

# *Play*

a play in one act by  
Robert Locke  
1984

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I used to write on my title pages something like: “All Rights Reserved: Nobody can use this unless they contact me or my agent in writing.” But I just turned 70; so screw that. This is a good play. If you want to do some scenes from it, go ahead and be my guest. But I hope that you will at least tell me about it, and give me the writing credit for it. If I am still alive —and that’s growing more and more doubtful—contact me at [boblocke@csus.edu](mailto:boblocke@csus.edu). Or contact my agent, Loren Valterza, [valterza@gmail.com](mailto:valterza@gmail.com).

## THE CHARACTERS

THE MANAGER	—	any gender, any race, any age
THE MAN	—	any race, 30-60
THE WOMAN	—	any race, 30-60
THE OTHER MAN	—	any race, 20-30
YET ANOTHER	—	any gender, any race, any age

TO THE DIRECTOR: As I retype “PLAY” in 2015, it occurs to me that because of a far greater and more welcome acceptance these days, I could put “any gender, any race, any age” beside all of the characters. But I have left THE MAN and THE WOMAN and THE OTHER MAN as they originally were, just because.

Well, and also there is the problematic pronouns; I would be forced to type the tiresome “his/her” and the even more burdensome “s/he” throughout. So please, Mr. Miss Ms. Director, cast this play as you will.

*THE SCENE: The set can be any set, or no set. The time is now, or any time.*

*(As performed by Front Row Theater Company at The Next Stage in San Francisco, October 1984, the set is that for Mark London Williams' one-act play, PICCOLO PETE. The actors refer to each other by the names of the actors in that production: Greg de Graf as THE MAN, Sandy Hillard as THE WOMAN, Dan Quinn as THE OTHER MAN, Terry Gault as YET ANOTHER, and Blaine Souza as THE MANAGER.)*

*At 8:35 THE MANAGER, carrying the promptbook for a play titled "THE AFFAIR"—in a colored three-hole punch cover—comes onto the stage and addresses the audience. THE MAN follows partway, lingering at the edge of the stage, anxiously watching both THE MANAGER and the audience.*

#### THE MANAGER

Excuse me. Ladies and gentlemen, uh, please excuse me. Uh. Thank you. I know that you all came here tonight to— Well, I don't know which play you came to see, uh, specifically, but—  
*(addressing The Man)*

...uh, Greg, could you go get Sandy and Dan and do whatever you need to out here?

*(The Man goes offstage)*

Uh, we're billed as performing tonight Robert Locke's "PLAY", uh, his play that is titled "PLAY", and Mark London Williams's play titled "PICCOLO PETE". Oh, and I'm the Stage Manager, my name is Blaine Souza, and uh, I need to announce that we have a change tonight. "PICCOLO PETE", yes, will be performed and it will be performed in the second slot as was originally planned. But "PLAY" will not, uh, unfortunat— well, fortunately, I guess, really, it depends how you look at it, we do have a great surprise for you, but Mr. Locke, the playwright, was just in touch with me to inform us that, with his regrets and apologies to you all, he has been advised by his agent to withdraw the rights to "PLAY" at this time. It seems she's convinced him, his agent has, that he's got to do some rewrites to make the play somehow, I don't know, I didn't get it, it was an extremely brief conversation, and he's now ... uh, unavailable or I guess I should say inaccessible at the moment, but since...

*Meanwhile THE OTHER MAN and THE WOMAN, still in her makeup smock, come onstage. The Man tags uncertainly along behind. As quietly and unobtrusively as they can, they change some of "PICCOLO PETE's" set pieces to suggest their set for "THE AFFAIR".*

*NOTE TO ACTORS: Try to subtly scan the audience to find friends and give them a reassuring but subtle nod that indeed you are enthusiastic about this change of program.*

THE MANAGER (cont)

...in good faith we did not sign a contract with Mr. Locke, uh I guess it's his play and he can do what he wants to with it but— well, we hope this is good news for “PLAY” because it's a very good piece, very provocative piece, which is why we , uh, committed to it in the first place. As many of you know who have seen our work before, Front Row Theater Company was established as a venue for experimental, new theater, and that's why tonight we are— uh, it just so happens we are in rehearsal for another play, also by Locke, which is opening next week just down the street here at the Lyric Stage, and uh, what we have decided, the cast and I— now okay, it's experimental, right?— is that since three of the actors here are also in the cast of “THE AFFAIR” — and that's the title of that other play “THE AFFAIR”—

*(holds up the promptbook for the audience to see)*

— and since Bob has **not** pulled the rights to it— or at least yet, in fact he didn't say so...

*(laughs sheepishly)*

...and I didn't ... uh ... it was a very brief conversation and we couldn't cover all the bases and ... uh, being as how we're caught up short here, but you know, forgive us, and this is quote-unquote experimental theater, you know so, uh... we're going to just go ahead and make this last minute change in our program, and it's really very very good, and I think all you “PICCOLO PETE” people might even like it better than, uh, uh, uh ... “PLAY”, the original piece, “PLAY”.

THE MAN

*(under The Manager's last words)*

Uh, Blaine, could you .. could, could we talk?

