



Preview Script

Loving Chopin

by

Chris Lambert

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Setting

A withdrawing room in the decaying stately home of Lord and Lady Cavendish. A winter in the late 19th century.

Characters

Lord Walter Cavendish : an elderly high court judge. He is a bigoted old man prone to sudden outbursts. He is also deeply sad as he hides a great secret that he can never share. He thinks that he controls this household. He does not.

Lady Josephine Cavendish : his long-suffering wife. She is trapped in a loveless marriage and seeks solace in books and in the butler. She is also highly manipulative and prone to sudden acts of extreme violence when tested. She easily controls her husband and thinks that she controls Stiles.

Stiles : the butler. Very polite in manner but he is also a subversive influence in this household. He is manipulative of Lord and Lady Cavendish until his own masculinity is threatened at the end.

Synopsis

The play can either be performed in a long(ish) one act or a short(ish) two act version. If you divide this into two acts, as it was originally, then you can include the following information in your programme:

Act 1: Saturday Morning

Act 2: Several hours later

The point where this division occurs is shown in the script.

(Act 1) All of the furniture is covered with white cloth. Stiles enters and removes a dust sheet from one chair revealing Lord Cavendish, asleep. Lord Cavendish begins reading the paper and rails at the filth displayed in its pages. Lady Cavendish enters and enquires as to the whereabouts of the “children” Emily and Jack. Lord Cavendish resents Emily still living under the roof and enquires after his accountant Henry. Stiles calls Lord Cavendish “sir” and is reprimanded (he should refer to him as “your grace”). Lady Cavendish then reprimands Walter, denigrating his position and warns that his temper may cause him great pain if he’s not careful. This does not deter him so Josephine knees him in the groin. This calms him down. In this calmer state it is revealed (to the audience) that Walter loves Stiles. Walter starts to get excited again as he rails against homosexuals. Stiles enters and informs Lord Cavendish that his dog, Henry has frozen to death outside. This leads to talk regarding the culinary quality of canines, a dog named after a former mistress and an amusing moment of confusion concerning Henry the accountant and Henry the dog. A further altercation over how he should be addressed leads Stiles to remind Lord Cavendish that he should “remember his blackouts” – when Lady Cavendish causes his temper to rise further he becomes so aggressive that she is forced to, very calmly, knock him unconscious. In this quiet moment Lady Cavendish and Stiles reveal their true feelings for each other. In a final delirious rant Lord Cavendish reveals his true nature and his isolation. He collapses.

(Act 2) Recovering but lucid, Lord Cavendish questions his wife on the subject of female authorship and pseudonyms, why he has a bandage on his head and on the whys and wherefores of women’s etiquette. When he realises that his wife is wearing make-up he calls for Stiles to eject her from the building, but the butler and his wife both round on him angering him again. When he exits to find the children (also engaged in a love triangle) Stiles and Lady Cavendish resume an earlier conversation and end in a romantic clinch as Walter returns. Walter asks Stiles why he had his tongue in Josephine’s mouth. Thinking quickly Stiles explains that it is a dentist’s craft that he has been performing. Walter demands that it be performed on him (owing to a pain in one of his upper molars). Stiles reluctantly obliges. At this moment Lord Cavendish’s mask slips and he experiences a frightening moment of self-revelation. The two quickly reassure him that this has been a dream and Lord Cavendish, reassured, starts to laugh. This laughter soon turns to tears.

First Performance

The first performance of 'Loving Chopin' was given on Wednesday 13th May 1998 at the Axiom Theatre, Cheltenham. The cast was as follows :-

Lord Cavendish : Aidan Herd
Stiles : Jonathan Shelley
Lady Cavendish : Chris Lambert

*When passion rides against the wind,
The seasons shall remain.
The winter sun still thaws the heart,
Whilst summer clouds cry rain.*

*Though springtime fruits can ne'er be born,
Blossoms still full bloom.
As beauty filled as petals past,
That autumn winds consume.*

