

# Opening Night

Opening Night was first performed at The Piggery Theatre in North Hatley, Quebec, June, 1989 with the following cast:

RUTH TISDALE Pauline Little  
JACK TISDALE Andrew Johnston  
RICHARD HYDE-FINCH John Dolan  
CILLA FRASER Diana Fajrajsl  
MICHAEL CRAIG Peter Elliot  
CLAYTON FRY David Francis  
LIBBY HUSNIAK Laurel Thomson  
TOM DELANEY Chris McGregor

Directed by Gregory Tuck.  
Set and costume design by Ruth Howard.  
Lighting design by Craig Lindsay.  
Sound design by Michael Boisvert.  
Stage managed by Jennifer Emery.  
General Manager – Joseph Martek.

## THE CHARACTERS

JACK TISDALE, a varnish salesman.  
RUTH TISDALE, an accountant and Jack's wife.  
RICHARD HYDE-FINCH, a director.  
CILLA FRASER, Richard's girlfriend.  
MICHAEL CRAIG, an actor.  
CLAYTON FRY, an actor.  
LIBBY HUSNIAK, an ingénue.  
TOM DELANEY, a waiter and aspiring actor.

Re-written January, 2007

Act One, Scene One

*The VIP lounge of the Charles Killian Theatre Noir Repertory House, twenty minutes prior to curtain of the play 'Whisper on the Wind'.*

*The set includes two couches and a small stand-up bar. The main entrance to the room is S.R. and U.C. is the entrance to the theatre. S.L. is an entrance that is used by staff and company members. MICHAEL CRAIG is S.R. with TOM DELANEY. MICHAEL, dressed in a relatively formal manner, is drinking champagne. TOM is dressed as a waiter and carries an empty tray. Lying on the floor behind one of the couches is CLAYTON FRY. As the lights come up, CLAYTON is going through his warm-up exercise.*

CLAYTON Hum Ma-ma. Hum Ma-ma Gutta-butta gutta-butta gutta-butta gutta-butta. Neet! Neet! Neet! (*getting up off the floor*) Neet, noot, not, nanny. Neet, noot, not, nanny. Neet! Neet! (*He exits.*) Neet!

TOM (*to MICHAEL*) That's gonna be me one day. At least I hope it is. I mean, I'm sure even you went through some lean years at first, right? Sure. Trying to get your foot in the door, huh? Trying to get someone to notice you. I mean, I've been to a lot of auditions, but so far ... I don't know what it is. I give it my best shot, you know, but something always goes wrong. Like my mouth goes dry sometimes and my lips start to make this loud smacking sound, or else my mouth is nice and wet and I wind up spitting on the director. One time I walked into an audition and my fly was open.

MICHAEL And even that didn't work?

TOM No. Of course, I don't suppose you have any trouble getting parts do you?

MICHAEL Well ...

TOM How long have you been in the business now?

MICHAEL Twenty-one years.

TOM Twenty-one. Wow. I was still in the cradle when you started. Amazing, huh? Boy, it must be a great feeling being established like that. Being respected.

MICHAEL Oh, I don't know about that.

TOM Oh, come on. All the awards you've won? The great roles you've played? If I can have half the career you've had I'll be satisfied.

MICHAEL Well, that's nice of you to say, but ...

TOM All I need is a break, that's all. If I can just get a director to notice me I'll be on my way. I can feel it. Who knows, maybe one day you and I will be on the stage together.

MICHAEL Could be.

TOM Yeah. You could play my father or something.

MICHAEL Yes. Or perhaps your doddling old grandfather.

TOM Right. Wouldn't that be great? Boy, me and Michael Craig on the same stage. Kinda gives you goosebumps, doesn't it?

MICHAEL Kinda.

TOM Yeah. Well, I'd better get back to work. They don't like me to mingle with the customers. So, if I don't see you before then, I'll see you when we open.

MICHAEL Open?

TOM Yeah. You know? In that show we're gonna do together.

MICHAEL *(smiling and toasting the notion)* Oh. Yes.

*TOM exits.*

MICHAEL *(to himself)* Provided I can cling to life until then.

RUTH *(entering and looking around in awe)* Oh, my. *(calling offstage)* Jack? Jack, come on.

*JACK TISDALE enters.*

RUTH Well, this is it. The VIP Lounge of the Charles Killian Theatre Noir Repertory House. Who would've ever thought that you and I would be standing here about to rub shoulders with the elite of the city's theatrical community?

JACK *(belches.)*

RUTH Oh, Jack.

JACK I can't help it. It's that damned bratwurst. The stuff just won't stay down.

RUTH I told you to have the stir fry.

JACK Too much oil. Goes right through me.

RUTH What time have you got?

JACK Seven-forty.

RUTH Well, I guess we're a little early. There doesn't seem to be too much happening just yet.

JACK I wonder if they've got a TV around here.

RUTH Oh, for heaven's sake, Jack. This is a theatre. They don't allow televisions in here.

JACK *(looking at his watch)* Seven-thirty start. They're probably near the end of the first inning just about now.

RUTH Jack, don't

JACK What?

RUTH You know what. This is our anniversary. You've known for a month that we were coming here tonight so I don't want to hear any complaints.

JACK I'm not complaining.

RUTH I don't think it's asking too much for you to miss one silly baseball game.

JACK The World Series.

RUTH I mean, we have so little culture in our lives as it is.

JACK The seventh game.

RUTH This'll do us both some good. You'll see.

JACK I'm not complaining.

RUTH Fine.

JACK They got a candy stand or anything here?

RUTH A candy stand? We just ate.

JACK Yeah, but I thought I might get some Nibs or a bag of chips.

RUTH No, they don't have one. Candy stand.

*TOM enters carrying a tray of champagne and hors d'oeuvres.*

TOM Champagne?

RUTH *(taking a glass)* Oh, thank you.

JACK *(taking a glass)* Thanks.

TOM Minced meat tart?

RUTH Oh, lovely. *(taking a tart)* Jack?

JACK *(looking at the tart)* Uh, no thanks. You got a TV in here?

TOM No, sir. Sorry.

JACK Radio?

RUTH Jack!

JACK *(to TOM)* Never mind.

*TOM moves to MICHAEL.*

RUTH Well, happy anniversary, sweetheart. *(holding her glass up in a toast)* And here's to twenty-five more.

JACK Cheers.

*MICHAEL exchanges his empty glass for a full one. TOM exits.*

RUTH You look very nice tonight.

JACK Thank you.

RUTH You look like the man I married back in Springwater all those years ago.

JACK I am the man you married back in Springwater all those years ago.

RUTH Yes, you've hardly aged at all. Oh, you've lost a little hair, put on some weight here and there, added a wrinkle or two, lost your behind, but you're still the same man who winked at me as I walked down that aisle to be nuptialized. (*pecking him on the cheek*)

JACK (*looking at MICHAEL*) Hey, I know that guy.

RUTH Who?

JACK Him. Right over there. That's Handy Randy.

RUTH Handy who?

JACK Handy Randy. From the Handy Hardware commercials. You know, the guy who comes out dressed as a socket wrench.

RUTH No.

JACK Yeah. I'm sure it is.

RUTH Well, I was under the impression that the VIP lounge was for invited guests only. How would someone named Handy Randy get invited?

JACK I wouldn't exactly call us invited guests.

RUTH We are too.

JACK Ruth, you got the mayor's tickets because nobody else in the office wanted them.

RUTH That's not true. A lot of people wanted them but they had previous engagements.

JACK Right. They were all booked a month in advance.

RUTH That's right.

JACK Even Grace Miller?

RUTH Grace has got bingo.

JACK Come on, Ruthie, face it. Nobody wanted to come. You got the World Series on TV, the Sportsman show at the centre, and Bob Goulet opening down the street. Who wants to be stuck at a play when you've got all that going on?

RUTH I do, that's who. The theatre is ... it's magic. It's noble. The entertainment of Kings and Queens.

*TOM enters.*

JACK (*flagging down TOM as he passes*) Yo! Squire? Can I get an ale?

TOM Sir?

JACK A beer. Brewski.

TOM Oh, right away, sir. *(He exits)*

RUTH And to be here on opening night. We should feel privileged.

JACK Uh-huh.

RUTH Well, we should. This is a special night in the theatre. All the work that goes into these shows. The people involved. All coming together as one as the curtain rises and the stage explodes in a sea of lights. It's gives me a chill just thinking about it.

JACK For Godssake, Ruth. You've been to one play your whole life. That time you and Yvonne went to see ... whatever it was at that dinner theatre.

RUTH Hamlet.

JACK Hamlet, right.

RUTH Well, what would you know about it? You haven't even been to see one. Imagine. A person forty-five years old who hasn't been to the theatre once in his life.

JACK I was hoping to keep that record intact.

RUTH Well, you're not going to. We're here and that's that. And don't you spoil this for me either. This is a very special night for me. It's like a new beginning. I mean, Jeannie's been gone for almost a year now, and Jackie for almost five. I think that now that we're alone again it's time to start doing things. Oh, I have wonderful plans for us, Jack. We'll go to the theatre, we'll travel. Who knows, maybe we can rekindle some of the old fire.

JACK What old fire?

RUTH You know? The spontaneity we had before there were children in the house. *(snuggling up to him)* Those-spur-of-the moment encounters when our passion would get the best of us no matter where we were?

JACK With my back? I've told you before, Ruthie, it's gotta be on the bed. A firm mattress. A couple of pillows for support.

*TOM enters with a beer for JACK.*

RUTH *(smiling, covering up)* Hello.

TOM Here you go, sir.

JACK Oh, thanks.

TOM By the way. I checked, and it turns out the security guard at the stage door has a radio.

JACK *(looking to RUTH who gives him a dirty look and then back to TOM)* Well, thanks a lot, but that's okay. Thanks anyway.

*TOM moves on.*

MICHAEL Son?

*TOM stops. MICHAEL takes another glass and puts empty glass on tray. TOM exits.*

MICHAEL Thank you.

JACK I'm gonna go over.

RUTH What for?

JACK To talk to the guy.

RUTH Jack, it's probably not even him.

JACK It is too.

RUTH It's probably somebody important and you'll wind up embarrassing yourself.

*JACK moves to MICHAEL.*

RUTH Jack?

JACK *(to MICHAEL)* Excuse me? Hi. You're, uh ... You're him, aren't you?

MICHAEL I beg your pardon?

JACK Handy Randy. You're him, right? My wife and I were just wondering. I said you were him but she didn't think you were, so, you are, aren't you?

MICHAEL Yes.

JACK I knew it. *(to RUTH)* Ruthie! It's him! *(to MICHAEL)* Yeah. The socket wrench, right?

MICHAEL Right.

JACK Yeah, that's a great ad. You chasing all those little sockets around the tool box. That's terrific. Oh, sorry. Jack Tisdale.

MICHAEL Michael Craig.

*They shake hands.*

JACK Nice to meet you. Yeah, I take kind of a special interest in those hardware commercials, you know, because I'm in varnish.

MICHAEL Varnish?

JACK *(taking out a business card and giving it to MICHAEL)* Yeah. Lemme give you my card here. Ya see? Jack Tisdale. Allcoat Industries. I'm on the sales end. It's a great line of products. Practically sells itself. We've got the varnish, the wood stains, shellac, liquid plastics, but the varnish is really the flagship of the company. Well, you know that. I mean, your store moves a lot of that stuff for us.

MICHAEL My store?

JACK Handy Hardware. They carry Allcoat.

MICHAEL Well, that's not my store. I just do their commercials. I'm an actor.

JACK Oh, I thought maybe you worked for the store. You know like those car dealers who do their own commercials?

MICHAEL No. Sorry.

JACK So, you're an actor.

MICHAEL I'm afraid so.

JACK Where do you act? I mean, besides Handy Hardware.

MICHAEL Well, I mainly work on the stage and in film.

JACK Film, huh? You do movies?

MICHAEL Occasionally, yes.

JACK Anything I would've seen you in? I mean, me and the wife are big movie fans. Wait, lemme get her over here. Ruthie? She'll love this. Talkin' to a real actor? This'll make her night. Ruth? What's your name again?

*RUTH moves to JACK and MICHAEL.*

MICHAEL Michael Craig.

JACK I'm sorry. Michael?

MICHAEL Craig.

JACK Michael Craig. Well, I've never heard of you but maybe Ruth has. Ruthie, this is Michael Craig.

RUTH Hello.

MICHAEL How do you do?

JACK Name ring a bell?

RUTH Uh-uh.

JACK Well, he's an actor.

RUTH Oh?

JACK Yeah, but he does these TV commercials too. You've seen them. The one where the big socket wrench climbs out of the tool box? (*to MICHAEL*) And the tool box is supposed to be a coffin and you're some sort of vampire socket wrench, right?

MICHAEL Right.

JACK I'm tellin' ya, it's a classic.

RUTH So, you're here to see the show are you, Mr...I'm sorry. I've forgotten your name.

MICHAEL Craig. Michael Craig. Yes, I usually get invited to these opening night affairs. Excuse me.

*MICHAEL moves away from them but RUTH pursues.*

RUTH Then you must be fairly well known.