*All four huddle and discuss quickly and quietly. The Man seems resistant, but they outnumber him. The Manager turns back to the audience, leaving the actors still whispering among themselves.*

THE MANAGER

We'll just give them a few—

THE MAN

*(approaching The Manager again)*

Uh, Blaine...

*(thinks better of it, withdraws a bit)*

THE MANAGER

—we'll just give them a few seconds to, uh, get their heads screwed on, and then—

*(The Woman hurries offstage, pulling off her makeup smock. The Other Man follows her off, in deep thought. But The Man lingers on the periphery of the stage.)*

THE MANAGER (cont.)

—oh, and I should tell you, too, that this is not our set for “THE AFFAIR”. At the Lyric we have a very fine, very sort of Victorian drawing room ... well, it’s almost finished, and it looks great, with uh, very very elegant furnishings, which we obviously—

*(calling offstage)*

—uh, Mary, just bring up the stage full and take out the house...

*(to the audience again as the lights make the changes)*

...and if we had our—

THE MAN

And we’re going to have to cut. Did you...

THE MANAGER

Huh?

THE MAN

...tell them? We’re going to have to make some, some, some cuts. Did you say that?

THE MANAGER

Yeah, that’s just what I was coming to, Greg.

*(to the audience)*

—if we had our programs here for “THE AFFAIR” —but they’re not printed yet— you would see that there are two additional characters in “THE AFFAIR”, James and Annie, they’re, uh, servants here at Hope’s End Manor, but we couldn’t reach Rich and Darlene, so we’re—

THE MAN

Did Bob— ?

THE MANAGER

—and yes, I did talk it out with the playwright, well no, I didn’t really flesh all of this out with Bob, Greg, because as I told you this was a very brief contact, and he doesn’t, Bob doesn’t— well, he would agree with these cuts because he understands this kind of thing, he’s on top of it, but this is experimental theater and we can, we can—

*(laughs)*

—don’t worry, I know this playwright, and I know the way he works, “the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,” how many times have I heard him say that, but...

*(laughs)*

...if any of you know Rich and Darlene, don’t tell them; they think they’re essential, of course.

*(calling offstage)*

And so, actors, are you ready? Greg, are you ready? Is that what you’re going to wear?

THE MAN

Uh, yeah.

THE MANAGER

Okay, uh...

*(opens the promptbook for "THE AFFAIR")*

...Let's go from, uh...

*(to the audience)*

...Rich and Darlene open it up, or used to, but, uh...

*(to the actors)*

...Geoffrey's line, uh, no, Celia's line, "Geoffrey I heard typing again—" Where's Sandy?

THE OTHER MAN

*(starting offstage)*

She's ... uh...

THE WOMAN

*(coming back onstage)*

I'm here.

THE MANAGER

Take it from "Geoffrey, I heard typing again in the night." Go right from the entrance.

*(fading to the side of the stage while The Woman and The Other Man start quickly offstage, leaving The Man alone on the stage)*

Ladies and gentlemen, "THE AFFAIR", a romantic mystery in one act by Robert Locke. Thank you.

THE MAN

Shouldn't I ... ? Don't you still want me to ...

THE MANAGER

Huh?

THE MAN

...do the letter business? Before Celia comes in? The letter, where I lock it in the secretary? I don't have—

THE MANAGER

Oh, yeah, of course, uh, just uh, pantomime it. He's got a letter. Pantomime that and...

*(to The Woman)*

...the fags and the manuscript stuff, pantomime all that.

*The Man goes to the imaginary secretary and pantomimes letter business. He signs it, glances over it, seals it into an envelope. He taps it thoughtfully, then locks it in the center drawer of the*

*secretary. pocketing the key. The Woman, meanwhile, has entered behind him, observing this last action.*

THE WOMAN

*(in a plummy upper class English accent)*

Geoffrey, I heard typing again in the night. Was it you?

THE MAN

*(caught by surprise by Celia, same plummy accent)*

You know it wasn't.

*(laughs, covers his discomfort)*

Must be a ghost writer.

THE WOMAN

Yes, and I bloody well know who the ghost is. I wish you'd speak to James about it. It was awful, like a five-finger exercise for only thumbs.

THE MAN

Celia, I want to—

THE WOMAN

*(searching through the drawers of imaginary furniture)*

I know what it is. He's writing another gothic quintilogy, I know he is. Wittering on about love and violence. And the proper portal to Heaven. Have you seen my fags?

*(finds the locked door of the secretary)*

THE MAN

*(pantomiming cigarette business)*

Here. Have one of mine.

THE WOMAN

Why is that one drawer of the secretary locked?

THE MAN

Oh, is it?

THE WOMAN

Where's the key?

THE MAN

*(searching his pockets)*

I must have mislaid it.

THE WOMAN

I've such a dreadful headache. All that clacking all night on that typewriter. And no one will ever read it, let alone publish it. You'd think James could divine for himself that no one, no one in the wide world is interested in reading even one syllable of a gothic quintilogy by a domestic.

THE MAN

Celia, I want to—

THE WOMAN

And you know he'll set the whole bloody thing here at Hope's End, as if Hope's End Manor had not seen enough trash living and breathing and, thank God, dying within these walls through the centuries. Darling, you've let the fire go out. You might have stoked it. Where's James?