Written for the first performance of 'Loving Chopin' by Nigel Laight

Loving Chopin

A lounge in a stately home. On the back wall in white chalk are drawn two suits of armour, a central fireplace with two candlesticks and a carriage clock upon it. Above the fire place is a picture of Lord and Lady Cavendish, it's frame is also drawn in chalk. Along the sides of the room are large windows (drawn in chalk) with snow resting on the frames. On stage are three pieces of furniture. Stage right is an armchair covered in a white cloth upon which sits Lord Cavendish, asleep and covered in another white cloth. Stage left is another armchair, covered in a white cloth. Centre stage between the two chairs is a small table, covered in a white cloth. On the table is a copy of 'The Times'. (This can be represented using a sheet of white A2 paper with a newspaper format crudely reproduced using thick black ink. The headlines can mirror Lord Cavendishes opening tirade e.g. "BLOODY, FESTERING FILTH!" or "UNFLUSHED LAVATORY BOWL!").

Enter Stiles. He wears white gloves and a tail coat. He is very controlled in his movements and impeccably polite in tone (though not necessarily in the content of what he says). Stiles walks over to Lord Cavendish and takes off the dust cover. He begins to fold it neatly. Lord Malmsey Cavendish wakes.

Lord Good Morning, Stiles.

Stiles Good Morning, Sir.

Stiles exits with the dustcover folded.

Lord *(Waving him away regally, although he has already gone)* You may go. *(He reaches for his newspaper and begins to read).* Filth ... Filth ... Filth. Don't know why I bother; should pack up the whole judge thing and retire. Filth. Bloody, festering filth. I remember when newspaper's could be read by children, toddlers could examine the rise and fall of the stocks they'd bought without being made violently sick by this festering dribble spewing from the toilet minds of the Filth Street so called filthy Journalists, grubby, muddy, mouldy filth. Filth. Filth. Filth. I don't see why I, the Saturday news-sheet digester, should have to be subjected to such a barrage of effluent. I may well wash my hands once I have finished dipping my mind into this never-ending stream of raw sewage, but I fear the damage may already have been done. Filth. Why read the newspaper, why not stare into an unflushed lavatory bowl? It's all the same, it's all filth.

Enter Lady Cavendish.

Lady Darling?

Lord Hmmmm?

Lady *(Sternly)* Darling.

Lord What?

Lady Where are the children?

Lord What?

Lady The children.

Lord What children?

Lady Where are they?

Lord I don't know. I don't keep my offspring under close observation. Caged and studied like a rat ... or kept on a lead like an imaginative prostitute.

Lady *(Ignoring his crudity)* We need to know where the children are.

Lord They're not children, darling.

Lady Yes they are. Emily is a mere child.

Lord She's twenty-two. Should be out of the bloody house by now. Out of my greying hair.

Lady Where are they?

Lord I said, I don't know, you ridiculous old cow.

Lady Don't you call me a ridiculous old cow!

Lord I didn't.

Lady Yes you did.

Lord Did I? Well, don't take it to heart, heifer. I am trying to read the paper! One of the few joys of my life, reading intelligent, worthwhile and clean words on a Saturday, is disturbed by your wittering on!

Stiles enters with tea.

Lady Stiles, where are the children?

Stiles Your fair daughter, the lady Emily, and Master Jack Preston had planned a riding trip for this very morn, I presume that they are presently galloping fast and furiously through the Cavendish parkland.

Lord Where's that bastard Henry?

Stiles I am without that information, sir.

Lord Well, he better bloody turn up soon, my accounts won't wait you know.

Stiles I shall attempt to discover his location, sir.

Lord Good, and it's Your Lordship or Your Grace not Sir! Bloody peasant, I'll take a stick to your arse!

Stiles I shall remember that, sir.

Lord Yes, well, you do that.

Stiles exits.

Lady Really Walter, you should not chide Stiles so, he is a credit to his profession and an asset to this household.

Lord Ten years spent under me and he still forgets my bloody title!

Lady Well, maybe some people don't think that your title is important.

Lord What did you say?

Lady I said, maybe some people don't think that your title is important.

Lord And are you one of these alleged people?

Lady Well you do mention it a great deal ... perhaps more than is absolutely necessary.

