

RIVER'S UP

An environmental tragi-comedy

BY

ALEX JONES

Produced by Alan Ayckbourn for Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, July 2002, Swan Theatre, Worcester, October 2002, Radio 4, 18.08.2008, Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, tour, March - April 2009, two productions in Rome at Teatro Cometa and Teatro Belli and productions at Coventry Belgrade and Cheltenham Everyman Theatre. This play was also adapted for radio and was broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 18,8,08 and the World Service

Tom and Sally Millington's house is about to be flooded yet again! Sally is worried and blames the icebergs, though Tom seems more concerned about the drunken Brummie revelers he has to sail up the Severn every weekend on his disco-boat. But this time the water level shows no sign of retreating, and before long they're drifting around a watery Worcester searching for the Malvern Hills. The irrepressible Millingtons' begin to realise they are witnessing the results of a global cock-up. Join them on their poignant journey in a dilemma that pits them against cataclysmic odds in a comic/tragedy of epic proportions... Written in 2000 for Alan Ayckbourn's Stephen Joseph Theatre; the recent flooding in the UK and our planet's climate emergency emphasises the importance of the play's message.

**SYNOPSIS & SAMPLE SCENES
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CHARACTERS

SALLY MILLINGTON - LATE FORTIES.

TOM MILLINGTON - LATE FORTIES.

*THEY BOTH SPEAK WITH A
WORCESTER DIALECT.*

For Sarah.

ACT I**SCENE 1**

The Millington's kitchen. Simply furnished - there is a window to the garden, which slopes down to the riverbank. SALLY is making tea as a huge crack of thunder rings out. She takes toast from the toaster, puts it on a plate and places it on the table with the tea. TOM enters, dressed for the wet weather outside, dripping water everywhere.

SALLY: Hey, tek them boots off, you'm dripping everywhere!

TOM grunts and struggles out of his waders, tossing them carelessly into a corner.

Some toast on the table... *(Pointedly)* An' some tea.

TOM hangs up his coat and joins SALLY at the table. He grunts again, sips his tea and munches at the toast.

TOM: River's up.

SALLY: It's raining.

TOM: That means the river's up.

SALLY: Oh... high is it?

TOM: It's *up*.

SALLY: Up high?

TOM *(Slightly irritated)* The river's up.

SALLY Yeah?

TOM *(More irritated)* Bloody hell!

SALLY What you gerrin' at?

TOM If the river's up -

SALLY Yeah?

TOM It stands to reason.

SALLY What does?

TOM *(Very irritated)* That it's bloody high!

Pause.

SALLY Touchy, n' yer?

TOM: If the river's up, it means it's not down.

SALLY: I know.

TOM: Really?

SALLY: I en' thick.

TOM: No?

SALLY: Shouldn' tek the mickey.

TOM: "High is it?"

SALLY: On'y askin'
Pause.

SALLY: How high is it then?

TOM: S' over the bank. Better loosen the moorin' .

SALLY: S' the rain, n' it?

TOM: *No?*

SALLY: Yeah, s' all the rain.

TOM: Well yer learn summat new every day, done yer? N' I thought it was them pebbles that kids chuck. Either that or another iceberg's floated down the Severn an' melted.

SALLY: On'y mekin' conversation.

TOM: Conversation? You done know the meanin' of the word.
Pause.

SALLY: There *is* icebergs meltin'.

TOM: What?

SALLY: There *is* icebergs meltin'. It was on the news.

TOM: Not in the River Severn.

SALLY: No - in the sea.

TOM: Exactly.

SALLY: Loads of 'em.

TOM: Where is this conversation gooin'?

SALLY: You'm in a right flippin' mood, you are!

TOM: "Icebergs in the sea!"

SALLY: Got out the wrong side o' bed, I reckons.

TOM: *Daft!*

SALLY: S' 'cause I din' bring you a cup of tea, n' it?

TOM: Got nothin' t' do with it.

SALLY: I en' yer slave, yer know.

TOM: Nothin' t' do with it whatever.

SALLY: Sulkin' now you are.

TOM: I en' sulkin'.

Pause

SALLY: Looks like a walrus.

TOM: What?

SALLY: Looks like a walrus, yer does.

TOM: A walrus?

SALLY: A walrus - all... walrus like.

TOM: Well thank you very much!

SALLY: The way they sit on rocks an' mope.

TOM: Walrus's done mope.

SALLY: They look like they mope.

TOM: They'm animals, they done mope.

SALLY: They look like you.

TOM: Thank you very much!

SALLY: All... mopey.

TOM: I got plenty t' mope about, n' I?

SALLY: Look dead miserable, walruses...

TOM: Plenty.

SALLY: ... like you.

TOM: Walruses, icebergs! You talk such absolute rubbish.

SALLY: Meks yer think, though -

TOM: What does - *walruses*?

SALLY: No - icebergs.

TOM: You're brain is a mystery t' me.

SALLY: If they'm all meltin', the water's gorra goo somewhere.

TOM: Eh..?
Pause as TOM ruminates on this prophetic piece of information. But then he snaps out of his reverie, perplexed that he has been led down this blind alley... again.

S' the rain - s' bin rainin'. Bloody icebergs!
Pause

Well, shan't be doin' no trips t'night.

SALLY: Might clear up.

TOM: No way - look at it. Reckon it might flood.

SALLY: Oh not again!

TOM: Weather forecast sounds a bit ominous; probably have to cancel Saturday night an' all.

SALLY: Oh no!

TOM: Can't risk it. The current's crazy when it gets this high.

SALLY: We got the mortgage t' pay end o' this week.

TOM: It'll just have t' wait.

SALLY: An' the insurance payment.

