

David Henry Wilson

# **HIM A LAYIN' BARE**

THE CHARACTERS:

Jim, a crow  
George, a chimpanzee  
Mary, his wife  
Charlie, the keeper  
A man  
A woman  
Gary, a gorilla

THE SET:

To begin with, a single cage standing stage centre. The door is stage right, and there is a swing suspended right of the centre and initially attached to the back of the cage. The second cage is identical to the first, except that it has no swing.

HIM A-LAYIN' BARE was first produced at The Collegiate Theatre by the South London Theatre Centre on 27 March 1971. The cast was as follows:

Jim.....Ray Jones  
George.....Charles Cheetham  
Mary.....Amaryllis Adams  
Charlie.....Michael Archer  
Man.....Michael Matthey  
Woman.....Christine Wilson  
Gary.....Alex Kanarek

Directed by Audrey Broderick

## ACT ONE

*A cage in the centre of the stage. In it lie George and Mary, curled up and asleep on the floor. On the roof of the cage sits Jim.*

JIM: And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee...

*George wakes up.*

GEORGE: There's that blasted voice again!

*He scrambles to his feet, advances to the front of the cage, and grips the bars. Mary looks up but remains on the floor.*

JIM (*taking no notice*): ...of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth...

GEORGE (*shaking the bars*): Shut up, will you!

JIM: ...that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth...

MARY: Stop shaking the cage, George. I'm trying to get some rest.

JIM: ...And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives...

GEORGE: It's that bloody voice!

MARY: What voice?

JIM: ...with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl...

GEORGE: The Lord God Almighty bloody voice!

JIM: ...and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

MARY: It's just a crow.

GEORGE: It's not a crow...

JIM: ...And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord...

GEORGE: Built, you ignorant bastard! Can't even speak the bloody language.

JIM: ...and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl...

MARY: It's a crow.

GEORGE: It's not a crow...

JIM: ...and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart...

GEORGE: It's that bloody preacher.

MARY: And I wish you'd stop swearing.

JIM: ...I will not again curse the ground for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done...

GEORGE: Leave us alone!

*Silence.*

He's stopped.

MARY: Good. Now perhaps you'll let me get some sleep.

GEORGE: You don't mean to tell me you couldn't hear him.

MARY: All I could hear was a crow cawing and you shouting like a maniac.

GEORGE: He was going on about God.

MARY: God, God, caw, caw, please yourself. I'd just like to get a bit of rest, George, before the customers come.

GEORGE: So would I! I'm not the one making all the row!

MARY: Well, let's say I can sleep through his row but I can't sleep through yours.

*He sits disconsolately on the floor.*

GEORGE: Preaching all the time – God this, God that...

MARY: I think you should see a doctor, George.

GEORGE: There's nothing wrong with *me*. You're the one who should see a doctor – get your ears dewaxed.

MARY: I don't have any difficulty hearing you.

GEORGE: Then you shouldn't have any difficulty hearing him.

MARY: Precisely.

GEORGE: What do you mean, "precisely"?

MARY (*patiently*): I can hear every word *you* say, George, so there's nothing wrong with my hearing. And I hear our friend the crow saying 'caw', and since there's nothing wrong with my hearing...

GEORGE: Oh, shut your gob!

MARY: Such reasoning! And such charm!

GEORGE: No use reasoning with you.

MARY: True, since you never win.

GEORGE: Oh very clever.

MARY: The fact remains that you ought to see a doctor. Even better, a psychiatrist.

GEORGE: The only day I ever needed to see a psychiatrist was the day I married you.

MARY: Thank you.

GEORGE: Must have been stark raving bonkers.

MARY: No, dear, you became stark raving bonkers *after* we were married. After you'd got what you wanted.

GEORGE: Meaning?

MARY: Before we were married, you gave every impression of being normal.

GEORGE: I *am* normal.

*Mary raises her eyes to the heavens.*

Anyway, if I have gone bonkers, and it happened after we were married, even your feather brain should be able to grasp the implications.

MARY: Certainly. You never know anyone until you've lived with them.

GEORGE: Ha! You can say that again! The way I used to worship you. If you'd told me to jump off the nearest ugibongo tree, I'd have done it.

MARY: If I'd known then what I know now, I'd have taken up the offer. I suppose you think life with you has been all nuts and bananas – though figuratively speaking I suppose it has.

GEORGE: I've looked after you all right.

MARY: You call this being looked after?

GEORGE: What's wrong with it?

MARY: It's a cage, George, that's what's wrong with it.

GEORGE: It's not a bad cage. It's light. Airy.

MARY: I do not like living in a cage.

GEORGE: I've seen plenty of wives worse off than you.

MARY: I didn't know you'd been married before, George.

GEORGE: I suppose that used to pass for wit in your family.

MARY: You're in no position to make remarks about my wit. A fine mess you'd be in if I didn't write your scripts for you.

GEORGE: That's not wit, that's memory. Most of your jokes were around when we were just amoebas.

MARY: And that's one of mine too.

GEORGE: Oh, is it?

MARY: When did you ever think up a joke of your own?

GEORGE: I've thought up plenty of jokes in my time. Your father used to laugh at my jokes. Though he must have had his biggest laugh when I told him I wanted to marry you.

MARY: As a matter of fact, my father was very much against my marrying you. He said I was marrying beneath me.

GEORGE: Oh yeah? So that's why he paid me to take you away.

MARY: What you call 'payment' in other people's language is called 'dowry'.

GEORGE: Glad to get rid of you he was. Poor old hen-pecked sod.

MARY: My father was not hen-pecked. He and my mother were very happy.

GEORGE: Ha! She had him climbing up so many trees, he got varicose veins in his arms.

MARY: My father liked climbing.

GEORGE: Probably the only way he could get away from your mother. If you ask me, it was your father who did your mother in.

MARY: My mother was trodden on by an elephant.

GEORGE: And who was riding the elephant?

MARY: Anyway, I'd rather have a hen-pecked father than a father whose identity was unknown.

GEORGE: He wasn't unknown! My mother must have known him.

*He slouches off to the right-hand side of the cage – she is on the left – and stares moodily out through the bars.*

Nothing but moans and criticisms and stupid jokes. No wonder you write such lousy scripts.

MARY: The public seem to like my jokes.

GEORGE: Only because of the way I put them over. Your jokes wouldn't make a ruddy hyena laugh. If it wasn't for my talent, we'd be starving by now.

MARY: If it wasn't for your talent, we wouldn't be in this situation.

GEORGE (*turning*): There's nothing wrong with this situation.

MARY (*with sudden fierce intensity*): Nothing wrong with it? George, we're trapped in a cage! I can't even remember what the sky looks like without bars across it.

GEORGE (*mumbling*): We've got security.

MARY: Security! We've got no freedom, no privacy. I can't even urinate without the world looking on. There are times when I think my bladder's going to burst.

GEORGE: Just let it go.

MARY: I may have lost my liberty, but I haven't lost my pride.

GEORGE: Well you can't blame me just because you're too proud to be natural.

MARY: I'm blaming you because it was you who got us into this mess. "Ooh, look at that lovely bunch of bananas!" he says. I told you not to go for them. Who's ever seen bananas that grew on the ground? "It's a new species," you said. "Specially developed by Nature to save us the trouble of climbing."

GEORGE: Well you shouldn't have followed me if you were so clever.

MARY: I wasn't following you – I was trying to rescue you.

GEORGE: Anyway, we're here now.

MARY: I know we're here now, George. And I would like to get away from here.

GEORGE: We will, when the time is right.

MARY: The time is right every day, George.

GEORGE: I mean, when we get the chance.

MARY: We get the chance three times a day, whenever your friend Charlie...

GEORGE: No! No, no, no, no! I won't listen! If you're going to start that again...

MARY: Oh, how masterful. George putting his foot down. "I won't listen, I won't do anything, I won't be anything!" I suppose you'll wait for Nature to invent elastic bars.

JIM: I went down to the bottoms of the mountains...

GEORGE: Oh no!

JIM: ...and the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God...

GEORGE (*again going to the front of the cage*): Can't you leave me alone?

JIM (*undisturbed*): ...When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

MARY: You're not hearing your messages from Mars again, are you?

JIM: They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

*George has put his fingers in his ears and is now stamping round the cage, shouting "Wah! Wah!" Despite his noise, Jim's voice comes over loud and clear:*

And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

*George continues to stamp.*

MARY: For heaven's sake, George, stop it. You're behaving like the imbecile you are.

*Charlie enters right, carrying a broom and pan.*

CHARLIE: 'Allo, 'allo. 'allo. Aimin' for the charts, are we, George?

*He has a large bunch of keys on a chain, and with one of these he opens the door in the right-hand side of the cage. He then climbs inside, snapping the door shut behind him. George continues to stamp and shout, but suddenly sees Charlie, stops, and takes his fingers out of his ears.*

GEORGE: Charlie!

*He bounds across the stage to greet him.*

MARY: You should have married Charlie instead of me.

GEORGE: Am I glad to see you, Charlie!

CHARLIE: 'Allo there, Georgie boy. Gettin' ready for the show, then?

GEORGE: Charlie, I keep hearing this bloody voice all the time.

CHARLIE: Yeah, yeah, it's the government, George. Blame the government.

GEORGE: I'd be grateful if you'd see who it is and shut him up.

CHARLIE: They take the banana, an' they leave you with the peel. Always do an' always will.

*Charlie starts sweeping, and George follows him around.*

GEORGE: Thanks, Charlie. I knew you'd help.

MARY: Knew you'd help. As if he understood a word you were saying.

GEORGE: Of course he understands.

MARY: Charlie, you stink. Charlie, your pants are on fire. Charlie...

GEORGE: Mary!

MARY: ...you're an idiot, an imbecile, a turd from a rhino with the runs. He doesn't seem to understand, George.