JACK Well, of course he's well known. He's Handy Randy for Godssake.

RUTH No, I meant in theatrical circles.

JACK Well, what's the difference?

RUTH Well, theatre people don't usually mix with TV people. *(to MICHAEL)* Isn't that right, Mr. Craig?

MICHAEL Only if there's money involved, Mrs. Tweedsdale.

RUTH Tisdale.

MICHAEL Yes. Well, it's been a pleasure chatting with you both, but I really must rush. I've got to...uh...I've got to...

RUTH Yes?

MICHAEL Well I've got to...

JACK Walk the Schnauzer?

MICHAEL I'm sorry?

JACK You know? The men's room.

MICHAEL Ah. Yes, yes. I've got to ... walk the Schnauzer. Excuse me.

*MICHAEL exits. RICHARD HYDE-FINCH and CILLA FRASER enter the lounge.*

RICHARD Cilla, please, I'm in no mood to deal with your insecurities right now.

CILLA It's a simple question, Richard and I think it deserves an answer. Now, why don't you want me here?

RICHARD I didn't say I don't want you here.

CILLA Yes, you did.

RICHARD No, I didn't. I said if you must come, don't expect to be fussed over. This is going to be a very busy night for me and I cannot afford to have my attentions divided.

CILLA Oh? And who else were you planning to give your attentions to?

RICHARD Cilla, please.

CILLA Is that why you didn't want me to come? Is there someone else you'd rather have by your side tonight?

RICHARD No.

CILLA Someone a little younger perhaps? A little prettier?

RICHARD Cilla, will you stop all of these ridiculous accusations?

CILLA They're not ridiculous.

RICHARD They are. How many times do I have to tell you? There is no other woman. There is nobody. No pretty young ingénue at my feet. No radiant femme fatale broadening my horizons with her sparkling wit. And no exhilarating woman of the world gracing me with intelligent conversation into the small hours. No, my love, there is just you.

CILLA Well, then why won't you commit to me?

RICHARD I am committed to you. God help me, I am.

CILLA Well, you certainly don't show it. In our five years together you've shown me no sign of commitment whatsoever.

RICHARD We buy season's tickets to the opera every year, don't we? You don't think that's commitment? Sitting through two and a half hours of senseless warbling by overweight Europeans?

CILLA Let's not forget who pays for those tickets, dearest.

RICHARD Oh, of course not. Let's not forget that. No.

CILLA And who pays for the house you live in and the car you drive.

RICHARD Right. You're so right. Why don't I just get down on all fours so you can rub my nose in it?

CILLA I'm only trying to make a point.

RICHARD Oh? And what point is that?

CILLA That if you're committed to anything at all, it's my wealth.

RICHARD I don't give a tinker's damn about your wealth. You can burn the lot of it for all I care, and you can start with the opera tickets!

*RICHARD turns to find JACK and RUTH watching him. They look away nonchalantly.*

RICHARD *(checking his watch)* Where the devil is everybody? It's a quarter of. This room is usually full by this time opening night. Of course, I can't say I blame them for not coming. I mean, my God, who wants to see another play about farmers? Nobody does plays about farmers anymore. Not unless one of the characters is boinking the livestock.

CILLA Well, if you feel that way, Richard, why did you agree to direct it?

RICHARD Well, the challenge of course. I mean, any half wit can direct a good play, but to direct a bad play like this, well that calls for someone extremely gifted.

*TOM enters with more champagne and moves to RICHARD and CILLA.*

TOM Mr. Hyde-Finch?

RICHARD Hmm? Oh, thank you. *(taking two glasses, handing one to CILLA)* What happened to all the dignitaries who were supposed to be here? I mean, they told me that invitations were being sent to everyone of influence... *(noticing TOM who is still standing there.)* Yes?

TOM Tom Delaney, sir.

RICHARD Where? *(looking around for a dignitary)*

TOM Here, sir. Me. Tom Delaney. I auditioned for you last year. *(beat)* Pygmalion? *(beat, RICHARD doesn't answer)* I did the Sam Shepard piece. *(beat)* I didn't get the part. *(beat, no answer, holding out tray with hors d'oeuvres)* Minced meat tart?

*RICHARD says nothing. TOM exits.*

RICHARD *(checking his watch)* The mayor. The mayor was supposed to be here too. And where is he? Too busy I suppose. Probably cutting a ribbon at a new mall. Well, thank God he's got his priorities straight.

*RUTH approaches RICHARD and CILLA.*

RUTH Excuse me? You're the director, aren't you?

RICHARD Yes.

RUTH Yes, I saw your picture in the lobby. I couldn't help overhearing. You were looking for the mayor?

RICHARD Yes.

RUTH Well, unfortunately the mayor is unable to attend tonight, so, I'm here in his place.

RICHARD Oh. *(shaking her hand)* Then you must be the deputy mayor, are you?

RUTH No, she's got bingo.

RICHARD I see. Than you're what? An alderwoman?

RUTH No.

RICHARD City councilor?

RUTH No. I'm in the accounting department.

RICHARD Accounting. *(stops shaking her hand)*

RUTH Yes. I work in the mayor's office. Well, not actually in the mayor's office. I'm just down the hall from the mayor. Actually down the hall and two floors below the mayor.

RICHARD Ah. But, you are in the building.

RUTH Oh, yes.

RICHARD Well, good for you.

RUTH Yes, we're all just one big happy family there.

RICHARD I'm so glad.

RUTH Yes, that's how I got the tickets. The mayor gave them to Grace Miller. Grace gave them to Alderman Cappelletti. Alderman Cappelletti gave them to John Levine from the budget department, and John apparently left them in the men's room by mistake. That's where Ravi Maheshi found them. Ravi has the desk next to mine. He couldn't come because Thursday is Tai Kwon Do, so he passed them along to me and, well here we are. Me and my husband Jack. Oh, you must meet Jack. *(calling) Jack? (to Richard)* This is his first time in the theatre and he's very excited.

RICHARD Oh, goody.

*JACK moves to them.*

RUTH Jack, this is the director of the show we're going to see. Mr. ...

RICHARD Richard Hyde-Finch.

JACK Jack Tisdale.

*They shake hands.*

RUTH And this is.

CILLA Cilla Fraser.

JACK Hi.

CILLA How do you do? They shake hands.

RUTH I was just telling Mr. Hyde-Finch about how much we're looking forward to this evening's performance.

JACK Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

RUTH This is our twenty-fifth anniversary so it's rather a special night for us.

CILLA Oh, well, congratulations.

RUTH Thank you. Yes, here we are twenty-five years, two daughters and three mortgages later. And still feeling like a couple of school kids. Mind you, it hasn't been trouble-free all these years. We've had our rough spots like anybody else, but we persevered. Just didn't know when to quit I guess. *(laughing)* You two aren't, uh ...

CILLA Married? No, we're not.

RUTH Oh, well I suppose it's hard to imagine what it's like then.

RICHARD *(aside)* Something akin to a leg-hold trap I should think.

CILLA What was that, dear?

RICHARD I was reciting the Rosary, love. You know, opening-night jitters.

JACK So, you direct a lot of these things do you, Dick?

RICHARD Oh, two or three a year, yes.

JACK Uh-huh. And what do you do the rest of the time?

RICHARD The rest of the time?

JACK Yeah, I mean, do you have any hobbies?

RICHARD Hobbies? No.

JACK Oh. The reason I ask is that I'm in finishes. You know, varnish, varathane. Here, lemme give you my card. *(taking out a card and giving it to RICHARD)* Now, if you're lookin' for a hobby, you might want to check into restoring furniture.

RUTH Jack, please, don't get started.

JACK Get started with what? I'm doin' the man a favour here. *(to Richard)* I'll tell you there's nothin' more relaxing than stripping down an armoire and returning it to it's original sheen.

RICHARD Sounds fascinating. Absolutely riveting. *(checking his watch)* Oh, look at the time. I really should go back and check on the cast. You'll excuse us?

JACK Oh, sure. Hey, listen, maybe I'll run into you later. We'll shoot the breeze.

RICHARD Oh, let's do. Yes.

RUTH Good luck. Oops! You're not supposed to say good luck, are you? What is it now? Oh, break a leg. Break a leg.

RICHARD *(under his breath)* Yes, wouldn't I like to.

*CILLA gives RICHARD a little elbow, then waves to the TISDALES.*

CILLA Bye now.

RICHARD Ta-ta.

RUTH Ta-ta.

*RICHARD and CILLA exit.*

RUTH Well, he seems like a nice man, doesn't he? Engaging. Warm. It's wonderful isn't it, how theatre people are always so eager to patronize the patrons.

JACK She's a little on the stiff side though, don't you think?

RUTH You think so?

JACK Yeah, kinda cold, you know? Like bein' smacked in the puss with a mackerel.

RUTH No, I didn't find that.

JACK Ah, maybe it's just me. Where the hell's that kid with the beer?

RUTH Oh, Jackie called last night. She asked how you were and said to say hello.

JACK What does she want?

RUTH Who said she wanted anything?

JACK Whenever those girls want something they always tell you to say hello. Now, what does she want?

RUTH Nothing. She just called to talk. Her and Larry are having problems again. You know, money-wise. I guess he lost a bit of their savings last week and didn't tell her.

JACK What was it this time? The track?

RUTH Uh-huh.

JACK How much?

RUTH Three thousand.

JACK So, she wants three thousand dollars.

RUTH No. She wasn't asking for money. She's going to handle this all by herself. She thinks Larry needs help.

JACK I'll tell you what he needs. He needs one of my Hush Puppies up his ass—that's what he needs.

RUTH Oh, Jack.

JACK Never mind "oh Jack." She married a loser, let's face it. And you and me, we wind up paying for it.

RUTH Jack, we're not paying for anything. She's told him she's leaving him until he gets some counselling.

JACK And where's she gonna go?

RUTH Well, she wanted to come and stay with us.

JACK And you told her it was okay?

RUTH No, I told her we'd discuss it. That's all I said.

JACK Oh, Ruth, I know you. You told her it was okay, didn't you?

RUTH No, I ...

JACK I mean, I know she's our daughter and I know she's got nowhere else to go, that's fine. I just wish that when you said we were going to discuss something, that we actually did discuss it before you made up our minds, that's all.

*TOM enters and JACK waves him over.*

JACK Hey, kid?

*RICHARD and CILLA enter. TOM exits to get JACK a beer.*

RICHARD Cilla, please. This is neither the time nor the place. I have an actor who is twenty minutes late. Where the hell is she?

CILLA I don't care about your tardy actors. Every time I try to talk about us you change the subject. Well, I won't be put off any longer. I feel useless. Don't you understand that? I have nothing to show for my life.

RICHARD You run one of the most successful art galleries in the country. You call that nothing?

CILLA It's not enough. Years ago I thought it would be, yes, but it's not.

RICHARD Oh, and I suppose that's my fault.

CILLA No, but I thought we were going to start something together. A family.

RICHARD And we will.

CILLA When?

RICHARD I don't know. Soon.

CILLA How soon?

RICHARD Very soon. What's the bloody rush?

CILLA I'm thirty-five years old.

RICHARD That's young.

CILLA Not for child-bearing.

RICHARD Then raise horses for Godssake! They're better than children. They eat less and you can ride them until they drop.

CILLA Richard, what would you think if I were to get pregnant? Right now.

RICHARD What, here?

CILLA No, I mean, what if I was pregnant?

RICHARD This has got something to do with your visit to the doctor today, doesn't it? Huh? God, I should've guessed. Every time you see that voodoo high priestess she has you on about getting pregnant. The last time you were there she wanted to know how high my sperm count was. Well, you can tell her for me that I've got more than enough sperm, and they're the size of bloody lake trout!

*JACK and RUTH are eavesdropping again and when RICHARD sees them, they turn away nonchalantly.*

CILLA This has got nothing to do with my doctor.

RICHARD No?

CILLA No.

RICHARD And I suppose she didn't mention anything at all about babies?

CILLA Well, we talked about babies, yes, but ...

*TOM enters and moves to JACK with beer.*

RICHARD Just as I suspected. Honestly, Cilla, is that all you can think about? Are you that selfish? Don't you realize that I have a curtain in less than ten minutes and an actor who could be lying in a ditch somewhere? Not to mention the fact that it's opening night, and the only prominent people in sight are a pimply-faced servant boy and Ma and Pa Kettle!

*MICHAEL enters and moves to RICHARD and CILLA as TOM exits. JACK and RUTH wander off, exiting.*

MICHAEL Richard?

RICHARD Ah, Michael. At last, a familiar face. How are you?

MICHAEL Oh, getting by. *(giving RICHARD a kiss on the cheek)*

RICHARD Good. Cilla, you remember Michael, don't you?

CILLA Of course. Hello, Michael.

MICHAEL Cilla.

CILLA *(to RICHARD)* Excuse me. I think I'll go and freshen up before the show starts. *(to MICHAEL)* Nice seeing you again.

MICHAEL You too.

*CILLA exits.*

MICHAEL She's a darling.

RICHARD Yes, quite.

MICHAEL Very special.

RICHARD A godsend. So, Michael, where have you been keeping yourself? I haven't seen you about lately.

