

DROP BY ANYTIME

a slight but charming little comedy that's
perfect for 10-minute play festivals

by

Jonathan Caws-Elwitt

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Characters

Danny: A likeable, good-natured guy, age 30-50.

Havelock: A friend of Danny's. A bit stuffy, a bit dull, and a bit unsociable. But he has a superficial civility and is sincerely affectionate toward his wife. Close in age to Danny.

Botanica: Havelock's wife. She displays a bright and pleasant personality. She loves her husband and is fond of their friend Danny, but she is a bit self-absorbed. Close in age to Danny and Havelock.

Time: The Present

Place: Havelock and Botanica's apartment.

(Havelock and Botanica's apartment is comfortably furnished, tastefully decorated, and impeccably clean and tidy. A door USR opens to the hall, and immediately stage left of that door is another door that communicates with the kitchen. Other doors or archways imply access to other parts of the apartment. At center stage is an area rug on which is situated a loveseat [which faces the audience], with a coffee table in front of it. Stage right of the loveseat is an armchair [more or less perpendicular to the front of the stage], which is also within reach of the coffee table. A second armchair, a rocking-chair, or an ottoman may be placed stage left of the loveseat. At SL is a free-standing bar.)

(As the play opens, we hear a doorbell. Havelock emerges from the kitchen door and unlocks the door to the hall.)

HAVELOCK

(He opens the door.)

Hi, Danny.

(Havelock opens the door wider, allowing Danny to enter. They smile and shake hands.)

DANNY

Hello, Havelock.

(Havelock turns toward the kitchen door.)

HAVELOCK

(Calling offstage through the kitchen door)

Botanica! Danny's here, honey.

BOTANICA

(Offstage)

Terrific! I'll be right out.

(Havelock ushers Danny downstage to the living room area, where they both sit -- Havelock at the stage left end of the loveseat, Danny on the armchair stage right of center. It is obvious that Danny has been here before and feels at home. Nevertheless, he exudes a certain hesitation and awkwardness.)

DANNY

So . . . here I am.

(He laughs self-consciously.)

HAVELOCK

(With an enthusiasm that seems a bit artificial)

Yes! Thank you so much for stopping by, Danny. It's really wonderful!

DANNY

(Diffidently)

Oh, well . . . you know, thanks for having me.

HAVELOCK

(Distractedly, he waves aside Danny's polite remark.)

Tchahh! Always a treat, Dan.

DANNY

And what's new around here?

HAVELOCK

(With an air of preoccupation, mixed with boredom)

Nothing. Not . . . a . . . thing.

(There is a few moments' silence, during which Danny studies his fingernails and Havelock hums a strain of classical music.)

DANNY

(With a chuckle)

Of course, I shouldn't expect much in the way of news. After all, I was over here pretty recently, wasn't I.

HAVELOCK

Dan, you are welcome here as often as you like. Anytime you want to drop by . . . you don't even have to phone, like you did today.

DANNY

(He provides a tactful little cough.)

Actually -- as you'll recall -- *you* phoned *me* and asked me over.

HAVELOCK

(He does not appear to have absorbed Danny's remark.)

That's what I'm saying -- you don't have to phone. Just drop by unannounced, and Botanica and I will always be glad to see you. If we're not in the middle of something, I mean. Or on our way out. Or entertaining other people. Or watching TV. You know -- just drop by *anytime*. I mean it.

DANNY

(He wishes to change the subject, which has become awkward. He looks around the room.)

I have to hand it to you guys -- your place is always so tidy and clean. I don't mind telling you that mine is usually a mess.

(He leans in toward Havelock, with a friendly, conspiratorial air.)

Now, tell the truth -- is it like this even when you *don't* have company?

HAVELOCK

(Stiffly)

What do you mean, Dan?

(Without waiting for an answer, he rises and begins walking toward the bar.)

What would you like to drink?

(Botanica enters from the kitchen. Danny rises. They walk toward each other, meet upstage of Danny's armchair, and exchange a friendly kiss on the cheek.

BOTANICA

(Cheerfully)

Good to *see* you, Danny.

(She sees Havelock at the bar, and appears slightly surprised. She speaks the next line with a lack of enthusiasm.)

Ah . . . drinks. Of course.

(She walks toward the bar. As she reaches it, she speaks in a slightly reserved, slightly strained tone.)

I didn't realize we were going to be serving *drinks*, honey.

HAVELOCK

(In a stage whisper)

We can't just invite someone over and not offer him anything.

BOTANICA

(Whispering)

I know, but I was going to bring out some *edamame*. People tend to *linger* over drinks.

HAVELOCK

(Patiently)

It'll be fine, darling.

BOTANICA

(She is unconvinced.)

The meeting starts in 45 minutes, and we absolutely *cannot* be late.

HAVELOCK

I know. No problem.

BOTANICA

I'm worried about the parking.

HAVELOCK

(He gives her a reassuring pat on the shoulder.)