GEORGE: Charlie, I'm sorry about all this...

MARY: If you understand me, Charlie, raise your right arm.

CHARLIE (*still sweeping*): Very talkative this mornin', you two.

GEORGE: That's what I told her, Charlie.

MARY: What did he say?

GEORGE: To shut your gob or he'll clout you with his broom.

MARY: Liar.

CHARLIE: I've got a bit of a surprise in store for you.

GEORGE: Thank you, Charlie. He says last warning.

MARY: If he'd said that, he'd have looked at me.

GEORGE: Well he's looking at you now.

CHARLIE: Got a new neighbour comin' this afternoon. He'll shake things up a bit round 'ere. Big feller.

GEORGE: Yes, Charlie, I will. But she doesn't mean it – it's just her moaning, miserable nature.

CHARLIE: Should bring in a few more customers. Better watch your step, though, Mary love – he's a lady-killer.

*He returns to his sweeping.*

GEORGE: So now you know.

MARY: Know what, George?

GEORGE: He said he's sick and tired of all your moaning.

MARY (*with a sudden scream*): Aaaargh, look at that snake!

*George jumps. Charlie merely glances at her and sweeps on.*

GEORGE: Where? Where?

MARY (*calmly*): Nowhere, George. It was just a joke.

GEORGE: Some bloody joke! Could have given me a heart attack.

MARY: Not Charlie, though. Maybe Charlie isn't afraid of snakes. Aren't you afraid of snakes, Charlie?

CHARLIE: Yes, a bit o' competition might liven you two up.

GEORGE: Very clever.

MARY: Sh! Charlie's speaking. You mustn't speak while Charlie's speaking – you might miss what he's telling you.

CHARLIE: The customers find you a bit borin' actually, George.

GEORGE: Thank you, Charlie.

MARY: "Thank you, Charlie."

CHARLIE: In fact, I find you a bit borin' too, George.

GEORGE: I'm very grateful, Charlie.

MARY: George, you are pathetic.

GEORGE: The fact that you can't understand Charlie doesn't mean nobody else can. Your mental deficiency's already been proved by your inability to hear a voice everyone else can hear.

MARY: Everyone?

GEORGE: Charlie's heard it, and I've heard it.

MARY: It's a small world.

CHARLIE: There you are. All done an' dusted an' deodorized.

GEORGE: That's very good of you, Charlie. *(To Mary:)* He's going to see about it right away. *(He goes across to Charlie.)* Sorry about how the wife carries on, Charlie.

CHARLIE: Ouf, George, you should do somethin' about your breath!

GEORGE: I appreciate that, Charlie.

CHARLIE: Anyway, try an' keep the customers awake.

*He goes to the door of the cage and selects a key.*

MARY: This is the time to do it. When his back's turned and his hands are full.

GEORGE *(out of the corner of his mouth)*: Be quiet, Mary.

MARY: It would all be over in a minute.

GEORGE *(trying to drown her voice)*: Thanks very much for all your help, Charlie.

*Charlie is opening the door.*

MARY: We'd be free.

GEORGE: And for seeing about the voice. *(To Mary:)* Will you shut up?

*Charlie leaves the cage and locks the door behind him.*

MARY: The black key, that's the one.

*Charlie goes off right.*

GEORGE: Thanks, Charlie! *(To Mary:)* I'm not interested in keys, Mary. I just want a quiet and peaceful life.

MARY: Oh, so you don't *want* to get out of here.

GEORGE *(caught)*: I didn't say that. But I'm not going to attack Charlie

MARY: Then how else do you propose to escape?

GEORGE: I...I haven't worked it out yet.

MARY: "Yet". The way you grovel to Charlie is nauseating.

GEORGE: Charlie's a very good friend of mine.

MARY: Charlie is our maid, George. He does the cleaning for us – that’s all he does.

GEORGE: Charlie’s done a lot of work for me on the side.

MARY: Like what?

GEORGE: Like seeing about that ruddy voice, for one thing.

MARY: Oh, we’re playing the voice game again, are we?

GEORGE: It’s not a game, it’s a fact.

MARY: You don’t know the meaning of the word.

GEORGE: A fact is something real and true.

MARY: Yes, George, like steel bars or an empty stomach. Not a god that says caw or a Charlie that does what you tell him.

*The customers enter, right.*

GEORGE: You know what’s the worst thing about being locked in a cage with you?

MARY: Oh good, George has thought of a riddle. I say, I say, I say, what’s the worst thing about being locked in a cage with me?

GEORGE: You.

MARY: Oh! That’ll have them rocking in the aisles.

GEORGE: One of these days...

MARY: The customers!

*As soon as they see the customers, they rush to the back of the cage to unwind the swing. Mary then stands beside this, in a “girl assistant” pose, one leg bent slightly forwards, one hand on hip. During George’s performance, she occasionally changes leg and hand. The customers watch the whole spectacle without any reaction whatsoever.*

GEORGE: Hello, folks. Welcome once again to the greatest show on earth. Thrills and spills, comedy and glamour, every joke guaranteed for the last hundred years, ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! And talking of jokes, did you hear the one about the cow that got mated with a stork? When they milked her, all that came out was liquid margarine! Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! Have you met my lady assistant, the glamorous Marie? If you haven’t, lucky for you! Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! Hello, Marie.

MARY (*sexy voice*): Hello, George.

GEORGE: Tell me, Marie, what does a crocodile wear on his legs when he goes bowling?

MARY: I don't know, George. What does a crocodile wear on his legs when he goes bowling?

GEORGE: An alley gaiter! Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! Oh, I kill me!

MARY: (*quietly*): I wish you would.

GEORGE (*quietly*): Shut your gob. (*Loud*): Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! How about this one? Which snake is an expert at building summerhouses?

MARY: I don't know, George. Tell me, which snake is an expert at building summerhouses?

GEORGE: The bower-constructor! Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! Every one a winner! Here's another. Listen carefully. What's the name of a male animal...you'll love this one...a male animal that goes to bed naked? Come on, come on, come on. Male animal? Goes to bed naked? Give up? The him a-layin' bare! Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! Himalayan Bear! Ahahaa! (*He looks directly at the customers, desperate for a reaction.*) Ahahaa, ha haa, ha...ha...ha...Now then, folks, a riddle...what's the difference...work this one out...the difference between an animal that eats insects, and a heavy drinker? Think about it! Animal eats insects...heavy drinker...No? Hold you ribs, then...One will eat a dragonfly, and other will drink a flagon dry! Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! What a joke, eh? The Family Show! No smut. No filth. Just sheer fun. And laughter, ahahaa...ha...haa. Now then, folks, now then...ha haa...it's time for the serious part of the show...

*He holds up his hand to stop the non-existent laughter.*

...No more hilarity, please...ladies and gentlemen, I am about to perform my famous, death-defying act upon the trapeze here. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I must ask for absolute quiet. This amazing feat requires total concentration...If my lady assistant would hold the trapeze steady...Thank you, Marie...

*She holds the swing, and he sits on it, adjusting his position with total concentration.*

(*Tensely*;) All right, Marie.

*She steps behind him and gives him a gentle push, then increases the pressure until he is really swinging. He builds up the tension and then, grasping the ropes high up, he leaps to his feet so that he is standing on the swing. He slips, grunts, just about retains his grasp, rights himself, and stands erect in showman's pose. The swing slows down. Mary changes legs and hands. George leaps off the barely moving swing, arms wide in*

*triumph, staggers, falls, picks himself up, flings his arms wide again to force applause (which doesn't come), and is hit in the back by the swing.*

What the...

*He sees the swing, coughs, turns again to the customers, sticks out his chest, and bows.*

Thank you, folks, thank you. Please, please!

*He holds up his hand to halt the non-existent applause.*

Save your appreciation till the end of the show, ladies and gentlemen.

MARY (*quietly*): It is the end of the show.

GEORGE: Which is...NOW! Ladies and gentlemen, you've been a wonderful audience, wonderful. And now really is the time to show your appreciation.

*He puts his arm out through the bars.*

A bunch of bananas would be very welcome. That bunch there, sir...

MAN (*tonelessly*): Gets on your nerves, this one.

WOMAN (*tonelessly*): Other one's all right.

GEORGE: Give generously, please. Don't forget, there's two of us.

WOMAN: Give that one a banana.

*The man holds out a banana. George moves across to try and grab it.*

MAN: Not you. Get out of it! (*To Mary*): Here you are.

*Mary takes it.*

MARY (*with a little curtsey*): Thank you very much.

GEORGE: Don't forget there's two of us. Bless you, sir – but you can't live on...ahahaa...laughter alone.

*The customers move off left.*

WOMAN: They'd do better to get rid of that noisy one.

GEORGE: Just one more banana! Sir! Madam!

*They have gone.*

Give us a banana, you mean, bloody, lousy sods!

*Mary holds out half to him.*

MARY: Here, George.

*George takes it.*

JIM: For what you are about to receive, may the Lord make you truly thankful.

GEORGE: Thankful for what?

MARY: Talking to yourself again, George? Eat it slowly.

GEORGE: Mean, lousy sods.

MARY: Maybe if you showed off a bit less, and concentrated on putting the jokes over properly, instead of all this “ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa” business, they might like it more.

GEORGE: Nothing wrong with the way I put the jokes over. They were rocking with laughter.

MARY: Rocking?

GEORGE: Sort of. They’re just mean. That’s all. And the script’s no good.

MARY: Funny they should be rocking if the script’s no good.

GEORGE: They were laughing at the way I put it over. One of them said: “The script’s no good, but he puts it over well.”

MARY: And that’s why they gave me the banana. You hear what you want to hear, George. It might help if you cut out that death-defying act of yours. Death-defying. Two feet off the ground.

GEORGE: It happens to be a very difficult trick.

MARY: So I noticed. I’ve never seen a trick look more difficult, the way you do it. “Total concentration” – to sit on a swing.

