

ILLUSIONS

By Thomas Jackson

A philosophical farce in three acts

Act 1: May 1st 2010

Act 2: May 2nd – May 6th 2010

Act 3: A night and a day in autumn 2010

Characters in order of appearance

Venus: The Goddess. She also plays the roles of May and June (cleaning ladies); a shop assistant; a fashion photographer; Mizzi Baumgartner (A Jewish refugee)

Brenda Smith: secretary to Diana

Diana Moncrieff-Manners: a fashion designer

Ferguson Moncrieff-Manners: a Tory MP. Husband to Diana

Gerald Knight: in his mid-fifties. Founder of Knight & Quest advertising agency

Camilla: Diana's mother

Sebastian Quest: Gerald's business partner. In his twenties

Julian Moncrieff-Manners: son to Diana and Ferguson

Monsignor Paddington (played by same actor as Ferguson): a senior Catholic clergyman

Gerald Knight senior: father to Gerald (also played by same actor as Ferguson)

So far as possible an actor playing different parts simply swops hats or some other identifying feature openly on stage.

Prologue

(enter Ferguson , Julian, Diana, Sebastian, Brenda, Gerald. They stand in a crescent with two gaps in it . Venus to one side

Ferguson: I want a seat in the cabinet again

Julian: I want my childhood back

Diana: I want to sell knickers to billionaires. Well anybody actually

Sebastian: I want to solve the mind-body problem

Brenda: I want to be beautiful

Camilla: And I want someone to say I love you before I die.

Venus: Let me introduce myself. I'm the goddess Venus. Goddess of love yes, but also a kind of mother figure I guess. I want you to think about mothers. We tend not to see people as they are but illusory imprints of our own mums and dads. Ever noticed that? Just hang on to that thought.

Ferguson : And I'm playing some father-figure roles. If mums always have a bit of the goddess about them dads always have a bit of the clergyman (putting on a biretta and moving to another gap in the crescent): So, Monsignor Paddington: I want to become a bishop.

Gerald: And I want to get the Conservative Party into my portfolio

Cupid: Hey, hey, don't forget me. Cupid, messenger of love.

(exeunt. As they go Venus moves into the centre)

Venus: Ferguson Moncrieff-Manners LL.B., M.P.
Was of Thatcherites the epitome
Rising in the eighties like a star

Cupid: He pleased his mistress by his fawning air

Venus: Under John Major he ascended still
 There was no office he might not fill
 Smart, fast-talking, charming, guileful, glib
 Expert in half-truth and devious fib
 A master of the politician's art
 He bungles matters of the heart.
 Alas! this rocket rising in the heaven

Cupid: Was downed in the crash of ninety-seven

Venus: Now obscurity, the back bench for him.
 In the Blair years he stuffed the kitty
 By doing a sort of something in the city.
 Fast on his feet, he wriggled out of blame
 For his exaggerated expenses claim.

Chpid: It wasn't me guv! Everybody was doing it!

Venus: Phew! That was a close one! But now he's back
 In another election to try his luck
 He must keep moving, he can never relax
 For the hidden mainspring of his life
 Is to flee his saddened nagging wife
 The beautiful Diana: she has it all -
 Glamour, famous husband, successful business;
 Honours fall upon her; with an accolade from Which?

Cupid: For selling knickers to the rich.

Venus: She is one of London's society queens
 A darling of the womens' magazines;
 Hello, Cosmo, Woman's Journal, Vogue and Elle
 Each begs Diana to kiss and tell;
 But within this glittering palace all is dust
 Gall, wormwood, mould, decay and rust;
 Julian - their daughter - from posh school let out
 Through their lovely home roams unloved about.
 Camilla's a lady of wealth and fashion
 With a seething heart of stifled passion
 She longs to take her daughter's hand
 To show she can love and understand -
 But there are always dragons she cannot pass
 She's trapped in the ways of her age and class
 In too little affection and too much will
 Like a butterfly on a windowsill.
 Diana's secretary and friend is Brenda

Cupid: Poor Brenda!

Venus: How she longs for me to send her
A lover who will make her beautiful.
She's a Liverpool girl so perhaps I will.
Which leaves Gerald and Sebastian, two guys

Cupid: Who earn a living by telling lies;

Venus: But I will lead them by my magic arts
To find the truth - in the wanderings of their hearts
Enough! Begin! Let them take their chance
Turn the wheel of the cosmic dance!

ACT ONE

The stage is split. At the rear of stage right is Gerald's office, at the rear of stage left Diana's.

Gerald's office is that of Knight and Quest's advertising agency. Over Gerald's desk are pin-ups of page three girls and advertising posters. A large graph shows plunging consumer buying during the recession. The walls are cluttered, over-full. There is very little above Sebastian's desk. What there is is a large oil painting of Descartes in his periwig. Also, written in large capitals, is a slogan TRUTH IS AN ARMY OF METAPHORS.

On stage left is the office of Diana's firm Prettithings. The office has an efficient but very feminine look. Diana has a desk and Brenda has a desk. Although the desks are very close to each other there is an intercom between the two desks. There is a computer, an electric typewriter, a fax machine, charts, certificates of business awards etc. Dominating the office is a large reproduction of a picture by Matisse, The Pink Nude.

In between the scenes there is always a snatch of music and before scenes in which Diana has a leading role it is always Mozart.

Scene One

As the introductory music dies away May is discovered dusting: Enter Brenda

May: I thought you was out at lunch

Brenda: Oh hello May. No. I don't eat lunch these days. How are you?

May: (flicking a duster about desultorily): Tired and bored.

Brenda: Lovely day.

May: Seen better seen worse.

Brenda: The office looks you know like in need of a clean.

May: It's getting it.

Brenda: Who's going to win the election?

May: Time we had a different lot. Hey, did you hear Gordon Brown called a woman a bigot?

Brenda: Yes I did.

May: Bloody foreigners. Coming over here and nicking our jobs. You just leave my duster alone, mate, and go and do some dusting back wherever you came from. All as bad as each other. Time I was off. See yer tomorrer

Brenda: Goodbye May. Come earlier tomorrow

(exit May. Enter Diana hurrying)

Diana: And at my back I hear the fashion critics hurrying near. Sorry I'm so late. Happy family photos for Ferguson's election campaign. Just listen to this (reading): "The heyday of Prettithings was in the eighties when female yuppies wanted to re-assure themselves of their femininity by wearing frilly diamante studded panties beneath their power suits. But the decline of the yuppie and the advent of lycra with its attendant no visible panty line changed all that. Prettithings then re-invented itself as green and environmentally responsible. Thongs and strings use less material and use up less energy to make. But unfortunately responsible greens can get their VPL's much cheaper from rejuvenated Marks and Sparks. No VPL was always going to be, and now is, the writing on the wall for Prettithings...". Rotten isn't it? But he's right of course. What do women do in a recession for goodness sake? Get their knickers from Next of course.

Brenda: Today's new woman as imaged by dynamically chic and beautiful Diana Moncrieff-Manners. Or the ones still in old environmentally friendly expensive undies that is.

Diana: If we don't get more orders soon we'll be in the queue for the liquidator. This beastly recession. If Gordon Brown could give all that money to the banks why can't he give us some?

Brenda: How's Ferguson?

Diana: With his mistress whom I'm not supposed to know about. One assumes.

Brenda: And Julian?

Diana: Plotting revenge I expect.

(the phone rings)

Brenda: (into phone) Hello Prettithings....Yes. Who's speaking please? A private customer? Oh I see...Well it's a bit unusual....Excuse me for a moment please (hand over mouthpiece)

It's somebody from Leighton Buzzard. Wants two dozen assorted pairs of navy blue serge drawers as worn by schoolgirls in the nineteen-fifties. Have we got them? (into phone) I'll just enquire from our Dreams of Yesteryear Department. Walks about loudly and rustles papers (hand over phone again and to Diana?). Can we?

Diana: No, but we can make them up.

Brenda: (into phone): Yes, we do have them in stock. Will you confirm in writing please? Normally we invoice so could we have the address?....25 Andromeda Avenue...Leighton Buzzard. Thank you. Goodbye

Diana: Oh Despair! Now we're reduced to blue serge drawers.

Brenda: What on earth do they want them for?

Diana: Oh Old Girls' School Re-unions I expect. You spend a week wearing school uniforms and playing hockey and having dorm feasts. All rather jolly. Julia Scott-Carrington went on one.

Brenda: How nauseatingly spiffing. If things are well so tight can't you sell that picture?

Diana: It's only a copy. And one is rather fond of it.

Brenda: What do you say it's called?

Diana: The Pink Nude. Matisse. I love her. She's simply gorgeous I think. That wonderful proud and haughty and laid back look. She just looks out so scornfully at the world of men. OK mate, just you come and get it if you dare. She reminds me of the Goddess Diana.

Brenda: I knew it was somebody who lives in Hampstead or Highgate. (Highgate resident's voice) "Such a dear friendly place. I always just pop down to the village naked to do the shopping. Anyway what's Goddess Diana do?

Diana: Acteon, who was a bit of a peeper it seems, when out hunting spotted her naked while she was bathing. As a punishment he was turned into a stag and eaten by his own hounds.

Brenda: That'll teach him not to leave the toilet seat up.

Diana: How's the romantic front Brenda?

Brenda: As from last night between men. Again.

Diana: Oh Brenda you *are* attractive. It's all in your mind. Of course you're attractive. Beauty in people is just how we see them. It's a kind of illusion.

Brenda: Let's face it. I'm fat and nearly forty. In the eighties Hooray Henrys just used me as a stand-in until Miss Right came along, under Blair bored for just an evening investment bankers did, under Brown I was down to estate agents -

Diana: Regarder l'homme, c'est trouver chauvinist -

Brenda: (Hooray Henry voice): Darling! Hello! Where have you been hiding? Let me introduce you to Brenda Nobody. Brenda Nobody - Miss Right. Miss Right – Brenda Nobody. Brenda's just off. Aren't you Brenda? (estuary accent voice) Just fuck off will you, don't be a cow Brenda. I've just seen a prettier woman over there. Here's a fiver. Buy yourself something.

Diana: One meets the type in business. The up and coming investment banker. My God! The wimps in the city!

Brenda: You should have seen the one I escaped from last night. Boom Boom! Let me tell you about wine. Boom Boom! My shares are doing incredibly well actually. Do you tie your own flies by the way? Eric with the Ego from Eton.

Diana: Now I met just the chap for you last night. He's called Peter. Awfully sweet. Essex. Five eight, thick glasses, sallow complexion -

Brenda: Red braces.

Diana: White towelling socks.

Brenda: Don't tell me. Purple striped shirt with white collar.

Diana: Tie with herbaceous border on it.

Brenda: Didn't quite make it to Armani suit.

Diana: Super fellow. He talked for two hours -

Brenda: About his Porsche, Merc, Jag. BMW, Ferrari -

Diana: Do you know he changes the plugs himself?

Brenda: No? Never! Goodness. Do they have plugs nowadays?

Diana: (estuary voice) 'Are you interested in car engines at all?' Well not terribly' 'Oh good let me enlighten you then'. The continuing story of Pete and his Porsche plugs.

Diana: Oh Brenda!

Brenda: I just feel like you know so humiliated. What ever I tell myself I still can't help feeling guilty because men find me unattractive. If it weren't for womens' consciousness -

Diana: But Brenda, you *are* attractive -

Brenda: I'm trapped. In the ethic of female submissiveness. You're worth it. If only. Oh I don't know. Perhaps I'm just too choosy.

Diana: Men can be really foul of course but -

Brenda: In the Middle Ages I suppose I'd have gone into a convent. But what does an ageing spinster do in our liberated society? I'll end up doing good works and wearing a twinset and pearls with blue rinse and running Tory party fetes. Or Labour Party ones in my case. It's no good. I must get on with this letter.

Diana: Brenda you don't have to if you're feeling upset.

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Brenda: Thanks Diana for being so sweet.

Diana: Well, home for Lord Sugar and muffins for tea tonight with any luck.

Brenda: Not me. It's Womens' Group tonight. Re-enfranchising our sexuality.

(the phone rings)

Brenda: Hello....Yes just a moment please Mrs Bainbridge (hand over phone) It's your mother.

Diana: Oh no! Tell her I'm out.

Brenda: She's just gone out I'm afraid.

Diana (mouthing and gesticulating): I've left the labrador in the car.

Brenda: She's left the labrador in the car.

Diana: (mouthing and gesticulating): I've just gone out to the shops.

Brenda: She's just gone out to the shops (Diana is tip-toeing out) Yes..yes, I'll give her the message. Ring her at Esther's. Thank you Mrs Bainbridge.

(Brenda sits for a moment. She gets up and walks about. She is clearly having something of a struggle with herself. After a moment she takes out a cassette tape from her handbag and inserts it into a player on the desk. She brings out from a drawer a chocolate cake and cuts a large slice. She switches on the tape and begins to eat, an expression of guilty bliss on her face).

Cassette voice: Angela was thinking all morning about her meeting with Craig Rivington. How handsome he was with his clean cut profile and determined chisel jaw. And what a lovely name. What music it held. Craig Rivington. She had always admired men called Craig. But Rivington! Ah Rivington! If only he were here with her now. If only....She heard a soft knock on the office door. No? No? Could it be? Come in, she said, her heart leaping like a salmon. Yes? Yes? It was! A flash of desire shot through Angela at the sight of - yes, surely she could now call him her lover! "Angela! Angela! I couldn't wait" How daring of him to come in here. In a moment they were in each others' arms. Oh Rivington! Rivington! I knew you'd come. Moments later she was gazing up breathlessly into his cornflower blue eyes as he hung poised above her, about to enter her unguarded citadel, the

muscles standing out like whipcords from his rippling chest like golden corn. Oh Rivington, Rivington! She pleaded. Don't stop now. Take me, take me, she gasped, Take me, take me -

(there is a sound of an outer door slamming. Brenda hastily switches off the tape recorder, sweeps the cake into a drawer and starts typing furiously. Enter Diana.)