TOM: Bloody robbers they am.

SALLY: Gorra pay it.

TOM: Premiums they tek off a workin' man!

SALLY: Since the floods, n' it?

TOM: Disgustin'!

SALLY: Bad risk by a river now.

TOM: Exploitin' the situation they are - an' we never got the money for the carpets last time we claimed.

SALLY: Well they did recommend we just put down rugs.

TOM: *Disgustin'!* Tellin' us how t' decorate our own house.

SALLY: Meks sense really.

TOM: I done want bare floors.

SALLY: Wouldn't be bare if you had rugs.

TOM: It en't the same... I likes me comforts.

SALLY: Well if you done pull a wage in soon, we wone have no comforts at all.

TOM: What can I do?

Pause.

SALLY: Told you we shoulda' just stuck t' the pleasure trips.

TOM: Done start with all that again.

SALLY: But I did.

TOM: You wone let me forget it.

SALLY: Said "We should stick t' pleasure trips."

TOM: I know yer did.

SALLY: But you didn't.

TOM: No I didn't.

SALLY: Wouldn't listen.

TOM: Nothin' t' do with it.

SALLY: Wouldn't listen, no.

TOM: Listen t' you?!

SALLY: I tried t' tell yer.

TOM: You never stop talkin'.

SALLY: But you wouldn't listen.

TOM: Givin' advice, criticisin'.

SALLY: I tried t' tell yer -

TOM: Somebody should tek the battery out yer back.

SALLY: Said it was a mistake.

TOM: It wasn't a mistake; we was losin' money hand over fist.

SALLY: Forkin' out for a sound system an' all them other facilities.

TOM: Think I enjoy it?

SALLY: *Disco boat!* Ten't what the river's for.

TOM: S' the on'y thing the river's for these days. Time was yer could mek an honest livin' on this river, transported coal an' all sorts; regular little highway it was, an' when the elvers came; folks'd come up from London an' everywhere t' buy 'em.

SALLY: I en' had elvers for years.

TOM: Tha's 'cause they'm all gone; extinct they are around 'ere.

SALLY: There's still fishin' though.

TOM: Not for the likes of us - most o' the riverbanks am owned by syndicates; can't wander down t' the water without some red-faced towny leapin' out of the bushes shoutin' about permits an' private property.

SALLY: An' they even build houses on the banks an' all - there's that new development near Pitchcroft; about a million each they am, can't get by there now.

TOM: Yeah - all architectural gems wi' their own little jetties an' *Keep Out* signs. (*Laughs*) Oh, it was great when they all flooded last year!

SALLY: Terrible floods they were.

TOM Cruised by just for the fun of it.

SALLY Terrible.

TOM All them beautiful new high-tech houses with their little jetties and' security fences - *flooded (laughs)*.

Pause.

SALLY: We was flooded too,

TOM: Yeah.

SALLY: That wasn't funny.

Pause.

TOM: Phone'll be ringin' soon; everybody wantin' refunds.

SALLY: Shoulda' stuck to pleasure cruisin, be no refunds then.

TOM: Ten' my fault - I 'ates 'em, I does: drunken Brummie gits. Things I've sin on that boat - women flashin' their wotsits, lads droppin' their trousers: drunken drug-crazed degenerates - language an' all; I dunno what's 'appenin' t' this country.

SALLY: The world's comin' to an end, tha's wha's 'appenin'.

TOM: Blinkin' feels like it.

SALLY: God's lookin' down on us, shakin' his head.

TOM: Wish he'd shake them Brummie gits.

SALLY: S' like Sodom an' Gomorra.

TOM: I've sin everythin' on that boat.

SALLY: "An God turned his back on the world".

TOM: See it the next mornin' - broken glass, vomit, blood.

SALLY: Sent a flood.

TOM: Animals they am.

SALLY: Flooded the whole world.

TOM: Just Birmingham'd do me.

SALLY: Punished their wickedness.

TOM: Spaghetti Junction under three metres of cold water.

SALLY: End o' the world's comin'.

TOM: (*Sarcastic*) Better tek them library books back then.

SALLY: End o' the world.

TOM: Change the record will yer?

SALLY: Mark my words.

TOM: I think we'd know if the end o' the world was comin'.

SALLY: God's had enough.

TOM: (*Referring to SALLY*) He en' the on'y one.

Pause.

Yeah... I'd better loosen the moorin's.

SALLY: Look some sandbags out an' all.

TOM: Done think it'll get that high.

SALLY: You said that last year...

TOM: Just top the jetty, I reckons.

SALLY: ... an' the whole bottom floor was flooded.

TOM: That was last year.

SALLY: An' the year before.

TOM: Well this is *this* year - it's a different year an' things am different.

Pause.

SALLY: I think we should move.

TOM: Where to?

SALLY: Somewhere it done flood'd be nice.

TOM: What you talkin' about? This is a lovely spot - lots of folks'd love t' live by a river.

SALLY: Yeah, but not *in* one.

TOM: This house has bin in my family for three generations.

The Millington's have always worked the river.

SALLY: You said it yerself - what kind of a livin' is it now?

TOM: N' I'm the last 'n.

SALLY: Can't blame her. Got her own life now; got her own little 'ns.

TOM: Should've liked Sabrina t' stay in the family, though.

SALLY: Would you seriously want your daughter t' do a job like that?

Pause.

TOM: I dunno what's 'appenin' t' the world.

SALLY: Should've moved years ago; got a proper job.

TOM: (*Losing it*) Oh shut up why done yer!! Always bloody critcisin'! I does me best an' all I gets is... is *criticism!!*

SALLY: Well I *am* sorry.

