

David Henry Wilson

THE BISCUIT

THE CHARACTERS:

Mr Godfrey
1st Grotesque
2nd Grotesque

Note: The two Grotesques can be male or female.

The stage is bare apart from Mr Godfrey's cage.

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MR GODFREY is standing in his cage. The GROTESQUES enter.

1st G.: Ugh! Look at that!

2nd G.: What a sight!

1st G.: Ouf. Makes your flesh creep.

GODFREY: You've got no right to shut me in here.

1st G.: It talks.

2nd G.: Horrible noise.

GODFREY: I demand to be released.

1st G.: Demand!

2nd G.: It demands!

GODFREY: This whole thing is ridiculous. You're the ones who should be bloody shut up.

1st G.: After what you've done, I don't think you should be pointing fingers.

2nd G.: After what you've done, you should be sitting in your cage contemplating.

1st G.: And repenting.

GODFREY: I haven't done anything. I'm totally innocent.

1st G.: Totally innocent.

2nd G.: He says it with such total innocence.

GODFREY: All right, what am I accused of?

They look at each other.

Well? Name one crime that I'm accused of.

1st G.: You don't have to commit a crime to be put in a cage.

2nd G.: What crime did Polly Parrot commit?

They both let out a shrill laugh.

GODFREY: If you're not accusing me of anything, then you have to let me go.

1st G.: Why?

GODFREY: Those are the rules.

2nd G.: Whose rules?

GODFREY: Our rules. The rules of society.

1st G.: Whose society?

GODFREY: You can't just lock somebody up for no reason!

1st G.: Who says it's for no reason?

GODFREY: Then give me a reason!

1st G.: Why?

GODFREY: Because it's my right!

1st G.: Right!

2nd G.: Right!

They look at each other, and laugh their shrill laugh.

1st G.: All right, little Godfrey, we'll give you a reason. You're a monster. An ugly...

2nd G.: Brutal!

1st G.: ...brutal...

2nd G.: Murderous!

1st G.: ...murderous, greedy...

2nd G.: Rapacious!

1st G.: ...rapacious monster.

2nd G.: You're a disease.

1st G.: A plague.

2nd G.: A blot.

1st G.: (*slightly surprised:*) A blot?

2nd G.: On the landscape.

1st G.: I see what you mean.

2nd G.: You soil the soil.

1st G.: Interesting.

2nd G.: You are a boil on the bottom.

1st G.: Crude.

2nd G.: You built your own cage.

Pause.

1st G.: And that's true.

GODFREY : I'm good. I do nothing but good.

2nd G.: (*Scottish:*) "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!"

Shrill laugh from both of them. Pause.

GODFREY: Then you should see yourselves. You call me a monster! Look at yourselves! You're so ugly, a warthog would puke at you. If I'm diseased, then you're leprous. Look at the sores on your faces, the carbuncles, the pus. Hear the cackles, smell the stench. What evil force cobbled you together?

1st G.: You did.

2nd G.: And there's an end of it.

1st G.: Let's go.

They go out. He stares after them.

GODFREY: (*shouting:*) I never did any such thing!

He subsides, and talks to himself.

Mistaken identity. That's what it is. I'm a victim of mistaken identity. What a nightmare!

2nd GROTESQUE returns.

2nd G.: In spite of everything, one part of me feels sorry for you. I don't like to show it when he/she's around, but in your situation I'd feel the same.

GODFREY: Then let me out.

2nd G.: I can't do that. But here, take this.

He/she passes something through the bars.

GODFREY: What is it?

2nd G.: A biscuit.

GODFREY looks from it to the GROTESQUE and back. Clearly the biscuit is revolting and he is torn between his revulsion and the desire not to spurn an act of kindness.

GODFREY: Thank you.

2nd G.: Aren't you going to eat it?

GODFREY: I'll...I'll eat it later.

2nd G.: Don't want it to go bad.

GODFREY: No. I'll eat it soon. I'm not hungry at the moment.

2nd G.: I'd have thought you'd be starving. Anyway, it's yours.