THE MAN

I'll do it.

THE WOMAN

By the way! Did you see the look on Sarah's face last night when I let the hairpin drop?

THE MAN

Among so many of your dropped hairpins last night, my dear, which do you mean?

THE WOMAN

About her husband and her maid? And then there was that delicious moment when it sank into her tiny, dismal brain that it was true. Oh, for a photograph of that face at that moment.

THE MAN

You merely think it's true.

THE WOMAN

Oh, what's true, what's not, who cares?

THE MAN

Your cruelty is terrible to watch. Sometimes I can almost convince myself that I hate you.

THE WOMAN

But you love me. You are my husband.

THE MAN

Sometimes I wish I could love you.

THE WOMAN

I love you.

THE MAN

Sometimes I wish I could believe that.

*(she laughs)*

It's hardly a laughing matter, is it, Celia?

THE WOMAN

Oh, do forgive me, Lord Boggis-Rolfe. It is indeed hardly a laughing matter.

*(laughs again)*

THE MAN

I thought she took it surprisingly well. It was a charming answer she made you, didn't you think?

THE WOMAN

The cow.

THE MAN

About Annie.

THE WOMAN

Moo.

THE MAN

And Ian.

THE WOMAN

I thought I might go to the theatre tonight. They say Shaftesbury Avenue is virtually alive with drama.

THE MAN

And what about Ian?

THE WOMAN

Ian? What about him?

THE MAN

Do you imagine I don't know what's going on between you?

THE WOMAN

Ian? Don't be daft, he's a gardener.

THE MAN

Precisely, he—

*The Other Man enters abruptly. It's clear none of the three actors are prepared for an entrance here. They flounder a moment.*

THE MAN

*(cont., doing his best to cover, brand new dialogue)*

Er, oh, yes, Ian, what is it? I - I - I - I ...

THE OTHER MAN

*(in an English working class accent)*

Annie said you wanted to see me. Sir.

THE MAN

Well, er, she was ... that was ... that ...

*(breaks character, addresses the Manager, dropping his accent)*

Uh, can we take, take, take it back?

*(to The Other Man)*

I have a good, a very funny line there, you cut my line.

THE MANAGER

No, just go on. The line was cut.

THE MAN

When?

THE MANAGER

Just now. You were here. Go on, just play it.

*(goes back off)*

THE MAN

*(uncertain, frustrated, to The Other Man)*

Uh, take your line again, about Annie.

THE OTHER MAN

Annie said you wanted to see me. Sir.

THE MAN

That was yesterday.

THE OTHER MAN

Couldn't make it. Sir.

THE MAN

And just where were you?

THE OTHER MAN

Plowin' the master's fields. Sir.

THE MAN

*(breaks, to The Manager)*

See, it doesn't work. Who ... who made that cut? I mean we lose the set up.

*(to the audience)*

See, in that scene with Celia before Ian comes in, I accuse her of having an affair with Ian and she says, "Ian?" uh...

*(gestures to The Woman)*

THE MANAGER

Greg—

THE MAN

Sandy?

THE WOMAN

What?

THE MAN

Give your line.

THE WOMAN

I'm past it.

THE MAN

No, just, just go ahead and give it. It's the set up.

THE WOMAN

But I'm past it.

THE MANAGER

Greg, come on, just—

THE MAN

*(to the audience)*

Celia says, "Ian? Don't be daft. He's a gardener." And I say, "Precisely, he's employed to plow the master's field, not the master's wife." And now Ian enters, "Oh, yes, Ian, what is it?"

THE OTHER MAN

No, I come in before that.

THE MAN

No, before the cut, you used to come in like I said, and I say, “Oh, yes, Ian, what is it?” And you say—

THE OTHER MAN

No, I’m past that.

THE MAN

*(to the audience)*

Ian says, “Annie said you wanted to see me. Sir.” I say, “That was yesterday.” Ian says, “Couldn’t make it. Sir.” I say, “And just where were you?” And Ian gives the pay off for the set up, “Plowin’ the master’s fields. Sir.” See the joke? Get it? Set up, pay off. But without the set up—

THE MANAGER

*(easing back onto the stage)*

Greg, if you lose a bit, you lose it. Just cover, just play it.

*(to the audience)*

For you in the audience, you might like to know that Bob’s in a bind with this. He also writes children’s books, under a different name, but still, they’re for kids. So a sexy line like that, he’s got to be careful. He’s cutting all that stuff which is probably what he’s doing right now with his agent, cutting all the gratuitous kind of sexy stuff from “PLAY”, getting rid of it where he can, where he thinks it doesn’t hurt the core of what he’s trying to get at, because you know he wants to write for his audience, and that’s why Greg is having trouble here.

*(to actors)*

So go on now. Go on, play. Give him his cue, Dan.

THE OTHER MAN

Plowin’ the master’s fields. Sir.

THE MAN

Well, it’s a little late now, isn’t it? What I wanted you for—

*(blinks erratically, puts his hand to his brow, confused)*

What I wanted you for ... was yesterday’s affair. Today’s affair is quite a different affair.

THE OTHER MAN

Yes, sir. Will that be all? Sir.

THE MAN

Quite all.

