



# FAMILY FURNITURE

BY **A.R. GURNEY**



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FAMILY FURNITURE was originally developed and produced by  
The Flea Theater, New York City  
Jim Simpson, Artistic Director; Carol Ostrow, Producing Director

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*To Tommy Kail, the director,  
and The Flea Theater with many thanks.*

FAMILY FURNITURE was presented at The Flea Theater (Jim Simpson, Artistic Director; Carol Ostrow, Producing Director; Beth Dembrow, Managing Director) in New York City, opening on November 25, 2013. It was directed by Thomas Kail; the set design was by Rachel Hauck; the costume design was by Claudia Brown; the lighting design was by Betsy Adams; the sound design was by Bart Fasbender; and the stage manager was Andrea O. Saraffian. The cast was as follows:

CLAIRE..... Carolyn McCormick  
RUSSELL ..... Peter Scolari  
NICK..... Andrew Keenan-Bolger  
PEGGY..... Ismenia Mendes  
BETSY..... Molly Nordin

## CHARACTERS

RUSSELL, fifties

CLAIRE, his wife, forties

NICK, their son, early twenties

PEGGY, their daughter, a couple of years older than Nick

BETSY, Nick's girlfriend, early twenties

## SETTING AND SET:

The play takes place during a summer in the early 1950s, in and around a house on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie, not far from Buffalo, New York.

The various settings are defined primarily by appropriate lighting and furniture consisting simply of wooden square stools and rectangular benches which the actors arrange into various configurations as needed. In this way, they create their own playing areas, such as a living room, an outdoor terrace, a small sailing dinghy, an upstairs bedroom, and even a clearing in the woods when these pieces of furniture are stood on end. The only literal piece of furniture might be a wooden "captain's chair" which is used primarily by the character of Russell.

In the New York production, the entering audience walked by an offstage squeaky wooden screen door, worn from over-use, its screening stretched by the pushing of small children and large dogs, which then is heard slamming or squeaking on various entrances and exits. There also might be an obtrusive shelf on one side of the stage which holds occasional props.

At the top of the play and during the changes between scenes, there are short segments of songs and instrumental arrangements of music popular in the early fifties.

# FAMILY FURNITURE

*At rise:*

*Night.*

*Music from the period.*

*The furniture is piled arbitrarily in the center of the stage. The music diminishes so as to come from a small portable radio on the side shelf. Nick enters, turns off the radio. Russell enters from elsewhere with a highball glass in his hand. They arrange the furniture to suggest a living room. Then Nick exits as Russell sits in his chair, looking somewhat anxious in isolated lights, nervously shuffling through the Buffalo Evening News, his highball glass on a table beside him. He glances at his watch, takes an occasional sip of his scotch, and rattles the newspaper nervously. After a moment, Nick enters through the screen door. He wears summer clothes and because it is an early June evening, he may have a sweater slung over his shoulders.*

NICK. Dad!

RUSSELL. Good evening, Nicky.

NICK. You're still up?

RUSSELL. I am indeed still up. And may I assume the drive-in movie is now open for the summer.

NICK. You may assume that, Dad.

RUSSELL. Did you have the beauteous Betsy on your arm?

NICK. I did.

RUSSELL. Did you treat her to a chocolate milkshake afterwards?

NICK. Something like that.

RUSSELL. And was it a good movie?

NICK. It was all right.

RUSSELL. "All right." That I can believe. Most of the movies today are simply "all right." Where is Ginger Rogers when we need her? And what in heaven's name does Fred Astaire think he's doing without her?

NICK. Why are you still up, Dad?

RUSSELL. Why am I still up? I am up, Nicky, because I'm worried about your mother.

NICK. She's in New York, Dad.

RUSSELL. And that is exactly why I'm worried. New York is one of the most dangerous cities in the entire free world. And your lovely mother has chosen to visit it instead of being here with me, watching the summer moon rise over Lake Erie.

NICK. She had to buy stuff, Dad.

RUSSELL. Oh yes. And the "stuff" she had to buy was simply new slipcovers for the living room couch which she could have easily bought right here in Buffalo.

NICK. Mom says you get better everything in New York.

