



## CHARACTERS

MARVIN JAMES actor

LIZZY TURNDALE actress

JOCELYN COWELL psychiatrist

*The action takes place in a  
dressing room at the Vic in  
the Strand.*

**ACT ONE**

**THE SCENE** opens on the empty dressing room of **MARVIN JAMES** at the Vic in the Strand.

This is no ordinary dressing room. 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. The dressing room is even equipped as a mini-stage with a rake and a sophisticated light and sound system.

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 phone, a mobile phone, a loose radio mike and a pile of playscripts and unopened letters.

The console, besides controlling the lights etc, also controls an intercom system linking this spoiled man to every part of the theatre. For the purpose of speaking to others in the admin part of the building or front of house or backstage he uses the mobile phone.

His swivel chair is a soft leather article coloured burgundy.

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

The entrance to the dressing room is actor's right. The door opens on to the set and in an upstage direction.

There is a wide arched opening upstage centre, beyond which lies an inner room with a window visible to us---it looks out on rooftops, for the dressing room is above the stage.

Right of this arched opening there are screens behind which MARVIN may undress in the case of there being visitors. Immediately in front of these we see a dumb waiter.

Downstage and to the left, close to the settee, there is a cupboard in which MARVIN keeps certain props of a theatrically historical value (at least to him).

When the action begins we hear hammering and voices from the main stage, brought to him by speakers (two for the stereophonic balance).

The door is being 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. The cane he is holding turns out to have a silver knob and if we could see it closely it would turn out to be a tiny replica of the theatre's cupola.

MARVIN walks to the console and deftly touches a button with his stick to cut off the stage noises and with another touch he brings in the theme music from one of his musical shows, May Bugs. The music is ~~of a highly rhythmic, dramatic type like Brian Eno's~~ (*The Jezebel Spirit* and *Help me Somebody* are useful models).

in c  
sense

MARVIN at once goes into his extraordinary dance routine from that show, but roughly. We don't expect such vigor, expertise and with-it movement from such a suave dated appearance. Soon his steps pick up to make a real performance.

At the end he 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.

A copy of *The Times* lies ready for him. He opens it and then begins the awesome operation of scanning the paper from end to end for a mention of himself. His head and eyes dart about diagonally and upwards and downwards with demonic concentration, taking in every column inch with expertise and dismissing it with quick disgust. It is all over in a few moments. Having found nothing he screws the whole paper into a ball and throws it into the empty wastepaper basket.

He rises and takes off his gloves and hat and deposits them on a shelf of the dumb waiter. He removes his jacket and impressive

double-breasted waistcoat, and hangs them more carefully than a wealthy actor would.

He goes behind one of the screens and takes off his shirt, throwing it on to the top of the screen. He emerges in a light smock for making up which but for the grace of God could be Hamlet's. He takes his shirt from the dumb waiter and hangs it carefully.

His movements are precise, charged with a somnambulistic spontaneity that comes from daily repetition.

He once more seats himself at the dressing table, this time to adjust the lights, watching the lanterns and waiting for each area to light up. His next movement affords him great satisfaction. It is to fix an amber glow that shows him off to best advantage.

He gazes at himself with the detachment of an actor who has been through almost (but surprises are on hand) everything.

Just as he begins making himself up the phone rings. He takes no notice. It stops ringing. He pencils in wrinkles. He leaves this to try on the-unmentionable-play wig.

The phone rings again. He nonchalantly fits the wig. He returns to the wrinkle pencil.

To avoid having his work interrupted he tips the phone off its cradle with his elbow. 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 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 but worried? 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, 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!.....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 TURNDALÉ enters right, a cup of coffee in her hand. She is a bright attractive young woman with wide black eyes. She is in a provocative one-piece.

She stands there uncertainly, glancing about the dressing room in an inquisitive, even insatiable manner.

MARVIN (cont.) To *what?* 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 lady and your leading man in one fell swoop! I am 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.

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*) Who the---?

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

Suddenly he 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 during all this. She sits down quietly on the settee.

He turns to her, expecting to find her in her former place, then finds her.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Whose idea was that, bringing me coffee? Not our director's by any chance? Not Nigel Burbage's? What a ridiculous idea to assume the name of an Elizabethan actor-manager, don't you think so? (*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 Algonquin 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 last night was after my socks. You have nice tits, I'll say that.

LIZZY: What?

MARVIN: She speaks but one word---'what'. (*Turning to her with a leer*) 'What'?

LIZZY: Who do you think you are?

MARVIN: Oh my God not *that* line! (*Continuing his make-up*) Not after Eliza! What's your name anyway?

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.

MARVIN: Who's he?

LIZZY: Your director. He's just directed you in Macbeth.

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 door*)!

MARVIN: Get out, go on! Get out quick! and KNOCK!

He pushes her out of the door and closes it smartly.

MARVIN (*cont., screaming at her through the door*) Knock three times!

LIZZY (*off*) What?

MARVIN: Oh don't keep saying what woman! This is a matter of life and death! Knock on the fucking door three times!

LIZZY knocks on the door.

He is visibly relieved.

MARVIN (*cont.*) You may come in.

She reenters.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Now turn round three times. *Turn!* Go on!

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---  
.....*What?.....*This is *what?.....*The *second shock?.....What?* Oh do stop talking about your bloody ex-wife man! This is a theatre and---!*.....What?* (*Turning to stare at LIZZY*) That's right, Lizzy Turndale. And 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.*) So you're an actress. (*Putting his nose within an inch of hers*) You're Nigel Burbage's wife aren't you? (*As she is about to speak*) It's no use you lying, he's just told me! 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. Why are you here?

LIZZY: Because I'm in love with you.

MARVIN: No I mean the real reason. Why did you name the 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 Macbeth? You will notice that in naming the Play I've joined your little subterfuge.

LIZZY: 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 considered the most avant garde man in the business! Students travel from all over the world to see the man who's always different, who performs the Old Chap as you've never seen him performed before, as a new event!

LIZZY: But that's old hat!

MARVIN: Avant garde means ahead of the time!

LIZZY: You're only ahead of the time when you were twenty. That's *years* ago! You've stayed there ever since. People don't even *use* the word avant garde any more. They don't know what it means! And all you do is turn the stuff on its 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, except Cordelia, to think he really *is* old and that he screwed his mother and by the end of *that* show 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 Macbeth as a dike and him<sup>al</sup>/AC DC. I mean it really does work. They hire someone to play Macbeth and they take the rap for the murders because they want the next king to be a woman.

A puzzled silence.

LIZZY: Don't you see, everybody's *ignorant* now? You can't stand Shakespeare on his head if they know nothing about him<sup>al</sup> on his *feet!* I mean, they want to know, shit, what's all this about? They don't get the *words!* 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 ~~to~~ put your hand in a pram and bring it out with shit all over it---but the list of outrages has been exhausted now Marvin---

MARVIN (*jumping up with a scream*) NOT MARVIN! You will not call me Marvin.

She shrugs. He rises, paces round in thought.

She leans back, her eyes closed. He stands watching her.

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

He looks bewildered, steals a glance at his dressing table.

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 (*objectly submitting to his need for an immediate answer*) You won't tell me?

LIZZY: I think it's because you never change, never listen. The sun doesn't look at me or listen to me but I love to bask in it.  
*(Gazing at him with real curiosity)* You can't be anything but what you are, can you? If the world shrivelled up you'd go on being yourself as a little spot of grease.

*He's your fumble -*

MARVIN (*with uncomfortable insincerity*) I'm *myself*, yes. What else can I be?

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 sixty minutes, nobody would notice the difference.

MARVIN: So---I don't look old?

LIZZY (*sighing*) You even *talk* old, like it was 1900. I mean, you never talk ordinary.

MARVIN (*still abject*) Because I'm *not* ordinary?

LIZZY: 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.  
*(Regretfully)* Have I hurt you?

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

LIZZY (*this passes her by*) If you played straight---I mean instead of playing for dirty laughs when you're supposed to be sterling noble, and high tragedy when it's knockabout farce, people would see you've got nothing inside you! You're all outside! But that's an asset. 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 what does that matter now

that theatre doesn't exist? You don't need to have an inside.

MARVIN: Ah, so theatre doesn't exist!

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 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. 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.*) 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 and does a deafening whistle.

MARVIN (*cont., gripping her round the throat in horror*) Stop, stop!

She screams so loud that he loosens his grip at once.

MARVIN (*cont.*) What an extraordinary noise. *Two* extraordinary noises.  
Now---where were you?

LIZZY: I was saying you're unreal.

MARVIN: No 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*) But the idea isn't to keep you *in*, Miss Turnout! It's to keep others *out*!

LIZZY: He also said you were completely bloody bonkers.

MARVIN: You see, my dear, I'm going to take you hostage. But more of that later.

He returns to his dressing table and resumes making up.

MARVIN (*cont.*) You'll be my Ophelia. It's a good part for you because it isn't really a part at all. 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. Now that this is no longer true, now that I'm prime Lear material and thin in the shank I shall give them a younger, in the sense of 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 Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, will probably be half my age, but she shall be seen as a crone next to my adolescence.

LIZZY: I'm not a bit afraid. All you do is talk.

MARVIN: That's what *you* think. You don't witness me at this moment removing Macbeth and replacing him with Hamlet? You don't hear me say Macbeth shamelessly and thus joining you in the clever bad spell you put upon our production? You have 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 Macbeth is billed for the coming Thursday? Because this is REVOLUTION my dear. Talking time is over. The 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?

His earnestness sweeps her out of her  
scepticism.

LIZZY: Oh yes! He knows I only run after men who can do without me,

so he divorces me to show he can do without me.

MARVIN: Which of course he can't.

LIZZY: Oh no.

MARVIN: So he will hear those screams with a measure of concern!

He dials a number on the 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. We can see in this all his revenge for what she has said to him.

