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10 February 2010

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52 pages

very badly under?

ONE

THE SCENE opens on the empty dressing room of MARVIN JAMES at the Vic in the Strand. Our first impression is of a bright extravagant show-biz version of a dressing room that might be suitable for a musical, and indeed it is a surprise that MARVIN doesn't open with a song. Being the size of a stage it is equipped as one, with a slight rake and a sophisticated light and sound console, the whole space having once been a rehearsal room frequently hired out to ballet companies..

Downstage actor's right there is a dressing table with the conventional dressing room mirror framed with naked light bulbs, except that there is no glass in the frame and we see MARVIN JAMES through it.

On the dressing table are two wigs, one grey (for the play which MARVIN won't dare name but which takes place in Scotland) and the other a deep blue-black (for HAMLET). They are on mounts.

At MARVIN's right hand is a further table containing the elaborate lights and sound console, together with a land-line phone, a mobile phone, a loose radio mike and unopened letters.

This spoiled man is thus connected to every part of the theatre below him. His swivel chair is a soft leather article coloured burgundy.

At roughly centre stage there is a settee partly covered with play scripts which can easily be thrown off if sexual dalliance is scripted, and there is for this purpose a thick outsize blanket and an ample supply of gaudy cushions.

The staircase entrance to all this is actor's right, its doors made of double-glazed plate glass.

Upstage there is a wide screened-off area with an inner room whose wide window looks out on rooftops and affords a view---to those who go close to it---of the street into which the backstage entrance far below abuts. This area consists of an unseen kitchen, bathroom and changing room.

Downstage actor's left there is a cupboard in which MARVIN keeps certain props of a theatrically historical value.

When the action begins the stage is empty.

Then the staircase door is pushed open slowly by a cane.

The cane is followed by a yellow-gloved hand and an elegantly cut sleeve owned by MARVIN JAMES, a handsome man in his (to say the least) early middle age. He is dressed urbanely in a striped suit and his hat is set at an angle last seen in Jack Buchanan's day.

He walks to the console and deftly touches a button with his stick to cut off the stage noises and with another touch to bring up the theme music from one of his musical shows, *May Bugs*. This music has a highly rhythmic, dramatic aura like Brian Eno's (*The Jezebel Spirit* and *Help me Somebody* are useful

models).

MARVIN at once goes into his admittedly extraordinary dance routine from that show. We don't expect such expertise when combined, as it is, with a suave dated appearance. Soon his steps pick up to make a real performance.

At the end he switches the sound off and deposits his stick in a rack for that purpose near the door and then sits down at the dressing table, switching on the lights so that we see him dazzlingly framed.

He finds, as usual, a copy of *The Times* before him and with astonishing rapidity races through every page and every column and then in fury screws it up into a ball throws it in the wastepaper basket.

He returns to perfect calm at once, gazing at himself with the detachment of an actor who has been through almost everything. Just as he begins making himself up the land-line phone rings. He takes no notice. It stops ringing. He pencils in wrinkles. He leaves this to try on his wig for the *Scottish Play*, as he calls it.

The phone rings again. He nonchalantly fits the wig. He returns to the wrinkle pencil, tipping the phone deftly off the hook. There is the faint crackle of a voice at the other end. As he paints the face in we see that he clearly favours a *Henry Irving* view of the *Scottish Gentleman* as sardonic and evil. He then dries his hands and picks up the phone.

MARVIN: Hullo?.....Yes.....You what? Could you repeat that?.....You want a pair of my socks?.....No you can't, you can bloody well sweat in your own! What an idea, collecting great actors' socks! How did you get my number anyway?.....What?.....Well why in the hell didn't you say so in

the first place?.....Ah, you've just had a shock...But when were you anything else? And when were box office receipts anything but down?.....Listen, I told you ages ago, they'll never take another play by the Old Chap this year, particularly after that lousy Lear. I was all for doing a Coward revival.....Yes I know there've been three this year but they are safe. Having once filled the Henry Miller theatre with Present Laughter I know what I'm talking about.....It had nothing to do with your direction, a Coward play directs itself! They were touting tickets at hundreds of dollars! Forty percent of my capacity was black, I refer to the colour of their skin. Coward was pure Wasp until I came along!.....What? It was paper? I've never had paper in a show of mine, you're delirious!.....Well of course it's going to be paper for The Play, we'll be lucky to sell the first row! It makes me sick, doing The Play. He's such a miserable old bugger. Murdering people in their beds and getting on his wife's nerves and having nightmares at the dinner table. I know what I'd have told him to do with that brief candle if I'd been his wife! Anyway, what are the takings?.....Oh my God! I shan't go on! Full dress rehearsal this evening and miserable takings, I won't do it!.....What's that? I'm upset because The Times didn't mention me this morning? I've told you repeatedly I don't give a damn about The Times, I don't even take it let alone read it (with a bland glance at the wastepaper basket). As for you, you're sore because you can't direct, it's simply not within your range of gifts, it never has been. I shall never forget the time I stood behind no fewer than fifteen armour-clad henchmen at the Final Dress and your little voice comes piping up from the stalls---'Marvin's completely masked!'. Masked, I was obliterated! Nobody could see the top of my head, let alone hear me speak! That's not blocking, that's blundering!.....I see, you're too distraught to speak are you? And you've heard it all before have you?.....Your who? Your *ex-wife*? I didn't even know you were married.....She what?.....Well of course she left you, you got a divorce didn't you?.....You went back together?.....You married her twice? And what's the state of play at the moment?.....She ran out of the house---?

LIZZY TURNDALE enters right, a cup of coffee in her hand. She is a bright attractive young woman with wide black eyes and she is in a very fine costume.

She stands there uncertainly, glancing about the dressing room in an inquisitive,

even insatiable manner.

MARVIN (cont.) To *what*---bring me a cup of coffee. Come here? What the devil for? Because she's in love with me? Oh for God's sake man they all say that! Anyway I'm not responsible for your domestic skirmishing. As far as I'm concerned you've cooked your bloody goose this morning---you've lost your male lead in one fell swoop! I'm certainly not going to play to a 55% house. But I'll tell you what I *am* going to do. I'm going to play Hamlet.

LIZZY nearly drops the coffee with surprise. He slams the phone down and only now seems to realise what he has just said. He leans back in his burgundy chair gazing before him in a dream.

MARVIN (to himself, mumbling) Ha, are you honest?

LIZZY: Me?

MARVIN (jumping out of his skin) Who the---?

He stares at her, then at the cup she is holding. He rises and courteously takes it from her, then deposits it on his dressing table.

Suddenly he turns and grabs her. She is about to scream but he puts his hand over her mouth.

MARVIN (cont.) Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?
(Breaking from her) No dammit, it just won't do!

He returns to his dressing table sulkily and resumes his making up. But suddenly he tears off his wig and begins creaming out his wrinkles.

He puts on a smoother foundation and is quickly a younger if not young man. He

tries on the blue-black wig and leans back with some satisfaction.

LIZZY's astonishment gives way to steady curiosity. She sits down quietly on the settee.

MARVIN (cont.) Whose idea was that, bringing me coffee? Not our director's by any chance? Not Nigel Burbage's, your *husband's*? What a ridiculous idea to assume the name of an Elizabethan actor-manager, don't you think so? Burbage my foot! (He sips the coffee) You've put sugar in. (Resuming his making up) Never put sugar in Marvin James's coffee. Put it in his tea. Not his coffee. They know it at the Savoy and the Alconquin but in the theatre where he's been resident star for fifteen years news is apparently slow to travel. (Without looking in her direction) Why are you here? Wheedled your way into the job to get my autograph or something? Are you after my socks? Chap on the phone this morning was after my socks. You have nice tits, I'll say that.

LIZZY: Me?

MARVIN: She speaks but one word---`me'. (Turning to her with a leer) Me, me, me, me!

LIZZY: Who the bloody hell do you think you are?

MARVIN: Oh my God not that line! (Continuing his make-up) Not after Eliza Doolittle! What's your name anyway? I mean your maiden one.

LIZZY: Lizzy Turndale.

A stunned silence. He turns towards her slowly.

MARVIN: No one's called Lizzy Turndale. It's impossible. And you've made a bad thing worse by abbreviating the Elizabeth, don't you see that? However, it's the turn in Turndale I dislike most. Turning round, turning away, turning up, turning out, it's all bad news, reminding one of funerals, Wednesday matinees and Number Two tours, not to say the closing of shows on second nights. It spells something rather worse

than doom---the drab. Elizabeth has been overdone anyway---two queens and Taylor. No, Lizzy Turndale's completely self-defeating. What's your real name?

LIZZY: Jean Stokes.

MARVIN: That makes me like Lizzy Turndale.

LIZZY (gazing at him) It's exactly what he said. You're completely unreal.

MARVIN (unruffled) Who said?

LIZZY: Nigel Burbage.

MARVIN: Who's he?

LIZZY: He's my husband and he's just directed you in Mac---!