GODFREY: Thank you.

2nd G.: Don't tell him/her I gave it to you.

GODFREY: No.

2nd GROTESQUE goes out. GODFREY looks at the biscuit, shudders, and throws it down in one corner of the cage. 1st GROTESQUE returns.

1st G.: What's he/she been saying?

GODFREY: What?

1st G.: I want to know what he/she said to you.

GODFREY: That's none of your business.

1st G.: Yes it is. You'd better tell me.

GODFREY: No.

1st G.: (*pointing:*) What's that?

MR G.: What?

1st G.: In the corner there. It's a biscuit, isn't it? He/she gave you that, didn't he/she? Well? There's no need for you to answer. It's obvious. (*Intimate tone:*) Now I want you to listen very carefully. Although you don't realize it, I'm your friend. Right? I'm the one you can trust. You know where you are with me. When all this happened, there was a lot of ill feeling, resentment, but I never wanted you killed. You understand? And I don't believe in inflicting suffering for the sake of suffering. You may do, but I don't. Only I'm not so sure about him/her. You can never be sure how others think. Others may say one thing and think another, but I'm not like that. I'm straightforward.

GODFREY: What do you mean about killing?

1st G.: What do you mean, what do I mean?

GODFREY: Is someone going to kill me?

1st G.: I didn't say that.

GODFREY: Well does someone want me killed?

1st G.: Oh yes. There are plenty that want you killed. After what you've done.

GODFREY: What have I done?

No response.

What have I done?

1st G. (*slowly:*) You made...the mess. And now we have to clear it up, but we don't know how to.

GODFREY: What mess?

1st G.: Don't play the innocent with me! You might wheedle a biscuit out of him/her, but I'm different metal. Now listen. I'm your friend. I want to know the truth. What did he/she tell you?

GODFREY: Nothing. He/she just gave me a biscuit.

1st G.: Let me put the question another way. What did you tell him/her?

GODFREY: I didn't tell him/her anything!

2nd GROTESQUE returns.

2nd G.: Oh, there you are. I've been looking everywhere.

1st G.: I mislaid something.

2nd GROTESQUE spots the biscuit.

2nd G.: A biscuit, maybe?

A moment's pause, then they both laugh their shrill laugh.

GODFREY: Excuse me.

They stop laughing and look at him.

Am I going to be killed?

2nd G. (*to 1st G.:*) Now what have you been saying to him?

1st G.: Nothing.

2nd G.: Yes you have. He was all right when I left him, and now he's frightened. (*To GODFREY.*) What's he/she been saying to you?

GODFREY: Somebody wants me killed.

2nd G.: I thought so.

1st G.: And unless I'm much mistaken, I suppose you told him you felt sorry for him. (*To GODFREY:*) Am I right?

He nods.

There you are, then.

GODFREY: Please let me go!

1st G.: (*to 2nd G.:*) Why don't you sing to him? Soothe the savage breast?

2nd G.: (to tune of "Rock of Ages ", in surprisingly melodious voice:)

Barren mountains, barren seas,
Faded flowers and fallen trees,
Blackened sky and blackened earth,
Living death and dying birth...

1st G.: Go on.

2nd G.: I can't.

Silence.

GODFREY: Please!

1st G.: Tell us we're beautiful.

GODFREY looks from one to the other.

GODFREY: You're beautiful.

2nd G.: And now tell us you're ugly.

GODFREY: I'm ugly.

1st G.: Do you believe that?

GODFREY: I don't know. I'm doing what you told me to do.

1st G.: But you don't believe what you're saying?

GODFREY: That you're beautiful?

1st G.: Right.

GODFREY: No!

1st G.: Then why did you say it?

GODFREY: You told me to say it!

1st G.: And you always do as you're told?

GODFREY: I thought you were going to set me free!

1st G.: So you told what you consider to be a lie in order that we should set you free.

GODFREY: I'll do anything to get free!

1st G.: Then kill yourself.

The 1st GROTESQUE stomps away to ruminate.

2nd G.: Very bad tactics.

