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Long Live Love

a romantic farce in two acts

By Don Zolidis

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Full-Length Farce
5M 5W

It's opening night for Long Live Love, a drawing room comedy about a marriage squabble where everything turns out happy in the end. But hours before the curtain is set to go up, George Harold, one of the show's two playwrights, rushes in with a new, much more cynical version of the script he wrote in an angry, drunken haze. As the actors scramble to add a tragic ending to their romantic farce, Marjorie Bright, the other playwright—and George's wife—arrives with a new new ending for the show. Now the actors are stuck in an impossible situation, trying to piece together a working script from the remains of the playwrights' marriage. Long-lost children, mistaken identities, and sword fights abound in Long Live Love—and that's just behind the scenes.

Cast of Characters

The cast of Long Live Love

MORTIMER BARRINGTON, 40ish, the feckless head of the family.

ANGELICA BARRINGTON, 40ish, Mortimer's wife,

BERTRAND MONTGOMERY, 20, ward of Rose

FELICITY BARRINGTON, 18, in love with Bertrand.

TYRONE WESTLEY, 40ish, a business associate of Mr. Barrington, family friend.

ROSE VALANCE, late 30s, personal secretary of Tyrone, confidante of Angelica.

NURSE (MARGARET BITTERSBY), 50s.

The Actors:

BARNEY DILKS, (playing the role of Mortimer) a long term collaborator with numerous physical ailments.

VIVIAN ROSSUM (playing the role of Angelica) – her last shot at reviving her career.

RICHARD O'CASEY (playing the role of Bertrand) – a wide-eyed innocent from Iowa.

MARY BASKIN (playing the role of Felicity) – a young woman of the world.

CABO (playing the role of Tyrone Westley) – a budding movie star.

CLYTEMNESTRA FIELDS (playing the role of Rose) – a consummate professional

ZORA (playing the role of Nurse), her first show. Terrified. Too young for the part.

The Playwrights –

GEORGE HAROLD, mid 40s

MARJORIE BRIGHT, mid 40s

The Director:

CHARLES LIPPINCOTT, the director, any age

Setting: 1930's. The stage at the Howard Bryant theater. A drawing room comedy of the play, *Long Live Love.*

Act One

We are near the end of the play, Long Live Love.

It's a drawing room comedy, the kind that proliferated on Broadway stages for decades. A big, well-appointed room. Lots of overstuffed furniture. Pictures on the walls. A set designer's pride and joy.

There are six actors currently on stage, and they are in the middle of rehearsing the show.

MORTIMER, early 40s, who stands near the fireplace, seething with anger, is pointing at

TYRONE, early 40s, who has just walked in the front door, wearing a rain coat, and spritzed with water. He carries a bouquet of roses, which he is about to hand to

ROSE, late 30s, the personal secretary of Mortimer, who is dressed rather flamboyantly for the evening, and in the middle of handing a letter to

ANGELICA, early 40s, not dressed for dinner, in fact, wearing a shawl as she appears to be suffering from an illness, who is reaching out to stop

BERTRAND, 20, from fishing in his pocket for something to give to

FELICITY, late teens, (Angelica's daughter) who is recoiling from Bertrand and trying to hide behind Mortimer.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
How dare you, sir?! Interrupt a sacred family occasion with your dastardly –

CABO (TYRONE)
Oh put a sock in it, Mortimer, and your family is hardly sacred. I have no use for religion, but if there is an Almighty, He would certainly praise me for putting a stop to the night's festivities.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
You insult me!?

CABO (TYRONE)
I've been insulting you for most of your life you squirrel, it's not my fault you've only just realized it.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Enough!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
And besides Mortimer, you were hardly thinking of the sacredness of your family earlier this evening!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
That's a fine accusation coming from *you!*

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Whatever does that mean?!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Oh I think *everyone* knows what that means! I. FOUND. THE BEAR.

Felicity gasps.

Yes it is shocking, daughter. You will be even more shocked when you learn the purpose of this bear! It was no ordinary bear!

CABO (TYRONE)

Undoubtedly. We are all disappointed it didn't eat you on the spot.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Speaking of ferocious animals I would like to point out that -

MARY (FELICITY)

Father, perhaps Mr. Westley has a valid reason for being here.

RICHARD (BERTRAND) *(seizing his chance to make an announcement)*

I have a reason for being here!

MARY (FELICITY)

No you don't!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

He has no valid reason for being here! Mr. Westley, I insist that you remove yourself from my presence before I am forced to thrash you!

CABO (TYRONE)

Oh we're at mister now? Have you forgotten my name again?

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

What does that mean?

CABO (TYRONE)

You've always been dense, Morty, but before now you've never been a liar.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

That's it! That is it! That is enough!

CABO (TYRONE)

If you keep saying it eventually it will come true.

Mortimer shrieks with rage and darts out of the room.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Will someone please tell me what is going on?!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I will tell you!

MARY (FELICITY)

No you won't!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

But surely –

Felicity rushes to Bertrand and clamps her hand over his mouth.

MARY (FELICITY)

Mother! Do you mind?! This was supposed to be your job!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Very well, Felicity.

She clamps her hand over Bertrand's mouth instead.

CABO (TYRONE)

It's very simple, Rose. We find ourselves in the home of a colossal idiot.

Mortimer returns and continues searching for something.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Idiot?!

CABO (TYRONE)

See? It's capable of repeating noises, but incapable of making sense of them.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I'll show you an idiot!

CABO (TYRONE)

Yes you've been doing that marvelously.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Darling, please – the more you speak with him, the more he makes you look like a fool.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

A ha!

Mortimer grabs a dueling saber from a display case.

My honor has been insulted! Defend yourself, miscreant!

CABO (TYRONE)

Stop waving that thing around before you hurt yourself.

MARY (FELICITY)
Father, it simply isn't fair to be the only one with a sword.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Tough luck! It's my house, my rules!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Don't be ridiculous. At least give him his own sword.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Fine!

He tries to kick the case over to Tyrone.
Rose intercepts it and pulls out the other saber.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
I have had just about enough of this nonsense! I was invited over here because Bertrand told me he had an announcement, and I have been struck with an umbrella, had a cup of water dashed in my face, and been stuffed into a closet with live minks for the better part of an hour! Someone had better tell me what's going on before I skewer all of you!

CABO (TYRONE)
Rose, the fault is mine – I misread –

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
You deserve to be imprisoned in a closet with seven irritable minks for your actions!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
My actions?!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Yes, your actions you devious ferret! You dare show your face here again?! I should have you whipped with a willow branch! It was I who tossed the water in your face, and I shall do it again!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
You?!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Yes, me!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
But why have I been invited here if you bore me such ill will?

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
I will tell you!

MARY (FELICITY)

No you will not!

CLYTMENESTRA (ROSE) *(pointing the sword at Felicity)*

Let him speak!

Felicity backs away.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

As my adopted guardian, I wanted you here to witness my love.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Who on earth is your love?

MARY (FELICITY)

Daddy, I think you need to put down the sword.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I have nothing to fear.

He gets down on one knee.

Felicity – darling –

Felicity has a coughing fit. She collapses on Bertrand and tries to drag him up to his feet.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Oh dear.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!

VIVAN (ANGELICA)

It's nothing! It's not anything! The boy is confused and has problems with his knees.

Mortimer attempts to stab Bertrand with the saber.

Rose leaps in the way.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

He doesn't know, Mortimer!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Out of the way, Rose! This is best accomplished quickly!

CABO (TYRONE)

I see your executions follow the same philosophy as your love-making.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I will deal with you and my love-making presently!

He attacks again.

Rose deflects the blow.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
I warn you, Mortimer, I was ladies fencing champion three years running at Vassar.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
And I was ladies fencing champion four consecutive years at Harvard!
A moment.
I exclusively dueled women.
Another moment.
It was a way to meet girls. Imagine my surprise when I discovered there were no girls.

CABO (TYRONE)
I see your stupidity is long-established.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
I was young and I needed the exercise!
He swings at Rose.
This is entirely your fault!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
My fault?! It was your lies that started this whole affair!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
You're a fine one to speak of affairs!

CABO (TYRONE)
I never speak of affairs. Mine are too sensational to be believed.
Rose and Mortimer duel.
Mortimer is quite terrible at it.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
Felicity, let's run for it!

MARY (FELICITY)
No thank you!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
They'll never accept us! Let's –

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Sit down, Bertrand!
He sits.
We have had quite enough of your protestations of love for one night, thank you very much.

CABO (TYRONE)

Can we stop this duel before you slay one of the rugs, Mortimer?

Mortimer escapes from Rose and chases Tyrone, swinging his saber at him.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I'll slay your rug!

Tyrone runs around the furniture.
Mortimer chases him.
Rose chases Mortimer.
They all circle around Angelica.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Come back here!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Oh you want him stabbed just as badly as I do!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I love him!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

What?

CABO (TYRONE)

What?!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

What?!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I love him. I know he's bad for me. I know his manners are deplorable and his wit is poisonous. I know he's treacherous and poorly built, with a history of deceit.

CABO (TYRONE)

History of deceit?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

But I can't help it. I love this bastard. All those years as your personal secretary, all those dictations, all those dinner reservations… I wished I could tell you how I truly felt. I did it all for love.

To Mortimer

And though I know he does not reciprocate my feelings, I will fight to the death to defend his honor.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

And I too will fight to the death to –

MARY (FELICITY)

Not the time!

Mortimer lunges for Bertrand and stops, hyperventilating.

VIVAN (ANGELICA) *(alarmed)*

Darling?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I didn't even stab him!

Mortimer staggers and drops his sword.
Tyrone rushes and picks it up.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Nothing… just a minor… heart attack.

He slumps over.

MARY (FELICITY)

Father?!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Do something!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I'll save him!

He rushes over to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

…no…

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Stay still dear chap I am skilled in mouth to mouth resuscitation… open your mouth…

MARY (FELICITY)

Oh no!

Bertrand lays Mortimer down, who's struggling.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Must…

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Live, yes. Must live.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Kill…

Mortimer's hands reach up to strangle Bertrand. But he's very weak.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

His grip is quite strong! That's a good sign!

Mortimer continues to attempt to strangle Bertrand.

I hope some day to call you father.

Mortimer tries to strangle him harder.

Yes some of his strength is returning! Ack.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Ohhh… not good.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Just relax now.

Against Mortimer's will, Bertrand starts doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Mortimer throws him off and staggers to his feet.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Ack! Agggg!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Could the members of this family stop kissing each other please?!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

What.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

I mean –

NURSE enters.

ZORA (NURSE)

Is this the Barrington residence?

CABO (TYRONE)

You may wish to call on the Barrington family later, ma'am, as they are not finished maiming each other yet.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I have no desire to maim anyone!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I do.