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. But I warn you that she may be found dead. If I were you I'd remember your own words, Marvin James is a madman.

He tightens the grip and she screams frantically.

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

He lays the phone on the table and releases her, leaving her staggering about clutching her throat.

He goes briskly to the cupboard upstage of the settee and pulls it open. She watches with horror as he draws out a dagger.

She grabs the phone.

LIZZY: Nigel, Nigel! He *is* mad! He's---!

MARVIN approaches her menacingly. He grabs her after a little chase.

She struggles and tries to bite him. 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: All I did was draw a little blood. 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 mean I need to kill her later, 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 blubbering, it was only superficial!

LIZZY (*inspecting the blood*) This is ketchup! You fucking---!

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

MARVIN: 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 this little display is about?

LIZZY: Yes I am.

MARVIN: It's my little museum of stage daggers. Several date back to 1701. I have some of the most memorable daggers ever used. (*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, why don't you wash out that ketchup, it hopefully won't stain too much?

She follows helplessly, going behind the screen.

We hear her washing the dress.

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 that on to flatter me?

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

MARVIN: Where did you find it?

LIZZY (*off*) At 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 (*sitting at his dressing table and gazing before him with pleasure*) I suppose it *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 take 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 your *Macbeth* 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 and almost in 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, beautifully got up in his dressing gown but she is 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 he seems to cry on her shoulder.

LIZZY: Change the lights to something sweet!

MARVIN (*breaking from her with dry eyes*) 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: I could never manage that. They used to squirt water in my eyes from the wings.

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*) Nigel always said you couldn't take criticism! That's your downfall he said! That's why you're a museum piece, why it's impossible to direct you, why 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, a Madame Tussaud revolutionary'! (*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 like a fucking intellectual without an intellect! Look at the way you played that scene when I came in. 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 Macbeth 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!

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.

LIZZY (*cont.*) OK go on!

We hear police sirens in the distance.

LIZZY (*cont.*) *Go on!*

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 jumps up and gets the radio mike from the table. She thrusts it into MARVIN's hand. He is still on the floor.

MARVIN (*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!

The police sirens come nearer.

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 strange 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 Macbeth 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 to the end of the corridor now, 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 Macbeth production---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 Macbeth! 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 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 Macbeth 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 hundred of us down here. Will you do that? Please do that Mr James.

Together MARVIN and LIZZY steal to the window in the inner room. When they have glanced below they stare at each other with chastened astonishment. They return 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 shall have to 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. The Irish Republican Army is threatening to renew its bomb attacks and if

the past is anything to go by they take advantage of any abnormal situation of this kind, where the police force is concentrated in one spot. Help your country Mr James! Don't facilitate the murder of innocent men and women!

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

H.N. (*VO*) Well Miss Turndale they means 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 inside 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?

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 twenty eight 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 hotpants, 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 a stage! She warned me early what seething cauldrons of manipulation you cunt-people are, using our natural terror of the mother to instal 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: If you'd played like that in *May Buds* all might have been well. 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*) When you were throttling me a little while back it was 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 not?

MARVIN: 'Why not?'

LIZZY: And why *shouldn't* Ophelia be a hotpants? That was a very successful scene! Anyway you've got two minutes or less to decide on your future, Marvin James. If you don't come up with the right answer it's curtains for you and your stage career. Has

the penny not dropped? (*Underlining it vehemently*) It isn't only Ophelia I'm after, it's a new production of Hamlet *on my terms!* Do you get 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 directs 'round you! As he always says, when you're in a play the centre's always missing!

MARVIN (*drunk with insults now*) Oh bugger what Nigel Burbage always says. It's a pity you don't look into yourself instead of me. You're trying to get into my pants and you're using Ophelia as a ploy. 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 remain 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 (*trying to grab ther mike from between her legs!*)

She manages to retain it by hitting him in the balls with it.

LIZZY (*as he yells with pain*) I'm going to marry you too!

MARVIN (*falling back*) Marry me? Nobody's ever succeeded in doing that!

LIZZY: Why else do you think we were flung together this morning? Why else should I be magnetised to this room? It hurts me to hear you spoken of as too old for Lear---

MARVIN: Too old---!

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 then suddenly sees her as his leading lady? They fall inlove during the siege! Surrounded by the police! 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 it, Marvin, a Lady Macbeth!

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

LIZZY: You liar, you'd give your right arm to be a knight, let alone a king, everybody in the business knows it! You go green with envy every time a fag gets hit on the shoulder with that 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.

H.N.'s voice breaks in over the intercom, in some alarm.

H.N. (VO) Mr James---Mr James---! We---

There is an enormous explosion.

Simultaneously the lights BLACK OUT.

Screams in the distance. Shattering glass. People running.

The hammering on the door has ceased.

LIZZY *(her screams genuine this time)* Marvin! Marvin!

Ambulance sirens.

**ACT TWO**

The scene opens on a **BLACKOUT**. We gradually discern dim street lights at the window of the far room.

The **LIGHTS** suddenly come 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.

A few seconds later they stir. Blinking awake they are surprised to find themselves where they are, and with whom they are, and at what degree of proximity.

**LIZZY**'s clothes are disordered. He is dishevelled.

They slump 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? Miss Turndale?

**MARVIN** stirs. He kisses **LIZZY** lightly on the cheek.

**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*) Christ, 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) Three people were killed in the explosion Mr James.

MARVIN: Three people! (*Roughly nudging LIZZY, then to her, hissing:*) Three people were killed. (*Into the mike*) Where for God's sake?

She leans up.

H.N. (VO) It was an IRA bomb Mr Marvin---it blew up half the foyer!

MARVIN: Oh my God!

H.N. (VO) There were seven of them dressed as policemen Mr Marvin. I did warn you Mr James that the IRA might take advantage of the situation, though I didn't expect them to be that brash.

MARVIN: Yes, you did warn me dammit!

H.N. (VO) After the bomb went off, in the confusion, the IRA men entered the foyer and took possession of it. They're still there Mr James. They're at the foot of your staircase.

MARVIN: Oh my God!

LIZZY (*hissing*) Stop saying that!

H.N. (VO) I'm afraid we are now their hostages Mr James. All of us.

MARVIN: Oh my---(*he is gagged by her hand*)!

H.N. (VO) That is, *we're* barricaded in on the auditorium side of the foyer while *they're* barricaded in on the other side, in the foyer itself, against both us and the police outside. Do you get the picture?

MARVIN: Well of course I get the picture!

H.N. (VO) We are thus in control of the auditorium, the stage and the dressing rooms, while they occupy the foyer and, of course, being Irish, the foyer bar. They have radio-controlled bombs and are threatening to blow up your staircase by blasting their way through to the back of the stage, which alas we don't *wholly* control, which is why a few of them have got through to your staircase, which they will blow up if they don't get their demands.

MARVIN: Well, give them what they want man!

H.N. (VO) I'm afraid, Mr James, that's out of our hands, since we too are hostages, though divided from our captors by a wall and two rows of seats which we pushed against the foyer doors, we broke them up into twos and threes---

MARVIN: Yes, yes, I don't need to know your guerilla arrangements, what the fuck is going to happen to *me*?

LIZZY (*hissing*) Us!

H.N. (VO) I'm afraid that depends on the hostage negotiator, who of course isn't me any more, he's dealing with them by voice from the street. They want twenty-one men serving life-sentences in Northern Ireland released and the good thing is that they *are* prepared to negotiate on the exact number. So I find myself Mr James in the odd position of being a hostage negotiator while at the same time a hostage.

MARVIN makes an insipid smile to LIZZY.

H.N. (VO, *cont.*) By the way the Resistance, as they prefer to be called, would like to say that they are especially sorry to see your life sacrificed as they remember your memorable performance as Othello at the Gate theatre in Dublin.

MARVIN: Oh my---(*again he is swiftly gagged by LIZZY*)!

H.N. (VO) I'm afraid you do bear a heavy responsibility Mr James for attracting the IRA to this theatre, thus incurring the death of three innocent members of the front of house staff. We have armed police with us here but unfortunately they are hostages too. However the police surrounding the building, on the outside of the foyer entrance doors, are free. We've been ordered not to enter your room, Mr James---ordered by the Irish Resistance. There is an understandable fear on their side that the only exit to the street still unguarded is the one leading from your suite to the stage door, which is why they have a few men there.

LIZZY (*horrified, hissing*) They're OUT THERE?

MARVIN (*hissing*) Waiting to blow up the staircase! (*To H.N.*) Is the stage door in their hands?

H.N. (VO) I'm afraid so Mr James.

MARVIN: Oh my god.

H.N. (VO) They overran the corridor on one side of the stalls and managed to get to the stage door that way, through the pass door. They're all in radio communication with each other but of course are fearful of talking because we can monitor every word. When we realised what was going on we occupied the stage, thus protecting ourselves and to some extent you.

MARVIN: But *my* exit goes down to the stage door too dammit!

H.N. (VO) Right again Mr James. In this sense you and Miss Turndale are more their hostages than we are, since we can at least fight for it, cut them off so to speak.

MARVIN: So to speak my arse! Fancy letting a bunch of phoney policemen through!

H.N. (VO) They were awfully convincing, I'm afraid. By the way, there is a possibility that the ones at the foot of your staircase, at the stage door, will try to negotiate with me through you or, worse, kill or torture one or both of you in an attempt to twist the Home Secretary's arm. Is your door locked Mr James, I mean really well?

MARVIN: Of course it is, I locked it against *you*!

H.N. (VO) Not that it'll give you much protection. But I'm forgetting. You can defend yourself very adequately. You have an arms cache.

MARVIN: That's boloney! 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 life was a stage gun and that scared my balls off! The things can backfire and scorch your wrist you know!

H.N.(VO) What was Miss Turndale's motive in lying in this way do you think?

MARVIN (*they are fighting for the mike now*) Publicity! She wants to play Ophelia to my Hamlet. She couldn't even play Hamlet's skull!

