

Prologue

09:25

The grounds of Malaprop Hall. The dispersal area. Downstage a lawn on which deckchairs, badminton rackets, a cricket bat, boxing gloves, books and magazines lay strewn. Stage left a hut with a blackboard outside it. A broken Hurricane parked up in the distance is being cannibalised for parts. Upstage Malaprop Hall is silhouetted against the horizon. Enter Mrs Malaprop.

Mrs Malaprop Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Royal Notional Theatre!

I am Mrs Malaprop, a character created by the playwright Richard Bristly Sheridan. Mrs Malaprop became famous for an egregious mangling of her verbiage to 'ysterical effect. 'Owever! I am a parsonage of great lexicographical dexterity and faultless electrocution. Not to mention my grammar, about which no one is able to find fault with it.

Mrs Malaprop is a batty old widow. Imelda Staunton was not available. Dame Helen Mirren told casting that she'll decide when she's old, thank you very much. My understudy, Krispin Scott Thomas, will be going on for me this Wednesday matinee, if any of you want to see it done brilliantly in French.

The first half is just over an hour long so if any of you men are having prostrate problems, do try and squeeze one out now. As for the rest of you, let me show you around my piles.

(She gestures grandly.) This, up behind me, is Malaprop Hall.

Lucy enters, stage left.

Mrs Malaprop Lucy! Chop-chop! We have guests! Clean up all this male dermatitis! Cleanliness is next to Godalming. Malaprop Hall –

A fighter plane roars overhead. It's tremendously loud. Mrs Malaprop waits for it to pass. Ground crew begin to cross the upstage going to and fro about their business. Lucy busies herself

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righting the deckchairs and gathering up the cricket bats and boxing gloves, which, at the right time, develops into a full Lazzi routine with collapsing deckchairs and juggling. Mrs Malaprop shouts over the noise.

Mrs Malaprop Malaprop Hall is the family seat of my dear belated husband, Sir Horace. He died in the autumn of 1932 although I didn't notice until the spring of 1933. What? It's a big house.

Dudley Scunthorpe and another fitter enter carrying a propeller (11 foot 3 inches). They are heading straight for **Mrs Malaprop** and will cut her in half. They lower it and **Mrs Malaprop** steps over it while talking as if she does this six times a day. They lift it over **Lucy** who bobs down. **Lucy** flirts with **Scunthorpe**, and **Scunthorpe** walks on, looking back at her.

Mrs Malaprop Lucy! Stop flirting!

Chastened, Lucy goes back to her comedy routine.

Mrs Malaprop After I had recovered from the elation of Horace's death, the rural Sussex nights grew longer and lonelier. I've always liked a man in uniform so I called my old friend Nancy Mitford, who has friends in high places, and, before you know it, we're involved in an air war!

Brian Coventry comes out of the hut and starts writing on the blackboard.

Mrs Malaprop I was hoping for a bomber squadron. A rear gunner who might find a little R and R with me appalling. But they sent me fighter pilots. Not even Spitfires. Hurricanes. Flown by mere children! Look at the mess they make.

Another Hurricane roars in to land.

And the noise!

She continues on, directly into . . .

Act One

Scene One

09:30

Dispersal area, gardens.

Mrs Malaprop Good morning, Officer Daventry!

She approaches Coventry.

Coventry My name is Coventry, not Daventry.

Mrs Malaprop Oh stop whining, I'm only out by twenty miles.

Coventry What can I do for you, Mrs Malaprop?

Mrs Malaprop I am thrilled for your boys to land their Hurricanes on my croquet lawns, but an English lady's garden should be an oasis of peace and quiet medication.

Coventry We are fighting a war.

Mrs Malaprop I lived through the Great War, young man, and I don't remember it being this loud!

Coventry You weren't in France.

Mrs Malaprop Au camembert, monsieur, throughout 1915 I was le toast of the Moulin Rouge. They called me la crème anglaise. And the noise never bothered me when I was incontinent.

Coventry I'll have a word with mister Hitler, and ask him to keep it down.

Mrs Malaprop My niece, from whose room you need to be emasculated from, arrives today.

Coventry Oh. You'd like me to move out of my room?

Mrs Malaprop Lucy can help with your personal oblongs.