Reaches up to strangle Bertrand again.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I called Miss Bittersby here!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Bittersby? Why is that name familiar?

ZORA (NURSE)

If this isn't a good time, I will return later.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

No no no you must stay! I believe you are the key to this entire situation.

VIVAN (ANGELICA)

You would think that!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Dear Mrs. Barrington, I have shown you nothing but kindness in this entire ordeal.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

And what have you shown my husband?!

CABO (TYRONE)

Your husband?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Yes, my husband, with whom you have been having the most scandalous affair!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

…what?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

…what?

CABO (TYRONE)

Wh-a-a-t?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Do you think me blind, girl?

She picks up the sword Mortimer dropped as he collapsed.

My husband has been unusually energetic and happy lately, and it's all your fault!

She looks at his body on the ground.

Well – before the heart attack of course, he was unusually spry.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

…I am forty-five years old.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Yes, but it was hard living, darling, and you are prematurely decrepit. I mean for goodness sake look at you.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I do not know where you've gotten such an outrageous idea, but I will not be slandered in this house! Not while I have breath to breathe and steel in my hand!

She draws her blade again.

CABO (TYRONE)

Fiercely said, darling.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

And I'm not your darling until you can answer my questions!

CABO (TYRONE)

What questions?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

The ones I put to you in my letter!

CABO (TYRONE)

What letter?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

En Garde!

MARY (FELICITY)

Mother!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Have no fear, Felicity, her wealth of skill, experience, and fitness is no match for my blind rage.

She attacks.

They fight back and forth.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Now see here! I had thought to overlook being locked in a closet with not one, but two live minks –

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

So that's where they went! Those were intended for you, darling.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Both of whom were exceedingly irritable and foul-tempered, but I shall not be intimidated by physical violence!

CABO (TYRONE)

My dear, what letter are you referring to?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Not now, Tyrone, I am in the middle of thrashing this woman. In due consideration for your advanced age and infirmity, I will only thrash you a little bit.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Infirmity?!

CABO (TYRONE)

I never received a letter.

ZORA (NURSE)

So it seems you're quite busy. I'll return at a later date then. Ah I see you've found my valise.
She picks up a valise.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Wait one moment, this is *your* valise?!

ZORA (NURSE)

Yes. MB. Margaret Bittersby.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

And not Mortimer Barrington?

ZORA (NURSE)

Goodness no!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Bittersby? Why is that name familiar?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

So the letter I found was not to my husband?

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Which letter?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

The one that begins, "You rake, you scoundrel, you thief of passion, I yearn to be your puppet!" And it only grows more diabolical from there!

Skipping Forward

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

When did you see her last?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

I'm trying to remember!

ZORA (NURSE)

I used to work for the Sisters of Blind Mercy.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Oh my goodness! It's *you!*

ZORA (NURSE)

Yes. And I remember you as a very young mother who handed me a babe wrapped in a blanket.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Our son! We were too poor to take care of him!

ZORA (NURSE)

And I was supposed to deliver that babe to a young single woman who had no interest in marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

That was me! I still don't!

CABO (TYRONE)

Really.

ZORA (NURSE)

Correct. Well, I'm afraid on my way to the deliver the babe I took the subway. And I left the pram out in the open on a very crowded subway platform, and when I returned I found that my original pram had been replaced with an identical pram, also containing an infant. An infant who looked rather similar to your child, but who was not, in fact, your child.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

A mysterious infant?!

ZORA (NURSE)

Yes! And I promise you I searched for your original child until my feet were sore – or at least until I got tired and then I decided, well, as long as I had *one* baby to deliver to Miss Valance, she wouldn't mind. Surely this baby was in as much need as any other and surely the original baby had been taken by a couple who would lavish love upon it. So I delivered the child, and took the payment, and was so ashamed that I ran away to join a convent where I have conveniently been living for the past twenty and one-half years.

CABO (TYRONE)

Miss Bittersby, you have shown yourself to be a thoroughly disreputable liar. Why should we believe this story? Quite clearly this love is an abomination.

ZORA (NURSE)

The original baby, the one that belonged to the Barringtons, had a birthmark on his right cheek. A half-moon crescent.

RICHARD (BERTRAND) *(feeling his face)*

Why I have no birthmark on my cheek!

ZORA (NURSE)

Not that cheek.

MARY (FELICITY)

Then we're in the clear!

Everyone looks at Felicity.

If I knew of such cheeks – which I do not – because I have no knowledge of which I speak.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

One moment!

He starts taking his pants off.

CABO (TYRONE)

Not here, idiot!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Oh!

He runs off-stage.

MARY (FELICITY)

Oh Bertand, always so quick to take off his pants.

A moment

Again – I would like to clarify that I have no practical knowledge of either his propensity to remove his pants or any markings on any cheeks as I would have had no occasion to experience either.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Don't worry about it, dear girl. It happens.

Bertrand runs back in.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

My cheeks are unmarked!

MARY (FELICITY)
I knew it! Again – what a surprise.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
Then our love is not an abomination!

MARY (FELICITY)
Oh thank goodness!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
I always knew the attraction I had for you was unfamiliar.

MARY (FELICITY)
I am so glad you aren't related to me in any way whatsoever!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Then the baby I handed to you –

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Our son…?

ZORA (NURSE)
Living a happy life with his new adopted parents, no doubt.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Oh thank goodness.

MARY (FELICITY)
This is the happiest day of my life!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
Mine too!
He gets down on one knee.
Felicity Barrington, will you marry me?

MARY (FELICITY)
Of course!
Tyrone drops to one knee.

CABO (TYRONE)
And Rose Valance, will you marry me?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
I thought you'd never ask! I've seen the error of my ways and now know that marriage is the greatest of all contracts. Even greater than a publicity deal.

Mortimer drops to a knee.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
And Angelica Barrington, will you forgive me?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Always.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
I wish that I could ask you to marry me again.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Then do! Because there is nothing more wonderful than a fine marriage finely executed!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
I hope to execute it most brilliantly in the future.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
I hope so as well.
Everyone gathers close to their partner.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
And I say, Mother, Father and Mother and Father, that I hope to be just as brilliant at love as I am in business.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
About that…

CABO (TYRONE)
Oh let the dear boy keep his delusions for now. We've had enough shocks for one day. A toast!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
Wonderful idea! To what?

CABO (TYRONE)
To love.
Long live love.

EVERYONE
Long Live Love.
They all toast, then move to kiss each other and freeze.

CHARLES *(From the audience)*
Annnnnnd blackout!
CHARLES, the director, bounds onto the stage, full of positive energy.

Okay okay okay okay okay okay! That felt better! Right? Not a disaster? It's going to be fine! The energy was there, the passion, the timing – I almost believed it! Which is fantastic because yesterday I was certain we were going to implode and lose our careers forever. But not anymore! We have pulled the proverbial fat out of the fire, if that is how the expression goes. Lovely. Sit sit sit we shall have notes!

The actors come forward grudgingly.

BARNEY

Do we need to have notes?

CHARLES

Little ones. Tiny ones.

RICHARD

Then perhaps we could break for dinner first?

CHARLES

Not at all, no! All right sit! Mary?

MARY

Yes?

CHARLES

I noticed you ogling Bertrand.

MARY

Correct, yes.

CHARLES

There was a certain predatory hunger there –

MARY

Right. Should I not do that?

CHARLES

I must remind you at this point in the play you believe him to be your brother. So… less ogling.

MARY

But maybe just a little?

CHARLES

No. Richard?

RICHARD

Yes?

CHARLES

You on the other hand, do not fear Felicity. You are enamored with her. I'm still sensing a little terror in your interactions with her.

RICHARD

Well it's um… she's very beautiful –

MARY

Oh Richard –

RICHARD

So it's difficult to look directly at her. I was raised to be polite.

CHARLES

I need you to be less polite and more… confident.

CABO

Watch how I do it.

CHARLES

Yes, Cabo may be your tutor in that regard. He has a marvelous way of observing ladies.

CABO

Thank you, Charles. It's a gift.

CHARLES

Zora.

ZORA

Yes?

CHARLES

Zora. Zor-a. Well. Yes.

ZORA

Was that better today?

CHARLES

So much better. You almost had most of the lines.

ZORA

I get so nervous out there! I see the lights and my mind goes blank!

CHARLES

No one can tell.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You're doing fine, dear.

Cabo raises his hand

CABO

Shouldn't we do something with her makeup? Age her?

ZORA

Shall I hunch more? Maybe I could use a cane? Or stutter perhaps?

CHARLES

None of that, it's perfectly fine –

CABO

The script says she's supposed to be fifty-five years old!

VIVIAN

The script says a lot of things. It's best to ignore them.

CABO

How old are you dear?

ZORA

Nineteen?

MARY

This is what we get when the playwright gets to select the cast.

To Zora

It's not your fault. Playwrights are terrible people.

CHARLES

She can be a young nurse!

CABO

She's been in a convent for twenty and one-half years! Did she join as a fetus?!

VIVIAN

Cabo. Stop trying to inject logic into the show. It will only cause you grief. Do what I do. Pretend you are some kind of livestock – your role is to chew your cud, smile, and bleat when appropriate.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I think she's doing a fine job!

ZORA

I'm sorry everyone it's my first show, I feel quite jittery out there. I'm afraid I'm ruining everything!

CABO

Oh don't worry you're only ruining your part.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I remember your first role, Cabo, when you were known as Kevin. Those wearing glass trousers shouldn't toss stones.

CHARLES

Everyone, we're fine. It's fine. It's lovely. It's better than lovely it's grand.

RICHARD

Am I doing a good job?

MARY *(a little too quickly)*

Yes.

CHARLES

Actually, I was going to hold this until after dinner, but I believe the time has come. I have some *news*.

BARNEY

Is it the review?!

CHARLES

Now, it's no secret that, at times previews have been… somewhat… *rocky*. But… BUT… just before rehearsal, a little bird sent me an early draft of Nigel Southworth's review.

VIVIAN

Am I mentioned? Am I in there? Is my name in there?

CHARLES

Vivian –

VIVIAN

Is it good is it good Charles is it good?

CHARLES

I will not comment on specific actors, but I want to read the conclusion –

VIVIAN

Hold him down, we can take the review from him, he can't stop us all.

BARNEY

Vivian?

VIVIAN

I am very relaxed. Go ahead, Charles. Sorry. Lost my grip a bit there.

CHARLES

Thank you. The last few sentences of Mr. Southworth's review…

Clears his throat.

`Once again, the muses of romantic love, playwrights Harold and Bright have fashioned a delectable confection, gossamer-thin and lighter than air. *Long Live Love* may not have weighty matters on its mind, but it certainly shows us, the audience, that love is not dead—in fact, it's very much alive—and not just alive, but EFFERVESCENT.'