RUSSELL. Better everything? Ah yes. I've heard that one for years. Ever since Best and Company, fresh from New York, set up shop down at the Statler Hotel, where they sell us better everything, even as they systematically rob us blind. (*Indicating his wristwatch.*) But I seriously doubt, Nicky, that you can get better ANYthing in New York after eleven o'clock in the evening.

NICK. What do you mean, Dad?

RUSSELL. Your mother's not in her hotel.

NICK. No?

RUSSELL. I telephoned and she's simply not there. Oh, she's registered all right, but her room doesn't answer.

NICK. Maybe she's still out, Dad.

RUSSELL. Out? Out? At this hour? Out?

NICK. She said she might see a play.

RUSSELL. Plays don't last that long, Nick, even in New York. Unless the play has been written by Eugene O'Neill. Who doesn't write them any more, probably because they got too long.

NICK. So what are you saying, Dad?

RUSSELL. I'm simply saying I'm worried, Nicky. I tried to call her at five o'clock this evening when the long-distance rates went down, but she wasn't in her room. I called again at six. Still no answer. I left a message with the hotel operator for her to call me as soon as she came in. That call has yet to arrive, Nick.

NICK. Do you have something important to tell her, Dad?

RUSSELL. I do. I want to tell her that Brooks Brothers will have delivered to her hotel two blue Oxford cloth button-down shirts for her to bring back to Buffalo. Well sir, according to the hotel, those shirts are there but your mother isn't.

NICK. Maybe she's in her room after all. Maybe at the desk they didn't see her come in.

RUSSELL. I have covered that option, Nick. I asked them to check her room. They said it was against the law to enter it, but they'd knock on her door. Which they did. To no response whatsoever.

NICK. Oh boy.

RUSSELL. Oh boy indeed.

NICK. So what should we do, Dad?

RUSSELL. That's the thing, Nick. What should we do? I'm thinking of calling the police.

NICK. The New York police?

RUSSELL. I'm afraid our Buffalo police would find this somewhat out of their bailiwick.

NICK. But what can the New York police do, Dad?

RUSSELL. They can enter her room with a skeleton key. They can examine the premises. If there's suspicious evidence, they can send out an alarm.

NICK. Do you think they'd do all that?

RUSSELL. Oh, look, Nicky. I'm no fool. I'm perfectly aware that the New York police won't pay much attention to some stranger calling long-distance at this ungodly hour. But I happen to know a distinguished New Yorker named Kingman Baxter, who was my roommate at Yale, and who is now a major figure in New York politics.

NICK. I've heard you mention him.

RUSSELL. Yes, well, I may now mention him to the New York police.

NICK. I thought you didn't believe in name-dropping, Dad.

RUSSELL. I normally don't, Nick. I think name-dropping is vulgar and humiliating. But there are times in life when we are forced to do it. And I hope that if Kingman Baxter's wife were in difficulty here in Buffalo, he'd feel free to drop mine.

NICK. Oh Dad. I don't know ... calling the police ...

RUSSELL. Have you got a better suggestion?

NICK. Maybe we should wait a little longer.

RUSSELL. Wait? Just wait?



NICK. You're always saying haste makes waste.

RUSSELL. You're suggesting I simply sit and wait? While your lovely mother could be in serious difficulty? (*Peggy comes in through the screen door, also in summer clothes.*)

PEGGY. What's going on?

RUSSELL. I'm extremely worried about your mother.

NICK. She's not in her hotel room.

RUSSELL. And it's virtually midnight!

PEGGY. Oh.

RUSSELL. Oh? Is that all you can say, sweetheart? Just "oh."

PEGGY. She's probably out on the town with that friend of hers from Farmington.

RUSSELL. "Out on the town"? At this late hour?

NICK. New York is the city that never sleeps, Dad.

RUSSELL. Well, I'm sorry. New York may not sleep, but I myself would very much like to.

PEGGY. Or maybe she's not out, Dad. Maybe she met her friend for dinner, and they had a drink, and split a bottle of wine, and maybe she forgot to check with the hotel desk when she came in. So now she's tucked into bed and dead to the world.

NICK. "Dead to the world"? Jesus, Peggy.

RUSSELL. That's an unfortunate way of putting it, Peggins.

PEGGY. It's just an expression.

NICK. The hotel sent someone up to bang on her door.

RUSSELL. And there was no answer.