Relax, Bo. We'll give him a drink, chat for 5 or 10, and he'll be gone.

DANNY

(Though he has not heard their dialogue, he has been very aware of the whispered tete-a-tete and appears restless and self-conscious. He leans forward and calls across to the bar.)

Hey . . . guys? If I've come at a bad time or something . . .

BOTANICA

(She gives a silvery, artificial laugh.)

How absurd! Don't you know that *anytime* is perfect for you to invite yourself over, Danny?

DANNY

(Still speaking loudly from his chair to communicate with the others at the bar)

Actually, *Havelock* invited *me*.

BOTANICA

(She walks toward him and speaks with a nervous over-emphasis.)

Well, of course he did! I suggested it, in fact. Delighted, I'm sure. Like I always say, you just call anytime, Danny darling.

(She sits on the loveseat, at the end nearest Danny.)

(Danny rolls his eyes, shrugs it off, and tries to relax.)

(Botanica looks at her watch.)

HAVELOCK

(Walking toward Botanica and Danny with two drinks.)

Here we are.

(Havelock hands one drink to Botanica. He gives her another pat on the shoulder with the hand that is now free. He leans toward Danny, who stands to meet him halfway, and passes him the second drink. Danny sits back down, and Havelock joins Botanica on the loveseat.)

DANNY

(He looks approvingly at the drink.)

Perfect!

HAVELOCK

(With a forced joviality)

I guess you've been here often enough that I know what you like, heh heh.

DANNY

(Awkwardly)

Heh heh

HAVELOCK

(Smugly)

Yep, if there's one thing I know, it's that our pal Danny loves a little glass of chardonnay.

BOTANICA

(Quickly)

A *little* glass.

(Beat)

Heh heh.

HAVELOCK and DANNY

(Together)

Heh heh.

BOTANICA

Yeah, I'd say that what Danny has there is about a *four minute* chardonnay.

(Nervously, she addresses Havelock. Her voice rings with an artificial gaiety.)

Wouldn't you agree, dear?

HAVELOCK

(Confidently)

Oh, absolutely . . . four minutes at the outside. Three and a half, maybe.

DANNY

(He is feeling very uncomfortable.)

Uh . . . I could just take it "to go", if you prefer. I know I've seen some Dixie Riddle Cups in your powder room.

HAVELOCK

(He responds to Danny with instant, overdone heartiness.)

Nonsense! You're our guest, Dan!

BOTANICA

"To go"!

(She laughs the artificial laugh again.)

How absurd! You're hilarious, Danny.

(Botanica's laughter ends abruptly -- as if someone has turned off a spigot -- and there is another awkward silence.)

DANNY

(Attempting to be sociable)

So . . . how was your day, Botanica?

BOTANICA

Complete washout. All I did was answer emails and schmooze with people on the phone.

DANNY

That's too bad. How about you, Havelock?

HAVELOCK

Fairly productive, as a matter of fact. I got a lot of correspondence out of the way, and I made some important networking calls.

DANNY

Hey, that's great.

(There is another dead silence.)

DANNY

(He is trying desperately to get the conversation going again.)

Botanica . . . I was just telling Havelock how impressed I am with the fact that your apartment is always spotlessly clean.

(Botanica looks at Havelock briefly, a hint of fear on her face, then breaks out into another silvery laugh.)

DANNY

Seriously . . . I must be here -- what, about once a week -- and . . .

HAVELOCK

Anytime you want, Danny-boy.

BOTANICA

You don't even have to phone, sweetie.

DANNY

(He rolls his eyes again before proceeding.)

And I could swear it always looks like you've just cleaned every inch of it.

HAVELOCK

(Overbearingly)

How you doin' on that drink, Dan?

(Danny looks guiltily at the drink he has thus far neglected, then takes an obligatory gulp.)

BOTANICA

Dear, wasn't it kind of Danny to invite himself over on a Wednesday?

HAVELOCK

Wonderful. Always a treat.

BOTANICA

Wednesday must be such a *busy* evening for him. Why, I expect he'll have to be running off at any moment.

(She looks hopefully at Danny.)

DANNY

No, this is more or less a quiet night for me. But if you two --

(Havelock and Botanica cut in, immediately and simultaneously.)

HAVELOCK

Well, Danster, now that you mention it

BOTANICA

To tell you the truth, we

DANNY

(He jumps to his feet and shouts.)

Stop!

(Havelock and Botanica immediately shut up.)

DANNY

(Still shouting)

What is this all about??

BOTANICA

I don't know what you could mean, sweetie.

(To Havelock)

Do you, dear?

HAVELOCK

(Pleasantly)

Not an inkling.

DANNY

(Exasperated, he paces stage right of his chair.)

