

VENOM

A wicked slander
By Phil Willmott.

Cast in order of appearance.

(The play can be doubled by a minimum cast of seven)

HARRY GRIMES (50s)

A nurse

A policeman

ROSE GOSLING (50s)

CLIVE GOSLING

GRACE TURNER

MARTIN LUCAS

BRISLEY - a butler

ARTHUR

JULIA GOSLING

EVIE LUCAS

REED

An italian/US. waiter

Arch Bishop

A doctor

OTTO VON SEISSER

Bell Boy at the Savoy

(Characters are in their late twenties unless specified otherwise)

Scene 1

A SEEDY DRESSING ROOM IN A SOUTH LONDON THEATRE ABOUT 1910.

EVERY THING IS FADED AND YELLOWING.

HARRY GRIMES, AN OUT OF CONDITION, MIDDLE AGED ACTOR, GROTESQUE BECAUSE HE IS BADLY MADE UP AS A PANTOMIME DEMON, AND HIS TACKY COSTUME HANGS, FILTHILY OFF HIM.

WE CAN NOT SEE WHO HE IS TALKING TO.

HARRY:

Hello Little Boy. Enjoy the pantomime did you?

And you found your way backstage.

No I won't tell. You can trust old Harry.

Run away from home, have you? Run away to join the special people?

Ruby Lips, I know a secret place under the stage where you and I can become special friends and mummy and daddy will never find you. It can be our own magic kingdom. Would you like that, Ruby Lips? Would you?

But it must be a secret or the spell will be broken.

We'll have to creep on tippy toe. Do you think you can do that? Quietly now, Quietly now. Quiet as mice so no one knows where we're going. Like bad boys, Ruby Lips. Bad, bad boys with secrets.

HE EXITS, LIGHTS FADE ON HIM AND UP ON ROSE (THE LITTLE BOYS MOTHER) SHE IS STANDING OVER A HOSPITAL BED THOUGH WE CAN NOT SEE IT. A NURSE APPROACHES HER.

Scene 2

NURSE:

D'you want a cup of tea Mrs Gosling?

ROSE:

No thank you, nurse.

NURSE:

He's having a good sleep. Best thing eh?

ROSE:

Yes.

THE NURSE STEPS OUT OF EAR SHOT. SHE IS JOINED BY A POLICEMAN THEY BOTH LOOK AT ROSE.

POLICEMAN:

How's she baring up?

NURSE:

Hard to say, constable 'seems to be alright but how can you tell? Terrible thing to happen to your kid.

POLICEMAN:

It could have been a lot worse. He's killed in the past they reckon. Other little children.

NURSE:

Evil bastard. What'll happen to him?

POLICEMAN:

Oh he's going to hang, make no mistake about that.

NURSE:

It's too good for him. That little mite's going to have to live with this the rest of his life.

POLICEMAN:

Oh I wouldn't worry about him.

NURSE:

What do you mean?

POLICEMAN:

That's not a normal kid.

NURSE:

What you on about?

POLICEMAN:

There's something weird about him.

NURSE:

How can you say that after what he's been through?

POLICEMAN:

Oh I know but... never mind.

NURSE:

No go on say it. You might as well now.

POLICEMAN:

Well, I can't get it out of my head, what I saw when I found him. The old devil had taken him down to a store room, deep underneath the stage. There was hardly any light down there, just from this candle they'd taken down with them and it was lighting up all these incredible things, swords and crowns and masks and things like you've never seen before. It must have been where they keep things from all the old plays and that. Well, there was the old man slumped in the corner, passed out drunk and in the middle of all this there was the little kid naked, his body all black and blue but he was dancing.

NURSE:

(MYSTIFIED) What?

POLICEMAN:

He was dancing. He had a gold cloak slung over one shoulder and he had lipstick smeared all over his mouth and he was dancing, definite dancing, his hands in the air, his body swaying backwards and forwards in the middle of all this junk. Then when he saw me, he just stopped and looked and an expression flickered over his face like he didn't know whether to laugh or cry and we stood there like that, staring at each other. When I gathered him up in my arms he cried and howled like I've never heard.

NURSE:

I'm not surprised.

POLICEMAN:

But I got the feeling that he wasn't crying because of what had happened, he was crying because I was taking him away from that room.

NURSE:

Don't be so foolish. He was in shock. People do terrible things when they've had a nasty shock.

POLICEMAN:

Yes, I suppose so.

NURSE:

(CONTEMPTUOUSLY) You suppose so.

LIGHTS DIP ON THEM AND THEY EXIT AS LIGHTS COME UP ON ROSE LOOKING DOWN AT WHERE THE BED MUST BE.

ROSE:

(SOFTLY, AS MUCH FOR HER OWN REASSURANCE AS FOR THE STILL SLEEPING CHILD) I'm sorry my baby, I'm sorry. Mummy's going to look after you now. I promise. keep you safe. Safe with the nice kind, good people, with the fairies.

BEHIND HER. A TABLEAUX. TWO POLICEMAN LEAD IN HARRY. HE HAS A SACK OVER HIS HEAD. THEY STAND WITH THEIR BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. A DOOR OPENS AHEAD OF THEM. THERE IS NOOSE HANGING IN THE DOORWAY. THEY ADVANCE INTO THE LIGHT AND THE DOORWAY CLOSES BEHIND THEM. ROSE CONTINUES:

You see lamb, in this life there are many, many good people but there are a very, very few ugly monsters. But we can beat them. the good fairies will help you grow up big and strong so that the monsters won't harm you. Mummy will see to it. Only the good fairies will touch you.

Scene 3

THE STAGE OF THE APOLLO THEATRE, IN LONDON'S WEST END. SOME TWENTY YEARS LATER.

CLIVE AND GRACE. GLAMOROUS YOUNG STARS AT THE HIGHT OF SUCCESS.

CLIVE AS GERALD:

Oh my darling, Tell me you'll run away with me tonight.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

Run away? To what? to be bullied, to be called a dolt.

CLIVE AS GERALD:

Oh yes, yes my darling, yes. And in return you must be your utterly unreasonable self.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

I won't let you belong to anyone else. Your cruel heart and your shabby nature must always be mine and mine alone.

CLIVE AS GERALD:

Can you doubt it darling?

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

But what shall we tell the others. Your little fiancee and my decent, good, wonderful man.

CLIVE AS GERALD:

Tell them to go to hell.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

Could we? can we?

CLIVE AS GERALD:

I believe we can. Cast away that foolish ring.

AN AWKWARD PAUSE. GRACE ISN'T WEARING A RING.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

I've already done it darling... earlier... I.. um.. I knew what you were going to say. when I saw your eyes... um .. over dinner... the um soup.. tomato.

SHE CALLS FOR A PROMPT.

Line!

PROMPTER:

Do you think they'll ever be able to forgive us?

SHE RETURNS TO THE SCRIPT.

GRACE:

Do you think they'll ever be able to forgive us?

CLIVE AS GERALD:

They'll thank us for it. They're off the hook. Think what misery we would have made their lives.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

But now we'll do that to each other.

CLIVE AS GERALD:

Yes oh yes, delicious, unending misery.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:

Make love to me here.

CLIVE AS GERALD:
Now?

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:
Now.

CLIVE AS GERALD:
But..

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:
No more talking. Do you remember our special word. When we'd said all there was to say.

CLIVE AS GERALD:
Sosso Darling.

GRACE AS JEMMIMA:
Sosso.

THE KISS.

THE CURTAIN FALLS. TUMULTUOUS APPLAUSE.

CLIVE:
I don't believe it. The ring. She forgot the fucking ring!

GRACE:
I'm sorry.

CLIVE:
Tomato fucking soup! Is this how it's going to be on Broadway?

GRACE:
Darling I'm sorry.

CLIVE:
Oh never mind. I can't wait to get to America. That reminds me, I may have some exciting news about our supporting cast soon. Are you joining us down at Amblehurst this weekend? It could be our last chance and the others insist it hasn't been the same with out you.

GRACE:
Yes, but may I bring a friend?

CLIVE:
Which species?

GRACE:
Male.

CLIVE:
Is he handsome, promiscuous and of questionable sexuality?

GRACE:

Darling I've told him all about you. So you've no chance I'm afraid.

CLIVE:

An admirer of yours?

GRACE:

All mine.

CLIVE:

Darling, I do think you should avoid taking your admirers to the country. All that natural beauty cruelly exposes the man made nature of yours.

GRACE POKES OUT HER TONGUE.

Listen, if you're going straight down tell Julia I've got a business meeting after the show. It may keep me in town overnight.

GRACE:

Darling she's your wife not your housekeeper. Why don't you phone her?

CLIVE:

Well there's no need, is there? You'll be down in no time. See you later.

GRACE:

Darling, before you go I have something for you.

SHE PRESENTS HIM WITH A LITTLE BOX. IT CONTAINS A WATCH.

CLIVE:

It's beautiful. But why?

GRACE:

Don't you remember?. What's the date?

CLIVE:

The eighteenth.

GRACE:

It's twenty years today since we first met as children. When you told me you wanted to be the most important man in the English Theatre. It's to thank you for taking me with you.

CLIVE:

Darling, I don't know what to say.

GRACE:

Then, that alone has made the whole thing worth while.

HE KISSES HER. AN AFFECTIONATE BUT CHASTE KISS.

THEY LEAVE FOR THEIR DRESSING ROOMS

CLIVE'S DRESSING ROOM. MARTIN IS THERE.

CLIVE:

Who are you? How did you get into my dressing room?

MARTIN:

My name's Martin, Martin Lucas Sir, I'm sorry sir, I... I...

CLIVE:

What do you want?

MARTIN:

I... I... don't you remember me?

CLIVE LOOKS.

CLIVE:

Well... yes... I think I.. I can't quite...

MARTIN:

Last Christmas, Russell Square, We met... In the dark..

CLIVE:

How dare you! How did you find me? I won't give you a penny.

MARTIN:

No, no. Mr Gosling you've got me all wrong. I didn't come here to Blackmail you. How could I? You're my hero. In fact I saved you till last. I'm only bothering you now because no one else will listen to me.

CLIVE:

What are you talking about?

MARTIN:

Mr. Gosling I want you to... I.. I mean.. could you?.. would you please..? You see I've written a play.

CLIVE:

What?

MARTIN:

I've written a play - and I think... well, I hope.. Oh Mr Gosling please would you read it? No one else will take any notice of me. I thought you might because-

CLIVE:

Because if I don't you'll go to the police?

MARTIN:

No! no! If you don't have time then I'll leave, I won't bother you again but I think it's a good play but no producers will even see me.

PAUSE. CLIVE STUDIES MARTIN.

CLIVE:

What did you say your name was?

MARTIN:

Martin, sir, Martin Lucas.

CLIVE:

Yes, I'll read it, Martin but not because we once..

MARTIN:

No, no, of course.

CLIVE:

I'll read it because... you remind me of myself. How old are you?

MARTIN:

Twenty four sir.

CLIVE:

Four years younger than me. The age I started.

MARTIN:

Yes, sir.

CLIVE:

What made you try to write a play?

MARTIN:

Well.. the theatre, it's like a passion for me. When I was a boy I used to sneak in at the back and watch all the greats. Then my wife Evie, she used to tear tickets on the door. She'd let me in. She can't do that now. She's having a baby but I've just been given a position here in the box office. I start on Monday. So maybe they'll let me stand at the back.