TOM: So you should be!

Pause.

(Sulky) Could've med me a cup of tea.

SALLY: You got a cup of tea now.

TOM: Cup of tea in bed en't much to ask for.

SALLY: I wouldn't mind a cup of tea in bed meself now an' then.

TOM: I works hard on that boat.

SALLY: An' I works hard in that supermarket.

A massive crack of thunder; the rain falls harder; it can be clearly heard inside now. TOM looks out of the window.

TOM: Oh no, it's up t' the jetty! I'd better goo an' loosen the moorin's. I'll get the sandbags out the shed an' all.

SALLY: Thought yer wouldn't need sandbags?

TOM: Just in case.

TOM grabs his coat and wellies and exits.

SALLY: Told yer.

TOM: (*Off*) I heard that!

Music as lights fade to blackout.

SCENE 2

The Millington's kitchen. TOM is talking on the telephone.

TOM: No we'm all right, thanks for the offer, but we'll stick it out... We'll be okay, Caroline, done worry; got the dinghy from the launch tied up outside the window just in case... Kids all right..? Yeah... Gie' 'em a kiss from their Grandad... Yeah, you too... Tarah darlin'.

TOM puts the phone down as SALLY enters.

SALLY: Was that Caroline?

TOM: Said do we wanna move in for a while?

SALLY: An' you said no, I s'pose? It's over the road by the bridge.

TOM: It always floods there.

SALLY: Not that quick. Done think I'll be able get t' the supermarket t'morra'.

TOM: Well have a day off then.

SALLY: Local news says it's gonna be really bad this time.

TOM: We'll be all right.

SALLY: Advisin' people t' tek precautions.

TOM: I put the sandbags out.

SALLY: Soon be over them.

TOM: Oh, stop worryin', we'll be all right. Anyhow, I got the dinghy from the launch tied up outside the window, an' we can always move upstairs if we have to.

SALLY: Scares me it does.

Small pause.

TOM: You wanna goo an' stay with Caroline?

SALLY: What about you?

TOM: Need t' keep an eye on things - Lee Jones's bungalow was ransacked last time; took everything, they did.

SALLY: Should see it out there - *torrential*.

TOM: I pulled Sabrina upstream a bit; lashed her to that big oak. Should be okay there.

SALLY: It's scary.

TOM: Where you parked the car?

SALLY: Out the back, same as usual.

TOM: I'll pull it up the lane a bit later... just in case.

SALLY: Oh... I can't leave you on yer own!

TOM: I'll be fine.

SALLY: I'd worry.

TOM: No need.

SALLY: (*Sighs*) Oh, we'd better start movin' the furniture upstairs.

TOM: No need for that... Well maybe we could shift a bit...just in case.

SALLY: You are so stubborn!

TOM: Yeah... sorry, Sal.

SALLY: I could brain yer!

TOM: Wouldn't blame yer.

SALLY: We'm in a right mess, n' we?

TOM: Shouldn't've remortgaged the house, I know that now. I didn't wanna lose the boat though; thought the disco'd be a good venture... trying to keep up with current trends in the leisure industry an' all that; thought it would y' know... be a new start.

SALLY: You did what you thought was best.

TOM: I loves that river; can't help it.

SALLY: I know.

TOM: You goo an' stay with Caroline.

SALLY: Can't leave you 'ere.

TOM: I'll be all right, honest. I just needs to keep an eye on things.

SALLY: I done wanna leave yer.

Pause.

TOM: We'll be all right.

SALLY: Bit wet.

TOM: Damp.

SALLY: Cold.

Pause.

TOM: Wone happen again.

SALLY: We flooded for the past three-year.

TOM: Yeah, but next time we wone be 'ere.

SALLY: What you sayin', Tom?

TOM: Time t' give up.

Pause.

SALLY: I think so.

TOM: Sorry love.

SALLY: Nobody's tried harder than you.

TOM: Just can't mek it work.

SALLY: Put all that effort into that boat; everyone knows that.

TOM: N' I failed.

SALLY: En't no shame in that. Sometimes you just has t' give up.

TOM: I'll put her on the market. See if we can sell the house an' all.

TOM is choked; he tries not to cry.

SALLY: You done all yer could.

TOM En' good enough though, is it?

SALLY People meks mistakes, ventures done work out, business's ~close, so what - we done need a lot.

TOM Need more than we got.

SALLY We'll manage.

TOM Should be able t' pay off the overdraft when we sell the launch.

SALLY There yer goo -

TOM N' if we can sell the house -

SALLY: Move near Caroline.

TOM Yeah.

SALLY There's jobs gooin' at Darren's work... I mean... he just happened to mention.

TOM *(Smiles)* You got it all worked out, n' yer?

SALLY I bin tired o' this life for years.

TOM: Shouldn't've med yer stick it.

SALLY: You never med me. But you're a stubborn git, I'll say that much.

TOM: Walrus.

SALLY: Eh?

TOM: I'm a walrus - a mopey walrus.

SALLY: You are - a right mopey walrus. Giz a kiss, you miserable old git.

They kiss and then SALLY surveys the job in hand.

Oh well, here we goo again!

TOM: Yeah... sorry.

SALLY: What shall we carry up first? Table?

TOM: Oh... I dunno. Could start with the little stuff, I s'pose.

SALLY begins to collect their belongings together to transport to the upper floor. It appears to be a well-worn routine as boxes appear from various parts of the room.

SALLY: Oh, better get all the paperwork an' that. A lot o' that got spoiled last time.

TOM: Good thinkin'! Oh, n' me computer an' all.

SALLY: Hardly a priority.

They carry on packing and searching drawers for paperwork, etc. during the dialogue.