GEORGE: It’s not a swing. It’s a trapeze.

MARY: Next you’ll be wanting a safety net.

GEORGE: You can sneer. I'd like to see you do it.

*She tosses aside the banana skin.*

JIM: For what you have received, may the Lord make you truly thankful.

GEORGE: Aw, shut up!

MARY: I beg your pardon?

GEORGE: Not you. Him. The bloody voice.

MARY: Not...the bloody voice Charlie promised you he'd see about?

GEORGE: He must have forgotten.

MARY: Oh dear. After all that grovelling. (*She sits on the swing.*) Pray silence for Marie, who is about to defy death.

*He watches as she sets the swing in motion and proceeds to accomplish the trick with perfect balance. She finally jumps off, again without difficulty, and bows.*

Apologies to the Grim Reaper.

GEORGE: All right, so you can do it. You bloody well ought to be able to do it after watching me all this time.

MARY: Watching you make a mess of it.

GEORGE: I might also remind you that when I perform, it's invariably on an empty stomach.

MARY: Which is invariably what you land on. George, you can't do it, and you should cut it out.

GEORGE: What we need is a better class of customer. I'll have a word with Charlie about it...

MARY: Either the act has to change, or...best of all, George...we leave this place.

*Charlie enters, right.*

GEORGE: There's Charlie! Charlie, I'd like a word with you...

CHARLIE: 'Allo, stinker. Goin' to 'ave to move you, I'm afraid.

GEORGE: Charlie, those customers you sent us...

CHARLIE: Make room for your new neighbour.

GEORGE: They only gave us one banana.

*Charlie has gone to the left side of the cage.*

CHARLIE: We'll have you over that side now.

GEORGE: We can't live on half a banana!

CHARLIE: Hold tight.

*He pushes the cage over to the right. George yelps and staggers.*

GEORGE: Help! It's an earthquake!

JIM (*through the dialogue*): God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

MARY (*shaking her head as she looks at George*): Death-defying.

CHARLIE: That should do it, I think.

GEORGE: Ouf, Charlie, you gave me quite a shock then.

CHARLIE: Was it you causin' all that weight, George? Them ribs must be heavier than they look.

*Charlie goes off left.*

GEORGE: Oh, I see...it...it was for the voice. (*To Mary*): He's moved us to get us away from the voice. Thanks a lot, Charlie. Appreciate it. (*To Mary*:) See, he didn't forget.

MARY: And what did he say about our half a banana?

GEORGE: He's going to see about getting us some new cus...

*There is a tremendous bellow from off stage left. George and Mary are startled. The roaring continues, and the words become distinct. George and Mary go to the bars to watch.*

GARY (*off*): Let me out of here! I'll kill 'em! I'll murder 'em! Where are they? I'll kill 'em all! Where are the bastards?

*Charlie pushes on the cage containing the mighty Gary, who is facing the front.*

I'll slaughter 'em! I'll break every bone in their bodies! I'll tear 'em all to shreds! I'll mash 'em all to pulp!

CHARLIE: This way, Sugar Lips.

GARY: I'll rip their arms off their shoulders...

*Charlie pushes the cage to within a couple of feet of the other cage.*

...and I'll rip their legs off their hips...

CHARLIE: That should do it.

GARY: ...and I'll rip their heads off their necks...

CHARLIE: Here we are, George. Meet your new neighbour.

GARY: ...and then I'll stick 'em all together THE WRONG WAY ROUND!

CHARLIE: King Kong.

*George and Mary are both gazing with rapt attention at the newcomer, who ignores them.*

GARY (*holding up his right arm and flexing the bicep*): Power!

CHARLIE: Phew! King Pong!

GARY (*holding up his left arm and flexing the bicep*): Duplicated!

CHARLIE: With your gob, George, an' 'is armpits, you could fuel my central 'eatin'.

*Gary beats his chest and roars.*

CHARLIE (*feigning a lunge at him*): Gertcher!

*Gary leaps back.*

All hair an' larynx, that's what you are. Have fun then, George. Try not to scare 'im – 'e's very sensitive.

*Charlie goes off right.*

GARY (*waiting till Charlie has gone*): Come back here, you yellow-belly! I'll kill you! Too scared to fight, ha? Everybody's scared of Gary. I'll take 'em all on.

*He mooches to the front left corner of his cage, sits down, produces a nail file, and begins to file his nails.*

MARY Who is he?

GEORGE: I don't know. I think Charlie must have misunderstood.

*Mary goes to the left side of the cage to look at Gary.*

I'll have another word with him. Don't want loud-mouth neighbours like him around. Drive all the customers away.

MARY: Ahem!

GEORGE: Come away from there, Mary. You'll give him the wrong idea. Mary!

MARY: What?

GEORGE: Come away!

MARY: Why?

GEORGE: Because he'll see you staring at him, that's why.

MARY: Why shouldn't I stare at him?

GEORGE: Oh all right, stare at him. I don't care.

*He goes to sulk in the right corner of his cage.*

(*Mumbling*): Stare at him till your bloody eyeballs pop out.

MARY: Hullo. (*No response.*) Hullo-o-o.

*Gary looks up, sees Mary, and jumps to his feet.*

GARY: Hi!

*He produces a comb, and straightens the hair on his shoulders and chest.*

MARY: I'm Mary. From next door.

GARY: Hi, Mary from next door.

*He saunters to the right-hand side of his cage.*

MARY: What's your name?

GARY: I'm Gary. To my friends.

MARY: And your enemies?

GARY: They prefer not to mention my name.

MARY: You sounded in a bit of a temper just now.

GARY: Yeah, I was riled up. I'm pretty mean when I'm riled up.

MARY: So I saw.

GARY: I go wild. It's my nature. I'm uncontrollable. Just uncontrollable.

MARY: You must be dangerous when you're in that mood.

GARY: Dangerous? Mary, I'm lethal.

MARY: Are you as strong as you look, Gary?

GARY: Strong? Mary, I'm so strong I can crack a coconut with one bicep. Look at this.

*He shows her his coconut-cracking biceps.*

MARY: Wow!

GARY: Sometimes, Mary, I look at my arms, and wonder if they're pregnant. Chest.

*He expands his chest.*

I'm colossal.

MARY: You certainly are.

GARY: It's a disadvantage sometimes.

MARY: Oh? Why's that?

GARY: Everyone's scared of me. One look, and they run. I'm *too* colossal.

MARY: I'm not scared of you.

GARY: Females, it's different.

GEORGE: Mary, come away from there.

GARY: Hey, who's the scarecrow?

MARY: That's my husband. George, come and meet Gary.

GEORGE: I don't want to meet Gary.

MARY: He's our new neighbour.

GEORGE: I can see that.

*Nevertheless, he crosses the stage.*

GARY: Hi there, George. Shake hands – I'll try not to crush you.

*He reaches through the bars, but George does not respond.*

MARY: George, this is Gary. Gary, George.

GEORGE: How-d'you-do-pleased-to-meet-you-come-on-Mary.

GARY: Fine set of ribs you have there, George. Nice of you to show 'em to us.

GEORGE: Very funny. Mary!

*He tries to pull her away, but she resists.*

MARY: Wait a minute, George!

GARY: It's always the same, Mary, always the same. Jealousy. Wherever I go, jealousy. I'm just too attractive.

MARY: I can understand that.

GEORGE: Well, you don't attract me, so you keep to your side and we'll keep to ours. That way there won't be any trouble.

GARY: I don't want trouble, George. I just want to be friends with my neighbours. And especially my neighbour's wife.

GEORGE: You leave your neighbour's wife alone.

MARY: George, you *are* jealous!

GEORGE: I've seen his sort before. Shows his coconut muscles to hide his peanut brain.

MARY: Well, he's certainly got muscles.

GEORGE: There's more to life than muscles.

GARY: So what else have *you* got to offer, George? (*He looks at Mary.*) Ha ha!

GEORGE: Oh blimey, we've got another flashing wit in the neighbourhood, have we? Just leave my wife alone, that's all.

GARY: George, you're really scaring me now! Mary, Mary, keep him under control! He might..he might run amok and stab us all with his shoulder blades. Ha ha!

GEORGE: I've seen bigger bubbles than you go pop.

GARY: Oh M...Mary, s...save me. Don't let him p...pop me!

GEORGE: Use a pair of tweezers on you and you won't look so tough.

MARY: George, stop being childish.

GEORGE: Nah, Mary, it's all right. I'm used to it.

GEORGE: Come on, Mary, I want to run through the act again.

MARY: There's plenty of time for that.

GEORGE: I want to do it now.

MARY: Well I don't.

GARY: Ha ha, she doesn't feel like doing it with you, George!

GEORGE: All right, you carry on flirting with that muscle-bound fur coat, then. Only don't come running to me if you catch his fleas.

*He goes sulking over to the front right corner.*

GARY: Don't worry, George. My fleas like red blood, so you're safe. (*He looks at Mary.*) Ha ha!

GEORGE (*imitating him*): "Ha ha!"

GARY: What's this act of yours, Mary?

MARY: Oh, it's just George's comedy turn. He tells jokes. I write the scripts for him.

GARY: So you're a writer!

MARY: Well, just...

GARY: Beauty *and* brains. I...er...I have a few connections. I might be able to help you.

MARY: What's *your* act, Gary?

GARY: Feats of strength. (*He taps his bicep.*)

MARY: Yes, of course.

GARY: But it's enough just for me to *be* there, Mary. The people come flocking just to *see* me.

MARY: How strong *are* you, Gary?

GARY: Mary, there's no limit. Power unlimited, that's me.

MARY: Could you bend these bars?

GARY: Bend 'em? I could break 'em. And then break the pieces.

MARY: Will you show me?

GARY: Show you?

MARY: How you break the bars?

GARY: You mean, now?

MARY: Why not?

GARY: Why not? Why not?...Well...why not?

