



Preview Script

Digs

A black comedy in one act

by

Tony Layton

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Cast (4m, 4f)

Ben Freeman	Bright, professional, fortyish.
Sara Freeman	Ben's wife. Attractive and confident.
Brigid	Ben's sister-in-law.
Mrs Schiller	A strong, squat woman in her eighties.
Dad	Ben's father. A brusque upper middle-class type.
Mum	Ben's mother. A gentle foil for her husband.
Male Guest	
Policeman	

If available numbers are limited it would be possible for four enterprising players to perform the play.

- 1 - Ben
- 2 - Sara, Mum
- 3 - Brigid, Mrs Schiller
- 4 - Male Guest, Dad, Policeman

Scenes

- 1 - The Freeman's Garden
- 2 - The Cold Light Of Day
- 3 - Mrs Schiller's Bed-sit
- 4 - Head To Head
- 5 - Mrs Schiller's Bed-sit

Set

Just one set is required, that of Mrs Schiller's spartan bed-sit. It resembles the accommodation of a poor Russian peasant. There is a metal-framed camp-bed, SR. A pine chest of drawers is USC, and SL there is a large plain wardrobe with a long mirror on it. A simple wooden chair stands SR. At SC, there is an old-fashioned stove with a chimney that goes up through the ceiling. A pile of logs is set by the stove. A single central light dimly illuminates the set. There is no carpet on the floor. The only door to the room is SL. The first scene in the Freeman's garden could be played front of tab.

Time & Place

The present. Somewhere in Britain.

Incidental Music

- 'Help' by The Beatles
- 'The Last Waltz' by Engelbert Humperdinck
- 'Lili Marlene' by Marlene Dietrich

NOTE : Producing Organisations are reminded that the use of any background or incidental music suggested in the play, whether live or pre-recorded, prior to obtaining a suitable licence from PRS (Performing Rights Society) or some equivalent body is an infringement of copyright. This may not apply outside the United Kingdom, where different rules may apply.

Conventions Used

Text in upper case is shouted, and underlined text is spoken with emphasis.

DIGS

Scene 1

The scene opens front of tabs. Ben, who is in the prime of health and middle-age is having a drink in the garden outside his house. In the background we can hear the sound of a party going on. Intermittently, we see flashes and hear fire-works cracking. The scene is lit as though a large fire in the garden is providing the only light. A sudden chorus of fireworks starts the scene.

Ben November the 5th..We're great traditionalists in our family. Today is the day we burn everything we hate. Last year I burnt my old school reports and baby photo's which for the past 20 years my wife had been dragging out to embarrass me and to amuse our friends. This year I'm burning my company's annual report. It reads like a Jacobean tragedy and you know how they end up. There's something about death that lacks a certain enchantment for me. Sometimes I wish that I had some sort of religious insurance philosophy, but that heaven idea revolts me. Normally I like harp music, but can you imagine having to listen to it for eternity ... and you can picture the sort of people you'd have to talk to every day ... you know the type ... supercilious smirks on their faces ... "Hi there! I see you're new here. I expect you're relieved to be here, after all who hasn't had a little teenzy-weenzy indiscretion at sometime in their lives. It's my turn to play the harp at dinner this evening. I'm so excited! I've been practising for going on a thousand years now". How do you stay sane for eternity? Of course my wife is a straight down the line believer. As far as she is concerned everything in that book is true ... Adam and Eve, Noah and the animals, all the miracles ... everything true! And she's happy, and that's fine. Live and let live! Every Sunday she goes to church, takes the kids and says one for me. In a way I like that. It might count in my favour if one day ... well if ... well, who knows.

A male guest enters carrying a sausage on a stick.

Male Guest Great party, Ben. How's business?

Ben Fine! Fine! On the turn. Looking good. Try the salami! Special import. *(The guest exits)*. The house is crawling with people. My wife loves parties. She's an extrovert. You know the type ... amateur dramatics and Pippa-Dee parties. Every month, we have a party. I think she must put an open invitation in the local rag. Of those that come, I can count those I know on one hand. The rest could be illegal aliens as far as I know. It's a certainty I'll never see most of 'em again.

