

# **EXCELLENT BEAUTY**

**A collection of short plays**

For Lisbeth, Chris, Jenny and J.J.

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# HOW TO AVOID A TRAGEDY

The characters:

Larry (white male), in his fifties  
Oliver (black male), in his forties  
Henry (white male), in his thirties  
Delia (white female), in her twenties

The set: bare stage, except where specified.

NOTE: Music should be played between the scenes.

Instead of leaving the stage, the actors might change the set and their costumes in full view of the audience.

*How to Avoid a Tragedy* won the Hydrae Prize 2003, and was first performed by Hydrae Productions at the Tabard Theatre, London, in June 2003 with the following cast:

Henry: alternately Adam Blake & Adrian Peck  
Larry: Silas Hawkins  
Delia: Rebecca Nancarrow  
Oliver: Gabriel Sanguinetti

Director: Adrian Peck  
Costume design: Ceres Dandridge  
Stage Managers: Zyg Staniaszek & Nick Wharf  
Lighting: Eric Young

**Scene 1: THE MOOR THE MERRIER**

*(Bare stage. LARRY and HENRY are static, OLIVER is pacing. They are all dressed in Elizabethan costume.)*

LARRY: It's crazy, Oliver.

OLIVER: She's done nothing wrong!

LARRY: That's beside the point.

OLIVER: It's the whole point!

LARRY: If you don't like the job, you don't sign the contract.

OLIVER: If you don't take the job, you can't change things.

LARRY: Henry, talk some sense into him.

HENRY: You're saying that at some point we go our own way.

OLIVER: Yes.

HENRY: On the premise that great art goes against all expectations, he's right.

LARRY: You're as mad as he is!

HENRY: I know a hawk from a handsaw.

LARRY: And do you know a contract from an application form?

*(Enter Delia, also in Elizabethan costume.)*

DELIA: Hi, everybody!

*(General greeting.)*

You're looking very conspiratorial.

*(She kisses Oliver and Larry formally, and Henry less formally. There is an awkward silence.)*

Did I say something?

LARRY: Oliver doesn't want to kill you.

DELIA: Oh! That's very sweet, Oliver.

LARRY: He's serious,

OLIVER: I want us to live happily ever after.

DELIA: How, Oliver?

OLIVER: I haven't worked it out yet.

HENRY: I can see it. I know how it can be done. You could be onto something really big here, Oliver. They sit down and wait for the usual story, and then – wham! We hit them with something totally different. It could be a new art form.

*(Oliver shrugs modestly.)*

DELIA: So what happens?

HENRY: I'll show you. Put your wig on, Larry.

*(Larry, shaking his head, puts on a wig, which makes him look younger.)*

LARRY: I do this under protest,

HENRY: We have noted it well.

OLIVER: There is a problem, Henry. I know what I don't want to do, but I don't know how not to do it.

HENRY: Lay thy finger thus, and let thy soul be instructed. *(To Larry:)* Look to your wife.

LARRY: Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio.

Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure.

I would not have your free and noble nature

Out of self-bounty be abus'd; look to't.

I know our country disposition well:

In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks

They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience

Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.

HENRY: Et cetera, et cetera.  
*(He motions Larry to withdraw, and Delia to enter.)*

OLIVER: Look where she comes.  
 If she be false, O! then heaven mocks itself.  
 I'll not believe it.

HENRY: There's the vital moment! You've heard the story. Now you're face to face. You have the choice. Do you now dissemble, or do you tell her what Iago said?

OLIVER: I tell her.  
*(Henry nods.)*  
 How now, Desdemona,  
 Iago has been speaking of strange matters.

DELIA: What sort of matters?

OLIVER: That thou art a whore,  
 And sleeping in the arms of my friend Cassio.

DELIA: Me? A whore? With Cassio? Did he say Cassio?

OLIVER: Ay, Cassio. Of course, I don't believe it,  
 But let me hear thee say it is not true.

DELIA: It is not true.

OLIVER: I'm glad to hear thee say it.

DELIA: I'll say it once again. It is not true.

OLIVER: And once again I'm glad to hear thee say it.

DELIA: Then shall I say it again?

HENRY: This could go on all night. You must have proof!

OLIVER: I must have proof! But how can there be proof  
 Of something that has never taken place?  
 Perhaps I need once more to see Iago.  
*(Henry gestures frantically towards himself.)*  
 Or better still, to speak with Cassio.  
 Cassio!

HENRY: I thought you'd never ask.  
 I'm here, my Lord. Forgive my drunkenness.  
 Grovel, grovel. What's your Lordship's pleasure?  
*(Oliver looks puzzled.)*  
 Your Lordship called me. Wilt thou ask a question?

OLIVER: *(cottoning on)* Iago says that thou and Desdemona  
 Are having an affair. She says you're not.  
 What sayest thou?

HENRY: No such luck, my Lord.  
 Your wife is truer than the truest truth.

OLIVER: If she is truer than the truest truth,  
 Iago's falsier than the falsest falsies.

HENRY: Send for him, sir, and we'll expose his falsies.

OLIVER: Iago!  
*(Larry 'enters'.)*

LARRY: General? Did I hear you call?  
*(He 'sees' Henry and Delia. Double take.)*  
 Oh! Your Ladyship. And Lieutenant Cassio.

HENRY: Ex-Lieutenant.

LARRY: Is there something wrong?

HENRY: You told the general that his wife and I

Were having an affair.

LARRY: I...may have done.

HENRY: Then tell me, when did this affair begin?

LARRY: Begin?

HENRY: What needs this iteration, man? Begin.

LARRY: Well, lovers meet whenever meet they can.

HENRY: When, Iago? Was it on the sea?  
 We followed brave Othello here to Cyprus,  
 Me on one ship, you and Desdemona  
 Upon another. When we came to Cyprus,  
 Just yesterday, we drank till I was drunk,  
 Disgraced myself, and rightly was cashiered.  
 And now today it's said that we are lovers,  
 So where, Iago, could I sleep with her?  
 Upon the stormy seas, or in her bed  
 Last night, while she lay in her husband's arms?  
 Where, Iago? When?

OLIVER: Answer, Iago.

LARRY: (*shuffling*) It's possible I've made a slight mistake.

OLIVER: Cassio, take this viper to the dungeons,  
 And have him flogged a hundred thousand times.

HENRY: With pleasure, sir.

OLIVER: And Cassio.

HENRY: My lord?

OLIVER: Now art thou my lieutenant once again.

HENRY: Thank you, my lord.

OLIVER: So there's a happy ending!

DELIA: Not quite.

OLIVER: Not quite?

DELIA: Aren't you forgetting something?  
 Two little words, perhaps?

OLIVER: Two words? Two words?  
 Goodbye, Iago? Hello, Desdemona?

DELIA: You just accused your wife of being a whore,  
 And needed Cassio here to prove I wasn't.

OLIVER: It's true. You're right, of course. Two words. Thanks, Cassio.

HENRY: Perhaps your wife means you should speak to her.

OLIVER: (*To Delia:*) The problem's solved. We've proved Iago guilty.  
 Two words? Well done? Two words. Well...sod Iago.

DELIA: (*breaking the act*) You're hopeless, Oliver!

HENRY : (*To Oliver:*) Go on, say you're sorry!

OLIVER: (*kneeling*) Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish.

DELIA: That's more like it.

HENRY: So now we have our happy ending.

LARRY: Do we?

HENRY: What?

LARRY: If you can twist things, so can I. I demand the right to defend myself.

OLIVER: On what grounds?

LARRY: That uttering a rumour is no crime. I'll prove my innocence with an action replay.  
 I am to pray you not to strain my speech

To grosser issues nor to larger reach  
Than to suspicion.

OLIVER: I will not.

LARRY: Should you do so, my lord,  
My speech should fall into such vile success  
As my thoughts aim not at. Cassio's my worthy friend.  
Were these my words, or weren't they?

OLIVER: Yes, they were.

LARRY: My lord, I would I might entreat your honour  
To scan this thing no further. Were these my words,  
Or weren't they?

OLIVER: Yes, they were.

LARRY: In the meantime,  
Let me be thought too busy in my fears,  
As worthy cause I have to fear I am,  
And hold her free, I do beseech your honour.  
Were these my words, or weren't they?

OLIVER: Yes, they were.

LARRY: I rest my case.

OLIVER: But we know that you're a villain!

LARRY: To vouch this is no proof. Can you destroy my defence?

OLIVER: No.

HENRY: You can't unsay what you said to Rodrigo.

LARRY: If we're all authors now, we can say and unsay what we please. You can't have one rule for the goodies and one for the baddies. Up until the point where you've changed the script, my only crime is cheating Rodrigo, and none of you know about that. I can't be punished for mere prattle without practice. Now listen:  
Forgive me, Othello, Forgive me, Desdemona.  
I told you what I thought, and told no more,  
But I was wrong. Thank heaven, I was wrong!  
No harm is done, save to my reputation,  
And losing that is punishment enough,  
For I have lost the immortal part of myself  
And what remains is bestial. Woe is me!

HENRY: Bloody hypocrite!

LARRY: Prove it!

OLIVER: So what is our ending?

HENRY: I must say that democracy has its problems. Clearly Othello and Desdemona live happily ever after.

LARRY: And Iago?

OLIVER: Must be thrown into the dungeon.

LARRY: I refuse.

HENRY: You're a subversive, Larry,

LARRY: It wasn't my idea to rewrite the play. But since you insist on your rights, I insist on mine.

OLIVER: Well I say to hell with Iago, so long as we two are happy.

HENRY: Amen to that.

LARRY: And I will plot your downfall. Or I'll make a deal with you.

OLIVER: A deal?

HENRY: What sort of deal?

LARRY: Let King Lear live, and I'll let Iago die.  
HENRY: If it be man's work, I will do it. Delia?  
DELIA: What about Cordelia?  
LARRY: Oh, she must live as well – and happily ever after.  
DELIA: Suits me.  
HENRY: Oliver?  
OLIVER: Fine with me.  
HENRY: What will hap more tonight, safe 'scape the king! Come friends, let us prepare.  
*(They all go off.)*

## Scene 2: ENTENTE CORDELIA

*(Larry alone, enthroned and dressed as Lear.)*

LARRY: Come, my daughters.  
Since now we will divest us both of rule,  
Interest of territory, cares of state,  
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,  
Our eldest-born, speak first.  
*(Henry and Oliver enter, dressed as Goneril and Regan and carrying scripts.  
Delia follows, as Cordelia.)*

Why dost thou bear a script? Know'st not thy lines?

HENRY: It is a part I've never played before.

OLIVER: And hope shall never have to play again.

LARRY: Goneril, our eldest-born, speak first.

HENRY: *(Reading:)* Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter,  
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,  
Beyond what can be valu'd rich or rare,  
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour.  
As much as child e'er lov'd or father found,  
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable,  
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

DELIA: What shall Cordelia do?

LARRY: Nothing, my dear. What says our second daughter,  
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

OLIVER: You've left a bit out.

LARRY: I'm not giving away the prizes till I've heard all the competitors.

HENRY: That's fair.

OLIVER: *(reading, rather badly:)* I am made of that self metal as my sister,  
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart  
I find she names my very deed of love.  
Only she comes too short: that I profess  
Myself an enemy to all other joys  
Which the most precious square of sense possesses  
And find I am alone felicitate  
In your dear highness' love.

HENRY: Ye-e-es, we'll let you know.

DELIA: Then poor Cordelia!  
And yet not so, since I am sure my love's



OLIVER: And the lavatories.

LARRY: In that case, they can only marry you  
If they agree to come and live in England.  
Who wants to live in Europe anyway?

DELIA (to Henry:) Get changed.  
(Henry rushes off stage.)  
My lord, I have a better plan.  
Here in the court there is a handsome youth  
Of noble birth and nobler disposition,  
Who would, I'm sure, be just the man for me.

LARRY: Who is this man?

DELIA: The Earl of Gloucester's son.  
Edgar, come forth.  
(Henry comes half on, as he is only half dressed. He is still wearing  
his Goneril wig.)

HENRY: Hold on!

LARRY: My godson Edgar!  
A great idea, first mooted by Nahum Tate  
In a version that supplanted William Shakespeare's  
For something like a century and a half.  
Come on, come on! Flannel, rhubarb, flannel.

HENRY: (as he finishes dressing ) Your Majesty.

LARRY: What an untidy boy.  
(Delia points to Henry's wig, and he removes it.)

HENRY: Long in your court I've made my amorous sojourn,  
And now beg leave to marry your youngest daughter.

LARRY: Then wilt thou promise not to live abroad?

HENRY: I will.

LARRY: And I can come and live with you?

HENRY: You can.

LARRY: I'll have a bathroom of my own?

HENRY: You shall.

LARRY: My own TV, with satellite?

HENRY: Whate'er you want.

LARRY: Then yes. Iago's dead.  
And we shall all live happily ever after.

HENRY: I see thou art enjoying this new sport.

LARRY: I must admit, it has its compensations.

HENRY: As Edgar, I approve this happy ending.  
(He dons his Goneril wig.)  
As Goneril I must register a protest.  
(He gives Oliver a dig.)

OLIVER: And so must I.

LARRY: Upon what grounds?

OLIVER: (to Henry:) What grounds?

HENRY: We are girls more sinn'd against than sinning.  
Had we not flattered you, Your Majesty,  
As you desired, obedience we'd have scanted,  
And would be worth the want that we have wanted.

OLIVER: I didn't quite follow that – the want that we have wanted? Did we want a want?

Surely it's a want we didn't want.

HENRY: Pray you, let us hit together. He who wants to be flattered should not complain when he is flattered, let alone cut off his daughters with a mere dukedom.

OLIVER: I agree.

LARRY: Too bad.

HENRY: What?

LARRY: I'm King, so I make the rules.

HENRY: Corruption in the place!

DELIA: Hold on, aren't I supposed to be Queen now?

LARRY: Yes.

DELIA: So Edgar should be King.

ALL: Ah!

*(Each "Ah!" is in a different tone, according to circumstances.)*

DELIA: In which case, father, I suggest you leave Edgar to deal with Goneril.

ALL: Ah!

LARRY: A Daniel come to judgment! Yea, a Daniel!

DELIA: *(to Henry:)* Dear lord and master, say what's to be done.

HENRY: Cordelia, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

DELIA: O! throw away the worser part of it.

LARRY: Proceed to judgment!

HENRY: *(removing his Goneril wig)* Why then, thus it is:  
 You must all prepare...to live happily ever after.  
*(Larry and Delia cheer, and they all go out. Henry stops at the exit.)*  
*(to the audience:)* All, that is, except Goneril and Regan.  
*(He goes out.)*

### Scene 3: HAMLET AND MACBETH, ALL HALE

*(Stage bare, except for a screen. Larry, Oliver and Delia come to centre stage, with Henry standing on one side.)*

LARRY: Ophelia, walk you here. Gracious, so please you,  
 We will bestow ourselves.*(To Delia:)* Read on this book,  
 That show of such an exercise may colour  
 Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this,  
 'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage  
 And pious action we do sugar o'er  
 The devil himself.

OLIVER *(aside:)* O! 'Tis too true.  
 How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!  
 The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,  
 Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
 Than is my deed to my most painted word.  
 O heavy burden!

HENRY: And that's the crucial moment!

DELIA: What do you mean?

HENRY: Claudius wants a happy ending! Proceed.

LARRY: I hear him bossing us; let's withdraw, my lord.

*(Larry and Oliver hide behind the screen.)*

HENRY: Soliloquy – to cut, or not to cut...

ALL: Cut!

*(Henry holds up his hand in acknowledgement.)*

HENRY: Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember'd.

DELIA: Good my lord,  
How does your honour for this many a day?

HENRY: I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

DELIA: My lord, I have remembrances of yours  
That I have longed long to redeliver.  
I pray you now, receive them.

HENRY: No, not I.  
I never gave you aught.

DELIA: My honour'd lord, you know right well you did,  
And with them words of so sweet breath compos'd  
As made the things more rich: their perfume lost,  
Take these again; for to the noble mind  
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

HENRY: And you are right. O what a fool I've been,  
Moping around when I've got you to love.  
Forgive me, dear Ophelia, forgive me.  
Let this, and this, the greatest discords be...  
*(He is kissing her.)*  
That e'er our hearts shall make.

OLIVER: Hey! That's my line!

HENRY: Ha! Methinks I hear mine uncle's voice.  
*(Striding to the screen)* And there he is! The King's a peeping Tom!  
Confess!

OLIVER: O Hamlet, what thou say'st is true,  
And I have done much worse a crime than peeping.  
I killed thy father, and I took his crown,  
And took his life, his wife, his teddy bear.  
But conscience now is what has taken me.  
My mind's made up. Hamlet, the throne is thine,  
And with this sword I'll end my misery.  
*(He stabs himself.)*

HENRY: Well done!

OLIVER: No, wait! I haven't finished yet.  
Death, O death, how welcome is thy sting.  
Forgive me, Hamlet. Marry Ophelia,  
Rule wisely over Denmark, and remember  
A wicked uncle who repented much,  
And...

HENRY: ...died a rapid death.

OLIVER: If you insist.  
*(He 'dies'.)*

LARRY: So Hamlet marries Ophelia, they become King and Queen of Denmark, and live  
happily ever after. But what happens to poor Gertrude?

HENRY: Ah!

OLIVER: I know!

HENRY: Lie down. You're supposed to be dead.

OLIVER: Let me be Gertrude.

HENRY: I thought you were sick of drag.

DELIA: Let him do it, Henry, if he wants to.

HENRY: Right. Give him his Regan wig!  
*(Someone - preferably a stagehand - brings Oliver the wig, which he puts on under the kingly, now queenly crown. He gazes down at the spot where he had 'died'.)*

OLIVER: My husband dead. Slain by his own dark hand.  
 And so once more the widow's weeds are mine.  
 What shall become of me?

HENRY: Well, you tell us.  
*(Oliver gazes at Henry, then at Delia, and finally - very meaningfully - at Larry.)*

LARRY: Oh no!

OLIVER: Oh yes. Polonius, my love...  
*(He closes in.)*  
 I've always had a penchant for old men.

DELIA: *(to Henry:)* Your mother is a nymphomaniac.

HENRY: I think the word's a necrophiliac.

LARRY: I'm not that old.

OLIVER: Oh, my dearest Polly...

LARRY: Give over.

HENRY: Well, it's not a bad idea.

LARRY: No. I refuse.

HENRY: You can't refuse a queen.

OLIVER: Who are you calling a queen? Oh, yes, I see.  
 Polly, my darling, wilt thou marry me  
 And prove the ancient adage: third time lucky?  
*(Larry doesn't know what to say. Henry and Delia giggle.)*

HENRY: Say something, Larry!

LARRY: Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!

OLIVER: Don't try to change the subject.

HENRY: I'd have thought Polonius would be quite keen on the idea of marrying himself into the royal family.

LARRY: I don't think Mrs Polonius would approve.

HENRY: I thought she was dead.

LARRY: Everyone assumes she's dead, but there's no evidence in the text. Laertes talks of his true mother, but no-one else ever mentions her. I reckon she's just tucked up at home waiting to get a word in edgeways.

OLIVER: Oh, woe is me.

LARRY: Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!

HENRY: Agreed. Oliver, as consolation, you shall be Macbeth.

LARRY: Textual justification for such miscasting?

HENRY: Act Four Scene Three: "Black Macbeth will seem as pure as snow." Oliver, give Larry the crown.  
*(Oliver hands the crown to Larry.)*  
*(To Larry:)* Gracious, so please you, we will bestow ourselves.  
*(To Oliver:)* You have no spur.

OLIVER: I have no spur  
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
 Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
 And falls on the other.

*(Delia "enters".)*

How now! What news?

DELIA: He has almost supp'd. Why have you left the chamber?

OLIVER: Hath he asked for me?

DELIA: Know you not he has?

OLIVER: We will proceed no further in this business.

He hath honour'd me of late, and I have bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon.

*(Henry pushes Larry on.)*

LARRY: O worthiest cousin!

The sin of my ingratitude even now  
Was heavy on me. Thou and thy dear Lady  
Have filled this day with measureless content.  
More is thy due than more than all can pay,  
And all your humble debtor now can say  
Is...Aaaargh!

OLIVER: Is what?

LARRY: Is aaargh! Ooooh! Aaaargh! Ooooh! Aaaargh!

*(He is clutching his chest, and staggering all over the stage.)*

OLIVER: My Lord!

DELIA: Your Majesty! Why do you clutch your bosom?

LARRY: Help, help!

DELIA: What kind of help?

OLIVER: He needs a doctor.

*(Larry subsides to the floor.)*

LARRY: Too late, too late. They always come too late.  
Send for young Malcolm, Prince of Cumberland.  
Make haste. The strings of life begin to crack.

OLIVER: Malcolm! Malcolm!

*(Henry "enters".)*

HENRY: Cousin, I am here.

LARRY: Malcolm, my son! Aaaah ooooh!

HENRY: What ails thee, father?

Hast thou o'ereaten? Or indeed o'eracted?

LARRY: I pant for life.

HENRY: Behold my father's pants.

DELIA: Where?

LARRY: When I made thee Prince of Cumberland,  
I little dream'd that I should die so soon.  
Thou art too young now to be King of Scotland.  
I should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word...

HENRY: O father, thou art right. I am too young.

O do not die. Live on for twenty years,  
And then perchance I'll be mature enough.

LARRY: I cannot live.

HENRY: And I cannot be king!

What shall we do? This situation's hopeless!

LARRY: There must be a solution. Ah! Perhaps...  
 Macbeth!

OLIVER: Your Majesty?

LARRY: Would you be king?

OLIVER: What me, Your Majesty?

HENRY: A great idea!

OLIVER: Oh well...

HENRY: Refuse.

OLIVER: No, no, I really couldn't.

HENRY: Cousin, we beg of you!

OLIVER: Me? King of Scotland?  
 King of Scotland? Me? (*To Henry:*) Should I still refuse?

HENRY: A few more noes.

OLIVER: No. No, no. No, no!

LARRY: If thou dost love thy king, and love thy country,  
 Then heed my dying wish, and say thou'lt do it.

DELIA: Do, good my lord; your wife and king entreat you.

HENRY: O! make us joyful: grant our lawful suit!

OLIVER: Will you enforce me to a world of cares?

LARRY: Macbeth, I die!

OLIVER: I am not made of stone,  
 But penetrable to your kind entreats,  
 Albeit against my conscience and my soul.

HENRY: Long live Macbeth, our worthy King of Scotland!  
 (*The three others cheer Oliver.*)

LARRY: I die...aaargh aaargh...I die a happy man.  
 (*He "dies".*)

DELIA: It's not much of a play, is it?

HENRY: It's a happy ending.

DELIA: Halfway through Act One Scene Seven.

HENRY: It's a definite improvement on the original. Nobody wants tragedy these days,  
 right, Oliver?

OLIVER: Right on, man!

LARRY: No more, the text is foolish.

DELIA: Foul and foolish.

OLIVER: Fair is foul.

HENRY: And foul is fair.

LARRY: You'll get the sack.

HENRY & LARRY: But we don't care.