*He flexes his fingers.*

Break might be a slight exaggeration, Mary.

MARY: Can you bend them?

GARY: Sure I can bend ‘em.

MARY: Then just bend them, Gary.

GARY: Right.

*He flexes his fingers again.*

Outwards or inwards, Mary?

MARY: Outwards.

GARY: Then outwards it shall be.

*He takes a few steps round the cage, flexing his arms and expanding his chest.*

Hey, when I’ve bent ‘em, Mary, maybe...maybe George’ll come and straighten ‘em again, ha? Ha ha! OK.

*He goes to the front left corner of his cage and grasps two bars.*

Here we go!

*A mighty heave. The bars remain unbent. George watches intently.*

And there we are.

*He plants himself massively between Mary and the bars.*

How’s that, Mary?

MARY (*trying to see*): Have you bent them?

GARY: Like a bow-legged giraffe.

MARY: I can’t see.

GARY: That’s because they’re bent outwards, Mary.

MARY: Is it wide enough to get out?

GARY: To get out? Well, no, Mary. Maybe spider-chested George walking sideways...but I’m a big feller, Mary. I’ll just straighten ‘em again.

MARY: Can’t you bend them enough to get out?

*Gary with a mighty heave "straightens" the bars.*

GARY: Ergh! What's that, Mary?

MARY: Can't you bend them enough to get out?

GARY: Mary, I'm notorious for breaking out of cages. I don't remember how many cages I've broken out of. But they're getting wise to me. This is a special cage, see – look at the angles.

MARY: What angles?

GARY: The angles all round. It's a technical thing. I can bend these bars like George can bend a blade o' grass, but I can't get past the angles.

GEORGE: Can't get past the angles! There's no more angles in your cage than any other cage...

GARY: George! So glad we're on speaking terms again!

*George crosses left.*

GEORGE: If you can really bend those bars outwards, you should be able to get through even with your bosom. Why don't you bend the bars over here, so we can get a proper look?

GARY: Well, George, I've had a long journey and I'm tired and any other day...

GEORGE: You can't bend them.

GARY: Now see here, George...

GEORGE: A load of swellings, that's all you are.

MARY: George!

GEORGE: He never bent those bars! Did you see them bent?

MARY: No-o-o, but...

GEORGE: He's all bluff and body odour.

GARY: Now George, my patience is limited...

GEORGE: And so's your strength. You couldn't bend a banana.

GARY: If you were within reach, George, we'd soon see who was the banana.

GEORGE: Bluff! Bluff, bluff, bluff, bluff!

MARY: Why don't you come within reach?

GARY: How do you mean, Mary?

MARY: Bring the cages together. It shouldn't be difficult.

GARY: Bring the cages together?

MARY: If you and George joined hands and pulled, you could do it.

GEORGE (*returning to his corner*): No, thank you. One whiff's enough for me.

MARY: I'd like him to be nearer.

GEORGE: And I wouldn't.

MARY: You'd like to be nearer, wouldn't you, Gary?

GARY: Well now, little lady, that sounds like an invitation.

MARY: It is.

GARY (*oozing*): A gentleman should never refuse an invitation from a lady. How are we going to do it, Mary?

MARY: You mean, bring the cages together?

GARY: Is that what I mean? Ha ha!

MARY: Since George won't help, we'll do it on our own.

GARY: I don't think I need any help from George, Mary! Ha ha ha!

*Mary stretches her arms through the bars in the left-hand side of her cage.*

MARY: Grab my hands, Gary, and pull.

GARY: I don't want to damage those lovely arms of yours, Mary. It's the power, you know...

MARY: I'll risk it.

GEORGE: You'll regret this, Mary.

MARY: Come on, Gary.

GEORGE: Don't do it, Mary!

*He takes her hands, and giggles.*

GARY: We're holding hands, Mary. Such lovely soft hands...

GEORGE: Mary!

MARY: Take my wrists – you'll get a better grip.

*He does.*

GARY: Coming closer!

GEORGE: If you do this, I'll never speak to you again!

MARY: Pull, Gary!

GARY: It'll be a pleasure to pull you, Mary!

*He pulls, and the cages come closer together.*

JIM: My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him...

GEORGE: Oh God!

MARY: Now take my elbows.

GARY: Yes, ma'am.

JIM: He only is my rock and my salvation...

GEORGE: Stop it, will you?

MARY: Pull! Pull! Pull!

GARY: Ha ha ha ha!

JIM: ...he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

GEORGE: Stop it, stop it, stop it!

*They are all shouting together as the cages come together. Then there is an abrupt silence. Gary puts his hands on Mary's shoulders.*

GARY: We made it, Mary.

*He kisses her.*

Curtain

End of Act One

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene One**

*Early next morning. When the curtain rises, the stage is in semi-darkness, and it will not be fully light until just before George wakes up. At present he and Gary are asleep, George in his corner and Gary close up to the bars separating the cages. Both of them are snoring, Gary with a deep growl, George with a high moan, the two sounds alternating in rhythm. Mary is sitting on the swing, rocking gently. She sings a few notes to their rhythm, stops, gets off the swing, and goes to the left-hand side of the cage.*

MARY (*whispering*): Gary! Gary, wake up! (*She reaches through the bars to shake him.*) Gary-y-y!

GARY: Mmm? Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I surrender!

MARY: Sh! It's only me.

GARY: What? Hey, Helen!

MARY: Mary.

GARY: Mary. Of course. What's the matter?

MARY: I want to talk to you.

GARY (*pressing closer to the bars*): Oho, well...

MARY: I said talk.

GARY: You mean talk? With words?

MARY: Sh, keep your voice down. I don't want George to hear.

GARY: Is that George snoring?

MARY: Yes.

GARY: How do you put up with it, Mary? (*Imitating George*): Mmmm! Mmmm! Is he living or dying?

MARY: Gary, I want to know how strong you really are.

GARY: Mary, I'm colossal, I'm...

MARY: Are you as strong as Charlie?

GARY: I could kill him with one finger! Who's Charlie?

MARY: He's our cleaner. He brought you here.

GARY: The guy with the broom?

MARY: Yes.

GARY: Well, Mary, when I first saw him, I didn't know if he was carrying the broom, or the broom was carrying him! Ha ha!

MARY: Could you beat him in a fight?

GARY: Mary, you're asking if an elephant could squash a pineapple. Beat him? I'd annihilate him!

MARY: Sh!

GARY: Mary, why don't you come a bit closer? We could hear each other better.

MARY: I can't get any closer. The bars are in the way.

GARY: Well, you could put your sweet little leg through.

MARY: I don't see how my sweet little leg will help us hear better.

GARY: Ho ho, quite a wit you got there, Mary.

MARY: How would feel about fighting him?

GARY: Fighting who?

MARY: Charlie.

GARY: I'll fight him any time, any place. But he won't fight me.

MARY: Maybe he will.

GARY: As soon as I got here I challenged him. You might have heard me. But he's scared. The Charlies of this world, Mary, are all talk. They talk a good fight, but when Gary comes along, they run a good run.

MARY: Charlie comes into our cages to clean them.

GARY: He does? (*Less than enthusiastic*): He does?

MARY: That would be the time to fight him.

GARY: Yeah, but...er...why would I want to fight him, Mary?

MARY: Do you like living in a cage, Gary?

GARY: I guess it's better than dying in a cage! Ha ha! You could put that in one of your scripts, Mary!

MARY: Wouldn't you like to be free?

GARY: Free! Oh yes, sunshine, blue sky, broad horizons with no bars...I believe in freedom, Mary. I'm a champion of liberty. (*He yawns.*)

MARY: So if you had the chance of freedom, you'd take it.

GARY: Nothing I'd take quicker, Mary. I'm just a bit sleepy now...

MARY: If you could beat Charlie, we'd all be free.

GARY (*yawning again*): No ifs, Mary, no ifs.

MARY: When he comes to clean your cage, you can fight him and take his keys.

GARY (*mechanically*): Great idea.

MARY: And with his keys you can open the cages. Gary! (*She is forcing his attention.*) You can open the cages!

GARY: Ah, but...we wouldn't know which key fitted which lock, Mary.

MARY: Ours is the black one. But you could try them all.

GARY: Great idea. Maybe we should sleep on it...

MARY: Then there'd be no bars between us, Gary.

GARY: No bars?

MARY: We'd be free. To do whatever we wanted to do.

GARY: Yeah. That's right.

MARY: If you can beat Charlie.

GARY: No ifs. But Charlie might not come into my cage.

MARY: Then how's he going to clean it? That's his job.

GARY: That's a...good point, Mary. (*Decisively*): I'm going to sleep on this.

MARY: We could be free today.

GARY: Today? Well, that would be something! We'll talk about this some more...

*He lies down with his head on the far side from Mary.*

MARY: We'll be together, Gary, if you can kill Charlie.

*Gary lets out a deep growl and begins his snoring rhythm. On hearing the word "kill" Jim has sat bolt upright. Mary returns to her swing. The light is full.*

JIM: Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him.

*George wakes up. His face shows his distress.*

Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel...

*George has stood up.*

...and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

*Mary watches as George grasps the bars at the front of the cage.*

Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me...So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

*Pause.*

GEORGE: And what about the rest of us?

MARY: Messages from outer space again, George?

GEORGE (*turning*): I'm not speaking to you. Since you prefer the company of that overgrown gooseberry to the company of your own husband. Listen to him! Baaaboooo, baaabooo! Like an army of randy bullfrogs. I haven't had a wink of sleep all night – not a bloody wink!

MARY: Poor George.

GEORGE: How long have you been up?

MARY: If you've been awake all night, I'd have thought you'd know.

GEORGE: Oh, if we're going to have a morning of reparbloodytee...

MARY: I woke up just before you.

GEORGE: Well, I've been thinking things over in the night, during the concert.

MARY: What things, George?

GEORGE: The whole set-up. You and me. We've got to do something about it.