CLIVE:

I see.

MARTIN:

If I could write like you, and act and direct and everything then I could be a part of it. Not just selling tickets and sneaking in like I don't belong.

CLIVE:

They make you feel like that, do they? Like you don't belong. The self proclaimed God's of the theatre.

MARTIN:

They're all toffs. Except you Mr Gosling, well you're a toff but I can talk to you. You and...

CLIVE:

Who?

MARTIN:

Mr Coward was very kind to me sir. He gave me tea.

CLIVE:

Noel Coward is a flash in the pan. He won't last another season, I'm afraid. But I am not a toff, Martin. I'm like you.

MARTIN:

But the way you speak, the things you say.

CLIVE:

What's your play called?

MARTIN:

"The Second Hand Man".

CLIVE:

What's it about?

MARTIN:

The lives of ordinary people. Ordinary working people. A girl who works in a department store decides to stand up to her boss who no one thought had any feelings but gradually she helps him see what's wrong with the cruel way he treats his staff and his heart begins to melt but the way it might for real.

CLIVE:

Stop, stop stop! People do not pay good money to see real. They see real every day of their lives, in their offices, their homes, from the top of Omnibuses. Why parade it in front of them in their leisure hours. This is 1928, It's a party. Set the charming cad to work, make his eyes flash, his teeth sparkle and they'll shriek with delight as he gets away with murder.

MARTIN:

But I don't know about any of that.

CLIVE:

You must learn. The upper classes are our puppets. It is through them that we speak to our audience. Without their voices our characters would be vulgar music hall turns. Move amongst them, become one of them. I couldn't get it right at first.

MARTIN:

I'm so ashamed, how could I have thought anyone would be interested in my grubby little story?

CLIVE:

Don't talk like that. Do you really want a place in the theatre?

MARTIN:

Yes, more than anything but I just don't see how.

CLIVE:

Let me tell you something, Martin. When I was a little boy - a terrible man, an actor, tried to destroy me in this very theatre but I fought back, I survived him and I'm here today a star. You have to fight, Martin. You have to do whatever it takes. Remember that.

MARTIN:

Yes sir. I'm glad I came to see you.

CLIVE:

I want you to think of me as a friend. No one else knows what I've just told you.

MARTIN:

I appreciate that sir.

CLIVE:

I hope I can trust you.

MARTIN:

Yes sir.

CLIVE:

Are you all right for money?

MARTIN:

Things have been tough but I've got this box office job. It's long hours but it'll see us through. I thought we were going to lose the flat.

CLIVE:

And you didn't consider coming to me for money?

MARTIN:

I told you. I wouldn't take money off you.

CLIVE:

How much will the theatre pay you?

MARTIN:

I'm starting on the part time rate.

CLIVE:

That's not enough. You've got a child on the way. I'll sort it out.

MARTIN:

No, please. I don't want to be a burden to you. If I could come and visit you here, now and again.

CLIVE:

In a month's time we go to Broadway with my new play "Baroque".

MARTIN:

But what about "Riviera Sunset" people won't want to see anyone else in your part.

CLIVE:

I'm closing it.

MARTIN:

But I've only just found you again.

CLIVE:

You're very sweet. I'll make sure they pay you properly. I might be wrong about your play, you know? It might be that people just aren't ready for it. Let me keep it for a while.

MARTIN:
Thank you sir.

CLIVE:
You should have come to me before.

MARTIN:
You do remember that night in the square don't you? Tell me you do. Please.

PAUSE

CLIVE:
Of course I do.

Is your wife expecting you back soon?

MARTIN:
Yes

THEY STARE AT EACH OTHER

but...

BLACKOUT

Scene 6

THE FOLLOWING EVENING.

THE DRAWING ROOM OF CLIVE'S COUNTRY HOUSE - AMBLEHURST.

SOON EVERYONE WILL GATHER FOR DRINKS BEFORE DINNER.

JULIA IS CLIVE'S WIFE. SHE'S IN HER MID TWENTIES AND QUITE PRETTY BUT BEING CONSTANTLY SURROUNDED BY GLAMOROUS ACTRESSES HAS EATEN AWAY AT HER SELF CONFIDENCE UNTIL SHE CONSIDERS HERSELF DOWDY.

SHE IS SUPERVISING THE BUTLER, BRISLEY - A HANDSOME MAN IN HIS EARLY FORTIES.

ARTHUR ENTERS. HE IS IN HIS LATE TWENTIES, SLIGHTLY PODGY.

BRISLEY IMMEDIATELY STANDS TO ATTENTION.

BRISLEY:
Good evening Your Royal Highness.

ARTHUR:
Good evening Brisley, Please carry on. Good Evening Julia.

JULIA:
Good evening Artie. I meant to ask you, could you sleep last night?

ARTHUR:

Yes thank you, Julia.

JULIA:

Good, Oh good. I've been worrying about you all day. I'm sorry we had to put you in that awful little room.

ARTHUR:

There's nothing awful about it.

JULIA:

But it's not your usual one I know and that must be an inconvenience for you but Grace bagged it for her friend. It's completely thrown all my arrangements. I have a new cook, a genius but doesn't speak a word of English so none of the servants have a clue what's going on and I'm never sure, even if we manage to sit down for a meal at the proper time, what on earth will be placed in front of us and heaven knows what she'll make of Clive and -

ARTHUR:

Julia, calm down for heaven sake. Is Clive here yet?

JULIA:

I don't believe so. Oh Artie I just can't get a cook to stay with us longer than a few weeks. My nerves are completely frazzled. I don't think I can stand another of these weekends.

ARTHUR:

Of course you can my darling. You'll be fine. Why don't you sit down and let me fix you a Martini.

JULIA:

Oh, no Artie I daren't stop. Well, just for a minute.

(NOT WHINING, TRYING TO THINK THINGS THROUGH)

Honestly you don't know what it's like keeping these house parties running smoothly and then everyone's off and I'm left all alone down here to dread the next one. All week I long for some company and then at the weekend I'm so busy I don't get a chance to talk to anyone even if I had anything interesting to say.

ARTHUR:

Darling, of course you have interesting things to say.

JULIA:

But how can I have? I'm trapped down here. I don't blame Clive of course but my husband is the most fashionable playwright in London and I'm the only one who can't talk about his plays because I never get to see any of them and Artie I'm so worried about New York. Won't all those Broadway people be terribly sophisticated I won't know what to say to any of them.

ARTHUR:

I remember when you met he was absolutely enchanted because you weren't interested in theatre.

JULIA:

I thought it was all rather silly and I told him so.

ARTHUR:

What a challenge you must have been.

JULIA:

(A HAPPY MEMORY) Must I. I never thought of it like that. Oh, Artie, do you think I bore him. I'm so terrified I'll bore him.

ARTHUR:

I don't think so for a minute. If anyone is in danger of that it's me.

JULIA:

You? But you're-

ARTHUR:

I'm what?

JULIA:

You're a sweetheart. You are coming to New York with us aren't you? You're the only one who listens to me.

ARTHUR:

I don't know if Clive wants me there and darling everyone's dying to talk to you. It's just that you're always rushing out of the door with a coffeepot in one hand and tonight's seating plan in the other.

JULIA:

Is that the way it is?

ARTHUR:

A little.

JULIA:

It's just that I can't let him down.

ARTHUR:

I know. Are you feeling a little calmer now?

JULIA:

Yes I am. But where is Clive? I know he'll arrive late and dinner will be ruined. Business in town, Grace said.

ARTHUR:

Did she say what?

JULIA:

(PREOCCUPIED) Artie do you speak French?

ARTHUR:

Well, A little.

JULIA:

Please do come and see if you can't explain a few things to Cook. She get's such a wild look in

her eyes sometimes. I'm terrified she's going to serve up something terribly gaelic and half The West End will be laid up with food poisoning.

ARTHUR:

I think I remember the words for dog and cat.

JULIA:

Good at least we'll be spared the domestic pets.

THEY GO OUT.

GRACE ENTERS WITH REED A HANDSOME BUT RATHER EARNEST LOOKING AMERICAN. ARISTOCRATIC LOUISIANA ACCENT.

REED:

Oh, We must be early.

GRACE:

Oh meal times are always like this at Amblehurst. Waiting for Clive. It drives poor Julia to distraction.

REED:

All this. It seems so strange to me.

GRACE:

What does, Angel?

REED:

It just doesn't seem to make sense to give one person so much power over you.

GRACE:

Goodness, how thrillingly blunt of you, darling. It's only dinner.

REED:

He puts on plays. He does that very well but at the end of the day it's only a play isn't it?

GRACE:

Darling you are adorable. Haven't you worked it out yet. You simply mustn't think like that.

REED:

Why not? Plays, they're not actually.. I mean they're not really... When I'm with you..

GRACE:

This is his house. We're here at his invitation to be characters in this weekends comedy.

REED:

But you're a big star. He needs you.

GRACE:

Try and see it our way for a few days.

REED:

Why won't you let me take you away from all this.

GRACE:

You see, you're talking like one of his characters already.

REED:

The conversations we've had over the last few months, your grasp of theology and literature and yet.. you play these games.

GRACE:

Please Reed... I... You have to realise that these "games" as you call them are the only life I know. It's twenty years this weekend since Peter Pan. I was playing Wendy which is quite an important role.

REED:

I do know Peter Pan, Grace. you needn't carry on as if I were some kind of creature from another planet.

GRACE:

Darling, did you see it as a child? How adorable but I can't imagine you cried out to save Tinkerbell.

REED:

I wanted too but how could I? I was the eldest.

GRACE:

Sweetheart. Clive was only brought in at the last moment to replace a Lost Boy.

REED:

A child was mislaid?

GRACE:

Angel, do be quiet and listen. I remember his dancing squirrel in act 2. He enchanted the entire West End.

REED:

By imitating Vermin?

GRACE:

I was so proud this funny little chap took a shine to me in particular. He told me then it was his ambition to have the British theatre at his feet, he had no money, no breeding and yet it seemed no more unreasonable then this gawky school girl's thoughts on the scientific journals her father left all over the library. We became inseparably close. It seemed the most magical friendship in the world. Though of course it was all a particularly virulent strain of puberty.

REED:

What does his wife think of all this?

GRACE:

Julia? She's a lamb. Darling, you really must get it into your head that there is absolutely nothing to feel jealous of Stoj for.

REED:

I wish you didn't have to use those silly names. Honestly Grace you've got so many little secrets

together, I'm always going to feel shut out.

GRACE:

Angel.

REED:

Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sounding like such a grouch.

GRACE:

If you'd been there at the beginning.... It was so exciting. Turning the theatre world on it's head. Can you understand that? We seem a million miles away from that tiny little place in Hampstead where we performed his first play.

Sometimes, now I..

REED:

What? you what?

ARTHUR ENTERS.

GRACE:

Oh Artie darling, How wonderful to see you. I want you to meet someone. This is Reed Woodfield, a colleague of Daddy's from the university.

ARTHUR:

Ah, your the one who's been stealing Grace away from us these last few months. Honestly, she's practically a stranger now, we're destitute without her.

GRACE:

Artie you do talk nonsense. Reed this is Arthur. Artie, Prince Arthur actually. Fourth in line to the throne, and our beloved Duke of Kent. I point this out to him, Artie, because he's American and he might not speak to you with appropriate respect.