HENRY: (*to audience:*) So, on your patience evermore attending,  
 New joy wait on you! Here our play hath ending.  
 But if our words and actions caused offence,  
 We beg to plead the case for the defence:  
 By changing these existing tragic courses,  
 We do but what the Bard did with his sources.  
 (*They all go off.*)  
 The End

# EXCELLENT BEAUTY

The characters:

Fanny

Frank

The set consists of a double bed and two chairs, with a small cupboard to contain the props.

N.B. The bed is made and has not been slept in. It should remain untouched throughout the performance.

*Excellent Beauty* was first performed at the Union Theatre, Southwark, in October 2003 with the following cast:

Fanny: Seainin Brennan

Frank: Alex Faulk

Director: Janey Clarke

*(The stage is in total darkness. A match is struck, and a cigarette is lit, then there is darkness again.)*

FANNY: So...what do you think, then? Am I, or aren't I? You've only got the voice to go by, but the voice they say is the hearing-aid to the soul. What are you thinking? Nice voice, but what's the face like? What's the body like? Let's have a look at her titbits. But what you don't see is what you get, so try and work it out – use your imagination.

*(She squirts some perfume towards the audience.)*

“Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination.” Not many whores can quote Shakespeare at you, can they? Maybe I'm not a whore. Why do you think I'm a whore? The cigarette? The invitation? Anyway, here I am. It's up to you.

FRANK: *(from the audience:)* All right.

FANNY: All right what?

FRANK: I'll take you on.

FANNY: Good! I have a taker-onner! So now I just have to decide whether I'll take you on.

FRANK: I thought...

FANNY: You thought it was one-way traffic – whores'll take anybody on.

FRANK: I never said you were a whore.

FANNY: Well, let's have a look at you.

*(A spotlight shines straight onto FRANK, sitting in the front row. FANNY remains in darkness.)*

Not bad. Come a bit closer, darling.

*(Frank steps onto the stage. The spot follows him.)*

FANNY: That's close enough. What's your name, then, lover?

FRANK: Frank.

FANNY: Married?

FRANK: No.

FANNY: Good. I'm Fanny. You're a good-looking fellow, Frank. So, you fancy me, then?

FRANK: I don't know yet.

FANNY: Yes you do, otherwise you wouldn't have offered to “take me on” as you put it. But you can back out if you like.

FRANK: Look, I can get any girl I want...

FANNY: I'll bet you can. But you're curious.

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: So am I. Take your trousers off.

FRANK: No!

FANNY: You're not going to make love with your trousers on, are you?

FRANK: Maybe I will back out.

FANNY: Just because I asked you to take your trousers off? You ashamed of something?

FRANK: I don't need this.

FANNY: Of course you don't. I just want to know what I'm getting, that's all.

FRANK: I thought...

FANNY: There you go – thinking again. Not your strong point, is it? Have you got a “strong point”?

*(FRANK is not sure how to take the question.)*

The answer to what you're thinking is: either. I'll take you on, Frank – to use the current terminology. So I've committed myself, right? And you've committed yourself.

*(Short pause.)*

Well?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: So now you want to see what you're getting.

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: And no backtracking?

FRANK: I've given my word.

FANNY: I shall want more than words, darling, but I take your meaning. All right then. Stand by for the goodies.

*(Full lights. FANNY is bulgingly fat and astonishingly ugly. She is sitting on a chair.)*

Taaaaa!

FRANK: Jesus!

FANNY: So aren't you the lucky guy. This way, sweetheart.

*(She puckers up her lips.)*

FRANK: Christ Almighty!

FANNY: Come to Fanny.

FRANK: No way!

FANNY: "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion."

FRANK: You must be joking!

FANNY: We had a deal, Frank. You gave me your word.

FRANK: The deal's off.

FANNY: I'm afraid you can't do that.

FRANK: So what are you going to do? Rape me?

FANNY: That won't be necessary. I'll get you so turned on, you'll beg to be disconnected.

FRANK: This I must see.

FANNY: So you shall.

*(She squirts the perfume under her armpits.)*

But I'll give you a chance first.

FRANK: You'll give me a chance?

FANNY: I'm fair-minded, you see. If you can find one good reason why I shouldn't hate you, I'll let you go.

FRANK: You can't keep me here!

FANNY: A thousand pounds says I can. And I can turn you on.

FRANK: A thousand? That you can keep me here?

FANNY: And turn you on.

FRANK: You're crazy!

FANNY: Mind you, there's a logistics problem for you. If you win, how will you get your money?

FRANK: What?

FANNY: I bet you a thousand pounds that you can't leave here. But if you win, it means you've left here, in which case I can't give you the money.

FRANK: Ah!

FANNY: Not a problem, though, since you're going to lose anyway. Assuming you'll take the bet.

FRANK: I'll pick the money up later.

FANNY: We have a deal, then?

FRANK: Yes. Goodbye.

*(He makes for the exit, but the lights go out.)*

Hey!

*(Violent section from Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring", accompanied by the sound of a struggle.)*

Ow! What the...Ouch! Gerroff! Christ! Jesus Christ! Ow! You're bloody mad! You know that? Christ! What the hell do you think you're doing?

*(The lights go on again. FRANK is tied up. FANNY turns off the music.)*

FANNY: Do you like Stravinsky?

FRANK: Crazy bitch!

FANNY: No he wasn't.

FRANK: You! Not Stravinsky!

FANNY: I'm not crazy, Frank. I know exactly what I'm doing, and I know exactly what I'm going to do.

FRANK: Jesus! *(Suddenly frightened:)* What are you going to do?

*(She approaches him slowly and provocatively.)*

Keep away from me! Get away!

*(She takes his face in her hands, and tries to kiss him, but he manages to turn his head.)*

FRED: Stop it! Get away from me!

FANNY: You don't exactly make a girl feel wanted, Frank.

FRANK: Just leave me alone!

FANNY: As I was saying, I'll give you a chance. I want a reason why I shouldn't hate you.

FRANK: Why should you hate me? I haven't done anything to you.

FANNY: You've rejected me.

FRANK: Well look at yourself in the mirror.

FANNY: "Look at yourself in the mirror." Why should that stop me hating you?

FRANK: Because you're revolting. I'm sorry, but you asked me, and...

FANNY: I'm physically disadvantaged. And so that gives you the right to reject me, and to insult me.

FRANK: No. OK, I shouldn't have said that. But I mean, to have sex with somebody, you need to be physically attracted, and I don't find you attractive.

FANNY: You found me attractive in the dark. I was attractive enough in the dark for you to give your word.

FRANK: Part of sexual attraction is what you see.

FANNY: And would you say that the visual attractiveness of a person is essential to the implementation of the sexual urge?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: So blind people never have sex.

FRANK: Well, maybe in their case...

FANNY: Why maybe?

FRANK: All right, in their case the other senses take over.

FANNY: So if you were blind, you'd have me.

FRANK: I don't know.

FANNY: You were blind. You couldn't see a thing, and you wanted to "take me on" I think was the poetic expression you used.

FRANK: Because I imagined that you'd be different.

FANNY: Oh well, let's turn the lights off, and you can use your imagination again.

FRANK: That's ridiculous. I've seen you now.

FANNY: But if I turned the lights off, you wouldn't see me. You'd only imagine me – so just imagine someone unbelievably beautiful, who happens to have my voice, which you must admit is nice enough to have got you going in the first place.

FRANK: Look, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. But honestly, there's no way that I could make love to you now that I've seen you. Not even in the dark, because...you're just not my type.

FANNY: It's a bit hard on a girl to be told she's revolting.

FRANK: Yes, I'm sorry.

*(FANNY, suddenly pitiful, dabs at her eyes.)*

FANNY: I have feelings, you know. And I've got a lot of qualities. I've got a first-class degree in English Literature.

FRANK: Have you? Gosh!

FANNY: And I've got a nice voice, and a nice personality, and a sense of humour, and a lot of initiative, and a black belt at judo.

FRANK: Look, you're...you're a terrific girl – I can see that.

FANNY: So why won't you make love to me?

FRANK: Well, maybe if I get to know you a bit better...I mean, it would help if you untied me.

FANNY: Help who?

FRANK: I can't make love to you if I'm tied up, can I?

FANNY: I could do a blow-job on you.

FRANK: Oh God!

FANNY: But I won't.

*(He is relieved. She leaves him now and walks to the back of the room, from which she brings a bowl of water and a large, bloodstained towel. She puts the bowl and towel down in front of FRANK.)*

FRANK: Christ, what...?

*(He makes desperate efforts to break free as she goes again, and returns with a very large, very vicious-looking knife.)*

Oh my God! Please...look...

FANNY: *(waving the knife:)* Like a razor.

*(She cuts off a piece of his hair and holds it in front of him.)*

See?

FRANK: Fanny, please...I know I've behaved really badly, really stupidly...

FANNY: Yes, you have.

FRANK: ...but I didn't mean any harm. Honestly.

FANNY: You rejected me.

FRANK: I know, but...

FANNY: After you'd given your word.

FRANK: I'll make it up to you.

FANNY: How will you do that?

FRANK: I'll...I'll come to bed with you.

FANNY: I'm not your type.

FRANK: Fanny...oh God! Help! Help!

FANNY: Now you're being pathetic.

FRANK: Why me?

FANNY: You volunteered. Remember?

FRANK: I'll do anything you want. *(With sudden inspiration:)* We had a bet! You

said you could keep me here...

FANNY: Which I have.

FRANK: And turn me on. That was the bet.

FANNY: Yes.

FRANK: So you've got to turn me on.

FANNY: Yes. So what are you thinking? That I can't turn you on if I cut off your balls?

FRANK: *(hopefully:)* Yes.

FANNY: And you're so right. Well done, Frank. But of course the question is: what happens after I've turned you on?

FRANK: *(hopelessly:)* Fanny, please don't do this. I'm begging you.

FANNY: You say I'm revolting, that you could never make love to me, that I'm not your type. Now I want you to watch very carefully.

*(She slowly unbuttons her dress, and slips it off. Her body is covered with padding, and with the knife she cuts the binding so that the padding falls away. Underneath, she is wearing clothes that are revealing but not indiscreet. What they reveal is a perfect body. Next she kneels before FRANK, lays the knife beside the bowl, and removes items such as spectacles, crooked teeth, stuck-on warts, a false nose etc. She washes her face in the bowl, wipes it on the towel, and finally, removes her wig, to reveal a full head of flowing hair. When she stands up, we see that she is a ravishingly beautiful girl. FRANK watches all this, open-mouthed.)*

So things aren't always what they seem. Do you still find me revolting?

FRANK: No.

FANNY: Good. And do you still think I'm crazy?

FRANK: I don't understand why you're doing all this.

FANNY: But now you think I might have a legitimate reason?

FRANK: Perhaps.

FANNY: Whereas before, I was what you called "a raving lunatic". Why was I a raving lunatic when I was ugly, but I might be sane now that I'm beautiful?

FRANK: Well, maybe you are a raving lunatic. I don't know.

FANNY: Do I seem mad?

FRANK: No.

FANNY: Would you like to make love to me now?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: I can turn you on?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: What are you thinking at this moment?

FRANK: I'm thinking that you're very beautiful.

FANNY: Isn't that strange?

FRANK: No. Why should that be strange?

FANNY: You're not thinking: I'm tied up here, I'm in her power, she's got a knife, she's mad, she could castrate me, kill me. You're thinking: she's very beautiful.

*(She again goes to the back of the stage, and returns with pen and clipboard. She brings her chair across and sits close to FRANK.)*

FANNY: Name? Frank.

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: Occupation?

FRANK: Why do you want...?

FANNY: Occupation?

FRANK: I'm stacking shelves at the moment, but I'm an actor.  
FANNY: Sad. Next of kin?  
FRANK: Oh God!  
FANNY: Really?  
FRANK: Are you going to kill me?  
FANNY: Is your mother still alive?  
FRANK: Yes.  
FANNY: So she's your next of kin. And how often do you have sexual intercourse with your mother?  
FRANK: I've never had sex with my mother!  
FANNY: Why not? Isn't she your type? Father?  
FRANK: No!  
FANNY: No what?  
FRANK: I've never had sex with my father!  
FANNY: I was asking if he was still alive.  
FRANK: Oh. Yes.  
FANNY: That's nice. To have a Mummy and a Daddy. Do Mummy and Daddy still have sexual intercourse?  
FRANK: I don't know. They're separated.  
FANNY: (*writing:*) Not with each other... Do you like football?  
FRANK: Yes.  
FANNY: And who do you support?  
FRANK: Arsenal.  
FANNY: (*writing:*) Arsenal. And how often do you yourself have sexual intercourse?  
FRANK: Well, it...  
FANNY: Once a week? Twice? Seven times?  
FRANK: It varies.  
FANNY: According to what? Lust, or availability of partners?  
FRANK: Both, I suppose. Look, this is all...  
FANNY: How often do you change partners?  
FRANK: Fairly frequently.  
FANNY: How frequently?  
FRANK: Fairly frequently. Look, I don't have to...  
FANNY: Once a week, once a month, once a year?  
FRANK: I don't have to answer these questions! And I don't see the point.  
FANNY: You're still tied up.  
FRANK: Yes, I realize that...  
FANNY: And I'm very beautiful, and you might possibly be onto a good thing, so why not play along? And after all, Frank, if I'm writing down your answers, I can hardly start cutting off your balls. How many girls have you slept with in, say, the last six months?  
FRANK: Four or five. Maybe six.  
FANNY: And before you have intercourse with a girl, do you inform her that you're only interested in sex, and that you tend to change partners approximately once a month?  
FRANK: No!  
FANNY: Do you think women have no feelings?  
FRANK: No.  
FANNY: Do you hate your mother?  
FRANK: No.

FANNY: Do you like women?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: How often do you watch Arsenal?

FRANK: Every week. I've got a season ticket.

FANNY: Given the choice between spending a Saturday afternoon watching Arsenal, and making love to me, which would you choose?

*(He doesn't know what to say.)*

Why can't you answer?

FRANK: I don't know what you want me to say.

FANNY: Just tell me the truth.

FRANK: Could I watch Arsenal in the afternoon and make love to you in the evening?

FANNY: What a charmer you are, Frank. You should go a long way in the acting profession with charm like that. Which is it to be, Arsenal or me?

FRANK: You, Fanny, definitely you.

FANNY: I'm honoured. But I'll bet you say that to all the girls.

FRANK: No I don't.

FANNY: Fantastic.

FRANK: What is?

FANNY: The charm. Irresistible.

FRANK: You're taking the piss, aren't you?

*(She stands up, approaches him, and looks down at him. There is a moment of great tension before finally she bends down and kisses him. He returns the kiss. When it ends, she stands straight again, looking down at him. He lets out a long gasp of pleasure and satisfaction.)*

FANNY: One last question, Frank. What are you most afraid of in all the world?

*(He thinks for a moment.)*

FRANK: Being disfigured, or mutilated.

FANNY: *(pointing to the padding etc. on the floor:)* Like poor Fanny, then.

FRANK: You said that was the last question.

FANNY: Yes.

FRANK: Are you going to untie me, then?

FANNY: I have a problem. I've turned you on.

FRANK: I'll say you have.

FANNY: Which means that you owe me a thousand pounds.

FRANK: Oh!

FANNY: But maybe I'll let you off that.

FRANK: Well, thank you. I...I appreciate that.

FANNY: Maybe. My problem, though, is what you're going to do if I untie you.

FRANK: I'll do whatever you want me to do.

FANNY: You'll make love to me?

FRANK: Yes, of course.

FANNY: In spite of everything that's happened?

FRANK: That's history, Fanny.

FANNY: And you really want to make love to me?

FRANK: Yes! Yes, I do!

FANNY: That's my problem, Frank.

FRANK: Why?

FANNY: You see, I don't want you to make love to me. You're a good-looking fellow in a superficial way, but I don't find you attractive. You're not my type. In a word, you're revolting. And so if I untie you, I want you to go

back to where you came from. I don't want you to touch me. I don't even want you to look at me.

FRANK: All right, if that's what you want, I'll do it.

FANNY: Is that a promise?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: You give me your word?

FRANK: Yes.

FANNY: You sound convincing. But you're an actor. And actors can make any lie sound convincing.

FRANK: I'm not lying!

FANNY: And besides, you gave me your word before, and look what happened.

FRANK: That was before I knew you.

FANNY: And now that you know me, you wouldn't lie to me? You only lie to strangers – and ugly women.

FRANK: You're going to have to untie me in the end, aren't you?

FANNY: Or kill you.

FRANK: Well I don't think you're going to kill me. I don't think you're that sort of person.

FANNY: What sort of person do you think I am, Frank?

FRANK: I think you're kind, and gentle, and...

FANNY: You said I was mad.

FRANK: No! No, you're beautiful.

FANNY: What charm! What logic! Nevertheless, Frank, these changing attitudes are quite bewildering. But perhaps that's what makes you an actor. All the same, you're right, I'll have to let you go in the end, so why not now?

FRANK: Exactly.

*(She puts the clipboard down and goes to FRANK in order to untie him.)*

FANNY: Your poor legs and arms must be even stiffer than your penis. Have you had much experience?

FRANK: I told you, I've had plenty of girls.

FANNY: I meant acting experience.

FRANK: Oh! Not professionally, no.

FANNY: What you need is a lucky break. Right person, right place, right time. Like all your lucky girls when they meet you, eh?

FRANK: *(laughing:)* Yeah!

FANNY: There you are. You can do your legs yourself.

FRANK: Thanks.

*(His arms are free, and she stands watching as he unties his legs. As soon as he has finished, he swoops on the knife, and then leaps to his feet.)*

Right, you bitch! Now let's see who's in power here!

FANNY: Oh dear, is this a dagger which I see before me?

FRANK: It certainly is.

FANNY: And is that another dagger which I see before you?

FRANK: You can just go over to that bed, and take your clothes off.

FANNY: *(not moving:)* Are you going to rape me?

FRANK: You invited me here, remember?

FANNY: And you gave me your word, remember?

FRANK: I gave you my word that I'd make love to you.

FANNY: And then you gave me your word that you wouldn't make love to me.

FRANK: Well, I'm a man of one of my words. Get over there.

FANNY: I don't think you're going to kill me. I don't think you're that sort of person.

FRANK: Maybe. Maybe not.

FANNY: That's a great line. Humphrey Bogart?

FRANK: Jesus! You've been trying to humiliate me ever since I arrived, and I'm not taking it any more!

FANNY: I thought you'd humiliated me, actually. Wasn't it you who called me revolting?

FRANK: Look, I'm not going to argue with you. Take your clothes off.

FANNY: No. And you owe me a thousand pounds.

FRANK: I don't owe you a thousand pounds!  
*(FANNY steps towards the audience.)*

FANNY: Does he owe me a thousand pounds?  
*(It doesn't matter whether there is an answer or not. FRANK steps towards the audience.)*

FRANK: She's tricked me all the way along the line. The Fanny that turned me on was not the same Fanny as I made the bet with. They were different bloody Fannys, in which case the bet's invalid.

FANNY: You gave me your word that you would leave, and now you want to rape me.

FRANK: You deliberately turned me on. You set out to turn me on. And if a girl does that to a man, she's asking for it. Nobody would call that rape.

FANNY: A girl has a right to say no.

FRANK: Not when she's practically pulled him into bed.

FANNY: I haven't pulled you into bed. You're trying to force me there at knifepoint.

FRANK: You've driven me to this!

FANNY: No, you've driven yourself. But I'll help you, Frank. I'll help you to be true to your basically kind and gentle nature, so that you'll have no regrets and you'll leave here with unstained character and underpants.

FRANK: How can you help me?

FANNY: In two ways. First...  
*(She snatches the knife from his hand.)*  
 ...by disarming you...and second...  
*(She goes back to the chairs.)*  
 Come. Come here, Frank.  
*(He approaches. She picks up the bowl and throws the water full onto FRANK'S crotch. He screams.)*  
 By cooling you down. Here.  
*(She tosses him the towel.)*  
 It's all over, Frank, but I'll let you off the thousand pounds. Your performance was worth it. Off you go.

FRANK: Jesus!

FANNY: Go on.

FRANK: You bitch!

FANNY: You arse..nal fan.  
*(A picture of misery, FRANK goes back to his seat in the auditorium. He is spotlit as the other lights go out.)*

FRANK: *(to audience:)* What are you gawping at? It could happen to you.  
*(The spotlight goes off, leaving the stage in complete darkness just as FANNY begins to speak.)*

FANNY: I'm going to play a game with you. It's a sort of treasure hunt, and I'm the treasure. I'll tell you that I'm beautiful, and intelligent, and lively, and quick. But you don't know me, so I might be lying. I might be a whore. Though a whore could also be beautiful, intelligent, lively and quick. Your problem is the darkness, but without the darkness it wouldn't be so exciting. And you've come here for excitement. I promise you excitement. I'm special.

*(Pause. A match is struck, and a cigarette is lit, then there is darkness again.)*

So...what do you think? Am I, or aren't I?

*(Pause. FRANK applauds.)*

*The End*

# **THE APPLE**

Characters:

William, in his twenties  
Mary, in her twenties  
Old Man

The set is a bare stage

*The Apple* was first performed by Hydrae Productions at the Tabard Theatre, London, in June 2003, with the following cast:

William: Nicholas Van Gelder  
Mary: Lenet Asatourian  
Old Man: Steve Tyrrell

Director: Zyg Staniaszek  
Stage Manager: Nick Wharf  
Lighting: Eric Young

*WILLIAM runs across the stage and out the other side.*  
WILLIAM: Wait for me!  
*A moment later he runs the other way, and disappears.*  
WILLIAM: Wait for me!  
*A third time.*  
WILLIAM: Wait for me!  
*He reappears, but this time addresses the audience.*  
WILLIAM (*shrugging his shoulders*): Gone. They never wait, you see. It's a mug's game, chasing.  
*MARY runs across the stage and out the other side.*  
MARY: Help! Help! Help!  
*WILLIAM turns and watches her disappear. A moment later she runs the other way, again disappearing.*  
MARY: Help! Help! Help!  
*WILLIAM watches. She appears and disappears a third time.*  
MARY: Help! Help! Help!  
*She reappears and addresses the audience, standing some distance away from WILLIAM.*  
MARY: Nobody cares. Even if he killed me, nobody would care.  
WILLIAM: Excuse me, I don't want to be rude, but you went this way and that way and this way shouting for help, but there was nobody chasing you.  
*She studies him in silence for a moment or two.*  
MARY: You mean you didn't see anyone chasing me.  
WILLIAM: That's right.  
MARY: That's not the same thing.  
WILLIAM: Not the same as what?  
MARY: As nobody chasing me.  
WILLIAM: Well, you went both ways, so surely if someone had been after you, I'd have seen him.  
MARY: Maybe you were looking the wrong way. Maybe you were too busy looking at me, admiring my bouncing boobs perhaps, or my smooth, shapely legs, or my long hair streaming in the wind behind me as I ran.  
WILLIAM: I'd still have seen whoever was chasing you. They'd have come into my line of vision eventually.  
MARY: Your "line of vision".  
*She removes her top. She is wearing a bra.*  
MARY: Have a good look, go on.  
*He does.*  
MARY: Now cover your eyes.  
*He does.*  
MARY: What colour shoes am I wearing?  
WILLIAM: I don't know.  
MARY: Have a look.  
*He does.*  
WILLIAM: Black.  
MARY: I suppose they weren't in your line of vision.  
WILLIAM: There's a big difference between a pair of shoes and a human being.  
MARY: Who says I was being chased by a human being?