Diana: Oh I'd better ring her. Why am I completely unable not to ring her? Funny, I could have sworn I heard voices.

Brenda: Voices? How extraordinary.

Diana: I suppose she's at Esther's.

Brenda: That's right.

Diana (dialling): It's Diana. May I speak to Mummy please Esther? Hello Mummy...Yes I got the message. Look I don't think I can quite manage.....it's really very difficult today..terribly difficult....I know I did but I didn't realise then....Yes I know you came up from Hampshire specially....Alright all right then. Outside Harvey Nicholls at 3.30. I'll see you there. Goodbye. (puts down phone) Aaaaaaaaaaaaaarrgh!

SCENE TWO

Gerald's office. A scantily clad girl is having her photograph taken. June Taylor is dusting and cleaning round her as if she were not there. Sebastian is lying horizontal with a baseball cap over his face making paper darts and firing them out of the window. There is a phone connected to an intercom, filing cabinets, a cassette recorder with very large speakers attached and a fax. Enter Gerald, all bustle

Gerald: Lovely morning June.

June: Not when you're a cleaner at Knight and Quest on the minimum wage it ain't.

Gerald: Sorry I spoke.

June: Feel free.

Gerald: Sorry I breathed.

June: They've not put VAT on the air yet. Hey did you hear about that woman in Rochdale Gordon Brown called a bigot?

Gerald: We are professionals in the PR business, June, in case you hadn't noticed.

June: All these immigrants taking all our jobs.

Gerald: Maybe they work harder.

June: They've no right to work harder than we do. It's not fair. Level playing field, that's what I say.

Gerald: Spin, spin, spin. Every crisis is an opportunity in disguise for the professional.

June. Right, that'll do. See yer tomorrer

Gerald (leaping with old-fashioned courtesy to the door to show her out): Goodbye for today June. May you be swept off your feet by an impossibly handsome Eastern European. May your nights be dripping sweet and thick with honey as we say in Poland. Auf Wiedersein. Till tomorrow, June. (to the bimbo) Now darling. Just a bit more profile. That's it. That's lovely. Lets' just see the thumb in the elastic band of the panties. Bit wider. Great. Bust jutting just a bit more. Yes I like it. I like it. Give us that simpering look. Think coy. More. Coy. You can do it. Coy. You've just met Beckham in the supermarket. I want you, David. I want you. That's it. Hold it. Fantastic. Hold it. Hold it. (snapping shots at great speed) This is going to be just great. Great. OK darling. Enough for this month. You can run off now (Obediently the dolly girl scampers off) Over to you Seb. Let's have the literature. (hands poised over the word processor. There is a pause. Sebastian continues to fire paper darts out of the window)

Gerald: Sebastian? What are you doing?

Sebastian: I'm keeping the elephants away

Gerald (going to window): Elephants? But there aren't any elephants

Sebastian: Exactly

Gerald: Sometimes Sebastian....Come on. Text. There's a recession. God knows what the figures for April are going to be like

Sebastian: April is the cruellest month

Geral: You think May will be better? Hope you're right. We'll just have to hope that the Tories get in this time. A hung parliament isn't much good for us. We need uncertainty, crisis. But Dave Cam did well in the last debate. I still hope they'll turn to us for the last few days of the campaign. Anyway. Come on . Text.

Sebastian (reciting): Get your eyeballs yes just your eyeballs you yobbos onto the vital statistics of lovely Samantha Frost, this month's fabulous cover girl. Sam is just nineteen and works as a model in Luton. Oh and by the way punters. Turn to page three for the uncovered version. But cool it lads. Don't scorch the pages turning them too fast. You might get Frostbite. (turning away) Bah! I sometimes so hate myself. A first in greats at Oxford and it comes to this. Years of the most expensive education in Europe dedicated to fostering erotic illusions (sarcastically) Mind the gap. Mind the gap. Mind the gap.

Gerald: Pays the bills Horace. Go with the way things are. Chinese proverb. Man is an image-loving animal. Sell soap in the form of soap and it will sell for fifty pence. Sell it in the form of skincream and it will fetch five pounds. Why? Because soap promises to make

you clean. But skincream promises to make you beautiful. Our calling is the creation of dissatisfaction and then creating more by failing to satisfy it. It's a tragedy cigarettes have gone.

Sebastian: A cigarette is the perfect pleasure. It tastes exquisite and leaves you unsatisfied. Oscar Wilde.

Gerald (walking up and down excitedly with the air of a missionary): Motivational research. MR. Is the name of the game. In a test in America with three different packets containing the same margarine 32% would only buy it in blue packets, 36% in yellow and 25% in red.

Sebastian: And 7% used it to run lawn mowers.

Gerald: Are you meek? We'll promise you belligerence. Are you unsuccessful? We'll sell you golfballs as recommended by the champion.

Sebastian: Who fortunately for the Retail Trade Index suffers from personal mouth odour.

Gerald (triumphantly): Tingle fresh! An ice-cold rugged Alpine experience from the pine forests. It's the illusion that counts. Things are just not what they seem. They are what they seem.

Sebastian: You've been reading Kant.

Gerald: Can't what?

Sebastian: Never mind.

(phone rings)

Gerald: Monsignor Paddington? Yes put him through.....Yes Monsignor. Hello Monsignor.....yes the Say Hello to Jesus badges will be ready the day after tomorrow.....yes, the image does need warming and softening we accept that. We suggest we plant pictures in as many heavyweight qualities as possible showing the cardinal as an authority figure but relaxed.....How about on a beach in swimtrunks and biretta?.....You think not? His dignity?....You yourself? Would be better? OK OK that's a wonderful idea. I think your image potential could be terrific.....Well in these days of AIDS the church's anti-condom campaign is always going to be difficult to market. A tough nut that one. But does the world throw down the gauntlet? We accept the challenge. We have a line. Stickers in the back of every priest's and nun's car that say "Catholic sex is just great. Would you eat a toffee with the wrapper on?" And we'll try TV. Scene. Girl has heart stopping moment when she sees handsome young man across a crowded room. Then she stops and turns. Then you see the natural family planning kit. Then the motto. "Stop me and buy one". OK? We'll try it. We'll send through the prototype artwork Thursday. And you'll come here yourself for photographing next week? Great. Terrific. Goodbye Monsignor.....Goodbye for now.....always obliged to help the Church. Fax vobiscum. Ha ha ha

(puts down phone) Up till now sex has been the supreme seller. Not necessarily crude mind. Give the guys the image of the woman they never had. And make the women feel guilty they're not the girl the guys want. That's the secret of it. I feel I missed out on something so I'll fill up on Murgatroyd's muffins or whatever it is.

Sebastian: So much for romantic love

Gerald: Oh romantic love went out when the microchip came in. It's just biology these days.

Sebastian: Do I dare to eat a peach?

Gerald: What have peaches got to do with it? Some sort of aphrodisiac or something?

Sebastian: Never mind.

Gerald: But advertising is in crisis. The environmental movement and health consciousness are causing a Copernican revolution in the world of commercial images. How can we exploit environmental consciousness when the whole point of environmental consciousness is to consume less?

Sebastian: Even a logician could hardly miss that contradiction.

Gerald: Exactly. What a challenge. Take an example. Traditionally one of our richest resources has been the exploitation of the desire for oral satisfaction. We sold an Atlantic ocean of milk. But not for its nutritional value. Oh no. But because it was what mother first gave us. Or if we in the profession are lucky what mother first didn't give us. Way back in the fifties it was discovered that ice cream symbolizes forbidden pleasure. Oral self-indulgence. Infantile voluptuousness and orgiastic lactic play. So how did we sell it? Through the pulsating bosoms of lavish dripping dairy queens overflowing with pleasure. Oral abundance fabulous and unchecked. But that's yesterday's news. How about today? (he leans over conspiratorially to Sebastian) Here's the beauty of it. Sell them the same stuff in the form of yoghurt. And what will be the provoking image now? An aerobic sylph? A fibre-consuming ice-maiden slipping modestly out of her cowgirl's brassiere and arising, a genie unattainable and polyunsaturated, out of the tub on the supermarket shelf? Or -

(the phone rings)

Tony Walker? (hand over phone to Sebastian) Not that walley. The last person I want to speak to. (to caller) Hi! Tony!Yeah great.....So glad you rang. You're the very person I wanted to speak to. Condom sales are dropping? I don't think you need worry.No we've got a new line....Of course we're working on keeping the AIDS scare going....Well how about a sticker in the back of every social worker's car saying "Condoms are just great. Would you give your girlfriend a present without the wrapper on?" And we'll try TV. Scene. Girl sees young man across a crowded room and has heart stopping moment. Then you see the packet of condoms. Then the motto "Buy Me and Stop One". You like it? Great.....I'll let you into a trade secret. The environment's the big new seller.....well of course there's no connection between condoms and the environment. We've got to create one. That's what we're paid for.....just leave it to us.....See you Tony. Bye Bye. (putting phone down) Creep. The environment has replaced sex as the Number One sales illusion. Appeal to cosmic duty is the slogan of tomorrow. The cosmic puritan within us all. Do your bit for the ozone hole. Show you care about global warming. Lock away your gas guzzler in the garage and for short journeys buy a catalytically converted runabout. Two cars instead of one. Good news for us. Who are the most environmentally conscious of all the firms? Why the petrol companies of

course. Because they're perceived as doing the most damage. Show that you care. What you can't do with a few green leaves and a cuddly koala bear. We can lick this one Seb.

(lights strengthen to bring Diana's office into the focus of stage attention)

Diana (into phone): Could I speak to the sales executive manager please....Diana Moncrieff-Manners....Prettithings.....Yes I'll hold -

(phone rings in Gerald's office)

Gerald (picking up phone): Diana Moncrieff-Manners of Prettithings? (hand over mouthpiece to to Sebastian) It's that ghastly pushy woman everyone hates so much. (into phone) Mrs Moncrieff-Manners! How good to hear from you.

Diana: You won't know me.

Gerald: Of course I know you. The whole world's lost in admiration.

Diana: That's very kind of you to say so. I was just ringing to see if you can help us. I'm afraid our figures for February have been a bit disappointing. You know Prettithings? Contemporary environmentally friendly lingerie? People are reluctant to buy fair trade and environment when money's short in a recession. I just feel that our marketing could be improved.

Gerald: Well you said it, a recession. And obviously women don't buy new underclothes in a recession.

Diana: But why not? They still buy other things.

Gerald: My dear girl -

Diana (hand over mouthpiece): Patronizing chauvinist.

Gerald: You don't go to a job interview in your underclothes. You market yourself in your outer garments. Deceive the eye is the motto of all upwardly mobile self-improvers.

Diana (hand over phone): What a ghastly chap (to Gerald) Well can you do anything about it?

Gerald (hand over phone): Just get out darling. Leave it to the men. (to Diana) Well it may just have to be tough knickers ha ha ha. (Diana grimaces as if shot) Just leave it with us.

Diana (crisply): Can you or can you not help us?

Gerald (hand over phone): All right all right Tarantula. (to Diana) I'll see what we can do.

Diana (hand over phone): *So feeble* (to Gerald) Well please come up with something.

Gerald (hand over phone): *So pushy*. I do so hate women clients. (To Diana huffily) I'll deal with it when I can. Goodbye.

Diana (putting down phone) Goodbye. I just think men are so pathetic.

Gerald (putting down phone): I just think women are so....so undermining. Women and the Inland Revenue are the leeches of mankind. Never let them know what you're up to.

Sebastian: But you never let anyone know what you are up to. You're the classic secret agent.

Gerald: Which reminds me. Tax falsification time will soon be here again.

Sebastian: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May.

Gerald: Oh I don't know. A bit cold for time of year I admit. I really plan to outsmart the revenue this time. Go for the Big One.

Sebastian: Truth like a naked new-born babe striding the blast shot down once again.

Gerald: I'm a tax evasion artist, not a SAM missile

Sebastian: Truth, come lie in the hay with me my love. If you don't like women clients why do you take them?

Gerald: So long as they pay. Like this Moncrieff-Manners woman. Apparently she's terrible to work for. She's well known as the worst employer in London. She just eats secretaries. Though I believe she's got a fat girl now who's lasted nearly a year.

Sebastian: Survival of the fattest.

Gerald: She gets it from her mother. She's supposed to be the most hideous gorgon in Hampshire.

Sebastian (Horror film voice): Come and be thrilled by Diana's mother. At a cinema near you. Soon.

Gerald: Have we got anything on lingerie? Try the voice over cassettes.

(Sebastian goes to tape deck and presses fast forward)

Mid-Atlantic man's voice: The slinky undies you always dreamed of. So kind. They make you feel so good

Gerald: Not good enough for Ms Moncrieff-Manners you can bet your last condom. Try another.

Mid-Atlantic voice: Tough. But irresistible. Ladies. It's the foundation that counts. These pretty panties are for you.

(Sebastian fast forwards for a longer interval)

Covered in rich flaky chocolate.

Sebastian: Sorry. (re-winds briefly)

Voice: So sophisticated. So chez toi.

Gerald: No. She won't like that. Any more?

(Sebastian fast forwards) Facetious singing voice: These ultra-femineen panties are for you-
oooh!

Gerald: No. No good. Can you think of anything? (pause) Come on Seb. Come on. I pay
you to think. Something really awesome like Nice One Cyril or Go To Work On An Egg.

(pause)

Sebastian: Environmentally friendly underwear you say?

Gerlad: Yes. The Environment. Green. Organic. Fair trade. In a recession. Come on Seb.
Think. I thought that was supposed to be the point of philosophy. We care at Prettithings.
Woven in our factories -

Sebastian: Workshops -

Gerald: Workshops. From specially chosen organically grown fibres. So soft. So sensitive

Sebastian: So compassionate to your crotch.

