

FOR ENTERTAINMENT
PURPOSES ONLY

by

Philip Ayckbourn

Mea Culpa (scene)

Nick – age flexible.

Joanna – age flexible.

When I'm Gone (song)

Rose – younger woman.

Kyle – younger man.

Critical Analysis (scene)

Adele – younger woman.

Tom – younger man.

Frank – age flexible.

Punters – age flexible.

Madness in the Method (scene)

William – middle-aged man.

Richard – middle-aged man.

I Don't Think That Is For Me (song)

Rose – younger woman.

Kyle – younger man.

Interval

N.D.E (scene)

Death – younger woman.

Victor – middle-aged man.

When I Come Home (song)

Vincent – mid thirties.

The Waiter (scene)

Dennis – father. Middle-aged man. Yorkshire accent.

Irene – mother. Middle-aged woman. Yorkshire accent.

Kevin – son. Early teens. Yorkshire accent.

Franco – waiter. Middle-aged man. Italian accent.

Somebody To Talk To (song)

Lucinda – mid thirties.

Kyle – younger man.

Actors Reminisce (scene)

Peter – older man.

Richard – older man.

V.O. Bar Staff – age flexible.

Mea Culpa

Characters:

Nick – age flexible

Jo – age flexible

*A room in Joanna and Nick's house. JO is found onstage.
NICK enters.*

NICK: Hi.

JO: Hi.

NICK: How are you?

JO: Okay. You?

NICK: Okay. *(Together.)* Look, it was me.

JO: *(Together.)* Look, it was me.

NICK: No it wasn't you, Jo, it certainly wasn't you. It was me.

JO: No, it was me, Nick. We both know it was me. Really.

NICK: No, no, it wasn't you.

JO: It was.

NICK: Seriously it wasn't you. There's no way it was you. It was me – one hundred percent me.

JO: Come on, Nick, it wasn't.

NICK: Anyone looking on with half a brain cell could see that it was me and not you, Jo.

JO: How can you say that?

NICK: Because it's true, that's why. I was being argumentative, stubborn, vile, obnoxious, petty and downright rude.

JO: Oh, come on, you're just twisting things, Nick.

NICK: I was being all those things and more – and you know it, Jo.

JO: Excuse me, who was being the horrifically moody bitch completely out of the blue for no apparent reason whatsoever? Thank you.

NICK: You weren't.

JO: I was.

NICK: You were not.

JO: I think I know what I was *being*, Nick.

NICK: Well, even if you were – even ever, ever, ever so slightly – which you weren't – in my opinion – you had every right to be that way, Jo, every right.

JO: Really?

NICK: The things I was saying, the way I was saying them – every right.

JO: Well perhaps you didn't hear how hideous I was being. How insulting, vicious, hurtful, sarcastic, contrary, spiteful –

NICK: Oh come on, Jo, you're just listing random words.

JO: They're not just random words, Nick, it's how I was *being*.

NICK: Okay, okay, let's go back there, shall we?

JO: Oh I'm back there, Nick, don't worry, I'm back there.

NICK: You were upstairs in your office room, sitting there quite happily catching up on work you had to do, when I –

JO: I was not quite happily catching up on work I had to do, Nick.

NICK: Yes you were.

JO: I wasn't. I was sitting there plotting like a malicious witch on how I could punish you for the way I've been treated – not by you I hasten to add, but by men – men in past relationships – the pain of which I'm unconsciously dumping on you because my psyche doesn't have the maturity to own it and work through it in a responsible adult way.

NICK: Please!

JO: It's true.

NICK: If I may be allowed to continue. When I waltzed in drunk in order to –

JO: You did not waltz in drunk, Nick.

NICK: Yes I did.

JO: You were not drunk.

NICK: Excuse me, I'd had three very large gin and tonics downstairs. I'd been knocking them back like a bloody dipsomaniac.

JO: Well you didn't seem it.

NICK: Well I was. When I waltzed in – *drunk* – in order to project on you all my unworked through anger issues I have with my father –

JO: Oh come on, Nick, they are not unworked through.

NICK: Excuse me, there's a whole shadow side of myself that I haven't yet even scratched the surface of. It's practically controlling my every waking move.

JO: If you say so.

NICK: I do. When I selfishly – and drunkenly – waltzed in to your peaceful environment –

JO: It was not peaceful, Nick! (*Head.*) What was going on in here was a veritable hornets' nest of unimaginable nastiness. I was actually hoping you would come in so I could not only ruin your evening, but – with any luck – the rest of your weekend too. And what's more – due to my horrendous lack of self-control – I could have killed you chucking that bloody thing at you.

NICK: You could not have killed me.

JO: If that thing had hit you in the head you'd be dead now.

NICK: It was only a paperweight.

JO: A solid marble one.

NICK: I'm sorry, but it would take more than a solid marble paperweight hitting me in the head to kill me. Anyway... even if it had killed me I'd have deserved it.

JO: What? Deserved to die?

NICK: Absolutely – the things I was saying, the way I was saying them.

JO: Seriously, Nick?

NICK: Seriously.

JO: You... kind, loving, thoughtful, generous, wonderful Nick.

NICK: Oh, please!

JO: I was the one who deserved to die, Nick.

NICK: Oh come on, Jo!

JO: The things I was scheming – in here – in this den of poisonous vipers, absolutely.

NICK: I'm sorry, I don't accept that. You, amazing, beautiful, understanding, easy-going, peace-loving, incredible Jo.

JO: Enough, Nick! That's enough!

Pause.

NICK: I guess this little make-up mission hasn't gone as well as we'd hoped.

JO: It appears not.

NICK: No thanks to me.

JO: No thanks to me.

Pause.

NICK: Well...

JO: Well...

NICK: I'll...

JO: Yes...

NICK: Right.

JO: Right.

NICK starts to go. He stops.

NICK: *(Softening.)* You know... thinking about it... you're right, you were being a horrifically moody bitch.

JO: *(Softening.)* Yes. And you were being – like you say – argumentative, stubborn, vile, obnoxious, petty and downright rude.

NICK: Yes. And I'm sure you were sitting up there in your room plotting away like a malicious witch.

JO: I was. And you were drunk, Nick, you were disgustingly drunk.

NICK: I was.

JO: It was more than blindingly obvious.

NICK: Thanks. And you were a crazy, mad woman chucking that thing at me. You're right it could've killed me. I don't know what the hell you were thinking.

JO: Thanks.

NICK slowly starts to walk towards JO.

NICK: You're actually a... vindictive, spiteful, vengeful, passive-aggressive, ill-tempered, shrew of a woman to be married to, Jo.

JO: And you're... an egotistical, pompous, smug, condescending, infantile, complacent, pig of a man to be married to, Nick.

Beat.

NICK: Cow.

JO: Swine.

NICK: Dragon.

JO: Ogre.

NICK: Snake.

JO: Ape.

Beat.

NICK: I hate you.

JO: I despise you.

NICK: I detest you.

JO: I loathe you.

Beat.

NICK: Do you want to go to bed?

JO: God, yes!

Lights down.

Song: **When I'm Gone**

Characters:

Kyle – younger man

Rose – younger woman

KYLE and ROSE sit on chairs SR and SL facing out.

KYLE:

I've never been someone who has ever been anyone
The boy in the background is all that they will say when I am gone
What's-his-name? Thingummy
The one with the ears
Is how I'll be remembered when I'm gone
When I'm gone

ROSE:

I've never been someone who has ever been anyone
The girl in the corner is all that they will say when I am gone
What's-her-face? You-know-who
The one with the glasses
Is how I'll be remembered when I'm gone
When I'm gone

It's not that I have not tried to fit in

KYLE:

It's not I've never looked to make a friend

ROSE:

It's not because I've wanted to spend my days alone
All on my own

KYLE:

It's not that I've not wanted to belong

ROSE:

It's not I've never meant to get along

KYLE/ROSE:

But every time that I felt that something in my life was going right
I was wrong

I've never been someone who has ever been anyone
Who was that person? Is all that they will say when I am gone

KYLE:

What's-his-name?

ROSE:

What's-her-face?

KYLE:

Thingummy

ROSE:

You-know-who

KYLE/ROSE:

The one with the ears/The one with the glasses

Is how I'll be remembered when I am gone

KYLE:

When I'm gone

When I'm gone

ROSE:

When I'm gone

When I'm gone

KYLE/ROSE:

When I'm gone

Critical Analysis

Characters:

Adele – younger woman

Tom – younger man

Frank – age flexible

Punters – age flexible

A room in the gallery. Four chairs are placed downstage and are spaced apart. On the first is a pair of rubber gloves with a broom propped against it. On the second there is a half full black plastic sack. The third is empty and the fourth has a scrunched up can of Coke on it. A couple of punters enter S.R. They briefly glance at the chairs and consult a sheet of paper they each hold before exiting S.L. TOM and ADELE enter S.R. They stare at the chairs and items thoughtfully for some moments.

TOM: Interesting.

ADELE: Very.

TOM: They all have something.

ADELE: They do.

TOM: Even that one that seems to have nothing, that still has something.

ADELE: Of course. It wouldn't be here if it didn't have anything.

TOM: True.

They consider again.

One artist?

ADELE: Sorry?

TOM: You think it's one artist?

ADELE: There's certainly a uniformity of style.

TOM: Yes.

They consider again.

The space is very interesting.

ADELE: Which bit of it?

TOM: Well... all of it – in and around it all.

ADELE: It is. Although I don't think that's meant to be our primary focus.

TOM: No, not our primary focus – the exhibits are that, of course. I just thought I'd mention it since it was... there.

They consider again.

So it's one artist, you think?

ADELE: Yes, it's quite obvious now – looking at it more closely.