TOM: Got all me files on that, I has.

SALLY Files? What files?

TOM All me files for work an' such-like.

SALLY You en' got no files.

TOM I have.

SALLY: On'y thing you uses that thing for is yer blinkin' games.

TOM: I hardly plays 'em now.

SALLY: That synthesised tart.

TOM: "*Synthesised tart?*" Who you talkin' about?

SALLY: Her wi' the big bazookas.

TOM: You talkin' 'bout *Tomb Raider*?

SALLY: If anybody had tits that big they'd be bent double.

TOM: *Lara Croft*, tha's her name.

SALLY: Ooh, *Lara Croft* is it?

TOM: A very dynamic young woman when it comes t' raidin' tombs.

SALLY: (*Irrationally irritated*) Never mind raidin' tombs' her'd never mek it up the blinkin' stairs.

TOM: Her's a real babe, her is.

SALLY: What a way t' talk about another woman in front of yer wife!

TOM: *Ooh, me an' Lara!* We've spent a few late nights t'gether lookin' for buried treasure, I can tell yer!

SALLY: It en' nice talkin' about other women like that.

TOM: (*Laughs*) Her's computer-generated, her en' real.

SALLY Real in your head, I reckons.

TOM It's a computer game!

SALLY Who knows what the pair of yer get up to in yer imagination.

TOM: (*Laughs*) I done believe it. You'm jealous of a bloody computer-generated woman.

SALLY: (*Getting worked up*) I en' jealous! Jealous of her - bloody deformed, her is. S' a wonder her spine done snap every time her bends down.

TOM: You am, you'm jealous of a bloody computer game character! (*Laughs*). (*Finds a folder of paperwork*)

Here's all the insurance stuff; be needin' that.

SALLY: Obsessed you are - *computers!* They'm a blinkin' menace.

TOM: They'm a useful tool.

SALLY: En't what you use it for.

TOM: I en' arguin' with yer.

SALLY 'Cause you know I'm right.

TOM I know nothin' of the sort.

SALLY: *Titillation*, that's what *you* use the computer for.

TOM: (*Ignoring her*) There's the bank stuff.

SALLY: (*Ignores him*) That n' the Internet.

TOM: I'll put it all in a carrier bag, shall I?

TOM pulls a load of Tesco bags from a cupboard.

SALLY: That n' the Internet.

TOM: Empty the drawer first, afore we lug that great thing up there.

SALLY: (*Getting even more wound up*) Gone deaf, have yer?

TOM: No, I en' gone deaf. I'm just ignorin' yer.

SALLY: I wonder why.

TOM is packing letters and stuff into plastic bags.

Never sin nothin' like it.

TOM: I clicked on the wrong site; tha's all.

SALLY: Middle o' the night - lookin' at all them pornographic images.

TOM: It was a mistake.

SALLY: Mistake you thought I was asleep.

TOM: That search-engine's crap; never use that again.

SALLY: There was me concerned y' was workin' late, worryin' about the business.

TOM: I was.

SALLY: An' all the time y' was lookin' at women... with nothin' on. Some of 'em was bendin' over an' all.

TOM: It just popped up.

SALLY: I could see that!

TOM: Never gonna forgive me, are yer?

SALLY: Be prostitutes next.

TOM: Don't be ridiculous.

SALLY: Caught yer, din' I? Caught you red-bloody-handed.

TOM: I got the wrong site. S' easily done; I was after *cleats an' riggin' dot com*.

SALLY: A likely story.

TOM: An' I got...

SALLY: I done wanna know!

They carry on packing in silence.

SALLY: All this stuff's s'posed t' mek our lives easier; just meks it more complicated. Papers stuffed with filth, n' the telly's just sex an' violence an' all - no wonder the world's such a brutal place - time was a family'd sit down t'gether an' talk.

TOM: We always talked.

SALLY: Not enough. You was always workin' on that boat, you was. Caroline hardly ever saw yer.

TOM: Gotta earn a livin'.

SALLY: Everybody wants to escape reality: telly, computer games, booze, drugs. Wha's wrong with a walk in the countryside an' a good book?

TOM: (*Absorbed in his task*) Shall I tek these videos upstairs?

It won't get that high, will it?

SALLY: En' I enough for yer?

TOM: 'Course you am.

SALLY: Too old now, en' I? Done excite yer anymore.

TOM: I fancies yer just as much, yer know I does.

SALLY: All them young Brummie wenches on yer boat - how can I compare?

TOM: You'm me wife.

SALLY: Wish I was younger.

TOM: Don't we all!

SALLY: But does yer still fancy me?

TOM: I'll shag yer right 'ere an' now on the kitchen table if yer likes.

SALLY: No need t' get crude... The bed will do nicely.

TOM: (*Pleasantly surprised*) Am I on a promise, then?

SALLY: Maybe... we'll see how I feel.

TOM: Yeah - no pressure. Don't you worry.

SALLY: The sweatin's bin ever so bad t'day; so embarrassed at work.

TOM: I'm sure nobody noticed.

SALLY: Armpits like the Niagara-bloody- Falls.

TOM: Everybody sweats.

SALLY: See the steam comin' off me. Gonna see the doctor; get me some of that I.V.F. or M.F.I. or whatever they calls it.

TOM: Well - if it helps.

SALLY: Sorry if I...

TOM: I understand.

SALLY: Affects me moods.

TOM: I know.

SALLY: Dunno what *your* excuse is though.

TOM: (*Laughs*) Oh, I was just born a miserable git. But I'm still gonna miss that river.

SALLY: It's never done you no favours.

TOM: I still loves her though.

SALLY: Oh, look what I found!