ARTHUR:

He'd better not speak to me with any respect what so ever.

REED:

It's an honour to meet you, your Royal Highness.

ARTHUR:

Please, please call me Artie. I hope I may call you Reed.

REED:

Why of course.

ARTHUR:

And you're an academic, Reed? what is your particular field of interest?

REED:

The teachings of St. Paul.

ARTHUR:

Gosh.

GRACE:

Reed's a real life crusader, aren't you darling?

REED:

Well.. um... My Grandfather bequeathed a large sum of money for the establishment of a foundation in Louisiana. The Damascus Institute. We hope to publish a number of texts putting a modern interpretation on St. Paul's writing. Hold seminars, courses, helping people apply his stamina to everyday problems.

GRACE:

Isn't it all deliciously American?

REED:

Artie, when someone you care for makes fun of you do you scold them or make love to them?

ARTHUR:

You're talking to a veteran and I still don't know.

GRACE:

Reed, Artie is Clive's lover.

REED TRIES NOT TO LOOK SHOCKED. DOESN'T SUCCEED.

ARTHUR:

A situation of which St. Paul might not have approved.

GRACE:

We apologise on his behalf.

ARTHUR:

Oh please don't, my father The King believes we all shoot ourselves.

GRACE:

Darling, don't you dare we need you for the Bridge. Reed, do close your mouth, it's not becoming and take a walk down by the river will you, angel, I want a word with Artie in private.

REED:

I... I.. very nice to meet you.

STILL STUNNED HE WANDERS OFF.

GRACE:

Isn't he adorable?

ARTHUR:

Well, he's certainly a dish.

GRACE:

Oh Artie I'm so happy. I love him so much. I've never felt like this about anyone before.

ARTHUR:

I can certainly see there's a lot of him to get excited about.

GRACE:

But it isn't just the way he looks. He's so.. I don't know. He understands me. The whole side of me I let go when I got caught up in the theatre. We talk long into the night. I feel challenged, inspired again. I haven't felt like this since I met Stoj.

ARTHUR:

Yes, but Grace, the teaching's of St. Paul!?

GRACE:

Oh that's just what he's paid to do. He thinks so deeply about so many things. It's all such a long way from.. from.. well, repeating the same lines night after night. That all seems so stale and pointless when I'm with Reed. Arty I'm thinking of leaving the theatre.

ARTHUR:

What!

GRACE:

He's asked me to marry him. To return to the states with him and help set up the foundation.

ARTHUR:

Grace no!

GRACE:

Why ever not?

ARTHUR:

What about Broadway? He'll go absolutely crazy. He'll, he'll.. Oh my God. You can't.

GRACE:

I have to. I... want to. I think.. I know it's what I want. I'll make Stoj understand.

ARTHUR:

But the new play, Baroque? It's a vehicle for the two of you.
This is unbelievable. When are you going to tell him?

GRACE:

I don't know. I haven't even told Reed I'm accepting him yet.

ARTHUR:

Please think again. Isn't there a compromise? Couldn't Reed work from London, New York even.

GRACE:

It wouldn't work.

ARTHUR:

You'd rather leave your friends, everything.

GRACE:

Of course not but...

ARTHUR:

You're kidding yourself if you think this isn't going to be bloody.

GRACE:

I know.

ARTHUR:

He'll fight you tooth and nail and fight dirty. He needs you and if you force him to admit that it won't be very pretty. He didn't arrive last night.

GRACE:

He said he might be late. Business.

ARTHUR:

We all know what that means.

GRACE:

(SYMPATHETIC) Oh Artie.

ARTHUR:

Sometimes, just sometimes I think maybe I don't love him so much. That it's just convenient to have fallen in love with a man who couldn't afford a scandal any more than I could. Especially after I made such a fool of myself with that boy in Paris but it isn't just that you know?

GRACE:

I know.

ARTHUR:

I'm twenty six years old and my only occupation is trying to get this terrible man to stay in love with me. What a ninny I am.

GRACE:

No.

ARTHUR:

I wish I could escape, like you.

GRACE:

Will you help me? Try and control him?

ARTHUR:

I'll try.

GRACE:

And you're not a ninny. There's nothing wrong with loving someone.

ARTHUR:

Thank you. I'll do everything I can.

ROSE (CLIVE'S NOW QUITE ELDERLY MOTHER) ARRIVES.

ROSE:

Hello my dears.

ARTHUR:

Good evening Mrs Gosling.

GRACE:
Did you enjoy your nap?

ROSE:
Oh yes thank you Grace. Have you seen that naughty son of mine?

ARTHUR:
I don't believe he's arrived yet. He had some business in London.

ROSE:
There's no stopping him is there?

ARTHUR:
(WITH A DOUBLE MEANING) Very seldom Mrs Gosling.

ROSE:
I worry for his health I really do. He was such a delicate little boy. I hope he makes it down for a bit of a rest. (TO ARTHUR) Oh. I believe Julia wants to ask you something about soup spoons.

GRACE:
Poor Julia.

ROSE:
Artie, run and sort it out there's a good boy.

ARTHUR:
I shall see you both later.

HE LEAVES. ROSE SITS WITH GRACE AND THEY LOOK OUT THROUGH THE FRENCH DOORS.

ROSE:
My goodness, look at the moon out there. So bright tonight. I say there's a young man in the garden. Is it a new friend of Clive's?

GRACE:
No, he belongs to me.

ROSE:
He's rather handsome isn't he?

GRACE:
I think so. He's an American.

ROSE:
That explains it then. They get a lot of air over there, marvellous air on the prairies, very bracing I should imagine, like Margate. But we shall have to pack our long-johns when we go. He doesn't look very happy does he? Swishing about with that stick.

GRACE:
I think he's rather confused.

ROSE:
Is he?

GRACE:
Shall I go and set him right about a few things?

ROSE:
I think you'd better dear or he'll have all the heads of those dahlias.

GRACE:
Well, there doesn't seem to be any sign of dinner, perhaps I will. Will, you be alright here on your own?

ROSE:
Oh yes, You run along but come back and see me later and we'll have a proper chat. We haven't seen you for a few weeks have we?

GRACE:
No. I may have some good news for you.

ROSE:
Ooh lovely. I'll look forward to that then.

GRACE LEAVES.

BRISLEY ENTERS.

BRISLEY:
Oh I'm sorry madame, I didn't realise there was anyone in here.

ROSE:
That's all right George, How's your aunty Gwenny getting on? Is she any better?

BRISLEY:
Yes thank you, madame. The family have moved her in with them at Copper Street. The Morton Street house was getting a bit damp for her.

ROSE:
'Course it would do. The houses was always damp. We had some good times there though.

CLIVE APPEARS. THEY DO NOT NOTICE HIM.

Those were the days. D'you know if I could turn the clock back I would. I'd love to see us all again like we were, not a care in the world. We was so poor but it didn't matter somehow 'cause you had all your family around you and not just your real family but the whole street was a family. Sometimes if we was a bit short at the end of the week I could send our Clive round to the neighbours and they'd send him home with a pot of dripping or a few vegetables and no one would begrudge it 'cause they knew you'd do the same for them the next week.

CLIVE:
Ah mother, taking another trip down memory lane are you?

Would you leave us please Brisley. A Mr DuTree and A Mr Reis have travelled down from London with me. Would you please see they're comfortable and inform Julia there'll be two more for dinner.

BRISLEY:

Very good sir.

HE LEAVES CLIVE AND RUBY ALONE.

CLIVE:

What a strange old lady you are. All the wonderful things we have now and it simply can't compete with the good old days begging scrapings of pork fat door to door. You are a caution.

ROSE:

Clive. I'm not saying this isn't all lovely. I'm so proud of you, you know that but I've got to have my memories haven't I?

CLIVE:

Memories. Ah yes memories. Well, let me join you for a moment tripping back through the mists of time, if I may. Let me see what I remember from those golden halcyon days. Morton street, Deptford. That loving family weren't quite so warm when the polish woman moved in, were they?

ROSE:

She was a tart.

CLIVE:

She was different that was all! A woman living alone. A foreigner, on outsider. I remember the talk. She was a witch, She was going to steal all the men away. She was a spy, do you remember?

HE IS BEGINNING TO LOOSE HIS TEMPER. **HE DOES NOT SHOUT. HE IS FAR MORE DANGEROUS THEN THAT.** HE SEETHES WITH ANGER UNDERNEATH.

HIS WORKING CLASS SOUTH LONDON ACCENT BEGINS TO SLIP THROUGH HIS IMMACULATE ARTICULATION.

Do you remember when those women held her down and set fire to her hair?

ROSE:

I wasn't there. I didn't do that.

CLIVE:

But it happened didn't it? On good old Morton Street. Perhaps you weren't there because it was a friday night and our old dad was pissed out of his head and beating the shit out of you. Do you remember that?

ROSE:

Stop it stop it.

CLIVE:

Perhaps you'd like me to be a good old fashioned Deptford boy. They love there old mums, don't they? but they give 'em a good pasting when it suits them.

ROSE:

Don't shout at me again Clivey. You know you don't mean it.

CLIVE:

All I ask is that you try and forget the animal you once were and the zoo we crawled out of, or at least that you keep it to yourself in the cess pool of your memory.

I have taught you how to speak and I have taught you how to behave but you won't even try.

If I hadn't dragged myself out of that pig shit we'd still be swilling around in it today. I will not have you pull me back down.

You ignorant old cow? Is this how you'll behave in New York? Jam butties and Mother Kelly's Door Step with the servants?

ROSE:

Clivey, I'm sorry I've let you down again. I try, really I try.

CLIVE:

JUST GO!

SHE DOES.

CLIVE PICKS UP THE PHONE AND DIALS.

Hello, box office? Archie is that you?... How did we do Last week.. Good... Listen, Archie, do you have a boy starting with you tomorrow morning, called Martin Lucas?.. you do?.. Get rid of him.. he's trouble. I was talking to Seb at the Criterion... Yes... Nonsense... There's plenty of people will do it for half what your paying. Don't enter into any discussion with him. Just give him his marching orders. See you tomorrow night.

RE-DIALS.

Yes, could I speak to chief superintendent Darcy Please? - George it's Clive Gosling here. I'm sorry to disturb you at home and on a Sunday too... Oh you were. Oh Good... I so enjoyed seeing you and Elizabeth the other evening. Do you know I never got a chance to ask you if you enjoyed the show... Really... I'm so pleased.

George. A bit of a sticky problem at the theatre. There's this man who's constantly hanging around, making my life absolute hell.. I wouldn't mind so much but he's an awful little nancy boy. Sending me letters every post, always at the stage door. if I were to give you his home address I wonder if you could make him disappear for a while. Obviously my name can't be involved but it shouldn't be too difficult to trip him up, you know what these poofs are like... you could? Oh I knew I could rely on you.. Thank you so much.. absolute discretion.. I have every confidence.

HE READS THE ADDRESS FROM MARTIN'S SCRIPT.

It's a Martin Lucas, address 43 Turner Mansions, Camberwell. Your an angel George. Thank you. Goodnight.

THE BUTLER ENTERS.

BRISLEY:

Excuse me sir. Cook, would like to know when she should serve dinner. (PAUSE) I think.

CLIVE:

How the hell should I know? When ever she likes. Can't my wife sort it out?

BRISLEY:

Mrs Gosling is in some agitation regarding an alleged rat dropping in the airing cupboard, sir.