MICHAEL Well ...

RICHARD No, no, wait. I did see you on television the other night. Yes, in that commercial you do about the screwdriver.

MICHAEL Socket wrench.

RICHARD Hmm? Oh yes, the socket wrench, yes. They must pay you well for that, do they?

MICHAEL As a matter of fact, yes they do.

RICHARD Well, I expect so, yes. Any stage work coming up, or ...

MICHAEL Well, I'm up for Iceman.

RICHARD Iceman. Wonderful. Well, of course you're perfect for it. Who's directing?

MICHAEL Phillip Endersby.

RICHARD (*indignantly*) Phillip! (*beat*) Oh, fabulous. He's the best. He'll direct the hell out of that piece. Yes, you'll be in good hands with Phillip.

MICHAEL Well, I haven't got the part yet, but ...

RICHARD Well, we'll cross our fingers. I could talk to Phillip if you like. Put in a good word?

MICHAEL No, that's not necessary ...

RICHARD Consider it done. Phillip owes me one anyway.

MICHAEL Well, thank you. that's very kind.

RICHARD So, they're doing Iceman again, are they? Well, I suppose some people never tire of it.

MICHAEL To tell you the truth, Richard, I was kind of disappointed that I didn't get to play Ol' Daddy in this show.

RICHARD Well, Michael, you were up there on the short list. Believe me. We looked at you long and hard but we decided to go in another direction with the role, so ...

MICHAEL So, Clayton Fry's doing it.

RICHARD Yes. Do you know Clayton?

MICHAEL Yes, we've worked together.

RICHARD Marvelous actor.

MICHAEL Very talented.

RICHARD Wonderful range.

MICHAEL Pleasant too.

RICHARD Extremely pleasant.

MICHAEL Charming fellow.

RICHARD So easy to work with.

MICHAEL And the court case?

RICHARD Behind him now.

MICHAEL Ah, good.

RICHARD Yes, the girl's parents dropped the lawsuit.

MICHAEL Wonderful news.

RICHARD Well, the case was flimsy from the start.

MICHAEL Even with the Polaroids?

RICHARD Inadmissible it turns out.

MICHAEL Ah. Good for Clayton. But, tell me. Doesn't Ol' Daddy speak with a southern accent?

RICHARD And Clayton pulls it off brilliantly.

MICHAEL Oh, I don't doubt that.

RICHARD Absolutely brilliantly.

MICHAEL No, I don't doubt that for a minute. No. So, what's on your plate after this?

RICHARD Well, I'm doing "The Tempest" in November.

MICHAEL "The Tempest?" I did that three years ago at the Braymore Centre. Got good notices too. In fact, some of the best notices I've ever received. Here let me show you. *(He reaches into his pocket.)*

RICHARD You have them with you?

MICHAEL What?

RICHARD Your reviews. You carry them on your person?

MICHAEL: Only the recent ones.

RICHARD I see.

MICHAEL Yes, I would love to do The Tempest again.

RICHARD Well, the fact is, I've already cast it.

MICHAEL You have?

RICHARD Yes. Damn it, Michael, if only I'd known you were available. But, I thought you were tied up with this grease gun thing.

MICHAEL Socket wrench.

RICHARD Socket wrench, yes.

MICHAEL Oh, well. Keep me in mind down the road though, won't you?

RICHARD Your name's at the top of my list. I mean, it's been far too long since we've worked together.

MICHAEL Yes, well, I seem to be having trouble finding work with anyone these days.

RICHARD You? Michael.

MICHAEL Of course I'm sure it's just a case of nobody doing plays right now that require my type.

RICHARD That's exactly what it is. It's this youth kick. I mean, an actor with your credentials, Michael, don't insult my intelligence by saying you can't get work. I should have you flogged. Can't get work.

MICHAEL Well ...

RICHARD You mischief-maker you.

MICHAEL It's just my insecurity working overtime I suppose.

RICHARD I should say it is.

MICHAEL Well, I'd better get to my seat. They should be starting soon.

RICHARD Enjoy.

MICHAEL Oh, I'm sure it'll be wonderful. See you after?

RICHARD Looking forward to it. With every fibre of my being. Ciao for now old friend.

*(Michael exits)*

RICHARD *(under his breath)* Has-been.

*TOM enters carrying a tray.*

RICHARD You there. Tim?

TOM *(moving to RICHARD)* Tom, sir. Tom Delaney. I auditioned for you last year.

RICHARD Yes, I know. Pygmalion. Here you go. Thank you. *(putting empty glass on tray)*

TOM You probably didn't know this, Mr. Hyde-Finch, but I've been watching you rehearse this show for the past couple of weeks. I sat up in the balcony so I wouldn't be noticed. I hope you don't mind.

RICHARD Well, there's not much I can do about it now, is there?

TOM I thought if I watched someone of your calibre at work, I could learn something, so I sat in almost every day. I know the show inside out I've seen it so many times. *(getting no response)* Anyway, I thought I should tell you. *(turning to leave)*

RICHARD And did you?

TOM Did I what?

RICHARD Learn something.

TOM Oh, yeah. I think I learned more watching you than I did during my whole stay at theatre school.

RICHARD Really?

TOM And I'm not saying that just to flatter you.

RICHARD Goodness, no. We wouldn't want to flatter a director, now would we? He might find you a job.

TOM No. That's not why I'm telling you this. I mean, true, I am still waiting for my first professional acting job, but I just wanted you to know that when it does come along, I think I'll be a little better prepared for it. You know, after watching you.

RICHARD Well, it's nice to know that someone was paying attention during rehearsal.

TOM Anyway ... thanks. *(turning to leave)*

RICHARD I'm holding auditions next week for "The Tempest." Why don't you call me and we'll see if we can set something up for you?

TOM No, look you don't have to do that

RICHARD I'm not promising you a part. In fact, I doubt if you'll get one. But, if you want to come out and try, then ...

TOM Okay. Sure.

RICHARD Fine.

TOM So, I'll call you Monday?

RICHARD Whatever.

TOM Monday. First thing. Or would you rather I called in the afternoon?

RICHARD Morning. Afternoon. Whenever you like.

TOM Okay, morning. Good. Or maybe midmorning ... No. No, first thing. First thing Monday.

RICHARD Right.

TOM Like nine? Nine-thirty? Ten?

RICHARD Ten!

TOM Ten. Ten. Monday at ten. Got it. And thanks. *(He exits.)*

*LIBBY HUSNIAK enters wearing a coat, carrying a bunch of flowers and singing "There's no business like show business" to herself.*

LIBBY Everything about it is appealing. Everything the traffic will allow ...

RICHARD Libby?

LIBBY Richard. Oh, Richard, isn't it exciting? My very first opening night. I feel like I'm absolutely positively going to bust wide open.

RICHARD Libby, you're late.

LIBBY Oh, I know, but don't worry. I can get changed in no time.

RICHARD Libby, the cast is supposed to be backstage at least one half hour prior to curtain.

LIBBY I know, but, my family wanted to take me out to dinner and I couldn't very well say no. Oh, Mom and Dad bought me these flowers. Aren't they pretty?

RICHARD Yes, lovely.

LIBBY They're so proud of me. And they're all here tonight too. Mom and Dad, my sister and brother, and Grandma Husniak. She's so sweet.

RICHARD Wonderful ...

LIBBY And so old. She was an actress once too you know? Back in Poland with the Krakow Little Players. Of course, that was before the Nazis bombed their theatre. Why would they do that, Richard? Bomb a harmless theatre like that.

RICHARD Who can figure a Nazi, darling?

LIBBY Well, by the sound of it, they didn't have much respect for actors.

RICHARD No, and that's why we crushed them, dear. Now, run and get dressed will you?

LIBBY Richard, I have you to thank for this.

RICHARD Libby, please ...

LIBBY I mean, when I think back to my audition, the way I stammered and stumbled through it, and you still hired me. Why?

RICHARD Two reasons, love. Now, please, get them backstage and into their costume.

LIBBY Oh, Richard, I hope we can work together again after this. That would be so incredible, don't you think?

RICHARD It would be too much to hope for.

LIBBY There's a perfect part for me in "The Tempest," you know. Absolutely, positively perfect.

RICHARD Yes, Libby, but ...

LIBBY Could I read for it, Richard? Please?

RICHARD Libby, we really are running short of time here.

LIBBY Please? I mean, if I could do Shakespeare I think that would be so neat. And to do it with you, oh, please Richard, please ...

*CILLA enters and overhears.*

RICHARD All right, Libby, all right, I'll tell you what. If you perform well for me tonight ...

LIBBY Yes, yes?

RICHARD I mean, if you put out with all your heart...

LIBBY Oh, I will. When it's over you'll be completely satisfied, Richard.

RICHARD Fine. You do that, and we'll see about giving you another role.

LIBBY Wheee! *(throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him)* Oh, thank you. I won't let you down, Richard. I promise. This is going to be the most wonderful night of my entire life.

*LIBBY exits singing "Showbusiness."*

'Yesterday they told you would not go far. Tonight you open and here you are.'

*CILLA moves to RICHARD.*

RICHARD Oh, there you are. It's about time. What have you been doing?

CILLA I was freshening up.

RICHARD And it took you this long? You look the same as you did when you left.

*CILLA hits RICHARD in the stomach with her purse and exits into the theatre.*

RICHARD I meant good! You look good!

*RICHARD exits into the theatre. JACK and RUTH enter. The lights begin to flash signaling the beginning of the show.*

JACK What the hell is that? A power failure?

RUTH No, it means the show's going to start. We'd better go in.

JACK Can I take my beer?

RUTH No, you can't take your beer.

JACK Why not? They let you drink beer at the ball games.

RUTH That's because you're watching a bunch of grown men spitting on their shoes and rubbing their privates. This is a respectable place for heaven's sake. Now, put it down and let's go.

JACK You go ahead. I'm gonna hit the john first.

RUTH What, now? Why didn't you go before we left the house?

JACK Because I didn't have to before we left the house.

RUTH Well, you'd better hurry then. You haven't got long.

JACK I'll be right behind you.

*TOM enters, picks up a couple of empty glasses and exits again.*

RUTH Do you know where the seats are?

JACK I'll find them. Don't worry.

RUTH exits.

JACK (*wondering aloud*) Stage door, stage door. Where the hell would that be? (*calling offstage*) Hey, kid? Hang on there a second, will ya? (*He exits.*)

Act One, Scene Two

*Moments before the curtain rises on "Whisper on the Wind" in the theatre of the Charles Killian Theatre Noir Repertory House. Box seats are located on the right and left of the stage. One stage right where RUTH sits reading her program. Two stage left, one occupied by MICHAEL, and the other by RICHARD and CILLA. D.C. is set for the play: two bales of hay, a butter churn, an axe stuck in a tree stump.*

RICHARD (*looking out to the audience*) Well, it's a good house tonight. What would you say? Full? Three quarters full?

CILLA (*looking out*) Half.

RICHARD Half? No, it's three quarters at least.

CILLA No, no. Half. If that.

RICHARD Not on an opening night. It's never only half full on an opening night.

CILLA Well, there's a whole empty section over there. Another one over there. Two or three rows at the back are empty. I'd say it's less than half.

RICHARD Less than half? No. Look, there are no seats left over there. This section here is full, and they're still coming in.

CILLA Where?

RICHARD Up there. At the back.

CILLA Those are ushers.

RICHARD They are not.

CILLA Richard, they've got flashlights.

RICHARD Well, they might be coal miners. Out for a night on the town. We don't know. So, what would you say? Half? Three quarters?

CILLA (*looking out again for a beat*) Maybe half.

RICHARD At least half. Probably three quarters.

*JACK and TOM enter from the audience. TOM shows JACK to his seat.*

JACK Well, the varnish is where we do most of our trade. We got the high gloss, semi-gloss ... You into furniture stripping at all? It's a great hobby. In fact, some of the great minds of all time restored furniture on the side. You know, to relax themselves. Confucius, Einstein, Jerry Lewis. Did I give you my card?

RUTH Jack? Jack, over here.

JACK Oh, there she is.

*TOM and JACK move onto the stage and to the box where RUTH is sitting.*

JACK Boy, we're not gonna miss a whole lot from here, are we? *(He hands Tom some money.)*  
There you go, kid. Thanks a lot.

*TOM exits through the audience.*

RUTH What was that for?

JACK What?

RUTH What did you give him?

JACK I gave him a couple of bucks.

RUTH What for?

JACK A tip. The kid showed me to my seat.

RUTH Jack, you don't tip the ushers.

JACK Why not? I thought you said this was a respectable place.

RUTH Well, yes, but the people who work here, work here because they love the theatre. They don't care about money. You'd only be insulting them.

JACK All right, I'll get it back at intermission.

RUTH The interval.

JACK Huh?

RUTH They don't call it intermission in the theatre. They call it the interval.

JACK Why? What's wrong with intermission?

RUTH Well, I guess intermission implies that you go out for popcorn.

JACK So?

RUTH So, you can't get popcorn here.

JACK Well, you can get that finger-food crap. Isn't that the same thing?

RUTH No. The finger food crap is for intervals. Popcorn is for intermissions.