WILLIAM: Or a dog, or a bear, or a duck-billed platypus.  
 MARY: You were chasing me.  
 WILLIAM: What?  
 MARY: You were chasing me.  
 WILLIAM: Never!  
 MARY: You ran after me shouting, "Wait for me!"  
 WILLIAM: No I didn't.  
 MARY: So who were you after?  
*He doesn't answer.*  
 MARY: Surely you're not going to deny that you were after someone?  
 WILLIAM: No - but it wasn't you.  
 MARY: Who was it then?  
 WILLIAM: It was someone I knew once. Someone from the past. Not like you at all.  
 MARY: I don't believe you.  
 WILLIAM: I don't care whether you believe me or not. It doesn't make any difference to me.  
 MARY: Would it make a difference if I gave you an apple?  
 WILLIAM: An apple? Why should an apple make a difference?  
 MARY: I'm asking. Would it or wouldn't it?  
 WILLIAM: Have you got an apple?  
 MARY: I might have.  
 WILLIAM: Where is it?  
 MARY: Would it make a difference?  
 WILLIAM: No.  
 MARY: Well then, I don't believe you, and it doesn't matter. Here.  
*She gives him an apple, which she takes from the pocket of her skirt.*  
 MARY: Aren't you going to eat it?  
*He hesitates.*  
 MARY: It's not poisoned.  
 WILLIAM: No, no. It's just...  
 MARY: Someone gave you an apple once before.  
 WILLIAM: Yes. How did you know?  
 MARY: It happens. Why won't you admit that you were chasing me?  
 WILLIAM: Because I wasn't.  
 MARY: You don't fancy me, then?  
 WILLIAM: I didn't say that.  
*An OLD MAN enters.*  
 OLD MAN: Excuse me, I couldn't help overhearing...if you don't want the apple...  
 WILLIAM: You want it?  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
*WILLIAM gives it to him, and he bites into it. MARY puts her top on.*  
 OLD MAN: I'm not a beggar...I just like apples.  
 WILLIAM: I understand.  
 OLD MAN: They're good for you...an apple a day...so they say...  
*There is an awkward silence.*  
 OLD MAN: I've disturbed you...Just carry on as if I wasn't here.  
 MARY: How can we do that? You are here. We can't ignore you.  
 OLD MAN: I live here.

MARY: Are you saying we should move on?  
 OLD MAN: No! I enjoy company.  
 WILLIAM: You're not disturbing us. There's nothing going on.  
 MARY: What are you afraid of?  
 WILLIAM: What?  
 OLD MAN: She asked what you're afraid of.  
 WILLIAM: I heard what she said.  
 OLD MAN: Then why...?  
 WILLIAM: I'm not afraid. I simply said there was nothing going on.  
 OLD MAN: It's an excellent apple. Crisp and juicy – just how I like them.  
 WILLIAM: Good. I'm glad you approve.  
 OLD MAN (to MARY:) May I ask where you got it?  
 MARY: There's an apple tree in my garden.  
 OLD MAN: So it's fresh from the tree! And may I ask what species of apple it is?  
 MARY: Fireball.  
 OLD MAN: Fireball!  
 WILLIAM: Fireball?  
 OLD MAN: When I was young, so many years gone by,  
 The sky was blue, the sun shone through the trees,  
 And young girls' hair curled gently in the breeze,  
 And no-one thought that they could ever die.  
 WILLIAM: What are you talking about?  
 MARY: Sh!  
 OLD MAN: When I was young, birds sang throughout the day,  
 The fields were green, and insects drank the flowers,  
 While bright-eyed creatures danced the daylight hours,  
 Until a ball of fire took them away.  
 MARY: I know you!  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 WILLIAM: Who is he?  
 MARY: You were my teacher!  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 MARY: But you disappeared one day.  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 MARY: And no-one knew where you'd gone.  
 OLD MAN: No.  
 MARY: Where did you go?  
 OLD MAN: I went home.  
 WILLIAM: I thought you said this was your home.  
 OLD MAN: I said I live here. But this is not my home.  
 MARY: Will you teach me again?  
 OLD MAN: What do you want to learn?  
 MARY: Teach me to lie.  
 OLD MAN: That comes naturally.  
 MARY: Then teach me to tell the truth.  
 OLD MAN: No-one can teach you that.  
 WILLIAM: I can tell the truth. I was chasing you.  
 OLD MAN: Good!  
 MARY: I knew it! But why did you say you weren't?  
 WILLIAM: I was embarrassed.

MARY: Are you embarrassed now?

WILLIAM: No.

MARY: And you fancy me?

WILLIAM: Yes.

OLD MAN (*to no-one in particular*): But does the young lady fancy the young man? If so, why did she run away from him? And call for help?

WILLIAM (*to OLD MAN* :) What was the ball of fire?

*The OLD MAN does not reply.*

WILLIAM: You mentioned a ball of fire that took the bright-eyed creatures away.

OLD MAN: Yes.

WILLIAM: What was it? What caused it?

OLD MAN: Perhaps...perhaps...

WILLIAM: Yes?

OLD MAN: An apple.

*A momentary pause, then lights out.*

*The End*

# LEAR'S FOOL

## Introduction

“And I’ll go to bed at noon,” says the Fool, in Act III Scene 6, and he is never seen again. What became of him? The only clue we have is a controversial line right at the end of the play, when Lear says: “And my poor Fool is hang’d!” I have never understood why this line should be controversial, but since it is, and since it has crucial relevance to my play, we must examine the arguments.

The editor of the Arden edition states categorically that it refers to Cordelia, and “fool” is a term of endearment. He also quotes Bradley, who thought that Lear’s mind was wandering and that he was confusing one “affectionate dependent” with another. If it is a term of endearment, it’s a very strange one. Goneril calls her despised husband a “moral fool” and a “vain fool”, and complains that “my fool usurps my bed”. Why should a term of abuse suddenly become one of endearment? The Bradley interpretation entails an extraordinary mental process in which Lear thinks he’s looking at the Fool but knows he’s looking at Cordelia. Why must this line take on so many complications? There is one word which makes Lear’s thought processes clear and utterly logical: “And” means in addition, and as he gazes at the body of his hanged daughter - his mind totally absorbed by this appalling tragedy - it would be absurd for him to say that in addition his daughter is hanged. The addition, I would suggest, is that the Fool has suffered the same fate, of which Lear is reminded by the sight of his daughter’s mutilated neck. This would be dramatically consistent (both “affectionate dependents” and truth-tellers die the same death), would tie up a loose end in the play, and would dispense with all the linguistic and psychological anomalies. Let us, then, henceforth give the word its capital F.

This, however, is only our starting-point. How does Lear know that the Fool was hanged, since he and Cordelia were taken straight to prison after the battle? The answer can only be that the Fool was in prison, too. And this in turn offers a solution to the mystery of his disappearance after Act III Scene 6. When we next see Lear, in Act IV Scene 6, he has somehow been separated from the Fool, but it is unthinkable that the latter would abandon his master:

But I will tarry, the Fool will stay,  
And let the wise man fly:  
The knave turns Fool that runs away;  
The Fool no knave, perdy.

The idea that the separation came about through the capture and subsequent imprisonment of the Fool seems to me to be irresistible.

This leads us to two fascinating areas of focus. Firstly, with the Fool now cut off from his master’s all-consuming passion, we have a chance to get to know one of Shakespeare’s most enigmatic characters in his own right. Secondly, when he is eventually joined by Lear and Cordelia in the prison, they will all have the opportunity to look back over their own actions as well as each other’s, and to reassess what has happened.

These, then, are the basic premises of my play, and if it gives pleasure plus a few insights into its parent masterpiece, it will have justified the writing.

Characters:

John, a guard  
The Fool  
The Captain  
King Lear  
Cordelia

The scene: a prison cell in Dover

LEAR'S FOOL was first performed at Christ's Hospital Theatre, Horsham, on 4 November 1994, and subsequently at the Mill Studio, Guildford with the following cast:

John	Nick Fawcett
The Fool	Stephen Chance
The Captain	Ben Totterdell,
King Lear	Richard Owens
Cordelia	Amanda Beard

Director	Michael Friend
Designer	David Myerscough-Jones
Lighting	Leigh Porter
Prod. Manager	Amanda Jameson

The first London production was at the Jermyn Street Theatre on February 6 1995, with the following cast changes:

The Fool	Andrew Wheaton
King Lear	Joe James

## LEAR'S FOOL

### Scene One

*A cell in Dover. THE FOOL enters, followed by JOHN.*

JOHN: In you go then, Fool.

FOOL: Is this where you live?

JOHN: No, sonny, no. This is where you live.

FOOL: Will you keep watch over me?

JOHN: Yes.

FOOL: Then you must live here, too. Whither I go, thou goest, and where I lodge, thou lodgest. Welcome home, Fool.

JOHN: You'll be inside, and I'll be outside.

FOOL: So the dog chained to the kennel is free. Lucky dog!

JOHN: I'm not a dog.

FOOL: It's a metaphor.

JOHN: A what?

FOOL: If I say the Duchess of Albany has a heart of stone, it doesn't mean she has a heart of stone.

JOHN: No?

FOOL: It means her heart is hard.

JOHN: What's that got to do with me being a dog?

FOOL: Forget it. Let's bark up other trees.

*He sits on the floor.*

Ah! This must be what's called a hard cell.

JOHN: What's it like being a Fool?

FOOL: Tell me.

JOHN: What?

FOOL: Well, you have to wear a uniform.

JOHN: So do I.

FOOL: Do you indeed? And you have to do as you're told.

JOHN: I'm the same.

FOOL: And if you do the wrong thing, you're punished.

JOHN: We get punished, too.

FOOL: There seems to be no difference between us.

JOHN: I wouldn't call that a uniform.

FOOL: Underneath it's the same as yours.

JOHN: What's underneath, then?

FOOL: Skin. Dost know the difference between a Fool's skin and a soldier's skin?

JOHN: No.

FOOL: Nor do I.

JOHN: I know the difference between a Fool's job and a soldier's job.

FOOL: Oh teach me, Solomon, teach me.

JOHN: A Fool has to entertain people.

FOOL: And a soldier?

JOHN: A soldier has to fight.

FOOL: And keep guard.

JOHN: Yes.

FOOL: Hm, I don't think that riddle will ever get to the top twenty. What's the difference between a soldier and a drunkard?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: A soldier goes to battle, and a drunkard goes to bottle. What's the difference between a soldier and a glutton?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: A soldier runs to fight, and a glutton runs to fat. What's the difference between a Fool's death and a soldier's?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: A Fool dies laughing, and a soldier dies crying. That's nonsense. Nobody dies laughing.

JOHN: You served the King, didn't you? Is it true that he's gone mad?

FOOL: Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend which is the mightier.

JOHN: It's a shame. He was a good king. Not that I knew him personally. But he was  
kingly. A kingly king. Old age, was it?

FOOL: What?

JOHN: That got to his brain?

FOOL: Only before he went mad.

JOHN: What about this French invasion? Know anything about it?

*The Fool shakes his head, and subsides into melancholy.*

Well, there's a French invasion. That means the French are invading. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want to be governed by the French. They eat funny things, the French. Frogs. And snails. With garlic. And they talk a funny language. If they give me orders in French, I shan't understand them. I have enough trouble coping with English. So if there's going to be a battle, I hope we win. Not that I'm keen on our present government, but at least they speak English.

*Pause.*

For a Fool, you don't do much entertaining, do you?

FOOL: I'm off duty.

JOHN: When do you come on again?

FOOL: When my master calls.

JOHN: He's not here.

FOOL (*looking around*): It's a lovely place to spend a holiday.

JOHN: You're lucky. I never get a holiday.

FOOL: Handy dandy, which is the prisoner, and which is the guard?

JOHN: Do you know why they took you prisoner? Normally they kill people they don't like. You must be important, even if you are a Fool.

FOOL: Oh yes, I am important. No-one is more important to myself than me. Why did they choose you to guard such an important person?

JOHN: I'm reliable. And I'm too old to fight.

FOOL: How strange! I'm also reliable and too old to fight. We were made for each other.

JOHN: Tell me a funny story.

FOOL: Once upon a time there was an old King who gave away his kingdom. He gave half to a bitch and half to a vixen, and kept nothing for himself. One day he was hungry, and asked the bitch for a crust of bread, but instead she gave him a kick in the teeth. Then he asked the vixen for a drink of water, but she gave him a slap in the face.

JOHN: Then what did he do?  
FOOL: He went mad.  
JOHN: You mean the old King, don't you?  
FOOL: Lightning moves not faster.  
JOHN: I wouldn't call that a funny story.  
FOOL: It has its moments. If you gave me your sword and complained when I stabbed you, wouldn't that be funny?  
JOHN: No.  
FOOL: One man's gain is another man's loss.  
JOHN: If the King's mad, why would the French want to put him back on the throne?  
FOOL: Because the French think that all the English are mad. Who said they want to put him back on the throne?  
JOHN: That's what I've heard. Isn't it true, then?  
FOOL: I don't know. I wasn't consulted.  
JOHN: They say the King of France has come over with his wife - that's the old King's youngest daughter - to conquer us and make the old King King.  
That's what I've heard.

*The Fool does not react.*

So what have you heard?

FOOL: I've heard that the King of France has come over with his wife to conquer us and make the old King King.

JOHN: Ah! So it's true.

FOOL: I don't know.

JOHN: Why not?

FOOL: I can't be sure my source is correct.

JOHN: Who's your source?

FOOL: You.

JOHN: Oh!

*Pause.*

Are you hungry?

FOOL: Yes.

JOHN: If you promise not to escape, I'll get some food.

FOOL: I shan't escape.

*John goes out. The Fool takes off his cockcomb. He has grey hair. He leans back wearily, closes his eyes for a moment, then opens them again as he cries out:*

Nuncle!

*He stands up, goes to the door of the cell, looks out and shakes his head. Now he addresses the audience:*

He that has a little tiny wit

Must make content with his fortunes fit.

Even the job of a Fool is better than no job. I didn't run away from my master - the Fool no knave, perdy. My master ran away from me. It's been an exhausting time, and after our journey to Dover I slept and slept and slept. When I awoke, the King had gone. How could he do that to me? Except that he's mad, and knows not what he does. Then along came Gloucester's bastard son and had me pinioned and brought here. This honest fellow at least untied my arms, praise be for human kindness, and here I am. That's my story, and you are dissatisfied. A Fool must entertain. Very well, then. Gods, Gods, I swear 'tis strange, 'tis passing strange. As I did travel

through England's weedy fields, accompanied by my weak-headed master-slave the King, I did perceive in myself a heaviness of eye and limb such as cometh upon a man who hath not slept for many a night, being bestressed and bestrained as for instance when he be to deliver a script full of funny jokes ere morning yet by cock crow hath not thought of one that might be worthy of a giggle.

Then I did sleep upon the grass,  
Without a bed for head nor arse.  
No silk or cotton, hair or hide,  
Nought but a king to warm one side.  
Hast had a royal snore in the ear,  
Been bumped in the back by a royal rear,  
Or heard the beat of a royal heart,  
Or smelt the whiff of a royal fart?  
There on the grass we dreamed our fill.  
I was in a show. I was top of the bill.  
I heard folk laugh, cheer and applaud,  
And then was given a gold award.  
The title was strange, and not quite clear,  
But I think 'twas Albion Fool of the Year.  
Something after my time, so it would seem.  
Amazing the sort of things you dream.  
What did the King dream? Could he perchance  
Have been on holiday in France?  
Or back on the throne - with the harm undone  
That he wreaked on us in Act One Scene One.  
Whatever it was, when he oped his eyes,  
There was me beside him, surprise, surprise.  
So up he got and off he ran.  
What a way to treat your fellow man.  
There was I, in this massive hall,  
Being idolised by one and all.  
Got the biggest ovation I've ever known,  
Woke up - and I was on my own.

*John re-enters, with food and drink.*

JOHN: Come on then, while there's still time.

FOOL: Time for what?

JOHN: You'd better hurry. I've got some bad news.

*They eat and drink.*

FOOL: When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.

JOHN: I've got a confession to make.

FOOL: There's another man.

JOHN: What? You remember I asked you about the French invasion?

FOOL: Yes.

JOHN: Well, I was told to.

FOOL: Told to?

JOHN: And I had to report to the Captain what you said.

FOOL: But I said nothing.

JOHN: Yes. And the Captain wasn't too pleased. He said nothing would come of

nothing,  
and you should speak again.

FOOL: What should I say?

JOHN: He's given me a few minutes to find out what you know, and then he's going to try other methods.

FOOL: You've found out what I know.

JOHN: Oh? What's that?

FOOL: Nothing.

JOHN: But he wants something.

FOOL: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my nothing into a something. What sort of man is this captain?

JOHN: He's a brute. Worse than a brute. He's a brutish brute. You'd better eat up, because you won't feel like eating when he's finished with you.

FOOL: I don't feel like eating before he starts with me. I'm no lover of pain. It undermines my stoicism.

JOHN: Then just tell me.

FOOL: Tell you what?

JOHN: What you know about the French invasion.

FOOL: Well, the French invasion is...French. It's been organized by the French, and run by the French, and the French have landed with the intention of invading. Invading England. In a French way.

JOHN: I think he wants more details.

FOOL: I don't know any more details!

*The Captain enters.*

CAPTAIN: Well?

*John leaps to attention.*

JOHN: Captain, sir!

CAPTAIN: What have you found out?

JOHN: The prisoner was just giving me details, sir. Prisoner, attention when the Captain speaks to you.

*The Fool does not move. John hisses to him:*

Stand to attention!

FOOL (*also hissing:*) He hasn't spoken to me yet.

CAPTAIN (*to Fool:*) Tell me everything you know.

*The Fool heaves himself to his feet.*

How many men?

FOOL: Thirty-five.

CAPTAIN: What?

FOOL: Maybe thirty-six.

*The Captain knocks the Fool down with a savage blow.*

CAPTAIN: Fool you may be, but don't fool with me.

FOOL (*whining:*) It's true. But then they left the King and joined the French.

CAPTAIN: Left the King?

JOHN: Sir, I think he means the King's knights.

CAPTAIN: I'm not interested in the King's knights. How many men do the French have? Stand up!

*The Fool is badly frightened. He stands and cowers.*

Well?

*The Fool looks at John, who mouths: "Tell him!"*

FOOL: A thousand?

CAPTAIN: A thousand? They think they can conquer England with a thousand?  
FOOL: Curses! A thousand curses on the French! May they drown in their own bouillabaisse. They have a large army, sir. Ten thousand men.  
CAPTAIN: Ten thousand! You're sure of that?  
FOOL: As sure, sir, as I am of my own future.  
CAPTAIN: How did they get them across? They must have a huge fleet. Ten thousand! This will be a bloody battle.  
FOOL: Bloody Captain...bloody.  
CAPTAIN: Is it true that the King of France has returned to France?  
FOOL: You heard that, did you, sir?  
CAPTAIN: I'm asking if it's true.  
FOOL: Yes, sir.  
CAPTAIN: Who has he left behind him general?  
FOOL: Monsieur...Bonbon.  
CAPTAIN: Never heard of him.  
FOOL: He's a new general. Hard boiled.  
CAPTAIN: Why not La Far?  
FOOL: Why not indeed?  
CAPTAIN: Has La Far gone back to France, too?  
FOOL: Yes, sir. He wanted to get La Far away as possible.  
CAPTAIN: No King and no La Far. Why did they go back to France?  
FOOL: The King caught a chill, sir. You remember that terrible storm we had. The French have no nose for our climate - he was coughing and sneezing as only a Frenchman can. And he had no faith in our English doctors, so...

CAPTAIN: English doctors? They have English doctors with them?  
FOOL: Yes, sir.  
CAPTAIN: Doctors defecting.  
FOOL: Defecting and infecting, sir. The health service, as in part I understand it, is to blame.  
CAPTAIN: And La Far?  
FOOL: A stomach upset, sir. What the French call "les trottes".  
CAPTAIN: So they left this Bonbon in charge. Why did you leave the French camp?  
FOOL: Leave it? Ah, why did I leave it? I couldn't stand the food, sir.  
CAPTAIN: And the old King...  
FOOL: I couldn't stand him either, sir.  
CAPTAIN: How mad is he?  
FOOL: Mad enough to stay with the French, sir.  
CAPTAIN: Could he rule England again?  
FOOL: Oh sir, mad rulers are our speciality.  
CAPTAIN: I want a direct answer, Fool. How mad is he?  
FOOL: He is completely mad, sir. He is madness personified. He couldn't be more mad, sir, if you cut off his head and emptied it down the jakes.

*The Captain nods.*

CAPTAIN: The Earl of Gloucester shall know of this.

*He goes out. The Fool collapses in a heap. John takes him a drink.*

JOHN: Here, get this down you.

*The Fool drinks.*

FOOL: What will he do when he discovers I was lying?

JOHN: Lying?

FOOL: I told you, I don't know anything.

JOHN: Were you not in the French camp?

FOOL: Oh! I am a fool. I'd forgotten whose side you were on. Now what are you going to do?

JOHN: In wisdom, I should tell him. On the other hand, if the French have ten thousand men, I'll need a friend.

FOOL: I don't know how many men they've got.

JOHN: Then maybe I shan't need a friend.

FOOL (*slapping his forehead:*) Fool twice over!  
*Pause, as John reflects.*

JOHN: I'll say nothing.

FOOL: Thank you, good friend.

JOHN: If we win the battle, you told me nothing, right? And if they win, I told the Captain nothing.

FOOL: Right. The Earl of Gloucester!  
*John leaps to attention, then sees there is no-one there.*

JOHN: Where?

FOOL: The Captain has gone to see the Earl of Gloucester.

JOHN: Yes, he's our general.

FOOL: The Earl? But he'd never fight against the King!

JOHN: Don't you believe it. There's talk that he might be the next king himself.

FOOL: But he helped the King escape! He loves the King!

JOHN: Ah, you're thinking of the old Earl. I'm talking about the new Earl.

FOOL: The new Earl?

JOHN: Earl Edmund. Haven't you heard what happened?

FOOL: Tell me.

JOHN: They caught the old Earl after he'd helped the old King, and they put out his eyes and took away his title. Gave that to his bastard son.

FOOL: Gloucester's eyes! Then where is he now?

JOHN: We thought he might be with the French as well. And the Duke of Cornwall's dead.

FOOL: What?

JOHN: Slain by one of his servants. Which leaves the widowed Duchess chasing after the bastard Earl. I don't know what the Royal Family's coming to.

FOOL: O poor Gloucester!

JOHN: Hey, you're not supposed to cry. Fools are supposed to laugh.

FOOL: The old Earl's blind,  
The old King's mad.  
The knave may laugh.  
The Fool is sad.

JOHN: Make a joke out of it.