Enter Sara.

Sara Darling, do you see that man over there? It's Nicolai Brushkov. He can't speak a word of English poor man. Apparently he used to be very high up in Leningrad before everything went funny. Can you try to fix him up with something on the export side. I'm sure he'd be very good.

Exit Sara. The sound of rocket going off is heard.

Ben That was her,my wife. How do I tell her that the export department ceased trading last week, that the import department could go under any time and the building society could be planning a few devious moves in the not too distant ...?

The sound of 'Jumping Jack' going off is heard. Enter Brigid, who is somewhat tipsy. She is carrying a bottle of champagne from which she takes the occasional slurp.

Brigid Benjy! I've been looking for you.

Ben I needed some air. You need a respirator to survive in there!

Brigid The lone wolf! The lone wolf is trying to be enigmatic.

Ben Of course.

Brigid Oh, what nice lips you've got Mr Wolf. Wouldn't you like to gobble me up?

She drapes herself around Ben and forces some champagne down him straight from the bottle.

Ben *(To audience)* This is my sister-in-law, Brigid. She married my wife's brother, Frank. Frank is a high-flying barrister. Specialises in divorce. If you want to get out of the marriage with a smile on your face, Frank's your man. When he walks passed a stone it bleeds. He lives for work. Doesn't see Brigid from one week to the next. Every time they meet they've got to be introduced. Keeps the marriage fresh. *(To Brigid)*. Where's Frank, Brigid?

Brigid Who?
Ben Your husband, your lover, your provider ... your blank cheque.
Brigid You mean Franky-wanky. *(She slips down, and ends up holding Ben's knees with both arms).*
Ben *(To audience)* This is Brigid in a fairly subdued mood. She can be violent when tight. Whenever she is violent, she always blames it on her distant Irish ancestry. She says she's in direct descent of Irish kings.

A large rocket screams into the sky. Loud, distant bangs follow. The stage is bathed in flashes of colour.

Brigid I think I want to puke.
Ben *(To audience)* Sometimes I despair. *(He helps her to her feet).* I'll find Frank.
Brigid You dare!
Ben He'll take you home.
Brigid Will he? How exciting. Hey!
Ben What?
Brigid Can I be frank ... with you ... for a mo, Ben?
Ben You can be anyone you like.
Brigid *(She laughs loudly and begins to crumple again but is supported by Ben)* "... anyone you like". Can you imagine it? Me, Frank. *(Beat)* Oops! Think I've had a little accident.
Ben What's happened?
Brigid Turn round ... and no peeking. *(She forces Ben to turn round so they are back to back. They lean against one another as Brigid removes her panties and holds them aloft. Another large rocket whistles into the sky with the same effect as before).* TARRA!
Ben Brigid! *(He grabs the panties and puts them in his pocket).*
Brigid I feel freeeeeeeee! *(She spins around and has to be caught by Ben).* Frankly, Benny boy, old Frank hasn't got it anymore.
Ben I'll ask Sara to lend you a pair ...
Brigid Dry as dust. No spark. No oomph!
Ben Don't move Brigid. Stay here! I'll fetch Sara and Frank and ...
Brigid A girl needs a bit of oomph now and again. "More Oomph for women!" D'you know what I think? All you men are so busy making your pile, you're all becomin' ... becoming ... emascul ... emascul ... like women.
Ben Thank you, Brigid.
Brigid Although, perhaps you're different. Are you different, Benny? *(Another rocket takes off).* Can you still ring bells? Can you pour renewed hope into a bored woman's soul? Can you make my feet tingle? My feet haven't tingled for years. *(She pulls Ben on top of her, with her legs wrapped around him).* Come on Ben, make my feet tingle!
Ben *(To audience)* What do you do in this situation? She's not unattractive, in fact I've often wondered what it would be like, you know, with her. But that's as far as it's gone. After all, she is my sister-in-law and I do care for my wife. One moment of weakness now, and the rest of my life would be thrown onto a wild, nightmarish course, as if I haven't got troubles enough. Phew! Thank God for reason.
Sara *(Enters, sees and screams).* Ben! What the hell are you doing?
Brigid *(Quickly sober, pushing Ben off her).* Rape! Rape! Get him off. Get him off me!