TOM: Yes.

They consider again.

One idea expressing one concept... or do you think we should be viewing them all separately?

ADELE: No, they're absolutely unified by a linking theme.

They consider again.

TOM: Detritus.

ADELE: What?

TOM: The linking theme... detritus.

ADELE: Well, I suppose on a purely simplistic, literal and non-metaphorical level it could be viewed as such.

TOM: Yes... I was... moving on to the non-literal, non-simplistic, metaphorical levels.

ADELE: Well, that's usually where I like to begin from.

TOM: Me too... usually.

They consider again.

So what would *you* say it is – the theme?

ADELE: Transience.

TOM: Transience?

ADELE: Yes.

- TOM: As in...?
- ADELE: As in transience.
- TOM: Yes, that's what I thought you meant.
- ADELE: Ephemerality of phenomenality.
- TOM: Yes. *(Beat.)* Can you say more – I mean I get it absolutely – just if you wanted to... unpack it a little further?
- ADELE: The ephemerality of phenomenality represented by the everyday objects that are either there to be mutated or there to facilitate their mutation. The discarded can of Coke – or what you would call 'detritus' – the thing which is to undergo transformation. The broom and gloves: the instruments to facilitate. The refuse sac: the repository for that which has been transformed and the now empty chair – plinth – or what you will – which represents the thing that once was in appearance.
- TOM: The can of Coke?
- ADELE: Well done.
- TOM: Thanks.
- ADELE: The irony, of course, is that the exhibit itself is static in time thereby refuting the very idea of transience.
- TOM: Do you think the artist himself – or herself – would be aware of that?
- ADELE: She – or he – would most definitely be aware of it. The very act of staging the exhibit in the first place quite brilliantly emphasises the idea. Of course the double irony is – which also wouldn't be lost on her – or him – is that the exhibit itself will be in time subject to the very theme it's exploring. It will itself be deconstructed – in the physical sense – when the exhibition is over.
- TOM: *(Attempting humour.)* Hopefully it won't end up in a black plastic sack. *(More to himself.)* No... I'm sure it won't.
- They consider again.*
- ADELE: The more I look at it the more I realise how brilliant it is.
- TOM: Yes... brilliant in its simplicity.
- ADELE: And in its complexity.

TOM: Yes, that too. Derrida would like it. Jacques.

ADELE: Yes.

TOM: Something he could deconstruct.

ADELE: Derrida would like anything he could deconstruct – which *is* practically anything – so yes.

TOM: True. Sartre would be excited about the being and nothingness of it, wouldn't you say?

ADELE: I think 'excited' is probably misrepresenting him.

TOM: Yes, perhaps more...

ADELE: Captivated.

TOM: Yes, captivated. Plato?

ADELE: Plato would hate it.

TOM: Yes, that's what I thought.

ADELE: Although he'd no doubt see the perfect template of it in the realm of idea so I somewhat take that back.

TOM: Yes, good point. He'd probably just be slightly irritated by it. Jung would be interested in it – wouldn't you say?

ADELE: Perhaps, but not so much in the exhibit per se, but more in the way we 'the perceiver' views it. The Ego would certainly attempt to rationally contextualise it. The Unconscious would no doubt have its unresolved issues with it. And the Collective Unconscious might find itself seriously challenged by it. The notion of decay and death being at its very heart would certainly be at odds with its innate need for existence.

TOM: Yes. Wittgenstein? What do you think he'd make of it?

ADELE: He'd enjoy the empirical verification of it.

TOM: Right. Heidegger?

ADELE: He would admire its ontology.

TOM: True. Kant?

ADELE: Kant would recognise the reality of it, but would attest that the thing in itself is essentially unknowable.

TOM: Hegel?

ADELE: Hegel would appreciate the absolute idea of it.

TOM: Schopenhauer, what do you think he'd make of it?

ADELE: He would see it as something that's full of injustice, disease, repression, suffering and cruelty. Which isn't to say he wouldn't like it.

TOM: Descartes?

ADELE: Descartes would apply Cartesian doubt to it, but I'm confident he would eventually recognise its empirical existence.

TOM: Eventually I think he would, yes. Nietzsche?

ADELE: Nietzsche would definitely resonate with the 'God is dead' quality that runs through the piece.

TOM: Yes, there's a very 'God is dead' quality running through it, isn't there? You could say there's something for everyone in it.

ADELE: And perhaps at the same time nothing for anybody.

TOM: Good point. I suppose it's true to say that works of art such as this end up asking more questions of us than we do of it... perhaps. Although we are asking quite a few questions of it. Good ones I think. Don't you think?

ADELE: Yes. For me, the exhibit – the concept, its execution, the environment it's contextualised in – cleverly challenges boundaries not only of contemporary art, but in the way we *view* contemporary art. Conceded, the idea of transience is not in itself – of itself – a new one per se, but the manner in which it's been articulated here: immediate, visceral, simple in structure, yet metaphorically complex, communicates to the informed onlooker a very definite – and one might add a hugely important – sense of –

FRANK enters S.L. in his sanitation officer's overalls.

FRANK: Afternoon.

ADELE: Afternoon.

FRANK notices the can of Coke and tuts.

FRANK: Kids.

FRANK picks it up.

TOM: What are you doing, man, that's a priceless exhibit you're destroying!

FRANK: What this?

TOM: Yes.

FRANK: It's an empty Coke can.

TOM: But it all belongs together – that, that, that and that!

FRANK: That, that and that is my sanitation equipment. Not this, this is rubbish. If you want the exhibition it's through there.

FRANK picks up the sack, the rubber gloves and broom and exits S.R. Pause.

TOM: Do you think that's all part of it, him coming in and... deconstructing it? What the artist intended? Transience. What do you think?

ADELE: I think we should both agree that *this* never happened and move next door. Come on.

ADELE and TOM exit S.L.

Lights down.

Madness In The Method

Characters:

William Shakespeare – middle-aged man

Richard Burbage – middle-aged man

A room near the Globe Theatre. RICHARD is practising the opening lines of 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I' to himself. WILLIAM enters with a couple of sheets of new script.

WILLIAM: Hi Richard.

RICHARD Will.

WILLIAM: Here we are, another soliloquy for you.

RICHARD Another one, Will?

WILLIAM: Yes, another one, Richard. That okay with you?

RICHARD Yes. I'm just wondering where you're going to put it, that's all.

WILLIAM: The beginning of Act Three. I felt Hamlet just hanging around waiting for Ophelia to arrive while going through the steps of a traditional Danish folk dance wasn't really doing it for me.

RICHARD No, I wasn't quite sure about that myself to be honest with you, Will. So you're replacing it with a soliloquy?

WILLIAM: Yes.

RICHARD It is *replacing* right, Will?

WILLIAM: What?

RICHARD I mean you're not wanting him to be doing the folk dance at the same time?

WILLIAM: No, the folk dance is now gone.

RICHARD Good.

WILLIAM: That doesn't mean to say he's doing nothing at all, Richard.

RICHARD What's he doing now?

WILLIAM: I'm just about to tell you.

RICHARD Will –

WILLIAM: I know what you're going to say, Rich, and the answer's 'no'.

RICHARD I just think stuffing your plays full of unnecessary stage directions, Will –

WILLIAM: They are not *unnecessary*, Richard. They help the actors – and God knows they need it – with clear instructions on how the characters engage with the environment they're in.

RICHARD But aren't your brilliant words enough, Will?

WILLIAM: No, Richard, they are not.

RICHARD But can't you just leave it up to the actors to –

WILLIAM: I am not Christopher Marlowe, Richard! I am not just leaving it up to the actors.

RICHARD But Kit says –

WILLIAM: I don't care what Kit says. Clear, concise stage directions not only prevent the actor from going woefully off the rails with their own misguided interpretations, but they also inform the audience where the character is – mentally, emotionally – by indicating not only *what* they engage with, but *how* they engage with it.

RICHARD You're the playwright, Will.

WILLIAM: Yes, I am, thanks for noticing.

RICHARD All right, let me have it and I'll commit it to –

WILLIAM: I'll need to go through it with you.

RICHARD But I've just nipped out of rehearsal, we're in the middle of Act Two and –

WILLIAM: They're hardly going to go on without you are they, Rich?

RICHARD No, but –

WILLIAM: Hamlet is pretty key to the scene – if I remember correctly.

RICHARD Yes and that's why I should be –

WILLIAM: I can always just tear this up and bring back the traditional Danish folk dance if that's what you want, Richard.

RICHARD No, it's not what I want, Will.

WILLIAM: Just ten minutes of your time, Rich, that's all.

RICHARD I'm all ears, Will.

WILLIAM: Good. (*Indicating chair.*) Please.

RICHARD sits.

Right. (*Reading.*) Act Three, Scene One. King Claudius and Polonius have just withdrawn upstage right. Hamlet enters downstage left. He has a pensive and wistful air about him as sniffs the air like a curious cat. He crosses upstage right and looks off. He crosses downstage right and looks off. He then crosses upstage left and looks off.

RICHARD What's he looking for, Will?

WILLIAM: To see if he's being spied on or not. Make sense? (*Reading.*) He stares back into the room as he nervously toys with the buttons on his doublet.

RICHARD Why does he do that, Will?

WILLIAM: Because he's nervous.

RICHARD About what?

WILLIAM: You have read the play I take it, Richard?

RICHARD Yes, of course I have.

WILLIAM: Then you'd know he's currently deliberating whether to murder the king or not. That would make one slightly nervy wouldn't you think, Rich? But perhaps you're planning to play him as a cold-blooded serial killer.

RICHARD No, of course I'm not.

WILLIAM: Good, because it's not how I envisage him.