FOOL (*using two voices:*) Mad King am I.  
Blind Earl, that's me.  
I can't think.  
And I can't see.  
What's the difference, my boy, between a madman and a blind man?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: A madman ceases to know, and a blind man noses to see. O Nuncle, Nuncle,

beat at the gate!

JOHN: Make me laugh, go on.

FOOL: I cannot even make myself laugh. What makes a blind man mad?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: To see that he cannot see. What makes a madman blind?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: Not to see that he can see. Dost know what nails a blind carpenter uses for eyes?

JOHN: No.

FOOL: Why, his fingernails. Dost know what tool made eyes unnecessary?

JOHN: No.

FOOL: The handsaw.

*John does not react to any of this.*

Thou art hard to please.

JOHN: Thou art hard to understand.

*The Captain enters.*

CAPTAIN: We're marching on the French.

JOHN: Oh! Good luck, sir.

CAPTAIN: You're marching too.

JOHN: Me, sir? But I'm too old to fight.

CAPTAIN: We need every man we can get

JOHN: But what about the Fool, sir?

CAPTAIN: Leave him. Or kill him. The Fool doesn't matter.

*He goes out.*

JOHN: I don't want to fight.

FOOL: And I don't want to be killed.

JOHN: I'm not going to kill you. It's me I'm worried about. You can go home, but what's going to happen to me?

CAPTAIN (off): John!

JOHN: Sir! (*To Fool:*) Goodbye.

FOOL: Good luck.

JOHN: And you.

*He goes out.*

FOOL: The Fool doesn't matter! Hath not a Fool eyes? Hath not a Fool hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, et cetera, et cetera. This speech Shylock shall make, for I live before his time. I can go home. But I have no home. The King was my home. (*To audience:*) There is nowhere to go, and nothing to do. When the battle's over, something will happen, but in the meantime shall I tell you a story? Once there was a yeoman with a son of strange disposition. He would laugh and joke the livelong day, and turn the rain to sun and the sun to birdsong. The men and women of the village would laugh too, but thought him mad though harmless. For only a madman would laugh and joke the livelong day. Of course, they did not know his secret: he was happy. One day, riding out of the woods, there came a young prince who was hunting with his knights. Of a sudden his horse was startled, reared and threw the prince to the ground. The knights dismounted and looked on, dismayed, while the men and women came running from the fields. All were silent and serious, until the strange one came, gazed upon the scene, and sang

this song:

The prince rode through the forest,  
And to the fields did come.  
His horse did shy,  
The prince did fly,  
And landed on his bum.

No-one dared speak. This could be a case for beheading. And then the prince laughed. And everyone laughed. And the fields and forests echoed with the laughter of prince and knights and peasants. The prince was so taken with the young jester that he engaged him in service. And I have served him ever since. He's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him, yet a yeoman's son would be mad to say no to a prince. Especially a prince like Lear. Say no to Lear and be split by a thunderbolt. I call him Nuncle. That too is a story. Everything is a story. Today's life is tomorrow's story. Lear's father loved women. He was a lusty king, and a lusty king takes women in a flood. The Queen his wife bore him only the one son, our Lear, after which he never soiled her bed again. She was a hard woman. Well, it was rumoured — no more than that, merely rumoured — that Lear's father once rode the same path as later his son would ride, and he came upon a pretty maid in the fields. He took her to the nearest tussock, and there he had his way with her. The maid gave birth to a son, who in due course grew up to be a yeoman. When this yeoman had a son, it was me. Which would make Lear my uncle. But since we know not whether rumour be true or false, we know not whether Lear be my uncle or no. And so I call him Nuncle. Lear hated his father's heat, and equally he hated his mother's cold. For years he avoided women. You have seen how even lately he travelled only in the company of his knights — and made no allowance for them to have women with them. When his father died and he ascended the throne, his mother told him again and again to marry, and what was his reply? "Never, never, never, never, never." But marry he did. At the age of fifty, soon after his mother had at last relieved the world of her presence, he decided that perhaps he too was mortal and should provide the kingdom with an heir. His wife was a beauty, of sweetest, kindest nature, by name Cordelia. He loved her, in his own uncertain manner, and when she was with child, they prayed night and day that it would be a son. But out came Goneril. Then she conceived again. O let it be a son, prayed Lear, and out came Regan. And when for the third time the Queen grew round-bellied, the whole kingdom waited with an air of foreboding. It was another daughter. Her birth killed the good Queen — whether by force of nature, or by fear of her husband's disappointment. Great was Lear's sorrow when his Queen died, and to the new daughter he gave the Queen's name: Cordelia. He loved her most, and she was most lovable. Until, in one moment of rare blindness, she spoke what she should not have spoken. Nothing. Had she but said: Father, I love you with Cordelian love, we should all have lived happily ever after. Should she be blamed? Knaves flatter for gain. Yet it would not have been dishonourable to tell the truth. You are getting restless. The Fool's task is to entertain, and you are not being entertained. But can you be sure that I am the Fool? What makes you so certain? Why, the clothes I wear. But clothes are a hiding place. Supposing I told you I was not the

Fool? Now listen to my voice: I am not the Fool. There was, you see, a plot to kill the King, and a king is a king while a fool is merely a fool. The King must be saved. And so the Fool puts on the King's clothes, and the King puts on the Fool's clothes, and hey ho, which is which and who is who? There is safety in poverty, for what can you take from a man who has nothing? I am the King. When I do stare, see how the subject quakes. (*He laughs.*) But I am not the King. I am the Fool you took me for, though not altogether the fool you take me for, since I am not altogether fool. Are you altogether watcher, clerk, priest, schoolmaster, mother, merchant, murderer...critic? Are we not all parts that play parts? I'll set you a riddle: Blow, blow, thou winter wind, Thou art not so unkind. As what? If thou knowest not, thou shalt learn, and if thou knowest, then spare a thought for my master. I will explain. The King is a kind man. Rash and swift-tempered, devilish if he get not his own way, but loving and generous to those who please him. He takes men to be honest that but seem so, and delights in delighting them. It is a fault, but not a vicious fault. What is most sad in this kind king's composition is that, although he loves, he knows not what it is to be loved. He does not understand women. You may ask: Who does? Now strangely, although he knows not what it is to be loved, he is loved. Many would endanger their own lives for love of him. But he cannot discern. When he gave away his kingdom, he thought to live in the sun, and only when the wind blew did he smell them out, the marble-hearted ones, whose ingratitude is unkindier than the winter wind. His fault then was not evil, but ignorance. Thus saith the Fool. I pined when Cordelia went away, for I love her more than word can wield the matter. I had hoped that this journey of ours would bring us to her again, so that winter might end. If the French were to win the battle, it might happen. But you and I know that the French will not win the battle. Why? Because when did the French ever beat the English?

*John returns, very frightened.*

JOHN: Oh!

FOOL: Oh!

JOHN: You still here?

FOOL: Yes. What's happened?

JOHN: I've deserted.

FOOL: What?

JOHN: When the Captain wasn't looking, I ran away.

FOOL: The better part of valour is discretion.

JOHN: The better part of life is life. Why should I be killed because the people up there are quarrelling? If they want to quarrel, let them kill each other.

FOOL: Then you don't mind if France conquers England?

JOHN: I'd rather they didn't, but killing me isn't going to make any difference either way.

FOOL: Such selfishness. Why, if every soldier did the same as you, there'd be no wars. And then what would mankind do?

JOHN: Oh there's always people willing to fight.

FOOL: Ah, then mankind is safe. Who was winning the battle when you left it?

JOHN: I never left it.

FOOL: Oh?

JOHN: You can't leave something you haven't joined.

FOOL: True, boy. Then simply, who was winning the battle?  
JOHN: Doubtful it stood, as two spent swimmers that do cling together and choke their art.  
FOOL: That's a fine image for a plain soldier.  
JOHN: I heard it somewhere.  
FOOL: Not in England, I'll wager. Then you don't know who's winning?  
JOHN: No. But whoever wins, I'm in trouble. To the English I'm a deserter, and to the French I'm the enemy.  
FOOL: Stick a feather in your cap and pretend you're German.  
JOHN: I've got an idea. Why don't you and I swap clothes?  
FOOL: How will that help us?  
JOHN: No-one'll recognize me.  
FOOL: Better to be hanged for a fool than hanged for a knave. Can you sing?  
JOHN: No.  
FOOL: Dance?  
JOHN: No.  
FOOL: Make jokes out of disasters?  
JOHN: No.  
FOOL: Ah, thou wouldst make a good fool.  
JOHN: Come on, take off your clothes. I mean it.  
FOOL: And what will they do to me if they catch me?  
JOHN: I haven't got time to worry about you. Get them off!  
*They both undress.*  
FOOL: I'll take thy soldier's helmet  
And armour rich and rare,  
I'll take thy hose and take thy shoes,  
But keep thine underwear.  
*They take each other's clothes.*  
Have you thought this through?  
JOHN: What do you mean?  
FOOL: If the English win, they'll take you for a traitor, and if the French win, the King will demand of thee that which thou canst not give.  
JOHN: No-one'll take any notice of a fool. I'm not stupid.  
FOOL: And not to be stupid is wisdom indeed. If I must be a soldier, then give me thy sword.  
*John hands over his sword.*  
JOHN: Here, soldier.  
FOOL: Thanks, soldier. And now...(pointing to the sword)...take off my clothes and give them back to me.  
JOHN: What?  
FOOL: Take off my clothes, or thou shalt get a stabbing.  
*John realizes the situation, and disrobes.*  
Truly the sword is mightier than the word. One flash of the blade gains more territory than a hundred flashes of wit.  
*They are both in their underwear as the Captain enters.*  
CAPTAIN: What's going on here? Pederasty in the ranks!  
JOHN: Sir!  
CAPTAIN: John? Is it you?  
JOHN: Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN: I thought you were dead.

JOHN: So did I, sir. He took my sword, sir.

CAPTAIN: Who is this?

JOHN: The Fool, sir.

CAPTAIN: Ah! Draw your sword on an officer, would you?  
*The Captain draws his own sword, and knocks the Fool's out of his hand.*

CAPTAIN: Why are you both in your underwear?

JOHN: He was about to rape me, sir.

FOOL: What?

CAPTAIN: A Fool, a rapist, and a liar. You told me there were ten thousand Frenchmen under a General Bonbon.

FOOL: I may have been mistaken.

JOHN: He was lying, sir. I discovered it just after you left, and tried to warn you, but he overpowered me...

CAPTAIN: Be quiet, John.

JOHN: Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN: You also told me the old King was mad.

FOOL: That he is mad, 'tis true.

CAPTAIN: It's not true.

FOOL: What?

CAPTAIN: Some other time for that. *(To John:)* Get dressed. I have a task for you.  
*(To Fool:)* You too.

*John and the Fool both get dressed.*

We've defeated the French.

JOHN: Oh great news, Captain!

CAPTAIN: They'd barely sniffed our breakfast cereal before they threw down their weapons. Now we have other business to attend to. Can you be trusted not to give your sword away again?

JOHN: Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN: Here.  
*He flicks the sword towards John, who jumps out of the way.*

Pick it up. Now, guard him. I'll be back shortly.  
*He goes out.*

FOOL: Rape?

JOHN: I'm sorry. It's all I could think of.

FOOL: Well, at least he didn't kill us.

JOHN: I wonder what task he's going to give me.

FOOL: Why, to write the history of the battle.

JOHN: I don't know anything about the battle.

FOOL: Ignorance never stood in the way of historians. What you do not know, invent.

JOHN: I can't write either.

FOOL: Thou art the best o' the historians. Yet he's good that knows no history at all. If thou knowst none, thou art the nonpareil.

JOHN: I don't know much.

FOOL: Then take my coxcomb, for thou art a greater myself than myself. Tell me, why did the Captain say the King is not mad?

JOHN: I don't know.

FOOL: He's as mad as the vex'd sea. Unless...oh!

JOHN: What?  
 FOOL: My poor master. And mistress. too.  
 JOHN: What are you talking about?  
 FOOL: The French have been defeated. A dead king is not a mad king, a dead queen is no threat to the usurpers. Those devils would do it. Did heaven look on, and would not take their part?  
 JOHN: Cheer up. He never said they were dead.  
 FOOL: I know that the King is mad.  
 JOHN: Not being mad doesn't mean you're dead. I'm not mad, but I'm alive.  
 FOOL: Could he have been pretending? Why would he pretend to be mad?  
 JOHN: There's beggars in the street pretend to be mad. They make a better living  
 begging than they would working.  
 FOOL: No, no, he's dead, and all's cheerless, dark and deadly. Gloucester too. He helped us escape. A kind, brave man, blinded for his compassion. World, world, O world.  
 JOHN: I'm not staying in here if you're going to be a misery.  
*He goes out.*  
 FOOL: Take me with thee, Nuncle.  
 Not a flower, not a flower sweet,  
     On my black coffin let there be strown;  
 Not a friend, not a friend greet  
     My poor corse, where my bones shall be thrown.  
 A thousand, thousand sighs to save,  
     Lay me, O! where  
 Sad true lover never find my grave,  
     To weep there.  
*There are loud voices off stage.*  
 JOHN (off:) In you go, sir. You've got to go in.  
*He drives in King Lear and Cordelia. At the sight of the Fool, Lear immediately stops protesting, and the scene freezes for a moment.*  
 FOOL: Nuncle!  
 LEAR: My boy! My pretty boy!  
*The Fool runs across the stage and kneels at Lear's feet. Blackout.*

## Scene Two

*Later. Lear, Cordelia and the Fool. Lear is seated.*  
 LEAR: Now, our joy, although our last, and least; to whose young love the vines of France and milk of Burgundy strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.  
 CORDELIA: Nothing, my lord.  
 LEAR: Nothing?  
 CORDELIA: Nothing.  
 LEAR: Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.  
*A moment of tension, broken by a loud laugh from Lear.*  
     Everything comes of nothing.  
 FOOL: And everything goes to nothing.  
 LEAR: From nothing we come, to nothing we go.

FOOL: And all between is a passing show.  
 LEAR: Can you make no use of nothing, boy?  
 FOOL: Why, no, Nuncle; nothing can be made out of nothing.  
 LEAR: A kingdom can be lost for nothing. A daughter can be lost for nothing.  
 FOOL: Why, then, you have no kingdom for nothing and no daughter for nothing, and so you have made nothing out of nothing.  
 LEAR (*rising and embracing Cordelia:*) And what lies now between daughter and father?  
 CORDELIA: Nothing.  
 LEAR: And from that nothing I will make my kingdom. I have caught thee.  
 FOOL: And they have caught us all. O Nuncle, I'd rather have my nothing in the tempest than in a prison cell.  
 LEAR: My good old friend, lay comforts to your bosom.  
 FOOL: The comforts to your good old friend's bosom will not loosen the noose around his neck.  
 LEAR: Let's have no misery here. Where love is, is joy. Now, sirrah, sing us a song.  
 FOOL: Since thou art joyful, thou shouldst sing the song.  
 LEAR: Images of revolt! Am I not still thy master?  
 FOOL: Since thou art master of nothing, thou art my master, but since nothing will sing of nothing, sing thou the song.  
 LEAR (*singing:*) Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
     Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
     Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
     But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
 FOOL: O master, with such a voice you make even the edge of doom seem welcome.  
 LEAR: A man must use the gifts he has been given.  
 FOOL: Then Nuncle, I pray thee, use them sparingly.  
 LEAR: Cordelia, will you not sing to us, and still this viperous tongue?  
 CORDELIA (*singing:*) Then is there mirth in heaven,  
     When earthly things made even  
         Atone together.  
     Good King, receive thy daughter;  
     The gods from heaven brought her;  
         Yea, brought her hither,  
     That thou mightst join thy hand with hers,  
         Ere death his own cold hand bestirs..  
 LEAR: Why these sad faces?  
 FOOL: I am never merry when I hear sweet music.  
 LEAR: Cordelia? Why do you weep?  
 FOOL: Wert thou not in a prison, Nuncle, thou'dst well deserved to be set in a prison for that question.  
 LEAR: Why, boy?  
 FOOL: You lack soldiers.  
*Lear still does not understand.*  
 The lion that has no teeth will starve to death, for else  
 The King of England

And the Queen of France  
Could lead the people  
In a merry dance.

LEAR: No. They durst not do't. They could not, would not do't.

*He goes to the door of the cell.*

You there without, I must needs speak with thee.

*John comes in.*

What are your orders?

JOHN: To guard you, sir.

LEAR: Who gave the order?

JOHN: The Captain, sir.

LEAR: And who gave him the order?

JOHN: The Earl of Gloucester, sir.

LEAR: The Earl of Gloucester?

FOOL: The new and bastard Earl of Gloucester, Nuncle, not the old and legitimate one.

LEAR: Where are my sons-in-law?

FOOL: One's on his way to hell, and the other, being married to a devil, is there already.

JOHN: The Duke of Cornwall's dead, sir, and the Duke of Albany was somewhere else

at the time.

*Lear dismisses John.*

LEAR: Albany is an honourable man. And we have no quarrel with Gloucester. So wipe thine eyes. Of comfort let us speak, and not of graves. We three are not the first of fortune's slaves, nor shall not be the last, and so with patience let's bear our own misfortune on the back of such as have before endur'd the like. (*Majestically to the Fool:*) Entertain us.

*He sits close to Cordelia.*

FOOL: I'll play a game with you, Nuncle.

LEAR: Ah!

FOOL: Question and answer. I ask you a question which my lady must answer, I say if her answer is true or false, and you say if I'm right or wrong. Then we each take it in turns. It's an entertaining game. I'll begin. Why did you give away your kingdom?

LEAR: I gave...

FOOL: No, no, Nuncle, the Queen of France must answer.

CORDELIA: He gave it away because he was tired.

FOOL: False. Now, Nuncle, you must say if I'm right or wrong. No lying, mind. And you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped.

LEAR: Thou art i' the right.

FOOL: Good, good, that's the spirit. Now you must ask her a question.

LEAR: Why wouldst thou not say that thou didst love me?

*He waits for her answer.*

FOOL: And the Fool must answer. Because she hates to flatter. Now you say if my answer's true or false.

LEAR: True.

FOOL (*to Cordelia:*) And you say if he's right or wrong.

CORDELIA: He's right.

LEAR: But to tell the truth is not to flatter!

FOOL: No cheating, Nuncle! Await your turn! Questions and answers only. (*To Cordelia:*) Ask away.

CORDELIA: Why did my father not see through the flattery?

FOOL: Oh clever, clever mistress - to ask me a question that he must answer.

LEAR: Because he was a foolish, fond old man. But wiser now.

CORDELIA: True.

FOOL: And you are right! New rule: questions must not pertain to the person who gives the answer. My turn again. Why did you give away your kingdom?

LEAR: I...

FOOL: Ah, ah.  
*He points to Cordelia.*

CORDELIA: If it was not because you were tired....I remember a phrase – it seemed strange then: ‘That future strife may be prevented now.’ Was that it?

FOOL: You mustn’t ask him.

CORDELIA: You thought that when you died, there would be civil war. By dividing the kingdom first, you would ensure peace.

FOOL: True! Am I right?

LEAR: Yes.

FOOL: There! The Fool triumphs again. Twice I’ve been right. Now, Nuncle, your turn.

LEAR: We need not play it as a game.

FOOL: Oh but we must, Nuncle, we must.  
A lord and a dame  
Would die of shame  
If you stripped them naked  
Except in a game.  
But they’ll shiver all day  
If they think it’s play.  
Do as you’re told, Nuncle. In prison a Fool may be King.

LEAR: You would not flatter me, and yet you do love me. Couldst not have told me so?

FOOL: And the Fool must answer. It’s a difficult one, Nuncle, but the answer is...yes

LEAR: Then why didn’t she?

FOOL: Oh Nuncle, you’ll never get the hang of this game. Is my answer true or false?

LEAR: True.

FOOL: Is he right?

CORDELIA: Yes.

LEAR: Then...

FOOL: You must wait your turn. If kings cannot keep to the rules, then we shall have chaos. (*To Cordelia:*) Ask me a question about myself. I’m tired of being the outsider.

CORDELIA: When the wind blew, and the rain came, and the thunder would not peace at my father’s bidding, why did you stay with him?  
*They look at each other. Then the Fool turns to Lear.*

FOOL: Answer.  
*Lear has been gazing at Cordelia, but now turns his eyes upon the Fool. He is deeply moved.*

LEAR: My boy!  
*He embraces the Fool.*

FOOL: Nay, but answer.

LEAR: Love.

CORDELIA: True.

FOOL: Right.

LEAR: My poor boy.  
*The embrace ends.*

FOOL: Is it not a good game, Nuncle?

LEAR: O! thou art wise, 'tis certain.

FOOL: Then let us hear the answer to this: you gave away your kingdom to prevent future strife. If this English angel with French wings had obeyed you, how would the plan have worked?

LEAR: I...

FOOL: Nuncle!

CORDELIA: How would it have worked?

FOOL: Think of the shares!

CORDELIA: Goneril had the north, and Regan the south-west. I was to draw a third more opulent than my sisters - all the land between, keeping my sisters apart.

FOOL: True!

*Lear nods.*

Right.

LEAR: Right.

CORDELIA: Oh father. You said: 'I thought to set my rest...'

FOOL: No, mistress, you must wait. It's your father's turn, and he burns to ask his question.

LEAR: Thou couldst have said: 'I love you', and not flattered me. Why didst hold back what was true, preferring to say nothing?

FOOL: To thine own self be true.

LEAR: And it must follow, as the night the day...

FOOL: Thou canst not then be false to any man.

CORDELIA: I did you wrong!  
*The Fool holds up his hand to stop her.*

FOOL: True or false?

LEAR: True.

FOOL: Right or wrong?

CORDELIA: Right.

FOOL: That's how the game is played. Question and answer, question and answer, lower the bucket into the well, and truth will come up shining. But take comfort, mistress, thou art the daughter of thy father, as I shall prove with my next question.

CORDELIA: But it's my turn. Art thou unhappy?

FOOL: Am I unhappy, Nuncle?  
*Lear gazes at him.*

LEAR: Yes.

FOOL (to Cordelia:): True or false?

CORDELIA: True.

FOOL: Wrong! Truly I am the champion of this game, since I alone have been right every time.

LEAR (*puzzled but pleased*;) Art thou happy, my boy?

FOOL: Is the wheel to spin the other way? Well, if I'm the hub, let my mistress answer. (*To audience*;) It's nice to have a King and Queen concerned about your happiness.

CORDELIA: If thou art not unhappy, then must needs be happy.

FOOL: True or false, Nuncle?

LEAR: True.

FOOL: Wrong again! How absolute these knaves are! If a man be not a fool, is he then wise? If he be not poor, is he rich? If he be not thin, is he fat? Ha, ye have much to learn, my masters, but we have time and the Fool will teach you. Nuncle, I have a question to ask of thee, so let us restore the natural order, shall we? When thy sweet daughter did forbear to flatter, why didst thou give the rod to thy crab daughters, and put down thy breeches?

LEAR: My sweet daughter will answer.

CORDELIA: For the same reason that his sweet daughter did forbear to flatter.

FOOL: True!

LEAR: Right!