She lands him a blow in his belly which forbids further speech but he manages to retain hold of 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. I mean, I told the IRA that you had an arms cache in there which would make them green with envy. So Miss Turndale's lie has turned out useful, perhaps to us all.

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) In the meantime Mr James keep as calm as possible. At least you're no longer a kidnapper, not in the immediate technical sense, having been taken hostage by the IRA. Was that ever your serious intention, Mr James, to kidnap someone?

MARVIN: Of course it wasn't (*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! I must say she did her screams pretty well, for RADA anyway, I mean even *you* took them seriously didn't you?

H.N. (VO) Let me say this Mr James. If Miss Turndale can assure us that she hasn't been injured or molested, then, if we all come out of this alive, no charges will be preferred against 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 Mr James we must all be brave and patient and pray to God that peace enters the hearts of our captors.

LIZZY (*hissing*) Say Amen!

MARVIN: Balls!

The intercom cuts out.

MARVIN (*cont., from under the table*) I thought the IRA was finished. Wasn't there something about a ceasefire to get the President re-elected? An actor was telling me about it at Sardi's.

LIZZY: Perhaps.

MARVIN: What do you mean, perhaps? Don't you read the newspapers? (*Shaking his head and sighing*) I suppose the talks must have broken down, or they just decided to re-exist, just like that!

He crawls out from under the table.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Trust a damned little rep actress to get me blown up by the IRA! The Home Office won't give them their conditions. Release twenty one prisoners? The Home Office? It takes them two years to file a report! So blow us up is what they'll do. (*Going close to her*) But if we walk out of this alive, Miss Turnpike, I shall 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 (*coldly*) I dare say you're quite a reliable judge of performance.

LIZZY: But you didn't excite me!

MARVIN: I didn't notice your attention wandering!

LIZZY: Oh, I get hot at the sound of a zip.

She begins making up nonchalantly.

MARVIN (*gazing at her*) You're acting pretty cool.

LIZZY: There isn't an Irishman in the world would blow up a theatre, least of all with a famous actor in it. A palace, a cabinet office, yes, but not a theatre. Have you got a loo here?

MARVIN: As a matter of fact I've been thinking, you hold it pretty well.

He indicates the inner room.

She takes her shoes and panty hose with her.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Don't mistake the door, otherwise you'll find yourself with the Irish resistance. Then your false bravado'll fall to pieces.

We hear LIZZY open the lavatory door.

MARVIN paces up and down in thought.

MARVIN (*cont., to himself*) The son of the greatest comedienne of her

time---

He is interrupted by the sound of LIZZY peeing. He stares at the arch with irritation.

We hear the john flush. LIZZY returns.

MARVIN (*cont., to LIZZY*) 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?

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

LIZZY: Soap's bad for the skin.

MARVIN: That's what *she* said.

LIZZY: I run my fingers through the water. Perfectly adequate.

MARVIN: 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*) Yes I know, and she screwed all of them. '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---

With his hand over her mouth he begins shaking her.

LIZZY: You're hurting me!

MARVIN: *Hurting you? You're as strong as an ox!*

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 Resistance 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, except for two groups, one guarding the main doors of the theatre and the other outside the stage door. These are now assisted by troops. From your window you will 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.

LIZZY and MARVIN make sour faces at each other.

H.N. (VO, *cont.*) The breathing space will give the resistance time to reconsider the Home Office's terms, which offer reduced sentences and/or prison transfers. On the other hand there have been three deaths and these chaps are going to be held for murder and this imparts a certain recklessness to their approach which is hardly good news for you and us here, particularly for you. I'll be in touch again soon.

H.N. cuts out.

LIZZY: Could I have a glass of milk?

MARVIN: Since things are looking up I'll get it for you (*making for the inner room*).

We hear him opening the fridge.

LIZZY: I suppose I ought to make you coffee.

MARVIN (*off*) I can imagine what *you* mean by coffee. I used to make coffee for my mother on tour. That's how I knew you were a fake when you came into this room with a cup of coffee in your hand. People bring Marvin James tea but never coffee (*reappearing with a glass of milk*).

He hands her the milk.

LIZZY (*sipping*) So you play me along.

MARVIN: I was intrigued by those large eyes. They reminded me of someone.

LIZZY: Your mother.

MARVIN: Someone else.

He sits at his dressing table and sips the coffee she brought him when she first entered, and which he didn't finish.

LIZZY (*staring at him*) That wasn't any good even when it started!

He shrugs this off.

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 phonecalls 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 could make love to you three times in a row at my age is my cue to pull out much quicker 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. But I made it, I think for that reason. My first hit was *The Cherry Orchard*, where having a world of my own seemed to fit the bill. The rest was a series of flukes and some good casting. Then Nigel Burbage came along and was wise or foolish enough to see me as a classical actor. (*Gazing at her*) When you and I made love your noises were hers. I inwardly returned to the primal scene while in your arms. You know about Freud and the primal scene, that model for all the love we ever make. I heard once again the sounds of my mother's lovemaking. They dominated my life. If I married you I'd never act again, my old fears would grip me. All my childhood I trembled. 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

*Exploited*

masturbate under the covers when she thought I was asleep. She always used my fear as her disciplinary weapon---'If you don't do this your mother'll never come back.' And now I need that fear like a drug. You can see me trembling now maybe but I'm in my seventh heaven. If I married you I'd be trembling night and day.

LIZZY (*quietly*) Isn't this from a show?

MARVIN: What?

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

MARVIN (*unconcerned*) What about it? 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 an *it*. You're not a monster. You're a stage *thing*. Your mother must have fucked a theatre to get you.

He is sipping his coffee but suddenly rejects it with disgust.

MARVIN: You're right! One simply shouldn't drink day-old coffee. (*Jumping up*) I have an idea.

He hurries to the inner room.

MARVIN (*cont., off*) My balls literally ached when I walked off after that speech. It was the longest fucking speech ever written. I tried it as an extended exit line---you know, half of me going out and the other half drifting ~~back~~. It always looks bloody silly.

We hear the pop of a champagne cork.

MARVIN (*cont., off*) Healthy sound, what? Burbage said that's no good at all. You can't keep bobbing in and out like that. Even the RSC doesn't do it any more. Keep seated, he said. Then it'll come from inside.

LIZZY (*gloomily*) That's good news at any rate.

He reappears with two glasses of

champagne.

MARVIN: What is?

LIZZY: That Nigel thinks you're got an inside.

MARVIN (*handing her a glass*) Save your wit for the IRA. (*As they touch glasses*) Here's to survival.

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 the 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: Another long speech---watch it! When he's nervous he talks, and mostly lies. That's another thing they say.

MARVIN (*as he goes back to the inner room for a refill*) Anyway, you know how good Tilly Armitage is on character, she pulled it off like a dream.

LIZZY: So who do my eyes remind you of, if not your ghastly mother?

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

LIZZY: Well of course I remind you of her. I'm her daughter!

MARVIN returns very slowly.

MARVIN: What did you say?

LIZZY: Tilly Armitage is my mother.

MARVIN (*staring at her*) The big eyes! Shining black grapes! If a writer could get black shining grapes into a speech she grabbed the play! Why didn't you say so before? I'd have kicked you out long ago! (*Vehemently*) She sent you here, didn't she, you little bitch?

LIZZY: Sent me *here*? She bars your name! That's why I had to see your shows in secret.

MARVIN (*really to himself*) You're the spitten image!

LIZZY: She used to tell the front of house people if you see Lizzy kick her out.

MARVIN: I *thought* something fishy was going on. OK, it's the last time I touch you! Jesus, sleeping with Tilly Armitage's daughter! She'd kill me!

LIZZY (*calmly*) And me.

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! *To my daughter, that she's a bitch!*

LIZZY: Why don't you sit down and shut up? You're not convincing. You know she wants to kill you anyway.

MARVIN: Of course I know. They're the most famous offstage lines in the trade---Marvin James killed my career, he hogged all the light, kept his best profile to the audience at the expense of mine, he masked my best business! I turned him into a star and after that the audience hardly noticed me! (*Imitating her gravelly baritone*) I feel totally unseeeeeeen.

LIZZY: It's true though isn't it?

MARVIN (*furiously*) Well of course it's true! This is a tough business!

Mami: Who do you mean -  
flying high?

LIZZY: I'm amazed you never made it with her sexually. Nigel Burbage reckoned you had fifty-four actresses in the course of fifteen productions---

He suddenly remembers something.

MARVIN: But of course! That's her husband's name isn't it? Stokes! You're Jean 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 as well. Your mother started just like you did by the way.

LIZZY: How was that?

MARVIN: She wanted to get there so badly she was prepared to forfeit the happiness of any male she had her eye on. Don't forget Stokes was one of the most generous of the City angels and that 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. You who have no ethics saw that the best way to do this and still look like a human being was to play roles in which the heart predominated! 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 her off her technique poor thing! Tilly Armitage all over! The fact is you're both too bloody lazy to *learn* a technique!

LIZZY (*perfectly tranquil*) But it works doesn't it? You say so yourself.

MARVIN: Precisely! 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 Tilly Armitage---all her lovers say it---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. (*Drilling*

*it into her*) If those IRA men came in now you'd deflate like a beach mattress, whereas I'd give them the performance of my life! That's the difference between me and the Armitage family---I'm a *stage beast*, I was dandled on knees in dressing rooms before I could utter my first syllables. The only life I know is in the company of that sweating, morose, unkind and yet gentle monster, the theatre audience. And that's why I invariably have them at my feet, even the critics who pan my performances. *They* only go to the theatre a few evenings a week but I live it, I inhabit its darkneses and know how to weave my spells and in the end my enemies fall before them.

LIZZY: 'My enemies <sup>(do)</sup> *succumb*' are the words. And mummy says 'Oh *Peter* go to *bed* and shut up'. She's sitting more or less where I'm sitting. You're a bit further downstage, with your good side to the audience.