THE OTHER MAN

Meanin' no disrespect. Sir.

THE MAN

Er, er, er, oh, yes, what is it?

THE OTHER MAN

The bullsh— the manure. Sir. I paid ten quid out of me own pocket. Sir.

THE MAN

Oh, yes, of course, you want ... you want ... me to ...

*(recovers his character)*

I won't be a mo'.

*The Man exits but remains just offstage to watch The Woman and The Other Man who are now alone on the stage together. They hold each other's eyes for an extraordinarily long moment while she pantomimes turning pages of a magazine.*

THE WOMAN

I am feeling distinct vaginal awareness.

*The Woman and The Other Man turn, questioningly to The Manager, who simply shrugs. The Man, still watching, takes a little step onto the stage, quite alarmed and confused. Through this next scene there is distinct discomfort among the actors.*

THE OTHER MAN

You mean you got an itch in your little cunny?

*The Man, at the edge of the stage, throws up his hands in frustration, glares at The Manager, who merely shrugs at him.*

THE WOMAN

No, I've got a hurt.

THE OTHER MAN

Should 'ave greased up. I told you so. Always best to grease it good when the machinery ain't been used in a while.

THE WOMAN

Lubrication was not necessary. You must have noticed. How was I next to your little Annie?

THE OTHER MAN

Aw, Ceils!

THE WOMAN

I told you not to call me that.

THE OTHER MAN

Yes, mum, your ladyship, mum.

THE WOMAN

My tits are hot. Do you suppose I'm preggers?

THE OTHER MAN

Not by me. I got it fixed.

THE WOMAN

Well it certainly does work well now.

THE OTHER MAN

*(kicking at imaginary log in the imaginary fireplace)*

Your fire's gone out.

THE WOMAN

Geoffrey knows about us.

THE OTHER MAN

Does 'e? What's 'e say?

THE WOMAN

He's outraged, of course.

*THE OTHER MAN*

'E's a bleedin' arse'ole.

THE MAN

*(still at the edge of the stage, more confused than ever)*

Blaine, how can he? How can you?

*Again The Manager shrugs, holds up a finger for silence from The Man.*

THE WOMAN

My husband? A bleeding arsehole? Is there no one at Hope's End Manor who is exempt from your sexual predations?

THE OTHER MAN

Fifi.

THE WOMAN

Fifi? The charolais heifer that calved last week?

THE OTHER MAN

I never laid a finger on her.

THE WOMAN

Silly wanker.

THE OTHER MAN

Silly cow.

*(pulls her to him, kisses her)*

Come away with me.

THE WOMAN

It would kill Geoffrey.

THE OTHER MAN

Blast Geoffrey.

THE WOMAN

He's trapped in the same way we are.

THE OTHER MAN

Do she don't she, y'v'ad it.

THE WOMAN

You with your little working class mentality. You make me laugh.

*(she laughs. It becomes clear that an entrance has been missed.)*

You make me laugh.

*(laughs again)*

THE MAN

This is ... this is all ... this is ... Did you say the line about—

THE WOMAN

*(laughs)*

You make me laugh.

THE MAN

*(entering)*

And so saying, she threw back her head, parted her ruby lips, and laughed like a drain.

THE WOMAN

Oh, it wasn't I who said it. It was Ian. He's been regaling me with the cleverest anecdotes about the bastard rocket which has just sprung up in his herb garden.

THE MAN

I'm sure that he's very amusing. Well, not a sou in the castle, Ian. Got a tenner, darling?

THE WOMAN

Concealed upon my person?

THE MAN

No, of course you wouldn't have money on you, would you? But in your ...

*(vague, distressed)*

...er...private ... places?

THE WOMAN

*(moving to exit)*

I'll just have a look, shall I?

THE MAN

*(surprised but unable to suppress the line)*

And haughty Celia, lovely goddess,  
From her chamber issues,  
Arrayed with lace upon her bodice,  
In fine brocade and tissues.

THE WOMAN

*(stops, throws a look to The Manager, then covers regally)*

Very nice, thank you.

THE MANAGER

*(shrugs)*

Bastardized Jonathan Swift. Don't take it up with me, take it up with the man.

THE MAN

And he, young swain, his heart still beating  
In his amorous fits,  
With love now dying, stands repeating,  
“Oh! Celia ... Celia ... Celia ... shits.”

THE MANAGER

He’s coming to terms, that’s all.

*NOTE TO THE ACTORS: There is great and growing distress among The Man, The Woman, and The Other Man. Not one of them knows what is going on, that the script is being transformed even as they perform it. Bits and pieces are being cut, or interpolated from later scenes. Some of it is familiar, safe, rehearsed. Some of it is brand new to all three.*

*The Woman and The Other Man are more secure with these changes because they adapt more quickly, accepting the script changes rather easily, and even enjoying it a bit.*

*The Man is not so adaptive. He thinks too much, cares too much. As the script keeps unreeling, he tries to find his place, grows angrier, more frustrated, and finally paranoid. He tries occasionally to rebel, to force the script into his own direction, but he can’t.*

THE WOMAN

Very nice. Thank you.

*(exits)*

THE OTHER MAN

Er... ain’t, er, you goin’ to offer me a brandy? Sir?