Several bangers are heard. Sara pulls Ben off Brigid, and pushes him onto his back.

Sara Ben! What the hell are you doing with Brigid? Animal! *(Ben takes the panties out of his pocket in a naïve attempt to explain. Brigid quickly snatches them out of his hand.)* You swine, Ben. I trusted you!
Ben But ...

Brigid kicks him smartly in the groin. Ben doubles up in pain. A large rocket screams off. Blackout. 'Help' by The Beatles is played during the blackout.

Scene 2

Fade up. Front of tabs, or a tight spot on Ben. He is alone, holding a small briefcase.

Ben I still can't believe it. The last twenty-four hours have been sheer purgatory. Have you ever seen those third-rate movies where a poor slob is accused of a crime he didn't commit. Everyone is pointing the finger at him and giving him a bad time and the lousy script-writer isn't giving him any words to defend himself, and you're on the edge of your seat shouting, "Tell her you didn't do it, for God's sake!". Well, that slob was me. To tell you the truth I was shocked. Friends I've known for years were calling me names I've only read about. Words just would not come. I must have looked like a gigantic carp in shock. If there was a great scriptwriter in the sky he certainly deserted me last night. Sara packed my bag; two pairs of socks, one shirt, two pairs of under-pants, my life policy and my bank statements.

I had the brilliant idea of sleeping on the couch in my office. I walked ten miles into town. When I arrived, I realised the key to the main door was in my other suit, so I broke in, smashing through the heavy glazed door with one of those huge ornamental stones that decorate the front steps. Naturally, I set off the alarm ... ten minutes later I was sitting in a cell. They kept me there all night and all day. Sara refused to come down and identify me. She told them that no husband of hers would be stupid enough to try to break into his own office in the middle of the night. Eventually, they let me go a few minutes ago. It looks as though I could be charged with breaking and entering, but I could get off on a plea of leniency pending the findings of a psychiatric report. At least they gave me an address to stay at ... Mrs Schiller's. *(He reads from a note)*. "Bed-sit, £40 per week plus bills. Suit single gent. No pets or children". I'll stay here for a couple of nights, let the dust settle. When Brigid sobers up, she'll explain.

Scene 3

Light centre and up stage area to reveal Mrs Schiller who is centre stage. She is wearing a high-necked white blouse with a three-quarter length grey skirt. She has grey socks and heavy black boots. Her head is covered by a red scarf, worn peasant-style. Her hair is grey, in the style of a bun. She is a large, strong-looking woman.

Mrs Schiller As you see Mr ... er ...

Ben Freeman. Ben Freeman.

Mrs Schiller Freeman. As you see it is very spacious and functional.

Ben *(To audience)* What is this? A scene from 'Gorky's Childhood'. If I wasn't so tired, I'd leave. If I had the energy, I'd break another window. At least I'd have a warm cell.

Mrs Schiller The rent is one month in advance, with £100 surety to cover any damage to furniture, etcetera. You do your own cleaning and you may use the kitchen, but only for the preparation of light snacks. I do not allow visitors under any circumstances, and music must not be heard at any time. Are there any questions Mr. Freeman?

Ben *(Sotto voce)* What time is 'lights-out'?

Mrs Schiller What's that?

Ben I said, "I see that the fire's out"!

Mrs Schiller The chimney's blocked. But you'll find heat comes through the floor from downstairs. You won't freeze.

Ben To be honest, Mrs Schiller I don't think I'll be staying for more than let's say, one night. You see, my wife and I had a little disagreement, a misunderstanding. It's nothing really. I'm sure it will all blow over by tomorrow. So what I need here is more or less a bed for the night.

Mrs Schiller It's still one month in advance.

Ben Okay! Look, I see you run a tight ship here. I respect that. When you're in business you need discipline; organisation. I know that only too well. So, here is a cheque for, how much is it?