The cast cheers and hugs.

VIVIAN *(overlapping)*

Oh thank Goodness! My heart had nearly stopped!

CABO *(overlapping)*

That's a surprise –

BARNEY *(overlapping)*

Oh it's wonderful great job everyone!

CLYTEMNESTRA *(overlapping)*

See? What did I tell you?

CHARLES

So! Despite the various… hiccups… this week, I daresay: Everything is going to be allllll right.

In bursts GEORGE, very much disgruntled and very much hungover and possibly very much still a little drunk.

GEORGE

BLAAAAAAAAAAUGH.

He slaps a set of red pages on the table.

Love. Is a dog. From Hell.

Takes a swig from his bottle.

CHARLES

Oh no.

BARNEY

George you should have been here to –

GEORGE

Do not presume to tell me what to do.

BARNEY

Sorry sir. I just meant that we just rehearsed the ending for tonight and it is… immaculate.

ZORA

I almost got most of the lines correct this time!

BARNEY

But so close that no one could tell the difference between what you wrote and what we are performing.

MARY

I just want to say that it has been an honor to perform yours and Bright's words – I feel like I understand Felicity. I myself have often been attracted to those closest to myself. Right, Richard?

RICHARD

What? I just wanted to thank you for taking a chance on me. Every day in New York I am freshly terrified but I am so glad to find a safe place to be here in rehearsal, away from the city.

CABO

I'm glad you're here. One thing has been bothering me: The question of what happened to the missing son has never been answered. Are we just to assume that the baby is in good hands?

CHARLES

What do you suggest, Cabo?

CABO

Well, if I may –

CHARLES

You suggest nothing because we're opening in four hours and changing nothing!

GEORGE

We're changing everything.

CHARLES

I'm sorry?

GEORGE

I came to a realization last night. Love is a terrible mistake. Anyone who engages in it is doomed. Life is about pain. I'm a liar. My only friends are pigeons.

CHARLES

George –

GEORGE

My entire career has been in the service of lies, Charles. False Hopes! I am a purveyor of DUPLICITOUS NONSENSE! No more!

CABO

Perhaps we ought to call your wife –

GEORGE

I want nothing to do with that HARRIDAN! She is a cancer on my soul!

CHARLES

Oh dear.

VIVIAN

George, calm down, so you had a fight with Marjorie –

GEORGE

No one must SPEAK her name! It causes me pain. Which, by the way, is the only thing that's real in life. Marriage. Love. Family. Commitment. All LIES.

VIVIAN

Surely with a spot of flowers you can clean this up and –

GEORGE

She threw me out.

VIVIAN

I'm so sorry to hear that but –

GEORGE

But the joke was on her because I broke in through the basement – the glass is exceedingly thin – and there I found, amongst the ruins of my dreams –

CHARLES

You are a highly successful/ playwright –

GEORGE

Amongst the *ruins* of my *dreams* I discovered – my old typewriter… my only friend.

BARNEY

We're friends!

George gives him a look.

George I've been in eight of your plays. I'm practically your muse. I am the godfather to your children.

GEORGE

I have no children.

BARNEY

Yes but you told me that if you ever did have them, I would be their godfather.

GEORGE

Which was intended to prevent me from ever having children. To that end, you have succeeded.

BARNEY

But what about – ?

GEORGE

Where were you last night when I was boiling in the pit of my own despair?

BARNEY

I was at home. Where I am every night. Alone.

GEORGE

While I confronted the specter of who my wife has turned me into. A feckless, chattering twit with no more to say about life than a greeting card!

CHARLES

You bring joy to/ thousands -

GEORGE

I sell LIES! Do this, do that, you will find love, your special partner exists, when in truth, we are all destined to be food for worms. Our skulls will decay into the earth from whence they came! Why don't my plays address this fundamental truth?!

VIVIAN

Because you and Bright write charming romantic farces?

GEORGE

Not what I wanted. It was all Bright's doing. And once the money came – I SOLD MY SOUL TO A HAPPY FUTURE. I didn't need the yacht. Or the manor house. Or the stables.

BARNEY

You have stables?

GEORGE

Of course I have stables.

BARNEY

I've never been invited to them –

GEORGE

The stables exist for my horses, Barney, not for you. I was seduced by the trappings of wealth when my soul, my *artist's soul*, WITHERED on the vine.

CHARLES

Bravo, George! Bravo! And the next play we will find something trenchant and miserable and dark and no one will want to come to it and you can feel like a true writer.

GEORGE

No. I told you I found a typewriter.

CHARLES

Yes. It was quite thrilling, the way you set that scene.

RICHARD

I had goosebumps. Master storyteller.

GEORGE

Well I *wrote*.

CHARLES

You what?

GEORGE

I wrote. A new ending for Long Live Love.

CHARLES

A new ending?

MARY

I love the ending. I mean, if I were to end something, that's the way I would end it.

RICHARD

Send them home happy yes!

CABO

I do think the question of where the missing child has gone –

GEORGE

I have addressed it in my new ending.

Skipping Forward

VIVIAN

George, you know the love I bear you, but we cannot possibly learn 15 new pages in a few hours, what if we did the show as normal tonight and then incorporated the changes into the second week?

GEORGE

No! The saccharine nonsense ends tonight! No more confectionary piffle! Now we shall have *art!*

CHARLES

Oh no, anything but art. I'm trying to direct a successful show here.

GEORGE

ART! We shall plumb the depths of the human soul! We will dig into the crevices of despair! Page 67! Places!

CHARLES

I say places.

GEORGE

Say it then. Places.

CHARLES

George –

GEORGE

Places.

CHARLES

Places.

The actors complain

I said places please! I'm sure the changes are minor – you're all professionals, you can do this. Let's take it from where Clytemnestra grabs the saber.

Reluctantly, the actors find their marks.

Let's take a moment and breathe – let the spirit of Thespis move through us. Envision our success tonight. Joyous laughter. Peals of happiness. Maybe a spontaneous marriage proposal. All right. From your line, Clytemnestra. When you are ready.

All the actors hold the red scripts as well as their props.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I have had just about enough of this nonsense! I was invited over here because Bertrand told me he had an announcement, and I have been struck with an umbrella, had a cup of water dashed in my face, and have been stuffed into a closet with live minks for the better part of an hour! Someone had better tell me what's going on before I skewer all of you!

CABO (TYRONE)

Rose, the fault is mine – I misread –

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

You deserve to be imprisoned in a closet with seven irritable minks for your actions!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

My actions?!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Yes, your actions you devious ferret! You dare show your face here again?! I should have you whipped with a willow branch! It was I who tossed the water in your face, and I shall do it again!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

You?!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Yes, me!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

But why have I been invited here if you bore me such ill will?

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I will tell you!

MARY (FELICITY)

No you will not!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE) *(pointing the sword at Felicity)*

Let him speak!

Felicity backs away.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

As my adopted guardian, I wanted you here to witness my love.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Who on earth is your love?

MARY (FELICITY)

Daddy, I think you need to put down the sword.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I have nothing to fear.

He gets down on one knee.

Felicity – darling –

Felicity has a coughing fit. She collapses on Bertrand and tries to drag him up to his feet.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Oh dear.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!

VIVAN (ANGELICA)

It's nothing! It's not anything! The boy is confused and has problems with his knees.

Mortimer attempts to stab Bertrand with the saber.

Rose leaps in the way.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

He doesn't know, Mortimer!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Out of the way, Rose! This is best accomplished quickly!

CABO (TYRONE)

I see your executions follow the same philosophy as your love-making.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I will deal with you and my love-making presently!

He attacks again.

Rose deflects the blow, still holding on to her script.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I warn you, Mortimer, I was ladies fencing champion three years running at Vassar.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

And I was ladies fencing champion four consecutive years at Harvard!

A moment.

I exclusively dueled women.

Another moment.

It was a way to meet girls. Imagine my surprise when I discovered there were no girls.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I am no girl, sir! *En Garde!*

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Oh ho! Very well!

He breaks character

I don't feel comfortable dueling with script in hand. You are aware of my infirmities, of course. Too much physical exertion can cause me to overheat. Perhaps we can –

GEORGE

It won't be long, Barney! Charles, if you could read the stage directions.

CHARLES

Certainly, since I have nothing else to do. `He lunges forward clumsily.'

GEORGE

There, can you manage that?

BARNEY

I can try.

Mortimer lunges clumsily.

CABO (TYRONE)

Oh do stop before you slay one of the rugs.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I'll slay your rug!

CHARLES

`Barney rushes for Tyrone, but Rose is there.'

Rose awkwardly gets in position.

`She runs him through.'

BARNEY

What?! I'm wounded? By a mere woman?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Mere woman?!

CABO

Barney, that is the single most realistic thing in this entire play.

VIVIAN

One moment. Don't I believe that Rose and Mortimer are having an affair? Her stabbing him makes no sense at all.

GEORGE

Or it makes too much sense. A relationship, like a marriage, devolving to the point of hideous betrayal, lies, and the desire to see someone impaled on sharp steel.

VIVIAN

Hmph.

CABO

Your wife is in good health, yes?

GEORGE

If you all are going to object to every moment, we'll be here forever and there will be no dinner for anyone!

RICHARD

Can he do that?

CHARLES

Please, let's continue. Barney. From the stabbing, please.

Rose mimes stabbing Mortimer.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Arrrggh.

CHARLES

`Mortimer drops the blade and staggers backwards'

Mortimer does so, showing it to be a nick

`blood pouring from the wound in his stomach.'

Mortimer increases the size of the wound in his stomach and moans louder.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

You appear… to have slain me?

CHARLES

He drops to one knee.'

Mortimer does so.

MARY (FELICITY)

Father!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Be a good girl for your mother now… you're all she has.

CHARLES

`He lightly touches his daughter's cheek.'

Mortimer puts a hand on Felicity's face while reading his script.

`It is graceful and quiet, like a whisper.'

Mortimer changes up how he's touching her face.

`Mortimer looks heavenward, where his final reward awaits.'

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Aaaaaaaahhhhh…

CHARLES

`He is gone.'

Barney sits right up.

BARNEY

I'm *dead?!*

CHARLES

Apparently.

BARNEY

Now see here, George!

GEORGE

You are dead! The dead do not speak!

BARNEY

I am the romantic hero of the play!

GEORGE

And you have been slain by a chance encounter with a blade!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'm a murderer?

BARNEY

People are coming expecting a romantic farce! We can't willy-nilly slaughter the hero in act 2!

CHARLES

It says `blood gushes from the wound' – how does that work?

GEORGE

That is not my problem!

CHARLES

We have three and a half hours until curtain, George, /you can't simply add –

GEORGE *(overlapping)*

Theatrical magic, that's how! Theatrical magic!

