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NORMAN from THE DRESSER by Ronald Harwood

NORMAN:

Sixteen years. I wish I could remember the name of the girl who got me into all this. Motherly type she was, small parts, play as cast. I can see her face clearly. I can see her standing there, Platform 2 at Crewe. A Sunday. I was on platform 4. "Norman" she called. We'd been together in *Outward Bound*, the Number Three tour, helped with wardrobe I did, understudied Scrubby, the steward. That's all aboard a ship, you know. Lovely first act. "We're all dead, aren't we?" And I say, "Yes, Sir, we're all dead. Quite dead." And he says, "How long have you been – you been – oh you know?" "Me, Sir? Oh, I was lost young." And he says, "Where – where are we sailing for?" And I say, "Heaven, Sir. And hell, too. It's the same place, you see." Lovely. Anyway. "Norman!" she called. What was her name? She'd joined Sir, oh, very hoity-toity, I thought, tiaras and blank verse while I was in panto understudying the Ugly Sisters. Both of them. "Are you fixed?" she shouted at the top of her voice. Well. To cut a short story shorter, Sir wanted help in the wardrobe and someone to assist generally, but mainly with the storm in *Lear*. I've told you this before, haven't I? Put me on the timpani, he did. On the first night, after the storm, while he was waiting to go on for 'No, you cannot touch me for coining', he called me over. My knees were jelly. "Were you on the timpani tonight?" "Yes, sir," I said, fearing the worst. "Thank you," he said. "You're an artist." I didn't sleep a wink. Next day he asked if I'd be his dresser.

[To return to lists of speeches, close this page](#)