MARY (*surprised*): Good. What do you suggest?

GEORGE: I think you should do the trapeze bit, and I'll just handle the comedy.

MARY: Oh!

GEORGE: I only did it to save you from straining yourself, but ...well...maybe you're right, I'm more of a comic than an acrobat. (*Pause.*) Well? What do you reckon?

MARY: I'd hoped you were thinking of something else.

GEORGE: I can't do anything else, Mary. I'm not really...quite as talented as you might think.

MARY: I didn't mean the act.

GEORGE: What did you mean then?

MARY: I thought you were thinking about our situation. About being in this cage. That's what I thought you were thinking about.

GEORGE: But we can't change that, Mary.

MARY: Can't we?

GEORGE: No!

*For a moment he looks puzzled, and glances up towards the roof of the cage.*

No, we can't.

MARY: Then we're going to die here, George.

GEORGE: Not if we change the act.

MARY: I'm not talking about the act.

GEORGE (*taking no notice*): And maybe the new customers'll be more appreciative.

MARY: What new customers?

GEORGE: Charlie's finding us new customers.

MARY: Like Charlie was going to get rid of what you call a voice and I call a crow? Why do you think he's brought Gary here?

GEORGE: I'm damned if I know. It's the most stupid...

MARY: It's because the customers have had enough of us, George. They need something new. Gary's not an addition. He's a replacement.

GEORGE: I'm worth ten bloody Garys!

MARY: Maybe you think so. Maybe the customers don't.

GEORGE: Of course they do. They don't feed us for nothing, do they?

MARY: They don't feed us, George.

GEORGE: Perhaps times are hard out there.

MARY: Well they're certainly hard in here, and they're going to get harder. Face the facts, George. We're starving. Charlie's brought in Gary. He doesn't need us. What do you think he's going to do to us if he doesn't need us?

*He looks at her.*

GEORGE: Charlie wouldn't do that. He and I are friends!

MARY: Charlie wouldn't hesitate. And nor should we.

GEORGE: I'm not prepared to attack Charlie!

MARY: You wouldn't have to attack Charlie.

*Pause. Again he looks at her.*

GEORGE: Then how would we do it?

MARY: Gary will attack Charlie.

GEORGE: Why would Gary attack Charlie?

MARY: Because he also wants to get out.

GEORGE: How do you know?

MARY: He told me.

GEORGE: I see. (*He glances up at the roof.*) I see. So he's been chatting you up.

MARY: No, George, I've been chatting *him* up. Because he's our only hope. That's why I got him to pull the cages together.

*George crosses to the left and looks down on the sleeping Gary.*

GEORGE: It's not muscle, that. It's fat. He's nothing but a fat, mangy fur coat, that's what he is.

*Mary crosses over to stand beside him, and runs her fingers over his head and down his back.*

MARY: Wouldn't it be nice to be free again, George? Gathering nuts and bananas under a blue unbarred sky, swinging hand in hand through the branches...

GEORGE: You're tickling, Mary.

MARY: Chasing butterflies...

GEORGE (*laughing*): Stop it! (*He wriggles away.*)

MARY: I was only being romantic, George.

GEORGE: Well cut it out.

MARY: Yes, George.

*He goes to his corner.*

GEORGE (*after some reflection*): I could handle Charlie myself.

MARY: Of course you could, George.

GEORGE: It's just that I have my principles. I don't like violence.

MARY: That's what I told Gary.

GEORGE: What did you tell him?

MARY: I told him you could handle Charlie yourself, but you don't like violence.

GEORGE: That's right. I could handle the fur coat as well if I wanted to.

MARY: Yes, George.

*Pause.*

GEORGE: You don't think, if I did the comedy and you did the trapeze...

MARY: No, George. We're finished. That's why *he's* here.

GEORGE: After all I've done for Charlie! (*Looking across at Gary*): Supposing he does it, why should he let *us* out?

MARY: Why shouldn't he?

GEORGE: What's going to happen then?

MARY: I told you, we'll be free. Swinging through...

GEORGE: There'll be three of us.

MARY: I expect he'll go one way and we'll go another.

GEORGE: I was wondering...if you were thinking...you and him...

MARY: If I'd wanted that, George, I needn't have told you anything.

GEORGE: That's true. Have you whiffed his armpits?

MARY: Yes, George.

GEORGE: I wouldn't want to be lumbered with him afterwards.

MARY: No, George.

*He reflects.*

GEORGE: If I agree to this, Mary, it doesn't mean I approve of it.

MARY: No, George.

GEORGE: And I'd want no part of it.

MARY: You wouldn't have to do anything, George. You can sit in the corner till it's over.

GEORGE: And afterwards, just you and me?

MARY: Just you and me.

GEORGE: All right. I agree.

*Reaction from Jim.*

MARY: George!

*She kisses him.*

GEORGE: Better wake him before Charlie comes.

MARY: Yes, George.

JIM: Thou shalt not kill.

MARY (*going towards Gary's cage*): Gary! Gary! (*He opens one eye, but goes on snoring.*) Gary, wake up!

GEORGE: Shove your foot in his gob.

MARY: Wake up, Gary. (*She reaches through the bars and shakes him.*) Gary!

GEORGE: I'll do it.

*He crosses the cage, reaches through the bars, and viciously grabs a lump of Gary's hair.*

GARY: Aaow!

*George returns to his corner.*

Aaaah! Who...

MARY: Gary, it's morning.

JIM: Thou shalt not kill.

GEORGE: It's got nothing to do with me.

GARY: Leave me alone.

MARY: Wake up! Charlie'll be here in a minute.

GARY (*"collapsing"*): Ah, sleep...

*He has "collapsed" out of reach.*

MARY: Gary, don't go back to sleep!

GEORGE: Oh leave him, Mary, if he's too scared to do it.

MARY: Gary, are you scared of Charlie?

GEORGE: All hair and air, that's what he is.

MARY: Gary, answer me, are you scared of Charlie? (*No response.*) I hate you, Gary! And I despise you. All hair and air, that's what you are. Hair and air, hair and air, hair and air...

GARY (*painfully raising his head*): Mary...Mary, have a heart. I need my sleep.

MARY: You're all hair and air.

GARY: Mary, you might find this hard to believe, but if I don't get a full night's sleep, I lose my strength.

MARY: You're right, Gary, I do find it hard to believe. But it's all right. If you're too scared to keep your promises, there's no need for a discussion. When you've had your good night and morning's sleep, perhaps you'll be strong enough to help me push these cages apart.

GARY: Now wait a minute, Mary, wait a minute! What promises are these?

MARY: You promised to kill Charlie and take the keys.

GARY: Keys, Mary?

MARY: To the cages. So we can escape.

GARY (*memory "returning"*): Of course! It's coming back to me! So we really did have that conversation, Mary. And I thought I was just a beautiful dream.

MARY: Well it wasn't.

GARY: I'm glad to hear that, Mary.

MARY: Are you going to kill Charlie, or aren't you?

GARY (*raising himself to his full height and flexing all his muscles*): Where is he? Where is he, Mary?

*Jim begins to climb down from the roof of the cage.*

MARY: He hasn't come yet.

GARY: Come here, Charlie, you yellow coward! Come here, and I'll rip you to pieces! He doesn't seem to be coming, Mary. Maybe I could get a bit more sleep...

MARY: He'll be here any minute.

GARY: Even a minute's sleep, Mary – it can make all the difference...

*He breaks off at the sight of Jim climbing through the bars and into George and Mary's cage.*

Well, look at this!

*Mary turns to see. George stands up, and all three of them watch as Jim advances to the centre of the cage.*

JIM (*interlinking with the dialogue*): The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him. But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by lying of wait, that he die; or in enmity smite him with his hand that he die; he that smite him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.

GARY: Hey, feller, who's your tailor, ha? George looks like he's seen a ghost.

MARY: It's only a crow, George.

*Jim walks towards George, who is transfixed.*

GARY: Hey Mary, quick, step on his tail.

*She does so, and Jim is jerked to a halt.*

Now let's see if he can get there as the crow flies!

GEORGE: Get off him, Mary.

MARY: It's only a joke, George.

GARY: Hey George, for a scarecrow you look mighty scared of crows! Ha ha!

GEORGE: Why don't you shut that great ugly hole in that great ugly face and go and gas yourself in your armpits.

JIM (*again linking with the dialogue*): The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I have my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off my hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded.

GEORGE (*to Jim*): And you can shut up too, with your bloody revenger!

GARY: What's he talking about, Mary?

MARY: George can hold a conversation with anybody. He has a gift for communication.

GEORGE: Get off him!

GARY: Yeah, Mary, let him go. Let's see what tricks the flea can perform.

*Mary takes her foot of Jim's tail, and he advances to stand right in front of George.*

There you are, straight to big brother.

JIM: Thou shalt not kill.

GEORGE: Go away!

JIM: Exodus, chapter twenty, verse thirteen: Thou shalt not kill.

GEORGE: Why don't you leave me alone!

JIM: Because you hear me.

GARY: Mary, your husband – he's a "raven" lunatic! "Raven" – get it?

*Jim goes to Mary.*

Look out, he's coming for you.

JIM: Verse fourteen: Thou shalt not commit adultery.

MARY: It looks like he's trying to say something to me.

GARY: I know what he's saying.

MARY: What?

GARY: He's saying: "Caw caw!" Woah! He's coming after me!

*Jim walks straight through the bars into Gary's cage.*

Help, help! Ha ha! (*Backing off*): Hey feller, don't caw is, we'll caw you!

JIM: Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commnt adultery. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.

GARY (*at the same time*): Help! Ha ha! Don't hurt me! Don't hurt me! (*He clings to the bars with mock fear.*) Help! Help! Hey, Mary, I thought of a joke. Why can't you hit him with one of these bars?

MARY: I don't know, Gary. Why can't I hit him with one of these bars?