Lord I'm a bloody lord! I run the country! I fought in eight bleeding world wars so that you could live safely in this house and make your slanderous comments!

Lady Now Walter, stop being silly, the doctor warned you about these tantrums. I quote, "Any strong outburst of anger may result in an appalling groinal complexity". A condition that I am sure is far from pleasant.

Lord Tantrums? Groinal complexity? I'm not a bloody child, I'm a Lord! Why does no one care?

Lady I care about you, not your silly lordship.

Lord Silly lordship? Why ... why you ungrateful cow!

Lady Walter, remember your groin.

Lord Oh bugger my groin! You have no respect for me. I am a Lord! (*Enter Stiles*). You are a parasite!

Stiles A parasite on a parasite; how novel, sir.

Lord It's "Your Grace", you filthy scum!

Lady Walter!

Lord Push off, you vacuous old bag! (*Lady Cavendish knees him very hard in the groin. He falls to the floor*). Oh my groin, the pain's come back.

Lady You strained yourself again, you silly young pup. Did you see that Stiles?

Stiles Indeed, Madam, he seems to have brought on another attack.

Lady A case of "appalling groinal complexity".

Stiles helps Lord Cavendish to his seat.

Lord I must have become over-excited, I won't be able to do much for a while.

Lady (*Genuinely*) Well that is a shame. You just sit there and rest.

Lord Yes, yes, I'll do that. Oh yes, Stiles, have you found Henry?

Stiles As I suspected, Master Henry Johnstone was in the study working on the accounts. Evidence shows that he has been present at that location since sunrise. I have taken the liberty of providing him with breakfast.

Lord Excellent work Stiles ... (He looks at Stiles for a moment, almost longingly). Tell me Stiles ...

Stiles Sir?

Lord You ... carry yourself rather well ... I mean I do admire the way you walk about the place, holding your head up high ... so tell me ... do you have some ... aristocracy in you?

Stiles Not since boarding school, sir.

Lord (*Suddenly snapping back to reality*) Yes, yes Stiles, you may go. (*Exit Stiles. Lord and Lady Cavendish watch his exit*). I just don't understand it dear, I get angry and the pain comes on.

Lady The doctor did say there was some connection, dear.

Lord Yes, I must pay more attention to him.

Lady If only you were to control your temper, then these inexplicable attacks would not occur.

Lord Quite right, but I think anger is second nature to me, there is a fine line betwixt itching and scratching; caressing and cudgelling; whispering and shouting; kissing and biting; fawning and fisting ...

Lady Yes dear.

Pause.

Lord Did Stiles say that Emily and Jack were out riding?

Lady Yes, Walter.

Lord Well I hope that they are wrapped up warm, it's real brass monkey weather.

Lady Brass Monkey, Walter?

Lord Brass Monkey Weather, dear.

Lady Brass Monkey Weather?

Lord Yes, I mean if Jack were a brass monkey and out in this cold, both his balls would freeze, snap off and roll to the ground.

Lady Well he's not made of brass, dear.

Lord All the more reason for him to wrap up warm or he'll be scrabbling around in the snow looking for his frozen balls and then where will he be? Well, he won't be able to give Emily children if he's short of balls. He might be able to give her his balls though, once they have defrosted he could put them in a jar. Pickle them perhaps.

Lady Walter, what are you talking about?

Lord Balls, dear. Men need balls or the world will go to pot. Do you know what would happen if men didn't have balls, dear?

Lady *(She does, she has heard this before)* No.

Lord Well, for a start we'd all be leaping around like raving nancy boys, wearing lace, doing the cooking and sewing things.

Lady *(Tired)* Stiles cooks, dear.

Lord Does he, does he indeed? Not sure I approve of that. Man starts cooking, next thing you know he'll be wearing a skirt and Sodom and Gomorrah will happen all over again. Do you know about Sodom and Gomorrah, Josephine?

Lady Yes, dear.

Lord Well, that was caused by men who were totally lacking in balls. Men who lack balls want to get their hands on the balls of those fine, upstanding members of society who have good, honest, solid manlike balls. Anyway, these men ... are you listening to me?