ZORA

What if we used ketchup or syrup of some kind?

CABO

Oh yes lovely brilliant idea.

GEORGE

You are the director! You are a problem-solver! Solve the problem!

CHARLES

You are creating the problems!

GEORGE

Yes, that's right! I am the Creator!

VIVIAN *(to Cabo)*

When he says things like that, that's when I think he's murdered his wife.

CABO

Agreed.

GEORGE

Can we continue?!

CHARLES

Very well. From your death, Barney.

BARNEY

I do not wish to die!

GEORGE

Death comes for all of us!

CHARLES

Barney, from your death.

BARNEY

Fine. But I would prefer not to die.

MARY

Just do it, Barney. Usually people who die get the most applause.

He grabs his script.

CHARLES

Your line is `aaaaaaaaaaahhhhh.'

BARNEY

I know what my line is!
He lies down again.
Aaaah.

GEORGE

Do it better!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Blllaarrrggh.

CHARLES

Read the actual line please!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Aaaaaaaguughgh.

CHARLES

`All is still.'
The actors all stand still.
`Angelica emits a wail of anguish.'

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Aaaaaghhhhh.

GEORGE

No.

CHARLES

Wail of anguish, Vivian. Like this: aaaaarrrhghhhh.

GEORGE

No it's more like, `Aaaauuuuuuuugg.'

VIVIAN

Aaaaauauuuugh.

GEORGE

I'm not hearing enough anguish.

VIVIAN

Aaarrrhghghghghh.

ZORA

Maybe like this? Aarruuuuuguugh.

RICHARD

What if it was AAaaaaauuuuu?

VIVIAN

Aarrrrrrgggh.

MARY

I think it's more in the back of your throat. Aaaaaarrrrrrrrrggghgh. But long. Aaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrgghh.

CHARLES

There's no r sound in it. Auuuooooohhgh.

Everyone starts making their own wails of anguish.

CABO

More like Oooooaarrrgggh-

RICHARD *(overlapping)*

Yarrraarrrrrrr

CLYTEMNESTRA *(overlapping)*

Aaaiiiiieeeeee

VIVIAN *(wail of frustration)*

Arrrrrrrr!

CHARLES

There you go. Again, please.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA) *(same wail of frustration)*

Aarrrrrrr!

She waits for someone else to pick up a cue.

CHARLES

You have a line.

Vivian checks her script.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

My heart! You have slain my heart!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

You heard me! I explained my skill to him! I didn't intend to kill him!

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Murderer!

CABO (TYRONE)
Surely we can agree it was an accident.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
It was no such thing! She has slain him in cold blood!

CABO (TYRONE)
Her blood is quite hot, I can assure you.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)
More jokes from you?! The time for laughter is past! A man is dead.

MARY (FELICITY)
My father is gone! The best and brightest amongst us!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
Yes, there there, my darling.

CHARLES
`Betrand comforts Delicity.' There appears to be a spelling error.

MARY
Mine has the same error.

GEORGE
It is a simple mistake, overlook it!

MARY
I was wondering who Delicity was.

RICHARD
She's delicious, whoever she is. I would nibble her up.

MARY *(flirty)*
Oh Richard! Stop.

RICHARD
Nibble nibble. I am hungry.

CHARLES
Go please!

Bertrand awkwardly comforts Felicity, both of them with scripts in hand.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Perhaps there is one way to make you feel better. You have lost a father but perhaps you have gained a husband.

CHARLES

`He gets down on one knee, near the corpse of Mortimer.'

RICHARD

I am proposing marriage on the corpse of her father?

GEORGE

Near.

MARY

Do I find this charming?

GEORGE

No. You still believe you are his sister.

MARY

Can I be a little charmed, though?

CHARLES

He is kneeling *near* your father's dead body and proposing marriage.

MARY

Which is at least surprising. Maybe half a smile?

BARNEY

How do I react?

GEORGE

You do nothing you are dead.

BARNEY

Perhaps I may express a sound like my disapproval leaving my body.

CHARLES

Does anyone want dinner? Ever?!

RICHARD

Sorry.

Richard gets down to one knee, near the corpse of Mortimer.

Will you mar – ?

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

She's your sister!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Dear God no.

CHARLES

`Bertrand emits a wail of anguish.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Aaaauuguuguuuuughh.

CHARLES *(to Vivian)*

See?

RICHARD

And then what do I do?

GEORGE

You slump in recognition of the cruel irony of fate.

RICHARD

Okay.

He slumps in recognition of the cruel irony of fate.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I may have a solution to our present difficulty.

CHARLES

`Felicity rises to confront her.'

MARY (FELICITY)

We have had enough of your solutions, Rose. My father lies dead. My dreams are in tatters. This is life, then. An unrelenting carnival of misery and suffering. A blood-spattered veil for a bride of nothing. Oh the agony! The pain! The death of all that is good and wonderful in life! Fate is capricious and wicked, like a bitter wife!

GEORGE

Stronger please!

MARY

What would Felicity know about having a bitter wife?

GEORGE

It's common knowledge!

CHARLES

George, the metaphor is strained –

CABO

What if she said bitter child? I know a lot of bitter children. Just awful.

MARY

I feel like you're trying to work something out here.

GEORGE

Oh dear am I? Am I trying to *work something out?* Have I put something in the play about discovering that my wife of seventeen years was secretly married to another man before we met and had a child?! Did I put that in there?

CABO

I don't know, we're barely into this rewrite!

BARNEY

And I am dead!

GEORGE

And you will remain dead! I have exercised great restraint in this draft! This is but the barest hint of the duplicitous nature of womankind! It is a great truth –

CLYTEMNESTRA

It's misogynistic, George.

GEORGE

Oh is it?!

CLYTEMENSTRA and VIVIAN

YES.

CHARLES

What if we said `bitter herb?'

GEORGE

Bitter *herb?!*

CHARLES

Some herbs can be quite bitter.

MARY

Fate is capricious and wicked, like a bitter herb.

CABO

See I still prefer bitter child.

GEORGE

Are we to quibble over every word now? Is that what this is? Are we having a *Democracy?!*

MARY

If we did put it to a vote –

GEORGE

No! Wife wife wife wife wife!

CHARLES

Just say it, Mary. As written. With passion, though.

MARY

Very well.
(As Felicity)
Fate is capricious and wicked, like a bitter wife!

CHARLES

`Felicity staggers about, sword in hand.'
Mary stumbles about crazily.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Don't do anything foolish, Felicity. I was ladies fencing champion three years running at Vassar.

MARY (FELICITY)

I care not for your trophies, brutalizer of dreams.

CHARLES

`Felicity emits a wail of anguish.'

CABO *(under)*

Again?

MARY (FELICITY)

Arurururururururuuuguuguguuguuguughhhhhhhh.

CHARLES

Ooh.
`She clutches her heart and looks towards Bertrand.'

MARY (FELICITY)

Bertrand… I am so sorry we are an abomination.

CHARLES

`She drops to her knees.'
Felicity does, gently.

MARY (FELICITY)

I am coming, Papa. I am coming.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

What is happening?

MARY (FELICITY)

Do not weep for me, mother. I go to join father in his rest.

CHARLES

`She dies.'

MARY

What?!

BARNEY

Ha!

MARY

What do I die of?!

CABO

Expediency.

GEORGE

A broken heart.

MARY

I keel over and die for no reason?

GEORGE

It happens all the time in serious literature. You are consumed with regret for your poor choices in life – the future, which was so bright, is now a broken wasteland. There is nothing for you now but the sweet embrace of death.

MARY

I am twenty years old!

RICHARD

And I'm not actually her brother! Am I? Oh dear have you changed that part?

Skipping Forward

Zora emerges.

ZORA
Oh I am so sorry I'm just very nervous! You know my issues with reading!

GEORGE
Most of your lines are the same!

ZORA
Still – the blocking has changed – the entire character of the play has changed. I start thinking about all the people out there, watching me, thinking about me, wondering if the play makes any sense?

VIVIAN
You needn't wonder. It doesn't.

CHARLES
While I appreciate your candor, I need to remind you that the show opens in barely over three hours –
Zora shudders
The house will be filled
Zora shudders more
And everyone will be looking at you. So settle your nerves and get it right!
Zora freezes

CLYTEMNESTRA
Well done, Charles. You have frightened the girl half to death.

MARY
Can I get off the floor please? Can we simply assume that I remain dead?

BARNEY
If she gets to leave, I get to leave.

CHARLES
Dead people stay dead! From your entrance, please. `The Nurse enters.'
Zora stands there, petrified. She squeaks.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE) *helping*
Yes?

ZORA (NURSE)
…Excuse me, is this the Barrington residence?

CABO (TYRONE)

You may wish to call on the Barringtons later, ma'am, as they are not finished killing each other.

RICHARD (BETRAND)

I'll kill you!

CHARLES

`Bertrand attacks.'

Richard does his best with script in hand -

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

I called Miss Bittersby here!

Richard chases after Cabo – who, not knowing the blocking, keeps trying to skitter out of the way.

CABO (TYRONE)

I have no sword! This is unfair!

They all wait.

CHARLES

Zora!

She finds her line. Still terrified and frozen stiff.

ZORA (NURSE)

If you are busy, I can call again later.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

No, do stay! I believe your presence will clear things up quite nicely.

CHARLES

`Bertrand stabs Tyrone.'

RICHARD

Really?

CHARLES

`Bertrand stabs Tyrone.'

Richard shrugs and mimes stabbing Tyrone.

CABO (TYRONE)

Aaaarrrhgghg!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Tyrone?!

CHARLES

`He stumbles and falls. Blood erupts from a wound in his side.' More blood?
Cabo enacts this, enthusiastically over-acting.

CABO (TYRONE)

Aaarrr…! Aaaaahhh! Aggg!
He continues stumbling about.

CHARLES

You have a line, Cabo.
Cabo stops and checks his script.

CABO (TYRONE)

Oh… farts.

CHARLES

`He slumps to the ground.' Farts? The line is farts?

GEORGE

Yes.

CABO

I'll make it work. Can I try it again?
He gets up, re-enacts his death.
Ohhh… farrrrrrrrts.
He slumps to the ground. Gives a thumb's up.

CHARLES

`Rose emits a wail of anguish.'

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh Lord.

GEORGE

Wail of anguish!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Are you being paid by the number of wails of anguish?

GEORGE

Wail of anguish please!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Aaaarrrrrhghgh.

VIVIAN

No it's aaaarrrhrhghghgh!

CABO

I think it's arrrooooooo –

ZORA

Aaarrhgh?

CHARLES

Moving on!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Moving on.

She checks her script, gets in character

Now I see it: The curse of existence. This is how it happens. A chance at love dashed at the last moment. I had guarded my heart forever as a single woman, and now, how bitter the drink that I had kept from my lips til now.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

Yes.