Gerald: Eco-panties! Get it onto the cassette recorder, Seb

Sebastian (dictating into microphone in mid-Atlantic voice): Environmentally friendly
underwear from Prettithings. We care at Prettithings about the earth and we care about you.
Wear our designer produced eco-panties. Secured by bio-degradable elastic and woven in
our workshops from specially hand chosen organically grown fibres. So soft. So sensitive.
So compassionate to your crotch. Eco-panties! The knickers of today!

Gerald: Hmmm. I love it. It's up-front and beautiful. I just love it. The appeal to erotic
satisfaction sublimated so professionally through the trigger words. Security. Caring.
Compassionate. It's got 'em all. That's really professional Seb. It makes you proud. But it
ain't going to work. People have moved on from the environment to the banking crisis.

Sebastian: What are we going to say? Do your bit to get down the national debt by wearing
no knickers?

Gerald: Think of something.

(pause)

Sebastian: What are the problems and pre-occupations of today?

Gerald: The Iraq war. Afghanistan. Banker's bonuses. Student loans. Sir Fred Goodwin's pension. Somali pirates. Manchester City's millions. Beckham wishes good will to all men. Global warming -

Sebastian: That's it! Global Warming. Pants and socks in a time of climate change.

Gerald: Hmmm! Hmmm! Ye-e-es. Yes! I like it. I like it. Can we do still more? Something's coming. Something's coming. Doom pants! 'Await the great climate catastrophe in our pants and socks'. More. It's coming. Doom Pants by Prettithings! If there isn't going to be greed any more there's still going to be guilt. Feeling guilty about destroying the planet? No prob. Buy our pants and socks. And all your problems will be over.

Sebastian: Feeling bad about your carbon emissions? Our doom pants will relieve your guilt. We don't say that bit of course it's unconscious. Ten per cent of profits to buy Schnorkels for the Maldiv Islands.

Gerald: Aaaaah! Aaaaah! It's a knock-out (hugging Sebastian) I can't wait to knock her out with this. She'll come crawling. (dialling on phone and singing in impatient offensive voice "Come on Ms Richbitch. Come on Ms Richbitch") Hello Mrs Moncrieff-Manners? This is Knight & Quest. We've cracked it. It's big. It's beautiful. We've got the answer

Diana: That was quick. Super. But will it sell anything?

Gerald: Will it sell anything? I'll say it will sell something. I want you to show me all your new designs next week. I'll ring you later and let you know when I can see you and whether it would be better for me to come to you or for you to come to me. I'll explain by e mail. But I must see your samples next week. Can you give me your office number?

Diana: 027 - 743 - 5128

Gerald (writing): 027 - 743 - 5128. OK. See you next week with the samples. Goodbye till then

Diana: Goodbye:

Gerald (tap-dancing and singing Match Of Day music): We done it. We cracked it. Glob-al Warm-ing! Glo-bal Warm-ing!! Doom pants here we come!

Scene Three

(Ferguson and Julian are sitting at the central table. Enter Diana with tray laden for an al fresco supper for the three of them)

Diana: How nice. Just the three of us in for supper for once. Julian home from school and Daddy snatching a moment from the campaign. I just thought it would be so lovely just the three of us. Julian? Soup? Julian?

Ferguson: Julian, will you please answer when your mother is asking you a question.

Diana: Julian!

Ferguson: I am not having this absurd behaviour. Please answer your mother. Julian!

Julian: I've got an announcement to make.

Ferguson: At last! The Sphinx utters! What oracular pronouncement cometh out of your lips now oh wise one.

Julian: I don't want to be Julian Moncrieff-Manners anymore. Henceforth I shall be known as Melodie Smith.

Ferguson: What! How ludicrous.

Diana: Darling have you gone off your rocker? This is just absurd. In fact it's insulting.

Ferguson: Is this what I'm paying school fees for? And your extras bill was horrendous.

Diana: And while we're about it I've refrained from telling you, but you're getting so common. I'm ashamed to take you anywhere. That awful oik voice you now have.

Ferguson: It's the school. Full of pinkos and animal rights activists.

Diana: So insulting and ungrateful. And will you please turn down that awful noise machine you've got -

Ferguson: Ghetto blaster -

Dioana: Ghetto blaster. If you were playing proper music at least -

Jiulian: OK. OK. Chill out

Diana: And don't use these awful expressions.

Julian: Just chill out. Chill out will you? Mellow down.

Diana: I don't know what you mean.

Julian: Of course you don't know what I mean. You don't know me. You don't know anything about me. You don't care about me. You just twisted me up when I was young and now you're trying to stop me getting out of the mess. All you care about is your own careers. You're hypocrites -

Ferguson: We may be the worst scoundrels since Pontius Pilate but we do at least try not to be hypocrites.

Julian: OK. What about the porn mags under your bed then?

Ferguson: That's nothing to do with you.

Julian: Never is it? Of course it's something to do with me if my old man is a sex pervert.

Diana: I think Daddy's just trying to -

Ferguson: All right Diana. Leave this to me. Now Julian -

Julian: Melodie

Ferguson : Er - Melodie then -

Diana: Don't pander to him. You're falling into his trap.

Ferguson: Will you please leave this to me. Mummy and I realise things have been difficult for you recently. They have been for all of us. Difficult time politically. Recession. Mummy's very worried about her business. So we thought once the election's over we'll all have a week together in France. Brittany or Provence -

Julian: Big deal

Ferguson: Provence is lovely when the mimosa is out -

Julian: Fucking mental

Diana: Will you please not swear!

Julian: Don't do this. Don't do that. Well let me tell you not to do something. Don't pollute the planet. You've messed me up and you've messed the earth up. Your generation. And we're going to have to pick up the bits. I'm going out now. Maybe for ever. I don't want to have to speak to anybody over thirty ever again. You're all in mortal sin. Tainted. And it's time somebody told you. Goodbye. (exit)

Ferguson: Phew!

Julian (returning): Ferguson Moncrieff-Manners MP Major Polluter! (exit)

Diana: I told you you're spoiling him.

Ferguson: Me spoiling him? It's you who spoil him. And let's face it you did neglect him when he was young. To get that business going.

Dianma: You neglected him. It was you who neglected him. You were always away on politics.

Ferguson: Yes but you were his mother. You just won't take responsibility will you?

Diana: Not when it isn't deserved. You are so hurtful. You are *so hurtful*.

Ferguson: I suppose it never occurs to you that you hurt me.

Diana: Oh me me me. This is hell.

Ferguson: Well at least we can agree on that. This is hell.

Scene Four

(Sebastian is sitting alone in Gerald's office. There is a bottle of whiskey and a glass in front of him. He has a revolver in his hand. With an expression of much mental agony he puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. There is a dull click. Sobbing with relief he pours himself a glass of whiskey)

Sebastian: To Philosophy! You bony whore! Oh for my days of innocence. Before I awoke from my dogmatic slumbers. Farewell for ever, naive realist! Adios Arsehole! When I used to think my life had a purpose. To love and cuddle my fellow creatures in a world in which there were real tables and chairs given copper-bottomed meaning by a loving and

compassionate creator. Pfff! (slapping table) What's there? What would I not give to take it all for granted again? To walk again through the garden of this world unhaunted by the obscene creatures waiting in the shadows. Cancer, the car crash, madness, fools in office, horrors of civil war disguised as principles, concentration camps, babies starving, lovers' promises forgotten. Why not do as others do? Why not adopt the usual stratagem on finding the real world dreadful of removing myself to an imagined one? I will arise and go now and reverence life! How we cover over the sad and dying creature with the beguiling draperies of art. Thought you were living a teleologically justified life in a real world defined by real space and time did you? You poor sucker! My dear fellow! If an atom were blown up to the size of St Peter's its nucleus would be as big as a grain of sand and its electrons specks of dust wizzing round Michelangelo's dome. (he blows an atom off his hand as if it were thistledown. He picks up a chair) so a chair's billions of atoms must be billions of empty spaces. Well it doesn't look like it. Why, our most ordinary experiences are illusions. How can we be sure our senses tell us truth? Is this really red? This blue? Science tells us there are just long and short light waves out there. Is this a chair? This an office? How do I know that this chair and this office are not all part of a dream anyway? (He dives into the desk to bring out a chap book of quotations. Riffing through the chap book) "How do I know that I am sitting in front of my fire in my dressing-gown when I might really be in my bed dreaming?" Rene Descartes. Meditations. "When I dream space and time *seem* real enough in the dream. But when I wake up I find they were just in my head. So how do I know they are not just in my head now in a dream within which I have other dreams which give me the illusion that this is not a dream?" Rene Descartes. Meditations. (riffing) "Space is not a conception that has been derived from external experience" Immanuel Kant. Critique Of Pure Reason. And time? (riffing) "Time is not something which inheres in things as an objective determination". Immanuel Kant. Critique Of Pure Reason. And if we can only know things through our senses how do we know that they're still there when we are not there to sense them? Maybe they are there because we see them, not seen by us because they're there. "To be is to be perceived. *Esse est percipi*" Bishop Berkeley (whipping round) Don't move. Everything stay absolutely still. Stay where you are. This is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Philosophy Department. (to chair) Trying to disappear were you? Well I caught you didn't I? (wagging admonitory finger) Just you exist unquestionably. See! (beginning to exit and turning round) and don't you disappear while I'm not here to check up on you. I'll be back. Goodbye now (exit)

Scene Five

(Camilla is waiting alone. She walks up and down, looks at her watch. After a short pause Diana rushes in)

Diana: Hello Mummy. Sorry to keep you.

Camilla: Hello darling (they peck each other on the cheek) I do wish you'd stop all this rushing around. It's so inelegant.

Diana: Mummy I can't help it if I'm late. It's not my fault.

Camilla: Only Plain Jane makes excuses. I've had to come all the way from Hampshire. I'm sorry darling but someone has to tell you.

Diana: How's Hampshire?

Camilla: It suits your boring mother.

Diana: And Wilberforce?

Camilla: He's being really rather tiresome. He's getting romantically involved with a common tabby next door. Ungrateful beast. Anyway, let's look if there's a sale.

Diana: Mummy I can't stop long. I've got to meet Georgie in Chelsea. And I've left the labrador in the back of the car. And I have to get a dress for Ferguson's election party.

Camilla: But darling I can help you. You know I can never trust your dress sense in spite of everything I've tried to teach you. And how is Ferguson?

Diana: He's OK. Mummy about the dress -

Camilla: Now ground floor is all cosmetics and accessories. The sale will be further up. Let's take the elevator.

(they stand one behind the other as on an elevator)

Camilla: And Julian? My dear grandson? Indeed my only grandson. I do wish you'd had more children Diana.

Diana: Mummy you know how difficult it's been just bringing up Julian.

Camilla: You'll regret it. I do so miss not having had a son.

(they are now crossing the next floor)

Designer fashions. Oh how gorgeous. Let us pass quickly by with averted eyes. There will be some in the sale.

(they are now on the second elevator)

Diana: Mummy, about this dress -

Camilla: You were telling me about Ferguson. How is he?

Diana: He's OK. I told you. He's worried about the outcome of the election. He thinks we're slipping in the polls.

(they are now crossing the next floor)

Camilla: Summer fashions here.

Diana: The sale is on the third floor.

Camilla: Isn't that where they have outsize fashions for big women who shout?

Diana: Yes but today it's a sale.

Camilla: Oh I say I like that. I'll order it on the way back. And have it sent by Red Star. There's a little man in the village who will collect it. Of course we'll get in. Bastinado these New Labour types. Dave Cam 'll give 'em what for. Diana please be more cheerful. You're always so depressing these days.

Diana: Mummy I have a business to run.

Camilla: I saw Ferguson on television in the House of Commons the other day. He was wearing a frightful yuppy suit and would you believe it an old school tie. Can't you dress him yourself the poor lamb. Or let me do it -

Diana: Mummy it's very sweet of you but I can handle it. And in any case it was an Armani.

(they are now on the third elevator)

Camilla: Darling I do so worry about you. Why you spend your time making knickers for currency dealers I can't imagine. Why can't you be like Fredericka Grundy-Hope?

Diana: Fredericka Grundy-Hope has left her husband and three children and is living with a rock star who takes drugs.

(they are now on the third floor)

Camilla: But Diana she's been mentioned three times in *The Daily Mail* and met Prince Harry at a party. (she catches sight of an imaginary sign) SALE. NINETIES DESIGNER WEAR! THEY WERE GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS! HALF-PRICE!!

(They both fall on the imaginary dresses with ecstatic cries)

Camilla: Jasper Conran! How divine.

Diana: Oooh! Yves St Laurent!

Camilla: Arabella Pollen - mmm not sure that's me.

Diana: Chanel! How gorgeous! How lovely!

Camilla: Vivienne Westwood. A bit too avant garde for me even now.

Diana: Vivienne Westwood! Yes *this is me*. Mummy! Mummy! Versace! Oooh! Versace! How super. How super. Oh how wonderful!

(the hysteria is mounting)

Camilla: Look at this! Caroline Charles! Lovely! Lovely! Lovely!

Diana: This is Karl Lagerfeld! Mummy this is Karl Lagerfeld!

Camilla: Now look at this. Jean Muir! This will look wonderful. You can never go wrong with the little black dress.

Diana (total ecstasy): My God! My God! A Christian Lacroix! This is (hushed reverence) so beautiful. It is wonderful. Angelic. Beyond imagining -

Camilla: Darling how can you? Have you lost your senses? At least in my day -

Diana: I love this. I love this.

Camilla: Darling you used to look so lovely with your hair in plaits. And now -

Diana: I'm going to have this one.

Camilla: At least don't have that one.

Diana: In fact I'm not even going to try it on.

Camilla: Darling I don't quite think -

Diana: It's so gorgeous I must have it -

Camilla: Don't you think that with your figure in this dress you'll look - well, not quite your best? A bit inadequate perhaps? Of course in my day Hartnell would not even have made clothes for people without bosoms -

Diana: I want this dress!

Camilla: Diana this is absurd.

Diana: Mummy times have changed. The little black dress is no longer de rigueur -

Camilla: Darling I'm sorry but I just can't let you. I really feel I have to come in here. For poor Ferguson's sake -

Diana: SHUT UP! GET AWAY FROM ME! I CAN'T BEAR YOU NEAR ME! I'M GOING TO HAVE THIS DRESS!