THE MAN

Would you ... care for a brandy ... Ian?

THE OTHER MAN

Couldn’t say no.

*The Man pantomimes ringing for a servant.*

Ringin’ for James?

THE MAN

Er... yes... I ...

THE OTHER MAN

But James ain't 'ere, is 'e? 'E's been cut, ain't 'e? 'E's been terminated.

*The Man breaks and starts offstage toward The Manager.*

You, er ... lookin' for the liquor, me Master? Sir. Ain't it on the caddy there? Sir. In the corner. Sir.

THE MAN

Oh. yes.

*(heads for the imaginary caddy, points to the stage wall)*

It's a, a beautiful portrait of her, don't you think? The sun ... was in ... her eyes ... there was a time ... Oh, Celia!

THE OTHER MAN

The brandy. Sir. On the caddy. In the corner. Sir.

THE MAN

Oh, yes, of course.

*(goes into the corner, pantomimes pouring a glass of brandy)*

I ... I ... understand from my wife that you've been plowing her fallow fields?

THE OTHER MAN

Yes, Geoff, so I 'ave. Big job it was, too. Worth a few bob extra to you, I should think.

THE MAN

*(handing him the imaginary glass of brandy)*

I'll strike a bargain with you.

THE OTHER MAN

*(surprising himself as much as The Man)*

'Ow's Billie?

THE MAN

*(completely thrown)*

Billie?

*Neither knowing what will happen from moment to moment, The Other Man reaches out for the brandy glass in The Man's outstretched hand, but finds himself instead stroking the hand, caressing it.*

*Their eyes hold on each other. Both are breathless, trembling. Slowly The Other Man embraces The Man. He kisses him. They both back away. They stare at each other a long moment.*

THE MAN

I ... I feel ... I feel like I was just ... born.

THE WOMAN

*(entering uncertainly)*

I ... heard ... a silence.

THE OTHER MAN

Yeah, Ceils, that was us.

THE MAN

*(turning to The Manager)*

What's happening?

THE MANAGER

*(coming onstage)*

All right, people, good, lights change, and let's go right on, we're in the conservatory, it's very lush, with plants all over, luxuriant foliage, all of it enclosed...

THE MAN

What's happening?

THE MANAGER

...in glass. Ian and Celia are onstage. Once again the scene starts with James and Annie, but since they are now removed, take it from, um, um, Ian's line, "I feel like I was just born."

THE MAN

That's not his line.

THE OTHER MAN

That's not my line. Is it?

THE MANAGER

It is now.

THE WOMAN

Sure, and I say, "Do you know, Ian, my love, blahdeeblah."

THE OTHER MAN

Oh, okay.

THE MANAGER

And where are you?

THE WOMAN

The conservatory.

THE OTHER MAN

Wrapped in each other's steamy arms.

THE MANAGER

*(fading to his place at the side of the stage)*

And Geoffrey is just about to enter, ready Geoffrey? And ... play.

*The Man drifts towards the side of the stage, watching The Manager, his fellow actors—and now even the audience—warily.*

THE OTHER MAN

I feel ... as if... I were just born.

THE WOMAN

Do you know, Ian ... Ian ... You must get the playwright to change that name, it's really quite diminishing. Ian. Do you know, Ivan, my love, when I first saw you, and your eyes blazed across the kitchen into my eyes and told me you would rip me from my ivory tower, and impale me upon yours ... I had nothing but contempt for you. Then when you took me, upon the warming oven, and you flashed in my pan, you turned more than my head. Ivan. My heart is spinning, twisting, knotting wringing. It's all quite ghastly actually; I wish I had never set eyes upon you.

*NOTE TO THE ACTORS: Until this point the acting of "THE AFFAIR" should have been naturalistic. Now both The Woman and The Other Man begin cutting up, hamming, having fun at the expense of "THE AFFAIR".*

*The Man watches from the edge of the stage, incredulously.*

THE OTHER MAN

You don't mean those words.

THE WOMAN

Oh, but I do, I do mean them. I ... I'm heppy with Geoffrey.

THE OTHER MAN

‘Appy?

THE WOMAN

*(trying to make The Other Man break)*

No, not ‘appy. Heppy. Heppy. Heppy, do you hear me? Heppy.

THE OTHER MAN

‘Appy? With that meanmouthed little sod?

THE WOMAN

And why shouldn’t I be heppy? Heppy beyond all endurance?

THE OTHER MAN

*(now trying to make her break)*

Because the meanmouthed little sod is a meanmouthed little sod, and when I say meanmouthed, I mean mean and I mean in the mouth and I mean sod.

THE WOMAN

I’ve got everything here at Hope’s End Manor. Wealth, beauty, talent ...

THE OTHER MAN

Beauty? Talent?

THE WOMAN

You heard me.

*(she does almost break, but comes back into control)*

And a husband who adores me, even though he is pathetic. Why shouldn’t I be heppy?

THE OTHER MAN

Because there’s one thing you’ll never ‘ave, Ceils, Lady Boggis-Rolfe. ‘Appi-NESS.

THE WOMAN

“Appin ... Heppiness?

*(they both break, laughing)*

THE OTHER MAN

And you will never ‘ave ‘appiness so long as you choose to live a lie.