Mrs Schiller Two hundred and sixty pounds.

Ben Two hundred and sixty pounds. There! *(He hands over a cheque)*.

Mrs Schiller What guarantee do I have? You go tomorrow, this bounces ... where's the guarantee?

Ben *(Taking off his wrist-watch)*. This is worth at least a thousand pounds. Solid gold! A present from my wife to celebrate twenty happy years of married life. It has great sentimental value, naturally, so I'd appreciate it if you would take care of it. *(He hands over the watch)*.

Mrs Schiller *(Holding the watch to her ear)*. Does it keep good time?

Ben In a thousand years that watch will not have lost or gained a second. That's in black and white in the official guarantee.

Mrs Schiller Who's to know? Stupid! Okay! Agreed! This I put in a safe place.

Ben Thank you.

Mrs Schiller What was this misunderstanding with your wife? You didn't beat her did you?

Ben Me beat! Most certainly not.

Mrs Schiller Or rape her? You didn't rape her, did you?

Ben Rape? Rape? Do I look like a rapist?

Mrs Schiller They don't go around with 'rapist' written on their foreheads you know. For all I know, you could be a serial killer who rapes his victims before cutting them up into little pieces. You could be on the run from the police. Who knows what that case contains? Could be the head of your latest victim!

Ben *(Opening his bag and pouring out the contents onto the floor)*. See! No heads, legs, arms or severed breasts.

Mrs Schiller A woman on her own must take precautions. We are so vulnerable aren't we Mr Freeman. The world isn't as safe as it used to be.

Ben I suppose not. *(Replacing the things into the bag)*. I understand your concern.

Mrs Schiller So, what was the disagreement about Mr Freeman?

Lights fade. Exit Mrs Schiller. Single spot on Ben. He undresses as he speaks, ending up in brightly coloured boxer shorts.

Ben *(To audience)* What do you do with someone like that? I could see I wasn't going to be able to get rid of her until I told her the whole story. Anyway, what did I have to hide? I'm innocent! Did you notice her accent? Austrian! I thought, "if she's going to be nosey, then I'll be nosey". So I asked her where she was from. She didn't like that. She grunted, "Austria" and left. Actually, thinking about it, this is probably doing me the world of good. This could be good therapy. Being alone, no frills, no distractions, no diversions, just me with me. We all need time to get things into some sort of perspective. We all need to take stock now and again don't we. *(He goes up to the wardrobe and inspects himself in the long mirror)*. So, Benny boy, how do you feel now? Look at yourself! Ozymendias! Remember him? "Look on my works and despair!". You had it all there, now it's like dust on the wind, blown away over night. There you were, complaining about the firm ... what about the good things you have, what about them ... your wife, your kids, the dog, the home and the back-breaking mortgage ... and Sandy?

(To audience) Sandy's been a great comfort to me since I was five years old. He's my teddy bear. He knows all my closest secrets. It's always reassuring when I get home after a tough day at the office to know that Sandy is there, always ready to listen. He sleeps on my bed every night. In fact ... I'd forgotten about that. One night won't matter ... too much. *(He places his clothes by the fire and gets into bed. He holds onto his pillow tightly)*. Goodnight Sandy!

(Fade to black. "The Teddy Bears Picnic" plays during a ten second blackout, during which, Ben's clothes are removed from the set. Lights up. Ben is lying in bed).

I've worked it all out. I'll send Sara some flowers with a little message, like, "Please take me back". No, that's no good. How about, "Can't live without you" or "Please forgive me". No, sounds as though I'm guilty. I'm innocent for Christ's sake! How about a religious angle! Yes! How about, "Your prodigal husband wants to return. Kill the fatted calf". Too demanding. Tread warily. "The quality of mercy is not strained". How does that go? "It blesseth him that gives and him that takes". No! She hates Shakespeare. I wonder if Catherine Cookson wrote any pithy prose, any apt phrase to suit the occasion? Anyway, a dozen ... no, two dozen red roses, a heart-rending message, then a discreet wait for effect. Then the phone call late in the evening, with the wind whistling around my ears and my chattering teeth, she'll melt. Twenty years of marriage must count for something these days. *(He gets out of bed to find his clothes are missing. He does a quick room search, then goes to the door which he opens slightly)*. Mrs Schiller! Mrs Schiller!