MARVIN (jumping up in wild panic) WHAT did you say? Oh my God! You said it! You said the word (dragging her up from the settee and pulling her roughly to the staircase door)!

MARVIN: Get out, go on! (Pushing her out and closing the door smartly, then at the top of his voice) KNOCK! KNOCK THREE TIMES!

LIZZY (off) What?

MARVIN: What, what get off the pot, this is a matter of life and death! Knock on the fucking door three times!

LIZZY knocks on the door. He is vastly relieved.

MARVIN (cont.) You may come in.

She reenters.

MARVIN (cont.) Now turn round three times. Turn! QUICK!

He whirls her round three times.

MARVIN (cont., hurrying back to his dressing table) I'll have to tell Nigel about this. It'll kill him. In fact we can't go on. (Grabbing the phone) Oh my God. We'll have to do Brighton and all stations to Richmond, oh my God (dialling), I told him we'd never be able to open cold like this. Nigel? The woman, God knows who picked her up for the kitchen, she came in here and named the fucking Play...Yes, she actually named it! She'll be whistling next, the stupid bitch! I sent her outside but it's a bad omen Nigel and together with your news of a poor house I don't think we can open, anyway I've never thought that opening cold was a good idea on the Play, I think we'd better open at Brighton---trust *you* to send your wife up!What?.....(aghast) She's an---an---

Very quietly he puts the phone down, his eyes still on her. He leans back in his chair and takes a leisurely sip of coffee. Then he gets up and approaches her.

MARVIN (cont., quietly) So you're an actress. (Putting his nose within an inch of hers) (As she is about to speak) You came here on the pretext of bringing me my morning coffee and what you really wanted was to put a bad spell on our production, thus ruining your husband. (Remembering) Hey, wait a minute! Didn't he tell me you were in love with me? (Sitting down by her) Now let's go into this methodically. What's the *real* reason you're here?

LIZZY: I'm in love with you.

MARVIN: Quite normal, but why did you name The Scottish Play?

LIZZY: Because you don't want to play in it.

MARVIN (rather taken aback) That's perfectly true. Now why don't I want to do it?

LIZZY: Mostly I think because you don't know how to play him.

MARVIN: I don't *want* to play him.

LIZZY: Because you can't. You're too old-fashioned.

MARVIN: Old fashioned---I'm the most avant garde man in the business, students travel from all over the world to see the man who plays the Old

Chap as you've never seen him played before, as a new event!

LIZZY: But all that's old hat!

MARVIN: Avant garde means ahead of the time!

LIZZY: People don't even use the word avant garde any more. They don't know what it means! And all you do is turn plays on their head---you make Julius Caesar a fairy, Othello a dwarf and deathly pale and in love with a Venetian hooker called Desdemona, and the top brass don't like it, your males always have to be in drag and your females in high boots carrying whips. It's so obvious!

MARVIN (gasping for air, hardly audible) But everyone knows---my characterisations are diaphonous, pellucid---words used by the critics---you see the Old Chap's plays work far better for the surface being flawed, I play against the character, don't you see that?

LIZZY (with a touch of compassion) But you've never had a really new idea. Romeo behaves as if he hates Juliet and sneers his way through the tender lines and in such a rush you can't understand a word, Hamlet says everything like he's in a pub reciting the sports section, Lear's just had his twenty-first birthday and has a thing about being old and his daughters are his sisters and they egg him on to think he really is old and he screwed his mother and by the end no wonder one of the critics said this was the Shakespeare interpretation of all time and they looked forward to Lord and Lady Macbeth as two queens, Hamlet as his father's ghost and A Midsummer Night's Dream as an ice drama.

MARVIN (weakly) As a matter of fact I did have in mind---he was a bloody awful critic by the way, drank himself to death---I did have in mind Lady Mac as a dike and Mac himself AC DC and they hire somebody else to play Lady Mac and she takes the rap for the murders because they both want the next king to be a woman.

A puzzled silence, shared by him.

LIZZY: But don't you see, everybody's ignorant now? You can't stand Shakespeare on his head if they know nothing about him on his feet! I mean, they want to know what the words and they don't get it! And all you do is mess about with the business! If the stage directions say

whisper you've got to scream, when they say creep along like a sleepwalker you run! It's like the Royal Court fifty years ago, all you needed to do to get an audience was put your hand in a pram and bring it out with shit all over it---but the list of outrages has been exhausted Marvin!

MARVIN (jumping up with a scream) NOT MARVIN! You will not call me Marvin! I am Mr. James!

LIZZY: Conversation doesn't move with you, does it? (Opening her eyes) That's what Nigel said. It just goes put-put-putting on but the vehicle remains stationary.

MARVIN (very quietly) Then why are you in love with me?

LIZZY: The walls could crack, trees could grow through the auditorium, rats could overrun the dressing rooms and every other man and woman could be dead but you'll still be up here recording yourself and looking in that damned mirror and seeing your audience through it.

MARVIN: But my acting, you must be in love with that too!

LIZZY: You see? You can't be other than yourself.

MARVIN (abjectly submitting to his need for an immediate answer) You won't tell me if you're in love a little bit with my acting??

LIZZY: I think it's because you never change, never listen. But then the sun doesn't look at me or listen to me but I love to bask in it. (Gazing at him with tenderness) But you can't be anything except yourself, can you? If the earth shrivelled up you'd go on being yourself as a little spot of grease.

MARVIN: Tell me how I could be other than myself?

LIZZY: All my life you've captivated me. In the end people don't care if Shakespeare's been shot to hell, it's your movements and your voice that count, you could be saying hickery dickery dock for an hour and forty minutes, nobody would notice the difference.

MARVIN: Do I look old, is that your complaint?

LIZZY (sighing) You even talk old, like it was 1900. (Looking round) Do you know what Nigel calls this dressing room?

MARVIN: Why don't you tell me?

LIZZY: The Vic Upstairs. The successful stuff takes place at the Vic downstairs while Marvin jerks himself off upstairs. Shall I tell you something? There's an audience downstairs at this moment you wouldn't believe. There isn't an empty seat. And a man's on th stage talking to them. Do you know why they're there? I mean it isn't a play they're looking, just a man with a radio mike clipped on his shirt. Do you know who he is?

MARVIN: Not an idea? But I would hope they're being the play that's supposed to open tomorrow night---I mean lots of schools are invited---perfectly usual.

LIZZY: They were all grown up. (A silence) Have I hurt you?

MARVIN (quietly) The question isn't that. (Almost to himself) It's how I'm going to hurt *you*.

LIZZY (this passes her by) If you just played *straight*---! But you play for dirty laughs when you're supposed to be sterling noble, you're high tragedy when it's knockabout farce! Your walk and your voice and your fascinating way of being absolutely nothing---that's what used to draw the crowds! They were never a real theatre audience but who cares about that? You don't *need* to have an inside.

He fixes his eyes on her for a long time, during which she fidgets uncertainly, and then he rises briskly.

MARVIN (cont.) Well, to work!

He goes to a drawer at his dressing table and seizes a bunch of keys then walks smartly to the staircase door and locks it. There are three locks and he does the job slowly and precisely.

MARVIN (cont., as he walks back to her, holding up the keys) For the insurance people, you know. They insist on three locks. Now, Miss Turnout (sitting close to her), I think we can agree on one thing---that I have to change. Isn't that what you've been suggesting? A rebirth? And then we have to remember that you too have a career. And that needs a brush up, doesn't it?

LIZZY: Well---

MARVIN (screaming with quite horrible force) IS THAT RIGHT?

She jumps and backs off.

MARVIN (cont., in a normal voice) It's why you came here isn't it? Let me tell you something about actors---everything about them is autobiographical, even their tears at somebody's grave are rehearsed! First of all are you *vulgar* enough for the stage?

She is silent.

MARVIN (cont.) Do something vulgar.

She suddenly puts two fingers in her mouth meaning to produce a deafening whistle.

MARVIN (cont., gripping her round the throat in horror) Stop, stop! That's another no no, whistling! I'd have to send you out again, turn you round three times! How is it you know *nothing* about the theatre---eh (tightening his grip), eh, *eh*?

She manages to scream so loud that he loosens his grip at once.

MARVIN (cont.) What an extraordinary scream. Where were you?

LIZZY: I was saying---

MARVIN: No for God's sake I mean what drama school?

LIZZY: Oh, RADA.