RICHARD Neither do I. Does he speak?

WILLIAM: Yes of course he speaks, he's got a damn great soliloquy coming up.

RICHARD I'm just wondering *when*, that's all, Will.

WILLIAM: In a moment, Rich. In... a ... moment. (*Reading.*) He crosses to the drinks cabinet and pours himself a large gin and tonic.

RICHARD Does he have to do that, Will?

WILLIAM: Yes he does, Rich.

RICHARD Why?

WILLIAM: Why does anyone pour themselves a large gin and tonic? His nerves are jangling, he needs to settle them.

RICHARD Can't he just say something like: 'Peace, be still my jangling nerves'?

WILLIAM: No, that's just more words. The audience want to see him engaging – tangibly – with his environment.

RICHARD Your audience will be getting impatient, Will.

WILLIAM: *Your* audience, Rich. You'll be the one up there on stage needing to make his every move absolutely riveting and highly watchable.

RICHARD He pours himself a large gin and tonic. What then?

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* He drinks it – quickly.

RICHARD Good.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* He then pours himself another.

RICHARD Oh!

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* Which he drinks slowly. He savours the bitter elixir as he cradles the fine Norwegian crystal in his steadying hand. He thinks... thinks... thinks... then drinks.

RICHARD Will?

WILLIAM: What?

RICHARD Please think of the groundlings.

WILLIAM: I'd rather not think of the groundlings, Rich, thanks very much.

RICHARD They want to see action.

WILLIAM: Then the buggers can wait for it, can't they.

RICHARD They're a substantial part of our paying audience, Will... *your* paying audience.

WILLIAM: Nonsense, they practically get in for free, the sods. If it was up to me I'd double – nay triple – their ticket prices.

RICHARD Will –

WILLIAM: Is it any surprise they're talking and eating all the way through my plays. They don't pay enough to appreciate them, that's why. It's a simple equation: the more you pay the more you appreciate. It's not rocket science.

RICHARD Can we not have this argument right now, Will.

WILLIAM: You brought the buggers up, I didn't.

RICHARD Hamlet... he's thinking and drinking.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.) To be, or not to be, that is the question*

RICHARD What question?

WILLIAM: His question.

RICHARD What?

WILLIAM: That's him – him speaking.

RICHARD Oh, right. Good.

WILLIAM: Do you want me to read that again?

RICHARD No, I heard it. 'To be, or not to be, that is the question.'

WILLIAM: *(Reading.) Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?*

RICHARD Nice!

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* He crosses to the upstage right French-windows and stares out into the freezing Danish night.

RICHARD Really, Will?

WILLIAM: Yes, really Rich. *(Reading.)* He stands there, a man haunted, troubled, alone. He looks out, searching... searching... searching for something Elsinore will not and perhaps cannot give him.

RICHARD And what pray is that, Will?

WILLIAM: A sense of belonging in a seemingly meaningless universe, Richard.

RICHARD That's a hell of a difficult one to act, Will.

WILLIAM: Not if you inhabit the character, Richard.

RICHARD Even so, Will, it's still –

WILLIAM: I'm sure Edward Alleyn could have a good stab at it. He was eyeing the part of Hamlet quite covetously in the read through, I recall.

RICHARD I can do it.

WILLIAM: Though you could. *(Reading.)* Like a man possessed he kicks at the French-windows. They fly open to the sound of shattering glass and the honking of startled geese. He takes a sharp intake of the icy air as silence returns. Whisps of freezing mist enter in at the yawning wound he has made in the castle's suffocating skin.

RICHARD What the...!

WILLIAM: It's metaphorical, Richard.

RICHARD Yes, I realise that. They're stage directions, Will.

WILLIAM: I know what they are, Rich.

RICHARD I'm just thinking of the...

WILLIAM: I hope you're not going to say groundlings, Rich.

RICHARD Please... go on.

WILLIAM: Probably for the best, Rich.

*(Reading.) To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd.'*

RICHARD Are we still in the metaphor, Will?

WILLIAM: No, that's him speaking.

RICHARD Oh.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* He crosses to the drinks cabinet.

RICHARD Again, Will?

WILLIAM: Yes, again, Richard. *(Reading.)* He pours himself another generous gin and tonic.

RICHARD Is he an alcoholic this Hamlet?

WILLIAM: No he is not.

RICHARD He does seem to enjoy his drink, Will.

WILLIAM: He's settling his nerves.

RICHARD Surely he must be slurring his words just a little by now.

WILLIAM: Hamlet is not slurring his words.

RICHARD You're the one who wants realism, Will.

WILLIAM: He's Scandinavian, he has a healthy tolerance for alcohol. All right? Besides, I've sworn to myself not to write any more drunks – not after that bastard Will Kemp completely butchered my Sir Toby Belch with his horrifically OTT drunk acting. The groundlings loved it – needless to say. We could hardly get the bugger off the stage in Act Four – him and his forty minute jig.

RICHARD Will, can we please return to Hamlet?

WILLIAM: Gladly. He even had the audacity to ask me after the show what I thought of his performance, the swine! I should've sacked him then and there.

RICHARD Will, they really will be missing me in Act Two. What does Hamlet do next – or say... with any luck?

WILLIAM: Do. (*Reading.*) He knocks back the gin and tonic and crosses to the chaise-longue. He sits and takes off his boots.

RICHARD Takes off his boots?

WILLIAM: Yes.

RICHARD For any particular reason?

WILLIAM: His feet are sore and he wants to rub them.

RICHARD Can he not still soliloquise while he's doing this?

WILLIAM: No, he cannot.

RICHARD Why?

WILLIAM: Because the audience will be more interested in a man taking off his boots and rubbing his feet than listening to my lines, that's why.

RICHARD Perhaps you can have him taking off just one boot and rubbing just one foot. Less is more, Will.

WILLIAM: No.

RICHARD Why?

WILLIAM: Because Hamlet happens to have two feet, two legs, that's why – unless you're thinking of playing him less one leg, a one-legged prince.

RICHARD No, Will, I am not.

WILLIAM: Good, at least we're on the same page with that one.

RICHARD He sits and takes off his boots.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* He rubs his feet... *both* of them. He stops and picks up one of his boots and stares into it thoughtfully. Pause. He puts the boot down. Pause. He picks up the other one and stares into it thoughtfully. Pause.

RICHARD Oh God, Will!

WILLIAM: What?

RICHARD They'll be climbing the walls with boredom.

WILLIAM: Who will?

RICHARD The... your audience, Will.

WILLIAM: Not if you inhabit the part, Richard.

RICHARD There's only so much inhabiting of a part an actor can do, Will, before the audience start to walk out in their droves.

WILLIAM: I'm sure Edward Alleyn could keep them glued to their seats.

RICHARD That idiot couldn't act his way out of his own breeches!

WILLIAM: Oh, I think we've touched a nerve here, Rich.

RICHARD The groundlings, Will, they'll probably never want to –

WILLIAM: Fuck the groundlings, Rich! Fuck them! Fuck them! Fuck them!

Pause. RICHARD glances off.

RICHARD *(To someone offstage.)* Sorry, we're just... rehearsing.

Pause.

WILLIAM: That was actually quite therapeutic. Remind me to use that word more often, Rich.

RICHARD He's staring into his second boot thoughtfully.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* He lets the boot drop.

To die, to sleep;

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub –

RICHARD He's still rubbing?

WILLIAM: What?

RICHARD His foot?

WILLIAM: No, that's him speaking.

RICHARD Oh.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* *Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.*

RICHARD You want me to pause there?

WILLIAM: No, he goes straight on.

(Reading.) *There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin?*

RICHARD Now that's more like it, Will, now we're cooking with gas!

WILLIAM: Don't interrupt, please.

RICHARD Sorry.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.)* *Who would fardels bear,*

*To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?*

- RICHARD Great stuff, Will!
- WILLIAM: It's not finished.
- RICHARD Oh. Please. Oh, just to say you've used 'bear' twice. Well, three times actually if you're including 'bare bodkin'. But that's a different spelling so it doesn't count. 'Fardel's *bear*' and '*bear* those ills we have'.
- WILLIAM: I know.
- RICHARD Right, I just thought I'd –
- WILLIAM: Does it bother you?
- RICHARD It doesn't bother *me*.
- WILLIAM: You think it will bother the audience?
- RICHARD I shouldn't think so, Will.
- WILLIAM: Then why did you mention it?
- RICHARD In case you'd overlooked it, that's all.
- WILLIAM: I'm William Shakespeare, Rich
- RICHARD I know who you are, Will.
- WILLIAM: If there's anyone writing for the theatre today who doesn't overlook things it's William Shakespeare.
- RICHARD Look, I'm sorry I mentioned it.
- WILLIAM: Yes, well... so am I.
- RICHARD I'd really like to hear how the soliloquy ends, Will.
- WILLIAM: Well perhaps if you'll stop interrupting we'll get there.
- RICHARD Continue, please.
- WILLIAM: Thank you.

(Reading.) Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

Pause.

*And (emphasising thus) thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.*

Longer pause.

*And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.*

Pause. Not as long as the second pause, but longer than first. Hamlet catches movement in the corner of his eye. A door opening. A heady and cloying French perfume begins to permeate the room.

RICHARD Ophelia?

WILLIAM: Yes, who else?

RICHARD Well, you're making it sound like it could be Cleopatra.

WILLIAM: It's Ophelia. *(Reading.)* There is the unmistakable swish of Versace.

RICHARD Versace?

WILLIAM: An Italian dressmaker on the Rialto.

RICHARD He comes on with Ophelia?

WILLIAM: No he does not, his *dress* does – *her* dress.

RICHARD What?

WILLIAM: Ophelia's wearing his dress.

RICHARD Right.