Camilla: Diana! How disgraceful. I have never been so ashamed in my life. And in a shop!

(there is an embarrassed silence while Diana hastily writes out a cheque and Venus wraps the dress. With high colour they march furiously to the elevator. As they descend the third floor elevator -)

Camilla: Nice weather for time of year.

Diana: Yes. But it may not last.

(they cross the second floor and board the next elevator)

Camilla: I really must get back to water the tulips.

Diana: Yes. I must see to the Labrador.

(they cross the first floor and enter the last elevator)

Camilla: I wish Mrs Thatcher were still in power.

Diana: So does Ferguson.

(they reach the ground floor)

Diana: Look Mummy I'm sorry.

Camilla: In a shop! Goodbye Diana. (exeunt)

Scene Six

(enter Sebastian)

Sebastian: Any meaning we discover can only mean in terms of the language game we are using or rather discover ourselves to be using. This is Wittgenstein's point. If I observe my wife at a fancy dress party dressed up as a policeman bending over to do up her shoelace and I say "You're a bent copper mate" this will have quite a different meaning from the same words when used to rebut a charge brought by a member of the Metropolitan Police Force. Words acquire meanings from the particular linguistic community in which we find ourselves. "If a lion could speak we would not understand him" Wittgenstein. The task of the philosopher must be to re-invigorate language with new meaning. But paradoxically *in some sense* that meaning must already be there. But where is it? *Where is it?* Oh God God. How weary flat stale and unprofitable. There has to be more to it than this. A daily sentence

of ever more fatuous fictions designed to sell soap flakes terminated by cancer or a nuclear bomb. Meanwhile what do I do? *What do I do?*

Scene Seven

(Enter Ferguson. He goes to the centre table which is now serving as the kitchen in Ferguson and Diana's home. They are giving a party which is taking place in rooms both to the right and left of the kitchen. Ferguson rushes on from Right with both full and empty bottles, glasses, bowl for rum punch etc. There is a loud hubbub noise of party talk. Diana rushes in from Left. Ferguson is looking round helplessly)

Diana: Did you bring the extra red?

Fergusonm: Well no. I just didn't quite -

Diana: You're just hopeless. I simply can't trust you to do anything. You make me feel completely desperate.

Ferguson: I had to go to Market Harborough.

Diana: You must have known you were going. What do you have a secretary for?

Ferguson: Well it just slipped my mind -

Diana: Oh don't make excuses.

Ferguson: I am not making excuses -

Diana: Grow up. You've not got a whole government department now.

Ferguson: I'm trying. If only you'd let me.

Diana: You're just pathetic.

Ferguson: And you're unkind, horrible -

Diana: Take that back.

Ferguson: I shan't. It's true.

Diana: Liar! Creep!

Ferguson: You're so unfair. Sometimes I hate you.

Diana: I hate you. All the time.

Ferguson: AND I HATE YOU.

Diana: Stop shouting.

FERGUSON; IT'S NOT ME THAT'S SHOUTING. IN THE UPPER CLASSES WE DO NOT SHOUT. IT'S YOU WHO'S SHOUTING.

Diana: Do keep your voice down. People will hear. We must get back to the party.

Ferguson: I shan't forget this. Just you see.

(they both run back to the party, Diana to front stage left, Ferguson to front stage right)

Diana: Annabelle! How delightful to see -

Ferguson: Monty! Welcome to the party old chap -

Diana: You're looking divine -

Ferguson: Thanks for the tip -

Diana: Matching rainbow brush -

Ferguson: Absolutely. Do let me top you up -

Diana: *No!* How fascinating. More white? -

Ferguson: Would you believe it? Just like that -

Diana: It's in the Tate of course -

Ferguson: Good Lord -

Diana: Frightful little man -

Ferguson: Somewhere in Kensington I think -

Diana: Hot pink walls and gold stars on the ceiling -

Ferguson: It was in 1984. Australians. Boycott in 84 -

Diana: Greenhouse effect -

Ferguson: Well of course I could have told them that -

Diana: All I can say is it serves her right -

Ferguson: As Margaret used to say -

Diana: Charming, delightful -

Ferguson: They picked the wrong man -

Diana: Such a pretty diamante choker -

Ferguson: Give 'em what for. Botham -

Diana: Really rather glamorous -

Ferguson: Absolutely -

Diana: I'll just pop and see how the punch is doing -

Ferguson: Let me get you another drink -

(they both run back to the centre table in the imaginary kitchen)

Diana: Corkscrew! Corkscrew—

Ferguson: Well it's not my fault you've lost the corkscrew.

Diana: Stop trying to avoid the blame. You're not being blamed.

Ferguson: I am being blamed.

Diana: Once and for all you are not being blamed.

Ferguson: I am being blamed.

Diana: You are not being blamed.

Ferguson: Blaming people is what you do in life. Of course I'm being blamed.

Diana: Oh stop being so egocentric. You make me sick.

Ferguson: You've been making me sick for years.

Diana: Pathetic.

Ferguson: Years years.

Diana: You're some sort of parasite.

Ferguson: I'm not surprised. You strangle people. You imprison them. You're a kind of gaoler. Like one of those torturers in South America. I can't breathe. I can't be myself.

Diana: Oh do shut up. SHUT UP!

Ferguson: I WILL NOT SHUT UP. I LOATHE YOU. I DETEST YOU. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

Diana: STOP SHOUTING YOU SILLY LITTLE BOY!

Ferguson: I AM NOT SHOUTING!

Diana: YOU ARE SHOUTING!

Ferguson: Please get control of yourself. We must get back to the party. People will start thinking.

(they run back to the party)

Ferguson: Sorry to keep you waiting. Corkscrew -

Diana: Don't worry a bit. Delighted to see you -

Ferguson: And then while the Governor of the Bank was hiding in the loo -

Diana: Fromage blanc with creme fraiche -

Ferguson: Something went ping. Off his rocker -

Diana: Well it's two hours to New York of course -

Ferguson: Just you watch it I said -

Diana: Antonia's become a Moonie or something -

Ferguson: Like a bat out of hell -

Diana: Running rather a smart coffee shop in Andover -

Ferguson: Give the police the powers they want -

Diana: Well it's got a pasta base of course -

Ferguson: I certainly do remember Denis Compton. It was Boycott in 1984 -

Diana: Julia Scott-Carrington -

Ferguson: Morocco this year -

Diana: St Tropez -

Ferguson: Maastricht -

Diana: Such a dear sweet little place -

Ferguson: Gave 'em a damned good hiding. Michael Vaughan -

Diana: A bit naughty of course -

Ferguson: Unbeaten so far this season -

Diana: Sweet! Sweet! -

Ferguson: And he said What are women for? He said What are women for? Ha ha ha -

Diana: Do you really have to go? Delightful -

Ferguson: Well goodbye Eric. Goodbye Nicola -

Diana: Darling it was lovely -

Ferguson: Remember me to Alice. What are women for? Ha ha -

Diana: Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye Angelica -

Ferguson: Goodbye. Goodbye. Next Tuesday at 3. Look forward -

Diana: So nice of you to come. Goodbye goodbye -

Ferguson: Great to see you again. Goodbye. Goodbye -

(they trudge back exhausted to the kitchen. They sit in silence looking away from each other. Diana bursts into tears. Ferguson says Hell! Damn! Blast!)

Scene Eight

(Brenda is gloomily eating an ice-cream and reading a paper. She is sitting on her desk dressed for aerobics. Reading -)

Brenda: Single Jewish male 44 seeks vegetarian female for caring relationship. Must like rabbits. No. No good.

Attractive sensuous amusing Basingstoke sugar daddy late thirties seeks fun loving woman to spoil over candle lit dinners and cuddle in front of log fires. And perhaps more. Yuk!

Lonely male amoeba 32 dis-satisfied with uni-cellular existence seeks female protozoan for meaningful mating dance that is small but beautiful. Must be a midget.

(throws down paper)

I feel like so awful. As if I've sort of got a hole inside me and I keep seeping away through it. What can I do? I know that I need to do something but the longer I stay as I am the less

I'm able to do it. And I've just got to stop this eating. Perhaps food is a substitute for men. Or are men a substitute for food? Not of course that a committed feminist like me needs men. Though last night's was the twenty fourth in twelve months. Of course I only binge when I'm feeling really awful but that's getting to be more and more of the time (decisively throwing ice-cream into waste paper basket) I'm going to stop. Up early. Health biscuit and orange juice. Carrot juice mid-morning. Lightly grilled toast, one round, and lettuce leaf for lunch. Supper? Well nut cutlet and yoghurt perhaps. Or half an aubergine. That ice-cream is the last between meals I'm going to have. I'm going to get more independent. I'm going to learn karate. I'm going to take up yoga. I'm going for a holiday ON MY OWN to Greece. I'm going to do a self-assertiveness course. I'm going to - (she begins to jog up and down chanting over and over to herself "You can do it. Take on the world. Why not? It's easy . You can do it. Take on the world. Why not? It's easy." She runs round the stage chanting and exits)

Scene Nine

(enter Sebastian)

Sebastian: I was brought up in a middle-class household in which there was a definite tendency to think that it was right to help old ladies across the road and wrong to put them into gas chambers. But suppose both my parents had been in the SS? Would it then have been an act of virtue to force down my squeamishness as I banged home the gas chamber door? Is the bond of human kindness no more than a bourgeois itch? Oh horror! Then indeed is chaos come again. You have to start reaching for the revolver (goes over to desk drawer to get revolver and chap book) not when you decide God doesn't exist but when you start to think it might not even be a meaningful question. (riffling) "Being metaphysical it is neither true nor false but literally senseless.....in particular it cannot be significantly asserted that men have immortal souls, or that there is a transcendent God" A.J. Ayer. Language Truth And Logic. (going over to picture of Descartes) Hail to thee, original modern man. Here's to you Rene Descartes. Founder father of all agnostics. Original space traveller. I think therefore I am. I THINK THEREFORE I AM. Hmmm. Champion of methodical doubters. (pointing gun with both hands as in police movie) I doubt therefore I am. That's

what you should have said you old sod. Tried to perpetuate the illusion by pretending to exist did you? It's me who's thinking so at least I must exist even if nothing else does. But Hume got you didn't he you great periwigged doubter? (Morningside accent) Yes, but I put it to you Monsieur Descartes. Is there a continuous self? Do I detect a continuous self when I look inside myself? Or only feelings of hot and cold and happiness and sadness? Am I the same person I was ten years ago or only a different collection of atoms in the same place? A theatre of impressions only, Monsieur Descartes. David Hume. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. But you *were* the first modern man. I salute you All-Father.....(he bows down still pointing the gun. Meanwhile Gerald, with a newspaper under his arm has entered and crept up behind Sebastian)

Gerald: Boo!

Sebastian: Aaaaah! (he involuntarily fires his revolver and the picture of Descartes drops to the floor)

Gerald: Damme sir you've shot Descartes.

Sebastian: Damme sir so I have. (going up to picture and turning it to wall) Well you won't be doing any more thinking will you? (standing reverently to attention) Farewell Old Doubter. I salute the nothingness you have now become.

Gerald: I thought you've been looking a bit depressed lately old chap. Thought I'd help cheer you up. What you need is a woman

Sebastian: I do not need a woman.

Gerald: Nothing like a bit of crumpet when you're feeling blue blue for conservative double entendre no pun intended ha ha ha. Now let's see (opening newspaper) "I'm fat and forty and full of cholesterol but absolutely scrumptious. Go on. Be naughty." No. No good. "Princess in tower seeks frog. Bring your own wand" No. Look Seb. I'll advertise for you. I'll find somebody nice. Thinky and arty type but good looker.

Sebastian: I don't need anybody nice as you put it. I do not want a woman. My needs are metaphysical. If there is anything beyond the physical.

Gerald: Your trouble is that if your unhappiness were taken away from you you'd lose what little identity you pretend to have. Must dash now. Think about it. By the way. Any idea what top churchmen wear at the seaside?

Sebastian: I shall wear white flannel trousers on the beach.

Gerald: No. Flannels won't do. We'd better stick to swim trunks. (exit)

Sebastian: I have heard the mermaids singing each to each. I do not think that they will sing to me. (exit)

Scene Ten

(Brenda runs in panting in her aerobic kit. She unwraps fish and chips which she proceeds to eat. They are in a plastic carton which is wrapped round with newspaper. Her attention is caught by the newspaper which she starts to read)

Brenda: (sudden attention caught voice): “Knight on quest for grail, 28, kind, humorous and intelligent, likes Muffins Matisse and Mozart. Knows magic word which will turn lonely girl into princess”. Muffins, Matisse and Mozart? They’re just the things Diana likes. What a co-incidence. She won’t be interested. But I am. I’m certainly OK on muffins but not on Matisse or Mozart. But I could find out (going to picture) Didn’t Diana say that was by Matisse? I could borrow Diana’s video of the Magic Flute. Isn’t that by Mozart? And if I hurry I might just get home to squeeze in a few muffins. (tries out beginning of her answer) Dear Advertiser. I am replying to your advert because muffins, Matisse and Mozart are my very favourite things. Isn’t that a funny co-incidence? Mmmmm. (looking at watch. Good Heavens. It’s Womens’ Group night. The Adventure Of The Menopause. I’m going to be so late. (exits and then rushes back to pick up the fish and chips. Curtain)

ACT TWO

Scene One

(The Moncrieff-Manners family are being photographed for an edition of a woman’s magazine featuring an article on Diana. The role of the photographer is played by Venus. She addresses the audience directly and recites her text as if it is a stockpiece that she knows by heart while snapping pictures and looking for the best angles. Ferguson and Diana have enthusiastic but fixed smiles on their faces. Julian looks tight -lipped and unhappy)

Venus: This month’s portrait number of a happy working mother features Diana Moncrieff-Manners the famous fashion designer who pioneered Prettithings. When we called at the Moncrieff-Manners’ beautiful home last week Diana was relaxing with her family in stripey cotton top from Parker and Dobson at £33.99 and lycra leggings from Middle Life Madness at £26.95. Casual chiffon square from Handybox at £10.00. Hair worked through with

Lucidity Styling Mousse at £4.99 a bottle, casual trainers from Michael Brand and earrings by House of McCann. I just love being at home with my men Diana told us - just a bit more to the right Diana, chin up Ferguson - especially when Julian is home for the holidays. I just adore having him round the house says Diana. Although Diana and Ferguson are both very busy people -

Julian: Do we have to do this?