- MARVIN: I thought that scream was RADA. I'll also say this. For somebody married to Nigel Burbage you're remarkably intelligent. Not that intelligence goes with acting awfully well.
- LIZZY: It certainly doesn't get in *your* way.
- MARVIN: And your repartee's good. Talent for improvisation---in the event of Marvin James ghosting. You see, my dear, I'm going to call this Operation Rebirth. No doubt you think you'll be leaving here for lunch. Nothing of the sort. You'll be lucky to be out of here in a week. You're going to pay for that line about intelligence not getting in my way, I'll have your guts on display for it.
- LIZZY: Listen---
- MARVIN: Now don't start that television-response stuff, you'll be saying let me out of here in a minute.
- LIZZY (jumping up) Let me out of here I've got claustrophobia!
- MARVIN (pushing her roughly back into her seat) The idea *isn't* to keep you in, Miss Turnout---it's to keep others out! You see, my dear, I'm going to take you hostage.
- He returns to his dressing table and resumes making up.
- MARVIN (cont.) You're going to be my Ophelia. It's a good part for you because it isn't really a part at all. So you're going to play it for sex.
- LIZZY: I always do.
- MARVIN: They denied Hamlet to me as a young man. They ridiculed the idea when, in my early forties, I was still eligible for the part. They said I was too big in the middle area. Which was true but not any longer. These days I'm prime Lear material, *thin in the shank*, I shall give them a more vital Hamlet than they've ever seen. They say a woman can't play Juliet until she's too old for it, the same is true of Hamlet, Miss Turnout. My mother, I mean the woman playing Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, will probably be half my age but she shall be seen as a crone next to my adolescence.

- LIZZY: Don't think you're frightening me, all you do is talk.
- MARVIN: You don't witness me at this moment removing Mac and replacing him with Hamlet? You don't hear me say Mac shamelessly, thus joining you in the clever bad spell you put upon our production almost the moment you walked in? You've given me courage my girl! (Busy with his face) And I can see you're a marvellous fuck. But why, you will ask, make up as Hamlet two months before rehearsals can possibly begin, and when the opening of *The Scottish Play* is billed for the coming Thursday, namely tomorrow? Because this is REVOLUTION my dear. Talking time is over. The *real* screaming will begin. And you will provide it.
- LIZZY: Nigel says that actors never commit crimes, they're not interested in anybody enough to murder them.
- MARVIN: The first part's right but not the second. They don't murder because they murder a thousand times onstage and know what a bore it all is compared with a nice cup of coffee or a bounce in bed. Don't worry, my dear, it's all going to be acted.
- LIZZY: And the endless speeches. He mentioned those.
- MARVIN: This time he's going to listen to every word. (With sudden earnestness) I hope he's still in love with you? A little bit?
- His earnestness sweeps her out of her scepticism.
- LIZZY: Oh yes! He knows I only run after men who can do without me, that's why he divorced me, to show he can do without me, which he can't.
- MARVIN: So he will hear your screams with a measure of concern!
- He dials a number on the land-line phone.
- MARVIN (cont.) Nigel. I have your ex-wife here. Listen carefully.

MARVIN beckons LIZZY towards him.

She comes. He suddenly seizes her and manages to grip her so that his arm is locked round her neck from behind.

MARVIN (cont.) I intend either to strangle her or plunge a dagger in her neck. I haven't decided which---you may take this as a joke if you like but I warn you she may be found dead. If I were you I'd remember your own words, Marvin James is a madman, you addressed it to my mother, who agreed..

He tightens the grip and she screams frantically.

MARVIN (cont.) Did you recognise the voice? But we can do better than that!

He lays the phone on the dressing table and releases her, leaving her staggering about clutching her throat. He goes briskly to the cupboard upstage and pulls it open. She watches with horror as he draws out a dagger.

LIZZY (grabbing the phone) Nigel, Nigel! He's mad! He's---!

MARVIN approaches her menacingly, after a little chase. She tries to bite him but he plunges the knife into her neck and blood gushes forth. She screams blue murder and her dress is covered in no time.

MARVIN calmly takes the phone again, wiping some blood from his hand and throwing the dagger into the wastepaper basket.

MARVIN (at the phone) All I did was draw a little blood, Nigel. I promise not to kill her yet. Hadn't you better notify the police? This is serious, not a rehearsal, Nigel. Not a play. But first let me get your ex-wife seated. I need to kill her later, you see, which requires her to be alive now, so I missed the jugular, just.

He helps the sobbing, quivering LIZZY to the settee.

MARVIN (cont.) Stop blubbing, it was only superficial!

LIZZY (inspecting the blood and tasting it) This is ketchup! You fucking---!

He signals her frantically to silence, then returns to the phone.

MARVIN (at the phone again) As I said, I managed to avoid the jugular, this is where a little knowledge of pathology counts, Nigel. Now these are my demands. First the Final Dress and the previews will not take place. You will inform not only the police but the media about this. You will tell them that your ex-wife who left you for good not an hour ago is being held hostage by an enraged Marvin James in his dressing room at the Vic on the Strand, and for God's sake don't say New Vic as if we're an imitation of the Old one, you were always such a bloody fool about that kind of thing. By the way, any attempt to batter down Marvin James's door will produce an entirely dead Lizzy Turndown in a split second. How the hell did she get that name by the way? (Turning to LIZZY) Didn't you tell me Stokes?

LIZZY (trying to speak as she wipes the ketchup off) !

MARVIN: Understandably she's distraught, Nigel, you can perhaps hear the gurgles, she must have lost a pint of blood at least. Amazing how much we have of it, isn't it? And its brightness, due I believe to the presence of oxyhemoglobins or did I get my lesson wrong? But to return to business you will announce this morning a Hamlet production with me in the title role, at this theatre, at the Vic Downstairs as I believe you call it....What?.....Oh for God's sake man youth depends on the legs and mine are in mint condition.

He crashes the phone down. LIZZY has in the meantime staggered to the cupboard and is staring at its contents.

MARVIN (cont.) I must say that last scream was even better than the first.

LIZZY: I wasn't acting that time.

MARVIN: You never do otherwise than act, my dear. We are of the same breed.
(Taking her affectionately round the waist) I suppose you're wondering what that little display of knives is about?

LIZZY: Yes I am.

MARVIN: It's my little museum. Several of the daggers date back to 1701.
(Pulling one out) Garrick! (Replacing it and pulling out two others)
These were used to murder Duncan in Henry Irving's Lyceum production in 1888. (Replacing them) And then of course there are the most up to date ones you can find on the market. I used a 1963 spring dagger on you which quite frankly I didn't expect to work. But, as you see (indicating her blood) it was most efficient. Now why don't you slip behind that screen and put on one of my dressing gowns?
(Drawing her to the screen) You'll find a wash basin, hopefully of won't stain your too much, put it in soak of course.

She follows his instructions helplessly, disappearing behind the screen. We hear running water.

MARVIN (cont.) That's Clarissa's dress from May Buds isn't it?

LIZZY (off) Yes.

MARVIN: I have eyes in my little asshole don't I? Did you put it on to flatter me?

LIZZY (off) I thought it might give you pleasure.

MARVIN: Where did you find it?

LIZZY (off) Angel's and Berman's. They wanted fifty pounds a day for it.

MARVIN: Did you give it to them?

LIZZY (off) Nigel did.

MARVIN: You see how the plot thickens? (Sitting at his dressing table and gazing

before him with pleasure) I suppose that dress *is* sort of historical. To buy it you'd probably have to pay thousands.

LIZZY (off) Vivien Leigh used it for Antony and Cleopatra.

MARVIN (disregarding this, since it is about another actor, with a characteristic sideways movement of the head) I suppose your husband has a lot of wonderful anecdotes about me? For instance how I exhausted three leading ladies during the Broadway run of *May Buds*?

LIZZY (off) He said they couldn't stand you always dropping your lines and never being letter word perfect even by the end of a run. He said you had half your speeches pinned to the back of the furniture.

MARVIN: They could have done the same, the silly cows! Acting isn't learning lines!

LIZZY (off) He said it was only the Americans kept you alive because of all their stuff about the Brits and tradition and all that. And they expect Shakespeare to be boring anyway. He said you're an effigy rather than an actor and that's why *The Scottish Play* tomorrow was going to play to 15% capacity.

MARVIN (quietly) Fifty-five.

LIZZY (off) Fifteen. That's another thing you do, wishful listening. He said fifteen.

MARVIN (stunned by this almost to tears) I filled the Henry Miller theatre with *Present Laughter* for over a year! And do you see these lights? What actor in the world has his dressing room equipped with an elaborate light and sound system by means of which he can simulate a performance in perfect privacy? (Throwing himself on the console and after plunging the stage into darkness introducing silver strobe effects). It cost thousands, thousands!

LIZZY is suddenly there behind him, naked under his dressing gown, her feet bare, though she makes a grotesque jerky figure under the strobe effect.

LIZZY (putting her hand on his shoulder) Marvin... (He becomes still) I didn't know you could be hurt. He said you couldn't be hurt.

She puts her arms round him and seems to cry on his shoulder.

LIZZY: Change the lights to something sweet!

MARVIN: Look at this! Golden autumnal!

The strobe effect is killed and a mellow harvest light steals up.

MARVIN (off) Try and beat that.

LIZZY: I thought you were crying.

MARVIN: Oh I could never manage *that*. They used to squirt water in my eyes from the wings. Ask any actor who has played with me---they used to say why does old Marvin always walk over to prompt side when about to shed tears?

LIZZY (walking away) Did you know how you got your nickname?

MARVIN: Nickname---?

LIZZY: `Hamlegs'. From the famous quote `My legs are in mint condition'!