Lady No, dear.

Lord These men did not know where to put their passion poles, and so God, who's got a big pair of balls and is a real man and has never cooked, put a stop to their behaviour; fire and brimstone, killed the whole, sordid lot of them. They deserved it, no balls see. You know, I'm a bit like God, I know how he feels ... maybe my balls are as big as his. I can cope with these ball-less people. Did I tell you about court on Friday?

Lady Yes, dear.

Lord Well, there was this man, if I dare call him that; he had no balls. The only balls he'd touched belonged to another man. He'd been caught doing the static leapfrog, down some damp, sticky alley with a person of the same genital grouping. So I quoted Jesus Christ himself, the kind of thing I resort to in an emergency. "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death".

Lady Moses, dear.

Lord What ?

Lady Moses said that.

Lord Did he, did he. Now there was a man with good honest balls. Pity he was a Jew though.

Lady Jesus was a Jew.

Lord Now don't be stupid, of course he wasn't, he was the Son of God, I will not have such blasphemy in the lounge! Jew indeed. Anyway I had the fellow hung, we can't have ball-less people bugging each other. Put him out of his misery; he was wallowing in sin, living in his own excrement and the excrement of other people, probably eating it too.

Lady Really dear, I wish you wouldn't use such coarse language.
Lord What do you mean, woman?
Lady That word.
Lord What, buggery?
Lady Oh sshh, Walter, it's abhorrent.
Lord What's the matter Josephine, haven't you got any balls?
Lady Oh dear.

Enter Stiles.

Stiles Is sir talking balls again?
Lord Certainly am, Stiles ... I fancy myself a bit of an expert.
Stiles Indeed sir, there is none quite so eloquent on the subject.
Lord Yes, yes Stiles, all this fawning and stroking of my character rather worries me, what do you want?
Stiles There's a frozen dog outside, sir.
Lord Well send him in, send him in.
Stiles No sir, a frozen dog. You must have left him out last night.
Lady Where is the dog?
Stiles It collapsed and froze outside the front doors, Madam.
Lord Damn and Blast! I knew I'd forgotten something. Is there anything we can do for it?
Stiles Well sir, I have started preparing it ...
Lord Really Stiles, I don't think we should eat it.
Stiles ... for burial sir.
Lord Oh, of course. Erm, actually, Stiles ...
Stiles Sir?
Lord What does dog taste like?
Stiles I have no idea. But I believe the peasants in the village had to eat a litter of puppies to stay alive last winter.
Lord That's disgusting! Were they punished?
Stiles Yes sir, you had them all sent to the Antipodean colonies.
Lord Rather lenient of me, don't you think?
Stiles Indeed sir, I was one of the first to express surprise.
Lord People don't call me 'that kind man' for nothing.
Stiles Quite, sir, they have to be paid.
Lord Well go and bury the damn thing while I ponder on the niceties of my sentence casting. (*Exit Stiles*). The Antipodes. The land of convicts. One wonders what will be bred from that miasma of decadence and felony. Perhaps we of the British Judicial System have inadvertently created a new society, a society where right is deemed as wrong and wrong is deemed as right.
Lady Maybe they'll sort themselves out over there. Being forced to survive in an untamed wilderness and all that.
Lord (*Lost in thought*) And all that ... yes, and all that ... (*Snapping back*). Pity about the dog though. Emily's wasn't it?
Lady Yes, yes, she'll be most upset. Called the dog 'Henry' you know, always found that a trifle odd.

Pause.

Lord I had a dog.
Lady Did you? Didn't know you liked pets.
Lord Oh I did, in India, while I was posted there, lovely Labrador bitch, called it 'Milly' after my mistress.

Very uncomfortable pause. Lady Cavendish stares at Lord Cavendish, who grins.

Lady What did you just say?
Lord Nothing.
Lady You said, and I quote, "... lovely Labrador bitch, called it 'Milly' after my mistress".

Pause.

Lord Milly was my headmistress at school, do you ever pay one iota of attention to a syllable I say, deaf woman!