Mrs Schiller *(Offstage)*. There's no need to shout Mr Freeman. We don't live in a field.

Ben I need my clothes. Where are my clothes? *(Enter Mrs Schiller)*. It's my clothes, Mrs Schiller. They don't appear to be where I left them.

Mrs Schiller How can they be where you left them, when I've removed them.

Ben You ... why did ...

Mrs Schiller I noticed when you arrived yesterday, tiny specks of blood here and there, so ... your clothes are being cleaned.

Ben Well, that's very kind, but what do I do?

Mrs Schiller Do? There's nothing to do. You relax, that's what you do.

Ben Mrs Schiller, I need to contact my wife. When will they be ready?

Mrs Schiller Very quickly.

Ben Good!

Mrs Schiller Tomorrow, or maybe the next day, but the next day is Sunday so it could be Monday. Very quick!

Ben That is not very quick Mrs Schiller. That is verging on the torpid.

Mrs Schiller Is this a complaint you are making? Do I understand correct, that you are not satisfied with my desire to be of some help?

Ben I'm sure your heart is in the right place Mrs Schiller and thank you for trying to help, but please, I would be most grateful if you could retrieve my clothes now, this morning, blood stains and all. I would be eternally in your debt.

Mrs Schiller Eternity is a long time Mr Freeman. Are you a God-fearing man?

Ben I've had my moments. Let's say I have an open mind on the matter.

Mrs Schiller Where did the blood come from? Is that why you want your clothes back?

Ben I need my clothes so that I can make contact with my wife. I'd like to send her some flowers, I'd like to phone her and I'd like her to know where I am in case she needs me for anything. So, please ...

Mrs Schiller I have the answer. Forget about the clothes for the moment. They are somewhere in the middle of the machine. You give me your wife's address and write down what you want to say to her. I will send the flowers.

Ben But I need to phone.

Mrs Schiller No problem. I'll phone. What do you want to say?

Ben That won't work. I must phone. I've worked it out you see Mrs Schiller. I must talk to her personally, otherwise it won't work!

Mrs Schiller You have a plan?

Ben Yes. Not a brilliant plan perhaps, but certainly a plan.

Mrs Schiller That's good. Everyone should have a plan. I too have plans.

Ben Really? Wonderful ... now ...

Mrs Schiller So, where did the blood come from?

Ben Honestly, I don't know. I can only assume it happened in the scuffle as I left home. Beyond that I have no idea.

Mrs Schiller Are you a truthful person, Mr Freeman?

Ben Very. Yes. Very.

Mrs Schiller Because if we don't have truth, we have nothing.

Ben *(To audience)* I know this scene. I'm a wealthy Jewish jeweller, and I've stashed a hoard of diamonds which are vital to the German war machine, in the basement of the Blue Angel café, where Marlené Dietrich sings "Lili Marlene" every night. This is Olga Stern, the mad witch of Auschwitz. She loves Jews; she has them for breakfast every day. She's been sent to interrogate me with orders to stop at nothing. If she fails, it's a one-way ticket to the Russian front and a signed copy by Hitler of "I'm Dreaming Of A White Christmas". *(To Mrs Schiller)*. Look Olga ... er, Mrs Schiller, do you have anything at all I can wear, anything to ...

Mrs Schiller What did you call me?

Ben "Mrs Schiller", Mrs Schiller.

Mrs Schiller You said, "Olga".

Ben Did I? Slip of the tongue.

Mrs Schiller I won't be a moment. *(She exits)*.

