

Prologue

The Appearance of Man: *A Play Out of Time & Space*

By J. D. Beresford

When the curtain rises, two men and a woman are discovered talking before an illimitable background.

FIRST MAN *[shaking hands with the man and the woman]* Well! Who'd have thought of meeting you here!

WOMAN. Or you, as far as that goes. We thought you were living in Putney.

FIRST MAN. So I am. It just happened that I'd run over this morning.

[Enter R. a nebula, spinning slowly. It passes majestically across the background as the scene proceeds.]

SECOND MAN. The world's a very small place.

FIRST MAN. Ah! You're right, it is.

WOMAN. And how's the family?

FIRST MAN. Capital, thanks. Yours well, too, I hope?

WOMAN. All except Johnnie.

[Enter R. a group of prehistoric animals; a few brontosauri, titanotheres, mammoths, sabre-toothed tigers, and so on.]

FIRST MAN. What's wrong with him?

WOMAN. He was bit by a dog. Nasty place he's got.

FIRST MAN. Did you have it cauterised? They're nasty things, dog-bites.

WOMAN. Oh, yes, we had it cauterised, you may be sure.

SECOND MAN *[reflectively]* Dangerous things, dogs.

FIRST MAN. If they're not properly looked after, they are. Now I've got a little dog.

[At this point the speaker's voice becomes inaudible owing to the passing of the brontosauri, which gradually move off L.]

WOMAN *[becoming audible and apparently interrupting in the middle of an anecdote]* Though I tell Johnnie it's his own fault. He shouldn't have teased him.

[Enter R. a few thousand savages with flint weapons.]

SECOND MAN. Boys will be boys.

WOMAN. Which is no reason, I say, that they shouldn't learn to behave themselves.

FIRST MAN. Can't begin too soon, in my opinion.

[Exeunt savages: enter the population of India.]

WOMAN. He might have been killed if a man hadn't come up and pulled the dog off him. A black man, he was, too.

FIRST MAN. What? A nigger:

WOMAN. Or a Turk, or something. I can't never see the difference. *[With a shiver.]* Ugh! I hate black men, somehow. The look of 'em gives me the shudders.

SECOND MAN. *[on a note of faint expostulation]* My dear!

FIRST MAN. I've heard others say the same thing.

WOMAN. A pretty penny, Johnnie'll cost us, with the Doctor and all.

[Enter two armies engaged in a Civil War.]

FIRST MAN. *[shaking his head, wisely]* Ah! I daresay it will.

SECOND MAN. *I don't know what we're coming to what with wages and prices and Lord knows what all?*

FIRST MAN. No more do I. Why, only yesterday. . . .

[The rest of his sentence is drowned by the firing of a battery of heavy guns.]

WOMAN. Oh! well, I suppose it'll all come right in time.

[The Civil War moves off L. Signs of the approaching end of the world become manifest.]

FIRST MAN. We'll hope for the best, I'm sure.

[The Hosts of heaVen appear in the sky.]

SECOND MAN. *[reflectively]* On the whole, I should say that things looked a bit better than they did.

[The Sea gives up its dead.]

WOMAN. We shall take Johnnie to Ramsgate as soon as his arm's well.

FIRST MAN. We always go to Scarborough.

SECOND MAN. We have to consider the expense of the journey, especially now there's no cheap trains.

[The universe bursts into flame. For a moment all is confusion; and then the Spirit of the First Man is heard speakjng.]

SPIRIT OF FIRST MAN. Well, I suppose I ought to be getting along.

SPIRIT OF SECOND MAN. Glad to have met you, anyway.

SPIRIT OF WOMAN. Funny our running up against you like this. As you said, the world's a very small place. Remember me to the family. *[They go out.]*

The nebula, still spinning slowly, passes off the stage L.

CURTAIN AD LIB.