

TURNABOUT

(A Comedy)

by

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THE CHARACTERS

ROGER NORTH, Head of the North Real Estate Agency, 40s

MRS NORTH, Roger's mother, 60s

ELVIRA NORTH, Roger's wife and an agency employee, 40s

MARIANNE, Their daughter and secretary, 20s

VAL HOBSON, An agency employee, 20s

CHESTER WELLS, Roger's brother-in-law, 30s

TERRY TUPPER, An agency employee, 30s

DORRINE WESTON, An agency employee, 30

MS FLIPOTE, A self-important attorney, 30s

MR MOLIERE, A client of the Real Estate Agency

THE PLACE

The Offices of the North Real Estate Agency

THE TIME

Recently

SCENE ONE

The Reception room of the North Advertising Agency: MRS. NORTH enters, in a huff; she is followed by ELVIRA, CHESTER and MARIANNE, who are all quite distressed)

ELVIRA

Mother! Will you please slow down so we can talk to you?

MRS NORTH

I'm getting out of here. And I'm not putting any faith in this false politeness, either.

ELVIRA

What has you so upset?

MRS NORTH

You really don't know?

ELVIRA

No.

MRS NORTH

(Hands in the air) That's even *worse!*

ELVIRA

Well, if you think politeness is phony, I don't suppose you want me to say I'm sorry.

MRS NORTH

Now I have to deal with downright rudeness!

CHESTER

(To MRS. NORTH) Will you calm down and explain?

MRS NORTH

You don't seem to realize my late husband began this Agency and made it the largest in the city!

Of course I realize it.

ELVIRA

You remind us every day.

CHESTER

(Quickly) That's not what I meant!

ELVIRA

Do you see the problem here? There is no respect!

MRS NORTH

I'm sure Chester meant no disrespect.

ELVIRA

(Mumbling) Don't be so sure.

CHESTER

If I thought he did, I'd soon teach him some. (She threatens him with a fist). Why, I've never had to—

MRS NORTH

May I say something?

MARIANNE

What is it?

ELVIRA

Now you're letting my grand daughter interrupt me!

MRS NORTH

But I wasn't interrupting.

MARIANNE

Then she calls me a liar!

MRS NORTH

(Aside, to MARIANNE) Save it, dear.

ELVIRA

MRS NORTH

I can see you haven't learned anything about respect from Mr. Tupper's example.

CHESTER

What some call respect, others might call toadying.

MRS NORTH

That's what I'd expect, based on the things I've heard about this office.

ELVIRA

What have you heard?

MRS NORTH

It comes from a very trustworthy source.

CHESTER

You mean that charming dragon Margery White?

ELVIRA

Chester, I'm sure mother is too intelligent to listen to vicious gossip.

MRS NORTH

Of course I am. But Margery wouldn't lie to me. I see her in church *every* Sunday.

CHESTER

(Chuckling) She had her fun once, but now that it's over, she begrudges anyone else a little harmless pleasure!

MRS NORTH

(Scandalized, To ELVIRA) You see what I'm taking about!

CHESTER

And as for your Terry Tupper—

ELVIRA

(To CHESTER) Drop it!

MARIANNE

I'm sorry. *I* can't drop it. Grandma, Mr. Terry Tupper seems far more interested in mother, than he is in God!

MRS NORTH

Good grief! Now she's spreading rumors about her own mother!

MARIANNE

I'm talking about that hypocrite, Terry Tupper!

MRS NORTH

(To ELVIRA) Do you permit her to go on like this all the time?

ELVIRA

(To MARIANNE) You made your point.

MRS NORTH

And a very pretty piece of slander it is, too! Libeling a man from whom every one could learn something of profit! I won't listen to any more of it! I'm leaving here! (She starts off).

ELVIRA

(Follows her off, leaving MARIANNE and CHESTER) Mother, do you really have to go? (They are gone).

CHESTER

(To MARIANNE) You know they say a lot of terrible things about mothers-in-law.

MARIANNE

What are they?

CHESTER

But I'll keep an open mind and assume a few of them aren't true.

MARIANNE

I'm sure Grandma *means* well.

CHESTER

You're still young. But how she goes on about that Tupper!