CLIVE:

Are Mr Reiss and Mr DuTree settled?

BRISLEY:

Yes sir. Would that be Mr DuTree the actor sir?

CLIVE:

Yes, it would Brisley. Are you a fan?

BRISLEY:

I saw him once at the pictures sir. He's a big star and a very fine figure of a man.

CLIVE:

Brisley.

BRISLEY:

Yes sir?

CLIVE:

Come here.

THE BRISLEY COMES AND STANDS VERY CLOSE TO CLIVE THERE FACES ARE ALMOST TOUCHING.

SEXUAL ATTRACTION BETWEEN THEM.

PAUSE.

CLIVE:

Brisley?

BRISLEY:

Yes sir?

CLIVE:

Don't get above your self. Or I'll chew your bollocks off.

BRISLEY:

No sir.

THEY STAND THERE A WHILE LONGER.

CLIVE:

You can go now.

BRISLEY:

Yes Sir.

HE MOVES AWAY.

CLIVE:

(BACK TO NORMAL) Oh Brisley. Don't let me catch you indulging my mother like that again.

BRISLEY:

No sir.

HE GOES.

ARTHUR ENTERS.

ARTHUR:

Hello Clive.

CLIVE:

Hello Artie, I can't stop to talk now I've got guests.

ARTHUR:

I saw.

CLIVE:

Quite a coup eh? getting a movie star to play second lead in my first Broadway play.

ARTHUR:

Who is that with him?

CLIVE:

You know Simon. You must have seen him about.

ARTHUR:

How could you Clive? I know there's others but you've never brought anyone else here. In front of Grace, Julia, Grace's new -How can you in front of my friends.

CLIVE:

My friends Artie. Not yours. Who's friends are they?

ARTHUR:

They're yours Clive.

CLIVE:

Exactly. Mine, not yours because you're very, very boring Artie.

ARTHUR:

Clive!

CLIVE:

You're boring me now. I've a good mind to report you to the police. As of this morning Simon

Reiss will be running my financial affairs.

ARTHUR:
What!

CLIVE:
He convinced me last night at the club. He was an absolute angel, ordered me some champagne and told me about some plans he had for investing on The New York exchange. Absolutely convinced me I wanted in. I can't loose.

ARTHUR:
You'd trust a creature like that with your money?

CLIVE:
I've made telephone calls, checked it out, and it's so much easier to be interested in these tedious matters when your accountant's got the smartest arse in London. Imagine Artie, his backside is a million times more interesting then anything you will ever say, think or do.

ARTHUR:
Why are you talking like this to me? Last weekend you told me you loved me.

CLIVE:
Oh I do love you, you little toad. It's just you bore me to death sometimes with your anxious sweaty little face always staring up at me. You make me say these terrible things to you, you know. You push me into it. I'm only trying to get you to lighten up a bit.

ARTHUR:
I don't think I can stand any more.

CLIVE:
Is that a tear? I do believe it is a tear. Sweet heart why do you make me treat you like this. You know I love you. Why do you keep putting me through this?

ARTHUR:
Let that man steal all your money, make love to him if you want to but not here. Don't make me have to sit at the same table with him smirking about it. Please don't humiliate me in front of the others. Don't hurt me that much I beg you.

GRACE ENTERS.

GRACE:
Darling you're here! Thank heavens everyone's starving. And I have some rather devastating news.

CLIVE:
And I have some news for you too. We have a special guest for dinner. Our Co-star in New York.

GRACE:
Who is it?

CLIVE:
Wait and see.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 8

THAT EVENING. AFTER DINNER DRINKS. CLIVE, JULIA, GRACE, REED, ARTIE.

CLIVE:

Well, I think that was a great success. Thank you every one for making him feel welcome.

JULIA:

How exciting to meet a film star. He was a lot shorter then I imagined him. I suppose that's because they're so large up their on the screen.

CLIVE:

Don't be silly Julia. Could you tell mother, Mr Dutree and Mr Reis have gone back to London.

GRACE:

Oh yes do. Tell her it's only us now and we're all missing her terribly.

JULIA GOES OUT.

Stoj who was that awful little blonde creep?

CLIVE:

That was not a little creep, darling, that was my new business manager.

GRACE:

Well, we can all see the qualifications which attracted you but does he have anything more formal to recommend him.

CLIVE:

Trust me. I know what I'm doing.

GRACE:

Yes darling I know but you mustn't get business confused with **who** you are doing.

CLIVE:

Oh it's too boring to talk about. Let's talk about our movie star. I thought you and Roger got along famously, I can tell rehearsals are going to be a hoot. I've arranged we all sail together on the Queen Mary. We're going to storm Broadway I can feel it.

REED:

I don't understand.

GRACE:

Reed please. I haven't had a chance to tell him yet.

CLIVE:

Tell me what?

GRACE:

Nothing. I just want to let you all in on a wonderful, wonderful secret.

CLIVE:

Darling you know the house rule. No one is allowed secrets from me.

ARTHUR:

No one get's a chance, you can spot gossip a mile off.

CLIVE:

I do not gossip I merely take a healthy interest in the well being of my friends. I hope we can be friends Reed. Such an unusual name. Did you parents dwell by the river side?

REED:

It's not an unusual name where I come from.

CLIVE:

How fascinating. I notice you had very little to say to our other American guest. Perhaps you're not familiar with his work.

REED:

I'm afraid I've had little time for the moving pictures with my studies.

CLIVE:

What a shame. He has quite a following. I'm told there's great excitement about his appearing in Baroque.

REED:

Baroque?

ARTHUR:

Clive's new play for Broadway.

REED:

What's it about?

CLIVE:

It's set in Ruritania. I play the earnest young king, too concerned with affairs of state to notice that Grace, my fiancée, has had her head turned by an American visitor, played by Dutree. However faced with this challenge to my manhood and against all expectation I come up trumps and prove myself every bit as heroic and clever as he, before exposing him as a bounder and recapturing Grace's heart for ever.

REED:

Ruritania? I don't believe I've ever heard of it. Where is that exactly.

CLIVE:

Grace you must introduce us to more of your friends. Where have you been hiding Reed.

JULIA LEADS IN ROSE. SHE LOOKS SHAKEN.

ROSE:

Hello everyone.

EVERYONE SAYS HELLO.

REED:

Mrs Gosling. Please take my chair.

ARTHUR:

We were so sorry to hear you're not feeling well.

REED:

How is your headache now?

ROSE:

I fell over a coal scuttle.

CLIVE:

Mother your getting confused you've simply had a bad headache. I've been telling them all about it. You had one of your heads didn't you?

ROSE:

(QUIETLY) yes Clivey. I'm a silly old woman.

ARTHUR:

Not at all. you've got more energy then the rest of us put together. I think you'll out last the lot of us.

JULIA:

Clive, she says she fell over a coal scuttle. It's that new maid again. I've told you about her. I don't know what to do. I really don't. She's always leaving things lying about. I knew this was going to happen. There was bound to be a terrible accident and-

CLIVE:

Julia! Mother had a headache. Why don't you listen.

JULIA:

But that maid -

CLIVE:

STOP FUSSING. THERE IS NOTHING TO FUSS ABOUT.

ARTHUR:

How are you feeling now, Mrs Gosling?

ROSE:

Oh, don't you mind me.

GRACE:

Would you like a drink. Reed fetch Mrs G. a large gin and Tonic.

ROSE:

Just a small one.

ARTHUR:

Nonsense, we want you dancing on the tables before the night is out.

ROSE:

Well, I'll keep the bottle by me just in case I fancy a top up.

SHE DRINKS HERSELF INTO A STUPOR THROUGH THE SCENE.

Artie you're such a sweet heart. We must find you a nice young lady in America. You could marry a princess like in a picture book. Do they have Princesses in America?

CLIVE:

Artie doesn't need a princess, his whole life is a fairy story.

GRACE:

I agree with you Mrs G. we ought to find Artie someone nice to save him from the trolls.

CLIVE POKES HIS TONGUE OUT AT GRACE.

GRACE:

Well, now we're all here. I have an announcement to make. You've all met Reed. I brought him down here this weekend because I wanted you, my dearest friends, to see what a lucky girl I am. This magnificent creature and I are going to be married.

JULIA:

Oh that's wonderful Grace. I hope you'll be as happy as Clive and I.

ROSE:

Oh Grace. That's cheered me up, that has. D'you hear that Clivey?

CLIVE:

What wonderful news. This calls for celebration. Champagne.

ROSE:

Oh yes Champagne. I love it when the bubbles go up your nose.

JULIA:

Oh dear Clive, I don't know what that new champagnes going to be like. I had to switch to a new supplier because Harrisons were so late with the last delivery, you know what they were like, only I thought I'd better warn you. I don't want anyone to be disappointed.

CLIVE:

I'm sure we're all so happy for Grace we could drink horse piss.

REED:

Now look here!

GRACE:

It's all right Reed.

CLIVE:

You're not serious?

GRACE:

Why not? I love him.

CLIVE:

Oh you love him. How absolutely tip - top. Well, why not let's play that little game for a while shall we? come along Julia darling, let's break out that champagne. Grace is in love.

GRACE:

Spit your worst. I'm prepared for you. I love this man and I want to spend the rest of my life with him. You wouldn't believe how strong that makes a person.

CLIVE:

Or how smug. Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you but I couldn't actually give a shit. Marry Artie if you like as long as it doesn't interrupt the Broadway opening.

REED:

Grace isn't going to Broadway.

CLIVE:

What do you mean?

REED:

She's coming back with me to Louisiana.

CLIVE:

Is this true?

GRACE:

I'm sorry Stoj. It's the only way. I've got to break away somehow. If I don't now I never will.

CLIVE:

You ungrateful bitch. Why didn't I see this coming?

REED:

Don't you talk to her like that.

GRACE:

It's alright Reed. Yes, I'm sorry that did sound ungrateful. They've been wonderful years. Who could have asked for a more exciting time then we had climbing our way from nothing to all this but in the climb I've lost something. I have a mind. An intellect I want more for myself.

CLIVE:

What about me. Don't I count?

GRACE:

Of course you do. I hope, I really do hope we can come out of this friends.

CLIVE:

Friends! I'm risking everything on this new show and you tell me your giving it all up to spend your life in a yank swamp with a man so up tight he shits marbles.

REED:

That's enough! Grace we don't have to stand here and listen to this. This creature has no hold over you any more.

ARTHUR:

Please, please let's not end like this. Clive, please try and see that this hasn't been an easy decision for Grace. It isn't because she doesn't care about you. She just has to find herself.

CLIVE:

I'll tell you where she'll find herself, snivelling back to me and not very far down the line either.

ARTHUR:

Clive! You're making a fool of yourself.

CLIVE:

(DANGEROUS) What?

ARTHUR:

You're making a fool of yourself.

PAUSE.

CLIVE:

(SOFTLY) Yes, yes you're right. I'm just... I've known you for so long Poj. and suddenly... you won't be there any more. You'll be giving some other chap the strength that you've always given me. I'm jealous, damn it. I don't mind admitting it, I'm jealous of you Reed. You've stolen my best friend away.

GRACE:

Stoj. I'm sorry it had to be this way.

CLIVE:

Don't be. I hope you'll be very happy. Everything I've ever felt for you would be a lie if I didn't hope you'd be very happy.