ZORA (NURSE)

True.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I see it now. I am the cantaloupe. A gift of poison, given to my love. Fit only to be pulverized into mash, then discarded into the rubbish. Mistaken for an art sculpture.

VIVIAN

That's a bit on the nose.

GEORGE

It's symbolism!

VIVIAN

I know what symbolism is, I'm not a Midwesterner! All I am saying –

RICHARD

There are five lines remaining. Please. Let us finish this so that we can eat dinner.

VIVIAN

Fine.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

There is nothing to be done. Love leads to tragedy as surely as the sunset follows the sunrise.

VIVIAN (ANGELICA)

What shall we do then?

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

What can we do?

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

What can we do, indeed?

ZORA (NURSE)

I do not know.

CHARLES

`The Nurse looks into the distance, as if to see the future.'
Zora tries this as best she can. She can almost see it!
`But it is unknown to them'
No she can't see it
`Forever unknown, like a woman's heart.'
She looks a little uncertain.
`They hold completely still.'
All the actors try their best.
`Lights slowly fade.'
`End of play.'

BARNEY

I felt a chill. I did. Bracing.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I've been in worse.

ZORA

It seems most of my lines have been cut.

GEORGE

Yes I thought it would help the play.

VIVIAN

That's it? That's the new ending?

RICHARD

Be thankful you survived, I thought he would be killing everyone. Especially, you know, the wife character.

VIVIAN

George –

GEORGE

I don't want to hear it, Vivian.

VIVIAN

Do you know where I have been the past nine years? NINE. YEARS. Dinner theater in Sauk Prairie, Wisconsin. Not even an actual town, a *prairie*! The wind screams across the prairie in the winter, gathering the odors of four thousand dairy cows, and *seizes* your face like a lover! Every night I am on stage, tossing pearls before swine, literal swine, occasionally a farmer will bring a pig, and they're usually better behaved than the humans! *Long Live Love* is my chance George, my last chance to escape banishment before I am reduced to playing crones for the rest of my career! And I am not going to set that chance on fire by engaging in ART! We will close. This play will close tonight! The audience will storm the stage! They will tear the set from its foundation and beat us unconscious!

I AM NOT GOING BACK TO SAUK PRAIRIE!

GEORGE

You can be replaced!

CHARLES

With who?! George, there's no time!

GEORGE

This is the new ending! Brutal, devastating, artsy! If you don't like it, the door is there!

VIVIAN

I say we all leave! Who's with me?!

Cabo stands up.

CABO

The new ending is perfect.

VIVIAN

What?!

CABO

I wouldn't change a word.

VIVIAN

There's a triple homicide in our romantic farce! Charles?!

CHARLES

I'm afraid I don't make any more money after the show opens, so…

He shrugs.

VIVIAN

Mary?! Richard? Barney? Barney you die! You spend the last ten minutes of the show decomposing on the stage!

BARNEY

The more I think about it, the more I enjoy not moving. You know how physically challenging my role is.

VIVIAN

You stand around and then sit!

BARNEY

Yes, but now I get to lay down.

GEORGE

Vivian – you are the only one here with objections.

She scoffs –

The rest of the cast has been moved, just as the audience will be moved. Imagine it – you stare out into space, contemplating the curse of existence – the lights fade, the audience sits, completely still. Stunned into silence. No applause at all.

Applause.

Slowly, from the back of the theater.

MARJORIE BRIGHT, disheveled, very hung-over, and possibly still drunk, ambles down the aisle.

MARJORIE

You've finally done it, George. You've written something worse than your love letters.

Charles snaps to.

CHARLES

Ms. Bright, I am so sorry –

MARJORIE

No one thought to call me while George mutilated my play?

VIVIAN

I was just explaining to them -

GEORGE *(interrupting)*

Your play?! Now see here –

BARNEY

He threatened us! We thought he'd gone mad!

CHARLES

You have to understand, Ms. Bright, he was threatening, his eyes were red like a demon's –

CLYTEMNESTRA

I thought him possessed, to be honest. How else can he write so quickly?

RICHARD

I didn't even like the changes! I found them disturbing and sexist!

MARJORIE

And yet all of you went through with this farce, changing my farce to some kind of miserable *art*.

GEORGE

Whose name is first on the marquis?! It's Harold and Bright, not Bright and Harold! I am first! It is my play!

MARJORIE

Your next writing partner will be an alley cat once I've finished ruining you.

GEORGE

You ruin everything you touch, you duplicitous octopus!

MARJORIE

Ruin?! You dare say that to me after the boondoggle with the llamas!?

GEORGE

Oh sure bring up the llamas again. It's *always* llamas with you!

MARJORIE

Yes I will bring up the llamas again! We've lost everything because of your stupidity! You signed over the copyrights to the plays, George!

GEORGE

It was an investment OPPORTUNITY! That's what you do! You invest! So I invested!

MARJORIE

Everything?!

GEORGE

Yes, that's how you invest!

MARJORIE

And you gave it all to your cousin who couldn't even tell the difference between a llama and an alpaca!

GEORGE

The joke is on you! There is no difference between a llama and an alpaca! They're the same beast!

MARJORIE

No, George, one of them is a great source of warm wool, and the other is a set of gums on four legs that smells like undercooked frog legs!

GEORGE

Oh I see you're an expert in llamas now! You're a llama savant! Marjorie Bright, llama genius!

MARJORIE

Alpacas!

GEORGE

Llama is a Peruvian version of the Argentinian Alpaca! They are one and the same! Fetch me an encyclopedia! I shall prove it! Someone! Fetch me an encyclopedia! New Girl –

ZORA

Zora –

GEORGE

Fetch me the theater's encyclopedia!

CHARLES

The theater doesn't have an encyclopedia, George.

GEORGE

Have you been to South America?! Have you lived amongst the people there?

MARJORIE

No! And neither have you!

RICHARD

I hate to interrupt, but are we able to break for dinner now while you sort out this business with llamas and alpacas?

CHARLES

Yes.

MARJORIE

No. It is not time for dinner.

RICHARD

Oh dear.

CHARLES

Well, seeing as how Ms. Bright is here, surely we can agree that the new changes are too recent to be committed to memory and we should return to the original version.

VIVIAN

THANK YOU.

GEORGE

No, we can agree on no such thing!

MARJORIE

None of the new changes shall be adopted.

GEORGE

We've already rehearsed it! It's too late now!

VIVIAN

George, Cabo's opinion notwithstanding, the previous version is vastly superior.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I agree.

MARY

I should prefer not to die.

GEORGE

The previous version is dead! I have buried it in the coffin of my imagination. I spit on its grave!

CLYTEMNESTRA

George, the play is titled "Long – Live - Love." Not "Short – Death – Despair."

GEORGE

It is ironic. The audience will weep.

BARNEY

Perhaps our romantic confection should not end in a spate of murders –

MARJORIE

And it shall not! George, do you remember why you are first on the marquis, even though my name is alphabetically first?

GEORGE
Because it sounds better. Listen to it: Harold and Bright. Ah. Lovely. Like a fresh summer breeze. Bright and Harold. Hideous. The stench of the grave.

MARJORIE
No, as always, we made the decision when you were drunk.

GEORGE
You always plied me with liquor whenever you wanted something.

MARJORIE
Because you were so pliable –

GEORGE
No more! I am unpliable. Like steel. Like iron.

MARJORIE
I agreed to allow you to have the first name on the marquis for the mere price of .1% of our plays.

GEORGE
Ah I remember. None one remembers the second name anyhow. My name shall live forever for a mere trifling sum –

MARJORIE
And since I own 50.1% of our plays, that mere trifling sum allows me to override your changes.
Marjorie produces a document.
I took the liberty of bringing our contract, as I anticipated this nonsense.
She hands it to Charles and points to a section.

CHARLES
I'm afraid it does state that, George.

GEORGE *(lunging for it and snatching it up)*
Let me see that!

MARJORIE
If you tear it up, it's still binding.

GEORGE
Is it?!

CHARLES
I'm afraid so.

MARJORIE

Checkmate.

Barney sighs a huge sigh of relief.

BARNEY

Oh thank goodness! George, you know I'm your closest friend, but that ending was…

GEORGE

Yes?

BARNEY

Not your best work.

VIVIAN

Abominable.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Preposterous.

ZORA

Terrifying.

CABO

Ahead of its time.

RICHARD

Well, that's that, then? We toss these new pages in the garbage and do the show as planned?

CHARLES

Yes.

MARJORIE

No. You see I also was struck by inspiration last night.

VIVIAN

Oh dear, nothing is worse than when a playwright is inspired.

MARJORIE

It seems to me that the original ending was entirely too simplistic.

CABO

Have you addressed the issue of the missing child then? Their firstborn was simply traded away and no one cares that –

MARJORIE

I have solved every problem my husband put in the script.

She pulls out a stack of blue pages.

We begin at page 67.

Lights fade as she passes out scripts.

End of Act One

Act Two

Two hours later.

Pages of the scripts have been scattered. Mostly red ones, but a few blue and a few originals.

Richard enters, still in costume and makeup.

He looks about, retrieves a bagel a paper bag and a bottle. He hears a noise and scampers off-stage to eat his food in peace.

Zora and Clytemnestra enter quickly, mid-conversation. Both of them hold blue scripts.

ZORA

I'm so nervous.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You're doing fine.

ZORA

What if I can't say the lines? What if I freeze? What if I take one look at everyone watching and panic? I can't do it! Is it too late to run away?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes. Entirely too late.

ZORA

I never should've said yes to this!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I will be there with you. We are going to execute this perfectly. Everyone is going to love you.

ZORA

Are you certain of that? What if I'm not what they wanted? `Oh, sorry, is there another girl we could bring in? This one is entirely too skittish.' You've seen what happens in the play – women are fighting with sabers and throwing water at each other. What if that's what they believe a woman should be? I'm not one for that. I enjoy reading and strolling – I don't even walk briskly. I'm much more of a person who stays in one place for a while and makes limited noises. What if they hate that?

CLYTEMNESTRA

They won't. You have to have faith.

ZORA

I don't even like the theater. Everyone pretending to be someone else. And then other people pay money to see people pretending to be someone else. Why?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I suppose it has something to do with happy endings. The belief that no matter how dark it appears, things will always work out.

ZORA

Do they work out for you?

CLYTEMNESTRA

My parents named me Clytemnestra, and here I am.

ZORA

Not sure I follow.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I was destined for a life in the theater.

ZORA

Did things work out for Clytemnestra?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Well, her husband sacrificed her daughter to the gods so she stabbed him in a bathtub with the help of her lover before she was subsequently murdered by her son. It's all very Greek. My father wanted to name me something theatrical but neglected to do any research. But I assume before all the sacrificing, murdering, and lovering, Clytemnestra had quite a nice life with many dear friends. As we will be dear friends when this is all over.