MARIANNE

If you think she's bad, you should hear my father! Father gives him the seat of honor at the dinner table, where he makes an incredible show over saying Grace. And now that you've left the agency, I think father's going to give the job to him. And before he showed up, I was certain Val would get it the promotion!

(ELVIRA then returns to the room, shaking her head in both awe and consternation)

ELVIRA

Are my ears on fire? You missed an incredible lecture out there!

CHESTER

I'm surprised Roger listens to her.

ELVIRA

(Shaking her head) Lately, he's come under Tupper's influence, too.

CHESTER

(Skeptical) Does he really have that much influence over Roger?

ELVIRA

Let me tell you—But listen, it sounds like Roger just pulled in. Ask him yourself. In the meantime, I'd better try to calm down before I see him. (She exits quickly).

MARIANNE

I'd better leave, too. Grandmother might have given him an earful before she left, and I could be in hot water. Uncle Chester, will you try to feel him out about Val?

CHESTER

Are you and Val engaged yet?

MARIANNE

(She shrugs helplessly) I wish I knew. (She exits).

(ROGER enters; He beams cheerfully, in prime health, shaking hands with CHESTER)

ROGER

Chester, my friend, I'm glad to see you. Were you looking after things in my absence?

CHESTER

First tell me how *you* are, Roger? How was your trip?

ROGER

It was a great success. How were things here? I trust everyone is all right?

CHESTER

(Pause; thinks) As a matter of fact, I hate to be the one to tell you—

ROGER

Good grief! I hope nothing's happened to Terry!

CHESTER

Terry! No, he's fine.

ROGER

You had me worried!

CHESTER

But your *wife* had an extremely high fever for three days. She was unable to touch a bite of food without getting ill.

ROGER

No.

CHESTER

We were awfully worried about her.

ROGER

And how was Terry?

CHESTER

Him! Never better. He ate like a horse while you were gone, and washed everything down with your most expensive wines.

ROGER

(Nodding with admiration) Hale fellow!

CHESTER

And since you're asking, Marianne developed a migraine headache and couldn't sleep a wink for two nights.

ROGER

That's too bad.

CHESTER

Dr. Chandler was out of town. We considered taking her to the emergency room.

ROGER

How is she now?

CHESTER

She's a little better.

ROGER

Ah. And how is Terry?

CHESTER

Oh, he's in perfect health! He rolled into a warm bed and slept like a log through it all.

ROGER

A stout fellow! How is the business?

CHESTER

You lost some clients while you were away. They bought homes with other agencies.

ROGER

No! I hope they weren't Terry's clients, the poor fellow.

CHESTER

(Throws up his arms in dismay) Roger! For heaven's sake, I've been pulling your leg.

ROGER

(Upset) What! Then Terry isn't really fine!

CHESTER

Good grief! Have you so completely fallen under this man's influence that you neglect your own family!

ROGER

But Chester, you don't know the man you're speaking of.

CHESTER

I know him as much as I care to! And as for his influence over you, I hate to upset you, but you look like a laughing-stock!

ROGER

Mind what you say about him.

CHESTER

I'm talking about *you*!

ROGER

Let me tell you, Chester, because of his example, I've become a new man! He's taught me to look upon this world as not worth a pinch of salt, and as for people, aren't we all miserable sinners? Terry has so liberated me from human bondage that I could see my wife, my children and my friends all perish tomorrow and not care a snap! (He snaps his fingers).

CHESTER

Those are truly admirable sentiments!

ROGER

Aren't they? He's taught me to scorn material things.

CHESTER

(Raised eyebrows) By his own example?

ROGER

If you'd been there when I first met him, you'd understand my respect for the man. He'd only been in town a few days, but he went straight to the church to get acquainted with Pastor English. Do you know at that time the poor man was living in a camper?

CHESTER

What! Pastor English?

ROGER

No! But what if he had been? It might teach him some humility. That's another lesson we can learn from Terry. You should have seen how devoutly he behaved at the Sunday service.

CHESTER

Who? Pastor English?

ROGER

Stop that! Now you've gone and made me angry! I was speaking of Terry Tupper! His devotion drew the attention of the *entire* congregation, and his voice was the loudest and most powerful, singing the hymns! He was an inspiration to everyone.

CHESTER

It sounds ostentatious!

ROGER

There you go again, criticizing such sincere piety.

