the BMW?