Ben *(Shouting after her)* An old pair of overalls, slacks, an old shirt ... anything will do. *(To audience)*. Did you see the way she reacted to 'Olga'? Either I hit a vital nerve, or she had a sudden attack of flatulence. So, at this moment she is either making a quick visit to the toilet or filling her Luger with lead. Why am I plagued with such a vivid imagination? It all goes back to a mis-spent youth I suppose. My parents were in the hotel business ... always busy ... always busy. *(Ben's parents*

appear DSR. They are counting money and working on a huge ledger). They were so busy making money they had no time for me. *(To parents)*. Hello mum, hello dad!

Dad Who's that?

Mum It's your son, dear.

Dad I thought we were sending him away to school.

Mum He's only five, dear. They won't take him until he's ten at least.

Ben I can't find Sandy. I want Sandy.

Dad Who's Sandy? He hasn't got a sister has he?

Mum No dear. Run along Benny, there's a good boy. We're very busy.

Ben I want Sandy.

Mum Sandy what, dear?

Dad Perhaps he's asking for food. Sandwich or something!

Mum I don't think so, dear. Cook is very good. She always makes sure he's fed.

Ben I want Sandy.

Dad Perhaps he wants to play on the sands. We're too busy to take you, Ken.

Mum Ben, dear.

Dad Ben, of course ... a slip of the tongue. When we're not so busy, Ben, we'll take you then.

Ben *(To audience)* But they were always busy. So, I was packed off to the pictures three or four times a week with Violet, our red-headed chambermaid. My imagination thrived, and the language of movies crept in and took over my every day vocabulary. By the time I was ten, I had become a citizen of the mid-Atlantic. *(To parents)* Hi pop, mom! Guess you're too busy right now. Thought I'd just fill you in on what I've been doin' with my life this week. I've sorta found out that girls are kinda different. It all happened by accident. This chick I know, Vera, a blonde doll who knows the score, had this crazy idea. She said we should play this game where we take our clothes off, and the one who takes their clothes off first is the winner. She said her parents play it all the time and its a lotta laughs. So, we went into her bedroom and I won, but then her father came in and he looked kinda angry to me. Anyhow, he said he'd be coming round to see you, pop.

Dad Go out and play, Ken. We haven't got time at the moment.

Mum Ben, dear.

Ben *(To audience)* I went through puberty and adolescence mostly ignored. They even forgot to send me away to school. On the eve of my wedding, I remember asking them for some advice. *(To parents)* Dad, mum ... as you know I'm getting married tomorrow.

Dad Really, Ken?

Mum Ben, dear.

Dad Of course. Why do I keep on doing that? Perhaps I had a crush on a Ken sometime.

Mum I think that was Nigel, dear.

Dad Nigel! That was it! Cricket captain and head boy ... Nigel. Yes ... I was his fag you know. By God he didn't half give you a leathering if you stepped out of line. Good old Nigel. Wonder if he's out yet? Scrubs, wasn't it?

Mum Broadmoor, dear.

Dad Oh yes. Nasty business.

Ben Dad!

Dad Now what do you want?

Ben I thought you might give me some advice.

Dad On what?

Ben On marriage.

Dad Marriage? Right! Yes! Do you want to do this dear or shall I?

Mum Better coming from you I think, dear.

Dad Right! Right! Now you see son, how can I put it? Your mother has a little slit thing you see, and I have, as you have, a little ding-dong device, which changes shape. How the hell it does it, I'm not sure. Never have understood the mechanics of it all. Anyway, the trick is to try to manoeuvre yourself into such a position that you can, that is your ding-dong can, that it can enter into that little slit thing, and somehow, don't ask me how, a baby is actually produced ... eventually. But, I must add, that you might have to try it more than once. Success is not guaranteed every time.

Ben *(To audience)* I knew all that. *(To Parents)*. What I want to know is, what is the key to happiness in marriage?

Mum Shall I answer this one, dear?

Dad Go ahead.

Mum You see Ben, what is happiness? Now that is the question. I think we take a leaf out of nature's book here. Take the garden. What makes a happy garden? What makes a flower happy? What makes a bush or a tree happy? It's not just the sun and the rain that brings a smile to their faces. No! To find out what really makes them happy you've got to dig them out and look at their roots. You've got to uproot them and look at their long, strong roots. It's the same with marriage ... a strong marriage will have roots like an oak tree, whereas a weak marriage will have the roots of, say, a pansy.