MARVIN: And just like your mother you're---infuriating to the point of---reducing one---. (*Sitting down with great fatigue at the dressing table*).

LIZZY: To sincerity? Wouldn't *that* be something! You know, you're probably right that I'm not really an actress. I actually try to be sincere, OK I rarely succeed but I do enjoy sincere company. There *are* sincere people. Real people.

MARVIN: I didn't say you weren't an actress. You're just a *bad* <sup>one</sup> actress. All you can do is act, sincerely, and act badly---if sincerely. Whereas *my* sincerity's perfect. It's rehearsed to the finest detail of hypocrisy, and it convinces everybody.

LIZZY: Just the same, that was the garden speech in *May Bugs*, and only a madman talks *prepared* lines as conversation.

MARVIN: If I ever spoke the truth she said you're doing a speech from some show. (*Furious*) The *names* are different! I never said Tilly or Miss Turntable in a play!

LIZZY: Well of course! You *adapt*.

He looks at her helplessly for a moment.

MARVIN: I could never touch that woman. When she said what about a drinky after the show I ran for a cab. I imagine Stokes is

wretchedly unhappy. I see him at Whites from time to time.

LIZZY: Is that your club? Your club should be the Garrick if you're an actor.

MARVIN: I don't do obvious things. *Sincere* things.

He sits forlornly.

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! *hum's*

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'm here for been* I sometimes needed a rest ~~dammit!~~ *'had Nigel's job now!*

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: She 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: The IRA's 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: I don't intend to.

LIZZY (*walking on*) Don't worry, the last thing they'll want to do to a woman is kill her, *daddy*. You see this (*opening her blouse and showing him her breasts*), *daddy*?

He does nothing.

She has gone.

We hear her footsteps echoing down the staircase.

Suddenly there is a burst of machine-gun fire.

MARVIN (*rushing to the exit*) Viktoria! Viktoria!

Blackout.

**ACT THREE**

The lights are set dim.

MARVIN and LIZZY are once more lying asleep on the settee. As before, she is more or less on top of him.

MARVIN's head is thrown back in extreme exhaustion. His mouth is wide open. They lie motionless, in a dead sleep.

We discern hushed movement in the area of the inner room.

Without a sound A HOODED FIGURE enters from the staircase and pauses to take in his surroundings.

He sees MARVIN and LIZZY and remains a few feet away, gazing at them. He stands there for some time.

He tiptoes to the settee. When he reaches it he stops, turning his gaze from MARVIN to LIZZY and back again. He moves closer to MARVIN.

He bends down and peers deeply into MARVIN's face, so that he almost touches him. He remains like this, peering at MARVIN, motionless.

MARVIN, stirred from his sleep by this proximity, blinks slightly, makes a movement. He starts and seems for a moment to see THE HOODED FIGURE. He lets out a sleep-muffled cry of horror, the silent scream of nightmare.

Perceiving this THE HOODED FIGURE withdraws, but slowly, still gazing at MARVIN, who seems to be following his movements with the utmost fear.

THE HOODED FIGURE disappears behind the arch.

MARVIN (*shaking LIZZY awake*) Did you see that? (*As she stirs helplessly*) Did you see?

LIZZY (*suddenly awake and sitting up, hitting his face in doing so*) See what?

MARVIN: Oh my God we must have left the door open!

LIZZY (*catching his terror*) Who was it?

MARVIN: A man! A hooded man!

LIZZY (*throwing herself back*) Oh fuck off!

MARVIN: He was *here, here!* Well get up dammit and shut the door!

Instead she hides her head under the blanket.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Where's that mike?

He pulls it from under her the mike and frantically switches it to on.

MARVIN (*into the mike*) Hullo! Hullo! Are you there?

LIZZY (*still hidden*) Well of course I'm here (*pulling the blanket away from her face in exasperation*)!

Silence.

MARVIN: Oh my God they've buggered off and left us with the IRA!

He desperately glances round at the inner room. H.N.'s voice breaks in quietly.

H.N. (*VO*) Are you calling us Mr James?

MARVIN (*into the mike*) One of them just came in! Hood over his head!

H.N. (VO) One of the Resistance sir?

MARVIN: Who else?

H.N. (VO) With a hood on? Was he in a policeman's uniform Mr James?

MARVIN: I was asleep, how the hell should I know?

H.N. (VO) And how did he effect his entry Mr James?

MARVIN: He just walked in! We must have left the door open!

H.N. (VO) Have you closed it Mr James?

MARVIN: Not yet. (*Hissing at LIZZY*) Shut the fucking door!

LIZZY (*hissing back*) And get myself shot?

H.N. (VO) Shouldn't you do that right away Mr James?

MARVIN manages to throw LIZZY off and stumble towards the arch, still holding the mike.

MARVIN (*into the mike*) I'm doing it now.

He approaches the doorway in gingerly fashion, craning round, on tiptoe.

LIZZY (*hissing*) You flabby yellow-livered wanker!

MARVIN : Sssssh!

He takes the plunge and with a grotesque run kicks the door closed, locks it once and rushes back to the settee and throws himself back on it.

MARVIN (*into the mike*) I've done it!

H.N. (VO) What possessed you to open the door in the first place Mr James?

- MARVIN: Miss Turnstile ran out. Couldn't stand the strain. She came back pretty quick when the bullets started flying!
- H.N. (VO) There *was* an unaccountable burst of machine gunfire at around 1.00 a.m.
- MARVIN: They fired up the stairs. She prefers life as a hostage.
- H.N. (VO) We didn't call you, thinking you might be asleep.
- MARVIN: We took a sleeping pill.
- H.N. (VO) Hence the open door.
- MARVIN: Exactly.
- H.N. (VO) The negotiations are breaking down, Mr James. At the moment they're trying to strike a bargain over your lives.
- MARVIN: Oh my God!

LIZZY hides her head again.

- H.N. (VO) They will kill you both if they don't get safe passage back to Ireland. But of course sir the Home Secretary can hardly consent to that.
- MARVIN: Aren't they threatening you as well?
- H.N. (VO) We humble policemen aren't the news value you are Mr James. It's a war of attrition sir. But I think we're wearing them down. Since there are so few of them they can only sleep fitfully. Might I suggest you and Miss Turndale quarrel less audibly? Please remember that you have both been trained in voice projection. Your voices are even reaching us over the IRA intercom.
- MARVIN (to LIZZY, *hissing*) It's that bloody fog horn of yours!
- H.N. (VO) Are you a catholic sir?
- MARVIN: No.
- H.N. (VO) And Miss Turndale?

LIZZY (*hissing with withering scorn*) What, Tilly Armitage's daughter? I'm not even baptised.

MARVIN (*into the mike*) Agnostic.

H.N. (VO) Would you nevertheless join us in a prayer from one here who's a C. of E. minister?

MARVIN: I suppose so.

C. of E. MAN: Let our minds dwell not on saving this life but on the glories of the next, so that should the moment come we shall be inwardly prepared and readily accept the sacrifice we have been called upon to make for ends which, in our earthly mantle, we cannot properly understand, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

ALL: Amen.

MARVIN is thoroughly mournful after this, his chin in his chest.

LIZZY (*appearing again*) That's the death knell. My granma used to say about clergymen if it's a catholic expect a glass of whisky but a protestant is curtains.

MARVIN: Stuff your granma.

LIZZY (*jumping up---and in the act pushing him off the settee*) I'm going to make some coffee. (*On her way to the inner room*) We need a plan! (*Off*) All you've got is this instant stuff! You're a born faker!

MARVIN: The IRA'll pick that up. (*Wandering over to the inner room*) What the hell are you doing? That's for constipation! The coffee's in a jar marked jasmine tea!

Something made of glass smashes.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Oh my God!

LIZZY (*screaming, off*) STOP SAYING THAT! Can't you see I've burned myself?

MARVIN (*entering the inner room, off*) You don't leave the gas on while you talk and *then* light it!

He leads her back into the dressing room with his arm round her.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Just like your mother. Can't even fix an egg.

LIZZY (*hiding her head in his chest*) I don't want to die!

MARVIN: So what about this plan?

LIZZY (*abruptly ceasing to cry*) That man came in here to see Marvin James! With his own eyes! Don't you see what magic you have for people as long as they don't know you personally?

MARVIN: You're trembling. Why don't you sit down?

He deposits her on the settee.

MARVIN (*cont.*) So you wish to use me?

LIZZY: Yes! I needn't tell you that the great Garrick made his first hit as Richard 111 by playing it without rant or declamation or those big artificial gestures that were fashionable at the time.

A silence. He stares at her.

MARVIN: That's Tilly's mad scene.

LIZZY: Critics of the time tell us he had an easy and familiar yet forceful style. You know that in 1746 he and the actor Quin, who played in the old flamboyant style, had a competition to see which of them the audience preferred.

MARVIN (*touching her*) Your hands are ice cold. Wake up! Wake up! (*Slapping her cheeks slightly*).

LIZZY: Garrick's natural style won. 53 years later another great actor called Kemble made his debut, also as Richard 111. He returned to the old high department but not to the ranting.

MARVIN (*past his patience*) Yes I know---

TOGETHER: He had a solemn cadence but made rather long stately pauses, while his action was extremely expressive. Now may I ask you a question?

MARVIN: I think I prefer coffee.

TOGETHER: Which of those three do you prefer?

MARVIN: They all bore the shit out of me. And so do you. (*Turning his back on her*) You're an alternative to the IRA but only just.

LIZZY: Kemble?

MARVIN: Frighten me out of my wits! Just like your mother. She feigned dead once. Two minutes was being called, you've never seen such a bloody commotion in all your life! They held the curtain and they carried her onstage. 'Play dead to a full house!' the ASM said and dropped her on the floor and ordered the tabs up. She was on her feet in a jiffy, the artful bitch!

LIZZY (*still trembling violently*) Kemble?