ZORA

I'm not sure if that's a comfort or not.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Trust me. Everything is going according to plan.

ZORA

That's probably something the original Clytemnestra said to herself.

Mary enters, rushed.

MARY

Has anyone seen Richard?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I haven't.

ZORA

Usually about this time he's hiding somewhere in the theater.

MARY

Yes, he's a bit terrified of the city.

ZORA

Have you checked his dressing room? Perhaps he's barricaded himself in there.

MARY

The door is locked and I banged on it quite forcefully.

CLYTEMNESTRA

That might have startled him into silence. Did you by chance hear a whimper or a cry of fear?

MARY

I shall try again. I will knock as lightly as a flea. May I confide in you?

ZORA

Please do.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You are in love with him.

MARY

Is it that obvious? He's such an innocent thing. Like a little fawn who's lost its mother. It makes him so dreadfully attractive. I feel the need to rescue him.

CLYTEMNESTRA

With your lips?

MARY

If necessary. I had planned on making my feelings known at the end of the play; the stage directions call for a kiss and I intended to make it quite unprofessional.

ZORA

And you're certain he'd get the idea and not panic?

MARY

With the correct kiss, my intent would be clear. I've been perfecting it for some time now. I've practiced on a quite a few men and have had a number of enthusiastic responses.

ZORA

Oh my.

MARY

And now…

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now there's no kiss.

MARY

In George's version I spontaneously die and in Marjorie's version I kick Bertrand in the rear and declare my intention to live in an island commune of independent ladies – in neither case do I get to plant the kiss I prepared! Which will make the note in my flower delivery quite confusing.

ZORA

You're sending him flowers?

CLYTEMNESTRA

That's quite bold.

MARY

I know that he has feelings for me, but he's so shy. Sometimes a shy man needs a shove down the right path and a few direct instructions.

ZORA

Are you certain of that, Mary?

MARY

Oh I don't know. I've tried all the usual ways of dropping hints. Brushing against him. Laughing at his jokes. Eye contact. Now I figure he simply needs to be told what to do in no uncertain terms.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Some men appreciate that. Husbands.

Richard returns, eating his bagel, unseen by them. He hears the voices and hides to eat.

ZORA

I don't know anything about husbands.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Neither do I, and if am lucky, it will remain that way.

MARY

In any event, my whole plan is in tatters thanks to this mess. I need to find him to prepare the way. If you see him, tell him I require him in my dressing room immediately.

She rushes off in one direction.

ZORA

We will let him know you are on the hunt.

Mary exits.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Poor thing.

ZORA

Do you think she'll succeed?

CLYTEMNESTRA

She could pry the very doors of hell off their hinges to get what she wants. The boy has no hope.

Richard whimpers.

ZORA

Did you hear something?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Sounded like a mouse.

ZORA

That's all we need.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Come along, I've got one more thing to go over with you.

Clytemnestra and Zora exit as
Barney and Vivian enter, with copies of the blue script.

BARNEY

I won't do it! I can't! I won't survive this! At least George's version had the decency to have me die on stage. This will kill me for real.

VIVIAN

You can manage it.

BARNEY

Run here! Run there! Jump over a couch! I haven't successfully jumped over a couch in a decade! Doesn't she know my physical infirmities? Asthma, Arrythmia, Angina. And those are just the A's.

VIVIAN

Have you read to the end?

BARNEY

I have read as far I dared. May I hope for a happy ending?

VIVIAN

It's an ending, I'll give it that. All the ladies retire to an island of independent women and the men are left to stew in their own inadequacy.

BARNEY

Oh dear.

VIVIAN

Listen to my final line: `Does this utopian island of female empowerment have room for a married woman?' `Of course! Many of our sisters are married to feckless irresponsible husbands who make poor financial choices. They have left them to find happiness and tranquility on our shores.'

Barney flips to the end of the script.

BARNEY

I suppose it's better than the carnival of corpses in George's version.

VIVIAN

Just barely. The audience is coming for a romantic farce, not an anti-marriage declaration. I can already sense the tendrils of Wisconsin reaching out for me. It's almost like a whisper on the wind - `Vivian, you will return to Sauk Prairie. You cannot escape us. Have some cheese.'

BARNEY

I can already feel my heart straining. Feel my pulse.

VIVIAN

You know I don't enjoy touching you.

BARNEY

We could try prevailing on her to change it back to the original.

VIVIAN

And miss her chance to kick her husband in the groin and stamp on his grave? Unlikely.

She notices Richard

Richard, are you eating in costume?

RICHARD

I am *starving!*

BARNEY

May I have some?

VIVIAN

No! Am I the only professional here?! Eat in your dressing room.

RICHARD

I believe my dressing room is haunted. Every time I try to relax I hear BANG BANG BANG as if some wild beast is attempting to get in.

BARNEY

Could be a rat. They grow quite large in the city.

VIVIAN

They will grow larger if there are crumbs upon the stage.

RICHARD

It's all right, I switched rooms and the noises stopped.

VIVIAN

Wonderful. Then perhaps you should eat there as you learn your new lines.

RICHARD

Are there changes?

VIVIAN

Yes, the play ends with you weeping and crawling into a gutter bemoaning your masculine stupidity.

RICHARD

You're joking.

VIVIAN

No! Page 84. Look it up.

Cabo enters, holding flowers and his script.

CABO

The strangest thing just happened, I was sitting in my dressing room, going over my lines, and these flowers were delivered to me. It's a mystery.

VIVIAN

The only mystery is how you lost your mind.

CABO

Lost my mind?

VIVIAN

The best ending you've ever written? Every line perfect?

CABO

I rather liked George's version.

Skipping Forward

Look, it says there, `your servant in all things, M. B.'

CABO

M.B.?

Marjorie enters with her script.

MARJORIE

Have you been going over my words?

Cabo stuffs the letter into his script and hands the flowers to Richard.

RICHARD

Marjorie Bright!

MARJORIE

Yes that is my name. Have you two been looking over what I wrote?

RICHARD

No of course not!

CABO

Richard misspoke. I must admit we have been perusing your - words. They are extraordinary. I never knew you were capable of such… words.

MARJORIE

I am very skilled with words.

RICHARD

I forgot that I am needed elsewhere! Cabo -

Richard is about to hand the flowers back to Cabo

MARJORIE

Nonsense! You are involved as well.

RICHARD

I am?

MARJORIE

I require much of you.

RICHARD

You do?

MARJORIE

Tonight. In the play.

RICHARD

Ha ha ha right! Of course. In the play. Not in other matters.

MARJORIE

Yes, the play, what else would I be talking about?

RICHARD

Nothing! Nothing at all. And your husband, how is he?

MARJORIE

George cannot stop me now. For too long he has held me back. I am finally unfettered – and I intend to use the opportunity to strike a blow for womankind –

CABO

Yes!

MARJORIE

It may be shocking to some, the audience may quiver in anger, but I cannot be stopped now.

CABO

Absolutely! Let me say, Ms. Bright, that I will give it everything I have this evening.

RICHARD

Again, I hear someone calling me from –

MARJORIE

I'm glad of that, Cabo. I shall need all of your skills if you are to perform as I require.

CABO

I shall do you as have instructed. Though it may tax me physically and mentally. I am ready.

MARJORIE

And are you memorized?

CABO

Not yet, but I will be. And if I miss a line, I shall *improvise.*

MARJORIE

Oh please do not improvise, that always ends in disaster.

RICHARD

I will be memorized shortly! Since we are talking about the play that you wrote and not anything else that you wrote.

MARJORIE

Are you all right, Richard?

RICHARD

Frightened, Ma'am. Very frightened.

MARJORIE

Have no fear. Once it begins, all the nerves will fall away.

CABO

I have found it ever to be thus. Thank you, Marjorie, for your… words.

He smells the flowers.

Charles enters, full of desperate energy.

CHARLES

Are we set to begin again? Where is everyone? Can I get the actors on stage please? Time is wasting! We need to run through the final scene!

Clytemnestra, Barney, and Vivian enter from one side of the stage, with scripts.

There you are! Always conspiring!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes yes yes where is George?

MARJORIE

George is where he can't hurt anyone anymore.

VIVIAN

Oh I do hope she hasn't murdered him.

MARJORIE

No one has murdered anyone. He was being unruly, so he has been dealt with.

CHARLES

He's been slightly tied up.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Tied up?!

CHARLES

It's just for the rehearsal. He is in a safe place, tied to a chair. This is a common thing for a playwright in the theater, trust me!

CABO

It's probably best if he cannot witness what happens tonight.

RICHARD

But perhaps his presence would be calming and would prevent disasters!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I don't like that he's tied up -

MARJORIE

Think of it like a papoose. He is being swaddled. It probably helps calm him like it does most colicky infants.

Mary and Zora enter opposite.

MARY

We are here and ready!

CHARLES

Wonderful!

Mary notices that Richard has the flowers.

MARY

Richard! I was looking all over for you!

Richard hides the flowers.

RICHARD

Here I am! Not hiding.

MARY

Did you receive flowers?

RICHARD

These?! No! These are for Cabo!

MARY

You're giving flowers to Cabo?

RICHARD

Yes, of course, it's a common custom in Iowa.

He hands the flowers to Cabo.

Here you are, sir. Good show.

MARY

Was there a note attached to those flowers?

RICHARD

No, not at all no why would there be a note? These are flowers from a man to a man. Just to say, `here you are, upright and moral, have a lovely show. Don't do anything that you would regret.'

CABO

I will regret nothing, I promise you.

CHARLES

Let's get going then! We're all here, we've had a spot of food, we're all refreshed!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Except George –

ZORA

Where is George?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Imprisoned somewhere in the theater.

ZORA

This is absurd! Can't you two find some way to work this out?

MARJORIE

We have been married for sixteen years – no one has any energy left to work out anything.

CHARLES

We don't have time worry about details about whether or not George has sufficient oxygen –

CLYTEMNESTRA

What?!

CHARLES

I said we don't have to worry about the details! We are going to make this work! We have just enough time to run through the final section one last time and we're giving to give a marvelous performance tonight! It will all work out it must!

BARNEY

If I may make one criticism…

MARJORIE

No.

BARNEY

I have not –

MARJORIE

Barney, I've been hearing your suggestions on my scripts for the better part of a decade and I have a perfect record of ignoring them – do sit down and do your job.

BARNEY
You seem to have given Mortimer quite a lot of physical activity –

MARJORIE
Some actors would die at the chance to do so much.

BARNEY
Yes, that is precisely what I am worried about.

MARY
I wonder if we could add more kissing to the play.

MARJORIE
No!