WILLIAM: *(Reading.) Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons*

Hamlet crosses to the drinks cabinet and pours two gin and tonics. One for himself and one for Ophelia.

Be all my sins remember'd.

Ophelia enters upstage right carrying Fortinbras.

RICHARD Carrying Fortinbras?

WILLIAM: Her favourite cat. And the rest is as written. That's it.

RICHARD Bravo, bravo, bravo, Will!

WILLIAM: You think you can manage that, Rich, do it justice?

RICHARD If Richard Burbage can't do your wonderful lines justice, Will, nobody can. Leave it to me.

RICHARD takes hold of the script, but WILLIAM doesn't let go.

WILLIAM: And the stage directions, Rich, you will do those justice too, I trust?

RICHARD Of course. I'll take them to the gents right now. They always appreciate new material.

WILLIAM: When you say gents, Rich, I am presuming that you mean your fellow gentlemen players of the Globe Theatre, A.K.A. The Lord Chamberlin's Men?

RICHARD Of course, Will, what on earth else did you think I meant?

WILLIAM: Good.

WILLIAM releases the script.

RICHARD See you at the first night, Will.

WILLIAM: Break a leg, Rich.

RICHARD exits.

(To himself.) Right... right... right.

WILLIAM turns and walks into the chairs that make up the chaise-longue.

Aah!

He limps off.

Lights down.

Song: **I Don't Think That Is For Me**

Characters:

Kyle – younger man

Rose – younger woman

KYLE and ROSE stand SR and SL. They read off their mobile phones.

KYLE:

Early morning yoga in sandals and a toga
Sub-zero meditation to focus concentration
Working through your karma by roleplaying through drama
Get off of medication by chant and invocation
In a tepee in Bermondsey
I don't think that is for me

ROSE:

Singles ayahuasca with Rupert, George and Oscar
Tantric sexual dancing with Doctor David Lancing
Former life regression to tackle your depression
A course in primal screaming for mother daughter healing
The first class free for a mum to be
I don't think that is for me

KYLE:

Out of body flying. Walking on hot coals
Drumming in a yurt in Battersea
Tuning up your chakras with Tibetan crystal bowls
I don't that is for me

ROSE:

Energise with pan pipes. Invigorate with gongs
Complimentary vegan cake and herbal tea
Dancing druid dances, singing Wiccan songs
I don't that is for me

BOTH:

Barefoot running in the park
Tai Chi in the dark
A ten week course in ancient sorcery
Survival in the wild
Release your inner child
Find peace of mind hugging a tree

KYLE:

Master lucid dreaming
In a bungalow in Ealing

ROSE:

A weekend of rebirthing
In a caravan in Worthing

KYLE:

Become a new age farmer

ROSE:

Cooking with a Lama

KYLE:

Hiking with a shaman

ROSE:

Kabbalah for the layman

KYLE:

Psychotropic Sunday

ROSE:

Levitate the fun way

KYLE:

Love yourself through rhumba

ROSE:

Kundalini Zumba

KYLE:

Learn sitar with Harry

ROSE:

Speak in tongues with Sally

KYLE:

Making spells and wishing

ROSE:

Transcendental fishing

KYLE:

Still your mind with Stephen

ROSE:

Voodoo to get even

KYLE:

Mindful church bell ringing

ROSE:

Naked choral singing

KYLE:

With Brother Lee

ROSE:

In four part harmony

KYLE/ROSE:

I don't think that is for me

Meet some E.T. friends
On a boat trip down the Thames
No, I don't think that that is for me

N.D.E.

Characters:

Death – younger woman

Victor – middle-aged man

A room in Victor's house. DEATH sits in a chair. She wears a black outfit and holds a skull mask to her face. VICTOR enters with a cup of tea.

VICTOR: Hello?

DEATH: Hi.

VICTOR: Who are you?

DEATH: Er... have a guess?

VICTOR: I've no idea.

DEATH: Who do I look like?

VICTOR: You look like Death.

DEATH removes the mask from her face.

DEATH: I love that one: you look like Death.

VICTOR: What are you doing in my living room?

DEATH: Another good one: Death in the 'living' room. Get it?

VICTOR: Who let you in?

DEATH: *You* did.

VICTOR: No I didn't.

DEATH: Well, in a manner of speaking you did – your time being 'up' as we say in the business.

VICTOR: What business?

DEATH: The business of death. I'm all out of business cards, I'm afraid, otherwise I'd give you one. That was supposed to be a joke too. More irony – getting a business card from Death. I know, not particularly funny, but you have to grab all the laughs you can in my job – it helps the days go that bit quicker... and the nights. (*Checking mobile.*) I'm actually a tad early. It sometimes happens – not often. I'm never late

though... never late. So no need to rush your tea... coffee? We've still got time to kill. Time to 'kill'. Another one. They're coming thick and fast today.

VICTOR: Did Eddie send you?

DEATH: Eddie?

VICTOR: Eddie Fraser?

DEATH: Eddie Fraser? (*Thinking.*) Eddie Fraser? (*Remembering.*) Oh *him*. (*Checking mobile.*) Six years, two months, twenty-eight days to go.

VICTOR: What?

DEATH: His exit date.

VICTOR: Did he?

DEATH: What?

VICTOR: Send you?

DEATH: No.

VICTOR: Gareth and Lisa then? Crockford?

DEATH: (*Thinking.*) Gareth and Lisa Crockford?

VICTOR: Yes.

DEATH: They go together, don't they?

VICTOR: Yes, they're married.

DEATH: No I mean *go* together. (*Checking mobile.*) Yes: in nine years, seven months and twelve days' time.

VICTOR: Was it?

DEATH: No, Gareth and Lisa Crockford did not send me.

VICTOR: Of course... Dave.

DEATH: Dave?

VICTOR: My brother paying me back for that joke birthday present I gave him? I knew he wouldn't let that one go. He's Mr Tit For Tat Dave is.

DEATH: What makes you think anyone sent me?

VICTOR: All right, *booked* you then – if you want to split hairs. So he’s booked me a... what are you supposed to be: a deathogram?

DEATH: A deathogram?

VICTOR: But it’s not my birthday till next Tuesday. Are you sure you’ve got the right day?

DEATH: Oh yes, I always get the right day.

VICTOR: So, what do you do?

DEATH: Do?

VICTOR: Apart from sitting in a chair and cracking puns. What’s your act?

DEATH: I would have thought my ‘act’ was pretty self-evident.

VICTOR: Are you expecting me to remove some clothing?

DEATH: It’s not a requirement.

VICTOR: Perhaps you’re the one who strips off.

DEATH: No, I do not. Death does not strip off... for anyone.

VICTOR: Okay. I’ve never had a deathogram before so I don’t know the score.

DEATH: I am not a deathogram.

VICTOR: Or whatever you like to call yourself.

DEATH: I call myself Death. Just call me Death.

VICTOR: All right... Death.

DEATH: Thank you... Victor.

VICTOR: Just to let you know – Death – I do have to be somewhere fairly soon.

DEATH: Yes, you will... don’t worry. I know why you’re not taking me seriously: it’s because I’m early and haven’t got straight down to business. I was keen to get out of Birmingham, that’s all. I’ve just done seven jobs back to back there. Also my appearance: not being the traditional Death look. I was sick of catching sight of myself in the mirror: the same old skull face with the sunken hollow eyes, not a hint of lippy on or mascara. And those skinny, bony fingers dangling out of the sleeves of my cloak. No, I was done with that look. Not to mention the scythe. Have you ever tried to carry a scythe around with you

twenty-four seven? It's no joke. And the ironic thing is it never even got used. It was purely symbolic. And you're probably also thinking if I'm Death how can I be so relaxed? I must have appointments coming out of my ears left, right and centre. Well I do, but I don't have to get to them all – well I do, but not *this* me... this *version* of me. There's countless versions of me out there. Well I have to be omnipresent, don't I? It would be impossible otherwise to try to get to every one. No, being omnipresent certainly takes the stress out of travelling. Most versions have kept the traditional skull face, black cloak and scythe look. Some, like me, have gone for something different – something a bit more... approachable – like me. I know one version of me has gone full circus clown. Clown face, wig, trousers, shoes – everything. I tend to think that sends the wrong message though. It's misleading. Just my opinion. You're quiet.

VICTOR: It's... all right.

DEATH: What is?

VICTOR: Your material.

DEATH: Material?

VICTOR: I mean it's all right – there's one or two funnies in there, but nothing really... laugh-out-loud funny – which I presume is what you're aiming for.

DEATH: What?

VICTOR: Well, you're obviously not going for the scary Death by your appearance and you yourself ruled out the sexy stripper Death, so what's left? Comedy Death. And that's the thing that's letting you down.

DEATH: What?

VICTOR: Your comedy. My advice is – for what it's worth – is find a funny friend and run it though with them a few times – try and work on some proper jokes not just rely on cheesy puns. Oh, and I don't know how long you've been doing this for – I'm guessing not long judging by your age, but just as a little side note – but an important one nonetheless – I know the element of surprise is very death-like, but I would absolutely make a habit of ringing people's doorbells or knocking in future, not just wandering into people's houses uninvited. I mean I'm not a violent man – not unless pushed – but some people I know are on a hair trigger and if they caught sight of someone like you in their living room, in that mask, they'd be up behind you with a cricket bat before you could say 'hello, I'm Death'. And that *would* be ironic: Death being bludgeoned to death by a cricket bat.

DEATH: You can't kill Death.

VICTOR: Well... anyway... just my two-penneth worth. Are we done?

DEATH: *(Checking mobile.)* Not quite.

VICTOR: Like I say I can't hang around much longer.