Lady So you were on first name terms with your headmistress?

Lord Yes, yes I was! I'm a Lord, remember, a Lord! You tend to forget that fact, don't you, hag!

Lady Walter, groin.

Lord *(Suddenly calm)* All right, just don't forget.

Lady Remember what the doctor said. You might even bring on one of those blackouts, you don't want that now, do you? *(Pause)*. Do you?

Lord No, I don't. I'll just read my paper.

Lady You do that.

Lord I'll do that. *(Pause)*. Could do with another cup of tea. *(Calling)*. Stiles?

Lady I wonder when the children will return. It's nearly lunch-time.

Enter Stiles.

Stiles You called, sir?

Lord Buried Henry yet?

Stiles He's doing the accounts, sir.

Lord No, the dog, Henry.

Stiles Just about to, sir.

Lord What?

Stiles Bury the dog, sir.

Lord You bury the dog!

Stiles Yes sir.

Stiles makes to leave.

Lord Where's my tea?

Stiles On the table, sir.

Lord It didn't say on your job description that you were some form of part time jongleur, clown thing.

Stiles No, sir.

Lord No sir, no sir! No, Your Grace! I will not have this insubordination in my house! I will have tea!

Stiles Yes sir.

Lord A fresh pot!

Stiles Yes sir.

Lord Yes "Your Grace"!

Stiles As you wish, sir.

Lord Tea, now, Your Grace!

Stiles At once, sir.

Lady Stiles.

Stiles Madam.

Lady Have the children returned yet?

Stiles I do not think so madam.

Lord Well?

Stiles Sir?

Lord Tea!

Stiles I'm talking to Madam, sir.

Lord What ... what? I asked you for tea, you peasant scum!

Lady Be quiet, Walter.

Stiles I shall attempt to obtain said tea, sir.

Lord "Your Grace"! Not "Sir"! Your bloody Grace!

Stiles Yes sir.

Lord Why you ... if I still had strength in this body!

Lady Be quiet, Walter!

Lord How dare you!

Stiles Remember your blackouts, sir.
Lord "Remember your blackouts, Your Grace!"
Lady Shut up!
Lord Does anyone in this room want a fight? Now damn it, I'm ready for you, you foreign scum!
Lady Walter!
Lord Don't you Walter me, you witch! (*As he continues to rant, Lady Cavendish stands and moves towards him. Stiles starts to clear the tea tray*). Don't deny your witchery, woman, I know you're evil ... well, come on, because I'm ready for you. And you Stiles, you're obviously working for a foreign power, your disrespect astounds me! Maybe you're some form of ho-mo-sexual; that should explain the odd amounts of time you spend in the kitchen. Bugger it, none of you deserve to live! You're all subversive perverts! It's time a man with balls stood up to you, well here I am ...

Lady Cavendish punches Lord Cavendish in the side of the head. He staggers back into Stiles. Stiles pushes him away towards Lady Cavendish. Lord Cavendish staggers slowly towards her. Stiles hands Lady Cavendish the tea tray. Lady Cavendish hits Lord Cavendish in the face with the metal tray. Lord Cavendish staggers back and falls unconscious into his chair (Stiles moving the chair to catch him). Stiles looks out of the window.

Stiles The children are returning, Madam.
Lady (*Regaining her composure*) Good, good.
Stiles (*Walking over to Lord Cavendish and checking his pulse*) Lord Cavendish is unconscious, Madam.
Lady Thank God for that.
Stiles Would you like me to attend to my duties Madam?
Lady What duties do you have left to perform?
Stiles Everything.
Lady Make sure the children don't disturb me.
Stiles Are you resting, madam?
Lady If you like. Lock them in a room together. Try and get them to experience something worldly.
Stiles I have a copy of the humorous magazine Punch that they may find enlightening.
Lady That's not quite what I had in mind. Lace their morning tea with ethanol or poppy seed resin. Urge that young man to get a bloody move on or her father will begin to think outrageous things.
Stiles That will be a change, madam.

Pause. Lady Cavendish looks lustily at Stiles.