This is too much for him. With a roar he jumps up and grabs her by the hair.

MARVIN: You're a critic aren't you? A fucking reporter! I suspected it in that second scream--- (Shaking her) Are you a damned feminist---a lesbian---a radical---you're a friend of Vanessa Redgraves!

LIZZY (flinging him off with unexpected success so that he reels away) You're a museum piece, that's your trouble, no wonder playwrights fly to the Bahamas when you announce an interest in one of their scripts! `Old Marvin', they say, `old Marvin's like a nostalgia record, he's in Madame Tussaud's already embalmed! (Sticking her face in his) But Hamlet's more than legs!

they say, `old Marvin's like a nostalgia record, he's in Madame Tussaud's already embalmed! (Sticking her face in his) But Hamlet's more than legs!

MARVIN: Tell me this, you slobbering moist bitch, how is it Nigel keeps me in this theatre, and my photos in the foyer, and my bust in the circle bar?

LIZZY: Because he's in love with you! Because he's a fucking pouf!

MARVIN: !!!

The phone rings.

MARVIN (cont., picking the phone up with a furious gesture and bellowing into it) What is it? (Turning to LIZZY and waving the phone at her) This has saved your life! (At the phone again, very quietly now) Oh really? (Again to LIZZY, with sarcastic charm) It's your husband. (At the phone again) No, my dear, I repeat this isn't a joke. I'm already ankle-deep in your ex-wife's blood and she happens to be hanging on to life by the merest thread. Believe me, if you don't get your over-used arse here in ten minutes flat she will never scream again! Secondly, I'm going to unplug this phone and you will talk to me from now on, and so will the police, by means of the intercom system. You will not, repeat not, negotiate with me through the door because, being an actor, I need my voice.

He slams down the phone, then detaches it.

LIZZY (before he can start up again) You're a fucking intellectual without an intellect, that's what *you* are! Look at the way you played that scene. You might have been a radio announcer. You just stalk and talk! (Putting her face close to his again and shouting as if he were deaf) You remember what Hamlet said? `Suit the action'---action, action, Marvin!---`suit the action to the fucking word, the fucking word to the action!' All you do is moon around trying to mask everybody else. No wonder the Scottish Play receipts are five percent of capacity!

MARVIN (frantically) You said fifteen!

LIZZY: Five! You don't think Nigel would dare tell you that do you? He

wants your arse! (As MARVIN lunges at her and she pushes him back) Let's go through that scene you always turn into a Purcell Room recital.

He allows himself to be led to centre stage.

LIZZY (cont.) Take it from I did love thee once.

MARVIN: What?

LIZZY: Don't say what! Say the line!

MARVIN: I did love thee once.

LIZZY: Indeed my lord you made me believe so.

MARVIN: You should not have believed me. For virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

LIZZY: OK now get hold of me---like this (grabbing his hand and putting it over her mouth, then drawing his head close to her ear).

MARVIN (hissing in her ear, not without personal malice) Get thee to a nunnery.

LIZZY: Good, now turn it round and smile.

He leers at her.

LIZZY (cont.) Smile!

MARVIN: That's a Marvin James smile dammit!

She takes his hand and puts it down the slit in her dressing gown, obliging him to fondle her breasts.

MARVIN: Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?

LIZZY: Not why wouldst thou! It's why comma wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?

MARVIN: That's interpretation!

LIZZY: Oh shut up and drag me to the floor!

Finally she pulls him down. Then she draws his hand up her leg, under the gown.

We hear police sirens in the distance.

LIZZY (cont.) Next line please!

MARVIN: I am myself indifferent honest but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother---

The sound of rushing steps along the corridor outside, right.

MARVIN (cont.) It were better my mother had not---

A violent hammering on the door. Shocked out of their wits, MARVIN and LIZZY sit up and stare at each other.

NIGEL BURBAGE's voice comes blaring over the intercom.

BURBAGE (VO) Lizzy this is Nigel! Are you OK? Talk to me Lizzy! Is it true he's keeping you hostage? Lizzy!

Suddenly LIZZY screams in the most bloodcurdling fashion.

MARVIN (hissing at her) What are you doing?

LIZZY (hissing back) Tell him you mean business, go on!

As he fails to act she screams again.

BURBAGE (VO) Oh Marvin, Marvin don't hurt her Marvin! Let her alone for my sake

Marvin!

LIZZY (hissing) Tell him to vacate the corridor outside, not to hammer on the door.

MARVIN (in a quite fantastic bellow) I've given you your directions Burbage! If the police---!

LIZZY grabs the radio mike from the table. She thrusts it into MARVIN's hand. He is still on the floor.

MARVIN (cont., into the mike, quiet and collected at once) If the police aren't here in a jiffy she dies by strangulation! Though she could quite easily die from loss of blood before then!

We hear police sirens in the distance.

LIZZY: Shit, the police!

BURBAGE (VO) They're on their way Marvin! You can hear them Marvin!

LIZZY screams again.

MARVIN (hissing at her) All right, don't overdo it! Fucking Method acting!

LIZZY (shouting frantically into the mike) He's trying to strangle me Nigel (making throttled noises)!

MARVIN stares at her aghast.

LIZZY (cont.) He's got guns as well Nigel! (Screams) He's got two 45-calibre rifles, a .357 Magnum pistol, a sawn-off shotgun, a 9mm Walther pistol, an AR-7 survival rifle, about three .22 calibre pistols, a .30.06 with telescopic sights!

MARVIN (hissing) What the---?

BURBAGE's answer now comes blaring over the intercom.

BURBAGE (VO) Marvin, Marvin, don't do anything unwise, we'll have the Hamlet

production---!

LIZZY gives MARVIN an intimate you-see? expression.

BURBAGE (VO) We'll strike The Scottish set now, there'll be no Final Dress tonight!
(Yelling frantically) Marvin, Marvin, are you there Marvin?

MARVIN (to LIZZY, pulling the mike away from her and sitting on it) Are you trying to get me in gaol for life dammit? What are you talking about, 'guns'?

LIZZY: That was a Bonny and Clyde hash-up I did in rep. (Seizing the mike by thrusting her hand under him and then speaking into it again) He wants you to leave the corridor free, Nigel, he doesn't want you hammering on the door!

Steps on a staircase outside.

BURBAGE (VO, aside to someone, still frantic) I knew the mother would go mad one day! (Shouting again) I'm going downstairs, Lizzy, the police have just arrived, keep calm Marvin, we love you Marvin, we believe in you Marvin!

LIZZY (to MARVIN) Now. You and I have got lots to talk about.

MARVIN (with menace) I'll say! (Trying to scramble to his feet but she pushes him back) I'm going to tell them the truth!

LIZZY: It'll be the first and last time in your life if you do!

The intercom cuts in with the urbane voice of THE HOSTAGE NEGOTIATOR, henceforth to be called H.N.

H.N. (VO) Good morning Mr James. Have you a problem? Police are now surrounding the theatre and I'm your Hostage Negotiator. I've had considerable experience of this kind of thing Mr. Marvin and if there's the smallest chance of our coming to terms right now, please state what the terms are and I'll do my best at this end.

MARVIN (hissing) Who the hell's this prat?

LIZZY (hissing) Tell him 'I've stated my terms to Nigel Burbage, he knows perfectly well what I want.'

MARVIN: What do I want?

LIZZY (hissing) Hamlet with me as Ophelia like you said!

MARVIN (hissing) Fuck you!

She screams again.

H.N. (VO) Now then Mr Marvin let's talk this over calmly, are you OK Miss Turndale?

MARVIN (into the mike) I've made my demands, Nigel Burbage knows what they are!

We are impressed by his instant change of mood for the intercom.

LIZZY (hissing) Good!

MARVIN (hissing) This'll ruin us both!

LIZZY (hissing) Only you! I'm the hostage, remember!

H.N. (VO) Very Well, Mr James, Mr Burbage is here at my side and corroborates what you say. We understand you wish to (mumbling to someone) you wish to cancel the Mac---(interrupted) ah, the Scottish play---you want the public refunded for the bookings on that show and you wish a Hamlet production to be scheduled and announced, and the booking to start as soon as possible, and you will release Miss Lizzy Turndale on hearing that the show has been fully booked for the first three nights. Is that correct sir?

MARVIN (hissing) I never said all that!

LIZZY: It's typical Nigel. He's always helpful in emergencies. Tell him yes, shithead!

MARVIN (into the mike) Yes it's correct!

H.N. (VO) Have you been injured Miss Turndale? Do you mind Miss Turndale talking to us, Mr James?

MARVIN (into the mike) Keep it brief!

LIZZY (into the mike) I'm more in shock! There's a little blood.

H.N. (VO) Blood Miss Turndale?

LIZZY: He tried to knife me in the throat!

MARVIN (hissing) You fucking---!

LIZZY (hissing back) Stop being old Mac! Lift your chin up! Look like a man! (Into the mike) He says you must alert the principal radio and television stations and press agencies at once. He won't release me until he hears a news broadcast has gone out on this matter!