TOM *goes to her. SALLY has a pile of photo wallets. She has taken some out.*

TOM: Photos?

SALLY: S' when we was in Minehead, remember?

TOM: Oh yeah!

SALLY: There's Caroline in the paddlin' pool.

TOM: She loved that pool.

SALLY: Couldn't get her out of it.

TOM: Weren' half bloody cold.

They begin to look through the photographs together.

TOM: There's me an' me Dad on the launch... Just before he died, that was. Deck's packed an' all - look at it!

SALLY: Yeah... it was a scorcher that year; real heat wave.

TOM: Med a packet that season. Med a small fortune. Never had a summer like that one again.

SALLY: Yeah it was a brilliant summer that was. Remember that party we had on board; whole family was there – aunties, cousins...everybody.

TOM: An' Dad insisted steerin' us all the way to Gloucester an' back, so's we could see the sun rise over the docks.

SALLY: He was blotto!

TOM: *(Laughs)* We all was! I remember that look on his face as we rounded the bend into the basin – all his family on board, laughin' and dancin'.

SALLY: Black Sabbath blarin' out the PA.

(TOM sings a snip of 'Paranoid' and laughs).

TOM: They were great times, great times.

SALLY: Awww – there's me Mom with Caroline on her knee. I done half miss her.

TOM: Her was a good 'n.

SALLY: *(To the photo)* Hello Mom. That was when we all went to Cornwall t'gether an' her got stuck in that toilet at Pizza Hut.

TOM: *(Laughs)* Tha's right, her did!

SALLY: Her was always doin' stuff like that. Doted on Caroline, her did; always buyin' her stuff, her was; bought her that beautiful new bike for Christmas 'cause her knew we couldn't afford it.

TOM: Ar', her was a good 'n. We gotta get these in an album.

SALLY: Keep meanin' to. *(Smiles)* Oh, we got us some nice memories, en' we?

TOM: Lots of 'em.

SALLY: N' now we can 'ave some more.

TOM: S' gonna be difficult startin' summat new.

SALLY: You'll manage.

TOM: Hope so.

SALLY: It's excitin'.

TOM: Is it?

SALLY: New challenges at our time of life.

TOM: Tha's excitin'?

SALLY: 'Course it is. Most people our age am startin' t' think about retirement.

TOM: Wha's wrong wi' that?

SALLY: I want summat more, Tom. I done wanna get stuck in a rut on the side of a river in the middle of nowhere.

TOM: I dunno, I can't think o' nothin' better meself.

TOM looks to the door.

Look, is that..?

SALLY: *Water!*

TOM: Ahh, s' up to the house, *bastard river!*

SALLY and TOM look out of the window, fearful.

Never come up that quick before; I can see it risin'!

SALLY: God's shakin' his head at the world.

TOM: Well if you've got a direct line to the Almighty, how about askin' him for this week's lottery numbers; 'cause if we floods again we'm gonna need every penny we can lay hands on....*look at that bloody water!*

Music as rain falls harder and the lights fade to blackout.

SCENE 3

Upstairs bedroom of the Millington's house. The same set, but now furniture is piled up - chairs on table, etc. and the back flat has been changed to portray a different room, again with a window overlooking the river. TOM is asleep.

The lighting suggests reflections from the swollen river outside. SALLY enters with a cup of tea. She wakes TOM.

- SALLY: Hey Tom, wake up.
- TOM: *(Stirring)* What..?
- SALLY: Cup o' tea.
- TOM: Ohh... what time is it?
- SALLY: Seven o' clock.
- TOM: Crikey, coulda' let me sleep a bit longer.
- SALLY: Never mind sleepin'; we gotta get out of 'ere, electricity's off.
- TOM: How'd yer mek the tea then?
- SALLY: It's from the flask I med up last night - *in case*. I can't get downstairs - it's nearly up t' the ceiling.
- TOM: *(Rising)* *The ceiling?!* *(Looks out of the window)* *Sabrina!* I left her on a long rope... where is she?
- SALLY: I'm frightened.
- TOM: Oh no – her's gone under... *oh no!*
- SALLY: What we gonna do?
- TOM: I dunno, she was everything to me...My grandad sailed her... an' dad....
- SALLY: What we gonna do, Tom?
- TOM: Time he put into keeping her on the river: refits, new deckin'...
- SALLY: So?
- TOM: So? So? We'm gooin' under big time, you daft woman!
- SALLY: Think I cares about the launch right now?
- TOM: What a fine attitude! Thank you for your support! That boat's worth twice the insurance value.
- SALLY: The water's up t' the ceiling downstairs.
- TOM: N' my livelihood's at the bottom of the river!
- SALLY: So will we be if we done get out of 'ere. It's still risin'; there's a national emergency.

TOM: How d'yer know?

SALLY: It's on the radio. It en' just 'ere; it's all over the country - East Anglia's disappeared - there's mass evacuation.

TOM: Well... we must be all right.

SALLY: How'd yer work that one out?

TOM: Well nobody's bin 'ere to evacuate us, 'ave they?

SALLY: Maybe nobody knows we're 'ere.

TOM: 'Course they know we're 'ere.

SALLY: Tucked away on the riverbank. They'd expect us to have gone by now. Any sensible person would move if the river was lappin' at their ceilin'.

TOM: *Downstairs ceilin'.*

SALLY: It's creepin' up the stairs.

TOM: Better ring Caroline.

SALLY: Phone's out.

TOM: Use me mobile then.

SALLY: I tried - no signal

TOM: No signal. Must've took some of the masts... crikey, it must be high.

SALLY: I think we've established that much! I hope Caroline an' the kids am okay.

TOM: They'll be all right.