DEATH: You won't be. You know you shouldn't be in such a hurry to get on. You're a long time dead as they say.

VICTOR: I would offer you a cup of tea, but unfortunately we don't have time.

DEATH: No we don't. Anyway tea goes straight through me... literally. All drinks, all food – same problem, straight through without touching the sides.

VICTOR: Have you had that checked out?

DEATH: No, I know what it is. Lack of internal organs.

VICTOR: Right, well, listen I would actually like to do a couple of things before I leave the house, so if we could just wrap it up here... What's your name, by the way?

DEATH: I've told you.

VICTOR: Your real name.

DEATH: You're doing it again. Not taking me seriously.

VICTOR: Look...

DEATH: No, this the last time I show up anywhere early. From now on it's going to be straight in, do the job – bish, bash, bosh – and onto the next.

VICTOR: Sorry, have I offended you?

DEATH starts humming something to herself.

I have, haven't I?

DEATH continues humming.

You know I'm actually beginning to doubt you're a deathogram after all.

DEATH: Thank you. At last.

VICTOR: Look... Death... is there somebody... somebody out there... taking care of you?

DEATH: What?

VICTOR: You know... looking after you?

DEATH: No.

VICTOR: No?

DEATH: No, I'm self-employed. Or you could say I'm a sole trader. Get it: soul trader... with a 'u'?

VICTOR: Yes. Ha! Do you have any... I.D. on you?

DEATH: I.D.?

VICTOR: Anything around your...?

DEATH: I'm Death. Death doesn't need I.D.

VICTOR: No. But perhaps I could... just look to see if...

VICTOR makes a move towards DEATH.

DEATH: Don't touch me!

VICTOR: Sorry I...

DEATH: I'm serious – unless you want to go sooner than you have to. One touch and it's lights out... for good.

VICTOR: Okay, I'm not touching you. Not touching.

DEATH: You don't want to go before your time.

VICTOR: No, no I don't... you're right. So... so Death?

DEATH: Yes, Victor?

VICTOR: Tell me... what do you like to do?

DEATH: Do?

VICTOR: When you're not... working.

DEATH: I'm always working.

VICTOR: Any hobbies? Sport? Music? Computer games?

DEATH: No time for that.

VICTOR: Oh. Shame. Do you have a boyfriend, Death?

DEATH: I should be so lucky. The one's I meet don't tend to stick around for too long. That's the problem being Death you can never establish any kind of relationship with anyone.

VICTOR: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. But *we're* getting on okay, aren't we, Death?

DEATH: We are.

VICTOR: You trust me, don't you?

DEATH: I do. You've got an honest face.

VICTOR: Thanks. I don't think anyone's ever said that to me before. So have you. Not just honest, it's a... lovely face.

DEATH: Really?

VICTOR: Yes.

DEATH: Thanks. I don't think anyone's ever said that to me before either. They certainly wouldn't have said it to the old me. I guess this new look Death is working out. You think I should keep it?

VICTOR: Yes, I do.

DEATH: It's nice around here, isn't it?

VICTOR: I like it.

DEATH: Have you lived here long?

VICTOR: About twenty-five years now.

DEATH: It'll be a shame to leave.

VICTOR: Yes, it will be. Well, nothing's forever is it... Death?

DEATH: Very true.

VICTOR: You know... I don't absolutely have to get going – to where I'm going to.

DEATH: I'm afraid you do.

VICTOR: No, I... I could call it off.

DEATH: I'm afraid it's not that easy.

VICTOR: Just a phone call.

DEATH: Well, you say that.

VICTOR: And perhaps we could... do something... together. Take a walk or... something.

DEATH: What... you want to take a walk with me?

VICTOR: Or something. You choose. We could just sit here and chat about... life, if you want?

DEATH: Chat about life with Death?

VICTOR: I know, I'm doing it now. It's actually nice to have company here – now I'm... on my own.

DEATH: You're on your own are you?

VICTOR: Yes. Divorced. Two years now. And to tell you the truth, Death, I do get a bit... well, lonely at times.

DEATH: Lonely?

VICTOR: Sometimes.

DEATH: Tell me about it.

VICTOR: You too?

DEATH: There's nothing more lonely than being Death. You're never welcome. No-one's happy to see you. Always on the move. Never settled. I hardly bump into the other versions of me – and if I do it's like: 'hello, got to dash. I'll call you.' But they never do.

VICTOR: Ah.

DEATH: No, sometimes I think...

VICTOR: Think what?

DEATH: Well... would anyone really... miss me – this version me, I mean – if I wasn't... around anymore?

VICTOR: You mustn't think like that, Death, you mustn't think like that.

DEATH: No I mustn't, must I?

VICTOR: Absolutely not.

DEATH: And anyway, I'm only speaking hypothetically: nothing can get rid of me. Not even me can get rid of me – whatever version I am. I'm immortal. Death immortal. How's that for a paradox eh?

VICTOR: That's better, Death. You're back to your old self again.

DEATH: *(Checking mobile.)* Oh dear.

VICTOR: What?

DEATH: Your time's up, I'm afraid, Victor.

VICTOR: Oh. Does it have to be? Can't we just talk a bit more?

DEATH: I'm afraid not. I have to be in Tunbridge Wells in a couple of minutes.

VICTOR: You're hardly going to make that.

DEATH: I'll get there.

VICTOR: Okay. Listen... perhaps later on – after Tunbridge Wells – when you're free – we could do something. Go for a drink or something.

DEATH: Like I say: me and drink.

VICTOR: Well, it doesn't have to be a drink. Something.

DEATH: Unfortunately there's not going to be an after Tunbridge Wells – for you, Victor.

VICTOR: No?

DEATH: Unless...

VICTOR: Yes?

DEATH: Listen... this is completely against the rules – if I get caught that'll be me absolutely out of a job... this version of me anyway – but I'm going to just stick you down as an N.D.E.

VICTOR: An N.D.E.?

DEATH: Near death experience. You don't actually get to 'go'.

VICTOR: Can you do that?

DEATH: I shouldn't. I'll just fudge the paperwork a little. This has to absolutely remain between you and me though.

VICTOR: Of course, I won't breathe a word to anyone. It'll just be between you and me, Death. Thank you.

DEATH: That's okay.

VICTOR: No, really... thank you... Death.

VICTOR and DEATH start to move closer together.

DEATH: I really do have to be in Tunbridge Wells.

VICTOR: Can't you be a little late?

DEATH: Death is never late.

VICTOR: Can't you make an exception... for once?

DEATH: I... I... I could. If you don't tell anyone.

VICTOR: Not a soul, Death. I won't tell a soul. Not a...

When their lips touch VICTOR clutches his chest. He collapses into the armchair and dies.

DEATH: Victor? Victor? Oh crap!

DEATH exits hurriedly.

Lights down.

Song: **When I Come Home**

Character:

Vincent – mid thirties

VINCENT is in his room.

VINCENT:

It's a starry night as I look out of this window
I'm alone but it doesn't feel that way
Moon kissing the horizon
Against the charcoal grey

This yellow house is cosy and familiar
Fire in the hearth and books upon the shelf
A quiet place to work with no distractions
Perfect for my health
Two chairs, a table, a basin and a single bed
Somewhere away from it all I can rest my weary head

When I come home
When I come home
When I come home
It feels like home

A quiet place to work with no distractions
Where I can be myself
Two chairs, a table, a basin and a single bed
Somewhere away from it all I can rest my weary head

When I come home
When I come home
When I come home

It's somewhere to relax
It's somewhere to unwind
It's somewhere to sit and simply be
It's somewhere I can sleep
With a satisfied mind
It's somewhere that's waiting just for me

When I come home
When I come home
When I come home
It feels like home
It feels like home
It feels like home should be

The Waiter

Characters:

Dennis – father. Yorkshire accent.

Irene – mother. Yorkshire accent.

Kevin – son. Yorkshire accent.

Franco – waiter. Italian accent.

Marco's Pizza Restaurant. The two tables are pushed together to make one larger table centre stage with the four chairs around it. FRANCO is laying up. He holds a waiter's towel and tray which are real, but cutlery, glasses, plates, menus etc can be imagined. DENNIS, IRENE and KEVIN enter. DENNIS is staring at his mobile phone. IRENE does the same with hers and texts at the same time. She wears Bluetooth earbuds. KEVIN is wearing a V.R. headset and is oblivious to his environment altogether. He lifts it slightly to look at the ground when he walks. Throughout the first part of the scene they remain glued to their devices. FRANCO approaches them.

FRANCO: Good evening, folks. Table for three?

Not looking up from his mobile DENNIS holds up three fingers.

Table for three. This one okay for you?

They cross to the table.

Good.

They sit.

My name's Franco, I'm your waiter for this evening. Franco. Have you been to Marco's Pizzeria before?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Nuh.

FRANCO: Okay, well I hope your first experience here is a happy one. I'll do the best I can to make it so. Special occasion? Birthday, anniversary, confirmation, bar mitzvah?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Nuh.

FRANCO: Just hungry, eh? Well you've come to the right place. A menu for you, signora, one for you, signore, and one for you, young signore. Any allergies?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Nuh.

FRANCO: Okay. No allergies. Good. The specials are on the board up there. Just up there. Any drinks?

DENNIS: Wine – red for us. Coke for him. No ice.

FRANCO: Wine – red, coke no ice. House red, signore?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Huh?

FRANCO: The house red okay for you?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Yeah.

FRANCO: I'll be right back.

FRANCO exits. DENNIS, IRENE and KEVIN remain glued to their devices. KEVIN suddenly stands and fights an imaginary enemy with an imaginary sword. DENNIS and IRENE take no notice. KEVIN sits down again. FRANCO enters with a tray.