H.N. (VO) I believe news has already gone out Mr James. If it's publicity you need you can trust the media to provide more than is healthy for anyone, particularly you. Let me assure you Mr James you don't have to murder anyone for extra publicity. You've already made your point. On the contrary, if you injure this woman, not to say kill her, you will spend the rest of your life in prison. Think it over Mr James. If you release this young woman now and come out of your dressing room behind her with your hands in the air there is a strong possibility that you will receive no more than a few months in prison or a fine for what, with Miss Turndale's permission, will be classed as an elaborate hoax. Is it a hoax Mr James?

MARVIN opens his mouth to say yes but LIZZY screams again.

H.N. (VO, cont.) All right Mr James you've made your point. I'm in contact with the Home Office and they'll be giving their decision about your terms in a few moments. Meanwhile Mr. James keep very calm because I'm sure you don't want anything to happen that would hurt your reputation permanently and put you behind prison bars until the day you die. Don't risk it Mr. James! Release the young woman. Come out with your hands in the air and who knows, perhaps no charges will be

preferred against you, provided of course that Miss Turndale is found to have only light injuries.

LIZZY screams again.

H.N. (VO, cont.) OK Mr James just wait for the Home Secretary's answer calmly.

More police sirens.

MARVIN: Oh my God... (Trying to grab the mike) I'm going to tell him your screams are fake!

LIZZY (resisting him) My screams are convincing! They chill to the bone! Do you think Nigel Burbage believed you when you were said you were taking me hostage? Of course he didn't! He hasn't believed a word of yours in twenty years! It was my screams that saved the day, my screams!

THE HOSTAGE NEGOTIATOR breaks in again on the intercom.

H.N. (VO) Mr James there've already been a number of special news broadcasts. Two television crews are setting up outside this theatre and will give hourly coverage of what has become known as the Vic siege. We're told that CNN are running the story with clips from your Coward season on Broadway. Mr Burbage tells me that the Scottish production has been cancelled. He has announced your new Hamlet but so far the media hasn't taken this up. But he's confident that all this publicity will ensure early booking, the courts permitting of course. Thus all you asked for and more has been conceded---

LIZZY screams.

MARVIN (hissing) But they're giving me what I want dammit!

LIZZY: Fuck what *you* want! I've got some terms too!

MARVIN (grabbing the mike from under her in a surprise move) She keeps on screaming, blast her eyes!

H.N. (VO) If you don't want the lady to scream just take your hands off her Mr James! Are you all right Miss Turndale?

LIZZY (seizing the mike) He's---he's hurting me (writhing and gurgling)!

H.N. (VO, urgently) I beg you Mr James think your position over! If at the end of five minutes---we're going to give you five minutes---if you walk out with your hands above your head no charges will be preferred against you unless of course Miss Turndale is injured more than superficially and she wishes to prosecute. There's only one proviso, that you submit to a medical checkup at St.Thomas's hospital, including a psychiatric examination.

MARVIN (grabbing the mike) She's the one for psychiatry!

H.N. (VO) No doubt she is Mr James if you've been trying to strangle her. Now come to your senses, man, you've a great career ahead of you, don't send it up in smoke!

LIZZY (grabbing the mike back) He says he doesn't believe you're real police!

H.N. (VO) Thank you for clearing that up Miss Turndale. Mr. James, if you don't believe we're police just take a peep out of your window and you'll see at least a dozen there, fully armed. Will you do that? Please do that Mr. James.

Together MARVIN and LIZZY race to the rooftop window upstage and glance below. Having confirmed the presence of the police they stare at each other with chastened astonishment and in this mood steal back to the dressing room as H.N.'s voice comes over again.

H.N. (VO) Have you taken a look Mr Marvin?

MARVIN (running to the mike on the floor) Yes I have!

H.N. (VO) Are you satisfied that the metropolitan police force is here in some strength?

MARVIN (into the mike) Yes I am.

H.N. (VO) Very well Mr James. We shall give you five minutes to make up your

mind. After that, if you don't come out peacefully, we must resort to less friendly methods. I'm afraid this may mean risking Miss Turndale's life but you will both appreciate that we can hardly tie up so many policemen indefinitely.

LIZZY (grabbing the mike) He wants to know what these less friendly methods are.

H.N. (VO) Well Miss Turndale they mean for starters he'll be charged with assault and battery, kidnapping, resisting arrest and attempted murder. I needn't tell you what the penalty is for that lot but I can say that if convicted Mr James will never see the inside of a theatre again.

MARVIN: Oh my god!

H.N. (VO) Once again, Mr James, come to your senses. We are giving you five minutes.

The intercom abruptly switches out.

MARVIN (grabbing her hair) What the hell are you doing this for?

LIZZY (pushing him away so that he falls onto the settee into a half-lying position) That's just what I'm going to explain. Ophelia---what about it?

MARVIN: You think anybody's going to believe I took you hostage because I want you as Ophelia?

LIZZY: Listen, in a short time there won't be a household in England hasn't heard of Lizzy Turndale even if they've never heard of you. For years I've been sweating it out in provincial rep with Nigel Burbage looking on with a smirk. Whenever I said let me meet Marvin James he said you were too busy but today I clinched it didn't I? I walked out of the house and here I am! I said to myself whatever Marvin James wants to do with me I do---and you took me hostage didn't you?

MARVIN: How is it he knew you were coming, he even announced you!

LIZZY: I told him! Don't think I was after any famous person---I was after you---my obsession and daydream since I was fourteen, bad and passé as I knew you to be even then!

- MARVIN: Oh my god!
- LIZZY: That's another of your nicknames.
- MARVIN: What is?
- LIZZY: Oh my god. They say Oh My God's threatening to do a one-man show called 'On the Boards'.
- MARVIN: On the b---! I discussed it once, in New York, with Merrick---no one else!
- LIZZY: There isn't much I don't know about you, dammit---another one of your nicknames, Dammit. You're going to end on the rocks and not on the boards unless you listen to me. You've got five minutes in which to do it!
- MARVIN: Oh my god!
- LIZZY: All these years, I'm nineteen now (he registers mouthing disbelief), you've figured in my daydreams, my masturbations! I think I saw every London production you were in, and several of the Brighton flops. (As he is about to protest) I had to go secretly because mother would have been furious had she known.
- MARVIN: 'And her mother came too'!
- LIZZY: You'll see later just how true that is. But back to business. When that man comes on the intercom again you're going to tell him you want me as your Ophelia and, another thing, my name goes next to yours above the play title.
- MARVIN (his mettle up) Ophelia my arse! You can get any actor in the world to put his hand up your skirt without picking on me! Ophelia isn't a hot-pants, little lady, just as Hamlet isn't a pair of legs! I'm sick and tired of the word love on the lips of women whose hearts are made of ice cubes! (Striding about dramatically while she watches him with some curiosity) Why for God's sake was I given so much charisma? Why the magnetic personality, the eyes that turn heads with a glance, the smile that while it hasn't exactly launched a thousand ships has flooded

a thousand hulls with moist thoughts! I never had a leading lady who didn't fall in love with me! I never knew in all my life a single girl who didn't buckle at the knees on touching my hand! (Closing in on her) My mother told me all about your damnéd breed! Yes I too had a mother! And a finer actress never crossed the boards! She warned me early what seething cauldrons of manipulation you cunt-people are, using our natural terror of the mother to install a new reign for yourselves! Why else do you think Hamlet told her 'If thou wilt marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them'? I pleaded with mama, for God's sake inhibit my charisma I said, the girls are going to give me trouble, they'll hang round the stage doors, solicit my agents, sleep with my managers to get me for life! Why insist mama that my eyes should be hypnotic, my lips beyond reproach, my walk, my stance, my gaze, even my way of thinking and choice of words so far beyond ordinary capacities that into whatever drawing room I set foot they will turn towards me as one creature and ask each other with importuning nudges 'Who is that?'

A dead silence after a speech that seems to stun even him.

LIZZY: You see, you really can act when you want to.

MARVIN: !!

LIZZY: I mean, you delivered that speech properly for the first time. When the play was actually running you gobbled up all the words like they were little balls of arse paper. I saw it as a girl of thirteen. Of course I realise you were supposed to be a ham actor in it but even ham actors have natural feelings sometimes. (Gazing at him with some puzzlement) Even when you were throttling me a little while back it felt like a stage throttle. And when you were playing with my tits it felt like I was reading a book about it. So the first didn't scare me and the second didn't turn me on.

MARVIN: Would you have wished me to use a real knife? Or make love to you hardly knowing your name?

LIZZY: Why shouldn't Ophelia be a hot-pants? That was a very successful scene! Also it isn't only Ophelia I'm after, it's a production of Hamlet *on my terms*, got it? No more talking heads. No more striding round

the stage in that fucking drag I know you're going to bring out, swishing your dress in all our noses and letting the audience see the good side of your face and never the bad, which is the most of it. No wonder Nigel Burbage always says he directs 'round' you because there's nothing *in* you!