MARY
When the nurse tells me to spurn Bertrand and live a life of happiness and peace, perhaps I could say, yes I would like that, but also, I would prefer to kiss Bertrand one last time here.

MARJORIE
Mary, you are young, and therefore your mind is full of delusions and fantasies about the worth of romantic love. Kissing Bertrand might be tempting in the throes of passion, but it will only lead to disappointment and misery later in life. Trust me. I have learned that, as a matter of principle, men are best left to do whatever they do in drawing rooms and clubs and racetracks while we women do our best to ignore them. If only there were an island in real life like the one I have described in my play. I would decamp there immediately had I any funds remaining to me.

CABO
Yes.

MARJORIE
Did you have something to add, Cabo?

CABO
It is refreshing to hear an opinion of romantic love so revolutionary.

VIVIAN
Marjorie – you know I have the utmost respect for you as a professional woman in a man's field.

MARJORIE
It is only a man's field because they have botched it so thoroughly no self-respecting woman would enter it.

VIVIAN

Yes yes and I love this business of female empowerment as much as the next girl, but can't you publish a book of essays instead? Call it "Life without men – a fantasy" or some such thing, and sell it at salons. A woman could get her hair done and read her fill of utopian conjecture about how we'd all be better off if all the men dropped dead.

MARJORIE

I am a playwright. I write plays.

VIVIAN

I am an actress, and I want to act in plays. And I would prefer to do so on Broadway instead of within sight and smell of a barn. Let's return to the old version.

MARJORIE

This is the play now. The old play is as dead as my marriage.

VIVIAN

The audience will hate it.

MARJORIE

The audience will revel in its truth.

VIVIAN

We will close, Marjorie. Trust me.

MARJORIE

When I need your opinion, I will ask for it.

CABO

Vivian, we must all agree that this new version is far superior to any previous version and I for one, am thrilled to be involved in every way possible.

MARJORIE

Thank you!

CABO

It is an honor. Truly. And I shall perform to the best of my ability. I give you my solemn vow. Tonight. And every night.

MARJORIE

Excellent.

VIVIAN

You're blinded by your current spat/ with your husband –

MARJORIE

Spat! SPAT!? That mollusk signed away our copyrights! We have NOTHING! It's all gone! Do you know that when you are married all of your property belongs to your HUSBAND! That's what the word husband means actually! I, though I created the lion's share of our success, am now financially destitute due to his idiocy!

BARNEY

Does that mean you are selling the stables?

MARJORIE

They are being liquidated as we speak! The horses are being converted into glue for all I know! So, yes, dear, we shall have a happy ending in this play, a one in which marriage is never uttered, and the fantasy of living without men and their foolishness is achieved! You may either perform in it or you may see yourself to the door!

VIVIAN

I'll see myself out then.

MARJORIE

What?

VIVIAN

Break a leg, everyone.

Vivian grabs her things.
Everyone objects at once

RICHARD

Vivian, this is madness!

CABO *(overlapping)*

Hold on one moment!

CHARLES *(overlapping)*

I'm sure that we can find a solution here –

MARJORIE *(overlapping)*

Go then!

Vivian is gone.

CHARLES

Okay. Well. Um… We will get through this!

MARY

I don't see how.

CHARLES

Neither do I but we will!

MARJORIE

We continue.

CHARLES

But who will play the role of Angelica?

Marjorie stands and grabs one of the blue scripts.

MARJORIE

I know the blocking.

CHARLES

Marjorie – I am trying to be delicate here – your skills as an actress…

MARJORIE

Yes, Charles?

CABO

I'm sure her skills are up to the task. Let's press on.

CHARLES

Cabo –

MARJORIE

Time is wasting! I shall perform the role until such time as a suitable replacement can be found. It has been some years since I trod the boards, but I was quite an actress in my day.

She takes her place.

Why do you all have your scripts in hand?

ZORA

We've had barely an hour.

MARJORIE

You have six lines!

ZORA

But they are new lines!

CABO

Think of the script as a security blanket –

MARJORIE

How are we to perform if you do not know your lines?!

BARNEY

Because you gave us new lines two hours before curtain! And new blocking! Run here! Run there! Wail in despair!

MARJORIE

No one wails in despair in this!

CLYTEMNESTRA

That was the other one.

BARNEY

Well I may wail in despair anyhow!

MARY

And I will wail in despair since I kiss no one! I am going to live my life as some sort of nun in a non-kissing wasteland! Aaaaaaaauguugh!

BARNEY

Aaaarrrhghgh!

MARJORIE

No wailing! Stop your wailing!

Mary and Barney wail at Marjorie.

CHARLES

QUIET!

Everyone is quiet.

I can't believe that worked. Marjorie, the actors need time to learn their new lines. And we need to go over the end section. If we can stop arguing, you might just have enough time. All right?

MARJORIE

All right.

CHARLES

Good. Wonderful. Let's begin at `I'll show you an idiot.'

CLYTEMNESTRA

Seems appropriate.

They all find their places in the blue script and set props. Marjorie is in the wrong spot.

CHARLES

I will read stage directions as necessary.

MARJORIE

One moment.

Marjorie does some vocal exercises.
Must warm up the instrument. It has been some time.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ready?

MARJORIE

Yes.
Marjorie exhales loudly, shakes out her fingers. She's pretty nervous.

CHARLES

Whenever you're ready.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I'll show you an idiot!

CABO (TYRONE)

Yes you've been doing that marvelously.
They wait for Marjorie.
She finds her line.

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)

Darling, please – the more you speak with him –

CHARLES

Let's try that again to get the rhythm correct, shall we?

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I'll show you an idiot!

CABO (TYRONE)

Yes you've been doing that marvelously.
Pause.

CHARLES

Pick up your cue, Ms. Bright!

MARJORIE

Right. Yes. Sorry.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

I'll show you an idiot!

CABO (TYRONE)

Yes you've been/doing that marvelously.

MARJORIE (ANGELICA) *(interrupting)*
Darling, please – the more you speak with him, the more he makes you look like a fool.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
A ha!

CHARLES
`Mortimer grabs a dueling saber from the display case.'

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
My honor has been insulted! Defend yourself, miscreant!

CABO (TYRONE)
Stop waving that thing around before you hurt yourself.

MARY (FELICITY)
Father, it simply isn't fair to be the only one with a sword.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Tough luck! It's my house, my rules!

MARJORIE
Oh. Sorry.
(as Angelica, overloud)
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS. AT LEAST GIVE HIM HIS OWN SWORD.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Fine!

CHARLES
`He tries to kick the case over to Tyrone. Rose intercepts it and pulls out the other saber.'

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
I have had just about enough of this nonsense! I was invited over here because Bertrand told me he had an announcement, and I have been struck with an umbrella, had a cup of water dashed in my face, and been stuffed into a closet with two irritable minks for the better part of an hour! Someone had better tell me what's going on before I skewer all of you!

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)
You deserve to be imprisoned in a closet with seven irritable minks for your actions!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
My actions?!

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)

Yes, your actions you devious ferret! You dare show your face here again?! I should have you whipped with a willow branch! It was I who tossed the water in your face, and I shall do it again!

As Marjorie

Oh that was good. That was good, wasn't it?

CABO

I have goosebumps.

MARJORIE

I feel like I was getting in the swing of things again. My goodness. I'm going to try it again.

CHARLES

Might I remind you –

MARJORIE

I will try it again! Clytemnestra, give me that face again. It lets me channel a lot of rage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

The one where I appear to be younger and prettier than you?

MARJORIE

Yes, that's the one.

Marjorie takes a moment to get back into it.

CHARLES

Speed is of the essence!

MARJORIE

DON'T RUSH ME, CRETIN! Oh this is fun!

Chewing the scenery with this part – (from here on out, Marjorie is INTO IT)

I should have you whipped with a willow branch! It was I who tossed the water in your face, and I shall do it again!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

You?!

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)

Yes, me! A ha! Aaaaah!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

But why have I been invited here if you bore me such ill will?

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I will tell you!

MARY (FELICITY)

No you will not!

CLYTMENESTRA (ROSE) *(pointing the sword at Felicity)*

Let him speak!

Felicity backs away.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

As my adopted guardian, I wanted you here to witness my love.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Who on earth is your love?

MARY (FELICITY)

Daddy, I think you need to put down the sword.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I have nothing to fear.

CHARLES

`He gets down on one knee.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Felicity – darling –

CHARLES

`Felicity has a coughing fit. She collapses on Bertrand and tries to drag him up to his feet.'

Mary does this, just as she did in act one.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

Oh dear.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)

It's nothing! It's not anything! The boy is confused and has problems with his knees.

CHARLES

`Mortimer attempts to stab Bertrand with the saber. Rose leaps in the way.'

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)

He doesn't know, Mortimer!

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Out of the way, Rose! This is best accomplished quickly!

CABO (TYRONE)
I see your executions follow the same philosophy as your love-making.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
I will deal with you and my love-making presently!

CHARLES
`He attacks again. Rose deflects the blow.'

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
I warn you, Mortimer, I was ladies fencing champion three years running at Vassar.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
And I was ladies fencing champion four consecutive years at Harvard!
A moment.
I exclusively dueled women.
Another moment.
It was a way to meet girls. Imagine my surprise when I discovered there were no girls.

CABO (TYRONE)
Rose, I simply cannot allow you to battle this buffoon. Honor demands that I take the blade from you.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)
Honor?! You speak of honor?!

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
That is sweet, Tyrone, but Bertrand is my charge, and I shall defend him. Perhaps you weren't listening when I mentioned my specific expertise in this area.

CABO (TYRONE)
As a man, I never listen to women if I can help it. Especially about their areas of expertise. It isn't polite. Now my dear, if I may.

CHARLES
`Tyrone takes the blade from Rose.'

CABO
I should point out that I haven't actually practiced the blocking for this part.

MARJORIE
That's all right, I'm certain you have quite a bit of practice playing with your saber.

Skipping Forward

Can you be less pleased with that word, Mary?

MARY

Oh am I supposed to be offended by that?

CHARLES

It's improper. Also, you believe him to be your brother.

MARY

Right.

CHARLES

So perhaps you are less than thrilled with that descriptor. From your brother.

MARY

Yes. I see your point.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Felicity is simply the most delicious, most appetizing, most delectable flower I have ever laid eyes on!

MARY (FELICITY) *(still mostly charmed)*

Delectable?!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Yes my dear. My love for you has overwhelmed my senses. I can think of nothing but your sweet warm lips –

Mary remains charmed -

CHARLES

`Mortimer growls.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Your dewy skin…

Mary thinks this is great

CHARLES

`Mortimer growls louder.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Your magnificent… b-b-b-

He stops, breaks character. Mary is disappointed.

Perhaps we could find a different word.

MARY

It's all right, Richard, you can say it. It's important.