GRACE:

Thank you. The play will be a wonderful success with out me. I've read it, it's your most brilliant. Any actress could be funny with those lines.

CLIVE:

Do you think so?

GRACE:

Certainly.

CLIVE:

Reed, I'm sorry for the things I said back there.

REED:

That's alright.

CLIVE:

And thank you Artie for pointing out I was making a fool of myself. We can always rely on you to spot that little character trait. You are, after all, the past master.

ARTHUR:

Thank you Clive.

CLIVE:

Reed, have you heard the story of Artie's last trip to Paris?

REED:

I don't believe I have.

GRACE:

Clive! We don't want to dig all that up again. Mrs G. I think you've had enough to drink now.

ROSE:

It's a celebration dearie, We're celebrating you and 'im.

CLIVE:

Mother eat the fucking bottle if you want to. Just keep quiet can't you?

JULIA:

Clive don't upset your mother she's had a nasty fall.

CLIVE:

Julia, I don't expect you've heard about Artie's trip to Paris either have you?

ARTHUR:

Clive please.

CLIVE:

Julia did you know Artie was a sodomite. Well, in theory. In practice of course it's a rather sorrier story.

GRACE:

CLIVE STOP THIS AT ONCE! if you're angry at me then deal with me you are not to take it out on Artie. He's never done anything to harm you. He loves you.

CLIVE:

Yes, so he keeps telling me. I don't know what he expects me to do about it.

JULIA:

Clive, what does Grace mean. Artie loves you?

CLIVE:

Just that my darling. Artie is in love with me, more then this, he lusts after me. He longs at every moment to slobber his fat tongue down my throat while I pull at his grey flabby nipples. That's why he's always down here week after week hanging around like a bad smell, boring us to death.

ROSE:

(PLASTERED) Why's nobody celebrating?

CLIVE:

Do you believe me Julia?

GRACE:

Julia pay no attention to him, help me put Mrs G. to bed.

CLIVE:

I said do you believe me?

JULIA:
(QUIETLY) No.

CLIVE:
Don't you?

JULIA:
No.

CLIVE:
Do you believe he comes down to see us because we 're his friends?

JULIA:
Yes.

ARTHUR:
Clive stop!

CLIVE:
Do you believe that?

JULIA:
Yes, yes, YES!

REED:
You've played your evil little game, now leave it.

CLIVE:
Why don't you ask him then, Julia? Go on ask him, ask him if he doesn't push his podgy little leg up to my thigh every time we sit down to dinner. Ask him if he loves me.

JULIA:
I'm going now. I don't understand what you're doing Clive. I don't understand any of this. I thought we were supposed to be happy. I thought we were going to be happy because Grace and Reed were getting married. I'm going now.

GRACE:
You go upstairs to your room. I'll bring you a hot drink.

JULIA:
Yes.

SHELL SHOCKED SHE LEAVES.

CLIVE:
Why don't we all have one? Mother?

ROSE:
Yes Clivey?

CLIVE:

Warming cup of Ovaltine? beef tea Reed?

GRACE:
(TO CLIVE) Why did you have to do that? Why?

CLIVE:
I know, how about a nice game of "In The Manner of The Word"?

GRACE:
Clive!

JULIA RETURNS UNSEEN.

JULIA:
Artie?

EVERYONE TURNS TO LOOK AT HER.

JULIA:
Artie?

ARTHUR:
Yes.

JULIA:
Are you in love with Clive?

ARTHUR:
Yes.

JULIA:
Have you... touched him?

ARTHUR:
Yes.

JULIA:
Does he like you to?

PAUSE.

ARTHUR:
He.. used to.

JULIA:
(SIMPLY) I thought you were my friend.

SHE GOES.

CLIVE:
Shall we just call that my wedding present.

REED:

What kind of animal are you?

CLIVE:

And what kind of fool are you that you can't see that she (GRACE) is just like me. Or if she isn't it's because can't be strong enough to be so honest.

GRACE:

No, no, I'm not like you. We're going now Clive. Artie I'm so sorry. If I thought this was how he'd get his revenge I never would have...

ARTHUR:

(SHATTERED) It doesn't matter. Write to me.

GRACE:

Yes of course I will. Clive, you're a genius. I hope for your sake that's enough.

SHE AND REED LEAVE.

CLIVE:

What does she mean? (DISMISSES THE THOUGHT FROM HIS MIND) Mother, can you hear me?

SHE'S IN A DRUNKEN DOZE. LOOKS AROUND HER.

ROSE:

Clivey what's happening?

ARTHUR:

Come along Mrs G. Let's get you to bed.

ARTHUR GOES TO HELP HER OUT BUT STOPS> SHE SLIPS BACK ASLEEP.

ARTHUR:

Clive, can we talk?

CLIVE:

Well, not tonight old chap. I think I should go and talk to my wife don't you?

ARTHUR:

Why don't you leave her alone!

CLIVE:

You really don't understand do you?

ARTHUR:

No, I don't. Why am I in this mess? How did it happen?

CLIVE:

Besides it's Sunday night. I always make love to my wife on Sunday night. You know the rules.

ARTHUR:

(QUIETLY) You're a monster.

CLIVE:

Only because I have to be.

CLIVE APPROACHES ARTHUR. ARTHUR STANDS AS IF HYPNOTISED BY A SNAKE. CLIVE KISSES HIM ON THE MOUTH. ARTHUR DOES NOT RESPOND BUT NEITHER DOES HE PULL AWAY.

CLIVE:

You know what to do if you don't like it.

CLIVE RINGS THE BELL FOR BRISLEY.

ARTHUR HELPS ROSE UP AND OUT.

BRISLEY ENTERS

CLIVE:

Ah Brisley, sorry to keep you up so late. I have some important instructions for you. Listen very carefully. I want you to pack the cabin trunks. I'm leaving for New York first thing in the morning. Please secure me a reservation. You're to load the car as quietly as possible so as not to disturb my mother or The Duke of Kent. Then I want you to telephone the theatre and tell Mr. Nelson he is to play the remainder of the run with the understudies. I'll write all this down for you. Any questions?

BRISLEY:

No Sir.

CLIVE:

Before you do all that would you take a bottle of champagne up to my wife and tell her I'll be joining her shortly. Not a word about my trip.

BRISLEY:

No sir.

CLIVE:

Thank you very much Brisley, goodnight.

BRISLEY:

Good night, sir.

BRISLEY EXITS. CLIVE ALONE.

CLIVE:

Why do you all have to be so weak. So very, very weak.

HE TAKES A SLOW DRAG ON HIS CIGARETTE. BLOWS THE SMOKE UP INTO THE AIR. WATCHES IT.

SLOW BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

MUSIC FADE INTO THE SOUND OF BOOING AND JEERING.

CLIVE STANDS IN A SPOTLIGHT LOOKING ASHEN FACED.

THE BOOING GETS LOUDER AND LOUDER.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 2

A HOSPITAL ROOM IN ENGLAND. A NURSE IS STANDING OVER WHAT MUST BE A BED. BUT WE CAN NOT SEE IT.

ARTHUR ENTERS WITH A BUNCH OF FLOWERS.

NURSE:

I'm sorry sir, you can't come in here now (RECOGNISES HIM) Oh I'm sorry Your Royal Highness.

ARTHUR:

Any improvement?

NURSE:

We thought she was waking a few days ago, sir but it was a false alarm. She's swallowed a lot of water, sir. The doctor thinks there may be some permanent damage.

Will, you excuse me if I go about my duties, sir?

ARTHUR:

Yes, of course.

SHE GOES, SNEAKING A GOOD LOOK AT THE PRINCE AS HE PULLS UP A CHAIR TO THE EDGE OF WHAT MUST BE THE BED.

ALONE.

ARTHUR:

You have to wake up. God wouldn't let you take your own life because he has delivered us himself. We have escaped and survived him so you have to wake up.

I'm getting married. I have to. Father is insisting. I know it will be based on a lie, I will only ever like... want the intimacy of men but I think she and I can be good friends and I think that may be better than sex, than the knives with which two people carve into each others hearts.

I hate him.

I wish, I wish... I wish I could stop thinking about him.

Are you thinking about him?

I'll get you out of this place.

Stop thinking about him, Julia.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 3

THE SOUND OF CLIVE BEING FUCKED BY A SURLY ITALIAN / AMERICAN.

A DELICATESSEN IN NEW YORK.

WHEN THE LIGHTS COME UP THEY ARE RECOVERING THEMSELVES.

WAITER:

Good. You call by again.

CLIVE:

You'll give me some food now?

WAITER:

Food? Food's expensive.

CLIVE:

I've just paid you haven't I?

WAITER:

Food's expensive. Call in again, then maybe.

CLIVE:

Listen you bastard. I haven't eaten for four days. You give me some food. You promised you would.

WAITER:

I didn't promise nothing. How much do you think your scrawny arse is worth anyway? A scrap of bacon rind? A lump of old cheese? some stale bread sticks maybe?

CLIVE:

Anything please. I'm so hungry.

WAITER:

The whole city's hungry. Do you think you're something special with your nice English accent?

CLIVE:

You scum.

WAITER:

Whose the scum here? Which of us has just had to sell his arse? What's happened to your nice

manners now? You didn't even say thank you. There are thousands of Americans got ruined in The Crash why should anyone help you? I remember you. You used to come in here in the old days. Hang round the actors.

CLIVE:

I am an actor. I am a playwright.

WAITER:

I remember now. Your play was a disaster, was booed off the stage, you made a big movie star look like a fool. Now nobody wants to hear your silly little stories about English princes, eh? Now, everybody's more interested in food in their bellies.

CLIVE:

Just a minute. You're Italian, perhaps you'll know what phthyrus pubis means.

WAITER:

No.

CLIVE:

I just can't get rid of them since I've been in your fair city. It's Latin for pubic lice. Enjoy, as you people say.

BLACKOUT.

Scene 4

GRACE AND REED'S VERANDA AT THE DAMASCUS INSTITUTE LOUISIANA.

THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

THE SOUND OF CICADAS.

REED IN HIS PYJAMAS. LOOKING OUT AT THE MOON.

GRACE COMES TO JOIN HIM.

REED:

I thought you were asleep.

GRACE:

No.

REED:

Look at it?

GRACE:

What?

REED:

It's just rubble.

GRACE:

It's not my darling. It's a building sight. We're going to build something wonderful here. A city of light.

REED:

I don't know any more. Just recently I..

GRACE

What's the matter?

REED:

How can I be inspired by St. Paul when his whole reason for doing what he did, his faith, is beyond my comprehension? Can't you feel it looking at the half finished class rooms, the piles of bills. It's all hollow.

GRACE:

Darling, It's been scarcely a year yet.

REED:

What have I brought you to?.

GRACE:

I'm happy just being with you. Please believe that. Let's go back to bed now.

REED:

Why can't I make love to you any more?

GRACE:

You just need to learn to relax. No one is judging you.

REED:

Before when we made love it was because we were happy together. Now, it feels like I'm throwing you a life line. I get so frightened I can't be enough for you.

GRACE:

Reed.

REED:

I wish I could be like him.

GRACE:

Who?

REED:

Your friend. Poj. The dancing squirrel. I wish I could do you a little dance, or write you a funny turn of phrase to make everything all right again.

GRACE:

You're getting tired now, your being silly. Let's go back to bed. What day is it tomorrow? I'm loosing track.