MARVIN (drunk with insults now) You're trying to get into my pants, that's all *you* want but don't be so sure you'd like it once you got there---a lot of ladies have had their little fannies burned, they remained in agony for the rest of their lives, hoping for a repeat and never getting it! Two suicides, untold nervous breakdowns, the close of at least five promising stage careers! Why deliberately invite a situation in which you retire to a low-rent suburb for the next sixty years with photos and memories to live on? Oh I admit you're quite intelligent! You can talk like a character out of George Bernard Shaw but, Miss Turnoff, this won't end in an upper class drawing room in a gale of laughter but Wandsworth prison for me and Wormwood Scrubs for you! Because you're colluding in the kidnap, which I'm going to tell them right now---

He tries to grab the mike from between her legs but she manages to retain it by hitting him in the balls with it.

LIZZY (as he writhes) I'm going to marry you too!

MARVIN (over his agony) Marry me? Nobody's ever succeeded in doing that!

LIZZY: Why else do you think we were flung together this morning?

LIZZY: Don't you see what a wonderful story we're cooking up between us? World famous actor marries his own hostage! Tries to cut her throat but suddenly sees her as his leading lady and they play together for the rest of their lives like Lunt and Fontann! (Approaching him as he draws away) Darling, I saw the potential the moment that phoney dagger touched my neck---I thought this is all too ham, no one's going to believe him---I'm going to have to scream, it'll bring half of Scotland Yard round! You needed a woman to push you into a knighthood, Marvin!

MARVIN: I'd rather die than be a king in *your* fucking arms!

LIZZY: Oh nonsense, you go green with envy every time a fag gets hit on the shoulder with the royal sword! (Imitating his highly individual pronunciation of English) 'Why no heteros? What's unknightable about a normal sexual impulse?'

There is a violent hammering on the door. It looks as if the door might cave in. It trembles on his hinges.

Simultaneously there is a BLACK OUT.

TWO

The scene opens on the same
BLACKOUT. We gradually
discern dim street lights at the
upstage window.

The lights suddenly go up.

MARVIN and LIZZY are asleep
on the settee. LIZZY is more or
less on top of him.

Her panties are on the floor with
her shoes.

They begin to stir. Blinking awake
they are surprised to find
themselves where they are, and
with whom they are, and at what
degree of proximity.

They slump helplessly back into
sleep.

H.N. (VO, considerably politer than before, almost unctious) Mr James. Miss Turndale.

They fail to wake.

H.N. (VO, cont.) Are you there Mr James?

MARVIN stirs.

MARVIN (mumbling) What happened for christsake?

LIZZY (her eyes still closed) I'm probably pregnant. That's what happened.

MARVIN: I'm asking him not you.

H.N. (VO) Mr James, Miss Turndale, the light cables have just been repaired. Could you report back that your lighting system is working? And the sound of course? Are you hearing me?

MARVIN fumbles for the mike under LIZZY.

LIZZY (eyes still closed) God, not again! Do you want my blood as well?

MARVIN: I'm looking for the fucking mike!

He finds it. LIZZY sighs with pleasure, still mostly asleep.

MARVIN (cont., into the mike) Yes we've got the lights. What happened?

H.N. (VO) There was a simple fuse, I'm afraid. Due to all the excitement no doubt. The police have told me they're rather worried about your arms cache. They don't want to kill you both first on the assumption that you will get them first.

MARVIN: That's damned silly! This idiot Turnstile made it all up! Even her screams were fake (as LIZZY struggles to get hold of the mike, landing them both on the floor amid bedclothes)!

H.N.(VO) Then you're unarmed sir?

MARVIN (clinging to the mike) Well of course I am! The only thing I ever fired in my whole damned life was a stage gun and that scared my balls off! The things can backfire and scorch your wrist you know!

H.N.(VO) So what was Miss Turndale's motive in lying do you think?

MARVIN (they are fighting for the mike now) Publicity! Besides her being a born liar of course. The fact is she wants to play Ophelia to my Hamlet. If you ask me she couldn't play Hamlet's skull!

She lands him a blow in his belly which forbids further speech on his side but he clings to the mike with a determination she would have admired at any other time.

H.N. (VO) Well sir it's lucky for you both that I didn't know this before. After all, I told the police you had an arms cache which would make them green with envy. So in view of the fact that the police might have broken their way and shot you both dead without argument Miss Turndale's lie has turned out useful, don't you think?.

MARVIN (to the mike) It'll be the first time---(struggle)---she's ever proved useful in a theatre!

H.N. (VO) Well I must return to my negotiations at the back of the stalls Mr James. It might take till morning---

MARVIN: Why, what's the time?

H.N. (VO) It's just past midnight. Perhaps we should synchronise our watches Mr James? Let me give ten seconds to one minute past midnight. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, it's precisely one minute after midnight Mr. James.

MARVIN (to himself) Oh fuck off!

H.N. (VO) Was it ever your intention, Mr James, to kidnap someone?

MARVIN: Of course not (dodging everywhere from LIZZY)! Oh the idea came into my head, the dramatic idea you might say. (Getting under the dressing table) But this woman Turnabout took it seriously! But I must say she did her screams pretty well, for RADA anyway!

H.N. (VO) Well, so far so good, Mr. James. If Miss Turndale can assure us that she

hasn't been injured or molested, then, I think we can avoid charges will either of you.

MARVIN (hissing from under the table at LIZZY) Why the hell don't you say something?

LIZZY (hissing back) I've got nothing to say!

H.N. (VO) Well I think we should offer a little prayer to God that peace enters the local magistrate's heart.

LIZZY (hissing) Say Amen!

MARVIN: Balls!

The intercom cuts out.

MARVIN (cont., from under the table) Wasn't there something once about a ceasefire in the American civil war so as to get the president elected? An actor was telling me about it at Sardi's.

LIZZY: Perhaps.

He crawls out from under the table.

MARVIN: Trust a rep actress to get me in the courts. The Home Office'll probably be years on this. Apparently it takes them two years to file a report. (Going close to her) But if we walk out of this alive, Miss Turnpike, I may file charges against you.

LIZZY: I have your baby inside. I mean you not only fucked me, you fucked me as if you'd never had a woman. I know young men who would have been hospitalised after less than what you did. It was like one of those plays which instead of ending develop ever more facets of plot, making one yearn for the refreshments bar while still rivetted to one's seat.

MARVIN: That's out of a show. I don't remember that one.

LIZZY: You weren't in it, I was. At least I think so, my mind's wandering this

morning.

MARVIN: It didn't when you were making love.

LIZZY: Oh, I get hot at the sound of a zip. Where the hell's the loo?

MARVIN: You *are* in a state. Straight on and turn left behind the screen.

He paces up and down as we hear the lid of the loo being slammed down, followed by the sound of her peeing and the flushing of the toilet.

MARVIN (cont., as she returns) I always find that women can be divided into two categories, those who leave the door of the john open and those well-bred enough not to. I've just realised, by the way, who you remind me of.

LIZZY: Who except your mother?

MARVIN: My mother. She used to leave the john door open. And she didn't wash her hands afterwards either, just like you.

LIZZY: Soap's bad for the skin.

MARVIN: That's what she always says. And she talked to her lovers like you talk to me. To soften them up in case they played opposite her. She played opposite some of the greatest men---

LIZZY (sneering) And screwed them all, I know! 'Dame Helen James plays offstage games'. 'Down comes the curtain, up goes her skirt, One thing's certain, he'll get his little squirt.'

MARVIN: You perfectly horrible creature!

LIZZY: 'First the play, then the lay, Helen James will have her way.' 'Helen's on the hunt, with her outsize---

MARVIN (clutching her throat) This is my mother!

LIZZY: 'She plays little tricks with gentlemen's---'

H.N. breaks in quietly over the intercom.

H.N. (VO) Are you there Mr James? I've been in conversation with both the Home Office and the police and I'm relieved to say we've won an hour's respite. During that time none of us will move from our present quarters and negotiations can proceed in a more methodical way than was possible when threats of assault were being exchanged. So the police outside have withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of the theatre to a mobile canteen so from your window you will now see neither. Do you have provisions Mr James?

MARVIN looks round for the mike and LIZZY is already holding it out for him.

MARVIN (into the mike) A few tins of baked beans, a ham, some cheese biscuits, milk and coffee and tea and there's some booze, also caviar.

H.N. (VO) Well supplied if I may say so Mr James.

H.N. cuts out.

MARVIN: Listen to me. Here's what I propose. If we leave here safe and sound I shall give you an income for life and provide for the kid, supposing you're pregnant, which since you say you are you almost certainly aren't. But there's to be nothing more intimate than that between us, do you hear?

LIZZY: Not even a weekly visit to see the child?

MARVIN: No phone-calls saying the money hasn't arrived this month and the little chap has been having a bad time with his teeth---

LIZZY (tenderly) It's going to be a boy?

MARVIN: It usually is where the woman's an ox and the man sensitive, it's a genetic reaction. Anyway I don't intend to allow the greatest dependency syndrome ever devised by female oxen to develop.