THE WOMAN

Live a lie?

THE OTHER MAN

You 'eard me! I can give you somethin' your pusillanimous Geoffrey ain't even dreamed of.

THE WOMAN

“Pussy amorous”? You quite mistake him.

THE OTHER MAN

You've seen the 'appiness I can give you. You've felt it.

THE WOMAN

I ... I ... don't know what you mean.

THE OTHER MAN

That's a lie.

THE WOMAN

It's the truth as I know it ... at this time. At **this** time.

THE OTHER MAN

And that's another lie!

THE WOMAN

Oh, stop it, stop this charade! Oh, Ian— Ivan, Ivan, my darling, I love you so. Take me away from all this.

THE OTHER MAN

Then you will come away with me?

THE WOMAN

Yes. No. Oh, I can't leave him.

*(turning as Geoffrey is supposed to enter)*

Geoffrey!

*(But The Man does not enter. He holds on the edge of the stage, disbelieving.)*

Yes. No, Oh, I can't leave him. Geoffrey! Geoffrey! Goddam it. Geoffrey!

THE MAN

*(coming onto the stage)*

What are you doing? What's happening?

THE WOMAN

Geoffrey!

THE MAN

Stop it, what's happening?

THE WOMAN

Geoffrey! It's not what it seems.

THE MAN

*(taking up the gauntlet, improvising, striding to imaginary drapes, flinging them back)*

Well, let me just open these drapes. Did you see the moon?

THE WOMAN

Geoffrey, it's not what it seems.

THE OTHER MAN

It's ... er ... dark of the moon tonight, i'n't it? Sir?

THE MAN

No, it's full. Well, gibbous actually. But practically full. Quite gibbous. Waxing gibbous, I should think, or perhaps waning gibbous. It's only just gone behind a cloud. Don't you admire it, Celia? Don't you admire it, Ivan?

*The Other Man and The Woman look to The Manager for help.*

THE WOMAN

If he's gonna do that kind of stuff, I'm gettin' off.

THE MANAGER

Greg, are you all right?

THE MAN

Well then, what's happening?

THE MANAGER

What's wrong?

THE MAN

What's happening?

THE MANAGER

What's wrong?

*Meanwhile YET ANOTHER has been approaching the stage from his seat among the audience.*

YET ANOTHER

Excuse me.

*They all turn, shocked. The Manager approaches, and they speak in whispers. The following dialogue is almost unheard.*

THE MANAGER

What?

YET ANOTHER

Could I help?

THE MANAGER

Do what?

YET ANOTHER MAN

Well, this guy seems like he's lost, or a little sick or something. I thought I could use your book there, and I could maybe read his part, and he could—

*This next section happens very quickly, all the dialogue and action overlapping. As YET ANOTHER starts onto the stage reaching for The Manager's prompt book, The Man recoils in sudden terror.*

THE MAN

Get that person off! Get that person off the stage! That person can't come on this stage. That person is not in this play! This is my part! This is my script!

THE MANAGER

God, Greg, God!

*(to YET ANOTHER as The Manager ushers YET ANOTHER off the stage, all the next dialogue overlapping.)*

You'd better go.

YET ANOTHER

I'm sorry. I just wanted to help him. I just thought I could find his place for him.

THE MAN

All the way out. This is THE THEATRE!

THE WOMAN

God, Greg!

THE OTHER MAN

God! God!

THE MANAGER

*(to YET ANOTHER who has headed back into the audience)*

No, no, outside could you just ... oh, damn!

*(to The Man, who continues to scream)*

Okay, Greg, take it easy, we're getting out of here.

*(ushers YET ANOTHER MAN out to the lobby)*

We'll ... we'll take care of all this, and you can come back.

YET ANOTHER

I said I'm sorry. I'm sorry for him.

THE MAN

*(turning now to the audience, continuing his rant)*

... I don't know what—I don't know—I don't know how you all set this whole thing up, or why, but it's stupid. You're the audience! You're supposed to come in and sit down, you're not supposed to do anything, you come in, you sit there, you shut up, and you stay in your goddam place. We're doing this for you, you know, this is for you! To make your goddam, lousy, goddam lives a little better! So you can remember! So you can hang onto something!

THE OTHER MAN

*(overlapping)*

Greg, shut up!

THE WOMAN

*(overlapping, to the audience)*

Please, I'm sorry, he's just upset. He's feeling... isolated, and ... lost, you know.

THE OTHER MAN

*(subduing The Man physically, calming him)*

Are you all right?

THE MAN

Where's Blaine?

*(They all look to the Manager's side of the stage.)*

He's gone. We could get out. We could go.

*(to the audience)*

If you got up now, if you just stood up and walked out of here, we could go with you.

THE OTHER MAN

Greg, stop it. You know we can't.

THE WOMAN

None of us can.

THE MAN

But he's not here.

THE WOMAN

It's not Blaine, you know that.

THE OTHER MAN

*(to the audience)*

Please don't listen to him. You can see that he's got ... he's got ...

THE WOMAN

He's got problems, you can see that.

THE OTHER MAN

*(laughs)*

Well, you've all heard of it, it's the actor's nightmare.