JACK God, it's like a whole different world, isn't it?

CILLA *(looking at her program)* Who's this Libby Husniak?

RICHARD Who?

CILLA Libby Husniak. The actress playing Missy Gal. I've never heard of her.

RICHARD Oh, she's new. Just out of theatre school. A little inexperienced perhaps but very eager.

CILLA Eager to what?

RICHARD To perform.

CILLA Yes, I'll bet she is.

RICHARD That's the most important thing you know. Eagerness. You can have all the talent in the world, but if you're not eager, if you're not driven, then it's wasted.

CILLA Uh-huh. And who's driving her?

RICHARD It's not who. It's what. It's her desire to act.

CILLA So, why have you never mentioned her?

RICHARD Hmm?

CILLA Miss Husniak. You've never mentioned her before.

RICHARD There was no reason to.

CILLA Well, I would think that her name would've come up sometime. I mean, you have been working with her these past few weeks, haven't you?

RICHARD Yes, I have.

CILLA And yet you haven't once mentioned her.

RICHARD No, I guess I haven't.

CILLA Well, don't you find that strange?

RICHARD Not entirely, precious, no.

CILLA You never mentioned Isabelle Windsor either, until I found her leotard in the back seat of my car.

RICHARD That didn't even belong to Isabelle. It belonged to Kenneth Lowrey in costuming. Isabelle borrowed it and I was merely returning it for her. *(calling to someone he sees in the audience)* Hello Phillip! Good of you to come!

CILLA Who's that?

RICHARD Phillip Endersby.

CILLA The director?

RICHARD *(waving and smiling at PHILLIP)* Director. The man couldn't direct sex in a brothel. *(scanning the audience)* I wonder where the critics are? Where are you hiding, you endomorphic

residue? Ah. There's one. Graham Sills. *(smiling and waving but talking only to CILLA)* So, nice of you to dress, Graham. Looks like he just came from a barbecue.

JACK Think there'll be any nude scenes in this?

*RUTH says nothing, just looks at him.*

JACK Well, I'm just wondering. I mean, sittin' this close and all.

RICHARD *(still scanning the house)* Oh, yes. William Gallagher. Oh, I knew he wouldn't pass up a chance to rattle my cage. He's never given me a good review, you know. Never. Not even for *Death Of A Salesman*. My finest piece of work. You know what he said? Hmm? The direction seemed uncharted. Uncharted indeed. I was directing a play, not searching for the bloody Northwest Passage! *(yelling at Gallagher)* Misanthrope!

CILLA Richard, please. I mean, the man's only doing his job.

RICHARD His job. I've rinsed more honourable life forms off my shower stall.

CILLA Well, then why do you let them get to you?

RICHARD I don't. I don't even read their damned reviews.

CILLA You read them all the time.

RICHARD I scan them. You can't read the things. They're unintelligible.

JACK *(looking at his program)* So, what is this? Is this a comedy?

RUTH Oh, no, I don't think so. It was written by a Canadian.

JACK Oh. Can't tell anything from the title. "Whisper on the Wind." What the hell kind of a title is that?

RUTH Oh, titles don't mean anything. Most of the time they have nothing to do with the show at all. The writer just uses it because it sounds good.

JACK Uh-huh. What was that Hamlet about?

RUTH A man named Hamlet.

CILLA So, how old is she?

RICHARD Who?

CILLA This Husniak tart.

RICHARD She's not a tart. And I don't know how old she is.

CILLA Well, didn't you read her resume?

RICHARD I suppose I did, yes. Sometime.

CILLA Well?

RICHARD I don't know. Twenty-two. Twenty-three.

CILLA She looks younger than that in her picture.

RICHARD They all look younger in their pictures.

CILLA Well, that's deceiving, isn't it?

RICHARD That's the idea I suppose.

CILLA Well, I don't think that's right.

RICHARD Fine. I'll put the word out first thing in the morning that you're opposed to it. If they know what's good for them they'll have it rectified by day's end.

CILLA You don't have to get sarcastic, Richard. All I'm saying is that these people shouldn't have to stoop to deception to get work.

RICHARD Love, they are not stooping. Reclining on occasion, yes, but never stooping.

*JACK reaches into his jacket and pulls out a bag of tortilla chips. He opens the bag and pops one into his mouth as RUTH looks on, perturbed.*

RUTH What are you doing now?

JACK What? Oh, sorry. You want one?

RUTH Where did you get those?

JACK I ran over to that little store across the street.

RUTH Put them away.

JACK Why?

RUTH Because they don't allow food in the auditorium. Good heavens, for the price these people are paying for tickets, the last thing they want to hear is someone crinkling a chip bag.

JACK (*putting the chips in his coat*) For the price these people are paying for tickets they should have a buffet set up in here.

CILLA So, what did Michael Craig have to say?

RICHARD Nothing of any importance.

CILLA Well, he must've said something.

RICHARD He's looking for work. As usual.

CILLA Well?

RICHARD Well, what?

CILLA Are you going to give him any?

RICHARD I've got nothing for him.

CILLA I thought you two used to be good friends. You used to work together quite often.

RICHARD Well, times change.

CILLA It was even rumoured that you were lovers.

RICHARD That was only because we fought so much.

CILLA Well, were you?

RICHARD No, dearest, we were not. You know, I don't know whether you've noticed, but I've been making love to you for the past five years or so. Now, mightn't that give you the notion that I'm attracted to women? Hmm?

CILLA You're right. I haven't noticed.

RUTH So, how did you like your anniversary gift?

JACK I liked it very much. Thanks.

RUTH Are you sure?

JACK Very much. I've never owned a pair of satin pajamas before.

RUTH Well, I thought it might be a nice change, you know, from what you wear now.

JACK You don't like the sweat pants?

RUTH No, they're fine, but I think the pajamas are more ... appropriate. You do like them, don't you?

JACK Yes, I love them. I do. I just hope I don't keep sliding out of bed, you know? I mean, at least with the sweat pants I had some traction.

RUTH Jack, you're only sleeping—you're not hauling freight. I mean, if you don't like them just say so and I'll take them back.

JACK I like them. Really.

RUTH Fine.

JACK And how'd ya like your present?

RUTH I like it.

JACK You don't sound like you like it.

RUTH No, I do. I just don't know where I'm going to find a use for two gallons of wood stain, that's all.

JACK I told you, I'm gonna build a deck next summer. You'll be able to use all of it on that thing.

*The lights in theatre dim and go to black.*

RUTH Oh, it's starting.

RICHARD Well, this is it. *(in the blackout)* Kiss for luck? *(beat)* Cilla?

CILLA Sorry. I thought you were talking to Michael.

*The lights come up dimly on the box seats and a small spot on the tree stump. LIBBY enters in darkness and stands at the butter churn, her skin glistening with sweat. The spotlight on the stump moves to find her. When it finally hits her she opens her mouth to speak, but before she can get her line out, the spot moves back to the stump. LIBBY moves to the stump, but the light goes out and comes on again on the churn. LIBBY moves back to the butter churn.*

RICHARD Oh, my God.

*LIBBY makes it to the spotlight, but when she opens her mouth to speak again she has forgotten her line.*

LIBBY Line.

RICHARD Line? She's forgotten her first line?? Unbelie..Days and nights!

LIBBY Days and nights on our ol' farm ain't never been easy. *(working the butter churn slowly, up and down)* There been times when I thought that my sweat and Ol' Daddy's sweat and Mama's sweat was just like sweat on the sun. As fast as you can wipe it off, it comes back again. Sweatin' first thing in the mornin', sweatin' through lunch, sweatin' through the scorch of the afternoon, sweatin' through dinnertime, even sweatin' in your bed when the sun ain't nowhere to be found. Sweatin', sweatin', sweatin'.

JACK *(removing his jacket)* Is it hot in here or is it me?

RUTH Shhh.

LIBBY And then when Mama went to the heavenly beyond, it seemed that me and Ol' Daddy took to sweatin' even more. Me, pullin' my load and Mama's, and Ol' Daddy spendin' days under the hot sun tryin' to loose this here tree stump from the firm grip of the Lord's earth.

CILLA She's a lot prettier in her picture, don't you think? *(looking at the program)* Looks like it's been air-brushed to death.

RICHARD Do you mind?

LIBBY That was the last thing that Mama asked Ol' Daddy to do was to get rid of this dead old eyesore so's she could plant herself a garden. A garden filled with growin' things. But now, Mama's gone. And Ol' Daddy's got it set in his mind that if it's the last thing he does on this earth, he's gonna loose this stump, and plant that garden hisself. For Mama. Two years he's been at it. Two years of choppin' and cuttin'. Cuttin' and choppin'. Doin' one last chore for the woman he treasured. The woman he feels so lost without.

*JACK belches. LIBBY stops churning and looks in his direction.*

JACK Sorry. Bratwurst.

CLAYTON *(off)* Missy Gal?

*CLAYTON FRY enters as Ol' Daddy, dressed in overalls.*

LIBBY Oh. Mornin' Ol' Daddy.

CLAYTON *grunts as a way of saying hello. Then he eyes the stump with determination. He spits on his hands, rubs his privates and moves toward the stump.*

JACK I'm gonna get my beer.

RUTH Sit down.

LIBBY Looks like it's gonna be another hot one, Ol' Daddy. I suspect we're gonna be doin' a lot of sweatin' again today. Like as not we'll be sweatin' through the mornin', sweatin' through lunch, sweatin' through the scorch of the afternoon

JACK Here we go again.

LIBBY Sweatn' through dinnertime, and even sweatn' in our beds when the sun ain't nowheres to be found.

JACK & LIBBY *(together)* Sweatn', sweatn', sweatn'.

CLAYTON *(speaking his southern lines through a British accent)* Well, little Missy Gal, I suppose if the good Lord didn't want us to go to sweatn' 'so much, he wouldn't a plunked us down in a land where there was such a heap of work to be done. At least, that's as near as I can figure on it.

JACK I thought you said this was written by a Canadian.

RUTH He must be from Saskatchewan. They all talk like that out there.

LIBBY Ol' Daddy? What would you say if I told you that I was thinkin' of leavin' this here farm and headin' out to seek my worth in more civilized surroundins'?

CLAYTON Twouldn't be talkin' about the city now would ya, Missy Gal?

LIBBY I twould.

CLAYTON Well, if that don't beat all. A youngin' of mine fixin' to run off to the city. I'm glad your Mama ain't alive to hear you talkin' like this.

LIBBY Now, don't go to tarrin' me with the guilt of my Mama, Ol' Daddy. You know well as I do that if Mama'd had a mind of her own, she'd a been livin' in the city herself.

CLAYTON That t'ain't true, Missy Gal. Your Mama was a farmin' woman through and through. The closest she ever got to the city was listenin' to the Reverend Gilly Thurmond on the radio. Yeah, every Sunday night me and her would hunker down beside the Westinghouse and listen to Reverend Gilly's sermon out of St. Paul.

CILLA Westinghouse? Don't they make toasters?

CLAYTON My oh my, that Reverend Gilly sure was somethin'.

CILLA Why would they hunker down beside a toaster?

RICHARD Cilla, please!

CLAYTON He'd be all full of brimstone about the evils of city livin'. Tellin' us how we was better off where we was. Doin' the Lord's work on the Lord's land.

*(The play-by-play of the baseball game can be heard in the distance. JACK has a radio.)*

CLAYTON You reap what you sow, he used to tell us. Reap what you sow.

RICHARD (*hearing the ball game*) What the devil is that? Do you hear that?

CLAYTON You sow a respected lifestyle, then respect is what you reap. You sow transgression, and you get transgressed upon.

RICHARD What is that?

CLAYTON Why, I can almost hear the Reverend's voice now. And you know what he's sayin'? He's sayin' ...

JACK Bunt! Bunt!

RUTH What? Jack? Give me that! (*grabbing the radio*)

CLAYTON Now, I don't wanna hear no more of this leavin' talk. Neither one of us is going nowhere. Not as long as I've got a breath left in me. Now, I gotta get to work. This ol' stump and me has got some powerful scufflin' ahead of us. (*He tries to pull the axe out of the stump, but the axe sticks and he lifts it up with the paper-maché stump attached to it*)

RICHARD Oh, for Godssake! (*calling to CLAYTON in an excited whisper*) Put it down, you lummo! Put it down!

CLAYTON (*looking at the stump at the end of his axe*) Been nigh onto two years now and this stubborn ol' thing ain't give an inch.

RICHARD For the love of God, put it down!

CLAYTON *sets the stump down.*

RICHARD Thank you.

CLAYTON *looks to LIBBY who stares at the stump.*

RICHARD Well, come on, Libby. Come on.

CLAYTON This stubborn ol' thing ain't give an inch.

RICHARD Oh, no.

CILLA What's wrong?

RICHARD She's dried.

CILLA What?

RICHARD Dried! Gone up! Forgotten her line! Good Lord. How could she do this? Stupid, no-talent, scatterbrain.

CILLA Well, she's driven. That's the most important thing.

JACK What's happening?

RUTH I'm not sure.

JACK Is this the interval?

RUTH I don't think so. It just started.