SALLY: How d' you know?

TOM: Well they done live by a river, do they?

SALLY: They'll be worryin' about us.

TOM: Yeah.

Pause as TOM reflectively sips his tea.

TOM: *Eughhr!* There's no sugar in this.

SALLY: Well put yer snorkel on an' get some from the kitchen!

TOM: What food we got up 'ere?

SALLY: Some tins an' stuff I brought up... *in case.*

TOM: Good thinkin'. (*Looks out of the window*) 'Least the dinghy's still there. It en' that bad, it's just a flood, en't the end of the world.

SALLY: But what if it is?

TOM: You en' got the sense you was born with.

SALLY God punishin' us.

TOM En' nothin' t' do with God... it's...

SALLY Icebergs!

TOM I don't think I can see any icebergs out there.

SALLY I'm scared.

Pause.

TOM: East Anglia, eh?

SALLY Mass evacuation.

TOM: We had a holiday there; remember? It was crap.

SALLY: I think the world's comin' to an end.

TOM: The world en' comin' to an end... s' just a bit of a flood.

SALLY: East Anglia's disappeared off the map!

TOM: So what?! Who's gonna miss East-bloody-Anglia?!

SALLY: I wish we'd gone t' Caroline's!

Pause.

TOM: Yeah.

SALLY: Hope they'm all right.

TOM: They will be.

SALLY: What we gonna do?

TOM: Switch the radio on - see if we can get some information on the local news?

SALLY grabs the radio.

 Probably tell yer about emergency procedures - what t' do; must be helicopters lookin' out an' stuff, bound t' be.

She switches it on - nothing. She flicks through the bands.

SALLY: Nothin'.

TOM: *Bloody batteries!* I told you t' get some new batteries.

SALLY: I did get some new batteries!

TOM: When?

SALLY: Two days ago.

TOM: Giz it 'ere!

SALLY: You have a goo then, clever dick!

TOM: *(Flicking though bands)* You must've dropped it.

SALLY: I didn't drop it - it was workin' half an hour agoo.

TOM: Well it en' workin' now!

SALLY: Give the man a coconut!

TOM: You dropped it.

SALLY: I didn't drop it!!

Pause.

TOM: Transmitter must be down, or summat.

SALLY: We should've moved out last night.

TOM: I cocked up again, n' I?

SALLY: Yes you flamin' well 'ave!

TOM: I'm sorry.

SALLY: You stubborn old git!

TOM: What a bloody failure.

SALLY: Just... *stubborn!* I'm scared.

TOM: I know.

SALLY: What we gonna do, Tom?

TOM: *(Sips tea)* Well we need some sugar for a start off.

SALLY: What?

TOM: Get the food an' stuff t'gether. I'll pull the dinghy up t' the window. If it comes over the stairs...

A sudden increase of the sound of the rain takes TOM to the window - a horrified expression comes to his face.

Oh no...

SALLY: Wha's wrong?

TOM: Now done panic...

SALLY: Done panic? Why shouldn't I panic?

TOM: 'Cause it won't help none.

SALLY: You gonna tell me why I shouldn't be panickin', or what?!

TOM: Well...

SALLY: Get on with it - you'm mekin' me panic.

TOM: The dinghy...

SALLY: What about the dinghy?

TOM: It's...

SALLY: It's what?

TOM: It's erm... it's not there now.

SALLY: Oh my God... *Oh my God!*

TOM: I told yer not t' panic.

SALLY: I'll panic if I wants! If this en' a time t' panic, I don't know what is?!

TOM: Calm down.

SALLY: No, I done wanna calm down; I wanna panic - we'm gonna drown an' all 'cause o' you!

TOM: Will you shut up?!

SALLY: Done you tell me t' shut up! You told me you tied the dinghy up - where is it?!

TOM: Must've worked loose.

SALLY: Works on a boat an' can't tie a flamin' knot!

TOM looks out of the window again.

TOM: Hey look - I can see it.

SALLY joins him.

SALLY: Where?

TOM: Over there - caught up in the top o' that tree.

SALLY: S' gonna float off an' then what will we do? We'll drown, we will. All 'cause you don't know how t' tie a knot.

TOM: I do know how t' tie a knot!

SALLY: A *slipknot*, yeah!

TOM: Oh, how amusin'! S' good t' see you've still got an appetite for comedy at a time like this. Got any more jokes y' wanna share?

SALLY: You *am* a joke, you am - one big bloody joke!

TOM: Maybe a helicopter'll come soon, or a rescue craft of some sort.

SALLY: Yeah, or Noah an' his flamin' Ark!

TOM: Sarcastic old...

SALLY: What?

TOM: Nothin'.

SALLY: Goo on, say it -

TOM: Dunno what you'm talkin' about.

SALLY: Yes you flamin' well do. You was gonna call me an old cow, weren' yer?

TOM: As a matter of fact... no.

SALLY: *Liar!*

TOM: I was gonna call you a sarcastic old...

SALLY: Cow!

TOM: ...bitch!

SALLY *slaps TOM's face.*

SALLY: I never bin called one o' them things in my life!

TOM: Right!

TOM *marches off to the window.*

SALLY: Where you gooin'?

TOM: For a swim!

SALLY: (Sarcastic) Ha, ha, ha!

TOM *begins to climb out of the window. SALLY suddenly looks worried.*

Tom..?

TOM: Tarah!

TOM *disappears through the window; there is a splash. SALLY is distraught - she calls to him.*

SALLY: Come back, Tom! Come back..! What you doin'?! Oh, I'm sorry, Tom... please come back - you'll drown!