REED:

Tuesday.

GRACE:

Just a minute. Isn't it the twenty eighth. Artie's Wedding?

REED:

I believe so.

GRACE:

I hope it goes well for him.

REED:

Do you think Clive will make an appearance?

GRACE:

He couldn't be so cruel. Could he? I pray he'll just leave Artie alone now.

REED:

Has anyone heard from him?

GRACE:

His Mother wrote the other day. She says no one knows where he is. The last address she had was a hotel and that seems to have gone out of business.

REED:

The crash is terrible. Even out here you see the long faces and bloodshot eyes. We seem to be the only people actually spending money for miles around. At least we can help by creating some employment.

GRACE:

There you are you see. You're talking positively again.

REED:

You should have gone over for the wedding. You could have seen all your friends. You could have protected Artie if needed.

GRACE:

My place is with you. He understands.

REED:

This will all work out won't it?

GRACE:

Of course it will. What time is Hennersey coming?

REED:

He can't make it until midday. He has to supervise a delivery.

GRACE:

Do we have any other appointments before then?

REED:

No but The board members are waiting for a report on Gideon's quote.

GRACE:

That can wait for twenty four hours. Lets take the morning to our selves. When did we last lie in?

REED:

I don't know whether I could. The responsibility to-

GRACE:

Let's spoil our selves a little. We deserve it. Let's lie in bed and kiss and drink coffee and eat pots of Mo's hazelnut yogurt with spoon fulls of honey.

PAUSE.

REED:

I can't do it for you?

GRACE:

what?

REED:

I can't be a performing squirrel.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 5

A BLAST OF GLORIOUS MUSIC. ZADOC THE PRIEST?

THE ROYAL WEDDING.

ARTIE STANDS AT THE ALTER BESIDE HIS BRIDE. SHE AND ALL THE OTHER FIGURES APPEAR ANONYMOUS.

HIS THOUGHTS:

ARTHUR:

Please, please, please, please, please , please, please, please. Please let me be free of him.

ARCH BISHOP:

If any man know of any just impediment why this couple should not be joined in holy matrimony let his speak now or for ever hold his peace.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 6

LIGHTS UP ON GRACE AND CLIVE.

CLIVE:

Hello Grace.

GRACE:

Clive!

CLIVE:

Surprised to see me?

GRACE:

"I am never surprised on principal, It's a devastating shock to every one I meet and irritates them most agreeably."

CLIVE:

Darling! No one delivers Gosling quite as well as you.

GRACE:

Except of course Gosling.

CLIVE:

Of course. Well, who would have thought we'd end up playing Swamp Ville, Louisiana.

GRACE:

I think they're too sophisticated for us. No one seems to have turned up for today's matinee.

CLIVE:

Just you and I.

GRACE:

Just you and I.

CLIVE:

Then we shall play to the rhododendrums. What a lovely garden. It quite takes one back.

GRACE:

Doesn't it. This is Reed's family house. They've been here for generations. His great grandmother planned this garden.

CLIVE:

How odd it is, this oasis in the midst of acres of building sight.

GRACE:

When the centre is finished I shall hold court here.

CLIVE:

I have taught you well my child.

GRACE:

No, not like you. I shall be a benevolent ruler.

CLIVE:

Then I must be your Machiaveli least you perish at the hands of marauding neighbours and discontented peasants.

GRACE:

You look awful.

CLIVE:

Thank you darling. The land of opportunity has taken every opportunity to crush me. I have remained steadfastly resilient in the face of everything it can throw at me but have grown a little shabby from the fray.

GRACE:

I read about Baroque.

CLIVE:
Did you.

GRACE:
I'm sorry.

CLIVE:
Please don't be. As it turned out your presence could not have deflected fate. That prick.

GRACE:
Darling, to which organ are you referring?

CLIVE:
Roger DuTree. Wanker. Every scene became a battle between us for supremacy. The audience cheered him and booed me, which of course pushed us to new heights until the entire piece collapsed under the weight of his imbecile ego.

GRACE:
You would think he might have learnt a little more humility at your table.

CLIVE:
Quite but film stars only exist in the roles the public love them for, if you show them looking foolish or not coming through in the final reel the dream is shattered. People turn nasty when you shatter their dreams. It was booed off the stage. I was spat at in the street. The London profits were tied up in that show. I lost everything else in the stock market crash.

Every where you looked last year the republican slogan "A car in every garage and a chicken in every pot" Well, the car was hurtling towards the abyss and it ran over the chicken on the way. I hate the American's. I have a sneaking suspicion none of this would have happened if they hadn't persisted in talking in that silly accent and serving everything with a limp side salad.

GRACE:
Have you missed me?

CLIVE:
No.

GRACE:
I was frightened you'd turn up at Artie's wedding.

CLIVE:
What! Artie's got married?

GRACE:
Didn't you know?

CLIVE:
To whom? Not that Grenadier?

GRACE:
Don't be silly. A very sweet little German countess.

CLIVE:

My mother will be thrilled.

GRACE:

Clive, you must write to her, she's desperately worried.

CLIVE:

I didn't travel all this way to talk about my mother.

GRACE:

May I write and tell her I've seen you, that you're alright.

CLIVE:

You call this alright? You will not tell any one anything until I am ready to emerge like the phoenix from the ashes.

GRACE:

Does Julia know where you are?

CLIVE:

Not another word on the subject.

GRACE:

Clive, It's just occurred to me. You do know that Julia-

CLIVE:

ENOUGH! It troubles me what Julia's had to go through. I'll make it up to her.

GRACE:

Don't you care?

CLIVE:

Of course I care. Now, the question is how are you and I to get our selves out of this mess?

GRACE:

Just a minute I am not in a mess.

CLIVE:

Darling, I have allowed you to persist in this folly long enough. I have come to take you home.

GRACE:

This is my home.

CLIVE:

Really?

GRACE:

Yes really. I'm very happy here living and working with the man I love.

CLIVE:

Oh yes, of course. And how is the man you love?

GRACE:

He's very well. He's away this afternoon negotiating a tender for the concrete.

CLIVE:

The concrete. How absolutely fascinating. How you must long for his return to wander hand in hand through these arbours and wile a way the hours with tittle-tattle on preferred methods of tiling, damp coursing and grouting. How is he in that department? Getting a regular grouting are you?

GRACE:

Don't be so unpleasant.

CLIVE:

And don't be such a fool! Am I really supposed to fall for your Little Miss Davey Crocket routine? Darling, two years ago if you so much as broke a nail it laid you up for a week. It doesn't wash.

GRACE:

This was the choice I made and I'm going to see it through.

CLIVE:

You've had your fun. Life can't be one long hedonistic brick lay, my girl. It's time to work. As it turned out your stray from the fold was extremely well timed, you escaped the flying debris from my spectacular demise. The public's memory of you remain's glorious glowing and most importantly intact. It should be relatively easy for us to sell your return to The West End.

GRACE:

Now just a moment. I am not going back to London. Reed needs me here.

CLIVE:

For what?

GRACE:

I'm his wife.

CLIVE:

You're his drudge. Doesn't he respect you? Can't he see he's just using you?

GRACE:

How dare you? Hypocrite! What are you proposing then, if it isn't using me to revive your career.

CLIVE:

I just need a chance to prove I wasn't a passing fad. That's what they write about me now. If they write about me at all. Well, we're going to show them, we're going to return from the dead.

GRACE:

Haven't you heard a thing I've said?

CLIVE:

I won't listen to you for your sake.

GRACE:

Then work it out for yourself. People would laugh at us. There is nothing so ridiculous and ugly as yesterday's fashion. Don't you read the papers. Businesses, communities, family's ruined. Europe as well as here, there's talk of war before the decade's out. We were another world, about gaiety and innocence and naivety.

CLIVE:

But we're so young, we can lead the fashion again. We can change.

GRACE:

That is not what people will think when they see your name under the title.

CLIVE:

Then let's do someone else's play.

GRACE:

What?

CLIVE:

Yes. What if I were to find us a wonderful new play by a completely unknown writer. The darlings of the old world in a play about the new.

GRACE:

What are you talking about? what play?

CLIVE:

It's called... It's called... The second Hand Man. by... by.. It's by a box office clerk, used to work for us at the Apollo. Yes, yes that's it. You must read it at once, my darling, it's perfect. A simple story about goodness rewarded. It could be just what poor London wants to see now. I play the ruthless yet handsome captain of industry. You play the hard working shop girl, wrongly dismissed who softens and finally wins my heart by her perseverance and fortitude.

GRACE:

Darling, I don't know anything about shop girls.

CLIVE:

Well, we'll make her a debutante fallen on hard times. That doesn't matter. The fact remains that the ogre's heart is captured and love finds a way. Love not money. Because no one has any money now.

GRACE:

Clive listen to me. No.

CLIVE:

Why not?

GRACE:

I've left the theatre.

CLIVE:

But you're a star.

GRACE:

Was a star. You won't find a producer willing to take the risk. An unknown writer. Yesterday's

matinee idols.

CLIVE:

Leave that to me.

GRACE:

Clive, what are you planning?

CLIVE:

We'll produce it ourselves. We'll show them, get our name's up in lights where they belong and the public will come flooding back.

GRACE:

Where are you going to get that kind of money? Look at you. Look at that overcoat.

CLIVE:

I can find the money. Don't worry about that, but will you join me?

GRACE:

No Clive. It's a lovely idea but please believe me I am very happy here. I don't want anything else.

CLIVE:

Please.

GRACE:

I'll help you in anyway I can but not that. And I don't want Reed to know you were here. Things aren't on schedule he's terribly insecure at the moment.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 7.

THE SAME, A FEW MONTHS LATER. CLIVE TALKING TO REED.

CLIVE:

Is it safe to meet here?

REED:

Yes, Grace is away for the day. I've sent her into town to look at some tile samples.

CLIVE:

Nice treat for her.

REED:

(UNAWARE OF ANY IRONY) Yes. How have you been doing?

CLIVE:

Oh much better. Much, much better. When I want a drink I just focus in on what you've told me, about Saint Paul's strength.

REED:

And it works?

CLIVE:

Sometimes. I'm still... well, I still... I need such strength. Last night I succumbed. I drank a bottle of Bourbon and collapsed into a ditch somewhere.

REED:

Where did you get the money from?

CLIVE:

I... I can't tell you. I'm too ashamed.

REED:

Please. We agreed if I'm to help you with your problem you have to put your trust in me.

CLIVE:

I'm frightened.

REED:

What of?

CLIVE:

I'm frightened if you knew how wicked I was that you wouldn't help me any more.

REED:

You mustn't think that. The whole point of this centre is that we can help people. I thank God that in your hour of need he sent you halfway across the world to me, a man whom once I hated, laid low with the demons of drink. Just when I was beginning to question the worth of what we were doing here. God sent you to test me. To be a challenge. I can hardly keep from telling Grace.

CLIVE:

Oh, but you mustn't. You don't want her to see me like this. I want to be able to point to you and say this is the man to who gave me life and hope again. How happy we're going to make her. I just hope it's not too late.

REED:

What do you mean?

CLIVE:

I know Grace so well. When things start to go wrong she becomes distracted. It's not that she's fickle it's just that her mind is so brilliant, how can she tie it down. Harness it to the mediocre.

REED:

Yes. I feel that.

CLIVE:

But she loves you. She loves you so much.