CHESTER

I think I can tell the difference between piety and humbug.

ROGER

Well, what do you say to this? On the spot, I offered him any assistance he wished, and the only thing he would accept was a job.

CHESTER

And a free room and the run of your home—

ROGER

But I'm telling you that *I* owe him the gratitude. Why, the first week he worked for me Val Hobson missed an appointment, and Terry covered for him, and he clinched the sale!

CHESTER

And no doubt declined the commission.

ROGER

That's what he tried to do, but I convinced him to accept it.

CHESTER

Roger, listen, while we're speaking of Val Hobson—

ROGER

That's what I was leading into. Did you know that he and Marianne have some kind of understanding?

CHESTER

Does that disturb you?

ROGER

(Shaking his head) That young man is becoming increasingly irresponsible.

CHESTER

Really? You never seemed to notice that before.

ROGER

Could he be on drugs?

CHESTER

(Genuinely alarmed) Why do you say that?

ROGER

His behavior is becoming erratic. He's been missing appointments, and some days, he never even bothers to check in to the office.

CHESTER

I've always thought he was a very responsible young man.

ROGER

I'm afraid you're very naïve, my friend. I see there are people who can pull the wool over your eyes!

CHESTER

(Sarcastically) I appreciate the warning, Roger, and I won't forget where it came from.

(Now DORRINE enters the office, plump but pretty, and with an independent spirit)

DORRINE

Why hello, Mr. Wells. It's nice to see you again. And good morning to you, boss. I hope you had a fun trip. (She smiles)

ROGER

Hello, Dorrine—It wasn't mean to be fun!

DORRINE

But I've heard Atlanta is a very *fun* city. (She winks at CHESTER).

ROGER

I wouldn't know about that.

DORRINE

Of course you had Pastor English keeping an eye on you, eh? (She chuckles, then adds before ROGER can reply) Well, I have an appointment in an hour. I only stopped to see if you were back. I'll make some coffee. (She exits).

CHESTER

I'd better be off, too. But Roger, I only hope no one has been unfairly prejudicing you against Hobson.

ROGER

I'm sure I can trust my own judgment.

CHESTER

Well, good morning. (CHESTER then exits).

(After CHESTER exits, MARIANNE returns; She appears happy to see ROGER)

MARIANNE

(Effusively buttering him up) Why, dad! It's good to have you home!

ROGER

Thank you, dear. Where is your mother?

MARIANNE

I'm sure she's around somewhere.

ROGER

Well then, you and I have a few minutes alone. There's something I want to discuss with you.

MARIANNE

(Pulling his leg) What? Have I *already* done something wrong?

ROGER

On the contrary, I've always found you a very sensible daughter.

MARIANNE

I try to be.

ROGER

And I hope you've found my advice worth listening to.

MARIANNE

(Smiling) I'm always willing to listen.

ROGER

So let me ask. How do you find our guest?

MARIANNE

I have no reason to look for him.

ROGER

No, no! I mean what do you have to say about him?

(DORINNE now re-enters with coffee for ROGER, but unobserved by him)

MARIANNE

(Trying to be diplomatic) I'm not sure what you want me to say.

ROGER

I want you to be honest.

MARIANNE

You really want my honest opinion?

ROGER

That's right. Don't you find him, for instance, an extremely intelligent man?

MARIANNE

(Thinking) I suppose I *could* say that—

ROGER

(He smiles) That's what I thought.

MARIANNE

But I'd have to know him better.

ROGER

That's exactly what I want!

MARIANNE

(More wary) *What* do you mean?

ROGER

Well, I'm sure you'd enjoy going on a date with him.

MARIANNE

I would?

ROGER

I know some people in this office are prejudiced against him for their own reasons.

MARIANNE

What if those reasons are justified?

ROGER

Nonsense! I find Terry Tupper a good, upright man.

MARIANNE

Then why don't *you* go on a date with him?

ROGER

I find your humor a bit insolent.

MARIANNE

I'm sorry, dad, but don't ask me to do something I'm against.

ROGER

Now listen, Marianne. Do you have confidence in my judgement?

MARIANNE

About some things—

ROGER

I think my knowledge of people is pretty accurate. For instance, I asked your mother to marry me against the criticisms of certain people.

MARIANNE

(Laughs) I'll bet that was grandma.