THE WOMAN

That's exactly right, the actor's nightmare. We all have it. You're dreaming, you can't remember your lines, you can't find your script, your costume's not right.

THE OTHER MAN

The play is moving on and on onstage, and you're getting to your entrance and you're running around backstage and you can't find your shoes and you can't remember your first line and—

THE WOMAN

It's so funny. We laugh about it, but—

THE OTHER MAN

But you're butt-naked, and you've got a hard-on, and your cue to go onstage comes up, and — Greg, it's the actor's nightmare, that's all it is.

THE MAN

*(going to The Manager's side of the stage)*

Did he leave the script?

THE OTHER MAN

There is no script.

THE WOMAN

What do you want the script for, Greg?

THE MAN

I just want to find ... uh... where we are.

*(looks to audience sheepishly)*

I'd, uh, I think I owe you all, I think I should apologize to everybody, to all of you who came out... for whatever reasons, who came out to the theater tonight. I promise ... and to my, uh, colleagues... Acting is, uh... I love doing it, I love doing it for you, the audience, and uh., but...

*(laughs)*

It's so funny. I mean, we come here and do what we do and you come here and sit out there and watch us do what we do and laugh or cry and hit your hands together at the end. You've got your job and we've got our job, and everyone knows what they're supposed to do. But sometimes ... I get so ... lost. Then suddenly maybe I find my place, maybe somebody touches me, maybe ...

*(looks to The Other Man longingly)*

... somebody ...

THE OTHER MAN

I like it, myself. It's so safe. All we've got is words that somebody else gives us. It's so safe...

THE MAN

...and I feel like I was just born.

THE OTHER MAN

... and it's ... as if... one has just been ... brought into this world.

THE WOMAN

All I've ever wanted to be is an actor. Ever.

THE MAN

*(to The Other Man)*

It's not too late, is it?

THE WOMAN

Ever since I first remember. It's all I've ever known. It's all—

*(stops herself, feels a song)*

THE MAN

I want so much more than ... this. I want so ... much.

THE WOMAN

I know a song.

*(sings)*

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child...

THE OTHER MAN

Where did you learn it?

THE WOMAN

*(shakes her head, continues to sing)*

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child ...

THE WOMAN/THE OTHER MAN

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

THE MAN

Everyone knows that song. Their mothers teach them that song.

*The Man, impatient with their slow tempo joins the song, snapping his fingers and trying to get the old tune to swing.*

ALL

A long way from home.

A long way from home.

Sometimes I feel...

*The woman breaks off, sensing something.*

THE OTHER MAN/THE MAN

...like a feather in the air,

Sometimes I feel like a feather...

THE OTHER MAN

*(breaking out of the song, to The Woman)*

What is it?

*(The woman shakes her head and gestures him to hush. He goes back to the song.)*

...in the air,

Sometimes I feel...

*(breaks off, sensing something too)*

THE WOMAN

Feel it?

*The Other Man shakes his head and gestures for her to hush. The Man has gotten lost.*

THE MAN

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone... (etc.)

THE WOMAN

*(amused, moved)*

This is "PLAY".

THE OTHER MAN

Oh! Yes!

THE WOMAN

This is "PLAY". The whole thing is "PLAY". Everything. All of it.

THE OTHER MAN

*(laughs with her, beginning to understand)*

I remember...

THE WOMAN

Yes. I remember first. Then you remember. Then he remembers. Remember?

THE OTHER MAN

Oh, yes! Oh, God! God!

THE WOMAN

He's playing. He just plays with us. He comes to terms.

THE MAN

*(sings)*

Sometimes I feel ...

*The Woman and The Other Man burst out laughing at him, in fun, not in malice. The Man pauses in his song, bewildered. The Other Man jumps up and begins to conduct The Man in his last belabored notes. Not conduct, really. It is as though each note is born at the same time in both of them.*

THE MAN

...like ... I'm ... al ... most .... ....

*They hang together waiting for the last note. Then The Other Man makes the conductor's close-off gesture.*

THE WOMAN

True believer.  
For us there will never be home.

THE MAN

*(trying to regain control)*

Something completely unexpected has happened.

THE WOMAN

Nothing is unexpected.

THE MAN

I ... I've met someone.

*The Woman and The Other Man turn to him in shock. Then they both understand and laugh.*

THE WOMAN

You have not.

THE MAN

I have.

THE WOMAN

You have not.

THE MAN

A woman.

THE OTHER MAN

You have not.

THE MAN

I mean a man.

THE OTHER MAN

You have not.

THE MAN

I could!

THE WOMAN/THE OTHER MAN

You could not.

THE OTHER MAN

You should just accept, you know. You would be happier.

THE WOMAN

You would make us all a lot happier. We've got to live here too, you know.

*Their heads turn to where The Manager is about to enter from the lobby, and they stare like goats in silence, waiting. In a moment The Manager comes in, carrying a different prompt book (different color paper cover). Also a straight razor.*

THE MANAGER

Okay, I've gone over the script with Bob, and we're ...

THE MAN

Is Bob here? Is he in the lobby?

THE MANAGER

... going to make those changes. Celia...

THE MAN

What changes?