MARVIN: Let me get some milk first. (*He returns to the kitchen, off*) Kemble no, too romantic.

LIZZY: So it's Garrick?

MARVIN (*off*) Garrick had my sort of magnetism. Had them in the palm of his hand (*appearing again with a glass of milk and sipping from it*).

LIZZY; So you see how you live at cross purposes, how you esteem Garrick and act like Quin---

TOGETHER; And in the end succeed only in being Kemble.

LIZZY: Don't you see you must now graduate to Henry Irving---

TOGETHER: By adding *hypnotism*?

MARVIN: As a matter of fact, you're marginally more bonkers than she is.

LIZZY: With your magic you can beguile, persuade, flatter, convince!

Go downstairs and use it! I'd do it if I had your fifty years of experience!

MARVIN: *Fifty?*

LIZZY: All your life you've twisted directors and managers and leading ladies---

TOGETHER: ---and casting agencies round your fickle finger.

LIZZY: Go and twist the IRA!

He sits at the dressing table and studies himself at the mirror.

MARVIN: What would I tell them?

LIZZY: 'Hullo, I believe you're all Dubliners. I did a dramatisation of The Dubliners a while back.'

He stares at her.

MARVIN: I didn't. That was Samuel Beckett. He wanted to write a one-man show for me as a hand. I said what about my mouth and he said that'll be invisible, all I want is your hand, I told him to piss off.

LIZZY: Tell them that.

MARVIN: What?

LIZZY: About Samuel Beckett.

MARVIN: It isn't true (*as he begins to make up*). Anyway, I must have real lines. I can't talk like a *person*.

He takes a packet of letters tied round with ribbon from a drawer.

MARVIN (*cont., throwing them at her*) Here! Let's rehearse from 'I have remembrances of yours.'

LIZZY (*trembling violently*) I'm not doing that Ophelia scene! (*Screaming*) I CAN'T! I CAN'T!

He suddenly jumps up with enormous ferocity and seizes her by the throat.

MARVIN (*cont.*) You're acting along with me! Now pull yourself together! They like to see a nice pair of tits! (*As she hesitates*) Go in the kitchen and wait for your cue!

She picks up the packet of letters and start to go reluctantly. He sets the lights. She turns, watching him.

LIZZY: We're performing *here*?

MARVIN: Since the buggers aren't paying the least they can do is walk up the stairs.

LIZZY: You mean you're afraid to walk down them.

MARVIN: Get out!

She leaves. He finalises the lights and prepares his position, his best side towards the door.

MARVIN (*cont. playing Hamlet*) Soft you now! The fair Ophelia (*gazing toward the kitchen area*)!

No LIZZY.

MARVIN (*cont.*) Soft you now! The fair---! What the fuck are you doing?

LIZZY comes in with her eyes popping out of her head. She has taken the ribbon off the packet of letters.

LIZZY: These letters are from my mother!

MARVIN (*dashing forward*) How dare you---!

She jumps aside, clinging to the letters.

LIZZY (*reading from a letter*) 'She tried to burn the house down yesterday.'  
Who's *she*?

MARVIN: I wouldn't press the enquiry if I were you. You've been hurt once, this time it'll be worse! Worse than me sleeping with your mother for a week!

LIZZY (*resolute*) Who's *she*?

He walks away.

MARVIN: My daughter. *I think*. Her name's Viktoria with a K.

LIZZY: That's the name you shouted down the stairs!

MARVIN: My daughter by your mum. There, I told you not to walk into the fire.

She sits down under the weight of the shock.

LIZZY (*completely out of it*) You mean you're *not* my daddy? That I *haven't* committed incest? That I *don't* have the child of incest within me?

MARVIN: I'm talking about Viktoria, not you. After all, we named this theatre after her. I wanted it spelt with a K but Tilly said no, spell it like the *old* Vic, it has more impact.

She watches him.

LIZZY: So I'm Arthur Stokes's daughter after all? I don't *mind* being his daughter (*her face crinkling up with tears*), I *love* him, but I just want to know!

MARVIN: Read some more, burn your hands more.

LIZZY (*reading unwillingly through her tears but also excited*) 'She's a criminal like you'. (*Looks at him*) 'She said she'll come to your first night and start screaming when you say out out brief candle. She says you can put your bloody candle where the monkey put the nuts. She says you snuffed *her* candle all right. And she says she loves you.' (*Looks at him*) 'She'd much rather see you than me. That's *your* dirty work too isn't it? Undermining and pulling down, counting me for nothing, upstaging me as you've always done! By the way, Viktoria says she put *a real knife* in your daggers cupboard last night---

LIZZY looks round at the daggers cupboard.

LIZZY (*cont.*) If that's true you could have killed me two days ago! That could have been my blood, not ketchup. *Is there a real knife in that cupboard?*

MARVIN: Oh Viktoria's full of nonsense.

LIZZY (*thinking*) Wait a minute. You and Tilly did a play called *The Name's Viktoria*. That was with a K wasn't it? You're so bloody mad, you're so---!

She relapses into quiet crying.

MARVIN: The letters might give you a clue.

LIZZY (*controlling herself and reading on*) 'She says you won't be able to tell the difference between that knife and the other ones---!

MARVIN: Nor *will* I.

LIZZY (*screaming as she throws down the letters*) It's the play! These are letters from the play! My mother couldn't learn her lines and she had these notes in her handbag! The critics said what a wonderful effect she got always looking down at her handbag--- such demureness, such pathos!

MARVIN (*with a feckless shrug*) Well, you know---critics.

LIZZY: You pair of fucking frauds! (*Suddenly screaming out*) WHO AM I? IS THERE ONE OR TWO OF ME? AM I VIKTORIA AS WELL OR NOT VIKTORIA AT ALL?

MARVIN (*shifting about*) I don't know.

LIZZY (*hysterically*) I did tell mum you could stuff your bloody candle! But (*her face crinkling up again*) the monkey and his nuts aren't me.

MARVIN: You see, you are Viktoria in the sense that Tilly and I talk about you *both* as Viktoria. Sometimes. I mean we use the same name for convenience. I mean I don't know if *you're* mine but I know *she* is.

LIZZY: Yet you say she's me! The madman says that Lizzy is Viktoira, Viktoria Lizzy! Or I *might* be Viktoria! TELL ME MY NAME YOU SHIT! I don't know who I am! Doesn't that move you to pity? Please God tell me who I am! I don't know if I'm Lizzy or Viktoria or even anybody at all! Tell me I'm somebody you shit! TELL ME I'M---!

MARVIN gets hold of her.

MARVIN: Calm yourself---Viktoria!

LIZZY: TELL ME ONCE AND FOR ALL YOU SHIT AM I BEARING YOUR GRANDSON? HAVE I GOT YOUR GRANDSON INSIDE ME?

He seems to be thinking this over.

LIZZY (*cont.*) Tell me! (*Crying desperately*) Do you want to know something about yourself? You're not bonkers, you should be in care, male nurses should be looking after you, your walls should be padded.

MARVIN: In the twenty-eight years since Viktoria's birth not a soul has discovered, as far as I know, that she isn't Arthur Stokes's daughter.

LIZZY: No feelings, no heart!

MARVIN: The other day I was in a little tea room and Viktoria came in. I happened to be with Joyce Bellamy, you know the girl who played Clarissa in *May Bugs*. Viktoria came in clutching her belly, oh it was some absurd little drama she was enacting---

LIZZY: Appendicitis!

MARVIN: And Joyce whispered to me venomously---

LIZZY (*screaming*) This is the Viktoria play!!

MARVIN: She venomously whispered, Look at that, she's holding her belly because you've got your fist up her!

LIZZY: And so you have! You *have*!

MARVIN: May I put in a good word for myself?

TOGETHER: Betrayal was the horror of my childhood, it was in my mother's goodnight kiss, her surreptitious return in the early hours with yet another fellow.

MARVIN: The bed springs would clang---

TOGETHER: ---like bells from hell! At dawn, sleepless, I would rise and go to the door of her bedroom and do you know what I would do---

LIZZY (*breaking off*) Oh my God (*her head in her hands*)! We're going to be shot...

MARVIN (*continuing the speech and now trembling too*) I would stand there and try to *smell* him, smell the kind of man he was! My stomach was sickened for life.

TOGETHER: Do you wonder I couldn't let my daughter go, even to the point of acknowledging her? Won't you see that she's the only creature in my life not bold enough to do without me and thus betray me?

A long silence.

LIZZY: All right. I got the message. You're *not* going downstairs. You're *not* going to perform for the IRA even up here. **YOU'RE JUST SHIT SCARED SO SIT DOWN AND SHUT UP!**

He stares vacantly before him.

H.N. breaks in over the intercom.

H.N. (VO) Mr James?

Neither of them stirs. Then with his eyes on LIZZY he takes up the mike.

MARVIN (*into the mike*) Yes?

H.N. (VO) I'm afraid we must give up hope.

LIZZY: There, what did I say?

H.N. (VO) The Resistance won't accept the Home Secretary's conditions. I

can't tell what might happen. If the Home Secretary doesn't recant within ten minutes the fuse will be fired. I'm sorry Mr James. Miss Turndale, this is particularly tragic in your case because you are the more innocent party. Prayers are being offered throughout the nation and the United States. Standing two minute silences are being planned at some Broadway theatres. The managing committee of Equity in Dublin has issued a special appeal to the IRA to spare us. We did our best Mr James. We must die bravely.

MARVIN (*to himself*) Oh fuck off.

LIZZY shivers.

The intercom switches out.

They have nothing to say.

An ambulance siren is heard. And then police sirens.

LIZZY (*cont., bursting into tears and rushing to him*) Oh daddy we're going to die!

He holds her in silence, then leads her to the window.

MARVIN: Oh, I've played many last scenes my dear. (*As they gaze out of the window*) Look how normal everything is---buses, I can see a woman leading her dog.

