

In the following excerpt from a recent British novel, the narrator, a young man in his early twenties, is attending a play with his new girlfriend Isabel when she unexpectedly discovers that her parents are in the theater. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the author produces a comic effect.

Oh my God, I think that's my mum over there,' she gasped.

'Where?'

5 'By the pillar. Careful, don't look. What is she *doing* here? And what's that dress? It looks like a willow tree. Where's Dad? I hope she didn't come with one of her gentlemen friends. She's really too old for that.'

'Did you tell her you were going?'

10 'No, I mean, I said I wanted to see the play, but I didn't let on I had tickets for tonight.'

'She's talking to someone. Can you see?'

15 'Phew, it's my dad. He must have gone off to buy programmes. And he's about to sneeze. Look, there we go, aaahhtchooo. Out comes his red handkerchief. I just hope they don't spot us and we can escape quickly at the end. With any luck, they'll be too busy arguing to glance up here. This is prime argument territory for them, Mum will be asking Dad where he put the car park ticket and he'll get flustered because he'll just have dropped it into a bin by mistake.'

20 Luck was not on Isabel's side, for a moment later, Christopher Rogers happened to glance up to the gallery and recognized his eldest daughter, in the midst of trying her best not to recognize him. So that she might cease to dwell in ignorance, Christopher stood up in the middle of the elegantly suited and scented audience, and began making the vigorous hand gestures of a man waving off a departing cruise ship. In case Isabel had not spotted this maniac, her mother was in turn informed of her eldest daughter's location, and decided that the presence of four hundred people in the auditorium should be no impediment to her desire to shout 'Isabel' at top pitch and with all the excitement of a woman recognizing a long-lost friend on the deck of an in-coming cruise ship.

35 Isabel smiled feebly, turned a beetroot shade and repeated in panicked diction, 'I can't believe this, please let them shut up.'

40 Not a second too soon, Lorca* came to the rescue, the lights faded, and Mr. and Mrs. Rogers reluctantly took their seats, pointing ominously to an exit sign by way of interval rendezvous.

45 An hour and a quarter of Spanish domestic drama later, we found ourselves at the bar.

'What are you doing here, Mum?' asked Isabel.

50 'Why shouldn't I be here? You're not the only one who does fancy things with your evenings. Your father and I have a right to go out once in a while.'

'I'm sure, I didn't mean it like that, it's just I'm surprised at the coincidence.'

'Where did you buy this dress? Is that the one I paid for at Christmas?'

55 'No, Mum, I got it myself last week.'

'Oh, well, it's very nice, pity you don't have more of a cleavage for it, but that's your father's fault. You know what all the women in his family are like.'

60 'How are you Dad?' Isabel turned to ask her father, who was looking up at the ceiling with an intent expression.

'Dad?' repeated Isabel.

'Yes, darling, how are you, my bean? Enjoying the show?'

65 'Yup, and you? What are you staring at up there?'

'I'm looking at the light fixtures they have. They're new tungsten bulbs, Japanese things, quite wonderful, they use only a small amount of electricity but give off a very nice light.'

70 'Oh, great, Dad. And, ehm, there's someone I'd like you to both meet.'

'Delighted,' said Mrs. Rogers, confiding in me almost at once: 'She's a lovely girl really,' in case my theatre companion had inspired doubts to the contrary.

75 'Thanks, Mum,' said Isabel wearily, as though the statement were no one-ff.

80 'Don't mind her, bean, she's had a hard day,' explained Dad, now looking more horizontally at the world.

'My day would be fine if I wasn't lumbered with someone who kept losing tickets to the car park,' snapped Mrs. Rogers.

'Dad! You haven't?'

85 'Yes I'm afraid I have. They're so fiddly these days, they fall right out of one's hands.'

—Alain de Botton, *Kiss and Tell*

* Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936): Spanish poet and playwright