REED:

But I don't know why. I can't work out what it is she gets from me. If I could just get hold of that in my mind I'd feel so much more secure.

CLIVE:

But it seems so obvious to me. You're a tower of strength. Without your guidance over the past few months I don't know where I'd be. She must feel that too.

REED:

I don't know.

CLIVE:

And the joy's of married life? The things only a husband can bring to a wife, that must sustain her.

REED:

It doesn't. I... can't... I... Please you have to help me, you have to help me keep her here.

CLIVE:

You don't need me.

REED:

I do. I.. I'm not a husband to her. I can't take control. Our life together used to be so passionate, I would look down at her in my arms and I knew I had so much to offer her. Now when we're alone together thoughts of failure flood my mind.

CLIVE:

What would Saint Paul do in such a case as this?

REED:

He was a saint.

CLIVE:

That must have been a great comfort.

REED:

He had known Jesus.

CLIVE:

But we can all know Jesus. You've taught me that. I, who took pleasure in sin.

REED:

God will forgive you.

CLIVE:

He forgives everything. He has blessed you with an extraordinary woman who can hold two thousand people in the palm of her hand and make them laugh and make them cry. How does she look, my darling girl? I haven't seen her since I left England.

REED:

She's still beautiful. So, so beautiful but...

CLIVE:

But what?

REED:

She's tired. I can see she is. And I made her that way.

CLIVE:

I remember that look so well. She would give her all to rehearsals until at dress rehearsal she was like a waif but I never worried because I knew that once she was up there on that stage, bathed in soft pink light in front of all those who adored her, she would come alive again. And she always did.

REED:

But not here. There is nothing to offer her here but earth and rubble.

CLIVE:

But there will be. You're building her a palace. If you can keep her until the work is done.

REED:

I must. I can't bare to loose her. You know her better then anyone, please help me?

CLIVE:

But I'm sure she would never leave you. That's so clear from all her letters to me this past year. Her love for you shone out. She states over and over again that life may be hard but she will grind away at the drudgery because she promised it to you.

REED:

She used that word? She said drudgery?

CLIVE:

But there were other words too - "commitment", "the marriage contract", "her obligations".

REED:

She promised me she didn't think of our life like that.

CLIVE:

She want's to be with you. That's clear. She loves you.

REED:

I've turned her into a drudge, haven't I?

CLIVE:

No.

REED:

Then why did she write those things then?

CLIVE:

Well, if sometimes she feels that way it's only until the centre's finished.

REED:

But until then. What can I do?

CLIVE:

How I wish I knew what to suggest but what do I know of this world? I could only help her in my world, her world, the theatre.

REED:

If only...

CLIVE:
What?

REED:
No, it's too ridiculous.

CLIVE SMILES CHARITABLY

If only... there were... some way she could return to the stage. Until the centre is finished.

CLIVE:
But..

REED:
Do you think it could work? Do you think it could make her happy?

CLIVE:
I don't know. This is all so sudden I... Let's think this through. Grace in London, you here, both building dreams in the way that each of you knows best. You could work here free from guilt, planning for the day when she can return from London, not as she is now but as the beautiful creature you fell in love with and she would fall in love with you all over again seeing what you had created for her. I think it might just work.

REED:
You must take her away. Take her back to all that, until I can finish the centre. Take her away until I can be worthy of her.

CLIVE:
You are worthy of her.

REED:
No.

CLIVE:
Besides what could I do? I'm penniless.

REED:
But you used to put on plays. You used to be the most important man in the London Theatre.

CLIVE:
That was then. I had the money to create her roles to shine in.

REED:
But you must know people, people who could give her a job.

CLIVE:
Playing supporting cast. She'd hate it.

REED:
Put her in a play. Make her happy. I'll pay what ever it takes. Can you do that?

CLIVE:

There is a play. I know she'd be perfect in it. A play about love conquering evil.

REED:

And she would be the heroine. I want to see her on stage again.

CLIVE:

She wouldn't listen to me. She needs you to tell her that it's what you want. If you're sure it is.

REED:

Oh yes.

CLIVE:

If only I could win this battle with alcohol.

REED:

You can. you must. Think of Saint Paul let him give you strength.

CLIVE:

I don't know.

REED:

Let's say a prayer together.

THEY KNEEL.

Lord, bless our endeavours. Look down on us kindly and... and..

CLIVE:

(CONTINUING THE PRAYER) Lord help us to climb back out of the mud in which you hurled us. To come out stronger, fitter, harder. Help us to find that bountiful love that I so needed when I was a child and you betrayed me. Help us to feel some of the strength with which you sent everything I achieved in spite of you crashing down. How about coming into bat for our team now. I'm at Damascus, Lord. The Damascus Institute U.S.A. Where are you? Are you listening. Or do I still have to do this alone?

REED:

(GENTLY TO CLIVE) Of course he's listening. He will decide what's best.

CLIVE:

Best for me?

REED:

For everyone.

CLIVE:

Of course, best for everyone.

REED:

Guide us Lord, Give us strength. Amen.

CLIVE:

Amen.

REED:
Do you feel stronger now?

CLIVE:
I am going to be so strong.

Now we must make plans. I'll need some money to return to London. We must talk to theatres, designers, make arrangements with our banks. Don't speak of any of this to Grace yet. In a few months time I will invite her to join me. She must never know we planned this. That we've even met.

REED:
I couldn't lie to her.

CLIVE:
Then this will fail. All I require you to do, when I make her the offer is encourage her to take it up. If you tell her you're paying for this it may hurt her pride and she might never accept.

REED:
I see that, of course.

CLIVE:
I hope I can persuade her.

REED:
I don't think it will be too difficult. God is with us.

CLIVE:
Do you trust me?

REED:
I trust you.

CLIVE:
Then perhaps he is.

REED:
Thank you my friend.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 8

A SMALL BUT TIDY FLAT IN EAST LONDON. A MONTH LATER.

EVIE LUCAS IS A HANDSOME WOMAN IN HER LATE TWENTIES.

EVIE:
Won't you come through? I'm sorry it's such a mess.

CLIVE:

Thank you Mrs Lucas.

EVIE:

I use my maiden name now. Bryant. But please call me Evie.

CLIVE:

Allow me to tell you a little more about my self. My name, as I say is Clive Gosling I-

EVIE:

Oh I know all about you Mr Gosling. I used to be a theatre Usherette when I was younger and Martin was full of talk of you. The day they arrested him he was due to start in your box office.

CLIVE:

Yes of course. The whole thing was most unfortunate. How is he?

EVIE:

Oh I don't keep in touch with him Mr Gosling. I can't bare to. not after what he done. I suppose you heard what he was arrested for did you?

CLIVE:

Yes, yes I did.

EVIE:

It's disgusting, unnatural.

CLIVE:

As you say perhaps it is best if we draw a veil over it and face the future.

EVIE:

I haven't had much of a future Mr Gosling. I was expecting our Amy when it all happened. It's not easy holding down any kind of job with a small baby around.

CLIVE:

It must have been awful for you.

EVIE:

Have you got any children Mr Gosling?

CLIVE:

Children? No. I'm so busy I'm afraid I don't have time to think about a home life. Now, I have some good news for you, Evie. Your husband wrote a play.

EVIE:

That load of rubbish.

CLIVE:

Actually it's very good. I want to produce and star in it. It could earn you a lot of money.

EVIE:

What would I have to do?

CLIVE:

Nothing. Simply sign this document granting your permission in your husband absence. I have a cash advance with me now. Three hundred pounds.

EVIE:

Three hundred! and all I have to do is sign that piece of paper!

CLIVE:

And it's only the beginning.

EVIE:

I can't believe it.

CLIVE:

Will you sign?

EVIE:

Yes, of course.

SHE SIGNS.

CLIVE:

Congratulations.

EVIE:

I don't know how to thank you.

CLIVE:

You deserve it. You've had a run of bad luck. It must have been awful all that time without a husband.

LONG PAUSE HE STARES AT HER.

EVIE:

Why are you looking at me like that Mr Gosling?

CLIVE:

It must be so dreadfully lonely for you with your husband in prison.

EVIE:

Sometimes, but I wouldn't have him back. Not after what he's done.

CLIVE:

Of course not but he was a handsome young man. You must miss the company of a handsome young man and I've been so busy I haven't seen my wife in such a long time. She's down in the country you see. We all have needs. Do you understand what I'm saying Evie?

EVIE:

I'm sure I don't know what you mean Mr Gosling.

CLIVE:

I believe we have two existences Evie our head and our body. Some times when we are working hard with our heads it is easy to neglect the wants of our bodies. We forget the satisfaction the touch of another can bring. The Solace, the thrill, the ecstasy. How long is it Evie since your whole body thrilled with the touch of another.

EVIE:

I'm not used to this kind of talk Mr Gosling.

CLIVE:

(SUDDEN MOOD SWING) That makes me angry Evie. Very angry to think that persons unknown have made you ashamed of your wants, ashamed of your beautiful body. It should be worshipped. I worship it Evie, I desire it. Would you let me kiss you?

SHE IS FRIGHTENED.

EVIE:

I couldn't allow that Mr. Gosling. What about your wife?

CLIVE:

My wife is dead to me Evie. I haven't seen her for years. You poor child. Bullied into putting the wants of another woman before your own. And by whom?

EVIE:

It wouldn't be right.

CLIVE:

Not right? To allow ourselves the honesty of what we feel? Shall we suppress it then? deny our bodies the chance to express our passions? Passion Evie. Do you know that word?

EVIE:

Yes.

CLIVE:

Say it Evie, form the word on your lips and give it breath.

EVIE:

Passion.

CLIVE:

Again.

EVIE:

Passion.

CLIVE:

Again.

EVIE:

Passion.

CLIVE:

How do you feel Evie?

EVIE:

I... I don't know.

CLIVE:

What do you want?

EVIE:
Please no...

CLIVE:
What do you want Evie? Tell me what it is your body wants.

EVIE:
(VERY QUIETLY) I want....

CLIVE:
Ask me. Ask me for what you want.

EVIE:
I want you to touch me.

CLIVE:
Would you like me to fuck you?

EVIE:
Yes.

CLIVE:
Ask me.

EVIE:
Will you fuck me?

CLIVE:
Louder.

EVIE:
(FRIGHTENED, QUIETLY) Will you fuck me...? Please.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 9

IN AMERICA, REED ENTERS A DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM.

DOCTOR:
Reed, come through to the consulting room. What can I do for you?

REED:
Doctor, you have to help me, my skin is on fire. It's like my body is drying up, cracking like parched earth. Around my wrists and hands, all over my legs, a terrible itching.

DOCTOR:
Show me your hands

REED DOES.

Ah ha. You see those little white sacks between your knuckles. That's the eggs.

REED:

The what?

DOCTOR:

Phthyrus Pubis.

You have Pubic lice.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 10

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

ARTIE ALONE.

HE LOOKS TERRIBLE.

HE ROLLS UP HIS SHIRT SLEEVE, EXPOSES A VAIN AND INJECTS HIMSELF WITH MORPHINE.

ARTHUR:

He's back. It didn't take him long to find me. There were no words he just grabbed me and forced me down. I'd forgotten.

I used to think it was passion.

One day he took me from the front and I saw his eyes.

It isn't love, it's subjugation, claiming me.

No matter how he hurts me I don't struggle.