LIZZY (*shaking her head*) I don't want to look!

MARVIN: That dress of yours should be dry by now! Try it on! The one from May Buds.

LIZZY (*through her tears, shivering*) I played it in rep---York, Coventry, Liverpool. And a parish hall in Torquay, off season.

MARVIN: Do you remember Dallying with a Maiden? (*Bustling about*) I've a tape of the whole number. And the lighting programme! I can synch it in a jiffy! (*singing*) Whan an old man dallies with a maiden---

He fixes the console.

MARVIN (*singing, to encourage her*) When an old man dallies with a maiden---

LIZZY joins in croakingly.

TOGETHER: He dances with death, he dances with death!

With a glance at him for reassurance she runs behind the screen to change into her original dress.

He runs to the door to the door and unlocks it, flings it open. He goes out and stands, off, at the top of the staircase, shouting down hysterically.

MARVIN (*cont., off*) Guerillas! Guerillas! Feel free to climb the stairs! Have no fear of my arms arsenal! The safety catches are on, the bullets have been removed! Come and see the dance that rocked Broadway! Hear the music that haunted a generation! If we must die let us do so on a note of joy!

He hurries back on and goes to the console, where he sets the lighting programme. He presses two buttons simultaneously and the overture to *May Buds* begins. With childish wonder he watches the lights as they come up.

MARVIN (*cont., mouthing to the rhythm*)  
When an old man dallies with a maiden  
He dances with death, he dances with death.

He puts on a trilby hat at a rakish angle and glances at himself in the dressing table mirror, humming. He is urbane and debonair. He puts on a jacket.

LIZZY makes a sweeping entrance through the arch in her dress.

The lights come up gold for her entrance and

the gold spreads to enclose the set in a bustling, cheerful light that exactly reflects MARVIN'S man about town appearance.

The cue for their dance comes. They meet centre, behind the settee, and he takes her hand. She does the first steps, he remaining still to watch them with paternal interest. He mimes charmed approval.

He joins her steps until they are dancing together with great precision. This carefree music arouses the kind of elation we associate with a successful musical in which the hit numbers seem to have been written in our minds before we hear them, so spontaneous and natural do they seem.

The lights add amber and silver to the gold. The dance at one point has elements of Jack Buchanan's soft-tap style. Then it goes into hard aerobic choreography, which proves too much for MARVIN. He begins to falter, reel, yet strangely he keeps his rhythm and is part of the dance. His face takes on a vacant, then a frightened look. This is part of the routine. They now break from each other's rhythms and the lights change to darker and more threatening combinations.

As the dance proceeds THE HOODED MAN returns. We see him more clearly now. He has a knitted mask that covers his head and all but his eyes and lips. Otherwise he has a conventional suit on. He watches them from the doorway and then slips, well upstage, to the archway. He continues watching them, ready to conceal himself.

LIZZY dances round MARVIN as he falters, her steps jagged in their beat. There is a disturbing deep twanging in the music.

He almost falls. The dance macabre begins.

It is a helpless, jerky thing. She is powerful, flushed, strong. A certain deathly joy comes over his movements too. This is a mad joy, as if his movements were being worked from another source. His look is inspired, deathly wan, hers is coolly triumphant. The lights become deep purple, brighten to silver and then they begin to dim almost to blackout. As they do so we perceive that LIZZY's dress has a phosphorescent design of the Reaper and his Scythe, while MARVIN's jacket has a Skull and Crossbones. These luminous designs hover together in the darkness.

The music stops. MARVIN goes to the console and kills the lighting programme. They stare at each other, panting.

THE HOODED MAN is hidden behind the arch.

MARVIN goes to the open door once more and out onto the landing.

MARVIN (*cont., returning*) Nobody. (*Listening*) I think I hear footsteps. (*Shouting down the stairs again*) Guerrillas! Friends! Pray come and take your seats--- (*To LIZZY*) We'll have to run it again.

LIZZY: They'll never come up here! Do you want to know why?

He disregards her and she makes a furious dash to where he is standing.

LIZZY (*cont., close to his face*) They're laughing out loud! You're a freak and a fraud! You've ruined our lives---daddy's and Tilly's and mine and Nigel's! Do you think they want to see a played-out wreck with an inch of make-up on his face?

She tears the cupboard door open and seizes the first knife she can find.

He wrestles with her. He tries to run to the exit but he stumbles and she plunges the

knife into his back.

He staggers, stands still, then falls, the knife still sticking in his back. He lies face down, motionless.

As this happens THE HOODED MAN appears again from behind the arch. He is still in his mask. He stands there with a helpless hand extended.

LIZZY is horrified. She tries to stir MARVIN but he doesn't move. Whimpering, she runs off---and out down the staircase.

THE HOODED MAN gazes at MARVIN's still form. He tears off his mask. He goes to MARVIN, turns him so that he can see his eyes, takes his pulse.

THE HOODED MAN (*hoarse with fear*) Mr James.

When he speaks we realise he is H.N.

MARVIN is immobile.

THE HOODED MAN stands again, aghast. He looks here and there. He doesn't know what to do. He bends down to MARVIN again.

THE HOODED MAN (*desperately shaking MARVIN*) Mr James! Mr James!

Still no movement.

THE HOODED MAN (*cont., shouting this time*) MR JAMES!

There is a long pause as THE HOODED MAN is finally convinced that MARVIN is dead.

MARVIN raises his head cautiously, then

lets it fall again.

THE HOODED MAN is astonished, delighted, bewildered.

LIZZY appears on the scene again.

LIZZY (*to H.N.*) Who are you?

H.N.: My name's Cowell.

LIZZY: That bugger's spoofing.

She goes and gives MARVIN a light kick.

MARVIN (*still immobile*) How do you know?

LIZZY: I tasted the blood. It's ketchup again.

MARVIN sits up slowly and with effort. He takes off his jacket with the knife still sticking to it and throws it aside. He rubs his face with exhaustion.

MARVIN (*looking up at THE HOODED MAN*) Well, who *are* you?

THE HOODED MAN: I'm your hostage negotiator.

MARVIN: You're not one of the Irishmen posing?

THE HOODED MAN: No. My name's Cowell. Can't you recognise my voice?

MARVIN: I look after my own voice not other people's. So we're finished?

COWELL: Not exactly Mr James.

LIZZY: The foyer isn't wrecked at all! People are buying tickets for something or other. It's sunny and crisp outside. (*To COWELL*) How do you account for the absence of the IRA?

COWELL: Might we sit down and talk this over?

LIZZY (*staring at him*) You're Nigel's counsellor, the shrink, aren't you?

COWELL: Not shrink. Transaction analyst. I also do neurolinguistic programming.

This baffles them.

MARVIN: Most intriguing. But we have a little matter of life and death here. Which is it?

COWELL: None of us is in any danger Mr James.

MARVIN gets himself to his feet and walks over to the window and gazes out, exuding relief, while LIZZY collapses into a chair.

MARVIN turns slowly and regards COWELL for a few moments, calm and dispassionate.

MARVIN: Mr---?

COWELL: The name's Cowell.

MARVIN (*turning it unpleasantly on his tongue*) Cowell. You like champagne?

COWELL: Oh yes, I like champagne.

MARVIN goes to the kitchen.

LIZZY: Where are the police?

COWELL: They're no longer here.

We hear a champagne cork fly, off.

LIZZY: And the IRA?

COWELL: I'm surprised you aren't aware that the IRA declared a permanent ceasefire long ago.

MARVIN enters with a tray bearing three glasses containing bubbly. With deliberate unction he bends before COWELL, offering him a glass, which COWELL takes.

MARVIN (*with a leer*) And what about you, my dear Turncoat?

LIZZY (*taking the champagne*) He says the IRA went out of business.

MARVIN: That's not the point. (*To COWELL*) Were the IRA here at all, perhaps a splinter group?

COWELL: Not in any shape or form, no.

MARVIN: It was a hoax then.

COWELL: It wasn't *all* a hoax.

MARVIN (*to LIZZY*) This is your husband's work. I can smell him!

COWELL: I'm afraid it was largely my devising.

MARVIN: At Nigel Burbage's invitation.

COWELL: His *urgent* invitation, virtually on his knees. And to save your skin, Mr James. Solely for that. Miss Turndale was safe from a police charge but you---they wanted you as firmly inside for as many years as the judge could be persuaded to give you.

MARVIN: Is there still a police charge?

COWELL: It depends on you.

MARVIN (*not believing him*) To victory (*raising his glass*)!

They drink.

COWELL: You declared Miss Turndale your hostage---

MARVIN: I arranged *that* with Nigel Burbage!

LIZZY: You did *what*?

MARVIN: But I didn't ask him to organise the IRA!

COWELL: Don't you see how foolish that arrangement was? You can't buy publicity *that* cheap, you know. Don't you agree Miss Turndale?

LIZZY: For Christ's sake stop calling me Miss Turndale. Either Mrs

Burbage or Lizzy.

COWELL (*sipping his champagne*) It seems I'm not very popular here.

LIZZY (*to MARVIN*) You sewed it all up with Nigel beforehand did you?

MARVIN (*to COWELL*) The police were fake as well I imagine?

COWELL: Not at all. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Your plan with Nigel was to tip the police off wasn't it? And have it go out on television? Well it did go out. And the police *were* tipped off. By me. At Nigel's tearful request.

LIZZY: He told *me* he was only going to tell The Sun.

MARVIN (*swinging on her*) You scheming bitch! I might have known you two were in it together. No wonder you screamed! You wanted it all for real didn't you? Well you got it! A police charge that might put me inside for the rest of my life!

COWELL: If it's any comfort, Miss Turndale will face a charge too.

LIZZY: What charge?

COWELL: Collusion.

She shrugs.

MARVIN: And what about all those bloody police sirens?

COWELL: Sound effects. From the BBC actually. The other stuff was from theatre stock. You've got everything from 1920s Bugattis to clop-addy-clops in this place.