LIZZY: You love me don't you?

MARVIN: That's precisely why I'm getting all this straight now, to prepare you for the letdown. The very fact that I make love to you three times in a row at my age is my cue to pull out much more quickly than even I would normally do. You see, Miss Turnover, I was my mother's domestic slave and you've got mother written all over your empty face. From the age of ten I served her breakfast in bed. I looked after the sheets, a whole drama in itself considering the number of men she brought home. Do you know, Lizzy---

LIZZY (rapture) You called me Lizzy!

MARVIN: When you were insulting my mother just now I felt a quickening of emotion---compounded I think of both hatred and sexual excitement. When she saw me in my first speaking part at the age of fifteen she walked straight out of the theatre and left a message with her agent to tell me I stank. She said later that the only character I could play was my own, which was a bad one. (Gazing at her) When you and I made love your noises were hers. I inwardly returned to the primal scene while in your arms. I heard once again the sounds of my mother's lovemaking. They dominated my life. Every time my mother bent down to kiss me goodnight it was like saying good bye. Her perfume, the powder on her neck, the way she had of bunching her lips a little when she kissed me, the same way you have, these things were the touch and smell of fear for me. That's why I came three times when I was making love to you. I was in the primal scene, with my mother. Coming and fearing are very close to each other for me. The smell of blood and the smell of come aren't so distant from each other. My mother always seemed on the point of abandoning me. Always a new tour or dinner out or late rehearsals or a plane to catch. Sometimes I went with her but mostly I stayed, in the hands of a governess who used to masturbate under the covers when she thought I was asleep.

LIZZY (after a pause) Isn't all that from a show?

MARVIN: What?

LIZZY: The long speech from A Man Called Shrink? Nigel produced it thirteen years ago.

MARVIN: The sentiments happen to fit. That's why I accepted the script. Why else should I accept a script?

LIZZY (with great mildness) You're not a man, you're a stage *thing*. Your mother must have fucked a theatre to get you.

MARVIN: My balls literally ached when I walked off after that speech. It was the longest speech written. I tried it as an extended exit line---you know, half of me popping off the stage and the other half popping back in. It always looks bloody silly. Your husband always said you can't keep bobbing in and out like that, even the RSC doesn't do it any more.

MARVIN (with the milk) Here's to our separation. .

They drink.

LIZZY: I don't even believe you're Helen James's son. Your mother worked on the railways. She used to announce the trains. I read it in one of your programme notes.

MARVIN: That was for a dramatisation of Emile Zola's *Bête Humaine*. We had to have a hookup with the railways so we put it out that my mother was Britain's first train driver. Another time we were doing a show on Dr Barnardo's homes, not the musical but a play which came to nothing. I got thousands of letters suggesting ways of finding my mother. The PR idiot put it out that I was an orphan and Helen James only adopted me and I yearned for my real mum. The mail got so heavy we had to make a statement, so we put it out that my mum had been found. We got Tilly Armitage to paint in a few wrinkles and put a shawl round her and we passed her off as my mother who lived in Barnstable and had been widowed in some war and lived like a recluse out of remorse for having given me up for adoption but the war had been on and she'd been forced to work in a munitions factory and had thought it best for me to be---

LIZZY: Watch it! When he's nervous he talks, and mostly lies. So who do my eyes remind you of, if not your ghastly mother?

MARVIN (off) Tilly Armitage as a matter of fact. My favourite leading lady!

LIZZY: And do you know why that is?

MARVIN: Why?

LIZZY: I'm her daughter.

MARVIN: You said your name was Turnstile!

LIZZY: Tilly Armitage is my mother.

MARVIN (staring at her) Tilly----! (Staring at her with growing fear) The big eyes! Shining black grapes! If a script had black grapes in it she took it at once! Why didn't you say so before for God's sake, I would have kicked you out at once! (Staring at her hard again) Oh my God! You know what this means? We're brother and sister! We've committed incest!

LIZZY (calmly) Could be.

MARVIN: You'd better keep your mouth shut dammit. And don't tell your bloody husband. He only has to think and it's all over London in an hour. Of course I should have seen it! Those unmistakable vineyard eyes!

LIZZY: Why don't you sit down and shut up? We've done it now. Lord Byron was incestuous, so they say.

MARVIN: But of course! You said your name was Jean Stokes. That's her husband's name isn't it? Stokes! It's that pot-bellied stockbroker with the bald patch---!

LIZZY (in her enormous voice) Just you leave daddy out of it!

MARVIN (leering) I'd love to. And his daughter. Your mother by the way started just like you. Don't forget Stokes was one of the most generous of the City angels and he had a proportionate say in the casting of the women---in general angels aren't interested in the men. You see, I know all about you. You saw early on when you married Nigel Burbage that it was better never to let the heart get in the way of a possible contract. In Lizzy Turntable née Stokes we have a woman who is eminently woman, in bed woman, in tears woman, in screams woman but in fact is

a player of roles so adept that even when she plays them badly we say to ourselves it's because she has a heart, her heart insists so much that it takes away her technique!

LIZZY (perfectly tranquil) But it works doesn't it?

MARVIN: Indeed, yes. What a technique is there, my friend, in the absence of technique! Even when you're making love I can't tell where your brain is---just like our mother---her lovers tell how being in Tilly's arms is like wandering round a fine old country mansion where the table's set for a banquet and the fires are all alight but there's no host. The fact is that what she has ticking in her thoracic area is a cardio-calculator linked to casting agencies, producers and television networks. Just like you.

LIZZY: And then she says 'My enemies always succumb in the end'. She's sitting more or less where I'm sitting. You're a bit further downstage, with your good side to the audience.

MARVIN (waking up) What? what?

LIZZY: You played it with mummy, don't you remember A Game Called Incest?

He looks at her helplessly. There is a long confused silence.

MARVIN (hushed) I must go to Whites. I lunch there.

LIZZY: Your club should be the Garrick if you're an actor.

MARVIN: I don't do obvious things.

He continues forlorn.

LIZZY (watching him) You don't do intelligent things either.

MARVIN (hardly audible) Tilly Armitage again... My mother!

LIZZY: Otherwise you'd have seen long ago that you needed this siege not for Hamlet but to keep you in a job!

MARVIN (still on his lonely theme) Do you wonder at the success of feminism? We males quail at the sound of mother's rasping tongue!

LIZZY: For years now Nigel's been renting this place out to other productions, it was dark for nine whole months not two years ago!

MARVIN: I sometimes needed a rest dammit!

LIZZY: No one can break through to you! You were offered an off-off-off Broadway venue last month---off-off-off Broadway, you the star!

MARVIN: Times are hard dammit!

LIZZY: And the Macbeth you were going to play to a ninety-five percent absent audience was a studio Macbeth, broken down to a two hander, you and Tilly! Because Nigel can't afford you any more and you drag him downhill with you---he'll have to sell up soon!

MARVIN: All he has to sell is me! The theatre isn't his.

LIZZY: The trust decided to sell within the year unless something dramatic happens---

MARVIN: Isn't this dramatic? After this we're either dead or playing Hamlet.

LIZZY: But you're still seeing it in little personal terms. A few hours ago this siege was a small event in London's theatreland but with three people killed and the IRA in on it don't you see you have the attention of the world?

MARVIN (with one of his great sighs) Lizzy, I've said it often enough---whatever I do I do in spite of myself. He can't act, my mother said. But did she ever get a theatre of her own?

LIZZY gives up.

MARVIN (cont.) I had to act. Theatre was all I knew. I had to cultivate the ways of a great actor without being one, for no actor ever is a great actor. There are good moments and bad moments. You see, they used to hold their breath at my first entrance---and disregard the rest of the play. Funnily enough, that's still theatre.

LIZZY (staring at him) Are you crying?

MARVIN: As I said before, that's something I could never do. My mother said shake your shoulders and hide your face, it's as near as you'll ever get.

LIZZY: Did you know the trust was thinking of turning this dressing room into a studio theatre? You could seat about a hundred in here if you broke down that wall.

He has no reply.

LIZZY (cont., watching him) At a loss for words.

She goes on an impulse and sits on his lap.

LIZZY: I never opened to a man in my life like to you. You went so deep I thought I would faint. That's why I came to you today, a woman can see ahead.

MARVIN (wriggling uncomfortably) Stop talking like my mother.

LIZZY: Why didn't she seduce you?

MARVIN (with a leer) She had Stokes.

LIZZY (laughing) What are you talking about? That's Tilly Armitage!

MARVIN: What's the difference? (Suddenly, gripping her) Which makes you not her daughter at all! Twenty eight years ago she didn't even know Stokes!

LIZZY (kissing him) When you're inside it's like having a rich totem in there, quivering

and trembling---as if all your imagination was there!

MARVIN: My imagination's here (indicating his head)!

She smiles and kisses him again dreamily.

LIZZY: I always wanted to fuck my father.

MARVIN: Thank you very much.