Here we are. One coke for the young signore. House red.

FRANCO opens the wine. He pours a little into Dennis's glass.

Perhaps you'd like to try the wine, signore? Signore?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Huh?

FRANCO: The wine. Perhaps you'd like to taste it, signore?

DENNIS tastes it absentmindedly. He puts the glass down.

Okay.

FRANCO fills the glasses.

Signora. Signore. Okay. Are you ready to order, or do you need more time?

DENNIS: I'll have the Pollo pizza.

FRANCO: Pollo e Pancetta. Good choice, signore.

DENNIS: She'll have a Margherita.

FRANCO: Margherita for the signora. Another excellent choice.

DENNIS: And he'll have the five cheeses.

FRANCO: Cinque Formaggi for the young signore. Eccellente. Water? Signore?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Huh?

FRANCO: Would you like some water – fizzy, still, tap water?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Nuh.

FRANCO: Okay.

FRANCO exits. After a moment KEVIN stands again and has an animated shootout with some imaginary enemies. He sits. FRANCO enters carrying three plates of pizzas.

Okay now, here we are. The Margherita for the signora, Pollo e Pancetta for signore and Cinque Formaggi for the young signore. Black pepper?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Huh?

FRANCO: Would you like black pepper?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Nuh.

FRANCO: Okay. Enjoy. Please enjoy. If you need anything I'll be over there. Franco. Franco. *(More to himself.)* Franco.

FRANCO crosses to the edge of the room and looks on. DENNIS and IRENE start eating their pizza while remaining glued to their devices. KEVIN sniffs at his plate and then starts eating without taking off his headset. After a moment he stands again and shoots at some more imaginary enemies. He sits. FRANCO appears to be getting more and more distressed as he looks on. He takes out a gun from his inside pocket and crosses to the table.

How's the food? Signore?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* Huh?

FRANCO: How's the food?

DENNIS: *(Not looking up.)* It's all right.

FRANCO points the gun at DENNIS.

FRANCO: No, how's the fucking food, signore?

DENNIS looks up and sees the gun.

DENNIS: *(Nervously.)* Ah.

FRANCO: Tasty? I like the Pollo e Pancetta, it's the one I usually have when I eat here. Although I would say the Margherita is definitely my second favourite. The Cinque Formaggi is delicious too. Smoked mozzarella, gorgonzola, pecorino, parmesan and cream. The chef, Tony, puts a great deal of love into every pizza he makes. Tony loves making pizzas. And there's nothing Tony loves better than customers who love eating Tony's pizzas. I hope you're loving eating Tony's pizza, signora. Are you?

DENNIS: Yes.

FRANCO: Good.

FRANCO turns the gun to IRENE who hasn't looked up from her mobile.

Signora?

DENNIS: Reeny? Reeny?

IRENE looks up and sees the gun.

IRENE: Oh!

FRANCO: Take of the buds.

IRENE: Dennis?

FRANCO: I said take of the fucking buds, signora.

DENNIS: You better do as he says, Reeny.

IRENE takes off her ear buds.

IRENE: What's going on, Den?

DENNIS: I think he wants to know if we're enjoying our meal.

FRANCO: Well are you, signora?

DENNIS: Better say yes, Reeny.

IRENE: Yes.

FRANCO: Good. I'll tell Tony, he'll be so happy.

IRENE: Who's Tony?

FRANCO: The chef.

DENNIS: The chef.

IRENE: Is there a chef? I thought they just came out of a packet.

FRANCO: These pizzas don't come out of a damn packet, signora! Tony puts hours of love into these pizzas – every night, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty four days of the year. He would even work on Christmas Day if this place was open. There is no chef in this damn, stinking country who puts love into pizzas like Tony does!

IRENE: I think we should get the bill, Den, don't you? Can we get the bill please?

FRANCO: No, you cannot get the damn bill, signora! You've barely touched your food and you've still got profiteroles, tiramisu and ice cream to come.

IRENE: But we haven't ordered that.

FRANCO: You will. Eat and enjoy. *(With gun.)* Eat... and... enjoy.

DENNIS: We better do as he says, Reeny.

FRANCO: Mobiles switched off and away please. Now, please.

DENNIS and IRENE put their phones away.

(Friendly.) Eat... and enjoy.

DENNIS and IRENE try to eat and enjoy the best they can.

Good?

DENNIS: Yes.

IRENE: Yes.

KEVIN stands again and stabs an imaginary enemy.

Kevin?

DENNIS: Kevin?

FRANCO: Leave him. I'll get to Kevin in a moment.

KEVIN sits again.

(Friendly.) Eat. You know what the secret is to Tony's pizzas – what makes them so good? Have a guess.

IRENE: The... oven temperature?

FRANCO: No.

DENNIS: The... I don't know, my mind's a blank.

FRANCO: The San Marzano tomato. They have a dense flesh and a rich, sweet flavour. It's my home town, so I should know. You know where San Marzano sul Sarno is?

DENNIS: Er... Italy.

FRANCO: Near Naples. The tomatoes are grown in the shadow of Vesuvius. The story is that the first seed came from Peru in seventeen seventy. It was a gift from the Viceroyalty of Peru to the Kingdom of Naples. Ever since then the tomatoes have been lovingly grown. My grandmother used to pick them. During the harvest time she was up at four o'clock in the morning, sitting in the wagon, going into the fields. Back-breaking work. Her fingers sore, bleeding sometimes at the end of each day. Later in her life she could barely move them, the arthritis was so bad. Now they have machines. But they make a delicious passata. Don't you think?

DENNIS: Yes it's...

IRENE: Tasty.

DENNIS: Tasty.

FRANCO: Good. And the wine? How is the wine?

DENNIS: It's...

IRENE: Nice.

DENNIS: Nice.

FRANCO: Ripe fruits... strawberries, raspberries, plum. A little hint of licorice, spices, black pepper. Yes?

DENNIS: Yes.

IRENE: Yes.

FRANCO: It's made near to Tony's home town in Livorno. Small, independent growers working hard all year to produce the best grapes. The finest. Every grower contributes their choicest bunches to the co-operative. Nothing inferior, sub-standard goes in. Every mouthful you are tasting

is the sweat, the tears – and sometimes yes, the blood – of every simple, humble grower. So drink. Enjoy.

DENNIS and IRENE try to drink and enjoy the best they can.

Now we talk to Kevin.

FRANCO puts his gun away.

DENNIS: Kevin?

IRENE: Kevin?

DENNIS: Kevin?

IRENE: Kevin?

IRENE removes Kevin's V.R. headset.

KEVIN: What's going on?

DENNIS: Franco wants to know how you're enjoying your food.

KEVIN: Who's Franco?

FRANCO: Hello Kevin. How's your pizza?

KEVIN: It's all right.

DENNIS: It's more than all right, Kevin.

IRENE: Tell him it's delicious, Kevin.

DENNIS: The chef's worked very hard to make that.

KEVIN: I thought it just came out of a packet.

DENNIS: It does not just come out of a packet, Kevin!

IRENE: That's a stupid... It doesn't just come out of a packet, Kevin.

DENNIS: Tony works hard.

IRENE: Very hard.

KEVIN: Who's Tony?

FRANCO: Tony's the chef, Kevin. Tell Kevin about the tomatoes.

DENNIS: The tomatoes are from Italy – very special ones. San...

FRANCO: Marzano.

DENNIS: Marzano.

IRENE: Hand-picked.

DENNIS: By his grandmother.

FRANCO: Used to be. Cinque Formaggi.

KEVIN: What?

FRANCO: Five cheeses. Your pizza. Smoked mozzarella, gorgonzola, pecorino, parmesan and a little cream.

DENNIS: Special cheeses, no doubt?

FRANCO: Very special cheeses.

IRENE: All lovingly made in Italy, I'm sure?

FRANCO: Yes.

DENNIS: You hear that, Kevin, all lovingly made in Italy.

IRENE: Yum, yum.

DENNIS: Yum, yum, Kevin.

KEVIN: Can I have my headset back now?

IRENE: No you cannot.

DENNIS: No.

FRANCO: Your mama and papa are making some new rules, Kevin. (*To DENNIS and IRENE.*) Right?

DENNIS: Are we?

IRENE: We are. What are they again?

FRANCO: No electronic devices at the dinner table. No mobile phones, no laptops, no headphones, no earbuds, no virtual reality headsets.

KEVIN: But –

FRANCO: And no arguments, Kevin. Right, mamma, papa?

IRENE: Right. No arguments, Kevin.

DENNIS: None.

FRANCO: Tell him what you're going to do instead.

DENNIS: We're going to...

IRENE: We're going to...

DENNIS: What are we going to do instead?

FRANCO: You're going to talk to each other.

DENNIS: That's right, we're going to talk to each other.

IRENE: Talk, Kevin, to each other.

KEVIN: About what?

FRANCO: About anything and everything. *(To DENNIS.)* Ask him about his school today.

DENNIS: How was your school today?

KEVIN: I don't want to talk about school.

IRENE: We're talking about school, Kevin. How was school today?

KEVIN: Okay.

FRANCO: Ask him what was okay about it.

DENNIS: What was okay about it?

IRENE: Kevin?

KEVIN: We made a wigwam.

FRANCO: A wigwam. A wigwam. Eh, mama, papa. We all want to make a wigwam, don't we?

DENNIS: We do.

IRENE: We do.

FRANCO: Ask Kevin how he made the wigwam.

DENNIS: How did you make the wigwam, Kevin?

KEVIN: Out of sticks.

FRANCO: *(To DENNIS.)* What kind of sticks?

DENNIS: What kind of sticks?

KEVIN: Ash wood sticks.

FRANCO: Ash wood sticks. *(To DENNIS.)* Why ash wood?