Ferguson: Keep quiet and smile.

Julian: I don't want to do this.

Ferguson: I won't pay for you to go to New York with the Carter-Walkers unless you do

Venus: - they both acknowledge the part the support of a loving family has played in their success. Nothing comes before the family said Ferguson as we sat in Diana's beautiful drawing room on a mouth-watering neo-second-empire sofa with half-hitched chintz surround, a snip from Pringle and Antrobus at £2015, set off to perfection by swagged peach curtains at £824.99 a pair. Even at my busiest when we were getting Prettithings going, I always made Julian first priority. It pays in terms of family happiness in the end, averred Diana as Ferguson nodded in sage agreement - can we have you all over there now, Diana between Julian and Ferguson this time - what Diana really adores is cooking their favourite French dishes for Julian and Ferguson - relax a little more Julian - gosh Mum spoils us laughed Julian who was trying on next term's new school uniform, skirt from Appleyard and Tucker at £85, shirt and blazer from Teenager and Mr Elegance at £42 and £135.99 respectively

Ferguson: Will you please smile Julian

Julian: Melodie

Ferguson: Julian

Julian: Melodie

Ferguson: Julian

Julian: Melodie

Ferguson: All right, Melodie but smile

Venus: - Diana often cooks a ragout or a cassoulet but always with fresh organic vegetables as both parents' share Julian's enthusiasm for the environment. And rattling good they are too said Ferguson in casual slacks from Dingle and Palmer at £155 and polo shirt from The Horse's Mouth at £77.50. Diana insists on taking personal charge of his dress when he attends the House of Commons - it's so rough she complains - and next week he will be dressed for the despatch box in a tough Hebridean tweed suit from McIntyre and Drummond at £515 and hand-made brogues from Supertread at £145 a pair - OK let's have you in another position, arms round each others' shoulders, Ferguson in the middle - the family especially love holidays in Provence. Ferguson and Julian go off for long rambles to discover

mimosa bowered chateaux while Diana samples the fare in the local shops. Though I can't resist she confesses an occasional peek at the local peasant fashions. Meanwhile Julian and Ferguson are enjoying the plonk du pays in Arles or Albi which at five franks a bottle is, said Ferguson, a rattling good buy. We had a super afternoon with Diana and her family ending with English tea from Marriotts' of Regent Street at 2.99 a packet. And the secret? Lots of love and home cooking spiced with a dash of surprise and adventure, confides this up-with-the-state-of-the-art mistress of relaxed style and scintillatingly exciting underwear. OK. Out next month. Don't bother to offer me tea. I'm in a hurry. Bye

Scene Two

(Gerald's office as before. Monsignor Paddington is posing exactly where the dolly girl had been. June is cleaning round him as if he weren't there. Sebastian is lying with baseball cap over his face. Monsignor Paddington is wearing a biretta and cassock and has a beachball lying handy. Gerald enters with camera, all bustle)

Gerald: Ah you're in position, Monsignor. Nice day June

June: Alright for some

Gerald (fiddling with camera and loading it): We'll soon know. Gordon Brown will either be back in Downing Street or out of a job.

June: Won't catch 'im going round to the job centre in 'is bleeding Daimler

Gerald: Any tips for the result then?

June: Depends on you

Gerald: That's very nice of you. Thank you June

June: It wasn't a compliment

Gerald: Shall we get your vote?

June: I'm a C3. I need to be wooed

Gerald: How do I do that?

June: Well you can start by putting up my hourly rate to the European minimum.

Gerald: OK I surrender. After the election.

June: Not a bad day is it? See yer tomorrer

(June crosses stage to Diana's office where she becomes May and begins to flick a duster, soon to adopt her familiar posture of chin resting on broom handle)

Gerald: Now Monsignor (Monsignor Paddington takes off the cassock to reveal swimtrunks beneath. He takes up his pose wearing the biretta and swimtrunks and holding the beachball) Nothing like pictures of the clergy for emotional definition. Camera loves you. Just a little bit more profile. That's it, that's lovely. Let's just see a little bit more of the swimming trunks. Great. Biretta forward just a bit. Bit more. Wonderful. Yes I like it. I like it. Give us that sincere look. Think kiddies in need. More. Give me more Monsignor. Give me kiddies in need. That's fantastic. Kiddies in need. Hold it. Hold it (snapping at great speed) This is going to be great. Just great. Fantastic. Wonderful. OK Monsignor that's enough for this session. (he shows the Monsignor rather elaborately and servilely to the door and exits with him) Let me show you the dressing rooms Monsignor. Great. Great

(Cupid dressed as a postman enters stage L invisible to May, picks up a letter on Brenda's desk and flutters across to deposit it on Sebastian's desk, unseen by him. Exit Cupid. Sebastian realises there is a letter he has not seen on the desk and opens it)

Sebastian (reading): Dear Advertiser. I am replying to your advertisement because Muffins, Matisse and Mozart - Good Heavens! What on earth's this? - are my favourite things. What an amazing co-incidence. I sometimes think I could be described as a lonely girl who would like to become a princess. I am also a secretary in the West End. I am told that I am slim and attractive and of marriageable age without psychological aberration. Well I suppose I would say that wouldn't I? Would you like to meet me? If so please ring my office number 027 - 743 - 5128. I can always get some time off. Looking forward to meeting you. Brenda Smith

Sebastian: Hmmmm (exits)

(Gerald enters. He is trying out different approaches to advertise the Conservatives in the last week of the election campaign)

Gerald (syrupy soothing voice): Twenty-one years ago you exercised your right of choice and put Margaret Thatcher into Downing Street. There followed eleven years of Conservative policies which have made our country into the green and pleasant land we know today. No. No. Not enough emphasis on the future (jovial sincere voice) We know how worried you are about the shopping bills. Shoes for the kiddies. New suit for Dad. No. (patrician Tory voice) I've just got back from patronizing the EC in Brussels and as I explained to them, we're not joining them they're joining us. Vote for Britain. Vote Conservative. No. Not enough appeal to the C3's (common man's voice) We did awlright in Maggie's time under the Conservatives, Mabel and me. We're just awdinry people. Very common. But we've bought our own council 'ouse. Yeah. Never 'ave believed it wudjer? Castle 'igginbottom. And our shares in BT and Water are a bit of awlright too. Brekfasts 'ave never been so intristin' under Labour. Ye-e-e-es. Could be OK in the Labour marginals. Good heavens. I must ring that underwear woman. (looks for Diana's number and dials) 0 2 7 4 3 5 1 2 8.

May (answering phone); Yus.

Gerald: Could I speak to Mrs Moncrieff-Manners please?

May: She's out.

Gerald: Well can I leave a message please. I'll come and see her tomorrow in her office at three o'clock. Remind her, she said she'd fit Gerald in. Tell her I called. Thank you.

(May is about to write this down when the phone rings again. It is Sebastian who is ringing from a mobile phone.)

May: Yus.

Sebastian: Could I speak to Miss Brenda Smith please.

May: She's out.

Sebastian: Well can I leave a message. Can she come and see me at Knight & Quest's Sackville St Piccadilly at 3 o'clock tomorrow. Tell her Sebastian rang. Thank you.

May: Yus. Thanks.

(enter Brenda who is eating a Big Mac. She rapidly hides it behind her when she sees May and stands with her back to the door)

Brenda: Hello May how are you?

May: Tired and bored.

Brenda: Any messages?

May: Oh yus. There was one for you. A Mr Gerald Sebastian rang an' wants to see you here at 3 o'clock tomorrow.

Brenda: (backing out of the door): Really? I wonder if.....

Diana (entering): Hello May. How are you?

May: Tired and bored

Diana: Any messages?

May: Yes there was one. A Mr Sebastian FitzGerald wants to see you in his office at
(reading her note) Knight & Quest Sackville St Piccadilly at 3 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

Diana: Oh what a nuisance. I did hope he'd come here. That means I'll have to pack up the samples. Anyway. Thanks May.

May (muttering): I'm not an answering machine.

Scene Three

(Lights remain focussed on Diana's office. As before May is dusting. Enter Brenda. She is excited and nervous)

Brenda: Hello May. How are you?

May: Tired and bored.

Brenda: I'm so excited. I've got an important meeting today. And such a gorgeous day for it.

May: At least Blair didn't privatise the weather.

Brenda: Are the Tories going to win May?

May: If they offer enough bribes ye'.

Brenda: Abolishing inheritance tax isn't a bribe May. Thousands of people will benefit, even though I say it. .

May: Just look at the 'ealth service.

Brenda: Labour have spent a record amount on it.

May: Don't believe it. Anyway I thought you went in for this 'erbal medicine.

Brenda: Yes I do May.

May: At least you'll die smelling terrific. Got to go now. See yer tomorrer.

(Exit May. Brenda paces to and fro. There is a knock. It is Gerald)

Brenda: Oh come in. I'm so glad you came. Especially as nobody else is here.

Gerald: How do you do? Weather's a bit cool isn't it? For early May.

Brenda: I've - like well like - I've never done this before.

Gerald: Really? You amaze me. I would have thought that your sort of woman would have done it hundreds of times. No substitute for the personal touch of course.

Brenda: Well no.

Gerald: Well let's get straight down to business shall we? Can I see your underwear?

Brenda: WHAT?

Gerald: Your underwear. I want to see what you've got to offer.

Brenda: You want to see my underwear?

Gerald: Well there wasn't much point in coming otherwise was there?

Brenda: I thought you wanted to talk about Matisse and Mozart.

Gerald: Matisse and Mozart? They must be new brands I'm not familiar with. I thought they were artists and such like. Well you learn something every day don't you? Anyway let's get at 'em. I need to see panties, bras, girdles, that sort of thing. Something to get my imagination working.

Brenda: You must be some sort of...some sort of...

Gerald: Well I try to be modest about it but I reckon I'm an expert in this particular field yes.

Brenda: This is terrible. I should have known it. Men are just dreadful. Dreadful. All of them.

Gerald (very kind): Dear girl, why are you so upset? Has there been some sort of mistake or something? Has there -

Brenda (screaming in terrifying voice): GET AWAY! I HATE YOU! (she slaps Gerald in the face. It rings out like a pistol shot. They both stare transfixed at what she has done. Pause)

Brenda: I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that. Look this has been awful. I'll never answer a lonely hearts again.

Gerald: Lonely hearts? What's that got to do with it? I thought you wanted an interview with an advertising consultant.

Brenda: An advertising consultant? But I thought you were coming for a personal assignation. Look this is awful. I feel so terribly embarrassed. There's obviously been some terrible mistake. Look I've just got to get out of this office. I just hope we never bump into each other again.

Gerald (barring the way to the door): Please don't go.

Brenda: Will you please let me out. This whole thing is just an awful mess.

Gerald: Please don't go. Please. Look, when you lost your temper you suddenly changed. You forgot yourself. Look I have to say this. You suddenly became very beautiful. Come round the corner and have an ice cream. Please?

(pause)

Brenda: An ice cream?

Gerald: Yes. How about a honey-sweetened mango sorbet.

Brenda (pause): I don't suppose you could manage a knickerbocker glory.

Gerald: I do believe I could. Or how about vanilla ice cream with banana splits and chopped walnuts.

Brenda: Or Black Forest Gateau with kirsch and Morello cherries?

Gerald: Or a crushed praline strawberry sundae with whipped cream?

Brenda: Or a passion fruit flavoured surprise in a chocolate basket?

Gerald: Or strawberry liqueur ice cream with double whipped cream and raspberries and rum?

Brenda: Mmmmmm. OK. I'll come.

Scene Four

(Diana knocks on the door of Gerald's office. She is looking especially stunning. Sebastian opens the door. He is nervous and flustered. He is taken back by her attractive looks)

Sebastian: Oh you've come. We haven't got long. Everybody else is out. How nice of you to come.

Diana: I'd rather hoped you'd come to me but it doesn't matter. I'm here now.

Sebastian: Chilly isn't it?

Diana: Yes. A bit cool. But it is still spring.

Sebastian: Cup of tea? Drink?

Diana: How sweet of you. But no thanks. I must get on with what I came for. What would you like to start with? Knickers?

Sebastian: I'm sorry.

Diana: Knickers? Are you interested in knickers?

Sebastian (collapsing in chair): I don't believe this.

Diana: This year's creations are rather exciting. (opening her briefcase and holding up a pair of panties) Secret Assignations. What do you think? Enticing?

Sebastian (he is goggle eyed): Enticing? Er - what sort of assignations?

Diana: Secret (holding up another pair) Now what about these? Could you do anything with them? Serendipity. They really are a bit sensational. Just for the way you are. They're designed to make a girl feel she's comfortable and therefore attractive to men. It would be really interesting to get a man's reaction. Do you have any comment?

Sebastian: Am I naked in my bed dreaming? Rene Descartes. Meditations.

Diana: Good. That's just how the girl wants the man to feel. (another pair) now these are perhaps a little bit naughty. Frisson Sensationelle. But of course it depends how you look at it.

Sebastian: To be is to be perceived. Esse est percipi. Bishop Berkeley

Diana: And now we come to the really exciting bit. (she takes out a pair of black Pantisocracy knickers and holds them to her waist) I know you've been wanting to see these. Pantisocracy. Do they appeal? Of course it's going to be much better when you can see them properly modelled. In the flesh so to speak.

Sebastian: This is fantastic.