ROGER

That's beside the point. (Preening a bit) And I think I can say I've done pretty well building up this agency. I've made improvements in methods, in efficiency—But the point is I hope you don't think your father is a fool!

MARIANNE

I would hope he isn't.

ROGER

(Not entirely mollified) Then I think I can say if you'd suspend your judgment and spend a little time with Mr. Er, with *Terry*, you'd be as impressed by him as I am.

MARIANNE

(Feeling slightly out-manuevered) Well—I'll think it over.

ROGER

That's all I'm asking.

DORRINE

(Laughing, bursting to interrupt) Boss, you can't be serious!

ROGER

Have you been eavesdropping—again?

DORRINE

I brought your coffee. I couldn't help over-hearing. (To MARIANNE) And it *was* a good joke! Don't you think so?

ROGER

(To MARIANNE) I'm serious. And I happen to know Terry thinks a lot of you.

MARIANNE

How do you know that?

ROGER

I'm not blind.

DORRINE

No?

ROGER

What does *that* mean?

DORRINE

If you ask me, I think your Mr. Tupper is far more interested in someone else.

ROGER

Did I ask you?

I could tell you a few things—

DORRINE

Keep them to yourself!

ROGER

I'm sure I'm sorry.

DORRINE

All right.

ROGER

(To MARIANNE) But I just can't believe this conversation is really serious.

DORRINE

(To MARIANNE) I told you I'm serious.

ROGER

(To ROGER) You can't think Marianne would be interested in Terry Tupper!

DORRINE

Why not!

ROGER

He's not her type.

DORRINE

You mean because he's a few years older than she is?

ROGER

No, that's not important. What do fifteen or twenty years matter?

DORRINE

Thank you for agreeing with me.

ROGER

DORRINE

And he can't really help the way he looks.

ROGER

(Now to MARIANNE) I'll admit he doesn't look like a movie star.

DORRINE

Oh, I don't know. Francis the Talking Mule was a movie star.

ROGER

(Growing angry, To MARIANNE) There are qualities more important than good looks!

DORRINE

There certainly are—

ROGER

(Turns on her angrily) Will you stop interrupting me!

DORRINE

But I was going to agree with you. There are qualities more important than good looks.

ROGER

Thank you!

DORRINE

(To MARIANNE) But Terry Tupper doesn't have those qualities, either!

ROGER

I told you I'm not interested in your opinions.

DORRINE

Now, now, boss, can't we discuss this without getting angry?

ROGER

I have no intention of discussing it with you! And besides, I'm not angry!

DORRINE

You know I like you too much to see you get angry and make a fool of yourself.

ROGER

I don't care if you like me or not! (Stamping his foot) And I'm *not* angry!

DORRINE

Besides, Marianne and Val have become pretty serious about each other.

ROGER

(To MARIANNE) I have grave reservations about that young man.

DORRINE

You never had them until Terry Tupper came around.

ROGER

(To MARIANNE, who now becomes increasingly uneasy.) He's becoming very irresponsible. For instance, he's been missing appointments.

DORRINE

But *he* claims he never made those appointments.

ROGER

(To DORRINE) What would you expect him to say?

DORRINE

That's *just* what I'd expect him to say.

ROGER

(Back to MARIANNE) There!

DORRINE

If he hadn't made them—

ROGER

(Back to DORRINE) Will you *please* stop interrupting me!

DORRINE

I was talking to myself.

ROGER

Well, do it somewhere else. You're a pest, and you're a bad influence on my daughter. I've half a mind to fire *you*!

MARIANNE

Now, now, father, you shouldn't become so angry.

ROGER

(Stamps his foot) I AM NOT ANGRY!

MARIANNE

That's good.

ROGER

Anyway, I hope I can expect my daughter to behave more sensibly than—(He nods towards DORRINE) certain other people. I'm only asking you to think about what I said. But now I should go see your mother before I really do lose my temper! (ROGER exits angrily).

DORRINE

For a minute there, I thought you'd lost your voice!

MARIANNE

I thought it was wise to keep my mouth shut.

DORRINE

If you do that, you'll end up spending Saturday nights with Terry Tupper.

MARIANNE

But I'm simply playing for time.

DORRINE

For heavens' sake! Why not just come out and speak the truth! You're old enough to make your own decisions!