DENNIS: Why ash wood, Kevin?

KEVIN: It's strong and bendable.

FRANCO: Strong and bendable. Go on, Kevin, your mama and papa want to know how you made your wigwam, don't you?

IRENE: We do.

DENNIS: We do.

KEVIN: We put eight sticks in the ground first of all and tied 'em together at the top to make a dome shape.

DENNIS: Go on.

IRENE: We're listening, Kevin.

KEVIN: Then you put another eight sticks in the ground and tie 'em over the other sticks. Then you need to get twelve more sticks and wrap them round to make a frame.

DENNIS: Okay, I think I'm getting it.

IRENE: Go on.

KEVIN: Then you've got to cover it. In the old days they used reeds, but we used bits of canvass. We started from the bottom and worked our way up. You mustn't forget to leave space for the door.

FRANCO: Good thinking. Good thinking, eh papa?

DENNIS: Yes, good thinking, Kevin.

FRANCO: Go on.

KEVIN: And you've got to leave a hole at the top for a chimney.

DENNIS: What, you had a fire in it?

KEVIN: We did.

DENNIS: Did it work?

KEVIN: What, the fire?

DENNIS: The chimney?

KEVIN: It did.

IRENE: It sounds like fun, Kevin.

KEVIN: It were. We all sat inside it and sang songs.

DENNIS: Songs?

IRENE: What kind of songs, Kevin?

KEVIN: Indigenous ones.

DENNIS: What's indigenous?

KEVIN: I don't know, but it were fun. Then we all went out into the woods and learnt how to read tracks in the earth.

DENNIS: Tracks?

KEVIN: Animal tracks, foxes, rabbits and things. And after that we all had to find something in the woods – a rock or a fir cone or a leaf or something – and then we went back into the wigwam again and we all had to tell each other...

KEVIN continues speaking, but without sound. DENNIS and IRENE continue to listen and occasionally silently interject.

FRANCO: There now, one big happy family.

FRANCO crosses to exit.

(Calling off.) Tony, they love your pizzas. They all send their compliments to the chef. *(To himself.)* Oh nearly forgot.

FRANCO takes out the gun and approaches the table. DENNIS, IRENE and KEVIN stop and look at him nervously.

KEVIN: He's got a gun.

FRANCO: It's okay, Kevin, it's not real, it's just to light the candles with. My customers like it.

FRANCO lights the table candle with the lighter gun.

Let's make it nice and cosy for you all. There. One big happy family.
One big happy family.

Lights down.

Song: **Somebody To Talk To**

Characters:

Lucinda – mid thirties

Kyle – younger man

Two separate tables at an outdoor café. LUCINDA sits at one and KYLE the other.

LUCINDA:

Hey you, sitting there what's up?
You look like you could use a little pick-me-up
Perhaps you're waiting for someone to join you here
If you are then don't mind me, I don't wish to interfere
It's just that I couldn't help but notice you seem a little out of sorts
And I was wondering if there was something I could do?
It's not fun to sit alone, I find, lost within one's thoughts
It's good to have somebody to talk to

Is it okay for me to join you there?
If only for a little while. I'll bring over my chair
Please don't look so afraid I don't bite
I come in peace, no strings attached, no need to clam up tight
A stranger, they say, is just a friend one's not yet met
So let me be a friend to you
If there's something you want to remember, or someone you want to forget
It's good to have somebody to talk to

Every now and then we all need a helping hand
Somebody to reach out and lift up our day
Once in a while we need someone who'll understand
A friendly voice sometimes to tell us it's okay

LUCINDA: What's your name?

KYLE: Kyle.

LUCINDA: Nice name, strong, purposeful.

KYLE: Yes?

LUCINDA: Lucinda.

KYLE: Sorry?

LUCINDA: That's me, Lucinda.

KYLE: Oh.

LUCINDA:

Tell me are you looking for something in your life?
A lucky break, a better job, a lover or a wife?
Forgive me I can be somewhat direct
You see I'm not a small talk kind of girl, I like to connect
Everybody has a story, a fascinating tale
And life is an adventure to go through
And sometimes we'll succeed and often times we fail
But we all need somebody to talk to

Every now and then we all need a smiling face
Somebody to say hi and show us that they care
Once in a while we need to feel a warm embrace
Someone to take our hand and let us know they're there

LUCINDA: I'm guessing you're not waiting for anyone.

KYLE: No.

LUCINDA: You're lonely.

KYLE: Am I?

LUCINDA: Yes. I can see it in your eyes. I'm very good at reading eyes. Especially men's eyes, they're a little more transparent.

LUCINDA:

Perhaps you'd like to take a walk with me
We can look around, see the sights, stop somewhere nice for tea
Come on now be brave, my newfound friend
It's not a marriage proposition, you're clamming up again
It's just enjoying each other's company for a little while
Doing the things that people like to do
The two of us together, Lucinda and Kyle
A brisk walk or at leisure, whatever is our style
And you never know I might even make you smile
It's good to have somebody to talk to

LUCINDA: Are you up for it, Kyle?

KYLE: Sure.

LUCINDA: Good. There's a new exhibition of contemporary sculpture just round the corner celebrating the timeless erotic... if that appeals?

KYLE: Why not?

LUCINDA: Shall we?

Actors Reminisce

Characters:

Peter – older man

Richard – older man

V.O. Bar Staff – age flexible

In the pub. RICHARD and PETER are seated in two chairs by a table. They both hold pints.

PETER: Well, cheers, old chap.

RICHARD Cheers, old boy.

PETER: It's been yonks, Dickie, hasn't it?

RICHARD Yonks and yonks, Peter.

PETER: Yonks and yonks and yonks.

RICHARD And may I add 'yonks'?

PETER: You may. So tell me, still treading the boards, Dicky old sausage?

RICHARD No, Peter old prune, I had to put away my grease-paint a couple of years back.

PETER: Not for good surely.

RICHARD I'm afraid so. Things just weren't sticking any more.

PETER: To your face?

RICHARD What's that?

PETER: The grease paint wasn't sticking to your face any more?

RICHARD No, to my brain.

PETER: What?

RICHARD The lines.

PETER: Oh, the lines.

RICHARD The last play I was in at Chichester I had to ask for a prompt seven times.

PETER: Oh dear. Was it a big part?

RICHARD No, I was playing a coachman, I only had eight lines.

PETER: Oh, poor man.

RICHARD Yes. Utterly humiliating. Anyway, enough of me. What about you, Peter, still dazzling your fans?

PETER: Alas no, I had to call it quits too I'm afraid, Dicky.

RICHARD Oh really?

PETER: Yes. I went to the doctor last December and he told me my eyesight was deteriorating rapidly, the blackouts I was having were likely to get worse, the uncontrollable shaking most certainly would. It was all looking rather bleak.

RICHARD Goodness, Peter, what was that due to, a brain tumour?

PETER: No, the booze. He said either I quit drinking or say goodbye to my acting career. I made the only choice I could.

RICHARD Well we both had a good innings, Peter old sprout, a very good innings.

PETER: We did, Dicky old cabbage, we did.

RICHARD Cheers to our careers.

PETER: To the hours of pleasure we've given... to the ungrateful sods.

RICHARD Our audiences?

PETER: No, the critics.

RICHARD Oh yes, them. I haven't missed them, not one jot.

PETER: Nobody will, Dicky, nobody will... that's the beauty of it.

RICHARD Talking of critics, Toby's Hamlet at the Old Vic got a very mixed reception.

PETER: Toby Spankworth?

RICHARD Yes.

PETER: Didn't see it, did you?

RICHARD I did. In Act Three Spankers came on completely naked.

PETER: Was that a production choice?

RICHARD Oh no, it was all being done in period costume. Toby just decided to go for it.

PETER: Good for him. He's a courageous actor is Toby.

RICHARD He is. Of course some of the audience were murmuring and tittering.

PETER: Were they?

RICHARD Quite a lot of them actually.

PETER: How rude!

RICHARD Yes, I thought so. That's modern audiences for you, little or no sense of decorum.

PETER: Quite. Did it put him off?

RICHARD God no, he's a consummate professional is Toby. It would need more than a large percentage of the audience murmuring and tittering to put Toby off.

PETER: That's what I thought.

RICHARD A lady in the second row was actually shouting at him to put his clothes back on.

PETER: Goodness! How did he react to that?

RICHARD He calmly sauntered to the edge of the stage and stood there, confidently bearing all. Of course the lady couldn't do anything – being in such close proximity to Toby's sizeable manhood – but to sink back down in her seat utterly defeated and quite brilliantly silenced.

PETER: Bravo Toby!

RICHARD Yes. Unfortunately a man in the dress circle decided to yell out 'Mr Spankworth, you're a disgrace, sir!'. To which Toby replied in his stentorian baritone 'I am the Prince of Denmark and I can dress – or not dress – however I damn well like. And you, sirrah, are a member of the general public so know your place and shut up!'

PETER: And did he?

RICHARD Oh yes, completely dismantled him. You could hear a pin drop after that as Toby went seamlessly into his 'To be or not to be'.

PETER: How marvellous!

RICHARD Yes.

PETER: Was it only that Act he was naked for?

RICHARD Yes, Act Three he was back on again in full Elizabethan attire. It was almost as if Act Two – Toby’s nudity, the dissenting voices in the audience, Ophelia’s embarrassing tantrum – had all been a bit of a dream.

PETER: Ophelia’s tantrum?

RICHARD Yes, she was completely livid at Toby’s state of undress.

PETER: Who was playing her?

RICHARD Olivia Tucker-Wright.

PETER: Never heard of her.