Diana: I'm glad you think that. We think they're fantastic too. Feeling guilty about your carbon emissions? Await the great climate catastrophe in our pants and socks. Ten per cent of profits to schnorkels for the Maldives Islands.

Sebastian: That sounds familiar. I think I'm beginning to understand.

Diana: Well that all I have to show you for now. I've shown you everything in my case.

Sebastian: You've shown me so much. So much. The world. Everything. 'The world is everything that is the case'. Wittgenstein. .

Diana: Well do they do anything for you? Do they get you going? Now you've seen them do they fit in with your idea? What's your sense of it?

Sebastian: Our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through experience -

Diana: Well I wouldn't have come to see you if you weren't experienced.

Sebastian: - And that which the faculty of cognition supplies of itself. Immanuel Kant.
Critique of Pure Reason

Diana: Well I don't understand all that. Advertising jargon I suppose if you'll forgive my saying that. Well that's all I've got to show you today. Do you think you can take me on?

Sebastian: Oh yes. Oh yes.

Diana: I think I'm going to be able to show you something even more exciting next week. That is, if you'd like to see me again.

Sebastian: I've *got* to see you again. I *must* see you again.

Diana: Good. Super. I'm glad you're so interested. Well give me a ring. Thanks so much for seeing me. I do hope you can do something. Diana Moncrieff-Manners -

Sebastian: Diana Moncrieff-Manners? But I thought -

Diana: Of Prettithings. Goodbye.

(exiting but turning before she goes) I'd really love to see you again. You were so sympathetic. You will ring won't you? Please?

(she exits. Sebastian is overcome)

Scene Five

(enter Julian wearing headphones)

Julian: This is planet earth. This is planet earth. Calling Ferguson Moncrieff-Manners. Calling Ferguson Moncrieff-Manners. Is there anybody there? Is there anybody there?

Scene Six

(Gerald and Sebastian are at their desks in Gerald's office. Brenda is sitting at hers in Diana's office)

Sebastian: I'm just going out to the printers' for a few minutes

Gerald (busy): OK

(Sebastian leaves the office, takes out a mobile phone and rings)

Brenda (phone rings): Hello. Prettithings.

Sebastian: Is that Mrs Moncrieff-Manners please?

Brenda: No it's her secretary. Who rang please?

Sebastian: "I'm a double glazing salesman". (He puts away the mobile and returns to the office. Meanwhile while he is out Gerald has been trying to ring and getting the engaged tone. He leaves the office and passes Sebastian on the way back. Gerald: "Just going out to buy a paper. Election". (Meanwhile Brenda is about to phone and is dialling in Diana's office. Diana enters) Brenda (hastily putting down phone): "I'm just slipping out for a minute to get some health biscuits". (She walks out quickly, takes out a mobile and rings).

Brenda: "Is that Knight & Quest Advertising please? Could I speak to Mr Gerald please"

Sebastian: "I'm afraid he's out. Who rang please?" Brenda: "Random Election Sampling.

Sorry I bothered you" (Meanwhile Diana tries to ring but Gerald's phone is engaged. Gerald is trying to ring from his mobile but can't get through because Diana is trying to ring

Sebastian. Diana rings off. As she does Gerald gets through to Diana's office from his mobile) Gerald: "Could I speak to Ms Smith please?" Diana: "I'm sorry she's out. Who

shall I say rang?" Gerald: "Oh Monster Screaming Raving Looney Party" (meanwhile Sebastian has been trying to get through to phone Diana's office and is getting engaged

signal. He runs out to phone on his mobile, passing Gerald on the way back) Gerald:

"Glorious weather". Sebastian: "Pity it's such awful weather". (meanwhile Diana is dialling

when interrupted by returning Brenda) Diana (hastily putting phone down) "Crisis, Lipstick" (she runs out of the office to use her mobile and rings getting Gerald). Diana: "Could I speak

to Sebastian please?" Gerald: "I'm sorry he's out. Who shall I say rang?" Diana: "

Conservative candidate for Finchley. Sorry I bothered you" (meanwhile Sebastian rings

Brenda from his mobile Sebastian: "Could I speak to Diana please?" Brenda: "Sorry she's

out. Who shall I say rang?" Sebastian: "Inland Revenue. I'll ring again" (meanwhile Gerald

has been trying to ring but getting engaged tone. He leaves the office and passes Sebastian on the way back) Gerald: "I've had an urgent call from Central Office" (Brenda is about to phone when Diana enters.) Brenda (hastily putting down phone): "I badly need some fresh air" (she runs out and rings on her mobile). Brenda (getting Sebastian): Is that Knight & Quest please?" Sebastian "Speaking" Brenda: "Could I speak to Gerald please?" Sebastian "No I'm afraid he's out. Who shall I say rang please?" Brenda (Jehovah's Witness Telephone Evangelizing" (Gerald gets through to Diana from his mobile) Gerald: "Could I speak to Ms Smith please?" Diana: "I'm sorry she's out. Who shall I say rang please?" Gerald: "EC Brassiere standards Commission. I'll ring again" (Meanwhile Sebastian has been trying to get through to Diana's office and getting engaged tone. He runs out to ring on his mobile passing Gerald on the way back) Sebastian: "Urgently need to get some dirt on Peter Mandelson" (Meanwhile Diana is about to phone when she is interrupted by returning Brenda. She hastily puts down the phone) Diana: (quickly saying to Brenda as she leaves the office): "We need a straw poll on who's wearing camiknickers" (she runs to ring on her mobile, getting Gerald). Diana: Could I speak to Sebastian please?" Gerald: "I'm sorry he's out. Who shall I say rang?" Diana (dejectedly): "Oh just nobody" (she returns crestfallen to her office . Sebastian, not able to get through from on his mobile, returns dejected to Gerald's office. Gerald and Brenda both ring from their offices simultaneously. They both find the line engaged. Together: "Damn. Engaged". Gerald goes out to ring again on his mobile. Gerald as he goes) : "Can never get anyone on this damn phone" Diana: "I'm just going to see if I left the labrador in the car" Brenda: "But that was last week." Diana (sadly) : "Poor labrador". (Gerald rings from his mobile. At the same time Diana rings from her mobile)

Brenda (leaping to phone): Prettithings.

Sebastian (leaping to phone): Knight and Quest.

Gerald: This is me.

Diana: Is that Sebastian? This is me. Diana.

Brenda: Is that you? This is me.

Sebastian: I'm so glad you called. I've been desperate.

Gerald: I did enjoy yesterday.

Diana: I've been so worried. So terribly embarrassed when I realised.

Brenda: Yes yes. So did I.

Sebastian: Never mind how it happened. I loved meeting you.

Gerald: I loved the ice cream.

Diana: Did you? Why that's wonderful. So did I.

Brenda: Mmmmm. Delicious.

Sebastian: I just can't believe it. Shall we meet? Tonight?

Diana: Yes yes. I've absolutely nothing on.

Brenda: Can we meet tonight? I've nothing on.

Sebastian: Nothing? Really?

Gerald: Nothing? Really?

Diana: You bet I haven't. Indian or Chinese?

Brenda: Of course I haven't. Chinese or Indian?

Sebastian: What about Thai?

Gerald: How about Italian?

Diana: That would be lovely.

Brenda: That would be delicious.

Sebastian: Under the clock at Victoria?

Gerald: How about the entrance to National Portrait? To meet?

Diana: Yes. Under the clock at Victoria. How about 8?

Brenda: Entrance to National Portrait Gallery would be fine. Would 8 o'clock do?

Sebastian: I'm so happy. I'm so looking forward -

Gerald: I'm so happy. I'm so looking forward -

Diana: Me too.

Brenda: Me too.

Sebastian: How amazed my colleague would be if he could see me now (he starts to laugh).

Gerald: How jealous my colleague would be if he could see me now (he starts to laugh).

Diana (she is overcome with giggles): My secretary would have a fit. I'm supposed to be a leading political wife. If only she could see me now What a hoot! (she starts to laugh).

Brenda: My boss. She'd have kittens! (she is weak with laughter) I'm supposed to be an ardent feminist. What a hoot. If only she could see me now (Shrieking with laughter).

(They are all overcome)

Sebastian (wiping away tears): Life's so complicated.

Gerald (likewise): Life's so surprising.

Diana: I can't wait till this evening.

Brenda: I can't wait till this evening.

Sebastian: Nor me. Look I must go. My colleague will be back at any minute. Victoria clock. Bye bye love.

Gerald: Nor me. Look I can't stay any longer. My colleague will be wondering where I've got to. National Portrait at 8. Bye Bye love.

Diana: A bientot then.

Brenda: See you soon Gerald.

Scene Seven

(enter Gerald and Brenda into Gerald's office)

Brenda: So this is your office. So different from ours.

Gerald: The pinups are just professional of course.

Brenda: Oh of course. I mean you are an advertising agent. Thanks for another lovely meal. You know I used to live to eat once. Now I eat to live. I just never want to unless it's with you.

Gerald: Once. That seems another life now.

Brenda: I love your surname.

Gerald: Oh yes? It's quite an ordinary name.

Brenda: I think it's a wonderful name. I think it's so romantic to call a man by his surname. So rugged. So real man. So kind of Hemingway. I do hate this modern habit of calling people by their first names. It's really degenerate. Especially in business. It's even spreading down to pet names now. The other day I rang for an appointment for Diana in the City and the answer machine said: "This is Cutie. Buster will be back in an hour". Don't you think that's deplorable? Do let me call you Sebastian?

Gerald: But my name's -

Brenda: I want to be taken swiftly and mercilessly across a walnut desk.

Gerald: Uncomfortable for the bloke I should -

Brenda: To be driven a hundred and fifty miles an hour along the motorway.

Gerald: Even the royal family -

Brenda: To be made love to by a man in oily overalls with a toolbag -

Gerald: I'll remember to bring a spanner next time. Look my name's not Sebastian.

Brenda: Or a New York fireman -

Gerald: It's Knight.

Brenda: Don't be silly. How could it be Knight? How could a man of your calibre be called by a name like that? It's so ordinary. So common.

Gerald: Nevertheless -

Brenda: Now look, you can't suddenly change your name. When the lightning struck, to me you were Gerald Sebastian. I can't suddenly start thinking of you as Knight. I'm sure you're just being modest. OK? Your manhood's not just genetic, a family heirloom, a matter of biological inheritance. It's your own achievement. And it's that achievement I love. So I'm giving you a new and secret name. Just between us. You've started a new life so you want a new name. Like monks.

Gerald: Not like monks. Definitely not like monks..

Brenda: Can't you see? I *think* of you as Sebastian. I've got to call you Sebastian. You *are* Sebastian. Those are the colours under which you boarded me. *Please?*

Gerald: Oh well. OK. If that's what you want. But only as a temporary flag of convenience.

Brenda: Oh Sebastian, I do love you.

Gerald: Brenda, I adore you, I worship you. Call me what you like. Perhaps it is a good idea, a new name. I mean our lives have been renewed. Perhaps it is like monks after all.

Scene 8

(enter Julian wearing headphones)

Julian: This is planet earth. This is planet earth. Calling Diana Moncrieff-Manners. Calling Diana Moncrieff-Manners. Is there anybody there? Is there anybody there?

Scene nine

(Sebastian is in Gerald's office on the phone to Diana who is in her office)

Sebastian: Hi darling. It's me.

Diana: Hi sweetheart Hi.

Sebastian: I'm just finishing some copy. I don't mind doing it now. You've brought meaning into my life. Even advertising soapflakes seems worthwhile now.

Diana: Well it's the same for me of course. You've brought me back to life. I was dead with Ferguson.

Sebastian: Have you told him yet?

Diana: No I think we'd better wait until after May 6th.

Sebastian: What are you doing?

Diana: Thinking up designs.

Sebastian: Fashion Goddess.

Diana: Merchant Adventurer.

Sebastian: Princess in a tower.

Diana: Knight of the Grail. Laughing cavalier.

Sebastian: Pink Nude.

Diana: Am I really pink?

Sebastian: No you're a sort of gorgeous Gloire de Dijon rose colour.

Diana: It's extraordinary how the Pink Nude looks about ten feet long and still manages to be completely beautiful.

Sebastian: That's because Matisse painted her.

Diana: Let's go to the South of France.

Sebastian: We could live in one of those Matisse Mediterranean rooms. With open windows.

Diana: I love Matisse's Mediterranean rooms.

Sebastian: You always feel there are happy lovers only just out of sight.

Diana: But they aren't the tumbled rooms of lovers who've just gone out for five minutes.

Sebastian: You mean for some cigarettes or an ice cream.

Diana: They're lucid light filled rooms.

Sebastian: Cool. Kind of hieratic almost.

Diana: Arranged. Meditated. Ordered. He painted his own rooms of course.

Sebastian: Not so much the rooms of a lover as a priest of love.

Diana: Yes. He's a kind of celebrant. As if he himself were celibate almost. But he never holds himself aloof from the happiness of the lovers he redeems.

Sebastian: Anyway let's go to the Mediterranean. To Nice. We could make love under the benign eye of Matisse..

Diana: We don't want him actually *in* the room do we?

Sebastian: Not while we're actually *in* bed no. But he could paint the room while we were out.

Diana: Then they would be the tumbled rooms of lovers who've just gone out for five minutes.

Sebastian: We might meet him on the promenade. With Madame Matisse.

Diana: She looks nice.

Sebastian: Except she had a green face.

Diana: She didn't have a green face. It was a green blouse.

Sebastian: Maybe. In reality everybody might have a green face. How do we know our senses are reliable? If there is anything called reality.

Diana: He'd have loved it if she'd had a green face.

Sebastian: Oh adored it. He was Matisse after all. Do you think she minded all those nudes he painted?

Diana: Oh I shouldn't think so. Artists are sort of neutral. Like doctors.

Sebastian: I bet he wouldn't have been neutral if he'd painted you. He'd have raged, rampaged. Howled tragically up and down the Riviera.

Diana: All those stuffy English people who went to Nice wouldn't have liked that.

Sebastian: They went to Nice because they were trying not to be stuffy.