RICHARD Give her the line, Clayton ... Clayton, give her the ... *(to LIBBY)* "No more stubborn than you, Oi' Daddy." Libby? "No more stubborn than you."

CILLA I don't think she can hear you.

RICHARD Of course, she can't hear me. She's in a bloody trance! *(to LIBBY)* Wake up, you slut! Clayton? Clayton, give her a whack!

RUTH Maybe this is the interval.

JACK *(standing with RUTH as if to leave)* Well, that was painless enough.

RICHARD *(calling to JACK and RUTH)* Where are you going? Sit down!

RUTH Oh, look. It's the director.

JACK Is he waving at us?

RUTH Why, yes. I believe he is.

RICHARD Sit down!

RUTH *(she waves to him)* Hi!

RICHARD Will you sit?

RUTH Let's go over and say hello.

JACK Aw, do we have to?

RUTH Come on, just a quick hello.

RICHARD *(shouting)* Sit down!!

*RUTH and JACK sit quickly. CLAYTON sits on one of the bales of hay.*

RICHARD *(to CLAYTON)* Get up!

*JACK, RUTH and CLAYTON stand.*

RICHARD *(to JACK and RUTH)* Sit down!

*JACK and RUTH sit. CLAYTON remains standing.*

LIBBY No more stubborn than you Oi' Daddy.

RICHARD Oh, thank you God.

CLAYTON *(distracted, speaking to LIBBY out of character)* Beg your pardon? Did you say something?

RICHARD Her line! She said her ...That's it. I shall have to kill the both of them. (*climbing out of the box*)

CILLA (*grabbing his coat and pulling him back*) Richard, no!

RICHARD No, I'm going to kill them first, and then the accountant.

CILLA Richard.

RICHARD (*to JACK and RUTH*) I'm coming over there! You're next!

CILLA Richard, stop.

*RICHARD sits back exhausted and CILLA fans him with her program.*

RUTH What did he say?

JACK I think he said he's coming over.

RUTH Well, you see? I think we made an impression on him.

*The spotlight on CLAYTON and LIBBY goes out.*

RUTH Ah, we were right. It is the interval.

*RUTH and JACK applaud. RICHARD is lying back, trying to catch his breath. MICHAEL gets up and speaks to RICHARD on his way out.*

MICHAEL Going very well, Richard.

*Lights down. End Act One.*

### Act Two, Scene One

*The interval of "Whisper on the Wind," the VIP lounge. As the scene opens, RICHARD is seated with an ice pack on his forehead. CILLA is with him.*

RICHARD A ten-minute first act. Ten minutes. Do you know what that means?

CILLA Richard, it'll be fine.

RICHARD The second act is going to run approximately two hours and twenty minutes.

CILLA Well, that's not too long.

RICHARD No, not for a yacht race perhaps, but for a second act it's preposterous.

*TOM enters carrying a tray of champagne.*

TOM Champagne?

RICHARD Yes. Leave the tray.

TOM Sir?

RICHARD Leave it.

TOM Leave it?

RICHARD Leave it! Leave the tray. Set the bloody tray down and walk away! Do you understand? Thank you so much. Thank you.

*TOM sets the tray down.*

TOM *(moving to leave then hesitating)* So ... Monday then?

RICHARD What?

TOM Monday. I'll call you Monday?

RICHARD Sorry. I won't be taking any calls Monday.

TOM Oh. *(beat)* Tuesday then?

RICHARD No. I plan to be incommunicado for the entire week. Thank you.

TOM But, I thought ...

RICHARD Did you not hear what I just said? Now, go away. Quickly.

*TOM exits. RICHARD takes a glass of champagne and gulps it down. He leans back with the pack over his eyes.*

CILLA Richard, you needn't get short with the help.

RICHARD Cilla, please don't tell me who I can and cannot get short with. I'll get short with whomever I please. I've earned the right to get short. I've just witnessed the shortest first act in the history of the theatre.

*JACK and RUTH enter.*

RUTH Honestly, Jack. How could you do that? I've never been so embarrassed.

JACK Oh, nobody heard it.

RUTH The entire theatre heard it. They were all staring at us. Every one of them.

JACK All right, I'm sorry.

RUTH Well, I expect you should be. I mean, good heavens. You seem bound and determined to ruin this entire evening for me.

JACK I said I was sorry, didn't I?

RUTH I'm surprised you didn't have the ushers bringing you updates every so often. I mean, really. Oh, and there's the director. I suppose he heard it along with everyone else. I guess I should go over and apologize. Are you coming?

JACK No, you go ahead. I'm ... uh ... I'm gonna get a beer.

RUTH Well, don't wander too far. We'll have to go back in soon.

JACK I'll be around.

*RUTH moves to CILLA and RICHARD. JACK exits.*

RUTH Well, well, well. What an exciting first act.

*RICHARD slowly moves the ice pack and looks at RUTH. He covers his eyes again.*

RUTH Moved along very quickly too. Kudos to the director for that I suppose. *(to CILLA)* We're enjoying it very much

CILLA You see, Richard? It's going over well.

RICHARD Uh-huh.

RUTH *(to CILLA)* Something wrong?

CILLA Oh, just a little headache.

RUTH The champagne, I'll bet. It gives me a headache sometimes too, if I drink it too fast. Does that to a lot of people I hear.

CILLA Yes. Well, if you'll excuse me I think I'll go and freshen up.

RICHARD Again? You freshened up ten minutes ago.

CILLA Well, women at my age, we tend to spoil quickly.

*RUTH laughs and CILLA joins in half-heartedly.*

CILLA *(to RUTH)* Excuse me. *(She exits.)*

RUTH *(long beat)* Yes, how very exciting.

RICHARD *(removing the ice pack again)* Ah, you're still here. Good. I was worried that you might have gone off and left me alone.

RUTH Actually, I wanted to apologize.

RICHARD Apologize?

RUTH Yes, for well, for my husband's behaviour. It's his first time in the theatre and I'm afraid he isn't familiar with the protocol. He does mean well though.

RICHARD Fine. You're excused.

*RICHARD puts the ice pack on again.*

RUTH And I assure you, it won't happen again.

RICHARD That's most comforting.

RUTH Yes, you can look forward to an incident-free second act.

RICHARD I tingle.

CLAYTON *enters, wearing a bathrobe over his overalls.*

CLAYTON Richard? Richard? *(to RUTH)* Excuse me. Richard, you must come quickly.

RICHARD Clayton? What are you doing out here?

CLAYTON It's Libby. She's in an awful state. She says she won't go on for the second act.

RICHARD What?

CLAYTON She's afraid. She's almost hysterical. I think you should talk to her.

RICHARD Oh, what next? Come on then. Oh, and by the way, Clayton. Do something about the accent, will you?

CLAYTON Which one?

RICHARD That one. It's creeping in again.

CLAYTON Oh, dear. Is it noticeable on stage?

RICHARD Only to those of us attending this particular play, love.

*RICHARD exits. CLAYTON starts to move but stops when RUTH speaks to him.*

RUTH I thought you were wonderful.

CLAYTON I'm sorry?

RUTH The first act. I thought you were marvelous.

CLAYTON Oh, well, thank you. How very kind.

RUTH Yes, I was quite moved.

CLAYTON Really? And you are?

RUTH Ruth. RuthTisdale.

CLAYTON *(taking her hand)* Enchanté *(kissing her hand)* Clayton Fry. At your behest.

RUTH Oh, my. How very gallant.

CLAYTON Not at all. I am always at the ready to do service to such a handsome woman.

RUTH Service?

CLAYTON Of any kind.

RUTH Well. Service. I'm flattered.

CLAYTON No, no, no. It is I who am flattered that you would allow me to bask here momentarily in your radiance. I shall feed off your glow as a honeybee would the soft petals of a rose garden.

RUTH You talk nice.

CLAYTON Talk is cheap.

RUTH I like cheap talk. I mean, I like, you know, talking to you. Like this.

CLAYTON Well then, perhaps we could talk later. After the curtain. Have you an escort?

RUTH Toyota.

CLAYTON Pardon me?

RUTH Toyota. We have a ... oh, you mean a ... I thought you meant. Yes, I have an escort. My husband.

CLAYTON Pity.

RUTH Well ...

CLAYTON C'est la vie.

*RICHARD enters.*

RICHARD Oh, Clayton? Care to join me?

CLAYTON Coming.

*RICHARD exits.*

CLAYTON Well, I must away. Adieu, fair maiden. *(giving RUTH a deep, graceful bow)*

*RUTH does a bit of a curtsy. TOM enters with a tray of hors d'oeuvres.*

TOM *(to CLAYTON)* Chicken ball?

CLAYTON What? Oh, yes, don't mind if I do.

*CLAYTON takes two chicken balls from the tray. RUTH moves to CLAYTON. TOM exits.*

CLAYTON Thank you.

RUTH Excuse me? Mr. Fry?

CLAYTON Hmm?

RUTH Before you go, would you sign my program for me?

CLAYTON It would be an honour.

*RUTH hands him the program and a pen from her purse. CLAYTON still has the chicken balls in his hand.*

CLAYTON Would you mind holding my ... the uh ...*(handing the chicken balls to RUTH)*

RUTH Oh, certainly.

CLAYTON Thank you.

*RUTH takes the chicken balls and CLAYTON autographs the program.*

CLAYTON To Ruth. With undying devotion. Oh. this won't make your husband jealous, will it?

RUTH Well, it's worth a try.

*They both laugh. CLAYTON continues to write.*

RUTH Uh...back there. Just now. Were you ...I mean, was that an advance you were making? I mean, excuse me for asking and if it wasn't, I understand, but well ... you know, married twenty-five years and all. I'm not sure I'd recognize one right off.

CLAYTON One doesn't advance on royalty, dear lady. One waits humbly to be summoned forth.

*CLAYTON hands back the program and RUTH.*

CLAYTON And besides, I should have supposed that one as comely as yourself would've been snatched up long before now.

RUTH Well, we all make mistakes.

CLAYTON In another time, in another place, perhaps we could've gotten to know each other on a grander scale. Wouldst that such good fortune could have befallen me.

RUTH Yes. That ...wouldst have been lovely.

CLAYTON *(taking her hand)* Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these: It might have been.

CLAYTON kisses RUTH's hand then begins to leave.

RUTH Oh. Mr Fry? Your balls.

CLAYTON Hmm?

RUTH Your chicken balls.

CLAYTON Ah! Right. Thank you. *(He takes the chicken balls and exits.)*

*JACK enters with CILLA.*

JACK Oh, there's Ruthie. Ruth?

*JACK and CILLA move to RUTH.*

JACK Listen, Cilla here was just tellin' me that she runs an art gallery. And I was sayin' how we've been lookin' for a picture for the dining room. So, maybe we should take a run over there sometime. What do you think?

RUTH *(still lost in CLAYTON's gallantry)* Yes. Maybe we could.

JACK *(to CILLA)* We're not lookin' for anything, you know, fancy. Just one of those pictures of the ocean or trees or something. You got anything like that?

CILLA Oh, I'm sure we do. Yes.

JACK And what do they run? I mean, on the average.

CILLA Well, our pieces start at about one thousand dollars.

JACK *(beat)* One thousand dollars?

CILLA Yes.

JACK Well, to tell you the truth, we weren't lookin' for one quite that big. Maybe about like yea, you know? *(gesturing with his hands)*

RUTH Jack, it's not the size of the painting. It's the quality of the work.

JACK Oh. *(to CILLA)* Well, do you have any with a little less quality? I mean, we're just lookin' for a couple of trees, you know? A dirty pond?

CILLA No, I'm sorry. But there are other galleries. Perhaps if you shopped around.

JACK Oh, sure. We can do that. I just thought I might be able to throw some business your way.

CILLA Well, that's very kind. *(to RUTH)* Did you happen to see where Richard went?

RUTH Yes, he went to speak to the young lady.

CILLA Young lady?

RUTH The one in the show. Miss Husniak is it?

CILLA Yes?

RUTH Apparently it was very urgent so he ...

CILLA I see. Well, if you'll excuse me I think I'll go back in now. *(She exits into the theatre)*

JACK One thousand dollars? I think I'm in the wrong business. Why would anybody pay a thousand dollars for a picture?

RUTH Painting.

JACK Huh?

RUTH They're not referred to as pictures. They're paintings. And people are willing to pay dearly for them because it's art.

JACK Art smart.

RUTH You just have no notion of it at all, do you?

JACK Notion of what?

RUTH This whole evening is lost on you, isn't it?

JACK What?

RUTH I don't know why I even bother. I honestly don't. I should have left you at home with your beer and your baseball game. You would have been much better off and, quite frankly, I would have been too.

JACK What's the matter? What'd I say?

RUTH All I wanted was to come here and enjoy a pleasant evening in the theatre. I thought that might be a nice way to celebrate the occasion. Doing what I wanted for a change. And maybe, at the same time, getting you interested in something besides your damned baseball or football. But, there's no point, is there? I'll always be playing second fiddle, won't I? Of course, I don't know why I thought it would change all of a sudden. It's been like this for twenty-five years. It was like this when Jackie was born.

JACK Now, don't throw that in my face again. I didn't even know you were in labour.