GARY: Because they're not crowbars! Ha ha!

*Charlie comes on stage from the right.*

MARY: That's very good, Gary.

CHARLIE: Mornin' all.

*George and Mary immediately react to his arrival.*

GARY: You know, Mary, I reckon I could be a writer too.

MARY: Gary, Charlie's here.

GARY: What?

CHARLIE: 'Allo, 'allo, 'allo, left you in the cold, 'ave they, George?

*He pokes George with his broom through the bars.*

Told you 'e was a ladykiller.

*Charlie unlocks the cage door and climbs in. Gary comes away from the bars, looking warily at Charlie.*

GARY: Is that Charlie?

MARY: Can you handle him?

GARY: Sure I can handle him. (*Yawns.*) I could just do with a bit more sleep.

*Jim, who has been watching Gary, now turns and goes back into George and Mary's cage. Charlie has already closed the door behind him and has begun to sweep.*

CHARLIE: Now then, George, what little buds o' fragrance 'ave you left for your Uncle Charlie? 'Allo!

*He sees Jim enter the cage.*

Somebody died?

*Jim walks past Charlie and stands in front of George.*

Friend o' yours, George? Come in on a flyin' visit?

*He resumes sweeping.*

MARY: You see the keys?

GARY: The keys? Oh, sure, the keys. Mary, I'm just going to have a quick shut-eye, and then I'll...

MARY: There's no time for a shut-eye. He'll be coming to you next.

GARY: Mary, I need my sleep. We can leave this till tomorrow.

MARY: You're afraid of him, aren't you?

GARY: I'm afraid of no-one, Mary. But I need...

MARY: Just wait till he's got his back to you...

GARY: I know what to do, Mary.

CHARLIE: You're very quiet this mornin', George.

MARY: Then do it! Unless you're too scared to do it!

CHARLIE: Bit depressed by the competition?

GARY: All right, all right. (*Loudly:*) I'll take his hands off his arms, and his arms off his shoulders, and his ears off his head, and his head off his neck...

MARY: Sh! Not so much noise!

CHARLIE: Bit of a loudmouth, inne?

MARY: He mustn't suspect anything.

GARY: There won't be a sound, Mary. When I kill, I kill quietly.

JIM: And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth.

GEORGE: I haven't done anything! And he's not my brother!

CHARLIE: What you crowin' about then?

GARY: He hasn't got a chance, Mary. (*Very loudly:*) If he had any sense, he'd stay right away from here!

MARY: Sh!

GARY: Because if he comes in here, I'll tear him apart...

MARY: Gary!

GARY: ...limb by limb and piece by piece!

CHARLIE: Keep your chest on, Tarzan. I'm on me way.

GARY: If he sets foot in here...

MARY: You're trying to frighten him off. You're scared.

GARY (*holding up his hands*): You're right, Mary. I gotta keep quiet. I'm not thinking straight. It's lack of sleep, Mary...

MARY: Then wake yourself up.

GARY: Yeah. I gotta get into training.

*He does some ostentatious muscle-flexing, while Charlie continues to sweep in the sudden complete silence. Mary watches Charlie, George sits thinking, Jim watches George, and Gary tries to impress himself.*

CHARLIE: All gone very quiet. Enjoyin' the show, are you? 'Scuse me, madam.

*He is now sweeping the left-hand side of the cage, and Mary moves out of his way. He and Gary suddenly confront each other through the bars, and Gary freezes in mid-exercise.*

CHARLIE: 'Allo, 'andsome. Workin' up a good sweat? (*He wrinkles up his nose.*) Phew! I know what you need for Christmas.

*He carries on sweeping.*

GARY (*whispering*): Hey, Mary, he's pretty big.

MARY: Not as big as you, Gary.

*Now they all watch Charlie as he finishes.*

CHARLIE: There we are. (*He squirts an air freshener.*) Chanel No. 5. Hup!

*He briskly lifts George's arm and squirts the armpit.*

That'll get her goin', George. (*To Jim:*) You too?

*He squirts Jim, then goes to the cage door, which he unlocks.*

Next stop, the gas chamber.

JIM: And Cain said unto the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou has driven me out this day from the face of the earth. And from thy face shall I be hid...

*Charlie climbs out, locks the door behind him, and begins to walk round to Gary's cage.*

...and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

*George rushes to the front of the cage.*

GEORGE: Don't go, Charlie! Don't go into his cage!

CHARLIE: 'Allo, George. Found your tongue, 'ave you?

GEORGE: Don't go there, Charlie! He's going to kill you!

MARY: George, stop it!

CHARLIE: I'm only goin' next door. You can still tell me all your troubles.

GARY: This way, Charlie. Come and get yourself ripped apart!

CHARLIE: Everybody gettin' very excited.

GEORGE: Stay out of there!

MARY: I don't think he understands you, George.

CHARLIE: Must be the air freshener.

GEORGE: Charlie!

GARY: This way, sucker!

CHARLIE: Like bein' a pop star, this is.

*He has reached Gary's cage.*

GEORGE: Don't go in, Charlie! Don't go in!

*Gary roars and beats his chest.*

CHARLIE: Cool it, kids, cool it! Course, now you got yourselves all matey, I can't get in, can I? 'Ad a little tate-ah-tate, did we?

*He puts down his cleaning utensils, and goes round to the left side of Gary's cage.*

GEORGE: He's not going in!

*A sharp intake of breath from Mary.*

GARY: He's not coming, Mary! I guess he's too scared!

*Charlie grips the bars of Gary's cage and pulls it to the left, leaving the door clear on the right-hand side.*

CHARLIE: Let's 'ave you back where you belong.

GARY: Hey, what's happening?

CHARLIE: Sorry if this interferes with your love life.

*When he has finished, Charlie returns to pick up his cleaning stuff. The movement has been a shock to Gary, who now watches Charlie with the utmost suspicion.*

GEORGE (*also watching Charlie*): Oh no!

MARY: He *is* coming, Gary.

CHARLIE: Hey Mary, how strong *is* this guy?

MARY: Not as strong as you, Gary.

*Charlie unlocks the door to Gary's cage.*

GARY: Well, I...I'm not so sure...

*Charlie climbs in, to find Gary facing him, a picture of uncertainty. Gary backs away.*

CHARLIE: 'Allo, beautiful.

*He squirts him with the air freshener. Gary leaps back with a grunt. Charlie closes the cage door behind him, momentarily turning his back on Gary, who stands motionless watching him.*

MARY: Now's the time to do it, Gary, when his back's turned.

CHARLIE: What's that, darlin'? You want a little puff?

*He squirts her too with the air freshener.*

MARY: Ugh!

*Charlie turns and starts sweeping.*

CHARLIE: Back off, big feller.

MARY: Get behind him, Gary, so he can't see you.

GARY: Give me time, Mary...I gotta plan this.

*George crosses the cage to join Mary, and Jim follows.*

GEORGE: Don't turn your back on him, Charlie.

MARY: George, you're pathetic. Get behind him, Gary!

GEORGE: Face him, Charlie, or he'll kill you!

MARY: Behind him, Gary!

GEORGE: Face him!

MARY: Gary, you'll miss your chance!

*Charlie turns to look at George and Mary.*

CHARLIE: Oy, oy, oy, what's all the racket?

MARY: Now, Gary, now!

GEORGE: Turn round, Charlie!

CHARLIE: Somebody planted a bomb in 'is droppin's?

GEORGE: Turn round!

MARY: Gary!

GEORGE: Charlie!

*Gary takes an enormous breath and hurls himself at Charlie, putting his arms round Charlie's neck and forcing him to the ground.*

GEORGE: Charlie...

GARY: You bastard, you damn bastard, you filthy sweeping bastard, I'll kill you, I'll murder you, I'll slaughter you!

MARY: Do it, Gary, do it!

GARY: I'll mash you, smash you, crush you, crunch you...

*Charlie clutches ineffectively at Gary's hands, gasps for breath, and finally slumps.*

...I'll turn you inside out and then you'll turn you back in again...

MARY: He'd dead, Gary.

GARY: What?

MARY: You've done it.

*A moment's silence and stillness as they all take in what Gary has done.*

JIM: And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? Then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord: Such as are for death, to death; and such as for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.

MARY: Get the keys, Gary.

GARY: Ha?

MARY: The keys! To let us out!

*Gary looks at her, and then at Charlie.*

GARY: I killed him! Mary, I killed him!

MARY: The keys, quick! Before someone comes.

*Gary gets off the body.*

GARY: Well, how d'you like that! (*He sticks out his chest.*) I'm just colossal!

MARY: Get the keys!

GARY: Oh yeah, the keys. (*He kneels beside Charlie.*) Tough guy, ha?

*He takes hold of the bunch of keys, stands up, and walks towards the door of his cage. The chain remains attached to the body, which Gary drags after him.*

Hey, these keys are heavy!

MARY: Take them off the chain!

GARY: What? *(He sees what she means.)* Ah! *(He undoes the chain.)* Killed him dead, Mary. Just like that!

MARY: Hurry up, Gary.

GARY: Yeah. *(Nevertheless, he pokes Charlie with his foot.)* Not so tough now, ha?

MARY: Gary!

GARY: All right, all right. Which key?

MARY: You'll have to try them all.

*Gary tries one.*

GARY: Nope.

MARY: Come on, Gary!

*He tries another.*

GARY: It's not so easy, Mary. It was easier to kill Charlie than to get this door open! *(Trying another):* Mary, maybe this is the wrong lock.

MARY: Try the key next to the black one.

GARY: Which is the black one, Mary?

MARY: The one that's black, Gary. That one!

GARY: Ugh! *(He tries it, and it works.)* Aha! *(He opens the door.)* Yahoo! *(He jumps out.)* I'm out! Freedom, Mary! We're free!

MARY: We're not free. Let us out!