PEGGY. Maybe she's sleeping on her good ear.

RUSSELL. What?

PEGGY. I'll bet that's it, Dad. She couldn't hear the knocking because she had her bad ear up.

NICK. She does it a lot, Dad. Purposely. Sleeps with her bad ear up.

RUSSELL. I know how your mother sleeps, Nick.

NICK. Remember when I had whooping cough? She said it was the only way she could get any sleep at all.

PEGGY. Maybe you should get some sleep yourself, Dad.

RUSSELL. Sleep? I couldn't possibly. I'm too wound up.

PEGGY. Take one of Mother's sleeping pills.

RUSSELL. Now that's a thought.

NICK. Does Mother use sleeping pills?

RUSSELL. Oh yes. And I know right where she keeps them.

PEGGY. So take one and go to bed, Dad.

RUSSELL. All right. I'll at least make the effort. (*Kissing them.*) Good night, you two. (*Heading off, then turning.*) But tomorrow morning, if there's still no word from your mother, I plan to jump on the Empire State Express and head straight for New York.

NICK. A train? You'd better fly, Dad.

RUSSELL. Fly? You think I should fly?

PEGGY. It's much quicker these days, Dad.

RUSSELL. All right, I'll take an airplane. Which requires a second sleeping pill. (*He goes.*)

NICK. (*To Peggy.*) He wanted to bring the police in on it.

PEGGY. What could the police do?

NICK. Break down her door.

PEGGY. (*Listens.*) Hold it.

NICK. Why?

PEGGY. He's coming back. (*Russell appears again.*)

RUSSELL. I forgot to ask you, Peggy. How's your life?

PEGGY. My LIFE, Dad?

RUSSELL. I can't keep up with you lately.

PEGGY. Are you talking about Marco?

RUSSELL. I suppose I am. Did you see him tonight?

PEGGY. I did.

RUSSELL. He drove all the way out from Buffalo?

PEGGY. We're not that far, Dad.

RUSSELL. Oh yes we are. We are very far from Marco. In more ways than one.

PEGGY. Dad ...

RUSSELL. Did you go to the movies with him?

PEGGY. No.

RUSSELL. Nicky and Betsy went to the drive-in movies.

PEGGY. That's Nicky and Betsy.

RUSSELL. But you and Marco went where?

PEGGY. We sat on the beach and talked.

RUSSELL. Did you have something to talk about?

PEGGY. We always do, Dad.

RUSSELL. (*Starting off again.*) Yes, well, perhaps you and I may also have something to talk about when I return from New York. (*Turning.*) If the plane doesn't crash in the process. (*Exits.*)

NICK. What was all that about?

PEGGY. With Marco? He doesn't like him.

NICK. Did he say so?

# FAMILY FURNITURE

by A.R. Gurney

2M, 3W

Amid the gin and tonics, vichyssoise, and tennis doubles of Buffalo's summer scene, siblings Nick and Peggy must confront their mother's possible infidelity, their father's apparent indifference, and their own increasingly complicated love lives. *FAMILY FURNITURE* is a coming-of-age-tale of one certain summer when everything shifts.

*"FAMILY FURNITURE is a period piece set in the early 1950s, a time of luncheon clubs, Studebakers and casual bigotry, but there is nothing dated about the emotions portrayed therein, and nothing in any way rusty about the self-assured craftsmanship with which Mr. Gurney puts them onstage. He is an American master, one of the best playwrights that we have, and in FAMILY FURNITURE he shows us that his mastery, against all odds, is continuing to deepen ... Plays like FAMILY FURNITURE used to open on Broadway. This one belongs there."*

—**The Wall Street Journal**

*"... a tender, sepia-toned play about a traumatic passage in the lives of a tight-knit, well-bred clan ... [Gurney] expresses a graceful respect for all his characters, who are drawn with his customary gentle humor and sympathy."*

—**The New York Times**

*"It's an old-fashioned, 1950s-set gin-on-the-rocks drama, and it's a pure delight."*

—**Entertainment Weekly**

*"This is a Darwinian lesson for the modern, civilized world, in which keeping up appearances is a more useful survival mechanism than honesty ... It's this unseen churning under a placid surface that gives this subtle play its tension."*

—**TheaterMania.com**

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