Fool (*singing*;) He is a wight of high renown,

And I am but of low degree:

'Tis pride that pulls the country down,

Then take thine owd cloak about thee.

The game is over, and I declare that the winner and undisputed champion of the cell is none other than...THE FOOL!

*Enter John with food.*

JOHN I've brought you some food.

FOOL: Thou art good.

JOHN: And some drink, too.

FOOL: We thank you.

JOHN: I'm sorry Your Majesties are being kept like this in prison.

FOOL: Our Majesties are sorry too. May we suggest that you set us free?

JOHN: I would if I could, but I have to obey orders.

FOOL: Then we order you to set us free.

JOHN: Not your orders. The Captain's.

FOOL: Set us free, good friend, and I'll see thee richly rewarded. I have contacts in high places.

JOHN: You know I can't.

FOOL: To do a great right, do a little wrong.

*John shakes his head.*

LEAR: Where should we go, boy? Make content with thy fortunes fit. Thou knowst the lesson, for thou didst teach it.

FOOL: I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching.

CORDELIA: Shall we not see these sisters and these daughters?

JOHN: I don't know, madam.

*The Captain enters.*

CAPTAIN: John!

JOHN: Sir!

*The Captain motions to John to step outside. John hurries out. The Captain looks at each of the prisoners in turn, then leaves.*

FOOL: Nuncle, I am afraid.  
 LEAR: What of, boy?  
 FOOL: Of dying.  
 LEAR: Be absolute for death; either death or life shall thereby be the sweeter.  
 FOOL: Ay, but to die, and go we know not where.  
 LEAR: Thy best of rest is sleep, and that thou oft provok'st, yet grossly fear'st thy death, which is no more.  
 FOOL: To lie in cold obstruction and to rot; this sensible warm motion to become a kneaded clod.  
 LEAR: Thou art not thyself; for thou exist'st on many a thousand grains that issue out of dust.  
 FOOL: From dust I come, but to dust I would not go.  
 LEAR: Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
           Nor the furious winter's rages;  
 Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
           Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:  
 Golden lads and girls all must,  
           As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.  
 FOOL: I joy to feel the warmth o' the sun,  
           And shelter from the winter's rages;  
 My worldly task is never done,  
           My body's home and life's my wages:  
 Golden lads and girls all must,  
           As chimney-sweepers, hate the dust.  
 LEAR: Fear no more the frown o' the great,  
           Thou art past the tyrant's stroke:  
 Care no more to clothe and eat;  
           To thee the reed is as the oak;  
 The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
 All follow this, and come to dust.  
 FOOL: I joy to hear the laugh o' the great,  
           And feel my master's gentle stroke:  
 I love to clothe and love to eat;  
           Bend with the reed, stand with the oak;  
 The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
 Follow this, and hate the dust.  
 CORDELIA: Stop it, please.  
 FOOL: 'Tis but a game.  
 LEAR: All is but toys.  
*There is a trumpet call. They are all startled. A second, then a third, followed by one more distant. John reenters.*  
 LEAR: What was that trumpet call?  
 JOHN: It was trumpets calling, sir.  
 LEAR: To what purpose?  
 JOHN: Someone's challenged the Earl of Gloucester to a duel. Listen, I've got to blindfold you all and tie your hands. I'd be grateful if you'd refrain from resisting.  
 LEAR: Why, soldier?  
 JOHN: I don't like nasty scenes.  
 LEAR: Why are we to be blindfolded and tied?

JOHN: Because those are the orders, sir.  
LEAR: And if we refuse?  
JOHN: Then the Captain won't be very pleased.  
LEAR: And a King must bow to a Captain?  
JOHN: Yes, sir. Well, no, sir. But yes, sir. May I proceed, sir?  
LEAR: Men must learn now with pity to dispense; for policy sits above conscience. Obey your orders.  
JOHN: Thank you, sir.  
*He blindfolds Lear and ties his hands.*  
LEAR: I stumbled when I saw. What has become of the old, blind Earl of Gloucester?  
JOHN: I don't know, sir. He was last seen wandering along the cliffs with a mad beggar.  
LEAR: A mad beggar? Poor Tom! I remember him. We talked about the cause of thunder. 'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind.  
*John now goes to Cordelia.*  
CORDELIA: Are we to be taken away?  
JOHN: Yes, madam, I think so.  
CORDELIA: Where are we to be taken?  
JOHN: I don't know, madam. I was just told to blindfold you and tie your hands.  
CORDELIA: No.  
JOHN: Oh please, madam! If you refuse, I'll have to send for help, and others won't be gentle with you like I am. They'll beat you for sure. I'm sorry.  
LEAR: We must endure our going hence, even as our coming hither. 'Tis better to go in peace than go with whipping.  
*Cordelia submits.*  
Where's my pretty boy?  
*The Fool weeps silently.*  
FOOL: I'm still here, Nuncle.  
LEAR: Wilt thou not lighten our darkness?  
FOOL: Mine is the darkness,  
Thine the light,  
For thou seest not  
What's in my sight.  
LEAR: What dost thou see, boy?  
FOOL: I see the darkness,  
Thou the light.  
O do not seek  
To share my night.  
*John moves to blindfold and tie the Fool.*  
JOHN: It's your turn now.  
FOOL: I have done no harm.  
JOHN: I'm only obeying orders.  
LEAR: Cordelia.  
CORDELIA: Here, father.  
LEAR: Let me come close to thee.  
JOHN: No, no, you have to keep separate.  
LEAR: Why?

JOHN) Orders.

FOOL)

FOOL: He's sorry.

JOHN: I am sorry. I don't like this sort of thing. I'm a nice man - basically.  
*The Captain enters and surveys the scene. He is carrying two nooses and two pieces of cloth, as well as a cushion.*

JOHN: Captain, sir.

CAPTAIN: Are the prisoners ready to be moved?

JOHN: Yes, sir.  
*He stares at the nooses, clearly distressed. The Captain gestures towards Cordelia and the Fool, indicating that they are to be hanged. John looks at the cushion. The Captain gestures towards Lear and presses the cushion over his own face.*

CAPTAIN: Listen carefully, all of you. You're to be moved to a secret place.  
 There's nothing to be afraid of.  
*As he talks, he sets up the nooses, placing a box beneath one of them.*

We've tied and blindfolded you so that you won't cause trouble. We shall take you out one by one, and gag you to stop you calling. Don't be afraid. You'll soon be reunited. The Fool is to go first. Should he be discovered, no dog will bark.  
*He gags the Fool.*

JOHN: Sir!

CAPTAIN (*through his teeth:*) Men are as the time is; to be tender-minded does not become a sword. (*Loud:*) Gag the others.  
*John hesitates, but gives way. The Captain grips the Fool by the arm and walks him round the stage.*

LEAR: Sans speech, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.  
*John gags him. The Captain leads the Fool to the box.*

CAPTAIN: There's a step.  
*He mounts the box with the Fool. John gags Cordelia.*

Stand still.  
*He puts the noose round the Fool's neck. The Fool realizes what is happening and tries to resist, but the Captain is too strong for him. He fixes the noose, jumps down from the box, and pulls it away. The Fool jerks, twitches, and then hangs limp. John is appalled, and turns his head away. The Captain places the box beneath the second noose, then pretends to re-enter.*

The Fool is safe, and now attends the Queen of France. Madam, will you walk?  
*He leads her round the stage by the arm.*

There's a step here, madam.  
*He mounts the box with her. John becomes increasingly agitated.*

JOHN: No, sir!

LEAR: Mmmm?

*The Captain puts the noose round Cordelia's neck. She struggles, but he is far too strong.*

JOHN: No!  
*John unties Lear's hands, and Lear tears off the blindfold just as the Captain jumps down from the box and pulls it away. Cordelia is hanged. Lear seizes John's sword, and with a bellow leaps at the Captain and kills him. He cuts Cordelia's noose and catches her body.*

LEAR: Cordelia! Cordelia! Cordelia! She's dead!

*He holds her body in his arms, and walks towards the door. Only now does he see the hanging body of the Fool.*

*And my poor Fool is hang'd. Howl, howl, howl, howl, howl!*

*He goes out. John follows him. The lights remain for a moment on the body of the Fool. Then blackout.*

*The End*

# BILLY

The four scenes cover a span of 50 years. The only two characters who appear in more than one are Billy, who ages from 21 to 70, and Les, who ages from around 35 to around 65.

The setting is a pub.

Characters:

## **Round One**

Billy  
Les  
Landlord  
1st girl  
2nd girl

## **Round Two**

Billy  
Shirley  
Barmaid  
Les  
1st Girl  
2nd Girl

## **Round Three**

Billy  
Danny  
1st Girl  
2nd Girl  
Les

## **Round Four**

Billy  
Sharon  
1st Man  
2nd Man  
Landlord

Note: in order to leave time for Billy and Les to change their makeup, the four rounds can be performed at intervals during a programme of short plays. If *Billy* is to be performed on its own, the actors could change their makeup on stage, in full view of the audience, perhaps accompanied by music from each period.

**BILLY**

## Round One

*The crowd in the pub. LES at the bar. BILLY enters. Cries of "Billy! It's Billy! Well done, Billy!! Attaboy, Billy!" He makes his way to the bar.*

BILLY: Drinks on me, Jimmy. Drinks all round.  
*More cries of adulation.*

LANDLORD: Well done, Billy  
*A couple of girls have come up beside him.*

1st GIRL: Well done, Billy.

LANDLORD: You have this one on me, Billy.

LES: You nailed 'im then?

BILLY: Yeah.

LANDLORD: First round 'e nailed 'im.

LES: Yeah?

LANDLORD: Right cross. Set 'im up...well, you tell 'im, Billy.

BILLY: Set 'im up wiv a straight left... *(He mimes)*...Then 'it 'im wiv the right – bang, right on the button.

LANDLORD: Went down like 'e was poleaxed.

BILLY: 'E was poleaxed. 'E was more poleaxed than a bloody poleaxe.

2ND GIRL: What's a poleaxe, Billy?

BILLY: What's a poleaxe? They wanner know wot a poleaxe is.

LES: Yeah, what is a poleaxe?

BILLY: Well...it's a bloody axe, innit? Innit?

LANDLORD: *(shrugging his shoulders)* Yeah, s'pose so.

2nd GIRL: Why's it called a poleaxe?

BILLY: Cos it's on the end of a pole. Like a flag.

1st GIRL: Wotcher wanner put an axe on the end of a pole for?

BILLY: *(irritated)* I dunno! Oo bloody cares?

LES: Gonner be a champion, then, are yer, Billy?

BILLY: Yeah.

LANDLORD: Right 'and like that, who's gonner stop 'im? 'E'd 'ave knocked out Joe Louis wiv that right 'and.

BILLY: 'E was there.

LANDLORD: What?

BILLY: Joe Louis. 'E was there.

LANDLORD: 'E wasn't!

BILLY: 'E was.

LANDLORD: I never saw 'im.

BILLY: I spoke to 'im afterwards.

LANDLORD: You never!

BILLY: I did.

LANDLORD: You spoke ter Joe Louis? Woddid yer say?

BILLY: I said...'Allo, Joe.

LANDLORD: You never!

BILLY: Yes I did.

LANDLORD: An' woddid 'e say?

BILLY: 'E said...'Allo.

LANDLORD: Joe Louis said 'allo?  
*BILLY nods.*  
'E didn't say 'allo Billy?

BILLY: No. Just ‘allo.  
LANDLORD: But ‘e musta known who you was.  
BILLY: No, ‘e never saw the fight. ‘E come roun’ the back cos he was seein’ somebody else, somebody ‘e knew. On’y I saw ‘im first.  
1st GIRL: Who’s Joe Louis?  
BILLY: Blimey, you ain’t arf iggerant. Joe Louis’ was the greatest ever. World ‘eavyweight champion, Joe Louis was, fer twelve bloody years.  
LANDLORD: The Brown Bomber they called ‘im.  
1st GIRL: Why’d they call ‘im the brown bomber?  
LANDLORD: Cos when ‘e ‘it yer, it was like bein’ ‘it wiv a bomb.  
1st GIRL: An’ why was ‘e a brown bomber?  
LANDLORD: Cos ‘e was black.  
*A moment’s pause as they both realize the implications.*  
1st GIRL: So why wasn’t ‘e called the black bomber?  
LANDLORD (*joining in:*) ...the Black Bomber. I knoo you was gonna ask that. Cos ‘e wasn’t black black, ‘e was brown black.  
2nd GIRL: Are you gonna be world ‘eavyweight champion, Billy?  
BILLY: Do I look like a ‘eavyweight? Welter, that’s me.  
2nd GIRL: Welter?  
1st GIRL: Yeah, they carry them flame things wot sticks metal tergether.  
LANDLORD: ‘E’s gonna be welterweight champion o’ the world is Billy, you mark my words. Eh, Billy?  
BILLY: Nobody gonna stand in my way. Not when I got this. (*He holds up his right fist.*)  
LES: Mug’s game.  
BILLY: Wot?  
LES: Mug’s game, boxin’.  
BILLY: Who you callin’ a mug?  
LES: I’m not callin’ you a mug. I’m just sayin’ it’s a mug’s game.  
LANDLORD: There’s lots o’ things is mug’s games, Les, an’ one of ‘em is tellin’ a boxer that boxin’s a mug’s game.  
LES: Sorry, didn’t mean no offence.  
LANDLORD: I’m proud o’ you, Billy. When you landed that right an’ ‘e went down, I stood up an’ cheered. That’s ‘ow proud I was. (*To Les:*) An’ let me tell you, you are sittin’ beside a man wiv a perfect record. Ain’t that right, Billy?  
BILLY: Well, I did get caught shop-liftn’ once...  
LANDLORD: Fights, one. Wins, one. Knock-outs, one. Defeats, none. Knock-out percentage, one ‘undred. Perfect record.  
LES: So when’s yer next fight?  
BILLY: Next month.  
LANDLORD: Who you fightin’?  
BILLY: Dunno yet. Don’t care. I’ll knock ‘im out ooever ‘e is. I’m goin’ to the top, that’s where I’m goin’.  
LES: What’s yer name, then, son?  
BILLY: Billy.  
LES: Billy what?  
BILLY: Billy ‘Arris.

LANDLORD: Bomber Billy, that's wot they're gonna call 'im now.  
LES: I'm Les. 'Ere's to yer, Billy 'Arris, an' I'll 'ave a scotch.  
*They shake hands.*  
*Blackout*

## Round Two

*The crowd in the pub. BILLY enters with SHIRLEY. His face is a mess.*

BARMAID: 'Allo, Billy, Shirley.  
SHIRLEY: 'Lo. Jane.  
BARMAID: Took another bashin', then?  
SHIRLEY: No, 'e won.  
LES: Blimey, wouldn't like ter see the uvver bloke.  
SHIRLEY: Billy knocked 'im out in the tenth round. 'E's southern area champion now.  
LES: Still got yer 'ammer, then?  
BILLY: About all I 'ave got.  
SHIRLEY: 'Ad 'is front teeth knocked out.  
LES: You wanner pack it in, Billy, before yer brains get knocked out an' all.  
SHIRLEY: Wot brains?  
BILLY: I just wanna crack at that British title.  
*Two girls have come in. They recoil at the sight of Billy, and keep a safe distance.*  
1st GIRL: Wot 'appened to 'im, then?  
LES: 'E's a boxer.  
2nd GIRL: We 'ad a boxer once. It was better lookin' than 'im! *(They both laugh.)*  
BARMAID: Usual, Shirley?  
SHIRLEY: Yeah.  
LES: You 'ad a crack at the British title once, didn't yer?  
BILLY: Nah, eliminator.  
LES: Wot 'appened?  
BILLY: I was eliminated.  
LES: When was that, then?  
BILLY: Five years ago.  
LES: Well you ain't got no better since then, 'ave yer?  
BILLY: Course I 'ave. I've learnt a lot since then.  
LES: Wotchoo learnt then, Billy? 'Ow ter get up at ten an' a 'alf? 'Ow ter get free dentures on the NHS?  
BILLY: I've won me last two fights.  
LES: An' lost six on the trot before that.  
BILLY: Coulda gorn either way.  
LES: You was knocked out in free of 'em. Dunno about either way, unless you mean you coulda fallen ter the left or fallen ter the right.  
BILLY: I bin unlucky.  
LES: I'll give you that. You was unlucky ter be born a boxer oo can't take a bloody punch.  
BILLY: I c'n take a punch.  
LES: Only lyin' down.

BARMAID: Leave 'im alone, Les. 'E won, didn't 'e?  
LES: Only cos 'e was fightin' a geriatric.  
BILLY: Fred Lomas was good enough ter fight fer the British championship.  
LES: Twenty years ago! Before 'e took out 'is pension! Fred Lomas 'as gorn further over the 'ill than the bloody sunset at midnight. An' even then look wot 'e done ter you.

BILLY: I knocked 'im out.  
LES: 'Spec' 'e lost his grip on 'is zimmer frame.  
BARMAID: Give over, Les. Let 'im enjoy 'is drink.  
2nd GIRL: Go on.  
1st GIRL: No, you.  
2nd GIRL: Oh, all right. 'Scuse me.  
SHIRLEY: Yeah?  
2nd GIRL: No, Mr Boxer. (*Billy looks up.*) C'n I ask you a question?  
BILLY: Wot?  
2nd GIRL: Does it 'urt?  
BILLY: Does wot 'urt?  
2nd GIRL: When you get 'it?  
BILLY: Course it bloody 'urts.  
2nd GIRL: Well....  
1st GIRL: Go on.  
2nd GIRL: Why dja do it?  
BILLY: Cos I get paid ter do it.  
1st GIRL: Why does anyone pay yer ter get bashed up?  
BILLY: I don't get bashed up.  
1st GIRL: You look bashed up ter me. Don' 'e look bashed up, Marl?  
2nd GIRL: If that ain't bashed up, then I dunno wot bashed up is.  
SHIRLEY: 'E's a perfessional boxer, an' people pay ter see 'im get bashed up.  
BILLY: No they don't.  
SHIRLEY: Don't they?  
BILLY: They pay ter see the uvver bloke get bashed up.  
LES: Maybe they pay ter see both of yer get bashed up.  
BILLY: Whadda you know about it?  
LES: Orl right, orl right!  
SHIRLEY: I thought getting' bashed up was wot they call one o' the perks o' the job.  
BILLY: That ain't wot they call it, Shirl. It ain't a perk. It's a bloody wot's-it, that's wot it is.  
SHIRLEY: Wot's a wot's-it?  
BILLY: Getting' bashed up is not a perk. It's a... (*big effort:*)... 'azard.  
*A moment's silence.*  
SHIRLEY: A 'azard?  
2nd GIRL: Ain't that part of a chicken?  
1st GIRL: Well why do they pay anyway? If you wanner see people bashin' each uvver, yer c'n get it 'ere fer free Sat'day night.  
BILLY: Boxin' ain't just bashin'. Boxin's an art. It's a sweet science, that's wot it is.  
SHIRLEY: The sweet science o' bashin'.  
BILLY: No it ain't. Well, it is...but it's self-defence too, innit? An' movement.  
LES: Like ballet wiv gloves on.

BILLY: Yeah. Yer move, yer jab, yer duck an' weave, yer cross an' 'ook.  
 LES: An' then yer fall down.  
 BILLY: The uvver bloke falls down.  
 1st GIRL: So wot's the point of it?  
 BILLY: Wot's the point? It's sport, innit? I mean, wot's the point of kickin'  
 a ball in a net, or knockin' it in a 'ole, or poncin' aroun' wiv a  
 bloody racket in yer 'and?  
 1st GIRL: They don't bash each uvver, though, do they? I mean, they don't  
 end up lookin' like you.  
 BILLY: I don't always look like this, do I, Shirl?  
 SHIRLEY: No. It's usually worse.  
 LES: Mug's game, boxin'.  
 BILLY: Oh shut up, Les.  
 LES: I've said it before...  
 BILLY: Well don't say it again.  
 LES: If I was you...  
 BILLY: You ain't.  
 LES: I know I ain't. But I'm just sayin', if I was, I'd pack it in now, Billy,  
 that's all I'm sayin'.  
 BILLY: I'll pack it in when I'm ready ter pack it in. I've just beaten Fred  
 Lomas. I'm on the way up. An' all I want now is a crack at the  
 British title. That's all. If I lose, I'll pack it in.

*Blackout.*

### **Round Three**

*The crowd in the pub. BILLY is now behind the bar. DANNY, a young black man, enters with two girls. Cries of "Danny! It's Danny! Well done, Danny! Atta boy, Danny!" He makes his way to the bar.*

DANNY: Drinks on me, Bill. Drinks all round!  
*Cries of "Good lad, Danny! Thanks, Danny!"*  
 LES: Good win then, Danny?  
 DANNY: Left 'ook. Second roun'. Never knoo wot 'it 'im. You shoulda bin there,  
 Bill – yer'da learnt a f'ing or two.  
 LES: Bill don't go ter boxin', do yer, Bill?  
*Billy (serving drinks) shakes his head.*  
 1st GIRL: Why don't yer go ter boxin', Bill?  
 DANNY: 'E used ter be a boxer. Ain't you seen the photers on the wall?  
 2nd GIRL: That you, on the wall? Cor!  
 DANNY: They ain't all 'im. The ugly ones, that's 'im.  
 1st GIRL: Was you a champion, then, Bill, like Danny?  
 BILLY: I was southern area champ.  
 LES: Fought fer the British championship too, didn'tcha?  
 DANNY: I never knoo that, Bill. Wot 'appened?  
 LES: 'E never knoo it either. Got knocked out, didn't 'e? First roun'.  
 Bloody froze.  
 BILLY: I never froze. 'E caught me cold.  
 LES: That's wot 'appens when yer freeze. Yer get caught cold. We was  
 all there, cheerin' 'im on, an' 'e come out of 'is corner, an' then

'e just stood there while the uvver bloke zapped 'im on the chin.  
 One punch an' it was all over.

BILLY: 'E was lucky.  
 LES: 'E was lucky? You was lucky! Lucky he didn't 'it yer twice.  
 BILLY: Well at least I got me name in the record books.  
 LES: Yeah, quickest title fight in 'istory.  
 DANNY: Well, nobody gonna catch me cold. Not while I got this. (*He waves his left fist in the air.*) Drink up, girls.

1st GIRL: You married, Bill?  
 BILLY: I was. Why? Yer fancy me?  
 1st GIRL: No-o-o! I was just wonderin' if anybody would.  
 BILLY: Lotsa girls fancied me when I was 'is age.  
 2nd GIRL: Then wot 'appened?  
 BILLY: Then I wasn't 'is age.  
 1st GIRL: Is that when yer got married?  
 BILLY: Got married when I was thirty. Shirley 'er name was.  
 2nd GIRL: An' wot 'appened to 'er?  
*Billy busies himself pouring drinks.*

LES (*confidentially*): They 'ad a friend oo was a jockey. An' one day Bill saw 'im 'avin' a ride.

2nd GIRL: 'Avin' a ride?  
 LES: On Shirley.  
 2nd GIRL: Oh!  
 LES: Left 'im wiv a kid an' debts up to 'is eyeballs.