Lady Say something else about him.
Stiles Ma'am?
Lady He's unconscious ... (*playfully*) go on, insult the useless old judge.
Stiles I would never insult the master, madam.
Lady Oh but you do ... Rub my feet.
Stiles Madam?
Lady You heard me.
Stiles But the master.
Lady The master is dead to the world. Rub my feet. Get your hands on them, now! (*Stiles undoes her shoes slowly*). I've been watching you.
Stiles I know, Madam.
Lady You're a sly old fox.
Stiles I would prefer less assumptions about my age, madam.
Lady You really know how to put him down.
Stiles Just doing my duty.
Lady To me?
Stiles To my fellow man.

Stiles starts to massage her feet. She starts to moan. Suddenly Lord Cavendish jerks awake. They do not notice.

Lord Where's my blasted hat!?

Lord Cavendish instantly falls unconscious again. Stiles gets up and checks Lord Cavendish's pulse.

Stiles The master is agreeable again, Madam.

Lady (*Giggling*) You are evil.

Stiles I try my best, madam.

Lady I know you do.

Lord Cavendish wakes again. He looks frightened.

Lord Sodom! (*Lady Cavendish and Stiles stop looking at each other longingly and turn their attention to the stricken Lord*). Sodom and Gomorrah!

Lord Cavendish goes back to sleep. Pause. Stiles checks Lord Cavendish's pulse again and shakes his head.

Lady Oh leave him be Stiles, he always gets like this after one of his attacks.

Stiles As you wish, madam.

Lord Cavendish wakes again, in earnest. Fire and Brimstone.

Lord “Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom - both young and old - surrounded the house. (*Becoming frightened*). They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came with you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them”. (*Suddenly violent, angry*). Destroy them, oh lord! All their sort. Destroy! (*Now lost within the story*). “Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, “No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof”.”.

Lady (*Sarcastic*) Good old Lot.

Lord (*Angry, raging*) You knew what you were doing, Lord! They're all the same! String 'em up by their balls in the fiery pits for eternity! (*Now righteous*). “By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah; from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities, and also the vegetation in the land. But Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt”.

Lord Cavendish falls asleep. Pause.

Stiles He does seem to be overly concussed my lady.

Lady I don't care, he deserves everything he gets.

Lord (*Waking, scared*) Leave me be! You all want me! It's disgusting! Keep those clean and oiled limbs away from me. Don't touch me with those tender looks ... leave me be!

Lord Cavendish falls asleep again.

Lady He will recover. He'll just be disorientated ... again. Now where were you?

Stiles Your big toe, I think, Madam. (*He starts to massage Lady Cavendish's feet again*). So is Master Jack still not performing, my lady?

Lady Yes, it's most peculiar ... I mean you wouldn't say Emily is a hideous crone, bent double with ghastly deformities and a chronic lack of limbs.

Stiles No, ma'am. I would not.

Lady In fact a man should be strung up by his thumbs for for even declaring her plain.

Stiles Indeed.

Lady She is not plain; not by any stretch of the imagination.

Stiles She has inherited your good looks, my lady.

Lady (*Pleased by this*) Yes ... yes she has.

Stiles I'm sure Master Jack will come to his senses.

Lady I jolly well hope so, she needs a good seeing to.

Stiles So many of us do, madam.

Pause. Lady Cavendish looks deep into Stiles' eyes, trying to fathom what is going on inside his head.

Lady Now do my legs.

Stiles Madam, I must stop. Further physical contact between us ... above the ankle, may lead us down a path that we do not wish to travel.

Lady No let us go there. Let us go down that pink, petal-strewn path.

Stiles Madam, it is unwise in the extreme. Though the master is heavily concussed we cannot rely upon his present state lasting. *(Pause)*. I must attend to my duties.

Lady *(Earnest, secretive)* Tonight then ... or at any moment when he is not here.

Stiles *(Kissing Lady Cavendish's hand)* My duties ...

Lady You must promise me. You must promise me something more. It is your duty. Attend to it.

Stiles When opportunity raises its head. *(He turns to go)*.

Lady Stiles?

Stiles Ma'am?