SALLY *looks out of the window, but can't see him anywhere.*

Tom! Tom, I can't see yer! Oh God, Tom - *I can't see yer!!*

Music as rain falls harder and the lights fade to blackout.

Reviews

Radio 4, 18.08.2008.

The Observer - Radio Choice: When Sally Millington cries: 'The water's up to the ceiling downstairs', her husband Tom replies dourly 'And my livelihood's at the bottom of the river'. In this melodramatic-sounding, but superbly realised play by Alex Jones, a middle-aged couple who run a ferry business on the River Severn come to realise the true consequences of global warming after a massive flood leaves them floating around in a dinghy, perhaps the only people left alive. Annette Badland and Peter Corey are excellent as the sparring pair in what is also a memorable love story. *Stephanie Billen.*

Financial Times - Critic's Choice, Radio: River's Up depicts an elderly couple bickering as the Severn overflows. Alex Jones' script start pleasantly ordinary and imperceptibly turns to nightmare as the waters never stop rising and Tom and Sally, forced into their dinghy realise they can no longer see Worcester or the Malverns, and the water around them is salt. A gently riveting story, its ecology worn lightly, beautifully acted. *Martin Hoyle.*

Sunday Telegraph - Radio Choice: Modern diluvian fable about a squabbling midlife couple trapped in their riverside cottage by the rising Severn and then adrift on the ensuing flood in a dinghy. What starts as comedy (Tom: 'There's no sugar in this tea!'; Sally: 'Well get your snorkel on and get some from the kitchen!') promises an Old Testament denouement, 'God's shaking his head at the world' says Sally, having railed herself hoarse at today's Sodom and Gomorrah lifestyle choices. Tom, scouring the horizon meanwhile is wondering where the hell Worcester went. *JH.*

Radio Times - River's Up was a small masterpiece. Though imagining a world ending by flood, the storyline was grippingly realistic, movingly credible from what initially seemed no more than local flooding to the final catastrophe. Portrayed through the dramatic experiences of an ordinary couple, it could justifiably be described as a working man's *Titanic*.

Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, July 2002.

Yorkshire Post - Few productions could be more timely and topical than this. Is art imitating nature, or nature art? There was actual flooding not far from the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, while in the lunchtime show, *River's Up*, two actors play characters who abandon their flooded home and set sail on a dinghy. But surely, however bad the situation, in reality the whole world couldn't disappear under water? That's the concept floated here by playwright Alex Jones. And you have to stop and think, following so many recent disasters that sometimes the unthinkable does happen. Could this?

Although the piece is site-specific to the Worcester region where it's also being stage by the Swan Theatre this autumn, it will have many resonances for Yorkshire home-owners as Jones gives his global warning in a small-scale personalised way. Caroline John and Barry McCarthy depict Sally and Tom, who sit and bicker like any couple, long married and with grandchildren. He's sulking because she didn't take him a cup of tea in bed. She says he looks like a moping walrus. Deep affection clearly underpins their arguments. They live near the River Severn on which Tom runs boat trips. In a rhythmic conversation handled with masterly timing by the two actors, she says he should have stuck to pleasure cruising and not started up a floating disco for drug-crazed degenerates from Birmingham. But in any case he can't work at the moment because the rain, it raineth every day. The river is rising ominously. Yet Sally and Tom remain optimistic and wonder whether they'll get any insurance payments this time. They move upstairs. He refuses to leave and she won't go without him. Later, they hear on the radio there's a national evacuation that East Anglia has disappeared under water. Eventually, their boat having been lost, they set sail in its dinghy. They see the Malvern Hills above the surface and aim towards them, hoping to be reunited with their daughter and her family, but every sign of land vanishes. France is then their target

destination, although Sally is not sure at first that she'll like French cuisine. Fortified with tinned food and bottled water, this latter day Mr and Mrs Noah continue having rows as they row on. He may occasionally shout, but he is determined to keep up her spirits. He indulges her survival fantasies while she indulges his sexual ones. For grandparents, they have a surprisingly modern use of sexual vocabulary. Mostly, however, their tight dialogue remains superbly realistic. 'It takes a bit of a crises to put your life into perspective' he says as dead bodies float by. (I'll certainly say amen to that.) The playwright amusingly injects the commonplace into the extreme situation. The end of the world being nigh is compared to there being no sugar for the tea. *Lynda Murdin.*

Scarborough Evening News - Tom and Sally eke out a living on the River Severn, taking trippers on disco evenings on their pleasure boat. However, every year when the rains come, the river rises, eventually flooding their home. This year there are severe weather warnings nationally, so maybe it is time for the old couple to leave. Unfortunately, events move too swiftly and before they know it they are facing the biggest test of their lives. Barrie McCarthy and Caroline John are again perfectly matched as Tom and Sally, their faces especially betraying the whole range of emotions. For any budding local thespians, this is an object lesson in quality acting. The clever set is also a tribute to the designer Pip Leckenby. Although the ending as portrayed by author Alex Jones, is probably inevitable, you can't help but hope that there will be a last minute reprieve for this ordinary but likeable couple caught up in a situation beyond their control. *MP.*

Swan Theatre, Worcester, October 2002.