BILL (*returning*): Tellin' em my life story, are yer, Les? (*To Danny*): You make the most o' wot yer got, son, while it lasts.

DANNY: Don'tchoo worry about me, Bill. I'm goin' right ter the top.  
 LES: Bill 'ere was goin' right ter the top, weren't yer, Bill?  
 BILLY: I did go ter the top.  
 LES: Southern area champ is 'ardly the top, Bill.  
 BILLY: It's the top o' the southern area.  
 LES: The top o' the southern area ain't the top, is it? The world is the top, Billy.

BILLY: There's tops an' there's tops.  
 DANNY (*pinching one of the girls*): An' there's bottoms an' there's bottoms.

LES: All I'm sayin', Billy...all I'm sayin'...is that the world is the top o' the tops, an' you never got there an' you never even got to the top o' the English tops.

BILLY: Nor did Marlon Brando.  
 LES: Wot?  
 BILLY: Only 'e dun orl right, didn'e?  
 LES: Wot's Marlon Brando got ter do wiv it?  
 BILLY: 'E coulda bin a pretender. That's wot he said. An' I was, cos I fought fer the British championship, an' it don't matter that I was robbed – I was a pretender, an' that means I reached the top.

LES: Robbed? Knocked out with the first bloody punch o' the fight?  
 BILLY: I wasn't ready.  
 DANNY: See ya then. Come on, girls.  
 LES: See ya, Danny.

*Chorus of "Goodbye, Danny!" He and the girls go out.*

BILLY: Wot's 'is uvver name?  
 LES: I dunno. Akibongo or summink like that.  
 BILLY: You seen 'im fight?  
 LES: Yeah.  
 BILLY: Is 'e any good?  
 LES: Yeah, 'e's good.  
 BILLY: As good as I was? In me prime, I mean.  
 LES: Didn't know you ever 'ad a prime, Billy. When was that then?  
 BILLY: All these years, Les, that I've known you, there's bin summink I always wanted ter do an' I never managed ter get roun' ter doin' it.  
 LES: Wassat, Billy?  
 BILLY: This.

*Billy leans over the bar and punches Les on the nose.*

*Blackout.*

#### **Round Four**

*Crowd in the pub. At first we can't see BILLY. Everyone sings "Happy birthday to you" with Bill as the subject, and glasses are raised. Someone shouts: "Give us a speech then, Bill!" and there are cries of "Speech! Speech!" After the initial movement, Billy is revealed sitting in a wheelchair. SHARON, mid-thirties, sits beside him. She holds a glass to his lips, and he drinks. He is paralysed, and his speech is slightly slurred, though perfectly audible.*

BILLY: No good makin' bloody speeches. Seventy. Oughter be bloody dead. Like good ole Les. Bloody Les. Never said a kind word about nobody. You 'member Les?

*A few murmurs.*

Always needlin' me. Punched 'im on the nose once...broke 'is nose... then 'e looked like me!

*Laughter.*

Speech. Can't 'ardly talk let alone make a bloody speech.

1st MAN: Tell us yer best moments, Bill.

BILLY: Best moments. 'Ighlights. Biggest frill: met Joe Louis. Met 'im, spoke to 'im. Greatest fighter ever. Joe Louis.

2nd MAN: Better 'n Muhammed Ali?

BILLY: In 'is prime. Yeah. Dunno. Mammed Ali wan't bad. Mammed Ali talked better. But Joe Louis... 'e was the best.

1st MAN: Wot was your best fight, Bill?

BILLY: Best fight? First one. Knocked 'im out one round. Then it was down'ill all the bloody way. Mind you, made a lot o' friends frough boxin'. Lost a lot an' all. Depends if yer goin' up or comin' down. I knoo Danny Aki... Aki...

1st MAN: Akiwumi?

BILLY: Yeah. Knoo 'im when 'e was startin' out. Used ter come in 'ere. Me be'ind the bar. I give 'im advice. 'Elped 'im. Cocky git. But 'e listened.

1st MAN: Wot sort of advice?

BILLY: I told 'im...I said...well...make the most...o' wot yer got.

*(Emphatically:)*

An' 'e did! Tell you summink I learnt. 'Bout boxin'. Mug's game. Payin'

people ter get bashed up. Mug's game.

2nd MAN: If you 'ad your life over again, Bill, what would you do?  
*Long pause,*

BILLY: Box. Boxin' was good ter me. Well, it wasn't...bloody messed me up...but I was somebody, wan' I? Just for a bit. I 'ad people cheerin' me. Till they started booin' me. Yeah, I'd box. Couldn't do much else anyway.

SHARON: Come on, Dad, let's get you home.

BILLY: No! Don' wanner go 'ome. It's me birfday. I bin asked ter make a speech...so I'll make a speech.

SHARON: I thought you'd finished your speech.

BILLY: 'Aven't started! They keep interruptin'!

1st MAN: You give us a speech, Bill.

BILLY: Wot I learnt...in seventy years...by Bill 'Arris. I learnt...we're all the bloody same! Yer knock 'em out...yer get knocked out...an' it don't make a blind bit o' diff'rence cos in the end we're all the bloody same. If yer don't die young, yer die old.

1st MAN: That's true.

2nd MAN: Unless yer die middle-aged.

BILLY: Everyfink comes to an end, that's wot I'm sayin'. One minute yer on yer feet, an' the next minute...

2nd MAN: Yer off yer feet.

1st MAN: Some people stay on their feet longer'n uvvers.

2ND MAN: Yeah, course they do. A world champion ain't gonna be on 'is feet an' then off 'is feet. 'E's gonna stay on his feet. If 'e gets knocked off 'is feet, 'e won't be...

BILLY: D'you mind? It's my bloody speech!

2nd MAN: Sorry, Bill, I was only...

BILLY: Wot I'm sayin' is...now I've forgotten wot I was sayin'...

1st MAN: You was sayin' you was on yer feet an' then you was off yer feet.

BILLY: Right. An' that's life.

2nd MAN: That's death, innit?

BILLY (*annoyed:*) It's life an it's death. Can't you shut up fer a minute?

1st MAN: Yeah shut up, Malc. Let 'im make 'is speech.

BILLY: Ev'rybody that I know...young an' old...male an' female...black an' white...rich an' poor...ev'rybody is the same.

2nd MAN: That ain't true. I'm sorry, Bill, I know it's your speech, but that ain't true. I'm not the same as you. I'm not even the same as 'im. An' I'm certainly not the same as 'er.

BILLY (*very frustrated:*) Sharon, punch 'im on the nose, will yer?  
*Chorus: "Shut up, Malcolm! Put a sock in it! Belt up!"*

2nd MAN: Orl right, orl right. If you think yer all the same, that's your lookout.

BILLY: 'Ow c'n I make a speech? I keep fergettin' wot I wanted ter say anyway.

LANDLORD: Let me ask you a question, then, Bill. (*Billy nods.*) You've been on this earth seventy years. Are you glad that you've been here?

BILLY: Yes! I am glad. I didn't 'ave a successful career. I gotter be 'onest. I was unlucky, in that I kept fightin' blokes that was better 'n me. An' there was a lot of 'em. An' lookin' back, I wish there 'adn't bin so many. An' I wish they 'adn't 'it me so 'ard. An' I wish that Sharon's Mum 'ere 'ad bin a better Mum...an' a better wife...but on the

uvver 'and, she give me a bloody marv'llous daughter...

*Sharon puts her hand on his shoulder.*

I coulda done wivout gettin' meself paralysed, but I'm told that c'd be the result o' my career. Wot was yer question?

LANDLORD: Are you glad you've lived?

BILLY: Right. Well, on the 'ole I've 'ad a good life. It's bin a bloody awful life, but it's bin a good life.

SHARON: I'll ask you a question.

BILLY: Go on. That's Sharon. She's me daughter. An' me arms an' me legs.

SHARON: What would you like people to say when you've gone?

*He thinks about it.*

BILLY: Goodbye?

SHARON: No, I mean about you?

BILLY: I know wot you mean. Maybe... 'e put up a fight. Yeah... 'e put up a fight. 'E never quit. Well, no, I did quit 'alf a dozen times. But I come back. Yeah... 'e come back.

2nd MAN: When you've gorn, I don't fink you'll come back.

1st MAN: That depends on your beliefs, dunnit?

2nd MAN: I don't fink you'll come back wotever you believe.

BILLY: Let me ask you a question, darlin'. Wot are you goin' ter say about me when I've gorn?

SHARON: I'll say, 'e was my Dad. An' I was proud of 'im.

*He looks up at her.*

BILLY: I'll settle fer that.

*Blackout.*

*The End*

# MEGALO

The characters:

Mr Godwin

Manfred

Mr Godwin should be older than Manfred. He is small, but this should not be apparent until the moment of revelation in the stage directions.

The set: A door up left, and Mr Godwin's massive desk. This should be right of centre, as full on as possible to the audience, but at an angle that will also allow the audience to see plenty of Manfred.

## MEGALO

*MR GODWIN, grey-suited, immaculate, overbearing, sits behind his massive desk. There is a knock at the door.*

GODWIN: Come in!

*Enter MANFRED, unshaven, dishevelled.*

Ah. The miscreant.

*He consults a paper.*

Manfred Manley Manningham Mann. Stand there. Closer. Stop. Miscreant. We've been kind to you. We've provided you with everything necessary for the happy life, and what has been our reward? Miscreancy. It grieves us. It cuts us to the quick. Like a hand grasping the heart. And I ask myself, was it worth the effort? The ef-fort! The effing fort. For scum, dregs, rrriff-rrraff like you. And my answer is: no. A waste of time. You're a disgrace. What have you got to say for yourself? Speak.

MANFRED (*mumbling:*) I haven't...mmmmmmmm...

GODWIN: What?

MANFRED: I don't know what you...

*He breaks off.*

GODWIN: You don't know what I what? Or what I whatted? Or what I would what, or what I wish to what? Can you be more precise?

MANFRED: What you're accusing me of.

GODWIN: Ha! We plead ignorance! A brilliant defence! Drunkenness? Insanity? Amnesia? You are accused...(*pause*)...of insulting me. You know who I am, don't you?

MANFRED: Yes.

GODWIN: Yes who?

MANFRED: Yes, Mr Godwin.

GODWIN: The accent is on God. God-win.

MANFRED: God-win.

GODWIN: It's a free country. You can say what you like. I have no wish to curb freedom of speech. I invented freedom of speech. I am free to say whatever I like, and so are you. But...if you say whatever you like, and I don't like whatever you like to say, I am free to say that I don't like whatever you like to say if I don't like it. Why should you be free to say whatever you like, and me not be free to say whether I like or do not like whatever you like to say? This is called philosophy. Or maybe it isn't.

MANFRED: (*mumbling:*) I never insulted you.

GODWIN: Speak up.

MANFRED: I never insulted you.

GODWIN: Did you not refer to me, in the presence of a loyal colleague – loyal, that is, to me – as...small? Well?

MANFRED: Yes, but...

GODWIN: But?

MANFRED: You are small.

GODWIN: I am not small. I am perfect. You realize I can have you executed for this.

*MANFRED squirms.*

But I shall give you a chance. Why, I don't know. In fact, on second thoughts, I shan't give you a chance. (*He speaks into an intercom:*) Sergeant, I want this man taken away and shot immediately.

MANFRED: No, please. There are things I can tell you.

GODWIN: What?

MANFRED: Information. I can give you information.

GODWIN: Cancel the order. For the time being. Information? What sort of information?

MANFRED: What people are saying about you.

GODWIN: I know what people are saying about me. Immortal, invincible, Godwin only wise...

MANFRED: No they're not.

GODWIN: What do you mean they're not?

MANFRED: I mean they're not.

GODWIN: Of course they are. I'll have them shot otherwise. Although of course they're free to say what they like. Who's saying what about me? Don't tell me. It's all lies. Except when they say what I want them to say.

MANFRED: People say you're small.

GODWIN: I told you not to tell me what people are saying! (*Short pause, as he slits his eyes.*) Cunning. Devilishly cunning. You're putting your words into the mouths of others, in order to divert attention away from your own words. You're saying that others have committed the very crime of which you yourself are accused. Ha! The deviousness of the criminal mind.

MANFRED: And they say that you're a megalomaniac.

GODWIN: Me? Me me? Me me me? Me me me me me me? Nonsense. I never speak about myself. I am devoted to others. Unsparing in my dedication to my fellow man. And woman. Megalomania is the province of those who do not understand that I, the supreme me, the me of all me's, am the greatest man on earth. How can the greatest man on earth be a megalomaniac?

MANFRED: They say that you abuse your power.

GODWIN: Abuse my power? I, who do nothing with my power but exercise it? Bend over. Touch your toes. Touch your knees. Stand straight. Put your hands on your head. Scratch your right buttock with your left hand.

*MANFRED obeys these instructions.*

I give the orders, and you obey. What could be more natural? Unto those that have power shall be given the power to exercise power. Thus it is written in the Book of Godwin. Revised Version. And he who sayeth that he who exerciseth power abuseth the power that he exerciseth sayeth that for which he that exerciseth the power hath the power and deserveth the power to have him shot. Which he deserveth.

MANFRED: They say that you're filthy rich and have gained your wealth through corruption and exploitation.

GODWIN: I am hurt. Now I am as stricken as a striker struck with strychnine. Do they begrudge their beloved leader his meagre twelve palaces, his 365 limousines, his free-range Fabergé eggs, his priceless Leonardo di Caprios, his harem of exquisite beauties...

*His face contorts with a look of exquisite pleasure, accompanied by a squealing grunt of exquisite satisfaction...*

...oooaaooomph...acquired purely by personal charm and charisma from the hearths of their fathers and the beds of their husbands? Is this not a small price to pay their almighty leader for his selfless, unmegalomaniacal devotion to their welfare? Speak, you ungrateful purveyor of ingratitude.

MANFRED: I'm only telling you what people say.

GODWIN: Who says it?

MANFRED: Everybody.

GODWIN: I want names!

MANFRED: Smith, Brown, Jones, Johnson...

GODWIN: Wait, wait!

*He starts to write.*

Smith, Brown...They're just names.

MANFRED: You asked me for names.

GODWIN: I don't want names! I want names! Of miscreants, slanderers, traitors.

MANFRED: No.

GODWIN: No? What do you mean, no?

MANFRED: I mean no.

GODWIN: You dare to say no to me? Me me me? *(He looks up, and raises his arms in the air.)* Where's the thunder? Come, you bolts, and split the miscreant asunder!

*No thunder, and no miscreant-splitting bolts.*

I'll make it worth your while. A thousand for every name.

MANFRED: Then you'll shoot me afterwards and take it all back.

GODWIN: Shoot you? Why would I shoot you? A friend, an ally? A man willing to tell me the names of my enemies? To root out the miscreants for me? Give us some names. Go on. Eh? No-one'll know. I'll protect you.

MANFRED: You promise you won't shoot me?

GODWIN: Cross my fingers and hope to fly.

MANFRED: All right.

GODWIN: Ah!

MANFRED: Do you have a telephone directory?

GODWIN: Indeed, indeed. *(He produces it.)*

MANFRED: Open it.

*GODWIN makes to open it, but stops in mid-movement.*

GODWIN: Wait a moment. Are you giving me orders? I don't take orders from treacherous riff-raff like you! Get down on your knees. Go on!

*MANFRED goes down on his knees.*

Now then, scum, let's hear you beg.

MANFRED: For what?

GODWIN: For what, O Almighty One?

MANFRED: For what o almighty one?

GODWIN: Say that again.

MANFRED: For what o almighty one?

GODWIN: That's not the way I want it said.

MANFRED: How do you want it said?

GODWIN: For what, O Almighty One?  
MANFRED: For what, O Almighty One?  
GODWIN: For whatever it is you want from me.  
MANFRED: I beg you, O Almighty One, please, please, open the telephone directory.  
GODWIN: That's better. Stay on your knees.  
*He opens the telephone directory.*  
And now?  
MANFRED: I beg you, O Almighty One, whose very presence maketh the pages to turn, please, please, make the pages to turn.  
*MR GODWIN turns the pages.*  
GODWIN: Well?  
MANFRED: Before you are the names of those who call you small and...*(he has difficulty:)*...megalomaniacal.  
*MR GODWIN stops turning the pages.*  
GODWIN: You mean everybody, don't you?  
MANFRED: Yes, O Almighty Intelligence.  
GODWIN: Now I know you're lying. The media don't call me small.  
MANFRED: No.  
GODWIN: People in my presence don't call me small.  
MANFRED: No.  
GODWIN: People who know what's good for them don't call me small.  
MANFRED: No.  
GODWIN: So you've lied.  
MANFRED: Ordinary people out of your presence and in private say that you're small and...*(stumbling:)*... megalomaniacal.  
GODWIN: You speak convincingly, apart from your pronunciation. But I ask myself: 'How does he know? Has he opinion-pollled every ordinary person in the universe? Does he have a secret service lurking in every shadow – as I do? Does he have a bug in every bedroom as I do? A finger in every fax machine, a mouse in every mobile, a tap on every telephone, a log-on to every email. And every female. The answer has to be: no. And if the answer is no, he is lying. And if he is lying, then it follows that not only am I not small, and not megalomaniacal, but that the time has truly come for a shooting.  
MANFRED: You promised not to shoot me.  
GODWIN: I had my fingers crossed.  
MANFRED: The greatest man on earth should keep his word.  
GODWIN: "The greatest man on earth." I like it. It has a ring to it. Of course, it's been said before. Many times. I believe I may even have said it myself. Very well, little creature of stink and grovel, I'll give you another chance. An obedience test. Next time I give you an order, I want you to stand up. Do you understand?  
MANFRED: Yes.  
GODWIN: If you stand up and obey my orders to the letter – I shall spare your life.  
MANFRED: I understand.  
GODWIN: Good. Kneel down.  
*MANFRED is uncertain. He stands up.*  
So, you disobey me.

MANFRED: You told me to stand up when you gave me the next order.  
GODWIN: But I ordered you to kneel down. He who stands up when ordered to kneel down is a very bad boy.  
MANFRED: I was kneeling down. How can I kneel down when I'm already kneeling down? And besides you told me to stand up when you told me to kneel down.  
GODWIN: Bewildering.  
MANFRED: You said...  
GODWIN: I know what I said, and I said what I meant, and I meant what I said, and I make the rules. You are a bad, bad boy, disloyal, disobedient, disrespectful, dishonest, dis, dat and the other, and you must be punished.

*He comes out from behind his desk. He is small.*

Kneel down.

*MANFRED kneels. GODWIN produces a gun.*

MANFRED: No, no, please.  
GODWIN: There's only one thing to do with treacherous traitors like you.  
MANFRED: Please!  
GODWIN: But I am not going to shoot you.  
MANFRED: Thank you!  
GODWIN: The greatest man on earth must keep his word. And so you are going to shoot yourself. Here. *(He offers him the gun.)* Take it, and die like a man who shoots himself.

*MANFRED cannot believe his luck. He takes the gun. GODWIN returns to sit at his desk. MANFRED stands up, and points the gun at him.*

MANFRED: The greatest man on earth is not only small and meg...megalomaniac, but he's also a fool. Put your hands where I can see them.  
GODWIN: I order you to shoot yourself.  
MANFRED: Well I'm not going to shoot myself, am I? I'm going to shoot you.  
GODWIN: No, no. This is impossible.  
MANFRED: I think not.  
GODWIN: Don't point it at me.  
MANFRED: Frightened?  
GODWIN: I order you...  
MANFRED: Sorry, little man, but I'm giving the orders now. He who hath the gun giveth the orders. Book of Manfred. Revised Version. Stand up.

*GODWIN stands up.*

Now come here.

*GODWIN obeys.*

Kneel down.

*GODWIN obeys.*

How does it feel?

GODWIN: Exhilarating.  
MANFRED: Now, say after me: I am small.  
GODWIN: I am small.  
MANFRED: I am a megalomaniac.  
GODWIN: I am a megalomaniac.  
MANFRED: And I am the biggest fool in the universe.  
GODWIN: And I am the biggest fool in the universe.  
MANFRED: You're at my mercy.

GODWIN: You're at my mercy.

MANFRED: I'm making a comment. Are you going to beg for your life?

GODWIN: Why not? Please spare me, spare my life, I beg you, oh kill me not, but let me live for ever and ever amen.

MANFRED: No.

GODWIN: Pardon?

MANFRED: I am going to rid the world of you.

GODWIN: (*deadpan:*) Aaaaah! Aaaaah! Save me! Save me!

MANFRED: Pathetic.

*He takes aim.*

GODWIN: No, no! (*Normal voice:*) Let me deliver my dying speech.

MANFRED: Make it short, then.

GODWIN: Friends, countrymen, citizens of the world, grieve not that it is come to this. I die for you, prematurely, and yet maturely, knowing that it is a far, far better thing that I do than anyone else has ever done, for by dying I am doing that which must be done, though if it were done when 'tis done, then it were well it were done quickly, and bother not to find out for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for me – me me me – in this hour of need, oh Eli, Eli, Lama Dalai Lama, mine and only mine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever – and ever – and ever and ever – and ever and ever and ever...

MANFRED: That's enough. You've said your last...

GODWIN: Amen.

MANFRED: Exactly. Now die!

*MANFRED takes aim again and fires. A little flag pops out of the gun.*

GODWIN: Saved by the flag! It's a miracle! (*He stands up.*) In years to come, this will be a legend, and upon this spot there will stand a sign: here did the gun defy the laws of bulletry, and the bullet did turn itself into a flag so that the almighty Godwin might be saved. I shall put up the sign myself. It's over, little Manfred, and you've failed every test. You can't even assassinate me properly. (*He goes to his desk, and speaks into the intercom:*) He's coming out now, sergeant.

MANFRED: You bastard!

*He moves towards the desk, but GODWIN produces another gun which halts him in his tracks.*

GODWIN: Out! Go on.

*MANFRED backs away.*

Right out. Till the nice sergeant has got you.

MANFRED: You are small.

GODWIN: Out.

MANFRED: And one day you'll fall.

*He goes out.*

GODWIN: "You are small, and one day you'll fall."

*There is a moment's silence, and then a horrific scream from off stage, cut short by the sound of a shot. GODWIN speaks into the intercom:*

Next!

*Blackout.*

*The End*

# LADY MACBETH ON THE UNDERGROUND

Characters:

Marie  
Harold  
Vicar  
Dora  
Damien  
Fred  
Marcus  
Simon  
Old Man  
Claude  
Jacques  
Giles  
Voice over loudspeaker

NOTE: This play can be performed by one actress (Marie) and two actors

The set: A platform on an underground station

Some of the interviews were first performed at the Union Theatre, Southwark, in December 2000 under the title *Surveying the Passengers*. The part of Marie was played by Victoria Jeffrey.

LADY MACBETH ON THE UNDERGROUND

*Scene: the platform of an Underground station. We hear the sound of trains at appropriate intervals. MARIE stands with a clipboard and pencil in her hands. She is smartly dressed, pretty, and friendly. She approaches HAROLD – middle-aged, grey-suited, with briefcase and evening paper.*

MARIE: Hello.

HAROLD: Oh, hello.