Lady Get my book.

Stiles Of course.

Exit Stiles. Lady Cavendish sits still for a while, thinking. Lord Cavendish awakes again, she jumps when he speaks.

Lord Ha!

He sleeps again. Lady Cavendish recovers herself.

Lady For heavens sake. *(Stiles enters and hands her a copy of 'Mansfield Park')*. Thank you, Stiles.

Exit Stiles. Lady Cavendish starts to read. Lord Cavendish starts to mumble. His eyes flicker as if about to open, but never quite managing it. Lady Cavendish gets steadily irritated with every word.

Lord *(Mumbling)* Where is he? Is he here? Still out drinking with all his friends the filthy rascal. Why do I even bother with such offal? I found him in my trouser drawer going through my delicates, I mean where in Hades is a man supposed to look? *(Becoming coherent)*. I grant he often gave me many pleasurable evenings sitting by the blazing ... flamy thing, trying on shrunken uniforms of forgotten days, sipping gently from a flask of mulled chocolate ... hours flitting by like years ... talking of nothing but traditional family days out in the desert and the devious discrepancies possible in a left-handed game of Backgammon Solitude no longer an object ... It all rushes on like a huge wall of paper strewn pink doilies scattered through the expanse of the stars that we shared on that last evening together ... *(Lady Cavendish puts down her book and shakes her head. During the next speech she stands, puts a cushion behind Lord Cavendish's head and then leaves calling for Stiles)*. What the devil am I to do? I sit here playing Cribbage with Death himself sitting atop a forlorn mountain of utter despair. The vultures of complete unhappiness ravage at my rotting cadaver and I cannot scream. I will not scream for God's sake, not shout out nor let my solid wall of total strength crumble in the face of mine enemies ... my head he does with oil anoint and my cup overflows causing a *(standing up)* bloody mess and it will take more than salt to get that up, mark my words you bloody scoundrels ... you'll not have me, keep your filthy little mouths shut!

Lord Cavendish falls back into his chair. Enter Stiles with a roll of bandage. He starts to wrap it around Lord Cavendish's head.

Author's Note : *In the original performance a blackout and interval occurred here, with the second act beginning with Lord Cavendish asleep in the chair. Though this is quite a short play, it is so energetic that the cast needed a rest, and this is a very good point to pause. The audience also feel they have had their monies worth due to the energetic performances.*

Enter Lady Cavendish. She watches Stiles for a few lingering moments. She sits down and begins reading again. Lord Cavendish is asleep in a chair, snoring. Stiles has finished. He exits the room. He does not look at Lady Cavendish, who is intent on her book. Lord Cavendish jerks awake and stares at Lady C. until ...

Lady What?

Lord What's that?

Lady A book.

Lord What book is it that you are reading?

Lady Mansfield Park.

Lord Ah yes, by James Austin.

Lady Jane Austen, dear.

Lord His name isn't Jane, that's a girls name.

Lady Jane Austen is a woman.

Lord Well he would be with a name like that. Anyway, women don't write books, they can't, they're incapable.

Lady Yes they can, and Jane Austen is a woman.

Lord Well it's a first. What was that book you were reading last week?

Lady Middlemarch.

Lord Who was that by?

Lady George Eliot.

Lord See, see, that's a man.

Lady Is there an actual point to this argument?

Lord Just proving the usual, dear.

Lady That women cannot write books.

Lord Yes, apart from that James Austin fellow.

Lady And the Bronte sisters. And George Eliot.

Lord George Eliot is not a woman. George is a man's name.

Lady Apparently Chopin is seeing a lady called George Sands, also an author.

Lord Chopin, the pianist fellow? Playing crochet with the other club? That George Sands is a fellow, I read it in some literary periodical.

Lady She dresses as a man. It's short for Georgina.

Lord Good God! That's a woman's name!

Lady Yes.

Lord (*Genuine realisation*) Oh, so George Eliot is a woman, George being short for Georgina.

Lady No dear, it's a pseudonym, her real name is Mary Ann Evans.

Lord Doesn't sound a thing like George.

Lady That's the point.