Worcester Evening News - *River's Up* is a powerful play with a strong idea at its core and a fantastic set, but it's not easy to watch. Set firmly in present-day Worcester, Tom and Sally live alongside the River Severn and are hardly surprised when the river, once again bursts its banks. They are staggered, however, when the floods fail to subside and engulf the bottom floor of their house. It soon becomes clear these are far from the city's average floods, and Tom and Sally strike out in a small dinghy in search of dry land. This is a difficult play because the actors are confined to a small boat throughout the second act. It makes the play static, but generates the vital claustrophobic feel. Stephen Crane and Sunny Ormonde do a grand job as the middle-aged couple. They capture the panic, and despair whilst not losing sight of the play's loves story. *River's Up* is not a gritty realism play where a couple bemoan their soggy carpet - the humour does go some way to divert the audience from the insurmountable despair in the play's heart. Writer, Alex Jones stands back from ramming the eco-warrior themes down the audience's throat... *River's Up* is well worth seeing - not least of all because the Swan's financial crisis means we might see a top-quality local play produced by them again. *David Lewins.*

The Birmingham Post - *Tragedy on and off stage at Swan* - Alex Jones' highly watchable two-hander takes a topical theme - that of an engorged river and its consequences. The Severn is in high flood, and the Millingtons, who happen to live on the riverbank near Worcester, are scared for their lives. Tom Millington's livelihood is renting out pleasure boats for river discos, etc. As the evening opens out in the Millington's besieged kitchen we hear that Tom's boat has gone beneath the water and the future looks bleak. The house goes next and as the waters continue to rise we move from a bedroom (the Millington's final sanctuary) out on to the river in a tiny rowboat, where Sally Millington begins to see this disaster as divine retribution. In Jenny Steven's excellent production we are constantly engaged with the action of this ultimately tragic play. And this is no easy thing to achieve with a two-hander, which, by its very nature is necessarily static (the confines of the tiny boat, for example). In one poignant scene after another the tension builds. In an eerie sequence the Malvern's disappear and then on this open water, which they believe is covering Europe, the horrors of thirst and starvation begin and a catastrophe of epic proportions is revealed. Stephen Crane and Sunny Ormonde are superb as the tragic pair, and together they give the play its wonderful sense of pathos, none of which is overstated. If the closure of the Swan, surely one of the jewels in Worcester's crown, follows the withdrawal of support by a ludicrously foolhardy council, this may be the last production I shall review of Worcester Theatre Company's work. The local community

at Worcester - both children and adult theatregoers and actors, can only suffer as a result of such bureaucratic bungling. *Richard Edmonds.*

Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, tour, March - April 2009.

The Stage - With eerie prescience, Alex Jones wrote this play about the meteorological consequences of climate change in 2000. As he notes, Britain has experienced several flooded summers since then, particularly in the area in which this play is set - the banks of the River Severn. In just under two hours, he works up to a worst-case scenario while resisting the temptation to preach. The result is a finely wrought tragicomedy that provides laughs, tears and food for thought in equal measure. The central relationship between Sally (Nicky Goldie) and Tom (Richard Stone) is handled beautifully. Sometimes fractious, sometimes amorous, it is a believable portrait of fifty-something's caught in the crossfire of events beyond their immediate control. Through the first half, Tom seems beleaguered and powerless, a man teetering on the edge of failure, but his good sense prevails in the second half. By contrast, Sally is initially a tired sceptic, only to rediscover her joie de vivre as the two attempt to row to safety. They are both winning performances, with an easy humanity that makes everyman figures of this bickering husband and wife. Laura McEwen's stage design is also impressive, allowing for downstairs, upstairs and upriver within the small spaces of OTTC's run-sheet. The only snags for some may be the occasionally adult material and some mild swearing, but all in all this is a highly recommendable production. *Andrew Blades.*

The Oxford Times - There's nothing like going to a play in your own community — where neighbours can come together to enjoy a good evening out. And that's what the good people of Dorchester experienced at the opening night of the new OTTC play *River's Up*. They are the county's premier touring company (soon to be renamed as Oxfordshire Theatre Company), travelling far and wide to bring several new productions every year. *River's Up* is one of their best ever. Written by Alex Jones, it tells of Sally and Tom, a middle-aged couple who live on the banks of the river Severn and are caught up in cataclysmic flooding. The sparring but affectionate couple are excellently played by Nicky Goldie and Richard Stone. The serious message of the piece is both counterbalanced and made more poignant by the humour and sparkiness of their relationship. In the second half they try to escape from the flooding in their dinghy unaware that their troubles are only just beginning. It's a powerful evening of theatre and Karen Simpson directs with great assuredness, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats throughout. A must see show. *Angie Johnson.*

Daily Info, Oxford - With their house about to be flooded – again! – Sally and Tom are cast adrift with a bottle of water and a tin of beans. Domestic tragicomedy of epic proportions - Alex Jones' play *River's Up* is funny, poignant and heart wrenching. It pulls the audience in with its familiar characters and setting, with plenty of laughs about the bickering of the two lead characters, and puts them in an unfamiliar context of crisis. Set in the nearby English countryside, it finds middle-aged Tom and Sally Millington facing yet another flood in their riverside home. They sandbag the house and move the furniture upstairs, only to awake the next morning to a flood of epic proportions, lapping at the ceiling. They manage to get into a dinghy, and start paddling for dry land, amidst rising waters. As their stock of food and water dwindles over the weeks, it becomes clear that that the world will never be the same, and they may be the last ones, afloat in a giant sea. Sally is in denial and Tom is trying to be strong; together they manage to keep going. Despite their uncomfortably familiar bickering (she nags, he retaliates), they love each other very much, which gives us hope at the same time as the subject matter of the play, global warming, gives us fear. Both Nicky Goldie (Sally) and Richard Stone (Tom) boast a wealth of experience with television and theatre, and this is clear from their performance. They play their characters effortlessly, with emotion and honesty. It is a bit of challenge to listen to their realistic arguing, despite knowing it is scripted, but it only brings more reality to the situation, which we are all potentially facing. A nice range of props (including a rowboat), subtle lighting and lots of watery sound effects make this interesting to watch. *Kate Bottriell.*