Dad You don't want to be a pansy, son.

Fade lights on parents who exit. Enter Mrs Schiller, carrying a pile of women's clothes.

Mrs Schiller I'm afraid these are all I've got Mr Freeman. But at least they'll keep you covered up and warm. I thought the long tweed skirt would be most suitable rather than something shorter.

Ben I can't wear this. *(He holds up a heavy tweed skirt which he takes from the top of the pile held by Mrs Schiller).*

Mrs Schiller What's wrong with it? It's a perfectly good skirt.

Ben It's not my colour for one thing.

Mrs Schiller You think it is a sign of weakness to wear a skirt, is that not so?

Ben Well ...

Mrs Schiller Do you think I'm weak Mr Freeman? Do you think that because I am a woman I am a weak person?

Ben Most certainly not, Mrs Schiller.

Mrs Schiller You have been conditioned to associate skirts with weakness, Mr Freeman, and yet what is a kilt if not a skirt. Would you say a Gordon Highlander was a pansy, Mr Freeman?

Ben I would not.

Mrs Schiller And they don't wear underpants. So put it on and don't be silly. *(Ben puts on the skirt, followed by a blouse and a cardigan). I'll be back in a minute. (She exits).*

Ben I don't believe this. The woman has a problem. She probably has a deeply imbedded psychosis caused by her husband who was into leather, a perversion that was brought on mainly by his addiction to storm-trooping, a lively pastime that involved him in travel and adventure all over Europe. There I go again. I mustn't let my imagination run away with me. It's no good for my condition. I don't like to talk about my condition on account of it's to do with a part of the body that I find totally disgusting. That is where, I feel, the design of the human frame has a serious flaw. We have laws that say we are not allowed to build toilets close to the kitchen. Even designers of cars have the sense to build exhausts well away from the engine. I rest my case. I don't want to talk about it. It was embarrassing enough having to show a lady doctor. *(He is now dressed and moves around the room trying out various feminine moves which he enjoys).* "And Benjamin is wearing a sensible tweed skirt which is ideal for that autumn sojourn to the highlands and islands, the brown matching perfectly the rich colours that nature provides at that time of year. Notice how the cardigan blends beautifully, enhancing the motif of wool and warmth. The blouse, made of finest white cotton, has a texture that caresses the skin and keeps you feeling fresh all day". *(He dances around the room in Gay Gordon fashion).* Long time since I've had a good dance. Sara and I used to go dancing all the time. Yes ... all the time. I popped the question during a last waltz.

Music plays 'The Last Waltz' either sung by Englebert Humperdinck, or an instrumental version). Lights down.

Scene 4

Enter Sara, who stands close to Ben. They are lit head and shoulders, with a tight spot.

Ben I was thinking ...

Sara *(To audience)* Now what? If he thinks I'm going on another of those transcendental weekends in Brecon, he can think again. *(To Ben)*. What Ben?

Ben *(To audience)* Oh, very curt. Perhaps this isn't the best time. *(To Sara)* Nothing. Doesn't matter.

Sara *(To audience)* I see. He probably wants to stay the night again. *(To Ben)*. Don't be annoying. What is it? What were you 'thinking'?

Ben *(To audience)* Definitely not the time. Change tack. Brecon! *(To Sara)*. Thought you might like to go away for the weekend.

Sara *(To audience)* I knew it. I can read his mind like a book. *(To Ben)*. I hope you're not going to suggest Brecon again. One wet weekend in a leaking tent is enough, thank you very much.

Ben *(To audience)* How does she do that? Right, where else? I know. *(To Sara)*. What makes you think I'd want to go to Brecon? No, I was thinking of Edinburgh. See the tattoo.

Sara *(Aside)* The damned cheek! Edinburgh! That's where he took that bitch Samantha last year, to the festival, and he thinks I don't know. *(To Ben)*. Edinburgh? Well, that's different. Have you been there before then, Ben?

Ben *(Aside)* Good! She doesn't know about Samantha. *(To Sara)*. No. But I hear it's worth a peek. Lots to see.