MARVIN (*with a leer*) I know the tapes, thank you.

COWELL: Surprised you didn't recognise them in that case.

MARVIN: The explosion and the machine gun bullets were new material I hadn't heard before. (*To LIZZY*) I told Nigel, I said machine gun bullets don't *thump*, people are going to think it's a ghost story.

LIZZY (*exhausted*) Oh shut up.

COWELL: You see, Mr James, everything went wrong because Nigel was convinced by Lizzy's screaming. He said I know Lizzy's scream and this is for real. That's why I contacted the police.

MARVIN (*to LIZZY*) I told you not to go over the top!

COWELL (*also to LIZZY*) I must agree you didn't help the situation, Lizzy. But you had your secondary gains to consider didn't you? We call them secondary gains in the counselling business. You were determined to become Mr James's leading lady. You said so yourself. We have it all on tape.

MARVIN: You have it on *tape*?

COWELL: Yes.

LIZZY: What---all our conversations?

COWELL: Yes.

LIZZY: All that gasping and groaning on the settee as well?

COWELL: Three copies.

MARVIN: Mr Cowpad, don't you think you had better tell us in your own words exactly what happened?

COWELL: By all means. Nigel pushed a lot of speeches under my nose and said read these on the intercom. I said 'This is too obvious, Nigel, they'll never believe the IRA have broken the ceasefire' but no he said 'all these two people read is The Stage and Variety, on the box all they look at are the Oscar awards'.

A pause of truth occurs.

MARVIN: But where does the fact that you're a hypnotist come into all this? I mean you suddenly turn up at the theatre and started reading speeches. Were you hypnotising us?

COWELL: I'm a transaction analyst. I don't put people to sleep, I wake them up!

MARVIN: But I saw policemen from that window!

COWELL: We hired a repertory company to to speak.

MARVIN: A repertory company *so to speak*? You either hired them or you didn't.

COWELL: Partly we did and partly we didn't. As I said before, police *were* here. At the beginning. There was a lot of press interest. You got what you wanted. You're both very much on the map now.

LIZZY: Are we really?

She and MARVIN smile at each other.

COWELL: You had to be frightened. The police demanded it. They were very good about it.

MARVIN: About me dying of fear?

COWELL: They agreed to reduce the charges against you if we could bring it all to a peaceful and hoax-like conclusion which the public could laugh about afterwards. You'll be up for obstruction---you know, wasting police time. Their original charges, if they press them, will get you life.

MARVIN: That's more spoofing is it?

COWELL: It's dreadfully for real. If you care to look through that open door you'll see a policeman standing there.

MARVIN walks upstage, looks and quickly returns.

MARVIN: Oh my God.

LIZZY: I saw police cars on the street! You couldn't have hired *them*!

COWELL: Your eyes invented them I'm afraid. It happens in emergencies. Just as your acting makes people see things that aren't, so you saw police cars that weren't.

LIZZY (to MARVIN) Nigel wanted me to go to this jerk for counselling.

COWELL: And you said no, he'll analyse my talent away.

LIZZY: Your name's Jocelyn isn't it?

COWELL: Yes.

MARVIN: I was never awed by shrinks. I always showed them what bad actors they were. For instance, (*to COWELL*) half your gestures are unnecessary. They don't go with the pitch of your voice.

COWELL (*drinking again, then to MARVIN*) Which brings me to why I accepted a role in all this.

MARVIN: Why did you?

COWELL: I was convinced that a great human drama was being played out up here. I mean, your powers of invention, Mr James, your love of surprise, your quite remarkable ingenuity in devising entirely false situations! I was spellbound and I couldn't allow you to be arrested as a public danger, to perform in a prison theatrical society for the rest of your life! *Could I?*

MARVIN (*with a long-suffering glance at LIZZY*) Apparently not.

COWELL: I mean, performing *life!* And living the performance! I've never known anything like it. I mean, here was Nigel showing me the scripts as you were performing them but not performing them exactly, with marvellous ingenuity you were adapting them to the living situation as you went along!

MARVIN and LIZZY stare at each other gloomily.

COWELL (*cont.*) I mean I couldn't believe it! (*Jumping up and pacing round*) I mean, the very idea of people expressing themselves by means of lines they might have learned years, decades before!

MARVIN: *She* did it too.

COWELL: I realised with a jolt---the kind of jolt that changes one's whole career---I mean I looked back on the thousands of hours I've listened to people's woes and I suddenly saw that not one single original word had been spoken, not one word that could truly be described as *of their own devising!*

MARVIN and LIZZY simply stare at him after this outburst, of which they appear not to understand nothing.

COWELL (*suddenly turning on them*) Not very impressed eh? Well here's the meat of the matter. This place, the Vic on the Strand, is now a bingo hall.

MARVIN: A bingo---! (*Jumping up*) What the fuck are you saying?

COWELL: I thought that would rouse you.

MARVIN: *Rouse* me? This is my theatre, not Nigel Burbage's, much less yours!

LIZZY (*going to MARVIN's dressing table*) I'll talk to that bugger!

She grabs the phone. But COWELL snatches it out of her hand.

COWELL: Stop blustering! (*To MARVIN*) And sit down.

He strides across to MARVIN and pushed him down on the settee.

COWELL (*cont.*) Now listen to me. It's bingo or a life sentence. That is, it's going to be bingo anyway, whether you go out of this theatre today a celebrated actor or in handcuffs. Take it or leave it!

MARVIN: I take it.

COWELL: Thank you, Mr James. The fact is Nigel hasn't a penny left and there isn't a man in the City who's going to finance this make-believe one day more.

MARVIN (*with a glance at LIZZY for corroboration*) Have you ever met a rich man who wasn't in dire straits?

LIZZY: He can't afford a new pair of shoes.

MARVIN: Just leave this to me and the hypnotist!

COWELL: Of course there have been some wonderfully successful shows in

this house but they've rarely been yours. If he'd rented this place to other producers all would have been well but he was always in awe of you, Mr James, he worshipped you too much!

MARVIN (*to LIZZY*) I always told him you're AC DC and it's time you came out.

COWELL: 'It's Marvin James's theatre'. That's what everybody said about it. And over the years this description killed it. There is no longer an audience for theatrical temperament Mr James.

MARVIN: Really? How sad!

COWELL: You could try walking out of one of your own performances but it's been over-played and in any case when an actor walks out there has to be an audience.

MARVIN (*to LIZZY*) I find this quite hypnotic, don't you?

COWELL: And let me correct you about Lizzy. She played a very crucial role in all this. It was she who told you---we can replay you the tapes---that you can't turn Shakespeare on his head for ever.

LIZZY: If you mean he's going to be pensioned off you'll never keep *him* off a stage, he'll start busking.

COWELL: That was never in our minds. After a three-hour verbal fight with the police I got them to agree to a plan of mine that will keep both you and Mr James fully occupied on the stage downstairs, though not in front of theatrical audiences.

MARVIN: Bingo ones?

COWELL: We mean to keep this theatre open by hook or by crook. It won't go dark for an hour. We'll be using it more than it has ever been used before. I have hundreds of clients, Mr James. I earn a great deal of money and my practice is expanding beyond practical limits. The human race is losing its nerve at a fantastic rate! When the nervous system collapses Mr James people no longer know who they are! No guidance comes from within! *You* have old scripts! They only have their dreams! I am speaking, Mr James, of shopgirls, pharmacists, wine tasters! They don't fit their roles any more! They don't know how to *live* them! Don't you see that when we can't live our roles any more as waiters or hotel receptionists or dentists' assistants we can't be

happy?

MARVIN and LIZZY have begun to look at him with alarm.

COWELL (*cont.*) The shop proprietor tells the shopgirl 'Don't stand there and mope. 'When you talk to a customer look as if you're alive! Put a bit of charm into it, a bit of interest and enthusiasm!'

MARVIN and LIZZY look round for the shopgirl.

COWELL: But the shop girl doesn't have any charm. As for *interest*, she only has interest in her woes and despairs, her hopes and dreams! As for enthusiasm, she thinks that's ridiculous! What is she to do, Mr Marvin?

MARVIN makes a slight bow to indicate that the ball is in COWELL's court.

COWELL (*cont.*) She must play a role! Lines have to be learned. Business has to be rehearsed. If Miss Shopgirl is to adopt charm without having any she must learn it pace by pace, expression by expression! She must learn which side to turn to the audience, how not to be masked by other shopgirls! And when she notices audience response---why, her life changes---she too can magnetise, influence! You will show my patients---who will now be your patients too---how to play the role we call life!

He flings himself down on a chair, aware of having achieved no audience response whatever.

COWELL (*cont., running out of steam*) Truthfully I have never witnessed a more expert recital of roles, running the whole gamut of human emotions, as you have given us in the last two or three days!

A long pause.

MARVIN (*clearing his throat*) Mr Towel---

COWELL: The name is Cowell.

MARVIN: What *is* it you're proposing? That we perform while bingo

numbers are being called? Or will your patients file in like the prisoners in *Fidelio*, moaning to themselves and dragging their chains and singing a hymn to the light?

COWELL: I confess, Mr James, I allowed my enthusiasm to overrun the plan. This theatre is bankrupt. It outrages me! Yes! My sense of outrage inspired me to come up with this plan for a daily and above all paying audience! An audience I can muster at any time! In my business we call it a workshop, an intensive. I already give several a year. They last from a week to a month. The fee far exceeds what people pay for a seat in a theatre, Mr James.

MARVIN: Most encouraging! But my dear Mr Trowell you are failing to explain where the bingo people come in or, rather more hopefully, go out!

COWELL: Bingo will take place in the evenings, Mr James. *Your* performances will take place in the day. You and Lizzy will fight, flirt and fantasise precisely as you've been doing over the intercom---I may say to our delight and fascination below!