MARIE: I'm doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you'd mind just answering a few questions while you're waiting for your train.

HAROLD: No, of course not. Fire away.

MARIE: How often do you use this line?

HAROLD: Twice a day.

MARIE: Business or pleasure?

HAROLD: Business. Nobody would use this line for pleasure!

*They both laugh. MARIE takes notes throughout the conversation.*

MARIE: And how often do you have sex on the train?

HAROLD: Um...pardon?

MARIE: How often do you have sex on the train?

HAROLD: Well, never.

MARIE: Why not?

HAROLD: Why not? Well, you don't have sex on a train.

MARIE: Why don't you have sex on a train?

HAROLD: Well, it's...it's in public, isn't it!

MARIE: Do you think sex is strictly a private matter?

HAROLD: Yes. Yes, I do.

MARIE: Why?

HAROLD: Why? Well...because it is.

MARIE: Are you embarrassed if you see other people having sex?

HAROLD: You mean on the train?

MARIE: Have you seen other people having sex on the train?

HAROLD: Well, no actually.

MARIE: But would you be embarrassed?

HAROLD: Yes. Yes, I would.

MARIE: Why?

HAROLD: I...I just think...people...should do it in private.

MARIE: Dogs don't.

HAROLD: Ah, but dogs are animals.

MARIE: So are humans.

HAROLD: Well, yes, in some respects, but...

MARIE: In which respects?

HAROLD: Well, I suppose sex is an animal sort of thing.

MARIE: So are you embarrassed to see dogs having sex in public?

HAROLD: Well I...I can't say I like it.

MARIE: Why not?

HAROLD: Um...

*He shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders.*

It's a personal matter, I suppose.

MARIE: *(writing)* Personal matter...

*She thinks for a moment, then looks directly at him.*

What sort of personal matter?  
 HAROLD: Just personal taste. I prefer sex to be done in private – human or animal.  
 MARIE: With lights on or off?  
 HAROLD: Look, I don't want to be rude, but...  
 MARIE: I'm only doing my job. I have to ask these questions, you see, because the London Underground needs to know what sort of services its passengers require. Most passengers are deeply concerned about sex, and if we're to move with the times, we have to move with the times. A season ticket won't be much use to people if they're frustrated.  
 HAROLD: No...I suppose not.  
 MARIE: Which you obviously are.  
 HAROLD: What?  
 MARIE: Frustrated.  
 HAROLD: No, I'm...  
 MARIE: So it's for people like you that we're going to change the whole nature of underground travel. Do you know what that machine is over there?  
 HAROLD: Er...  
 MARIE: It's a condom machine. Now what's the use of a condom if you're not going to have sex?  
 HAROLD: But it doesn't mean you have to have it on the train!  
 MARIE: Now I'm going to ask you a slightly personal question.  
 HAROLD: I thought you already...  
 MARIE: (*very hush-hush*) Are you married?  
 HAROLD: Yes, but I'd hardly...  
 MARIE: Sh!  
     *She looks furtively around.*  
     To a woman?  
 HAROLD: Yes of course it's to a woman!  
 MARIE: (*normal tone*) What do you mean of course? You're not against gay marriages, are you?  
 HAROLD: Oh, well, no, but...  
 MARIE: Now listen carefully, because I must have a straightforward answer to this question. What do you think...is the approximate length...of a giant-size Mars bar?  
     *Harold looks at her quizzically, then grins.*  
 HAROLD: You're having me on, aren't you? I mean, this is all a joke, isn't it?  
     *He looks around.*  
     Am I on camera? Come on, I've rumbled you, haven't I?  
 MARIE: Why are you embarrassed at the mention of Mars bars?  
     *Now he doesn't know whether to grin or not. He looks at her, he looks around, he scratches his head with his paper...*  
     Five, six, seven inches?  
 HAROLD: I don't know! Six inches.  
     *She now writes copiously, even starting a new page. He waits for a while, then asks:*  
     What on earth are you writing?  
 MARIE: Oh! Now you've broken the thread!  
 HAROLD: What?

*She closes her eyes, as if trying to remember something.*

Sorry if I...

MARIE: Sh!

*Pause. She opens her eyes.*

No, it's gone.

*Sound of an approaching train.*

There's your train.

HAROLD: Look, what's this all about?

MARIE: You'll miss your train. It's been nice meeting you.

HAROLD: Damn!

*He rushes off.*

MARIE: *(to audience:)* It's not my real job, you know. I'm an actress. Look.

*She throws her arms in the air, head and clipboard held high.*

A tree.

*She puts her hands behind her back, clipboard held out behind her, sucks in her cheeks, and struts, jerking her head forward.*

A bird. I'm very versatile. I can do accents. *(Northern:)* Oh ay, ay, ah can. Oh, ah c'n do accents. This woon's northern. Oh ay, ay. *(Scottish:)* Ma Scottish accent's no tui guid. *(Cockney:)* Bu' me Cockney's bloody marv'llous. Well, I'm a Lond'ner, yer see. Born in Lond'n, live in Lond'n, an' now I'm bloody workin' in Lond'n, on the bloody Lond'n Unnergroun'. Wot a bleedin' job fer an actress.

“Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature:  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way.”

*(Cockney:)* The nearest way bein' the Lond'n Unnergroun'.

*(Snooty:)* For the ignorant among you, that was Lady Macbeth.

*(Whispering:)* The Scottish play. *(Normal:)* A riddle for you:

What's the connection between the Scottish Play and the London Underground? The answer is: me. Hands up those of you who don't know the story of Macbeth. You really are ignorant, aren't you? A quick synopsis. Act One: Macbeth wants to murder the king so that he can become king. Act Two: Macbeth kills the king and becomes king. Acts Three, Four and Five, Macbeth kills just about everyone in sight so that he can stay king. But he gets killed in the end so that somebody else can be king. Act Six: everybody says what a nice man Macbeth would have been if only he hadn't had a horrible wife, because Lady Macbeth agreed to help him. Oh, by the way, she's so appalled by what they did that she kills herself. Act Seven: Marie Morgan shocks the theatre world with The Truth About Lady Macbeth. Just give me one season at the Royal Shakespeare. Please. *(Pause.)* When I was fifteen, I won a prize at school for drama. First prize I'd ever won. I was thrilled to bits. Then the school captain comes up to me. God he was handsome. Martin Delaney – black hair, green eyes, I'd have died for him. *(As Martin:)* “Hi, Marie. Congratulations on the prize.” “Thank you, Martin, goggle, golly, gloop.” “Got a proposition for you,

Marie.” “A proposition, Martin? Golly, gloop, goggle.” “Yeah. How’d you like to earn fifty quid?” “Fifty quid, Martin? Gloop, golly, goggle.” “Yeah. At the prize-giving, when you’re up on the platform, take your knickers off and wave them in the air.” “Do you want me to do that, Martin?” “Yeah, it’d be terrific fun, Marie. And I’ll give you fifty quid if you do it.” I’d have done it for him for nothing. So on prize-giving day, up goes Muggins, takes ‘em off, waves ‘em in the air, and all the boys cheer like mad. Then the head takes my prize away, summons my parents to the school, and suspends me for a fortnight. The bastard Martin never gave me my fifty quid. And of course he got off scot free – said it was all a joke. Even Macbeth was fairer than that – he never blames Lady Mac for anything. He knows she did it for him. So when I read English at Cambridge, I wrote an essay on Lady Mac, defending her. (*Imitating professor:*) “Ah, Miss Morgan, this essay of yours. Obviously been reading a different play from the rest of us, what?” “No, professor, I just think she’s been misunderstood.” “Oh well, of course, you would, wouldn’t you, being a woman.”

*Enter a vicar.*

MARIE: Good afternoon, vicar.

VICAR: Good afternoon.

MARIE: I’m doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you’d mind just answering a few questions while you’re waiting for your train.

VICAR: No, of course not.

MARIE: How often do you use this line?

VICAR: Oh just occasionally. Once a week at the most.

MARIE: Business or pleasure?

VICAR: Business. Nobody would use this line for pleasure!

*They both laugh. Once again, Marie will take notes at appropriate moments.*

MARIE: Do you subscribe to Wittgenstein’s earlier view of language as analogous to pictures, or to his later view of language as analogous to games?

*The vicar stands for a while with his mouth open.*

VICAR: Well, to be honest, I’m not an expert on Wittgenstein.

MARIE: (*slightly shocked*) Oh! Were you aware that during the Second World War, Wittgenstein worked as a hospital porter and a lab assistant?

VICAR: (*with exaggerated interest*) Did he? No, I didn’t know that.

MARIE: He studied under Bertrand Russell, who had four wives.

VICAR: Really? Not all at the same time, I hope.

MARIE: No. Do you think it would be a good idea for passengers on the Underground to be given philosophy lectures during their journey?

VICAR: Well, yes...I mean...what have they got to lose?

MARIE: Are you aware that Bertrand Russell was against religion?

VICAR: Oh!

MARIE: And in favour of free love?

VICAR: Oh dear.

MARIE: Are you in favour of free love?

VICAR: Well no, I believe in Christian morality.

MARIE: But you would support philosophy lectures on the Underground.

VICAR: (*bumbling*) Well...perhaps...I mean...um...I need to think about this.

MARIE: Is it true that Jesus was descended from David?

VICAR: *(on surer ground now)* Ah, yes.

MARIE: Is it true that the line goes down from David to Solomon all the way through twenty-seven generations to Joseph, husband of Mary?

VICAR: Yes. You know your Bible.

MARIE: So Joseph was directly descended from David.

VICAR: Yes.

MARIE: But Joseph was not Jesus's father.

VICAR: Pardon?

MARIE: Is it not true that Jesus's father was the Holy Ghost?

VICAR: Ah!

MARIE: In which case, Jesus was not descended from David.

VICAR: Well, that's an interesting...

MARIE: Would you be willing to perform the marriage ceremony on the London Underground?

VICAR: Oh! This is all rather confusing – you seem to be dodging from one...

MARIE: I'm only doing my job. I have to ask these questions, you see, because the London Underground needs to know what sort of services its passengers require,

VICAR: Ah!

MARIE: Would you be prepared to perform the marriage ceremony on the London Underground?

VICAR: Well, yes, yes I would.

MARIE: Would you be willing to marry gay couples on the London Underground?

VICAR: Now that's a very controversial...

MARIE: Sorry, I have to have a yes or no.

VICAR: Well if the Church...

*She looks directly at him.*

*(hesitantly)* Ye-e-es.

MARIE: Would you be willing to bless the happy couple while they were consummating their relationship on the floor of a London Underground train?

VICAR: Is this...is this some kind of a joke, young lady?

MARIE: If not, why not?

VICAR: Oh no, this is really going too far.

MARIE: Did God create man and woman?

VICAR: Yes.

MARIE: Did God create sex?

VICAR: Yes.

MARIE: Were Adam and Eve naked before they ate the forbidden fruit?

VICAR: Yes.

MARIE: So what is there to be ashamed of?

VICAR: I think I hear my train coming.

*There is no sound.*

MARIE: No, there's no train yet...

VICAR: I really must go.

*He rushes off.*

MARIE: He's the sort who'd blame Eve. Most of you are probably the sort who'd blame Eve. My professor would have blamed Eve. But of course he would, wouldn't he, being a man. Personally, I blame the serpent, and I

blame God for making the serpent. Either God knew what he was doing, or he didn't know what he was doing. Both ways, he's guilty. (*As God:*) "A somewhat presumptuous judgment, my child. What about free will? "But you knew which way the cookie would crumble, didn't you, o heavenly father, because you know everything." "Well, yes, but it would have been so boring otherwise." "There you are, then, it's all your fault." "It's the Devil's fault!" "And who made the Devil?" "Curses, I've been rumbled." And God slinketh off, closing the pearly gates behind him. You know what pisses me off, I mean really pisses me off? The Church. (*Pious voice:*) "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." So say the bishops and the archbishops and the popes in their palaces. Not to mention the perverts in the presbytery and our friends the exploding fundamentalists. "Ah but Miss Morgan, that's man's fault, not mine." "Remember, o heavenly father, you made them in your own image. And while we're about it, why did you make the nasty bugs and viruses, and the nasty hurricanes and earthquakes and volcanoes?" Mm?

*Pause.*

Something terrible happened to Martin Delaney at Cambridge. He was in his last year, and this young first-year undergraduate invited him to her room. Apparently they'd known each other at school. She cooked him a meal, but it was all very innocent. I mean, the candlelight, and the wine, and the off-the-shoulder, and the cleavage and all that. It was really innocent. He had no right to do what he did. And she had no choice but to scream her head off. And the porters had no choice but to grab him and call the police. So he got sent down. It was really sad, because he was quite a gifted man – specially with that black hair and those green eyes. Maybe I shouldn't have invited him. Maybe I shouldn't have screamed. What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

*Enter DORA – elderly, muffled up.*

MARIE: Hello.

DORA: Hello dearie.

MARIE: I'm doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you'd mind just answering a few questions while you're waiting for your train.

DORA: I'm not waitin' fer a train dearie I don't come down 'ere ter wait fer trains I come down 'ere cos it's warmer'n up there an' cos sometimes yer c'n talk ter people down 'ere whereas up there nobody wants ter know yer not that anybody really wants ter know yer down 'ere but yer don't notice it so much cos people ain't movin' down 'ere leastways not till the train comes so they're sorta trapped 'ere like what I am an' that's why it feels like yer got company even if you 'aven't.

MARIE: Ah!

DORA: Ask away.

MARIE: Sorry?

DORA: You said you was doin' a survey an' was goin' to ask me some questions not that the London Underground would be interested in what I 'ave ter say cos their effin' ears would burn right off their 'eads if they 'eard what I 'ave ter say cos I tell yer straight dearie I've gorra lot o' complaints about the Underground I mean just look at these seats fer a start cos yer

can't stretch out on 'em like yer could on the old benches an' in any case they don't let yer sleep down 'ere no more cos they'd rather you was up on the streets freezin' an' drownin' though they don't want you in the streets neither in fact they don't want you nowhere at all but that's not what yer askin' about is it?

*Short pause as Marie writes furiously.*

MARIE: I'm supposed to ask you how often you use the line.

DORA: I dunno what yer mean by usin' the line I don't piss on it if that's what yer mean cos there's proper toilets 'ere at this station but if yer mean 'ow often I come down 'ere well I come most days though sometimes I like a change cos yer don't wanna get stuck in the same place all the time do yer I mean yer gorra 'ave a bit of variety but I s'pose yer could say I'm down 'ere five days a week give or take the odd day or two but maybe yer askin' 'ow often I go on the trains an' I don't dearie cos I'm a bit cloisterphobic yer know all packed in there like toothpaste an' the noise an' the tunnels no it's not good fer yer 'ealth cos ter tell yer the truth dearie some o' those people don't arf stink an' yer never know wot yer might catch.

*Another short pause.*

MARIE: I have to ask you whether you use the line for business or pleasure?

DORA: (*with a cackle*) Well that's a good one that is cos yer don't get much pleasure down 'ere I can tell yer specially on a Sat'day night wiv 'em all vomitin' all over the shop but the fact o' the matter is an' I'm gonna let you into a little secret 'ere dearie I do sometimes do a bit o' bus'ness down 'ere cos one o' the advantages of 'avin' people trapped is they can't just walk past yer like they do in the street or pretend you ain't there so I do sometimes go up to 'em like wot you do an' I ask 'em a little question like wot you do only the question wot I ask 'em is 'ave you got any change?

*Pause as MARIE finishes writing.*

I said 'ave you got any change?

MARIE: Oh! Yes, yes, of course.

*She gives DORA some money.*

DORA: (*counting*) Thank you dearie.

MARIE: Where did you live when you were a girl?

DORA: I was never a girl dearie bless yer 'eart but thanks fer askin' that's really nice I c'n see you care yes yer a carin' person but no I was never a girl.

MARIE: But you must have been young once.

DORA: Oh yes I was young orl right.

MARIE: So where did you live?

DORA: I lived wi' my Mummy 'n' Daddy in a 'ouse on Streatham Common but I run away when I was fifteen years old cos my Daddy killed my Mummy an' 'e woulda killed me if I'd stayed so I disappeared see an' nobody never seen me again but I notice you ain't writin' that down.

MARIE: No.

DORA: Your people don't wanna know that do they dearie like they don't wanna know nasty people like me in the first place cos it upsets 'em an' it would upset 'em even more if they knew wot was reelly goin' on down 'ere.

MARIE: Why did you say you were never a girl?

*DORA unmuffles herself.*

DORA: Cos I'm a man dearie only don't tell nobody cos 'e might still be lookin' fer me see an' if he found me 'e'd kill me bye dearie.

*DORA starts to leave.*

MARIE: Here! I've found a bit more change.

*DORA takes it, waves an acknowledgement, and leaves.*

Jesus! She's running away from her father. My Dad died when I was ten, and I've been looking for him ever since. Actually, I usually prefer to interview men, but I thought: "She looks interesting." Well she was, wasn't she? The thing about men is they don't see you as a person. They don't. They see you as a body. I like that. You can hear their little minds working: "Nice tits, nice mouth, nice legs, wouldn't mind a bit of that." Right, boys? Then gradually you can start turning them off. Sex on the Underground – Wittgenstein – make them feel stupid or abnormal or inferior. You can hear them thinking: "Why doesn't she shut up? Why doesn't she just turn into a lump of flesh, all soft and feminine, instead of yapping on?" And by the time you've finished with them, they can't wait to get away. You can't do that with a woman. A woman sees you as another woman. That's why men hate Lady Macbeth.

"Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts! Unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top full  
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose."

And all you men sit there and think, "Cor, is that a woman? How does Macbeth stand it? Poor guy, no wonder he went off murdering people." But people don't pray for what they've already got. She's praying not to be soft and feminine. Why? Because that bastard told her he wanted to kill Duncan and become king. Why did he tell her? "What beast was't then that made you break this enterprise to me?" He needed her help, that's why he told her. And the silly woman was so besotted, she took her knickers off and waved them for him. Then she found out what he was really like. Milk of human kindness? Him! All he cared about was saving himself. At Cambridge I was Ophelia. That's what the men like – the helpless little victim. Yeah, that's what a woman should be, eh boys? Crushed by the big, tough world that you men have put together. But who gets called the tragic hero? Not Lady Mac, or Ophelia, or Cordelia, or Desdemona. Oh no, it's the men – noble Macbeth, the princely Hamlet, Old Father Lear, the duped Othello. They're the ones we're supposed to feel sorry for. When did a woman mess up the world? But try telling that to the historians. Try telling that to the Royal bloody Shakespeare Company.

*DAMIEN – young, pushy – comes in talking on his mobile phone.*

DAMIEN: No, no, I'm tellin' you, 'old on. Don't sell...I know...I know...but what I'm sayin' is that it's goin' ter go up...

*MARIE approaches him and waits patiently.*

...I know it's fifteen thousand now, but 'old on cos it 'asn't finished goin' up...my judgment against yours, an' I'm in charge, right? Don't panic. I'll ring you back in a coupla minutes.

*He rings off.*

MARIE: Sorry about that. What c'n I do for you, darlin'?

MARIE: I'm doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you'd mind just answering a few questions while you're waiting for your train.

DAMIEN: No problem.

MARIE: How often do you use this line?

DAMIEN: All the time. Spend 'alf my life goin' up an' down.

MARIE: Business or pleasure.

DAMIEN: Business. Nobody would use this line for pleasure!  
*He laughs and MARIE doesn't.*

MARIE: Do you think mobile phones should be banned in public places?  
*He looks at her and laughs again.*

DAMIEN: You must be jokin'.

MARIE: I'm only doing my job. I have to ask these questions, you see, because the London Underground needs to know what sort of services its passengers require.

DAMIEN: Oh well, I c'n soon tell you that. Let's have the fuckin' trains runnin' on fuckin' time.

MARIE: (*writing*) ...on fucking time.

DAMIEN: I've just gotta ring my seckertary.  
*He makes his call*  
Janice...it's me. 'As 'is Lordship rung?...Right, if he does, tell 'im I'm on my way, but I'm stuck 'ere on the Underground...No, you c'n tell 'im what I just told Larry – not to bloody panic. I know what I'm doin'...Right, that's exactly right. Leave it all to me.  
*He rings off, and shrugs apologetically to MARIE.*

MARIE: You were askin' me some questions.  
If it takes three men eight days to dig a hole, how long will it take four men?  
*He looks at her quizzically for a moment, then smirks.*

DAMIEN: Depends 'ow 'ard they're workin'.

MARIE: If I buy shares at 45p and sell them again at 60p, what percentage profit will I make?

DAMIEN: A bloody good percentage. An' what's that gotta do with services on the Underground, eh?

MARIE: Do you think the London Underground should provide free access to The Internet?

DAMIEN: Ah, now you're talkin'. That would be very useful to people in my business.

MARIE: What is your business, if you don't mind my asking?

DAMIEN: Stocks 'n' shares – high finance. You know.

MARIE: Have you got any tips?

DAMIEN: Yeah. Leave it to people like me, 'oo knows what they're doin'. I've gotta make another call, then I'll be with you.  
*He makes his call.*  
Larry? It's me. Well?...What did I tell you?...No...If it's sixteen thousan' now, it'll be twenty thousan' in an hour...Trust me...  
*He winks at MARIE.*  
We'll sell when I say we sell...Right...Right...You've got the

message.

*He rings off.*

MARIE: Oh my God!

DAMIEN: What?

MARIE: I've just remembered! Sorry, but can I borrow your phone?

DAMIEN: Eh?

MARIE: I need your phone.

DAMIEN: No, no, you can't...

*She grabs it out of his hand.*

MARIE: It's an emergency.

DAMIEN: Hey!

*She turns away from him and starts to make her call.*

*(Note: if possible, she should do all this holding the clipboard tucked under her arm rather than putting it down.)*

Give it back! Fuckin' give that back!

*She turns again and gives the phone back to him. He snatches it from her.*

MARIE: Do you think the London Underground should provide mobile phones that work?

DAMIEN: Fuckin' bitch!

*He storms away.*

MARIE: *(writing)* Total prat. What the hell am I doing here wasting my time on total prats?

*She takes out her mobile, which hasn't rung.*

Hello?...Speaking. Who's this?...Royal Shakespeare Company...*(She mouths "Royal Shakespeare Company" to the audience)*...Lady Macbeth? Well, I might be able to. When is it?...Just a minute, I'll have to get my secretary to look at the diary...

*She does her bird act, and struts round the stage.*

Hello?...Yes, I can manage a couple of months in the autumn, but you do realize I shall do it my way...Right, as long as that's understood. And I shall want a say in who's to do Macbeth...And you...Byeee.

*She puts the phone away, then tuts and pulls it out again.*

It's just non-stop. I wish these things had never been invented. Yes? Who is it?...Speak up...Oh, it's you, Your Royal Highness...What is it this time?...Yes, it's really me...Come on, control yourself...No, I can't make it today, I'm tied up...No, not that sort of tied up. Tied up with meetings – Royal Shakespeare, Hollywood, usual things...Well, I might be able to give you an hour tomorrow, after breakfast, say. Yes, 11 o'clock... Well, if you like. That's nice of you. I'll have one of the Rembrandts... OK, Your Royal Highness, and try not to get too excited... Yes, keep yourself dry...Byeee.