Lord Well, anyway, books are for women, real men don't have time for stories about the trials of dressmaking and cake decoration, we're too busy doing the real work like planning wars and shooting black people.

Lady Yes, dear.

Lord Yes, you go ahead and bury your head in a book while I protect you from the hoards of black muscular spear-wielding killers camping right outside the French windows! Banging their war drums and yelling in their satanic and foreign tongue, "Let's eat them people what read books and don't do any work, they'll be easy picking". And when I charge down on my white stallion and pluck you from their giant cooking pot, will you thank me? I don't think so, no, you'll just ask for a towel and your copy of Mansfield fucking Park!

Lady Be quiet dear or you may bring on another attack. (*Lord Cavendish touches his head. Then, to audience, unconcerned*). I must have hit him too hard.

Lord I've got a bump on my head.

Lady Don't be stupid, dear.

Lord No I have, I've got a bandage too.

Lady Well maybe when you blacked out, you hit your head and fell into a bandage.

Lord That's lucky. Reminds me of a battle I once ... (*Pause. He slumps and looks over at Lady Cavendish in earnest*). Don't you think ... just once ... I might tell you ...

Lady I'm sorry?

Lord Can I tell you why I don't ...

Lady Why you don't what?

Lord Why I don't ...

Lady Walter, what don't you do?

Lord What don't I do? (*He is back to normal*). What don't I do? Tell me, what is it I do that I don't do?

Lady The Lord alone knows.

Lord Would I be wrong in assuming that sometimes you resort to flippancy?

Lady You would be very wrong dear, for being flippant is not once mentioned in 'The Ladies Guide to Etiquette' by Lord Andrew Manorborn, of whom I am an avid reader and pupil.

Lord Andrew Manorborn, short for Mary Ann Smith?

Lady No dear, that's his real name.

Lord He's a he?

Lady Yes.

Lord Mary Ann Smith?

Lady No, Andrew Manorborn. It's not a pseudonym; it's his real name.

Lord You're telling me that a man wrote 'The Ladies Guide to Etiquette'?

Lady Well men do know best, dear.

Lord Yes, but we don't go talking about ... women's business, and we certainly don't write books about it. Real men don't write books as I have already established.

Lady Well he certainly seems to be an authority on the subject of 'women's business'.

Lord Does he wear a dress?

Lady I don't know.

Lord Bet he does.

Pause. Lady Cavendish tries to hide her utter disgust at his puerile nonsense.

Lady He is very helpful in telling a lady how to behave during her time.

Lord During her time?

Lady Yes, he tells us to hide the fact that our time approaches, to never mention our time to our husbands or to any men.

Lord What time?

Lady Our time.

Lord Your time? What, in the kitchen?

Lady No.

Lord In prison? Your time in prison?

Lady No dear.

Lord Have you been to prison Josephine, without telling me?

Lady I have not been to prison, not even in a visiting capacity.

Lord Then what in the name of Satan are you talking about?

Lady Our time, (*pointing to her private parts*) ... women's time.

Lord (*Copying her gesture and pretending to understand*) Oh right.

Lady Andrew Manorborn, Lord Andrew Manorborn, tells us how to hide our time, we are to smile and sit graciously, to wash our undergarments in secret, preferably in the hours of darkness. To always smile and to avoid long walks, games of crochet, extensive rose pruning and the riding of horses. Andrew Manorborn has his finger on the pulse of womankind. He knows how it is for a lady; the pressures of embroidery and the pain of watching polo.

Lord Sounds a bit of a big girls blouse.

Lady (*To herself*) He's twice the man you'll ever be.

Pause. He has heard this.

Lord (*Hurt*) Oh. (*Suddenly recovering*). Well let me tell you this, if I catch this Lord Andrew Manorborn with his fingers all over your pulse, I'll BLOODY WELL KNOCK HIS HEAD OFF!

Lady Charming, dear; you're a real man.

Lord That's right.

Lady Powerful, decisive and stupid.

Lord Nice to know I'm appreciated.

... in this Preview Script, the remainder of the play has been deleted from here ...

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