GODFREY: What?

2nd G.: You don't want to tell lies, not to us.

GODFREY: All right, then, I'm beautiful and you're ugly. Now will you let me go.

2nd G.: Are you calling me ugly?

GODFREY: I'll call you whatever you want me to call you.

2nd G.: Once upon a time the positions were reversed. We had to call you what you wanted to be called. The universe is a wheel.

GODFREY: I don't know what you mean.

2nd G.: If you'd suffered as much as we have, you'd know. But I don't want to quarrel with you. I'm your friend.

GODFREY: That's what he/she said. You're not my friends, either of you. If you were my friends, you'd let me out.

2nd G.: We can't.

GODFREY: Why not?

2nd G. (*across to 1st G.:*) He wants to know why we can't let him out.

1st G.: Tell him.

2nd G.: We can't let you out, because we didn't put you in.

GODFREY: If you didn't put me in, then who did?

The 1st GROTESQUE rejoins the 2nd.

Who did put me in?

They laugh their shrill laugh.

Why is that funny?

1st G.: Tell him.

2nd G.: Tell him why it's funny, or tell him who put him in?

1st G.: The answer's the same.

2nd G.: (*To GODFREY:*) You put yourself in, and after the mess you created, you don't deserve to come out.

GODFREY (*coldly:*) If I do come out, I'll kill you.

1st G.: Of course you will. That's the nature of the beast, isn't it? But if you don't come out, maybe we'll kill you.

2nd G.: I don't like this talk of killing.

1st G.: Why not?

2nd G.: It lowers us.

1st G.: Is that why you gave him a biscuit? To raise yourself?

2nd G.: Let's not quarrel.

1st G.: I'm only asking.

2nd G.: Then don't.

GODFREY: If what you say is true, and I did shut myself in here, then presumably I can let myself out again.

1st G.: Do not presume.

GODFREY: I wouldn't have thrown away the key, would I?

He searches his pockets. Nothing. He looks round the cage, then scans the territory outside the cage.

Who has the key? Did I give the key to someone?

1st G.: Who would you give the key to? Who would you trust?

GODFREY: Are you asking me to ask myself, or are you telling me there's nobody?

1st G.: Ambiguity, the art of life.

2nd G.: The life of art.

GODFREY: You're enjoying this, aren't you? Bloody sadists!

2nd G. (*quite offended:*) I'm not a sadist.

1st G.: I am. Just a little bit. I like seeing somebody suffer who deserves to suffer.

GODFREY (*to 2nd G.:*) Who has the key? Does anyone have the key? Answer me!

2nd G.: You should eat your biscuit before it goes bad. (*To 1st G.:*) Let's go.

GODFREY: No, don't go!

They go to the side of the stage and watch.

They're lying. Nobody shuts himself in a cage. Why would they lie?

This is pointless. I've got to get out. So what's happened to the key? If I did put myself in here, what did I do with it? The key is the key.

1st G.: I told you it's hopeless.

2nd G.: Not yet.

1st G.: He'll only think of himself. Always has done, always will.

2nd G.: He'll have to go through stages.

1st G.: Stage one, self. Stage two, self. Stage three, self. How many stages?

2nd G.: All the way through to the end.

1st G.: Who says there'll ever be an end?

2nd G.: We shall know. I'll help him.

2nd GROTESQUE returns to the cage.

You look depressed. Why don't you eat your biscuit?

GODFREY: I think you have the key.

2nd G.: Aren't you curious about something?

GODFREY: What?

2nd G.: The mess.

2nd GROTESQUE returns to join 1st.

GODFREY: What mess? WHAT MESS?

He has lost sight of 2nd GROTESQUE.

What mess?

1st G.: I'm going to kill him.

2nd G.: No. What's the point?

1st G.: Vengeance.

2nd G.: That's petty.

GODFREY: Why should I be curious about the mess? They seem to think I caused it. Could I have done it in ignorance? Who knows what we crush in our footsteps? But they said I made them, and that was a lie. I never saw them before in my life.

2nd G.: Work it out.