RUTH Of course you didn't. You were at a hockey game. You weren't even there for the birth of your own daughter.

JACK She was two weeks early! And it was the playoffs!

RUTH Just once ... just once I'd like to see you show me some consideration. I mean, I try to get interested in the things that you like. I talk to you about your sports. I do it, not just for you, but for us. So, we can be a couple who share things. But, what about my interests? What about what I want to talk about?

JACK We talk about the kids, don't we?

RUTH The kids. Is that the only thing you think I'm interested in? Is that my whole life? Jack, the kids are gone. The kids have their own lives. And now I want one.

JACK You've got a life. I mean, you've got a nice house, you've got friends. What more do you want?

RUTH I want to grow. I want to pursue new interests. I want to feel better about myself. Don't you want to do that?

JACK I don't know. I'm kind of comfortable the way I am.

RUTH Fine. Fine, Jack. Then you stay that way. *(moving away)*

JACK Ruth, wait a minute. Ruthie? *(chasing her, and she stops)* Come on. I'm sorry, okay? I didn't know this stuff meant that much to you. Really. I didn't. So, uh ... let's just watch the rest of the show and enjoy ourselves, okay? Huh? *(getting no answer)* And no more baseball. I promise.

*TOM enters, carrying tray of champagne.*

TOM Sir?

JACK Hmm? *(taking a step toward TOM to stop him)* No...

TOM Three two, Cardinals. Top of the fifth.

*RUTH exits into the theatre.*

JACK Ruth? Ruthie?

*JACK follows RUTH and exits. MICHAEL enters. He sees TOM and calls to him, not too politely.*

MICHAEL Champagne?

*TOM goes to MICHAEL with the tray.*

TOM How ya doin'?

*MICHAEL says nothing as he grabs a drink and downs it.*

TOM Boy, talk about the luck I have, right? Not a half an hour ago Richard Hyde-Finch offered me an audition for a part in a play. And now, all of a sudden, he says forget about it. No explanation. Nothing. Just forget about it.

MICHAEL What play?

TOM "The Tempest." He's holding auditions next week and he told me to call him. It was all set.

*MICHAEL grabs another glass of champagne and downs it.*

TOM I mean, I figured this was the break I was looking for. To show him what I could do. Now, I'll probably never get a chance. Maybe I should just give up and go to work for my father. He has this carpet warehouse. You've probably heard of it. Daffy Delaney's? Well, that's my Dad. Daffy Delaney. Try living that one down. I think that's why I decided to go into acting, you know?

*MICHAEL exits.*

TOM So, people would take me seriously. Because when you're an actor, people listen to you. They pay attention. But, when ... *(turning and finding MICHAEL gone)* Yeah, I gotta get back to work, so ... See ya.

*LIBBY enters followed by RICHARD. LIBBY has her coat on and is storming towards the exit.*

RICHARD Libby? Libby, wait! You can't walk out in the middle of a performance.

LIBBY Oh, no? Just watch me.

RICHARD Libby, come on now. I mean, it's not going that badly.

*RICHARD motions angrily for TOM to get out. TOM exits.*

LIBBY Not going that badly?

RICHARD All right, so you forgot a couple of lines. That's nothing. I don't think the audience even noticed.

LIBBY Oh, how could they not notice? We were all over the place. The story doesn't even make sense anymore.

RICHARD So what? This is the theatre. Who cares if it doesn't make sense? They'll think we're on the cutting edge, for Godssake.

LIBBY *(near tears now)* No, Richard, I can't. I mean, my family's out there. I've humiliated them. I've embarrassed you. I've ... oh, I've let everybody down ... *(breaking down)*

RICHARD No, Libby, no. (*holding her, patting her back*) You haven't done that at all. Why, we're all just as proud as punch of our little girl.

LIBBY No, you're not.

RICHARD We most certainly are. And you know what?

LIBBY What?

RICHARD We'd be prouder still if she'd go back out there like the little trouper she is, and finish the show for us.

LIBBY No, I can't.

RICHARD But, Libby, darling, you've got to. Think of your parents.

*LIBBY cries a little louder.*

RICHARD All right, all right, to hell with your parents. Think of Gramma Husniak. Hmm? Do you think she would've walked out on the Krakow Little Players this way? I sincerely doubt it. Standing up there on that stage with those Nazi mortars bursting all around her. Why, I'll bet she didn't miss one beat. Not one subtle nuance.

LIBBY Do you think so?

RICHARD I'm sure of it. Why, it's in the Husniak tradition to carry on regardless. And if you don't carry on tonight, well, I'm afraid the family name may be smeared forever.

LIBBY Really?

RICHARD Oh, yes. Beyond repair.

LIBBY (*beat*) Well...all right then. I'll finish the show.

RICHARD That's the girl.

LIBBY But under one condition.

RICHARD What's that?

LIBBY (*suddenly losing those little girl tears and becoming firm*) "The Tempest." I want that part.

RICHARD Now, Libby, I already told you I'd see about letting you read for it.

LIBBY I know but that's not the same as actually giving it to me.

RICHARD No, it's not, but ...

LIBBY Well, I want your assurance that I have it.

RICHARD Now, how can I do that when you haven't even auditioned? Do you understand? Do you see my dilemma?

LIBBY (*with a pout*) Well ... yes, I guess so.

RICHARD Good, now why don't you just ...

LIBBY Goodnight, Richard. *(moving)*

RICHARD What? All right, Libby. Wait. Wait.

*LIBBY stops.*

RICHARD All right. You have my assurance.

LIBBY I want it in writing.

RICHARD What?

LIBBY I want a firm offer in writing. I mean, I don't want to be taken advantage of, now do I?

RICHARD What, you question my word? My word is my bond!

*LIBBY starts to cry again.*

RICHARD All right, I'll put it in writing.

LIBBY Tonight?

RICHARD Yes.

LIBBY A firm offer?

*CILLA enters and overhears.*

RICHARD Yes, Libby, yes. It'll be firm and in your hands before the night is out.

LIBBY *(full of sweetness again, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him)* Oh, Richard, thank you! You won't be disappointed I promise. *(kissing him on the cheek and then exiting)*

*CILLA moves to RICHARD.*

RICHARD *(seeing CILLA)* Ah, Cilla. There you are. *(Before he can finish his greeting, CILLA whacks him in the chest with her purse and storms off into the theatre.)*

RICHARD *(following CILLA)* What? What?

*MICHAEL enters.*

MICHAEL Richard?

RICHARD Oh, Michael. I'm sorry but I really can't be sociable right now. I'm just having a hellish time.

MICHAEL Richard, about Phillip Endersby

RICHARD Yes, Michael, I promise. I'll put a bug in his ear first chance.

MICHAEL I just spoke to him. I didn't get the part.

RICHARD Oh. Well, that's a shame, but ...

MICHAEL And you! You told me you had already cast "The Tempest."

RICHARD What? What's that got to do with ...

MICHAEL You're holding auditions next week.

RICHARD I'm what?

MICHAEL You're holding auditions next week.

RICHARD Oh, that. Just a formality. I already know who I want and ...

MICHAEL Why wouldn't you let me read?

RICHARD Michael, I've just explained to you that ...

MICHAEL Just a reading. A bloody reading. Would that have been so much? Don't I merit at least that?

RICHARD But, that's exactly my point, Michael. I know what you can do. Why would I put someone with your standing through the humiliation of having to read for a part. Surely, you merit more than that?

MICHAEL But, "The Tempest." You've seen me do it. You know that my interpretation is unequalled.

RICHARD Yes, Michael, I have seen you do it, and you're right. There is nothing like it.

MICHAEL Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling of their afflictions and shall not myself, one of their kind, that relish all as sharply.

RICHARD Michael ...

MICHAEL Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art? Though with their high wrongs I am strook to th' quick.

RICHARD Mother of God.

MICHAEL Yet with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury, do I take part. The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance.

RICHARD Michael, I think maybe we've had a little too much to drink.

MICHAEL And as for this part. Clayton Fry? Good God, Richard, what were you thinking? I originated the role of Ol' Daddy. I workshopped it. Made it my own. How do you think I feel seeing it butchered like that?

RICHARD Now, Michael, let's be fair ...

MICHAEL What is it? What's wrong with me?

RICHARD There's nothing wrong with you

MICHAEL Then why can't I get a part? I can barely get an audition anymore! What's wrong? Am I being blacklisted?

RICHARD No, you're not being black ...

MICHAEL That's it, isn't it? Somebody's put the word out, haven't they? What is it? Is it my drinking? Is that the problem?

RICHARD No.

MICHAEL You know me, Richard. You know I never touch it while I'm working. I'm a complete professional. All right, that one time in Montreal but God, how they drove me to it.

RICHARD Michael, it's not the drinking.

MICHAEL My temperament then. I mean, I know I can be difficult, but look at who I've had to work with. Hacks! All of them!

RICHARD No, no, it's not your temperament.

MICHAEL Ah! It's because I'm gay. Of course. I should've thought of that first. Narrow-minded twits.

RICHARD Oh, Michael don't be ridiculous. Nobody cares if you're gay. In fact, that's a plus!

MICHAEL Then it's the breakdown, isn't it? Oh, they never let you forget, do they? No. One nervous breakdown and suddenly you're a risk. I should've known.

RICHARD No, Michael, that's not it.

MICHAEL Ah! It was the second breakdown then. Huh? Of course! For Godssake, Richard, I'm well now. I was in therapy for a year! Was that all for nothing?

RICHARD Michael, it's none of those things. Believe me.

MICHAEL Really? It's not the drinking?

RICHARD No.

MICHAEL Not the temperament?

RICHARD No.

MICHAEL Not the breakdowns?

RICHARD No.

MICHAEL And not because I'm gay.

RICHARD No.

MICHAEL Oh, don't tell me it's something new. I'm running out of support groups.

RICHARD Michael, it's nothing like that. It's just that ... well, you're too well known.

MICHAEL What?

RICHARD You're too well known. The public is tired of you.

MICHAEL Tired? They're ... Who said? Did somebody take a poll?

RICHARD No, Michael, it's a sense. There's a sense in the land and the sense tells us that you're yesterday's news.

MICHAEL But ... but, I haven't been today's news yet. I've been struggling ever since I got into this damned business!

RICHARD No, that's not true. You've been on top.

MICHAEL I have?

RICHARD Yes.

MICHAEL When?

RICHARD You remember your second breakdown?

MICHAEL Yes?

RICHARD Then.

MICHAEL Then?

RICHARD You were in the headlines for weeks. "Stage Star Suffers Collapse." "Actor's Nerves Give Out." You were a household word.

MICHAEL I was in the hospital!

RICHARD But, you were a star! Unfortunately, as a result, people grew tired of hearing about you.

MICHAEL I was a star?

RICHARD The biggest.

MICHAEL And I missed it?

RICHARD So, you see, Michael, that's why you're going through a bumpy period right now. But it'll change. In a few years, you can stage a major comeback. People love that sort of thing. "Fading Star Returns. Picks Up Pieces of a Shattered Life." You'll grab the headlines again. Just give it a few years.

MICHAEL A few years? What am I supposed to do until then?

RICHARD Well, you'll just have to go on being that plumber's helper for a while.

MICHAEL Socket wrench!

RICHARD (*looking at this watch*) Oh, I have to run. We'll talk later.

MICHAEL But ...

RICHARD *(as he exits)* Take heart, Michael. And remember, no matter what happens tomorrow, you'll still have those days when you were king of the hill. Cherish them always, my friend. *(He exits into the theatre)*

MICHAEL I don't remember them! I was in group! I was ... *(to himself)* I was sharing experiences with substance abusers. Nymphomaniacs. A dry cleaner who thought he was Genghis Khan

*RUTH enters. She has been crying and is wiping her eye with a Kleenex. She crosses paths with MICHAEL. MICHAEL is almost numb, and RUTH on the verge of tears again.*

RUTH Hello.

MICHAEL Hello.

*MICHAEL keeps walking until RUTH calls to him.*

RUTH I wonder, would you have a cigarette I could have?

MICHAEL Hmm? Oh, yes.

*MICHAEL moves back to RUTH, taking out a pack of cigarettes.*

RUTH I don't smoke ordinarily, but ... well, for some reason I feel the urge tonight. *(taking a cigarette)* Thank you. I'm not sure I even know how to smoke. Silly, isn't it? A woman my age and I've never even had a cigarette. I guess there are a lot of things I haven't tried.

*MICHAEL holds a lighter out to Ruth.*

RUTH Thank you.

*Michael is not paying attention and he closes the lighter on the cigarette and puts them both back into his pocket.*

MICHAEL You ... you don't know me, do you?

RUTH Well, of course I do. We met earlier.

MICHAEL No, I mean, you don't know what I've done as far as my craft. My life's work.

RUTH You mean not counting the hardware commercials?

MICHAEL Yes. Not counting those.

RUTH Well, I'm afraid I don't. But, I've only just started going to the theatre recently. You see, I've ... well, I guess I've missed a lot.

MICHAEL And I've just had a man tell me that I'm too well known. Too well known. Not for my accomplishments, mind you, but for two harmless little breakdowns.