MARVIN (*icily*) We do our best.

COWELL: You will say your lines---from dozens, hundreds of shows---just as you've been doing! From time to time you will speak to the audience directly---to the guaranteed 85% capacity audience, Mr James! There will be two performances a day, a morning and an afternoon one---

MARVIN: I never perform in the morning!

COWELL: But to a guaranteed audience Mr James?

LIZZY (*to COWELL*) Are you sure this isn't one of Nigel's moronic schemes? How do we know you're not one of the rep actors he so to speak hired?

MARVIN: Exactly! Your speeches were bloody good. A bit rough and ready but then you may be out of the RSC stable, isn't that so? *Is* it so?

COWELL calmly takes out his wallet.

COWELL: Nigel said you'd better take your passport along, they'll think you're fake, they think everybody is.

He rises and shows the passport to them.

COWELL (*cont.*) Note the occupation.

MARVIN (*reading*) 'Psychiatrist'.

LIZZY: We use prop passports all the time. (*To MARVIN*) There was that immigration play.

MARVIN: Just what *I* was thinking. So, Mr Bowel---

COWELL (*a contained outburst through tight teeth*) This is going to be your community service. You have no choice. The police say you've got to do some community service and it took me five hours of solid talk to get them to agree to this plan---

MARVIN: You said three hours before.

COWELL: Three hours, five hours---! and if you think I'm going to go back to that bloody negotiating table I can tell you this theatre can become a public lavatory as far as I'm concerned!

MARVIN: There's no need to let your feelings run away with you.

COWELL: Feelings my arse!

LIZZY: Why should *I* do community service?

COWELL (*still shrill*) You were no more being murdered than I was! Look at it this way (*trying again as he once more paces the floor*), many of our audiences will consist of children. I shall be lecturing from a rostrum to one side of the proscenium arch. You will be called upon, both of you, to perform the emotional transactions that keep us all distraught and wild with anxiety and awake in our beds until the day we die. You will act parents, loving parents and warring parents, you will act children, grown-up children and grandfathers and dominating people and yielding people and you will show, with that dazzling sense of the need for changes of mood and information which both of you have demonstrated for almost seventy-two non-stop hours! (*His enthusiasm gathering again*) Do you realise what a

revolution this brought about in my own professional life? I always dreamed of being able to enact the roles which people love to play and which bring them so much sorrow and, sometimes, a little joy! Mr James---Lizzy--we are all friends here, joined by our great love of this theatre and our need to keep it alive. You can give us snatches of Macb---!

MARVIN (*screaming*) DON'T SAY IT! (*As COWELL starts to speak again*) Stop!

COWELL: What on earth---?

LIZZY (*with growling menace*) Never speak that name in a theatre.

COWELL: What name?

MARVIN: The name you named.

LIZZY (*quickly, as COWELL opens his mouth to speak again*) Just don't talk about any Shakespeare characters.

MARVIN: So where were you?

COWELL: I was talking about the marvellous therapeutic---

MARVIN: No, what drama school, man, drop the bloody hypnotist stuff!

COWELL: Drama---? (*He descends into a chair again, deflated*) I'm a transaction analyst, also a neruolinguistic programmer, I've never acted in my life.

MARVIN (*to LIZZY*) What we could do is have him standing at this rostrum of his doing a kind of master of ceremonies side act, you know like the old-style music hall.

LIZZY gazes at COWELL appraisingly.

LIZZY: I think if he could just act himself that's uncanny enough. (*To COWELL*) If you think you can upstage Marvin James you're mistaken. He hogs all the light, all the best angles, all the vocal projection points, I mean there's not an actor today can even *exist* on the same stage as Marvin. That's why they suddenly have big film contracts when he asks them to audition for him.

COWELL (*wan*) So we're going to fall back into playing parts are we? and making up the future? and planning things that won't happen? That's fine by me but just be apprised that this is now a bingo hall. In a week from now they start pouring in. Take it or leave it.

He rises.

MARVIN (*alarmed*) You're not going?

He goes to COWELL, takes his arm.

MARVIN: Now come, my dear Mr Vowel, you mustn't mind us rehearsing you a little. We're theatrical beasts and there is little to commend us, I fear, apart from our performances.

COWELL (*with a smile*) Do you know you have a charm that would topple the walls of Jericho? I notice it in my most *manipulative* patients. Offstage I can well imagine you're an empty husk. Which is why he built you this enormously expensive wanker's palace (*looking round*). He recognised, you see, how deeply autistic you are. Do you know the word 'autistic'?

They stare at each other.

COWELL: Autistic children are those who feel a deep and frightening lack of security. They frequently invent little imaginary systems that replace the security their mothers and fathers and schools were unable to give them. They do drawings of themselves sitting in vehicles that look rather like rooms, only they have a driver's seat and a steering wheel. It is safer driving through life inside this room than confronting it with just your frightened heart. Do you understand me, Mr James?

MARVIN (*to LIZZY*) Is he being arch, do you think?

COWELL: I've often thought of writing to Bruno Bettelheim, probably the world's top authority on autism, that every man jack of us is autistic, we would all like a protective system round us and they usually get it in the form of a job, a profession, a home, and the more autistic we are the more money or fame we crave, the more security! You see, Mr Marvin, autism is the basis of the mania for success.

MARVIN: But, dear Mr Jowl---

COWELL (*with sudden fury*) If I may interject my name after a dozen or so of your blasted distortions---the name is (*yelling*) *Cowell, Cowell, Cowell!*

MARVIN (*taking COWELL's arm again*) But my dear Mr Cow Well you are getting angry at the very moment when you begin to talk my language. You've hit upon why audiences come and see me---

LIZZY: Why they *used* to come and see me.

MARVIN: Because the stage is a *home!* For a moment we observe a home that won't collapse before our eyes as our real homes do! Homes which a word from the spouse can turn into a smoking ruin and all imagination is dead for the space of an hour, a day, a lifetime!

LIZZY (*to COWELL*) This is a bloody awful one-man show that died a first night death on Broadway.

COWELL with a sigh moves away from  
MARVIN.

COWELL (*still quivering*) Just one last word about this wanker's palace. You may keep it, even for an occasional studio performance, but if you don't sign this contract (*taking a contract out of his pocket*) here and now you'll be out of it by this evening and the receivers move in.

LIZZY: Sign it.

MARVIN seizes the document.

COWELL: Sign here. You Lizzy sign here.

He takes out a pen.

COWELL (*cont.*) We suggest that Lizzy takes that area (*indicating the area beyond the arch*) as her dressing room, so as to afford you both a little privacy from each other's inventions.

MARVIN: It's the worst part of the bargain, being saddled with her (*as he takes the pen and they move towards the dressing table for the signature*). One has to do more than scream, you know.

COWELL: As a matter of fact, Lizzy, there is the little matter of your pregnancy that is going to stick in the works. We'll have to call in an understudy and there's a clause here to that effect.

LIZZY: What pregnancy? I'm on the pill.

COWELL (*shaking his head*) What was all that about this man being the grandfather of his own child?

MARVIN looks at LIZZY, puzzled.

LIZZY: He means about Viktoria. (*To COWELL*) He's been trying to claim Tilly Armitage's children for thirty years. Everybody knows he's impotent.

MARVIN: Right, I'm not signing that fucking thing, not with you in it!

COWELL puts the document under his nose.

COWELL (*shouting*) Do you see that police officer out there? Do you want me to call him in? Sign it, SIGN!

This has no effect on MARVIN. LIZZY goes to him and takes his arm.

LIZZY: Sign it. We can give Sunday performances for the Profession. (*To COWELL*) He'll sign.

MARVIN signs.

LIZZY (*cont., to COWELL*) You think it's the money he's after but Sunday performances got him. You see, Sundays are the only time the Profession can come in and see a show and he loves to make them green with envy. He's never been after success. He's a born autist, you see.

COWELL hands the pen to her with long-suffering pursed-lip forbearance. She signs.

COWELL: I must hurry back to my consulting rooms. (*On his way out*) Nigel will be overjoyed, he's been listening to us. It's recorded, too, so there's no chance of either of you backing out. (*As he leaves*) Well, police officer, I think it's the all clear.

MARVIN and LIZZY watch him leave.

MARVIN: That bloody police officer's fake.

LIZZY: As a matter of fact a cop never holds himself like that. He's got the rehearsal slouch.

MARVIN: And he's taken off his hat. No bobby would do that.

LIZZY: It isn't Nigel made up is it?

MARVIN: There's something awful about the shoulders. Do you know what I mean---the way they combine with the spineless neck?

LIZZY: I do.

MARVIN: I hope he gets *that* on tape.

He starts taking off his makeup.

LIZZY: Fancy saying autist for artist!

MARVIN: I thought of saying listen old chap try *dancing* but plays are full of words!

LIZZY: What was all that about artists driving around in *rooms*?

MARVIN: That's the kind of acting material you get these days. I mean *autists*! Just listen to it! I felt like saying you have to use your ears, not just your mouth! (*Imitating COWELL*) Cezanne was an autist! Picasso was an autist!

They fall about laughing.

LIZZY: And we're *perfauming autists*!

MARVIN: I mean that man's a CRIPPLE! He shouldn't be allowed to carry a banner! Or hold a train! I mean, if you can't pronounce *words* how can you even act *badly*? (*As he gets into his outdoor clothes*) Actually I was thinking while he was talking all that bilge, I'll do The Old Chap straight. That'll shake 'em.

LIZZY: Not in original costume?

MARVIN: In original costume! It's the only avant garde thing left. We'll show the kids how you make up, what it feels like to put a doublet and hose on---

TOGETHER: We'll teach them how to stand and breathe and project! We'll turn a nation of slouches into men and women!

MARVIN (*as he sets his hat at an angle and takes up his stick*) To lunch my girl!

TOGETHER: And bubbly! I'll get that bloody peerage yet!

They leave, as the May Buds music comes up.