*Jim's speech now interlinks with the rest of the dialogue.*

JIM: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day...

GARY *(breathing in deeply)*: Boy, what air! The air of freedom!

MARY: Gary, open our door!

JIM: ...But it shall come to pass if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee...

GARY: Hold on, Mary, hold on. The liberator cometh! Hey, this air is good!

MARY: It's the same air as in here, Gary. Just stop the deep breathing and let us out.

JIM: ...Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field...

*She follows as he passes along the front of the cage, heading for the door. George stays on the left, still looking at Charlie, while Jim continues to address him.*

JIM: ...Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goes out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.

GEORGE: I'm sorry, Charlie.

MARY: The black key, Gary.

GARY: The black key. Mary, I'm...er...kind of colour blind.

MARY: Then give them to me!

JIM: The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish.

GEORGE: But I didn't do it!

*Gary hands Mary the keys through the bars. Mary opens the door.*

That's it. George! (*No response.*) George!

GEORGE (*not turning*): What?

MARY: Come on! We're leaving.

GEORGE: I'm not going.

MARY: What do you mean, you're not going?

GEORGE: I don't want anything to do with it.

*Mary crosses to him.*

MARY: George, stop being maudlin.

GARY (*grandly*): The door is open! Gary has set you free!

MARY: The door's open, George, and you never lifted a finger.

GEORGE: He was my friend.

GARY: The liberator is waiting, Mary.

MARY: Just a minute, Gary. George says he won't come.

GARY: I should damn well hope he won't come! I didn't kill Charlie for George's fair hand!

MARY: George, you never so much as breathed on Charlie.

GEORGE: If we go out of that door, then we as good as killed him ourselves.

MARY: Don't be such a prig!

GARY: Come on!

MARY: Please, George!

GEORGE: No!

MARY: I don't want to leave you.

GEORGE: Then stay.

MARY: I want to be free.

GARY: I'm going!

MARY: George!

GEORGE: It's wrong!

*Mary hesitates, then quickly turns and climbs out of the cage. Gary holds the door, but does not help her down.*

GARY (*leering*): That's my girl!

*He slams the cage door shut and tosses the keys away. Then he grabs Mary round the waist and tries to kiss her.*

No bars now, eh, Mary?

*She breaks away and goes to the front of the cage, level with George.*

MARY: George, it's still not too late.

*Gary comes after her.*

GARY: Maybe not for him, but it is for you, baby!

*He picks her up and slings her over his shoulder.*

Ha ha! Goodbye, George! Enjoy your funeral!

*He carries Mary off left.*

MARY: George! George! George!

*They have gone. George has raised his head at her cries, and comes to the front of the cage to look. He is very unhappy. Jim watches him.*

JIM: Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.

GEORGE: I should have gone with her.

*Pause. Charlie stirs and gives a loud grunt. George whirls round. Charlie rubs his neck.*

Charlie!

*With much grunting and grimacing, Charlie gets to his feet. George bounds across his cage.*

Charlie! You're all right!

CHARLIE: Damn bloody ape! (*Seeing George*): I'll fix you later.

GEORGE: I thought you were dead, Charlie!

CHARLIE: 'E won't get far. 'Allo, where's Mary? Oh, that's it, is it? Double-crossed you, George, did they?

GEORGE: I tried to warn you, Charlie.

CHARLIE: Serves you right for distractin' me.

*He climbs out of the cage, spots the keys on the ground, and picks them up.*

Bloody apes are cleverer than you think.

GEORGE: I'm really happy you're still alive, Charlie.

*Charlie goes to test George's door.*

CHARLIE: Locked you in, 'ave they? Teach you a lesson.

GEORGE: Perhaps you'll be able to bring Mary back.

CHARLIE: An' I'll teach them a lesson too.

*He goes off right.*

GEORGE: Charlie, you couldn't get me something to eat, could you? Just to keep me going, before the customers come?

*Charlie has gone.*

Charlie, that's the wrong direction. They went that way! *(To Jim:)* Why doesn't he understand me?

*Charlie returns, carrying a rifle.*

Charlie, they went in that... What have you got there? Charlie?

*Charlie crosses the stage and goes off left.*

Charlie! Don't shoot Mary! Don't shoot Mary!

*Curtain*

*End of Act Two Scene One*

**ACT TWO**  
**Scene Two**

*Two hours later. George is resting in his corner. Jim is pacing slowly up and down the cage.*

JIM: Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life...

GEORGE (*not getting up*): Shut your beak and leave me alone!

*Jim stands and looks at him.*

Just leave me alone.

JIM: You're hungry and afflicted.

GEORGE: You're bloody right I am.

JIM: I bring you comfort.

GEORGE: If you brought me my wife and something to eat, you might be worth listening to.

JIM: I bring you something better.

GEORGE (*roused, but still lying down*): All I've eaten in a day is half a lousy banana, and the last I heard of my wife was the sound of two shots. I'm worried. I'm worried and I'm starving. You think words can comfort me?

*Jim turns away, and goes to sit down at the back of the cage. Short pause.*

It could have been an echo. (*No response.*) I said it could have been an echo.

JIM: Perhaps.

GEORGE: Some comfort! Was it an echo or wasn't it? I'm asking for your opinion.

JIM: My opinion is that it was two shots.

GEORGE: Well I'm not interested in your opinion. It could have been an echo. (*Short pause.*) Or he might have fired twice at Gary. Or he might have missed. At least once.

JIM: Yes.

GEORGE: And he could have given me something to eat, or let the customers in before he left. Don't you ever eat?

JIM: I eat.

GEORGE: I can hear my ribs scraping my backbone. At this rate I shan't even have the strength to do my act. (*Short pause.*) Mary didn't touch him. So why would he shoot her? Do you think he'd shoot her?

JIM: Yes.

GEORGE: He wouldn't! For my sake he wouldn't. (*No response.*) I said, for my sake he wouldn't shoot her. (*No response.*) A fat lot of good talking to you. That's one thing you can say about Mary – you can always have a decent conversation with her.

JIM: The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

GEORGE: And what's that supposed to mean?

*Charlie comes on left. He is wheeling a barrow, on which are slung the bodies of Gary, underneath, and Mary. He has his gun strapped to his back. George sees him, and rushes to the front of the cage, where he grasps the bars. Charlie stops in front of him, and lets the barrow down.*

CHARLIE: There you are, George. Caught 'em up a telegraph pole. 'Spec' they were sendin' you a message. 'Avin' a lovely time, wish you were 'ere, love Hairy Mary an' the killer gorilla Don't look so mis'erable, George. You'll be joinin' 'em soon..

*He picks up the barrow again, and goes off right. George watches him all the way, and continues to gaze after him for a while.*

GEORGE: He killed her.

JIM: Now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee and thou art troubled...Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

GEORGE: He needn't have killed her. She didn't touch him. Bastard! After all we've done for him. (*To Jim*): And she wasn't wicked! She was kind. She always shared her bananas. And she let me take the credit for the act, though she was the brains behind it. She wasn't wicked! She was just...unhappy!

JIM: Shall I preach to you?

GEORGE: No! No. (*He leans his head on the bars.*) Now what am I going to do? I need to think. I wish I had her brain. Life goes on. (*He raises his head.*) Life bloody goes on. And I'm bloody starving. I haven't even got a script. So I'll write my own script. I can make up jokes. She wasn't the only one who could make up jokes. So come on! How did she do it? Him A-Layin' Bare. Think of an animal. (*To Jim:*) Think of an animal with a long name.

JIM: Hippopotamus.

GEORGE: Hippopotamus. Now then...hip...hippo...hypo...I pop...I pop!...I pop...otamus...at a mouse...I pop at a mouse. What does that mean? I peep at a mouse. That's better. I – peep – at – a – mouse. Now you just have to work out the question. Which animal...has a look...at a mouse? Not exactly side-splitting, is it?

JIM: What about Amos?

GEORGE: What's Amos?

JIM: A prophet.

GEORGE: Amos. Which animal...has a look...at a prophet? I-peep-at-Amos. Well, it's a start, isn't it? We need some more, though. More animals, birds or something. We've got to make 'em laugh, you see. That's how to stay alive – keep laughing. And the occasional thrill, like the trick on the trapeze. Give us another name.

JIM: The great-crested grebe.

GEORGE: What animal's that?

JIM: It's a bird.

GEORGE: The great-crested grebe. Let's see...great...greet...crate...crote...crite... Let's try crested. Crusted. How about that? The great crusted...now grebe...grabe...grape! The great-crusted grape! What bird sounds like a large...loaf of fruit? The great-crusted grape. (*To Jim:*) You're not laughing.

JIM: There's nothing to laugh at.

GEORGE: I'll get it across to them. A bit of patter. But we need some more...

*He breaks off as he sees Charlie come on right with the customers.*

I'm not ready! Charlie, I'm working on a new script. Give us a few more minutes.

CHARLIE (*reaching George's cage*): 'E's the only one left, you see.

WOMAN (*shaking her head*): Ts, ts!

CHARLIE: An' you know how useless he is. So I mean, it just wouldn't pay.

MAN: No, of course not.

GEORGE: All right then. (*He takes a deep breath.*) Hallo, folks. Welcome once again to the Greatest Show on Earth. Thrills and spills...comedy and glamour...

*His voice tails off as they go past his cage to Gary's.*

CHARLIE: An' this is where it 'appened.

WOMAN: Ah!

*From now on, George's show and Charlie's account overlap.*

GEORGE: Every joke guaranteed for the last hundred years. Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa!

CHARLIE: I'd finished cleanin' that one out, an' found they'd pulled the cages together. – dunno why.

*Grunts and tuts from the customers.*

GEORGE: Talking of jokes, how about the one...the animal...let me get this right...which animal...

CHARLIE: I pulled 'em apart, so I could get in, and then I went in myself. But I noticed one thing.

WOMAN: What was that, Mr Parker?