Diana: Anyway they wouldn't have liked it when he started smashing wine glasses.

Sebastian: Hurling easels through shop windows.

Diana: Reciting *The Waste Land* in hotel lounges. Do you think you'd have fought a duel with him?

Sebastian: Mmmm. Not sure about that. I'll have to think about it. No. Definitely not. If I'd killed him we wouldn't have had the paper cut-outs. The Snail and Jazz. That would have been awful. No, at that stage I'd have let him paint you. In a dignified way of course.

Diana: What colour would he have painted me do you think?

Sebastian: A sort of gorgeous Gloire de Dijon rose colour.

Diana: Anyway let's go.

Sebastian: To the South of France.

Diana: To the South of France.

Sebastian: Allon s- y, Alonso!

Diana: See you in Nice, Matisse!

Scene Ten

(Brenda and Diana are both sitting working at their desks in Diana's office)

Brenda: Diana. Er.. Well I've got something I wanted to tell you like.

Diana: Oh yes Brenda? Fire away.

Brenda: I'm well you know in love. I've found the most wonderful man. At last. Isn't it incredible?

Diana: Oh Brenda. I'm so pleased. How totally super. It's really very strange you should say that. Because I've got something to tell you. A little secret of my own. And I want you to be the first to know. I've been seeing somebody too. Not Ferguson. Somebody else. I've also met the most wonderful man.

Brenda; Good heavens Diana. But what about Ferguson? Does he know?

Diana: Not yet, no. Well there is the election you know. And one does try to be decent. I've been so longing to tell you. Poor Ferguson. I know. But Ferguson and I just don't get on any more. I'm really a hindrance to him. And the constant quarrelling is so bad for Julian. We'll be better separated. I think we've got a duty in fact. For poor Julian's sake.

Brenda: You've had a bad time I know.

Diana: And when invited by life itself to a love as wonderful as this, how can one refuse?

Brenda: Diana, I'm like, you know, well like so pleased for you if it's really what you want.

Diana: Many many thanks, Brenda. One is feeling rather heavenly. And I'm so pleased for you..

Brenda: What a wonderful thing for it to happen to both of us at the same time. It's amazing.

Diana: It's like a new dimension of reality. Like being a kind of mystic.

Brenda: Like being on LSD or ecstasy you mean?

Diana: You'll keep this secret for the moment won't you? Tell not the laity of our love. I suppose great artists must feel like this the whole time. Oh Brenda. I am so pleased for you. After all your despairs and doubts.

Brenda: How sweet of you Diana.

Diana: Thanks Brenda.

Brenda: Thanks Diana.

Diana: Dear Brenda.

Brenda: Dear Diana. It's wonderful being in love isn't it?

Diana: Quite wonderful.

Brenda: I wonder what he's doing now.

Diana: Yes. I wonder.

Brenda: To think how I used to believe all that feminist rubbish.

Diana: You did rather didn't you? I never believed it of course. *Quelque chose de maintenant.*

Brenda: Well I didn't really. It just passed the time really. I mean it is like just a modern fashion.

Diana: A contemporary fad. It will pass. Like all fashions. We should know after all. It's the eternal things that count. Art. Beauty. Love. The perpetual dance of the sexes.

Brenda: I wonder what your chap looks like. I wonder if he's at all like mine.

Diana: Well there's no way of telling unless we all meet one day is there? I mean how do you describe someone. It always sounds like a passport. How would you describe your chap then?

Brenda: Well - er - average height. Wears a suit. Tie. Very good looking.

Diana: He sounds nice. Rather like mine.

Brenda: Very mature.

Diana: Oh so is mine. Very mature. After all, maturity is a state of mind.

Brenda: I do so hope you meet Sebastian one day.

Diana: I beg your pardon. Did you say Sebastian? How odd. My friend's called Sebastian. He works in Knight & Quest advertising.

Brenda: So...does....mine

Diana: Sebastian? He can't be.

Brenda: He certainly is.

Diana: Are you sure he's called Sebastian?

Brenda: Yes Sebastian. I love him and he loves me.

(pause)

Diana: Sebastian?

Brenda: Do I have to tell you again Diana? Sebastian.

(pause)

Diana: I'm terribly sorry. He loves me.

Brenda: What do you mean?

Diana: Well what I say actually. What do you think I mean? When Ferguson and I are divorced he's going to marry me.

Brenda: But he loves me. I'm sorry but I've got bad news for you Diana. He's going to marry me. He's proposed to me.

Diana: Dear Brenda. There must be some mistake. I can hardly believe this. Do you mean that you've repaid all my kindness to you by stealing my lover?

Brenda: I most certainly do not. What I do mean is that you've repaid all my loyalty and hard work by stealing mine.

Diana: Good heavens. This is incredible. I have to admit it is straining all the resources of my upbringing and education not to call you a liar and a bitch.

Brenda: I am calling you a liar and a bitch.

Diana: One is so constantly dismayed by human nature. Do you need proof? (she takes out a postcard from inside her handbag and reads) "Darling Diana. Can't wait to see you. It's rotten weather isn't it? Love Sebastian"

Brenda: And let me show you this (she takes out a card from inside her own handbag and reads) "Darling Brenda. I love you so much I'm feeling ill. Isn't it awful weather? All my love. Sebastian"

(pause)

Diana: Then he must have -

Brenda: No I can't believe -

Diana: That he's been -

Brenda: It's just incredible -

Diana: That -

Brenda: That -

(they stare miserably in front of them)

Diana: May I just see your postcard? (she compares the two postcards) The creepy crawly! He's deliberately disguised his handwriting when writing to one of us. Or perhaps both. Perhaps there have been other women who have been the victims of his evil machinations. What a rotten fellow.

Brenda: He's been deceiving us.

Diana: Two- timing us....Playing with us.

Brenda: The traitor.

Diana: The fornicator.

Brenda: Rat.

Diana: Toad.

Brenda: Snake.

Diana: Octopus.

Brenda: The randy goat.

Diana: The rutting cockerel.

Brenda: Yuk! What a lustful chauvinist pig.

Diana: Ugh! What a self-centred licentious stallion.

(they burst into tears and fly into each others' arms)

Diana: Oh Brenda! Brenda! Thank goodness we've got each other. Dearest girl. I'm so sorry you've been so hurt.

Brenda: Dearest Diana. How sweet you are. And what about you? How you've been damaged and wounded. And you so sensitive and vulnerable. Thank goodness for womens' consciousness. What ever did people do in this sort of situation before the feminist movement?

Diana: How thankful one is for one's upbringing and education. It gives you the strength to hold back always that last little bit of yourself, that last inner sanctuary. Otherwise I couldn't have coped with a thing like this.

Brenda: How foul men are.

Diana: How loathsome.

Brenda: How despicable. I wish I never had to see one again.

Diana: Oh they're everywhere. The streets are full of them.

Brenda: Let's put a face on and go out together. This has been so shocking and awful. Perhaps in the circumstances just for once we could treat ourselves to a large slice of cream gateau.

Scene eleven

(Gerald's office. It is empty. A pause. Enter Sebastian. He sees a letter on his desk. He opens it and reads. First silently and then aloud)

"Sebastian. I regret that I shall not be able to see you again. I wish you happiness in the future. Yours sincerely. Diana Moncrieff-Manners"

(He is thunderstruck. He exits. Enter simultaneously Gerald into his office and Brenda into Diana's. Gerald dials)

Brenda (picking up phone): Hello. Prettithings

Gerald: Helo Darling. I was just ringing....Hello Darling? (pause) Are you all right darling?

Brenda: I never want to see you or hear from you again.

Gerald: Er...what did you say?

Brenda: I never want to see you again. You deceiver. You fornicator. You told me I was the only girl you loved.

Gerald: I've always told you you were the only girl I loved.

Brenda: That's exactly what I'm complaining about.

Gerald: Please Brenda! There's been some terrible mistake.

Brenda: Yes, that's exactly what it's been. A terrible mistake. I never want to see you again or receive any communication.

A

Gerald: This is awful.

Brenda: Yes, awful. Frightful. Don't try and contact me. Or Diana. I've never been so unhappy. So wretched. I'm shattered if that's any satisfaction. So's Diana. You bastard. You criminal. I was so happy till I met you. KEEP AWAY!

(she slams down the phone. She is weeping bitterly. Gerald immediately tries to re-ring. Brenda's phone rings. She takes it off the hook and presses down the cradle buttons with her hand. Gerald puts his phone down)

Gerald: Shit!

(the phone immediately rings again. Gerald picks it up joyfully)

Gerald: Darling?.....Three hundred and six seats and it's a hung parliament?.....Piss off.

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

Scene One

Enter Venus

Venus: Well good gracious me! Would you believe?
 They are all in a rare old fix
 But never fear. I've still some tricks
 Hidden deep within my sleeve.
 All is not quite what it seems.
 I'll show them secrets in their dreams

So here goes. And first - here is the dream I've sent to Gerald

(exit)

(soft light. Dreamy music. Enter Gerald. He is dressed as a twelve year old schoolboy from the nineteen seventies in cap, blazer, grey shirt with woollen tie, short trousers, S-clasp belt, long socks. Also enter and standing on tall stools so that they tower above Gerald, Monsignor Paddington (Ferguson) partly dressed as a priest but also with shiny top hat and bright check trousers with plus fours, and also Mizzi Baumgartner. She is a middle aged Jewish woman).

Gerald: Knight Gerald: Born in the summer of love 1968.. Mother: died from drug overdose.. Father: professional con-man chiefly of self. Brought up: by adored and sad late

lamented Mizzi. Major characteristic: compulsive liar. Married: never, on account of same. Brief emotional liaisons: innumerable. Occupation: using said talent to great advantage in commercial world. Major personal pursuit: keeping others at distance to prevent emotional lesion or abrasion. Well, this is my Dad.

(running to father)

Gerald: Dad, Dad, where's Mizzi?

Father: Life, son, the art of the possible. Empires there for the taking, son. The Lord guideth the just man. Psalm 35. After the 3.30 at Redcar this afternoon we'll be rich. Crown Prince, son, goes like a flash, runs like lightning. Dead cert for the 3.30.

Gerald: Can I come too Dad?

Father: Not this time, son. I'm too busy making us rich. For your sake, son, and for your poor mother's God rest her soul. Go and find Mizzi, son.

Gerald: Mizzi, parents ex-concentration camp inmates. Haunted, beautiful. She was my only mother. Only I was allowed to enter the magic forest of her aloneness. Standing holding my breath in the caves of shadow. While she sang songs of her race in the dazzling moonlight. (he runs over to Mizzi) Mizzi, Mizzi, Dad's gone to get rich with a crown prince. We're going to have a red car Mizzi. Mizzi, shall I make you laugh, Mizzi? (he imitates being rich and driving a red car).

Mizzi (laughing in spite of herself): We will go far away in the red car, Gerald, you and I. Beyond the magic forest, Gerald.

Gerald(running over to father): Did the horse win, Dad?

Father: Not this time son. But God trieth the patience of the just man Job three seventeen. Now I'm going away for a bit son. Got to do a kindness to some rich old ladies. Lonely and lost they are. Succour the widow. Proverbs seventeen twenty four. Advise them how to invest their money son. So I can't see you just now. Go and find Mizzi son.

Gerald: Mizzi. Her hair is a dark wood. Her breasts are singing birds. They sing sweet songs. Her love is a slow river (running across to Mizzi) Mizzi, Mizzi, Dad's going to show some rich old ladies how to hide their money in their vests. (he imitates old ladies hiding money bags inside their vests)

Mizzi (laughing in spite of herself): You must practise your reading and your piano Gerald. Shall we do it together?

Gerald (running across to father): Did the old ladies find their money, Dad?

Father: I'm going away, son. To make our fortune. For your dear old mother's sake. To Monte Carlo. To challenge the world, son. Get thee to a far country. Genesis thirty five four. After that we'll be rich, you and me, Biarritz, Florence, Paris. We'll be up there with all the nobs, son. You be a good boy until I get back. And look after Mizzi, son.

Gerald: Mizzi. Stumbling along exhausted, pursued by wolves (he runs over to Mizzi)
 Mizzi, Mizzi, Dad says I've got to look after you till he gets back. He's gone to a far country with somebody called Monty Carlo to get rich. Shall I make you laugh, Mizzi? Shall I do Hitler?

(Mizzi weeps)

Gerald (running to father): Dad, Dad, did you make our fortune with Monty Carlo?

Father: Temporarily indisposed, son. Unforeseen liquidity problem. So going for a holiday instead. By favour of his Majesty the King. Accommodation all found and guaranteed. Remission of entry fee for good conduct. Blessed are the peacemakers. Matthew chapter five. So it's goodbye, son. Never tell lies. Be gentle with the fair sex. Always wear a clean shirt. Be smart as a ribston pippin. And the Lord shall bless thee. Farwell, old son (exit).

Gerald: Goodbye Dad. My Dad's going for a holiday with His Majesty the King. (he runs over to Mizzi but she has gone, leaving a note) Mizzi? Mizzi? (he reads the note with some difficulty) "My dear darling Gerald. I want you to be always good boy, darling. Practise your reading and your music. And always look after your daddy. I have to leave you now but for always. I love you. Mizzi" Mizzi? Mizzi? (running across the stage from one empty stool to the other) Dad? Dad? Mizzi? Mizzi? Dad? Mizzi? (pause)

I've just got to stop telling lies. I've just got to stop telling lies.

(Lights up. Enter Venus. She has put a dressing gown on over her Mizzi costume. She is holding a telephone)

Venus: And now for a slice of real life.

(a spot snaps onto Ferguson talking into his mobile in the BT phone box)

Ferguson: Is that 25 Andromeda Avenue?.....Leighton Buzzard?.....Hello, I'm a prospective client....Mr Harpbarple.....The afternoons only? That's OK.....Yes tomorrow afternoon...Yes 3pm would be fine. Tomorrow at 3 then. Thank you..... Goodbye

(exit Ferguson)

Venus: And now for Diana's dream.