I am itching all day and all night. I take Morphine to help me bare it.

HE INJECTS HIMSELF WITH MORPHINE.

A FOOTMAN ENTERS.

FOOTMAN:

Count Otto Von-Seisser is here to see you sir.

ARTHUR:

(HE IS DISTRACTED FROM THE MORPHINE) What? oh yes, yes. Send him in.

OTTO IS SHOWN IN. A HANDSOME ARYAN MAN IN HIS EARLY THIRTIES.

OTTO:

Your royal highness.

ARTHUR:

Please call me... call me...

OTTO:

I would like it very much if I could call you cousin. It is a very great honour that one of our house should marry into the English Royal Family.

ARTHUR:

Oh, well, yes. Thank you. She's a sweet girl. Sweet, sweet girl.

OTTO:

Quite so.

ARTHUR:

Perhaps you'd like some refreshment. Whisky?

OTTO:

No cousin. I don't drink alcohol.

ARTHUR:

Don't you? Well, best thing, what. Keep a clear head.

OTTO:

I prefer not to pollute the body.

ARTHUR:

Yes. Well, yes.

OTTO:

Are you a sportsman cousin?

ARTHUR:

Umm, no not really. Bit of rugger when I was at school, most miserable time of my life. Not much since then.

OTTO:

Rugger. What is this please?

ARTHUR:

Oh it's a game. We Brits play. Your chaps have to transport a ball, well, not a ball more of a large leather egg shaped thing right to the other side of the field through some other chaps, who at the same time are trying to get it, the leather egg, back the other way. It's awfully physical.

OTTO:

How strange.

ARTHUR:

Yes I suppose it is when you think about it. I should imagine you're a bit of an athlete are you Otto? You look a bit of an athlete.

OTTO:

I have had the honour of representing my country.

ARTHUR:

That must be very nice for you. Are you representing your country on this trip or is it a purely social visit to Mitzi and I?

OTTO:

Oh, it is not official in that I do not come at the behest of my government.

ARTHUR:

Well, how pleasant. Perhaps you would like to come to the theatre with us tomorrow night. Some friends of mine are opening in a new play. There's a big party afterwards. Would it interest you to see a London first night?

OTTO:

I'm afraid I should seem out of place. I have spent very little time outside the hard discipline of the military academy and the training camp. The decadent life seems very alien to me.

ARTHUR:

Then you certainly must come. We'll see if we can't find you a pretty girl.

OTTO:

I think not.

ARTHUR:

No please, I insist. You're our guest. Aren't you staying at the Savoy? That's where the party is. I'll send over, make sure they've got some lemonade in.

OTTO:

My visit is not entirely for pleasure.

ARTHUR:

No? Oh well if we ask them for particularly bad lemonade then you won't get too carried away.

OTTO:

I am also in London to represent a particular organisation.

ARTHUR:

Oh yes?

OTTO:

Things are changing in Germany, a new mood. I don't know how much of this has reached your shores.

ARTHUR:

Well, I like to keep in touch. Mitzi's filled me in on what you chaps get up to. A lot of hunting I gather. We hunt of course but you have much bigger mountains I think.

OTTO:

My half sister knows very little of what goes on. She has been sheltered from the realities of German life. My country's spirit was smashed, cousin. Our back was broken by the conditions your allies imposed upon us at the end of the war.

ARTHUR:

Bad business.

OTTO:

Quite so. A bad business. A once great nation lay sprawling on it's back, it's underbelly exposed to parasites. Maggots came, buried deep, ate there way to it's heart, cousin. There are an ever growing number of us who want to tear the maggots out. Dig deep and pull them out.

ARTHUR:

It all sounds rather painful.

OTTO:

Pain is not important. It cost what it costs. If we need money to spread the word then we will find money.

ARTHUR:

Who are these maggots?

OTTO:

Every bank, every committee, every university, every high street has in its midst non-Germans. People who have no right to our home, yet who feed off us. Aliens, communists, Judases. These are the people who get rich whiles real German children go hungry. Can you understand how much that hurts us?

ARTHUR:

It must be very distressing.

OTTO:

You see, I knew you would understand. It makes by blood boil, but I am from the aristocracy, I can afford such sensibilities. My fellow countrymen in the streets they can not. They have been down trodden for so long. For them there is no way out. But a man has appeared in our midst. An ordinary man, a little man but a man of such vision that he must be heard. When his voice sounds in every German heart then we can begin to rebuild.

ARTHUR:

I see. And you're an admirer of this ordinary little man?

OTTO:

Why certainly. Once you have heard him speak you can not fail to be touched, to understand the urgency of what we must do. We are giving our children back what is rightfully theirs.

ARTHUR:

Are things really so bad in Germany?

OTTO:

I am not a poet cousin. If I were a poet I could give a voice to the sights I have seen and you would weep.

ARTHUR:

Gosh.

OTTO:

Germany is a big country, cousin. Much bigger then Britain. We have much work to do. You could be a part of the work.

ARTHUR:

I? But... well, if what you say is true then obviously I sympathise but I'm not sure what-

OTTO:

We need money, cousin. We need friends like you all over the world who can provide us with the funds we need.

ARTHUR:

I have a very small allowance, I doubt if-

OTTO:

You have friends here who could be our friends and you can reach out for us to so many people. A member of the English Royal Family, what door is not open to you? what mind closed? you could do us so much good.

ARTHUR:

I'm sorry I can't get involved. You don't understand, we can not be seen to be involved in politics.

OTTO:

I am not asking you to shout Herr Hitler's name from the roof of your Buckingham palace. We do not want a sensation that will be over as soon as it is begun. We must to build something stronger than that, that will go on and on. That will change the shape of Europe.

ARTHUR:

Of Europe? Not just Germany?

OTTO:

No, yes. I don't know. It's not important. The important thing is that I am inviting you to play a part in the future.

ARTHUR:

I'm sorry. It's all too complicated for me. I can't.

OTTO SCOOPS UP THE MORPHINE GEAR.

OTTO:

You prefer to find a future polluting your body with morphine?

ARTHUR:

It's to stop the itching. All day long I can't stop itching. You don't understand.

OTTO:

I understand that you are a looser, a nobody, a nothing.

ARTHUR:

Don't talk to me like that. It's how he talks to me. I need drugs to escape from people like you. Bullies. All my life I've been bullied.

OTTO:

Then stand up for yourself. We will help you, make you strong. Stand with us. Help us build tomorrow.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 11

ON STAGE AT THE PALACE THEATRE. CLIVE AND GRACE SING.

People like us,
We'll always be together
People like us
No matter what the weather
When skys are gloomy
We'll chase away the rain
I hold you to me
And life is gay again.

People like us
We'll have a happy ending
People like us
I feel success impending
Some people doubt us
And laugh at every flop
They talk about us
But we'll come out on top.

People like us
Don't underestimate us
People like us
life can't intimidate us
We've got our lines right
We're waiting in the wings
To take the spotlight
In what tomorrow brings.

People like us
There's nothing to discuss
We're smiling now because
People like us.

BLACK OUT.

Scene 12

LIGHTS UP ON THE GARDEN OF CLIVE'S COUNTRY HOUSE.

ROSE, CLIVE'S MOTHER PUSHES A WHEEL CHAIR. IN IT SITS HIS WIFE JULIA. WE CAN TELL BY THE WAY SHE SITS THAT HER BRAIN HAS BEEN DAMAGED.

ROSE:

There now, look at the lovely roses just like last year. We're home again. Nicer than that horrid hospital. Even the nice one Artie got for you. There's nothing like your own home is there? You feeling glad to be home?

Artie had to pay lot's of money to get it back. He's good to us isn't he?

Good Old Artie.

He's a proper Prince isn't he?

Like in the picture books I used to read our Clive. He used to cheer when the prince killed the monsters.

Soon Clive and Grace will be down and everything will be back to how it was before.

I wonder why they didn't come down last weekend. I expect they're very busy. But this weekend they'll come and see us, eh?

Can you understand what I'm saying? I don't think you can?

Would you like me to read you a story?

Your not much company are you? A poor thing what fell in the river and then swallowed so much of it, it washed her out between the ears. How you used to chatter. I used to hide when I saw you coming. Now I'd give anything in the world to hear another voice but me own.

What if he doesn't come down this weekend. What if he doesn't come and see us ever again.

Have you frightened him away with your dribbling and your farting?

I'll go and see him. I'll tell him we need him down here with us. It'd do you good to see him as well wouldn't it?

I had a letter from Grace. It's the first night tonight. That's very important isn't it? And there's a big party at The Savoy. Imagine that My Clive the toast of The Savoy. Please God, let my baby come and see me soon.

BLACKOUT

Scene 13

THE SAVOY.

A BELL BOY SHOWS CLIVE AND OTTO INTO A BEDROOM AT THE SAVOY.

OTTO TIPS HIM A HUGE AMOUNT OF MONEY.

CLIVE SNATCHES IT BACK AND HANDS OVER A MUCH SMALLER SUM.

OTTO:

Don't worry about him. They know to be discreet. Why do you think the Savoy keeps all these bedrooms so occupied at these prices?

THE BELL BOY LEAVES.

FROM BEHIND, CLIVE UNDRESSES THE TOP HALF OF OTTO.

OTTO TURNS AND TRIES TO KISS HIM.

CLIVE:

No. I don't want you yet. I'm still buzzing. Pour me some champagne.

OTTO DOES.

CLIVE SITS IN A CHAIR. OTTO SITS ON THE FLOOR BETWEEN HIS LEGS. THEY SIP THE CHAMPAGNE.

CLIVE:

So you've been reeling off all this Nazi bollocks to Artie have you? And he agreed to everything I suppose?

OTTO LOOKS UP AT CLIVE.

CLIVE:

Well, I wouldn't hold your breath. I've met more politically minded stage weights than that man.

OTTO IS VERY DRUNK. TOO DRUNK TO REALLY TAKE IN WHAT IS BEING SAID. HE RESTS HIS HEAD ON CLIVE'S KNEE. CLIVE PLAYS WITH HIS HAIR.

CLIVE:

Did you enjoy the play?

OTTO:

Ja.

CLIVE:

I'm glad to hear it. Everyone thinks it's mine of course no one believes it's by that poor bastard.

Did you hear them cheer? Twelve months ago they booed and spat at me. I had nothing, my career in tatters. In twelve months I'm back on top again. Clever wouldn't you say?

But not as clever as your Herr Hitler will need to be.

When I was little my father would beat up my mother. One day when he was roaring around the house and we knew that she was in for a good thrashing, I said something that made him laugh. And then he stopped and I could see him taking stock of what he was about to do, he stood there for a moment frozen in time and then his face crumble and he began to sob but my mother, she didn't praise **me** for how clever **I'd** been, she took **him** in her arms and held **him**. I watched them kissing through the window.

So I knew then that changing things isn't enough Otto. You have to make people grateful. Even the people you hurt. Especially the people you hurt.

Of course **I** only want to write light comedy, you want to take over the world.

When I've finished this champagne I'm going to throw you on to that bed over there and hurt you until you beg me to stop.

And do you know something? You'll enjoy it.

Now, can you're Herr Hitler do that I wonder?

How will he be remembered?

The world turns, fashions may change but set the charming cad to work, make his eyes flash, his teeth sparkle and they'll shriek with delight as he get's away with murder.

BLACK OUT.

END OF PLAY