Sara *(Aside)* And he didn't blink an eyelid. The swine! *(To Ben)*. Good hotels are there? Large beds ... king-size?

Ben *(Aside)* Why this anger? Does she think we're going to sleep in a tent or something? *(To Sara)*. There's a good hotel I've heard, close to the Royal Mile. Very central, very comfortable and very reasonable.

Sara *(Aside)* I bet it was very comfortable, I bet he was very central and I bet she was very reasonable. *(To Ben)*. And what's the name of this hotel you stayed at?

Ben *(Aside)* I don't believe this. Brazen it out. *(To Sara)*. I haven't stayed at it, Sara love. It's my friend ...

Sara *(Aside)* He's trying to brazen it out. Not this time, sonny Jim. *(To Ben)*. Don't you remember? You stayed there last year with that slut Samantha.

Ben How did you know that?

Sara Lots of little birdies told me. I've been waiting for you to tell me.

Ben What was the point? If I'd told you, how would you have felt? Would you have felt better? No! It was nothing. The whole incident meant nothing, so why bring it up? I have a great deal of respect for you ... I respect your feelings ... I respect your integrity. You're very special to me. Very special. I love you. I never want to hurt you. I never want to go with another woman for the rest of my life. You mean everything to me. OK, I admit it, I was wrong. I was very wrong. It was a moment in my life I will always regret. I should have known better, I know. From now on, I promise, everything will be up front. No lies, no deceptions. What is a relationship without trust? Nothing! So ... *(Aside)*. What a performance! I think she's impressed.

Sara So, what?

Ben Am I forgiven?

Sara *(Aside)* They're all like little boys aren't they. *(To Ben)*. Let me sleep on it.

Ben *(Aside)* I see. Very cool. So let's throw in the big one. *(To Sara)*. If you do forgive me, I would like you to be my wife someday soon, if you'd have me?

Sara *(Aside)* A bit on the feeble side, but charming for all that. Yes, I think I'll accept. *(To Ben)*. Give me time, Ben. Don't rush me.

Ben *(Aside)* What sort of answer's that. Not 'no', not 'yes'. Exciting though. A challenge. Better brush up my act. Start on the flowers and poems and love letters. I won't give her a chance to say 'no'. *(To Sara)*. Sure love. I won't press you. Let things take their course.

Sara *(Aside)* He's hooked.

Fade lights. Exit Sara. Fade up. Ben is alone CS.

Ben Our wedding night was a classic. It was to form the basis of a thesis by Dr Sybil Mendel, the famous marriage-guidance councillor, entitled, 'How To Survive Disaster On Your Honeymoon'. I blame it on the stars. Don't get me wrong. I don't believe in that stuff. I know newspapers and I know reporters. For instance, I know a certain hack who pens the stars column for a big national. I've seen how he does it. He makes it all up. He couldn't do it one day, so he asked me to cover for him. I had a great time. I gave Virgo a good week, the rest I promised doom and gloom. Now, Sara is into star signs, prophecies and portents of evil. I told her that I'd booked a flight for Acapulco for the honeymoon. She refused to go, on account that her stars had told her not to go around with her head in the clouds because it could lead to disaster. It was no use arguing, so we drove down to Bournemouth. That night we stood alone in the honeymoon suite, the rest of our married lives in front of us.

Enter Sara, wearing a pink silk dressing gown. They stand face to face and sigh.

Sara That was wonderful, darling.

Ben Wasn't it! *(Beat)*. I particularly enjoyed the lobster.

Sara Mmm! That sauce was divine. We must try to weedle the recipe out of them before we leave.

Ben *(Yawning expansively)* What a day!

Sara Tired?

Ben Mm. A touch.

Sara Why don't you get undressed ...

Ben Yes?

Sara ... have a nice shower and go to bed.

Ben That sounds terrific.

Sara Meanwhile, I think I'll go for a stroll along the beach and have a paddle in the sea.

Ben Why? Aren't you tired?

... the remainder of this play has been deleted from this preview copy ...

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