Look! For the past three months, *you* have invited *me* over here -- always on short notice -- about every week to ten days. I know we're friends, but we're not really very close friends --

(He stops pacing and turns to face them.)

no offense --

(He resumes pacing.)

and we don't have that much in common. I like both of you,

(Again he stops pacing and turns to face them.)

but we never seem to have anything much to talk about, and whenever I'm over here -- at *your* invitation -- you both seem kind of bored, preoccupied, and generally unenthusiastic about my being here . . .

(Havelock and Botanica begin to protest, but Danny cuts them short.)

DANNY

. . . *despite* your phony display of bonhomie. The reality is that no sooner have I arrived, then you start giving hints that you'd like me to leave, that you have other things to do

HAVELOCK

(Looking at his watch)

Uh, say Danny, we really don't have time

DANNY

I am not leaving until you tell me why I'm here.

(Botanica gasps.)

DANNY

Well?

(He carefully places his drink on the coffee table, without taking another sip. Then he sits down, leans back in his chair, and folds his arms, expectantly.)

(There is an brief silence, during which Havelock and Botanica exchange looks.)

BOTANICA

It's -- uh -- it's very kind of you to compliment us on our clean apartment.

(To Havelock)

Don't you think so, honey?

DANNY

(He leans forward and admonishes her with his forefinger.)

Don't try to change the subject!

HAVELOCK

(He clears his throat self-consciously.)

Ahem. She's not . . . uh . . . actually, changing the subject.

BOTANICA

(To Havelock)

Shh! *Darling*

DANNY

(To Havelock)

What are you talking about?

HAVELOCK

(To Botanica)

You'd better tell him, dear.

BOTANICA

Why should *I* have to tell him? He was your friend first.

HAVELOCK

Yes, but you *like* him more than I do.

(Danny is taking all of this in, and his face shows the audience his surprise and indignation.)

BOTANICA

Says who?

HAVELOCK

Come now, sweetheart . . . surely you haven't forgotten what you told me after the New Year's Eve party, about that little fantasy of yours.

(Danny starts in his chair. He gives the audience a look that mixes a lot of amazement with a little bit of delight.)

DANNY

(Hoarsely)

Um . . . Botanica? What's he talking about there?

BOTANICA

(Ignoring Danny, she addresses Havelock.)

All right, bigmouth. I'll tell him why he's here.

DANNY

Does it have anything to do with the "little fantasy"?

BOTANICA and HAVELOCK

(Together)

No!

(Danny shrugs, as if to say "Easy come, easy go.")

(Botanica inhales deeply to prepare herself, then addresses Danny.)

BOTANICA

All right, Danny. You want to know why you're here. Well . . . do you ever have something you just can't make yourself do? No matter how much you're aware that you need to do it?

DANNY

(A little confused, he addresses Havelock.)

Now is she changing the subject?

(Sheepishly, Havelock shakes his head "no".)

DANNY

(Thoughtfully)

Trouble making myself do things? Sure. There are plenty of tasks I have a hard time getting myself to do. Obligations, chores You know, things like cleaning the apartment

BOTANICA

(She laughs the silvery, artificial laugh.)

Cleaning the apartment! Funny you should bring that up!

(Another silvery laugh.)

DANNY

Heh heh.

(Beat)

Er . . . *why* is that funny?

(Before she replies, Botanica gives a great, prolonged show of "composing herself" after her latest outburst of fake laughter.)

BOTANICA

You see . . .

(She hesitates, looks at Havelock, then rounds up her courage and continues.)

It just so happens that we have a teensy problem around here with getting motivated to clean the place.

(Now it is Danny's turn to laugh heartily -- only his laughter is genuine.)

DANNY

(Laughing)

Give me a break! You guys have -- ha ha -- trouble getting "*motivated*" to clean? Yeah, right.

(His laughter is gradually diminishing.)

I mean, unless what I'm seeing every time I come over is just *totally* unrepresentative.

(His laughter is now dying to a trickle.)

Like if you *only* clean your place when you know I'm coming over.

(He is no longer laughing, and his face is beginning to cloud over in thought.)

Or . . . if . . . you . . . only . . . *invite me over* . . .

(The light has dawned.)

because you need something that will *motivate you to clean*. Oh, for crying out loud!

(He rises angrily, picks up and drains his wine glass, bangs the empty glass on the table, and begins walking toward the door. He stops and turns.)

I've had people take advantage of me before, but -- oh, for pete's sake! You guys . . . are *pathetic*.

(He turns toward the audience and softens, now speaking matter-of-factly.)

Inventive, but pathetic.

(He turns back toward Havelock and Botanica, scowls, and once again starts stomping toward the door.)

HAVELOCK

(Quietly)

Danny?

DANNY

(He stops and turns.)

What!

HAVELOCK

Same time next week okay?

DANNY

(He rolls his eyes and gives a shiver of exasperation. Then he hisses his answer, petulantly.)

Yes.

(He stomps out the door.)

HAVELOCK

(Casually, to Botanica)

It's getting harder and harder to find good cleaning help, isn't it.

(Botanica nods and sips her drink.)

(The End)