*She puts the phone away, but this time it rings.*

Oh! *(She takes it out, and looks at it.)* Hello, Mum... Yes, I'm fine. You all right?... Well, I'll be home by seven... No, I'm not going out... Right, I'll buy some on the way. Anything else?... It's perfectly safe, Mum... No, it's not dangerous down here. I've met some lovely people. I even had a chat with a vicar... No, he was married, Mum... Yes, to a woman... I know they are, some of them, but he wasn't... I'll see you at seven... Yes, I will, I'll be very careful. I've got to go, Mum – there's a client waiting.

*She puts the phone away.*

Worry, worry, worry. I keep telling her it's ten times more dangerous up there than it is down here. She thinks the Underground's the same as the underworld. Only one thing worse in her eyes – the theatre. My Mum's what Ophelia would have become if she'd lived into old age. But I'm all she's got, and maybe when all's said and done, she's all I've got.

*FRED and MARCUS come on stage, decked out in Arsenal kit and singing raucously:*

FRED:)

Arsenal, Arsenal, Arsenal, Arsenal! Arsenal, Arsenal, Arsenal, Arsenal!

MARCUS:)

MARIE: Ah, Tottenham Hotspur fans, I presume.

FRED: Boo!

MARCUS: (*singing:*) Spurs are rubbish...

FRED: (*joining in:*) Spurs are rubbish...

MARCUS:)

Arsenal, Arsenal!

FRED:)

MARIE: So who were they playing, boys? West Indies?

MARCUS: West Indies?

FRED: Whatcher talkin' about? West Indies don' play football.

MARIE: Look, boys, I'm doing a questionnaire on behalf of Arsenal Football Club. Can you spare a minute?

FRED: Yeah.

MARIE: How often do you watch Arsenal play?

MARCUS: Ev'ry match, 'ome an' away.

MARIE: Why?

MARCUS: What?

MARIE: Why? Why do you watch them?

*MARCUS looks at Fred.*

FRED: Cos they're the best.

MARIE: So you wouldn't watch them if they lost?

MARCUS: Well, we're Arsenal supporters, ain't we? So we watch 'em wevver they win or lose.

MARIE: So you don't watch them because they're the best. You watch them because you support them.

FRED: Yeah.

MARIE: Why?

FRED: What?

MARIE: Why? Why do you support them?

*FRED looks at MARCUS.*

MARCUS: We support 'em because they're the best. Don't we?

MARIE: If Arsenal folded, who would you support?

FRED: (*grinning:*) Arsenal ain't gonna fold.

MARIE: No, but supposing they did. Who would you support? And why?

FRED: Well...

*He looks at MARCUS, who shrugs his shoulders.*

MARCUS: It ain't gonna 'appen. They can't fold.

FRED: Life wouldn't be worth livin', would it?

MARCUS: Not wivout Arsenal.

MARIE: (*writing:*) “Not worth living.” If you had to choose between watching Arsenal and having sex with the most beautiful girl in the world, which would you go for?  
*They are both flummoxed by this.*  
 Straight choice. One or the other.

MARCUS: Well, it ain’t gonna ‘appen, is it?

MARIE: But the directors of Arsenal Football Club particularly want an answer to this question. It could have a vital effect on their gates.

FRED: They ain’t plannin’ ter lay it on, are they? (*Dirty laugh.*)

MARIE: I’m afraid I must have an answer.

MARCUS: Well, the thing is...if you was ‘avin’ sex an’ you knew Arsenal was playin’, you’d be wonderin’ all the time ‘ow they was getting’ on, wouldn’t yer? I mean, if it was me, I’d prob’ly ‘ave the teletext on. An’ if I saw they was losin’, I don’t fink I’d get it up.

FRED: No, I wouldn’t get it up – not if they was losin’.

MARIE: (*writing:*) “Arsenal One, Sex Nil.” Do you believe in God?

FRED: Yeah. ‘Is name’s Arsène Wenger\* (*\*or whoever*). (*Raucous laughter.*)

MARIE: Do you believe that God supports Arsenal or Manchester United?  
*They think about it.*

FRED: Arsenal.

MARCUS: ‘E never supported Arsenal free years ago when the ref give a penalty in the last minute. ‘E was on Man U’s side.

FRED: Swings ‘n’ roundabouts, innit?

MARCUS: Can’t make up ‘is mind.

MARIE: Last question: in the hour before kick-off, which one of these would you prefer: music – free hot dogs – a religious service – a lecture on poverty in Africa, followed by a collection – an illustrated talk on AIDS – a punchup – a band of naked girls dancing?  
*They both laugh.*

MARCUS: Girls dancin’.

FRED: Yeah.

MARIE: And in second place?

FRED: A punchup.

MARCUS: I wouldn’t mind free ‘ot dogs.

FRED: Yeah, maybe free ‘ot dogs an’ then a punchup.  
*Sound of train.*

MARIE: Thanks, boys. There’s your train.

FRED: Cheers, darlin’. ‘Ere, this is fer you.  
*He hands her a deflated football. They rush off, singing “Arsenal”.*

MARIE: Our Wenger\* (*\*or whoever*), who art from heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy cup and league come, thy will be done, away as it is at home. Give us this day our weekly goals, and forgive us our infringements though we kick back at them that infringe against us. And lead us not into defeat. But deliver us from goals against, for thine are the tactics, the transfers, the victories for ever and ever. Amen.  
*She holds up the ball.*  
 Alas, poor Yorick. This football – this ex-football – has been made by somebody. (*Reassuring the audience:*) It has. If I told you this evolved out of nothing, you’d say I was bonkers. Somebody made it. And yet some people believe that brains and eyes and sperm and eggs

evolved out of nothing. The greatest minds in the world can't create a football that could reproduce itself, but people think that chance could create us. Chance that made the brain that moved the hand that made the ball that chance could never make. If you believe that, you'll believe anything.

*SIMON – young, gaunt, haggard – enters, and stands staring down at the track.*

Well, it's more comforting to believe in nothing than to believe in something nasty. But it's more comforting to believe in something nice than to believe in nothing. *(Looking up:)* That's my problem with you. *(God:)* "Ah, my child. Comfort is truth, truth comfort. That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

*MARIE sees Simon, and approaches him.*

MARIE: Hello.

*No response.*

Hello-o.

SIMON: *(not looking at her)* Go away.

MARIE: I'm doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you'd mind just answering a few questions while you're waiting for your train.

SIMON: Leave us alone.

MARIE: How often do you use this line?

SIMON: I'm gonna use it once.

MARIE: Business or pleasure?

SIMON: Neither.

MARIE: Are you planning to commit suicide?

SIMON: *(looking at her for the first time)* Yeh.

MARIE: Are you satisfied with the London Underground's facilities for committing suicide?

SIMON: I'll let you know.

MARIE: Would you consider leaving something to the London Underground in your will?

SIMON: I haven't made a will.

MARIE: Do you think the London Underground should provide will-making facilities in all its stations?

SIMON: I haven't thought about it.

MARIE: Do you want your burned, squashed and shattered remains to be buried or cremated?

*SIMON shrugs.*

If you happen only to get burned, or only to get squashed and shattered, but not actually killed, do you wish to be treated on the NHS or privately?

SIMON: Look, shut up, will you?

MARIE: If your eyes or teeth happen to get knocked out, do you want London Underground to glue them back in, or would you prefer new ones?

SIMON: You're not gonna put me off, so go away.

MARIE: Are you aware that ninety per cent of people who've killed themselves regret it later?

*SIMON thinks about this for a moment, then starts to grin.*

SIMON: You can't regret it once you're dead.

MARIE: How do you know?

SIMON: How do you know?

MARIE: London Underground has a special hotline. Through British Teletomb.  
SIMON: Don't be daft.  
MARIE: Are you aware that committing suicide on the London Underground is an offence for which you can be fined a maximum of one hundred and fifty pounds?  
*SIMON laughs.*  
SIMON: Stop it!  
MARIE: Did you know that a suicide on the line can cause delays of up to ten hours, thereby making the person responsible extremely unpopular?  
SIMON: You're crazy, you know that?  
MARIE: Not as crazy as you, you great berk. What do you want to kill yourself for?  
SIMON: Nobody loves me.  
MARIE: You think they're going to love when you're splattered all over the front of a train?  
SIMON: Lost me job.  
MARIE: Get a new one.  
SIMON: Lost me girl-friend.  
MARIE: Get a new one.  
SIMON: Lost a valuable antique diamond ring that was left to me by me Auntie Margaret.  
MARIE: Get a...nold one.  
SIMON: Nearly caught you there, didn't I? What's your name?  
MARIE: Marie.  
SIMON: I'm Simon. You're all right, Marie.  
MARIE: So are you, Simon.  
SIMON: Do you fancy me?  
MARIE: I might do. Whole. Wouldn't fancy you in bits and pieces. You're not going to jump, are you?  
SIMON: No. Can't afford the fine.  
MARIE: Here. Present for you.  
*She hands him the football.*  
That could have been your head.  
SIMON: Give us a kiss.  
*She looks at him for a moment, and then gives him a light kiss. Enter OLD MAN.*  
MARIE: Now go and get yourself a life.  
SIMON: Thanks, Marie.  
*He goes off. She watches him go.*  
OLD MAN: Excuse me.  
MARIE: Oh, hello.  
OLD MAN: Is this the right line for Cockfosters?  
MARIE: Yes, but you'll have to change at King's Cross.  
OLD MAN: Thank you.  
*He doesn't move.*  
MARIE: Is there something else?  
OLD MAN: Well, I thought you might want to ask me some questions. (*No response.*) I saw you asking other people, so I thought you might want to ask me.  
MARIE: What sort of questions would you like me to ask you?

OLD MAN: Maybe how old I am.  
 MARIE: Right. How old are you?  
 OLD MAN: Guess.  
 MARIE: Seventy.  
 OLD MAN: I'm eighty-one.  
 MARIE: Are you?  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 MARIE: And now you'd like me to say: "How amazing! You only look seventy!"  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 MARIE: Well that really is amazing – in fact, it's astonishing. I'm dumbfounded. I mean, when I saw you, I thought: "That man is seventy – not a day older than seventy." And now you tell me you're eighty-one. I don't believe it. You're having me on, aren't you?  
 OLD MAN: No, no, it's true. I'll show you – look. (*He produces a card.*) There's my date of birth.  
 MARIE: Well, so it is. Eighty-one...and a bit!  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 MARIE: I'm flabbergasted.  
 OLD MAN: I've got twelve grandchildren.  
 MARIE: You haven't!  
 OLD MAN: Yes I have. Seven girls and five boys.  
 MARIE: Well, that's fabulous.  
 OLD MAN: I remember all their names.  
 MARIE: Do you?  
 OLD MAN: Would you like to hear them?  
 MARIE: I believe you. What about their birthdays? Do you remember all their birthdays?  
 OLD MAN: No, I have to write them down on the calendar.  
 MARIE: Well, if I had twelve grandchildren, I'm sure I'd have to write their birthdays on the calendar.  
 OLD MAN: The eldest is twenty-eight.  
 MARIE: Is he?  
 OLD MAN: No.  
 MARIE: Sorry?  
 OLD MAN: Not he. She. She's twenty-eight.  
 MARIE: So do you have any great-grandchildren?  
 OLD MAN: No. But I'm hoping. The second eldest is twenty-six, and he's living with a girl from Glasgow. They've shacked up together.  
 MARIE: Have they?  
 OLD MAN: Yes. Shacked up means they live together, but they're not married.  
 MARIE: Oh. I didn't know that.  
 OLD MAN: Last summer, I went to Southend-on-Sea.  
 MARIE: Did you?  
 OLD MAN: Yes.  
 MARIE: And did you like it?  
 OLD MAN: Well...I went with a group.  
 MARIE: A group?  
 OLD MAN: Yes. And there was an elderly lady. And I'm afraid she did

something in her knickers.

MARIE: Did she?

OLD MAN: Yes. It didn't smell very nice.

MARIE: I see.

*Sound of a train.*

OLD MAN: That's my train. I enjoyed our little conversation.

MARIE: So did I.

OLD MAN: Goodbye.

MARIE: Goodbye.

*She watches him disappear, then she sits down. She is very sad.*

I shall never have any grandchildren. I don't suppose it matters. I did a lot of acting at Cambridge, but I wasn't really sure – not like I am now. It was the first time I'd been away from home, from my Mum. Afterwards, I went to Ghana to teach. Just to go somewhere different. I loved it. I loved the Ghanaians. They smile a lot. And I loved the African sun. It makes you drunk. Then I met this man, Frank Buabeng. He was something big on the railways, very handsome, laughing, bright. I didn't actually know he was married, though. Not that it would have made any difference – to him or to me, because somehow over there... Anyway, I got pregnant, and I didn't want a child – not then. He didn't want me to have it either. He took me to this old woman, and it went wrong. They rushed me to hospital, and I nearly died. Then they told me that I could never have children. So I went crying home to Mum. It broke her heart. And when I stopped crying, I started asking questions. Like what the hell's going on in this world? And how much is my fault, other people's fault, chance's fault, God's fault, and the fault of the Royal Shakespeare Company. *(Pause.)* I'm sick of this job. I'll lose it anyway if they find out what I'm doing. Does it matter?

*Enter Claude and Jacques, a gay couple holding hands.*

MARIE: Hello,

CLAUDE: Bonjour.

JACQUES : Bonjour

MARIE: I'm doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you'd mind just answering a few questions while you're waiting for your train.

CLAUDE: Qu'est-ce qu'elle dit?

JACQUES: Sais pas. Woood you speeeek...more slowleeeee pleeeese?

CLAUDE: More slowleeee.

MARIE: *(more slowly)* I'm doing...a survey...for the London Underground...

JACQUES: Ser...vay...?

CLAUDE: Ser...vay...?

JACQUES: Ah! Je sais. You wornt to knew ser vay for ze Londonne Ondairgronde. Eet ees' ere. Zees ees ze Londonne Ondairgronde.

CLAUDE: Ze Londonne Ondairgronde.

MARIE: No, a survey. I wonder if you'd mind...

JACQUES: Wandair...?

CLAUDE: Wandair...?

JACQUES: Wandair...c'est 'errer'...You 'ave loooosed your vay. You air een Londonne. Een ze Ondairgronde.

CLAUDE: Zees eez ze Ondairgronde.

MARIE: No, I want to ask you some questions.

JACQUES: Oui, oui, je comprends. You wornt to usque whaire ees ze Londonne Ondairgronde. Eet ees ‘ere. Zees ees ze Londonne Ondairgronde.

CLAUDE: Zees eez all ze Londonne Ondairgronde.

MARIE: Right...um...how often do you use this line?

JACQUES: More slowleeee.

CLAUDE: More slowleeee, pleeze.

MARIE: How of-ten...do you use...this line?

JACQUES: ‘Ow off tenne...

CLAUDE: (*pushing out his lips as if in a kiss*) Doooo yoooo uuuuse...

JACQUES: Zees laine...

MARIE: How often do you travel on this Underground?

JACQUES: Travelle...

CLAUDE: Travelle...

JACQUE Travail! Elle veut savoir si nous travaillons ici!

CLAUDE: Ah! Non, non, non, non, non, non, non, non, non!

JACQUES: Non, weeee doooo note wairk een ze Londonne Ondairgronde.

CLAUDE: Non, non, non, non, non!

MARIE: Well, are you here on business or...

JACQUES: Beeeezneeeess...?

CLAUDE: Beeeezneeeess...?

JACQUES: Beeeezneeeess, beeeezneeeess, beeeezneeeess...je sais ce que c’est. C’est un proverbe anglais. Ze beez neez. Les genoux d’une abeille. C’est un compliment (*To MARIE:*) Senk you vairy mouche. You air ze beez neez too.

CLAUDE: You air two beez neez.

MARIE: Well, thank you both very much. You’ve been very helpful. (*Very English accent:*) Au revoir.

JACQUES: Au revoir!

CLAUDE: Au revoir!

JACQUES: (*as they go off, with a perfect English accent:*) Silly cow!

MARIE: (*not to them, but in perfect French:*) Espèce de putain. Petits cons! So what language does God speak? (*Looking up:*) It had better be English, mate. Even Arsène has to speak English. Rats don’t speak English. That’s their bad luck. Imagine yourself a researcher. (*Rat:*) “Ouch! That hurts! Stop it! Please don’t put that stuff in me, please don’t cut me, please don’t make me go mad!” Animals can only squeal, scream or whimper – so take no notice. Yet people believe in evolution, so they know we all came from common ancestors, and we all survive because of pain, fear, hunger, love. “Oh, they’re just animals – they don’t feel things like we do. The Jews, the Arabs, the blacks – they don’t feel things like we do. Kill the animals. Kill the Jews, kill the Arabs, kill the blacks.” I should be at Hyde Park, shouldn’t I? Well, I’ve been there too. And I’ve marched. I’ve marched against the lying politicians, and the murderous industrialists, and I’ve marched for peace and for the environment, and I’ve collected for victims and sick kids. But I don’t want to do that as a career. I want to act. Damn and blast it, I want to be Lady Macbeth at the Royal Shakespeare, not Lady Macbeth on the Underground. I want people to say: “That’s Marie Morgan, and she’s a great actress.” I don’t know why it matters, but it

not does. Acting is me, which doesn't make sense because if I'm acting I'm

me. But it does make sense, because I don't want to be me. I want to get away from me. I'm not happy being me. (*Pause, during which her expression is completely unreadable.*) But I'm not unhappy being me. No, I'm pleased about some of the things I am. I'm a fighter. I'm pleased that I'm a fighter. Men don't like fighters – especially when they're a bit aggressive. That's why Lady Mac is tragic. She makes herself into a fighter, and because she's a damn good actress, people think that's what she's really like. So when she relives all her nightmares at the end, and then kills herself, you all say: "Serves her right, the bitch!" I'm not suicidal, though. But then I never helped to kill anybody. Except my unborn (*she breaks off*)...I was punished for that. But I don't think I'm suicidal. No, no, I don't think so.

*GILES enters – stiff and pompous.*

MARIE: (*to herself:*) Smile. (*To Giles:*) Hello.

GILES: Yes?

MARIE: I'm doing a survey for the London Underground. I wonder if you'd mind just answering a few questions while you're waiting for your train.

[GILES: Ah, well, hm, depends on the questions.

MARIE: How often do you use this line?

GILES: Never if I can help it.

MARIE: Business or pleasure.

GILES: Nobody would use this line for pleasure! Ha!  
*Snort from GILES, sickly grin from MARIE.*

Now let me ask you a question. Do you know who I am?

MARIE: Sorry?

GILES: You don't recognize me?

MARIE: No, I'm afraid not.

GILES: (*disappointed*) Oh! I'm Giles Worsley.

MARIE: Have we met then?

GILES: I'm the Deputy Assistant Secretary to the Deputy Under-Secretary to the Secretary to the Minister of Transport!

MARIE: Oh.

GILES: I practically run the Underground!

MARIE: Oh good. Then perhaps you can tell me why the trains are constantly delayed and lines are constantly closed.

GILES: Now before I answer that question, let me say this: the London Underground is one of the finest railway systems you'll ever find, and it

is

indeed the envy of the world, and what's more – now this is a fact that most people are unaware of – the London Underground was the very first underground railway in history, and that's something to be proud of. We led the way for others to follow, and too many people spend too much time knocking this country, but the government believes, quite rightly, that our heritage should be cherished and nurtured, and we shall leave no stone unturned in our quest to keep this country in the forefront of economic and technological development. On the London Underground.

MARIE: So why are the trains constantly delayed and lines constantly closed?

GILES: Ah, now it's important to put your question in its historical perspective. Until this government came into power, investment in the London Underground was scandalously low, and despite all the well-documented efforts of my own Party when we were in Opposition, the system was economically and technologically neglected to a point of virtual breakdown. However, since coming into power, my government has raised investment by no less than 93.4 per cent and independent surveys have shown that there has been a corresponding improvement in services, and the vast majority...

MARIE: Not according to my survey.

GILES: ...Do please let me finish. You've asked me a question, and I think I have a right to answer. Independent surveys have shown that not only have services improved dramatically under this government, but also the majority – the vast majority – of Londoners support the government's initiative in introducing these new policies designed to streamline the nation's transport and make it economically and technologically congruent with the needs and requirements of twenty-first-century society.

MARIE: So why are the trains constantly delayed and lines constantly closed?

GILES: You've already asked that question.

MARIE: But you haven't answered it.

GILES: I think I've given you a very full and very clear answer, but I will just make one further and very important point. The government is absolutely and categorically blah blah rhubarb rhubarb waffle waffle waffle because it is simply essential for all Londoners categorically and absolutely waffle waffle with the best possible facilities and the most reliable rhubarb rhubarb which will keep this country in the forefront of the blah blah blah, best system in the waffle, keep Britain rhubarb...

VOICE: (*over loudspeaker*) Attention, all passengers. This is a public announcement. Owing to technical difficulties there will be no more trains today. All passengers are advised to take a bus or taxi or to walk to their destinations. We regret any inconvenience, and the Minister of Transport sends his love. Have a nice day.

GILES: Damn!

*He goes off.*

MARIE: (*waving:*) Bye. Lovely talking to you. (*Looking up:*) OK, God, if you're so full of the milk of human kindness, why do you send us bugs and floods and earthquakes? "Well, Marie, the point is that I'm absolutely and categorically blah blah rhubarb rhubarb waffle waffle waffle, and that's all there is to it." But it's still a miracle, whatever your motives, and I'm grateful. I think I'm grateful. The trains keep coming till suddenly someone says there'll be no more trains. Anyone there?

*No response. She puts her clipboard down. During the following performance, she plays two different characters: 1) Lady Macbeth alone, in agony or terror as the case may be; 2) Lady Macbeth with her husband, acting with feigned confidence and authority:*

"1) Yet here's a spot. Out damned spot! Out I say! – (*She looks down at the grooms:*) One, two: why, then 'tis time to do it. – Hell is murky.

2) Fie, my Lord, fie! A soldier and afeard? – What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to accompt? 1) Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? 2) No more o' that, my Lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting. 1) Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! Oh! Oh! 2) Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale. – I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave. To bed, to bed: there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand.

*(Now both characters combine, with 1) breaking through 2):)*

What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.”

To death, to death, to death.

VOICE: *(over loudspeaker:)* Hello, Marie. This is God speaking. If you don't bugger off out of there in two minutes, we'll lock the gates on you and you can stay there all night.

*She looks up.*

MARIE: *(quietly:)* Thank you, God. Another day for history.

*She takes out her mobile and dials.*

Hello, Mum. I'll be home early. The trains have stopped... Yes, I'll get it on the way... I'm leaving now... No, I'll have to get a bus. See you soon.

*She puts the mobile away and grabs her clipboard.*

She doesn't like surprises. Whereas I like surprises. But one day I won't. One day I'll say: “This is what I want. Let me keep it.” And then he'll say: “Nothing's for keeps, Marie. You've had your chance.” I'll be forty next year.

*She goes off.*

*The End*