RUTH Oh, you're that one. Yes, I read about that.

MICHAEL You see? That's exactly what I mean. Everything else that I've done has gone unrecognized. Forgotten. Lear, Stanley Kowalski, my Cyrano. Gone. But get dressed up as a fool just once! Have a mental collapse or two. Do you have any idea what it's like to feel that you've wasted over twenty years of your life? No, of course you don't. I mean, you work and you work,

you give from the very depths of your bowels, hoping against hope for just an ounce of appreciation. Just an ounce! And what do you get?

RUTH Wood stain.

MICHAEL Exactly. Well, I'll show them. They can't dismiss Michael Craig that easily. I am going to be remembered. And not as some hardware huckster. Not as a victim of shattered nerves.

*TOM enters carrying a tray.*

MICHAEL No. No, they're going to remember me for what I truly am.

TOM *(holding his tray out to Michael.)* Cheese puff?

MICHAEL Stand aside, cretin! The time has come to seize the moment. I find my zenith doth depend upon a most auspicious star, whose influence if now court not, but omit, my fortunes will ever after droop! *(He exits)*

RUTH *(almost in tears to Tom.)* Everybody talks so nice around here.

*Lights down.*

## Act Two, Scene Two

*A few minutes prior to the curtain of the second act of "Whisper on the Wind." The theatre of the Charles Killian Theatre Noir Repertory House. As the scene, opens, JACK and CILLA are seated in the box ordinarily occupied by CILLA and RICHARD. JACK is eating his tortilla chips. On the set is a basket filled with ears of corn.*

JACK I don't know what it is, Cil. You know? I mean, just try and please some women. What does a man have to do? I bring her to a play. Buy her a nice anniversary gift, and she's still not happy. Tortilla chip?

CILLA No, thank you.

JACK Ah, I just can't figure it. What about you and Dick? Do you ever have this kind of problem?

CILLA Well, I don't...I mean, I don't think I'm hard to please, if that's what you mean.

JACK So, he does okay by you, does he?

CILLA For the most part, yes.

JACK For the most part?

CILLA Well, no relationship is perfect. I ...never mind.

JACK Hey, I understand. A little too personal, right? Forget I mentioned it.

CILLA I suppose he could be a little more attentive.

JACK Hmm?

CILLA It doesn't take much. Just some indication that you're in the other person's thoughts, that's all. Otherwise you're left to feel that you're all alone. And that's the worst kind of loneliness, isn't it? Being lonely in love?

JACK Right.

CILLA He can be quite romantic when he wants to be. I think that's one of the things I liked about him at first. He'd send me flowers. Surprise me with little gifts. He made me feel wanted. It was very romantic. And his wit. It just sparkled. We used to laugh constantly. But, over the years, the wit ... it's become acerbic. Like a weapon. And the romantic touches are now few and far between, and I guess I take that as a sign that ... No, I've said enough. Forgive me for going on like that.

JACK Hey, no problem. *(going back to his tortilla chips)*

CILLA *(after a beat)* And sexually he could be a little more aware of my needs.

JACK Come again?

CILLA I wish. Now, don't get me wrong. I mean, it's good. The sex. But, it could be better if he explored certain areas.

JACK Explored?

CILLA Yes. Am I being too open?

JACK Explored what?

CILLA Well, there are certain areas on a person's body that respond to the touch. I'm sure your wife has them too.

JACK Just the usual ones.

CILLA Well, perhaps you think it's just the usual ones. Perhaps you've never explored either. With me, it's my back. Right between the shoulder blades. And touched at just the right moment, it can be very inspiring.

JACK Uh-huh.

CILLA And Richard's never discovered that spot. Oh, I suppose I could tell him, but it's not the same when you have to tell a person, is it? It's much better when they stumble upon it in the heat of passion. With bodies entwined. Flesh against flesh..... I'm sorry. It's just that you've caught me at a vulnerable moment. I don't know, maybe it's the hormones. Please forget I ever said it.

JACK I'll do my best.

*RUTH enters from the audience and makes her way to their box onstage.*

JACK Oh, there's Ruth. I guess I'd better get over there.

*RICHARD enters the box.*

JACK Oh, hi Dick. She's all yours. I was just leaving. *(to CILLA)* You know what? You're okay after all. It was nice talkin' to you. *(putting his hand on her back in a friendly gesture, then realizing what he's done, pulling it away quickly and exiting.)*

RICHARD Well, I see the theatre's bumpkin warning system is on the fritz again. That's what I get for doing a piece about farmers. I should've known that it would be a veritable call to the trough for every dilettante swine within earshot.

CILLA So, I hope you're enjoying yourself.

RICHARD Oh, having the time of my life, dear, yes. Trying to convince the actors that we're a hit. That the audience loves the show. That our next stop is Broadway. I can't remember when I've had such a splendid outing.

CILLA Is that what you were doing with that Husniak girl?

RICHARD Yes. *(aside)* The conniving little trollop. *(scanning the audience)* Well, that's an encouraging sign. We only lost about half the audience at the interval.

CILLA Three-quarters.

RICHARD You know, I begged the author to let us do this thing straight through. I mean, why give them a chance to make a run for it?

CILLA Richard, do you remember the days when you used to send me flowers? And when you used to buy me those little gifts all the time, for no reason?

RICHARD Yes.

CILLA Whatever happened to those?

RICHARD Well, I assume the flowers died, dearest.

CILLA I was referring to those days.

RICHARD Ah. Well, I believe those are commonly known as the good old days.

CILLA But, why did they end?

RICHARD Good old days always end. That's the whole purpose. So we can have something to reflect fondly upon during the bad days.

CILLA Is that what we're doing now? Going through bad days?

RICHARD Well, that depends. If things get worse later on, then these will be good old days, won't they? It's a wonderful system really.

CILLA I don't see what's so wonderful about that. Living in the past? It seems a waste.

RICHARD Well, if that's all you've got.

CILLA But, what if there was something coming up in the future that would make the future days the good old days, and the old good old days just ordinary old days?

RICHARD Are you on some sort of medication I should know about?

*JACK makes his way to his seat.*

JACK Hi.

RUTH says nothing.

JACK You know I'm really looking forward to the rest of this thing. Should be a good second half.

RUTH Second act.

JACK What?

RUTH It's not a football game. It's divided into acts.

JACK I knew that. (*putting his arm on her chair and rubbing her back*) So, I've been thinking about Jackie coming to stay with us and ... well, if that's what you want then it's okay with me.

RUTH Well, it's not what I want.

JACK But, I thought you said ...

RUTH I said nothing of the kind. You just assumed I'd let her come back. Well, I won't. I'm tired of being the shoulder everyone leans on. I mean, who do I go to when I have problems? Hmm? No one. I have to take care of it myself and it's about time the kids learned to do the same. So, she's not coming home.

JACK Okay, fine.

RUTH I looked after those kids for almost twenty years. Now, I'm going to look after me. I ... What are you doing back there?

JACK (*pulling his hand away*) Nothing.

RUTH Well, stop it.

JACK Don't you like it?

RUTH What, being rubbed down like some Clydesdale? No.

JACK You mean it doesn't feel good?

RUTH I'm getting friction burn.

JACK Well, maybe I was rubbing too hard. I'll try it a little softer. (*rubbing again*)

RUTH Don't do it at all.

JACK Well, maybe somewhere else then. (*rubbing her leg*)

RUTH Stop it. What's gotten into you? Oh, now, look at that. You've given me static cling. (*smoothing the cling out of her dress*) Honestly.

CILLA I want to make things better for us, Richard.

RICHARD Why?

CILLA What do you mean why? I want us to be happy. Like we used to be. Maybe if we had something that would bring us closer together again. Like ... well, like a baby.

RICHARD Like a baby? And what would that be? A chimpanzee?

CILLA No, a baby. Maybe if we had a child. Maybe it would...

RICHARD Cilla, we've been over this a hundred times. Why do you insist on going on about it?

*The lights in the theatre start to dim signalling the start of the act.*

RICHARD Now, the second act is starting. Let's just sit back and watch my career go into the toilet, shall we?

CILLA Richard, I'm pregnant

*The lights go to black.*

CILLA Richard?

*The lights come up on the stage and dimly on the boxes. RICHARD is barely visible on the floor. CILLA is trying to help him up.*

CILLA Richard?

*LIBBY appears on stage, carrying a glass of lemonade. Meanwhile, CILLA has helped RICHARD back into his seat.*

LIBBY Oi' Daddy's been out in the hot sun so long it's made him powerful...powerful...Line?

RICHARD Pregnant?

LIBBY Pregnant. Bein' in heat all day does that to a person, so I figured I'd better bring him some cold lemonade to cool him off. *(setting the lemonade down and, sitting near the basket of corn, she begins to shuck it)*

RICHARD How could this happen?

CILLA Well, I didn't do it on purpose.

RICHARD Oh, I wouldn't put it past you. You've probably been planning this for months.

*CLAYTON enters RICHARD and CILLA's box. He is wearing his robe with just his boxer shorts underneath. He holds a handkerchief to his nose.*

CLAYTON Richard?

RICHARD Oh, not now Clayton, please. *(to CILLA)* I'll tell you this much.. *(to CLAYTON)* Clayton? What are you doing here? You're on!

CLAYTON He punched me. He punched me right on the nose.

RICHARD Who did?

CLAYTON Michael Craig. He stormed into my dressing room and punched me. And then, as I was lying there, he took my overalls.

RICHARD He what?

CLAYTON *(opening his robe)* Just as bold as brass, with no regard whatsoever for a person's modesty.*(noticing CILLA)* Hello Cilla.

CILLA *(staring at his shorts)* Clayton.

RICHARD So, where did he go?

CLAYTON I didn't see. I was hiding my face.

RICHARD Oh, for God..*(to CILLA)* You picked a fine time to get pregnant, didn't you?

CLAYTON What? You're with child?

CILLA *(smiling)* Yes.

CLAYTON Oh, Cilla. Congratulations.

*CILLA and CLAYTON hug.*

CLAYTON Such wonderful news. What are you hoping for?

RICHARD Clayton, will you get back on stage?

CLAYTON What, without a costume? How do you expect me to act without a costume?

MICHAEL *(off)* Missy Gal?

LIBBY Over here, Ol' Daddy.

RICHARD Oh dear God.

LIBBY I hope he's in a good mood, cause I'm afraid I got some news that he's not likely to take kindly to otherwise.

*MICHAEL enters wearing the overalls. His bow tie is visible still. LIBBY doesn't see him as she reaches for a glass of lemonade.*

LIBBY I made you some lemonade Ol' Daddy. Just the way you like it.

*LIBBY turns to hand the lemonade to Ol' Daddy. When she sees MICHAEL, she freezes. MICHAEL takes the lemonade from her. LIBBY doesn't move.*

MICHAEL Thank you, darlin'. *(taking a sip of lemonade)*

JACK That's Handy Randy.

MICHAEL Ahhh. T'ain't nothin' as satisfyn' as freshly squeezed fruit.

RICHARD From the horse's mouth.

MICHAEL You know, Missy Gal. I got a feelin' that we're gonna be blessed with a plentiful crop this year and that's gonna ease our burden considerable. I only wish your Mama could be around to savour it with us.

CLAYTON Well, I don't particularly care for that accent. *(moving over to MICHAEL's box and sitting)*

MICHAEL You look troubled, Missy Gal. Is there somethin' you'd be wantin' to tell your Ol' Daddy?

*LIBBY doesn't answer.*

MICHAEL Missy Gal?

RICHARD You know what this is? (*indicating the stage*) This? (*indicating CILLA*) You? Everything? I'm being punished for something I've done in a previous life. My God, it must've been something unspeakable.

MICHAEL I say, is there somethin' you'd be wantin' to tell Ol' Daddy? Anything?

*LIBBY is still frozen. MICHAEL throws the glass of lemonade in her face. LIBBY faints and falls to the floor.*

RICHARD Pontius Pilate. I must've been Pontius Pilate.

*MICHAEL leans over LIBBY and gives her a couple of little taps on the cheek to try and revive her. Then, he reels back, about to give her a big smack.*

TOM (*entering from the audience and making his way up on stage as he speaks*) As a matter of fact, there is somethin', Ol' Daddy. I got a feelin' too. There's a change comin' over me. A feelin' of wanderlust.

RICHARD (*standing*) Cilla, could I have the car keys please?

CILLA Shhh!

RICHARD sits.

TOM I tried to resist the hankerin', but it was more than I could overcome, so this mornin' I went and bought myself a ticket on the Greyhound. I'm leavin', Ol' Daddy. Come sun-up tomorrow, I'll be nothin' more than a whisper on the wind.

JACK Ahhhh!

MICHAEL I ... I can't believe what I'm hearin' out of your mouth.

RICHARD You're not alone.

MICHAEL How can you do this to your Ol' Daddy? What kinda girl are you?

TOM I know it's puttin' a bruise on your heart Ol' Daddy, but you gotta understand. I ... (*moving toward MICHAEL and stumbling over LIBBY's legs*) I got no future on this farm. I think it's about time that I struck out on my own and made somethin' of myself 'sides a farm girl. I mean, I see how you and Mama used to be so much in love and I'd like to have that kind of sparkin' kinship with a man of my own.