MARIANNE

I know... but sometimes dad intimidates me.

DORRINE

What about Val?

MARIANNE

Sometimes he intimidates me, too.

DORRINE

I mean what will *he* say about this? Tell me the truth. How do you feel about him?

MARIANNE

I've already told you.

DORRINE

You told me you were serious about him.

MARIANNE

I am.

DORRINE

Then why didn't you tell your father?

MARIANNE

You're right! I'm infuriating! I do have a mind of my own, and sometimes I use it, too! But when it comes to this subject I'm a complete coward! Now don't scold me, Dorrine, because believe me, I'm harder on myself than anyone else could ever be. I know I should just come right out and say, 'Dad, I'm in love with Val Hobson!'

DORRINE

How do you think *he* feels?

MARIANNE

Didn't you just hear him?

DORRINE

I mean how does *Val* feel, dodo?

MARIANNE

That's another reason I'm frustrated.

DORRINE

Doesn't Val feel the same way?

MARIANNE

I don't know! Dad might have a point. Val really *has* been acting strange lately. In fact we haven't been out for nearly two weeks!

DORRINE

Listen! I think it's time *everyone* was told the absolute truth.

MARIANNE

You're absolutely right, Dorrine!

DORRINE

That's the spirit, girl.

MARIANNE

So when are you going to tell them?

Me? DORRINE

MARIANNE
Well, you know the whole story, and you're not afraid to tell it.

DORRINE
But I'm afraid of bring fired!

MARIANNE
Pooh. Dad would never fire you.

DORRINE
Look, I have a much better plan.

MARIANNE
(Dubious) What is that?

DORRINE
I think you should be an obedient daughter and go along with what your father wants.

MARIANNE
You mean go out with Terry Tupper?

DORRINE
It's the perfect solution.

MARIANNE
How can you say that?

DORRINE
For one thing, it will make Val jealous.

MARIANNE
(Dubious) You think that's a *good* idea?

DORRINE
(Sarcastic) Don't you know that a complicated lie is always better than simple honesty? But more than that you and Terry could have a splendid evening together. I know he affects a somber demeanor, but underneath it, I'll bet he's a barrel of fun.

MARIANNE
You can't be serious.

DORRINE

I'm sure you'll find his pompous affectations amusing. And then, when you've finished enjoying his hypocrisy, you can entertain yourself by contemplating his appearance. Think of the fun you'll have staring at those beady eyes, that purple face, and his huge red nose. Why, it's like looking at a Christmas tree!

MARIANNE

(Shaking her head) I never thought you'd make fun of my problems.

DORRINE

Your passive attitude is exasperating!

MARIANNE

(Laying on the guilt) I honestly thought we were friends.

DORRINE

(Grudgingly relents) Oh, let me think about it. But here comes Val.

(VAL HOBSON now enters. Looking rather angry, he walks straight up to MARIANNE)

VAL

I just heard something I can't believe. Maybe you can tell me if it's true or not?

MARIANNE

I can't unless you tell me what you heard.

VAL

I just heard a rumor that you're going out with Terry Tupper.

MARIANNE

(Amazed) Where did you hear that?

VAL

(Irked) That's not important. I asked you if it was true.

MARIANNE

It's my father's idea.

VAL

Then it *is* true!

MARIANNE

I didn't say I would.

VAL

Well, I think you *should* go out with him, by all means!

MARIANNE

Then that settles it!

DORRINE

Oh for heaven's sake! Both of you stop acting childish.

MARIANNE

But I'm only taking his advice.

DORRINE

Oh, all right. What do I care? (To VAL) I'm sure you think that's exactly what she should do.

VAL

I'm only telling her what she wants to hear.

MARIANNE

(To DORRINE) I told you he was looking for an excuse to break things off.

VAL

(To DORRINE) She blames me, but I'm sure it was her plan all along.

DORRINE

(Covers her ears) I don't want to hear any more of this nonsense!

VAL

(To DORRINE) But she's getting her wish.

MARIANNE

(To DORRINE) I'm giving him what he wants.

DORRINE

Stop! Leave me out of it!

VAL

(To DORRINE) And I think it's best if I quit my job, then she'll never see me again. (He starts to exit, turns back) What did you say?