RICHARD

I fear I might turn red with embarrassment.

MARJORIE

You'll manage.

RICHARD

Perhaps I could say `your magnificent feminine charms.'

MARJORIE

Richard, we need the specific word.

RICHARD

Or `magnificent front.'

MARY

Do find a way to say it. It's vital to have a wide vocabulary.

CABO

I can attest to that.

MARY

Perhaps it would help if held myself in a certain way?

Mary holds her arms to show a bit more cleavage, Richard turns away in embarrassment and, let's face it, fear.

RICHARD

I shall try to say the word!

CHARLES

Let's go from `dewy skin' and Barney, I want to see more growling like a deranged wolf. Mary, again, you are not enjoying this. Not even a little.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Your dewy skin…

CHARLES

`Mortimer growls louder.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Your magnificent… b-b-b-bosoms…

CHARLES

`Mortimer loses his mind.'

Barney shrieks in rage.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Aaarrrrhrhrhrhghg!

CHARLES

`Mortimer attacks. Bertrand shrieks in fear, runs and leaps atop the divan.'

Richard shrieks, runs and jumps on the divan.

Barney stumbles after them.

`Mortimer chases him and jumps upon the divan.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

ABOMINATION! ABOMINATION!

Barney stops, gasping for breath.

CHARLES

`Tyrone runs to intercept Mortimer and swings wildly, missing by a mile.'

Cabo runs at Barney, who can barely move.

Cabo swings his sword over Barney's head, missing.

`Bertrand escapes and runs downstage left.'

Richard shrieks again and runs away.

Barney stops, hands on his knees.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

One moment… Please.

CHARLES

`Tyrone makes a weak attempt to stop him, but Mortimer charges past, like a runaway locomotive.'

Again, Barney slowly ducks Cabo and tries to jog downstage towards Richard.

MARJORIE

You have a line.

Barney stops, sweating, gasping for air.

BARNEY (MORTIMER)

Sweet lips… Dewy Skin… Bosoms! You dare… speak… of… bosoms!

CHARLES

So at this point I think you three men should continuously run about, swinging your swords and stamping like wild beasts.

RICHARD

Right.

CABO

Got it.

CHARLES

And go!
`All three women stand and watch as the men continue to chase each other, shrieking and stomping.'

Richard runs, jumps, and shrieks, Cabo runs slowly after Barney, who is making a valiant attempt at running after Richard, but failing.

Barney stops, clutching his chest, and falls over.

CHARLES

Don't fall over just yet!

MARJORIE

Barney your heart attack isn't for another four lines. We have some jokes here first.

MARY

Barney?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Shall I just say my line then?

As Rose

One wonders how men came to be in charge of things.

MARY (FELICITY)

Yes it does seem improbable, doesn't it?

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)

I am married to one of these.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I don't think he's acting.

CHARLES

Barney? Barney are you all right?

Barney gurgles on the floor.

MARY

If you're acting, this is quite excellent. Well done.

RICHARD

I think he might actually be having a heart attack.

CHARLES

If you're having an actual heart attack, give a thumb's up.

Barney is incapable of giving a thumb's up.

CABO

How is he supposed to give a thumb's up if he's having a heart attack? Speak sense, Charles.

CHARLES

I don't see anyone else coming up with a signal.

CABO

You're the director, direct.

RICHARD

I shall give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation!

Richard leaps upon Barney.

BARNEY

Arrhghg… arrhgh…. Arrghghg…

He fights off Richard.

CHARLES

Are you better? Thumb's up if you're better?

Barney can barely move.

Let's take it back to before the running and see if we can get the timing on the heart attack better.

Barney falls over.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I think he's actually hurt, Charles.

MARJORIE

How did you come to that conclusion?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Remember when he told us over and over and over and over again that he had physical ailments and feared for his life?

MARJORIE

Oh yes.

To Barney's prone form.

Can you try it again at half speed?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I don't think he can try it at all, Marjorie.

MARJORIE

What? Get up! The show must go on!

She tries to get him up by the arm.
Cabo and Mary reach out to stop her.

CABO

He's hurt!

BARNEY

I can't do it. I have to stop.

He crawls towards the off-stage area.

MARY

Should we call someone?

CHARLES

I don't know who we could get at such short notice.

MARY

No to take Barney to the Hospital!

BARNEY

…no Hospitals… I'll be fine.

CABO

Good.

MARY

Are you certain?

He gives a thumb's up.

CHARLES

See?! Thumb's up!

CLYTEMNESTRA

We obviously can't ask Barney to continue.

MARY

Who can play the role?

CHARLES

I would volunteer except I am exceedingly awful at acting. That's why I direct.

MARJORIE

There is no one who could play the part!

George enters, holding several severed lengths of rope.

GEORGE

Miss me?

MARJORIE

How have you got free?

CABO

You actually tied him up?! I thought you were joking!

GEORGE

You forget my time as a prisoner of war in northern Italy. I chewed through my bonds like a rodent. And I have been watching this disgrace from the wings, just waiting for my opportunity to strike!

MARJORIE

Oh so you could come and ruin it like you did everything else in our life?

GEORGE

It was ruined the moment you put your fingers to the keys you treacherous she-weasel! I merely come to gloat at its demise.

MARJORIE

I am treacherous?! I am treacherous! You squandered a fortune –

GEORGE

IT WAS AN INVESTMENT! You were married before me! You had a child and you never told me!

MARJORIE

Because I knew you were an insensitive, jealous neandertal!

GEORGE *(pronouncing it the exact same way)*

It's pronounced neandertal you ignoramus!

MARJORIE

That's what I said you just didn't listen! Like you never do!

GEORGE

And you never trusted me!

CLYTEMNESTRA

STOPPPPPPPP! Cease your squabbling you toddlers! George – do you have any money?

GEORGE

What kind of question is –

CLYTEMNESTRA *(cutting him off)*

Do you have any money?

GEORGE

No.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Marjorie, do you have any money?

MARJORIE

I am horrifically ruined due to the actions of my husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Wonderful. And since I have gleaned, through your continuous repetition of the fact, that you have lost the copyrights to your earlier plays, the only prospect of either of you making money is the success of this show which opens in…

She points at Charles

CHARLES

Fifty-two minutes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Fifty-two minutes – I suggest that you both bury your differences, hike up your tights, and help us finish this rehearsal! George, you will be playing Mortimer.

MARJORIE

What?! That's prep-

CLYTEMNESTRA

GEORGE WILL BE PLAYING MORTIMER! I AM IN CHARGE NOW.

CHARLES

I'm the director –

CLYTEMNESTRA

NOT ANYMORE. We finish this rehearsal, we learn our lines, we do the play.

She points at Richard

No one eats in costume.

RICHARD

Yes, Ma'am.

Clytemnestra hands Barney's script to George.

CLYTEMNESTRA

We go from bosoms.

RICHARD

Um… again –

CLYTEMNESTRA

Bosoms!

Richard nods.

RICHARD (BERTRAND) *(strangely powerful)*

Your magnificent bosoms!

CHARLES

`Mortimer loses his mind.'

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

Aaarrrrhrhrhrhghg!

CHARLES

`Mortimer attacks.'

George charges at Richard. He's actually amazingly good at this.

`Bertrand shrieks in fear, runs, and leaps atop the divan.'

Richard does this.

`Mortimer chases him and jumps upon the divan.'

George triumphantly leaps upon the divan.

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

ABOMINATION! ABOMINATION!

Marjorie, in spite of herself, is impressed.

CHARLES

`Tyrone runs to intercept Mortimer and swings wildly, missing by a mile.'

Cabo intercepts George, and swings, missing badly.

`Bertrand escapes and runs downstage left.'

`Tyrone makes a weak attempt to stop him, but Mortimer charges past.

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

SWEET LIPS! DEWY SKIN! BOSOMS! YOU DARE SPEAK OF BOSOMS!

CHARLES

`All three women stand and watch as the men continue to chase each other, shrieking and stomping.'

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
One wonders how men came to be in charge of things.

MARY (FELICITY)
Yes it does seem improbable, doesn't it?

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)
I am married to one of these.

CLYTEMNESTRA (ROSE)
My decision to remain single seems more sound than ever.

CHARLES
`Mortimer lunges for Bertrand and stops, hyperventilating.'
Mortimer lunges for Bertrand and stops, hyperventilating.

MARJORIE (ANGELICA) *(alarmed)*
Mortimer?

CABO (TYRONE)
I didn't even stab him!

CHARLES
`Mortimer staggers and drops his sword.'
George does so.

GEORGE (MORTIMER)
Nothing… just a minor… heart attack.

CHARLES
`He slumps over.'

MARY (FELICITY)
Father?!

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)
Do something!

RICHARD (BERTRAND)
I'll save him!

CHARLES
`Bertrand rushes over to perform mouth to mouth resuscitation.'.

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

…no…

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Stay still dear chap I am skilled in mouth to mouth resuscitation… open your mouth…

MARY (FELICITY)

Oh no!

CHARLES

`Bertrand lays Mortimer down, who's struggling.'

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

Must…

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Live, yes. Must live.

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

Kill…

CHARLES

`Mortimer's hands reach up to strangle Bertrand. But he's very weak.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

His grip is quite strong! That's a good sign!

CHARLES

`Mortimer continues to attempt to strangle Bertrand.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

I hope some day to call you father.

CHARLES

`Mortimer tries to strangle him harder.'

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Yes some of his strength is returning! Ack.

MARJORIE (ANGELICA)

Ohhh… not good.

RICHARD (BERTRAND)

Just relax now.

CHARLES

`Against Mortimer's will, Bertrand starts doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
`Mortimer throws him off and staggers to his feet.'

George does so, still holding his script.

GEORGE (MORTIMER)

Ack! Agggg!

Pause.

They wait.

To Marjorie, not in character.

I see you've left most of the lines the same.

MARJORIE

Some of them. Some of them I changed.

GEORGE

I killed people.

MARJORIE

I didn't.

CABO

What are we waiting on?

CHARLES

Zora!

CABO

Oh.

Zora enters as the Nurse. She's even more petrified this time than last time.

ZORA (NURSE)

Is this… the… Barrington residence?

CHARLES

Can we try that again with less terror please?

CLYTEMNESTRA

It's difficult for her, Charles.

CHARLES

I understand that, but she's acting as if she's about to be executed!

GEORGE

If it were my script, she might.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Zora – it's going to be okay. A little more confidence.

ZORA
Right. You know what's best.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Take it again. From `Ack! Aggggg!'

GEORGE
Ack! Aggggg!
Zora returns.

ZORA (NURSE)
Is this the Barrington residence?

CABO (TYRONE)
You may wish to call on the Barrington family later, ma'am, as they are not finished maiming each other yet.

End of Except.
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