MICHAEL So, it's a man you're after. Well, there are plenty of fine young boys hereabouts. Good strong farm boys. (*moving away from TOM*)

TOM Ol' Daddy, I don't want a farm boy. (*following MICHAEL*) I want a man who can ... (*stumbling over LIBBY's legs again*) Shit. A man who can show me new things. Show me what livin's about. What lovin's about. A man who can make a woman out of me.

CLAYTON Actually, Richard, the lad's quite good, isn't he?

*From the darkness, a member of the stage crew reaches out, grabs LIBBY by the hands, and slowly drags her off the stage. TOM continues to speak as LIBBY is being dragged off. MICHAEL watches her go in stunned silence.*

TOM So, whether you be thinkin' that it's wrong or right, it won't make no never mind. A girl's got to be doin' what a girl's got to be doin'. And whether you believe it or not Ol' Daddy, I think Mama woulda gimme her blessin'.

*MICHAEL doesn't answer but stares off to where LIBBY has just been dragged.*

TOM Ol' Daddy? Did you hear what I said? I said I think Mama woulda gimme her blessin'.

MICHAEL Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and she said thou wast my daughter!

TOM Huh?

MICHAEL I have done nothing, but in care of thee. Of thee my dear one. Thee my daughter, who art ignorant of what thou art, nought knowing of whence I am, nor that I am more better than Prospero, master of a full poor cell, and thy no greater father.

CILLA What's that?

RICHARD "The Tempest," my love.

CILLA Well, what's he doing?

RICHARD Having another breakdown, I suspect. *(standing)*

CILLA Where are you going?

RICHARD To bring the lights down. *(He exits.)*

TOM I believe you misunderstood me, Ol' Daddy. I said ...

MICHAEL Silence! One more word shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What, an advocate for an imposter? Hush!

JACK This is gettin' good.

MICHAEL Our revels now are ended. These our actors, as I foretold you, were all spirits, and are melted into air. Into thin air, and like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself. Yea, Missy Gal, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, and like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

*The lights come down on the set. JACK, RUTH, CLAYTON and CILLA applaud. The lights come up on the set. TOM is making his way, almost sneaking, offstage. When the lights come up he stops. MICHAEL steps forward and takes a deep bow and holds his hand out to acknowledge TOM, who takes a tentative bow. MICHAEL motions for TOM to come to him and take his hand. TOM does and they both bow. Then MICHAEL whirls TOM around to his other side and they both bow again. MICHAEL whirls TOM across him again and they bow once more, TOM very much into it now. They wave and begin to exit. TOM goes offstage but MICHAEL stops, trots back and takes one final bow. He blows a kiss and begins the exit again. Just before he exits, he turns one*

more time to wave to the audience. RICHARD enters, puts his arm around MICHAEL, and like a caring father, leads MICHAEL offstage. Lights down.

Act Two, Scene Three

About fifteen minutes later. The stage door of the Charles Killian Theatre Noir Repertory House. CILLA enters through the door. She is wearing her overcoat. She waits there a moment, taking in the night air. RICHARD enters. He too is wearing his overcoat. He stands a moment and looks around.

RICHARD Well, my love, the end of another day. Isn't it amazing how the night just carries on no matter what tragedy befalls it? You would expect the world to come to a screeching halt in such instances, wouldn't you? But, it doesn't. It just wends its way towards the next calamity-filled day. Like a train bound for hell.

CILLA How's Michael?

RICHARD Oh, coming along. As they were loading him into the ambulance he kept shouting "Not the toolbox. Please don't put me in the toolbox." Of course, this will most certainly postpone that comeback for a few years.

CILLA And the girl?

RICHARD Libby? Oh, she's fine. Although she's developed quite a nasty twitch.

*TOM enters through the front doors, wearing a windbreaker and carrying a gym bag.*

RICHARD Ah. Finished signing autographs already, are we?

TOM Listen, I'm sorry about what I did in there. But I thought I was helping. I really did. I mean, he was all alone up there. The show was going nowhere.

RICHARD Yes, well, thank God you were there to put it back on track.

TOM Well, you won't have to worry about it happening again. I just got fired. And I guess once word about this gets out, my acting career will be finished too. Even before it starts.

RICHARD Well, all things considered, you didn't do badly I suppose. You remembered more lines than Libby did.

TOM Yeah. Well, if you ever need any carpeting, look me up. I'll be at Daffy Delaney's.

RICHARD You mean you're giving up?

TOM Well, like I said, who's gonna wanna hire me after this? Maybe I'm better off selling carpets anyway. I mean, it's steady money, right? I'll see ya. *(starting to exit)*

RICHARD Wait a minute.

*TOM stops. RICHARD takes a pen and a piece of paper out of his pocket and begins to write.*

RICHARD I don't know why I'm doing this. Maybe I have a soft spot for young actors. Heaven knows there's no other reason why I should. *(handing TOM the slip of paper)* Here. I want you to call this number first thing Monday morning. It's the number of a friend of mine.

TOM A director?

RICHARD A contractor. He's renovating his house. Maybe you can sell him some carpeting.

TOM (*disappointed*) Oh. Thank you.

RICHARD Don't mention it.

*TOM begins to leave.*

RICHARD Oh, by the way. November third, a Monday, what are you doing?

TOM Sir?

RICHARD We begin rehearsals for "The Tempest," November third. A ten a.m. call. I assume you can make it?

TOM Uh ...

RICHARD Well, come on. Speak up, speak up.

TOM Yeah, yeah. I can make it. I mean, I might have to move a few things around, but yeah, I can be there.

RICHARD Fine. See you then.

TOM Right. Thanks.

*TOM exits.*

TOM (*off*) Yahoooo!

CILLA Well, that was uncharacteristically kind of you.

RICHARD Well, he was only trying to help. And in spite of everything, he is a nice fellow I suppose. Makes me wonder what well, what a son of mine would turn out like.

CILLA A miserable son of a bitch I would guess.

RICHARD Not necessarily. I mean, after all, the child wouldn't be born with my disposition. He could be steered in an entirely different direction. It's all in the upbringing.

CILLA Oh, and you know a lot about raising a child, do you?

RICHARD Well, how difficult can it be? I mean, lesser men than I have raised offspring. Phillip Endersby has two of them! And if he can do it with his limited talents then surely I could foster a dozen moppets.

CILLA Richard, are you saying you want this child now?

RICHARD Well ...as long as he behaves himself, yes. I mean, I won't put up with any of this crying business or crawling around and getting into things.

CILLA Richard, before you get too far ahead of yourself here, hadn't you better think about us?

RICHARD What about us?

CILLA Our relationship. The way we're self-destructing.

RICHARD We're not self-destructing.

CILLA Well, what would you call it? At each other's throats day and night. Mistrusting one another. The constant bickering with no concern for feelings. What does that sound like to you?

RICHARD Love.

CILLA Well, it's not my idea of love. When I think of love, I think of how Tennyson describes it. Or Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

RICHARD Oh, Cilla. They're writers. You can't expect them to know what real life is about.

CILLA Occasionally it's about romance, Richard. A loving word here and there. A touch. A look. A smile.

RICHARD I'm sorry, but I'm not a romantic.

CILLA You have your moments. And, I mean, if you string enough of those moments together, you could be quite lovable.

RICHARD What?

CILLA Yes, you could.

RICHARD Cilla, I would hardly think of myself as lovable.

CILLA Nobody would think of you as lovable. But then, nobody has seen as many sides of you as I have. You're a man that I once loved very much, Richard, and one that I wish dearly to love again. But, I can't wait forever.

RICHARD You really think I could be lovable?

CILLA Yes.

RICHARD Well, why didn't you tell me this before?

CILLA Because it was only me before. I was willing to give it time. But, now there's someone else who needs you too.

RICHARD Lovable, huh? Well. It would add another dimension to my character. Nothing wrong with that. A little depth? All right, fine then. Count me in.

CILLA No, Richard. It's not your decision. It's mine. It's up to me.

RICHARD Oh. Well, what do you think? Is it doable?

CILLA Well, you haven't started stringing any of those moments together yet.

RICHARD And how am I supposed to do that?

CILLA Well, some affection might be a good start. A kiss?

RICHARD Oh. A kiss. Of course. Right. Move in slowly to her. Look into her eyes.

CILLA Will you stop directing??

RICHARD Sorry.

*They kiss.*

RICHARD Well?

CILLA That's one. *(She exits.)*

RICHARD *(To himself)* I could have done that better. *(Calling to Cilla.)* Can we go back and do that again please? We'll take it from 'loveable'. *(He exits.)*

*RUTH enters wearing her overcoat. CLAYTON enters through the stage door, wearing his overcoat. He starts to exit.*

RUTH Good night.

CLAYTON Hmm? Oh, it's you. Yes, good night indeed. And you, my lady, were the high point.

RUTH Oh. Uh ... likewise.

CLAYTON And where is your, uh ... .

RUTH Escort? He had to make a stop at the men's room

CLAYTON I see.

RUTH You know, the beer and all.

CLAYTON Quite.

RUTH Listen, it may be out of place for me to say this, but I'm sorry about ...

CLAYTON Oh, don't be sorry. It's only a play. By tomorrow evening it'll all be forgotten, and we'll be back onstage giving it our all for an entirely new audience. That's the wonderful thing about the theatre. One night can be so unforgiving, so odious as to make one cast off all hope. But, then the next night it favours you with a second chance. And a third and even a fourth. So, don't be sorry. No, just be thankful that we're in the acting profession and not aircraft maintenance. *(kissing her hand)* Farewell. *(beginning to exit)*

RUTH I meant I was sorry I had an escort.

*CLAYTON stops.*

CLAYTON ....Madam, you have made an aging, ridiculous old Romeo feel very very special. Thank you.

*CLAYTON exits. JACK enters wearing his overcoat.*

JACK Okay, all set?

RUTH Yes.

JACK Nice night, isn't it?

RUTH Hm-hmm.

JACK Hey, come on, Ruthie, you're not still mad, are you?

RUTH No.

JACK Yes, you are.

RUTH I'm not.

JACK Look, you don't live with a woman for twenty-five years and not know when she needs cheering up.

RUTH No? Well, there seems to be a lot of other things you've missed after twenty-five years.

JACK Okay, so maybe I'm not the most attentive guy in the world.

RUTH No, you're certainly not that.

JACK And maybe I don't show you enough consideration.

RUTH No.

JACK And maybe I'm not that cultured.

RUTH No.

JACK And maybe I ...

RUTH Please, Jack. Enough cheering up.

JACK But, maybe I can change.

RUTH Why would you want to?

JACK I don't know. For you, I guess.

RUTH For me?

JACK Sure. I mean, you know, you're my wife, and ... and I don't want you to think that I don't care or that you're alone or something. You know? Lonely in love.

RUTH ...Who have you been talking to?

JACK Come on, Ruthie. I mean it. Maybe they're not my words exactly, but I still mean them.

RUTH Well. I don't know what to say, Jack. It's hard to believe that you're about to change just like that after all these years.

JACK Well, it won't be just like that. It'll be kind of gradual. And besides, I'm not gonna have to change that much, right? I mean, it's not like I'm a total loss here, huh?

RUTH No. No, you're not a total loss.

JACK All right then. There you go.

RUTH Oh, Jack. Maybe it's not you at all. Maybe it's me. I don't know. Maybe I'm going through some sort of mid-life crisis.

JACK Didn't you already go through that?

RUTH When?

JACK That time you bought that black underwear.

RUTH No, that was a mistake. The box said white.

JACK Well, you wore it.

RUTH Well, I couldn't return it. It was a sale item.

JACK I kinda liked it.

RUTH You didn't say so.

JACK I didn't want you to think I was a pervert.

RUTH Jack, I've lived with you for twenty-five years. I know you're not a pervert. You're not anything close to a pervert.

JACK Thanks.

RUTH Oh, why did this have to happen on our anniversary? And our silver anniversary at that. This is supposed to be a memorable night.

JACK Don't worry about it. We've still got the golden anniversary coming up. Huh? Don't we?

RUTH ...Maybe.

JACK Maybe?

RUTH Oh, all right. Yes.

JACK You see? And we'll make the next twenty-five years even better. And this is a good start, you know? Exposing me to the theatre like this?

RUTH No, I shouldn't have done that. I should've known you wouldn't like it.

JACK But, I did. Yeah, I really got into it. It was like you said. It was magic. All those lights, everybody working together like that. And the story? Boy, that twist at the end where the girl died. I mean, it was exciting. It was inspiring.

RUTH Oh, for heaven's sake, Jack, it's only a play. Now, give me a kiss.

JACK What?

RUTH A kiss.

JACK What, here? On the street?

RUTH No, here. On the lips.

*JACK looks around, then kisses Ruth. Then he grabs her behind as the kiss becomes more passionate.*

RUTH Oooh, Jack.

JACK You like that?

RUTH Well, of course I like it. Come on, let's get to the car. *(She exits.)*

JACK *(to himself)* Well, whaddya know? It was staring me in the face the whole time.

*(JACK exits.)*

LIGHTS DOWN. THE END