LIZZY: No I mean when you said his pot belly I felt excited. It doesn't matter his not being my real father.

MARVIN: You mean that flatulent gasping accountant took you over as a bastard?

LIZZY: He's a good man and you're not. (Nestling her head in his chest) I don't care if they kill us, I don't care any more.

He gazes before him.

MARVIN: When I was a child everything was so charming. People called each other darling and you went to Brighton for the weekend on the Flying Fornicator. If you went by car you wore gauntlet gloves and flaps over your ears and you might do five miles without seeing another vehicle. There were white and yellow butterflies, and buttercups in the fields, and the beach at Littlehampton was so clean it gleamed like salt at low tide. Shaftesbury Avenue had a couple of Shakespeare productions at least---commercial ones, mind, not subsidised. There were two or was it three evening papers and when you opened them you read say an article by Eevelyn Waugh or a poem by Ezra Pound and it was stuff that didn't insult you. You could pop round to the Piccadilly hotel or Odenino's for a cup of tea and you got fresh toast and gentleman's relish and cup cakes and some dancing if you felt like it. The world hummed with pleasure in those days, you heard it when you woke in the morning but now you hear planes on the descent to London airport.

LIZZY: But wasn't there an awful lot of unemployment?

They laugh, squeeze each other with delight.

MARVIN: It's actually 'Wasn't there an awful lot of hunger marches?'

LIZZY: I saw it at least four times.

MARVIN (looking at her with admiration) You really did see just about every show of mine!

LIZZY: When she let me.

MARVIN: But surely she wouldn't rob you of a chance to see her!

LIZZY: She knew I wanted you. You were the only man for me (stroking his face). This is the first time in all my life I've felt safe, and we're under a sentence of death.

MARVIN: You make the most sincere statement sound phoney.

LIZZY: Why is that?

MARVIN: Well, you only have one feeling really and that's to land yourself a big part in a big show and your name above the title and your phone ringing all day and agents fighting for you and new parts coming up you can pick and choose from like a rich woman over her jewellery. Anything else, sex for instance, is counterfeit. So is the truth, for you. Hence you always sound phoney.

LIZZY: What feelings other than ambitious ones do you have? I mean your love-making's thrilling but it's thrilling like a show is thrilling. So?

MARVIN: Don't you see Ophelia was a liar just like you? She only comes out insipid because people play her truthful and good. I mean her verses are the bawdiest the Old Chap ever wrote:

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day
 All in the morning betime,
 And I a maid at your window,
 To be your Valentine.
 Then up he rose and donned his clo'es
 And dupp'd the chamber door
 Let in the maid, that out a maid
 Never departed more.

TOGETHER: By Gos and by Saint Charity
Alack and fie for shame!
Young men will do't if they come to't,
By cock, they are to blame!

It delights them.

LIZZY: Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me
You promised me to wed'.

MARVIN; 'So would I 'a done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.'

LIZZY: Is that what you feel?

MARVIN: What?

LIZZY: That because you fucked me you have no further interest in me?

MARVIN: I never had any further interest in you.

They laugh.

LIZZY: I spent hours pushing my clit up against his belly when I was thirteen or fourteen. Arthur Stokes, chartered accountant, doesn't get anything but figures but how I wanted that man!

MARVIN: The poor man ached for Tilly, not you.

LIZZY: e never got in before three in the morning and her shows were usually down by eleven. She could easily have told him pick me up at the theatre but she never did because her real name was Duchesse de Sade.

MARVIN: That's what I called her.

LIZZY (sweetly) I know. He used to sit drinking whisky and watching the box and I knew he was good for a cuddle after the third or fourth drink. One evening when I was sixteen he went to bed early and I started tickling him and he pulled me into bed with him, I'd just had a bath and only had a dressing gown on and he started to put it in, I nearly fainted and

would you believe it the front door opens and in she comes, she's never been home that early before or since, he was half in and I swear he was just about to come and she's suddenly standing there over the bed screaming 'Leave my child alone!' and tearing all the bedclothes off to get a better look. Then she puts her arms round me and takes me off to my room and she rocks me in her arms, the silly cow, and keeps saying 'Poor darling! Poor darling!'. She didn't give a damn about me sleeping with him, she just wanted to keep us both out of the deepest thrill of our lives. I've never forgiven her for that.

MARVIN: For doing what any mother would?

LIZZY: She didn't let him out until dawn.

MARVIN: Out?

LIZZY: She let him come inside! He must still be dreaming about that one night, first me, then her, it extended until dawn and then he fell into the happiest sleep of his life, I could hear him snoring. She makes a sort of shocked gasp, you know, when she comes. Almost a protest, a refusal. As if she's in bed for reasonably polite conversation and then this thrusting begins and she can't account for it and makes that gasp as if he's taking a fearful liberty, but she allows it out of a kind of inability to quite understand.

He looks away.

LIZZY (cont.) Am I making you jealous?

MARVIN: Not on your Nelly, I was thinking of what Freud said in A Man Called Shrink---a lover's always second best for a woman because he isn't her father. (He shrugs) I've been so close to Tilly in stage embraces, stage marriages that we never---

LIZZY: You see, she let him have it the whole night only to kill his desire for me. It was pure jealousy, she was just scared of any sex happening that she wasn't having. It had nothing to do with me being her daughter. She drugs all her men like that. Drugs them! Not with her body because she hasn't got much of one, her strength lies between her legs, she weaves a spell there and they're her prisoners for life. That efficient organ is such a tunnel of sweets and ecstasies I feel she must

have rehearsed its performances as meticulously as she does all her stage business. So quiet, so secretive without being furtive!

MARVIN: You have a special eloquence when you talk about Tilly.

TILLY: I married Nigel to get free of her. I was living in her pleasures.

MARVIN: Captive of both wife and daughter, poor Arthur Stokes!

TILLY: When we were asleep I could feel those IRA men downstairs yearning for a woman in their dreams! Danger does that. Do you remember that world holocaust play---?

MARVIN: I'll say! I lost twenty thousand on it.

TILLY: Where the woman goes round offering herself to the men just before some battle. The last coitus! That was what it was like between you and me! And it's always going to be like that! We'll never look at anybody else (clutching his hand and biting it), let's draw blood like the gypsies and marry now, whether they kill us or not!

She continues biting him until he jumps up yelling and nursing his hand.

MARVIN: What the fuck are you doing? You nearly bit my finger off!

LIZZY (uninfluenced) Let's at least enjoy our last moments darling! All my childhood I yearned for you and now they want to snatch you away from me! You melted in with the golden afternoon light and the tea table with its gleaming white cloth and all the good things, the raisin cake and the fire crackers and icing with the little terracotta hobgoblins (taking off her panty hose) and the chrysanthemums in a bowl and the hum of voices I knew and the dark vivid colours of my comics and the sound of the street outside! How can one open one's legs to an outsider? It is a boy! I can feel him (as she pursues MARVIN), he's kicking!

MARVIN: I'll kick you if you don't get out of my way (jumping around to avoid her)! AND STOP QUOTING THAT BLOODY WORLD HOLOCAUST PLAY! (Dodging her) I told, you, I lost a mint on it. It was Nigel Burbage's fault. He said I get a hundred world holocaust plays a week and I've got to do one just to show the silly buggers they

don't work. Now listen to me---(gripping her wrists firmly so that she can't move and pushing her on to the settee) Pull yourself together! You've got your lines mixed up. You've moved on to that bloody Royal Court disaster, Incest!

He backs away from her as she shivers and comes back to herself, gazing at the floor.

Everything is hushed. He looks at her in a gingerly way, as if about to announce something.

MARVIN (cont.) You see, Lizzy, I did have your mother.

She looks up at him blearily.

MARVIN (cont.) It was long before Arthur Stokes. When I thought she was human.

LIZZY: How long ago?

MARVIN: Twenty eight years ago. We did it night and day for a week and she didn't take any precautions.

A long pause during which she sighs, involuntarily picks up her panty hose, then throws it back on the floor again.

LIZZY: I always half knew it, wanted it so deeply!

MARVIN: I'm not saying it's the case, nothing was proved, she was having others of course but it's possible, just possible---

LIZZY: In other words it's definite.

MARVIN: It could be, yes.

She pulls her panty hose back on and puts on her shoes.

LIZZY: I'm going to find out.

MARVIN: Find out what?

LIZZY: If you're my daddy! You are my daddy aren't you?

MARVIN: How the hell do I know?

LIZZY: That's why I'm going to ask her! She's downstairs rehearsing!

She walks towards the exit door. He gapes at her.

MARVIN: Your watchers are down there too.

LIZZY: Exactly.

She walks to the door.

LIZZY (cont.) And I wouldn't try and stop me if I were you.

MARVIN (almost in tears) I don't intend to.

LIZZY: You see these (opening her blouse), daddy?

He does nothing.

She has gone.

We hear her footsteps echoing down the staircase.

MARVIN (rushing to the exit) Viktoria! Viktoria! I agree to play Hamlet right away.

She reappears.

LIZZY: Right, let's get to work.