GODFREY: If one thing's a lie, everything can be a lie.

1st G.: There he goes.

2nd G.: Give him time.

GODFREY: Are you there?

2nd G.: Don't answer!

GODFREY: Are you there? Either they're not there, or they are there, but they're not answering.

2nd G.: It's a familiar problem.

GODFREY (*Loud:*) I know you're watching.

1st G.: Or not watching!

They stifle a giggle.

GODFREY: Why would they watch?

2nd G.: Go on.

GODFREY: Enjoyment of suffering. One of them admitted it.

2nd G.: That was you. Shocking!

GODFREY: But the other one said he/she wasn't a sadist.

1st G.: Creep!

GODFREY: In which case... in which case....

2nd G.: Yes?

GODFREY: They're not there.

2nd GROTESQUE makes a gesture of disappointment.

1st G.: Well?

2nd GROTESQUE shakes his/her head.

I'll give him one more chance.

1st GROTESQUE strides to the cage.

You bastard mischief-making, crime-creating, sin-sowing, grief-grinding, soul-sucking, fear-forming, looting, shooting, polluting, hurting, hunting, hating....

words fail me! No they don't. Greedy, grasping...GROTESQUE. That's it!

GROTESQUE! You are grotesque! Look at you! Listen to you! Grotesque! What are you?

GODFREY: I have never seen you before in my life, so why are you treating me like this?

1st G.: Hold on, hold on. Just hold on. I've been telling you something. Didn't you hear what I said?

GODFREY: Yes, and I asked you a question.

1st G.: What did my colleague say to you a moment or two ago?

GODFREY: Oh, we're not starting....

1st G.: I know what he/she said. I'm trying to recall it to your closed mind.

GODFREY: He/she asked me if I wasn't curious about the mess.

1st G.: And what did you ask?

GODFREY: I asked what mess.

1st G.: There you are, then. Last chance.

GODFREY: What do you mean, last chance? What are you going to do to me?

2nd GROTESQUE lets out a terrible cry. GODFREY is shocked and freezes. 1st GROTESQUE is equally shocked, and jumps back.

1st G.: (to 2nd G, who is still hidden:) What did you do that for? Half my warts have fallen off!

2nd G.: Watch him.

1st G.: He's not doing anything.

2nd G.: Look at his eyes.

2nd GROTESQUE lets out another cry.

1st G.: Stop doing that!

GODFREY (in a horrified whisper:) Was that me?

A tense silence.

If that was me...

Pause. He breaks the tension.

I can't live with that. No, I don't believe it. You bastards, you're....

He breaks off as 2nd GROTESQUE rejoins 1st.

2nd G.: My colleague wants to kill you.

GODFREY: Why?

2nd G.: Vengeance. I told him/her vengeance was petty, and that I was still hopeful of some light shining through the murk of your black soul.

GODFREY (a huge cry:) My soul is white!

2nd G.: Have you no pity?

GODFREY: Me? I'm the one in the cage, aren't I? What do you mean, have I no pity? You're crazy.

2nd G.: Have you no sense of guilt?

2nd GROTESQUE is weeping.

GODFREY: What...what are you crying for? I don't understand. What are you crying for?

1st GROTESQUE pulls out a gun. GODFREY watches him/her in an appalled silence.

1st G.: Well?

2nd GROTESQUE sadly nods his/her head.

(To GODFREY:) You're a fool. The key was in the biscuit.

GODFREY: What?

Feverishly, he scrabbles on the floor to get the biscuit. On his knees, he picks it up and breaks it. Then he breaks the pieces.

There's nothing in it! There's no bloody key in it! What are you playing at?

1st G.: Why did he/she give it to you?

GODFREY: I don't know.

1st G.: No. You don't know.

1st GROTESQUE aims the gun, and fires. GODFREY falls dead.

2nd G.: It solves nothing.

1st G.: I feel better for it.
2nd G.: It solves nothing.
1st G.: There is no solution.
2nd G.: It solves nothing.
1st G.: It's done.

They go off.

THE END