GEORGE: Right...which animal has a look at a prophet? This is a good one. Charlie, let them listen!

CHARLIE: George over there seemed very excited.

*The customers look at George.*

Thank you, Charlie. Now, folks...

CHARLIE: So I should 'ave guessed something' was up.

GEORGE: Which animal has a look at a prophet?

MAN: Well, he's a noisy devil, isn't he?

CHARLIE: Yes, that's why I didn't take much notice.

GEORGE: No collusion, now, no collusion!

WOMAN: Smelly too, isn't he?

GEORGE: You give up, folks? Shall I tell you?

WOMAN: And listen to him now, jabbering away.

GEORGE: All right, folks, here it is. The animal that looks at a prophet is...wait for it...I-pop-at-a-mouse...No! Sorry! I-peep-at-Amos! That's it! I-peep-at-Amos.

CHARLIE: I'll show you what 'appened, if you like.

MAN: Yes, we'd like to see.

*They all turn away from George.*

GEORGE: Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! I-peep-at-Amos. Hippopotamus. Oh come on, it's not that bad!

*They have gone to the door of Gary's cage.*

CHARLIE: I climbed in, you see. (*He climbs in.*) An' 'e was over there, keepin' out the way.

GEORGE (*to Jim*): It's not that bad, is it?

JIM: It's that bad.

WOMAN: I wouldn't get into a cage with any of them.

CHARLIE: Oh, you get used to it.

GEORGE: All right, here's another one. Listen carefully. Listen!

CHARLIE: An' the other two were standin' back there watchin' from be'ind the bars.

*The customers look round again.*

GEORGE: Thank you. Now then, which bird...sounds...like a large loaf of fruit?

CHARLIE: So I started sweepin' as usual – I mean, I didn't know what was comin'...

WOMAN: Of course not.

GEORGE: A large loaf of fruit!

CHARLIE: Suddenly, them two starts jabberin' and screamin' like they've just seen a fifty-foot python.

GEORGE: Will you please pay attention!

CHARLIE: Like that, see. So o' course I turned round.

*They all turn*

MAN: Anybody would.

GEORGE: Thank you. Which bird sounds like a large loaf of fruit?

WOMAN: Probably trying to distract you.

CHARLIE: That's what I reckon.

GEORGE: Work it out, work it out!

MAN: You wouldn't think they'd be that cunning, would you?

GEORGE: You give up?

CHARLIE: Oh, they're cunnin' all right.

GEORGE: Here you are then, folks. The bird that sounds like a large loaf of fruit is...

CHARLIE: Anyway, the moment I turn my back, the big one jumps on me!

GEORGE: The great-crusted grape!

CHARLIE: I never 'ad a chance.

GEORGE: Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa!

CHARLIE: 'Ad me roun' the throat, an' before I knew what was 'appenin', I blacked out.

*They are ignoring George again.*

GEORGE: Every one a winner!

WOMAN: Terrible.

CHARLIE: 'E musta thought I was dead. Well, *I* thought I was dead. But 'e got off of me *before* I was dead.

GEORGE: And here's a brand new joke for you.

WOMAN: Lucky he did.

CHARLIE: It was.

GEORGE: What male animal goes to bed naked?

CHARLIE: When I come round, the big un an' Mary 'ad 'opped it, an' they'd locked George over there in 'is cage.

*They all look at George.*

GEORGE: Come on, come on, what male animal goes to bed naked?

WOMAN: I wonder why.

CHARLIE: I reckon they double-crossed 'im.

WOMAN: Serves him right.

GEORGE: It's not that difficult! Come on! Come on!

MAN: They probably left him there because they couldn't stand his noise!

*They all laugh.*

GEORGE: No point in laughing before you've heard the answer! All right, I'll tell you. The animal that goes to bed naked is the Him A-Layin' Bare. Now you can laugh!

CHARLIE: Well, to tell the truth, I always thought 'e was quite a friendly little chap.

GEORGE: Brand new, that one. Almost.

WOMAN: It just goes to show you can't trust them.

CHARLIE: You're right. Taught me a lesson, that 'as.

GEORGE: Now, folks, the grand climax...I'm going to perform a feat...that'll take your breath away.

*He is panting as he struggles over to the swing. Charlie meanwhile is getting out of the cage.*

It's my famous, death-defying act...on this trapeze...and I must ask you all for absolute silence...as it requires one hundred per cent concentration.

*Charlie rejoins the customers.*

WOMAN: You had a very narrow escape then, Mr Parker.

CHARLIE: I certainly did. Lucky to come out of it alive, I was.

GEORGE: My lady assistant Marie can't be with me today, so this may be difficult...

CHARLIE: An' now you see what I've got left. Two cages an' a bundle of fur an' bone on a swing.

GEORGE: Absolute quiet, please!

*They all look in George's direction. He has started swinging.*

GEORGE: Thank you.

*The swing gathers momentum, and George tenses himself.*

Now!

*He makes a desperate grab at the ropes, loses his grip, and falls off the swing, landing in a horrible heap on the floor of the cage.*

Ahahaa, ha haa, ha haa! Missed!

MAN: Did you have much trouble finding the other two?

CHARLIE: No, they'd gone up a telegraph pole. Or she 'ad. 'E was 'halfway up. Sittin' targets, both of 'em. Only she got caught in the wires after I shot 'er. Took me 'alf an hour to get 'er down.

*George crawls painfully to the front of the cage.*

WOMAN: What a day you've had!

CHARLIE: I wouldn't like to live through that again, I can tell you.

GEORGE: That's it for today, folks. End of the show.

*He heaves himself to his feet.*

MAN: We shall miss our little outings.

WOMAN: Yes, we liked that other one. She was nice and graceful.

GEORGE: Show over.

CHARLIE: I'm sorry to turn it in meself, but after an experience like that...

MAN: I was going to say, after an experience like that, you'd want to turn it in.

GEORGE: You've been a wonderful audience. Now perhaps you'd like to show your appreciation.

*He puts his right arm through the bars.*

MAN: Got anything lined up, have you?

*They turn to go off.*

GEORGE: Show your appreciation, please!

CHARLIE: Well, I was offered a job a while back as a lavatory attendant. It's similar work really.

GEORGE: Anything'll do.

WOMAN: Be safer than here.

CHARLIE: I'm not sure about that. I've seen some o' the customers.

GEORGE: A banana. Half a banana.

MAN: Maybe we'll come and see you there.

CHARLIE: You might, sir. I don't think madam will.

WOMAN (*demurely*): Oh!

GEORGE: Give me something, will you? I'm starving!

MAN: What are you going to do with that noisy one?

CHARLIE: Shoot 'im. Wouldn't get anythin' for 'im, an' there's no point in keepin' 'im.

*They go off right.*

GEORGE: You mean bloody sods! Charlie! Charlie! *(He sinks to his knees.)* That was a bloody good show I put on. Now what am I going to do? *(To Jim:)* Well, you're always full of ideas. What do you suggest, eh? *(No response.)* I messed up the trapeze again, that's the trouble. But how can they expect me to do it on an empty stomach?

JIM: I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God.

GEORGE: So where is it?

JIM: Where is what?

GEORGE: The meat, the bread, the fruit, the nuts, the bloody banana, the bloody half a banana?

JIM: Let me preach to you.

GEORGE: I don't want you to preach to me! I want you to feed me! I want you to get Mary back.

JIM: I can help you.

GEORGE: No-one can help me. Not unless they give me a banana. Except...

*Pause. An idea has come into George's mind, and he fixes his eyes on Jim.*

Maybe you can...

*Painfully he goes onto his hands and knees, and begins to crawl towards Jim. At first the crow merely waits for him, not understanding. Then at the last moment, he scurries away. George makes a despairing lunge, misses, and finishes flat out. Jim goes out of the cage, and disappears round the back.*

I'm finished.

*He crawls to the front of the cage, till he lies with his face to the bars.*

Charlie! *(Silence.)* Bastard!

*He shakes the bars with what strength he has left.*

Charlie, Charlie, Charlie, Charlie! *(Pause.)* Come back, mister! I didn't mean it! I won't hurt you. Please come back. *(Pause.)* I don't know why you're doing this to me, all of you. I haven't hurt anybody. *(Pause.)* This is bloody stupid. No point lying here.

*He grasps the bars again, and raises his head.*

We'll see who's going to live and die around here.

*He hauls himself on to his knees.*

If I can just get the act right...I'll have 'em falling about tomorrow. Come on!

*With another great effort he heaves himself upright.*

Where there's a will, there's a banana!

*Jim appears on the roof of the cage, and takes up his earlier position.*

Charlie! Come here, Charlie! I know you're there! Maybe he isn't there. He must be there. I know you're there, Charlie! Are you there?

*Charlie comes on right, wheeling his barrow. His gun is strapped across his back.*

Charlie! I knew you were there! Those two friends of yours forgot to give me breakfast.

CHARLIE (*letting down the barrow*): 'Ere we are then, George. End o' the road.

GEORGE: Thanks, Charlie. I knew you wouldn't let me down.

*Charlie takes the gun off his back.*

Anything'll do, just to keep me going. What are you doing, Charlie?

CHARLIE: Still the old chatterbox, eh, George?

*He loads the gun.*

GEORGE: Is that for me?

CHARLIE: I'll quite miss you in a way. In spite of your breath. Now, if you move your arms, I can get you through the heart.

GEORGE: Don't kill me.

CHARLIE: Otherwise, it'll 'ave to be the 'ead. Go on, move your arms, George.

*George drops his arms and steps back two or three paces, staring at the gun.*

GEORGE: Don't kill me, Charlie.

CHARLIE: Good lad, George. That's lovely.

*He takes careful aim.*

JIM (*with the genuine cry of the crow*): Caw caw! Caw caw! Caw caw! Caw caw!

*As the curtain falls, the shot rings out.*

**The End**