RICHARD Neither had I. T.V. actor from some soap or another. Bums on seats obviously. Very thin voice and even thinner stage presence – apart from her tantrum which brought a bit of life to her.

PETER: They don’t get the training nowadays that’s the problem. God knows what they teach them in drama schools.

RICHARD Not acting, that’s for sure.

PETER: They come out with very little skill.

RICHARD No imagination, charisma, panache.

PETER: Quite. The sheer naked daring of the Toby Spankworths of this world.

RICHARD Pun intended.

PETER: Ha ha! I mean take someone like Nobby Pinchwood.

RICHARD Oh Nobby, yes. Fine actor Nobby.

PETER: Very. On the press night of Uncle Vanya at The Strand he did the whole thing on a unicycle.

RICHARD Yes, I remember hearing about that. Incredibly daring thing to do.

PETER: I’d say. Especially since he’d only had six weeks to master it apparently before the show opened.

RICHARD That's not long.

PETER: Not long at all. The director was absolutely furious, mind you.

RICHARD Who was the director?

PETER: Nigel Guildenstern.

RICHARD Oh *him*.

PETER: He said it had made a mockery of his whole production.

RICHARD A little precious don't you think?

PETER: Just a little. Of course it only made Nobby want to do it more.

RICHARD And he did, if I recall.

PETER: Certainly did. Practically every night until the middle of the run when he swapped the unicycle for a penny-farthing.

RICHARD Yes, that's right. He fell off it into the audience one performance, I seem to remember. It was in the Evening Standard.

PETER: Yes, although Nobby claimed it was deliberate and he was actually aiming for somebody in the third row who'd been snacking tirelessly on a large bag of Kettle Chips since curtain up.

RICHARD That's probably the last time that person ever brought noisy snacks to the theatre again.

PETER: Or possibly ever *went* to the theatre again.

RICHARD Well no loss, Peter, no loss. Audiences really ought to know how to behave themselves – especially in public.

PETER: Quite.

RICHARD George 'Woody' Woodcock.

PETER: Ah yes, 'Woody'. Very exciting actor.

RICHARD Very. I don't know how many hours in the theatre I've spent wondering what the hell Woody was going to do next.

PETER: Or say.

RICHARD That to. Just when you imagine he's just going to say the line – like any other actor would – he totally takes you by surprise and does

something memorably unexpected... like leave the stage and then come back on flanked by two Irish Wolfhounds – which of course he did when playing Oberon at The Royal Exchange in Manchester.

PETER: Yes, wonderfully inspired thing to do.

RICHARD Hugely.

PETER: He had a notoriously bad working relationship with Camilla Livingstone – his Titania – I heard.

RICHARD Oh they did. I don't think the Irish Wolfhound incident helped matters. There were others.

PETER: Insatiable libido too – Woody.

RICHARD Oh yes, insatiable.

PETER: Whatever production he was in he had his methodical way of working through all the actresses one by one – not always one by one – before moving onto stage management. And once he'd depleted the stage management he'd progress to front-of-house.

RICHARD Not with Camilla Livingstone I presume.

PETER: I did hear she succumbed one night towards the end of the run.

RICHARD Bravo, Woody! Another clean sheet.

PETER: So to speak.

RICHARD Ha! Of course his pièce de résistance was him setting fire to The Young Vic on the final night of his Woyzeck. He said Woyzeck – his character – had been whispering in his ear for him to do it for the whole of the run and on the last night he just went for it.

PETER: Very brave decision.

RICHARD Apparently he performed the last half hour of it – while they were putting out the fire – to any audience members that stuck with him on a bus from Waterloo to Peckham on his way home. Some people said it was the best thing they'd ever seen.

PETER: Marvellous!

RICHARD Yes.

PETER: You've got me thinking of women now.

RICHARD Oh have I?

PETER: Not like that, Dickie, not like that you naughty badger. Godiva Winterbourne.

RICHARD 'Lady' Godiva Winterbourne. Her Cleopatra was a tour de force at the Nash.

PETER: All her leading roles were a tour de force, Dickie.

RICHARD True, Peter.

PETER: And her supporting roles too.

RICHARD Yes, you got nothing less than tour de force with Godiva.

PETER: I remember watching her in the Scottish play in Stoke. Lady Macduff?

RICHARD Small part for her.

PETER: Early in her career, years back.

RICHARD Who was Lady Maccers?

PETER: Dame Edwina Lake.

RICHARD Oh yes, it is a while back.

PETER: Well, Godiva made the most of her brief scene by launching into Habanera from Carmen.

RICHARD Goodness, what a courageous choice!

PETER: Yes. Took everybody by surprise – not least Lady Macduff's murderers. They didn't know whether to come on, stay off, or hide.

RICHARD What did they do?

PETER: Sort of a bit of all three. She sang it entirely a cappella of course. Earned her a standing ovation. Nigel Hennessey who was playing Malcolm said Dame Edwina was beside herself with rage as she listened to the applause on the tannoy backstage.

RICHARD Jealousy.

PETER: Yes.

RICHARD The green-eyed monster.

PETER: Quite. She refused to go on for her 'out, out, brief candle' scene.

RICHARD How childish!

PETER: It was. Tragic end though.

RICHARD Dame Edwina?

PETER: Godiva Winterbourne.

RICHARD Oh yes, dashed against the rocks at the Minack Theatre wasn't she?

PETER: Yes.

RICHARD She insisted on being flown in for her entrance as Hecuba in The Trojan Women. The whole thing was an unfortunate combination of inexperience, faulty equipment, bad communication and alcohol.

PETER: Still, it's probably what she would've wanted.

RICHARD Do you think?

PETER: As a way to go, I mean.

RICHARD Oh. Yes, rather. Dramatic.

PETER: Now tell me, Dickie, what's yours?

RICHARD Well if you're buying, Peter, I'll have a –

PETER: No, your finest hour on stage, Dickie?

RICHARD Oh I see. Oh, now you're asking. I think it has to be Lear at Leeds Playhouse. I was playing the Fool to Adrian Ratcatcher's Lear.

PETER: Oh Ratty. Terrific actor, Ratty.

RICHARD Quite brilliant.

PETER: Very in-the-moment actor.

RICHARD He certainly kept me on my toes. Every night he changed his accent completely. One night King Lear would be a dour Swede from Stockholm, another night a feisty Italian from Milan, another night an argumentative Frenchman from Toulouse. His laconic, drawling Texan Lear was spot on, I thought. I tried to match his accent every night, but I did struggle. Accents were never my thing. He was an absolute chameleon – not just with accents, but with his whole persona. You'd actually think he had a multiple personality disorder if you didn't know he was a actor. Just sharing the stage with him I think was the apex of my career.

PETER: I'm sure.

RICHARD What about you, Peter?

PETER: It has to be Sir Gilbert.

RICHARD Sir Gilbert Wellington?

PETER: The one and only. The Tempest at The Royal Court. I was Trinculo, Sir Gilbert was Prospero, needless to say. Consummate method actor.

RICHARD Legendary, Peter.

PETER: Knighthood thoroughly deserved – and they aren't always.

RICHARD Indeed.

PETER: But in his case absolutely. He'd spent two years in Peru learning magic with a shaman before rehearsals even started.

RICHARD That's dedication.

PETER: He could make spirits appear and disappear at will during the run.

RICHARD Oh, exciting stuff!

PETER: Yes – and terrifying at times. He conjured up Caliban's spirit daemon on one performance: a savage jaguar with dark yellow eyes. Gordon was absolutely petrified. Gordon Parrot, he was playing Caliban. He levitated Ariel – Ralph Carter – into the upper circle on another night.

RICHARD How absolutely thrilling!

PETER: It was a mesmerising performance – quite literally. On the final night he took advantage of some empty seats in the stalls to summon up a great army of marching skeletons from Peru.

RICHARD Goodness! That must've been something to see.

PETER: It was. It could've been the opening ceremony of the Olympics. When he broke his staff at the end and relinquished his magic you thoroughly believed every bit of it. The strange thing is that up until his dying day he claimed to remember absolutely nothing about the production.

RICHARD Nothing at all?

PETER: Nothing. Not even his two years spent in Peru.

RICHARD Extraordinary!

PETER: Yes. I suppose that's the downside of being so in the moment. What happens in the moment stays in the moment. Certainly was the case for Sir Gilbert.

RICHARD You know, Peter, all this reminiscing makes me want to get out there again.

PETER: Doesn't it, Dicky.

RICHARD The tingle of the nerves as one stands in the wings waiting to go on.

PETER: Hearing one's cue.

PETER stands.

Out we go.

RICHARD stands.

RICHARD Finding our light.

PETER: Knowing all eyes are upon us.

RICHARD What's he going to say? How's he going to say it?

PETER: What's he going to do? How's he going to do it?

RICHARD The glorious hush of the audience.

PETER: The pin-dropping silences.

RICHARD The gasps, the cries of shock at the unexpected.

PETER: The squeals, the titters of delight at the anticipated.

RICHARD The sighs, the sobs.

PETER: The tears as we tug deftly on every heartstring.

RICHARD Master marionettes we.

PETER: The laughter.

RICHARD Ah, the laughter.

PETER: And finally... the applause

RICHARD The applause.

PETER: The rapturous cheers as they rise to their feet.

RICHARD Their shouts of approval as we stride out to take our bows.

PETER: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

RICHARD Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Pause.

PETER: What do you say, Dickie, shall we call our agents in the morning to see if they'll take us on their books again?

Sound of bell off.

BAR STAFF: *(Off.)* Last orders!

PETER: What do you think?

RICHARD I think we should get one more in before closing, Peter old pudding, that's what I think.

PETER: Good thinking, Dickie old dumpling, good thinking.

They exit with their glasses in the direction of the bar.

Lights down.