(soft light. Music)

(enter Diana and Camilla Diana is wearing ear-rings, sun-glasses and an expensive coat. There is a menacing ticking of clocks).

Camilla: We are now descending to the second floor. Summer wear and needlepoint. I am going to take off your ear-rings. (she removes them)

Diana: Why are you doing that?

Camilla: All the better for you to hear with.

(enter Ferguson)

Diana: Ah Ferguson. Did you want to say something?

Ferguson: I'm frightened of you. You set the labrador on me.

Diana: I didn't. I never did.

Ferguson: Please put him back in the car.

(exit Ferguson. Diana is appalled and weeps)

Camilla: We are now descending to the first floor. Designer fashions. I am going to take off your glasses. (she removes Diana's glasses)

Diana: Why are you doing that?

Camilla: All the better for you to see with

(enter Julian): Hello Julian. Did you want to show me something?

Julian: Gosh Mum spoils us. And you really did didn't you? You really did.

Diana: I didn't....I didn't mean.

Julian: You really did didn't you?

(exit Julian. Diana is appalled and weeps)

Camilla: We are now descending to the ground floor. Cosmetics and Accessories. I am going to take off your coat. (she removes Diana's coat. Diana is wearing a white shift)

Diana: Why are you doing that?

Camilla: All the better for you to feel with

Diana (she is backing away): Mummy! What are you doing here?

Camilla: Can't you dress him yourself the poor lamb?

Diana: Mummy I have a business to run.

Camilla: I really feel I have to come in here for poor Ferguson's sake.

(she advances towards Diana who backs away in terror)

Diana: GET AWAY FROM ME. I CAN'T BEAR YOU NEAR ME. GET AWAY.

(Camilla continues to advance on Diana who is weeping and shrieking)

Diana: GET AWAY! GET AWAY! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

Camilla: I'm going to love you if you'll let me.

(Camilla engulfs Diana in her black cloak. There is a loud and strident cacophony of sound. It starts on a low note towards the end of the dialogue and rise higher and higher and higher until it reaches a crescendo and falls with a crash onto its original starting note. By this time the stage is in complete darkness. As the crash happens a spotlight snaps on to reveal Ferguson knocking on the door of 25 Andromeda Avenue Leighton Buzzard. During the first few lines of the subsequent scene the stage lights rapidly strengthen to full light

(Venus, back in her dressing gown is behind an imaginary door frame with a door in it upon which Ferguson is knocking. She opens the door a crack on the chain. Venus is now a madame)

Venus: You the police?

Ferguson (looking furtively round): No, I'm a client. Harpbarple. I rang earlier.

Venus: All right. You can come in. From London are you?

Ferguson: Yes. That's right.

Venus: We get a lot of gentlemen from London. Professional are you?

Ferguson: Oh yes. Absolutely.

Venus: We offer a discreet service for professional gentlemen of adult taste. You'd be surprised the famous people who've been clients. A lot of our clients are in the newspapers.

Ferguson: I'd rather steer clear of the newspapers actually

Venus: Generals, politicians, film stars, celebrities. Only last week a cabinet minister said to me "Myrtle, your establishment is a haven of delight in a naughty world".

Ferguson: A cabinet minister. I wonder who that was.

Venus: My lips are sealed. Like with clingfilm. We pride ourselves on being professional. Would you like menu or a la carte?

Ferguson: Oh....er.....menu please

Venus (taking out list of services and reading) : Policewoman arrests client in flagrante delicto. While she dresses him down he undresses her down. Client discovers the bare essentials of the law are fabulous beyond dreams.

Head girl summons client to study to correct him for stealing cigarettes. After chastisement with cane Head Girl invites client to view her navy blue serge drawers as worn by schoolgirls in the nineteen fifties followed by romps in the sun and shared shower

Client dressed only in leopard skin loincloth is fleeing with Girl Friday from pursuing gorilla through steaming jungle. Gorilla dies of heart attack. Client makes wild love to Girl Friday on floor of rainforest.

Do any of these appeal? Or do you want further pulsatingly exotic but tasteful scenarios?

Ferguson: I think the second actually. The Head Girl one.

Venus: With or without erotic surprise.

Ferguson: What is an exotic surprise?

Venus: You'll be surprised .

Ferguson: All right. Why not? Might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb what? I'll go for the erotic surprise as well.

Venus (taking off her dressing gown to reveal she is wearing an old fashioned gymslip and putting on a wig with long plaits): Stand up straight when I'm talking to you.

(Ferguson pulls himself up to attention)

Venus: Now Piddlington-Minor, did you steal Ashley-Hodgkinson Major's cigarettes?

Ferguson: No I didn't.

Venus: No I didn't Mademoiselle Head Girl.

Ferguson: No I didn't Mademoiselle Head Girl.

Venus: If you know what's good for you you'll say you did.

Ferguson: All right. I did.

Venus: Mademoiselle Head Girl.

Ferguson: Mademoiselle Head Girl.

Venus: Very well, Piddlington-Minor, I'm going to cane you. It is what you deserve. You ought to be deeply ashamed of yourself. But I know there is a little boy inside who wants to be loved. Now take your trousers down and bend over and shut your eyes.

(She takes out cane. Ferguson lets down his trousers and bends over with eyes closed. As he does so there is a sound of whistles blowing. Venus is about to administer the caning, but on hearing the whistles she rapidly and silently exits with looks of alarm. She returns wearing a police mac and policewoman's hat. She stands looking at Ferguson)

Ferguson: I'm waiting (he looks round and stands up): You must be the erotic surprise.

PCW: Policewoman Constable Dobbs. South Bedfordshire Constabulary.

Ferguson: Caught in flagrante delicto, eh?

PCW: Would you like to assume an erect posture sir?

Ferguson: So you can dress me down while I study the bare essentials of the law, eh? Isn't that it? (he winks) Eh? Eh?

PCW: I must warn you that anything you say may be taken down in evidence against you.

Ferguson: Got something French and frilly to take down? Eh? Eh?

PCW: Will you please come with me to the station.

Ferguson: To the station? I'm not leaving here.

(The PCW blows her whistle.)

Ferguson (light dawning): I say. Who are you? This is going a bit far.

Policewoman: Come on sir. You're going a bit farther. To the station.

Ferguson: This is frightful. I protest. You can't make me go to the station. This is an outrage. I can't believe it. Are you sure you're a policeperson?

Sergeant: I was under that impression, sir.

Ferguson: You can't make me go to the station. You've got to listen. I can explain everything. I'm a famous person.

Policewoman: You'll be even more famous when this is over. Now just pull up your trousers and come with me, sir.

Ferguson:(pulling up his trousers): Oh dear. Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear oh dear. This is the end. This is the end. Oh dear Oh dear. I'm finished

Venus (entering as herself): And now for Brenda's dream (exit)

(trumpets. Enter Diana and Ferguson. They are wearing medieval cloaks and hats.)

Diana: We are here to try Sir Gerald the Unready for the crime of rape. Bring him in. (Ferguson exits and returns with Gerald)

Diana: You are accused Sir Gerald the Unready of the crime of rape. What do you have to say?

Gerald: Come off it. I never raped anybody. I just took photographs of pretty girls.

Diana: In the Court of Love that counts as rape. You are condemned to lose your life unless within a year and a day you can come back to this court and tell it what women most desire. The court is dismissed.

(Diana and Ferguson exit but immediately return with two free standing blossoming trees each which they leave about the stage as if in a wood. Exit courtiers. Soft light and mysterious music. Gerald wanders between the trees. Enter May)

May (to Gerald): I think it's a wonderful name. I think it's so romantic to call a man by his surname. So rugged. So real-man, so kind of Hemingway. I bet you'll find David Cameron changes his name when he arrives in 10 Downing Street in his bleeding Daimler. King Dave.. Do let me call you Sebastian.

Gerald: But my name's -

May: I'm tired and bored. I want to be taken swiftly and mercilessly across a walnut desk

Gerald: Uncomfortable for the bloke I should -

May: Tired and bored. I want to be driven a hundred and fifty miles an hour along the motorway.

Gerald: Even the royal family -

May: To be made love to by a man in oily overalls. I want to die smelling terrific.

Gerald: I'll remember to bring a spanner next time. Look my name's not Sebastian. It's Knight.

May: Well I dunno. When the lightning struck, to me you were Gerald Sebastian. See yer tomorrer (exit)

(Gerald wanders about among the trees. Enter a hideous old hag. She wears a grotesque mask that is reminiscent of Brenda's features. She has almost crossed the stage when Gerald becomes aware of her and accosts her)

:Gerald: Excuse me! Excuse me! I'm looking for myself. Can you tell me what women most desire?

Hag: Are you sure you want to know?

Gerald: Oh yes. You see my life is forfeit unless I can find myself in a year and a day. Unless I can find out what women want I shan't be able to find myself.

Hag: If I tell you will you promise to give me whatever I ask?

Gerald: Oh yes. Oh yes. Without question (she whispers in his ear. Trumpets. Re-enter the court)

Diana: Sir Gerald the Unready. Can you tell me what it is that women most desire? Otherwise you must forfeit your life.

Gerald: To know the name of the man they love.

(the court breaks out into clapping)

Diana: You mean his secret name?

Gerald: I do.

(More clapping)

Diana: You have answered right. Your life is saved.

Gerald: I'm so glad. Can I go now and do what I like?

Hag: Just a minute. You promised me that in return for telling you what women most desire you would give me what I want.

Gerald: So I did. I'd forgotten that. What is it you want?

Hag: Marry me.

(the court is dumbstruck. Gerald falls onto his knees with his head in his hands. He rises)

Gerald: Is there no way out of this?

Diana: No. No way. It is the law of chivalry that a knight must keep a promise made to a woman.

Hag: Will you keep your promise? Will you kiss me? Will you make love to me?

Gerald (aghast): I will.

Hag: And take me for your awful wedded wife?

Gerald: I will.

Hag: Then you must choose. Either you can have me ugly and always faithful to you. Or you can have me beautiful but faithless.

(there is a pause while music plays)

Gerald: Which do you want? Which will make you happier? Which do you prefer?

Hag: Then kiss me.

(overcoming his revulsion he kisses her. She removes the mask she had been wearing. It is Brenda)

Gerald: Brenda! (he falls onto his knees with his hands on the hilt of the sword in the posture of the Knight of the Grail kneeling before the altar)

Brenda: Yes it was always me. You were kind to me and you loved me. And because you loved me and made me beautiful you can have me faithful too. You are now ready to set out on your new quest. So I shall give you a new name. Arise Sir Gerald.

Gerald: But Brenda what are you doing here? What does all this mean?

Brenda: Come let us dance to solemn music in this magic glade.

(they dance, after a time separating to opposite sides of the stage and exiting making gestures of farewell. Exit Diana and Ferguson taking the trees with them)

Scene Two

(Diana enters right. Venus enters left with newspaper vendor's billboard)

Venus: Read all about it. Read all about it. MP resigns in vice scandal. Read all about it

(Diana buys paper and quickly scans it. She takes out her mobile and dials)

Diana: Ferguson?...Darling? It's me...Yes it's me.....It doesn't matter, darling...it doesn't matter...of course I will....No it was my fault.....It was all because you didn't get the love from me you needed. I see that now....course I will.....It was always you I loved. We both have...Yes yes darling....yes yes yes.....Oh I've been missing you so terribly...this evening?...eight....I'll be there....oh yes I'll be there.

(exit Diana. Enter Venus with different billboard)

Venus: Well known advertiser in tax-dodge case.....read all about it. Advertiser in tax-dodge case. Company in receivership. . Read all about it.

(enter Brenda who buys paper and quickly scans it. She takes out her mobile and rings)

Brenda: Gerald?...It's me Brenda...I had to ring when I heard. No, no it was my fault....Of course I will...No it was my fault...I realise now.....I've been missing you so much.....can we meet this evening? Old place?....I'll pay...Yes yes I'll be there. Oh Gerald. I can't wait.

Scene Three

(Gerald and Brenda are on one side of the stage in a spotlight. Diana and Ferguson are on the other, also spotlighted)

Gerald: I confessed to the Inland Revenue

Ferguson: I really was caught in flagrante

Brenda: Darling how brave.

Diana: It doesn't matter darling.

Gerald: They've bankrupted me of course. And they'll bring criminal charges. I'll go to prison

Ferguson: The police will bring a charge of course. I may go to prison even.

Brenda: It doesn't matter. I'll be there. At last.

Diana: It doesn't matter. I'll face it with you

Gerald: But I've found you at last. Nothing else matters.

Ferguson: I've found you at last.

Diana: Dearest Ferguson. I've found you again. .

Gerald: We'll start again together.

Brenda; And begin again.

Ferguson: Let's start again. Together

Diana: Oh yes. As if we'd met for the first time. Because we have. Time can't go backwards. Or can it? It's as if we'd met for the first time. As if we've changed into other people. Ourselves. And returned to the beginning.

Gerald: We'll get a flat in Camberwell or Ealing.

Brenda: A bit expensive Camberwell these days,

Gerald: OK then , Neasden, Croydon., Wolverhampton Anywhere.

Brenda; Yes anywhere.

Ferguson: We'll find a flat. Somewhere very ordinary.

Brenda: And begin again at the beginning.

Diana: And begin again at the beginning.

Gerald: The magic island of beginnings.

Ferguson: The garden at the start of things.

Diana: Open the door into our place.

Ferguson: Yes, this is our place.

Brenda: The end of all our wandering.

Gerald: It was always here.

Diana: But not known before. Forgotten

Ferguson: This is the place.

Brenda: Yes, this is the place.

Gerald: No longer strangers in the dark. But travellers come home.

Diana: Together now. In a still place. For ever and for always. (slow fade and exeunt)

Epilogue (spoken by Sebastian)

So the lovers lived happily ever after. Cicely gets Algernon and Gwendolyn gets Jack. But in real life there's always somebody left out. I'm afraid it's me. Oh well. Back to the philosophy, you bony whore.