THE MANAGER

*(handing the straight razor to The Woman)*

...here's your prop. And we'll make that one last cut, shall we? So let's take it from...

THE MAN

What is that? Is that a ... a razor?

THE MANAGER

...just before Billie's entrance. Billie's line, um...

THE MAN

Billie? Who's Billie? Who - who - who ... is Billie?

THE MANAGER

...no, Celia's line, "Then you'll do it for me?"

THE WOMAN

Shouldn't we— don't you want us to do the letter business? Where I take it out of the secretary and—

THE MANAGER

No, that business is all cut. It's not important any more. And Geoffrey...

*(placing the stool in a new spot, and seating The Man on it)*

...we have a special for you.

THE MAN

I need a script.

THE MANAGER

*(calling off stage)*

Mary, bring up the special. And the gibbous moon comes out from behind a scudding cloud, and we see the entire mansion now, magically, every room opening out onto the stage like the petals of a flower.

*(to The Man)*

And Geoffrey, adjust to the hot spot...

THE MAN

*(whispering to The Manager)*

What's happening?

THE MANAGER

...beautiful, hold it right there, you're perfect, don't move. Sorry, we all have our parts to play. And so, play. And ... Celia ...

THE WOMAN

Then you'll do it for me? For us?

THE OTHER MAN

*(takes the razor proffered to him by The Woman)*

I've met ... someone.

THE WOMAN

Who? Where is this person?

THE MANAGER

And Billie enters.

*YET ANOTHER enters from the lobby, now sinister.*

THE OTHER MAN  
*(to The Woman)*

This is Billie.

YET ANOTHER  
*(takes the razor proffered to him by The Other Man)*

Where is he?

THE WOMAN  
He's in the library. We'll prepare him. Come, Ian.

*The Woman and The Other Man pantomime opening doors and going through rooms in a labyrinthine walk through Hope's End Manor. YET ANOTHER follows a few steps behind. They will arrive at last in the library where Geoffrey sits as though in paralysis in his pool of light.*

THE MAN  
*(meanwhile, whispering to the audience, catching individuals' eyes and appealing directly to them)*

Help me. Please. Please. Help me. Please.

*NOTE TO ACTORS: It is conceivable that some audience members might want to somehow interfere. The Manager should keep one eye on audience members to make sure they stay in their seats, quieting them if necessary.*

THE WOMAN  
*(meanwhile during their walk through the labyrinth)*

These rooms are ancient, you know, labyrinthine actually, designed that way—one can only suppose— by a mad man. Or perhaps by generations of mad men over decades of construction, perhaps centuries. The records have all been lost to time. Here we come at last to the library.

*(to The Man)*

Hello, dear. Have you had a good evening? You look marvelous. Doesn't he look marvelous, Ian?

THE OTHER MAN  
Right down gorgeous.

THE WOMAN  
*(to The Manager)*

Doesn't he?

THE MANAGER

Perfect. Just ... a little ...

*(turns Geoffrey a bit on the stool, perhaps tilts his head to the special on him)*

THE MAN

There's ... a time. The time's too short.

THE WOMAN

Yes, dear, it's lovely, isn't it? In the beginning there was the word. It's all spelled out.

THE OTHER MAN

It's the same for all of us, though, i'n't it, mate. Just 'urts you a little more, that's all.

THE MAN

I wanted ... so much.

THE WOMAN

Of course you did. Oh my, look at the moon.

THE OTHER MAN

Right down gorgeous.

THE MANAGER

And Billie, start your cross. And Mary, start your fade, stage to black in fifteen, special to black in thirty. And ... PLAY. One thousand thirty, one thousand twenty-nine, one thousand twenty-eight...

*He continues his countdown more quietly throughout the scene.  
The stage lights begin to dim; the special lags behind.*

YET ANOTHER

*(pacing toward Geoffrey from where he has stopped just inside the last doorway, the one to the library, sings)*

“Oranges and lemons,” say the bells of St. Clement’s.  
“You owe me five farthings,” say the bells of St. Martin’s.  
“When will you pay me?” say the bells at Old Bailey.  
“When I grow rich”, say the bells st Shoreditch

THE WOMAN

*(meanwhile, kisses The Man on the cheek)*

Oh, the time is so short. Goodbye, darling.

THE OTHER MAN

*(kisses The Man on the other cheek)*

Goodbye, mate. Remember me.

THE MAN

Ian, do you remember ... remember when we kissed? Please, help me.

THE OTHER MAN

*(kisses him on the mouth)*

Goodbye, Geoff. Hush now.

THE WOMAN

*(kisses Geoffrey on the mouth)*

Hush now.

THE MAN

*(whispers to audience members again)*

Please. Please. Please.

*(etc. to black)*

THE WOMAN

“When will it be?” say the bells of Stepney.

THE OTHER MAN

“I’m sure I don’t know,” says the great bell at Bow.

YET ANOTHER

Here comes a candle to light you to bed.

And here comes a chopper ...

THE MANAGER

...one thousand three, one thousand two, one thousand one.

*YET ANOTHER is in position now, just behind The Man. The last of the special goes to black as he slowly pulls The Man’s head back and places the straight razor to his throat.*

YET ANOTHER

... to chop off your head.

BLACK OUT

THE END